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world news

Zapatistas support lesbians and gay men

The Zapatista guerrillas who fought the Mexican government in January in southern Chiapas state incorporated a list of gay and lesbian civil rights demands into the official document that emerged from their National Democratic Convention held in August in the Chiapas jungle. And perhaps even more remarkable: The 7,000 delegates to the gathering accepted the queer planks without any controversy.

Seventy leaders of Mexican gay and lesbian groups met in Mexico City before the convention and prepared demands that included a national anti-discrimination law, improved education on sexuality in schools, appointment of gay men and lesbians to government positions, a government campaign against homophobia, and unbiased AIDS education. A contingent of 16 of the leaders then traveled to Chiapas and presented the demands to the convention.

"Some convention delegates were surprised, but there were no arguments against us during the assembly," said Tijuana gay leader Alejandro Garcia. "It was a climate of equality and brotherhood. In a situation like that, when someone is homophobic, no one will support him."

"The most important result," Garcia said, "is that our ideas were disseminated. Many people with very little knowledge of the gay movement now have heard a lot more about it."

The convention's overall aims included proposing a new Mexican constitution, preparing demands for Mexico's new president, Ernesto Zedillo, and furthering the rebels' campaigns for improved basic services, human rights reforms, and a democratic political system.

Queers march in India Day Parade

The South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association marched in New York's 14th annual India Day Parade on Aug. 20, even though it was banned by parade organizers. The group marched with Sakhi, a South Asian women's group that disagreed with the organizers' stand.

Parade-watchers were mostly supportive, according to the New York press.

The president of the Federation of India Associations, Ramesh Patel, said his organization banned the group because it "does not respect the parade.... We allowed this group to march two years ago, and they didn't behave—they used it for what they wanted."

"You would think that with what has happened with other groups like us in other parades, the organizers would support the way we act," marcher Kevin Conare told *The New York Post*. "We're out there not to be angry and militant but to be visible."

"They haven't given us any real reason why we can't march, so it's only fair that we're here," said SALGA spokeswoman Priyamvada Sinha.

Media coverage of the parade focused almost exclusively on SALGA.

In a statement posted on the Internet computer network, the group said, "We plan to rigorously pursue our right to march in future India Day parades using media, litigation and pressure from local politicians."

Confest ejects male-to-female transsexuals

Some 80 separatists repeatedly disrupted the annual National Lesbian Confest in July in Brisbane, Australia, until they succeeded in forcing organizers to eject male-to-female transsexuals.

Queensland Pride, a local queer newspaper, reported the confest "was marred by radical-separatist action which included death threats against members of the Brisbane confest collective. Damage to personal property was also threatened, if lesbian transgenderists were not banned from attending the event."

"The disturbance began during the formation of the opening circle. [Separatist leader] Lavender called out, 'Join this second group if you don't want to hold hands with men.' The separatists then formed their own circle. With confusion mounting, a third circle was formed. This was made up of women from other countries who wanted to demonstrate their inclusiveness," the newspaper reported.

The organizing collective gave in to the demands after 80 separatists surrounded collective members and, according to the members, threatened their safety.

"I was aware of some of the backlash we would get, having worked around women who identified very solidly with separatist beliefs, [but] the ferocity of it was really unexpected," collective member Gai Lemon told another local queer newspaper, *Brother Sister*.

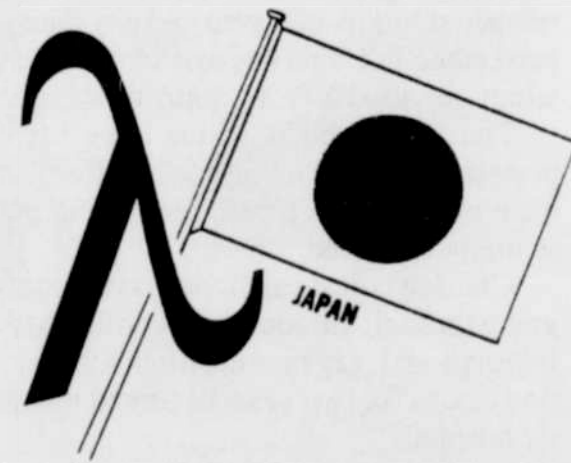
First queer parade in Japan draws 1,500

Tokyo saw its first pride parade Aug. 28, when 1,500 lesbians and gay men marched from the queer bar area of Shinjuku to the Shibuya district, three miles away.

Lesbians marching in the parade outnumbered gay men by a substantial margin.

Some passersby looked surprised, some waved and snapped photos, according to several reports. No negative incidents were reported.

"Japan is not an easy place to live for lesbians, so, for me, organizing this was a way of reducing stress," said Akiyo Ohya.



"Up until now, it was hard to come out and say you're gay," parade Chairman Teishiro Minami told the Associated Press. "But changes in our society have made it easier to be open about it."

Minami said he has waited 20 years to organize a gay and lesbian march.

"This is a landmark day for us," said a marcher named Mizuko. "We were able to prove that we're alive and that we exist in this society."

"People look at us and think we're strange," said another marcher. "Perhaps their way of thinking won't change immediately, but I hope ordinary people will gradually start to accept us."

Marchers carried signs with such slogans as "Mother, your son is gay," and "Stop homophobia."

Japanese society is generally tolerant of same-sex orientation, but under a rather strict "don't ask, don't tell" norm.

The Shinjuku district has about 400 queer bars, most of them very small.