

An interview with Jose Ramon Pedroza, director of *Los Jinetes Del Tiempo (Time Riders)*

By Kevin Martinez
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The WSWS spoke with director Jose Ramon Pedroza after the screening of his film, *Los Jinetes Del Tiempo (Time Riders)*, in San Diego, but due to scheduling conflicts we asked if we could conduct an interview via email. The following is a transcript of our questions and his answers.

WSWS: What made you want to do this film?

Jose Ramon Pedroza: In 2012, I was working on a project called *Mi Pueblo TV*, in a small town named Zacualpan de Amilpas in Morelos, a state in the center of the country. We were teaching a group of young locals to create their own video content. Tar Falfan, the head of that project, introduced me to Angel Ortega, the director of an amateur *campesino* [peasant] theater group called Grupo Actoral de la Revolución Zapatista del Sur. Angel invited us to take a horse ride from his hometown (Quebrantadero) to another place called “La Piedra Encimada,” where the revolutionary Emiliano Zapata made his last stop before he encountered his death on April 10, 1917.

That’s where we thought about making a documentary film about that horse ride, involving the kids and the instructors from *Mi Pueblo TV*. After an eight-hour walk, pulling a donkey that carried the equipment, we arrived at La Piedra Encimada. We met the old members of the acting troupe by the fire. They were descendants of the Zapatista fighters. They told stories about the revolution that they had learned directly from their grandparents. A warm friendship flowered and, with the help of *aguardiente* [a drink], we agreed that same night to make a movie about the encounter of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. The plan was to ride into Mexico City in December 2014, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of this historical

moment.

This movie is a big collective effort between people of the countryside and people of the city.

WSWS: I liked the scenes where the actors talked about NAFTA, Dow Chemical, and “multinational corporations” replacing the hacienda system of old. What has changed in the last 100 years and what has stayed the same?

JRP: A hundred years ago, the agricultural production system was in the hands of a few estate owners, or *hacendados*. Now this system is in the hands of big corporations such as Sygenta [a global Swiss agribusiness company], Dow Chemicals, etc. It’s even worse now, because besides the oligarchic production system, the corporations claim to have a copyright of the seeds, so it’s illegal for the *campesinos* to become independent and plant their own seeds.

WSWS: The final scenes where the riders enter Mexico City were very powerful, especially because they met a protest about the 43 martyrs of Ayotzinapa, the students recently killed in Guerrero. The authorities didn’t allow the riders to stage their last picture, entering the city center or Zocalo. Why?

JRP: December 2014 was a very difficult moment at Mexico City. The government was facing daily protests, most of them related to the disappearance of the 43 young students from Ayotzinapa. People were very angry, so the government used a clever strategy to dissolve the protests: usually people gather at wide open landmarks, such as the Angel of the Independencia, at Reforma Avenue, or at the Revolution Monument, and they march towards the Zocalo, the main plaza in México.

So the authorities put a lot of police filters on the

main paths to the Zocalo, obliging the huge groups of protesters to take other streets or avenues outside downtown. But the cherry on the cake was the construction of the biggest ice skating rink in Latin America on the Zocalo, including slides, and a monumental Christmas tree, and all the plaza was blocked with fences and police, so no one could enter the Zocalo that day.

So, it was impossible for us to enter with the troupe on horses, because the Zocalo would be closed, and it could be dangerous to ride to another iconic place such as the Revolution Monument, because we were not given any security guarantees from the police. A scene in the film shows a meeting in Xochimilco, where we decided to end the ride to avoid any risks. So I decided to change the end of the movie, not entering the Zocalo but meeting the ghosts of the old Zapatistas.

Pre-production of the ending scene started in January, after the authorities removed the ice skating rink, and we got permits to shoot in February. Twenty-four hours before the shooting, the permission was canceled with no explanation. Then an exhibition baseball field replaced the ice track on the Zocalo. It lasted two weeks. After that, we couldn't get a new film permit. Then it was time for the shooting of *Spectre*, the big super-production of the James Bond saga, from March 21 to April 1.

After that we got a second permit that was again canceled 24 hours before the shooting. We started to suspect that there was some kind of deliberate blocking of our shooting from the city government. I was very disappointed: Why can Bond do it but not the *Time Riders*?

In September, finally a miracle occurred: the third in charge of the city government was fired, and the next day we obtained the authorization to film.

WSWS: What are your thoughts on the political situation in Mexico? And the United States?

JRP: Now more than ever in recent years, ignorance is empowered. This ignorance contains a big dose of evil, our leaders in general have this dangerous combination. But also we, the simple people, while we have more access to knowledge than ever, we don't know how to manage it. Also, new forms of repression have appeared with new technologies that are supposed to serve our freedom.

Our leaders are using fear to control the population,

and that is what happened with the rise of Trump. In Mexico the empowerment of the horror arrived long before, with the rise of organized crime, permitted by high levels of corruption. But, sadly, these criminals, the legal ones in the case of the corrupt officers, and the outlaws in the case of the organized crime, are not extraterrestrials. They are the product of the societies we have constructed.

So, I think that the only way to combat this situation is through education, not only in academic terms, but in terms of family and social values, with equal opportunities for everyone in work, in health services and in school. These must be opportunities with high humanistic and scientific standards so we are able to think and solve problems, not to be sheep in an enterprise as modern slaves, but most of all to act in line with fundamental civic values such as solidarity with our neighbors, the reevaluation of humankind, and most of all with love.

Our societies need to transcend the comfort level of believing that voting for somebody, a leader, is going to solve our problems. We need to become responsible for our acts, we need to grow as human beings with higher levels of consciousness. We need to become responsible for our own actions, taking care of each other and taking care of our environment. We need to refound our societies not in terms of possessing, but in terms of being with one another in harmony.

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