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Whose Violence?

Emiliano Zapata

June 1970

It is not necessary for you to tell me that violence breeds violence. We of the people have known this longer than you have, and for my part I knew it ten years ago when nobody came dashing down from Washington to tell Diaz that to let the peasants live on grass would breed violence; or that shooting down those who asked for a few pence more a week would breed violence; or that feeding the lice on prisoners from one decade to another would surely breed violence.

Now when you see the workers with Winchesters in their hands you hasten to explain to us uneducated men that this will only breed more violence, and you say and I know that history proves you right. Only I would like to know where we should be if we throw away our guns and stood out there hat in hand bowing before the landlords and officers like we did before the revolution. My friends can answer for themselves – you know as well as I do where I should be – three feet under after dancing six feet over.

And you also know that men who are here have only to stop fighting and they will go to feed worms in the grave or lice in the jails or at the best go back to slavery, and this thought sometimes makes men more fierce than is their nature. But they are

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not barbarians as you think. Oh, I know, when you come here with cameras you salute me as if I were the President and address me out of my degree as General, but, when you are in New York, in your offices, with your drinks and your women, then you write to tell the world I am the most savage barbarian of them all. Isn't that so? But I am not so stupid as you think, and know just as well as if I had studied history that fighting provokes more fighting and blood, blood.

You tell me (President) Wilson deploras violence but I am not such a fool as to ask you if in that case (General) Pershing has gone to work in the fields. I understand the futility of violence better than this Wilson, for I was flogged and saw my brothers starve and be shot down when he lived in a big house with servants and was told he was a Christian. If I had not known this as a boy I might have been so great a criminal as to join the state army and by now be one of Carranza's generals whom nobody tells violence is unvirtuous.

Enough, we know violence breeds violence, what I would like to know is how peace may breed peace? For my part I think when there are no masters and no slaves, when there are governments issuing orders indeed and churches decrees, but nobody obeying them, when all who wish land and liberty may have it, and those who want to oppress have no arms then and then only, peace will breed peace.