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The Mexican Revolt

Voltairine de Cleyre

1911

At last we see a genuine awakening of a people, not to political demands alone, but to economic ones,—fundamentally economic ones. And in the brief period of a few months, some millions of human beings have sprung to a full consciousness of a system of wrong, beginning where all slaveries begin, in the sources of life. They have struck for Land And Liberty. And even if their revolt shall be crushed by the mailed hand of the United States Government (for I do not believe the present nondescript thing calling itself a government, in Mexico, has craft or power to pacify or crush all the seething elements of rebellion), yet it has set a foremost mark upon the record of human demand, from which hereafter there will be no retreat. From now on, when an oppressed people revolt, they will not demand less.

“Events are the true Schoolmasters,” I hear the justified voice of my dead Comrade Lum calling triumphantly from his grave. For years and years the brothers Magon and their coworkers in and out of Mexico have been voices crying in the wilderness which some few thousands at best have heard. But in the storm-wind of popular revolt, rising, no prophet could have foretold when, nor gazer at the aftermath just why it was

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the chosen hour, in that strong clean-sweeping of the psychic atmosphere, millions of unlettered and otherwise ignorant people saw, as with lightning sharpness cutting a black night, the foundation of all their wrong, and heard the slogan "Land and Liberty" to which their ears were so long deaf,—heard it, raised it, acted on it, are acting on it. With that clear and direct perception of the needful thing to do which lettered men, men of complex lives, nearly always lack, being befogged by too many lights, they move straight upon their purpose, hew down the landmarks, burn the records of the title-deeds.

So do the plain people. Temporizing men, sophisticated men, men of books and theories, men made timid with much mind, Hamlets all,—they devise solemn indirections ; they figure on compensation schemes, on taxation fooleries, on how-to-do and how-not-to-do at the same time. The simple man says, "No: you have told us, and truly, that this land was filched away from us by a paper-title scheme. Its power lay in our admitting its right. Well, we no longer admit it; we destroy it. The land is ours; we take it." And they have driven off the paper-title men, and are working the ground on hundreds of ranches.

It is true there were other millions asleep in the storm; true that many of the awakened have been quieted with political hocus-pocus; true that a hundred and one reactionary forces are battling on the same ground. It is true that the world at large, outside of Mexico, is but little informed as to the real struggle. But that does not alter or diminish the truth that the Slaves of Our Times, in a nation-wide revolt, have smitten the Beast of Property in Land. And once a great human demand is so made, it is never let go again. Future revolts will go on from there; they will never fall behind it.

At present the great press is saying little of the chaos in the Mexican situation, though for the last few days, since as news purveyors they cannot keep entirely silent, small hinting editorials are creeping in, pointing interventionwards, "in case

the serious, intent spirit which watches and welcomes the manifestations of the people themselves —no matter what their degree of development or enlightenment—as the real indications of how the Race will come into its own! Not according to any men’s preconceived program, not by any little platform-prescription, not by any carefully selected route, not by anybody’s plan of campaign to make an “educated, class-conscious,” etc. ad nauseam vote-casting machine; but in their own unforeseen and unforeseeable, undetermined, by-the-hour-and-circumstance-decided way, as the peoples always move,—as Life, which is greater than the peoples, always moves.

And the business of the revolutionist, the Seeker for the Changes of Old Forms, the dreamer of Liberty and Plenty, is to be with them in their struggle, in their victory, in their defeat, whenever, wherever, the people rise.

Hail to our brothers, the Mexican peons, who are too unlettered to read Henry George’s gospel, but who have discharged their landlords and set to working the ground for themselves.

Hail to the Mexican strikers, who likely are too ignorant to pursue a course in the “Evolution of Class-consciousness,” but who are apparently very alive to the fact that Now is the hour to Strike for better conditions, —the hour of governmental weakness and popular strength.

Hail to the Mexican Revolution, victorious or defeated. And hail to the next that rises!

disturbances are not pacified.” No doubt the United States Government would prefer to preserve its hypocritical pretense of abstinent impartiality. It hopes its catspaw will safely pull the chestnuts out of the fire. It is comfortable to pose as the disinterested friend of peace in our sister republic, so long as American landlord powers in Mexico are undisturbed, or so long as the Mexican branch of the Capitalistic Defense Association is able to tend to its division. But one thing has been pretty plain since the provisional government assumed its functions: “Barkis is willin’,”— but not effulgently able. People who have once taken up arms and felt the satisfaction of ridding themselves of one tyrant, of doing rude justice in opening prison doors, of seeing a whole confraternity of office-holders and office-seekers in anxiety to placate them, are not so unready to take up arms again; especially when the whole mass of discontent is leavened with conscious revolutionists who are crying the means of social regeneration in their ears.

It is very plain now that the provisional governors are treading on thin crust, and the elections instead of steadying the human subsoil down to mortuary rigidity, may prove the prelude to more violent eruptions. In that case, the reluctant (?) hand at Washington may be forced to play—clubs! on its own responsibility.

Meanwhile, what have the revolutionary elements of the United States to say about it? I almost sneered as I wrote “revolutionary elements,” for candor compels us to inquire where they are. Time was when some people thought the Single Tax was based on a fundamentally revolutionary idea, the final expropriation of the landlord by the people. The Single Tax papers, however, have said as little as possible about the great Land cry of the Mexican revolutionists, have laid all stress upon the political mirage-chasing by which Madero and his coadjutors side-tracked the uprising of May, and have refused to print the Manifestoes and Appeals of the Mexican Liberal Party, to afford the publicity of their columns to the real demands of

the revolutionists, that their readers might give their sympathy and support, and the influence of their understanding. They were waiting, they said, for Madero to pronounce himself upon the land question! I opine they have still quite some wait coming.

From all which, it seriously appears that the expropriation of the landlords by the people, the restoration of the land to the people, is not the object of the single tax movement; on the contrary, the object is the establishment of the single tax itself,—not as a working means to a great end, the establishment of the equal right of all to the use of natural resources, but as a neat sleight-of-hand method for collecting revenue; at best, a way of getting rid of landlords by fooling them into getting rid of themselves, not because they are robbers to be got rid of, but because it's such a clever trick to play! Men are to demand the land, not that they may get the land, but that the demand may serve as an excuse for instituting the Single Tax!

If this is not the interpretation we are to put upon it, then how else are we to read the conspicuous silence of the Single Tax press concerning this great agrarian revolt? Millions of people have been demonstrating their appreciation that The Land for All the People is the primary foundation for a better economic structure. They have taken a more direct route than the single tax. And the land agitators are silent!

Time was when Socialism was a revolutionary word. And there are still some Socialists who are international revolutionists. But the official political Socialist Party, —bah! If ever the vitiating influence of the marriage of Socialism with Politics (that old Bluebeard husband of so many fine young wives) was demonstrated beyond disputation, it has been in the official attitude of Socialists towards this spontaneous manifestation of the Mexican people.

The utterances of Victor Berger, “the Socialist Congressman” (we receive this information as to his status with painful

reiteration at least once a column in every issue of the Chicago Daily Socialist), concerning “the bandits of Mexico” were enough to make the authors of the Communist Manifesto repudiate their name. Those strong souls who asserted that “the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things,” and appealed to “Workingmen of All Countries to unite,”—what would they have in common with a smug occupier of a congressional seat, who in a strongly marked German accent makes anti-immigration speeches against Slavs and Italians in the name of protection to American labor (?) and who directs his secretary to say, concerning the Mexican revolt, that “the Socialist Party can afford to have no connection with this movement” (?). In the light of this and similar utterances in the Socialist press (I have even learned on good authority that one Socialist editor really desires United States annexation of Mexico, but dares not advocate it yet, “because it would be unpopular” with Socialist readers) it would appear that the distribution of the Communist Manifesto by the Socialist Party is about of a piece with the distribution of the Christian Gospels by the Christian Church; in both cases, it is traditional literature, which nobody is supposed to take seriously.

Instead of giving even the news of international revolutionary movements (often one looks in vain for any), or the economic ground-plan of Socialism, we have columns of vice-crusading, sporting pages, and veritable hot-air balloons of self-inflation for having assisted in some relatively trivial petition. Only in their correspondence columns is there some occasional evidence of the indignant spirit of a true Socialist, outraged by all this trimming to suit the wind, this flunkeying to the respectable element, this suffocation of revolutionary principle and sentiment under a time-serving mantle of political prudence and cheap catering. Yes; Politics is nicely bluebearding Socialism. How far away is all this from