

Ricardo Flores Magón

The Triumph of the Social Revolution

1915

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Juan is ecstatic. He has just seen a notice from Washington in a newspaper, saying that they have recognized Carranza as the head of the Executive Power of the Mexican Republic. He effusively embraces his wife Josefa; he kisses his young son, and yells out:

“Now, peace will be a reality! Misery will End! Long Live Carranza!”

Josefa stands there with her mouth open, looking attentively at her husband. She does not understand how merely raising a new President to Power could put an end to misery. She casts a glance around the room, a room in a dead-end alleyway in the Mexico City neighborhood of Tepozán, and sighs. Everything around her is miserable. The wicker chairs are breaking apart at the bottom. The plate of the brazier does not have a sliver of carbon. The miserable bed flaunts sheets that display arbitrary drawings of maps, the product of a physically suffocated child. Atop the rickety table glows a stump of paraffin in the neck of a bottle streaked with dense droplets of melted fuel. Without realizing that his wife has not understood him, Juan yells:

“An era of prosperity and liberty has opened before the Mexican people! Long live Carranza!”

Josefa opens her eyes insolently. Decidedly, she does not comprehend what relation could obtain between the exaltation of an individual to Power and the death of misery. She submerges herself in profound reflections, until a louse, perhaps the hungriest among the innumerable ones that populate her head, jabs her terribly and returns her to reality. She scratches furiously, eagerly, frenetically. At the same time, with a voice enfeebled from prolonged periods of fasting, she says to her husband:

“Could you tell me, Juan, what are the poor going to gain when Carranza ascends to the Presidency?”

“Come on Josefa, do you still not understand these things? We are going to gain laws that benefit the worker. The ones we have favor the agricultural workers. We are going to receive lands from the hands of the government. Finally, we are going to enjoy liberty and well-being.”

The outline of a grin forms on Josepha’s lips, expressing the bitterness in her heart. Although poor, she has had the opportunity to read something about the History of Mexico. She remembers that all the presidents, before reaching a high public position, swore, thousand and thousands of times, to dedicate all their concerns to the well-being of the people. This was offered by the proclamations of Iturbide, the manifestos of Bustamante, the edicts of Santa Anna, and the proclamations, manifestos, songs and circulars of Zuloaga and Comonfort, of Gonzalez and of Diaz; in a word, of everyone, including Madero. All vowed to make the people happy, and the people were disgraced under all of them.

A bedbug walks slowly along the wall, as if killing time by going out for a stroll, while the poor people, the victims of the capitalist system, decide to go to bed. Josefa sees it, and with a prowess that demonstrates a great deal of practice, smears it with the tip of her toe, leaving a bright red footprint on the wall. The miserable woman casts an almost sympathetic glance at her husband, a glance that appears to say: “Poor slave! When will you open your eyes?”

Juan is radiant with joy, and shaking the newspaper overhead, exclaims,

“This a constitutional order. Respected individuals guarantee the prerogatives of citizenship, without bonds; impartial administrative justice; free suffrage; no reelection; honor among public functionaries. What more could you want, my wife? Why do you make your face look so sorrowful?”

Josefa replies

"This is all a very lovely dream; but what about the bread: who will give us bread?"

"Ha, ha, ha! For that, I have arms," Juan says, laughing. He adds, "Only the lazy will die of hunger."

Discouraged, Josefa lets her arms drop. "Decidedly," she thinks, "Juan is a perfect sheep." Various louse bites make her scratch herself desperately, until she begins to spout blood. Suddenly, peals are heard: it is the church bells of the parish of Santa Ana. Drifting from Tezontlale comes the rumble of cries, the clatter of the firecrackers, the peal of all the church bells that every temples emitted in turn, mixed with the triumphant notes of a military band playing a two-step. The noise winds up making Juan enthusiastic to the point of delirium. Taking off his hat, he marches out the street to give free rein to his exaltation, crying at the top of his voice: "Long Live Carranza!"

It is the supporters of Carranza who are celebrating the recognition of Carranza's government extended by foreign governments and the capitalists they represent.

A month has passed. Juan works, but his situation does not change. His miserable salary is just barely enough to prevent himself, Josefa, and his young son from materially dying of hunger. The room still contains the same broken windows, the same miserable bed with its maps, the poor table that they still have not been able to replace. In the brazier, they still can not cook a decent soup: Pieces of carbon cost too much, as if they were made of gold. The many bloody grooves in the walls indicate that the bedbugs still have not abandoned their habit of going for a walk before eating. The louses extract the fire from the poor Josefa.

"How much have we gained from the elevation of Carranza! Truly, my beloved Juan!" Josefa said with a certain sneer.

Juan scratches his head, tormented by the louses and by the deception. He believed that Carranza's ascendance to Power would ensure abundance in the home. Nevertheless, he can not accept defeat. He exclaims:

"It is impossible that a government could make the people happy in just one month. Let's give them some time so they can implement the reforms that will benefit the masses. Then we will see."

A year has passed. The conditions of Juan's life are the same as before. Certainly, the salaries are now greater. However, the owner of the house has increased the rents of the rooms; the merchants have raised the prices of primary necessities; clothes are more expensive now than they were before. Now, he works no more than eight hours a day. However, in the end, he has to do the same, exactly the same, that he did before in twelve, fourteen, and even sixteen hours.

Josefa has an copy of *Regeneration* in her hands. She reads it with marked interest, abandoning the reading for moments only when the pokings of the parasites make the intervention of her fingernails absolutely indispensable. Juan paces back and forth around the room. Visible agitated, he holds a red booklet in his hand, whose color is the only joyous tone in this dark well of misery, filth, and sadness: It is the Manifesto of September 23, 1911.

Suddenly, Juan interrupts his pacing, and, slapping his forehead, exclaims:

"What an blockhead I've been, and, along with me, all the workers who supported Carranza! We live here in misery, in the ultimate misery, even though

we break our backs in work just like we did before we elevated that old scoundrel to power. Those redistributions of land wound up being the crudest deceptions. One has to bribe officials to get anything. The laws that supposedly protect the worker are actually written to protect Capital. The bourgeoisie contrived to retrieve everything they had lost to us in a cunning manner. The concessions they made in their constitutional orders do not profit poor people. We continue to be, in virtue of our miserable poverty, the same pariahs as before. Death to Carranza!”

“Death to all Government!” yells Josefa, shaking the issue of *Regeneration* in her hand like a flag.

“Long live Anarchy!” Juan yells, shaking the red booklet, whose pages spout the freshness of youth, the exhalations of spring, the balm of hope, and the rays of the sun for all who suffer, for all who breathe, for all who drag their existence along in the black abyss of slavery and tyranny. . .

For the first time, the sordid room is ennobled, for it serves as the haven for a pair of lions and a cub.

Several days passed. The barricades of the Mexico City present a formidable front. The united neighborhoods of Merced, Curtidos, and Manzanares have erected barricades in two hours. Men, women, elders, children, and even some disabled people have taken part in the work. The ugly edifice of the Merced market has provided most of the material. Behind the barricade bristles a sea of palm hats. The leather sandals and the crude shoes of the defenders tread the black land energetically, now proud to serve as pedestals for a band of heroes. For many moments, they await the attack of Government forces. Everything is activity behind the barricade. The women dig trenches; the men wash their rifles; the children distribute outfits to those champions of the proletariat. A red flag, showing in white letters the inscription “Land and Liberty” smiles to the sun at the top of the barricade, sending its salute to all the disinherited of the earth from its peak. The proletariat of Capital is up in arms against Capital, the Government, and the Church.

The proletarians of Rastro and San Antonio Abad do not display any less activity. The butchers sharpen their knives, testing them with the tips of their thumbs. The streets adjacent to Rastro and the Factory of Hilados and Tejidos are stripped of pavement. All the materials have been converted into resources for the construction of the barricade. Tables, pottery, pianos, clothing, mattresses: all had been brought down in a horribly confusing heap of objects, serving to shield the noble bosoms of its defenders.

Belen and Salto del Agua; San Cosme and Santa Maria de la Rivera; San Lazaro and San Antonio Tomatlán; La Bolsa and Tepito; San Juan, Nonoalco, Santa Maria la Redonda, La Lagunilla; all the various districts of the populous city have vacated their neighborhoods and their dwellings, emboldened by the revolutionary fire. They prepare to resist the attack of the military officers supporting Carranza. The barricades sprung forth from the land in an opening and closing of the eyes. The barricades of San Lazaro and San Antonio Tomatlán shows upon its summit a singular flag. It is an old petticoat, torn and grimy. It is the flag of misery! It is the brave rag defying the world of the oppression and privilege. As long as the tatters are not detached from the proletariat’s body, the master remains tranquil. When it appears attached to the top of a staff, the world trembles.

Whereas all the barricades are filled with enthusiasm, nothing surmounts the

activity, enthusiasm, audacity, and revolutionary zeal in the united barricade of the neighborhoods of Peralvillo, Santa Anna, and Tezontlale. Juan and Josefa do not rest for a moment. Blackened with powder, they look very beautiful, sweating, panting, crossing to and fro in the barricade, communicating energy and enthusiasm to its defenders. Suddenly a formidable clamor, followed by rifle shots and bugle blasts, can be heard from the direction of Concepción Tequipehuca.

“It is our comrades from Bolsa and Tepito fighting!” Juan cries, tossing his hat into the air.

A few minutes later, the air resounds with the roar of cannons, the racket of rifle shots, the beating of the drums, the angry cries of the bugle, the martial airs of the military bands. They are all jumbled together in one singular thunderous crack throughout the entire city. All the barricades were being attacked simultaneously by the Carranza’s forces.

Juan and Josefa climb to the height of the barricade where they see a dense column of Carranza supporters approaching the streets of Santo Domingo on foot.

“Finally, the enemy is closing in, comrades,” they yell at the same time. “Everybody: choose the place that best suits you to defend our bastion!”

In an instant, the barricade is crowned with rifles. The enemy places two canons at the base of Santa Catarina y Moras street, while part of the column continues advancing toward the barricade, which is situated at the base of the street.

An imperious voice emerges from the column when it is a hundred paces away from the barricade:

“In the name of the supreme government, give yourselves up!” it says.

“Long live Land and Liberty!” the defenders of the barricade answer.

Rifle shots follow rapidly from both sides. The cannons direct their projectiles against the center of the barricade in order to open a breach. The smoke saturates the atmosphere until becomes unbreatheable. The attack is furious; the resistance is formidable. Carranza’s officers accompany their shots with abusive words; the proletarian defenders of the barricade sing:

Child of the people, shackles constrict you,
but this injustice can not continue:
If your existence is filled with pain,
Rather than being a slave, prefer to die.

Broadcast to the four winds like an invitation made to dignity and honor are the notes of this magnificent hymn; of this hymn common to all the downtrodden of the world; of this hymn that condenses all the bitter martyrdoms of the people and the anguish of its saints who long for redemption, of this hymn that is simultaneously a complaint, a protest, and a threat.

The following day, the proletarians of Mexico city celebrate the triumph of the Social Revolution. The capitalist System has died.

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October 17, 2009



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Author: Ricardo Flores Magón
Title: The Triumph of the Social Revolution
Publication date: 1915

Retrieved on April 8th, 2009 from
<http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/magon/ENArticles/triumph.html>
Translated from Spanish by Mitchell Cowen Verter. From "Regeneration" number 209,
October 23, 1915.