

# **Mexican Workers in the IWW and the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM)**

Devra Anne Weber

2016

# Contents

<b>Mexicans re-envisioning the Industrial Workers of the World</b> . . . . .	4
Fernando Palomares, leaving 'trails of powder' . . . . .	8
Conclusion . . . . .	11

Rosendo A. Dorame  
1879–1932  
Phoenix IWW Local 272  
“An injury to one is an injury to all.”  
— Gravestone in Evergreen Cemetery, East Los Angeles

Mexican workers have been part of the making of the United States since, as the saying goes, the border crossed them by the end of the Mexican American War in 1846.[1] The expanding industrial capitalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries propelled an increasing number of Mexicans to work in the growing mining, railroad, and agricultural industries and cities on both sides of the border. The new conditions of modernity elicited new kinds of resistant social movements, which took the form of social revolution, internationalist unions, and local uprisings.

Early twentieth century Mexicans who migrated into the US were diverse. Many were from indigenous communities, spoke indigenous languages, and were tied to families and social networks which still considered themselves indigenous. These social relations shaped migration, work, and were cornerstones of developing communities. Mexicans were also part of an international group of workers laboring in the United States. Some Mexicans joined internationalist social movements such as the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) which was organizing for a social revolution in Mexico. Others, usually members of the PLM, worked with and also joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The PLM members helped shape Spanish speaking locals of the IWW. Mexican PLM members who joined the IWW challenge IWW historiography which excludes these workers. They suggest the need for multilingual research into workers whose communities and political concerns shaped local organizing. Much as indigenous people in the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) of Chiapas led the first uprising against NAFTA’s neoliberal agenda in 1994, indigenous Mexicans were part of internationalist responses to the ravages of early twentieth-century globalization.<sup>1</sup>

Mexican workers such as Rosendo Dorame, whose epitaph opens this essay, are emblematic of PLM Wobblies in the early twentieth century. Rosendo was born to a Mexican family from Sonora, who had moved to Florence, Arizona.<sup>2</sup> He was possibly an Opatá Indian. He found work where he could – as a barber, a miner, a carpenter, even serving a brief stint as an Arizona sheriff. Piecing together shards of information, we know he worked in Texas, found jobs across Arizona, in Colorado and California, and possibly labored in northern Mexico. Somewhere in these travels, he joined the Western Federation of Miners, and claimed to have participated in

---

<sup>1</sup> A number of historians have written about Mexican workers in the IWW, unions, and the United States Communist Party (CPUSA). See Monroy, D. (1983). “Anarquismo y Comunismo: Mexican Radicalism and the Communist Party in Los Angeles Curing the 1930s.” *Labor History* 24(1): 34–59, Vargas, Z. (1993). *Proletarians of the North: A history of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917–1933*. Berkeley, University of California Press, Gomez-Quinones, J. (1994). *Mexican American Labor 1790–1990*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, Gonzalez, G. G. (1994). *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900–1950*. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, Zamora, E. (1995). *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*. College Station Texas, Texas A&M.

<sup>2</sup> The Los Angeles Times, sure that Dorame was Indian but confused as to what kind, referred to him as “another California Mexican Indian.” See “Order IWW from El Paso,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 1913, p.16. His family believes he was Opatá or from a mixture of indigenous roots. Dorame was listed alternately as Mexican or Caucasian on the census and in his Leavenworth prison record.

Colorado's Cripple Creek mining strike which lasted from 1903 to 1905.<sup>3</sup> He joined the IWW and worked with other organizations in the US that were open to Mexicans. He was a candidate on the Socialist Party ticket for its constitutional convention in 1910. This bilingual Mexican (for he was "Mexican" in the Southwest, regardless of his U.S. citizenship) also belonged to the Partido Liberal Mexicano. In 1911 Dorame recruited Mexican men from mining camps across Arizona, and led one arm of a coordinated invasion into Mexico that the PLM hoped would trigger a revolution.<sup>4</sup> He was arrested in 1912 and, convicted of violating neutrality laws, spent a year in Leavenworth federal prison. He later organized an IWW strike in an El Paso smelter along with Francisco Palomares and in 1917 was part of organizing the Bisbee Arizona copper strike.<sup>5</sup>

## **Mexicans re-envisioning the Industrial Workers of the World**

Mexicans were a critical part of the workforce that built the expanding industrial United States, yet they were also an under-recognized part of organized efforts to improve working conditions through unions and social movements. Some Mexicans joined and organized with the IWW. The PLM acted as a de facto recruiting tool for the IWW, and "paved the way for the powerful IWW movement among the Mexican workers, both in America [sic] and Mexico," as a 1911 letter noted in the IWW newspaper, *The Industrial Worker*.<sup>6</sup>

Migration is an important part of this story. This period was one of intense mobility, as the insecurity of jobs forced laborers to move in search of work. The IWW reflected the movement of workers, and was as much in motion and en route as it was rooted in a factory town, rural area, or city. These movements were embodied in the IWW membership card which became the de facto ticket to ride the rails: those without the card could be summarily removed from train cars by other Wobblies. The IWW traveled with workers and with traveling organizer propagandists who carried the newspapers. Through its newspaper, *The Industrial Worker*, the IWW could mobilize over large areas. The effect of this IWW in motion can be seen in actions, such as the cry to join free-speech fights in western cities which was met by an influx of Wobblies. The IWW also traveled with workers across national boundaries, albeit shaped by the particular political concerns of these workers. Italian and Swedish Wobblies returning home (for a visit or longer) formed grassroots internationalist ties. Among Mexicans, the experience with the PLM and IWW, as they understood it, traveled back with some of them to villages, settlements and work sites in Mexico.

Although unrecognized in most histories, Mexicans were a crucial part of building the IWW, especially in the southwest. Within a year of the IWW's 1905 founding, Mexican organizers were working among Mexican laborers in the borderlands of northern Mexico and the southwestern United States. Rosendo Dorame and an Arizona-born blacksmith, Fernando Velarde, co-founded the Phoenix IWW local 272 in 1906. Three years later, they started the first Spanish-language

---

<sup>3</sup> *Regeneración*, March 23, 1912

<sup>4</sup> *Tucson Citizen*, October 31, 1911.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller account of the strike, see Mellinger, P. J. (1995). *Race and Labor in Western Copper: The Fight for Equality, 1896–1918*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press, Benton-Cohen, K. (2009). *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.. The Pueblo Chief tan, September 16, 1917. Personal communication, Jo Dorome, February 4 2009. See also prison file for Rosendo A. Dorame, Leavenworth Prison.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Stanley M. Gue, Local 13 San Diego IWW. *Industrial Worker* September 7, 1911.

IWW newspaper, *La Union Industrial*. Mexicans were among the Wobbly traveling organizers and propagandists, the lifeblood of the organization who connected disparate groups of workers into an organizational network. For example, by 1905 Fernando Palomares, a Mayo Indian from Sinaloa, Mexico, was organizing Mexican workers into the IWW in Arizona while meeting with Yaquis and Mayos in Cananea mining camps forty-some miles away.

Despite ongoing perceptions by Anglo workers, and many observers in the US, that Mexican workers were peons untutored in organization, Mexicans joined the IWW and in some areas were a substantial part or majority of the membership. By 1909, “the bulk of [the Phoenix local’s] membership was ‘Spanish speaking.’”<sup>7</sup> In Los Angeles of 1909, the number of Mexican Wobblies had increased so much that the IWW local expected “to almost double our number” when they formed an all-Mexican branch.<sup>8</sup> While exact numbers are elusive, Mexican Wobblies were visible enough to inspire the *Los Angeles Times* (in hysteria-based inflation) to report that “15,000 Mexicans belong to this branch of this malcontent order,” although more reliable sources put the number at about 500.<sup>[10]</sup> In 1910 a labor march of 10,000 in the city sported a group of an estimated two thousand “unskilled” men and women, mostly Mexican, who marched under the banner of “Workers of the World Unite” along with Russian workers.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Mexicans’ work with, and support for, the IWW was part of other strategies and concerns about Mexico. All Mexican Wobblies I’ve encountered in research were also members of the *Partido Liberal Mexicano*. The PLM had been founded in Mexico in 1902 as part of the liberal opposition to Mexican President Porfirio Diaz. Facing increasing repression in Mexico, the organization relocated to the United States, eventually moving to Los Angeles. The PLM membership drew primarily from artisans, industrial workers, and a nascent middle class in the United States and Mexico and had a substantial following north of the border, with strong enclaves in California, Texas, and New Mexico. The circulation of its newspaper, *Regeneración*, was 30,000 in 1906, and in 1914, after the organization’s heyday, the Los Angeles chapter’s membership alone was 6000.<sup>10</sup> Through its newspaper, the PLM focused on abuses suffered by rural and urban workers, attacked US capitalist incursions in Mexico, defended indigenous rights to communal land, and called for a social revolution in Mexico. They found support among Anglos and left-wing organizations, among them the Western Federation of Miners and the Socialist Party. From 1909 to 1911 the PLM was a popular cause of the left in the US, finding their staunchest allies in the IWW. The PLM made several attempts to create revolts in Mexico, in 1906, 1908 and 1910-1911. The PLM’s continued attempts to foment a revolution in Mexico were increasingly impeded by coordinated efforts of the U.S. and Mexican governments which worked to either incarcerate or assassinate leading PLM members. A number of PLM members, including the organization’s leader Ricardo Flores Magon were jailed by the US government on charges of violating neutrality laws. Flores Magon would die in Leavenworth prison in 1920 under circumstances that led to widespread suspicions that he had been murdered.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *Industrial Worker* May 20, 1909.

<sup>8</sup> *Industrial Worker*, July 1, 1909.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, A. (1915). *The Basis of Solidarity*. *New Review*. 3: 186. *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1914.

<sup>10</sup> McEuen, W. W. (1914). *A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles 1910-1914*. Los Angeles, University of Southern California. 89.

<sup>11</sup> For selected works on the PLM see: Gomez-Quinones, J. (1982). *Sembradores: Ricardo Flores Magon y el Partido Mexicano*. Los Angeles, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publications. 24., Torres-Pares, J. (1990). *La Revolucion sin frontera: El Partido Liberal Mexicano y las relaciones entre el movimiento obrero de México y de los Estados Unidos 1900-1923*. México D.F., UNAM, Sandos, J. A. (1992). *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and*

PLM-Wobblies shaped some locals into de facto syndicalist arms of the PLM. They were ubiquitous enough that in Bisbee, Arizona in 1917, where the head of the Mexican IWW local also sold *Regeneración*, sheriffs used the terms “Magonistas” (so called after PLM leader Ricardo Flores Magon ) and “Mexican IWW” as substitutes for each other.<sup>12</sup> Meeting places were used interchangeably, and a meeting of one organization easily overlapped with a meeting focusing on concerns of the other. Arizona mining hubs such as Douglas, Clifton-Morenci, Bisbee, and other towns often both clandestine and open locals of both organizations, with often common memberships. By 1909 the PLM formed Grupo *Regeneración*, a network of small clubs established to raise money and increase sales for the PLM’s newspaper, and to spread PLM ideas. These groups popped up in small towns as well as cities and formed de facto organizing foci for the PLM. These small groups seemed to have met regularly. Some appeared to have formed discussion groups which read aloud *Regeneración*, fueled petition campaigns, scrounged for arms, and in some areas, especially along the border were part of ongoing battles. They also worked with IWW locals. In a number of cities and towns, women formed all-female branches.

Its unclear how many Mexican women actually joined the IWW, as did Isabel Fierro, a well-known IWW member in the California border town of Calexico who was a member of the PLM and of the local Grupo *Regeneración*. [15] Women who worked in the fields, ran boarding houses, cooked, cleaned clothes, and raised children also supported workers’ strikes and the PLM in various ways. Some made tamales, coffee, and prepared food for fundraisers, typed, sang, and passed out literature at rallies. They raised money. They smuggled letters in and out of jails and smuggled guns and ammunition across the border. They made flags, visited prisoners, and helped with plans for revolution. Activist partners of traveling organizer propagandists continued political work while caring for children and households while their partners were away. Eloise Monreal Velarde, wife of Member of the PLM Wobbly Fernando Velarde, hid organizers escaping the law in their California home, fed them, and organized a memorial in their home on the day the Swedish Wobbly Joe Hill – also a family friend – was executed. As an organization, the PLM was more progressive than the IWW. Magon’s statement on women, “A La Mujer” argued for the liberation of women. Yet most PLM pronouncements, similar to those of the IWW, implicitly or explicitly assumed a female “nature.”<sup>13</sup>

Women’s involvement in the PLM was reported in PLM newspapers, but more research is needed to more thoroughly excavate political activities and familial dynamics.. Politics was often a family affair. Josefina Amador Fierro Arancibia, whose brother and father were PLM members and Wobblies, sang PLM songs at political rallies. She ran Winchester rifles across the border at Mexicali in a baby carriage. Basiliza Franco, the daughter of PLM parents, who would marry another PLM Wobbly, Fernando Palomares formed a support group for PLM Wobblies imprisoned in Leavenworth federal prison, among them her father Efran Franco and Palomares. Her mother, Josefa was the group’s treasurer. Basiliza made the red flags that PLM members used

---

the Plan of San Diego, 1904–1923. Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, Cienfuegos, A. T. (2003). *El Magonismo en Sonora: Historia de una persecucion*. Hermosillo, Universidad de Sonora, Torua-Cienfuegos, A. (2003). *El Magonismo en Sonora: Historia de una persecución*. Hermosillo, Universidad de Sonora.

<sup>12</sup> Benton-Cohen, K. (2009). *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 210, *Regeneración* November 19, 1910.

<sup>13</sup> Flores-Magón, R. (1974). *A La Mujer*. Oakland, Prensa Sembradora. Interview with Evelyn Velarde Benson by author, Los Angeles, California, May 4, 1971. Perez, E. (1999). *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

in the subsequent “red flag revolt” of 1911, and led an all-female Grupo Regeneración in El Paso. She smuggled Regeneración and PLM literature across the border, may well have contributed to Fernando’s organizing with the IWW in an El Paso smelter, and his later work in Los Angeles with the PLM and IWW.<sup>14</sup>

Mexicans published Spanish-language newspapers that were Wobbly papers which featured articles about PLM plans for revolution. Phoenix local 272, under Fernando Velarde and Rosendo Dorame, published *La Union Industrial*, which advertised itself as “the only Spanish paper in the United States teaching revolutionary industrial unionism.” Mexican Wobblies in Los Angeles published *Huelga General* between 1912 and 1914, and *El Rebelde* which ran from 1915-1919.<sup>15</sup> The PLM newspaper *Regeneración* often ran news of IWW strikes and organizing, which helped build support for the union among Mexicans. The newspapers found a receptive audience. An Arizona Anglo organizer wrote that “...only a very limited number of them can read, but those that can sure can eat up the literature we can get to them in their own language.”<sup>16</sup> Newspapers would be passed “from hand to hand and from one town to another until they fell to pieces from use. One man who could read would meet with others in a house or small hut, and there by the light of a candle, he would read the paper to them.”<sup>17</sup> Newspapers were read aloud in homes, towns, public squares, and workplaces. A Mexican worker interviewed in the 1920s said he had picked up anarchism by listening to speakers in the old Plaza of downtown Los Angeles, visiting the local hall of the Spanish language IWW (which sported a library of anarchist literature), and reading newspapers.<sup>18</sup>

Anglo Americans tended to believe that most Mexican workers were peons, unlikely to organize. Yet among Mexican migrants were those who had been involved in the liberal movement in Mexico, in indigenous rebellions, and early labor organizing in Mexico. Some had joined strikes, such as the bloody Cananea copper strike of 1906. Some Mexicans north of the border knew about or had been members of the Knights of Labor (called *Los Caballeros de Trabajo* in Spanish) in earlier decades. Mexicans in the US became involved in strikes in agriculture, the mines, the railroad, smelters, and other sites where they worked. Mexicans picking crops joined Japanese workers and went on strike in the 1903 Oxnard strike in California. Up to fourteen hundred Mexican track workers building the Los Angeles streetcar network went on a series of strikes from 1903 to 1911.<sup>19</sup> Mexican mine workers in the binational copper-mining triangle spanning northern Mexico, Arizona, and New Mexico contested the dual-labor system that paid Mexicans half of that earned by their Anglo counterparts, and they were part of large and bitter strikes in 1903, 1906, 1907, 1909, 1915, and 1917 as well as of smaller work stoppages that became so

---

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Josefina Arancibia by author. Madera, California, 1982, For *Basiliza* see *Regeneración* July 29, 1911, December 6, 1911, January 11, 1913, Leavenworth prison files of Fernando Palomarez.

<sup>15</sup> Mellinger claims it was put out by the Propaganda League of Mexicans in LA. Mellinger, P. J. (1995). *Race and Labor in Western Copper: The Fight for Equality, 1896–1918*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press. 178.

<sup>16</sup> From Charles Clinton, IWW Camp delegate, *Industrial Worker* October 5, 1911.

<sup>17</sup> Ethel Duffy Turner, “Fernando Palomarez”, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>18</sup> “Guillermo Salorio” Gamio, M. (1930). *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant: Autobiographic Documents Collected by Manuel Gamio*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, Estrada, W. (2008). *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space*. Austin, University of Texas Press.

<sup>19</sup> Gomez-Quinones, J. (1994). *Mexican American Labor 1790–1990*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press. 78

frequent that they were dubbed “strikitos.”<sup>20</sup> In 1907 one organizer in Clifton, Arizona remarked that Mexicans and Italians had a “strong sentiment for organization,” arguing that those who “most require education along industrial lines are not wage workers of alien races but the so called ‘intelligent American skilled workers.’”<sup>21</sup> Another wrote from California that “contrary to the accepted notion that Mexicans won’t stick ... the majority of [strikers] were Mexicans [and are]...setting a good example of solidarity.”<sup>22</sup> The Los Angeles Labor Press wrote of the 1915 Arizona miners’ strike that “everyone knows it was the Mexican miners that won the strike ....”<sup>23</sup>

PLM members of the IWW circulated within a larger international grouping of workers, rubbing shoulders with Swedes, Lithuanians, Greeks, Russians, Italians, and workers from other backgrounds — at work, on streets of cities such as Los Angeles, in towns, and on the road. *Regeneración* carried greetings of solidarity from Cuba, France, and Italy; printed news of the general strike in Sweden; and followed Yaqui battles against Mexican government troops. In downtown Los Angeles multiethnic meetings were held in the old Los Angeles Plaza, bounded by Chinatown on one side, Main Street on another — filled with bars, pool halls, and employment agencies — and the old Plaza Catholic church. Italian Hall, host to many multinational gatherings, was half a block away. This old historic Mexican core of Los Angeles was a hub for international organizing for early twentieth century revolutions. By 1904 Sun Yat Sen was organizing Chinese in Los Angeles’s Chinatown to join a revolution in China which would break out in 1911. A few years later PLM rallies called for the fall of Mexican President Diaz and a social revolution in Mexico. Similar rallies were held at the Italian Hall, and nearby Burbank Hall, where meetings for the PLM boasted speakers in Spanish, Italian, “Hebrew” (probably Yiddish), and German.<sup>24</sup> Smaller towns echoed this internationalism. In the dusty desert town of Holtville, in California’s Imperial Valley near the Mexican border, *Regeneración* reported “real internationalism and solidarity” as French, Italian, Mexican, Argentinean, and North American Wobblies constructed a new labor temple in the agricultural town.<sup>25</sup> Certainly, working together and living in proximity did not erase previous prejudices, animosities, and hostilities. Employers did successfully pitted groups of workers against one another. Yet the conditions of work and migration encouraged a burgeoning sense of internationalism.

## **Fernando Palomares, leaving ‘trails of powder’**

Biography can trace the lives of Mexican organizers and suggest how working with the IWW was part of binational strategies. Mexican traveling organizer-propagandists were descendants of tramping artisans and the lifeblood of the PLM and the IWW. One of these, Fernando Palomares, likened his work to “leaving a trail of powder,” an incendiary mix of explosive ideas. Palomares

---

<sup>20</sup> Benton-Cohen, K. (2009). *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 203, see also Huginnie, A. Y. (1991). ‘Strikitos: Race, Class and Work in the Arizona Copper Industry, 1870–1920. *History, Yale*: 380. Mellinger, P. J. (1995). *Race and Labor in Western Copper: The Fight for Equality, 1896–1918*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press. , 178

<sup>21</sup> Letter from H.W. Kane. *Miners Magazine* February 21, 1907.

<sup>22</sup> *Industrial Worker* October 15, 1911.

<sup>23</sup> *Labor Press*, April 14, 1916. cited in Gomez-Quinones, J. (1994). *Mexican American Labor 1790–1990*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press.

<sup>24</sup> *Regeneración* September 3, 1910, May 13, 1911, June 16, 1911 and other dates. Estrada, W. D. (2008). *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space*. Berkeley, University of California Press. 134–138.

<sup>25</sup> *Regeneración* January 21, 1911.



came from a Mayo Indian family near the small enclave of Mayocoba, Sinaloa, in northern Mexico. The trilingual Palomares— he spoke Yoeme, the language of the Mayo and Yaqui, as well as Spanish and English – joined the PLM in 1902. Sent by the PLM to the copper-mining town of Cananea in 1903, he worked with the liberal underground and organized miners, especially in Yaqui and Mayo labor camps. By 1905 he joined the IWW, and became a prominent traveling organizer and propagandist with both organizations. He was known as a Mayo, signing letters to Flores Magon with “el indio mayo.”<sup>26</sup>

Palomares, as one Anglo wobbly wrote, was “well known to all California IWW men.”<sup>27</sup> He served as a bridge between Mexican workers, members of the PLMs and monolingual English-speaking allies. Palomares was a dedicated IWW organizer, yet his primary loyalty was to the PLM and Flores Magon. In 1908, for example, Palomares and Juan Olivares published a short-lived “independent liberal newspaper” in Los Angeles called *Libertad y Trabajo* for Spanish-speaking Wobblies and PLM members. Yet articles were more focused on the PLM, and many were penned, under pseudonyms, by Flores Magon and Member of the PLMs, and was jettisoned when Palomares and Olivares abruptly left to organize for a long-planned PLM revolutionary uprising in Mexico.<sup>28</sup>

Palomares’s departure marked the beginning of a trip that lasted from 1908 to 1910, taking him from Southern California, through northern and central Mexico, and back into the United States and across the Midwest, the Southwest, and the Pacific Northwest. This trip is the only journey of a traveling organizer of the time that is relatively well documented. The Mexican trip was a critical part of Flores Magon’s plan for an uprising in Mexico in 1908. Magon had designated Palomares as the delegate to work with Mayos and Yaquis in Northern Mexico. In Mexico, Palomares met with PLM supporters. Walking some of the way, jumping trains when he could, he met with contacts, targeted workers in particular areas, distributed newspapers and literature and delivered clandestine plans and letters. Over four months, Palomares made his way through northwest and central Mexico, speaking with workers, meeting with PLM cadres, and moving between safe houses, where he collected mail, money, and wrote reports back to the PLM leadership. When the attempted revolution failed, he moved south.

When Palomares crossed back into the United States, he first moved north across Texas; into Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska; then west into Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada; north again into the mining areas of Montana; across into Washington; and then down into Oregon and California, where he crisscrossed between the interior and coast. His itinerary was probably driven by pre-arranged meetings with groups of PLM groups, and specific areas where Mexicans

---

<sup>26</sup> See Monroy, J. G. (1962). *Ricardo Flores Magón y su actitud en la Baja California*. México DF, Editorial Academia Literaria. 67, Turner, E. D. (1981). *Revolution in Baja California: Ricardo Flores Magon’s High Noon*. Detroit, Michigan, Blaine Ethridge – Books. 60. Martinez, P. L. (1960). *A History of Lower California*. Mexico D.F., Editorial Baja California. 467, Bassols, J. B. (2000). *Correspondencia: Obras Completas Ricardo Flores-Magón*. México D.F., CONACULTA.

<sup>27</sup> *Industrial Worker*, July 16, 1910

<sup>28</sup> Other articles, written by Member of the PLMs such as Blas Lara, Maria Talavera, Lucie Norman (Talavera’s daughter), and Teresa and Andrea Villarreal were prominently featured in the newspaper. *Libertad y Trabajo* ran from May 9, 1908 to June 13, 1908. UCLA Special Collections. See letter from Ricardo Flores Magon to Enrique Flores Magon, June 7, 1908 in Bassols, J. B. (2000). *Correspondencia: Obras Completas Ricardo Flores-Magón*. México D.F., CONACULTA. Vol 1 p444-462, 699 re plans for the 1908 uprising. See also. Gomez-Quinones, J. (1982). *Sembradores: Ricardo Flores Magon y el Partido Mexicano*. Los Angeles, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publications. 42. Palomares wrote this in a letter to the editor of *Revolt*, March 6, 1912, re support of IWW local see *Regeneración*, March 6, 1912.

worked, such as in sugar beets, at cotton farms, railroad camps or mines. In Denver, he met Bill Haywood and Charles Moyer to thank them for the Western Federation of Miners's support to Mexican strikers in Cananea. His route into Washington and Montana may have been following IWW free-speech fights which were erupting in 1909. In Seattle he met with William Z. Foster, a leader in the Spokane free-speech fight. He may have met with PLM member Blas Lara who worked at a coal mine near Seattle, or with Mexicans who surfaced in the Spokane free-speech fight in 1909, or some who were later among the fifteen hundred Mexicans who joined the Seattle general strike of 1919.<sup>29</sup>

Organizing for PLM revolutionary efforts in Mexico coalesced in preparations for a 1910–1911 PLM/IWW invasion into Baja California. The focal points for organizing were the desert areas of the Imperial Valley of California and the adjacent Mexicali valley of Baja California. *Regeneración* reported that PLM supporters in the area – numbering at least one hundred people – all belonged to the IWW by 1911.<sup>30</sup> Palomares and indigenous organizers planned for the invasion from the Imperial Valley. Camilo Jimenez, a Cocopah Indian and member of the IWW and PLM, recruited for the invasion, holding meetings in a newly constructed IWW hall. Jimenez organized “a small cavalry” of about three hundred and fifty Cocopahs, who formed what one writer estimated to be about a third of the expeditionary force in the immediate borderlands.<sup>31</sup>

Palomares was simultaneously in San Diego organizing a Spanish-speaking IWW local.<sup>32</sup> According to *Regeneración*, night after night orators in San Diego were “instructing their brothers in their rights as the producing class” Palomares led a multiethnic strike among the city's gas workers, doubling the size of the IWW and creating a Spanish-speaking public service workers IWW local. This spirit was directed toward organizing the Baja invasion. An anonymous letter suggested, Mexican Wobblies were preparing to “cooperate with their fellow slaves in Mexico.”<sup>33</sup> Tellingly, the IWW local abruptly dissolved itself in 1911: the reason for disbanding read simply ‘Mexican Revolution.’<sup>34</sup> The attempt to take Baja California for the revolution was ultimately a failure, yet these preparations provide a window into PLM Wobblies and their organizers.

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibíd.*, Blas Lara-Caceras wrote his autobiography under a pseudonym; Mariano Gómez-Gutierrez, Lara-Caceras], M. G. G. a. f. B. (1954). “La vida que yo viví. Novela histórico-liberal de la

<sup>30</sup> *Regeneración*, January 21, 1911, Monroy, J. G. (1962). Ricardo Flores Magón y su actitud en la Baja California. México DF, Editorial Academia Literaria. p 63.

<sup>31</sup> Ironically, Camilo Jimenez, also understood early twentieth century tourism and, playing off the popularity of all things “Indian,” raised money for the invasion by “making moccasins and selling them to American tourists.” “*Regeneración* April 29, 1911. See also Martinez, P. L. (1960). A History of Lower California. Mexico D.F., Editorial Baja California, Monroy, J. G. (1962). Ricardo Flores Magón y su actitud en la Baja California. México DF, Editorial Academia Literaria, Turner, E. D. (1981). Revolution in Baja California: Ricardo Flores Magon's High Noon. Detroit, Michigan, Blaine Ethridge – Books. On the Cocopahs see Spicer, E. H. (1962). Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533–1960. Tucson, University of Arizona Press. 262–265, 25–45.

<sup>32</sup> Blaisdell, L. L. (1962). The Desert Revolution: Baja, California, 1911. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press. , p156. San Diego Union, June 6, 1911. Brissenden, P. F. (1919). The IWW: A Study of American Syndicalism. New York, Columbia University Press. p156. For the strike, see Industrial Worker, July 16, 1910, *Regeneración* Sept 3, 1910. There was at least one report that a rally held at Germania Hall for the strikers was attended by a “mixed” gathering of 250, including Mexicans, “negroes and a number of Americans” San Diego Union, August 29, 1910.

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Industrial Worker November 2, 1910 from Local Union 13, San Diego. The writer, citing the large number of Mexican workers, also asked the IWW to fund a Spanish-speaking organizer for the southwestern states.

<sup>34</sup> Brissenden, P. F. (1919). The IWW: A Study of American Syndicalism. New York, Columbia University Press. 366.

## Conclusion

Rosendo Dorame's headstone which opened this piece is indicative not just of history, but of persistent memories and influences of Member of the PLM Wobblies. PLM- Wobblies became a touchstone for a younger generation, and influenced activists in the 1930s who, in turn, educated activists of the 1960s. Some Mexican families boast multigenerational legacies of social activism: PLM -Wobblies, members of the Communist Party. activists in the United Farm Workers, the Chicano movement, and in current immigration struggles. Josefina Amador Fierro Arancibia, for example, later joined the Communist Party U.S.A., and her daughter, Josefina Fierro Bright, helped form the Spanish Speaking People's Congress in the late 1930s and 1940s. Fernando Velarde's son, Guillermo, helped form and lead the successful agricultural union, the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (CUCOM), a union active in the 1930s in southern California that eventually became part of the national CIO agricultural union.<sup>35</sup>

PLM Wobblies provide a window into the diverse history of Mexicans who migrated to the United States and into the historical roots of many Chicano families and communities. They challenged economic structures, and fought to launch a social revolution in Mexico. While their vision of revolution did not succeed in the way they envisioned, they are the familial and ideological links to earlier binational movements and provide historical perspectives and connections to binational visions and organizing for social change in the twenty first century.

[1]This is an excerpt from "Keeping Community, Challenging Boundaries: Indigenous Migrants, Internationalist Workers and Mexican Revolutionaries, 1900–1920," in John Tutino, ed., *Mexico and Mexicans in the History and Culture of the United States* (Austin: University of Texas press, 2012) 208–235.

I want to thank Miguel Albert Bartolome for his thoughtful comments on my initial presentation of this paper, and comments by John Tutino, Laura Velasco-Ortiz, Juan Gomez-Quinones, and Alice Wexler. Thanks also to Sharla Felt, Emily Able, Janet Brodie, Carla Bittel, and UC Riverside's Center for Ideas and Society. Some ideas contained here were originally published in Devra Weber, "Un pasado no visto: perspectivas históricas sobre la migración binacional de pueblos indígenas" in Laura Velasco Ortiz. *Migración, Fronteras e identidades Étnicas Transnacionales*, México: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte y Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2008, 119–139

31. Los Angeles Times February 14, 1914. The lower estimate is by Monroy, Monroy, J. G. (1962). *Ricardo Flores Magón y su actitud en la Baja California*. México DF, Editorial Academia Literaria. 109

37. For Isabel Fierro, see *Regeneración*, November 24, 1911 and December 12, 1911. She is also referred to as "a Mexican girl, a member of local 437" of the Calexico IWW. *Industrial Worker* December 7, 1911.

*Revolución Mexicana*". Mexico D.F., s.n.

---

<sup>35</sup> Weber, D. (1994). *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton and the New Deal*. Berkeley, California, University of California Press. 85, 159–160.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



Devra Anne Weber  
Mexican Workers in the IWW and the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM)  
2016

Retrieved on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021 from [depts.washington.edu](http://depts.washington.edu)

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)