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Felipe Corrêa
Magonism and Zapatism
Latin Paradigm of Resistance
June 2006

Retrieved on 14th October 2021 from www.anarkismo.net
This article is an excerpt from Social Mobilizations in Latin America: from the nationalization of Bolivian resources to the resistance in Mexico. Felipe Correa is a militant from the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ). Translated for Anarkismo.net by Jonathan-ZACF.

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tarian socialists of today will accompany these movements, and try to influence them as much as is possible, or if they will simply abandon the train of history, leaving them only to the tentacles of the state, the alienation of capitalism, and the ill-elements that seek every day to use them, clearly in a bad way.

Unlike the attempts at change that take place inside the state, there are those alternatives which are outside the state. It is inevitable that we talk in dispute of power, but understanding power as political space, and not as the power of the state and as domination. Power does not necessarily imply domination. Therefore, it is clear that social movements, although generally constituted outside of the state, dispute political space with the state and the representatives of representative democracy. The movements that have or have had, in history, the objective to provide a change of status-quo, and give it a more libertarian direction, certainly disputed political space with reaction and with the state. In the vast majority of cases, to claim something in an organized fashion, constituted them a movement.

Latin America has a great tradition of social movements and, for this discussion, I believe it's relevant to use two of them, both from Mexico in the context of the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century, and which continue to play a major role in Latin America until our days: Magonism and Zapatism.

Magonism

In 1876 the dictatorship of Porfírio Diaz was initiated; a government characterized by the exploitation of the worker and peasant classes, concentration of wealth, political power and access to education, basically in the families of latifundists and foreign companies, coming principally from France, England and the United States. The concentration of land in Mexico was absurd, and the ranch owners were "absolute masters of men and things", with immense power and resources. Although the people were living in extreme poverty, the dictatorship of Diaz ensured large profits for capitalist investment

from abroad. Nine million Mexicans were illiterate. According to Pier Francesco Zarcone:

> *"The two main pillars of the system of rural properties were:*
>
> a. *the 'tiendas de raya' [stripe stores] – grocery, liquor and poor quality clothing stores (the owners of them were the ranch owners themselves), where the peasants from a farm were forced to make their purchases, including and especially on credit; through this system the farmers – who resold goods of little value at higher prices – almost recovered the money allocated for wages and indebted peasants could not move from the farms where they worked before paying their debts as contracted (this system is still in use in many parts of South America);*
> b. *the 'ley de fuga' [law of escape] – which allowed owners to kill the fugitive peasant; for the rebel workers a punishment widely used was to bury the rebel in a hole in the ground, with their head sticking out, and crush it by galloping horses over it."*[1]

With the objective of combating these injustices, was constituted, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a libertarian resistance very rich in its diversity. Many were examples of

[1] Pier Francisco Zarcone. The Anarchists in the Mexican Revolution. I used this great article to lead this text about the Mexican Revolution. Zarcone's article, with a new appendix from the author discussing Zapatismo and Magonismo today, was published by Faísca Publications in 2006. The name "stripe stores" was used because the larger part of the workers was illiterate and in the payment register books, instead of a signature, they used to put a stripe.

A Paradigm of Actual Resistance

I believe it's important to highlight the "neo-Magonism" in increasing development in Mexico. In the same way inspired by the principles raised by the Mexican Revolution, and to a great extent by the Zapatistas, the contemporary Magonistas are also working for the creation of alternatives to state power, stimulating the autonomy to be able to exercise their rights in practice. Thus, the Magonistas and Zapatistas of today have established a dialogue that takes place in the organizational foundations of left-wing thought, outside the institutional framework, which meets the demands of the indigenous issues on a revolutionary, non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian basis. Fruit of this exchange, the Aliança Magonista Zapatista [Zapatista Magonista Alliance] (AMZ), which consists of indigenous groups and militant organizations, surged in 2000, declared its fight against the injustices that occur against the poor and oppressed people, again bringing to light the slogan "Land and Freedom", symbol of the Magonista-Zapatista cooperation of a not so recent past. Moreover, they point out the importance of "another way of doing politics" and of the rejection of state power, saying: *"we do not aspire to exercise power, but to build a free, fair and democratic world."*

For those who hope to trace a paradigm of struggles from the 21st century, which has as its objective the ending of exploitation, it is worth knowing that even within our Latin America, movements of great importance are taking place, and that they have in their midst much more democracy and freedom than all the state projects in vogue today. Mexican Magonismo and Zapatismo are just two examples of so many mobilizations that, like sectors of the piqueteros in Argentina, sectors of the landless and homeless movements in Brazil, the Free Pass Movement, among others, question, outside of the state, the status-quo and offer a libertarian perspective on transforming the world. The question is whether the liber-

on democracy, freedom and justice. Continuing the radical critique of institutional policy and proposing a formal break with the Mexican Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) – a supposedly left party of the country – which is defended in the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, the EZLN proposed a form of politics which opposes elections and institutional means, emphasizing the left and anti-capitalist social movements. For them, in this campaign, the focus is to bring their conception as a social movement to other regions of Mexico and the world. It is to show that the power of decisions and the management of the life of the people should not be given to a government or any institutional power that is above them. It is to show that the people must organize themselves as a people to handle their own affairs and take the political space (in terms of decision-making) that they were robbed of by the bureaucracy of governments and institutional political parties.

With the objective of fulfilling the demands created by the establishment of the autonomous municipalities, arose the Good Government Juntas which constitutes another interesting example of politics made by contemporary social movements. The Juntas have an objective to function as a school of direct democracy, giving space to and encouraging the public to take decisions in a non-hierarchical manner and without corruption: proper self-management or self-government. As the Zapatistas said, they "command obeying", and then, they stimulate discussions and collective decision-making. The Juntas were constituted to reorganize the old Zapatista autonomous municipalities, taking into account the demands of the Zapatistas, the peasants and indigenous Mexicans. Thus, they serve as a bridge for the articulation between the diverse Zapatista municipalities, preserving the autonomy in relation to the state controlled by Vicente Fox.[6]

[6] This article was originally written in 2006, and Vicente Fox is no longer state president.

associations of mutual aid (Sociedad Particular de Socorros Mútuos [Particular Society of Mutual Aid]), militant groups (A Social [The Social], Sociedad Agrícola Oriental [East Agricultural Society]), strikes organized by workers, libertarian schools (Escuela del Rayo y del Socialismo [School of Ray and Socialism]), study groups (Grupo de Estudiantes Socialistas [Socialist Students Group]), and the formation of the Congresso General Obrero da República Mexicana [General Workers' Congress of the Mexican Republic]. We can cite also the very constitution of the Mexican Communist Party, which had Bakuninist tendencies. The government began a wave of repression, closing the anarchist circles and ending violently with two uprisings organized by workers.

Some years later, already in the beginning of the twentieth century, Ricardo Flores Magón would be one of the major representatives of libertarian ideals in the fight against the Diaz dictatorship. "The apostle of the Mexican social revolution" as he was called by Diego A. de Santillán, began his campaign against a new Diaz candidature a few years before the turn of the century, and little by little he became increasingly oriented towards libertarian socialism. In 1900 he founded the journal Regeneración [Regeneration] that soon became one of the largest vehicles of the workers press and whose goal was the overthrow of the dictatorship and the establishment of libertarian communism, which Magón so well learn from the readings of Kropotkin. In Diego Abad de Santillán's description:

> *"On August 7, 1900 the first issue of Regeneración appeared in Mexico, composed by Ricardo Flores Magón and his older brother, Jesus. The language of this journal, which would exert great influence on the fate of the Mexican people, led to the surprise of Diaz and the 'scientists'; one soon saw that behind this daring publication was an indomitable will; without any effort the anti-Porfírioists of Mexico*

City were assembling around Ricardo Flores Magón, in whom they saw the most conscious brain and most resolute will against the tyranny of General Diaz."[2]

In 1901 Magón also joined the Partido Liberal Mexicano [Mexican Liberal Party] (PLM), which had been founded a year earlier. The program of the party had a radical liberal direction and the objectives were about the criticism of the Catholic political clergy which emerged in defense of the interests of the large landowners and capitalist entrepreneurs. Besides, it emphasized the importance of claiming the rights of Mexican citizens and the abandonment of the belief that the government would be the solution to all ills. It emphasized collective action as the main element of democracies.

During the entire period of dictatorship, the PLM and the periodical Regeneración – both very influenced by Magón – were major opponents of the regime, advocating an end to dictatorship and the Porfirista regime. Moreover, by virtue of this libertarian influence present in the party from the second half of the 1900s, the PLM radicalized, turning to a more combative discourse and creating an internal tension within the party, which repelled the less radical elements. It is worth emphasizing that the party did not compete in the elections, and served only as a space for horizontal articulation of the libertarian revolutionaries of the time, without the objective of taking the state and establish a dictatorship, but to put an end to the government of Diaz, establishing libertarian communism in its place. In 1906 the PLM launched its program and also the Manifesto to the Mexican Nation, a document of great importance to the revolutionary movement of the time and which proposed a strategy to end the dictatorship of Diaz and the land structures. The PLM turned clandestine

[2] Diego Abad de Santillán. Ricardo Flores Magón: the apostle of the Mexican revolution. Rio de Janeiro / São Paulo: Achiamé / FARJ/ Faísca, 2006.

of the Zapatistas can also be cited as significant traces of the movement. They say that:

"the people limit themselves only to elect 'representatives' offered to them. Their involvement only occurs at the time of the election, to give your vote for this or that candidate. For the rest of the time, they are kept as a mere spectator of the social scene and one doesn't make the slightest effort to involve them when the matter is to organize the economic and political life of the country. [...] In order that it be possible to revert this situation, the EZLN becomes a reference and a way for people to cease to be spectators and to have an active participation in everyday social life, so that rebellion and resistance gain body and mind, in order to realize the hope that things may be different than what they are and that the construction of a better world only depends on the involvement and participation of every one to eliminate all forms of discrimination and exploitation. [The members of the EZLN] do not want to have the honor of arriving alone, do not pursue the privilege of sitting in higher places, but dedicate themselves tirelessly to ensure that there will be everything for everyone."[5]

After the dissolution of the Zapatista National Liberation Front (FZLN) – civil arm of the EZLN and whose goal was to set itself up as a civil and peaceful political organization, that would not fight for the seizure of power – in 2005, the EZLN launched the Other Campaign. With this, the EZLN intended to devote itself to open, civil and peaceful political work, giving room to a new phase of Zapatista struggle with views

[5] Ibid. pp. 58; 59; 13.

realities of the uprising which occurred and the autonomous community that had formed in Chiapas. In this way, the story of Chiapas went beyond the borders of Mexico. Even though the EZLN was an armed national liberation movement, it did not receive repulse from the global population and internationalized itself, being sympathetic to the causes of other places in the world.

Even though much of the Mexican population is not fully prepared to join the armed struggle, the Zapatista uprising ended up inspiring groups and movements around the world. About the fact that it is an armed movement, the EZLN justifies:

> *"But for soldiers to no longer be necessary it is needed to turn into a soldier and shoot a certain amount of hot lead, writing freedom and justice for all, not for some, but for everyone, all of the dead from yesterday and tomorrow, the living of today and always, for all those who we call the people and homeland, the excluded, those who were born to lose, the nameless, the faceless."*[4]

The conception of the EZLN to educate civil society by means of facts has been implemented with the divulgence of the political reality of the communities of Chiapas, and, in this way, the Zapatista insurgents have become a model for the left the whole world over. The tireless struggle against neo-liberal policies and for the demilitarization of the autonomous zone that was created, was a source of inspiration to all militants who advocated a political struggle by means of direct action, with decisions being made in a democratic manner, taking into account autonomy and equality between genders. The criticism of representative democracy and the collective goals

[4] Emilio Gennari. Chiapas: Zapatista communities rewrite history. Rio de Janeiro: Achiamé, 2002 p. 60.

and organized more than 40 groups of armed resistance throughout Mexico and also had indigenous members, known for their struggle for the rights of communities and against capitalist property. After radicalization, Francisco Madero – a businessman who sympathized with the social reforms and who came, still in 1905, to give his blessing to the PLM – established disagreement that peaceful means to take Diaz's power would be exhausted.

The electoral fraud of 1910 commanded by Diaz, gave initiative to the explosion of the Mexican Revolution. With the arrest of Madero, his opponent in the elections, he succeeded to be reelected again. Exiled in San Antonio, in Texas, Madero drew up the Plan of San Luís, calling for an armed uprising on November 20, in addition to declaring void the elections of 1910, rejecting the election of Diaz and instituting himself as provisional president. Many rebels responded to the revolutionary call, among them Emiliano Zapata, who played an important role in the organization of the indigenous of the Morelos region, and Pancho Villa, a former cattle thief and bank robber, very recognized by the humble of the regions of Durango and Chihuahua. They were united in an anti-re-electionist front, which gave each group a relative degree of autonomy and independence.

Already in 1911, in the midst of revolution and with support from the U.S. IWW union, the anarchists, who had Magón at their front, occupied the region of Lower California, taking cities of importance such as Mexicali. At the end of the month of January, they constituted the "Socialist Republic of Lower California", the first socialist republic in the world. The Magonists also had victories in cities like Novo León, Chihuahua, Sonora, Guadalupe and Casas Grandes; spaces that would be lost after the repression occasioned by the Madero government. Incidentally, we remember that before the rise to power of Madero, Magón was invited to become vice president of Mex-

ico, which he refused, in honor of his libertarian communist flag.

A large part of the revolutionaries broke with Madero by reason of the amply bourgeois constitution of his government and that he did not have any aspirations to go beyond liberalism. One of these revolts, organized by Zapata in the state of Morelos and the Plan of Ayala launched in November 1911 (and that demanded the overthrow of the Madero government and proposed a land reform process with control by the peasant communities) formed themselves as tools in the struggle of the peasants for the social revolution in the country, always inspired by the motto Tierra y Libertad [Land and Freedom]. As the historian Alexandre Samis emphasized,

> *"the revolutionary cry of Land and Freedom [...] would have been chanted first by the anarchist poet and militant Praxedis Guerrero and then disseminated by the Magonists. [It was then that] Soto y Gama, a Magonist very close to Emiliano Zapata, would come to popularize it within the Zapatista revolutionary army."*[3]

Another interesting fact that proves the closeness between Zapata and Magón happened when Zapata invited Magón, in 1915, to bring the periodical Regeneración to Morelos, putting at his disposal the means that would give the journal a national expansion. That ended up not working out owing to reasons of health problems and arrests that happened with Magón, and because he believed that if the newspaper would remain in the U.S. (as it was at that time), the internationalist perspective would be favored.

After that, Mexico sank into a period of civil war and tried to establish a Convention, already at the end of 1914. The facts

[3] Alexandre Samis. "Presentation" In: Ricardo Flores Magón: The Mexican Revolution. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2003 p. 19.

that happened in sequence, like the attempt by Villa and Zapata to take Mexico City, the convening of the Constituent Assembly by Carranza, who afterwards was elected president and then murdered, and the conflicts that followed in the country ended up constituting the context of the decadence of the revolutionary period in the country.

Zapatism

Inspired openly in this context of the Mexican Revolution, already at the beginning of the 1990s, arose the new Zapatista movement. Unsatisfied with the policy of devotion to neo-liberal capitalism adopted by the world, indigenous peasants in the south of the country – more specifically the region of Chiapas in Mexico – concentrated themselves in the Mexican jungle and began a process of discussion and an attempt to unite forces and membership in their struggle against neo-liberalism and the consequences of the policies of NAFTA, which was scheduled to come into force on the first of January 1994. According to the indigenous, the signing of NAFTA would be a death sentence for them, a treaty that would further benefit the rich in Mexico by increasing the concentration of wealth in the country and prejudicing the poorest. For the same day as the beginning of NAFTA this group of Indians, who called themselves the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), planned an uprising, which ended up taking quite a severe form, the whole world over. Its assessment of the Mexican context indicated that the EZLN saw the situation in Mexico as a colonial country dominated by the USA, and that to be able to make the transition to democracy and socialism would require a revolution. Thus the name of the EZLN was chosen.

The EZLN sent, from then on, communications to the whole world, criticizing neo-liberal capitalism and accounting the