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# **(Excerpts from) The Social Revolution in Northern Mexico and the Anarchist Communes of the Mexican Liberal Party 1911–1915**

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assassinating your brothers in chains, for a miserable wage you don't hesitate in raising your arms against those who fight for the liberty and well-being of all, and when you see yourself at risk of losing your own harmful butcher life, then you shout our shout, ah, but too late! Die!' A bullet deprived the professional assassin of his life.

Ortega is conscientious. He knows that to leave the enemy alive is to prolong the war, he knows that tyranny never lets rebel prisoners live, he understands that it's necessary to return blow for blow, that terror has to be answered with the same terror.

We have the pleasure of letting this portrait of that intelligent soldier of the Social Revolution be known."

—Ricardo Flores-Magón, via *Regeneración* April 6, 1912

## Introduction

*"If, from the beginning, we had called ourselves anarchists, nobody save for a few would've listened to us. Without calling ourselves anarchists we've been lighting up in the minds ideas of hatred against the propertied class and against the governmental caste."*

—Ricardo Flores Magón, Letter to Enrique Flores Magón and Práxedes G. Guerrero, June 13, 1908

Mexico inaugurated the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with revolution, igniting a spark that would go on to engulf the rest of history throughout the world. The spark had been set in the 1906 miner's strike in Cananea, veterans of the strike such as Fernando Palomarez, Pedro Ramírez Cuale, José Mariá Leyva, would go on to take the incendiary actions and lessons learned then and harness them into full-blown rebellion under the guidance of the brothers Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón. Their project, one of nominally liberal reform against Porfirio Díaz, belied the true anti-governmental and anti-capitalist stance taken by the central Board of the party; as Malatesta once said, "... we must, in certain conditions, avoid mentioning socialism and anarchy, but only as long as our practice is socialism and anarchy. We may well not speak out against the government, but only as long as we are actually attacking the government; we can steer clear of talk directed against property, but only as long as our practice is expropriation."<sup>1</sup> No one had learned this better than the members of *el Partido Liberal Mexicano*, the Mexican Liberal Party.

More than any other faction that partook in the Mexican Revolution, theirs was the most far-sighted and radical of them all. They were aided in solidarity by many then and now renown figures such as Jack London and Eugene Debs though the backbone of their movement was comprised by members of the IWW

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<sup>1</sup> Errico Malatesta, "Another Strike" (1889); "The Method of Freedom: an Errico Malatesta Reader" ed. David Turcato (2014) p. 87

and other American anarchists such Big Bill Haywood, Joe Hill, Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, and Pyotr Kropotkin among many, many other lesser known but nonetheless just as important figures to the movement.

Reader, you hold the collective effort to preserve a long overlooked part of socialist history that was the *Partido Liberal Mexicano* that set itself to gather all of its forces to see through a social revolution, an economic revolution —an *anarchist* revolution. In these pages you will find some of the first-ever translated documents gathered by comrade Maldonado that means to give a chronology of the PLM revolution, its trajectory narrated by both its adherents and opponents in their own words. The importance of these can't be overstated, nor can the contributions of the anarchists at the time minimized, the world would go on soon to feel the economic-political pressures the Mexicans did, and follow suit in their own manner; had they learned the lessons of the dangers of a simply political, governmental revolution, would the Russian and Spanish revolutions played out differently? As haunting as that question may hang over our heads, it is all the more reason for us to learn.

It is no small feat that they managed to mobilize both people from as far as Wales and Russia but also African-Americans and Indigenous Cupapá and Mayo Indians, all experimenting with what a world outside of State and Capital may look like. More than any revolution before them, they tapped into a solidarity rarely seen or imitated to the degree of sincerity that was shown in those short years of revolutionary upheaval.

The brothers Flores Magón are usually forgotten when talking about the Mexican Revolution since they have to share the stage with impressive and romantic figures such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, their fellow revolutionaries on the front lines and yet it must be remarked that their struggle lives on to this day; a section of the EZLN is named after them and the watchword *Tierra*

“The desire to break forever the chains that martyrize the disinherited from social wealth pushes us into the fields of battle to conquer, with arms in hand, what our pleads, with our cries and docility [*mansedumbre*] could not achieve: the right to live.

Our clamors to seek from the wealthy class and the government a little more justice and a little more freedom [*libertad*] were never listened to. Very well! Now we are no longer asking, now we are no longer pleading, now, rebels, we employ the most powerful of reasons: violence!

With arms in hand, we will take off the yoke that oppresses our proletarian brothers, carrying with us on high the motto: Bread, Land and Liberty For All.

We are here, in the fields of action, to face the battles against the bourgeoisie and, soldiers of equality, we come to destroy every privilege and we don't recognize any authority. We've come to abolish slavery, economic as well and political. No more starving! No more misery for anybody! We didn't come, as politicians do, offering niceties and joys 'until after we win'. We've come to expropriate and invite all of our brothers in misery and pain to do the same. We've come to tell the workers to take everything that exists and to work and consume in common like brothers, recognizing no masters nor authority of any kind [...].”

—Calixto H. Guerra Chico, “*Proclama*” via *Regeneración*, March 28, 1912

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“The comrade Pedro N. Ortega distinguished himself by his bravery, showcasing intelligence and audacity. There was no place too dangerous for him. He took a prisoner and interrogated thus: ‘Why do you fight against your own brothers in misery?’ ‘Because I'm paid to,’ answered the henchman. ‘Very well,’ said comrade Ortega, ‘shout “*Long Live Land and Liberty!*”’ The henchman shouted so. ‘Now listen,’ said Ortega, ‘you make your living

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“Madero’s government has proven to be an obstacle to the happiness of men and peoples, such as that of the one of the tyrant Porfirio Díaz and of the interim one of the cleric Francisco L. de la Barra did. And the reason for this doesn’t rest on the fact that Francisco I. Madero is eviler than Díaz or Barra. The reason is that governments, whomsoever they may be of, are simply instruments of the capitalists and, these, in order to maintain it, see themselves forced to maintain the masses of workers in misery, in ignorance and slavery, a crime that governments sanction. As long as there is a government in Mexico those fifteen million of denizens who make up the working class will never be able to be happy.

We rose up in arms in order to achieve a radical change of conditions in Mexico and we will not lay them down until achieving the realization of those grand ideals which are stamped on the Red Flag risen high by our rebel columns: *Tierra y Libertad* [Land and Liberty]. We don’t seek to elevate any man to any public office for we are convinced of the failure that are the government’s institutions upon the lives of the people. We consider politicians like Bernardo Reyes, Emilio Vázquez Gómez, Pascual Orozco and others, ambitious simpletons; we repudiate them and won’t permit power’s exaltation of any of those reptiles. We are libertarians who wear the conviction that we Mexicans will not be free until we have taken possession of the lands, the waters, the forests, the machinery, the factories, the mines, the workshops; in a word, all the means of production and transportation and, meanwhile, we fight against the government that, together with the church, maintains capitalism, a monster who has monopolized all the riches of the nation [*país*] [..].”

–Primitivo Gutiérrez, “¡A las Armas!” via *Regeneración*, February 17, 1912

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*y Libertad*, “Land and Liberty” was introduced by PLM to later be taken up by Zapata.

We hope these short snippets, presented here, showcase the continuation of the webs of mutual aid first established all those years ago during the glorious days of revolution for more than a hundred years now. A forthcoming full translation of the work is in the works and if there’s something to be mourned it is the lack of attention paid to the female anarchists of the day; something that was remedied by comrade Maldonado’s second book in this series, *Revolucionarias, rebeldes, y anarquistas: Las mujeres en el Partido Liberal Mexicano*, “Revolutionaries, Rebels and Anarchists: The Women of PLM”, a translation also in progress.

Long Live The Social Revolution, Long Live Anarchy!  
–2024.

## Excerpts

“The involvement of the Chapais or Cucapás Indians of the region is important to note [on the January 29, 1911 attack on Mexicali], due to the mistreatment they received at the hands of the Porfirists and to the poverty in which they lived which caused them to join the insurrectionists and serve the liberal cause.

A few hours after the occupying the plaza, Camilo Jiménez, a Cucapá Indian and one of the main organizers of the movement, will send a message to get in touch with another indigenous group:

‘Mexicali, Baja California, January 29, 1911. Señor Francisco Bustamante. La Huerta, California. Hurry, my dear friend, to safeguard the mountain pass with all of its people and we will win here with ease. Camilo Jiménez.’

Francisco Bustamante was a fake name; the message was meant for the Indian Juan Largo López.

Largo's involvement in the movement against the government was discovered in the process held in Ensenada during the first days of February 1911 of the Indian Juan Antonio Choloy, who was found with the message. Choloy confessed that, among other things, Camilo Jiménez, during the month of December 1910, traveled throughout the ranches of Distrito Norte spreading revolutionary propaganda.

<em>Velasco Ceballos, R. ¿Se apoderará Estados Unidos de América de la Baja California? 1920</em>]

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"While the Mexican [revolutionary] Simón Berthold was still in the mining town [of El Álamo], the famous writer Jack London came to visit him from the US and talk to him even though Berthold was still gravely injured. The American Embassy in Mexico confirms the version of events that the writer had been effectively in Baja California. It would seem that London was contemplating enlisting more liberal reinforcements. London dedicated a story to PLM's struggle, *El Mexicano*, the story of a boxer who fights for the cause of the Mexican Revolution and buys firearms for the revolution with the winnings."

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"In the face of the worsening situation [caused by the insurrectionaries], the Secretary of Foreign Affairs launches a patriotic cry in desperation; meanwhile

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"Other news say: Evaristo Guajardo, chief of the hated Múzquiz, tells of his fighting (as always!) in Encino Solo's ranch against a party of *magonistas*, (he means to say liberals) because the only *magonistas* that live in Mexico are Juan Sarabia and other rascals of his ilk that today lick my brother's boots, the lawyer Jesús Flores Magón, Minister of Government in Chato Madero's cabinet, as they wait for a bone to chew on. Those individuals are '*magonistas*', loyal dogs to mister Minister Magón, for as long as they have hope of thriving in his shadow. But those who fight for the ideas that we, Ricardo and I, promote, are not '*magonistas*', for they have the dignity to not bootlick us —they don't even take orders from us, should we ever be stupid enough to give them."

—Enrique Flores-Magón, excerpt from *Regeneración*, May 11, 1912

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"The Red Cross hospital that was in Torreón has been closed down due to the fact that the doctor there got tired of sending telegrams to the nation's capital asking for funds to be able to heal and attend to the wounded, and being told to send them to other hospitals, no doubt as to avoid sending the necessary funds. The press says that, when informed of this, the poor wounded soldiers cried like children. Hopefully this will be a lesson learned so that the soldiers become convinced that no future awaits them in sacrificing their lives upholding the Government that will never benefit them but, on the contrary, will ever be the hangman of the working people for it is the guard dog of Capital. Our brother soldiers, uphold no more any Government, disobey your boss and join the revolutionaries so as to expropriate all goods that the bourgeoisie holds!"

—Francisca J. Mendoza, excerpt from *Regeneración*, July 13, 1912

was merely a wretch who knew how to take advantage of the large agitation, of the sacrifice on the part of the liberals, to become a *caudillo* with his own bourgeois-democratic revolution.

According to Teodoro Hernández, who was a committed member of PLM to raise arms in Veracruz, in his book 'The Precursors to the Revolution' [*Los precursores de la Revolución*] he mentions a list of forty eight people who were committed like him (each with their own group) throughout various states to fight in armed struggle.

This grand generation of revolutionaries of PLM achieved the unthinkable, to sack that tyrant Porfirio Díaz from power. Victoriano Salado Álvarez, a staunch supporter of Díaz close to him and also member of the 'Circle of Friends of Mister President' [*Círculo de Amigos del señor Presidente*], predicted it well in saying in his memoirs:

It seems to me that granting Madero and his friends the merit of revolution is undeserving. The real revolutionaries were the *maonistas*, who not only constantly maintained their position but managed to get the whole border to rise up, firing it up with hatred against the tyrant Díaz, whom those people believed to have truly been an aborted hellspawn and a man more perverse than any could be found and read within the annals of history...

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"In Peralta Station, Coahuila, a four-car military train that was en route to reinforce General Huerta's column stopped midtrack due to a lack of charcoal for the engine and was shot at by a rebel. The henchmen, seeing that it was a lone man, exited the train with great vigor; the man ran away under a hail of bullets as the *federales* chased after him, and fell into an ambush by the revolutionaries." –Enrique Flores-Magón, excerpt from *Regeneración*, April 27, 1912

some nationalist and patriotic parties emerge such as *Los Defensores de la Integridad Nacional* [Defenders of the National Integrity] to 'safeguard' their own bourgeois interests, 'the nation' demonstrating a hatred of foreigners, and 'defending the motherland', many of them being defeated *porfiristas*."

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"Towards the end of the month of April, Antonio P. Araujo is arrested and imprisoned. According to the soldiers his crime is he's 'a revolutionary'."

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"More wobblies arrive to Tijuana at the end of May including Joe Hill, the singer-songwriter of the worker's struggle and composer of, among other songs, *The Rebel Girl* and *Workers of the World Awaken*. He belonged to the IWW syndicate and would reenergize the fighters with his protest songs, participated in the last battle for Tijuana, and distributed *Regeneración* [the PLM's newspaper] throughout the territory. Emilio Guerrero, the militant hunter, also arrived with his indigenous guerrilla forces, as well as a group of Italian anarchists, among them Antonelli referred to by Ludovico Caminita who kept his quarters in Mexicali."

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"Due to the further radicalization of PLM, given that they were embarking on a fundamental social-economic revolution with an openly anticapitalist stance, they stopped having as much support from many liberals; many deserted and joined the ranks of Madero, even some American socialists like Eugene Debs stopped aiding the

cause. Regardless, the *Western Federation of Miners* and the *Industrial Workers of the World* continue with their principles of solidarity.

Aside from the anarchists on an international level, only Chicanos and Mexicans and a few anarchists radicalized in the U.S. would continue bringing their support to the PLM anarchists, among them the Englishman William C. Owen, in charge of the English section of *Regeneración*; the Spaniards Jaime Vidal, Florencio Bazora, Pedro Esteve, and the anarchists in charge of the newspaper *Cultura Proletaria* [Proletarian Culture]; the Italians Ludovico Caminita, in charge of the Italian section of *Regeneración*, Vittorio Cravello, Carlo Tresca, the Italians from *Círculo de Estudios Sociales* [Social Studies Circle]; *Grupo Independiente Pro Revolución Mexicana* [Independent Pro-Mexican Revolution Group], which housed Italian, Spanish, and Cuban anarchists; *Comité Internacional del PLM* [PLM's International Committee], which was made up of anarchists from Russia, Italy, Mexico, Poland, one German and one American; as well as the now-famous Berkman, Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre, who compared the revolution in Baja California with the Paris Commune.

Here's how Edingardo Aguilar and Salvador Hernández speak of it in their notes:

Things stand as such, the only revolutionaries —aside from the Chicanos— that have constantly rendered support from the U.S. to PLM have been the anarchists, many exiled and relentlessly attacked by the government of the 'yanqui paradise'. For example, Alejandro Berkman, Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre took it upon themselves to inform and fundraise for the Magonista cause because for them it was 'a cause of vital importance.' Voltairine, the exemplary revolutionary, wrote about the Magonistas: '[They are engaged in] an actual death struggle for

a town from its yoke and proclaimed anarchist communism. It's part of recuperating our historical memory and it teaches us that there weren't always just defeats, we have to also talk of those small triumphs of which nobody wants to talk about and which don't appear in the history books."

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"When the people suffered in silence the blows of tyranny, the applications for police work and other employment of the sort were overflowed; but now nobody wishes to be a henchman. The police inspector and Chief of Police of the *rurales* in Torreón have each handed in their respective resignations. They were hound dogs when the prey didn't use their claws. Now, the cowards, they quit."

—Ricardo Flores-Magón, via *Regeneración*, February 25, 1911

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"The fall of this gerontocratic dictatorship was owed in large part by the work done by the Magón brothers and PLM through their newspaper and organ *Regeneración* that, since 1900, had been laboring and laying the ground and foundations for a possible revolution that would put an end to Díaz' dictatorship.

[..] We mustn't forget that many of the first revolutionary worker and peasant movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were by or promoted by PLM, for example, the historic strikes of Cananea, Sonora (1906) and Río Blanco, Veracruz (1907); the uprisings of Jiménez, Zaragoza, Monclova and Porfirio Díaz City in Coahuila; in Acayucan, Veracruz and Camargo, Tamaulipas (1906); Las Vacas and Viesca, Coahuila (1908); Casas Grandes and Palomas in Chihuahua, and Valladolid, Yucatán (1908), and later in other states such as Sonora and Baja California among others.

[..] The fall of the Porfirian dictatorship was written in these pioneer movements such that, as Ricardo Flores-Magón put it, Madero

regime of Victoriano Huerta and, later, against that of Venustiano Carranza.

However, the triumphs of PLM were first seen in the Mexicali Commune (the first city to be liberated in the *Porfierato*): abolishing private property, the rebels began to distribute the land amongst the indigenous people and sent out an important call for sociological books in *Regeneración*, thereby creating a small library; on top of that, Berthold and Leyva introduced the idea of a ‘cooperative community’ in that arid patch of desert. Ricardo Flores Magón, like a good Kropotkinist, gave his advice in the article ‘The Labor of the Land is Common’ in *Regeneración*, written on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1911:

As brothers, those who work the land in common  
should reap of the labor, not in equal parts but, rather,  
each should take according to their necessities.

[..] And secondly in the Tijuana Commune, where the anarchists Teodoro M. Gaitán, Fernando Palomarez, Pedro Solís, Juan Montero, Antonio de P. Araujo and Pedro Ramírez Caule were some who serve as delegates to the Junta. Once taken, Tijuana established the principles of mutual aid, solidarity, ties of fraternity with the people; there were also expropriations of the large stores and businesses by the people, legal and official documents were destroyed and burned within the official offices; and the established government order was destroyed, replacing it with the slogan: ‘Bread, Land and Liberty For All’ which guided the expropriation of the lands that were in the hands of the bourgeoisie and landowners, dividing the land and working in common. There was also talk there of creating a utopia.

[..] It doesn’t matter how short these small communal projects lasted, the fact remains that they were able to show that utopia is possible.

[..] It doesn’t matter how long it was possible to live in a communal manner, the fact is that these men and women managed to free

what we anarchists pretend to believe in. There is more genuine Anarchism in *Regeneración* in a week’s issue than the rest of our publications put together! – fighting Anarchism, that means to do and is doing something to smash this whole accursed system.’<sup>2</sup>

*Mother Earth*, edited by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, published important articles in support of the Mexican Revolution and of PLM.

For her part, Emma Goldman had already dedicated two nights to the Red Flag liberal revolutionaries in which she gave speeches in favor of the Mexican Revolution, there was dancing, food, and raised funds to keep the struggle going.”

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“The Social Revolution in the northern peninsula of Baja California would last from January to June, almost six months of triumphs – Mexicali, Algodones, Tecate, El Álamo y Tijuana –, not just defeats which is what is mostly talked about, and almost never of the small accomplishments, which truth be told are actually great victories together with their hits and misses, for history has always been written by the ‘victors’.

Moreover, these experiences leave us with a great lesson in life and organization, as much as from the PLM guerrillas and their peculiar manner to make decisions through anarchist practice, assemblies, brotherly aid with the people, repatriation of land, and their proletarian internationalism throughout the revolution. We should also stress the role women of action had in PLM that has been left out of history; these brave militants stopped being wives,

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Avrich cites this in his biography, ‘An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre’ p. 227, as originally in a letter addressed to Joseph J. Cohen, March 28, 1912, Cohen Papers. Bracketed is included in Avrich’s book. For more on de Cleyre’s writings on the Mexican Revolution please read “The Mexican Revolution” (1911) and “The Mexican Revolt” (1911).

the companion of men, to fight alongside, shoulder to shoulder, such as Margarita Ortega and Carmen Barragán, the latter who founded the liberal group composed exclusively of women in July of 1911 [...]. And finally, the native peoples and tribes of the Rarámuri (Tarahumara), Chapai (Cucapá), Ko'lew (Kiliwa), Yo'eme (Yaqui) to mention just a few groups who maintained contact with the revolutionary Junta and made alliances in solidarity for the restitution of their lands, joined the battles of Baja California, after all, there were party members that belonged to these groups: Camilo Jiménez, Emilio Guerrero, Francisco Quijada, José María Cardoza, Francisco Pacheco and Juan Montero having been leaders of the guerrilla forces.

The battles won in Mexicali, Algodones, Tecate, El Álamo and Tijuana left good experiences and lessons to those living where the Red Flags of PLM and of Land and Liberty were raised, leaving also the lesson and legacy that it's possible to live without lords, authority, without government. Dividing the land among the poor and peasantry in each town that was gained and inviting them to take part of the struggle that they also had a stake in, not just the revolutionary cause. These victories penetrated deep into the mind and heart of the exploited in every village they passed by, where the guerrillas tested their mettle; despite the calumnies they were forced to endure, being slandered with everything, there were always people who would remember them in the manner of Pedro Ramírez Caille, a still living member who was there when PLM was active in Baja California:

Everywhere we went we left planted good ideas. We were welcomed with open arms in every little town and ranch as soon as they came to know our ideas: Bread, Land, and Liberty For All. We treated everyone like a brother and they would beg us not to leave, to stay with them; but the necessities of the struggle made us part ways from those simple and good people

who anxiously await our return. That's where we're going, brothers. Soon we will embrace you."

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"Tyranny and exploitation had been abolished in the territories of Tijuana won over by the liberals, and a new project of communal living was created. As the French newspaper, *L'Ere Nouvelle* no. 56 May-June 1911, puts it:

It seems that the revolutionary groups in Baja California have established several communist colonies, agricultural colonies of course. This is how the city of Tijuana finds itself completely transformed into a communist colony. The plazas and churches serve as food stores and stables. Town Hall has been baptized as 'Communal Counsel'. The revolutionaries built a sociological library there. Everywhere they establish themselves they burn the archives of property deeds in order to abolish individual privileges.

While Madero pushed a merely political revolution, Ricardo Flores Magón and the anarchist members of PLM were undertaking an economic and social revolution; that's to say, beyond the war, PLM was trying to build a horizontal society."

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"[T]he anarcho-syndicalist revolutionaries would not give up the struggle, having lost in Baja California, they dispersed and regrouped in other parts of Mexico such as Las Vacas, Coahuila in 1912 where they proclaimed an anarchist communism. With the fall of Francisco I. Madero, they raised their arms again against the