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Cannon Fodder

Ricardo Flores Magón

1910

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It's the hour to reflect. For centuries and centuries the task of thinking, of studying, of reflecting, has been the task of the so-called ruling classes of society: the rich and the intellectuals. The masses haven't thought, and, naturally enough, those who have done it for them have been well paid for this "service," done contrary to the interests of the multitude. But the moment to reflect has arrived. The moment has arrived to decide whether the poor will continue under the self-interested direction of the rich or if we'll bravely take charge of the study of our problems and entrust in ourselves the defense of our interests.

Now is the time to do it. Let us choose: let us be either an easily led flock or a phalanx of conscious beings; shame or glory.

Dragged along by the interests of the ruling classes, the proletarian masses have shed their blood throughout the ages. There has always been discontent among the poor, discontent occasioned by misery and injustice, by hunger and oppression. At the same time, the proletariat has always been disposed to rebel in the hope of attaining an improvement in its conditions. But being proletarians they haven't thought with their heads; rather, it's the ruling classes that have

thought for them: it's the ruling classes who have channeled the tendencies in insurrectionary movements. And they have been the only ones who have taken advantage of the sacrifices of the working class.

Look then, workers, how important it is that you undertake on your own account the conquest of your own well-being. Every time that the ruling classes need the force of numbers to ensure a victory beneficial to themselves, they go to the proletariat, to the masses always disposed toward rebellion; they are certain of finding heroes in the mob that they cordially despise, but who at the time of need they adulate. They will praise the passions and even applaud and stimulate the vices of their dupes, as if passing the hand over the back of a beast in order to tame it with kindness when it's not necessary to employ the whip.

In this manner the proletarian masses have been hurled into war, have been pushed into committing acts contrary to their own interests. Wars of conquest, wars of commerce, wars of colonialism, political insurrections all have been waged with the blood of proletarians, who are wildly applauded while they live their lives as heroes, and who are scorned and spit upon after the victory when it's necessary that someone sows grain, takes care of the cattle, makes clothing, builds houses.

Then the heroes are kicked off the pedestal erected for them by the ruling classes and forced to return to their work in the fields, the workshops, the factories, the mines, the railways, each of them carrying, as if a prize, a paper, an official declaration of their valor, and a copper medal that shines upon their rags on holidays plus some physical scars as well as the bad habits they picked up from their days in the barracks. Meanwhile, the rich and the intellectuals split up the lands of the conquered country. And in the nation whose government won via the sacrifice of the common people, they'll squander the copious booty seized from the vanquished by the plebeian army.

Proletarians: take in hand the gun and gather behind the banner of the Partido Liberal, which is the only one which invites you to take possession of the earth for yourselves.

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it about. It's better to die for honor, better to die defending the future of our families, than to continue suffering, in the midst of peace, the affront of slavery, the shame of misery and ignorance. But, comrades, don't let the so-called directing classes do your thinking for you and don't let them organize the revolution in such a way as to favor their interests. Take an active part in the great movement which is going to break out, and make sure that it takes the direction necessary so that this time it benefits the working class.

Go over the pages of history, and in them you will find that in armed struggles in which the ruling classes have taken part, your role has always been that of cannon fodder, for the simple reason that you didn't want to go to the pain of thinking with your own heads and of undertaking the task of your own redemption. Remember that the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the workers themselves, and that this emancipation will begin with taking possession of the earth. Get ready, then, for the great revolution; but carry with you the purpose of taking the earth, of yanking it from the claws of those who now hold it for themselves. Only by doing so will you not be cannon fodder, but rather heroes who will know how to respect yourselves, in the midst of revolution and after the triumph, because you will have, through only the acquisition of the land, the power necessary to achieve, with little more effort, your total liberation.

Bear in mind, once again, that a simple change of rulers is not a fount of liberty, and that any Revolutionary Program that doesn't contain a clause concerning the taking of the lands by the people is a program of the ruling classes, who will never struggle against their own interests, as history has shown, and who only go to the masses, the plebeians, the rabble, when they need heroes to defend them and to sacrifice themselves for them, heroes who a few hours after the triumph will see themselves with their flanks bloodied by the spurs of the bosses who ride them.

And this has been repeated since time immemorial; those below are always swindled, made the butt of a joke, and those above always win, without the experience opening the eyes of the flock, without the great swindle, constantly repeated, making the masses revolt, without even making them think. The present crowd is the same crowd that, inflamed and innocent, carried the great captains of antiquity on its shoulders: the crowd of Alexander, the rabble of Cyrus, the plebeians of Cambises, the flock of Scipio, the multitudes of Hannibal, the barbarians of Attila, all of them thought the same as the Napoleonic mobs, the conquering rabble of the Transvaal, the American plebes of Santiago and Cavite, and the triumphant yellow legions in Manchuria. The psychology of the contemporary masses is the same as that of the French masses in 1789, of the masses of Hidalgo in 1810, of the republican masses of Portugal today. It's always the same: the sacrifice of well-intentioned proletarians to the benefit of the ruling classes; the suffering and pain of the humble to the benefit of the intellectuals and the rich.

This has all been because the proletarians have not had the purpose of channeling popular movements toward the goal of their own best interests, but rather have obeyed the orders of the dominating minority that, as is natural, has always worked in the interests of itself. So, for example, in wars of conquest, in commercial and colonial wars, wars that the government of one nation has carried out against the people of another in order to extend its territorial domain or to conquer markets that will consume the industrial or agricultural products of the aggressing nation, the proletariat has done nothing other than give its blood to obtain, in exchange, no material benefit. The great industrialists, the great financiers, the great bankers and the men in government are those who benefit from these wars.

To the proletariat nothing remains but the glory, if it's possible that murder on a grand scale committed against foreign peoples, to satisfy the absurd greed of the kings

of industry, banks, and commerce, provides glory. Are the British workers happier today after the triumph of British arms in the Transvaal? Are the American workers happier as a result of the triumph of the U.S. Army over the Spanish army? Do the Japanese today enjoy more comforts than before Japan's triumph over Russia? No, not a bit of it. The British, Americans, and the Japanese continue being confronted with the same social problems as before, aggravated even more by the increase in the power of the ruling class provided by the acquisition of new markets.

And in regard to revolutions, one can observe the same result. Acts performed solely to obtain political liberty, triumphs obtained with the blood of the proletarian masses, have left the workers enslaved just as they were before they shed their blood. Our own history provides sufficient examples to prove this great truth, which could appear as blasphemy to those who don't probe deeply enough to get to the bottom of things, to those conservators of political institutions already fallen in deep disgrace.

The insurrection of 1810, which gave us political independence, didn't have the power to give, to a people hungry for bread and education, that which was necessary for their elevation, and this was because the proletariat didn't decide to undertake its own redemption, to channel the movement led by the martyr Miguel Hidalgo toward an end that would benefit the working class. The insurrection against Santa Anna, initiated in Ayutla, and which had as its result the promulgation of the Constitution of 1857, likewise didn't have the power to deliver bread and education to the people. As is well known, it provided political liberties, but these were only taken advantage of by those who occupied prominent places in the political and social life of the country, but not by the proletarians who, because of their lack of money, education, and even social status, found themselves totally subordinated to the will of the ruling classes.

Again, the proletariat derived no benefit from the movement initiated in Ayutla because it didn't make the decision to channel the rebellion toward a practical end, that of benefitting itself. The insurrection of Tuxtepec, which dragged the people behind the banner of "Real Suffrage and No Re-election," reconquered for the masses the choosing of alternatives via popular election, and had as its result the despotism that today we suffer in the political terrain and in the increased misery and misfortune of the working people, because the working class didn't take charge of the revolutionary movement of Porfirio Diaz and instead entrusted its future to the ruling classes of society.

Now, a new Revolution is brewing. The excesses of Diaz's tyranny have injured all, both proletarians and non-proletarians, both men and women, both old and young. Political power has been monopolized and held in very few hands, and many members of the ruling classes have seen themselves obligated to allow the power they held under former governments to remain in those few hands; these individuals, naturally, have undertaken to work toward recapturing their former power. As always, these members of the ruling classes go down to the proletariat now that they need the force of numbers, and they caress it, extol it, they put in play the traditional scam of applauding it to the point of numbness; in the end, they pass their hand over the back of the monster in order to entice it with sweetness, without in any way hindering their ability to make the slavery harder in the haciendas, more arduous and less remunerative in the factories, workshops, and mines the day after the victory achieved through the blood, sacrifice, and heroism of the proletarian masses.

Proletarians: this is the hour to reflect. The revolutionary movement cannot be detained; it must, naturally, explode because of the forces producing it. But there's no reason to fear this movement. It's best to desire it and even to bring