

The Soldier

Ricardo Flores Magón

1912

The labourer and the soldier met each other along the way.

– Where are you bound? the soldier asked.

– Off to the factory, answered the labourer. – And yourself, where are you bound?

– I'm off to the barracks: the village of Jalapa has revolted and we have orders to go there and crush the revolt by fire and sword.

– Could you just tell me – the labourer pressed him – why those folk revolted?

– Certainly, I'll tell you as best I can: all of a sudden these folk refused to pay their house rent, the rent on their land, their government taxes and when the authorities turned up to evict the tenants and drive the share-croppers off the land whilst at the same time collecting the taxes, the villagers resisted, stabbed the magistrate, the notary, the gendarmes and the chairman of the town council and all of the officials: they set the archives on fire and atop the tallest building they erected a red flag bearing the inscription in white lettering: "Land and Liberty".

The labourer shuddered. It occurred to him that these were folk from his own class, the poor and the disinherited, the proletarians who had revolted.

– And you're off to fight them? – he asked the soldier.

– Naturally – answered the uniformed slave. These villagers have trespassed against the right of private property and the government has a duty to protect the interests of the rich.

– But you aren't rich – the labourer told the soldier – What interest have you in killing these folk?

– I have to enforce respect for the law – the soldier dryly responded.

– The law? – cried the labourer. – The same law that upholds privilege! The law that is an oppressive burden to those at the bottom and an assurance of freedom and well-being for those on top! You are poor and yet you support the law that grinds down those of your own class. Your relatives, your brothers, your family are all poor: the folk who have revolted in Jalapa are poor who suffer just as you do, as your relatives, and there may well be a member of your family among the rebels!

The soldier shrugged his shoulders, spat on to the grass along the roadside and threw the labourer a look of scorn and haughtily shouted: – The law comes before all else! If my own father were to break it, I will kill my own father, because those are my orders!

– Fine – said the labourer. – So go and kill the flesh of your flesh, the blood of your blood!

The labourer and the soldier continued on their way in different directions: the former was off to toil for the greater enrichment of his master: the latter to kill so as to see that his master might enjoy "his" wealth in peace.

Jalapa was a hub of activity, of rejoicing, of boundless enthusiasm. The sad faces of the evening before had disappeared. All of the villagers were on the streets celebrating the day of freedom. One old man was haranguing the crowd like this:

– Comrades: now that every one of us is his own master, let us celebrate our victory: let us draw up an inventory of everything in the village and its environs so see what we can call upon in terms of provisions and tools and then, like brothers, and once we have celebrated our success, let us set to work to produce what is useful for all and ...

Not that he got to complete that sentence. A shot rang out and the old man, mortally wounded, fell, never to rise again, his face turned towards the sun.

The soldier had killed his own father...

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