

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



The Attitude of Anarchists in the Face of the Mexican Revolution

March 2, 1912

The Attitude of Anarchists in the Face of the Mexican Revolution
March 2, 1912

Retrieved on September 6, 2026 from
historykeepshappening.wordpress.com

Translated manually from the Italian language article in 'L'Era Nuova: Giornale Rivoluzionario', March 2, 1912, Paterson, New Jersey; later archived at Archivo Magón; undoubtedly written originally in English but never published in that form, to my knowledge, nor am I aware of any original English manuscript, though perhaps there is one tucked away in some other archive. -Ed., History Keeps Happening, 2026

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

In my opinion, there is only one possible attitude that an anarchist can take in the face of the Mexican Revolution, if his anarchism has dug some roots and become part of the very fiber of his being.

I believe this revolution to be the most important event to have taken place on the North American continent since the anti-slavery war of 1861–65 in the United States. And in various ways, between these two movements, this one is more important, since in this case, the very basis of all human slavery, landed property, is being attacked; and also because now (fortunately!) there is no contradictory complication, on the side of class emancipation, of the struggle for increased government power, as was the case in our civil war — a paradox, that in the liberation of blacks from slavery there was also the first step toward the consolidation of centralized power, the tyranny of which was augmented with the rise of each new man to government, that power now being the terrible weapon that our masters use to threaten even our weakest movement toward emancipation from capitalism.

This time it's an entire people in revolt against economic tyranny, which is at the same time the basis of political tyranny, and in this sense, the two either support each other or fall together.

I am told that some of my respectable Italian comrades have claimed that anarchists cannot have any special interest in this revolt, because of the fact that those who are actively giving the struggle a certain direction are not, in their opinion, anarchists, and because the mass of the people who sacrifice their lives over the beloved land that capitalist greed has stripped from them, making them the most sympathetic slaves, are not anarchists either.

Even if all this were true, such a mental attitude would still be absolutely incomprehensible to me.

But it is not true, at least as far as the Junta of the Mexican Liberal Party is concerned. But we'll talk about them later.

I ask all comrades, what is our anarchism? Is it the seed of the idea that we must sow anywhere the terrain promises to make it sprout? If so, everywhere the storm clouds thicken to water it, there lies the terrain for us. And when we do, it will sprout up into the light and stretch forth its green strength powerfully. And men will reap the fruits.

Or is it a barren and arid concept that demands we withdraw from the struggles of our fellow man, and that we push it down into the depths of our innermost being for the intellectual pleasure of keeping it all to ourselves? Does it have nothing to do with the real phenomena of life? If so, what is the difference between us and those who address their souls to the heavens and create their ideals out of thin air?

I believe that this state of mind has been the curse of our movement and the cause of our sterility, wherever it has prevailed. Because of it, the tide of revolt has left us high and dry on the beach, powerless to do our part in the attack on those dams that men have constructed across Life.

Now, it is true that there have been many reasons that this state of mind has been generated among us American anarchists. I

can say nothing about the Latin-American [Italian American] comrades in the United States, about whose movement I am, to my utmost regret, profoundly ignorant. But among us English-speaking American anarchists, the truth is that there has been no movement among the proletariat into which we could conscientiously instill any special energy or enthusiasm. The people have never been agitated enough to ask for anything fundamental; their organizations have always stalled, and have advanced only insignificant demands. Nor have we ever been able to instill in them any desire to ask for more. In this case, maybe it's all our fault.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that the people of this country, from the abolition of black slavery until today, have not had any burning desire. Even the momentary fury over the question of war violence, provoked by the arrest of the McNamaras, is only a superficial scowl. Nothing vital has been accomplished. The workers are still aiming for nothing more than the stupid and ineffective patching-up of conditions, both inside the unions and outside of them.

And aware of the futility of all their intentions, and of our own incapacity to alter them, we have taken refuge in a kind of subjective anarchism, if I may express myself that way, which has carried us away, and always carries us further away.

But now we have before us an enormous social uprising — the spectacle of millions of men in revolt to win back their great human freedom, ruthlessly trampled by the bandits of Capital, the freedom to access the land, the woods, the waters and the mineral deposits. We have a practical affirmation, in gigantic proportions, of that which we have preached for so long to small audiences, specifically, that the way for the people to regain their personal freedom is to obtain the land for themselves, and the way to get it back is to take it.

Life itself has taught that to Mexicans; their acts demonstrate that they understand that political freedom is a hoax without the return of land. Believing that he was tricking the people with

promises of political freedom, Madero tried to... put his hat over top of Mount Vesuvius, so to speak, and then sit on it. But the lava rises, scorching everything around him; the people are not content with words; they want the land and nothing less.

Companions, should we not be interested in this struggle aside from being simple spectators when such a fundamental demand is made and the people are engaged directly in expropriation, and when so much of their goal and the methods used to achieve it match ours?

Does a revolt or a person in revolt have to bear the label “Made by the Anarchist Union” to have our approval?

Most of the revolutionaries are either Indians or semi-Indians. I remember well the surprising definition of an Indian from my half-blood friend, Honoré J. Jaxon, a rebel from the North-West in the abortive struggle against the theft of the lands of the Hudson Bay Company in 1885–86 — “An anarchist,” he said, “is a person who believes that men can live without laws; an Indian is a man who lives without laws.”

Now, the fact is that these Indians are by instinct anarchists — and communists also — and they have an unquenchable thirst for their ancient freedom. Should we ask them to subscribe to Kropotkin’s ideas before giving them our support? This is unnecessary; Kropotkin has already given his approval to them.

But even if conscious anarchism is all that can get our certificate of approval; if this heroic cry of the Mexican proletariat: “give us land or give us death!” does not echo in our hearts; I still don’t know by what logic we can deny cooperation to the Junta of the Liberal Party, which week after week, month after month, through the voices of Ricardo and Enrique Magón, Wm. C. Owen and others, has proclaimed:

“From now on there can no longer be any stable government in Mexico, because what the people want is to eat, and no government can give them bread. The people must take bread for themselves, destroying the capitalist system and taking possession of the lands,

the tools of labor, of everything that exists for the use and benefit of all, without exception.”

And furthermore: “What is needed now? The launching of all these formidable energies of revolt towards true freedom — the freedom that is based on economic freedom — and this can be won in only one way: through the expropriation by force of lands, waters, houses, mines, factories, workshops, railways — in short, everything, so that the poor can organize production in accordance with the needs of each productive community.... We take possession of that which belongs to all and is now in the hands of a few. Which political ruler will then be able to impose himself on us?”

I have never read, nor written, nor can I conceive of a more open declaration of anarchist objectives. And it is from the pen of Ricardo Flores Magón.

Whoever knows of another more worthy or grander movement deserving the support of anarchists, let him proclaim it. I don’t know of one. Nor can I understand how such a proclamation as the one mentioned above can fail to inflame the mind and heart of anyone who dares to call themselves a revolutionary internationalist.

Voltairine de Cleyre