

RICARDO FLORES MAGÓN
LAND AND LIBERTY

The Revolution is now about to break out at any moment. We, who during so many years have followed attentively the social and political life of Mexico, cannot deceive ourselves. The symptoms of a formidable cataclysm leave no room for doubt that we are on the eve of an uplift and a crash, a rising and a fall. At last, after four and thirty years of shame, the Mexican people is about to raise its head, and at last, after this long night the black edifice, which has been strangling us beneath its weight, is about to crumble to dust.

It is timely that we should here repeat what already we have said so often; that this movement, springing from despair, must not be a blind effort to free ourselves from an enormous burden, but a movement in which instinct must be dominated almost completely by reason. We [Liberals] must try to bring it about that this movement shall be guided by the light of Science. If we fail to do this, the Revolution now on the point of coming to the surface will serve merely to substitute one President for another, one master for another. We must bear in mind that the necessary thing is that the people shall have bread, shelter, land to cultivate; we must bear in mind that no government, however honourable, can decree the abolition of misery. The people themselves – the hungry and disinherited – are they who must abolish misery, by taking into their possession, as the very first step, the land which by natural right should not be monopolized by a few but must be the property of every human being.

No one can foretell the lengths to which the impending Revolution's task of recovery will go; but, if we fighters undertake in good faith [to help] it as far as possible along the road; if, when we pick up the Winchester, we go forth decided not to elevate to power another master but redeem the proletariat's rights; if we take the field pledged to conquer that economic liberty which is the foundation on which all liberties rest, and the condition without which no liberties can exist; if we make this our purpose, we shall start it on a road worthy of this epoch. But if we are carried away by the desire for easy triumph; if, seeking to make struggle shorter, we desert our own radicalism and aims, so incompatible with those of the purely bourgeois and conservative parties – then we shall have done only the work of bandits and assassins; for the blood spilled will serve merely to increase the power of the bourgeoisie and the caste that today possesses wealth, and, after the triumph, that caste will fasten anew on the proletariat the chain forged with the proletariat's own blood, its own sacrifices, its own martyrdom, which will have conquered power for the bourgeoisie.

It is necessary, therefore, proletarians; it is necessary therefore, disinherited, that your thought be not confused. The conservative and bourgeois parties speak to you of liberty, of justice, of law, of honourable government; and they tell you that when you replace with others those who are now in power, you will have the liberty, justice, law and honourable government. Be not deceived! What you need is to secure the well-being of your families – their daily bread – and this no government can give you. You yourselves must conquer these good things, and you must do it by taking immediate possession of the land, which is the original source of all wealth. Understand this well; no government will be able to give you that, for the law defends the “right” of those who are withholding wealth. You yourselves must take it, despite the law, despite the government, despite the pretended right of property. You yourselves must take it in the name of

natural justice; in the name of the right of every human being to life and the development of his physical and intellectual powers.

When you are in possession of the land you will have liberty and justice, for liberty and justice are not decreed but are the result of economic independence. They spring from the fact that the individual is able to live without depending on a master, and to enjoy, for himself and his family, the product of his toil.

Take, then, the land! The law tells you that you must not take it, since it is private property; but the law which so instructs you was a law written by those who are holding you in slavery and a law that needs to be supported by force is a law that does not respond to general needs. If the law were the result of general agreement it would not need upholding by the policeman, the jailer, the judge, the hangman, the soldier and the official. The law has been imposed on you, and these arbitrary impositions we, as men of dignity, must answer with rebellion.

Therefore, to the struggle! Imperious, unrestrainable, the Revolution will not tarry. If you would be really free, group yourselves beneath the [Liberal] Party's banner of freedom; but, if you merely want the strange pleasure of shedding blood, and shedding your own by "playing at soldiers," group yourselves under other banners – that of the Anti-reelectionists, for example, which, after you have done "playing at soldiers," will put you anew under the yoke of the employer and government. In that case you will enjoy the great pleasure of changing the old President, with whom already you were becoming disgusted, for a spick and span new one, fresh from the mint.

Comrades, the question is a grave one. I understand that you are ready for the fight; but fight so that it shall be of benefit to the poor. Hitherto all your revolutions have profited the classes in power, because you have no clear conception of your rights and interests, which, as you now know, are completely opposed to the rights and interests of the intellectual and wealthy classes. It is to the interest of the rich that the poor shall be poor eternally, for the poverty of the masses guarantees their wealth. If there were not men who found themselves compelled to work for other men, the rich would be under the necessity of doing something useful, of producing something of general utility, that they might be able to exist. No longer would there be slaves they could exploit.

I repeat, it is not possible to foretell the lengths in which the approaching Revolution's task of recovery will go; what we must do is to endeavour to get all we can. It would be a great step in advance if the land were to become the property of all; and if among the revolutionists there should . . . be strength, the conscious strength, sufficient to gain more than that, the basis would be laid for further recoveries which the proletariat by force of circumstances would conquer.

Forward, comrades! Soon you will hear the first shots; soon the shout of rebellion will thunder from the throats of the oppressed. Let not a single one of you fail to second this movement, launching, with all the power of conviction, the supremest of cries, Land and Liberty!

Taken from "Land and Liberty," in *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 335–

FREDERICK THE GREAT (1712–1786)

ANTI-MACHIAVEL (1741)

Introduction

As Kings have the Power to do Good or Evil according to their Choice and Inclination, how deplorable is the Condition of that People who have every thing to fear from the Abuse of Majesty, whose Properties are a Prey to the Avarice of their Prince, their Liberty to his Caprice, their Repose to his Ambition, their Safety to his Perfidiousness, and their Lives to his Cruelty? Such would be the tragical Situation of a Country governed by a Prince of Machiavel's forming.

I. The Several Sorts of Principalities and after What Manner Thy Are Acquired

A Sovereign, he should have said, was originally designed for the Good of the People; this is therefore what a Prince ought to prefer to every other Consideration; and Justice alone ought to be the Guide of all his Actions. What becomes then of all those Notions of Self-Interest, Grandeur, Ambition and Despotism; when it appears that the Sovereign, far from being the absolute Master of his People, is nothing more than their chief Servant?

XV. Of the Things for Which Men, and Particularly Princes, are Applauded or Censured

For my part, I affirm, that in order to be safe, it is necessary to be virtuous. Men are commonly neither wholly good, nor wholly bad; but both good and bad; and such as are between the two will unanimously revere a powerful Prince, who is just and virtuous.

XVII. Of Cruelty and Clemency, and Whether It Is Best for a Prince to be Feared or Beloved

The most precious Depositum that is put in the Hands of a Prince, is the Lives of his Subjects: As his Office gives him a Power of condemning to Death, or pardoning Criminals, so it makes him the supreme Arbiter of Justice. Good Princes look upon this Power, which is so much boasted of, as the weightiest Part of their Charge; they know they are Men themselves, as well as those whom they judge; they know that Injustices and Injuries may be compensated in this World, but that Execution of a Sentence of Death too hastily passed, is an Evil that can never be repaired; they are only inclined to Severity, when they find Severity necessary, to prevent greater Evils, which otherwise could not be averted; they are merciful, except in desperate Cases, where Mercy to Particulars would be Cruelty to the Whole; and act like a Man, who having a Leg or an Arm gangrened and incurable, is willing to bear the painful Operation of having it cut off, in order to save the rest of his Body.

XXVI. An Exhortation to Deliver Italy from the Barbarians

I have told Kings, That their true Policy was to excel their Subjects in Virtue, that they might not find themselves obliged to condemn in others what their own Practice authorized. I have observed, that bright and glorious Actions were not alone sufficient to establish their Reputation, and that true and lasting Fame was only to be purchased by such Actions as tend to the Benefit of Mankind.

Princes whose only Aim it is to make their People happy, ought well to consider, before they expose them to every thing that human Nature has most Occasion to dread.

Others who look upon their Subjects as their Slaves, endanger them without Pity, and see them perish without Regret; but those Princes who consider Men as their Equals, and look upon their People as a Body of which they themselves are the Soul, are as sparing of the Blood of their Subjects, as of their own.

To conclude this Work, I would beseech all Sovereigns not to take Offence at the Liberty with which I speak to them: My sole Design is to make them acquainted with Truth, to animate them to Virtue, and to flatter none. The good Opinion I have of the Princes who reign at present in Europe, makes me believe them worthy to hear the Truth

Taken from Frederick the Great, *Anti-Machiavel: or, an Examination of Machiavel's Prince* (London: T. Woodward, 1741), vii–viii, 3, 166, 179–181, 331.

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