

Two revolutionaries

Ricardo Flores Magón

1910

The old revolutionary and the modern revolutionary met each other one afternoon marching in different directions. The sun glowed like an ember above the distant mountain range; the king of the day was sinking, it sunk down irrevocably. As if it were conscience of its defeat by the evening, it reddened with anger, and cast upon the earth and the sky its most handsome lights.

The two revolutionaries regarded each other face to face: the old one, ashen, disheveled, his unpolished visage like a rag tossed into a wash basket, crossed here and there by ugly scars, his bones insinuating the edges of his body underneath his shabby garb. The modern one, erect, filled with life, his face luminous with the presentiment of glory. He was clothed in rags as well, but he carried them with pride, as if they were the flag of the disinherited, the symbol of a common meditation, the password of humble people elevated by the zeal for a great idea.

“Where are you going?” asked the old man

“I am going to fight for my ideals,” said the modern one. “And you, where are you going?” he asked in his turn.

The old man coughed and spat angrily upon the earth. He cast a glance at the sun, whose anger he also felt in this moment, and said:

“I am not going; I am now coming back home.”

“What happened?”

“I am disillusioned,” said the old man “You are not going to a revolution. I also went to the war and you see how I now return: sad, old, damaged in body and spirit.”

The modern revolutionary cast a glance that encompassed space, his brow resplendent; a great hope rose up from the depths of his being and gazed out through his face.

He asked the old man:

“Did you know what you were fighting for?”

“Yes, a wicked man was dominating the country. We poor people were suffering from the tyranny of the Government and from the tyranny of people with money. Our oldest children were locked up in jail; the families, abandoned, prostituted themselves or panhandled to be able to live. No one could look the lowest policeman in the face; the least complaint was considered as an act of rebellion. One day a noble man said to us poor people:

Fellow citizens, in order to put an end to the present state of things, we must have a change in the government: the men who are in Power are thieves, assassins, and oppressors. Let us eliminate those in Power: elect me President and everything will change.

“This is what the noble man said. After this, he gave us firearms and sent us off to fight. We triumphed. The wicked oppressors were dead. We elected the man who gave us the weapons, making him President while we went to work. After our triumph we continued working exactly like before, like mules and not like men; our families continued suffering from need; our oldest sons kept on being taken to jail; the taxes kept on being collected with precision by the new Government, and rather than decreasing, they grew larger. We had to abandon the products of our labor to the hands of our masters. Any time we wanted to declare a strike, they killed us in the most cowardly fashion. Now you see, I knew what we were fighting for: the rulers were bad and we were precisely exchanging them for good ones. And now you see how those who said that they were going to be good turned out to be just as bad as the ones we dethroned. Do not go to the war, do not go. You are going to risk your life merely to exalt a new master.”

So spoke the old revolutionary; the sun sunk down without recourse, as if a gigantic claw had dragged it behind the mountain. The modern revolutionary smiled. He retorted:

“Comrade, I am going to war, but not like you and those of your era. I am going to war not to elevate any man to Power, but to emancipate my class. With the aid of this rifle, I will force our masters to loosen their claws and to release what they have robbed from the poor for thousands of years. You entrusted a man to create your happiness; my comrades and I are going to create happiness for all by our own efforts. You entrusted notable lawyers and men of science with the task of making laws. Naturally, they made them in such away as to benefit themselves. Instead of being the instrument of liberty, they were the instrument of tyranny and infamy. Your entire error and the error of those who, like you, have fought, has been this: to give powers to an individual or to a group of individuals, surrendering to them the task of making everybody happy. No, my friend; we, the modern revolutionaries, do not search for helpers, nor protectors, nor manufacturers of good fortune. We are going to conquer liberty and well-being for ourselves. We are beginning by attacking the root of political tyranny, and that root is called “the right of property.” We are going to seize the land from the hands of our bosses, to hand it over to the people. Oppression is a tree, the root of this tree is called “the right of property.” The trunk, the branches, and the leaves are the policemen, the soldiers, and the officials of all ranks, large and small. Look here: the old revolutionaries have surrendered the task of chopping down this tree every time. They chopped it down, it sprouted, it grew up, and it strengthened; again they chopped it down, again it sprouted, again it grew up, and again it strengthened. This keeps on happening because they have not attacked the root of the wicked tree; all have been too frightened to extract the core and pitch it into the fire. You see, my old friend: you have given your blood for no good reason. I am disposed to give mine so that it will benefit all my brothers in chains. I will burn down the tree from its root.”

Behind the blue mountain, something still blazed: it was the sun, which had finally sunk, perhaps wounded by the gigantic claw which beckoned it to the abyss, while the sky became red as if had been tinted by the blood of the star.

The old revolutionary sighed and said:

“Like the sun, I also am setting. And I will disappear into the shadows.”

The modern revolutionary continued to the place where his brothers were fighting for the new ideals.

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