Chapter 4
American Anarchists and the Mexican Revolution

Emma Goldman, the most famous figure in American anarchism, first made contact with Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón and other leaders of the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) in 1905 when they were in exile in Saint Louis, Missouri, a year before they launched their first uprising. Goldman had long talks with the Magonistas and though she is often credited with playing an important role in converting them to anarchism, in fact they were already predisposed toward anarchism from their own reading and experiences in Mexico. Rather than she converting the Magonistas, it was they who converted her into supporters of their revolutionary movement in Mexico. Their political alliance and personal friendships would endure until the death of Ricardo in 1918, and in the mid-1920s Enrique and Goldman were still corresponding.

Five years later the Mexican Revolution broke out, an enormous decades-long peasant and worker rebellion inspiring two generations of American radicals and labor activists who saw in it the struggle of the underdogs for social and economic justice. As Goldman wrote in autobiography, Living My Life:

The revolution in Mexico was the expression of a people awakened to the great economic and political wrongs in their lands. The struggle inspired large numbers of militant workers in America, among them many anarchists and I.W.W.s (Industrial Workers of the World), to help their Mexican brothers across the border. Thoughtful persons on the Coast, intellectuals as well as proletarians, were imbued with the spirit behind the revolution.¹

By then Goldman and other anarchists had already been involved for years in solidarity with the Mexican revolutionists. For ten years, from 1907 until the suppression of Mother Earth by the U.S. government in 1917, Emma Goldman and her collaborators wrote scores of articles dealing with Mexico, the government of dictator Porfirio Díaz, and with the revolution.² Two of Mother Earth’s contributors, William C. Owen and Voltairine de Cleyre, developed an anarchist analysis of the revolution that went to the very heart of the matter. As anarchists, they rejected bourgeois political leaders such as Francisco Madero and Venustiano Carranza, and threw their support to Emiliano Zapata and the peasants and Indians of Morelos and other areas of Mexico. Their view would inform American anarchist thinking about Mexico for a decade or more.

The American anarchists saw the Mexican Revolution as the greatest revolutionary event since the Paris Commune of 1871, at least until the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917. They argued that the Indian peasants with their communal traditions had raised the struggle for human liberation to a new level through their direct action in taking and redistributing the land. But in addition to offering such a political analysis, the anarchists of Goldman's Mother Earth also promoted international labor solidarity among U.S. and Mexican workers, supported the Mexican
Liberal Party, opposed the U.S. government's attempt to jail PLM leaders, and organized a movement against U.S. military intervention in Mexico.

For the American anarchists the Mexican Revolution represented the cutting edge of a world-wide anarchist revolution, and they took up the Mexican cause with enormous enthusiasm. Emma Goldman herself carried out a speaking tour on behalf of the Magonistas in Southern California in May of 1912. Other anarchists spoke and wrote on the Mexican Revolution in English, Spanish, Italian and Czech. The American anarchists took the matter of Mexico to the Canadian and British labor unions. Several went off to join the Mexican Revolution in one fashion or another. The British-born anarchist William C. Owen went to work with Ricardo Flores Magón on his newspaper *Regeneración* in Los Angeles. Influenced by anarchist publications and ideas, radicals like labor organizer Charles Cline set off across Texas to join the revolutionary movement in Northern Mexico. Some anarchists participated in the invasion of Baja California by forces of the Mexican Liberal Party and the Industrial Workers of the World. Other American anarchists such as George Duval joined Zapata's forces in Morelos.3

Goldman's magazine *Mother Earth* provides a record of the development of the anarchists' thinking about and activities in support of the Mexican Revolution. The anarchists' interest and involvement in the Mexican Revolution began as a campaign of international solidarity with the Mexican Liberal Party. While *Mother Earth* carried two short pieces on Mexico in 1907, the first major article on Mexico appeared in February of 1908, the PLM's "Manifesto to the American People." The Manifesto, several printed pages long and written from the Los Angeles County Jail in 1907 by Ricardo Flores Magón and his co-thinkers, was an appeal to the American people for support by the Mexican revolutionaries.

Workers of the world! Our cause is your cause. The cause of the proletariat knows no frontiers. The interests of the working people are the same in all lands under all climates, and all latitudes of our globe. Help us!...Remember that only by unity of action and solidarity of effort the workers will emancipate themselves.5

That PLM plea for help initiated a decade long anarchist campaign to defend Mexican political prisoners in U.S. and Mexican jails. By the very act of printing the PLM Manifesto, to say nothing of their other activities, the anarchists put themselves in danger of the same sort of repression.

Shortly before the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, the British anarchist William C. Owen, wrote one of the first articles in *Mother Earth* in defense of the Mexican political exiles, who were constantly being arrested or jailed in the United States or extradited to Mexico where they would be jailed or killed. In what was the first or certainly one of the first anarchist articles on the Mexican Revolution, Owen wrote that U.S. immigration laws and the extradition treaty with Mexico were "a net placed in the hands of Diaz for the capture of his political enemies, and it is high time that these conditions, which represent an arbitrary use of authority as evil as anything found in Russia, should be taken up and investigated without fear or favor."6 He concluded, "There should be a general call to stop, and *muy pronto*, the Russianizing of this country."7 (Written before the Russian revolution of 1917, the reference, of course, here is to Czarist Russia.)
Owen’s was among the first of dozens of such articles in *Mother Earth* and other anarchist publications. From these first articles by Ricardo Flores Magón and William C. Owen grew an increasing collaboration and sympathy between the Mexican “liberals” and the American anarchists.

**William C. Owen**

Once the revolution broke out, the anarchists rushed to its defense, but more important perhaps, they also developed an analysis of the nature of the Mexican revolution and its goals which armed their American anarchist followers. While Emma Goldman herself and many other anarchists participated in this process of analyzing the Mexican Revolution in the pages of *Mother Earth*, but the analysis was primarily developed by the British anarchist Owen and the American anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre during 1911 and 1912. At a time when the revolution was either derided as another Latin American coup d’etat by some or hailed as a movement for political democracy by others, their emphasis on the social and economic character of the revolution represented a revelation. In a series of brilliant articles, the two anarchists grasped the fundamental character of the Mexican Revolution as a peasant upheaval directed toward the communal ownership of land.

Owen would be one of the first anarchists to develop a real analysis of the Mexican revolutionary process. Owen was born on February 16, 1854 in Dinapore, India, the son of a wealthy British family who was orphaned at birth. Raised in England, he studied law, and in 1882 migrated to the United States living in New York and California and working as a journalist and teacher. He joined the socialists of the International Workingmen’s Association, read *The Commonweal*, the newspaper of the Socialist League and corresponded with William Morris, the socialist artist and writer who was active in that organization. Together with the Italian Saverio Merlino, Owen found the Socialist League of the United States, but then discovered the writings of Peter Kropotkin and soon became his translator, beginning Owen’s turn toward anarchism. After a visit with Kropotkin in England in 1892, he returned to the United States to become a journalist for the League for Prison Reform in 1893 and wrote among other things a pamphlet titled “Crime and Criminals.” He began to work with the anarchist newspaper *Free Society* and with *Mother Earth*, the newspaper of Emma Goldman, the leading American anarchist.

Owen developed his own particular anarchist philosophy. He considered himself to be an individualist as opposed to a collective anarchist, meaning that he was opposed to any form of social organization which would stifle the free activity of the individual. He strongly rejected not only Marxist socialism with its idea that a society could be both centralized and democratic, but also opposed the centralism of the syndicalists of the Industrial Workers of the World. Unlike some anarchists, Owen did not accept Marx’s analysis of capitalism, but was more influenced by Henry George and his theory of “land monopoly.” For Owen the monopoly of land laid the basis for capitalism and for other economic and political monopolies. Through the abolition of landlord class’s land monopoly society could achieve “equality of opportunity,” which was for Owen the goal. Unlike George, Owen did not see any role for the state in bringing about a more fair distribution of wealth. Owen also rejected Marx’s idea of class struggle as standing at the center of society, arguing that social problems were the problems of the whole society. He did not privilege the working class or labor unions, but rather encouraged anarchists and other revolutionaries to use
education and action to move society to reorganize itself. He argued for direct action by the people against the powers that oppressed them.\(^\text{10}\)

After reading John Kenneth Turner’s book *Barbarous Mexico*, Owen began to take an interest in Mexico and particularly in the Mexican Liberal Party led by Ricardo Flores Magón. He developed his views on the Mexican Revolution and its significance in Goldman’s *Mother Earth* and later in his own newspaper *Land and Liberty*.\(^\text{11}\) Becoming directly involved in work with the Mexican revolutionaries, from 1910 to 1912, Owen worked on the staff of *Regeneración*, the Spanish language newspaper of the Mexican Liberal Party edited by Ricardo Flores Magón, editing the English page.\(^\text{12}\)

In *Barbarous Mexico* Turner had revealed the scandalous fact that chattel slavery existed in Mexico at the opening of the twentieth century. Owen began the analysis in his article “Viva Mexico” in April 1911, arguing that the Mexican Revolution “proposes to abolish chattel and wage slavery.” By combining the struggle against chattel slavery with the struggle against the system of capitalism and wage labor which socialists and anarchists called wage slavery, Owen shifted the argument to the left. The Mexican Revolution, if it really was a struggle against wage slavery, had the possibility of becoming a socialist or anarchist revolution.

Owens was surely influenced by the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin and his anarchist study of the French Revolution, a history “from below” which emphasized the self-activity of the sans-culottes and the peasants. He argued that even that most famous “bourgeois revolution” tended toward anarchism and communism. Kropotkin had written of the year 1791 and 1792 that, “…the revolutionary education of the people was being accomplished by the Revolution itself, and that the masses were by degrees emboldened to demand measures imbued with a communist spirit, which to some extend would have contributed to efface the economic inequalities.”\(^\text{13}\)

Owen went on to challenge those who would characterize the Mexican Revolution as simply another Latin American *coup d’état*, arguing that in fact, “an entire nation is in revolt.” The revolt was not a localized affair, but was rather “nation-wide” and Mexico was a big nation. One test of a real revolution, argued Owen, was that it appeared not simply in the big cities, but throughout the countryside. The French Revolution of 1789 or the Russian Revolution of 1905 had involved “spontaneous outbreaks at a thousand and one scattered country points. Tested thus the Mexican movement bears all the marks of a genuine revolution.” Owen's Mexican Revolution was no *coup d'état* and no merely political revolution either; it was a nation-wide upheaval, a people in revolt, a social revolution to abolish slavery and wage slavery. Owen concluded his article by returning to the slavery issue and elevating it to the status of a global issue: “The question is not Mexican but international; slavery and freedom are again at death grips.”\(^\text{14}\)

Owen returned to the Mexican Revolution again in June of 1911 in another article, this time titled "Mexico's Hour of Need." By this time the profound differences between Francisco I. Madero, the wealthy liberal who had called for the national insurrection on November 20, 1910, and the anarchists of the Mexican Liberal Party led by the Flores Magón brothers had become apparent, and Owens addressed those political differences. Owens stood on the side the Flores Magón and the PLM, but his emphasis was on the role of Mexico’s peasants themselves.
Owen argued in this article that the primary factor in the revolution was the peasants’ opposition to the landlord. Wherever the Revolution goes, said Owen, the peasants burn the records, just as they did in the French Revolution. “Not a Mexican peon but knows that the land monopolist is his enemy, who strikes him through the official and the machinery of law,” wrote Owen. The Mexican peon, then, was a natural anarchist, a natural opponent of government records and government officials.  

Just as Kropotkin had shown in the case of the French Revolution that the driving force was the “direct action of the serfs,” Owen argues that the peasants were the agents of the Mexican Revolution. As he writes “…the Mexican Revolution is spontaneous; proceeding from the bosom of the people; engendered by their economic needs and social aspirations; absolutely apart from the political ambitions of Madero and other representatives of privilege.”

The real Revolution, Owens claimed, had little or nothing to do with politics. “In the almost invariable burning of the records; in the not infrequent execution of public officials; in the leaderless uprisings of plantation serfs and the constant multiplication of guerilla [sic] bands, is to be read the true story of the Mexican Revolution.” Owen stressed the Mexican Revolution's agrarian, peasant character, a rebellion of a simple people. “For the hundredth time I emphasize my conviction that the simpler nations--living close to nature and not having lost their grip of elemental facts--invariably start these revolutions and fight them to the bitter end.”

This interpretation of the Mexican Revolution marked a profound difference between anarchists and socialists. An anarchist like Owen believed that the simple peasants living close to nature represented the most revolutionary social class, while socialists believed the industrial working class had to play the leading role in a social revolution. While the anarchists stressed the importance of the social revolution, the socialists emphasized the importance of the struggle for state power, the political revolution. These differences in interpretation of the revolution would lead also to strategic and tactical differences between anarchists and socialists, and eventually to a complete split between them over the question of Mexico.

As an anarchist, Owen believed in the spontaneous uprising of the masses, and rejected the idea of a leading role for a political party, even his allies in the Mexican Liberal Party. “The Mexican Liberal party has not made this revolution; could not have made it. That, however, it has interpreted the revolution correctly I have no doubt. That it will fight to the last ditch to prevent the people from being cheated of their victory I know.”

Owens suggested that he role of an anarchist organization was to interpret events, and to provide guidance, and offer solidarity. But the anarchists could not direct a movement which represented what was an elemental, natural force. Owens articles provided anarchists with an interpretation of the Mexican Revolution far different that of the socialists and progressives with whom they worked in coalitions to stop the U.S. government's repression of the PLM, and to oppose U.S. military intervention.

**Voltairine de Cleyre**
The next contribution to the Votairine de Cleyre was one of the best known American anarchists writers and lecturers in the opening decade of the twentieth century. Born in the town of Lesilie in rural Michigan on November 17, 1866 to Hector and Harriet de Claire, her father, a socialist and free thinker, named her after his idol Voltaire. The family was quite poor and her father, an itinerant tailor, wandered throughout Michigan to find work. Voltairine attended a convent school where she receive a very good education and developed a lifelong hatred of the Church.

After she left the convent school at age seventeen, she moved to Grand Rapids and became a writer for free thought newspapers and magazines—*The Progressive Age, The Freethinkers’ Magazine, the Truth Seeker, Free Thought*—and then a speaker on the movement’s lecture circuit first in Michigan and then in Ohio and Pennsylvania. As her biographer Paul Avrich explains, she was an especially effective speaker because like the runaway slaves on the abolitionist lecture circuit a generation before she should speak from personal experiences. She had spent four years in a convent and escaped to tell the truth about how young lives were “murdered by the church.”

Expanding her speaking tours, she traveled as far west as Kansas and as far East as Philadelphia and Boston, and in the course of her lectures came in contact with the socialists and anarchists who were often active in free thought organizations. While participating in a Memorial Meeting for Tom Paine in Linesville, Pennsylvania in December 1887, she heard Clarence Darrow deliver a lecture on socialism. She decided that she was a socialist, and her talks on individual conscience and religious liberty began to be tinged with socialism. Soon, however, she was converted to anarchism. Conversations with Russian Jewish anarchists played an important part in her conversion, though perhaps more important was the November 11, 1887 execution of the men convicted of the bombing at Chicago’s Haymarket: Albert Parsons, August Sies, George Engel and Adolf Fischer.

Chicago police had fired into a picket line at strike at the McCormick Reaper Works, leading to the calling of a protest meeting at Haymarket Square. As the meeting was breaking up, police showed up and demanded that the meeting stop and the crowd disperse. At that moment, someone threw a bomb, killing a police officer and wounding some seventy others, six of whom later died. The police then opened fire on the workers, killing four and wounding many others. The authorities indicted eight men and brought them to trial, charged with the bombing. Six of them had not been present; evidence indicated that two others clearly had nothing to do with the bombing. No evidence was produced to connect any of the men with the bombing and no bomb thrower was ever identified. The combination of a biased judge, a packed jury, perjured testimony, and the public hysteria resulted in a guilty verdict for all eight. Appeals and petitions for clemency failed. Three of the eight were given long prison terms and five were sentenced to death. One of them, Lingg, committed suicide. The other four, Parsons, Spies, Engel and Fisher, were hanged on November 11.

The Haymarket events had a profound impact on the American labor movement, putting an end to the period of strikes and rapid union organization by the Knights of Labor that had opened in the mid-1870s. The defeat of the Knights of Labor was a defeat for its idealism and its inclusive organizing approach; out of the wreckage of the radical labor movement arose the more moderate and narrow alliance of craft unions, the American Federation of Labor led by Samuel Gompers. At
the same time, the Haymarket hardened the small anarchist movement, making the anarchists even more intransigent in their opposition to the state.

The Haymarket executions deeply moved de Cleyre, as it did other idealists of her generation, making her a convinced anarchist and leading her to participate nearly every year in the memorial services for the Haymarket martyrs. The following year, in 1899 de Cleyre moved to Philadelphia which would be her home until 1910. There, living in poverty, she gave piano lessons and taught English to hundreds of Russian Jewish immigrants, many of them cigar makers and textile workers. A native speaker of English and of French perfected in the convent school, she now also developed "a respectable command of both written and spoken Yiddish." Under the tutelage of her older friend Dyer D. Lum, a longtime labor union activists and anarchist, she developed her anarchist views, rejecting individualist and collectivist (or communist) anarchism in favor of mutualism and voluntary cooperation. De Cleyre had a child, Harry, by her lover James B. Elliott, but was economically, physically and emotionally unprepared to take on the responsibility of motherhood and gave him to Elliott’s family. In 1894 de Cleyre had an opportunity to travel to England and Scotland, meeting with anarchists there, including Jean Grave, one of the leading French anarchists. Returning to the United States she translated his book his book Moribund Society and Anarchy.

During the years 1890 to 1910 de Cleyre became recognized for her essays and lectures as one of the outstanding figures of American anarchism, if not as famous as Emma Goldman, the movement’s outstanding leader in those years, she was equally admired. While originally an anarchist pacifist, state violence against the poor, the Spanish American War and the growth of militarism and imperialism changed her mind. By the time of the Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910, she had become an advocate of revolution. As Emma Goldman wrote, “Voltairine began her public career as a pacifist, and for many years she sternly set her face against revolutionary methods. But greater familiarity with European developments, the Russian Revolution of 1905, the rapid growth of capitalism in her own country, with its resultant violence and injustice, and particularly the Mexican Revolution, subsequently changed her attitude."

De Cleyre’s Mexican Revolution

In the summer of 1911 Voltairine de Cleyre's first article on the Mexican Revolution appeared in Mother Earth, “The Mexican Revolt.” De Cleyre followed closely the views laid out by Owen, but added other dimensions to them as well. Like Owen, she rejected the idea that this was a merely political revolution, and emphasized its social character. Her article opens with the words: “At last we see a genuine awakening of a people, not to political demands alone, but to economic ones--fundamentally economic ones.” For anarchists like Owen and De Cleyre, the real test of a revolution was its economic character. Politics was the superficial; economics, the profound. Like Owen, she praised the Mexicans who “hew down the landmarks, burn the records of the title-deeds.” She wrote, “...they have driven off the paper-title men, and are working the ground on hundreds of ranches.” But to this De Cleyre added a new element, the notion that the Mexican Revolution and the principle of the direct expropriation of the land represented a new and higher stage of revolutionary action. She wrote, “...the Slaves of Our Times, in a nation-wide revolt, have smitten the Beast of Property in Land. And once a great human demand is so made, it is never let
go again. Future revolts will go on from there; they will never fall behind it.”

The Mexican Revolution with its demand for the land would be the benchmark by which future revolutions were measured. In December of 1911, de Cleyre published in *Mother Earth* the first of three installments of an article titled “The Mexican Revolution,” based on a lecture she had delivered in Chicago two months before. This article represented the most ambitious anarchist analysis of the Mexican Revolution so far, and the most insightful. First De Cleyre began by putting the Mexican Revolution in the context of international events: “The Mexican revolution is one of the prominent manifestations of [a] world-wide economic revolt....It holds as important a place in the present disruption and reconstruction of economic institutions as the great revolution of France held in the eighteenth century movement.” By placing the Mexican Revolution at the center of a world-wide revolutionary movement, De Cleyre had elevated its significance and changed the perspective from which one analyzed it. By comparing it to the French Revolution's role in world history, she had given it a world historical significance. Consequently, Mexico automatically became the concern of everyone, and certainly of all revolutionaries.

As Owen had done, and as she had done in her earlier essays, she argued that land was the central issue. But now she made a stronger claim: because land was the central and indeed the only issue, either that problem would be solved, or the revolution would be smashed. The revolution “...will end,” she wrote, “only when that bitterness is assuaged by very great alteration in the land-holding system, or until the people have been absolutely crushed into subjection by a strong military power, whether that power be a native or a foreign one.” She predicted that “...the Mexican revolution will go on to the solution of Mexico's land question with a rapidity and directness of purpose not witnessed in any previous upheaval.”

De Cleyre now added another element previously unmentioned by anarchist writers, the particular character of the Mexican rural people. The Mexican peasants were: “...primitively agricultural for an immemorial period, communistic in many of their social customs, and like all Indians invincible haters of authority.” The Indians had traditionally been a “communistic” people. “The habits of mutual aid which always arise among sparsely settled communities are instinctive with them,” wrote de Cleyre. This was clearly a partial misunderstanding, for the communal traditions of Mexico’s Indians were as strong or probably stronger where the population was most dense, that is in Central and Southern Mexico. Nevertheless, the Indians communal traditions were an important factor. The Indians, moreover, wrote de Cleyre, had “No legal machinery...no tax gatherer, no justice, no jailer.” In addition, the “mestiza [sic] or mixed breed population, have followed the communistic instincts and customs of their Indian forebear[ers]; while from the Latin side of their make-up, they have certain tendencies which work well together with their Indian hatred of authority.”

Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, through his economic development programs granting concessions to foreign capitalists and corporations, had attacked traditional Indian and mestizo life. “The government took no note of the ancient tribal rights or customs, and those who received the concessions proceeded to enforce their property rights.” Díaz passed laws which took away vacant lands, that is what were formerly common lands, from those who could not produce a land title. The Madero family and the Terrazas family and others had seized thousands of square miles
of territory. Here, suggested de Cleyre, was the cause of the revolution. Land, the theft of the Indians communistically held land, was the source of the revolution, and until that problem was resolved, the revolution would not end.

De Cleyre’s Zapata

De Cleyre identified Emilianto Zapata as the leader of the forces who were carrying out the expropriation of the landlords’ estates. “Zapata has divided up the great estates of Morelos from end to end, telling the peasants to take possession,” she wrote. “They have done so. They are in possession and have already harvested their crops.” This was the thing, as de Cleyre saw it. In a particularly perceptive passage she writes:

[Not] all of this fighting [is] revolutionary; not by any means. Some is reactionary, some probably the satisfaction of personal grudge, much no doubt the expression of general turbulency of a very unconscious nature. But granting all that may be thrown in the balance, the main thing, the mighty thing, the regenerative revolution is the REAPPROPRIATION OF THE LAND BY THE PEASANTS. Thousands upon thousands of them are doing it.

Ignorant peasants; peasants who know nothing about the jargon of land reformers or of Socialists.

Yes: that's just the glory of it! Just the fact that it is done by ignorant people; that is people ignorant of book theories; but not ignorant, not so ignorant by half, of life on the land, as some of the theory-spinners of the city.

A real revolution, de Cleyre seems to be saying, follows a logic of its own. Whether this is a logic determined by the underlying economic system, in this case, the system of landed property, or the logic of a fundamentally communistic human nature is not clear from this passage.

In the final section of her essay, de Cleyre anticipated the critics of communal land ownership who would argue that such a system would fail to bring about economic development. De Cleyre argued that Díaz had brought about the development of the corporations at the expense of the people. De Cleyre defended the Indian and mestizo appropriation of the soil arguing that “however primitive their agricultural methods may be, one thing is sure: that they are more economical than any system which heaps up fortunes by destroying men.” Moreover, argued de Cleyre, the Indians had different values than the Anglo-Saxons. “An Indian has a different idea of what he is alive for than an Anglo-Saxon has,” wrote de Cleyre. “And so have the Latin peoples.” The Anglo-Saxon wants to “be busy,” to create what is useful and profitable, while the Indian and Latin peoples want “to live,” by enjoying a sensuous existence, creating beautiful things as part of nature. These are cultural ideals that caused conflict in a capitalist world, but which de Cleyre believed would be valued under anarchism.

The political revolution and the election victory of Madero could never bring stability to Mexico, argued de Cleyre, at least as long as they failed to resolve the land question. Given that the land
question continued to be the central issue, only three outcomes were possible: a military dictatorship, a U.S. intervention, or a successful peasant revolution. Whatever the outcome, said de Cleyre, she honored the Mexican peasant revolutionaries and their struggle for the land.

A few months later, de Cleyre returned to these themes once again in an article on the Paris Commune of 1871 titled “The Commune Is Risen” published in Mother Earth in March of 1912. After surveying the world's revolutionary movements in Western Europe, Russia, China and elsewhere she concluded giving the place of honor to the Mexican Revolution. She wrote, “under the Mexican sun, we know men are revolting for something: for the great, common, fundamental economic right, before which all others fade,--the right of man to the earth.” She ended her last article on Mexico before her premature death with the words, "the Great Ghost has risen, crying across the world, Vive la Commune!" The Paris Commune lived on in the Mexican Revolution, in the forces of Zapata and the peasants of Morelos.

Anarchists versus Socialists

The anarchists social revolutionary interpretation of the Mexican Revolution helped to sustain the anarchists campaigns for solidarity with the Mexican peasants and workers in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and other cities. But at the same time, this anarchist analysis led inevitably to conflicts with the American Federation of Labor and the Socialist Party, which had thrown in their lot first with Madero and then later with Carranza.

After 1911, when the Socialist Party opted for Madero, the anarchists became its implacable critic. The Socialist Party's position derived logically from the evolutionary, gradualist politics of both the Socialist Party of the United State and the Second or Socialist International. The Socialists' position was that the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz had ended a period of political dictatorship and economic feudalism, and had thus opened the way for an era of bourgeois democracy and capitalist economic expansion in which industry and the working class would grow, while the people would enjoy democracy and labor unions and socialists would be able to organize. For this reason, Socialists supported the Madero government, or later the Carranza government, on the grounds that they opened a period of economic expansion, political liberty and labor union rights. Socialism, in this view was obviously not on the agenda, and much less some sort of libertarian communism. (We take up the Socialist Party view at greater length in the following chapter.)

The anarchists characterized the Socialist Party's position on the Mexican Revolution as “...so cowardly, contemptible and disgusting as to deserve the severest chastisement by the entire international revolutionary proletariat.” This harsh condemnation came in part from differences between the Socialist Party and the anarchists over the invasion of the cities of Mexicali and Tijuana in Baja California by the joint forces of the Mexican Liberal Party and the Industrial Workers of the world. Mother Earth quoted the views of Socialist Party Congressman Victor Berger (speaking through his secretary W.G. Ghent):

The “insurrectos” [who had taken Baja California] are not Socialists, but are, in the main opposed to Socialism. Their movement is not predominantly a Mexican movement. It is a movement originating in the United States and its promoters and followers are a mixture of
men of every creed except Socialism. Some of them are merely vague utopians. Some of them are so-called "direct actionists." Others are avowedly Anarchists. Still others are revolutionists by temperament and would as readily revolt against a Socialist administration as against a capitalist administration. The Socialist Party can afford to have no connection with this movement.  

The anarchists, of course, held exactly the opposite view. “But for the I.W.W. boys and the Anarchists who joined the Mexican revolution from its very inception, the revolutionary traditions of the international proletariat would have been shamefully destroyed.” The anarchists argued that the Socialists had cut themselves off from and turned against "the most significant social events since the Paris Commune." Even worse, in the view of the anarchists, the Socialist Party had thus adopted a counter-revolutionary position. “They are working with Madero, with Wall Street, and Washington against the Mexican revolution--for political considerations. But they will only gain the contempt and condemnation of the revolutionary element everywhere.”

The anarchists attacked the Socialist newspaper The Appeal to Reason for “an infamous article beginning: ‘the Mexican Revolution is at an end.’” And they attacked Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist Party’s presidential candidate and most popular socialist leader, for calling for the Mexican Revolution to be brought to an end to prevent more bloodshed. The anarchists were appalled to find that “…Madero, the henchman of the Mexican Revolution, enjoys the co-operation of the party of Eugene Debs.” Owen, after analyzing the Socialists reformist campaign in Los Angeles and commenting on their tepid attitude toward the Mexican Revolution declared, “…the Socialist party is not a friend, but an enemy.” Thus, by the end of 1911, anarchists and Socialists had broken completely and definitively over the issue of the nature of the Mexican Revolution.

**Against U.S. Military Intervention**

Nevertheless, when the United States bombarded the city of Veracruz on the Mexican Gulf coast and then landed troops there, both Socialists and anarchists worked to oppose U.S. military intervention in Mexico, even if they often did so separately. The anarchists laid out their anti-interventionist arguments in two articles published in Mother Earth in May of 1914, just after the U.S. invasion and occupation of the port of Veracruz, Mexico. The anarchists feared, the occupation of Veracruz might be the opening of a general war with Mexico, so their arguments were not simply against the invasion, which they of course opposed, but against a full-scale war.

First, the anarchists saw the U.S. attack on Mexico as a struggle between two state powers, and therefore an issue in which working people could have no interest. “The American military invasion of Mexico is the act of a big ruffian bullying a smaller one,” declared Mother Earth in an unsigned article, possibly written by editor Emma Goldman. U.S. and Mexican workers had no quarrel with each other, in fact, the anarchists argued, workers should be allies across the border: “The working class of this country especially have not the slightest reason for war with the Mexican people. Their cause is a common one, both suffering from oppression and exploitation of a rapacious predatory class, whose official governmental representatives for the time being are Wilson and Huerta. The Wilson-Huerta war is a quarrel between two thieves. Let them fight it out themselves. American workingmen should refuse to slaughter or be slaughtered to protect the
The article continued to argue that war should be turned into a rebellion against the military authorities: “But if they should be forced to bear arms against the Mexican workers, they would do well to emulate the example of the Italian anti-militarist Augusto Masetti. When drafted for the war against Tripoli and ordered to kill his proletarian brothers, Masetti turned his gun against his Colonel and shot him in full view of his regiment.” Rather than fighting peasants and workers in Mexico, argued *Mother Earth*, American workers should join the fight against the bosses in their own country. “It is not in Mexico but in Colorado that the real American war is being waged. It is there that American workers have a most vital interest. It is the war of labor against capital, against the very interests are are inciting the American people to slaughter in Mexico.

The paper's editorialist called for a “General Strike” against U.S. military intervention in Mexico. In the same issue, Leonard D. Abbott's article “Let Us Make War Against War!” also argued that “We have no real quarrel with Mexico,” and supported William “Big Bill” Haywood's statement that a general strike would be labor's most effective protest against a capitalist war. But Abbott added another argument, urging his readers to refuse to serve in the military. “...a working man or a liberal does not need to wait for a general strike to make effective his protest against war. His duty is quite clear. As yet, fortunately, we are not plagued in this country by the systems of conscription and of enforced military service that have been established in many European countries....All we need to do is to refuse to join the army.”

To Wilson’s invasion of Mexico the anarchists opposed a program of conscientious objection to military service, mutiny in the military, and the general strike. Little wonder, given their fierce anti-militarism and anti-imperialism, that that the U.S. government immediately suppressed *Mother Earth* and expelled Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and other anarchists from the United States at the outbreak of World War I. Perhaps partly because of the protests organized by anarchists, Socialists, labor unionists, and liberals and pacifists, there was no general U.S. invasion of Mexico during the course of the Mexican Revolution. Certainly there was a widespread movement against U.S. intervention in which the anarchists played a part.

**International Labor Solidarity**

The American anarchists organized an international campaign for the defense of Mexican revolutionaries, for the victory of the Mexican revolution, and against U.S. military intervention in Mexico. Their efforts involved anarchist, Socialist and labor organizations in several countries, among them Cuba, Canada, and England, as well as Mexico and the United States. With shoe-string operations, the anarchists organized meetings, published pamphlets, and carried out protest demonstrations.

Cuba and Mexico have had a long and close association based on history, trade and culture, and so it is not surprising that one of the first international connections was between Cuba and Mexico. In 1908, *Mother Earth* carried an appeal by Cuban anarchists in opposition to the government of Porfirio Díaz. “We, the proletarians of Cuba, feel it our duty to acquaint the world with the crimes committed against liberty and humanity by Porfirio Díaz,” read the Cuban appeal. “We call upon...
all workingmen to voice their solidarity with the oppressed of Mexico, and to take steps to end the brutal reaction in that unfortunate country.”

The anarchists in New York created the Mexican Revolution Conference in the spring of 1911, and organized a demonstration in support of the revolution at Cooper Union on June 26 of that year. In Chicago, the anarchists created the Mexican Liberal Defense League. In April of 1912, Voltairine de Cleyre wrote a report for *Mother Earth* on the activities of the League. As treasurer, de Cleyre reported that she had collected a total of $247.96 from various cities which was sent on to the Junta of the Mexican Liberal Party in Los Angeles. While the sums of money were small, the group's activities were impressive. Most of the activities were educational. De Cleyre reported that the Chicago anarchists had distributed 4,000 copies of a leaflet titled “The Mexican Revolt,” among Chicago labor unions. The anarchists also sold 200 copies of Owen's pamphlet on the Mexican Revolution. De Cleyre or other anarchists had spoken at the Scandinavian Liberty League, at I.W.W. Local 85, and at the Open Forum.

In a cosmopolitan and polyglot city like Chicago, educational work had to be carried on in many languages. Ludovico Caminita, a visiting Italian anarchist, spoke on the Mexican Revolution to Italian speaking audiences. Through his speeches, the Chicago anarchists also met some Spanish anarchists with whom they began to work. Voltairine also helped her friend Josef Kucera produce a pamphlet on the Mexican Revolution in Czech, *Revoluce v Mexicu*, as well as writing articles herself for the Chicago Czech anarchist newspaper *Volne Listy*.

The Chicago group's work also had an international dimension. De Cleyre's comrade Honore Jaxon, a Canadian, visited England and distributed a statement on the Mexican Revolution to the Standing Orders Committee of the British Trade Unions. He also arranged interviews in the Manchester *Labor Leader* and other British newspapers. Jaxon returned from England to Canada where he lectured on the "struggle of the Mexican proletariat" before the Trades and Labor Councils of Montreal, Quebec and Toronto. In addition, he arranged interviews on the Mexican Revolution with newspapers of those three cities, as well as with journalists in Winnipeg.

**William C. Own and *Land and Liberty***

William C. Owen had joined the staff of Ricardo Flores Magón’s newspaper *Regeneración* in 1910, working for the paper until 1912. In 1914 he moved from Los Angeles to Northern Califormia and he and his comrade W.D. Guernsey created the Bakunin Institute in the East Bay community of Hayward to promote their anarchist views. There, beginning in the Spring of 1914, working in a “remote country house,” Own edited, wrote and published his tabloid format newspaper *Land and Liberty*. While particularly concerned about the Mexican Revolution and aiming to promote solidarity with Mexico’s working people, it also carried articles dealing with other national and international issues, as well as with arguments about the superiority of anarchism both to capitalism and to socialism and syndicalism. Owen was particularly concerned about the question of U.S. intervention in Mexico, condemning newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst and *Los Angeles Times* editor Harrison Gray Otis, for promoting war with Mexico, and President Woodrow Wilson for invading Mexico. Owen and his readers still saw Mexico as standing at the center of the world wide struggle for social justice. Jo (Charles Joseph
Antoine) Labadie, a leftist labor activist in Hudson, Michigan wrote to *Land and Liberty*, “Mexico is now the point of the wedge that divides the landlord from his power over the people and is the point of a world-wide push.”

As opponents of intervention and activists in solidarity with Mexico’s working people, Owens and his readers were interested who supported American intervention and why. In early 1914, Owens published a letter from Lucy E. Parsons, socialist labor activist and widow of Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons, in which she argued that not only capitalists but also the corporate middle class supported Mexican intervention. Parsons wrote, “You will find, for example, thousands of Standard Oil employees more anxious than Rockefeller himself for intervention in Mexico, because all their business future is bound up with the continuance of a system that enables them to exploit the Mexican peon as that company is now preparing to exploit the chinese [sic] coolie. Their tastes and social standing are those of the financial magnates.”

Another group interested in American intervention were U.S. property owners and corporate employees actually involved work in Mexico. A “San Diego correspondent” wrote to the paper about the American refugees from Mexico who had shown up there, presumably American corporate employees or American property owners who had fled the revolutionary violence in general and the attacks on Americans in particular. “The truth about the majority of these refugees is that they are as cold-blooded a lot of sharks as ever existed. They went to Mexico to pile up fortunes form the sweat and blood of the peons, and if the Mexicans had killed them they would merely have got their just dues.”

What about the American working class? Where did it stand? In another letter to the editor George W. Stamm wrote, “Everywhere the American worker is largely indifferent to the struggle in Mexico.” Stamm argued that American workers mistakenly thought that the great fortunes of the growing capitalist class were made only off of his or her labor. “He thinks these fortunes are made from his own underpaid work, whereas the greater part of them is coming, more and more, from foreign countries’ from the cheap labor of the natives of the still underdeveloped nations, applied to their practically virgin resources.” Stamm argued that the Panama Canal had opened up the virtually untouched resources of Mexico and the Pacific Coast. “That is the game the American worker is up against, and it is time for him to begin to understand it.”

If they did understand the Mexican Revolution and support the Mexican people, what were Americans to do? Owen reported to his readers that in early 1914 he had received several letters from readers who wanted “to go to Mexico and fight for Land and Liberty.” In answer to their questions for information and advice he Owen wrote, “Our advice has always been that the Mexicans be left to fight their own battles; that we who wish the Government of the United States to refrain from interfering keep our own hands off. The Mexicans have proved themselves to be excellent fighters, and foreigners who go into their country, ignorant of its customs and language, are sure to be looked upon with suspicion and to be more of a nuisance than they are worth.” Rather than going to Mexico to fight, Owen proposed that Americans could show solidarity by explaining to Americans what was going on in Mexico. “The propaganda of explanation is still in its first infancy,” he wrote. “Nineteen-twentieths of our people are still unaware that the Mexican peon is fighting the battle they themselves will have to fight, for life must win security.”
On July 15, 1914, defeated by the revolutionary armies of Obregon, Carranza, Villa, Zapata and others, Mexican president General Victoriano Huerta gave up and fled the capital. Owen wrote in a brief note in *Land and Liberty*, “Huerta has gone and we now come to another phase of the Mexican problem—Carranza & Co., as agents for the benevolent dictator (in the interest of the North American plutocracy) Woodrow Wilson. It is now that the hornet’s nest will begin to hum.” Owen correctly understood that Carranza was no friend of Mexico’s working people, but he failed to understand that Carranza was a dedicated nationalist who would fight to defend the country’s sovereignty and to renegotiate the terms of its subordination to the United States. 

**The World War**

The outbreak of the World War in early August of 1914 forced Owen, as it forced everyone else in politics, to reorient themselves and to rethink positions. Owen’s *Land and Liberty*, originally conceived of primarily as promoting solidarity with the underdogs of the Mexican Revolution, was transformed within a few months to a magazine dedicated principally to discussions of the war. At first, in the September 1914 issue of *Land and Liberty*, Owen accepted the war as an inevitable result of Europe’s “class, racial and religious hatreds,” economic pressures, and of the drive of nations for more territory. He placed responsibility for the war on Germany, which because of its location at the center of Europe in the midst of hostile empires had become militaristic.

> “Circumstances made Germany and armed camp, and living in the camp, the nation grew military in all its thoughts.” Given the rise of German militarism, he argued that all nations were being drawn into the war by fear. “This war has its roots in FEAR—each nation is afraid, and justly, of the other; the individuals of each nation, thanks to the ruthless commercial war which ravages us all the time, are afraid of one another.” In this situation, he spoke out for the rights of oppressed nations—Mexico, India, Ireland, Belgium, and Serbia—to defend themselves against invaders. Finally, he saw the World War as an opportunity for revolutionaries. “This war…should be but the prelude to an infinitely more gigantic struggle and should usher us immediately into the true revolutionary era.” Rejecting pacifism he wrote, “This is not time to lisp of peace and mediation. It is the time to set the teeth and spread the nostrils wide in our determination to win a life worth living.”

In his October issue Owen continued to emphasize the responsibility of Germany for the war and excoriated the German Socialists for their support of their government. Still he reported sympathetically the position of the Anarchist Group of San Francisco, “The Anarchists believe it imperative that the world should understand that this is a government-made war; that it is the natural consequence of building up huge governmental machines which hold the fate of nations in the hollows of their hands and, by creating and defending vast industrial and political monopolies rules and helpless rule.” Owen also cited the anarchists new pamphlet, *The Social Revolution* which declated that, “Democratic America and England are not one whit better than is autocratic Russia. Republican France shows us precisely the same picture as does Imperial Germany.” Owen himself lashed out at Woodrow Wilson for his invasion of Veracruz, Mexico on behalf of “unscrupulous monopolists,” warning: “He has ordered out and will order out the federal troops whenever the privileges of our plutocracy are seriously threatened. Should we finally decide to
invade Mexico he will enforce the Dick conscription law.”

Owen Comes out for England and the Allies

Owen’s initial position resembled that of revolutionary socialists and anarchists in various countries of the world, but by November 1914, he had abandoned the revolutionary internationalist position, announcing his support for England and its allies France and Russia against Germany. In doing so, Owen acknowledge that he was following the lead of the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin who in a letter published in the anarchist magazine Freedom in the fall of 1914, argued that the idea of a general strike against war was an illusion that had hypnotized the anarchists. Since no general strike was going to take place anarchists and working people generally should participate in the military to defeat German militarism. “I consider that the duty of everyone who cherishes the ideals of human progress, and especially those that were inscribed by the European proletarians on the banner of the International Workingmen’s Association is to do everything in one’s power, according to one’s capacities, to crush down the invasion of the Germans into Western Europe,” wrote Kropotkin. Alexander Berkman writing for Mother Earth replied, “We unconditionally condemn all capitalist wars…” Later in February of 1916, Kropotkin helped to initiate and garner anarchist support for the Manifesto of the Sixteen, warning of the dangers of German victory and expressing their support for the Allies in the First World War.

Agreeing with Kropotkin position, Owen now argued that the war was not the result of capitalism, but rather the result of militarism as embodied in the German state. Capitalists he would argue have no desire for war, since war interferes with commerce, but militarist states want war to expand their territory. Working from his theory of land monopolies as the basis of all social ills, he argues that the land monopolist is an invader and taker of the land of others. German militarism and war, he suggested, represented the land monopolist writ large. Owen explained, “I do not believe that Belgium invited invasion. I do not believe that either the French or the British wanted war. I do not believe that Germany was defending herself against Russia….” Owens made his position quite clear: “In my judgment, and I have examined the evidence with greatest care—this war is an invasion, plotted for years and put most deliberately into effect by the Kaiser and his military clique.”

The German invasion of other nations had caused the war and working people, argued Owen had a right and duty to resist. Owen explicitly broke with the socialist and anarchist tradition of internationalism, writing, “Great as are the worker’s wrongs, it is not true that, as a class, he has neither home nor country. It is not true that he has nothing to lose but his chains. It is not true that it makes no difference to him whether he lies under Prussian military rule, as an inhabitant of an annexed and conquered country, or as a citizen of a land that has known how to defend itself.” Owen asks how San Francisco’s workers would respond if invaded by Japan? “Would the workers shrug their shoulders indifferently, saying it was no concern of theirs? Of course they would not. Of course they would fly to arms, and he who tempted to convince them that their action was foolish would find it going hard with him.” Owen now used the example of Mexico and its right to self-defense against the United States to argue for the right of the Allies to resist and to crush Germany. Emma Goldman in the December 1914 issue of Mother Earth attacked Owen for his pro-English and pro-war position, criticisms which Owens brushed off without responding to her
Within a few months of the outbreak of the war, Owen had completely revised his position, rejecting Marxist and anarchist theories of capitalism and imperialism, developed his own understanding of the war. He denied that capitalism and the corporations were behind the war as Marxists and many anarchists believed, arguing instead that capitalist actually opposed the war because it interrupted and interfered with business. This was not a commercial war, he argued, but a state war. States made war when they became dominated by a philosophy and practice of militarism, as embodied in Germany.

By February 1915, Owen had gone farther and was not only supporting the allies but actually singing the praises of England, arguing that England was not an imperial power. Owen writes, “England has been no said, but neither is she today the military criminal her foes are painting her. Free trade converted her nearly a century ago into a trading power and to free trade she owes her richest colonies and that supremacy at sea which she enjoys. Her rule over those colonies is largely nominal, and the proof is given by the alacrity with which they rush habitually from all four quarters of the globe.” Not only is England not an imperial power, but she is not a militaristic nation, says Owen. “Great Britain stands along among the European powers in her refusal to adopt conscription and she fights today only because her back has been thrust…against the wall. She would bring about universal disarmament tomorrow if she had the power and lead the world in that evolution from militarism to industrialism which has to come.”

Owen in reviewing J.A. Crumb’s book *Germany and England* argued that England was a force for democracy and peace, even in her colonies. “England has the most extensive empire on record; an empire which, in Canada, Australia, Africa and even in India itself, she has been endeavoring to democratize. For her, therefore, the leisurely securities of peace are the one necessity, and inevitably she leans toward the compromises of parliamentarianism, toward arbitration, peace conferences, Pacifism, disarmament proposals, religious toleration, etc., etc.” Germany on the other hand was all militarism, war, and invasion.

Surprisingly, while supporting Mexico’s right to independence from interference from the United States, Owen had never been a supporter of Ireland’s independence from Ireland. *Land and Liberty* had from early on run articles supporting the Ulster Protestants who stood opposed to Irish independence. Owen wrote in the August 1914 issue published before the outbreak of the war that “…Ulster is voicing the world-wide dissatisfaction with what is called Democracy, the cornerstone of which is majority absolutism.” Now, with the outbreak of the war, and concerned about the possibility of Ireland taking advantage of England’s war with Germany to fight for its independence, he ran an article P.J. Healy of San Francisco arguing that Ireland would be foolish to try to separate from England. Healy wrote, “The war is a most excellent lesson to those Irishmen who think they could maintain and absolutely separate, independent, and sovereign government in Ireland. Let them look at the monstrous and barbarous outrage that has overwhelmed Belgium, a country fully as able to maintain its independence as Ireland would be if she were left to look out for herself.” Healy went on to argue that in any case attempts to separate Ireland from England would be futile. “Ireland is the keystone in the arch of the British Empire, and the British people
will never consent to its removal. So, the Irish may just as well admit the stern fact that Ireland is indissolubly connected with England and that, so long as men to turn plowshares into machine guns, there will be a justification for the connection.”

Owen’s opposition to Germany and support for Great Britain in the war led him to become an opponent of labor unions and strikes. Opposition to labor unions flowed from Owen’s belief that Great Britain and her allies must be bigger and stronger economically than Germany to win the war, and unions interfered with the war effort. Owen wrote, “As all the world has heard, Great Britain labors under one enormous disadvantage in this war, being severely handicapped by the rebelliousness of Labor. In the Clyde and Tyne districts, that small section of workers on which the country must depend for repairs for its fleet is taking advantage of the public necessity and playing exclusively for its own hand.” He quoted the British Director of Transport who accused the Clyde shipyard workers of being able to make enough in three days to keep them drunk for the rest of the week. He criticized what he called the workers as “selfish” and “unintelligent” and added that by striking they were hurting trade unionism by alienating it from the nation.

Pancho Villa: A Modern Robin Hood

In 1916 Francisco “Pancho” Villa carried out a raid on Columbus, New Mexico, in retaliation for the U.S. government having assisted his enemy Venustiano Carranza. Villa’s attack on U.S. soil was followed almost immediately by President Woodrow Wilson sending General “Black Jack” Pershing to Mexico with a "punitive expedition.” Consequently here was a great deal of controversy surrounding Panch Villa who was usually dismissed in the American press, even by some of the left press as an ignorant, violent bandit. While Owen’s political views on the international situation had moved in a more conservative direction, he remained steadfast in his opposition to United States intervention in Mexico. In a contribution to this controversy, Owen wrote an article titled “A Modern Robin Hood” for the New Review, the theoretical journal of the left-wing of the Socialist Party of the United States. Owen, of course, opposed U.S. intervention, arguing that “our government's sole and sovereign aim was the protection of the enormous properties Americans had acquired in Mexico...” Owen added that if Americans really wanted to understand what would come from U.S. intervention in Mexico, they should study that “chapter of United States history which deals with the extermination of the North American Indian.” Wrote Owen, “It is against his blood brother beyond the Rio Grande that we are now advancing; against fully ten millions of his brothers. What is really on the tapis [on the carpet, that is on the floor for debate] is the greatest Indian war on record.”

Opposition to U.S. intervention was widespread among the anarchists and most Socialists, as well as among many labor unionists and liberals. While the anti-war position was common on the left, what was original in Owen’s argument was that this was another American war against the Indians. What made Owen's contribution particularly important was not only his opposition to U.S. intervention, but his defense of Pancho Villa, the man who had just invaded the United States. This is somewhat surprising, given that Ricardo Flores Magón and the Mexican Liberal Party had never forgiven Villa for having at first supported Madero and helped him to disarm PLM fighting units in Mexico. Owen came to his defense. “Villa is, and has been for many years, a bandit. Mexico is full of bandits, as are the United States, England, Germany, and all civilized countries.
But Villa has been a bandit of the mediaeval, Robin Hood type; a proletarian bandit, who made it his specialty to levy on the rich and divvy with the poor. Robin Hoods have always been popular with the masses, but modern civilization has shoved them to one side and given us in their stead the subtler gentry who rob under cover of the law.\textsuperscript{87}

Owen admitted that Villa was violent, a “free-handed spender” who had no doubt engaged in “many grotesque extravagances.” He also conceded that he might have gotten "a bad attack of swollen head," after being courted by entrepreneurs, financiers and the U.S. government who were looking for an alternative to Carranza.” “But,” wrote Owen, “these are only passing follies, and the permanent character is the thing we must get at it we are to form a just estimate of Villa.” He continued: :That character I am convinced--and I have talked with men who know him well--is basically proletarian, and nothing else; I.W.W., if you like to look at it that way; in closely -sympathetic touch with men in the rough, with the primarily virile instincts, with all that smug respectability abhors, with the very things to which such a government as that of the United States is constitutionally opposed.”\textsuperscript{88} Owen contrasted Villa’s and Zapata's radical nationalism to the views of Madero. “Madero sincerely admired us [the United States] and our institutions, and events proved that he had no hold on the masses. Villa and Zapata instinctively hate us, and I, for my part, believe that their hold on the masses is proportionately great by reason of this very fact.”\textsuperscript{89} On this question, Owen was clearly wrong. Villa had begun his revolutionary activity as a great admirer of American corporations, American bosses and workers and the U.S. government. Only after the U.S. dropped support for him had Villa changed his mind.

Owen not only opposed U.S. intervention, but he supported Mexican efforts to expel the U.S. Army. The Mexicans “...have a most decided objection to our absorption of their country, and to our imposing on them a civilization by no means to their taste,” wrote Owen. “Curiously enough I sympathize with them in this.” Owen expressed little hope that the people of the United States would stop the U.S. intervention, that, he said would take a revolutionary movement in the United States. The Mexicans, he hoped, would "show themselves the stronger and kick us out.”\textsuperscript{90}

Owen continued to publish articles supporting the Mexican revolution’s radical wing and condemning Woodrow Wilson and the United States government for their intervention in Mexico. At the same time, he had also developed a set of positions on the World War, on England and its empire—support for England and the Allies—that stood in stark contrast to his positions on Mexico. Moreover it must have been clear to him that Wilson would eventually lead the United States into the war as an ally of England against Germany, an upshot that would bring his contradictory positions into high relief. Fearing deportation for his work on behalf of the Mexican Liberal Party and perhaps recognizing the emerging contradictions in his position on Mexico and the World War, Owen fled to England where he wrote for the anarchist \textit{Freedom} newspaper, supported England and the allies in the war, and after the revolution fiercely attacked Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. Owen’s contribution had been his early and trenchant analysis of the Mexican Revolution.

Owen’s support for the Allies in the World War was not characteristic of the anarchist movement, and his idiosyncratic positions seemed to have no impact on anarchist solidarity with the Mexican Revolution. Anarchists in the United States were still involved in solidarity with the Mexican
revolutionaries in 1916. The anarchists helped create the Workers' International Defense League, with branches in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and New York. While it also took up many other causes as well, this organization focused much of its attention on the Mexican Liberal Party and the defense of the Flores Magón brothers and their comrades. The anarchists worked in a united front, as reported by Edgcumb Pinchon, general secretary of the Los Angeles branch: “There is a permanent organization ‘in the service of all who require defense and aid in the struggle for economic justice.’ It is identified with no faction. On its Executive Committee are men and women of Organized Labor, Socialists and Single Taxers, Industrial Workers of the World and Anarchists—and rebels without a label. And these are of many nationalities—American, British, German, French, Italian, Russian, Jewish, and Mexico.”91 Such organization in solidarity with the Mexican Revolution continued until the suppression of the anarchist movement in June of 1917 by the government of President Woodrow Wilson.

The Rangel-Cline Case

While most anarchists limited their support for the Mexican Revolution to keeping informed about developments, defending the Mexican people’s right to determine their own fate, and perhaps throwing a quarter in the hat for the Mexican solidarity campaign, some went further. During this period, the American anarchists devoted nearly four years to the defense of a group of fourteen Mexican and U.S. anarchists who were arrested in Texas and several of whom were held on charges of murder. Known as the Rangel-Cline case, the matter involved several members of the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) and the American labor organizer Charles Cline.

Cline had had a remarkable career as a labor activist. He was a member of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, Local 7 of Pueblo Colorado and of the International Slate and Tile Workers Unions, as well as several other unions in St. Louis, New York City and Boston. In addition, he was also a member of the National Industrial Union of the Industrial Workers of the World. During his career as a labor activist he had participated in the Hotel and Restaurant Employees strikes of 1903 and 1904, the Southern Pacific Machine Shop strike of 1911, and the Louisiana Lumber strike of 1912. "By reason of his capacity as a speaker and organizer," wrote Goldman’s *Mother Earth*, "he is regarded as a very dangerous character by the lumber barons of Louisiana and Texas."92 Then in 1913, Cline had aligned himself with the Mexican Liberal Party and was on his way with thirteen of its members to join the revolution when he was arrested.

*Mother Earth* gave this version of the story. On September 11, 1913, thirteen Mexican men, Mexican Liberal Party members and Charles Cline, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, left Carrizo Springs, Texas heading toward Mexico intending to cross the border “peacefully” and join the Mexican Revolution. Between 1910 and 1916 hundreds of Americans crossed the border to join the revolutionary forces of Madero and Villa, the Magonistas, or later of Venustiano Carranza and the Constitutionalists. Some were anarchists or socialists, some soldiers of fortune or dilettante adventurers. The U.S. and Texas governments sometimes took the attitude that as long as such groups were not organized and did not constitute an armed invasion, that they were legal. At other times the U.S. government viewed such activities as a violation of the U.S. neutrality laws which forbid the organization of an invasion force on American soil and had the violators arrested. Unknown to the Rangel-Cline group, they were followed by four Texas sheriffs.
The party camped for the night at Capanes Wind Mill in Dimmit County, not far from Carrizo Springs. In the morning of September 12, as they were breaking camp, one of the Mexicans who had been active in the labor movement in both Mexico and the United States, Silvestre Lomas, was shot through the back of the head and died. At that point the PLM group discovered the deputy sheriffs, and took two of them prisoner as the other two fled. The PLM men later said that they intended to release the two sheriffs when they reached the Mexican border.

The two prisoners, Dimmit County Sheriff Eugene Buck and Deputy Sheriff Candelario Ortiz were put in the charge of PLM member José Guerra. As they rode along, Sheriff Ortiz supposedly went for Guerra’s gun, and in response Guerra shot and killed Ortiz in self-defense. The PLM party then continued on its way until confronted by a group of sheriffs who demanded the release of Sheriff Buck. After some negotiation, Sheriff Jesse J. Campbell signed an agreement granting the PLM men permission to continue on to Mexico without further problems from the police in exchange for Sheriff Buck. The PLM group turned over Buck and continued on toward Mexico.

The night of September 12 the group camped in a ravine, still on the Texas side of the river. Campbell and the other officers, meanwhile, had returned to Carrizo Springs, raised a posse, and then later that same night followed the PLM group to the ravine where they opened fire upon the sleeping revolutionaries. The sheriffs succeeded in overpowering the PLM men, wounding Juan Rincón, Leonardo L. Vázquez, and José Abraham Cisneros. Rincón died of his wounds. Guerra was either killed or escaped, but was never heard from again.

The prosecution accused Jesús M. Rangel and Charles Cline of being the leaders of the group, but also indicted twelve others for murder and other crimes. All fourteen men were tried, found guilty, and sentenced to prison for terms varying from six years, to twenty-five years, to life. In prison, two of the revolutionaries were murdered. Lucio R. Ortiz was murdered in Camp No. 1 at Parry Landing, Texas in 1915, and Eugenio Alzaldo was murdered at Penal Camp No. 3, at Perry Landing, Texas in August of 1916. One of the PLM men, J.A. Serrato, succeeded in breaking out of the penitentiary, crossed the border into Mexico, and joined the revolution.93

The anarchists conducted a four-year campaign for the release of these men who embodied their notion of international labor solidarity. “These cases offer the first opportunity that the American labor movement has had to give a practical demonstration to the Mexican worker that the American worker is not indifferent to his Mexican brother,” declared Mother Earth (in an unsigned article). “We now have the opportunity of showing in a definite form that we really believe that ‘An injury to one is an injury to all.’”94

While defending Rangel, Cline and the others, Mother Earth hoped to turn the defense campaign into a movement which would help to organize Mexican and Mexican American workers in the Southwest of the United States. The anarchists’ argument bears citation at some length:

We have said that the American Federation of Labor, the Western Federation of Miners, the United Mine Workers and the Industrial Workers of the World have practically failed in the organization of these men. Right now the strength of the Building Trades
organization on the west coast is seriously endangered because of the influx of the Mexican workers who can do the unskilled work of the concrete worker, etc. Unless these men are organized and brought in, and made part and parcel of the American labor movement, the strength of those organizations which have been developed as a result of years of struggle is in danger. The same can be said of the railroad service, the mining industry and manifold other lines. These cases [the Rangel-Cline cases] open the door for an immense propaganda among the workers, who, if they remain apart from you are a menace, but who, if you can incorporate them into your bodies, can give you an enormous strength.\(^{95}\)

The anarchist argument as given here is that the defense of the Mexican Revolution and of its most radical wing constitutes a bridge to Mexican immigrant workers in the United States who will work with an organization that has proven that it stand on the side of Mexico’s working people.

_Mother Earth_ carried at least half-a dozen articles on the Rangel-Cline case during the years from 1913 to 1916, anarchists formed Rangel-Cline defense committees, raised money, wrote leaflets and pamphlets, and spoke at public meeting. But for the anarchists work, the Rangel-Cline case inevitably involved not only the defense of the fourteen victims, but also two other causes: the organization of the unskilled worker, and the support for the peasant revolution in Mexico. Defense of Rangel and Cline was inseparable from the defense of the oppressed and exploited Mexican workers on both sides of the border; the cause was one. All of those involved in the incidents of 1913 were pardoned by Texas’s first woman governor, Democrat Miriam A. Ferguson in 1926.

**Conclusion**

For over a decade, from 1905 to 1917, Emma Goldman, William C. Owen, Voltairine de Cleyre and other American anarchists supported the Mexican Liberal Party and the Mexican Revolution. American anarchists engaged in all sorts of educational work, protest movements, and fund-raising campaigns for the Mexican revolutionary movement. Some anarchists even crossed the border and joined the revolution. William C. Owen, living at the PLM's headquarters in Los Angeles, editing _Regeneración's_ English language page, and writing for _Mother Earth_, provided for two years a crucial organizational link between the two groups.

William Owen and Voltairine de Cleyre provided the anarchists with an analysis of the Mexican Revolution that was both congruent with the anarchist worldview and fit the facts on the ground in Mexico. While progressives, socialists and the AFL saw the Mexican Revolution as primarily a political revolution, a revolution for democracy, the anarchists better understood its economic and social goals. Though there was on the part of Owen and de Cleyre a certain romanticizing of the revolution and particularly of the Indian peasants, still they had grasped the fundamental character of the revolution—a peasant revolution to reclaim the land—in a way that virtually no other political groups of that time had. Certainly contemporary historians have tended to agree with Owen and de Cleyre that the Mexican Revolution was fundamentally a nation-wide peasant upheaval which could not end until the land question was resolved. This view was systematically argued by Frank Tannenbaum, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) who spent time in Mexico in the 1920s, in his classic _Peace by Revolution: Mexico After 1910_, and taken up
again more recently by British historian Alan Knight in his *The Mexican Revolution*.96 This is certainly the dominant position among Latin Americanists today.

The other aspect of the anarchist interpretation, that is, that the Mexican Revolution represented part of a world-wide revolutionary process, has been defended by John Mason Hart in his book *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution*.97 The importance of Indian communalism as a kind of proto-socialism has been emphasized by Adolfo Gilly in his books *The Mexican Revolution* (*La revolución interrumpida*) and especially in *El cardenismo, una utopía mexicana*.98 Owen's support of Pancho Villa, a modern Robin Hood, anticipates the work of Eric Hobsbawn on *Primitive Rebels*.99 Moreover, their emphasis on the role of the peasants (which they learned from Kropotkin's history of the French Revolution) anticipated by fifty years the “bottom-up social history” of the 1960s in England and the United States.

But the anarchists, of course, were not primarily intellectual interpreters of events. They were attempting to understand the Mexican Revolution and to draw out its lessons both to make possible the building of solidarity among American leftists and labor unions and to spread what they saw as the emerging anarchist ideal in the Zapatista commune to inspire American workers and other workers around the world.

Despite their efforts, the American anarchists of the 1910s had little influence on either the American labor movement or on American politics. The anarchist movement was small, fragmented, and its influence diffuse. While the anarchists often worked with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), they did not share that organization’s dominant view that a strongly centralized organization was necessary to defeat the power corporations and the government, and consequently they had little influence in the union.100 They had even less in the American Federation of Labor, a business union federation dominated by the pragmatic job and wage control method and craft union structure that Samuel Gompers had created. In terms of politics and public opinion, the anarchists had been under attack since the 1880s, seen as foreign, anti-American, and violent advocates of nihilism. They became virtual pariahs with the anarchist Leon Czolgosz’s assassination of President William McKinley at the Pan-American Exhibition in 1901. Anarchist petitions to the American government brought no redress of grievances and they had virtually no influence on political developments.

The American labor movement and left’s big and influential organizations in the 1910s were the American Federation of Labor and the Socialist Party, and it is to them and their attitudes toward and involvements in the Mexican Revolution that we now turn.

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2.. The first reference to Mexico deals with the Mexican Liberal Party and appears in *Mother Earth* (Vol. II, No. 6), August 1907, 256.
4. The August 1907 piece has already been noted above. The other piece was one paragraph titled
8. Similar articles appeared in such anarchist publications as Alexander Berkman's *Blast! and The Agitator*. For example, the letters of March 13, 1911 from Emma Goldman and Ricardo Flores Magon to *The Agitator*, Emma Goldman Archives, Berkeley, California.
10. Owens discusses these issues in various articles in the 16 issue of *Land and Liberty* published in 1914 and 1915.
14. William C. Owen, "Viva Mexico," *Mother Earth*, (Vol. VI, No. 2) April 1911, 42-46. All citations in this paragraph from this article.
45. *Mother Earth* published one other major piece of analysis of the Mexican Revolution, M. Baginski's "The Significance of the Mexican Revolution," *Mother Earth* (Vol. VIII, No. 10) December, 1913, 300-304. Baginski's article written during the Huerta dictatorship was much more pessimistic, and added nothing new to the Owen-Voltairine analysis.
52. "Observations and Comments," *Mother Earth* (Vol. VI, No. 6), August 1911, 162.
77. Kropotkin played a key role in influencing other anarchists, such as the Frenchman Jean Grave to support the war. See: Louis Patsouras, *Jean Grave and French Anarchism* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 87-88.
81. "Revolutionary Notes," *Land and Liberty*, Vol. I, No. 4, August 1914, pp. 3-4. This issue was published before Owen was aware of the outbreak of the World War.
84. Lincoln Steffens, for example, called Villa a "bandit" and supported Carranza in his article,