11. Mexico

A. The Nineteenth Century

Utopias were already known in Mexico during the colonial period. Suffice it to mention Vasco de Quiroga’s two utopian communities founded in the 1530s outside of Mexico City and Michoacán in his attempts to realize Thomas More’s *Utopia.* In an unpublished manuscript “Constitución Orgánica para el Régimen de Mexico,” Dr. Francisco Severo Maldonado (1775–1832), a priest from the Tepic region, conceived of a utopia that “aspired to economic equality, suppressed all monopoly, and guaranteed all families a plot of land and employment.” The priest and senator José María Alpudre tried to start a socialist-style community of Freemasons in 1825. Juan Nepomuceno Adorno, a Leibnizian philosopher and author of *Los males de México y sus remedios practicables,* in 1858, and *La armonía del Universo y la ciencia de la Teodicea,* in 1862, combined an optimistic metaphysics with conceptions of utopian socialism.

We can also look to the priest Miguel Hidalgo, who proposed to abolish, even if by “gentle and gradual means,” what he called in almost Proudhonian terms “the horrible right of territorial property—perpetual, hereditary, and exclusive.” Even Benito Juárez, who later would not hesitate to harshly reprimand anarchist agrarian movements, may be said to have had the “mark of Saint-Simon.” In 1828 Robert Owen, the famous English socialist, approached Vicente Rocafuerte, a Mexican diplomat in England, and requested approval from the Mexican government to start a socialist colony in Texas. According to García Cantú:

His petition consisted of a compendium of his *Essays on the Formation of Human Character,* published in 1813. It is not a repetition of that work, strictly speaking, but a fresh presentation of the same argument. His materialism and some ideas he derives from Godwin and the French Enlightenment are the immediate antecedents for his theory of the character of man, and together they present the possibility a new human being in a rational and just society.

Melchor Ocampo, whose influence on Juárez led him to “a complete evolu-

..." during his exile in New Orleans read not only Fourier but also Proudhon, and translated a chapter from his *Philosophy of Poverty* in 1860 (though this does not make him a Proudhonian). Plotino C. Rhodakanaty, a Proudhonian and Fourierist, was a little-known figure who was mistakenly believed to have disguised himself as a Mexican physician and “had the silly idea to change his name, to present himself as Greek, and to spread Spinozian ideas.” He was indeed born in Athens on October 14, 1828 into an aristocratic family. After his father was killed in the war for national independence against Turkey, his mother, an Austrian, took him with her to Vienna. There he began medical studies during a boom period of romantic idealism and homeopathy. In 1848 he travelled to Budapest to join Hungary’s war of independence. With the rebellion suppressed, he went on to Berlin where he took an interest in philosophy. Like so many other university students of that time he admired Hegel, and might have followed lectures by Schelling.

Some similarities in the lives of Bakunin and Rhodakanaty are worth noting. Both were of aristocratic backgrounds, were interested in philosophy and admired Hegel, and committed themselves to the struggles for independence by people subjected to an imperial yoke. Also, both travelled to Paris and were profoundly influenced by the thought of Proudhon. But there is no indication that they were at all personally acquainted with each other. In 1848 Rhodakanaty was in Budapest, and Bakunin was in Leipzig and then Prague, conspiring with the Czech patriots against the Austrian empire. Bakunin was arrested in May 1849 in Saxony for his involvement in the Dresden Uprising and sent to the Saints Peter and Paul fortress in St. Petersburg, then to Schlüsselburg and Siberia, finally escaping to North America in 1861; Rhodakanaty on the other hand resided in Paris for several years and then a few months in Spain. He had heard from some friends in Paris that Mexican President Ignacio Comonfort sought to encourage the establishment of foreign agricultural colonies in Mexico. Consequently, Rhodakanaty planned to travel there with the hope of putting the ideas of Fourier and Proudhon into practice. But Comonfort was toppled and the young Rhodakanaty had to delay his trip, finally arriving in Mexico in February 1861.

A few months after his arrival, Rhodakanaty published a pamphlet titled
Cartilla socialista o sea el catecismo elemental de la escuela de Carlos Fourier, el falansterio, marking the beginning of a quarter-century of intense theoretical and practical activity on behalf of libertarian socialism in Mexico, where there is no doubt that he was the first anarchist ideologist. In 1877 an anonymous biographer wrote in El Socialista:

By conviction a philosopher, he adopted the profession of medicine. But as a partisan to progress, he joined the homeopathic school, for wherever a new truth or discovery was made, he was there. He was fluent in seven languages and in philosophy as well, and he sought an honorable livelihood: without fee and with all his effort he healed the sick, and taught those who retained him as educator. He harmed no one, did good for others, and those who knew him recognized his high moral standards.

In 1886 he left the terrain of social struggles in Mexico. His name was never again mentioned; it is very likely that he returned to Europe—either to Greece, his homeland, or France, his intellectual home—and died there.

Rhodakanaty’s thought may be grouped into three areas: philosophical, religious, and social, sharing as their foundation a metaphysical conception based on Spinoza’s pantheism that Rhodakanaty preferred to call “panteosophy.” Spinoza was one of principal figures of German idealism between Fichte and Hegel. It is not surprising that Rhodakanaty would be deeply influenced by his thought, given the philosophical environment in German universities during the period when he studied in Vienna. Spinoza’s rationalist, if not geometric, method guarantees a break with traditional theology and all positivist religion, and his conception of Deus sive natura as the sole infinite substance integrated into infinite attributes frees the imagination, giving it wings for a romantic flight without limits or borders.

Rhodakanaty does argue for the necessity of religion and the superiority of Christianity over all other religions. For him the essence of Christianity is charity, that is, love for all, as it is taught in the Gospels. And that essence is the moral foundation of socialism and revolution as well. “Pure Christianity,” he wrote, “is the religion that will regenerate the world when people finally come to understand the power of its basic principles: liberty, equality, and fraternity.” But it is Christianity without dogma, like Saint-Simon’s, and without priesthood, liturgy, or hierarchical organization, the model for which he finds in the life of Jesus and his earliest followers. Primitive Christianity is authentic Christianity. But it has been entirely degraded by the Catholic and Protestant churches, and has nothing to do with so many sects that call themselves Christian. For Rhodakanaty, the Christian religion is not only compatible with the rationalist and monist metaphysics of Spinoza and the libertarian socialism of Proudhon, but is indeed the hinge between them. He is, in short, a libertarian socialist basically influenced by Fourier and Proudhon.

Victor Considérant, a French Fourierist, tried to aid the liberation of Mexican peasants during Maximilian’s imperial government in 1865. He was the author of La destinée sociale, published in 1834, and Le socialisme devant la vie moderne, published in 1848, and was a member of the National Assembly, editor of several Fourierist newspapers like La Phalange and La Democrazia Popolare, and the founder of a colony called La Reunión in Texas. It had as little success as those of Owen or Cabot. During the French military occupation of Mexico he wrote four letters to marshal Bazaine, head of the military. Without trying to sell him on the advantages of Fourierism, he did attempt to persuade the marshal to eliminate the system of servitude in rural Mexico, something that the latter did, in fact, seriously try.

But Rhodakanaty went further than Considérant, who dedicated himself to parliamentary politics in his last years. He combined the idea of an agricultural community with Proudhon’s critique of private property and the State. When in contact with the reality of rural peasants and the problematic of the working classes in Mexico, he incorporated a number of ideas from Bakunin. From the point of view of his social ideas he can be classified as a libertarian socialist or an anarcho-socialist, with Christianity as the moral base of the doctrine, as religion, for him, is reducible to a humanistic ethics. In any event, García Cantú’s reference to him as a Christian socialist fits him no better than it does Saint-Simon. Like Kropotkin and other anarchist theoreticians, Rhodakanaty thinks of socialism as the logical conclusion of the French Revolution, the fullest expression of the motto “Liberty, equality, fraternity.” For Rhodakanaty, “the French Revolution is the formula for today’s socialism—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, to which we now add Unity.” That is why he said, “after the French Revolution all revolutions in the world are French.”

Property is the origin of all evil and the great enemy of the unity of
mankind. The immediate objective of socialism is the “extinction of poverty, the distribution and increase of the common wealth, the abolition of prostitution, and the conservation of all of our faculties, including the intellectual, physical, and moral ones”; and its ultimate objective is “the transformation of humanity through science, beauty, and virtue.”

Cosmopolitanism was one of the essential elements of Rhodakanaty’s thought:

We are cosmopolitans by nature, citizens of all nations, and contemporaries to all the ages. The greatest and most heroic human actions belong equally to all. Wherever the regenerative idea emerges, the greatest problems of democracy are examined, and freedom is established: where we immediately attach ourselves, and recognize as our adopted nation any country in which the sacred rights of humanity are preserved.

_Ubi libertas ibi patria: where there is liberty, there is homeland._ “Our country is the entire world and all men are our brothers.” Proudhon’s critique of the state and of government is present in Rhodakanaty’s conception of socialism. “In a people renewed by socialism,” he wrote, “all government is synonymous with slavery and with the most monstrous inequality because free men do not need tutors or guardians, but friends and collaborators in their future happiness.”

For Rhodakanaty, the abolition of the state—which some consider impossible and others a dangerous source of evil and disorder—opens new doors. “The abolition of all government in the nations, which frightens you and you consider impossible and absurd, though you have never tried it, will usher in a totally new world of institutions … in which the peoples of the world will live in happiness.” Like Bakunin, Rhodakanaty insisted that socialism will emerge from a class struggle, a struggle between the poor and the rich. At first his Fourierist background kept him away from the idea of a violent revolution. Bit by bit, however, he seemed to accept it, following the path of his young Mexican Bakuninist friends, and came to acknowledge the necessity of a “social revolution in which many heroic victims will be sacrificed on the sacred altar to restore the justice denied to the people.”

After his attempt to start a socialist agricultural colony and the publication of his _CARTILLA SOCIALISTA_, Rhodakanaty dedicated himself to intense journalistic and organizational efforts for the dissemination of socialist ideas. In 1863 he initiated the first _Grupo de Estudiantes Socialistas_, in which the influence of Bakunin’s ideas was clear. In the 1860s and 70s the first ideologists and leaders of Mexican libertarian socialism emerged from that group—Santiago Villanueva, who tried to organize the workers’ movement, Hermenegildo Villavicencio, and, above all, Francisco Zalacosta, leader of rural masses. This nucleus served as a base for a more important anarchist group, _La Social_, which was at once dedicated to propaganda and action, and also a free school. Its members not only created the first mutual aid society and reestablished the inactive _Sociedad mutual del Ramo de Sástrerfa_, but also took workers associated with both groups beyond mutual aid to an active systematic defense of their class interests against entrepreneurs and bosses. Thus the mutual aid societies became resistance societies.

In June 1865 anarchists from _La Social_ promoted the first industrial strike in Mexico against two textile mills. Emperor Maximilian’s soldiers quickly repressed it. The occupation of the country by a foreign power, governance by a sovereign totally alien to the people, the country burdened by a fatuous and extravagant court, and, most of all, the harsh economic conditions imposed on workers and artisans encouraged the spread of anarchist ideas in Mexico City. Also in 1865 Rhodakanaty established the _Escuela del Rayo y del Socialismo_ in Chalco, and in November he met with his disciple, Zalacosta. Julio Chávez would later emerge from the Escuela as an important leader of the peasant rebellion prior to Emiliano Zapata and a strong anarcho-communist. “I am a socialist,” he is reported to have said, “because I am an enemy of all governments, and a communist because my brothers want to work the fields together.” Followed by a group of friends who shared his ideals, he began a process of land expropriation. Many peasants who saw in this a return to the ancient indigenous regime of common property, the _calpulli_, soon joined him. His activities ranged from the Chalco-Texcoco region, where he began, to all the states of Puebla and Morelia. The federal army finally moved against him. Defeated and imprisoned, he was executed in 1869 by order of President Juárez. Dying, he cried out, “Long live socialism!”

A few months earlier he had released a manifesto calling for armed struggle. According to Hart:

The importance of the manifesto in the development of agrarian ideology
is not only to have introduced the European socialist concept of the class struggle to the Mexican movement, but also to have situated the injustices suffered by peasants in a historical context, and to have identified those responsible. He proposed to replace the sovereignty of the national government, which he looked on as the corrupt collaborator of the landowning class, with the venerated principle of communal autonomy, an ideal common to many agrarian revolutions.39

It is the classic anarchist thesis of a free commune in a confederation with other communes, without government or state. Other disciples of Rhodakanaty, like Villavicencio and Villanueva, undertook the work of organizing artisans and workers in the urban context. Their initial Proudhonian character soon enough turned Bakuninist. And immediately after the fall of the Empire they had to fight not only against employers and the old conservative politicians, but also reformers, like Romero and Cano, who supported Juárez’s liberal government. In July 1868 they promoted an industrial strike in the textile mills in Tlalpan. It was the first one to achieve its objective. In 1869 they established the Círculo Proletario, in 1870 the Gran Círculo de Obreros de México, and in 1871 the newspaper El Socialista, which sometimes expressed ideas that were clearly anarchist. This activity soon spread to the interior of the country, influenced by libertarian ideology. “It was at that time,” Hart writes, “that the red-and-black was adopted as the official symbol of the Mexican workers’ movement.”35

During the 1870s Mexican anarchists encouraged cooperativism and collectivism, supported a struggle in the workers’ and artisans’ organizations against moderate elements that counted on support from the government, and promoted the syndicalist struggle through the proletarian press—for example, El Socialista, El Hijo del Trabajo, El Obrero Internacional, and others. They disseminated libertarian ideology and began the organization of workers at the national level.31 The Congreso General Obrero de la República Mexicana convened in March 1876. Its manifesto revealed “an expansion of libertarian ideology in Mexico,” according to Hart, in which anarchists were successful in having women accepted as delegates for the first time. Valadés reported on two opposing groups in that Congress—first the socialists, like Mata Rivera, Larrea, and then the anarchists, like Rhodakanaty and members of La Social—along with those who, though not anarchists, were opposed to government intervention in working class issues, like Ricardo V. Vellatti, Rivera Cambas, Serralde, and others.32

Unfortunately the Mexican workers’ movement soon found itself torn apart by partisan and electoral politics. Some groups supported the presidential campaign of Lerdo de Tejada, while others went for José María Iglesias or Porfirio Díaz. Needless to say, anarchists rejected any involvement in the electoral process and saw in the various candidates nothing but greed and desire for power. Meanwhile, the increasingly harsh conditions of the working class in the city and the growing proletarianization heightened the prestige of anarchist socialism. Through his newspaper La Internacional, Zalacosta was busy promoting a twelve-point program, including the idea of a “universal social republic, autonomous municipal government, women’s rights, worker’s associations, abolition of wages, and equality in property.”33

While José María González, a disciple of Villanueva, proposed the creation of agricultural communities, based on free association and a plan partly influenced by Proudhonian ideas,34 Zalacosta, a Bakuninist, was convinced that socialism could not be realized in either the city or country without direct action. Consequently, in 1877 he led a peasant insurrection in Sierra Gorda and Planes de la Barranca. His followers fought the federal troops until 1880. And even though he was defeated and imprisoned in Querétaro in 1881, the peasant rebellion did not die with him. In the meantime, his friend, Colonel Alberto Santa Fe, proposed the Ley del Pueblo, a document showing clear influence of Bakunin’s ideas, though not an anarchist manifesto as such.

The Ley del Pueblo’s four fundamental points, as summarized in El Hijo del Trabajo, were: distribution of lands, promotion of national industry, suppression of the army, and free and compulsory education. According to Colonel Santa Fe only the distribution of lands would bring the independence of Mexico. “In those days,” García Cantú writes, “the peasants in Coahuila, State of Mexico, Michoacán, and Hidalgo forcibly recovered the lands that had been robbed by landowners. . . . The daily newspaper La libertad called it an unconscionable communism.”35

General Negrete supplied arms to Santa Fe’s revolutionary program. He had already supported Chávez López in 1869 and Zalacosta in 1879. Santa Fe’s exemplary resistance to Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorial government went beyond democratic opposition and electoral politics. He sought nothing less
than the transfer of political sovereignty to the autonomous municipality, and of land to peasant collectives. The resistance lasted until the 1890s. Nonetheless, using first bribery and then repression, Díaz was able to control or suppress almost the entire workers’ movement in both urban and rural contexts in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. During that period the great mass of peasants saw meager wages, while industrial workers and miners were better paid (which is not to say they were paid well—and by 1898 they too began to feel the effects of the crisis). According to Cardoso and Hermosillo, after 1898 “labor wages began to decline steadily, and even when there was some improvement, in 1910 wages were at their lowest levels ever seen.”

B. The Liberal Party and Magonism

The start of the twentieth century witnessed a rebirth of the workers’ movement and anarchism in Mexico. The arrival of new groups of Spanish immigrants is partly to thank, as well as contact with North American anarcho-syndicalists. But the decisive factor was the ideological evolution of the great Partido Liberal Mexicano [PLM]. Initially this was an anti-clerical and anti-dictatorial party, but its programmatic basis did not exclude a concern with agrarian reform. At some point, it ceased being liberal and became libertarian. This qualitative change accompanied the ideological evolution of Ricardo Flores Magon, and marks the triumph of his radical position over the moderate one of Camilo Arriaga.

In Peru, Manuel Gonzalez Prada was experiencing a similar evolution from radical liberalism to libertarian socialism. But when he declared himself an anarchist, he also abandoned the Unión Nacional he had founded, and its members proved unable to follow him. By contrast Magon stayed with the Partido Liberal, and tried to retain its original name even when it became clear to him that he was no longer a liberal but had become a libertarian, and the organization could no longer really call itself a “party” but was more properly a “revolutionary organization.” On February 5, 1901 the first Congreso Liberal convened in San Luis Potosi. Among the resolutions adopted, it is important to note those that refer to the “means to combat the influence of the clergy” (Resolutions 33 and 37), and the “guarantees that ensure the rights of all citizens” (Resolutions 44 and 52). At this time, the socialist and libertarian viewpoints seemed far off in the distance. But it will be a matter of only a few years. During the Congress, Magon, the main promoter of these viewpoints, was already attacking Díaz’s dictatorship and denouncing the exploitation of Mexican workers.

Magon was born in San Antonio Eloxochitlán, state of Oaxaca, on September 16, 1873. On his father’s side, he was a descendant of Indians, and on his mother’s side of mestizos. A Spanish great-grandfather from Cartagenas perhaps explains his less than indigenous features. He began the study of law in Mexico City during hard economic times, but did not complete his degree. As early as his student years at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria he was involved in political struggles, took part in anti-government rallies, and in 1892, before his twentieth birthday, became acquainted with the prisons of the dictatorship. In 1893 he joined the editorial staff of El Democrata, an anti-Diaz publication that was soon shut down. On August 7, 1900 he founded Regeneracion. It would become the most important publication of the Mexican Left in the twentieth century. Santillan says that its language “frightened both Diaz and the scientists.” From May 1901 to April 1902, Magon was imprisoned in Belén, but publication of Regeneracion continued. Again, Santillan:

It appears that during this time Ricardo read the works of Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Gorki, and those readings helped to clarify several uncertain points and to strengthen his faith. There are a number of testimonies of an early adoption of libertarian ideas. But for several years the struggle against the dictatorship left the anarchist tendency simply to incubate in his heart.

Magon had secured those anarchist readings from the personal library of the wealthy liberal landowner Camilo Arriaga, who on January 29, 1902 was also incarcerated for an entire year along with the leaders of the Club Liberal de San Luis Potosi. In the meantime, Magon was publishing El Hijo del Ahuizote in the capital, a satirical anti-Diaz publication for which he was again imprisoned in April 1903. When he gained his liberty in 1904 he moved on to Texas, and in San Antonio renewed publication of his famous paper Regeneracion, bringing together all sectors of the radical opposition to Diaz’s dictatorship. Proof of this is the fact that the Partido Liberal Mexicano was founded in 1905, after the reissue of Regeneracion. That year the
paper had a circulation of twenty thousand and by the next year it had grown to thirty thousand. The Junta Organizadora of the Partido appointed Magón as president, Juan Sarabia as vice-president, and Antonio Villareal as secretary. Even when the newspaper was being introduced in Mexico and had as its objective “the struggle by any means against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz,” being internationalists they did not fail to engage themselves with the North American Left, and particularly with the IWW. According to James Cockcroft, the “support the North American Left extended to the Partido Liberal Mexicano became even stronger in subsequent years. They were natural allies.”

Persecution by Yankee police and Pinkerton thugs (paid and encouraged by agents of Porfirio Díaz) forced Magón to move even further north to St. Louis. There he renewed publication of his newspaper in February 1906. The PLM platform drafted in June of the same year was not limited to demanding a single-term presidency; abolition of compulsory military service and military tribunals during peacetime; free, secular, and mandatory education; and limitations on clerical privileges. It also included the eight-hour workday, minimum wage, holidays and weekends, prohibition of child labor, and the appropriation of nonproductive lands. Cockcroft notes:

If the program of the PLM was the first one to present publicly and nationally the main ideas of the Mexican Revolution, it was also the only public document that went beyond the Constitution of 1917 in some of its progressive aspects. In spite of the fact that the authors of the program deliberately softened their declaration so as not to alienate certain elements of the upper class that, though conservative, were sympathetic to the cause, the framers of the Constitution, by way of its Jacobin majority, intentionally radicalized their propositions to satisfy the demands of the peasantry and the working class, which, having waged armed rebellion, were still in a posture of war. As a pioneering document, the program of the PLM has no equal.

Meanwhile in Mexico, Francisco I. Madero began organizing the Partido Demócrata with the aim, according to Magón, of weakening support for the PLM. Its program was entirely political and lacked any explicit concern with social problems, particularly agrarian reform. Madero was an upper-class intellectual, a free marketeer and democrat, generally indifferent to the problems of the Mexican masses, an enthusiast of Allan Kardec, and an assiduous reader of the Revue Spirite. He sought to replace Porfirio Díaz’s administration with a democratic regime elected through free and fair elections, with laws prohibiting all presidential reelection. But it would be very difficult to consider him a revolutionary.

On October 12, 1905 Magón, his brother Enrique, and Juan Sarabia were detained and charged with defaming the Mexican government. Consequently, the offices of Regeneración were raided, its printing press and furniture confiscated, and its postal permit suspended. Publication was renewed a few months later when they were released. In February 1906, it was again published from St. Louis. But Magón was forced to flee to Canada. The United States government was complicit in the Díaz dictatorship, which it saw as a “guarantee” against the revolutionary tide, and it thus became increasingly hostile to exiled liberals.

Between 1906 and 1908 the PLM either directly or indirectly promoted a series of strikes and popular uprisings in different regions of the country. The first strike took place on June 1, 1906 in Cananea in the copper company of William C. Greene, a subsidiary of the sadly celebrated Anaconda. A group of readers of Regeneración and sympathizers of Magón’s ideas—Esteban Baca Calderón, Francisco M. Ibarra, Manuel M. Diéguez, and others—started the Unión Liberal Humanidad in Cananea, which grew to have some one hundred members. The lawyer Lázaro Gutiérrez de Lara, for his part, organized the Club Liberal de Cananea. Like the Unión Liberal Humanidad, it soon joined the PLM in St. Louis.

Mexican miners from Cananea were being paid barely subsistence wages, and faced shameless discrimination in their own land, while foreign workers received twice their wages in U.S. dollars. Led by Calderón, liberals organized a miners’ union for the first time. In May 31 a strike unexpectedly erupted in the Oversight mine. Miners demanded higher wages, the eight-hour workday, dismissal of various foremen, a workforce comprising seventy-five percent Mexican workers, and equality of treatment and opportunity for them. William C. Greene, president of the company, rejected all demands, and tried to convince the miners that his treatment was fair and the wages he paid them excellent. Meanwhile, Porfirio Díaz thought it reckless to raise wages for Mexican workers.

Later, a peaceful miners’ demonstration was attacked by gunshots from several Yankee employees. The miners then set against the company’s em-
ployees and a spontaneous rebellion broke out. Police and thugs massacred a multitude of demonstrators using dum-dum bullets, prohibited even in war by all international agreements. The rebellion spread, and the workers, supported by the people of Cananea, appeared to triumph for a moment. But rural Mexican forces under orders of Colonel Kosterlisky together with more than five hundred North American Rangers and police officers under the command of Captain Thomas Rynning drowned the rebellion in blood. The massacre left more than two hundred dead, twenty thousand jailed, and an indeterminate number wounded. Diéguez, Calderón, and Ibarra avoided execution but were condemned to fifteen years in the San Juan de Ulúa prison. Porfirio Díaz was cognizant of the revolutionary character of the strike in Cananea and he knew very well that Magón and the “liberals” of St. Louis had provided the inspiration.

Strikes of crucial importance by textile workers of Río Blanco in Veracruz were held in 1906 and 1907. The main leader was the worker José Neira, a worthy successor to Villanueva and Zalacosta, a friend of Camilo Arriga, and a follower of Magón’s ideas since 1903. It is important to keep in mind that “after mining, the textile industry was the most important economic activity in Mexico in the twentieth century.” French capitalists owned the textile mills in Orizaba and Río Blanco, and British workers held the most important administrative and technical positions. An engineer was paid forty-one pesos and seventy-five cents weekly, while a worker received a meager thirty-five cents per day, a female worker twenty-five cents, and a child ten cents for a workday varying from twelve to fourteen hours. Neira and a group of Magonists like Porfirio Meneses and José Olivares responded to the urgent need to organize workers to defend their rights. These men sought to start a true resistance society, but others like the Protestant pastor José Rumbia were more moderate in that they did not want to go beyond a mutual aid society. Ultimately the moderates prevailed. Once the Gran Círculo de Obreros Libres de Río Blanco was founded its presidency went to Rumbia and Neira was elected vice-president. But Rumbia and Manuel Ávila’s moderation “did not serve for much.” Management began to harass the leadership and some of them were forced to leave the Río Blanco region.

At a meeting held in Nogales on May 5, workers decided to start a newspaper that would be the voice for the rights and aspirations of the working class. In spite of objections by some moderates, the name of the paper would be Revolución Social, with Neira at the editorial helm. Ávila died suspiciously and in the days following his death, Neira assumed the presidency of the Gran Círculo. His acceptance speech ended with the following words: “When we run into difficulties with management, we shall strike. And if the strike is not successful, we shall turn to dynamite and revolution.” He was able to have a resolution passed that the Gran Círculo would maintain “secret relations with the Junta Revolucionaria residing in St. Louis, of which Magón is president,” and act on behalf of all workers in the country “by any means necessary against the abuses of capitalism and the Díaz dictatorship.”

Díaz and his government could not tolerate the few victories won by Neira and his Magonist comrades against entrepreneurs. So orders were given to apprehend them, but they evaded arrest by fleeing to Puebla. An intense repression against Magonist leaders then followed, and it was not long before the workers’ movement in the Río Blanco region decayed under the schemes of the collaborator Morales. However, Morales was not able to accept the decision Díaz offered him in January 1907 without open protest from workers. To all accounts the settlement favored the interests of bosses and ordered workers to be better team-players. On Monday, January 7 as the whistle sounded in Río Blanco “a group of workers walked towards the mill not with the intention of resuming their labor but of setting the mill ablaze with bosses and scabs in it.” They threw rocks through windows and were met with an armed response by Lieutenant Arroyo and his troops. But workers were not intimidated. “They initiated,” Hernández Padilla says, “not a strike but the workers’ rebellion in Río Blanco, as it is still called today.” Workers raided and set the company store on fire, freed prisoners at the local jail, and cut electrical wires. Then they set out for Nogales. In Orizaba they armed themselves by breaking into pawnshops and took command of the railroad station. General Rosalino Martínez arrived at midnight in Santa Rosa with orders to execute the rebels without trial, and the next day, Governor Colonel Próspero Cahuantzi, arrived with the 24th Infantry Regiment from Puebla “to help landowners and subdue the bandits.” A systematic search of workers’ homes began on January 8. Hernández Padilla writes:

Men, women, and children were pulled from their homes and executed in the barracks. Those able to flee were later captured and killed. Meanwhile,
management at the Río Blanco mill raised their champagne-filled glasses and in unison honored General Martínez with a toast. They celebrated the massacre.  

On the January 9, as workers entered the mill at Santa Rosa, Colonel Francisco Ruiz pulled three individuals from their work: Rafael Moreno Alvarado, president of the Gran Circulo, Manuel Juárez, vice president, and Ceferino Navarro, secretary. All three were executed: the first in front of his store which had already been looted and burnt; the second on the corner of the ruins of El Modelo; and the third among the rubble of El Fénix in Nogales. Herzog writes, “El Imparcial of Mexico City, a daily paper underwritten by the dictatorship, published an editorial on the bloody events that was filled with praises for General Díaz. The title of the editorial was ‘That’s How to Govern.’”

The uprisings in Cananea and Río Blanco, undoubtedly inspired by Magon’s anarcho-syndicalist ideas, were not the only ones during this period. A peasant rebellion broke out in Acayucán in 1906, promoted by Hilario C. Salas. Mancisidor observes: “The armed uprising led by the Partido Liberal Mexicano spread to the municipalities of Tuxtlas, Minatitlán, and the state of Tabasco. But once again cruelties and defeats put down the peasant insurgency.” Magonists led other peasant uprisings in 1908. A highly dedicated group rebelled in Viescas the night of June 24, even when they knew their revolutionary plans had been reported to government officials. The libertarian poet and journalist Práxedes G. Guerrero, whom his friend Magon called the “landowning peasant” and the “capitalist worker,” recounts the following events:

The comrades met at midnight, each was assigned a post, and they got to work. Police tried to resist and gunfire was exchanged, wounding one person on each side, and leaving one gendarme dead. The jail was then emptied, the liberal program proclaimed, and the dictatorship declared null.

There was a request for horses and they took the few funds they found in the public offices. The revolution had taken control of the entire town without a single violent act against neutral families or individuals.

Another Magonist revolutionary group under the leadership of José M. Rangel and Basilio Ramírez attacked the town of Las Vacas on June 26, 1908. The fight lasted over five hours. Guerrero describes it thus:

Everywhere one looked there were acts of heroism among the volunteers for liberty. Each man was a hero; each hero a portrait animated by the spirit of a great epic…. A young man, blonde like the Scandinavians, ran from one to another danger, his clothes tattered and bloodstained. He had been shot in the shoulder, the leg under the knee, the thigh, and his bag. The shock knocked him down. But the bullet encountered the strength of a libertarian in its path and jumped, leaving intact the life of this valiant young man who returned to his feet and resumed the fight.

Mancisidor, commenting on this passage, adds, “acts of heroism like the one described were abundant.”

On July 1 another anarchist group exiled in El Paso raided the town of Palomas near the border, with the goal of facilitating a later invasion and the movement of revolutionary troops into the interior of Mexico. Guerrero writes: “with a fistful of bullets and a few bombs that were quickly assembled with less than effective materials, this small group was formed during a period of violent repression, and set itself against an enemy equipped with more than sufficient elements to resist it.” The raid failed. Francisco Márquez, a friend of Guerrero, was killed. Magon and Guerrero were just able to cross the border. Another Magonist insurrection broke out in Valladolid, Yucatán, and was also defeated by the government’s enormous numerical superiority in men and guns. Ramírez Bonilla, Alberto, and Kankum were summarily executed there. “There justice was not,” Guerrero says, “a devious and underhanded lawyer, but a uniformed beast.”

In 1906, while in Canada, Magon planned a general rebellion throughout Mexican territory, under the leadership of the PLM. Díaz’s government, informed of the revolutionary plan through its network of spies, was able to abort it without great effort. One of the spies from the infamous Pinkerton agency described Magón, leader of the movement at the time, in a report to Enrique C. Creel, Governor of Chihuahua:

He is a very intelligent journalist, a hard worker, active, and disciplined. He is never drunk. He is also a good typist, well-respected by all who know him, a resolute and energetic character fascinated by the cause he pursues, and possessing all the brutal and dangerous fanaticism of the anarchists.

With their revolutionary plan defeated, but encouraged by North Ameri-
can anarchists and socialists, Magón and his followers planned another rebellion for 1908. But it was frustrated for the same reasons. Cockcroft writes: “In 1906 as well as in 1908 the Mexican government learned of the planned insurrection by the PLM, and with the assistance of the United States was able to crush it.”

On August 23, 1907 Magón, Sarabia, and Villareal were again jailed for a period of three years. All the resources available for their defense were in vain as the “powerful of Mexico and the United States were determined to imprison them and keep them from agitating and promoting risings against Díaz.” Their appeal to President Theodore Roosevelt went unanswered; the Supreme Court denied their request for conditional liberty. Meanwhile, the North American journalist John K. Turner, a friend of PLM, published individual chapters of his book México bárbaro in a magazine. It was a passionate but accurate testimony of the social and political situation that the Magonists were fighting, and not, as Cosío Villegas recklessly says, “a demagogic exaggeration.”

After serving their sentence, Magón and his followers left prison in August 1910. They immediately went to Los Angeles and there were received by a large rally organized by the Partido Socialista. Publication of Regeneración was renewed. The old German anarchist Alfred Sanftleben, Turner’s spouse, and later W. C. Owen edited its English-language section. Years later, Owen wrote the following in Freedom:

The English-language section of Regeneración had a circulation of some 27,000 papers when I took the place of John Kenneth Turner as editor, and the paper should have been making money. But all the money was spent on propaganda. We had between 600 and 700 newspapers in our exchange list. Our hope was a unified opinion in Mexico, Central and South America against the invasion by plutocrats, and a sentiment sufficiently strong in North America to undo the constant threat of intervention.

Such objectives required the constant vigilance of the Latin American Left. To get a sense of the direction of propaganda by Regeneración it is crucial to keep in mind that in the United States there was then a robust socialist movement, numerous European anarchists, and a workers’ central, the IWW, whose revolutionary syndicalism was close or identical to anarcho-syndicalism. At the same time, Mexican workers in the Southern Unit-
ed States were taking part in the revolution that was developing in their native country with assistance from the IWW and other organizations attached to the PLM.

By this time there was no doubt about the anarchist ideology of Ricardo Flores Magón and his followers. So it was no surprise when he failed to join the anti-dictatorial campaign of 1910 led by Madero. The goals of representative democracy, anti-reelectionism, and political liberty could not begin to satisfy his aspirations. For him these were all lies, for the working masses achieved nothing by being able to elect their legislators. The true goal of the revolution was to achieve the social and economic emancipation of the proletariat, and to put both land and the means of production in the hands of workers’ communities. In the January 28, 1911 issue of Regeneración, Magón wrote:

Governments are the representatives of capital and therefore have to oppress the proletariat. For once and for all, know this: No Congress will approve the program of the PLM because we, the dispossessed, are not the ones who will be seated in Congress, but our masters, and our masters will be careful not even to let us breathe. Our masters will angrily reject the liberal program of July 1, 1906 because it proposes to expropriate their lands, and they will mock proletarian aspirations. Anarchists do not take seats in Congress, only the bourgeoisie.

It is obvious that such openly anarchist ideas (in spite of what Jean Grave in France or others said) were incompatible with Madero’s moderate program. But as Cockcroft rightly notes, “Madero’s revolution, later renewed and guided slightly left by Carranza, is the one writers seem to have in mind when they refer to the Mexican Revolution as a bourgeois revolution. For the PLM, however, and to a lesser degree for Zapata and his peasant army, who had adopted the PLM’s motto ‘Tierra y libertad,’ the Mexican Revolution was a revolution of urban and rural workers against the bourgeoisie.”

Hence it was a social and not purely political revolution; it was moreover, a libertarian revolution.

Magón persistently rejected offers from President Madero, made via the ex-Magonist Sarabia, just as he had rejected earlier offers from Porfirio Díaz. The manifesto published by the Junta of the PLM on September 23, 1911 reaffirmed Magón’s anarchist ideology. Already in February 25 he
had written an article for *Regeneración* titled “Francisco I. Madero es un traidor a la causa de la libertad” that provoked a deep chasm between the two wings of the anti-Díaz movement. 80 When the PLM troops that rebelled with Madero’s—but without making common cause with them—lost strategic positions in Chihuahua (with Pascual Orozco and the middle class siding with Madero) and had to retreat, they turned their attention to Baja California. This sparsely populated territory of the Mexican Republic was the property of North American, British, and French businesses. Magonists decided to seize control of it and establish a libertarian society there, serving as a model for America and the world. On January 29, 1911, a small contingency under the command of José María Leyva and Simón Berthold took control of Mexicali, on February 21 of Los Algodones, on March 12 of Tecate, and finally, on May 9 of Tijuana. North American landowners and newspaper owners in California (who were frequently the same individuals, e.g., Chandler, Otis, and Hearst) with good reason took alarm and in no time trumped up the absurd legend of Magonist military adventurism.

Some conservative Mexicans and more than a few supporters of Madero (to say nothing of Díaz’s friends like Salado Alvarez) accused Flores Magón of seeking Baja California’s secession in order to incorporate it to the United States, something the Californian magnates surely would have liked. In a *Regeneración* article of June 16, 1911 addressing himself to “patriots,” Magón asked:

Does Baja California belong to Mexico? It does not belong to it but to the United States, England, and France. It is under the control of Cudahy, Otis, and other North American millionaires. The entire west coast of Baja belongs to a powerful British pearl mining company, and the region in which the town of Santa Rosalia is located belongs to a wealthy French company. And what do Mexicans own of Baja? Nothing! And what will the Partido Liberal Mexicano give them? Everything! So, dear patriots, what are you doing when you say that we are selling our country to the United States? Respond. We have no country because all of Mexico is owned by foreign millionaires who enslave our brothers. You have no country, and simply put you do not have even a place to die. And when the Partido Liberal Mexicano wants to establish for you a true country without tyrants or exploiters, you object, bluster, and insult. When you hinder the work of the PLM you impede our own people from throwing all bourgeoisie out of the country and taking possession of their properties. 81

His invasion of Baja California had nothing to do with Madero’s maneuvers in Chihuahua. His goal was not political change, as Madero’s followers pretended, even less to incorporate the territory into the United States, as proclaimed by so many misinformed journalists and politicians of bad faith. On the contrary, Magon’s goal was nothing other than a classless and stateless libertarian society that would provide the archetype and point of departure for the Mexican and world revolution. “The Magón brothers,” Silva Herzog observes, “waged an armed struggle in accord with the principle of international anarchism, with the aim of establishing an ideological base for Mexico’s economic, social, and political reorganization.” 82 North American capitalists then began an aggressive propaganda campaign against Magonists through their newspapers, like the *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Examiner*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*, and developed a plan to annex Baja California by first separating it from Mexico, as had been done in Texas. Leftist groups, above all the IWW, so far as they were able, assisted Magón’s movement and invasion.

In a manifesto that appeared in all the North American socialist press and was addressed to the “dear and valiant comrades of the Mexican Revolution,” the great novelist Jack London wrote:

We Socialists, anarchists, hobos, chicken thieves, outlaws and undesirable citizens of the United States are with you heart and soul in your efforts to overthrow slavery and autocracy in Mexico. You will notice that we are not respectable. Neither are you. No revolutionary can possibly be respectable in these days of the reign of property. All the names you are being called, we have been called. And when graft and greed begin to call names, honest men, brave men, patriotic men and martyrs can expect nothing else than to be called chicken thieves and outlaws. So be it. But I for one wish there were more chicken thieves and outlaws of the sort that formed the gallant band that took Mexicali. ... I subscribe myself a chicken thief and revolutionist. 83

A group of Italian anarchists from Chicago as well as several IWW militants joined the ranks of the Magonists. One of them, the proletarian songwriter Joe Hill, wrote:

While the red flag fluttered in Baja California, hard as I tried I could not find any “important people” in the rebel ranks. I only found common and
everyday working people, and in great number ... It's about time that each rebel comes to realize that "important people" and the working class have nothing in common. Let us then sing the song that says: "the workers' flag is a deep red, and to hell with the 'important people.'"5

The revolutionary project in Baja California failed not as a result of adventurers and gangsters like Dick Ferris, motivated by the interest of North American magnates, but because of its defeat in the field of battle to Madero, the leader of the bourgeois democracy, who was supported by the North American government and eager capitalists from Los Angeles. What remained of the Magonist army was defeated by Celso Vegas in a long, hard fight under the command of Jack Mosby. Moreover, as Ricardo Flores Magón himself declared then, "Madero has joined his forces to Díaz's federal army and executed a number of Magonists on the pretext that they were bandits. Madero has begun a war of extermination against our combatants." By mid-1911 the Magonist movement in Baja California was finished. But that was not the end. Detained along with three of his associates on June 14, 1911 and accused of violating U.S. neutrality laws, Magón was tried in Los Angeles and condemned to McNeil Island Prison, in the State of Washington, where he remained until 1914.

The Manifesto of the PLM identifies private property as the root of all social injustice. It reads: "Abolishing the principle of private property annihilates all political, economic, social, religious, and moral institutions comprising the environment in which the free initiative and association of human beings are choked." Without that principle there is no reason for government, which itself is necessary to repress the dispossessed from their rebellion against the rich, or for the Church, which pursues the same goal by preaching humility and submission, and promising the poor a reward in the afterlife. The Manifesto continues:

Capital, authority, clergy. That's the bleak trinity that turns this beautiful earth into a paradise for those who through the power of their claws, cunning, violence, and crime have monopolized the products of the sweat, blood, tears, and sacrifice of thousands of generations of workers, making a living hell for those who with their arms and intelligence toil the earth, run the machines, build the homes, transport the goods, and in this way leaving humanity divided into two classes of diametrically opposed interests— the capitalist class and the working class, the class that possesses the earth, the production machine, and the means of transporting wealth; and the class that counts on nothing more than its arms and intelligence to secure a living.

It goes on to say that between one and the other class there can be no friendship or harmony, their interests are mutually exclusive and necessarily in conflict—one aims to retain the present state of affairs, and the other to destroy this iniquitous system. The PLM recognizes that all men have equal right to the enjoyment of all advantages of civilization, that work is indispensable for subsistence, that no one but children, the aged, and infirm are exempt from it, and that government and clergy are the pillars of capital. "Expropriation must be carried out by blood and fire during this great movement." With a language that is undoubtedly Kropotkin's and mirrors the programs of revolutionary action from the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, or the Federación Anarquista Ibérica, the PLM described in detail the process that will follow the expropriation of lands:

The inhabitants of every region in which such an act of supreme justice is carried out have only to agree to a place of easy access for storing all the goods found in stores, warehouses, and granaries, where women and men of good will may then conduct a detailed inventory of all that has been gathered and calculate their shelf life, taking into account the needs and the number of inhabitants who have to make use of them from the moment of expropriation until the first harvest of the new system, and in the other industries until the first goods are produced. Once the inventory is complete, workers from different industries will come to a brotherly understanding to regulate production so that during this movement no one will lack essential goods, and only those who do not wish to work will die of hunger, with the exemption of the children, the handicapped, and the elderly, who will have the right to full enjoyment of goods. Everything that is produced will be sent to the general warehouses of the community, and everyone will have the right to take everything according to their needs with no other requirements than to provide the password showing employment at one or another industry.9

In February 1916 Flores Magón was again deprived of his liberty. This time he was jailed under the Espionage Act for writing several articles against Carranza. The government of the “liberal” Woodrow Wilson kept
him in jail until July, when a group of exiled anarchists led by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman joined in solidarity to pay for his bond. These and many other Europeans taking refuge in the United States showed an understanding of and sympathy for Flores Magón and the Magonist movement that was totally lacking in Jean Grave and certain other collaborators of Les Temps Nouveaux, who instead attacked them and even went so far as to claim that the Mexican Revolution exists only in the imagination of the editors of Regeneración. Kropotkin refuted such attacks on April 27, 1912. Emma Goldman, the Russian revolutionary and editor of the anarchist publication Mother Earth, always supported Regeneración and the PLM, offering them her moral and material support, and without any of the prejudice that often carried racial overtones. The same can be said of another anarchist, Voltairine de Cleyre, daughter of a Belgian and born in the U.S., who made the following observation about the Magonists:

They are involved in a struggle to the death, precisely what anarchists claim to believe. Compared to our publications the pages of every issue of Regeneración are impregnated with a genuine anarchism, a combative anarchism that takes measures to destroy the basis of this damned system.

Meanwhile, Flores Magón did not cease from his campaign against those whom he saw as departing from the Mexican revolutionary process. He attacked Carranza and his government while calling on Zapata to move the agrarian revolution forward and return land to peasant communities. On June 13, 1914 he wrote the following for Regeneración:

No, we do not have to be content with the distributions of land. We have to take it all so that we can make it common, not individual property, and to achieve that goal members of the Partido Liberal Mexicano not only fight in libertarian groups organized for this war, but also spread throughout the entire country promoting in both rural and urban settings the salvific principles contained in the manifesto of September 23, 1911, principles that advocate for the permanent removal of authority, capital, and clergy.

From his internationalist perspective, Flores Magón criticized the entry of the United States into the First World War, and more strongly than Kropotkin and other famous European anarchists. For him that war had no other cause than protecting the supremacy of North American plutocracy in the world. On September 19, 1915 he gave a speech titled “La patria burguesa y la patria universal,” later included in the book Tribuna roja, in which he wrote:

The capitalist system will die from self-inflicted wounds, and a shocked humanity will witness a formidable suicide. It was not workers who dragged nations into a conflict against each other, but the German bourgeoisie, motivated by its desire to dominate markets. The German bourgeoisie has achieved tremendous progress in industry and commerce, making its rival the British bourgeoisie quite jealous. That is what is at the bottom of this conflict that is called a European war: jealousies between merchants, hostilities among traffickers, and the quarrels of adventurers. The honor of a people, a race, or country is not litigated in the fields of Europe, instead it is the pocketbook of each that is in dispute in this fight between wild beasts. It is not the wounded national honor or an outraged flag that has brought on this war, but the control of money—money that was first produced by the sweat of the people in fields, factories, mines, in all the different places of exploitation and that now wants this same exploited people to protect it and keep it safe in the pockets of those who robbed it.

And:

The poor are killing each other in the European fields for the benefit of the rich, who want you to believe it is a war for the benefit of the nation. Tell me, what nation do the poor have? What nation do those who labor for mere subsistence with their arms have? A nation should be like a loving mother who equally protects all her children. What protection do the poor have in their respective countries? None! The poor person is a slave in all nations, is equally wretched in all of them, and is a martyr under all governments.

Several months later Wilson, whom Flores Magón had called a “political dwarf,” an “amusing farce,” and a “little toy of the bourgeoisie,” declared the United States at war. Flores Magón responded by publishing a manifesto that called people to rebel against this war by oppressors, and to turn it into a war against the oppressors themselves, that is, into a social revolution. The predictable result of this revolutionary proposal was once again imprisonment. He was sentenced to twenty years and sent to McNeil Island Prison once more; later he was transferred to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas where his precarious health continued to deteriorate. On March 22 he wrote the
following to Ellen White, a North American friend:

Any doctor will tell you that diabetes is an incurable illness. Sugar can temporarily disappear from one’s urine in this strange disease, but the condition will persist. Is it true that low blood pressure, my current anemic condition, cannot be attributed to my diabetes, as my present physician informed me on September 13, 1920? And what about the rheumatism that continually makes me suffer, and this eternal freeze in which healing cannot occur? As you can tell, not only am I losing my sight, I am also afflicted by a number of other conditions.\textsuperscript{103}

Flores Magón was firmly opposed to the constitutionalist government of Venustiano Carranza and accused him of being a strikebreaker, an assassin, and a wolf in sheep’s clothing in the August 26, 1916 issue of Regeneración.\textsuperscript{104} In spite of all this, the Chamber of Deputies offered him a pension that, as one would expect, Flores Magón rejected. In a letter to Nicolás T. Bernal on September 20, 1920, after expressing his happiness for the “fraternal breath of Mexican workers” he conveyed gratitude “for the generous sentiment that moved the Chamber of Deputies to provide a pension to me,” and then added:

I do not believe in the State; I support the abolition of international borders; I fight for the universal brotherhood of man; I consider the State an institution created by capitalism to ensure the exploitation and subjugation of the masses. Consequently, all money obtained by the State represents the sweat, the anguish, and sacrifice of workers. If this money came directly from workers, I would gladly and even proudly accept it because they are my brothers. But when it comes through the intervention of the State after being compelled from the people, the money would only burn my hands and fill my heart with remorse.\textsuperscript{105}

Kropotkin adopted a very similar attitude towards Lenin and the Bolshevik government when they offered him an academic position.\textsuperscript{106} During this same period, the North American government made it clear to Flores Magón that it would consider his release from prison if he publicly repented and petitioned for a pardon. But it goes without saying that this incorruptible fighter could not accept such conditions.\textsuperscript{107} In another letter to Bernal dated August 3, 1921, he remarked on the required repentance, saying that “sarcasm touches the limits of tragedy.” With the indignation of the just

against agents of a State so often corrupted and corrupting, he exclaimed:

Repentance? I have not exploited the sweat, anguish, fatigue, and labor of others; I have not oppressed a single soul; I have nothing to repent for. My life has been lived without my having acquired any wealth, power, or glory, when I could have gotten these three things very easily. But I do not regret it. Wealth, power, and glory are only won by trampling others’ rights. My conscience is at peace, for it knows that under my convict’s garb beats an honest heart. I could be released if only I sign a petition for pardon repenting of what I have done, as the Department of Justice suggests I do. I could then join my poor, abandoned family; I could then attend to my failing eyesight that casts shadows around me and brings bitterness into my heart. But I think that the joy of being out of this hell that seems to have swallowed me forever would ruthlessly be stifled by the remonstrance of and indignant conscience that would shout to me: shame! shame! shame! For it is my honor as a fighter for freedom, my honor as a champion of the poor and dispossessed, invigorated in a thirty-year struggle for justice for all that is in danger here. Thus, I do not surrender the ideal, come what may.\textsuperscript{108}

Ricardo Flores Magón was found dead in his cell at Fort Leavenworth on November 20, 1922. A few hours earlier he had spoken with his comrade and friend Librado Rivera. Suspicions that he was assassinated are very likely true.\textsuperscript{109} But even if he was not assassinated, the North American government was certainly responsible for his premature death.\textsuperscript{109} Mexican workers were later able to repatriate his remains which today rest in the Rotunda de Hombres Ilustres.\textsuperscript{109}

In the course of the anti-Díaz Revolution, alongside the Partido Liberal—or better yet, alongside the left wing of that party and its undoubtedly anarcho-communist ideology which with good reason we have called Magonist—there emerged a second popular movement: a movement of landless peasants centered in the State of Morales and led by Emiliano Zapata. From the strategic and ideological viewpoints, this movement may be considered an extension of the rural revolutionary movements of the 1870s. As these were inspired by ideas from Bakunin and other anarchists of the time, it is important that we mention them here. A spontaneous and almost intuitive revolutionary, Zapata had no real ideology at first other than that of the calpulli, which runs deep in the collective unconscious of the indigenous population.
Later, nonetheless, he raised the anarchist motto “Tierra y Libertad” on his flag, which was originally Magonist and first used by Práxedes Guerrero. Soto y Gama, Secretary of the Zapatista army, served as a conduit for the libertarian ideas of Flores Magón, and may have been the author of the famous Plan de Ayala.

According to Blaisdell, even if Zapata never considered himself an anarchist he did popularize Flores Magón’s revolutionary plan and fought to bring it into practice. John Womack underscores the initial moderation of Zapata’s program, but does not fail to recognize that the insurrection of landowners forced him to embrace the revolutionary agrarianism of Soto y Gama and Flores Magón. Based on information from Nicolás Bernal, José Muñoz Cota reports that Zapata received a messenger from Flores Magón, who sent the suggestion to use the motto “Tierra y Libertad.” Pietro Ferrata cites a letter from Flores Magón in which the latter explains that “the only group akin to ours is Zapata’s,” and concludes that between both revolutionaries “with or without messenger, there was real communication.”

George Woodcock compares Zapata to Makhno and adds:

The philosophy of the Zapatista movement—with its egalitarianism and desire to recreate a natural order, with its insistence that the people should control the land in village communities, with its mistrust of the police and its contempt for personal gain—looks very much like the rural anarchism that emerged in Andalucía under quite similar circumstances.

And in Latin America Zapata can be compared with the Venezuelan Ezequiel Zamora, whose frustrated revolutionary career is analogous to Zapata’s in a number of important points.

In any event, Flores Magón could see a clear difference between Zapata and other revolutionary caudillos like Pancho Villa. In the July 11, 1914 issue of Regeneración, he wrote the following:

We all know the sincerity of Emiliano Zapata as a revolutionary. He practices expropriation for the benefit of all, while Villa is a dog for the bourgeoisie, and executes the proletarian who takes a piece of bread to ease his hunger. Zapata understands that worker control of lands is the firm basis on which the liberty of the proletariat rests, and consequent on his ideas he is not opposed to inhabitants of those regions in which his army operates taking control of the lands and working them for themselves, while in that region under control of Villa workers cannot count on enough dirt to cover their bodies when dead. It is absurd to speak of a union between Villa and Zapata. The latter is an honorable and sincere revolutionary who wrests riches from the hands of the bourgeoisie and delivers them to their true owners: the poor.

Indeed, other than in some conditional alliance against Carranza, Zapata and Villa had nothing in common, and in a letter dated August 21, 1914 Zapata stated that “national peace depends on observance of all the clauses of the proposed Plan de Ayala.”

It is worth mentioning the effect the Mexican Revolution had in other Latin American countries, for example, in the Río de la Plata region. In September 1911, Dr. Juan Creagh, then editor of La Protesta in Buenos Aires, travelled to Los Angeles for the sole purpose of joining the Magonists. The anarchist poet Alberto Ghiraldo dedicated almost the entire July 11, 1912 issue of his publication Ideas y Figuras to discussing and celebrating the revolutionary accomplishments in Mexico. In Montevideo libertarian publications, particularly Idea Libre, Tiempos Nuevos, and El Anarquista, provided extensive coverage of those accomplishments. Rafael Barrett wrote an article titled “Mexico” in which he denounced: “Not only have Yankees positioned large capital in Mexico, but they have also imported Mexican manual labor at an infamously low wage to the southern States.”

For their part, Marxists like the Uruguayan Evaristo Bouzas Urrutia, following the lead of Juan B. Justo, founder of the Partido Socialista Argentino, attacked the extreme anarchism of Mexican liberals.

C. The Workers’ Movement and Anarcho-Syndicalism

While Flores Magón was fighting in the north and Zapata in the south, a workers’ movement was reemerging in Mexico City. It was in large part the result of Spanish immigrants who, having arrived in the early twentieth century, set out to promote and spread anarchist ideals. One of the most outstanding of them was the Catalan Amadeo Ferrés. He was an educated man and a good orator, who, Hart writes.

during the last months of the Díaz regime, began the seemingly hopeless task of organizing an independent anarcho-syndicalist Mexican labor movement, free of all government influence, by arranging small secret
meetings of workers from the typographic industry in Mexico City.\textsuperscript{115} Ferrés was more of a firm believer in education and organizational solidarity than in violence. He was insistent on the value of frugality, of work and mutual aid, and on the necessity of a rational education that would make the worker and the anarchist a “responsible being” and a “Titan of good will.”\textsuperscript{116} A few days before the resignation of Porfirio Díaz, with the collaboration of Díaz Soto y Gama, Ferrés and several anarchist workers started the Confederación Tipográfica de México, destined to become the point of departure for the organization of Mexico’s working class. Two important anarchist leaders emerged from it, José López Dóñez and Rafael Quintero. They were joined by other “intellectual workers” who would later play important roles in the activities of La Casa del Obrero Mundial: Federico de la Colina, Enrique H. Arce, Fernando Rodarte, Lorenzo Macías, Pedro Ortega, and Alfredo Pérez.\textsuperscript{117}

On October 8, 1911 Ferrés began publication of El Tipógrafo Mexicano, an organ of the Confederación with an anarcho-syndicalist focus. In its objective of mobilizing the urban working class it was, Hart writes, the predecessor to newspapers of the 1970s like El Socialista, El Hijo del Trabajo, and El Obrero Internacional.\textsuperscript{118} Anarchist typographers contributed to the formation of numerous unions like the Unión de Canteras Mexicanos, which published La Voz del Oprimido. Many of these unions’ leadership joined the anarchist society Luz, and were among the founders of La Casa del Obrero. Spontaneous strikes erupted during the interim administration of De la Barra, such as one by tramway workers in July 1911.\textsuperscript{119} Subsequently, typographers promoted several strikes in the capital and the interior of the country, in spite of the moderation of Ferrés, López Dóñez, and other leaders who considered them “tactically harmful.” In 1914 the Confederación, now called Artes Gráficas, joined La Casa.\textsuperscript{120}

On June 22, 1912 the Columbian teacher and journalist Juan Francisco Moncada Estrella arrived in Mexico from Cuba. There he founded a workers’ group in which we find Jacinto Huitrón, Luis Méndez, Ciro Z. Esquivel, Pioquinto Roldán, and Eloy Armenta. He also founded Grupo Luz and its newspaper by the same name (starting on July 15), and sought to start a rationalist school following the model of Francisco Ferrer.\textsuperscript{121} The unions of graphic workers and stonemasons, along with those of tailors and train conductors, and the Grupo Luz made up, as Huitrón says, “the keystone of La Casa del Obrero, which later would become a powerful national syndicalist movement.”\textsuperscript{122} Those four unions and the Grupo Luz had met on September 22, 1912 and founded La Casa del Obrero, giving it an anarcho-syndicalist orientation. By 1913, La Casa had to reject proposals by Junco Rojo and Alberto Frisson that it direct its activities towards electoral politics. According to Huitrón, syndicalism was understood then as “the working class movement that sought to achieve complete rights in the factory and workshop, and to show that the emancipation of work is based on the personal and direct effort of workers.”\textsuperscript{123} Marxist socialism, having proposed a reformist and legalist approach and excluded anarchists from the Second International, was rejected in accordance with the principles of anarchist syndicalism, as was all collaboration with political parties, bourgeois or proletarian.\textsuperscript{124}

La Casa del Obrero offered courses and lectures, organized a popular library in which classical anarchist texts were abundant, and in place of the defunct newspaper Luz began to publish a biweekly titled Lucha on January 11, 1913. It also continued to participate in worker-owner conflicts and to support all strikes that erupted in Mexico City, including the boycott of the Café Inglés called by the Unión de Dependientes de Restaurantes on January 27, 1913. May Day was observed for the first time in Mexico that year with assistance from many workers’ unions and mutual aid societies, bringing together some 20,000 workers in the old Palacio Municipal to hear a speech by Soto y Gama. It was then that the word “Mundial” was added to the banner of La Casa del Obrero, and the red flag changed to the red-and-black.\textsuperscript{125} The martyrdom of the Chicago anarchists was also remembered on that day in Mérida, Monterrey, and Río Blanco. Other unions joined La Casa.

Direct action took several forms: tailors organized a boycott of the Palacio de Hierro, and textile workers called strikes in factories in Colmena, Miraflores, and other places. The Huerta dictatorship did not ignore the activities of La Casa, particularly when its members began to criticize it for usurpation and militarism: it deported several foreign activists, jailed many Mexicans, some of whom were then kidnapped and murdered, and closed the headquarters of the vigorous proletarian association.

On August 1913, the Confederación de Artes Gráficas joined La Casa del
Obrero Mundial and began to publish *El Sindicalista*, under the editorship of Rosendo Salazar and José López Dónez. Anarcho-syndicalism was firmly established in La Casa’s organizational structure, while at the same time its members set out to clarify their goals and purposes. Partial strikes had limited purposes—wage increases, the eight-hour workday—but each one of them served as a rehearsal for the general strike that would end capitalism and the State, and bring about the industrial republic. Nonetheless, there was no lack of philosophical differences. Some adopted a positivist attitude and maintained, like Agustín Aragón, the inevitability of a new libertarian order emerging out of the natural law of human progress. Others, however, like the tireless fighter Díaz Soto y Gama, professed a kind of Christian but firmly anticlerical anarchism analogous to Rhödakanyán’s. The difficult situation in which La Casa del Obrero Mundial found itself made impossible the continued publication of *El Sindicalista*, but did open the way for another kind of propaganda tactic: a popular group of orators known as the *tribuna roja*. Beginning in late 1913, these speakers reached masses of illiterate workers and yielded large numbers of new members. In May 1914, publication of *Emancipación Obrera* began. But in no time Huerta’s brutal dictatorship violently repressed the paper, raided La Casa, and destroyed its library.

Huerta’s government represented an attempt to return to Díaz’s regime. General Venustiano Carranza, who defeated Huerta, wanted to continue the work of Madero. His greatest concern was to modernize the institutions of the country, end the caudillo system, and show the world an organized and democratic Mexico. Although he had no real sympathies for anarchism, he found himself having to seek the support of La Casa and its affiliated unions, not only because opposing them would have made the consolidation of his government and development of his plans difficult, but also because, besieged by Villa in the north and Zapata in the south, he needed to recruit as many workers as possible into the ranks of the constitutional army. Alvaro Obregón, Carranza’s minister, showed an attitude favorable to many of La Casas’s hopes and received the welcome of its members. He followed up that welcome by offering the Jesuit college Santa Brígida for use as their headquarters. This understanding between anarchists and the new government seemed contradictory in the light of libertarian doctrine, but old and proven militants justified it on grounds of special historical circumstances, and contested the claim that acceptance of certain gifts from the government entailed some compromise with it.

La Casa del Obrero began an intense proselytizing campaign in the interior of the country. Other Casas were founded in Guadalajara and Monterrey. Hart writes:

La Casa moved toward a more refined and elaborate national structure composed of affiliated groups. Throughout the country a local Casa del Obrero operated independently of, and affiliated with, the Mexico City Casa at the national. At both the national and the local level they remained “self-governing.” Any action taken in concert with the national Casa occurred at the local and regional Casas’ discretion. They also affiliated with the national Casa for armed defense through local workers’ militias and armories.

By the end of 1914, while La Casa was making every effort to raise class consciousness among its affiliates and to spread anarcho-syndicalist ideas, founding the paper *Tinta Roja* under the editorship of Arce, Salazar, and la Colina, discussions began about the necessity of giving the Constitutionalists military support against Villa and Zapata. There was some ideological confusion among anarchists; also, non-anarchist leaders like the electrical worker Luis N. Morones had some influence in this conversation. While an anarchist syndicate may find itself forced by historical circumstances to provide military support to a democratic government—as would happen twenty years later in Spain—it can do so only against a more reactionary power. Even assuming that such was the case with Villa, who had more in common with the clergy and the banks than the anarchists, it was certainly not so with Zapata. Nonetheless, the numerous measures favorable to workers that the Carranza government had taken since 1914, as well as a certain aversion to peasant guerrillas who often carried banners of the Virgin of Guadalupe, encouraged many Casa members to take a collaborationist position. They saw the workerist, lay government of Carranza, with its labor law proposals and seemingly sophisticated agrarian reform plan, as the lesser of two evils.

Zapatistas entered the capital city on November 24, 1914 and withdrew in January 1915. Zapata thus showed that he was not interested in the presidency, as Villa would have wanted him to be. Nonetheless, in La Casa there was much talk that both caudillos were enemies. So, when Obregón’s
troops returned to the capital, the way was already prepared for La Casa to accept a pact with the government, and even to offer its collaboration in military activities. The pact was signed in Veracruz on February 17, 1915. In it members of La Casa del Obrero Mundial committed themselves to engage “in active propaganda to win the sympathies of all workers of the Republic for the Constitutionalist Revolution,” and to form “red” battalions in Carranza’s army.²⁹

Recent investigations, however, have determined that the majority of anarcho-syndicalist militants were never in agreement with this pact and, moreover, “because of its nature or historical determination, the working class was never really allied to the Constitutionalist project.”¹³º In any event, those who signed the pact should have defended themselves from the challenges issued by representatives of anarcho-syndicalist orthodoxy: “We are also accused of meddling in politics and misrepresenting our syndicalist creed. To show that this assertion is false it suffices to say that in a short time we have been able to establish syndicalism from one end of the Republic to the other.”¹³¹ What is certain is that among many members of La Casa, starting from about 1914, anarcho-syndicalist ideology seems to have been contaminated with a “radical” nationalism.¹³² Such contamination later made possible the direct or indirect subordination of the majority of syndicalist organizations to a “workerist” State, and to the realization of a populist politics that, since Carranza and Obregón and then through Calles and Cárdenas, persists to the present day.¹³³

The pact between La Casa and the Constitutionalists produced results that were favorable to both sides. With government support, the organization was able to increase its proselytizing activities among workers in Oaxaca and Orizaba, and to start affiliates in Jalapa, San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Pachuca, Tampico, Tabasco, Morelia, Uruapan, Zamora, Mérida, and other places.¹³⁴ The Constitutionalists substantially reinforced their army with the incorporation of some 10,000 workers, the Red Battalions, and cornered Villa in Chihuahua. La Casa kept growing in 1915 with the addition of numerous unions, published a new and combative newspaper, Arist, and finally realized Moncada’s project of a rationalist school. But inflation and high unemployment in 1915 led to great discontent among workers, who responded by demanding higher wages and price controls. In the summer teachers and drivers affiliated with La Casa declared a strike; so too did bakers in late July, oil workers at the British company El Aguila in October, followed by textile workers, and in December carpenters, button makers, and barbers. Battles broke out between workers and scabs at the foreign-owned El Oro mines. Hart writes:

The anarcho-syndicalist leaders of La Casa openly challenged both capitalists and government and were confident in their course of action. No era in the history of Mexican labor has witnessed the militancy and belligerence that La Casa demonstrated in the last six months of 1915 and the first eight months of 1916. The pressure and turbulence were building up towards the general strike of 1916.¹³⁵

In January 1916 the Red Battalions were decommissioned. But after leaving the barracks workers found themselves jobless, joining an already high number of unemployed in the capital. Unemployment, high prices, low wages, and the devaluation of the peso forced La Casa into a combative posture. A number of strikes and protests erupted in the first months of 1916. On February 4, the government shut down La Casa’s offices and jailed a number of militants, among them Jacinto Huicién. General Pablo González referred to syndicalist actions as the “dictatorship” of the proletariat.¹³⁶ A Congreso Obrero Nacional convened in Veracruz between March 6 and 17, 1916, with delegates from 73 unions. That congress created the Confederación del Trabajo de la Región Mexicana, ideologically defined by the principles of anarcho-syndicalism, including the class struggle, socialization of the means of production, and rejection of all political activity, its goal was not to conquer power but to abolish it as a force independent of the will of workers.¹³⁷

In May 22 a general strike was called in Mexico City to protest the imprisonment of La Casa’s leadership and to achieve a number of emergency economic measures to ease the very difficult situation confronting the working class. The strike was an immediate success but set a nefarious precedent for the revolutionary spirit of anarcho-syndicalists. Due to its ease, many young militants from La Casa came to believe that improvements could be achieved through a popular and benevolent State. Among those who signed the agreements with the Carranza government was Luis Morones, future leader of the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM), and of the Partido Obrero Socialista, which “changed the recognized mode of
struggle from direct to multiple action.” A second general strike erupted on July 31. Workers had been driven to a state of profound pauperization by an agreement between government and capitalists that fixed the value of the peso, used to pay wages, at two cents. Carranza ordered mounted police to attack workers’ assemblies, closed the local Casas, arrested the leaders who came to meet with him, accusing them of being traitors to the nation, and declared martial law. The government was thus able to break the strike, and even Obregón, the minister most sympathetic to the workers, distanced himself from the conflict. The Strike Committee, headed by Barragán Hernández, decided to suspend all action and the defeat was definitive. One of the committee’s leaders, the electrician Velasco, was condemned to death, although the sentence would be later commuted and he was freed in February 1918.

The closure of La Casa del Obrero Mundial and the failure of the general strike of August 1916 were heavy but not mortal blows to the Mexican anarchist movement. In mid-1917 the group Luz and its newspaper were renewed. Other groups emerged in the capital—Jóvenes Socialistas Rojos, Los Autónomos, Solidaridad—and in the interior of the country: Casas del Obrero Mundial in Guadalajara, Tampico, and Saltillo; Cultura Racional y Rebellión in Aguascalientes; Germinal, Vida Libre, and Fuerza y Cerebro in Tampico; Hermanos Rojos in Villa Cecilia; Alba Roja in Ciudad Victoria; Francisco Ferrer Guardia in Nuevo Laredo; Acción Consciente en Monterrey; Acracia and Ni Dios ni Amo in Ciudad Juárez; Acción Cultural Sindicalista in Zacatecas; Ciencia y Libertad and Luz y Fuerza in Toluca; Emancipación in Saltillo; Hermandad Acarata in Orizaba; and Grupo Cultural Libertario in León. In October 1917 anarchists were defeated at the Segundo Congreso Obrero Nacional by the reformist and pro-government group of Luis Morones. Later at the Tercer Congreso Obrero, Moreno founded CROM. It remained at best only a few anarchist symbols, and quickly aligned itself with Samuel Gompers’ famous pro-management American Federation of Labor (AFL). The anarchist López Dómez referred to a group called Acción, formed by Morones and his “carrancistas” friends, as the Cowhide Apostolate (Apostolado de la Vaqueta). Another Mexican worker, speaking of the pact between the new CROM and the AFL, asked: “Is it the American Federation of Labor that sends us its delegates or the government of the White House?”

In September 1919 a Congreso Socialista convened in Mexico City and founded the Partido Nacional Socialista, which quickly changed its name to the Partido Comunista and joined the Third International. Among its founders were several foreigners like the Hindu Manabendra Nath Roy and the North American Lynn A. Gale, as well as a Mexican, José Allen, who turned out to be an agent of the Yankee government. On December 21, the group Acción started the Partido Laborista Mexicano, which quickly offered its support to the presidential candidacy of Alvaro Obregón.

The Russian Revolution had a certain influence on anarcho-syndicalist groups. On March 1, 1918 the worker Vicente de Paula Cano celebrated it in the pages of the anarchist publication Bandera Roja:

¡Obrero mirad hacia el oriente.
Ved cómo el pasado se derrumbe.
Oíd cómo suena lentamente.
La hora de redención omnipotente.
En qué los muertos se alzan de la tumba!

Workers look to the east.
See how the past crumbles.
Listen slowly to how it sounds.
The hour of omnipotent redemption.
When the dead rise from their tombs!

The impact, however, was not as great as it was in other Latin American countries and the information available perhaps was more confused.

On May 21, 1920 President Carranza died in the highlands of Puebla, while fleeing to Veracruz. Obregón, who succeeded him, while he supported the CROM reformists, did not adopt a hostile attitude towards anarcho-syndicalists, as Carranza had since 1916. During the interim administration of Adolfo de la Huerta, a number of strikes erupted, beginning in June 1920 and mobilizing more than 22,000 workers. Textile workers in La Hormiga and San Antonio Abad, Federal District; miners in Velardeña, Mina Vieja, and Dolores in Chihuahua; foundry workers in Monterrey; rural peons in La Laguna; oil workers in El Aguila; and others staged conflicts with their bosses for a variety of reasons. The fact that de la Huerta, and after him Oregón, Calles, and other Mexican presidents, thought of themselves as “socialists” and intervened in strikes and other labor conflicts between...
workers and bosses, generally deciding on behalf of workers, was not a good thing for anarcho-syndicalists. In July 1920 the number of strikes increased to affect some 65,000 workers—metallurgists in Torreón, miners in Chihuahua and Durango, textile workers in Valle de México, oil workers in Tamaulipas, railroad workers in Yucatán, dockworkers in Veracruz, and still more—in spite of CROM’s reformist attempts to stop them.

The Federación Comunista del Proletariado Mexicano (FCPM) was founded on August 11, 1920, with both Marxist-Leninist and anarchist members. But its ideology advocating a “free communism” or libertarianism and its evidently federalist organization came more easily to the anarchists. Between February 15 and 22, FCPM sponsored a congress in the capital city with the aim of creating a workers’ revolutionary regional that would oppose CROM, already joined to the AFL and supported by the Mexican government. To do so they founded the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT), with the participation of some fifty unions. In its constitution the CGT accepted a “libertarian communism,” the “rationalist system for the instruction of workers,” “the class struggle,” and “direct action, which implies the exclusion of all political activity” as fundamental principles necessary for the “complete emancipation of workers and peasants.”

Julio Godio considered the weakening of political action proof of CGT’s “ultra-Leftist sectarianism.” The truth is, as Fernando Córdova says, that the anarcho-syndicalist founders of the CGT were “the first to criticize the Constitution of 1917, the social institutions, Gompers’ imperialist tactics, the recruitment of workers to fill parliamentary seats, and, in a simple word, the failure of the Mexican Revolution.”

In the tradition of the anarchism of the first decade of the century, CGT vigorously denounced North American imperialism, attacked Morones, whom anarchists considered as “Mexico’s Mussolini,” and repudiated the alliance with Gompers and the AFL. It was also openly critical of recent deportations of foreign anarchists and socialists like José Rubio, Natalia Michaelova, Michael Paley, and Sebastián San Vicente, a Basque anarchist from Guernica, founding member of the CGT, and a victim of the “socialist” Obregón. Proclamations by CGT, whose formation was assisted with an Iberian push from Buenaventura Durruti, were signed with the motto “Health and Libertarian Communism,” and even when it came to accept the issue of the dictatorship of the proletariat it never endorsed the Leninist interpretation of this concept (as democratic centralism) but rather that of Rosa Luxemburg and of those called “councilists” (Pannekoek, and others). But a confrontation between the Partido Comunista Mexicano and the majority of anarcho-syndicalists could not be avoided. Anarchists could not feel at ease in the Third International, promoted by the same Russian government that persecuted and exterminated anarchists. At its First Congress in September 1921 CGT withdrew from the Third International, while communists loyal to Moscow walked out. A specifically anarcho-syndicalist group, called Centro Sindicalista Libertario (CSL), was then formed at that Congress in the hopes of serving this CGT the same role played by FAI for the Spanish CGT.

Since that First Congress, the CGT showed its concern for workers throughout the American continent. And in spite of ignoring and denying all representative legitimacy to the so-called Confederación Pan-Americana del Trabajo, the CGT worked energetically for the Confederación Obrera Revolucionaria de toda América, for which a meeting would be called with “representatives from communists, syndicalists, and anarchists from the entire American continent.” At the same time, it declared that “the Mexican proletariat recognizes its brothers in the world proletariat and their struggles.”

In March 1921 the CGT supported the great strike called by the Confederación de Sociedades Gremiales Ferrocarrileras against North American companies. Obregón and his minister Calles were at first opposed to the strike, but in the end they recognized the CGT, conceded to their demands, and gave priority to their members over scabs. In 1922 the anti-political position of the CGT leadership was once more put to the test. On January 14 the CGT’s Consejo Confederal challenged attempts by the Partido Comunista to control CGT’s functions and reiterated its position that it could not have any commitments or relations of any kind with any political party. Four months later, on May 13, the Consejo Local of Mexico City, convened by Huitrón and Montoya, after a long discussion into the night, expelled Salazar and Escobedo, members of the Consejo Confederal, for having aligned themselves with the presidential candidacy of Adolfo de la Huerta. In a telegraph to President Obregón in October of the same year, CGT clarified its position on government and the State:
Of course we are convinced of the fundamental truth that there is not today, nor can there ever be good governments. The very word “government” means “abuse.” Without going far into proletarian protests and without having to repeat on this occasion what the most cultured and disinterested men have written through the ages concerning the organic and sociological foundation of governments, can you tell us sincerely, Mr. Obregón, what good the Executive under your command has done for us? We do not seek help, Citizen Obregón. Leave us at peace to continue our struggle, without compromises or humiliations.

And a little later, it added: “The CGT is not a political organization: it is rebellious, anti-statist, and libertarian.”

On May Day 1922 the commemoration of the Chicago martyrs turned into an act of protest in front of the North American consulate demanding the release of Librado Rivera and Ricardo Flores Magón, both being held at Fort Leavenworth. But this peaceful act was broken by street violence provoked by the reactionary Caballeros de Colón, who murdered a marcher’s son as the CGT crowds passed by its headquarters. And the bourgeoisie knew how to use other weapons against the CGT, like misinformation and calumny. In August the newspaper El Universal Gráfico announced the dissolution of the workers’ central, the embezzlement of funds by its directors, the demoralization of its members, and expressed the desire to see CGT disappear because it was an anarchist organization.

As in Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile, in Mexico City anarchists promoted a tenants’ strike on March 17, 1922, giving way to the organization of the Sindicato Inquilinario. While the Partido Comunista Mexicano took the initiative, several anarchists affiliated with the CGT, like Valadés, were its soul. Veracruz anarchists organized a tenants’ strike as early as January; among them was the tailor Herón Proal, an old militant from the Partido Liberal Mexicano. In September a strike was called at the textile mill in San Ildefonso, after the failure of management to make good on an agreement to increase wages. In October workers at the same mill joined CGT and gave the bosses seven days to settle the matter. When they failed to do so, the anarcho-syndicalist CGT called a general strike. It proved successful. But on October 20 a rally to protest the kidnapping of the Secretary of the Federación de Hilanderos de Santa Teresa was batted in San Angel by mounted gendarmerie, and two workers were killed. The CGT blamed Ce-}

lestino Gasca, who had once been a Casa member and was then Military Governor of the Federal District.

The Second Congress of the CGT convened between November 4 and 12, 1922 and decided to concentrate its organizational efforts in the industrial setting, as it offered “the best chance for successful strikes.” In addition to Verbo Rojo, other anarcho-syndicalist publications appeared: Tierra Libre and Sagitario in Villa Cecilia; El Rebele in Jalapa; and La Humanidad and Nuestros Ideales. In January 1923 a strike broke out among transit workers in response to a threat of termination en masse. In February CGT militants confronted mounted riot police in the streets of Mexico City. Thirteen militants were wounded and more than one hundred detained at the Inspección General de Policía. In March anarchists from Mexico City marched in protest of the assassination of the Spanish CNT member Salvador Seguí (pseud., Noy del Sucre), who was shot by gangsters hired by his employers, and in April they protested the prison sentences of Sacco and Vanzetti in Boston.

A series of letters and telegrams were exchanged during this period between Obregón and CGT’s leaders. Even if this exchange cannot be classified as always cordial, it is nonetheless true that Obregón was the only head of a Latin American country who directly dialogued with anarcho-syndicalists, with the exception of Batlle in Uruguay. In June 1923, CGT resisted a lockout called by employers in Orizaba and Veracruz. That same month during a strike at the textile mills twenty-one unions from Puebla joined the CGT, and within a few weeks the CGT led the new members to occupy all textile mills as the only means to resolve the issue of unemployment. Meanwhile, a number of groups, like Luz y Vida, Esfuerzo Libertario, Juventud Comunista An Bíquica, Tierra Libre, and others, were busy forming the Alianza Local Mexicana Anarquista (ALMA) in Mexico City. In September CGT joined the then recently formed International Workingmen’s Association in Berlin, and in December convened its Third Congress.

New libertarian newspapers appeared in 1923: El Sindicalista, Alma Obrera, and Nuestra Palabra (organ of the CGT) in Zacatecas; and Germinál and Tribuna Roja in San Luis Potosí. In 1924 the CGT celebrated Labor Day at its headquarters in the Plaza Vizcaíñas and continued to receive new members from the interior, like the Grupo Libertario de Mujeres de Nuevo León (in January), the feminist group Emancipación de Margaritas, from
Villa Acuña (in June), the Agricultores Unidos del Bravo and the Organizaciones Libertarias de Tampico (also in June), the Federación Anarquista de San Juan Potosí, and the Sindicato de Obreros Molineros (in September). In August and September the CGT participated in the strike waged by the Federación del Ramo Textil and mobilized some 15,000 workers. In October CGT members organized a meeting in solidarity with striking teachers and oil workers, while the Federación Textil held a rally in front of the factory in San Antonio Abad demanding liberty for the militant anarchist Enrique Rangel, imprisoned in Tuxpan, Veracruz. More anarchist publications appeared that year: Alba Andrógina in Monterrey; Humanidad (a continuation of La Humanidad) and Verbo Rojo in Guadalajara; and Nueva Solidaridad Obrera.172

General Plutarco Elías Calles assumed the presidency at the end of 1924. His support for CROM was in direct proportion to his aversion to the CGT. He was at once less anti-imperialist and more anti-anarchist than Obregón was. It is safe to say that only the Catholic clergy aroused his ire more than militant libertarians.173 On November 19, 1924 CROM held its Sixth Congress in Ciudad Juárez, determined to defend “the interests of the Mexican proletariat” and “its relations with the Socialist government over which comrade Calles presides.”174 In December Calles appointed Morones Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and Labor and enacted important labor legislation that openly favored CROM and undermined CGT. In 1925 CGT “had to confront a combined CROM/government attack in the Federal District that threatened its very existence.”175

Between May 4 and 10, 1925 a Fourth Congress was convened that decided to fight for the eight-hour workday as a temporary remedy for unemployment (FORA pursued the same tactic in Buenos Aires), and to support the peasant movement and the Zapatista deputy Díaz Soto y Gama in his radical agrarian reform project.176 But 1925 was above all,

The year of the great oil strike in El Aguila; of conflict between CROM and Calles’s government over control of the workers’ movement in Chihuahua, Jalisco, and Tamaulipas; of miners’ strikes in El Boleo and Nueva Rosita; of the CROM offensive against “red” bakers in the Federal District; of confrontations between CROM leadership and its peasant base, which carried out a general strike on its own; and of the great institutional offensive against the “red” textile workers of the Valle de México.177

In these workers’ struggles — persistent, violent, sometimes paramilitary — the anarcho-syndicalist CGT showed its best. “It was between 1922 and 1925,” Rodríguez says, “that CGT achieved its greatest strength and dissemination, concentrating its energies on social conflicts.”178 In 1926 CGT comprised 108 syndicates, 23 unions, 13 groups, 9 federations, and 4 agrarian communities for total of 157 affiliated societies.179

In July 1926 CGT held its Fifth Congress and, echoing FORA V two decades earlier, made a clear profession of its anarcho-syndicalist ideology. From that moment on it demonstrated a special interest in the problems of the countryside, joining the agrarian leagues, and later that year convening a peasant’s congress in Guadalajara.180 In 1927 CGT supported a general strike in Mexico City in solidarity with the railroad workers, and through the oil workers’ syndicate in Tampico promoted another one that — for no reason other than its leaders were anarcho-syndicalists — Calles tried to put down with guns.181 In 1928 CGT supported a large strike by the textile workers of Río Blanco and one by telephone workers from Ericsson.

CROM began a rapid decline due to the conflict between Obregón and Morones, whose presidential ambitions forced the latter to resign his position as Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and Labor, and kept his supporters Gasco and Moneda from high government office. Contrary to what one might imagine, CROM’s decline did not mean CGT’s revitalization. It was instead the beginning of its own demise. With CROM’s loss of official favor, CGT found itself increasingly ignored by the government and its functionaries. A new conflict with President Calles ended by destroying both Morones and CROM. In 1929 some CROM syndicates joined CGT, pushing its membership from sixty thousand to eighty thousand.182 But at the same time many in its leadership began to take a CROM-style attitude and to think that “direct action, anarchism, and revolutionary syndicalism were unrealistic.”183 When in 1931 the government of the engineer and general Pascual Ortiz Rubio introduced a new labor code, many CGT leaders, like Luis Araiza and Ciro Mendoza, welcomed it, while others, like Jacinto Huitrón and Enrique Rangel, refused any relation with the State. In 1934, Marjorie Ruth Clark wrote: “In a few years CGT became more conservative. It has continued to call itself anarchist, but in truth it is nothing more than trade unionism, lightly nuanced syndicalism.”184

Something quite similar had occurred in Argentina with the FORA IX
and the Unión Sindical Americana. Nonetheless, as in Argentina anarchism did not totally disappear in Mexico, even though its influence declined in both countries after the 1930s. The Federación Anarco-Comunista Argentina (FACA) had its complement in the Federación Anarquista Mexicana (FAM), and Jacinto Huirron was among its most active organizers and leaders until his death. Just as FACA published Acción Libertaria, so too FAM published a second run of Regeneración. The arrival of many Spanish members of CNT and FAI after 1939 led to the formation of new groups that published the newspaper Tierra y Libertad, and to a series of libertarian works, including the outstanding Enciclopedia Anarquista. Other small nuclei worked, and continue to work, in the syndicalist terrain or in active propaganda, among them the Grupo Cultural Ricardo Flores Magón.

1 Silvio Zabala, La “Utopía” de Tomás Moro en la Nueva España (México: n.p., 1937) and Ideario de Vasco Quiroga (México: n.p., 1941).
6 Ibid., 142.
8 García Cantú, El socialismo en México. Siglo XIX, 141.
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30 Ibid., 80.
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38 G. Aguirre Beltrán, Introducción a Ricardo Flores Magón: Antología (México: CEHSMO, 1972), VII.
40 Ibid., 27.
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48 The diplomat Victoriano Salado Álvarez, said: “To me it is unfair to credit Madero and