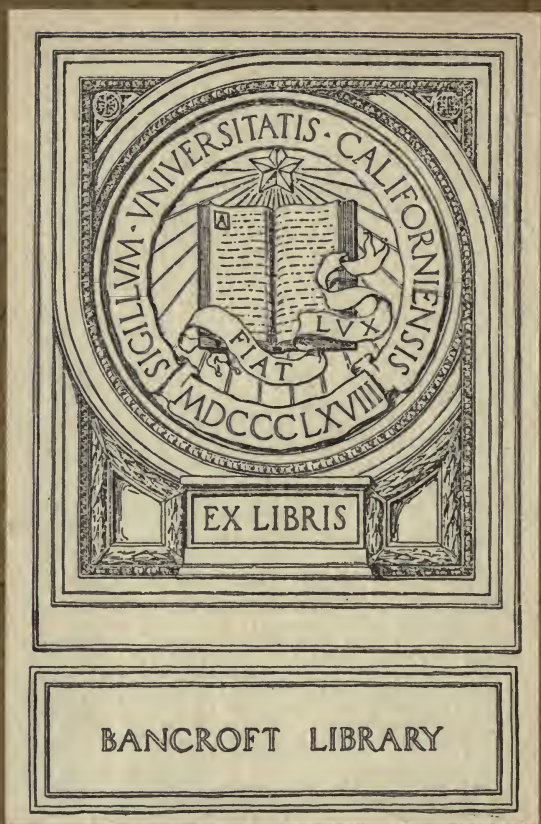


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A Reconstructive Policy in Mexico

By M. C. ROLLAND



Notable first meeting of Laborers under an old tree, at the beginning
of the Revolution.

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A Reconstructive Policy in Mexico

By M. C. ROLLAND



The most important and promising movement of modern times for securing the welfare of the majority of mankind is the Socialistic. All previous existing systems, including the religious and the commercial, have failed owing to the revulsion of mankind since the time of Plato against the exploitation of the masses. Socialism alone has proved an adequate instrument for converting humanitarian theories into the hard metal of accomplished realities.

The progressive efforts of the Socialists in Europe, the brilliant showing they have made in New Zealand, and the agitation throughout South America towards shaking off the remnants of the feudal yoke, are phenomena on which the gaze of the world is riveted today.

Among such phenomena, the Mexican Revolution stands out prominently; and in spite of all the mantles with which Capitalism has endeavored to cloak it, the Mexican agitation shows more and more definite Socialistic tendencies, which are of tremendous importance to every South American country, and no less vital to the North American people, who, in their turn, will have to solve the same problems that are now being worked out in Mexico, notwithstanding the superior material progress of the northern hemisphere.

HOW LONG WILL THE REVOLUTION LAST?

In Mexico, we have had inexorably to answer the call of civil war, which will last as long as there is on the one side, a tendency to monopolize the riches of the land, to insist on privileges and concessions obtained through actual robbery of the rights of the people; and on the other side, the strivings of those who demand equality, justice, and education, and claim the right to comfort and contentment. Civil strife will cease only when the working classes, those who have no capital, secure their economic liberty by means of a political and social organization more in conformity with the pure moral principles that supposedly govern humanity.

Our civil war, so long and bloody and painful, has clearly placed in evidence these conflicting aims and in like manner has also clearly defined the necessity for changing our social order, for transforming our systems of government, and for creating small property holdings as the bases of the economic liberation of our people, who then and then only will cease from being a vagrant mass without any exact notion of citizenship and without any power of resistance as a people.

WHAT THE AIMS ARE.

These are the high ideals that inspire the chiefs of the Mexican Revolution, and if until now it has been necessary to scatter, or even to annihilate, those who represent the tendencies of the privileged classes, it is very important that everybody should know what are, in the concrete, the first steps towards national reorganization which are now being taken firmly and seriously, in the most profound conviction that the Socialist state should be established. These are the control of public utilities without speculative aims and the creation of small interests by the re-apportionment among all the natives of land holdings and of the natural resources of the country, which will tend to establish the Mexican in a peaceful and happy home, and so ultimately make for the peace and happiness of the entire nation.

We do not want a nation prepared to kill, like Germany, or one organized mainly for material gain, like the United States of America. We want a nation prepared for happiness, the ideal toward which mankind has always striven.

WRONG SYSTEM OF TAXATION.

One of the greatest ills of the Latin-American countries consists in the uneven methods of tax levying. The great lords of the land have always contrived to cheat the Exchequer by paying almost nothing for taxes, placing all the burden of public administration on the unfortunate shoulders of the small landed proprietors and on the humbler business concerns in general.

That is one of the most flagrant evils that the Mexican Revolution is rectifying. The First Chief, with keen perception and appreciation of the situation, is silently working with firm hand for the most minute investigation of all the properties in the Republic, reappraising them and imposing on each one the tax proportionate to its value. We find today that estates that were appraised under the old system at a value of twenty or thirty millions, have risen in valuation to five and even eight hundred millions. Pause and calculate how much better off the national treasury will be by the equal division of taxes! On this new basis, the small concerns will have a chance to breathe, and the old Spanish system will be eliminated whereby minor business houses and the less prosperous citizens used to be the ones most iniquitously overburdened with taxation, while the influential and opulent paid ridiculously small sums in comparison.

This policy of the Revolutionary leaders is the first step towards the doctrine of the single tax.

USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS.

There is also another political change that every effort is being made to bring into effect and which is of immense importance to our people: that is, the genuine establishment of the Commonalty Government.

Up to the present, it has been the custom for the dictators to name a representative, entitled the "Jefe Politico," the Chief of Politics and Politicians—the odious instrument of all tyrants, through whom the public funds were concentrated in the coffers of the various States and of the Federation, where they served as a distraction for the hands through which they had to pass. In this manner, although the Government explored even the remotest corner of the Republic, nothing was ever left that would serve as an incentive to develop private initiative, since

the only party who could be enriched was the "cacique"—the political "boss." Thus an atmosphere of discouragement and dejection prevailed amongst the citizens, who never bestirred themselves for the betterment of their districts because they knew too well that the money given would never be applied to its ostensible object.

The First Chief, who, in the course of his political campaign, has passed through and visited every place, and knows fully every necessity of our people, is obsessed with the idea to institute free independent municipal government in order to give the Mexicans, for the first time, the opportunity to augment the prosperity of their respective cities and towns, and thus encourage personal initiative to develop, with the guarantee that there will be no more governmental exploitation. We feel sure that very soon in Mexico will come the rejuvenation of the beautiful cities that today lie in the drowsiness and lethargy produced by the political tyranny and despotism to which they have been subjected in the past. And thus will be opened up a new horizon for the Mexican people, who for the first time will be able to live peacefully and contentedly in attractive cities equipped with all the modern hygienic improvements.

There are other places in Mexico like Tuxpan which, owing to its vast supply of petroleum, is one of the richest spots on earth, but where, on account of the negligence of those who sold this source of national wealth, owing to the iniquitous centralization of the public funds, there is to be found neither a water supply nor any kind of sanitary service, and not even a single cart for the removal of rubbish and refuse. In thousands of beautiful spots in Mexico, richly dowered by Nature, the people drag out a miserable existence in the midst of the most backward conditions of sanitation, positively revolting to the natural habits of the race, all due to the centralization of political and economic power.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

The Revolutionary party is fully alive to the situation, and the adoption of free municipal government, which is already being put into practice in almost every part of the Republic, will be the heroic remedy. In a little while the desired transformation will have taken place, and if this were the only work of the First Chief it would suffice to make him great among us. Being

on the fair road to the democratic Socialistic state, we submit to the world the example of the organization of our federal telegraphic service. In spite of the Revolution, and with a thousand and one other difficulties to contend against, this service, still controlled by the government, has been improved and developed to such a degree that to-day we have a magnificent system with very good service, at a price five or six times less than the telegraphic service of the United States, where many public utilities are exploited by companies which naturally seek to obtain enormous profits in order to partition dividends among the elect.

We prefer to lower the tariffs for the service of the public instead of making money on this popular necessity.

The wireless service has been improved to such an extent that we are able to make the assertion that the entire Republic is covered by stations that control the country in a far more efficient manner, proportionately, than the same service does in the United States. All this has been accomplished during the Revolution.

In order more concisely to present a case typical of what the Revolutionary Government has accomplished towards the establishment of the democratic Socialistic State, I am going to present in as few words as possible the experience of the Government in the State of Yucatan, where I spent six months recently studying matters with reference to the Revolution.

IMPROVEMENTS IN YUCATAN.

In Yucatan, the veritable Revolution arrived with General Alvarado.

The State was formerly organized in such a manner that its entire wealth rested in the hands of two or three hundred individuals, and the people, an indigenous mass of two hundred and fifty thousand souls, were herded together in abject slavery. On every plantation there was always a priest who exhorted the slaves to obey their master, the proprietor of the estate, and promised them the kingdom of heaven as their reward for such obedience.

All at once the system of debts was abolished. This was the means by which the peon, the working man, had been held in

subjection and fettered for life. This reform resulted in a new freedom for the working people. Liberated from debts, they could move about in search of better wages, and consequently, wages have been considerably increased.

Next, the priests, who used to be on the plantations, were each supplanted by a school. It was absolutely necessary to suppress the Clericals, because it was impossible to make any progress in the work of reform while they insisted on using their religious influence to oppose and retard the best social reforms which the Revolutionary leaders had planned and wanted to institute.

The sale of alcoholic liquors was prohibited; cock-fights and bull-fights were forbidden, and in their stead a new impulse was given to games and sports such as baseball. In the most out-of-the-way town of Yucatan today, there is as much interest and eagerness about baseball as that displayed among players and spectators in the United States.

There are about five hundred travelling libraries; public lectures are also given, besides which, a department in charge of public instruction has been organized with a pedagogue of renown as head.

Regarding economics, it was necessary to maintain a very active campaign against the powerful American Trusts that were monopolizing the henequen industry, which constitutes the wealth of the State. With this aim in view, the trusts caused an investigation into the matter. A special investigation was made by the American Senate, during the course of which the justice of the Government of Yucatan was made patent. Just as Frederick the Great forcibly organized the feudal lords to make the rural treasuries the economic basis of the German States, so did General Alvarado compel the planters, by bringing strong official pressure to bear upon them, to organize co-operatively and to unite for the defence of the State. The results are now in evidence. Every one has been convinced of the iniquitous monopoly which the trusts carried on: and now, eight or ten million dollars in gold which these gentlemen used to pocket, pass into the purses of the henequen producers, with the result that the independence and stability of the national product are now assured.

In order to fulfil one of the highest ideals of the Revolution—that is, the economic freedom of the peon—General Alvarado

obtained the approval of the First Chief to the decree relating to the distribution of lands, and then formed an agrarian commission to have it put into practice. This law enacts that lands within the State, or communal lands, which might have been taken or stolen, will simply be confiscated and the rest will be expropriated according to their just value. These lands are being redistributed among those who want to work them at the rate of twenty hectares of uncultivated land to each head of a family, and ten hectares if the land is already in process of cultivation with henequen. The law lays down certain indispensable requirements in order to make sure that production shall increase, since it is not the intention of the State to take away lands from certain persons and to pass them over to others who would leave them unproductive. He who cannot or will not work must leave the land to another who is willing and able to do so. The solution of the agrarian problem is not merely a platonic scheme to the end that every one may have some land, but it is expressly stipulated that an increase in production must be shown. Consequently, this will tend to the prosperity of the people. Toward the accomplishment of this purpose the Government is using every possible means. A Department of Agriculture has been organized with a foreign expert at its head, and with a plan of operation quite similar to that in vogue in the United States. There is an organization which takes care of the circulation of such propaganda as may tend to encourage the small cultivator in his efforts and to help him out of his difficulties.

An Agricultural School has been organized and established and experimental stations are also being started.

The great problem regarding the working classes has been attacked in Yucatan with ample appreciation of cause, a law having been decreed which creates special tribunals for compulsory conciliation and arbitration. The State has been divided into five labor districts and the workmen have organized into labor unions. The tribunals consist of representatives of the laborers and the capitalists, and if a friendly settlement of the matter in question cannot be arrived at in the Council of Conciliation, the Tribunal of Arbitration gives its judgment on the case within a fixed time, and from the latter judgment there is no appeal. The Council of Conciliation takes the matter into consideration and has power to impose, for the term of one month only, and on trial, an arrangement which shall have the force

of an industrial agreement if none of the parties concerned enters protest within said period. The Tribunal of Arbitration has full power to study the books of the proprietors and go to the bottom of the matter in question in order to judge whether it be really possible to satisfy the demands of the laborers.

Both the working classes and the capitalists are subject to fines if they do not comply with the terms of the industrial agreements. The purpose is to suppress strikes, which are injurious to all. Nevertheless the right to go on strike is recognized as the supreme measure to which industrial unions may have recourse. The law establishes measures regarding accidents and provides for the establishment of an insurance department to be controlled by the government in case private insurance agencies abuse this public necessity. Since this law has been put into force, the public worker has come to understand its justice and the authorities have not yet had to debate any difficulties between labor and capital, these seeming to adjust themselves automatically before the tribunals mentioned. Hence, the condition of the working man is automatically being improved without any painful shocks. Besides, a reorganization of the Labor Department has taken place, and this now studies, in a general way, the conditions of the working people as well as the commercial prospects; and it also compiles statistics. This is one of the most valuable and conclusive of the reforms that are being effected in Yucatan and shows how, if efficient official power is energetic and well-guided, in a very short time the laborer gains materially both in an economic and social sense.

With the finances of the State firmly assured, and with the people living and moving along firmer and more stable social bases, General Alvarado has launched farther in his trial of the Socialist state and will endeavor to control public utilities without speculative aims so as to apportion among the people the essentials for increasing their prosperity.

A company has been organized with a million dollars to construct a railroad that will unite the State of Yucatan with the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, crossing the States of Campeche, Tabasco and Chiapas. These regions are inconceivably rich. They abound in cattle and all kinds of fruits and hardwoods. Practically speaking, these regions have been unexplored owing to lack of adequate means of communication.

Yucatan will be a safe and reliable market for all of these products and there will be no need of importing from abroad any

foodstuffs whatever, not even corn. At the same time, this railroad will unite the peninsula with the capital of the Republic, which owing to motives of national importance, is absolutely necessary. The other works which the company will undertake are: The introduction of petroleum into the State, construction of the Port of Progreso, and the installation of a line of steamboats. Petroleum will cheapen manufacturing and will liberate for other industries, fifteen thousand men actually employed in timber-felling to such an extent that the country is being ruined through deforestation, and the climate is being injuriously affected. These men will then be so many more hands gained for more productive employment, with the result that public prosperity will be greatly increased. Such laborers would be far more valuable than immigrants, since they are already acclimated. Besides, with the aid of cheap petroleum more extensive immigration will become possible and thus the day will not be far distant when orchards full of aromatic fruits and vegetables, with prosperous, flourishing ranches, will be more abundant. All these works are of immense social importance, since they tend to enable the people to gain their livelihood with smaller living expenses, and will also increase the productive capacity of the State. Thus benefits will be apportioned among all in conformity with the Agrarian Law and that of Labor, and an era of the greatest prosperity and happiness must ensue. The company is controlled by the government, which subscribes five per cent. of the capital, and the rest is subscribed by private individuals. Its purpose, we repeat, is not a business investment; it is to open up new horizons to private initiative, and above all, to control those services of public utility for the benefit of all and not of a few concessionaires as was formerly the custom.

In Yucatan it has been possible to advance more rapidly than elsewhere in Mexico in the work of reconstruction, thanks to the characteristic energy and spirit of General Alvarado and also to the circumstances that there they have had more peace and less fighting. But in other parts of the country also, experiments have been made in the line of the general plan traced out by the First Chief and consistent with the enthusiasm of the individuals actually in charge. Naturally, it is not in all parts of the country that things are being well done, and we have to acknowledge that the true revolutionary spirit does not reign in the hearts of all the men who have been raised to eminence by the Revolution. Nevertheless it can be easily understood that all of the

men who find themselves to-day invested with power and who have risen without any previous experience whatever, and the majority of whom indeed are ignorant of what national reconstruction signifies, are not entirely blamable. In every case the man of intellect will be held accountable.

We must fain acknowledge that there are abuses and thefts of property belonging to the public, and we also admit that there are not a few whose only aim is to acquire great wealth rapidly; but this is natural, and the history of this world proves that the same thing inevitably occurs. Revolutions do not transform men into angels. But the fact remains that the Socialistic ideal is incarnated in a directing majority and will not turn aside from carrying out its aims just because there happen to be some who are fools and others who are knaves.

This is not mere phrase-making. Keen activity exists in Mexico for the solution of the agrarian problem; and the growth of the schools is such that to-day in some parts of the country the teacher gains more than the minister, and all this will eventually produce unfailing results. Equable taxation and free municipalities will infallibly yield hopeful results in a very short time.

The students of sociology of the entire world ponder over these facts coldly and dispassionately, and realize that, apart from all false interests and passions, the Mexican problem points to one section more of mankind that has destroyed the feudal yoke—by means of bloodshed, it is true, but this is a detail—and is emerging into the fulness of the social and economic organization of a free and contented commonwealth.

Every honest man, every man who does not have two moral codes, one private and the other public; every man who is opposed to theft in private life must also be opposed to any strong nation that would try to plunder a weaker one, and must recognize the supreme justice of the efforts which these brave leaders are making to form a pathway for the people of their nation that will lead them to peace and contentment. Therefore, no one can approve of the conduct of the majority of those Americans who, in our country, plead for intervention in order to forward their individual schemes and interests.

I do not make accusations lightly, since it is a well-known fact that the Americans resident in Mexico are in general Republicans with the desire for intervention. It is not so very long

since the entire American population in Tampico, made public confession that they had aided the Republicans with money, and urgently requested assurance and protection for the immense wealth in petroleum that they had obtained there from the former Mexican Government for nothing, and this when they were not in the slightest danger.

Recently I was in Mexico City and went frequently to the American Club. There I was fully convinced how charged the atmosphere was with the desire for intervention. There they discussed barefacedly the schemes they had in mind, in like manner as the jackals doubtless take counsel together when they see their prospective prey in its agony. The United States of America will gain nothing whatever by intervention in Mexico, but will, on the contrary, paralyze, through perverted conceptions of humanity, the Socialistic regeneration that is progressing there. On the other hand, it will certainly have great advantages to gain when to the south there exists a civilized nation with perfect understanding and appreciation of the fellowship of nations.



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