

Rewarding merits

Ricardo Flores Magón

1916

The prison and the temple chat secretly, like two cronies who are tied together more by the nooses of crime than those of friendship. From the citadel escapes the stench of rotting cattle. From the temple emerges a fume laden with dismay, saturated with swooning, like the mouth of a cave in whose darkness all the debilitated grovel and all the impotent wring their arms.

“I abhor the people,” says the citadel, yawning. “However, I bestow my consideration and respect to the worthy, distinguished people whose interests I shield. Each time the honorable guardian of order brings me a new guest, I shiver with emotion. My satisfaction climaxes when I feel more and more criminals stirring within my stone belly.”

There is a pause. Through the bars can be heard jangles of shackles, murmurs of protests, cracks of horsewhips, bullying voices of authority amid the wheezing of harassed beasts, all of the horrible noises that form the horrible music of the prison.

“Great is your mission, my friend the prison,” says the temple. “I reverently bow my towers before you. I also feel satisfied to be the shield of distinguished people. Whereas you enchain the body of the criminal, I break the will of the people. I castrate their energy. Whereas you lift up a wall of stone between the hand of the poor and the treasures of the rich, I invent the fires of hell, putting them between the cupidity of the miserably poor and gold of the bourgeoisie.”

There is a pause. Through the windows and the doors enter the aromas of incense and the fetid perspiration of the clustered cattle. From the blue space emerges sounds of sobbing, of supplications, a vile racket created by all the debilitated people and all the penitents, the abject music of the submissive and the defeated.

“As long as I remain standing, the master sleeps tranquilly,” the prison says.

“While there are knees that touch my tiles, the master’s power will remain standing,” says the temple.

There is a pause. The prison and the temple appear to meditate: the first, satisfied for enchaining the body; the second, content for enchaining consciousness; both of them, proud of their merits.

In the corner of a small cave, some dynamite overhears their conversation, powerfully restraining its forces so that it does not explode from indignation.

“Wait!” it says to itself, “wait, monuments of barbarism, for the bold hand that will unleash the blast from my bosom will arrive sooner than you think. In the belly of Misery convulses the fetus of Rebellion. Wait! Wait for the fruit of centuries of exploitation and tyranny; the black phalanxes of men consume the last swallows of bitterness and sadness; the glass of patience overflows; some more drops, and all the indignations will overflow, all the angers will leap out of their jail cells, all the audacities will transgress their limits. Wait, somber edifices, cellars of agony, for in the great calendar of human suffering flares, with colors of fire and blood, a red date, a new July 14 for all the Bastilles, those of the body and those of consciousness. The cattle are standing up, converting themselves into men. Soon the sun will stop toasting the backs of the herd to illuminate the fronts of free men... Wait! You will remain standing only as long as I stay in this corner.”

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