

The barricade and the trench

Ricardo Flores Magón

1915

Front to front are the two enemy defenses: the barricade of the people and the military trench. The barricade shows to the sun its enormous, irregular bulk, and appears to be proud of its deformity. The military trench flaunts its geometrically plotted lines, smirking at its hunchbacked rival. The people, mutinous, are behind the barricade; the soldiers are found behind the trench.

“A barricade is such a horrible thing,” exclaims the trench, adding, “horrible like the people who are behind it!”

From the barricade spring the virile notes of revolutionary hymns; in the trench, silence reigns.

“It is well known”, says the trench, “that only lost people are behind that monstrosity! I have never seen an absurd hulk like this used for anything other than to protect the rabble from the death they deserve. Grubby people and smelly bandits, restless people, are the only ones who could seek shelter in such an ugly thing. In contrast, behind me are the defenders of law and order; the supporters of republican institutions; disciplined and polite people; the guardians of public tranquility; the shield of the citizenry’s life and business.”

Barricades have self-respect, and this one could not be the exception to the rule. Within its recesses of sticks, clothes, pottery, rocks, and whatever else, it shudders with indignation. With a tone of voice that reflects the solemnity of the utmost popular resolution and the severity of the people’s utmost determination, it says:

“Stop there, refuge of oppression, harbor of crime, for you are in the presence of the bulwark of liberty. As ugly and hunchbacked as I am, I am great because I have not been constructed by men earning a wage, by mercenaries serving tyranny. I am the child of popular despair; I am the product of the tormented soul of the humble, and in my recesses are born Liberty and Justice.”

There is a moment of silence during which the barricade seems to meditate. It is deformed yet beautiful at the same time: deformed from its construction; beautiful for its signification. It is the strong and robust anthem of liberty; it is the formidable protest against oppression.

The gallant notes of a bugle are emitted from the trench, breaking the silence. A March breeze sweeps clean the deserted streets of the insurrectionary city. The rumble of clashing firearms emerges from the barricade and the trench. The barricade continues:

“I feel so proud to defend the noble bosom of the child of the people. I will open up my very recesses if the oppressor tries to use me for its defense.”

A cannon ball knocks against the center of the barricade, without being able to break open a crack. The entire barricade creaks, and its creaking seems like the straining of a colossus that gathers together all its forces to resist an assault. Nothing! Some splinters bounce off and glisten in the sun, like sparks emitted from a forge. The barricade continues:

“The tyrant pales with just the mention of my name, and kings quiver in their grand bandit crowns when I am afoot. What would you give, guardian of henchmen, to feel within you the arduous breathing of the people fighting for its liberty. You are erected to perpetuate oppression and slavery; I come as an announcement of vindication and progress. I am deformed and hunchbacked; however, for those who suffer, I have the resplendence of the dawn. Even though I am gnarled, I radiate a light that leads men to the site of duty.”

The bugle in the military trench plays the call to “attention”, followed immediately by “fire”. A hail of projectiles beats against the exterior wall of the barricade, making pieces of wood, bricks, and pottery leap about. The barricade remains in place, valiantly resisting the shrapnel assault, the formidable attacks of cannon balls, and the furious gnawing of rifle shots. The drummers roll their snares in the military trench. The bugle vibrates rabidly. All can clearly hear its wrathful notes through the clattering volley, like the sinister screech of a bird of prey within a tempest. The barricade strains like a giant receiving a mace blow in a duel between titans. Recovering its strength, the barricade continues as follows:

“A barricade in each city at the same time, and liberty would spring forth from my luminous recesses, radiant like the breath of a volcano. As dark as I am, I illuminate. When the poor see me, they sigh and say: finally ...!”

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Retrieved on April 8th, 2009 from www.waste.org
Translated from Spanish by Mitchell Cowen Verter. From "Regeneration" number
213. November 20, 1915.

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