

Book Review

Mexico's Revolution Then and Now

by D. Cockcroft. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010. \$14.95 US, paper. ISBN-13: 978-1-58367-224-2. Pages: 1-160.

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In *Mexico's Revolution Then and Now*, James Cockcroft interrogates the parallels between the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17 and current political conflicts in Mexico. He explores what persuasive ideas shaped and influenced revolutionary acts and the ways in which anarchist ideas and modes of thought were woven into revolutionary action. The author also attempts to provide a critical reassessment of continuities between early strands of revolutionary thought and those that persist, however embattled, in Mexico today.

In his first published book in 1968, *Intellectual precursors of the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1913*, Cockcroft explored the ideas which shaped revolution in Mexico. *Mexico's Revolution Then and Now* is a welcome addition to existing literature on Mexican revolutionary ideology, relevant for its assessment of the ways in which revolutionary ideas have shaped contemporary resistance movements. Cockcroft highlights *Magonistas'* influence upon the revolution, including their ideals of anarcho-communism and socialism. Scholars such as John Mason Hart have explored the critical role played by Ricardo Flores Magon as an organizer of a "pro-democracy movement" in Mexico from the 1890's through to 1910. Hart's emphasis upon the instrumental ideological work carried out by the Partido Liberal Mexicano (P.L.M.) mirrors Cockcroft's assessments of the movement. Cockcroft draws our attention to the "lessons and legacies" of the revolutionary period, illuminating present-day asymmetries and inequalities. In Mexico, for example, the minimum wage remains the "weakest" across Latin America.

Revolutionary struggles in contemporary Mexico enrich the narrative, which intertwines past and present. Cockcroft affords considerable attention the Oaxacan-born revolutionary, Ricardo Flores Magón,

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and the anti-imperialist Mexican Liberal Party. In 1906 the P.L.M. disseminated an agenda for radical agrarian reform for communities dispossessed of lands and set out clauses to protect indigenous peoples. Significantly, Cockcroft weaves in the revolutionary contributions and sufferings experienced by *Magonista* women (e.g. Margarita Ortega), redressing the paucity of historical attention devoted to Mexican women involved with the *Magonista* movement.

Cockcroft links revolutionary-era struggles to present-day labour conflict. The author emphasizes the *Magonistas'* goals of human emancipation and social justice and the role of the P.L.M. in co-ordinating a series of strikes prior to the Revolution and the repression faced by those who joined its ranks. Cockcroft flags persisting labour violations as key sites of contemporary struggle. Of note are conflicts between working people's rights and American, as well as transnational, companies based in Mexico from Anaconda Copper at Cananea to Continental Tire in El Salto. The current political scene in Mexico is assessed as wholly neoliberal and corrupt, poverty is viewed as generated (rather than worsened) by neoliberal policy, and mass emigrations and union-busting considered normalized features of Mexican life. The militarization of the Mexican border control, which increased under the Obama administration, and consolidation of contemporary imperialism, particularly in oil, feature in Cockcroft's intrepid work. Cultural items are treated in connection with the economy, including for instance, the dual monopoly over Mexican television which operates under the "iron control" of two Mexican billionaires.

Mexico's uneven economic development is counterbalanced with the *Magonista* era in which it was believed that the means of production were in need of a re-ordering. The Revolution and its aftermath are deconstructed to their very core through a wholly economic analysis rooted in a social history approach. The ascent of the Mexican bourgeoisie in the twentieth century is charted and the "institutional" revolution is exposed as counter-revolutionary, antagonistic to the interests of most Mexicans. Labour concerns remain at the heart of *Mexico's Revolution, Then and Now*, which unearths contemporary popular uprisings against neoliberalism in the face of state-led, patriotic pacification campaigns that emphasized the "glorious Revolution" and championed Mexican identity through the celebration of public art. While the study does not go to great lengths to enrich our understanding of the revolutionary period, it does a fair job at emphasizing the ideological contributions made by Magon and his followers.

Cockcroft assesses the Cárdenas administration as fraught with holes: during this time millions of hectares of land were transferred to peasants, yet best quality lands remained in the hands of twelve mostly foreign-owned corporations, enabling *neolatifundismo* to dominate Mexican agriculture in ensuing decades. The abandonment of revolutionary ideals and political corruption are key themes. His immiseration thesis identifies N.A.F.T.A. as responsible for Mexico's dramatic loss of self-sufficiency in agriculture. Neoliberal trading schemes are treated as naked imperialism. In spite of Mexico retaining state-owned resources such as oil, PEMEX profits have not trickled down to the population and this state-owned company continues to fuel American consumption. As in *Mexico's Hope* (1998), Cockcroft is tuned into Mexico's most recent social conflicts.

Cockcroft believes that, while population growth does not create immiseration, in reality it has more to do with how capitalism operates. Cockcroft credits injustices perpetuated upon the people to right-wing decision-making, and the book is concerned more with explaining current social ills facing the nation than with actually revisiting the revolutionary period. It emphasizes, for example, the high proportion of indigenous people and languages still present in Mexico and the spread of neo-Zapatismo from Chiapas to other indigenous communities. Resistance strategies are presented, for example the modern-day "sit-in" (*plantón*) of *Adelitos* and *Adelitas* advocating fair politics (actions taken by a female-led labour solidarity movement for *maquiladora* workers). Modern attempts to reinstate political democracy are emphasized, including the neo-Zapatistas who champion *Tierra y libertad* (a Magonista slogan) and continue to maintain autonomous "Good Government" municipalities. Women's issues are not ignored in this work. The author's critiques of transnational capitalism's inherently exploitative character refresh our understanding of current crises facing Mexico, offering a relevant and necessary contribution and critical manifesto for change. Perhaps lacking for not sufficiently engaging with the views of Mexicans on their own revolutionary past and current predicament, Cockcroft's diligent and methodical work remains radical in nature and should be considered required reading for all those interested in gaining a better understanding of Mexico today.