Book Review Essay: Mexico, Transnational and World Revolution

written by Dan La Botz | March 12, 2023

Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans Race, Empire and Revolution in the Borderland* (New York: W..W. Norton, 2022), 372 p., illustrations, notes, index. Hardback, $30.00

Christina Heatherton, *Arise! Global Radicalism in the Era of the Mexican Revolution* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 305 p., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Hardback, $29.95.

Two women scholars have each written a new book on the Mexican Revolution, and both books take up the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón (RFM), his associates known as the *magonistas,* and the Mexican Liberal Party that they founded. Flores Magón is famous and virtually revered in Mexico, so much so that the Mexican government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador declared 2022 to be "The Year of Ricardo Flores Magón, Precursor of the Mexican Revolution." (AMLO, a politically ambiguous figure, may have done this to burnish his own radical credentials.) The authors of these books, both of which are informed by a critical view of capitalism and imperialism, racism, sexism, class exploitation and oppression, clearly chose RFM as a subject because they admire him and his comrades. The same is true of most other books on the subject.

The study of RFM and the *magonistas* is a well worked field. Amateurs and scholars have produced dozens of dissertations and monographs and several book length studies, among them: the Spanish-Argentine anarchist Abad de Santillán's *Ricardo Flores Magón* (1925); *Ricardo Flores Magón y el Partido Liberal Mexicano* (1960) by RFM's friend and comrade Ethel Duffy Turner; James Cockcroft's *Intellectual Precursors of the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1913*;, and Claudio Lomnitz's *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magóm* (2014). The general outline of events is well known to historians. In the early 1900s and 1910s, RFM and his band published the revolutionary newspaper

Regeneración and operating on both sides of the U.S-Mexico border, organized forces to overthrow the Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz. Díaz had invited capitalists from the United States, Canada, Britain and France to develop mines, build railroads, establish industries, and create ranches and farms while at the same time he dispossessed the Mexican peasants and indigenous people of their lands for the benefit of his wealthy friends. Many Mexicans were discontented and the *magonistas* attempted to organize that discontent, give it a military form and a radical social program. The Mexican and U.S. government collaborated to suppress the *magonistas,* and many of the leaders spend years in jail on one side of the border or the other. The have been called the precursors the great Mexican Revolution led by Francisco Madero that broke out in 1910.

As in the case of other studies, these two authors wonder who was RFM and who were the *magonistas*? What did they believe? What was the impact of their decade of revolutionary activism? And what can we learn from them?

Bad Mexicans

Elizabeth Lytle Hernández, who holds the Thomas E Lifka Endowed Chair in History and directs the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA, has also received a MacArthur "Genius Grant" and is the author of two other books: *Migra* and *City of Inmates.* Her book *Bad Mexicans* is both a straightforward, blow-by-blow history of RFM and the *magonistas* and a social history of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the borderlands. Her desire is to explain the transnational character of the revolution and to recognize and vindicate the role of Mexican Americans in it. To do so, she uses new sources and mines neglected ones—all of that relegated to the end notes—and writes in a strong, clear novelistic style telling an engrossing and often exciting story filled with colorful details. In large measure, hers is the story of brown people—Mexicans and indigenous people dispossessed in Mexico and exploited and discriminated against in the United States.

While some other historians have focused narrowly on the brothers Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón and their closest male comrades, Lytle Hernández is always attentive to the role of women like Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza and Jovita Idar who were sometimes overlooked in earlier histories. We meet their American Socialist Party allies like Job Harriman and John Kenneth Turner, and among them too the women like Elizabeth Trowbridge and Ethel Duff Turner. At the same time, she introduces the reader to the *magonistas*' antagonists, the major bourgeois figures who dominated the economy on both sides of the border: the Rockefellers, the Guggenheims, William Randolph Hearst, William C. Greene, and Edward L. Doheny. She describes the effort to destroy the *magonistas* dictated from the top by Porfirio Díaz and Theodore Roosevelt as well as the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs Ignacio Mariscal, and the U.S. Secretary of State Elihu Root, and many of their underlings. Then too there are the Furlong and Pinkerton detective agencies and their detectives, thugs, and informers. Her wholistic approach demonstrates the dynamic struggle between revolutionaries and the reactionary governments and capitalists who wanted to destroy their organization.

The *magonistas* lived exciting and dangerous lives, and Lytle Hernández's account is often not only engaging but frequently gripping as she describes how they fled the police, moving from city to city first in Mexico and then in the United States. She follows them from Laredo to San Antonio, St. Louis, Toronto, Montreal, and Los Angeles, describes the various uprising and assaults on towns and villages that they organized, and details their arrests, trials, and imprisonment. She discusses their stirring manifestos and their agitational journalism distributed to both Mexicans and Mexican Americans. At times as she writes about them riding from town to town, we can almost taste the dust in our mouths. Yet, good a read as the book is and as much information as it imparts, I believe Lytle Hernández fails to understand the fundamental political ideas of the *magonistas.*

Lytle Hernández believes that RFM and the *magonistas* only gradually and later in their political careers came to the anarchist politics that they espoused. She mentions their early encounter with Kropotkin, but doesn't mention Bakunin. In my view, James Cockcroft long ago made a convincing case that during their dearly imprisonment, RFM and his friends became Bakuninists, anarchists with a theory of a secret, elite vanguard meant to lead the revolution from above. However, they "all agreed to conceal" their politics. (Cockroft, *Precursors,* p. 115). They were duplicitous, telling the Mexican and Mexican American people, at least until 1910, that they were reformists, when in reality they were revolutionary anarchists.

Bakunin's revolutionary theory was elitist and authoritarian. As Bakunin himself wrote, "It is necessary in the midst of popular anarchy, which will constitute the very life and energy of the revolution, *unity of thought and revolutionary action should find an organ.* This must be the secret and worldwide association of the international brethren." The Marxist scholar Hal Draper comments on this passage, "This pattern of a secret elite of dictators bossing the revolution behind the backs of the anarchic masses *occurred over and over* in Bakunin's various drafts for his *secret* organ."[1]

In case you think Draper exaggerates, here's what Bakunin wrote this about his planned revolution in Bohemia in his famous 'Confession' of 1851:

> All clubs, newspapers, and all manifestations of an anarchy of mere talk were to be abolished, all submitted to one dictatorial power; the young people and all able-bodied men divided into categories according to their character, ability, and inclination were to be sent throughout the country to provide a provisional revolutionary and military organization. The secret society directing the revolution was to consist of three groups, independent of and unknown to each other: one for the townspeople, another for the youth, and a third for the peasants.

> Each of these societies was to adapt its action to the social character of the locality to which it was assigned. Each was to be organised on strict hierarchical lines, and under absolute discipline. These three societies were to be directed by a secret central committee composed of three or, at the most, five persons. In case the revolution was successful, the secret societies were not to be liquidated; on the contrary, they were to be strengthened and expanded, to take their place in the ranks of the revolutionary hierarchy.[2]

This is practically a description of the behavior of RFM and the *magonistas.* There was no place for democracy in their anarchist revolution. Lytle Hernández's neglect of Bakunin seriously weakens her understanding of RFM and the *magonistas*. Perhaps that is why this stirring narrative, even while acknowledging some of their faults, shares the excessive romanticization of RFM and his group.

While RFM popularized many of the ideas of anarcho-communism in some broad sense, he was an exemplar of Bakuninist vanguardism and authoritarianism and personally an intolerant and vicious political leader. Consequently, I find it difficult to agree with several of Lytle Hernández's political judgments. She notes that RFM outed Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza as a lesbian and lashed out at his male competitors in the PLM for being "perverts" and "pederasts," yet she calls him an "anarchist-feminist." (p. 211) When RFM puts an anti-Chinese clause in the PLM's 1906 program, she excuses him, writing, "He…likely disagreed with the platform's proposed ban on Chinese immigration." (p. 144) She says he was succumbing to pressure from his base, but we know that RFM made other sinophobic remarks at other times. While she portrays the PLM revolutionaries as

heroic, she recognizes that as opposed to Francisco Madero who was waiting for a political crisis, RFM had no plan. “Indeed, his only military strategy was a kind of prepared spontaneity.” (p. 149) Like some other anarchists, though the author does not discuss this concept, the PLM relied on the “propaganda of the deed,”[3] meaning that they expected their revolutionary actions to inspire others. But Lytle writes of the many assaults on towns, “…the PLM struck and the people did not revolt. So too in Mexicali. Local residents did not rush out to join the revolution.” (p. 284) When the political crisis comes, Francisco Madero calls for revolution and it breaks out in 1910, but RFM doesn’t return to Mexico to lead his forces, which then dissolve and consequently had little impact on events.

Lytle Hernández adds to the story one new element, the PLM’s influence on the Plan de San Diego uprising. The Plan was a manifesto distributed in 1915 calling for the redistribution of land to Mexicans, the indigenous, and Blacks. On July 9 that year fifty armed Mexicans crossed the border into Texas, murdered a few Anglos, and set off a horrific reaction in which the U.S. government sent 4,000 soldier to keep order while the Texas Rangers and white posses killed thousands of Mexicans and established the complete dominance of white property owners over Mexican and Black laborers. The poorly planned and ultimately disastrous uprising was very much in. keeping with the PLM’s earlier fiascos.

Lytle Hernández writes at the beginning of her book, “the revolution the *magonistas* sought to incite was successful.” I find this assertion surprising. While the PLM program of 1906 with its long list of progressive reforms did have a significant impact on political thought in Mexico and on future post-revolutionary legislation, the *magonistas* were absolutely unsuccessful. Their uprisings and assaults were a series of disasters, and when Madero actually launched the Revolution of 1910, RFM’s lack of political or military strategy condemned them to irrelevance. Madero even offered Magón the vice-presidency, which true to his anarchist beliefs, he turned down. The RFM and the *magonistas* fought for an anarchist revolution—no God, no state, no classes—but the revolution that happened perpetuated the capitalist economy and created a post-revolutionary one-party state stronger than the Díaz dictatorship. This was no victory for the *magonistas.*

Finally, while readers will be swept up in the story and appreciate the richness, nuances, and evocative character of this book, one has to ask if it fundamentally changes our understanding of RFM and the *magonistas.* In my view, for all of its new details, *Bad Mexicans* doesn’t provide a new perspective on the central characters, their story, and their politics, and it shares the dominant tendency to romanticize Ricardo Flores Magón.

Arise!

Christina Heatherton, author of *Arise! Global Radicalism in the Era of the Mexican Revolution*, is Assistant Professor of American Studies and director of the Racial Capitalism Working Group at the Center for the Study of Social Difference at Columbia University. She is also the co-editor of *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*.

Her new book *Arise!*, reminds me of the popular, prize-winning film also produced in 2022, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* written and directed by the Daniels (Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert). The book and the film, both with a multiplicity of dimensions, tell stories of events that interweave mundane and world-shaking events with tremendous enthusiasm to convince us of the interconnectedness of everything in the world and of the larger underlying significance of a universal struggle of good against evil. In the film a Chinese immigrant family that runs a laundromat finds itself at one level in a struggle with the IRS over taxes, but in the multiverse, they are in a struggle with people from the parallel Alpha-verse.

Similarly in *Arise!*, ordinary people—Black Americans, Mexicans, natives of Okinawa, and East Indians— some of them quite extraordinary really, find themselves involved in a fight against some particular local evil that the author asks us to see is also part of a worldwide struggle against capitalism. She shows the varieties of oppression—by class, race, and gender—and how all are shaped by capital, which also shapes the movements of resistance. These people and events are in Heatherton's imagination part of the same global movement, made up largely of people of color and often represented here by women, who, whether they recognize it or not, Heatherton believes, have become connected through world's capitalist economic system and the class struggles it generates. I am not convinced.

While the Mexican Revolution figures in the title, this is not fundamentally or mostly about Mexico which is here the point of origin for some of her characters, a destination for others, a brief stopover for yet others, characters who in their travels and struggles exemplify her notion of internationalism. Heatherton has written her book, as she says in the conclusion, "against impossibility." She wants to show us that throughout the twentieth century people around the world rose up and fought and that they can do it again. The point of her book is in the first word of the "Internationale," the workers anthem, and of her title, "Arise!"—and it is didactic. She is advocating revolution.

I sympathize with her desire and her goal. She wants her readers to rise up and she encourages them to do so by telling these tales and provides them examples of people she believes to have been internationalist in the past. She knows many stories—about the Mexican revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magón, the Okinawa immigrant Shinsei "Paul" Köchi, the Indian revolutionary M.N. Roy, the Russian revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai, the young Communist organizer Dorothy Healey, the Black American artist Elizabeth Catlett—and her stories are engaging. In several of the chapters about these people she provides remarkable detail. Yet, while providing historical detail, she does not provide historical specificity, that is, she does not give us the context to explain who here characters are and why they behave the way they do.

Though Heatherton promises to base her book on a Marxist political economy, once she has spent a chapter sketching the nature of capitalism and imperialism toward the beginning of the book, she is done with political economy which plays little explanatory role in the bigger story of internationalism that she tells. She does not provide an account of this period—or periods—of economic crises, wars, and revolutions to contextualize her stories. *Arise!* offers us no explanatory framework and no analysis of either revolutionary Mexico, around which many of her stories revolve, nor of the broader political trends of the period. While I share Heatherton's enthusiasm for this era (1900-1945) and her interest in Mexico, as well as her desire to encourage revolutionary internationalism, I believe her failure to explain the historical context means that she cannot provide us with an understanding of the politics of her characters and the political conflicts of the period.

Let us turn again to Ricardo Flores Magón, who is one of Heatherton's first representatives of internationalism, with his "belief in an international struggle." "Flores Magón," she writes, "recognize that a global revolutionary movement needed to simultaneously shatter the agreed-upon lines of racial hatred." He "proposed that the Mexican Revolution could inspire new global visions of liberation across the color line." (p. 95) In fact, however, as I have mentioned, Flores Magón harbored racist views towards the Chinese and had little confidence or interest in an alliance with American workers.

As already mentioned, RFM headed the Mexican Liberal Party and edited its newspaper *Regeneración.* On one occasion, the paper wrote about Cananea, the mining town where "the people have to put up with the insolence of the three thousand Yankees who live in Cananea and with the disgusting filth of the two thousand Chinese there, part of whom have monopolized the grocery business, while the others give themselves to their parasitic and ignoble lives."[4] In 1906 Ricardo

authored the PLM's Program and Manifesto which stated, "The prohibition of Chinese immigration is, above all, a measure of protection of workers of other nationalities, principally the Mexicans. The Chinese in in general ready to work for the lowest wages, submissive, mean in aspirations, he is a great obstacle to the prosperity of other workers. Their competition is fatal and it must be avoided in Mexico."[5]

Just as RFM despised the Chinese, he also held American workers in contempt. As he wrote to his brother Enrique:

> Americans are incapable of feeling either enthusiasm or indignation. This is really a nation of pigs. Look at the socialists, how they cracked in such a cowardly way in their campaign for freedom of speech. Look at the brilliant American Federation of Labor, which with its million and a half members can't stop the judges when they declare injunctions against the unions or when they send organizers to places where there is no organized labor movement. These attacks on socialists and unions are tremendous, but they don't move the people. Those without work are broken up and dispersed as in Russia; Roosevelt asks Congress to empower the administrator of the mails to exercise censorship over the newspapers: the nation is being militarized by giant steps but in spite of everything the Anglo-Saxon pachyderm doesn't become excited, doesn't become indignant, doesn't vibrate. If their domestic troubles don't agitate the Americans, can we expect them to care about ours?[6]

Flores Magón rejected the idea of working with American workers and planned, once he and his group took power, to invited Spanish, Italian and South American anarchists to come help them, having little faith in people of other nationalities or with any other political views.

Those were RFM's opinions, but one also has to analyze his practice, his actions, because but internationalism is not just a vague idea or a series of random experiences of individuals; it exists within a context of political visions, parties, programs and, if it is to be successful, of strategies. Let's look at Flores Magón's strategies. His principal goal among his larger global aspirations, was quite reasonably the overthrow of the Mexican government, and his strategy was to launch a series of insurrections by his Mexican Liberal Party carried out between 1906 and 1910. They were defeated in large part because of his party's failure to create a secure communications system, relying instead on the Mexican and U.S. postal systems, where the authorities opened mail, read it to learn their plans, and traced it to the leaders and organizers who were then arrested. (Lytle Hernández explains all of this in great detail in her book.) The uprisings were defeated with the deaths of many revolutionaries and the imprisonment of many of the leaders.

As discussed above, when the Mexican Revolution of November 1910 broke out, led by the liberal landlord and industrialist Francisco I. Madero, the event we think of as beginning of *the* Mexican Revolution, Ricardo Flores Magón did not return to Mexico to attempt to lead his anarchist forces there. Some think this was due to cowardice, but in any case, it was a major strategic failure. One might compare this to the Russian Revolution and ask oneself what would have happened if Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, both in exile, had not returned to their country to lead it. Francisco Madero even offered RFM the vice-presidency, and while it would surely have been short-lived and ultimately led to conflict between them, it would have given RFM and his group national publicity and a role in the center of Mexico at least for as long as it lasted. RFM could have rallied his forces, propagandized for his ideas, and organized to the revolution he really wanted. But, being an anarchist, he turned it down,

Amidst the PLM's several failed insurrections, one event in particular stands out as a particularly disastrous mistake. In 1911 the PLM together with members of the Industrial Workers of the World and a good number of soldiers of fortune attempted an invasion of Mexico and the seizure of the then tiny towns of Mexicali and Tijuana in Baja California. At the time all of northern Baja had less than 1,000 inhabitants and Tijuana only 100. The *magonistas* briefly took and held Tijuana, but the PLM leaders in Los Angeles were arrested while Francisco Madero, leader of the principal forces of the Mexican Revolution, sent troops to crush the anarchist invasion. The invasion of Baja California from the United States was a political stupidity. While the Magonistas never intended to separate Baja California from Mexico or to integrate it into the United States, many Mexicans were easily persuaded that the PLM-IWW was just another American imperialist venture, one that discredited the Flores Magón brothers and the PLM. Needless to say, whatever the sentiments of the IWW and PLM members who rode together into Tijuana, the venture did not further the ideals of internationalism.

Enough about Flores Magón. Heatherton uses her account of Alexandra Kollontai's brief stint as Soviet ambassador to Mexico primarily as an opportunity to talk about the diplomat's social welfare work in Soviet Russia and her famous views on "love-comradeship." Her tenure as ambassador was spoiled by events beyond her control. Kollontai wanted to keep a low profile, so she avoided carrying out Communist propaganda and agitation in Mexico—though she met with some feminist groups—and dedicated herself to promoting Soviet-Mexican trade relations. But it proved impossible because her predecessor, Ambassador Stanisław Pestkowski, had arranged before she arrived to get money from the Soviet Union to support a Mexica railroad workers' strike, a donation that arrived after he had left. The United States which only a few years before had carried out the first red scare raids, arrests, and deportations, waged a campaign against the role of Soviet Russia in Mexico. The Mexican government itself was also disturbed by the activities of the Soviet ambassadors. Claiming she was ill, Kollontai left Mexico and returned to Russia, the Soviet Union left the post unfilled. Clearly this is an example of a failed internationalism, as the author herself has said, but the reader has been given no explanation of the broader context of what has happened in Mexico and in the Soviet Union that could account for this disaster.

Heatherton hasn't explained that in Mexico, before Kollontai's arrival in 1926, Presidents Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles had succeeded with the help of their ally Luis N. Morones, the head of the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM) in defeating the anarchist, syndicalist, and Communist-led workers movement and had laid the basis for the establishment of a one-party capitalist state a few years later, in 1929 to be exact. While the late twenties were still a period of land seizures and of strikes, the great upheaval in Mexico was over and the nationalist government was consolidating. At the same time, in the Soviet Union, following the death of the Soviet Communist Party leader Vladimir Lenin in 1924, there had been a power struggle over who would succeed him. Joseph Stalin took power over the party, over the Soviet government, and over the Communist International. These two reactionary developments conditioned the limits of Kollontai's ambassadorship and her internationalism.

Once in power, Stalin gradually got rid of the Old Bolsheviks who had built the party and made the revolution, imprisoning them, having them killed, or sending them to the *gulags*. Yet Kollontai, who was one of the Old Bolsheviks and one of the rare women among the leaders, and who had moreover been in opposition to the party under Lenin and Stalin, somehow survived. Historian Beatrice Farnsworth writes, "Evidence, particularly her conversations with Stalin, suggests that Kollontai, struggling to prove that she was no longer an oppositionist, nurtured a dynamic with him, by playing a stereotypically female-gendered role, that helped save her life." She developed a close relationship with him, discussed personal matters, and sought his protection. Farnsworth adds, "While remarkably candid in many ways, after 1922 she never specifically criticized Stalin, nor the "cult of

personality, and she explicitly supported Stalin's General Line." When accused of being a Trotskyist, she was outraged—and no doubt also fearful—she "sought a meeting with Stalin in October 1926 and insisted that she did not share the oppositionist position but fully supported Stalin's General Line. Stalin knew, she reminded him, of her poor relations with Zinoviev and Trotsky."[7] Stalin's General Line in foreign affairs was one of Soviet nationalism at the expense of internationalism. Kollontai, through her obsequious behavior, not only survived but served as Stalin's Soviet ambassador in Mexico (1926–27), again in Norway (1927–30) and eventually in Sweden (1930–45). She thus ceased to be any kind of internationalist, but served the Soviet dictator and the Soviet government. Heatherton, however, never touches upon the contradictions of her position nor the ultimate destination of her career.

Let's look at another of Heatherton's internationalist heroes. The last third of the book, deals with Dorothy Healey and Elizabeth Catlett when they were activist in the 1930s and 1940s and discusses in passing some other members or fellow travelers of the Communist Party. We meet Dorothy Healey in the unemployed councils and in the struggles of the Communist farm workers unions working with Mexican workers. The strikes were really heroic and simultaneously tragic affairs, huge militant strikes met by bosses and politicians with massacres and the starvation of children.[8] Heatherton vastly exaggerates, however, when she writes romantically, "Working against the international collusion of capitalist and state entities, farmworkers and their families had learned that the class struggle was decidedly internationalist and, by necessity, waged across the capitalist division of the color line." (p. 130). But this was not the case, quite the contrary in fact. Historian Cletus E. Daniel in his account of the cotton strike writes:

> The several hundred, white [Dust Bowl] migrants taking part in the conflict represented an especially difficult problem. Union leaders found that while the whites brought to the strike a combative disposition that made them militant and courageous fighters, they also brought racial attitudes from their southern homelands that rendered them incapable of regarding their nonwhite collaborators in the struggle as equal. When added to the antagonism that had long existed between the Mexican and Filipino laborers, and the uniformly strong bias of all three groups toward the black workers taking part in the strike, the separatist mentality of white strikers presented union leaders with especially delicate problems of strike consolidation. Unable to find a ready solution to the dilemma, [organizer Sam] Darcy and his cohorts, were, he later wrote, "forced to let developments take their course for we found that by common consent, Negro as well as white, Mexican as well as Filipino, accepted the idea that they must each constitute a separate group within the strike."[9]

And what are we to make of the Communist organizers Communists like Healey appear through Heatherton's eyes as just other "internationalists," much like the Magonistas or Kollontai, all nice people fighting the good fight. The author, however, never provides the political context to really understand who these Communists were. Heatherton has virtually no discussion of the Communist Party, its history and its politics that shaped Healey and her comrades in those decades. She doesn't mention, as already noted, Stalin's overthrow of the workers' revolution in the Soviet Union, nor does she discuss the tens of thousands or Old Bolsheviks murdered, nor the rise of Great Russian chauvinism, and events such as the Holodomor, the horrors of the forced collectivization of agriculture and Stalin's intentional starvation of Ukraine leaving millions dead.[10] We don't see the twists and turns of the Third Period, the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and the Popular Front. She doesn't discuss Hitler and Stalin dividing Poland or Stalin's invasion of Finland. She doesn't discuss how Stalin subordinated the Communist International and parties around the world, including the CP USA, turning it from internationalism and making it simply an arm of the Soviet Union's nationalism

and its foreign policy. Yet these are the circumstances that shaped Healey and her comrades. Throughout all of this the CP USA and members like Healey supported Stalin and followed his orders.

On the domestic front in the United States, we don't learn about the Communists domestic policies during World War II, such as supporting the no-strike pledge or about their dropping their fight for Black civil rights. Her verse-jumping, as the Daniels call it in *Everything Everywhere All at Once,* in her case between the alternative universes of Los Angeles, Chicago, Mexico City, doesn't bring her into contact with Chester Himes or Richard Wright, who would have differed with Heatheron's rosy picture of Communist internationalism.

Dorothy Healey was no doubt an idealistic and brave young woman in the 1930s, but she became a Communist Party cadre, a loyal Stalinist. In California, she became one of the party's few prominent women leaders. "We knew with absolute conviction that we were part of a vanguard that was destined to lead an American working class to a socialist revolution," she wrote. To Communists at that time, a "socialist revolution" meant the creation of a government and society like that in the Soviet Union, a one-party state that owned and controlled the economy and dominated the labor unions and social movements. When in February 1956 Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev revealed Stalin's crimes and violence, Healey began to question the Communist Party. As she wrote,

> What was devastating—and at the same time liberating—about listening to the Khrushchev speech was that it severed the bond that kept us in subordination to the Soviet communist leaders for all those years. Just as rank-and-file members of our own Party looked to the American Communist leaders as perfect beings incapable of error, we had taken the same attitude to the Soviet leaders. They knew what they were doing in the Soviet Union and by extension must know what was best for us to do in the United States. We had surrendered our capacity to think independently, to look at reality and say this is what's happening and this isn't.[11]

Still Healey stayed in the Communist Party, even after the Khrushchev speech and even after the Soviet Union crushed the Hungarian Revolution in late 1956, believing that she could reform it. Not until Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev send Soviet tanks into Czechoslovakia to crush the Prague Spring reform movement did Healey leave the party, later joining the New American Movement which merged with other leftists to form the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee that later became the Democratic Socialist of America (DSA). Heatherton—who read Healey's memoir—never told us that Healey later looked back on her years in the CP, from the 1930 to 1970, as one of intellectual and political subordination to the Soviet Union and the CP USA, where she had lost her own ability to think critically and to independently take a position in which she believed.

While Heatherton strings them together as internationalists one and all, anarchists like Flores Magón and Communists like Healey were not part of some universal, internationalist struggle for a better world. After 1918, anarchists organized to overthrow the Soviet government in Russia. Stalinists assassinated the anarchists in Spain in the 1930s. These "internationalists" did not share the same ideals, methods, or goals.

Finally, since this is *Arise!* where Mexico is a kind of touchstone, international revolution is the main theme, and the period extends from 1900 to roughly 1945, one is surprised that she didn't include in her cast of characters Leon Trotsky and his wife Natalia Sedova who were in Mexico at the time, as well perhaps as their erstwhile friend and comrade Victor Serge. All were internationalists, more consistently internationalists I would argue, than most of Heatherton's crew,

but to meet them the author would have had to verse-jump to another poetical universe.

One's fondness for any book goes beyond appreciating the author's research and writing and apart from its politics, is ultimately a matter of taste. While I admire the political values of these two scholars, I don't find either of these books satisfying because they like many other authors perpetuate the romantic view of Ricardo Flores Magón. James Cockcroft's *Mexico's Revolution then and Now* might win the prize for such romantic interpretations of RFM. I feel that books like these provide young would-be revolutionaries with dangerous elitist notions of vanguardism, a glamorization of revolutionary violence, and disdain for political analysis and strategic thinking.

I suppose that is why, after reading these two books, I would still prefer Claudio Lomnitz's *The Return of Ricardo Flores Magón*, despite the rather too harsh a review I wrote of it when it appeared in 2014. I prefer Lomnitz, who also admires RFM, because his book does many of the things that Lytle and Heatherton do or attempt—putting the book in a transnational context, recognizing the Mexican Americans and women—but also because it is a rumination: thoughtful, speculative, critical, dubious, and ambivalent. His book leaves us like him, I think, wondering what in the end we think of the story, and may make us desire better heroes and ideals.

Notes

[1] Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Vol. III, p. 146.

[2] Mikhail Bakunin, *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, edited by Sam Dolgoff. Preface by Paul Avrich (New York: Random House) pp. 69-70.

[3] Bakunin, *Bakunin on Anarchy,* pp. 195-96.

[4] Letter cited in: Claudio Lomnitz. *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón* (New York: Zone Books, 2014), p. 133.

[5] Programa del Partido Liberal Mexicano y Manifiesto a la Nación, at: http://www.ordenjuridico.gob.mx/Constitucion/CH6.pdf My translation.

[6] Flores Magón, *Correspondencia*, Letter 238, pp. 372-79. My translation.

[7] Beatrice Farnsworth, "Conversing with Stalin, Surviving the Terror: The Diaries of Aleksandra Kollontai and the Internal Life of Politics," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Winter 2010), pp. 944-970.

[8] See the account of these strikes in Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), Chapter 4, "The Great Upheaval" and Chapter 5, "The Cotton Strike."

[9] Daniel, *Bitter Harvest,* p. 185.

[10] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p42. He writes: "In the waning weeks of 1932, facing no external security threat and no challenge from within, with no conceivable justification except to prove the inevitability of his rule, Stalin chose to kill millions of people in Soviet Ukraine. … Though collectivization was a disaster everywhere in the Soviet Union, the evidence of clearly premediated mass murder on the scale of millions is most evident in Soviet Ukraine."

[11] Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers: A Life in the Communist Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 154. Also published in 1991 under the title

California Red: *Dorothy Healey Remembers: A Life in the Communist Party.*