

Cockcroft: Mexico's Revolution Then and Now

January 19, 2011

James Cockcroft, *Mexico's Revolution Then and Now* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 160 pages.

James D. Cockcroft's *Mexico's Revolution Then and Now*, written for the centennial of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, is a radical scholar's guide to radical Mexico and well worth the read. Both a scholar and a political activist, Cockcroft writes as a partisan of oppressed and exploited and an opponent of capitalism. Inspired in large measure by the thought of Ricardo Flores Magón, Mexico's anarchist revolutionary of the beginning of the last century, the book is, on the one hand, a breathlessly romantic account of the struggle for justice, and, on the other hand, the story of the defeat of the movement, punctuated with dark passages describing the repression of the past and the difficulties facing the nation today.

One could look at this little book as the condensation of what are the three most important of Cockcroft's books on Mexico written over the last 40 years: 1) *Intellectual Precursors of the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1913*; 2) *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation and the State*; and, 3) *Mexico's Hope: An Encounter with Politics and History*. Retracing the major themes of his earlier and more theoretical books, the author wants us to recognize the anarchist and libertarian roots of the Mexican Revolution, to understand that its history has been the history of class struggle between capital and labor, and to see and appreciate the role of women and the indigenous people in this complex history.

The author's sympathy for the underdogs, his admiration for the *luchadores sociales* (the social strugglers), and his enthusiasm for revolutionary change carry the reader along at a dizzying pace. At times, Cockcroft seems to suggest that Mexico in 2010 is not so different in some ways from the Mexico of 1910. And one might be swept along by that analogy to think that we are on the brink of revolution in Mexico today. Yet Cockcroft also recognizes the reality of the current situation, as he writes: "Mexico's new popular protests are mainly defensive, however much they are spiced by calls for a 'revolutionary offensive,' a 'Constituent Assembly,' and 'national sovereignty.' Right now the correlation of forces does not favor the protestors." The reasons are the power of capital, conservative trends in the society, the corrupt official labor unions, and divisions on the left. Things could be changed by a sudden and unforeseen explosion, he concedes, but, "With or without such sudden turning points, the struggle in Mexico will be long and hard." And in another passage he writes, "One thing is clear: there are no easy or obvious solutions when so many factors are complicating the situation nationally and internationally."

While it is written in accessible prose, readers who are not familiar with modern Mexico may find it challenging because of the densely packed pages filled with the scores of names of activists and political leaders, dozens of important happenings, and allusions to various interpretations of those events. Unlike Cockcroft's earlier books which raise and develop important economic, social and political ideas, this book only alludes to political ideas and social theory—a brief description of anarchism, a reference to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, emphasis on the importance of feminism and the role of native peoples, the absolute necessity of internationalism—hardly stopping to explain the references. The book is a tightly packed compendium of Mexico's revolutionary history which will no doubt encourage readers to study Cockcroft's weightier tomes mentioned above.