

## **Magón, Ricardo Flores (1874–1922) and the Magonistas**

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Magonism designates a social movement as well as a certain school of libertarian theory, named after the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón. The organizational core of Magonism was the Partido Liberal de México (Liberal Party of Mexico, PLM), founded in the US on September 5, 1905 in St. Louis, Missouri. Although the Magonists took their public discourse from liberalism, the group embraced an anarchist political philosophy and strategy. The Magonists were one of the most influential radical currents during the Mexican Revolution (1910–21).

Ricardo Flores Magón was born in San Antonio Eloxochitlán on September 16, 1874 in Oaxaca, Mexico. If the area from which he came was not the center of his activities, it nonetheless played a role in forming his thoughts and actions. The democratic, non-hierarchic organizational forms of political and everyday life in Oaxaca's indigenous communities exerted an enormous influence on Magón's ideas and philosophy. Moreover, his work and political activism were influenced by the works of the nineteenth-century anarchists Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Peter Kropotkin, and Mikhail Bakunin as well as by anarchist contemporaries such as Errico Malatesta, Florencio Bazora, Emma Goldman, and Elisée Reclus. These anarchist influences were crucial for the transformation of Magón's

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political thinking from radical reformism into revolutionary anarchism.

Most studies of Flores Magón's life connect it directly to his political goals and the movement named after him. In speaking about Magón, then, it is hard to avoid speaking about Magonism. The phases of his life seem to coincide with those of the movement. Scholars have divided Magonist history into three primary periods: (1) 1904–6, when the movement constituted itself; (2) 1906–8, when the movement expanded and engaged in rebellions and uprisings; and (3) 1910–13 and the onset of the Mexican Revolution. In the first phase, when the PLM was founded, the Magonist movement fought for a socially conscious state that would intervene to improve the living conditions of workers and peasants and facilitate their exercise of constitutional rights. After 1904, Flores Magón spent most of his time in the US, much of it in a series of prisons.

The second phase, comprising the years from 1906 to 1908, saw the movement grow and instigate several uprisings, both near the US border and in southern Mexican states such as Veracruz. Both authors consider this period the peak of the movement. Organized in five sections all over Mexico, the Magonist guerilla groups initiated various uprisings in an attempt to spark a general insurgency against the Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz. Also during this time, the radicalization from liberalism to anarchism was accomplished. Magonists were also involved in various strike activities of the workers' movement.

The third phase begins with the Mexican Revolution 1910/1911 and ends with Magón's death on November 21, 1922 at the US Federal Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. In 1918, he had been sentenced to prison for violating the Espionage Act of 1917 ("obstructing the war effort"). Trejo (2006) points out the specific importance of Magonism's role during the first years (1910–13) of the Mexican Revolution. The slogan "Tierra y Libertad" ("Land and Freedom"), later adopted by Emiliano Zapata, first appeared in the Magonist newspaper *Regeneración* (Regeneration). In 1911, the Mexican state Baja California was temporarily under Magonist control.

Unlike liberals, the Magonists opposed private property and their fight was explicitly anti-capitalist. Unlike other anarchists, they focused on the question of land. The rural situation in Mexico was considered the key problem to be

addressed by revolutionary action, as expropriation seemed an adequate anti-capitalist measure, and peasant and indigenous organizational forms were regarded as more democratic than state institutions. Another difference from other anarchist currents, according to Trejo, was that the Magonists put their claim of "libertarian transnationalism" into effective practice. They built extensive contacts with socialists and anarchists in the US, where the PLM's headquarters were based until 1911, and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the PLM supported each other in their particular battles.

Over the entire period, the social composition of the Magonist movement was rather heterogeneous, consisting of Mexican and American workers, peasants, indigenous people, and intellectuals. From 1913 on, the Magonist movement faltered. On one hand, the Magonists were suppressed even by the first revolutionary government under the liberal Francisco Madero. On the other, they refused to enter alliances with other radicals. Thus, Trejo contends that it is a misjudgment to classify Pancho Villa, the leader of the revolutionary northern army (División del Norte), as a "keeper of bourgeois interests." The Magonists also declined due to divisions and internecine conflict within the movement.

Even if the original Magonist movement failed, Magón's philosophy has to this day been an important component of the revolutionary history of Mexico. Today, several initiatives and activist groups, indigenous and rural as well as urban, are influenced by Flores Magón's ideas and practice their politics under his name. For instance, one of the autonomous regions controlled by the Zapatista Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) in the state of Chiapas is called Ricardo Flores Magón. In the state of Oaxaca, organizations such as the Indigenous Organization for Human Rights in Oaxaca (Organización Indígena para los Derechos Humanos en Oaxaca, OIDHO) and the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca-Ricardo Flores Magón (Consejo Indígena Popular de Oaxaca-Ricardo Flores Magón, CIPO-RFM) make reference to Magonist concepts. Also explicitly Magonist is the anarchist magazine *Autonomía: Periódico de Pensamiento y Crítica Anarquista*, published in Mexico City.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism, Mexico; Industrial Workers of the World (IWW); Mexican Revolution of 1910–

1921; Villa, Pancho (ca. 1878–1923) and the Division of the North; Zapata, Emiliano (1879–1919) and the Comuna Morelense; Zapatismo; Zapatistas, EZLN, and the Chiapas Uprising

#### References and Suggested Readings

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