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ANOTHER UTOPIA IN YUCATAN

A Topsy-Turvy Land. Where the Poor Exploit the Rich—No Wonder Our Capitalists Wanted Intervention.

(By Robert Haberman)

I do solemnly swear to tell the truth and nothing but the truth; but I can't tell the whole truth about Yucatan. Gulliver himself wouldn't be equal to such a task. Yucatan is upside down, inside out and hind end to. Everything that can't happen anywhere happens there. It is the finest country you ever saw—and the rottenest. It all depends on who you are.

If you are a capitalist, accustomed to exploiting workingmen, you will agree that Yucatan is rotten. If you are a workingman your verdict may be different. The capitalists don't exploit the working men in Yucatan. The working people exploit the capitalists.

If you are not a Socialist you will be terribly lonely in Yucatan. If you are one, you will be terribly confused. Ninety-nine and sixty-five hundredths per cent of the voters voted the Socialist ticket at a special election while I was there; but not one per cent of them ever heard of Karl Marx, Economic Determinism, Surplus Value or any other of the famous Reds.

With practically everybody a Socialist, Yucatan has not adopted Socialism. It hasn't even instituted Government ownership. Its one industry is "owned" by the capitalists—who don't seem to have a thing to say in regard to its management.

If you are a pacifist in the usual sense of the term, you will be shocked out of your senses by the situation in Yucatan. There the army runs everything. Almost every army officer holds a civil office, too.

If you are a militarist, you will be equally shocked, for almost all the army officers are Socialists and anti-militarists.

If you should happen to be a Russian revolutionist, and if you helped win the freedom for your country by overthrowing the Czar, Yucatan will give you a political headache. In Yucatan it was the Czar who rebelled. It was the Czar who rose as one man against the conditions of slavery and insisted that the people should be free whether they wanted to or not. It was he who demanded that the people rule. It was he who insisted on liberty, equality and fraternity; for he is a Socialist Czar—Gen. Salvador Alvarado, Military Governor of Yucatan under Gen. Carranza.

Now, as I said before, I am perfectly well aware that none of these things can happen. But they did. And here are a few of the results:

In Yucatan common laborers get from \$5 to \$10 a day. The capitalists get nothing—or just as near to nothing as Gen. Alvarado can figure it.

Any worker may quit his job in Yucatan, but he can't get discharged. At least, if he is discharged, he is pretty sure to get from one to three months' pay in advance and free transportation to any part of the province where he wants to work.

In order to get a job a man must belong to the union. The president of the railroad, by the way, is a union agitator and strong for this by-law of the organization. He must join the union before going to work, as the railroad workers are not organized along the lines of the American brotherhoods, but on one radical

industrial organization similar to the I. W. W.

The people of Yucatan, the common people, are the happiest people I have ever seen. The capitalists are the gloomiest gang I ever knew. Their one product is in great demand. Never were there such prices offered for it. The American harvester industry is practically dependent for its existence upon this Yucatan product, a product which can be grown nowhere else in the world, and for which there are no substitutes. And yet, the capitalists of Yucatan, with millions invested in the industry, cannot dispose of their product in the public market. They have to sell it to the State, to Gen. Alvarado's Socialist Government, at the price the buyers stipulate. The State then sells it in the open market and the returns are wonderful.

This product is hennequin. The soil of Yucatan is too poor to grow anything else. If the soil were fit for anything else, it would not grow the right sort of hennequin; the growth would be so rank that it would not have the tough fiber which is essential; for hennequin is the plant from which practically all our binder cord used in harvesting, is made.

It may almost be said that the wheat industry of the United States is dependent upon this precious product of Yucatan. It is no wonder, then, that the fortunes of Yucatan, until they struck this unheard-of catastrophe, were famous throughout the world. Hennequin was one of the choicest bonanzas on earth and the owners of the great estates lived in more than royal magnificence. Now there is scarcely a land owner in Yucatan who wouldn't be glad to sell out. But who wants to buy? Who, at least, wants to pay anything that looks like a fair price for land tied up with such restrictions? The best they can do is to hope and pray for a return of the good old days of Diaz or Huerta—and vote 35-100th of 1 per cent strong, against the damnable Socialists.

When Gen. Alvarado came to Yucatan about two years ago, he found all this magnificence still in flower, in spite of the troublous state of war. He also found something else. He found a race of slaves, perhaps the most degraded slaves on the face of the earth.

The Indian laborers worked in the hennequin fields practically without pay. If they didn't work fast enough, they were beaten—occasionally clubbed to death or tortured in a hundred other ways, as an object lesson in industry. Thousands of them were wearing chains as they worked—chains about their ankles that frequently cut through to the bone. The magnificent landlords were entirely satisfied with the system. That was what an Indian was for, evidently—to be beaten if he didn't work. It was better, they thought, than the wage system. It kept a man at his job and they weren't forever bothered with hiring new batches of help. So the Indians worked, half-naked and half-nourished, on tortillas, chili and beans. And the magnificent fortunes grew.

Not all the employers were cruel. There were good employers and bad. If any employee didn't produce the goods, a bad employer would kick him in the eye. A good employer would only kick him in the neck. It was only natural, then, that the slaves generally accepted their lot as a personal matter and did not rebel against the system. The good

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rich men, besides, built many churches, some of the most magnificent churches, in the world. They didn't build schools so that anyone would notice it, as hennequin pickers don't need an education.

But Gen. Alvarado, with the Government of Yucatan suddenly thrust upon him, was the strangest sort of man. He didn't care much for Mexican millionaires as he had seen them, but he passionately loved the down-and-outs, especially the Maya Indians. He was more than a soldier and more than an executive. He was an idealist and a scholar. He had heard of Karl Marx, Surplus Value and all the others, and he decided that he would put a little of Karl Marx into Yucatan and take a lot of surplus value out.

There were a good many Socialists even then in Yucatan. "Land, Liberty and Justice" was their cry, but they finally cut this down to "Land and Liberty," concluding that with such a combination justice ought to be able to look out for herself. They had had no chance with the vote, so most of them had expressed their convictions by joining the various up-

risings. Eventually the leaders among them became officers in the revolutionary army.

There were few Socialists among the Maya slaves. They were crushed beyond the power to revolt and their one solace was to get drunk at the private "still" which was connected with every ranch. Many devotees of liberty were drinkers, too, and they were hardly prepared for Gen. Alvarado's program.

This is what Gen. Alvarado did. He proclaimed freedom. He proclaimed slavery a crime. He issued orders that all workers must be paid sufficient wages to sustain them in not only the necessities but the reasonable luxuries of life, and that in the determination of such compensation, each was to be considered as the head of a family. He made it a crime to discharge a man without reasonable grounds and instituted a Labor Department in the Government which should be the final arbiter of such dismissal. He destroyed all the "stills." He prohibited the manufacture of all strong liquor, but allowed the sale of beer. He prohibited bull-fighting and all gambling, making

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