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# THE DIVIDED CALIFORNIAS: SAN FRANCISCO AND THE 1911 BAJA CALIFORNIA REBELLION

*Jeffrey David Mitchell*

THE study of the 1911 Rebellion in Baja California del Norte, a Mexican peninsula on the Pacific Coast best known to Americans for the region's enclave of expatriates, locates an event from the early twentieth century that provides a glimpse into how a nation's social, political, and economic patterns affect another nation. In this case, the rebellion reflects the dynamics of interdependence between Mexico and the United States. Concentrated attention reveals attempts by labor, business, and political groups in both nations to form alliances, but who found themselves eventually ensnared by events in their own nation. The failure to close ranks with one another illuminates the true power of national ambitions and the fitful experiences of potential transnational alliances.

With an eye on the larger picture, the rebellion stands as much more than a moment in time when American California was ascendant over Mexican California, or when disturbances in Mexico affected the United States. Through newspaper reports, the statements of labor organizations, and the general consensus of national politicians, a study of the 1911 Rebellion can attempt to give all of the above perspectives. An examination of these sources, read by people interested in a conflict far from their homes, presents a picture of how San Francisco's labor organizations supported social change and justice. They did so in their home city, and throughout the state. In their fight against business leaders, they even addressed the collusion between capital and imperialism in other countries, such as Mexico. Yet their aversion to radical politics hamstrung their full commitment to change in Mexico. Ironically, the business leaders they opposed in the United States also had interests in Mexico. When they failed to support radical revolutionary change in Mexico, which the 1911 Rebellion represented, labor organizations in American California failed to complete the struggle against American-owned businesses in Mexico's California. In many ways, this

failure to close ranks between the “two Californias” represented the aversion that the large industrial labor organizations had with radical politics and how, consequently, this aversion was part of the fragile peace between labor and capital in early twentieth-century America.

Once treated by both American and Mexican historians as a mere sideshow of the Mexican Revolution due to the rebellion’s appearance as an episode of American filibustering, the conflict’s true nature has recently been reevaluated.<sup>1</sup> Yet most accounts of the actual fighting, the real nitty-gritty blood and guts detail that military aficionados love, has a chronology that is more or less undisputed. From January 29, 1911, when the rebels captured the Mexican town of Mexicali, to May 9, when Tijuana fell to the rebel onslaught, success favored those who fought the badly provisioned and commanded federal forces. Success in any regard, measured in the capture of federally held towns, was largely dictated by financial necessity. When the U.S. Army entered the border town of Calexico, and prevented rebels from purchasing supplies, the Welshman Caryl Ap Rhys Pryce, commander of American and European volunteers in the “Foreign Legion,” drove deeper and deeper into Baja California in order to refurbish his diminishing stocks of food and ammunition—and money.<sup>2</sup>

When Pryce went to Los Angeles to request more money from the rebellion’s leaders, Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón, the high point of the rebellion ended and the second phase soon began. Pryce’s advice, that the rebellion should disband and accept the revolutionary government of Mexico led by Francisco Madero, ended the Welshman’s influence with the Flores Magóns. On May 24, they issued a manifesto for the continuation of the rebellion. With Pryce’s removal from the fold of the leadership—as well as his absence from the contested battlefield of Baja California—the Foreign Legion split up into two factions, those who wanted to wait and see what Madero would offer and those who promised to continue the fight under the Flores Magón’s manifesto. With no

<sup>1</sup> Filibustering is when citizens of a nation, with or without the consent of their government, launch an armed invasion of an independent nation with the intent to start a revolution that, in some cases, leads to the annexation of a portion of territory, or the entire nation, by the filibusterers’ native country. The best example of filibustering in United State history is the war between Mexico and American settlers that led to the independence of the Republic of Texas in 1836. Most important to consider, was the unsuccessful filibustering invasion of Baja California and Sonora by the American William Walker in 1853. Baja California was the site of repeated filibustering expeditions by American military and business adventurers.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence D. Taylor, “The Magonista Revolt in Baja California: Capitalist Conspiracy or Rebellion de los Pobres?” *Journal of San Diego History* 45, no. 1 (Winter 1999).

funding, however, this faction had few options. They looked for allies who could finance them.

This activity brought them into contact with an American businessman named Richard “Dick” Ferris, whom they believed represented rich Americans who wanted to annex Baja California. Under the impression that they had rich allies, this faction of the Foreign Legion proclaimed it the “Republic of Lower California” on June 2 in the hopes of attracting attention in the United States. They elicited attention, though not the type they intended, as the rest of the rebel forces committed to Flores Magón’s manifesto chased Ferris’s supporters out of Baja California. With a new leader, Jack Mosby, the Foreign Legion watched as the rest of the rebels, the First Division, surrendered to Madero’s Peace Commission on June 17. Outnumbered by federal troops almost three to one, Mosby led his forces into a three-and-a-half-hour-long fight on June 22 that ended with their rout and subsequent ignominious retreat back to the United States, where American troops arrested them as soon as they crossed the border. Their Mexican and Indian allies, native tribes from the peninsula, stayed behind to continue the fight, and with allies in the United States, mounted border raids until 1914.<sup>3</sup>

This chronology only hints at the connections between groups in Mexico and the United States. Recently, explaining the more dynamic nature of the 1911 Rebellion has usually meant discussing radical ideologies from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Viewing the event as a socialist filibuster, an explanation consistent with how most twentieth-century observers described the fighting, gives a degree of insight into the events of the rebellion. Peter Gerhard’s 1946 work provides a comprehensive narrative.<sup>4</sup> While Gerhard never questioned why, thirty years after the fighting, the historical community still called the revolutionaries “socialists,” his approach alludes to another compelling question. Just as any study is correct to focus on contemporaries’ descriptions of the rebellion, so too should newer works reflect on the underlying motivations of the people who defined the 1911 Rebellion as a socialist revolution.

A more thorough explanation can be found in Lowell L. Blaisdell’s work in the 1960s. In his 1962 monograph *The Desert Revolution*, he put the conflict in context of social forces in southern California, and showed how *alta* California’s economic growth as a state collided with political changes in Mexico, creating an explosion of radicalism in Baja Califor-

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gerhard, “The Socialist Invasion of Baja California, 1911,” *Pacific Historical Review* 15, no. 3 (Sept. 1946): 295–304.

nia.<sup>5</sup> His narrative described a powerful strain of Mexican political radicalism that threatened the rise of agribusiness in southern California's Imperial Valley and, simultaneously, American properties in Baja California's Mexicali Valley. These two regions were separated by a political border, but were bound by a natural landscape of desert aridity, fertile silt-bottom lands, and the allure of transported water from the nearby Colorado River. Agriculture boomed in this area—and American landowners in both regions saw no reason why the boom time should cease. Mexican radicals threatened Americans' dreams of cotton fields underneath the white-hot sun, nestled beside barely moving canals of cheap and abundant water.

Even as Blaisdell elaborated on these themes more succinctly in an earlier 1954 article, "Was It Revolution or Filibustering?" his choice for the title captures the varied meanings behind observers' descriptions of 1911.<sup>6</sup> More interests possibly existed in the conflict than just the presence of revolutionaries. In 1966, Blaisdell wrote an article about Harry Chandler, co-editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, and the allegations that he supported an armed invasion of Baja California.<sup>7</sup> Blaisdell's research as a whole indicated, though not directly, that socialism could not solely explain the 1911 Rebellion. The private interests of Americans, in this case corporate interests, were exploitative forces that aroused armed revolt, and more importantly, threatened the promise of social justice. These social forces, explained by fiery political radicalism, did not just manifest themselves in Baja California but also in American California—*alta* California. As Americans played a role in exploiting the region, other Americans chose to fight the bonds of exploitation that tied together what Blaisdell called the "two Californias."

In the pursuit of continued examinations of the rebellion, many newer works look at the Flores Magón brothers, Ricardo and Enrique, and their anarchist ideologies. To understand the concept of *floresmagónismo* and the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM), an organization committed to democratic reform and a modern Mexico, wisdom argues for a fuller examination of these chief leaders and founders. Monographs by W. Dirk Raat and James Sandos stand together in their appreciation for the legacy of political radicalism in pre-revolutionary Mexico.<sup>8</sup> These

<sup>5</sup> Lowell L. Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> Lowell L. Blaisdell, "Was It Revolution or Filibustering? The Mystery of the Flores Magón Revolt in Baja California," *Pacific Historical Review* 23, no. 2 (May 1954): 147–164.

<sup>7</sup> Lowell L. Blaisdell, "Harry Chandler and Mexican Border Intrigue, 1914–1917," *Pacific Historical Review* 35, no. 4 (Nov. 1966): 385–393.

<sup>8</sup> W. Dirk Raat, *Revoltosos: Mexico's Rebels in the United States, 1903–1923* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1981); James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Border-*

works also highlight the connections that developed between the Flores Magón brothers and American labor groups, especially after the two Mexican anarchists fled from the Mexican president, Porfirio Díaz, and made the United States their home with a renewed passion to bring democratic change to their home country. Their connections with radicals such as Emma Goldman and Eugene V. Debs helped spread the PLM's message, not just to Mexicans in the homeland and in the United States, but to radical American labor organizations, chiefly the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Like Blaisdell did earlier, both Raat and Sandos cover the activity between the *floresmagónistas*, the followers of the Flores Magón brothers, and other American radicals in Los Angeles, California—the command base for the PLM “Junta” during the 1911 Rebellion.

However, the previously mentioned works fail to adequately cover the activity in the other major region of *alta* California, San Francisco, and the inhabitants' reactions to events in Baja California. To focus on the city requires a study of the period during the early twentieth century. While Robert W. Cherny and William Issel's 1986 study does not mention the conflict in Mexico, their focus on power, politics, and urban development describes San Francisco in the last period of its uncontested position as the premier city in the American West.<sup>9</sup> While not wholly discounting Roger Lotchin's “Darwinian competition” model for explaining San Francisco's impetus for growth on the Pacific Coast, the authors suggest a more nuanced explanation, in that business leaders financed commercial opportunities in Los Angeles and San Diego, and San Francisco unions worked to organize workers in the Southland.<sup>10</sup> The interests of San Francisco leaders in southern California highlight the regional connections in American California, and expose the northern city's attention to activities in the south, a pivotal region in the story of *floresmagónismo* and the 1911 Rebellion.

Gray Brechin's *Imperial San Francisco* examines the tangled interests of the men who owned the city's major newspapers, press magnates like William Randolph Hearst and John Spreckels.<sup>11</sup> San Francisco publications betrayed their own interests when they reported the fighting in

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*lands, Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904–1923* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Cherny and William Issel, *San Francisco, 1865–1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 202–203. As the two authors further explain Lotchin's analysis, “leaders of business, unions, and civic affairs set aside differences . . . for the commercial primacy of the Pacific Slope” (203). The works they cite are listed in “Notes” (259 n. 8).

<sup>11</sup> Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Baja California. Brechin's mention of William Randolph Hearst's extensive properties in Mexico, and later comments about the appeal of conquering a weakened revolutionary-era Mexico, cannot fully explain the notice that Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner* gave to the fighting on January 31, 1911. More telling is the subject of the article, the justification for sending United States troops to the border "to prevent armed expeditions from crossing into Mexico."<sup>12</sup> While Brechin devotes little attention to Hearst's opinion of the Mexican Revolution, the publisher opposed any liberal revolution in Mexico, and saved his most ferocious attacks for Ricardo Flores Magón.<sup>13</sup>

On the other side of the divide between American businessmen and Mexican revolutionaries, there stood the labor organizations of San Francisco. By all intents and purposes, these groups fell onto the side that opposed the efforts of men like Hearst. Where they differed with one another, but ultimately found a common cause, bears mentioning. Labor unions involved in the fields of transportation fell under the aegis of the Labor Council (LC). The Coast Seamen's Union, later to become the Sailor's Union, stood out as the most prominent, along with the Longshoremen's Union. When Mayor James D. Phelan sided with employers during the 1901 City Front Federation Strike, the LC ran its own candidate and won the 1901 election as the Union Labor Party. This caused a split with many of the labor organizations in the construction industry, organized as the Building Trades Council (BTC). With all the unions that belonged inside the federated LC, the numerical superiority should have given the LC dominance. The BTC would prove the more powerful entity, however.<sup>14</sup>

Led by Patrick Henry McCarthy, an Irish immigrant and president of the core member of the BTC, Carpenters Local 22, the BTC dominated the construction trade in San Francisco. McCarthy used his connections with powerful building companies in the city to wield a highly disciplined labor organization. While some of his members did, in fact, flirt with radicalism, it was McCarthy's willingness to work with contractors that gave him great leverage and greater power. But he was no revolutionary, interested in the overthrow of the system. He wanted to preserve

<sup>12</sup> "US Troops Sent by War Secretary," *San Francisco Examiner*, 31 January 1911, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Colin MacLachlan points out how Hearst played an important role in an earlier incarceration of Ricardo, saying, "lawyers justified holding the men [PLM] incommunicado by citing a series of articles in the local Hearst newspaper, the *Examiner*, which claimed that Flores Magón directed broader violence from his jail cell" (88). Colin MacLachlan, *Anarchism and the Mexican Revolution: The Political Trials of Ricardo Flores Magón in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

the system, as long as it worked for labor. This was important and partly why, by the early twentieth century, the rift between the LC and BTC had started to close.<sup>15</sup>

This willingness to come together for a common cause, their own shared interests in the state of labor in San Francisco—the very preservation of power—would allow the LC and BLC to reach the same conclusion over the revolution in Mexico, the meaning of the rebellion in Baja California, and whom to support in the coming conflagration. Would it be Francisco I. Madero, the American-educated middle-class Mexican who wanted nothing more than to unseat Díaz and replace him as president of Mexico? After all, Madero represented the new sector of Mexico's growing society, recently industrialized, strained by corruption and inefficiency, who hoped to reform the nation and take full advantage of the promise of free-market capitalism. Men like Madero increasingly looked to the United States for support. Would they find it? Or would the new leader of Mexico look like Ricardo Flores Magón, someone who once had fallen in with the moderates who merely looked to change presidents and not the system, but had always deep in his heart wanted to completely change Mexican society? The more and more Flores Magón attempted to fight Díaz, the more he wanted to eradicate the system that kept the majority of Mexico poor and powerless. Flores Magón, like his brother Enrique, and like so many other Mexican radicals in labor organizations and political parties, wanted a radical revolution; and as they turned their eyes to the ideas of socialism and anarchism in Europe, they also looked to allies in the north, in the United States. The only question was whether Americans would support this kind of revolution.

In February 1911, both the BTC and the LC responded with comments that supported the larger Mexican Revolution, for at this time war raged across the whole nation and not just in Baja California. The publication of the Labor Council, the *Labor Clarion*, denounced Díaz and his “minions” who had “shown themselves the bloodthirsty enemies of organized labor.”<sup>16</sup>

Resolved by the San Francisco Labor Council that we endorse the Mexican Revolution, and call upon the workers of America, individually and collectively, to render such aid and encouragement to the revolutionists as they may be able, and to protest against any scheme seeking to use

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *Labor Clarion*, 24 February 1911, 11.

the forces of the United States to bulwark the tottering despotism of Díaz.<sup>17</sup>

The Building Trades Council shared this same sentiment, when their paper, *Organized Labor*, reprinted a speech by John Kenneth Turner, the author of anti-Díaz articles that became his book *Barbarous Mexico*, explained how foreign capital supported Díaz's "feudal" system in Mexico.<sup>18</sup>

An important point to notice about both of these articles is the glaring omission of the leadership of the Mexican Revolution. Given that John Kenneth Turner and his wife Ethyl had befriended the Flores Magón brothers and spent time with the PLM, the omission of the Flores Magóns' names might mean that neither labor council knew much about the Flores Magón brothers. The attention by the local popular press might partly explain why. Around this time, San Francisco newspapers mostly covered Francisco Madero, the upper-middle class, liberal politician who had challenged Díaz for the presidency in 1910, and upon Díaz's theft of the national election, called upon the Mexican people to rebel against their august autarch. Since early February, Madero's armies had laid siege to Ciudad Juárez, the Mexican border city to the south of American El Paso. He would capture the attention of American newspapers much sooner than any successful occupation of the city. Before Madero won the revolution against Díaz, he won the appreciation of American readers.

Events in Baja California, though, did find their way into San Francisco newspapers. The newspapers expressed unique points of view that confirmed what men like Hearst had to say about the Revolution. A week after the fighting had begun the Hearst-run *Examiner* quoted Díaz's governor of Baja California, Celso Vega, who said "[t]his is not a revolution. The difficulty [is] caused by irresponsible men, citizens of no country and friends of no one. I blame the dissatisfaction, if any, to the Americans and their newspapers and their socialists."<sup>19</sup> Historians not only confirm how easily revolutionaries could cross the border, but also how the Díaz regime identified the rebellion as nothing more than another American filibuster aimed at seizing Baja California.<sup>20</sup>

Vega had cause to be worried about support in the United States. New recruits served as the difference that repulsed his attack on Mexicali seven days later on February 15.<sup>21</sup> Simon Berthold, a Mexican *flores-*

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "John Kenneth Turner," *Organized Labor*, 18 February 1911, 8.

<sup>19</sup> "Celso Governor," *San Francisco Examiner*, 8 February 1911, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard, 296–297; Blaisdell, "The Flores Magón Revolt," 155.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard, 297.

*magónista* of German descent, easily left Mexicali after the battle to get more arms and ammunition.<sup>22</sup> Americans who held properties in the border region of Baja California confirmed the presence of these activities and complained that weapons and *insurrectos* (insurrectionists) continued to cross over from the United States.<sup>23</sup> Harrison Gray Otis, owner and editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, also complained that support came from the American side of the border.<sup>24</sup> While American ranchers went to Calexico, the border city on the American side, and complained to American authorities, Otis used his own connections to personally contact President Taft.<sup>25</sup> Otis epitomized the foreign grandees that ruled Baja California. He, along with his son-in-law, Harry Chandler, owned a tract of 832,000 acres in the Mexicali Valley. Needless to say, men like Otis with business interests in Mexico could be very influential in affecting the outcome of the rebellion.

The connection between Berthold and Otis is worth mentioning if for no other reason than to remember Otis' anti-union tactics and, in the words of Blaisdell, Berthold's "labor exertions against Otis."<sup>26</sup> The Southland patriarch must have been upset when the *floresmagónista* rebels requisitioned supplies from his California-Mexicali Land Company Ranch.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, he must have heard reports from his ranch manager about the rebellion and seen what San Francisco newspapers also reported: a strange encampment of rebels in Mexicali.<sup>28</sup> The Hearst-owned *Examiner* plausibly expressed sympathy with Otis, for Hearst's properties might have found themselves overrun with rebels. Yet the source of any sympathy between the two might have had to do with more than the appearance of the Flores Magón brothers' army. Blaisdell notes the press's reaction to the rebellion; given that "they were anathema to the prosperous," Otis directed his organ, the *Los Angeles Times*, to remind readers about the politics of the rebels, and brand them as "anarchosyndicalist banditti."<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, the rebels' proximity to the Colorado River and the waterworks that supplied water to the Otis and Chandler properties in the Mexicali Valley—and beyond, through the Alamo Canal that brought

<sup>22</sup> Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution*, 39; *San Francisco Examiner*, 19 February 1911, 2.

<sup>23</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 February 1911, 3.

<sup>24</sup> "Otis Charges Aid to Rebels," *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 February 1911, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, 18 February 1911, 5; Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution*, 174.

<sup>26</sup> Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution*, 39.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>28</sup> "The red flag flies above the bullring in Mexicali and a large white flag bearing skull and crossbones was raised above a building in the center of town," *San Francisco Examiner*, 16 February 1911, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Blaisdell, "The Flores Magón Revolt," 155.

water for *alta* California's Imperial Valley threatened the livelihood of American businessmen who had a stake in the affairs of Baja California. The rebels' seemingly impregnable position on the old tidal washes of the Colorado River in Mexico, plus the necessity for American troops to enter Mexico and protect nearby flood levees, scared men like Otis and Chandler who had investments in the region.<sup>30</sup> For too long, American property owners had not only controlled the supply of water from the Colorado River in Baja California, they had also taken half of the water for use in the vast northern agricultural fields in the Imperial Valley.<sup>31</sup> Their use of the Colorado River had built towns like Calexico and Mexicali, and coincided with the rise of southern California.<sup>32</sup> Not only did businessmen from southern California prosper, but so too did entrepreneurs from San Francisco, such as John Spreckels, who was a sugar magnate, an investor in a railroad from San Diego to Tijuana, and the owner of San Francisco newspaper, the *Call*.<sup>33</sup>

The end of the halcyon days in Baja California for American businessmen like Otis and Spreckels seemed to lie in the ranks of the rebel army. The *Examiner* ran some articles that appeared to confirm that, just as the governor of Baja California had said, the insurrection possessed American radicals. The rebel force that occupied Mexicali contained a "division" called the "American Legion," its members made up of IWW members from Los Angeles, Portland, Seattle, and Spokane.<sup>34</sup> The San Franciscan press alerted the city's readers that many of these radicals came from California. One story explained that one hundred IWW members had taken over a train in Redding, "headed to Mexicali to join the rebels."<sup>35</sup> American California was a major staging ground for the rebellion in Mexico; and men like Otis and Spreckels with financial interests in Baja California could not have been too pleased.

<sup>30</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, 19 February 1911, 1; *ibid.*, 16 February 1911, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Only recently has the Colorado River Delta assumed an important place in the study of the U.S.-México border. Evan R. Ward's 2003 *Border Oasis* describes the conflict between a nation's quest for independence and especially, in the case of the connections between the United States and México, the inescapable reality of interdependence. Evan R. Ward, *Border Oasis: Water and the Political Economy of the Colorado River Delta, 1940-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); Eugene Keith Chamberlin examined how the efforts of the revolutionary state of México to develop northern Baja California took on the hardened efforts of American landowners and United States politicians to retain control over the region. The key to success: access to the waters of the Colorado River. Eugene Keith Chamberlin, "Mexican Colonization versus American Interests in Lower California," *Pacific Historical Review* 20, no. 1. (Feb. 1951): 43-55.

<sup>32</sup> Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution*, 25, 29-30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> "Swell American Legion," *San Francisco Examiner*, 18 February 1911, 11.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Around the same moment that the Flores Magón brothers accused President Taft of using the United States military to stop the revolution in Mexico to protect American business interests, the San Francisco Labor Council made the same condemnation of the United States government. This seemingly bright spot for the cause of the rebellion, when they appeared to have the support of organized labor in San Francisco, happened around early March. And not a minute too soon. This was a desperate time for the rebellion, for cracks had begun to appear in the ranks of the rebels, while papers in southern California published bold fantasies of an independent Baja California, created by the Flores Magóns. The rebellion needed allies. American newspapers that accurately represented the movement's goals could help in this regard, not tabloids with imperial dreams about pro-American filibusters. Ricardo Flores Magón seemingly caught a favorable wind when he talked to a journalist from the *Examiner*.<sup>36</sup> He had found a mouthpiece for his own interpretation of events in Baja California, and commented on Díaz's absence of complaints about American troops on the border. Magón viewed Díaz's silence as evidence for Taft's planned use of the military to support Díaz and the "moneyed interests of Mexico."<sup>37</sup> The *Labor Clarion* viewed Taft's use of the U.S. Army in the same way.<sup>38</sup> On March 17, their words specifically targeted American corporate interests in Mexico. The council spoke about "reforms in our sister land" and the hope that the revolution would "take away some of the power now held by rich men who are using the resources of Mexico for their own financial benefit."<sup>39</sup>

On the surface, the *Labor Clarion* contains words that address the inequalities of wealth that existed in Mexico. While no mention is made of Baja California, the region still suffered from the same inequities caused by American corporate interests. However, any direct sympathies with the Flores Magóns never materialized. Earlier in the month, they had named Madero as the leader of the revolution.<sup>40</sup> Ideologically the two parties had a common cause, but the Labor Council did not recognize a common cause with the Flores Magóns despite the fact that the fellow BTC appeared tantalizingly close to addressing one feature of oppression in Baja California, the use of water from the Colorado River. The mention of this exploitative use of a natural resource came when the

<sup>36</sup> Gerhard, 298; Blaisdell, "The Flores Magón Revolt," 155.

<sup>37</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, 9 March 1911, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Delegate Ernest L. Reguin, "Synopsis of Minutes of the Regular Meeting Held February 24, 1911," *Labor Clarion*, 3 March 1911, 10–11.

<sup>39</sup> Will J. French, ed., "The United States and Mexico," *Labor Clarion*, 17 March 1911, 8.

<sup>40</sup> *The Labor Clarion*, 3 March 1911, 9.

BTC condemned the deployment of United States troops to the border: “The immediate reason ascribed for the remarkable movement of troops is the inability of the Díaz government to protect the Colorado River dam being constructed by the United States government. It is reported that the dam is imperiled by the brigands’ attacks.”<sup>41</sup> The article then went on to cite the insidious position of capital, in this case “Wall Street,” within the continued livelihood of the Díaz regime.

The recognition of the role that the Colorado River had in American business interests might have come from announcements by the Taft Administration that described how any kind of revolutionary state, in this case “a new republic in Northern Mexico and Lower California,” threatened American interests, “not only in the belligerent territory itself, but on the American side immediately adjacent.”<sup>42</sup> The article then moved on to describe how this “new republic would include in its self-constituted borders the great reclamation project and improvement on the Mexican side in the Imperial Valley.”<sup>43</sup> Further, the administration considered this area of “special consideration” and the “storm center of the alleged maneuvers is near the Imperial Valley and Lower California. It is there they predict that United States troops will be called into active service on Mexican soil.”<sup>44</sup>

Business interests in San Francisco had a different perspective on the fighting, one that paralleled Taft’s opinion about the revolution’s threat to, not only American interests in Mexico, but the United States as well. John Spreckels provides one excellent example. An editorial in his *San Francisco Call* favored the use of the U.S. Army because Baja California had the strongest “revolutionist” presence, and the rebels “threatened to set up a government independent of either that of Díaz or the revolutionists in the east.”<sup>45</sup> More so, the editorial pleaded that, because the “line between the United States and Lower California is but an imaginary one,” a revolutionary state so near the United States potentially imperiled business in the Imperial Valley.<sup>46</sup> The rebellion in Baja California and the rebellion led by Madero in nearby Ciudad Juárez, were not in any way the same revolution. Americans might tolerate Madero, but not a separatist state ruled by socialists and anarchists, bent on the destruction of the capitalist order. A clear distinction between the different revolu-

<sup>41</sup> “U.S. Troops Rushed to Mexican Border,” *Organized Labor*, 11 March 1911, 4.

<sup>42</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, 10 March 1911, 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> “Editorial,” *San Francisco Call*, 31 March 1911, 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

tions of the Flores Magóns and Madero might have played a role in the lack of notice by San Francisco labor of the PLM cause.

Another explanation comes from recent studies on the subject, which have noted how the Flores Magóns' political ideologies confused organizations in the United States. John Sandos points out that American socialists thought the PLM were socialists, while American anarchists expected them to carry out the international ideology of anarchism.<sup>47</sup> While the Flores Magóns made ties with the IWW and WFM, they also courted conservative labor organizations, the American Federation of Labor and Samuel Gompers.<sup>48</sup> As Sandos points out these varied connections made for a diverse alliance that allowed the PLM to survive during its exile in the United States.<sup>49</sup> But Raat's own term for the strategy, "thinly veiled anarchism," only confused labor groups in the United States, and only worked to separate the *floresmagónista* rebellion in Baja California from the larger Mexican Revolution.<sup>50</sup>

Oblivious to the radical goals of the 1911 Rebellion, San Francisco labor did indeed attack American business interests, both in the United States and in Mexico. Writing in the *Labor Clarion*, Joseph Moore attacked the "public press" for the distorted coverage of the Mexican Revolution and exposed owners of major newspapers, specifically Otis, who had "large interests in Mexico."<sup>51</sup> This attack on the most powerful businessman of Los Angeles came at a time when San Francisco labor continued to assist unionization efforts in southern California. "How do you union men expect to organize Southern California," Moore continued, "or even to maintain union conditions in Central and Northern California if you permit, by your silence and inaction, the Mexican workers to be crushed for want of your moral and financial assistance?"<sup>52</sup>

The reaction of San Francisco labor groups to the 1911 Rebellion appears, once again, to have tantalizingly close connections with their denunciations against Otis. For their efforts to organize workers in the Southland, the *Labor Clarion* reported, "there is a struggle going on in the south between labor and capital . . . [and] all the taunts of Otis . . . have failed to cause them to swerve from organized labor's ranks."<sup>53</sup> Works on the subject of *floresmagónismo* note that Otis was a target of labor organizations, namely because of his use of the *Los Angeles Times* to combat union activities. Blaisdell notes the remark of a U.S. Army

<sup>47</sup> Sandos, 28.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–23.

<sup>50</sup> Raat, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Moore, "Barbarous Mexico—An Inferno," *Labor Clarion*, 31 March 1911, 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> "A Parade that Means Strength," *Labor Clarion*, 21 April 1911, 3.

general touring southern California, “honeycombed with the Socialist spirit.”<sup>54</sup> There was also the imminent mayoral election in Los Angeles and the possibility of John Harriman, a moderate socialist, winning the election. This city environment nurtured the political activities of the Flores Magón brothers. The city’s radical social currents provided them with connections to local socialists and IWW members, served as a recruitment pool for foot soldiers in the army of liberation, and provided a base for the directions of the revolutionary Junta.<sup>55</sup>

Seemingly, the Labor Council favored a point of view that saw unionization as an international effort, one that promised to help Mexican workers, and idealistically defined the border as an “imaginary line.” This further rhetoric also promised to “wipe out” international boundaries “in fact.”<sup>56</sup> This point of view is supported by recent historical work on this subject heralded by David Montgomery’s recent article.<sup>57</sup> Yet, the Labor Council, like other American labor unions filled with craftsmen, was cognizant of the insidious nature of capital and professed for the liberation of fellow workers in foreign countries. This meant the Labor Council, like most AFL-affiliate unions, was conservative in nature.

That is not to say that the conservative labor unions of San Francisco ever supported Díaz. Maybe because southern California newspapers continued to have the same fantasies about acquiring Baja California, supported by the United States government offering to purchase Baja California, the BTC and LC continued to think the worst about Taft’s use of troops near the border.<sup>58</sup> In this fashion, they displayed trends of anti-imperialism and saw the Mexican Revolution as part of that movement. They still paid attention to the influence of American business interests, part and parcel with their own ongoing battle with the forces of capital. Despite the address by the *floresmagónista* John Kenneth Turner to one thousand members at the Building Trades Temple on April 15, the BTC did not utter a single statement that supported the rebels in Baja California. They could not have argued ignorance of the situation, for Turner himself mentioned that he had just arrived from the rebellion and “you will hear of some severe fighting in Lower California.”<sup>59</sup> He even described how an alliance of American businesses and the United States

<sup>54</sup> Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution*, 67.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 28; Sandos.

<sup>56</sup> *Labor Clarion*, 3 March 1911, 4.

<sup>57</sup> David Montgomery, “Workers’ Movements in the United States Confront Imperialism: The Progressive Era Experience,” 2007 SHGAPE Distinguished Historian Address, *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 7 no. 1 (January 2008): 7–42.

<sup>58</sup> *Labor Clarion*, 7 April 1911, 9; *ibid.*, 14 April 1911, 3–4.

<sup>59</sup> *Organized Labor*, 15 April 1911, 4.

government had taken steps to “starve the rebels.”<sup>60</sup> Clearly, one would assume, the struggle of organized labor against the alliance of business and the state had a parallel with the Mexican Revolution.

One explanation for United States labor’s lack of support for the cause of the PLM lies with national politics of both the United States and Mexico. The strongest force that joined the “two Californias” was an aversion to radical politics. The Taft and Díaz governments targeted the Flores Magón brothers in the United States and doomed their revolution in Mexico. Raat spends the good part of his work pointing out how both nations used their police forces in tandem to arrest *floresmagónistas* in the United States and extradite them to the Mexico.<sup>61</sup> Problems also began to present themselves for the Flores Magóns on another front, partly attributable to the nature of their radical politics that widened the ideological split between Madero and the brothers over the nature of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>62</sup> The *Examiner* printed articles that called attention to the *floresmagónista* objective to challenge Madero for leadership of the revolution. These articles had the power to legitimize Madero—and isolate the Flores Magóns.<sup>63</sup> Another article ran with the headline about Madero, “Gratified at Díaz’ Resignation, Plans to Crush Lower California Socialists.”<sup>64</sup> Apparently, Madero had taken Díaz’s place as a partner the United States could count on to protect American interests in Baja California. As Blaisdell explains, Madero reached out to American businessmen to consolidate the revolution, one of whom was Harrison Gray Otis.<sup>65</sup>

As Sandos points out, since the time of Madero’s victory at Ciudad Juárez and Díaz’s resignation and exile, conservative labor groups distanced themselves from the PLM. This is a point that other historical works have noted, but none have examined the issue like Sandos. He shows in specific detail how men like Samuel Gompers and Mary Harris Jones (“Mother Jones”) retracted their support for *floresmagónistas* in the United States. Partly, this was a result of Ricardo’s less-than-conciliatory statements about Madero in the PLM organ *La Regeneración*. But the

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Much of this activity took place in southern California, yet judging from the stories in the press San Francisco readers still had a chance to read about these events. Take for example the story of the arrest of Francisco Vasquez Salinas, a rebel commander who had fought in Baja California (*San Francisco Examiner*, 30 April 1911, 1).

<sup>62</sup> Blaisdell, “The Flores Magón Revolt,” 155.

<sup>63</sup> “Socialist Rebels Pin Their Faith to Magon,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 23 May 1911, 2.

<sup>64</sup> “Madero to Relinquish Rank Voted by Rebels,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 26 May 1911, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution*, 175.

divorce between the PLM and conservative labor groups owes a great deal to the slow emergence of the Flores Magóns' anarchosyndicalism.<sup>66</sup>

In the case of San Francisco labor groups, the failure to recognize the 1911 Rebellion was a failure to close ranks with groups who fought exploitation. This failure existed despite San Francisco labor groups' attempts to unionize southern California and defend the McCarthy brothers during their trial, when they were accused of bombing Otis's *Los Angeles Times* building. Labor groups could see the fight in *alta* California, and how the struggle was connected to the fight in Baja California, but politics and the commitment to a relationship between business and labor kept the "two Californias" divided. In San Francisco, it would appear that the growth of state and the spirit of city conciliation reigned supreme. The California of Mexico and the United States, united by the intrusion of capital, found that politics could be as equally as divisive.

*Jeffrey David Mitchell did his undergraduate and graduate work at San Francisco State University between the years of 2004 and 2008. He earned a degree in U.S. History with an emphasis on the American West. Since then, he has worked as a substitute teacher at charter schools in the Bay Area and has pondered a macro-photographic project about irrigation canals in the Central Valley.*

<sup>66</sup> Sandos, 29, 30, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 41.