

Zapata wouldn't approve

Emiliano Zapata, hero of the Mexican Revolution, would be 88 today had he lived. However, his spirit — captured and recreated here by Star columnist Bill Waters — wouldn't approve of today's Mexican revolutionaries.

By BILL WATERS
The Arizona Daily Star

I am Zapata.

Fared by gringos, *gachupines* and capitalist oxen of any kind — and why not?

Did I not make agonizing and fatal fun of the sons of whores who resisted my Army of the South? Did not the tales of horror — men covered with honey and staked across anthills, men lashed over the fast-growing point of the *maguey*, *heyheyhey* — did not such tales make my northward advance perhaps a bit smoother?

And in Mexico City, my justice was swift as the horses I love. Three men hanging by their necks from a telegraph pole, the flies decorating their bodies as so many thousand jewels: on one, a sign saying "This man killed for being a thief," on another, "This man killed for being a counterfeiter." And on the third? "This man killed by mistake!"

They won't soon forget the end of 1914, when my troops moved in on the capital and that jackal Victoriano Huerta. On the north side of the city were the men of Villa and Obregon, rampant with rape, robbery and shooting. And on the southern side of the city, what do you suppose? Christ! My *muchachos* were begging for food — and for money, one peso at a time.

Once again now I contemplate the recapture of Mexico — and no more *Senor Simpatico*. This time I will show the barbarity for which I am known in my little part of the world.

It tires me thinking of another

advance toward a stinking city. What were we doing there anyway? We wanted land — our own land, not land on which we work as slaves for the sugar-barons, so many with foreign names. Well, with the capital — and the whole country, therefore — in our hands, who would dare to tell us that the land is not ours?

And where is the land today? It is there, some of it in the name of my *compadres* even. And my *compadres*? Dead not long after they thought I was; dead not from a fusillade of Mausers, but dead nonetheless. Hunger and cold — and the heart wounds of watching babies, little girls, little boys and young men and women die of diseases born of filth from which they had no escape — can kill the most valiant soldier, and more effectively than a swarm of bullets.

Drying costs money, even in the *campo*. So does living. Little by little, my people have lost control of what little land they won as they pay their debts to the doctors, the druggists, the merchants of the town, who in turn pay their debts to the bankers of the city.

And the rest of the land? Retained for a bribe by the *hacendados*, who lost little time learning which Revolutionaries were for sale.

Some of my *muchachos* go on working the land — for someone else. Some of them went to the city to work — for another rich someone else. Life is better there, they say. Soon I'll awaken them.

And what of the gunfire of that April day of 1919? What of the lumpy corpse made by the ambush at the *hacienda* of Chinameca? Was not the wily Zapata aware of the treason in the heart of Jesus Guajardo? Did I not sacrifice a nearly-as-handsome cousin to the ideals of the Revolution? Did Emiliano Zapata, at 38, not know that he would, once again, be needed in the 1970s?

Yes, I knew. I hoped that the pain and the blood of the 1910s would turn my beloved Morelos and all the other little countries of Mexico into places of peace and prosperity. I hoped that at least some of those fast-talking little butterflies in their frock coats would follow their promises of material progress with some kind of action.

Some kind of action is about it — every once in a long time a contractor comes to one of a million pueblos and gives a few people some jobs and next thing you know a bunch of politicians are dedicating a new bridge to the memory of the Revolutionaries. Yes, there is a new bridge — but the tax money that built it was enough for five bridges, and where is it? In the pockets of those shameless politicians who gave out the contract for the fine, new bridge!

And who are the Revolutionaries to whom they dedicated this piece of

work? Villa, Obregon, Zapata . . .

So today is the birthday of a modern Mexican saint — San Emiliano Zapata, patron of the landless masses, the stereotyped Banana-republic *bandidos* and Marlon Brando.

For years, I was what they call a non-person. No lionizing of an illiterate peasant with charisma capable of mobilizing the masses. The fighting was over, and my country once again had a class of rulers. Gone were the bloodthirsty *Atecas*. Gone were the gold-greedy *gachupines* of Espana. Gone were the chocolate-drinking salamanders of Porfirio Diaz.

And who was giving the orders in Tenochtitlan now the war was over? The chameleon cousins and brothers and uncles and nephews and bootlickers of Carranza, Obregon, Calles, it didn't matter who they were: the pesos poured into Mexico City and they trickled back to their source.

As for me, well, they couldn't decide whether I was to be vilified as a vandal and outlaw or simply forgotten.

Half a century after the ambush, they knew what to do with me: build statues and bolt up plaques in my honor. After all, is not the ruling party named after the Revolution? And what is the Revolution to the people of today? How do you get them to pay taxes to support the bureaucrats of a party that's the same thing as the government that rules in the name of the Revolution? Well, you remind them of the *valientes* who made the Revolution. And who were the most valiant of the valiant? Villa, Obregon, Zapata . . .

So now they steal from the people in my name. But not for long. At 88, I am rearming my *muchachos*. I am stealing the finest horses in the land for a triumphal sweep into the capital, whose slum-dwellers, all those millions, will rejoice to the news that the land will be theirs, this time once and for all —

What do you mean they don't want it? They can't prefer a factory job to the pleasures of farming their own piece of land, can they? What can be so great about a cave in a brick tower? Is that little *television* more attractive than a countryside shrine to the Virgin? Why would they hock their futures for an automobile to throw into a river of automobiles? And how can they live in the compound filth and smoke of the city?

Watch: they'll come running to the banner of land for the people. They'll join my *muchachos* in a bloody battle and bring those coat-and-tie'd dwarfs to their knees!

Vamonos, muchachos! Muchachos! Hey, muchachos, where are you?

Bill Waters is the Star's public affairs editor and writes a column on Latin America.

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