

Freedom In Mexico

By Frank Seaman

SOMETIME ago Paul Hanna made a flying trip to Mexico, was feted by the Mexican Government and by the Gomperses of the Mexican labor movement, and returned to the United States to write a series of articles about "The Labor Government of Mexico," as he called it. I take it that a good many readers of the *Liberator* will have seen Paul Hanna's articles and may be interested to know just how a "labor government" goes about the business of deporting its radical agitators. Fortunately I am in a position to supply this information, having been deported myself. I am writing this in Guatemala, to which country I was deported in company with Sebastian San Vicente and Natalia Michaelova only a few days ago. Guatemala City is the ridiculous capital of a comic opera republic; no newspapers find their way in, there is no industry here, no way of making a living—but, of course, that is no concern of the Mexican Government.

Natasha, Sebastian and I were thirty-three* as part of a general clean-up drive on the whole labor movement, a drive that did not stop until every foreigner who was identified even remotely with the working class movement had been kicked out of the country. Naturally the first deportations were of comrades like Jose Rubio and M. Paley, who were working in radical organizations like the Confederacion General de Trabajadores, the Mexican I. W. W., etc., but later even the aristocrats of the Confederacion Regional Obrera Mexicana began to go. One fellow, Walter Foertmeyer, was deported for the reason that he was a friend of mine. Jose Allen, a born Mexican of American descent, was separated from his Mexican wife and children and shipped out of the country because he was "unable to prove his nationality."

It was a regular orgy of governmental libertinism, a wholesale atrocity, one of the most complete of its kind that has ever been pulled off. Obregon went the very limit in his endeavor to show that Mexico was worthy of recognition by the United States Government. When he had kicked out everybody in sight, Obregon topped off his work with an Ole Hansonesque proclamation in which he announced that any foreigner who attacked "Mexico's fundamental institutions" would be deported.

There can be no doubt of it. Civilization has reached Mexico at last.

San Vicente, who is a member of the Executive Committee of the Confederacion General de Trabajadores, was arrested on the evening of May 15th. I was arrested the next morning. In the Inspeccion de Policia, Sebastian was robbed of some letters, a wallet and his batch of seaman's discharges, and I was relieved of my wallet, notebook, fountain pen and pocket knife. Perhaps some friend of the President's is using them now! After being held for some hours without anyone having explained to us why we were arrested, without any charges having been preferred against us, and without being given an opportunity to say a word in our behalf, we were suddenly informed that the Chief of Police was willing

to see us. We were led out of the building and down a side street, where we were pushed into a waiting automobile. Four plain-clothes men jumped in after us and the machine made full speed for the depot. Inside of fifteen minutes we were on board a train for the Texas border. Arrested May 15-16th and out of Mexico City before nightfall of May 16th. No noise; no publicity, everything just as smooth as clockwork. True, Sebastian and I were losing practically all our things; we had not even a clean pair of socks with us and we were not given a chance to get some money!

Our train had already reached Monterey when our private escort received a telegram signed by President Obregon ordering us to put about for Mexico City. It was not until we saw next day's newspapers that we found out what it was that had induced the President to change his mind so suddenly and had saved us from the eager claws of the United States Government. The Executive Committee of the Confederacion General de Trabajadores had been in session with Obregon on the afternoon of May 17th and he had finally promised that we "would not be sent to the United States." He didn't say that we were already on our way there! He further promised that we should be allowed to choose the country to which we preferred to go. It seems that this last promise was never meant to be taken seriously. Anyway, no one consulted us as to our choice in the matter, and we were shipped here because it was a short haul and the rates were cheap. After being held in jail for nearly a month, first in Queretaro and then in Manzanillo, we were unceremoniously dumped into the steerage of a Pacific Mail liner on June 9th and were dumped out again three days later at San Jose de Guatemala.

The Government's original plan was to ship us to the United States before anyone should know that we were even arrested. Comrades who came to see us at the Inspeccion de Policia were told that we were not there. Every bit of paper was taken away from us to keep us from writing messages. Luckily we were able to "break through the blockade"; Sebastian found a good comrade among the soldiers who were guarding us and sent him to C. G. T. headquarters with the news of our arrest. So the Executive Committee knew we were in jail only a few hours after we landed there.

Paul Hanna is not the only one who has written nonsense about Mexico. American radical publications have been swamped with articles about the flaming Bolsheviki who are supposed to be ruling Mexico. The origin of all that stuff can be traced to the campaign promises of Obregon, Calles & Co.—Carranza made the same kind of promises in the early days of his regime—and not to any tangible work for the laboring class. It ought to be understood that generals are very seldom class-conscious Communists. Obregon breaks strikes, jails workers, shuts down labor papers just like any other respectable bourgeois president. Councils of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers are not yet ruling Mexico, nor will they ever rule it if Obregon and the rest of the "military politicians" have their way. The Mexican Government is a capitalist government. It is inexperienced and weak and may not be so well versed as the United States in the uses of the repressive machinery, but it is learning fast.

*To be "thirty-three" is, according to Mexican slang, to be kicked out of the country under the provisions of the famous Article 33, of the Mexican Constitution, which gives the President of the Republic the power to deport summarily and without explanation any whose presence in Mexico may be, in his judgment detrimental to the country.