

SINDICALISMO SIN FRONTERAS - UNIONS WITHOUT BORDERS

By Mike Alewitz

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The following is an edited version of the mural dedication speech.

Sisters and Brothers: It is a humbling experience to come to Mexico to paint, for this country is the home of the modern mural movement, and gave birth to some



of the greatest public art of this century. Here is where the Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiras were inspired by millions of peasants and workers to illustrate the historic conquests of the Revolution. On a smaller scale, we are attempting to illustrate the UE-FAT efforts to build international solidarity and cross-border organizing.

It was Emiliano Zapata who gave the greatest political expression to the Mexican revolution, and it is under his watchful eyes that our mural unfolds. We have also included the figures of Albert and Lucy Parsons. Albert was one of the Haymarket martyrs, framed up and executed for his leadership in the Chicago labor movement's fight for the eight-hour day. Lucy was also a leader in that movement, and she continued her revolutionary activities until she died at an old age. She was of African-American and Mexican ancestry, was an early leader of the feminist movement, and a founding member of the Industrial Workers of the World. The Parsons hold in their hands some bread and a rose.

"Bread and Roses" was a slogan of the Lawrence textile strikers; women who demanded not only the bread of the union contract, but the rose to symbolize that workers deserve a rich spiritual and cultural life. The quotation in the painting is from August Spies, also executed on November 11, 1887: "If you think that by hanging us you can stamp out the labor movement...the movement from which the downtrodden millions, the millions who toil in want and misery expect salvation-if that is your opinion, then hang us! Here you will tread upon a spark, but there and there, behind you-and in front of you, and everywhere, flames blaze up. It is a subterranean fire. You cannot put it out." How fitting a quote for this land of volcanoes.

This is precisely what is happening today, as first a Los Angeles, and then a Chiapas explode, here and there, precursors of a generalized conflagration. Our class is like the core of the earth, being compressed under ever-greater pressure, until forced to explode. We are using this cultural project to illustrate our collective union vision. Unions are the first line of defense for workers. They keep us from getting killed or poisoned. They allow us some basic human dignity. Unfortunately, too often our unions resemble exclusive clubs, or worse, criminal gangs. Even unions that pride themselves on being progressive are often bureaucratic and autocratic. Without the full and active participation of the membership, all the weaknesses of our organizations emerge.

As workers, we often must not only battle the employers, but our own conservative leaderships as well. This is a particular problem in the United States, where employers keep us stratified and divided. They attempt to pit low-wage workers against the more privileged. They use divide-and-conquer tactics to con-

vince us to be for "labor peace." But labor peace is the peace of slavery, whether in the U.S. or in Mexico.

The Frente Autentico Trabajadores is helping to lead the struggle for genuine union democracy. There have been, and will continue to be casualties in this historic fight. And today we dedicate this mural to those who have been victimized in the struggle for union democracy. This mural is the product of not only artists, but the thousands of workers who built our unions. This is their mural.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to denounce the criminal policies of the United States government. In particular I denounce the economic sabotage of Mexico and the criminal embargo of Cuba. The gang in Washington does not speak for me, or millions of other American workers. They are waging war upon our class. They are my enemy and your enemy. They represent the past - we are the future. If we continue to forge these links of solidarity, they can never prevail."