

## Mexican Revolution (Round II)

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### Mexican Revolution (Round II)

In the most recent decades, you could travel to Oaxaca Mexico and expect to find the beautiful Southwestern Mexican state flourishing with tourists, walking down the little pueblo streets, shopping for fine jewelry and lavishing their taste buds with exquisite cuisines. As the fifth-largest state in Mexico that received most of its revenue from such tourist industries, you would be welcomed into specific areas in order to make sure to hide the grave poverty that lies outside the walls of the city. However, on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Oaxaca turned from civilized existence into full scale revolution when an annual protest for higher teacher wages aimed at governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz raged into dissent as the police violently tried to intervene. With the aid of locals, the protestors chased the police out of the town and since then, have not left the town-hall of Oaxaca and have engaged in months of terror and conflict in an act of revolution. What is their request? It is the permanent removal of the leader of the state, Ulises Ruiz, from power.

Since the beginning of government, people have declared revolutions such as the one in Oaxaca, yet some seem to have more justifications than others. Is it enough for a leader to simply be disliked by the commonwealth in order for a public to have right cause to revolt? Or must there be a certain level of atrocities committed? Overall it can be assumed that a people must examine the purpose of the sovereign before they can judge whether or not a given leader is actually rightfully ruling. Depending on the definition of what a leader or sovereign is, then one can find exactly whether or not revolution is legitimate and necessary. Political philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke both took into examination exactly what valid sovereignty looks like and thus, revealed to us when a state of revolution, if ever, is necessary to bring about a true commonwealth. Using their ideas as a basis of political ideology, new light is brought upon the turmoiling city of Oaxaca, which fights not only for its right to fair wages and economic equality, but for its right to a leader chosen by the people.

In his piece *Leviathan*, English philosopher Thomas Hobbes sets down what he believed to be guidelines of a true social contract. Mostly working with the empiricist viewpoint popular in the late 1500's, Hobbes examines the theory of the human being in order to use logic to process the experience of political reality. In short, *Leviathan* defines what Hobbes believes the role of a government or sovereign is. Beginning in Part 2, *Of Commonwealth* we see a clear picture of a sovereign as a result of humans needing someone to enforce contracts made to alleviate the

violence and brutality of the state of nature (which to Hobbes, is synonymous to the state of war). Hobbes writes, “Commonwealth is one person of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient for their peace and common defense.”(Wootton, 189). A page earlier, Hobbes states that all this is done to create a “visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear or punishment to the performance of their covenants, and observation of those laws of nature” (Wootton, 187).

From these statements, one can find the two greatest appointments of a sovereign; the peace of the commonwealth, and the defense of the commonwealth. Although covenant protection and enforcement is the means to which a sovereign is erected into power, actually being in the position of a sovereign implicitly enforces contracts by involving a third, more powerful party in the process. One must think that Hobbes is trying to enforce other terms by which a sovereign is made a true sovereign, such as those of peace and defense. When referring to the peace of a commonwealth, the state of war automatically comes to mind. The state of war exists simultaneously with the state of nature to Hobbes because in nature, “all men had right to all things” (Wootton, 192). With only brute strength and wit as tools, pre-civil men used their own power to daily defend what they called their own while trying to obtain more objects or land that others also claimed as their own. This is where the sovereign’s role came into play, as he establishes propriety or ownership in order to eliminate the state of war and establish peace. Hobbes writes “and therefore this propriety, being necessary to peace, and depending on sovereign power, is the act of that power, in order to the public peace” (Wootton, 192). The sovereign’s means of establishing peace in the commonwealth is essentially by developing ownership and property so that one can keep what he calls his own with certainty and not by pure force.

The possession of force is then given to the sovereign who comes upon his second main role as leader of the commonwealth; the defender. Hobbes highly stresses that the near absolute definition of a sovereign is one who can defend the commonwealth. The supremacy to do so is given to the sovereign because he alone has the most power to protect the people. Explained in two ways, this ultimate power exists because it is God-willed, and compoundly enforced. Hobbes states “the sovereign power is conferred by the consent of the people assembled” (Wootton, 189). Even though it sounds as if Hobbes is allowing the people to will into power a sovereign, he is actually declaring that people passively recognize a sovereign who is naturally more powerful. In this way, the sovereign is God-willed and logically meant to be sovereign and simply must be recognized and then given consent

in order to rule. This divine rule allows the sovereign great ability to complete his role as the defender of the commonwealth. Similarly, once people have given their consent for a sovereign to rule, they become his subjects, thus adding to his compound power (which is the greatest form of power according to Hobbes). This compound power is what Hobbes is hinting at back on page 189 when he writes “to the end he may use the strength and means of them all” (Wootton). Compound power combined with divine will establish a sovereign not only acceptable but undeniable for rule.

However, one must recognize that if Hobbes is claiming to have a divinely placed sovereign, such an idea as revolt or revolution would be treading on the grounds of damnation. When discussing Christian politics, Hobbes blatantly declares that to go against a sovereign is indeed to actively disobey God’s will by outlining salvation in terms of politics. He claims “All that is necessary for salvation is contained in two virtues: faith in Christ, and obedience to laws” (Wootton, 290). Any act of civil disobedience is strictly condemned because a God-willed sovereign has placed the laws over you. The only exception to this would be if the sovereign were an infidel. In such a case, then it is hard to argue that following the laws and ways of the sovereign is the way to salvation since the sovereign himself is not on a path to salvation. Hobbes answers to this that one must obey his commands because of all the things one can be asked to do, they will never sacrifice your inner morality and integrity. Today and even in the time of Hobbes, still great difficult meets such a statement, since it is known that many martyrs have stood in acts of civil disobedience in order to avoid having to deny Christ or some other faith. As a result to their faith and unwillingness to deny God (an act that is viewed as eternally damnable), they have been tortured and murdered. In no place in *Leviathan* does Hobbes encounter such a difficult attack on the right to civil disobedience compared to salvation.

Conclusively, Hobbes seems to be claiming that in no case is revolution acceptable since the sovereign is indeed God-willed. Yet what if a sovereign is unable to enforce contracts, establish peace through property, or even more, unable to defend the commonwealth? Then, perhaps, Hobbes could reason a rightful revolution? Yet staying within his nature of not allowing people active wills in the commonwealth, Hobbes makes it clear that such a state would dissolve itself. Once a people were to recognize that a sovereign could not defend his commonwealth, he would then no longer actually be sovereign (since the definition of a sovereign no longer applies to him/her). The civil contract then comes to an end since there is no sovereign to enforce it, and the commonwealth dissolves and returns to a state of nature. One might suggest that this state of nature would be better than a wrongful or tyrannical



ruler, however Hobbes makes no distinction between tyranny and monarchy since both are better than the state of war nature leads to.

Before looking back to the state of affairs in Oaxaca and claiming that the revolution is unjustified through the eyes of Hobbes, let us examine another very powerful shaper in the history of Western political thought: John Locke. Also a British philosopher, Locke wrote about 40 years after Hobbes but with a very different focus that often pushed against authoritarianism. He strove to use reason to search for truth rather than simply accepting the opinion of authorities, and institutionally, Locke worked to distinguish the legitimate from the illegitimate functions of institutions and to make corresponding distinctions for the uses of force by these institutions. In examining his *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke lays a distinct foundation of what political power is and ought to be, and therefore, claims what is within the *right* of a sovereign to do with his power. He states:

“Political power I take to be a right of making laws and penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community, in the execution of such laws, and in the defence of the commonwealth from foreign injury; and all this only for the public good” (Wootton, 312).

While the prose style and rhetoric may seem similar to Hobbes, the ending line draws a very clear differentiation on the key element of sovereign power; “for the public good”. In Latin this reads *salus populi suprema lex*, or “the common good of the people is the supreme law”. Although establishing laws, carrying out punishments, regulating property and defense of the people are among the important jobs of the sovereign, everything done must be done under the pretenses of looking out for the good of the public. One can already begin to see a very different view on revolution emerge.

According to Locke, for a sovereign to have any of the above political power, he must be given the right to govern. This right is transferred to him by the combined power of the individuals within his state. The sovereign does not naturally possess anymore power than any person in the commonwealth since all men exist naturally in a “state also of equality” (Locke, Wootton 312). His power comes from the people so that the laws of nature can be enforced by him, one individual, which they appoint to keep order. In short, a sovereign’s greater power is given to him because “the laws of nature would as all other laws that concern men in this world, be in vain, if there were no body that in the state of nature had a power to execute that law” (Locke, Wootton 313). Essentially, Locke is claiming that power is invested in the sovereign by the commonwealth, giving them ultimate claim to revoke that

power if ever abused. Locke states “community perpetually retains a supreme power of saving themselves from the attempts and designs of any body”(Wootton, 356). Since the definition of political power is the right to make laws for the common good, then attempts and designs of any body in an abusive power situation would be one in which the sovereign trespasses beyond the good of the people. Such a situation calls for a revolution, according to Locke, where the tyrant is removed and power is returned to someone who can enforce the common good.

Here we begin to see solid talk of the possibility of the commonwealth taking action to remove a given individual or body from a place of sovereignty. Locke first fully addresses this option in chapter three where he writes “for wherever violence is used, and injury done, though by hands appointed to administer justice, it is still violence and injury... wherever that is not bona fide done, war is made upon the sufferers, who having no appeal on earth to right them, they are left to the only remedy in such cases, an appeal to heaven.”(Wootton, 315). Locke uses violence as a reason for an appeal to heaven, but perhaps he is not talking about any use of violence. He is speaking of violence that undermines the sovereign’s ability to carry out justice, bona fide, and thus causing injury to his people. This obvious use of power outside assigned rule becomes more apparent when one compares it to the purpose of laws given later in the chapter by Locke, which states that “the end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom” (Wootton 328). There has yet to be a case in history where violence used upon a people has enlarged their freedom.

In giving us the right to revolt, Locke is careful not to entrust too much power into the hands of the people (possibly out of fear of the current governing system in England accusing him of heresy). Since no one can know the individual will of the sovereign simply through his actions, only God can truly judge if the sovereign is using his power for the common good. The role of the people is to defend their natural rights and not allow a sovereign “to exercise a power the people never put into [his] hands, do that which they have no right to do” (Wootton 363). The commonwealth must attempt to refrain from making the ultimate determination as to the intent of the sovereign and only judge if one’s natural rights, which are indivisible to each man, are being threatened. When threatened by ruling outside of his right, the sovereign can expect his people to make, in Lockian terms, “an appeal to heaven”.

At this point, a thorough reading of the entire *Treatise on Government* by Locke is an important accomplishment to have made in order to understand exactly what he is implicating. When telling the people to make an appeal to heaven, there is an implied assumption that there is no one on earth to appeal to because the sovereign is corrupt. According to Locke, “when there is no common superior on earth to appeal to for relief, [there]

is a *state of war*” (Wootton, 316). Each time Locke uses the phrase appeal to heaven, he is indirectly referring to a state of war. Therefore when a sovereign exercises power outside his right, which is given to him by the people, the commonwealth has the ability to defend their natural rights. They may embark upon a state of war with the sovereign and appeal to heaven because the sovereign has put himself at a state of war with the people of the commonwealth. When this day comes, Locke tells the commonwealth “They should then rouse themselves, and endeavor to put the rule into such hands which may secure to them the ends for which government was first erected” (Wootton 379). In other words, there is rightful claim to a revolution.

Whether or not they have studied Locke and Hobbes, the teachers and fellow revolutionaries of Oaxaca seem to feel justified in their demand to oust goverener Ulises Ruiz. The accusations against Ruis range from rigging the 2004 elections, indigenous repression, destruction of public works, to blame for several killings, political thuggery, intimidation, and corruption. Although not all of the accusations can be confirmed, the party which Ruiz belongs to, the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), has a long record of undemocratic ruling (Gibler). The PRI originated during the Mexican Revolution as a means to stop the violent struggle for power between the various factions. The transition of power was peaceful for the members of the PRI party, however recent investigation have led historians to claim it was anything but democratic (Chasteen). Peruvian-Spanish writer Mario Vargas Llosa even went so far as to call the party “la dictadura perfecta” (the perfect dictatorship). Gaining popularity in the divided country, the PRI controlled Mexico virtually unchallenged for more than 70 years under a succession of names. However in 1976 PRI member Lopez Portillo was elected President and in less than a decade, brought Mexico into massive economic debt. He borrowed a total of \$80 billion dollars in loans to the US alone to finance massive economic and social development programs which coupled with mismanagement and corruption, let to a major political crises in 1982 (Joseph). Regardless, the party kept power until 2000, when the PRI lost the presidential elections for the country of Mexico for the first time in nearly a century and was replaced by a representative from the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional).

It is under these relatively hostile pretenses that Ruiz ran for the position of Oaxacan goverener in the 2004 elections and allegedly rigged them in order to win majority vote. Despite the losing federal race of the PRI to the PAN when Fox was elected, Oaxaca has remained within the grips of the party for the past 50 years. The allegation of riggery hits a very sensitive nerve across Mexico since recent history is littered with claims of manipulated and fixed elections. According to The Independent, “They accuse him of using thugs to crush and even kill his political

opponents. It has been a protest against what many perceive as illegitimate government” (Usborne). As it stands, government records indicate that Ruiz Ortiz won with 523, 979 votes, taking 47.56% of the votes against PAN member Gabino Cue Monteagudo, who claimed 488,640 votes, a total of 44.35%(Instituto Estatal Electoral de Oaxaca). Similar to the election of the Bush Administration into the US government, little argument to the actual numbers exists, however the tactics in which Ruiz gained majority (those of alleged murder, thurgery, and intimidation) circulate among the protestors and people of the state. For this very reason, many do not view him as the popularly elected ruler of Oaxaca.

Since his election in 2004, Oaxaca has existed in a state of instability that characterizes the bulk of Mexico, where democracy, born only six years ago, remains fragile. The economy and underlying social and cultural issues have created a yawning gap between its wealthy and grindingly poor. Unable to take blame for such challenges, Ruiz’s is suggested as some to be a scapegoat for the greater issues of corruption within the government (Sanchez). However some stories find fact within the records of Oaxaca. Unlike accusations set for making shady mining deals, extracting money from Swiss banks, and other undocumented scandals, some have openly accused and set forth proof of repression. The newspaper “Noticias De Oaxaca”, noted for holding political views contrary to Ruiz, suffered a massive strike by the CROC union, a union affiliated to the PRI party of Ruiz. Many media outlets like “Reforma”, openly accused Ruiz of repression of free speech, claims made even stronger after attempts to publish were halted by vandalized delivery trucks (Sheridan). Standing alongside the accusation of oppression, an obvious lack of investment and commitment to the public education system holds itself on firm ground as a revolting point against Ruiz.

In Oaxaca, the state is crowded with a population of 3.5 million , 1.1 million of which are indigenous. Half of the one million people age fifteen and older cannot read or write. Between the ages of 5 and 14, 112,000 children do not attend school at all(Center for Education Statistics). Since a great percentage of children are not attending school, Oaxaca boasts an amazing 170,000 children between age 6 and 14 who work. Compared to the total 3.3 million children allegedly working in Mexico, Oaxaca is among the prime offenders. Accordin to Marlene Santiago, director of the non-governmental Center for the Support of Street Children, which has worked in Oaxaca since 1994 “We see 10-year-old children who are just starting school for the first time, and others of the same age who have been attending school but who can barely read, or don't understand what they are reading”( Cevallos). Because of all the above factors combined, the Index of Mexican Children’s Rights, which rates such variables as education,

nutrition and other rights on a scale from zero to 10, Oaxaca receives a 3.6 for children up to age 17(Cevallos).

Aside from the overwhelmingly plaguing circumstances surrounding the children within the education, teachers find low wages and no benefits from Ruiz's government that might be the cause of such issues. Overall, it was this very issue of lack of attention to the education system that began the actual event of revolution on June 14, 2006.

It was the 26<sup>th</sup> year in a row that teachers gathered almost ritualistic in front of the capital of Oaxaca. Normally, the event ended with an agreement for a small wage increase or offers of better conditions for the protestors by the state government. However, when the teacher decided to take the protest to a more intense degree and declare a state wide strike in May 2006, locking 1.3 million children out of the classroom, Ruiz did not budge. They demanded reclassification for the state of Oaxaca, which would allow a raise in the salaries, yet Ruiz refused. After weeks of protest, Ruiz made what seems now to be his most fatal mistake; to send in poorly trained police officers into Oaxaca City's central plaza with tear gas and batons. The violence and repression used against the teacher ignited far more serious resistance against Ruiz and his government, adding to the protest indigenous rights groups, local activists, the far left radicals, and even anarchist. They collaborated together to create the APPO(Oaxaca Peoples Assembly), which added to their original demands their new, primary goal: the immediate resignation of the governor, Ulises Ruiz (Gibler).

Thus far, the revolution of Oaxaca seems to be mixed in whether or not it was or is completely legitimate, especially in the eyes of Locke who is more excepting of rightful revolution. Yet the key to this issue remains in the reasons of the APPO for wanting to remove Ulises Ruiz from power, and the goals of the party. Sighting the long list of accusations to atrocities and corruptive behavior, the APPO has a wide range of "leftist" views, all which involve the removal of Ruiz to solve their problems. The APPO includes anti-capitalist trends, more radical and revolutionary forces who want to oust the government completely, and those who want to make reforms within the existing system. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, when the APPO declared itself the de facto governing body of Oaxaca, they chanted "No leader is going to solve our problems," and asserted the need for common civilians to organize and work beyond the scope of elected officials (Nest). They want a complete turn around from the repressive system under Ruiz, including broader economic, social and political transformations as well as a change of the state constitution. According to Narco News the Popular Assembly of Oaxaca "aims at nothing less than expanding the traditional idea of general assemblies of citizens to form a new state government. Such assemblies oversee the execution of their resolutions by their municipal authorities. That is to say, 'the executive branch' (the authorities) is charged with

accomplishing the tasks the assembly gives it. The municipal president, foremost among the authorities, leads (as the Zapatistas' phrase explains) by obeying."(Ascensio). It is clear that although each individual's reason for demanding Ruiz's removal is different and defensible within the APPO, they have come as a group and will not leave until they have instilled their new government; one which rules with the people for the people.

What might Locke say about the right of the individuals of Oaxaca to completely remove Ruiz from power for this new government? As with most types of philosophy, the principles stated are broad and not completely applicable to every circumstance that could occur since it is meant as a guideline to government. Yet one can still get a sense that Locke, much more than Hobbes, might have actually supported the revolution of the Oaxacan people. For one, Locke makes it clear that if a sovereign rules outside of his right, then he has become a tyrant who abuses his power and has put himself at a state of war with the people of his commonwealth. When Ulises Ruiz decided on June 14<sup>th</sup> to use force to halt the people's right to protest through the deployment of the brutal police force, he essentially ruled outside his right. Not only were the people executing their freedom of speech, but the brutality used to remove the protestors has resulted in over 25 deaths to date. Locke stands firm in claiming that to take another human's life is outside of natural law since we do not even have the right to take out own. Working outside of the laws of nature, Ulises stepped into a state of war with the people and now, they (under Locke) have the right to do whatever they see fit to protect their freedoms.

Secondly, the teachers and indigenous people of Oaxaca have been denied sufficient wages with which they could live an achieving life while the children of the state remain under-educated. Both circumstances created by Ruiz have limited the freedoms of those within the state. Locke clearly states that "the end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom"(Wootton 328). By these standards, Ruiz was not fulfilling the law, and therefore did not deserve the right to make the law (a crucial piece to the definition of political power). Likewise, the equal application of laws for everyone is one of the main reasons a sovereign is erected, however repeatedly throughout his rule there have been instances of repressing opposing parties, favoring the wealthy, and actions against the indigenous population. Locke makes this claim under the pretense that all men are equal with the right to *equal* freedom; something not granted if rules apply differently to each individual.

Therefore when the teachers gathered to strike against Ruiz's policy and turned to revolution, they were within Lockian right to do so. Justice was not being done according to the teachers, and "violence used and injury

done” (Wootton 513) made war where the only remedy was war in return. Yet Locke might still have had a problem with the fast-paced move into revolution made against the Oaxacan governor. Revolution is intended by Locke for when the people want to “secure to them the ends for which government was first erected” (Wootton 379). “The ends” are spelled out as enforcing the laws of nature for the public good. The problem with Ruiz was not his excessive use of power but rather his lack of use of power, therefore before the actual protest began Ruiz was never cited to have ruled outside of his right. Most accusations made regarded Ruiz’s personal scandals aside from the reforms needed in the education, which still never put Ruiz outside his right, just not fully exercising his power. Some might argue that lack of power used is just as harmful and wrong as exercising too much power, however as to where Locke stands, there is a sort of thin middle line that Ruiz most likely crossed which pushed him into the category of rightful leader who needs reform, not revolution.

It is much easier to declare who Hobbes would side with when given the choice between the APPO and Ruiz. Since Hobbes almost completely rejects the idea of legitimate revolution, all atrocities committed by Ruiz were matters to be discussed, not to be used as weaponry to oust him. They were in his power to do so because Ruiz was in a divinely appointed position and therefore legitimate. As to whether or not the acts were cruel, just or loving is a different matter, but one can be sure that Hobbes would see no right to revolution in Oaxaca. Even if all atrocities committed were to classify him as a tyrant, Hobbes would still acknowledge Ruiz as a legitimate sovereign. The only reason for which Ruiz could possibly be taken out of his role would be if he were unable to defend his country. For Hobbes “the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defense” (Wootton 189). Although peace for all is not granted, Hobbes puts an emphasis on the main purpose of a sovereign being to defend his commonwealth, something that Ruiz has never proved unable to do. Therefore, before the revolt, he still held power as rightful sovereign. However, today, things have dissolved into a post-revolutionary state in Oaxaca, bringing to picture what Hobbes state of nature would look like. To Hobbes, in a place without a sovereign, men rely only on their brute physical strength. They cannot produce anything, there is no transportation, there is no account of time, and only fear of death is most forefront in the minds of man. A recent report from Oaxaca states “mobilizations have wreaked havoc on the economy. The people have intentionally created what they call an atmosphere of “ungovernability” to clarify that their demand for the exit of the governor is nonnegotiable. Citizens have blockaded banks, car dealerships, and multinational fast-food chains; highways have been blockaded and shutdown at times. The state government has visibly ceased to exist as the

“whereabouts” of elected officials are “unknown,” and barricades and encampments blockade access to state buildings. The teachers of the SNTE have refused to return to work until the governor has been removed from office”(Maldonado).

Bombs, teargas and graffiti continue to torment the face of toiling Oaxaca, as the government now stands in shambles, pressed for a new leader and left to deal with the ruins of the city. This very revolution, an act in which the people declared what a just sovereign is and simultaneously decided that Ruiz goes against these ideals, finds shaky but sure ground in the words of Locke, and even a few quotable justifications from Hobbes. One can find that both Locke and Hobbes agree that revolution is an act done against a governing body which the people believe has somehow out-stepped its role. Hobbes stops here, standing firm in his conviction that all moves by a sovereign are within his right because he has the power entrusted by God and the people. Only if one cannot defend the commonwealth (which Ruiz still could do until June 14, 2006) is he or she no longer rightful sovereign. Only now can the people of Oaxaca look to Hobbes for support since he would recognize that there exists a state of post revolution where a new leader chosen by the people is necessary (possibly the APPO). Locke adds a few more requirements to the justification of revolution by concentrating on the *right* of a ruler to use his attained power, and the boundaries of his rule: that is, to only work for the good of the commonwealth. The people of Oaxaca felt that Ruiz was not only ignoring the good of education and indigenous rights, but perhaps that he was not even given the power to rule to begin with (recalling the supposedly fraudulent elections of 2004). Therefore, clinging to their firm conviction that justice was not being done, a necessity in order for the common good of the people to remain, the APPO and supporters continue to revoke what little power they felt they gave to Ruiz. By the power invested in Ruiz, the struggle of force will continue as their modern Lockian revolution writes the history of Mexico, with or without the approval of Hobbes.



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