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If all of this has a familiar ring, it may be because the *Missing* controversy contains many of the same elements as the debate around the publication of Jacobo Timerman's memoirs of torture and anti-Semitism in Argentina. Like Costa-Gavras, Timerman indicted the United States as a co-conspirator in the system of repression he described. And while Timerman has his many sympathizers, he was widely criticized for excesses of emotion, intuition and suggestibility. Neo-conservative guru Irving Kristol savaged Timerman and all he represented in a *Wall Street Journal* column, in tones reminiscent of the campaign against *Missing*. Kristol dismissed Timerman's charges as irresponsible and dishonest demagoguery. Those who defended Timerman were part of "a major intellectual and propaganda campaign . . . mounted by the left and liberal-left" to blur the fashionable new distinction between acceptable authoritarianism of the right and unredeemable totalitarianism of the left. That is, the Timerman issue

was part of a larger ideological war.

Now it may be a false sign of spring, but I can feel the first faint shift in the wind of that war. *Missing* did not produce the change, of course; movies don't shake the world. But many of the inherent contradictions, the logical limitations in the "old line" attack on the post-imperial culture, became clearer in the controversy the movie engendered. Greed is not enough, after all; brute force is finally self-defeating. "You cannot stop history," Costa-Gavras wisely said. The generalized failure of America's foreign and domestic policies over the past few months has started the process of invalidating their underlying intellectual premises. There is space now for new coalitions to emerge, for voices to rise, for alternatives to take shape. There are stirrings again on campuses, in the streets, in churches and workplaces. People who have been on the run are digging in. The old dividing line is indeed revitalized, and bigger battles are bound to begin. □

Every hour or so we stopped at some station, shot to pieces by one army or the other during the three years of Revolution; there the train would be besieged by vendors of cigarettes, pine nuts, bottles of milk, *camotes* and *tamales* rolled in cornhusks. Old women, gossiping, descended from the train, built themselves a little fire, and boiled coffee. Squatting there, smoking their cornhusk cigarettes, they told one another interminable love stories.

As is well known, his Harvard chum Walter Lippmann did not think too highly of Reed's writing: he claimed it lacked thought, was too direct, vivid and unmediated by qualifications. No doubt it also put Lippmann off by giving all issues human features. In Reed's Mexican writings we learn what people eat, and where they sleep, and who with, as well as their political ideas; we are shown how they respond to pain and death, and we get a powerful sense of place and time. All this makes it difficult to persist in seeing Mexicans as subhuman rapists and desperadoes.

Reed wrote as he did because that was the best chance he had for understanding an alien tradition of revolutionary violence. He wrote out of his own discomfort and exhilaration, trusting himself as an authority on something he knew little about. I'm sure his confidence in his method was bolstered by what he read in the "bought" press on the other side of the border.

Mexico was Reed's second departure from home, as it were. He'd already visited England and worked as a casual laborer. But in Chihuahua and Durango he was among a different race, among Indians and mestizos, and he did not choose to despise them; there were times when his survival depended upon his trusting them, just as Pancho Villa, their leader, trusted and welcomed him. Through their encounters we watch a process of humanization: "Villa himself stood leaning against a car, hands in his pockets. He wore an old slouch hat, a dirty shirt without a collar. . . . All over the dusty plain in front of him men and horses had sprung up like magic. There was an immense confusion of saddling and bridling—a cracked blowing of tin bugles. . . ."

Insurgent Mexico would make a more cinematic script than *Reds*, I think. It is not the work of a man who had not yet lived but of a young man exhilarated and saddened by the experience of living at great peril. It is also a book with con-

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Before dying young, John Reed witnessed and participated in two great social revolutions which became extremely messy and corrupt after he was already buried in the Kremlin Wall. Reed's journalism on Mexico and Russia (not to mention his brilliant writing from the trenches during World War I) has been called "idealistic" for its celebration of the revolutionary ideals he attributed to the Bolsheviks and the peasantry of Chihuahua; but Reed was probably not as callow as Warren Beatty has portrayed him in the recent film *Reds*. That's a movie about a romance (and, as we all know, romance is a deepening experience), and it makes only brief reference to Reed's days in Mexico (a few frames at the film's outset show him fleeing a battlefield behind a wagonful of *guerrilleros*). Beatty's point is that Mexico was only a passing interlude in Reed's pursuit of Louise Bryant, commitment and death. But that is surely a strange way of looking at an experience that produced *Insurgent*

Mexico, Reed's finest writing, a book of such vividness, empathy and daring that much of what passes for personal journalism today does seem callow by comparison.

Insurgent Mexico has just been reprinted by International Publishers (292 pp. \$1.95). It seems as fresh today as it did in 1914 when it appeared as a series of magazine articles after Reed's return from Mexico. At the time, the American press was intent on supporting the Porfirista regime and its heirs, and Reed's articles went against the press's prevailing racism and xenophobia by expressing sympathy with an indigenous social revolution that directly threatened powerful U.S. interests.

Reed's account of the Mexican revolution is fragmentary and incomplete—what his eyes and ears took in. *Insurgent Mexico* is a series of personal adventures culminating in the battle for Gomez Palacio and interspersed with sympathetic profiles of Pancho Villa and V. Carranza. Its style is closer to Hemingway than it is to political journalism, and it is often beautifully wrought:

All the long afternoon we ambled slowly south, the western rays of the sun burning as they struck our faces.

Richard Elman's forthcoming novel is *Menu Cipher* (Macmillan).

temporary lessons: As I write this I am listening to a State Department spokesman explain why the United States supports terror in El Salvador to deter "terrorism." A Congressman from California looked out from my television last night to say that if the rebels won in El Salvador, his state would be inundated with Central American refugees; even as he was speaking, the United States was putting off the insurgent forces' request for a negotiated settlement.

The leaders of the Mexican revolution were always trying to explain themselves to the American public and to express their desire to end the

fighting, and they were usually rebuffed, which is why they chose military force to gain power. Only then were they taken seriously, and they then became increasingly authoritarian and corrupt, like us.

The fact that we look to Bolshevik conspiracies to explain revolutions in Central America and not to the history of our "good neighbor" to the South is indicative, I think, of our bad intentions toward the area. John Reed was a partisan journalist with good intentions toward Mexico, and that is why he was able to write a book of enduring value and vividness. □