

CALIFORNIA REVOLUTION OF 1831:  
A NOTABLE MANIFESTO.

By H. D. Barrows.

The Native Californians have been charged with fomenting frequent revolutions. But when we consider their treatment by both the Spanish and the Mexican governments, we are not surprised at their resentment, nor at their attempts to redress the wrongs which they suffered.

The Protest, or Pronunciamiento, of 1831, promulgated by Pico, Bandini, Carrillo and others, which inaugurated the movement against Governor Victoria, and which resulted in his being driven out of the country, was a statesmanlike document. It gave good and valid reasons for the action of the patriotic men who sought to terminate evils which had become intolerable, and which are briefly and in part recounted in the following manifesto.

If the reasons given in our own Declaration of Independence for revolution received the approval of mankind, certainly those cited in this document are equally entitled to indorsement by all fair-minded men.

Bancroft, in the third volume of his History of California, chap. VII, pp. 181-215, gives a vivid account of the rule and overthrow of Governor Victoria. Indeed, in some respects this chapter describes one of the most interesting and dramatic episodes in early California history.

Some of the principal causes of the Revolution of 1831 are herewith briefly pointed out:

1. After the organization of republican government in Mexico, which succeeded the downfall of the imperial regime under Iturbide, the Mexican Congress by law provided for the distribution of the public lands of the nation among the citizens in conformity with regulations that were to be issued by the executive branch of the government, but which were not promulgated until 1828.

And, inasmuch as under this law and these regulations the co-operation and approval of the legislative department of the government of California were necessary in order to make

grants of lands to citizens legal; and, as Victoria neglected and finally flatly refused to take any steps to carry out the same, or to call the Territorial Legislature together, the people naturally became indignant that the beneficent land laws of the republic should be thus arbitrarily rendered absolutely inoperative so far as they related to California.

2. The people of Los Angeles had become exasperated with Victoria, because of their belief that the acts of the Alcalde of Los Angeles, Vicente Sanchez, who, during the year 1831 had kept a large number of the most influential citizens of the pueblo under arrest in the guardhouse, mostly for contempt of his authority, or for some trivial offence, etc., were inspired by Victoria.

His suspension of the Departmental Assembly and his attempts to have all elective ayuntamientos abolished and to have military rule substituted; and his barbarous ordering that several persons should be shot for comparatively trivial offences, etc., etc., were among the causes of the people's exasperation, and as a result of which, the following proclamation was issued:

Pronunciamiento de San Diego contra el Gefe Politico y Comandante General de California, Don Manuel Victoria, en 29 de Noviembre, y 1 de Diciembre de 1831, MS.

MEXICAN CITIZENS, RESIDING IN THE UPPER TERRITORY OF THE  
CALIFORNIA.

If the enterprise we undertake were intended to violate the provisions of the laws, if our acts in venturing to oppose the scandalous acts of the actual Governor, D. Manuel Victoria, were guided by aims unworthy of patriotic citizens, then should we not only fear, but know, the fatal results to which we must be condemned. Such, however, not being the case, we, guided in the path of justice, animated by love of our Soil, duly respecting the laws dictated by our supreme legislature and enthusiastic for their support, find ourselves obliged, on account of the criminal abuse noted in the said chief, to adopt the measures here made known.

Being conscious of the purity of our motives we proceed, not against the Supreme Government or its magistrates, but rather against an individual who has violated the fundamental bases of our system; or, in fact against a tyrant who has hypocritically deceived the national authorities, in order that he might thereby reach the rank to which, without deserving it he

has been raised.

The Ruler of the Universe, and Searcher of all hearts, knows that we are actuated only by the sincerest love of country, respect for the laws, a desire to obey them and make them obeyed, and to banish the abuses, which, with accelerated steps, the actual ruler is committing against the liberties of the people. These sentiments we insist are in accordance with public right and moral law.

We will maintain these truths before the National Sovereignty with confidence that our course will meet with full and unqualified approval.

From the sentiments herein indicated may be clearly inferred the patriotic spirit which moves us to the proceeding this day begun; and the knowledge that such sentiments are entertained by the people of Alta California, assures us that our action will be sustained by all who live in this unfortunate country.

As for the military officers in actual service, opposition is naturally to be expected from them to our plan, and we must allow them at first this unfavorable opinion demanded by their profession; but not so later, when they shall have fully learned the wise and beneficent intentions with which we act; for they also, as Mexican citizens, are in duty bound to maintain inviolate the code to which we have all sworn.

We believe that your minds are ever decided in favor of the preservation of society, and your arms are ready for the service of whomsoever may assure happiness, and in support of the laws which promulgate its representation.

You have had positive proof of the contrary spirit shown by the arbitrary acts of the present chief executive of our Province. We point you to many of his criminal acts, to his plain infractions of the laws, committed against the Territorial representation, which has been suppressed on pretexts that amply confirm his absolutism, though the members were elected by you to be the arca (repository) of your liberties; to the total suppression of the Ayuntamiento (Town Council) of Santa Barbara; the shooting of several persons by his order at Monterey and San Francisco, without the necessary precedent formalities prescribed by the laws; the expatriation suffered by the citizens Jose Antonio Carrillo and Abel Stearns without notification of the reasons demanding it; the scorn with which he has treated the most just demand which, with legal proofs, was presented by the Honorable Pueblo of Los Angeles, leaving unpunished the public crimes of the present Alcalde; and,—not to

wear you with further reflections of this nature,—please consider the arbitrary powers which he has assumed in the department of revenues, making himself its chief, with grave injury to the public funds.

We trust that after you know our aims you will regard the removal of all these evils as demanding the co-operation of every citizen. The said ruler has not only shown himself shameless in the violation of law, but has at the same time imperilled our security and interests by reason of his despotism and incapacity.

You yourselves are experiencing the misfortunes that have happened during his brief administration, of the office of Governor.

For all these reasons we have proposed:

1st. To suspend the exercise of Don Manuel Victoria in all that relates to the command which he at present holds in this Territory as Comandante-General and Gefe-Politico, for infraction and conspiracy against our sacred institutions, as we will show by legal proofs.

2nd. That when at a fitting time, the Excelentisima Diputacion Territorial (Honorable Territorial Assembly) shall have met, the military command and the political command shall fall to distinct and separate persons, as the laws of both jurisdictions provide, until the question is definitely decided by the supreme Federal authority.

These two objects, so just for the reasons given, are those which demand attention from the true patriot.

Then let the rights of the citizen be born anew; let Liberty spring up from the ashes of oppression, and perish the despotism that has trampled ruthlessly on our sacred rights!

Yes, Citizens! Love of country and observance of the laws prescribed and approved by the Supreme Republic are and should be the fundamental basis of our action. Property must be respected as well as the rights of each citizen. Our Diputacion Territorial will work and will take all the steps conducive to the good of society; but we beg that body that it make no innovation whatever in the matter of the Missions, respecting their communities and property, since our object is confined solely to the two articles as stated. To the Supreme Government belongs exclusively the power to decide what it may deem proper on this subject, and it promises to the Padres to observe respect, decorum, and security towards the property intrusted to their care.

Thus we sign it, and we hope for indulgence in considera-

tion of our rights and justice. Presidio of San Diego, Nov. 29, 1831.

(Signed with respective titles.)

PIO PICO,  
JUAN BANDINI,  
JOSE ANTONIO CARRILLO.

Approval of Pronunciamento by Citizens of Los Angeles.

We, Jose Maria Echeandia, Pio Pico, Juan Bandini, Jose Antonio Carrillo, Pablo de la Portilla, Santiago Arguello, Jose Maria Ramirez, Ignacio del Valle, Juan Jose Rocha, and Sergeant Andres Cervantes (as Comandante of Artillery) being acquainted with the preceding plan signed by Pico, Bandini and Carrillo, (according to which the people of this place surprised the small garrison of this Plaza on the night of November 29th), consider it founded on our national right, since it is known to us on satisfactory evidence, that the Gefe Politico (Governor) and Comandante General (Military Commander) of the Territory, Don Manuel Victoria, has infringed our Federal Constitution and laws in that part relating to individual security and popular representation; and we find ourselves not in a position to be heard with the promptness our rights demand by the supreme powers of the Nation, which might order the suspension that is effected in the plan, if they could see and prove the accusations which give rise to so many complaints.

But at the same time, in order to secure in this movement the best order, and a path which may not lead us away from the object proposed, we declare and ordain that Lieut.-Col. of Engineers, citizen Jose Maria de Echeandia, shall re-assume the command, political and military, of the Territory, which this same year he gave up to the said Senor Victoria—this until the Supreme (Federal) Government may determine, after the proper correspondence, or until, the Diputacion (Legislature) being assembled, distinct (separate) persons may in legal form take charge of the two commands. And the said chief having appeared at our invitation, and, being informed on the subject, he decided to serve in both capacities as stated, protesting, however, that he does it solely in support of public liberty according to the system which he had sworn, and for the preservation of order, pending submission to the approval of the supreme powers of the Nation.

Thus, all being said publicly, and the proclamation in favor of Senor Echeandia being general, he began immediately to dis-

charge the duties of the command. And in token thereof we sign together with said chief—both the promoters of the plan who signed it and we who have seconded it—today between 11 and 12 o'clock, Dec. 1, 1831.

(Signed) Jose Maria Echeandia, Pio Pico, Juan Bandini, Jose Antonio Carrilo, Pablo de la Portilla, Santiago Arguello, Jose Maria Ramirez, Ignacio del Valle, Juan Jose Rocha, (and as comandante of the Artillery detachment), Sergt. Andres Cervantes.