

## **THE LEGEND: INDEPENDENCIA Y LIBERTAD**

Miguel L. Munoz, From Volume VI Number 70, PLUS ULTRA, 1969

For over thirty years, millions and millions of Mexican coins have shown on the edge the impressed legend: "INDEPENDENCIA Y LIBERTAD". However, no author tells us the origin of this motto. Some of them only mention it and others do not even take it into consideration. People, naturally, are so used to this legend that they take it as a matter of course and if a numismatist takes a look at it, it is to check if the coin is genuine without thinking about its meaning and still less about its origin.

If you look up our coins we shall find that this beautiful motto started being used on the edge of our coins from 1895, in accordance with the monetary law of that year. We can be sure that this legend was started on our coins in 1905, due to the fluctuations in the price of silver in the world markets. These conditions compelled Mexico to change our monetary system. The origin of the motto, of course is different.

It is a well known fact that Mexico has been the largest producer of silver in the world. We do not say this in boasting, but only to prove that the fluctuations of this metal in the world market have a

direct bearing on Mexico and more so on our coinage. The fluctuations of the price of silver at the beginning of this century had an adverse effect on Mexico's economy, that is, the price of silver continued dropping and Mexico had to take protective measures. On November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1904, our Treasury Department presented a program to Congress to reform our Monetary Laws and the corresponding decree was published on December 9<sup>th</sup> authorizing the President to carry on. This law became effective on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1905 and we copy only the necessary:

## LAW THAT ESTABLISHES THE MONETARY SYSTEM OF THE ESTADOS MEXICANOS

### Chapter I.

#### Of the coins.

Art. I – The unit of the Monetary System of the Estados Unidos Mexicanos shall be represented by 0.75 grams of pure gold, and it shall be called “Peso”, coined up to the present, with 24.4388 grams of pure silver shall under the provisions of this law have a legal value equivalent to the aforesaid 0.75 grams of pure gold.

Art. 2 - The “peso will be divided in 100”centavos” and the coins struck shall have the following values:

#### Gold Coins:

Ten Pesos

Five Pesos

#### Silver Coins:

50 centavos

20 centavos

10 centavos

#### Nickel Coins:

5 centavos

2 centavos

1 centavo

Art. 8 – The National coat of arms and the legend “Estados Unidos Mexicanos” must be struck on all coins; the other emblems, legends and requisites shall be determined by Governmental decree. As we all know, only the two gold coins and the silver fifty-centavo pieces have on the edge the legend, “Independencia y Libertad”. The other silver coins have a milled edge and the nickel and bronze coins a plain edge.

On April 5<sup>th</sup> 1905, the corresponding decree was published and we copy a few extracts of it:

## DECREE RELATIVE TO THE EMBLEMS, LEGEND AND OTHER REQUISITES USED IN THE STRIKING OF THE NATIONAL COINS.

Secretary of State and Treasury Department, Mexico, Section 4<sup>th</sup>. The President of the Republic (Gral. Porfirio Diaz) in accordance with Art. 8 of the Law of March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1905, has ordered striking of

the National Coins with the following emblems, legends and other requisites be used:

TEN AND FIVE PESO GOLD COINS

Obv: The obverse of these coins will have the national coat of arms. On the upper part, around the eagle shall be the legend: "Estados Unidos Mexicanos". Encircling the aforesaid there shall be a (gráfila) mortised border within the corresponding protective one.

Rev. : The main feature shall be the bust of Hidalgo surrounded by the coin and the year of coinage. The mortised border and the protective one shall be the same as the ones used on the obverse. The edge shall be the same as the fifty cent silver coins.

SILVER ONE PESO COINS

Until other action is taken the one peso coins shall be the same as the present ones; but in the obverse will show the inscription: "Estados Unidos Mexicanos".

FIFTY, TWENTY AND TEN CENTAVO SILVER COINS

Obv. :The corresponding obverses of these coins shall be the same as the gold coins.

Rev. : The composition of the design shall be the same for the three coins, without any other variation than the number indicating their value, which should be visible in the center of the field and immediately below, the word "centavos". The date will be in the exergue. Above the value indicating the value of the coin there shall be a liberty cap with rays and on the lower part of the reverse enclosing all the inscriptions, a wreath formed by a twig of laurel and another of oak. The mortised and protective borders will be the same as those of the obverse. On the edge of the fifty centavo coins there will be an incuse legend "Independencia y Libertad"; -- and the edge of the twenty and ten centavo coins will be milled.

.....  
All of the coins referred to in this resolution will have on the reverse the mintmark in the most appropriate place.

Mexico, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1905 – José Yves Limantour- Sect'y. of the Treasury and Public Credit.  
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We have omitted the corresponding rulings to the nickel and bronze coins, as they have no relation to this article. However, we wish to make some comments to the Monetary Law and the corresponding decree:

ART. I – states clearly, "The unit of the Monetary System shall be the PESO. "But in spite of being a UNIT, it did not deserve having the legend on the edge . . . nor . . . the change from "Republica Mexicana" to "Estados Unidos Mexicanos. " This coin had a milled edge up to 1909. As we know, the first "peso" with the legend, "Independencia y Libertad" on the edge is dated 1910. popularly known as "Peso del Caballito". However, this matter must have been studied very carefully as we

can read in the same decree, “until other action is taken, the one “peso” coin shall be the same as the present ones..”

Beyond doubt, Mexico did not make changes in the design of the one peso coin due to the fact that it was exported in large quantities to the Orient, China, Philippines, Siam etc. and it was not wished to make the mistake of 1869 – 1873 – when Mexico changed the design to the “Juarista” peso known as “Peso de Balanza” that was not accepted in the Orient. Due to this fact Mexico had to discontinue the “Balance” peso and reinstate the “Liberty Cap eight reales up to 1898 when it was redesigned with a more slender eagle and also changing the “8R” for “Un Peso” but leaving the coin basically the same.

The second point that we wish to make is that not withstanding the fact that the Ten and Five peso gold coins are the first ones mentioned and are of the highest value, the legend on the edge is not mentioned. It is simply referred to by saying, “...the edge shall be the same as that used in the fifty centavo coins...”

The third point is that when it comes to the fifty-centavo coin and finally the legend, “Independencia y Libertad” is mentioned (for the first time) it is done as a matter of no importance and “hidden” in the next to the last line.

But the most disheartening thing about all of this, is the fact that neither in the Monetary Law or the corresponding Decree, is any mention made of the origin or the reason why this motto was chosen. After some investigation and research, we learned that General Morelos used this legend as his own motto for a number of years. Fortunately, we also came across the incident that made him adopt the slogan and we wish to give a brief account of it.

On October 20, 1820 the priest Morelos had an interview with the priest Hidalgo who was already Generalissimo of the Insurgents. Their meeting was at Indaparapeo. It was then and there where Morelos received instructions from Hidalgo who also appointed him General of the “Costa Sur” (South Coast). Five days later the priest Morelos left his parish with 25 men badly equipped he continued by the town of Churumuco, crossed the river and arrived at Coahuayutla where Rafael Valdovinos joined him with a few more men.

It is convenient to point out at that time, the small villages in Nueva España had practically no protection; some towns of relative importance only had limited groups of undisciplined militia; cities or important towns as well as sea ports had small detachments of soldiers. The militia was formed by people that never met for military training; the first arms were at the captain’s homes; the majority of the officers lived in the various capitals; their commissions were considered honorary and many times they never saw their soldiers.

When Morelos was near Zacatula, he sent a messenger requesting an interview with the captain of the

militia. A little later Morelos came to the plaza of this town by the ocean. He dismounted from his horse and went inside a room lit by the dim light of a coconut oil lamp around which there were about 20 officers and soldiers well armed with carbines and sabers. They were cavalry militia. The noises made by the horses in the patio could be heard in the room. When the priest went in, some officers took off their hats as a sign of respect for the arriving priest. They all looked at his shabby aspect and dirty clothes and unshaven beard due to his hurried and hazardous trip. When they saw his fierce and magnetic eyes they thought that they were from an outlaw, in spite of the fact Captain Martinez had already warned them; they felt that they were wrong-doing and sooner or later the King's justice was going to catch up with them.

But when Morelos started talking and drawing a picture of the state of the fatherland, he woke in these men the desire for liberty and the thrill of glory; he dropped in their minds the seeds of their civil rights with plain words and familiar scenes and with the powerful eloquence of sincerity and truth which always works on people. Morelos stopped talking and remained silent. Suddenly the group of officers and soldiers exploded in a unanimous and deafening yell! : .... **VIVA LA INDEPENDENCIA!! VIVA LA AMERICA LIBRE! ! VIVA MORELOS! !** Morelos replied in a loud voice: **"VIVA DON MIGUEL HIDALGO, GENERALISSIMO DE AMERICA".....**

The enthusiasm of the group was transmitted to the other soldiers and to the people of Zacatula and Captain Marcos Martinez joined in with a strong feeling for Independence and fifty well-armed soldiers.

From then on Morelos used constantly the words **"LIBERTAD"** and **"INDEPENDENCIA"** or vice versa, changing it sometimes but always bearing in mind the idea of "Independence & Liberty". We may prove the above when we look up the document that he presented to the Congress of Chilpancingo on September 14, 1813 from which we copy the following: **FEELINGS OF THE NATION OR 23 POINTS GIVEN BY MORELOS FOR THE CONSTITUTION.**

1. That America is **FREE AND INDEPENDENT** from Spain and from any other Nation, government or Monarchy and that so shall it be known to the world, giving these reasons.

.....

As we see above, Morelos included in his first point the words "Libre e independiente" which is equivalent to the motto used on our coins; **independencia y Libertad**". We must point out that the Insurgents used the word "America" whenever they referred to the Spanish Provinces on this side of the Atlantic.

During our research we picked up another version: Morelos was shot in San Cristobal Ecatepec (15 miles from Mexico City) at 3 PM and buried one hour later (!!!) at the church yard of this small town, on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1815 and before being shot he yelled out: "Independencia y Libertad". We cannot accept this version because the only account of this incident is from Morelos' confessor, Padre

Salazar, who states that Morelos requested a crucifix and in an emotional but clear voice he said, taking it in his hands: “Oh my Lord, if I have done right, you know it; if wrong I accept Your infinite mercy.”.

For this alone, we have in our hands a Mexican coin bearing on the edge the legend:  
“INDEPENDENCE Y LIBERTAD”

Miguel L. Munoz

Anitlán

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