



*Silver Dollar Pay Day
Relaxation in Englishtown*

Campbell

Dia de Raya

I was sitting at my desk when the thought occurred to me to check the meaning of the phrase "dia de La Raya." This is what the Miners called pay day at the New Almaden mines. Locally, the term is said to mean day of The Rip, a sentiment regarding the traditional pay day. On pay day the miners lined up at the mine office to receive their wages, less the monthly \$1 fee for the Company medical plan (a doctor on horseback) and less any penalties for broken tools, conversion to cash, debts at the Company store, violations of Company policies, etc. Makes sense, but when I checked the meaning on the Internet, I discovered that raya literally means "streak," as in bright red streak of cinnabar ore. Rasgón is the Spanish word returned for the English word rip, as in tear. I asked a friend from Central America for help.

My friend tells me that dia de La Raya is a common expression for pay day, or at least it was common. "Timo" means rip-off. "Día de paga" means pay day. My friend reports that "in the past the term "dia de La Raya" was used by indigenous people of Central and South America to mean pay day, but often with an undercurrent of disdain for the paltry wages and abuse often suffered as a result of their Indian heritage." In the early days, the miners at New Almaden were said to be "Mexican Indians" and not treated too kindly. Regardless, my friend says there are so many local variations of expression and meaning (in essence, slang) that one must simply defer to what the term is said to mean locally.

I like to think that the meaning changed over time and that dia de La Raya came to mean "the day we get paid for the streak of ore." Perhaps in the early days it implied a rip-off of the workers, but New Almaden was safe and an orderly community after the Quicksilver Mining Company of New York took over the operation in 1863. Miners at New Almaden made comparatively good wages on average, even though miners at New Almaden were mostly contract workers. They bid for the work they performed. Hourly wages were only paid for support jobs, such as furnace attendants and carpenters. Miners made their money according to the nature of the rock. Those that bid on ore extraction could have a fabulously wealthy pay day if they hit a rich streak, otherwise, they would make what their low-bid that won the work dictated per day, foot, or carga (load of ore delivered to the surface).

The meaning of dia de La Raya certainly depended on the intonation with which the expression was said, and the intonation rested on fortune's finger. If a miner who won the low-bid for each carga of ore delivered to the surface found no ore, "Dia de la Raya!" was surely uttered with an air of disgust. The hapless miner might then be absent for the traditional pay day queue in front of the mine office and instead compelled to ask their nice neighbors to help his family eat until his fortune might return. None the less, one can imagine that there was always a waiting list of people trying to get into New Almaden to take advantage of the social improvements- three schools, two churches, libraries, medical staff, well-stocked stores, lively and close-knit community, beautiful country, temperate weather year-round (much more mild than the gold fields), the proximity to the much-civilized city of San Jose, and other benefits.

Written by Michael Cox