EIGHTH EDITION

Latin America:
An Interpretive History

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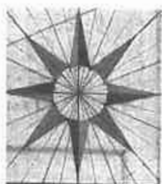


CHAPTER 7

THE MEXICAN EXPLOSION

The struggles for political voice and economic space that characterized Latin America at the turn of the century were not resolved at the electoral polls in Mexico. Mexico continued to represent the extremes of Latin American patterns, from its exceptional chaos in the early nineteenth century to the amazing endurance of its liberal, modernizing caudillo, Porfirio Díaz, at century's end. The dictator refused to open the political system to the new economic elites, and their desperation for a role in the system ignited long-simmering disputes with the masses. The result was the Mexican Revolution, or perhaps more accurately, revolutions (the "long" revolution ran from 1910–1940).

By revolution, we mean the sudden, forceful, and violent overturn of a previously relatively stable society and the substitution of other institutions for those discredited. Change by revolution thus denotes sweeping change, the destruction of old social, political, and economic patterns in favor of newer ones. Use of this definition divides genuine revolutions from the innumerable palace coups, military takeovers, civil wars, and the wars of independence, which were nothing more than shifts in the holding of power within the same or similar groups unaccompanied by fundamental economic, social, or political changes. These changes are also accompanied by new ideology and national mythologies reflecting a change in the balance of power.

Octavio Paz wrote one of the most famous and moving descriptions of the Mexican Revolution: "Like our popular fiestas, the Revolution was an excess and a squandering, a going to extremes, an explosion of joy and hopelessness, a shout of orphanhood and jubilation, of suicide and life, all of them mingled together." But in that explosion, much was unclear: Who won? Who lost? What were the goals, and were they achieved? And were the results worth the loss of more than one million lives?

Cracks in the Regime

By 1910, Porfirio Díaz and the "New Creoles" had ruled for thirty-four years, without a popular mandate, for the benefit of privileged native elites and foreign investors. The economy still depended upon foreign whims and direction, a neocolonialism clearly seen in the statistics: 75 percent of all dividend-paying mines in Mexico were owned by U.S. interests. Foreign capital represented 97 percent of investment in mining, 98 percent of rubber, and 90 percent of oil. Some Mexicans resented the high level of foreign investment. Others were concerned that the Porfirian prosperity was narrowly based, relying mostly on mining, utilities, commerce, and large-scale agriculture, with relatively little industry.

The majority of the population did not share the wealth. Real wealth actually declined for the majority: Hacienda peons earned an average daily wage of 35 cents, which remained almost steady throughout the nineteenth century, while corn and chile prices more than doubled, and beans cost six

The initial target of the revolution was Porfirio Diaz, who by the time of his overthrow in 1911 had ruled for thirty-six years. (Library of Congress)

times more than they had at the beginning of the century. Life was a little better for urban workers, who worked eleven- to twelve-hour days, seven days a week, and lived in squalid housing with one bathhouse per 15,000 residents.

Land, a principal source of wealth, remained in the hands of a few. Foreigners owned between 14 and 20 percent of it. Ninety-five percent of the rural population owned none. Not even 10 percent of the indigenous communities held land. Fewer than 1,000 families owned most of Mexico. In fact, fewer than 200 families owned one-quarter of the land. Private estates reached princely proportions. The De la Garza hacienda in the state of Coahuila totaled 11,115,000 acres; the Huller estate in Baja, California, sprawled over 13,325,650 acres. Productivity was low, and absentee landlords were common. The fact that a majority of Mexicans lived in the country and worked in agriculture made the inequity of land distribution all the more unjust.

At the same time, the growing mestizo urban classes were dissatisfied with the inequitable institutions inherited from the past. The mestizos had grown rapidly in number over the centuries. By the end of the nineteenth century they surpassed the indigenous in number and totally overshadowed the tiny "creole" class. It was obvious from their size, skill, and ambitions that the mestizos held the key to Mexico's future. The mestizo working and middle sectors of the cities voiced discontent with their inferior and static position in Porfirian Mexico. The inflexibility of Mexico's neocolonial institutions retarded their mobility and inhibited their progress.

As early as 1900, intense criticism of the Porfiriato was launched by the anarchists Jesus, Enrique and Ricardo Flores Magón in their weekly newspaper, *Regeneración*. The brothers were jailed in 1901 for criticizing the political chief of Oaxaca. From their subsequent exile in St. Louis, Missouri, they issued the Liberal Plan, calling for an eight-hour work day and a six-day week; abolition of the notorious plantation store (*tienda de raya*); abolition of payment in scrip, which could only be used at the tienda de raya; restoration of the ejidos; and redistribution of uncultivated land.

However, it was actions within Mexico that revealed the intensifying contradictions of the Porfiriato. In 1906, workers went on strike at Colonel William Greene's Cananea Consolidated Copper Company, one of the ten largest mines in the world. One of the workers' chief complaints was that Mexicans were paid less than U.S. workers, who held all the technical and managerial posts. Furthermore, the foreigners were paid in gold dollars, whereas the Mexicans received silver pesos, which were worth far less. When the 3,000 Mexican workers went on strike, Greene refused to negotiate. When unarmed workers tried to force their way through a locked gate at the company lumberyard, high-pressure water hoses were turned on them. The gate collapsed and workers streamed into the yard. Company guards fired into the crowd, killing dozens of workers. The chaos spilled into the town, where Greene's guards shot indiscriminately into crowds. When Díaz could not get his rurales to the scene quickly enough, Greene turned to

the United States, and 275 Arizona Rangers were brought in, a direct challenge to Mexican sovereignty that angered Mexican elites.

Six months later, new violence broke out at the Rio Blanco textile mill in Orizaba, Veracruz, where the poorly paid workers put in twelve-hour days, and the workforce included children as young as eight years old. The 1907 conflict began when wives of the employees were denied credit to purchase food at the company store. What began with pushing ended with shots, as rurales fired into the crowd at point-blank range, killing women, children, and workers. When survivors returned later to claim the bodies, they were again assaulted.

Despite these harbingers of problems, it was not the oppressed workers who led the uprising. It was the upper classes, who had their own complaints about the regime. The theoretical justification for the Porfiriato was "Order & Progress"—but order had become rigidity, and progress had slowed. These dissatisfied elites wanted a share of political power, and they questioned the dictatorship. Northern elites in particular chafed under Mexico City's control, made possible by the telegraph, the railroad, and Díaz's grip on centralized power. Furthermore, his support of foreign commercial interests brought unwanted competition to the north, hurting their economic fortunes as well. It is not surprising, then, that it was a northern son who led the uprising.

Effective Suffrage and No Reelection

Francisco I. Madero was the son of a wealthy rancher from the border state of Coahuila, Evaristo Madero, who had been a supporter of Díaz in the early days of his leadership. Francisco was educated at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Sorbonne. The Madero family was among the elites: Among the family's vast holdings was the Compañía de Tierras de Sonora, comprising 1,450,000 acres of land, as well as iron and coal mines.

Despite their wealth, northern elites such as the Maderos were too far away from Mexico City to compete with the foreign interests that gathered around Díaz. His concessions to foreign companies translated into direct losses for Mexican businesses. For example, the Maderos were among cotton planters mired for years in lawsuits to reduce the unlimited water rights of the British-owned Tlahualilo Company. The Maderos were also the only serious competitor to the Rockefellers' Continental Rubber Company, which tried to eliminate the competition by merging with the U.S. Rubber Company and glutting the market, driving the price of rubber down from $1.00 to 25 cents per pound. In addition, the Maderos were among only a few Mexicans who owned smelters that could compete with foreign mining firms, and the only ones to survive after Díaz gave generous concessions to the Guggenheims' American Smelting and Refining Company.

In 1908, the elites were taken by surprise when Díaz announced in an interview with journalist James Creelman in Pearson's Magazine, a U.S. publication, that he would not seek reelection in 1910. "I have waited patiently for the day when the people of the Mexican Republic would be prepared to choose and change their government at every election without danger of armed revolutions and without injury to the national credit or interference with national progress. I believe that day has come. . . . No matter what my friends and supporters say, I retire when my present term of office ends, and I shall not serve again."

His opponents immediately began to express their views. In 1909, Andrés Molina Enriquez published *Las Grandes Problemas Nacionales* (The Great National Problems). Molina was no revolutionary. In fact, he was a positivist who hoped that reform, particularly agrarian reform, could avert revolution. The same year, Francisco I. Madero published *The Presidential Succession of 1910*, calling for political change. The challenges were felt on the local level as well: In Morelos, Patricio Leyva challenged Díaz candidate Pablo Escandón. Leyva's candidacy drew popular support from such local community leaders as Emiliano Zapata.

But despite his claims, Díaz chose to run again in 1910. Madero, under the banner of the Antireelectionist Party, ran as well. His platform called for political reform and free and open elections. His motto was the same one that Díaz himself had raised long ago in the Revolution of Tuxtepec: Effective suffrage and no reelection. When asked about economic issues, however, Madero replied that the Mexican people wanted liberty, not bread. Madero was more than willing to compromise with Díaz, even offering to run as his vice presidential candidate. But Díaz refused and instead threw Madero in jail the night before the election. To no one's surprise, Díaz declared his victory at the polls—with more than one million votes to less than two hundred for Madero—and took office for the eighth time.

Madero escaped to the United States. When he saw the popular response that his political opposition to the old dictator had aroused, he chose to launch a revolution. In San Antonio, Texas, he wrote his revolutionary plan, then crossed the border in October 1910, to announce the Plan de San Luis Potosí on Mexican soil. His plan showed the simple goals of his movement: the forced resignation of Díaz and electoral reforms. Repeatedly, his followers voiced the slogan "Effective suffrage and no reelection," a clue to the exclusively political, urban, and middle-sector origin of the revolution.

Patrias Chicas

Mexico's vast territory was a country of regions, each with its own set of local traditions and problems. The reaction to Madero's call for revolution depended as much on local conditions as on resentment toward the Díaz

regime. Indeed, the impact of Díaz policies differed by region. The two main geographic divisions were north and south. The north included the contiguous northwestern states of Chihuahua, Sonora, Sinaloa, Durango, and Coahuila. The south comprised the five adjoining central states of Guerrero, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz.

In general, the north was characterized by its distance from the political power center of Mexico City. There was no sedentary indigenous population, and settlers on the frontier had been united in their struggle against the Apaches. A border region, restless workers could cross to the United States in search of better jobs. It was a region where the Catholic Church had less impact, indeed, where Protestants and Mormons from the United States had made inroads. If there was any tradition to the northern states, it was one of independence and mobility. That independence was threatened during the Porfiriato by increasing state intrusion without a corresponding inclusion of local elites in the national power structure. Within this region, states had their own peculiarities. For example, residents of Chihuahua chafed against the monopoly over politics and economics exerted by the Terrazàs-Creel family, whereas in Durango, Díaz had alienated the middle class by his generous support to foreign mining companies.

The south and central states, on the other hand, were places where the Catholic Church and the large hacienda had formed the main structures of society. Small villages of campesinos struggled to maintain their farms against the encroachment of modernizing and expanding haciendas, eager for their land and labor. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Morelos, where the sugar plantations threatened the continued existence of traditional haciendas, the small rural settlements known as ranchos, and of entire villages. In contrast, in Veracruz, industrial workers labored in foreign-owned textiles mills under miserable conditions.

In isolated areas of Mexico, the revolution initially would have little impact. It was not until 1913 and 1914, well after the Maderista phase had ended, that people in Chiapas and Tabasco were aware of the revolution. Isolation was only one factor keeping Yucatán removed from revolutionary upheaval: There was also the iron-fisted power of the henequen industry. As a result, the revolution would not come to the peninsula until 1915. Oaxaca, on the other hand, was quiet because most of the land was still in traditional indigenous villages, relatively untouched by the capitalist displacement and political intrusion of the Porfiriato.

THE MADERISTA REVOLT

Madero called for Mexicans to rise in revolution on November 20, 1910. The only response to his call came in Chihuahua, where Abraham Gonzalez, head of the state's Antireelectionist Party, called for an uprising. When the

Revolutionary leader Pancho Villa rides among his troops on a dusty trail in 1916 during raids in the United States and northern Mexico. (Library of Congress)

conspirators found that their plans for November 20 had been discovered by the authorities, they rose instead on November 14. They were led by Toribio Ortega, a campesino leader who had led his native village in a 1903 attempt to recover lost lands. Ortega began with sixty men, and they were soon joined by the residents of nearby villages who had also struggled over lost lands. In Parral, a mining town, it was a wealthy merchant, Guillermo Baca, who led forty men in an attack on the jefe politico and was soon joined by 300 men. The revolt spread quickly throughout Chihuahua's mining towns and old military colonies. While they were responding to Madero's call, the local rebellions were aimed primarily at unpopular local authorities and were fueled by local grievances. When the revolutionaries failed in attacks on local police, they retreated to the mountains to regroup for guerrilla warfare.

There were many local leaders like Ortega and Baca, but two men would emerge to coordinate the local uprisings in the north: Pascual Orozco and Pancho Villa. Orozco was a member of the new middle class, the minimally educated son of a store owner. He made his money as an enterprising muleteer leading convoys of precious metals through the mountains. His knowledge of the region and the danger of his occupation made him a natural revolutionary leader. He was at first much better known than Pancho Villa, who entered the revolution as the leader of only twenty-eight men.

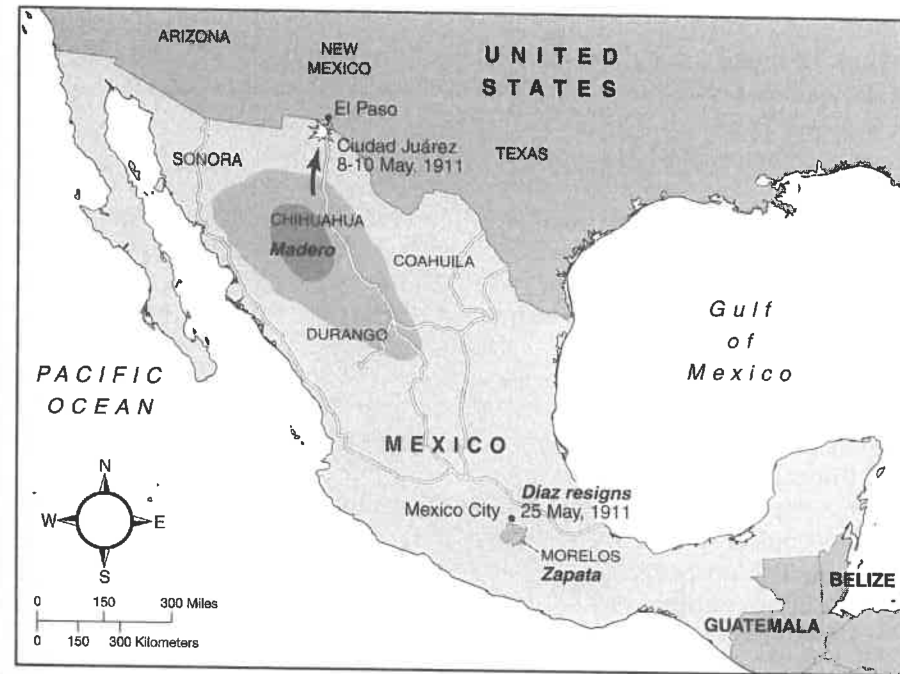
Villa was born Doroteo Arango into a family of hacienda peons in the state of Durango. Legend has it that he shot the hacendado, or perhaps his son or an administrator, after the man attacked Villa's sister. He fled to Chihuahua and began a career as a small-time bandit; he was arrested for minor robberies and sent to the army, where he served one year before deserting. He fled to Chihuahua and changed his name to Francisco "Pancho" Villa. Much has been made of Villa's life as a bandit with several gangs, eventually switching from holdups and robberies to cattle rustling. But he also worked at a number of legal jobs, mostly for foreign companies; he was a muleteer for a silver mine and a contractor for a railway line, as well as the organizer of cock fights. In all of these legal activities, he proved to be honest and reliable, as well an effective leader of men. Perhaps it was for those reasons that Abraham Gonzalez recruited Villa to the revolution. As the first to defeat regular government troops, Villa's fame as a revolutionary drew hundreds of men to serve under him.

Initially, there was less action in the south. Would-be revolutionaries, including Zapata, met in Morelos in November, but they took no action until a delegation sent to Madero in mid-December returned in February with formal appointments to leadership positions. On March 11, the leaders marched to the Villa de Ayala and read Madero's Plan de San Luis Potosí, gathered seventy men, and headed for the mountains south of Puebla.

Despite his October call to action, Madero had remained out of the country until February, when he arrived in Chihuahua to assume control. He ordered an attack on Ciudad Juárez, a border city that would have given him control over customs duties. The attack failed, but Madero's presence in Mexico inspired more uprisings. By March 21 the federal army was in retreat, and on April 1, Díaz promised reforms, including land reform and an end to reelection. But the promises came too late and served only to show the revolutionaries the weakness of the regime.

By mid-April, the revolutionary guerrilla bands had become organized armies, and Madero again ordered them to march on Ciudad Juárez. Orozco and Villa each headed a column of 500 riders, and Madero led another 1,500. The Díaz government frantically proposed negotiations, and Madero implemented a ceasefire in order to carry out the talks. On April 22, Madero and government representatives agreed to a treaty that did not demand the resignation of Díaz, though Madero was told confidentially that the president would step down. Villa and other leaders were outraged, leading Madero to change his position and insist that Díaz resign. At that point, negotiations broke down, but Madero continued the ceasefire. He had been convinced by the government that an attack would provoke the Taft administration, which in March had sent 20,000 U.S. troops to the border and ships to patrol Mexico's coastline.

Orozco and Villa chose disobedience at this point and fired on the federal troops. They took the city easily, and on May 21 the Treaty of Ciudad Juárez



Map 7.1 The Overthrow of Diaz
Source: http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/mexico.htm.

ended the war. The revolutionaries had no more respect for the treaty than for the ceasefire, for it promised little change. Díaz and his vice president, Ramón Corral, would resign; foreign minister Francisco de León de la Barra would become provisional president until new elections were held in the coming months. Madero would approve the interim cabinet and name fourteen provisional governors, but nothing else would change: judges, mayors, state legislators, police—all would stay in office. The revolutionary army, however, was required to disband, a sure signal of Madero's limited goals.

On May 26, 1911, Porfirio Díaz boarded the ship *Ypiranga* and sailed to exile in Paris, where he died in 1915. As he left, Díaz commented, "Madero has unleashed a tiger; let us see if he can control him."

Madero in Power

On the same day that Díaz left the country, two other key events occurred. A victorious Emiliano Zapata rode into Cuernavaca at the head of 4,000 troops waving the image of the Virgin de Guadalupe. Zapata and his followers had been motivated by the third clause of Madero's Plan de San Luis Potosí, a

vague plank calling for illegally obtained land to be returned to the rightful owners. But that same day, Madero issued his first manifesto since the end of the war. He noted "the aspirations contained in the third clause of the Plan of San Luis Potosí cannot be satisfied in all their amplitude."

In Morelos, land had been the reason for fighting. Zapata had given orders that village lands be restored, and haciendas were occupied during the struggle. The terms of the treaty, however, essentially restored the Díaz regime in Morelos as the governor, state legislature, jefes politicos and municipal presidents were all reinstated. Once subject to arrest for resisting the revolution, the old leadership now expected the revolutionaries to respect their authority.

On June 7, Madero arrived in Mexico City. Among those greeting him at the train station was Zapata. When they met the next day, Zapata tried to convince Madero of the importance of land reform. Madero dismissively told Zapata that it was a complicated issue, and that it was far more important for Zapata to disband his rebel troops. Stunned, Zapata wondered how Madero could trust the army to be loyal to an unarmed revolutionary government. The unspoken answer was that there was nothing revolutionary about Madero's aims.

Zapata convinced Madero to visit Morelos, but the visit backfired. Madero was influenced by the Mexico City press, which called Zapata "the Attila of the South," and by the Morelos "revolutionary" elites, who insisted that Zapata could not control his "barbaric" troops.

Madero stood by ineffectually as de la Barra, the interim president, ordered troops south to Morelos to disarm the Zapata forces. Zapata was at his wedding celebration on August 9 when he was informed that more than 1,000 troops were entering the state under the leadership of Brigadier General Victoriano Huerta. By August 29, Zapata had been declared an outlaw. Huerta's forces rampaged through Morelos, and the campesinos became Zapatistas.

During those summer months, there was little peace in Mexico. Despite conciliatory statements, Madero was criticized by both the right and the left. Madero turned his forces on the anarchist Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) in Tijuana, then began to demobilize his troops. In July, miners formed unions and began a series of strikes. In August, right-wing leader Bernardo Reyes began to campaign against Madero, but he fled to the United States in September after he was physically attacked by Maderistas and congress refused to postpone the election.

Madero won a massive victory at the polls in October and took office in November. But he was quite unprepared for the task he faced. His political platform contained some vague planks on political reform and almost nothing solid on social or economic change. He represented the traditional liberalism of the nineteenth century, which did not harmonize with the newer demands being made. Although he restored some ejidos, villagers bore the burden of proof to reclaim lands. He used troops to break up strikes,

Emiliano Zapata was the revolutionary leader who embodied the goals of the poor campesinos. He is shown in what forever became the image of the Mexican revolutionary: wearing a large sombrero, chest crossed with bandoleros, holding a Winchester single-action rifle and a sheathed saber. (Library of Congress)

and his education budget was a mere 7.8 percent, little more than Díaz's 7.2 percent. Instead of changing the old Porfirian regime, he worked with it to end the social instability that threatened elite wealth. Coahuila governor Venustiano Carranza complained that Madero was "delivering to the reactionaries a dead revolution which will have to be fought over again." His words were prophetic.

¡Viva Zapata!

Emiliano Zapata was not a typical campesino. He had estate land to sharecrop and apparently a personal relationship with hacendado and Díaz son-in-law Ignacio de la Torre y Mier, who had used his influence to help Zapata leave the army after a scrape with the law. Zapata was a renowned horseman, had some education, and sometimes hired laborers, making him a patrón and a member of the rural middle class. He was well-respected and had been elected to head his village of Anenecuilco. In that role, he once had armed eighty men to retake the land that the government had allowed big landowners to take from the village.

Zapata went on to earn admiration during his fighting for Madero. But when Madero abandoned the cause of land reform, Zapata abandoned Madero. In his Plan of Ayala, issued in November 1911, Zapata called for the overthrow of Madero and the return of land to the people. Campesinos rallied to his cause. A new force had been unleashed and it represented what distinguished the Mexican Revolution from previous movements in Latin America: the stirring of the masses. It became clear that a social revolution had begun.

Map 7.2 **The Madero Regime**
Source: http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/mexico.htm.

By January 1912, the Zapatista example had inspired movements in Tlaxcala, Puebla, Mexico state, Michoacán, Guerrero, and Oaxaca, creating a crisis in the south just as Pascual Orozco was becoming increasingly estranged from Madero in the north. Zapata called on Orozco to lead the new revolution. At first, Orozco remained loyal to Madero, but by March, Orozco, too, had turned on the government, won over by the Terrazas-Creel clan. Despite the support from wealthy elites, his Plan Orozquista called for the end of the ten-hour day and child labor, higher wages, better working conditions, the end of the tienda de raya, and, like Zapata, agrarian reform. Villa, however, remained loyal to Madero, who asked Villa to merge his forces with Huerta's; together they defeated Orozco in May. The Huerta-Villa relationship was, naturally, conflictive, given that Huerta had originally defended the Díaz regime against Villa. On trumped up charges, Huerta had Villa arrested, and he spent seven months in jail before escaping to El Paso, Texas, in December 1912.

As before, the attacks on Madero came from the right as well as the left. Bernardo Reyes had returned to Mexico and was imprisoned after leading an unsuccessful revolt against Madero. In prison, he and Felix Díaz, Porfirio's nephew, bribed a general to release them and launched another coup in February 1913. In what became known as the *Decena Tragica*, the

The revolution was led by Francisco I. Madero, a northern rancher who wanted political democracy but worried less about economic change. (Library of Congress)

Tragic Ten Days, Mexico City became a maze of barricades and trenches. Cars burned in the streets, horses ran wild, and gunfire claimed thousands of civilian lives. Businesses closed and food shortages drove the desperate to live on rats, while bodies rotted in the streets.

Madero relied on Huerta to defend the government. Huerta promised Madero that he would bring peace, but it was a peace brokered by Felix Díaz and Huerta at the United States Embassy, with the blessing of Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson. On February 20, Huerta switched sides and arrested Madero, who was soon killed.

Huerta and the Counter-Revolution

Huerta became the symbol of reaction, of the counterrevolution. A native of Jalisco, Huerta was the son of a poor Huichol farmer who worked an unirrigated plot of land. He joined the military in order to receive schooling, and a general took him on as a personal secretary and aide. He was sent on to military college, and his career coincided with that of Porfirio Díaz; both fought the Yaqui and Maya peoples during their uprisings. His coup was supported by the upper classes, business interests, the Church, and the federal army. Although Orozco initially opposed Huerta, by March he had joined him.

Huerta's coup was deplored by both Villa and Zapata, but neither leader had national standing. Only one Madero government official called for resistance to Huerta, and that was Coahuila governor Venustiano Carranza. Carranza was an unlikely revolutionary. A rich hacendado from an old colonial family, he had held positions in the Díaz regime and been a supporter of Bernardo Reyes. When Díaz blocked Carranza from becoming governor, Carranza turned against the regime; but he only joined Madero after Reyes went into exile. Carranza was even more conservative than Madero on all but one issue: nationalism. As governor of Coahuila, he had supported strikers at foreign-owned companies.

Carranza tried to rally the other northern governors, but he soon found himself alone as the governors were murdered and imprisoned. He then tried to negotiate with Huerta, and when that failed, took up arms. Villa returned from the United States to organize resistance in Chihuahua, while in Sonora forces were led by Alvaro Obregón, the owner of a medium-sized ranch who had also worked as a mechanic, schoolteacher, and tenant farmer. Although he was not involved in the Madero revolution, Obregón had fought against the Orozco uprising. In the struggle against Huerta, Obregón quickly emerged as one of the most talented military leaders of the revolution. In March, Carranza issued the Plan de Guadalupe, in which he declared himself "First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army" and claimed to be Madero's rightful successor. Zapata, meanwhile,

Map 7.3 Huerta vs. the Constitutionalists
Source: http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/mexico2.htm.

continued to fight on his own in the south, trusting neither Huerta nor the Constitutionalists to restore the ejidos.

From 1913 to 1914, Mexico devolved into a bloody civil war. At the same time, however, Huerta's government initiated some domestic reforms: The education budget rose to 9.9 percent of the national budget, and Education Minister Nemesio Garcia Naranjo overturned Gabino Barreda's positivism. One hundred thirty-one rural schools were built, and community projects were initiated in many indigenous villages, including the restoration of seventy-eight ejidos to Yaqui and Mayo Indians of Sonora.

However, any achievements were outweighed by his increasingly dictatorial measures. Huerta closed congress, ordered the assassination of his rivals, and dragged poor conscripts from the streets in the detested *leva* (military draft). But perhaps his biggest problem was U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's refusal to recognize the Huerta regime, despite the urging of the ambassador. And it was the United States that Huerta would eventually blame for his downfall.

In April 1914, the USS Dolphin was stationed off the shores of Tampico. The ship's captain sent a small group of sailors to get fuel, and they wandered

into a restricted area. They were immediately arrested, but released within a few hours, along with an official apology. But the United States refused to let the small incident go so easily, instead demanding that the Mexicans hoist the U.S. flag and give a twenty-one gun salute. The Mexican government reluctantly agreed, but said the United States officials should then salute the Mexican flag, which Wilson saw as tantamount to recognition of Huerta's government. Before they could resolve the matter, the United States received word that a German ship was bringing weapons to Huerta. U.S. naval forces were ordered to occupy Veracruz, where they prevented the Germans from landing, controlled the custom's house, and killed hundreds of civilians. Villa was not particularly concerned about U.S. occupation, if it would help topple Huerta. Zapata said the U.S. actions made his "blood boil," but so did the idea of uniting with Huerta against the United States. The Constitutionalist forces raged against the insult of U.S. invasion, but obviously, Huerta could not ally with the Constitutionalists. Spontaneous demonstrations erupted in Mexico against U.S. actions, and Huerta concentrated his troops in the east to counter the occupation.

The northern revolutionaries capitalized on the U.S. distraction. In June, in the bloodiest battle of the war against Huerta, Villa captured Zacatecas, a railway junction essential to the route to Mexico City. The battle resulted in the deaths of 6,000 federal troops and 1,000 rebels, and the injured numbered 3,000 federales and 2,000 constitutionalists. On July 15, Huerta resigned; like Díaz, he fled to Europe on the *Ypiranga*.

But Huerta's fall was no more of a unifying force than the fall of Díaz had been. The revolutionaries had been able to agree when they focused on the overthrow of a particular leader. But their interests conflicted, and there was no peace to be gained. Instead, each revolutionary force tried to be the first to reach Mexico City and take control of the federal government. The northern forces had split into factions led by Carranza and Villa, with Obregón eventually swinging his support to Carranza. Villa's and Zapata's forces discussed a possible alliance, while the other revolutionaries tried to keep both of them from the capital.

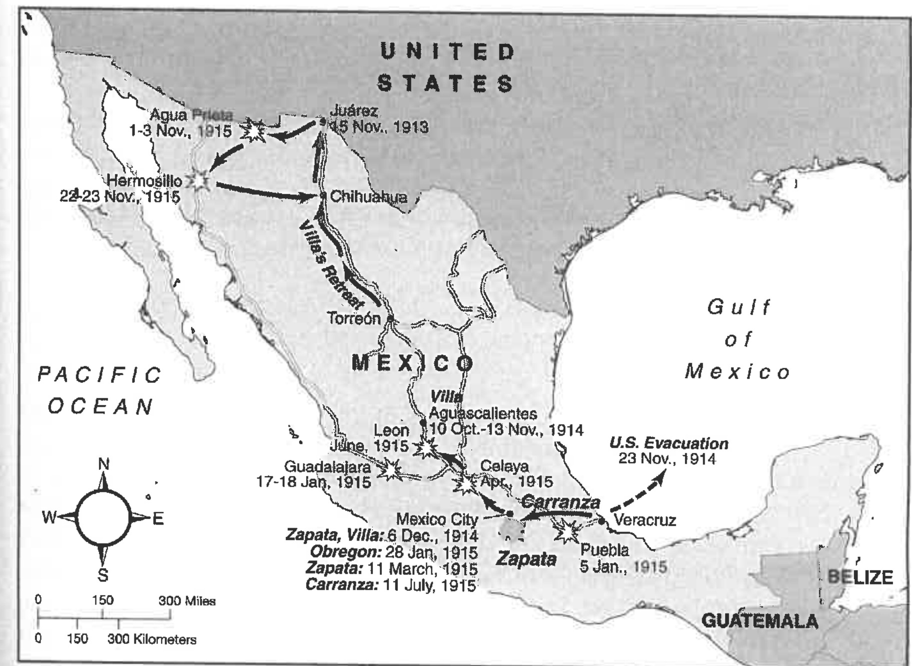
On August 20, Carranza arrived in Mexico City and declared himself the new chief executive. He called a convention for October 1 and made sure that only Carrancistas would attend. To his dismay, the convention voted to move to Aguascalientes, where Villistas could join them. The delegates then declared their sovereignty and invited Zapata to attend. The convention was split, with the forces of Carranza and Obregón on one side, Villa and Zapata on the other. Carranza and Obregón represented the elites and middle class, those whose interests focused more on political than economic and social change. Zapata and Villa represented the lower classes, the Mexican masses that hungered for redistribution of land and economic opportunity. The convention tried to find a compromise in Eulalio Gutierrez, who was installed

with the backing of Villa's troops. A furious Carranza fled and established his own government at Veracruz.

As 1914 drew to a close, Zapata and Villa met, trying to ally their more radical Conventionist forces against the elite Constitutionalists. Unfortunately, neither Zapata nor Villa was able to articulate a message that went beyond their regional and social bases. Neither had an overarching ideology, and some would argue that Zapata's concerns were anachronistic, envisioning a return to a past that was long gone.

Villa and Zapata fought on, but by late 1915, the tide had turned; Gutierrez abandoned Mexico City to rule from Nuevo León, and Carranza was able to return to Mexico City and consolidate his position. Zapata was driven out of Mexico City, although his forces kept pressure on the capitol. Villa controlled Chihuahua, but he struggled in the rest of the north against Obregón's forces.

The beginning of the end for Villa came with his defeat in April 1915 at the town of Celaya. Obregón, using the new tactics of the European war, dug trenches, enclosed his defensive positions with barbed wire, and used machine guns to mow down 14,000 of Villa's men. With a subsequent defeat at León, Villismo was destroyed as a national force. Villa's army disintegrated,



Map 7.4 Carranza vs. the Conventionists
Source: http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/mexico2.htm.

and even many of his closed collaborators turned against him. In his heyday, the Division of the North had boasted 50,000 men. By the time he headed to Sonora, he was down to 12,000 demoralized troops, short on food and supplies. The coup de grace came with an ambush at Agua Prieta on November 1, 1915, made possible by U.S. President Wilson giving permission for Carrancista troops to pass through the United States. Villa disbanded his army and disappeared into the mountains with a few hundred men. No one expected to hear from him again.

But Villa blamed Wilson for his defeat. He wanted revenge, and he hoped to provoke a United States invasion that would cause a backlash against the Carranza regime. First, Villista forces stopped a train carrying U.S. mining engineers and technicians from the Cusi Mining Company, hoping to reopen their mine. Instead, they were dragged from the train and fifteen were killed. Villa took his revenge again in March on the town of Columbus, New Mexico, where seventeen U.S. citizens were killed. Villa failed to get money, supplies, or arms and lost 100 men in the raid. But he succeeded in luring the United States into Mexico.

President Wilson sent General John J. Pershing and 5,000 U.S. troops on what was called the Punitive Expedition, which included cavalry, infantry, artillery, and eight planes. In April and May 1916, Villa was injured and in hiding, with 10,000 U.S. troops and 10,000 federales occupying Chihuahua. He seemed defeated. Yet, by the end of the year, his forces numbered 6,000 to 10,000, and they controlled a substantial part of Chihuahua, where he had the support of the majority of the people.

The year was not as successful for the Zapatistas. Carranza's forces invaded Morelos, wreaking such havoc that the campesinos adopted the word *carrancear*, meaning to loot. By the fall of 1916, Zapata had disbanded his 20,000-member regular army and reverted to guerrilla warfare with only 5,000 men.

A Radical Constitution

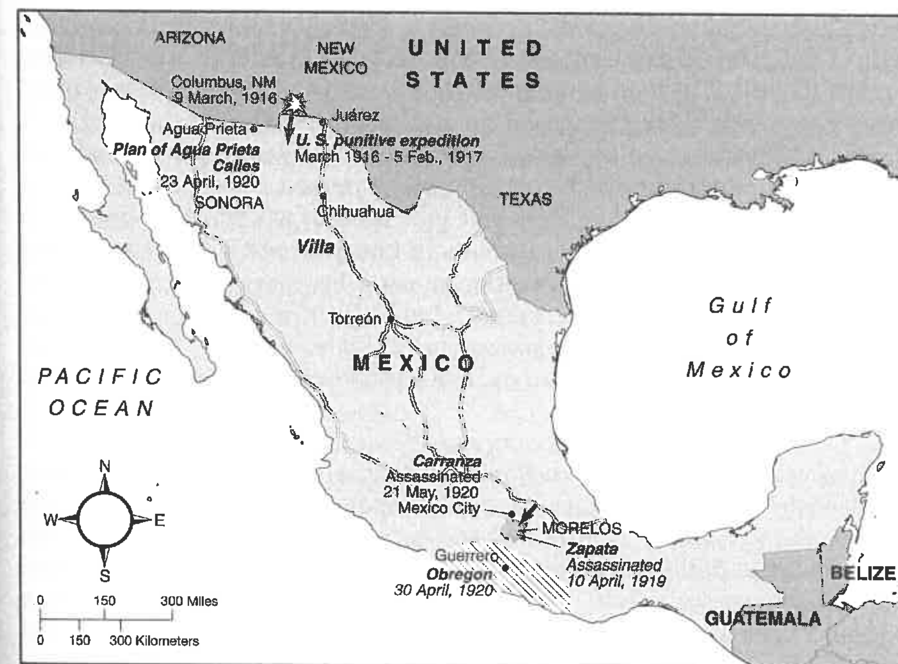
With the Zapatistas nearly defeated and U.S. forces chasing Villa, Carranza decided to institutionalize his position by calling a constitutional convention at Querétaro. This time he would not repeat the mistakes of Aguascalientes: Only Constitutionalists would be allowed to attend. Carranza envisioned minor changes to the 1857 constitution. But as he soon found out, the Constitutionalists were no more unified than the other revolutionary bands. The desire for more radical social changes dominated, and Carranza was presented with a document far from the one he had envisioned.

Ideological differences split the delegates. The radicals, supported by Obregón, gained control and imposed their views. The constitution that

emerged after two months of bitter debate at Querétaro contained many of the traditional enlightened ideas characteristic of the former constitution. In the customary Latin American fashion, the constitution conferred strong authority on the president. However, it went on to alter significantly some fundamental and traditional concepts.

The new constitution exalted the state and society above the individual and conferred on the government the authority to reshape society. The key articles dealt with religion, labor, and land. Article 130 placed restrictions on the Church and clergy. Churches were denied juridical personalities and could not own property. States could limit the number of clerics by law, and priests were not allowed to vote, hold office, or criticize the government. The Church was barred from participating in primary education. These provisions would give the State the supremacy over the Church that Mexican liberals had sought since the midnineteenth century.

Article 123 protected the Mexican workers from exploitation by authorizing the passage of a labor code to set minimum salaries and maximum hours. Workers were to receive accident insurance, pensions, and social benefits. The right to unionize and to strike was guaranteed. Because foreign investment in Mexican industrialization was significant, this article



Map 7.5 Carranza in Charge
Source: http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/mexico2.htm.

could be potentially used as one means of bridling the operations of the foreign capitalist.

The most significant change was Article 27, which laid the foundation for land reform and for restrictions on foreign economic control. It declared government ownership of mineral and water resources, subordinated private property to public welfare, and gave the government the right to expropriate land. This clause annulled all alienations of ejidos since 1857 and recognized communal ownership of land.

Carranza was unhappy with the constitution and had little intention of following its tenets when he was sworn in as president in May 1917, after an election in which he was unopposed. Nonetheless, the constitutional reforms stole some of Zapata's thunder.

The Radicals Lose

By the summer of 1917, Zapata was struggling to hold his revolution together. In March 1918, he issued new manifestos, for the first time recognizing the different needs of the different regions, but no new support was forthcoming. In November, Spanish flu swept Morelos, where the campesinos had already suffered the effects of typhus, malaria, and dysentery. The population dropped 25 percent in 1918 alone, and Zapata was left with only 2,000 soldiers, each armed with only 304 cartridges. The final blow came on April 10, 1919, when Zapata walked into an ambush. As he walked into a meeting with supposed Carrancista defectors, a bugle sounded three times and soldiers who appeared ready to shoot in his honor instead lowered their guns and fired twice at point-blank range.

In the north, it became clear that Villa himself would never be caught. Growing more concerned about events in Europe, the United States began withdrawing the Pershing Expedition in early February 1917. Villa continued to fight Carranza, but there seemed to be little justification. By the end of the year, Villa had lost popular support. With his limited forces, he failed in an attack on Parral in 1918 and in an ill-conceived plan to kidnap Carranza in 1919.

Confident that the wars were over, Carranza attempted to name his own successor to the presidency. His arrogance was greeted with another revolt, led by three Sonorans: Alvaro Obregón, Adolfo de la Huerta, and Plutarco Elias Calles. Carranza fled and was killed by his own guard. With Carranza dead, Villa was ready to negotiate. De la Huerta, as interim president, gave amnesty to Villa's men and gave Villa a ranch, Canutillo, where he could have security and a means to live in retirement. Nonetheless, Villa met the same end as Zapata when he was assassinated in 1923 after a newspaper article indicated that he might be planning a comeback.

From Destruction to Construction

The periodization of the Mexican Revolution typically casts 1910–1920 as the violent phase and 1920–1940 as the constructive phase. In some ways, the periodization is a bit misleading. Full-scale war had largely ended by 1917, when Villa's and Zapata's movements were in disarray and the constitution promised a new political order. Violence, however, continued to plague the countryside and to play a role in politics well into the 1920s.

The period from 1920–1934 was dominated by two veterans of the revolution: Alvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles. Obregón was the undisputed leader of the revolution, having been the architect of Villa's military defeats and leader of the coup that prevented Carranza from maintaining control of the presidency. Both were from a lower middle-class background in Sonora. But Obregón had been the epitome of the successful middle-class entrepreneur; he raised chickpeas on a 150-acre farm and became an expert mechanic, even patenting a harvester. Calles was less fortunate. The illegitimate son of a prominent hacendado, he had little success in his business endeavors before the revolution. As a school teacher, he was fired because parents complained about him. He was fired from a position as city treasurer because funds were missing from his department. He tried hotel management—the hotel burned down; farming—the farm went bankrupt; and milling—business that failed. His true success came with the revolution: He was an early supporter of Madero, rose to be a divisional general and governor of Sonora. Calles served as Obregón's government secretary before becoming president himself.

These leaders from Sonora declared themselves to be the rightful heirs of Madero and proclaimed an era of peace and reconstruction. A practical man, Obregón tried to reach compromises among the various conflicting sectors in order to rebuild the country. The destruction of the war had indeed been considerable: The railroad was bankrupt and in ruins; more than a 1,000 miles of telegraph lines were destroyed, agricultural and mining production had fallen by half. The foreign debt topped $1 billion, interest payments were overdue, and foreign governments demanded compensation for destruction of the property of their citizens. And the military consumed 60 percent of the national budget.

At the same time, veterans of the wars expected their goals to be met. As Saturnino Cedillo of rural Morelos, told the new government: "I want land. I want ammunition so that I can protect my land after I get it in case somebody tries to take it away from me. And I want plows, and I want schools for my children, and I want teachers, and I want books and pencils and blackboards and roads. And I want moving pictures for my people, too. And I don't want any Church or any saloon."

Obregón wisely named Zapatistas to be minister of agriculture and to head the new agrarian reform commission. But it took campesinos five to

Land Distribution in the Mexican Revolution

	EJIDOS HECTARES	0.1–1,000 HECTARES	1,000 HECTARES
1910	1.6%	26.6	71.8
1923	2.6	19.6	77.9
1940	22.5	15.9	61.6

Source: Adolfo Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution* Copyright 1983. Reprinted by permission of Verso, an imprint of New Loft Books Ltd.

eight years to get their land grants. Obregón distributed three million acres of land benefiting 140,000 people. But Luis Terrazas, who Obregón allowed to return from exile to Chihuahua, owned as much as Obregón distributed. More than half of Mexican territory in 1923 was still owned by 2,700 wealthy families, and 25 percent of the land belonged to a mere 114 families. Furthermore, the majority of Mexico's rural population consisted of resident farmhands, and they were not eligible to get land. Calles went further than Obregón, distributing eight million acres of land, mostly in the form of ejidos from 1924 to 1928. He accompanied the land grants with credit and agricultural schools. But from 1928 until 1934, agrarian reform became a low priority and little land was distributed.

The record on labor reform was equally mixed. During the war, Obregón had cultivated the Mexico City workers' organization Casa del Obrero Mundial. He supported their strike against the Mexican Telegraph and Telephone Company, and in turn 5,000 union members joined his army, forming the Red Battalions. When he ran for president in 1919, Obregón again sought out the workers, forging an alliance with the *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM; Regional Confederation of Mexico Workers). Nonetheless, real wages barely improved and remained well below the three peso a day minimum that, according to the national labor commission, was necessary for subsistence. Calles took the alliance even further, naming CROM boss Luis Morones to his cabinet as minister of industry, commerce and labor. A massive union organizing drive brought even Mexico City's prostitutes into unions.

One of the most significant aspects of building the new Mexico was the construction of a new culture. Obregón named as his education minister José Vasconcelos, one of Mexico's leading intellectuals. Vasconcelos was determined to bring education to the masses, partly through a commitment to rural education and partly by making art available to the masses by fostering the painting of murals in public places.

The beginning of the mural movement generally is attributed to the paintings in the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* (National Preparatory School), which prepared students to enter the National University. It was there that

the great artists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros made their first contributions to the movement. In 1922, Rivera initiated the formation of the *Sindicato de Pintores, Escultores y Grabadores Revolucionarios de México* (Syndicate of Revolutionary Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors of Mexico), an organization that urged collective art creation that would play a significant role in the struggle for justice for the masses. The syndicate rejected easel painting and championed "monumental art in all its forms, because it is public property." However, the largely conservative art community denounced the murals, which were even attacked by the students, who threw mud and stones at the murals by Orozco and Siqueiros.

All three went on to paint other murals, which reflected their radical political views. But it was Rivera's work that would become emblematic in its adulation of traditional folk elements of Mexican culture. Critics charged that he represented an idealized indigenous past, whereas the real Mexican masses would gladly trade their colorful pottery and woven clothing for modern, mass-produced goods. The veneration of the indigenous *campesino* went hand-in-hand with Vasconcelos's desire to bring education to the countryside. But while the revolution supposedly celebrated rather than denigrated the campesino, it shared the old liberal doctrine of wanting to assimilate the indigenous into a society that was largely not of their making. Vasconcelos set up an "Indian Department" focused on teaching Spanish to the indigenous so that they could enter the school system and be incorporated into mestizo society.

A tremendous effort was made to educate teachers and send them to the countryside, where more than 1,000 rural schools were established from 1920 to 1924. The curriculum was basic—reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history. The tone was secular, and teachers often encountered hostility from both the Church, which was losing its educational role, and from rural families themselves, who often viewed the teachers as atheist outsiders. Nonetheless, the government continued to emphasize education, adding another 2,000 rural schools from 1924 to 1928.

In the 1920s, education in Mexico took a socialist turn. Math lessons calculated excess profits of factory owners and geography classes examined imperialist exploitation. New history texts focused on the struggle of the oppressed masses against capitalists, imperialists, and importantly, the Church. A textbook published by the state of Tabasco's Redemption Press in 1929 cautioned, "The worker's ignorance is very dangerous, for it allows him to be victimized by the exploiters, priests, and alcohol."

The attitude towards the Church displayed in the schools was one of the factors leading to the Cristero Revolt, an armed conflict between militant Catholics and the government. The catalyst for the uprising was Calles's determination to enforce the anticlerical provisions of the 1917 constitution. The Church had been hostile to the revolution almost from its beginning. In 1911, the clergy formed *Partido Católico Nacional* (PCN; National Catholic

Party), whose candidates for the 1912 congressional elections swept Jalisco and Zacatecas, making it a major political party. The Maderistas annulled the results, turning the PCN against Madero and the revolution. Huerta courted the Church hierarchy, and both Zapata and Villa had cordial relations with the Church. The Zapatistas in particular tended to be religious, riding into battle with banners of the Virgin de Guadelupe. Carranza was hostile to the Church and welcomed the anticlerical aspects of the 1917 constitution, but he did not try to enforce them.

Obregón was committed to reconciling all elements of Mexico, so he did not enforce the constitution either. But during the heated days of the war, in 1914 and 1915, Obregón had been unsparing in his pursuit of anti-revolutionary clergy. Church leaders did not forgive him for having priests and nuns imprisoned, seizing churches and convents, and closing Catholic schools. During Obregón's presidency, Church leaders became more openly opposed to the revolution. The Church also challenged the State and its connection to labor in 1920 by creating the *Confederación Nacional Católica de Trabajadores* (CNCT; Catholic Labor Confederation); by 1922, the organization boasted 80,000 members, as many as the CROM, which responded to the competition by sending thugs to attack priests and churches.

Calles was determined to demonstrate the supremacy of the state and to end the Church's challenge. He took aim at the Church within weeks of taking office by reminding the state governments that they needed to control the activities of the clergy. The states immediately began to take action; for example, the state of Tabasco limited the number of priests to six, one for each 30,000 residents. In 1926, the archbishop of Mexico, José Mora y del Río, commented in a newspaper interview that, given such incidents in the various states, Roman Catholics could not accept the Constitution. His comments gave Calles an excuse to attack the Church by disbanding religious processions, deporting foreign-born priests and nuns, and closing monasteries, convents and Catholic schools. The Church, in turn, went on strike, refusing to conduct masses or administer the sacraments. The strike lasted three years, leaving babies unbaptized and sending the old to the grave without last rites.

Loyal Catholics were incensed and ready to fight. Most priests—some 3,390 out of 3,600—fled to the cities. Of those who remained, only about forty openly supported what became known as the Cristero Rebellion, named after their cry, ¡*Viva Cristo Rey*! (Long live Christ the King!). The rebellion was essentially a series of uncoordinated local protests. There was little activity in the generally secular northern states or in the south, where strong indigenous cultures in such states as Oaxaca and Chiapas competed with the Church. But the central states of Michoacan, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Colima were in open revolt.

The violence was as severe as the darkest days of the revolution. Catholic militants murdered teachers and burned down government

schools. Government troops retaliated by trying to kill one priest for every teacher. By the time the war was over, it had cost the lives of 90,000 combatants and thousands of people caught between the government and militant Catholics. The war was finally ended by Calles's successor, Emilio Portes Gil, who agreed to enforce the laws in a less provocative way.

Portes Gil came to the presidency after the Cristeros claimed their ultimate victim—Obregón had won another term of office, but before he could take office, he was assassinated by a Cristero militant. Portes Gil was appointed to serve from 1928 to 1930, and Calles protégé Pascual Ortiz Rubio won election to the 1930–1934 term. Ortiz ran as the first candidate of the new *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR; National Revolutionary Party) founded by Calles to consolidate the revolution. Ortiz Rubio lasted two years before resigning and being replaced by Abelardo Rodriguez.

It was clear to everyone, however, that none of the three presidents who served from 1928 to 1934 had any power. It was Calles who continued to rule as Jefe Maximo, lending the period the name Maximato. During these years, Calles moved revolutionary action to the right, while creating a public image and ideology that spouted leftwing rhetoric. For example, Zapata was hailed as an official national hero, conveniently overlooking the fact that the winners of the revolution actively fought Zapata and were responsible for his death. The cooptation of Zapata's image occurred as the actual distribution of agricultural land dwindled.

The Apex of the Revolution

Calles expected to continue ruling Mexico under the next president, Lázaro Cárdenas. Cárdenas, who joined the revolution when he was 15 years old, had been a protégé of Calles, who called him "the kid." He moved up along with his mentor. In 1930, he was named president of the PNR, and in 1934 he was tapped as the party's presidential candidate.

Although his victory was all but assured, Cárdenas campaigned across the country, building a network of supporters. He developed a reputation for modesty, largely by refusing to live in Chapultapec castle, the traditional presidential palace. His immediate goal in the presidency was to wrest control from Calles. He purged his cabinet of Callistas and gave generous retirement benefits to generals so that he could replace them with his own men. He favored the new labor organization, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (CTM; Mexican Workers' Confederation), rather than the CROM. The final confrontation took place in 1936, when demonstrating workers demanded that Calles be removed from the political scene. Cárdenas ordered Calles into exile and emerged as his own man.

Cárdenas also reorganized the revolutionary party into the *Partido Revolucionario Mexicano* (PRM; Mexican Revolutionary Party), based on four pil-

lars of society: the military, labor, agrarian, and popular sectors. Mexicans were mobilized into groups that communicated directly with the government, encouraging a vertical hierarchy of base and state, rather than a horizontal linking of mass organizations. This corporate structure minimized social conflict, and during the Cárdenas years, it largely worked in favor of the masses. For example, labor unions dealt directly with the government, rather than industry; the government intervened on labor's behalf. However, the corporatist organization also created the basis for future state domination of society.

The president also turned his attention to agrarian reform, intent upon rebuilding the traditional ejido. During his administration, which was Mexico's first sexenio, or six-year term, the Cárdenas government distributed nearly fifty million acres of land, representing 66 percent of the total land distributed from 1917 to 1940. In addition to land distribution, the government created the *Banco de Crédito Ejidal* (Ejido Credit Bank) to provide financing. The massive distribution of land dramatically changed society in some parts of Mexico, destroying the old hacendado class. But that class was replaced by a welter of new elites: agrarian reform officials and local political bosses. The process to receive land was often long and torturous, the amount received frequently insufficient. And in many parts of Mexico, no redistribution of land took place at all.

Although Cárdenas has been portrayed as a beloved figure among the campesinos, many rose up against him over his hostility toward the Church and a renewed socialist emphasis in school curriculum. Even in his home state of Michoacán, campesinos who were the very targets of his policies boycotted the schools and said they would prefer not to get land unless local churches were reopened.

The most dramatic event in the Cárdenas presidency was the expropriation of the foreign-owned oil companies. The conflict began in 1936, when workers went on strike to demand higher wages and improved working conditions. The dispute was sent to an industrial arbitration board, which ruled in favor of the workers. The oil companies appealed to the Mexican Supreme Court, which upheld the board's ruling. At that point, the companies simply refused to abide by the decision. Cárdenas insisted that foreign companies must follow national laws and ordered the nationalizing of seventeen oil companies. The president wrote of his decision in his diary: "I believe that there are few opportunities so special as this for Mexico to achieve independence from imperialist capital, and because of this my government will comply with the responsibility conferred by the revolution." The confiscated companies were organized into *Petroleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX) and became a symbol of economic sovereignty.

However, the outcry from the oil companies was matched by the U.S. and British governments. Cárdenas negotiated a settlement of $24 million to the companies—a far cry from the $200 million they claimed, and far above the $10 million he deemed to be fair. The United States and Great Britain responded by boycotting Mexican oil and silver, with oil output falling by nearly 60 percent and silver production falling 50 percent.

Nonetheless, the expropriation was wildly popular in Mexico. Even the Catholic Church supported the decision by raising the Mexican flag above the national cathedral. Throughout the country, people gathered to contribute their pesos to pay the indemnity to the companies.

U.S. Ambassador Josephus Daniels observed women lining up in the Zócalo, Mexico City's main plaza, to contribute: "They took off wedding rings, bracelets, earrings, and put them, as it seemed to them, on a national altar. All day long, until the receptacles were full and running over, these Mexican women gave and gave. When night came crowds still waited to deposit their offerings, which comprised everything from gold and silver to animals and corn."

A Revolutionary Balance Sheet

By 1940, Mexico was a far different country than it had been in 1910. There was progress in many areas, but the country was still beset with problems. Although nearly 23 percent of the nation's land had been redistributed into ejidos, 62 percent of the land remained in farms of 1,000 or more hectares (down from 72 percent in 1910). School attendance for children six to ten years old increased from 30 to 70 percent. But rural poverty was still endemic. In 1940, 27 percent of the population was too poor to afford shoes—a figure that rose to 75 percent in the mostly indigenous states of Chiapas and Tabasco. Eighty percent of the population outside Mexico City lived without indoor plumbing or sewage disposal.

By 1940, critics wondered whether the Mexican Revolution was dead or whether it had been a revolution at all. Some dismissed it as a bourgeois revolution, won by the middle classes, who now took the place of the former Porfirian elites. Others complained that the country was still run by caudillos and that the new political party was as corrupt as its predecessors.

Perhaps the best analysis is offered by Michael J. Gonzales: "The popular and agrarian character of the revolution makes it a social revolution. The conflict pitted landless peasants, elements of the working classes, and discontented provincial gentry against the dictator Díaz, his elite supporters, and the federal army. The revolution threw out the old guard, reinvented the state, and made possible historic social and economic reforms. The revolutionary state gave landless peasants hundreds of thousands of hectares of land, nationalized foreign-owned petroleum companies, and significantly expanded public education. If the final outcome failed to eradicate poverty, create democracy, or achieve economic independence, the event still remains revolutionary."