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# Huerta and the Failure of Dictatorship

## Huerta

Victoriano Huerta was born of a Huichol Indian mother and a mestizo father in a small Jalisco village. Attending a poor local school run by the parish priest, he learned to read and write and showed some natural talent for science and mathematics. As a teenager he was taken on as an aide by General Donato Guerra, a career officer who had fought against the French. Guerra used his influence in Mexico City to have Huerta accepted at the National Military Academy. Despite his mediocre educational background, he did well as a cadet and received his commission in 1876 as a second lieutenant assigned to the army corps of engineers.

Huerta's prerevolutionary career coincided almost exactly with the Díaz dictatorship, and he became an effective agent of Don Porfirio's system of enforced peace. During the thirty-four-year Porfiriato, Huerta fought in the north against the Yaqui, in the south against the Maya, and in the central part of the country against other Mexicans unhappy with the autocratic regime. Encountering much success on the field of battle, he rose rapidly in the ranks and by the turn of the century had been awarded his brigadier-general stars. National prominence and some notoriety engulfed him for the first time in the summer of 1911 when interim President León de la Barra dispatched him to Morelos to enforce the demobilization of the Zapatista troops. His relationship with Madero was never good again.

When Bernardo Reyes and Félix Díaz planned the military coup of February 1913, their emissaries approached Huerta and solicited his support. He refused the invitation, however, not out of loyalty to the Madero administration but rather because he wanted the leadership for himself. When Bernardo Reyes was killed during the first major encounter, the situation changed. Huerta dallied for a week and, having determined that he would be able to control Félix Díaz, made his





decision to change sides. Sge sides. Sworn into the presidential office a few day later, Huerta was sure he has sure he had made the proper choice.

Within a few days feder days federal generals and state governors began t pledge support of the new of the new regime. A group of talented statesmen an intellectuals accepted cabinepted cabinet portfolios. Sanitation workers started t scour the bloodstained stredstained streets of the capital and to attack a ten-da backlog of garbage. Red Crage. Red Cross units tried to identify hundreds of de caying corpses, and electricand electricians repaired wires dangling dangerousl from their poles.

## Rebellion and Militand Militarization

The first genuinely ominonely ominous sign came from the northeast wher Coahuila Governor Venustiaor Venustiano Carranza, an ardent Madero supporte announced his decision not ecision not to recognize the new regime. Carranza is sued a circular telegram totelegram to other state governors exhorting them t follow his good example. Wiexample. Within a few weeks he found support in Chihuahua and Sonora. Panchcora. Pancho Villa assumed military leadership of the anti-Huerta movement in Clement in Chihuahua, while Alvaro Obregón, a man o considerable military talent, itary talent, took charge of the antigovernment operations in neighboring Sonoloring Sonora. The alliance of the northern revolutionaries, and their formal pair formal pronouncement of defection, was sealed in late March when representat representatives from the three states affixed their signatures to the *Plan de Guadan de Guadalupe*. After withdrawing recognition of the Huerta government, the pment, the plan named Venustiano Carranza as "First Chief" of the Constitutionalnstitutionalist Army and provided that he, or someone designated by him, woby him, would occupy the interim presidency upon Huerta's defeat. An exclusivein exclusively political document, the plan embodied no program of social reform.cial reform.

In southern Mexico Huertexico Huerta encountered an implacable enemy of a different sort. Emiliano Zapaniliano Zapata angrily rejected Huerta's invitation to pledge support of the governi the government. In fact, the southern rebel arrested and subsequently executed t executed the federal peace commissioners sent to garner his allegiance. Zapata, ice. Zapata, unlike the Constitutionalists in the north, did not denounce Huerta fo? Huerta for having overthrown Madero. While he found treason in Huerta's sudduerta's sudden shift of sides during the Decena Trágica, he declared himself in reimself in rebellion because he saw no hope that the federal government under Hnt under Huerta would begin to restore the village lands in Morelos. Not trustingNot trusting the Constitutionalist dedication to agrarian reform either, Zapata ne; Zapata never allied himself with the anti-Huerta movement in the north. But north. But by forcing the government to divert some of its war effort from the nortom the north to the south, Zapata placed additional military pressure on the new on the new regime.

*Modern technology is brought to warfare. In one of the first military uses of aircraft, Huerta employed 80-horsepower planes similar to these in reconnaissance and bombing raids against the Villistas in the north.*

Facing rebellion in the north and in Morelos, Huerta's first priority was pacification. With a federal army numbering about fifty thousand, the president announced brazenly to the Congress that he would reestablish peace, "cost what it may." But pacification proved elusive on the field of battle. In March and April the Constitutionalists scored impressive victories in Sonora and Chihuahua, while in the south Emiliano Zapata had done the same. The psychology of the civil war changed drastically in May when First Chief Carranza, in a singularly intemperate decree, announced that federal soldiers who fell into rebel hands would be executed summarily. The Constitutionalists thus declared that they intended to give no quarter, and by the summer of 1913 Huerta had concluded that pacification would come only if he militarized Mexico to the teeth.

Factories and stores not related to the war effort were required to close on Sundays so that civilian employees could be given military training. Railroads left civilian passengers and freight standing in the stations so that military personnel and hardware could be shipped to where it was needed. The National Arms Factory, the National Artillery Workshops, and the National Power Factory received new equipment to increase their productive capacities. Scarcely a week passed without a showy military parade or public display of the latest military equipment. The president himself enjoyed participating in these graphic exhibits of military culture and used the occasions to sport his favorite dress uniforms replete with ribbons covering the left side of his jacket and medals draped from his neck. The Mexican school system felt the impact of the militarization in the late summer of 1913 when school after school found its governing regulations changed to provide for the mandatory wearing of military uniforms. Training in the military arts and sciences was added to the curricula. Military decorations were passed out in wholesale lot to the president's cronies, and new military awards were authorized to compensate favorites or



to win over those of doubtful of doubtful loyalty. Most importantly, the president decreed constant increases in ncreases in the size of the federal army—from fifty thousand to one hundred thoundred thousand to two hundred thousand and finally to a quarter of a millionof a million, or about twelve times the number of troops available to Porfirio Dí Porfirio Díaz when the Revolution broke out.

When small pay increases y increases failed to attract enlistees in large numbers, Huerta fell back on a timack on a time-honored tradition—the leva, a system of forced conscription directedion directed exclusively at the indigent masses. Tens of thousands of illiterate men verate men were picked up off the streets of the barrios in the large cities and fronies and from the surrounding countryside and sent into the field. The crowds emecrowds emerging from a bullfight or staggering out of a cantina closing its doors foi its doors for the night were favorite targets, as were criminals in jail for minor offe minor offenses. But the effects of the leva were disastrous. The quality of the fality of the federal army declined steadily. The lack of adequate training meant mg meant no *esprit de corps*, no discipline, and tremendously high desertion r desertion rates. In the fall of 1913 it was not unheard of for entire units of ne units of new recruits to turn themselves and their equipment over to the enemy the enemy without firing a single shot.

The toll of the civil war in 19vil war in 1913 and 1914 was tremendous. The military presence was obvious ev obvious everywhere. The population of a village could double to triple overnighble overnight as a large unit moved in to camp. Because there was no advance no advance notice, a week's stay could deplete stores of food, supplies, and other basid other basic necessities, thus aggravating the obscenities of war. When the trooien the troops withdrew, villages were often on the verge of starvation. The receipt The receipts a local merchant might receive as the troops emptied his store were store were scarcely worth the paper they were hastily scrawled on.

With his military position detposition deteriorating, Huerta became increasingly impetuous, egotistical, and dicical, and dictatorial. Cabinet secretaries could not work with him for very long, avery long, and turnovers followed one another in rapid succession. Recognizing tecognizing the potential value of a controlled press, Huerta initiated an extensive poextensive policy of censorship. Editors who adopted hostile attitudes were removed re removed from their positions, sent into exile, or jailed. A vast network of secretrk of secret agents and spies reported on the activities of real and potential enootential enemies, and by the fall of 1913 the jail cells in Mexico City and many c and many of the state capitals were crowded with political prisoners.

Without question the most n the most reprehensible facet of the Huerta dictatorship was its unbridled usabridled use of political assassination. After the senseless slaying of Madero ar Madero and Pino Suárez, Maderista Governor Abraham González was the nextwas the next to be killed. Army officers, congressmen, professional men, and evnen, and even petty bureaucrats who manifested their discontent were sacrificede sacrificed to the ill-conceived exigencies of the

day. The most celebrated case of all was that of Senator Belisario Domínguez from Chiapas, an outspoken critic of the regime. In late September 1913, against the good counsel of friends in the Senate, Domínguez asked for the floor to read a prepared statement.

> Peace, cost what it may, Mr. Victoriano Huerta had said. Fellow Senators, have you studied the terrible meaning of those words . . . ? The national assembly has the duty of deposing Mr. Victoriano Huerta from the presidency. He is the one against whom our brothers in the north protest with so much reason. . . . You will tell me, gentlemen, that the attempt is dangerous; for Mr. Victoriano Huerta is a bloody and ferocious soldier who assassinates without hesitation anyone who is an obstacle to his wishes; this does not matter gentlemen! The country exacts from you the fulfillment of a duty, even with risk, indeed the assurance, that you are to lose your lives.[1]

Two weeks later Belisario Domínguez was dead from an assassin's bullet. The morally outraged Senate passed a resolution requesting full information from the president and resolving to remain in permanent session until the case be closed. Two days later Huerta responded by dissolving both houses of the legislature and arresting the majority of the congressmen.

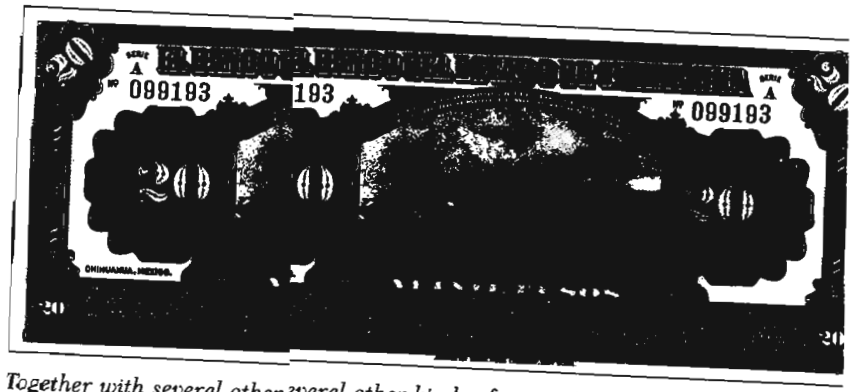
## Economic Problems and Foreign Relations

The war Huerta was fighting against the Constitutionalists in the north and the Zapatistas in the south was costly, and the regime had inherited an empty treasury. By relying on the leva to fill the ranks of the federal army, Huerta depleted the work force in both the cities and the countryside. With no pickers, cotton rotted in the fields, coffee beans fell off the trees, and sugarcane remained unharvested on the large plantations. Mines closed operations; cattlemen in the north lost thousands of head to the rebels; and fruit growers, realizing their perishable products were extremely vulnerable to transportation delays, cut back production. As food and manufactured goods became scarce, a black market began to flourish in the larger cities, and the entire economic structure of the country was severely tested.

The first government expedient was to issue paper money without adequate hard reserves to back it up. The new paper issue depreciated almost as soon as it rolled off the press. Not to be outdone, the

1. Quoted in Michael C. Meyer, *Huerta: A Political Portrait* (Lincoln, 1972), pp. 137–38.






*Together with several other kinds of scrip, this 20-peso note from Chihuahua state was used by the Constitutionalists in late 1913 and early 1914.*

Constitutionalists and the Z:s and the Zapatistas issued their own currency, as di a number of states and largtes and large mining and industrial concerns. Late i 1913 there were at least twe at least twenty-five different kinds of paper currenc in circulation, and nobody wd nobody was able to ascertain accurately the fluctu ating exchange rates. Countates. Counterfeiters, of course, had a field day, while bankers and tax collectors wcollectors were driven almost to insanity.

In addition to his militar his military and economic problems, Huerta faced one other dilemma as well. Tna as well. The United States not only refused to recognize his regime but adopte but adopted a frankly hostile attitude toward him. Woodrow Wilson came to th came to the United States presidency almost simultaneously with Victoriano Hvctoriano Huerta's rise to power. While the American ambassador to Mexico, Henrexico, Henry Lane Wilson, urged recognition, President Wilson and his newly a his newly appointed secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, both with an ab with an abiding faith in the concept of the democratic state, refused. To the Wed. To the White House, Huerta, who came to power by forcefully ejecting the prec ing the previous regime, was a symbol of all that was wrong with Latin America. L America. Unprepared by temperament or training to understand the complexitie complexities of the Mexican Revolution, President Wilson decided to apply his ov apply his own standards of political ethics to the situation. The moral judgment, l judgment, as abstractly admirable as it was diplomatically impractical, once mcal, once made proved unshakable.

Demonstrating little faith in little faith in the reports received from Ambassador Wilson, the president and thdent and the secretary of state decided to dispatch special agents to Mexico to rMexico to report on the nature of the growing conflict. The first chosen for the sen for the special assignment was William Bayard Hale. Speaking no Spanish, H Spanish, Hale relied heavily on the United States

business community for his information, but he managed interviews with several high-level Mexican officials as well. As his reports to the White House began, he noted that the businessmen in Mexico favored early recognition of the regime, but, sensing what the American president wanted to hear, he indicated that he himself did not. Appealing to President Wilson's sense of moral rectitude, Hale characterized Huerta as "an ape-like man, of almost pure Indian blood. He may be said to subsist on alcohol. Drunk or only half drunk (he is never sober) he never loses a certain shrewdness."[2] The American president was impressed with Hale's findings; he would not have written the report any differently, he claimed, had he gone to Mexico City himself. By summer Ambassador Wilson had been recalled and the White House had another special emissary in Mexico—John Lind, a former governor of Minnesota and a longtime friend of Secretary Bryan.

If there was ever any hope for a reconciliation between the United States and Mexico in the late summer and fall of 1913, Lind's reports to Washington eliminated it. Speaking no more Spanish than Hale and being even less conversant with Mexican politics, his dispatches were haughty, bellicose, inaccurate, and often laden with anti-Catholic and anti-Indian slurs. His characterization of the Mexican cabinet ("a worse pack of wolves never infested any community") reveals more about Lind than about Huerta's advisers. Given President Wilson's insistence that Huerta had to go, there were only two genuine avenues open: Wilson could intervene militarily in Mexico, or he could intervene indirectly by channeling United States aid to the Constitutionalists in the north. He chose the second alternative first, and, when that did not work, he opted for military intervention.

## Domestic Reforms

Amazingly, despite the military, economic, and diplomatic pressures the regime faced, Huerta and his advisers found some time for domestic programs. The enemies of the dictatorship labeled them counterrevolutionary, an attempt to reincarnate the age of Díaz. But examination of the regime's social programs reveals that they were anything but that. While Porfirio Díaz had never allocated over 7.2 percent of his budget for education, and Madero had raised the percentage slightly to 7.8 percent, Huerta projected a 9.9 percent allocation for educational services. The funds were still inadequate, but

2. Quoted in Larry D. Hill, *Emissaries to a Revolution: Woodrow Wilson's Executive Agents in Mexico* (Baton Rouge, 1973), p. 31.



Huerta did manage the conste the construction of 131 new rural schools with seats for some ten thousand ı thousand new students. Secretary of Education Nemesio García Naranjo, impranjo, impressed with Henri Bergson's philosophical assault on positivism, decicivism, decided to initiate a new curriculum at the National Preparatory School. By School. Breaking sharply with the positivist tradition of Gabino Barreda, Garareda, García Naranjo made more room for the study of literature, history, andhistory, and philosophy. He did not abandon the sciences but argued persuasivel persuasively that the other branches of learning should not be sacrificed to theniced to them. By creating a reasonable balance between the arts and the sciences,he sciences, the secretary struck an important first blow at the científico philosopho philosophy of education.

The anticientífico posture of› posture of the regime manifested itself in Indian policy as well. Administration sinistration spokesman Jorge Vera Estañol was an early champion of *indigenismo*. *ıdigenismo*. National unity, he argued, was impossible when millions of Indians wof Indians were estranged from the rest of the population by language, customs, d customs, diet, and life expectancy. The rural education program was well intens well intended but was not sufficiently expansive to bring the Indian into the mainto the mainstream of national life. Huerta's secretary of interior, Aureliano Urrıreliano Urrutia, a full-blooded Indian, began dispatching teams of government overnment consultants into the pueblos to organize community projects that ojects that could make small but meaningful changes in the patterns of dailyrns of daily life. But again the program was so small as to make scarcely a dentrcely a dent in the prevailing structure.

It is in the matter of agrarian of agrarian reform that the Huerta dictatorship has been most widely misrepredy misrepresented. The regime initiated its program modestly by distributing fistributing free seed to anyone who asked for it and by expanding the activities ıe activities of the agricultural school in Mexico City. Of greater practical significtical significance Huerta authorized the restoration of seventy-eight ejidos to th ejidos to the Yaqui and Mayo Indians of Sonora. In the late spring of 1913 the pı 1913 the president upgraded Madero's National Agrarian Commission to a cabinet to a cabinet department and instructed Eduardo Tamariz, Mexico's secretary of agretary of agriculture, to begin studying the problem of land redistribution. Tamaution. Tamariz could find nothing in the Constitution of 1857 that even faintly even faintly authorized the expropriation of land, so he had to devise another schenother scheme. He found his solution in the taxation provisions of the Constitute Constitution. If taxes were increased on the large haciendas, the land would land would be less valuable for speculative purposes and hacendados would havs would have to consider sale. Congressional authorization was not forthcoming,orthcoming, but Huerta went ahead on his own and decreed an increase in land ase in land taxes.

In the areas of labor, church por, church policy, and foreign relations the Huerta regime also departed drastically fdrastically from the models of the Porfiriato. The programs the administration spcstration sponsored did not add up to a social

revolution. The reforms bore little demonstrable relationship to one another, no attempt at syncretization was made, and social mobility for the masses did not, as a result, increase. But the regime was no counterrevolution; it was in many ways more farsighted than that of Madero. Huerta and his advisers allowed themselves to be tossed around by the winds of twentieth-century change and harbored no notions of pegging themselves to a Porfirian status quo. While it is true that Huerta's abuse of political power can justifiably be likened to Don Porfirio's authoritarianism, nevertheless, in the larger social sense both Huerta and his advisers recognized that the days of Díaz were gone forever.

## United States Intervention and the Fall of Huerta

By the spring of 1914 Huerta was losing his wars on both the military and the economic fronts. But the final blow was precipitated by his steadily deteriorating relationship with the White House. Early in 1914 President Wilson beefed up the American fleet stationed off Mexican waters. In April a seemingly insignificant event augured the most serious United States–Mexico dispute since the war of the middle of the nineteenth century. Captain Ralph T. Earle of the USS *Dolphin*, stationed off the coast of Tampico, ordered a small landing party to go ashore to secure some badly needed gasoline. Tampico was still in government hands, but the Constitutionalists had attacked several days before and the federal forces were awaiting a more concerted assault. The United States sailors wandered into a restricted dock area and were arrested on the spot.

Within an hour orders came for the sailors' release, accompanied by an official apology. But Rear Admiral Henry T. Mayo, commander of the naval forces off Tampico, considered the apology insufficient and demanded something more elaborate. Since the boat carrying the sailors to shore allegedly flew the American flag, Mayo demanded, among other things, that the Mexican government hoist the American flag at some prominent place on shore and present a twenty-one gun salute to it. President Wilson considered the demands reasonable and prepared himself to make the incident a *casus belli* should Huerta not publicly recant in exactly the manner prescribed. Huerta's secretary of foreign relations insisted that the small landing craft had not carried the flag but agreed to the salute on the condition that the United States return the salute to the Mexican flag. The White House considered the rejoinder impertinent, for both President Wilson and Secretary of State Bryan realized that a United States salute to the Mexican flag could be considered tantamount to recognizing the Huerta regime.



With neither side knowing exactly what to do next, the stalemate was broken when the United States consul in Veracruz wired Washington that a German ship, the *Ypiranga*, was scheduled to arrive at that port on April 21 with a large shipment of arms for Huerta. President Wilson gave immediate orders for a naval occupation of Veracruz. The marines took the city but Mexican casualties mounted into the hundreds, including many noncombatants of both sexes. The public outcry in Mexico City was understandably indignant. Congressmen denounced the United States, and mobs looted American-owned businesses, tore down the statue of George Washington, and threatened tourists. Mexican newspapers urged retaliation against the "Pigs of Yanquilandia." In Monterrey the United States flag was ripped from the consulate and burned on the spot. But the Stars and Stripes, which had precipitated the furor in the first place, was subjected to even greater indignities in the cities in the capital. Tied to the tail of a donkey, it was used to sweep clean the streets of the central plaza.

President Wilson's attempt to rid Mexico of a dictator and himself of a self-made enemy almost backfired. Venustiano Carranza and the majority of his Constitutionalists, the supposed beneficiaries of the Veracruz intervention, expressed their strong disapproval of the blatant violation of Mexican sovereignty. Huerta, however, was unable to capitalize upon their displeasure, and his call for all Mexicans to lay aside internal differences and present a united front went unheeded. Even the initial indignation expressed in Mexico City soon dissipated as the United States troops, despite rumors to the contrary, did not march on Mexico City as they had in 1847.

As Huerta called in his troops to make a show of force against the Americans, the Constitutionalists in the north and the Zapatistas in the south quickly moved into the military vacuums. By the early summer with Pancho Villa's capture of Zacatecas, Huerta's military position had become completely untenable. The continued occupation of Veracruz meant that revenues from the customhouse were stopped before they reached the federal treasury. Recognizing that the diplomatic, economic, and military pressures had all conspired to his disadvantage, Huerta made his decision to resign on July 8, 1914. In his statement of resignation he placed the prime responsibility for what had happened to Mexico on the Puritan who resided in the White House.

It is true that Woodrow Wilson was in large measure responsible for Huerta's overthrow. He had meddled shamelessly in Mexico's internal affairs and, without the semblance of a threat to United States security, had shed innocent Mexican blood to effectuate the foreign policy objectives he deemed opportune. But Wilson cannot be held accountable for the larger calamity that had struck the Mexican na-

*U.S. Navy "bluejackets" engage Mexican defenders at Veracruz in April 1914.*

tion. Not all Mexico's domestic ills were orphans of United States bullets. Mexicans had not yet agreed on the meaning of their Revolution. Francisco Madero's well-meaning but ineffectual experiment with democracy had failed when he had urged caution and moderation on the burning social issues of the day. But Huerta's dictatorship failed as well. While he was not unwilling to give the social reformers the chance to institute change, many Mexicans could no longer bring themselves to accommodate another brutal dictatorship that exalted order at the expense of liberty. The number of options still open were gradually being reduced, but the better day had not yet dawned.

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# 29

# The Illusory Quest for a Better Way

## The Convention of Aguascalientes and Near Anarchy

The years following Victoriano Huerta's ouster are the most chaotic in Mexican revolutionary history as the quarrels among erstwhile allies began. In 1914 First Chief Venustiano Carranza allowed that a convention should be held to determine, among other questions, who should be the provisional president of Mexico until such time as national elections could be scheduled. A proper choice, he believed, could finally put an end to the fragmentation that had characterized the Revolution almost from the beginning. The town of Aguascalientes, in neutral territory, was selected to host the convention, and invitations were extended to all the important revolutionary factions, the number of delegates being apportioned according to how many troops had been deployed in the recent anti-Huerta campaigns.

The military delegates, in a wide array of uniforms and most carrying rifles with full cartridge belts, began to arrive in Aguascalientes in early October. At one of the early sessions Alvaro Obregón, the First Chief's official spokesman, presented the Convention with a Mexican flag inscribed with the words, "Military Convention of Aguascalientes." Each of the delegates then went to the podium, placed his signature on the flag, and swore allegiance to the Convention, some offering a few garrulous remarks. The impressive display of confraternity was not destined to last for long, however. When the Zapatista delegation arrived, a few days late, its leader Paulino Martínez asked to speak. In a deliberate affront to Carranza and Obregón he recognized Villa and Zapata as the genuine leaders of the Revolution. Manifesting the typical Zapatista aversion to gradualism, he argued that "effective suffrage and no-re-election" had no meaning for the vast majority of Mexicans. The Revolution had been fought for land and liberty. The speech presaged a serious schism in the Convention between Villistas and Za-





patistas on the one hand and Carrancistas and Obregonistas on the other. The debates were not se were not sectarian squabbles; rather they reflected fundamental differences of opences of opinion on the direction the Revolution should take.

Martínez was followed to tllowed to the rostrum by the vice-chairman of the Zapatista delegation, Antonio n, Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama. A thirty-year-old socialist and a polished orator, hed orator, he delineated future lines of combat.

> I come here not to attack art to attack anyone but to evoke patriotism and to stimulate shame. I come to excicome to excite the honor of all of the delegates to this assembly. . . . Perhaps it is nerhaps it is necessary to invoke respectable symbols [gesturing to the Convention flagnvention flag], but I fear that the essence of patriotism does not lie in the symbols,the symbols, which are, after all, quite similar to the farces of the church. . . . I berch. . . . I believe that our word of honor is more valuable than all of the signaturethe signatures stamped on this flag. In the last analysis this flag represents nothing nts nothing more than the triumph of the clerical reaction championed by Iturbided by Iturbide. I will never sign this flag. . . . That which we called Independence was endence was not independence for the Indian, but independence for the criollo, fthe criollo, for the heirs of the conquerors who continue infamously to abuse anc to abuse and cheat the oppressed Indian.[1]

Soto y Gama's speech was conch was continuously interrupted from the floor both by those who cheered himheered him and by those who were livid at his ridicule of Mexican history and distory and defamation of the flag. Not yet ready to embrace the chastening influeening influence of open debate, some of the delegates even pointed pistols in hipistols in his direction. The acrimony occasioned by the impassioned speech was npeech was not easily abated, and as the Convention set to work on naming a prcaming a provisional president the underlying issue was whether the Revolution Revolution was going to follow the politically oriented plans of San Luis Potosí anis Potosí and Guadalupe or the agrarian Plan de Ayala.

When, against Carranza's wisranza's wishes, the Convention chose Eulalio Gutiérrez as provisional presidental president of Mexico, the First Chief, haughty as ever, disavowed the action and action and, from Mexico City, ordered his followers to withdraw. Some, includome, including Alvaro Obregón, obeyed, while others made common cause with tcause with the Zapatistas and Villistas. As Villa's troops marched on the capital to it capital to install Gutiérrez in the presidency, it was obvious to all that Mexico wa Mexico was on the verge of still another civil war. Carranza believed it was bet it was better not to make a stand in Mexico City and withdrew his Constitutio Constitutionalist government to Veracruz. The

1. Quoted in Isidro Fabela, ed., *Docume*, ed., *Documentos históricos de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City, 1960–73), 23: 181–82. 23: 181–82.

United States government had agreed to pull out its troops just in time for Carranza to make the gulf port his provisional capital.

## Multiple Civil Wars

In early December 1914 Carranza's two principal antagonists, Pancho Villa, "the Centaur of the North," and Emiliano Zapata, "the Attila of the South," staged a dramatic meeting at Xochimilco on the outskirts of Mexico City. While their followers had knotted the bonds of intellectual camaraderie at the Convention, the two leaders had never before met. The historian Robert Quirk has recreated the encounter from eyewitness accounts.

> Villa and Zapata were a study in contrasts. Villa was tall and robust, weighing at least 180 pounds, with a florid complexion. He wore a tropical helmet after the English style. . . . Zapata, in his physiognomy, was much more the Indian of the two. His skin was very dark, and in comparison with Villa's his face was thin with high cheek bones. He wore an immense sombrero, which at times hid his eyes. . . .
>
> The conference began haltingly . . . both were men of action and verbal intercourse left them uneasy. . . . But then the conversation touched on Venustiano Carranza and suddenly, like tinder, burst aflame. They poured out in a torrent of volubility their mutual hatred for the First Chief. Villa pronounced his opinion of the middle class revolutionaries who followed Carranza: "Those are men who have always slept on soft pillows. How could they ever be friends of the people, who have spent their whole lives in nothing but suffering?" Zapata concurred: "On the contrary, they have always been the scourge of the people. . . . Those *cabrones!* As soon as they see a little chance, well, they want to take advantage of it and line their own pockets! Well, to hell with them!"[2]

But while Villa and Zapata could agree enthusiastically about their profound disdain for Carranza, their alliance was short lived. Although each had promised to support the military engagements of the other, cooperation against Carranza was noticeable only by its absence. The early months of 1915 saw the Mexican Revolution degenerating into unmitigated anarchy. Civil wars ravaged many states. Civilian casualties mounted as atrocities were committed on all sides. While it is not difficult to find things noble in Hidalgo's revolution of 1810 and Madero's revolution of 1910, it is difficult to find nobility in the Mex-

2. Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution, 1914–1915: The Convention of Aguascalientes* (New York, 1963), pp. 135–38.



*Pancho Villa (left) and Emilianand Emiliano Zapata (right) meet in Mexico City. The camaraderie was more appas more apparent than real.*

ican chaos of 1915. Hidalgo, a. Hidalgo, and Madero a century later, had exhibited a reasonable measure of tneasure of tolerance and patience before their forbearance ultimately was exhau was exhausted. Many of the regional warlords of this period employed military fed military force for reasons no more profound than instant political self-gratificatio-gratification.

With his own Conventionist onventionist coalition falling apart as well, provisional President Gutiérrez abartiérrez abandoned Mexico City and Obregón took the capital unopposed. But notled. But nothing was thereby settled. Gutiérrez, still claiming to be president, estasident, established a new government in Nuevo León; Carranza, claiming natioming national executive control as first chief, continued to govern from Veracrrom Veracruz; the Zapatistas supported Roque González Garza as president; wresident; while Pancho Villa, pretending to speak for the entire nation, ruled from. ruled from Chihuahua. None of the governments recognized the paper money, cor money, coinage, or legal contracts of the others.

The muddied political waterstical waters were cleared somewhat in the most famous military engagement of tigement of the Revolution—the battle of Celaya—in April 1915. While Pancho Villa Pancho Villa prepared to put his slightly tarnished record of military victories on thtories on the line, Alvaro Obregón had immersed himself in the battle reports fro reports from war-torn Europe. He had learned,

among other things, that one of the best ways to blunt a concerted cavalry charge was to encircle carefully laid out defensive positions with rolls of barbed wire. In early April, when Villa attacked with a force estimated at twenty-five thousand men, Obregón was ready. He had planned his defenses with consummate skill, and, when Villa launched a furious cavalry charge, Obregón's well-placed artillery and machine guns began cutting the attackers to pieces. Villa was forced to retreat, but in the middle of the month tried again to dislodge Obregón's forces. The second Villista offensive was even less successful than the first; in fact, it was a disaster. Bent upon victory even at exorbitant costs, Villa threw his cavalry against the barbed-wire entrenchments only to see wave after wave massacred. When it all ended, thousands of bodies were strewn across the fields of Celaya and impaled on the barbed wire. Obregón's official report listed over four thousand Villistas dead, five thousand wounded, and six thousand taken prisoner. He calculated his own losses at only 138 dead and 227 wounded.

The battle of Celaya did not immediately destroy Villa's capacity to make war, but it did presage his ultimate defeat. By the summer and fall of 1915 First Chief Carranza was clearly gaining the upper hand as both the Villistas in the north and the Zapatistas in the south found themselves increasingly isolated and without national support. In the White House President Wilson decided to throw the official support of the United States behind the Constitutionalists. He extended diplomatic recognition to the Carranza regime in October. Pancho Villa, who had courted the United States for years and who had not even criticized the invasion at Veracruz, was incensed. Determined not to turn the other cheek, he began to take his vengeance on private United States civilians.

The first serious incident occurred at Santa Isabel (today General Trías), Chihuahua. The strange scenario began on January 9, 1916, at El Paso, Texas, where a group of United States mining engineers and technicians from the Cusi Mining Company boarded a train for Mexico. Assured of a safe conduct and Mexican government protection, they set out to reopen the Cusihuiriachic mine. At the hamlet of Santa Isabel the train was stopped by a barrier laid across the tracks. A band of Villistas boarded the car carrying the Americans, dragged them off, and murdered fifteen of them on the spot.

But an even more outrageous incident occurred exactly two months later. Early in the morning of March 9, 1916, Villa dispatched 485 men across the border from Palomas, Chihuahua, and attacked the dreary, sun-baked adobe town of Columbus, New Mexico. One of the first shots stopped the large clock in the railroad station at 4:11 A.M. For the next two hours the Villistas terrorized the town's four hundred in-



*Pancho Villa (1878–1923). Never an "armchair general," Villa often led his troops into battle. His famous Division of the North, numbering some fifty thousand men, was the largest revolutionary force ever amassed in America.*

habitants. Shouting *¡Viva Villa! ¡Viva Villa!* and *¡Muerte a los Gringos!* they shot and burned and looted. Troopers from the Thirteenth Cavalry succeeded in driving them off by daybreak, but eighteen Americans had been killed, many were wounded, and the town was burned beyond recognition.

The clamor for United States intervention was immediate and predictable. Senator Albert Bacon Fall of New Mexico called for a half-million men to occupy all of Mexico. President Wilson was not willing to go that far, but he did agree to dispatch a small punitive expedition under the command of General John J. Pershing, an army man who years before had chased the Apache chief, Geronimo, through the same northern Mexican desert. It took a week for Pershing to organize his expedition, and that was more than enough time for Villa to cover his tracks. Approximately six thousand United States army troops wandered hot and thirsty through the rough terrain in a futile effort to locate their prey. Little if any help could be expected from the rural Mexicans, and as the Americans entered small pueblos they were often greeted with shouts of *¡Viva Mexico, Viva Villa!* As the expedition

*General Pershing's cavalry expedition into northern Mexico may have hardened his troops for the upcoming war in Europe, but his effort to capture Pancho Villa was in vain.*

cut south into Mexico, First Chief Carranza began to get nervous and ordered Pershing to withdraw. Not yet ready to admit defeat, Pershing engaged a group of Carrancista troops ordered to forestall his southward thrust. When hostilities began he received orders to withdraw gradually to the north, but the expedition was not pulled out of Mexico until January 1917. By that time the United States had spent $130 million in its unsuccessful attempt to catch and punish the Columbus raiders.

## The Constitution of 1917

The failure of the Pershing punitive expedition notwithstanding, Villa got progressively weaker and Carranza gradually consolidated his position in Mexico City. The First Chief's advisers convinced him that the time had come to give some institutional basis to the Revolution that had engulfed the nation for almost six years. In an attempt to legitimize the Revolution he reluctantly agreed to convoke a congress to



meet in Querétaro for the pud for the purpose of drawing up a new constitution. Remembering how he had low he had lost control of the Convention of Aguascalientes, he vowed not to repd not to repeat the error in Querétaro. No individual or group who had opposehad opposed the Constitutionalist movement would be eligible to participate; thuticipate; thus no Huertistas, Villistas, or Zapatistas were included among the delong the delegates when the first session convened in November 1916. But First ò. But First Chief Carranza quickly learned what he should have already known; dy known; the Constitutionalists themselves were scarcely in ideologic agreemenic agreement.

The delegates at Querétarat Querétaro represented a new breed of Mexican politician and, in a sense, cora sense, constituted a new social elite. Unlike the Convention of Aguascalientes,ıascalientes, military men constituted only 30 percent of the delegates. Over haes. Over half had university educations and professional titles. The large majorityrge majority were young and middle class; because they had been denied meaninied meaningful participation during the Porfiriato, many were politically ambitioully ambitious.

With every intention of conıtion of controlling the proceedings, Carranza submitted to the Querétaro Congrétaro Congress a draft of a new constitution he himself preferred. It showed him howed him to be a liberal in the best nineteenth-century tradition. His draft dHis draft differed little from the Constitution of 1857, although it contained a ontained a series of sections strengthening executive control. It occasioned an inısioned an inevitable split in the Congress between those moderates who supporteho supported Carranza and the radicals (called Jacobins by their opponents) whoonents) who desired something more likely to harbinger rapid social reform. reform.

The debates in Querétaro, fQuerétaro, focusing on everything from temperance to prison reform, were acrimonere acrimonious. After the first few votes had been taken, it was clear that the racthat the radicals held the majority. Led by thirty-two-year-old Francisco Múgicaisco Múgica, they succeeded in pushing through a number of anticlerical provisioical provisions and three extremely significant articles that came to embody the fmbody the fundamental orientation the Revolution was to assume in the 1920s ande 1920s and 1930s.

The anticlericalism of the Cim of the Congress was even more intense than it had been during the height of te height of the liberal-conservative struggle during the nineteenth century. All of tury. All of the old arguments were heard, but, in addition, the church was now sı was now seen to be blocking the path of the social revolution. Article after artcle after article limited the powers of the church. Marriage was declared a civil ceed a civil ceremony; religious organizations would enjoy no special legal status, anal status, and, as a result, priests were considered ordinary citizens; public worshublic worship outside the confines of the church was banned; state legislatures egislatures could determine the maximum number of priests to be allowed within wed within state boundaries; all priests in Mexico

had to be native born; clergymen were prohibited from forming political parties; priests had to register with civil authorities; and new church buildings had to be approved by the government. The anticlerical tenor of the Querétaro Congress also surfaced in one of the three most important articles.

The drafting of Article 3 was assigned to Múgica's committee on education, and his proposal touched off passionate exchanges on the floor of the Congress. Few took umbrage at the principle that primary education should be free and obligatory in the Mexican republic, but Múgica and his radical cohorts had one additional criterion to add. Education should be secular. The lessons of history convinced Múgica that the clergy had sacrificed all claim to obedience. He saw the church as the implacable enemy of the Mexican people and an unrepentantly anti-democratic institution.

The responses of Félix Palavicini and other Carranza supporters in the Congress were just as terse, personal, and caustic. But when the final vote was taken, Francisco Múgica's Article 3 passed by a margin of almost two to one. With the radicals' dominance well established, two other major issues were resolved in their favor. And if the debates on education reminded many of the anticlerical rhetoric of the Reform, the ensuing disputation on land and labor left no doubt that a new age of liberalism had dawned.

Article 27 addressed itself to Mexico's endemic land problem and can be considered a direct outgrowth of Díaz's alienation of Mexico's subsoil rights and his policy of allowing the land companies to appropriate the old communal lands. While the Zapatistas were not present in Querétaro, the issue that had made them a potent force had to be squarely faced. Article 27 required that lands seized illegally from the peasantry during the Porfiriato be restored and provision be made for those communities that could not prove legal title. Equally as important, the private ownership of land was no longer considered to be an absolute right but rather something of a privilege. If land did not serve a useful social function, it could be appropriated by the state: "The nation shall at all times have the right to impose on private property such limitations as the public interest may demand, as well as the right to regulate the utilization of natural resources . . . in order to conserve them and to ensure a more equitable distribution of public wealth." A special section of Article 27 deeply disturbed foreign nationals who owned property in Mexico.

> Only Mexicans by birth or naturalization have the right to acquire ownership of lands, waters, . . . or to obtain concessions for the exploitation of mines or waters. The state may grant the same right to foreigners, provided that they agree b they agree before the Department of Foreign Relations to consider themselves as nemselves as nationals in respect to such property, and bind themselves not to invoke tht to invoke the protection of their government.[3]



The last, precedent-breakindent-breaking article treated the labor question and sought to provide a reasonable reasonable balance between labor and management. Article 123 provided for an eied for an eight-hour workday, a six-day workweek, a minimum wage, and equal paid equal pay for equal work regardless of sex or nationality. Most importantly, it gortantly, it gave both labor and capital the right to organize for the defense of their nse of their respective interests and allowed that the workers had the right to bargaght to bargain collectively and go on strike.

The Constitution of 1917 vn of 1917 was not nearly as radical as many contemporary observers found it,rs found it, but it did coagulate into a repudiation of nineteenth-century laissez-ury laissez-faire liberalism. Although ideologically indebted to the Liberal Plan iberal Plan of 1906, the Plan Orozquista, and the Plan de Ayala, it was more refas more reformist than revolutionary. Carranza accepted it with great reluctancet reluctance. It bore scant resemblance to the draft he had proposed, but he had sut he had set the requirements for delegates himself and, more importantly, waortantly, wanted to become constitutional president after having served as First Ch as First Chief for four years.

## THE CARRANZA PRESIDENCPRESIDENCY

Carranza handily won the spevon the special elections that were held in March 1917 and took the oath of officoath of office on May 1. Not only was the country far from pacified, but the econcut the economy was in a state of acute distress. The banking structure had been shad been shattered, in part because of the general chaos but also as a direct resultdirect result of the worthless paper money that had inundated the commercial marmercial markets. Mining suffered enormous losses, with gold production declininon declining some 80 percent between 1910 and 1916 and silver and copper prd copper production falling off 65 percent during the same period. Industrial produstrial production fell off as well, and wages were depressed. The communicationmunication and transportation networks in which Díaz had taken so much pridemuch pride were in shambles. Agricultural shortages pushed food prices up, anrices up, and the inflation took a terrible toll on poor urbanites trying to live ong to live on a monetary economy.

Carranza quickly let it be knolet it be known that, although he had accepted the Constitution of 1917, he had no', he had no idea of enforcing it. Confusing change in government with change in change in society, he believed the Revolution to

3. Quoted in *Diario de los debates delos debates del Congreso Constituyente, 1916–1917* (Mexico City, 1960).

be over. In fact, it had scarcely begun. Still prompted by the inviolability of private property, under Article 27 Carranza distributed only 450,000 acres of land, a paltry sum when one considers that many hacendados had more than this and Luis Terrazas alone owned in excess of seven million acres. In addition, the land Carranza did distribute had been taken away from his political enemies. This was neither the spirit nor the intent of Article 27.

The record of the administration on labor was no better. Even before the new Constitution was enacted, Carranza's labor policy was known. In the fall of 1915, when workers in Veracruz struck protesting payment of wages in worthless paper currency, Carranza used his army to put down the strike. A year later, when railroad workers declared a strike, Carranza found it treasonous and arrested the leaders. Mexican labor leaders, hoping for a better day with the adoption of Article 123, were disappointed as well. On a few occasions innocuous concessions were granted to labor, but the labor movement did not have an advocate in the presidential chair.

Though without his blessings or support, an event did occur during Carranza's presidency that was a landmark in the Mexican labor movement. In 1918 the labor leader Luis Morones founded Mexico's first nationwide union, the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM). The gains made by the labor movement in the next two years were marginal, but the establishment of the confederation did lay the foundation for future progress.

There can be no doubt that Carranza's presidency was complicated by World War I. The eventual entrance of the United States into the European conflagration was a foregone conclusion, and the Mexican government was anxious that it be sooner rather than later. Perhaps Washington would then be too concerned with trans-Atlantic matters to intervene again in Mexican affairs. But Mexico's own position had to be carefully defined. Many Latin American nations were prepared to follow the lead of the United States and break diplomatic relations with Germany. Should not Mexico also align itself with its Western Hemisphere counterparts? While many prominent Mexicans urged this course of action, others argued with understandable passion that, unlike France, England, and the United States, Germany had never landed troops on Mexican soil; Germany had not stolen half of the national territory or presumed to dictate how Mexico should manage its own affairs.

As Carranza himself weighed the alternatives, he received a strange proposal from the German foreign secretary, Arthur Zimmermann. In return for a formal alliance with Germany, on the successful conclusion of the war Mexico would receive back the lands it had lost to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century. However tempting the



offer sounded, Carranza had arranza had to turn it down. Germany, he realized, was much too bogged down in El down in Europe to come to Mexico's assistance in a war with the United States. ted States. The best course for Mexico to follow, Carranza determined, was to mai, was to maintain strict neutrality during the war.

Although the European cEuropean conflict was disquieting to Mexico and resulted in some economic dislonomic dislocation, the slow pace of the reform program cannot properly be attrperly be attributed to it. Carranza did not want to accelerate the pace of the Revc of the Revolution. Of all the disillusioned groups of revolutionaries in Mexico, th Mexico, the Zapatistas were most dismayed. The president sent thousands of fousands of federal troops into Morelos under trusted General Pablo González. Cgonzález. Conducting a very competent campaign, González took a number of Zumber of Zapatista towns, but the guerrilla chieftain himself eluded capture. Thapture. The fighting in Morelos was relentless—perhaps the most terrible of terrible of the entire Revolution. Thousands of innocent civilians were chargedere charged with succoring Zapatistas and executed. Entire towns were burned, ce burned, crops methodically destroyed, and cattle stolen. The Zapatistas respondstas responded in kind and on one occasion blew up a Mexico City–Cuernavaca tuernavaca train, killing some four hundred passengers, mostly civilians. ns.

In March 1919 Zapata dire Zapata directed an open letter to Carranza. It was a passionate statement but orment but one that helps to explain why Zapata had fought every Mexican head ofcan head of state for a full decade. It was not written to the president whom hent whom he did not recognize, nor to the politician whom he did not trust, but totrust, but to Citizen Carranza.

*Venustiano Carranza (1859–1920). The First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army assumed the presidency in 1917 but, despite revolutionary rhetoric, moved slowly on the issues of social reform. His timidity on these central issues ultimately cost him popular support.*

> As the citizen I am, as a man with a right to think and speak aloud, as a peasant fully aware of the needs of the humble people, as a revolutionary and a leader of great numbers, . . . I address myself to you Citizen Carranza. . . . From the time your mind first generated the idea of revolution . . . and you conceived the idea of naming yourself Chief . . . you turned the struggle to your own advantage and that of your friends who helped you rise and then shared the booty—riches, honors, businesses, banquets, sumptuous feasts, bacchanals, orgies. . . .
>
> It never occurred to you that the Revolution was fought for the benefit of the great masses, for the legions of the oppressed whom you motivated by your harangues. It was a magnificent pretext and a brilliant recourse for you to oppress and deceive. . . .
>
> In the agrarian matter you have given or rented our haciendas to your favorites. The old landholdings . . . have been taken over by new landlords . . . and the people mocked in their hopes.
>
> EMILIANO ZAPATA[4]

Carranza was not about to retire in the face of polemical thunder. He had one more plan for ending his problem with Zapata. The president discussed with General Pablo González a daring plot to deceive Zapata and then to kill him. The scheme was put into operation at once. Colonel Jesús Guajardo, one of González's subordinates in the Morelos campaigns, wrote to Zapata that he wanted to mutiny and to turn himself, some five hundred men, and all of their arms and ammunition over to the Zapatistas. Zapata demanded proof of Guarjardo's sincerity, for tricks had been played in the past, and asked that several former Zapatistas, who had previously defected to the federal cause, be tried by court-martial and executed. Colonel Guajardo agreed and carried out the order. Zapata was still not fully convinced when news reached him from his own network of spies that Guajardo had captured the town of Jonacatepec in the name of the Zapatistas. Zapata at this juncture agreed to meet the defecting federal officer. A conference was set for April 10, 1919, at the Hacienda de Chinameca in Zapata's home territory. With only a few men accompanying him, Zapata rode into the hacienda in the early afternoon. A young eyewitness later described what happened.

> Ten of us followed him just as he ordered. The rest of the people stayed [outside the walls] under the trees, confidently resting in the shade with their carbines stacked. Having formed ranks, [Guajardo's] guard looked ready to do him honors. Three times the bugle sounded the honor call;

4. Quoted in Fabela, ed., *Documentos históricos de la revolución mexicana*, 21: 305–10.



> and as the last note died a note died away, as the General in Chief reached the threshold of the door . . . ate door . . . at point blank, without giving him time even to draw his pistols, the solditols, the soldiers who were presenting arms fired two volleys, and our unforgettableunforgettable General Zapata fell never to rise again.[5]

While Carranza had thus richad thus ridded himself of his most implacable adversary, he did not have much have much time left himself, as he would also die by the bullet. In 1920, when th920, when the president attempted to name his successor in the high office, Alvaoffice, Alvaro Obregón allied himself with fellow Sonorans Adolfo de la Huertae la Huerta and Plutarco Eliás Calles and declared himself in revolt. Under a newlnder a new revolutionary banner, the *Plan de Agua Prieta*, a new army of northern of northerners began marching on Mexico City. In May, Carranza was forced to f forced to flee the capital and, on his way into exile, was assassinated by one of d by one of his own guards in the squalid village of Tlaxcalantongo. The assassin we assassin was a loyal Obregonista, but evidence directly linking Obregón to the ıgón to the murder is scanty.

The Carranza regime has regime has not yet received the type of careful historical evaluation it merits. Wh merits. When it is subjected to the tests of archival research it might very well prery well prove to be the period of counterrevolution in the Mexican social uphe social upheaval. Carranza was so imbued with hatred for Victoriano Huerta, his Huerta, his predecessor, that he not only repudiated everything Huerta did buerta did but, in fact, nullified in the name of the Constitutionalist Revolution mevolution many of the more progressive measures undertaken by that dictatorshi dictatorship in the period 1913–14. Having determined that Huerta had raised had raised teachers' salaries, Carranza reduced them to their former levels at ter levels at the very time that inflation had pushed consumer prices up. Land that l Land that Huerta had begun to redistribute to the communal ejidos was restored tas restored to its Porfirian proprietors. While Francisco Madero had projected 7.8rojected 7.8 percent of his total budget for education, and Huerta 9.9 percent, th percent, the figure under Carranza had slipped, by 1919, to an appalling .09 percerg .09 percent. Expenditures for all social programs dropped from 11.6 percent in lpercent in 1913 to 1.9 percent in 1919.

While the counterrevolutionerrevolutionary thesis must remain a thesis pending further investigation, what ation, what is certain is that the social revolution did not find a protagonist in thgonist in the First Chief. Carranza would never have admitted that laissez faire laissez faire could conflict with social welfare. One should not be misled by the fad by the fact that the socially oriented Constitution of 1917 was enacted duringacted during the Carranza years. Carranza was unhappy with its progressive articlessive articles and reacted to them by applying the

5. Quoted in John Womack, Jr., *Zapata*ack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York. 1968), p. 326.

old colonial maxim, *Obedezco pero no cumplo*. He simply failed to take into account the aspirations of the social reformers.

Mexico had finally rounded the corner by 1920. The violence was not yet completely spent, but generally the struggles in the post-1920 period became less chaotic and more deliberative as national politicians found more constructive releases for their energy and fervor. A gradual stabilization of the political order, coupled with a modest implementation of the new Constitution, would begin to change the contours of society in the 1920s. As the shock of carnage receded into the past, the goals of a better life began to be realized, but progress was slow and arduous. Not until the 1930s would Mexico inaugurate a president undeterred by centuries of tradition or by the vested interests.

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# 30

# Society and Culture during the Age of Violence

## The Impact of the Revolution on the Masses

The rapid changes in the presidential chair, the heated debates in Aguascalientes and Querétaro, and the redounding phrases of the Constitution of 1917 surely had little immediate meaning to the Mexican masses. It was the violence of that first revolutionary decade that most dominated their lives and left Mexico a country without charm or gaiety. For every prominent death—Francisco Madero, José María Pino Suárez, Pascual Orozco, Emiliano Zapata, or Venustiano Carranza—a hundred thousand nameless Mexicans also died. By any standard the loss of life was tremendous. Although accurate statistics were not recorded, moderate estimates calculate that between 1.5 and 2 million lost their lives in those terrible ten years. In a country with a population of roughly 15 million in 1910, few families did not directly feel the pain as one in every eight Mexicans was killed. Even Mexico's high birthrate could not offset the carnage of war. The census takers in 1920 counted almost a million fewer Mexicans than they had found only a decade before.

Some of the marching armies were equipped with small medical teams, and Pancho Villa even fitted out a medical train on which battlefield operations could be performed. But medical care was generally so primitive that within a week after a major engagement deaths of wounded often doubled or tripled losses sustained immediately on the battlefield. And in more cases than one likes to recount captured enemy prisoners, both federals and rebels, were executed rather than cared for and fed. Civilian deaths rose into the hundreds of thousands as a result of indiscriminate artillery bombardments and, in some cases, the macabre policy of placing noncombatants before firing squads in pursuit of some imperfectly conceived political or military goal.

It is axiomatic that war elicits not only the worst in man but often psychotic behavior in otherwise normal human beings. While Mexican





*Execution without benefit of trial was it of trial was common during the violent decade of 1910–20e of 1910–20. Bodies were left hanging for weeks as objecteks as object lessons.*

history does not have names such aames such as Andersonville, Dachau, Auschwitz, or My Lai to connote atrocity, theatrocity, the cumulative stress of exhaustion and constant exposure to death did prleath did produce its psychiatric casualties during the first decade of the Revolu the Revolution and, on occasion, led to behavior that can only be termed sadisticmed sadistic. The inhumanity visited upon civilians by soldiers became legendarne legendary in the folklore of the Revolution. One could pass off stories of mutilies of mutilated prisoners hanged from trees or telephone posts as exaggerations hagerations had not scores of eager photographers captured hundreds of horrifying scorrifying scenes for posterity. Bodies with hands or legs or genitals cut off were a goff were a grotesque caricature of a movement originally motivated by the highest the highest ideals.

Fratricidal horrors so outrageouo outrageous and so cataclysmic exacted burning resentment and fear in the civilir in the civilian population. An approaching unit invariably meant trouble for poor, le for poor, rural Mexicans. The best that could be hoped for was a small band deall band demanding a meal. But often the demands were more outrageous as thageous as the war could not lend itself to decency or compassion. In northern n northern Mexico tens of thousands of rural Mexicans joined their middle classmiddle class and wealthy counterparts in seeking the security of the United StateJnited States. On a single day in October 1913 some eight thousand refugees croefugees crossed the border from Piedras Ne-

gras, Coahuila, to Eagle Pass, Texas. While the vast majority left the country with the idea of returning once the situation stabilized, most remained in the United States. But in central and southern Mexico there was virtually no place to run, and the civilian population had no choice but to keep their heads low and resign themselves to the worst. The documentary evidence from the period suggests forcefully that the excesses of war cannot be attributed simply to one side or another. Both federals and rebels were guilty. An excellent community study of a village in Morelos corroborates the contemporary sources. Informants who had lived through the revolutionary period declared that both sides posed an equal threat in this war without scruple.[1]

Fear in the rural areas was challenged only by frustration. Two months spent clearing a field and planting crops under a burning sun could be wiped out in five minutes as an army of five hundred horsemen galloped through the carefully tilled rows of corn and beans. Then they might stop at the one-room hut and confiscate the one milch cow and four turkeys that held out some promise for a slightly less redundant diet in the six months to follow.

There is precious little published evidence upon which to assess the impact of the early Revolution on life in rural Mexico. But the findings of Professor Luis González, in his perceptive and beautifully written account of the Michoacán village of San José de Gracia (population about 1,200 in 1910) are probably not atypical. By 1913, when violence engulfed the region for the first time,

> Don Gregorio Pulido had given up taking local products to Mexico City, for bands of revolutionaries made the roads unsafe for travel. The San José area began to return to the old practice of consuming its own products. Trade declined. Padre Juan's goal of increasing prosperity receded in the distance. From 1913 on, increased poverty was the rule. . . . Everything in San José shifted into reverse. The revolution did no favors for the town or the surrounding *rancherías*. . . . Parties of rebels often came to visit their friends in San José, either to rescue the girls from virginity, or to feast happily on the delicious local cheeses and meats, or to add the fine horses of the region to their own. . . . They summoned all the rich residents and told them how much money in gold coin each was to contribute to the cause. In view of the rifles, no one protested.[2]

1. Lola Romanucci-Ross, *Conflict, Violence and Morality in a Mexican Village* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1973), pp. 15–16.

2. Luis González, *San José de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition* (Austin, 1974), pp. 124–25.



The "armies" the peone" the peones of rural Mexico saw and feared did n look much like armies. St armies. Standard uniforms were unheard of amor the rebels, and weapons d weapons consisted of whatever could be found appropriated. Sometimes Sometimes makeshift insignias identified rank b gave slight clue as to grou as to group affiliation. Anonymity served rebel com manders well as it left thas it left them unconcerned with the niceties of a countability, but it causedit it caused problems for the rural *pacífico* wantin to respond correctly to theectly to the question, "Are you a Huertista, a Villist or a Carrancista?" a?"

For Mexican women the women the Revolution often had a degrading person meaning. With husbands, fhusbands, fathers, and sons serving somewhere in th ranks, they were subjectede subjected to the terror and indignity of wanton as sault. But many did not mo did not mope or simply stay home to become the tar get of rape. Freeing themseing themselves from the eternal task of grinding corn thousands joined the Revold the Revolution and served the rebel armies in th capacity of spies and arms s and arms smugglers. So active were the women i smuggling ammunition acrcunition across the border in Ciudad Juárez that th United States Customs Burustoms Bureau was forced to employ teams of femal agents to search the undergathe undergarments of suspicious, heavy-looking ladie returning from shopping sphopping sprees in El Paso.

Perhaps the most notewonost noteworthy role assumed by women was that o *soldadera*. The soldaderas woldaderas were more than camp followers. They pro vided feminine companionscompanionship, to be sure, but because neither the federal army nor the rebel a the rebel armies provided commissary service, they foraged for food, cooked, w cooked, washed, and, in the absence of more competent medical service, nurservice, nursed the wounded and buried the dead. Both sides were dependent upon ident upon them, and in 1912 a federal battalion actually threatened mutiny wh mutiny when the secretary of war ordered that the women could not be taken t be taken along on a certain maneuver. The order was rescinded. Not infrequeiot infrequently, the soldaderas actually served in the ranks, sometimes with a baby with a baby slung in a *rebozo* or a young child clinging to their skirts. Women h. Women holding officer ranks were not uncommon in the rebel armies. es.

The soldadera endured theendured the hardships of the campaign without special consideration. While the r While the men were generally mounted, the women most often walked, carrying d, carrying bedding, pots and pans, food, firearms, ammunition, and children. O children. Often the men would gallop on ahead, engage the enemy in battle, and battle, and then rest. By the time the women caught up, they were ready to moveady to move again, and the soldadera would simply trudge on. Losing her special her special "Juan" in battle, she would wait an appropriately decent period and period and then take on another, to prepare his favorite meal and share his bedhare his bed. Not a few gave birth in makeshift military camps, and some even oome even on the field of battle.

*Among the disparate revolutionary contingents in Mexico, the Yaqui Indians of Sonora figured prominently in the campaigns of the northwest.*

The hard life of the soldadera was a relative thing. A fascinating oral history of a Yaqui woman from Sonora who was deported to Yucatán, cut her hands raw on the henequen plants, and saw her babies die from lack of adequate care, reveals that she was thrilled to become a soldadera. She later recalled that "her personal misery decreased by impressive leaps and bounds. . . . At no point during the next several



years did she view her life as a her life as anything but a tremendous improvement after Yucatán."[3]

While, with the protection o protection of anonymity, men could treat women as virtual slaves, public displays lic displays were more often marked by the type of chivalric indulgence so long ide e so long identified with the Hispanic tradition. One traveler to Mexico City in 191 City in 1918 was especially amused by the sign he found posted in the streetcar: e streetcar:

> GENTLEMEN: When you see hen you see a lady standing on her feet you will not find it possible to remain sitting emain sitting with tranquility. Your education will forbid you to do so.
>
> GENERAL MANAGER OF THE RAILWAYS[4]

In an oblique and unintended unintended sort of way the Revolution contributed to the emancipation of the Me n of the Mexican woman. As the shortage of adult males in the cities contracted t ontracted the labor supply, women began to make some inroads into the business he business world. At first their contributions consisted of the simplest type of wo t type of work in the stores, but once escaped from the confines of the house they house they would not be persuaded easily to return. In Yucatán, at least, a con least, a concerted policy of women's liberation was initiated by Governor Salvador or Salvador Alvarado. A farsighted revolutionary, Alvarado declared: "I have alw "I have always believed that if we do not elevate the role of women we will find ve will find it impossible to build a country."[5] Not only did he lower the age of m he age of majority of women from age thirty-one to twenty-one, but he actively b e actively began placing women in open positions in state government. In 1916 h . In 1916 he sponsored a Congreso Femenino in Mérida, Yucatán. Four major th ur major themes were discussed: the social means to be employed to remove the emove the yoke of tradition; the role of primary education in women's liberation 's liberation; the arts and occupations the state should support to prepare the v epare the women for a fuller life; and the social functions women should employ uld employ to contribute toward a better society.

The Revolution, to be sure, ha be sure, had different meanings to different Mexicans during those years of gre ears of greatest violence. But a most recurrent theme is the fear of the leva, t the leva, the institution that snatched away the male population for service in t service in the military. One corrido, popular in 1914, capsulized the problem in problem in the doggerel of the masses.

3. Jane H. Kelly, "Preliminary Life Histo ary Life History of Josefa (Chepa) Alvarez" (mimeographed, 1970), p. 16.

4. Quoted in P. Harvey Middleton, *Ind* iddleton, *Industrial Mexico: 1919 Facts and Figures* (New York, 1919), p. 6.

5. Salvador Alvarado, *Actuación revoluc uación revolucionaria del General Salvador Alvarado en Yucatán* (Mexico City, 1965), p. 49. 35), p. 49.

*Armies had to be fed, and the task of grinding corn for the daily supply of tortillas continued as it had for centuries.*

*A familiar sight between 1910 and 1920, the soldaderas experienced both the excitement and privations of life on the military campaign.*





La leva, la odiosa levla odiosa leva
que sembró desolación desolación
en todo el suelo queriduelo querido
de nuestra noble nacióoble nación.
Al obrero, al artesano, al artesano
al comerciante y al peónte y al peón,
los llevaban a las filas a las filas
sin tenerles compasión.'compasión.[6]

Edith O'Shaughnessy, the wiessy, the wife of the United States chargé in Mexico City, described the leva in hee leva in her memoirs.

> I was startled as I watched as I watched the faces of some conscripts marching to the station today. On so many On so many was impressed something desperate and despairing. They have a feary have a fear of . . . eternal separation from their loved ones. They often have to hten have to be tied in the transport wagons. There is no system about conscription conscription here—the press gang takes any likely looking person. Fathers of famithers of families, only sons of widows, as well as the unattached, are enrolled, besenrolled, besides women to cook and grind in the powder mills.[7]

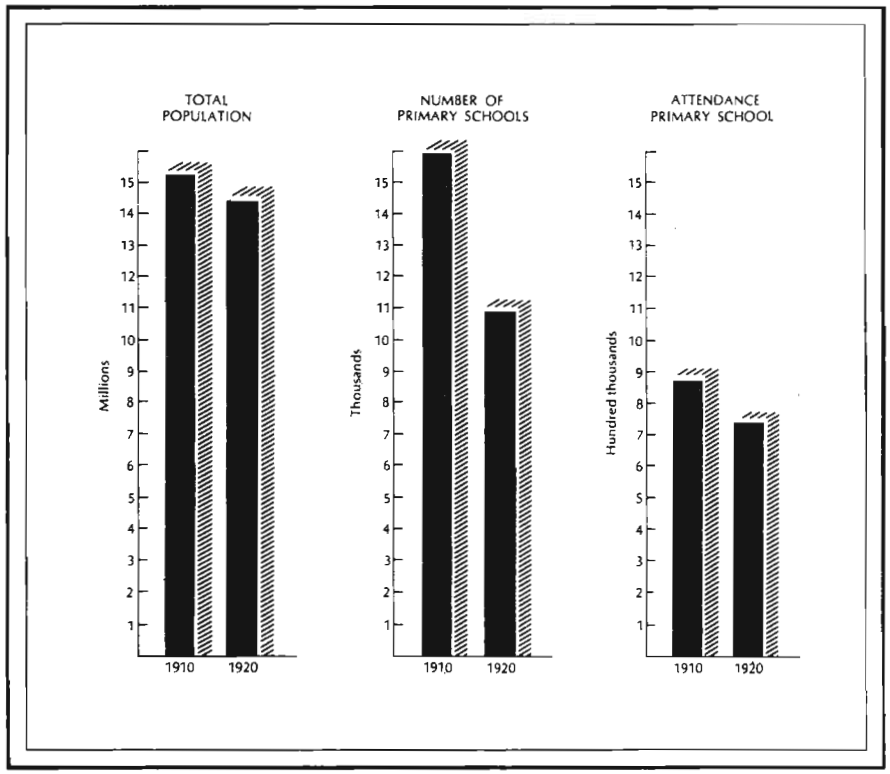
Among those who suffered ho suffered most were foreign residents of Mexico. Because the Revolution was ilution was in part a reaction against Díaz's coddling of foreign interests, not a fews, not a few revolutionaries took out their wrath on the foreign community. Cast junity. Cast in the role of exploiters, foreign oilmen and miners were forced to paorced to pay not only taxes to the government but tribute to various groups of rebroups of rebels and bribes to local bandits. But other frugal and industrious foreigrious foreigners, without the slightest claim to exploitation, suffered worse. Afte worse. After a battle for control of Torreón in 1911 over two hundred peaceful Chpeaceful Chinese residents were murdered simply because they were Chinese. A Chinese. A few years later Spanish citizens in Torreón were expelled from the d from the country and their property confiscated by Pancho Villa. Colonies of olonies of United States Mormons in Chihuahua and Sonora were terrorized to errorized to such an extent that they finally packed up those belongings they coulcs they could carry and left their adopted home.

City dwellers, too, were subo, were subject to the ravishments of war. Almost all of the larger cities in the cies in the country hosted battles at some time between 1910 and 1920, and so20, and some witnessed three or four major en-

6. Quoted in Merle E. Simmons, *The*Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido as a Source for Interpretive Study of Modern Mexico (1870–19xico (1870–1950)* (Bloomington, 1957), p. 121.

7. Edith O'Shaughnessy, *A Diplomat's*, *A Diplomat's Wife in Mexico* (New York, 1916), p. 58.

THE VIOLENCE TAKES A TOLL




gagements and were turned into debris before the decade ran its course. The sight of burning buildings, the sound of wailing ambulances, and the nausea of mass burials brought home in tangible terms and most immediate meaning of the Revolution. Starvation reached major proportions in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Puebla.

The construction boom of the Porfiriato ended shortly after the outbreak of hostilities. While a few unfinished public projects were completed, for the most part those workmen who could be spared from the ranks were kept busy clearing debris, repairing damaged structures, knocking down gutted buildings, and trying to put the railroad lines back in operation.

The early Revolution took a terrible toll in education. Hundreds of schools were destroyed and hundreds of others abandoned. In the Federal District alone the number of primary schools in operation declined from 332 in 1910 to 270 ten years later. The story repeated itself in



city after city, town after town after town. Total primary school attendance in the country declined from 880,0(from 880,000 to 740,000 in the same ten-year period.

## INTELLECTUALS AND ART AND ARTISTS

The first decade of the Revcof the Revolution, as violent as it was, nevertheless spawned a new generation oeneration of Mexican intellectuals and artists. During the last year of the Porfiriaf the Porfiriato a group of young thinkers had banded together to form the Ateneo the Ateneo de la Juventud. Among its charter members was a small group that group that would come to dominate early revolutionary thought: Antonio Casntonio Caso, Alfonso Reyes, José Vasconcelos, and Martín Luis Guzmán. Meetimán. Meeting fortnightly, the members of the Ateneo began to formulate a philulate a philosophical assault on materialism in general and on positivism in parvism in particular. Impressed with Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, buenhauer, but most especially with Henri Bergson's masterpiece *L'Evolution créalution créatrice* (1907), they lashed out against the científicos and launched a mcnched a movement for ideological and educational reform based on a healthy res healthy respect for the humanities.

By 1912 the members of thmbers of the Ateneo were ready to give some practical application to their antip their antipositivist posture. Interested in moving into areas that Díaz had ignoriz had ignored, in December 1912 they founded a "people's university," the Unive," the Universidad Popular Mexicana, and took their message to the factories and shories and shops in Mexico's leading population centers. Mexico's future happinesre happiness, they preached, was not dependent upon commercial or industrial r industrial growth but rather upon social progress. The Universidad Popular Me?opular Mexicana did not offer degrees; rather it tried to bring humanistic knovanistic knowledge to those who would not otherwise receive it. Stressing lessoessing lessons in citizenship and patriotism as well as practical instruction in hygieion in hygiene and stenography, the *ateneístas* who constituted the faculty not onlylty not only lectured but sponsored weekend tours to art galleries, museums, and leums, and historical and archaeological sites. They all served without pay. ay.

The winds of change shook tnge shook the literary and artistic communities as well. A new age in the Mexicathe Mexican novel was born in 1915 when Mariano Azuela (1873–1952) wrote952) wrote *Los de abajo* (translated as *The Underdogs*). A classic in twentiet in twentieth-century Mexican literature, *Los de abajo* is a social novel and markel and marked the beginning of a trend that would last for thirty years. Azuela was Azuela was deeply concerned with the progress of the Revolution and through the through the character of Demetrio Macías probed its meaning. Historical novels ical novels were not new in Mexico, but Azuela added new ingredients. The stents. The story is related not in the sophisticated dialogue of the French school nch school but in the coloquial language of the Mexican masses. Avoiding the inoiding the intrusion of secondary plots, Azuela tells

the story of real revolutionaries, not those who intellectualized the movement and coined its resounding phrases. Demetrio Macías is caught up in the struggle without really knowing why, yet when confronted with complex decisions is able to make proper choices with amazing spontaneity. Luis Cervantes, a middle-class federal deserter, joins Macías's guerrilla band and tries to articulate the revolutionary goals for him, but the uneducated Macías recognizes the shallowness and hypocrisy of Cervantes's explanations and the inherent opportunism in his actions.

The day-to-day dehumanizing realities of the Revolution are all there—pillage, looting, burning, destruction, theft, and general debauchery. Illustrative of the passion the Revolution evoked is Azuela's description of the battlefield after a struggle for control of Zacatecas: "The three-hundred-foot slope was literally covered with dead, their hair matted, their clothes clotted with grime and blood. A host of ragged women, vultures of prey, ranged over the tepid bodies of the dead, stripping one man bare, despoiling another, robbing from a third his dearest possessions."[8] The novel ends where it began—at the Canyon of Juchilpa. Demetrio Macías, by this time a general, is killed where he first ambushed a federal convoy. The circle has been completed, and nothing has really changed. After all the suffering and killing, the Revolution seems to be back where it began. While social programs have been shunted aside and forgotten, the Revolution has become almost self-perpetuating—it just goes on and on. Shortly before he dies Demetrio's wife asks him why he must continue fighting. He answers by tossing a rock over a precipice and responding with a beautifully appropriate metaphor: *Mira esa piedra cómo ya no se para* (Look at that rock—it just keeps rolling).

Mexican music, too, changed its tone as a new nativist movement was introduced by Manuel Ponce (1882–1948), a talented young pianist and composer from Zacatecas. Ponce decried that Mexican salons in 1910 should welcome only foreign music. He urged the acceptance of the native folk tradition and believed that the Revolution was already beginning to usher it in. In an essay he attacked the stodgy salons.

> Their doors remained resolutely closed to the *canción mexicana* until at last revolutionary cannon in the north announced the imminent destruction of the old order. . . . Amid the smoke and blood of battle were born the stirring revolutionary songs soon to be carried throughout the length and breadth of thereadth of the land. *Adelita, Valentina*, and *La Cucaracha*, were typical revolutionary revolutionary songs soon popularized throughout the republic. Nationalism captunalism captured music at last. Old songs, almost forgotten, but truly reflecting the naecting the national spirit, were revived, and new melodies for new corridos were coidos were composed. Singers traveling about through the republic spread far and wiad far and wide the new nationalistic song; everywhere the idea gained impetus that mpetus that the republic should have its own musical art faithfully mirroring its owroring its own soul.[9]

8. Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*, trans. E. Munguía (New York, 1963), pp. 80–81.



Ponce was a major contrihajor contributor to the movement he described. In 1912 and 1913 he composece composed his *canciones mexicanas*, including the famous *Estrellita*. And at apı And at approximately the same time he was training the individual destined tl destined to become the most illustrious name in twentieth century Mexican m Mexican music—Carlos Chávez.

Of all the intellectual andllectual and artistic groups in the country, Mexican painters showed themselves tchemselves to be most restless. Having already embarrassed the Díaz regime at the gime at the centennial celebrations of 1910, these recalcitrant artists continued toontinued to scandalize staid society during the first decade of the Revolution. Wholution. When neither interim President León de la Barra nor Francisco Madero vco Madero was willing to remove the Porfirian director of the Art Academy of San lemy of San Carlos, the artists took matters into their own hands. Not only did theynly did they go out on strike demanding the resignation of the director but on one but on one occasion pelted the poor soul with rotten tomatoes. The desired ch; desired change came with Victoriano Huerta, who named Alfredo Ramos Martínmos Martínez, an impressionist, as director. Ramos Martínez reformed the curricl the curriculum, de-emphasizing the stifling classroom training in copying and ppying and formal portrait work that strived for photographic precision. Instead he. Instead he encouraged the students to venture out into their Mexican world and world and paint what they saw and what they felt.

When the Constitutionalistsitutionalists came in, Ramos Martínez went out but his innovative ideas were not ts were not to be overturned. The new director, Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo), was evillo), was even less conventional than his predecessor. Politically a loyal Carrancyal Carrancista but artistically a free spirit, Dr. Atl wanted to convert the acaden the academy into a popular workshop for the development of the arts and crafts and crafts. But when Pancho Villa marched his army into Mexico City followinCity following the Convention of Aguascalientes, the director and his loyal studentsyal students, including José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, fled to iros, fled to Orizaba. The days of Mexican academic art were over.

9. Quoted in Robert Stevenson, Mustevenson, *Music in Mexico: A Historical Survey* (New York, 1971), pp. 233–34.

The second decade of the twentieth century was still an experimental period for the Mexican artist. Diego Rivera spent most of his time in France and Spain, dabbling with some success in cubism. Siqueiros abandoned the brush for the gun and served in the Carrancista army for several years, storing up penetrating impressions of camp life, battles, and death, all of which he would later re-create. Orozco spent much of his time painting posters and sketching biting political cartoons and caricatures for Carrancista newspapers. In different ways these three giants of twentieth century Mexican art were preparing themselves for an artistic renaissance and the most important development in Latin American painting—the muralist movement of the 1920s and 1930s.

## Social Change

Even during the chaos of violence certain unstructured social change was occurring in Mexico. Internal migrations took place, northerners and southerners came into more frequent contact with one another, and distinct regional language patterns began to yield to a more homogeneous national tongue. Increased travel, even that occasioned by the leva, provided a broader conception and a deeper appreciation of Mexico. Greater physical mobility brought about by the war tended to increase miscegenation and began to homogenize previously isolated zones. Thousands of Mexicans escaped obscurity and rose to positions of tremendous power in the various armies. Even though they did not always exercise their newfound influence with moderation, for them the Revolution was an agent of social change.

By 1920 a new kind of revolutionary nationalism had begun to emerge. The dead heroes had become martyrs to a young generation of Mexicans who did not always realize that their favorite protagonists had been killed fighting one another. The heroes loomed larger in death than in life, and their errors of judgment and human frailties could be overlooked. Madero became a symbol of democracy, Orozco of Mexican manhood, Carranza of law and justice, and Zapata of land for the humble. The newly developing revolutionary nationalism had its antiheroes as well: Porfirio Díaz, who had caused the holocaust; and Victoriano Huerta, the very incarnation of treachery and deceit.

In concrete terms, life for the great majority did not improve in the decade 1910 to 1920. In fact, because of the violence, it deteriorated in many ways. But the base of power in the republic had shifted into new hands, and the country was finally on the threshold of better times.



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