

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

Introduction

It is difficult to understand the Mexican revolution properly without understanding how some of the social and political conflicts which were fought out in the Revolution had their roots in the earlier 19th century. It is also important to understand how the political ideologies of the Mexican Revolution harked back, at least initially, to 19th century precedents. We can then see more readily how far the final outcome of the Revolution represented a break with the past, a new set of structures. The initial political revolution of Francisco Madero was very much centred on the Liberalism of the epoch of Benito Juárez. The Revolution was to prove that this programme was, in fact, an irrelevance to 20th century Mexico. The Revolution did, eventually, lead to social and political change of significance, but one could argue that very little of the ultimate outcome was what was envisaged or planned by any of the revolutionary factions. Ultimately what made the Mexican Revolution revolutionary was the way change was canalised by popular struggles: the final outcome was, one could argue, in many respects a continuation of the project of the pre-revolutionary regime of Porfirio Díaz - that is, a project to 'develop' and 'modernize' the country through the action of a centralized state. The post-revolutionary élite were state-builders just as Díaz had been: but unlike Díaz they were forced to build a state apparatus which incorporated the 'masses' - indeed, the Revolution laid the basis for creating a 'mass society' in place of the more socially fragmented, regionalized kind of system which existed before. Knowledge of the social and political structures of 19th century Mexico also helps us to think

about the more general theoretical issues involved in analysing social revolutions. The Mexican revolution is a crucial case to consider in making any general argument, since:

- Although some historians have tried to downplay the 'popular', agrarian side of the revolution, it is difficult, in the end, to deny that it did involve massive, and extremely violent, rural rebellions. These 'rural' social movements were not all of the same kind, and some rural regions remained quite tranquil during the revolution, until they were disturbed by the interventions of revolutionary armies from outside. Some of these 'quiet' regions, like the Yucatan, were places where the most vicious and brutal forms of exploitation of rural people took place, so there is definitely something to explain here. They had also been explosive earlier in the 19th century. Nevertheless, the scale and extensiveness of agrarian movements alone makes it difficult to sustain this 'revisionist' view that the agrarian side wasn't really important. And if we go on to try to gauge the impact of the agrarian movements on Mexico's subsequent social development, this view seems even harder to sustain.
 - On the other hand, a purely 'agrarian' model of the Mexican revolution seems equally unsatisfactory. Firstly, there's the problem of the non-peasant leaderships who play such a prominent part in the affair. Secondly, there's the problem of actually describing some of the popular forces which fought in the revolution in agrarian terms. Pancho Villa's popular army from the North was made up of people who were very
- different from the Indian peasant villagers who formed the core of the forces of Emiliano Zapata in the South. Local 'revolutionary' bands, particularly in the North, might be made up of people from different social classes within a community - landowners, shopkeepers, miners and cowboys: it looks as if what we've got here are entire local communities revolting against something, and that 'something' would more plausibly be the central state in Mexico City. 'Class relations', in the sense of economic inequalities, may not be central to all forms of popular mobilization - or at any rate, class divisions *within* the local community are overridden by oppositions between the community as a whole and the larger society which may not be exclusively oppositions of class.
- Even more important, perhaps, is the difficulty of analysing the Mexican revolution in terms of the kind of teleological, 'world historical' formulation so deeply entrenched in western thought about social revolutions. This is reflected in a famous analysis presented by Adolfo Gilly. Gilly subscribes to a general model of the *necessary movement of history*. First we have 'feudalism', then bourgeois revolution, then proletarian revolution. As Gilly acknowledges, Mexico doesn't fit neatly into either the 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian' pigeon-hole. Its outcome is not a transition to socialism, but it's equally hard, Gilly suggests, to see pre-revolutionary Mexico as 'feudal', and interpret the revolution as 'bourgeois'. So Gilly describes the Mexican revolution as 'mixed', a kind of 'half-way house' between bourgeois and

proletarian revolution: it failed to secure the breakthrough to a new social order provided by the later 20th century revolutions, because its 'mass' base was 'peasant': nevertheless, the participation of the masses gave it a very different character to anything which had happened in history before.

It is important to stress that 'socialist' ideologies, and socialist or communist parties, did not play a significant role in organizing the popular movements which underlay the Mexican revolution. Some of the more radical non-peasant leaders did make limited appeals to the notion of 'socialism', but generally meant something very different from 'socialism' as we understand it: the governments of the post-revolutionary period favoured capitalist development, but sponsored 'socialist education' - i.e. secularisation of the educational system. Marxist perspectives were not really significant until the era when Lázaro Cárdenas (no friend of communism up to this point) became president (1934-40). Even so, the Communists enjoyed only a brief period of political favour. But a more important objection to the framework offered by writers like Gilly is the argument presented by Theda Skocpol in her book *States and Social Revolutions*. Skocpol argues that the so-called 'bourgeois' revolution in France is essentially the same sort of phenomenon as the so-called 'proletarian' revolution in Russia, and also similar to the revolution which brought down the Imperial state in China: all are triggered by political crisis in a "proto-bureaucratic" state regime with a particular kind of agrarian structure, and all are more similar to each other than they are to the earlier so-called 'bourgeois' revolution (The Civil War) in England: she suggests, *en passant*, that her analysis might possibly embrace the case of Mexico too. In his book *The Mexican Revolution*, the historian Alan

Knight argues, however, that the *international* dimension of revolutionary crisis which is so important to Skocpol's analysis of France, Russia and China was not really relevant to the Mexican case. Another reason for wanting to look at Mexico before the period of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz is that the role of international factors becomes more significant in this context. Leaving that aside for the moment, one point which Knight certainly does seem justified in criticising is, the *Eurocentricity* of most general theories of social revolution. One could argue that what makes the Mexican case so complicated is that Mexico's social and political structures cannot be fully understood in terms of conventional European categories. Certainly, Mexico was a 'country' formed by a particularly comprehensive form of European colonial penetration: 'aboriginal' culture and civilisation was more comprehensively assaulted by the imposition of European forms than was the case in, say, most of Asia. Even so, there is an 'ethnic' dimension to the revolutionary social movements which requires analysis. But it is equally important, I think, to examine the way in which the social and political structures of 'white' and 'mestizo' Mexico also differed from the kinds of structures envisaged by classical European social theory.

- Some people would, of course, argue that the Mexican revolution wasn't a revolution at all, because of the nature of the social system which emerged in the post-revolutionary period. It's certainly true that things turned out very differently to what many of the revolutionaries themselves had had in mind, though it's important to stress that even people like Pancho Villa were in no sense antagonistic to capitalist development. But I think it is quite

difficult to argue that no significant social change took place as a result of the Mexican Revolution: though capitalist development continued apace, and the peasantry hardly enjoyed the millenium, the old form of landed oligarchy and its systems of agrarian exploitation *was* eventually abolished, even if the same people who had been rich and powerful under the Porfiriato continued to be rich after the Revolution. There was a lot more social and economic mobility, and the relationship between the Mexican state and its people was changed significantly, even if the result was not a so-called 'liberal democracy'. It is, however, important to stress that the most sweeping social transformations did not occur until the Cárdenas period: though the tendency towards increasing land concentration was arrested early in the Revolutionary period, the regimes of Carranza, Obregón and Calles all adhered to models of economic development which were not too different from those of the Porfiriato.

[1] THE INSURGENCY, 1810-1821

1810 marks the beginning of the armed insurrection against Spain known as 'the Insurgency'. Surprisingly few historians are interested in studying the Insurgency as a social movement. But it was, in fact, a popular uprising of considerable violence, which involved a good deal of what we might call, albeit with reservations, 'class warfare'. In many respects, it deserves the title of a failed revolution. We obviously have to begin this discussion by saying something about the colonial state and social system. The Hispanic-American empire falls

fairly readily into Skocpol's 'proto-bureaucratic' Absolutist or imperial state category, and much of what she says about France could be readily applied to the Hispanic-American empire, which was, after all, actually ruled by Bourbons in the 18th century. The 'dominant class' enjoyed proprietary wealth based on ownership of landed estates and could purchase public offices from which it could enrich itself in various venal ways. There are, however, two special features of the Spanish colonial world which made it different from Absolutist France. The first crucial distinctive feature is the existence of the original inhabitants of the New World. The Spanish colonial state turned the "Indians" as it chose to call them into Crown tributaries - it sought to 'protect' the Indians' land from expropriation by private landlords in order to exploit them itself. This 'protection' was very incomplete: the Crown couldn't and didn't stop the owners of landed estates (*haciendas*) from encroaching on Indians' lands and irrigation water to a significant extent. It also adopted various policies which forcibly integrated the Indians into the Spanish economy, both as suppliers of labour and as suppliers of commodities to the urban market. By the second half of the eighteenth century, Indian populations were generally well on the way towards recovering and exceeding their pre-conquest levels. Because haciendas had taken over land left vacant by Indians who died earlier in the colonial period, there was now a serious land shortage in many regions. In central Mexico, most Indian villagers had worked as seasonal labour on haciendas since early in the colonial period. But by the 18th century an increasing number of Indians were sustaining themselves as full-time workers or more frequently tenants on land owned by landlords. Nevertheless, despite all this, the Indian communities in many regions did still possess a significant amount of communal village land. And there *was* a kind of contradiction between the interests of the colonial state and

private landlord interests, as Skocpol suggests is always the case in 'imperial state' regimes. In the case of a large hacienda in Western Mexico that I studied, Guaracha, in the Ciénega de Chapala, the Bourbon government actually encouraged an Indian community which had lost land to hacienda to reclaim it in the courts, not out of concern for the Indians' welfare, but because it feared that they would cease to be able to pay their taxes to the Crown. They didn't, in fact, get their land back, because the estate was bought up by a rich local merchant, who had sufficient influence with the local judiciary to block the Indians' petition. This kind of example suggests that private class interests had achieved such power in colonial society that the Crown couldn't really do much to interfere with private agrarian property rights - i.e. that the colonial state was really quite weak in relation to the dominant class in 'civil society'. Most of the redistribution of land to Indian communities which took place under the Bourbons was redistribution from one Indian community to another: in other words, the Indians' ability to pay taxes was sustained by a 'sharing out of poverty' which made the situation of Indians in general worse than it had been, by penalising those who had managed to retain more resources in the face of the deprivations of their colonial masters. Nevertheless, from the landlords' point of view, the *ideal* situation would have been one of the total abolition of Indian communal land tenure.

It was also important that these colonial rights to village land had existed from the point-of-view of later events, including the revolution of 1910. Indians could reactivate these primordial claims when the political wind changed, and many communities resisted liberal attempts to abolish colonial land tenure arrangements very vigorously before the revolution. In some cases, however, the notion of achieving restitution of lost village land wasn't really the effect of a continuous history of struggle by 'indigenous communities' which

preserved a genuine notion of their historical sociocultural identity, but a matter of manipulation of post-revolutionary legislation on land restitution by groups which were neither 'indigenous' nor peasant.

The Guaracha example also happens to be particularly relevant to the present topic of discussion, the Insurgency, because the new *hacendado* and his entire family were killed in the course of the uprising. Once the military protection offered by the colonial state broke down, the underclasses rebelled and slaughtered their exploiters. Even hacienda tenants who didn't join the Insurgent army refused to pay their rents once the landlords lost their coercive power. So the Insurgency appears to have involved 'class struggles' of the most direct kind, a revolt by various different kinds of rural people against different forms of landlord domination.

What we should perhaps ask about this type of rural 'class struggle' is how far it corresponded to a revolt of the rural underclasses **as a whole** against the 'ruling class'. I think the answer is that much of this often violent confrontation remained very localized: particular groups of 'peasants' had particular grievances, and took the opportunity presented by the disorganization of state power to do something about them. As the experience of the 1910 Revolution was to demonstrate, I think, the widespread occurrence of popular agrarian struggles doesn't necessarily imply that different groups in different regions were capable of extensive cooperation with each other, or were interested in the pursuit of common revolutionary goals according to some larger plan or ideology.

The second peculiar feature of the Spanish colonial regime in comparison with France lay in the fact that the colonial dominant class was divided. The most important offices in the colonial government were reserved for peninsulars, Spaniards born in Spain. So were the very top positions in the Church, the army and the

most important monopolies controlled by the Crown in the colonial trading system. The Mexican-born elite, the *Creoles*, could enjoy enormous wealth, be extremely well-educated and cultured. But they didn't have access to the centres of power in colonial society and naturally resented this. So there were two types of conflictive situation in late colonial society in Mexico. A latent political conflict between Creoles and Peninsulars, or Creoles and the colonial state, and a potential for class conflict between hacienda tenants and landowners, and impoverished communal Indians and landowners. Both types of conflict came together in the War of Independence, with highly illuminating results. Let me briefly run through the scenario of what happened.

The start of the processes which led to Independence again has certain similarities with the process which brought about the French Revolution: the Bourbons did something which provoked conflict with the dominant class. In 1804, Spain went to war with Great Britain: as in the French case, war created a fiscal crisis. The Bourbons tried to resolve this problem by making their colonies pay for the war. The way they did this is a little technical. They ordered the immediate redemption of mortgages notionally held by various religious foundations in the Americas. These mortgages were a way in which Hacienda and mine owners and merchants in Latin America endowed foundations which provided income for members of the lower clergy. The foundations didn't actually possess the cash, so the wealthy people who stood behind the endowments had to pay up the full value of the mortgages. In other words, this was all a manoeuvre by which the Crown secured a forced loan of 40 million pesos from the dominant classes in the colonies. The very rich were disgruntled, but smaller creole landowners and merchants actually had to sell off their lands and other assets to raise the money.

Miguel Hidalgo, the first creole leader of the Independence movement, lost his hacienda under the redemptions. The Church was also upset, and again it was the lower creole clergy who were particularly upset, because a lot of them depended on income from the type of religious foundations the Bourbons had now wound up for their livelihood. Hidalgo was also a cleric. So the Bourbon's behaviour over the redemptions had a serious impact on the creole part of the colonial dominant class, and therefore exacerbated the existing resentments over the privileges enjoyed by peninsulars. This wasn't the only reason the creoles were discontented. The Bourbons had introduced mercantilist policies which established much stronger control over colonial trade than had existed before, and favoured the Spanish metropolitan economy. Though a lot of smuggling went on, legally imported goods became more expensive, which discontented the landowners in the colonies, who liked to consume Spanish brandy and fine clothes. But there was a more serious economic impact, which explains why the Insurgency started in a particular region, the Bajío, north of Mexico City.

The economic and social development of the Bajío was unusual. It had become the most important region for commercial grain farming in Mexico in the 18th century. It acted as middle-man in the trade with the Northern cattle ranches, supplying them with both grain *and* manufactured goods. This is the third point about the Bajío: it was highly urbanized, containing not only Mexico's silver mines, but her most dynamic artisan-based industries. The Bajío elite lived in the local cities, not Mexico City. The region was one which had been colonized by Indians as well as Spaniards after the conquest, but there were few surviving corporate Indian communities. Barriers of ethnic status had been broken down, and Indians merged with the rest of the population socially, because the mine owners, *hacendados* and workshop owners were all

competing for labour which remained in short-supply until the later 18th century. In the late 18th century, things began to change. The population had grown, and labour ceased to be in short supply. The economic elite of the Bajío started cutting wages and increasing rents paid by hacienda tenants, and lower class discontent increased further when Bourbon mercantilism hit colonial manufacturing exports, most of which came from the Bajío urban centres. Life in the Bajío rapidly ceased to be enviable. When the rains failed for a second year in succession in 1786, 15% of the rural population starved to death. This catastrophe reflected a fundamental shift in the nature of regional class relations. Unable to compete with "self-exploiting" peasant family labour farms in the maize market, estate owners had switched to growing wheat and vegetables for the urban upper income market, taking advantage of their monopoly control of irrigation water. This meant that the landlords' storehouses no longer contained maize stocks to distribute as food aid, but even had they possessed the means to help, they lacked the will. Much of the growing rural population was now expendable from the landlord point of view, eking out an existence on the margin of subsistence survival as insecure tenants and squatters on estate land. Totally dependent on landlord power, unlike the communal peasants of Central Mexico, this rural underclass may not have received much sympathy from established tenants and resident estate workers initially, but the ruthless exercise of the rights of property was soon to increase the insecurity of all. Having already taken advantage of growing demographic pressure to raise rents and lower wages, at the end of the 18th century the landlords began to evict even more prosperous tenants whose families had lived for generations on the estates, leasing their land to people with capital: merchants, owners of textile workshops, officials and tax collectors. The peasants believed

that tenancy arrangements had a morally binding force of custom and even of "contract"; the evictions fuelled feelings of moral outrage against landlords who were condemning people to starve so that already wealthy "speculators" could farm the land that had given them a livelihood in selfish pursuit of surplus wealth. The Bajío did not rise in 1786, or even in 1800, and to analyse the case more fully it would be necessary to consider a counter-factual: what would have happened had the colonial political system not entered what appeared to the peasants to be a crisis of intra-elite conflict, which turned a criollo-led political rebellion into a popular social revolution in which the target of the slogan "Kill the Spaniards!" was the entire agrarian ruling class without distinction between *criollos* and *peninsulares*?

Class war erupted in Mexico, as in France, once the State became embroiled in a political conflict with the ruling class, and the peasants and artisans perceived their oppressors as disorganized. In 1810, Napoleon deposed the Bourbon King of Spain. This gave the Creoles their chance to seek redress of their grievances. As it happened, the Viceroy of Mexico at the time had a close business liaison with the mine owners of the Bajío - i.e. he took bribes. In the disorganization created by events in Spain, he agreed to cancel the redemptions and announced that Creoles would no longer be barred from high office. This provoked an immediate reaction from the Peninsular Spaniards, who saw their privileges being threatened. With almost unbelievable stupidity, they staged a *coup d'état* and deposed the Viceroy, thus preventing a reasonable compromise. The creoles who were particularly disgruntled with Spain for economic reasons seized their chance to begin a movement for Independence. They sought to achieve their ends by rallying the disaffected masses to the banner. As an inducement, Hidalgo and his associates announced that it would be permissible for the

rapidly growing force rallying to their cause to sack the properties of Peninsular Spaniards, on the understanding that they would leave properties owned by Creoles who supported Independence alone. This was an error, because Hidalgo had no means of controlling the popular forces he had now unleashed. Political conflict turned into class warfare, as all landed property came under attack. Hidalgo's forces attacked the civic granary of Guanajuato, and the creole officers could only look on in horror as the rabble proceeded to massacre all the defenders. As the revolt spread, killings were repeated on any estate where members of the ruling class were still to be found: most of those who did not already live in distant cities fled, but amongst those who died, as I noted earlier, were the family of the resident owner of the Guaracha hacienda in western Michoacán, Don Victorino Jaso.

Such atrocities immediately produced a backlash on the part of wealthy Creoles, who now rallied to Spain, to defend their property interests as a class. As a result, Hidalgo was unable to take Mexico City, and turned west to Guadalajara at the head of an army of 80,000. At this point, and for the first time, he attempted to give a direction to the popular movement he had so unwittingly released by announcing a 'social programme', which included the abolition of Indian tribute obligations and land distribution to the needy. Creole intellectuals had been arguing the need for reform for decades, inspired by the American and French revolutions. The creole bishop of Michoacán had been one of the most outspoken of these humanist intellectuals and was a personal friend of Hidalgo. But he, like most of the Creole intelligentsia, now got cold feet, and started writing pamphlets defending the colonial system as the guarantee of civilized values and a society where people knew their proper place. Hidalgo was excommunicated, and then defeated and executed. Francisco Morelos, another creole cleric, took over the leadership, and attempted to

create a more disciplined Insurgent army, with some success. He and his colleagues also developed a fully coherent republican and social programme, based on the abolition of all ethnic distinctions, slavery and tribute. He founded a 'Congress' on the American model, and it's important to stress the extent to which the creoles identified with the North American independence movement in this period.

But when Morelos died in 1815, the Insurgency began to lose momentum. The class warfare continued sporadically, but the Church and big landowners remained implacably opposed to Independence, and the Royalist cause received a big boost from the defeat of the Napoleonic forces in Spain and the restoration of Bourbon rule. What made Independence possible in the end was not revolution but reaction. In 1820, liberal army officers staged a coup in Spain, imposed constitutional government and introduced a whole range of measures designed to secularize the state. The Church hierarchy in Mexico now decided to support Independence, in order to preserve the traditional power of the Church in Mexico. They looked for a suitable leader for this new conservative independence movement, and found him in an officer in the Royalist army. Iturbide guaranteed both the rights of landowners and the rights of the Church in Independent Mexico. Iturbide extended these guarantees to all peninsular Spaniards who chose to become 'Americans', promised all Royalist officers a key place in Independent Mexico, and then proceeded to do a deal with the remaining leaders of the Insurgent forces, who naturally accepted, not simply because their radicalism was not very deeply entrenched, but because they could see this was their only way of winning. After Independence Iturbide got carried away, declared himself emperor and was overthrown, but his personal fate isn't very important for understanding the kind of state structure which was created in post-Independence Mexico. The

outcome of the struggle for Independence was not, in the end at all social revolutionary. In fact, all the social and political structures of the colonial system were preserved unchanged - actually *conserved* in what was ultimately a reaction to liberal political revolution in Spain. The masses were ruthlessly repressed. The only difference was that the old distinction between Creole and Peninsular was abolished the dominant class became more unified in this sense.

[2] CAUDILLO POLITICS AND THE LIBERAL REFORM, 1821-1876

The next phase will take us from 1821 to the beginnings of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz in 1876. After the collapse of the colonial state, Mexico entered one of the most tumultuous periods in her history. In the first 33 years of Independence, Mexico had forty-four different governments. This pattern of instability was characteristic of most Latin American states after Independence, and it reflected the sharp decentralization of power which followed the ending of Bourbon rule, the system known as *caudillo politics*. The writ of the government in Mexico City virtually ceased to run in the provinces, which were dominated by regional 'strong-men', the *caudillos*, whose power rested on their landed estates and the use of the wealth they extracted from them to recruit a clientele of armed followers. The core of the caudillo's following was recruited by personalistic patron-client ties. But caudillos also competed for power by involving themselves in the continuing social struggles of the period, promising justice to peasants, including Indians, for example, when it suited their ambitions. In fact, the traditional model of caudillo politics, which only emphasizes patron-client relations between strong-men and peasant clients misses the fact that all this apparent disorder was in fact structured. There was a sort of order underneath all the chaos.

The first point to grasp is who controlled the central government. Although there were 44 governments between 1821 and 1855, eleven of them were headed by the same man, Santa Ana of the seige of the Alamo fame. Until 1855, conservatives were in the ascendant, and the conservatives were essentially a military oligarchy, the old officer corps of the Royalist army. There was a brief interlude, terminated by a military coup in 1830, when Vicente Guerrero, heir to Morelos and hero of Independence, was President. Guerrero favoured social reform, and embraced the lower as well as middle classes in his plans. But he was replaced by conservatives who had no such popular sympathies, and favoured the rebuilding of a strong central government.

So part of the dynamic of caudillo politics was a matter of conflict between '*federalists*' and '*centralizers*', though people of different political orientations with regard to social programmes could belong to both camps, as they were to do again in the Revolution of 1910-20. The fact, however, that Guerrero achieved power at all, and that conservative regimes had such difficulty in stabilising themselves, also reflected the continuing role of inter-class tensions and social unrest after Independence: though the Insurgency was defeated by the compromise between its leaders and Iturbide, the underlying problems did not go away. But this type of inter-class conflict was not the whole of the story. As the 19th century proceeded, political conflict increasingly became a matter of conflict between liberals and conservatives. This conflict cannot be understood in economic class terms, but it did have roots in Mexico's social structure.

The liberal leaders were mostly people of what we might term urban 'petty bourgeois' origin, though the *Marxisant* term 'petty bourgeois' is really rather Eurocentric: it goes along with models of the development of 19th century European industrial capitalist society which focus

on the rapid polarization of those societies into an extensive 'proletariat' and a dominant 'bourgeoisie'. In the 19th century Mexican context, it is better to emphasize characteristics of these urban 'petty bourgeois' which are not really concerned with 'class' in its classical Marxist or Weberian senses of position with respect to control of means of production or the market.

First of all, the Liberals were from the *provinces*. Liberalism was particularly strong in the Bajío and western Mexico, which had a broadly similar social structure: small commercial towns and small-holder farmers coexisted with giant haciendas like Guaracha. The smaller landowners and provincial merchants identified with liberalism, but the leadership itself consisted of journalists, lawyers, school teachers, minor bureaucrats and junior army officers - most were creoles or *mestizos*, and a few, like Benito Juárez, later President of Mexico, were actually Indians. (Juárez was a Zapotec from Oaxaca). All of them were, however, essentially urban people, with little understanding or sympathy for the rural poor this was just as true of the Indian Juárez as any of the others. This urban orientation of political radicals is very important for understanding Mexico's subsequent development. What these people were reacting against primarily was the continuing power monopoly created by the conservative perpetuation of colonial structures: though rich creoles had obtained an entre into the commanding heights of power, poorer provincials and mestizos were still excluded: they were not *gente decente*. They could neither advance to the more important civil or military offices, nor achieve real economic class power, because all these avenues for advancement were still blocked by the old oligarchy.

So this is the second underlying structural determinant in Mexico's post-Independence political instability: the opposition between political centre and periphery. The liberals were

violently anti-clerical, promised constitutional democracy, and also had a social programme which espoused the principle of creating a rural middle class of prosperous private farmers. They also, of course, promised to end ethnic and other forms of discrimination against Indians, but it's vital to understand that their 'modernizing' programme wasn't actually very attractive to poor Indians: they wanted to abolish all forms of communal land tenure, and make Indians private proprietors like other citizens. Many poor Indians correctly surmised that this would lead to their getting totally dispossessed and impoverished, by removing their last legal protection against encroachment by haciendas and the exploitation of poor members of Indian communities by the richer ones. Indian communities therefore frequently supported Conservative factions in the civil wars of 19th century Mexico (as they also did in Guatemala), although there are cases, such as that of the Sierra Norte de Puebla discussed by Florencia Mallon in her book *Peasant and Nation*, where they supported liberals, putting their own readings on the liberal land laws. Although they are intelligible within specific regional circumstances, such alliances tended not to be particularly advantageous to the Indians in the longer term, since Liberals secure in power tended to turn on their erstwhile indigenous allies. In general terms, it is clear that the liberals were not really interested in protecting peasant farmers: they regarded the peasant subsistence plot as an anachronism and a barrier to economic progress. They didn't worry too much about *hacendados* taking over peasant land, or propose any sort of radical agrarian reform programme, beyond assuming that the breakup of Church property would enable a rural middle class to emerge. The conservatives' problem was that the liberal programme was actually quite attractive to the landlord class. So in the long term the balance of forces in Mexican society favoured the triumph of liberalism - only the Church and poor Indians

remained steadfastly opposed to the so-called 'reformers', and the Church rapidly ceased to be an opposition element under the Porfiriato. But this is running a bit too far ahead in the story. After Guerrero was forced to retire to his hacienda in 1830, the new conservative regimes set about trying to rebuild a centralized state. In many ways, the intentions of these governments were similar to those which were implemented successfully in Germany later on. They thought it was necessary to modernize their countries' economies. In the late 1830s, the government of Lucas Alemán, who came from a rich Bajío mining family, tried to create a modern capitalist textile industry in the Bajío. He imported British-made machines, set up a state bank to finance the development, and erected tariff barriers against foreign imports to protect Mexico's 'infant industries'. In other words, the state was to be used as an instrument for 'modernization' from above. But Alemán's policy did not prove popular in certain quarters. First of all, the new protectionist trade policy didn't go down well with the powerful import-export merchants of Veracruz, who suddenly decided they were liberal social reformers. Secondly, this whole strategy was dependent on the state's being able to tax people, including landowners. The policy of these conservative governments was centralist. In reality, the state was still dreadfully weak, but the attempt to rebuild it provoked resistance from the regional *caudillos* and landlord class in general. So there were now two types of opposition to the structure of central power defended by the conservatives: liberals, who wanted an end to the restrictions on social mobility imposed by the colonial status order, and socially conservative landowners who wanted to ensure that the state didn't interfere with them, and eventually became quite sympathetic to the liberal agrarian programme and policy towards the Church's wealth. Though the big landowners were devout Catholics, their devotion to mother Church didn't

blind them to the fact that they were all mortgaged up to the eyeballs by her, and that they'd make an enormous windfall profit if those mortgages were cancelled and the temporal wealth of the Church distributed, which was what the liberals eventually proposed. But the conservatives might have been able to deal with these contradictions if they hadn't faced another foreign intervention. In 1845, the USA annexed Texas. In 1848, it added New Mexico and California. These catastrophes were followed by a wave of spontaneous agrarian rebellions in Central Mexico and the famous rising of the Maya Indians in the Yucatan known as the 'War of the Castes'. Haciendas were looted and destroyed. At first, the liberals and conservatives forgot their differences out of fear of the masses, in a sort of re-run of the events at the time of Independence. Indians might be given the status of citizens by their liberal masters but they were not, it seemed, going to free themselves from exploitation by more modern methods. For the liberals, social progress was seen as a matter of "whitening" Mexico, and Indians remained a living symbol of the country's backwardness that needed to be expunged by forced cultural assimilation and "race mixture". In consequence, Santa Ana was returned to power for the last time as a dictatorial strong-man fronting a conservative government. He assumed quasi-monarchical powers, and found himself in desperate need of money, so he sold southern Arizona to the USA. This was the beginning of the end for conservatism. Santa Ana was overthrown for the last time, and the incoming Liberal government finally enacted the legislation which was to bring the end of the key colonial institutions. In 1856, it was decreed that all church real estate urban and rural had to be sold to its existing tenants and lessees. This legislation, the *Ley Lerdo* (after Miguel Lerdo, minister of Finance), was rapidly followed by a new constitution which in effect abolished all

corporate property ownership (in favour of individual private ownership): it therefore applied equally to the communal lands of Indian peasant villages.

The great irony of the Liberal programme was that an increasing number of landowners came to support the liberal cause, and violent resistance in the countryside came from the Indian community. In fact the resistance from the Indians was so violent that the implementation of the Reform in the Indian villages was stopped within a few months. But this still left the Liberals locked in a desperate struggle *with the Church*, even though quite a lot of landowners had decided that it was no longer rational to remain actively conservative. In 1857, there was a conservative military coup: Benito Juárez escaped from custody, declared himself constitutional president, and the country entered a violent civil war, known as the "War of the Reform". The Lerdo Law was revoked, but the Liberals succeeded in forming what was in effect a separate government controlling much of the country outside the old colonial centre in central Mexico. In 1859 the constitutional government of Juárez added further clauses to the Lerdo Law abolishing all Church mortgages on private property - this was its trump card, since almost the entire landowning class was up to its eyeballs in debt. Since the Church had so clearly financed the conservative coup, it was easy to attack it more radically than even before, and the liberal position was growing stronger as a still greater proportion of the landlord class defected to the liberal cause out of naked self-interest. In 1861, the conservative government in Mexico City collapsed, and Juárez won a sweeping victory in new elections. He was, however, master of an empty treasury, and began to nationalize Church property. He refused to pay the foreign creditors of the former conservative government, which provoked a further combined foreign intervention by Britain, Spain and France.

This is the episode which led to France's temporary installation of a new emperor, Maximilian Habsburg, in Mexico, an episode which ended with Maximilian's execution at Queretaro in 1867. It is rather ironic that the unfortunate Maximilian was rather more of a real moderniser and social reformer than Juárez was - he legally abolished debt-peonage and the use of company stores, restricted child labour and made it illegal for *hacendados* to beat their workers. He also restored quite a lot of communal land to Indian villages. Maximilian also believed that the rich should pay taxes, on the model of European national state regimes. None of this made him popular with the Mexican ruling class: the landowners were quite outraged at both the thought of paying more taxes and the new government's interference with their rights to exploit their *peones* as they pleased. So they defected to Juárez again. Furthermore, the French intervention marked the end of the road for the Conservatives. Having lost the support of enough of the dominant class to be incapable of remaining in power, they supported the French intervention out of desperation. Once the landlords got fed up with Maximilian, Juárez was able to enjoy the reputation of the leader of a *national liberation movement*, and the conservative cause was lost for ever. I think it is important to stress the way that the foreign interventions played a key role in fostering Mexican nationalism, which to some extent percolated down to the lower classes, even if it was not turned into a true mass ideology until the post-revolutionary period, when it was fostered by the post-revolutionary state through mass education programmes.

The liberal reform did not achieve its avowed ends. It did not create a rural middle class. It created a speculative boom in real estate which enriched the speculators and drained the country of investment capital. It laid the basis for the further impoverishment of the Indian community,

expansion of the great estates, and development of the most exploitative forms of agrarian capitalism - Maximilian's labour protection legislation became a dead letter. The liberals repaid the support they received from the Veracruz import-export merchants by adopting a policy of free trade - thus laying the country open to further 'peripheralization' by the industrial capitalist powers. Lastly, the liberals created only the formal constitutional framework for a modern national state: the central government had little administrative or fiscal control over most of the country, and could only implement the reform because local dominant class interests wanted the reform to be implemented. This brings us to 1876, and the period of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, which was finally ended by the Mexican Revolution.

[3] **THE PORFIRIATO**, 1876-1910

The first question to pose is why Mexico succumbed to a dictatorship and didn't achieve a liberal-democratic regime, since this is what most liberal politicians claimed they wanted. The answer, I think, has two sides to it:

(1) No representative political institutions were created by liberalism at local level. The regional caudillos remained firmly in control, and what Mexico had in the way of 'state institutions' were concentrated still in Mexico City. The liberal leadership simply joined the ranks of the existing landed oligarchy.

(2) The totally urban-based liberal political movement had done nothing to bring the agrarian masses into any form of participation in national life: indeed, liberalism created new types of rural unrest.

This second point is, I think, particularly important. In the early decades of Independence, as we've seen, the different political factions in Mexico tended to unite in the face of fear of popular rebellion and inter-class conflict. Those who were inclined to liberalism were too scared

to rock the boat. The constitutional republican state created by the liberals left private class power not simply untouched, but absolutely rampant. The only problem was that it was so weak and ineffective that it could not guarantee internal social tranquility or do anything about Mexico's 'national' problems - in particular the continuing threat posed by the USA to the country's national integrity.

Díaz's regime offered an end to civil wars, greater social stability, and promised a form of national development: from the ruling class point of view it probably didn't matter too much that this national development involved the increasing domination of foreign capital initially, since the major problem through the 19th century had been the loss of national territory to the USA, and securing effective domination over the lower classes. The export economy was beneficial to Mexican landowners; it's only later, when US capital began to take over large sections of the Mexican economy, that some members of the elite began to feel that there was an issue of national integrity at stake in terms of economic domination, but as I've said, I don't think this was a key issue in terms of explaining the revolution, i.e. I don't think it should be seen as some kind of 'nationalist' revolution.

Díaz had been a liberal general, and in some ways he continued the trend set up by liberalism, particularly in the countryside. Before I say something about the relationship between agrarian structures and the Revolution, I want to mention some other, crucially important things. First of all, there's the question of Church-State relations. Díaz differed from his liberal predecessors, and the caudillos who ran the post-revolutionary state, particularly in the 1920s, by abandoning a strongly anti-clerical stance. It is extremely important to stress that the Church remained an independent corporate power in Mexican society after the Reform. In France, Napoleon also reached a concordat with the

Church to calm conservative opinion, very like Díaz: but in France the Church lost most of its property, and the state took over the job of paying its priests. In Mexico, in contrast, the Church's wealth had remained largely untouched by the reform - it was simply more disguised. The Church no longer owned haciendas - it simply financed other people's. Members of landed families entered Holy Orders and the clergy acted as administrators and financiers to the landed and commercial sectors. In fact, the Church's relationship to the landlord class became an even more *organic* one under the Porfiriato. As the tendencies towards class polarization and rural proletarianization which we've already discussed increased, the clergy played an increasingly important role in the ideological control of the masses and the campaign against the agrarian reform movement which gathered momentum through the period of the Wars of the Reform and the Díaz dictatorship. But the Church was extremely astute in its strategy. It managed to combine putting itself at the service of agrarian capitalism with retaining its social power over the masses. What it did was embark on a campaign of spiritual reconquest of the masses, launched against traditional folk Catholicism and secular ideologies alike. It rather cunningly advocated the policy of a 'third way' between capitalism and socialism. Though the Church Hierarchy did make serious mistakes - like welcoming the counterrevolutionary coup of Huerta - the way the Church as a whole had hedged its bets ideologically stood it in extremely good stead when it subsequently had to face a particularly strong anti-clerical post-revolutionary state in the 1920s.

This was important, since the greatest challenge which the post-revolutionary state faced came not from the old landlord class or the military, but from the *Cristero* rebellion - a large-scale mass movement with genuinely popular roots which swept the country from 1926 to 1929. The

Cristero rebellion reflected the fact that the Porfirian state had provided the conditions for the Church to recover its social power, so the struggle to do that had to be renewed under the post-revolutionary regime. It also reflected the substantial degree of alienation which existed between the rural masses and the post-revolutionary state élite, and the extent to which the kind of secular ideologies by which that state sought to incorporate the rural masses were rejected initially.

Now let's turn to a second, and in many ways the crucial issue, Porfirio Díaz's attempt to create a stronger and more effective central state machine. At the start of Díaz's dictatorship, it was pretty evident that no Mexican government could afford to offend the landlord class in any way, and that power was effectively held by that class in a decentralized form in which whole areas of the country were effectively controlled by regional caudillos. What Díaz did, in essence, was to try to beat the caudillos at their own game. He either coopted local strong-men and made them into his personal clients, or he inserted his own men as military or civil governors, so that they could control local opposition. His state still had very little in the treasury at first, so he was forced to rely on foreign capital to prop up this expanding structure of central patronage. He channelled money into infrastructural development railways, irrigation schemes, etc. - which increased the wealth of the landlord class, and landlords were supported by the state as they sort to take over peasant land and create a cheap rural proletariat. All this, of course, meant promoting the export dependence of the Mexican economy, though it should be said that Díaz was quite astute in trying to play one foreign interest off against another: US capital, for example, didn't succeed in achieving its objective of total control of the Mexican petroleum industry. I don't think it's correct to see the Porfirian state in terms of the notion of 'dependency' the reliance on the

development of the export economy and penetration of foreign capital were all the result of the fact that decades of civil wars and foreign interventions had drained the country of investment capital, and the state machine was too weak to support any German-style process of rapid industrialization from above based on state finance. There wasn't really any other option. Díaz did, however, succeed in strengthening centralized state power considerably. He built up the federal army, and enormously enhanced the state's ability to collect taxes. Local communities which hadn't seen any manifestation of state power for decades now had to contend with recruiting sergeants and federal tax collectors. There was, therefore, some significant development of bureaucracy and a new administrative apparatus under the regime, a significant degree of state 'modernization' and consolidation. The weakness of the Porfirian state lay in the fact that its structure was held together by Díaz's personal patronage system, and kinship relations among the Porfirian elite. Government had a tendency to remain arbitrary, not to mention corrupt. But worse than that, Díaz failed to give any real thought as to how to replace his personal power and integrative function with institutions which would endure after he was gone: he simply refused to go, and he also refused to allow the Porfirian élite as a whole to steer his régime towards a more institutionalised and constitutional system. The Porfirian political system therefore created conditions for political crisis of the kind which could lead to social revolutionary crisis.

[4] **AGRARIAN REVOLUTION 1910-1940**
 Now let's look briefly at the implications of the Mexican case for producing a general theory of agrarian revolution. The Porfiriato certainly brought about a major process of commercialization and capitalist expansion in the Mexican countryside. This was not, however,

something that was unique to Mexico, and so one must argue that the Mexican revolution was the product of some special combination of factors: the factors taken individually may all have been present in other cases, but the combination of agrarian, social and political conditions must have been a special one. As I've already suggested in contrasting the Bajío with central Mexico, regional social and agrarian structures were really quite diverse. There was not one Mexico, but many, and some regions, like the Yucatan and Chiapas, were scarcely part of the country at all. Very broadly and crudely, we can distinguish three major types of agrarian system: in the North, with its strong emphasis on cattle-ranching, mining and so on, there was a predominance of 'free wage labour' systems, whereas the deep south was more characterised by the expansion of tropical plantation agriculture based on semi-servile labour and physical coercion. In the centre, landlords enjoyed a near monopoly of land, but could recruit virtually inexhaustible and growing supplies of wage labour from the peasant villages. In the case of the Guaracha hacienda, the municipal head-town, Villamar (then, symptomatically, called Guarachita), originally an 'Indian town (*pueblo*)' had lost all its land during the Porfirian period. The hacienda drew on seasonal labour supplies from the villages when it needed them, and rented land to villagers working as share-croppers, but relied on a core of permanent workers called *peones acasillados*, who were waged and had a written contract. Guaracha had 'modernized' its production technology, and was an entirely commercial enterprise: everything it sowed was shipped out by train and sold to the urban market. All this reflected the new situation created by the Porfiriato's investments in transport infrastructure, irrigation and land reclamation, and its support for land concentration by haciendas: the revolt at Naranja, some fifty miles

from Guaracha, described in the classic anthropological works of Paul Friedrich, was promoted by changes which began under the Porfiriato, as a result of which Naranja lost most of its communal land. Guaracha's *peones acasillados* were not revolutionary, and the local agrarian movement began, instead, in the municipal head-town. All this suggests, as Eric Wolf, Adolfo Gilly and others have suggested, that the 'village community' was an essential ingredient in agrarian revolt in the Mexican case. It should not be assumed, however, that the 'village community' here means the *Indian* village community exclusively: some 'indigenous pueblos' were completely 'mestizoised' by the 19th century, and revolutionary villages might never have had any 'Indian' ethnic affiliation, even in theory. Furthermore, the existence of a 'village community' seems an essential ingredient of another kind of rural rebellion which is central to the Mexican revolution - what Alan Knight calls *serrano* movements, where the chief issue is not hacienda encroachment on village land, but resistance to political centralization - the recruiting sergeant, the tax man, and the arbitrary rule of the 'political chiefs' (*jefes políticos*) installed by Díaz. *Serrano* movements were certainly nothing new, but the transport and economic developments under the Porfiriato caused them to develop in new places - in particular the mestizo north. The core of Pancho Villa's army were people who had been sent out as settlers in the 18th century to fight the Apache, military colonists. Some of these communities were being squeezed by the expansion of cattle ranches, but in many cases there was no real agrarian element involved in their willingness to fight. Many, though certainly not all, of the people who fought in the Cristero rebellion against the post-revolutionary state might also be seen in terms of this notion of a *serrano* movement, the immediate issue then being

secularization and the enforced closing of churches by the national government.

Alan Knight has argued that taxation was less of an issue in the Revolution of 1910 than it had been in earlier periods, or was in, for example, the case of Indochina in the 1930s, as described by James Scott, because Díaz had abandoned the old regressive head-tax system in favour of property taxes, stamp duties and import duties.

Nevertheless, taxation was still an important issue in the case of serrano revolts, especially where it was levied on an arbitrary basis by local bosses who enjoyed effective impunity. What was critical in the case of agrarian revolts was much more usually the land itself. It was not just haciendas which were taking the land of the villages: Porfirian economic policy did do something to increase the prosperity of smaller commercial farmers, the *rancheros*, and they were also interested in taking over community land, provoking agrarian conflicts in regions where big landed estates were not prevalent. Furthermore, Porfirian economic policies encouraged differentiation of wealth within communities and growing inequalities between one community and another - for example, the location of railway lines could transform the situation of different communities in a region, enriching some, impoverishing and marginalising others.

Land engrossment by haciendas was nothing new in Mexican history. But the Guaracha case provides a perfect illustration of what was new under the Porfiriato: the surrounding villages lost not just some, but *all* of their land, the people being proletarianized. As Guaracha also shows, they might be taken into the new commercial agriculture as share-croppers rather than straight wage-labourers or peones, but the important point here is that in both cases 'non-economic' coercion was added to the pressure of economic necessity in order to extract a surplus from the agrarian producer. Peones were brutalised, their wages had to be spent in the company store, and hours of

work were extended by force against the peones' resistance. Share-croppers were robbed when accounts were settled after the harvest, and they faced the armed 'White Guard' of the hacienda if they felt like arguing about it. There was a general decline in rural living standards, as real wages fell, and the terms of sharecropping and tenancy agreements deteriorated. If the peón or sharecropper provided dissident, he and his family were either simply thrown off the estate, perhaps to starve, or, if the person concerned did anything which seemed to constitute a 'threat' from the hacendado's point of view, they might be consigned to the chain-gang. Behind the landlord stood the power of the Porfirian state and its repressive apparatus.

This certainly provided the kind of conditions we might expect to provoke 'agrarian revolution'. An inflexible landlord-class, whose income is ultimately based on monopoly control of land, backed by an equally inflexible state, uses its coercive powers to drag the last ounce of surplus of a peasantry in a kind of 'zero-sum game'. In the Guaracha case, better-off kulaks from the municipal head town were forced to take their commercial surpluses to market as 'contraband', because the hacienda guard used to stop them crossing the hacienda's terrain in a bid to monopolise its control of all commercial agriculture. As emphasized by Jeffery Paige in his book *Agrarian Revolution*, to understand what particular type of 'peasant' is likely to engage in agrarian revolt, we need to see conflict (or its absence) as a product of *both* the peasant's and the landlord's position - the product of a class *relationship*, rather than of the discontents a 'type' of peasant producer taken in isolation. Nevertheless, there are other factors at work which affect the outcomes. The *peones acasillados*-cum-sharecroppers of the Guaracha region were not, in fact, revolutionary, despite the fact that they practiced other forms of "everyday" resistance to exploitation, by attempting to

cultivate their subsistence plots instead of working in the cane fields, for example. The only spontaneous agrarian movement in the Ciénega villages came from the kulaks, after 1910, and they were aided by urban revolutionary politicians with influence in the post-revolutionary state. Not all 'village communities' in Mexico were revolutionary, and still more important, places which had been active in *earlier* phases of agrarian or serrano conflict were quiescent during the 1910 revolution.

What we have to take into account here is the pattern of change locally, and the context: the peones of Guaracha were clearly not 'happy' with the hacienda, but they clearly felt that the world outside the hacienda was less secure and agrarian revolt was unattractive because it seemed to threaten what little they had. Everything in their experience confirmed this view, including the way agrarian reform was managed in the village communities which did get land restitutions - violent *caciquismo* (local boss rule) and the grabbing of land by the former leaders of the agrarian rebel movement. The hacienda had also offered them a degree of military protection against the violence of the revolutionary world: before the revolution it was far too effective a repressive apparatus to be seriously challenged. Peasant communities outside the haciendas were better equipped to revolt: even if they were unequal internally, they had community organisations of their own, like the French villages in the 18th century. What pushed them into a readiness to revolt was the Porfirian expansion of the hacienda and commercial *ranchero* sector, which turned what had been an asymmetrical symbiosis and situation of exploitation into a zero-sum game which promised the complete extinction of the last vestiges of community autonomy. In fact, it was the dominant class's actions which enabled these communities to overcome their internal divisions and act in a relatively solidary way in the face of

an unacceptable and illegitimate threat by landlords to their continued survival. It seems that even non-revolutionary peones, like the Guaracheños, did not hold their masters in high regard: in fact, the hacienda administration's emphasis on coercive discipline, and the severe punishments meted out to anyone who showed 'disobedience' or 'insolence' suggests that the Porfirian order created antagonisms which were more widespread than the conditions which could turn such antagonisms into agrarian revolt. It was not simply a matter of 'economics' and a deteriorating standard of living or security of subsistence: Porfirian 'modernizers' sought to eliminate every non-commodity form of relationship from their dealings with the rural underclasses, and realizing that this would provoke tension and resentment, resorted to a whole range of 'disciplinary' practices to keep the uprooted masses they were creating under control. Had their been no political crisis, this tactic might actually have worked until social change had worked itself out and the transformation of rural society had been completed.

Knight suggests that one of the most significant effects of the armed, popular phase of the revolution was to destroy 'traditional' patterns of deference and submission to landlord authority. It does seem clear that *overt* deferential behaviour by the lower orders declined after 1910. But if we look at the agrarian history of the 19th century it becomes clear that latent antagonism is there all the time, and growing in intensity. Even un-revolutionary peones were not really 'passive' or 'fatalistic'. The core of even the nonrevolutionary peasantry's view of the old agrarian and social order was that it 'humiliated' them - this is the recurrent leitmotif of every interview I have ever conducted with poorer people who lived in the Porfirian epoch. The grievance of the peasantry was more than an 'economic' one: it was, as James Scott suggests, morally grounded in an underlying world-view. The post-revolutionary

leadership was, however, just as capable of acting in a way which was offensive to that world-view as the landed élite. Indeed, it could sometimes seem even more authoritarian than its Porfirian predecessor. Even active *agraristas* of the 1920s often made comments to me which imply that they had little real enthusiasm for the 'políticos' who ran the state: they simply had to ally themselves with that state machine in order to have any hope of continuing their struggle for the land where they did not possess the autonomous military power to seize it for themselves unaided. Even the peasant movement in Morelos found itself in this situation after the defeat of *Zapatismo*. Because the peasants could not retain their initial military gains, or create a movement which unified the underclasses as a whole at a national level, their long-term incorporation into the state was assured. This, one might argue, is the paradox of agrarian revolution in general. Peasant revolution can only realize peasant objectives by destroying state power utterly: peasant revolution lacks the capacity to destroy state power utterly.

The onset of political crisis, then, ensured that the masses would erupt with unprecedented vigour onto the historical stage in the Mexican case, by opening the floodgates to accumulated resentments and opposition to both agrarian expropriation and political centralization. If we consider the roots of the political crisis against the background of the 19th century, it becomes clear that Díaz's style of centralization and state building had not resolved the contradiction which had originally produced liberalism. Much of the popular agitation against the regime came from the still unsatisfied urban 'petty bourgeoisie' especially in the provinces. The Cárdenas family itself represented this stratum. They were educated people without real prospects of economic class power or political advancement under the Porfiriato: both economic and political power were still monopolized by a small

oligarchy except it was now an oligarchy which contained the old liberal leadership. This, then, is really a continuation of an established pattern of political and social conflict, whose basis lies in the heavily urbanized nature of Mexican society and its proliferation of professional occupations. Porfirian centralization created more provincial bureaucrats and lawyers. These urban people were also the promoters of the more radical agrarian reform movements in places like Michoacán the ones which called for the breakup of the old haciendas and the distribution of land to landless workers as well as 'indigenous communities'.

The difference between the time of the Revolution and the reform period is that these people now embraced a different perspective on how social transformation could be implemented. They could perceive the potential power which would accrue from mobilizing the 'masses'. The masses now included a small but organized urban working class, which played an important role in stabilising the post-revolutionary regime by lending their support to Obregón against the 'peasant' movements led by Villa and Zapata. After popular insurrection had swept Díaz from power, Madero's attempt to revive what was essentially the 19th century liberal programme had failed, and the counterrevolution which sought to restore the Porfiriato had failed, the revolution became a contest between two sets of forces - the popular movements headed by Villa and Zapata, and the 'Constitutionalist' forces headed initially by Venustiano Carranza. This 'War of the Winners' is an important phase in the revolutionary process because it allows us to evaluate the nature of the 'popular' agrarian revolution, on the one hand, and clarify the role of the provincial urban caudillos, on the other. It is clear that the 'Constitutionalist' forces embraced people of very different class backgrounds and political ideologies, as equally did the Villistas and, to a lesser extent, Zapatistas: but what united

the Constitutionalist side, in the last analysis, was a concern with *state-building*. They were the new centralizers, men whose revolt against Díaz had always implied the recreation of a new, modernizing, national state.

The movements of Villa and Zapata were not centred on such a 'national' project. It may, however, be too facile simply to dismiss them, and subsequent 'counterrevolutionary' movements like the Cristiada, simply as 'backward looking' *reactions* to unwelcome change, with no positive projects of their own. *Zapatismo*, for example, not only had a vision of a new type of agrarian social order, but also called for a reform of the justice system and "municipal autonomy" — the right of local government, representing communities, to determine not simply local affairs, but the amount of state power it should finance and what the proper functions of national government should be. The contradiction of the Zapatista vision was that its lack of enthusiasm for national-level institutions prevented it from securing the national-level political transformations which would have enabled it to defend their gains effectively. When the armies of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa found themselves effective masters of the country after they occupied Mexico City in 1914, they simply handed over the government to professional politicians who promptly betrayed them to the *Carrancista* faction. What the peasant movements of the Mexican revolution certainly were were movements rooted in particular regional societies and based on a vision of the world which did not centre of the capture of state power. This is an important facet of the Mexican revolution of 1910-1920: no organized revolutionary 'vanguard' attempted to take direct control over the popular agrarian movement - they were left, more or less, to their own autonomous devices, and it was not until the Cárdenas period that the peasantry were finally, and effectively, incorporated into national

politics. *Zapatismo*, at any rate, did have its attached 'bourgeois' ideologues, like Manuel Palafox, but the majority of the ordinary people who fought in the armed phase of the Mexican revolution were not thinking in terms of 'modern' political ideologies.

Perhaps the interesting question to pose is whether the supposedly 'progressive' versions of these ideologies - those which argue that the capture of the state apparatus is the route to freedom and emancipation - are really so 'progressive' after all, even if they are ultimately realistic. After all, the promises made by the later revolutionary *caudillos* to the peasantry, in particular the promises of Cárdenas, were not to be fulfilled.

How, then, should we periodise the revolution? When did it actually end? The conventional date is 1921, the effective end of widespread armed revolution. But there was only a limited political stabilization under the regimes of Obregón and Calles. Carranza and his constitutionalist successors once again set about centralizing, and they began the process of incorporating the masses into politics with the wooing of workers' organizations. Yet the agrarian issue was not in any sense resolved in this period. Calles's attempt to establish a 'modern' fully secularized state provoked the Cristero rebellion. Dealing with the Church remained a problem, still unresolved from the 19th century. Knight argues that the post-revolutionary state under Obregón and Calles was congenitally weak. I would accept that this is true, but it totally fails to appreciate the impact that even weak states can have on the development of the societies in which they operate, and the fact that the post-revolutionary leadership's actions have to be interpreted in terms of the process of 'state building'. The colonial state was weak in comparison with the emerging modern national state regimes of western Europe and North America. But there was scarcely a state at all after its demise, and much of Mexico's subsequent

history must be understood in terms of successive attempts to build a new central state machinery. Díaz's state was really quite weak, because it relied on clientalism to maintain centralization. Knight rejects Jean Meyer's argument that the Cristiada represented a reaction to the creation of a more centralized 'Leviathan' state. But it seems ridiculous to reject the idea that the processes of attempting to recreate a more centralized political order was not one of the processes which led to the Cristiada. What we do need to emphasize is the reason why an attack on the Church provoked such a violent and extensive popular response against a government which promised various kinds of social reform. In my view, the Cristero rebellion reflected two things:

(1) the extent to which the previous weak incorporation of the lower classes into a national political system had increased the social power of the Church as the only institution providing meaning and social identity to people in conditions of great economic insecurity, dispossession and class relations of a frequently brutal kind. The violence of the revolution simply increased the power of religion in this sense.

(2) distrust of a 'government' which was perceived as a government of alien urban social strata, was not rooted in rural life and collective organizations, and which put itself further beyond the pale by its attacks on religious observance. Most of the rural priests fled to the big cities when the Cristiada broke out, and didn't therefore provide a leadership for the struggle, which was truly popular and self-organizing. The Cristeros were recruited from various different sections of the 'popular' classes — hacienda workers, small-holders, people who had recently been turned into urban workers — and young women factory workers ran the ammunition used by the Cristeros out of Mexico City (one third of the "industrial proletariat" of Mexico in 1910 was female). The question one should ask about the Cristiada was whether it wasn't a fairly reasonable reaction

on the part of these groups what confidence should these people have placed in the post-revolutionary state of Calles, which didn't try to organize the rural masses, didn't promise any radical rural programme of a kind which would have abolished agrarian capitalism, and didn't offer any real political participation to the masses besides those who were organized in trade unions? The state as run by Calles was not, therefore, a fully successful mass-incorporating state. It did create a rural clientele for those who sought the kind of land reform it offered, which did not remember, envisage the expropriation of modern agro-industrial enterprises. But because its drive for secularization actually exacerbated underlying social disorder, and prevented a restabilization of the rural situation, it prevented a

simple resolution of the social revolutionary situation, laying the basis for a continuation of mass mobilization and patterns of class conflict which forced the more radical solution imposed by Cárdenas, who clearly did create a mass-incorporating state of a more effective kind. Nevertheless, the continuing social dominance of private capital circumscribed the possible actions of the Cardenista state. What Cárdenas did was create a more effective apparatus for central control — he bureaucratized the military, for example, so that they no longer constituted a potentially autonomous power bloc which might take over the state, although they did have some influence in policy, acted as an agency of repression, and could pursue private business deals (including, in more recent years,

participation in the drugs trade) unmolested. He brought the mass organizations under control, not in the sense that they became totally subservient to 'the state', because even the corrupt leaders of the official worker and peasant organizations and unions engaged in various kinds of factional conflicts within the state, whilst their memberships periodically tried to resist the imposition of leaders and reestablish a degree of independence. What Cárdenas succeeded in doing was creating a 'a system' of political control that was flexible enough to resolve the periodic crises caused by its failure to deliver on the revolutionary regime's promises of social justice and greater equality.