

The Working Class and the Mexican Revolution, c. 1900–1920

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Like any major historical phenomenon, the Mexican Revolution can be viewed from a variety of angles. From one, arguably the most important, it was a rural phenomenon, rightly categorised by Eric Wolf as a ‘peasant war’, hence comparable to the Russian or Chinese Revolutions.¹ From another it can be seen as a generalised social and political (some might like to call it a ‘hegemonic’) crisis, marking the end of the old oligarchic Porfirian order and characterised by mass political mobilisation; as such, it bears comparison with the crises experienced in Italy and Germany after the First World War; in Spain in the early 1930s; in Brazil in the 1960s or Chile in the 1970s. But what it emphatically was *not* was a workers’ revolution. No workers’ party sought – let alone attained – political hegemony. No Soviets or workers’ councils were established, as in Petrograd or Berlin. There were no attempts at workers’ control of industry, as in Turin, Barcelona – or the *gran minería* of Bolivia. Though the Mexican working class had to confront the realities of the revolution, and thus in turn contributed to its development, its contribution was limited and largely reflexive; it responded to events rather than initiating them. A study of the role of the working class in the revolution may help

¹ Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1969). In the course of this paper, relatively few comparisons are drawn with other Latin American labour movements/working classes, though some are drawn (perhaps fancifully) with Europe. In part, this reflects the writer’s ignorance; in part his belief that studies of the European working class (by Thompson, Barrington Moore, the Tillys and others) often ask more interesting questions and thus suggest more fruitful lines of comparison. The whole question of the introduction of the time and work discipline of capitalism, now a staple theme in European labour history, has only just begun to agitate Latin American research (e.g. Arnold Bauer, ‘Rural Workers in Spanish America: Problems of Peonage and Oppression’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. LIX (1979), pp. 34–63); as yet, it does not seem to have had much impact on studies of the urban workers which, with some notable exceptions, still tend to concentrate on the rather formalistic political and ideological gyrations of labour confederations and their leaderships: acronyms rule.

to explain why, but it must be less a study of the dynamics of revolution than of the revolution's impact on the working class, which was to be decisive and formative.

Like the peasantry, the working class constituted a diverse social group: part of the analysis must consist of breaking it down into subgroups, and it will become clear that the typology presented here is strongly influenced by the historical experiences of 1910–20. That is, divisions within the working class are derived not only from conventional or theoretical axioms (e.g. artisans/proletarians) but also from demonstrable historical behaviour during that decade. In consequence, this analysis is an example of what Hexter calls 'rank' as against 'file' history: it is concerned more with a social totality during a specific, fairly brief period of its development (Mexico, c. 1900–20, with particular reference to the working class) than with the evolution of the Mexican working class over the *longue durée*. One advantage of this approach (and there are obvious disadvantages, too) is that justice can more easily be done to the constraints and pressures acting on the working class from without.

The working class (as defined here) was to varying extents distinguished by two characteristics, and moulded by two formative influences: first, an urban environment, and second, immersion in the market, the two correlating closely.² The significance of the urban environment has often been underestimated: perhaps out of exaggerated fear of theories postulating 'urbanism as a way of life':³ perhaps out of a residual reluctance to admit the gulf (and a 'cultural' gulf at that) which often separated working class from peasantry, or the corresponding bonds which united working class and 'bourgeoisie'. But Barry Carr is surely right to stress the 'growing cultural gap which was separating the world of the urban artisan and workers from the world of the villagers of central and southern Mexico' at the time of the revolution.⁴ For one thing, the workers shared the higher

² As regards 'urbanism' (which I shall not attempt to define by size of community, etc.), this is a self-imposed, but conventional distinction; it eliminates the agricultural proletariat (who were also immersed in the market) from consideration. The argument does try to take in, albeit briefly, (a) the large intermediate rural/urban sector and (b) the vestiges of 'traditional' or 'paternalist' practice which still characterised industry, to the detriment of a pure free market economy. Both urbanism and immersion in the market, in other words, are ideal types, analytically valid, though often compromised in practice.

³ A. Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of life', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. XLIV, (1938), pp. 1–24.

⁴ Barry Carr, 'The Casa del Obrero Mundial, Constitutionalism and the Pact of February 1915', in Elsa Cecilia Frost *et al.* (eds.), *El Trabajo y los Trabajadores en la Historia de México* (Mexico and Arizona, 1979), p. 621.

literacy rates evident in the cities: in a country where average literacy was no more than 20%, working class literacy was nearer 30–35%; the leadership of the railway union claimed 100% literacy.⁵ This reflected not only the significant growth of secular education in Porfirian cities, but also the powerful educational drive mounted by the workers themselves, particularly the artisans, in response to what was evidently a strong demand. The plethora of working-class papers and pamphlets (and the letters and comments contained therein), the educational efforts of mutualist societies (libraries, discussion groups, *veladas*), were all indicative of this trend. In the industrial city of Orizaba on the eve of the revolution a million copies of the Constitution were sold at 10c apiece; the *Casa del Obrero Mundial*, famous for its political activism, began as an educational/cultural organisation, which carried the stamp of its creators: the *tipógrafos* of Mexico City, who ‘saw themselves as catalysts for cultural revolution, duty bound to bring light to those still submerged in obscuratism’.⁶

Thus, the urban working class was open to a range of ideas, which could combine in bizarre but appealing constellations: liberal, socialist, anarchist, Catholic (the 1900s saw the efflorescence of Catholic social action in Mexico), and even Protestant.⁷ Foreign influences were important, but not all-important in this process: working class politicisation cannot be explained by some crude diffusionist theory. But certainly it was the capital, the major ports (Veracruz, Tampico, Acapulco), and communities in the border zone (Chihuahua, Juárez, Cananea), which were most affected.⁸ For these and other reasons, the cities became the focus for the oppositionist politics of the 1900s, in which the urban working class (in contradistinction to the peasantry) played an important, if dependent role. ‘The workers of the big cities’, Roque Estrada noted in 1916, ‘live in days of emancipation, and the authority of the representatives of dogma – be it official, religious, or social – does not exercise such decisive influence over

⁵ Rodney D. Anderson, *Outcasts in Their Own Land; Mexican Industrial Workers, 1906–1911* (De Kalb, 1978), p. 198; José Gutiérrez to Madero, 12 June 1911, Archivo Francisco Madero (henceforth AFM), INAH, r. 20.

⁶ Gabriel Gavira, *General de Brigada Gabriel Gavira, su actuación político-militar revolucionaria* (Mexico, 1933), p. 7; Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 82–2, 108–9; Carr, ‘Casa’, p. 606.

⁷ Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State 1926–1929*, (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 9–10.

⁸ Mario Gill, ‘Los Escudero de Acapulco’, *Historia Mexicana*, vol. III (1953), pp. 291–308; Leif Adleson, ‘Coyuntura y consciencia: Factores convergentes en la fundación de los sindicatos petroleros de Tampico durante la década de 1920’, in Frost *et al.* (eds.), pp. 632–61. It was the American workers who pioneered strike action at Cananea.

them as over the *peonaje*.⁹ As elsewhere in Latin America, electoral politics flourished in the cities, while the countryside still languished under the control of cacique or coronel – or, in parts of Mexico after 1910, experienced violent rebellion and jacquerie. Of course, there were dragooned voters in the cities too (the post office workers mobilised by the government; the poor of provincial towns who literally sold their electoral birthright for a mess of pottage, after the manner of Eatanswill);¹⁰ but these could not compare in numbers and docility with the *cuadrillas* of peons who turned out for their landlords in Tlaxcalan elections, or who were carted into the towns of Veracruz and there shown how to fill in their voting slips.¹¹ In the cities, control was less complete, turn-out was higher, and the working class – though not, it seems, the under- or unemployed lumpenproletariat – participated: during congressional elections in Mexico City in 1912, an American noted, ‘while I saw many well-dressed men seemingly of the professional classes and those of the labouring classes, I did not see any of the lower or “pelado” class voting.’¹²

To put it another way, the cities contained *masas disponibles*, relatively unfettered by ‘traditional’ authority. This had important political implications; but it did not therefore render the urban working class more ‘revolutionary’, any more than the continued presence of ‘traditional’ authority in the countryside necessarily rendered the peasantry docile and inert. On the contrary, forms of ‘traditional’ authority (the village representatives of Morelos; the *serrano* caciques of Durango or Puebla) often supplied a vital organisational prerequisite for protest and rebellion; equally, it was the presence of ‘traditional’ norms (and their apparently arbitrary violation) which in Mexico, as elsewhere, provided the stimulus to revolt.¹³ Peasants rebelled in defence of a material and normative *status quo ante* (in a few instances, as we shall see, they received the support of ‘worker-peasants’); and, among urban working-class groups, it was the declining artisanate (which had a retrospective point of reference, if not

⁹ Estrada to E. Baca Calderón in *Diario de los Debates del Congreso Constituyente 1916–17* (2 vols. Mexico, 1960), II, 988.

¹⁰ Report of the ex-Secretary of the Club Político Libres Mexicanos, Zaragoza, Coahuila, n.d. (1914) in Archivo de Gobernación (henceforth AG), legajo 873.

¹¹ G. Ugarte to J. Sánchez Azcona, 24 April 1912, in Isidro Fabela, *Documentos Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, Revolución y Régimen Maderista* (5 vols. Mexico, 1964), III, 331–2; M. Guzmán to Madero, 23 Dec. 1911, AG, ‘Convención Revolucionaria’.

¹² Shanklin, Mexico City, 1 July 1912, State Department Archive (henceforth SD), 812.00/4468. The whole question of the *pelados* – the urban lumpenproletariat – merits separate treatment (and further research); I am differentiating them from the urban working class, as defined here, and thus excluding them rather arbitrarily from the analysis.

¹³ Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (London, 1978).

a contemporary capacity for organisation, comparable to those of the insurgent peasantry) which showed by far the clearest commitment to violent protest. Elsewhere, the relative absence of both traditional authority and pre-existing traditional norms and expectations made working-class rebellion more difficult and less likely; just as it made the working class itself more pliable, and politically *disponible*.¹⁴ The miners of Cananea, for example, came closest to the model of a classic, *déraciné* proletariat (Cananea had scarcely existed twenty years before the revolution): 'lacking any history as a group, they began their working lives unequipped with any clear, time-honoured criteria of justice which could provide them with a common basis for protest or rebellion'.¹⁵ Organisation and protest, therefore, had to be built up from scratch – pragmatically, cautiously, by trial and error and imitation. The 'moral outrage', the search for 'justice untarnished by compromise', which characterised peasant rebellion, had no place in the cities.¹⁶

The ideas purveyed in the cities were heterodox, and working-class ideology was eclectic. For all its radicalism, it had a lot in common with progressive 'bourgeois' thought. First, as Rodney Anderson has shown, traditional liberalism exercised a strong and not wholly irrational appeal to the urban workers: workers' demands were frequently couched in terms of constitutional right and the legacy of *Juarismo*; the workers of Orizaba, as already mentioned, snapped up copies of the Constitution at 10c apiece. The Constitution, after all, guaranteed freedoms of organisation, expression and withdrawal of labour (all of which the Porfirian regime repeatedly infringed); it provided for democratic representation which (in theory) gave the working class a political voice.¹⁷ But there was also a strong working-class attachment to the values of what might be termed, at some risk of confusion, 'social liberalism',¹⁸ or, at the expense of euphony,

¹⁴ Alan Knight, 'Peasant and Caudillo in the Mexican Revolution', in D. Brading (ed.), *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge, 1980).

¹⁵ Reginald E. Zelnik, 'Passivity and Protest in Germany and Russia: Barrington Moore's Conception of Working-Class Responses to Injustice', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 15 (1981–82), p. 489.

¹⁶ Moore, *Injustice*, pp. 233–4, 241, 251, 257, 269–74; Gavin A. Smith and Pedro Cano H., 'Some Factors Contributing to Peasant Land Occupations in Peru: the Example of Huasicancha, 1963–8', in N. Long and B. Roberts (eds.), *Peasant Cooperation and Capitalist Expansion in Central Peru* (Austin, 1978), p. 188.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 254–65; and the same author's synthesis, 'Mexican Workers and the Politics of Revolution, 1906–11'. *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. LIV (1974). Cf. the use of the 'rhetoric of constitutionalism' by spokesmen of the English working class in the late eighteenth century: E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 85–97.

¹⁸ Jesús Reyes Heróles, *El Liberalismo Mexicano* (3 vols. Mexico, 1957–61), III, 539–674, uses the term 'social liberalism' in a different sense.

‘developmentalism’, or even the Mexican Protestant ethic.¹⁹ For, as early as the 1840s, artisan circles in Mexico City were preaching thrift, sobriety, education and hard work.²⁰ The *Casa del Obrero Mundial* followed suit; and the ephemeral radical papers of the revolutionary decade also displayed a commitment to these values, which the working class (or, at least, the working class literati who publicised them) shared with ‘bourgeois’ thinkers and polemicists of different political colours: Porfirian/positivist, social Catholic, *Maderista*/liberal.²¹ All these politically diverse elements – ‘bourgeois’ and ‘proletarian’ – agreed, for example, that drink was the curse of the working class (though one suspects that many of the working class went along with Wilde’s reformulation of the problem); tirades against alcohol form one of the most common, pervasive, yet neglected themes of the political discourse of the time.²² And temperance was allied to anti-clericalism: pulque and priests were (for many – not, of course, for the social Catholics) the twin evils which had to be extirpated. Nowhere was the gulf between the enlightened urban worker and the obscurantist peasant clearer than in their respective attitudes towards – not necessarily the Church hierarchy, but the Catholic religion; nowhere else was the barrier between civilisation and barbarism more imposing. Hence the *Zapatistas*, with their deferential references to God and their Virgin of Guadalupe banners and badges, appalled the anti-clerical progressives among the Mexico City working class.²³

Finally, in addition to these ideological factors which sundered city and countryside, while creating a certain identity between working class and bourgeoisie, there was also a concrete material interest. Workers in the Federal District were offended as much by *Zapatista* depredations – which forced the outlying textile factories to close, curtailed the electricity supply, and halted construction work – as by *Zapatista* religiosity.²⁴ Elsewhere, too, the logic of the workers’ position gave them a vested interest in

¹⁹ Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge, forthcoming), ch. 9, pt. ix.

²⁰ Frederick J. Shaw, ‘The Artisan in Mexico City’, in Frost *et al.* (eds.), p. 413.

²¹ Moisés González Navarro, *Historia Moderna de México: El Porfiriato, La Vida Social* (Mexico, 1970), pp. 72ff.; *Diario de los Debates*, II, 620; *El Demócrata*, 29 Nov. 1915, 5 March 1916.

²² Carr, ‘Casa’, p. 607; *Trabajo y Producción* (organ of the Unión Minera Mexicana) 13, 21 Jan., 15 April 1917.

²³ Carr, ‘Casa’, p. 621; J. Womak, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York, 1970), pp. 398, 401.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 245; Director, 6th dirección, to Secretary of Labour, 8 Aug. 1914, *Trabajo* 34/1/14/22; London: Public Records Office, Hohler, Mexico City, 9 March 1915, FO 371 (Mexico)/2404, 182348.

continued industrial or mining production (which they shared with other urban groups); and it made them critical of rural rebellion. They, after all, could not retreat into their *milpas* when times were hard. In the spring of 1912, for example, rural rebellion engulfed the Laguna; at Torreón – then witnessing strenuous working-class organisation and strike activity – production fell, local mines and mercantile houses closed down, 6,000 men (in a population of some 50,000) were made redundant and, as prices rose, mobs invaded the streets, demanding food. The workers' hitherto bold attitude towards employers and officials was converted into an enforced dependence; 'consumptionist' demands now took precedence over the battle for wages; and, since the workers rightly blamed the revolution for this change in conditions, it was as much as the Army could do to prevent rebel prisoners from being lynched by the city mob.²⁵ In addition, we shall note, workers were prepared to demonstrate and even take up arms to defend the regime – the moderate, liberal Madero regime – against rural rebels.

A variety of factors thus created a perceived identity of interest between urban bourgeoisie and working class. And this was a two-way process. Long before the revolution, Porfirian (even *Juarista* and *Lerdista*) leaders sought the political support of the urban working class; and began to concern themselves with the 'labour question' (in contrast, *Porfiristas* saw the 'agrarian question' in purely productive, rather than politico-social terms: it was a question of modernising agricultural technology and boosting output, not benefiting the peasantry by way of reform).²⁶ In the 1900s Díaz commissioned two major reports on labour; *políticos* like Guillermo Landa y Escandón, Governor of the Federal District, took a lively, enlightened interest in industrial problems and sponsored mutualist societies; state governors like Reyes (Nuevo León), Dehesa (Veracruz), and Bandala (Tabasco) thought it worth cultivating the working class.²⁷ This did not necessarily imply altruism. The regime had been shaken by the 'year of strikes' (1906), and especially by events at Cananea and Río Blanco; in Mexico, as elsewhere in Latin America, the 'social question'

²⁵ Carothers, Torreón, 24 Feb., 15, 19 March 1912, S.D. 812.00/3085, 3362, 3421.

²⁶ Luis González y González, *Historia Moderna de México: La República Restaurada. La Vida Social* (Mexico, 1956), pp. 440–5; Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 173ff.; and, for the agrarian question, Ramón Eduardo Ruíz, *The Great Rebellion, Mexico 1905–24* (New York, 1980), pp. 96–8.

²⁷ Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 176, 210–11; Ramon Eduardo Ruíz, *Labor and the Ambivalent Revolutionaries, Mexico 1911–23* (Baltimore, 1976), p. 6; Gavira, *op.cit.*, p. 14; Manuel González Calzada, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana en Tabasco* (Mexico, 1972), p. 31.

began to agitate men's minds; even the Mexico City theatre started to explore 'social' themes.²⁸ Landa y Escandón, like later revolutionary labour reformers, clearly attempted to curtail working-class protest, or divert it into acceptable channels. But the significant fact is that such an attempt was systematically made – in a way that was not when the regime confronted peasant protest. The peasant – especially the *indio* – represented barbarism (Porfirian official thinking was infused with crude Darwinian stereotypes, some of which the revolution inherited); but the urban worker might be converted to civilisation. And, since governors and policy-makers themselves resided in the cities, it was in their interest that he should.

Both working-class protest and official thinking must be seen in the contemporary economic context; and here we come to the second distinguishing feature and formative influence, the market. The working class existed within a money economy, almost entirely governed by the laws of the market, free labour and the cash nexus.²⁹ This carried two important implications, one secular, one 'conjunctural'. First, like many early twentieth-century working classes, that of Mexico was still in the making; the inculcation of the time and work discipline of industrial capitalism was still partial, in some cases incipient.³⁰ Employers' complaints concerning the fecklessness, unreliability and absenteeism of workers were nothing new: they had been vocal enough in the 1840s and before; but now, with the rapid growth of industry, and the conversion of artisans and peasants into proletarians, the complaints came thick and fast.³¹ The separation of the worker (artisan or peasant) from the means of production guaranteed an abundant supply of labour, but not of suitably motivated

²⁸ González Navarro, *op.cit.*, pp. 808–10; on elite responses to the 'social question' in Chile (where it did not, of course, presage a popular revolution), see James O. Morris, *Elites, Intellectuals, and Consensus: A Study of the Social Question and the Industrial Relations System in Chile* (Ithaca, 1966), especially pp. 78–171.

²⁹ As already suggested, this represents an ideal type: within many factories, labour was highly regulated, and, even outside, there were still vestiges of peonage, e.g. in recruitment for the mines: *El Correo de Chihuahua*, 9, 23 Jan. 1910. Of course, as Bauer and others have pointed out, the cash advance (*enganche*) may serve as a device to recruit free wage labour (particularly in the face of peasant resistance), as well as to create a semi-servile peonage: see Bauer, 'Rural Workers'; Friedrich Katz, *La Servidumbre Agraria en México en la Época Porfiriana* (Mexico, 1980), pp. 40–2, 79–81, 97–8; Thomas Louis Benjamin, 'Passages to Leviathan: Chiapas and the Mexican State' (Ph.D. Diss., Michigan State, 1981), p. 103.

³⁰ E. P. Thompson, 'Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism', *Past and Present*, vol. xxxviii (1967), pp. 56–97; the seminal statement is still to be found in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London, 1974), pp. 47–78.

³¹ Shaw, *op.cit.*, pp. 416–17. On industrial growth during the 1890s, see Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 21–9.

labour. Employers lamented the chronic absenteeism of their workers; the old practice of San Lunes; the pernicious effects of drink; the lack of application and initiative.³² And they responded, roughly, in two contrasting ways. Some (in the troubled textile industry, for example) borrowed the 'paternalistic' ways of the hacienda: that is, they instituted close supervision of the factory, compiling complex regulations, imposing fines, docking wages, keeping dossiers of supposed trouble-makers, hiring and firing at will.³³ Though (as in some haciendas) a more benign, protective paternalism was also apparent, this was increasingly exceptional; under the pressure of the market, the inexorable trend was towards 'stricter industrial regimes for the workers and harsher personnel practices'; workers complained that 'today in Mexico the *patrón* is not the father that yesterday he was'.³⁴ As in the countryside, the growth of the market and of proletarianisation did not necessarily dissolve old regulatory practices (which we are here calling 'paternalistic') but often served to distort them, emphasising their coercive or oppressive aspects, while stripping away what reciprocity formerly existed. The hated *hacienda mayordomo* (often Spanish) had his counterpart in the hated factory foreman (also Spanish); hacienda and factory alike possessed their *tiendas de raya*; and harsh, arbitrary factory discipline (justified on the grounds of the workers' fecklessness) was a source of constant working-class complaint.³⁵ The more modern industrial enterprises faced similar problems: in the mines of Cananea it was difficult to ensure sustained work, over the week and the month. But for a variety of reasons, such companies – typified by the large, corporate, Anglo-American mining and oil interests – came to rely less on semi-coercive control than on calculated incentive: paying a premium, for example, at the end of a full week's work.³⁶ They could count on their own favourable market position (*vis-à-vis* labour) and their financial resources (oil began to boom as textiles contracted); and employment in these sectors was better paid and sought after.³⁷ Mexican industrialisation during the Porfiriato can thus be seen (though it has been

³² González Navarro, *op.cit.*, pp. 77–8, 416–19, 535–36; William H. Beezley, *Insurgent Governor: Abraham González and the Mexican Revolution in Chihuahua* (Lincoln, 1973), pp. 103–13; *El Correo de Chihuahua*, 19 Feb., 26 June 1910; *La Nueva Era* (Parral), 8 March, 18 Oct., 16 Dec. 1906; Katz, *La Servidumbre Agraria*, pp. 97–100.

³³ Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 76, 159, 308.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 95.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 130–1, 153, 159; Katz, *La Servidumbre Agraria*, pp. 114–15.

³⁶ Company auditor's report, April 1906, INAH, serie Sonora, r. 9.

³⁷ A. S. Knight, 'Nationalism, Xenophobia and Revolution: the Place of Foreigners and Foreign Interests in Mexico, 1910–15' (Oxford D.Phil. Diss., 1974), pp. 84–92, 323–6.

little researched) in terms of the secular struggle to implant the ethic of modern capitalism, to which there were divergent responses, hence divergent political and economic behaviour on the part of the workers.

While neither the strength of hacienda ‘paternalism’, nor the prevalence of subsistence agriculture should be exaggerated, the fact is that both cushioned the rural population (peon and peasant) against the effects of the market; and these, in the 1900s, were largely detrimental. Apocalyptic (but common) assertions of a catastrophic fall in living standards throughout the Porfiriato have been shown to be statistically unfounded.³⁸ But there is little doubt that, from the late 1890s, as population growth and agrarian expropriation swelled the supply of labour, as food production failed to keep pace, and as industry destroyed jobs faster than it created them, so real wages fell markedly.³⁹ The years 1907–8 witnessed economic recession, 1908–9 consecutive bad harvests. Historians have readily inferred that these lean years provoked the revolution. We cannot enter that argument here, though it should be noted that recovery was well under way by 1910 and that – whether the focus is on regions, individuals or social groups – political dissidence and revolutionary proclivities usually antedated these years. More immediately important, in considering the role of the working class, it must be questioned whether economic indices and cycles (though superficially attractive as ‘hard’ data) are necessarily so useful in explaining popular protest: not only are they often unreliable, and lacking any *causal* relationship with the phenomenon of protest (it is often just a question of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*); they are also suggestive of a rather crude, positivistic, correlative technique (inflation up two points, government popularity rating down three; recession in 1907, therefore revolution in 1910). Social reality is more complex than that.

In fact, to the extent that tentative correlations can be established between wages and employment on the one hand, and the workers’ *economic* struggle on the other (measured in terms of strike activity), the experience of Mexico in the years before the revolution is a familiar one: economic hardship and unemployment went with a fall in strike activity and decline

³⁸ John H. Coatsworth, ‘Anotaciones sobre la producción de alimentos durante el Porfiriato’, *Historia Mexicana*, vol. xxvi (1976), pp. 167–87.

³⁹ The real, minimum daily wage is reckoned to have fallen by some third (for agriculture) between 1899 and 1910, by a quarter for industry, while for mining it rose by a quarter; these figures are open to question but the broad picture – a general fall in real wages, alleviated in certain export sectors (e.g. mining) – seems valid. El Colegio de México, *Estadísticas Económicas del Porfiriato*, pp. 148–51; Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 58, 62; Fernando González Roa, *El Aspecto Agrario de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico, 1919), p. 165.

in apparent militancy. The later years of the revolution produced a similar effect.⁴⁰ Here, at least, broadly comparable variables, drawn from the same economic universe, are being correlated. As regards the much more complex question of popular, political protest (which underlay the 1910 revolution), it is worth bearing in mind that recent work, dealing with both peasant and working-class protest, has emphasised ‘non-economic’ factors (and, in my view, correctly): the ‘moral economy’, the violation of existing (tacitly) agreed norms of behaviour, the imposition of new, arbitrary authority, the capacity for ‘moral outrage’ as a primary impulse and collective organisation as a necessary basis of effective protest.⁴¹ Obviously, such arguments embrace the ‘economic’, but they place it in context and do not exalt it (not even to the status of necessary ‘cause-in-the-last-analysis’). As regards the Mexican working class, therefore, a catalogue of bad times – unemployment, low pay, atrocious conditions of work – may have little explanatory power, as it stands.⁴² Aggregate economic data – illustrating, for example, the decline in real wages suffered during the 1900s – are relevant in considering working-class reactions to the Porfirian regime and the revolution; but taken alone they tell us little, and they must be interpreted in the light of other more important (largely non-quantifiable) data relating to regions, industries, social groups and political events. The first task, therefore, is to disaggregate the working class itself, and analyse how different subgroups reacted to historical change.

II

Despite its gradual decline, the artisanate (broadly defined for the moment) greatly outnumbered the classic proletariat. The 1910 census revealed between 90,000 and 100,000 factory workers (of whom about one-third worked in the textile industry), as compared with 67,000 carpenters, 44,000 shoemakers, 23,000 potters (and so on).⁴³ But at least three subdivisions must be made. First, there were village artisans (potters, weavers, carpenters) who, protected by distance, local poverty, and ingrained

⁴⁰ Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 224, 333; Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, ch. 9, pt. vi.

⁴¹ Moore, *Injustice*; E. P. Thomas, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd of the Eighteenth Century’, *Past and Present*, vol. 1 (1971), pp. 76–136; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, 1976).

⁴² Cf. Ruiz, *Labor*, pp. 7–11.

⁴³ *Mexican Year Book* (Los Angeles, 1922), pp. 341–2.

custom, could survive in the face of industrialization.⁴⁴ If their plight worsened, it was as a result of the general fall in rural living standards, particularly associated with the growth of large landholdings. Village artisans often played an important role in rural rebellion: they figured as leaders, or as ‘village intellectuals’ – Felipe Neri in Morelos, Orestes Pereyra in the Laguna.⁴⁵ But they were clearly marginal to the urban working class, in terms of both location and organisation. With regard to the towns, a second, crucial group was composed of declining artisans, engaged in a mortal struggle with factory production: of textiles, shoes, hats, candles, leather goods.⁴⁶ Their sad lot was most apparent in the towns of the Bajío, where artisan crafts had long flourished in conjunction with the mines; but now the mines were past their peak, wages were depressed, and industrial competition (usually emanating from other parts of the country) was intense. The same conditions which made the Bajío the main source of *braceros* and of recruits into the Rurales contributed to the immiseration of the artisans (whose work was often done on a domestic, putting-out basis); hence travellers observed ‘the workers of León working at home in their miserable tenements’, or were moved by ‘the patent misery of the pariah of León, Irapuato, Celaya (and) Querétaro... who, in the stations of the Central Railway, offer the most exquisite pieces of work for the lowest prices imaginable.’⁴⁷

But in Mexico as elsewhere handicraft workers of this kind found it notoriously hard to achieve any collective organisation or mount collective resistance.⁴⁸ They might share with the peasant a nostalgia for the world they had lost, or were fast losing, but they were less equipped to do anything about it. The artisans’ characteristic response, during the revolution, was the urban riot: a form of popular protest, particularly evident in the towns of the Bajío, which historians have largely neglected. In the spring and early summer of 1911 riots hit Ciudad Manuel Doblado (where the mob burned the courthouse and tax office and opened the jail), Pénjano (municipal buildings and pawnshops sacked), and San Miguel

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Outcasts*, p. 349.

⁴⁵ Womack, *Zapata*, p. 81; Patrick O’Hea, *Reminiscences of the Mexican Revolution* (Mexico, 1966), p. 16; Alan Knight, ‘Intellectuals in the Mexican Revolution’, paper given to the VIth Congress of Mexican and U.S. Historians, Chicago, Sept. 1981.

⁴⁶ Aggregate figures are hard to obtain; in textiles, while the attrition was probably most marked, the ratio of artisans to factory workers moved from 41,000 : 19,000 (1895) to 12,000 : 32,000 (1910); for these and other figures see Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 38–9, 46–7.

⁴⁷ Vitold de Szyszlo, *Dix Mille Kilomètres à travers le Mexique* (Paris, 1913), p. 229; Toribio Esquivel Obregón in Jesús Silva Herzog, *La Cuestión de la Tierra* (4 vols. Mexico, 1961), II, 132; and Wistano Luis Orozco in the same series, I, 213.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 346.

Allende, where a protracted riot, claiming the usual victims, came as a surprise to some, since San Miguel was thought to be 'a fairly respectable town, mostly factory workers who could read and write'.⁴⁹ Riots were expected and only narrowly averted at Celaya, where an industrialist 'who is scarcely loved by his workers' hastily summoned the *Maderista* forces to keep the peace; and at San Francisco del Rincón, where the same forces set about 'firmly repressing the workers' movement... preventing them from opening the prison and saving business from damage'.⁵⁰ It is clear that longstanding grievances against industrialists, officials and retailers were exacerbated by the effects of the revolution (which also afforded the opportunity for grievances to be expressed): at León, for example, the handicraft workers were 'on the point of starvation... because their market in the north had collapsed'.⁵¹ It is also worth noting that, after the artisans, it was the miners – but chiefly the miners in the older, declining centres, not the new, corporate mines of the north – who were most prone to riot: at Angangueo, Los Reyes, Hostotipaquillo, Pachuca and (a particularly grisly riot, reminiscent of *Germinal*) Concepción del Oro.⁵² But while they followed in the old tradition of the brawling miners of Bourbon Mexico, their colleagues in the collieries of Coahuila or the copper mines of Sonora eschewed riot in favour of unionisation.⁵³ Similarities between these riotous groups and events and their counterparts in pre-industrial Europe spring to mind.⁵⁴ And, with the physical remoteness of their industrial competitors inhibiting outright Luddism,

⁴⁹ B. Soto to A. Robles Domínguez, 22 May 1911; R. Zamora to same, 27 May 1911; Archivo A. Robles Domínguez (henceforth AARD), Biblioteca Nacional de México, 11/2, 11/22; Rowe, Guanajuato, 23 May 1911, SD 812.00/2046; San Miguel petition to Gobernación, 27 May 1911, AG 898. Neither these reports, nor such additional evidence as I have found, shed much light on the precise composition of the rioters (in particular, whether they were 'factory workers' in the strict sense, or out-workers, or some combination of both); the 'faces in the crowd' remain blurred.

⁵⁰ B. Soto to Robles Domínguez, 2 June 1911; F. Lizardi to Carlos Robles Domínguez, 1 June 1911; AARD 11/69, 11/53; *El Diario del Hogar*, 23 March 1911.

⁵¹ Rowe, Guanajuato, 23 May 1911, SD 821.00/2046.

⁵² Hohler, Mexico City, 17 May 1911, FO 371/1147,20780; Aguirre to Gobernación, 22 July 1911, AG 898; G. Sánchez to Gobernación, 22 July 1911, AG 898; Manager, Cía Minera de los Reyes, to directors, 31 May 1911, AARD 6/136; jefe político, Zitácuaro, to Governor Silva, 3 July 1911, AG 14, 'Relaciones con los Estados (Mich.)'.

⁵³ D. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico 1763–1810* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 233–5, 276; cf. *Trabajo y Producción* (organ of the UMM), 12 Jan. 1917, where the aim of socialism is said to be that of freeing the worker 'without resort to violence'; during the one major strike at Cananea during the Madero years, the miners' 'leaders advised against violence': Simpich, Cananea, 21 Dec. 1912, SD 812.00/5750.

⁵⁴ Cf. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester, 1974), pp. 108–25; George Rudé, *The Crowd in History 1730–1848* (New York, 1964).

the Bajío artisans (and the 'traditional' miners) shared with the pre-industrial mob a concern for issues of consumption (as against production): hence the repeated attacks on shops and pawnbrokers (many of them Spanish-owned).⁵⁵

The third category of artisans is the most diffuse: it embraces those who survived, grew in numbers, and even prospered during the generation of the Porfiriato; it extends from those 'artisans' on the one hand who served the new, buoyant sectors of the urban economy (trams, public utilities, printshops, the construction and electricity industries), and who merge into the proletariat proper, on the other hand, the aspiring, 'petty-bourgeois' artisans, skilled, literate, and cast in the image of their Victorian counterparts. Despite the wide range which these groups spanned – and the frequent poverty and insecurity of the first, contrasting with the relative affluence and respectability of the second – they shared important characteristics: they were skilled or semi-skilled, and were familiar with the urban environment, which they and their families had long inhabited; they were neither recent rural migrants, nor classic proletarians (in the sense of working in large industrial units), nor yet were they part of the large lumpenproletariat, the unemployed, underemployed, vagrants, beggars and criminals who constituted the *pelados*. As such, these workers displayed certain comparable political traits.

The aspiring artisan, the *artesano culto*, provided the backbone of the educational and cultural organisations already mentioned. Literate, aspiring and politically aware, he joined mutualist societies (where he might rub shoulders with the middle class); he inhabited the new suburbs of the capital around Buenavista station; he may be seen graphically depicted in the woodcuts of Posada.⁵⁶ Typical of this group were Aquiles Serdán, the Puebla shoemaker and first martyr of the revolution; Silvestre Dorador of Durango; the *Veracruzanos* Gabriel Gavira (a cabinet-maker) and Rafael Tapia (a saddler).⁵⁷ Madero, in preaching to and mobilising the disaffected

⁵⁵ Hobsbawm, *op.cit.*, pp. 108, 124. Something akin to Luddism, however, appears to have characterised the worker-peasant movement in Tlaxcala/Puebla: Jenkins, Puebla, 18 Nov. 1914, SD 812.00/14073.

⁵⁶ Carr, 'Casa', p. 606; Ron Tyler, *Posada's Mexico* (Washington, 1979), p. 72; A. L. Morgan, 'Economy and Society in the D.F., 1880–1920' (Council for National Academic Awards, Ph.D. thesis, in preparation), ch. vi; González y González, *op.cit.*, pp. 449–50.

⁵⁷ Atenedoro Gámez, *Monografía Histórica sobre la Génesis de la Revolución en el Estado de Puebla* (Mexico, 1960), pp. 22–3; Silvestre Dorador, *Mi Prisión, La Defensa Social y la Verdad del Caso* (Mexico, 1916), p. 2; Gavira, *op.cit.*, p. 6; L. J. Nunn, Veracruz, 29 April 1911, FO 371/1147, 18523.

middle class, also singled out that 'chosen element of the working class which aspires to improvement' as an important source of support, which it, indeed, proved to be.⁵⁸ In 1909 came the rapid conversion of mutualist societies in cities like Puebla or Orizaba into Anti-Re-electionist clubs; and often these included white collar workers and members of the professional and commercial middle class – at Cananea, for example, at Río Blanco, and at Múzquiz (Coa.), where, notwithstanding its proletarian label, the Club Obreros Libres had a town merchant and veteran *Maderista* as president.⁵⁹ The political involvement of the artisans (nothing new in Mexican history)⁶⁰ was not confined to *Maderismo*, however; *Porfirista* officials also established relations with mutualist societies; and five years after the revolution began, it was the Mexico City artisans who pioneered the political alliance between the organised working class and the Constitutionals.⁶¹

With the obvious exception of the village artisans, this important social group was typically, ineradicably urban. But, as already suggested, the making of the Mexican working class was very much in progress when the revolution occurred. As a result there were large semi-proletarianised groups, who defy precise categorisation (no doubt that reflects upon the categories in use; but for the moment we are stuck with them). From the perspective of revolutionary participation, furthermore, these groups were of much greater significance than 'pure' working class. At the risk of simplification, we may discern two groups: the 'worker-peasants' of central Mexico, who collaborated with the vigorous peasant movements of that region, Zapata's included; and the 'semi-proletarian' or migrant workers of the north, who supported the Orozquists and *Villista* movements, and who may best be regarded as elements within the generic *serrano* rebellion.⁶² It is worth noting that the worker-peasant was a central

⁵⁸ Francisco I. Madero, *La Sucesión Presidencial en 1910* (San Pedro, 1908), p. 241.

⁵⁹ A. Santos Coy to Madero 26 Sept. 1911, AFM r. 21; to Robles Domínguez, 9 July 1911, AARD 39/11; records of the Workers Mutualist Society, Aquiles Serdán, Cananea, 27 Sept. 1919, and the Cooperative Mutualist Society, Río Blanco, 16 Feb. 1920, Archivo del Depto. de Trabajo (henceforth Trabajo) 34/2/8, expd. 2.

⁶⁰ González y González, *op.cit.*, pp. 426–7, 437–45.

⁶¹ Carr, 'Casa', pp. 613–14; Jean Meyer, 'Les Ouvriers dans la Révolution Mexicaine. Les Bataillons Rouges', *Annales E.S.C.*, vol. 25 (1970). Again, the question is raised of how legitimate it is to include both the *artesanos cultos* – the skilled, often self-employed craftsmen – and (for example) the print workers or tram drivers under the generic heading 'artisans'.

⁶² Raymond Th. J. Buve, 'Peasant Movements, Caudillos and Land Reform during the revolution (1910–17) in Tlaxcala, Mexico', *Boletín de Estudios Latino-Americanos y del Caribe*, No. 18 (1975); Knight, 'Peasant and Caudillo', pp. 26–36.

character in the revolution in Russia, where continued ties between village and factory served to fuse the discontents of both groups (elsewhere kept distinct), and where both the nature of the regime (highly autocratic and repressive) and the nature of factory production (large, self-contained, regimented units) inhibited the growth of organisations which might ameliorate the workers' conditions or socialise them into urban society.⁶³ In Mexico this phenomenon was much less pronounced, hence much less productive of urban revolution. In Puebla and Tlaxcala, where 'long-standing job mobility between rural villages and urban areas' was evident, relations between peasant rebels and urban workers were often close (displaying little of the cultural gulf apparent in the D.F.); thus, while the Tlaxcalan peasant movement obeyed familiar, agrarian motives – the recovery of land lost to expansionist haciendas – the shift of peasants into industry (textiles) encouraged a cross-fertilisation of ideas, a degree of mutual trust and support, and an unusual capacity for collective worker/peasant action.⁶⁴ Tlaxcala consequently witnessed the development of a radical worker/peasant movement, capable not only of rural insurrection (even in advance of the 'official' *Maderista* revolution), but also of urban political mobilisation, leading to the election as Governor (on the strength of the *operario* vote) of Antonio Hidalgo, himself an ex-textile worker, who put out an allegedly 'socialist' programme, gravely alarmed the owners of property in the state, and certainly represented the radical wing of *Maderista* government.⁶⁵ In Puebla, too, at Metepec and Atlixco, factory workers also of recent, rural origin gave aid and comfort to *Zapatismo*.⁶⁶ But this phenomenon – the collaborative protest of city and countryside, worker and peasant – was strictly limited, both by time and by region. Military recruitment at Atlixco, for example, did not come until 1914–15, when both factories and workers were facing hard times, and recruitment offered an alternative to unemployment and destitution. Prior to then, factory employment – while it lasted – usually acted as a disincentive to revolt, as we shall see: the pioneer revolutionary commitment

⁶³ Reginald E. Zelnik, 'The Peasant and the Factory' in Wayne S. Vuchinich (ed.), *The Peasant in Nineteenth Century Russia* (Stanford, 1968), pp. 158–90.

⁶⁴ Buve, *loc.cit.*, pp. 131–2; Anderson, *Outcasts*, p. 316.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 275; B. Altariste to Madero, 26 Nov. 1911, Fabela, II, 346–8; Banco Oriental manager, Tlaxcala, to manager, Puebla, 26 Sept. 1911, AG, 'Convención Revolucionaria'.

⁶⁶ Anderson, *Outcasts*, p. 317; Barry Carr, *El Movimiento Obrero y la Política en México 1910–29* (2 vols Mexico, 1976), II, 20–2, 50–1 touch on the largely unexplored question of rural labour recruitment. A. Pacheco to M. Lopez Jiménez, 30 Jan. 1915, Trabajo 34/1/14/28 on support for Zapata.

of the Tlaxcala worker-peasants was the exception rather than the rule.⁶⁷ Elsewhere in Mexico, it would seem, proletarianisation was more gradual yet more complete than in Russia: it built upon a stronger artisanal base (which Russian industry lacked), and relied less upon mass, rural recruitment; hence ties between city and village, worker and peasant, were weaker. Furthermore, for all its black image, the Porfirian regime was less intransigent than its Tsarist equivalent: it not only allowed but sometimes positively encouraged the peaceful association of the workers, and their integration into urban society.⁶⁸

The semi-proletarian character of the northern revolution has been emphasised elsewhere; indeed, there is a risk of over-emphasising it, for the northern rebels, too, were mostly rural folk, some of them classic peasants, some of them motivated by agrarian grievances analogous to those of the *Zapatistas*.⁶⁹ But the more mobile, market-oriented nature of the north also ensured the participation of semi-proletarians, migrants, and especially miners. A recent article has even suggested that the northern revolution – in its initial phase (1910–11) – was a *révolution minière*.⁷⁰ This is untenable: it makes the mining tail wag the peasant dog.⁷¹ To appropriate northern rebels and rebel communities as *mineros* is to fasten upon and exalt one factor at the expense of many (for the individuals, if sometimes *ex-mineros*, were also *ex-peasants*, -outlaws, -*vaqueros*, liberals, or persons with a grudge against authority; and the participation of a community – like Tomochic – in the mining industry in no sense made it a mining community *per se*). Such an occupational bias, derivative of industrial societies, is inappropriate in societies where the division of labour was less advanced, and jobs were less functionally specific: the *curriculum vitae* of a *serrano* rebel should not be read like that of a Sorbonne

⁶⁷ Even in the rebel heartland of 1910–11 – the Sierra Madre of Chihuahua – the workers in the timber towns (Madera, Pearson) were reckoned to be *gente tranquila*, ‘fully dedicated to their work in a very peaceful manner’: J. Vega Bonilla to A. Terrazas, 30 Nov. 1910, Silvestre Terrazas Archive, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, Box 28. Many other examples could be cited from later in the revolution too.

⁶⁸ Landa y Escandón’s Grand Mutualist Society appears to have had more success than Zubatov’s police unions: Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 232–3; see also pp. 225, 249–50; and Gavira, *op.cit.*, pp. 9, 13, 17, on the sympathy which some Porfirian officials displayed towards the workers, at least in the Orizaba region.

⁶⁹ Katz, *Servidumbre Agraria*, op. 43–7, 54–5; Knight, ‘Peasant and Caudillo’, pp. 24–5, 29–31.

⁷⁰ F.-X. Guerra, ‘La Révolution Méxicaine: d’abord une révolution minière?’, *Annales, E.S.C.* vol. 36 (1981).

⁷¹ Alan Knight, ‘La Révolution Méxicaine: révolution minière ou révolution serrano?’, *Annales, E.S.C.* vol. 38 (1983).

professor. As we shall note, mining communities almost never rebelled as collectivities, as some villages did (though they might engage in brief, violent *journées*); and, throughout much of the revolution, the mines kept working, where they were permitted, to the evident satisfaction of their employees. *Serrano* rebellion obeyed motives which were largely divorced from mining, and the sporadic participation of miners or ex-miners in such rebellions scarcely imparted an 'industrial' character to these revolts, or detracted from their rural, *serrano* origins.

Roughly speaking, therefore, semi-proletarians participated actively in the armed revolution precisely because they were semi- and not wholly proletarianised (or urbanised); it was their contacts with or even membership of rural communities – the cells of revolution – which counted. Conversely, if the focus is switched to the classic, fully proletarianised groups, it is the absence of such revolutionary commitment which is conspicuous. Thus, where factory employment could soak up surplus labour – which, admittedly, it could not always do – the result was a diminution, not an accentuation of revolutionary potential. As Barrington Moore observes in the case of Germany, 'industrialisation solved the problem of the proletariat rather than created it'.⁷² Once the process of proletarianisation – the 'making of the working class', be it English, German or Mexican – was well advanced, the dangers of violent revolution tended to recede, as the development of 'modern' capitalism was matched by the development of 'modern' working-class organisations, with a vested interest in continued industrial production; what has been called (by a Marxist, not a Panglossian modernisation theorist) the 'imbrication of working class organisation in the *status quo*'.⁷³ And this was particularly true during the revolution, when unemployment facilitated rebel recruitment (the Red Battalions were the classic but not the sole example), while stable employment often made recruitment impossible.

This is not to characterise the emergent proletariat – the railwaymen, dockers, textile operatives, and (proletarian) miners – as inert or politically indifferent. On the contrary, they displayed 'a very marked tendency to associate': first and foremost in 'economist' organisations (mutualist societies, *sindicatos*), secondarily in political formations. But the latter were strongly reformist and pragmatic in nature, and they were prepared to countenance alliances with parties and regimes of almost any type – left, right, and centre. Thus it was possible for groups like the miners of Sonora

⁷² Moore, *Injustice*, p. 135.

⁷³ E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978), p. 71.

and Coahuila (a) to form combative unions; (b) to achieve tactical alliances with revolutionary politicians like Maytorena or Espinosa Mireles; while (c) avoiding active participation in the armed struggle (indeed, while demonstrating against revolutionary upheaval and in favour of peace, as the miners of Coahuila did in 1912).⁷⁴ The dockers, who represented one of the most aggressive and developed sectors of the working class, behaved similarly. At Acapulco and Tampico, for example, they progressed from syndical organisation to political involvement: working-class participation in Tampico elections was sustained (and the port workers, like the Coahuilan miners, marched for peace in 1912); the dockers' union, led by the redoubtable Sam Kelly (a Mexican, despite the name), threw its weight behind political candidates according to the same pragmatic, non-ideological principles as Gompers, and the A.F. of L.⁷⁵ A similar dual strategy – economic organisation and wage bargaining, coupled with judicious political alignment – characterised the railwaymen.⁷⁶ Even if anarcho-syndicalist ideology exercised an appeal (as it did in some quarters – perhaps not as many as often imagined) it was largely honoured in the breach. The most advanced sectors of the working class ('advanced' in terms of organisational strength; and, incidentally, located in the more 'advanced', high wage sector of the national economy) had no inhibition about mixing in bourgeois politics. And, as regards the central, 'economist' struggle, the intransigence of most employers ensured that this was no soft option.

Though such behaviour corresponds with that observed in the modern, industrial sectors of working classes elsewhere, it does not fit the prevailing historiography of the Mexican revolution particularly well. Not only are the riotous artisans and (sometimes) the worker-peasants neglected;⁷⁷ there is also a tendency to stress the role of the industrial proletariat, if

⁷⁴ Rafael Sierra y Domínguez to Trabajo, 13 March 1913, Trabajo 31/3/3/22; Francisco Urquiza, *Páginas de la Revolución* (Mexico, 1965), pp. 11, 33.

⁷⁵ Gill, 'Los Escudero'; Miller, Tampico, 13 Nov. 1911, 17 Feb. 1912, 15 June 1912; Bevan, Tampico, 9 Dec. 1912; SD 812.00/2515, 2901, 4262; 5714.

⁷⁶ The railway workers sought not only to organise and improve conditions, but also to supplant the American employees who held the better jobs; in which respect their long struggle – initiated under Díaz – achieved real results: Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 117–19, 235–41; Ruiz, *Labor*, p. 28. Groups such as the Jalisco Railwaymen Club 'Union and Progress', affiliated to Madero's P.C.P.

⁷⁷ Or, there is a prevailing assumption that where worker-peasants rebel, the initiative springs from the 'worker(s)' transforming the peasant(s); as in the crude dualism of vintage development theory, the city (or factory) is seen as the source of peasant politicisation – without which the peasants remain in rural idiocy, inert and ideologically dumb. In fact, the transfer of resources may go the other way.

only by emphasising the events at Cananea (1906) and Río Blanco (1907) as decisive antecedents of the revolution. Even Anderson, whose excellent analysis dispels numerous myths, cannot altogether rid himself of the idea that Cananea, for example, ‘may well have been the watershed of the Old Regime’ (note the subjunctive).⁷⁸ In fact, these events do not invalidate the interpretation presented here. In both cases, the workers were bent on asserting moderate economic claims: specifically against the imposition of fines and other penalties at Río Blanco; against the differential wage scales which favoured American employees, and the company’s decision to change shift practices and increase the work load at Cananea.⁷⁹ However much both the Díaz regime and later radical historians would like it to have been the case, they were not engaged in subversive political agitation; the role of the P.L.M. (which anyway recruited more among white collar employees than among rank-and-file proletarians) has in both cases been considerably exaggerated.⁸⁰ At Cananea, the miners confronted an inept, capricious management; at Río Blanco, one which sought, by means of a lockout, to ‘throttle’ the workers’ incipient organisation and solidarity.⁸¹ In the latter case, too, the national government – and its local representatives – were a good deal less hawkish than the employers, and Díaz’s arbitration (which immediately preceded the violence) was not the sell-out to management it has sometimes been depicted.⁸² Finally, it should be noted, the violence itself (which led to repression, and hence the notoriety of the disputes) was precipitated by specific events, and initiated by the company employees (shopkeepers at Río Blanco, American foremen at Cananea), not by the workers themselves. Such incidents reflected badly on the Porfirian regime, but it is hard to draw direct, causal links between them and the successful revolution of 1910. The legitimacy of the regime was at a low ebb in any case; and bloody industrial disputes (in which the workers were as much victims as aggressors) were not the stuff of mass revolution. Cananea was staunchly oppositionist – *Reyista* then *Maderista* – in 1908–10, but it did not go over to the revolution *en masse* in 1910, did not establish itself as an armed camp, after the manner of the Bolivian tin mines in the 1950s, and instead continued operations under its new, more enlightened, corporate management. Miners’ wages were higher than revolutionary pay anyway. Meantime, the miners continued to press for

⁷⁸ Anderson, *Outcasts*, p. 117.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131; Manuel J. Aguirre, *Cananea* (Mexico, 1958), pp. 71–150; Hector Aguilar Camín, *La Revolución Sonorense, 1910–14* (Mexico, INAH, 1975), pp. 127–30.

⁸⁰ Anderson, *Outcasts*, pp. 114–16, 121–3, 131, 268–70.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 109, 133, 143–54; Gavira, pp. 7–9.

'economist' gains, and received a degree of satisfaction.⁸³ Río Blanco, though a supposed nest of *Maderismo*, did not live up to either revolutionary hopes or Porfirian fears in 1910; it was still working at 90% capacity in March 1915, when a recent pay rise again made revolutionary recruitment financially difficult.⁸⁴ Thereafter, with growing economic dislocation, and the vigorous propaganda of the *Casa del Obrero Mundial*, recruitment picked up; but even then, the Orizaba factories lagged behind those of Puebla, where links with the *campesinado* were stronger.⁸⁵

To summarise matters crudely: to the extent that enterprises conformed to the 'modern' industrial norm (large units, an advanced division of labour, hence full proletarianisation and a complete divorce from the countryside) so the workers' protest assumed 'modern', associational forms – trade unions, involvement in reformist politics – and eschewed both armed revolutionary commitment and violent street confrontations. Violence was absent, the political order was (broadly speaking) accepted, and economic grievances focused on questions of production rather than consumption. The workers struck against their employers (angling for political support while they did) and did not lynch *jefes políticos* or ransack Spanish pawnbrokers. As the comparison with Russia has already suggested, this pattern of development depended on factors outside the control of the workers themselves: it required not only the growth of modern industrial units (many of them foreign-owned and managed) but also the increasing tendency of the government (Porfirian, *Maderista*, *Carrancista*) to seek a rapprochement with labour, if only the better thereby to control it. The workers' acceptance of the state, and preparedness to invoke the authority of the state, required that the state meet them at least part of the way. Parallels with Europe, and the growth of labour reformism there, are evident. Given half a chance, the organised working class opted for unionism and reformism (sometimes camouflaged under revolutionary rhetoric); only when it was brusquely and brutally denied the chance did it entertain risky thoughts of revolution. Historically, the workers have not been born revolutionaries, but have had revolutions thrust upon them.

⁸³ Aguilar, pp. 122–30 and Simpich, Cananea, 16 Dec. 1912, SD 812.00/5746 on wages; see also Aguirre, pp. 156, 173, and David M. Pletcher, *Rails, Mines and Progress: Seven American Pioneers in Mexico 1867–1911* (Ithaca, 1958), pp. 229, 255. Not only were wages raised; the American share of the force – at Cananea, as on the railways, a source of discontent – was cut from 34% (1905) to 13% (1912).

⁸⁴ Lefavre, Mexico City, 24 Nov. 1910, Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, Mexique, Pol. Int., N.S. 11: Gavira, *op.cit.*, pp. 28–9; R. Díaz to M. López Jiménez, 22 March 1915, Trabajo 32/1/1/14; Canada, Veracruz, 13 April 1915, SD 812.00/14982.

⁸⁵ Anderson, *Outcasts*, p. 308; Carr, *Movimiento Obrero*, 1, 49–50.

III

The object of this exercise is not to create another trite typology of 'primitive' rebels and 'modern' reformists, but to explain historical developments in Mexico between c. 1900 and 1920. Finally, therefore, these generalisations must be placed in historical context (whence they were extracted in the first place). So far as the working class is concerned, the revolutionary decade breaks down into three political phases, and two economic (though, as usual, the political phase can be precisely delimited, while the economic must be rather arbitrarily sliced): (1) the period of political liberalisation and modest labour reform during the Madero regime (1911–13); (2) the Huerta military dictatorship (1913–14), during which political freedom gave way to repression, but the workers' capacity to engage in apolitical, economic struggle was less affected; and (3) the phase of Constitutionalist rule, aptly characterised as one of revolutionary 'ambivalence' towards the labour movement.⁸⁶ But meanwhile, and in many respects more important, there occurred the gradual, ultimately disastrous decline of the economy: the collapse of the peso, of some (not all) exports, of agricultural and industrial production, and thus of living standards; a trend evident in 1913–14, precipitate in 1914–16, and only showing signs of genuine recovery in 1918–20. Taken together, these developments set the context in which the working class had to act.

The 1910 revolution ushered in a phase of political change, popular mobilisation, and plebeian optimism – all of which historians have consistently underestimated.⁸⁷ Though it had contributed little to the overthrow of Díaz, the urban working class at once began to display its 'marked tendency to associate', taking advantage of the new, liberal political climate. Indeed, even before Díaz fell, working-class mobilisation was apparent; soon local, regional and national labour organisations were established (the *Unión Minera Mexicana* in 1911, the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* in 1912); the workers contributed to the efflorescence of the press made possible by *Maderista* tolerance; and strikes proliferated in all sectors of industry.⁸⁸ The railways of Yucatán were struck, the factories of Chihuahua, Torreón and Orizaba; the mines of Coahuila, Sonora and San Luís; the

⁸⁶ Ruiz, *Labor*; comments of Jean Meyer in Frost *et al.* (eds.), p. 66z.

⁸⁷ John Rutherford, *Mexican Society during the Revolution: a Literary Approach* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 189, 236–7, is a good but not untypical example.

⁸⁸ Carr, *Movimiento Obrero*, 1, 58–63; examples of strikes taken chiefly from American consular reports for 1911–12, which contain abundant information.

smelters at Monterrey, Wadley and Aguascalientes; the docks at Veracruz, Tampico, Frontera, Puerto Mexico, Manzanillo and Acapulco. As early as July 1911 it was observed in Durango, that 'more strikes have taken place in the last two months than in all the history of this district'.⁸⁹ And though the grievances were almost invariably economic (hours, pay, conditions), it was abundantly clear that these strikes 'would not have occurred except for the condition of political unrest' prevailing in the country.⁹⁰ In general, the political authorities were reluctant to repress striking workers: not only did they (the authorities) subscribe to liberal beliefs; they were also, in many cases, too insecure to risk trouble. But, from Madero down, they were prepared to call out the troops when they feared damage to property of disruption of public order (which in the current climate was often enough), and there was no question of the regime conniving at proletarian militancy.⁹¹ Like Díaz before him, however, Madero realised that a hands-off policy, if ideologically sound, was politically inadequate; once again, the government was drawn into industrial disputes and compelled to smooth industrial relations – partly to defend the economy and the peso, partly to avoid potentially bloody conflicts. And Madero went further than Díaz, establishing the Department of Labour, whose brief was to settle disputes, defuse proletarian militancy, and help rationalise industry to the benefit of all parties. The second of these objectives was clearly recognised by Labour officials: 'it is an urgent necessity to acquire an understanding of the workers' associations, pointing out to them the course they ought to take'; and the Department's philosophy in general was epitomised in the two 1912 textile agreements which, in seeking to guarantee minimum wages while rationalising textile production, were attractive on paper, but proved impossible to implement with any degree of success.⁹² If benefits conceded from above were elusive, so, too, were those won by syndical efforts on the ground. Despite the plethora of strikes in 1911–12, working-class gains were very limited. As yet, unions had neither the organisational nor the financial resources to sustain protracted strikes; the abundant labour supply made it relatively easy for

⁸⁹ Hamm, Durango, 30 July 1911, SD812.00/2265.

⁹⁰ Voetter, Saltillo, 12 Aug. 1911, SD 812.00/2346.

⁹¹ Madero to Governor Rosales, Hidalgo, 18 Jan. 1912. Fabela *op.cit.*, III, 45; *El Socialista*, 16 Jan. 1913. For examples of repression, Carr, *Movimiento Obrero*, I, 67; Kirk, Manzanillo, 19 March 1912, SD 812.00/3361.

⁹² R. Sierra y Domínguez to Trabajo, 13 March 1913, Trabajo, 31/3/7/22; Ruiz, *Labor*, pp. 32–6.

employers to break strikes, as they did on the Manzanillo docks, in the mines of Coahuila, and at the time of the attempted general strike at Torreón.⁹³ At Aguascalientes, for example, the centre of the National Railways machine shops, ‘in most strikes the strikers gained very little of anything. . . the authorities used all their influence to smooth matters over but did not accomplish much in the way of getting the demands of the strikers satisfied’.⁹⁴ Where modest gains were made – at Tampico, Cananea, or on the Yucatán railways – it was usually in the more buoyant export sector, which also boasted the strongest unions.

The ‘tendency to associate’ was also evident in the political field, where it was encouraged by the new, open (or half-open) politics of the Madero administration. Working-class anti-re-electionism, a notable feature of 1909–10, revived in 1911–12. Madero’s reconstituted liberal party now contained branches with impeccably proletarian names – Martyrs of Río Blanco; Union of Freight Workers – while in some regions the politicisation of the working class was the dominant feature of the new liberal order.⁹⁵ At Tampico, for example, political candidates, aspiring to state or national office, eagerly courted the nascent labour unions, especially Kelly’s stevedores; working-class participation in liberal electoral politics was evident in industrial centres like Monterrey and Aguascalientes.⁹⁶ In such cases (certainly at Tampico) political and economic muscle went together. The Tampico workers were now benefiting from the oil boom; they ‘have continuous work and their wages are above those paid in other parts of Mexico (and there seems to be no idea of revolution)’; hence, successful unionisation and successful political participation were both possible.⁹⁷ Over and above specific political affiliation, meanwhile, the urban working class showed a disposition to support the government in the face of sustained rural revolution, since governmental stability and peace guaranteed jobs, while revolution jeopardised them. Hence, there were peace demonstrations in Tampico and Saltillo and, three years before the Red

⁹³ Kirk, Manzanillo, 7 Aug., Ellsworth, Cd. Porfirio Díaz, 11 Aug. 1911, SD 812.00/2346; Hamm, Durango, 27 Nov. 1911, SD 812.00/2856.

⁹⁴ Schmutz, Aguascalientes, Aug. 1911, SD 812.00/2346.

⁹⁵ E. Arenas to G. Madero, 24 Aug. 1911; AFM r. 20; Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, ch. 6, pt. iii.

⁹⁶ The Tampico workers, whose politicisation has already been noted (n. 75), became vital elements in the political battle between Portes Gil and Lopez de Lara in Tamaulipas: Adleson, pp. 633ff.; Hanna, Monterrey, 1, 11 Aug. 1911, Schmutz, Aguascalientes, 1 July 1912, SD 812.00/2256, 2346, 4381; note also the Aguascalientes electoral returns (San Pablo), 1 Oct. 1911, in AFM r. 20.

⁹⁷ C/o USS *Des Moines*, Tampico, 25 Sept., 8 Oct. 1912, SD 812.00/5091, 5195.

Battalions signed up, volunteers came forward from the mines of Coahuila and the docks of Mazatlán, offering to help defend the status quo.⁹⁸

Like Italian industrialists of the time, it could be said, the Mexican workers were 'government supporters by definition';⁹⁹ and this in part explains their relative complaisance in the face of Huerta's military coup. True, Huerta was not welcomed, and Madero was genuinely mourned; but there was no rapid, belligerent, working-class response. And Huerta (though his supposed reformism has been grotesquely exaggerated by revisionist historiography) had no desire and no need to antagonise the workers: he had enough on his plate with continued rural rebellion and growing American displeasure. While working-class political subversives (along with middle-class political subversives) got short shrift (hence the eventual closure of the *Casa* in May 1914), unionisation and strikes continued, as did the mollifying activity of the Department of Labour.¹⁰⁰ But by now, the decline of the economy was beginning to depress working-class economic resistance, irrespective of the prevailing regime.

The final phase of the revolution presents a paradoxical appearance. On the one hand, official patronage of and solicitude for urban labour reaches unprecedented heights; the resurrected *Casa* receives the blessing of the Constitutionalist leadership (and with it subsidies, premises, and presses); the Red Battalions are recruited to fight for the Constitutionalist cause; military leaders throughout the country, engaged first in military battles with *Villistas* and *Zapatistas*, later in political battles with each other, compete for working-class support with labour decrees offering minimum wages, maximum hours, sick pay, accident compensation, favourable arbitration.¹⁰¹ Thus, to its friends, Constitutionalism appears as a 'reforming movement of international importance'; to its enemies, an offshoot of 'Trotski's Russia'.¹⁰² And Constitutionalist reformism culminates in the 1917 Constitution, of which article 123 represents the Magna Carta of Mexican labour. But, as that shrewd observer Ernest Gruening put it,

⁹⁸ Urquizo, *Páginas*, p. 33; Ellsworth, Cd. Porfirio Díaz, 18 March 1912, SD 812.00/3341; Angel Flores *et al.* to Gobernación, 17 Feb. 1912, AG 14, 'Relaciones con los Estados'; railwaymen and Cananea miners also offered to aid the Madero regime militarily: Jose Gutiérrez to Madero, AFM r. 20; Marcelino Caraveo to Madero, 27 Nov. 1911, AG Convención Revolucionaria.

⁹⁹ Roland Sarti, *Fascism and the Industrial Leadership in Italy 1919-40* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ Ruiz, *Labor*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰¹ Davis, Guadalajara, 7 Nov. 1914, SD 812.50/3; M. Triana to Gobernación, 14 June 1916, AG 86/7; *El Demócrata*, 3 Feb., 7 March 1916.

¹⁰² Carr, 'Casa', pp. 618-19; W. F. Buckley (oil company attorney) in *US Senate, Investigation of Mexican Affairs* (2 vols. Washington, 1919-20), p. 827.

‘in labor . . . as in all else Mexican, things are not what they seem or what they are declared to be’.¹⁰³ Beneath the rhetoric and official reformism, the social reality of 1915–20 was one of disease, dearth, malnutrition, unemployment and poverty. Within the general *saufe qui peut* of these years, some workers (chiefly those in the flourishing export sectors, oil and henequen) managed to maintain living standards. Yucatán, under Alvarado’s ‘burgeoning welfare state’, had never had it so good, as henequen profits were ploughed back into the social infrastructure; the oil workers, by dint of strong organisation and strike activity, were able to exact better terms from the increasingly profitable oil companies.¹⁰⁴ But elsewhere times were hard – particularly and embarrassingly so in some sectors under government control, such as public utilities, railways, and the collieries of Coahuila.¹⁰⁵ The frequent strikes of these years, at first sight indications of labour militancy, attuned to the ‘revolutionary’ temper of the times, were in fact desperate attempts to prevent living standards falling too far, even below subsistence. Hence the most common demand was for wages to be pegged to gold, thus avoiding the constant depreciation of paper wages which, even a Constitutionalist officer admitted, ‘were insufficient to maintain the subsistence of the proletarian classes’.¹⁰⁶ This was the basic demand of the miners of Pachuca and Dos Estrellas (Mex.), of the Mexico City printers and the machine shop workers of Aguascalientes, of the Monterrey smelter employees and even the (militant) workers of Tampico¹⁰⁷ It precipitated strikes in Veracruz, the capital, Chihuahua and elsewhere; it prompted a strike by the Nuevo Laredo police; in Mexico City itself there was an affray when the government tried to pay off striking police and tram workers in virtually worthless paper.¹⁰⁸ In such circumstances the modest funds accumulated by unions or mutualist societies were soon spent, or rendered useless (the collapse of a mutualist society, patiently built up over five years at Cananea, was attributed to the ‘frightful’ fluctuations in the currency).¹⁰⁹ In such circumstances, too, some employers

¹⁰³ Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and its Heritage* (New York), p. 342.

¹⁰⁴ G. M. Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatan, Mexico and the United States, 1880–1924* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 141; R. Campbell, Mexico City, 9 Jan. 1918, FO 361/3242, 38000.

¹⁰⁵ F. Garzall to Carranza, 8 May 1916, Carranza Archive, Condumex; c/o USS *Marietta*, Veracruz and Tampico, 23, 30 March 1916, SD 812.00/17729, 17921.

¹⁰⁶ Jefe político, Tepic, to Gobernación, 27 Oct. 1916, AG 81/21.

¹⁰⁷ *El Demócrata*, 25, 29 Nov. 1915, 26 Jan. 1916; Schmutz, Aguascalientes, 6 March; Hanna, Monterrey, 27 Oct. 1916; SD 812.00/17476, 19664; Adleson, p. 636.

¹⁰⁸ US border report, 20 May; Thurstan, Mexico City, 24 Nov. 1916; SD 812.00/18284, 19943.

¹⁰⁹ S. Rivas to Chamber of Deputies, Hermosillo, 27 Sept. 1919, Trabajo 34/2/8.

now found labour unusually 'respectful'; and some workers even surrendered the battle over wages and besought the government to 'turn its attention to the abuses being perpetrated by the majority of merchants on account of the excessive increase in prices' (an approach which the government, as a major employer of labour and the sole printer of money, was only too keen to encourage).¹¹⁰

The official press might denounce hoarders and speculators, but this did not solve the problem. To the government, pressed to meet its daily commitments to troops and police, and exercising only a tenuous control over much of the country, even the defensive struggles of the workers seemed treasonable.¹¹¹ Carranza and many of his colleagues had never warmed to the alliance with the *Casa*; and when the latter extended its propaganda throughout the country, and the Department of Labour (the government's chief counter to such subversion) proved incapable of conjuring the threat, there was a swift resort to force. In the course of 1916 the *Casa* was closed down, its leaders arrested, its archive destroyed; the Red Battalions were dispersed; *Casa*-inspired general strikes were broken in Tampico and Mexico City.¹¹² In invoking (for the second time) the old *Juarista* decree of 1862, which provided summary execution for treason, Carranza placed the strikers of 1916 in the same category as the *Huertistas* of 1913. The 'tyranny of the workers' was denounced in the press and in presidential decrees.¹¹³ Thus, between 1916 and 1918, as the economy passed its nadir and began a slow recovery, and the regime gradually consolidated itself, labour remained weak, repressed, hungry and disillusioned. In Coahuila, striking railwaymen alleged that the regime was 'attempting to put the government on the principles of the Díaz administration'.¹¹⁴ The working-class press, in its numerous but ephemeral newspapers, contemplated global events – the Russian revolution, labour agitation in Barcelona and Madrid, strikes in the American copper mines – as if these afforded some solace, some signs of labour militant and triumphant, while Mexico was in travail.¹¹⁵ Economic weakness implied political deference. Though working-class political support was still being solicited, the terms of trade tended to favour the *políticos* (that is, the

¹¹⁰ C. Husk, Santa Barbara (Parral) to Gral H. L. Scott, 12 May 1915, Scott Papers, Library of Congress, Box 18; *El Demócrata*, 3 March 1916.

¹¹¹ A. Millán to C. Aguilar, 23 March 1917, Carranza Archive.

¹¹² Rosendo Salazar, *Las Pugnas de la Gleba* (Mexico, 1923), pp. 148–50, 153–4, 166; Carr, 'Casa', 629; c/o USS *Marietta*, Tampico, 5 April 1916 SD 812.00/19921.

¹¹³ Decree of 1 Aug. 1916, Carranza Archive doc. 10097.

¹¹⁴ Blocker, Piedras Negras, 17 Feb. 1917, SD 812.00/20533.

¹¹⁵ E.g. *Evolución* (Zacatecas), 1 Oct. 1917.

generals). Groups like the *Partido Obrero Veracruzano* (which, suitably multiplied and accepted at face value, give an impression of labour militancy) were, in fact, in a parlous state: ‘almost disorganised’, as the organiser confessed, scarcely able to raise a quorum of twelve, its funds dissipated by fraud and by the collapse of the recent strike against the tram company.¹¹⁶ Soon after, Article 123 was handed down from on high. Few working-class delegates had attended the Constitutional Congress at Querétaro; of the handful which did, Nicolás Cano, the most vocal, denounced the present plight of the working class, concluding that ‘its’ more sure that we get bad governors than good ones’ – one of the last kicks of the old anarcho-syndicalist cause.¹¹⁷ The very radicalism of Article 123 could be tolerated by the conservative wing of *Carrancismo* precisely because the labour movement was then prostrate and in no state to demand its immediate implementation; it, therefore, remained a statement of intent, a promise of better things to come.

And, finally, the economy revived, and some sort of détente between the regime and the workers emerged. By 1919–20, with Carranza’s term drawing to a close, labour leaders, pragmatic as ever, saw the opportunity for a *transacción*. During the massive settling of accounts, rapprochements and realignments which took place in these years one of the most significant was the foundation of the CROM, and its alliance with the national heir-apparent, Obregón. These events have been well described elsewhere; it is worth stressing the role played by both the Mexico City artisans (led by Luís Morones) and the *Unión Minera Mexicana*, whose alliance with the smart young governor of Coahuila, Espinosa Mireles, paved the way for the CROM’s foundation at Saltillo in May 1918.¹¹⁸ The CROM represented the culmination of a long, hesitant process of détente between labour and the state: one that had begun appreciably before the revolution (and which had been pioneered by *Porfiristas*) but which the revolution served to accelerate; one that required the workers’ repudiation not only of anarcho-syndicalism (witness Morones, the ideologue and lyrical poet of yesterday, become the labour boss of today) but also of the pristine liberalism promised by Madero, to which many had eagerly responded in 1909–13. In place of these discarded dreams, it required their

¹¹⁶ D. A. Jiménez to C. Aguilar, 27 Jan. 1917, Carranza Archive.

¹¹⁷ *Diario de los Debates*, pp. 846, 848–50.

¹¹⁸ Carr, *Movimiento Obrero*, 1, 129–35; *Trabajo y Producción*, 18 Feb. 1917; for a personally graphic but politically haywire description of Espinosa Mireles and his crew of ‘demagogues, socialists, IWW’s, and Bolsheviks’, see O’Hea, Gómez Palacio, 11 March 1918, FO 371/3243, 60324.

acceptance of a very different regime, formally liberal, in fact semi-authoritarian and increasingly corporatist, in which organised blocs, headed by new-style caciques, mobilised, bargained and collided, under the controlling aegis of the state; and in which organised labour in particular acted as a crucial, clientelist ally of the state in its battles with the Church and (on occasions) foreign interests. Increasingly, therefore, as Mexico became a *país organizado*,¹¹⁹ numbers, organisation, and access to state power counted; the 'modern' workers' associations of the revolutionary decade, with their pragmatism, antipathy to mass violence, and respect for institutional power, pointed the way forward, and were able to play a disproportionate role in post-revolutionary politics. For, if the workers' relative weakness – cruelly highlighted by the travails of 1915–20 – rendered them dependent allies of the state, the state, for its part, had to make concessions and take note of working-class grievances. The CROM was established in the same years as the Stinnes–Legien pact in Germany; both, in their different ways, represented not only the workers' acceptance of corporate capitalism (and thus their further 'imbrication in the status quo') but also their conquest of a foothold within the state, which for workers in many other societies remained a distant dream.¹²⁰ Thus the labour leaders who emerged out of the decade of revolution (like their German contemporaries) traded independence and ideological fidelity for access to power. But they were not mere lackeys 'at the beck and call' of the regime; nor did they necessarily 'corrupt' the labour movement thereby.¹²¹ In its readiness to countenance political alliances and partake of power, the labour movement – at least in its 'modern', associational guise – contained the seeds of its own corruption. And had that not been the case, neither the revived militancy nor the solid achievements of the 1930s would have been possible.

¹¹⁹ Arnaldo Córdova, *La Política de Masas del Cardenismo* (Mexico, 1976), p. 202.

¹²⁰ Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany and Italy in the Decade After World War One* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 59–60. Cf., for example, 'the absolute repression by the Brazilian authorities of any attempt at trade union organisation, even the most peaceful', reported by the Italian consul at São Paulo: Michael Hall and Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, 'Elements for an interpretation of the early Brazilian labor movement', Paper given at the 44th International Congress of Americanists, Mimeo Manchester, Sept. 1982; and Thomas E. Skidmore, 'Workers and Soldiers: Urban Labor Movements and Elite Responses in Twentieth Century Latin America', in E. Bradford Burns and Thomas E. Skidmore, *Elites, Masses and Modernisation in Latin America, 1850–1930*, (Austin and London, 1979), pp. 99–103.

¹²¹ Ruiz, *Labor*, p. 70.