

single generation); and it impacted upon communities, especially rural communities, which had a long history of popular mobilization (not least, in the patriotic war against the French in the 1860s). Initially a popular and successful liberal hero, Díaz became increasingly detached from his supporters, reliant on Científico counsel, and unable to control the process of economic development he had helped initiate. Born in 1830, he was, by 1910, an old man, whose powers were in decline. Even when he attempted to rein in the provocative expansion of commercial landlords—for example, at the agrarian trouble-spot of Tamazunchale in the Huasteca—he found that his powers of mediation could not halt the headlong advance of land expropriation and concentration.

Meanwhile, within the narrow ranks of the Porfirian oligarchy, middle-aged aspirants for power began to jockey for the succession: in particular, Finance Minister Limantour, the guarantor of foreign business confidence, contested with General Bernardo Reyes, who enjoyed support in the economically buoyant north-east, and in the ranks of the army and its reserve militia (which Reyes had founded). But Díaz was loath to relinquish power. He played his rivals off against each other and when a vice-presidency was instituted in 1904, he ensured that the appointee, Ramón Corral, was an unpopular figure, lacking support, thus posing no threat to Díaz's personal authority. No efforts were made to institutionalize the regime: Díaz was re-elected president—in 1900 and 1904—by means of managed elections in which fly-by-night political parties existed solely to propose and applaud his re-election. But when a presidential election loomed again in 1910, a quite different scenario emerged which took the regime by surprise and provided the opening act of the Revolution.

If the combustible fuel of the Revolution thus derived from socio-economic—especially agrarian—tensions, the timing of the explosion obeyed a political rationale: the lead-up to the 1910

presidential election, which would inaugurate a six-year presidential term which Díaz could hardly be expected to survive. (In fact he died in 1915, in exile in France.) While oligarchic insiders jockeyed for power, seeking the president's favour, a broader political opposition now mobilized, chiefly in Mexico's burgeoning cities, calling for free elections, party competition, and a democratic succession. Essentially, the opposition sought to make a reality of the liberal Constitution of 1857—which still prevailed (in theory), and still stirred strong positive sentiments, even though Díaz had systematically traduced it in practice. In 1908 Díaz unwisely and perhaps unwittingly gave encouragement to the nascent opposition, declaring to an American journalist that Mexico was now ready for free democratic elections. His motives have been much debated; perhaps he wanted to smoke out the opposition; possibly he fell victim to a palace conspiracy; certainly he wanted to please American opinion. At any rate, now old and out of touch, he misjudged the consequences, since his invitation to political contestation was taken at face value by citizens who sought to make a reality of their paper constitutional rights.

The rise of opposition

Those citizens spanned a wide range of classes and sectors. The middle class—white-collar workers, professionals, and smaller businessmen—had grown along with the cities and the deepening of the market. These were literate people, who read the press, knew their Mexican history, and had a grasp of global news. Many harked back to the glorious old liberal-patriotic tradition of Juárez which, it was reasonably alleged, Díaz had abandoned in the interests of authoritarian power and skewed economic development. (The comparison may have flattered Juárez, but it was a cogent criticism of Díaz.) Such people also pointed to the advance of democracy in Europe (Republican France being the preferred model), in the US (where the Progressive movement was in full swing), and elsewhere in Latin America (notably Argentina).

For all its material advance, Mexico seemed mired in a personal dictatorship.

If the literate and articulate urban middle class tended to the incipient opposition of 1908-10, it did not lack for popular allies. The Mexican working class—both industrial workers and more numerous artisan class—were strongly drawn to liberalism which promised them representation and civic rights, while appealing to their staunch patriotic sentiments—liberalism fused with patriotism in the crucible of the French Intervention already mentioned, patriotism did not mean Boxerish xenophobia but, given that many companies and bosses were foreign (Canada and Río Blanco, scenes of recent repression, were American and French companies respectively), liberalism exerted an additional appeal among Mexican workers. Many of the latter were literate in particular, the urban artisans prided themselves on a measure of book-learning; they knew Mexican history (typically from a liberal/Juarista perspective), they eagerly read the 'penny press' (popular newspapers, aimed at the workers, notable for their acerbic caricatures), and, like aspiring artisans elsewhere in Catholic Europe or Latin America, they often displayed a robust anticlericalism.

The cities tended to be the focus of liberal opposition, but the countryside was by no means inert or detached. The liberal tradition had deep roots in rural communities and families (including prominent revolutionaries-to-be like Zapata, Obregón and Cárdenas) and, while it was harder to mobilize in scattered rural communities, a sequence of contested state elections in 1909, and 1910 showed that country people were also keen to base opposition candidates against the official nominees. Central political control began to slip from the hands of the regime.

Meanwhile, popular demands from below conspired with divisions with the narrow Porfirian elite. General Bernardo Reyes, a suitably macho military figure with a veneer of progressivism, emerged as

the figurehead of the opposition. But Reyes was Díaz's creature, ill-suited to lead a genuine political insurgency, and when Díaz sent him on a prolonged international mission (in effect, a decorous exile), he meekly complied. The vacuum at the top was now filled by another elite figure, though of a very different kind: Francisco Madero, a short, balding landlord and businessman, son of one of the richest families of northern Mexico, foreign educated, a devotee of spiritism and homoeopathic medicine, but a genuine idealist who sought—by peaceful persuasion—to make a reality of Mexico's liberal-democratic tradition. Advocating *sufragio efectivo, no re-elección* ('a real vote and no re-election'), Madero's Anti-re-electionist Party called for free elections in 1910 (in which Díaz could himself participate) (see Figure 1).

Their programme was quintessentially liberal, political, and moderate: Madero, like many of his supporters, was well aware of



The old regime and the causes of the Revolution

1. Anti-re-electionists—supporters of Francisco Madero—march in support of 'A Real Vote and No Re-election', in opposition to President Porfirio Díaz, 1910: typically, the scene is urban and the marchers are a mix of middle- and working-class men.

broader socio-economic grievances (the plight of urban workers, land hunger, the repression of the Yaqui Indians), but he favoured narrowly political solutions. Free elections, as Madero told the textile workers of Orizaba, would enable them to voice their grievances; but he did not offer them anything resembling socialism, still less social revolution.

Díaz underestimated Madero, while Madero's own family spun his quixotic political crusade. But it prospered. Copying the methods of US campaigning, Madero barnstormed the country by train, addressing mass meetings, distributing lapel buttons, attracting large and enthusiastic crowds. The regime was rattled no such challenge had been mounted in a generation of Porfirian rule. The authorities tried to beat Madero at his own game, but official rallies lacked appeal and tended to backfire. So the regime resorted to what it knew best—repression. Anti-reelectionist clubs were closed down, rallies were broken up, and opposition leaders—including Madero himself—were arrested. By the summer of 1910, as Mexico prepared to celebrate the centennial of its independence from Spain, it seemed that the regime had turned the corner. In June, Díaz was re-elected in an anodyne, stage-managed poll. Madero languished in gaol. Three months later, the Centennial went ahead with much self-congratulatory celebration and glad-handing. A German diplomat confidently reassured Berlin that 'I consider general revolution to be out of the question, as does public opinion and the press.' He was not the last foreign observer seriously to misread Mexican reality.

Chapter 3 The Madero revolt and regime (1910–1913)

From ballots to bullets

However, diplomats confined to the hothouse of Mexico City had very little idea of what was going on in the vast sprawling spaces of provincial Mexico. Madero's political campaign of 1909–10 had given hope to the many Mexicans, especially rural Mexicans, who resented the political bossism and economic abuses of the Porfiriato. Having promised a free election, Díaz had reneged: the door to peaceful electoral reform was slammed shut. The middle class of the major cities saw little point in persisting in quixotic opposition: they risked reprisals and had their careers and businesses to consider. Furthermore they were ill-suited to armed revolution: penned in the cities, they lacked guns, machetes, mounts, mobility, boltholes, and, perhaps most important of all, the experience and tradition of guerrilla warfare. All recent revolts had been readily put down. But Madero, quirky and quixotic, reached the inevitable conclusion that peaceful politicking had failed: he jumped bail and fled to the US, calling for an armed insurrection to begin on 20 November.

Now, the Revolution entered its armed phase, which demanded a significant change of personnel. The urban middle classes retired to the wings; so, too, did the urban working class who, by and large, were similarly ill-suited to violent insurrection (remember

slipping from the state's control and the legendary *rurales*, the cut fine figures in the eyes of impressionable Mexico City tourists proved utterly incapable of policing the countryside as they supposed to. By virtue of their speed, elusiveness, and overwhelming popular support, the rebels could evade pursuit and build up their forces piecemeal. This was a classic case of 'asymmetric warfare': a static well-armed conventional force confronting a mobile—but poorly armed—popular rebels.

Madero, the nominal leader of the Revolution, spent the early months of the insurrection in the US. Some have claimed that interests—the US government and/or big US companies—backed the Revolution in the hope of toppling Díaz. Like most conspiracy theories, this cannot be definitively refuted (if the conspiracy is good one, it leaves few traces). But the claim makes little sense. The Taft administration—a conservative Republican administration headed by a legalistic president—had good relations with Díaz and, in confronting the turmoil to the south, it followed legal norms: there were no grounds for arresting Madero unless he actively led an armed incursion across the border. US companies could, of course, clandestinely fund foreign rebellions if they could, but it is difficult to see why they would choose to do so in this case. They had done well under Díaz's rule and, even if some US interests resented the alleged preference shown to the British entrepreneur, Weetman Pearson (Lord Cowdray), it would have been a rather risky business to plan the ouster of the long-standing president in the expectation of some hypothetical benefit. Perhaps some minor foreign (not necessarily American) interests put speculation money into Madero's pocket; but all the evidence suggests that the financing of the Revolution was scanty and depended on the personal finances of those involved (Madero himself was rich), as well as the resources raised, on the ground in Mexico, by the rebels. And this meant, of course, that they were poorly armed, short of ammunition, and compelled to face the Federals' Mause with, at best, Winchester rifles—hunting weapons which soon overheated in a sustained firefight.

As the Revolution spread, it became clear that Madero could not remain in the US: the Díaz government clamoured for his arrest which, sooner or later, seemed likely; and, as the nominal leader of the Revolution, he had to exert his authority over the fast-growing but scattered and uncoordinated rebel forces. In February he crossed into Chihuahua, putting himself at the head of the largest rebel force, of perhaps 500 men. An ill-advised confrontation with Federal Army forces at Casas Grandes confirmed that the rebels could not face Díaz's professional army in open battle. The guerrilla war went on; meanwhile, in Mexico City, the vested interests of the old regime began to react to this unprecedented situation. Díaz sacked a few unpopular governors and made emollient noises. But it was too little too late. His key allies and advisers looked to save their own political skins, and to maintain the structure of the old regime, even if it meant ditching Díaz himself.

In April, as Madero mustered his rag-tag army on the outskirts of the northern border city of Ciudad Juárez, the government agreed to talks. But Díaz refused to resign, as the rebels demanded, and the talks broke down. Fearful that an attack on Juárez would produce casualties in neighbouring El Paso, Madero prudently ordered his army to retreat to the south. But his authority was tenuous and his plebeian lieutenants, spoiling for a fight, disobeyed and began to blast their way into the city, using improvised dynamite bombs against vulnerable adobe walls. Soon, the city was theirs, the Federal garrison had surrendered, and a major border port was in revolutionary hands. Talks were resumed and Díaz agreed to resign, in favour of an interim president, while Madero undertook to demobilize his forces and await the outcome of fresh presidential elections.

The Madero administrations: the travails of liberalism

This, the Treaty of Ciudad Juárez, ended the Maderista revolution as well as the Porfirian regime. It has been strongly criticized as a

premature capitulation, which allowed the substance of the regime—the army, officialdom, and political elite—to persist while stopping the Revolution in its tracks. The criticism is, but, just as the Porfirian elite saw the advantages of compromise, so, too, did Madero and some fellow-leaders of the Revolution. A humanitarian, Madero wanted to avoid further bloodshed; he also realized that, if they were to seize major cities from Federal hands (as they had Juárez), it would require extensive and costly fighting; and he was aware that, throughout northern and central Mexico, the partial collapse of the old regime threatened a descent into chaos. Sizeable rebel forces now prowled the countryside, threatening incursions into the cities. Aggrieved peasants were occupying disputed land. In isolated cities, food prices rose and the urban poor grew restive. Eventually riots broke out: in northern mining towns like Concepción del Oro, where local officials were butchered; in the big cities of the Bajío, home of a near-destitute artisan class; and in the cotton-country metropolis of Torreón where, unusually, the rebel forces joined with the local mob to loot and murder, the chief victims being the city's Chinese community. This was not the decorous liberal-democratic revolution which Madero and his *bien-pensant* allies had envisaged; hence their readiness to do a swift deal with the old regime.

But the deal rankled, especially with rebel leaders—like Orozco in the north or Zapata in the centre—who now led sizeable forces and could smell victory. The later history of the Revolution would amply confirm that the opinion of local military leaders was crucial to any durable political settlement. But Madero feared anarchy and favoured peace and order. He also too readily assumed that the likes of Zapata and Orozco—youthful, uneducated plebeian warlords-in-the-making—were unsuitable for high office (again, the later history of the Revolution proved otherwise). At the cost of much popular dissent and disaffection, the peace treaty held and an interim president—the conservative Catholic Francisco León de la Barra—took office, pending a presidential election in October which, predictably, Madero comfortably won

taking office a month later. Over the summer, however, the strains of the peace settlement became more acute. Interim President de la Barra threw his weight behind conservative elite interests who clung to power, while the 'Liberating Army' of the Revolution, hastily assembled during the winter and spring, was just as hastily demobilized and sent home. The first, short bout of civil war was over: it had ousted Díaz—who sailed into exile in France—and installed Madero as elected president. He could now implement his liberal-democratic political programme, but in testing circumstances, marked by mounting social and political tension.

Opposition, Right and Left

Madero had promised 'a real vote and no re-election': a functioning liberal democracy in accord with the 1857 Constitution. He was sincere, if naive, in pursuing these goals. But he faced enormous obstacles. On the Right (to use convenient and conventional labels) he had to reckon with the elites of the old regime, whom the peace treaty had spared: the landlord class, foreign and Mexican business interests, the Porfirian bureaucracy, and, above all, the army. (The position of the Church was more ambiguous; however, the Catholic hierarchy, as we will see, feared the Revolution and gravitated into the conservative camp.) These were minority interests, but they had money, status, influence, and political access. Above all, they sought a return to the Porfiriato, by which they meant strong authoritarian government which would keep Mexico's insurgent plebs in check. With Díaz gone, they looked to leaders like Bernardo Reyes or Félix Díaz (the deposed president's nephew) to assume the Porfirian mantle.

On the Left, meanwhile, stood the forces who had brought Madero to power, but whom he had summarily sent home: popular leaders like Orozco and Zapata, backed by their popular levies; insurgent peasants who sought to recover their lost lands; an incipient working-class movement which, though it had not risen up en masse in 1910–11, now took advantage of the new

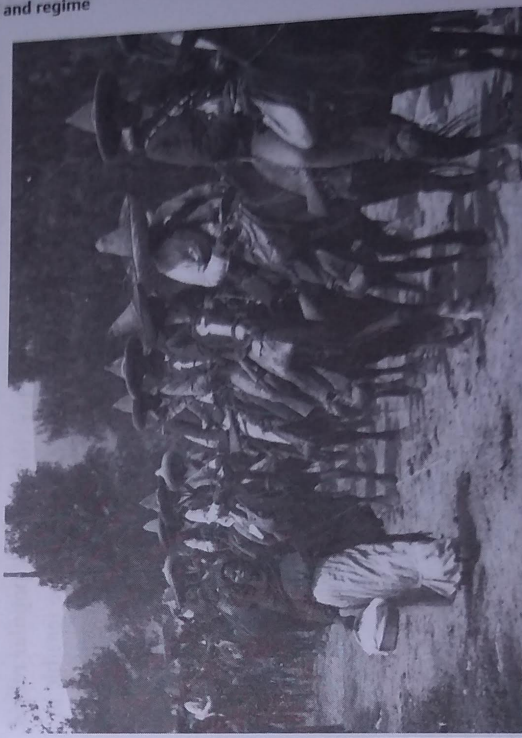
regime to organize, strike, and press their claims through the ballot box; and radicals—including some of the old PLM veterans and their followers—who wanted to push the Revolution beyond the narrow confines of Maderista liberalism. Madero found himself marooned on a narrowing middle ground, threatened by a rising tide to both Right and Left (though his tendency, over time, was to shift to the Right, that is, to rely on the Federal Army to bolster his fragile presidency).

The threats from Right and Left were qualitatively different. The Right, as an elite minority, could deploy the 'weapons of the strong'—money, political contacts, the power of the conservative press; but the Right lacked a mass following and, when it came to the *ultima ratio* of armed force, it had but one weapon (albeit a potentially crucial one): the Federal Army, which Madero courted, funded, and even expanded. So long as the army remained guardedly loyal, Madero was safe from a top-down military coup; hence, attempts by conservative leaders like Reyes or Félix Díaz to oust the president by insurrectionary means failed miserably. But the army watched and waited. The Left, loosely defined, could count on ample popular support, as had the initial Revolution of 1910–11. Disappointed by the peace treaty and the rightward shift of the Madero regime, revolutionary leaders now resumed their rebellious ways, denouncing Madero's betrayal of their cause. Two major revolts broke out in 1911–12; both were, in essence, continuations of the initial insurgency of 1910–11.

In Morelos, Zapata resumed his agrarian struggle, proclaiming the Plan of Ayala, which would remain the Zapatista programme and banner for nearly a decade. It excoriated Madero, reiterated the old Maderista promise of free elections, but also provided for distribution of land from hacienda to village. Initially quite moderate, the agrarian demands of the Zapatistas grew more radical as the Revolution progressed and the country became more politically polarized. Zapatismo soon spilled over from Morelos into neighbouring states in central Mexico; meanwhile,

rebel forces elsewhere—the Cedillo brothers in San Luis, insurgent Yaqui Indian in Sonora—seconded the Zapatista demand for land reform. Rooted in their peasant villages, fighting a classic guerrilla war, the Zapatistas were redoubtable opponents (see Figure 2). Madero, like a good hand-wringing liberal, lamented the need for harsh measures, but he unleashed the Federal Army on Morelos, where it adopted all the tactics typical of counter-insurgency, familiar from the Boer war and Spanish campaigns in insurgent Cuba: shooting prisoners, razing villages, and 'concentrating' the civilian population.

Morelos suffered; but Zapatismo proved inextinguishable. The fighting ebbed and flowed. Tied to their villages, the Zapatistas tended to campaign during the winter, roughly November–April; when the summer rains came, planting and harvesting took priority and the fighting ebbed, encouraging the Federal Army to claim, spuriously, that Zapatismo was a spent force. In nearby Mexico City, the conservative press, when it was not lampooning



2. Zapatista forces from southern Mexico, with accompanying soldadera.

President Madero, treated its readers to spine-chilling stories of Zapatista rapine. In fact, the rapine was largely the work of the Federal Army.

Zapatismo thus became the pre-eminent peasant and agrarian movement of central Mexico. In the north, a more serious challenge arose when Pascual Orozco declared against the Maderan government early in 1912, alleging betrayal of the revolutionary cause, calling for social reform, and carrying with him many of the northern veterans of 1910–11. Orozquismo was thus a popular, radical, and nationalist movement which, unlike Zapatismo, benefited from ample regional resources as well as access to the US border. However, in a bizarre twist not unusual in the history of revolutions, disaffected members of the old Chihuahua elite, aggrieved at their loss of political power, threw in their lot with the rebellion, in the hope of overthrowing Madero and his regional representative, the reformist Governor Abraham González.

A short-lived marriage of convenience, this union of popular rebel and conservative counter-revolutionary elites was more feasible in the north—where popular motives were mixed and leaders like Orozco could be seduced by elite blandishments—than in central Mexico, where the weight of village tradition and the overriding goal of land reform deterred any such opportunistic alliance of Left and Right, plebs and patricians, against the beleaguered Centre. In Morelos, class divisions (accentuated by ethnicity) were too sharp: Zapata would no more ally with the sugar planters than they would ally with the swarthy 'bandit' who threatened their lives and livelihood.

As in 1910–11, the northern (Orozquista) revolution proved mobile and effective, winning a major battle at Rellano in March 1912. It seemed that the rebels might now advance on a panicky Mexico City. But Madero placed his faith in the Federal Army, commanded by a ruthless and experienced old general, Victoriano

Huerta, who, two months later, defeated the Orozquistas, his artillery taking a heavy toll. The rebels dispersed, now bent on raiding; and the chief politico-military threat to the Madero government was eliminated. The government survived, but it could not bring peace. The Zapatistas and other popular rebels remained active, chiefly in central Mexico.

In the south, too, the reverberations of Revolution were now felt. Following the fall of the Porfirian state, old disputes bubbled to the surface: if, in much of central Mexico, these derived from agrarian tensions (chiefly, the classic confrontation of village and hacienda), a secondary form of conflict involved battles for political pre-eminence between rival towns, cities, and regions. In Oaxaca—a sprawling, variegated, ethnically diverse southern state—the government in the Valley of Oaxaca struggled to impose its will on dissident communities both in the Mixtec highlands and down on the hot lowlands of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Further south, in Chiapas, a local civil war broke out, pitting the old clerical/conservative capital, San Cristóbal, against the new upstart—and liberal—city of Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

The democratic experiment

With the glue of Porfirian rule removed, it seemed, the mosaic of national power created by Díaz was falling apart, as towns, villages, and localities sought to assert their autonomy against rivals, these assertions often involving class, ethnic, or ideological inflections. Madero, increasingly seen as an effete civilian, appeared unable to control the deteriorating situation; and many of his erstwhile middle-class supporters, who had hailed the new dawn of democracy in 1910, now gravitated to the Right, lamenting the breakdown of 'order and progress' and fearing for their own lives and livelihoods. Indeed, Madero himself, by bolstering the Federal Army and sanctioning repressive counter-insurgency campaigns in Morelos and elsewhere, encouraged this liberal apostasy.

Yet, at the same time, the president sought to institute a functioning democracy, as he had promised. Competitive elections were held; parties flourished; and 'mass publics' became involved in politics to a degree unknown under Díaz. At the same time, Madero allowed a much greater measure of press freedom (and much of the press used to snipe at the president). Mexico thus experienced a genuine, if partial, democratic *apertura* (opening). It was partial because, in a context of sustained social upheaval and even civil war, many regions—such as Morelos and Chihuahua—could hardly practise a limp liberal democracy. In addition, the old Porfirian elite—still strong in the south, in particular—disdained democracy and strove to curtail mass political mobilization (even to the extent of eliminating dangerous popular leaders or outspoken journalists). In many cases, therefore, Maderista democracy failed to deliver, and appeared something of a sham. But in some parts of the country it functioned, after a fashion.

Three features of this incipient democracy deserve mention. First, in some states electoral politics assumed a class logic, as workers threw their weight behind preferred candidates. A key example was the oil port of Tampico, where a lively working class combined trade union activity with pragmatic politics, showing that the urban workers, even if they had not, in the main, taken up arms were useful allies when it came to urban electoral politics. In the state of Tlaxcala, 'hyphenated' worker-peasants (who combined agricultural work with stints in the local textile factories) managed to elect one of their own to the state governorship, alarming the local landed elite. Though a minority in the land, organized labour thus displayed its political potential.

Second, in those regions where the Catholic Church was powerful—notably the centre-west (including the states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, Michoacan, and Aguascalientes)—a form of ideological politics arose, pitting liberals against political Catholics ('political Catholics' being those whose politics was premised on

their Catholicism and who often took their cue from the *cura*—the parish priest). Liberal/Catholic conflict was nothing new in Mexican history, as I discuss in Chapter 6; but the initial Maderista revolution had avoided anticlericalism and Madero himself was a believer, if a rather unorthodox one. When, taking advantage of the democratic opening of 1911, a new Catholic Party (the PCN: Partido Católico Nacional) was formed, Madero welcomed it as a legitimate player in the new democratic game. The PCN was strong in the centre-west and soon acquired an important representation in the National Congress. While Madero applauded this outcome, some liberals, who carried the old anticlerical political gene, were alarmed and resisted. Catholics and liberals strenuously contested elections, sparred in the partisan press, and occasionally skirmished in the streets. As yet, this conflict could be seen as an inevitable squabble in the nursery of democracy. But it highlighted a crucial politico-cultural fault line which, before long, would become a broad and threatening abyss.

The Madero revolt and regime

A final significant factor concerned the rise of what could be called 'populist' politics. Under Díaz, political office depended on the favour of the president or his senior cronies; some elected representatives had never set foot in the districts they 'represented'. The Maderista political *apertura* meant that popular support counted (e.g. in the cases of Tampico and Tlaxcala). As a result, a new brand of *político*, endowed with different traits, entered the political stage. We can take as a single example Alvaro Obregón, who will figure prominently in the following narrative. A small farmer from the go-ahead commercial north-western state of Sonora, Obregón had not—to his chagrin and regret—joined the Revolution in 1910–11. Rather, he won his spurs fighting against the remnants of the Orozquistas who, after their defeat at the hands of Huerta, scattered across the mountains from Chihuahua into Sonora.

As well as displaying an unusual—if amateur—military aptitude, Obregón also ran for mayor of his local town, Huatabampo, and

won, which he did by appealing to diverse constituencies: friendly landlords, their 'gangs of peons', the local garrison officials (his brother was interim mayor), and the Mayo Indians who were mobilized by their Indian 'governor'. This was a real election—not a top-down imposition, Porfirian-style—but it also involved some shrewd politicking, allied to a populist style (Obregón, for example, could speak Mayo to the Mayos). As this phenomenon pointed the way forward: not necessarily to pristine liberal-democratic politics, as Madero had hoped, but at least to a politics that genuinely involved both 'mass public' and a new kind of populist campaigning.

Populism was not Madero's forte. The political capital he had initially enjoyed—as the victor of 1911—was soon spent. He relied excessively on the army (as his erstwhile revolutionary allies charged), yet he seemed incapable—as his vocal critics on the right complained—of restoring peace and order. His original political platform consisted of one big plank—electoral democracy—but implementation of this key promise was vitiated by continued warfare, as well as the difficulties of installing democracy after more than thirty years of Porfirian authoritarianism. Conflict plus ineffectuality were inimical to the creation of consensus, which was—and is?—a necessary basis of a functioning democracy. To put it differently, it was supremely difficult for Mexicans to institute, almost overnight, a new (democratic) system, when old-regime interests were hostile and popular revolutionary forces sought radical policies of land and labour reform. This had nothing to do with some enduring Mexican psyche (the legacy of Hispanic colonialism or the sanguinary Aztecs). Democracy is best learned and tested over time, and Madero had very little time; it is also best learned and tested in societies which are not racked by class, ethnic, and regional tensions, as Mexico was in 1911–12. To that extent, Madero's failure was, if not inevitable, at least heavily 'over-determined'.

As opposition candidate and, now, incumbent president, Madero had never promised sweeping social reform. He was aware of

social tensions, in both city and countryside, but he proposed that they should be mediated and resolved through the ballot box—a proposal which, in the conflictual circumstances of 1911–12, was naively optimistic. For Madero, solutions—to the agrarian problem or the demands of labour—would have to be legal and consensual, not the work of an arbitrary executive. Property rights had to be respected; at best, the state could distribute public land or revamp the—pitifully low—land tax in order to encourage redistribution. The question of land reform was debated in Congress (even if they remained beyond the political pale, the insurgent Zapatistas at least helped place the question on the national agenda); but no decisive action followed. Liberals like Madero also agreed that better education was essential, but education took time and money and, since the government's priority was survival, the expanded military took an increasing share of the budget (up from 20 per cent to 26 per cent of total spending), at a time when government revenue was, at best, static.

In one area, however, the government did innovate, since innovation made political sense and came cheap. The urban working class emerged from the 1910–11 Revolution with heightened hopes and better organization. Strikes came thick and fast (though with modest results); employers lamented the loss of discipline and the spread of subversive ideas; and workers, especially those in key sectors (ports, railways, textiles), forged opportunistic alliances with rising—often 'populist'—politicians. This represented less a dramatic U-turn than an acceleration of incipient trends evident in the late Porfiriato, when a few far-sighted politicians—such as Governor Dehesa of Veracruz—came to see organized labour less as a threat to be repressed, than a challenge to be met and, perhaps, an ally to be courted. Compared to the insurgent campesinos—often depicted as dark barbarians wielding bloody machetes—the urban workers, especially the literate artisans, seemed sober and civilized, members of a common urban culture, worthy of political redemption.

Amid the ideological ferment of the day, in which liberal, nationalist, socialist, and anarchist currents swirled, the left Casa del Obrero Mundial ('House of the World Worker') was set up in Mexico City, chiefly by radical artisans who advocated socialist-cum-anarchist policies hostile to capital, foreign investment, and the Church. In response, Madero's government created a new Department of Labour, whose task was to consider radical appeals, to display the state's solicitude for working-class interests, and to monitor and mediate labour relations (in order to deter strikes). Again, Madero fell before this initiative could achieve results, but it pointed the way forward: to a state-labour alliance which would underpin political stability and social progress.

Chapter 4 Counter-revolution and Constitutionalism (1913-1914)

Enter the army

Madero fell: how and why? Popular protest, as I have suggested, could test and weaken the regime, driving it into the Judas-embrace of the army; but, as the defeat of Orozco showed, it could not topple the central government. Only the army could do that and, in February 1913, it did. Madero had built up the army, conferring increasing de facto power on its generals (notably Victoriano Huerta). Like Allende in Chile sixty years later, he thus mortgaged his regime to the military. The officer class—still overwhelmingly Porfiristas who hankered after the old regime—objected to Madero less because he was a radical reformist, which he wasn't, than because he was an ineffectual civilian—short of stature, with a squeaky voice and idiosyncratic beliefs, such as spiritism and homoeopathy. He required them to do his counter-insurgency dirty work (which they often relished), but he did so with much liberal hand-wringing and lamentation. The army believed they would do a better job under more congenial leadership: one of their own, unfettered by liberal misgivings, in the mould of old Don Porfirio. And there would no doubt be fat pay-offs and kickbacks along the way.

Arrested for subversion, Bernardo Reyes and Félix Díaz languished in gaol in Mexico City. (His advisers had urged Madero