

to have them swiftly executed; but, again, liberal scruples held him back.) In February 1913 they were sprung from gaol in order to head a military uprising in the capital. As the rebels marched on the National Palace—expecting the doors to be flung open by friendly forces—a fusillade of shots rang out and Reyes was killed. Díaz, the junior partner, took refuge in a military arsenal in central Mexico City and, for the following ten days (known as Decena Trágica, the 'Ten Tragic Days') the capital, for the first time, experienced the horrors of civil war, as shells arced across downtown plazas and machine guns strafed the streets. The stand-off was resolved by means of treachery. Appointed commander of Madero's loyalist forces, Huerta contrived that they would be repulsed, with heavy losses, while he entered into clandestine negotiations with the rebel leaders, the US Ambassador, Henry Lane Wilson, offering his services as a sympathetic mediator. Finally, Huerta switched sides, arrested Madero, and had him surreptitiously killed, at dead of night. He then engineered a congressional farce, whereby he was appointed interim president. His allies—notably Félix Díaz—believed that interim meant interim; but Huerta had other ideas.

The coup of February 1913, involving both the overthrow and the killing of Madero, had decisive effects. Huerta and his allies, apart from promoting their own careers, hoped to return to the *belles-lettres* of the Porfiriato, for which they enjoyed the support of the old elite, the military, most foreign interests, and a significant section of the Catholic Church, whose celebration of the coup did not go unnoticed. In fact, far from turning the clock back, the coup set it running fast forward. That is to say, it resolved many of the contradictions which had vexed the Revolution since 1911 and ensured a renewed—now more prolonged and definitive—conflict between the forces of revolution and the forces of reaction.

By the time of his death Madero had lost most of his earlier popularity. But as a martyr to democracy, he became a potent symbol of resistance. Unlike the elites, the majority of the Mexican

people (as we know from detailed American consular reports) opposed the coup; even if they could not immediately resist, they grudgingly consented, awaiting the right moment to turn sullen resentment into outright rebellion. Resistance was difficult because Huerta had the army on his side and his immediate policy was one of root-and-branch repression: 'peace, cost what it may' was his slogan. For the likes of Zapata, he told a British diplomat, the only solution was an 'eighteen-centavo rope' with which to hang him, as any common bandit deserved. A career soldier, whose—very successful—career had involved a series of counter-insurgency campaigns, culminating in his defeat of Orozco in 1912, Huerta had scant grasp of politics and saw the 'iron hand' as the only way to govern Mexico's wayward masses. Though he wanted to emulate Don Porfirio, he had none of the latter's political acumen; and he faced the challenge of mounting popular protest, which demanded political as well as military responses. The so-called 'psychology of military incompetence' has few better representatives in history than Victoriano Huerta.

Huerta boosted the military, replacing elected governors with hand-picked generals, while sidelining both cabinet and Congress. Congress was closed at bayonet-point in October; and Huerta's 'cabinet' consisted of a handful of cronies who often conducted business in the up market cantinas of Mexico City, where Huerta slaked his prodigious thirst for fine French brandy. Popular rebels like Zapata were under no illusion and fought on, their resolve stiffened by the sudden turn of events in the capital; after all, they knew Huerta at first hand as a brutal military commander in Morelos. The same was true of many minor rebels—like the Cedillos of San Luis—who saw no reason to surrender to a government which considered them troublesome bandits, worthy of the noose. One notable exception was Pascual Orozco who, completing his bizarre political odyssey, came out of the wilderness to ally with his old nemesis, Huerta. In the main, however, Huerta relied exclusively on the old Federal army and, in reaction, many of the components of the fragmented Maderista coalition now

began to reassemble and reorganize. The Huerta coup thus brought fresh clarity to the political scene: the Revolution—its social and regional diversity—revived, and the old regime betting the bank on the army, made a final bid, as it turned out disastrously counterproductive attempt to restore the Porfirian force of arms.

The Revolution regrouped

In this new situation, the big northern frontier states—Coahuila, Chihuahua, and Sonora—played a key role. They had contributed disproportionately to the Maderista rebellion in 1910–11. As a result, they had also experienced greater political renovation than states in central or, a fortiori, southern Mexico. New men had come to power, especially at the grassroots—Alvaro Obregón, newly elected mayor of Huatabampo, being a good example. A historic antipathy to the distant and capricious authority of Mexico City was now heightened by the fear that Huerta would snatch away their political gains. Huerta did nothing to allay that fear. In Chihuahua, reformist Governor González was deposed the military and peremptorily murdered. Northern leaders took note: yielding to Huerta could be highly dangerous; perhaps valour was the better part of discretion.

That was the conclusion of Coahuila's governor, Venustiano Carranza, a crafty old *político* who had held office under Díaz rather unusually, backed Madero (who also came from Coahuila). As governor, Carranza had urged Madero—in vain—to beware the burgeoning Federal Army. In response to the coup, Carranza prevaricated, bought time, then, in March 1913, repudiated the Huerta regime, calling for a restoration of constitutional rule; hence the generic label of his Revolution—Constitutionalism—began it. Carranza had the support of a small state militia, but was no match for the Federals so, styling himself 'First Chief of the Constitutionalist Revolution', Carranza made the long overland

trek to the north-west, where the state government of Sonora had also rebelled, though more successfully.

The Sonoran revolt was a coordinated movement, involving the state administration and militia, capable of drawing on the state's rich resources (cattle and mining) to acquire arms from the US, albeit illegally and therefore expensively. Sonora enjoyed an additional advantage: it lay 1,000 miles from Mexico City and there was no direct railway link. By the time Huerta could dispatch troops to the north-west, the Sonoran revolution was up and running, an affirmation of regional autonomy and political representation in the face of military authoritarianism. The pioneer Sonoran rebels thus created a safe haven where Carranza and others could congregate; and they formed the key nucleus not only of the forces that would defeat Huerta, but also of the coalition which would eventually win the Revolution and create the revolutionary state of the 1920s, Alvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles foremost among them.

The final piece in the northern jigsaw was Chihuahua, the pioneer revolutionary state of 1910–11, which now reprised its role in opposition to Huerta. Here, the brutal Federal takeover had decapitated the state government, so an orderly Sonoran-style resistance was impossible. Instead, popular opposition to Huerta—which was extensive—was forged from the ground up, by local leaders, one of whom now shot to prominence: Francisco Villa who, along with Zapata, would become the great popular caudillo of the Revolution. (A hundred years later, Villa and Zapata are still the revolutionary leaders most recognized and revered in Mexico.)

Villa, born Doroteo Arango, came from a poor peasant family; as a teenager he fell on the wrong side of the law (versions vary, but a defence of family honour was probably involved); and he carved out a reputation as an intrepid bandit, rustler, and petty trader. With this experience under his belt, he provided useful service to

to Huerta removed... and Villa—who had only recently escaped from a Mexican... gaol—stepped into the breach.

He rapidly built a following among fellow-bandits and bushwhackers, cowboys, miners, railway workers, middle-class activists who opposed Huerta and saw in Villa a kind of popular caudillo who could mount an effective armed opposition. Uneducated—indeed, illiterate until he had recently learned to read while in gaol—Villa was shrewd, audacious, and popular. His bandit past gave him an intimate knowledge of the centre-north, its people and places. He was motivated by a genuine urge to uplift the common people (he was particularly keen on providing basic education) and to punish the arrogant elites—the local Creel/Terrazas faction—who had profited from the Porfiriato and brought about Madero's overthrow and death. Madero's family gravitated into the Villista camp. Villa's political vision may have been somewhat inchoate and unsophisticated, but he had no doubt about the righteousness of the Revolution and he rapidly mobilized forces in the north, he soon showed himself to be a bold and resourceful military commander.

While the continued Zapatista revolt in Morelos, now second in well-organized rebellions in the north, confronted Huerta with the biggest military challenge, resentment at the coup was apparent throughout Mexico and soon began to translate into armed opposition. As in 1910–11, rebellions tended to be localized, improvised, and initially poorly provisioned. But they were ubiquitous; and many of the later leaders of the revolutionary regime now made their names leading local forces against Huerta: the Cedillos in San Luis, Joaquín Amaro in Michoacán, the Gutiérrez brothers in Coahuila. Huerta thus faced two kinds of challenge: a potential advance by the burgeoning northern army soon capable of conventional campaigning; and a series of local

insurrections, loosely allied to the northern Constitutionalists, many of them following the precedent of Zapatismismo, by virtue of being peasant-based, agrarian, and committed, initially, to guerrilla warfare.

Militarization

Huerta's response, again indicative of the 'psychology of military incompetence', was to boost the army and rely on repression. He broke with his erstwhile civilian allies—Félix Díaz fled into exile in fear of his life—and created a thoroughgoing military regime. Military commanders ran the states, extracting resources as they saw fit. Congress was ignored, closed down by force, and then reconvened as a Huertista talking shop. The press was censored and dissident journalists were gaoled, sometimes murdered. The Federal Army payroll soared: from 20,000 in 1910 to 250,000 in 1914. In part, this was fiction: padded payrolls put money into officers' pockets. But the cost still mounted, in terms of both blood and treasure. The military budget spiralled out of control; and, when the government's dwindling revenue could not meet rising current expenditure, Huerta printed money. Since the rebels had begun their own paper-money production, Mexico began to drown in a polychromatic tide of pretty banknotes. Inflation rose, starting a cycle that would reach hyperinflationary levels in a couple of years. Mexico's credit, carefully husbanded under Díaz, collapsed: Huerta defaulted on the national debt; and, for over a generation, Mexico was cut off from foreign loans.

Counter-revolution and Constitutionalism

This did not prevent Huerta from acquiring arms abroad—initially from the US, also from Europe and Japan—on a grand scale. For a year the Federals heavily outgunned their opponents, who lacked artillery, had inferior small arms, and were chronically short of ammunition. What the Federals lacked was committed manpower. The Huertista cause was deeply unpopular, so voluntary recruitment proved impossible. Appeals were made to the landed class, but Mexico's *hacendados* were no warrior aristocracy and—as

Luis Terrazas commented in Chihuahua—if guns were given to the peasants, they might well be turned on the peasants' masters.

The only alternative was forced recruitment, which had a long history in Mexico, but which elicited strenuous opposition, resistance, and evasion. In some cases, hitherto quiet regions in the northern highlands of Puebla, where Indian communities lived on the margins of both state and market—were provoked to rebellion by the Federal recruiting sergeant. The press-gangs (*leva*) was also at work in the major cities, rounding up men and boys from the trams and the markets, seizing them as they emerged from bullrings and cinemas. Of course, such reluctant conscripts made poor soldiers: when they could they deserted (and by the spring of 1914 desertion was rife); and officers were weary of heading into open country with sullen armed conscripts at their backs. Though the Federal Army fought well, especially when it dug into fortified towns, its morale was always suspect and readily surrendered the countryside to rebel forces; and, during 1914, its will to win collapsed in the face of successive defeats.

For the rebels to exploit Federal weakness and triumph, they had to make the difficult transition from guerrilla to conventional warfare—something they had not had time to do in 1910–11. The northern forces pioneered this transition; Zapata and others in central Mexico advanced more slowly down the path of professionalization, retaining a closer organic link with their peasant communities, while the free-wheeling northern armies undertook prodigious feats of recruitment, supply, and logistics. (The title of Obregón's meticulous autobiography says it all: *Ocho mil kilómetros en campaña*—‘eight thousand kilometres on campaign.’)

The role of the US

A key actor in this transition was the United States. Thus far, the role of the US in the Revolution was fairly marginal. American

economic interests were part of the fabric of Mexican economic life, especially in the north, but that did not mean that resentment against those interests fuelled the Revolution. In fact, the evidence for this common assertion is thin. Some American interests were resented—for example, because they discriminated against Mexican workers, as they did at Cananea, or on the railways—but this was in no sense a major cause of the Revolution. Most revolutionary leaders—Madero, Villa, Carranza, Obregón—maintained pragmatic relations with American interests (which yielded valuable resources and revenue). In fact, rather than greater hostility was shown by Huerta and the army; in part because of the army's ingrained anti-Americanism, but also because of evolving US policy towards Mexico.

Counter-revolution and Constitutionalism

Republican President Taft had maintained generally good relations with the Madero government; but his Ambassador in Mexico City, Henry Lane Wilson, increasingly—and vitriolically—denounced the embattled president, applauded his overthrow, and even helped smooth Huerta's Machiavellian path to power. (These were the days when ambassadors were important, not just decorative; and when, as in this case, they could pursue policies independently of their distant governments.) Huerta's coup coincided with the arrival of Woodrow Wilson in the White House, thus of a Democratic administration, critical of big business and dollar diplomacy and, eventually, committed to a liberal-interventionist foreign policy—first in Mexico, then in war-torn Europe. Indeed, Mexico provided the first major scenario for Wilson's 'new diplomacy'.

While cynical Europeans might view the ouster and killing of Madero as the usual Mexican way of doing things (which they viewed with equanimity, just as they hailed Huerta as the 'strong man' whom the wayward Mexicans needed), Wilson came to believe that Mexico was ripe for democracy, even social reform. Initially, he refrained from recognizing the new Huerta government; and he recalled Ambassador Wilson, preferring to

report on Mexico (which they say, given very unreliably). The summer of 1913 Huerta continued to import arms legally from the US, while the northern rebels had to rely on limited and expensive shipments of contraband weapons. This illegal trade made fortunes for US arms dealers, but it was also made possible by the strong sympathy for the Revolution evident in American border communities, especially their Mexican/Latino populations.

When Huerta forcibly closed Congress in October, Wilson ordered the border; and, four months later, he decided to allow the free export of arms to the rebels—a crucial decision which enabled northerners to equip major conventional forces that could take war to the Federal Army. Wilson's decision, which cynical European observers deplored, was not—as the Europeans surmised—designed to prolong the war and facilitate an American takeover; rather, Wilson wanted to speed the victory of the Constitutionalists, to end military tyranny, and help create a stable, representative political system south of the border. Indeed, his most egregious intervention, and ill-advised as it was counterproductive, was the seizure by American naval forces of the Atlantic port of Veracruz in April 1914: a plan designed to cut off Huerta's arms supply and hasten his fall which in fact, did neither, while it enabled Huerta to play the national card (if to little effect), while seriously straining American relations with the rebels.

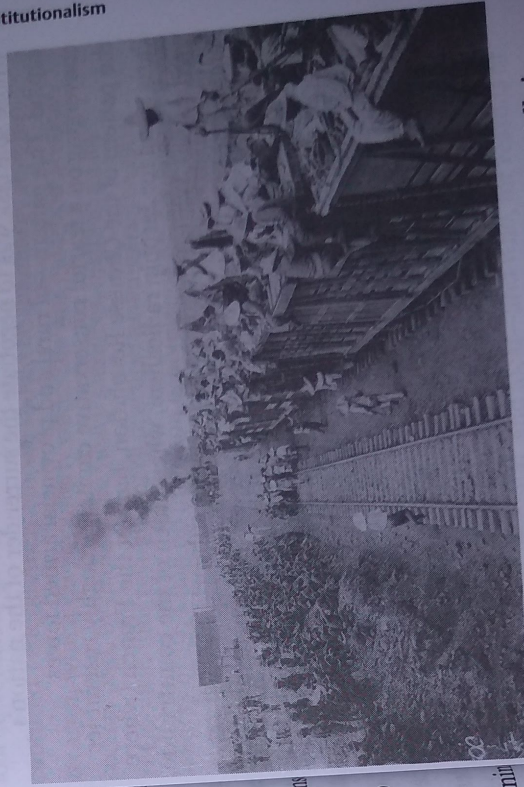
Flawed in its execution, Wilson's policy nevertheless made sense. While the name—'Constitutionalists'—no doubt appealed to Wilson's liberal academic sensibilities, the president was also aware of the social tensions underlying the Revolution and accepted the need for a land reform, not least because the Constitutionalists had effectively lobbied in Washington, gaining the ear of the president himself. And, while Wilson's grasp of events in Mexico was often naive and patchy, it was certainly better—that is, more sound and coherent—than that of his European counterparts, who, viewing things through racist and

colonialist lenses, clung stubbornly to the belief that the Revolution was systematic banditry and that Huerta was Mexico's last best hope for a successful neo-Porfirian solution.

The triumph of the Revolution

In spring 1914, with the US arms embargo lifted, the northern armies could acquire rifles, machine-guns, artillery, and ammunition sufficient to accelerate their advance on Mexico City. While Obregón led his—predominantly Sonoran—forces down the west coast, already displaying remarkable military flair, Pancho Villa's Division of the North, 15,000-strong and growing, equipped with troop trains (see Figure 3), artillery, and medical services, tightened its control on Chihuahua and advanced on the key north-central city of Torreón, in the heart of the Laguna cotton country. Here, in April, the rebels battled their way across the fields, canals, and hills north of the city, finally overcoming tenacious Federal resistance.

Counter-revolution and Constitutionalism



3. Revolutionary troop train, c.1914, by which time, especially in northern Mexico, guerrilla ('asymmetric') warfare had given way to major conventional campaigns, in which railways were key.

The victory opened the way to Mexico City and further broke Federal morale: subsequent battles at Zacatecas, San Pedro, Orendain, near Guadalajara, ended in Federal routs and heavy losses. At Zacatecas alone, 6,000 Federals—perhaps half the defending force—were reckoned to have been killed: a sober reminder for those who assert that Mexican-revolutionary battles were noisy and amateurish *fiestas de balas* ('carnivals of bullets' in which—compared to Europe in 1914–18—few actually died). Torreón made clear that Huerta's days were numbered, which why the US occupation of Veracruz in the same month served a useful purpose.

It was now just a matter of time. The northern armies converged on Mexico City; Zapatista forces and their allies dominated an increasing area to the south of the capital; and a swathe of semi-autonomous rebels penned the Federals into their remaining beleaguered garrison towns. In August, as the Great War began, rebel forces approached Mexico City; Huerta resigned and took a ship to Europe, leaving an interim administration whose sole task was to negotiate the surrender of the nation's capital. This pattern—of rural and provincial armed forces converging on a fearful conservative capital—roughly resembles the pattern of the Chinese Revolution, but not the French (which Paris stood for Jacobin radicalism, when much of the country was hostile). While this comparison clearly subverts Samuel Huntington's—odd—notion of 'eastern' versus 'western' revolutions (the Mexican Revolution being, by Huntington's criteria, distinctly 'eastern'), it confirms Eric Wolf's thesis of a 'peasant war', which mobilized country people, under provincial and popular leadership, against the capital and the old regime interests headquartered there.

Chapter 5

The Revolution in power (1914–1920)

Personnel and policy

The final defeat of Huerta and his army—thus, more consequentially, of the old regime which they fought to shore up—brought decisive changes. While the Madero revolt of 1910–11 had been halted in mid-course, the Constitutionalist revolution was a fight to the finish. 'A Revolution which compromises is a lost Revolution,' as Carranza pronounced; and he decreed that captured Federal Army officers should be summarily shot for treason, which they regularly were. The war polarized Mexican society and, by demanding heavy sacrifices, instilled an icy realpolitik into revolutionary practice: as winners, the rebel leaders of 1914 had no intention of emulating Madero's naive optimism. They would purge opponents and impose their will by force; in August 1914 Carranza closed the law courts and suspended all constitutional guarantees. This new radicalism—new, at least, in comparison to Madero's earlier magnanimity—had three dimensions: personnel, policy, and practice.

First, the 1913–14 revolution brought to power a clutch of new, young, mostly military leaders, who had fought their way to power—national, regional, and local—and who, for reasons of both idealism and ambition, intended to assert their authority. Most were in their thirties: in 1914 Zapata was 35, Villa 36, and

Obregón just 34 (Carranzas at 60), was of a different generation which mattered). They came from the provinces, and had close ties to their educated beyond basic schooling, and had close ties to their popular following (whose opinion Zapata, in particular, took seriously). Many of them, like Obregón or Villa, cultivated an easy-going populist style, mixing with the common soldiers, sharing jokes, distributing handouts to the poor (such as cheap beef in Chihuahua), ostentatiously humiliating the rich and powerful (thus, Obregón issued brooms to the well-to-do of Mexico City and forced them to sweep the streets of the capital), and without overly romanticizing the relationship, it is clear not only that these new politico-military leaders were qualitatively different from their Porfirian predecessors (being younger, browner, and more plebeian), but also that they wielded a different kind of authority, authority that was more broad, popular, and in some cases—Villa, Zapata, Obregón—charismatic.

Of course, enemies of the Revolution saw all this as mere demagoguery and rabble-rousing (and there is no doubt that revolutionary populism coexisted with a good deal of self-seeking ambition and profiteering). But the Revolution was much more than that; and the creation of a new and deeper relationship between leaders and led, state and people, was an important consequence of the broad mobilization of these years. Total war helped forge a new 'social pact', as it would in post-1945 Europe.

Second, extensive fighting coupled with political polarization served to radicalize revolutionary goals, especially in socio-economic terms. Or, we could say, social reform now trumped political democratization—which, in the context of 1914, seemed a reasonable and risky objective: look what had happened to the naively democratic Madero. During 1913–14, land reform became a staple of rebel manifestos, espoused—probably opportunistically—eventually by the elderly and conservative Carranza. Villa, too, promised a *reparto de tierras* (land distribution), even though the demands of his massive military campaigns deterred immediate action,

since the Villista government depended on hacienda production of cattle and cotton for revenue and any sudden radical *reparto* might have led to the rapid dissolution of the army, as soldiers scrambled to get their promised patrimony. However Zapata, and many lesser rebel leaders, notably in central Mexico, were not so inhibited. Their forces were less professional, more closely tied to the villages, hence a sweeping land reform was possible, even in the midst of armed revolt.

In Morelos, as Zapatista agrarianism grew more radical, the sugar plantations were carved up and local villages took possession of their fields and water. Similar processes, if less sweeping, affected other parts of Mexico: under the Cedillos in San Luis; or with the insurgent Yaqui Indians of Sonora—some of whom fought alongside Obregón, while others campaigned independently, and successfully, to recover control of their ancestral lands in the Yaqui River Valley. This *de facto* land reform was legitimized by laws and decrees from above, which laid down—in vague prospective terms—that haciendas could be stripped of their holdings in order to assuage peasant land hunger. Reform went beyond the matter of land distribution and also addressed the problem of debt-peonage, a key question as the northern rebels began to turn their attention to the benighted south, where peonage still flourished and the Revolution had made much less headway. In all these instances, revolutionary social reform had an obvious political dimension: it rewarded—and very likely swelled—the revolutionary rank-and-file, while punishing the landlord class who had, by and large, supported Huerta.

Hacienda peons were, by definition, landless labourers and, when it came to the working class, the revolutionaries again flaunted their social reformism, evident in a swathe of laws and decrees which established the minimum wage, protected workers' rights, and favoured trade union organization. While much of this, too, remained at the level of promise and prospectus, it was no mere froth: the workers—notably in the big textile factories east of

speaks of a revolution which... taking advantage of the political upheaval to press their jittery bosses for wage increases and fringe benefits. Indeed, wage rises were essential at a time of mounting inflation.

While land and labour reform were hardly novelties—they had been evident since the early days of the Revolution—a new political order now became evident: revolutionary anticlericalism. This is a crucial but contentious subject, to be discussed in Chapter 6, dealing with the 1920s, when religious conflict reached its zenith. But its origins date to 1913–14. Madero had happily tolerated Catholic politicization, as we have seen; but his fall, and the subsequent hardening of political antagonisms, soon involved the Church, which was blamed by the rebels for aiding and abetting the Huerta regime. Of course, the Church was a large and diverse institution which, for all its authoritarian character, did not act as one. But certainly a good many clerics—particularly in the upper hierarchy—welcomed Huerta (as the potential bringer of peace and order) and some even preached accordingly. Parish priests were, in some cases, in cahoots with the landed class, thus bitterly opposed to agrarian protest and reform.

The Catholic National Party, in the main, collaborated with Huerta, even supplying several of his ministers in 1913 (for which it was hard to plead the excuse of *force majeure*). Thus the rebels drawing upon an old reservoir of Mexican anticlericalism, blamed the Church—in general—for being antipopular and antinationalist. Sonoran leaders like Obregón and Calles—progressive, literate members of the provincial petty bourgeoisie—were particularly outspoken in their anticlericalism. In Mexico City Obregón arrested 180 priests and, effectively, held them to ransom, demanding a hefty pay-off which, he said, would be destined for poor relief; he also made much of the fact that a third of the detained priests were found to be suffering from venereal disease. In response, there were angry Catholic protests. And, across the country,

revolutionaries of similarly Jacobin persuasion arrested (allegedly) subversive priests, closed convents, and turned parish churches into barracks, schools, even stables. In Monterrey the PLM veteran Antonio Villareal smashed the cathedral's old colonial statues and had the confessionals publicly burned.

Popular rebels, like Villa and Zapata, tended to be less committed anticlericals, although Villa hated—and persecuted—Spanish priests (more because they were Spanish than because they were priests). In response, the Church denounced revolutionary sacrilege, excommunicated the culprits, and actively lobbied against the Revolution in the US. The conflict ratcheted up, eventually culminating in the massive Catholic ('Cristero') revolt against the revolutionary state in the late 1920s.

Finally, revolutionary practice also became more radical in terms not just of policy but also of practice: radical ends required radical means. Unlike that of 1910–11, the civil war of 1913–14 was fought to the finish. Huerta fled, and along with him went a clutch of the old Porfirian elite, who flocked into exile in the US, Cuba, and Europe. Some would eventually return; a few even managed to rescue their family fortunes. But many never recovered and the revolutionaries, as they confiscated haciendas and took over the imposing town houses of the old elite in Mexico City, made it clear that they intended to supplant that elite, thus to reconfigure political—and to some degree socio-economic—power.

A key example was the Federal Army, the mainstay of the Huerta regime. Where Madero had maintained, conciliated, and bolstered the army, the victorious revolutionaries of 1914 simply abolished it. The conscript rank-and-file went home or joined the rebels; indeed, they had been deserting in droves well before the final debacle of summer 1914. The surviving officers either followed the Porfirian elite into exile or tried to carve out new careers in the chaos of Revolution. (A few—not many—managed to parlay their entry into the ranks of the Revolution: Villa seems to have been

more tolerant of this opportunistic enervism than Carranza. Meanwhile, even if the Constitutionalists nominally defended the Constitution and the rule of law, they were, de facto, the military masters of Mexico, who governed by decree, enacting reforms running the railways, confiscating goods, printing money, and extracting taxes (not least from the remaining foreign enterprises) notably the oil companies, then enjoying an export bonanza. They confronted the Church and took a stern—though by no means 'xenophobic'—line with foreign representatives: the first Minister to Mexico, who had been a strenuous supporter of Huerta, was promptly handed his passports.

The revolutionary schism

Thus, by the summer of 1914, the Revolution—in all its topsy-turvy variety—was victorious; but its achievements thus far were largely destructive (eliminating the political old regime, weakening the socio-economic order), while the constructive work of reform was still incipient and inchoate. Two crucial and related issues now occupied the political agenda: could the victorious rebels agree first, on a common programme and, second, on a common government which would enact it? The subsequent story, spanning the turn of 1914–15, revealed that the respective answers were: yes, to some degree, and no. Because of the second answer, Mexico descended into its third bout of civil war in five years—now, one which pitted revolutionary against revolutionary, in a fratricidal struggle (the 'war of the winners') whose logic remains a matter of continued debate.

Hastily and chaotically assembled in order to fight Huerta, the huge revolutionary coalition of 1913–14 was riven with internal divisions—regional, factional, and ideological. Even before the common task of defeating Huerta was over, major fissures began to open up. These can be plotted at both the regional and national levels. Regionally, Mexico had fallen under the control of caudillos (warlords) and their forces who were jealous of their power: in

almost every state, potentially rival factions were warily eyeing each other—Maytorena's clique confronted that of Calles and his allies in Sonora; in Tlaxcala, Domingo Arenas competed with Máximo Rojas (even though both were popular leaders of peasant levies); in Chihuahua, where Villa was predominant, he faced dissent, notably from the powerful Herrera family of Parral. Such factional divisions are common in most revolutions; but in Mexico they were more acute, given both the size and heterogeneity of the country and the absence of a central party leadership (in Russia and China the respective Communist Parties battled for power, eventually successfully; in Mexico, no official revolutionary party was established until nearly twenty years after the outbreak of the Revolution, when the Partido Nacional Revolucionario was created in 1929). Thus, any potential revolutionary regime faced the problem of controlling and disciplining a host of ambitious regional warlords and their followers.

Nationally, we see the same problem writ large. The Revolution against Huerta involved, *grosso modo*, a loose coalition of the northern Constitutionalists, on the one hand, and the—less militarily powerful—Zapatistas and their allies in central Mexico. This fault line persisted: as Obregón's forces approached the capital, they were at pains, first, to get there before the Zapatistas and, second, to keep the Zapatistas—encamped only a few miles to the south—at arm's length. Negotiations between the Zapatistas and Constitutionalists proved tense and eventually broke apart. But the northern Constitutionalist coalition was also falling apart. Here, the predictable fault line split Carranza and his Sonoran allies (notably Obregón) from Villa, the Division of the North, and its north-central base. Personal antipathies—and ambitions—played a part, perhaps also deeper politico-ideological differences (as I discuss shortly). Carranza was keen for Obregón to reach Mexico City before Villa and, allegedly, schemed to bring this about; as suspicions mounted, it was agreed that, once Huerta had been ousted, the revolutionaries would summon a national convention of the victors to thrash out Mexico's future. There would be no

immediate elections, no swift return to constitutional rule, and the revolutionary military would debate and decide on the country's future.

The revolutionary convention duly met, representation based (notionally) on the size of military contingents; one division for every 1,000 soldiers. First in Mexico City, then in the city of Aguascalientes to the north of the capital, the revolutionary convention spent most of October 1914 in speeches, arguments, horse-trading, and some drama—for example, when the Abasco Díaz Soto y Gama, a representative of the Zapatistas, insulted the national flag and was nearly shot on the spot. The convention achieved some success in airing what were seen as the chief problems of the Revolution, including anticlericalism, labour reform, and land distribution. The Zapatista Plan of Ayala was thus formally accepted as a blueprint for the nation. In piecemeal fashion, the 'ideology of the Mexican Revolution'—an eclectic blend of social and political reform, coloured by nationalism, anticlericalism—began to jell. Again, we see the contrast with revolutionary Russia or China, where Marxism-Leninism became the canonical orthodoxy (albeit its interpretation was open to serious dispute), whereas in Mexico the revolutionary creed was cobbled together, over time and *ex post facto*, in the absence of canonical thinkers or texts.

When it came to the practical task of brokering a political settlement, however, the convention failed. The Zapatistas—clever smart-talking 'city boys', like Soto y Gama, sent as surrogate representatives by Zapata, who preferred to stay at home in Morelos—flaunted their radicalism and spurned compromise. Followers of Carranza and Villa, meanwhile, viewed each other with increasing suspicion. In the provinces, local caudillos watched events with trepidation, deciding how to jump if and when the time came. The time came when Villa effectively hijacked the convention, sending a large military force to occupy Aguascalientes. Factional divisions thus trumped efforts to

achieve revolutionary unity; though a rump 'Conventionist' government survived, an increasingly irrelevant and itinerant talking shop, it had no influence on the course of events, which involved a fight to the finish between the two major factions: on the one hand, Carranza, his loyal followers, and, above all, Obregón and his proven Sonoran forces; on the other, Villa and the Division of the North, loosely in alliance with the Zapatistas (see Figure 4).

Local leaders had to react to this national schism, whether they liked it or not; several switched sides back and forth, displaying not just cynical opportunism, but also genuine confusion and uncertainty. Before long, skirmishing broke out.

Late in 1914 the Villistas and Zapatistas entered Mexico City, forcing Obregón and his Carrancista forces to retreat to the east,

The Revolution in power



4. Meeting of the two great popular revolutionaries, northerner Pancho Villa (left) and southerner Emiliano Zapata (right), outside Mexico City, December 1914.