

## Revolution, 1910–1946

The call for revolution on November 20, 1910, to overthrow the three-decades-old regime of General Porfirio Díaz came from defeated presidential candidate Francisco Madero, an exile in the United States. His manifesto received little attention from those who opposed the government and even less from its supporters, who still basked in the glow of the extravagant celebration of the centennial of independence. Madero's followers, Pasqual Orozco Jr. and Pancho Villa, won minor victories against federal troops in the remote mountains of distant Chihuahua, and the revolution sputtered to life. Mexico City remained placid and the national administration complacent in response to the faraway uprising.

President Díaz ordered troops north to smash the insurrection, and they nearly did with a victory at Nuevas Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, in December 1910, in which federal troops wounded Madero, who had taken command. Madero quickly relinquished military authority back to Orozco and Villa, who held the rebels together. Despite the loss, the insurrection expanded by fits and starts, as volunteers arrived daily in the north and, in other regions, local rebels took up arms in Madero's name, but with their own goals, such as Emiliano Zapata in Morelos.

In April 1911, the rebels in Chihuahua managed to isolate the federal army in Ciudad Juárez. For three days, rebels carried out fierce house-to-house fighting, watched by a holiday crowd of spectators across the Rio Grande in El Paso, to capture the city. The victory gave them a border port for the shipment of guns and ammunition and an even greater public relations victory. New rebel groups began to appear almost daily. Shaken by the defeat of his troops, Díaz ordered negotiations with Madero that concluded in May 1911 with the Treaties of Ciudad Juárez. In the accords, the president agreed to resign and go into exile. Díaz, his family, and many of his closest advisers sailed for Paris in May 1911, bringing an end to the thirty-five years of Porfirian rule and nineteenth-century politics.<sup>1</sup>

The rebels who seized power in 1911 represented a young generation that would dominate the country until 1946. As individuals, they came from different class and ethnic backgrounds; many became rebels

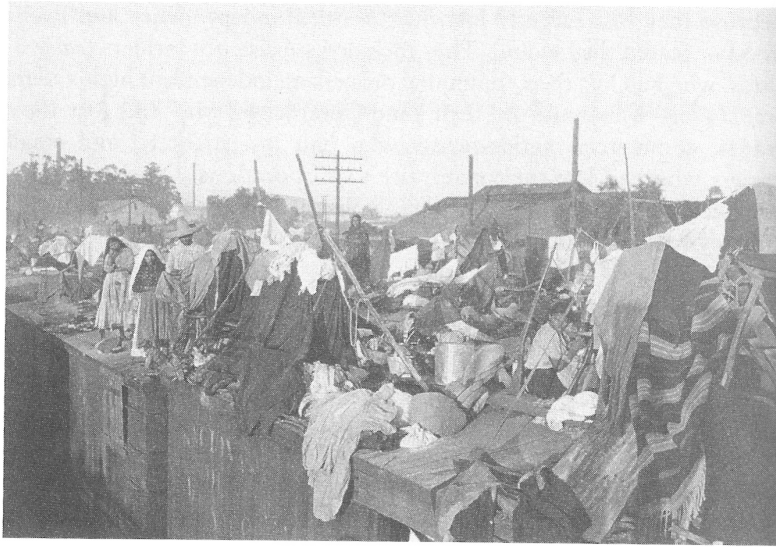
because they had recently lost their political independence and livelihood or feared they would. They included subsistence farmers (*campesinos*) who had lost their communal properties, independent highlanders (*rancheros*) who had lost their lands, craftsmen who had lost their trades, commercial agriculturists who had lost markets, and small miners who had lost their enterprise to corporations. Others included provincial elites who had lost their political influence and indigenous peoples denied social and economic access to modernizing programs.

They shared a commitment to create a nation that offered social mobility to all its citizens, the opportunity to participate in their government, the prospect of economic justice, and the promise of legal equality. They all intended to achieve these goals by limiting the economic activities, political influence, and ethnic prejudices of foreigners (especially mining, railroad, and commercial entrepreneurs) and by reducing the role of three domestic groups—the capital city bourgeoisie, the Catholic Church hierarchy, and the commercial agriculturalists (the owners of large estates that produced export crops such as coffee and sugarcane).

In the revolutionary struggle, the rebel resort to violence established a pattern that continued for at least three decades. Several leaders, notably Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and above all Lázaro Cárdenas, became national heroes, and in some cases international celebrities. They shared a brash nonchalance about death that came from an understanding that beyond their lives, they had little to lose. Their achievement came as these populist rebels initiated and administered the world's first social revolution.

Rebels, both men and women, risked their lives for a better life, and for an exciting adventure. While fighting for their demands for farm land, workers' rights, political participation, and basic needs for health, education, and housing, the rebels experienced a wider world. For the first time, many rode trains, mounted horses, even drove cars, and saw new places, especially the national capital with the president's office, tall buildings, departmental stores, and posh restaurants; as long as they survived, they grabbed shirts, boots, spoons, saddles, or whatever they wanted as loot. From the beginning, they also met other Mexicans from across the republic.

Violence had a scattered, local character that swept back and forth across the country. The battles and regimes moved in kaleidoscopic fashion, as the first phase of the revolution under Francisco Madero (1910–13) fell to the counterrevolution of military dictator Victoriano Huerta that ignited the Constitutionalist revolution (1913–14) of



*In 1913, Pancho Villa directed his revolutionary army southward toward the capital city, using the railroads. Men and women rebels made boxcars their homes, cooking and sleeping atop and inside the train cars. Women, called soldaderas, fought alongside the men or worked in the commissaries and medical service and as morale boosters. Hugo Brehme, *Zeltlager der revolutionären Truppen auf den Dächern von Eisenbahn Wagon in México*, ca. 1914; The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (98.R.5)*

Venustiano Carranza, Pancho Villa, Alvaro Obregón, and Emiliano Zapata, followed by civil war once Huerta fled as the Constitutionalist leaders divided against each other (1914–16) and invasion by U.S. Marines (at Veracruz and Tampico) and soldiers (the Pershing Punitive Expedition, named for General John J. Pershing, in Chihuahua).

The revolutionaries fought some large-scale battles that featured the deep trenches, barbed wire, and machine guns modeled on the contemporary European warfare, but more frequently small armies appeared suddenly on horseback or on freight trains and fought skirmishes that ended with the victors executing the losing officers and often allowing the enlisted men to change sides. Nomadic bands roamed the countryside, pillaging the great estates and small settlements and looting homes, towns, and mines. Women formed part of these armies as combatants, sometimes as officers, and as camp followers who provided the commissary and medical treatment for the troops.<sup>2</sup> The dangers of remaining in the countryside quickly drove families—often

just women and children because the men had joined the upheaval—to flee to the greater security of towns and cities.

The victors established presidential regimes beginning in 1916 that survived their terms, only to fall to assassination and rebellion as a means of succession in 1920, 1923, and 1928. Antirevolutionary Catholics took the field from 1926 to 1929, and again briefly in 1933. As a result, all of the revolution's early leaders—Francisco Madero (1913), Emiliano Zapata (1919), Venustiano Carranza (1920), Pancho Villa (1923), Alvaro Obregón (1928), and a dozen more—were murdered. They joined one in seven of the nation's population who died in the fighting, from wounds, or from disease or deprivation or who fled into exile as result of the revolution in just the decade after 1910 (nearly 2 million people in all).<sup>3</sup> More died in the decades leading to 1940.

The revolution's achievements seemed minimal in the first decade, with the outstanding exception of the writing of the constitution of 1917, which offered four major provisions. These articles initiated land reform to restore village lands and provide lands to those who worked them, while claiming national ownership of subsoil and water rights; announced the most advanced labor code in the world for workers, with an emphasis on wages, safety, and unionization; prohibited monopolies, in an effort to make food, housing, education, and health care available to everyone; and attempted to restrict the Catholic Church to religious issues, nationalizing all church properties including temples, eliminating all political rights of priests, and expelling foreign prelates. (This last episode received novelistic treatment in Graham Greene's *Power and the Glory*.)

Implementing these constitutional provisions required enabling legislation and presidential backing, so that Alvaro Obregón (president, 1920–24) focused on land reform and labor organization, Plutarco Calles (president, 1924–28) initiated strict anticlerical enabling legislation, and Lázaro Cárdenas (president, 1934–40) administered a comprehensive campaign for all of the constitutional provisions. Tying together the constitutional social initiatives was a commitment to the ideal of the mestizo, the mixture of ethnicities into one nationality, race, and culture that Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos termed the Cosmic Race. Internationally famous muralists, particularly Diego Rivera, hired by Vasconcelos, gave artistic expression to these revolutionary campaigns.

Obregón occupied the presidency from 1920 to 1924, joined by his close advisers from Sonora, Adolfo de la Huerta (interim president, 1920) and Plutarco Calles (president, 1924–28; *jefe maximo* [maximum

leader], 1928–36). The three brought a commitment to social programs that would rebuild the national government and revolutionize the society and the economy. Obregón attempted to reduce national violence, redistribute agricultural lands to the nation's peasants, and revitalize government finances by using oil production for social programs, especially education.

Obregon's agrarian program focused on restoring land to villages (often properties that Porfirian commercial agricultural entrepreneurs had seized), most often as community holdings, but worked by individual families. In a program delayed by bureaucracy, counterclaims to titles from various villages, and large estate owners, the Obregón regime nevertheless successfully distributed properties to 128,907 actual recipients (in the system, many communities received tentative grants of land, but the actual titles took years to obtain).<sup>4</sup> The land reform often contributed to the rural violence, as villagers invaded properties in efforts to reclaim them, and estate owners hired gunmen, called white guards, to preempt any land invaders.

The revolution's most successful general, President Obregón, also faced difficulties with the revolutionary army. He intended to reduce violence and return to more tranquil times by reducing the size of the army, especially the number of generals (there were 116 generals of division), by retiring officers, placing others on the inactive list, and discharging troops. As a first step, he ordered the registration of all revolutionary soldiers with their ranks. Rather than spending time sorting out things, he declared that if "someone said he is a general, he is a general." Once he had the officers identified, he began placing them on the retirement list, using what he referred to as a "cannon blast of pesos," that is, bonuses to encourage retirement. Consequently, Obregón spent close to half of the national budget on the revolution's soldiers during his presidency, with the lowest expenditure 33.6 percent of the 1923 budget. The annual expenditure in millions of pesos was as follows: 1920: 63.8; 1921: 120.0; 1923: 79.2; and 1924: 117.8. Remarkably, these payments to the military were reductions in national spending from previous administrations.<sup>5</sup>

Foreign nations, particularly the United States and Great Britain, expressed grave concerns about the 1917 constitutional provisions that made landowning a social responsibility rather than an inherent right and that returned ownership of all subsurface rights to the national government. Representatives of these foreign governments wanted protection of the properties in Mexico owned by their citizens. These foreigners held titles to commercial agricultural lands, mines, and oil fields.

Another group of foreign bankers clamored for resolution of the Mexican debt they held in bonds. Obregón's foreign minister, Alberto Pani, carried out masterful negotiations that resulted in agreement that the government would not attempt to enforce the constitution's provision retroactively on properties on which efforts to develop the economic potential of the lands had occurred (called "positive acts"), but land left fallow faced expropriation. Pani and his colleagues brilliantly divided the foreigners by proposing a tax on foreign oil producers that would be used to pay debts to the foreign bankers and bondholders. This agreement, with some discrepancies on each side, resulted in the Bucareli Agreements of 1923, followed by U.S. recognition of the revolutionary government.

Obregón named José Vasconcelos secretary of the newly created Ministry of Public Education. Vasconcelos brought frenetic energy to his office, with nonstop programs to teach the nation's peoples about their history, culture, and heritage. He inspired public murals (thirty-six in the Obregón years), civic sculptures, rural schools, capital city open-air painting classes, and national collections of indigenous clothing and musical traditions. The president invested what he could in the educational programs, and his 1922 and 1923 expenditures of 13 and 15 percent, respectively, of the national budget were the first ever commitment of funds in double digits for national education.<sup>6</sup>

Obregón's regime and the Sonoran administrations that followed promoted cultural programs to give visual displays of the new society, provide dramatic statements of government programs, and offer memorable expressions of revolutionary nationality. Taken together these efforts aimed at establishing the legitimacy of the new order, identifying the appropriate historical legacies, and celebrating the revolutionary society. Officially sponsored activities included new monuments to revolutionary heroes, parades for new revolutionary holidays, and the celebration of the centennial of the achievement of independence (1921) that featured the crowning of María Bibiana Uribe from Necaxa, Puebla, as the India Bonita (in a beauty contest theoretically restricted to indigenous women). The celebration of independence resulted in a variety of classic and revue theater performances, opera, ballet, *orquestas típicas*, folk dances, and the Exhibition of Popular Arts, which later toured the United States.<sup>7</sup> The celebration of popular culture and history opened the revolutionary society to the outside world.

This openness to social programs developed elsewhere gave the Mexican Revolution its unique character. During the Obregon years, the influence of American John Dewey, Chilean Ménéz Bravo, and



*Hired by the Ministry of Public Education, Luis Márquez went into rural Mexico in the 1920s to photograph the indigenous peoples whom the revolutionary leaders expected to be assimilated into the new society. He concentrated on Indian women, such as this Otomí woman from rural Hidalgo, and also collected their traditional dress. Both his photographs and the costumes were quickly used by painters hired to illustrate popular calendars given away as advertising by tequila producers, bars, and restaurants. Otomi Maiden, Mexico by Luis Márquez from the Luis Márquez Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos*

Peruvian Vivar V. Patrón appeared in the new educational programs. Women in the Yucatán, who pushed for female political rights and social programs, drew inspiration from Jane Addams, and Governor Pedro Alvarado eventually invited her to come from Chicago to the Maya peninsula and consult on social programs there. The energetic and imaginative programs drew foreign artists, writers, journalists, photographers, folklorists, and the curious to the capital, where many joined in what historian Mauricio Tonorio-Trillo has labeled the nation's "Cosmopolitan Summer" of revolution.<sup>8</sup> Anita Brenner, Carleton Beals, Katherine Anne Porter, and Francis Toor joined the Mexican artistic circle that included Diego Rivera, Miguel Covarrubías, Moisés Sáenz, and Dr. Atl, who promoted both Mexico and its revolution.

The young revolutionaries who came to the capital and carried out these reforms took time to enjoy life as well. The northerners wanted familiar music, sought out romance (sometimes with the children of old Porfirians), attended theaters to see both Mexican and Hollywood movies, and raced around town in imported Hudson and Ford motor cars. At home they listened to recordings of music from the north and across the nation. Successful because of their military experience, they brought the same improvisational pragmatism to the capital. From Obregon down through the ranks and across the bureaucracy, the revolutionaries sought ways to accomplish their goals and to enjoy the good life as they understood it. To some extent the new urban culture reflected the cosmopolitan fashions such as those of the flapper, known in Mexico as the *pelona* (the baldy, for her short hair), but more than anything it resulted from flouting old social roles.

The years of revolutionary reconstruction saw increased urbanization combined with developing media of radio, recordings, films, and comic books that reflected and shaped the new, more open city life that was less caste-bound than the previous society. No more obvious expression of changing social propriety existed than displays of public affection. The intimate lovers' kiss without regard for the audience could be found everywhere, in the park, on the street corner, in restaurants, and on public transportation. During the Porfirian years commonly the peasant workers were expected to kiss the hand of the hacendado overlords who had seized the land. In the new revolutionary era, urban and liberated society found its most personal expression in the public kiss.

The presidency of Plutarco E. Calles (1924–28) continued Obregón's radical remaking of the society. The president added to programs of land reform and public education his personal emphasis on anticlericalism and unionization. His expansion of social programs benefited



from Obregón's reduction of army budgets and the unsuccessful 1923 military rebellion in support of the presidency of Adolfo de la Huerta. The latter resulted in numerous deaths, executions, and retirements of senior officers. Calles spent the increased federal monies on programs for land distribution, anticlerical campaigns through the schools, and assistance to working groups. He succeeded in more than doubling the number of acres (8 million) that Obregón had redistributed (3 million acres) and continued the emphasis on land grants to small families.

Emulating the Obregón programs aimed at solving social problems, Calles expanded the rural education missions and established the Department of Public Health. The health campaign not only featured the major smallpox vaccination campaign in 1926 but also initiated health inspections of food and beverage production. The agency determined to teach children proper hygiene practices and worked with several antialcohol campaigns. Embedded in both education and hygienic programs under Calles was a virulent anticlericalism. Calles intended to create a secular society, free from both what he regarded as Catholic mumbo jumbo and superstition, and the economic and political influence exercised by priests. His campaign encouraged state governors to make civic use of church buildings, restrict the public presence of priests, and instigate campaigns to destroy religious icons. Particularly in the states of Tabasco under Tomás Garrido Canabal (1920–35) and Sonora under the president's son, Rodolfo Elías Calles (1931–35), the anticlerical campaign took on a feverish character, with youngsters organized to burn holy images, destroy church windows, and harry the religious in every way imaginable.

The Calles anticlerical campaign threatened Catholics, both priests and believers, and for many it proved to be the last straw. Substantial numbers of both priests and laity supported social revolutionary programs with a role for the church (these individuals organized Catholic Social Action), while others remained quite conservative or reactionary in their beliefs. Once Calles initiated his policies, the more activist priests and parishioners organized Catholic Defense groups to protect their religious communities. These groups, ignoring dictates from the bishops and archbishops, soon began to stockpile arms and ammunition. Calles's hostility to the church met an equally hostile reaction from Archbishop José Mora y del Río of Mexico City, who declared that Catholics could not accept the constitution. His jeremiad provoked Calles to action, ordering the registration of all priests, among other restrictions. In response, bishops declared a church strike, beginning in 1926, which closed temples, suspended masses, and ended sacraments.

The strike ignited a civil war called the Cristero Rebellion. More military Catholics through their defense leagues began a series of attacks against the agents of the government, especially rural schoolteachers and soldiers. They murdered and wounded teachers and dynamited a troop train. Particularly in the western states, but elsewhere as well, the Cristeros provoked brutal attacks and retaliation on both sides. The bishops soon fled to safety in exile as lay Catholics battled federal troops and state militias.

In the midst of the Cristero fighting, revolutionary leaders became divided over the question of presidential succession. Former president Obregón had decided that the nation needed strong leadership and that only he could defeat the Cristeros. Consequently, he and his supporters pressed congress to amend the constitutional—and hallowed—revolutionary principle of “no reelection” to “no immediate reelection.” Obregón then won election to a second term, with an inauguration set for December 1928. While some revolutionaries, including Calles, had misgivings about this succession, the Cristeros were appalled at the prospect of an alternation in office between Obregón and Calles. Attempts on Obregón's life followed. As the president-elect motored to the bullring with three friends, a car pulled alongside, and a passenger unsuccessfully hurled a bomb at them. Shortly afterward at an afternoon dinner in a swanky San Angel restaurant celebrating Obregón's successful election, a sketch artist hired to draw caricatures of the guests approached the president-elect, drew a pistol, and shot him to death.

The assassination and earlier attempts gave the Cristeros martyrs. The Jesuit priest Padre Miguel Pro, who conspired to murder Obregón, and José de León Toral, who assassinated him, were both convicted and died before military firing squads. Padre Pro recently was made one of the saints of the church, along with other Cristero priests killed during the rebellion. The fighting continued for three years until, finally, the struggle sputtered out, as civil and church negotiators agreed to recognize the integrity of the other's position. The revolutionaries continued their social programs, and the church resumed its religious activities. Certainly, fanatics remained on both sides, and the few ferocious outbreaks of accusations and violence in the future notwithstanding, government leaders recognized the national culture was encrusted in Catholicism, and church leaders understood that the revolutionary leaders and their programs dominated politics. Both now understood that neither the revolutionary regime nor the Roman Catholic Church was going away.

Running parallel to the Cristero struggle, revolutionary efforts to legitimate the national regime continued. The murder of Obregón ended

talk of presidential reelection. In 1929, Calles moved to solve the succession difficulty with two major steps: the creation of an official party that would contain struggles over candidates and a revision of the single presidential term to six years. The Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR; National Revolutionary Party) brought together revolutionaries, including military officers, agrarian leaders, labor organizers, and government agents from public health, education, and finance. The party, in theory and most of the time in practice, contained conflicts among the revolutionaries, selected candidates for offices, disciplined voters, and manipulated ballots cast to ensure victories. This organization became the official party that (with two later name changes) dominated the national government until the presidential election of 2000. The creation of a six-year term reduced the number of presidential campaigns and gave individuals more time to develop programs.

The immediate political demand was for a president to replace Obregón. The first six-year term reflected the intense political rivalries confronting the party leaders. Calles remained a formidable presence, and despite illness and foreign travel, he exercised considerable influence on the government using the unofficial title *jefe maximo*. Emilio Portes Gil (1928–30) replaced Obregón and carried out social programs as he arranged for new presidential elections. Although often viewed as the cat's-paw of Calles, in fact, he initiated major land reforms, defused college student strikes by arranging for university autonomy, and, failing to arrange the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Nicaragua, gave asylum and an agricultural property to rebel leader Augusto Sandino. His interest in the entertainment industry led to his promotion of the mariachi band from his home state of Tamaulipas in national films, including the classic *Alla en el Rancho Grande*.

Elections placed General Pascual Ortiz Rubio in office, but an assassination attempt by Daniel Flores on the afternoon of his inauguration, in which both Rubio and his wife received gunshot wounds, disrupted his administration from its beginning. Despite intense interrogation, Flores refused to identify any coconspirators (he later died without explanation in his cell). General Eulogio Ortiz nevertheless ordered the arrest, torture, and then secret execution of sixty supporters of José Vasconcelos, who had stood as the opposition presidential candidate. The murder victims were discovered about a month later, and the event became widely known as the Massacre of Topilejo. The president also ordered an armored car for his personal use. The car, complete with inch-thick reinforced windows, protected the president against would-be assassins but could not shield him from associates



*Communist Party members, opposed to President Alvaro Obregón's support for other unions, demanded greater government attention to the working classes rather than agrarian issues. The photographer Tina Modotti, an Italian member of the intellectual community of foreigners such as Edwin Weston and Mexicans such as Diego Rivera, made photography a political medium. Tina Modotti, Untitled, 1923; gelatin silver print; 2 15/16 in. x 3 7/8 in. (7.46 cm x 9.84 cm); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase through a gift of the Art Supporting Foundation, John "Launny" Steffens, Sandra Lloyd, Shawn and Brook Byers, Mr. and Mrs. George F. Jewett, Jr., and anonymous donors*

who looked past him to former president Calles for leadership. As a result, the president felt Calles exercised undue interference in his government. Constant political disruption was underscored by the economic difficulties that resulted from the world depression. As a result, barely two years after his inauguration, Ortiz Rubio resigned and went into exile in the United States.

General Abelardo Rodríguez finished the term (1932–34), and despite the economic challenges caused by the world depression, such as the repatriation of an estimated 500,000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans by the United States, the president carried out successful programs. Determined to eliminate internal conflicts, he notified all cabinet members that they had to have his approval for all decisions. He supported the building improvement programs of financial minister

Alberto Pani, especially the completion of the Bellas Artes Building and, in an effort to save the iron cupola from being sold as scrap, the conversion of the half-finished Porfirian congress building into the Monument to the Revolution. Rodríguez also initiated an effort to establish minimum wages for all workers across the nation in the face of the world depression. He did not reach his goal of four pesos a day but made progress and reached nearly half that in the capital. He also continued the land reform efforts, despite the economic contraction caused by the depression.

All three of these two-year presidents—Portes Gil, Ortíz, and Rodríguez—came to office with experience as military commanders and successful state governors of Tamaulipas, Michoacán, and Baja California del Norte, respectively. Despite the long shadow of Calles, they proved capable of running their own administrations.

As the nation approached the 1934 presidential election, the PNR called for a convention to establish a six-year plan to guide the next chief executive. Interim president Rodríguez had a major role in shaping the document by the appointment of the committee that wrote the first draft. Delegates at the PNR convention in Querétaro revised the document, without completely redoing it. The party then backed the official candidate, Lázaro Cárdenas, another revolutionary general and state governor. Cárdenas had a populist sensibility that resulted in a peripatetic campaign, visiting major cities and remote villages across the nation. He traveled with mariachis, and in addition to music, he listened to local needs rather than lectured voters on their duties.

The Cárdenas presidency (1934–1940) became the apogee of social revolution as he insisted on the implementation of constitutional provisions, especially land reform (he redistributed 4,958, 203 hectares during his term) and labor organization.<sup>9</sup> He continued to travel widely and became the first president to make use of the radio as a political tool, giving regular talks to his fellow citizens. During his campaign and after, he actively promoted the rights of all citizens and had committed himself to extending voting rights to women. The suffrage campaign was put off due to an economic crisis. Foreign oil company officials challenged the Cárdenas governmental programs, and when they refused to abide by judicial decisions against them, Cárdenas nationalized the oil industry on March 17, 1938—an event widely proclaimed as the nation's declaration of economic independence. Despite boycotts by U.S., British, and Dutch refineries and shippers, the Mexicans organized a national corporation (PEMEX) that remains a powerful oil producer today.

As European events cast a shadow across Mexico, Cárdenas became a leading spokesman in favor of the Spanish Republicans, who fought the army and Conservatives (along with their Nazi German and Italian Fascist assistance) in the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). After their defeat, he welcomed exiles and orphans from Spain. Moreover, the Spanish Civil War deeply influenced Cárdenas as he considered his successor. The left-wing members of the official party, now renamed the Partido Revolucionario Mexicano (PRM; Mexican Revolutionary Party), favored the president's mentor, Francisco J. Mújica, the general who had preceded him as governor of Michoacán, chaired the 1917 Constitutional Convention, served as a member of his cabinet, and helped promote revolutionary efforts in Venezuela and several Central American countries. The president worried that a militant leftist candidate would provoke the militant right to action and result in civil war, as it had in Spain. He decided to choose a more moderate candidate and turned to his longtime subordinate General Manuel Avila Camacho from Puebla. The latter faced a major campaign challenge from General Juan A. Almazán, backed by business and church leaders on the right, but the PRM carried the election. Cárdenas left office as the epitome of the revolution; in part this reflected the fact that the largest number of like-minded revolutionary veterans from the countryside (80 percent) made up his government.<sup>10</sup>

As a former president, Cárdenas adopted a senior statesman's demeanor, but members of his administration continued to press for his policies. Out of the public view, the onetime First Lady, Amalia Solórzano de Cárdenas, became increasingly active in politics. The public first saw her in public affairs as a prominent member of the Aid Committee for Children of the Spanish People. She remained active in official party politics until 1952, when many of Cárdenas's colleagues organized the Party of the Revolution and backed Miguel Henríquez Guzmán in an unsuccessful bid for president. Because Solórzano de Cárdenas took an active role in the campaign for Henríquez Guzmán, it was widely believed that the former president backed him as well.

Avila Camacho succeeded Cárdenas from 1940 to 1946. Although often portrayed as a more conservative president by choice, in fact his ability to carry out social programs was severely restricted by World War II. His regime worked in concert with the United States in support of the Allies, and Mexico declared war against Germany, Italy and Japan in the spring of 1942. Mexicans provided vast amounts of needed raw materials for the war effort, especially oil, lead, zinc, cottonseed oil, and mahogany. Air Force Squadron 201, based in the Philippines in

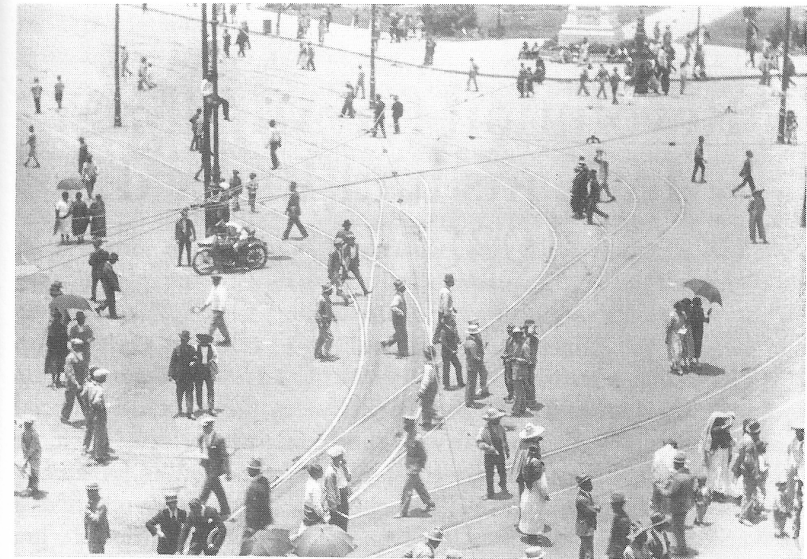
1944, flew support for the Allied invasions of islands moving toward Japan. Many additional Mexicans joined the U.S. armed forces and fought in both Europe and Asia. No separate statistics were kept of Mexican, Mexican American, or Latino members of the U.S. armed forces, but the total is estimated at 250,000 to 500,000, or 2.3 to 4.7 percent of the total.<sup>11</sup> When the war ended, Mexicans played a leading role in the creation of the United Nations, especially of the children's organization, UNICEF.

Avila Camacho, despite the demands of the war, pushed forward programs to provide social security for workers. At first limited in scope to the capital, then reaching other cities, nevertheless the Social Security Institute began to provide an essential health care safety net to the public. The government continued the effort to grapple with issues of potable water, sewage disposal, accessible transport, and basic literacy. The latter problem resulted in a campaign under the motto "Each one teach one." Those individuals who taught several others to read received certificates and other awards. In some cases, social centers such as the one in Oaxaca City offered women the opportunity to use sewing machines in exchange for attending literacy classes.

Revolutionary programs with their social and economic goals shaped this period, but other major developments had an impact on the society. These were the increasing pattern of urbanization, especially to the capital city; the successful public health campaigns that resulted in rapid population growth; and the adoption of technology that provided the development of mass media. The era from 1920 through 1946 became the golden age of radio, records, and movies, centered in the rapidly growing Mexico City.

Mexico City and other cities, during the war years, found themselves overwhelmed by housing, water, and transportation needs. The demands of the war limited spending on these needs, which came to constitute the immediate problems of the postwar years. The success of public health programs meant that many more Mexicans survived their first year of life, reached adulthood, and lived longer. This happy development increased the burden on schools, public services, and employment. The number of literate individuals vastly increased, but the percentage of illiterate people remained high because of the population increase.

Shortly after the end of the war, Mexico had become an urban nation—population statistics show slightly more than half of the people lived in urban areas by 1960.<sup>12</sup> This change required new approaches by future governmental administrations and shifts in the revolutionary



*The Zócalo (central plaza), the preeminent public space in the national capital, brought together members of revolutionary society, who expressed modern, working-class identity in overalls, although some of the rural migrants continued to wear sombreros, and women adopted modern clothing. The motorcycle offers a preview of coming traffic jams and air pollution that soon came to plague the city. Tina Modotti, Zócalo (Mexico City Square), ca. 1926–1929. Gelatin silver print; 2 5/8 in. x 3 3/4 in.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase through a gift of the Art Supporting Foundation, John "Launny" Steffens, Sandra Lloyd, Shawn and Brook Byers, Mr. and Mrs. George F. Jewett, Jr., and anonymous donors*

programs. The urban nation shaped the national culture, with the advent of radio, recordings, movies, and comic books. The focus of this new mass media was urban life and its problems, and a romantic nostalgia for a rural past that never existed. Cosmopolitan nightlife with its mambo rhythms and bolero ballads had a major audience of those who lived in cities and those who dreamed of doing so. For those who missed the country, ranchero music and mariachi bands created a wistful rural refuge. Music blared everywhere, and as the nation prepared for a new president in 1946, it heard the popular Veracruz song "La Bamba," rewritten to promote the presidential campaign of the official candidate, Miguel Alemán. Of course, he won.