

Porfirian Mexico

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Histories of the Mexican Revolution traditionally begin with the Centennial celebrations of 1910, the great bonanza laid on to commemorate Mexico's initial rebellion against Spanish rule, an event which happily coincided with Porfirio Díaz's seventh re-election to the presidency. So far, then, this is traditional history. But the Centennial was, above all, a Mexico City affair: the parades and processions, the banquets, the unveiling of monuments and mental asylums were designed to impress Mexico City high society, the press, the diplomatic corps and, perhaps, the fickle Mexico City populace—'this capital', as an army general put it, 'always full of amusement . . . this people born to amuse itself'.¹ And, by all accounts, they were impressed.²

In all this, provincialism had no part, even if the provinces made their gastronomic contribution (a hundred sea-turtles from the Guaymas fisheries, a thousand Río Lerma trout, which formed part of one of the master-chef Sylvain's lavish banquets).³ Overt provincialism, however, was frowned upon at such cosmopolitan occasions, and strenuous efforts were made to ensure that Indians in their baggy white shirts and drawers were kept off the streets of the capital. Outside Mexico City, it is true, there were attempts to make this, the hundredth anniversary of the Grito de Dolores, something special, and thereby to foster the tender plant of patriotism: the Indian children of Morelos were got up in clean white blouses and had patriotic recitations drummed into them; in Chihuahua and Durango the authorities did their best to combine patriotic enthusiasm and public order during three days of torrential rain.⁴ But, probably more typical of most Mexicans' experience in the summer of 1910 was probably that of San José de Gracia (Mich.), where the Centennial was ignored,

and where two years of drought and the appearance of Halley's comet attracted more concern and attention.⁵

Yet the real Mexico, and in particular the Mexico of the Revolution, was provincial Mexico. In some histories the story begins and the metropolitan angle is fixed with the Centennial; from the angle we focus on the comings and goings of revolutionary leaders—boorish, provincial interlopers—in Mexico City, and on the intermittent paranoia of the diplomatic corps, fearful of a repeat of the Peking siege. But the Revolution cannot be comprehended in these terms; unlike its Russian counterpart, it arose in the provinces, established itself in the countryside, and finally conquered an alien and sullen capital.⁶ And, unlike its Chinese counterpart, it failed to produce either a vanguard party or a coherent ideology. Rather, in its provincial origins, the Revolution displayed kaleidoscopic variations; often it seemed less a Revolution than a multitude of disparate revolts, some endowed with national aspirations, many purely provincial, but all reflecting local conditions and concerns. The forces thrown up by these revolts concluded regional deals, adopted national political labels, and entered grand, ephemeral coalitions; but, beneath these spreading ramifications, it was the local roots which gave the Revolution its sustenance. And, even as revolt gave way to reconstruction in the years after 1915, the chief problem of the revolutionary victors—newly but precariously installed in Mexico City—was that of imposing their authority on the recalcitrant provinces, whether by conquest or diplomacy. It was a problem which had exercised Porfirio Díaz throughout his long regime.

Thus, to understand the Revolution, it is necessary to look beyond the capital and beneath the major, national leaders; to comprehend something of the diversity of the provinces (the Mexico City saying 'fuera de Mexico, todo es Cuautitlán'—'outside Mexico City, it's all Cuautitlán'—says more about the *capitalino* mentality than the sameness of the despised provinces).⁷ For the Mexico of 1910 was, borrowing

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Lesley Simpson's phrase, 'many Mexicos', less a nation than a geographical expression, a mosaic of regions and communities introverted and jealous, ethnically and physically fragmented, and lacking common national sentiments; these sentiments came after the Revolution and were (notwithstanding some theories to the contrary) its offspring rather than its parents. The Porfiriato, it is true, saw trends working towards a more centralised state and national economy (and these trends, though halted in 1910, reasserted themselves after 1915); nevertheless, Mexican on the eve of the Revolution still retained much of its nineteenth-century character as 'a semi-fictitious political entity', a character which the Revolution revealed to an alarming extent.⁸ The initial task, therefore, is to depict, in broad strokes, the 'many Mexicos' of 1910, the Mexico beyond Cuautitlán, the human and physical backdrop for the great upheaval which began in that year.

PEOPLE

'Many Mexicos' implied many allegiances. Mexicans, it may be suggested, displayed five kinds of primary allegiance which, taken together, in various combinations, and with no single allegiance necessarily prevailing over all others (even 'in the last analysis'), determined their political conduct during the years of revolution. These were: ethnic, regional, ideological, class and clientelist. Ideological allegiance will figure prominently in chapter two, class in chapter three; the importance of clientelist relations will become apparent at many points. This first chapter concerns itself with two allegiances which were the most visually obvious, if not necessarily the most important: those of ethnicity and region.

Following the conquest, the Spaniards imposed a colonial and clerical hierarchy on the sedentary Indian population, whose members continued to plant corn and beans under new masters, and whose old gods were subsumed into a hybrid Catholicism. Miscegenation between Indian and Spaniard created a spectrum of racial types which the regime sought to classify with bureaucratic precision, creating a colonial 'pigmentocracy'.⁹ Though, after Independence, these distinctions became juridically irrelevant, they remained of great social consequence throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.¹⁰ As of 1910, at least a third of the Mexican population was reckoned to be Indian, and a little over a half mestizo. But, not only are Mexican statistics for this period notoriously unreliable; in this case the constituencies they seek to measure are fluid and uncertain. As in the rest of Indo-America, ethnic categories of this sort were

socio-cultural, rather than biological; they related to perceived characteristics—language, dress, income, food, literacy and domicile. Such characteristics, and the ethnic status they implied, were subjective and mutable. Pedro Martínez passed for an Indian in Yautepec, but was called a *ladino* (mestizo) in his native Azteca: the uncertainty stemmed partly from perspective, partly from the individual's transitional status.¹¹

Individuals could—through the murky process of 'acculturation'—shed Indian attributes and acquire mestizo status; some made great strides down the available—albeit narrow—paths of advancement offered by the army, the Church, and the law. Some, remaining in or returning to their native villages, performed important roles as organisers and propagandists; they became the 'village lawyers', the 'pen-pushers' (*tinterillos*) who acted as intellectual captains of popular revolt.¹² Others broke away from the *patria chica* and rose high in state and national politics: Próspero Cahuatzí, the fat, somnolent Governor of Tlaxcala, seemed a 'delightful Aztec gentleman'; Manuel Alarcón, four times Governor of Morelos, was an Indian 'of plain beginnings'; Policarpo Valenzuela, 'an Indian who was at one time a timber hewer, in the forests of Tabasco, rose not only to govern but also to own a large slice of the same state.'¹³

Indian ancestry was no bar to the presidency. Juárez, the liberal hero of the Reform, was a Zapotec (a group known for their enterprising traders and teachers); while Porfirio Díaz, the son of a Mixtec mother, could remember from his childhood the chill fogs which blanketed the mountain villages of the Mixteca Alta, on the summit of the continental divide in Oaxaca.¹⁴ But progress to the presidency wrought necessary changes; with 'acculturation' Indian characteristics were, where possible, removed and, where the characteristics were physical, politely ignored; the Indian was 'whitened'. As an American of twenty-four years residence in Mexico put it, Porfirio Díaz gave Mexico the strong 'white man's government' which, as an Indian country, it required, therefore—he rationalised—Díaz 'of supposed only one-eighth (sic) Indian' was in fact 'probably all white'.¹⁵

Yet more important than this process of individual acculturation was the collective, corporate form: the transition—made, for example, by Huatusco (Ver.) in the nineteenth century—from Indian to mestizo status.¹⁶ Acculturation was gradual, it was not unilinear, it was capable of halts and reverses. Yet some consideration of the degree of acculturation experienced by Indian communities is essential in explaining the character—even the very fact—of revolutionary commitment. Some commentators, on hearing the word 'acculturation' reach for their revolvers—

the same they have used to pepper old, dualistic scenarios in which 'civilisation', radiating from dynamic, modern, poles, penetrates and 'modernises' the inert, traditional countryside. We may be well rid of such scenarios, but it must be recognised (as even some fervent 'monists' recognise, *sub rosa*) that there were variant forms and degrees of Indian acculturation, which had important historical consequences.

Some communities, while retaining Indian language and mores, were firmly integrated into colonial—later national—society as labourers, taxpayers and subjects; indeed, there may be no contradiction here, for the maintenance of the Indian community was in many cases functional to the survival and prosperity of the hacienda—the two lived in a stable though 'unequal symbiosis'.¹⁷ The villages of Morelos, for example, had co-existed with the sugar plantations since the sixteenth century; travellers, used to the suspicious and taciturn Indians they encountered elsewhere in Mexico, found the people of Morelos more forthcoming, 'distinguished by their obliging manners'.¹⁸ Towns like Tepoztlán—outside the immediate sugar zone, but 'in the heart of Zapatista country'—were key points in the state's network of trade and administration and played an important role in local politics.¹⁹ The Zapotecs of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, though similarly integrated into the mestizo state and economy, had a record of resistance stretching back through colonial times; they were also reckoned to be 'freer, prouder, more enterprising and vivacious' than other Indian groups.²⁰

Elsewhere in Oaxaca the case was different. Few villages had escaped the impact of colonial authority and colonial market relations. But, after the collapse of the cochineal trade in the late eighteenth century, Oaxaca lapsed into subsistence farming and barter trade, and even the opening of the Mexican Southern Railway in 1892 provided only a slow, tortuous and costly means of access from the north. While the regime of the hacienda was established in a few fertile valleys—Cuicatlán, Zaachila, Oaxaca itself—the bulk of the Indian population enjoyed an economic and political independence in proportion to the inaccessibility of their villages and the undesirability of their lands. Many, in fact, possessed abundant land, and agrarian conflicts pitted village against village rather than village against hacienda; groups like the Mije remained 'rabid isolationists' well into the twentieth century.²¹

In such regions political authority was wielded by local caciques whose rule was tolerated and sometimes utilised by a distant central government. The *finqueros* of Chiapas assumed the role of paternalist protectors of Indian lands and communities—thus perpetuating the 'colonial' symbiosis well into the

twentieth century; mestizo caciques ruled in the Sierra Juárez of Oaxaca; the old Indian cacique Juan Francisco Lucas travelled by sedan chair through the Puebla sierra around Teziutlán, where he held sway throughout the Porfiriato and where, a member of the Chamber of Deputies pointed out, the Indians had managed to retain a form of vigorous self-government.²² If such fiefs lay within the interstices of the mestizo state, enjoying a conditional, partial independence, there were other Indian groups who retained a fuller, 'quasi-tribal' freedom, fending off the embrace of the state and the commercial economy. They stood at one end—and a diminishing end—of the spectrum of acculturation, and they had usually parted company with at least a section of the 'tribe' which had succumbed to the embrace. The Chamulas and Lacandones of Chiapas, though being drawn into the Soconusco coffee economy, lived in their scattered highland settlements, where mestizo control was often tenuous and census officials needed an Indian escort if they were to avoid attack.²³ The Huicholes maintained a similar independence, entertaining 'a profound hatred for the mestizos' in the wild country of Tepic; nearby, the Cora Indians of the mountains contrasted with their more 'acculturated' cousins of the lowlands; the Tarahumara of western Chihuahua were similarly divided.²⁴

But the best example of this pattern of development was the Yaqui tribe of Sonora, whose resistance to the incursions of whites and mestizos (collectively the *yori* in the Yaqui tongue) gave rise to the protracted Yaqui wars of the Porfiriato. Part of the Yaqui 'nation', dispossessed of its fertile valley lands, became hacienda labourers or urban workers (the American consul at Hermosillo had a Yaqui washerwoman); these were the *manso* (pacified) Yaqui, who had taken the first reluctant steps towards 'acculturation' and *mestizaje*.²⁵ Another part of the tribe, however, labelled *brancos* or *bravos*, maintained a fierce resistance in the mountains. Both groups played a major part in revolutionary events after 1910, displaying an evident degree of ethnic cohesion, and continuing their ancient struggle under new, political labels, whether in shaky alliance with mestizo forces, or in outright opposition to the *yori* in general.

Over time, however, such ethnic allegiances tended to give way to others—class, ideological, regional and clientelist. As inexorable external pressures compelled tighter integration within the nation and national economy, so the Indian mass merged into the ethnically indeterminate *campesinado*; Mayan Indians became Yucatecan peons; caste identity was supplanted by class identity.²⁶ For this reason (we might interject at this point) there is little point in attempting analyses of 'mestizo' society, paralleling

those of Indian society. For, while the latter has a certain socio-ethnic validity, the former is a chimera. There has been no definable mestizo society—or social personality—only mestizo *campesinos*, mestizo workers, mestizo priests, politics and businessmen, their shared *mestizaje* relevant only in that it collectively differentiated them from the Indian. Hence, the thumbnail portrait of the mestizo penned by Eric Wolf and taken up by others—the rootless, *macho*, powerhungry mestizo, ‘relegated to the edges of society . . . belong(ing) to a social shadow world’, prone to drink, fantasy and gambling—is at best a crude national stereotype, of dubious validity.²⁷ At the same time, the diametrically opposite image of the mestizo propagated by Molina Enríquez (the mestizo as the higher racial synthesis, the quintessential Mexican, the carrier of the country’s destiny) is of interest as a theme in Porfirian and revolutionary thought, linked to other integrative, nationalist myths, but it has no validity as a concept for historical inquiry.²⁸

In 1910 the transition from ethnic to alternative allegiances was very far from complete; hence ethnicity figured as an important factor in the Revolution, sometimes complementing these allegiances, sometimes competing with them; and in doing so, it helped determine revolutionary commitments. The Zapatista and Yaqui rebellions, for example, obeyed common agrarian causes, yet they assumed different modes of expression—the first steeped in liberal, patriotic tradition, politically articulate, and nationally aware (if not nationally effective), the second, fundamentally atavistic and anti-national. Similar distinctions may be noted among those rebel movements which I shall categorise as *serrano*. If, later in this book, it is the common causes of such rebellions which are stressed, it is worth noting at the outset the different degrees and modes of acculturation which characterised, say, the Zapatistas and Yaquis, and which in turn determined the manner of their revolutionary commitment.

Indian social organisation displayed certain recurrent features. It exalted the *patria chica* above the national state which, for most Indian groups, was at best a remote figment, at worst an arbitrary oppressor. Hence Indian movements were fiercely parochial: many—like the Chontal/Mixtec pueblo of San Bartolo (Oax.)—‘seemed to have their municipality on the brain’, outsiders found them *cerrado* (locked up, introverted) and their social organisation ‘very clanish’.²⁹ This exclusivism extended to other Indian tribes (there was no Pan-Indianism), even to neighbouring communities of common ethnic origin. Hans Gadow arrived at Huilotepec, a Zapotec village in Oaxaca, riding a Huavi ox-cart, accompanied by a

Mexicano guide; but ‘the Zapotecs did not care for the Huavi, would not even allow them into the house, and . . . the Mexicano hated the Zapotecs’.³⁰ Hence tribes could be pitted against each other: Pima against Yaqui, Zapotec against Mexicano.³¹ Intervillage disputes were endemic: among the people of Morelos, the Maya of Yucatán, the highland communities of Oaxaca. Sometimes land was at issue, sometimes (as in the conflict between Chan Kom and Ebtun) political authority; some feuds had been going on for so long that their original rationale seemed lost in the mists of time, even though the feud still prospered.³² There were also cases of intra-village conflict between rival *barrios*. When the Revolution came, factional allegiances tended to follow these ancient fault lines.³³

Within Indian communities religion—a syncretic blend of Catholic and pre-Columbian beliefs and practices—was pervasive; there was no clear differentiation between sacred and secular. Political authority—when it emerged from within and was not imposed from without—mingled with religious, creating intertwined civil-religious hierarchies which served to integrate the community and to provide, where permitted, a vigorous form of self-government, resistant to external pressures. In addition, while Indian communities were by no means egalitarian, nevertheless internal stratification was kept in check by mechanisms of redistribution, such as feasts and other religious expenses.³⁴ Thus, like the atom, the ‘closed corporate community’ remained bonded together, defying the fissiparous forces which threatened its dissolution from within and without; like the atom, too, when dissolution occurred, it released violent energies.

Not that Indian communities had a monopoly of these defensive and integrative characteristics. They may be discerned, too, in some rural mestizo communities like Tomóchic, in the Chihuahua sierra, or Arandas, in the Altos de Jalisco.³⁵ Nor are they confined to Mexico: ‘inward-oriented villages’, complete with ‘community survival mechanisms’, have been noted throughout the world, wherever peasantries exist on the margin of subsistence, facing the combined threats of government, landlord, and the elements.³⁶ The peasant’s alleged conservatism, hostility to innovation, and ‘sheer unadulterated cussedness and pigheaded stupidity’³⁷ were traits induced by the subordinate and precarious position of peasant communities; they were social responses, to given social conditions, not products of Indian culture *per se*. It was rather the case that Indian communities—almost by definition—had developed these traits to a greater extent, over a longer period of time, and had

maintained them more fully intact in the face of outside pressures.

These supposed characteristics influenced outsiders' opinions of the Indian. Though the Porfiriato saw stirrings of interest in and concern for the plight of the Indian—anticipations of the full-blown *indigenismo* of the twentieth century—the prevailing view among the political nation, when it went beyond indifference, was at best paternalistic, at worst domineering and racist.³⁸ The well-to-do prized their creole ancestry, 'Quelle horreur!', exclaimed the wife of a Mexican diplomat in Tokyo when it was suggested to her that she shared a common, Asiatic racial heritage with the Japanese; as the choice of idiom implied, her kind (especially the Catholic creoles of central Mexico) looked to Europe, and particularly to France, for their cultural inspiration.³⁹ Pablo Escandón, briefly Governor of Morelos, was 'more at home in Europe than in Mexico'; to a Lieutenant Colonel of the Zouaves he seemed 'le plus Parisien des Mexicains'.⁴⁰ Landa y Escandón, speaking perfect English as he took tea in Cuernavaca (he had been educated at Stonyhurst), 'look(ed) like an Englishman and is proud of it'.⁴¹

In their eyes, the Indian represented a drag on Mexico's 'progress' (a concept to which constant appeal was made), and white immigration, on Argentine lines, was the preferred—though unattainable—solution.⁴² Meanwhile, the stereotypes of the 'lazy native', familiar in colonial contexts, were invoked to justify low wages, land seizures and forced labour. 'The Indian', as the Yucatecan proverb went, 'hears through his backside'; without the discipline of hard work on their henequen estates, the planters of the peninsula maintained, the Maya would live on 'sunlight and a patch of beans'; and similar arguments were heard in Morelos.⁴³ Attitudes of this kind were confined neither to conservative Porfirians, nor to members of the landed elite. Revolutionaries—especially those from the progressive, mestizo north—subscribed to the racist and Social Darwinist ideas which passed for scientific thinking in those times; they inveighed against Chinese immigrants, and they saw the Indian population of central and southern Mexico as alcoholic degenerates, ready for a rough redemption.⁴⁴

Racist practice was, of course, anterior to pseudo-scientific racist thinking (which, for a literate minority, merely rationalised existing attitudes); and it was particularly significant where it underpinned a local, political hierarchy. Indian communities were frequently dominated by a handful of *ladino* (mestizo) caciques, who monopolised land, commerce and political power. Azteca was controlled by a few such

caciques who 'had money and rode fine horses and were always the officials'; at Tepoztlán the caciques lived in the best *barrio*, owned most of the private land, controlled the communal fields, and enjoyed political contacts in the capital.⁴⁵ Mestizo caciques were not necessarily despots; or, at least, they could be enlightened despots. Vicente Mendoza of Tepoztlán was one such; so, too, was the cacique of Huixquilucán (Mex.), 'an old mestizo of rather forbidding manners but kindly spirit', under whose regime the village seemed to prosper.⁴⁶ More typical, perhaps, was Don Guillermo Murcio, blacksmith and cacique of the Triqui pueblo of Chicahuastla (Oax.), where 'he has gained almost unbounded influence among the simple natives. His word is law and the town government trembles before his gaze'; the traveller Lumholtz encountered another blacksmith /liquor dealer/ cacique at Yoquivo, in the Chihuahua sierra.⁴⁷

Mestizo caciques, like their landlord betters, justified their exercise of power and their commercial sharp practice in terms of the Indians' sloth and fecklessness (even mestizo priests, condemned to the Indian backwoods, were inclined to agree).⁴⁸ Indian degeneracy invited contempt and exploitation. 'What these people needed', declared a mestizo schoolmaster at Huancito (Mich.), who reportedly 'despises the Indians within his charge', 'was a second Cortez (for) . . . they had never been properly conquered'.⁴⁹ For the highminded, of both 'conservative' and 'revolutionary' persuasion, a second conquest was required to eliminate Indian vice, filth, superstition and alcoholism, and to inculcate values of hygiene, hard work and patriotism.⁵⁰ Some communities were polarised by this socio-ethnic division. At Naranja (Mich.) dispossessed Indian villagers clashed with mestizo hacienda workers; at Acayucán (Ver.), where such conflicts had produced a minor 'caste war', 'the whites and mestizos live in the centre of a large Indian community, but the separation between them . . . is as great as if they lived leagues apart . . . (and) between the two a conflict over land has gone on for centuries'.⁵¹ Other 'bi-ethnic' communities of this kind—such as Tantoyuca in the Huasteca, and Jamiltepec on the coast of Oaxaca—figured significantly in the Revolution after 1910.

But mestizo control could also operate at a distance. Frequently, a mestizo town acted as metropolis for outlying Indian satellites which, though they might retain land, still languished in the grip of mestizo merchants and officials.⁵² Tlacuiltepec (Hgo) was a mestizo pueblo which 'has charge of several Indian villages'; Chilcota, head town of the Once Pueblos in Michoacán, was mestizo, while dependencies like Huancito (home of the *maestro* of

conquistador mentality) were 'primitive and purely Indian'; Izúcar de Matamoros, in Puebla, had fourteen such satellites.⁵³ On a grander scale, the commercial tentacles of the city of Oaxaca embraced the surrounding sierra, while the merchants of Acapulco dominated the hinterland of the Costa Chica.⁵⁴ In some cases this dependency involved the direct transfer of resources—land and water rights—from Indian satellites to mestizo metropolis; when this occurred (as it did at Ometepec and Jamiltepec, communities lying athwart the Guerrero Oaxaca state line) agrarian rebellion could assume the guise of a localised caste war. Indeed, it is likely that some of the ubiquitous inter-community conflicts of the revolutionary period derived from such unequal political and economic relationships, as yet uninvestigated.

Certainly the landlord and merchant victims saw Indian rebellion in terms of caste war (there had been enough nineteenth-century precedents, and not simply in Yucatán).⁵⁵ Where the social historian discerns agrarian rebellion, contemporaries often saw something akin to Carleton Beals' 'feather-shanked aggressions, disorganised seizures of ancient patrimonies'.⁵⁶ Zapata's agrarian revolt was soon construed as a 'caste war', in which members of an 'inferior race' were captained by a 'modern Attila'; the creole planter Pablo Escandón came to fear the rise of a 'true Niggerdom' in Mexico—terms which came readily to the lips of some British and American observers too.⁵⁷ Agrarian revolt revealed the other side of the lazy Indian: the bloodthirsty, atavistic savage, 'half devil and half child'. Urban readers were titillated by stories, mostly apocryphal, of refined brutalities, while those responsible for combating 'Indian' rebellion not only used similar methods as colonial governors, but also evinced similar attitudes. 'Hunting for Zapatistas', according to the version of the aristocratic Alfonso Rincón Gallardo, 'seems to be the biggest kind of "big-game" shooting'.⁵⁸ As for the troublesome Yaquis, the leading Catholic paper *El País* was prepared to advocate the genocide of a tribe 'unworthy of membership of the great human family'; while revolutionaries justified repression (and the traffic in Yaqui prisoners-of-war) on the grounds of the Indian's 'instinct for pillage and evil-doing'.⁵⁹ To the *gente decente* of town and countryside this sudden volte-face of the Indian—from deferential peon to belligerent savage—necessitated tough measures, just as it smacked of treachery and threatened a reversion to barbarism.

The ethnic face of Mexico corresponded to its physical face: the Indian population was to be found—along with pine-trees, pulque and pneumonia—in the high country; and Mexico's ubiquitous mountains, slicing the country into distinct regions and discrete valleys, shaped not only patterns of settlement but also modes of government, of economic development, and, after 1910, of revolutionary conflict. The mountains march south in two mighty parallel chains: the Western Sierra Madre continuing the line of the Rockies, the Eastern Sierra Madre rising among the hills of Nuevo León in the north east and sidling towards the Gulf coast in its progress south. These, which with the lesser sierras cover a quarter of the country's area, harboured a distinctive, *serrano* population: Indians, hardy pioneers, independent villagers, remote mining and lumber camps, bandit lairs.⁶⁰ In the north, between the arms of the mountains, lies a broad expanse of high plain, at its broadest and most inhospitable in the deserts, dunes, and trapped rivers of Chihuahua, Mexico's largest state. Chihuahua, which has the strongest claim to the disputed title of 'cradle of the Revolution', was a land of sprawling cattle ranges, dotted with isolated haciendas, settlements, cities and mining camps, populated by few men but thousands of cattle, dependent on the rivers flowing eastwards out of the mountains into landlocked lakes, or via the Conchos down to the Río Grande.⁶¹ These northern plains were the theatre of the keenest fighting in 1911 and again in 1913-14, but many of the revolutionary protagonists were men of the sierra who had ridden down from the mountains to oppose first Díaz, then Huerta. In Chihuahua, as elsewhere, the Revolution took on the character of a conflict between highland and lowland, matching the conflicts between villager and landlord, Indian and mestizo, 'sandal and shoe'.

Water, not land, was the scarce resource in the north. Men jostled for access to the irrigated valleys of the north west, especially that of the Yaqui River. Further east, on the Durango/Coahuila borderlands, the River Nazas wound its way down to the cotton country of the Laguna which, thanks to its seasonal waters, appeared in summer 'toute blanche . . . sous sa neige de coton'.⁶² The Laguna was a region of dynamic growth: Torreón, the main town, 'misbegotten on an arid site for no better reason than that of the intersection of the railway lines', became a bustling, Americanised metropolis; and the waters of the Nazas became a bone of bitter contention.⁶³ After 1910 the Laguna (like the Yaqui valley) was a

hotbed of revolt; and Torreón, with its strategic railway junction, was the site of the bloodiest siege of the Revolution.

This northern region had been patchily settled in the colonial period, chiefly in response to the silver boom; the Indians of the Gran Chichimec were wild, nomadic and less numerous than those under Aztec dominion to the south and, since they could supply neither tribute nor a docile labour force, they were annihilated or pushed into the mountains (a process that was long, bloody, and barely complete in the 1900s). Northern society, mestizo rather than Indian, was shaped by the operations of mine and hacienda, both of which prospered and expanded with the advent of the railway in the 1880s. This was a pattern of development dependent on local initiative and self-sufficiency—virtues displayed in the struggle against Apache and Yaqui, which was waged with only limited help from Mexico City.⁶⁴ With its scant population, shifting internal frontier, and dynamic economy, the north was the land of the self-made man where, compared with central Mexico, achievement counted for more than ascription, where the rich (both Mexican and foreign) could expect bonanzas, and where even the poor enjoyed some mobility and opportunity.⁶⁵ In Monterrey, it was noted, the sons of the wealthy did not waste their substance, but studied business (often in the US) and went into the family firm.⁶⁶ Here, if anywhere, the Porfiriato saw the birth of a vigorous 'national bourgeoisie'. Hence, major commercial and industrial cities—like Monterrey, Chihuahua, Torreón—prospered, seeming to ape the ways of North America; the Church kept a low profile (Torreón was practically churchless); and the authority of the central government was grudgingly tolerated, sometimes sourly resented. Traditionally, the north had stood for federalism, liberalism and anti-clericalism, often in opposition to Mexico City. Under Díaz, these commitments were strengthened and with them the potential opposition of the north to the centre.⁶⁷

Further south, as Mexico narrows towards the Isthmus, the two Sierra Madre ranges merge in a knot of convoluted peaks and valleys, crossed and further complicated by an east-west volcanic seam which had thrown up some of Mexico's greatest and (in the case of Parícutín) most recent mountains. Here, the Mesa Central had formed the heartland of the Aztec empire, of the colony of New Spain, and of independent Mexico. And, despite the growth of the north, the central plateau still contained the bulk of the population in the days of Díaz. In seven central states, together with the Federal District, one-third of the population inhabited one-fifteenth of the country's area.⁶⁸ Here, the pattern of settlement and

society reflected the broken nature of the landscape. The Spaniards had built their ordered, gridiron cities, centred around church and plaza, in the temperate valleys, often following pre-Columbian precedent: Mexico City usurped the place of Tenochtitlán, Puebla inherited the religiosity of neighbouring Cholula, becoming a city noted for its churches, its Catholicism, and its conservatism. Most of the state capitals of the central states were, like these, old colonial cities, steeped in history: Guanajuato and Querétaro to the north of the capital, Toluca and Morelia to the west, Oaxaca to the south and Jalapa to the east. Some (which Lejeune labelled 'Catholic', compared with the 'American' cities of the north) failed to take up the economic challenges of the Porfiriato and remained administrative, ecclesiastical and cultural centres with sluggish economies, often declining artisan industries, and sometimes dwindling populations; others (the 'European' cities) embraced change and achieved new levels of prosperity.⁶⁹

Outside the cities, three centuries of Spanish rule saw the hacienda emerge as the dominant, though by no means the sole form of rural tenure, as it amassed the better valley lands, dispossessing Indian villages, converting villagers into peons, and pushing the major areas of independent Indian settlement into the sierras. In the valleys, the hacienda raised crops to feed the cities, the mining camps, and later foreign markets: wheat and barley in the high Toluca valley, sugar in Morelos, maguey on the plains of Apam in Hidalgo, coffee on the temperate slopes around Jalapa. In addition, a vigorous class of middling landowners—*rancheros*—developed, particularly on the plains of the Bajío, watered by the River Lerma. Here, though the silver mines of Guanajuato were in decline, and with them the ancillary artisan industries of Celaya, León and San Miguel, *ranchero* agriculture nevertheless prospered, creating a distinctive pattern of agrarian tenure and social organisation.⁷⁰ In the Bajío, too, the economic influences of the Mexico City and Guadalajara markets met, their contrary tugging paralleled by a certain regional, cultural and political rivalry. The people of Guadalajara (some 120,000 to Mexico City's 471,000 in 1910) were almost ostentatiously well-off, notably devout, and seemed distinctly Spanish in appearance. Travellers noted few Indians (Indian settlements had always been rare in the Bajío) but a good many attractive blondes; altogether, the people seemed 'a great deal more refined than their compatriots in Mexico City', whose authority—like the *norteños*—they did not suffer gladly.⁷¹

South and east of the populous central plateau the land falls away to the broken country of the southern

Sierra Madre which, less imposing but no less inhospitable than the northern ranges, cuts a broad swathe of rugged, under-populated land almost from coast to coast. To the east of the capital—and despite its relative proximity—the state of Guerrero enjoyed a long tradition of political autonomy, facilitated by geography, and later revived by the Revolution. It also contained within its borders (as did all such mountain states) ‘outlying districts (which) are never visited by either the 134 *jefes* or the Governor . . . really independent communities which, if left alone, behave according to their own notions’.⁷² Similarly, in Oaxaca, the arid, cactus-strewn sierras were the home of some of the largest Indian populations, while the valleys were the preserve of white and mestizo, merchant and *hacendado*. Government also emanated from the valleys, where the administrative centres lay—like the city of Oaxaca, ringed by mountains and hostile *serranos*, ‘the ancient enemies of the town people’.⁷³

Internally divided, Oaxaca was nevertheless jealous of its independence and suspicious of the claims of Mexico City—less so, perhaps, when a Oaxaqueño like Porfirio Díaz ruled in the National Palace, more so when northern interlopers appeared, as they did in 1914, and when the mountain barriers and the deficient communications facilitated a regional resistance in which different social and ethnic groups collaborated. The same was true of Chiapas, also a highland, Indian state, closely tied to Guatemala, and only recently and imperfectly linked to the Mexican heartland by the Panamerican Railway; and of Yucatán, too, cut off by the swamps and jungles of the Isthmus, oriented by trade towards the Caribbean and the US, and possessed of a vigorous regionalist, even separatist tradition which the Revolution served to revive.⁷⁴

The mountains dominate the Mexican heartland. But from their highest points around Mexico City they fall away gradually towards the south, precipitately to east and west. Travellers riding the double-headed locomotives which, in the days of Díaz, zig-zagged down from Esperanza, on the Puebla/Veracruz border, to Orizaba, Atoyac and the port of Veracruz, descended from cool peaks to temperate slopes to torrid lowlands in a matter of hours; on the 260 mile trip from the capital to Veracruz the altitude drops by 8,000 feet, and the temperature rises by some 2500° Fahrenheit.⁷⁵ But the descent from the mountains to the coastal or isthmian lowlands, from the *tierra fría* to the *tierra caliente*, brought more than a change of climate; it meant also a change in ethnicity and population, in flora and fauna, in drink and disease.

The hot lowlands, especially the broad flood plain

alongside the Gulf, had been sparsely populated during colonial times, attracting neither Indian nor Spaniard. But in the late nineteenth century growing demand for tropical products lured men into the lowlands, just as the mines had lured them to the inhospitable north centuries before. In southern Veracruz, Tabasco and Campeche plantations were set up to produce rubber, cotton, and tropical fruits; companies began to exploit the resources of the forest; and Yucatán, with its unique limestone formation, came to base its entire cash economy on the cultivation of henequen (sisal) to supply the farmers of the American Mid-West with binding twine.⁷⁶ With the development of these new crops, huge plantations were carved out of near-virgin tropical country, watered by broad, turgid, flood-prone rivers like the Grijalva, the Papaloapam, and the Usumacinta. Alone in Mexico, this region had more water than it needed, but the water had not yet been harnessed, and its very abundance only encouraged disease and the encroachment of the rain forest. Engineers working on Lord Cowdray’s railway across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec doused the railway sleepers with petrol to stop them sprouting, and a quarter of those who built the railway terminus at Salina Cruz, on the Pacific coast, died within two years.⁷⁷ Here, foreigners came as managers and planters, but Porfirian hopes of white settlement were disappointed.⁷⁸

Mexicans from the plateau, too, inured to the respiratory and gastric diseases prevalent there, rapidly succumbed to the malaria and yellow fever (the *vómito*) of the tropical lowlands. In Guerrero, it was noted, ‘nearly all the inhabitants of the inland plateau have an exaggerated dread of the coastlands’—a dread that was not, perhaps, so exaggerated for under-nourished peons, who, unlike European travellers, were at the mercy of the lowlands quinine racket, and who too readily switched from the nutritious *pulque* of the highlands to the firewater of the tropics.⁷⁹ Yet in the same state—as the Revolution was to reveal once again—‘the people of the coast find it very difficult to campaign outside their own region’, that is, when they ventured into the mountains.⁸⁰ Granted these territorial imperatives—and the absence, outside Yucatán, of a settled, Indian population in the lowlands—the new plantations had difficulty securing labour. Some Indians could be coaxed down out of the mountains, as the German coffee planters of Chiapas found; and for some poor communities the opportunity of seasonal work in the *tierra caliente*, however hard and unhealthy, offered an economic lifeline. Hence an annual flow of labour from highland to lowland became a feature of the Porfirian rural economy.⁸¹ But since the free flow of labour proved inadequate, the plantations also relied

on more coercive methods: forms of forced labour, penal servitude, and the ensnarement of nominally 'free' contract labour by the system of debt peonage, which reached its harshest in southern plantations like those of the celebrated Valle Nacional.⁸²

Porfirian Mexico was thus ethnically and physically diverse; and the analysis of its diversity could be pushed further—to go beyond region and state, to encompass village, valley and *barrio*, each of which was capable of eliciting powerful loyalties. Tannenbaum gives the example of eleven neighbouring pueblos in Hidalgo, characterised by different economies, different reputations, and different politics.⁸³ Since, after 1910, the Revolution was fundamentally linked to local factors, a great variety of responses was possible; and the problems which this implies for the national historian of the Revolution, in his work of analysis, are analogous to those faced by Díaz—and by his revolutionary successors—in their work of government. During a generation of dictatorship, Díaz strove to create a strong, centralised government whose writ would run the length and breadth of the country. He succeeded, at a price. For, in turn, he created an opposition which, no longer confined to a town or a state, sought to emulate the national standing of the regime, and to create a national opposition transcending local particularism. The Porfirian regime—and its enemies—whose mortal struggle is now to be recounted were, in a paradoxical sense, mutual allies against the recalcitrant localism of Mexico and of the Mexican people.

THE REGIME

The Porfirian regime gave Mexico a generation of unprecedented peace and stability. The Pax Porfiriana was, of course, a flawed peace, based on recurrent repression as well as popular consensus; nevertheless, the continuity of government, local and national, and the absence of serious civil war, contrasted with the endemic political conflict of the fifty years after Independence. Díaz knew the old days: he had fought against the conservatives and their French allies in the 1860s, against his fellow-liberals, Juárez and Lerdo in the 1870s, finally battling his way to the presidency. A Liberal by affiliation, Díaz displayed more appetite for power than adherence to principle and, once president, he resolved to curb factionalism, to blur the liberal-conservative battle-lines, and to create a strong, centralised regime around his own person.⁸⁴ For Mexico, it was the end of ideology. Old Liberals died off or were harassed into silence or grew fat on the spoils of office; the Church was conciliated and allowed, tacitly, to

recover some of its old importance, political, social and economic. The slogan of the Porfiriato summed it up: 'mucha administración y poca política'—'plenty of administration and not too much politics'.

In the early days Díaz had a deft touch. He played off rival provincial factions, perpetuating divisions where it suited him, throwing the weight of the 'centre' behind a favoured party, thereby creating a loyal client.⁸⁵ The caciques and generals who had riveted their control on to particular states—Alvarez in Guerrero, Méndez in the Puebla sierra, the Cravioto clan in Hidalgo—were patiently prised from power or cajoled into alliances, or, when they were allowed to die in peace, succeeded by Porfirian appointees. Some, like the Craviotos, who never crossed the President, survived for decades. Others, one-time enemies of Díaz, saw the advantage of detente. In Chihuahua, Luis Terrazas (one of the north's self-made men, he was the son of a butcher) had opposed Díaz during the liberal infighting of the 1870s and the president accordingly maintained anti-Terracista administrations in the state through the 1880s and 1890s. Meanwhile, by judicious investment and marriage, Terrazas built up an empire of cattle ranches, flour and textile mills, banks and factories worth over 27m. pesos. Old rancours faded: Terrazas became state governor again in 1903 and was succeeded by his son-in-law Enrique Creel in 1907. Political hegemony now complemented economic power, as the Creel—Terrazas oligarchy came to dominate state politics, local government and the courts.⁸⁶

At the other end of Mexico, in Yucatán, Olegario Molina—a man who has made not only himself but all his family, down to the nephews and sons-in-law of cousins—created a similar politico-economic empire, based on henequen. Though a member of the 'Divine Caste' of richest planters, Molina could not compare with Terrazas for sheer landholdings; but he and his son-in-law, Avelino Montes, served as Mexican agents for the International Harvester Co., the monopolistic buyer of Yucatán's henequen.⁸⁷ In addition to his economic muscle, Molina became state governor in 1902; one of his brothers was *jefe político* of Mérida, another President of the United Railways of Yucatán; lower in the clan, the son of a cousin served as Inspector of Mayan Ruins—in which capacity, he told two English travellers, 'he had never been to Chichén Itzá, but . . . he had satisfactory photographs'.⁸⁸ The Creel—Terrazas and Molina—Montas oligarchies were—sheer wealth apart—only exceptional in that they finally added national to local preferment: Creel served as Foreign Minister, Molina as Minister of Fomento (Development) in the penultimate Díaz cabinet.

Most local elites remained staunchly local. Over the years, however, as the political mobility of the civil wars gave way to the *immobilisme* of the late Porfiriato, so they grew older, tighter, and more exclusive. In San Luis Potosí, the Díez Gutiérrez brothers alternated in the statehouse for twenty years; Sonora was dominated by General Luis Torres, who served five terms as governor, with a Torre-sista front-man filling in between each term.⁸⁹ The Rabasas ran Chiapas: Ramón governed, one son was boss of San Cristóbal, another of Tapachula (where he had a monopoly of the slaughter-houses to add to his tram concession in Soconusco), a nephew served as a state deputy, as *jefe* of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, and as commander of the state *rurales*; a brother-in-law was mayor of Tuxtla and a sister ran the Escuela Normal.⁹⁰ Brother Emilio, the intellectual of the family, figured prominently in the Científico elite of Mexico City. In Puebla, an old companion-in-arms of Díaz, Mucio Martínez, held the governorship for eighteen years (this was no record: Cahuantzi, in Tlaxcala, served twenty-six and others over twenty), enriching himself by operating illegal saloons, brothels, and the state *pulque* monopoly. He and his official accomplices—notably his Chief of Police, Miguel Cabrera—were bywords for corrupt and arbitrary government, even by Porfirian standards; ‘with governors like Mucio Martínez’, declared an opposition spokesman, ‘revolution is a duty’.⁹¹

But Díaz made it clear that the perpetuation of these great satrapies depended on his goodwill. In the early days he weeded out governors of doubtful loyalty; thereafter, re-elections and replacements only went ahead after Díaz had weighed local reports and petitions, exercising the ultimate veto of the ‘centre’.⁹² Where necessary, he created counterweights to incumbent caciques: the young, ambitious and loyal General Bernardo Reyes was sent as chief of operations in the north east in order to offset the influence of Generals Treviño and Naranjo, and to bind these distant states to the central government; Treviño and Naranjo turned from public life to private business and their many clients were prised from power. But there was a revealing postscript. Elected governor of Nuevo León, Reyes enjoyed two decades of uninterrupted power—a model ruler and a prop of the Porfirian establishment. But when men began to talk of Reyes as presidential timber, Díaz was swift to act, and among the decisive measures he took in 1909, in order to eradicate Reyes as a political threat, was the appointment of the aged General Gerónimo Treviño as military commander in the north east. The wheel had come full circle; in the end, as in the beginning, the divide-and-rule principle kept all the strings in Díaz’s hands and these hands had only to twitch, at

the apprehension of an over-mighty subject, for the threat to be removed.⁹³

If, in the last analysis, the ‘centre’ prevailed over these local oligarchies, Díaz certainly took care not to antagonise too many provincial caudillos at one time; he buttressed their authority so long as they remained loyal, and he was not too bothered when state governors—who on their visits to the capital strove to convey an impression of culture and civilisation—drank, domineered, grafted, and abducted. Loyalty, rather than civic responsibility, was the chief desideratum. Hence, a large proportion of Porfirian governors—maybe 70%—were presidential favourites, imported into alien states, where their prime allegiance was to their president and maker, rather than to their provincial subjects: Antonio Mercenario of Guerrero, for example, knew the state merely as overseer of the Huitzucó mines, owned by Díaz’s wife; his successor, Agustín Mora, was another outsider, from Puebla.⁹⁴ Local opinion might be outraged, but governors tended to be loyal, even servile.⁹⁵ As a result, when the Revolution came, it was not, like so many Latin American revolutions, the work of ambitious state governors (Urquiza riding out of Entre Ríos to topple Rosas, Vargas seizing power from Rio Grande do Sul in 1930), rather, it was an upswelling of popular feeling directed not only against Díaz but also—even more so—against the creatures he had installed in the state palaces of the Federation.

The army, the other great source of Latin American revolutions, offers a comparable case. At the outset, the Porfirian regime had a military complexion: three-quarters of the state governors of 1885 were generals, even if only two or three were career soldiers. By 1903, however, the complement of military governors had fallen from eighteen to eight and those who survived and prospered politically were those, like Reyes, who displayed administrative talents as well as military skills.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the military establishment itself was cut back: the number of generals by a careful quarter, the total strength by a third, from thirty to twenty thousand. Even this was paper strength, for when, in 1910, the army was called upon to face its biggest test, only 14,000 or so men could be put into the field.⁹⁷ Auxiliary forces, too, like the state militias had been savagely pruned (in the interests of centralisation) and, as peace reigned and municipal government decayed, the once vigorous local defence forces had fallen into disuse.⁹⁸ This run-down of the bloated armed forces of the 1870s made political and budgetary sense, eliminating the gang of power- and peso-hungry generals which had battered on the treasury since Independence. And it worked militarily: thanks to the new

railway network, Díaz could despatch troops into areas of disaffection and stifle revolts with unprecedented speed and efficiency. But this low-cost strategy involved risks which were dramatically revealed in 1910-11, when revolts proliferated, and the army, confined to the major towns and the vulnerable railway lines, proved inadequate to maintain the regime.

Díaz's was not a military regime. True, the army played an important part in maintaining the Pax Porfiriana: it had fought no foreign opponent since the French quit Mexico in 1867, and officers like Reyes and Victoriano Huerta won their laurels and secured presidential favour by 'pacifying actions' and punitive expeditions, in which rebellious Indians or political dissidents were the victims.⁹⁹ But the regime enjoyed other—civilian, *caciquista*—institutional bases and the army was in no sense an autonomous political actor: it took its orders from Díaz and carried them out loyally; rarely did officers, like Heriberto Frías, denounce in public the repressive actions they had to perform in practice.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the army underwent gradual professionalism (in the 1900s, along Prussian lines) and it became less a bastion of conservative privilege, more a *carrière ouverte aux talents*, especially middle-class talents.¹⁰¹ At the top, Díaz's generals grew old (by 1910 all the divisional generals were in their seventies, veterans, like Díaz himself, of the mid-century civil wars); they had acquired European spiked helmets and waxed moustaches to match their European munitions and European military manuals; under their leadership the army served as a loyal arm of the dictatorship, devoid of political pretensions. The Revolution changed all that.

What the Revolution failed to change—if we compare the 1900s and the 1920s—was the position of the rank-and-file, who were for the most part reluctant conscripts, rounded up by the authorities to meet required quotas, or even dragged from the gaols. Since most were Indian or mestizo, foreign military opinion disdained them as quasi-colonial levies (an estimation which was not altogether wide of the mark).¹⁰² Not surprisingly, they were unreliable. When a picket of press-ganged troops was set to guard a prison work gang, an additional police detachment had to keep an eye on the troops; when soldiers were sent to Salina Cruz to protect a gang of West Indian labourers, whose presence the local workers resented, 'the first request of the officer in charge was to have strong blockhouses built, as the only means of preventing his soldiers from running away and marauding in the neighbourhood'.¹⁰³ For the common people, forced service in the army was among the most feared of punishments, and one that a good many rebel leaders (such as Zapata and Calix

to Contreras) had suffered.¹⁰⁴ A few significant individuals thereby gained some familiarity, not with the arts of war, but with the internal working of the army, and the army acquired a mass of sullen conscripts, many on the look-out for the first opportunity to desert.

In the old days, when Díaz was young, the power of the military had been rivalled by that of the Catholic Church. But the liberal victory in the civil wars of the 1850s and 1860s had broken the economic power of the Church, stripping it of its huge landed wealth, and laws now curtailed the Church's ability either to educate outside church schools, or to pray, process and preach outside church buildings. The defeat of the conservatives left the Church in political limbo, shunned by the liberal rulers of Mexico and compelled, by its adherence to Pius IX and the Syllabus, to abjure them.¹⁰⁵ But as a moral force, capable of influencing the hearts and minds of men (and even more of women), the Church remained powerful and Díaz, keen to maintain a somnolent political climate, had no intention of going the way of doctrinaire, priest-baiting Liberals. On the contrary, his regime witnessed a gradual, though never total, detente between Church and state. The laws and the landed status quo remained (too many Liberals had a stake in that for any change to be contemplated) but the rules were gently bent, or overlooked, especially in states where devout Porfiristas ruled, and clerical garb reappeared on the streets, church bells were rung, religious lessons were tacked on at the end of the day in secular schools. Díaz sanctioned detente in Mexico, just as Pope Leo XIII did globally: the Archbishop of Mexico, exiled by the liberals, returned to officiate at Díaz's wedding; when the old prelate died in 1891, Díaz attended his funeral.¹⁰⁶ Some die-hard Liberals denounced this backsliding, just as some more radical Catholics began to question the social abuses of the Porfiriato; in the course of the 1900s, as the following chapter shows, both became more vociferous. Till then, the Church-State conflict remained muted, to the advantage of the regime, and Díaz, if he had not won a fervent ally in the Church, had at least disarmed a potential opponent.

The regime's neglect of constitutional requirements, evident in the case of the Church, was even clearer in the operations of Mexico's supposedly representative democracy. Díaz's Mexico was thus a leading member of that great tribe of 'artificial democracies', states in which political practice diverged radically from imposed, liberal theory.¹⁰⁷ Mexican politics were shot through with fraud, graft and nepotism; vices in the eyes of the regime's critics, but sources of strength to Porfirian rulers,

complementing brute force, and so deeply entrenched that they easily survived the overthrow of the Porfirian system. It was expected that men in power, nationally and locally, would protect and advance their families and *compadres*, that political and judicial decisions would be influenced by considerations of personal gain, that concessions and contracts would be awarded according to criteria other than the purely economic. The *mordida*—the ‘bite’, or bribe—was an integral part of business and politics: Lord Cowdray, the British oil magnate, probably never ‘bribed any of the Mexicans’, commented an ingenuous (and mistaken) diplomat, ‘(but) he sometimes gave valuable presents and he appointed prominent Mexicans to positions which did not involve much work in his businesses’.¹⁰⁸ But, in indulging in such methods—greasing palms, trading favours and recruiting clients—foreigners merely followed the local rules. The bonds of blood, *compadrazgo* and clientelism (the most ubiquitous of the allegiances mentioned earlier) stretched across Mexican society: ‘each employee represents a whole hierarchy of protectors’.¹⁰⁹ Out in the sticks, for example, muleteers needed the favourable recommendation of the local political boss to secure trade; state governors, as we have seen, advanced their friends and relatives wholesale; officers in the rural police—in defiance of regulations—commanded over and promoted their own sons and nephews.¹¹⁰

Hence, when the bastard son of the *jefe político* of Tulancingo (Hgo) was threatened with arrest by the *jefe* of neighbouring Tenango del Doria, the response was typical: ‘son,’ his father said, ‘I am the *jefe político* of Tulancingo and the Governor of the state is Pedro Rodríguez; I am his intimate friend and we shall succeed in ousting that *jefe* in Tenango . . . who has ordered your arrest’.¹¹¹ The outcome is unknown; the story—told by a ‘garrulous, simple-minded individual’—may even be apocryphal; but it is in keeping with the mores of Porfirian Mexico. Politics was less a high-minded, Gladstonian striving in the public interest, than a source of power, security and patronage, in a society where opportunities for advancement were often limited. A growing number of Mexicans, however, deplored this state of affairs and sought to close the chasm between constitutional precept and political practice; for, as long as constitutions remain, however neglected and abused, authoritarian regimes (be they artificial liberal democracies or pseudo-workers’ states) can hardly expect their subjects to maintain indefinitely a ‘willing suspension of disbelief regarding matters political and constitutional. Eventually, as Díaz found, the constitutional chickens come home to roost.

For a generation, however, it worked. Within the central government, the executive, with Díaz at its head, was all-powerful. The Supreme Court, commented a critic, was more ‘courtesan’ than court, in this it reflected the position of the judiciary as a whole.¹¹² Opposition groups in Congress—still vocal in the 1880s—were gradually silenced, as their members were harassed and as rigged elections guaranteed an increasingly loyal legislature. Relatives and cronies of the president packed the Chamber, and fellow-Oaxaqueños rose high in government and administration. Local factions who sought to field a candidate for state governor, and who therefore needed Díaz’s support, could do worse than pick a native of Oaxaca—‘that favoured spot . . . so productive of statesmen’—even if the governorship was that of San Luis.¹¹³ At both state and national level, therefore, the legislature was effectively appointed by the executive and its members were cyphers, ‘I doubt’, remarked an Englishman in Durango, ‘if 1% of the inhabitants could tell their names’.¹¹⁴ The irrelevance of Congress became a byword. When one Federal deputy had failed either to attend the Chamber or—more surprising—to collect his salary for two months ‘they sent an urgent messenger and ascertained that he had died eight months before he was ever elected’; another apocryphal story, perhaps, but one that is no less revealing.¹¹⁵

Political power, during the Porfiriato, was concentrated in a small coterie surrounding the dictator—a national oligarchy paralleling the state oligarchies already mentioned. First elected to the presidency in 1876, after a revolt against Lerdo and the evils of re-election, Díaz secured his own re-election on seven occasions; following the presidential term of his old compadre Manuel González (1880-4) he ruled for twenty-seven consecutive years. Early presidential rivals, González, Dublán, Pacheco, Romero Rubio, were beaten off and by the 1890s Díaz’s personal dictatorship was not only established but was clearly seen to be established. Now, as the president entered his sixties, a new political generation, familiar with and moulded by the years of peace, came to the fore, replacing the old generals and caciques. They paused to wonder what would happen (what, in particular, would happen to them) when the lynchpin of the system was removed; in 1897 their fears were stimulated by an unsuccessful attempt on Díaz’s life and Finance Minister Limantour, on a trip abroad, learned that foreign bankers were also worried about the political succession.¹¹⁶

The 1890s thus saw the first attempts to place the regime on a surer institutional footing. In 1892 a group of Díaz supporters formed the Liberal Union, which advocated the president’s third re-election in

return for certain concessions which, they argued, would strengthen the regime, ensure continuity of government and avert the 'terrible crisis' of succession which they foresaw when Díaz was removed from the scene. Even some critics of the regime regarded their proposals as 'noble and pure'.¹¹⁷ A third re-election, the Liberal Union conceded, meant a sacrifice of democratic hopes, but this was warranted by the situation; peace, now established, had to be preserved, and Mexico could not implement the full democracy of the 1857 Constitution without risking anarchy. Future reforms depended on continued peace and material progress. Hence, though the Liberal Union made moderate political proposals, advocating the immovability of the judiciary and the creation of a vice-presidency, its chief concern was for continued economic development: more railways, a rationalised fiscal system, the suppression of internal customs barriers, European immigration, and further cuts in the military budget. This insistence on the primacy of material progress and on the need to match political reforms to the level of economic development revealed the positivist influence at work among the Porfiristas of the Liberal Union. Hence, claiming a Comtian and 'scientific' view of society, they acquired their nickname: the Científicos.¹¹⁸

But this move towards a party organisation (which some hoped would be seconded by conservative, Catholic interests, creating an embryonic two-party system) was soon thwarted and the mild reforms were ignored or compromised away. Perhaps the last, best chance of gradual change, guided from above, was thereby lost and personal rule, lacking institutional supports, persisted. Even when Díaz conceded the vice-presidency in 1904, he made sure that its incumbent was (as he admitted himself) an unpopular *adicto*, who posed no threat to the president: Vice-President Corral began unpopular, remained unpopular, and Díaz took pains to keep him uninformed and uninfluential.¹¹⁹ Fearful of rivals and jealous of his untrammelled power, Díaz thus perpetuated a variety of personal rule which, after the manner of the Virgin Queen, kept the succession an open and potentially explosive question.

But this was not the end of the Científicos. Though their proposals of 1892 foundered, they were clearly the coming men, a new generation (most of them were born in the 1850s) who now stepped into the shoes of the moribund liberal veterans of Díaz's own generation. They were also a new type: urbane, cosmopolitan, articulate and well read. Led (unofficially, for they constituted no formal political party) first by Díaz's father-in-law, Romero Rubio, and then by Finance Minister Limantour, they acquired a comprehensive range of political, administrative and

business posts, amassing huge wealth and, supposedly, huge influence. Over time, their positivist emphasis on economic development squeezed out their moderate political reformism and they emerged as the foremost advocates, apologists, and beneficiaries of Mexican capitalism. The Científicos have often been portrayed as corrupt *vendepatrias*, representatives of a comprador bourgeoisie which—unlike the national bourgeoisie of the Revolution—delivered the Mexican economy into foreign hands.¹²⁰ Certainly the Científicos favoured foreign investment, which grew some thirty-fold during the Porfiriato, with the US supplying the greatest share.¹²¹ Of total direct foreign investment, about one-third went into railways, a quarter into mining, the remainder into banks, utility companies, property ventures, textile factories and oil. The Científicos involved themselves directly in these operations, handling concessions and contracts and serving on company boards: Pablo Macedo, for example, President of the Federal Congress, was director of two banks, of the Aguila Oil Co., the Panamerican Railway, the Buen Tono cigarette firm, the Mexican Light and Power Co., and the Light and Power Co. of Pachuca; Fernando Pimentel y Fagoaga, Mayor of Mexico City in 1910, served on the board of four banks, of the Chapala Hydro-Electric Co., the San Rafael Paper Co., the Industrial Co. of Atlixco, the Sierra Lumber Co., and the Monterrey Smelting Co.¹²²

But the Científicos were not simply profiteers masquerading as positivists. They had a genuine vision of a dynamic, developing Mexico. They saw foreign investment as a crucial factor in this development, but they looked to Europe to offset American influence and they anticipated the day when—as Limantour and Pablo Macedo argued—domestic capital, already dominant in some sectors, would assume a greater, determining role within the economy.¹²³ By the 1900s, indeed, a new economic nationalism emerged in Porfirian-Científico circles: protective tariffs were raised, the bulk of the railways were merged and taken under government control, and the debates over the new Mining Code indicated that the Científicos' design to nationalise the process of economic development was real and not just rhetorical.¹²⁴ Furthermore, both Científico thinking and government policy recognised that development also depended on factors which were 'non-economic'. Crime, alcoholism, illiteracy, squalor and disease were subjects of lively debate and study: Justo Sierra championed educational reform (and the Porfiriato witnessed a modest but significant improvement in educational provision); preventive medicine and urban sanitation were overhauled.¹²⁵ Achievements in these fields were variable and limited, in

particular, the Científico strategy of development encountered major, 'structural' barriers which it showed no desire or capacity to dismantle. Their demolition was not to come until after the Revolution.¹²⁶ But it cannot be denied that the Científicos had a programme of development which—however unjust or misconceived—went beyond personal speculation and collective *entreguismo*. It was a programme, furthermore, which later revolutionaries plagiarised at will and it was certainly not a formula for standpat conservatism. Politically inflexible and authoritarian, the Científicos were economically progressive, dedicated to the principle of 'progress' and capable, it seems, of imparting a similar dedication among their minions.¹²⁷ Indeed, it was as much their fervent commitment to social and economic change as their resistance to political reform which brought about their eventual downfall.

For by 1910 the position of the Científicos proved to be precarious. Over the long term their economic strategy appeared to be vindicated: during the Porfiriato, as population grew at 1.4% per annum, economic production increased at a rate of 2.7%, exports at 6.1%.¹²⁸ Mexico experienced a phase of export-led growth not unusual in Latin America during these years and this enabled Limantour, Finance Minister since 1893, to convert a situation of chronic governmental bankruptcy into one of unprecedented fiscal and budgetary stability. In the course of the 1890s Limantour balanced the budget, reformed the treasury, abolished internal tariffs and overhauled the country's banking institutions. In 1905 he placed Mexico on the gold standard, eliminating the fluctuations in value of the peso, hitherto based on silver. By 1910 the Mexican government had reserves in excess of 60m. pesos and could borrow at 5%; indeed, when the Revolution broke out, Limantour was in Europe, negotiating a reconversion of the national debt at 4%.¹²⁹ Limantour's success depended to a large extent on global trends which—as the recession of 1907 displayed—were beyond his control. But even then Díaz retained his faith in Científico theory and practice: sound credit and a healthy budget were essential ingredients of the Pax Porfiriana, which preceding regimes had lacked, to their cost. In the financial world, therefore, where Díaz's own abilities were limited, the president readily deferred to his team of loyal and efficient technocrats.¹³⁰

Politically, however, the Científicos were weak and, by 1910, bitterly unpopular, the very term 'Científico' having become a general term of abuse, indicating a Porfirista, reactionary, or almost any political opponent associated with the old regime. Unpopular village officials were 'Científicos', often misspelt.¹³¹ Apart from their greed and graft, the Científicos were

supposed to have ensnared Díaz, making him their pliant puppet. Down in Oaxaca, where Díaz's friends, high and low, were still numerous, Limantour was 'universally considered a dangerous man, a sinister factor . . . dictating the policy of the President'; Limantour was forced to complain to Díaz himself of the 'daily attacks whose instigators (whom you and I know well) try . . . to portray you before the whole world as a puppet manipulated by the "científicos"'.¹³² Some historians have taken these polemics at face value. Yet it is clear that the Científicos, for all their wealth and contacts, enjoyed limited political power, and their position was always conditional on the favour of Díaz himself. They were rooted in Mexico City, where they held their cabinet or congressional posts and managed their legal and business affairs; with the exception of Creel and Molina (and maybe Rabasa) they exercised no power in the provinces, though their unpopularity knew no such bounds. The loathed Científicos remained an intellectual, technocratic elite, confined to the metropolis, their influence 'deriving from the only authentic source of power, which was Porfirio Díaz'.¹³³ This dependence, indeed, was heightened in the closing years of the regime. While politics remained the prerogative of narrow camarillas, national and local, the Científicos prospered, but as the issue of the succession began to agitate the political nation and as new political movements got under way, they faltered. They lacked popularity, they lacked support among Porfiristas in the provinces, they lacked the charisma and common touch which, in the novel situation of political mobilisation, counted for more than seats on the board or a well-stocked law library. Open—even half open politics did not suit them. Limantour, passed over for vice-president in 1904, when he had fallen victim to a hostile press campaign, was no more popular in 1910.¹³⁴ There was no question of the Científicos surviving the fall of their master: all that remained of them after 1910 was the opprobrious label and the developmentalist ideology, soon to be taken up by others.

The Científicos' crucial weakness was their neglect of the provincial grassroots. Díaz knew better: his regime depended, at root, on the tight control exercised over the municipalities of the country by political bosses, the *jefes políticos*, appointed by the executive. It was through these three hundred or so key officials, 'who, at the moment of action, were indispensable political agents', that the Porfirian regime exercised its social control and it was in reaction to these many petty 'Díazpotisms' that local opposition and revolutionary movements often developed.¹³⁵

Mexico's municipalities had longstanding democratic traditions, tracing back to the self-governing

Spanish towns and Indian villages of the colony, and later enshrined in the liberal constitutions of the nineteenth century. But, particularly since the days of Bourbon centralism, power-hungry administrations had cut back the authority of municipal government, of mayor and town council. By the 1900s, outright executive appointees had replaced elected officials in certain states, such as Chihuahua.¹³⁶ Elsewhere, elected officials only secured election through the good offices of the executive, that is, of the *jefe político*. As a result, local elections became a sham, conducted amidst apathy and indifference, and municipal authorities became the supine servants of the executive, irremovable, unresponsive to local opinion, and starved of funds.¹³⁷ The strings of local power were gathered in the hands of the *jefe político* and only in regions where centralisation had made less headway—in the sierras and the remote south—did municipalities retain some of their old freedom and autonomy.

The character of the *jefe* varied from place to place. Like many Porfirian officials, *jefes* often owed their position to family connections: Luis Demetrio Molina, of Mérida, had uncle Olegario to thank; Silvano Martínez of Uruapán (Mich.) had married the daughter of state governor Mercado.¹³⁸ Such family relationships penetrated deep into the fabric of local government. Some municipalities—like Guachóchic, in the Chihuahua sierra—were nests of nepotism, in which a couple of related families monopolised political, fiscal and judicial offices: Urique, in the same region, represented 'el colmo de compadrazgo', where a single family ran the beef trade and held all federal, state and municipal posts.¹³⁹ Increasingly, as the power of national and state governments grew, these local hierarchies depended on—often were created by—forces external to the *municipio* itself. Standing at the apex of the local hierarchy, the *jefe político* sought to reconcile its interests (usually the interests of the well-to-do) with the growing demands of the 'centre'. Where such a reconciliation could not be effected, the regime faced the opposition of entire communities, from top to bottom.¹⁴⁰ More often, the *jefe* governed to the satisfaction of the well-to-do and to the disgust of the *pelados*.

Most *jefes* were imposed from outside, by the 'centre'. Some were military men, like Colonel Celso Vega, the middle-aged army regular who ran Baja California Norte, or the disastrous Brigadier-General Higinio Aguilar, an old veteran of the French Intervention, who lasted two and a half months as *jefe político* at Cuernavaca (Mor.), antagonising the population, until a fraud charge removed him from office.¹⁴¹ There were also suave *jefes*, who impressed foreign travellers with their culture: the antiquarian

Andrés Ruiz of Tlacolula (Oax.) whom, it was said, the local people 'trusted and liked', or the 'well-read Cicerone', Enrique Dabbadie of Cuautla (Mor.), who proved no literary slouch when, facing political opposition in his district in 1909, he ordered the mounted police to break up demonstrations and arrested a crowd of 'local merchants, workers, clerks (and) peons . . . some without charges being filed, most simply because of their reputations'.¹⁴² Curbing the opposition in this way was one of the main tasks of the *jefe político*, particularly in the last years of the Porfiriato, when political passions were rising. Puebla, seat of the corrupt and arbitrary Martinista administration, became a centre of political dissidence, which the Martinista *jefe*, Joaquín Pita, sought to contain. When the governor's car was stoned in the streets of the city, Pita (dismissing the political significance of the affair) had thirty alleged culprits consigned to the army.¹⁴³ At election time he personally closed down polling booths which might deliver an anti-government vote and had their rash supervisors arrested.¹⁴⁴ The *jefe* of the Chihuahuan mining town of Batopilas similarly disfranchised the opposition, denying them booths and sending a list of miners thought to be sympathetic to the opposition to the American manager, in the hope that he would apply suitable pressure. Though there were precedents for such action, the manager declined: foreign businessmen were chary of direct involvement in the flux of Porfirian politics.¹⁴⁵

Foreign businessmen did, however, take steps to cultivate the local *jefe*, and they valued his co-operation in the maintenance of order: the *jefe*, it might be said, stood in the front line of the Porfirian 'collaborating elite', performing a function no less vital than that of the Científicos.¹⁴⁶ Some *jefes*—like an earlier incumbent at Batopilas—defused strike agitation by diplomacy and exhortation; Carlos Herrera at Orizaba, and even Joaquín Pita at Puebla, showed an awareness of the problems of the textile workers and a clear desire to combine repression with sympathy.¹⁴⁷ In this respect—and particularly where the textile workers were concerned—they reflected a more general change taking place in Porfirian official attitudes towards labour. But elsewhere, most notably, it would seem, in the wild and remote mining camps of the north, *jefes* preferred the stick to the carrot and 'mine managers openly boasted of these methods to timid investors'.¹⁴⁸ The *jefe político* of Mapimí, for example, broke a strike at the Peñoles mine by riding into town with the police, dragging the strikers from their homes, and beating up the furnacemen who refused to work at the old rate: a case of *trop de zèle*, it would seem, for the company

were prepared to concede a pay rise, after a suitable delay.¹⁴⁹

In addition to political surveillance and peace-keeping, the *jefe* could fulfil a number of informal functions: 'he was the local authority of the central government, the boss of the town and often its moneylender, pawnbroker, house agent, merchant and marriage broker at the same time, and all greatly to his own profit'.¹⁵⁰ Some resisted the gross temptations of office and exercised a benevolent despotism over their districts. Demetrio Santibáñez, despite an earlier record of political repression in southern Veracruz, 'ruled the district (of Tehuantepec) with firmness and tact', settling complex conjugal disputes with threats and blandishments, rattling off official letters on his typewriter, while stocking his private menagerie with parrots, monkeys and geckos. Santibáñez governed with the support of a Tehuana *cacica*, thereby, it seems, guaranteeing his popularity: a few years later, when the Revolution gave the chance, his son was made *jefe político* by popular acclamation.¹⁵¹ There were other *jefes*—like Juan Francisco Villar of Uruapán, who had 'practised Democracy in the full flood of Dictatorship'—who were the objects of popular esteem and recall.¹⁵² Equally, there were cases where the *jefe* was exonerated of abuses committed by other officials: the corrupt judicial authorities of Parral, the police chief who was a 'real tyrant' at Jiménez (Chih.).¹⁵³

As these examples suggest, there was considerable scope for individual variation, which in turn might be translated into a varied pattern of revolutionary response after 1910. Given the opportunity, many communities were discriminating in offloading some officials, retaining, even recalling others. Yet, even here, it seems, the system contained a quantum of oppression which it was hard to avoid: if the *jefe político* escaped censure, then the police chief, *juez de paz*, or tax-collector incurred opprobrium; the licence to oppress was not eliminated, simply shared around. It was particularly evident, too, in certain recognisable and recurrent cases, where the imperatives of social and political circumstances defied individual tact or reputation. In regions of acute agrarian tension, for example, the *jefe*, as appointee of the centre and upholder of law and order, was easily converted into an ally of expansionist landlords.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, where a small commercial elite held a community and its rural hinterland in an economic vice, the *jefe* partnered mercantile exploiters—at Acapulco for example.¹⁵⁵ But the *jefe* was most acutely and specifically resented in regions where he acted as the arm of an entrenched state oligarchy, enforcing a new and rigid centralism in defiance of municipal interests and independence: in Chihuahua, where

Governor Creel replaced elected with appointed *jefes municipales*, creating a tribe of 'veritable sultans'; or in Sonora, where the Torres administration likewise dismantled elected local government in a state where political literacy and expectations were on the increase.¹⁵⁶

In circumstances like these, the *jefe político* appeared as a tyrant subverting local liberties. Hence communities preferred that a local man should occupy this crucial office, for a local man might display some degree of social responsibility, and, after 1911, demands to this effect came thick and fast, coupled sometimes with declarations that 'this pueblo refuses to be abandoned into the hands of a stranger who comes from outside'.¹⁵⁷ During the Porfiriato, however, outsiders predominated, and the chief criterion for appointment was loyalty to the executive—to the state governor, and to Díaz himself, who took a close interest in the selection of *jefes políticos*.¹⁵⁸ The Porfirian regime, bent on centralisation, knew no other way of operating. As for its opponents, some sought the end of centralisation and the consequent abolition of the *jefaturas*, others would retain but democratise the system, making it answerable to its subjects. Meantime, the regime judged a *jefe* according to his success at managing elections, maintaining order, silencing political opposition and labour unrest. If he failed in these respects—as Dabbadie appreciated at Cuautla—his remunerative employment was at an end; similarly, municipal officials who went against their governor's wishes were soon out of a job.¹⁵⁹

Loyalty to Díaz rather than responsibility to subjects was the hallmark of the system: for *jefes políticos* 'the sole desire is to keep the Centre happy, and the Centre is happy so long as there is no revolution and not too many bandits in the countryside. The rest is neither here nor there'.¹⁶⁰ If keeping the Centre happy allowed, even encouraged, more enlightened rule, as it apparently did with Herrera at Orizaba or Santibáñez at Tehuantepec, that, for the locals, was a fortunate bonus. More often, as in Durango, the *jefes* were 'men who, to say the least, could never be elected', while some, like Rafael Cervantes (San Juan Guadalupe, Dgo), Jesús González Garza (Velardeña, Dgo), Cipriano Espinosa (San Felipe, Gto), Ignacio Hernández (San Miguel Allende, Gto), were known tyrants, spurs to local rebellion.¹⁶¹

The position of the *jefe* lent itself to corruption. In Oaxaca, a prospective appointee, aware that the official salary of 150 pesos a month was inadequate, had to tout himself around the local planters and businessmen, seeking retainers in return for services to be rendered.¹⁶² Others supplemented their income with fines, some of which were diverted into

the *jefe's* pocket. Complaints against petty, arbitrary fines were legion: in the prosperous towns of Sonora and the booming oil port of Tampico; in Guanajuato, where Indians were fined for coming into town wearing their baggy drawers; in Chihuahua where drunks were mulcted twenty-five pesos, and *arrieros* were fined for watering their burros at public springs.¹⁶³ Joaquín Pita, it was said, made so much money fining the people of Puebla that he paid his boss, Governor Martínez, for the privilege, rather than receiving a salary, while the *jefe* of Soconusco was reckoned to have accumulated a personal fortune of a quarter of a million pesos in three years, dispossessing people of their land and extorting excessive fines.¹⁶⁴ Early in 1911, his fortune made, he quit the region for Mexico City, fearing assassination.

Apart from such quasi-judicial peculation, the *jefe* enjoyed other means of making money. Dabbadie, in Cuautla, embezzled political funds (the Revolution brought to light many similar malpractices); increased, often arbitrary taxes were a constant complaint in Chihuahua and elsewhere; Aguilar lost his job at Cuernavaca for 'defrauding the feeble-minded heir to a Cuernavaca fortune'.¹⁶⁵ Even if some of these allegations were untrue, or exaggerated, they indicated something of the public image of the *jefe* and of his stewardship. Certainly *jefes* followed gubernatorial example and prevailing political mores in blurring their official and private functions. In Yucatán, the *jefe polttico* of Acanceh managed a Molina plantation, while another ran a butcher's shop which local people were obliged to patronise, to the detriment of competitors and customers alike.¹⁶⁶ In Chihuahua, too, local officials, appointed by Governor Creel, were on the payroll of Creel's private companies.¹⁶⁷ Sonoran officials—*jefes*, judges, police chiefs—ran liquor stores and gambling houses.¹⁶⁸ The *jefe's* control of prison work gangs also proved lucrative: one *jefe* used forced labour to pave a road through his brother's hacienda; another had prisoners build him a private house; *jefes* in Guerrero reaped profits supplying work gangs for the Chilpancingo-Acapulco highway.¹⁶⁹ Perhaps most lucrative, certainly most infamous, was the trade in *enganchados*, 'hooked' labourers who were consigned, by force or fraud, to the semi-slave plantations of the south. Ten per cent of the labourers in the notorious Valle Nacional were reckoned to have been sent there by Rodolfo Pardo, *jefe polttico* of nearby Tuxtepec, who 'by the illegal sale of lands and people has amassed a large fortune'.¹⁷⁰ The *jefe* of Pochutla, which lay 'ankle-deep in dust under the blazing sun' of the Pacific, ran a similar trade, while further afield at Pachuca — a large, run-down mining town on the central plateau, where the miners' acquaintance with liquor and unemployment helped business—the *jefe*

annually sent 500 labourers south for plantation work.¹⁷¹

There was one final prerogative of the *jefe* which, if less profitable, was no less gratifying to the official or galling to the people in his charge: the *jefe's* droit de seigneur. 'To possess by force or deceit', it has been said, is the essence of *machismo*, and the *jefe polttico*, along with other members of Porfirian officialdom, had ample opportunity to play the *macho*, again blurring public and private activities.¹⁷² The caciques of Azteca (Mor.), for example, 'took advantage of poor girls. If they liked a girl, they got her—they always enjoyed fine women just because of the power they had. One of the caciques died at eighty in the arms of a fifteen-year-old girl'.¹⁷³ A *jefe* at Mariscal (Chis.) celebrated his birthday by 'inviting' a young woman to his house, while his men ran her *novio* out of town; his counterpart at the Yucateco port of Progreso, Colonel José María Ceballos, aroused a 'very keen hatred' among the local people, not least because of his 'questionable attitude towards the young girls of Progreso', and his propensity to arrest their fathers in order to further his suit.¹⁷⁴ Similar kinds of sexual exploitation had impelled rebels—like Pancho Villa—on their early outlaw careers. In the case of Ceballos it was his libidinous pursuits, rather than the forced conscription, exorbitant taxation, heavy fines and 'arbitrary and dictatorial behaviour in general', of all of which he was guilty, which finally brought his downfall. For in 1914 the daughter of a Progreso butcher, Lino Muñoz, spurned the *jefe's* advances: the father rebelled rather than face reprisals and, recruiting fifty men, he captured the port, paraded Ceballos in the square, and had him shot. The Revolution thus came to Progreso after the manner of a Corsican vendetta.

In the main, Porfirian officialdom's sins of commission weighed most heavily on the *pelados*, the common people, who suffered arbitrary fines, arrests, impressment, deportation, even—in notorious cases like Tepames (Col.)—murder.¹⁷⁵ They conceived a bitter hatred of the regime, in its local manifestation, and the Revolution was therefore characterised both by sudden, violent, popular uprisings against such officials and also by a more general popular hostility to the Porfirian system, and to would-be restorers of that system, whose legitimacy had been irretrievably squandered. This popular reaction must be seen within the general context of Porfirian economic and agrarian policy (the subject of chapter three). The *gente decente* on the other hand, the respectable, literate, propertied people, resented Porfirian officialdom somewhat differently. Some, it is true, suffered arrest and imprisonment for their political views. Antonio Sedano, a 'respected merchant' of

Cuernavaca, who dabbled in opposition politics, was arrested 'for not having washed down the street' in front of his store; Ponciano Medina, arrested by the *jefe político* of Tuxtepec (Rodolfo Pardo again) for participating in an opposition demonstration, chose to pay a fifty peso fine rather than to go to gaol, 'since his social and financial position would not allow his dignity as an honourable businessman to be outraged'.¹⁷⁶ He was gaoled just the same. In general, however, the *gente decente* escaped the more extreme abuses. Their chief complaint was likely to be the unfair, sometimes capricious incidence of taxation, which could weigh heavily on small businessmen and artisans.¹⁷⁷ It was perhaps for this reason that 'Commerce' was linked to 'the People in general' as the joint victims of the corrupt city government of Puebla, or that the *jefe* of San Miguel Allende was said to have 'all the middle and lower class subjugated'.¹⁷⁸

The *gente decente* complained more of Porfirian sins of omission, of official derelictions of duty. The businessmen of Enseñada, for example, were sick of the extravagance and ineptitude of *jefe* Celso Vega, a military mediocrity, who was held responsible for a smallpox outbreak in the region.¹⁷⁹ In Chihuahua, the authorities at Ciudad Camargo tolerated drunkenness and abduction; the *jefe* of the Benito Juárez district of the state could never be found in his office; the municipal boss at Carichic failed in his duty to support the local schools; at Cusihuarachic, a fast-growing mining town, the *jefe* was a wastrel who kept only two policemen on the payroll, and they slouched about in sandals and sloppy shirts. Chihuahuan *jefes* in general, critics complained, failed to supervise their districts, preferring to sit immobile in the *cabecera* (the head town), save when they left 'to come to the capital for some banquet'.¹⁸⁰ What the respectable, literate people of Chihuahua wanted was not less government, but more, better, responsible government. What such people also wanted was a government which not only honoured its constitutional obligations (an obvious but central point), but also lived up to its progressive, 'developmentalist' rhetoric. Científico advocacy of hard work, hygiene, sobriety and 'progress'—values to which respectable critics were also strongly attached—was daily belied by the facts of life in small towns, like Potam (Sra), where the drunk police chief could be found with his cronies—the judge, postmaster and schoolteacher, the 'influential, governing class' of the community—drinking, playing billiards, fixing deals, while outside the streets remained unswept, the streetlights were inadequate, and the only centre of recreation was the saloon. In such towns, 'inefficiency and dishonesty were the order of the day', while, despite the regime's

philosophy, 'all evolution was a sin, and every effort to break with custom a crime'.¹⁸¹ Científicos like Sierra would have shared the sense of outrage. For critics of this kind, it was not that Científico social philosophy fundamentally erred (Científico political authoritarianism was, of course, a different matter), it was rather that the regime had failed to implement the philosophy, that it appeared to tolerate in practice the ingrained vices it condemned in principle.

It was additionally vexing for the *gente decente* that they had no say in the election of local officials, hence no control over their conduct. Sustained pressure, if it came from the right sources and was articulated in the right way, might dislodge an intolerable local boss. Díaz was prepared to cast the occasional *jefe*, like the occasional state governor, to the wolves, in order to assuage public opinion—and *pour encourager les autres*. Peculation and oppression had to be nicely judged, as Higinio Aguilar learned to his cost at Cuernavaca.¹⁸² The people of Villa Aldama (Chih.) showed how to set about removing a hated political boss. They mounted an impressive, decorous demonstration, bringing over 250 protesters to the state capital and handing in a petition to the governor; on returning to Villa Aldama their train was met by 'a group of ladies and señoritas of our better society, with palms and flowers'. Clearly, this was no rabble and since, in the words of the governor, the people of Villa Aldama 'had always given proof of a model peacefulness and notable submissiveness and obedience to the constituted authorities', he agreed to accede to their petition and remove the offending official.¹⁸³

But the government did not like doing this too often. Many more petitions and complaints were ignored; some egregiously offending officials (in particular, one suspects, those who chiefly offended against mute *pelados*) survived and prospered.¹⁸⁴ And from the point of view of the protesters—even successful protesters—this was a clumsy, expensive and uncertain method of effecting changes in local government. When the proposed re-election of unpopular city officials at Tampico produced vocal complaints in December 1910, the ticket was withdrawn and new candidates were substituted. These were elected 'in the usual form'. Not surprisingly, the townspeople remained dissatisfied, since 'they claim that they had no voice in the selection of the new men on this new ticket'.¹⁸⁵ What thinking, respectable citizens wanted was not this vague and uncertain right of veto (a right that could only be exercised occasionally and discreetly), but regular consultation through the polls, as the Constitution provided. Hence arose the original slogan of the 1910

revolution, *Sufragio Efectivo, No Re-elección*, and the reiterated cry for *Municipio Libre*, free local government.

In maintaining, in defiance of the Constitution, a closed, *caciquista* form of politics, the Porfirian regime had constant resort to repression, perpetrated by the army or the police, particularly the mounted police, the *rurales*. In some towns, such as Parral, the police chief called the tune and incurred popular hostility.¹⁸⁶ Elsewhere, at Potam, for example, or Puebla, he acted as ally and crony of the *jefe*. The death of Miguel Cabrera, Puebla's chief of police, provoked scurrilous verses in 1910:

Cabrera arrived in hell, in his bowler hat and frockcoat,

And a witch said to him: 'Why haven't you brought Pita?'¹⁸⁷

Porfirian police methods were crude: suspects had been known to die in custody (Cabrera had been involved in one famous case) and there were allegations of torture, though in this respect Díaz, and his regime, were mild in comparison with Latin American dictatorships of then and now.¹⁸⁸

If the regime was even less a police state than it was a militarist state, nevertheless it maintained a degree of covert political surveillance, particularly in the later years, as opposition grew and the president, perhaps, became more suspiciously dictatorial. Plainclothes policemen watched opposition demonstrations, like those of the Anti-Re-electionist students in 1892; in the provinces, governors, *jefes políticos*, and military commanders monitored local subversion, reporting to Díaz members of opposition groups and subscribers to opposition newspapers.¹⁸⁹ Governor Martínez of Puebla was particularly zealous in the collection of political intelligence: he employed a retired policeman, turned newsagent, to furnish the names of those who read the wrong papers; he supplied Díaz with a complete run of the oppositionist *Regeneración*; he sent his hired thugs to pay nocturnal visits on suspect citizens. As new opposition parties developed in the 1900s, they were promptly infiltrated, as were some Masonic lodges. *Jefes* sent delegates to opposition party conventions (when they were permitted), while the military commander at Juárez hired a 'seductive lady' to worm her way into the Liberal Party and monitor their plans in the US. Political exiles such as these were closely watched (as were their families in Mexico) and there were even attempts at assassination on foreign soil.¹⁹⁰

Within Mexico, the growth of political activity in the 1900s was matched by a parallel growth of secret police activity, of which people were well aware. In Yucatán, the rise of the 'universally detested secret

police' added a new dimension to the old *caciquismo*: it was reckoned that Governor Molina had recruited 700 agents in a city of 50,000 (Mérida), where they 'were used for political and worse purposes by the Governor'.¹⁹¹ Creel had his secret police in Chihuahua, too, said to be better known than the uniformed variety, and 'recognisable from miles away'.¹⁹² Nevertheless, Porfirian rulers were tolerably successful at sniffing out disaffection and quashing revolts, like those of 1906 and 1908, organised by the Liberals. The first flicker of the 1910 revolution was easily doused as well. Porfirian political intelligence was thus adequate for pinpointing known oppositionists. It failed, however, to convey an accurate, general picture of political conditions and unrest and it failed because the kind of reports which governors, *jefes* and police chiefs liked both to file and to receive were ones in which the strength of the opposition was deprecated and derided, that of the regime taken for granted. A generation of peace had instilled a fatal political hubris and the regime, insulated from the reality of its own unpopularity, was encouraged to disregard mounting political and social unrest. Hence the 1910 revolution came as a surprise.

When it came, the regime proved equal to the challenge in the cities, where most known oppositionists were gathered and where they could easily be apprehended. But in the countryside, soon to be the locus of rebellion, the situation was different. Opposition here was more anonymous, inarticulate, and often unforeseen. Its supposed antidote was the rural police, the *rurales*, the showpiece of the Pax Porfiriana. The *rurales*, established in the 1860s as the Juárez government's answer to endemic banditry, had by the 1900s become a symbol of the Porfirian regime's *machismo* and efficiency. Foreigners, especially foreign ladies, were susceptible to the *rurales'* fine mounts and dashing *charro* outfits—tight trousers, brief leather jackets, wide sombreros, bandannas, cummerbunds and assorted weaponry. Parading through Mexico City, with sparks flying from their horses' hooves, they cut a fine figure and the romantic aura (cultivated by the official press) was only heightened by the prevalent belief that many *rurales* were themselves ex-bandits, now given 'the congenial occupation . . . of hunting down other robbers and malcontents'.¹⁹³

The truth was more prosaic. The early *rurales* had included some ex-guerrilleros, though few bandits. By the 1890s the majority of recruits were *campesinos* and artisans (the latter disproportionately represented), many coming from the declining towns of the Bajío.¹⁹⁴ Their activities were less glamorous too: in 1908, for example, the First,

Second, and Seventh Rural Corps were engaged escorting railway and factory paymasters, keeping order during Holy Week fiestas or on hacienda paydays, policing local elections, quelling revolts against unpopular authorities, conveying prisoners across country (chiefly to the penal colonies on the Tres Mariás islands off the Tepic coast) and chasing rustlers and criminal fugitives. The occasional petty train-robber was the closest to the bandit quarry of the good old days.¹⁹⁵ Some *rurales*, it is true, lived up to the image. Corporal, later Major, Francisco Cárdenas peers impassively from the pages of Casasola, ruggedly handsome in embroidered *charro* jacket and waistcoat and a broad-brimmed sombrero. In 1910 he hunted down the elusive bandit-rebel Santañón and killed him on the banks of the Huasuntán River; three years later he collected an even more prestigious trophy.¹⁹⁶ Yet even Cárdenas' heroics were perhaps, like his jacket, embroidered and there can be no doubt that the *rurales* of the late Porfiriato were in general older, fatter, and less dashing than their image suggested. They were not averse to beating helpless peons (some used that favourite Latin American *bastinado*, the bull's penis), nor to liquidating prisoners by means of the *ley fuga*, the 'shot while trying to escape' formula which saved the authorities the embarrassment of a trial.¹⁹⁷ But Paul Vanderwood has ably documented their many failings, evident in the Gobernación archive, if not in the pages of Mrs Moats and Mrs Tweedie: their predominant illiteracy and one-in-three desertion rate, their combination of adolescence and senility, their drunkenness, delinquency, ill discipline and incompetence.¹⁹⁸

The department of the First Rural Corps, on the eve of the Revolution, did not differ much from the average.¹⁹⁹ Its commander had enlisted in 1869; one of his corporals was a veteran of the War of the Reform (1857–60). But, an inspector concluded, the demands placed on the officers were not extreme: 'posts in the Rural Police . . . as they are carried out at the moment are real sinecures, since the commanders of the detachments, once they establish themselves in the places allocated for residence, apart from procuring a small fortune in the shortest possible time, and at any cost, delegate all the duties of the service to subordinates'. The Corps' tasks—patrolling the railways, haciendas and textile factories of the Puebla-Mexico region—were poorly performed. Trains went unescorted (the *rurales* preferred to lounge in the stations) and managers believed their factories were menaced by labour agitation. The factory workers despised the *rurales*, while the peons of the Oaxaqueña plantation resented their well-paid employment as field managers and

foremen. It was in this (strictly illegal) capacity that the only energetic detachment of the Corps exhausted their horses patrolling the plantation perimeter and bent their sabres belabouring the field hands. Discipline in the Corps was lax, or of a crude, pecking-order variety; nepotism was rife; and officers, generally illiterate, behaved like petty tyrants. Ignorant of the rule-book, they beat their men, reviewed them in shirt-sleeves, neglected their horses, drank, gambled, attended cockfights and ran up bills at the local bars—that is, if they did not, like Corporal Francisco Alvarez, at Atotonilco, run a *cantina* of their own. The men wore 'peasant garb' (no tight trousers and cummerbunds out in the sticks) and lived in squalid barracks, often with their families. Here, one corporal had been laid up with rheumatism for six months. While Corporal Alvarez ran his bar and Corporal Gutiérrez policed the plantation, Corporal Pacheco, who had been stationed at Necaxa for no less than eight years, had built up so many connections that the town was polarised into Pachequista and anti-Pachequista factions. Indeed, relations between the rural police and the civil authorities were not always cordial, and were frequently corrupt: Alvarez, receiving the inspector in bed, boasted of having the judiciary of Atotonilco in his pocket.²⁰⁰

Clearly, the *rurales* were unprepared for the supreme test of 1910. Their job was to police the countryside; they were, supposedly, the fleet, remorseless pursuers of bandits and rebels; they were the regime's first line of defence against subversion in the countryside, where political intelligence was poor and which the Federal army, with its troop trains and artillery, could not easily penetrate. That they failed in 1910 was partly because of their unpopularity at the grassroots (an admirer, with unconscious irony, likened them to 'the Irish Constabulary or . . . that splendid corps, the Guardias Civiles in Spain').²⁰¹ But failure can also be attributed to their acquisition, over the years, of new, peacetime habits; to their accumulation, in particular localities, of sinecures, contacts, retainers, kickbacks; to their growing preference for the quiet life in La Simpática Michoacana (Corporal Alvarez's *cantina*) over that of the hungry, saddle-sore bandit hunter.

The *rurales*, as Vanderwood remarks, were a typical Porfirian institution, a blend of self-interest and oppression tempered by inefficiency, sloth and complacency, displaying an overriding loyalty to the dictator. They may serve as a more general allegory of the regime. By 1910 Mexico's rulers had grown flabby, overweening, unpopular and often unaware of their unpopularity, for too long the monopolists of power and privilege. It was a government of old men: Cahuantzi, governing Tlaxcala, was eighty, Bandala

in Tabasco was seventy-eight, Mercado, of Michoacán, was reckoned to be too senile to sign his name on state papers.²⁰² Old and sick men filled the cabinet, where four senior ministers had enjoyed an average of twenty years apiece in office.²⁰³ As for Díaz himself, now seventy-nine, he had once enjoyed undeniable popularity—as the hero of the French Intervention and the creator of peace and progress; in Oaxaca, and probably elsewhere too, he still enjoyed support.²⁰⁴ But by the 1900s this popularity—and with it the legitimacy of the regime—had waned, not least because of the social stresses consequent on rapid economic change. These stresses, to be considered in the next two chapters, could neither be mediated nor repressed. The Díaz regime was not a military dictatorship, nor a police state: it depended on some lingering legitimacy, as well as on coercion, and the coercion was selective and limited, not indiscriminate. Hence the financially successful rundown of the army, and the recognition, even by opponents of the government, that 'General Díaz has used absolute power with great moderation', that he 'is not a tyrant—a bit rigid, but not a tyrant'.²⁰⁵ Indeed, a fully-fledged police or militarist state might have coped with the challenge of 1910 better than Díaz's ramshackle civilian/*caciquista* regime could.

But this was a failure of political mediation, as well as of military repression.²⁰⁶ Barrington Moore has identified a species of 'strong conservative government', committed to state-building and economic development, but bent on 'trying to solve a problem that was inherently insoluble, to modernise without changing . . . social structures'.²⁰⁷ The Porfirian regime, entertaining similar objectives, went even further in conserving both social structures and political mechanisms. If the Científicos represented one face of the regime—economically progressive, developmentalist, forward-looking—the corrupt *rurales* and arbitrary *jefes* displayed another, which was politically haggard, with rheumy eyes fixed on the past. Yet the social consequences of development had to be mediated through the political system; protests of increasing vigour had to be either accommodated or repressed. As it was, the Porfirian regime refused to accommodate aspiring, articulate groups (its sins of omission), while, in the last resort, it failed to repress aggrieved, declining groups, the chief victim of the regime's sins of commission. Like some saurian monster, the regime lacked a political brain commensurate with its swollen economic muscle; hence its extinction.

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- 127 Judging by the repeated invocation of 'progress', condemnation of 'those who impede progress', and advocacy of education, sobriety and hard work (the 'virtue of great peoples'): see, e.g., *Nueva Era* (Parral, Chih.), 8 Mar., 8, 24 June, 18 Oct., 2, 16, 23 Dec. 1906; *jefe político*, Juárez, to Creel, 29 June 1908, STA, box 28.
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- 132 Lawton, Oaxaca, 3 Apr. 1911, SD 812.00/1300; Limantour, *Apuntes*, p. 178.
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- 134 Henry Lane Wilson, Mexico City, 20 March 1911, SD 812.00/1027.
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- 138 Baerlein, *Mexico*, p. 168; Starr, *In Indian Mexico*, p. 78.
- 139 *El Correo*, 14 May, 21 Sept. 1909.
- 140 See below, pp. 117, 122, 125. Even if the local boss was a decent enough fellow, it was later recalled, 'he always had to be on the side of the rich'; Simón Márquez Camarena, interviewed by María Isabel Souza, 1973, PHO 1/113, p. 12.
- 141 Lowell L. Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution, Baja California 1911* (Madison, 1962), p. 37; Womack, *Zapata*, p. 40.
- 142 Gadow, *Through Southern Mexico*, pp. 246, 278; Womack, *Zapata*, pp. 32-3.
- 143 *El Diario del Hogar*, 9 Oct. 1910.
- 144 Baerlein, *Mexico*, pp. 120-1.
- 145 *El Correo*, 7 July 1910; cf. the same paper's report of 10 Sept. 1909, on the management's veto of the establishment of a political club at Dolores.
- 146 John Hays Hammond, *Autobiography of John Hays Hammond* (2 vols., New York, 1935), I, p. 118; Alfred Tischendorf, *Great Britain and Mexico in the Era of Porfirio Díaz* (Durham, 1961), pp. 73-4. On the 'collaborating elite', see Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism' in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, 1972), p. 120.
- 147 David M. Pletcher, *Rails, Mines and Progress. Seven American Pioneers in Mexico 1867-1911* (Ithaca, 1958), pp. 203-4; Rodney D. Anderson, *Outcasts in their own land. Mexican Industrial Workers 1906-1911* (Dekalb, 1976), pp. 105-9, 130-3, 155, 159.
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- 153 *El Correo*, 7 July, 5 Oct., 1910.
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- 156 *El Correo*, 26 July 1910; R. Sandels, 'Antecedentes de la revolución en Chihuahua', *Historia Mexicana*, XXIV (1975), p. 398; Aguilar, 'La Revolución Sonorense', pp. 98-105.
- 157 Margarito Vázquez, Cuajimalpa, to Gobernación, 10 July 1911, AG 898.
- 158 Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, p. 86; Ochoa Campos, *Causas políticas*, II, p. 216.
- 159 Womack, *Zapata*, p. 32; Niemeyer, *Reyes*, p. 77.
- 160 Cosío Villegas, *Vida Política*, p. 427, quoting *El Diario del Hogar*.
- 161 Graham, Durango, 19 Apr. 1911, FO 371/1147, 17946; *Diario del Hogar*, 6 Oct. 1910; J. Trinidad Cervantes to Madero, 4 July 1911, AG 898; Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, pp. 154-5; Rodrigo González to Madero, 9 Nov. 1911, AG (CRCFM); Rutino Zamora and Manuel Herrera to Robles Domínguez, 27, 30 May 1911, AARD 11/22, 11/43.
- 162 Baerlein, *Mexico*, pp. 93-4.
- 163 Aguilar, 'La revolución Sonorense', pp. 99, 101; Miller, Tampico, 22 Mar. 1911, SD 812.00/1196; Charles Macomb Flandrau, *Viva Mexico!* (New York and London, 1921), p. 68; *El Correo*, 25 Mar. 1909, 24 June 1910.
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- 167 *El Correo*, 2 Apr. 1909.
- 168 Aguilar, 'La revolución Sonorense', pp. 100-1.
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- 170 Turner, *Barbarous Mexico*, pp. 73, 76; Aureliano Tenorio to Robles Domínguez, 5 June, 1911 AARD 7/54; see also Baerlein, *Mexico*, p. 87.
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- 173 Lewis, *Pedro Martínez*, pp. 129-30.
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- 175 Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, p. 153; Baerlein, *Mexico*, p. 91.
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