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University of Glasgow

**The Mexican Mural Movement 1900-1930**

Volumes 1 & 2

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Ph.D., 1992

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## Abstract

Many studies have been made of the 'Mexican Mural Renaissance', but these generally have not provided an integrated account of the philosophical and ideological beginnings, development and end of the Mexican government's 1920's programme. Also, recent studies dealing with aspects of the programme have brought new evidence forward which allows this study to provide an overview of the social, political and aesthetic context of the mural programme. This is helpful in the assessment of the muralists' artistic achievements both as individuals and as members of the artists' syndicate. Primary source material such as the artists' autobiographies and the newspapers such as 'La Vanguardia' and 'El Machete' to which they frequently contributed have also been studied closely to provide new insights into their political thinking and aesthetic principles as they sought to create a 'revolutionary art for all.'

Since the programme was government-sponsored as part of a national education policy, the ideology of the regimes which preceded and followed the Revolution of 1910-17 has been examined to ascertain how well the muralists' ideals and work matched the expectations of their official patrons. Accordingly an account is also given of the political life of Mexico, in particular during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and the Revolution, and especially close attention is given to politics during the 1920's when the mural programme was underway.

Concerning the muralists themselves, aspects of their experience which may have influenced their art are considered concurrently with their contemporary work. This is particularly important as a major question addressed in this study concerns the reduction of the muralists' programme from a group project, to the efforts of three noted muralists with assistance in some cases from others previously employed as muralists in their own right, to the final reduction of the programme to just Diego Rivera and several assistants.

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## Introduction

Many visitors to Mexico make a point of viewing some of the great murals painted in the 1920's by José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera and others as part of a national education programme initiated by José Vasconcelos. The murals are impressive, but seen in a haphazard or fragmentary way as visitors do, their decontextualisation diminishes their meaning to the viewer. For not all of the murals are easily accessible, even to Mexicans today, and this unintended seclusion from public viewing of some of them has given rise to distorted perceptions about the aims and achievements of their painters. Furthermore, while the murals have attracted a great deal of critical comment, little attention has been paid to the relationship of the muralists with other activists and with the State. One purpose of this study is to clarify what the aims and practices of the painters actually were, and how these may have been influenced by their relationships with their state patrons, who of course had aims of their own. To achieve this, a comprehensive, chronological mural survey has been provided accompanied by illustration of those of major interest by slides and plates, which are identified in the text by lettering for slides, e.g., (5.C) and numbering of plates, e.g., (5.6) - the third slide and sixth plate of Chapter 5 respectively.

One of the most frequently seen murals in Mexico is that painted by Diego Rivera in the National Palace; and one of the best-known works by José Clemente Orozco, 'The Trench', also dates from this period. In order to avoid the problem of misrepresenting any muralist's work by seeing it in isolation from contemporary work and displaced from its historical and political context, the later chapters discussing the murals of the 1920's aim to present an integrated account of the influences and circumstances possibly affecting their production. However, since the two panels mentioned above are more fully discussed at appropriate points in the study which follows, they may be used here to identify issues and questions to be addressed.

Even at first appearances, Rivera's National Palace panel 'The Porfirian Era' (Intro.1) and Orozco's 'The Trench'(Intro.A; 7.2) possess significant differences. Both works are nearly contemporary: Rivera's dates from 1929, and Orozco's from 1926. Both artists were

members of the 'Union of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico' formed in 1923, and, at least initially, supported its aims. Despite this, it might be more appropriate to discuss these two panels in terms of their contrasts rather than their parallels. Rivera's panel is crowded with figures and detail, whereas Orozco's depicts three figures struggling in a devastated land. Evidently the painters began with quite different aims, and deal with the idea of revolution in quite diverse ways. Indeed these works may be said to exemplify the contradictions of the mural commissions provided by the government.

Rivera's panel shows a gallery of the leaders of four decades or so of Mexican political life, i.e., 1880-1920, when a harsh dictatorship pursuing Positivistic policies was overthrown by a popular revolution advancing radical social proposals, which were then subverted by elements which mistrusted the power of the organised masses. All this conflict is contained within the frame of a single panel, but its force is lost among the contending claims and counter-claims of the politicians, militarists and revolutionaries crowded together like images piled up in a scrapbook. Not a single fallen soldier, wounded campesino or liberated peón is to be seen among the ranked celebrities; rather, the ordinary people of Mexico stand as if no more than bystanders spectating while the revolutionary process is worked before their eyes, as the regime of Porfirio Díaz and his supporters are confronted by outraged opponents waving revolutionary programmes and articles of the 1917 Constitution. Every legendary figure can be identified from a portrait. There is Zapata, with Villa, Carrillo Puerto, Flores Magón, Madero, Pino Suárez, Pascual Orozco, Vasconcelos, Carranza and Díaz Soto y Gama - but who are they, and what is their significance in terms of the struggle to rid Mexico of the Porfirians? The panel offers little elaboration of their contribution beyond identifying their authorship of the various revolutionary 'plans' (or manifestos). It is little more than a who's who of the leading political figures of these years, and says little about the painter's sympathies beyond the depiction of the bad old regime seen off by the radicals of the new era. What are not apparent, however, are the fundamental differences among the leaders ranked against the Porfirian regime. Yet the revolutionary conflict and the divisiveness of its many realignments were every bit as violent as the scenes in the main panel depicting Spanish brutality painted below the arched surface depicting 'The Porfirian Era.' Without an

understanding of the political events and an analysis of how 'plans' were proposed and integrated or ignored, it is impossible to read Rivera's panel for any kind of argument or point-of-view beyond the most straightforward grouping of historic heroes and villains, and we are obliged to accept the reliability of his groupings.

Orozco's **The Trench** offers no information whatever about its three struggling fighters. We cannot see their faces, their allegiance is not apparent, and their cause is quite unknown. Both panels are abstractions rather than depictions of the conflicts, yet Orozco's panel is more emotive and challenging than Rivera's huge panorama of Mexican history. Indeed Orozco's panel communicates even less about the events of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17 than Rivera's, it satisfies even less of one's curiosity about the great upheaval, but somehow says more about the experience of conflict, than Rivera's. The comparison indicates that the artists were using the medium quite differently, for Orozco offers tension and pessimism where Rivera presents grand commemoration and frozen celebration of the consolidated revolution. If Rivera's purpose was to celebrate and inspire respect, Orozco's evidently was a profoundly sceptical intention to reflect the futility and despair of revolution.

Several important questions about the patronage, successes and constraints of the mural movement of the 1920's are suggested by the comparison made above. The muralists sought to create 'a fighting, educative art for all', inferring an opposition to their proposals, a task to be undertaken and a general benefit to be achieved. How far were these aims met by the government mural programme, and how formidable was the opposition they encountered? Given that by 1930 only one muralist, Rivera, was still employed in this scheme, what were the cohesions and dissensions within the muralists' syndicate, and why did only Rivera retain the approval of his patrons? A last important question remains: how did the murals reflect and relate to the politics of the time, given their intended ideological purpose?

This study aims to suggest answers to these questions with a chronological account of contemporary events, issues and art bringing together political and cultural influences likely to have had a bearing upon the muralists and their work. Accordingly discussion of political events and issues, especially those of the 1920's charted in the last three chapters, has been

linked as closely as possible to mural analysis in an attempt to establish the fullest possible context for assessing the 'radical' and innovative nature of these murals and the ideology they promote.

## Chapter One

### POPULAR, ACADEMIC AND 'NATIONAL' ART

The 'Mexican Mural Renaissance'(1) of the 1920's was a striking phenomenon to which many aesthetic and political factors contributed, not the least important of these being the influence of the traditional academic and popular art genres upon the artists of the mural movement. The following account of the development and social contexts of these artistic traditions is intended to provide a broader basis for the critical assessment of the ideological content and sources of post-revolutionary muralism.

The artists' claims that their muralism was an altogether radical form of art appropriate to a new post-Revolutionary society perhaps tend to obscure the long and varied history of Mexican popular and public art. Some discussion of earlier muralism as a form of public ideological expression which dates from pre-colonial times is therefore also an important element of any attempt at an evaluation of the aesthetic intentions and achievements of the muralists.

#### Art before the Mexican Academy.

When the sixteenth-century Spanish *conquistadores* encountered the Aztec civilisation of Mesoamerica they came upon a powerful organised society which was actually a combination of unified tribes. These had been subdued and made into a single confederation under the control of the Aztec leadership. The Aztecs had developed an effective social organisation which provided for an extensive religious hierarchy and a large military class as well as supporting its rulers.

Their development of a form of writing was the key to this social organisation. Existing codices and manuscripts show that Aztec script was originally based upon a system of pictographic representation which later became a form of hieroglyphic writing. As the colourful symbols used in codices demanded a certain level of art in their execution, even the Aztec script reflects the functionalism of their art. However, the sculptured relief friezes of their temple buildings, together with the established native mural art traditions of Mesoamerica

(exemplified by the murals of Teotihuacán in Central Mexico, of Monte Albán in Oaxaca, and of Bonampak, Chiapas), suggests perhaps more strongly that art had state and religious functions. Thus, the art of the Aztec culture was symbolic and perhaps even didactic, rather than merely decorative.

When the Spanish finally managed to take their capital Tenochtitlán and thereby destroy the central power of the Aztecs, the first phase of the colonial process was over. The Cathedral of Mexico City was built on the site with stone from the great temples. Without its central direction, Aztec society was much more vulnerable. The violence of the first phase was duly replaced by the ruthless subjection of the indigent population by the imposition of alien Spanish codes of civil and canon law, as shown in many modern Mexican murals by Diego Rivera (e.g., the National Palace frescos) and his successors.

Following the Conquest, the native people of New Spain were moulded by missionary influences. Twelve Franciscans painted in an apostolic array appear in a church mural(2) after their arrival in Mexico in 1524. Men such as these were charged with bringing Christ to the heathen of New Spain, but they occasionally tolerated a native artistic expression of religious feeling, as the highly-coloured conquest fresco of the Church of Ixmiquilpán, Hidalgo(3); and the impressive 'Christ in Majesty'(4), both show. Though stylistically European, the latter was worked entirely in feathers and is a vivid example of the cross-cultural transfer of style from the Aztec religious symbol, the plumed serpent. However, these were rare exceptions to the new cultural regime:

For a native of Mesoamerica, life before the Conquest had been a succession of elaborate ceremonies under the priestly keepers of the calendar; his every art was in service of his religion. After the Conquest all connection of the Indian with his former life and art was deliberately destroyed... With the growth of native culture cut off, onto its roots was grafted the Mediterranean culture, then in full flower.

5

A sixteenth-century Mexican codice(6) graphically shows how the unstinting efforts of the friars which stifled the religion of Mesoamerica were also stifling its culture. It depicts an Indian painter practising various styles on four panels spread out before him. He has abandoned the traditional efforts shown in the first two panels in favour of the florid motif of the third, and then moved on to painting in his fourth panel a bearded European figure in a stiff classical pose

taught to him by the missionaries. To preserve the standing of fine art, a monopoly for European artists newly arrived in Mexico was created in mid-century in the form of an ordinance which restricted the important commissions for the production of devotional works:

To ensure the propriety of works the First Mexican Council, assembled in 1555, agreed that no Spanish or Indian painter would be allowed to create images or altar-pieces without examination by the vicars-general of the Church. The Ordinances of the Art of Painting of 1557...laid down the requirement of the purity of blood; in spite of this discriminatory imposition, the native masters continued to collaborate in the execution of works of painting until the eighteenth century.

## 7.

From the later sixteenth century the participation of indigent artists was effectively limited to wall painting, the only area of exemption permitted by the edict. (8)

By the seventeenth century, then, Indian artistic expression had languished into increasingly mundane, merely decorative forms. Although it was a much more basic variety of the native tradition of functional art, some local clergy did exploit the native talent in order to fill their small churches with expository murals depicting saintly ecstasies and agonies, such as those in the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, Hidalgo (1.1) Not until 1686 were Indians to be considered for licensing as painters. In any case, the new leisured consuming class of Spanish colonial families and seventeenth-century colonists who deplored the primitivism of Indian art still considered Europe to be their cultural centre.

One of those who clearly benefitted from the injunction was the Flemish painter Simón Pereyns (1530-ca.1590). He had accompanied his aristocratic Spanish patron, Gastón de Peralta, to New Spain in 1566 when the latter was appointed viceroy, and his first commission in the New World was for murals in the viceregal palace. Pereyn's artistic eclecticism (one source cites the German and Italian, as well as Spanish and Flemish, influences present in his work(9)) was apparently accompanied by an irreverence about religion, for he underwent torture at the hands of the Inquisition charged with heresy by the zealous colonial Church. Nevertheless he was cleared and it seems he received some reparation in the form of a series of commissions for Church frescos in the metropolitan and regional cathedrals. Although little of Pereyns' once extensive body of work has survived his fresco had a significant influence on his successors of the next century.

The demise of Pereyng marks the beginning of what seems to have been a considerable break in the major commissioning of pictorial art which lasted at least until the middle of the seventeenth century and the arrival in New Spain of the Aragonese sculptor, architect and painter, Pedro García Ferrer. Little is known of this Spanish master's brief stay in Mexico which lasted for only a year or so, but he completed some mural work in the Cathedral of Puebla before returning in 1649 to Spain. The employment of García Ferrer by the Mexican Church is significant not merely because it reflects the huge prestige of European art, but also since it probably indicated that no Mexican artist regarded as suitably talented could be found.

A very different situation developed during the last three decades of the seventeenth century when the three *criollo* artists Cristóbal de Villalpando, Juan Correa, and José Rodríguez Carnero gave Mexican baroque fresco its most magnificent expression.<sup>(10)</sup> Although these artists incorporated recent European artistic conventions derived from imported engravings into their art, they proved themselves able to compete with foreign artists for Mexican patronage. The many Church fresco commissions they each received indicate their skills and success at emulating contemporary European masters (Correa, for instance, seems to have been influenced by Rubens).

The neoclassical style of art would eventually emerge in Mexico as the dominant, preferred artistic style late in the eighteenth century having first become established in Spain. Neoclassical painting was a response to what was seen as the extravagances of the outmoded baroque style; it projects its intrinsic order, serenity and confidence in a restrained manner which contrasts with the richness and emotion of baroque painting.

However, for at least the first two decades of the eighteenth century there was little innovation in Mexican fresco as it continued to be the province of the two ageing masters of baroque religious muralism, Correa and Rodríguez Carnero. Even after their deaths there were few major commissions available as a result of their considerable output. Baroque, as the even more highly-worked Ultrabaroque or Churrigueresque, was still preferred in Mexico as late as 1756 when the creole muralist Miguel Cabrera depicted the traditional tale of Juan Diego's visions of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a series of gilded and ornate, intricately-linked

panels(11). He also founded what might be considered a forerunner of the *Real Academia de San Carlos de Nueva España* in which the sixteenth-century principle that fine art was the exclusive province of Europeans was once again asserted, however briefly:

In mid-century a short-lived school of painting under Miguel Cabrera added volume rather than quality to the work of the eighteenth century. The school included only students of pure Spanish descent.

12.

#### Mexican Independence, Patronage and the Academy of San Carlos

In Europe, the eighteenth century saw the foundation of many academies of art, including a number in Spain, signifying the broadening interest in fine art and concurrent growth of the market which supported the artists trained in the academies(13). With the expansion of European mercantile activity, a new middle class of professionals, merchants and wealthy administrators had arisen which bought and commissioned paintings and other fine art productions. Middle class patrons increasingly assumed patronage which had formerly exclusively belonged to the Church and the nobility, though in Mexico the Church would remain by far the most important single source of patronage at least until the nineteenth century. The new European appreciators of art collected it for the same initial reasons as those which had originally motivated aristocratic patronage, that is, as a display and symbol of their newly-acquired wealth, power, and social position. In colonial Mexico secular patronage of baroque art had become established during the early eighteenth century:

...an art of great sumptuousness and richness, it expressed perfectly the life, taste and the ideas of the viceregal period in its long central development, its growing economic and cultural force and the display of attendant ostentation.

14.

The fast growth of the colonial economy, sustained throughout the century, was the source of much of the new affluence enjoyed by the upper classes. The population of the country tripled, rising from two to six million inhabitants(15) despite a terrible plague which took an estimated one million lives. The size of the colony was more than doubled by its expansion into California and New Mexico, and trade seems to have undergone a sudden growth based on the continuing exploitation of the country's natural resources, for the number of ships using the port of Veracruz (Mexico's main port) rose from 222 ships in the

1740's, to almost 1500 in the 1790's(16). Although the royal revenues increased from five and a half million pesos in 1763 to twenty million pesos in 1792, much wealth was retained within the colony:

By 1800 Mexico had become one of the richest countries in the world, a country of "much wealth and maximum poverty".

17.

Most of Mexico's growing wealth was concentrated in the hands of two groups, one comprised of first-generation Spaniards (settlers called *peninsulares* by native Mexicans) and Crown administrators; the other being the *criollo* class, a native but exclusively white colonial elite. A constantly growing *mestizo* (mixed ethnicity) middle class of artisans, tradesmen and petty officials occupied minor entrepreneurial roles. Other less privileged *mestizos*, denied the economic participation essential for any capital accumulation, were the subordinate intermediaries who oversaw and constrained the Indian workforce. The Indians, whose impoverished existence was generally below subsistence level, were the actual producers of the wealth.

As part of an educational development plan which included the establishment of a Royal School of Mines, in 1785 King Carlos III founded by charter a fine arts academy modelled on those of Europe, the *Real Academia de San Carlos de Nueva España*. As it was maintained by a direct grant from the Spanish royal coffers, its direction was dominated by the influences arising from Spanish royal patronage. Its directors, Don Geronimo Antonio Gil in 1785, Manuel Tolsá in 1798 and Rafael Ximeno y Planes in 1816, were Academicians of Merit from one of the Spanish academies, and the examples and styles taught in the Academy were always based on those brought in from Europe. The intention was that Mexican painting and architecture, thought to have become too extravagant and wholly stylised, would be refreshed and brought up to date with respect to the contemporary European taste for neoclassicism:

After the Royal Academy of San Carlos had been established in Mexico City neoclassic architectural design and decoration was enforced officially wherever new construction or reconstruction of importance was undertaken, so that this style spread into the provinces.

18.

However, the recognition that the Academy had been founded in a very different social

environment from the usual context of fine art teaching is implicit in Carlos's decree that four students of pure Indian descent be maintained each year, with each scholarship to last for twelve years. It may have been the case that this 'liberal' monarch intended in some way to alleviate the customary discrimination against Indian artists. Nevertheless native art continued to be considered totally inferior to the foreign neoclassicism taught in the Academy, which emphasised balance, decorum and studied technical accomplishment.

The murals and architecture of the Church of El Carmen in Celaya, Guanajuato by the self-taught local artist Francisco Eduardo Tresguerras are evidence of the success of this attempt to introduce neoclassical axioms into Mexican art on a national basis. In provincial surroundings Tresguerras clearly responded to the new aesthetic permeating Mexican culture. His ten or so mural panels present fresh, uncluttered perspectives within the framework of his radical architecture:

This is a cruciform temple with triple neoclassical facade; the white and gold interior, lighted from the high cupola, is bright, austere, bare - everything that the other great churches of the region are not. It seems probable that Tresguerras derived the pure and graceful style of El Carmen from a book of architectural drawings published in Paris in 1768 by Jean Charles Delafosse...

19.

Both the artist's unexpected cosmopolitanism and the evident penetration of European neoclassicism into contemporary colonial taste are indicated by his debt to the French design. Yet more strongly than the architecture of *El Carmen*, the murals suggest the appeal neoclassicism held for Tresguerras because they are the product of his translation of the neoclassical aesthetic into a new medium. As well as the architectural innovation for which he is remembered, the introduction of neoclassical style and content into Mexican muralism was Tresguerras's artistic legacy.

Probably Carlos III expected the establishment of the Academy to reinforce the strong cultural links between Spain and its lucrative colony. Towards the end of the century the colonial basis of New Spain had begun to weaken for a variety of reasons. The Inquisition which had flourished in Mexico as in Europe and which had been instrumental in maintaining Spanish hegemony in the colony had slowly lost much of its vigour in the more liberal climate introduced by eighteenth century rationalism.

Moreover, in 1776 the Mexicans had witnessed other colonials, in what was to become the United States, declare themselves an independent nation. However, affluent Mexicans saw independence for their country as economically unsound until in 1796 Spain became engaged in a war with Britain which disrupted Spanish colonial trading links. The Mexicans consequently found that trade with other nations could be more profitable than with Spain, and that it was possible to rely upon their own resources for economic development rather than have Spain exploit their dependence upon her.

*Criollo* self-confidence and class consciousness, assured by apparently limitless natural and human resources, swelled with the growing economic power of Mexico. A sense of pride in national and personal achievements made them increasingly jealous of the prerogatives of Spaniards in positions of colonial authority. Accepted as advantageous in economic terms, autonomy from Spain also appealed to the liberal sentiments of radical priests and idealistic young creole professionals. Their ideas inspired growing support, and Independence was achieved in 1821 after a lengthy and very bitter struggle against not only the Spanish military forces but also the powerful creole loyalists.

Also within the Academy, independence from Spain and national identity became joint issues in the early nineteenth century with, for example, Don Manuel Tolsá (who had been appointed director of sculpture in 1790) casting various artillery pieces which were used by the Royal forces in their campaign against the rebels.<sup>(20)</sup> Tolsá's fierce loyalist sympathies had already been demonstrated by his statue of Carlos IV seated upon a charger which is trampling Indian weapons beneath its hooves. In 1798, Tolsá became general director of the Academy until his death in 1816.

The muralist Rafael Ximeno y Planes, who became overall director after Tolsá's death, had been appointed director of painting in 1793. In 1813, Ximeno y Planes produced religious murals for the Chapel of the College of Mines, Mexico City, which was designed by Tolsá. In these two murals, 'The Assumption of the Virgin' and 'The Miracle of the Well', Ximeno y Planes gave the figures Indian skin tones.<sup>(21)</sup> This minor concession towards nationalistic painting was to be followed up by Pedro Patiño Ixtolinque, who represents the other side of the nationalistic conflict within the Academy.

Patifio, who was of Indian descent, had been one of Tolsá's students. Nevertheless Tolsá opposed his nomination for the position of academican. Ironically Patifio's case was supported by the liberal regulations laid down by the Crown, and ultimately Tolsá's opposition was overruled. This outcome reveals the Crown's paternalistic attitude towards the Indian people. As the hostility Patifio faced demonstrates, it was not generally shared by the colonial elite. However, Patifio rejected this royal favouritism when he openly embraced the cause of Mexican nationalism, serving as a lieutenant to the rebel General Vicente Guerrero.

Three phases are discernible in the struggle for Independence which took eleven economically disastrous years to achieve its aim. The first move was led by the radical priest Miguel Hidalgo y Castilla in 1810-11. The wide-ranging liberal cause of this first major uprising was quickly defeated despite its early successes because Hidalgo's mainly rural supporters, poorly organised and ill-equipped, were no match for the Spanish colonial military. Hidalgo's execution in July 1811 did nothing to curb the growing popular resentment of Spanish rule. Although a commission was sent to the Convention of Cádiz to speak for the rebels to the new Spanish government, fierce fighting continued throughout Mexico with the appearance of a new leader, José María Morelos, another outspoken priest. Even though in 1813 the new Spanish constitution (which restricted the power of the throne) was instituted in Mexico, Morelos and his creole supporters sought independence not just from the Crown but from any Spanish domination.

The second phase was the greater participation of creole radical liberals. The Constitution of Cádiz was abolished in Mexico in August 1814 by a new viceroy, and disaffected creoles joined the well-organised campaign of Morelos, who is reputed to have said: "The nation wants to be governed by the Creoles and since it has not been heeded, it has taken arms to make itself understood and obeyed."<sup>(22)</sup> Taking advantage of the absence of a ruling mandate from Spain, Morelos had assembled a group of creole senior professionals into a constitutional convention, and by October 1814 they had completed their discussion of an exhaustive series of almost two hundred and fifty articles, mostly dealing with the form of government for a new republic. The **Apatzingan Constitution** they had composed was never enacted since by this time Morelos's military campaign was failing. His army, reduced by

successive defeats to only one thousand men, fought desperately but in vain against the overwhelming Spanish forces. Morelos was himself captured and executed on 22nd December 1815.

The final phase can be dated from 1820 when a Spanish revolution forced Fernando VII to recognise the Constitution of Cádiz:

Yielding to the spirit of revolt, King Ferdinand in 1820 granted constitutional reforms to New Spain - reforms little to the liking to those dominant in the land. The concessions were resisted by conservatives who, thinking to govern the country as an empire, declared independence for Mexico in 1821.

### 23.

However, the Mexican viceroy refused to promulgate these measures in the colony, and instead sought to safeguard royal prerogatives by declaring complete independence from Spain *for as long as the monarch was acting under pressure from insurgents*. But events forced the viceroy in the end to enact the Cádiz Constitution throughout Mexico, which was therefore theoretically an independent nation with a liberal constitution *for the time being*.

Nevertheless, as the viceroy continued to be effectively the supreme authority this was not yet full independence. In order to avoid conceding many of the proposals contained in the Apatzingan Constitution while gaining actual independence from Spain and dislodging the colonial administration, rich creoles assumed the direction of the movement as a whole, choosing Colonel Agustín de Iturbide as their leader. Iturbide quickly appeased the rebel leader Vicente Guerrero (Patíño's commander) and their joint forces compelled the viceroy to stand down. A new viceroy wasted little time in conceding full independence to Mexico and Iturbide became the Emperor Agustín I on 28th September 1821. The position of overall control the creole elite had attained would be challenged by 'liberal' mestizos in later episodes of this new struggle for national dominance:

...civil strife had brought a mixing of the races and a consolidation of the... middle class. After 1821, it was the middle class that contested the power of the landed aristocracy.

### 24.

Independence placed the Academy in grave financial difficulties. For thirty-five years dependent upon support from the Spanish Crown, it lost this income in 1821 and as a result was obliged to close completely before the end of the year. When informally reopened in

1824, it was still ostensibly under the general direction of the aged Ximeno y Planes who had held the post when it had been forced to close. His death in 1825 left the directorship open, and the post was filled by Pedro Patiño Ixtolinque. Until his own death in 1835 Patiño tried through his teaching to introduce a rather Romantically-expressed sense of Mexican identity to academic painting which, though also influenced by foreign masters such as the Spaniard Francisco Goya (25), remained essentially neoclassical.

Whatever nationalism Patiño introduced was more or less ignored once the Academy was again guaranteed a regular income in 1843 from the proceeds of the National Lottery. The Spanish painter Pelegrin Clavé was selected as director of the Academy and Spanish masters were again employed as teachers. The Academy's benefactor was the current president of the republic, General Santa Anna, who also provided overseas scholarships for the Academy's top students which enabled them to study the European masters at first hand. Two young mestizo painters who took up this opportunity, Primitivo Miranda and Juan Cordero, were to find upon their return that the situation within the Academy had changed considerably:

Pelegrin Clavé, a Spanish painter influenced by German artists, who was finally selected as general director, became "official dictator of taste in Mexico" - with contempt for all things Mexican...Miranda returned from Europe in 1848 to find the Academy moved under foreign control with no place for him...when Cordero returned in 1855...he found that the San Carlos had a whole foreign staff, including two from England and two from Italy, with no official opening for his talents.

26.

The European standards of art were firmly re-established having retained their prestige more or less intact throughout the struggles for Independence, and nationalism in art was to remain a lesser aesthetic concern for a considerable time. Santa Anna's financial arrangements largely protected the Academy from the worst effects of the instability of the general political situation until 1862:

From 1821 to 1850, Mexico was in a state of constant turmoil. In thirty years there were fifty governments, almost all the result of military coups and eleven of them presided over by General Santa Anna. The life of the country was at the mercy of feuding masonic lodges, ambitious army officers, audacious bandits, and raiding Indians.

27.

### Nineteenth-century Changes in Mexican Art

The civil wars of the first half of the nineteenth century which had severely disrupted the national economy were to continue into the latter half of the century. Though the main grounds of these later conflicts were temporarily obscured by Napoleon III's imperialistic adventure of 1862, they became much more clearly defined into a power struggle between the mainly middle class *mestizo* liberals who wanted an egalitarian constitutional republic, and those creole conservatives who now wanted a return to Mexico's colonial status. Significant changes and developments occurred in Mexican art at both academic and popular levels during the same period. These can be analysed in terms of four main genres: fine art muralism; fine art landscape painting; popular urban portraiture, and the painting and illustration in diverse media of urban popular artists independent of the fine art aesthetics.

Fine art mural painting during the nineteenth century moved only slowly away from purely ecclesiastical themes towards the more secular works which were to emerge during the period 1860-1880. In 1842, Antonio Padilla had retained the devices of religious allegory in his neoclassical mural, '**Triumph of the Church**'. Juan Cordero (1824-1884) gave this trend a different emphasis in his Mexico City church murals.

While excluded from the Academy by Clavé, Cordero painted '**Jesus Among the Doctors**' in 1855 in the Church of Jesus María. In 1857 he painted a number of murals in the Chapel of Christ of the Church of Santa Teresa. '**God and the Virtues**' occupies the high dome of the Church where God the Father is shown surrounded by the Evangelists and the Cardinal Virtues. The monumental figure of an angel, placed by Cordero in the apse vault below them, faces down into the area where the faithful gather. There the sacrament unites heaven and earth in a mystical union allusively illustrated by the mural '**Renewal of Christ**' on the apse wall behind the altar:

In the narrow vault that leads to the apse, an angel with stars above head and hands spreads his arms, dark wings, and drapes to fill the star-shaped space created by cutting in of side window vaults...High in the half dome of the apse, accompanied by cherubs, two silhouetted angels with trumpet and scroll announce the miracle of the *Renovación*, or self-renewal of the figure of Christ, pictured taking place below in the arms of angels.

28.

The four symbolic figures of '**Astronomy**', '**History**', '**Poetry**' and '**Music**', intended to

represent the worldly cultural counterparts of the heavenly virtues, stand beside the central windows of the church. Finally, in 1859, he painted 'The Immaculate Conception' in the dome of the Church of San Fernando. The last mural of this group seems to have somewhat restored his reputation, which had been damaged by the ambitious fusion of secular and ecclesiastical themes he had produced in the 1857 murals in the Church of Santa Teresa:

These murals painted by Cordero in the Chapel of Christ were too daring in color and execution to be well received by fellow artists or by the public. He did not receive the full contract price.

29.

During the 1860's, a period in which the liberals successfully struggled against the conservatives to have Benito Juárez installed as the leader of the 'Restored Republic' in 1867, other artists worked to make muralism harmonise effectively with the functions of various secular settings. For instance, Santiago Rebull's gracefully Bohemian 'Bacantes' were probably the first Mexican fine art murals to have the customary religious message replaced by simple decorative sensuality. The Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg's patronage of these decorations for his residence, the Castle of Chapultepec, accounts for Rebull's creative freedom.

Almost by contrast to the studied elegance of Rebull's courtly revellers, the folkloric *hacienda* murals painted under private commission by Gerardo Suárez at La Barca, in Jalisco show that the current interest in Mexican subject matter meant that patronage was perhaps more available than before for the competent local artist. Significantly, most of the material used by Suárez in the numerous murals which comprise this group is thought to have been derived from a famous volume of lithographs, *México y sus Alrededores* (1856) (30), which contained sketched compositions depicting a variety of idealised rural activities and regional costume. Suárez' murals typify the content and style of painting now called 'costumbrista.' Provincial tastes favour the familiar and colourful over the imported values of neoclassicism admired by the wealthy, but the limitations of both types of painting reveal Mexico's aesthetic dependence on Europe, and its relative cultural underdevelopment. The indigenous art of Mexico was shunned by influential patrons and did not prosper in this climate of admiration for the styles and fashions of Europe.

However, while these developments took place, traditional religious muralism continued much as before. At more or less the same time as Rebull was adorning the loggia at Chapultepec, the academic Pelegrin Clavé (1810-1880) was working with five students in the Church of La Profesa in Mexico City on 'The Seven Sacraments' and 'The Adoration of the Cross by the Angels'. The end of Clavé's personal reign in the Academy was then fast approaching:

This decoration was finished in 1867 as civil war raged near the City. The following year...Clavé departed for Spain. However, he was able to have his disciple, Salomé Pina, recalled from Europe as general director, a position he held until 1880. 31.

Felipe Castro, another of Clavé's pupils, left the *La Profesa* group well before the completion of the works to participate in perhaps the grandest secular mural project of the period, the Degollado Theatre in Guadalajara, Jalisco. Designed along European lines by the architect and painter Jacobo Gálvez, this building was inaugurated in 1866. Castro and Gálvez were joined by Gerardo Suárez, and a working group was formed. Castro's allegorical painting in the tympani of the theatre consisted of two versions of Fame, messenger of Jupiter, and in the centre of one arch he painted Time surrounded by the Twelve Hours. The bulk of the work (much of which was inspired by Canto IV of The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri(32)) was completed by Suárez and Gálvez.

Following the collapse of the three-year constitutional monarchy of the French-imposed and supported Ferdinand Maximilian of Habsburg, the liberals led by Benito Juárez finally overcame the conservative opposition in 1867. Juárez, leader of the government of the restored republic, launched Mexico upon a course of reform and attempted to promote the recovery of the national economy during the short '*Reforma*' period.

The Reform period began to make some headway under the leadership of Benito Juárez, but its more radical measures, especially those affecting the Church, finally resulted in odious dissension permitting military intervention by Napoleon III's French troops and the establishment of Maximilian's "Empire." Juárez and his government retreated to the north and kept up guerrilla warfare against the European usurpers. The withdrawal of the French army in 1867 spelled doom for Maximilian and his remaining supporters; he was executed by a firing squad in Querétaro, and Juárez reassumed his rightful place as president of the republic. From this brief review it can readily be seen that strife, fear, and uncertainty were the constant companions of Mexico throughout almost the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. 33.

Even the title of Ignacio Ramírez' and Altamirano's newspaper, 'Renacimiento' ('Rebirth'), proclaimed the essential nature of contemporary liberal thinking that national development required a radical reshaping of Mexico's social, economic and political life.

Liberal positivist theory stressed progressive development, and favoured education as a means of broadening and carrying forward the new social dynamic into succeeding generations. To improve the educational system, measures designed to secularise it by removing it from Church control were introduced. Henceforth education was to be under the central management of the government, and it was hoped that an educational revolution would occur which would greatly increase the nation's productivity and thereby augment social development.

The concept of progress, given a more technocratic emphasis and backed by foreign borrowing, became a fundamental tenet of the political ideology of the next regime. When Juárez died in 1872, his protege Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada found his succession to the presidency opposed by an armed insurrection led by Porfirio Díaz, another of Juárez' former lieutenants. Díaz' campaign for 'effective suffrage and no re-election' was ultimately successful and he was elected president for a term from November 1876. His successor, General Manuel González, governed so badly that ironically the Comtist Díaz had little difficulty in being re-elected himself, and he remained president until 1911. During the *Porfiriato* (when Díaz presided uninterruptedly from 1884 for twenty-seven years until the outbreak of the Revolution of 1910-1917) France took Spain's place as a culture to be emulated because Mexicans began to develop their liberation from Spanish hegemony:

After Juárez' death, Porfirio Díaz, as President, looked to France for Mexico's culture, and for almost twenty-five years Don Lascruán was general director of the National Academy of San Carlos. It was during this period that Leandro Izaguirre matured to become teacher to both José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera, great muralists of the twentieth century. Landscape painting had been introduced into Mexico, and José Luis Velasco was painting with... great distinction his strangely lovely land.

#### 34.

Velasco's work exemplifies the growing desire to produce art which would rival European work in its execution but would reflect the distinctive identity of Mexico. Fine art landscape painting had been introduced to Mexico by the Italian painter Eugenio Landesio, who established a

school of landscape painting within the Academy soon after his arrival in 1855. The most notable practitioner the school produced was José María Velasco (1849-1912). Although heavily indebted to the established European techniques of landscape, his works nevertheless celebrate their Mexican context.

Velasco portrayed the improvements in the country's communications which were highlighted by the vast expansion of the national railway network from 1880 until the end of the century. These inspiring and hopeful visions were included in his otherwise naturalistic depictions of actual rural vistas, as in, for example, 'The Train' (1897)(35), where he depicted the seemingly untiring machines and the long stretches of railway which ranged through the Mexican valleys linking urban centres, the mines and other production areas, and the main port, Veracruz, vastly improving communications:

For half a century following independence, endemic banditry afflicted rural Mexico. Tortuous roads, often near trails etched over mountain barriers, barely linked the population centers, usually no more than villages, and there were few rivers to improve communications. Geography, therefore, favored those who would live by extortion and plunder. So did political instability, at times approaching chaos, for governments which were struggling for self-survival had neither the energy nor the revenue to devote to public security.

36.

His paintings clearly endorse the policies of scientific and technical development pursued by the contemporary Porfirian regime as the most effective means of achieving economic development and organising Mexico to respond to central direction.

However, Velasco's pictures were uncritical of the means the regime employed to achieve their progressive objective. He chose to ignore the less attractive features of Porfirian positivistic economics such as the massive foreign investment behind these debt-producing public works, and the outright exploitation of Mexican labour fundamental to the realisation of such projects. Velasco's idealisation is politically significant because it is a partial perspective of Mexico's economic growth. His neglect of the social realities of these projects would suggest that his sensibility was the artistic counterpart of Porfirian *científico* aspirations.

An urban popular art style developed during the nineteenth century which sought to emulate academic fine art but lacked its prestige and status. In contrast to academic painting, this style tended to subordinate the dominant interest in naturalistic landscape painting and

there are relatively few of these. Instead, local artists including José María Estrada (1810?-ca.1862) and Hermenegildo Bustos (1832-1907) painted portraits, especially those of children(37), for example, Estrada's **'Doña María Tomasa García Aguirre'**.

The later work of Bustos was more formal and finished, and he carried on the type of painting established by Estrada into the late nineteenth century. Interestingly, Bustos is known to have also painted at least one allegorical mural, **'Beauty Overcoming Force'**, on a shop ceiling in Purísima del Rincón, Guanajuato, indicating yet again the variety of work carried out by such local artists. The availability of this 'popular' art was in practice restricted to those who could afford to commission work. When compared with the art of the often anonymous, untutored, urban artists, it displays a thinness and conservative detachment symptomatic of its narrow social confines.

The urban art of the popular caricaturists, ex-voto 'miracle' painters, and *pulquería* muralists is at a far remove from the art of the portraitists and landscape artists. In general, the productions of these truly popular artists of the urban centres are characterised by spontaneity, vibrancy, and a witty satirical treatment of current issues totally devoid of the conventional reserve and pretension of both of the other genres. Although the richness of its social context means that it is too complex and diverse to be readily treated in terms of a single type, a survey of its interrelated elements will suggest something of its overall nature.

The *pulquería* mural was perhaps the most obviously striking of these varied art forms. The *pulquerías*, busy local bars frequented by the working class men of the area, abounded in the urban centres(38). They were often foci of the local community, selling *pulque* (the native drink which from pre-colonial times had been produced from the maguey plants widely grown in the countryside) and frequented by *corrido* singers whose impromptu ballads would relate the latest and most sensational news. The mural served to decorate and advertise the bar (similar murals often decorated shop fronts), and its vivid colours captured some idealised tableau or common scene, like that of the facade of the **'El Charrito'** bar in Mexico City(39) which showed a well-dressed countryman proudly standing beside his beautifully saddled horse, giving a friendly wave to passers-by. The subject matter of such murals often reflected the sentimental attachments and aspirations of the local people:

Pulqueria murals are painted in cheap brilliant oils which quickly fade and peel. They are therefore constantly changing, are always the national landscape in the present, which includes the beloved and amusing things of the past.

40.

A second type of popular art favoured by the poorer members of nineteenth-century Mexican society was the recording of some beneficial intercession in which the event or 'miracle' was depicted upon small sheets of inexpensive tin plate. Canvas, the surface the urban portraitists usually worked with, was otherwise reserved only for the most special of miracles since it was so expensive(41). Such was the demand for painted miracles that often an artist could subsist in a poor area simply by executing the miraculous tableaux described by the local people, to the standards demanded, and in the ways dictated by, whoever wished to have the event depicted. More often than otherwise, the painted miracles would be anonymous, and while of course reflecting their artists' lack of interest in individual fame (unlike the practitioners of the fine art traditions), this also reflects the artists' collective attitude towards their work.

The key to this lies in their attitude towards the work. The view that they seemed to have commonly held, that they were artisans rather than artists in any professional sense, indicates a genuine lack of pretension about their art. The participation of the person who would pay the small fee for the production of a painted miracle engendered in the artist a lack of any proprietorial possessiveness with respect to the finished product. Though it would be an example of his skill (some of the miracle painters developed a personal style), such artists would not assert or claim any rights over it. They were paid to execute a tableau in the conventions of their craft, as they saw it, and regarded themselves as having much more in common with the other local craftsmen than with any 'artist'. Even the titles of the paintings reflect their main preoccupations and the general theme, common to all of them, of the sudden beneficial intervention of the saints or other sacred figures on behalf of those in peril: **'Accident In a Power Plant'** (1883); **'Miraculous Cure of Señora Carmen Escobar'** (1893); and, **'A Miraculous Escape'** (date unknown)(42).

The attitudes and critical voice of the poorer urban population were vibrantly cast into graphic art in the work of the popular caricaturist and illustrator, José Guadalupe Posada

(1852-1913). Posada's success resulted both from his remarkable skill in the adaptation of an established popular genre to suit the distinctive personal style he developed, and from his ability to satirise sensational social events or political controversy with sardonic comment:

Posada's broadsides, issued in huge editions by the publishing house of Vanegas Arroyo, were designed primarily to meet the specific needs of the large illiterate segment of the population. In effect, and for that group in particular, the estimated fifteen thousand engravings made by Posada before his death were the newspapers of the period.

Consequently, anything that might interest his large audience became a theme for Posada's art. His illustrations were necessarily forceful and pertinent, and they were accompanied by equally dramatic comments in verse. 43.

The tradition of using the broadside as a medium for the mass circulation of news and controversial satire was established in Mexico well before Posada's output began in the 1870's, and most likely originates in the importation of sheets from Spain during the colonial period:

Print-making...is...linked to the penny pamphlet, the rhymed corrido or the prose relato which it illustrates. In colonial times Mexico received such sheets from Spain, of which a sample dated 1736 exists in the National Museum. But the mestizo transformed such models...

44.

The motivating force of this transformation seems to have been largely political. During the struggle between the liberals and the conservatives which followed the end of Spanish colonial rule, the caricature became a direct means of pursuing the vilification of political opponents in the hands of graphic artists like Ignacio Cumplido, Constantino Escalante, and Santiago Hernández(45). Whereas Cumplido's work accompanied the liberal satire of Juan Bautista Morales's 1845 book, El Gallo Pitagórica, the later work both of Escalante and of Hernández, published in the conservative periodicals 'La Orquesta', 'La Patria' and 'El Ahuizote', was directed against the liberals during the Juárez governments.

Before his employment in the Mexico City publishing house of Vanegas Arroyo began in 1887, Posada had already produced a series of traditional political caricatures. However, he incorporated many of the attributes of the popular art media discussed above, the painted miracles, *pulquería* murals, and the *corridos*, in creating his famous individual style(46).

The influence of the painted miracles can be clearly seen in any one of a number of moral illustrations done by Posada which depict the crimes committed by a whole variety of

miscreants. In such illustrations, Posada shows the malignant influence of Satan or his accomplices at work. The content of the engraving was always comprised of two elements which accused and at the same time condemned the wrongdoer. The accusatory element always melodramatically showed the crime taking place, while its inevitable consequences were either hinted at in the menacing shapes of diabolic accomplices, or vividly demonstrated by the casting of the wrongdoer through the gaping jaws of hell by horned and tailed devils. While the events depicted in the painted miracles show a benevolent influence at work to aid the helpless, Posada contrasts the idea of these miraculous intercessions with the intervention of diabolic corruption or depravity. Examples of this type of graphic work are: **Ejemplo: "El hijo desobediente"** (The disobedient son)(47); and, **Ejemplo: "Una hija en pacto con Satanás"** (A girl in league with Satan, 48).

The contribution made by the *pulquería* murals to Posada's work is less obvious but may even be more important. The painted miracle is simply a record of a remarkable event requiring little in the way of explanation to be readily understood. However, most of the engravings made by Posada actually project their content as a result of the influence of the *pulquería* mural. Posada achieves his emphasis by constructing his illustrations around a main focal point, as do the artists who paint *pulquería* murals. In the painted miracle, the work records all the circumstances of the event, and consequently the focus is diffuse since the painting usually contains the entire surroundings in which the event took place.

The final of the three influences listed earlier, that of the *corrido* or ballad, stands in a reciprocal relationship with Posada's work. Posada produced many illustrations which were placed in broadsheets above or alongside a *corrido*, and which depicted the event about which the *corrido* was written(49). However, Posada also used the insight into the *corridos* he thus gained as a source of some of his ideas for illustrations depicting other events or incidents. As the *corridos* were very popular, they ensured that his work had a ready market. Moreover, their popularity implied that the incidents they related were of a sort which caught the popular imagination and so were a reliable indicator of the kind of dramatic events which the poor urban populace were intrigued by. So the *corridos* also helped to ensure Posada's popular success, for he could always be sure that his latest production would be eagerly

awaited if he kept the formula they followed in mind.

However, Posada went further than the successful utilisation of important aspects of the other popular media, for he commented on current events with a critical voice not found in them. Both the popularity of the painted miracles, and the belief of their owners that the saints would intervene to aid them in adverse or difficult circumstances, was satirised by Posada in the illustration titled, '**Pleas of the lonely unmarried to Our Miraculous Saint Anthony of Padua, saint of lost objects and lovers**'(50). The same sardonic humour, deployed in a more scathing and perhaps risky way, is at the core of his political work.

Though he was less openly hostile towards the authorities, Posada clearly shared the anger of opposition writers like Filomeno Mata at the pervasive violence and often ambiguous justice which characterised late nineteenth century Mexican society. In his many illustrations of executions Posada again and again depicted the authorities carrying out the most unattractive and threatening aspects of their role, and he thus accurately reflected the prevalent oppressiveness of his time. The *calaveras*, engravings which consist of grinning skeletal figures, reflect Posada's sardonic dismissiveness of death and perhaps more disturbingly, indicate a grim social acceptance of the idea that violent death is commonplace and impersonal. The *calaveras* were cartoons in which the common mortality of generals, camp followers, Don Juans, politicians and dance-hall girls amongst many others was used to ridicule their pretensions.

But the irony evaporates when Posada equips the shrunken figures of his *calaveras* with sabres, guns, bandoliers and uniforms. The grins of these personifications of Death are menacing because the military outfits reflect the business of killing which is their wearers' occupation. As well as this, Posada customarily portrayed the more sensational issues and turbulent demonstrations of his time, and, as '**Continuation of the anti-reelection demonstrations**'(51) (which shows the police forces of Porfirio Díaz dispersing a demonstration with drawn swords) clearly proves, he was not afraid to attack the excesses of the current regime.

Apart from the major contribution to Mexican popular art which Posada had made by the time of his death, his work and example was to inspire the next generation of caricaturists and

lithographers, as well as the first generation of Mexico's twentieth century muralists, for both José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera acknowledge his influence upon them as muralists in their autobiographies(52).

#### Early Porfirian Positivism and its Preference for European Culture.

Juan Cordero's notable late mural, '*Triunfos de la Ciencia y el Trabajo Sobre la Envidia y la Ignorancia*' ('Triumphs of Science and Labour over Envy and Ignorance', 1874;1.2), exemplifies the aesthetic line of the early *Porfiriato*, and in its function as a means of projecting the ideology of its time it clearly anticipates the later secular muralism of the post-revolutionary era. In fact Cordero's secular mural promotes the dominant ideology of Mexican positivism, and it was inaugurated with a speech by Dr. Gabino Barreda, the Director of the National Preparatory School and the 'champion of positivist philosophy in Mexico'(53).

The foreground platform of the mural carries upon it the throne of Minerva, the goddess of Wisdom, which dominates the mural. Below her, Science and Industry are seated on the front of this platform attending to their respective apparatus. Science, identified by the logo borne on the front of the platform below her, 'Science. To know in order to foresee', reaches forward to examine a symbolic piece of electrical equipment. On the other side of the platform, Industry, similarly endowed with classical robes and a corresponding slogan, 'Industry. To foresee in order to work', adjusts the steaming glass flask which itself rests on an ornate classical pedestal to her left.

Minerva's right arm raised above this tableau representing the twin dynamic forces of industrial production, steam and electricity, conducts the viewer's gaze to the ship, symbolizing maritime trade which is being unloaded in the background behind science and to the left of her ornate throne. On the other side of the mural, the similarly upraised arm of the fleeing unkempt figure representing Ignorance and Envy brings attention both to himself and to the distant train crossing the plain behind him below a line of hills somewhat reminiscent of a scene from a Velasco landscape. Elements of this mural anticipate Diego Rivera's use of scientific symbols and machinery, especially agricultural machinery, in his 1926 murals at Chapingo ('Good Government') and in the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* ('*Corrido of*

the Agrarian Revolution'), amongst others.

The Mexican art historian Jean Charlot has drawn attention to an early call by the art critic López-López (a friend of Cordero's since childhood) for public mural commissions.

López-López publicly applauded Cordero's mural in 1874 in the 'El Federalista' periodical:

...recommending to the good taste and culture of the administration the convenient beautification of public buildings with mural paintings...The schools of medicine, law, mining, agriculture and commerce...the palaces of the government and of justice, the city halls, and other buildings that house the administrative sovereignty, all need distinctive marks and wait for the brush and chisel of Mexican artists dedicated to the study of the fine arts, so that such places be spared the trite appearance of private dwellings.

54.

The unfortunate consequences for Mexican art of the rather outmoded neoclassicism of this mural were that potential government patrons ignored López-López' call, choosing instead to again look to Europe for a vigorous, suitably modernistic artistic principle with which to celebrate the social progress they supposedly had achieved as a government. However a growing dissatisfaction and impatience became evident amongst Mexico's artists and intellectuals over the European cultural preferences of the Díaz regime. Ignoring the potential of Mexican artists to suitably dignify their regime, the government employed European artists and architects in their continued attempts to create the general impression of the progressiveness and buoyancy of the Mexican economy resulting from their *científico* positivism.

The construction of the great public buildings of the capital in the European fashion is a good example of this flaunting of Mexico's notional new stature. This public display, which relied on the emulation of European standards, actually also obscured the nation's grave social problems but the gathering discontent amongst Mexican artists and intellectuals had much more to do with their resentment of the Europeans whose talents were purchased by the government, than with the poverty, illiteracy, and harshness of the living conditions of the majority of the population.

One opposition newspaper in particular, 'El Hijo del Ahuizote' (to which Posada contributed illustrations), attacked this aspect of government policy. The paper's main target in its promotion of indigent artists was the academic art of the time, with its continuing heavy

emphasis on European fine art traditions. The paper highlighted the lack of a strong national art, and called for the promotion of one able to portray the Mexican spirit authentically.

Therefore, when the Academy held an exhibition in 1898 of Spanish paintings which were to serve as examples to be emulated by Mexican artists, the paper responded with an article condemning it:

We hear talk of what a difference there is between the Mexican works and the Spanish ones. Only too common among us is the impulse to praise what is foreign and to depreciate what is national, and this regardless of quality.

55.

The article was accompanied by a cartoon representing Salomé Pina (Professor of Painting) enveloped in cobwebs. It was captioned, '**Professor of painting in perpetuity at the Academy of Fine Arts**'(56). Though there were isolated examples of paintings which were recognisably Mexican in theme(57), what the newspaper called for was the fostering of a comprehensive national art movement and consciousness which, it was hoped, would prevent any further uncritical adoption of European standards in art.

#### Justo Sierra's Concept of National Culture and his Promotion of 'National' Art.

Justo Sierra, in 1901 a subsecretary in Díaz' government, resolved to respond to the discontent over the lack of a recognisably Mexican aesthetic. While his approach to this problem, together with the reasons for its failure, will be dealt with shortly, it is opportune to discuss here the ideological basis of the educational policies he pursued.

Sierra was a lawyer who had been employed in the *Secretaría de Justicia y Instrucción Pública* under the direction of the minister, Joaquín Baranda. When Justino Fernández took over from Baranda in 1901, he rationalised the Ministry by creating two new offices dealing with law and education on a separate basis. Sierra was then appointed director of the educational office, and became the leading figure in the regime's educational policy in the last decade of the Porfiriato.

The prevailing educational ideology of the Porfirian regime was loosely based upon the formulation of positivism by Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the French philosopher and mathematician. Comte's theories proposed a hierarchy of knowledge with three levels - '...the

Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive.' (58)

Comte's third level promoted good ends, and essential to the social process he outlines is, 'the second effect of Positive Philosophy...to regenerate Education.' The Porfirians formulated a technologically-oriented educational policy intended to produce the scientists and technicians required for the industrialisation of the Mexican economy. To further this aim, the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* (National Preparatory School) was created. Comte's positivism also attracted the nineteenth-century Mexican liberals because it was anti-clerical. It seemed to offer the basis of the desired national economic growth, but it also promoted the interests of the Mexican bourgeoisie:

The liberal party, by virtue of having taken over the government [when Díaz first comes to power] had to establish the basis for a durable social order. This responsibility could not be turned over to the groups that had been displaced: the clergy and the military. Nor could it be turned over to the new military, which continued to be as ambitious as that which was conquered. Hence, a social group that would guarantee order was selected. This class was the bourgeoisie. The Mexican bourgeoisie was the only class capable of guaranteeing social order. [Justo] Sierra said that the leaders of the triumphal social movement came from this class. The Mexican bourgeoisie provided the banner and the principles of the revolutionary movement against the conservative class. 59.

Ironically the linkage of positivism with the middle class during Porfirio Díaz' thirty-four dictatorship in Mexico led not to the 'humane and enlightened proletariat' that Comte foresaw, but resulted in widespread poverty amongst most of the population as the growing bourgeoisie sought to make the most of their political and economic opportunities. Díaz himself observed at the end of his days in power that, 'It is true...Mexico has a middle class now; but she had none before. The middle class is the active element of society here as elsewhere. The rich are too much preoccupied with their riches and in their dignities to be of much use in advancing the general welfare. Their children do not try very hard to prove their education or their character. On the other hand, the poor are usually too ignorant to have power. It is upon the middle class, drawn largely from the poor...the active, hard-working self-improved middle class, that a democracy must depend for its development. It is the middle class that concerns itself with politics and with general progress.' (60)

During the later Porfiriato, the country's prospering middle class were able to justify their position and rebuff their critics by citing the theories of the English philosopher Herbert

Spencer (1829-1903), who, by the misapplication of Darwin's evolutionary theory to the study of society, held that the poor were naturally so because they were politically incompetent and intellectually inferior to their wealthier fellow citizens. Sierra, who was more of a liberal than most of the Porfirians, could not accept this. He believed that the poor were morally corrupt because they lacked any education. Increasingly, he became convinced that the poor needed the example and guidance of a cultural elite to encourage that transformation into a productive and willing workforce which would remove their poverty. Sierra viewed the poverty of the lower classes as a moral rather than a structural problem (61). His appointment as education minister gave him the chance to try a combined educational and cultural solution.

Part of Sierra's programme required the formation of a native cultural group in response to the demands for a national art movement less dependent on European tastes and styles. He employed a twofold approach, one element of which concerned the Academy. Sierra appointed Antonio Rivas Mercado director of the Academy, and charged him with the task of producing a Mexican school of painting. Mercado was to be frustrated in this, however, due to the appointment of a Spanish artist, Antonio Fabrés, as director of painting in 1903:

A Catalán like Clavé, Fabrés was a newcomer to Mexico. He had just been named subdirector of the school in a personal move of President Díaz, who befriended the recent arrival. His salary of 7,200 pesos exceeded that of the director. His masterpiece, a Bacchanal...had just been bought by the Mexican Government for 12,000 pesos. Rivas Mercado, at least at the beginning of his tenure, made an honest effort to work in harmony with Fabrés, but the task proved impossible.

62.

Another point of contention between them was that Rivas Mercado, himself an architect, encouraged and favoured the school of architecture. This provided Fabrés with a cause which he used to form a temporary unification within the school of painting amongst students and staff otherwise disgruntled with his teaching. Fabrés, again conforming to the emulation of European models still favoured by the Porfirians, based his teaching upon the respective styles of the Spanish artist Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945), and the French master, Jean Meissonier (1815-1891). These were compatible, since Meissonier's precepts concerned the technique of the depiction of historical genre subjects as realistically as possible by precise attention to detail and the use of authentic items, and Zuloaga's strength lay in a late

Romantic *Costumbrismo*, a preference for folk dress and customs. Fabrés aimed to link the development of recognisably Mexican content and themes with the introduction of a contemporary European style:

Indeed Fabrés seems to have had considerable influence; for a new generation of artists, including Félix Parra (1845-1919), Leandro Izaguirre (born 1867), and Saturnino Herrán (1887-1918) became popular for their picturesque Mexican scenes and Mexican folk types in native costumes. In spite of their pompous baroque style they prove that love and appreciation of native material was not altogether a product of the postrevolutionary renaissance... 63.

Fabrés's insistence that his stultifying precepts were to be rigorously followed lost the support of the student body. Had he not had the backing of the Porfirian regime in the matter of his teaching methods, his tenure at the Academy may have been even shorter than six years for many students disliked what they saw as his regressive ideas. In this revealing criticism of a colleague's teaching methods, Fabrés states the strength of his position with unconscious irony, for he cites the central principle of the Porfirian attitude to educational policy, and, by implication, the controlling influence of the state which offered its citizens *pan o porra* - 'bread or the club':

You know very well that, in my system of drawing, approved by the Government so that today IT IS THE LAW, there is no such thing as drawing from prints. If we keep it for the first years it is only with the understanding that, eventually, we shall be able to replace prints with photographs. 64.

This first attempt made by the educationalists to establish a school of native Mexican painting failed because of the conditions which were imposed upon it. Even in an attempt to produce a Mexican national art, European conventions must be taught so that the art students could appreciate the methodology of an established style of painting in current use. Yet for the purposes of conveying a sense of vigorous national development, *Costumbrismo* (be it Mexican or Spanish) was found to be unsuitable and inadequate, much as neoclassical figurative allegory had been.

Moreover the choice of Fabrés as director of the school of painting was a mistake because the European absolutely dictated the principles of the style, and advocated its 'qualities' so much that the students, keen to diversify their abilities by experimentation, were prevented within the school from developing their personal interests. Increasing student discontent

ousted Fabrés from his post before long and he returned to Spain in 1909 (65).

The other element of Sierra's twofold approach was to support independent Mexican artists who worked within the fine art tradition. Sierra's dissatisfaction with the crude materialism of Porfirian positivism was articulated in his book, The Political Evolution of the Mexican People (1902) (66). He wrote of the Mexican nation as 'a social organism' which he believed required the guidance of a cultural elite if it was to avoid the dangers of the total subjugation of moral values to the pursuit of materialistic goals. In seeking to form this elite cultural group Sierra followed the activities of the artist Gerardo Murillo Cornadó (1875-1964), and his associates with growing interest. Sierra recognised that Murillo could be of great assistance to him in his encouragement and support of the independent native artists, because he had gathered together a group of artists, namely Roberto Montenegro, Guerrero Galván, Ixca Farías and Carlos Orozco Romero, all of whom wished to pursue a new direction in their art.

Murillo had already held two exhibitions of his work in Guadalajara, and was an outspoken critic of contemporary Mexican fine art standards. An ex-student of the Academy (he had left in 1896), he had very recently returned from a seven-year stay in Europe which had been financially assisted by the Republic's President Díaz. Although the purpose of his stay had been to study philosophy and penal law, he had visited many of Europe's fine art collections and exhibitions. Before his return to Mexico fired with enthusiasm for impressionism, he had also practised art in Europe, including the painting of murals in a private Roman villa which were impressionistic in style and depicted 'Man in a triumphant social struggle against Nature' (67).

However Sierra failed to attract Murillo (who considered himself a socialist 68) to his project and the artist returned to Europe where, in 1907 and 1908, he painted a series of twelve murals in Boulogne-Sur-Seine intended for the House of the People of Paris (69). Meanwhile in 1905 Sierra was appointed minister of the newly-created *Secretaría de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes* (70).

Sierra's hope for the formation of an elite cultural group was revived by the foundation, in 1907, of the *Sociedad de Conferencias* by Alfonso Reyes, and others (71). Reyes had, in

1902, provided the foreword to Sierra's book. Co-founders of this group included José Vasconcelos a future education minister, Diego Rivera the muralist, Rafael Ramos Martínez a future art academy director and Antonio Caso, who had in 1906 formulated a critique of positivism attacking its profit-seeking, materialist principles. This society became, in 1909, the *Ateneo de Juventud*, with associations of classical learning (an atheneum was a forum of educated discussion) and claiming for itself the identity of a young, vigorous cultural group. The bohemianism enjoyed by members of the group was a reaction to positivist materialism: 'Mexico's elite youth indulged their feelings in Baudelairian despair. "To get drunk on love, wine and poetry was the rule." '(72). However, José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) found this self-indulgence in the face of Mexico's grave social problems unacceptable. Vasconcelos took on an active political role as the editor of Francisco Madero's opposition party newspaper, 'El Anti-reelectionista.' He was to become the minister of education in General Alvaro Obregón's Cabinet in the post-revolutionary reconstruction period, and as such, the patron of the muralists of the 1920's. The programme of education and the direction of culture in general in the 1920's owes much to the idealist tradition which arose in the last decade of the *Porfiriato*.

The essay, '*Ariel*', written in 1900 by the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodo (1871-1917), was welcomed by the members of the *Sociedad de Conferencias* on its publication in Mexico in 1908. This essay stressing order, strong leadership, and the motivating power of idealism, offered Mexican intellectuals cultural answers to problems which were social and economic:

He (Rodo) believed that, provided there was equal opportunity for education, a natural aristocracy of the best - i.e., men and women prepared to follow a disinterested ideal - would emerge to lead society. A really great civilisation could arise in a society only when its members pursued some non-personal goal, The Greek ideal of beauty and the Christian ideal of charity were two such ideals for a worthy modern society to combine. Such a society, based on a democratic system enabling 'the best' to rise to the top as leaders, would inevitably produce a superior civilisation. On the other hand, a power whose only concerns are material was doomed to mediocrity.

73.

By citing the United States as an example of a 'mediocre' nation, in that he said it had completely surrendered to materialism, Rodo created a mood of self-confidence in Latin America. Furthermore, his selection of the United States as his target spared the Mexicans

the embarrassment of being cited as the obvious Latin American example of the pursuit of materialist goals, a situation which of course had arisen from a quarter-century of the application of Porfirian positivist theories.

The publication of *'Ariel'* in Mexico in 1908 voiced some of Justo Sierra's arguments from an exterior source, and so appeared to support the policies which Sierra had been trying to establish in Mexico as education minister. He would not accept defeat in his attempt to foster a national school of painting within the Academy. Accordingly, in the reorganisation of the institution which Fabrés's return to Europe in 1909 made necessary, he allowed Mercado to try a different approach to the teaching of fine art:

The director, Antonio Rivas Mercado, then went to the other extreme by introducing a method of abstraction from Paris known as the Pillet system. The Pillet system was a method of visual discipline by which the eye and mind of the student were trained to the beauties of line, form, and color without the encumbrance of a model or nature. It was originally intended primarily for the instruction of children of grade-school age, so that its use in an academy of advanced students turned out to be somewhat ridiculous.

74.

Although the approach was a radical departure from the methods of Fabrés, it too failed because of its heavy emphasis upon a single aspect of fine art painting. Fabrés imposed a single style and allowed no departure from it; and Mercado imposed, in the Pillet system's exaggerated emphasis on the structural considerations of painting, a single, equally restrictive method. The Pillet system, amongst other things, provoked a rebellion among the art students in the revolutionary year of 1911 which caused its teaching to be discontinued.

In 1910, Sierra's policies had received the official approval of Díaz when the ageing dictator had placed the whole of the higher education system of the country under the centralised control of the education minister by incorporating the National University and the Academy into a single body. However, the failure of Mercado's attempt to foist the Pillet system on the students of the Academy, and the fall of Díaz in the same year, were both to put Sierra in an untenable position. After the revolutionary upheaval José Vasconcelos would take his place with similar aims.

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## Chapter Two

### THE OVERTHROW OF THE OLD REGIME

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the main features of the last decade of the thirty-four year dictatorship (1877-1911) of General Porfirio Díaz, and to examine the central concerns and identity of the various opposition groups which supported his elected liberal successor as president, Francisco I. Madero. Since Madero was himself soon ruthlessly displaced by another military dictator, General Victoriano Huerta, it is relevant to discuss here the emergence and defeat of Huerta which itself preceeded the most turbulent phase of the Revolution of 1910-1917.

It is important to examine the whole range of the political ideas which were current in the Revolution since some are idealised, some ridiculed, and some not represented in the retrospective allusions of the post-revolutionary murals of the 1920's. These references to past events are of course significant to the extent that they convey the muralists' own views of the Revolution. However, the allusions which were made by the muralists are not wholly static, reflecting the changing beliefs and political alignments of the muralists during the decade after the Revolution. Siqueiros's iconographically communist '**Burial of the Martyred Worker**' (1923) is an example which marks a considerable departure from his former Constitutionalist sympathies. It is only the knowledge that the 'martyred worker' in question, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, had been very recently assassinated for advancing communism which prevents one arriving at the conclusion that Siqueiros is superimposing a contemporary allegiance upon an incident of the revolution. It is all the more important, therefore, to establish as clearly as possible the nature of the historical actualities which gave rise to these sometimes obscure references. Otherwise there is a danger that the muralists' responses to the Constitutionalist liberal regime which eventually emerged in the place of the Porfirian hegemony could be assessed incompletely or inaccurately.

Karl Marx's analysis of the French Revolution of 1848-1852, '**The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte**' (1), was found to be useful for clarifying the alliances formed between the various conflicting interest groups during the Revolution of 1910-17 in

Mexico, especially because Díaz had sought to build a role for the middle-class during his thirty-four years in power. In addition, the middle-class of Mexico dominated the politics of the decade immediately after the Revolution, re-emerging at the expense of groups like the urban working class and the *campesino* rural workers as the main force in national politics. Marx's analysis is also of value in comprehending the Mexican Revolution because events took a broadly similar course in both the French and Mexican social struggles.

Both conflicts initially dismayed the powerful capitalist supporters of an aged despot and successfully achieved his downfall. The defeats of both Díaz the dictator and Louis Philippe the monarch were absolute. Moreover in both cases the reactionaries and conservatives staged a resurgence as soon as they perceived that the opportunity they had awaited had arisen. Subsequently, the revolutionary radicalism of both struggles was diverted and weakened in a series of confrontations over subsidiary issues which eventually produced a firmly-consolidated bourgeois ruling group and an effectively circumscribed opposition.

#### The Porfirian Era.

The Porfirian era of Mexican politics began in late 1876 when General Porfirio Díaz dislodged President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada by capturing Mexico City. Díaz and his supporters had opposed Lerdo's re-election. At the end of his first term, Díaz backed the campaign of General Manuel González, a close friend who had served in his government. The retiring president anticipated that González would stand down at the end of his term. He also thought that such was González' greed and administrative ineptitude that the voters would, at the next election, prefer to vote for his order and proven stability of government. As Díaz had foreseen, González' term in office had been characterised by an incredible degree of corruption at all levels of the administration, and by the wholesale pledging of land, resources, future income, and lucrative mining and ranching concessions in return for negotiable, foreign ready cash.<sup>(2)</sup> The voters accepted Díaz' second candidature readily, ignoring his original principle of 'no re-election' since he was not at this time seeking *consecutive* re-election.

In advancing the fortunes of González, Díaz had chosen to jeopardize the nation in order to further his own political ambitions. Before long many would be appalled by Díaz'

ruthlessness, and concerned both about the size of the national debt he himself would allow and the domestic and international consequences of his exclusive political hegemony. Justo

Sierra wrote:

The country's real desire, manifested everywhere, was peace. No one wanted a resumption of the war [of the 1860's and 1870's] except those who thrived on anarchy, those who were misfits in any normal situation. Seldom in history has there been a people with a more unanimous, more anguished, more determined aspiration.

Having understood and analyzed this pervading sentiment, the revolution's leader [Díaz] decided to build his authority on it, for it was in accord with his personal vow to make another revolt impossible.

In order to make this seemingly visionary ideal a reality, all interests, from the highest to the lowest must be involved, and the leader believed, that to accomplish this, all must have faith in him and fear him. Faith and fear, those two profoundly human emotions, have been the pillars of every religion and were to be the pillars of the new political regime.

### 3.

When he was elected to a second term in late 1887, Díaz embarked on what was to be an unbroken dictatorial reign of some twenty-seven years. Latterly, the ever-present threat of U.S. military intervention against any dissident groups, coupled with foreign domination of national industrial and export production, were crucial to the maintenance of Díaz in power.

During this period, the '*Porfiriato*', Díaz' political position moved from the initially centrist liberalism which had brought him into office, more and more to the right, as he adopted open market free enterprise from the disadvantageous position of underdevelopment. In the face of increasing if rarely coordinated opposition to his policies, Díaz' continuous return to office in unopposed re-elections was facilitated by his practise of nurturing the support of two influential economic groups, native and foreign industrial capitalists, and the large estate owners of the countryside, the *hacendados*. Dictator and power groups peacefully coexisted because Díaz had shared the balance of power almost exclusively between his two favoured pillars of society. This tripartite arrangement between dictator, *hacendados*, and capitalists, for the purposes of manipulating the economy for their own ends, also ensured the stability of his hegemony until it was shaken by the impact between 1907 and 1911 of an international economic crisis.

Díaz supported each of these power groups in different ways. His support of the landowners included his approval of the economic suppression of the system of

sharecropping, practised by the inhabitants of the *aldeas*, or communal rural villages, in order to increase the size of the *haciendas* while providing a more or less captive workforce for these large agricultural enterprises.

During the Age of Porfirio Díaz the patterns of land tenure clearly changed in favor of the wealthy. At the *porfiriato's* peak, it became government policy to support capitalism as the vehicle for economic development. Large, efficiently run plantations became the norm. Consequently, the progressive "Laws of the Reform," passed in the 1850's in order to break up corporate ecclesiastical landholdings, were applied to Indian communal lands believed to be inefficiently managed and a major stumbling block to progress. The result was the alienation of Indian *ejidos* and the consequent acquisition of these lands by mestizos who thirsted for larger parcels of real estate, and by creoles as well as foreigners who added to their already seignorial landholdings. The activities of officially sponsored land-companies netted northern cattle barons and regal *hacendados* immense tracts of additional private property. As stated earlier, such a system of land tenure dominated the Porfirian period, constituting, so far, a clear contrast to postrevolutionary goals.

#### 4

However, although the growth and spread of haciendas reflects an increasing tendency towards the capitalistic centralisation of agricultural assets (land, manpower, timber, and water), in pursuit of productivity and profit, Mexican rural society at the turn of the century was by no means uniform.

Since Mexican territorial boundaries contain a variety of terrains and climates, there were regional variations in the rural economic structure which are reflected in the social structure of the regions. In the north and west, where the inhospitable deserts and barren mountain ranges (which cover about two-thirds of Mexico<sup>(5)</sup>) could not support even restricted cultivation by village communities of sharecroppers except here and there, cattle ranching was the dominant form of agricultural industry. In the central valley and southern and central plateaux, haciendas, smaller ranches, and aldeas were supported by the land's greater fertility and a gentler climate. In the north of Mexico agrarian employment of Indians and *mestizo* peons was largely restricted to cattle ranching, but in the central valley and south states like Morelos rural communities were composed of Indians and *mestizos* who lived in debt-peonage on the haciendas, *campesinos* or rural wage workers, small ranchers and village sharecroppers. In the very south-east, in Quintana Roo and in Yucatán, there were tribal Indians who still put up a stubborn resistance to the expropriation of their lands and

freedom, and notorious jungle labour camps for enemies of the regime.

Other aspects of the agrarian economy are of considerable significance in terms of the analysis of contemporary national politics. This significance is reflected in the post-revolutionary mural work of, for instance, Diego Rivera, whose 'Distribution of the Land' murals are hopeful depictions of rural people rallying to the cry of 'Land and Liberty' in pursuit of agrarian reform. Hatred and mistrust of the exploitative agricultural capitalism which dominated rural issues in this period gave rise to sporadic episodes of violence followed by harsh suppression in rural communities, particularly in the south of Mexico. However, traditional rural society throughout Mexico was generally being weakened by the acquisition of land and the vital resource of water by hacendados and their agricultural companies.

The plutocratization of the Díaz regime through the 1880s eased the planters' way. The Ministry of Public Works sold them almost all the public land left in the state (of Morelos) and granted them favourable rulings on their requests for clear titles to other acquisitions...Twenty years later, under Díaz's patronage, they had more power there than before. Increasingly, only the plantations looked like legitimate, progressive institutions. It seemed that other kinds of communities existed as resources for them, that all human beings in Morelos must surrender their personal destinies...and become mere factors in the planters' cosmopolitan enterprise. The process which individual greed had motivated now emerged as regular, científico practice.

#### 6.

The expansion of the *haciendas* was resented throughout Mexico's local rural communities for a number of reasons. In the first place, the expansion was at the expense of smallholders and aldeas, whose subsistence was jeopardised by the often illegal acquisition (with the complicity of the local *jefe político* whose powers over the inhabitants were extensive) of the rights to either their tenancies or their common lands. The people thus dispossessed of their ability to win a living from the lands which they had traditionally worked often found themselves trapped into working on the haciendas in wretched conditions. One source cites the appalled reactions of a contemporary traveller:

One marvels...not that they are dirty but that under the circumstances they are as clean as they are; not that so many of them are continually sick, but that any of them are ever well; not that they love to get drunk, but that they can bear to remain sober.

#### 7.

In many cases, they were effectively tied to a particular *hacienda* because their low wages were paid to them in the form of tokens, rather than money. These tokens were redeemable

only in the *hacienda's* shops in return for goods and basic commodities which were sold at inflated prices. Moreover, a form of credit highly favourable to the *hacendado* was extended to them to cover such special expenditures as weddings and funerals, and so debt was incurred. This liability was heritable, being passed on to the other members of a family, so that often a hacienda peon was born into a debt from which he never escaped.

Accordingly, even in the expenditure of his 'wage', the hacienda worker was subjected to yet another level of capitalist exploitation. This system, known as 'debt-peonage', allowed the hacendados and agricultural companies to pursue their over-riding concern, the maximization of their profits. As well as the acquisition of as much land as possible for intensive cultivation of cash crops, particularly sugar-cane and cotton, these rural capitalists pursued other means to increase their profits:

They astutely developed interests in processing and selling to match their interest in production. They brought the railroad into the state, imported the new machinery, and planned how to get more land to grow more cane.

8.

The establishment of locally-owned primary processing plants throughout Mexico during the first decade of the century aggravated the problems of the *campesinos*, the rural wage workers, and were to create new problems for the planters themselves. For the *campesinos*, the introduction of this new machine technology to replace the traditional methods such as the manually-operated cane presses worsened existing employment difficulties. Not only were they now suffering a general inflationary depreciation in the value of wages which were already low, but increasingly they were also experiencing the effect of a two-fold pressure on the security of their employment.

In the first place, the growing numbers of the rural unemployed and displaced meant that there were always others to replace those dismissed for resenting managerial demands. Additionally, the incorporation of smaller, more labour-intensive concerns into larger establishments which pursued ever-increasing productivity adversely affected existing employment. The *rurales*, rural paramilitary police who occupied barracks in regional centres, maintained order rigorously. Together with the private company police retained by hacendados and managers, they enforced evictions, appropriated for local notables village

assets such as cattle and water (required to irrigate new intensive cultivation), and countered any rural rebelliousness with harsh and brutal suppression. Although under the command of state and federal government, they were also at the disposal of local *jefe políticos* whose arbitrary or corrupt decisions they enforced, often by their abuse of the '*ley fuga*'. According to this statute, a fleeing suspect was assumed to be guilty and usually shot. Therefore, a gunshot wound in the back of the dead troublemaker was considered by the authorities to clear a *rurale* from suspicion of murder. This was a much-hated law and there were continuing calls for its abolition but since local elections were customarily rigged by the *jefes* and state government, effective political opposition was impossible.

However, the planters' system which had allowed the single-minded pursuit of productivity and profit began to struggle under the inherent stress of its radical expansion. Hacendados faced two main difficulties which in their different ways reflect their total dependence on the system which they had developed. Firstly, accustomed to huge annual profits, they neglected the need to allow for a fallow period to replenish the soil depleted by as much as thirty years' continuous exploitation. Productivity threatened to collapse in the near future as a result.

Their solution to the second difficulty entailed worse problems for the country as a whole. The productivity they prized had the consequence of creating domestic surpluses in their commodities, and they were forced to export more and more of their output. Not only did this mean that they had to compete in the international market, but their income was subject to the uncertainties of international trading. Their overproduction of cash crops for export laid them open to sudden fluctuations in price which could rapidly cut back their profit. These interests were hit by the economic crisis of 1907 to 1911, and oppressive measures were increasingly used from about 1908 onwards as a new instability in rural Mexican society emerged.

Díaz' support of the second force, the industrial capitalists, was based upon the advice of an intellectual clique known as the *científicos* (upper middle class professionals such as engineers, and the technocratic element of the Mexican bourgeoisie) whom he incorporated into his regime. They advised Díaz on opening up the economy to foreign investors in return for the optimal exploitation (or, 'scientific development') of Mexico's land and resources,

particularly in the fields of mining, railways, and civil engineering. They were able to reap prosperity from his borrowing of capital derived from inward foreign investment, especially for capital-intensive infrastructure projects, such as the construction of canals for the drainage of the main valley basin of the State of Mexico, completed after Díaz acquired a loan of £2,300,000 sterling (9). The *científicos* were the most influential policy group during the Porfiriato, and their advice was more welcome to the ageing dictator than that of Congress.

The economic situation of Mexico in the last decade of the Porfiriato can be contrasted with its economic position when Díaz took over from González. For perhaps as long as the first ten years of the Porfiriato, the expansionist, open-market policies applied to the Mexican economy were apparently fruitful, and seemed to prove that Díaz would indeed rectify the worst consequences of González' trading of Mexican assets and concessions to foreign interests. However, though Díaz' policies were certainly more prudent and measured than González', they were much the same, and consequently even more of Mexico passed into the hands of foreign financiers and companies. Yet by the time that this was unmistakably clear to most Mexicans, Díaz had consolidated forces which buttressed his regime. Díaz' principles of bread or the club, fear and faith suppressed organised opposition, and foreign capital flowed into Mexico.

Throughout the Porfiriato, foreign investors were invited to invest capital in civil engineering projects or industries which exploited the country's natural resources, which of course included cash crops for export. These were seen by the regime to be mutually beneficial to the interests of both entrepreneurial capital and the state. Investors would receive generous returns, and the government would appear to be engaged upon the pursuit of expansionist policies. A major consequence was the creation of a sustained inflationary trend, which produced profound resentment amongst workers who, like the *campesinos*, were restricted to wages whose value was rapidly declining and also was subject to sudden fluctuations in prices for food and basic commodities.

Between 1893 and 1907, the price of corn - a basic part of the diet of over eighty-five per cent of the population - increased more than fifty per cent. And after 1907, many staple commodities, including cotton, fluctuated in price by as much as four hundred per cent within a period of days... Yet during this period, there was no ascertainable rise in wages. At the beginning

of the nineteenth century, average wages were around twenty-five centavos a day; in 1891 they were between twenty-five and fifty, and in 1908 they were back to about twenty-five again. Furthermore, it has been estimated that a day's labour in 1908 only bought one-third as much as it did in 1808. Under such conditions the workers were almost helpless. 10.

However, in examining the question of the importance of inward investment to the Mexican economy it is necessary to distinguish between infrastructure projects which had some national benefit, and extractive industrial activities, particularly in mining metals such as copper, lead, silver and gold, and oil production, which merely produced the depletion of natural resources for little tangible economic advantage to Mexico. Other areas of the economy were also bought up by foreigners:

As in Mexico's railroad-building, so in its industrial development - foreigners dominated. ...In the last nine years of the Porfiriato, new investments by U.S., British, and French capitalists exceeded all their investments of the first twenty-three years of the Porfiriato. The most spectacular increase was in U.S. investments, which more than quintupled between 1897 and 1911. As early as 1900, foreigners owned outright 172 of the 212 commercial establishments in the Federal District (Mexico City), and by 1911, foreign interests accounted for two-thirds of Mexico's total investment outside agriculture and handicraft industries.

11.

Heavy reliance on foreign investment is one of the main grounds upon which later charges of Díaz' encouragement of 'imperialist' exploitation of Mexico was founded. 'Constitutionalism' which stressed nationalism became the ideology of the revolutionaries and the muralists, and its appearance is related to the erosion of the political system under Díaz, in which, for instance, Congress had no independent existence, and congressional elections were rarely held. The ideological justification created to support his rule involved portraying him as a paternalistic chief, a *cacique* whose strict authoritarianism was projected as being necessary in the national interest. Trust in Díaz would result in Mexico being led out of its culturally and commercially backward position with respect to the rest of the world.

Those responsible for the creation of the ideology were Díaz' *científicos*, who held that the country was as yet politically too immature to enjoy and sustain democracy and freedom. All political opposition, particularly that which saw Díaz as an unconstitutional dictator, was suppressed. The ideology required strong control and firm leadership, particularly in view of the pressing need to maintain foreign economic confidence in the country, and both of these were prerogatives of the white upper class and 'enlightened' bourgeois *mestizos* (Díaz was

himself a *mestizo*). All facets of the Indian culture were criticised, and discredited as unproductive and rebellious - in Sonora alone, Yaqui Indians were in almost continual rebellion over various government-assisted encroachments upon their diminishing lands from as early as 1880. Using this as a sufficient pretext, the government organised the forced relocation of many thousands of Indians to labour on plantations, two-thirds of whom reportedly died within twelve months of their arrival (12). In científico eyes, Indians were no more than a sort of commodity (literally, for they fetched £7 each as slaves in Yucatán), or merely obstacles to the acquisition of assets and important profits, to be quickly removed for £10 each, the reward paid by the government for a pair of Indian ears, these apparently being easier to gather than actual bodies (13). In the case of the Mayan Indians (who also continued to resist federal incursions until as late as the beginning of the twentieth century) suppression was equally severe, involving the employment of units of the Federal Army:

The much-celebrated peace was overshadowed by the Government campaign against the Yaqui and Mayan tribes in the States of Sonora and Yucatán, where, after several years of bloody and inhuman conflict, the government succeeded in subjugating them, with the surrender of some of the rebels, whilst others continued attacking regional and federal government offices.

#### 14.

During the Porfiriato, both the status and the informal civil role of the army grew. Díaz, himself a general and a former hero of the *Reforma* revolts in which the French-supported Maximilian was ousted, recognised the value to his regime of maintaining a disciplined, well equipped army. Though considerable resources were made available, and public manoeuvres of elite troops were used to keep morale high, the army's competence was in fact somewhat superficial. The mass of the army was composed of unwilling conscripts, usually forcibly drafted, who were ill-equipped and poorly fed because of corruption amongst their officers, who often embezzled their nominal pay and sustenance allowance. Indeed much of the army was little more than an ill-disciplined, informal prison since many of the conscripts had been drafted into it because they had been troublesome, or more often simply destitute. The illusion of the army's competence held throughout the Porfiriato because the first major challenge to its strength did not materialise until the Revolution, and the generals were able to cope with smaller-scale insurrections because the new railways meant that troops could

rapidly be sent to trouble spots. Thus, despite its problems the army nevertheless retained the appearance of being a strong deterrent. Their apparent strength, together with the construction of new prisons, and the gruesome efficiency of the firing-squads and the rurales (the *ley fuga* is reported to have been employed during the Porfiriato on more than 10,000 occasions (15)), kept Díaz' grip on Mexico firm until mid-way through the first decade of the new century.

### The Liberal Resurgence

The internal political stability which had sustained the dictatorship of Díaz began to show signs of increasing strain during 1900-1910. As time passed the internal contradictions inherent in his policies had become ever more significant, and were worsened by the external pressures to which the economy was subject as a result of increasing uncertainty and price instability in the international markets, especially from 1908. The growth of an assertive working class, the unrest of lower middle class professionals, and the campesino response to científico agrarian policies were all to pose a crucial challenge to Díaz' regime and precipitate the Revolution. The unfulfilled promises of the Juárez Constitution of 1857, among them neglected agrarian reforms and land distribution, abandoned undertakings on labour wages and conditions, and lapsed guarantees of social and legal rights in general, would figure prominently in the various revolutionary manifestos and national 'Plans' of these diverse groups. However, from 1900 at least until 1908, the Liberal movement (after 1905, the ***Partido Liberal Mexicano*** - the PLM, or Liberal Party) provided the most coordinated and militant opposition to Díaz, his científicos, and his proteges, the grand proprietors and foreign entrepreneurs.

Such was the scale of the Porfirian oppression that the wave of opposition which carried him out of office might have started almost anywhere. There were widespread labour conflicts and the pervasive exploitation of the industrial workforce, not to mention the banning or suppression of labour organisations except the fairly ineffectual mutualist, local *círculos*. In any case, these were just shadows of their larger predecessors, such as the *Gran Círculo de Obreros de México* (founded 1870) and the anarchist group *La Social* (founded 1871), all of which had eventually succumbed to the Porfirian hostility to workers' organisation:

By 1880 all the workers organisations throughout Mexico were either taken over by Díaz, as was the Gran Círculo which lasted a few more years, or suppressed.

16.

Nevertheless, the new Liberal movement's rapid growth suggests that there were many aggrieved groups who had hitherto desisted from political and industrial action not only because of the local strength of the various agencies of Porfirian oppression, but also because their relative isolation in widespread regional centres, industrial plants, and mines made dissidents uncertain of the broader support of co-workers. The Liberal movement would give them, in the shape of its party newspaper 'Renacimiento' ('Rebirth'), a forum and a national voice, as well as providing information about labour issues elsewhere in the country.

In early 1900 Liberals in San Luis Potosí were increasingly resentful of the Church's open flouting of the Constitutional prohibitions on its activities, seemingly with the complicity of the State government:

When compared to some other state governments during the Díaz period, civil authorities in San Luis Potosí were especially lenient in their enforcement of the anticlerical Reform Laws of 1855-1862...Priests were observed to have worn in public their elaborate sacerdotal vestments of satin and gold. Catholic schools were allowed to function in some parts of the state. Local Liberals became increasingly incensed at these open defiances of the 1857 Constitution and the Reform Laws.

17.

The local Bishop, Montes de Oca y Obregón, brought the President's name into the matter at the General Assembly of the International Congress of Catholic Agencies in Paris on 6th June 1900, when he revealed in his address that the position of the Church in Mexico had prospered during the presidency of President Díaz:

The Bishop, who thirteen years earlier had warned Catholics that "better times" were a thing of the past, now asserted that, under the benevolent leadership of President Díaz and with the support of Mexico's women, the Church in Mexico had achieved "the prosperity it enjoys today." So far as some irascible Liberals were concerned, the Bishop had conceded and even boasted that an overlapping control of clerical, economic, and political elites had been re-established in Mexico. The Reform Laws, declared the Bishop, were so much dead wood.

18.

The speech was reported in Mexico on 7th August. That very day, Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón established the outspoken anarchist opposition newspaper, 'Regeneración', in Mexico City. On 30th August, a leading Liberal Camilo Arriaga published a

manifesto, '**Invitation to the Liberal Party**', in which he decried the Church's growing confidence and power. With other upper and middle class (19) Liberals of San Luis Potosí, Arriaga called for a national congress of fellow Liberals to be held there in February 1901. On 13th September 1900, the Potosinos organised a Liberal club, named "Ponciano Arriaga" after a famous nineteenth-century Liberal, with Potosan students led by Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama. Juan Sarabia began publication on 11th November of the Liberal newspaper **Renacimiento**. By early 1901, there were fifty or so Liberal clubs located in the Federal District and thirteen other states, though most were in the states of San Luis Potosí and Hidalgo(20).

The anticlerical cause gained adherents from right across the social spectrum because it was the only issue in contemporary Mexican politics which did not clearly involve the interests of a particular class. As Arriaga recognised in the manifesto phrase '...private initiative...should be seconded and extended until made into collective action'(21), the movement would at some point have to take the potentially divisive step of adopting more controversial national issues in order to broaden their membership and maintain a credible, progressive challenge to the Porfirians. The Flores Magón brothers, in Mexico City, saw the February 1901 Congress as a chance to promote the adoption of a wider sociopolitical programme, one which would be radical and militant:

The Flores Magón brothers looked forward to the First Liberal Congress where they might be able to convert "plain 'priest-baiters' into anti-Díaz militants." As Enrique Flores Magón later recalled: "Camilo Arriaga's initiative excited Ricardo and me...the formation of Liberal Clubs provided a basis for socialist organisation." 22.

The First Liberal Congress was well attended, and the Flores Magón brothers travelled to San Luis Potosí to participate. The Porfirians' tactic at this stage was simply to monitor the proceedings, and the 15th Battalion was deployed to patrol the streets outside the hall. Ricardo Flores Magón, not daunted by the military force outside, confronted his largely middle class audience with condemnation of the morality of the Porfirian system as a whole:

At this Liberal Congress Ricardo made his first open and formal attack on Díaz and his dictatorship. While the other delegates in their speeches were content to confine themselves to mere anticlericalism, Ricardo, when his turn came to speak, denounced the Díaz administration as a den of thieves.

23.

Despite his defiant condemnation of the government, Flores Magón's remarks apparently had little immediate effect on the Liberals' platform. The Congress passed a series of general proposals which demonstrate their broad lack of sympathy with the grave sociopolitical problems facing most Mexicans:

Resolutions of the First Liberal Congress, however, did not go beyond the theme of militant anticlericalism. The congress' political program was founded essentially on formalistic liberties and political democracy not related to the social and economic sufferings of the Mexican people. Pro-labor proposals merely endorsed the nineteenth-century form of labor organization known as "mutualism". A free press and a free, effective vote were encouraged. *Jefes políticos* were condemned.

24.

The Congress dispersed without much incident and the Flores Magón brothers returned to Mexico City and *Regeneración*, probably more convinced than ever of the need to create a radical challenge to the regime. A new Liberal '**Manifesto to the Nation**' went some way towards just such a programme, and it marks an important stage in the development of a national political challenge to Díaz' positivism. It was published in March 1901, the month following the Congress, by the movement's leaders including student lawyer Díaz Soto y Gama. This second manifesto widened the Liberal programme, which now presented a much broader appeal to all those disaffected with the Porfirian system whatever their social background. The dictatorship, the conservative press and the científicos were criticised, and there was a call for the formation of a national party which could effectively remove the President and his proteges from their consolidated power. Díaz was to be replaced with 'a generous, able, and progressive man', although the Liberals did not identify who this would be. Significantly, the Liberal leadership also acknowledged the role that the masses would have to play in overthrowing the exploitative Porfirian socioeconomic structure:

In defiance of Mexico's elites, the signers of the manifesto vowed that the Liberals would overcome "the fury of the aristocrats" because the people would be "strong and sound."...Now, led by the San Luis Potosí signatories of the March, 1901, manifesto, Mexican Liberals willing to do more than simply "bait the priests" were issuing a direct challenge to the Díaz regime.

25.

Ricardo and Jesus Flores Magón expressed 'a vote of solidarity' with the new manifesto of the San Luis Potosí group by forming the *Asociación Liberal Reformista* with other Mexico City Liberals in early April 1901, but they decided to issue a separate manifesto 'analysing the

political and social conditions of the country.'(26)

Although the Porfirian response to the First Liberal Congress may have been delayed, it was widespread and concerted when it came. The military and police forces closed Liberal clubs in six or more states, and the Flores Magón brothers, with many Liberals including Arriaga and Díaz Soto y Gama, were separately imprisoned on a variety of charges ranging from libel to sedition. Presses were smashed or confiscated, with heavy fines or imprisonment for opposition journalists. But the consequences of this repression were to foster the Liberals' further radicalisation, for in November 1901 they issued another manifesto in which they included for the first time agrarian problems amongst those which required radical reform and immediate legal revision. Moreover, Díaz' actions against the now embattled Liberals precipitated both a rapid growth in the membership of the Liberal movement, and a significant change in the composition of the membership, with the result that Mexican Liberalism progressively became less like an innocuous middle-class political association, and generally more committed to outright disruptive activity against the Porfirian socioeconomic system:

- These repressive techniques had the effect of drawing political lines more sharply. Moderates from the upper class and traditional anticlericals, Protestants, and Masons soon began to withdraw from the movement...Even the pro-Díaz clerical press had to admit that by October of 1901 there were at least 150 Liberal Clubs operating in the open and two or three times as many clandestine ones.

## 27.

The pattern of repression, imprisonment, and seizure of presses continued throughout 1902 and 1903. The Government's strategy was twofold - they concentrated their harassment upon the Liberal leaders (in September 1902, for example, the entire leadership was separately jailed), and their means of disseminating information and critical comment, the opposition journalism. Ricardo Flores Magón kept a list of the victims of the Government drive against the opposition press which included the names of about one hundred journalists who were jailed during 1901 and 1902 for criticising the regime, and some fifty opposition newspapers founded and suppressed during the same period(28). General Bernardo Reyes, Governor of the State of Nuevo León and Díaz' Minister of War, was the chief agent of the Porfirian response. Nevertheless, the opposition journalism continued to inform and politicise the Mexican people.

The San Luis Potosí nucleus of the Liberal movement was called the 'Precursor movement' since its platform shifted from its initially cautious, legitimate position to a very much more radical perspective anticipating the revolutionary consciousness which underlies the events of 1910-1917. It was the target for the most concerted Porfirian aggression, so much so that on 5th February 1903 Arriaga, with Díaz Soto y Gama, Juan Sarabia, and Ricardo Flores Magón, reconstituted the Club Liberal 'Ponciano Arriaga' in Mexico City. Half the membership consisted of Potosinos displaced by the intense harassment to which they had been subjected in their native state. Another significant development was that while the Government had more or less wiped out the opposition press in 1902, Ricardo Flores Magón had rented the Mexico City newspaper 'El Hijo de Ahuizote' as a replacement for 'Renacimiento' and 'Regeneración', both of which had been suppressed. Flores Magón ran the paper from 16th July 1902 until 7th September when he was jailed. The paper's reappearance on 23rd November under the editorial control of Juan Sarabia, then aged twenty, demonstrates the increasing combativeness and radical commitment of the movement's leaders.

However, by March 1903 the leadership of the Liberal movement was becoming divided over the future tactics of Liberalism with the prospect of the 1904 presidential and congressional elections in view. Another Liberal grouping arose in Mexico City, '*Club Rendición*' and its newspaper 'Excelsior'. Although there was in fact a considerable degree of cross-membership between it and Club '*Ponciano Arriaga*', *Rendición* had a clear anti-reelectionist principle. Moreover, some Liberals foresaw revolution as a necessary means of ousting the Porfirians from power, while the issue of Liberal participation in the elections also drew complaints of 'personalism' and 'ambitiousness' from Arriaga and Díaz Soto y Gama (29). It was decided that *Rendición* would be exclusively anti-reelectionist, while '*Ponciano Arriaga*' would remain open to adherents of whatever view.

The movement became increasingly involved in public demonstrations against the regime. The government's response again showed its intolerance of dissent in Monterrey, where a crowd reported to have been ten thousand strong denounced the attempt of General Bernardo Reyes to be once more re-elected as Governor of Nuevo León. Fifteen

people were killed when his troops opened fire on the gathering and over eighty protestors were arrested. Arriaga and Díaz Soto y Gama quickly filed charges against Reyes with the Mexican Congress, which showed where both its interests and allegiance lay by completely clearing him. Instead of Reyes being indicted with the responsibility for the offences, the two Liberals had to flee for their lives to the United States, establishing the practice of continued Liberal agitation from exile which would become a common recourse of the movement's spokesmen.

Other Liberal leaders took the opportunity of promoting their aims in the absence of Arriaga and Díaz Soto y Gama. The remaining Liberals of '*Ponciano Arriaga*' were urged by Sarabia, Librado Rivera, and the Flores Magón brothers to issue a joint manifesto with *De la Hoz* and *Club Rendición* in which they directed all Liberal clubs to support a Liberal candidate against Díaz in the 1904 elections. This manifesto of 11th April 1903 attacked the government for having created general discontent throughout all Mexican classes and countenancing the foreign exploitation of Mexican workers 'in a multitude of towns and farms'. It thus linked agrarian and industrial unrest and presented the respective problems of these areas of labour as attributable to the same cause. It concluded with the implication that if Díaz was not ousted by other means, a revolution would be the only avenue to the regeneration of Mexican society.

In response, the Porfirian police raided the offices of 'El Hijo del Ahuizote' five days later on 16th April, imprisoning the journalists and Liberal leadership and seizing all their equipment. In a concerted effort to totally smash the Liberal press, other newspapers were also shut down and their staffs either jailed or forced into U.S. exile. Thus, just as the Liberals (who were largely of the lower middle class - 'low status intellectuals'(30) ) took the crucial step of assuming the role of national spokesmen for labour and the disadvantaged, the government made every effort towards a final assault upon the opposition. A government decree of 9th June 1903 which prohibited the publication of any writings by the jailed journalists of 'El Hijo del Ahuizote' was the ultimate legal sanction intended to silence the outspoken and defiant Potosino Liberal critics and their Mexico City fellow agitators.

A new, even more militant resolve with a growing anarchist emphasis seems to have

overtaken the Liberal leadership who had been collectively jailed in the capital's Belén Prison. They made plans, to be carried out on their release, to formulate a radical political programme built around agrarian and industrial labour, to move to the U.S. and there republish Regeneración in exile, to transform the Liberal movement into a party, the PLM, and to organise an underground military wing for the revolution they now believed would be necessary:

They would...organize trusted PLM members into armed revolutionary cells. "In case of failure in the first uprising, " they agreed "to keep repeating the attempts until the movement spreads."...they decided that their group would evolve more and more openly toward "libertarian Socialism," without the need for a transitional phase of "state Socialism." This constituted an important concession to the Anarchism of Ricardo Flores Magón, who already was emerging as a prominent leader of the movement.

31.

It is clear that at the end of 1903 the Liberal leaders had decided to turn from the short-term commitment of participation in the elections of 1904 and instead had embarked upon the more extended course which they anticipated would firmly establish the PLM as a proletarian party. The PLM would complement its radical politics with a campaign of armed insurrection, both against the Díaz government and against foreign bosses and proprietors. The Marxian perception of an alienated petty bourgeois group seeking to become leaders of the proletariat and masses is borne out in the formation of the PLM. The Liberal leaders had by now exhausted virtually all means and given up all hope of effecting legalistic change, partly because of the problems of coordinating opposition through a radical press which could not achieve the widespread penetration of their principles in a largely illiterate society and against government repression. They were attempting to start a revolution to overthrow the government. In a literal sense, the Liberal movement's leaders were founding a 'party of Anarchy', but one which had limitations and which events in 1906-1909 would overtake.

Once in the U.S., the differences between the exiled leaders surfaced and these divisions produced two more and more loosely affiliated groups centred on Arriaga and Flores Magón. The question of the overall leadership of the movement encompassed issues of strategy and moderates like Díaz Soto y Gama were alarmed at what they saw as the extremism of the Magonista faction. Though Arriaga held to his more moderate principles, he perceived

a growing challenge to his direction of the movement from Flores Magón. Nevertheless, Arriaga negotiated for funds to maintain the publication of 'Regeneración,' now largely in Magón's hands, including the acquisition of a loan of two thousand dollars based on his own home from the affluent Francisco I. Madero, founder and first president of the 'Coahuilan Club Democrático Benito Juárez', formed in 1904. Though the 1903 Monterrey massacre had raised his interest in the Liberal movement, Madero's assistance was to be less than reliable. Citing Magón's extremism as his pretext, Madero withdrew from his involvement in the movement in the aftermath of the unsuccessful PLM strikes of 1906, and recalled his loan in 1907.

The PLM itself came into being as of 28th September 1905, though the party's 'Program' did not appear until 1st July 1906. In the interim 'Regeneración' had renewed publication from St. Louis, Missouri, having survived the efforts the Pinkerton Detective Agency made in October 1905 to smash it by jailing the Flores Magón brothers and Sarabia. The year of 1906 marks a crucial turning point in the Liberal resurgence. The party became the focus of growing support from Mexican labour, especially in the absence of national trade union organisation. PLM agitation produced two linked fronts of confrontation with Porfirian hegemony during 1906, which set the pattern for the next three years. The twin areas of militant opposition encompassed armed insurrections as well as strikes, particularly in the northern states of Mexico. Though both rocked the Díaz Administration and made foreign investors fearful, the revolts were directed against Díaz generally whereas the strikes were specifically against the U.S. domination of the economy, especially in mines, factories, railways and textile mills. These PLM-instigated activities prompted a forceful response from the U.S. and Mexican authorities.

The PLM itself was in disarray, however. The leadership split had widened dramatically when in October 1905 Ricardo Flores Magón had accused Arriaga of being a traitor in the Mexico City paper 'El Comillo Público' (founded in March 1904 as an associate publication to 'Regeneración'). Flores Magón and the PLM militants had to flee to Canada on their release from prison in the U.S.A. in March 1906 to avoid extradition, and this indicates their resolution to confront the Díaz regime by industrial disruption and military means. Though

PLM agents were organising the smuggling of arms across the U.S.- Mexico border in early 1906, this was part of a plan to prepare units of armed insurgents to go on the offensive in the near future. However, a crisis on the industrial front which the PLM threw its weight behind developed before the planned insurrections.

Like many other foreign-owned industrial plants, William C. Green's copper mine at Cananea, Sonora was a focus of PLM efforts to organise the workforce to seek improvements in their employment conditions, principally through the miners' Unión Liberal Humanidad which was affiliated to the PLM and distributed its publications<sup>(32)</sup>. The mine management's contempt of this agitation is evident in their decision to award North American workers in the Cananea plant an exclusive pay rise, which provoked the strike. Indignant Mexican miners immediately went on strike, on 1st June 1906, demanding not just the rectification of the disparity, but also a minimum wage, an eight-hour day, and promotion on a non-discriminatory basis for eligible Mexican workers.

The situation deteriorated rapidly after American workers fired on the Mexicans, and two days of rioting ensued. Armed American civilian volunteers crossed the border in force and their threatening presence held off the angry Mexicans for twelve hours until Mexican Government forces hastily arrived. The rurales and troops set upon the strikers, leaving between thirty and one hundred dead, and many wounded. The strike was finally broken on 6th June when, having arrested some fifty strike leaders including Baca Calderón, Francisco M. Ibarra and Manuel M. Diéguez, the Military Governor of Sonora threatened to send all the strikers, upwards of two thousand, to Southern Sonora where they would be forced to fight against rebellious Yaqui Indians, also victims of Porfirian policies.

Though unsuccessful, the Cananea strike was significant for four principal reasons. In so far as it was the first major strike for some time, it proves that the new PLM radical approach to the issues concerning Mexican labour was effective in gaining workers' support. Moreover, although the main issue was initially the discriminatory pay rises and promotion of North American workers, the PLM broadened the strike to encompass other exploitative employment conditions. Additionally, the intervention of armed foreigners which took place allowed the PLM to focus on the foreign domination of Mexican industry, and to establish that

the U.S. would not allow their interests in Mexico to be threatened. In fact, an indirect correspondence took place at the time between Díaz and the U.S. Government in which the latter offered to send in regular troops. Díaz, though very worried about the trouble in Sonora and the rising conflict on the labour front, declined, fearing even greater popular anger<sup>(33)</sup>. Finally, the Cananea strike also encouraged other Mexican workers to resort to the illegal strike tactic even in the face of foreign and conservative violence, as the 1906 railway workers' strike shows. Some three thousand Mexican workers in the states of San Luis Potosí, Nuevo León, Aguascalientes and Chihuahua went on strike in July and August, and effectively closed the northern rail network, forcing industry to stockpile goods and materials for export to the United States. Since this strike was more widespread, and was decentralised due to the nature of the railway industry, it was harder to break. Eventually Díaz had to give his personal if empty assurances to the workers that their just aims would be realised, perhaps hoping that a token reference to the PLM Program might appease their growing militancy.

The revised PLM Program <sup>(34)</sup> had been published on 1st July 1906, one month after the Cananea strike erupted. Some two hundred and fifty thousand copies were printed in the U.S. and a large proportion were smuggled into Mexico. While intended as a full statement of PLM political objectives, the document included fifty-two clauses which the PLM sought to have enacted into the Mexican Constitution, many of which were revisions of articles of the 1857 Constitution which had not been effected. Nevertheless, others went further than their forerunners, such as Clause 35 which made the Government responsible for the cost of repatriating expatriate Mexican nationals and providing them with land for cultivation. The clauses of the PLM Program were set out under eight appropriate group headings such as 'Constitutional Reforms', 'Foreigners', 'Capital and Labour', and 'Lands'. Among many points covered were the prohibition of re-election to any office and the reduction of the presidential term to four years; the standardisation of conditions and hours of employment, with Mexicans not to be paid less than foreigners for the same job; the provision of free and obligatory secular education of children up to the age of fourteen years, who were also to be prohibited from employment; the abolition of obligatory military service (though military education was to be obligatory for all of school age); comprehensive taxes on the Church (since the Church

was considered to be a *business*); measures against absentee foreign landowners and business concerns; the prohibition of the hacienda or company store, the basis of debt-peonage (all debts of rural day labourers to their employers were also to be declared null and void); the protection of the indigenous Indian peoples (the Mayan and Yaqui tribes were specifically named); and the restitution of communal ('*ejido*') lands to villagers.

The Program had been compiled in St. Louis, Missouri by the PLM's radical nucleus in the light of grassroots proposals which had been invited through the columns of 'Regeneración'. Although it had been carefully prepared in the form of potential legislation, it did contain some peculiarities, such as the prohibition in Clause 16 of Chinese immigration, as well as curious omissions from a labour charter such as neglecting to mention the right of workers to strike or to organise, indeed belong to, a trade union. Nevertheless, by taking the important step of linking together and considering problems of industrial and agrarian labour on the same basis, the PLM Program introduced a fresh political perspective. This raises the issue of the PLM's implicit attitude to capital and labour. The Program seeks to regulate contemporary extremes of capitalism rather than to institute co-operativism, workers' management, or their ownership of the means of production, although the first part of the Program recognises the workers as the producers of wealth. No mention is made of nationalisation, either for banks and finance, or for national industrial concerns. The PLM program was therefore pluralistic in its overall strategy towards capitalism, and made no explicit move towards the redistribution of the massive wealth which the Mexican bourgeoisie possessed.

Despite these shortcomings, the document's provisions were obviously intended to attack the tripartite Porfirian socioeconomic hegemony. As well as tackling the economic stranglehold the landowners and industrialists enjoyed under Díaz, the document's final 'Special Clause' addressed to foreign governments aimed to undermine Díaz' recourse to international borrowing by explicitly renouncing any further foreign debts to which the President might commit the nation. The major significance of the PLM Program was not just that it provided a rallying point around which opponents of the regime could unite, but that it clearly identified the issues which were at stake in the struggle to overthrow the Porfirians.

Though it is quite likely that its authors did not anticipate the variety of 'reform' manifestos which would appear in the course of the Revolution of 1910-17, these would be measured against the scope of the PLM Program, which therefore can be seen as highly influential in establishing the framework of the political discourse of the Revolution.

Events moved quickly for the PLM in September 1906, and it is clear that the authorities had firm suspicions about the intentions and activities of the PLM group (consisting of Juan Sarabia, Ricardo Flores Magón, Antonio I. Villarreal and others) who had gathered in El Paso, Texas, virtually on the Mexican border. For the time being the authorities stayed their hand against the PLM leadership, though, and instead on 4th September they crushed the neighbouring PLM base in Arizona which issued another opposition newspaper, 'El Demócrata,' seizing a quantity of arms. On 12th September Librado Rivera, the main PLM representative in St. Louis, Missouri, was arrested on charges brought by William C. Greene, the owner of the Cananea mine. Three days later the U.S. authorities in the same city started an intensive campaign they sustained until the end of September designed to destroy 'Regeneración' once and for all. Meanwhile Francisco I. Madero, a wealthy former PLM supporter, refused requests for arms and material assistance from Prisciliano G. Silva, one of the El Paso group. Twelve days later the first of many PLM revolts took place on 26th September in the town of Jiménez, Coahuila near the Texas border. The insurgents achieved a limited success but were quickly overwhelmed by troops and fled across the border, from where they were extradicted by the U.S. authorities at the request of the Mexican Government.

The larger-scale uprising which began in the east (Gulf coast) State of Veracruz on 30th September suggests that the PLM's organisation, though heavily based in the northern border states, actually was national. The thousand-strong assault on Acayucan against well-defended Federal troop positions was a failure. Hundreds of the PLM force were killed or subsequently executed. Many of those who survived were imprisoned, and the remainder who escaped began a guerrilla campaign.

A similar plan to capture the small city of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua on the northern border was better thought out. The assault was to be preceded by the destruction of the

garrisons's barracks, but the government had by now decided that the PLM had to be broken before more serious conflict occurred. In a concerted move on 19th October, U.S. Government and private agencies raided the El Paso PLM headquarters while across the border three key PLM activists were betrayed in Ciudad Juárez by a junior army officer who had once been a member of San Luis Potosi's Club Liberal '*Ponciano Arriaga*'. Meanwhile the small-scale PLM revolt in Camargo, Tamaulipas was defeated by a superior force of rurales and Army reservists. Ricardo Flores Magón managed to escape capture in El Paso and fled to Los Angeles, California, but vital documents listing recipients of 'Regeneración' and PLM activists fell into the hands of the authorities, who used them to arrest most of the PLM underground network in Mexico.

The Porfirians were now also even less tolerant of PLM-inspired strikes, recognising that the PLM's successful recruitment of thousands of industrial workers pointed to growing problems they would have to confront sooner or later. Nonetheless they were confident enough of their power to use it freely, as their response to the national textile workers' strike of December 1906 shows. The strike was initially provoked by a reduction in wages on the basis that the cotton price had fallen. The first industrial action occurred in the states of Puebla and Tlaxcala which lie between Mexico State and the Gulf Coast of Veracruz, which had already seen the Acayucan revolt in October. The Spanish mill owners responded by laying off twenty thousand workers in Orizaba in adjoining Veracruz. The strike quickly escalated after fruitless talks between Díaz and workers' representatives on 26th December in the Capital. On 4th January 1907 Díaz declared strikes illegal, and ordered that textile workers involved in the strikes in six states return to work by 7th January. Perhaps fearing the consequences of further action and no doubt unable to sustain themselves without work any longer, the workers had to comply. However, disturbances at a company store and the municipal building in Río Blanco, Veracruz between federal troops and strikers who had just returned to their employment got out of hand. Fearing reprisals for the destruction of the store many had fled to Nogales, a nearby town, but having decided to go back to Río Blanco they encountered a large force of soldiers:

The Río Blanco workers, finding themselves harassed in Nogales and hearing of the heavy death toll in Río Blanco, decided to return to Río Blanco to collect the bodies of their dead. They were met on the road by federal reinforcements under the command of Colonel Rosalino Martínez, who ordered his troops to shoot the advancing workers. An indeterminate number were killed in the bloodiest single massacre of the Díaz regime.

35.

If 1906 had been a year of mingled hope and disappointment for the PLM (in February 1907 Ricardo Flores Magón and Antonio I. Villarreal issued a '**Balance Sheet of Events in 1906**'), then 1907 was to be a year of even greater frustration for PLM activists. For with new pressures produced by an international monetary crisis stemming from a major Italian bank issuing currency unsupported by assets beginning to affect the unstable Mexican economy, Mexican labour now became more reluctant to strike in the face of increasing unemployment and the nationwide migrations of those seeking new work. Moreover, the PLM's planned revolts had come to nothing, and their remaining activists were reduced to defensive or localised guerrilla actions which the regime could easily dismiss as 'mere banditry.' No further revolts of much significance took place during 1907.

Nevertheless Ricardo Flores Magón and a much reduced PLM nucleus kept the party in being by publishing a new radical newspaper from Los Angeles in June 1907 which was named '**Revolución**' in keeping with their militant commitment to the struggle to overthrow the dictator and his supporters.

The first phase of concerted PLM subversive activity, dated from the Cananea strike of 1906 at the heart of which lay the Liberal's populist radical politics with their concept of a force of petty-bourgeois radicals allied to both industrial and agrarian labour, constitutes a definite first 'Prologue to the Revolution'. Unlike Louis Philippe, however, Díaz did not topple at the first attempt. The obvious hindrance to their attempt was a simple lack of resources in the face of cross-border governmental collusion and the Porfirians' military strength. The seizure of their documents at a critical moment compounded their problems.

But it is likely that their general failure to rally campesinos and peons (the participation of Yaqui Indians and peons in the Veracruz revolt was exceptional) was another crucial shortcoming of their 1906 offensive. This may have stemmed from PLM's reliance upon newspapers and complex manifestos to mobilize those disaffected with the Porfirians and

illiteracy among the agrarian workers was probably even more widespread than among the industrial workforce. Furthermore, contemporary agrarian unrest was generally directed against local injustices rather than towards the achievement of any specific national political objectives.

Despite all this, the militant PLM was by no means exhausted, and it had set the political agenda for others by raising expectations of change. It is clear that the PLM opened up radical perspectives to the nation, and had they been successful in ousting Díaz, many of the issues and reforms the muralists refer to in the 1920's might have been enacted. Strangely none of the PLM's activities, successes or defeats are shown in any evident way in the state-sponsored murals of the 1920's. For example, although the PLM Program attaches great value to respecting the claims of both the urban and agrarian workforce, Rivera and Siqueiros reflect their interest in worker-campesino unification through the ideological symbols of the Soviet Communism they promoted rather than the earlier radical ideology of the PLM. Recent political history portrayed in the murals is therefore highly selective, and their ideological content seems to date from Carranza's Constitutionalism of 1917.

#### The End of the *Porfiriato*.

When it finally came in 1910, Díaz' overthrow resulted from a complex variety of national and international pressures, and it is the object of this section to chart the rise of the various revolutionary groups which contributed to the dictator's fall from power. Yet despite the radical expectations of some of these groups and an increasingly general commitment to precipitating change by revolution rather than by a gradual process of reform, the outcome of what has been termed the first prologue to the Revolution was not to be a bloody confrontation between capital and labour or right and left, but the election of a moderate successor to the despot.

Towards the end of 1907, the PLM began preparing for another series of revolts throughout the northern states of Mexico which were to take place sometime in 1908. These uprisings were to be better armed and coordinated than their unsuccessful counterparts of 1906, and the PLM appear to have decided to withdraw from the industrial front of their

campaign for the time being. Only one major strike occurred in 1907, a general strike among Mexican railway workers which closed down the national railway network completely for several days during the spring. The issue again was the management's discrimination in favour of U.S. employees, but the rail union's executive called the strike off having been shown a telegram from Díaz which made an ominous reference to the Río Blanco incident.

Díaz was apparently having a difficult time in early 1908. The air of confidence and affluent optimism the bourgeoisie had hitherto enjoyed under his rule had been replaced by a disturbing atmosphere of insecurity. Personal and commercial credit was more and more difficult to obtain in Mexico as a result of the international monetary crisis. The government's response was to introduce legislation to tighten bank lending and foreign exchange, measures which prompted protests from angry and apprehensive proprietors. Then Díaz personally contributed to the growing bewilderment amongst Mexicans with the unexpected revelation that he would not seek re-election in 1910:

The effect was worse than if he really had died. No politician in the country quite knew how to start acting. Científicos were at a loss whether to pretend the interview had never occurred, or to take it seriously and begin organizing independently for the 1910 elections, bargaining with Díaz for what support they might get. Reformers also worried over a strategy: was the interview a trick to get them to stick their necks out...? By talking about leaving and then not clearing out, Díaz made it hard for Mexican politicians to count on anything. Thus he confused the regular workings of the whole system.

36.

The occasion was an unusual interview on 17th February between himself and a U.S. journalist, James Creelman of Pearson's Magazine. Given the debate in the U.S. over whether or not President Theodore Roosevelt should stand for election to a third consecutive term in 1909, Díaz agreed to discuss with Creelman the whole issue of consecutive presidential re-election. The interview began with Díaz speaking about the differences between theories of democracy and its pragmatic application as a system of government: '...abstract theories of democracy and the practical and effective applications of these are necessarily often different; that is, when one seeks substance rather than form.' (37) He then went on to praise the qualities of President Roosevelt both as a statesman and as a humane leader who had achieved genuine moral victories. This brought him back to the nature of democracy in Mexico:

We have preserved the republican and democratic form of government. We have defended the theory and keep it intact. Despite this, we adopt a political patriarchy in the actual administration of the affairs of the nation, guiding and restraining popular tendencies, in the full belief that an enforced peace will allow education, industry and commerce, to promote elements of stability and unity...

Having already vaguely attributed the necessity for a titular democracy which restrains 'popular tendencies' to the particular conditions prevailing in Mexico, Díaz identified the new middle class as the political progressives of Mexico and stated that the rich 'are too concerned with their wealth and dignities to be of benefit to the general good' while the poor were 'generally too ignorant to have power'. He then went on to describe his own peculiar conception of this crucial middle class:

It is the active, working, self-improved middle class, drawn largely from the poor, and also some of the rich, on which democracy depends for its development. It is the middle class which is concerned with politics and progress in general.

Prompted by Creelman to discuss the future of Mexican democracy, Díaz pointed out what he believed was the political immaturity of Mexicans and then reprimanded his compatriots for their tendency to demand their rights in the face of national responsibilities:

The future of Mexico is assured. I fear that the principles of democracy have not been deeply enough implanted in our people. But the nation has developed and loves liberty. Our difficulty has been that the people have not concerned themselves enough with political matters for democracy. The Mexican, individually and in general, is much too concerned with his own rights and is always disposed to demand them. But he is not much concerned with the rights of others. He thinks of his privileges but not his duties.

He then stated that the Indians (whom he claimed formed more than half of the population) were especially indifferent to political responsibility. Nevertheless, he once again affirmed that democratic principles flourished in Mexico. Creelman then raised the issue of the absence of a Mexican opposition party. Díaz replied by hinting that his friends might not tolerate such a minority group very well because it would probably attract his enemies. Then he revealed his hitherto unsuspected determination to give up office in 1910:

It is true that there is no party of opposition. I have so many friends in the Republic, that my enemies do not appear to want to identify themselves with such a small minority...

Whatever be the feeling or the opinion of my friends and supporters, I am disposed to retire when my present term ends, and not to return to accept my re-election. I will then be eighty years old.

Declaring his readiness to advise and support his successor, Díaz returned to the matter of a political opposition party, and reportedly with great emphasis, he welcomed the prospect of this allegedly as yet unborn political force: 'I delight in forseeing an opposition party in the Mexican Republic. If it forms, I will look upon it as a blessing, not as an evil.' In concluding, Díaz enumerated the improvements which he had brought to the nation in the new railway network, an improved postal service, and a greatly extended telegraph system.

Díaz' remarks to Creelman were influenced by his desire to appear before North American readers as a benevolent, fatherly and generous leader who is conscious of the incoherent but passionate aspirations of his regrettably politically-backward countrymen. Nevertheless this extraordinary interview is valuable because, whatever his latest worries, it reveals Díaz' political principles to be still dependant on an essentially nineteenth-century vision of progressive democracy, emphasising education, commerce and industry as sources of national stability. Free capitalism is of course the mainstay of this conception, coupled with his 'patriarchical' autocracy which restricts the actual political freedom of the lower classes. His system ensures the containment of the vast majority of poor (therefore supposedly irresponsible and totally ignorant) Mexicans in the lowest levels of the capitalism central to the Porfirian economy. Everything, including education and political opposition, was subordinated to expansionist, technocratic capitalism. Díaz' system upholds formal rather than 'substantial' democracy.

In his conception of the middle class Díaz yokes together the rich and poor of Mexico ignoring the fact that their interests are fundamentally opposed. The significance of this unprecedented statement is that it seems to reflect the dictator's concern about the firmness of his support. Perhaps Díaz was beginning to see that his own position was no longer strong enough to permit him to consider the interests of his wealthy supporters alone: '...Díaz' 1908 "Creelman interview" confirms that the President was not unaware of the need for some political adjustment to ward off a rising revolt from below in Mexico.' (38)

To forestall the potential threat that this development might sooner or later produce, he would have to form a broader base of support. Trying to incorporate the restless poor of Mexico into an artificial and empty nationalistic alliance which he would head seemed increasingly attractive. Clearly, Díaz at this stage sees that in any attempt to overcome the

latest problems affecting his regime without making substantial concessions to the oppressed majority, his way forward lies in forging a trans-class populist political order with the minimum social mobility between classes to avoid losing the support he could already count upon.

When Creelman put it to him that an opposition party is an indispensable element of a genuinely democratic system of government, Díaz' response exposed the fundamental contradiction of his nominally democratic regime. He chose to neglect to recognise the PLM's growing popularity in admitting that no opposition party existed in Mexico. But paradoxically he thereby compromised his entire effort to promote his regime as democratic. He may then have tried to recover his democratic credentials somewhat by suddenly announcing his firm resolve to resign from office.

As we have seen, Díaz made a final effort to appear politically broadminded by emphatically declaring that he would welcome the formation of an opposition party. Not surprisingly, there was no rush of political opponents to declare themselves candidates against Díaz when he allowed the pro-Government Mexico City newspaper 'El Imparcial' to carry the interview on 3rd March-1908. Opponents reacted cautiously to Díaz' apparent determination to resign, preferring to see how long this sudden resolution would endure. They got this answer over two and a half months later when on 30th May Díaz announced that he would stand for re-election after all.

Díaz' motivation in declaring his intended resignation remains obscure, but if he had hoped that he could draw potential political opponents into the open by it, he was to be disappointed. In the meantime the PLM stood alone as the sole opposition party. Otherwise, the actual political consequences of the Creelman interview seem to have been that the Mexican bourgeoisie took a hard look at the President's executive shortcomings, and with their current difficulties in view many may even have welcomed the prospect of some change in the political order:

Whatever his intention, the interview was a major mistake. Díaz sat back to await the mass protest against his retirement. It never came. Finally on 30 May, the awkward suspense was broken when Díaz allowed Limantour and Corral to 'convince' him of the necessity of standing for election once more in 1910, his eighth term of office.

The consequences of Díaz' decision that he would again stand for the Presidency are, however, less ambiguous.

Within a year, two other political parties had joined the PLM in opposition, and another, the Círculo Nacional Porfirista, was hurriedly re-established to promote the re-electionist partnership of Díaz and Ramón Corral, the prospective vice-president. Although it had been written into the PLM Program as early as June 1906, the whole issue of re-election had become crucial in the wake of the Creelman interview. Both the new opposition groups were initially prepared to see Díaz re-elected though they opposed Corral's re-election in favour of their own leaders, General Bernardo Reyes of the Partido Nacionalista Democrático and Francisco I. Madero of the Partido Democrático Independiente.

During early 1909, both groups were very active in setting up their respective national organisations of clubs, newspapers and committees. Much police activity was directed against the various elements of both parties, and there were many violent clashes. Scattered agrarian revolts, and the continuing activities of the PLM, also added to the rapidly spreading civil unrest the Porfirians had to counter. Clearly something would have to be done in order to prevent these new parties gaining a real foothold in national politics and thereby threatening the overwhelming dominance of the científicos. Díaz attempted to disrupt the opposition by recalling Reyes, state governor of Nuevo León, in June and sending him to Europe on 8th November to observe military manoeuvres. With Reyes banished at least until after the elections of 1910, his Partido Nacionalista Democrático collapsed.

Madero's party was to benefit greatly from the demise of the Reyistas' political hopes. Madero's book, La sucesión presidencial en 1910, was published in January 1909. It was a general attack upon the *científico* system but made only muted criticism of the dictator himself, because at this stage Madero was considering the possibility of displacing Corral and standing with Díaz, with whom he was on quite good terms:

In sum, Madero was a high-status intellectual from an elite family of Mexico's North who, in general, remained aloof from the problems of Mexico's masses. Economically and personally, he was on good terms with the Díaz regime. Culturally of the *gente decente* (aristocracy or upper class), Madero was French-educated. Ideologically, he was a spiritist, a free enterpriser, and a democrat. Politically, he was at first complacent, but, after the 1906-1908 economic crisis, he was willing to enter into coalition with leaders from other

classes in order to change Mexico's political system. Sociologically, he represented a growing dissent among Mexican intellectuals as expressed in small part by a handful of younger- and middle-generation sons of elite families. Unlike most of Mexico's revolutionary intellectuals, Madero was not an "out" intellectual. Rather, until 1909 at least, he was, like lawyer-hacendado Carranza and others of his class, decidedly an "in" intellectual.

40.

But by May, Madero had decided to challenge Díaz himself, and he founded the *Partido Antireeleccionista* to replace the declining *Partido Democrático Independiente*. Madero's wealth (even in 1902 he had a personal fortune of more than two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, being a member of a rich family of landowners and industrialists from San Luis Potosí (41)) meant that he could afford to travel freely on national speaking tours, and he was usually well received because the fame of his book preceded him wherever he went. He spent more than a year in this way, and won many supporters to his cause, including disaffected former Reyistas. Madero's support came from widely divergent groups:

The broad, heterogeneous movement around Madero, brought together: an important bourgeois sector whose axis of accumulation was shifting from agrarian property to industry (a sector typified by the Madero family itself); sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie styled by the dictatorship and anxious to secure democratic rights and political reform; sections of the working class that hoped to win trade-union rights and better living conditions; and even sections of the peasantry that sought a release from the hacienda pressure on their little remaining village land, and improvement in the peon's oppressive lot, and above all some form of agrarian redistribution in favour of landless or expropriated peasants.

42.

A pre-election rally was held in Mexico City on 15th April 1910 and Madero was fully endorsed as the anti-reelectionist candidate despite an attempt by the Porfirians to intimidate his supporters and throw him into prison:

In a desperate attempt to throw the convention into confusion Corral ordered Madero's arrest on a trumped-up charge but Madero defied the order and was acclaimed as the party's candidate with Dr Francisco Vázquez Gómez, who had once been Díaz' personal physician, as vice-presidential candidate.

43.

The challenge to Díaz' position made by Madero was to result in his victorious entry into Mexico City as President, in 1911. On 5th October, 1910, Madero published his political manifesto, *The Plan of San Luis Potosí* (44), which demanded the overthrow of the presidential dictatorship, a constitutional government, liberty and free elections. He was the leading figure of the anti-electionist campaign, whose slogan, 'Effective suffrage - no

reelection' sums up their main aims. In contrast to Magón's plan, the constitutionalist manifesto lacked any concrete proposals for social reform. This identifies it as being primarily a bourgeois document, designed to appeal to those sections of the Mexican bourgeoisie which had been excluded from power under the Porfiriato. Madero, coming of a very large northern family which had large-scale capitalist interests in ranching, farming and commerce, understood and used the frustrations of bourgeois groups to form a base of support. His main support came from the middle groups of Mexican society such as merchants, artisans, ranchers, public employees and professionals from the north. This was the area in which U.S. presence was most obvious because of their ownership of much of the mining and ranching interests of the region. Their heavy involvement in the region's two major industries frustrated the ambitions of the regional Mexican middle class, whose response to the imperialist monopoly was nationalist. Madero's manifesto, created under these conditions, could not fail to appeal to other petty-bourgeois groups throughout the nation who felt that they were similarly excluded from participation in commercial speculation, marketing, and its benefits, capital growth and the enhancement of social prestige. The most striking indication of the amount of support generated by Madero from these groups is the speed with which Díaz' militarily-consolidated thirty-four year old regime was brought to a close, once these disenchanted sections of society had found someone acceptable to further their cause.

Three groups, the skilled industrial workers, the campesinos and the petty-bourgeoisie, were the forces which, during this pre-revolutionary period, developed the potential to become influential, participative forces in the Revolution of the next decade. Each acquired a measure of organisation, and a leadership capable of articulating the various demands of the interest group it represented. The constitutionalist group led by Madero was the force which exerted most pressure upon the dictatorship at the national level, but was also the group whose policies, being bourgeois in nature, were the most acceptable to the outgoing regime. The very fact that Díaz was to negotiate with Madero's constitutionalist party in May 1911, indicates the bourgeois nature of that group, as compared with the other two main groups.

During November 1910, the month after the publication of Madero's manifesto, the Revolution proper got under way with the uprising of Francisco ('Pancho') Villa in Sierra Azul,

in the State of Chihuahua:

The first uprisings took place in the northern state of Chihuahua, whose governor, Abraham González, was a Madero supporter. Francisco Villa, Pascual Orozco and others, hitherto unknown except in their home district, led the small peasant units which inflicted successive defeats on the army detachments sent to put down the rebellion. At the same time, there were smaller-scale risings in Durango and Coahuila State. In these first guerrilla actions, the federal army already gave signs of that lack of initiative, timidity and conservative leadership which would soon be amply demonstrated in the major battles. In fact, these were the precise opposite of the features beginning to emerge in the revolutionary guerrilla units.

45.

Villa and his forces were to play a major military role in the Revolution although they lacked any plan or manifesto. In the meantime they sided with those who would oust the dictator Díaz and similar uprisings spread throughout the northern states of San Luis Potosí, Sonora and La Laguna. Another group whose presence in the forces of the Revolution was a slight, but highly significant one, was that of the Yaqui Indians of the State of Sonora, who represented the most actively discriminated-against group in Mexico during the Porfiriato, the indigenous Indian population. Their involvement proves conclusively that the opposition insurrections were supported by the population in general even if the political leadership was born of bourgeois dissatisfaction with the regime's economic and (to a much lesser extent) social policies. The PLM's radical political line was shunned by Madero's class as a whole, and their rival leaders were in exile or in prison.

Despite these uprisings and insurrections in the northern states, General Porfirio Díaz successfully contrived to have himself reelected, for the seventh successive time, as Constitutional President of the Republic of Mexico, and was inaugurated as President on 1st December, 1910, for a six-year term. Meanwhile, Madero, having fled across the border into the United States of America was preparing a militant challenge to the recently reconsolidated old regime. The call to the Mexican people for open rebellion against Díaz in the name of 'Effective suffrage - No reelection' came from Madero and his followers, based in El Paso, Texas. By 13th February 1911, Madero's group had commenced its drive southwards to Mexico City, D.F., having crossed the Texan border that day.

A month after Madero's forces crossed the border in the north, Emiliano Zapata, with a group of eighty village chiefs, rose in arms on 10th March 1911 against the Federal force in

Villa Ayala, near to the town of Cuautla, in the southern rural State of Morelos. In 1910, the *campesinos* had begun to challenge the authority of the *hacendados* through armed resistance. Moreover, the *campesinos* had found, in the person of Emiliano Zapata, a leader who could effectively organise them against the landowners. Zapata was a native of the state of Morelos, a rural area of economic importance which lay immediately to the south of Mexico City with a high concentration of haciendas. By March 1911, the efforts of the Zapatistas, like those of Madero and Villa, were directed against the Federal forces of Díaz. The Zapatistas were now formally in rebellion against the regime, in line with Madero's Plan de San Luis Potosí. They believed that Madero, as President, would provide legislation for the re-establishment of the village system, and organise the peaceful coexistence of village and hacienda. Later, having witnessed the failure of the new regime to carry through the reforms which they had fought for, they would demand 'land and liberty', in other words, a redistribution of the land, and the total elimination of the hacienda system, which had been gradually swallowing up virtually all of the independent villages since the 1880's because of the *hacendados*' pursuit of maximal efficiency in the production of sugar for export. The slogan itself, '*Tierra y Libertad*', and the specific demands of the movement, were set out in their own manifesto, the Plan de Ayala (46), published by Zapata on 25th November, 1911.

Of the three politically active groups of the Revolution, the urban workers, Madero's constitutionalists and the Zapatistas, only the latter two made a significant military contribution to this, the early stage of the Mexican Revolution. However, as noted, the Zapatistas and the Maderistas were joined in the struggle to end the dictatorship by the rebels from the north, under Villa and Orozco. The lack of commitment on the part of the industrial workers was largely a result of the hard lessons learned in the suppression of the strikes at Cananea and at Río Blanco.

The pace of the Revolution slackened in May, 1911, when a peace conference held in Ciudad Juárez on 21st May, and attended by Madero, as well as representatives of Díaz, decided that until an election within the terms of the Constitution could be held, Francisco León de la Barra (hitherto Minister of Foreign Relations in the Cabinet of Porfirio Díaz) should

be the Interim President, once Díaz resigned. This appointment of de la Barra was in accordance with the decisions made at the New York meeting of 14th March, held between José Limantour, Díaz's representative, and Gustave and Francisco Madero Senior. Their agreement shows that Madero and the petty-bourgeois elements of his support were temporarily appeased by Limantour's offer of constitutional reforms. The provisional government which was the product of this agreement bears a striking resemblance in terms of its form and character to that described by Marx in his analysis of the 'Eighteenth Brumaire':

The first period, from the fall of Louis Philippe on 24th February 1848 to the meeting of the Constituent Assembly on 4 May, the February period proper, can be described as the prologue to the revolution.

Its character was officially expressed by the declaration of its own improvised government that it was merely provisional, and, like the government, everything that was suggested, attempted, or enunciated in this period proclaimed itself to be merely provisional. Nobody and nothing took the risk of claiming the right to exist and take real action. The dynastic opposition, the republican bourgeoisie, the democratic and republican petty bourgeoisie and the social-democratic working class, i.e. all the elements that had prepared or determined the revolution, provisionally found their place in the February government.

47.

Madero, as the recognised leader of the revolutionary movement, was supposed to represent the interests of his followers. However, the Porfirians, and other groups, such as the secular representatives of the Church, also found places in de la Barra's interim government. The fact that the provisional president was a former Cabinet Minister of the last government of the Díaz regime suggests that the old order was still firmly in control. Other Díaz men, as ministers of the new Interim Cabinet, were allowed to retain their grip on the reins of power although Díaz himself had to go into exile on May 31st. Yet even this relatively short-lived 'interim' arrangement was to undergo some revealing and far-reaching changes.

The five-month period of de la Barra's Interim Presidency was a period in which various attempts were made to re-establish public order prior to the forthcoming Presidential election. Madero used this time to ensure the fullest possible support for his candidacy. The interim presidency was achieved as a direct result of a pact between the anti-reelectionist party and the dictator Díaz, which confirms both the bourgeois nature, and the limited content, of the constitutional reforms brought about by the uprisings and civil disorder of the last decade of the Porfiriato. The radical perspectives advanced by the PLM were ignored. The period of de

la Barra's interim presidency had the effect of severely limiting the impetus of the Revolution:

Madero's confirmation of Francisco de la Barra as provisional president was the first of a tragic succession of blunders made by a well-meaning but inept politician. De la Barra was a Díaz man and his appointment put an immediate check on the progress of the Revolution.

48.

In this interim period, Madero's standing was enhanced at the expense of the other leaders of the early phase of the Revolution such as Magón, Zapata, Villa and Orozco.

Madero's popularity consequently reached its height with his triumphal entry into Mexico City on 7th June, 1911, in which he was popularly hailed as '*el jefe de la Revolución*'. In the months between his first appearance in Mexico City in June, and his return as successful candidate in November, he toured the country gaining popular support and recognition as the one leader who would be willing to listen to the complaints of all, and put in motion reasonable measures to eradicate the injustices of the Porfirians. He was accompanied by representatives of many of the groups originally involved in the uprisings, particularly anti-reelectionists. As Marx observed, a similar enthusiasm prevailed in French society in the 'February period' of the provisional government set up to replace the overthrown monarchy of Louis Philippe:

In no period, therefore, do we find a more variegated mixture of elements, more high-flown phrases, yet more actual uncertainty and awkwardness; more enthusiastic striving for innovation, yet a more fundamental retention of the old routine; a greater appearance of harmony throughout the whole society, yet a more profound alienation between its constituent parts.

49.

Madero and his supporters were able to whip up support on their tour of the rural states while de la Barra as provisional president ran the country for them from Mexico City. This was an arrangement which Madero would later regret. However, the agreement made in Ciudad Juárez for continuation of central government gave Madero sufficient time to rally support to his platform and thus abide by his principle of effective suffrage for the Mexican people; persuasion rather than ballot-rigging or force would provide his mandate. Many other political figures, especially on the right, always remained alienated, for various political reasons. Those permanently estranged from Madero's platform included *científicos* and other Porfirians, unable to find Cabinet positions in the interim government of de la Barra; others included some Reyistas, or supporters of General Bernardo Reyes; and members of the bourgeoisie,

dismayed by Madero's sudden rise to power. Radical activists, including the PLM and Zapatistas, were also wary. However, these differences were submerged in the hope and enthusiasm, real or assumed, for the new era in Mexican politics which seemed to have arrived.

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## Chapter Three

### THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION 1910-17 AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

Tracing the course of the revolution is far from straightforward because many of the conflicting groups formed temporary alliances as the opportunity arose to advance their cause. However it is essential for a full understanding of the murals, painted in some cases only a few years after the end of the warfare, that the reasons why Carranza's Constitutionalism emerged as the dominant national ideology rather than the muralists' Communism or the Zapatistas' '*Tierra y Libertad*' political manifesto. There is also the question of the fate of the PLM's revolutionary Liberalism, and the issue of foreign exploitation of Mexico's natural resources, as well as the reaction of the military and conservative remnants of the *Porfiriato*. Given the divisiveness of the conflict, the source of the post-revolutionary nationalist ideology and artistic aesthetic must also be clarified, for it is central to an understanding of the aims of the muralists' government patrons.

#### The Increasing Involvement of the Zapatista Movement in 1911

The forces of Zapata had originally been encouraged to join in the revolutionary war by Madero, who had in return promised some concessions on agrarian reform in his **Plan de San Luis Potosí (1)**. While all other revolutionary groups agreed to disarm following the **Ciudad Juárez Accords** of May 1911, the Zapatistas refused since land redistribution had not as yet been carried out. Meanwhile, tensions still existed in Morelos, between both the campesinos and their hacendado bosses, and between the returned revolutionaries and the Federal forces in the state. These tensions came to a head when, 'On the night of July 12 (1911) a fracas between revolutionary troops quartered in Puebla City and the Federal garrison there ended in a massacre of the revolutionaries.'(2)

This was followed by the arrest of Abraham Martínez, who had hitherto been Zapata's chief of staff. These two incidents moved Zapata to remobilise his irregulares - and once this force was again called together, the Zapatistas resisted the subsequent demands made by de la Barra via Madero for their dispersal. The Zapatistas were objecting to the presence of the '*Federales*', and becoming more and more suspicious of the delay of Madero in bringing

about initial steps in achieving the necessary laws to implement the promises made to them. It seems that de la Barra had no intention of allowing any moves to appease the Zapatistas. He refused to hold any discussions with the campesino organisation whatsoever, with the result that Madero was forced into playing the role of his intermediary to the Zapatistas, one which it seems Madero did not want, and which would later cause him considerable embarrassment.

The main trouble spot continued to be the State of Morelos. Madero returned there early in August and met Zapata at Cuautla. Zapata promised to resume demobilisation but President de la Barra ignored Madero's wishes, sent reinforcements to Huerta and ordered him to push ahead with his campaign to disperse the Zapatistas... Fighting raged through September, with Zapata repeating his willingness to negotiate. But the government demanded his immediate surrender before any talks could take place.

3.

Despite Madero's intentions, de la Barra would not consider the fulfillment of any of his promises to the Zapatistas, because the interim president also represented the interests of the Porfirians, who had consolidated the hated hacienda system in the first place. De la Barra found his justification for a campaign of pacification in the south in the reluctance of the Zapatistas to disarm for a second time, and authorised Brigadier General Victoriano Huerta to virtually occupy Morelos with a force of over 1,000 troops:

...more than a thousand troops under the tough and talented Brigadier General Victoriano Huerta had entered Morelos... A regular military campaign had begun, to end three weeks later with Madero gravely embarrassed and repentant and Zapata nearly killed. In their political innocence both men believed to the last that they could stall, compromise, or suspend the threat. Neither saw that de la Barra and García Granados (Minister in the de la Barra Cabinet) would use the strictly limited task of compelling and supervising demobilisation as a grand opportunity to invade and occupy the state.

4.

Huerta did not succeed in eliminating the threat posed by the Zapatistas to the government and its interested parties amongst the landowners, hacendados, and city bourgeoisie, despite the resources at his command including a mandate from the government to treat the Morelos pacification as a campaign of war. The tactics of Huerta included the gravest contraventions of the normal legal code. Military tribunals passed sentence without right of appeal; many Zapatistas were summarily executed without even that rudimentary process; and even the peons of the haciendas, who were as yet uninvolved in the situation, received similarly harsh treatment at the hands of Huerta's *Federales*. Madero eventually managed to

have action taken against Huerta:

Madero, torn between his desire for conformity with legal processes and sympathy for Zapata's point of view, was bitterly disappointed over the failure of his mission, which, he felt, reflected on his own sincerity. Instead of blaming de la Barra, he considered General Huerta to be primarily responsible for the renewed fighting and made repeated efforts to have him replaced...  
...At the end of October Huerta was replaced as commander of the Federal forces.

5.

Though the Zapatistas became dispersed, the failure of Huerta to apprehend the popular leader meant that a focus still existed around which the revolutionaries could re-form. The overall effect of the attempted suppression of the Zapatistas was to increase their determination to obtain the land reforms they wanted. Another indirect result of Huerta's campaign was that many other campesinos had joined the Zapatistas. Though in hiding for the time being, Zapata and his followers were soon to re-emerge as an important force.

#### The National Election Campaigns of 1911

After the initial months of de la Barra's interim presidency the political ferment in the capital, the centre of major bourgeois power and influence, clearly shows that divisions were appearing in their apparently stable consensus. Various bourgeois power groups formed political parties to further their own interests and candidates were found to represent the different interests in the forthcoming elections.

The *Partido Católico Nacional* (PCN) inaugurated their campaign on 17th August, 1911, by the formation of a campaign management committee. The second session pledged the Party's support to the campaign of Madero, but not to that of his running partner, Pino Suárez, who was seeking election to the vice-presidency. The National Catholic Party was composed of many whose interests were closely linked to conservative politics. Their support of Madero casts doubt upon the authenticity of his promises to the Zapatistas because Madero seemed to believe it was possible to please both of these groups, whose respective interests were fundamentally in conflict. On the one hand the Church, whose secular interests were represented the PCN, wished to preserve its established estates and holdings; the Zapatistas, on the other hand, had risen in arms demanding a redistribution of

the land.

An important threat to the success of Madero's attempt to gain supreme executive power was posed by the opposition of General Bernardo Reyes. He had been forced into a political exile in Europe (from which he had only very recently returned) during the reign of the dictator, Díaz, in whose Government Reyes had held the position of Secretary of War. With Díaz now himself in exile, Reyes would not be appeased as he was in a very strong position for the presidency. Reyes had the support of the military, of Mexican businessmen seeking patronage denied to them during the Porfiriato, and certain foreign entrepreneurs not favoured by the *científicos*, Díaz' unofficial economic and technical advisory group. Furthermore, Reyes could claim relevant experience, and proof of ministerial ability, which Madero lacked. Reyes' main base of support consisted of a number of political clubs established in Mexico City, brought together under the '*Comité Central*' of the Reyistas. No steps had been taken towards the declaration of a single political party or platform, however, for his supporters were content simply to await his ideas.

By 11th June, two days after his arrival in Mexico, Reyes was present at a meeting of the Reyista Committee of the Central District and a document setting out some aims of the grouping was produced. It contained declarations which, when not actually praising and celebrating the General, were otherwise empty of political meaning, showing a preference for generalities over commitment to specific policy. The document finally made the emotive assertion, '*Todo por la Patria*'(6), which became the slogan of the Reyistas, and exemplifies the deliberate vagueness of their politics. The slogan itself summarises an approach which is simplistic, but also has direct appeal: it exploits nationalist sentiment without defining the forms of nationalism it favours or society it seeks, merely linking the ideas of nationalism and liberty together. The Reyistas neglected to deal with such crucial policy questions as whose liberty would be advanced, or how a policy of nationalism would deal with Mexico's heavy dependence on foreign investment in the national economy. This deliberate vagueness is a characteristic reaction of political groups with established interests to an upheaval which introduces a different political climate in the aftermath of the collapse of an authoritarian regime. Now the Maderistas had rivals who also laid claim to being the guardians of liberty, and

who promised future national prosperity. Yet Madero remained in a very strong position, for he knew that in any confrontation between his party and the faction of Reyes his group would appear to be the more radical of the two. The confrontation came very quickly.

A large demonstration was held on 3rd September, 1911 in Mexico City to whip up support for Reyes. It met with no opposition at first; however, when the demonstration reached the *Plaza de la Constitución* it was confronted by Maderistas. A riot ensued, and the Reyista leaders including the General were forced to shelter in a nearby house. The demonstration and riot broke up when the police charged the public, and the Reyistas suffered a public embarrassment.

Not long afterwards, the Reyista faction held another convention on 12th September at which the General received the party's official nomination as their presidential candidate. Also decided upon at this meeting was the resolution to negotiate an agreement with the Maderistas that both factions would avoid confrontations with each other. The Reyistas wanted to carry out their electoral campaign without violent interference from the numerically superior and more popular Maderistas. An agreement was achieved, but it seems that it was not secure enough for Reyes because shortly afterwards he withdrew from the elections on the grounds that he felt threatened by the violent nature of events. Ironically, the retired general was making plans of a rather violent nature himself, as subsequent events were to show. He left Mexico for New Orleans in September, and returned on 13th December at the head of a 'revolutionary' army of 600 men, having been expelled from the United States. This army of Reyes' was defeated by government troops after a series of skirmishes, and Reyes and his son, together with a number of men who had been left in Mexico as a provisional 'cabinet', were taken into custody, and with unusual clemency, sentenced to lengthy periods of detention in the *Prisión Militar de Santiago* in Mexico City rather than execution. The withdrawal of Reyes from the presidential election had left Madero in a position of virtual supremacy, challenged only by de la Barra, the current interim president - a challenge which, because of the emphasis Madero had placed on 'effective suffrage - no reelection', was not a serious one. Madero further strengthened his support: on 31st August, 1911, he had accepted nomination as presidential candidate of his recently constituted Partido

Constitucional Progresista which replaced his earlier anti-reelectionist party.

Madero's efforts were successful, for the party became the single focus of the anti-reelectionist movement, and, as we have seen, Madero had also won over the support of the Partido Católico Nacional. Madero and his running partner Pino Suárez triumphed in the elections of 1st October, 1911. The published results of these elections were as follows:

For President:

Madero	19,997 votes
De la Barra	87 votes
Various persons	45 votes

For Vice-President:

Pino Suárez	10,245 votes
De la Barra	5,564 votes
Vasquez Gómez	3,373 votes
Iglesias Calderón	51 votes

Z.

Thus duly elected, Madero officially became the President of the Republic of Mexico on 6th November, 1911.

The Presidency of Francisco Madero, 1911-13.

Madero's short term in office prior to his assassination by political opponents proved to be the beginning of a rather confused period in Mexican politics. No group was able to advance significantly their own interests until it became clear what the president, whose majority suggested that he had enjoyed general support, would actually do. In the meantime there was general relief that further fighting seemed to have been avoided, but the underlying volatility of the complex political situation which emerged once the dictator's oppressive hand was lifted had not been reduced by Madero's success. Marx's study of the French Revolution reveals a parallel course emerging in the events of 1910-17. The 'prologue to the revolution' of Marx's analysis of the Eighteenth Brumaire was characterised by congratulations and passive glorification of the future in which the enemy was imagined as overcome. In general, the people of Mexico had similar hopes.

The populace who had joined in the revolutionary war expected the promised

socio-economic reforms which were to complement those of a constitutional nature already enacted. The old order was temporarily in disarray with some clinging to Porfirian ideals and others examining the newly-awakened expectations of the oppressed workers and campesinos. Politically ambitious *Porfiristas* were hoping to gain control once more, encouraged by the presence of some Díaz officials in Madero's new government. They hoped to ensure that promises of liberal concessions would remain promises. Meanwhile, enthusiasm for the electoral triumph of the new regime fuelled popular hopes for long-awaited social changes. Wolfe's analysis of Madero's position echoes Marx's analysis of the political situation in France during the first phase of the revolution which toppled Louis Philippe:

Madero had virtually the support of the whole people...Backed by the victorious forces of an aroused peasantry and looked upon by all disinterested people as a great national hero, he might easily have begun the breaking up of the great estates, reduced the Church to its pre-Porfirian dimensions, stimulated labour and peasant organisation, and destroyed the economic and social base of the otherwise inevitable counter-revolution... But his principles of democratic suffrage and non-reelection were inadequate to the needs of revolutionary transformation.

8.

However Madero's deal with the National Catholic Party might have precluded the possibility of the reduction of the Church 'to its pre-Porfirian dimensions.' Furthermore, Madero had already set in motion the estrangement of one section of what Wolfe describes as 'an aroused peasantry' by his prevarication over Huerta's campaign against the Zapatistas.

One of the pressing problems Madero inherited from the presidency of de la Barra was the need to restore civil law and order in the whole of the country, but especially in the south of Mexico, where widespread disorder was on the increase following the escalation of the activities of the Zapatistas. Surprisingly enough in view of the embarrassment caused to him by the Huerta campaign, Madero's response to the refusal of the Zapatistas to disarm once and for all owed something to that of de la Barra: Madero sent an ultimatum to Zapata, and followed it with an army. Forces were again sent to the south in November, 1911 against the Zapatistas. As before, the immediate result of this action was to consolidate the campesino movement. On 28th November, Zapata and his campesino 'generals' produced the *Plan de Ayala*, only 3 weeks after Madero was officially made president. Some of the main aims of the Plan were as follows:

The Plan...advocated immediate seizure of all foreign-owned lands and of all properties which had been taken away from villages, the confiscation of one-third of the land held by the hacendados friendly to the Revolution and full confiscation against owners who 'directly or indirectly' opposed the Plan. It also demanded the extradition, arrest and execution of Díaz, Corral and Limantour, the expulsion of all Spaniards from Mexico, the absorption of all revolutionary forces into one national army 'to prevent aggression by foreign powers' - and, surprisingly, support of Madero's Plan of San Luis Potosí.

9.

The *Plan de Ayala* also justified the Zapatistas' aggressive commitment to the fulfillment of their demands in the light of Madero's failure to implement reforms. Their support for Madero's Plan is qualified by their rejection of its author, whom they believed had deserted the causes which had brought him to power.

Madero, the document charged, had deserted the revolution, persecuted revolutionaries from his position of power, allied himself with elements from the Díaz dictatorship, broken the promises in the San Luis Potosí Plan...and outlawed anyone who sought to uphold them. The Zapatist leaders therefore considered him a traitor: they no longer recognised him as head of the revolution or president of the republic, and openly called for him to be overthrown.

10.

Unfortunately, although the Zapatistas wished to form an united military front of revolutionary forces, their overriding concern with forcing a return to the village system destroyed by the Porfirian regime did not readily translate into the demands of other groups and they continued their struggle unaided throughout the remainder of Madero's term.

This period at the end of 1911 which also saw the insurrection in the North of Reyes' few forces was the beginning of several turbulent years of Mexican history. Madero's presidency was characterised by a series of rebellions and insurrections, the most carefully-planned and reactionary of which was to result, in 1913, in his overthrow and death. However, the second in the series of risings which he survived came from an unexpected quarter: his ex-comrade, Pascual Orozco. Displeased with Madero's betrayal of the Revolution on the land problem, Orozco defected in March 1912 from Madero's support with an army of 6,000 men in the North. Initially both Villa, and Zapata (in the *Plan de Ayala*), recognised Orozco and he in turn produced the *Empacadora Pact* on 25th March 1912 which acknowledged the plans of both Ayala and Madero's San Luis Potosí. As well as land redistribution, Orozco called for the nationalisation of the railways and for reforms to generally improve the social conditions of

workers(11).

Later, Villa commenced a war of attrition against Orozco and his 'Colorados' when he claimed they had abandoned the *Empacadora Pact*. This struggle continued for some months and gave the Federal authorities time to respond. However reluctantly, Madero recalled Brigadier General Victoriana Huerta, who was put in command. By September, the '*Federales*' gained the upper hand, and Orozco's forces were in disarray. Huerta then condemned Villa to be shot on a trumped-up charge, but Madero intervened and Villa received a last-minute reprieve, being sent instead to Santiago Tlatelolco military prison in Mexico City, from which he escaped in December 1912. He then made his way to the United States, ironically still trusting Madero while the truth was quite different - 'Villa did not in fact realise that Madero's aim was to prevent him becoming leader of the whole northern peasantry, and he therefore retained his trust in the president.'<sup>(12)</sup>

The episode had disturbed the uneasy truce in the North and re-established Huerta as a military commander, as well as enhancing his position by the promotion he received for his part in the operations. Madero's position, far from thus becoming more secure, became one of greater danger because what had really happened was that a provincial, if powerful, dissident had been replaced by a dangerous potential rival.

Although the third of these insurrections was perhaps the least successful, the production of a 'plan' by its leader demonstrates very clearly its political dimension. On the 16th October 1912, the garrison of Veracruz rose in support of Félix Díaz, the nephew of Porfirio, and author of the *Plan Felicista*. The *Felicista* revolt was quickly crushed and Díaz was imprisoned in Santiago Tlatelolco military prison in January 1913, having meanwhile been held in prison in Veracruz while the authorities debated his fate. Though guilty of treason, Díaz' influential friends in Madero's cabinet had his sentence commuted to imprisonment by means of a fictitious technicality. It was in prison that Félix Díaz and Reyes were to meet and plot against Madero's government, and plan further uprisings. The nature and leadership of these rebellions, and the ready participation of a wide range of ordinary Mexicans, northern peons, soldiers, and southern campesinos in different causes, demonstrate the increasing reaction to Madero and suggest the ineffectiveness of his efforts to retain the popular support

which had brought him so triumphantly into office.

#### Madero's Response to Porfirian Influences.

An estimate of Madero's overall contribution to the Revolution can now be made by examining both the compromises he made, and the degree of liberal influence he exerted, during the period of his greatest national prominence, 1911-13. Perhaps one of the most crucial errors Madero made was to reach a compromise with the Porfirians in the matter of the interim presidency. This gave Madero a chance to campaign for the forthcoming election during de la Barra's interim presidency, as well as allowing Díaz to retire without too much loss of face.

Nevertheless, de la Barra's presidency was disastrous to the long-term interests of Madero because in trying to force the suppression of the Zapatistas, the interim government alienated the campesino forces who produced their *Plan de Ayala*. Madero became estranged from one of the forces principally responsible for his military victories over Díaz. Indeed, we can see some of the political weakness and vacillation of Madero in his attempt to mediate between the obviously opposed interests of de la Barra, and those of the Zapatistas. The whole treatment of the problem posed by the Zapatistas was later to embarrass Madero: he should have prevented the whole affair, but his vacillation ensured that de la Barra and Huerta could move freely against the campesinos. It should be noted that de la Barra's cabinet was mainly composed of supporters of Díaz as can be seen in the appointment of García Granados to the cabinet.

García Granados had been Governor of the Federal District under Díaz, and his promotion indicates the policy behind de la Barra's presidency. By drawing on these relatively minor but loyal Porfirian bureaucrats, de la Barra managed to avoid other more easily identifiable Díaz supporters. Madero's cabinet also contained a number of figures who had been members of the Díaz administration. All this points to the indisputable presence of Díaz sympathisers and followers like Huerta who had survived the changeover, and were still active in politics at the national level. That these influential figures should have been allowed to exercise such freedom of action became an increasing problem for Madero.

In an attempt to balance this, Madero surrounded himself with a circle of friends and relatives, presenting them with offices in his cabinet and administration, for which they presumably lacked any real experience. He thereby followed Díaz's precedent in enhancing his security in his new role. This led to further trouble in the first few months of his presidency, for, despite the numerous insurrections and conflicts occurring in the country with a view to overthrowing him, he courted the high society of Mexico City in a series of celebratory fiestas, banquets and balls, instead of giving the country's current turmoil his fullest attention. He was seeking to preserve the enthusiasm of the early days of his ascendancy as a revolutionary leader. Of course this was a most dangerous course of action. Far from seeking to promote alliances or form a working coalition for example with the Zapatistas, Madero ignored the serious turn of events in the country, and made himself an easy victim for Huerta.

In fact, a few gestures were being made about the promises of the *Plan de San Luis Potosí*, but they did not originate from Madero himself.

In Mexico City a presidential commission had published its report advising restoration of village lands, a reformist had been appointed minister of public works to consider agrarian problems, and six different bills had come up in the new Congress for popular changes in rural life.

### 13.

Madero did not introduce these bills himself, but the more optimistic atmosphere of his presidency encouraged progressive ideas. Although most of the liberal aspects of Madero's Plan were blocked by the strong Porfirian influence which dominated the Congress and the cabinet, he did achieve his primary aim, that of overhauling the Constitution to forestall any attempt to re-establish a lengthy dictatorship like the Porfiriato. His failure to realise social and agrarian reforms was also due to a number of other factors, quite apart from the main cause, the reluctance of Congress to enact legislation. A major factor amongst these other causes was the continual harassment to which President Madero was subjected by the U.S. ambassador, Henry Lane Wilson. Sceptical of the president's policies, and a friend of many of the major figures of the Porfirian regime, Wilson used his duty to protect the large American interests in Mexico as a pretext to harass Madero at every opportunity.

The circumstances of this period and their consequences are consistent to a striking degree with those noted by Marx in his analysis of the revolution of Eighteenth Brumaire.

Although Madero, as president by popular mandate, notionally represented all interests, he could not meet the demands of all of those who had brought him to the presidency, and the alliances between the parties of the Revolutionary army had broken down as a result.

In February 1913, when everyone in Mexico was talking of the imminent overthrow of Madero, the US ambassador wrote as follows to his government: 'In my view, the general situation here has become very gloomy, not to say desperate.' In Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila, Nuevo León and Zacatecas, 'the hideous revolutionary ferment' was breaking out once again. 'For two years now, more than a third of Mexico's states have been caught up in an ever-rising revolutionary movement ... This fact, as well as others which we do not have to mention here, has been greatly demoralizing and disturbing financial and banking circles in the country. Not only does it seriously damage commercial business and reduce credit; above all it is a threat to the very existence of these institutions.'

#### 14.

The Porfirians were still very much in control and were viewing the demands made by the people, of which Madero took some heed, with concern so a plot was hatched to have Madero ousted from his position, to be replaced by one of their number.

#### The Counter-Revolution 1913-1914.

The plot of the counter-revolution was straightforward: Generals Reyes and Félix Díaz were in prison in Mexico City, and the first act of the conspirators would be to release them. Reyes would be then installed as a provisional president until elections could be held, which would give the supreme executive power to Félix Díaz. The revolt was to be led by General Manuel Mondragón, and was to take place on 16th March. Huerta had been informed of the plot and invited to participate, but, as he was unhappy about the allocation of power in the proposed new regime, he had so far withheld his support. However, Gustavo Madero learned of the conspiracy and warned his brother, who seemingly took little notice of it beyond ordering the redeployment of certain troops whose loyalty was suspect. The conspirators were thus informed that their planned military coup was in jeopardy, and hurriedly they swung into action on 8th February, 1913.

Initial successes were quickly turned to defeats: the rebels freed Reyes and Félix Díaz, but Reyes was almost immediately killed at the head of a cavalry column which he was leading to an attack on the Chapultepec Palace, which was guarded by troops whom Gustavo Madero

had persuaded to remain loyal. Díaz took over and occupied the *Ciudadela* (Citadel) of Mexico City. The *Ciudadela* was the city barracks and arsenal, and when the plans of the conspirators had begun to go astray, the rebel troops and supporters of the faction decided to hold out in it.

The situation had stabilised somewhat: the rebels had occupied the *Ciudadela*; loyal forces were containing them therein; and Madero had shaken off his passivity, having realised the gravity of the revolt. What followed would be remembered by Mexicans as 'The Tragic Ten Days', though not thanks to the post-Revolutionary muralists who usually did not depict soldiers being misled by their leaders. As Madero was not a military man, he decided to appoint a commander for the forces which had remained loyal to him. He made the fatal error of placing Huerta, the senior officer now in the Capital, in overall command of these forces, in place of General Lauro Villar who had been injured. However, Huerta had been in collusion with the rebels almost from the start. Huerta's defection remained covert. He secretly treated with Díaz, and their combined artillery fire began to sweep the city, bombarding almost everywhere except their respective positions. Eventually Huerta made his move, and Madero with almost his entire cabinet was placed under arrest on 18th February. Francisco and Gustavo Madero and Pino Suárez were subsequently shot on 19th February in the time-honoured manner - 'while trying to escape'.

Huerta became 'Provisional President', and Félix Díaz was assured that he would be free to pursue election as president. Unfortunately for Huerta, there had been a change of government in the United States, and Woodrow Wilson had become president. He refused to recognise or support Huerta's regime, and ignored the repeated pleas of the Ambassador in Mexico, Henry Lane Wilson, to acknowledge Huerta's Provisional Presidency.

Huerta made claims to be adhering to the Constitution of Mexico by having the next man in succession to the Presidency, Pedro Lascuráin, Madero's Foreign Minister, sworn in as the President of the Republic for as long as it took to persuade Lascuráin that Madero and Suárez would come to no harm, whereupon Lascuráin had resigned, leaving Huerta next in line in the Presidential succession. Woodrow Wilson saw through this, and, by withholding his recognition of Huerta, he helped to precipitate the usurper's eventual downfall.

### The Popular Struggle against Huerta.

The Mexican people were generally horrified at the treachery of Huerta, and a formidable opposition quickly arose. With the struggle of the 1910 Revolution still fresh in their minds, and the prospect of the total loss of whatever it had achieved staring them in the face, the 1910 revolutionaries once more went into action. The Zapatistas, remembering Huerta's campaign against them during de la Barra's presidency, fought Huerta's forces with absolute hatred. In the north, the forces fighting the reactionary usurper united under the leadership of Venustiano Carranza, whose *Plan de Guadalupe*, issued on 26th March, 1913, set forth their demands, 'a document which, by its very vagueness, proved acceptable to all factions of the rebellion.'<sup>(15)</sup> These rebel forces adopted the name of 'Constitutionalists', and they appointed Carranza their 'First Chief'. The Plan's strongest article was that which refuted Huerta's Presidency and it was clearly less of a political programme than a simple declaration of intent. As such, its genesis bears a marked resemblance to the document produced by the Reyistas eighteen months before. Not everyone was happy to accept such a bland document:

When Carranza presented the draft plan to his young officer-supporters, a group including Captain Francisco J. Múgica argued for the inclusion of working-class demands, points referring to land-distribution and the abolition of employers' shops, and a number of other social questions. In reply, Carranza stressed the need to unite the broadest possible forces and to neutralize the many enemies who would be turned against the revolution by such demands. First there had to be a military victory, and then could come the social reforms. By means of this old argument, typical of a bourgeois leadership seeking to contain a revolutionary movement within its own horizons, Carranza forced acceptance of the Guadalupe Plan with its call for nothing more than a change in government.

16.

Nonetheless, Carranza's Plan provided a focus for the forces opposing Huerta, who united against their common enemy. The only opposition forces which did not acknowledge the Plan were the Zapatistas, who continued their own struggle against the dictator independently.

The Revolution's 'First Chief' is an important figure because his leadership of the political element of the Constitutionalists was the principal cause of the drawn-out conflicts which affected the revolutionary forces after their overthrow of Huerta. Venustiano Carranza was a

landowner, and this was always to be evident in his mistrust of, and opposition to, the agrarian reform movement headed by Zapata. Under Díaz, Carranza had been a senator, and also had become governor of his home state, Coahuila. When Madero vindicated himself by winning the elections in 1910, and Reyes disgraced himself by his dishonourable surrender after his abortive 'invasion' shortly afterwards, Carranza, '...went reluctantly into the Madero camp.'<sup>(17)</sup> Finally, when Huerta demanded that all State Governors swear allegiance to his Provisional Presidency, Carranza was one of the first to refuse, proclaiming instead that Huerta's assumption of the supreme executive power had been 'unconstitutional', 'illegal', and 'unpatriotic':

Whereas the Legislative and Judicial Powers, contrary to laws and constitutional precepts, have acknowledged and supported General Victoriano Huerta and his illegal and antipatriotic proceedings...

18.

Carranza's Plan sought to be seen as a nationalist manifesto, as well as a constitutionalist one. Carranza's aims <sup>(19)</sup> were threefold: he wanted the Revolution to destroy the monopolies which had proliferated in Mexico under Díaz, and which Madero had made little real impact on; to restrict and then diminish the Church's power; and, by the removal of what he saw as these feudal relics of the Porfirian system, to promote the growth of the Mexican middle class of professionals, industrialists, businessmen, and small farmers. These quite obviously political concerns, which Carranza was careful not to include in his Plan, were either ignored or accepted uncritically by the other leaders who gave the First Chief their allegiance, such was the overwhelming nature of their mutual desire to topple Huerta.

The Constitutionalist forces can be divided into three main groups: the Division of the North, under Villa's command; the north-western division, commanded by General Alvaro Obregón, a wealthy farmer from Sonora state; and the group led initially by Carranza and then by General Pablo González in the north-east. The command of each of these three groups differed greatly, although the northern peasantry provided support for all three. Pancho Villa's forces, subordinate to Obregón, grew in six months from the eight men he had crossed into Mexico with in March 1913, and played a major role in the military success of the Constitutionlists over Huerta. Composed mainly of northern peasants, miners and railway

workers, Villa's Division of the North tackled the most difficult and strongest Federal line of defence. Huerta had, during the latter half of 1913, prepared a line of strong points centred on the towns which straddled the main railway lines north from Mexico City to the United States. These were held by a composite force of Federal troops, civilian sympathisers, and Pascual Orozco's hated 'Colorados'. Villa's forces, after a few attacks on various of the northerly outliers of this line, were withdrawn northwards again by their commander who wished to secure the State of Chihuahua before embarking on his drive southwards to Mexico City in earnest.

The two main centres still held by Federals in the State were the state capital, Chihuahua City, and the important border town of Ciudad Juárez, but Chihuahua City was found to be too well defended, and Villa swept on northwards to attack Ciudad Juárez. The border town was of extreme importance to Villa, as most of the arms and supplies for his troops were smuggled into Mexico from the United States at this point. Meanwhile, the Federals in Chihuahua City sought to trap Villa's Division in the extreme north of the State, and were drawn out of the State Capital's prepared defences to pursue and eliminate them. The Federals suffered a terrible and overwhelming defeat, and their commander in Chihuahua was forced to withdraw southwards, leaving the Villistas in control of the state.

With Chihuahua secured and his access point to supplies from the U.S. thereby safe-guarded, Villa was free to pursue the fleeing Federals and begin to tackle Huerta's defences. Taking as precedent the Federals' utilisation of the railways as troop transport, Villa made steady progress southwards in early 1914, but his advance was held up by the formidable defence of Torreón which the Federals mounted. Despite the fact that by now the Federal forces had been reinforced by means of Huerta's policy of forced conscription in Morelos, Mexico City, and elsewhere, Villa regained Torreón from the Federals, who withdrew eastwards. Though in possession of the town itself, the presence of a large Federal force under General Velasco was a major worry to Villa, but his troops were too exhausted to march off eastwards in pursuit.

The issue of the threat posed by Velasco's forces brought Carranza and Villa into a confrontation, and their mutual dislike caused this disagreement to become a breakdown of

their fragile accord. Villa, now showing his political ambition for the first time, was also worried that should he pursue Velasco he might well deny his Division the opportunity of entering Mexico City first. Carranza had no intention of allowing Villa's Division to take the Capital, and it was apparent to all of Villa's commanders as well as to Villa himself that the pursuit of Velasco was intended by Carranza merely to slow the Division of the North up so that another group could reach the Capital first. By May the situation between Carranza and Villa had become critical: the First Chief ordered the Division of the North of 20,000 men to take the Coahuila State capital, Saltillo, the only town still in Federal hands. Villa objected because Saltillo lay some one hundred and eighty miles from his position, whereas it lay only fifty miles from the positions of González's Division; and instead wished to push on to Zacatecas, the last main town in his southward path. Carranza knew that if Villa took Zacatecas the road to Mexico City would be open to the Division of the North, and had decided that Obregón would be first into the city.

General Alvaro Obregón was the resourceful commander of the Division of the North-West. Despite the disadvantage of being the youngest of a family of eighteen, he had managed to become a rancher by the time Huerta overthrew Madero. Obregón had been an active Maderista, and had gained a measure of fame and respect by his organisation of 'The Rich Battalion', a group of some three hundred young ranchers and landowners, to oppose the Orozcista uprising. He considered himself a socialist.

When Huerta overthrew Madero in early 1913, Obregón, in response to a call to arms by the anti-Huerta Governor of Sonora, José María Maytorena, secured the state for the Constitutionalists. On 20th September 1913, Carranza made Obregón the commander of the Constitutionalist forces in the North-West when the ex-rancher stated his recognition of Carranza as the First Chief, and Obregón, with his subordinate commanders Plutarco Calles (a police superintendent in Agua Prieta, Sonora) and Benjamín Hill, began to organise their forces for a south-westerly campaign down the Pacific coast. Despite the difficulties they faced in this venture due to the often-mountainous nature of the terrain as much as Federal opposition, they accomplished this assault quickly. Ultimately, in line with Carranza's desire that Obregón's division should be first into Mexico City, the division had reached Irapuato by

the end of July, 1914. They were thus only two hundred miles north-west of the Capital, and were the most southerly-positioned of the Constitutionalists at the end of the hostilities against Huerta.

Carranza had little experience as a soldier, and in early 1914 had given over command of the Division of the North-East to his brother, Jesus Carranza, and General Pablo González. He at first returned with the headquarters of the Constitutionalists to Sonora, where he and Gerardo Murillo Cornadó (better known by his pseudonym of Dr. Atl) watched the southwards progress of the Constitutionalist armies. Only in March, 1914, did Carranza decide to follow the other Divisions, and moved to Chihuahua City, before going on to Saltillo, recently recaptured by Villa. The Division of the North-East under Jesus Carranza and González had pushed down the Gulf Coast, capturing for the Constitutionalists the vital oil-producing areas on the Gulf of Mexico from which they procured much revenue for arms and munitions. In doing so, they made Huerta's position even more difficult, for, as interim President of the Republic he was supposed to protect the installations and interests of the foreign-owned oil companies whose governments, with the exception of the United States, had recognised his regime. Huerta failed in this, which provoked these foreign governments into making their own arrangements for the protection of their interests and nationals in Mexico. Foreign warships began to arrive in the Gulf, lying close into the coast. It was at Tampico, while the Division of the North-East was preparing to attack the port of Veracruz in early April, that the incident which indirectly led to the invasion of Veracruz by the Americans took place.

The attitude of the U.S. Government had been quite openly hostile towards Huerta's interim presidency, and Woodrow Wilson refused to recognise Huerta's regime despite the dictator's desperate attempts to persuade the U.S. President of the legality of his position. Huerta even went so far as to call an 'election' in October, 1913. This was a sham, for despite the fact that there were four official candidates, the only 'candidate' to receive a clear mandate was none other than the one major Federal figure who had declined to stand - General Victoriano Huerta. The scrupulously 'constitutionalist' dictator declared that these elections were null and void, and that fresh elections were to be held in July, 1914. Far from convincing Wilson that the proceedings on the Federal side in Mexico were in fact completely in accord

with the provisions of the country's constitution, Huerta's October elections only served to infuriate the American Democrat still further, and Wilson now asked other foreign powers to use their influence to persuade Huerta to resign. Though the North American economic embargo was beginning to bite in Mexico, and although his Federal forces were almost daily suffering more defeats at the hands of the Constitutionalists, Huerta refused to stand down.

Woodrow Wilson's policy of 'watchful waiting' was put aside when the uncertain position of U.S citizens in Mexico gave him the excuse he needed to interfere. United States Marines and seamen were put ashore at Veracruz on 21st April from the American warships which had been lying off the Gulf Coast for months, and the occupation of Mexico's main seaport by some seven thousand troops lasted until 23rd November. It was to be a major factor in Huerta's overthrow, for the dictator finally gave up hope of his gaining the recognition from the U.S. which he needed.

Another force which helped to bring down Huerta was that of the Zapatistas, though they at all times acted independently of the Constitutionalists and were indifferent to foreign pressures affecting other regions of Mexico.

Huerta had, in 1913, placed General Juvencio Robles in the governorship of Morelos, and instructed him to suppress the Zapatistas. Martial law was once again proclaimed in the state, and Robles initiated his plans for the 'resettlement' of the populace. This involved the compulsory recruitment of men for the Federal forces fighting in the north; their families were left to fend for themselves in Robles' concentration camps. Robles's policy of virtual genocide, resorting once again to his "scorched earth policy", was intended to clear the state of the campesinos, disperse those who survived, and ultimately replace them with immigrant Japanese. The Zapatistas fought Robles's troops with a ferocious determination - they were now fighting for survival. Their ranks were swollen by refugees fleeing from the Federals' draconian measures, and, as the situation deteriorated in the rest of the country, Huerta was forced to order Robles to withdraw most of his force by the beginning of September, leaving only the main towns heavily garrisoned, and also leaving the Zapatistas with a degree of freedom of movement which they used to organise their growing forces.

Zapata marshalled his forces for a final push on Mexico City: their preparations included

the collection of rents from plantations, and the robbery of trains. The money gained helped to provision and arm the campesino forces, who now due to the virtual destruction of the entire state by Robles, more than ever resembled a true people's army. They were now no longer even the rural wage workers of the past, for such was the havoc wreaked upon the state economy that normal production was impossible and the agrarian reform movement derived all its income with force.

#### The Convention of Aguascalientes.

When the hostilities more or less came to an end on 15th July, 1914, after Huerta resigned and fled into exile, Zapata's forces were preparing to attack Mexico City itself. The provisional president Huerta had left in his place, Francisco Carvajal, was forced to treat with the Constitutionalists when Jesus Carranza captured San Luis Potosí on 18th July, and a ceasefire was hurriedly finalised. This placed Zapata in a difficult position for until now his forces had operated completely independently of the Constitutionalist armies and their strategies. While the First Chief's armies were close to the Capital but still too far from it to occupy it, and as the Federal forces still holding the Capital were under the command of Carvajal, the Zapatistas could still have attempted to take it, and thus gain an advantageous negotiating position with which to press for the acceptance of their demands. However, Zapata soon discovered the truth about the First Chief's attitude to the whole question of the agrarian reform movement when Carranza treated with the Federal forces inside the Capital to make sure they would continue to hold it until a force of Constitutionalists could enter and occupy it. This arrangement was designed to prevent either Zapata or Villa from taking the city, and both men saw through it at once. It deepened the crisis between Villa and Carranza, alienated Zapata immediately, and further helped forge a united front between Villa and Zapata.

Carranza himself was also in a difficult position, for with the flight of Huerta the task which the Constitutionalists had originally set themselves was accomplished, the main aim of the Plan was achieved, and dissension began to split up their alliance. Villa no longer supported Carranza's claim to pre-eminence within the movement as its First Chief, and when Carranza

sent Obregón to consult with the Commander of the Division of the North, Obregón was very lucky to escape a summary execution when Carranza turned down a deal between himself and Villa which Obregón had arranged on his behalf.

Villa finally showed his real intentions when, on 30th September, he published a manifesto to the Mexican people which repudiated Carranza and asked them to support him in ridding the country of the First Chief, who would be replaced by a civilian government. Meanwhile, Carranza was in Mexico City, having entered it three days after Obregón, who had taken over control of the Capital from the Federals on 15th August, 1914.

When Obregón returned there after his almost fatal consultation with Villa, he took steps to arrange a meeting at which all the Revolutionary forces would be represented with a view to settling the dissensions which had already cost lives in sporadic confrontations between Carrancista and Villista forces, and which threatened to escalate. Carranza also recognised the danger represented by the fragmentation of the Constitutionalist alliance, and himself had called for a meeting to be held in Mexico City on 10th October, 1914.

The Convention of Aguascalientes was a last-ditch attempt on Obregón's part to settle the differences between Carranza and Villa, but ultimately only served to reinforce the divisions apparent in the ranks of the Revolutionaries. Carranza, seeing that the Convention was in danger of ratifying Villa's notion that he should resign, refused to attend in person or to send personal representatives. Also, the Convention ran still greater problems when the representatives of Zapata finally arrived, for of course they immediately demanded that the principles of their *Plan de Ayala* should be written into any new Constitution. This was refused.

The Zapatista and Villista delegates formed an alliance and had Eulalio Gutiérrez installed as the President of the Convention on 1st November 1914, with a constitution supported by the Villistas which endorsed the *Plan de Ayala*:

The manifesto enunciated a 'minimum programme' which included: withdrawal of North American forces from Mexican territory; restitution of communal lands to the villages; 'the destruction of latifundism, so that large landed property is disentailed and redistributed among the people, who bring forth the produce of the soil...'; nationalization of property belonging to enemies of the revolution; freedom of association and the right of workers to go on strike.

...the Convention...became the meeting-ground between the two (i.e., Villa and Zapata) and moved to the left, albeit without a public declaration, through its adoption of the Ayala Plan.

20.

Gutiérrez now declared Carranza to be in rebellion, and Obregón hurried back to Mexico City with the news that Villa had been appointed Commander of the Convention's forces, and that Carranza had been superseded. The First Chief had left the Capital, and was moving east. Obregón met Carranza at Córdoba, where he learned that the First Chief, refusing to recognise the authority of Gutiérrez, had issued an order recalling all Carrancista delegates from the Convention. Obregón hurried back to Mexico City to arrange the evacuation of all Carrancistas remaining in the Capital. Zapata's forces were harrying the southern suburbs, and when Obregón finally left the Capital the Zapatistas moved in and occupied it.

Obregón's occupation of the Capital had seen the first manifestations of a new wave of anti-clericalism, for various of the city's churches had been despoiled and a number of priests arrested in an attempt to provide funds to ease the problem of starvation amongst the city's less well-off inhabitants. Such anti-clerical activities and attitudes were quickly to be adopted as a keystone of the political ideology of Constitutionalism. Meanwhile, Carranza, having been informed by the Americans on 16th September of their imminent withdrawal from Veracruz on 23rd November, moved into a position to occupy the port as soon as the Americans left, and Obregón was appointed Commander of the Constitutionalists' Army of Operations. Now the confrontation would be between the radical forces of the Convention, and the more conservative forces of Carrancista Constitutionalism, both with a distinct political ideology enshrined in a manifesto of their own making. The nature of the post-revolutionary society would be shaped by whichever constitution ultimately would be enacted by the winners.

Applying the Eighteenth Brumaire model to this period of the Mexican Revolution, there are clear correspondences between what Marx describes as being the second phase of the revolution, that is 'the period of the constitution of the republic or of the Constituent National Assembly' (21); and the proceedings of the Convention of Aguascalientes, and subsequent events over the course of the next two years. The consolidation of the bourgeois republic

which occurs during this phase in both the French, and the Mexican, revolutions took longer to consolidate in the Mexican case because of the existence of two rival factions who each asserted that they represented the 'nation' and 'national interest'. The result of their competition was the continuation of the civil war until one or other faction was eliminated. Carranza's faction ultimately triumphed, and the foundation and consolidation of the bourgeois republic could then proceed.

The Convention of Aguascalientes was wound up on 13th November, 1914, and was to be reconvened as soon as Villa and his Army of the Convention could occupy the Capital. This was tantamount to a declaration that the Convention had failed to secure agreement amongst the various revolutionary groups, and was virtually a declaration of war on Carranza.

(22) The Zapatistas entered the Capital on 24th November 1914. Villa and the Northern Division joined them on 3rd December. They then agreed to hold a meeting at Xochimilco, twelve miles south of Mexico City, on 4th December. Both represented the rural poor and they shared a mutual hate of Carranza which cemented a strong bond between them. It was decided that a joint triumphal entry into the city would be held on 8th December.

#### The Crucial Moment: The Convention has the Initiative.

After spending some time in the Capital, Gutiérrez was informed of plans for the pursuit and destruction of the Carrancistas, now in Veracruz. A two-pronged attack on the port had been decided upon, with Villa and his Army of the Convention swinging at first north-east from Mexico City, then south-east to Veracruz while Zapata's forces were to attack due east along the most direct route to Veracruz from the Capital. Had they not dispersed their forces they might well have changed the course of the civil war, and perhaps the character of the future republic.

The military situation appeared altogether favourable to the armies of the Convention: they dominated the capital and the entire centre of Mexico, virtually all the northern regions, nearly all the richer and important states (with the notable exception of Veracruz), and the great bulk of the railway network. For their part the Constitutionals retained their last bastion in Veracruz and nearby areas, as well as a few northern ports and frontier-towns and a small region in the far south which played no significant role in the revolution.

23.

However, Zapata's customary caution outwith Morelos asserted itself, and the Zapatistas failed to pursue the Constitutionalists any further than Puebla. Villa also did not want to have to settle to a long static campaign around Veracruz and was as reluctant as Zapata to fight on unfamiliar territory, so his Army of the Convention did not press their pursuit of Carranza. Instead of attacking the port they moved north again to ensure the security of their bases in Torreón and Chihuahua City, as well as protecting their main supply lines from the north. Thus, the 'First Chief' did not have to defend himself, but could choose when to attack.

Carranza's choice of Veracruz as a base was an astute one, for he could take the busy port's customs revenues for his military effort. Furthermore, the Americans who had held the port for seven months had not just repaired the damage caused in their invasion, but they had also greatly improved the services of the town, as well as its general condition. Thus Carranza had secured a well maintained and lucrative base for himself, as well as being virtually guaranteed a method of escape should that be necessary. Obregón used the breathing space given to him by the irresolution of the Convention forces and the Zapatistas to prepare a large army, which was called the Army of Operation. On the other front, Zapata's forces finally left Mexico City to the Constitutionalists under González without putting up much of a fight on 2nd August 1915. Meanwhile, the Carrancista *políticos* and propagandists developed an ideology to expand upon the virtually obsolete *Plan de Guadalupe*. Murillo, who had been made Chief of Propaganda by Carranza, played a major role in this and his activities included the formation of the six Red Battalions(24) of workers who fought in the Constitutionalist forces. He also established the Constitutionalist daily newspaper, 'La Vanguardia'.

#### The Casa del Obrero Mundial.

Murillo used his influence with the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* to organise these six battalions of workers. The *Casa* was a workers' organisation, originally founded by Ricardo Flores Magón at the turn of the century but which had soon closed down. It was re-established in 1912 for the purposes of worker organisation, political activism, and the communication of labour views. Murillo disrupted a special mass meeting of *Casa* members held on 8th February, 1915 when

it appeared that the majority view that the *Casa* should remain neutral from all three factions was about to be upheld. The grounds for this were that the *Casa* had hitherto remained independent from party politics. This was unacceptable to Murillo and the Constitutionalists whose initial intentions were to attract as much support as possible to their cause. Another meeting was held on 10th February, at which the majority view was considered, then over-ruled, by a select committee of some sixty-seven members who took it upon themselves to decide upon a future course of action. As expected, these men made the decision that the *Casa* should be involved in the determination of the future of the nation, but, unwilling to recognise the Zapatistas as fellow workers, chose instead to form an alliance with Carranza's Constitutionalists.

This conservative decision both indicates the nature of the *Casa's* political vision and reflects Murillo's thinking. Only a few months later in his paper, 'La Vanguardia', the Villistas would be labelled 'reactionaries' and 'militarists'; and the Zapatistas would be decried for their alliance with Villa, and their 'association with the Church'. These apart, the decision which committed the *Casa* to the struggle on the side of the Constitutionalists has its roots in the ideals and character of the organisation itself. G. García Cantú has condemned the *Casa's* political spokesmen for shallowness:

Everything that the most vulgar pomposity, showy ignorance, extreme pretentiousness and obsessive oratory could achieve, can be observed in the writings of the orators of the Casa del Obrero Mundial. The scribblings of real bores: a mixture of pathos and vulgarity, moral preaching and daring gestures. 25.

The *Casa's* much-cherished policy of neutrality which had now come to an end was at least partly the result of their poor comprehension of the anarchist doctrine which they asserted. The *Casa* brand of anarchist thought held that a policy of non-intervention in government or national politics was the best course. In fact, such a policy meant that the group might well become rather inward-looking and hence politically naive in its response to topical issues, as was the case with the *Casa* itself which became an easy prey to those who sought to manipulate it.

The Constitutionalist newspaper 'La Vanguardia' enumerated arguments against the defection of Villa and Zapata from the nationalist cause. In this respect, Carranza, Murillo and

other participants in the production of the newspaper were the embodiment of the intellectual component of the Constitutionalist army, just as General Alvaro Obregón manifested the military aspect in his leadership of their forces.

#### The Military Defeat of the Convention.

The forces opposing Carranza by now had undergone a split, for Villa was making for the north, the area which he knew so well and felt master of, and Zapata would not commit his forces to a long-range conflict outwith his native area. Thus, the army of the northern peasants, miners and railway workers under Villa, and the southern force of campesinos under Zapata, separated, became once more isolated in their respective native areas, and thereby effectively more than halved their combined strength. Their divided front could now be separately attacked by Obregón's army.

Obregón decided to attack Villa's Army of the Convention first, as it was the most mobile threat due to Villa's skilled use of the railways, and thus possibly was seen as the most immediate danger. Obregón's Army of Operations pursued the Army of the Convention northwards, and Villa's force fell back before Obregón's advance. However, Villa now changed his tactics, and having rescued General Felipe Angeles from defeat at Monterrey, again advanced southwards. He met Obregón's forces at Celaya, a small town one hundred and fifty miles north-west of Mexico City.

Obregón's forces had captured Celaya, and the town had been fortified under the guidance of a German officer attached to Obregón's division. Trenches, barbed wire defences and many machine guns had been placed in carefully chosen positions in the town's precincts, and Obregón's forces waited behind these for Villa's attack. The first attack, which commenced on 5th April, 1915 and lasted for about thirty hours, resulted in Villa's forces over-running Obregón's positions and taking control of the centre of the town on the morning of the 8th April. However, Obregón's forces counter-attacked and drove the Villistas out. The Army of the Convention withdrew for re-organisation to Irapuato, thirty-eight miles to the west. Obregón strengthened his defences, for he knew that Villa's pride and determination to destroy the Army of Operations would force him to once more attempt to dislodge it

from Celaya.

The expected attack materialised on 13th April, after Obregón had received both reinforcements and more ammunition. The second attack on Celaya was the biggest single battle in the whole Revolution: Villa's forces, 25,000 strong, well-equipped and well used to their usual attack tactics, faced Obregón's 15,000 men, dug in around the town. Virtually from the start, Villa's attacks were disastrous for his well-tried tactics could not succeed in this new type of warfare. He threw thousands of men against the defences of Celaya in an attempt to overcome them by sheer weight of numbers. This strategy failed terribly, for the Constitution-  
alists' machine guns quickly destroyed the Villistas' superiority in numbers. The shattered remains of the Army of the Convention withdrew, this time northwards, and Obregón's victorious forces pursued them. The tide had turned against Villa, and more disastrous defeats followed that of Celaya. Zapata did not recognise Villa's plight for what it was, and even had he done, there is no evidence that he would have chosen to risk his own forces by aiding Villa in the north. The Zapatistas were working on their own agrarian programme which has come to be known as 'The Morelos Commune'(26). Villa grew desperate and tried to persuade Carranza, Zapata and the new provisional President of the Convention, Roque González Garza, of the need for revolutionary unity, chiefly because his forces were suffering a chain of defeats (27).

This ploy failed, for Carranza knew that his position was daily growing more secure as Villa's forces were destroyed. The United States, too, recognised Carranza's growing power, and was slowly realising that the First Chief would sooner or later have to be officially recognised as *de facto* President. War supplies to Villa began to be affected. Carranza, expecting this *de facto* recognition, wished to recapture the Capital before the U.S. showed their hand. To this end, he appointed Pablo González commander of the newly-formed Army Corps of the East to wrest control of the city from the Convention, still supported by Zapatistas.

Despite the fact that the Convention in Mexico City was facing the prospect of a re-occupation of the Capital by Carranza, another new Provisional President had been elected by the Convention on 9th June. This man, Francisco Lagos Cházaro, was an ex-governor of

Veracruz, and he found himself elected into a most difficult role.

González' initial strategy was to try to effectively isolate the Capital both from food supplies and reinforcements, but in this he was only partially successful for although he blockaded the City's food supply, causing the civilian population distress and starvation, his force was not strong enough to close off at least two access points to the north and south, through which the forces engaged in the defence of the Capital could move. However, such was the strength of his position that by 13th June, he could issue a forty-eight hour surrender ultimatum to the defenders and Convention, which they chose to ignore. There then ensued a drawn-out struggle for the control of the Capital which lasted for some six weeks, with one side occupying much of the city before losing this grip to the other, which then attempted to regain control.

This continued pattern of occupation, loss, and re-occupation by both sides had its effect on the civilians, for it brought about a widespread disruption of the normal trading and industrial life of the city. The virtual famine which resulted from González' tactics caused increasing social disorder: there were food riots, demonstrations, and the starving poor died in the streets. The constant switching between the currencies used by the contending factions provoked staggering inflation, which was exacerbated by the loss of trading confidence amongst the shopkeepers, suppliers, and other businessmen of Mexico City. As under Huerta, the banks of Mexico City found themselves in an impossible position, and normal commerce was virtually destroyed during this period.

Eventually González won, reoccupying the city for the last time on 2nd August, 1915. With the Constitutionalists firmly in control of the city once more, and now that Villa's forces in the north were rapidly dwindling, Carranza, still in Veracruz, received *de facto* recognition from the United States Government on 19th October, 1915. The U.S. Government also quickly enforced an embargo on the supply of arms to any group involved in the Mexican conflict, with the exception of the Constitutionalists.

When news of this arrangement reached Villa it did not deter him, for he had once before received supplies from U.S. sympathisers across the border despite a similar embargo. However, he needed to recapture a border town as a point of access through which such

supplies could be transferred, and thus his army, much reduced but still some five thousand strong, mounted an attack on Agua Prieta, Sonora. The town was held by General Plutarco Elías Calles for the Constitutionalists and he had prepared defences like those at Celaya. From the Villista point of view, the attack on Agua Prieta was as futile and disastrous as that on Celaya had been. Calles' defensive trenches, searchlights, and machine guns combined to make the town almost unassailable, yet the Villistas attacked - and suffered tremendous losses. Villa's force, once 25,000 strong, had been reduced to less than 1,400 by early November, but he still was to remain a significant figure in Mexican politics for some time to come.

#### The Working Class Challenge to Carranza, 1915-16.

The *de facto* recognition extended by the U.S. Government had improved the First Chief's domestic and international position :

The American decision thus fixed politically the new balance of power which the Carrancista armies had already won militarily. And it marked the beginning, after five years of civil war, of Mexico's reconsolidation. Carranza had finally realised his claim to sovereign legitimacy. Although the Carrancistas could not yet dominate the whole nation, they could prevent any other faction from displacing them. Henceforth, they would rule.

28.

However, although Carranza was the leader recognised by a growing majority of Mexicans as the one who would ultimately become President of the Republic, he would have to tackle the serious economic and social problems created by the Revolution. One of the most worrying to the Constitutionalist *políticos* was that posed by the resurgent urban working class. The proletariat, having been incorporated into the Constitutionalist movement by Murillo's manipulation of the *Casa del Obrero Mundial*, now discovered that, ironically, the organisation and expansion of the *Casa* which the Constitutionalists had encouraged to increase the latter's popular base of support, allowed them to press their own demands on the employers with much greater success. The workers grew more demanding and outspoken, and the 'alliance' which Murillo had contrived between the Constitutionalists and the proletariat had begun to break down as early as the summer of 1915, causing both industrialists and the bureaucracy to fear the potential of this more militant working class:

By June 1915 Villa and Zapata had suffered military setbacks which rendered their positions hopeless. With that threat removed, the Constitutionalists' amalgam of upper-class elements and urban workers began to unravel. Open Casa support for the "International Working Class Movement", and the presence of armed workers' militias, provoked the concern of industrialists and public officials. With food shortages, runaway inflation, unemployment, public demonstrations, script monies for some factory payrolls, wildcat strikes and armed workers calling themselves "Red", it was a volatile situation.

29.

During the winter of 1915-1916, the economic and social crisis deepened in Mexico City, causing the urban working class to make greater and greater demands on the employers. This period has been described as one of the greatest militancy ever known in Mexican labour history (30), and the Casa itself grew as a result, because more and more workers realised the importance of organised activity:

On 5 December it (the Casa) issued a manifesto which stated: 'The armed struggle is coming to an end, and soon we shall begin to reap its fruits. We shall know how to use this freedom, won at the price of so many sacrifices, in order to form powerful unions sufficient in themselves to command the respect of our exploiters.'

31.

The confrontation between employers and Constitutionalist bureaucrats on the one hand, and the militant workers on the other, grew more severe as the workers' use of strike tactics to force the implementation of their demands disrupted the commercial basis of capitalism in Mexico:

Late in December, the Guadalajara tram-workers and electricians struck in support of wage-demands. In the El Oro mines in Mexico State, the strikers even replaced their superiors and took over the installations. Dock-workers walked out in the two chief ports of the country, Veracruz and Tampico.

32.

Carranza's attempt to break the growing power of urban labour was at first limited to ordering the demobilisation and dispersal of the six Red Battalions, but this action had unforeseen and ironic consequences, for the thousands of workers released from military service only exacerbated the problem. These veterans discovered the effects which the war they had fought in had produced in the economy, and found that life as a worker was now even more difficult in the inflation-stricken economy than it had been when they enlisted. Accordingly these discharged soldiers aggravated the militant mood of the Casa still further. Carranza faced a growing industrial crisis of national proportions.

The First Chief returned to Mexico City on 14th April, 1916. Rather than backing the demands of the workers, Carranza chose instead to once more attempt to destroy the power of the *Casa*:

On 19 January 1916, General Pablo González made a public declaration against the widespread labour agitation. 'If the revolution fought capitalist tyranny,' he argued, 'it cannot sanction proletarian tyranny.' The declaration was accompanied with a series of measures against the organized labour movement.

33.

But when Carranza ordered the seizure of the *Casa*'s headquarters in the House of Tiles, and the imprisonment of all those found there, the workers retaliated later by holding a general strike on 22nd May, 1916 which quickly paralysed Mexico City, thereby forcing the authorities to come to terms with the workers' demands. However the concessions made by employers (who were forced to concede them by the government) were never to be implemented.

Villa's activities in early 1916 unwittingly gave the Constitutionalists a cause which they could use to attempt to unify society in the wake of the post-Revolutionary civil war, for it was in response to his flurry of anti-American action that the Americans decided to once more invade Mexico. This invasion allowed the Constitutionalists to rally support on a nationalist basis. The Villistas' reputation in the United States was at an all-time low following the massacre in January of the American owners and staff of the Cusi Mining Company who were returning by rail through northern Mexico after their flight to the U.S. during the Revolution. Witnesses stated that the massacre was carried out by a group of Villistas who had spared the lives of the Mexican passengers. American public opinion was further outraged by the news that Villa had actually attacked the U.S. border town of Columbus for money, food and ammunition. Though the Villistas were beaten off with losses when the town's U.S. Cavalry garrison turned out, the very fact of the attack was enough to produce demands that Villa be apprehended and punished. Accordingly, a very large force under General Pershing crossed the border in pursuit of Villa only three days after the attack, on 11th March, 1916. Although Pershing's Punitive Expedition, as it was called, did not catch Villa despite its eleven-month stay in Mexico, it severely curtailed his activities.

By July, it was becoming clear to the workers of Mexico City that the concessions made to

them in order to persuade them to abandon their general strike of May were not to be implemented by the employers. The workers decided that appropriate action could only be in the form of another general strike, and this was called for 31st July. Initially, it was as successful as the first had been in paralysing the Federal District, but it was broken when Carranza responded by declaring martial law on 1st August. The line which the authorities took in dealing with the strike was hardened by Carranza's assertion that the U.S. intervention was a threat to the sovereignty of the Republic, and consequently, the strikers' action was viewed as unpatriotic in the face of the U.S. presence. As Barry Carr's account points out, this supposed U.S. threat was an important component in the tactics used by the authorities to break the strike:

But Carranza's reply was swift and drastic - a declaration of martial law accompanied by a ruthless campaign to blacken the strikers' actions as unpatriotic and calculated to aid the enemies of Mexico. In particular, Carranza linked the strike with attempts to exploit Mexico's current difficulties with the U.S. by depriving the government of arms and ammunition manufactured on Mexican soil.

This last charge was energetically rejected by the Casa which pointed out that at no time during the strike did the State munitions factories stop production.

34.

However, Carranza and his colleagues did not feel that enough had been accomplished by merely smashing the strike, for they went on to declare the Casa itself a subversive organisation, and outlawed it. The power of an organised proletariat had been demonstrated, but from this point on the strength of the workers' movement was undermined by every means available. Henceforth, successive regimes were to recognise the importance of the incorporation of the labour movement into their support, and steps towards this were to be written into the forthcoming Constitution of 1917.

#### The Querétaro Constitutional Convention, 1916.

The Constitutionals, for all their apparent sympathy for agrarian reform as expressed in the columns of 'La Vanguardia', had decided by the end of 1915 that the only recourse for dealing with the Zapatistas was that of suppression after the fashion of de la Barra, Madero and Huerta. The exhausted Government of the Convention had left Mexico City in January 1915 and taken refuge in Cuernavaca, the capital of the State of Morelos, birthplace of the

southern campesino movement. When, in early 1916, the Carrancista force entered Morelos, their law and constitutional principles were not immediately obvious:

As it entered Morelos, the Carrancista army seemed the old federal army reincarnate. Its troops came not as liberators but as conquerors of the local population, which was itself the enemy and enjoyed at most only the rights of prisoners of war.

35.

The only recourse remaining to the Zapatistas, now that Morelos had fallen, was to once more retreat into the hills to continue their struggle as guerillas. What they were forced to abandon was a quite successful implementation of the agrarian reforms they were fighting for. During the years of revolution, Morelos had seen many incursions and punitive expeditions, but while the forces of the Convention had superior forces to those of the Constitution the state had been run by the Zapatistas along the lines proposed in their *Plan de Ayala*. Large-scale private land ownership had been abolished, land had been redistributed to the villages and the sugar production mills had been 'nationalised' so that their profits were used for the welfare of campesino fighters and their families. Much of this was swept away by the invading Carrancistas, whose tactics gave Mexicans a new word - *carrancear*, meaning 'to plunder'(36). Nevertheless, the Zapatistas had shown the agrarian reforms to be a practical possibility.

Carranza had acted quickly and effectively in putting down any possible threat to his regime. The Villistas, as a force, had been almost totally reduced; a similar fate had now befallen the Zapatistas; the organisation of labour under the auspices of the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* throughout 1915 and 1916 had been irremediably weakened; and Carranza had further destroyed the basis for any other opposition by his use of the U.S. invasion as a nationalist focus around which to rally support for his Constitutionalist faction. Thus, the First Chief had now consolidated the position which the military success in the civil war had guaranteed him.

The patriotic fervour engendered by the U.S. intervention had distracted attention from the forcible means by which much of this had been accomplished. By December 1916, it was obvious that the limited objectives of the U.S. intervention had been adhered to, and thus it no longer appeared to be the acute foreign threat which Carranza had imagined. This is not to

say that Carranza had abandoned his nationalism, for the new Constitution of which he was the main architect lays heavy emphasis on duty to the Republic and its sovereign rights. Rather, the outcry which had initially greeted the American invasion had diminished, and a new endeavour was needed to maintain the fervour of the Constitutionals. Carranza called a special convention for 21st December, 1916 at Querétaro to discuss the proposals for a new Constitution. In this convention, the foundations of the social-democratic bourgeois republic were laid, but against opposition from Carranza, who wanted exclusively political reform. With the Constitutional Convention of 1916, the Mexican Revolution enters a phase which approximated to that described by Marx in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire' as the third period of the French Revolution of 1848, 'the period of the constitutional republic or of the Legislative National Assembly' (37).

The Constitutional Convention proved that Carranza's was not the only authoritative voice in national politics. Despite the limited aims set by the First Chief other objectives were achieved. The chief authors of these were Generals Obregón and Calles, who pressed for reforms of a social nature. These reforms were intended to win the urban labour movement to the idea that their objectives would be best realised by means of conciliatory discussion rather than by direct action in the form of strikes. Carranza, on the other hand, adhered to the belief that a firm response to any manifestation of discontent amongst the proletariat was the most effective solution. Obregón and Calles saw the possible danger of the escalation of class conflict in this response, and insisted on the incorporation of their provisions. In this they were successful, but the enactment of these reforms lay in Carranza's hands.

The Constitutional Convention clearly demonstrated the presence of two factions within the Constitutionals. These have been identified as 'Jacobin' and 'Liberal', the former led by Obregón, and the latter led by Carranza:

Constitutionalism was never a socially homogenous force since it contained both 'liberal and 'Jacobin' wings. The liberals, led by Carranza, saw their commitment largely in terms of traditional political reform. In contrast, the Jacobins, their most representative figure being Alvaro Obregón, were particularly responsive to demands for change articulated from below and pressed for reforms of a social and economic nature. Among this second group were most of the revolutionary figures from Sonora and Sinaloa whose influence proved so crucial in widening the social appeal of Constitutionalism.

....They were themselves responsible for a symbolically important alliance with the nascent Mexican labour movement, and it was largely on their prompting that Carranza issued his series of decrees on agrarian and social matters.

38.

Although Obregón and Calles, with the rest of the 'Jacobin' faction, had seemed to put forward their ideas successfully, both later found their positions in the Carrancista government to be in conflict with their views, and in 1917 Obregón resigned from his post as Minister of War and returned to Sonora. Later, in 1920, Calles, too, would resign his post as Minister of Industry and Commerce.

#### The 1917 Constitution of the Republic.

However, despite the dissension within the Constitutionalist movement over the questions of social and economic programmes, Carranza had his role as First Chief of the Revolution confirmed by his election to the Presidency on 11th March, 1917 by a massive majority (39). His electoral triumph over his opponents, Pablo González and Obregón, was enhanced by the extension of *de jure* recognition to his regime by the United States Government. The way to Carranza's electoral success was carefully paved by the enactment into law of the provisions decided upon at the Querétaro Constitutional Convention of 1916, which were enacted as statutes on 5th February, 1917 - the very day that Pershing's Punitive Expedition finally left Mexican soil.

Doubtless the social and economic provisions of the 1917 Constitution did much to win support for Carranza in the elections, though ironically he had opposed these measures. Indeed, the Constitution is a somewhat deceptive document, for many of its apparently 'radical' articles are actually underlaid by the Constitutionalist themes of nationalism and anti-clericalism, which had been used against the radical influence of Zapatismo in a reactionary manner. Furthermore, the article on labour (Article 123) reveals perhaps the most striking anomaly of the whole Constitution.

This particular article, which appears to be a declaration of workers' rights, was the product of a discussion which involved the participation of only a very few workers. Thus, the legislation which was enacted in 1917 was not a product of consultation with a representative

cross-section of workers, but was generated by the leadership of the Constitutionalist group and was therefore imposed on the working class of the Republic. The article restricts the means by which labour can pursue its interests by laying down a machinery of legal constraint, by which means the government is the final arbiter of disputes, and is thereby promoted to the position of overall controller of the labour movement. The class struggle within Mexico is thereby severely curtailed for although Article 123 recognises the basic fact of class conflict, it also lays down rules for the regulation of it, such as the recognition of the right to strike - but only in the context of maintaining a harmonious balance between those who own the means of production, and those who actually operate them. The State has thus assumed the power, and the duty, of protecting the commercial basis of Mexican capitalism (40).

The power and supremacy of the State was also stressed in two other important areas: property ownership and exploitation of natural resources; and State control of the Church.

The laws enacted concerning property ownership were set out in Article 27. These asserted that the State was the original owner of all lands and national resources in Mexico, and all exploitation and development was to be under State control. Furthermore, only Mexicans, or those who would give an undertaking to the effect that their foreign exploitation would be subject to Mexican government control, would be allowed to own or develop properties within Mexico. Carranza thus ensured the adoption of his nationalist dictates. Given the excessive exploitation by foreigners which was encouraged under the Porfirian system, these laws might appear as an attempt to provide a remedy. In addition, the Constitution, by means of this Article, made some concession to the demands of the agrarian reform movement in that it advocated the restoration of the lands taken from the villages by the *hacendados*. However, though this would seem to recognise the demands of the agrarian reform movement as just, neither Carranza's government, nor the future governments of Obregón and Calles in the 1920's were to take any effective measures towards the realisation of these provisions(41).

The Mexican clergy suffered a double blow in the provisions of Articles 130 and 3, respectively those dealing with religion in Mexican society, and the State control of education. The most direct attack on the Church came in Article 130, for it established State control over

all clerical appointments, introduced the registration of all priests with the Government, and demanded that State permission be sought for the commission of any new churches. Article 3, that on education, ordered that all education was to be of a purely secular nature. Thus the Constitution asserted the supremacy of the State over the Church.

The Constitution promoted the growth of a bourgeois-dominated social democracy which put strict limits on the development of revolutionary radicalism. Marx has observed that:

The bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe could only be followed by a bourgeois republic. In other words, if a limited section of the bourgeoisie previously ruled in the name of the king, the whole of the bourgeoisie would now rule in the name of the people.

42.

This is paralleled in the Mexican situation, for Díaz' *científicos* had, by means of their economic and political power, dominated Mexican capitalism. The Revolution achieved a wider dispersal of this power, but it passed almost exclusively into the hands of the bourgeoisie. They then attempted to consolidate their power by trying to force the reconciliation of capital and labour by means of the Constitution. Marx analyses the essential nature of social democracy in the following way:

The peculiar character of social-democracy can be summed up in the following way: democratic republican institutions are demanded as a means of softening the antagonism between the two extremes of capital and wage labour and transforming it into harmony, not of superseding both of them.

43.

The social provisions of the Constitution were included despite the opposition of Carranza. The authors of the socially-democratic Constitution were in fact the bourgeois delegates to the Constitutional Convention, rather than their leader himself. As in the case of the French Revolution of 1848, the particular interests of the bourgeoisie are put forward as the only conditions which protect the general interests of society, not because they are consciously promoting their own interests, but because they were convinced by the ferocity of the Revolution that only by means of the control of class conflict could the nation be preserved (44).

The form of social democracy created by the Constitutionals was characterised by an alliance formed between the bourgeoisie and the workers. The joint programme this alliance produced, that is, the Constitution, involved both parties in reciprocal compromises. The

demands of the proletariat were so compromised by the alliance that they changed emphasis from direct industrial action to operating within the legislative institutions which were part of the bourgeois democracy. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie, by their stress on the need for social reform as a provision of the Constitution, had imbued their political ideology (Constitutionalism) with a socialist content, and thereby radicalised it. Marx observed an almost parallel phenomenon in the French Revolution:

The social demands of the proletariat lost their revolutionary point and gained a democratic twist, while the democratic claims of the petty bourgeoisie were stripped of their purely political form and had their socialist point emphasized. In this way arose social democracy.

45.

#### The Fate of Proletarian and Agrarian Movements under the New Regime.

Although the Constitution had established a legislative framework designed to regulate the class struggle, the establishment of the government-sponsored national labour union, the Mexican Regional Workers' Federation (*Confederación Regional Obreros Mexicanos* - **CROM**), added a further level of State control.

CROM was founded in May, 1918, and by means of State subsidies and with the tacit approval of the Government, soon replaced the *Casa* as the central workers' organisation. The founder of CROM, Luis N. Morones, a former electrician, was hand-picked by the government as labour's new representative, in order to further harmonious government-labour relations. Morones decisively turned his back on the *Casa's* tactics of direct action through strikes, and pursued his own practice of persuading the proletariat to court the patronage of politicians as the only means of procuring representation. Workers' freedom to strike was replaced by a weakened version of this right which was under the control of the leadership of CROM.

The Government, having successfully broken the power of the urban working class and incorporated it into the new order, moved against the last remaining possible threat to its hegemony - that represented by the surviving Zapatistas. Despite the fact that Zapata, faced with the overwhelming strength of the Constitutionalist forces, had already compromised with Carranza to the extent of recognising the President and his Government, in return for a

constitutionalised programme to bring 'Reform, Liberty, Justice and Law' (gone were the demands of 'Land and Liberty' - 'land' became 'reform'; and 'liberty' became constrained by 'justice' and 'law'), Carranza launched a new offensive against the Zapatistas in 1919. Workers, again formed into 'Red Battalions', were sent into the countryside to crush the Zapatistas, and the popular leader of the agrarian reform movement was treacherously killed. Carranza had apparently seen in Zapata, despite the latter's compromises, a danger that the campesinos' hope in revolution might be revived, given a fresh opportunity such as that represented by the forthcoming elections.

#### National Elections, 1920.

These elections were to finally bring Obregón into the open against Carranza. In 1919, Obregón began to prepare the ground for his challenge by entering into negotiations with CROM.

A new stage opened for the union movement in May 1918, when a national labour congress in Saltillo founded the Mexican Regional Workers' Federation (CROM)... This gave rise in December 1919 to the Mexican Labour Party... The CROM and its party immediately attached themselves to Obregón's policy and were one of the main props in his rise to power.

46.

Obregón promised the leaders of CROM that once elected, he would establish a Ministry of Labour in return for their support for his candidacy. Although Obregón in fact reneged on this promise once he was elected to the Presidency, CROM was allowed to gain a substantial measure of influence in the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Labour.

Carranza, on the other hand, while not seeking personal re-election which would have been too blatant a contravention of Constitutionalist principles, did seek to impose Ignacio Bonillas, the Mexican Ambassador to the U.S., as a puppet candidate for the Presidency. This was seized upon by Obregón, who chose to interpret Carranza's move as an attempt to circumvent the 'no re-election' principle. Obregón amplified this into a campaign which sought to persuade the Mexican public that Carranza's manoeuvres were a thinly-disguised attempt to devalue the other guiding principle of the Constitutionlists, that of 'effective suffrage'. Obregón's next move was to produce a manifesto on 23rd April, 1920, which

demanded the resignation of Carranza, and seemed to advocate measures to cater for the rather vague demands of developing industry and commerce, but paid little attention to the specific economic problems of the country. This manifesto, in line with tradition, was entitled **The Plan of Agua Prieta**, thus emphasising that the Plan was the product of the group of 'Jacobin' Sonorans who had resigned from Carranza's Government. Obregón had already won the support of CROM, and, when the military began to back him and desert Carranza, the latter fled to Veracruz, but met his death *en route* on 21st May, 1920.

After the death of Carranza, General Adolfo de la Huerta (previously the Governor of the State of Sonora), was installed as interim president for a period of six months. It was de la Huerta who finally appeased Villa. Thus, the ex-revolutionary leader managed for a few years to avoid the sort of fate which tended to befall well-known leaders like, for instance, Madero, Zapata and Carranza, and instead received the grant of an estate worth £60,000.

General Obregón was sworn in as the new President of the Republic on 1st December, 1920 for a four-year term. Meanwhile, the remaining campesinos had agreed upon a new leader, Gildardo Magaña, although he had been promoted to the leadership against the opposition of Francisco Mendoza. Mendoza and his supporters favoured the established Zapatista line of independent struggle whereas Magaña, following Zapata's recent compromise, wished to further the new alliance with the Constitutionalists. From the start of the 1920's onwards, the emphasis of the Revolution was shifted from class struggle to anti-imperialist struggle, with Mexico as a 'united' country against the feared intervention of foreign powers. Magaña, responding to his sense of duty to the nation, brought the Zapatistas into this national alliance. The incorporation of this last remaining revolutionary group into the social democracy paved the way for the consolidation of the national ideological hegemony which occurred in the 1920's.

### Footnotes and References

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2. Womack, J. Jr., Zapata and the Mexican Revolution; Penguin Books Ltd., 1972; p.152.
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6. Casasola, G., Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana 1900-1970. Vol. 2; Editorial Trillas S.A., México D.F., 1973; p.370.
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8. Wolfe, B.D., Portrait of Mexico; Covici, Friede Inc., New York, 1937; p.22.
9. Atkin, op.cit., p.108. See Gilly, op.cit., pp.75-77 for a more detailed analysis, and Casasola, op.cit. Vol.2, pp.426-427 for the full text of the *Plan de Ayala*.
10. Gilly, op.cit., p.75.
11. Idem., p.87.
12. Ibid.
13. Womack, op.cit., p.216.
14. Gilly, op.cit., p.94.
15. Atkin, op.cit., p.151.
16. Gilly, op.cit., p.99-100.
17. Wolfe, op.cit., p.36.
18. Reprinted in Casasola, op.cit., Vol.2, p.568.
19. Brenner, A., The Wind that Swept Mexico: The History of the Mexican Revolution 1910-1942; University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1971; p.41.
20. Gilly, op.cit., p.142-143.
21. Marx, K., 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', Surveys from Exile, Political Writings, Vol.2; edited by David Fernbach; Penguin Books, 1977; p.152.
22. Atkin, op.cit., p.252.
23. Gilly, op.cit., p.159.
24. The Red Battalions drew members from many types of urban industries:

So it was that four 'red battalions' fought on the winning side in the decisive battles against the Villist army. They were battalions composed of textile

workers, cabinet-makers, stone-cutters, tailors, masons, printers, mechanics and steel-workers, while two more battalions, comprising armoury-workers, tram-drivers and other trades, were assigned to various other missions. A group of COM women-workers formed a nursing corps and joined the Operational Army under the title Acrata Health Group. According to Obregón's memoirs, the Mexico City workers altogether supplied nine thousand men for his army, most of them belonging to organisations affiliated to the Casa del Obrero Mundial.

Gilly, *op.cit.*, p.191.

25. Cantú, G.G., *El Socialismo en México. Siglo XIX*; México, 1969.
26. Gilly, *op.cit.*, Chapter 8.
27. Atkin, *op.cit.*, p.282.
28. Womack, *op.cit.*, p.338.
29. Hart, J.M., 'The Urban Working Class and the Mexican Revolution: the Case of the Casa del Obrero Mundial'; *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol.58, No.1, 1978; p.14.
30. *Idem.*, p.17.
31. Gilly, *op.cit.*, p.215.
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33. *Idem.*, p.216.
34. Carr, B., *Labour and Politics in Mexico, 1910-29*; Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford University 1974; pp.114-115.
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36. Gilly, *op.cit.*, p.257.

With all the population centres occupied, Pablo González reported to the ministry of war in Mexico City that the Morelos campaign was over. His officers now devoted themselves to systematic plunder, shipping everything movable to the capital and selling it on the black market for their own gain. Livestock, sugar, alcohol, sugar-mill machinery, the contents of the munitions factory, furniture - all this could be, and was, carried off and sold. The inhabitants of Morelos were subjected to systematic persecution: murder, imprisonment, rape, exile, a whole wave of terror designed to subjugate them and to facilitate the plunder. In this way, the new bourgeois army that emerged from the revolution inaugurated one of its most constant practices. The Mexican people erected its own indelible monument to Carranza and his officers by coining the word 'to carrancize' (*carrancear*) as a synonym of 'to plunder.'

37. Marx, *op.cit.*, p.152.
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39. Casasola, *op.cit.*, Vol.4, p.1230.

40. Leal, J.F., 'The Mexican State, 1915-1973: A Historical Interpretation'; Latin American Perspectives No.2, Summer 1975; p.55.
41. A fuller account of the details of Article 27 can be found in Atkin, op.cit., p.326.
42. Marx, op.cit., p.154.
43. Idem., p.176.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Gilly, op.cit., pp.219-220.

## Chapter Four

### THE REVOLUTIONARY BEGINNINGS OF THE MURAL MOVEMENT

Set against the backdrop of the larger social revolution which took place in Mexico in the second decade of the twentieth century, the artistic revolution promoted by the muralists slowly gained support and influence as a result of their allegiances and participation in the greater struggle. As the following account of their activities before and during the Revolution of 1910-17 will reveal, their involvement was a factor in bringing them the government support which was to be such an essential element in the mural programme of the early 1920's.

However, the very foundations of their movement, in common with so much else of the cultural and political ambience they experienced, lie in the last unsettled years of the *Porfiriato*. During the pre-revolutionary period, their efforts at first were directed against the prevailing artistic establishment. Chief amongst the agitators for a new movement in Mexican art at that time was Gerardo Murillo Cornadó.

#### Aspirations for an Indigenous National Art, 1900-1910.

Murillo, also known as 'Dr. Atl', always maintained his links with the National School of Fine Arts (as, since 1867, the Academy of San Carlos was known), that single institution which was so important in promoting and upholding the derivative, elitist aesthetics of the Porfirian 'nation'. However, his relationship with the Academy, as artist, lecturer, and, for a brief spell in 1914, its director, was very unsteady, especially when he bolstered his reputation as a radical by criticising its conservatism and readiness to look to Europe for classical inspiration. According to his biographer Arroyo, Murillo was the 'Initiator of the Revolutionary Movement in Art' though Arroyo overlooks others such as Posada, the radical caricaturist. Murillo's first exhibition in Mexico was also the first public break with academicism which would lead to the recognition the State itself would accord 'national' art:

On his return from Europe, Dr. Atl organised an exhibition of works...in Guadalajara. Thus he gave lectures of a clearly revolutionary orientation, explaining the necessity for reform, and for the elimination of worn-out expressions of classical art and of academicism, arousing with the displayed works and speeches, a commotion...but on the other hand, he had the virtue of stimulating a group of young men: Montenegro, Guerrero Galván, Ixca

Farías, and above all Carlos Orozco Romero. The latter recalls: "that the revolutionary movement in art in Mexico was initiated by Dr. Atl in Guadalajara before Mexico City and that this exhibition...was surely one of the first manifestations of non-conformity with the old systems of painting."

1.

Yet Murillo found the archives of the Academy, where he conducted research into Mexican art history, an invaluable source of inspiration. This determined critic of the status quo in Mexican art also made acquaintances with students who were sympathetic to his cause. Murillo was an able activist, making a unique contribution to the aesthetic and political arguments which raged throughout the turbulent first two decades of the twentieth century, and reinvigorating Mexican art with his vision of muralism as a new social medium. Of course muralism - or more properly, ecclesiastical fresco - had been established in colonial Mexico as a major means of making public statements of political as well as religious ideology. Murillo did not just reverse its decline, he revived it as a means of projecting a 'radical' ideological message. Ironically, this conception of the medium seems to have developed during his first visits to Europe in 1901-03, and again, in 1907-08:

The painter, who in his late youth drank from the fountains of the French Impressionists and from those of the Italian Renaissance, filled the walls of a private villa next to the famous Villa Papa Giulio, in Rome in 1901, drawing out colossal and fantastic beings in its sixteenth century chapel, illuminated by an impressionistic rainbow arch. I saw these painted murals. In them Man is driven in his social struggles and in his conflicts against Nature, to appear triumphant in a large central panel dominating the Universe. These pictures were destroyed some years later...

From 1907 to 1908, Dr. Atl painted in Bologna-Sur-Seine twelve large plaster panels which were to be hung in the House of the People of Paris...

2.

His relationship with the students of the Academy is seen at perhaps its most productive and influential in the case of Diego Rivera, the future muralist.

In 1898 Diego Rivera (1886-1957) entered the National School of Fine Arts ('the Academy') at the age of twelve. Three years later, he was fully participating in the school's courses of curriculum perspective, anatomy, and landscape drawing(3). The next year, 1902, saw him making his first start in painting using the Academy's plaster figure models rather than from life. His main achievement of the year was an extremely accurate copy in oils of a Bandinelli plaster cast which Charlot thought 'astonishingly successful in the illusion of make-believe relief, even when seen at close range.'(4)

In his fifth year, Rivera studied art history, and was also taught landscape painting by the acclaimed Mexican master, José María Velasco, the artistic proponent, in paintings such as '*El Tren*' ('The Train';1897), of Mexico's Porfirian technological expansion. Rivera's studies under Velasco gave the young artist a firm grounding in perspective and large-scale naturalistic depiction (and even, perhaps, his first awareness of pictorial art as a means of advocating an ideology).

Charlot also records that Rivera's personal attraction to Mexican landscapes was enhanced by his extra-curricular forays into the small Indian community which still existed near the Academy, and which was the last remaining vestige of the once-mighty Indian capital, Tenochtitlán. He relates how Rivera was attracted by the vitality of the place, with the constant bustle of Indian people selling countryside flowers, fruit and other produce. It seems that during Rivera's absences from his academic classes this was a preferred haunt, a haven of Mexican life into which the young artist escaped. It was as a relief from the stultifying influence of the foreign procedural tuition of Antonio Fabrés, the Academy's master of photographic replication after the French painter, etcher and lithographer Ernest Meissonnier(1815-91). Typically, the lively, populist work of Meissonnier's Mexican counterpart, José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) was fastidiously ignored by academics like Fabrés.

Eventually Rivera's attitude towards Fabrés' artistic narrow-mindedness became apparent through his part in a squabble between Fabrés and Rivas Mercado, the general director of the school. Rivera, becoming increasingly irritated by the director of painting, came into open conflict with him by refusing to sign a document produced by Fabrés without first seeing the contents, although all but one of his fellow-students complied. Until it became clear to Mercado what the paper contained, he was forced by Fabrés to suspend Rivera and his friend. Thus, despite his excellent achievement as a student, Rivera was punished for this defiant act, and it was not until the paper was later returned to Mercado the general director that its contents became known to him. When Mercado received the missive from the Ministry of Education, Rivera and his friend were reinstated at once. What Rivera's fellow-students had signed at the bidding of their director of painting was a commendation of Fabrés himself, which the students were supposed to have themselves composed. The object of the

exercise it seems was to further Fabrés' ambitious pursuit of the chief executive post of the National School held by Mercado.

Rivera had both demonstrated his dislike of Fabrés, and implied a loyalty to Mercado which in fact he probably did not have; still, it brought him clearly into the limelight. But Rivera turned his back on the Academy at the age of sixteen, choosing to give up its self-congratulatory atmosphere to set himself up as an independent, working artist (5). Thus, in late 1903, he seems to have decided that his principal aesthetic interest lay in depicting Mexican life as he found it, though very little of this early work has been preserved:

Armed with brush and pencil and high resolve, the sixteen-year-old lad went out into the world to seek his artistic fortune. Four years he ranged up and down the countryside, painting ardently: houses, streets, churches, Indians, volcanoes, all the beauties of the picturesque and dramatic Mexican land. The impress of Velasco was on his immature style, and his work was not unworthy of his master, though it lacked the latter's gentle strength.

6.

Murillo, ever critical of the Academy's neglect of the potential afforded by indigent Mexican culture, knew of Rivera's withdrawal from the Academy and his new resolve to capture the real nature of everyday Mexican life. So began what would be for Rivera a most important relationship. When, in 1906, Rivera was sponsored by the Governor of the State of Veracruz, Don Teodora A. Dehasa, to study in Europe, Murillo helped Rivera raise further funds to supplement his scholarship by acting as agent in the sale of some of Rivera's paintings. From Rivera's point of view, his studies in Europe did not mean that he would turn his back upon his homeland. The whole purpose of the award, in the eyes of Dehasa (who, like Justo Sierra, believed that education was the only peaceful means of overcoming Mexico's grave social problems), was to allow Rivera an opportunity to study the art and culture of Europe at first hand, so that young men such as he could return to face Mexico's educational crises better prepared to help remedy them(7). Thus, with a letter of introduction to the Spanish painter Eduardo Chicharro y Aguéra (1876-1949) written by Murillo, Rivera left Mexico in 1907 to take up his studies in the Academy of San Fernando in Madrid. In Spain from 1907 to 1908:

Rivera...acquired a sound understanding of Spanish realism and its distinguishing characteristics...His subject, whether portrait or figure study, looms strikingly large in the foreground, and is usually made additionally

powerful by a subordinated and simple background. The results, monumental and impressive, are typified in the figure composition The Picador of 1907 and the portrait Head of a Breton Woman of 1908. 8.

Rivera used his first stay abroad to visit art galleries and museums, but complemented this by his more active interest in contemporary styles and artists. In 1909 he left Spain for Paris where he wished to practice different styles of expression. Initially, he was attracted by the new style adopted by Cézanne, and participated in the Paris exhibition of the works of 'The Independents'(9). Though he was also an enthusiastic convert to Impressionism and later, Cubism, the influence of Cézanne was an enduring one(10).

While Murillo had also left Mexico at around the same time, and spent some time in Boulogne-sur-Seine painting murals, by 1909 he was back in Mexico once more, and agitating as loudly as possible in his usual manner for a radical change of direction and emphasis in Mexican art. In the Academy itself, the revolt against Fabrés had by this time culminated in his dismissal and subsequent return to his native Europe; and Mercado was initiating his ill-fated programme of teaching methods founded upon the Pillet system. The arguments over the relative merits of Mexican and European art became particularly heated at this time, because 1910 would see the emotive celebration of the centenary of Mexico's Independence from Spain, and Murillo was determined that the occasion should be celebrated by an exhibition of native Mexican painters' works.

Murillo himself excited unfavourable comment when, in 1909, he painted a bacchanal of female nudes in a gallery of the National School which was intended to celebrate the installation there of a group of ancient works of art gifted to the nation. The gesture outraged the Porfirian Establishment, who officially ordered the destruction of the work(11). When it was announced that the centenary of Mexico's Independence was to be celebrated by an exhibition of European paintings, Murillo was incensed. He set out to organise a rival exhibition of works by native Mexican artists. Charlot's description of the official plans conveys both their expansiveness, and the irony of their slavish deference to Europe, as much in art, as in the economics of development:

The year 1910 was Centennial Year, with many festivities planned for September, to commemorate Hidalgo's uprising and Mexico's political independence from Spain. With a kind of surrealist illogic, contemporary Spanish art should add fitting gloss to the celebration. Toward this end

35,000 pesos were allotted, with a specially-constructed exhibition building thrown in. 12.

To further his plans for a counter-exhibition, Murillo wrote to Rivas Mercado, the Director of the National School, asking him to allow his newly-formed pressure group, the Society of Mexican Painters and Sculptors the use of several areas in the Academy building for the planned exhibition. So pleased about Murillo's plans for the exhibition was Mercado that he not only permitted the exhibition to take place in the Academy, but gave a personal donation of 300 pesos towards its expenses. Justo Sierra, always keen to encourage native artists, followed Mercado's example and himself donated 3,000 pesos(13).

Rivera, having in the meantime returned to Mexico, contributed works to the exhibition, as did many others, including one of the Academy's senior students, José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949).

Orozco, who would become a principal member of the government-sponsored public art programme of the 1920's, was three years older than Rivera. He had been studying in the Academy on a full-time basis for more than four years, having first pursued studies on scientific agriculture at the Agricultural School of San Jacinto in Mexico State. Thereafter, he had studied in the National Preparatory School in Mexico City with the aim of becoming an architect, before again changing his mind and opting to become an artist. To this end, he went to Murillo's evening classes in the National School of Fine Arts: 'In the National School of Fine Arts, he knew Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo), whose lectures against academicism and in favour of a suitably Mexican art excited him.'(14) Orozco supported himself during his early artistic studies by working as a draughtsman with the newspaper 'El Imparcial', before enrolling as a full-time student in the National School in 1907(15).

One of the most immediately obvious of the themes of Murillo's exhibition was that of the depiction of various aspects of the patria, the native land. A strong sense of ethnic consciousness was presented by many of the works such as in, for instance, Jorge Enciso's 'Anáhuac' (16) which depicted an Indian standing with his arms open and upraised to the sky. The artist's depiction of the Indian's posture is echoed by the natural shape of the cactus beside which he is standing, and the painting compellingly conveys the idea that the native Indian's actions are both natural, and in complete harmony with the spirit of the patria.

Another participating artist, Saturnino Herrán, contributed 'The Legend of the Volcanoes', which was a theme employed by a number of contemporary artists, including Diego Rivera. Murillo himself was also busy producing a series of depictions of volcanoes - for the Mexican artist, the volcano was an evocative national symbol suggesting both the strength and the dynamicism of the Mexican spirit.

The success of Murillo's rival exhibition suggests that there was now a crisis in art circles which mirrored that developing in national politics. Indeed, Murillo seized the initiative on behalf of the native artists, putting forward proposals for a collective effort, presumably to consolidate their grouping, and promoting the particular genre which he had been developing abroad - muralism. He formed a new society, which he called the '*Centro Artístico*', whose primary function was to organise and centralise the efforts of the native artists towards the lobbying of the government for the provision of mural sites in government buildings. Orozco, in his autobiography, recalls the enthusiasm and excitement felt by the group when they learned that they were to be permitted to decorate the walls of the Amphitheatre of the National Preparatory School as the first step in their mural programme, and recalls the swiftness with which events overwhelmed their cherished project:

We asked permission of the Secretariat of Instruction [headed by Sierra] to decorate the walls of the Amphitheatre of the Preparatory School. It was granted, and we portioned out the panels and set up scaffolding. The great Exposition of Mexican Painting had been held in September of 1910. In November we were preparing to do the murals. On the twentieth day of that month the Revolution began. There was a panic, and our projects were ruined or postponed.

17.

Clearly, then, had the first major governmental crisis of the Revolution not intervened, Mexico's first publically-commissioned murals would have been executed in 1910 by members of Murillo's '*Centro Artístico*'. However, it was not to be, and, with the postponement of the murals, Murillo and Rivera returned to Europe.

Members of the '*Centro Artístico*' who opted to return to the Academy to continue their studies, among them Orozco, soon found that the prevailing climate of the Academy was a disadvantageous change from that which had been produced in the '*Centro Artístico*' by Murillo. Still, the openly critical attitudes which had been the doctrine of the group did not just

disappear. Orozco and his fellows, having experienced the sense of active participation in the pursuit of the goals aspired to by the group which had brought success so nearly into their grasp, were not content to suffer the restrictions of Mercado's Pillet system, and their dissatisfaction with the Academic perspective of art was to emerge fully in the strike which they organised.

In the meantime, Orozco sought to get in touch with the ultimate reality of Mexican life, as he saw it, in much the same way as had Rivera. Whereas Rivera's efforts had brought him into contact with the more picturesque aspects of the remaining Indian enclave of the Capital, Orozco's search for the essence and reality of the *patria*, in complete contrast, took him into the worst *barrios* or slums of the Capital to depict their inhabitants, paying particular attention to the social situation of the Capital's prostitutes. He called the series of works he produced 'The House of Tears.'

Apart from these activities, Orozco also contributed caricatures(18) of leading politicians to a newspaper, 'El Ahuizote', which was openly anti-Madero. In, for instance, '**Los Dos Régimenes**' ("The Two Regimes"; published 28th October 1911), he shows Madero, wearing a crown and assisted by two equally clownish figures representing Pino Suárez and de la Barra of the Interim Government, trying unsuccessfully to remove an embedded sword from a female figure tied to a tree. To the other side of the tree stand two figures representing the old regime, a giant clad in a ragged uniform representing Díaz whose hand drips blood on to the head of the diminutive, tottering figure of Bernardo Reyes who is supporting himself on crutches, and it is apparent that the violated figure tied to the tree is the Nation. Orozco's caption, "The pigmies are trying to continue the work of the giant..." shows his contempt for Madero's 'radicalism', and his view of the extent of the national crisis. Madero is again scorned, though not directly, in '**Tal para Cual**' ('Two of a Kind'; published 25th November 1911). The two caricatured figures represent Gustavo Madero, the President's brother, who is being supported by a gangling, staring Emiliano Zapata. Madero's drunken brother bears the slogan '*Ojo Parado*' - Orozco's catchphrase for corruption, and his arm is draped round Zapata's shoulder. These are "two of a kind" in that they represent disruptive forces which threaten the shaky government of Madero because they are beyond his effective control - no

matter that they actually stood for very different things. Orozco, who considered himself to be genuinely apolitical, points out in his autobiography that he could just as easily have worked for a journal favourable to Madero(19), and without qualms.

#### The Art Students' Strike, 1911-1912

The art students' strike of 1911 to 1912, though in itself of major significance in establishing the nature of artistic participation in the revolutionary struggle, was also of great significance with regard to the status of many of the figures discussed in Chapter 1: for Sierra and Rivas Mercado, it spelled out to everyone that their efforts had failed. For Murillo, his foreign successor Alfredo Ramos Martínez, and to a lesser extent, José Vasconcelos, the art students' strike was the beginning of their ascendancy. To understand the real importance of the strike, it must be seen not as an isolated and contained episode of dissension, but rather as a component of the overall groundswell of rebellion which would culminate in the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz and his positivistic values.

The dictator's downfall was a direct result of the rejection of the Porfirian system by certain social groups, but by no means was there a genuine socialist revolution because the working classes, except the *campesinos*, were directed by the bourgeoisie and prevented from assuming the control and direction of the state. The art students' strike was itself politically significant, not only because most of the rebellious students were supporters of Madero, but because the strike was also directed against the 'culturally modified positivist' educational policies of the late Porfiriato. These were the ideas of Justo Sierra and were promoted in the Academy by the imposition of the restrictive artistic dictates of first Fabrés, then Mercado, with the latter's insistence upon the teaching of the simplistic Pillet system. The students, many of whom had assumed Murillo's views of nationalism in art, and of art communicating with society as a whole, wished to replace the Pillet system with the teaching of Impressionism in open-air schools.

While this was a rebellion in an artistic context, it was also a politically-motivated rejection of the educational policy of Sierra, who despite having aided Murillo's group with their 1910 exhibition, nevertheless adhered to his practice of directing and controlling everything from

his position of centralised authority. Sierra did not adopt the option of directing Mercado to allow the students more freedom in the matter of their education, an option which was open to him as the Minister of Education. To do so would have meant that he would effectively have lost control over the development of the enlightened and dedicated class of native educationalists which he was cultivating in the hope that new cultural leaders, native and nationalistic, would arise and inspire the poor, and the working class by the nobility and self-sacrifice of their efforts. Not surprisingly this rather idealistic programme was rejected by the increasingly militant art students, who saw that, at this early stage, Madero's programme seemed to promise more immediately effective measures - whatever others, like Orozco, seemed to think.

On 29th June 1911, the students' growing unrest was precipitated by Mercado's refusal to allow them to use the assembly room of the students' union as a forum of political discussion which favoured Madero:

The conflict arose when the director, architect Antonio Rivas Mercado, primarily worried by the public activities of the students in supporting the electoral campaign of Francisco I. Madero, cancelled the permission he had given for the use of the room which the students' union used for meetings...

20.

The students had previously been active in lobbying journalists over their cause, but when, as Charlot relates, the conflict was aggravated by the introduction of a hitherto-unknown degree of force in the Academic controversies, the students' response stimulated increased journalistic support for their views, and the nation became more fully aware of the crisis in Porfirian educational policy when the issue hit the headlines:

In previous troubles, students had been urged to attend classes. Now a squad of policemen had orders to throw them out of the school bodily if they attempted to get in. With a flourish that won reporters and news photographers over to their side, the uncowed students re-formed ranks outside the Academy building. They planted their easels in public parks, and sketched and painted what they saw and what they painted were people in motion, and landscapes drenched in a sunlight filtered through green foliage. Thus a breath of Impressionism - modern enough for the Americas and the year 1911 - threatened the reign of bitumen shadows inherited from the nineteenth-century Nazarenes.'

21.

So began the Impressionist experiment: as yet, it was still without official or academic recognition. However, as the students discovered to their delight, the principles of

Impressionism and the freedom they enjoyed from the stuffy supervision they had endured in the Academy both contributed to their sense of active involvement in the mainstream of Mexican life, a feeling which was to sustain them during the long months of the strike. The fall of Díaz, and the replacement of Justo Sierra by Francisco Vázquez Gómez as Madero's new education minister in late 1911, did not affect the students' position as much as they might have hoped. Mercado stubbornly would retain his position as overall director of the Academy for eight months, until the strike ended with his resignation on 19th April, 1912, and the granting to the students of all their demands, which included the revocation of Mercado's expulsion order against the student leaders of the strike. Despite their triumph, Madero's minister, Vázquez Gómez, seems to have responded unenthusiastically over the whole issue of the teaching of Impressionism as part of the Academy's syllabus, and nothing more was done during Madero's presidency about it.

However, on another educational front, Madero's presidency saw the first involvement of Vasconcelos, the future minister of education who would provide public money for the mural movement, in the attempt to radicalise educational policy. Though Vasconcelos had expressed his dissatisfaction with the escapist nature of the *Ateneo de Juventud* by leaving it, by this time (1911), the ideology of the members of the *Ateneo* had undergone a remarkable change, 'They were no longer a circle of lovers of culture but a circle of friends with visions of action.'<sup>(22)</sup> Vasconcelos and Alberto Pani (Under-secretary of Public Instruction in the Madero government) set about organising the new '*Universidad Popular*', and drew on the active members of the *Ateneo* to form the teaching staff of this educational venture. Unfortunately for Vasconcelos's grand designs, Madero was assassinated by Huerta's men and the Maderista dreams died with him before they had a real chance to become established. Fearing for his own life, Vasconcelos fled to the United States and safety, leaving the '*Universidad Popular*' experiment in ruins. Vasconcelos was shocked by the murder of Madero, and became further enraged by Huerta's political opportunism. He promptly took the side of Huerta's opponents, whose chief spokesman was Carranza. For the duration of his stay in the United States during 1913, Vasconcelos was Carranza's apologist.

If Huerta's ruthless assumption of power was to bring nothing more than bloodshed to the

Mexican people in general, it did surprisingly prove to be of some benefit to the Academy's restless students. As yet, no official sanction of their actions to introduce Impressionism into the curricula had emerged, but with the irony which is so often evident in the Academy's history, what was generally bad for the nation was somehow to its advantage of the Academy:

In this confusion appeared Alfredo Ramos Martínez, fresh from Paris with the theories and ideas of the Impressionists, to become the self-styled leader of the revolting students. Actually he was in no more of a position to champion the rights and ideals of the new generation than any of the other foreigners, but when Victoriano Huerta seized control of Mexico in 1913, Nemesio García Naranjo, a friend of Martínez', was chosen minister of education. Martínez thus became director of the Academy, and it consequently turned Impressionist.

23.

Thus, in 1913, by an unexpected route, the students won the last round of their struggle. Director Martínez founded the open-air school of Santa Anita, called by the students '*Barbizon*' after the woods near Paris which had been favoured by the early Impressionists in the 1840's. The two future muralists who were still at the Academy at this point, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros(1895-1974) had both been involved in the strike which had had as one of its aims the founding of the open-air school of Impressionism, but they now responded differently to it.

The youngest of the three muralists dealt with in this study, Siqueiros, had just entered the Academy in 1911, the year in which the strike had erupted. He was then fifteen years of age, and though one of the youngest participants, had nevertheless become so enthusiastic as to have been arrested by the police for his part in the unrest. He had come to the Academy from his studies at the French-English College in Mexico City, and had found himself suddenly embroiled in the most activist and militant dispute going on in Mexican higher education at that time, and, when he later experienced the rarified atmosphere of Santa Anita while at the same time observing the nature of the current political regime of General Huerta, his enthusiasm for active participation in events once more surfaced. Siqueiros and a group of his fellow students used the seclusion of '*Barbizon*' to vent their feelings against Huerta in rather conspiratorial meetings(24). The caricaturist Orozco's response to '*Barbizon*' was to decry its atmosphere of passive reflection.

### 'La Vanguardia' and the Political Awareness of Artists.

Though Orozco's sceptical response to *'Barbizon'* was probably unique amongst Martínez' students, this did not mean that the Impressionistic school of Santa Anita was therefore left to flourish: once again, the Academy did not remain unaffected by instability in contemporary national politics. Carranza's Constitutionalist and the forces of Villa and Zapata triumphed over Huerta's forces in 1914, and Murillo, who had by this time returned to Mexico, had allied himself to Carranza's cause in order to overthrow Huerta. In so doing, the tireless politico-artistic activist had acquired a reputation in the headquarters group of Carranza's Constitutionalist army, and so, after Huerta was ousted, Carranza had the outspoken Murillo installed as overall Director of the Academy in Martínez' place. Martínez' spell as the leading influence in the Academy, and his school of Impressionism at Santa Anita, had both lasted only a few months. The easy-going and other-worldly atmosphere of *'Barbizon'* appalled Murillo:

Barbizon lasted only a few months. With or without the help of its youthful plotters, First Chief Carranza ousted General Huerta, who fled into a California exile. Aesthetic fortunes followed political fortunes, and gentle Ramos Martínez was replaced as director of the Academy by Dr. Atl. Having already helped the generation of Orozco and Rivera to an understanding of greatness in the arts, Dr. Atl now endeavoured to train the younger men to his heroic concept. He could hardly stomach the pleasant atmosphere of Barbizon, with its pretty Indian maidens patiently holding pots to their hips or balancing lacquer *bateas* on their heads, and he was even less pleased with the palettes loaded with rainbow hues that Ramos Martínez favored. He would make or break the young students along no less than cosmic lines: "Operative from this date, and valid until countermanded, there will be no more live models in this school. - Mexico, September 12, 1914...Dr. Atl."

25.

Murillo's plans for the Academy were to transform it into a school of arts and crafts, rather than a school of fine arts: the conventions of academic study of the fine arts were to be replaced by those of the popular art workshop. His primary concern on the level of the teaching of art seems to have been one of the tuition of the students in practical techniques, rather than the demonstration of stylistic principles. His motivation was based on his belief that the work of an artist is dictated by the media and materials employed, rather than in the Bohemian belief that the spontaneity and inspiration of the artist will somehow transcend the limitations imposed on the work by the characteristic features of the style employed.

However, Murillo's attitudes are all the more astounding when one compares them to those he had advocated during his recent stay in Europe. Murillo, perhaps inspired with idealism by the tremendous European enthusiasm for radicalism and modern art, and also for general innovation in culture, had published a magazine called 'Action d'Art' in which he proposed a very ambitious project aimed at the establishment of an exclusively artistic colony.

The French capital city of Paris was, in Murillo's plans, to be wholly redesigned and rebuilt to both inspire and accommodate a select cadre of artists of all disciplines, including, for example, painters, sculptors, and idealist writers like José Enrique Rodó, the author of 'Ariel.' The city, thus changed, was to be for the exclusive use of 'the talented', and they were to be allowed to raptly ponder the artistic glories and enjoy the illuminating discussions of their fellows, in utter dissociation from the mundane material world. Even the construction and preparation of the artists' city was to proceed without any disturbance whatsoever, be the cause of the disruption either social or political(26).

Murillo's elitist project never got off the ground, however, for two socio-political reasons. Murillo himself had been distracted by the violent rise to power of the usurper of Madero, General Huerta; and when, in 1914, the First World War engulfed Europe, even the wildly optimistic Murillo, by then back in Mexico, had abandoned his visions of the establishment of the ultimate cultural centre. It was indeed ironic that Murillo, professedly something of a socialist, should encourage the foundation of this elitist, but totally impractical, 'superclass' of artistic aristocrats and demagogues.

Nevertheless, although Murillo's vision of the elitist artistic colony in Paris fell through, he took back to Mexico with him his new-found drive for artistic radicalism as well as his frustration and disappointment. His desire to promote in the Academy, by means of the art workshop idea, a group of talented artists who would command a degree of popular support, can then be seen as his attempt to establish a working and effective example of applied Arielism. Ironically, Murillo's attempt to foster a certain radicalism, and nationalism (the arts and crafts of Mexico were to be the basic media of instruction) in Mexican art via his workshop in the Academy buildings, was just as short-lived as had been his predecessor Martínez' attempt to promote Impressionism. The political tide turned again after only a few short months and, with

the armies of Villa and Zapata advancing on the Capital, Murillo emulated Carranza and fled to Orizaba near Veracruz, taking with him those students whose loyalties lay with the Constitutionalists, including Siqueiros and Orozco.

Murillo, now promoted to Head of Propaganda by First Chief Carranza, installed his group in a disused church in Orizaba from which the group produced the Constitutionalist newspaper, 'La Vanguardia'. To Murillo, having lost the accommodation afforded by the Academy buildings was only a minor setback, for now his students could participate at first hand in the Revolution, but without the loss of their status as artists and cultural figures - more so now than ever, these students seemed to be following the Arielist line of disinterested, heroic self-sacrifice in pursuit of a nationalist goal.

On the political propaganda front, Murillo's main contribution was the foundation of the Constitutionalist newspaper, 'La Vanguardia'. As its title suggests, the paper was intended from the first to express Constitutionalist views as being a radical solution to Mexico's problems, well to the fore of Mexican political thought. Under Murillo's guidance, a group of artists and writers worked on the paper using, as a rather blatant piece of anti-clericalism, a disused church (*Los Dolores*) in Orizaba near Veracruz, as their workshop. Those who worked on the paper included José Clemente Orozco (who produced mainly anti-clerical cartoons and caricatures) and David Alfaro Siqueiros, a staff officer.

The content of the newspaper was mainly comprised of national news as seen from the Constitutionalist point of view, but it also included articles on international affairs such as the war in Europe, the Panama Canal, Japan and the United States.

On the contemporary situation in Mexico, there was daily information about current battles, political articles on Zapata, Villa and General Huerta, a 'doctrinal page' with views on the Revolution and articles which urged workers to support the Constitutionalist Government of Carranza and which explained why the Constitutionalists could help them. Attention was paid to the urban working class of Mexico with a 'Worker Page' addressed exclusively to them. There were sections on forestry, education and divorce, and on the cultural level, articles appeared on the theatre, in particular '*El Teatro Llave*', Orizaba; and on novels such as *La Mariposa de Lupe* and *La Muerte de Cerdo* by Julio del Verde. Information about

train schedules, hotels, markets, telegraph and social services, and the price of food was provided in most issues. All of these features were of course designed to attract a large readership to the paper, who would thus be made more receptive to the persuasive political columns of the paper.

In the first full edition of the paper on 21st April 1915, the publishers set out a fourteen-point plan of the aims of the newspaper. Some of these appear to be more plausible as radical thought than others, for instance, point three asserts the importance of the agrarian question thus: 'To study thoroughly the agrarian problem and to resolve it in a revolutionary way!'; whereas point eleven asserts the importance of the Mexican woman as a 'threat' to be conquered and overcome: 'To take to the conscience of the Mexican woman the conviction that she must have in this moment. We can obtain all imaginable conquests but if we don't conquer the intelligence of the woman, we will always have an enemy inside our own home.' Though the former statement is more acceptable than the latter, both statements are vague. More importantly, the remaining points are almost totally devoted to either the 'merits' of Carranza's Constitutionalism, or the advantages of a policy of almost exclusive nationalism. Of the former group, points 1,2,4,7,10 and 12 all extol Constitutionalism; whereas points 5,6,8,9 and 13 all assert the importance of nationalist policies as a means of achieving 'liberation' and overcoming Mexico's economic problems in the future. However, it is in point fourteen that the real purpose of the newspaper becomes clear: 'To point out the errors of the Revolution'. Clearly the writers of 'La Vanguardia' thought of themselves as reviewers of the Revolutionary struggle.

Apart from the publication of this programme of aims, there was also an advance notice that a following edition would print the main articles of Carranza's *Plan de Guadalupe* in order to attract support to combat Villa's forces. The Plan was being reinstated to perform almost exactly the same purpose for which it had been used against Huerta. The main articles of the Plan appeared on 23rd April, 1915, and revolved around the central issue of uniting all groups under Carranza's command. The Revolutionary ideal of the Constitutionalists was vaguely stated as 'the largest amount of common well-being.' (The implication of the statement in its context was that this common well-being could only be achieved with the

defeat of Villa.)

The next edition of the paper, that of the 24th April, carried a statement made by Murillo on the two other revolutionary factions. In it, he indicated that Villa and his group were the principal enemy; and while he apparently sympathised with the aims and origins of the Zapatistas, they were also criticised due to their intolerable association with Villa: 'The principles of *Zapatismo* and *Villismo* are antithetical. The revolution of the south is a violent eruption caused by a very intense popular necessity...It is a spontaneous manifestation of an oppressed and hungry people...It is the product of persecution but it commits the serious error of allying with Villa...The Division of the North is the arm of foreign capitalists, of the clergy and the embryo of militarism'. As events would show, Murillo's description would eventually fit the Constitutionalists themselves when they came to power far better than it had ever matched Villa's Northern Division.

The Zapatistas were criticised by Murillo for their alliance with Villa: but the statement also carries the implication that the aims and revolutionary endeavour of the Zapatistas are limited. Their participation in the Revolution is diminished by Murillo, who refers to it as 'The revolution of the south...', almost as if to make it seem to be a localised, lesser struggle. Again, he seizes upon the limited nature of the demands of the agrarian reform movement to compare it unfavourably with the supposedly 'national' movement of the Constitutionalists - but he neglects to point out that at no time had the Zapatistas claimed that their manifesto and aims were a national programme.

About a week later, in the edition of 30th April, Murillo identified the essential motivating spirit of Constitutionalism in terms of nationalism. The Constitutionalist movement, he stated, was 'neither socialist nor anarchist. It has its own character which is more transcendental than all known liberal doctrines. It is not a movement born of a group; it is the movement of the whole people.' There are some obvious difficulties with this statement: Murillo's claim that the 'movement' was not born of a group is obviously historically inaccurate, given the particular origins of the **Plan de Guadalupe**. Furthermore, to claim that Constitutionalism represents the national 'movement' is also debateable, as at least two major revolutionary groups opposed Carranza's 'movement'. The denial that Constitutionalism is either socialist or

anarchist is also of interest, and we may assume that this public denial is intended to allay fears arising from the alliance of the 'anarcho-syndicalist' *Casa del Obrero Mundial* with the Constitutionalists. Finally, the claim that Constitutionalism is of a 'transcendental' character is extremely vague, and evades any attempt to explain the motivating spirit of the movement in more concrete and coherent terms. The implication that the character of Constitutionalism was very different from 'all known liberal doctrines' conceals its debts to the past, especially the *Reforma* period. As Marx's study of the Eighteenth Brumaire indicates, it also has more recent parallels with nineteenth-century European liberal ideas, notably in its anticlerical concerns.

On the alliance between Villa and Zapata, Murillo commented that the Zapatistas were allowing themselves to be misled by what he saw as their own idealistic socialism, while he attacked Villism with his customary intolerance: 'The reactionaries lack moral cohesion. They have no uniform programme. Zapatismo, in the clauses of the *Plan de Ayala*, holds on to a socialist hope, but some day will have to search for the lost path. The Villistas are the legal obstacles to the making of a Convention. They are personalistic, and their leader has such power that, when it is convenient for him, he will declare himself a dictator and renounce the mob.' ('La Vanguardia', 10th May.) Murillo has differentiated between the two factions which oppose the Constitutionalists: the Zapatistas are gently deprecated for what he sees as their political naivety; and the Villistas are merely 'the mob', whatever the strength of their local popularity.

More significantly, in the very first sentence of the quotation above, both groups are termed 'reactionary', and accused of being deficient in 'moral cohesion', whereas another article in the same issue points out that Carranza's movement is not similarly afflicted with these weaknesses: 'Constitutionalism has not fallen into the province of incoherence like its opponents: its course is righteous, its principles firm; its action determined by a singular feeling, and it stresses the need for social reform.' Constitutionalism, the writer claims, does not suffer from incoherence. However, it is obvious that by its very vagueness as a political doctrine, it is subject to contradictory and intuitive assertions. The very idea propounded above that '...its action (is) determined by a singular feeling', together with Murillo's assertion

that its nature was 'transcendental', clearly demonstrates that at this time Constitutionalism was not at all well-defined in terms of a coherent programme. The articles published in the paper do not deal with any specific social or economic issues, their authors choosing instead to make emotive assertions designed to fire the popular imagination by conveying a suggestion of the supposedly all-embracing vitality, constructivism, and dynamism of the Constitutionalist movement. They also stress the political awareness of the movement, which, they claim, is more mature and pragmatic than that of the idealistically-motivated 'socialist' Zapatistas, or the 'incoherent' faction who support Villa.

Worse still, both these separate groups were supposedly the dupes of the powerful Mexican clergy: in an article which appeared on 23rd April, both Villa and Zapata were caricatured as slavishly following religious doctrine: 'Zapata hoists the flag of (the Virgin of) Guadalupe, and Villa who refuses to fight on Good Friday, has forty priests following him who approve his actions.' By denigrating the figures of the leaders of the two anti-Constitutionalist groups in this anti-clerical manner, the writer diverts attention from the principles of agrarian reform which Zapata stood for. In an article written some eighteen months later and dated 1st October, 1916, Zapata answered these charges:

...these attacks upon religious cults and popular conscience are counter-productive and prejudicial because they persuade no one, convince no one; they only exacerbate passions, create martyrs, awaken more vividly the superstitious which they wish to dominate, and give strength to the enemy whom they pretend to fight. 27.

Though both Orozco and Siqueiros contributed diligently to the production of the paper, they responded differently to events in Orizaba. Charlot's graphic description of the students' life there illustrated the prevailing conditions under which they worked, while also suggesting the effects of this environment on both Orozco and Siqueiros:

Carranza mostly fought the agrarian hordes of Zapata. A daily batch of prisoners - Indian farmers turned warriors, in white calzones and wide-brimmed hats - was brought in from the battlefields and shot in the city square in the early dawn. The sacked church, which was to the artists a combination dormitory, studio, and press-room, faced that square. It was Orozco's job to toll the church bells to call his colleagues to breakfast. Presumably, it was the dawn shootings that awoke him in turn.

Siqueiros felt quite at ease with this strong fare. Longing for more than a sideline contact with the battlefields, he soon left for the forthright military pursuit, the youngest officer on the staff of General Diéguez, steady foe of Villa. 28.

Siqueiros was 'quite at ease with this strong fare' - and became a soldier. Orozco, charged with tolling the dawn bell, was rather less comfortable - perhaps because he realised that in waking his fellows he was tolling the bells of the ex-church over the bodies of the fallen Zapatista prisoners in the square outside, and as his earliest caricatures for 'El Ahiuzote' show, he did not lack sympathy for the suffering poor. In the caricatures he produced for 'La Vanguardia'(29) such as, 'PROTECTIONISM? Huerta and the Archbishop - Quick, Liberty protects us!'(25th April 1915) - 'Liberty' being the flag of the United States of America; and, 'The Divorce Law - Right, let's separate...and (what about) the chirper?' (the cartoon showed a parrot on its perch above the heads of a couple with eight energetic children), he alternated between domestic satire and invective against the international supporters of Huerta.

Perhaps at the instigation of Murillo, Carranza commissioned Orozco and two other artists to paint large works in the museum of San Juan de Ulúa, in Veracruz. Orozco painted '**The Last Spanish Troops on Mexican Soil at *San Juan de Ulúa***'(30) in a naturalistic style, showing the soldiers calmly awaiting orders rather than engaged in conflict or at the mercy of their victorious Mexican foe. On the strength of his previous work, and of the murals he would later paint, this was an unusual work, restrained - even decorative - and with what was for him an exceptionally nationalistic theme.

Later, while Siqueiros was promoting the Constitutionalist cause as a second captain attached to the General Staff of the Western Division under General Manuel M. Diéguez, Orozco mounted an exhibition of his paintings of the slum *barrios*. On show in Orozco's exhibition, which took place in Mexico City in 1916, were one hundred and twenty-three water-colour paintings of women and prostitutes of the Capital's notorious red-light district, Calle Cuautemotzin. Orozco's own title for the series was 'The House of Tears', which betrays his characteristically ironic attitude towards a favourite subject, human vanity. The paintings are rather stylised portraits of coquettish young prostitutes or red-faced madames and their well-heeled clients, sometimes candid like Degas's 1886 '**The Tub**', as in '**Toilette Intime**'(1912); sometimes bohemian (if less highly-coloured) after Toulouse-Lautrec, as in '**Nymph**'(1913); and sometimes compassionate but matter-of-fact, as in '**The Desperate Woman**'(1912).

### Vasconcelos during the Revolution.

José Vasconcelos, who was to be the official patron of the mural movement of the 1920's under Obregón, had a mixed time during the war. During the Revolution, Vasconcelos changed from being a fairly obscure Mexico City lawyer, to holding a senior post in the provisional Government of the Convention, that of education minister; and then soon afterwards found himself taking on the role of an exiled intellectual. These are the bare facts; but there are two versions of his fall from favour, both of which involve corruption and fraud, so however one looks upon Vasconcelos in the 1920's when he was re-instated as education minister, this recent association with sharp practices says much, either about the man himself, or about his senior political associates, including Carranza.

After the assassination of Madero, Vasconcelos allied himself with Huerta's opponents, the Constitutionalists under Carranza, and during 1913 acted on Carranza's behalf in the United States as a sort of unofficial ambassador. In 1914, Vasconcelos returned to Mexico at the behest of Carranza, and accepted a post in the First Chief's new government as Director of the National Preparatory School, in Mexico City. However, Vasconcelos did not hold his post for very long. According to one version of his rise to power, he was too outspoken about the First Chief's corrupt practices<sup>(31)</sup>, and found himself in jail as a result. He managed to escape, and made his way to Aguascalientes where he declared his support for the Convention, and was rewarded by being appointed Minister of Education in the Provisional Cabinet. By having joined the administration of Carranza's rivals, he had received promotion, for he was now charged with the responsibility for, and overall control of, the educational policy of the Convention. It is worth noting that, if it is true that Vasconcelos's defection from the Constitutionalist standard was as a direct result of Carranza's personal enmity because he had criticised the corruption prevalent amongst the Constitutionalist políticos, his outspoken integrity stands in stark contrast to Murillo's flattery in the propaganda of '*La Vanguardia*'.

However, Vasconcelos was to be an uncomfortable partner in the Convention's cabinet, and it was this which prevented him from achieving any more than the most administrative decisions. It has been argued that he was repelled by what he considered as the 'chaos' resultant from the Villistas' occupation of the Capital, which he called a 'cannibal's nightmare',

and could accomplish little or nothing because of their behaviour and the instability of the forces which constituted the Convention's armies(32). However, another account has him again involved in accusations of corruption, this time about himself, and again the object of a general's personal enmity. His accuser was Juan Banderas, a Sinaloan general in Villa's Division of the North:

Villa...demanded to know what he had against Vasconcelos, who a few months earlier had been full of praise for Villa. Banderas replied that before the revolution, he had been arrested in Mexico City in connection with a land dispute. Vasconcelos had then visited him in his cell, offering to defend him and secure his release in return for a large sum of money. Banderas raised the money at great cost to his family. But once he had handed it over, Vasconcelos never reappeared in the prison and left him to rot... But the revolution converted this particular peasant into General Juan Banderas, and he was determined to settle accounts with this cut-purse lawyer.

Villa suggested that Banderas leave the minister alone, so as not to provoke a governmental crisis, offering to reimburse the sum out of Northern Division funds. Banderas refused. The money did not concern him in the least, it was just that such an immoral man should not be secretary of education and responsible for the upbringing of children and young people.

33.

Prompted by his fear of the unruliness of the Division of the North, he persuaded Gutiérrez to remove the Government of the Convention from the reach of the Villistas to the relative safety of a remote corner of Nueva León. They escaped under the protection of four thousand loyal troops, but were pursued both by their avowed enemies, the Constitutionals, and their recent supporters, the Villistas:

Vasconcelos did leave the capital, but as an open enemy intent on making propaganda against Villism and Zapatism. He later became secretary of education in the Obregón government, and later, as is well known, he developed into the spokesman and theoretician of the most reactionary tendencies in Mexico.

34.

This conclusion refers to his later affiliation with the pro-clerical faction, for he became a public apologist for the Church during its protracted struggle with the Jacobin governments of the 1920's. Then, in the thirties, he publicly espoused Franco's *Hispanidad* fascism, as did Murillo.

In a last attempt to gain international support, Gutiérrez despatched Vasconcelos on a diplomatic mission to the United States with instructions to seek recognition from Woodrow Wilson, the U.S. President, for the Provisional President, so that his administration could thus

achieve some legitimacy over that of Carranza's. Furthermore, he hoped to forestall any attempt by the forces of the Convention to organise another cabinet. But as Vasconcelos discovered, the North American President was by this time occupied by the First World War in Europe, and, to resolve the matter of the neighbouring Mexican troubles, Wilson opted to support the Constitutionalist cause by extending U.S. recognition to Carranza's faction. Realising that now his enemy Carranza would be in a stronger position than ever, Vasconcelos made a pragmatic decision to remain in the United States.

From 1915, Vasconcelos spent most of the first period of his exile in New York, studying Greek philosophy in a library. The fruits of this seclusion were his first philosophical treatises, 'Pitágoras'; and, 'Monismo Estético'. These works were in fact developments of Rodó's essay 'Ariel.' As Rodó had done, Vasconcelos contrasted the aestheticism of Latin American culture against the materialism of North American and European industrialised societies. He asserted that Latin American culture must be both preserved and extended so that it could challenge the superiority of Anglo-Saxon materialism.

After a brief visit to Peru, Vasconcelos settled in Los Angeles on his return to the United States, and commenced studying contemporary radical political and educational theory, paying particular attention to the writings of the Russian communist radicals, Lenin and Anatoly V. Lunacharsky, the Soviet Commissar of Education (who Vasconcelos thought of as a co-worker, in so far as they were both educationalists).

Through his studies, Vasconcelos came to view art as the medium of expression which could, by transcending the everyday level of reality, excite the observer with a new vision of life. Thus freed from the perceptive chains imposed by reality, the observer perceived the optimistic joys of constructive endeavour, which eclipse conflict. A profound, general awareness and appreciation of art, Vasconcelos believed, would cause conflict to be easily resolved, for the transcendence of conflict through fine art would destroy the ground of conflict by diminishing the immediacy of it, and ultimately create harmony. So, believing that art as a vital expression of human awareness had the ability to inspire heroic self-sacrifice in the pursuit of an ideal, Vasconcelos was later to organise the mural movement of the 1920's, and to ensure government support for it.

In 1919, Vasconcelos wrote a play in Los Angeles, 'Prometeo Vencedor', using the medium of drama to convey his theories of the socially-detrimental effect of Positivism and industrialisation. Indeed, he condemned industrialisation as being unable to exert any benign, constructive, or fruitful influence on society whatsoever. His play, written in the wake of the First World War (which he asserted had demonstrated to the world once and for all the malignancy of Positivism, which invariably led only to the conflict of interests) celebrated the progressive, constructive spirit of the human will, as symbolised by the central protagonist of the drama, Prometheus. The drama also asserted that conflict could be avoided through education but, this perspective was naive, being constructed around an over-simplified concept of the modern state. What Vasconcelos ignored was the function of conflict in bringing the proletariat to recognise possibilities for improvement in their social circumstances and the nature of their power. Vasconcelos misunderstood the historical process by believing that sophisticated culture alone would provide the means of forging a new humanity whose appreciation of art and culture would free them from materialism.

Vasconcelos's attitude towards Carranza had been hostile ever since the latter had imprisoned him for his outspoken criticism. When, in 1920, General Alvaro Obregón began campaigning for the presidency, Vasconcelos's hopes rose. Later in the year, when Carranza was assassinated by Obregonistas, Vasconcelos was at last free to return to Mexico.

#### Rivera's Activities during the Revolution.

Throughout all this most divisive and bloody phase of the Revolution, Diego Rivera had been painting in Europe, having returned there after Murillo's successful exhibition of native Mexican painting in 1910. Rivera had adopted the new and radical style of painting called 'Cubism'. On his first stay in France, Rivera had been impressed and influenced by the work of Cézanne, whose style in some respects anticipated that of the Cubists. There are clearly three phases discernable in Rivera's utilisation of Cubism during his stay in France, but his first efforts on his return to Europe in late 1910 show him experimenting with 'pointillism', a style of painting which was a form of neo-impressionism developed by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac. He employed this pointillist style in landscapes such as '*Las tierras quemadas de*

**Cataluña** - 'The scorched lands of Catalonia' (1911)(35).

Having participated in the Paris exhibition of work by 'The Independents' in 1912, Rivera painted a series of landscapes based on Cézanne's structural composition of flat, angular planes. Works in this style include, '**Landscape with Farmhouse**' (1912) and two landscapes of Toledo which he painted in 1912 and 1913. These were followed by works such as '**Man with Cigarette**', '**Viaduct**', '**Portrait of a Painter**' and '**Young Man in a Gray Sweater**' which demonstrate that by 1914 Rivera had fully adopted the principles of analytic cubism.

By the outbreak of the First World War, Rivera had moved to Majorca, and had exhibited his work in Madrid. But by this time Rivera had become interested in another form of cubism, synthetic cubism. Works such as '**Marine Fusilier**' (1914), '**The Rooftops**' (1914) and '**Shore of Majorca**' (1914) demonstrate Rivera's transition from analytic to synthetic cubism with the introduction of new textures into the paintings. From 1915 to 1917, Rivera explored the potential of this more constructivist form of cubism, and this new interest marks the beginning of the second phase of his exploration of cubism.

The third phase which existed contemporaneously with the second, but which was clearly a development of it, was Rivera's introduction of Mexican themes and concepts into his work: paintings such as '**The Awakener**' (1914), '**The Bullfight Ring**' (1915), '**Portrait of Martín Luis Guzmán**' (1915), '**Still Life with Gray Bowl**' (1915) and '**Zapatist Landscape**' (1915), belong to this third phase (36). Clearly, then, although Rivera was heavily committed while in Europe to the exploration of the new style, he was also aware of the current political and social turmoil which was gripping his native land. Despite this, he preferred to remain in Europe, thus avoiding any active participation in the revolutionary struggle in which Murillo, Siqueiros, and Orozco had engaged themselves. Even his generally decorative, token references to Mexico disappeared from his painting after a visit to Madrid in 1915.

However, by 1917 and again in Paris, Rivera was becoming dissatisfied with cubism. It seems that he was increasingly conscious of the fact that for him, the conventions of cubism were becoming too restrictive, and he felt that more and more these considerations of style

were interfering with what he wished his art to express. Between 1917 and 1920, Rivera produced some works which reveal the influence of Cézanne and Renoir; indeed, paintings from this period show a profusion of such influences. This state of affairs seems to have lingered with him until, in 1919, he met Siqueiros in Paris, who, fresh from Mexico, was enthusiastic about the climate of radical change prevailing in Mexican art circles. Rivera found Siqueiros's description of the Mexican art situation extremely interesting, and together they began to discuss the whole question of the need for a form of social art which would be both national and popular. Both men, imagining that the hostilities were effectively over, felt that a new form of art had to be found which was capable of expressing the prevalent sense of national optimism and the constructive atmosphere which were emerging in Mexican society in the aftermath of the bloodiest and most destructive phase of the Revolution.

#### Siqueiros, Rivera and Orozco.

The source of the new passion which had gripped Siqueiros, (and through him, the expatriate Rivera), lies in the ex-soldier's activities in Guadalajara in 1918. After he had left Orizaba, Siqueiros had been attached to General Diéguez's Western Division, which had held Guadalajara for Carranza. The art student-turned-soldier had maintained his interest in art by means of his acquaintance with local artists, and had been involved in the publication of a local mural periodical at the behest of Murillo, who, from the Capital, had been organising a network of such publications in Guadalajara, and other towns such as Tampico, Hermosillo and Mérida(37). Evidently Murillo was seeking to have his pre-revolutionary mural project revived, hence his attempt, with Siqueiros and others, to win over public opinion by means of these mural periodicals, which had appeared about late 1915.

Thus Siqueiros, by 1918, was very well known in local art circles in Guadalajara, in particular that of the town's '*Centro Bohemio*'. Siqueiros was convinced of the necessity for Mexican art to be radically reformed so that it might be fully capable of fulfilling the role of being a truly national art, and the '*Centro Bohemio*' of Guadalajara gave him a forum of discussion and a willing audience, including, among others, José Guadalupe Zuno (future governor of the State of Jalisco and mural patron); and other future muralists, Ixca Farías, Carlos Orozco

Romero, and Amado de la Cueva.

Considering form and function in the new art of the revolution, this group (later named "The Congress of Artist-Soldiers of Guadalajara" by Siqueiros) agreed on the necessity of understanding the people and of acquiring knowledge of the ancient indigenous cultures (38). Murillo's influence is again evident in this, for he was at that time the chief protagonist of a radical change in art: in his abortive attempt to set up the workshop in the Academy in 1914, he had wished to change the basis of contemporary Mexican art from the established fine art tradition of the Academy to the idea of a much more practical and innovatory artistic expression. There would be a heavy emphasis on the understanding of artistic form, and the function of art in a much wider social context. It was precisely from that perspective that the Guadalajara group approached the subject in their discussions, but, as Siqueiros was later to state, it was the events of the Revolution themselves which awoke among Mexican artists a fuller sense of public responsibility, and a greater desire to investigate Murillo's conception of Mexican art history particularly the historic social function of art he had discerned. Siqueiros clearly felt that the events of the Revolution had forced a new awareness upon Mexican artists in general, and, in his autobiography declares:

...it had killed traditional Parisian bohemianism in us. We were able to conceive that art had a great social function in all important periods of history, whether it be State art or subversive art against the State.

39.

These were the concepts which fired Siqueiros' imagination, and which he communicated to Rivera when they met in Paris in 1919. Many of the topics discussed by the two artists were to be developed and incorporated into the various manifestos or artistic principles which they produced in the 1920's. In the meantime, Rivera travelled to Italy in 1920 to spend seventeen months studying Italian fresco painting by the Renaissance masters Giotto, Mantegna, Masaccio and Uccello(40), in anticipation of a chance to paint murals on his return to Mexico in 1921.

José Clemente Orozco, after leaving Orizaba and having held his exhibition of **The House of Tears** in the Capital, had quite different experiences from those of Rivera or Siqueiros. He decided to leave Mexico in 1917 with the intention of residing in the United

States, but, when crossing the Mexico-U.S. border, his series of drawings were inspected by U.S. Customs officials who destroyed sixty of the series as they considered them to be 'immoral prints'(41). Despite this shattering setback, Orozco made his way to San Francisco where he was to spend most of the next two years supporting himself by working as a photo-finisher and enlarger. Before returning to Mexico in 1919, he paid a visit to New York where he painted Harlem and Coney Island and met Siqueiros on his way to Europe.

Back in Mexico, Orozco found that Alfredo Ramos Martínez had managed to re-establish a number of open-air schools. However, Orozco was just as sceptical of this method of teaching as he had ever been, and, refusing to become involved in these, seems to have spent some time working as an independent artist, contributing caricatures and illustrations to a variety of periodicals and newspapers before being employed by José Vasconcelos, the new minister of education, to produce illustrations for a series of popular editions of the classics which Vasconcelos initiated in the early 1920's (42).

#### Murillo's Mixed Fortune, 1915-1920.

During the period 1915-1920, Murillo's loyalties appear to often have been divided, for he sometimes acted in favour of the Constitutionalists' interests (as in his manipulation of the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* on Carranza's behalf and the formation of the 'Red Battalions' in 1915); and sometimes his actions were clearly in opposition to what Carranza and other Constitutionalists felt were the best interests of their party, and by implication, the nation. Murillo's support of the tramway workers' strike of 1917, was in direct violation of the new Constitution, which of course was a reflection of Constitutionalist policy towards the proletariat. The occurrence in 1917 of the tramway workers' strike promoted a definite split between Murillo and President Carranza; and Murillo left Mexico for Los Angeles, California.

Murillo's activities in Los Angeles clearly prove that he had defected from Carranza's Constitutionalists: during this period of temporary exile, Murillo published a newspaper, named 'Sonora', which promoted the cause of the 'Jacobin' faction of the Constitutionalists headed by General Alvaro Obregón. In the next year, 1918, Murillo returned to Mexico apparently content to once again take up painting his favourite subject, volcanoes.

However his studies of Popocatépetl were interrupted in 1919 when the split between the two Constitutionalist factions and their respective leaders became quite open over Obregón's electoral campaign, and Carranza's attempts to have one of his proteges elected to the presidency. Murillo got himself into even deeper complications when he declared, not for Obregón, but for the First Chief for when Carranza was killed by Obregonistas, Murillo found himself in jail. He managed to escape from his confinement after two weeks spent in the prison of Santiago Tlaltelco, Mexico City; he then hid in an ex-convent in the Merced Market. There he embarked on another ambitious project by planning the conversion of his austere hiding place into a museum of popular arts. Two of his artist friends, Jorge Enciso, and Roberto Montenegro, were persuaded to approach Alberto J. Pani, the Minister of External Relations, with Murillo's plans for an exhibition of popular art which was intended to celebrate Mexico's Independence on the anniversary of this event in 1921. Murillo hoped that a successful exhibition would promote his project for the museum of popular art, and encourage a resurgence in native Mexican folk art. Events soon would bring together Murillo, Vasconcelos, and the muralists in an ambitious attempt to put all their ideas into practice.

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## Chapter Five

### THE MURAL MOVEMENT 1920-23

No less than any European art tradition, Mexican art has responded throughout its centuries-long history to the various social and political circumstances within which it has taken shape. During the early 1920's a government drive to create and communicate a national ideology nurtured a spirit of social consciousness in a group of young Mexican artists whom later generations of muralists throughout Latin America and beyond would respect as innovators and idealists. Contemporary muralists in the ghettos of U.S. cities and in the barrios of Nicaragua and Peru have drawn upon the themes, styles and values of their Mexican predecessors. The mural movement of the 1920's is a notable example of how contemporary concerns can be reflected by the art of the time. During its formative period, particular aesthetic and political conditions arose which brought about the new art aesthetic of state-sponsored muralism. Later disputes would reduce its momentum and influence its iconography, and it is the aim of this chapter to identify the ideological issues which encouraged these changes of style, subject-matter and membership of the muralists' group - dedicated in their Manifesto to 'a fighting educative art for all' - through a detailed examination of contemporary political events from 1921 to the end of 1923.

The activities of the three muralists Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros during the Revolution, and during the Presidency of Venustiano Carranza have been described in the preceding chapter. Particular attention was also paid in earlier chapters to the years of discontent which led up to the Revolution since many of the concerns and influences seen in the post-Revolutionary murals originate then. The problematic significance of the academic and popular art models which the muralists incorporate into their work will become apparent in the analysis of their murals. Their ideological significance, however, can best be understood in relation to contemporary politics. The increasing hostility of a bourgeois and petit-bourgeois public with traditional fine art preferences and values (most pronounced from 1924) itself suggests the controversial outspokenness of some of the murals created within the government programme.

Having traced the muralists' individual commitment and participation in the Revolution, the origins of the mural movement of the 1920's can be more clearly evaluated here. In contrast to Rivera and Siqueiros who were politically active throughout the decade, Orozco continually emphasised his non-involvement in political affairs<sup>(1)</sup> yet his mural work of 1922-26 reflects a radical shift from simple stylistic innovation to the use of the medium for expressing explicit social protest. It is clearly important to examine the role of the muralists as state artists (including their political views and activities) in the light of the political events of the decade. A central question which must be addressed concerns the image of the state which their art - sponsored by the Minister of Education as part of the national education programme - conveys.

Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros participated in what has variously been termed 'the Mexican Mural Renaissance'<sup>(2)</sup> and, '*el movimiento muralista mexicano*'<sup>(3)</sup>; and in so far as the muralists formed an organised group whose quite specific aims were expressed in a manifesto in 1922<sup>(4)</sup>, both names are accurate. Lately Dawn Ades has reaffirmed their pre-eminent role in contemporary culture: 'The muralists were the most vigorous and creative of the cultural vanguard of revolutionary Mexico, with a powerful sense of the social value of their art.'<sup>(5)</sup> Furthermore, this group and its principal members Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco (with others<sup>(6)</sup>) received official backing and financial support from the government during the period 1921-24 for the production of their murals, many of which were painted on the interior walls of state buildings. While Rivera and Siqueiros belonged to the new Mexican Communist Party, all were at least indirect participants in national political activity. Yet this was a very diverse group, and despite their now well-known manifesto there was not always a consensus of opinion and action.

Some commentators <sup>(7)</sup> have sought to preserve the reputations of the muralists as radical activists intact. Within the complexities of the political situation of the period (largely due to the re-emergence of the Mexican bourgeoisie as a major political force at the national level), the claims of the Mexican muralists to be seen as 'revolutionary' artists have often hitherto been upheld <sup>(8)</sup>. In order to examine in a critical light the degree to which these three leading members of the muralists' syndicate can justifiably be regarded as 'revolutionary', the

political events and party alliances of the early 1920's must be clarified. Even in a very recent study it is wrongly claimed that the Revolution of 1910-17 succeeded in righting many profound social injustices:

Obregón, who had been a major figure in the revolution, presided over a country which had not only deposed a dictator but had suffered several years of bitter civil war. During that period Mexico's old ruling class was broken and defeated, and its powerbase in the Church, the Army and the 'haciendado' had collapsed. On the land, debt-peonage had been destroyed.

9.

Given the attempt to foster a popular national art the question of revolutionary aesthetics and their political axioms assumes distinct importance, because the evidence of the murals themselves suggests that the state patrons and artists did not always share a common nationalist ethic. The central difficulty in assessing the ideology of the murals is the diversity of interpretations of this 'radical' principle, which itself is a product of two interlinked ideas: '*Indigenismo*' and Nationalism. The first idea is essentially cultural but is not without a central political dimension in its commitment to native rather than colonial or imperialistic dogmas. The second, Nationalism, is essentially ideological: post-revolutionary politics gave rise to a Bonapartist solution to the pressing need to rebuild the state after the Revolution, co-opting indigenous culture to that end. One way to clarify the importance of the nationalistic ethic in the work of the muralists is to seek to establish an integrated view of national politics which takes into account the political activities of the muralists during the growth and disintegration of their movement. The national politics of 1921 form the background to the foundation of the mural project by Murillo ('Dr. Atl') and Vasconcelos.

General Alvaro Obregón took office as President on 1st December 1920. His four-year term of office was to be dominated politically by two main issues: the natural resources of the nation (including agrarian reform) and labour relations. Catholic opposition was later to become a third. These issues had been important in various revolutionary ideologies and programmes, and had been highlighted by their incorporation into Carranza's 1917 Constitution as Article 123 (labour), Article 27 (property ownership, national mineral resources, and agrarian reform), and, no less controversial, Articles 130 (religion), and 3 (education). Due to their assertion of State supremacy over Church dominion, the latter two

laws would antagonise Catholic organisations when implemented. Since the reformist scope of these major articles was not clearly defined, different political groups interpreted the prospects for reform in the light of their particular interest. Far from being a period of immediate reconstruction and clear policy (with the significant social investment in education as a notable exception), Obregón's presidency was a time of great rivalry between contending parties. His faction was able to exploit this dissension to their advantage.

...the key to Obregón's victory, from beginning to end, was his populism. He promised something to everyone: land reform to the peasants, labour reform to the workers, guarantees to businessmen, and defence against imperialism to all classes. To the Army he offered plunder and promotions, to the bureaucrats the spoils of war. He gave intellectuals government posts. ...Obregón wooed the Mexican masses with simple appeals and popular slogans. He talked the language of many classes and races - he could speak some Yaqui and Maya. To everyone he made promises. His vision was national, for he craved power, and he knew it lay in Mexico City. He would use it to manage the masses. He gave the land distribution agency to Díaz Soto's peasant leaders, money to Luis Morones' unions, and government posts to intellectuals like José Vasconcelos. 10.

The muralists Rivera, Siqueiros and Xavier Guerrero responded enthusiastically to the promise of the new liberal era. Revolutionary political enthusiasm pervaded their artistic inspiration and in 1922 they joined the Mexican Communist Party, the *Partido Comunista Mexicano* (PCM) founded in 1919. This was the officially recognised communist party, not to be confused with a rival group led by the American Linn A. Gale which had broken from the Mexican Socialist Congress of Aug.-Sept.1919. Under the leadership of the Indian nationalist Manabendra Nath Roy a group which set up the PCM also broke from the rest of the Congress (formed in the aftermath of the collapse in 1917 of Luis Morones' *Partido Socialista Obrero* or 'Socialist Worker Party') (11).

One issue taken up by the PCM was the growing corruption within the national labour organisation, CROM, which had come under the indirect control of Obregón. Hodges and Gandy provide a description of the close relationship between President Obregón and the leaders of the national labour organisation which began at this time:

In the birth of Mexico's large labour central (the CROM), the government acted as midwife; and this enraged many radical workers. Though at first the CROM seemed independent of the government, some radicals looked upon it with suspicion. They refused to join; they worked to organize rival labour centrals. In 1919 workers and intellectuals founded the Mexican Communist Party, which cried out for revolution.

Obregón's star was rising. The nation expected him to become president when Carranza's term ran out in 1920. Luis Morones and his Action Group inside the CROM secretly proposed a pact to Obregón. In the struggle over the presidency, the CROM would support Obregón in return for these guarantees: creation of a Ministry of Labour headed by Morones; material and moral support for the CROM from the government; presidential consideration of the CROM's views on all proposed reforms affecting the nation; and government money to build links between the Mexican proletariat and the international working class. Obregón signed this pact with the Action Group. Neither rank-and-file labour nor the Mexican public knew what had happened in a smoke-filled room. 12.

Luis Morones, the opportunistic leader of CROM, is generally held to have been the principal source of its notorious corruption. Indeed Orozco (who always claimed independence from any political line) would later portray him in a caricature as the personification of greed. The PCM's criticism of CROM's leader was ineffectual for at least the first two years of its existence. Morones simply ignored it. However, when the PCM decided to ally itself with a rival organisation to CROM (the CGT or *Confederación General de Trabajadores*) Morones and Obregón collaborated to suppress the CGT:

Communists and anarchists organized a rival labour central... (CGT), which soon claimed 100,000 members. Anarchists became its guiding influence and preached direct action and revolution. Many radical unions formed regional confederations, like the Societies of Railwaymen, that stayed clear of the labour centrals. The government-sponsored CROM mushroomed over the nation and tried to smother its rivals. In the shade of this giant they struggled to grow, but they were cut off from the nourishing rays of Obregón's sun: massive financial aid, protection in disputes with employers, and for CROM leaders posts in government. ...The anarchist CGT carried out or supported the major strikes of the period, but Obregón excluded its newspaper from the mails, persecuted its leaders, and expelled its foreign-born agitators from Mexico. He often sent troops against these strikes. 13.

In contrast to the marginalised CGT and its political centre the PCM, the *Partido Liberal Constitucionalista* (PLC) seemed to be the strongest of the various parties in early 1921. It had supported Obregón in his electoral campaign, and he had chosen three leading members of the PLC as cabinet ministers: Generals Benjamín Hill, Antonio Villareal and Rafael Zubarán Capmany. Furthermore, the PLC had also controlled the legislative bodies since 1918.

Of all the loose conglomerations of individuals boasting the title party at the beginning of 1921, the Liberal Constitutionalist Party...was the group most obviously in receipt of presidential favour; it counted three important cabinet ministers among its ranks and controlled both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. 14.

The PLC's association with Obregón was to be short-lived. Later in 1921, legislation was proposed in Congress to severely curtail the powers of the party's executive and Obregón clearly was behind the move. Obregón had begun the consolidation of a new and independent party in August 1920, the *Partido Laborista Mexicano* (PLM), or Mexican Labour Party. He was setting out to build for himself another base of support which, free of Carrancista domination, would offer him its undivided allegiance. He sought to strengthen the PLM by promoting an alliance between it and the CROM. The PLM, he assumed, would be the party to which the workers would turn in pursuit of their rights under Article 123. Together with the CROM, the PLM would more effectively facilitate the incorporation of the proletariat into the bourgeois republic, and thus help guarantee the control of the proletariat by the executive, forestalling industrial confrontation between government and proletariat. That the PLC viewed these manoeuvres with suspicion is clear from their opposition to Obregón's attempt to further co-opt the proletariat into a central, government-controlled body in March 1921. The PLC-dominated Chamber of Deputies threw out Obregón's proposal for a new Ministry of Labour, a measure that had been a condition of CROM support for him. More importantly, it now seemed that the PLC had directly rejected the workers' aspirations. The Constitutionalist seemed to have withdrawn their patronage from CROM and Morones, who began to look to the PLM.

The PLC went on to further weaken their position with their opposition to another measure. The issue concerned a proposed revision of Article 27: state governors were to lose the power to break up confiscated hacienda lands. Obregón's argument was that the state governors might easily favour the *hacendados*, thus slowing up the pace of agrarian reform. He wanted Cabinet control over this, claiming that the process would be facilitated by a more 'objective', central co-ordinating body working through local courts. The central direction of this effort of agrarian reform did not result in large-scale redistribution of the land to the *campesinos*.

Rural Mexico divided into two regions. In the central states the hacienda peons were born on the plantation and died on it; the master ruled over their work, fiestas and prayers; theirs was the psychology of dependence. In the South, where Zapata rode his white horse over the mountains in popular legends, men lived in free villages - theirs was the courage to revolt. Here

Díaz Soto y Gama, the Zapatista intellectual, founded the National Agrarian Party in 1920. These agrarians supported President Obregón, who promised a land distribution programme: free villagers were to get their stolen lands back. But Obregón was in no hurry to keep his promise to the South.

His government handed the land reform to judges who entangled it in red tape. Every village must count a certain number of family heads, must become a legal persona, must put its claim through the courts. The villages, spurred on by agrarians, fed their claims into the bureaucratic machine; the gears clanked in endless court cases. The Mexican peasantry was tormented by the fires of land hunger, and Obregón sprinkled drops of water on the flames.

15.

The political advantage to Obregón was in having the PLC branded as a reactionary force by both the labour group of PLM-CROM, and the agrarian party, the *Partido Nacional Agrarista* (PNA).

The PNA had been formed in 1920 by Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama (formerly also of the PLM in the years before Díaz' downfall) and other ex-members of CROM dissatisfied with the labour organisation's continuing neglect of the agrarian problem. The united front symbolised in Rivera's mid-decade murals by campesino and urban worker shaking hands did not emerge after the Revolution. Thus Rivera's worker-campesino alliance murals do not represent a contemporary political force so much as an unfulfilled political possibility. Soto y Gama's principle was that as most of the campesinos were wage-workers they were of equal importance to the further expansion of the Mexican economy as the urban working class. The leaders of the urban workers did not recognise any value in joining forces with the agrarian cause. Soto y Gama and his supporters within the CROM pressed for agrarian reform as it paved the way to the most efficient and yet just exploitation of the land. Morones refused to concede this, and so the PNA came into being to preserve the independent position of the agrarian cause. Hodges and Gandy even suggest that Soto y Gama 'laboured to keep the urban workers divided from the peasants.'<sup>(16)</sup> Significantly Soto y Gama's group did not join the PCM (the well-known Zapatista religious traditionalism being wholly at odds with anarchist and communist atheism), and the artists in the PCM of 1922 did not align themselves with the PNA despite works like Rivera's 'Zapatista Landscape' (1915) which may suggest a sympathy with their cause. One of the PNA's first objectives was to circumvent the PLC, whose domination of the legislative bodies and opposition to what seemed to be quite reasonable agrarian demands earned it the reputation of being the most reactionary national

party.

Under the simultaneous assaults of the PLM, CROM and the PNA, the PLC lost its control of both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate after the elections held in July 1922 to decide the next legislature. The PLC virtually ceased to exist as a national party because in the face of such vociferous and determined opposition which it had experienced in June 1922, its candidates either dropped out of the contest or defected to other groups(17).

The year 1921, the first of four years of Obregón's power, also saw the celebration of the anniversary of Mexico's Independence. This event was treated enthusiastically, not least by Obregón and his government who saw it as an ideal opportunity to promote a sense of nationalism. The celebrations included a service of remembrance in the Metropolitan Cathedral attended by Obregón and the whole Cabinet, followed by the ceremony in the National Palace which recalled '*El Grito de Dolores*' - the declaration, in 1810, of the priest Hidalgo y Costilla which is seen by Mexicans as being the very first step in the long struggle which brought Mexico independence in 1821(18). These activities, together with others in the centennial year, were an attempt to foster a sense of national unity but they stand in stark contrast to the factional national political situation. Yet that was not so extreme as to undermine Obregón's central control, which he further secured through cultural ideology by promoting a positive image of Mexico as an enlightened modern nation proud of its artistic heritage. He chose José Vasconcelos to manage the rebirth of Mexican national culture.

Vasconcelos returned from exile in the United States in May 1920 and was first appointed Rector of the National University by the Interim President, Adolfo de la Huerta, before becoming the Minister of Education in the new cabinet of President Obregón in 1921. As Rector of the National University, he arranged for the re-appointment of Alfredo Ramos Martínez as the Director of the Academy of San Carlos, and Martínez re-established his open-air schools of painting. At the same time a move towards basing art upon indigenous forms was continuing to gather momentum, and the new Director of the Academy was sympathetic to the current spirit of Mexican pride. In 1920 Martínez arranged an exhibition of the work of the Mexican artist Carlos Mérida, who emphasised the part played by indigenous influences in his 'American' work:

My painting is fired with an intimate conviction that it is imperative to produce a totally American art. I believe that America, possessed of such a glorious past, with both nature and race original in character, will doubtless breed a personal artistic expression. This is a task for the prophetic vision of the young artists of America.

19.

The national newspaper 'El Universal' which favourably reviewed the exhibition, remarked upon its 'indigenously rustic style' and its 'Indian atmosphere'(20). Moreover though Manuel Gamio's 1916 ethnographic study Forjando Patria recognised the neglected richness of Indian and Mestizo rural culture and asserted the need for their assimilation (21) Jean Charlot credited Vasconcelos with much of the initiative for the new nationalistic mood:

The portents that heralded the renaissance remained scattered and unfulfilled until José Vasconcelos became president of the University in June 1920. In July Ramos Martínez was elected director of the Academy and in August opened a one-man show by Carlos Mérida.

22.

On his appointment as Minister of Education in July 1921, Vasconcelos immediately began to implement liberal educational measures such as the publication in a popular format of the classics illustrated by Orozco. Behind this populist measure is the influence of the writings of Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Soviet Commissar of Education who had initiated such a series in Russia prior to 1920. Other important elements in Vasconcelos' cultural vision were derived from Pythagorean philosophy and the theories of the German cultural historian Oswald Spengler (1880-1936). Vasconcelos saw a new era for Mexico in Spengler's idea of the decline of the West European culture and the resurgence of other cultures, even if at the same time he looked more to Lunacharsky for practical ideas in his task of constructing an innovative national educational system. Therefore in addition to its obvious '*Indigenismo*' Vasconcelos' eclectic ideology drew its psychology from Pythagorean ideas of spiritual harmony, its inspiration from Spengler's declaration of the decadence of European hegemony, and its praxis from Lunacharsky(23). At the same time, Gerardo Murillo Cornadó (Dr. Atl) helped in the formation of a group of native artists, and persistently agitated for, amongst other things, a resurgence in native Mexican folk art and a museum of popular art. Atl also called for an exhibition of popular national art to celebrate the 1921 anniversary of Mexican Independence. But with regard to the mural movement of the 1920's, undoubtedly

Atl's greatest contribution was his early call for muralism (as far back as 1910), seeing it as a truly public art form.

Vasconcelos was persuaded to include mural commissions as part of his proposed national education programme. On his appointment as education minister in July 1921, Vasconcelos initiated his plans, and the first murals to be painted under his patronage were started later that year in the ex-convent of Saints Peter and Paul (later Public School No.6) and the former *Hemeroteca Nacional*, the periodicals library of the National University (24). The artists involved included Roberto Montenegro, Xavier Guerrero, Jorge Enciso, Eduardo Villaseñor, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Julio Castellanos and Atl himself. The themes of some of these early murals - very different from either the traditional *pulquería* or Baroque church murals - are indicated in their titles: 'The Reconstruction of Mexico by Labourers and Intellectuals,' *Fiesta de la Santa Cruz* and 'The Popular Arts of Mexico'(25). By no means all the murals display the new *Indigenismo* themes and style: Xavier Guerrero's work 'Zodiacal Signs' (5.1) seems more in line with the established tradition of decorative muralism in which he had worked an apprenticeship in 1910 in Guadalajara, painting romantic scenes, biblical themes and allegories and landscapes in a large house. Significantly, Jorge Enciso had painted murals before the Revolution. Indeed, Enciso had been commissioned by Education Minister Justo Sierra to paint scenes with Mexican motifs in two schools in Morelos, 'the first of their kind in twentieth-century muralism.' (26)

However in the first of the 1920's commissions indigenous influences were sometimes overwhelmed by the decorative classicism of works like Roberto Montenegro's 'Dance of the Hours' (also known as 'The Tree of Knowledge') in which twelve lightly clad female dancers cast their spell over a knight in armour (5.2 & 5.3). Like Enciso and Guerrero, Montenegro had painted decorative murals before, in Mallorca, Spain during 1919. His 'Dance of the Hours' is quite out of step with its 'nationalistic' counterparts, and is markedly different from his other early mural, *Fiesta de la Santa Cruz* (5.4) painted the following year, in 1923. Stylistically unified, the mural panels of the stairwell of the *Antiguo Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo* shown as 5.5, 5.6 & 5.7 were actually painted seven to

ten years after the first which depicts the festival, and reflect the compositions and themes developed by Diego Rivera at Chapingo and elsewhere during the 1920's when Montenegro worked as his assistant. Significantly, in the original mural the banner now carried by a gracious female was carried by Vasconcelos.

The contribution of these muralists has been obscured by the better-known figures of the movement such as Atl and Rivera. Interestingly, the three famous muralists who are the principal subjects of this study did not participate in this innovative project at the outset (though Orozco was involved in the national programme as a book illustrator) but came in later with the important extension of the mural programme to the refurbished National Preparatory School and the new Education Ministry buildings. The 'mural movement' got underway without its three best-known participants, and quickly lost its most outspoken agitator. Atl's work, quite out of step with the decorative and constructive themes of the others' murals, provoked a public controversy which embarrassed Vasconcelos.

Vasconcelos' cultural policy rested upon the idealistic belief that through education a group of learned men could unite the nation in a constructive effort transcending all class distinctions. It was to further this policy that the government commissioned the muralists, believing that public art would render certain key concepts such as "reconstruction" and "the nation" more accessible to the largely illiterate Mexican populace. However, Vasconcelos rejected the narrow Positivism of the Porfiriato, and insisted that the new public art of muralism should project different values:

Vasconcelos's commission had a further purpose: to replace the stigma of another mural, remembered from his own student days at the *Preparatoria*, that once occupied the principal stairway of the main school building, Juan Cordero's 19th-century **Triumph of Science and Labor over Ignorance and Sloth**, an emblem of Positivism, the utilitarian philosophy of the Díaz era, which his egalitarian and more broadly visionary policies were designed to supersede.

27.

During his three year period of office under General Obregón, Vasconcelos set up two other departments dealing with schools and with libraries, as well as the one dealing with fine art. This reflected his interest in the U.S. library system and the fine arts movement of Lunacharsky, but it was also to some extent a revival of the ideas of the nineteenth-century minister of education, Justo Sierra, who under Porfirio Díaz had chosen to follow a policy of

liberal education and the development of a Mexican national culture. The emphatic nationalism of contemporary Mexican art is thus less of a radical break with the past than might appear since both Vasconcelos and Sierra would seem to have believed that culture should emanate downwards and outwards from a central educating institution in the Capital. The state should be corporate, moral, and provide a "civilising" influence under the direction of a central monitoring institution, the ministry of education. When in 1921 Vasconcelos created the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (National Education Ministry), he was therefore broadening the ideals of Justo Sierra, and in this way, was developing the ideas of the old Porfirian bureaucracy. It was not until the next year that the inauguration of the building itself took place (28), but by then his mural programme had become controversial thanks to the free hand he gave the muralists working in the recently renovated National Preparatory School. From his important appointment to the newly-created ministry until his resignation from it in 1924, Vasconcelos was to demonstrate his own radical modernism by consistently siding with the liberals against the clergy and Church (29).

For Atl, the year 1921 was one of mixed fortunes, which was to culminate in his withdrawal from muralism altogether. A major declaration of faith in popular and folk arts is contained in his *Las Artes Populares en México*, which was published during this year (30). This work describes the character and development of Mexican art in two volumes, and a second edition contained extensive appreciations of popular hand-made products and the social importance of folk art. Atl's idea of popular art is concisely stated in it:

Popular arts are those that are born spontaneously by the people, as an immediate consequence of their familiar, civil and religious needs. The arts that they make that are under artistic or commercial influence are different to the arts that they make from necessity, they are not popular arts. Those shown in the public schools are official arts.

His expressed preference for what might otherwise be called 'folk' or 'ethnic' arts as opposed to 'official' arts is especially significant because he is implicitly disowning the official patronage which he had vigorously sought for indigent art. His motives are rather unclear, but his retreat from Vasconcelos' programme may have had something to do with his distinctive individualism and the poor reception of his murals. Later he would take up the cause of the Church and later still advocate fascism in his pursuit of an individual reputation which he eventually

secured through his famous aesthetic of the volcano. Atl's provocative attitude towards officialdom is evident in his 1921 confrontation with Vasconcelos.

Early in 1921 Atl had arranged an exhibition of his landscapes accompanied by a lecture on 'The Art of Drawing in the Closing Phase of Bourgeois Culture'<sup>(31)</sup>, perhaps a somewhat optimistic and premature description of the post-Revolutionary social situation, but it suggests a radical aesthetic. For the time being, things were going very well: he gained a mural commission and started work with the rest of the group in the ex-convent of Saints Peter and Paul which in 1921-22 was being converted into an annexe of the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*. Atl painted nine murals, among them 'Man Coming Forth from The Sea', 'The Wave', 'Bat' and 'The Wind' (see plates 5.8 - 5.16). All were destroyed on Vasconcelos' orders after the later murals of the series provoked a 'moral' outcry despite the painter's attempts to defend them on artistic grounds:

My decorative work is inspired by a pagan philosophy, it does not have a relation with the revolutionary propaganda patronised by the Government. There are landscapes full of light, starry nights, men and women naked with all that God gave them, but with a nudity that is innocent, chaste, clean like that of the Final Judgement of Michelangelo. 32.

Like others of the series, 'The Wave' (5.8) depicts a titanic natural force. A single huge curling wave crashes on to the fore front of a dark, mountainous landmass which is the mural's background, while in the right foreground a smaller curling wave and swirling currents suggest the sea's unceasing motion. There are no figures in the mural, and its stylised naturalism perhaps reflects an Oriental influence: Atl had visited the Far East at the turn of the century, and may have seen Japanese prints such as Hokusai's (1760-1849) 'Great Wave'. Also, he may have been influenced by early impressionistic treatments of the theme of natural forces such as Van Gogh's 'The Starry Night' (1889), though his own 'Night' (5.13a & 5.13b) is more tranquil.

Although it seems to have been his phallic 'The Wind' (5.9) which gave the greatest offence to prudish sensibilities, the single naked male figure of 'Bat' (5.10) also displays a blatant sexuality which, together with the vampiristic features (large, claw-like hands, great muscles, lowered head, "witch's peak" hairline and long protruding upper lip, and high-collared cloak) could certainly have been inspired by a 'pagan philosophy'. The two

nude female figures representing 'Moon' (5.11) and 'Rain' (5.12) are anatomically detailed, as is the youthful glowing figure of the male sun god (5.14) which, with the highly derivative 'Titan'(5.15) so reminiscent of Michelangelo's powerful heroes, and 'Man Coming Forth from the Sea' (5.16) made up Atl's series of essential forces.

Clearly the series has very little in the way of explicit political reference. However individually or collectively provocative, certainly Atl could claim that they do not 'have a relation with the revolutionary propaganda patronised by the Government.' His dismissiveness towards the ideological role of the mural project suggests that he believed that his work was of a higher aesthetic quality than that of his contemporary muralists and, as a later comment suggests, Atl was in no doubt as to the significance of his 'unique' murals: '...if the decoration had not been destroyed then an innovation of universal interest would have been realized.'<sup>(33)</sup> His work lacks the explicit themes and topical messages of the murals some of his colleagues painted in the main building of the ENP at about the same time, but Atl's work had some influence upon his fellow muralists.

Perhaps his allusive claims suggest that Atl thought that as the instigator of the mural project he might be due special recognition but other muralists and their critics have described a more direct connection between their work and Italian Renaissance predecessors. While Atl's reference to a 'pagan philosophy' may have been intended to imply for Vasconcelos that his work was inspired by classical aesthetic ideals (the reference to Michelangelo's painting would support this), the title of his mural 'Man Coming Forth from the Sea' suggests that the particular 'pagan philosophy' he adopted as an anti-clerical gesture was an evolutionary Pantheism in which all life had a marine origin, apparently without Christianity's divine intervention.

Later, in 1924, Siqueiros would reply on behalf of the muralists' group in his attack upon academicism 'The Reactionary Academics Impress Ideas Contrary to the Revolution upon Youth who to their Shame Follow them to Sustain Themselves' (34). Its first section 'The Bats and the Mummies Attempt to Impede the Development of the Revolutionary Paintings' may have been influenced by 'The Bat'. Moreover Atl himself figures in the piece but significantly Siqueiros demoted him

to the lowly rank of a 'dried-up mummy' (Murillo's adopted name 'Atl' means "water" in the Náhuatl language) in his hierarchical cast. Atl's murals express a progressive ideology in their uncompromising emphasis upon a frankness which Mexicans found shocking; they are, however, not concerned with experience and understanding of contemporary society in the same way later murals project the issues and consequences of the Revolution.

For someone scornful of 'official' academic art to defend his painting by reference to the neoclassicism of the Italian Renaissance so favoured by Positivist intellectuals is paradoxical. However Atl's claims did not prevent the authorities from destroying his work - Vasconcelos himself gave the order. On witnessing the act of destruction, Atl resolved to give up mural painting and turned once more to his depictions of volcanoes, travelling the world during the 1920's and 1930's studying and painting them. In the end Rivera won the sort of official favour Atl unsuccessfully sought.

Atl was by no means the only dissenter with the views of the Obregón Government to feel the weight of their disapproval, for the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT), an organisation whose specific aim was to provide an alternative for workers to the state-controlled, highly corrupt CROM, suffered quite heavy suppression at the hands of Obregón's government. The CGT was founded in 1920, and participated in the union congress called by the PCM in 1921. It brought government hostility upon itself by being a rival labour organisation to the CROM, which it openly and repeatedly criticised. Its political line was generated by its combined anarcho-syndicalist and minority communist membership:

...the CGT, founded around 1920, endorsed a revolutionary syndicalist position...attacking both the government and CROM as reformist enemies of the proletariat. It appealed to all workers and endorsed strikes, boycotts, and sabotage as valid tactical weapons, even advocating armed confrontation in response to government repression. 35.

In the suppression of the CGT (which included the expulsion of its leaders from the country), the Obregón Government clearly demonstrated its intolerance of either criticism or dissent from the official party line of national unity and constructivism, which the CGT had obviously threatened by calling for a series of general strikes and a boycott of all political parties. This event also made apparent the confidence which the Obregonistas had in their new PLM-CROM-PNA alliance.

The intolerance of dissident minorities of a radical platform typified by this action showed that the general line taken by the Obregonistas was both conservative and bourgeois rather than revolutionary. The suppression of the CGT suggests the growing confidence of the re-emergent bourgeoisie.

Although Siqueiros, still in Europe, and Orozco (then illustrating Vasconcelos' classics) were not to become practising muralists until the following year, Rivera (having returned from Italy in September 1921, where he had been studying and sketching frescoes) watched the other muralists at work in the ex-convent. Then, in November, he accepted an invitation from Vasconcelos to accompany him as one of a group of artists and writers whom the education minister proposed to take along on one of his trips into the country. As Rivera's biographer states, this trip led directly to Rivera's participation in the mural commission:

In November 1921 the Minister of Education set out on one of his voyages of cultural exploration and propaganda to the peninsula of Yucatán and invited several painters and poets, Rivera among them, to make part of his expedition. The voyage proved fruitful for Diego. He came back with sketches of the landscape, the huts, the *cenotes* (underground rivers), and the people, which were afterwards to figure in his murals and canvasses. His mind was stirred by the great ruins at Uxmal and Chichén Itza; and even more, by the dimly-comprehended spectacle of the uprising of the hennequen peons, the *Ligas de Resistencia*, and the "Communist" Governor, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, who ruled the State of Yucatán... But most important of the results of his journey was that his ardent talk about murals and public buildings had persuaded Minister Vasconcelos to offer him a wall!

36.

Rivera did not immediately start to paint his first Mexican mural: he was to spend a few months in careful examination of 'his' wall in the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* (ENP, or National Preparatory School) planning the composition of his work before he felt sufficiently prepared to commence painting in early 1922. Though in a separate location, his finished work might be considered with an 18th century religious decoration 'Holy Family with Seven Archangels' by José Antonio Vallejo in the former chapel and the 19th century secular mural 'Triumph of Science and Labor over Ignorance and Sloth' by Juan Cordero in the main staircase.

Despite the muralists' ideological purposes, Rivera's first mural 'The Creation' avoided any reference to current affairs though the year was to be very important politically. The work Rivera undertook would please Vasconcelos where Atl's had not, and though like Atl's there

is little in it which explicitly refers to Mexican political events or thinking, it is worth examining for what it reveals about the ideological consciousness of both Rivera and his patron Vasconcelos. Certainly it has been the subject of adverse criticism:

Although it is believed that Rivera had intended to decorate the auditorium further with the history of thought, including Marx and Engels, *The Creation* must stand as his contribution at this juncture of the movement. It may be looked upon as a blend of contemporary European neo-Classical tendencies, with the drawing of the Renaissance and the gold backgrounds and haloes of Byzantine art. In color, it is lamentably weak; as pictorial expression, it is a low point in Rivera's career.

37.

'The Creation' (5.A) was completed in March 1923 in the Bolívar Amphitheatre of the National Preparatory School, an important location within the complex for which the earlier mural commissions had been granted. Rivera's design, huge in scale, presents a hybrid of Classical and Christian themes. The artist himself would emerge in a year or two virtually exempt from the controversies which would overtake his fellow muralists, having caused some earlier work to be effaced. The mural is situated on a broad, impressively arched wall and in the large niche set into it which also contained a pipe organ (38), later removed. The mural was painted in encaustic (a laborious process) by Rivera himself and three other muralists, Jean Charlot, Xavier Guerrero and Amado de la Cueva (39). It covers the two plane surfaces the structure afforded, the organ in the niche providing the common focal point both of the entire auditorium and of the mural. Rivera exploited this focus in his depiction on the niche's recessed wall of a large central figure whose outstretched arms direct attention to the scenes to the fore and on either side of it. The main area of the mural was painted on the two supporting walls of the archway and it appears as a foreground into which the niche mural perspectively intrudes. Thus the mural effectively is comprised of two components spatially but not thematically separated.

The main or foreground area of the mural is divided into two elements by the niche. Each component contains a watching nude figure seated on a painted ground (raised above floor level like a podium) and these figures appear to look into the perspective created by the podia towards an ascending group of symbolic figures. In each group the ground rises as it recedes, thus contributing to the illusion of depth. Moreover, the nude figures to the fore

thus appear to look upwards to each group of allegorical *personae*.

Taking each group separately, the left hand group (5.B) contains a rather graceless female nude with strong Indian features (dark skin tone and hair) seated watching an upright, poised dancing figure in a long robe whose hands are raised above her head in a graceful classical pose. One of a group of four figures representing the Classical Greek muses, she represents dance while of the others music, (a seated figure playing pipes), song, and comedy (a girl standing behind the seated figures wearing an expression of delight, hands raised before her as if to illustrate a tale) are represented as female attributes. Behind and above the muses stand the haloed figures of Faith, Hope and Charity, and to their right, above the corner of the niche arch, there is a seated winged figure, an angel in an exalted position - Wisdom.

The seated male nude to the right hand side of the niche whose head is wholly turned to the group of five figures (5.C) seated on an ascending ground 'above' him ignores temptation symbolically represented to his left by a phallic serpent. The five figures of Fable, Knowledge, Erotic Poetry, Tradition and Tragedy are female; above and behind these five stands the distinctive figure of Strength with Contenance on her right and Justice and a bare-shouldered 'Prudence' conversing to her left. Paralleling the upward development of the opposite side, the highest figure is again that of an exalted angelic figure beckoning to the lower figures, nominally Science but lacking any distinctly scientific attributes or apparatus.

Both sides of the 'foreground' mural are united over the centre of the niche arch by a starry semi-circle symbolising the cosmos, perhaps a Pythagorean reference. This is bounded by a rim from which three sacerdotal hands (perhaps suggesting the divine trinity) point outwards and downwards to the angels of the main area of the mural and the central figure of the niche mural, linking all three sections of the mural triptych very effectively.

The ideology develops along masculine and feminine principles, with nude figures of man and woman below at right and left and juxtaposed allegorical virtues about them...These contrasting attributes of Knowledge and Spirit then coalesce into the Infinite, which is again associated with the symbol of the Trinity given in the center of the mural.

40.

The scale of all of the figures of 'The Creation' is monumental - the piano in the niche which

appears in the slide indicates that these figures are three or four times life-size. The striking neoclassicism of the mural nearly overwhelms the Mexican features Rivera included in homage to its national identity. The central niche tableau is the most innovative, suggesting the attenuated influence of the French primitivist Henri Rousseau. Another contemporary European influence can perhaps be seen in the radical cubistic perspectives created by the podia, as well as in the grouping of the figures which rest upon them on either side.

The mural lacks an obvious political point of reference, but the educational policy of Vasconcelos lies behind its ideological content. The production of '**The Creation**' coincides with the education minister's project of the publication of the classics in a popular format. The absence of any hint of conflict from the mural's dynamic equilibrium and its emphasis on the possibility of progress through learning both imply an idealised perspective of education, social responsibility, and constructivism. However decorative, the mural's emphasis upon learning is clear if somewhat obscured by classical references which relatively few ordinary Mexicans would recognise. Whether Rivera intended it or not, in this mural the sources of enlightenment appear not simply European but specifically *classical* despite details which acknowledge the prevailing interest in *Indigenismo*. Rivera's own later discussion neglects the iconographical problem of the classical allusion but suggests a much more pronounced indigenous message, the celebration of all the peoples of Mexico:

The subject of the mural was Creation, which I symbolized as everlasting and as the core of human history. More specifically, I presented a racial history of Mexico through figures representing all the types that had entered the Mexican blood stream, from the autochthonous Indian to the present-day, half-breed Spanish Indian.

41.

The clear implication of the work itself is that the peoples of the New World ought to build upon the civilisations of the Old. In a recent discussion (42) Stanton L. Catlin has speculated that Rivera's mural was intended by Vasconcelos to counter the Porfirian message of Juan Cordero's famous mural '**Triumph of Science and Labor over Sloth and Ignorance**' painted in the stairway of the main building: 'Vasconcelos's commission had a further purpose: to replace the stigma of another mural, remembered from his own student days...an emblem of positivism.' Yet Rivera's mural hardly contradicts Cordero's.

If the messages of Positivism and Jacobin pragmatism seem to coincide in **'The Creation'** it is because both theories of social progress revere what are thought of as Classical ideas and themes. In both schemes, the further development of an ideally unified nation depends upon the leadership of an enlightened elite. In contemporary terms, Rivera assumed that the nation would be reconstructed not by bricklayers (as Montenegro's work suggests) but by clever men whose education qualified them to lead the nation. It would follow that current national leaders would be clever men. In cultural terms, Vasconcelos's ideas - as depicted by Rivera - clearly relate to past values but seek a broader social base. As would soon be apparent, co-option of the proletariat and the Porfirian model of foreign-dependent economic development underpinned the post-Revolutionary social reconstruction of Mexico. Artistically, muralists such as Orozco and Siqueiros would seek other solutions to the aesthetic problem of representing the revolutionary spirit, and Rivera himself would become more explicit in his treatment of political themes. So much for the secular idealism of the Classical figurative arch; the central panel, the last section to be completed, includes Christian symbols surrounding a titanic figure in the manner of Atl's series of essential forces such as **'Man Coming Forth from the Sea'**. The central mural is of a huge, foreshortened figure representing 'Emergent Man' (43) at the apex of a pyramidal tree of life with the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) emblematically represented beneath in the foliage as the head of an angel supported by Byzantine wings; a lion; a ox; and an eagle, respectively. The impassive features of the main figures are Indian rather than European and the open palms of its outstretched arms lack the stigmata, stressing the harmonious and benign ambience of the figure rather than the violence of crucifixion. 'Emergent Man' is supported and surrounded by the naturalistic, fertile allegorical tree of life. Despite the religious allegorical connotations of the mural as a whole, its central theme is essentially neoclassical, with its emphasis on education. The seated primitivistic nudes of both side panels are opposed to the angelic figures at the highest level of the respective groups, the classical figures representing the mediating role of education in the ascent from primitive ignorance to a state of exaltation. The work is a reassuring affirmation of familiar values in a time of political uncertainty - by the end of 1923, for instance, José Vasconcelos

himself would be out of favour both with the government and many of the muralists.

The contrast between Rivera's classical allegory and the Latin American aesthetic of '*Indigenismo*' is clearly demonstrated by two contemporary murals painted while '*The Creation*' was being completed. Jean Charlot's '*Massacre at the Templo Mayor*' and Fernando Leal's '*Feast at Chalma*', both painted in 1922 on opposite sides of the main stairway in the National Preparatory School, represent two facets of nationalistic art. Charlot's mural (5.17) is historical but painted in a contemporary style:

Charlot, who had been assisting Rivera on *Creation*, began his own wall in April/May 1922 - in fresco as opposed to Leal's encaustic - on the subject of the *Massacre at the Templo Mayor*. A remarkable blend of Ucello and Léger, it was the first mural to treat the Conquest, and depicts robotic and faceless armoured Spaniards driving blood-red lances into defenceless Indian priests and people celebrating in their temple in Tenochtitlán.

44.

Whatever its modernistic style, Charlot's mural had a precursor in the form of an easel painting by the Academic Félix Parra whose '*Scenes of the Conquest*' (1877) shows the armoured Conquistadors pillaging an Aztec city whose slain defenders lie at their feet. Both pictures suggest the brutality of the Spanish Conquest and thereby express a sympathy for the destruction of the indigenous culture; the difference is that being a mural Charlot's work was intended to communicate with the widest possible public. Indeed Charlot suggests the educative function of his mural by depicting a group of modern figures (among them an unflattering likeness of Diego Rivera holding a rolled up chart) looking up at the rest of the mural, including a teacher and young pupil pointing to the attacking horsemen. The message of the mural is that the colonisation of Mexico was very destructive of indigenous traditions and the development of Mesoamerican society was usurped by invaders.

Leal's mural (5.18) reflects '*Indigenismo*' with a portrayal of a lively *fiesta* in which the suppressed Indian spirit of Mexico breaks through the Christian celebration. The priest stands before the altar in the left-hand side of the mural benevolently watching the village dancers and the procession coming down through the centre towards him. On the other side of the procession in an abstract darkness which contrasts with the brilliant banners, towering figures in Aztec masks and plumed head-dresses dance their own more vigorous rituals in the larger, right-hand area of the mural. In his original study(45), the people of Chalma sit dressed

in pochos and shawls between two caricature *gringos* who are spectating, and their Indian ancestors who are dancing behind the banners and musicians of the parade. The reasons why Leal changed the caricatures of his watercolour study into a basket of flowers and other offerings in the mural are obscure, but the *gringos* of the watercolour foreshadow later caricatures of foreigners and the bourgeoisie in murals by Orozco and Rivera. The muralists working in the ENP may, as Charlot states, have been nicknamed "Dieguitos" or "Little Diegos" but the work of Charlot, Leal, Alva de la Canal ('**Raising of the Cross**' (5.19; 46) depicting the Spanish colonization of the New World) and Revueltas ('**Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe**' 5.20 & 5.21) influenced the style and themes of later work including Rivera's.

The political events of 1922 were to be of major significance until the end of Obregón's presidency and the intensity of contemporary political activity soon began to be reflected in the murals. Obregón had attempted to consolidate his position as President from the outset by his formation of a Cabinet which was almost exclusively composed of fellow Sonorans (47), and obviously 'liberal' sympathisers, such as Vasconcelos. Thus under Obregón's leadership the 'Jacobin' faction of the Constitutionalists rose to pre-eminence. The disaffected Sinaloan 'liberals' who had seen the assassination of their leader Carranza formed themselves into the nucleus of the PLC which had possessed virtual control of the two national legislative bodies since 1918. It had suffered a major electoral defeat two years later with Obregón's election in 1920 and had become even more marginalised by opposing Obregón's labour and agrarian proposals, spurring the PLM-CROM-PNA alliance dedicated to its overthrow. The PLC now seemed to be the focus of reaction to post-Revolutionary reconstruction and reform.

One section of the PLC leadership decided on a last stand. Enraged by the assassination of yet another of their group on 6th June 1922, the *junta* of 'liberal' Sinaloan generals who were the power behind the PLC launched a bitter attack on the Obregonistas, particularly reviling President Obregón, his *Secretario de Gobernación* (Home Secretary) Plutarco Elías Calles, and the *Secretario de Hacienda y Crédito Público* (Treasury Minister) Adolfo de la Huerta. In this first 'manifiesto' the generals led by Juan Carrasco also accused the Obregonista Cabinet of having arranged a series of political assassinations of PLC leaders

(48), including Carranza himself. The document was quickly followed by another signed by Carrasco claiming to represent all Sinaloan 'liberals' which was a declaration of open revolt against Obregón's Government.

The final stages of a power struggle between two quite separate groups of the provincial bourgeoisie who had originally been united under the Constitutionalist leader Carranza during the Revolution is clearly seen in these events. In the post-Revolutionary period, that is, from 1917 onwards, these two groups had undergone an increasing estrangement from each other, one (the 'liberal' faction) initially secure under the dominion of Carranza, whereas the other, the 'Jacobin' or Sonoran faction, had to strive to consolidate its position. Of course, the Sonorans won a major victory when Obregón was elected, but they still had to face the opposition of the 'liberals' in the two legislative bodies. They in fact triumphed over the PLC at the polls, and with the attempted insurrection of Carrasco, the Sonorans found an opportune excuse to try to dispose of the 'liberal' threat once and for all. With the quick suppression of the Sinaloan revolt, the PLC was discredited and thus apparently eliminated as a major political force.

The urban bourgeoisie (mainly of the Capital) courted the faction in power, the Obregonista 'Jacobins', who were not slow to enlist their support in their power struggle with their provincial bourgeois rivals. Due to the crucial nature of the electoral contests of 1922 (which had been foreseen by Obregón), the urban bourgeoisie were given an opportunity to demonstrate their support for the Obregonistas. Obregón, though confident of the PLM-CROM-PNA alliance he had built, was also expecting the support of the urban bourgeoisie whom he would then allow to fill the positions formerly occupied by the PLC 'liberals' in the twin legislative bodies, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The urban bourgeoisie responded by forming a party of their own to contest the July 1922 elections, the *Partido Nacional Cooperativa* (PNC), in May 1922. By 15th August the new party was celebrating its victory, and in deciding upon the main policy to be pursued in the Chamber of Deputies by its large block of elected representatives, demonstrated its bourgeois character: *'Autorizar a las comisiones del Bloque para que se hagan asesorar en la formación del proyecto de ley por técnicos y expertos profesionales.'*(49) That is to say that the PNC were

resolved to influence the planned law concerning technicians and professional experts - in other words, the urban middle class. Having borne the brunt of the anti-imperialist measures pursued by Carranza in his war of words with the United States, the urban middle class looked to his successor, Obregón, to re-open foreign investment in Mexico's economy and industry. Obregón's treasury minister Adolfo de la Huerta made continuing efforts to achieve this.

With the triumph of the PNC, the urban bourgeoisie were introduced into a working arrangement with the Sonorans, who had built the PLM-CROM-PNA alliance. Thus, the bourgeoisie (minus the Sinaloans) were for the meantime united, and effectively controlled both the CROM, through the compliant and corrupt Morones, and the PNA, under the leadership of Calles, Obregón's Home Secretary.

However, in 1923, with the prospect of the presidential elections of 1924 before them, much of Obregón's support moved from him in the direction of the likeliest presidential successor, Plutarco Elías Calles, who had his tacit approval. This is in contrast to his utter disapproval of the other two main contenders for election, one of whom, Adolfo de la Huerta, was an outright deserter from the Sonoran camp. The other, General Angel Flores, was less of an immediate threat to the Sonorans' plans due to his relatively small following, but he represented a resurgence of the Sinaloan challenge. Yet control of the proletariat was of no less importance to securing the Obregon-Calles succession than appeasing the bourgeoisie, and in early 1923 CROM once again became a major concern of the Sonoran faction in power.

The growth of CROM power during the four years of Obregón's presidency coincides with the attempts of the Government to re-open relations with Mexico's traditional main trading partner, the United States, and therefore occurs during a period of government anxiety about Mexico's economic future. The motives for Obregón's involvement and support of CROM can be readily inferred: if foreign investment, particularly from the United States, was to be assured, then steady productivity and tranquil labour relations, uninterrupted by general strikes and similar demonstrations of proletarian power and solidarity, was seen to be essential. Obregón had made overtures to the North Americans almost as soon as he was elected in 1920, but U.S. investors remained shy of Mexico for at least the next two to three years, ostensibly holding out for the payment of substantial damages caused by the

Revolution but in fact watching developments within the whole field of Mexican labour activities. Clearly, Mexico was effectively in a state of industrial probation, seeking foreign investment which would be forthcoming only if industrial stability could be guaranteed.

Given this situation, the real nature and function of the state-sponsored CROM becomes apparent. The labour organisation had, as its main directive, not the pursuit of the interests of the workers but those of the industrialists, the bourgeoisie, and foreign investors. Barry Carr's figures for official strikes from 1920 indicate two important features of CROM's practices during Obregón's Presidency, the rise and subsequent suppression of the rival labour organisation, the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT), in 1921 and the growth of CROM's control over the workers after 1921:

There was a sharp escalation in the number of strikes in 1921 followed by a levelling off over the next three years:

1920:	173 strikes
1921:	310 "
1922:	197 "
1923:	146 "
1924:	136 "

50.

This remarkable decrease in strike activity (from a peak of 310 in 1921 to 136 three years later) does not indicate any significant economic reform but rather suggests that CROM was successfully extending its control over the workers, and in so doing was also aiding Obregón's ministers in their attempts to encourage North American re-investment. In this respect, the resultant economic system would resemble that of the Porfiriato. Hodges and Gandy offer proof of government collaboration in the CROM co-option of smaller, local workers' organisations : '(In 1922) ...the strikes were less and usually not for higher wages or shorter hours - the workers struck to gain recognition of unions by management. The government intervened in these strikes to favour employers twelve times and the workers ninety!' (51)

The chief negotiator in the attempts to win back U.S. confidence in Mexico was Adolfo de la Huerta, ex-Interim President in 1920 and now *Secretario de Hacienda y Crédito Público*, or Treasury Minister. De la Huerta clearly possessed Obregón's full backing, for Obregón had himself initiated such moves as early as 1920 when President-elect. Then the occasion had

been provided by the celebration of Obregón's electoral triumph, and the guests included the governors of the U.S. States of Texas and New Mexico, accompanied by representatives of U.S. banking, commerce, industry, and politicians:

*Para celebrar la toma de posesión del nuevo mandatario, fueron invitados numerosos ciudadanos norteamericanos representativos de la Banca, la Industria, el Comercio y la política, entre los que venían los gobernadores de Texas y Nuevo México, los cuales fueron recibidos personalmente por el Presidente electo.*

52.

After this high-level beginning the task was delegated to de la Huerta. Over the course of the next three years, de la Huerta presided over a series of meetings in Mexico called to review the damages claimed by the North Americans. On 3rd September 1921, a meeting was held between de la Huerta, other Mexican government officials, and U.S. oil company representatives at which it was arranged that the export of Mexican oil would recommence in June 1922 (53). By the end of 1921, de la Huerta was involved in talks with the U.S. representative-general of the international bankers' cartel, the International Committee of Bankers, Thomas Lamont. It was decided at this meeting that a single Mexican bank of issue would be created, and one other important result was that Mexico's public debt was considerably reduced(54). In May 1922, de la Huerta attended a conference of international bankers in New York. His proposed agreement was discussed on 28th June by a council of Mexican ministers, and was ratified by the international bankers at another conference in New York during August. Guarantees would be restored to the North American oil companies whose assets in Mexico were threatened by the Revolutionary Constitution which declared national ownership of mineral rights. As Díaz had done four decades before, Obregón would abandon rights in favour of foreigners to bolster economic confidence, attract foreign investment and avoid U.S. intervention.

After Carranza was assassinated and succeeded by Obregón in 1920, Washington withheld recognition of the new government until the oil situation was settled. Finally relations were restored under the 1923 Bucareli Agreements, which converted the property rights of the oil companies into almost indefinite concessions, while a new production tax was levied, purportedly to finance war reparations.

55.

De la Huerta's successes were significant, and these measures with the international

community of bankers and industrialists helped to bring the urban bourgeoisie (represented by their party, the PNC) solidly behind Obregón. Confident that things were going smoothly, the President now assumed direct control, excluding de la Huerta from participating in the sensitive 'Bucareli' talks of 1923, which were the final stage of the process of *rapprochement* with U.S. interests which de la Huerta had engineered. The Treasury Minister, as events would later reveal, did not take the rebuff well. Meanwhile, muralism in the National Preparatory School was entering a new, more outspoken phase.

José Clemente Orozco had embarked on his career as a muralist in 1922, joining Rivera and the others in the project to depict uplifting national propaganda in the National Preparatory School. Indeed Orozco's first murals clearly show the influence of Vasconcelos, for whom he had recently been at work illustrating new editions of the classics:

Orozco began work with an unhistorical abstract concept grouped under the general heading of The Gifts of Nature to Man; this contained paintings with such titles as Virginity, Youth, Grace, Beauty, Intelligence, Genius and Force, of which only the realisation of the painting Youth can be proved.

56.

The fact that Orozco only ever completed one of this series, 'Youth', indicates that unlike Atl or Rivera (who spent months on his grand design 'The Creation') he rapidly abandoned his notion of simply producing an allegorical, neoclassical selection of attributes and 'virtues'. His next work, 'Maternity' (5.22; 5.D), depicts a more robust, everyday truth in place of these abstractions. Of even greater significance is the further development of 'Youth', which was partially repainted to form 'Spring', before becoming in 1923 a forceful, almost cubistic depiction of the Náhuatl sun god, 'Tzontemóc'(57). This work bears strong formal resemblances to Siqueiros' 'The Angel' (5.E), but Orozco's theme is wholly native, indicating that he was at this point striving for a theme and expression devoid of any neoclassical attributes. As 'Tzontemóc' the mural remained unchanged for three years, suggesting that Orozco was quite satisfied with the striking figure of the plunging sun god he had depicted but in 1926 he chose to exploit the architectural setting of 'Tzontemóc' for a new work, 'The Trench', and so the early mural was destroyed. Clearly for Orozco the period 1922-23 was one of innovation and experimentation: 'Consequently, there was a time of preparation, during which much trial and error went on and the works produced were purely

decorative, with only timid allusions to history, philosophy, and various other themes. (58)

Three factors support the supposition that the earliest extant mural by Orozco, **'Maternity'** (1923), was painted before **'Tzontemóc'**. In the first place, the subject matter of the mural clearly associates it with Orozco's unfinished early series; furthermore, the work's mildly cubistic background perspective anticipates the stronger cubist style of **'Tzontemóc'** and later murals; and finally, unlike the indigenous features of **Tzontemóc**, those of the blonde-haired figures of **'Maternity'** are wholly European.

**'Maternity'** consists of two distinct groups of figures: the foreground group comprises two female nudes, one of whom holds and kisses a naked infant while the other woman reclines on the ground in a sensuous pose in front of the mother and child figures. These latter two figures are derived from a religious tableau of madonna and infant, but the rather irreverent nudity of both women emphasises their sexuality. Orozco contrasts youthful sensuality wearing a fashionable, elaborate hairstyle and consuming a large bunch of grapes to 'mature' maternity whose hairstyle is simple and unadorned, and whose attention is entirely devoted to her infant: thus the 'wholesome' pleasure the mother derives from her child is contrasted with the obviously sensual pleasures enjoyed by the other woman. Moreover, the maternal figure is turned modestly towards the child which she holds upright. A long, dark robe drops away from her head behind her, and its pyramidal shape lends emphasis to her broad hips and their suggestion of strength and fertility. The iconography of natural force echoes both Atl and Rivera.

The influence of Botticelli's **'Birth of Venus'** on the mural is apparent, especially in the style in which Orozco painted the second group of figures (59). Four angelic female figures hover above and around the central group of mother and child, just as in Botticelli's painting three angelic figures attend Venus. The elaborately flowing robes of the group also suggest the style of the Italian Renaissance, as does the modelling of their faces. Their attention is entirely centred upon the mother and child, but their function is limited to suggesting the dignity of motherhood in a highly decorative manner.

**'Maternity'** is formalistically unique amongst Orozco's murals of this period in that he uses the pyramidal construction (as did Rivera in **'The Creation'**) to suggest momentous

natural forces. In later murals such as '**Social and Political Junkheap**' (1924) and '**The Destruction of the Old Order**' (1926), this would become transformed into a symbolic heap of fragments.

Siqueiros' first murals in the ENP, painted in 1922, were more innovative in style than provocative in content. At about this time, trouble erupted over the topics and nudes in some of the murals:

Although the sequence of events has not been precisely determined, Jean Charlot's account confirms that Rivera's work in the enclosed area Anfiteatro had to overlap in time with the first mural assignments being carried out by members of the Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors in the nearby open courtyard of the school. There, the erection of scaffolds in the stairways and along three floors of patio corridors, together with the uninhibited, untidy working habits of experimenting mural painters, and, above all, the unconventional forms that began to appear on the walls as the artists strove to create a native Mexican style, provoked the students into slanderous, rock-throwing attacks against the painters and school administrators. Some of the murals were damaged, and arming themselves with pistols, the artists fought back. The confrontation lasted well over a year and eventually escalated to implicate the official authorities in the newly reformed Ministry of Education, including the minister himself. Through all, Rivera seems to have continued to work more or less unmolested in the auditorium.

60.

Siqueiros produced only two comparatively small murals in late 1922, '**The Angel**' (5.E) and an Indian '**Christ**'(6.2), the first in a series with the theme of The Discredited (or "Fallen") Myths. The more ambitious of the two, '**The Angel**' (variously called '**The Elements**' (61) and '**The Spirit of the Occident Descending upon the Americas**' (62), is painted on the ceiling of a stairwell in the school. Siqueiros utilised the architectural setting of the mural to add a powerful perspective to his depiction of this winged figure swooping headfirst towards the viewer's position. The figure occupies about a quarter of the available surface, the remaining area being filled with geometric symbols of the elements (for example, lightning and shells) and cubistic cones (suggestive of flame) which contribute depth and a focal point to the mural. The depiction of the angel, with its modernistic simplicity rather than neoclassical style, accords with the views Siqueiros expressed in his 1921 article in Vida Americana:

We draw silhouettes, filling them with pretty colours; when modelling, we remain engrossed in superficial arabesque and overlook the concept of the great primary masses: the cubes, cones, spheres, cylinders, pyramids which should be the scaffold of all plastic architecture. Let us impose the constructive spirit upon the purely decorative; colour and line are expressive

elements of the second rank, the fundamental basis of a work of art is the magnificent geometrical structure of form and the concept of the interplay of volume and perspective which combine to create depth; "to create spatial volumes".

63.

Certainly 'constructive' in terms of criteria he advocated in his article, the mural itself does not express any direct contemporary political or social comment, though it offers a radical aesthetic contrast to the more neoclassical angels of 'The Creation' or 'Maternity'.

Also known as 'The Myths', Siqueiros' 'Christ' is simpler than 'The Angel' and lacks much of the dynamism of the other mural, being no more than the depiction of a figure identifiable as Christ by means of the halo, the sacerdotal gesture of the hands and the stigmata they bear. Rather than the emergent, dynamic Christ-like figure which is the focus of 'The Creation', Siqueiros' Christ is much more restrained. Once again, Siqueiros' over-riding concern is aesthetic rather than political, for he seems to have been influenced by the postures and style of the figures of 'Women at the Fountain'(64) painted in 1921 by Picasso, one of the 'three modern Spanish geniuses' he names in 'A New Direction' in Vida Americana. Siqueiros seems to have derived the facial features of his Christ - the long, broad nose and highly-arched eyebrow ridges - from an obsidian Aztec ceremonial mask (65) held in the National Museum. In a culture so sensitive about respect for religion, this mural was considered blasphemous and in his autobiography Siqueiros recounts how he often had to physically defend his art from students who interrupted him at work and persistently tried to damage it. He writes of the 'great shock' it created, and tells of the occasion when he drew a pistol to discourage the vandals(66).

By marrying a contemporary style to the indigenous features of his Indian Christ, he was again fulfilling the criteria he set out in his artistic manifesto: 'Let us further reject theories postulating a "national" art. We must become universal; our racial and local elements will inevitably appear in our work.' In his mural art of this period, Siqueiros clearly follows his own aesthetic principles (unlike Rivera, for example, who in 'The Creation' took his message and form from Vasconcelos' notions about education) and so his murals have more to do with his own perceptions of a national art befitting the new era emerging in his work 'inevitably' than the synthetic "nationalism" of his state patron. It was now apparent that no single approach to

the acknowledged problem of the creation of a national art was accepted by all muralists.

Perhaps in response to the hostile reception of the murals already painted, and the ominous manoeuvrings of the Obregón Government, a new determination and consciousness becomes apparent in the murals of 1922-23. Rivera, not hitherto the most prolific of the muralists, was nonetheless appointed 'Head of the Department of Plastic Crafts' (67) by Vasconcelos after finishing 'The Creation' in 1923 and embarked upon a very ambitious programme in the new Education Ministry building assisted by Montenegro, Charlot and de la Cueva. Rivera's SEP series demonstrate his confident mastery of the mural medium and an outstanding artistic versatility.

Since by 1928 Rivera would have completed some 235 mural panels in the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* it would not be practicable to attempt to analyse every one of the individual works. However, since Rivera conceived and organised these murals as forming distinct series with a common theme or linking device (as in the *corrido* series discussed in the next chapter) one may legitimately generalise about each series as an artistic totality, and focus attention more closely on representative murals which suggest Rivera's aesthetic and ideological perspectives most clearly.

Vasconcelos made available to the mural painters virtually all the wall space in the gallery corridors of the three floors surrounding the two patio courtyards of the building, as well as the main staircase and the elevator alcove. The two courtyards are separated by a cloister, leaving three walls surrounding each 'court'. Initially the project was intended to be completed by a small syndicate of muralists ostensibly working to Rivera's direction, but within a very short time Rivera had secured the whole remaining project for himself and one assistant, Xavier Guerrero, in an act of unscrupulous self-interest. The first murals were painted in the 'Court of Labor' by Rivera and in the other patio, the 'Court of Fiestas', by Jean Charlot, Xavier Guerrero and Amado de la Cueva. Although the scheme they worked to was not as tightly planned as the later series, Rivera objected to the murals of the others in the 'Court of Fiestas':

Rivera's painting of the fiesta courtyard marks both the point at which a certain distancing, even antagonism, begins to occur between himself and the other mural painters, and the development of his position as the movement's leading figure. To some extent this distancing was illustrated by his treatment of fellow artists. While working as assistants on the labour courtyard, Amado

de la Cueva, Xavier Guerrero and Jean Charlot had been given the task of decorating some areas of the fiesta courtyard. This job reflected the ethos of the mural painters' syndicate, which aimed to share out the work collectively. However, in his capacity as Head of the Department of Plastic Crafts at the Ministry of Education, Rivera found his fellow painters' efforts unsatisfactory, and complaining that their work was not technically adequate and would not integrate with his own scheme, summarily dismissed them. He then assigned them the menial task of painting the escutcheons on the floor above. Furthermore, when he finally entered the fiesta courtyard to start his painting Rivera decided to chip from the wall two of Guerrero's frescos and one of Jean Charlot's on the grounds that they interfered with his own plans.

67.

Even if Rivera allowed four other panels by these painters to remain among twenty or so of his on the ground floor his action in destroying their work on the first floor walls shows little respect for the collective principles of the syndicate which he himself had helped to form. Indeed this kind of criticism could well have influenced the decision to terminate the contracts of these muralists, reducing to the subordinate role of assistants artists who had been involved in the 'mural renaissance' at its earliest stage and before Rivera joined the project.

Nevertheless Rivera worked with amazing energy and skill from March - July 1923 in the 'Court of Labor', producing some twenty-five main panels as well as linking panels depicting scenes of Mexican life and work in the regions of the country which each of the three corridor walls faced. The north wall, for example, depicted scenes from the south of Mexico which portray the traditional agricultural and craft industries of the tropical Tehuantepec region of the State of Oaxaca. In panels such as **'Weavers'**, **'Maya Woman with Baby'**, and **'Market Figures with Scales'** Rivera celebrates a traditional Indian society in which the Tehuana women have an assertive role. Indeed Rivera emphasises this anthropological point about Tehuana society with several portraits of the strong-featured, serene women of the region interspersed between the main panels, reclining above the doorways and far out-numbering the men included in the sequence of the wall. While the Tehuana women look out from the panels confidently, men appear in arduous activities in **'Cane Harvest'** and **'Sugar Factory'** (5.F), their faces hidden by the bent posture which suggests the labour-intensive toil needed to produce the region's main cash-crop. The murals on the other walls retain the indigenous aesthetic but overlay it with a new ideological interest in portraying the harsher realities of contemporary Mexico.

Compared to **'The Creation'** and other similarly allusive works by his fellow muralists

such as Orozco's 'Youth' and Siqueiros' 'Angel', the murals in the 'Court of Labor' are much more readily understood and direct. It is almost as if Rivera, who joined the Mexican Communist Party at about this time (and introduced their hammer and sickle emblem into two of the Tehuana murals) had decided to preach to the bureaucrats who would occupy the completed ministry buildings. The murals of the east wall include oppressive scenes from the mines of northwestern Mexico such as 'Entry to the Mine'(5.G), 'Leaving the Mine'(5.H) and 'The Foreman'(5.I) among scenes of rural life such as 'Peasants' (5.K) and 'Pottery Makers' (5.J). The bleak desert scenes in which the only colour is provided by the bright details of the Indian clothing contrast with the lushness of the Tehuana scenes on the adjoining wall as if Rivera's new impulse is towards a realistic rather than folkloric depiction. But this too is idealised to some extent, as the significant work 'The Embrace' (5.K) shows. Situated more or less in the centre of the corridor range, the panel links the themes of the industrial and rural scenes it comes between. It shows an industrial worker in overalls and a *campesino* in a full embrace as if to suggest a shared and harmonious understanding, but in a land where debt peonage dominated the agrarian economy and workers sought recognition as a new and distinct class the image of unity and mutual sympathy is one of hope rather than experience.

Then after 1917 the exiled landowner returned to his fallow fields, rebuilt the ruined hacienda, and put the jobless to work. The age-old methods of production, clumsy and primitive, continued as before. Abuses like debt-peonage were against the new Constitution, but the law was rarely enforced. How much had really changed in Mexico?

.....The landowner carried a gun and lorded it over the peons as he had for centuries. These owners held sway in the central and northern states: Michoacán, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Guanajuato, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Durango, Coahuila, and Nuevo León. Against these powerful people Obregón could do nothing. His shaky government dared not begin land reform in their states, for it would mean class war: this might split the country and topple the president.

68.

The industrial and rural tableaux of the east wall continue round the corner into the murals of the southern wall, with foundry scenes and a centrepiece which is the most didactic of all the murals on the ground floor of the court. This, the group comprising 'Liberation of the Peon' (5.L) and 'Rural Schoolteacher' linked by an overdoor panel called 'Northern Landscape Illuminated by the Dawning Light of Revolution' depict oppression

and emancipation. 'Liberation of the Peon' (5.M) conveys the ironic message that death is the only tragic freedom from oppression many northern Indians experience. The backdrop is provided by the same desert mountains which are backlit by a revolutionary dawn above the doorway and which continue into the adjoining tableau of rural education. In the foreground an armed horseman with a grief-stricken face holds the reins of the horses of his companions, who are 'freeing' and covering the naked body of the murdered Indian farmworker tethered to a stake. In the background at the foot of the mountains, an isolated settlement is seen burning. The grief and reverence shown by the armed campesinos suggests conventional depictions of Christ's body being taken down from the cross which reinforces the poignancy of the death of the anonymous *peón*. The adjoining mural conveys a hopeful message about life after the Revolution in the harsh northern desert. A mounted guard looks out from the mural as he stands protectively over the little group of students and the 'Rural Schoolteacher' (5.N) - signified by the open book in her lap - seated in the foreground.

Obregón's programmes sent teachers into the countryside with a revolutionary mission.

These teachers went to live in the villages, and by the end of 1924 the peasants had built themselves a thousand schools. ...The teachers were young idealists who disliked religion - to them it seemed superstition. Soon the village became an arena for the struggle between teacher and priest. ...usually the peasant thirst for education was too strong, and the priests lost ground all along the line. The Mexican peasants enjoyed their taste of progress.

69.

Her students include children, mothers, an old man and a worker in overalls; in the background four men are ploughing the land with two teams of horses while further back still two figures are constructing a modest building. Again, all the figures have Indian features. The progressive message is unmistakable, and stands in stark contrast to the sombre depiction of the dead *peón* alongside; yet if Vasconcelos might have been expected to approve, he would also have noted the vigilant guard defending the educative emancipation of the *peóns* 'Rural Schoolteacher' endorses. Mike González has discussed the ideological implications of the murals:

The first series derive directly from his trip to southern Mexico and present in stylised form the women and the society of Tehautepec in southern Mexico.

On the east wall the two most overtly political panels address the experience of the miners; in *The Entry* bowed miners trudge down into the belly of the yawning mine which consumes them. In *The Exit* a miner is searched by the foremen at the surface, his arms raised in an attitude of crucifixion. In a later panel, the curiously named *Liberation of the Peon*, an armed soldier holds his companions' horses while they lay down and cover the naked body of a dead peon, its attitude that of the Christ figure taken down from the cross that Rivera must have seen in so many Italian murals. The peon's hands are tied; he has probably been shot, and his face is obscured. The religious echoes in all three paintings are inescapable; as a history of injustice they are telling and powerful. But they are also compellingly fatalistic, passive and without response. The workers have the status of victims; the Indians are picturesque but impassive and idealised. And, if the ninth panel, *The Embrace*, is intended as a pointer to the future, then the unmistakable halo around the peasant's head and his priestlike garb and stance suggest a reconciliation in sorrow, a shared despair. There is nothing here of joint action.

70.

In the second half of 1923 Rivera moved through into the 'Court of Fiestas' in which Charlot, Guerrero and de la Cueva were already working. Here he worked just as energetically, soon surrounding their work with his and then finding fault with it. In this he was supported by the new Minister of Education, Dr. J.M. Casauranc. Vasconcelos had resigned in protest over the de la Huerta affair (see below), but Rivera was to find Casauranc an appreciative patron. The folkloric themes of the murals in this courtyard had been established to complement those of the 'Court of Labor' and the work by all three muralists constitutes a celebratory depiction of indigenous culture. However Rivera's late interest in proletarian politics, reflected in his paintings of political gatherings embellished with the hammer and sickle, added a new dimension to the planned series. Rivera's political comment and attack upon injustice is more muted, but his expectation of a new era is depicted in the central sequence of the west wall consisting of four panels showing a socialist assembly on May Day and in that of the south wall where three linked panels depict a meeting for the redistribution of land to Indian farmers. His objectives for the series as a whole have been described by Stanton L. Catlin:

The series theme is the popular festivals of the Mexican people, both religious and secular. Rivera saw these communal celebrations in which votive and festive aspects are to a greater or lesser degree combined, as carrying on the spirit of the ritualized social existence of the ancient Mexicans. His aim was to integrate these rituals into a redefined, specifically Mexican, proletarian society that would embrace the full gamut of the nation's popular life and supersede the Spanish colonial tradition.

71.

In the two scenes of political assembly Rivera shows us an essentially static gathering listening attentively to leaders. The meetings are well-organised and calm, and have attracted such crowds that some spectators have had to find vantage points above the doorways which separate the murals' main panels. Each has a central focus, with some spectators actually facing away from the courtyard as if looking towards the speakers addressing the meetings. Most of the crowds are men, young and old, but several women are given prominent positions in 'May Day Meeting' near the two speakers - one in overalls and one in the white cotton shirt and trousers of the agrarian worker - who stand to each side of the central doorway. Each speaker addresses a crowd dressed as he is, but the message of unity is carried on a banner above and between both of them which fills the space above the door with the words: '*Real civilization will be the harmony between man and the earth and between man and man.*' Far from there being harmony in contemporary Mexico, the nation was in the throes of a power struggle between rival bourgeois factions in the Government which would culminate in a bloody attempted coup d'etat. Each faction sought to cultivate the urban and the agrarian workers, who themselves remained disunited and with their aspirations still circumscribed by the ruling bourgeoisie.

In 'Distribution of the Land' (5.0 & 5.P) Rivera treats one of the most important hopes of the Revolution - one which had remained largely unfulfilled due to Obregón's introduction of a formal process involving local judges in examining all land claims and redistribution. He depicted a *campesino* meeting at which Indian farmers have gathered to hear the pronouncements of the white officials who are seated around a table in their midst. The youngest official, a *mestizo* wearing a city suit like the others, is standing before three grey-haired old men (perhaps the council of the community) pointing with his left hand to a blueprint and gesturing into the distance with his right arm raised. Some armed villagers stand in the foreground with their backs to the viewer and some other men in suits, Zapata and Villa among them, stand in the right-hand panel looking out rather than at the meeting itself. Again the emphasis is on harmonious unity, preserved by proper legal process, despite the historical reality of the disunity between the Divisions of the North and the South during the Revolution when they occupied but failed to hold the capital in 1914. Mike González sees

Rivera's depiction of ordinary Mexicans as a 'moving' innovation in the art tradition but sees in their very stillness a disappointing abstraction from life:

These crowds of faces standing watching the May Day celebration or the ceremonies of Land Distribution are, in conjunction with the others in the same court, still-lives in human form, representations of life in a timeless place, an Eden lost and regained. Their symbolism, though the themes are secular, is religious; their form is statuesque; their function is iconographic. This is the creation of a language of symbolic forms, recurring in different times and places, so that they become, in some way, the substitution of the eternal nation for a religious eternity. They are moving because the peasant and the Indian have not figured in earlier Mexican art; they are disappointing because these representatives of the masses are still without life, without dynamic, without intervention in their own world.

72.

However these two centrepieces with their message of constructive stability have a more violent counterpart in the panel of the west wall adjoining '**Distribution of the Land**'. This mural, '**Burning Judases**' (5.Q), depicts a noisy traditional festival in a crowded street. The custom of burning the effigies of despised politicians here offers Rivera a satirical opportunity to represent church, army and industrialists in the form of firework-filled dummies swaying and exploding above the crowds. But the festive noise disguises a shot, and in the foreground three men bend to pick up cobblestones to defend themselves. Again, the people are reminded of the need for vigilance and self-defence. Before discussing Rivera's other murals completed in the SEP and at Chapingo at the end of 1923 and into 1924 it would be as well to discuss the contemporary work of Orozco and Siqueiros who were painting in the ENP.

Orozco's murals of 1923 reflect the transition to a more outspoken stance very clearly. Immediately to the left of '**Maternity**' Orozco painted a mural depicting '**The Struggle of Man Against Nature**'(73). In this mural a blonde-haired, muscular nude male overcomes a supine ape-like figure in a cubistic landscape of pyramidal mountains. The constellation the Plough can be seen shining above them in the twilight. Man is seen to overcome his animalistic opponent with the aid of a weapon, the dagger he grasps in his upraised arm. Although pyramidal forms figure in this mural clearly intended to complement '**Maternity**' immediately next to it (Orozco's attribution of roles on the basis of gender is thoroughly conventional) these structures are relegated to the background rather than contributing meaning as they do in '**Maternity**'. Like '**Tzontemóć**', '**The Struggle of Man Against**

**Nature'** was completely over-painted by Orozco in 1926, to be replaced with **'The Destruction of the Old Order'**.

It seems probable that Orozco next painted **'Tzontemóc'**, which in the original sequence was situated to the left of **'The Struggle of Man Against Nature'**; it may be that both the theme, and the indigenous features of the figure of **'Tzontemóc'** were intended to dispel any hint drawn from **'The Struggle of Man Against Nature'** that the indigenous races of Mexico were backward or inferior. Certainly these features in **'Tzontemóc'** were carried over into the last mural in this 1923 series, **'Christ Destroying his Cross'**, which is an important mural in that Orozco can be seen to be moving from allegory towards contemporary comment in his muralism. Against a backdrop of cubistic pyramids, cones and spheres very like those of **'The Struggle of Man Against Nature'**, a towering, powerful Christ wearing a long white robe applies a flaming torch with his left hand to the tumbling, large wooden cross which dominates the foreground and which the figure has just cut down with the large axe held in his right hand.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the mural is the haloed head of Orozco's Indian Christ whose strongly-set facial features convey an impression of sublime power, confidence and determination. The expression is positive and sure, without guilt. Christ's level gaze is directed at the orbiting paired spheres (representations of the world and the moon) which are set at the same height as the figure's head. The all-encompassing nature of his vision is further implied in the depictions of other planets as darker, smaller circles within the shadows cast by the larger of these two bright spheres. The astronomical motif is repeated in a reflected form above the competing figures of **'The Struggle of Man Against Nature'**, and by locating the focus of these motifs in the central panel **'Tzontemóc'** Orozco forged a link between all three murals in which the classical landscape of academic paintings or the indigenous landscape of Velasco is replaced by a modern stylistic iconography of the universe.

Clearly Orozco's portrayal of Christ in this mural as a lone, forceful, active figure rather than as Christ the preacher, crucified martyr, or divine king throned in glory marks a radical departure from such traditional depictions. Where, for instance, Baroque painting is typified

by exaggerated feeling, heavily modelled features like musculature, and florid backgrounds, Orozco chooses to be dispassionate. Aesthetically, there is an implied rejection of the commonplace Baroque excess of colonial Mexican church fresco. Orozco does not sentimentalise his subject matter: he plays down the godhood of Christ, and unlike Siqueiros omits the customary stigmata which proclaim Christ's martyrdom. Moreover, the powerful features of the face of Orozco's Christ and the simplicity of the folds of the robe he wears resemble the work of the early Renaissance Florentine painter Masaccio (some of Orozco's later muralism has been thought to afford further evidence of his interest in Masaccio [74](#)). The strong chiaroscuro effects of, for example, Masaccio's '**Miracle of St. Peter's Shadow**' ([75](#)) could have been an influence on Orozco's utilisation of light and darkness in '**Christ Destroying his Cross**', and would have harmonised with his apparent preference for simplicity.

Apart from these stylistic considerations, Orozco's perspective of Christ also differed from those produced by his fellow muralists. Rivera's rather neoclassical '**The Creation**' included a portrayal of a Christ-like figure situated at the apex of the tree of life; and Siqueiros' less exuberant '**Christ**' revealed a more reserved, passive figure. Neither work achieves the same degree of libertarian emphasis produced by the iconoclasm of Orozco's mural in which Christ himself seems to acknowledge that the crucifixion was an inglorious event. Returning to the same thought in 1932-34 with '**Modern Migration of the Spirit**' (Dartmouth College, U.S.A. [76](#)), he adopted an even more forthright, less ambivalent approach: a stigmatised but roused, vibrant, athletic Christ stands looking out from the mural over a felled cross in the foreground (the background being one of Orozco's pyramidal symbolic junkheaps) and the viewer is confronted by the figure's assertively-raised clenched fist and unflinching gaze.

The turbulent year of 1923 saw the murder of Francisco Villa. He had retired from active revolutionary politics in 1920 to establish a model farm in the north, supported by the lavish funds paid by the then Interim President, de la Huerta, as the price of peace. Ronald Atkin suggests that Villa's loyalties lay with de la Huerta:

Soon after retiring to the ranch Villa agreed to be interviewed by a group of American newspapermen. It was a short meeting. One of the first questions was whether he would ever take up arms again. Villa replied that he would do

so if the Americans attacked Mexico or if Adolfo de la Huerta should ever need his help.

77.

Villa was murdered on 20th July 1923, and de la Huerta made a bid for power with a well-supported military revolt early in December. In the very same week, the muralists adopted a series of radical collective precepts which sought to re-orientate the nature of the mural project. This is therefore a good point at which to review both the artistic achievement of two to three years and the ideological values of the iconography which emerged during what one recalls Orozco saw as 'a time of preparation...with only timid allusions to history, philosophy, and various other themes'. Moreover, from late 1923 the membership of the group dwindled until only Rivera and his assistants still had government funding and approval.

Clearly two forces effectively channelled the development of the ideological and artistic principles of state-sponsored muralism during the first years: a force external to the group which moderated the acceptable iconography and expression of this 'public' art, namely their official patronage; and a determined internal arbiter of style, Rivera. His particular advantage in this self-acquired role over his fellow muralists lay in having the clear backing and favour of Vasconcelos.

The influence of the mural funding arranged by Vasconcelos is evident. Without it, it seems highly unlikely that anything on the scale of the project, involving so many young, talented artists, would have survived in the difficult years of the early 1920's. Their commissions were an imaginative and bold aspect of a national education policy which itself was an inherent part of a programme of national reconstruction. The prestigious locations, the financial support of the group extending to salaries and material costs, and the official approval of stylistic experimentation and 'indigenous' themes all provided the muralists with what might have seemed ideal circumstances for the development of a strong movement. But there were disadvantages, too. Atl's work was an early victim of official disapproval, and later many of the remaining muralists were dropped from the project as a consequence of Rivera's criticism of their work.

Fortunately many of them did not simply abandon muralism but were able to later continue as muralists having regained or found other sources of funding and patronage - partly thanks to

Rivera's acknowledged success and the interest it created, ironically. Yet by the end of 1923 they had handed on to the remaining active members of the group several important features of the '*Indigenismo*' the project had sought to proclaim to the people.

In the early days of the project the emphasis on '*Indigenismo*' - valuing the native culture - is reflected in two distinct ways. Murals by Charlot, Amado de la Cueva and Leal portray and celebrate folkloric and everyday traditions of Mexico in works which depict the colonial past as an era of suppression of indigenous culture. Their interest in the everyday life and the fiestas of Mexico is taken up later by Rivera. Other works - the abstracted neoclassical, mythic themes of Atl, Montenegro ('**The Dance of Hours**') and Rivera (to a lesser degree, also of Siqueiros and Orozco) - seek to make bold, intellectual statements in line with Vasconcelos' cultural ideology and his political promotion of Nationalism.

The emergence of socialist awareness of the problems of Mexico's working people (coincident with some muralists joining the PCM in 1922 and the formation of their artists' union) is inherent in Siqueiros' and Orozco's works which offer an experimental iconography as a critical alternative to the fine art traditions of 'bourgeois' easel painting. It *appears* to be explicit in Rivera's depiction of workers and national feasts, as well as in his portrayal of an idealised union of worker and peasant (something which did not exist at the time and never had existed to any significant extent), but in fact it is diluted in his murals by the restrained iconography and passive role of the campesinos and urban workers he paints.

All three strands of artistic effort and experiment possess a common feature - an attempt to create a trans-class populist iconography in line with Vasconcelos' nationalist concerns. Also, all clearly recognise to varying extents the value of indigenous themes, subjects and symbols. In the early days of the mural movement, '*Indigenismo*' did not develop much beyond a limited and picturesque treatment of Indian culture and, with rare exceptions such as Leal's study for his mural '**Feast at Chalma**', generally do not reflect an awareness of the needs and hopes of the ordinary people of Mexico. If the central ideology of the state stresses reconstruction and consolidation as the necessary first stage in creating a social revolution then from the government's point of view these works would have been considered revolutionary. However, all the muralists of this period depict a limited view of Mexican society for its class structure is

reflected rather than explained and its contradictions largely ignored. The bourgeoisie and landowners, church and political rulers are rarely portrayed at this stage, though Rivera disapprovingly portrays the greed of the rich and the cruelty of the work they force upon the northern peons and campesinos. What is neglected of the socioeconomic conditions of post-Revolutionary Mexico is just as significant as what is actually portrayed about the nation. However, the next phase of the mural movement includes works which are more concerned with current political and social issues, and reveal explicitly how the people of Mexican suffer under the post-revolutionary bourgeois regimes as they ever did under Porfirio Díaz.

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2. Charlot, J. The Mexican Mural Renaissance 1920-1925; Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1963.
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4. 'A Declaration of Social, Political and Aesthetic Principles' in Siqueiros, D.A., Art and Revolution, *op. cit.*, pps.24-25.  
The attributed date, 1922, is not supported by any other secondary source; most date this document to late 1923 in concurrence with the date of signature. Indeed the Manifiesto was published in 'El Machete' No.7 (June 1924) above the following:  

*Por El Proletariado del Mundo.  
México, D.F., a 9 de diciembre de 1923.  
El Secretario General, David Alfaro Siqueiros;  
el 1er. vocal, Diego Rivera; el 2o. vocal, Javier Guerrero;  
Guadarrama, German Cuéto, Carlos Mérida.*
5. Ades, D., Art in Latin America: The Modern Era. 1820-1980; Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989; p.151.
6. Gerardo Murillo Cornadó (Dr. Atl), Roberto Montenegro, Xavier Guerrero, Jorge Enciso, Eduardo Villaseñor, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Julio Castellanos, Fermín Revueltas, Amado de la Cueva, Fernando Leal, Jean Charlot, Ramón Alva de la Canal, Carlos Mérida, Emilio García Cahero, Máximo Pacheco, Juan Manuel Anaya and Roberto Reyes Pérez were all involved in the mural movement of the 1920's according to Suárez' Inventario (op.cit.) p.39.
7. Brenner, A., Idols Behind Altars : The Story of the Mexican Spirit; Beacon Press, Boston, 1970. First published in 1929.  
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Stewart, V., 45 Contemporary Mexican Artists: A Twentieth Century Renaissance; Stanford University Press, U.S.A., 1951.  
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8. The distinction made here between the muralists' reputation as radicals and as 'revolutionary artists' is tenable. In their autobiographies Rivera (My Art. My Life, The Citadel Press, 1960) and Siqueiros (Me Llamaban El Coronelazo : Memorias de David Alfaro Siqueiros, Editorial Grijalbo, S.A., México D.F., 1977) claim revolutionary standing as artists; B.S.Myers (among others) concurs

(see Myers's Mexican Painting in Our Time; Oxford University Press, New York, 1956; Foreword, p.vii).

While there is ample evidence of their political involvement during the 1920's (with the exception of Orozco) the matter of their claim to have led a revolution in art with their muralism must be qualified in view of the long traditions of both mural and popular art in Mexico.

9. Rochfort, D., The Murals of Diego Rivera; Journeyman Press with the South Bank Board, London, 1987; p.18.
10. Hodges, D. and Gandy, R., Mexico 1910-1982: Reform or Revolution?; Zed Press, London, 1983; p.27.
11. Schmitt, K.M., Communism in Mexico: A Study in Political Frustration; University of Texas Press, 1965; pp. 4-6.  
Schmitt reports that Gale's splinter group received some support from Carranza but when Obregón came to power Gale himself was deported in 1920 and the group foundered.
12. Hodges and Gandy, op.cit., p.47.
13. Idem., pp. 48 & 49.
14. Carr, B., Labour and Politics in Mexico, 1910-1929; doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1974; pp. 195-196.  
(Published in 1976 as El Movimiento Obrero y La política en México, 1910-1929, I; SepSetentas, México D.F.)
15. Hodges and Gandy, op.cit., p.38.
16. Hodges and Gandy, idem, p.49.
17. A fuller discussion of the changing alliances of these parties in 1921 may be found in Carr, idem., p.190.
18. Casasola, G., Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana 1900-1970; Editorial Trillas S.A., México D.F., 1973; Vol.5, pp.1556-1557.
19. Charlot, op.cit., p.71.
20. 'El Universal', 27 August 1920.
21. See Ades, op.cit., pp. 198-200.
22. Charlot, op.cit., p.70.
23. Mike González has described Lunacharsky's influence:

Vasconcelos' ministry reprinted the classics in cheap editions and commissioned new histories, geographies and archaeology to furnish the edifice of Mexican nationalism. He claimed, in fact, to be 'the first imitator of the good aspects of the Soviet regime' and explicitly modelled himself on Lunacharsky. Presumably what he was pointing to was the ambitious Soviet intention to democratise the best of bourgeois culture, to make the classics widely available, to raise the general level of literacy correspondingly and to harness the persuasive powers of the artists.

'Diego Rivera: the man who painted walls'  
International Socialism 2:38; Spring 1988; p.67.

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28. Casasola, op.cit., Vol.5, p.1570.
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36. Wolfe, B.D., Diego Rivera: His Life and Times; Alfred A.Knopf, New York and London, 1939; pp. 148-149.
37. Myers, B.S., Mexican Painting in Our Time; Oxford University Press, New York, 1956; p.35.
38. See Schmeckebier, L.E., Modern Mexican Art, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1939, (fig.51) for a reproduction of 'The Creation' which shows the organ in situ.
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See also Charlot, op.cit., p.181.
40. Schmeckebier, op.cit., pp.48-49.
41. Rivera, D., My Art. My Life; The Citadel Press, New York, 1960; p.130.
42. This is quoted more fully as no.27, (p.166).
43. Catlin, op.cit., p.238.
44. Ades, op.cit., p.156.
45. Ibid.

46. Reproduced in Charlot, op.cit., figs.27a and 27b.  
A detail of Revueltas' mural appears as fig. 25b.
47. Casasola, op.cit. Vol.5.  
Attention is drawn to the Sonoran character of the cabinet by the rival Sinaloan group in their manifesto, '*Manifiesto Contra el Gobierno del General Obregón*', reproduced on pp.1593-1594.
48. Ibid.
49. Idem., p1587.
50. Carr, op.cit., p183.
51. Hodges and Gandy, op.cit., p.49.
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53. Idem., p.1571.
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58. Orozco, An Autobiography (op.cit.), p.85.
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64. Reproduced in Berger, J., Success and Failure of Picasso; Penguin Books, London, 1965; p.96. This illustration is accompanied by the observation: 'Later and more obviously he (Picasso) caricatured the classic ideal as found in Greek sculpture and in Poussin.'
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69. Hodges and Gandy, op.cit., p.34.
70. González, op.cit., pp.74-75.
71. Catlin, op.cit., p.245.
72. González, op.cit., pp.75.
73. Reproduced in Orozco! 1883-1949 ed. D.Elliot op.cit., p.23.
74. See Schmeckebier, op.cit., pp. 89, 91 & 99.
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## Chapter Six

### LOS TRES GRANDES, 1924-26

During these years two remarkable transformations affected the muralists. The mural art completed under government sponsorship acquired a much more direct and outspoken form and content, and two of the three muralists would lose mural commissions which had survived the change of education minister from José Vasconcelos to J.M.Puig Casauranc. Far from being coincidental, both changes were closely related. By the end of 1924, Rivera alone of the original group was retained by Casauranc as a muralist (others worked to his direction on his projects as assistants, without their former aesthetic and technical freedom). By a series of shrewd moves, Rivera enhanced his own position and in effect destroyed the collective principle of the muralists' syndicate. By the end of the decade, Mexican muralism and the art of Diego Rivera had become synonymous.

This was also to be a highly significant period in the development of Mexico's post-revolutionary society. Early in 1924 a civil war erupted which threatened the Sonoran presidential succession from Obregón to Calles, yet the decade closes with the central government in complete control. Much of the political turmoil and hopes of the time are reflected in the murals of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros as well as in the newspaper which they organised, 'El Machete'.

With Villa's murder on 20th July 1923, the last of the non-Sonoran military leaders of the Revolution had been eliminated: Carranza, Zapata, and now Villa were all dead. Perhaps Villa's death occurred at a most convenient time for the Obregonistas. De la Huerta now emerged as a threat to Sonoran supremacy, and Villa had earlier promised to support him if de la Huerta ever needed his help. The former vice-president's ambition for the highest office had been thwarted by Obregón. In the first place, Obregón removed de la Huerta from the limelight of the 'Bucareli' conference; secondly, Obregón himself favoured Calles as his successor out of all the potential candidates. Outraged by his treatment at the hands of the President, de la Huerta resigned from his Cabinet position in early September 1923; on 24th

September, he became the official candidate of the PNC for the forthcoming presidential elections of 1924(1). From the very start of his campaign he attacked the Obregón cabinet's dealings over the 'Bucareli' treaties, criticising them as a sell-out arranged by Obregón. In fact, de la Huerta had some justification in this, for the ratified 'Bucareli' treaties gave U.S. interests considerable concessions, damages, and operating rights within Mexico. These contravened Article 27 of the Constitution, which precluded the exploitation of Mexico's natural resources by foreigners(2). De la Huerta's candidacy caused Obregón considerable trouble, for not only was the ex-treasury minister's position and platform credible with respect to the issue of the U.S. concessions, but his nationalist campaign threatened the carefully-built PLM-CROM-PNA alliance. De la Huerta won over the support of its least committed member, the PNC, who adopted him as their official candidate. Though in favour of foreign investment, the PNC were themselves split over the matter of the terms of reparation demanded by the 'Bucareli' treaties; some members, among them Dr. J.M. Puig Casauranc, left the party and joined the Callistas, though the majority of the party were staunchly behind de la Huerta. As a result, Obregón lost much support among the urban bourgeoisie, as did Calles.

Obregón's own position, exacerbated by de la Huerta's outright defection, had been troubled for some time. As regards the overall position of the Sonorans, a slight threat had appeared in the shape of the candidacy of the Sinaloan General Angel Flores, declared on 21st August 1923. If this rivalry was to be somewhat overshadowed by the problem of de la Huerta, it was nevertheless indicative of the serious disaffection of the generals. This was dealt with by progressively reducing the political power and the material resources of the army. But in the second half of 1923, Obregón's main concern was centred on his declining relationship with CROM whose leader, Luis N. Morones, now clearly favoured Calles(3).

Although Calles also counted the leader of the PNA Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama amongst his supporters the PNA in general had become estranged from CROM over the matter of its rights to carry out organisation of the campesinos (whom the CROM sought to annex, arguing that they were wage-workers), and Obregón now exploited this estrangement to attempt to consolidate his position. With the apparent defection of CROM, Obregón was left without a

mass base of popular support, and sought to build a relationship with the PNA to replace it:

Obregón's gradual shift towards the agrarista bloc was a consequence of the growing boldness and independence of CROM's initiatives during the closing years of his presidency. But the move was also a necessity in view of the growing intimacy between Calles and organised labour. Obregón urgently needed at least the appearance of a mass popular base in order to counter the powerful position which Calles was creating for himself through lavish dispensation of patronage in favour of CROM leaders.

4.

Clearly, Obregón's carefully-built PLM-CROM-PNA alliance was in disarray. De la Huerta now threw the bourgeois bloc into much more serious disunity with an open rebellion against Obregón's regime which began in Veracruz on 4th December 1923. It would be potentially much more damaging to the Jacobin Sonorans' economic strategies than CROM disaffection because of the serious disruption to Mexico's economic recovery it posed by once again raising the prospect of another civil war and shaking the confidence of foreign investors. With little headway against the campaign of Calles possible, de la Huerta took the daring step of declaring himself and his supporters in the PNC(5) in open revolt against the Government and Obregón. Having realised that constitutional action would not bring him the presidency, de la Huerta chose to resort to military means.

The actual revolt lasted for just over three months, and initially de la Huerta's insurrection received widespread support, including the defection of some commanders and their units from the Federal army. As the conflict broke out in a great many regional localities at once, and as it was so well supported, it required a major effort of the Federal forces to first contain it, then suppress it(6). One estimate of the numbers of troops involved in the fighting puts the forces supporting de la Huerta at about 60,000 men, opposed by the remaining (that is, after the defections to the rebels) Federal forces of about 35,000 troops(7). The revolt finally ended when de la Huerta, after seeing his initial tactical superiority whittled down in the course of a series of drastic defeats, fled into exile in the U.S. on 12th March 1924. The conflict had tried loyalties amongst the bourgeoisie, some of which were undeniably rather tenuous. Much of de la Huerta's support had come from other sections of the provincial bourgeoisie, envious of the Sonoran factions's position, and angered by their own exclusion from participation and the Sonorans' monopoly of power. Also, the PNC had supported him *en*

*masse*, leaving the Sonorans stronger than ever in the wake of the revolt with their opponents having virtually all been neutralised. Having survived two attempted revolts, the Sonorans could now claim to be the only group not to have resorted to means outwith the Constitution in pursuit of their goals.

A final threat to the Sonoran succession remained, but the Sinaloan General Angel Flores faced an Obregonista-Callista front now at least superficially united as a result of their necessary mutual collusion in defeating the de la Huerta insurrection. For the time being, he waited. The muralists, however, responded to the political turmoil occasioned by the de la Huerta revolt with a burst of political activity of their own. Within days of the beginning of the revolt the manifesto of their syndicate was issued on 9th December. Its radical line reflects the enthusiasm for Communism evident in the Soviet motifs (red stars, hammers and sickles) of their 1922 murals. Diego Rivera had joined the PCM late in 1922 (8), and other muralists soon followed including Siqueiros and Xavier Guerrero. In 1923 the three were elected on to the executive committee, giving the newly-formed artists' group **The Union of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico** one vote less than a majority in the seven-member PCM executive.

The syndicate had a marxist ideological orientation which anticipated the political militancy of Siqueiros, Rivera and Xavier Guerrero, who were elected to form the Executive Committee of the Mexican Communist Party in the Convention held that year. The other painters were communists, socialists, anarcho-syndicalists or sympathisers with the revolutionary ideals of the time.

9.

These Mexican Communists who looked to the Kremlin and de la Huerta - formerly Obregón's international economist - had maintained an unlikely partnership.

The political position of the PCM when the three muralists were elected to the executive was somewhat uncertain. The Party had suffered from its alliance with the suppressed CGT, and the CROM had extended its monopoly of control over the workers of Mexico by its continuing incorporation of smaller autonomous labour organisations. Consequently when the three muralists achieved their positions on the executive, the Party's position as a proletarian group was circumscribed by a more powerful rival. The situation was further complicated by two other factors: the support of the Party for Adolfo de la Huerta, and the

opposition this encountered from Bertram D. Wolfe, the outspoken and articulate U.S. Communist who had recently joined the PCM, and who would later become Rivera's biographer(10). Since the Mexican Communists distrusted Obregón's control and involvement in the CROM they were willing to hold a dialogue with other groups disaffected with the Obregonista regime such as the CGT and the supporters of Adolfo de la Huerta. This association was further nurtured by de la Huerta, who actually paid a subsidy to the PCM.

In that same year Bertram D. Wolfe, then a U.S. Communist, arrived in Mexico, ostensibly to work as a teacher. He soon involved himself deeply in PCM affairs. He found the Party now thoroughly engaged in politics but according to his views backing the wrong candidate, Adolfo de la Huerta. De la Huerta was paying the Party a subsidy, and the PCM had in turn agreed to support him in a revolt if necessary. Wolfe protested to the Executive Committee that Calles, not de la Huerta, offered the best opportunities for continuing the revolution. Wolfe's success is attested by the fact that the PCM supported the Calles-Obregon organization when de la Huerta revolted in late 1923, and in Veracruz the Party actually raised troops to aid the government.

11

The liaison between the PCM and de la Huerta points to his attempt to gain as much personal support as he could muster, from whatever group and also suggests that he had been planning his revolt for a considerable time. The PCM's decision to back Obregón and Calles rather than de la Huerta in the event of war breaking out between them probably saved it from suppression. Siqueiros was the most orthodox and single-minded of all of the muralists in his adoption of communist iconography to depict the struggle against Mexico's bourgeois politics. His use of the symbols of the struggle against capitalism is much less prolific than Rivera's inclusion of hammer and sickle symbols and red banners in 'Festival of 1st May' but seems more blunt.

Having developed an 'international' style of painting in his two 1922 murals, Siqueiros expanded the scope of his muralism to include a hitherto negligible political content in his 1923 mural, 'Burial of the Martyred Worker' (6.1; discussed below) which can be seen in the context of his 'Declaration of Social, Political and Aesthetic Principles' (the first draft of the artists' union manifesto):

The noble work of our race, down to its most insignificant spiritual and physical expressions, is native (and essentially Indian) in origin. With their admirable and extraordinary *talent to create beauty, peculiar to themselves, the art of the Mexican people is the most wholesome spiritual expression in*

*the world* and this tradition is our greatest treasure. Great because it belongs collectively to the people and this is why our fundamental aesthetic goal must be to socialise artistic expression and wipe out bourgeois individualism.

12.

Siqueiros, general secretary of the artists' union, assumed the responsibility of drawing up a manifesto containing the basic principles of their association. On 9th December 1923 all the muralists including fellow PCM leaders Rivera and Guerrero, with Orozco, signed the manifesto, which is therefore an important statement of their aesthetic and ideological thinking at this time. The above quote reflects their fervent nationalism and their rejection of bourgeois aesthetic values. They advocate muralism as a public, monumental form of art, repudiating such 'individualistic' expressions as easel painting, and other forms and media which they regard as essentially bourgeois. They appear to take a deliberate line against private art, and in their promotion of public art a distinct ideological tone is evident though the specifically political issues of the second draft (to be published in 1924) are not mentioned here. However, they state that art must be educative and emphasise that their immediate aim is to inform the masses of the need for unity and alertness in the change from the 'decrepit order' of Mexican society to a new social order. There is a warning that without solidarity and watchfulness everything gained by revolutionary struggle would be lost, and the role of a revolutionary art is to maintain a forceful commitment to informing and educating the people by means of the art for which they would be paid:

We proclaim that at this time of social change from a decrepit order to a new one, the creators of beauty must use their best efforts to produce ideological works of art for the people; art must no longer be the expression of individual satisfaction which it is today, but should aim to be a fighting, educative art for all.

13.

Seeking to put into practice these expansive principles, the artists' union agreed that groups of painters would work with a common purpose upon the same mural. However each would work according to their aptitudes even if all followed a preconceived plan. In the spirit of an ideology of collective activity it was agreed that no member would sign his mural, and problems of elitism would be avoided. A modified version of Murillo's '*Centro Artístico*' of 1911, the artists' union was in some ways a craft guild with the advantage of not being at the mercy of market forces constraining its style and content. If freed from consideration of the art

market and private dealers in pursuit of its artistic aims, the union to which the muralists belonged was subjected to external forces as a consequence of its dependence upon state patronage. In the meantime, however, the artists' union did function as a trade union, fixing by negotiation the conditions of work as well as a standard daily rate of pay: 'The work was done by contract based on the measurements of the walls and an eight-hour day, for which the master artist and the master mason received an average of eight pesos.'<sup>(14)</sup> Clearly the collective responsibility for work at the heart of these principles would aim to prevent individualistic conflicts such as Rivera's attack upon the work of his colleagues in the SEP. The manifesto was a bold and imaginative response to what its author perceived to be the historic crossroads at which the nation had arrived. Its commitment to political education through art becomes evident in the murals painted in 1924 and after, and is at once apparent in Siqueiros' own fragmentary murals.

Stylistically simple and restrained in terms of its comment, **'The Burial of the Martyred Worker'** (6.1) nevertheless powerfully captures the frustrating contemporary struggles of Mexican labour. In this unfinished work a large blue coffin embellished with hammer and sickle is borne upon the shoulders of three pall bearers whose facial features resemble those of **'Christ'** (6.2). The foremost right-hand pall bearer of the funeral was never added, but above and to the right of the other right-hand figure a large five-pointed star complements the communist symbols on the coffin. The three male figures who bear the coffin are accompanied by a single female mourner wearing a shawl who stands looking up at the coffin between the two men on the left-hand side. Charlot relates how Siqueiros' response to the news of the execution of Felipe Carrillo Puerto (the Constitutional Governor of Yucatán <sup>(15)</sup>) by de la Huerta's rebels was to dedicate this mural to the murdered leader:

Siqueiros was working on his third fresco, 'The Burial of a Worker', when the news of the shooting of Carrillo Puerto reached him in January 1924. He wrote the name of the murdered man on a paper which he sealed in a bottle and walled in the mortar behind the painted coffin, dedicating this plebeian memorial to him who claimed descent from the Mayan king Nachi-Cocom.

16.

Carrillo Puerto was a regional politician, organiser and radical whose objectives were to secure a more just society by promoting the rights of the rural poor. The Revolution had not altered

their dependence upon the landowners because it had not provided the land from which they might earn a living without the burden of debt peonage. However the Revolution had brought their representatives into precarious positions of power. The redistribution of the land on an even basis was what would have improved the economic imbalance in the rural areas. Agrarian leaders like Carrillo Puerto agitated for this radical reshaping of the hacienda system of rural life but their opponents had a great deal to lose. The landowners acted to remove the threat to their privilege:

In Yucatán the state government had curbed the power of the *hacendados* and begun to regulate the hemp industry. Hemp brought high prices on the world market, and these profits gave Yucatán room to manoeuvre: its government toyed with radical policies; the popular masses pressed for action. The Socialist Party of the Southeast and Carrillo Puerto's Resistance Leagues were struggling to shorten work hours and raise wages for the Mayan serfs who cultivated hemp. In 1922 Carrillo Puerto became governor. The organized workers and peasants helped push through reforms, including distribution of land to villages. He translated the Constitution of 1917 into Maya and taught peasants their rights. For two years the peasants struggled forward. In 1924 the landowners carried through a counter-revolution and shot Carrillo Puerto and his associates.

17.

The raised heads of the Indian pall-bearers, with their reserved but wary expressions, suggest vigilance rather than submissiveness, and their arms linked beneath the coffin and hands resting upon one another's shoulders emphasise their comradeship. Both the stockiness of the dark-skinned figures and the economical lines of the coffin give the work a monumental quality wholly in keeping with Siqueiros' own principles as he set them down in the artists' manifesto:

We repudiate so-called easel painting and every kind of art favoured by ultra-intellectual circles, because it is aristocratic, and we praise monumental art in all its forms, because it is public property.

18.

The mural memorial to Carrillo Puerto is direct and not preoccupied with fine art aesthetics. Indeed, it seeks to speak forcefully and plainly in the manner of Soviet propaganda posters, conveying an stark message not capable of being misunderstood. No concession is given to the viewer's political leanings, for it is a challenge to adopt those promoted by the figures of the mural, the sacrifice of the revolutionary dead symbolised by the coffin and behind all of this, the muralist's own ideological certainty. Its sombre heroes are not European or even

mestizo but Mayan Indians, and Siqueiros goes beyond *Indigenismo* with an honest recognition of their political dignity. They are not revitalised in the national culture as a picturesque relic of an overthrown native society but claim an assertive role.

The students of the National Preparatory School, an important section of the public for whom the work was intended, did not take kindly to it and made their views apparent when they stoned it (19). Siqueiros' response was to make them one of the targets in his vociferous attack on academicism in 'El Machete' (1924), '**The Bats and Mummies Attempt to Impede the Development of Revolutionary Paintings**'(20).

There is evidence which suggests that Siqueiros worked on one other mural in 1923-24, completing a study of a head wearing a modified Jacobin cap, variously known as 'Democracy'(21); 'Revolution'(22); and 'The Call to Liberty'(23). The study was seemingly destroyed by Siqueiros himself, and what remains is a partially completed mural in the ENP which Charlot has identified as '**The Revolution that Breaks Chains**'. It shows a native couple who are asserting their right to freedom. The man is supporting the woman who stands before him, and she holds the chains in her left hand while her right arm is raised defiantly, stressing a point with her raised forefinger. In the absence of an authoritative interpretation of the work, it could be seen as an exhortation to peons to effect their own emancipation. After this Siqueiros, one of the 'three major muralists', abandoned the ENP muralism to devote his energies to producing 'El Machete', the newspaper of the artists' syndicate.

The de la Huerta revolt of late 1923 and the first three months of 1924 inevitably provoked much discussion among political activists such as the three muralists Guerrero, Rivera and Siqueiros (Orozco, though affiliated to the artists' union, was very sceptical of political action). These three had been involved in the defection of the PCM from de la Huerta, and now supported the government of Obregón and his most likely successor, Calles, as their articles in 'El Machete' show. This was a fortnightly periodical which began in March 1924 with the aim of conveying to the masses of Mexico the views and perspectives of the mural group on artistic, social and political matters(24). The editorial board (Guerrero,

Rivera and Siqueiros) were also members of the executive of the PCM and the emphasis was largely on political issues. Indeed little mention is made of art in the articles written by Rivera and Siqueiros. Rivera, for instance, contributed an article to each of the first three issues of the paper: 'Assassins!!' in issue 1 (first fortnight of March 1924); and 'Pay Attention, Worker!' in issue 2, and 'The Inertia of the Government Supports a New Reactionary Coup' in issue 3 respectively (25); his only other article for the paper was written and published in 1927.

Rivera sought to encourage an alliance of *campesino*, urban worker and soldier to counteract the threat of a resurgent bourgeoisie which would destroy all that had supposedly been gained since the end of the Revolution in 1917. His article in issue 3 (first fortnight of April) in which he accuses central government of inertia in tackling the infiltration of public office in the regional governments by the class enemies of the working classes begins with a call to form a defensive alliance:

There is an urgent need to form a campesino-worker organisation. In the State of Puebla, as in almost all parts, the campesinos must save the government, and at the same time, it will save the small victories and the little land that the proletariat has fought for, for fourteen years. The government is still not a campesino-worker government, and the reaction is setting in!

(26)

Rivera's appeal renews the line he took in the 1923 murals, stressing the need for joint action to preserve the gains of the struggle. But he also demands that the rural workers must rally to defend Obregón's government, and thereby preserve the 'small victories' and 'little land' won for them by the proletariat! Here Rivera is certainly glossing the historical record, for the proletarian 'Red Battalions' fought for Carranza against the Zapatistas, but this myth is one which he would perpetuate in his muralism. In the wake of the de la Huerta uprising, Rivera is apparently very loyal to his government patrons who are slow to confront the danger posed by the reactionary forces who were gradually taking control of the regional governments. However his analysis of events in Veracruz is expressed in Communist terms:

In the State of Veracruz, landowners and merchants...helped by the bourgeoisie, are falling upon posts of public trust, occupying places which simply by an instinct of preservation ought to be entrusted to the vigilance of the true friends...for their proletarian principles in the social struggle...

27.

Rivera distinguishes between the provincial bourgeoisie of Veracruz infiltrating the regional

bureaucracy and the Sonoran provincial bourgeoisie who have consolidated their position in the national federal bureaucracy. The former are 'reactionary', while he promotes the interests of the latter. Rivera held that the Jacobin Constitutionalist Government of Obregón, though possessing many failings which he criticises here and in other articles, still had the potential - supported by a worker-campesino bloc (ironically CROM and the PNA were moving further apart than ever) - to bring about the new social order:

This (i.e. the formation of armed 'common defences and guards' with the government) will ensure the collaboration of campesinos and workers in the near future, and perhaps immediately will guarantee their own lives as well as that of the Government and that of the transitory state which allows for the possibility for the social majority to enter a new order. This is indispensable, and is also a question of life or death.

28.

These are key statements for understanding the political values which lie behind Rivera's murals. Far from these political compromises being caused by the stagnation of the Revolution's radical energy and direction, Rivera views them as inevitable intermediate conditions which must precede the consolidation of a workers' democracy. In this he is not just reflecting the national crisis and the assault upon Obregón's government by disaffected generals and former cabinet members but the position of the Communist Party internationally.

Siqueiros, in contrast to Rivera, was much more prolific and continued to write for the paper on a regular basis up to and including the eighth issue, after which he contributed another three items. Moreover, the accounts published in issue seven show that Siqueiros and Guerrero each contributed 43 pesos, whereas Rivera only gave seven (Amado de la Cueva, another muralist of the artists' union who had lost his commission several months before, gave 15 pesos). The total income received by donation was 139 pesos. Therefore, of the three muralists who formed the editorial board, Siqueiros and Guerrero each provided one-third of this income, with the final third provided by various others including Rivera's token donation of one peso per issue. Perhaps his commitment to the paper was rather half-hearted, given this and the fact that his articles effectively ceased after three issues. However, his name continues to appear as a member of the editorial board until issue nine.

Siqueiros was also more imaginative in his contributions to 'El Machete', providing

entertaining features such as corridos and a long-running farce as well as argumentative articles like Rivera's. He and Guerrero collaborated quite often, with Guerrero providing the large woodcut illustrations which accompanied corridos like 'The Wise Advice of Zapata and Montaño' (issue 3 29) and 'Corrido of May First' (issue 5, given over to the news of Lenin's death 30) under the title, '*Campeños y Obreros del Mundo, Unidos!*' Another favourite combination of information and entertainment was mock epic drama ('*farsa en varios actos*') - '*La Caída de los Ricos y la Construcción del Nuevo Orden Social*'. 'The Fall of the Rich and the Construction of the New Social Order' appeared more or less regularly from the second to the eighth issues (it was omitted from issue 5 which commemorated Lenin, and from issue 7). In its five instalments Siqueiros attacked various aspects of the establishment, using scathing wit to great effect in sections like 'The Trinity of the Scoundrels' (issue 2) and 'The Bats and the Mummies try to Impede the Development of the Revolutionary Paintings' (issue 8).

Siqueiros' articles range from the political polemic '*Si los Trabajadores no ponen el remedio, siguirán despillferrando los Diputados seis millones de pesos al año, en automóviles, en gasolina, en coñac, en prostitutas, y en tiros disparados al aire*' (issue 6) to current aesthetics '*En el Orden Burgués Reinante hay que Buscar la Causa de la Decadencia Arquitectónica Contemporánea*' (issue 5). Clearly he too saw a resurgence of the bourgeoisie which threatened the fulfilment of the broad social aims of the Revolution. Under the pen-name of Domingo A. Sierra he contributed other political articles such as '*Los "Grandes" Diarios de los Ricos: "Excélsior" y "El Universal"*' (issue 3) and '*La Bandera Nacional y la C.R.O.M.*' (issue 5) criticising the press and the trade union organisation created by Morones respectively, as well as a report of the PCM conference also in issue five. In general, Siqueiros was more critical of the government and its supporters and more outspoken than Rivera. However, though his involvement in muralism was declining (it would be much more productive again from the start of the 1930's), he retained a very important role within the artists' union during the difficult year of 1924. As general secretary, Siqueiros had prime

responsibility for communicating their collective views, mainly through the publication of their manifesto. The manifesto of the artists' union co-founded by the muralists had a rather drawn-out and complex evolution.

In the first issue of 'El Machete', Siqueiros published a commentary on the Manifesto of the Artists' Union (written in 1923) called '**Marginal Notes on the Manifesto of the Union of Painters and Sculptors**' (31). These 'Marginal Notes' incorporated a political and ideological element into the manifesto itself which, as has already been noted, dealt predominantly with aesthetic and artistic concepts. Three months later, in issue 7, the extended manifesto including Siqueiros' commentary appeared in 'El Machete' ostensibly as the original manifesto. A comparison of this later edition with the first reveals that the artists' union seems to have become more overtly political in the intervening six or so months.

The manifesto appeared beneath the following editorial paragraph which stresses its topicality as a re-statement of the political line of the muralists' union as a whole:

The manifesto which we publish in an extended form (*a continuación*), was launched by the Union of Painters and Sculptors, dated 9th December of last year, stemming from the military revolt led by Don Adolfo de la Huerta, and today, when the electoral struggle presents undoubted characteristics of a new reactionary initiative, its publication has as its objective the confirmation of their political principles. (*lineamientos políticos*)

Siqueiros also extended the reference made to art and aesthetics with this argument for national art:

Because we know very well that the establishment (*implantación*) in Mexico of a bourgeois Government will result in the usual decline in the popular indigenous aesthetic of our race that actually does not exist any more except in our popular indigenous classes, but which already has begun, however, to purify the intellectual centres of Mexico; we will struggle to avoid this because we know very well that the triumph of the popular classes will bring a flourishing not only in the social order, but an unanimous flourishing of ethnic Art, cosmogonical and historically transcendental in the life of our race, comparable to our admirable autocratic civilisations; we will struggle without respite to obtain this.

Although Siqueiros may be talking about the 'popular masses' he is surely not talking to them here, but striving for a historical declaration which will impress fellow-intellectuals. When he wished to write for the masses, as in his *corridos* and farces, he avoided using difficult language like that above. In another addition to the manifesto, he builds on this appeal for

national art a call for national unity, demanding support for Calles' candidacy as Obregón's successor in the name of those who died in the Revolution:

In the name of all the blood shed by the people in ten years of struggle and in the face of the reactionary cartel, we make an urgent call to all the campesinos, workers and revolutionary soldiers of Mexico, in order that understanding the vital importance of the struggle which is going on, and forgetting tactical differences, we should form a united front to fight the common enemy.

The manifesto states the union's support for Calles. Unfortunately, the more abstract the discussion of art in this unique statement of the artists' aims the more it undercuts their commitment to educating the masses with art 'for the people'. Like Rivera's articles, Siqueiros' political writings were pleas for national unity and reconstruction but he was more specific and critical of the reactionary opposition. Ironically such pleas were exactly what the government and bourgeois establishment of Mexico, badly shaken by the de la Huerta revolt, urgently required to help reconsolidate their position. Orozco did not contribute to 'El Machete' but he too found a polemical voice which is expressed in his murals.

In early 1924 Orozco seems to have experienced a dramatic change of mood as his muralism reveals. The frustration which prompted him to depict mutilated constructivism in the disquieting final (1924) version of '**The Revolutionary Trinity**' achieved a more specific and more hostile expression in his first caricature mural, '**The Rich Banquet while the Workers Quarrel**'. This antagonism towards what Siqueiros calls 'the reactionary cartel' is transformed into the uncompromising style of the final series of caricatures which the artist hurriedly executed before his commission was revoked in July 1924.

As it exists today, '**The Revolutionary Trinity**' (6.3; 6.A) is a reworking of an earlier version (the sole record of which seems to be Jean Charlot's tracing 32). In both the iconoclasm of '**Christ Destroying His Cross**' is given a more topical context: the target is the reconstructive theme of the earlier murals suggesting that a new society is being built out of the destruction caused by the Revolution. Charlot's sketch shows three figures, an elderly planner seated to the left with his plans, set squares and pencil to hand; to the right kneels a scowling worker holding tools as if busy but in fact looking over his shoulder. He has been distracted by the third figure, a muscular revolutionary whose face (and therefore, vision) is

completely obscured by the large swirling red flag under which he stands, holding his rifle butt down behind his exaggeratedly sinewy forearms. The late 1923 'trinity' is therefore an uneasy group confined together within the bounds of the mural but with the explosive central dynamic represented by the sightless revolutionary whose presence forever threatens their circumstantial unity. The ironic contrast with the composure and balance of the Christian trinity provides another source of the mural's tension. It is disruption rather than cooperation which is depicted by Orozco, with the worker on the point of quarrelling with the revolutionary soldier who is blinded by his ideology. Meanwhile the planner, being caught up in his vision of the new order, fails to see what is happening before his eyes and the danger the quarrel poses to his hopes.

What specifically provoked Orozco to return to 'The Revolutionary Trinity' early in 1924 is unclear even from his autobiography. Retaining the central dynamic, Orozco replaced the planner of the original with the kneeling, faceless supplicant threatened by the militant's rifle butt, and as an image of proletarian impotence which would not have been allowed in post-revolutionary Soviet art, he truncated the arms of the worker. In the radical restructuring of his mural he removed even the slightest hint of revolutionary constructivism, perhaps responding to a profound new scepticism, even an alienation from the educational aims of the mural programme itself. Yet on an adjacent archway he had painted a small panel (6.4) showing a comradely handshake suggesting that the agrarian and urban workers (sickle and hammer dropped momentarily) would benefit from accepting each other as partners under the good influence of the red star of Communism. The juxtaposition of the two panels is puzzling, making a clear inference about their message difficult to decide, but one might conclude that the small panel celebrates peaceful cooperation and is earlier than the main panel condemning revolutionary violence. A contemporary incident which did anger Orozco and possibly sharpened and politicised his hatred of bourgeois attitudes has been recorded:

...The *Damas Católicas* or Catholic Women's Club were planning to hold a bazaar in the large patio of the National Preparatory School... Orozco's work occupied the main wall facing the entrance to the patio. The Catholic women were aghast at the row of grotesque constructions and demanded of Orozco that he remove them. Orozco refused, insisting that fresco painting was not a cheap stage decoration that could be moved or replaced to suit a temporary

mode or individual caprice. The ladies carried their objections to government and Church officials, citing scenes like the Christ Chopping Down His Own Cross as pure religious blasphemy. The Maternity they interpreted as a Madonna, claiming Orozco had intentionally painted her as a nude to mock the religious faith and morality of the public.

33.

While Anita Brenner states that the ladies involved damaged the murals by nailing their garlands and decorations across them (34), Orozco in hindsight dismisses the incident with restrained irony:

They were loud-voiced in their disapproval and their disgust. In particular the nude figure of a woman with a child displeased them; they believed that it was a Virgin. But I had had no intention of painting a virgin, I was painting a mother.

35.

The assault upon Orozco's murals was only the latest damage in what had been a continuing vandalism of his and other muralists' efforts by students of the school. Only Rivera's 'The Creation', in the Bolívar Amphitheatre, was as ever seemingly beyond the reach of the spoilers. During its production, Rivera had worked behind the hall's locked doors and was thus spared the continual taunting and harassment to which the others were subjected throughout their commissions in the school. Throughout the disturbances in the ENP Rivera worked in the relative tranquillity of the Education Ministry building.

At about the same time as he modified 'The Revolutionary Trinity', Orozco painted the first of his caricatures to its immediate left. In 'The Rich Banquet While the Workers Quarrel'(6.5; 6.B) he reinforced his adjacent statement of workers' political impotence with a depiction of proletarian discord and disunity juxtaposed with bourgeois self-indulgence, hedonism and secure indolence. The mural's message is not unlike that presented in Siqueiros' newspaper sequence 'The Fall of the Rich and the Construction of the New Social Order' from 'El Machete' but Orozco places no faith in the ability of the people to transform their society positively.

A bloated, drunken trio look down on the three workers viciously fighting among themselves in the foreground of the mural. The group of revellers is composed of two men in dinner suits seated at a table with a gross woman sprawling upon a corner of the table lewdly showing her garter and arm-in-arm with one of the men whose blonde hair suggests that he is

a foreigner. The three fighters in the lower two-thirds of the mural are oblivious of the amusement they provide for the mocking top-hatted man who points down at them from the bourgeois banquet table. All three hedonists wave wine glasses in drunken abandon; the table bearing fruit and wine, symbolic of the idle consumption of these affluent figures, effectively separates the rich and the workers.

The central figure of the three workers dominates the others. He punches the rather paunchy worker to the right while threatening the same fleshy individual with the sickle he wields in his other hand. The dismay of his victim is evoked by his ungainly, near-comic posture as he topples backwards with the blow; his weakness is further suggested by the hammer he waves ineffectually. This disordered trinity is made up with a third worker to the left of the mural whose intentions are rather ambiguous. Although he wields a trowel as if it were a dagger, his target is not clear for while he grasps the central worker aggressively his angry glare is directed to the toppling figure to the right. The blue overalls worn by the three workers contrast sharply with the black evening wear of the revellers above and beyond the table. The workers clasp tools rather than wine glasses but the trowel, hammer and sickle have become weapons in their hands. The divisiveness of their fight is emphasised by the violent separation of the hammer and sickle which in the murals of Siqueiros and Rivera always appear symbolically united. Stylistically, nothing could be further from **'The Creation'** or his own **'Maternity'**.

The mural marks a notable departure from Orozco's previous work not simply because it presents in a more direct way what he perceived as failure of the proletarian struggle, but also because in it we see him revising his own ideas of the nature of the genre. He perhaps even parodies his previous preoccupation with formal artistic problems: the posture of the two struggling workers in the lower right of the mural and the violence of their conflict suggest almost ironically the earlier **'Struggle of Man against Nature'**. Even a passing comparison between the two works shows that within the short time of less than a year the artist has adopted a style which is less self-consciously academic. Here Orozco has replaced the detailed facial expressions of his earlier work with more evocative grimaces. Rather than

the beauty of balanced musculature the heavy modelling of anatomical features is used to suggest dynamic, calamitous force; and the modish cubistic backdrops have been abandoned. As a result, his was now a more direct and freely expressive style, boldly liberated from the formal constraints of Mexican academic neoclassicism in favour of the vitality of popular caricature, a form in which he was already well experienced. Cubistic cones, spheres and triangles have been supplanted by a rudimentary iconography of class struggle but here used more as a means of criticism than the heroic promotion of the idea favoured by both Siqueiros and Rivera.

The dominant tone of this mural is undoubtedly anger. Orozco's pursuit of this theme again suggests that he is frustrated with such glib notions of proletarian solidarity as were routinely pronounced by national political figures intent upon understating the unrest of labour groups not yet co-opted into CROM. While the current turmoil caused by the highly disruptive de la Huerta attempted coup (1923-24) is the wider context of Orozco's subject-matter, a more specific source of his irritation is probably identified by his caricature depiction of Rivera as the outraged, pop-eyed fat worker struck by the violently angry man wielding the sickle. The association has been overlooked by other commentators. Rivera's opportunism, continual self-promotion, and uncooperative behaviour within the supposedly egalitarian artists' union had also offended others (36) but only Orozco went so far as to permanently record his annoyance with Rivera in one of his murals.

Rivera had continued working on a series of murals in the Education Ministry or SEP building assisted by several newcomers to the project. The other members of the original group effectively had been dismissed in September 1923 at his insistence:

August–September: Rivera assumes control over the entire Secretaría program and forces de la Cueva, Guerrero, and Charlot to stop painting, citing alleged problems of unity, and assigns them menial tasks such as the painting of the heraldic shields of the Mexican states on the second floor. Rivera destroys all their panels, with the exception of Charlot's **Washerwoman** and **Los Cargadores** (burden carriers) and de la Cueva's **The Little Bull** and **Battle Dance**.

37.

Rivera might not have had to endure the assaults of the students but was criticised by the press, receiving unfavourable reviews and hostile comment during 1923 and in January

1924. However he had the full support of Vasconcelos whose favour he had courted with the scenes of Tehuana, the minister's home region. Yet he had still to weather several difficult times when his official patronage seemed threatened, such as when Vasconcelos offered his resignation in January 1924, and again when the minister actually did resign later in 1924. Rivera worked throughout this time upon a mural series in the 'Court of Fiestas' which complemented and extended the murals of 1923 in the 'Court of Labour' and the first 'fiesta' murals described in the previous chapter, 'Distribution of the Land', 'Festival of 1st May' and 'Burning Judases'.

Though Rivera adopted the same layout in the fiesta courtyard as he had employed in 'The Court of Labour', dividing his themes geographically in accordance with the direction in which each wall faced, his style was markedly different. In the labour courtyard his compositions tend to be grand, sometimes monumental, employing only a few figures. In the fiesta courtyard, on every available wallspace, between the entrance to the offices, even over the doorways, Rivera painted hundreds of figures, as though he were creating a vast portrait of the Mexican people.

38.

The 'Court of Fiestas' is much bigger than the 'Court of Labour' (39) and here from 1923 throughout 1924 Rivera worked in a sequence, moving to the next wall in a clockwise direction after completing one or more panels. This means that, for instance, 'The Distribution of the Land' was painted on the south wall of the courtyard in 1923, before 'Friday of the Sorrows on the Canal at Santa Anita' (6.C) on the west wall, 'Market Day' on the north wall or the three 'Day of the Dead' panels also on the south wall. During 1924 he also was given sole charge of an entirely new project, the decoration of the former chapel at Chapingo which since 1921 had been part of the National Agricultural College.

These murals show another face of Mexico, the festive spirit which complements working life. Rivera uses the crowded scenes he paints to suggest the richness of Mexican social life, contrasting the dignity and lightheartedness of ordinary Mexicans with their political concern which he had already suggested in adjacent murals such as the ideological 'Festival of 1st May' painted late in 1923. The panel 'Friday of the Sorrows on the Canal at Santa Anita' shows a popular festival thronged with people. In the low foreground of the mural a family sits before their display of red flowers facing away from the viewer. As the eye is drawn

from the blonde woman in a revealing dress who is being offered a garland by the flower-seller, one notices the sidelong glances from the Indian women around her before one's view is led away up and deeper into the mural's sweeping perspective of the whole flower market. The contrast between the expensively but garishly dressed blonde and the more workaday dresses of the Indians is deliberate, an implied criticism of the *creole* socialite who hesitates to wear the garland worn by the Indians. Their sidelong look implies a criticism which is not so much political as personal, for she offends their moral rather than their class consciousness.

'The Market' is a two-panel work which provides a snapshot of a busy market-place full of produce and men wearing sombreros with shawl-clad women. The eye for detail and the observation is masterful, as is the clever way Rivera again overcomes the problems of composition provided by the arched doorway in the centre of the wall space by sitting three onlookers in the linking area above the horizontal lintel as he had already done in 'The Distribution of the Land'.

To do justice to the most widely observed of all the national celebrations Rivera chose three main panels side-by-side which show the festival of the Day of the Dead (All Souls' Day) in a rural setting, in the family home and in the city. The first of these, 'The Offering', shows a traditional ritual of remembrance in Michoacán. The sombreness of the open-air ceremony of the offerings to the dead is illuminated by the burning white candles on the altar behind the six kneeling women who are praying around the offerings. The floral garlands and wreaths arrayed round the offerings and the large altar cross, behind which the grey volcanic mountains stretch away into the distance, provide geometric patterns of colour. Rivera once again displays a concern for authenticity in details such as the traditional clothes worn by the people and in the three-legged clay dishes upon which offerings of food are made. Above all, one notices the character of the features of the participants, whose high cheekbones and narrow slanting eyes identify them as Indian folk of the rural area rather than *mestizo* or *creole* city-dwellers. However this is no mere *costumbrista* rendering of a quaint and colourful native ceremony, for Rivera depicts dignified and thoughtful people rather than the bourgeois

notion of the lazy, feckless and subordinate *campesino*. In so doing, Rivera brings into the very heart of the centralised bureaucracy another vivid but carefully-executed statement of the stature of the peoples of all Mexico. He thereby incorporates the ethnic element which Charlot and de la Cueva included in their work and transmitted from the radical nationalist movement which emerged towards the end of the Porfirato, but without the movement's promotion of the Indian 'spirit'.

The next mural of the sequence, 'The Dinner', also dignifies the ordinary people of Mexico by revealing their pious observance of another aspect of this feast-day. In a composition which would recur in later work, Rivera draws the eye upward and into a simple perspective of the scene. A family are gathered around the meal laid on their dinner table. They kneel in prayerful poses suggesting their devotion and respectful remembrance of their dead relatives. The customary fruits and cakes can be seen on the table, as can the memorial candles arrayed at the back of the room. In the lower foreground two widows pray by the doorway of the house suggesting their kinship to the family, but the older of the two stares outwards towards the viewer with a sorrowful expression which insists that her grief be recognised. This central panel stands in a simple but stark contrast with 'The Offering' to its left and 'The Day of the Dead in the City' (6.D) on its right.

All Saints' Day in Mexico City is cosmopolitan, noisy and bustling. Rivera crowds the scene with a mixed group of city-dwellers out thronging the food and drink stalls set up next to a large *calavera* display which forms the mural's background. Several people in the foreground carry the traditional skull-masks with which Mexicans mock their mortality. There are three striking aspects of the mural. In the foreground a glum, heavy prostitute sits with another rather plain-faced prostitute. Both are distinctive in that they have used excessive lipstick and rouge and their gaudiness provides a contrast to the pallid features of the 'respectable' Catholic matron dressed in sober black standing watchfully behind the children who are trying on *calavera* masks next to the two women. The two stall-keepers also have quite different social backgrounds: the one to the left is an Indian selling food with her hair in braids and wearing a traditional plain white blouse, long skirt and apron; on the right, a

fashionably dressed *mestiza* sells drinks.

In the background the *calavera* display towers over the crowd, containing another set of representative figures in the form of skeletal, caricature puppets who convey a witty revolutionary tableau reminiscent of 'Burning Judases'. Between the three dancing figures of guitar-playing northern *peón*, Zapatista and urban worker are two posts bearing four hatted skulls and crossbones, with a pyramid of candy skulls on display at the foot of each pole. The three larger-than-life puppets are dancing and playing their guitars in unison, as if celebrating the demise of their piratical class enemies whose dismembered bones are pinned to the poles. The lower two skulls of the vanquished are bourgeois, as indicated by the fashionable but silly hat and make-up of the one on the left; 'her' companion on the right wears a top hat. Above both are the unmistakable headgear of a sly-faced priest and ferocious general. Paper decorations in the national colours hang like garlands above the display at the very top of the mural. Before the mocking tableau pass a throng of faces, some of whom are portraits of Rivera's friends and prominent among them, standing looking out of the mural at the viewer from beneath the urban worker puppet, is the painter's own jovial face. He stands there smiling as if sharing a joke with the viewer through his political cartoon of an illusory revolution, the ironic dance of death beside which city life proceeds as usual. This is a complete break from the educative iconography of the revolution which the muralists had sought to create for themselves.

However impressive Rivera's artistic mastery and flair such works hardly perform the function of a fighting, educative art for all. Rivera chose to ignore the didactic role taken on by the others and provides instead a dignified, modelled portrait of the people who the theoreticians saw as the 'masses', by painting thousands of individuals rather than a single abstract figure or a furious trinity. His is therefore a rather different aesthetic, harking back to fine art work (if performed on a vast scale) rather than seeking a new idiom to directly question or affirm ideology of any kind. Ultimately this is in line with his government sponsor's view of the way forward for Mexico after the Revolution.

Turning again to Orozco's work in the ENP, we find a similarly integrated view of society

depicted on the first floor which he painted during 1924. The murals known collectively as 'Social Justice' focus on national politics as they affect the urban and proletarian domain rather than Rivera's SEP social panorama or Roberto Montenegro's decorative map of 'Iberoamerica' painted that year a little before Vasconcelos resigned. This mural has a panamerican theme, and at the foot of the huge map stand a gallery of independence heroes from throughout Latin America, rather like the twelve female dancers in Montenegro's first mural. (Incidentally Montenegro's mural was the last government commission in the 1920's not to be held by one of 'the big three,' or on Rivera's behalf.) Orozco's work is very different from the latter, consisting of a series of seven panels continuing the caricature style and critical theme of 'The Rich Banquet while the Workers Quarrel', the last panel of the ground floor sequence painted during 1923-24. His unpublished comments written in 1923 reveal his aesthetic values and his conception of the limits of the role he felt his muralism could play:

As fishermen reap much gain from troubled waters, so too HACK PAINTERS derive great profit from confusion.

Be wary of painting that needs explanations in order to be 'understood'. What would you think if, while you were enjoying some good music, an erudite musicologist started to give an 'explanatory' lecture? There are also SCHOLARS of painting: they know SO MUCH about it that through the works pass the paintings of all the others...except their own!

Painting for the People? But the People do their own painting: they don't need anyone to do it for them.

Painting is not HEARD, IT IS SEEN and in order TO SEE IT one merely has TO HAVE EYES. Pay no attention to what others say: judge for yourself with YOUR OWN EYES.

40.

This reveals his impatience with and resentment of academic critics and their adverse comments about the work in which he had striven to create graphic and monumental allegories of the themes Vasconcelos had encouraged. He declares passionately that the people do not need to have art painted for them since they themselves produce the art they need and value. There is also the insistence that public painting must be direct rather than allegorical, accessible rather than obscure and requiring explanation. He concludes with the assertion that, 'It is a lie that 'one has to be a connoisseur' in order to understand and feel a painting....' Clearly he was determined to create a forthright popular iconography whose

content would not allow misinterpretation but would also be the kind of art which people could enjoy as art without great deliberation. However if in seeking to achieve a forthright expression his imagery uses symbols which are not particularly obscure, the relationships between the symbols and how these contribute to his developing sociopolitical iconography repay close examination since they reflect his values. Orozco's values are particularly interesting because they are personal and do not reflect any prevailing party line in the way the murals of Rivera and Siqueiros reflect their more orthodox convictions.

As the first mural in the new graphic style ('**The Rich Banquet while the Workers Quarrel**') shows, in meeting the challenge of creating a new expression Orozco draws upon his own talents as a caricaturist and upon the popular appeal of Posada's broadsheet graphic art. One commentator has proposed Orozco's dislike of the bourgeoisie as a further factor which influenced his choice of subject-matter and style in this series:

To such an idealistic liberal the smug complacency of a limited bourgeois society with regard to their Church as well as to themselves was unjustifiable, and Orozco proceeded with vehemence.

41.

Orozco tried to depict the vulnerability of the deprived and disadvantaged in his society while exposing the hypocrisies of the Mexican bourgeoisie. He also attacked the failure of the various social institutions, principally the Church and the corrupt, bureaucratic legal profession, which he felt were to be identified and blamed publicly for the prevailing inequalities of society. His targets suggest that his ideology is closer to nineteenth-century liberalism than the anti-capitalism of contemporary socialists.

Taken as a whole, the first floor murals constitute a striking aesthetic achievement, despite the haste imposed on the artist by the prospect of the loss of his commission:

These caricatures were painted swiftly when Vasconcelos, disturbed by the "uglyism" that was occurring on the walls, gave Orozco sixty days in which to complete his contract; they show the artist's haste in execution and record his resentment at the indignity of disapproval.

42.

He was not able to work as carefully as he had on the ground floor murals which had reached their final state after many reworkings. Although there is no progression except a general tendency towards the centre window from either end of the corridor, and there is also nothing

to suggest the order in which they were finished, the murals clearly fall into two groups separated by the unpainted wall-space above the centre window. Viewing from right to left, 'The Reactionary Forces', 'The Honesty of the Church' and 'The Social and Political Junkheap' comprise one group of murals, with the remaining works 'The False Leaders and Liberty', 'The Last Judgement' and 'The Law and Justice' forming a second group.

An early sketch of 'The Reactionary Forces' (6.6 a & b; 6.E 43) shows that Orozco's initial concept for the work included an attack upon proletarian leadership which he decided to omit from the mural itself. The sketch (6.6a) shows a crawling worker, carrying a communist flag with hammer and sickle in his one raised hand, oppressed by the piggish figure he bears upon his back who is wearing a large conical clown's hat and spurs, and whose gaze is directed at the large jewelled ring on his upward-pointing finger. Because the clown distracts and urges on the struggling, exhausted worker the bourgeoisie and aristocracy who follow can enjoy their riches and be confident nothing will interfere with their privileges. The proletarian leader, a caricature of Luis N. Morones of CROM, is a clown whose corruption is simple-minded, and he is as much a reactionary force as any of the social parasites who follow on behind him. A lithe, lean, top-hatted man whose aristocratic bearing is confirmed by his high collar, well-cut tailcoat and gold-topped cane strides behind the worker and proletarian leader. He is followed by a succession of four grotesque bourgeois women (6.6b), one using her well-shod foot to fend off the begging Indian woman who is lying with her emaciated child in the street.

Orozco replaced the leading two figures of the procession of 'reactionary forces', the worker and his direct oppressor, with a church entrance thereby caustically suggesting that the remaining procession of the bourgeois *Damas Católicas* and their ominous, calculating aristocratic leader have rejected a desperate appeal for help on their way to ease their consciences and appease their deity with prayers. However, the decision to drop the proletarian pair denied the final work an important degree of topical reference, leaving a vivid but familiar critique of the greedy upper classes who enjoy the approval of the church.

According to Brenner, Orozco, still annoyed by the attitude of those who had damaged his murals in the corridor below, '...perpetuated their triumphant profiles in his second series of murals.' (44) When one views the jowly, gross features of the hideously pretentious women depicted as the agents of reaction, one can almost sense the delight he took in exacting this act of revenge upon the *Damas Católicas*.

In the next panel to the right Orozco developed the theme of '**The Reactionary Forces**' by adding a simple, direct message about Church greed. The iconography of '**The Honesty of the Church**' (6.7; 6.F) is plain to the point of being blunt: two skeletal arms clad in rags reach from either upper corner of this small panel to place coins in a heavily padlocked collection box in the centre of the mural, beneath which a plump hand (painted in the receding arch of a window) receives the coins which drop through the trick box. The mural conveys Orozco's contempt of the double standards and shady practices of contemporary churchmen who exploit the devotion of the starving poor.

To the left of the symbolic representation of the exploitation of the credulity of the poor, angry carrion birds tear at a pyramidal heap of discarded symbols of worldly power and aspiration under a lowering sky in '**The Social and Political Junkheap**' (6.8; 6.G). Prominent among the empty boxes and mouldering rubbish upon which they lie are a golden crown and sceptre, a green imperial laurel wreath, a large scroll of white parchment and an inkwell with an old-fashioned quill pen, the fascist axehead mounted on its bundle of rods and the bright red Jacobin cap draped very obviously over a broken staff. Less clearly displayed against the grey-black background of the spoil heap are a bishop's crozier, a pair of stone tablets, an archaic helmet, a swastika and at least three broken spears or spearheads. All are tokens of leadership and oppression, and Orozco rejects them by consigning them to the rubbish tip. The Jacobin cap suggests the political line of the government, and for Orozco it is just as useless as the rest.

The full sweep of Orozco's composition can be assessed in terms of the categorisation of the institutions symbolically represented. One can classify together the swastika of archaic pagan belief, the stone tablets of Judaism and the Christian pastoral crozier because of their

established religious context. Different systems of government are denoted by the laurels of imperial Roman democracy, the monarchic regalia and the constitutionalist quill pen, inkwell and parchment. Political beliefs are symbolised by the fascist paraphernalia and the red cap of radical liberalism pessimistically juxtaposed with the instruments of human violence. The symbols of proletarian struggle such as the hammer and sickle of Soviet Communism included in murals by Siqueiros and Rivera do not have a place on the junkheap, and it may be that Orozco omitted them for the same reason as he omitted the proletarian pair from **'The Reactionary Forces'**, namely that this sort of criticism would alienate leftist radicals at the very time when he was provoking the wrath of the right.

Reduced to the stature of discarded trinkets or gaudy trash, the fatal decay of these tokens of power is further implied by their association with death, evoked by the bleached human ribcage and other unburied bones lying to the top of the pile and the horse's skull lying in the lower foreground of the heap with the broken weapons. These are also twin products of social disorder, like the debris abandoned upon an old battleground.

As one continues along the first floor corridor towards the other mural group one first sees the tableau of duplicity and treacherous seduction called **'The False Leaders' (6.H)**. The murderous cleric to the left, and the portly, expensively dressed man to the right, act together to effect the downfall of the credulous worker who stands between them.

The affluence of the fair-skinned, bearded *creole* gentleman on the right-hand side of the mural is partly disguised by the cloak which almost conceals his tailed dinner suit. He looks encouragingly towards the worker, beckoning him with the small, toy-like red and black flag of anarchy he is holding in his right hand towards the red Jacobin cap draped over his raised left hand like a glove puppet. The diminutive crown of thorns he wears upon his brow ironically connotes the sincerity and heroic self-sacrifice expected of one who would take on a messianic role.

The barefoot worker in the centre of the mural (whose white *calzones* and tunic identify him as a *campesino* or provincial worker) holds a black and red flag which matches the rich man's in one hand, and carries a shovel in the other. Orozco exaggeratedly conveys his

naivety by endowing him with a primitivistic facial profile: a sloping forehead recedes above a black, simian jawline which, combined with a mouth filled with long protruding teeth, form an image of utter vacuity. Distracted by the rich man, the worker is oblivious to the imminent threat posed to him by the cleric stealthily coming up behind him, dagger raised ready to strike.

Though masked, the potential assassin is revealed to be a priest by his full-length black cassock with its distinctive row of buttons down the front; a bowler hat adds to the general malevolence of his appearance. Orozco so emphasised the attacking figure's posture that only one of his arms, that carrying the dagger, is visible: though this involves an oddly depleted perspective of the figure, the row of buttons down the front is thereby given prominence and the identification of the figure is ensured.

The ugly, bleary-eyed crone dangling theatrically (as if from a trapeze) from the old-fashioned gold curtain cords above the next corridor window over which this mural extends is Liberty, to judge by the red Jacobin cap on her head and the sections of broken chain she holds. She is another part of the cast of rogues and fools with which Orozco accuses contemporary Mexico in much the same way as Siqueiros does with his 'El Machete' farce. Orozco suggests her flighty character and changeability both by her acrobatic, vaguely sensual sprawl and by her contribution to the worker's downfall, for it is she who has unleashed the worker's attacker by breaking the chain she holds in her hands.

This mural can generally be seen as a more elaborate treatment of Orozco's previous idea (unused in '**The Reactionary Forces**') of graphically depicting the parasitic relationship between oppressed workers and their leaders. In '**The False Leaders and Liberty**' the worker seems to have more independence. The worker's anarchist flag, so easily counterfeited by the rich man, hints at freedom of action. However Orozco's unheroic image of the feckless proletarian at the mercy of the conspiracy between the State and the Church reveals his complete scepticism of the idea that workers can be autonomous. There is a clear topical reference to the attempted incorporation by the CROM of the smaller, often anarcho-syndicalist local workers' associations.

Perhaps the least overtly political of any of these murals, 'The Last Judgement' (6.9a; 6.1) is a lively, humorous overstatement in which the plight of the poor in contemporary Mexico is sardonically represented by Orozco. He depicts God's abdication of justice so that the poor, humble and meek people inherit hell while the rich retain their golden haloes and their privileged position.

In the centre of the mural sits the gigantic figure of God, with rich red brocade hangings which resemble opened stage curtains to either side of his massive presence. The affluent stand praying on the left of the mural, while on the right the poor are chased off by devils. God's overwrought features convey his agitation and the clenched fist resting on his right knee declares his determination. However, the toppled globe representing the world upon which his left hand rests summarises the effect of his resolve. Orozco's God is a crazy version of the reverently carved panel (6.9b) produced by an skilled Indian craftsman for the small assembly room, the *Generalito*, of the old building once used as a monastery.

The full meaning of this mural can be most easily understood by reading it from left to right. The source of God's agitation and resolve is attributed by Orozco to the group of five well-dressed, self-righteous figures praying on the left. By the simple but effective means of more or less duplicating the facial features of the cross-eyed lady (who like God faces the viewer whereas every other figure is painted in semi- or full profile) on God's comical face, Orozco identifies her (and by association, her companions) as the source of his craziness. So God listens to the rich, and their eagerness to promote their own interests is the source of his perplexity. As a result of their distraction of God the barefoot, huddled poor are sent to hell in an inversion of the redemption they were promised: on the right of the mural they are consigned to punishment they do not deserve. The figures to either side of the ultimate judge reflect their earthly power and confidence: the poor are thin and wretched, the affluent - from whom it seems even God must take orders - are overfed and self-confident.

'The Last Judgement' is, of all Orozco's caricature murals, the one in which his style most closely approaches that of the prolific native caricaturist Posada. Nonetheless Orozco adds his own touch: having directly alluded to Posada's devil-filled *ejemplos*, he makes his

point with a biting ironic inversion of the conventional moral expectation by exposing God's neglect of the poor. In the end panel Orozco turned his attention to the connivance of the legal profession with respect to the social meaning of justice in 'The Law and Justice' (6.J), another instance of his adoption of the critiques of Honoré Daumier (1810-79), the French caricaturist.

In this mural a paunchy but very well dressed man dances with an overweight woman arm-in-arm in evident abandon. The identity of the white-robed woman is disclosed by the gilded scales she recklessly waves but Justice peers out from beneath her blindfold to meet the knowing leer of her companion who wields her sword with his free hand. Taken together, his formal attire and the scroll he carries beneath his arm show him to be a lawyer. By painting 'The Law and Justice' to the immediate left of 'The Last Judgement', Orozco ensured that both murals contribute to a complete statement of the corruption of both divine and secular law when seen together. All in all, the murals of the 'Social Justice' series convey an unattractive image of the bourgeois republic being consolidated by the Constitutional government of the Jacobin Sonorans.

An independent spirit, Orozco had never belonged to the PCM nor did he contribute articles or funds to 'El Machete' though Rivera and Siqueiros were involved in different ways with both in their efforts to further the proletarian cause. By the end of the year, both muralists would have withdrawn from the editorial board of the newspaper and been ousted from the executive committee of the PCM. In Rivera's case these coincided:

The year 1924 also witnessed a thorough shake-up in the Party's leadership. In April, probably under Wolfe's direction, every member of the Executive Committee save Díaz Ramírez was replaced.

45

At the same time Rivera wrote his last article of the period for 'El Machete', and left the editorial board formally after issue eight. The paper and the PCM became more closely aligned until the Communist Party took on overall control of the paper after issue seventeen (16th-23rd October 1924) when Siqueiros and Guerrero resigned as editors. The paper founded by the muralists would continue as the official journal of the PCM throughout the 1920's and after.

As his later '*corrido*' and historical muralism suggests, Rivera understood that his work needed an ideological core or thematic concern to avoid becoming simply decorative. His great breakthrough is preserved in the former chapel of the National Agricultural College at Chapingo.

At Chapingo, 25 miles from Mexico City, Rivera commenced work in 1924 upon a large-scale project of which he had also been given full charge by Vasconcelos even though his assistant, Xavier Guerrero, had decorated the Rector's residence and corridors of the school in 1923. He began painting the entry foyers to the former chapel on two floors, starting with the ground floor, for the inauguration of the National Agricultural College. From the first he worked to a plan which would reflect the nature of the national institution while conveying the importance of its function as the source of a new spirit of agrarian change sustained by the central government's policies.

The ground floor walls carry decorations and panels which refer to the ideas of the first rector and compliment Rivera's state patron. Two large panels near the entry door preserve the rector's inaugural address. These face the stairway, which is decorated with a large number of geometric shapes giving the illusion of architectural detailing. The remainder of the wallspace on the ground floor is given over to two large panels around office doorways which show Indian people in symbolic natural settings. The figures seem stiff, passive and lifeless, intentionally even more like statues than any of the figures in his contemporary work in Mexico City. As in the SEP 'Court of Labour', education minister Vasconcelos's home region Tehuana is portrayed as a fertile land whose inhabitants live in close harmony with the forces of nature, symbolised in one panel by the sun, and in the other, by symbols of wind and cloud. The first floor murals are more ideological and didactic.

Upstairs Rivera depicts an idealised version of the government's agrarian policies. He shows in four main panels the desired union of campesino and urban worker, the results of good land management and bad land management, and the government's action on land redistribution. He draws upon compositions which he had already included in the SEP project, and invents a new image, that of the *campesino*-proletarian handshake, which he will

use again in later work having found it a satisfactory symbolic language for a concept fundamental to his own political perspective.

The two long facing walls of the first floor carry 'Good Government' and 'Bad Government', depicting landscapes which are flourishing or blighted by the management of their natural resources. Rivera's landscape concept may have been based upon an early Italian Renaissance fresco in Siena by Ambrogio Lorenzetti depicting 'Effects of Good Government'(1339), though the inclusion of life-size figures in the foreground and to the sides of the panels was entirely Rivera's own idea. In Rivera's 'Good Government' (6.10) a native settlement with its simple huts and peasant farming and fields is shown on a hillside (6.K) above an industrial plain with a mine and a railway viaduct leading to a thriving seaport. In its foreground two Indian figures lie relaxing at leisure, and to either end of the main panel there stands a group of exemplary figures. To the left, a surveyor and assistant are measuring the land accurately using a theodolite watched by a farmer clad in the typical white shirt and trousers (6.13). To the right, a revolutionary trio of armed *campesino*, urban worker and schoolteacher carrying a book stands shoulder-to-shoulder (6.12). Its counterpart, 'Bad Government' (6.11), depicts the effects of repressive and neglectful management upon a similar rural landscape. The harbour is replaced by a huge fortification which is being shelled by warships off the coast (an allusion to foreign intervention), the plain is instead a ravine and in the foreground two exhausted or dying *campesinos* lie slumped. On the hillside above them Indians are being killed, tortured and enslaved by the forces of the three smiling neo-colonialist exploiters whose life-size figures dominate the scene (6.15). At the other end of the main panel another three life-size figures (6.14) show the cooperation of church, lawyer and industrial boss in oppressing the people of the drab northern town which is located on the hillside above and behind them next to a large industrial plant. The fat *mestizo* owner is cheerfully passing a gold coin from a large bag to the lawyer and the transaction is blessed by the priest. They stand opposite the surveyor's group who are trying to distribute the wealth of the land fairly and accurately in the other mural.

The two end-wall murals, which are not interrupted by doorways, are focal points of the

work as a whole. 'Distributing the Land' (6.16; 6.L) is a parallel of the mural in the 'Court of Fiestas' in the SEP which shows a crowd witnessing the official redistribution of farming land in a rural state. The composition is somewhat different, however, for Rivera this time brings the central activity of the meeting well into the foreground and the officials and the former owners can be more clearly seen. Stanton L. Catlin describes the real event which Rivera portrayed as a formal generalisation of a national programme:

(It) depicts the breakup of the Hacienda of San Jacinto by the order of the revolutionary government of President Alvaro Obregón and its distribution to the peasants while the disgruntled former owners look on (one of the new government officials holds a blueprint of the triangular tract of land, which was primarily devoted to the cultivation of the maguey cactus.)

46.

The last element of the whole work shows the central revolutionary cooperation which underwrites the whole process of reform and proper exploitation of Mexico's land. 'Meeting of Peasant and Worker' (6.17), which develops the 1923 SEP mural 'Embrace', shows a comradely meeting between a *campesino* and an urban worker in a setting which echoes 'The Creation'. To each side four Indian graces recline on clouds and look on benevolently as the two humans exchange a firm symbolic handshake acknowledging their mutual interdependence and common interest. Behind and above the figure of Carrillo Puerto stands at the centre of the mural dressed in a long red robe and surrounded by a glowing orange oval which highlights his gesture of blessing upon the union below. Surmounting all is a banner bearing the message derived from Zapata - '**Here it is taught to exploit the land not the man.**' All in all, the four works depict vividly Rivera's understanding of and sympathy for the agrarian cause. For Rivera, liberty depends upon the alliance of Mexico's agrarian and industrial workforce, and only the government can fairly and securely oversee the restoration of *ejido* lands and the distribution of the *hacienda* estates.

Orozco and Siqueiros lost their commissions in July 1924 with the change of government. However Rivera and his assistants (Guerrero at Chapingo and Montenegro in the SEP) had their state support continued, alone of all the original group. To fully understand the reasons for this reversal (which directly led to the disintegration of the artists' union) the circumstances under which Vasconcelos resigned from Obregón's cabinet and was not

reappointed to that of the new president, Calles, must be appreciated.

The basic cause of Vasconcelos' resignation - disenchantment with Obregón's interpretation and selective neglect of the Constitution - is closely related to two clear features of his last year as education minister. His education programme was criticised increasingly for having failed to meet its objectives, and he also was dismayed by the events of later 1923 and 1924. His indignation was aroused by Obregón's disregard of Article 27 of the Constitution (which forbade the exploitation of Mexico's natural resources by foreigners) in his attempts to re-open relations with the United States and the rest of the international community. Indeed Vasconcelos seems to have sympathised initially with de la Huerta's complaints and his own marked dissatisfaction with the political line of the Obregón government dates from late 1923. He even offered his resignation in January 1924 in seeking to intercede for the rebels who were beginning to lose ground in their conflict with the government.

...on November 30, 1923 a rebellion against President Obregón broke out. By Christmas there was fighting in Mexico City. Vasconcelos resigned as minister of education in January to protest the ruthless suppression of the rebels, but he was persuaded to resume his post. The revolt lasted until March 1924, when it was finally put down at a cost of seven thousand dead. But politics remained volatile, and in June, Vasconcelos resigned again (for the last time) in protest against the election (with the support of President Obregón and United States interests) of Plutarco Elías Calles as president of Mexico. When he was gone, conservative students in the Preparatoria turned their ire upon the walls the muralists had painted, scratching curses into the plaster and spitting on the motifs that offended them most.

47.

Vasconcelos was committed to seeing through the fuller development of his educational projects, which is probably why he remained in Obregón's cabinet during the first half of 1924 despite public confrontations which had become increasingly embarrassing during 1923. His ambitious educational programme was criticised on three accounts, namely his cherished project of the publication of the classics, his attempt to maintain personal control over the ENP, and the controversial nature of some of the murals he had commissioned. On the first of these, M.K.Vaughan has shown that the classics project was regarded as being both elitist and unrealistic in the light of the fact that seventy per cent of the population were illiterate (48).

The second issue which brought Vasconcelos criticism was his attempt to retain personal

control over the ENP, and this was to bring a most humiliating defeat in August 1923. Though other influences were highly significant, it appeared that students had succeeded in deposing him. He had already passed the Rectorship of the National University to Antonio Caso but wanted to remain in charge of the ENP which was part of the National University in order to continue a personal involvement in his scheme for the creation of an altruistic, highly-educated group who would play a leading role in the regeneration of the nation. But the arrangement did not suit Caso:

A close friend of Vasconcelos since the bygone days of the Atheneum of Youth, Caso nevertheless objected strongly to this improbable arrangement by which a subaltern (Director of the Preparatoria) was also his superior (Secretary of Education), and handed in a tentative resignation. Rather than estrange Caso, Vasconcelos dismissed himself from the lesser post, turning it over to the future labor leader, lawyer Lombardo Toledano.

49.

At the root of the issue was Vasconcelos' refusal to allow the University in general the autonomy it sought and he would not countenance the involvement of the student body, especially the ENP group, in politics or decision-making. However the students, drawn for the main part from the middle class of the Capital, resented this prohibition - especially in view of the forthcoming presidential elections and current political controversies over Obregón's dealings with the U.S.

The students replied with a manifesto calling for the autonomy of their school and the resignation of the meddlesome education minister. Vasconcelos suspended all the signatories of the manifesto, and forced Toledano to resign the post which he himself had conferred upon him recently. The students and some sympathetic teachers held a strike over Toledano's dismissal, to which Vasconcelos responded by expelling all the strikers, even though the strike had the backing of CROM following Toledano's complaint:

A meeting of the students' federation requested school autonomy. Without a hearing, Vasconcelos suspended the students who had signed the manifesto. Behind the move, Vasconcelos perceived the threatening figure of Lombardo Toledano. Close to the labor organisation CROM, which was allied by August 1923 with the Minister of Interior and presidential candidate Calles, Lombardo appeared to Vasconcelos to be organising students to support the Callista political machine.

50.

All this was too much for Caso, and he resigned in protest. Vasconcelos appointed Roberto Medellín as a replacement for the deposed Toledano. However, the students were not prepared to accept Vasconcelos' choice, and greeted the arrival of the new director with derision:

Laughed at by the partisans of Toledano, the new incumbent had telephoned the Secretary to come and reinforce him with the prestige of his higher authority. At the sight of Vasconcelos, "the students broke into screams of 'Down with Vasconcelos!' 'Lynch him!' 'Down with the tyrant!' ...The Secretary sent for a fire squad...to turn their hoses on the trouble-makers. The firemen were stoned; shots were fired. A group of students got busy cutting water hoses. The fire department suffered a loss of 10,000 pesos."

51.

Caso was replaced as Rector by the elderly Ezequiel Chávez, who had been Undersecretary of Education under Díaz, and Medellín's new appointment as Director of the school was eventually accepted by the students. Vasconcelos, still smarting from the very public humiliation and loss of face, soon encountered fresh trouble over the mural projects from an unexpected quarter when the new Rector of the National University criticised the ENP murals, and thereby prompted attacks upon work by Orozco and Siqueiros:

...they were shocking to the ageing conservative Chávez, who was soon after to lend his moral support to their partial wrecking. A witness reported in July 1924: "The most excellent President of the University, Sr. Chávez, declared on a certain occasion and in front of a substantial gathering of students, 'Those paintings are not beautiful.'"

52.

Orozco expressed his irritation through a series of provocative murals, but Siqueiros counter-attacked Chávez and the group of conservative academics to which he belonged with a scathing attack in 'El Machete' (issue 8, second fortnight of July 1924). The fifth instalment of his 'farce', '**The Fall of the Rich and the Construction of the New Social Order**', satirised not just Chávez but a whole range of the educational thinkers of the past two decades. He called his woodcut satire, seemingly the first scene of the second act, '**The Bats and Mummies Attempt to Impede the Development of the Revolutionary Paintings**'. Under a banner headline - '**The Reactionary Academics Impress Ideas Contrary to the Revolution Upon Youth who to their Shame Follow them to Sustain Themselves**' - Siqueiros' woodcut illustration shows the reactionaries as bats, the

centre one of the three carrying a banner , '*Reaccionarismo*', flying over a symbolic trinity of worker, armed *campesino* and a soldier. The worker paints a hammer and sickle within a large, five-pointed Communist star as his comrades stand guard.

Beneath the illustration Siqueiros lists the cast of this act of his farcical social drama. There are a group of principals - three bats, Ezequiel Chávez being the 'first bat'; one fresh mummy and two dried-up ones - listed under the main principal, 'a very old worker symbolising experience'. Then follow the listing of minor figures, grouped into four sections led by the dried-up mummies among whom are found Dr. Atl, and the Ariel Group. The second group is composed of the fresh mummies, including Alfredo Ramos Martínez. Student leaders form the fourth group, the 'little bats'. Though Siqueiros later honours Murillo ('Dr. Atl') as 'the Political and Theoretical Precursor' in 1945 (53) he depicts him here unflatteringly, perhaps because he ceased to speak on behalf of public art when his own commission was withdrawn by Vasconcelos and became more right-wing in his political outlook.

Chávez' last speech suggests the cast's opinion of the murals - "Illustrious Doctors, before returning to the tombs from which my anger brought you forth in an uproar, I urge that you now give the final verdict on these poorly-done paintings." (54) This is in fact as near to a 'final verdict' as we get, for Siqueiros never actually wrote any more of the farce series; but the implication is clear in Chávez' request for an evaluation of 'these poorly-done paintings'.

The mounting criticism of his educational policies including the mural commissions and his own dissatisfaction with Obregonista policies prompted Vasconcelos to resign in July 1924, shortly after Calles had won June's Presidential election. Vasconcelos became a bitter opponent to Calles, standing for election in Oaxaca as a prospective member of the new Congress on a distinctly anti-Calles platform. Defeated at the elections, he returned to Mexico City where he opened an opposition newspaper in which he resumed his attacks. However, his presses were destroyed by CROM members and he subsequently fled into exile in Paris where he re-opened his anti-Callista paper but to less effect.

By contrast the muralists Siqueiros, Guerrero and Rivera seem to have decided to support Calles, to judge by their editorial of 'El Machete' 6 which came out during the elections (in

the first fortnight of June 1924). In a very lengthy editorial illustrated with thematic woodcuts depicting both Calles and the other presidential contender, Angel Flores, the three muralists state that their support for Calles is not uncritical but that he represents the lesser of two evils:

The difference, then, between an identical acting governmental mechanism of the "revolutionary" General Plutarco Elías Calles, and the "reactionary" General Angel Flores (so named after their respective self-classifications) and in spite of their different ways of explaining the actual problem, will only reside in that **THE GOVERNMENT OF CALLES WILL BE A GOVERNMENT SUBJECT TO THE BOURGEOISIE, WHILST THE GOVERNMENT OF FLORES WILL BE A GOVERNMENT DIRECTED BY THE SAME BOURGEOISIE...**

55.

The muralists go on to analyse what they claim are the differences between these two potential governments. They themselves believed that post-revolutionary society was moving towards a state characterised by campesino-worker control, but both candidates represent bourgeois social democracy rather than radical programmes. If both would-be presidents speak of 'collaboration of classes' and 'equilibrium between capital and labour' the nature of their supporters would mean that government by Flores would be more reactionary. They identify the backers of Flores as the national *latifundistas*; the national bourgeoisie allied to foreign bourgeoisies, international bankers and entrepreneurs; Catholic syndicates and strike-breakers; the bureaucracy and the old aristocracy - in other words, the pillars of Porfirio Díaz' regime. Calles, on the other hand, is said to have the support of organised workers, class-conscious *campesinos*, the 'liberal' middle class, small businessmen, progressive intellectuals and revolutionary students. They also argued that a Calles government, with such a base of support, would be more revolutionary and would promote the interests of the workers by interpreting Articles 27 and 123 of the Constitution favourably. The proletariat would have the benefits of a fully developed educational system, and the election of Calles would mean 'the better continuation of the Obregón government' ('*SERIA LA continuación MEJORADA DEL GOBIERNO DE Obregón*') whose controversial dealings with the United States were overlooked. The muralists conclude with an appeal to the organised workers of Mexico to safeguard the small advantages gained from the Revolution by voting for Calles - a vote for Flores would be a vote for direct government by the exploiters.

Perhaps the muralists believed that the Calles government would maintain their commissions as part of a programme of proletarian education; with the exception of Rivera and his assistants, they would be disappointed. When Vasconcelos was replaced on 29th July by his assistant Dr. Bernardo Gastélum (56), the acting Minister of Education suspended all mural commissions except those of Rivera and his assistants Pacheco and Montenegro (actually an experienced muralist in his own right), and, at Chapingo, Guerrero. Other muralists like Mérida, Charlot and de la Cueva also worked temporarily under the direction of Rivera on less important aspects of Rivera's SEP work. Calles' own appointee, J.M. Puig Casauranc, apparently endorsed the decision for no commissions were reinstated in 1924 and 1925 but Rivera's remained safe, because Casauranc liked Rivera's work, especially 'Entrance to the Mine' and 'Worker-Peasant Embrace' (57).

When Vasconcelos resigned Rivera had completed the stairway at Chapingo which depicted 'Good Government' and 'Bad Government' and was working on the main stairwell of the SEP (58) which links the three levels of his courts of Labour and Fiestas, only the first level of which was completed. The second level, discussed below, was effectively completed in 1924. Rivera's SEP stairwell consists of eleven panels and was completed in 1928. It is a sequential work which moves upward from naturalistic scenes through allegories of the Revolution and culminates with a vision of scientific land management overlooked by a self-portrait in the final panel. The ground floor (first level) panels show marine scenes ('The Sea' and 'The Coastline') which complement the regional landscapes of the ground floor murals in the two courtyards. A scientific reference is made in the final ground-floor panel, 'The Diver', which shows a diver whose colleagues are examining the creatures he has brought to the surface: the themes are investigation and natural resources. The sequence continues upwards and inland showing in the next two linked panels (6.M) a lush tropical landscape inhabited by graceful Indian nudes attending Xochipilli, the native god of flowers:

The south wall depicts deep jungle landscape in which Xochipilli, the Aztec god of flowers, feasting, and frivolity, appears in a trance surrounded by nude female votaries. Undulant and upright tree forms, embraced by winding vines and surrounded by opulent plant forms, glorify the prodigality of untamed nature and thus echo the primitive impulses and code of native libido.

59.

The mysticism and fertility of the marine and tropical landscapes then give way to scenes of the land being utilised. These scenes are in stark contrast to the natural harmony already depicted: 'The Hacienda' shows toiling natives being exploited by a landowner indolently lying in his hammock but 'Peón' shows one of the oppressed secretly sharpening his machete in a cave. These two panels bring one to the second-level landing and the murals of 1924-25.

The second level murals fall into two distinct groups in the 'courts' of Labour and Fiestas; neither offers much in the way of explicit political or ideological interest. The themes of the two series are quite different. The panels painted on the walls of the 'Court of Labour' commenced in 1924 show a range of scientific and technological activities with which Rivera depicts modern advances which contrast with the traditional industries of the floor below. The panels of the 'Court of Fiestas' (painted 1924-25) were delegated by Rivera to Charlot and de la Cueva and were limited to a decorative sequence showing the shields and coats-of-arms of all the States of Mexico. Ironically the second level murals are almost a resurrection of Porfirian *científico* themes except that Rivera includes a four-panel design of posed figures glorifying the hammer-and-sickle emblem of Communism in the centre of the east wall between all the modern scientific devices of the Court of Labour.

If Rivera's position was secure thanks to the approval of his state patrons, the same cannot be said for other muralists. Orozco's work was considered provocative and it may have seemed to him that his career as a muralist was effectively over. However he found his way back into public muralism with the help of a private patron. For some time after his dismissal in 1924 from the ENP commission he worked as a cartoonist for 'L.A.B.C.', a political weekly, and then he painted two murals under quite different circumstances before resuming his interrupted work in the ENP in 1926. 'Omniscience' (1925) (6.18) was a private commission bestowed by Francisco Iturbe for a large mural in his ostentatious colonial house in the capital known as 'The House of Tiles' for its striking tiled exterior. On the other hand, 'Social Revolution' (1926) (6.19) painted in an Orizaba workers' industrial school for J.M.Puig Casauranc (the new education minister) was more or less a government commission.

Iturbe's mural was obviously crucial as the first commission Orozco won after his regular mural work for the government was suspended, and on the strength of Iturbe's recommendation, **'Social Revolution'** paved the way for Orozco's return to direct state patronage.

Taken together, they indicate Orozco's versatility while also indicating the effect of the different conditions of private and public patronage. Structurally their locations are quite similar. Both are painted in stairwells and in each case the wall surface is interrupted by an architectural feature. However the settings are in other respects very different: **'Social Revolution'** is painted above and around a simple unglazed window and balcony whereas **'Omniscience'** incorporates a lunette above an ornately carved doorway. Most significantly, their respective styles and themes differ markedly.

**'Omniscience'** is an important mural not just because it was Orozco's only private commission of the decade, but because it also shows Orozco's individual handling of the conventions of neoclassical allegory. Orozco's unique interpretation creates a work remarkable for its visual tension and depth of meaning. Unfortunately this mural has suffered a general critical neglect because most commentators (60) have seen it simply as a return to Orozco's earliest mural experimentation - one calls it 'the first climax of Orozco's 'classical phase.' (61) - rather than as a contemporary piece created under quite different circumstances. Despite its neoclassical grandeur and apparent celebration of a glorious new era **'Omniscience'** unexpectedly leaves the viewer with an impression of the artist's disquiet about the style and central concept of his work.

The site of the mural presented two related difficulties. Physically the mezzanine wall upon which it is painted is traversed by a heavily ornamented ledge or cornice above which the wall forms a vertical gable pierced by a large, very ornate window frame. The exaggerated baroque style of the setting presents another challenge. Orozco responded by trying to achieve an integrated - 'plastic' - solution. The style of **'Omniscience'** reflects and augments the heavily modelled stone features of the doorway, the internal cornice, gable and window while its composition makes good use of the wall space itself. The ornately framed doorway dominates the lower wall and effectively divides it into two side panels which are used by

Orozco to depict two extended foregrounds of the main area above, much as Rivera does in

'The Creation'. There also was the matter of satisfying his patron's wishes for the work:

Francisco Iturbe had no interest in national or revolutionary art, and Orozco was desperately unhappy about the entire subject, so the choice of concept for the mural might have been made by either. The philosophic idea of creation, abstracted to the male and female principle, constructed like a grand machine, by some lucid miracle is part of the colonial building and dignity inheres in both.

62.

However, the official history of the House of Tiles published recently suggests that Iturbe provided a general idea of what he envisaged. This would have laid some quite specific constraints on the artist:

In the year 1925 its owner Francisco Sergio de Iturbe, admirer of the painter Orozco from Jalisco, commissioned him to paint a fine mural in the stairwell of the main staircase of the house. This greatly pleased Orozco who said, 'Although this building belongs to an individual, it will be open to the public and will become a focal point and favourite restaurant of Mexicans and tourists.' Speaking of his first private patron, Orozco recalled the dramatic circumstances of his meeting with Iturbe, whose financial and moral help had arrived as if out of the blue in one of those moments of life when all hope seemed lost. When Iturbe visited the patio of the ENP and saw Orozco's unfinished frescos, he was so deeply impressed that he exclaimed, 'Not since Michel Angelo has there been a muralist worthy of the name.' Immediately he promised to support him and the astonished artist returned to the Capital, where his downcast hopes were rapidly revived by the Iturbe's enthusiastic goodwill.

63.

If the official version is accurate, Orozco's mural for Iturbe clearly shows how private patronage can radically affect the production and meaning of a mural which, like the state murals, was open to public view.

'Omniscience' is a monumental mural which has some of the features of Orozco's earlier neoclassical murals - if on an exaggerated scale - and some similarities with Rivera's 'Creation' and Atl's series:

In Orozco's case there is the additional impact of Dr. Atl's influence toward the grandiose and allegorical. In the Annexe of the National Preparatory School...Atl had done a series of large-scale nudes of men and women as well as a number of landscapes symbolizing the forces of nature...

Orozco's first fresco experiments in the Preparatoria seem to have been influenced by Atl's point of view, and even his 1925 mural in the House of Tiles, (now Sanborn's) in Mexico City is affected by this gigantism.

64.

In this secular mural Orozco depicts a rising figure silhouetted by a sunburst. To either side of

this smiling figure stands a man and a woman, both nude. They are attended by titanic guardians who look towards the sunburst and whose forms are only sketchily suggested except for the powerful arms which serve the human figures. Above the main panel, pairs of giant hands dispense sacred gifts into the cupped hands of mankind. The central figure of the main panel smiles confidently and his vigorous posture seems expansive but the mural as a whole has a disturbing tension caused by the treatment of the other figures.

The brutally strong man to the left of the mural rests his hand on the hilt of a huge sword but his violence is held in check by the hand of his attendant titan who is forcing the man's head to the right to see the rising central figure, and beyond him, the woman. Her brow is furrowed in concentrated thought, and the muralist's distribution of light emphasises her expression, but again the impression of restraint is conveyed by the titanic arm which shields her passive introspection. Whatever the intention, the mural's iconography is obscured by the symbolism of restraint and redirection to the vague goal of a mystical awakening. A single detail - the Indian braided hair of the centre figure - hints at an *Indigenismo* theme, the mystical strength and wisdom of the Indian people of pre-conquest Mexico growing anew, for the centre figure rises joyously trailing a rope - perhaps the rope of slavery - which slips from its waist.

The depiction of an exemplary Indian figure glowing with omniscient power is an unconventional, even revolutionary portrayal of Mexico's repressed indigenous people which can only be read if the prevailing social and artistic conditions and context are understood, for though the figures of the mural are not contemporary like the caricatures of the ENP, the theme is. Additionally, the depiction of growth and development directed by external influences recalls Vasconcelos' ideas through the portrayal of the titanic educators and the transforming power of knowledge. However, the message of the mural is not explicit and cannot be read directly and immediately in the manner demanded of public art by the muralists' manifesto. While this may not have troubled Orozco very much in view of the mural's setting in a private residence, it clearly suggests the difference between the "fighting educative art for all" advocated by the muralists and supported by Vasconcelos, and the

personal tastes of the private patron whose cultural understanding is revealed by the art he commissions.

Whatever its limitations, 'Omniscience' is an impressive achievement for an artist whose career as a muralist was in real danger of being ended by the lack of financial patronage needed for large-scale works such as murals. Yet if it lacks the power and bitterness of the ENP caricatures it also lacks their explicit sympathy for the plight of the poor, the oppressed and the betrayed.

In contrast 'Social Revolution' is a public mural in the sense that it is found in a place open to the general public and expresses its constructive message clearly and without the obscurity of neoclassical symbolism. It is roughly twice the size of 'Omniscience' but is executed in a much plainer style. Once again Orozco overcomes the problem of an interrupted wall space by the creation of two parallel foregrounds beside the opening to the simple balcony. There are no nudes, but the figures in these lower areas of the mural seem much more vulnerable than the mannered figures of 'Omniscience'. The emaciated figures are those of the people caught up in the Revolution of 1910-17: weeping women share their distress in the left side panel (6.20) and in the right panel other grief-stricken women embrace each other while a third comforts an exhausted soldier (6.21). There is no glamour of power associated with these Indian figures, but their strength of character and mutual support emphasised by posture and grouping is unmistakable. Above and behind the tallest figures in each group a red flag is shown, deliberately emphasising in its contours the bowed head of the women comforting their friends or relatives and associating their suffering with a broader social movement. Looking up, one sees a contrasting scene of concerted activity. Armed campesinos and soldiers identified only by their uniform and straw hats work together with their rifles slung over their shoulders, struggling to raise timbers, trowel cement on to walls and clear the ground with a long-handled shovel. These are powerful, confident but totally absorbed figures, working with a shared, single constructive purpose. While this theme is appropriate in the setting of the industrial workers' school, it is unusual for Orozco to have portrayed such a positive image of the popular struggle without a single note of

scepticism. This may have been what Casauranc would have wanted to see but it lacks the critical political awareness of 'Reactionary Forces' or 'The False Leaders' which Orozco might have preferred to express given a completely free hand. Where the flag of 'Revolutionary Trinity' blinds the people the flags of 'Social Revolution' lend support and reassurance.

Taken together 'Omniscience' and 'Social Revolution' provide an informative insight into the re-establishment in Orozco's art of a generally radical spirit with a post-Revolutionary awareness. 'Omniscience' is an idealistic but essentially pessimistic mural in which the artist seems to suggest that only in an unattainable way can genuine liberation be achieved. The mural's romantic message is indeed a successful artistic sentiment but is clearly not a public expression of a possible road to widespread social improvement. In 'Social Revolution' (which anticipates his 1926 ENP series) the developing tendency towards a plainer and more respectful style dealing directly with human experience is evident.

Seen as a group, the murals of these years clearly reveal a greater political content and a real desire to portray the people and everyday experience of life in Mexico after the revolution. There is generally a greater sympathy with the concerns and hardships of living in both rural and urban society and a readiness to accuse the social groups responsible for the suffering or exploitation of others. There is also evident a willingness to risk the disapproval of government patrons in doing this, and most of the muralists of the first days of the movement were dismissed as the government changed and attitudes less tolerant to the mural programme prevailed.

Developments in content and theme were accompanied by changes in the style and execution of the murals themselves. Work was completed more rapidly, often under the pressure of hostile criticism, and in Orozco's case at least, there was less concern with the aesthetic quality of the finished work than before, though his single private commission of the time indicates that his ability to work within the fine art traditions and meet aesthetic expectations was undiminished. Rivera and Siqueiros emerged as political activists,

promoting the cause of Communism in Mexico, and this is very clearly seen in their work;  
Orozco kept a sceptical distance from formal politics.

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## Chapter Seven

### THE END OF THE MURAL MOVEMENT, 1926-30

The politics of the second half of the 1920's were to shape Mexico's future for many years as this period saw the consolidation of the Constitutional Republic. In the wake of the 1924 civil war (in which the Sonoran presidential succession was secured) another bloody uprising took place in 1926-28 which effectively broke the power of the Church when Calles' Federal armies defeated the *Cristero* rebels. By the end of the decade the Government was in a far more secure position, having successfully centralised power in the capital by defeating or co-opting the factions which had emerged during the overthrow of Díaz. So effective was the integration of mass interest groups such as urban labour and agrarian reformists that the government's own political party formed in 1929, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (the PRI or 'Institutional Revolutionary Party'), would manage to retain central control of national politics with six decades of one-party rule.

The muralists continued in their characteristic ways to seek to create an influential and expressive political language which seemed topical but did not abandon the revolutionary heritage. The murals of Rivera and Orozco present fresh images of revolution in the midst of this counter-revolution; dropping muralism during these years, Siqueiros became very active in the radical political life of Mexico's second largest city, Guadalajara.

After Siqueiros lost his commission in Mexico City, he went with Amado de la Cueva to Guadalajara, capital of the State of Jalisco. They had gained a commission from the State Governor, José Guadalupe Zuno, to decorate his official residence and an important educational location, the main hall of the University of Guadalajara. Zuno had an artistic reputation as a bohemian, having participated in the 1918 Congress of Artist-Soldiers, and he and de la Cueva had belonged to the *Centro Bohemio de Guadalajara*; later Zuno would also achieve recognition as a muralist with his two murals of 1953. De la Cueva's earlier Guadalajara decorative works in 1924, portraits of Cortés and Nuño Guzmán, and the much larger panel 'San Cristóbal', were later destroyed though the still earlier work 'El Torito' painted in the SEP in 1923 survives. An apprentice work 'heavily influenced by Rivera' (1),

the mural accords both in theme and style to the Rivera sequence in which it appears.

The mural commission for the university established by Zuno was completed in 1926, and was carried on alongside the project in Zuno's residence which involved many other artists and craftsmen working in a whole range of media. The art and architecture of Zuno's residence were to harmonise completely, with even the doors and furnishings designed to integrate with other aspects of the overall scheme in the contemporary manner of the Gropius *Bauhaus* school of design and the artisan-socialist principles of the Victorian designer and writer William Morris. While Siqueiros even joined the local house painters' and masons' unions to promote the cooperative spirit of the project, Anita Brenner reports that a growing involvement in local labour organisations was overtaking his artistic work. This led to his decreasing participation in both the residence and university projects, and he handed over the direction of both to de la Cueva (2). However, Siqueiros's influence is very clearly evident in the stocky figures, monochromatic reddish-brown hues and sparse detail of the mural series, which are reminiscent of such works as **'Burial of the Martyred Worker'**.

The university murals form a complete scheme of decoration, and are interesting both as examples of stylistic innovation quite different from any of the Mexico City work, and for their ideological expression. The murals cover all four walls beneath the cupola dome and its pendentives, and consist of black and brown stylised figures painted upon a reddish brown field, with symbolic clasped hands in the four pendentives. Though the use of the building has since changed, it retains a public function and its murals remain as well suited to their surroundings as ever. Seen in their broader context of the muralism of the 1920's, their significance as a continuation of the emergent concern with the politics of agrarian reform is apparent.

The unifying theme of **'Agrarian and Labour Ideals of the Revolution of 1910'** is the portrayal of exploitation and liberty in the rural areas of Mexico. The series offers an informative comparison with Rivera's near-contemporaneous series in the Chapingo stairwell depicting injustice and oppression in the countryside and the later series he would complete in the former chapel at Chapingo in 1927. Recalling the social sketches of the stairwell

paintings in which Rivera illustrates in graphic detail agrarian suffering and the exploitative partnerships of landowners, lawyers and overseers who maintain it, Siqueiros and de la Cueva's work is stark and statuesque, with minimal concessions to the naturalism and photographic portraiture Rivera prefers. The total effect is of an Egyptian frieze filled with symbols and stylised figures on a completely flat backdrop lacking any suggestion of depth or perspective. Even if seen as a development of Siqueiros' earlier style, the series is very distinct from other styles within the mural movement.

A variety of social activities are portrayed, and ten decorative panels along the side walls depict occupations and aspects of work in the State of Jalisco. They may be separated into those with rural and urban contexts: a factory, crafts (pots and bread), and engineering represent typical urban industries found in Guadalajara, while sugar cane, corn and ploughing the land (7.A) are essentially rural. Education, Vasconcelos' great hope for the ideological development of the nation, is also featured as a school scene.

Two end panels represent the themes of exploitation and protection. In one (7.B), exploitation is shown with workers and farmers being oppressed directly by the military and the church. To the right a soldier is borne on the bowed shoulders and back of a worker; the corresponding area to the left shows a kneeling campesino saddled with a priest. Centrally above both images, another figure stands with chained hands oppressed by the arching palls of thick smoke pouring from the factory chimneys which surround him on all sides. The complementary end panel at the entrance shows the desired partnership suggested by the clasped hands at each corner pendentive of the dome above the centre of the hall. This mural (7.1) is explicitly ideological. Three figures form a pyramid: the two at either side of the base hold oxen yokes and stand beside the ploughs crossed between them; at the apex, an armed man stands attentively looking out, both hands clasping the barrel of a rifle with its butt resting on the ground. He is clearly guarding the others and the maize field in which he stands. To either side of his feet, sickles form a frieze terminated in a red star at each end, and above his head the sun beams down upon the ripening corn. The sickles which are used to suggest harvest rather than the typical machete reveal the Communist nature of the panel's

message, emphasising the red stars of the panel itself and echoing the red-starred ceiling of the whole hall. The series reflected some of the socialist hopes of the day:

During the first two years of Calles' reign, people spoke again of a Workers' State. B.Traven's proletarian novels named the government a Workers' Regime; international monopolies screamed against Calles' 'Bolshevism'. There was widespread belief that Mexico aimed at socialism.

### 3.

Tragically de la Cueva was killed in a motorcycle accident on 1st April 1926, soon after finishing the series, and Siqueiros abandoned muralism altogether in favour of political activities in Guadalajara and beyond, becoming secretary of the PCM and helping to set up the *Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana*.

Two days after the hall which Siquieros and de la Cueva had painted was complete, de la Cueva was killed in a motor-cycle crash. This blow almost severed Siqueiros' connection with painting, and when some months later the Zuno house was finished and Zuno was overthrown, Siqueiros was out of a job as an artist but very much occupied as a leader of peasants and miners in the state of Jalisco.

### 4.

Zuno and Siqueiros must have been reluctant partners in labour organisation for Zuno was the powerful representative of Jalisco's regional Catholic organisations, including a number of independent unions, and Siqueiros was professedly anti-clerical and sought to create a centralised labour confederation to wield political power on behalf of the proletariat.

Though very sceptical of the CROM leadership, Siqueiros saw value in the role CROM played and the influence it exerted in national politics. He worked to establish a labour front in Jalisco to rival Zuno's Catholic unions and their Confederation of Free Unions, and he encouraged much of the labour unrest which broke out in Jalisco during 1926. There were strikes in mines, textile factories, oil and electricity companies. Many of the mining strikes were organised with the help of Siqueiros, including those of the mining unions of La Mazata, Cinco Minas, Piedra Bola and El Amparo. Collectively, these unions formed the Federación Minera de Jalisco, a combative mining workers' coalition. The strikes were in pursuit of better working conditions and safety measures, and to win compensation for injured workmen(5). To advance his aims for the workers of Jalisco, Siqueiros brought out a workers' newspaper, 'El Martillo' ('The Hammer') on 17th October 1926 which he claimed was born 'in the precise

moment when the bourgeois-worker struggle was at its height.'(6) He also gave his attention to the campesino cause, and, as representative of the League of Agrarian Communities of Jalisco, called for a national congress in order to '...take out fanatics from the campesinos, to give them culture, and to explain to them the agrarian law, to choose directors for the whole national campesino organisation and to assign responsibilities to agrarian functionaries.' ('El Machete', 28th October 1926) This rallying cry reveals a desire for the bureaucratisation and incorporation of the quite separate campesino issues. For Siqueiros, any campesino-worker alliance would be rather one-sided, the campesino element being a dependent sub-class. Siqueiros does not appear to appreciate the distinctive culture the campesino possessed, or the importance to them of the *ejido*, the traditional, localised cooperative which they preferred to large-scale or national organisation. However, campesino demands were being virtually ignored by the government, and in Morelos they staged an abortive uprising:

Obregón's measured pace had finally exhausted the peasant's patience, and under Calles there was increasing violence in the countryside: more clashes between agrarians and White Guards, and in 1926 the resurgence of Zapatista revolt in Morelos. Calles tripled the pace of land distribution from a walk to a trot, enough to keep the peasant nag from breaking the bit. But he dared not allow the agrarian left to gallop ahead, for the power on his right was rising steadily. The Church idealized feudal land tenure and encouraged armed rebellion against Calles' government. Generals turning into landowners threatened him with their guns. And the agrarian debt was soaring, for the government paid landowners with bonds for confiscated acreage. These bonds drifted into the hands of bankers in the United States. Where would the Mexican treasury find the money to pay?

7.

The government responded with force and an initiative. Four *ejido* banks were set up, but they soon collapsed because the government provided no finance(8), and by 1929, the redistribution of land had achieved little:

The right wing of the party rallied behind Calles, who grew more conservative every year. He openly said that Mexico must be capitalist; he slowed agrarian reform to a crawl and announced to the peasants that land distribution would stop. Mexico was still a nation of huge estates: of the privately owned land, a few thousand landlords held four-fifths while 700,000 men in the semi-communal *ejidos* held only a tenth as much, and 2.3 million peasants had no land at all.

9.

Meantime Orozco, having completed 'Social Revolution' in Orizaba during early 1926, had regained his commission for muralism in the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* which had

been interrupted by Vasconcelos's departure and the disintegration of the Artists' Union. However his restored commission was obtained through the National University and its Rector, Dr. Alfonso Pruneda, rather than the Ministry of Public Education, his former sponsors. His work in the ENP represents nothing short of an explosion of creative energy which gave new direction to the whole sequence, including the radical remodelling - even complete repainting - of several early works on the ground floor, and the completion of an entire new sequence on the top floor as well as several striking images in the stairwells painted last of all. Thus by early 1927, Orozco's work covered all three floors of the north wall of the courtyard and, whatever the criticisms made of them, murals with which he was satisfied - such as the entire social caricature series - were left untouched.

The confident reworking of the early murals of the ground floor and the speed of execution of the new sequence on the second floor indicate that while painting 'Social Revolution' in Orizaba Orozco had found both the form and style he sought for public muralism, with a satisfactory balance of popular message and fine art handling - a style unambiguous and without classical pretension, concise and direct, indigenous and artistically accomplished. Orozco, a signatory to the Artists' Union Manifesto, resolved to his own satisfaction the problem the group had confronted collectively. Inspired by popular experience, these works provide Orozco's response to the terrible upheavals which continued in Mexico, but few who saw them shared his view of the historical process taking place in the 1920's and the sacrifices ordinary people were making.

The stairwell murals suggest that Orozco originally hoped to work his way around the entire courtyard as Rivera was able to do in the SEP. Executed between 1924 and 1926, 'Thirsting Men' and 'The Engineers' commence the sequence on the ground floor. Located to either side of the ground-floor entrance to the staircase which leads under an ornamented tablet declaring 'Order and Progress', the paired panels have an unmistakable constructivist, even *científico*, theme. Mankind's needs, symbolised by thirst, are met by means of the engineer's expertise and the naked Indian labourer's strength. Thematically these panels would seem to belong to the period before the 1924 first-floor social caricatures,

and the master-slave relationship and postures of the figures of the panel echo those of the 1922 panel showing 'The Struggle of Man against Nature'. Furthermore, the proud, powerful bearing of the engineer himself anticipates the allegorical figure of masculine features from 'Omniscience', 1925.

The three other stairwell murals, probably dating from 1926, depict unconventional Colonial images. Two paired panels to either side of the stairway show 'Ancient Peoples' and 'A Franciscan Helping the Sick', these being surmounted centrally by a provocative and frank portrayal of 'Cortés and Malinche'. These three murals are located on the walls immediately below two large panels painted in the very first years of the mural movement, namely Charlot's 'Massacre in the Templo Mayor' and Leal's 'Feast at Chalma', both of which have messages about the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the oppression of the Indian during the conquest of Mexico and in more recent times by religion. This may have influenced Orozco's choice of theme for the murals on the empty walls between his ground floor pair and the earlier work above by Leal and Charlot. Nonetheless Orozco's pictures are typically stark and sombre. 'A Franciscan Helping the Sick' (7.C) seems to show the monk's compassion for the starving Indian he clasps but hints in the postures of the figures at a more disquieting relationship, that of vampire and victim. Reinforcing this ambiguous message overhead is an unusual symbolic device linking salvation and sin: the cross thrust by missionary zeal carries a coiled serpent. (Two other nearby panels showing Franciscans helping the oppressed and destitute native people of Mexico are more explicitly compassionate.) The central surmounting panel of the triptych is one of Orozco's few depictions of the Conquest. 'Cortés and Malinche' (7.D), nakedly portrays the ruthless exploitation of New Spain by the Conquistadors represented here by their leader, the powerful figure of Hernan Cortés. Also shown are his native mistress Malinche, reputedly a traitor to her race, and, lying face down at the feet of the triumphant Cortés, a slain or defeated Indian man. Despite being allusive rather than a graphic illustration of scenes of plunder and torture like those of Rivera's 1930 Cuernavaca and National Palace series, the bare truth about the Colonial period no doubt outraged *criollo* opinion.

On the ground floor of the north wall Orozco returned to his earlier work with a determination to replace his earlier allegorical experimentation with images in a new style of social realism. He painted three new panels on the ground floor, bracketed by three which he left as they were. Reading a sequence from left to right, 'The Rich Banquet While the Workers Quarrel' is not easily visible from the courtyard, and its style suggests its close relationship with the first floor murals above. Viewing from the courtyard, one sees a range of five panels beginning with the disquieting, aimless conflict of 'The Revolutionary Trinity' (7.E shows the three panels discussed below). A doorway separates it from a calm picture showing three strikers raising a red flag before a doorway - 'The Strike'. The strangely disembodied head of Christ - the only feature of 'Christ Destroying His Cross' preserved by the artist - floats like a symbolic endorsement of their activity almost like a detail from a miracle *retablo*. Next to 'The Strike' (7.F) one sees a poignant image of sacrifice in the cause of the Revolution, 'The Trench' (7.2; Intro.A). Said to reflect the painter's characteristic anarchist sympathies and radical scepticism, this painting has been identified by Mike González as his most powerful depiction of the human cost of struggle:

His most powerful painting is also his most tragic vision. In *La Trinchera*, three anonymous peasant guerillas lie slumped across one another, their faces turned away from the observer, their particular history lost in a gloomy and undefined background. That they fought is clear in the foreground where the ammunition belts stand out against their skin; but what they fought for is long forgotten.

#### 10.

This panel shows three anonymous men wearing bandoliers (possibly the same three of 'The Strike') clad in the white cotton trousers of the unskilled labourer lying sprawled in exhaustion in the trench from which they have fought. The still form of the centre figure clearly suggests the posture of crucifixion, an idea emphasised by the sweep of the broken beam, blocks and rifle pointing skyward in the background of the panel. The next panel depicts 'The Destruction of the Old Order' (7.3; 7.G). In the foreground two better clad men look over their shoulders to the tumbled architectural ruins which stretch into a reddish-brown distance. It is clear that the fine houses and churches of the wealthy and powerful have been destroyed in the struggle for freedom from oppression. The range of

murals now concludes disjointedly with the earlier **Maternity**, probably for no more greater reason than Orozco liked the 'fine art' style composition too much to alter or replace it. It is preserved, like Christ's head, unthematically for its aesthetic value to the artist rather than its revolutionary or radical character.

A tragic vision lies behind Orozco's last series of panels on the north wall of the ENP. Scathing in his autobiography about murals filled with colourful folkloric details, Orozco's concern is with the human experience of suffering prevalent during the Revolution and its turbulent aftermath. As suggested by the half-finished faces these grey murals were never quite completed. However far from lessening their impact, this provides their images of neglect, bereavement and endurance with a stark force.

The murals of the top floor are notably free of thematic ambiguity, social mockery and background or incidental detail. Bare images in the manner of '**Social Revolution**,' these panels attempt to capture and portray aspects of contemporary Mexican experience - but without the latter's constructive idealism. Instead we are presented with a series of images drawn from rural life showing men and women enduring and resigned to the events they are living through. Only their expressions and posture is given a detailed treatment; buildings and landscapes are blocky and featureless. The panels, as Orozco intended, require no interpretation and their titles indicate their subjects. For instance, in '**The Mother's Blessing**' a labourer is shown kneeling before his elderly mother, his plough standing in the foreground ready for use. Immediately to its left, '**The Gravedigger**' features a labourer lying asleep on the lip of the newly-dug grave which lies ominously wide waiting to receive perhaps the *campesino* seen leaving his dependent mother. This sombreness is extended in the next panel, the furthest left of those on this level, which shows distraught '**Women**' (7.4) in the plain styles of the countryside standing beside two abandoned ploughs. Relationships between the various panels are not easy to define, but each one suggests an aspect of the experiences of war in the countryside. Taken together (7.H), we see how Orozco's aim was to reveal the loss and despair *campesinos* endured throughout the decades of civil war and unrest. The series stands in a sharp contrast with Rivera's

contemporary series at the National Agricultural College at Chapingo (discussed later) where one is presented with images which praise revolutionary sacrifice and make heroes of those who confront oppressors. Rather than Rivera's depiction of defiance and resistance, Orozco portrays necessity and reluctant determination. Orozco's figures are dignified by their silent endurance rather than their conspicuous bravery, but they are not passive bystanders as we see in 'Return from Work' and 'Return to the Battlefields.' One recalls that Orozco experienced the revolutionary conflicts at first hand while Rivera was still in Europe, and this may well explain why Orozco's depiction lacks the idealism of Rivera's heroic stories of revolutionary confrontation.

Moving to the right from the central doorway (7.I), 'Return from Work', 'The Mother's Farewell', 'The Family' and finally 'Return to the Battlefields'(7.5) offer a sombre message about the continuing conflict which the Revolution did not resolve. Exhausted rural workers trudge home from the fields (7.X), but in the adjacent panel one is seen leaving home and his frail mother. In the next panel to the right a family of three generations sit in the street. The grandmother holds an infant in her dark shawl while husband and wife comfort each other as they look at their simple dwelling billowing with smoke in the background. In the foreground a young woman cradles the head of a sick man who is lying in the street wrapped in a blanket (7.J). In the last of these panels a group of three armed *campesinos* accompanied by two *soldaderas* (one carrying her infant on her bent back) trudge wearily and despondently off to war, their faces unseen and their identity unknown. These images communicate in the same way as many of the photographer Casasola's famous scenes of the Revolution. The life stories and personal background of those caught by the camera are obscure, though their feelings and struggle are graphically apparent.

These are the last panels Orozco painted in Mexico for several years. Having lost his commission through official distaste for his troubling depictions of the effects of the Revolutionary process and their roots in the historic oppression of the native people, Orozco is again saved by the help and influence of a wealthy benefactor. Forced to give up muralism,

Orozco turned to easel work in 1926, producing a series of drawings generally titled '**Mexico In Revolution**', and then in 1927 Genaro Estrado, Secretary of Foreign Relations, paid for a three month visit to New York (11). Subsequently Orozco found North American patrons for several years' work including several murals before returning to Mexican muralism in 1934.

Rivera is in the limelight for the remainder of the decade: his activities encompass national and international politics and aesthetics, and to many observers in Mexico and abroad, the name Diego Rivera now becomes synonymous with Mexican muralism. However, due to the remorseless suppression of the Church and the centralised attrition of union power the national political background is far from stable, and though Rivera cultivates the appearance of radicalism through his increasingly strong association with international Communism, he is able to retain the confidence of his capitalist government patrons despite the satirical themes of his new work such as the *corrido* series.

In 1926 Rivera began painting on the third floor patio walls of the SEP the innovative series he had conceived and sketched the year before. By this time he had painted dozens of panels, and had developed a talent for creating a coherent sequence of paintings linked by a common theme. However, he made the narrative and 'message' of his work explicit by using his murals to illustrate a *corrido*, or popular ballad. All the panels of the **Corrido of the Agrarian Revolution** correspond directly to the lines of the political song which accompany them. The caricature panels display Rivera's ideological concerns quite deliberately, and signed panels carry a miniature hammer-and-sickle logo after his signature. His Communist biographer Wolfe saw them as 'propaganda' (12), but this presupposes a popular or mass audience which, located on the third floor of the Ministry of Education, they were not likely to have. They do function as biting political satire nonetheless, especially where contemporary figures such as former education minister Vasconcelos or the American industrialist Rockefeller are exposed to scorn.

The spaces to be painted were very different from those on the lower floors, being generally narrow and tall. Rivera used grisaille (that is, the application of grey washes and mock carving to flat plasterwork) to convert the spaces into arched frames and to enhance the

perspective of each panel, with a red banner carrying the words of the ballad in festoons above each panel. The sequence begins with a narrow corner panel showing the agrarian leader Zapata holding his famous 'Land and Liberty' banner while four campesino musicians sing at his feet (7.K1). The next panel (7.K2) is a broad one, filled with another group of musicians and a well-known female singer singing the corrido surrounded by an attentive audience wearing plain rural clothes, though two or three of the onlookers are in uniform as a reminder of the revolutionary conflict. The words of the ballad commemorate Zapata, but claim "All are of the same party / Now there's no one to fight with" linking to the next panel, "Comrades, there's no more war / Let us go to work." Recalling the 'Federal' (i.e. Constitutionalist) Army's rape of Morelos and the destruction of Zapata's Army of the South, this constructive, hopeful message is a distortion of what actually happened. In a different sense from Wolfe's, these murals are 'propaganda', but government rather than radical propaganda aimed at its civil servants and professionals rather than the broad mass of the Mexican people.

The image the murals of the west wall present is of a progressive revolution, sure of its aims, coordinated, successful, decisive. Given the government efforts to co-opt the workers and campesinos while encouraging the inward movement of foreign capital, the panels promote some elements of the government line though Rivera publicly opposed U.S. imperialism and despised financiers like Morgan and Rockefeller, and the industrialist Ford. All are exposed as international predators in 'Wall Street Banquet' (7.K3; also known as 'The Billionaires'). The settled images in the first two panels are complemented by the others in the west wall range: workers are shown holding a harmonious and orderly union meeting, and children attentively learn to read in the next panel. The penultimate panel depicts the grain being threshed as the harvest is gathered in, and the range is completed by the panel showing the land being reinvigorated by the falling rain.

The style of the second range of murals becomes more exaggerated and the tone becomes critical as Rivera provides his Communist analysis of current events. In this series he attacks capitalism as a present evil much as Orozco had in his earlier caricatures of the

oppressive, greedy rich. Continuing the harmonious theme of the west wall panels, the north wall sequence commences with the depiction of a tractor, the symbol of agricultural progress, and concludes with a reminder of the potential of the countryside in **'All the World's Wealth Comes from the Land'**. Between these reminders of the wholesome values of the countryside, and the related centrepiece **'Fruits'**, Rivera depicts scenes of bourgeois privilege and debauchery contrasted with the deprivation of the poor or the imagined virtues of campesino life.

The wealth of the capitalists is displayed at their dinner table, where in all their finery they have sat down at table to consume gold. The figures in **'Capitalist Dinner' (7.K4)** are evident caricatures: men appear as affected as their women companions, one of whom is heavy-jowled and obese. Behind them, looking in on their feast, stand the revolutionary soldier and campesino whose arms are filled with wholesome produce. The corrido festooned above relates: "Gold is worth nothing / If there's no food, / It is the spring of the clock / Of the new generation" - and in this panel the rural and bourgeois children are contrasted, the creole crying and turning from the gold on his plate, the native child looking in as she eats a loaf. In the next panel, **'The Learned' (7.K5)**, Rivera attacks positivist and other intellectuals including Vasconcelos, who is seated on a white elephant to suggest the futility of his educational ideals:

Using the same composition - proletariat above and bourgeoisie below - as in most of these frescoes, Rivera represents characters well known in Mexico: at the left wearing a laurel wreath is the journalist José Juan Tablada, who had written a great deal about the artists of the revolution. Below him, seated on learned tomes, is the university rector Ezequiel Chávez, who had objected to the murals of the Vasconcelos regime and their propagandistic tendencies. To the right is represented Berta Singerman, who was known in Mexico as a reader of poetry, and in the centre the Hindu poet Tagore, as a prophet crowned with a tin funnel. At the lower right appears Vasconcelos himself (recognizable to everyone by his large protruding ears) seated on a white elephant.

### 13.

The books included in the mural are also of interest - works by Comte, Spencer, John Stuart Mill, and other theoreticians form Chávez' seat of learning. Vasconcelos, whose ideas had once been allegorised by Rivera in **'The Creation'**, had earned the enmity of the muralists by decrying them for 'covering walls with portraits of criminals.' (14) Rivera's revenge is to

attack his reputation in the very heart of his former ministry. The ballad text above them reminds the viewer that it is better to have something to eat every day rather than be learned in many sciences - alluding to the fundamental flaw in Vasconcelos' reforms, which required a prospering economy providing for everyone's basic needs to have any hope of succeeding. But, as the next panel shows, financial prosperity is controlled by the rich bankers and investors of Wall Street. Their ceaseless speculation is contrasted with the sleeping poor huddled in 'Sleep - Night of the Poor' (7.K6). The still forms of the poor are observed by the priest, politician and army general who skulk in the bushes, but the poor are guarded by the alert trio of worker, soldier and campesino. These guardians are discussing what a book has told them about their class enemies hiding in the bushes. The central panel of the range, 'Fruits' (7.K7) shows a male teacher instructing a class of children and adults including a soldier as a boy gives out the apples picked by the campesino and worker in the background while a capitalist and priest scowl disapprovingly from behind the ladders used by the fruit pickers. This depiction of educational progress rebukes Vasconcelos' discussion group whose principles and theories achieve nothing. The next panel, 'Orgy - Night of the Rich' (7.K8), stands as an uproarious contrast to the sleeping poor and their earnest sentinels. The revolutionaries look down on the scene of revelry, drunkenness and prostitution, and above their heads the red garlands carry on the verse commenced in the previous panel: "Blessed the tree that yields fruit / But very ripe fruit / Yes, gentlemen, it is worth more / Than all the hard dollars." The scene is very reminiscent of Orozco's caricature, 'The Rich Banquet while the Workers Quarrel'. While Orozco exposed the workers' in-fighting as a weakness exploited by the rich to preserve their hegemony, Rivera shows a united group of two campesinos, a soldier and an urban worker calmly and gravely discussing the excesses of the wealthy. Rivera shows the red worker explaining the scene to the campesinos and soldier, thus promoting the revolutionary leadership of the proletariat. Rivera's orthodox version neglects the reality of the divided proletariat and the mutual hatred of the *campesino* and *federale*. He extends this in the next panel by promoting a popular work ethic; a soldier and campesino store sheaves of wheat below the verse, "The only

well-being / That the Mexican desires / Is to be permitted to work / In order to be happy." The speculators are destroyed in the penultimate panel, which combines Orozco's themes from **'The Destruction of the Old Order and Social and Political Junkheap'**. Rivera's **'End of the Bourgeoisie'** (7.K9) shows the soldier bayonetting a capitalist in his golden heart as he is forced to emerge from the safe also shown in **'Wall Street Banquet'**. In another reference to revolutionary violence, one of the banker's fellows is impaled through the neck on the campesino's sickle while the worker's hammer crushes the capitalist's head. In the foreground two women sweep away the capitalist debris left as the old order is destroyed, including the bishop's hat and laurel leaves prominent at the foot of the mural where two boys watch gleefully.

In the final panel, **'All the World's Wealth Comes from the Land'**, Rivera depicts a well-dressed campesino family confidently using modern gadgets. The mother listens to the radio attentively while an older daughter uses a sewing machine. The younger children are writing, while in the background the father is seated on a fine horse and is protectively well armed. In the background a tractor tows a plough through the fields as two men easily carry out an otherwise arduous task, while an aeroplane flies overhead. Mechanisation has brought this industrious family the tangible benefits of progress, as the final verse of the ballad proclaims: "He wants no more glittering promises / Nor words without meaning; / He wants only security / For his dearly beloved home." The agrarian revolution secure, the soldier and urban worker do not make an appearance in this final panel which therefore suggests the self-sufficiency of the rural communities. Recalling the facts about the limited extent of land redistribution noted earlier, Rivera's conclusion seems utopian, for few campesino families had any land to exploit for themselves, still less the higher standard of living shown. However, the verse does indicate that the situation is to be worked towards, rather than being the status quo. Moreover, few genuine campesinos would be likely ever to see the murals painted on the third floor walls of the Ministry of Education, so complaints about the idealisation of their lives in the countryside would have been very unlikely.

In 1926-27, Rivera also undertook a new series in the *Escuela Nacional de*

*Agricultura*, the national agricultural college in Chapingo. These murals were painted in the chapel of the former private estate which was being converted into an assembly hall. However, Rivera's allegorical work here is very different from the earlier murals painted in the stairwell of the main building, the scenes of 'Good Government' and 'Bad Government'. The situation of the new series is architecturally quite distinctive. A series of rectangular panels along each long wall which present a revolutionary narrative is surmounted by semicircular panels, with oval and central hexagonal spaces formed above them by the intersecting arches which criss-cross the walls and ceiling, but the entire space is dominated by the flat, plain end wall at the 'head' of the building. Rivera is reported to have worked himself to exhaustion in creating this complex masterpiece.

In point of fact he did suffer an accident as indicated, but it was not a fall from a horse but from his scaffold. It was at the time when he was painting simultaneously at the Secretariat of Education and at Chapingo. The fever of creation was on him and he spent unbelievable hours painting in one place, only to snatch a few hours' sleep and then set out for the other. He drove his plasterers and assistants at such a pace to keep up with his painter's fury that, though they worked only in eight-hour shifts, two of them got sick and had to take leaves of absence. But he himself worked unending stretches, including Saturdays and Sundays. The strain began to tell on him but he would not let down. At last, after working all day and all night, he fell asleep in the midst of his painting and toppled off his scaffold to the pavement below.

15.

Rivera covered virtually every square inch of space, including the ceiling, with a vivid and overwhelming celebration of the fertility of Mexico's land and people, each panel boldly framed in ivory and terracotta, in what he conceived of as a pictorial poem to the earth (7.L).

The frescos of Chapingo were essentially a poem to the earth: to its profundity, beauty, richness and sadness. The dominant tones were violet, green, red and orange. The work covered almost one and a half thousand square feet of wall.

16.

This concept of the series should be extended, however, because the works advance two controversial and emphatically modernist tenets, namely, evolutionary rather than divine creation, and the licence of the artist to depict nudity in public art in a society whose Catholic values were outraged by Ail's nude titans and Orozco's 'Maternity'. Rivera's themes have been extensively treated by others, for instance, Antonio Rodríguez:

...the land, personified by a nude woman, is bent over in humiliation between the forces that exploit and oppress her: a representative of the high-ranking clergy, a military official carrying armaments and an obese man (capitalist) with a bag full of gold next to him.

The delicately drawn curves of the woman in her nudity and beauty suggest the carnal geography (coasts and peninsulas) of Mexico. At the side of this panel...another nude woman, luxuriant and virginal, suggests by the budding plant that opens next to her hand the potential of the land open to the seed.

On the upper part, in the cupola, the wind, the rain and the sun as well as the nude man at the right (whom the artist designated "the masculine element"), reinforce the idea that everything is ready on the land for the phenomenon of fecundation.

## 17.

Rivera also uses female nudes in a variety of graceful recumbent, sitting and upright poses in other panels to suggest the continuation of the process through germination, fruition and so on. However as Rodríguez discerns, there is also a propagandic theme as indicated by a red-shirted man in several of the lowest, rectangular panels and the symbolic appearance of the unified hammer and sickle. More significantly the series eulogises the new folk heroes created by the Revolution, and hence an ideological analysis is appropriate.

The ten rectangular panels form two distinct but thematically linked sequences on each wall. Both sequences develop from the first two which face each other in the entrance to the chapel. The first panel of the left-hand sequence introduces the assertive, exemplary figure of the agitator who in the successive panels defies the oppressors. Unusually, he personifies and unifies both labour sectors in his dress, for he wears blue overalls over a bright red shirt. Here Rivera urbanises the agrarian with the blue overalls he usually reserves for the politically aware proletarian, and inadvertently reveals his view of the campesino in general as being politically uninformed. In the first panel (7.6) he addresses a mixed crowd of workers, and though his companion cowers behind his red cloak, the agitator exposes the white miners working underground and drilling out Mexico's natural mineral wealth, a contemporary source of concern as is later explained. In the foreground the union of proletarian and campesino workers is suggested by the hammer and sickle, another issue Siqueiros in particular was currently advancing. This is echoed in the motif of the ceiling (7.7), which shows a large red five-pointed star unifying four hands, two of which are open in benevolent greeting above the other two which grasp a hammer and a sickle respectively. Opposite and in close proximity to

the other panel, the first mural of the other sequence (7.8) depicts Mexico's fallen heroes, whose buried bodies wrapped in red sustain the strongly growing maize field ripening for harvest. The agrarian martyrs of the Revolution, Zapata and Otilio Montaño (author of the *Plan de Ayala*) have joined the mystical natural cycle of regeneration and rebirth depicted by the fecund nudes of the east wall, typified by 'Germination' (7.M), a panel from the middle of this range.

The left side of the chapel depicts stages in the revolutionary transformation of the land, mirroring the right side which represents the earth's evolutionary development. The social revolution is evoked as the counterpart to natural evolution.

#### 18.

The second panel of the left-hand sequence (7.9) draws on elements of two earlier murals, 'Exit from the Mine' (in the SEP) and 'Bad Government', to depict oppression of industrial and rural workers by creole landowners and mestizo overseers. The panel above this shows 'Earth Enslaved', with caricature landlord, soldier and priest guarding their downcast victim; overhead, 'The Elements' offer nourishment and light to the earth below (7.10). In the ground level panel depicting revolutionary scenes (7.9), only one worker has the courage to stare up at his oppressor defiantly, the same young campesino agitator holding a sheaf of wheat and a sickle. In the next panel (7.11) he is seen addressing men and women workers representing the industrial and rural workforce. In the third panel (7.12) he is again the focus of attention, this time in death. His corpse draped in a red shroud, he is surrounded by sorrowing and wounded mourners. The iconography of Communism is explicitly reinforced with the red banner held respectfully by a comrade, and by the star-shaped red flowers which bloom from the sturdy tree behind the group. The message is clear: the class struggle is represented by the strongly-growing, massive tree rooted in the sacrifice of the fallen, who nourish and sustain it.

The sequence culminates with a tableau of harvest and harmony (7.13). Three symbolic workers representing the proletariat in blue overalls, the campesino in traditional white shirt and *calzones*, and the central figure of a worker in military style uniform (whose red necktie perhaps indicates his association with the Red Battalions) receive a meal from the women and

children sitting on the ground in front of them. The tyrants are nowhere to be seen. In the background stands a threshing machine, suggesting that in this new era mechanical progress has alleviated menial work and restored the dignity of labour.

Rivera's giant end panel (7.14) is a secular reworking of his earlier 'The Creation', thematically reminiscent of Orozco's 'Omniscience'. This time neoclassical allusions are abandoned in favour of a readily comprehensible allegory of the utopia man may create by making good use of the elements of earth, air, water and fire in machines of his own making.

In the foreground a nude man with his back to the spectator and holding an apple affirms his awareness of his deeds. Having been expelled from Eden, according to the biblical version for having eaten the fruit from the tree of wisdom, the new Adam constructs his own paradise by using the instruments of his creative imagination: a steel pinwheel to control the wind, water channeled to quench the thirst of the land and electricity to produce energy and light.

#### 19.

The interest in technology seen with increasing frequency in Rivera's murals marks a new element in his heroic visualisation of man, one which would come to accompany Communist ideology in murals of the 1930's as Rivera sees machines no longer solely associated with capitalist development and hence instruments of the oppressors, but as aids to a brighter future, a better society. Similarly progressive themes appear in the stairwell paintings he executed in the SEP during 1927-28. Political struggles continued unabated as he painted pictures of the new era, but four days after completing the Chapingo murals he left on an extended visit to the U.S.S.R.

Rivera retained his membership of the PCM throughout the 1920's, and continued his friendly contact with Siqueiros who, in 1925, had been appointed president of the Commission for Political Agitation of the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas. In 1927 Rivera was appointed general secretary of the Mexican section of the Pro-Confederation Union of the League and organised a meeting with the Latin American Pro-Confederation Union Committee for 21st December, 1928. In his speech to the meeting he condemned the 'good-will' tour of Latin America of U.S. President Hoover, and attacked the aims and activities of a rival organisation, the Pro-imperialist Pan American Worker Confederation.

While Rivera promoted the ideal principle of worker-campesino unity in his murals, and by

publicising and taking part in the 1926 First Convention of the League of Agrarian Communities and Campesino Syndicates of Tamaulipas State, Siqueiros was also working in Jalisco to bring it about. From June 1927 the former muralist edited the newspaper 'El 130'. He also presided at the Congress of Unification of Hostotipaquillo in June which called for 'unity of action in the region', echoing the earlier appeals by himself, Rivera and Guerrero in 'El Machete' in 1924. Undoubtedly worker-campesino unification was held by these muralists to be the way to carry forward the aims of the Revolution, and this form of incorporation suited the Government. In a current article in 'El Machete', Siqueiros explains that "the necessity for the campesino and worker unification resulted from the current erosion of their rights by the landowners and industrialists who were forcing "readjustments...against the interests of workers under the pretext of a contemporary crisis":

We do not merely have the organic fusion of one confederation with another, or one league within another. No, we try to unite on a common platform all worker and campesino organisations of the country, for the defense of all proletarian victories stated explicitly in Articles 27 and 123.

20.

In the specific case of mining, the same report in 'El Machete' No.68 blamed the deeper penetration of profit-chasing U.S. imperialism into Mexico for these "readjustments":

Mexican and U.S. capital have placed all blame on the precarious state of the national mining industry, on the world monetary crisis or on the prohibitive taxes on the mining industry. Under these pretexts they make their plans for readjustment to obtain more 'equitable' conditions of exploitation... For those years in which the companies speak of the mining crisis, however, production marked a prodigious ascending ladder.

Since Obregón's overtures to foreign capital had by now resulted in foreign reinvestment in Mexico, the foreign industrialists were attempting to regain their former dominion over the Mexican economy, and were encouraged and supported considerably by Calles. However, important articles had been written into the 1917 Constitution which restricted the operating conditions and privileges enjoyed by foreign companies under Díaz. Returning foreign industrialists now faced a difficult and complex situation where labour relations were concerned, for workers in some regions were disenchanted with the government-backed CROM and formed their own organisations, represented at national level by the Anti-Imperialist League. In effect, CROM under its corrupt leader Morones had become

institutionalised within the Calles Government.

In his presidential Informe of 1926 Calles announced that 'labourism', as a principle adopted by the national government as a goal of the labouring masses and as a system of economic and social organisation, has entered into a new phase of its evolution.

....  
For Calles, the term 'labourism' signified a corporatist vision of social justice, a doctrine of 'the balancing of forces' well suited to the needs of a regime engaged in balancing the mutually antagonistic forces that composed it, labour, the army, middle groups. 21.

Calles even went so far as to bring Morones into the cabinet as Minister of Industry and Commerce (22).

Although clearly opposed to the increasing influence of foreign capital within the Mexican economy, Siqueiros' position with regard to CROM was more equivocal. As his activities and writings show, he supported the principle of a centralised labour organisation such as CROM but was highly critical of the leaders of the actual organisation, especially Morones, and the relationship between itself and the Government that CROM enjoyed. This really came to light when, in December 1927, Siqueiros came under personal attack after a rival leftist group opposed to unification and centralisation ('a group of opportunists at the service of one of those political bands that oppose unification' 23) seized the social building of the Workers' Confederation of Jalisco, and the executive committee headed by Siqueiros was dismissed. Charges of corruption and of opportunism were made against Siqueiros: in particular the 'opportunist leftist group' condemned him in 'El Informador' and 'Izquierda' for having cooperated with CROM. The signing of pacts of solidarity with CROM and other central unions was seen by some as damaging the cause of 'radical regionalism', which this particular leftist group defended.

However Siqueiros had supporters as well as critics, particularly in the groups in which he was most active. In December 1927, 'El Machete' reports that he was defended at the Second Convention of Mining Syndicates, and exonerated:

Siqueiros did not cooperate with the CROM, but published in the newspapers of which he was director, 'El Martillo' and 'El 130', many articles in which the ideology of the yellow leaders of the CROM was condemned.

24.

Although Siqueiros condemned its corrupt leaders, he did in fact work with CROM. Resolutions of the First Miners' Convention held in 1926 prove this, for amongst other matters a call was made to:

...fight against all who wish to destroy unions affiliated with the CROM. Workers of all unions of the CROM have to be helped by the miners like class brothers. Even though there are bad elements in a union, the union must not be destroyed, only the bad element removed. The CROM, however, must break from government control and become independent.

This report of the proceedings of the Miners' Convention of Jalisco was taken from Siqueiros' newspaper 'El Martillo' and reprinted in 'El Machete' No. 53, 28th October 1926. Two other resolutions of the Convention were, to call for the integration of the CROM rival organisation, the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT), and to fight for Article 123, changing it in accordance with workers' interests.

The PCM's attitude towards CROM became clearer in a later issue of 'El Machete' (17th November 1928) when the call for unification between workers of 'autonomous' unions and those of CROM was repeated. Once more, the leadership rather than CROM itself was criticised.

The Communist Party exhorts all workers and campesinos affiliated with the CROM to struggle against the politics of class collaboration promoted by Morones. The Communist Party appeals to all discontented elements of the CROM imploring them not to leave, but to remain within it, and to strive towards revolutionary purification.

Evidently Siqueiros' activities in Jalisco were in accordance with the PCM line. Whatever their intentions, Rivera, Siqueiros and others in the PCM nevertheless were aiding the government strategy of seeking to incorporate and centralise control of Mexican labour, and hence, inadvertently improving the stability of the bourgeois regime. In effect, the result was the transformation of revolutionary class struggle into class collaboration, with the major containment of worker radicalism being achieved by CROM and its affiliated unions. However much labour activists and spokesmen sought to secure the promises of the 1917 Constitution, the Calles government, now increasingly dependent on the inward flow of foreign capital, could not easily meet these commitments to the proletariat and rural workers. To understand the scope of Rivera's aesthetic achievement, and the remarkable survival of

his commission when all others were terminated, it is vital to grasp the nature of the emergent hegemony within which he worked.

The muralists, PCM and other leftist political groups were not alone in their hostility for criticism had been made of the Calles regime by those on the right who objected to limited concessions to the left such as small-scale redistribution of land. Ever since Carranza had enacted the anti-clerical measures of his Constitution, the Catholic middle class of Mexico had felt their religious rights threatened, but sympathetic state governors like Zuno had resisted Federal pressure for their enforcement. Obregón had allowed some leeway during his term in office, but Calles would permit none. However, fearing the consequences of open confrontation with the government, the Catholic hierarchy in Mexico sought to maintain a neutral position, and the Vatican fully supported this approach. Nonetheless lay Catholics formed their own defence groups and were quite active even in Obregón's term. Many even went so far as to join the de la Huerta revolt of 1923-24 rather than see Calles elected, because as Obregón's *Ministerio de Gobernación* he had already revealed his intention to move against the Catholics as a political force. The revolt of 1923-24 was unsuccessful, but was a very great threat to Calles because de la Huerta commanded enormous support from the staunchly Catholic middle class membership of the PNC. Despite the defeat, the Catholic middle class remained a formidable political force, as the events of 1926 indicate.

The precursor to the widespread Catholic uprising known as the Cristero Revolt happened in early 1926. A letter attributed to Archbishop Mora y del Río appeared in the newspaper 'El Universal' on 4th February. The letter condemned all the articles of the 1917 Constitution which harmed Catholic interests. Calles used this as a pretext to move more openly against the Catholics, and clerics of foreign nationality were expelled from Mexico under Article 130 (one of Siqueiros' 1926 newspapers was called 'El 130', indicating his own hostility to the power of the Mexican Catholic Church). The campaign against this "enemy within" distracted attention from the President's politically embarrassing invitation to foreign investors and from the difficulties in labour relations caused by popular disaffection with CROM.

The Catholic uprisings of 1926 were widely supported but poorly coordinated. In June 1926, Calles enacted new penal laws to strengthen the anti-clerical provisions of the Constitution. Though Mexican bishops were totally opposed to these, they encouraged the people to remain peaceful. However by early August Catholic laymen took up arms in defence of their religion, and sporadic conflict began. While the hierarchy of the Mexican Catholic Church continued to advocate moderation, its regional archbishops and bishops (including Orozco y Jiménez, Archbishop of Guadalajara) called for armed resistance. This ambivalence of Church leaders was partly responsible for the poorly-coordinated nature of the Catholic revolt of 1926-27, which consequently did not pose a severe threat to the government though the ensuing bloodshed was widespread and Calles became detested by much of the population. Significantly this indicates that Rivera's work reflects contemporary Mexican society only selectively, for while the worker-campesino alliance is idealised and heavily promoted, no allusions are made to the terrible events of the *Cristero* Uprising.

Rivera and Siqueiros took no role in the political agitation caused by the uprising, for as prominent Communists they had been invited to the U.S.S.R. to attend conferences during the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. Ironically Rivera's dedication to depicting Communism as the way forward for Mexico ran into trouble, for his explanations of his aesthetic principles provoked official dislike rather than endorsement, so much so that he was eventually asked to leave the country. However, the trip began promisingly.

The painter was one of a delegation of workers and peasants sent from Mexico to the festivities; his pockets bulged with documents, mandates and credentials. They certified him to be a member of the Communist Party in good standing, delegate of the Mexican Section of the International Red Aid, representative of the Mexican Peasant League, General Secretary of the Anti-Imperialist League, editor of its official organ, El Libertador, and many other things besides.

25.

After appearing as guest of honour at a lecture given in Moscow on 9th November by George V. Korusnky on 'Contemporary Mexican Art', Rivera was invited to address a variety of artists' groups and was also appointed instructor in monumental painting at the Central School of Plastic Arts. On November 24th he was commissioned by Lunacharsky, Commissar of Education and the Fine Arts, to paint frescos in the Red Army buildings, and he also

enjoyed much favourable comment in the Soviet Press. Rivera also spoke on 'The Revolution and Science' at the Congress of Scientists. But Rivera earned disapproval for his outspoken dismay at the treatment of his old friends from Paris, the Russian cubist, futurist and expressionist painters whom he believed had been unfairly treated since returning home:

...though he had never agreed with them and warned them that they would have to produce an art accessible to the proletariat and capable of gradually elevating the popular taste, yet he was shocked to hear how they had been silenced, or driven out of the land, or paralysed by uncomradely and reckless criticism and hothouse forcing and adaptation so that many had given up painting altogether and gone into engineering and other occupations. Still more was he shocked by the shoddy atrocities produced by those who had hastened to conform to the latest thesis or line without genuine agreement or conviction.

26.

Rivera had arrived in Russia during Stalin's campaign against Trotsky. As well as for his ideological principle of 'permanent revolution', Trotsky was attacked for his 'formalistic' views about art. At the heart of the controversy was Trotsky's insistence that 'Artistic creation has its (own) laws, - even when it consciously serves a social movement.' He urged experimentation and radicalism in art and architecture - 'Art must make its own way and by its own means'. His desire to preserve artistic independence went wholly against the party line that art must serve the proletarian revolution in approved ways, free of bourgeois influences and concerns. Rivera himself was caught between both sides. As an artist retained by the state and responsible for the production of images which promoted publically the government line, he must have understood very well the nature of the conflict. He was himself something of a non-conformist but had astutely avoided confrontation with his state patrons over the content of his public art, and enjoyed considerable freedom in the form of his painting, which was innovative in its use of well-known themes. He sought to advise Soviet artists on the importance of popular, traditional art as a source of ideas, ignoring their principle that peasant art was of questionable value in formulating the post-revolutionary art of the proletariat.

Then he said that the Russians had erred in not seeking to fuse the developed technique acquired in Paris with the peasant and popular tradition of Russian folk art. "Look at your icon painters," he bade them, "and at the wonderful embroideries and lacquer boxes and wood carvings and leather work and toys. A great heritage which you have not known how to use and have despised!" Voices answered, charging him with glorifying icons and the Church, with admiring the backward peasant handicrafts and underestimating

the role of the machine, of industrialisation, of the economic plan. The debate became hotter and hotter and Diego began to feel ill at ease and out of sorts. 27.

Rivera's advice was drawn from his own experience and inspiration; its rejection challenged his own aesthetic principles and values fundamentally. If his latest murals revealed a growing interest in the role of technology, a discovery the Soviets had made earlier, his devotion to the folk art of Mexico was not seen as innovative, but as sentimental. However secure in his own principles, Rivera made no headway against the current Soviet enthusiasm for 'social realism' anchored in economic and industrial themes. Siqueiros took no part in the controversy, being involved in the Fourth Congress of the International Red Syndicate, but left with Rivera for Mexico in May 1928. Rivera's commission for the Red Army murals was dropped, and Lunacharsky released him from his contract at the request of the Latin-American Secretariat of the Comintern(28). On the way back to Mexico, Rivera alienated Siqueiros by deciding to reduce his involvement with the PCM, perhaps to safeguard his mural commissions. There remained a good deal of work for him in the unfinished SEP sequences of the third floor and the stairwell, and no doubt he was already considering the question of finding other government-sponsored work after their completion.

The latest panels of the stairwell murals are contemporaneous with the *corrido* series of the top floor patio walls, depicting many of their themes. In his 1960 autobiography, Rivera wrote of the stairwell paintings:

The whole stairway was painted in the same optimistic and visionary spirit (as the patios of Labour and Fiestas). I painted the Mexican landscape rising up from the sea to the mountains, the plateaux and mountain peaks. In this representation of the landscape there appeared a symbolic vision of the progress of man. Allegorical figures represented the ascending stages of the social evolution of the country spanning the popular revolutions, from a primitive society until the liberated and full social order of the future.

29.

Here again is seen Rivera's new aesthetic of social progress. It is both mythic and prophetic: a lush and vibrant past rooted in antiquity is the cultural bedrock of the Mexican spirit. A pagan Eden ruled by the god Xochipilli (6.M) gives way to the oppression of peons on a typical *hacienda* by a *hacendado* lazing in a hammock, and the sequence finishes with four panels relating to the Revolution and the new era of progress and justice.

The Revolution itself is shown as a historic process, still incomplete. The burial of a campesino (7.N) is attended by a huge, respectful crowd comprising fellow workers from the countryside and from industry - an ideological grouping with few actual counterparts. Oddly, Communist red flags carrying the hammer and sickle are juxtaposed with the mourning angels who fly overhead in the manner of Giotto's *Lamentation over Christ*; the effect is to provide secular and religious recognition of the anonymous victim's sacrifice. The next panel on the adjacent wall (7.O) shows an avenging angel draped in red casting down a fiery lightning bolt which forks out to strike down the three oppressors: a cleric, a capitalist and a soldier whose sword broken by lightning suggests centuries of oppression. Immediately beside the scene of retribution a sturdy native woman is seated on the ground in a fertile field of maize and wheat. She is a modern Xilonen, the Aztec goddess of corn and the spirit of young growth(30) as the corn she holds and the harvested wheat in her lap indicates. The natural abundance this suggests is enhanced by the modern agricultural technology in the landscape behind her, where a tractor is ploughing the field. Behind and beside it a hydroelectric dam dominates the landscape, and the power lines carry energy to the modern railway and the storage silo in front of which stand the revolutionary trinity: the soldier, armed campesino and armed urban worker who guard the achievement of the new era. It is also represented in the penultimate panel showing the 'Rural Schoolmistress' (7.P).

The new social order represented here has many elements which would have satisfied Rivera's first state patron, Vasconcelos, irrespective of Rivera's personal attack upon him in the first *corrido* series. First there is the prominence of education, with the female school teacher sitting surrounded by her adult and junior pupils in the countryside while behind them the concrete framework of a new building is put up using modern techniques. Her central position and the attentive gaze of her students suggest matriarchal power, a representation reinforced by the stepped, triangular symmetry of the building behind her which does not overwhelm her figure but rather seems to enthrone it. Her expression suggests intelligence, serenity and confidence. She is flanked on one side by a group of professionals including a doctor who is examining the infant held by its mother. This is a new feature of such

compositions, and Rivera seems to have recognised that a middle class will have a significant role in the construction of the new Mexico. In the corresponding space of the other side of the mural the familiar revolutionary trinity of soldier, urban worker and campesino are shown without their weapons - suggesting a peaceful time of harmony and stability - discussing the construction behind the schoolteacher; the industrial worker holds the blueprint. Finally we encounter the artist himself and his assistants in a small panel of their own at the very top of the ground to ceiling sequence. However, as the following account of the political turbulence of 1927-28 perhaps suggests, Rivera's group had created a positive image of the gains of the Revolution for the Mexican people rather than offering a view of contemporary events, for officials at the highest level were working to change the 1917 Constitution to consolidate their hegemony.

As the end of Calles presidential term approached, the Jacobin Constitutionalists faced the prospect of fighting an election with both former presidents, Calles himself and Obregón, ruled out by Articles 82 & 83 of the 1917 Constitution which maintained the 'no re-election' principle introduced to thwart the possibility of another Porfirian dictatorship. Obregón hoped for re-election on the basis of a 1924 undertaking given by Calles to amend the Constitution to permit non-consecutive re-election. This would be a highly controversial step, however, and would threaten the unity of the PNC (Carranza's *Partido Nacional Constitucionalista*). Catholics had appealed for reforms to the Constitution, but these had been refused on the grounds that no-one could tamper with it to favour their own interests, and the *Cristero* Revolt had ensued. In early July 1927, the Catholic hierarchy made peace initiatives to the Government and the civil war lost its momentum. During the respite, the Calles Government took the opportunity to amend the Constitution during August to permit non-consecutive re-election, and to extend the term of presidential office from four, to six years(31). Obregón had announced his candidacy on 26th June, so the timing suggests he knew that Calles would keep his 1924 promise.

Opposition to these tactics was immediate and subsequently, violent. On 12th August, a document was published by a large group of Mexico City students demanding that Obregón

withdraw from the election (32). Their call was ignored by the Jacobin faction in power but soon afterwards the prospect of civil war again faced the nation as a direct consequence of the Jacobins' favourable amendments to the Constitution. Two other candidates for high office, Arnulfo R. Gómez and Francisco R. Serrano, staged uprisings during September and October which were crushed. Serrano - a presidential candidate and therefore a direct rival of Obregón - was eliminated by assassination and Gómez was executed. The trouble continued: on 13th November, an unsuccessful attempt was made to assassinate Obregón with explosives, and a priest, Miguel Augustin Pro Juárez was executed(33). Two further attempts were made to frustrate the transfer of the presidency from Calles to Obregón, but both the May 1928 bombings were unsuccessful, and Obregón again became President on 1st July 1928. Sixteen days later he was dead, shot in the head at point-blank range in a restaurant by a Catholic artist, José de León Toral, who was later executed.

Calles acted as interim president, but had to resolve the problem of stepping down from the presidency in favour of someone who would continue the Jacobin control of power and would be amenable to Calles' own hopes for future re-election. He chose Emilio Portes Gil, who became the new *Ministro de Gobernación* on 16th August. Since Calles had himself held this position in Obregón's presidency four years before, the appointment of Portes Gil was a clear indication of Calles' intentions. To further secure his political future, Calles founded a new centrist party on 2nd December 1928, the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (the PNR, whose successor, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* or PRI has retained power ever since as the ruling party). The reasons for Calles' initiative, and its consequences, are important for understanding the agrarian-proletarian consensus promoted in Rivera's murals.

During Obregón's presidential campaign, CROM and the PNA had become further estranged. Obregón had associated himself with the PNA, and anti-Obregonist protestors had gathered around CROM as a result. The leadership of CROM saw Obregón's succession to power as bringing the erosion of its political influence. Moreover, when Obregón was assassinated, the PNA immediately accused CROM of complicity in the killing. Already beset

by rival regional independent labour groups CROM's problems were compounded by Morones' refusal to cooperate with Portes Gil. Against this background of division and mutual distrust between the centralised agrarian and proletarian organisations, Calles's PNR sought to attract support from the whole range of political groups and opinions. The development of the PNR undermined CROM for Calles was able to incorporate a much-weakened PNA (Carr attributes the decline of the agrarian party to internal division produced by financial corruption 34), and CROM's power diminished as the PNR's grew.

The founding of the PNR was a signal to all sections of the Mexican polity that serious political activity would only be possible through participation in the national party. CROM's aloofness from the PNR thus meant that it would almost certainly be pushed in the future on to the margins of national activity.

35.

Throughout the second half of 1928 Rivera worked on a series of full-length portraits of revolutionary 'martyrs' on the third floor walls of the Court of Labour to complement the *corrido* sequence - *Corrido of the Agrarian Revolution* - painted before his trip to Russia in the other courtyard. These murals thus continue the agrarian sequence along the north wall of both courts. Rivera honours the three agrarian leaders Zapata(7.15), Carrillo Puerto(7.16) and Otilio Montaño. Above monochrome designs in grisaille, Rivera's martyrs stand in revolutionary red shrouds, each in their own memorial frame attended by Indian handmaidens while angels hover overhead, unmistakeably contemporary folk heroes. In the centre of this range, which covers the north wall of the Court of Labour, a red star co-opts them into Rivera's Communist 'national' platform, surprisingly in view of Zapata's devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. They face neoclassical allegories of *The Arts*, *The Sciences* and *The Graces* painted on the opposite wall of the courtyard. On the walls connecting the two series of *corrido* panels, Rivera painted scenes of rural festivities which seem out of place in the 'Court of Labour', perhaps suggesting that the scheme followed on the first two floors has been altered by his delegation of the more decorative panels to various assistants while he painted the centrepiece of this east wall, 'Fraternity' (7.Q)

This large panel, approximately two metres high and six in length, promotes the mutual respect and expected cooperation of the campesino and the urban worker central to the

post-revolutionary era promised in the 1917 Constitution. Graceful native handmaidens in simple neoclassical robes stand to either side with gifts of fruits and wheat suggesting natural bounty as the workers' handshake symbolically unites not just themselves but the hammer and sickle each carries. Behind them a new, more powerful and serene Appollo emerges from the clouds to tower above them, arms outstretched in blessing and welcome. Quite different in both form and content from, for instance, 'End of the Bourgeoisie', Rivera's 'Fraternity' echoes earlier versions of the 'Worker-Campesino Handshake' (most notably in the Administration Block at Chapingo, 1924; 6.17) and 'The Embrace', as well as his first mural, 'The Creation'. This panel therefore represents a culmination of his development of this image of post-revolutionary solidarity and constructivism. The vision behind the monumental image is optimistic and heroic rather than analytical or representative of current issues; it can be contrasted with 'United Front', a panel of the second *corrido* series discussed below, in which the central figure is replaced by a slavish militant worker.

There is no doubt that Rivera exercised complete control of **Corrido of the Proletarian Revolution**, the last main sequence of the SEP. The contrast between this and the other *corrido* sequence of 1926 is immediately apparent, for while Rivera duplicated the red banners carrying the ballad verses, the style and treatment of the later series is more earnest and more international.

There are the familiar images of revolutionary solidarity and revenge:

In a further panel, 'Death of a Capitalist', an obese and ugly looking landlord sits surrounded by revolutionary peasants, one of whom thrusts a rifle into his face.

Alongside this satire and biting critique in the agrarian and proletarian *corridos*, Rivera also painted images that were idealistic and highly utopian. 'The Distribution of the Arms', 'To Work', 'Union', 'Learning the ABCs', 'The Co-operative', and 'United Front', with their intense colour and abundance of revolutionary imagery and symbol, express what were in effect wish fulfillments and poetic idealisations of a far from completed revolution and its future.

36.

But there are several other features which are highly significant, suggesting the inspiration and the limitations of Rivera's revolutionary awareness. Having scrutinised the earlier series, it will be sufficient to analyse those panels which offer something new rather than examine each

in detail; even so, many panels include something of note. In general one can observe a more forceful tone in Rivera's 1928 depiction of class conflict.

The series commences with a large crowded panel of workers, soldiers and campesinos receiving rifles from female revolutionaries, with Rivera's future wife Frida Kahlo given a prominent place in the centre of the panel(7.R1). However the token presence of two women is overwhelmed by the dozens of men with their red bandanas and stars crowding the store-room under the red flag and arriving under a banner bearing the words 'Land and Liberty'. Perhaps as a personal gesture of reconciliation, Siqueiros appears in a khaki uniform, a red star blazing from the front of his hat. Despite the campesino costumes of the agrarian revolutionaries in the background, the panel introduces elements which cast doubt on the success of the Mexican Revolution. The slavic-featured workers in the foreground, and holding the red flag in the upper centre of the panel, capture the attention as they direct the preparations for armed confrontation. The presence of the foreigners is all the more remarkable as they have such a prominent role in directing the Mexican revolutionaries. It is almost as if Rivera is suggesting that Soviet leadership would enhance the revolutionary efforts of the Mexican workers.

Another notable feature is seen in the emphasis in the next two panels upon the actual fighting a revolution entails, an aspect hitherto neglected by Rivera who has presented scenes of oppression and burials of 'martyred' workers but never the warfare itself. Unusually for this sequence, one verse of the ballad is illustrated by the two panels: 'Already the mass of workers and peasants / Has shaken off the yoke that it endured; / Already it has burned the malignant pollution / Of the bourgeois oppressor which bore them down.' In 'The Trench' (7.R2) six workers and campesinos defend themselves with rifles and a machine gun; the four unwounded fighters face away from the viewer firing their weapons with the exception of the slavic-faced worker passing forward the ammunition belt of the machine gun. Two obviously wounded men occupy the foreground. The figures fill the frame in such a way as to form a pyramid, with a red-shirted worker at the apex seen in part-profile against the stylised sky showing not the dark clouds of war but painted a reassuring light blue with creamy clouds.

The next, linked panel is quite similar but shows 'The Wounded' (7.R3) fighters receiving treatment while the battle rages. The purposive, vigorous scenes contrast starkly with the aimless turbulence of Orozco's earlier treatment of the Revolution's military confrontations in 'The Trench' discussed above, in which three anonymous fighters struggle in a wrecked, desolate landscape. The ragged *calzones* which clad Orozco's campesino fighters reveal nothing of their allegiances, whereas the clothes and uniforms of Rivera's fighters show that they are drawn from all the groups of Mexico's working people and military.

The next panel (7.R4) illustrates the verse: 'In order to carry out the workers' plans / Let no one turn tail; / Say to the rich and lazy, / "Let him who wishes to eat, work.'" Unlike the earlier corrido which contained much caricature, this and 'Death of the Capitalist' referred to above are the only two panels of the 1928-29 series to include satirical material. Rivera depicts a heroic worker, a campesino and a soldier standing assertively in front of an industrial landscape, and below them, a second group of workers file into the foreground kicking a middle-class creole who wears a pink jacket and sprawls amid artistic symbols such as a lyre, quill pen and a palette. Their scorn shows in their amused faces, and Rivera's contempt is evident in the jackass ears he gave the discredited bourgeois artist. A third group dominates the middle and right of the panel: a couple in wealthy clothes, the woman much younger than the pallid capitalist beside her, are confronted by a strong, sturdy *mestiza soldadera*. The female revolutionary wears the rifle and ammunition bandolier of a fighter, and she hands the slim, elegant bourgeois woman a broom. Since the well-dressed woman receives the broom with downcast eyes and expression, the woman in revolutionary red points sternly to the words above the panel, "Let him who wishes to eat, work." The message is clear - there is no place in the new socialist era for those who live lazily off the toil of others. While Rivera suggests that the new era will have an egalitarian work ethic, here he preserves the stereotype role of women as having charge of menial or domestic work.

The next panel portrays relations in the workplace in the wake of the successful revolution. The panel known as 'The Cooperative' (7.R5) depicts a management discussion in which two workers, one with Mexican features in contrast to the slavic face of the

one dominating the panel, are questioning a point of a document prepared by the two creole bureaucrats who occupy the right-hand side of the painting. Facing them, a seated worker representative holds his clenched fist on an opened book while a clerkess takes notes of what is said. Rivera has kept a place for middle-class managers, but they must negotiate with assertive workers and are clearly crestfallen; and the only woman present carries out a subordinate duty, but she seems more composed than either bureaucrat. The verse of the ballad clearly gave rise to the content of the panel : 'The industries and large enterprises / Are already directed by the workers; / Managed in cooperatives / Without bosses over their heads.'

The panel 'United Front' (37) suggests the *rapprochement* of the campesino revolutionary and the federal soldier mediated by a worker with the strong, slavic features of Rivera's current type of proletarian hero. A huge crowd of armed revolutionaries in the background witness the historic handshake, which as usual is used by Rivera to denote the restoration of harmony between interest groups which opposed each other during the revolution itself. Despite the presence of their weapons, the crowd is ranked in a settle, orderly composition by the artist who has depicted himself in their midst, while Frida Kahlo and Siqueiros are also portrayed among them.

The second-last panel, 'Our Bread' (7.R6), is notable chiefly for Rivera's self-portrait as he presides over a proletarian meal. In the background a huge crowd looks on while a statuesque native woman in regional dress carries in a basket loaded with fruit. In the middle and foreground, a table is set for ten with Rivera breaking a single loaf at the head of the table! The verse reads 'Now there is bread for everyone; / The ragged, the lowliest of men; / Equality, justice, and work / And customs and ways have changed.' The panel could be a parody of Da Vinci's 'Last Supper'. Rivera irreverently portrays himself in Christ's place, breaking bread for all his comrades in a proletarian communion. The secularisation of the sacred image once would undoubtedly have provoked a tremendous outcry as Orozco's **Christ Destroying His Cross** had several years before, but with the power of the Catholic Church in Mexico broken by the government's assertion of power and the suppression of the

*Cristero* rebels, Rivera's panel is less daring than it might otherwise have seemed.

The *corrido* concludes with 'The Protest' (7.R7), which shows a gathering of workers, campesinos and soldiers exercising their democratic right in voting unanimously, with the red flag carrying its hammer and sickle emblem of worker-peasant Soviet unity prominent in the industrial background. Since it is not made clear what the issue is, Rivera's purpose is to portray democratic working class consensus as an important outcome of the Revolution. However, as has been suggested above by Rochfort, the political reality was far removed from the homogenous solidarity Rivera depicts. The agrarian cause had been promised redistribution of hacienda land and a self-sufficiency permitted by the reform of *ejido* holdings, but there was general dissatisfaction with the limited scale of change. The industrial workforce had been given promises in the 1917 Constitution controlling working conditions and social benefits which the governments of the 1920's did not fulfil. They had also been encouraged to recognise themselves as a political power to be reckoned with. Siqueiros' involvement in grassroots labour organisation reveals something of the rapidly-changing pattern of alliance, rivalry and government incorporation which is discernible in the events of 1928-30.

Having returned from Russia, Siqueiros recommenced his involvement in the development of labour groups which would be affiliated to CROM. On 1st July 1928 he became a member of the committee of the Union of Breadworkers of Guadalajara. 'El Machete' No.122 reports that the union recognised the importance of supporting the Soviet Union: 'The Russian Revolution has created the basis for the social renovation of the world and it is therefore necessary for us to give support to the U.S.S.R. to defend her against attacks of powerful imperialists.' It is as evident in their declarations as in Rivera's murals that Mexican labour agitators, frustrated with the benefits gained in the ten years since the Revolution of 1910-17, looked to the Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet ideology to renew the revolutionary impetus in their own land. However the Mexican Government, less vulnerable to counter-revolution, was less responsive to the demands of the agrarian and industrial workforces and now offered confrontation or co-option. However Siqueiros continued to strive for the creation of a workers' front strong enough to stand up to the Government and

challenge their encouragement of inward foreign investment.

In his campaign for 'worker unification' he next approached CROM itself. In December 1928 a pact of solidarity was proposed to CROM aiming to create a single national union organisation. As General Secretary of the Committee of Proletarian Defence, Siqueiros signed this document and 'El Machete' reports that at a meeting of this committee Siqueiros declared 'those who do not struggle effectively against imperialism are false revolutionaries.' (38) Soon Siqueiros was organising a National Assembly of Worker and Campesino Unification for 25th - 29th January 1929. As a result a Centralised Union Confederation of Mexico (CSUM) emerged from the National Assembly, with Siqueiros as its General Secretary. 'El Machete' reported that a new organisation was needed to replace CROM because 'the masses had lost faith in their leaders' and CROM was 'in disintegration' (39).

For Rivera 1929 was a year of intense political involvement and exciting developments in his mural painting. Late in 1928 he was visited by Calles' personal lawyer who tried to dissuade him from supporting Rodríguez Triana, a military leader in the Revolution, for the leadership of the worker-campesino bloc, and even threatened that 'the Old Man is likely to give the order to stretch your throat.' (40) Triana was also the PCM candidate for the presidency held meantime by Portes Gil, Calles' protege. In January Rivera supported very publicly the cause of Tina Modotti, accused of murdering her lover, the exiled Cuban radical Julio Mella. As it turned out, the Mexican Government was forced to investigate more thoroughly and a conspiracy was exposed which led to the expulsion of the Cuban Ambassador. At the same time Rivera was working with Siqueiros to advance the unification of agrarian and proletarian groups into a single front, and Rivera, not Triana, became President of the Worker-Campesino Bloc. For Rivera and Siqueiros, however, the next year would hold very different prospects. Siqueiros would become more and more outspoken in his attacks on the failed 'bourgeois revolution' and would be imprisoned for seven months for political agitation including sending telegrams to Portes Gil and to Calles condemning the subordination of the government of Mexico to U.S. imperialism (41). Rivera on the other hand was expelled from the PCM, offered a cabinet post, installed as Director of the San Carlos

Academy (now the School of Plastic Arts), given a new mural commission by the Health Ministry, secured the most important mural location in the country - the walls of the National Palace - and was paid the enormous sum of 12,000 dollars by the American Ambassador, Dwight D. Morrow, for murals (discussed later) in the Palace of Cortés, in Cuernavaca. Rivera's biographer Wolfe called this period 'the zenith of his honours in his own country.'<sup>(42)</sup>

Rivera's murals in the Health Ministry beside Chapultepec Park in Mexico City (7.17) are of little interest to the analysis of his portrayal of the Revolution of 1910-17 and its consequences. One critic notes: 'The subject matter of the Salubridad in general is closely related to the decorations of the Chapingo chapel, without, however, the emphasis on the social philosophy that dominates the latter,'<sup>(43)</sup> as can be seen readily from the comparison of plates 7.14 and 7.17. Rivera himself has provided a comprehensive description of the large figurative frescos he painted there from May to November 1929:

These panels, done in the building's Assembly Hall and covering over 350 square feet of wall and ceiling, comprised six large female nudes symbolizing Purity, Strength, Knowledge, Life, Moderation, and Health itself.

Purity sat on the ground near a stream of clear water flowing over her hand. On the ceiling above her, looking downward, flew Life. Strength rested on the ground, full-bosomed, with sturdy thighs and powerful hands. Knowledge sat with her feet doubled under her, dreamily gazing at an open blossom in her hand. Near her and almost touching her face, was a snake coiled around a tree. Health was a seated figure with hands raised. Moderation was a tall, big-boned woman lying down, her eyes closed. In her hand she gripped a snake below the head from which darted its forked tongue; its body was clasped between her knees.

44.

During his commission in the Health Ministry, the government of Portes Gil became more intolerant of the Communists' concerted opposition and raided both the offices of 'EI Machete' and the headquarters of the PCM, which it had declared illegal on 4th March. Rivera's political standing deteriorated as his artistic fame increased. As he began work on what he would later call 'the finest thing I had ever done'<sup>(45)</sup> - the National Palace stairway murals - Rivera faced growing criticism from the PCM for his associations with government ministers and his unwillingness to join Party denunciations of the government <sup>(46)</sup>. It has also been suggested that Rivera had a personal meeting with Calles at the height of the government suppression of the PCM. Rivera's troubles with the PCM which culminated in his

expulsion from the Party are worth reviewing in more detail as they coincide with distinct changes in the content and imagery of his murals.

Despite having led the defence of Tina Modotti, criticism of Rivera's associations with government figures began after several meetings (47) with Ramón P. de Negrí, Minister of Agriculture, later Minister of Commerce and Labour. Rivera's expulsion from the Party also has been attributed to 'leftist deviation' in his regard for Trotsky. However, another explanation has been proposed by Valentín Campa, who has highlighted Rivera's relationship with Calles. Campa points out that Rivera had a meeting with Calles only a few days after both the execution in Durango of a member of the Executive Committee of the PCM, J. Guadalupe Rodríguez, and the ransacking of the 'El Machete' offices by the authorities. Campa writes in response to a series of articles by Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo asserting that Rivera's expulsion was directly due to the widespread purges of Communist parties internationally of elements suspected to be advocates of Trotsky's ideas. Campa sums up Rivera's and the PCM's respective political positions during the 1920's:

Rivera, on joining the Communist Party in 1923 was able to act on a bourgeois-democratic, anti-imperialist line; the Party in those years was allied to Alvaro Obregón against the rebellion of Adolfo de la Huerta, and helped Calles in the first years of his presidency. When Calles made agreements with Mr. Morrow, U.S. ambassador, he liquidated agrarian reform and made attacks against striking workers. With the assassination of J. Guadalupe Rodríguez the generalisation of political repression began and it is clear that Diego, in those moments, suffered a political panic which he masked with trotskysm in order to be a reactionary with a radical banner and with no risk.

48.

Campa also notes that when in 1952 Rivera applied for re-admission to the Party he stated that he had been expelled 'justly and reasonably'. Rivera's commission for the National Palace murals and his appointment to the top post in the School of Plastic Arts indicate a high degree of government approval, and even after his expulsion, the PCM executive publicised these as evidence of his collaboration with the bourgeois government.

The National Palace murals, which Rivera had initially conceived in 1927 before his trip to the Soviet Union, were commenced in a spirit of optimism, and initial progress was rapid. By August Rivera had produced a diagram of his whole scheme, transferred his preliminary cartoons to the walls, and started painting the north wall. An early interruption occurred in

September 1929, when, a few weeks after his marriage to Frida Kahlo, Rivera was expelled from the PCM and his health broke down. He continued the Ministry of Health scheme, completing it in November while also working in the National Palace. Next his position as Director of the School of Plastic Arts was threatened when he published sweeping changes to the syllabus which extended courses for several years and imposed arduous workloads which neither staff nor students were prepared to accept. Then, early in 1930 he accepted Morrow's commission and began working simultaneously on the project at Cuernavaca and the National Palace frescoes. Eventually the art school confrontation was resolved unfavourably with his dismissal from the post of Director in May. Throughout it all, Rivera worked on his cherished project at the very heart of the modern nation. Rivera's scheme is a broad development of the historic linear sequence he painted in the stairwell of the SEP showing Mexico's progress from a primitive past to a modern future. The mural work completed before Rivera travels to the U.S. in November 1930 forms the large single panel of the north wall depicting scenes from prehispanic Mexico called *The Aztec World* and the huge painted area of the west wall depicting Mexican history *From the Conquest to 1930*.

Significantly, the National Palace murals bridge the break between the first phase of modern Mexican muralism analysed in this thesis and the second phase which commences under President Lázaro Cárdenas in the mid-1930's with the re-employment of Orozco, Siqueiros and others. In the interval the three muralists found private commissions in the United States. Rivera's mural on the south wall of the National Palace, *Mexico Today and Tomorrow* of 1935 with its depictions of Marx, class conflicts and an idealised new era of workers' control effectively belongs to the latter group. Accordingly, the 1935 work is outwith the parameters of this study which is concerned with the analysis of the representation of the 1910-17 Revolution in murals painted in the initial phase.

Rivera provided this brief description of the murals in his autobiography of 1960:

The National Palace stairway rises broadly and majestically from a wide inner court then forks at the first flight to right and left. For the wall of the right staircase, I envisioned Mexico before the Conquest: its popular arts, crafts, and legends; its temples, palaces, sacrifices, and gods. On the great six-

arched [sic - there are actually five arches] central wall, I would paint the entire history of Mexico from the Conquest through the Mexican Revolution. At the triangular base, I would represent the cruelties of Spanish rule, and above that, the many struggles of my people for independence, culminating in the outer arches in the lost war with the northern invaders, and the final victory over the French. The four [sic] central arches would show aspects of the Revolution against Díaz and its reverberations in the strife-torn years of Madero, Huerta, Carranza, Obregón, down to the ugly present of Plutarco Calles.

On the wall of the right staircase, I would paint the present and future. Naturally, I was less certain of the course to which the present tended than of the past. ...after six years, my preliminary perspectives would be sharpened by the destruction of my mural in Rockefeller Center. 49.

The north wall mural, *The Aztec World* (7.18), shows six or so scenes of the indigent society which ruled ancient Mexico before the arrival of the Spanish. The linking theme is the prophetic legend of the Aztec god Quetzalcóatl. Around the centrepiece, which will be discussed below, one sees scenes of commerce and hegemony: the lower right shows a dozen people working at a variety of productive crafts and arts, while immediately above and perspectively behind them five dancers and musicians celebrate beside a maize field. Opposite the artisans and cultivators five men carry baskets of tribute goods up the steps of a pyramid to be placed at the feet of two knights of the warrior class; at the side of the pyramid, in the lower left of the mural, other knights fight off an attack by the common people. The agent of the disturbance is seen to the right of the combatants, where, in a stance reminiscent of his counterpart (the campesino agitator) in the chapel at Chapingo, he complains to an attentive crowd about the tribute provided to the warrior caste who occupy the top of the pyramid.

The centrepiece of the mural shows the white-skinned god Quetzalcóatl surrounded by his devotees, while the vault of the sky above the group shows the cosmic disorder caused by his departure on the winged serpent of the legend. To the left of the centre group, standing in the foreground of an erupting volcano from which a ferocious serpent can be seen emerging, three men are grouped in a ritualised posture of loss and sadness, facing different directions with open palms outstretched and faces distorted by grief. Below and to the front of them the scene of tribute-bringing and civic disorder fills the bottom left corner.

Skillfully Rivera presents a version of the past which appears well-informed about the

myths and which includes authentic representational details gleaned from primary sources such as ancient codices, murals and carvings. The mythic force of the legend of Quetzalcóatl, the fair-skinned god who promised to return from the east, lies in the welcome given to the treacherous conquistadors by the Aztecs. However Rivera introduces another message with modern connotations into the composition, class warfare between the producers and the rulers of Aztec society:

By giving prominence to the struggle between rulers and the ruled in Aztec society as evidence of class struggle, Rivera clearly injected an element of his personal political philosophy into the historical context, an inference that became explicit in his final stairway composition on the opposite wall.

50.

The chronological link between the north wall panel and the main wall series is the depiction of the Spanish Conquest which commences in the lower right corner with the attack of the fair-skinned invaders. Most of the main wall space narrates the history of the Conquest, the enslavement, indoctrination and suppression of the Indians, and the colonial hegemony which prevailed in New Spain (7.18 shows a section of the Conquest narrative). Among the scenes of conflict and exploitation a variety of historical figures appear, including Cortés and Malinche, Cuauhtémoc the last Aztec emperor, and the Franciscan friar Bartolomé de la Casas, amid a host of warriors, conquistadors, enslaved Indians, clergy, missionaries, native converts, and creole administrators. Since the style is limited to verisimilitude, the effect is documentary; and Rivera's (7.S) other commission at Cuernavaca which treats a similar theme of the same historical period repeats elements used here.

The colorful, crowded, seemingly chaotic lower two-thirds of the wall contrasts distinctly with the scenes in the five arches. These show three panels of recent liberators and their opponents bracketed between the panels at either side of the range which show ranks of soldiers firing volleys out to the left and right. As the finished work stands, dozens of notable historical figures are crammed beneath the arches, looking out to the viewer in what is virtually a portrait gallery almost devoid of female faces, though several women including the heroine 'La Corregidora', the wife of Porfirio Díaz, two anonymous courtesans and a *campesina* provide a token presence. Rivera's history of Mexican struggle omits the *soldaderas* and

other women Orozco included in his work. Neglecting at least half the population in his celebration of independent nationhood and social development is clearly part of his plan, which is to select the famous figures of the past whose achievements, for good or ill, he recognised as having shaped modern Mexico. The central panel of the five, called '**Legacy of Independence**', includes leaders drawn from all the stages of struggle, from the nineteenth century forward to 1930. Given the focus in this study on the Revolution and its consequences, the centre panel and the one to its right depicting '**The Porfirian Era**' (Intro.1) are of most interest. Since the latter was discussed in detail in the Introduction to the study, we may concentrate upon the centre panel. Significantly, the centre panel also reflects important changes to Rivera's initial scheme made as the whole work progressed.

Rivera's sketch for the main wall (7.T) indicates that most of the huge fresco emerged as visualised, apart from the central panel. Originally this was to show a gigantic maternal figure whose broad shoulders repeat the curve of the arch. In each arm she protectively hugs a man and a woman. She is surrounded by a crowd of figures looking as she does towards the viewer, and standing before her, a group of men is revealed by their period costume to be figures dating from the time of the Independence struggle. Facing them all, with their backs to the viewer, are a *campesino* family to the left, and to the right, a group of Independence fighters.

In reworking the panel, Rivera abandons the matriarchical principle of the mural cartoon but other elements are retained (7.U (sketch) and 7.V - finished panel). Working from the foot of the bay to the arch, the finished mural has two groups of Independence fighters looking up at the dignitaries above and before them. The *campesino* family shown standing at the foot of the bay in the sketch do not appear. There is also some slight repositioning of figures in the middle background, but otherwise the full cast of Independence notables together with their banners is depicted, among them Father Hidalgo, José María Morelos the mestizo priest turned general, General Allende, La Corregidora the heroine of Querétaro, Vicente Guerrero the southern agrarian leader, and Emperor Iturbide who was the first head of state of Independent Mexico. But to the fore an important change is evident, for Guerrero

points right with his sword as he directs the four soldiers standing at the foot of the bay. This gesture is repeated at the very top of the bay by a modern revolutionary.

Presumably because of the Porfirian hegemony dominating the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth which suppressed opposition, the other group of liberation leaders shown includes figures from the 1910 Revolution such as Zapata and Carrillo Puerto, and contemporaries including José G. Rodríguez and President Calles (who occupy well-separated positions on either side of the arched area). Perhaps the almost hidden group of downcast laborers carrying crates and hampers evokes the popular experience of the Porfiriato; certainly they do not seem to see the red banner held beside them by the leftist group including Zapata, Carrillo Puerto and Rodríguez demanding '*Tierra y Libertad*'. Their movement towards the bourgeois group ranked behind Presidents Obregón and Calles is headed off by a purposeful file of workers streaming below the red banner. Above them all, at the very apex of the composition, stands the assertive figure of an industrial worker in blue overalls who is looking towards the four leftist leaders. The worker wears no insignia such as the hammer and sickle or red star but his slavic features show him to be as much a Soviet representative as his fellows in the 1928 *corrido*. Echoing the gesture made at the foot of the bay by Guerrero with his sword, the proletarian revolutionary points out of the panel, apparently past the Constitutionalist presidents and their crowd of bourgeois supporters, denoting the revolutionary road still to be travelled past Constitutionalism. The way is spearheaded by the militant proletarian workers following the path discerned by the international worker.

Rivera's idealistic ideology is presented in a far less obvious way here than it is seen in the recent *corrido* depicting the Proletarian Revolution in Mexico, perhaps in deference to the importance of the site and his state patrons. The substitution of his conception of the continuing revolution for the matriarchical image indicates a preference for political didacticism over allegory, and suggests, albeit tentatively, his continuing disaffection with the government (the mural on the adjoining left wall painted in 1935, with its dominating portrait of Marx showing the way forward with the same gesture seen in the central panel, is blatantly

anti-capitalist and portrays class confrontation). The mural as a whole does not expose the nature of the government's policy of weakening class interests and solidarity by co-option, nor does it anywhere subject current political issues to the level of analysis applied to the Conquest and Colonial Mexico. Almost devoid of topical references although it purports to deal with the history of Mexico to 1930, the mural nevertheless achieves a generally uncritical association of the present with the proud history of nationalist struggle. But even as a depiction of history the mural is less than successful, as Mike González observes: '...Rivera has not reached through to any sense of the collective...'(51)

As a history of the Mexican revolution, as a representation of the circumstances of the birth of the new state, it is a hagiography, a celebration of its origins. A monument yes, but a bourgeois monument; history yes, but a bourgeois history of great individual heroes and a self-motivating progress. Time progresses, by itself, and there are victims and beneficiaries.

52.

The murals in the National Palace are in a sense the culmination of the Mexican Mural Movement promoted by Atl, fostered by Vasconcelos, developed by the Artists' Union and eventually dominated by Rivera. Ultimately they suggest not the limitations of the 'fighting, educative art for all' the muralists agreed to strive for but the compromises required by the client relationship the state imposed on the only artist it would continue to pay. It is true that Rivera's muralism developed beyond the modified neoclassicism and Positivist ideas desired by Vasconcelos, and in the very heart of the national education programme he incorporated Soviet symbols to awaken class consciousness into his pictorial calls to educate for social reform. However qualified, Rivera's public muralism of the late 1920's reveals a recognition that the Mexican Revolution had not achieved many of its fundamental aims, something Orozco exposed years before. Yet except to warn of the presence of those who would subvert the Revolution, Rivera does not address the fundamental issues and how they can be overcome other than by stressing the importance of constructive engagement, worker-campesino consensus, and education. In the National Palace, the very heart of government, he first implies that class struggle is centuries old in Mexico and ends with the discreet allegation that those in power are now obstructing the people's right to land and liberty.

Whatever else one concludes about Rivera's output during the four years when he alone represented muralism, the sheer volume and diversity of his work preserved the standing of muralism until new opportunities for muralists arrived with the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, who instituted a "socialist" educational programme in 1935 and employed Rivera and other muralists in a revival of the mural movement. In the meantime, Rivera also completed the Cuernavaca series and left Mexico in November 1930 to take up a commission, **Allegory of California** in the Pacific Stock Exchange of San Francisco; several major commissions, all in the U.S., followed.

In summation, the first phase of the Mexican mural revival of the twentieth century was a period when government sponsorship brought about a time of intense artistic activity intended to develop a national consciousness through public art. Different styles emerged, many of which were rejected by the state patrons for reasons the artists did not accept. The artists saw themselves and their work as 'radical', though much of it was conventional, at least in European terms; the governments of the 1920's considered themselves and their principles as 'radical' also, but there was a significant divergence in values and ideology.

The negative response of successive governments to what was produced by the muralists reveals their attachment to bourgeois aesthetics, with a preference for fine art styles like those to be seen throughout Rivera's later work. Consequently the initial creative impetus and diversity of the muralists' group was reduced within only five years until just one 'approved' muralist remained, backed by the government as much for the relatively harmless ideology of his murals as much as for his undoubted skill and creativity. As a means of creating a single national style and iconography, the government's mural programme was ineffectual because it ended by being focussed on one artist and his assistants whereas it had been conceived as an artistic movement with many committed adherents. It also failed as public art because the locations of the commissions were generally not visited by the general public.

However, it did create a rich and extensive body of work which inspired later generations of Mexican artists, especially the work, rejected by the government and its supporters, of José Clemente Orozco. Orozco's murals reveal his dissatisfaction with European fine art styles and

a successful transition to the popular idiom of Mexican caricature (after Posada), culminating in the ENP second-floor series. These murals represent an effective integration of fine art modelling (7.W) with monumental composition; they are self-explanatory but moving, and they deal with Mexican experiences without exaggerated classical sentiments (7.X). They show that Orozco, more than any other mural artist of the decade, came nearest to fulfilling the aesthetic principles of the artists' manifesto, and ironically, they remain incomplete.

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