

## THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION: A REVIEW

- HUERTA: A POLITICAL PORTRAIT.* By MICHAEL C. MEYER. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972. Pp. 272. \$9.50.)
- MEXICAN MILITARISM: THE POLITICAL RISE AND FALL OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY.* By EDWIN LIEUWEN. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968. Pp. 194. \$6.95.)
- THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 1910–1929.* By ROBERT E. QUIRK. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973. Pp. 275. \$10.00.)
- VIVA CRISTO REY! THE CRISTERO REBELLION AND THE CHURCH-STATE CONFLICT IN MEXICO.* By DAVID C. BAILEY. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974. Pp. 346. \$10.00.)
- THE CRISTERO REBELLION: THE MEXICAN PEOPLE BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE, 1926–1929.* By JEAN A. MEYER. (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1976. Pp. 260. \$19.50.)
- REVOLUTION AT QUERÉTARO: THE MEXICAN CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF 1916–1917.* By E. V. NIEMEYER, JR. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974. Pp. 234. \$10.00.)
- LOS CAMPESINOS DE LA TIERRA DE ZAPATA. I.* By SINECIO LÓPEZ MENDEZ, LAURA HELGUERA RESENDIZ, and RAMÓN RAMÍREZ MELGAREJO. (Mexico: Sep/INAH, 1974.)

A journalist once asked Chihuahua's revolutionary governor, Abraham Gonzalez, why he had never married. With twinkling eyes, the governor answered, "The Revolution has been my sweetheart."<sup>1</sup> Historians have shared his infatuation. For years the revolution has beguiled them with its dramatic struggle for social justice drenched in the blood of at least a million Mexicans. These scholars found a high romance with tragic martyrs, wanton brutes, self-sacrificing fools, and idealistic opportunists. Historians courting "Adelita," the revolution, celebrated the bizarre, the comic, and the gruesome, often making Mexico's struggle for social reorganization a melodramatic passion play.

This interpretation sanctified with sound scholarship the cult of personality. In sequence it portrayed the precursor, Ricardo Flores Magón, the martyr, Francisco Madero, and the first chief, Venustiano Carranza. Major supporting roles were assigned to Villa, Zapata, and Obregón, with the usurper, Victoriano Huerta, cast as the villain. The movement for social justice was inched forward by Madero, halted by Huerta, and sustained by Zapata until it achieved legal definition in the 1917 constitution under the less than enthusiastic auspices of Carranza.

Those scholars who have avoided the revolution's allure, for the most part have restricted their efforts to monographic studies. During the last decade they have reassessed the standard view at several junctures. Generally their

evaluations have attempted to humanize the demigods and the devils, who caricatured the principal personalities in the struggle. Thus efforts have been made to assay Madero's "revolution" without reducing his symbolic importance as the struggle's martyr, to salvage Orozco's reputation as a revolutionary, and, most recently, to understand Huerta not as a drunken, ambition-driven assassin, but as a repressive military dictator whose social and economic policies built on, rather than repudiated, Madero's precedents.

Before writing *Huerta: A Political Portrait*, Michael C. Meyer discarded usual historical and popular judgments of the dictator and entered the archives. He did not find sufficient documentation to write a biography, but he found enough to make Huerta come alive in a political account. The man, his strengths, and weaknesses, rather than the "Betrayal of the Revolution" emerges. Meyer is no apologist because he refused to label Huerta a drug addict, an alcoholic (although a heavy drinker), or a neoporfirian. He relied on proof, not preconception, to reach conclusions. The best example of his skillful narration is the description of the assassination of Francisco Madero and José María Pino Suárez. Meyer could not determine definitely who ordered these murders, but certainly he made Félix Díaz, rather than Huerta, the prime suspect.

As in the case of Huerta's complicity in the presidential assassination, the conclusions throughout the book are cautious and understated. Even so the author has revised the historical Huerta. Nowhere is this more evident than in the evaluation of the regime. Few scholars will disagree that Huerta could hardly be more counterrevolutionary than Madero was revolutionary. The author successfully untwisted the "revolutionary-counterrevolutionary" knot of Mexican historiography. Meyer found that Huerta did not ignore Madero's few attempts at reform; rather his ministers pushed slightly ahead with land and labor programs and made a considerable effort to expand education.

Meyer and other scholars have stressed the continuity with the profirian years, while recognizing changes from the dictatorship. From their work it is possible to identify four themes: (1) crisis of presidential succession, (2) resurgence of the church, (3) growing nationalism, and (4) persistent regionalism. During the first decade-and-a-half of the revolution, the presidential succession again caused the political crisis that it had prompted since Mexican independence. Only Porfirio Díaz, for more than a quarter century, managed to remove the question from debate. Its reemergence became the major issue that ignited the revolution of 1910 and marred the success of the rebels until 1924.

Álvaro Obregón, president, 1920–24, concluded his term by defeating an insurgent effort to capture the presidential chair. Thus, Plutarco Elías Calles' inauguration in 1924 symbolized the end of an era and the resolution of one theme of the revolution. But the solution was based on the strength of the president's military force—one of the techniques that had sustained the dictatorship. Later revolutionary presidents solved the riddle: first, Calles developed a revolutionary party to co-opt and regulate powerful generals and governors; second, Cárdenas strengthened the organization by restructuring the party and by breaking many large landowners and foreign interests while furthering the professional nature of the army.

The major factor in this continual political crisis was the military. Federal officers (1910–24) and revolutionary generals (1916–40) formed the strongest of Mexico's interest groups. Curbing military adventurism removed the presidential succession from jeopardy. It was the revolution's political achievement. Edwin Lieuwen examined how this happened in his *Mexican Militarism*. Without drums or bugles, he wrote "a history of a political process . . . the story of the seizure of power by the Mexican Army of the Revolution in the years 1910–1914, of the exercise of that power 1915–1935, and of the involuntary surrender of it in the years 1935–1940" (p. x). He argued that the generals were tamed by Obregón's *cañonazo* of pesos, but did not become housebroken professionals until 1940.

In this extended essay, Lieuwen gave a well-organized account of the army's professionalization. And properly he connected the military's declining political prominence to its reduced share of the national budget. The book is also notable for its sketches of such men as Obregón, Calles, Cárdenas, and Amaro. But the author claimed too much when he said that the monograph examines "how the old regime and the traditional society were destroyed, and presents both the constructive and destructive features of the military management of the Revolution" (p. x). Lieuwen's contention that the military has been completely depoliticized and professionalized has been closely questioned, most carefully in David F. Ronfeldt's "The Mexican Army and Political Order since 1940," where the potential military intervention and its residual political duties are discussed.<sup>2</sup> Lieuwen's contribution is the presentation of a coherent, compact account of the military as an interest group during the revolution. Other vested interests, such as foreign investors, and hacendados, await such judicious evaluation.

Another interest that has been examined from several vantage points is the Catholic Church—particularly from the view of church activities beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century through the Cristero Rebellion of the late 1920s and the early 1930s. The works of Robert E. Quirk, David C. Bailey, and Jean A. Meyer represent this scholarship.

Quirk, in *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910–1929*, traced church-state relations by describing the clashes—expulsion of priests, constitutional provisions, control of education, and the Cristero Revolt (1926–29)—between these institutions. His assessment of the revolution and the revolutionaries was skillfully done in the spritely prose characteristic of his other political studies, providing tightly organized accounts of the factions within the revolution, crisp sketches of the major leaders, and a succinct evaluation of the 1917 constitution. The revolution and the constitution he views as representative of various ideologies, opinions, and personalities.

But the author does not present the diversity within the church; he sees it as a monolith. The "church" for Quirk is those clerics and laymen who took as their text "Rerum Novarum." This papal encyclical prompted a social action program, resulting briefly in a political party, and more successfully in labor organizations and credit co-ops. The one-dimensional presentation glossed over deep divisions within the church hierarchy over social action and accommoda-

tion to the revolutionary government. It ignored the virtual independence of each cleric (bishop or priest) to respond in his own way to the government.

Quirk took a similar view of Mexico's Catholic faith. He depreciates the people's devotion because of their regard for the Virgin of Guadalupe rather than the catechism. Using knowledge of church laws and formalism as tests of the faithful, he concluded that "the church was weakest where it should have found its greatest strength, among conservative Indian peasants and peons" (p. 6). And from this conclusion, he argued that "the clerical strike [the Cristero Rebellion] failed, in large part because more Mexicans, especially those in the countryside, felt no overwhelming need for Masses and sacraments" (p. 3). If devotion is measured by ritual and formalism, then this interpretation stands. If devotion is measured by commitment to a way of life, loyalty to the church's representatives (priests), and acceptance of a yearly rhythm of life (the church calendar), the strength of the church was in rural Mexico. Both Bailey and Meyer examined this question.

Bailey's account of the Cristero Rebellion is a much broader study of government and church relationships than the title suggests. He argued that Mexican Catholicism is a cultural phenomenon—something much more, and more meaningful, than a sacramental experience. From this vantage he reviewed in detail the rise of the "new," more aggressive bishops and lay organizations that sprang from "Rerum Novarum," developed the internal divisions within the Mexican church, and traced the interplay between the church and the revolutionary government that led to the closing of the churches in 1926 and the fighting that followed. The book's strength is the author's ability to deal with the Catholic interests—represented by individual bishops, the papacy, the U.S. Catholics, and the leaders of the lay organizations—and the revolutionary spokesmen—Obregón, Calles, and others whose persuasion varied from anti-clerical to anti-Catholic.

Bailey followed the tedious negotiations—disrupted by duplicity on both sides, the execution of Father Pro, and the assassination of Obregón—that were brought to a successful conclusion only by the good offices of Dwight Morrow. The book is an analysis, not a narrative, of events, but the author still managed to invest his work with a sense of drama that makes it a delight to read. His advantage was access to public and private archival materials not available when Quirk researched his study. Jean Meyer went further, spending seven years digging out local, personal, and church documents.

Meyer's massive study has appeared in three published forms: *La cristiada* (3 volumes), *Apocalypse et Revolution au Mexique. La guerre des Cristeros, 1926–1929* (1 volume), and, most recently, *The Cristero Rebellion* (1 volume).<sup>3</sup> His most fully developed study is the Spanish edition, examining the guerrilla war, tactics, and battles in *La guerra de los cristeros*; political events in Mexico City, Rome, and Washington in *El conflicto entre la iglesia y el estado, 1926–1929*; and the Cristeros' social history—ethnology, agrarian interests, female participation, government, morality, theology, and ideology—in *Los cristeros*. These volumes overlap chronologically and topically. This makes the reading difficult at times, but the effort is worthwhile because Meyer has presented one of the most provocative studies done in recent Mexican historiography.

His achievement is to study the Cristeros—the people who went into the field to challenge the Mexican national army—as defenders of their religion, the cement of their traditional way of life. He described them as the heirs of the agrarian, rural, Catholic world that the Zapatistas had fought for in the 1910s. The research is breathtaking; it has been done with all the detail and patience of the *Annales* school. The bases of the work are the interviews with Cristero survivors and the mass of local data that he compiled.

For Meyer the Cristeros are the most authentic popular movement of the revolutionary period. He decried the fact that they were abandoned by urban Catholics, most of the clergy, and the church hierarchy. Finally both church and state leaders settled their differences, priests returned to the churches, and the rebels, in obedience to church orders, submitted to the revolution, centralization, and modernization. The strength and the weakness of the work is Meyer's empathy with the Cristeros. Because of his emotional commitment to these Catholic rebels he brings a sense of understanding to their cause, their problems, and their defeat that rarely is extended to history's "losers." Because of his attachment to them he overestimates their potential to give Mexico an alternative to the revolutionary government. Like the Zapatistas, the Cristeros were defending a traditional world; neither could have ruled Mexico. Still this is a masterful work—the detail is best available in the Spanish edition; the interpretation and arguments are best presented in the English account. This analysis demands the consideration of historians of the Mexican revolution.

The third theme of recent scholarship is the development of Mexican nationalism. Its roots extend far into Mexico's past, but the development of its modern form—economic and cultural self-sufficiency—received its first boost during the late Díaz era. The thrust came from the recession of 1903 that dropped to its nadir in 1907 and 1908. This depression starkly silhouetted the foreign presence in Mexico and stimulated grave concern among the leaders of the government and members of the oligarchy. It encouraged the dictator to take steps to reduce the hulking presence of the United States by counterbalancing it with other, especially German, investments.

The most direct display of this antiforeign sentiment was the dictator's effort to obtain control of the railroads. This began with the purchase of a controlling interest in the stock of the major lines, followed by the creation in 1908 of the Mexican National Railroad. Although the Mexicans were saddled with dual directorates, one in Mexico City and one in New York City, the railroads were recognized as a Mexican-owned enterprise. The growing sense of nationalism also became apparent among the Mexican working classes about the same time, particularly in the first major labor disturbances—railroad strikes, Cananea, and Río Branco—in the country. This xenophobia turned to outrage and drew the country together in early November 1910, when a Texas rancher's wife was raped and murdered and the suspect, a Mexican boy, was lynched by a mob of cowboys. Outrage swept across Mexico. Porfirian officials did little to curtail the demonstrations until the dictator ordered suppression out of fear that the outburst might precipitate revolution.

Once the revolution began, Mexicans demonstrated again and again from

1910 to 1924 that the country was in the throes of working out a national identity that encompassed all of its people. Nationalism, often simply anti-Americanism, was a powerful tool for rallying support. This sentiment was often expressed in hostility toward foreigners living in Mexico. The most flagrant episodes of anti-Asian violence, such as the massacres of Chinese in Torreón and in Sonora, are well known, as is Villa's almost paranoid hatred of Spaniards. But the most remarkable statement of Mexican nationalism was the 1917 constitution.

E. V. Niemeyer, Jr. wrote *Revolution at Querétaro: The Mexican Convention of 1916–1917* as the first thorough study of the convention rather than either an analysis of the constitution or an account of its evolution after 1917. He focused on the congress, believing that the delegates' debates and politics tell more about the nature of the Mexican revolution than the document itself. The book is not a "systematic analysis of the Constitutional Convention . . . [nor] . . . a definitive biographic study" (p. xii) of the delegates. Rather it is a lively description of one of the revolution's most dramatic moments.

The author, in three solid chapters, examined the church-state relationship (articles 3, 127, and 130), the establishment of an advanced labor code (article 123), and the attack on foreign business and citizens as vested interests (article 27). From the debates Niemeyer found that the delegates were nationalistic and humanitarian. Their nationalism was clearly demonstrated when they strictly defined the position of the church and regulated foreign enterprise and property ownership in Mexico. The discussions of the labor code displayed concern for workers and their working conditions. Humanitarianism—concern for the dignity of workers—rather than antiforeign attitudes prompted this section of the constitution.

One chapter examines the efforts of some delegates to create constitutional morality by writing prohibition and antigambling articles into the document. The delegates who voted against these provisions also rejected women's suffrage as too radical for Mexico. The delegates left the convention believing that they had given legal definition to national concerns—"anticlericalism, labor welfare, agrarian reform, and humanitarianism were basic to their thinking" (p. 231). Niemeyer concluded that they had "kindled the fire of national consciousness that symbolized the new Mexico" (p. 231). For them the revolution was completed; the "continuing revolution" and the "institutionalized revolution" were later political inventions.

Niemeyer's account will be standard for years because it is both readable and straightforward. But it should be supplemented with the excellent analysis of the delegates and their attitudes meticulously made by Peter Smith in "La política dentro de la La Revolución: El Congreso Constituyente de 1916–1917."<sup>4</sup> Smith compiled a great deal of information on the men at Querétaro and learned that "the convention was dominated by a social elite, of high educational and occupational status . . . [that] was young and middle class." Using sophisticated statistical techniques, he discovered a prevalent desire among the delegates to centralize power in the national government so it could regulate foreign businessmen and investors and achieve social reforms in the nation. He also identified provincial attitudes in the efforts to return political power to the states.



Thus Smith found that the delegates expressed one paradox of modern Mexican history: growing nationalism and persistent regionalism.

The continuation of loyalty to the *patria chica* is the fourth theme that appears in recent historiography of the revolution. John Womack's now classic *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* and Luís González's prize-winning *San José de Gracia* both exemplify studies of this regional theme.<sup>5</sup> Responding to the need to discover the many Mexicos, the Centro de Investigaciones Superiores del Instituto de Antropología e Historia established a seminar on peasant societies. The first published work to emanate from this seminar is *Los campesinos de la tierra de Zapata*, volume 1, in which three members share the results of their research. Senecio López presents a study of Hueyapan, a village located in the upper elevation of Popocatepetl, separating Morelos from Mexico. Laura Helguera Resendiz studied Tenango, a community created by the revolution's agrarian reform. Ramón Ramírez Melgarejo examined a 1942 bola chiquita, the resistance that began in Zacualpan to military conscription.

All three authors evaluated campesinos as forming a complex social group that is exploited by the greater social system of which they are a part. López makes a comprehensive study of the geography, land tenure, water usage, and crops in Hueyapan. He examined various economic groups—day laborers, tenants, and woodcutters—and reviewed the introduction of new crops and some mechanization. But the study's emphasis is on the network binding the upland workers to the lowland plantations and markets. Helguera described the changes in Tenango that followed the revolution's agrarian reform. The current ejido was created in 1938 from the former workers' settlement of Tenango hacienda. Salaried workers became campesinos from 1920 to 1938 and became linked to markets that define their lives by defining the products they produce. This is a more traditional, historical treatment than the other essays. The author offered information on the reaction to the revolution—the Tenango residents fled Morelos to escape serving in the federal army or with the *zapatista* troops. Military conscription, Ramírez Melgarejo discovered, motivated the peasant uprising in 1942. The draft represented a violation of guarantees that signified the integrity of peasants' lives and the ability to control their human resources. If a relative were drafted for military service, it diminished the family's autonomy. The struggle ended when the peasants accepted conscription with the provision that draftees serve only one day of eight and that day in their own community. If the seminar's future volumes maintain the same standards of these three studies, the INAH program will make a major contribution to an understanding of the campesinos in Morelos. Detailed studies such as these should be undertaken in other regions of Mexico.

All these themes—the presidential succession, church resurgence, nationalism, and regionalism—have been examined in bits and pieces or through inference by numerous writers in the past decade. But they need to be analyzed systematically. Urging that scholars must continue the trend to go beyond the romance of the revolution does not suggest they should dismiss the bewitching optimism that climaxed in the writing of the 1917 constitution.

This achievement is often undervalued. In the first decade of the revolu-

tion, Mexicans experienced a fiesta of bullets that became a frenzy of death and destruction as the rebels' provincialism and antiforeign feelings combined with the presidential ambitions of self-appointed leaders. From this bloody carnival the people received only paper promises for a better life in the 1917 constitution. But writing the constitution was an essential first step toward permanent reforms; moreover, it was dramatic testimony of the rebels' intention to incorporate all Mexicans into the national economy and national politics, while utilizing the government to improve their lives. Surely no better evidence exists of rebel idealism than the formulation of an advanced labor code for workers who constituted one of the tiniest minorities in the nation, and the declaration of agrarian reforms when the leading spokesman for restoration of village lands remained in revolt against the national government. The constitution was a genuine triumph because in the future Mexicans could be denied their rights only through force or subterfuge. The delegates defined the vision of Mexico for all Mexicans. If the constitution has yet to be fully implemented it is a measure not of the delegates and their goals, but of today's heirs of the revolution.

WILLIAM H. BEEZLEY  
*North Carolina State University*

NOTES

1. Daniel Moreno, *Los hombres de la revolución. 40 estudios biográficos* (Mexico: Libro Mex, 1960), p. 63.
2. Ronfeldt's essay appears in *Contemporary Mexico: Papers of the IV International Congress of Mexican History*, edited by James W. Wilkie, Michael C. Meyer, and Edna Monzon de Wilkie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 317–36.
3. Publication information for the French and Spanish editions of Meyer's work is Paris: Editions Gallimard/Julliard, 1974 and Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1974. 3 volumes.
4. *Historia Mexicana* 22 (1973):263–95.
5. *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969) and *San José de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).