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Research article

The revolutionary road not taken: what the 1920s did to the Mexican Left

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Abstract

The 1920s – and above all the *delahuertista* rebellion of 1923–4 – represent a fundamental moment of ideological narrowing in Mexico's postrevolutionary history. While prior to 1923 there were a host of competing leftisms – often radical, focusing on Indigenous peoples, women and campesinos – by the end of the decade these alternative 'revolutionary roads' had been closed off.

Keywords Left; agrarianism; socialism; rebellion; government; Mexico; peasant

Introduction

The special issue *Histories of socialism and Indigeneity* considers the history of interactions, tensions and connections between Indigeneity and socialism in the Americas; Mexico in the 1920s provides a

fascinating – if rather singular – case study. The historiography of the 1920s in Mexico has undergone significant challenges in recent decades. Orthodox narratives foregrounded the Sonoran supremacy (the presidencies of Obregón, from 1920–4, and Calles, from 1924–8, followed by the six-year ‘*maximato*’) while, to some degree, placing the enormous Cristero War outside a truly national narrative. A wave of social and cultural studies complicated the political narrative, but more recently, regional history has shown that conflict in west-central Mexico was far from exceptional, even if its concomitant ideologies were somewhat specific. Sarah Osten’s *The Mexican Revolution’s Wake* showed beyond doubt that this was a crucial decade both for the formation of a national revolutionary party and for important regional socialist politicians.¹ However, by synthesising this recent regional history with biography, augmented with archival material, I will take the argument further.² I claim here that the 1920s – and above all the *delahuertista* rebellion of 1923–4 – represent a fundamental moment of ideological narrowing in Mexico’s postrevolutionary history. While prior to 1923 there were a host of competing leftisms – often radical, focusing on Indigenous peoples, women and *campesinos* – by the end of the decade these alternative ‘revolutionary roads’ had been closed off.

The main reason why this apparent medium-term weakening of the Left is interesting and important is that the *delahuertista* rebellion was – as, to a lesser extent, were the uprisings of 1927 and 1929 – portrayed by the government as a battle between progressives and reactionaries. Obregón, for instance, maintained that the ‘military uprising has received the unanimous disapproval of the popular classes throughout the Republic and that [disapproval] consists of the spontaneous contingents that have contributed support to the government and our institutions from the various working classes of all the states’.³ Given that the ‘Left’ won in this framing, its post-rebellion fall in fortune is notable. The historiography is far less definitive in its ideological characterisation of the conflict’s antagonists. Plasencia, for instance, notes that there were agrarian reformers, labour unions and defenders of democracy among those characterised as *delahuertistas*. In spite of this, ‘the rebels were never able to shake off the stigma of what they themselves initiated: a simple military rebellion in pursuit of power’, and the more nationalist and agrarian elements of the programme only emerged on the point of defeat.⁴ Buchenau describes it as a ‘rebellion that once again agreed only on the removal of the current regime’ – a clear, popular political programme was necessary, but absent.⁵ While a clear Left–Right divide cannot be sustained, there were some broad differences. As Buchenau puts it:

It would be a mistake to impute any sort of ideological polarity to the emerging competition between Calles and de la Huerta. But the latter’s political supporters – whether civilians in the Chamber of Deputies or generals in the Unión de Militares – favored the social and economic status quo more so than Calles’s supporters from the PNA, the CROM/PLM, and the ‘Socialist’ Southeast. As a group, they were also less anti-clerical than leaders allied with Calles such as Tejeda, Morones, Carrillo Puerto, or Garrido.⁶

This article largely concurs with these accounts, arguing that (a) it was by no means a simple Left–Right conflict, instead being an agglomeration of several military rebellions and civil fractures; and (b) the Left (or, rather, Lefts) won only in limited circumstances and locations, Veracruz being the most obvious. In the southeast, as in Michoacán, 1923–4 represented a defeat for the Left (disastrously so in Yucatán), while elsewhere the outcomes of ‘victory’ were at best ambiguous. Instead, the true victors were the incumbent state-builders, centralisers and authoritarians who would go on to shape much of Mexican history over the next 70 years.

In previous research projects I have examined important turning points in the history of the Mexican Left from the 1930s onwards.⁷ One question that I have frequently asked myself is why there was no Mexican analogue of Mariátegui; that is to say, why did no radical, materialist tradition emerge which saw Indigenous peoples – numerous, oppressed, often well-organised and militant – as potential revolutionary subjects? I think the answer lies in the realignment of the political spectrum over the course of the 1920s. The *delahuertista* rebellion in particular was a hugely important moment in determining what sort of Left Mexico ended up with once the dust had settled. That said, neither of the two figures closest to promoting a line analogous to that of Mariátegui is a perfect comparator: Felipe Carrillo Puerto, on the one hand, was not a Marxist, though he was certainly an admirer of the Russian Revolution and a militant socialist – but he was killed before achieving national prominence; Ursulo Galván, on the other, is more solidly placed in the Marxist tradition, but like Carrillo Puerto he was more influential at the local

rather than the national level in his own lifetime – and unlike Carrillo Puerto, he left little in the way of a published legacy.

In this article I present short political biographies of 11 key figures and several organisations which were (or had been) important actors on the Mexican Left by 1923, but who were either dead, sidelined or co-opted within a few years, as a direct result of the *delahuertista* rebellion or of later (sometimes tangentially related) conflicts. The biographies are largely based on the secondary literature but integrate sources from archival work in Mexico City, Veracruz and Yucatán. In what is essentially an act of prosopography, I divide these figures into several groups, based either on their common fates or shared projects. The first two sections of the article give an overview of the rebellion itself as well as pen portraits of two of its more important Left-leaning participants, Salvador Alvarado and Antonio I. Villarreal. I then turn to the effects of the rebellion on two sets of organisations or groups, those being – broadly speaking – the communist movement and the labour movement. The second half of the article looks at nine leaders of the Left who supported the government against de la Huerta, almost all of whom found themselves politically neutralised one way or another.⁸ It is worth pausing here to note that – with the exception of brief references to Elvia Carrillo Puerto, Andrea Villarreal and Teresa Villarreal – the subjects of this study are all men. This reflects the evidence base, to be sure; both primary and secondary sources are profoundly androcentric. However, this also reflects a deeper bias in the postrevolutionary public sphere, a bias to which the Left was not immune. It is unfortunate, but probably indicative, that the three named women above each had a brother who was better known and – at least superficially – had a more immediate recognised impact on the shape and direction of the Mexican Left.⁹ The figures grouped together here are also – with the exception, perhaps, of Alvarado – drawn from the middle ranks of the postrevolutionary political hierarchy. This is, I suggest, an accurate reflection of the structural position of the Left in Mexico at the time: local, sectoral and intellectual currents were emerging, but radical *agraristas*, socialists and communists had to fight for space and recognition in the postrevolutionary state and its broader political landscape. This only began to change significantly in the 1930s.

The *delahuertista* rebellion

The 1920s represent a crucial conjuncture for Mexico; as Osten puts it, the decade ‘produced the foundations of the modern Mexican political system’.¹⁰ However, centralisation was ineffective, perhaps impossible, and state governors had a good deal of leeway. The Mexican state in the 1920s has been described as ‘a chaotic, multiauthored work in progress ... built on the backs of regional governments ... all [led by] builders of populist, clientelistic regimes’.¹¹ Several of those regional governments undertook self-proclaimed experiments in socialism, which together represent an important trend in the postrevolutionary decade. A number of regional leaders – military *caudillos*, civilian reformers, ambitious *políticos* – developed or adopted ‘socialist’ programmes. These ‘socialisms’ were broad enough (or perhaps sufficiently nebulous) to embrace both the European-influenced anarchism prevalent in the Atlantic ports as well as less overtly ideological rural peasant protests against exploitation in the ‘underdeveloped’ interior. Nor did they seek to exclude the reformist urban middle class. Here, I think it is worth noting Osten’s contention that ‘socialism’ is adopted as a proxy for ‘radical’ since, by definition, virtually everyone left standing after 1914 called themselves a ‘revolutionary’.¹² Thus, a relational rather than an ideological definition of ‘socialist’ goes a long way to explaining some of the political tensions and outright contradictions of the 1920s.

In the early part of that decade, Mexico was ruled by three Sonorans: President Álvaro Obregón, Interior Minister Plutarco Elías Calles and Secretary of Finance Adolfo de la Huerta. They had authored the Plan of Agua Prieta in 1920 which led to the capture and death of outgoing President Venustiano Carranza; the Sonorans are thus often described as the ‘victors’ of the Mexican Revolution. However, there were underlying tensions within this triumvirate, which came to the surface over several issues in the course of 1923. The first, in August, was the Bucareli Agreement by which President Obregón agreed not to use constitutional provisions to expropriate US oil companies in return for recognition of his government in Washington.¹³ The importance of dissatisfaction with the Bucareli Agreement cannot be precisely weighed, but it is worth noting that de la Huerta – having told Obregón of his impending resignation from the government – believed as late as 24 September 1923 that he was to depart for Washington to renegotiate the deal along more nationalist lines.¹⁴ The second major issue was the

presidential succession; it is striking that as soon as the various parts of the rebellion broke out, the slogan used in official communications changed from 'effective suffrage, no re-election' to 'effective suffrage, no imposition'.¹⁵ Third, there was an ongoing escalation of tensions around gubernatorial elections at the state level, most obviously in San Luis Potosí.

Thus, a combination of Obregón's idiosyncratic – and in the eyes of his critics, unpatriotic – approach to negotiations with the United States, persistent federal meddling in state affairs (where meddling sometimes meant the absence of state support for legitimate governors) and the emergence of Calles as Obregón's preferred successor all led incrementally towards rebellion. In December 1923, much of the federal army rose in support of de la Huerta, who had been passed over as Obregón's successor and eventually accepted the nomination of the Co-operatist Party (which was – though scarcely known today – the largest party at the time). This *delahuertista* rebellion of 1923–4 prompted a reversal of the government-sanctioned 'opening-up' of regional politics in Mexico, leading to the repression and centralisation that characterised the Calles presidency (1924–8) and subsequent '*maximato*' (1928–34).¹⁶

'The rebellion' itself was vague and fragmented. Examining contemporary documents, it is clear that it took several weeks for both the government and print media to come to the understanding that – rather than a series of unconnected or vaguely connected outbreaks of violence – this was a coordinated rebellion. Even so, this was an oversimplification, and one never shared by all rebel factions. In the Chamber of Deputies' debate over the granting of extraordinary powers to the government, the ongoing 'political effervescence' was described as a military rebellion centred on two states: 'some soldiers, forgetting about honour, have supported the rebel movement led by the heads of operations of Veracruz and Jalisco'. Neither de la Huerta himself nor national political conflicts were blamed.¹⁷ While in the historiography 'the de la Huerta Rebellion of 1923–4' – singular, time-limited and personalised – is a common soubriquet, neither the unity, the temporality nor the identity of the revolts was at all clear to contemporaries.

For instance, it is hard to say when 'the rebellion' began. In Michoacán, the *agrarista* conflict with the central government could be traced to the election of Governor Múgica in 1920, and certainly his ouster in 1922. In July 1923, Pancho Villa was gunned down in Parral, probably at Calles's behest, though perhaps Obregón was the architect. Although this occurred months before the rebellion took on national proportions, it can certainly be linked to the forthcoming presidential election – Villa (an ideological oddball but beloved by many *campesinos*) had intimated that he would support de la Huerta over Calles.¹⁸ San Luis Potosí was in turmoil from August 1923 following another contested gubernatorial election. In late November 1923, a series of localised military revolts broke out: on 1 December, it was reported that the previous morning, General Rómulo Figueroa had overthrown the governor of Guerrero and by 8 December, there were widespread reports that General Enrique Estrada had rebelled in Jalisco. Chiapas was gripped by a three-way power struggle which factored into national political conflict. As such, we can find a multiplicity of local tensions erupting at different stages of the Obregón presidency but eventually forming enough of a concurrent wave to suggest a national rebellion.

The role played by de la Huerta himself was also ambiguous, and barely mentioned in the first few weeks of newspaper coverage. He was seemingly cajoled into his position as de facto opposition leader: first, unsuccessfully, by General Ángel Flores; then, again unsuccessfully, through subterfuge and strongarming by Martín Luis Guzmán; and finally, after a large public demonstration on 14 October 1923, by Jorge Prieto Laurens and the oppositional majority of the Partido Nacional Cooperatista (National Cooperative Party, PCN). Prieto Laurens played a far greater role in the unrest than might be gleaned from general accounts. As leader of the PCN he was a focal point for opposition to Calles and when that party split – with Emilio Portes Gil leading the pro-Calles faction – Prieto Laurens devoted his attention to: first, getting de la Huerta elected (whether the latter wanted it or not) and second, to the armed rebellions. When, in February 1924, the leaders of the rebellion fled Veracruz, Prieto Laurens was identified by the *New York Times* as one of the 'rebel chiefs'.¹⁹ Even as the rebellion sputtered to a halt, the extent to which it was a personalist vehicle was contested. After de la Huerta fled to the United States to raise support, General Rafael Zubarán Capmany bemoaned the growing personalism of the movement 'which some wish to convert into Delahuertismo' – the co-conspirator evidently did not believe it merited that label (yet).²⁰ Pedro Castro Martínez therefore rightly describes the uprising as 'a rebellion without a head'.²¹ Not only that, there were visceral conflicts *within* the rebellion's leadership. As Enrique Plasencia puts it, 'examples include Guadalupe Sánchez, who obstructed Antonio I. Villarreal, García Vigil's hatred of de la

Huerta, [and] the latter's distrust of Prieto Laurens, and his of Zubarán'.²² Increasingly, therefore, it seems reasonable – as does Ignacio Almada Bay – to refer to it as the 'so-called *delahuertista* rebellion'.²³

As to ideology and identity, the motivations of key actors were generally couched in terms of opposing Obregón's imposition of the divisive Calles as his successor. One rebel general – José Rentería Luviano of Michoacán, who died by suicide in 1925 – wrote to Obregón personally to warn him that 'an imposition like the one you aim to carry out would make the entire world completely lose faith in the men of the revolution'.²⁴ A little more vaguely, General Estrada complained of a 'government that has flagrantly forgotten the principles of the Revolution'.²⁵ While no doubt many on the Right saw a chance to displace Calles as president-apparent, there were others who consistently pointed to Obregón's authoritarianism or factionalism. Among the rebels there were conservatives, political Catholics, agrarians, anti-clerical generals and liberals; neither Obregón nor Calles were short of enemies. As Paul Friedrich put it, the revolt(s) were 'linked to a much wider social protest by persons of the most various backgrounds who, rather than being in favor of some positive, coherent program, were united against Calles'.²⁶ Calles, it is clear, was widely reviled, and for a variety of reasons.

More broadly, though, the characterisation of the rebels by the government and its supporters was as reactionaries, traitors, pawns and landlords. A similar caricature pertained on the other side: Obregón and Calles were 'bolsheviks', while the armed masses were dangerous 'agraristas'. Most agraristas *did* support the government – not necessarily out of gratitude for reforms enacted, but rather in the expectation of radical change. Writing to President Obregón on Christmas Day 1923, a representative of the Confederación Agrarista (of the pueblos of Cholula, Atlixco and Huejotzingo) stated that their reason for backing the government was 'for the benefit of agrarian communities hungry for justice'.²⁷ This is a calculation – a negotiation, even – and not unquestioning loyalty.

As for the course of the rebellion, despite widespread military backing it was fractured both politically and geographically and (thus) hesitant and contradictory. Though there were significant early successes in both the coastal east and the centre-west (later the locus of the Cristero rebellion), the government was able to combine the remaining loyal troops with a significant *levée en masse* to defeat each in turn. President Obregón was patient, concluding agreements with the United States and eventually utilising the benefits of subsequent normalisation to defeat the rebels. Calles went on to be inaugurated without further incident. The spectre of *delahuertismo* lasted, though. In 1925, a minor kerfuffle erupted in the pages of *The Nation* over what was deemed to be the overly favourable coverage in the *Herald Tribune* of the prospects for renewed rebellion against Calles. The *Herald Tribune* foregrounded – most approvingly – comments from a minor official who, it claimed, had had a conversation with President Coolidge, telling him that the presidential days of 'Bolshevistic' Calles were numbered.²⁸ Other than the doomy and inaccurate prediction, this was in fact 'a fabrication'.²⁹

The 'Left wing' of *delahuertismo*: Salvador Alvarado and Antonio I. Villarreal

The Sonoran 'triangle' really had more than three points; one such was Salvador Alvarado (1880–1924), a close friend and ally of de la Huerta. Though born in Sinaloa, Alvarado was raised in a Yaqui town in Sonora. He joined the Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party, PLM), the radical movement seeking to overthrow the dictator Porfirio Díaz, which was influential in both labour politics and the print media along the US-Mexican border. After 1913, though, he emerged as a reliable enforcer for Carranza, who attempted to defang the more radical elements of the revolution while quelling the many regional movements competing for local *de facto* power. In 1915 Alvarado was sent to Yucatán as one of Carranza's military 'proconsuls', conducting what Gilbert Joseph called a 'revolution from without'.³⁰

Alvarado was a progressive, relatively radical governor of Yucatán, and was among the more Left-leaning of prominent revolutionaries in the second half of the 1910s.³¹ As governor he prioritised reform in what he perceived to be a backward and exploitative state. He thoroughly overhauled and modernised labour legislation, introduced sweeping education reforms and took a corporatist approach to land disputes. It was in the latter arena that he first encountered Felipe Carrillo Puerto who was working as a state agent. Alvarado also made significant strides in public health and gender inclusion. His economic policies did not constitute an attack on capitalism, but rather were an attempt to implement a more rational and modern statist approach. As Osten has noted, 'his reformist objectives

were significantly complicated by his equally important responsibility for keeping the state's valuable henequen export sector up and running'.³²

Having laid the groundwork for meaningful socio-political change, Alvarado returned to national politics, working under interim president de la Huerta in 1920 before departing for the United States as an emissary of the henequen industry. Alvarado was one of a number of prominent revolutionary leaders – alongside Villarreal (see below) and Estrada – who conspicuously failed to back Calles as Obregón's chosen successor; he was even floated as an alternative himself.³³ Over the course of 1923 Alvarado publicly aligned himself with his old friend de la Huerta; moreover, by this stage he was no longer allied to former Yucatán protégé Carrillo Puerto. Alvarado took a fairly prominent role in the military uprising and after de la Huerta's withdrawal to the United States, he was one of the two designated 'interim supreme chiefs' of continuing operations in the southeast; the other was Cándido Aguilar. Alvarado's part in the rebellion came to an end several weeks later when, on 10 June, he was killed while attempting to reach a rendezvous point in Chiapas.³⁴

Antonio I. Villarreal (1877–1944) was also a prominent leftist in the 1910s, albeit emerging from a different tradition from Alvarado. Villarreal and his sisters Teresa and Andrea had been prominent activists in the transnational revolutionary network of *magonistas* at the border with the United States. It is notable that two of the key themes of *magonismo* – feminism and anti-racism – were also prominent tenets of the early 1920s Left, but as the revolution institutionalised, the gaps between rhetoric and policy became increasingly obvious.³⁵ Rising through the revolutionary ranks, Villarreal maintained something of a neutral position at the constitutional convention before taking up the governorship of Nuevo León where he proved a radical reformer, albeit in a brief, curtailed term. Villarreal maintained friendships and alliances across the political spectrum but was always opposed to the Obregón–Calles succession. In November 1923, he was part of the attempt to forge a unified political opposition to Calles, alongside Alvarado, Estrada and others. Dulles notes that while de la Huerta was still equivocating on 30 November, 'Prieto Laurens, Rafael Zubarán Capmany, and Antonio I. Villarreal now had no doubt that there was to be an armed struggle'.³⁶

During the armed revolt, Villarreal played an important role in establishing Puebla as a rebel stronghold, but his exhortations to attack Mexico City were ignored. As the tide turned, he was forced north and retreated through Nuevo León to the United States. While Alvarado was doggedly hunted down, Villarreal proved feline-like in his many returns. After supporting the 1923 rebellion, he backed Gómez and Serrano in 1927 and Escobar in 1929, but each time was allowed to return after a period of exile. In the 1934 presidential election (for more on this, see the section on Adalberto Tejeda, below), Villarreal stood for the Revolutionary Confederation of Independent Parties. Like Tejeda, he took around 1 per cent of the vote, after which he withdrew from public life.

Communists and communism

In 1923 the Mexican Communist Party was in its infancy. Founded in 1919, then refounded in 1921, it was disorganised, ideologically incoherent, chronically under-resourced and poorly supported from without. It was not yet, I suggest, an especially important part of the Left (though the state of Veracruz was a notable exception). The Comintern had begun to take a serious interest in the Americas in the early 1920s, seizing upon perceived discontent with US imperialism and its policies of 'unspeakable diplomatic pressure and bloody intrigue'.³⁷ Under the guidance of various non-Mexican radicals, the Congreso Nacional Socialista was converted into the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM – Mexican Communist Party). Initially, it had been a rather eclectic group comprising several strands of political opinion, from the *oficialismo* of Morones to the revolutionary socialism of the Indian anti-imperialist M. N. Roy and the dissident José Allen (who was in fact employed by US military intelligence). Before Roy and Allen, with the help of Mikhail Borodin, were able to turn the group into a genuine communist party, its ideology had been 'most closely linked to, or conflicted least with, libertarian thinking'.³⁸ This heterogeneous ideological foundation was never fully transcended; partly for this reason, Carr suggests, 'the PCM struggled at first to dominate and then to differentiate itself from the largely anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist-influenced radical milieu from which it had sprung'.³⁹

Its initial reaction to the *delahuertista* rebellion was, perhaps surprisingly, to back the rebels; it reportedly received financial recompense for promising to do so. However, under the guidance of US

communist Bertram Wolfe, then a key member of the executive committee, the party pivoted 'after much disorder and division' to strongly backing Obregón and Calles.⁴⁰ It did not particularly profit from this support, however, and having declared for Calles in the 1924 election, entered a period of informal exclusion, then outright oppression lasting until the mid-1930s and the informal Popular Front of the mid-Cárdenas period. The importance of Veracruz as a secondary locus of communist support and organisation became a festering sore after the rebellion. After trying to relocate the party's headquarters to Xalapa in 1924, its leader Manuel Díaz Ramírez was ousted by Rafael Carrillo and Bertram Wolfe. Díaz Ramírez relocated to Xalapa anyway and formed a rival nucleus, including Ursulo Galván, on whom more follows below. Tensions built and sometimes erupted, and by 1926 the party was in crisis.

Laboristas and the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers

It is worth noting from the outset that Obregón and Calles each had contradictory, vacillating and difficult relationships with both the urban working class and the political Left. Obregón corralled the support of the urban working class with aplomb; he had been the most powerful member of the *carrancista* faction to deal directly with the Casa del Obrero Mundial; and its successor, the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM), was led by a close personal ally of Obregón, Luis N. Morones, on whom more shortly.⁴¹ Through this line of patronage Obregón was effectively portrayed as a friend of the working class despite policies which were limited in scope and inconsistent in application.⁴²

The Mexican Labour Party was the most significant national-level party associated with the government and the CROM, its more or less associated arm in organised labour. Luis N. Morones emerged during this period as a crucial ally of first, Obregón, then, Calles, in cementing the support of a certain section of organised labour, though it is important to remember that there were many radical, independent segments which were either sceptical or downright hostile to what was a fairly conservative, domineering and centralising confederation – in 1921 many of these groups had coalesced in the Confederación General de Trabajadores (General Confederation of Workers, CGT).⁴³ While Obregón had been fairly agnostic when it came to CROM–CGT rivalry, of which there was a great deal, Calles was a noted partisan of the former.⁴⁴ Thus, when the de la Huerta rebellion erupted and the CROM sprang into action, the CGT remained more focused on industrial disputes and a major rent strike in Veracruz. The story is similar for those Música supporters in Michoacán who fought federal forces in 1923; their primary focus was arguably land reform, but many of them were organised labourers. Again, this brings into question the notion of a Left–Right conflict; the radical progressives were rebels here.⁴⁵

As with Wolfe and the communists, another US citizen played a key role in mediating between the dominant Obregón–Calles dyad and, variously, the labour movement, the southeastern socialists and the United States. It is still a little unclear where Robert Haberman's true loyalties lay; he was a bridge between Calles, the CROM and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), between Calles and Carrillo Puerto and between Calles and the US business community. He did work separately for Carrillo Puerto for a time, but one wonders whether he was essentially spying on him for Calles throughout. As Osten has shown, Haberman was in the United States at the same time as de la Huerta was there trying to broker agreements on oil exports; in forging links with US labour and socialist groups, and promoting the Left-wing credentials of some revolutionaries, his actions were seen by de la Huerta, and to an extent Obregón, as unhelpful. Calles clearly approved though; again, his motivations here are a little vague and most likely cynical. When it came to the rebellion, Haberman's close links to the AFL proved very important – although official US policy moved towards recognition of Obregón and condemnation of de la Huerta, there was considerable practical assistance from unions in preventing arms and supplies reaching the rebels, who were characterised by both the CROM and the AFL as uncomplicatedly reactionary counterrevolutionaries. As one US union statement put it, 'the ranks of organised labor are in hearty accord with the policies of President Calles, Mr. Morones and the earnest men who comprise the present government'.⁴⁶

The visionaries: Felipe and Elvia Carrillo Puerto

Glorified by his supporters after his death as 'the apostle of the Indians', Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1874–1924) was a socialist – he could perhaps be fairly described as a heterodox communist – of creole

and Maya descent. His Socialist Party of the Southeast (Partido Socialista del Sureste, PSS), in power in Yucatán from 1920, was 'a coalition led by disaffected members of the middle, lower-middle and urban working class and drawing its support from a small urban labor movement and the rural masses'.⁴⁷ It represented the most fully realised coalition of classes sought at various times by the Left, an alliance that was not able (or allowed) to solidify in Yucatán – and certainly not at the national level. Building on the moderate socialism of General Salvador Alvarado before him, Carrillo Puerto was 'committed to bringing a socialist revolution to Yucatán'.⁴⁸ Carrillo Puerto explicitly cited the Russian Revolution as inspiration and told his supporters that 'we must put Bolshevik principles into practice'.⁴⁹ As Spenser notes, this nominal endorsement of radical communist politics drew support away from the nascent Mexican Communist Party. The peasant-worker alliance seemed to unravel, however, and when, in 1922, his radical policies seemed to be favouring rural peasants at the expense of *stevedores*, an attempt was made on his life. Less than two years later his opponents got their way. In January 1924, Carrillo Puerto, at that time governor of Yucatán, was executed (along with three of his 13 siblings) by *delahuertista* insurgents acting in conjunction with the landowners in the peninsula. The so-called 'Apostle of the Indians' had provoked a bitter reaction among the elite through his 'exciting experiments in labor and educational reform and women's rights' and 'profound structural change' in the area of agricultural production.⁵⁰

Though he did not leave a significant body of political writings, Carrillo Puerto nevertheless established a vision of a Mexican future that was both radically socialist and would grant unusual agency to Indigenous peoples. Published posthumously, an article he wrote for the *Survey Graphic* features a photographic reproduction of 'Maya Ruins in Yucatán', captioned with a quotation: 'These are the monuments of our past and the promise of our future'.⁵¹ Carrillo Puerto's sentiment anticipates decoloniality; it does not valorise the past uncritically, but imagines a future arrived at via a different route. There is a thematic revenge or retribution – 'the conquered Indian has conquered his conqueror' – but this is framed in cultural terms, whereby 'Yucatán is Maya'. This, for Carrillo Puerto, meant that 'the Spaniard in Yucatán has absorbed much of our habits of life ... [and] the *mestizo* ... wears our dress and sings our songs'.⁵² This was not, however, the rather depoliticised appropriation of many later *indigenistas*; it was an assault on the twin oppressions – material and metaphysical – that had been visited upon the Maya. While prevailing elite views of Indigeneity saw a 'repressed, despised, and forgotten caste' – and that from a sympathetic observer – Carrillo Puerto saw strength, community and nascent autonomy.⁵³ Hence, Carrillo Puerto is expansive in his conception of what the revolution should mean in a Yucatecan context: 'to give the Maya Indian his status as a free man, to save him from the evil consequences of physical slavery and from the cultural and spiritual stagnation which slavery had gradually imposed upon him'.⁵⁴

Carrillo Puerto's description of pre-revolutionary Yucatán is partial, of course. It works in very broad brush strokes whereby the 'Indian ... was rooted to the land like a tree and sold with the soil he tilled. He owned nothing. He had nothing. He was nobody, and his voice could not be raised in defense of even the most important things in his own life'.⁵⁵

Carrillo Puerto's portrayal of postrevolutionary Maya life is similarly proto-decolonial. He describes a shift away from monocrop henequen production dictated by 'two thousand hacendados' towards an autarkic federation of communes, though not transcending capitalist relations, at least not yet: 'economic independence and greater self-reliance' are noted as achievements.⁵⁶

The communes were manifest not only in the economic sphere; even more important for Carrillo Puerto were the political bodies, the *Ligas de Resistencia*. A *liga* was, he said: 'more than a political party ... more than a social organization ... more than an educational institution ... more than an instrument for government. It is all of these combined'.⁵⁷ Carrillo Puerto also saw the *Ligas* as a crucial defensive militia, a *levée en masse* which, if sufficiently well-armed, could defend the southeast against *delahuertista* rebellion. However, the revolt overtook the southeast far faster than the government anticipated – Calles seemed to drag his feet in sending support in any case, despite pleas for arms and warnings about disloyal members of the armed forces – and Carrillo Puerto was captured and killed.⁵⁸ Jürgen Buchenau has recently argued that the killing of Carrillo Puerto represented a double turning-point in the conflict: first, it gave the government a genuinely popular martyr, the death of whom could be pinned – however inaccurately – on de la Huerta; and second, with Carrillo Puerto dead, the government could assume his rhetorical mantle without having to follow through with radical socialist policies.⁵⁹

The assassination of Don Felipe indirectly deprived Yucatán of the influence of his sister, the socialist feminist Elvia Carrillo Puerto (1878–1965). Four years her brother's junior, Elvia was a prominent campaigner from a young age. Known as the 'Red Nun', she established feminist organisations in Yucatán from the early years of the Revolution and took part in the groundbreaking First Feminist Congress which took place in Mérida in 1916. She was described by Jane Addams as 'a birth control and communist advocate, shocking the correct Spanish ladies within an inch of their lives'.⁶⁰ In the face of opposition from many leading 'socialist comrades', though with her brother's support, she campaigned widely for women's suffrage, while simultaneously running a subversive education campaign by printing birth control pamphlets and slipping them into all marriage registrations.⁶¹

In November 1923, she was one of three women elected to the state chamber of deputies (alongside Beatriz Peniche Barrera and Raquel Dzib Cicero), but a month later rebellion broke out. The feminist leagues were outlawed and after her brothers were assassinated, Elvia was forced into hiding. Although the Socialist Party of the Southeast regained control, the post-rebellion regime moved to a more conservative position and undid much of the progress made since 1915, including women's suffrage. Elvia moved to San Luis Potosí and remained a tireless activist, elected to the national chamber of deputies in 1925 though barred from taking her seat on the grounds of gender. However, she never again enjoyed the power and prominence she had built in her home state.

In limbo: Carlos Vidal and Francisco Múgica

In Chiapas the socialist movement was led by Carlos Vidal, a comrade and sort of disciple of Carrillo Puerto. Whereas President Obregón maintained close ties to the latter – being rather dependent on his popular support both before and after the rebellion in Yucatán – in Chiapas the situation was different. Obregón was formally allied to a counterrevolutionary movement known as the Mapaches, led by the state governor Tiburcio Fernández Ruiz. This strengthens the argument that a Left–Right conflict is not the most productive framing for the 1920s, as Obregón's key motivation in forming alliances seems to have been their guarantee of local stability, whereas Calles (to whom more of the Left did gravitate, at least initially) was driven by the instinct to centralise authority. Calles would work with the radical demagogue Garrido Canabal (see below), embroiling Tabasco in conflict – something it is hard to imagine Obregón embracing – while it seems equally unlikely that Calles would have tolerated Mapache control of Chiapas. Indeed, after the 1922 local elections, which saw widespread fraud and a reimposition of Mapache rule, it became more difficult to do so; Obregón's desired criterion of local stability had evaporated. Fernández Ruiz's relationship with the national government grew increasingly strained throughout 1923 and he seemingly considered joining the rebellion in December.⁶²

Despite the Mapache supremacy in Chiapas, Obregón managed to maintain Vidal's loyalty, partly via Calles who, prior to his presidency, was the usual conduit to the Left. Vidal was already a brigadier general when the 1923 rebellion broke out and he played an important role in the fighting under Calles's command. Back in Chiapas, the *delahuertista* rebellion provoked a complex multi-polar conflict.⁶³ While the Left broadly opposed and fought against *delahuertistas*, a significant rebellion by the Left occurred simultaneously against the now somewhat tenuously Obregónista Mapache government. Regardless of Vidal's personal connection to Calles, there was a strong, relatively autonomous and militant Left, an uncomfortable situation for the central government during the rebellion, though one that had to be temporarily tolerated. Vidal would go on to win the 1925 gubernatorial election, ruling for two years before fatally opposing Obregón's re-election in the run-up to the 1928 contest. There is not enough space here to consider in detail the anti-re-election campaigns (deemed by some a rebellion) of Arnulfo Gómez (another Sonoran) or Francisco R. Serrano, but as a measure of the rapid fracturing of the Left following the de la Huerta rebellion, it is notable that 'the bitter fight over presidential re-election in 1926–27 was led by politicians on both sides who all described themselves as Socialist'.⁶⁴ Having lost Carrillo Puerto to the assassins' bullets in 1924 and Vidal to political purgatory (and three years later to a firing squad), a socialist Left committed to radical agrarian reform; strong, relatively autonomous labour and the resuscitation of Indigenous Mexico was rapidly diminished. Cardenismo revived echoes of these aspects of southeastern socialism, but only within strict and ever-narrowing limits.

The story was rather different for Francisco Múgica, who had a much more prominent national profile but faced more determined opposition in Michoacán. As with several others mentioned here, Múgica had been a contributor to the magonista newspaper *Regeneración* prior to the revolution. He

was a successful general on the Constitutionalist side and was among the first of the revolutionary leaders to enact substantial land reform. However, he fell out with Obregón (having backed Carranza until the last moment in 1920) and was kept at arm's length from the true locus of power, serving only a brief and tempestuous term as governor of Michoacán. His great friend and sometime protégé Lázaro Cárdenas would later serve as a much more successful governor in the same state. As governor, Múgica demonstrated similar political preferences to Carrillo Puerto – a direct appeal to campesinos, Indigenous groups and urban workers – but seemed to lack the latter's popular touch. Nevertheless, his establishment in 1920 of an Office for the Promotion of Indian and Worker Affairs along with support for the Union of Agrarian Communities laid the groundwork for a much broader radical movement which supported Cárdenas at the end of the decade. Like Carrillo Puerto, Múgica identified an alliance between urban workers and Indigenous communities (which of course sometimes overlapped) as key to the fortunes of the Left.⁶⁵

Despite Obregón's suspicions and the consistent interference of federal forces, Múgica cultivated a significant support base among armed agrarista militias, as well as support in the public sphere from publications such as *El 123*. This led to a tense and sometimes violent struggle for power in Michoacán and in 1922 – frustrated with the intransigence of landowners, the Church and military figures – Múgica became openly critical of the federal government which had, in his view, failed to support the legitimate government of the state. In February of that year, a proportion of the army rebelled against Múgica and when Obregón declined to back him, and in fact ordered the arrest of many of his key supporters, he presented his resignation to the state legislature.⁶⁶ Instead, he was given a year's leave. This would prove crucial to how he was affected by the *delahuertista* uprising, as it occurred at the same time as Múgica was seeking to return to his mandated position as governor.

Prior to the rebellion, Múgica had maintained links with de la Huerta, despite their ideological differences, and many of his supporters seized the opportunity to rise against the Obregón government which they now regarded as actively hostile.⁶⁷ This is somewhat different from rising directly in favour of de la Huerta himself and adds to the general picture of the rebellion as in fact comprising a series of separate conflicts. In December 1923, Múgica, armed with an *amparo* (or legal protection) from the Supreme Court, returned to Michoacán to reclaim the governorship.

On Monday 3 December, *Excelsior* reported that Múgica had been arrested and jailed the previous night for the 'usurpation of public functions'.⁶⁸ It is not much of a stretch to imagine that Obregón thought the rebellion the perfect opportunity to remove him from the chessboard once and for all; at the very least, the president loudly proclaimed Múgica to be a rebel. Telegrams to Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho show how keen Obregón was to find and arrest the errant socialist, claiming that 'está en convivencia con Gral. [Guadalupe] Sánchez que acaba declararse enrebelaría en Estado de Veracruz'.⁶⁹ There were even signs that Obregón anticipated (or encouraged) his killing while under arrest: Anna Ribera Carbó notes that his captor, Colonel Miguel Flores Villar, received a message from the president stating that Múgica 'was killed as his supporters tried to free him' – a veiled instruction, presumably, rather than a statement of fact.⁷⁰ However, with the help of friends and allies, including Cárdenas, he survived, going underground for much of the following year. His standing in the revolutionary family was greatly damaged, however, and it was not until the 1930s that he regained his prominence.⁷¹

The survivors: Genevevo de la O, Adalberto Tejeda and Tomás Garrido Canabal

Genevevo de la O (1876–1952) was one of the great survivors of the Mexican Revolution, avoiding the violent fate of many of his peers. He was one of just a few prominent figures who had actively engaged in politics in the pre-revolutionary, revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods. De la O was a close ally of Zapata and supported him until he was murdered in 1919. At that point, de la O threw in his lot (as did many other Zapatistas) with Obregón and backed the overthrow of Carranza. Under Obregón he held various military commands, and by 1923 was back in his native Morelos as chief of operations. When supporters of de la Huerta rebelled, de la O was one of many whose loyalties were seemingly divided. As late as 12 December, General Reynaldo Lecona wrote from Puebla to Genevevo de la O in Morelos to urge him, as an old 'co-religionist', to follow the example of 'our loyal and immaculate jefe Zapata' and to back General Antonio I. Villarreal 'who we, the fighters most addicted to the agrarian cause, have focused

upon'. Lecona was one of Zapata's representatives at the Convention of Aguascalientes in 1914 and his communications with de la O shed light on a divide within Zapatismo specifically, and agrarismo more broadly, over how to proceed in light of the de la Huerta rebellion. While Zapata's successors had little in common with de la Huerta, many felt let down, excluded or actively persecuted by Obregón; in particular they lamented, as Lecona put it, the 'brutal and iniquitous imposition' of Calles as his successor.⁷²

De la O, though, stuck with the Obregón–Calles regime, repelling a rebel attack from Guerrero and Morelos ultimately sent tens of thousands of troops to support the government in defeating the opposition. Despite this crucial practical display of loyalty, however, de la O was seen as a problem that needed fixing, whether because of a perception that his loyalty was superficial or because of his clear ongoing importance as an agrarista leader with an independent local power base. As such he was moved to Tlaxcala, and faded considerably from national importance after 1924. Only later in life, as one of the founders of the Federation of Parties of the Mexican People, did he return to the national political stage. This group represented a sort of rump Zapatismo and backed Miguel Henríquez Guzmán's unsuccessful bid for the presidency in the 1952 election.

Both Adalberto Tejeda (1883–1960) and Tomás Garrido Canabal (1891–1943) are notable examples of leftists emerging from the rebellion with enhanced *local* power combined with both strict geographical limits placed on future activity and an often deep suspicion emanating from the centre. Tejeda was a committed leftist of a distinctly heterodox stripe, a disciple of Harold Laski who 'envisaged ... a sort of utopia situated somewhere between pure anarcho-syndicalism and the classless society that Marxist communism claimed would follow the disappearance of the state'.⁷³ His first term as governor of Michoacán (1920–4) was one of limited concrete progress for three main reasons: first, the aftermath of the decade of armed conflict demanded stabilisation and recovery in times of limited resources and state capacity; second, the balance of power in the state of Veracruz remained tilted firmly towards the elite, notwithstanding the precipitous growth of a radical agrarian movement; and third, Tejeda was at a formative stage in his own ideological development. Nevertheless, working closely with Ursulo Galván (see below), Tejeda built a power base in the local Agrarian League.

From Tejeda's earliest attempts at land and labour reform onwards, the Right in Veracruz coalesced around General Guadalupe Sánchez who rallied frightened landowners to the National Co-operatist Party. This situation was further complicated by Sánchez's close relationship with – and implicit support from – President Obregón. It is worth reiterating here the broader point that until the rebellion, Obregón was rarely inclined to support the more radical agrarista governors (Tejeda, Garrido Canabal and Rodolfo Neri of Guerrero) in their disputes with reactionary generals.⁷⁴ Sánchez and the Co-operatists went on to rebel in late 1923, showing that while a Left–Right narrative may have some value in explaining the rebellion at the local level (as in Yucatán), the national/federal picture is less clear. They were roundly defeated though, with Veracruz providing the point of retreat from which the rebel leadership fled, some to the Yucatán Peninsula and others into exile.

For a time thereafter, Tejeda prospered, albeit on a short leash, serving as minister of *Gobernación* under President Calles from 1925 to 1928. However, he came to view the ruling party, as well as its version of agrarian reform, as 'a manifest imposition designed to prevent the common people, who had spilled their blood for the revolution, from enjoying its fruits and influencing the shape of Mexican society'.⁷⁵ In 1928 he won a second term as governor of Veracruz and began a wide-ranging and often frenetic programme of radical reform. This time, he was both better prepared and more determined, using amendments to, and simplifications of, existing law to attack large landholdings on multiple fronts. Understanding that he had little time to make an impact and would still face considerable regional opposition, he ploughed state resources into relevant institutions and organisations – most importantly the Agrarian League and Agrarian Commission – while co-opting as many as 30,000 members of the League into an armed militia. The Veracruz land reform stands out as an unusual success, with around twice as much land transferred to the state's peasants in a three-year period as the per capita national average across the *entire* period of land reform.⁷⁶

His intransigent radicalism and assertive localism left Tejeda politically isolated from the 'inner circle' of the revolutionary family. He stood as a candidate in the 1934 presidential election against his old friend Lázaro Cárdenas, receiving the nomination of the *Partido Socialista de las Izquierdas* (Socialist Party of the Lefts, PSI). Tejeda and the PSI were particularly loathed by the Mexican Communist Party, which rolled out its finest (late) Third Period rhetoric. The PSI was derided as 'the worst enemy of the workers' movement and the Communist Party' with Tejeda the 'boss of a demagogic, "leftist" and pseudo-socialist arm of

the bourgeois landlord regime', altogether too enamoured of 'constitutional reforms and relying on articles of the bourgeois landlord constitution'.⁷⁷ Despite the evident groundswell of interest in and support for a leftist opposition, Tejeda tallied fewer than 1 per cent of the votes to Cárdenas's 98 per cent. So, as noted above, did his old foe Antonio I. Villarreal.⁷⁸ The PCM fared worse still. There was a good deal of violent intimidation of opposition candidates on the campaign trail, and – clearly – significant manipulation of the vote itself. The PSI was sanctioned and its offices closed, but Tejeda reconciled himself to the victorious government, spending much of the Cárdenas presidency outside the country serving as ambassador to France and then Spain. Though Tejeda's second governorship and presidential campaign occurred several years after the revolts of 1923–4, they support the thesis that after de la Huerta's defeat, leftists would be tolerated at the local level *only* if they offered stability and could maintain their own support bases. Tejeda himself seems to have understood this well. At the national level, loyalty was the primary concern; here Cárdenas did not break from Calles's principle – if the Left wished to exist meaningfully, it must be 'inside the tent, pissing out'.⁷⁹

The infamous Tomás Garrido Canabal (1891–1943) became governor of Tabasco state in 1920, and unlike almost all the other cases presented here, he not only maintained his position – running Tabasco directly or indirectly until 1935 – but also became more trenchant as time went on. However, in keeping with the general model of constraint on radical leftist experiments, Garrido Canabal was handled carefully by successive presidents and attempts to exert power beyond his state jurisdiction were met with disapproval and, eventually, dismissal followed by exile. His gubernatorial rule has been demonised by historians and novelists. Martin Needler describes him as 'the crusading atheist ... who had run a socialist tyranny as governor'.⁸⁰ Needler's description is extremely similar to that of Graham Greene, whose account of Tabasco in the years immediately following Garrido Canabal's fall describes the governor as 'the puritan dictator of Tabasco ... [who] had left no church standing'.⁸¹

His earlier term was characterised by fiery rhetoric but limited reform; he called himself a 'Bolshevik' but prior to the 1923–4 rebellion proceeded in a tentative fashion. In the face of the *delahuertista* revolt, though, the gloves were off. As Osten puts it, the rebellion 'left an enduring scar on the politics of Tabasco, on its particular brand of socialism, and, it would seem, on Garrido himself'.⁸² From that point forward Garrido Canabal pursued both robust institutionalised reform – in a sense pre-empting future possible opposition – as well as violent retributions against rebels and other parts of the local elite. This led to something of a paradox: tremendous strength at a local level combined with wider condemnation. The sense that Garrido Canabal was manageable when confined to Tabasco but dangerous when abroad only increased, culminating in his exile after attempting to subdue exiled Tabascan Catholics in Mexico City with his loyal armed supporters. As Robespierre so aptly put it, 'no one loves armed missionaries'.

Ploughing other furrows: Ausencio Cruz and Ursulo Galván

Two very brief final cases remain: Ausencio Cruz (1898–1963), originally from Puebla but latterly a key figure in Tabasco; and the Veracruz communist Ursulo Galván (1893–1930). Cruz acted as a key ally to Garrido Canabal during the rebellion and would later serve twice as governor of Tabasco under Garrido's tutelage, from 1927–8 and from 1929–30. Cruz maintained links to the Marxist Left (not least through his second marriage to a Communist Party member, the writer María de la Luz Lafarja) and in various official roles acted as an enforcer of Garrido's anti-clerical policies. Working closely with his mentor, Cruz ensured that the Tabasco *Ligas de Resistencia* were both better organised and better armed than their predecessors in Yucatán. Again, this embedded local success marked out the Tabascans as problematic for central government.

Ursulo Galván was a prominent member of the Mexican Communist Party throughout the 1920s, but he always followed a distinct and rather heterodox line. Born in Tlacotepec de Mejía in Veracruz, Galván worked as a carpenter in the Huasteca region before serving in Carranza's army during the revolution. He maintained links with both radical campesinos and class-conscious urban proletarians, and for several years pursued a similar goal in Veracruz to that of Carrillo Puerto in Yucatán: to unite peasants and workers under a single socialist banner.⁸³ While its membership was small, the Veracruz section of the party quickly became a successful and powerful group; Galván, along with his close collaborator Manuel Almanza, was a leading light from the outset. Just as Carrillo Puerto was nicknamed 'the Apostle of the Indians', Galván was known as 'the Apostle of Veracruz Agrarianism'.

Galván found a close ally in Adalberto Tejeda, governor of Veracruz (see above). Some have viewed this as a marriage of convenience by which Tejeda shored up his Left flank (and support base) in the face of a powerful local opposition movement, yet Tejeda showed himself to be resolute in his long-term support for radical agrarianism. Galván, with his newly convened Agrarian League, was therefore crucially positioned as a key component of leftist support for the government during the rebellion. Perhaps more than anywhere in Mexico, the socioeconomic character of the two sides were clearly marked. As Fowler-Salamini puts it, a month before conflict erupted, 'tension between the unions of farmers and the armed peasants had reached such a high level that the governor felt it imperative to declare his intention to continue to arm the peasants [and] disarm the *guardias blancas*'.⁸⁴ In fact, as early as March 1923, Maximino Ávila Camacho had identified impending bitter conflict between radical reformers, grouped around Tejeda, and a coalition of landowners and reactionary military officers headed by General Guadalupe Sánchez, later a key figure in the rebellion.⁸⁵ These two groups, with the latter augmented by thousands of rebelling soldiers, plunged into brutal fighting, with the first weeks of the rebellion seeing the assassinations of several key *agrarista* and union leaders.

In early January 1924, the agrarian leagues reorganised their forces into guerrilla units and placed Galván in operational charge. This was perhaps a little premature as Galván had been away attending a conference in Moscow and did not even learn of the rebellion until he reached Cuba on his way home. Once he arrived, however, his impact was decisive, leading around 30,000 *campesinos* in concert with military forces to chase the rebels out of Veracruz by the end of the month. Galván was in a strong position following the rebellion, having had the agrarian leagues amply armed and supplied by Obregón. His alliance with Tejeda was strong and at that point Galván was also closely involved with the growing Communist Party. In contrast to agrarian militias elsewhere in the country, Tejeda and Galván were able to resist Obregón's efforts to demobilise – and particularly to disarm – the movement. Miles Rodríguez has argued that this represents a success for the Left in the period, though it was relatively isolated and ultimately fragile.⁸⁶ The promising link between organised armed peasant leagues and the PCM was undone with the Escobar rebellion of 1929, however. While Galván backed the government, the Communist Party (in its Third Period 'pomp') took a complicated position which effectively called for revolution; Galván was expelled and the association between the party and the leagues was severed. Notwithstanding arguments within the League, radical agrarianism in Veracruz was entering its apogee in Tejeda's second term (see above). Galván, though, would not live to see it; in July 1930 he travelled to the United States for cancer treatment and died in somewhat mysterious circumstances.⁸⁷

Conclusion: the *delahuertista* rebellion – a crisis for the postrevolutionary Left?

The 1920s constitute a crucial decade for understanding the direction of the Mexican Left in the postrevolutionary period. Three main points deserve recapitulation here. First, the *delahuertista* rebellion was, like so many other postrevolutionary conflicts, much more complicated, fragmented and contradictory than its simple soubriquet suggests. There was little ideological consistency on either side, and even the word 'side' might be a stretch – instead we see a panoply of local conflicts played out under a broad, simplistic national banner. In this sense, this conflict (along with the rebellions or disturbances of 1927 and 1929) bear similarities to recent interpretations of Latin America's Cold War. The headline conflict is important, but it doesn't tell us a great deal about the aims, ideologies or loyalties of the protagonists and victims. What is abundantly clear is that the ruling regime (and later, party), emerged much stronger as a result of its victory over the rebels. At a local level though, the picture was far less clear: a Left–Right conflict in Veracruz ended in a qualified victory for the Left; a Left–Centre conflict in Michoacán saw the Left defeated; a Left–Right conflict in Yucatán saw the Left vanquished, then the Right ejected by the Centre; while the triangular conflict along more or less Left–Centre–Right grounds in Chiapas was inconclusive in the short term.⁸⁸ Here, the interpretations of Buchenau and Almada – pointing to a fragmented struggle between centralising authoritarianism and regionalist pluralism – are reinforced. Where Left and Right were identifiable tendencies, they were bound into a much older conflict between centre and periphery.⁸⁹

Second, taken as a whole, there was a significant and powerful Left prior to 1923, notwithstanding the understandable weakness of the nascent communist movement and the born co-opted CROM.

In the years immediately preceding the rebellion, Thomas Benjamin lists six state governors heading 'prominent reformist regimes', all in large or otherwise significant states.⁹⁰ Two others – Emilio Portes Gil and Carlos A. Vidal – were established and popular enough to take power in 1925, though by that stage the scope for both radical reform and local autonomy was dramatically limited. Even in 1923, though, the Left's centres of power were localised and its socialism vague. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of the movements in the Southeast as well as Morelos suggest an interaction between socialism and Indigeneity (and, often, feminism) more far-reaching, collaborative and transformative than that which eventually received national backing under Cárdenas. Southeastern socialism was arguably at its most powerful and unified just four months before the rebellion broke out, with the Mérida Convention of August 1923.

This, albeit counterfactually, leads to the final point: had the *delahuertista* rebellion not seen, inter alia, the assassination of Carrillo Puerto, the sidelining of de la O and Múgica, the isolation of Vidal and the *traición* ('treason') of Villarreal and Alvarado, it is hard to imagine both the centralisation of authority and the deradicalisation of both socialist and agrarian currents in national politics, not to mention the halting of progress in gender equality (which has only been considered very briefly here) under Calles and his successors. Morones and the CROM would still have existed as a brake on radical labour, but in a far less secure and dominant position. Cárdenas took the revolution to its practical limits as *they were in the mid-1930s* but those limits might have been considerably more radical had the cards not been shuffled (or discarded) in the way they were in the winter of 1923–4. If 'regional socialism' can be described as a movement, 1924 should therefore be seen as a reversal, at least for its radical wing. In another way, though, it survived and prospered; as Osten and Benjamin have argued, the PNR which emerged in 1929 and went on (essentially) to rule Mexico for 71 years borrowed a good deal of the PSS model's form, while taking only a very diluted and largely rhetorical signal from its content.

Notes

¹ Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*.

² I am immensely grateful to Nathaniel Morris for his valuable assistance with parts of the archival research and commend his services to the reader.

³ Obregón to Aarón Sáenz (Subsecretary of External Relations), 28 January 1924, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City; Obregón-Calles, Caja 9, 101-R2-P-ii.

⁴ Plasencia, *Personajes y escenarios de la rebelión delahuertista*, 292.

⁵ Buchenau, *The Sonoran Dynasty in Mexico*, 163.

⁶ Buchenau, *The Sonoran Dynasty in Mexico*, 171.

⁷ See Booth, 'Hegemonic nationalism', 31–58.

⁸ The fates of the 11 individuals covered admittedly reads a little like the *aide-memoire* used to recall the wives of Henry VIII, though here would read: assassinated (1924), exiled, assassinated (1924), survived, assassinated (1927), sidelined, sidelined, survived, prospered locally, prospered locally, died – possibly murdered (1930).

⁹ A valuable project following on from this study may be to examine both the contemporary and lasting impacts of, inter alia, Elvia Carrillo Puerto and the Villarreal sisters.

¹⁰ Though Osten further notes that 'very few historians have dealt with the 1920s as a period unto itself in Mexico; instead, the decade is commonly treated as either the wind down of the Mexican Revolution, or the wind-up to *Cardenismo* (1934–40)'. See Osten, 'Trials by fire', 239 and note 2.

¹¹ Vaughan, 'Pancho Villa, the daughters of Mary, and the modern woman', 27.

¹² Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*.

¹³ Meyer, *México y Estados Unidos en el conflicto petrolero*, ch. 5.

¹⁴ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 191.

¹⁵ See various communications between members of the rebel government in Yucatán between mid-January and mid-February 1924; Archivo General del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida; Poder Ejecutivo: Gobernación, 711: 37 (1924). Interestingly, after the successful defeat of the rebels in Veracruz, leftists began to sign off their official communications with 'good health, and social revolution'.

¹⁶ For general accounts of the rebellion, see inter alia: Plasencia, *Personajes y escenarios de la rebelión delahuertista*; Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*; Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*, ch. 3; Buchenau, *The Sonoran Dynasty*, ch. 6; on Michoacán, see Sánchez Amaro, *La rebelión delahuertista en Michoacán*; on Veracruz, see García Morales, *La rebelión delahuertista en Veracruz*; on de la Huerta himself, see Castro

Martínez, *Adolfo de la Huerta y la revolución Mexicana*. See also relevant passages from Almada Bay, Álvaro Obregón.

Legislatura XXX – Año II – Período Ordinario, 8 December 1923.

Buchenau, *The Sonoran Dynasty*, 172.

'Tanker carries rebel chiefs away', *The New York Times*, 7 February 1924, 6.

Quoted in Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 263.

Castro Martínez, *Adolfo de la Huerta y la revolución Mexicana*, 103; translations here and elsewhere are my own.

Plasencia, *Personajes y escenarios de la rebelión delahuertista*, 290.

Almada Bay, '¿Cuál triángulo sonorense?'

Sánchez Amaro, *La rebelión*, 267.

Sánchez Amaro, *La rebelión*, 259.

Friedrich, *Agrarian Revolt in a Mexican Village*, 105.

Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City; Obregón-Calles, Caja 9, 101-R2-P-iii.

'Editorial paragraphs', *The Nation*, 29 July 1925, 131.

'Editorial paragraphs', *The Nation*, 29 July 1925, 132.

Joseph, *Revolution from Without*.

His tenure has been analysed by Ramón D. Chacón, Sarah Osten, Gilbert Joseph, Jorge Quintana Navarrete and José Luis Sierra Villarreal, among others. See Joseph, *Revolution from Without*; Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*; Chacón, 'Salvador Alvarado and the Roman Catholic Church', 245–66; Chacón, 'Rural educational reform in Yucatán', 207–28; Quintana Navarrete, 'El Sueño de Salvador Alvarado', 166–79; Villarreal, *La Revolución en Yucatán*.

See Osten, 'Mexico's political laboratory'.

Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 174.

Aguilar, the son-in-law of overthrown President Carranza, survived the attack and went into exile. He returned to Mexico under amnesty in 1939, eventually backing the moderate Left candidacy of Miguel Henríquez Guzmán in 1952 before being arrested under 'social dissolution' laws and returning to exile.

Andrea Villarreal, quoted in 1907, said: 'Some charge that we are agitators because of our Indian blood. But the great Juárez, our best president, was an Indian': *Evening Star*, 19 October 1907, n.p. Both Andrea and Teresa were energetic agitators and publishers of socialist, feminist and anti-racist writings in the United States and, after 1911, in Mexico. See, for example, Zárate, 'Dos hermanas revolucionarias'.

Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 209.

Comintern, 'On the revolution in America (1921)', 9.

Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 23.

Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 28.

Rodríguez, *Movements after Revolution*, 33.

See Hart, *Anarchism & the Mexican Working Class, 1860–1931*, 12.

I will not deal here with the role of Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who later, was hugely important as a labour leader at the national level. See, for example, Spenser, *In Combat* and Booth, 'Hegemonic nationalism'. Lombardo was briefly made interim governor of Puebla in late 1923 after the incumbent joined the rebellion. Though he achieved some limited reforms, Lombardo and his coterie were seen as peculiar intellectual outsiders and after local pressure he was removed from the post in March 1924. He did garner support from several of those under consideration here, though – Tejeda, for instance, wrote to Calles in March 1924 to urge him to support Lombardo in the face of reactionary attacks. See Tejeda to Calles, 20 March 1924; Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz, Xalapa; Archivos Particulares: Adalberto Tejeda, Caja 29 (1923–4).

Out of interest, even though I wouldn't classify him as being part of the radical Left, Morones was also sidelined within a few years of the *delahuertista* rebellion. Here the important variable was Calles's severe allergy to independent power bases.

See, inter alia, Hart, *Anarchism & the Mexican Working Class, 1860–1931*.

Another labour group on the Left accused of supporting the rebellion was the Confederación de Sociedades Ferrocarrileras de la República Mexicana (Confederation of Railwaymen's Societies of the Mexican Republic, or CSFRM). See Rodríguez, *Movements after Revolution*, 41.

In this case the statement came from the Miami Miners' Union but this was fairly standard AFL boilerplate. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City; Obregón-Calles, Caja 6, 101-R2-c.

Joseph, 'The fragile revolution', 42.

Joseph, 'The fragile revolution', 43.

- 49 Spenser, 'Radical Mexico', 64.
- 50 Joseph, 'The fragile revolution', 47–8.
- 51 Puerto, 'The New Yucatán', 140.
- 52 Puerto, 'The New Yucatán', 138.
- 53 Lopez, 'The India Bonita Contest', 308.
- 54 Puerto, 'The New Yucatán', 138.
- 55 Puerto, 'The New Yucatán', 138.
- 56 Puerto, 'The New Yucatán', 141.
- 57 Puerto, 'The New Yucatán', 141.
- 58 There is an ongoing debate over the extent to which (a) Calles was reluctant to allow Carrillo Puerto to arm the citizenry and (b) whether weapons were even available. See Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*, ch. 3.
- 59 Buchenau, *The Sonoran Dynasty*, 178.
- 60 Letter from Jane Addams to Emily Greene Balch, 26 October 1920, <https://digital.janeaddams.ramapo.edu/items/show/21045>.
- 61 Leyva Loría, *Elvia Carrillo Puerto*, 15.
- 62 See Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution*, esp. 31–4. Lewis notes that the relationship between the Mapaches and Calles in particular had deteriorated rapidly and, given the latter was about to become president, it is logical that Fernández Ruiz would have considered backing de la Huerta.
- 63 See Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*, ch. 5.
- 64 Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*, 195. See ch. 6 for a detailed account of the re-election conflict.
- 65 See Purnell, *Popular Movements*, 62–3.
- 66 Purnell, *Popular Movements*, 65.
- 67 One of his more prominent allies was Primo Tapia, whose part in the story is described by Ariel Rodríguez Kuri. The suggestion that both Múgica and his ally Primo Tapia 'failed to calculate the orientation of the uprising of Adolfo de la Huerta (1923), and at first seemed to sympathize with the protest' accommodates some of the historiographical ambiguities over whether either Múgica or Tapia were 'for' de la Huerta or rather 'against' Obregón. See Kuri, *Historia mínima de las izquierdas en México*, 23.
- 68 'Prision del Gobernador Gral. Múgica', *Excelsior*, 3 December 1923, 1.
- 69 '[Múgica] is in concert with General [Guadalupe] Sánchez who recently rebelled in the State of Veracruz.' Telegram from Obregón to Cárdenas, 6 December 1923 reproduced in Barragán (ed.), *Francisco J. Múgica*, 228–9.
- 70 Ribera Carbó, *Francisco J. Múgica*, 99.
- 71 To the extent that he was widely tipped as Cárdenas's successor, then overlooked in favour of the altogether more dull and predictable Ávila Camacho.
- 72 General Reynaldo Lecona to Genovevo de la O, 12 December 1923; Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City; Obregón-Calles, 101-R-2-A22, f. 42–3.
- 73 Ginzberg, 'State agrarianism versus democratic agrarianism', 343.
- 74 Plasencia, *Personajes y escenarios de la rebelión delahuertista*, 9.
- 75 Ginzberg, 'State agrarianism versus democratic agrarianism', 345.
- 76 Essentially 1917 to 1988. See Ginzberg, 'State agrarianism versus democratic agrarianism' for more details of both Tejeda's land reform experiment and the legal means used to achieve it.
- 77 *El Machete*, various dates 1933–4. Quoted in Mac Gregor Campuzano, 'El Partido Socialista de las Izquierdas'.
- 78 Perhaps it is at this point that we might speak of the divisions of 1923–9 being finally overcome – not through reconciliation, precisely, but in the face of cardenista supremacy.
- 79 To take Lyndon B. Johnson's aphorism a little further: a significant proportion of the Mexican Left struggled with this placement and found itself standing in the tent door pissing on its own feet. See Booth, 'Hegemonic nationalism'.
- 80 Needler, *Mexican Politics*, 15.
- 81 It is tempting to speculate that Greene is largely responsible for the demonisation of Garrido Canabal among English-speaking scholars. In what one suspects is an act of wilful mischief, Greene misspells Garrido's maternal surname as Cannibal. Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, viii.
- 82 Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*, 133.
- 83 Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz*, ch. 2.
- 84 Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz*, 41.
- 85 Quoted in García Morales, *La rebelión delahuertista en Veracruz*, 54.
- 86 See Rodríguez, *Movements after Revolution*, esp. chs. 2–3.

- ⁸⁷ Rodríguez, *Movements after Revolution*, 118.
- ⁸⁸ As Plasencia shows, it was reactionary elements co-opted by the Obregón government that emerged triumphant in Oaxaca. See Plasencia, *Personajes y escenarios de la rebelión delahuertista*, 291.
- ⁸⁹ Enrique Plasencia argues for the salience of another divide, between those who were nervous of the 'use of weapons' – bureaucrats, officials, the middle classes, etc., many of whom aided the rebels – and the regional caudillos and caciques that Obregón was able to press into service. This is a difficult point to sustain across an entire armed rebellion of course, but it is certainly relevant. See Plasencia, *Personajes y escenarios de la rebelión delahuertista*, 291. Buchenau also describes the divide between those who favoured a military leader and those who insisted upon a civilian, highlighting 'Maderista revolutionaries who preferred the civilian de la Huerta over a general whom they regarded as a latecomer to the revolution and mediocre strategist who had won victories over the Villistas due to the help of other Sonorenses'. See Buchenau, *The Sonoran Dynasty*, 170–1. The point is given further weight by Pedro Castro Martínez's biography of Francisco R. Serrano in which a key conflict within the post-rebellion elite emerges over the 1925 attempt to introduce compulsory military service. See Castro Martínez, *A la sombra de un caudillo*.
- ⁹⁰ Benjamin, 'Laboratories of the new state', 74.

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Research ethics statement

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The author is the current editor-in-chief for this journal. All efforts to sufficiently blind the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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