

President Porfirio Diaz: A Major Cause of the Mexican Revolution of 1910

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The Mexican Revolution was the turning point for the country of Mexico. It did not happen in a short span of time but built up during a century. The combination of controversial political methods, leaders, and laws ended up to be the cause of change in governmental structure, but most importantly for the lives of the citizens of Mexico and their economy.

Many events contributed to the cause of the revolution that would change the structure of Mexico. The chance to start a new in 1821 when Mexico declared its independence from Spain brought the country many challenges on the proper way to run independently. Many leaders, a civil war, the Mexican and American War, loss of land such as Texas and southern Arizona, and an extreme recession in the Mexican economy contributed to the need to take action.

The Mexican Revolution was brought on by, among other factors, disagreements between the Mexican citizens over the dictatorship of President Porfirio Diaz. He stayed in power for thirty one years. During those years, power was concentrated in the hands of only a select few groups of people. Otherwise, the citizens of Mexico had no power or way to express their opinions and had no chance to select their public officials. Both rural and urban sectors of Mexico faced inequalities and people did not have the comfort of prosperity.

Porfirio Diaz considered himself a open-minded politician, although he was a dictator. He was a young liberal general and had a great deal of history in the militia, most famous for being a hero in the French Wars. He worked for many years to become the next person in power and failed many times, but finally in 1876 won over the position, not by election but by revolt. He served consecutively except for the years of 1880-84. To avoid ending his term in office again, he amended the constitution by annulling the 'no re-election' amendment that had been placed in the 1857 Constitution to keep him in office.

Diaz's motto was known as the 'bread or the club' meaning that if you became apart of his team he would offer you bread in the form of bribes, public office, land grants, promotions or pensions. If you opposed him, he would offer you the club in the form of assassination, forcing people into exile, and loss of access to public money. For many of the years of Diaz's rule, Mexico's economy was booming and therefore he was considered successful and won the likings wealthy supporters. The positive aspects of Diaz's term were that he maintained a balanced budget and developed a flexible and powerful tax system to finance development.

The large group of people considered to be receiving 'the club' from Diaz lived in a poverty-filled environment. In 1910, the population of Mexico was 15,160,269. Of those, 410,345 were farmers but only 830 of them had the privilege to own land. Many people beyond the occupation of farming depended on rural wages. Mexico had 3,123,975 day labors that worked on 8,431 haciendas and 48,433 ranches. Therefore, 80% of the population relied on rural wages which were on average 18 to 25 cents per day. The few people that helped Diaz and gained his trust were allotted land, therefore enabling them to become extremely wealthy in comparison to the majority of citizens in the country.

Towards to the end of Diaz's time in power, he granted an interview with *Pearson's Magazine*, a popular US publication, and stated that he thought Mexico was now ready for democracy and he hoped to have serious opponents if he ran for the presidency in the 1910 election. He may have thought that few Mexicans would ever read the article or he might

have been trying to encourage his rivals to declare their political intentions. The interview directly encouraged potential candidates to announce their presidential candidacies. Diaz could handle those in his support group, such as his finance minister, José Limantour, and General Bernardo Reyes, governor of the northern state of Nuevo Leon by sending them off on foreign missions. However, he ran into trouble, when men caught wind of the interview that were not on his side.

One of the men that became interested by the article was Francisco Madero. Madero was the son of one of Mexico's wealthiest families. He was admired and studied political democracy in France and in the United States and felt very strongly that it was the best move for the government of Mexico. Madero made a bold move by running against Diaz in Mexico's first free election in 1910 but lost later to find that Diaz rigged it. Madero was thrown in jail on a technicality because he had angered Diaz. When being released from jail, Madero fled to the United States where he started his plan to begin a revolution and declared himself the legitimate president.

Madero had many political visions for Mexico. He promised to return all land which had been taken away from the peasants and he called for common voting rights and for a limit of one term for the office of president. Madero's call for an uprising on November 20, 1910, marked the beginning of the Mexican Revolution.

At this time, Diaz was 80 years old and was losing his touch politically. The joining of the peasants, workers, nationalists, anticlericals, and democrats fueled a fire to fight back and get what they deserved. In late 1910 and early 1911, various men such as Emiliano Zapata, Pascual Orozco and Pancho Villa raised the standard of revolt. Mexico's army was not up to par to deal with the rebellions that were now occurring frequently across the nation. Diaz tried to negotiate with the Madero family, promising reform to stay in office, but it was downhill for him from there. Diaz resigned on May 25, 1911 which ended Latin America's longest dictatorship. He is known as one of the great villains of Mexican history.

With the collapse of the Diaz regime, the Mexican Congress called for national popular elections. Victory was awarded to Francisco Madero from the constitutionalists' party as President and Jose Maria Pino Suarez as Vice-President. Madero was thought to be entering the perfect presidency, especially with his prestigious background and he was infamous as the man who defeated the Diaz dictatorship. This was not the case entirely though, many people believed that Madero was not fulfilling the many promises that he has made prior to his election. It had been said that Madero entered an era that was used to the iron fist of dictatorship and did not know how to adjust to or use the concept of liberty. Madero's loss of rebel support and his reliance on the federal army made him vulnerable to counterrevolutionaries.

Early in 1911, Madero appointed his cabinet and his regime was installed. In the little time that the Madero government was in place, people started to look upon him unfavorably. Zapata, one of the men that helped him overturn the rule of Diaz, did not trust him and he refused to recognize Madero as president and declared the Plan of Ayala. This plan proclaimed Francisco Madero a traitor and ordered a third of all hacienda lands to be redistributed to the peasants. General Bernardo Reyes agreed with Zapata and moved to San Antonio where he proceeded to make plans to overthrow the current government. He was quite popular and had many resources on his side but his plan was recognized by Madero and quickly shut down.

Similar situations arose with Pascual Orozco in the north. Many comparable situations were

in store for Madero. One of Madero's strongest military men was General Victoriano Huerta. In the uprising Huerta did many great things that essentially saved the Mexican Government. Upon return to Mexico City, Huerta was not promoted which was an enormous mistake on Madero's part. General Huerta developed a hate and mistrust for Madero. While the commander of federal forces for Mexico, Huerta overthrew President Madero and began his own dictatorship. During his time in power, he was known as one of the most "ruthless and corrupt leaders Mexico had ever seen."

The Governor of Coahuila, Venustiano Carranza, rose up in arms because he did not recognize Huerta as the nation's president. His army was known as the constitutionalists because it demanded respect for the constitution and this marked the start of a new phase of the Revolution. Many men and women joined the war efforts and prepared for the battles ahead. Leaders such as Alvaro Obregon, Francisco Villa, and Emilio Zapata were among the elite. Huerta was under the impression that he would easily receive help from the United States of America but was rejected by President Woodrow Wilson who instead sent troops to occupy Veracruz. This upset Carranza because he felt that Mexico's problems should be solved solely by Mexicans.

Many individual battles were fought and the Constitutionalists were gaining ground and rather quickly. The continuous revolts forced Huerta to resign and he went into hiding but was captured and imprisoned for several years. Huerta left the country in 1914 and Carranza entered Mexico City but unfortunately not all of the revolutionaries agreed that he should become the supreme leader, as he was calling himself.

This was the cause for a meeting to be held in Aguascalientes in October of 1914 at the Sovereign Revolutionary Convention with intentions to reach an agreement. Zapata created a program concerning the distribution of land to the peasants and the representatives chose Eulalió Gutierrez as interim President of the Republic. Carranza was not in agreement even though the majority of others were. This turned the Revolution into a struggle between two opposing groups which were divided into the forces of Carranza against those of Villa and Zapata. Villa and Zapata were favored to win due to the fact that they occupied most of the land in Mexico and had the capital in their possession. However, Carranza's leading General, Alvaro Obregon, retreated to Veracruz and defeated Villa at Celaya in April of 1915. At this point, the United States recognized the Carranza government.

The next step to Carranza's government was to politically consolidate with legality mandatory which included writing a new constitution and holding elections. At the convention to draft a new constitution, Carranza presented delegates with a draft for a new constitution. He recommended political, electoral, and judicial reforms but reiterated many of the basic principles embodied in the first constitution written in 1857, for example, separation of the church and the state. Important issues he failed to address included agrarian and labor reform. The convention convened on September 14, 1916, however there was not a clear resolution among the members present. This sprouted, once again, serious political and philosophical differences.

Those were the first of many steps that he took throughout his years in power from 1916 to 1920. Carranza made a series of policy decisions, but few were in compliance with the new constitution. He set new limitations upon foreign ownership of property, the elimination of special concessions granted to firms overseas and an increase in business taxes. However, Carranza, although he considered himself a liberal, opposed a widespread agrarian reform and did not manage organized labor well. These departures from the revolutionary beliefs, as outline in the new constitution, created opportunities for Carranza's rivals within the

Constitutionalist leadership. Ultimately, Carranza promised the citizens and country of Mexico more than he could actually do and this was not viewed favorably among his citizens.

One man that had lain dormant for some time was still causing trouble for Carranza. Although Zapata had been in hiding for quite sometime, he still wanted to get his revenge. After the constitutional meeting, General Obregon resigned from Carranza's cabinet and was persuaded to join forces with Zapata. In September 1917, Carranza responded to Zapata's new movement by reinforcing his statement to remain true to the Plan de Ayala. It was rumored that Carranza wanted Zapata dead because the peasant leader represented a "moral challenge" to his authority. With this in mind, Carranza arranged for an old acquaintance of his, Colonel Jesus Guajardo, to assassinate Zapata which was carried out in 1920. This, however, did not solve Carranza's problems because it is said to have immortalized Zapata in Mexican history for his beliefs on agrarian reform, which would remind others of the sacrifices that their forefathers had made to rebel in the first place.

In the final year of Carranza's time in power he made some key mistakes. The entire revolution had let loose a great number of injustices for workers and peasants. The new constitution was to be one of opportunity and equality for everyone and people were not seeing the results that they had expected. Carranza had first said that the president should rule for only one term, but he had yet to give up his title giving the people a fear that he could potentially start a new dictatorship.

Over the years, General Obregon's presidential ambitions were growing stronger. His ties and history to the Carranza government were described as 'strained'. In the few years since his involvement he gained international exposure by traveling to Cuba, Canada and the United States. He was known as the nation's most famous war hero and that was working in his favor. June 1, 1919 Obregon announced his candidacy for president. To run against him, Carranza picked Ignacio Bonillas as his candidate. In the election, Obregon had a tremendous amount of political support and was victorious. Obregon became president of Mexico in 1920 although Carranza was determined not to accept it. Carranza formed the Obregonistas and gathered what supporters he had left. He established a base camp and attempted to organize a national campaign, repeating similar actions that he had originally taken in 1915. This time did not work for him however. Carranza became a wanted man and he fled to the hills by Tlaxcalantongo. That evening while he slept, President Carranza, the first chief of the Constitutionalist movement, was assassinated by forces loyal to Felix Diaz, nephew of Porfirio Diaz, which marked the end of the Mexican Revolution and the beginning of the restructuring of Mexico.

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