

The bluffers guide to Mexican History.

Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821 after a dozen years of rebellion. The country was soon established as a federation of states with an elective president. Pretty well every presidency in the next 50 years ended in revolt or foreign invasion. The presidents were successful revolutionary generals, or less successful ones in the case of Santa Ana who nevertheless was president 4 times over 25 years.

The cause of the rebellion was mostly conflict between liberals & conservatives or of presidents trying to hang on to their position for too long. The liberal middle classes achieved quite a lot in Mexico including suppressing the church & trying to establish an educated middle class but the country is still backwards & badly educated. They did not really encourage the masses of the peasantry and in fact made one change they intended to benefit them that turned out very poorly – transferring land into individual ownership.



The pattern of revolutions ended in 1875 when Porfirio Díaz, *left*, became president. Of course he had to fight a brief revolution against his predecessor to do so. Díaz ruled the country with an iron hand placing his men in the top, supposedly elective, positions & vigorously suppressing revolts. He maintained an aura of personal honesty while his appointees were corrupt & incompetent.

He attempted to modernise the country by encouraging foreign investment at very favourable terms. There is in 1913 a great deal of industry in the country and a substantial rail network to support it. Unfortunately the industry is largely primary, agriculture or the extraction of oil & minerals. Most of it is owned by foreigners, Díaz has turned Mexico into a colony without the need for foreign intervention.

Díaz stood on a policy of “no re-election” but from 1875 to 1910 he was re-elected 6 times and the only gap in his presidency was when a lackey was in charge from 1880-84. This lackey was so corrupt that the constitution was amended to allow Díaz return. The rich gained during the Díaz years but the poor did not, particularly the increasing number of peons. These arose due to the land reforms mentioned before - Communal Village land had been distributed to the individual farmers. This allowed them to sell it which many did at terrible undervalue. Those that did not were often driven off by illegal means – denying access to water for example. The former village communities became Peons on haciendas.

The Peons were bound to work on the increasingly huge haciendas because of the debts they incurred to the owners. As they were paid in scrip only redeemable in company shops & their debt was inherited these peons were virtually slaves or feudal serfs at best. The debts arose from borrowing for church services for example. This issue, the concentration of land

ownership into very few hands and the destitution of huge numbers of others, is the main concern of the majority of people in the country.

In 1910 there was an election due when Diaz would be 80 years old. He implied in an interview that he would be stepping down. He was taken up on this by one Francisco Madero, a middle son of a wealthy family who wrote a book "The Presidential Succession of 1910" considering what should be done after Diaz. While this gained popular approval & made him a celebrity, it also drew Diaz attention & Madero fled to the USA.



It appeared Diaz was not going to leave office so Madero issued the "Plan San Luis Potosi" named after the Mexican city where he supposedly wrote it. In fact he wrote it in the US, but this violated US neutrality laws. This plan called for the people to rise in support of "effective suffrage" on 20 November 1910. Very little happened on that date – a few revolutionaries in Puebla were martyred. However over the next few weeks massive popular support for the revolution became obvious & the border town of Juarez (NC) was seized by rebels. Diaz fled the country & the government surrendered.



Madero, *left*, was elected president in 1911 but was nowhere near up to the task. Revolts of all flavours broke out or continued. Zapata had been in revolt in Morelos since 1909 following his "Plan Ayala" in favour of land reforms & saw nothing better from the new government. Felix Diaz the dictator's nephew lead a reactionary revolt. Bernado Reyes a general who had been seen as a possible replacement for Diaz also revolted.

These two ended up sharing a Mexico City jail, under a stronger leader they would have been shot. Pascual Orozco who had captured Juarez for Madero now revolted against him as he felt insulted by the role given to him in the new regime. This revolt unlike the others had large scale support especially in the North of the country. To deal with these threats

Madero had to call upon the army that he had recently fought against & its best general the "old indian fighter" Adolfo Huerta.

This proved a tragic mistake as in February 1913 Reyes & F Diaz launched a revolt from their jail cells in Mexico City. The revolt went badly at first, especially for Reyes who was killed and got holed up in a city armoury. Madero asked Huerta to put it down. Huerta opened negotiations with the rebels, or probably continued them as he was implicated in the revolt in the first place. He also sent several loyal Maderista regiments on suicidal assaults against the Armoury, while rebels & "loyalists" alike performed "terror" bombardments on the city.

After “10 tragic days” the general persuaded Madero that his time was up (with support in this from the US ambassador Henry Lane Wilson). Madero appointed Huerta interior minister, 3rd in line of succession & resigned together with his vice president leaving Huerta in charge. Huerta quickly made peace with the rebels & Madero was murdered.

Huerta, *right*, asked for recognition of his position from the state governors & from foreign powers. All major powers except the USA where the idealist Democrat Woodrow Wilson had just taken office recognised his government. All his state governors recognised his office except those of 3 Northern states Sonora, Chihuahua & Coahuila.



These governors were summoned to the capital. Maytorena of Sonora fled to the USA, Gonzalez of Chihuahua answered the summons & was murdered en route. Venustiano Carranza of Coahuila issued the “Plan Guadalupe” declaring revolution with him as First Chief & calling for all to join him fight against the usurper.