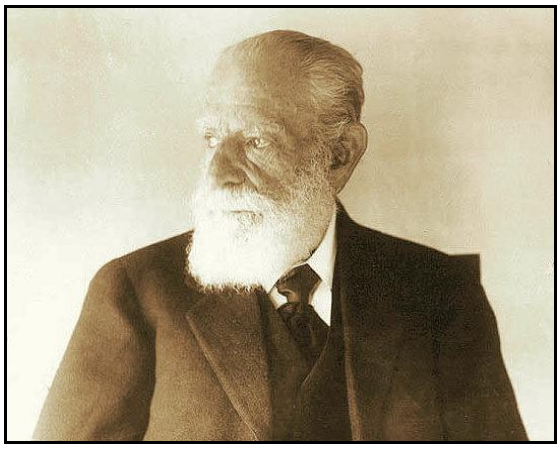

"The Mexican Revolution"

Luis Terrazas

In Northern Mexico, a savage war to the death between the federal Mexican government and the Yacqui and the Apache been going on for a generation. Luis Terrazas had become one of the richest men in Mexico, relying on his power as governor to seize abandoned haciendas for himself and his effectiveness in raising militias to ensure security, which attracted laborers for his estates. However, opposition to Diaz early in the dictator's career meant that he would not become a governor again until 1903, by which time he had become the wealthiest man in Mexico. The increase in wealth had been due to two events in 1885: the capture of Apache chief Geronimo by the American army and the completion of a railway link between Chihuahua and the rest of Mexico.

Terrazas became so powerful that Diaz saw him as a threat but Terrazas had manipulated existing tensions in the state, letting angry villagers believe that he supported the Tomochi Revolt (1891-95), which discredited Governor Carillo by showing that he could not maintain stability in the state. Villagers had taken up arms because outsiders from the state, including Jose-Yves Limantour, a key member of Diaz's cabinet, had gained a large federal grant of public land that was occupied by the military villagers, and then proceeded to evict the villagers from their land. Experienced Indian-fighters, operating on their home ground, they had easily beaten federal forces until the village of Tomochi was finally crushed by overwhelming force. Despite the defeat, the example of Tomochi would inspire later revolts.

Terraza's withdrawal of support ensured that the revolt did not spread, and Diaz realized that it would be easier to co-opt regional strongmen like Terrazas, so Luis Terrazas was permitted to become governor in 1903. Villagers thought that Terrazas was still their patron and would protect them. They were wrong. Since the Apache were no longer a serious threat, the family did not need the help of the villages' militias. As governor, Luis Terrazas was able to take away the villages' traditional land rights while bringing in foreign investment to fund the construction of railways and mines. Strikes were forbidden and the tame press was not permitted to criticize his actions.

Terrazas wanted control but he also wanted to also maintain his image as a man sympathetic to the people, so he granted enough of the villagers' petitions to preserve his image,

while strengthening his hold on the state by removing rivals. Once control had been ensured, he resigned on the grounds of old age and allowed his son-in-law Enrique Creel to succeed him as governor in 1904. Happy to rule with an iron hand, Creel thought that his actions would benefit Mexico. Like many key decision-makers in Mexico, he believed that progress depended on the introduction of technology and economy of scale in production, while eliminating wasteful inefficiency, in particular the overly generous grazing and water rights that had been granted to the villagers. Admittedly, some people in the state profited from the new economic opportunities that came with the railway, but the majority did not, and opposition grew. Letters of petition to the governor were ignored or answered with advice to seek justice in the courts. Expensive lawyers were hired but the courts were corrupt, and the villagers' appeals were rejected. Denied legal recourse, large numbers of tough, violent men all over the state were given two options: capitulate or start killing. Since the oligarchy in the state remained united, the villagers knew that revolt was futile, but a deep undercurrent of resentment bubbled in the region.

The economic depression of 1908 hit all of Mexico, but Chihuahua was struck especially hard, since the northern states were connected closely to the United States. Huge layoffs in mines and lumberyards threw thousands out of work, but the family farms that would have gotten them through the crisis had been taken away by the Terrazas-Creel faction. With so many people out of work, small-scale merchants went out of business, which broadened the social range of people dissatisfied with the government. The problem still remained regional and was unlikely to have exploded into a full-scale revolt but Madero's campaign against Diaz created a national crisis.

Courtesy of Michael A. Vasquez

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