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Reclaiming Revolution in Light of the "Mexican Miracle": *Celestino Gasca and the Federacionistas Leales Insurrection of 1961*

"If they want me to give my life in order to get their attention, I'll give it to them."[1]

In the hours before dawn on September 15, 1961, various groups of men armed with machetes, pistols and rifles attempted to take over military posts, police stations and municipal offices throughout Mexico, proclaiming "justice for the poor." The uprising of the so-called *Federacionistas Leales* was part of a strategy coordinated by an old revolutionary general, Celestino Gasca Villaseñor, who planned to take power in order to carry out a new agrarian program to benefit the campesinos of Mexico.

The Federacionista movement was founded at the end of 1958 when Celestino Gasca broke with General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán. The latter had kept alive the hope of insurrection in order to defend his alleged victory in the presidential election of 1952.[2] During the first half of the 1950s, many Henriquistas remained in high alert awaiting the order, which never came, to initiate the uprising. In an open and clear reclaiming of the armed mobilization that ushered in the revolution of 1910, the Henriquistas maintained their struggle around three fundamental demands: in the first place, ascension to power by General Henríquez and his supporters at the local level, as this was the only way to guarantee that the other demands be fulfilled; second, the redistribution of land, legalization of titles,

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1. Ramiro Guillén Tapia, rural schoolteacher and leader of the regional committee, "In Defense of Human Rights" in southern Veracruz. He self-immolated on September 30, 2008 in front of the Government Office Building in Xalapa upon the refusal by the authorities to resolve the conflicting agrarian claims in his town. Before his death, he had 107 appointments cancelled.

2. Regarding this election, see Elisa Servín, *Ruptura y Oposición: El movimiento henriquista, 1945-1954* (Mexico City: Ediciones Cal y Arena, 2001).

access to credit, water, and markets not controlled by the state[3]; and third, acknowledgement of military ranks for those who participated in the Henriquista movement—many of them veterans of the revolution who in some cases had been demanding official recognition as members of the Mexican Army for decades. In November 1958, after six years of waiting to start the uprising, Gasca announced his decision to break with Henríquez and called for the formation of the Federacionistas Leales. Gasca drew up a new agrarian program, and during the next two years took charge of reorganizing the forces that would carry out the insurrection.

Plans for the uprising took place in the context of a new wave of agrarian movements spearheaded by land occupations that took place between 1958 and 1959 under the leadership of Jacinto López and the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM) in the northern part of the country, and under the command of Rubén Jaramillo on the plains of Michapa and El Guarín in the western part of Morelos.[4] The Federacionistas were also contemporary with the struggle led by schoolteacher Genaro Vázquez Rojas and the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense, as well as the teachers, railway, and telegraph workers movements at the end of the 1950s.[5] The insurrection of the Federacionistas Leales was thus part of a widespread expression of discontent in response to the government's neglect of campesinos and workers, and its repression of opposition social movements. It also reflected a lack of faith among many sectors of society in electoral politics as a viable option for change.

The insurrection of the Federacionistas Leales also took place in the context of the Cuban revolution, the regrouping of the left in Mexico within the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN), and that organization's confrontations with the anti-communist right. The participation of right-wing Sinarquistas and ex-Cristeros in the Federacionista uprising, in an odd alliance with old revolutionaries, *agraristas,* and workers, provoked therefore mutual accusations of exacerbating and manipulating the desperate situation of the campesinos for political gain and power.[6]

3. State regulations designed to lower food prices in the cities established price controls on corn, beans, and other basic food products, controls that remained in place throughout the 1950s. Peasants complained of regulations that forced them to sell their products to the government at artificially low prices. See Hugo Azpeitia Gómez, *Compañía Exportadora e Importadora Mexicana, S. A. (1949-1958): Conflicto y abasto alimentario* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1994).

4. Regarding the occupation of land in northern Mexico, see Hubert C. de Grammont, "La Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México," in Julio Moguel, ed., *Historia de la cuestión agraria mexicana, vol. 8: Política estatal y conflictos agrarios, 1950-1970* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores/CEHAM, 1989). Regarding the conflict in Morelos, see Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), Chapter 7; Tanalís Padilla, "From Agraristas to Guerrilleros: The Jaramillista Movement in Morelos," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87:2 (May 2007), pp. 255-292.

5. Regarding the movement in Guerrero, see Salvador Román Román, *Revuelta cívica en Guerrero (1957-1960): La democracia imposible* (Mexico City: INEHRM, 2003); and Armando Bartra, *Guerrero Bronco: Campesinos, ciudadanos y guerrilleros en la Costa Grande* (Mexico City: Ediciones Sinfiltro, 1996). For a review of these movements, see *Política* 1:1 (May 1, 1960), and Ilán Semo, "El ocaso de los mitos 1958-1968," in Enrique Semo, ed., *México: Un pueblo en la historia*, vol. 6 (Mexico City: Alianza Editorial Mexicana, 1989), pp. 13-146.

6. See the September and October 1961 issues of the magazine *Política.*

Ideological disputes aside, the Federacionistas Leales, with their legitimacy rooted in the Mexican revolution of 1910 and their persistence in pursuing armed struggle, revealed the high degree of rural discontent during a period in which a strategy of industrialization prioritized urban development goals at the expense of the peasantry. The Federacionistas also demonstrated the continuity of the old ways of doing politics and the vitality of a concept of revolution based on local armed mobilization, which survived the postwar industrial modernization of urban Mexico—the institutionalized Mexico of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The insurrection of the Federacionistas renewed the armed reclaiming of the revolution of 1910 at a time when the Cuban revolution had a growing influence on agrarian movements throughout Latin America. In the following years, Mexican rural guerrillas, without abandoning their agrarista claims, made their demands and found their source of legitimacy in the context of the socialist revolution.

Discussion of the Federacionistas Leales is practically nonexistent in the historiography of the campesino movement after the Second World War, and in the postrevolutionary history of Mexico in general.[7] The initial historical interpretation of this period assumed notions of progress and modernization, and the institutionalization and hegemony of the PRI. This explains the almost idyllic image of economic development, industrial growth, political stability and consolidation of civilian authority, the so-called "Mexican Miracle" that until recently predominated the historiography.[8] This interpretation, however, ignores the importance of a militant campesino movement whose participants refused to serve as a mere lever for industrial development, and which resorted to violence on the local level on more than one occasion.[9] From the mid-1940s through the 1960s, the agrarian movement spread throughout the country and took on diverse forms, from

7. There are very few works published on the subject, see Martha Terán, "El levantamiento de los campesinos gasquistas," *Cuadernos Agrarios* 10-11 (December 1980), pp. 115-138; Elisa Servín, "Hacia el levantamiento armado: Del henriquismo a los Federacionistas Leales en los años cincuenta," in Verónica Oikión Solano and Martha Eugenia García Ugarte, eds., *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX,* vol.1 (Mexico City: El Colegio de Michoacán-CIESAS, 2006), pp. 307-332; and José Luis Blanco R., "El levantamiento gasquista en Chumatlán (1961)," in Agustín Ávila Méndez and Jesús Ruvalcaba Mercado, eds., *Cuextecapan: Lugar de bastimentos* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1991), pp. 151-162.

8. For a historiographical review, see Arthur Schmidt, "Making It Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940," in Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, eds., *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 23-68.

9. The exception is the Jaramillista movement which has been the object of a copious historiography, for example, Padilla, *Rural Resistance*; Marco Bellingeri, *Del agrarismo armado a la guerra de los pobres: Ensayos de guerrilla rural en el México contemporáneo, 1940-1974* (Mexico City: Ediciones Casa Juan Pablos-Secretaría de Cultura de la Ciudad de México, 2003), pp. 17-68; Aura Hernández Hernández, *La muerte de Rubén Jaramillo y la paranoia anticomunista del régimen de López Mateos 1960-1963* (Masters Thesis, Cuernavaca: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, 2001); Plutarco García Jiménez, "El movimiento jaramillista: Una experiencia de lucha campesina y popular del período post-revolucionario en México," in Horacio Crespo, ed., *Morelos: Cinco siglos de historia regional* (Cuernavaca: Centro de Estudios Históricos del Agrarismo en México/Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, 1984); Hubert C. de Grammont, "Jaramillo y las luchas campesinas de Morelos," in Julio Moguel, ed., *Historia de la Cuestión*, to mention a few.

participation in electoral politics to the occupation of land and attempted armed uprisings on the municipal and regional levels.[10]

These earlier historical interpretations of post-1940 Mexico began to be questioned by a more recent historiography in which the presumed hegemony of the political regime is viewed through the analytical lenses of resistance, dispute and negotiation. It has become increasingly apparent that postwar development was an uneven process, marked by regional forces with different interests, demands and rhythms.[11] The new historiography has recognized the strength and autonomy of local and regional enclaves within the seemingly homogenous processes of urbanization, industrialization and increasingly centralized politics.[12] Against the advance of political institutionalization, the persistence of violence is now studied as a recurrent means of opposing authoritarianism.[13]

Based on an analysis of the period beginning with the development of the Henriquista movement during the presidential election of 1952 and culminating in the insurrection of the Federacionistas Leales in 1961, this essay seeks to contribute to the new historiography, emphasizing the combative resistance of large groups of campesinos in various parts of the country during a period of accelerated urbanization and industrialization. In addition, this essay analyzes the per-

10. The historiography of the campesino movement in the period after Cárdenas has focused on the mobilizations of the 1970s, and has been the work more of anthropologists and sociologists than of historians. For a more comprehensive perspective see Armando Bartra, *Los herederos de Zapata: Movimientos campesinos posrevolucionarios en México* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1985); Julio Moguel, "La cuestión agraria en el periodo 1950-1970," in Moguel, ed., *Historia de la cuestión,* pp. 103-221; Francisco A. Gómez-Jara, *El movimiento campesino en México* (Mexico City: Editorial Campesina, 1970). In recent years, historians have begun to fill the breach, for example, Padilla, *Rural Resistance*; Samuel Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata: Myth, Memory, and Mexico's Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); Frans J. Schryer, *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Thomas Rath, "'Que el cielo un soldado en cada hijo te dio': Conscription, Recalcitrance and Resistance in Mexico in the 1940s," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37:3 (2005), pp. 507-531, among others.

11. For a historiographic review see Jeffrey W. Rubin, "Decentering the Regime: Culture and Regional Politics in Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 31:3 (1996), pp. 85-126. Some examples of the new historiography of this period include Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics and Corruption* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999), and Stephen R. Niblo, *War, Diplomacy and Development: The United States and Mexico 1938-1954* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1995); Servín, *Ruptura*; Padilla, *Rural Resistance.*

12. In addition to the extensive historiography on Morelos and Chiapas, inspired by the EZLN uprising in 1994, there are a number of important regional studies. For example, Verónica Oikión Solano, *Los hombres del poder en Michoacán, 1924-1962* (Michoacán: El Colegio de Michoacán/Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2004); Daniel Newcomer, *Reconciling Modernity: Urban State Formation in 1940s León, Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Jeffrey W. Rubin, *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Wil Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987* (Amsterdam: Center for Latin American Research and Documentation, 1990).

13. The historiography of armed movements in the second half of the twentieth century has been developed considerably. For example, Oikión and García Ugarte, *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX,* vol. 1; Bellingeri, *Del agrarismo armado;* Fritz Glockner, *Memoria roja: Historia de la guerrilla en México,* 1943-1968 (Mexico City: Ediciones B., 2007); Laura Castellanos, *México Armado 1943-1981* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 2007); Enrique Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México (1959-1985),* (Mexico City: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla/Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2007).

sistence of armed struggle, operating primarily on a local level, as a means of giving voice to political and social demands when electoral and legal channels of peaceful dissent were exhausted.

HENRIQUISTA AGRARIANISM

Starting in the 1940s, the political and economic elites of Mexico gave high priority to industrial modernization and development, which meant a redefinition of agrarian property relations and of agricultural production policies.[14] In contrast to the agrarian reform of President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1936-1938, which favored land redistribution and the *ejido* as the primary means of rural production and development, subsequent administrations put greater emphasis upon increasing agricultural productivity, the legalization of land tenure, and support for commercial private property and agrobusiness. Most significantly, the importance of the ejido as a basic means of production was diminished.[15]

Central to this redirection of development policies was the reform of Article 27 of the Constitution, which passed in Congress during the early days of the Miguel Alemán administration (1946-1952). This reform established new definitions regarding the size of small properties and authorized the agrarian *amparo* (legal stay) with which private property owners could defend themselves from expropriation based on public interest.[16] The reform very bluntly signaled the government's intention to protect the interests of landowners and cattle ranchers, as well as to support the expansion of small and medium-sized private properties and provide incentives for those who invested in a certain type of agricultural production.[17]

Throughout the Alemán administration, promotion of large-scale irrigation and infrastructure projects favored the expansion of commercial and industrial agriculture, especially those enterprises dedicated to export crops. The ejido, on the other hand, suffered severely from dispossession of land by neighboring private property owners, in addition to lack of credit, water, and access to nonstate-controlled markets, all of which contributed to the decline of its productive potential.

14. Sergio de la Peña and Marcel Morales Ibarra, "El agrarismo y la industrialización de México 1940-1950," in Sergio de la Peña, ed., *Historia de la cuestión agraria mexicana, vol. 6: El agrarismo y la industrialización de México 1940-1950* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores/CEHAM, 1989), pp. 3-250.

15. Cárdenas himself had to decelerate the distribution of land and the formation of individual and collective ejidos during the last part of his term because of increasing rejection of the immediate effects of his agrarian reform.

16. The reform in section XIV stipulated that the owners of land used for agriculture or cattle raising with certificates of exemption could utilize the *amparo* to prevent deprivation of or impact upon their land or water. Tzvi Medin, *El sexenio alemanista* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1990), p. 125.

17. The reform of Section XV defined small property as a spread of 100 hectares of irrigated land or its equivalent, depending upon the type of crop—150 hectares planted with cotton, and 300 hectares for fields to be used for the growing of bananas, sugar cane, coffee, henequen, rubber, coconut, grapevines, olives, quinine, vanilla, cocoa or fruit trees. Gerrit Huizer, *La lucha campesina en México* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones Agrarias, 1970), p. 83.

Furthermore, the authoritarian weight of the PRI's policies favoring peasant corporativism, as represented by the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC), coupled with the corrupt bureaucracy of its agricultural agencies, all enabled the government to control and mediate campesino combativeness, which had previously been pacified by the Cardenista redistribution of land.

Nonetheless, many expressions of peasant dissatisfaction appeared at the local and regional levels as early as the administration of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946). The demand for land was increasingly combined with demands for credit, water, and access to markets by those who already had land but lacked governmental support for production. In the northern part of the country, cotton growers, sugar producers and sugar refinery workers mobilized for higher wages and better prices for sugar cane and cotton.[18] In Morelos, Rubén Jaramillo organized the famous strike at the sugar refinery of Zacatepec, which ended up forcing him underground in 1943.[19] On the other hand, the right-wing Sinarquista movement, which had reactivated former Cristero bases at the end of the 1930s, was strengthened by antigovernment sentiment and popular resistance against the Alemán administration's campaign to control outbreaks of hoof-and-mouth disease in the Bajío region, a campaign that used the "sanitizing rifle" to slaughter cattle.[20]

Resistance to the counter-reform of the Alemán administration was consolidated with the creation of the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM) in June, 1949 after Vicente Lombardo Toledano separated from the ranks of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) and the PRI. The UGOCM, which was initially composed of worker and campesino groups opposed to the PRI's corporativism, soon began to suffer attacks from official unions. It was further weakened by the defection of contingents of workers who had originally constituted its base and who left when the UGOCM was denied official recognition by the Ministry of Labor. In spite of this, the UGOCM managed to establish itself as the only campesino organization independent of the CNC, and it endured the attacks of various administrations without breaking up.[21]

As the presidential election of 1952 approached, discontent in the agrarian sector found another channel of expression, this time in the Unión de Federaciones

18. de la Peña and Morales Ibarra, "El agrarismo," pp. 229-232; Luis Medina, "Del cardenismo al avilacamachismo," in *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana 1940-1952*, vol. 18 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1978), pp. 277-278.

19. Rubén Jaramillo and Froylán Manjarrez, *Rubén Jaramillo: Autobiografía y asesinato* (Mexico City: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1967); Renato Ravelo, *Los jaramillistas* (Mexico City: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1978).

20. Blanca Torres, "Hacia la utopía industrial," *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana 1940-1952*, vol. 21 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1984), pp. 252-269; Pablo Serrano Álvarez, *La batalla del espíritu: El movimiento sinarquista en el Bajío (1932-1951)* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992), pp. 280-291. Another source of discontent was the implementation of mandatory military service. See Rath, "Que el cielo un soldado."

21. Grammont, "La Unión"; also see Bartra, *Los herederos de Zapata,* pp. 68-69.

Campesinas de México (UFCM). The founding of the UFCM dated to November 1950, when organizers published in the press a "Manifesto to the Workers in the Countryside," calling for the creation of a new campesino organization. It would be comprised of state federations, made up of militants of the organizations who signed the "Manifesto," and *ejidatarios*, small-property owners and sharecroppers who wanted to join. The organizers had long careers as agrarian activists, and the document called attention to the discontent that the counterreform had generated in the Mexican countryside.[22]

The UFCM grew out of an electoral strategy designed to promote the presidential candidacy of General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán. It was destined to become the agrarian arm of the Federación de Partidos del Pueblo Mexicano (FPPM), the electoral springboard for Henríquez Guzmán, around whom diverse groups articulated their social and political interests. The FPPM also included a large number of Cardenista politicians unhappy with the exclusion to which they had been subjected during the Alemán administration.[23] From early on, Celestino Gasca supported the Henriquista movement. True to his background as a leader of the Casa del Obrero Mundial and afterwards in the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), Gasca concentrated on organizing and directing the Frente Político Nacional de Trabajadores, the workers' arm of the FPPM during the presidential campaign.[24]

In the manifesto, organizers of the UFCM sought to reclaim the social role of the ejidatarios, small farmers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers declaring, "upon them rests the economic development of the Nation." Due to agrarian reform, the organizers stated, regions that previously had been economically depressed and backward were now scenes of agricultural and industrial development. However, the manifest continued, after the Cárdenas administration ended, agrarian issues

22. Signers of the Manifesto were: engineer César Martino, for the Comité Nacional Organizador de la Unión de Federaciones Campesinas; attorney Luis Ramírez de Arellano, engineer Augusto Hinojosa and Enrique Sánchez Perea for the Liga Central de Comunidades Agrarias de la República; Adalberto Cortés, Félix Ramos Hernández, and Adalberto Ramírez López for the Liga Nacional Campesina "Úrsulo Galván"; and Cuauhtémoc Ríos M., Marcos Sánchez and Nicolás Cabrera for the Comité Reivindicador de los Derechos Campesinos. *La Prensa* (November 24), 1950. See also *Problemas Agrícolas e Industriales de México* 4:4 (October-December 1952).

23. Participants in the Henriquista movement included Graciano Sánchez, Wenceslao Labra and César Martino, founders of the CNC in 1938, as well as Raúl Castellano, Agustín Leñero, Ernesto Soto Reyes, Francisco J. Múgica, José Muñoz Cota and Luis Chávez Orozco, among many others. Trinidad J. García, founder of the CNC, was active in the UFCM, as well as the engineers Alonso Garrido Canabal and Salvador Solórzano, brother-in-law of ex-president Cárdenas. Servín, *Ruptura,* pp. 134-158.

24. Celestino Gasca was born on May 19, 1890 in Abasolo, Guanajuato, and from a very young age, he was active in radical workers' groups as a shoemaker. He was a militant in the ranks of la Casa del Obrero Mundial, was part of the Batallones Rojos (Red Brigades), and later was a member of the Grupo Acción of the CROM. He was governor of the Distrito Federal from 1920 to 1923, and in 1927 he sought the governorship of Guanajuato. He was a diputado for that state between 1937 and 1940 and senator between 1940 and 1946. In 1943 he ran for Secretary General of the CTM but was defeated by Fidel Velásquez's group. *Datos Biográficos del General Celestino Gasca Villaseñor (1890-1981)*, manuscript provided by Ing. Manuel González Gallardo.

had been set aside, and the countryside was being utilized as a base on which Mexican industry was being built, to the detriment of the campesinos and their needs.

Although it did not mention the reform of Article 27, the document enumerated various criticisms of the agrarian policy of the Alemán government and the conduct of the CNC. Among such criticisms were that lack of support for workers in the fields had forced many to migrate to the cities and undersell their labor, or emigrate to the United States as *braceros*, where they suffered discrimination and humiliation. Moreover, campesinos had to sell their products to the government at low prices, and the absence of available credit forced many to borrow money from usurers or at usurious rates. The redistribution of irrigated lands had benefited "*los influyentes*" and not actual campesinos, who suffered from lack of support from the CNC, an organization "more concerned about organizing regional folk costume contests while in the countryside workers lack the most indispensable necessities."[25]

The manifesto proposed an alternative program that sought to respond to the primary demands of campesinos. This program included a continuation of land distribution, which necessitated the carrying out of pending presidential resolutions and the facilitation of application paperwork; the implementation of irrigation projects, giving preference to campesinos who had secured rights to their land, thus impeding the formation of new latifundios; greater access to agricultural credit and the encouragement of private banks to expand their operations in the ejidos; the protection of agricultural production by increasing the prices of products, the creation of distribution centers, and the promotion of agricultural insurance; providing health and social assistance to rural communities and education beyond the primary level by establishing secondary schools in the countryside; the restoration of lands taken from ejidos; and fighting for the principle of the inviolability of the ejido and small property. Finally, the manifesto proposed the creation of producers' unions managed by campesinos.

The reclaiming of an agrarian program closer to that of Cardenismo thus formed a fundamental part of the policies that the Henriquista movement offered to its partisans. As other authors have noted, this program was not in the least bit as radical as that which the UGOCM was proposing at that time, nor as radical as Cardenista agrarianism itself, which Henriquismo declared it was restoring.[26] Nonetheless, it managed to attract large contingents of campesinos throughout the country.[27] The combination of a national leadership with clearly agrarian and

25. *Problemas Agrícolas*, p. 365.

26. Bartra, *Los herederos de Zapata*, p. 86. Moguel, "La cuestión agraria," pp. 111-113.

27. Between 1950 and 1951 many regional and local leaders adhered to the Henriquista line, accusing the CNC of passivity in response to the problems of the ejidos and the campesinos. Servín, *Ruptura*, pp. 177-183.

Cardenista backgrounds, allied with local politicians and local leaders close to the campesino population, made the UFCM an attractive organization for many groups, as indicated by its base of support made up of Campesino Federations in nearly every state.[28]

Both the UGOCM and the UFCM built regional bases that split or tried to split from the CNC. Both demanded a continued redistribution of land, and greater access to credit, water, and supplies for ejido producers and true small property owners. Both organizations also proposed to broaden the democratic mechanisms for the election of *ejidal* commissioners, recognize dissidents opposed to the CNC, to respect the legal opposition to the ruling party (PRI). The Henriquistas of the UFCM insisted upon an explicit reclaiming of the agrarian program of the Mexican Revolution, which for them was none other than the Cardenista agrarian reform.

Throughout the electoral campaign of 1951-1952, Henríquez Guzmán and the leaders of the Henriquista movement repeatedly referred to the "project of the Mexican Revolution" and proclaimed themselves to be the heirs of that revolution.[29] In the countryside, this reclamation assumed a very specific character: active participation by Henriquista soldiers and veterans of the revolution enabled the renewal of old alliances in which armed struggle once again became an implicit option of political and social struggle. From the beginning, Henriquismo spoke a dual language in which the bid for electoral democracy, as proclaimed in campaign discourse, did not exclude the possibility of the recurrence of violence in practice. If the vote was not respected and if the government engaged in fraud, arms would make them respect "the decision of the people," as the supporters of Francisco I. Madero had insisted at the beginning of the revolution in 1910. The participation of veterans and soldiers seemingly offered a degree of reassurance of victory for the campesino groups willing to commit themselves to an armed response. In the end, the elections of July 1952 were in fact characterized by a generalized fraud which in rural areas was carried out using the most rudimentary tactics: the stealing of ballot boxes, the manipulation of votes, and intimidation of all kinds. All were methods used to take votes away from Henríquez Guzmán and other Henriquista

28. On July 28, 1951, the Unión de Federaciones Campesinas de México (UFCM) was legally constituted in the Arbeu Theatre in Mexico City during an assembly in which approximately 5,000 participants attended and in which the candidacy of Miguel Henríquez Guzmán was formally endorsed. Twenty-six official delegations attended from the states which already had Campesino Federations, in addition to informal delegations from Veracruz, Michoacán, Tamaulipas and Sonora. The National Organizing Committee of the UCFM was made up of César Martino as president, J. Trinidad García in the position of vice-president and Alonso Garrido Canabal as Secretary General. The event ended with a minute of silence in honor of the death of Emiliano Zapata. Servín, *Ruptura,* pp. 198-99.

29. The presence of old revolutionaries and agrarian heroes of the stature of Francisco J. Múgica, Graciano Sánchez and Genovevo de la O in the Henriquista movement contributed to the attraction it had for people like Rubén Jaramillo.

candidates. Thus the PRI machine precluded any possibility of an opposition victory at the federal, state or municipal level, as well as in the legislature.

The Henriquistas had planned to celebrate their triumph at a "Victory Party" at the Central Alameda Park in Mexico City on July 7, the day after the election. Instead their massive rally was repressed by state forces thus demonstrating that the government's apparent democratic tolerance had come to an end. In spite of the repression throughout the second half of 1952, the Henriquistas tried to mobilize, first to obstruct official recognition of the victory of the PRI candidate, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, and later to prevent him from taking office. Their attempts to rally or organize postelection protests were carefully watched and broken up; the official government position was that the Henriquistas incited the violence. Although the FPPM remained a legally registered political party, the arrest of its militants under any pretext became a daily occurrence. In the countryside, disappearances and the murder of Henriquistas were common. Among other reprisals, their land was taken away, and credit and access to water cancelled.[30] Many Henriquistas therefore assumed that the time for an armed uprising had come and that only through the use of force would they achieve the triumph of their candidate and his proposals to attend to their social demands, above all in the countryside.

FIRST ATTEMPTS AT INSURRECTION

In early October 1952, the press reported that military authorities had put down an attempted insurrection in the region of Izúcar de Matamoros and Atencingo, in the state of Puebla near the Morelos border. Jesús García, ex-mayor of Matamoros, and Dr. Juan Vázquez, Henriquista representative in the region and candidate for *diputado* (member of the House of Representatives), were both arrested along with ten other leaders.[31] In the following days, dozens of Henriquistas were sought for investigation, primarily in Atlixco, Amozoc, Chiautla, Tehuacán, Izúcar de Matamoros and Atencingo. Although military officials refused to give any further information and tried to minimize the importance of the incident, press reports indicated that the men who had been detained confessed that they had recruited followers by offering military ranks, from lieutenant to general, in a future Henriquista army.[32]

Among those arrested was a well-known figure, retired Zapatista General Jenaro Amezcua. According to official information, he was the "leader of the conspiracy" since for the past two months he had "organized among the members of the

30. Regarding the elections and postelectoral events, see Servín, *Ruptura*, Chapter 5.
31. *Excélsior*, October 12, 1952.
32. *Excélsior*, October 13 and 14, 1952.

defensas rurales [rural reserve militia] in the hills of Puebla and Oaxaca," making promises that would be fulfilled "upon the triumph of the cause." With an arsenal of 100 guns, several hunting rifles and some 100 rounds of ammunition, the conspirators planned to take over Atlixco, Matamoros and Puebla and then continue on toward Oaxaca. The military ranks that Amezcua had already started to assign at his discretion would be formally recognized upon their triumph, bestowed upon the combatants in the uprising by the supposed "General" Manuel Aparicio.[33]

Jenaro Amezcua had been one of Emiliano Zapata's closest followers since 1911, when he joined the Zapatista movement. Dating from the 1930s, when he created the Unión de Revolucionarios Agraristas del Sur, Amezcua had spearheaded the struggle for recognition of veterans who had not been admitted into the federal army nor received any type of pension, as was his own case.[34] According to press reports, the former Zapatista denied involvement in the attempted uprising and declared his support for President-elect Ruiz Cortines.[35] However, according to the press the others arrested in Puebla were related to a Henriquista paramilitary organization directed by a small group of veterans.[36]

The Frente de Excombatientes y Veteranos de la Revolución (FEVR), directed by Antonio Caballero Miranda and José J. Kerlegand, was founded in 1952 during the electoral campaign. Caballero had been a Zapatista, a Cristero, and an Almazanista who called himself a general, while Kerlegand was known as a colonel who had been a Henriquista since 1950. The FEVR operated mainly in Puebla, Oaxaca and Tlaxcala, offering military rank to those who joined and were willing to defend the "Henriquista victory."[37] Caballero maintained a close relationship with General Pedro Rodríguez Triana—a Magonista and Zapatista, who was presidential candidate of the Mexican Communist Party in 1929 and governor of Coahuila during the Cardenas administration. Rodríguez was supposed to lead members of the FEVR in the northern part of the country and considered Celestino Gasca to be his direct superior.[38] Significantly, ideological differences within Henriquismo were ameliorated by shared agrarian claims and the goal of obtaining economic benefits for revolutionary veterans. Thus in the 1950s, the force of revolutionary pragmatism and the weakness of the ideological controver-

33. *Excélsior*, October 23 and 24, 1952.

34. Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Guía del archivo del General Jenaro Amezcua 1909-1947* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios de Historia de México/CONDUMEX, 1982).

35. *El Universal Gráfico*, October 24, 1952.

36. The paramilitary organization was discovered in early October in Mexico City thanks to construction worker Hilario Mercado Ocampo, who passed by the presidential guard in front of the Palacio Nacional in uniform and did not make an appropriate salute. *Excélsior*, October 4, 1952.

37. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Ramo Presidentes (RP), Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (ARC), 606.3/3.

38. AGN, RP, ARC, 606.3/3, letters dated June 11, 1953 and June 20, 1953.

sies of the 1920s and 1930s enabled alliances to exist among Cristeros, agraristas, Cardenistas, Magonistas and many others in a common front, which was the Henriquista movement.[39]

Among those arrested in Puebla was Lieutenant Ricarda Tlaseca Martínez, in whose home several boxes containing armaments were found. During interrogation, Tlaseca declared that the boxes were the property of her former brother-in-law, Porfirio Jaramillo, brother of Rubén Jaramillo, who was the leader of the sugar cooperative of Atencingo.[40] The link between the Jaramillo brothers and Puebla was longstanding, in particular with those who, like General Amezcua, had been active in the ranks of the Zapatistas from the beginning and continued the work of keeping alive the memory of Emiliano Zapata.[41]

The Jaramillistas had supported the Henriquista movement since 1945 when General Henríquez Guzmán first decided to run for president. In 1950 they formed an alliance between the FPPM and their party, the Partido Agrario Obrero Morelense (PAOM), and Rubén Jaramillo ran as its candidate for the governorship of Morelos.[42] The Jaramillistas' active participation in the campaign and their successful mobilization in various parts of Morelos lead to growing intolerance on the part of the state and federal government. The situation became worse after the elections when the new PRI governor Rodolfo López de Nava took office.[43] As other authors have noted, the participation of the Jaramillistas in the plans for insurrection was to a large extent a self-defensive reaction. The Jaramillistas had to contain the widespread repression unleashed by the federal government and local civil and military authorities, which the Henriquista leadership could not or did not know how to stop. For those reasons, the Jaramillistas also formed part of the insurrectional plans of Henriquismo, at least until 1954.[44]

But it was not only in Puebla and Morelos that preparations for the uprising were initiated. On October 3, the day before the national press reported on the attempted uprising of the Frente de Veteranos in Puebla, accusations made by Senator Luis I. Rodríguez from the rostrum of the Senate were published. He said

39. For example, a letter from Tizapán el Alto, Jalisco noted that there were numerous "Cristero elements" in the Henriquista movement in Jalisco. AGN, RP, ARC, 606.3/3-13, letter dated August 18, 1953.

40. *El Universal,* October 24, 1952.

41. A report by the Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DIPS) notes that Rubén Jaramillo had meetings with General Amezcua in the area of Jonacatepec, Morelos. AGN, DIPS, Caja 104, Exp 11, report of October 27, 1952.

42. Emilio García Jiménez, "Lucha electoral y autodefensa en el jaramillismo," *Cuadernos Agrarios* 10 (July-December 1994), pp. 95-116.

43. The state elections took place in March 1952. Immediately after the elections, Pedro García Velásquez, a close ally of Jaramillo, and the veteran Zapatista Luis Olmedo were kidnapped. García Velásquez managed to survive in spite of the wounds they inflicted upon his chest with an ice pick, but Olmedo died. The incident is narrated by Pedro García himself in Aura Hernández, *La muerte.*

44. Bellingeri, *Del agrarismo armado*; Grammont, "Jaramillo y las luchas."

that in Guanajuato "General Gasca, who was not a candidate nominated by the FPPM, nor engaged in electoral activities of any type, is now visiting the ejidos, reviewing the arms and ammunition that the campesinos are able to put at his disposal, and whispering that the Henriquistas will take power on December 1."[45]

In San Luis Potosí, plans for insurrection were being discussed as early as February of 1952 when various persons close to the "strong man" of that state in the 1930s, Saturnino Cedillo, were accused of preparing for that eventuality and arrested.[46] At the end of October, campesino leader and Cedillo's brother-in-law, Juan Soria Urías, was taken into custody in San Luis Potosí by the commander of the 12th Military Zone. Soria was accused of inciting rebellion and distributing arms to the campesinos, while the local radio stations continuously transmitted announcements warning that people should not join the Henriquista movement since it had no possibility of success.[47] One of the main leaders of Henriquismo in San Luis Potosí, Nicolás S. Araujo—railway worker, leader of the state FPPM and candidate for senator—had a close relationship with Gasca and would become secretary general of the Federacionistas Leales at the end of the decade.[48]

Yet Henríquez Guzmán continued to postpone the insurrection, using the same arguments over and over again: that they needed to better organize and coordinate the various groups committed to the uprising, and that they had to obtain more arms and munitions. In spite of Henríquez' temporizing, various groups in different parts of the country, tired of waiting for an order that was actually never given, opted for direct action between 1953 and 1954. At the beginning of 1953, police informants reported that among the Henriquistas there was talk that

> many groups were already in the mountains and in contact with the high command in order to maintain their activity in guerrilla fashion, operating constantly to harass the government. . . . Agitation was increasing among the Henriquistas in the states of Tlaxcala, Guerrero, Michoacán and they were going to start working in Oaxaca and Sinaloa.[49]

In addition to those groups, others were organizing in the state of Mexico, Veracruz, Hidalgo and the Huasteca area of San Luis Potosí and, of course, the Jaramillistas were active in Morelos.[50] In August 1953, leaders of the Frente de

45. *El Norte*, October 3, 1952.

46. Servín, *Ruptura*, p. 369.

47. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 84, San Luis Potosí, October 8 and 30, 1952. During the month of October, arrests were made in many different parts of the country without any apparent cause to justify them.

48. This data comes from information published in *El Heraldo*, taken from NARA, RG 84, Box 132, San Luis Potosí, October of 1951.

49. AGN, RP, ARC, 606.3/3, report of the Procuraduría General de la República, January 31, 1953.

50. Ravelo, *Los jaramillistas*, p. 130.

Veteranos were again arrested, having persisted in their work of recruiting and organizing even though their activities had been discovered the previous year.[51]

In spite of the arrests, interrogations and police vigilance, the Henriquistas continued with their plans. The date for the general uprising seemed to be once again set for the month of October, and it was rumored that uprisings in Chihuahua and Morelos would be "the fuses" of a national insurrection.[52] In addition to logistical reasons for initiating the uprising in those states, there was also a strong symbolic significance (Chihuahua and Morelos being the homelands of "Pancho" Villa and Emiliano Zapata) that resonated with the start of the 1910 revolution. In the end, although preparations took place in various parts of the country, including a plan organized by Jaramillo in Morelos, the general uprising did not take place.[53] Testimony by Jaramillistas indicated that the insurrection was halted upon direct orders from Henríquez Guzmán.[54] In Henriquista circles it was rumored that General Gasca scolded the ex-presidential candidate for lack of support for the rebels, and in response to Henríquez's repeated argument that they lacked arms, munitions, and money, Gasca responded, "we will get it, even if they are coins minted by the new rich."[55]

The situation heated up a notch in the early months of 1954 when before dawn on January 15, Lieutenant Colonel Emiliano J. Laing, former mayor of Ciudad Delicias, Chihuahua, lead dozens of Henriquistas of the region in an attack on the military barracks of Delicias from which he planned to advance to Meoqui and move toward the city of Chihuahua. Laing and other Henriquista leaders from Chihuahua, Meoqui and other places in the region had been ready for months, awaiting word of the day and hour at which they should start the uprising. However, within minutes his attempt was thwarted by soldiers who were awaiting the insurrectionists and, in the ensuing battle, Laing and several of his comrades were killed.[56]

Among the belongings of Colonel Laing a "small leather wallet" was found containing a proclamation signed on January 10, 1954 and which consisted of 15

51. AGN, RP, ARC, 606.3/3.

52. On October 18, 1953 a campesino protest was broken up in the city of Veracruz on the pretext that the real purpose of the meeting was to take over the Palacio Municipal. AGN, RP, ARC, 606.3/3-29.

53. The plan consisted of advancing with small, armed deployments from different towns toward Cuernavaca, where they were going to attack the military barracks in order to obtain additional arms and also to liberate prisoners. The order to halt the uprising did not prevent some actions from taking place in various parts of the state, such as the taking of Yautepec by a group of 20 to 25 campesinos. Ravelo, *Los jaramillistas*, p. 131-132; Bellingeri, *Del agrarismo armado*, pp. 49, ff.

54. Ibid.

55. AGN, Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), 48-1-953, L5, H329, October 29, 1953.

56. Carlos Gallegos Pérez, *Luto en Delicias: Vida y muerte de Emiliano J. Laing* (Chihuahua: Secretaría de Educación y Cultura/Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua, 2003). The attempted surprise attack had been uncovered by informants of Governor Oscar Soto Máynez, who had infiltrated the Henriquista movement in Chihuahua.

points. First and foremost was the demand "that upon the triumph of the cause we shall be recognized with a rank in accordance with the work done during the struggle." The families of those who died for the cause should be given "land in zones that can be irrigated, on which to live." Monopolists and abusive merchants would be punished, and the new leaders would be put in charge of lowering and controlling prices of basic products. Moreover, the governor and municipal mayors would be "replaced." Finally, the latifundios would be transformed into colonies, in order to meet the demand to "quickly construct a military colony where each soldier and his family would have their home."[57] If in Morelos the Jaramillistas revived Zapatismo, in this small enclave in Chihuahua the ghost of Pancho Villa appeared once again.

At the end of February, an intense mobilization of troops in the Papaloapan River basin in Veracruz alerted the press. According to information released a few days later, the mobilization was provoked by rumors that a large group of campesinos commanded by Henriquistas would try to blow up the Miguel Alemán dam under construction in that area, since their lands and communities would end up under water once it was completed.[58] Simultaneously, Rubén Jaramillo, commanding some 20 to 30 partisans, attacked the town of Tlalquitenango. In the ensuing confrontation with a military detachment, Pedro López, one of Jaramillo's lieutenants, died.[59] On the morning of Sunday, March 7, the Jaramillistas entered Ticumán and, after a trial by the people, executed men responsible for various murders and incidents of torture, including the chief of police, a councilman and three merchants.[60] These local uprisings, uncoordinated and almost desperate, provoked increased repression by the government and made it even more evident that General Henríquez was purposely refusing to initiate the insurrection, in spite of the fact that he had been preparing for it for the past two years. In response to the repression and lack of support from the ex-presidential candidate, many groups including the Jaramillistas ended up breaking with him.[61]

In spite of the internal divisions and the increasing lack of coordination among groups that had been committed to the uprising, in subsequent years there were incidents that indicated that the idea of insurrection remained alive among some partisan groups, though in a very localized and isolated manner. Such was the case in Chiapas, where in 1955 a demonstration of "belated Henriquismo," as Antonio García de León called it, resulted in an incident at Trinitaria. Here, a mobi-

57. AGN, RP, ARC, 559.1/9.

58. According to General Alejandro Mange, commander of the Second Military Region, the Henriquista attempt failed. *Excélsior*, March 3, 1954.

59. Ibid.

60. Bellingeri, *Del agrarismo armado*, p. 53; *Excélsior*, March 8, 1954.

61. In the following years the Jaramillistas maintained contact with Celestino Gasca, who also ended up disappointing them.

lization of Henriquista campesinos, supported by some soldiers, ended in a brutal massacre. A few months later, the same thing occurred following a mobilization led by Artemio Rojas Mandujano, ex-candidate for diputado for the FPPM in Tuxla Gutiérrez.[62]

THE FEDERACIONISTAS LEALES

Upon the inauguration of President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958), the breakup of political alliances forged during the electoral campaign intensified and desertions by the leaders of the FPPM increased. In June 1953, a number of prominent Cardenistas made public their break with General Henríquez and left the ranks of the Federación. Several founders of the UFCM including Alonso Garrido and César Martino left the campesino organization to its fate after having worked assiduously since 1950 to create it.[63] In the following years, Trinidad J. García from Michoacán took charge of the UFCM.[64]

Between 1953 and 1958, the FPPM was directed by various individuals who began to dispute the leadership of the organization, since it was clear that General Henríquez had a diminishing interest in the movement given the risks of committing himself to armed action. The departure of the left wing of the Henriquista movement increased its tilt toward the anticommunist right. In the midst of this disintegration, Generals Marcelino García Barragán and Celestino Gasca took over the organizational tasks required for the future, armed takeover.[65] Gasca also ended up directing the UFCM along with Trinidad J. García when its founders abandoned it.[66]

During the transition between the administration of President Ruiz Cortines and that of his successor, Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964), the country shook with wave after wave of protests led by teachers, railway workers, oil workers, telegraph workers, campesinos and students. These movements took advantage of the interregnum created by the change of president in order to demand democratic unions, better working conditions and salaries, and the resumption of agrarian reform.[67] Particularly remarkable were the activities of Jacinto López, prominent leader of

62. Antonio García de León, *Fronteras interiores: Chiapas, Una modernidad particular* (Mexico City: Océano, 2002), pp. 90-95.

63. Martino joined the official bureaucracy as a consultant, taking advantage of the new opening toward Cardenismo by the administration of Ruiz Cortines. Moguel, "La cuestión agraria," pp. 122-129.

64. AGN, RP, ARC, June 16, 1953.

65. Marcelino García Barragán had been a close friend of the Henríquez family since the 1940s, when he was Governor of Jalisco. Although he was a fervent Henriquista throughout most of the 1950s, President López Mateos subsequently "reintegrated" him into active duty in the army. In 1964 he became Minister of Defense under President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

66. As indicated by police reports since 1954.

67. For a review of these movements, see *Política 1:1* (May, 1960), as well as Semo, "El ocaso."

the UGOCM, whose militants in the northern part of the country moved into direct action by taking over lands in Sinaloa, Sonora, Baja California and Nayarit.[68] Direct action had a strong appeal in the absence of electoral politics as a viable form of struggle and the lack of government responses to the campesinos' demands for land, credit and supplies. In Morelos, Jaramillo also resorted to direct action, taking over land in Michapa and El Guarín after having put down his arms and obtaining amnesty from President López Mateos. Adding to these events, in January 1959, the revolutionary Cubans made their triumphant entry into Havana. Four months later, they promulgated the Agrarian Reform Law that, to a certain extent, took up the standard of Cardenista revolutionary agrarianism. The Cuban revolution generated intense debate throughout Latin America and in Mexico, in particular, it radicalized internal political forces, forcing President López Mateos to try to place himself at the very center of the political spectrum.[69]

Given this context, the Henriquistas who remained organized and were still waiting to start the insurrection tried to pressure their leaders to give the order to move into action. One participant commented:

> Don't you think we could have struck the blow? And then to finish it off, Demetrio Vallejo leads the railroad workers strike; for two weeks, the trains were stopped. . . . [W]e told the general: *Mi General*, it is time, now that the railroad is stopped, the telegraph workers are also stopped, the teachers of all the primary schools in the country are on strike. But the General said, I don't give a damn about that business of Demetrio.[70]

Neither Henríquez Guzmán nor Gasca accepted the challenge to give the order to start the insurrection at this point in time. Since 1957, internal differences within what was left of the Henriquista leadership had become more pronounced as the process of presidential succession approached. Henríquez Guzmán had flirted with the idea of launching another electoral campaign, and showed less and less interest in an insurrection doomed to failure.

In November of 1958, tired of Henríquez Guzmán's indecision about giving the final order for the uprising, General Gasca accused him of betraying the movement and called for the creation of the Federacionistas Leales who would "save the reputation" of the FPPM. Under his direction as "general coordinator," the

68. In 1955 a reform of the Agricultural Credit Law was approved, which eliminated the possibility of getting credit for agricultural unions made up of collective ejidos created during the Cardenista agrarian reform. Bartra, *Los herederos de Zapata*, pp. 77-78. The reduction of credit, which especially affected ejidos in the northern part of the country, combined with the increasing demand for redistribution of land and water fomented the move to direct action. Grammont, "La Unión," pp. 240-256.

69. Olga Pellicer de Brody, *México y la revolución cubana* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1972).

70. Terán, "El levantamiento," p. 131.

Federacionistas would fulfill the promises of agrarian reform and recognition of military ranks of their combatants, two policies that were at the heart of the movement's goals:

> The people were demanding to know from Henríquez Guzmán: when were they going to take power? And since Henríquez said that [it would be] tomorrow, that [it would be] the day after tomorrow, don't be impatient. . . . [T]he people got tired of waiting and one day Gasca got very brave and said: I will do it, compañeros! Right there, in front of Henríquez . . . and from that moment on, the people came out to follow Gasca to his house. That was the way it happened, and then it was the same with Gasca . . . [with] many people came from all over the country [joining him].[71]

After his break with Henríquez Guzmán, Gasca and his closest collaborators, in particular Nicolás S. Araujo, strove to keep alive the hope for insurrection. He called on those who continued to be militant Federacionistas to help strengthen the organization. From 1959 on, weekly meetings took place in Gasca's house, during which they discussed the problems of the country and began once again to prepare for the insurrection.

In September 1959, Gasca circulated a manifesto in which he called for the "overthrow of the bad government," specifying the day and time: September 15, 1961 at three o'clock in the morning.[72] A month later, in October 1959, he announced at the Congreso Agrario in Toluca his proposal to resolve the country's agrarian problem. The "Tercera Parte del Programa General" of the Federacionistas Leales was a document entitled "Soluciones al Problema Agrario y al Problema Agrícola," signed in Guanajuato in November 1958 by Celestino Gasca in his capacity as National Coordinator of the Federacionistas Leales. It consisted of 56 points that he heralded as the core of the movement. From the start, it was clear that this document distanced itself from the reclaiming of Cardenista agrarian reform as supported by the original Henriquista movement. In its place, the new Federacionista program championed the rights of private property, not those of *usufructo* (i.e., government concession for use without ownership) for ejidatarios and small landowners. Along those lines it stipulated, "[a]ll campesinos shall be given ownership of their parcels."[73] As has been indicated by other authors, the Gasquista proposal revived and adopted the demand raised by Sinarquismo since the end of the 1930s, that campesinos should be property owners inscribed in the logic of capitalist production, and not dependent upon the state through the usufructo of ejido land.[74] This proposal was attractive in certain regions of the

71. Ibid, p. 123.

72. *Política*, October 1, 1961.

73. AGN, DIPS, Caja 2936/A Exp. 1/1013 "Soluciones al Problema Agrario."

74. In an interview with Gasca in 1976, he defended his position by saying that the laws of Mexico were based on private property and for that reason, the campesinos had to adapt to this model. Terán, "El levantamiento," p. 127 and Bartra, *Los herederos de Zapata*, p. 87.

country, in particular places where Sinarquista militants were active, such as the border region between Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí.

Gasca insisted upon political autonomy of the campesino relative to the state. Ownership of land, not usufructo, would liberate ejidatarios from political dependence and submission "so that when campesinos are owners of their own parcels, the Commissioners and other Agrarian Authorities who have done so much damage to men in the countryside, to progress, and to the respectability of the Motherland, will disappear."[75] On the other hand, Gasca took from the Henriquista program the insistence upon economic autonomy for the campesino class through greater access to credit and markets in which to sell their products.

Although General Gasca defined himself as a revolutionary and defender of the campesinos and workers, his agrarian proposal was similar to those who had fought against Cardenista agrarianism. Perhaps it was for that reason that he was able to establish contact with the rabid anticommunist, Jorge Siegrist Clamont, an ex-student leader close to the Cristeros and ex-director of the Partido Nacionalista Mexicano (PNM), which was sympathetic to the Sinarquistas.[76] Although Gasca was surely a Mason, his relationship with Siegrist, a Catholic and religious fanatic, was convenient for both of them to the extent that they shared the idea of insurrection as an option.[77] In spite of his closeness to Sinarquista ideas, Gasca, however, insisted upon comparing the Federacionistas movement with the revolutionary experience in Cuba, which was then at the height of its implementation of social revolution. On various occasions, the General mentioned the example of Cuba during the weekly Federacionista meetings, reasserting his agrarian calling and his anti-Yankee nationalism.[78] Likewise, throughout 1959 and 1960, Gasca tried to keep the teachers and railroad workers, who were an important base of support throughout the Henriquista campaign, involved in

75. Ibid.

76. According to the magazine *Política,* the relationship between the two men was established in 1959. (*Política,* September 15, 1961.) On the other hand, reports by the Federal Security Agency indicated that Siegrist introduced Lic. Ignacio Ríos Leal with a card dated February 26, 1961, "as an absolutely trustworthy person." AGN, DFS, Federación de Partidos del Pueblo Mexicano (FPPM), 48-1-61, L16 H124-127, Mexico, September 14, 1961. Lic. Bernardo Cornejo Olaguíbel, candidate of the PNM for *diputado federal* in the 8th District of Mexico City, was also present at the meeting of July 9, 1961. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L15 H204 and 205, Report of July 9, 1961. All this indicates frequent contact between Gasca and Siegrist.

77. The possibility that Gasca was a Mason is inferred from his political relationships from the time he was a leader in the worker's movement and in the revolutionary army.

78. For example, in the meeting of January 29, 1961, Gasca "criticized the agrarian policy of the current administration and said that the triumph of the Federacionistas' struggle would mean the application of their agrarian program, which has currently been put into practice in Cuba. . . . Referring to the new President of the United States, he said that [the U.S. President] was doing everything possible to win back Cuba for the purpose of submitting it to his designs but he would not achieve that since the Cubans and the Federacionistas Leales of Mexico are dedicated to preserving and struggling for their independence. The movement in our country indicates a new era for Latin American nations." AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L-15 H-212, Memorandum signed by Manuel Rangel Escamilla, Mexico City, January 29, 1961.

the movement.[79] His right-hand man, Nicolás Araujo, had a long history with the railroad workers in San Luis Potosí and worked hard to keep them in the Gasquista ranks.[80] Gasca also sought to maintain contacts with leaders of the teachers' and railway workers' unions.[81]

Thus the Federacionistas Leales were born from a divided FPPM, whose diminished campesino base continued to await the definitive order to start the uprising:

> The famous general sent for us. . . . When we arrived at his house, it was full of people, there were many, many people; from Veracruz came four buses full of representatives. Veracruz was very willing and ready. I went to Veracruz and the people were ready, totally willing and ready. Then they began the roll call, and there were 26 states accounted for. . . . [T]he only states that did not come were Baja California and Yucatán, and that was because of the rain, it was raining a lot. . . . Don't you think that we could have struck the blow?[82]

The plan for insurrection that had been worked out by the Henriquistas at the beginning of the decade was revived. The country was divided into regions under the direction of "district coordinators" who were to establish "contacts" and take charge of organizing for "when the time comes." These coordinators "stored arms, manufactured hand grenades and printed instructions that were distributed among the partisans and possible sympathizers of the movement."[83] The proposed plan of action of the Federacionistas was to

> assault the National Palace, police headquarters and other public buildings in Mexico City, and simultaneously similar places in other points throughout the country, in a synchronized and uniform movement well-organized by the networked coordinators. This action had as its objective the violent separation of government officials from their offices and the establishment of a government headed by the repeatedly cited Gasca, who would put into effect a new agrarian program 'Upon the Triumph of the Revolution.'[84]

79. For example, in the meeting of July 31, 1960, "an Othonista teacher reported at length to those in attendance about the origin and motives of the teachers' conflict in Section IX of the SNTE (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación), seeking support from them and saying that it was not just a struggle for the teachers, but for the people in general." AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-60, L15 H54, report by Manuel Rangel Escamilla, July 31, 1960.

80. Araujo worked as a train dispatcher for the National Railway of Mexico in San Luis Potosí, according to information published in the presidential campaign of 1952.

81. The leader of the teachers in Mexico City, Professor Othón Salazar, participated in the Henriquista organization during the presidential campaign of 1952, initially from the ranks of the Partido Constitucionalista. He was one of the teachers who sharply criticized the attempts to incorporate the Alemán Doctrine into the SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública) curriculum. Servín, *Ruptura*, p. 187; Amparo Ruiz del Castillo, *Othón Salazar y el Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valde´s, 2008).

82. Terán, "El levantamiento," p. 130.

83. *Política*, October 1, 1961.

84. AGN, DIPS, Box 2936/A, Memorandum of the Procuraduría General de la República, July 3, 1962.

In the documents entitled "Plan Revolucionario que se pondrá en vigor al triunfo de la Revolución, bajo las siguientes bases" and "Proyecto para la proclama sobre la Reforma Agraria," armed action was deemed the only "dignified and efficient way to rescue our rights and liberties." Subsequent to the uprising, there would be another reform of Article 27 of the Constitution to address land reform.[85]

Between 1959 and 1961, the work of reorganizing the uprising mainly involved the states of Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, México, Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Coahuila. Police reports on meetings in Gasca's house in Mexico City regularly described the presence of campesinos and workers coming from those states with complaints from their places of origin, or representing groups aggravated by the loss of their lands, lack of credit or water.[86] Gasca asked them for patience, to wait for the moment in which they would carry out justice through arms. In his words, "the corn was just beginning to ripen."[87]

The progress of reorganizing the uprising was closely watched by agents of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), which promptly and regularly reported the activities of the Federacionistas to President Adolfo López Mateos. For that reason, it was very telling that the president asked General Lázaro Cárdenas, during a meeting in April 1961, if he knew General Gasca.[88] At that time, ex-president Cárdenas was organizing what would become the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN), formed later that August, and therefore was working with campesino groups and social organizations in different parts of the country.[89] Gasca himself had referred to these activities in a meeting of the Federacionistas, commenting that General Cárdenas "is organizing groups of patriots in the states of Guerrero, Puebla, Oaxaca and Veracruz, with the object of unit-

85. Ibid.

86. For example, "One campesino group from Oaxaca said that in one place in that state, numerous farmers in the service of an American business had invaded the forests and plots of land belonging to members of the FPPM, which took up arms and captured four of them who were then taken to the respective Authorities, General GASCA having then affirmed that 'the Federacionistas are not willing to continue to tolerate the invasion of their lands and they will have to shoot to kill those who are sent by the Yankees to appropriate the lands of others,' the General adding that 'that is the only way to resolve the problem.'" AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L15 H204 and 205, Mexico City, July 9, 1961.

87. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L15 H203-205, Mexico City, January 15, 1961.

88. Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras I: Apuntes 1957-1966*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: UNAM, 1986), pp. 213-216.

89. The Movimiento de Liberación Nacional was a mixture of Cardenistas, leftist parties, and groups of intellectuals and artists who pushed for a continuation of the Cardenista agrarian reform as a central point of the MLN's Integral Agrarian Reform program. As part of that process, the Central Campesina Independiente (CCI) was formed in 1963, also predominantly composed of Cardenistas and some of the campesino bases organized since the 1930s and reactivated in the 1950s. See Miguel Ángel Beltrán Villegas, "El MLN: Historia de un recorrido hacia la unidad (Mexico City: 1957-1967)" (Ph D. Dissertation in Latin American Studies: UNAM, 2000), pp. 140, ff. In May 2009, Professor Beltrán was arrested under false charges by Mexican authorities and, in complicity with the Colombian government, illegally expelled from the country back to his native Colombia, where he remains imprisoned under trumped up charges. I wish to express my solidarity with him and demand his immediate release. For further discussion of the MLN see also, Eric Zolov, "¡Cuba sí, Yanquis no!: The Sacking of the Instituto Cultural México/Norteamericano in Morelia, Michoacán, 1961" in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 214-252.

ing the campesinos and railroad workers who fully support him."[90] The government feared that behind these activities, the ex-President might be organizing a new revolutionary movement based on campesino militias. For that reason, López Mateos made sure that Cárdenas was the object of careful surveillance by the police.[91]

Preparations for the insurrection increased in the second half of 1961. One of its detonators was the midterm federal and state elections that took place in July, in particular the conflict over the governorship of San Luis Potosí. In that election, Dr. Salvador Nava Martínez ran as the opposition candidate against Manuel López Dávila of the PRI. Nava was nominated by the Partido Democrático Potosino (Democratic Party of San Luis Potosí), and was also supported by the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and the Sinarquistas, thus making him subject to accusations of being the "reactionary" candidate.[92] On July 21, 1961, shortly after the elections in which supporters of Nava complained of scandalous electoral fraud against their candidate, Gasca signed a pronouncement addressed to the Federacionistas Leales throughout the country, in which he accused the authorities of trying to

> prevent the Great Majority of People in San Luis Potosí from continuing their valiant protest, which they have been carrying out since the elections, proved by the fact that the Authorities are determined, as always, to make a mockery of the Will of the Citizenry, giving the Electoral Victory to the candidate that the official party [PRI] IMPOSED, who was obviously defeated in the capital and the municipalities of the state of San Luis Potosí.

For that reason, the Federacionistas Leales throughout the country

> should respond at the necessary moment, to help the People of San Luis Potosí in the Resolution that they are now making, since the time has come to confront the enemies of FREEDOM and Social Justice proclaimed by our great Revolution, the Revolution that has been and is being Betrayed by the Authorities who are abusing their Power and by the iniquitous exploiters who have enriched themselves with the Misery and Hunger of the People.[93]

Just six days later, on July 27, another letter began to circulate, in which Gasca called all coordinators and delegates to a meeting, "now that the time has come

90. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L15 H204 and 205, Mexico City, July 9, 1961.

91. *La Jornada*, May 30, 2002. Relations between the Federacionistas Leales and the MLN remain an unresolved historical question that merits further research.

92. This characterization is directly opposed to the current historiography in which Nava and his movement have been considered precursors in the struggle for democracy in the second half of the twentieth century.

93 AGN, RP, Adolfo López Mateos (ALM), 559/2, "Aviso," July 21, 1961.

to fulfill the formal and sacred commitment made in the month of November of 1958."[94] According to an investigation carried out by the Attorney General, two meetings took place in Gasca's house, one on August 10 and the other on September 3, during which agreements were made and conveyed to the coordinators in different parts of the country. Written communiqués were accompanied by pamphlets that stated: "The call to arms to enter towns or to attack the enemy is: 'justice for the poor.'" They also issued identification cards vouching for the character of the coordinators, "on which the new agrarian plan created by General Gasca was transcribed." That plan included the following demands:

1. That the Ejidatario's parcel of land be handed over to him as PRIVATE PROPERTY and that all corresponding legal rights as sole proprietor of the land be respected.
2. That all hacienda properties be divided according to the Constitution, for the purpose of handing over parcels of land as private property to more than 2 million campesinos who have not been given land because of evil manipulations.
3. That all campesinos, including all authentic small landowners, be given bank credit—honorable, secure and adequate credit in a timely manner so that they can enjoy success from the first labors on their land to the gathering of their harvests.
4. That the campesino be given, in an effective manner, all the guarantees necessary to dedicate himself with absolute security and tranquility to his labors.
5. That all campesinos be protected against the voracity of private monopolists and of CEIMSA [Compañía Exportadora e Importadora Mexicana, S.A.], which is how the Government forces them through hunger, to sell their meager harvests to them at very low prices; with the understanding that to protect campesinos effectively from the above-mentioned monopolists there should be a rigorous system of common or joint sales, since if each campesino sells on his own, as is now the case, he becomes a victim of shameless abuses; with the understanding that this system of joint sales must become part of a national plan for agriculture, ranching, forestry, and industries in which those campesinos who demonstrate the necessary skills and who have been previously trained, can transform the fruits of their land into products [for the market].[95]

The plan was also accompanied by a poem entitled "New Day," which "would be used as the hymn of the movement in which the people are invited to fight courageously for the motherland and for religion, because it is a sacred duty to make a new day dawn in which everything will be different."[96] Surely the call to defend religion, along with the relationship of persons close to Sinarquismo, was a way to deflect campesino mistrust at a time when belligerent anticommunism was

94. Terán, "El levantamiento," p. 132.
95. AGN, DIPS, Box 2936/A, Memorándum of the Procuraduría General de la República, July 3, 1962.
96. Ibid.

rampant in the country.[97] According to a later investigation carried out by the authorities, the agreed-upon signal that would ignite the rebellion was to be

> [a] general blackout that would take place in all the electrical systems in Mexico City, resulting from the destruction of the Necaxa plant. Simultaneously, they would cut telephone lines and cause blackouts throughout the entire electrical system. By December 4, [the insurrectionists] expected that they would have taken power, and have paid back the many small loans that they received from people, many of whom had even mortgaged their modest homes [in support of the movement].[98]

The Federacionistas strategy hewed closely to that of the Henriquistas, which called for organizing armed takeovers of municipal mayors' offices, military barracks and police stations, with the intention of capturing additional arms and gradually extending control of the countryside to the cities. All would be initiated in the predawn hours on September 15, 1961, the day originally chosen by Celestino Gasca two years earlier, when various groups launched forth to take over barracks and municipal government buildings throughout the country, only to encounter government repression.

POR FIN, EL LEVANTAMIENTO

On the morning of Sunday, September 10, 1961 the people of Actipan, a neighborhood to the south of Mexico City, witnessed an unusual military and police deployment: 60 agents of the Federal Security Agency, 100 military police, 46 Federal Police, and dozens of members of the Grenadiers Corps, the 8th Infantry Battalion and Secret Service approached with extreme caution the house located on 25 Tigres Street.[99] Shortly after 1 p.m., they entered the house to arrest its owner, General Celestino Gasca, and approximately 250 people with him. In a group predominantly made up of campesino men and workers, the presence of Jorge Siegrist Clamont was notable. Among those arrested were some 20 or so women.[100]

Searching the house, police and soldiers found many signs of preparations for armed rebellion, which included Mexico City's Zócalo. Among other materials

97. For example, in a letter to Gasca, he was warned "there was a gathering of Catholics in Puebla on June 4. The majority of campesinos have become discouraged because they think that our cause attacks the church, and for that reason we have to visit all the towns to let them know that we are not Communists." AGN, DFS, 48-1-61, L18, H31, undated letter.

98. *Novedades*, September 24, 1961.

99. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L16, H93, memorandum dated September 10, 1961, signed by Manuel Rangel Escamilla.

100. *Política*, September 15, 1961. Both the Unión Nacional Sinarquista and the Partido Nacionalista Mexicano distanced themselves from the insurrection. Édgar González Ruiz, *MURO, Memorias y testimonios 1961-2002* (Mexico: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2004), p. 316.

were instructions that concluded with the enigmatic phrase: "the child will be born on the 15th" and 76 sealed envelopes that contained the following message:

> The 15th of September, as indicated in the attached flier, is the ORDER that you have been waiting for so long and desiring so much. On the night of September 14th, upon the dawning of the 15th, that is, in the early predawn hours of September 15, the entire COUNTRY will be mobilized in the PLAN that you already know is to save Mexico from TYRANNY.

The police also seized arms, explosives and Henriquista propaganda inciting insurrection, as well as texts on guerilla warfare written by "Che" Guevara and "A. Camilo."[101] They also found a map of the coastal region of Chiapas in which towns with landing strips were indicated with an encircled figure of an airplane. In another map of the northern part of the country, the cities of Guadalajara, Celaya, Acámbaro, San Luis Potosí, Torreón, Monterrey and Tampico, as well as the area of Tacubaya in Mexico City and the presidential residence at Los Pinos were all marked. One sketch showed ejidos and ranches in Querétaro, while another indicated various military posts in Mexico City, Celaya, Guadalajara, San Luis Potosí, Tampico, Ciudad Victoria and Monterrey. Finally, a note was found describing military telegraph lines and fields in Celaya, Monterrey, Guadalajara, San Luis Potosí, Tampico, Sarabia, León and Acapulco.[102]

In spite of the arrest of Gasca and his compañeros, many of whom were local or regional "coordinators" of the insurrection, armed groups took action in various towns in the states of Veracruz, Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, México and Coahuila between the last hours of September 14 and noon of the 16. According to a report by the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, the immediate casualties of the attempted rebellion were more than 40 dead in Veracruz and Chiapas alone.[103] In the early hours of September 15, the Federacionistas attacked two areas in Veracruz: in the north, the towns of Espinal, Coxquihuí and Chumatlán in the mountains of the Papanteca range nearly on the border with Puebla; and in the south, in Jáltipan, on the road between Acayucan and Minatitlán. There were also confrontations reported around Xalapa and Perote. In Jáltipan, more than 200 armed men attacked the military barracks, police stations and the office of the Ejidal Commission. That attack was made under the command of Colonel Genaro Watla Gómez and Captain Herón Zúñiga, who were among those

101. According to U.S. Embassy reports, there were books about guerrilla warfare by Gasca himself and Che Guevara. *Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files. Mexico: Internal Affairs 1960-1963* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1999), 712.00/9-1661, telegram from the Embassy in Mexico City to the State Department, September 16, 1961. (Hereafter, *Confidential.*)

102. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L16, H124-143, September 14, 1961.

103. *Confidential*, 712.00/9-1661, telegram from the Embassy in Mexico City to the State Department, September 16, 1961.

arrested on September 10 in Gasca's house but released for lack of evidence. The local press reported that the townspeople, upon hearing gunshots, came out of their houses and helped to control the situation, which forced the rebels to disperse into outlying areas. In the following days, more than 30 Federacionistas were captured. Among those arrested were Watla Gómez and Herón Zúñiga who, according to reports, had been escorted to Minatitlán under police custody on the night of the 15th, where they allegedly were to reveal a cache of hidden arms. At Kilometer 13 of the highway, they were killed, under the pretext that they were trying to escape.[104]

Local newspapers also reported that during the same predawn hours of September 15, a group made up primarily of railroad workers tried to take the city of Xalapa, but were repelled by police and members of the 21st Infantry Battalion. Thirty to 40 people were arrested and the city was put under military and police patrols. Information received by the U.S. Consulate indicated that another group of railroad workers tried, unsuccessfully, to break into the Perote prison and liberate the inmates there.[105] Nearby, on the same day, a group of campesinos were arrested in the Hacienda de Tenextepec, a short distance from Perote, where they had planned to join the insurrection at midnight.[106]

One of the largest confrontations took place in the Alamo-Papantla zone in northern Veracruz on the border with Puebla. There, during the early hours of the 15th, approximately 500 campesinos from around the towns of Espinal, Coxquihuí and Chumatlán engaged in direct combat with the army. In Chumatlán, a rioting populace surrounded the police station, which had to be rescued by a military detail. A prolonged battle, lasting almost three hours, resulted in 18 deaths—15 campesinos and three soldiers—and many wounded on both sides. In Espinal, skirmishes continued until at least the next day. Outbreaks were also reported in Huauchinango, Puebla and in the following days, federal troops were mobilized from Poza Rica, Papantla, and Gutiérrez Zamora to pursue rebels hiding in the mountains.[107]

On the Puebla side of the border, "where the oil pipelines and electrical transmission lines that supply the capital of the country are located," followers of the

104. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L17, H177, memorandum dated September 15, 1961; *Confidential*, 712.00/9-1861, report by the Consulate in Veracruz, September 18, 1961.

105. The information about the state of Veracruz is taken from a report by the U.S. Consulate in Veracruz to the State Department, *Confidential*, 712.00/ 9-1861, September 18, 1961.

106. The police reports note that "approximately 200 heads of households, all of them campesinos, wooed by David García Rodríguez, Ejido Commissioner, and Daniel Nava, a construction worker, had joined the Gasquista group in order to try to take the Presidio de Perote fort with a group from Tenextepec." AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L17, H97, report dated September 18, 1961.

107. Blanco R., "El levantamiento"; *Confidential*, 712.00/ 9-1861, September 18, 1961.

Zapatista Ubaldino Gallegos, known as Tata Uba, "fought for ten days against Battalions 7, 27 and 12, and which were sent to the region with tanks and mountain artillery."[108] On September 25, Tata Uba, one of his sons, and 14 compañeros including Manuel Gayoso, died in a skirmish between the towns of Vista Hermosa and Pantepec. Two days later, a lieutenant of don Ubaldino, Leonardo Barrios, who had managed to break the military siege in Vista Hermosa, was killed in a shootout nearby. Combat also took place in the vicinity of Izúcar de Matamoros in Puebla, and in Ixtepec on the isthmus of Oaxaca, where five deaths and numerous wounded were reported.[109]

In Chiapas, the rebellion was concentrated in the municipalities of Huixtla and Tapachula, near the Guatemalan border. In Huixtla, 29 rebels under the command of Hernán Escobar were arrested on the night of the 14th after a confrontation with police and a group of soldiers who prevented the Federacionistas, joined by some 300 other people, from "taking the city" at the hour of the "grito."[110] There were also reports of clashes at the Unión Roja ejido, in the municipality of Cacahoatán, and in Mazatán, Independencia and Comitán. The army was ordered to take control of the coastal region in order to prevent the spread of the insurrection.[111]

In Guerrero the conflict was concentrated in the towns of Rincón de la Cañada and La Unión, near the border with Michoacán. A wounded soldier said that in La Unión about 500 men were involved in the uprising. Armed with 22-caliber rifles and shotguns, insurrectionists sought to procure more armaments by assaulting a military installation. In spite of their numbers—or perhaps because of that—the authorities attributed the confrontation to "old grudges revived by alcohol."[112] The commander of the Teloloapan municipal police reported arresting 11 individuals who were trying "to attack the municipal council, the mayor's office and the police headquarters" in the town of Pachivia.[113]

There were also skirmishes in the area around Saltillo, Coahuila, while in Guanajuato, incidents occurred before the scheduled day. For instance, during the first days of September an uprising in Santa Bárbara, in the municipality of Ocampo, was put down by the police and army, while on September 14 some 30 men assaulted the Hacienda Cerro Prieto in the municipality of San Felipe. There, they captured arms, munitions and a truck (which they later abandoned about a mile

108. In a report by the DFS it is noted that Gallegos was a veteran of the revolution. AGN, DFS, 48-1-61, L17, H43, September 17, 1961. It is possible that he was in contact with the organization of Antonio Caballero.

109. *Política*, October 1, 1961

110. AGN, DFS, FPPM, L17, H176, memorandum dated September 15, 1961.

111. García de León, *Fronteras interiores*, p. 95.

112. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L17, H31, memorandum dated September 15, 1961.

113. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L17, H145, telegram dated September 20, 1961.

away) all with the intent of capturing the town of San Felipe the next day. The assault, however, alerted the army, and the takeover was prevented.[114]

On the night of September 15, a confusing and violent episode transpired in downtown San Luis Potosí. Responsibility for the violence was officially attributed to the supporters of Salvador Nava. That night, while the official Independence Day ceremony was taking place in the Plaza de Armas, Nava and several thousand of his supporters were participating in a carnival in Tequisquiapan Park, some ten blocks from the Plaza de Armas. The purpose of the carnival was to raise funds to launch the Democratic Party of San Luis Potosí. Around 11 p.m., just when Nava began his speech, the lights in the park went out, forcing the assembled crowd to exit. Some Nava supporters made their way to the Plaza de Armas to protest the incident, where they were received by soldiers, bayonets drawn.[115] At that very moment, the lights went out there as well. A flurry of gunshots left various dead and dozens of wounded. The newspapers reported that shots were fired from the rooftops of various building at the Palacio Municipal, killing a police agent. Meanwhile a group of men entered the city jail, in a failed attempt to liberate the prisoners. Soldiers stationed in the Plaza de Armas continued to fire into the crowd in order to disperse it. The gunfire continued all night.[116] The next day, Nava and about 50 of his collaborators and closest supporters were arrested, accused of associating with General Gasca in order to incite rebellion and destabilize the country. A short time later, the home office of the opposition newspaper, *La Tribuna,* was taken over by police and soldiers and ordered closed. Arrests of Navistas and Gasquistas were extended to other parts of the state. Although Salvador Nava denied involvement in the Federacionistas revolt, he was taken to the Campo Militar Número Uno in Mexico City.

After Gasca's arrest, official statements minimized the scope of the insurrection. Among the characteristics attributed to Gasca by the Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Secretary of National Defense were senility, delusions more appropriately treated by a "shrink" than by authorities, "subversive obsession" and "revolutionary mania." Nonetheless, the authorities took precautions. Without making specific public announcements, the duration of the military parade on September 16 in Mexico City was reduced to an hour and a quarter instead of the usual three hours. This was on account of the fact that the cavalry and the military contingents of Puebla, Toluca and other places near the capital were confined to their quarters. Troop movements took place beforehand in different points,

114. AGN, DFS, FPPM, 48-1-61, L16, H39 and L17 H116, August 30, 1961 and September 21, 1961.

115. *Confidential*, 712.00/9-2761, report of the U.S. Consul in Monterrey to the State Department, September 27, 1961.

116. *El Universal*, September 17, 1961.

"almost always at night, in order to not provoke alarm."[117] At the same time, the President and various governors came to the Independence Day ceremonies under extraordinary security measures. Obviously, the authorities knew about the extent of the revolt and the possibility that it might spread throughout the country in a matter of days.

In the weeks that followed, repression extended throughout the areas where confrontations had taken place and soldiers and police set out to locate and arrest those whose names appeared on the lists found in Gasca's home. But not only Gasquistas were captured. Soldiers took advantage of the situation and arrested Jaramillista campesinos, mining, agrarian and railroad leaders, including the wife of Demetrio Vallejo, who was apprehended in Oaxaca under the pretext that she was involved in the revolt.[118]

The explosion of campesino violence and the subsequent repression unleashed against the Federacionistas Leales and other social activists in the following weeks once again brought to the attention of public opinion the gravity of problems in the countryside. The most relevant political actors, entangled in worsening internal political conflicts and disputes between the left and right produced by the Cold War and the Cuban Revolution, suddenly found themselves facing the radicalization of discontented groups, which in various parts of the country decided to take "justice into their own hands." There may have been discrepancies in the personal motives of General Gasca but all actors, from across the political spectrum, agreed that it was necessary to address the increasing misery of Mexican campesinos.

CONCLUSIONS

The uprising of September 15 emphatically demonstrated the persistence of large groups of campesinos for whom the only perceived way to resolve their problems was through armed struggle. Police reports estimated that approximately 4,500 Federacionistas across the country had participated in the organization of the insurrection.[119] In spite of the efforts in official spheres to minimize the Federationista movement and ridicule its leader Celestino Gasca, it is clear that the geographical extent of the Federacionistas and their capacity to organize and coordinate supporters indicated that throughout large parts of the country recourse to revolutionary violence continued to be perceived as an option of political and social struggle. Moreover, in a historical replaying of the logic that had fueled the gener-

117. *Política*, October 1, 1961.

118. Ibid.

119. According to a police report, the Federacionistas had a national membership of 4,580 persons, of whom 1,400 were coordinators and 3,180 were "helpers." *Enfoque* (supplement to *Reforma*), June 16, 2002.

ative forces of the 1910 revolution, the Gasquista insurrectionists also worked from a strategy that moved from the local to the regional, in order to capture the center.

At the heart of the Federacionista uprising one finds discontent with the agrarian counterreform policies of the "Mexican Miracle," and the quest for local power as a means of defense against injustice and the lack of attention suffered by ejidatarios and small property owners. For these groups, the causes that motivated the revolutionary campesino insurrections in the first decades of the twentieth century remained absolutely valid at mid-century. With this conviction, the reclaiming of the revolution of 1910 was perhaps the best argument to legitimize armed struggle. Even in organizational terms, campesino groups operated under the caudillista logic that made the presence of a "General" necessary to give viability to the insurrection. Along these lines, the words of Lucio Cabañas are revealing:

> Here there was a concept, and sometimes it still exists in this region: there was the idea that it is only with armed uprising, like the one that Vidales led, helped by some General, that one can make war. That's why every time that we came to a town, an experienced man would approach us and say "Hey, professor, who is the General that is going to help us?" That's what they expect, ever since the Revolution. When Zapata came, he sent arms, support, and everything for the uprising, that's what happened and then General Henríquez Guzmán came, he sent arms, and General Vidales came and sent in arms, and then General Henríquez Guzman came for the uprising, and then Celestino Gasca. Again came the armaments of a general, always a general; there has always been that. That's why they said "Hey, professor, and who is the General who will give us the materials, who is the General this time?"[120]

As a political movement, the Federacionistas Leales lacked a clearly defined ideology that could place them squarely in the perspective of right or left. For General Gasca and his followers, closeness of their positions to those of conservative agrarianism did not exclude the possibility of proclaiming solidarity with the agrarian reform of the Cuban revolution, or seeking alliances with groups associated with the left, such as the dissident teachers and railroad workers. This ideological flexibility was again demonstrated when, in 1963, a little more than a year after the uprising, groups of Federacionistas Leales participated in the founding of the Central Campesina Independiente (CCI), a new dissident agrarian union linked to the MLN. Ideology notwithstanding, for the insurrectionists, armed struggle was the only response possible against exploitation, impunity of power and social injustices.

Thus it is possible to look beyond the political and ideological inconsistency of the leaders of Henriquismo and of Gasca himself, as the campesino bases com-

120. A former school teacher and guerrillero leader, Lucio Cabañas was interviewed in the 1970s by the Spanish journalist Luis Suárez. This interview was published in Luis Suárez, *Lucio Cabañas, el guerrillero sin esperanza* (Mexico: Roca, 1976), and is cited in Semo, "El ocaso."

mitted themselves throughout the 1950s to armed insurrection in order to defend their interests. Therefore we must consider the Henriquista and Federacionistas Leales movements as missing pieces in the continuity between the agrarian mobilizations of the postrevolutionary period leading up to the redistribution of land under Lázaro Cárdenas in the mid-1930s, and the rise of a new stage of agrarian struggle, both civil and armed, that emerged in the 1970s and continues into the present.

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