

PROVISIONAL PRESIDENT EMILIO PORTES GIL DISCUSSES
MEXICAN REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS, 1928-1930:
AN ORAL HISTORY STUDY

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By
Barbara Dianne Morrison

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ABSTRACT

Emilio Portes Gil entered the service of the Mexican Revolution at an early age and served in a variety of governmental posts from 1914 until 1928 when he was elected as Provisional President of Mexico. His administration covered a period of fourteen months. During this time he was confronted with important internal problems concerning agrarian reform, labor, Church-state relations, military insurrection, and university autonomy. The study includes a survey of the revolutionary background of the Portes Gil administration as well as a description of the measures employed in dealing with internal problems. It also includes a chapter composed of selected oral history text based on tape-recorded interviews with Portes Gil by James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie. This oral history material has been translated from Spanish to English and annotation has been supplied for the purpose of making the text more easily understood by non-specialists with an interest in twentieth century Mexican political history. An introductory chapter describes the nature of oral history and discusses the methodology employed by the Wilkies in their interviews with elites.

The study represents a combination of political history, biography, and autobiography; also, it constitutes a case

study of presidential politics in a developing country. Emphasis is placed on description rather than analysis, with the primary objective to make available for English-language readers or researchers a document that relates how a former Mexican President viewed his presidential service when questioned by an oral historian approximately thirty-five years after leaving office.

PREFACE

Academic interest in the violent phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1940) has increased in recent years as scholars have attempted to describe and to analyze the effects of the period on the people and institutions of contemporary Mexico. As is the case with all periods of national history, time must pass before political events and ideological changes can be readily placed in perspective. During the administration of President Emilio Portes Gil, a Catholic guerrilla war was ended and an army revolt was suppressed. Only sporadic and small-scale violence broke out in the decade of the 1930's; thus it is now apparent that the Portes Gil era (December, 1928, to February, 1930) marked a final stage of the great armed struggle that began with Madero's attack on the Díaz dictatorship in 1910.

A detailed political history of the Portes Gil administration has yet to be written, and a biography of this Mexican president is still lacking. Although Portes Gil has authored two autobiographical works, neither has been translated into English. An important oral history source was produced in 1964, however, when Dr. James W. Wilkie (currently Professor of Latin American History and Associate Director of the Latin American Center at the University of California, Los Angeles) and his wife, Edna Monzón de Wilkie, taped interviews with Portes Gil in Mexico City.

This thesis project was designed to make available to English-language readers selected portions of the Wilkies' important oral history interview which combines biography with autobiography. For the purpose of making the translated document more easily understood by persons lacking a background in twentieth-century Mexican political development, necessary introductory and background information has been supplied and bibliographical annotations have been added.

The study begins with an introduction in which the oral history method is described. The second chapter provides historical background material on the Mexican Revolution which brought Portes Gil and his immediate predecessors to power. Chapter III deals with five major internal problems that confronted President Portes Gil and which are discussed in those portions of the oral history interviews that have been translated, annotated, and presented in the final chapter. Hopefully, this study will serve as a model for similar projects designed to make oral history materials readily available in a useful form.

Although the author assumes all responsibility for the writing, translation, and annotation involved in producing this work, appreciation is expressed to Dr. Lyle C. Brown, Dr. Robert T. Miller, Dr. Thomas F. Walker, Dr. James W. Wilkie, and Mrs. Edna Monzón de Wilkie for their invaluable assistance. As director of the thesis, Dr. Brown supplied needed encouragement and facilitated research by placing his private collection of Mexican source materials at my disposal. A much-appreciated graduate assistantship in the Department of Political Science

at Baylor University made possible the completion of this past year of graduate study. Lastly, I must pay tribute to the assistance of Mrs. Nancy Dodd, who typed the manuscript under the pressure of a fast-approaching deadline.

Barbara Dianne Morrison

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT. | iii |
| PREFACE | v |
| Chapter | |
| I. INTRODUCTION. | 1 |
| II. REVOLUTIONARY BACKGROUND. | 6 |
| III. MAJOR INTERNAL PROBLEMS OF THE PORTES GIL ADMINISTRATION. | 15 |
| A. Agrarian Reform | 15 |
| B. Labor and the CROM. | 18 |
| C. Church-State Relations. | 24 |
| D. The Escobar Revolt. | 30 |
| E. University Autonomy | 34 |
| IV. AN ORAL HISTORY DOCUMENT: TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED INTERVIEWS. | 39 |
| WORKS CONSULTED | 118 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reconstruction of the political history of a developing country presents many difficulties. Special problems are encountered by those who attempt to chronicle and to analyze the political events of a period of great violence, such as the years of revolutionary upheaval in Mexico that stretched from 1910 to 1940. Some participants in revolutions may be illiterate and therefore incapable of establishing a written record of their activities. Others often lack the time or the desire to compose memoirs or to maintain diaries. Still others die before they have had an opportunity to put their thoughts into writing. And of course, the destruction that accompanies revolutionary strife may sweep away public archival collections and personal papers. While there is no substitute for written source materials and carefully preserved statistical data, some gaps of knowledge can be filled in through employment of the oral history technique; where records abound, oral history simply provides an additional means of doing a good job in a

more thorough fashion.¹

Recording oral history involves interviewing individuals or groups for the purpose of creating "new source materials from the reminiscences of their own life and acts, or from their association with a particular person, period, or event."² Recollections are tape-recorded and then transcribed into typescript. Although some oral historians have argued that their proper role is restricted largely to being a good listener so that there will be a minimum of danger of influencing the narration of the interviewee, this argument has been rejected by Professor James W. Wilkie. He insists, "The role of the historian is to stimulate a historical conscience in his subject and to prod his man into

¹For information concerning the origin and development of oral history, consult the following: Charles William Conway, "Lyman Copeland Draper, 'Father of American Oral History,'" Journal of Library History, I (October, 1966), 234-241; Allan Nevins, "Oral History: How and Why It Was Born," Wilson Library Bulletin, XL (March, 1966), 600-601; G. Robert Vincent, "The Sound of History: The Story of the National Voice Library--and the Man Who Made It," Library Journal, XC (October 15, 1965), 4282-4290; Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., "The Voice as History: Twenty Years with Tape," The Nation, November 20, 1967, 518-521; Joel Lieber, "The Tape Recorder as Historian," Saturday Review, June 11, 1966, 98-99; and Louis Shores, "The Dimensions of Oral History," Library Journal, XCII (March 1, 1967), 979-983. A growing number of books is being published based largely on oral history sources or including many pages of quoted oral history interviews. In some cases, a book may be composed entirely of oral history materials; for example, see John A. Garraty, Interpreting American History: Conversations with Historians (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1970).

²Elizabeth Rumics, "Oral History: Defining the Term," Wilson Library Journal, XL (March, 1966), 602.

talking about a number of concepts which generally are of more interest to academicians than to men of action."³ In short, oral history is more than oral autobiography.⁴ Thus Wilkie has written:

There are many paths conversation can take at any given juncture, and the investigator must be quick to select the right one and skillfully return to the others. For this reason it can be helpful to bring several scholars together to conduct interviews in order to increase the possibility that important points are not omitted. As hard as he tries, the historian can never cover all of the material which should be developed analytically. The best he can do is to try to ask sophisticated questions, knowing full well that a student of the future will lament that he missed many key elements. Nevertheless, the recorded sessions offer more to history than does either autobiography or biography alone; and we can look upon the oral history confrontation as an improvement in method, not as any final answer to understanding the past.⁵

³James W. Wilkie, "Postulates of the Oral History Center for Latin America," Journal of Library History, II (January, 1967), 50.

⁴Wilkie points out that Oscar Lewis, a cultural anthropologist, made extensive use of the tape-recorded oral history interview in his research on the culture of poverty. Lewis, however, omitted his own participation as he constructed the life histories of individuals whom he interviewed. See the following works on Mexico by Lewis: Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty (New York: Basic Book, 1959); The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family (New York: Random House, 1961); Pedro Martínez, A Mexican Peasant and His Family (New York: Random House, 1964); and A Death in the Sánchez Family (New York: Random House, 1969). Also, see a similar work resulting from oral history research in a different setting: La Vida, A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty--San Juan and New York (New York: Random House, 1966).

⁵Wilkie, "Postulates of the Oral History Center for Latin America," p. 51.

Not only does the oral history interview allow the person being interviewed a chance to record for posterity his recollections, but also it gives the interviewer an opportunity to assist in the selection of the historical documents that will be preserved for use by future generations.⁶ Furthermore, Wilkie proposes:

A sociology of knowledge will emerge as the historian asks similar questions of leaders who represent ideologies composing the whole political spectrum. As in a court of law, testimony may be taken in an attempt to register facts and interpretation for the official record. While we must recognize that we shall never find the whole truth, we are able to record knowledge upon which representatives of major groups in society have acted to determine which leaders have worked with the most accurate information at a given moment in time. Essentially, we are interested in comparing men's lives to see how the process of national history develops, and we must remember that what men think happens is often as important as what actually happens.⁷

Also, Professor Wilkie explains that "the development of oral history adds a humanistic as well as a socially scientific dimension to the scholar's kit of tools."⁸ And he contends that "by retaining the individual element in the recording of history, we not only attempt to examine biases of both historian

⁶Ibid., p. 47.

⁷Ibid., p. 48.

⁸Ibid.

and historical figure, but we attempt to capture personal equations and shadings of history which give balance and perspective to impersonal investigation."⁹

Although Emilio Portes Gil has written two autobiographical accounts covering his participation in Mexico's revolutionary politics (including his fourteen months as Provisional President of Mexico),¹⁰ a reading of the oral history document presented in Chapter IV of this study indicates that Professor Wilkie's interview with Mexico's former chief executive represents an original contribution to our knowledge of twentieth century political development in that country. So that the importance of persons and events mentioned in this interview can be better understood, the following chapter will sketch the revolutionary background of the Portes Gil administration.

⁹Ibid. For further development of Professor Wilkie's oral history methods and concepts, see his "Oral History of 'Biographical Elitelore' in Latin America" (paper presented at the Conference on "Folklore and Social Science," Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., New York City, November, 1967. Also, see Wilkie's "Alternative Views in History: (1) Historical Statistics, and (2) Oral History," to be published in Field Research Guide to Mexico, edited by Richard E. Greenleaf and Michael C. Meyer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, probably 1972).

¹⁰Emilio Portes Gil, Quince Años de Política Mexicana (3rd ed.; México, D.F.: Ediciones Botas, 1954); and idem., Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, Un Tratado de Interpretación Histórica (México, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano de Cultura, 1964).

CHAPTER II

REVOLUTIONARY BACKGROUND

Born in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, on October 3, 1891, Emilio Portes Gil approached manhood as the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz was crumbling under the impact of the Mexican Revolution which broke out in 1910.¹ Earlier, after decades of disorder, Díaz had brought thirty-five years of peace and a substantial amount of economic prosperity to the country. During this period Mexico was governed under the federal Constitution of 1857, which provided for separation of powers; but, in fact, governing power was centralized at the national level and was monopolized by the chief executive. Díaz celebrated his eightieth birthday in 1910, and without doubt the advanced age of the dictator contributed to the weakening of the regime. Another factor leading to his eventual downfall was the rising tide of Mexican nationalism, which was accompanied by manifestations of resentment at the enrichment of foreign investors--especially citizens of the United States--who received the President's encouragement and protection. Thus critics of Díaz charged that

¹See below, p. 40.

he had made Mexico "the father of foreigners and the step-father of Mexicans."²

Shortly after the turn of the century the Liberal Party, headed by Ricardo Flores Magón, challenged the dictatorship; but this opposition movement was effectively suppressed and its leadership was forced into exile.³ As Díaz approached the end of his seventh term, however, a young landowner named Francisco Madero published an important book, La Sucesión Presidencial en 1910.⁴ Critical of the Díaz system, the book sparked renewed anti-Díaz activity and caused the author to become a presidential candidate. As a young student, Portes Gil became a supporter of Madero and assisted in the publication of an anti-Díaz newspaper in his home town.⁵ Before the election was held, however, Madero was arrested. After being jailed briefly, he was released

²Frank R. Brandenburg, The Making of Modern Mexico (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 40. For a classic exposé of the Díaz regime, see John Kenneth Turner, Barbarous Mexico: An Indictment of a Cruel and Corrupt System (London: Cassell and Co., 1912).

³See Lyle C. Brown, "The Mexican Liberals and Their Struggle Against the Díaz Dictatorship," In Antología MCC, 1956 (México, D.F.: Mexico City College Press, 1956), pp. 318-362; and James D. Cockcroft, Intellectual Precursors of the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1913 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

⁴Francisco I. Madero, La Sucesión Presidencial en 1910 (3d ed.; México, D.F.: Librería de la Viuda de Ch. Bouret, 1911). The first edition was published in San Pedro, Coahuila, 1908; and the second edition was published in México, D.F., 1909.

⁵See below, p. 41.

on bond in the city of San Luis Potosí but then fled to Texas. From San Antonio he issued his Plan of San Luis Potosí, calling on fellow citizens to rise up in revolt. Although unsuccessful at first, with the assistance of a former outlaw known as Pancho Villa and assorted patriots and adventurers Madero was able to defeat the government's forces in northern Mexico during the early months of 1911. Almost simultaneously other rebel bands came into existence throughout the republic. Included among the insurgents was a peasant leader named Emiliano Zapata who operated in the state of Morelos.⁶

In May, 1911, Díaz was forced to abandon the country; and for a few months Francisco de la Barra served as provisional president until Madero was elected to succeed him. After taking office in November, 1911, Madero soon disappointed the revolutionaries who had helped to overthrow Díaz. Instead of purging the government of pro-Díaz functionaries and undertaking social and economic reforms, the new president sought to govern with disloyal civil and military officials while at the same time maintaining the status quo in regard to social and economic policy. Finally, under attack by dissatisfied revolutionaries such as Zapata and pro-Díaz elements such as General Bernardo Reyes, Madero was overthrown by General Victoriano Huerta in February, 1913. Shortly thereafter he was murdered, along with Vice President José María Pino Suárez, while being transported from

⁶See Jesús Silva Herzog, Breve Historia de la Revolución Mexicana: Los Antecedentes y la Etapa Maderista, No. 17 of Colección Popular (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960), pp. 54-176.

the presidential palace to the penitentiary in Mexico City. Although he had disappointed most revolutionaries while living, in death Madero became a martyr.⁷

Refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the Huerta government, Governor Venustiano Carranza of Coahuila raised his standard of revolt and announced the Plan of Guadalupe on March 26, 1913. As First Chief of the Constitutionalist Revolution, Carranza sought support from the land-hungry peasant masses and the restless industrial workers by promising to carry out all necessary economic, social, and political reforms. With the able military leadership of Alvaro Obregón, Carranza's troops succeeded in capturing Mexico City in 1914 and Huerta fled to Europe. At this point, however, open conflict developed between the Constitutionalist forces and those led by Villa and Zapata. As a result of this division within the ranks of the revolutionaries, Carranza was forced to abandon the national capital and withdraw to the port city of Veracruz.⁸ It was there that Portes Gil

⁷See ibid., pp. 177ff.

⁸For a detailed account of these military and political developments, see Lyle C. Brown, "The Politics of Armed Struggle in the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1915," in Revolution in Mexico: Years of Upheaval, 1910-1940, ed. by James W. Wilkie and Albert L. Michaels (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), pp. 60-72. For a description of Villa's operations, see John Reed, Insurgent Mexico, ed. by Albert L. Michaels and James W. Wilkie (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969). The best treatment of Zapata is found in John Womack, Jr., Zapata and the Mexican Revolution (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969). See also Robert E. Quirk, The Mexican Revolution, 1914-1915: The Convention of Aguascalientes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960).

entered the service of the Constitutionalist government as a sub-lieutenant clerk in the Office of the Military Assessor; and after General Obregón's army reoccupied Mexico City, Portes Gil was licensed to practice law and was appointed to the post of sub-chief in the Department of Military Justice.⁹

During the two years that followed, Zapata was killed and his peasant forces were scattered; at the same time Villa's army was crushed and the former bandit was forced to seek refuge in the mountains and deserts of his native Chihuahua.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Portes Gil became a judge of the Supreme Court of Justice in the state of Sonora under the governorship of Plutarco Elías Calles; and later he was appointed by General Obregón to a legal post in the Ministry of War and Naval Affairs.¹¹ Carranza then decided that the time had come to hold a constitutional convention for the purpose of legitimizing his regime and paving the way for his election as president. Under the guidance of the First Chief, a draft constitution was prepared and submitted to the convention delegates who met in Querétaro late in 1916. Despite the strong influence of Carranza, more radical elements under the leadership of Francisco J. Múgica succeeded in writing a new constitution which was similar to the Constitution of 1857 but which included some far-reaching reforms relating to

⁹See below, p. 42.

¹⁰See Jesús Silva Herzog, Breve Historia de la Revolución Mexicana: La Etapa Constitucionalista y la Lucha de Facciones, No. 17 of Colección Popular (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960), pp. 181-251.

¹¹See below, p. 43.

education, land tenure, labor, and religion.¹² Mexico now had a national constitution that incorporated a definite revolutionary program. Thus Howard F. Cline wrote:

The years of seemingly inconclusive revolutionary turmoil had not been wholly in vain. Mexico's new nationalism had, at the cost of innumerable lives, been slowly defined and labeled "The Revolution." Its program henceforth was the Constitution of 1917. Its slogans could now be used to mobilize the new forces in society and politics necessary to implement its goals--social justice, exploitation and redistribution of national wealth and resources, extirpation of special privileges, especially corporate and foreign, and the extension of "modernism" to the polyglot and still heterogeneous Mexican people.¹³

Under the new constitution, Portes Gil was elected in 1917 to represent his native state in the Chamber of Deputies of the federal Congress. Two years later he became involved in a strike of petroleum workers in Tampico; and as a result of this activity he suffered imprisonment and banishment to Chihuahua.¹⁴ Meanwhile, in spite of opposition by Carranza, Obregón announced that he would be a candidate for the presidency in 1920. Prohibited from seeking reelection under terms of the Constitution of 1917, Carranza supported the candidacy of Ignacio Bonillas, Mexico's ambassador to the United States.

¹²See Silva Herzog, Breve Historia de la Revolución Mexicana: La Etapa Constitucionalista y la Lucha de Facciones, pp. 252-283.

¹³Howard F. Cline, The United States and Mexico (rev. ed.; New York: Atheneum Press, 1963), p. 170.

¹⁴See below, p. 43; and Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 249-256.

When Adolfo de la Huerta, governor of Sonora, declared his support of Obregón, conflict between state and federal authorities resulted. Finally, on April 23, De la Huerta issued the Plan of Agua Prieta calling for rebellion against Carranza's government. Within a few days most of the nation's military forces had turned against the President, and he was forced to abandon Mexico City. On May 21 Carranza was betrayed and killed in the village of Tlaxcalantongo, and De la Huerta was elected as Provisional President of Mexico. His administration lasted only six months--just long enough to permit a presidential campaign that resulted in the election of Obregón by an overwhelming margin. Obregón's opponent, Alfredo Robles Domínguez, was not credited with a single vote in some states.¹⁵

After nearly three years in office, Obregón made known the fact that he favored the election of Plutarco Elías Calles as his successor. This choice prompted several generals to rebel in support of De la Huerta. Despite the fact that half of the army had turned against him, President Obregón took fast and effective action. Within a few weeks the insurgent forces were crushed, and the election of Calles was arranged without further difficulty.¹⁶ Meanwhile, because of his association with Obregón, Portes Gil had become provisional governor of

¹⁵See John W. F. Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1920 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), pp. 17-87.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 218-263; and Edwin Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism: The Political Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Army, 1910-1940 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 72-79.

Tamaulipas following the overthrow of the Carranza regime; then in 1925 he was elected as chief executive of his state for a four-year term.¹⁷

During Calles' four years as president (1924-1928), he was confronted with a revolt by army units and with an insurrection of militant Catholics. Although strongly opposed to some of the articles of the Constitution of 1917, the Catholic hierarchy did not mount a strong campaign against that fundamental law until 1926. When Archbishop José Mora y del Río asserted the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to constitutional provisions concerning education, land ownership, and regulation of religious activities, Calles reacted by expelling all alien clergy from the country, closing Catholic schools, deporting the Pope's Apostolic Delegate, and requiring that priests should register with civil authorities. In response to this action, the hierarchy announced that religious services would be suspended as of July 31, 1926; and shortly thereafter thousands of militant Catholics launched a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the government. Because of their proclaimed dedication to Cristo Rey (Christ the King), these rebels were called Cristeros.¹⁸

¹⁷See below, p. 44; and Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 294-297.

¹⁸Good accounts of the development of the Church-state conflict are found in J. Lloyd Mecham, Church and State in Latin America: A History of Politico-Ecclesiastical Relations (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), pp. 466-492; and Wilfrid Hardy Calcott, Liberalism in Mexico, 1857-1929 (1931; reprint ed., Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1955), pp. 268-369. See also Alicia Olivera Sedano, Aspectos del Conflicto Religioso de 1926 a 1929: Sus Antecedentes y Consecuencias (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1966).

As Calles' term of office neared an end, Generals Francisco Serrano and Arnulfo Gómez made known the fact that they would be candidates for the presidency in the 1928 elections. Several months before election day, however, they became involved in a plot to overthrow the government. As a consequence, both generals were executed; and Obregón was elected on July 1, 1928, for a second term.¹⁹ His election was made possible by a constitutional amendment which removed the original prohibition against more than one term in that office. But only two weeks after his election victory, Obregón was shot by José de León Toral, a young fanatic who believed that he was being used as an instrument of God against an evil government.²⁰ Subsequently, Portes Gil was named by Calles as Minister of *Gobernación*;²¹ and shortly thereafter the Tamaulipan politician was elected by the federal Congress to serve as Provisional President from December 1, 1928, to February 5, 1930.²²

¹⁹See Vito Alessio Robles, Desfile Sangriento (México, D.F.: A. del Bosque, 1936), pp. 141-150; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism, pp. 95-99; and Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 332-354.

²⁰See Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 362-378.

²¹*Gobernación* defies translation. While the word means government, there is no equivalent department in the United States. The Minister of *Gobernación* is the most powerful member of a president's cabinet, and frequently this post serves as a stepping-stone to the presidency. Jurisdiction of this ministry extends to elections, federal-state relations, political affairs, and enforcement of federal criminal laws; thus in some ways this ministry resembles the ministry of interior of some European governments.

²²See Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 388-396; and Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 417-436.

CHAPTER III

MAJOR INTERNAL PROBLEMS OF THE PORTES GIL ADMINISTRATION

A. Agrarian Reform

Uneven distribution of land was one of the primary causes of the Mexican Revolution. By the year 1910 approximately half of the nation's population was composed of impoverished peons living on large feudal estates known as *haciendas*. Controlling over fifty percent of the privately held land in Mexico, the *hacendados* (big landowners) found an additional supply of cheap labor in neighboring villages that had usually been deprived of all or most of their *ejidos* (communal lands) during the 19th century, especially after the beginning of the Díaz era. Madero had promised restitution of communal lands and private properties that had been taken by fraudulent or other unjust means, but no effective action was taken during his administration. On January 6, 1915, Carranza issued a decree law providing for restitution of lands that had been taken illegally; furthermore, this measure provided that where the land needs of villages could not be met through restitution, such needs could be satisfied through expropriation of adjacent hacienda properties. Later the framers of Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917 provided that the state legislatures and the national congress could impose limitations on

the size of land holdings and could redistribute excess acreages. Although Carranza did little to implement the provisions of Article 27, some progress was made during the administrations of Obregón and Calles.¹

¹One of the first scholarly works in this area (and still a highly reliable source) is Frank Tannenbaum's The Mexican Agrarian Revolution (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929); also see Tannenbaum's Mexico: The Struggle for Peace and Bread (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), pp. 136-149. For other sources on agrarian reform prior to the Portes Gil administration, see Jesús Silva Herzog, El Agrarismo Mexicano y la Reforma Agraria: Exposición y Crítica (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959), pp. 13-363; Eyler N. Simpson, The Ejido: Mexico's Way Out (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), pp. 43-97; and Nathan L. Whetten, Rural Mexico (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 75-124. Concerning the importance of agrarian reform, Charles C. Cumberland wrote: "Of all the aspects of social and economic change ushered in by the Mexican Revolution, agrarian reform took top priority and created the greatest dissension. Article 27 of the Constitution reflected the demands of the vast majority of Mexicans for a drastic change in the tenure system, but any change giving the peasantry legal access to land would mean the eviction of those who already had title. The peasant himself thought of 'land reform' only in the sense of tenure, a system which would allow him the opportunity to work the land as he saw fit and to enjoy the fruits of his labor; but the intellectual agrarian reformer saw something much more fundamental in 'land reform' than a mere redistribution of the land itself. He accepted, as an article of faith, land reform as the basis for all other social and economic change. He was convinced that redistribution of land would, ultimately, increase productivity, since much idle land would be cultivated, but much more importantly he believed that land ownership or usufruct would give to the peasant a sense of dignity, of responsibility. Community-owned lands would serve as a practical school of local democratic and representative government, and the entire process of marketing the product would make the peasant more aware of the outside world. Only through this process, the reformer held, could the vast submerged 80 or 90 percent of the population become national and Mexican, and thereby make their contribution to the society as a whole. Within this scheme of thought, increased agricultural production was secondary." Cumberland, Mexico: The Struggle for Modernity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 294.

As governor of Tamaulipas, Portes Gil gained a reputation as an active proponent of land reform. Under his leadership the government of that state distributed more land to villages than was distributed in any other state, with the exception of the state of Morelos.² At the same time, with the collaboration of Marte R. Gómez, he organized the League of Agrarian Communities of Tamaulipas. This peasant organization was used as a pressure group for supporting the land reform program, promoting public education in rural areas, and obtaining financial assistance.³ Thus, in view of his record in Tamaulipas, Portes Gil's election as Provisional President was hailed as a victory for agrarianism. A few weeks before he occupied the presidency, his agrarian aims were publicized as follows: creation of ejidos as provided for by the Constitution of 1917, assistance for peasants in obtaining animals and equipment, construction of more rural schools, organization of rural cooperatives for marketing and purchasing, establishment of agricultural training schools, and organization of rural credit institutions.⁴

²Simpson, The Ejido: Mexico's Way Out, p. 109

³See Marte R. Gómez's oral history interview in James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie, México Visto en el Siglo XX: Entrevistas de Historia Oral: Ramón Beteta, Marte R. Gómez, Manuel Gómez Morin, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, Emilio Portes Gil, Jesús Silva Herzog (México, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas, 1969), pp. 75-139; and see below, p.

⁴New York Times, October 14, 1928, Sec. V, p. 3.

Despite Portes Gil's enthusiasm for agrarian reform, both Calles and United States Ambassador Dwight W. Morrow were opposed to further land distribution. Morrow was concerned because United States citizens were not receiving prompt payment for expropriated properties, and Calles feared that distribution of small parcels of land among *ejidatarios* (ejido dwellers) would result in an unproductive agricultural system.⁵ Nevertheless, Portes Gil went ahead with plans for increased land distribution; and during the fourteen months of his administration, nearly 700,000 acres of land were distributed.⁶

B. Labor and the CROM

Ernest Gruening has pointed out that prior to the Revolution of 1910 "the industrial worker was only little less a serf than the agricultural."⁷ Under Madero organized labor made little progress, and Huerta was openly anti-labor. Nevertheless, the Revolution did promote the cause of organized labor

⁵ See Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 393-394; Stanley R. Ross, "Dwight W. Morrow, Ambassador to Mexico, The Americas, XIV (January, 1958), 286; and Ross, "Dwight Morrow and the Mexican Revolution," Hispanic American Historical Review, XXXVIII (November, 1958), 521.

⁶ James W. Wilkie, The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change Since 1910 (2d ed.; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 188; Jesús Romero Flores, Anales Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, Vol. II: La Constitución de 1917 y los Primeros Gobiernos Revolucionarios (México, D.F.: Libro Mex, 1960), pp. 368-370.

⁷ Ernest Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage (New York: Century Co., 1928), p. 335.

in Mexico. A first step toward modern unionism was taken in 1912 with the establishment of a working-men's center in Mexico City; it was called *Casa del Obrero Mundial* (House of the World Worker). Following the assassination of Madero, Huerta suppressed the Casa; and its adherents rallied to the support of Carranza.⁸ A pact was signed by the First Chief and Casa representatives at Veracruz on February 17, 1915. Under the terms of this agreement the Constitutionalist government was pledged to support organizing activities of the Casa and to enact appropriate laws for improving the conditions of the workers; for their part, Casa members were obligated to take up arms to combat the enemies of the Carranza regime and to assist in defending cities and villages held by the Constitutionalist army. Six Red Battallions of workers were organized for combat purposes, and Carranza turned the facilities of Mexico City's famous Jockey Club over to the Casa for use as its headquarters. Later, however, when the Casa sought to carry out strike activities, Carranza closed

⁸ In *ibid.*, p. 336, Gruening states: "Madero, little understanding the urgency of labor's needs, believed a really free electoral system would ultimately solve all the nation's problems. Under him the industrial system remained unchanged--with one transcendent difference: The Díaz ruthlessness was gone. Workers could meet, talk of organizing, and dream of striking successfully. Though labor under Madero got nothing tangible, new ideas germinated. Huerta with an iron-handed return to Porfirism closed the *Casa del Obrero Mundial*, the working man's center which foreshadowed the coming unionism, and not a few of the victims of his ruthlessness were labor organizers."

the Jockey Club and imprisoned several strike leaders.

At the Queretaro constitutional convention, pro-labor delegates prevailed and incorporated into Article 123 of the Constitution of 1917 numerous specific guarantees of labor rights.¹⁰ Then in 1918 the Regional Confederation of Mexican

⁹For two detailed accounts of the short but troubled history of the Casa, see Rosendo Salazar and José G. Escobedo, Las Pugnas de la Gleba (México, D.F.: Editorial Avante, 1923), Part I, pp. 95-223; and Salazar, La Casa del Obrero Mundial (México, D.F.: Editorial Costa-Amic, 1962).

¹⁰Concerning these provisions, Frank Tannenbaum wrote: "The promulgation of the Constitution by Carranza on February 5, 1917, marks a revolution in the history of labor in Mexico more sudden and drastic than any that we can record except that of the Russian Revolution, which had not then taken place. The workers of Mexico achieved at one stroke a legal position which gave them rights, powers and perogatives for which the workers in other parts of the world had been struggling a hundred years. The industrial conflicts of England, Germany, France, and the United States had all gone to shape and influence the ends achieved by the Mexican workers. It was a victory which the Mexican laborer had a few years earlier neither aspired to nor dreamt of and for which he was inadequately prepared--for which the nation possibly was not prepared industrially. It was a full-blown labor code in an agricultural country, and the code had its major justification in its bearing upon the defense of the Mexican laborer against foreign exploitation. The code, too, was revolutionary in the sense that it set out a definite and legally prescribed program for an incipient labor movement. This distinguished the Mexican trade-union movement from similar movements in the world. The Mexican labor movement now had a definite goal, the enforcement of the specific provisions so fortuitously written into the constitution." Tannenbaum, Peace by Revolution: An Interpretation of Mexico (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), p. 243. Also see Alfonso López Aparicio, El Movimiento Obrero en México: Antecedentes, Desarrollo y Tendencias (México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1952), pp. 163-175.

Labor or CROM (*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana*) was organized at a labor meeting held at Saltillo.¹¹ As a result of CROM support of Obregón in his conflict with Carranza, the new labor organization prospered during the administration of Obregón. Later, during the presidency of Calles, the CROM became even more powerful; and in 1927 its political arm, the Labor Party (*Partido Laborista*), could claim "one cabinet member out of seven, eleven out of fifty-eight senators, forty deputies out of 272, two governors out of twenty-eight, the Mexico City municipal government, and that of a number of surrounding towns in the Federal District."¹² The cabinet member was none other than Minister of Industry, Commerce and Labor Luis N. Morones, head of the CROM.¹³ Between 1918 and 1927 CROM membership had increased from 7,000 to 2,250,000.¹⁴

Although Morones did not favor the re-election of Obregón for a second presidential term, he was even less pleased with the selection of Portes Gil as Provisional President. While

¹¹López Aparicio, El Movimiento Obrero en México, pp. 177-180.

¹²Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage, p. 360.

¹³See Rosendo Salazar, Líderes y Sindicatos (México, D.F.: Ediciones T. C. Modelo, 1953), pp. 96-103.

¹⁴López Aparicio, El Movimiento Obrero en México, pp. 180-181.

still governor of Tamaulipas, Portes Gil had clashed with Morones when the latter sought to take control of Tamaulipan labor unions which were strongly influenced, if not controlled, by the governor. In an effort to make peace between Portes Gil and the CROM, Calles arranged for the President-elect to meet with CROM leaders just a few days before Portes Gil assumed the presidency. Although Morones did not attend, his lieutenants exchanged views with Portes Gil concerning problems in Tamaulipas, and the meeting ended with an agreement to make peace. This peace did not last long. On December 4, 1928, less than a week after taking office as Provisional President, Portes Gil was attacked by Morones in a speech given at the ninth annual meeting of the CROM. Coming only a few minutes after Calles had addressed the convention delegates, Morones' move forced Calles to make a public statement on December 8 in which he indicated that Portes Gil enjoyed his confidence.¹⁵

During the CROM convention a resolution was passed calling on the Provisional President to halt the performance of a play then being presented at the Lírico Theatre in the national capital. Entitled "The Crumbling of Morones," the satirical play depicted the CROM leader as a corrupt, licentious gangster. Portes Gil insisted that he could not impose restrictions on free speech, and he provided special police protection

¹⁵ Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 410-411.

as a guarantee that CROM members would not disrupt the play. Other resolutions passed at the convention resulted in the resignation of CROM members from government positions and the withdrawal of CROM delegates from the Labor and Management Convention that had been convened for the purpose of assisting in¹⁶ the framing of a new federal labor law.

As governor of Tamaulipas, Portes Gil had been responsible for the adoption of a new state labor code which implemented provisions of Article 123 for the benefit of Tamaulipan workers.¹⁷ After Obregón's election for a second term as President, he informed Portes Gil of his intention to obtain passage of a federal labor and social security law. Invited by the President-elect to assist in the formulation of this measure, Portes Gil had begun work on the project before Obregón's assassination. Subsequently, as Calles' newly appointed Minister of Gobernación, Portes Gil presented a draft labor code to eight hundred delegates to the Labor and Management Convention. Convoked by out-going President Calles, the convention was charged with the task of studying the draft code and offering recommendations for

¹⁶ See CROM, Memoria de los Trabajos Llevados a Cabo por el Comité Central de la C.R.O.M., durante el Ejercicio del 8 de Diciembre de 1928 al 25 de Septiembre de 1932 (Orizaba, Ver.: CROM, 1932), pp. 65-95; see also Portes Gil, Quince Años de Política Mexicana, pp. 116-134; idem, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 487-495; and Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 411-412.

¹⁷ See below, p. 45.

change. Finally, a Mixed Commission of Workers and Employers was named to prepare a final revision of the draft which could be submitted to the federal Congress.¹⁸ Much to the disappointment of Portes Gil, a new federal labor code was not adopted during his administration.¹⁹ Apparently the national crisis precipitated by the Escobar revolt, opposition from CROM and Mexican communist elements, as well as the intensive political activity connected with the presidential election of 1929 all contributed to delay passage of the measure. With some changes, however, it became law in 1931 during the presidency of Pascual Ortiz Rubio.²⁰

C. Church-state Relations

In spite of various anti-clerical provisions found in Mexico's Constitution of 1857, the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed a great amount of freedom during the era of Porfirio Díaz.

¹⁸Portes Gil, Quince Años de la Política Mexicana, pp. 139-146; idem, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 512-516.

¹⁹For the text of the proposed code sent to the federal Congress in July, 1929, see Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 516-547. A necessary amendment to Article 123 was adopted in 1929. See ibid., pp. 547-549.

²⁰For the text of the measure as finally passed in 1931, see Ley Federal del Trabajo, with annotated text and concordance by Lic. Enrique Calderón (México, D.F.: El Nacional, 1938).

Likewise, even though the Church was generally unfriendly toward Madero, it was not subjected to significant restrictions or persecution until 1913 or later. Church sympathies for the Huerta regime branded the clergy enemies of the Revolution in the eyes of most Constitutionalist leaders. Although Carranza's proposed draft of the Revolutionary Constitution was only mildly anti-clerical in tone, the more radical convention delegates under the leadership of Francisco Mújica were responsible for incorporating into Articles 3, 5, 24, 27, and 130 many provisions that were viewed with great repugnance and alarm by the Mexican ecclesiastical hierarchy.²¹

21

Professor Lyle C. Brown has summarized these provisions found in the original text of the Constitution of 1917 as follows: "Article 3 declares that instruction in all public education institutions shall be free and secular; also, it specifies that private primary schools must impart secular instruction and may be established only subject to official supervision. Further, no religious corporation or member of the clergy may establish or direct a primary school. Monastic orders are prohibited by Article 5, and Article 25 provides for government supervision of public worship. Other anti-clerical provisions are found in Article 130, which prohibits establishment of a state religion, establishes marriage as a civil contract, and bans religious oaths. This article authorizes each state legislature to determine the number of clergy allowed to function within its territory, specifies that only native Mexicans may practice the religious profession, and prohibits members of the clergy from holding public office, voting, assembling for political purposes, or criticizing the Constitution. Also, it prevents construction of new churches without government consent; and under the terms of Article 27, religious institutions are prevented from owning land. Further, all places of public worship, together with other properties used for religious purposes, are declared to belong to the nation." Brown, "Mexico's Constitution of 1917," in Wilkie and Michaels, Revolution in Mexico, p. 114.

Despite continuing tension between Church and state, relatively little was done to implement the anti-clerical provisions of the Revolutionary Constitution until 1926. The principal complaints of the Catholic hierarchy concerned action by state legislatures which restricted the number of clergy allowed to function within state boundaries and government encouragement of the schismatic Mexican Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church (*Iglesia Ortodoxa Católica Apostólica Mexicana*). On February 4, 1926, a crisis began to develop as a result of the publication of a statement by Archbishop José Mora y del Río. The archbishop confirmed a previous newspaper report that the Church would open a campaign against unjust laws, and he stated: "The Episcopacy, clergy, and Catholics do not recognize and combat Articles 3, 5, 27, and 130 of the existing constitution."²² President Calles interpreted this as an act of defiance and subsequently began to apply various restrictions based on the controversial articles. In the eyes of the Mexican hierarchy, the most serious governmental action came on July 21 when the President decreed that as of August 1st all clergy functioning in the Federal district and territories must register with civil authorities. The hierarchy's response was to announce that all public religious services would be suspended after July 31. At this same time Catholic guerrilla bands began operations in various parts of

²²Quoted in Mecham, Church and State in Latin America, p. 479.

the country, particularly in the states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Colima, Querétaro, Puebla, and Veracruz. Loosely coordinated and supported by the League for the Defense of Religious Liberty (*Liga Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa*), these Cristero elements were openly supported by some of the bishops (who were in exile or in hiding) and were accompanied by priests serving as chaplains and even as military commanders. 23

Upon his arrival in Mexico in October, 1927, United States

²³ The best pro-Catholic account of this Church-state conflict is Antonio Rius Facius, México Cristero: Historia de la ACJM, 1925 a 1931 (México, D.F.: Editorial Patria, 1960). See also Aquiles P. Moctezuma, El Conflicto Religioso de 1926: Sus Orígenes, Su Desarrollo, Su Solución (2d ed., 2 vols.; México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1960); Spectator [Dionisio Eduardo Ochoa], Los Cristeros del Volcán de Colima: Escenas de la Lucha por la Libertad Religiosa en México, 1926-1929 (2d ed., 2 vols.; México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1961); and Mons. Leopoldo Lara y Torres, Documentos para la Historia de la Persecución Religiosa en México (México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1954). The Mexican government's side of the story is told in Luis C. Balderrama [José M. González], El Clero y el Gobierno de México: Documentos para la Historia de la Crisis en 1926 (2 vols.; México, D.F.: Editorial Cuauhtémoc, 1927); Lic. Alfonso Toro, La Iglesia y el Estado en México (Estudio sobre los Conflictos entre el Clero Católico y los Gobiernos Mexicanos desde la Independencia hasta Nuestros Días), (México, D.F.: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1927), pp. 361ff; and Silvano Barba González, La Rebelión de los Cristeros, (México, D.F.: Manuel Casas, 1967). For a graphic presentation of the Cristero Rebellion, see Gustavo Casasola, Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana (4 vols.; México, D.F.: Editorial F. Trillas, 1962), III, 1829-1837. One of the most recent works is that of a Soviet writer, Nicolás Larin, La Rebelión de los Cristeros (1926-1929), trans. by Angel C. Tomás (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1968).

Ambassador Dwight Morrow quietly went to work to end the religious dispute. First, Morrow was instrumental in setting up negotiations between Rev. John J. Burke, of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and President Calles. These negotiations progressed in a satisfactory fashion until President-elect Obregón was assassinated on July 17, 1928. In the months that followed, strong public sentiment stirred up by the trial of the assassin, José de León Toral, and the Catholic nun, María Concepción Acevedo y de la Llata, known as Madre Conchita, who was charged with influencing him to commit the crime. Nevertheless, Provisional President Portes Gil made known his willingness to renew negotiations.²⁴ After he refused to save Toral from the firing squad with a pardon, Portes Gil narrowly escaped death as his presidential train was dynamited while rolling through the state of Guanajuato on February 10, 1929. In spite of this experience, Portes Gil continued to seek a settlement of the Church-state conflict. In the weeks that followed Morrow, Rev. Edmond A. Walsh of Georgetown University, Ambassador Miguel Cruchaga Tocornal of Chile, and others were involved in a flurry of activity designed to bring Portes Gil and leaders of the Mexican Episcopacy together. Finally, in

²⁴ See Sister M. Elizabeth Ann Rice, The Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and Mexico, as Affected by the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Mexico, 1925-1929 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), pp. 109-140.

June, 1929, Apostolic Delegate Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores and Bishop of Mexico Pascual Díaz returned from the United States and held a series of conferences with Portes Gil.²⁵ On June 21 the negotiations were concluded with a public statement from the President in which he declared "that it is not the purpose of the Constitution, nor of the laws, nor of the Government of the Republic to destroy the identity of the Catholic Church or of any other, or to interfere in any way with its spiritual function."²⁶ Nevertheless, he did not indicate that there would be any alteration of the controversial articles of the Constitution or changes in the decrees that had been issued in 1926. Speaking for himself and Bishop Díaz, Archbishop Ruiz y Flores announced, "As a consequence of the said statement made by the President, the Mexican clergy will resume religious services pursuant to the laws in force."²⁷

²⁵Ibid., pp. 141-182.

²⁶From text of statement printed in ibid., pp. 205-206.

²⁷From text of statement printed in ibid., p. 206. In his accounts of the diplomacy leading up to the negotiations, Portes Gil minimizes the role played by Morrow. See Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 561-577; and idem, Quince Años de la Política Mexicana, pp. 310-332. Cf. Miguel Cruchaga Tocornal, "El Conflicto Religioso Mexicano," Revista Chileno de Historia y Geografía, CXIII (January-June, 1949), 216-255; and Edward J. Berbusse, S.J., "The Unofficial Intervention of the United States in Mexico's Religious Crisis, 1926-1930," The Americas, XXIII (July, 1966), 28-62.

Actually, nothing had been settled; the statements merely established a *modus vivendi*. Probably there was little else that the Church could do. Although Cristero bands still held out in the mountainous regions of western and central Mexico, their Supreme Chief, General Enrique Gorostieta y Velarde, had been killed on June 2.²⁸ In August, Gorostieta's successor, General Jesús Degollado Guízar, ordered all Cristeros to lay down their arms; and he explained, "His Holiness, the Pope, by means of His Excellency, the Apostolic Delegate, for reasons which we do not know but which we accept as Catholics, has disposed that, without abolishing the laws, worship services be resumed and the priest . . . begin to exercise his public ministry."²⁹

D. The Escobar Revolt

Beginning with the Madero administration, Mexico's chief executives had experienced a series of military revolts. Thus, Portes Gil could not have been greatly surprised when several of his generals rebelled early in March, 1929. Included among the insurgents were Generals José Gonzalo Escobar, Jesús

²⁸Rius Facius, México Cristero, pp. 425-429.

²⁹The text of this final order is printed in Degollado Guízar, Memorias de Jesús Degollado Guízar, Ultimo General en Jefe del Ejército Cristero (México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1957), pp. 270-273. For data concerning the effect of the Cristero Rebellion on Mexican Catholicism, see James W. Wilkie, "Statistical Indicators of the Impact of National Revolution on the Catholic Church in Mexico, 1910-1967," Journal of Church and State, XII (Winter, 1970), 89-106.

M. Aguirre, Francisco R. Manzo, and Fausto Topete. All had been closely associated with Obregón, and his assassination had come as a heavy blow to their hopes for high places. Seeing that Calles was determined to attempt to rule Mexico through the newly-created National Revolutionary Party or PNR (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*), the dissident generals decided that insurrection was their only recourse. So it was that in February they drafted their Plan of Hermosillo; and on March 3 they took to the field, followed by some 30,000 troops and approximately a third of the officers of the army.³⁰

Original plans of the rebels called for capture of Portes Gil and installation of Escobar as Provisional President. Early on the morning of March 3, however, Portes Gil received a visit from General Abundio Gómez, the Deputy Minister of War. General Gómez showed him a note that had just been received from General Aguirre, who was Chief of Military Operations in Veracruz. This communication stated that Aguirre was en route to Mexico City in compliance with orders from the Ministry of War; Gómez also had a second note from Aguirre which accused the governor of Veracruz, Adalberto Tejeda, of seditious

³⁰ Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism*, p. 103. The text of the Plan of Hermosillo is printed in Froylán C. Manjarrez, *La Jornada Institucional*, Part II: *La Crisis de la Violencia* (México, D.F.: Talleres Gráficos Editorial y "Diario Oficial," 1930), pp. xvii-xxi.

acts. Certain that Tejeda was completely loyal, Portes Gil immediately notified Calles of this development.³¹

Sensing that a revolt was in the making, Calles promptly volunteered his services. Portes Gil responded by naming him Minister of War³² and by informing the nation that disloyal military elements were in the process of rebelling.³³ At the same time the Provisional President made it clear that his government would take all necessary steps to maintain itself in power. Later Portes Gil recalled a meeting that he had had with Aguirre on February 7, less than a month before. At that time Aguirre had confided that Generals Escobar, Manzo, Topete, and others were attempting to initiate an uprising; but Aguirre had asked that he be named to command forces to be organized "in order to smash to pieces the traitors, especially this peacock Escobar, who is not and never has been a soldier."³⁴

³¹Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, p. 496; Manjarrez, La Jornada Institucional, Part II, pp. 11-12.

³²General Joaquín Amaro, Minister of War at that time, was incapacitated due to an eye injury resulting from a polo match. See New York Times, March 4, 1929, p. 3.

³³This message is printed in XLVI Legislatura de la Cámara de Diputados, Los Presidentes de México ante la Nación: Informes, Manifiestos y Documentos de 1821 a 1966, Tomo V: Manifiestos y Documentos, 1811-1966 (México, D.F.: Imprenta de la Cámara de Diputados, 1966), pp. 698-702.

³⁴Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, p. 498.

As for Escobar's loyalty, when informed by Portes Gil of Aguirre's infidelity, the general reported that all was normal within his command and that he was standing by to carry out any orders. The very next day Escobar declared himself in rebellion and moved toward Monterrey.³⁵

Calles wasted no time in striking at the insurgents. General Miguel M. Acosta was ordered to move against Aguirre, and within three days the rebel commander had been forced to abandon the port city of Veracruz. Shortly thereafter Aguirre was captured and executed following a fast court-martial. Meanwhile Calles sent the bulk of his forces northward in three columns commanded by Generals Juan Andreu Almazán, Saturnino Cedillo, and Lázaro Cárdenas, who was accompanied by Calles. After only two months of campaigning, most of the rebels had been killed, had surrendered, or had taken refuge in the United

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 503-504. Governor Fausto Topete of Sonora did not hesitate in sending a message of defiance to the Provisional President. He stated in part: "I advise you . . . that the Government of Sonora is following with enthusiasm the activity of the meritorious revolution under Chief Jesús M. Aguirre, who is having the honor, through his deeds, to break the shameful silence of those who refuse to recognize the servile government which has made a joke of our hopes as free men." He added, "We have looked in vain to see in you a successor of the noble late President-elect Alvaro Obregón, who paid with his life for his love of liberty and his love for his country as shown in his efforts to improve the conditions of the poor and weak." Quoted in New York Times, March 4, 1929, p. 18.

States. Unfortunately, there was much damage to railroads where the rebels had torn up tracks to slow down their pursuers; also, many banks were looted.³⁶ Nevertheless, Portes Gil remained firmly in the President's chair, and Calles had lived up to his title of Maximum Chief of the Revolution.

E. University Autonomy

The National University of Mexico came into existence in 1910 at the twilight of the Díaz era. Formerly grouped together under the name of the Pontifical University, the component schools acquired a new name and purpose as a result of the efforts of Justo Sierra, who was Díaz's Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Speaking at the inaugural ceremonies on September 22, Sierra proclaimed:

The University has no history; the Pontifical University is not the antecedent, it is the past; the new University desires to base itself fundamentally on scientific investigation; its educative action must result from its scientific functioning under the leadership of chosen groups of Mexican intellectuals who desire to cultivate the pure love of truth, and who must persevere day by day and determinedly to see to it that truth, the tests of science, and the interest of the fatherland must be united in the soul of every Mexican in order to create a type of character destined to crown the greater task of popular education.³⁷

³⁶A detailed chronicle of these military operations is found in Manjarrez, La Jornada Institucional, Part II, pp. 29-194. See also Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 436-458.

³⁷Quoted in George I. Sánchez, The Development of Higher Education in Mexico (New York: Kings' Crown Press, 1944), p. 69. See also George F. Kneller, The Education of the Mexican Nation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), pp. 170-172.

As early as 1881 this same Justo Sierra had envisioned the University as a "corporation independent of the State, since the time of creating autonomy of public instruction has arrived." ³⁸

It was not until 1929, however, that autonomy was achieved. This development had its genesis in a strike by students in the School of Law, the oldest branch of the University. This action resulted from a change in the system of administering examinations.³⁹ Begun on May 7, 1929, the strike brought about the closing of the Law School within two days as disorder and acts of violence spread. At this point a group of students held a meeting and decided to appeal to President Portes Gil to arbitrate the dispute. Meanwhile, an increasing level of violence brought police and firemen to the campus to restore order. ⁴⁰

³⁸Quoted in Jorge Siegrist Clamont, En Defensa de la Autonomía Universitaria: Trayectoria Histórica-Jurídica de la Universidad Mexicana (2 vols.; México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1955), I, p. 105.

³⁹There is some dispute concerning exactly what changes were made in the examination system. The New York Times (May 8, 1929, p. 7) states that the Law School had decided to administer monthly examinations instead of term examinations. Portes Gil states that the Rector of the National University had determined that students in the professional schools should have three written examinations each year instead of the customary oral examination (Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, p. 578). Siegrist Clamont says that the Director of the National School of Law had ordered the scheduling of a written examination each semester, and that at that same time the Director of the National Preparatory School also had formulated a stricter plan of study for that branch (En Defensa de la Autonomía Universitaria, p. 243).

⁴⁰New York Times, May 10, 1929, p. 3; Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 464-465.

After a series of clashes between students and police, on May 25 Portes Gil announced the withdrawal of all law-enforcement personnel from the campus and invited the strikers to confer with him either personally or in writing concerning the reason for the strike.⁴¹ Subsequently the President received a petition dated May 27 which called for the resignations of the Minister and Deputy Minister of Public Education and the Rector of the University; also, the petition demanded the dismissal of the Chief of Police of the Federal District and the Chief of the Security Commission, together with all University and Ministry of Public Education personnel "responsible for reprisals exercised against student strikers." Also, the document called for reorganization of the governing board of the University so that student body representatives could not be outvoted by faculty and administrators. It was proposed that the newly constituted board should then nominate three candidates from which the Provisional President would appoint one as rector to replace the incumbent, Antonio Castro Leal.⁴²

Portes Gil decided that these proposals did not go to the root of the problem that had produced the disorder. He concluded that to grant the demands would undermine his authority but would not resolve the serious problems at hand. Accordingly, he announced that in the near future he would

⁴¹The text of this announcement is printed in Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 578-579.

⁴²This document is printed in ibid., pp. 479-581.

recommend that the federal Congress grant autonomy to the University; accordingly, on May 29, he sent a message to the legislators calling for a special session to consider authorization of a University Autonomy Law.⁴³

Since the strike had broken out in the midst of a presidential campaign being waged by José Vasconcelos, the famous philosopher and writer who was a popular former rector of the University, some were quick to conclude that it had been politically inspired. Portes Gil himself was of the opinion that the strike had a definite political character; but he was convinced that an autonomous University would be better able to divorce itself from politics.⁴⁴ A cooperative Congress took the requested action in June;⁴⁵ hence, the Organic Law of the Autonomous National University of Mexico was signed by Portes Gil on July 10, 1929.⁴⁶

One writer concludes that "the arrangement for the autonomy of the National University at this time was another

⁴³The document is printed in Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Diario de los Debates de la Cámara de Diputados, XXXIII Legislatura, Año I, Período ordinario, Sesión de la Comisión Permanente, Tomo I, Num. 69 (May 30, 1929), p. 2.

⁴⁴Siegrist Clamont, En Defensa de la Autonomía Universitaria, I, p. 247. For Vasconcelos' own view of the university autonomy question, see his El Proconsulado (4th ed., purged; México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1958), pp. 210-211.

⁴⁵See Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Diario de los Debates de la Cámara de Senadores, XXXIII Legislatura, Año I, Período extraordinario, Tomo II, Num. 2 (June 5, 1929), pp. lff.

⁴⁶The text is printed in México, Diario Oficial, Tomo LV, Num. 21 (July 26, 1929), pp. 1-8.

dramatic and popular achievement for President Portes Gil."

In a statement addressed to the public, the Provisional President described this achievement as another great victory for the

Revolution.⁴⁸ Since supporters of Vasconcelos would have been happy to prolong the University strike and accompanying violence in order to discredit the government, the measure providing for University autonomy could indeed be considered a victory for Portes Gil and Calles, who personified the Revolution. At any rate, Vasconcelos was unsuccessful in his bid for the presidency and lost the election. On February 5, 1931, Portes Gil was able to turn over the presidency to a successor who had been selected and placed in power by Calles--in spite of Vasconcelos' presidential campaign and an anti-governmental revolt by General Escobar and his associates.

⁴⁷ Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, p. 467.

⁴⁸ The text of this statement is printed in Los Presidentes de México ante la Nación, V, 703-704.

CHAPTER IV

AN ORAL HISTORY DOCUMENT: TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED INTERVIEWS

May 7, 1964

[p. 493]¹ James W. Wilkie (JWW): *Licenciado*,² we should like to begin by talking about your birth, your childhood, your parents, your life, and your recollections of Ciudad Victoria.

Emilio Portes Gil (EPG): With much pleasure, but not without first thanking such a fine couple for honoring me with this interview.

JWW: Thank you.

EPG: I was born in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, on October 3, 1891; which is to say that I became 72 years of age in October of last year. My parents were very poor. My father was a lawyer, but he died when I was three years old. My mother was obliged to work in order to support her three children. My sister died at an early age; my brother died in 1918, shortly before he was to become a lawyer.

¹This page number and subsequent page numbers in brackets refer to the pagination of the original Spanish text in Wilkie and Wilkie, México Visto en el Siglo XX.

²The title *Licenciado* is given to persons who have received the licentiate degree in a university. It is generally given to those receiving a law degree. When used before a person's name, the title is usually abbreviated to Lic.

My mother is worthy of admiration for the way she toiled in order to pay for my primary school education. With her sewing machine she made clothing which I delivered to the homes of her customers. I did this until I was twelve years old; then I began to work in a store in Ciudad Victoria, earning a weekly wage of two pesos, which I gave to my mother. I continued my studies at the Victoria City Normal School [*Escuela Normal de Ciudad Victoria*] with the assistance of a state government scholarship of fifteen pesos per month; thus, I was able to give more help to my mother. Between the years 1906 and 1910, I completed my studies for the titles of *profesor* [teacher] and *bachiller* [secondary school graduate]. I worked as an elementary school teacher for three years, receiving a salary of forty pesos a month.

When Mr. Francisco I. Madero³ was campaigning for the Presidency of the Republic in 1910, in opposition to the dictatorship of General [Porfirio] Díaz,⁴ he passed through Ciudad Victoria

³Francisco Indalecio Madero was born in Coahuila on October 30, 1873. He was educated in the United States and Europe. For other biographical details see two excellent studies: Charles Cumberland, The Mexican Revolution: Genesis Under Madero (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1952); and Stanley R. Ross, Francisco I. Madero, Apostle of Mexican Democracy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955).

⁴Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) was born in Oaxaca City, Oaxaca. He fought in defense of the regime of Benito Juárez in the War of the Reform and against the invading French army. After an unsuccessful revolt against Juárez in 1871, he succeeded in overthrowing the government of Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada in 1876. From that year until 1911 he dominated Mexico and served as president except for the 1880-1884 period when the office was filled by his lieutenant, General Manuel González. For a readable biography, see Carleton Beals, Porfirio Díaz, Dictator of Mexico (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1932).

during the early days of November. A group of his partisans and some of us students welcomed him at the railroad station.

[p. 494] While a student, I collaborated with other school-mates in founding a newspaper which was in open opposition to the state government, because the governor at that time had been imposed [upon the people] and he had not obtained a majority of the votes. Besides, while he was Secretary General of the Government, he became a candidate without having resigned his post three months previously as required by the State Constitution. Because this was a violation of the law, we initiated our opposition to him. Persecuted, we had to leave Tamaulipas in order to continue our studies in Mexico City. This happened in July, 1912.

With our departure, the newspaper which we were editing ceased publication. I came to Mexico to take my second year of law school; I had completed the first year in Ciudad Victoria.

In those days a strike broke out at the National School of Jurisprudence [*Escuela Nacional de Jurisprudencia*]. Since we felt that the school was attempting to impose measures which infringed upon student rights, we felt it was our duty to support that movement.

For this reason the Free School of Law [*Escuela Libre de Derecho*] was founded. It has just completed its 52nd anniversary. I am a graduate of the Free School of Law, an institution which I consider to be of great prestige in the eyes of the Mexican Bar. Distinguished lawyers and judges, who have given eminent service to the Revolution and the Mexican Bar, have graduated from this law school.

In 1914, before I received my law degree, I adhered to the Constitutionalist Revolution while I was still a student and traveled to the port of Veracruz, placing myself at the orders of the government which was headed by the First Chief of the Revolution, Venustiano Carranza.⁵ There I began to work in the Office of the Military Assessor and in the Justice Department, having worked as the sub-lieutenant clerk to the Assessor. And thus, I was gradually rising in rank until Mexico City was taken by the forces of General Pablo González. I was then able to take my professional exam on October 3, 1915, that is to say, at the age of 24 years. Now licensed to practice law, I was named by the First Chief of the Revolution, Venustiano Carranza, as sub-chief of the Department of Military Justice, in which position I began to figure in politics in a modest way.

In 1916, I occupied the post of magistrate of the Supreme Court of Justice in Sonora, while General Plutarco Elías Calles⁶ was Governor of the state.

⁵Venustiano Carranza (1859-1920) was a native of Cuatro Ciénegas, Coahuila. He served as a senator in the Díaz era and was governor of Coahuila at the time of Madero's assassination. Carranza also suffered a violent death; he was shot on May 21, 1920, by forces under the command of General Rodolfo Herrero. For a biography, see Juan Gualberto Amaya, Venustiano Carranza, Caudillo Constitucionalista (México, D.F.: n.p., 1947).

⁶Plutarco Elías Calles (1877-1945) was born in Guaymas, Sonora. After employment as a teacher and school inspector, he rendered military service to the Madero and Carranza regimes. Under Carranza he became Minister of Industry, Commerce and Labor in 1919; but he sided with Obregón in the overthrow of Carranza. During the presidency of Obregón, Calles occupied the offices of Minister of War and Minister of Gobernación. Many details concerning Calles' public life are found in Juan Gualberto Amaya, Los Gobiernos de Obregón, Calles y Regimenes "Peleles" Derivados del Callismo (México, D.F.: n.p., 1947).

That same year I was called by General [Alvaro] Obregón,⁷ who designated me assessor of the Ministry of War and Naval Affairs and a member of the Revisory Commission of Military Laws. In 1917 I was elected Deputy to the Federal Congress from the port city of Tampico.

In the month of May, 1919, I led a strike of the petroleum workers, which broke out in Tampico after a labor meeting which took place in the Plaza of Liberty [*Plaza de Libertad*] and in which the federal forces had intervened in a violent manner. This resulted in the death of four workers and the military chief, Major Martínez Cuadras, who commanded the squadron of soldiers. By order of General Ricardo González V., chief of the Tampico [p. 495] garrison, I was deported to the city of Chihuahua in the company of eighteen workers and Professor Juan Gual Vidal.

We were in the State Penitentiary for two months. During this period I directed the Tampico newspaper, El Diario, which

⁷Alvaro Obregón (1880-1928) was a native of Sonora. Although he did not take up arms against the Díaz dictatorship, Obregón was elected as mayor of Huatabampo, Sonora, during the presidency of Madero. In 1912 he became an officer in the state military forces that combatted anti-Madero rebels led by Pascual Orozco. Following the assassination of Madero, Obregón became Carranza's principal military commander in subsequent campaigns against Huerta and, later, against Villa and Zapata. For an autobiographical account of his military service, see Alvaro Obregón, Ocho Mil Kilómetros en Campaña, Vol. V of Fuentes para la Historia de la Revolución Mexicana (2d ed.; México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959). Under Carranza he became Minister of War and Naval Affairs but resigned that cabinet position early in 1917. For an account of Obregón's political life and thought, see Narciso Bassols Batalla, El Pensamiento Político de Alvaro Obregón (México, D.F.: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1967).

opposed the government of Carranza, since he was attempting to impose *Ingeniero*⁸ Ignacio Bonillas in the Presidency.

In July of 1928, after the death of General Obregón, I was named Minister of Gobernación by President Calles. It was my lot to collaborate with General Calles during the tremendous crisis that originated with the assassination of the President-elect.

JWW: Before this you were governor of Tamaulipas, weren't you?

EPG: I was governor of Tamaulipas twice. My first term began with the triumph of the Revolution of Agua Prieta in 1920, when Governor Adolfo de la Huerta of the state of Sonora withdrew recognition from the President because of Carranza's desire to impose in the Presidency the unpopular Mexican Ambassador to Washington, Ignacio Bonillas. Because of this imposition, De la Huerta withdrew recognition from President Carranza and the revolt of the Plan of Agua Prieta triumphed. Again, in 1925, I was elected Governor of Tamaulipas.

On September 25, 1928, I was named Provisional President by the Federal Congress to substitute for General Obregón, the President-elect, who had been assassinated.

JWW: Had you followed mainly a pro-labor and pro-agrarian course of action in Tamaulipas?

EPG: It fell to me to initiate the Agrarian Reform in my native state since the land had not yet been distributed. During the years from 1925 to 1929, I gave land to all the peasants

⁸*Ingeniero* is the title given to one who completes university degree requirements in any engineering field. This title is abbreviated as Ing.

who had a right to receive it.⁹

It was also my lot to issue the Labor Law,¹⁰ one of the first in the Republic and, at that time, the most advanced. This law served as a model for the proposed law which I presented at a labor-management convention in August, 1928.

Being President of the Republic, I sent the proposed law to the Federal Congress which approved it in general. This proposal was fully discussed, but its approval was opposed in a scandalous manner by militant groups of Communists, who were sponsored by the Soviet Union, directed by David Alfaro Siqueiros, and united with certain political groups.¹¹ Nevertheless, two years later, in 1931, it served as a model for the law that was promulgated in that year.

Since the year 1917, when the general Constitution of the Republic was promulgated, the implementation of Article

⁹ See Moisés González Navarro, La Confederación Nacional Campesina: Un Grupo de Presión en la Reforma Agraria Mexicana (México, D.F.: B. Costa-Amic, 1968), p. 139.

¹⁰ For the full text of the Tamaulipas Labor Law, see Periódico Oficial del Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de Tamaulipas, Tomo L. Num. 48 (June 17, 1925), pp. 1-7; ibid., Tomo L. Num. 49 (June 20, 1925), pp. 1-8; and ibid., Tomo L. Num. 50 (June 24, 1925), pp. 3-7.

¹¹ Portes Gil had several clashes with the Mexican Communists during his years as Governor of Tamaulipas and later when he became President of Mexico. For a communist account of the Portes Gil administration, see Rafael Ramos Pedrueza, La Lucha de Clases a través de la Historia de México: Revolución Democráticoburguesa (México, D.F.: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1941), pp. 334-345. See also Robert J. Alexander, Communism in Latin America (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 327; and Raquel Tibol, David Alfaro Siqueiros (México, D.F.: Empresas Editoriales, 1969).

¹²123 had come to be a popular issue for all the candidates who desired to come to power. This was true for presidential candidates as well as candidates for state government offices and candidates for both houses of Congress. The implementation had not been carried out in spite of [p. 496] the fact that these aspirants for public office had declared, as their first point for obtaining the sympathy of the masses, their irrevocable decision to proceed with the implementation of the labor article.

Workers of all political persuasions were demanding the issuance of a labor law. Such demands were expressed in successive tumultuous demonstrations which were made before both houses of the Federal Congress during the years 1918 to 1928.

¹²One of the most important articles of the 1917 Constitution, Article 123 spells out the rights of labor in great detail. Professor Brown has summarized the content as follows: "This article guarantees the right of workers to organize unions, establishes a normal workday of eight hours, provides for double pay for overtime work, limits night work to seven hours, bars boys under sixteen and all women from late night work and all unhealthful or dangerous employment, prohibits employment of children under twelve, gives mothers special protection through provision for a three-month vacation with pay before the birth of a child and an additional month of paid vacation after the birth, provides for profit sharing and minimum wage protection, specifies equal pay for equal work by male and female workers, and requires payment of wages in cash." Lyle C. Brown, "Mexico's Constitution of 1917," in Revolution in Mexico: Years of Upheaval, 1910-1940 ed. by James W. Wilkie and Albert L. Michaels (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 115. For an English text of Article 123, see The Mexican Constitution of 1917 Compared with the Constitution of 1857, translated and arranged by H. N. Branch (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1917), pp. 94-102.

One of the gravest errors committed by the directors of the Regional Mexican Labor Confederation [*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM)] and which largely influenced the diminishing of its moral authority, which by 1928 was almost completely lost, certainly was that of not having taken advantage of the privileged political situation that it enjoyed from 1920 until the first half of 1928. During this period, [Luis] Morones¹³ and his co-associates had great power; but in spite of this, they did not make any effort to achieve the issuance of the aforementioned law.

The proposed law which I presented precisely defined the rights and prerogatives within the Constitution for the workers as well as for the employees: the absolute respect for the right to strike, the formation of industrial unions, and all the constitutional principles of Article 123.

Since the proposed law specified that the legislation on labor would be federalized, it would be necessary to amend Articles 73 and 123 of the general Constitution. Article 73¹⁴ needed to be amended for the purpose of enlarging the power of the General Congress to issue regulating labor laws, the application of which would be left to the competence of the state authorities in their respective jurisdictions, except

¹³For a hostile biographical treatment of Morones, see Rosendo Salazar, *Líderes y Sindicatos* (México, D.F.: Ediciones T. C. Modelo, 1953), pp. 72-102.

¹⁴Article 73 enumerates the specifically delegated powers of the Federal Congress.

when treating matters relative to railroads and other transportation industries protected by federal concessions, mining, hydrocarbons, electrical industry, and labor performed at sea or in the maritime zones.

At the same time, the reform of Article 123 was proposed for the purpose of giving Congress authority to enact social security laws which would cover disability, death, involuntary unemployment, professional illnesses, and accidents. These reforms were approved by Congress and the decree was published on September 6, 1929.

I do not believe that I commit the sin of immodesty, nor much less that I engage in the censurable practice of bragging, by affirming that the Labor Code, whose general features I have explained, constituted the most serious and documented effort that was elaborated by the Executive branch during my administration and which doubtlessly surpassed in all aspects those laws which had previously been formulated in the chambers of the Federal Congress. I repeat, unfortunately the body of laws was not approved during my short governing period, but I do claim for myself the honor of having been the initiator of a legislative movement which unfortunately was stalled, to the serious detriment of the working classes.

[p. 497] There were two fundamentals which figured among the principal reforms that were proposed in the project that I presented: the arrangement whereby only one union would be recognized within each factory, that composed of the majority of the workers for the purpose of avoiding the existence of

company unions which were so common and which produced countless conflicts; and the arrangement whereby there would function within each factory a Factory Council [*Consejo de Empresa*], composed of representatives of the workers and of the employers, whose mission would be to resolve the small conflicts which might arise, as well as to study the economic program which ought to be observed in the development of the industry. This Factory Council existed only in Germany. Its principal aim was to avoid sending thousands and thousands of small conflicts to the labor courts, which has resulted in the filing of cases that remain unresolved because of the excess of legal work.

Erwin Balader, a specialist in industrial law and Vice President of Pan American Airways at that time, commenting on the efficiency of Mexico's Federal Labor Law, stated at a convention sponsored by the Pan American Society, held in New York on January 15, 1935: "that Lic. Emilio Portes Gil had written the first labor law of the Americas, and that since that law had been in effect, Mexico had not undergone the interminable conflicts which the United States has suffered in its relations with its workers; and that the tremendous ascendancy of Mexico in the economic and social struggle during the last decade would not have been possible without the wise laws which facilitate an adequate and rapid solution for any labor controversy."

In summation, the above gives you an idea of my activities until 1929. Do you want me to continue relating my activities after that time?

JWW: Yes, but first let us talk more about your activities prior to that time because they are very important in order to understand your actions in the Presidency in 1928 and 1929, for example: Ing. Marte R. Gómez collaborated with you, and together, you gave away a great deal of land in Tamaulipas, didn't you?¹⁵

EPG: In Tamaulipas, during the three years I was governor, land was distributed in order to satisfy the needs of all the peasants for the time being. Afterwards, new groups and organizations appeared, and of course, new pressing needs for land; but while I headed the government of the state, and while Gómez was my collaborator, we gave away all the land the peasants needed. We did this without any bloodshed or violence; the measures were carried out with strict adherence to the law, calling meetings of the large landowners [*hacendados*] in order to hear their complaints. Many times the large landowners themselves attended the land dotation ceremonies.

At that time we founded a series of cooperatives throughout the rural areas. Among other labor cooperatives, [p. 498] I founded the United Guild of Stevadores [*Gremio Unido de Alijadores de Tampico*] which has been one of the most prosperous and which still exists; the Cooperative of Waiters; and many others.

¹⁵See the oral history interview with Marte R. Gómez in Wilkie and Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX*, pp. 75-139; agrarian reform in Tamaulipas is discussed on pages 107-112.

Rural schools functioned in all the ejidos;¹⁶ and in the state, councils of parents came into existence for the first time in Mexico. The objective of these councils was to collaborate with the government in giving greater attention to the schools.

Effective measures were ordered to restrict the use of alcoholic beverages. It can be said that in the rural areas the sale of alcohol completely ceased. In order to effect this, I organized the Leagues of Women Against Alcoholism, composed of all the wives and daughters of the peasants; they were the ones who watched to make sure that not a drop of alcohol was sold. And, in the cities, without any kind of violence, we issued orders to suppress the sale of alcohol wherever possible. It was arranged that all centers of vice already closed would not be allowed to re-open. Heavy taxes were imposed on the cabarets and the rest of the centers of vice, many of which closed because they could no longer operate profitably. No new vice centers were permitted to open.

¹⁶Rural schools were specifically endorsed in the ten fundamental postulates of the agrarian program proclaimed at the first convention of the Agrarian League of Tamaulipas. See Primera Convención de la Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos del Estado de Tamaulipas, 1926, edited by Marte R. Gómez (México, D.F.: Editorial Cultura, 1927), p. 28. Proceedings of the second and third conventions provide many detailed reports relating to the agrarian policies of Portes Gil and Marte R. Gómez in Tamaulipas. See Segunda Convención. . . , 1927 and Tercera Convención. . . , 1928, edited by Marte R. Gómez (México, D.F.: Editorial Cultura, 1928-1930).

In Tampico, I remember that the Office of the Comptroller General of the Nation, upon my request, made a study of this problem. When I entered the state government, there were more than 750 bars; when I left office, the number had been reduced to 400. I mean to say that although the population had increased, there were 350 less cantinas. In Ciudad Victoria we established, in fact, a dry community. Each person could have in his own home whatever he wished to drink, "*para tomar la copa*," as is commonly said, but the bars were abolished. In the social clubs, or casinos, wine could be sold to those attending a banquet or a dinner. But the sale of bad alcohol or adulterated wines, which cause crime and harm the poor people, was prohibited.

JWW: Were you able to curb prostitution?

EPG: Prostitution was also curbed wherever possible. In Tampico, which was where this vice was most developed, the number of houses of prostitution was diminished because of strict sanitary regulations. Also, in the border cities of Laredo, Matamoros, and Reynosa, a better administration was observed in this respect. And I am sure that this program was carried out, for the most part, in Tamaulipas, but unfortunately, other persons who came later abolished those regulations.

Also, we combatted the vice of alcoholism by founding for the workers and the middle class cultural centers in which men and women learned handicrafts and also participated in sports. The Board of Popular Aesthetics was organized for the purpose of forming orchestras, choirs, musical bands, teaching handicrafts, etc.

I remember that in January, 1926, Mrs. Miriam Ferguson, Governor of Texas, invited us to give an exhibition in Laredo, Texas, of the groups of elementary [p. 499] school children who were engaged in such activities. We sent 10,000 children from Laredo, Mexico, to Laredo, Texas. Mrs. Ferguson invited all the teachers in Texas to come and see what the Mexican children did: 10,000 children performing gymnasium calisthenics, singing in choirs, playing in musical bands, and dancing. Truly, this was a spectacle which the United States press covered fully.

JWW: Where did the ideas for making so many reforms come from?--for example, reforms concerning land, alcohol, the rural school--because among the revolutionaries there were those who wished to make some of these reforms, but not all of them. And where did your own ideas come from?

EPG: Well, my intellectual development was an outgrowth of the development of the Revolution. I founded in 1924 the Border Socialist Party [*Partido Socialista Fronterizo*]. This party adopted a program that I formulated, which included all of these ideas: anti-alcoholic programs, cultural centers for workers, encouragement of art and sports, and teaching of handicrafts. I repeat, later I took this program to Mexico City when I became President of the Republic. Cultural centers for workers were founded in Mexico and the anniversary of the Revolution was celebrated for the first time on November 20, 1929. This celebration was called the "Anti-Alcoholic Fiesta,"

and all the school children marched by singing anthems, carrying placards exhorting all the people, especially the workers and the employees, to eliminate the vice of which they were victims. This demonstration was held not only in the Federal District but also in all the states of the Republic.

In 1929, while I was President, the National Committee of the Struggle Against Alcoholism [*Comité Nacional de Lucha contra el Alcoholismo*] was founded, and also, my wife initiated the National Committee for Protection of Children [*Comité Nacional de Protección a la Infancia*]. It was not through violence or crude prohibitions that we sought to combat alcoholism; I repeat, the program I initiated in Tamaulipas was introduced throughout the Republic.

JWW: Especially with regard to agrarian matters, had you received news of the agrarian reforms, for example, in Morelos and in Yucatán?

EPG: Those of Yucatán were the only ones which existed. In Morelos very little land had been distributed, and it fell to me, as President of the Republic, to accelerate the Agrarian Reform in that state. The following parties existed in the Republic: in Yucatán, the Socialist Party of the Southeast [*Partido Socialista del Sureste*]; in the state of Mexico, the Socialist Party of the State [*Partido Socialista del Estado*]; in Guanajuato, the Liberal Party of the State [*Partido Liberal del Estado*].

The Socialist Party in Yucatán had the best program of all the parties, and it fell to me to make new reforms,

which had not been included in its program, that is to say, we went further because the Socialist Party of the Southeast had not embraced all of these ideas which I have just mentioned: the formation of cultural centers, the anti-alcoholic campaign, the struggle to prevent people from [p. 500] walking barefoot. (In Tamaulipas people were given shoes or sold shoes at very reasonable prices; and in this manner, by 1928 there was not a single barefoot person in the state.)

As I say, this campaign was expanded little by little with new ideas and suggestions, which were not only mine but also those of my associates and the teachers who collaborated with me. At that time we founded night schools to combat illiteracy among the peasants and workers. It was truly praiseworthy how the peasants, after working long hard hours, went to the night schools to learn to read. In this manner we educated many thousands of peasants and workers. We also established what I then called the collective marriage. A judge of civil registry was present at the big festivals. We convinced the peasants or the workers living in free union that they ought to legalize their marital status. After a series of speeches, we performed group marriages and, at the same time, legalized the illegitimate children. This same thing was done in 1929 when the first great sports park, the Venustiano Carranza Park, was built in Mexico City. More than 100,000 persons could be seen passing through this park on Sundays. In this park a movie theater was installed and large buildings, gymnasiums, and sports fields (for tennis, football, jai-alai, etc.) were built. It was the first great recreation park ever

built in Mexico. It still exists today. Later, fortunately, many more were built. These large Mexican parks for sports can be considered not only the most important in Latin America but also in the whole world. You must have seen them already. But I would like you to see the Venustiano Carranza Park which was the first great park for sports that was built.

JWW: We would like to see it. Did your government of Tamaulipas have difficulties with the Church during those years? Those were the years of the Cristero War.

EPG: There was no problem in Tamaulipas. Tamaulipas is one of the most liberal states in Mexico, as are all of the northern states. When difficulties came with the Church, there were no problems of any kind in Tamaulipas. In accordance with the Constitution of 1917, I promulgated a law which required that all of the priests be Mexican and that they register [with the government]. Since there were no foreigners in Tamaulipas, there was no difficulty in this regard.

JWW: And wasn't there a law to limit the number of priests?

EPG: I limited the number of priests to thirteen. Tamaulipas then had 280,000 inhabitants. And when a group of ladies interviewed me in order to request that there should be a larger number of priests, I answered them as follows:

[p. 501] "The priest of Ciudad Victoria, in charge of the Tamaulipas diocese, sent me the statistics concerning the priests who operated in the state, telling me that there were only nine and that they could scarcely support themselves.

Here I have the communication from him. I have given you thirteen. While the population is increasing, I believe thirteen priests are sufficient." The ladies went away very content, telling me that actually they did not know how many priests there were. The Ciudad Victoria priest, worthy of great esteem and respect, told me: "We barely live; we can scarcely sustain ourselves."

JWW: No more than nine? Very few!

EPG: There were no more than nine in 1926, and the law issued by the Congress increased the number to thirteen.

JWW: What was the matter with the Church? Didn't it want to send out its people?

EPG: No. The Mexican people are Catholic in general, but they are not clerical; that is to say, they love the good priests, but they despise the bad ones. The Spanish priests went frequently to Tamaulipas to preach, but they simply made the stopovers. Throughout the Republic, they did not function [normally]. Later, an invasion of foreign priests, those who actually dominate the Church, came to Mexico. They took over the most productive parishes and left the Mexican priests in the poorest parishes. That is the truth.

JWW: Then, do you believe its location on the border had much to do with liberalism in Tamaulipas? There was an interchange of ideas along the border. What were these ideas?

EPG: Before the colonial era, the border states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas were populated by fierce, savage Indians; and when the Spaniards

came to conquer, those territories were de-populated. They had to kill all the Indians, because they could not dominate them.

JWW: As in the United States.

EPG: As in the United States, except that there were not many of them, so the Spaniards wiped them out. Of course, there remained many native people, and from the cross between the Spaniards and the natives came the mestizo. The *fronterizo*,¹⁷ let us say, is the most vigorous type of Mexican with the strongest constitution and the most liberal ideology. Because of this, on the [northern] border there should be no fanaticism, nor has there been a religious conflict - during the Cristero Rebellion, there was not a single rebel.

JWW: Then, the Catholics never have had the power to maintain a very conservative position.

EPG: Not only have they not had the power, but neither have they contended for it. In general, the governors of the border states, above all Tamaulipas, were liberal men and all were civilians. General Díaz had a special consideration for my state: he always named natives of Tamaulipas as governors, generally civilians, of the state. There were only two generals, both excellent governors; but after 1880, the governors of Tamaulipas were all from Tamaulipas, as well as civilians. There was no political pressure, no tyranny, as in the rest of the Republic.

¹⁷A *fronterizo* is one who lives in a state bordering the United States; literally, the term means frontiersman.

[p. 502] JWW: Speaking of this, of the cultural environment of the north, can you distinguish other cultural environments in Mexico, such as, for example, a cultural environment of the central plateau, and a cultural environment of the south?

EPG: Well, the cultural environment of the north is the same as that of Sinaloa, Durango, and Zacatecas. Those three states are like the border; all the people are similar to those I have described to you. Above all, the clergy was dominant in the states of Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Michoacán, and Querétaro; these were the only states where there were uprisings against the government.

General Calles has been blamed for having been the one who provoked the religious conflict; nothing is more inaccurate. The one responsible for that conflict was the Archbishop José Mora y del Río who, without any motive and without anyone bothering the clergy, made a declaration in February, 1926, withdrawing recognition from the Constitution of 1917 and the laws in force.

To this first declaration, President Calles made no response at all. But later, as the Episcopacy of the Church made its statements, this did constitute a challenge to the government. General Calles answered by saying that the interference of the clergy signified an act of sedition against the government.

The clergy resorted to a series of measures which gave it no results. It called for a boycott against the government: the faithful were not to pay taxes. No one obeyed; that is to say, the large majority of the people which is Catholic continued paying their taxes. This meant that they did not

sympathize with the seditious act of the Catholic clergy. Since they had no success in their agitation, assassinations followed in Mexico City, and the priests abandoned their churches. It is not true that the government closed the churches. The priests abandoned the churches and the government ordered that they remain open for worship, delivering them to a council of neighbors named by the Catholics themselves. So the churches remained open; no one closed them. Thus they remained during the years 1926, 1927, 1928 and part of 1929.

The fanatic rebels succeeded in raising around 40,000 men who committed the most reproachable acts of violence; this included some priests who took up arms. When the conflict ended, the government gave amnesty to more than 14,000 rebels.¹⁸ Among the high dignitaries of the Church who took up arms was Archbishop Francisco Orozco y Jiménez of

¹⁸For pro-Cristero accounts of the Cristero Rebellion, see Jesús Degollado Guízar, Memorias de Jesús Degollado Guízar, Ultimo General en Jefe del Ejército Cristero (México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1957); Heriberto Navarrete, S.J., Por Dios y por la Patria: Memorias de mi Participación en la Defensa de la Libertad de Conciencia y Culto durante la Persecución Religiosa en México de 1926 a 1929 (México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1961); Joaquín Blanco Gil [Andrés Barquín y Ruiz], El Clamor de la Sangre (México, D.F.: Editorial "Rex-Mex," 1947); and Joaquín Cardoso, S.J., Los Mártires Mexicanos: El Martirologio Católico de Nuestros Días (2d ed.; México, D.F.: Buena Prensa, 1958). For a balanced interpretation, see James W. Wilkie, "The Meaning of the Cristero Religious War Against the Mexican Revolution," A Journal of Church and State, VIII (Spring, 1966), 214-233.

Jalisco, who hid in the mountains and stirred up the rebellion. The government came to possess photographs of Archbishop Orozco y Jiménez at the head of a group of rebels. These same Cristeros caused the de-railing of trains, the death of hundreds of citizens, and fires. But, as I say, they did not raise more than 40,000 men.

JWW: Has that photo of Orozco y Jiménez been published?

EPG: It must have been published during that time.

JWW: I would like to obtain a copy of that photo.

[p. 503] EPG: I will look for it, to see if it is possible.

But all of that was published in that period. After that came the assassination of General Obregón, plotted in a convent by a nun who was then called Mother Conchita.²⁰ This lady, along with the priest José Jiménez, were the ones who instructed León Toral to commit that crime. General Obregón was totally removed from the religious conflict; he had not taken part in it at all. General Calles was the President of the Republic and, in any case, he was the one responsible for the state of affairs.

¹⁹For biographical treatment of Orozco y Jiménez, see Lic. J. Ignacio Dávila Garibi et al., Homenaje a la Memoria del Excmo. y Revmo. Sr. Dr. y Mtro. D. Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, Arzobispo de Guadalajara (Guadalajara: Imprenta y Librería Font, 1936); and Vicente Cambreros Vizcaino, Francisco el Grande, Mons. Francisco Orozco y Jiménez: Biografía (2 vols.; México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1966).

²⁰See Ma. C. Acevedo y de la Llata (Madre Conchita), Obregón: Memorias Inéditas de la Madre Conchita (México, D.F.: Ediciones Botas, 1935).

JWW: There are some historians who say that Obregón was going to bring the conflict to an end upon becoming President.

EPG: That is true. I myself have affirmed this in writings and declarations. There was no reason for Obregón to be the victim of these people. But religious fanaticism, as well as political fanaticism, is always pernicious--plotting things that are very far from being reasonable or justified. As I say, in that convent (frequented by monks, some priests, and nuns), León Toral, who was an inexperienced, fanatical young man, was gradually instructed until he was convinced that he should assassinate General Obregón.²¹

Previously, General Obregón had been the victim of an attempted dynamiting in Chapultepec Park. The intellectual authors of this attempted assassination were Father Miguel Pro Juárez, his brother Humberto, and Ing. Luis Segura Vilchis.²² Fortunately, Obregón emerged unhurt. At a dance which was held in Celaya they also attempted to assassinate General Obregón and General Calles with some poisoned needles which the persons in charge of committing the crime had brought to the dance.

²¹For a graphic description of the trial of José de León Toral, see Gustavo Casasola, Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana: 1900-1960, (4 vols.; México, D.F.: Editorial F. Trillas, 1962), III, 1857-61 and 1874-84.

²²See Andres Barquín y Ruiz, Luis Segura Vilchis (México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1967).

Fortunately, the act never came to pass. As a result of the assassination of General Obregón, a tremendous crisis was produced. Within the revolutionary organization itself, there was a division between the callistas and the obregonistas.²³ Some accused General Calles of having been responsible for the crime. This was absolutely inaccurate. It fell to me to prove it, and to defend General Calles in my books and declarations, which I did. But, of course, the obregonista fanatics, those who desired to come to power at any price, plotted an uprising; an uprising that was headed by the generals [Gonzalo] Escobar, Francisco R. Manzo, Fausto Topete, Amado Aguirre, and others.

JWW: Were they obregonistas?

EPG: They had been obregonistas.

JWW: But afterwards, they favored [Gilberto] Valenzuela, didn't they?

EPG: They nominated Lic. Valenzuela as a candidate for the Presidency without a program of any kind. They alleged that the government was trying to impose a candidate when hardly any electoral propaganda had been initiated. But since they knew they could not win because the masses supported the government, . . . they believed that by means [p. 504] of a barracks uprising, with 30,000 soldiers, that they would be able to cause the fall of the President of the Republic and to establish a military government.

²³Factions identified with Calles and Obregón.

JWW: They had no program.

EPG: In two months they were defeated, and with the exception of one battle, the Battle of Reforma, in which they fought bravely, the other military actions were without importance. It is necessary to note that the rebels, in view of their weakness, dedicated themselves to sacking the banks in Torreón, Monterrey, and Chihuahua. Later they crossed the border, taking refuge in the United States, with the enormous quantities of money which they had stolen from the banks. Thus, my provisional government was able to restore the peace.

During my administration, the Archbishops Pascual Díaz and Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores²⁴ had talks with me to see if we could reach an agreement in what was called the religious conflict. They desired legal reforms. When Ruiz y Flores laid this presumptuous proposal before me, I responded: "I cannot reform any law. The only thing that you can do is to submit to the laws in force, and in this manner you can return to take charge of the churches and to impart your religion without the government attempting to interfere at all in the affairs of the Church. We do require that all the priests be Mexicans." Of course, this was pleasing to Archbishops Díaz and Ruiz y Flores because they were Mexicans. With the arrival of the priests of other countries, above all the Spaniards, the Mexican bishops had suffered from wounded pride.

²⁴See Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, "Recuerdos de Mi Vida," in Recuerdo de Recuerdos: Homenaje de "Buena Prensa" a la Memoria del Excmo. Rvmo. Sr. Dr. Don Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, Arzobispo de Morelia y Asistente al Solio Pontificio (México, D.F.: Buena Prensa, 1943).

We discussed the registration of priests. . . . I told [Díaz and Ruiz y Flores] that the government would register only those that the Church might propose. No one had proposed others. In this manner, the religious conflict was resolved. The clergy submitted to the laws in force regarding the number of priests, the nationality of priests, and the prohibition of teaching religion in the schools.

JWW: Did the clergy submit strictly to the laws?

EPG: Yes, they submitted strictly to the laws.

JWW: They had fought in vain.

EPG: For nothing. There had been no definite program. Currently, El Universal²⁵ is publishing an account by a journalist of what took place in that epoch. He mentions a book by one of the Catholic writers of that time. This writer was the private secretary of Archbishop Pascual Díaz.

JWW: Alberto María Carreño.²⁶

EPG: Alberto María Carreño. And there he denies the accusation that Washington intervened to resolve this conflict. The solution was given exclusively by Rome; and in accord with the instructions that went out from Rome, an agreement was reached with the government.

²⁵El Universal is one of Mexico City's oldest leading daily newspapers.

²⁶See the following works on Church-state relations by Alberto María Carreño: Pastorales, Edictos y Otros Documentos del Excmo. y Rvmo. Sr. Dr. D. Pascual Díaz, Arzobispo de México (México, D.F.: Ediciones Victoria, 1938); Páginas de Historia Mexicana: Collección de Obras Diversas (México, D.F.: Ediciones Victoria, 1936); and El Arzobispo de México, Exmo. Sr. Dr. Don Pascual Díaz y el Conflicto Religioso (2d ed.; México, D.F.: Ediciones Victoria, 1943).

JWW: Had you conferred with the North American Ambassador, Dwight Morrow, about this?

[p. 505] EPG: Mr. Morrow never intervened in our internal affairs. Mr. Morrow paid me a visit after the conflict had already ended in order to congratulate me on behalf of the American government. But he never intervened in this matter. The only thing that he did, on behalf of the American government, was to facilitate the departure of the Archbishops from the United States; and for its part, the Mexican government also gave them the consideration that they deserved due to their positions as heads of the Church.²⁷

JWW: How was the struggle against the guerrillas progressing in 1929? Was the government winning?

EPG: Against the Catholic guerrillas? In 1928 and 1929 there were two movements: the Cristero movement, which

²⁷ For an opposing viewpoint regarding Mr. Morrow's efforts to terminate the Church-state conflict, see Elizabeth Ann Rice, Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and Mexico, as Affected by the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Mexico, 1925-1929 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1959); and Miguel Cruchaga Tocornal, "El Conflicto Religioso Mexicano," Revista Chileno de Historia y Geografía, CXIII (January - June, 1949), 241. It is interesting to note that as late as May, 1929, Morrow's exact role in the Mexican Church-state negotiations was unknown to the general public. For example, the May 4 issue of the New York Times carried an article which noted that there were reports that Morrow was working on a reconciliation but that confirmation from the State Department and Morrow was lacking. See also Barbara Morrison, "Ambassador Morrow's Influence on United States-Mexican Relations, 1927-1929" (paper presented at the Fourth Annual Conference of the Southwestern Council of Latin American Studies, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas, April 17, 1971).

began in 1926²⁸ and had no relation at all to the rebellion of 1929, which was headed by the generals Escobar, Aguirre, Manzo and Topete.²⁹ The Catholic guerrillas said that they did not want to have relations with the army insurgents.³⁰

When I assumed power, since it was necessary to send federal forces to combat the army rebels in Veracruz and on the border (because with the exception of Tamaulipas, all of the rest of the border states were in the power of the insurgents), I ordered General Saturnino Cedillo, who had under his command 15,000 armed peasants, to take charge of the suppression of

²⁸For important autobiographical accounts of the Cristero Rebellion and its background by one of the prominent civil leaders, see the oral history interview with Lic. Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra in Wilkie and Wilkie, México Visto en el Siglo XX, pp. 413-490; and Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, El Caso Ejemplar Mexicano (2d ed.; México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1966). An important Cristero document, General Enrique Gorostieta's "Manifiesto a la Nación" dated October 28, 1928, is printed in Planes Políticos y Otros Documentos, edited by Manuel González Ramírez, Vol. I of Fuentes para la Historia de la Revolución Mexicana (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954), pp. 280-287.

²⁹Their justification for revolt is set forth in the Plan of Hermosillo, which is printed in González Ramírez, ed., Planes Políticos, pp. 295-300.

³⁰Despite this statement, negotiations were carried on between the two rebel groups. Two weeks before Escobar and his associates proclaimed their Plan of Hermosillo, a pact was drawn up between General Escobar and representatives of the League for the Defense of Religious Liberty. See Robert Cortes, "The Role of the Catholic Church in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion, 1926-1929" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Baylor University, 1969), pp. 86-87, especially f.n. 65.

the rebels.³¹ Then it occurred to me to send those peasants to combat the Cristeros. The object was that the peasants, who were not regular soldiers, would fight like guerrillas. General Cedillo, who had much experience in this sort of campaign, distributed his forces in such a manner that in a few days the main rebel leaders fell: first, the so-called General Enrique Gorostieta; next, the priest Aristeo Pedroza.³² The instructions I gave to General Cedillo were these:

Do not shoot anyone; invite all of the rebels to surrender to the government. As soon as you take possession of the areas of the states where they dominate, divide the land among the peasants. Give them food, money, and clothing, because they are in a dreadful state of misery. Make them see that the government is not anti-religious, but neither can it permit the Catholic clergy to violate the laws.

This was the way in which General Cedillo conquered those states.

Thus, when Archbishop Ruiz y Flores and Bishop Díaz came to confer with me, the revolt was already totally suppressed. I granted amnesty to more than 14,000 fanatics; all of them were given tickets to return to their homes, some cash, and even land; and since then, these people have been completely peaceful.

³¹Cedillo was considered a friend of the clergy in spite of this military operation. He rebelled against Cárdenas in 1938 and was killed in a skirmish with federal troops in his native state of San Luis Potosí.

³²Although a priest, Aristeo Pedroza served as a military commander of Cristero forces. He was famous for his involvement in several bloody skirmishes, one of which involved destruction of a Mexico-Guadalajara train and the slaying of many passengers. See J. Angel Moreno Ochoa, Semblanzas Revolucionarias: Diez Años de Agitación Política en Jalisco, 1920-1930 (Guadalajara: Talleres Linotipográficos Berni, 1959), pp. 234-235; and Barba González, La Rebelión de los Cristeros, pp. 171-176.

JWW: So, after many years of struggle between the state and the Church, it was surprising that it was terminated so rapidly and without many difficulties.

EPG: I tried to act with patriotism. To me, a religious struggle in the middle of the 20th century was an [p. 506] anachronism, and completely out of place. The errors that were committed on both sides were very great. Then, when I came to power, people had confidence in me. I remember that in November of 1928, while I was Minister of Gobernación under President Calles, the famous newspaperman [William] Randolph Hearst (who owned a chain of the most important newspapers in the United States, who strongly opposed the government of President Calles, who had been attacking the revolutionary governments since 1910, and who without doubt represented a very strong force in the United States) sent me a representative, to whom I granted an interview. In the interview, Mr. Hearst's representative told me:

"From the day in which you take possession of the Presidency of the Republic the Hearst chain is at your command. We will no longer attack the government of Mexico because we know that you will take the proper course of action in all matters." My answer was this: "I will do justice, but I will continue implanting the social, political, economic, and cultural reforms prescribed by the Constitution of 1917. I will press forward the Agrarian Reform and the labor laws that in due time I shall expedite, but you may tell Mr. Hearst that I appreciate very much this attention he has given me."

And Mr. Hearst kept his word: he did not resume his attack on the Mexican government; we were very good friends. And one time, when he visited Mexico City, I gave him a dinner attended by a group of distinguished newspapermen and friends. Many times he invited me to visit California, where he lived, but I was never able to go. Thus, from that moment on, the American press began to change; above all, the Hearst chain, which had been the least friendly of all.

JWW: Speaking of the religious matter, what situation existed in the south of the country?

EPG: The south was completely peaceful. In Oaxaca there was a priest who condemned the Cristero rebellion and who advised his parishoners not to exercise any act of violence against the government, and who exhorted all the priests in the region to obey the Mexican laws. Thus in that state there was not even one uprising. I repeat, there were rebels only in the states of Jalisco, Querétaro, Michoacán, Aguascalientes, and Colima. All of the rest of the Republic remained peaceful. This means that the Mexican people, the immense majority of whom are Catholic, perhaps 90-95% (more than Catholic they are idolaters, because for them the saint is an idol) remained on the side of the government and did not support the Cristero rebellion. Thus, this is how I answered Bishop Díaz when he asked me if I considered that the Mexican people were Catholic, adding: "The Mexican people are, in the immense majority, Catholic. And although it is true that even when the peasants who have been fighting the rebels wear on their hats the image

of the Virgin of Guadalupe, nevertheless, they oppose those rebels who have withdrawn recognition from the government."

"That means," I continued, "that we are giving them here in this life that which you offer them in the after life; that is to say, here we give them land, schools, a little bread, and a little happiness. Although [p. 507] much is lacking to make them happy, at least they see that something is given to them here, and that it is better to enjoy something in this life than to wait for something better in the great beyond, which may or may not exist."

[p. 507] JWW: Let's talk again about your agrarian ideas, and the reforms which you implanted in Tamaulipas. What happened when you assumed the Presidency? How did you know Marte Gómez?

EPG: Marte was a student from Tamaulipas studying agriculture. He was one of the best students of the School of Agriculture. He came to occupy the position of director of the school. And when I took charge of the government of Tamaulipas, I invited him to collaborate with me. It was a very effective collaboration. After a year or a year and a half of working with me, he was called to Mexico City to assume the position of Sub-Director of the Bank of Agricultural Credit, which was founded by the Calles government. I no longer had my collaborator [with me in Tamaulipas], but I continued counting on his friendship. I consider him to be one of the

Revolution's best prepared men on the agrarian question.³³

Above all, he is a man of complete rectitude and honesty, which has been the chief characteristic of his life in all public and private positions.

I had other very important collaborators; for example, with regard to the rural school, Professor Graciano Sánchez, who, in my opinion, was the most incorrupt, sincere, and capable agrarian leader. Unfortunately, this man died a few years ago. He helped me with the founding of the rural schools, and was truly an apostle. Marte Gómez, Graciano Sánchez,³⁴ Magdaleno Aguilar (another great agrarian leader who was the governor of Tamaulipas after Ing. Gómez), and I traveled throughout the state of Tamaulipas. There were no

³³See the oral history interview with Marte R. Gómez in Wilkie and Wilkie, México Visto en el Siglo XX, pp. 75-139. See also Marte R. Gómez's Las Comisiones Agrarias del Sur (México, D.F.: Librería de Manuel Porrúa, 1961); and his La Reforma Agraria en las Filas Villistas, Años 1913 a 1915 y 1920, No. 39 of Biblioteca del Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana (México, D.F.: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1966).

³⁴A leader of the Mexican Peasant Confederation [*Confederación Campesina Mexicana*] founded in San Luis Potosí in 1933, Graciano Sánchez became the first president of the National Peasant Confederation [*Confederación Nacional Campesina*] organized in 1938. See González Navarro, La Confederación Nacional Campesina, pp. 135-137, 157. At the presidential convention of the PNR in December, 1933, he served as spokesman for the agrarian wing of the party and succeeded in obtaining a revision in the party platform which called for more rapid distribution of land. For an English translation of important portions of his speech to the Querétaro convention which nominated Lázaro Cárdenas as the PNR candidate, see Graciano Sánchez, "The Agrarian Reform Must Continue," in Wilkie and Michaels, Revolution in Mexico, pp. 191-194.

asphalt highways, only trails and often we traveled on horseback, on foot, by train, and at times in a freight train, or using any other means of transportation. Without rest, animated by our convictions, we were able to resolve the agrarian problem without bloodshed, because there was not a single large landowner who suffered acts of violence; I repeat, many of them were present at the land-distribution ceremonies. They continue living in Tamaulipas, and are now small proprietors. Some of them have occupied public positions, with the applause of the people of Tamaulipas, in spite of the fact that they were the old *latifundistas*.³⁵

JWW: Well, you three also founded the Leagues there, didn't you?

EPG: We founded the League of Agrarian Communities of Tamaulipas [*Liga de Comunidades Agrarias de Tamaulipas*] which was one of the principal ones.³⁶ This League of Agrarian Communities built, for the first time in the country, the House of the Peasant [*Casa del Campesino*]. With the aid of the state government, the peasants assessed themselves and

³⁵*Latifundistas* are owners of *latifundias*, the large landholdings which still exist in certain areas of Latin America and even in Mexico.

³⁶See speeches by Marte R. Gómez and Portes Gil at the September 24, 1926, opening session of the League Convention in Gómez, ed., Primera Convención de la Liga de Comunidades Agrarias. . . , 1926, pp. 63-68 and 69-77, respectively. Portes Gil's closing address is printed in ibid., pp. 285-288.

and constructed a building which even today is considered modern. The ejidatarios came to the House of the Peasant where they were given medical attention, food, and assistance in order that their petitions would be promptly attended to.

[p. 508] JWW: Was this League one of the first to be founded?

EPG: It was one of the first. Afterwards, in 1935, while I was President of the National Revolutionary Party [*Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR)], I submitted for the approval of President Cárdenas a plan for organizing the National Peasant Confederation [*Confederación Nacional Campesinos* (CNC)], which still exists today and which unified the Leagues of Agrarian Communities of all the states of the Republic.

JWW: With the entering of the peasants for the first time into politics, by means of the Leagues, do you believe that this was the first time they had an effective voice?

EPG: Once organized, they made themselves heard. Disorganized, they were nothing. Through the Leagues the peasant sector has achieved political dominance because it is the largest sector in the Republic. They elect members of city councils, and they elect their representatives to the state legislatures and to the federal Congress. Thus it is now an organized force that makes itself heard in politics.

JWW: The Leagues held some meetings and Siqueiros and Diego Rivera were there, weren't they? Didn't they attend the conferences of the Leagues?

EPG: Neither Diego Rivera nor Siqueiros ever attended any convention. At one time, around 1926, I invited Diego Rivera to Tamaulipas. He made a trip with me, and was truly satisfied upon seeing the peasant and labor organizations that existed in Tamaulipas.³⁷ To me, the peasant and labor organizations of Tamaulipas are the best in the Republic. There is more unity, there is no division, and the leaders satisfactorily fulfill their mission; that is to say, there has been no corruption of leaders.

JWW: It was in 1926 that Diego Rivera arrived in Tamaulipas.

EPG: In 1926.

JWW: Was he a Communist then?

EPG: Yes, he was already a Communist.³⁸

JWW: And you were on friendly terms with him.

EPG: He had been my friend for many years, but I wanted to invite him in order that he might see the organization that existed there. He never made any propaganda; it was his opinion that that was the way the organization ought to be throughout the Republic.

³⁷For a biography of Diego Rivera and reproductions of some of his famous proletarian paintings, see Bertram D. Wolfe, Portrait of Mexico (New York: Friede Publishers, 1937).

³⁸As a founder of El Machete, which became the official newspaper of the Mexican Communist Party, and twice a member of the executive committee of that party, Diego Rivera was one of Mexico's most prominent Communists during the 1920's; however, he was expelled in a purge that was carried out in 1929. In 1954 he was readmitted. See Alexander, Communism in Latin America, pp. 322-327, 344.

JWW: During your administration as governor of Tamaulipas, did they ever call you a Communist?

EPG: Never. They called me a Bolshevik, which was the term of that time. They called me a Bolshevik because I initiated vigorously the Agrarian Reform, expedited the Labor Code, and implanted other reforms which caused uneasiness. Since then, we have conceived the idea that the Agrarian Reform must be integral but then we did not have the means with which to make it so; but the peasants demanded the land, and it had to be given to them. In spite of that, production began to increase a great deal. The government of the state began to give to the peasants small agricultural loans of 1,000 or 2,000 pesos, which in that epoch was much, because it equaled 5,000 or 6,000 of today's [p. 509] pesos . . . With those loans the *agraristas*³⁹ procured for themselves the farm implements. An American plow cost 15 pesos and a yoke of oxen cost 200 pesos. At times we did not have the means to construct a modest school, and the teacher taught the children to read under a tree.

I believe that the Agrarian Reform in Mexico has been a complete success. Production has increased in an extraordinary manner. Those unalterably opposed to the Agrarian Reform

³⁹*Agraristas* are advocates of land redistribution as authorized by Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917; usually the term is applied to peasants who are seeking land or who have received land as a result of the government's land reform program.

attacked us rigorously. Now all are agraristas. But in those days we had to struggle a great deal. And of course, the latifundistas, when we expropriated their lands, attacked us saying that we were Bolsheviki--that we were bringing Bolshevism to the state and to the country. But, I repeat, I never departed from the letter of the Mexican law. I have visited the Communist countries of the Iron Curtain; I have had conferences with Togliatti, with Khrushchev, and with Mao Tse-tung. I have told all of them as I am telling you: "In Mexico, we have a philosophy that is very Mexican, that is neither capitalistic nor communistic; it is a program conceived by our great revolutionaries, that never has departed from the letter of the law nor from the Constitution of 1917, which is the most advanced one in the whole world. It is of socialist tendencies, undoubtedly, but it is neither capitalistic nor communistic." Now, personally, I believe that the world is going toward socialism. All the European countries have already adopted a bourgeois socialism.

JWW: Well, it cannot be said that the people of the United States are the only capitalists, because. . .

EPG: No, no. I am coming to that. I believe that the country most prepared for socialism is the United States, for this reason: the large industries do not really belong to the men who have created them. They manage them--they work fourteen or fifteen hours a day or more--, but in fact, the industries are controlled by the workers who live a better

life. They have good salaries, good houses, good automobiles, and good profits. For this reason, I repeat, the United States is already well prepared for socialism. Besides, since the state at times demands taxes exceeding 85% of the profits, we can affirm, in fact, that the United States is going toward state socialism. . . Then there is state socialism. When Mr. Ford was here, some six months ago, he said this: "I am enchanted with Mexico; I would like to stay here at least fifteen days, but I cannot; my business calls me." That is to say, that man enjoys life less than his workers, in spite of the fact that he is a millionaire.

JWW: Well, his workers still have two cars and a boat for waterskiing.

EPG: And he could not remain in Mexico for three days!

JWW: Speaking of today, do you believe that Mexico can continue to distribute the land? There are many people here already, the population is increasing, and the quantity of land remains the same.

[p. 510] EPG: No, it is not the same, because the large irrigation dams that are being constructed are opening new areas (although unfortunately not enough for all the people who demand land). Irrigation is one method of alleviation. Another method of alleviation would be to industrialize the rural areas: better seeds, better fertilizer, better insecticides; that is to say, make the land more productive, so that the small parcel of land, which previously produced little,

can produce more; in short, to achieve intensive agriculture. There are states, like Chiapas, Campeche, and Tabasco, which are virgin areas. The government is planning to channel the waters which run through those territories. Quintana Roo is being opened to the cultivation of a large quantity of land. Before, it was pure forest. Now, with Dutch capital, one of the most important sugar mills in Mexico is being installed there. That territory, which only produced *chicle*, now is going to produce sugar and corn. Thousands of peasants can go there. Many families, hundreds of families, have been transported from La Laguna to Tabasco, Quintana Roo, and Campeche. This means that it is necessary to move people from excessively populated rural areas to those states where new lands are being opened up.

JWW: The peasant can become owner of his land by various means, can't he? . . .

EPG: The ejidatario is, in fact, owner of his parcel of land. With the expedition of the title that is given to him, the ejidatario now is the owner of the land that he has been harvesting. That land cannot be taken away from him. Previously, it belonged to the community. Now it continues as part of the community, but with the land titled in favor of each family.

JWW: Each family?

EPG: To the head of the family. Upon the death of the head of the family, the property passes to the children.

JWW: To all of the children?

EPG: To all of the children. And when the number of families in the village increases, the ejido is enlarged--the increase in the amount of land has been made possible due to the construction of the great irrigation dams.

JWW: But the ejido has to be increased in a certain region, doesn't it? Within a radius of seven kilometers of so.

EPG: Exactly.

JWW: Very well. Then one can say that in Mexico, since 1915, a certain number of ejidatarios has been benefitted?

EPG: More than two million families.

JWW: Then, if those who received the lands in the first place are now dead, two million ejidatarios exist, by virtue of the fact that the sons of the original beneficiaries inherit the land.

EPG: Yes, and they are increasing. The time is approaching when there will not be enough food for all these people, but with the construction of large irrigation dams, the [p. 511] problem can be resolved in part, since new lands are being opened to cultivation. Nevertheless, people are being sent to other places. If there are lands available for enlarging the ejido, it is enlarged; if there are not, that surplus population is moved to another place where it may have land.

JWW: Well, it can be said that, until now, Mexico has distributed about a quarter of the total land of the Republic.

EPG: Around 50 million *hectares*.⁴⁰ Since we have 200 million *hectares*, we have distributed about one fourth.

JWW: And it has benefitted more than two million families?

EPG: Multiply two by four. Supposing that each head of the family has four children, that means that there are eight or ten million persons who have benefitted.

JWW: From a population of 35 million, that would mean that more than a fourth of the Mexican population has already benefitted.

EPG: Exactly.

JWW: That is a lot!

EPG: That is a lot. For this reason everybody asks: What has Mexico done in order to acquire the political and economic stability that it has?

It is necessary to analyze the problem since 1910. First, a bloody revolution which sacrificed a million and a half people. No one understood the Mexicans; everybody attacked us. All the newspapers of the world attacked us very hard, asking us why we were killing each other.

Then around 1914 and 1915 they began to see the justice in our actions, because the distribution of land was initiated; later, in 1917, came the nationalization of oil and water. Our Constitution declared: "This belongs to Mexico; it is

⁴⁰One *hectare* is equal to 2.471 acres.

all right that the foreigners have the right to make a profit, but, fundamentally, the subsoil belongs to the nation."⁴¹ For this reason, after such a bloody struggle which lasted twenty years, from 1910 to 1930, the world sees that from that time we have been reconstructing the country, so all the countries say: How interesting is the Mexican phenomenon! But, the fact is that we made a revolution, the first of the century, which has given us the stability that we enjoy.

JWW: Do you not believe that one of the results of the agrarian revolution is that of creating *minifundios*⁴² in Mexico?

⁴¹As originally specified in Article 27, "In the Nation is vested direct ownership of all minerals or substances which in veins, layers, masses, or beds constitute deposits whose nature is different from the components of the land, such as minerals from which metals and metaloids used for industrial purposes are extracted; beds of precious stones, rock salt and salt lakes formed directly by marine waters, products derived from the decomposition of rocks, when their exploitation requires underground work; phosphates which may be used for fertilizers; solid mineral fuels; petroleum and all hydro-carbons--solid liquid or gaseous. In the Nation is likewise vested the ownership of the waters of territorial seas. . .; those of lakes and inlets of bays; those of interior lakes. . .; those of principal rivers or tributaries. . .; those of intermittent streams which traverse two or more States in their main body;. . ." Branch, trans., The Mexican Constitution of 1917, p. 17. An amendment added in 1960 extends to the Mexican Nation "the direct ownership of all natural resources of the continental shelf and the submarine shelf of the islands;. . ." Constitution of Mexico, 1917 (As Amended), Washington, D.C.: Pan American union, 1968). p. 8.

⁴²A *minifundio* is a parcel of land that is too small for economic operation and for the support of the occupant or owner and his family. Size varies according to fertility, rainfall, supply of water for irrigation purposes, and other significant factors affecting production.

EPG: For a large part, yes.

JWW: And this is not dangerous for the future?

EPG: Well, a minifundio is preferable to nothing. You are richer with a dollar in your pocket than with nothing. But the peasant now knows that the land is his; that no one can deprive him of it; that now he is a free man, which he wasn't before. You can see the Indian, who is accommodating, above all, with the foreigners. You must have traveled through humble villages. . . .

JWW: Yes.

EPG: And you have verified that the Indians and the peasants receive foreigners with much courtesy. If they are eating, they offer them a cup of coffee; they help them to find their way when they are lost. But, the foreigner had better not insult the Indian, because then that Indian begins to get furious and to say things that . . . many times the foreigners do not understand. Isn't that true?

JWW: Well, then you became President, completely convinced that it was necessary to distribute the land.

EPG: Not only then, but I am still convinced that it is necessary to move more to the left.

JWW: According to that which you have told us about Marte Gómez, and that which you have written in your book Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, recently published in 1963, Dwight Morrow had talked with the Minister of the Treasury, Luis Montes de Oca, about the necessity of previous

payment for land to be expropriated, didn't he?⁴³

EPG: Yes, I opposed it. The Minister of the Treasury did not tell me that it was Morrow's idea; Montes de Oca told me the idea was his and, of course, that of General Calles. I told him: "I cannot accept the idea of paying for the land because it is illegal that we pay for it; nor do we have sufficient money for that." "The Constitution says that they should be paid in forty-year bonds." "Ten million pesos are not enough for me for even one month, and I do not want to see myself in the position of having to deceive the people."

JWW: Didn't they spend about eighty million?

EPG: Eighty million.

JWW: That is to say, eight times more than that proposed by Montes de Oca.

EPG: I maintain that the idea was Montes de Oca's, supported by the President.

JWW: But why? Calles had a definite revolutionary record, didn't he?

EPG: Yes, but General Calles was already trying to stop the Agrarian Reform.

JWW: Why?

EPG: He had gone to Europe, and had come back with ideas which were not applicable to Mexico. He had been frightened by the minifundio of France, and he believed that it would be dangerous if Mexico arrived at that situation.

⁴³See Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, p. 425.

JWW: Well, he went to Europe while you were in the Presidency, didn't he?

EPG: First he went in 1924 before becoming President, and he was outside the country again for seven months, from June of 1929 until December, when I was in the Presidency.

JWW: Then you were able to act freely?

EPG: No, I always acted with complete liberty. Even in his presence, we had various friendly clashes, due to the fact that his unconditional supporters charged me with proceeding radically.

JWW: But there are those who have said that you. . .

[p. 513] EPG: . . . that I was a puppet of his.⁴⁴ This is false; General Calles was always respectful of my presidential office. Besides, during the fourteen months that I governed, General Calles was outside the country seven months. And in the difficult moments of my administration, he did not try to put pressure on me or on General [Abelardo] Rodríguez,⁴⁵ because the latter was also an independent president. When circumstances created any difficulty, we proceeded as best we saw fit, always in agreement with the program of the Revolution.

⁴⁴For example, see Amaya, Los Gobiernos de Obregón, Calles y Regimenes "Peleles" Derivados del Callismo, pp. 219-336.

⁴⁵Supporter of Obregón and Calles, and long-time political boss of Baja California, Aberlardo Rodríguez served as Provisional President from 1932 to 1934. Subsequent presidents have served six-year terms of office. For an account of the Rodríguez administration, see Francisco Javier Gaxiola, Jr., El Presidente Rodríguez (1932-1934), (México, D.F.: Editorial Cultura, 1938).

I repeat, the unconditional friends of General Calles accused Marte Gómez and me of distributing the land too fast. In one conversation that I had with General Calles, I told him: "Look, general, I must give away more lands than you gave, because a revolution is coming upon us within three or four months, and I consider it my duty to show the peasants that I am just as revolutionary as you. Part of the army is going to rise up against me, and I am going to need the peasants to substitute for the army."

JWW: You could foresee the rebellion.

EPG: That is so. I appointed General Calles Minister of War because he was the most respected soldier. At one time, when Marte Gómez, Ezequiel Padilla and Colonel José M. Tapia, Chief of the General Staff, were with me, General Calles told me:

"Listen, Licenciado, the uprising is approaching very rapidly. What are we going to do if the other military chiefs rebel?" (I relate this in my book.)⁴⁶ I replied:

"General, I have already resolved the problem. Not all of them are going to revolt; but supposing that this might come about, they are not going to surprise me as they did Mr. Madero in Mexico City. Already we have experienced the assassination of the apostle of the Revolution, and if I see

⁴⁶See Portes Gil, Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana, pp. 495-511.

the necessity of abandoning Mexico City, I have already prepared for my departure. I will go to the state of Hidalgo, where there are 10,000 armed peasants under the command of Colonel Matías Rodríguez, to whom I provided arms. Then, with 10,000 peasants, I will continue to San Luis Potosí, where General Cedillo has 15,000 armed men--also peasants--and afterwards I will establish myself in Tamaulipas, where I have 15,000 armed agraristas. If all the army revolts, we shall form a new army with those peasants."

JWW: Then you saw the necessity of creating your own force in order to govern independently?

EPG: Exactly. After my explanation, General Calles told me: "Well, you are right. I am going calmly to subdue the rebels. I leave you 600 men, ready for any situation which might arise."

JWW: But did the army permit you to send arms to the peasants?

EPG: I did not have to ask permission of the army. The army had a record of observing complete discipline under the authority of the President of the Republic. The first President who gave arms to the peasants in order to prevent the [p. 514] hacendados' armed guards from assassinating them was General Obregón in 1921. General Calles himself distributed arms among the peasants. And with the experience that we had with possible uprisings (such as those that took place in 1923, 1927, and 1929), I had to foresee any event that might threaten my authority.

JWW: Because one of the lessons that the Communists say that they learned in Guatemala in 1954 is that they wanted and needed to give arms to the peasants in order to defend President Jacobo Arbenz; but the army did not allow the peasants to receive arms; and since they [the Communists] were not able to do so, they fell.

EPG: The case of Guatemala was different from ours. There the army was all powerful and Arbenz committed, in my opinion, the error of wanting to implant Communism in Guatemala. I repeat, I had sufficient authority to decide on the use of the arms of the military manufacturing industry which was headed by General Juan José Ríos, in whom I had all confidence. Besides, as Minister of War I had General Joaquín Amaro, who was a great soldier and who never failed to comply with presidential orders. Furthermore, I issued a decree dated January 1, 1929, authorizing the formation of the Agrarian Defense [Forces], which did not yet exist, thus making the peasants a Rural Police [Force] in each ejido. The Rural Defense unit in each community consisted of twenty-five to fifty men, selected, naturally, from the best as judged by their record and conduct so as to guarantee the security of the region. Therefore, when the uprising of Escobar and his associates came in March, 1929, there were thousands of armed peasants in many states of the Republic, especially along the border, in Chihuahua, in Tamaulipas, in San Luis Potosí, in Veracruz, and in Hidalgo.

[p. 514] JWW: And Escobar and his associates did not realize that with the decree there were thousands of armed peasants?

EPG: They did not want to realize it, and therefore, they failed. I tried to make them see it. For example, General Cedillo had retained his 10,000 or 15,000 armed men since the time of the Revolution and no one had disarmed them.

JWW: He had his own army!

EPG: He had his own army. Matías Rodríguez had ten thousand armed men which General Calles had authorized him; and I, as governor of Tamaulipas, also had 15,000 armed men. Therefore, I had such a large number of peasant reserves ready to substitute for the federal army in case all the federal troops rebelled.

* * *

[p. 527] JWW: Returning to your work as President, during your administration, did you not send to Congress a new Labor Code?

EPG: The Labor Code. Yes, sir.

JWW: But it was never passed.

EPG: When I became governor of Tamaulipas, I formulated the Labor Code,⁴⁷ which was then praised by all the labor organizations and by all the groups who were informed about this matter. With such a reason, when General Obregón accepted

⁴⁷See above, p. 45, especially f.n. 10.

his candidacy for the Presidency, he commissioned me to draft a Labor Code, so that when he became the President, he could present it to Congress.

Regulatory legislation for the Labor Law authorized in the Constitution of 1917 was not passed until 1931. The workers as well as the employers and all interested forces were very anxious to have a labor law. Upon the death of General Obregón, I already had prepared the draft legislation, and I had even read to Obregón parts of that work. General Obregón was in agreement and told me: "As soon as I become the President, and after a revision is made of your proposal, we shall put it in force."

[p. 528] JWW: Were you going to have a position in the Cabinet?

EPG: No, I did not know if I was going to have any position in the government of General Obregón; I was governor of Tamaulipas. Obregón did not give me any hints. But, unfortunately, Obregón was assassinated; and President Calles named me Minister of Gobernación. Once I was named Provisional President by the federal Congress, in August of 1928, I got an agreement from Calles that the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Labor would convoke a labor-management congress so that the labor code proposal which I had formulated might be submitted for the consideration of that assembly.

At that meeting, all the articles of the so-called "Portes Gil Proposal" were discussed. In my view, and in the opinion of the people who are familiar with this matter,

it was the most serious work that was ever done in order to pass the Labor Law. It fell to me to send the proposal, already approved by the labor-management convention, to the federal Congress in the first months of 1929, after the Escobar revolt. Congress began to discuss the proposal in detail, but the same thing happened which always happens in these cases: the electoral campaign had already begun and there were new interest groups which desired to take part and to take positions in politics.

In spite of the fact that the discussion was already very advanced, there was a moment in which the Deputies could not continue working because they were involved in propaganda work, and the Labor Code proposal remained without being approved. The same proposal had progressive provisions which alarmed the employers. For this reason some of the articles were revised and were discussed in the following session, when it was approved. Everyone recognizes that the most serious work which had been done in the formulation of the Labor Law was that which I did.

Among the provisions in my proposal was the creation of Factory Councils, composed of workers and employers, to resolve the small conflicts which arose daily in the factories. . This institution of the Factory Council existed only in Germany and had given many good results. Then Germany had the most advanced labor laws in the world and from there I took this reform; but, unfortunately, it was not taken into consideration in the new Code, surely because it was my idea.

It fell to me to make the constitutional reform so that the Labor Law would be federalized, because previously each state had resolved its own problems. Also, it fell to me to reform Article 123 relating to Social Security, because that article limited Social Security too much and did not have the scope that I gave it when the reform was made--the reform on which is based the Social Security that now exists and which has given so many good results.

JWW: Then the employers did not want the Factory Council which was to be composed of workers and employers?

[p. 529] EPG: No, they opposed it.

JWW: And the CROM also had many complaints against you and against the Code?

EPG: Well, the CROM had complaints because its leaders had become corrupt and were corrupting unionism. Nevertheless, the delegates from the CROM attended most of the sessions.

The break which I had with the CROM happened on December 5, 1928. Between August and December, however, the CROM had sent its delegates who were headed by Lic. [Vicente] Lombardo Toledano.⁴⁸ Therefore, in all those points the CROM was in

⁴⁸Originally allied with Morones, Lombardo Toledano later broke with him to organize the "Purified CROM" in 1933. That same year he organized the larger General Confederation of Workers and Peasants in Mexico [*Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México*]. In 1935, in collaboration with President Cárdenas, Lombardo Toledano established the Confederation of Mexican Workers [*Confederación de Trabajadores de México*], which he headed for thirteen years. He was expelled from the organization in 1948 when he organized the Popular Party [*Partido Popular*], a leftist party that opposed the official revolutionary party of the government. See Lombardo Toledano's oral history interview in Wilkie and Wilkie, México Visto en el Siglo XX, pp. 235-409.

agreement because it attended the sessions. Later came the break, not over the question of the Code, because they had been in agreement with it, but over a personalist political question.⁴⁹

I received the principal attack from the Communist group, which was the group that was alarmed. It was afraid of a labor code which authorized guarantees to the workers. The Communists did not want worker guarantees so that they could continue their program of demagoguery and agitation. The Communist group was headed by the painter David Alfaro Siqueiros.

JWW: Speaking of your difficulties with Luis Morones, how did they arise?

EPG: As I have related in my books, my problems with Morones began in 1922. Thus, I have nothing more to say than what I said to him. Until 1921, Morones was a great union organizer and a great leader. Mexico has not had another like him. Then in 1923 Morones began to go bad. Using his immense power, he dedicated himself to exploiting the proletariat and to enriching himself, living a life of ostentation and immorality. Supported by bad leaders who obeyed him blindly, Morones lost the confidence of the workers.

⁴⁹For details concerning the meeting, see Rosendo Salazar, Historia de Las Luchas Proletarias de México: 1923-1929 (México, D.F.: Editorial Avante, 1938), pp. 313-316. In reply to attacks by the CROM, Portes Gil directed a letter to the convention dated December 5, 1928; this document is printed in ibid., pp. 328-331. See also Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 41-43.

When I was elected governor of Tamaulipas, the difficulties with Morones began. Unionism in Tamaulipas has been, until now, the best organization of the Republic: there has been no corruption of leaders there; the agrarian organization of Tamaulipas has been cited as an example by both Presidents [Lázaro] Cárdenas and [Adolfo] López Mateos,⁵⁰ who have progressive ideas. The only union that the CROM had in Tamaulipas was that of the theater stagehands, which was a very small group. With that group, the CROM wanted to destroy the labor organizations of Tamaulipas. These organizations controlled the petroleum company unions, the United Guild of Stevedores, the Union of Electricians, and the rest of the organizations of the region. I had organized all those unions, and of course, they had a high regard for me. (I had resolved their strikes and had been the arbiter in various conflicts. Because I defended the workers from the arbitrariness of the authorities, I was deported to Chihuahua in 1919; as a result of a strike against the Pierce Oil Corporation, I had almost lost my life, along [p. 530] with eighteen workers, in a military assault during a meeting which was held in the Plaza of Liberty in the port city of Tampico.)

When the strike broke out against "El Aguila," the Mexican Petroleum Company (an English company), Morones wanted to impose on the workers a contract too favorable

⁵⁰Cárdenas served as President from 1935 to 1940; Lopez Mateos held this office from 1940-1946. Portes Gil supported Cárdenas' bid for the presidency; later he served in the Cárdenas administration as Minister of Foreign Relations and as President of the PNR.

to the company and prejudicial to the union. Morones went personally to Tamaulipas to try to impose the contract. He did not succeed. Indignant, the workers gave him twenty-four hours to leave the port city, since they could not accept that imposition. Given this problem and since I was a Deputy, the workers asked me to help them in an effective manner. At the same time, the manager of "El Aguila" visited me to tell me that he also desired that I intervene, because he knew that his workers had invited me--an invitation with which he was in agreement; thus, he proposed me as arbiter. I accepted the role of arbiter in that conflict. After a series of discussions, the first collective labor contract of the Republic was signed. In that collective labor contract the workers obtained all the advantages that the Constitution authorizes them. Houses were granted to the workers, although they could not be constructed immediately; but then the company agreed to give to the workers a subsidy so that they could pay rent on the houses where they were living. The obligation of the company to pay the wages due was recognized. There was negotiation over this point. When it touched on the matter of profit sharing (since this was a measure which had been much fought over and which had not been applied), it occurred to me to propose an equitable arrangement whereby the company would deposit five per cent of the salaries of the workers, and the workers another five per cent, and the total, or ten percent, would be handed to the worker at the end of the year, with the six percent interest that was the going rate in those years.

That method equaled in those years what is today called profit sharing.

JWW: That was based more on wages than on profits.

EPG: Exactly. You know that it was impossible, especially in that epoch, that a foreign company would allow an investigation of its bookkeeping. It was better to obtain something than to attempt to reach an impossible goal.

JWW: It was much easier to base the calculations on the wages.

EPG: Exactly! Since then, all the collective contracts which were signed adopted that clause which was my idea. All the collective contracts in the Republic began to adopt the clause of a certain per cent of the wages; it was in fact then the first step toward profit sharing. Therefore, the relations between Morones and the workers was aggravated from day to day. Morones sent brigades to try to destroy the unions of Tamaulipas. But the moment arrived in which the situation reached a crisis. Mr. Morones was Minister of Industry, with a power almost omnipotent; he had [in his control] governors, deputies, senators, in sum, the majority [p. 531] of the organizations of the Republic. In the meantime, I was struggling, wasting time, and spending money in order to keep up the struggle. I came to the capital after a disturbance that took place in Tampico, in which, unfortunately, two or three workers, who had been sent from Mexico City, were killed. In an interview that I had with President Calles, I told him:

"Mr. President, this struggle that the government of Tamaulipas is having with your Secretary of Industry must terminate. I cannot hand over the labor organizations of Tamaulipas to the CROM, because they do not sympathize with the CROM, much less with Mr. Morones. I come to tell you that you have my resignation in your hands, so that I can withdraw from power, because I do not want to be an obstacle to the policy that you may wish to follow."

General Calles, with the manliness that characterized him, told me: "Don't let them beat you; continue fighting. Don't resign for any reason! Continue fighting." From that moment the struggle was ended; that is to say, Calles must have said to the Minister of Industry: "Do not bother Portes Gil."

JWW: Then you did not resign as Deputy?

EPG: I was already governor. But of course, Morones was not pleased that I should continue advancing in politics. As President of the Socialist Party of Tamaulipas, I had influence among the workers, whom I aided insofar as possible to obtain social betterment.

My final break with Morones came in December of 1928 as a result of the CROM convention which was held that year. Ex-President Calles attended it. At the time that General Calles left the convention hall, they began to attack the government of Portes Gil in an unusual and foolish manner. They accused me of being authoritarian and also blamed me because my provisional government permitted a theater performance of a satire which was entitled "The Crumbling of Morones"

["*El desmoronamiento de Morones*"]. At the same time, they threatened that if I did not prevent this play, the workers would march in mass to prevent it.

The following day, I made public my answer in this manner: "I cannot impede the free expression of thought; I cannot permit the exercise of violence against the artists of the theater. A picket line of one hundred men will be there to prevent the workers from attacking those who present that musical drama."

Of course, the play was presented; the Morones' threat to prevent it was not realized, because the workers declined to obey such an unjust order.

In reprisal, Morones decided that the government functionaries, the workers who shared his ideology, would resign immediately. The Minister of Industry and Commerce [Dr. J. M. Puig Casauranc] announced that the government was not an enemy of the workers; that those who wanted to keep on working would be able to continue in their positions.

[p. 532] Very few resigned, and from that time the decadence of the CROM began. Later came the government of [Pascual] Ortiz Rubio.⁵¹ While I was President of the National Revolutionary Party and the elections of deputies and senators were being initiated, I went to Cuba, invited by General [Gerardo] Machado. Morones made the accusation against me that I was going to promote communism in Cuba. Of course,

⁵¹Ortiz Rubio served as President from 1930 to 1932. Wounded in an attempted assassination on the day that he took office, Ortiz Rubio experienced two difficult years before he resigned because of lack of support from former President Calles, who was known as the *Jefe Máximo* [Maximum Chief]. Calles had more political power than Ortiz Rubio. See Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico, pp. 535-543.

in Cuba, everyone laughed at him. From Cuba I went to the United States. The authorities of the cities through which I passed received me very cordially; the mayor of New Orleans greeted me in the name of President [Calvin] Coolidge. While I was in San Antonio, I was always treated with much cordiality. But since Morones failed in his attempt to discredit me, he later charged that I had planned . . . a conspiracy to assassinate the candidate Ortiz Rubio in Los Angeles. The American authorities declared that it was untrue that there had been such a conspiracy. The President of Mexico declared the same thing. Morones persisted in his attacks and I answered him each time that it was necessary. And thus came a series of struggles which lasted until the early 1940's--that is to say, more than twenty years, until Mr. Morones finally reached the unfortunate level where he remained without any popularity, abandoned even by his own friends, and without any possibility of returning to figure in politics.

He made an attempt to participate in politics with Alemán and with General Cárdenas, but he could no longer succeed. Now he had neither the support of the laboring masses, nor much less of the government chiefs. Thus ended the political life of this man.

JWW: It is said that Morones came out of the Revolution very rich and [lived] with much ostentation.

EPG: Yes, unfortunately Morones made an ostentatious display of wealth. They attacked him very hard in the Chamber

of Deputies. At one time Jorge Prieto Laurens attacked him because he was wearing extremely expensive diamond rings, telling him: "How can a labor leader have diamonds on his fingers when the workers are dying of hunger, and when the Labor Law has not even been passed? How can a labor leader have a hotel like the Hotel Mancera when the workers are in misery?"⁵²

In summation, these things can be seen in the Diario de los Debates of the Chamber of Deputies.

JWW: And Morones continued being a callista in order to avoid obregonism, didn't he?

EPG: Exactly!

JWW: Then, upon trying to advance the program of the Revolution, were you able to continue with your plans?

EPG: I have one satisfaction and it is this: I have never sold out my principles, nor do I think I will ever

⁵²Observing Morones' conduct at the time that the CROM chief was at the peak of his power, Dr. Ernest Gruening wrote: "The head of the Mexican labor movement, Luis N. Morones, has become a man of wealth. He owns many properties including a textile factory--though not in his own name. He lives lavishly. He sports not less than a half dozen automobiles. His *parrandas* [carousals] staged every week-end in the suburb of Tlalpam are notorious for their orgiastic extravagance. In a retreat, intended not for any considerable group of workers but for the inner clique--the *Grupo Acción* [Action Group]--a great steel-girded *frontón* [Jai alai] court, swimming pool, bowling alleys, tennis court, and three dwellings with a retinue of servants lift this club to a plane of luxury unequalled except by millionaires' country clubs in the United States. Comrade Morones' diamonds have become famous, and while neither as large nor as numerous as cartoon and satire present them, were deemed worthy of a defence (sic.) in the C.R.O.M.'s official publication. Harmless in themselves, they have become a symbol of contrast with the hundreds of thousands who still wear *huaraches* [sandals], and of dissatisfaction within the movement." Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage, p. 390.

give up my ideals while I live. For example, in the Agrarian Reform, in fourteen months I distributed land at a greater rate than had been distributed in the previous periods. This means that the program of the Revolution was advanced. I made the most progressive study of the Labor Code, which was approved [p. 533] in general by the Congress. I decreed important measures, among others, creating the rural agrarian forces and giving arms to the agraristas to prevent their becoming victims of the latifundistas. Frequently, the agraristas were assassinated by the hacendados' armed guards and by the Cristeros.

The distribution of the land during my administration carried the same rhythm as during the Cárdenas administration; that is to say, I benefitted 155,826 families in fourteen months, and General Cárdenas benefitted 774,009 families during six years.

JWW: Didn't you also found the National Association for the Protection of Children?

EPG: That is true. In the year 1929, while President of the Republic, I experienced a series of problems, among others, the religious problem. It was necessary to terminate that struggle which cost so much blood by requiring the priests to submit to the laws and to register with the appropriate government offices, thus prohibiting them from teaching religion in the schools as prescribed by the Constitution and the laws.

My wife founded for the first time in Mexico that which is called the National Association for the Protection of Children.

Until then no wife of a President had collaborated with her husband on social questions. I have the satisfaction that my wife, who organized the Association when she was scarcely twenty-three years old, dedicated herself entirely to the protection of children, establishing also not only medical dispensaries, but also maternity clinics. With this beginning, other institutions were founded in the Republic, including schools.

JWW: Then your wife established a tradition.

EPG: She had done the same thing in Tamaulipas when I was governor. So all we did was to transport the idea from Tamaulipas to Mexico City.

JWW: You worked hard. Tamaulipas served as a laboratory.

EPG: It was a great laboratory. Sports parades were held throughout Mexico on November 20, 1929, for the first time in the history of the Republic. On the anniversary of the Revolution, the National Anti-Alcoholic Committee was founded in order to curb the vice of drunkenness among people.

JWW: Also, a National Tourism Committee was founded, wasn't it?

EPG: Yes, for the first time, the National Tourism Committee was founded. The first great sports park, the "Venustiano Carranza," was constructed, and was admired even by the Russian delegates who came to an aviation meeting. They told me, "In Russia we have not yet done this."

JWW: Speaking of your wife's work, when did you get married?

EPG: I got married in 1922. My wife was seventeen years old and I was thirty. We have been married forty-two years. We have had a very happy marriage. We have two daughters and their husbands do not work for the government. [p. 534] They have not given me any headaches. Fortunately we have seven grandchildren who also are a delight. We are very happy!

JWW: Are the parents of your wife still living?

EPG: My wife's parents were living when I married her, and my mother was also living. Unfortunately, my mother died first in 1940 and later my wife's parents died.

JWW: Your wife has done much work at your side?

EPG: She has been my faithful companion and when my mother was still living, they were my two advisors. She has had many hardships as well as many satisfactions. I also gave my mother many headaches, not because I committed any act contrary to the principles of rectitude, but because of my struggles in politics. She had many satisfactions. But I am pleased to say that neither my mother nor my wife ever impeded me from following the road which I had chosen, in spite of the fact that they ran the risk of receiving some bad news. They never said to me, "Don't do that."

JWW: And your wife never complained about your attitude

toward the Church?⁵³

EPG: Never. My wife was always at my side. Not only that, but moreover, she has continued observing a line of conduct much removed from religious ceremony. She is Catholic, but she goes to Church only now and then; she does not belong to any religious organization, nor does she patronize anything that can signify a violation of my principles. I do not profess any religion; I believe that the best religion is the fulfillment of duty and rectitude; the best thought and the best work in agreement with the dictates of conscience, which is the best God that we carry inside. I do not know if you are familiar with a quatrain by a great poet who says:

"Conscience never sleeps:
mute and pertinacious witness,
that does not allow to go without punishment
any crime in life."

What a philosophy!

⁵³Although a strong anti-clerical bias is displayed in all of Portes Gil's writings, the most detailed expression of his attitude toward the Catholic Church is spelled out in his La Lucha entre el Poder Civil y el Clero (México, D.F.: n.p. 1934). The book was written while he served as Attorney General in the Abelardo Rodríguez administration. In this study he provides an historical account of Church-state relations in Mexico from the colonial era to the date of writing, with special attention given to opposition by the Catholic clergy to provisions of the Constitution of 1917 concerning the role of the state in education. An English translation was published for use as anti-Church propaganda in English-speaking countries: The Conflict Between the Civil Power and the Clergy (México, D.F.: n.p., 1934). For a Catholic response, see Lic. Felix Navarrete [Pbro. Jesús García Gutiérrez], La Lucha Entre el Poder Civil y el Clero: Comentario al Estudio de Portes Gil (El Paso, Texas: Revista Press, 1935).

JWW: Have you followed that philosophy?

EPG: It has always been my ideal.

JWW: Didn't your wife attend school in Tamaulipas and didn't you meet each other there? How did you meet?

EPG: No, my wife is from Nuevo León. She studied there, and she had relatives in Ciudad Victoria. On one occasion when she went to a festival that was held in Ciudad Victoria, I met her. And there, well, we took a fancy to each other and we married a very few months later. She has put up with me for forty-two years.

JWW: She was very young when you married?

EPG: She was seventeen years old.

JWW: Well, since you married young, you can see. . .

EPG: There is the advantage that one can see the children and the grandchildren. It was been my fortune to see my daughters grow up and marry, and to see the grandchildren grow up. I am taking a personal interest in their [p. 535] education. Because it is not true that, upon marrying, the children relieve one of the obligations toward them. Grandchildren come and one continues with the responsibility of aiding their education.

JWW: Do the grandchildren live here with you?

EPG: No. Only three live here. One of them was around here. The other four were here until a moment ago; they went to see the dentist.

JWW: Speaking once again about your action in the Presidency, did you not have influence in the issuance of a new penal code?

EPG: The Penal Code was passed in 1929.⁵⁴ Measures of great importance were adopted for the first time in America--especially in the question of punishment, considering the delinquent as a social factor who is at times the victim of society itself. That is to say, the penalty was humanized. The Council of Social Prevention was created, which had as its object to watch over prisons, to analyze the record or the reasons why the delinquent had committed the crime, with the object of taking care of him and redeeming him effectively, not only placing him in seclusion, but also making an analytic study of his case in order to apply the best means available for the purpose of rehabilitating him.

Another of the steps that was taken was the suppression of the death penalty. The death penalty was prohibited for criminals who had committed common crimes. Penal courts, composed of three judges each, were established with the object that there would be more opinions in the trial of a delinquent. It was said: "Three capable people have more competency to judge a delinquent than only one judge."

The popular jury was abolished because it had then degenerated and become corrupt; the members of the jury, who were local citizens named previously on lists that were made each year, were influenced and bribed in order to obtain the liberty of the delinquents. For that reason,

⁵⁴For the full text of the Penal Code, see Diario Oficial (Organo del Gobierno Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos), LVI, Núm. 28 (October 5, 1929), pp. 3-138.

the jury was abolished. Also, another series of reforms was introduced. Unfortunately, the Law of 1929 was in force less than one year, because a new government came in, along with new interest groups. Then, by order of President Ortiz Rubio, a commission was named at my suggestion. That commission did not limit itself to making reforms, as had been ordered, but it repealed the Law of 1929 and published the Code of 1931, which did not contribute any reform to the legislation; that is to say, only five great reforms of the Law of 1929 were adopted. The Code of 1931 did not bring any new reform.

JWW: Also, it was your responsibility to name the ministers of the Supreme Court, wasn't it?

EPG: I appointed the ministers of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, and of magistrates of the Superior Tribunal of Justice of the [Federal] District and Federal Territories. I have the satisfaction that the Court which I named then has not been surpassed in professional quality. I designated the best and most honest jurists in Mexico.⁵⁵ That Court, which lasted until 1935, was never attacked; never was any one of the magistrates [p. 536] attacked for the least immoral act, nor was the Executive attacked for interfering with the resolutions of the judicial branch. I positively prohibited all of my collaborators from meddling in judicial affairs, and I ordered them to abstain from making recommendations concerning judicial business. This rule, as I tell you, was observed until 1935.

⁵⁵For the text of the decree by Portes Gil appointing sixteen judges to the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, see ibid., LI, Num. 43 (December 26, 1928), p. 1.

JWW: Did you institute life tenure?

EPG: Judicial tenure began to go into force in 1928, the year in which I took charge of the Presidency.

Nevertheless, I believe that judicial tenure must have as its initial base the best composition of the tribunals. That is to say, the best men must be chosen. Unfortunately, judicial tenure has given very bad results, because later the best jurists were not named to these positions: mediocre lawyers were appointed, some of bad reputation.

* * *

June 9, 1964

[p. 557] JWW: Licenciado, today we would like to talk about when you were President in 1929. Then there were many problems in the National University and this had something to do with the *vasconcelista*⁵⁶ movement, didn't it?

EPG: Yes, while I was President, around the month of May, the students declared a strike as a result of some measures taken by the Dean of the Faculty of Law. These were justified measures for the purpose of disciplining students

⁵⁶Lic. José Vasconcelos served as Minister of Public Education in the Obregón cabinet and won international fame as philosopher and writer. After failing in an attempt to win the governorship of Oaxaca, he traveled and lectured in Europe and the United States before returning to Mexico in November, 1928, to launch a presidential campaign as nominee of the Anti-reelection Party [*Partido Antirreeleccionista*]. For an autobiographical account of the unsuccessful election campaign, see José Vasconcelos, *El Proconsulado* (4th ed. and 1st "purged edition"; México, D.F.: Editorial Jus., 1958), pp. 11-256. Portions of this volume (along with parts of the other three volumes of Vasconcelos' memoirs (*Ulises Criollo*, *La Tormenta*, and *El Desastre*)) have been translated by W. Rex Crawford and published in an abridged work; see José Vasconcelos, *A Mexican Ulysses: An Autobiography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963).

and making them study. Among others, provisions were made for trimester examinations and regular class attendance by students and professors. The administration committed the error of trying to suppress the students in an energetic fashion, to which youth never consents. I was away from Mexico City, traveling through the state of Morelos when another serious error was committed: sending the police to frighten, shall we say, the students--something that was not possible. There were disturbances and violent demonstrations: I returned rapidly to Mexico City and took charge of the problem. The Central Department had sent the police at the request of the Department of Public Education. Immediately, I ordered that the police retire from the University buildings, that there should not be any demonstration of force at all on the part of the government, and I invited the strikers to name a commission for the purpose of explaining to me the objectives of the movement. After an assembly held by the students they named a commission in order to present me with a list of petitions. That list of petitions contained more or less the following points:

- I. (a) Resignations of Lic. Ezequiel Padilla, Minister of Public Education; Professor Moisés Sáenz, Deputy Minister of Public Education; Lic. Antonio Castro Leal, Rector of the National University.
- (b) [Resignations] of all those employees of the Ministry of Public Education and the National University who are found responsible for the reprisals which were exercised against the students on strike.

- [p. 558] II. Removal of Valente Quintana and Pablo Meneses, as unworthy of the offices that they presently fill.
- III. Acceptance, beginning with the resignation of Lic. Castro Leal, that the rector of the National University be selected by the President of the Republic from a panel of three names, in each case presented by the University Council. After this date, the Council is to be composed of a number of student delegates equal to the number of delegates who are deans and professors of the schools, including also on the Council a delegate of the Student Confederation of the Republic and a delegate of the Student Federation of the Federal District with the right of voice and vote and giving the rector a vote in the Council for the purpose of breaking a tie. The spirit of this agreement must be that never, nor for any reason, shall the faculty and administration delegates with voice and vote, constitute a larger number than the student delegates with the same rights of voice and vote.
- IV. Creation, with the same organization and function of the University Council, of a Council of Technical Schools and a Council of Normal Schools.
- V. Reincorporation of all the existing Secondary Schools into the National Preparatory School. Even if it is not possible for them to meet in the same building, each will carry the title of National Preparatory School.
- VI. Commencement of a minute and thorough investigation for the purpose of determining who were those responsible for the assault in which the students were victims and apply a stiff punishment to the guilty.

Mr. President, because of your record of justice and your revolutionary merits, all of the students hope that you will have the goodness to accede to these petitions that constitute our long-standing, unsatisfied goals, and compose the highest and most ardent aspirations of the students. These

petitions, if you see fit to resolve them favorably, will constitute the greatest revolutionary achievement of our class, which, like the labor and peasant classes, as well as all the social classes of the Republic, desires that the progressive and redeeming work of the Mexican Revolution shall be extended to us.

--Mexico, D.F., May 27, 1929

For the General Strike Committee
(signed) Ricardo García Villalobos, Secretary

When they handed me the list of petitions, I told them:

"Fellows, I believe that this is not enough to justify such a large movement as that which you have organized, since all the university schools have supported the Law School. These petitions do not constitute a program which fulfills the aspirations of the students; I will not be able to concede to you more than one thing: that you shall have greater representation on the University Council [p. 559] than you have had. The remainder I could not concede to you, because it would be equal to setting aside my powers of appointing and removing my collaborators."

"Think about something more serious, about a program of greater quality which would justify the movement that has affected not only Mexico City, but all of the Republic."

"But we have nothing else to ask you, Mr. President, except this," they replied.

"Very well, fellows," I said to them, "I believe that it is my duty to help you think. If I removed all those officials, would you return immediately to your classes?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"And what have you obtained? To take authority from me. But something great? Something of a higher plane? Well, nothing has been obtained! So, I am going to propose to you one thing: I am going to grant to you university autonomy, which has been sought for a long time, but unfortunately, there has never been anyone who would dare to concede it."

"From this moment, the University remains in your hands. It only remains for me to propose the respective law that I am already preparing with some collaboration of teachers, so that law can be sent immediately to the federal Congress. I invite you to name one or two representatives for the purpose of collaborating with me and making the Law of University Autonomy."

The students did not hope for such an answer, and of course, from that moment I had all of their sympathy and support for the issuance of the University Law.

Once the law was issued, peace returned to the University. The law spelled out to the University the property that belonged to it--property that had belonged to the University since the colonial epoch. All of the property that was in the possession of the government was returned to it, and the University was assigned a grant of sufficient size so that it might continue functioning.⁵⁷

⁵⁷For a detailed analysis of the law, see Siegrist Clamont, En Defensa de la Autonomía Universitaria, pp. 252-304.

I am happy to have granted university autonomy, because since this step the University has reached a high level of grandeur. It is now the University with the highest enrollment in the world, something like seventy-five thousand students.

The last rector of the University has imposed order and discipline, and, in sum, I certainly believe that our youth now has one of the most important centers of learning in the world.

JWW: In these days there are people who believe that it was an error to give so much representation to the students, because they now interfere greatly in University affairs.

[p. 560] EPG: When there is an energetic rector like Dr. Ignacio Chávez, it makes no difference how many representatives the students have. When one speaks to students with truth and sincerity, they are easily convinced, since it is done for their own good and for the good of Mexico. They are not stubborn when a man speaks to them with complete sincerity and proves to them that the measures which have been taken are beneficial for them and for the country. Besides, it is not true that the students have too much representation: the University Council, which represents the University, has the majority--that is to say, the rector and the University Council, which is composed mostly of senior professors who are capable and patriotic.

JWW: And the students take part in the decisions?

EPG: They have representation, but not enough to achieve

by themselves the measures that they desire; that is to say, the majority does not consist of students, but of professors.

JWW: Well, there are three groups represented: the rector, the Council, and the students. Do they all have votes?

EPG: Exactly.

JWW: But the rector and the senior professors compose the majority, don't they?

EPG: Except in the case in which the students are right, and the professors support the students. But this happens only in the case in which the student body is in the right.

JWW: And what measures can they take? Because if the professors and the students are not in agreement with the rector, can they impose a decision?

EPG: The term of office of the rector is three years. For this reason, only in serious cases can the rector be dismissed or made to resign. But, in other cases, the University Council and the students must support the rector, especially in the present case in which the rector has established discipline and order; he obliges the students to work and the professors to comply with their duties. Previously, the professors frequently missed classes; now, with the measures dictated by the Rectory, the professor who fails to meet a class does not receive payment for the class that he has missed. Previously, they missed weeks and weeks,

they collected their salaries, and they paid no attention to their obligations. Now, the student who misses a certain percentage of days--I believe that it is ten per cent absences in the year--does not have the right to take the final examination. It has always been like this, but formerly the rule was not obeyed.

JWW: And there are other persons who have said that it was an error to give autonomy to the University because thus the students can involve themselves in politics.

EPG: I have always said that the professors ought to belong to a political party; that the students must have their political ideas, but they must not engage in politics within the University.

When the teacher engages in politics within the University, he not only converts himself into a politician but also ceases to be a good teacher; when the students try to [p. 561] engage in politics in the University, they cease studying, become lazy and apathetic, and engage in agitation.

This is observed in all the universities, especially in those of Mexico. Nevertheless, this has been diminishing rapidly; now the University is a center of learning.

The University ought to be a center of learning where all the philosophies are taught so that the student can leave with knowledge about all political, religious, and philosophical systems; but it must not be a center of agitation. Mexico has gradually achieved educational improvement since university autonomy was granted.

Since it has ceased to depend on the government, now it has more liberty, and it has more room for development. When it depended on the government, the Secretary of Public Education was the one who determined everything; now it is the University Council, as I say, composed of the best teachers of Mexico, and it is assumed that those professors have the patriotism and sufficient ability to direct the government of the University.

JWW: Previously, I have read--I believe it was Baltasar Dromundo,⁵⁸ who wrote that he belonged to the generation of 1929 and that that generation had the ingenuity to ask you for the autonomy of the University--that the university autonomy was not your idea.

EPG: The students did not ask me for the autonomy of the University; they limited themselves to asking me for that which I have just said. Dromundo himself knows very well, because he has said it publicly, that they did not ask for autonomy, but it was offered to them by the President of the Republic. All the students of that epoch know very well that they did not ask for the autonomy; it was the federal Executive who granted it to them.

⁵⁸ See Baltasar Dromundo, Los Oradores de 29 (México, D.F.: Ediciones "Una Generación," 1939), quoted in Siegrist Clamont, En Defensa de la Autonomía Universitaria, pp. 298-304.

JWW: And the same generation of 1929 has said that they, who lived in that generation, wanted to put an end to *callismo* and they placed themselves on the side of *vasconcelismo*.⁵⁹

EPG: The *vasconcelista* movement was important within the University; but it did not come to have a majority of the students. All of the University students went on strike because of police brutality; but the immense majority were not *vasconcelistas*. Of course there was a certain *vasconcelista* faction inside of the University which agitated the student body; but, I repeat, the majority of the students were not *vasconcelistas*. There was a numerous group, directed by intelligent, brave, agitators, who desired that the University declare itself *vasconcelista*. They never achieved this.

⁵⁹The terms *callismo* and *vasconcelismo* suggest the personalist nature of Mexican politics of the Portes Gil era; *callismo* refers to the political ideals and practices of Calles, while the term *vasconcelismo* encompasses the same for Vasconcelos.

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VITA

On September 22, 1946, this writer was born in Buffalo, New York. Raised in a military family, she can call many places home. She received her B.A. with majors in Political Science and Spanish at Baylor University in May, 1968. Prior to returning to Baylor in 1970 to begin graduate study in political science, she was employed in Washington, D.C., by the following organizations: Defense Intelligence Agency; Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, Inc.; and National Teen Age Republicans. After completing her requirements for the master's degree in August, 1971, she will assume a position as Instructor of Government at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas.