

## **Revolutionary Tabasco in the time of Tomás Garrido Canabal, 1922-1935 : a Mexican house divided.**

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REVOLUTIONARY TABASCO IN THE TIME OF TOMÁS GARRIDO CANABAL,  
1922-1935: A MEXICAN HOUSE DIVIDED

A Dissertation Presented

by

KRISTIN A. HARPER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2004

Department of History

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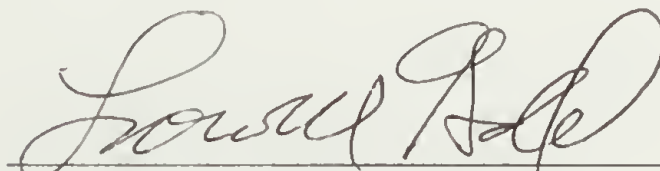
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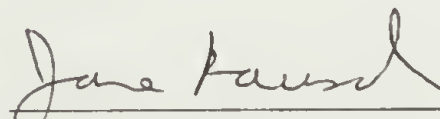
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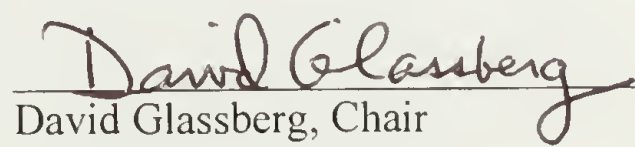
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above all, friendship. Sara Silver and John Authers also provided treasured companionship (and housing) in Mexico City. Special thanks to Maribel, Pache, Claudia, Lydia, Lety, Monica, Carlos, Pepe, Juanita, Doña Carmita, Magi, and Paulina for their friendship and support.

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## ABSTRACT

# REVOLUTIONARY TABASCO IN THE TIME OF TOMÁS GARRIDO CANABAL, 1922-1935: A MEXICAN HOUSE DIVIDED

SEPTEMBER 2004

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This dissertation is a regional study of Mexico during the reform phase of the Mexican Revolution. It analyzes the relationship between governing authorities and civil society in the southeastern state of Tabasco during the lengthy tenure of revolutionary strongman Tomás Garrido Canabal (1922-1935). Using a variety of previously untapped sources, this dissertation evaluates popular reactions to the governing mechanisms and cultural radicalism of the *garridistas*. It assesses how revolutionary labor policies, educational initiatives, anticlerical campaigns, and other reform measures, were received by Tabasco's diverse population. Ultimately, it concludes that while the *garridistas* were able to amass something of a popular following, the ideological intolerance and institutional rigidity of the Garrido State undermined the democratizing promise of its reformist agenda.

To a great extent, the governing rigidity of the *garridistas* can be explained by the repeated efforts of their political opponents to overthrow them. These "enemy" schemes, which had local, regional, and national dimensions, were more and less successful. That the Garrido regime successfully weathered attacks on its rule for better than twelve years

was due to the popular mobilization of its most loyal constituencies and the intervention of federal authorities. At a broader level, then, this thesis reflects on the complex way in which power was mediated and maintained in revolutionary Mexico.



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## INTRODUCTION

### THE ENDURING CONTROVERSY OF TOMÁS GARRIDO CANABAL

In 1943, Tomás Garrido Canabal, the controversial former governor of Tabasco, died in a Los Angeles, California hospital room at the age of fifty-two.<sup>1</sup> While most observers attributed his death to cancer, some of Garrido's most trenchant critics maintain that he died of syphilis, the implication being that his well-known sexual exploits had, in the end, killed him.<sup>2</sup> Disagreement over Garrido's cause of death, however, is not the only detail about his last days that hovers between truth and legend. Depending on their point of view, or what information they have been exposed to, today's Tabascans highlight one or other of two competing scenarios involving the moribund Garrido's thoughts about a possible afterlife. One version has it that the former governor, who in the 1920s and 1930s earned a reputation as perhaps Mexico's most rabidly anticlerical politician, refused last rites as he lay dying, adhering to his anticlerical precepts to the end. His detractors, however, anxious to portray Garrido as a hypocrite, alleged that two nuns and a priest kept vigil during his last hours, suggesting that behind all his anticlerical bluster was a man of faith.<sup>3</sup>

Today, more than sixty years after his death, Tomás Garrido Canabal and the policies he undertook as Tabasco's revolutionary strongman are still subject to passionate

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<sup>1</sup> "Falleció en Los Angeles El Lic. Tomás Garrido Canabal," *El Universal*, April 9, 1943.

<sup>2</sup> I first heard the rumor that Garrido died of syphilis from a Tabascan economist and writer who prefers to remain anonymous. Most accounts report that he died of cancer. See, for example, Baltasar Dromundo, *Tomás Garrido: Su vida y su leyenda* (Mexico: Editorial Guaranía, 1953), p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Kirshner, *Tomás Garrido Canabal y el movimiento de los Camisas Rojas*. Trans. Ana Mendizábal (Mexico D.F.: SepSetentas, 1976), p. 181. Baltasar Dromundo countered the conversion rumors by citing Garrido's decision to be cremated, a ritual prohibited to Catholics, arguing that this "proved that Garrido the iconoclast was not a fake, [he] died as he had lived...unshakably faithful to the doctrines he'd professed." *Tomás Garrido: Su vida y su leyenda*, p. 171. Alan Kirshner sustains Dromundo's assessment in his work cited above, p. 181.



debate, particularly among Tabascans, but among other Mexicans, as well. Certain individuals can barely contain their disgust as they relate one version or other of his anticlerical excess, dictatorial style, or sexual philandering. They point to the ways in which his regime harassed and even killed its opponents, dredging up any number of dastardly deeds as examples of his hatefulness. Others praise Garrido for his reformist zeal and his genuine compassion for and involvement with Tabasco's downtrodden. They credit him with inching Tabasco further into the modern age, citing among other things, the regime's road building campaign and dramatic advances in the realm of education. Others still, see a complex political figure who in embracing seemingly contradictory principles, steadfastly eludes facile categorization.<sup>4</sup>

Charismatic and forceful, Tomás Garrido was the principal *caudillo* of Tabascan politics between 1922 and 1935.<sup>5</sup> During that time he was elected to two (non-consecutive) terms as governor, first in 1922 and again in 1930. Briefly ousted from power in 1923, Garrido was restored to the governor's chair in 1924, and for the next

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the polarized views of *garridismo* and an invitation to pursue less ideologically-driven studies of the era, see, Carlos E. Ruiz and Jorge Abdo Francis, *El hombre del sureste: Relación documental del archivo particular de Tomás Garrido Canabal*, vol. I (Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco and Secretaría de Gobernación, Archivo General de la Nación, 2002), pp. 11-12. Controversial leaders, of course, often inspire literature heavier in polemics than empirical fact, Juan Perón of Argentina being a prime example. For analysis of this phenomenon see, Cristián Buchrucker, "Interpretations of Peronism: Old Frameworks and New Perspectives," as well as the introductory essay in *Peronism and Argentina*, James P. Brennan, ed. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1998).

<sup>5</sup> The Garrido period has spawned a sizable body of literature, of which only a spare sample is listed here. The most widely-cited analysis of Tabasco during the Garrido era is Carlos Martínez Assad's, *El laboratorio de la revolución: El Tabasco garridista* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1979). Other important studies include, Enrique Canudas, *Trópico rojo: Historia política y social de Tabasco, los años garridistas 1919-1934* (Villahermosa, Tabasco: Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 1989); Marcela Tostado Gutiérrez, *El intento de liberar a un pueblo: Educación y magisterio tabasqueño con Garrido Canabal, 1924-1935* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991); Ramona Isabel Pérez Bertruy, *Tomás Garrido Canabal y la conformación del poder revolucionario tabasqueño, 1914-1921* (Villahermosa, Tabasco: Secretaría de Educación, Cultura y Recreación, 1993); Alan M. Kirshner, "Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Redshirt Movement." Ph.D. diss. New York University, 1970; Stanley Rex Ridgeway, "The Cooperative Republic of Tomás Garrido Canabal: Developmentalism and the Mexican Revolution." Ph.D. diss., Department of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel

eleven years, he and an assortment of (more and less competent) family members and ideological loyalists churned the political machinery of Tabasco.<sup>6</sup> Their policies aimed to modernize agricultural production, promote “rational” co-educational schooling, eliminate the influence of the Catholic Church, increase women’s participation in political life, improve transport and communications, prohibit the consumption of hard alcohol and promote the “general well-being” of Tabascans. These were ambitious projects in a state noted for widespread indigence, a weak educational infrastructure and the oppressive labor regimes associated with export-oriented plantation agriculture and the extraction of tropical hardwoods. However, Tabascan revolutionary officials undertook their reform program with such intensity that their state was dubbed the “laboratory of the Revolution.”<sup>7</sup>

Tabasco, which is located in southeastern Mexico, had a minimal impact on revolutionary processes during the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917). However, during the reconstruction or reform phase of the Revolution (1920-1940) Tabasco, along with such regional neighbors as Yucatán and Veracruz, enacted vigorous

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Hill, 1996; and Trinidad Torres Vera, *Mujeres y utopía: Tabasco garridista* (Villahermosa, Tabasco: Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> When Garrido himself was not occupying the governor’s chair his unconditional loyalists were. For this reason contemporary observers and historians alike have seen fit to characterize Tabasco between the years 1922-1935 as the Garrido era. In this study I will make frequent references to *garridismo* and the *garridistas*. The first should be understood as the project or philosophy of social change intended to create “class harmony” and promote individual and collective responsibility. It sought to have a practical effect in society by enacting protective labor laws, expanding the reach of education, sponsoring progressive reforms, and developing an ethos of anticlericalism. (Contradictions in the application of this philosophy will be addressed in this thesis, but need not bog us down here). *Garridistas*, meanwhile, should be understood as those individuals who identified with or considered themselves followers of this philosophy/program.

<sup>7</sup> This quote, which originates with Lázaro Cárdenas, inspired the title for Carlos Martínez Assad’s classic 1979 study of Garrido-era Tabasco. Other “laboratories of the revolution” included Veracruz, Michoacán, Sonora and Yucatán. See, Adrian A. Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1998), p. 18; and Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 102.



social reform policies.<sup>8</sup> By 1920, of course, the Mexican Revolution had shifted from a movement aimed at political reform to one characterized by its promise of radical agrarian and social change. Although Tabasco under Garrido Canabal did not experience an agrarian revolution, the creative revolutionary experiment that transpired within its borders during his many years in power meaningfully affected the lives of many of its residents. Most remembered for his strident anticlericalism, Garrido and his governing entourage introduced a number of creative reform initiatives intended to elevate the standard of living for Tabasco's poor majority.

Not surprisingly, some Tabascans refused to accept the revolutionary vision advocated by Garrido, and they challenged his mandate (with varying degrees of success) during his many years in power. One victory for his opponents occurred in 1923. Less than a year after he took office, rebels linked to the national uprising headed by Adolfo de la Huerta toppled Garrido from the governor's chair. Though he was shortly restored to power, the rebellion had a decisive effect on Garrido's approach to governance. Already prone to act aggressively toward those who opposed its revolutionary platform, the Garrido government would accentuate these tendencies following the rebellion. (Indeed, throughout the 1920s, "reactionaries" and "*delahuertistas*" became handy code words to describe enemies of the regime). The Garrido regime, then, though widely credited for its innovative social policies, would also earn a reputation for arbitrariness.

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<sup>8</sup> The phenomenon of "proconsular rule" explains how states such as Tabasco and Yucatán, which had been relatively quiescent during the armed phase of the revolution, emerged as bastions of socio-political radicalism during the period of reconstruction and reform. During the constitutionalist era, revolutionaries from northern (and sometimes central Mexico, as was the case with Francisco Múgica) were sent to southern Mexico as governors and generals, frequently importing "political radicalism" into the region. See Alan Knight's informative discussion of proconsular rule in southern Mexico in, *The Mexican Revolution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1986] 1990) vol. 2, pp. 236-251; and vol. 1, p. 367.



This thesis argues that although Garrido counted on a good deal of popular support during his long stay in power, his regime lost the sympathy of many would-be supporters by adopting an ideologically and institutionally rigid form of government. Preoccupied to a fault with the question of loyalty, the Garrido regime undermined the democratizing impulse of what many observers agree was an impressive suite of social reforms. A tendency to rely on coercive tactics is explained by the repeated efforts of Garrido's political opponents to overthrow him.<sup>9</sup> However, the manner in which the *garridistas* responded to these security concerns amounted to something of a Catch-22. For in their attempt to make themselves less vulnerable to their political enemies, *garridista* authorities adopted a defensive governing posture, the effect of which was to alienate potential supporters. Its controversial governing style notwithstanding, the Garrido regime's success in delivering services and opportunities to the state's most marginal areas reminds us why, among some Tabascans anyway, his popularity has lasted.<sup>10</sup>

### A Regional Study in National Perspective

One of the truisms of the Mexican Revolution is that it occurred differently in the various regions of the Republic. This has been demonstrated in a voluminous

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<sup>9</sup> One can hardly blame Garrido for being paranoid. In addition to being ousted from power during the de la Huerta rebellion, Garrido's regime was in 1926 the object of a multi-tiered conspiracy that stretched all the way to Mexico City. And, if that were not enough, Garrido was targeted for assassination on more than one occasion.

<sup>10</sup> In February of 2002 I attended a meeting in Vicente Guerrero, a Chontal village in Centla, Tabasco. During the gathering at the newly-inaugurated Indigenous University, one of the speakers invoked with admiration the memory of Tomás Garrido Canabal, whose regular visits to the pueblo in the 1920s and 1930s are talked about to this day.

historiography devoted to provincial Mexico during the revolutionary years.<sup>11</sup> This dissertation's most obvious home is in the field of Mexican regional and revolutionary history, and it intends to shed light on the social, political, cultural, and economic processes that unfolded in southeastern Mexico during the period of reconstruction. Crucial to this endeavor is developing an understanding of how events in Tabasco related to events in the nation at large.

Regional studies carry more interpretive power if they are situated in national context. One aim of this dissertation, then, is to evaluate the relationship between local and national powerbrokers.<sup>12</sup> Garrido's tenure as Tabasco's polemical strongman coincided closely with the leadership exercised at the national level by Álvaro Obregón (president of Mexico between 1920-1924) and Plutarco Elías Calles (president between 1924-1928, and *Jefe Máximo*, or power behind the presidency, until 1935).<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> The literature is extensive. An early call to the regional (local) approach can be found in, Luis González y González' *Invitación a la microhistoria* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1973). Apparently responding to the call, Mexico scholars have, over the last twenty-five years unleashed a wave of regionally focused monographs and edited volumes. See, among others, Romana Falcón, *El agrarismo en Veracruz: la etapa radical (1928-1935)* (México: El Colegio de México, 1977); Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920-1938* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, México and the United States, 1880-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Dudley Ankerson, *Agrarian Warlord: Saturnino Cedillo and the Mexican Revolution in San Luis Potosí* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984); Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman, eds. *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1910-1929* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990); and Adrian A. Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1998). A useful diagnostic and prescriptive article for those who would pursue regional history can be found in Paul J. Vanderwood's piece, "Building Blocks but Yet No Building: Regional History and the Mexican Revolution," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 3:2 (1987). Alan Knight's broad synthesis of revolutionary Mexico, *The Mexican Revolution*, pays close attention to how the Revolution played out throughout Mexico's vast republic, prompting a distinguished interpreter of Mexico's provinces to praise it as a "regional history writ large." See, Mark Wasserman, "The Mexican Revolution: Region and Theory, Signifying Nothing?" *Latin American Research Review* (hereafter *LARR*) 25:1 (1990), p. 237.

<sup>12</sup> In his study of revolutionary Sonora, Adrian Bantjes emphasizes the importance of analyzing "national-level linkages," noting that "local and national history were articulated in a dialectics of power." *As if Jesus Walked on Earth*, p. xv.

<sup>13</sup> First and foremost an *obregonista*, Garrido would strengthen his ties to President Calles following Obregón's assassination in 1928. According to Baltasar Dromundo's somewhat dramatic telling of it, the death of Obregón—the man to whom Garrido's political ambitions and fortunes were tied—prompted Garrido to dash off a telegram to Calles. According to Dromundo, Garrido's brief message to President

mutually beneficial patron-client relationship that developed between Garrido and these men goes a long way in explaining the longevity of his rule. On more than one occasion, interventions from national leaders saved the Tabascan leader's political skin. However, Garrido, a radical governor with a social base to mobilize, also proved a convenient friend to Mexico's presidents, especially during the politically unstable 1920s.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most powerful example of this political interdependence can be seen in 1923-1924. During the surprisingly powerful de la Huerta rebellion (a national uprising precipitated by President Obregón's selection of Plutarco Elías Calles to succeed him as Mexico's highest leader) the *garridistas* remained loyal to the president. The rebellion, particularly virulent in Mexico's southeast, forced Garrido from office.<sup>15</sup> However, forces loyal to Governor Garrido (and by extension to Obregón) fought bitter battles with the rebels for six months. This "sacrifice" would not go unpaid. Armed forces loyal to Obregón restored Garrido to the governor's chair in the summer of 1924.

#### Toward a "New Political History" of Garridismo

If patron-client ties characterized Garrido's relationship with national leaders, they also defined state-society relations within Tabasco. Because political patronage was so central to Garrido's governing strategy, it will be helpful to provide a working

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Calles, which simply stated "I am at your orders," proved to be Garrido's "political salvation." Dromundo, *Tomás Garrido: su vida y su leyenda*, p. 110. Rather than go down with the *obregonista* ship (Calles would quash the *obregonista* Escobar rebellion in 1929) Garrido rode the wave of *callismo* for the next six years.

<sup>14</sup> Notes Thomas Benjamin of the interdependence of activist governors and the nation's leaders during the 1920s, "The president needed their political support, and they needed his." See his essay on the reconstruction period in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 473-474.

<sup>15</sup> Garrido managed to escape his attackers. However, the radical reformer in Yucatán, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, was less fortunate. He was executed during the rebellion.



definition of the concept here. According to historical sociologist Raymond Buve, political patronage is “a direct exchange relationship between two actors of unequal status and power. It is based on the control of critical resources by one of the actors (land, water, jobs, skills, state-related resources) and the disposition of the other actor to establish... ‘a moral dependence to get access to them’. This dependence reflects itself in political loyalty and services.”<sup>16</sup> The most coveted patronage to be dispensed in *garridista* Tabasco was jobs. This meant that workers had to join the state-run (and unabashedly pro-Garrido) labor federation, known as the *Liga Central de Resistencia*.<sup>17</sup> (Workers who were not inclined to join the state-run labor federation, meanwhile, discovered the lengths to which the state would go to “encourage” compliance.) *Liga* membership was about more than earning a living wage, paying dues, and depositing votes for pro-Garrido candidates, however. It was also about revolutionary redemption. Workers were expected to attend state-sponsored cultural events and rallies, achieve basic literacy, reject alcohol and religion, and reform their domestic living spaces in accordance with “modern” hygienic principles. Political *and* cultural loyalty, then, was expected of those on the receiving end of state patronage.

Patronage was a useful governing tactic for a regime whose political philosophy can be described as both authoritarian and populist. The *American Heritage College Dictionary* (4<sup>th</sup> edition) defines authoritarian as “characterized by favoring absolute obedience to authority as against individual freedom.” The same source defines

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<sup>16</sup> Raymond Buve, “Political Patronage and Politics at the Village Level in Central Mexico: Continuity and Change in Patterns from the Late Colonial Period to the End of the French Intervention (1867),” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 2:1 (1992), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Political patronage also characterized the relationship between *garridista* state authorities and Tabasco’s business or commercial class: those who adhered to the government’s social and political objectives enjoyed favored status.

populism as “a political philosophy supporting the rights and power of the people in their struggle against the elite.” To reach an appropriate understanding of the *garridista* governing philosophy, these two definitions have to be merged and then slightly modified. For while individual freedoms were encroached upon and punitive measures quite regularly taken against “disobedient” subjects, “absolute obedience to authority” is too strong a phrase to explain the Garrido government’s ability—or will—to control the social body. The institutional mechanisms of social control were too haphazard, and mitigated besides, by the sincere (if misplaced) desire of many Garrido authorities to reform and uplift “wayward” subjects. Meanwhile, though Garrido’s brand of populism sought to expand certain rights among Tabasco’s politically and socially disenfranchised groups, this program did not necessarily happen at the expense of the elite. Some elites lost out in garridista Tabasco, it is true, but this had more to do with their opposition to *garridismo* than a systematic policy of undercutting the economically privileged sector’s ability to accumulate wealth. In this sense, James P. Brennan’s explanation of the economic policies enacted by Argentina’s Juan Perón applies well to the Garrido case. Brennan writes, “Perón’s economic policies were predominantly an extension of his politics, tools used to garner political loyalties and cement political alliances.”<sup>18</sup>

To the extent that the controversial governing style exhibited by Garrido Canabal and his revolutionary cohort is crucial to the story I tell here, Tabascan politicians figure prominently in this study. Indeed, in analyzing elections, laws, and governing strategies, this dissertation bears some of the markings of a traditional political history. However, it

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<sup>18</sup>James P. Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba, 1955-1976: Ideology, Work and Labor Politics in an Argentine Industrial City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 5-6.

departs from traditional analyses inasmuch as it understands the state “less as a ‘structure’ that exerts its impact on ‘civil society’ than as a field of force, an arena of contestation, in which not only the powerful, but also marginal, subordinate, and previously neglected groups have a bearing.”<sup>19</sup> An attribute of what Carlos Aguirre and Ricardo Salvatore term “contextualized political history”—this conceptual approach, which has been used to great effect by historians of Latin America over the last two decades, offers a fruitful way to examine state-society relations in *garridista* Tabasco.<sup>20</sup>

### In Search of Popular Opinion: A Note on Sources

One goal of this dissertation is to expand the empirical basis from which to understand the ongoing polemic surrounding Garrido’s rule. To this end I have utilized a broad range of archival sources—some of which have not been tapped for the study of *garridismo*. Particularly useful have been the federal judicial files located in the *Casa de Cultura Jurídica del Estado de Tabasco*. Historians of Latin America have fruitfully used legal documents to explore issues of criminality and “deviance.”<sup>21</sup> However, as the 2001 essay collection *Crime and Punishment in Latin America* makes plain, legal sources are being used to analyze a host of other issues, including, “the dynamics of social and

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<sup>19</sup> See Carlos Aguirre and Ricardo Salvatore’s Introduction in, *Crime and Punishment in Latin America: Law and Society since Late Colonial Times*, Ricardo D. Salvatore, Carlos Aguirre and Gilbert M. Joseph, eds. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> See the classic (and pioneering) example of this approach in, Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); and Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, selections from Carlos A. Aguirre and Robert Bullington, eds., *Reconstructing Criminality in Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Jaguar Books on Latin America, Scholarly Resources, 2000).



cultural change [and] the nature of the state and its relationship with civil society.”<sup>22</sup> It is on the latter of these propositions that I have found legal documents highly useful. In particular, the *amparo*, a peculiarly Mexican legal mechanism designed to protect citizens from arbitrary and unconstitutional acts committed by government authorities, has aided my efforts to understand the sometimes strained relationship between *garridista* officials and civil society.

It was my fortune to pursue this study after the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) acquired the personal papers of Tomás Garrido Canabal. Donated by Garrido’s children in 1992, and formally incorporated into the AGN’s holdings in January of 1993, the documents were still in the process of being catalogued when I consulted them for this dissertation.<sup>23</sup> An extraordinarily rich depository, it contains books, pamphlets, decrees, and an overwhelming collection of letters and telegrams which, along with correspondence collections in other national and state archives, have been indispensable to my effort to examine popular reception and reactions to state policies. Notwithstanding the extraordinary richness of the documentary collections, the most rewarding aspect of my research occurred in the homes of elderly Tabascans who agreed to let me interview them for this project. Their recollections of events from the 1920s and 1930s have greatly enhanced my understanding of the era, reinforcing my archive-based conclusions, but also offering a window on important issues that I had failed to encounter in documentary collections.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Aguirre and Salvatore, eds., *Crime and Punishment in Latin America*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> A multi-volume index of the collection which is currently being produced promises to be an extraordinary research tool for Garrido-era scholars. See, Ruiz and Abdo, *El hombre del sureste*.

<sup>24</sup> Twenty interviews were conducted in six of Tabasco’s seventeen municipalities. Interviewees came from different regions, ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic classes. With their permission, I taped the interviews. Now transcribed, the interviews will be donated to the *Archivo Histórico y Fotográfico de Tabasco* in Villahermosa. I have also benefited from consulting the transcripts of interviews with Garrido-

## A Complexity of Actors

Despite their often heavy-handed approach, the new moral and political economy that the *garridistas* hoped to forge ultimately depended on the citizenry's acceptance of the reform agenda. To the extent that documents and oral history material have permitted it, this thesis demonstrates how "everyday" citizens interpreted, responded to or otherwise shaped the state's revolutionary agenda. Methodologically this has meant probing beneath policies, decrees and laws--which though they tell me a lot about the moral tenor and ideological program of the state, told me less about popular reception--in order to assess how Tabasco's heterogeneous population influenced (and was influenced by) revolutionary politics.<sup>25</sup>

As I hope this introduction has made clear, revolutionary Tabasco was marked by deep ideological fault-lines and popular views of *garridismo* varied widely. Those with an unshakeable faith in Garrido and his revolutionary cohort became enthusiastic spokespeople for the government, while uncompromising Garrido opponents dug in their heels, vowing to remove their nemesis from power. Each of these views has an empirical basis, and the positions of anti-Garrido and pro-Garrido activists receive ample attention in this thesis. However, only a partial understanding of popular reactions to *garridista* reformism can be gained by lingering in the ideological camps.

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era teachers conducted by Marcela Tostado Gutiérrez and her research assistants in the late 1970s. These interviews are located at the Dirección de Estudios Históricos at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City. For an insightful scholarly meditation of the value of oral history, not to mention essential advice on how to go about gathering oral testimony, see, Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, third edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> In the concluding paragraph of their article, "Robust Action and the Rise of Medici, 1400-1434" John F. Padgett and Christopher K. Ansell note that "to understand state building...one needs to penetrate beneath formal institutions and apparently clear goals, down to the relational substratum of people's actual lives....Heterogeneity of localized actions, networks, and identities explains both why aggregation is predictable only in hindsight and how political power is born." This article appears in the *American Journal of Sociology* 98:6 (May 1993).

Between the opposing camps lay a vast collection of individuals, who, motivated less by strict ideological considerations and more by practical concerns, responded to political changes with the reasonable goal of assuring their own well-being. This “middle” category (for lack of a better term) encompassed a wide range of individuals who, if we must label them, might be considered pragmatists, accommodationists, or opportunists. Some Tabascans realized that cooperating with the government was the best way to assure their material and social prosperity; others abided by existing rules and regulations even though they may have disagreed with some government policies. Of course, there were any number of resisters too, who, whether quietly or boldly, defied government authority without ideological fanfare. The perceptions of the vast “middle sector” (whose less legible experiences of the era have long been overlooked) enrich our understanding of how governance is negotiated not just by pressure from the extremes, but from a diversely constituted middle.<sup>26</sup>

The State—with its beneficent and interventionist policies, its apparatuses of power, and official ideologies—is central to this analysis. Yet even if the ordinary routines of human beings—forming relationships and families, living in communities, attending dances, weddings or funerals, or strolling through the market to find the perfect chicken or enjoy a gourd of *posol*--are not independent of the State, neither are they wholly defined by it.<sup>27</sup> As I work to unravel the multiple layers of Tabascan history in a socially and politically effervescent period, I bear this truth in mind.

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<sup>26</sup> On the methodological usefulness of exploring “multivocality” to counter the extreme interpretations that surround polemical figures and their eras, see, Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth*, p. xiv.

<sup>27</sup> These activities represent a facet of popular culture, which William H. Beezley and Linda A. Curcio-Nagy define as “everyday culture...a set of behavioral practices with pervasive, ordinary character” which are generally accepted, have “their roots in common knowledge” and are commonly articulated “in non-written form.” See their introduction in, William H. Beezley and Linda A. Curcio-Nagy, *Latin American Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2000), p. xi.



## CHAPTER 1

### WHEN MAHOGANY WAS KING: LABOR, COMMERCE, AND THE DARK SIDE OF PROGRESS IN PORFIRIAN TABASCO

In a manifesto directed toward organized workers in 1925, Tomás Garrido Canabal emphasized his government's commitment to social equity and economic reform. Gone were the days when foreigners absconded with the state's wealth and treated ordinary Tabascans like second-class citizens. His verbal lashings landed particularly hard on the Spanish, whose reputation for exploitative business practices had turned them into the *persona non grata* of the new regime. Exceptionally galling to Tabasco's revolutionary governor were the exclusive social clubs established by Tabasco's Spanish elite, who brazenly refused entry to the state's own citizens. So when one of these elite clubs offered honorary membership to Garrido in his capacity as Tabasco's Chief Executive, he refused on the grounds that the club's statutes prohibited the people he was elected to represent--the "great Tabascan family"--from joining.<sup>1</sup>

Even though Tabasco's wealthiest echelon included native-born Mexicans and foreigners of many nationalities, Governor Garrido's singling out of Spaniards is unsurprising. During the Porfiriato (the period of Mexican history between 1876-1911 that was dominated by the presidency of Porfirio Díaz) the vast majority of the foreign population residing in Tabasco were Spanish, and they owned a number of the state's medium and large-scale businesses.<sup>2</sup> Spanish commercial houses, such as Romano y

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<sup>1</sup> Tomás Garrido Canabal, "Manifiesto a los obreros organizados de la república y al elemento revolucionario," (Villahermosa, Tabasco: 1925), pp. 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> In 1890, of the 200 foreigners living in Tabasco, 191 were Spanish. Supposedly only two Americans lived in Tabasco at this time. A decade later the number of foreigners residing in Tabasco jumped to 940. Still, the Spanish predominated: there were 530 Spaniards, 92 Guatemalans, 64 North Americans, 28 British, 26 "Turks" (people of Middle Eastern origin were commonly referred to as "Turks" because their passports were issued in the administrative center of the Ottoman Empire), and 200 "others." Rosa María

Compañía, Maldonado y Hijos, Bulnes, and Ferrer y Compañía, for example, were major beneficiaries of the tropical hardwood industry.<sup>3</sup> The lumber industry, in particular, distinguished itself for its cruel treatment of workers, and certain Spanish administrators, like Fernando Mijares, whose violent behavior towards lumber camp laborers will be discussed shortly, became legendary.

Because they wielded so much economic influence, foreigners enjoyed political leverage as well. Reportedly, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, foreigners could be elected to Tabasco's municipal councils or named to county commissions.<sup>4</sup> Political corruption combined with land concentration, labor abuses, and export-oriented growth to propel the region towards revolution. The iniquitous economic and social characteristics of Porfirian Tabasco, then, provide the essential background needed to understand the reforms undertaken by the Garrido regime in the 1920s and 1930s and the popular support they received.

### Porfirian Politics as Usual

Like Mexico generally, Tabasco underwent a period of economic growth in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Explained in part by its closer association with foreign capital, Tabasco expanded the commercialization of its forest and agricultural products through increased exportation. Even so, in 1910 Tabascan goods represented less than 1% of Mexico's total exports.<sup>5</sup> Politically-speaking Tabasco experienced instability until

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Romo López, ed. *Historia general de Tabasco*, vol. II. (Villahermosa: Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 1994), pp. 272 (f.n.) and 276.

<sup>3</sup> Elías Balcazar Antonio, *Villahermosa: Crónicas y remembranzas siglo XX*, (Villahermosa: Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Romo López, ed. *Historia general*, vol. II, p. 276.

<sup>5</sup> Marcela Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, (Villahermosa: Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 1985) pp.174, 175.

the 1890s. The most memorable of the sixteen governors who served Tabasco between 1877 and 1894 was Simón Sarlat, an intellectual steeped in the liberal tradition. Though Sarlat was identified with Porfirio Díaz' presidential predecessor and rival, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, President Díaz lent him his support so as not to create waves of opposition among the local hierarchy; but when Sarlat introduced a tax policy unpopular among Tabasco's business class, his days were numbered. He was succeeded by Abraham Bandala, whose sixteen year reign as Tabasco's governor proved more durable.<sup>6</sup>

The secret to Bandala's success was maintaining a cordial relationship with the federal government led by Porfirio Díaz, and satisfying the demands of the local oligarchy.<sup>7</sup> Comprised of approximately fifteen families, many of them Spaniards who had made homes in Tabasco, this elite subset derived its wealth from commercial agriculture, precious tropical hardwoods (principally mahogany), and a variety of banking and mercantile activities. By participating in a federal program that rewarded the surveyors of public lands with large portions of the land they measured, many oligarchic families accumulated vast extensions of Tabascan territory. Policarpo Valenzuela, for example, is estimated to have owned 16.6% of Tabasco's surface area, more than half of which was acquired in the form of federal surveying concessions.<sup>8</sup> Yet while land did become concentrated in this period, it is important to recognize the diversity of land-holding patterns and productive activities in turn of the century Tabasco.

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 142-148.

<sup>7</sup>Stanley Ridgeway, "The Cooperative Republic," p. 75.

<sup>8</sup>Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, pp. 35, 140.



According to Marcela Tostado Gutiérrez in her study of Porfirian Tabasco, there were three types of land tenure between 1877 and 1910: Ejidos and communal lands, private landholdings, and lands given away in the form of federal concessions and contracts. Correspondingly, the state's economy revolved around subsistence farming, commercial agriculture and extractive industries (such as rubber, precious hardwoods, and chicle). Interestingly, between 1901 and 1910, a large percentage of the so-called "vacant" lands, which were distributed by the government in exchange for their being surveyed or measured, were appropriated by farmers who sought small or medium-sized holdings. 51.9% of the "denounced" lands were of surface sizes between .5 and 50 hectares. Even though 52% of the solicitors of public lands aimed for smallish parcels, which amounted to 3.1% of the total land area in this period, 1.1% attempted to possess 53.7% of the land surface.<sup>9</sup> The bulk of the *terrenos baldíos* (public "vacant" lands) that ended up in the hands of Tabasco's lumber magnates were forested. As such, their acquisition of vast landholdings was not necessarily tied to the expropriation of, or encroachment on, communal or ejidal properties.<sup>10</sup> Land concentration in Tabasco during this period, therefore, was not necessarily correlated to landlessness.<sup>11</sup> Even so,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-32.

<sup>10</sup> One of many points made by Emilio Kourí in his article urging the historical profession do away with unsubstantiated assumptions about the process of pueblo land disentailment in 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexico is that many Mexicanists have erroneously conflated the privatization of *terrenos baldíos* with the encroachment on communal lands. He writes, "Although it is true that in some cases public land surveying concessions were used to expropriate village lands, this cannot be taken to mean...that the two processes were ultimately one and the same....Whereas the former was a centrally managed federal enterprise, the latter had a much more heterogeneous and quirky character, given that it was shaped by state specific legislation." See his article, "Interpreting the Expropriation of Indian Pueblo Lands in Porfirian Mexico: The Unexamined Legacies of Andrés Molina Enríquez" *Hispanic American Historical Review* (82:1, 2002), pp. 72-73.

<sup>11</sup> "Not necessarily" is the operative phrase here. Taking Emilio Kourí's prescriptive article as a cue, perhaps some ambitious scholar will analyze the land concentration trends in Porfirian Tabasco to determine to what extent the vast landholdings of Tabascan and foreign *latifundistas* involved the displacement of historically rooted communities. It seems likely that many Tabascans lost their land or, at the very least, owned such minimal parcels that they were compelled to sell their labor as day laborers or

the rural poor were not unaffected by the creation of supra-sized commercial properties, as the following paragraphs attest.

Tostado Gutiérrez suggests that more than 60% of the population engaged in subsistence farming, growing beans, rice and corn for their own consumption.<sup>12</sup> At some level, the domestic economies of these rural workers bore little relationship to the wider economy of the state--their consumption of products they did not themselves grow, we can assume, would have been quite limited. But as Tostado Gutiérrez and others remind us, the lives of these small farmers intersected with the commercial economy when they sold their labor--on a part-time or full-time basis--to *hacendados* and owners of extractive industries.<sup>13</sup> Though cash-poor individuals were highly susceptible to the monetary advances and steady wages being offered by labor-hungry hacendados whose products were tied to the market economy, the salaries workers received were frequently barely enough to cover their basic needs.<sup>14</sup>

Some rural farmers willingly sold their labor to the commercial estates. However, the chronic scarcity of labor in Tabasco meant that large landowners had to devise methods to attract rural workers who often preferred to till their own lands. One way they did this was through the "enganche"--a method whereby the labor agents of lumber

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debt peons. Tostado Gutiérrez suggests that between 1895-1910 a significant part of the peasant population lost land, resulting in a 383% increase in the number of peons. See, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 104. In the municipality of Jonuta, a handful of large landowners pushed people off the land as they formed large extensions dedicated to crops and the extraction of commercial woods. Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México: El porfiriato, la vida social*, Daniel Cosío Villegas, General Editor. (México D.F.: Editorial Hermes, 1957), p. 210.

<sup>12</sup>Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup>See Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, pp. 49-50; and Gustavo Abel Hernández E. and Cesar R. Hernández E., *Historia Política de Tabasco*, (Mexico: Centro de Estudios Históricos del Agrarismo en México, 1984) pp. 42-43.

<sup>14</sup>The Tabascan intellectual Alberto Correa, reputedly of a conservative bent, criticized the low wages paid to agricultural workers, suggesting that hacendados "worked against their own interests" by requiring so much work of their laborers and providing them with poor diets. Workers so physically taxed became



magnates or hacendados would give out cash advances. The money might help a cash-strapped rural worker pay for a wedding, baptism, or funeral, but whatever the services obtained by such a loan, the worker was "hooked." The way to pay down the debt was to work for the lender. Debt peonage in Tabasco thrived both in the commercial agricultural sector and the lumber camps during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Commercial agriculture rested on the cultivation of crops such as cacao, sugar, coffee, and tobacco. Between 1889-1910, cattle and pig exports increased dramatically -- by 337% and 339% respectively.<sup>15</sup> Bananas also become an important export item in this period. In 1894, the Southern Steamship and Importing Company first delivered Tabascan bananas to New Orleans.<sup>16</sup> By 1909 there were fifty-three businesses devoted to banana cultivation located along the Usumacinta River, and North Americans were building wharves on both the Usumacinta and the Grijalva rivers.<sup>17</sup>

Local agronomists and foreign capitalists appreciated the great fortunes to be made by this oblong, tropical fruit. However, for those who labored on banana plantations conditions could be brutal. Banana workers prepared the ground for planting and dug drainage ditches. To prevent the death of the fragile young plants, workers weeded and cleaned the cultivation areas. Pruning trees was another task during the growing season. Meanwhile, because the fruit spoiled quickly, the harvesting of bananas was grueling and intensive. Cutting gangs worked 12-14 hours a day during the harvest, frequently in extremely hot temperatures.<sup>18</sup>

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weak and indolent, costing the hacendados more in the end. J.D. Ramírez Garrido, *La esclavitud en Tabasco: La jornada máxima y el salario mínimo*, second edition (Mexico, D.F., 1953), p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Ridgeway, "The Cooperative Republic," p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México: El porfiriato, la vida económica*. (México: Editorial Hermes, 1965), p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> Ridgeway, "The Cooperative Republic," p. 83.



Tabascan-grown bananas emerged as a significant export item in the early twentieth century, but perhaps the most dramatic commercial undertaking in 19<sup>th</sup> century Tabasco was the exportation of mahogany. The profits derived from this highly coveted tropical hardwood contributed to modernizing the state capital and creating fabulous wealth for a handful of local families. The magnitude of this extractive industry's impact on the region can also be gauged by its role in a significant re-negotiation of the Mexico-Guatemala boundary in 1882, whereby Guatemala lost 6% of its national territory (including 6,000 square miles of the Lacandón forest).<sup>19</sup> Equally noteworthy, was the ignominious reputation it earned for subjecting impoverished peons to a fate "worse than death."

#### When Mahogany Was King: Tabasco in the Late Nineteenth Century

In 1859 an enterprising individual, Felipe Marín, from the eastern municipality of Balancán, sought permission from authorities in El Petén, Guatemala, to conduct an experiment to test whether seventy mahogany and cedar trees tossed into the upper Usumacinta could pass through the rapids unharmed.<sup>20</sup> Happily for Marín and the Tabascan capitalists, who over the next several decades would amass enormous fortunes by extracting timber in the remote regions of Chiapas and Guatemala, the logs emerged from the mighty river unscathed. B. Traven, whose "Jungle Novels" exposed the wretched conditions in the *monterías*, or lumber camps, described the powerful Usumacinta as "the giant without whose assistance no mahogany could be taken out of

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<sup>19</sup> Jan de Vos, *Oro verde: La conquista de la Selva Lacandona por los madereros tabasqueños, 1822-1949* (México D.F., Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988), p. 106.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 51. This compelling historical study exposes the roots of the devastating exploitation of mahogany in southeastern Mexico and northern Guatemala.

these wild regions and brought to the civilized world.” Were it not for the river, Traven continued, “caoba [mahogany] would have been as valueless as a rotting pine stick in the forests of North Dakota.”<sup>21</sup>

By the late 1860s the mahogany, cedar and dyewood trees that grew in Tabasco’s coastal regions, particularly in the Chontalpa, were nearly exhausted. However, another reserve located in the southeastern area of the state promised great earnings.<sup>22</sup> Of course the relatively untapped forests in neighboring Chiapas and Guatemala presented a seemingly limitless terrain for the Tabascan timber merchants who moved in to exploit them. The federal public lands law, issued by Mexican President Benito Juárez in 1863, allowed companies such as the Spanish-owned commercial house, Casa Bulnes, to acquire large extensions of the Mexican land they undertook to survey. Article Two of the law limited the acquirable surface area to 2,500 hectares, though later laws enabled surveyors to legally claim much greater portions. Under the provisions of this law, the Casa Bulnes acquired vast tracts of land in the Jataté region of Chiapas.<sup>23</sup> Other members of the Tabascan oligarchy, such as Policarpo Valenzuela, and Manuel Jamet and his partners Jaime and Fernando Sastré, rivaled the Casa Bulnes in acquiring huge swaths of mahogany forests in Chiapas and Guatemala.<sup>24</sup>

The companies involved in the exportation of precious hardwoods represented the commercial interests of various European countries and the United States. One of the most important wood exporting companies in 1890 was the English-owned Guatemalan

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<sup>21</sup> B. Traven, *March to the Montería* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971), p. 224. This book belongs to a series called the Jungle Novels, of which *The Government*, *The Carreta*, *The Troza*, *The Rebellion of the Hanged* and *The General From the Jungle* form a part. Originally written in German in the 1930s, the Jungle Novels’ Spanish translations were also popularly received.

<sup>22</sup> de Vos, *Oro verde*, p. 72.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed discussion of these dealers in mahogany, see Jan de Vos, *Oro verde*, especially chap. 2.

and Mexican Mahogany and Export Company.<sup>25</sup> The other major players in the wood business had important financial links with foreign capitalists. The Spanish-owned Bulnes enterprise, for example, worked with both the London-based financial house Skelton and Schofields and David Midgley and Sons in Manchester. Another Spanish outfit, the Romano Company, the conditions of whose camps will be discussed shortly, also received capital from these English financiers. Policarpo Valenzuela worked with the North American Otis House based in New Orleans, but when problems developed, he entered into arrangements with English investors. European and North American capitalists were only too willing to finance these lumber companies. After all, it was for their markets that the mahogany, cedar and other valuable timbers were destined. Of the 47,791 cubic meters of precious hardwoods shipped out of the port of Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche, between 1913-1914, 52% went to England and 41.9% went to the United States. At the port of Frontera, in Tabasco, defective lumber was put aside for sale in the internal market. German, English and North American ships, meanwhile, loaded their cargo holds with hundreds of tons of precious hardwoods, which would be “transformed into London’s exquisite mahogany furniture, [German] cigar boxes, famous for their aroma, or some other object made in the ever-growing wood market of New Orleans.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Thomas Benjamin, “El trabajo en las monterías de Chiapas y Tabasco, 1870-1946” *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 30 (April-June, 1981), p. 511; and Trinidad Torres Vera, *Historia gráfica de Tabasco* (México D.F.: Archivo General de la Nación, 2000), p. 74. Torres Vera claims that along with the Guatemalan and Mexican Mahogany and Export Co., the Bulnes, Romano and Valenzuela enterprises were among the most important wood exporters in 1890.

<sup>26</sup>Romo López, ed. *Historia general*, vol. II, pp. 343-345.



Some foreign investors and local lumber executives--while no doubt interested in earning handsome profits--operated their businesses with a modicum of fairness.<sup>27</sup> However, more often than not, the business practices of Tabasco's mahogany kingpins ranged from unscrupulous to morally reprehensible. For example, they frequently cheated the Guatemalan exchequer of thousands of pesos by vastly underreporting the number of trees they were taking from the areas they had been licensed to log. The illegal transport of Guatemalan wood was difficult to contain given that the rural police force and forest inspectors charged with enforcing compliance were underpaid and susceptible to bribes.<sup>28</sup> More nefarious even than depriving the Guatemalan government of much needed revenue, were the grotesque working conditions of the peons, principally indigenous people from Tabasco and Chiapas, who labored in the lumber camps.<sup>29</sup> Eloquently and agonizingly described in the novels of B. Traven and denounced in such publications as José Domingo Ramírez Garrido's influential 1915 tract, *La Esclavitud en Tabasco*, the lives of the workers in the *monterías* were among the most degraded in Mexico.

It often took days of walking in the forest—under the watchful eyes and threatening whips of company overseers—for the laborers to reach the lumber camps. Once there, workers were forced to produce daily quotas of wood, laboring under

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<sup>27</sup> In his novel *March to the Montería*, B. Traven suggests that something approximating fairness could be found in the occasional camp. He writes, "Agua Azul, owned by Canadians and Scots, enjoyed among the workers the reputation of being the only montería where the worker was treated almost like a human being." Pp. 64-65. On this same passage, Thomas Benjamin comments that Traven gleaned this information from his travels to Chiapas in the 1920s. However, Benjamin suggests (and Traven no doubt would have concurred) that this instance of humane treatment was likely an exception. See, Benjamin, "El trabajo en las monterías," p. 516.

<sup>28</sup> de Vos, *Oro verde*, p. 98. Of greater consequence to Guatemala, of course, was the re-negotiation of its boundary in an 1882 treaty with Mexico. See, *Oro verde*, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> According to Thomas Benjamin, Ocosingo, Chiapas, was the principal recruiting center for *montería* laborers during and after the Porfiriato. See, "El trabajo en las monterías", p. 512. But workers from

grueling conditions. Miles away from even the tiniest of towns, the plight of these forest workers was hidden from the consciousness of Mexican society. In the words of Thomas Benjamin, "The way in which laborers were used in this industry demonstrates the extremes that can be reached in the process of capitalist production, when it is out of public view and tolerated by political structures."<sup>30</sup> Not unexpectedly, the harsh and insalubrious conditions of the *monterías*—three hundred machete workers died of "pernicious fevers" in 1886-- gave them a bad reputation. Since it was sometimes hard to get workers to go to the *monterías* willingly, prisoners were often forced to work in the lumber camps.<sup>31</sup> Of course the "enganche" was a popular recruiting tactic among *montería* agents.<sup>32</sup>

*Montería* managers were loath to let skilled workers leave the camps once their contracts expired, sometimes resorting to trickery and deceit to retain them; hence, the "re-enganche", or re-hooking of laborers. B. Traven's describes this phenomenon in his novel *March to the Monterías*. His character Celso Flores, a Tsotsil-speaking lumberjack whose dreams of returning to his village to start a family are undercut by the sinister dealings of *montería* agents, is the literary representative of the countless victims of Mexico and Guatemala's tropical lumber industry. After two grueling years in the lumber camps, Celso decides not to renew his contract but to take his earnings and return to his village. Aware that the camp manager would be unhappy about his departure, Celso keeps his intentions secret, announcing that he will go to his village for one month

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Tabasco, sometimes accompanied by women, also appear to have worked in *monterías* outside their state. See de Vos, *Oro verde*, pp. 58, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin, "El trabajo en las monterías", p. 508.

<sup>31</sup> de Vos, *Oro verde*, p. 109.

<sup>32</sup> It was not uncommon for labor contractors to buy indebted peons from haciendas or to pay the fines necessary to release prisoners. Many of B. Traven's characters, inspired by his first-hand observations in Chiapas, are "recruited" for *montería* work in this way.

and then return to the *monterías*. Celso's discretion notwithstanding, his labor boss suspects that the young laborer may not enter into a new contract and notifies the camp manager. Thus informed, the manager sends a letter to the recruiting agent in town, Don Gabriel. The letter advises Don Gabriel that a "Chamula youth", who had recently collected his wages, will be passing through the town of Hucutsin, along with a number of men whose contracts have just ended. He offers Don Gabriel a fifty peso reward to re-hook Celso, one of his best ax-men.

Once in Hucutsin, the town through which workers passed on their way in and out of the *monterías*, and where a splendid fair is in full swing, Celso senses that he is being followed. Aware that a plot was afoot to force him into a new contract, Celso steals away in the dead of night, attempting to avoid his captors. On the outskirts of town hired thugs obstruct Celso's path. They inquire about his travels and deal him several blows. When Celso resists, the attackers yell for the police. Conveniently, a policeman is on hand; they club Celso and drag him to jail.

Faced with the prospect of spending six months in jail (Celso's meager *montería* earnings of \$100 pesos would have sufficed to pay the fine, but Celso only had \$80 pesos left) Don Gabriel intervenes "to rescue" him. He offers to pay the remaining \$20 pesos of Celso's fine plus the \$25 in court costs that the unfortunate incident has incurred. In accepting the offer, Celso must agree to sign a new *montería* contract. Celso weighs his options: six months in a damp cell infested with lice, centipedes, scorpions and tarantulas versus another stint in the lumber camp. Yes, work in the camps was "devilish hard," but he would be in the clean, green jungle, a "glorious life in the open." In accepting Don Gabriel's offer, Celso goes "back on the hook". However, his \$45 peso debt quickly



mounts as Don Gabriel informs him that additional fees would be added to his debit account. After all, Don Gabriel needed to be paid his \$25 recruitment commission, and the municipal stamps needed to legalize the work contract cost \$25. Moreover, as a gesture of kindness, Don Gabriel offers Celso a \$10 peso advance, ratcheting the new expenses up to \$60. The recruiting agent optimistically tells Celso, "Once you've worked off those one hundred and five pesos all the rest will be clear profit for you." The deal sealed, Celso joins the other recruits who were camped out in the town awaiting their march to the *montería*. He thinks about the girl in his home village who he had hoped to marry and realizes the futility of returning to her. Celso resolved to "no longer care about anything. He would forget the girl....He belonged to the dead and so was free to do as he pleased. He could get drunk every day as long as his money lasted...he could run away, but then he would surely get caught. To avoid the one hundred lashes for desertion he would have to attack his captor and get shot down like a mad dog. He could pick a quarrel with the[overseer], talk back and let himself be cut to pieces with a machete. It all came to the same end. He was dead, and a man can die only once."<sup>33</sup>

It would be a relief to put down the Traven novels and attribute the barbarities outlined therein to the vivid imagination of a highly talented muckraker. However, where the *monterías* were concerned, truth was just as unsettling as fiction. In José Domingo Ramírez Garrido's 1915 tract about Tabascan slavery, a former *montería* worker, Joaquín Chacón, described the nine years he had spent in the lumber camps belonging to the Spanish-owned Casa Romano as an "infinite rosary of pain." Finding no

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<sup>33</sup> Traven, *March to the Montería*, pp. 74-103.

work in his region, he went to the Tabascan lumber camps administered by Mijares.<sup>34</sup> Like the other peons, he was contracted for one year. His contract stated that he would be earning \$5.50 for every ton of wood worked in the [mill], and that every Sunday he would receive lard, meat, coffee, pancela (a coarse brown sugar), rice and provisions for tortillas.<sup>35</sup> These relatively generous conditions, he discovered, were “the bait,” and once the contract was up, the peons were forced “to be something worse than slaves.” Those men who having fulfilled their contract obligations, expressed a desire to return home, were told that that decision was up to Mijares. “So we had no choice but to keep working in the *monterías* at the mercy of Mijares. From that point on they don’t pay us one cent for our work, they take away our coffee, lard, all the things that they used to bring us.” He saw his food rations reduced to beans, rice and corncobs. Particularly disturbing, was the manner in which sick workers were treated. Chacón recalled an instance in which a sick worker committed the infraction of asking for time off to get better. He was beaten senseless and later dragged to a stream where his head was submerged in the water.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This is likely a reference to Fernando Mijares, the administrator of the Romano camps, a large bearded man with a reputation for cruelty. He allegedly enjoyed punishing his workers and thought nothing of killing a worker so that he could move in on the man’s wife. Mijares reportedly brought his victim’s young widow to the camps to work as a cook. When he tried to “possess” her, she sank her fingernails into his face. As a reprisal, Mijares had her stripped and strung from a tree where she was whipped. Afterwards, he gave orders for her to be healed; and when she recovered he made his move again. She responded as she had before and Mijares executed the same punishment. This scene repeated itself four times until the woman apparently lost her will to live. She stopped eating and soon died. Romo López, ed. *Historia general*, vol. II, pp. 269-270.

<sup>35</sup> *Montería* wages were, it appears, high enough to attract laborers. For example a chart of 1899 wages shows indentured hacienda workers earning between \$7.50-\$9.00 a month, a free day laborer earning \$12.00 and *montería* peons earning a monthly sum of \$22.00. Romo López, ed. *Historia general*, vol. II, p. 277. The problem appears to be the manner in which worker expectations were betrayed once they entered the camps. Working conditions were onerous and company stores made them vulnerable to indebtedness.

<sup>36</sup> Gral. J.D. Ramírez Garrido, *La esclavitud en Tabasco*, pp. 7-8.

The Other Side of Progress: Infrastructure and Social Services During the Late Porfiriato

Far away from the muck and toil of the *monterías* were the Tabascan towns that, in one way or another, benefited from the wealth produced by the sale of precious hardwoods. The fabulous earnings made by the mahogany magnates Antonio and Canuto Bulnes in the 1870s, for example, allowed these Spanish-born siblings to take on two new commercial ventures—a mule-drawn streetcar in the state capital and a steamboat line connecting the capital to the port of Frontera.<sup>37</sup> Though Tabasco's first steamboat service was established in 1830, Bulnes Brothers Inc. was the first Tabascan company to win a river transport concession from the federal government. They agreed to offer roundtrip service between the capital and Frontera four times a month, making connections with the North American owned New York, Havana, and Mexican Mail Steamship Line, which passed by the Tabascan coast.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that the Bulnes purchased their ships from a North American shipbuilder with a sawmill in Frontera. In his 1904 *informe*, President Díaz praised a Henry J. Bushnell for the three “perfectly equipped” vessels that had been set upon the waters.<sup>39</sup>

New and/or improved transport services were one way that the increased availability of capital altered the diminutive urban landscapes of Tabasco. The commercial dynamism created by the exportation of agricultural and forest products also prompted the introduction or expansion of such services as the telegraph, telephone and street lighting.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> De Vos, *Oro verde*, p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72; and Torres Vera, *Historia gráfica*, p. 72. Torres Vera indicates that a North American named Guillermo H. Brown received the first riverboat concession in 1830, but she does not indicate if federal or local authorities granted it.

<sup>39</sup> Cosío Villegas, ed. *Historia moderna de México: La vida económica*, p. 467.

<sup>40</sup> Torres Vera, *Historia gráfica*, p. 44. Sometime after 1881 streetlights began to be introduced to the downtown areas of Tabasco's *municipios*. See Martínez Assad, *Breve historia de Tabasco*, p. 97.



Not surprisingly, the infrastructure of progress was concentrated in the state capital, known in this period as San Juan Bautista.<sup>41</sup> While exuberant foliage and winding rivers made the Tabascan capital visually distinctive, San Juan Bautista shared the features of other small, turn-of-the-century Mexican cities.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand there were streetlights, animal traction trams, quaint streets, bustling public markets and an electric company.<sup>43</sup> The elegant homes and impressive public edifices, such as the Palacio de Gobierno and the stately structure that housed the local branch of the Banco Nacional de México gave the small capital a measure of urban sophistication. On the other hand, the modest dwellings of poor *capitalinos* and hardworking street vendors attest to the vast numbers of people for whom Tabasco's increased wealth meant little. In his vividly rendered memoir of pre-revolutionary Tabasco, Rafael Domínguez describes the ambulant vendors, whose street sales, we must assume, helped sustain the domestic economies of poorer families. Among the images of childhood impressed upon his memory was the water carrier, who filled up empty gas tanks with well water and tied them to a strong wooden pole, balancing the contraption on his shoulder. He sold the two cans for ½ of a real. There were also the indigenous women from Alasta and Tamulte, pueblos on the outskirts of the capital, who, walking in pairs and conversing in a "corrupted form of Maya," peddled chocolate, *pinol* (a corn drink) and tortillas.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> In 1916 the highly anticlerical provisional governor, Francisco Múgica, decreed that the name of the capital should revert to Villahermosa, the name San Juan Bautista (Saint John the Baptist) apparently not in keeping with the revolutionary image he sought to project.

<sup>42</sup> The population of turn-of-the-century San Juan Bautista was 11,600. Torres Vera, *Historia gráfica*, p. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Between 1887 and 1911 more than 100 electric plants of importance were established in Mexico. Tabasco was home to one of these companies. Cosío Villegas, ed. *Historia moderna de México: La vida económica*, pp. 297-298. Supposedly the concession for Tabasco's first electric plant was given to a foreigner by the name of Narciso Goomban in 1890. See, Balcazar Antonio, *Villahermosa: Crónicas y remembranzas*, p. 116.

<sup>44</sup> Rafael Domínguez, *Tierra Mía*, (Villahermosa, Tab: Publicaciones del Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 1949), pp. 35-36.

Arguably freer than many of their rural counterparts who were tied to country estates as debt peons, Tabasco's urban poor nonetheless experienced material deprivation as they squeaked out a living on the margins of the state economy.

Whether indigenous street vendors or members of the Spanish elite, turn-of-the-century *capitalinos* still traveled mostly along dirt roads and cobblestone streets.<sup>45</sup> And when it rained, as it often did, the streets flooded or became muddy quagmires. Tabascan author Andrés Iduarte recalls the havoc created by rain-swelled rivers in his lively memoir about his childhood in revolutionary Mexico. Flooding was a sorry fact of life for Tabascans. But for the children, Iduarte notes, it provided the delightful and unlikely opportunity to swim in the streets or steer a canoe through the neighborhood! The potential for adventure notwithstanding, the tragedy of flooding was not lost on the young Iduarte who recalled the illness that spread in its wake.<sup>46</sup>

Whether from the miasma left by retreating floodwaters or the malaria that flourished in the state's hot and wet environment, Tabascans suffered wave after wave of debilitating illnesses. In 1882 Tabasco suffered a devastating cholera outbreak. Believed to have originated on a hacienda in Chiapas, the epidemic disease spread quickly into Oaxaca and Tabasco.<sup>47</sup> In 1903, the morbidity rate from malaria alone was 47.3%.<sup>48</sup>

Sick people, one imagines, would mostly have been cared for at home or treated by private doctors or local healers. Hospitalization would have been rare. At the beginning of the Porfiriato, Tabasco had just one hospital. With an annual budget of only

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<sup>45</sup>Torres Vera, *Historia gráfica*, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup>Andrés Iduarte, *Un niño en la Revolución Mexicana* (México D.F.: Obregón, S.A., 1954), pp. 80-81.

<sup>47</sup>González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México: El porfiriato, La vida social*, p. 109.

<sup>48</sup>Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 128.



\$12,857, the facility received patients from all over the state and even Chiapas.<sup>49</sup> This under-funded medical facility may be the one described in the book *Villahermosa: Crónicas y memorias, siglo XX*, as, “a building in ruinous state where the incurably ill and poor, tuberculosis and syphilis sufferers and the demented were sent.”

Supposedly, some extremely indigent people also lived on the premises, conjuring up the image of a poorhouse. Located in front of this older medical facility, the new Civil Hospital, constructed in 1881, was inaugurated during Governor Sarlat’s term in office.<sup>50</sup>

There was plenty of reason for complaint in Porfirian Tabasco. However, a total absence of educational opportunity does not appear to have been one of them. Rosendo Taracena, a Tabascan educator who began teaching during the Porfiriato and who during his lengthy career earned a reputation as one of Tabasco’s most beloved teachers, credited Abraham Bandala with fortifying the educational program during his tenure as governor.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were approximately 150 schools (presumably this figure encompasses both public and private establishments) distributed throughout the state.<sup>52</sup> The bulk of these schools were intended for children. However, by the late 1880s there were night schools established for adults in both the capital and the port town of Frontera. A normal school for women located in San Juan Bautista was founded in 1904,<sup>53</sup> and a rural school initiative was launched in 1898.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México: El porfiriato, la vida social*, p. 522.

<sup>50</sup> Balcazar Antonio, *Villahermosa: Crónicas y memorias*, p. 115.

<sup>51</sup> Rosendo Taracena Padrón, *La educación pública en Tabasco*. (Mexico: Consejo Editorial del Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 1980), p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> Romo López et al, eds., *Historia general de Tabasco*, vol. I, p. xxii.

<sup>53</sup> Torres Vera and Romero Rodríguez, *La educación*, pp. 42, 53.

<sup>54</sup> Taracena Padrón, *La educación pública en Tabasco*, p. 29. In the 1920s, Tabasco’s educational administrators rued the dearth of rural schooling opportunities, which would seem to suggest that Bandala’s initiative never made much headway.



Educational opportunities, though theoretically available, were far from equal. Class, geography and gender determined, to a great extent, how and whether a young person would be educated. The costs associated with an education, even at public schools, were often prohibitive for poor families, and even though the number of girls attending school increased over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were far fewer girls-schools than there were boys-schools. A scant 13% of females knew how to read and write at the close of the Porfiriato, up roughly two percentage points since 1900.<sup>55</sup> Residents of towns, moreover, whether they were living in the state capital or county seats, still had the best access to schools, putting rural students at a disadvantage.<sup>56</sup> Nineteenth century educational initiatives betray the privileging of Tabasco's non-rural residents. For example, an 1888 public education bill stating that primary education should be obligatory and free indicated that children who lived in municipal capitals (*cabeceras*) should attend school between the ages of 7-14, while children in rural areas need only attend between the ages of 8 and 11.<sup>57</sup>

The "transcendental" act of opening a normal school for female teachers and the acquisition and construction of buildings for schools were among the great works attributed to Governor Bandala in a tribute which appeared in a 1908 edition of el *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Tabasco*. Among the other accomplishments credited to his administration were the elegant gardens and walks that graced many communities around the state, the erection of public clocks, the improvement of roads and the construction of bridges. Of this flattering tribute, Marcela Tostado Gutiérrez notes wryly,

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<sup>55</sup> Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 136.

<sup>56</sup> Rural families of means, however, might send their children to schools in the towns or hire private tutors.

<sup>57</sup> Torres Vera and Romero Rodríguez, *La educación*, p. 42.

“There was nothing more to say, because dispossession, exploitation, misery, ignorance, corruption [and] political abuse obviously couldn’t be talked of.”<sup>58</sup>

A thin veneer of reforms would not be enough to hold off the rising resentment against Governor Bandala, whose administration was characterized by graft and a coddling of the elite. During the first decade of the new century, Tabascan citizens—principally urban intellectuals and disaffected members of the rural landed class—embraced the calls for revolution flowing downward from the north. Tabasco’s impoverished masses, divided geographically, and dispersed on haciendas and in the *monterías*, were not the first to rebel, becoming a revolutionary factor only after the Madero Revolution. The next chapter will begin by examining Tabasco’s early revolutionary years—the decade that set the stage for the *garridista* era.

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<sup>58</sup> Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 151.

## CHAPTER 2

### ARMED UPHEAVAL, TRANSITORY GOVERNANCE, AND DIVISIONS OF A LASTING NATURE: TABASCO IN REVOLUTION, 1906-1923

Sometime before revolutionary soldiers invaded the Tabascan capital in 1914, two boys went to a picture show at the downtown Merino Theater. The boys' relationship, it would appear, was born of duty rather than friendship, since one of them, Martín, was servant to the other, Andrés. After the movie and as the result of tiredness, crankiness, or perhaps for no reason at all, Andrés began beating on Martín, who gently repelled the physical antics of his smaller charge. As Andrés Iduarte recalled many years later, "Martín was a strong boy, larger than I, with tiny, lively, joking eyes that irritated me a great deal. He defended himself without hurting me, rather laughing at me the while. This irritated me even more."<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, from the stoop of a humble dwelling, a man watched the scene with displeasure. According to Iduarte, the onlooker had regarded him "with hate-filled eyes" and shouted, "'all that is going to end come the Revolution!'"<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting on his privileged childhood in Porfirian Tabasco, Iduarte explained his penchant for mistreating servant children in terms of Tabasco's feudal character.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, combating the entrenched social and economic inequalities that allowed Mexico's wealthier children feel a blithe sense of entitlement and privilege while their

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<sup>1</sup> Martín's response to Andrés' harassment is worth reflecting on. Despite his physical superiority, Martín's training in social subservience no doubt cautioned him against striking back. Maybe the laugh, though, which Andrés perceived as a taunting or teasing one, was Martín's weapon. As Michel Foucault reminds us, power relationships are relational, "Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance... present everywhere in the power network. See, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One: An Introduction*. Robert Hurley, Trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> According to Iduarte, his father, who hailed from humble origins, reprimanded his son for his behavior. See, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, James F. Shearer, Trans. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 21. The Spanish version of this memoir, which I cited in the previous chapter, is called, *Un niño en la Revolución Mexicana*.

<sup>3</sup> Iduarte, *Un niño en la Revolución Mexicana*, p. 22.



poorer counterparts suffered chronic privations and humiliation, was at the heart of the Mexican Revolution as it transmogrified from an armed political reform movement into a thoroughgoing experiment in social change. The purpose of this chapter is to chart this metamorphosis as it occurred in Tabasco. Paying attention to the state's insurrectionary experiences between 1910-1914, the chapter then considers how transitory governance and social instability hindered reform efforts and exacerbated fissures in the social fabric. An important aim of this chapter is to emphasize the divisive social climate and contentious political culture that developed in revolutionary Tabasco; for it provides a context within which to understand the uneven reception Tomás Garrido Canabal was given when he is elected Governor in 1922. Chapter two, then, offers glimpses of the process whereby Tabascan society not only began to slough off its most archaic Porfirian attributes, but found itself (much to the chagrin of some of its members) inside the "laboratory of the Revolution."

### From Literary Protest to Armed Revolution

As Porfirio Díaz' rule reached into its third decade, dissident journalists throughout the Republic were regularly registering their opposition to the regime in print.<sup>4</sup> Tabascan newspaper writers and editors, of course, were no exception, and on February 4, 1906, a medical doctor turned journalist from San Juan Bautista published an "open letter" to President Porfirio Díaz in which he attacked the lamentable political situation that reigned in the state. Courageously informing the aging president that, "We don't sympathize with the system of government you have implanted in the country,"

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<sup>4</sup> The most notable of these early anti-Díaz newspapers was Ricardo Flores Magón's *Regeneración* (1900-1918).

Doctor Manuel Mestre Ghigliazza (distinguishing himself from more radical journalists elsewhere) was quick to assure Díaz that their protest would not result in revolts or “ridiculous” proposals. Written some months before Tabasco’s gubernatorial elections that Dr. Mestre feared would put General Bandala in the governor’s chair again, the purpose of his letter was to remind the president of the terrible yoke the Bandala administration represented for the Tabascan people. Hoping that the president would use his considerable influence to get Governor Bandala to step aside, Mestre expressed confidence that Díaz would offer a “cure” for Tabasco’s “deep and pestilent ulcers.”<sup>5</sup>

Contributing to Tabasco’s ills, according to Mestre, were rising taxes, poor roads that hindered local agriculture, and a legal system so compromised that it “inspired terror” among the litigants. And while Mestre repeatedly stated his belief that the president would relieve Tabasco from so much injustice, he forcefully informed Díaz that, “Tabascans firmly believe that you will be the only one responsible if our suffering is prolonged.” On the other hand, should Díaz help them with his “beneficent work”, the generous and resilient Tabascan people would “in a few years, the wounds from which they now suffer scarred over...forget their current pains like one forgets a horrible nightmare.” Taking his plea to an even higher level—and appealing, seemingly, to the elderly president’s wish to be forever remembered as a Mexican hero--Mestre suggested that when Díaz died, the people would experience “the national pain without ironic smiles on their lips or bitter resentments in the heart. As Mexicans we will only think of the hero of the Second Independence and the Pacifier...”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The text of Manuel Mestre Ghigliazza’s public letter to Porfirio Díaz can be found in Alfonso Taracena’s *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco* (Villahermosa, Tabasco: Ediciones del Gobierno de Tabasco, Mexico, 1974), pp. 20-23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

As the director of the opposition newspaper *La Revista de Tabasco*, whose first edition in February of 1906 carried the above-mentioned letter to Díaz, Manuel Mestre Ghigliazza used his pen to agitate for political change. Indeed, the actions of Mestre and other intellectuals in the capital represented the first sustained challenge to the Bandala regime. *Revista* writers, for example, invited people to sign a statement protesting Bandala's intention to run for reelection. This statement was posted on their office door on April 2, 1906, the day a group of Bandala loyalists had chosen to hold a parade in support of the governor's reelection bid. As the pro-Bandala contingent marched past the *Revista* office in downtown San Juan Bautista, a throng of protesters shouted "Long live Mestre" and tried to disrupt the parade. The Bandala supporters dispersed, but the demonstration continued. When a colonel of the National Guard arrived on the scene, he was greeted with rocks and shouts, and the mare on which he was mounted was stabbed in the gut. Learning of the commotion, a group of students at the nearby Instituto Juárez joined the ruckus by turning over benches. Some of the older students even brandished their revolvers (among them a young man named Tomás Garrido Canabal). The day's protest landed six people in the public jail, including Manuel Mestre Ghigliazza.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps because he feared another prison term or worse, Mestre, who had withdrawn into private life after a second arrest in 1908, at first ignored the letters sent to him by Francisco Madero. Madero, a wealthy liberal from the northern Mexican state of Coahuila whose 1908 book *The Presidential Succession in 1910* had thrust him to the center of the anti-Díaz movement, contacted Mestre as early as July of 1909. Having heard positive things about the Tabascan journalist, Madero encouraged Mestre to run for governor of Tabasco during the next election. Mestre did not respond. Madero contacted

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 27-29 and Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 159.



him again in October, soliciting an interview. Supposedly Mestre then told Madero that the experiences he had suffered prevented him from collaborating with the anti-reelectionist cause.<sup>8</sup>

Mestre continued to eschew active involvement in the anti-Díaz movement. However, a Tabascan rancher named Ignacio Gutiérrez Gómez from the western municipality of Cárdenas, picked up the banner of political reform.<sup>9</sup> In May of 1910, Gutiérrez--who embraced the political program drafted by the Partido Liberal Mexicano in 1906--informed Dr. Mestre of his desire to overthrow "the current dictatorial government that has never respected the will of the Mexican people [and] that has always been reelected by means of electoral fraud." Gutiérrez advocated armed struggle to achieve this end. Mestre, perhaps scandalized by Gutiérrez's radicalism, ignored his missive.<sup>10</sup>

National events soon impelled the rebellious Tabascan rancher and thousands like him across the republic to pick up arms. In April of 1910, Francisco Madero was nominated for the presidency at a convention in Mexico City. Soon thereafter, the presidential hopeful was arrested in San Luis Potosí, preventing him from participating in the June elections that brought Porfirio Díaz to power for yet another term. Released on bail, Madero escaped to San Antonio, Texas where he drafted the revolutionary Plan of

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<sup>8</sup> Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano* pp. 160-161; and Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 475-477.

<sup>9</sup> The background of Gutiérrez is disputed. Some allege that he was the "illegitimate" son of Tabascan oligarch, Policarpo Valenzuela. Some identify him as an *hacendado* lumberman. While others claim that he was the son of indentured servants (whom he came to free). I suppose some combination of these scenarios is not out of the question. See, Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, p. 51; Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 160; and José Rogelio Álvarez, ed., *Diccionario enciclopédico de Tabasco*, vol. I (Villahermosa: Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 1994), p. 288, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, pp. 51-53; and Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 161.

San Luis Potosí. In this treatise Madero declared the June elections illegal, designated himself provisional president of Mexico and exhorted his country's towns "to rise up in arms" on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1910.<sup>11</sup> As the year 1910 came to a close, bands of rebels, Ignacio Gutiérrez Gómez and perhaps two other notable rebels, Pedro Sánchez Magallanes and Domingo Magaña, among them, were actively extorting guns, munitions, horses and saddles from plantations in western Tabasco. In some cases they recruited plantation peons to swell their ranks, causing consternation among managers, one of whom claimed that the departing workers were "'owing to us'"—a reminder of the prevalence of indentured servitude in the region.<sup>12</sup>

Political changes transpiring in Tabasco may have undermined the impetus for armed rebellion, however. In the same month that Francisco Madero was drawing up his revolutionary plan in Texas encouraging Mexicans to rise up in arms, Tabasco held its gubernatorial elections. In a move Dr. Mestre had hoped for back in 1906, President Díaz asked Governor Bandala to renounce his candidacy for reelection. Bandala agreed, and Policarpo Valenzuela, the fabulously wealthy Tabascan capitalist who hailed from humble origins, was proposed as Bandala's replacement. On October 16<sup>th</sup>, the elderly but vigorous Valenzuela became Tabasco's governor-elect. He took office in January of 1911.<sup>13</sup> Valenzuela's election had a dampening effect on the armed movement; indeed, the revolutionary commanders in western Tabasco were disappointed in December of 1910 when individuals who had committed themselves to attacking certain municipal centers failed to do so.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Meyer, Sherman and Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, pp. 478-482.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. I, p. 224.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 224-225; and Tostado Gutiérrez, p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, pp. 162-163.

This combative lull lasted but a few months. On April 6, 1911, Gutiérrez' troops captured the westernmost municipality of Huimanguillo. In neighboring Cárdenas, also taken by the rebels, Gutiérrez joined forces with the seasoned veteran and sometime drunk, Pedro Sánchez Magallanes, as well as Ramón Sosa Torres. On April 11 they captured Paraíso and moved on to Comalcalco. On April 13, at the head of a now quite substantial army, Gutiérrez returned to the revolutionary encampment in Aldama. It was there, on April 21, that federal forces dealt a debilitating blow to the Chontalpa rebels. Gutiérrez and scores of *maderista* troops were mortally wounded. Devastated, but not destroyed, General Domingo Magaña, perhaps the most militarily talented of these early Tabascan revolutionaries, regrouped and attained two victories in Tabasco's Sierra region. On May 10, he captured Teapa and Pichucalco, the latter a town on the Tabasco-Chiapas border.<sup>15</sup>

Tabasco's rebel victories in 1911, significant though they were by southeastern standards, were peripheral to the historically decisive battles waged in the north. As Ciudad Juárez, Durango, Torreón and other northern cities fell to the rebels and large numbers of federal soldiers abandoned the government to join the revolutionaries, Díaz was forced to admit defeat. On May 21, 1911 the Treaty of Ciudad Juárez, which stipulated that President Porfirio Díaz and Vice President Ramón Corral had to resign before month's end, was signed. On June 3, with his presidential protector gone,

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<sup>15</sup> Martínez Assad, *Breve historia de Tabasco*, p. 109; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 204, 224; and Álvarez, *Diccionario enciclopédico de Tabasco*, vol., p. 209.



Tabascan governor Policarpo Valenzuela, like every Porfirian governor in the country, submitted his resignation.<sup>16</sup>

### The Madero-Mestre Interlude: Instability and the Limits of Progress in Tabasco

With Policarpo Valenzuela's resignation, Manuel Mestre Ghigliazza, now in regular correspondence with Francisco Madero, became the provisional and then elected governor of Tabasco.<sup>17</sup> But his term as Tabasco's Chief Executive was fraught with difficulty. Rebel activity in the region threatened the stability of the Mestre regime.<sup>18</sup> Natural disaster, in the form of a locust plague, compounded the problem of rebellion and generalized banditry. The outbreak, which began in 1908, had devastated the countryside, severely damaging the corn crop. In fact, corn scarcity became so severe that late in 1911 Mestre's government requested of the Treasury Secretary that foreign corn be allowed to pass tariff-free through the customs point in Frontera. The municipal government of El Centro, of which the state capital San Juan Bautista comprised a major part, sold the more than 20,000 kilos of corn it had brought into the entity at modest prices to the city's poor.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Meyer, Sherman and Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, p. 486-487; Tostado Gutiérrez, *El Tabasco porfiriano*, p. 164; and John Womack, "The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920" in Leslie Bethell, ed. *Mexico Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 132.

<sup>17</sup> Martínez Assad, *Breve historia de Tabasco*, p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> National anti-Madero movements, such as those that coalesced around Bernardo Reyes and Pascual Orozco, found adherents in Tabasco. *Reyismo*, conservative in character, appealed to former porfirians like Policarpo Valenzuela who, Governor Mestre bitterly noted in a letter to Madero, gave money and encouragement to Reyes elements in Tabasco. According to Alan Knight, "a vigorous Reyista campaign was mounted in Tabasco, where 'a number of the most prominent partisans of the late Díaz administration' took the lead...." Unsettling as the Reyes rebellion was in Tabasco—they managed to cause serious disturbances in a number of municipalities—the movement collapsed when Bernardo Reyes surrendered. At the conclusion of their struggle, Tabasco's *Reyista* rebels informed President Madero that their complaint was with the authorities in Tabasco, not the federal government. See, Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, p. 105; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. I, pp. 252-253; and Martínez Assad, *Breve historia de Tabasco*, p. 110.

<sup>19</sup> Romo López, *Historia general de Tabasco*, vol. II, pp. 619, 622.

It was one thing to respond to the corn crisis with emergency subsidies, and another to implement broad reforms that would benefit the economically disadvantaged and politically disaffected classes. Few people expected the Mestre regime to resolve the centuries-old problem of economic and social inequality overnight. Neither did they imagine that the state's most privileged sector would continue to enjoy government favors. A disgruntled Tabascan wrote to President Madero in December of 1912 complaining that, "'The public posts of this locality are almost all occupied by the same people who were there during the government of Don Porfirio Díaz and General Abraham Bandala.'"<sup>20</sup> Indeed, "business as usual" in politics and the economy is the best way to describe the early revolutionary years in Tabasco.

In the previous chapter I discussed debt peonage, a labor system common in the country's southeast that drew heavy criticism by radicals in Mexico and even the United States.<sup>21</sup> Governor Mestre, for his part, criticized peonage as an "irregular and anomalous procedure of grave detriment [to] human liberty." But despite his fancy rhetoric, Mestre seemingly feared the consequences of giving peons too much freedom. After all, Tabasco's economy depended on getting crops planted and harvested. Mestre expressed his anxiety this way: "[the threat] of a socio-political conflict between the servants and the propertied farmer, because they try...to end with one stroke the bonds of those vicious old practices, [would] in the opinion of this government imply disaster for

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 623.

<sup>21</sup> John Kenneth Turner, a muckraking journalist who befriended Ricardo Flores Magón and other Mexican radicals in Los Angeles in the early 1910s, traveled to Mexico disguised as a businessman in order to get a close-up view of indentured servitude in Yucatán and the Valle Nacional. His book, *Barbarous Mexico*, first printed in 1909 as articles in *American Magazine*, exposed the horrific conditions of debt peons in Porfirian Mexico. See Sinclair Snow's introduction to the 1969 edition of *Barbarous Mexico* by John Kenneth Turner. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. viii-xv.



the state....” Not a proponent of radical quick fixes, Mestre favored a gradualist approach.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, at least according to one historical interpretation, Governor Mestre and some of his close collaborators held condescending opinions of the rural poor. This may explain why the municipal boards of the Agricultural Arbitration Commission, an agency established in 1911 to resolve the problem of debt servitude in the Tabascan countryside, were comprised of “old and rich Porfirian hacendados [while] the hacienda peons were only noticeable by their absence.” The National Agricultural Chamber of Tabasco, a conservative business association, aided the governor in appointing local representatives to the arbitration boards in each of Tabasco’s seventeen municipalities. All too willing to assist the Governor in forming commissions that kept powerful landlords in charge of agrarian conflicts, the organization nonetheless turned on Mestre when a coup dislodged Madero from the presidency.<sup>23</sup>

#### New Revolutionary Movements Unleashed: Tabasco 1913-1914

In February of 1913, a military coup several months in the making erupted in Mexico City. During what became known as the *Decena Trágica*, President Madero and his vice-president Pino Suárez, a popular Tabascan-born lawyer from Yucatán, were shot and killed and the traitorous general Victoriano Huerta became Mexico’s president. Despite his Madero sympathies, Governor Mestre stayed on as Tabasco’s governor when Huerta usurped the presidency. His decision to remain in office, at least initially, is not

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<sup>22</sup> Romo López, *Historia general de Tabasco*, vol. II, pp. 624-25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 625-626.



so surprising, since all save a few governors recognized the Huerta regime.<sup>24</sup> One governor who refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the new presidential regime, though, was Venustiano Carranza. The governor of Coahuila, Madero's home state, Carranza was a passionate supporter of the martyred president. His Plan of Guadalupe, composed on March 26, 1913, denounced Huerta and announced the formation of a Constitutionalist Army, of which Carranza was to be the First Chief.<sup>25</sup>

The Huerta coup unleashed a new and powerful wave of revolutionary activity in Tabasco, the earliest expression of which developed in the western region of the state, known as the Chontalpa.<sup>26</sup> Just weeks after an April 7 skirmish with federal troops in southern Huimanguillo, a group of rebels drafted a "Revolutionary Plan" condemning Huerta's treasonous government. Issued from the hacienda "San Fernando" on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, the Plan included a minor list of reforms, such as eliminating the head-tax, and established rules regulating the behavior of revolutionary combatants, which, if not adhered to, could result in harsh punishments. Most importantly, the drafters of the plan announced their intention to engage in armed struggle against the Huerta regime.<sup>27</sup> Carlos Greene became the titular head of the Chontalpa forces. He was named Chief of Insurrection on April 25. In April and May the rebels engaged federal troops in the Chontalpa, capturing the municipality of Comalcalco on May 12<sup>th</sup>.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. II, p. 9; and Womack, "The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920," p. 141.

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, Sherman and Deeds. *The Course of Mexican History*, p. 505; Womack, "The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920," p. 142; and Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. II, pp. 104-105.

<sup>26</sup> Tabasco is divided into four geographical zones that correspond to the names Chontalpa, Centro, Sierra, and Rios. The Chontalpa describes the western portion of the state, specifically the municipalities of Huimanguillo, Cárdenas, Comalcalco and Cunduacán.

<sup>27</sup> Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, pp. 225-228, 239.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239-240; and Álvarez, *Diccionario enciclopédico de Tabasco*, vol. I, pp. 111, 210.

In the summer of 1913 rumors began spreading that another rebel army was taking shape in the easternmost region of the state.<sup>29</sup> Essentially devoid of rebel activity in 1910-1911 (quiescence Alan Knight convincingly attributes to the stiff control and repression exerted by the “plantocracy”), the state’s eastern rebels played a significant role after 1913.<sup>30</sup> Commanded by a prosperous landowner from Balancán named Luis Felipe Domínguez Suárez, a cousin of the martyred vice-president, the Usumacinta Brigade was organized in 1913 with the blessing of First Chief Venustiano Carranza. Formed in the still densely forested municipality of Tenosique, members of the Usumacinta Brigade included former chicle workers and peons from the infamous Romano lumber camps.<sup>31</sup>

Bernardino Mena Brito, who joined the revolution in Campeche in 1913, but a good deal of whose military service was spent in Tabasco and Guatemala, provides a vivid glimpse of the southeastern campaign against Huerta in his testimonial novel, *Paludismo: o la revolución en la selva*.<sup>32</sup> A member of the Revolution’s dynamite regiment, Mena Brito experienced first hand the unbearable conditions of life in the *selva*. While his tales may be embellished for entertainment and political purposes, (*Paludismo* is, after all, described as a novel), they shed some light on the hardships faced by revolutionary soldiers operating in the depth of tropical jungles. Additionally, they detail the grim realities of the rural poor who were “recruited” into their armies.

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<sup>29</sup> Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, p. 255.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. I, pp. 366-67.

<sup>31</sup> Álvarez, *Diccionario enciclopédico de Tabasco*, vol. I, p. 162; and Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, pp. 255-256.

<sup>32</sup> Bernardino Mena Brito, *Paludismo: O la revolución en la selva (novela de tierra caliente de México)*. (Villahermosa: Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco, 2001; first edition by Editorial Botas, 1940). The prologue, “Lenguaje, tradición y novela” written by Álvaro Ruiz Abreu is an informative essay on testimonial novels and the Mexican Revolution.

It is well known that peons and poor people throughout Mexico were conscripted into both the federal and revolutionary armies. In some cases, peons joined the revolutionaries voluntarily, but the following story from *Paludismo* suggests that some peons were uninterested in joining their “liberators.” In the novel, a handful of revolutionaries including Mena Brito, who is the main character in *Paludismo*, arrive at a chicle encampment in the Guatemalan rainforest.<sup>33</sup> There, a drunk and foul-mouthed Spanish overseer is cruelly lording over a dozen emaciated women who are grinding corn, as their sickly children roll around in a fetid patch of mud nearby. Asked how many chicle workers there are in the camp, the overseer, who knows the revolutionary colonel, Pablo Gaméz, reports that of the eighty-seven that began the season, twelve remain. The revolutionaries are told that the surviving workers—presumably out harvesting latex—will be back in a matter of days. When the *chicleros* arrive, they are shackled by the revolutionaries and asked, “Who wants to join the revolution voluntarily and who by force?” All of them opt for force. Other than two workers (who as a result of ingesting an intoxicating, but ultimately deadly, tree sap are left to die in the camp), all the *chicleros* “join” the revolutionaries. The women are encouraged to accompany the rag-tag army as *soldaderas*, assured they will not be mistreated. Even the overseer, anticipating the wrath of the defrauded chicle bosses, asks to join the revolutionaries. “Another slaver turned liberator!” Mena Brito notes sarcastically of the overseer’s entry into the ranks of the revolution.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> As was shown in the previous chapter, Mexican workers (principally Chiapans and Tabascans) frequently labored in Guatemalan lumber and chicle camps. So it is unsurprising that revolutionary recruitment campaigns would take place across the border.

<sup>34</sup> Mena Brito, *Paludismo*, pp. 16-17. According to Alfonso Taracena, one of Luis Felipe Domínguez Suárez’s close collaborators was a man named Pablo Gamas. I suspect the character Pablo Gaméz in *Paludismo* is in fact Gamas. Mena Brito used the names of real persons in his novel, but frequently



That the nervous overseer threw in his lot with the revolutionaries is understandable enough; but what explains the chicle workers' *reluctance* to join the revolutionaries? If conditions at the chicle camp were as atrocious as Mena Brito described, and they may well have been, wouldn't the workers have jumped at the chance to abandon it? Moreover, wouldn't exploited rural peons be drawn to the Revolution's promise of a better life?<sup>35</sup> In my mind, there are (at least) three plausible reasons why *chicleros* and plantation peons in Tabasco may have been disinclined to join revolutionary bands. First, while it is possible that the Revolution's promise of liberation resonated favorably with them, rural conscripts would have had reason to distrust the bearers of the message. Many a revolutionary general, after all, hailed from the prosperous classes whose social privileges depended directly on the exploitation of Mexico's poor.<sup>36</sup> Second, despite the rigors men and women faced in the chicle encampments, conducting revolutionary campaigns in the thick of the jungle and risking life and limb in battles could hardly have been deemed desirable alternatives. Finally, the money gained from chicle work, as miserable as it was, may have been so essential to the

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misspelled them. For mention of Pablo Gamas and his role in the Usumacinta Brigade, see Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, pp. 255-56.

<sup>35</sup> Christopher R. Boyer speaks of the "quintessential revolutionary dilemma" in which disempowered people have "the inconvenient quality of failing to recognize their own oppression, at least in the same terms as the revolutionaries...." See, *Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920-1935* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 87. Also see his footnote #16. See, also, John Tutino on the factors that may propel exploited people to pursue insurrectionary justice (or not).

<sup>36</sup> Mena Brito writes about the "perspicacity" and "instinct" of the masses who distrust the revolutionary general, Luis Felipe Domínguez, because of his background as a *montería* owner and overseer. Mena Brito, *Paludismo*, p. 91. A Chontal perspective on the Revolution in Tabasco is also suggestive: "In the Revolution, the finca owners rebelled against the government so as to prevent their peons from rebelling against them." Rodolfo Uribe Iniesta and Bartola May May, *T'an I K'ajalin Yokot'an (Palabara y pensamiento Yokot'an)*, (UNAM-CRIM, 2000), p. 58.

subsistence strategy of rural peons that renouncing it was not a proposition to consider lightly.<sup>37</sup>

Reluctant conscripts notwithstanding, peons, servants and *montería* workers populated the ranks of the two armies that poured into the state capital between the end of August and mid-September, 1914. The Usumacinta Brigade arrived in San Juan Bautista first, followed some weeks later by the Chontalpa rebels, who numbered approximately 3,000. Mena Brito, who was among the latter contingent, described their tumultuous descent on the capital, but his account of the rebel takeover was most assuredly embellished for literary purposes. For example, in the novel, a revolutionary orator, José Domingo Ramírez Garrido, delivers a metaphoric speech in which he insists that just as the ancient Greeks had purged physically “deformed” people from their society, Mexico should purge its morally deformed members. The masses, as Mena Brito would have us believe, are unable to appreciate that Ramírez Garrido was speaking metaphorically, and in the days that follow they initiate a campaign to rid San Juan Bautista of its “one-armed,” “crippled” and “lame” beggars, much to the speech-giver’s horror and dismay.<sup>38</sup>

Because so many of Tabasco’s revolutionary speeches and exuberant popular scenes have been lost to history, even Mena Brito’s semi-factual account becomes a tool for the historian.<sup>39</sup> Fortunately, though, certain events that transpired in revolutionary

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<sup>37</sup> An anecdote from 1930 may be instructive here. A group of chicle workers from Balancán appealed to the Mexican president when the revolutionary labor leagues in Tabasco prohibited them from traveling to the chicle camps in Guatemala. Though the chicleros acknowledged that the leagues were trying to protect them from the risks associated with working without a contract, it was still an unwelcome intrusion since chicle collection represented the best way for them to “meet [their] families needs.” AHFT-DGG, rollo 5. “chicle” exps. 1-8.

<sup>38</sup> Mena Brito, *Paludismo*, pp. 97-98. Taracena refers to this literary episode and argues that it was an invention.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Cobb reminds us of the ephemeral nature of riot and rebellion in his essay, “Revolutionary Situations in France, 1789-1968”. He notes, “In any riot, once it is underway, and however chaotically it begins, there is a man or woman who stands out, pointing the way, holding an emblem, shouting a slogan. No one can identify him or her afterwards, but he or she will be remembered both by participants and

San Juan Bautista have left a firmer documentary trail. Soon after the Chontalpa rebels' arrival in the capital, for example, José Domingo Ramírez Garrido warned his comrades in arms that if debt slavery were not abolished and a law passed to guarantee worker freedom, the "Tabascan multitudes, crazed with indignation," might seek vengeance. He even alluded to Yucatán's Caste War--a massive rural uprising in which (mostly) Maya rebels expiated generations of exploitation by waging war against the privileged class--to underscore his point.<sup>40</sup> Within days of this pronouncement, Luis Felipe Domínguez, who Carranza had named Military Governor of Tabasco, issued a decree abolishing debt servitude and canceling the debts of peons.<sup>41</sup> This decree delivered the initial blow to Tabasco's most infamous form of labor exploitation. Its value, though, was more symbolic than real since many peons would remain tied to haciendas and plantations for several years to come.<sup>42</sup>

Not long after this decree was issued Carranza replaced General Domínguez with General Carlos Greene as Tabasco's Governor. More than his predecessor, Greene was a believer in retributive justice; and a campaign of reprisals soon followed. Huerta officer José Valenzuela, the son of the last Porfirian Governor, Policarpo Valenzuela, met a gruesome end. He and four other officers were marched through the streets in their underwear, "gagged like hogs," while bystanders jeered and clapped. That evening they

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onlookers." See, *A Second Identity: Essays on France and French History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969.), p. 278.

<sup>40</sup> Gral. J.D. Ramírez Garrido, *La esclavitud en Tabasco: La jornada máxima y el salario mínimo (segunda edición corregida y aumentada)*. (Mexico, D.F.), pp. 5, 8. For one analysis of the Caste War see, Terry Rugeley, *Of Wonders and Wise Men: Religion and Popular Cultures in Southeast Mexico, 1800-1876* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Ramírez Garrido, *La esclavitud en Tabasco*, p. 8. Though Domínguez was credited for it, the authorship of this decree properly belongs to José Domingo Ramírez Garrido who attempted, successfully, to rectify this injustice in later years.

<sup>42</sup> Uribe Iniesta and May May, *T'an I K'ajalin Yokot'an*, p. 58.



were shot, one every hour.<sup>43</sup> The family of Andrés Iduarte, which had fled San Juan Bautista when the first revolutionary troops began to arrive, learned of Pepe Valenzuela's execution from the safety of neighboring Campeche. According to Iduarte's account, Valenzuela's feet had been skinned before his death march to the cemetery.<sup>44</sup>

Carlos Greene was himself replaced as Governor, and in rapid succession three more governors followed. Plagued not only by instability in the executive office, but counterrevolutionary activity, particularly in western Tabasco, Carranza determined to pacify the region. He sent a loyal military man from the western state of Michoacán to quell the unrest. Francisco Múgica would become Tabasco's Military Commander and Provisional Governor in 1915.<sup>45</sup>

#### A Reform-minded Outsider: Francisco Múgica in Tabasco

An activist governor, Francisco Múgica introduced a number of reforms during his year in Tabasco—some substantive, others more showy than transformational. He prohibited hacendados from paying their employees with alcohol, attempted to convert church buildings into schools, changed the capital's name back to Villahermosa, and set about improving Tabasco's dismal road system. His unconventional (and unpopular) requirement that everyone traveling along the stretch between the capital and the outlying community of Atasta push a wheelbarrow of dirt purportedly allowed him to finish the road.<sup>46</sup> His approach to revolutionary reform surely influenced Tomás Garrido Canabal,

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<sup>43</sup>Ridgeway, "The Cooperative Republic," pp. 114-115.

<sup>44</sup>Iduarte, *Un niño*, p. 45.

<sup>45</sup>Ridgeway, pp. 116-117; and Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. II, pp. 245-246.

<sup>46</sup>Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. II, p. 246; Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, pp. 343, 352, 359.

a young lawyer of twenty-five, who thanks to the recommendation of his relative José Domingo Ramírez Garrido, was given a minor position in Múgica's administration as the head of the Department of Legal or Revolutionary Justice.<sup>47</sup> The impact Múgica reformism had on Garrido cannot be overstated: a controversial approach to road building, an anti-alcohol crusade, and a campaign to transform churches into schools (among other populist reforms) became hallmarks of the Garrido regime.

Perhaps the most noteworthy action undertaken by Múgica during his brief tenure as Tabasco's governor was in the agrarian sector.<sup>48</sup> Today, advocates of agrarian reform still point to Múgica's 1916 decision to restore thousands of hectares of disputed land to communal farmers in the municipality of Jonuta, as a highlight of the Tabascan revolution.<sup>49</sup> In the early days of his administration, a delegation of impoverished rural farmers approached Múgica with a request for revolutionary assistance. They described a series of political and economic machinations that, over a period of many decades, had deprived them of much of their land. Because they had been dispossessed of their land, they were forced "to emigrate, due to hunger, to the *fincas* of rich tycoons and foreign companies in search of sustenance for their families." Sadly, many of these itinerant laborers never returned. Citing the agrarian decree of January 6, 1915, issued by the "magnanimous Supreme Chief of the Nation", Venustiano Carranza, the petitioners asked Múgica to restore the entire "Isla Chinal" to them in the form of ejidos. Múgica soon began an investigation of their complaints.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Pérez Bertruy, *Tomás Garrido Canabal*, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> For an informative discussion of Múgica's class-conscious ideas about agrarian reform, see, Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos*, pp. 82-84.

<sup>49</sup> Andrés Manuel López Obrador, *Entre la historia y la esperanza: Corrupción y la lucha democrática en Tabasco* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1995), pp. 39-40.

<sup>50</sup> Armando María y Campos, *Múgica: Crónica biográfica* (México: Compañía de Ediciones Populares, S.A., 1939), pp. 96-97.



On May 13, 1916, Múgica ordered the disputed land returned to the Jonuta peasants. Telegraphing Carranza to inform him of the decision, Múgica described the jubilation that reigned among the *ejidatarios*, who had shouted their praise for the First Chief and the Constitutionalist Revolution. Popular adulation, though, would not be enough to offset the pressure put on Carranza by the owners of the company who lost out in that revolutionary transaction. The Compañía Agrícola Tabasqueña, the majority of whose shareholders were North Americans, protested to Carranza that they had been the victims of dispossession. Carranza ordered Múgica to return the land to the company. Múgica's "patriotic response" has become the stuff of legend. He begged Carranza to reconsider, but in the event that the First Chief should stand by his decision to return the land to the company, Múgica requested permission to cede the governor's chair to another person, for it would be an inestimable "sacrifice to work against my revolutionary convictions, of the laws of the pre-constitutional government and the aspirations of the people." Carranza reversed his decision.<sup>51</sup>

Múgica's tenure as Tabasco's governor though, while memorable, was brief. Not keen on having an outsider running the show, a group of Tabascan revolutionary generals, including Carlos Greene, asked Carranza to replace Múgica with General Luis Felipe Domínguez.<sup>52</sup> Carranza complied. The Múgica episode in Tabasco had ended, but the seeds of radical reform planted in 1915-1916 would spring forward

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 99-101. The company was not to give up easily, however, and the *ejidatarios* wrote to Múgica after he had left the state to inform him of a campaign of harassment against them.

<sup>52</sup> Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, p. 355; and Pérez Bertruy, *Tomás Garrido Canabal*, p. 22



with greater force in the next decade by Múgica's "one-time protégé, Tomás Garrido Canabal."<sup>53</sup>

### The Gubernatorial Elections of 1919: Bloodshed "Blue" and "Red"

After years of short-lived, politically appointed governors, Tabasco finally held gubernatorial elections in 1919. The two main contenders for Governor were Generals Luis Felipe Domínguez Suárez, who ran on the Partido Liberal Constitucional ticket, referred to as the "Blues," and Carlos Greene as the candidate of the Partido Radical Tabasqueño, or "Reds." The Domínguez candidacy appealed, it has been argued, more to the propertied classes, large landowners, and Porfirian types, while Greene's party was deemed more progressive and had greater support from veterans, "intellectuals with advanced ideas", student radicals and the popular classes. (However, it did not escape the discerning eye of Andrés Iduarte that the "Reds" had their share of "hacendados, landowners and *caciques* that had used stocks and whips on rural peons.")<sup>54</sup>

The period preceding the 1919 election was marked by outbursts of partisan rancor. Sometimes party sympathizers found harmless and creative ways to barb the opposition—a relative of Iduarte's who identified with the Domínguez campaign, wore a blue shirt and red shoes, so that she might "stamp on the symbol of the enemy with every step."<sup>55</sup> However, many party loyalists resorted to violence. In 1919, Military Commander and Pre-constitutional Governor of Tabasco, Carlos Vidal, sent a letter to

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<sup>53</sup> Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. II, pp. 246-247.

<sup>54</sup> Pérez Bertruy, *Tomás Garrido Canabal*, pp. 22-27; Iduarte, *Un niño en la Revolución Mexicana*, p. 77.

<sup>55</sup> Iduarte, *Un niño en la Revolución Mexicana*, p. 76.

President Carranza's Minister of the Interior in which he described the political disturbances party activists were causing, including street brawls. His frustration perhaps lending itself to exaggeration, Vidal commented, "Nobody works and the activities and obligations of citizens are abandoned in favor of the politicking that causes so much harm to the economy of the state and, above all, destroys social tranquility [by] planting hate among the Tabascan family." Poor Governor Vidal would not be spared the ravages of electoral violence. His father, Pomposo Vidal, was shot down on a Villahermosa street two days before the elections. The crime was attributed to the "Blues" who resented what they perceived as Governor Vidal's partiality toward the "Reds."<sup>56</sup>

Violence continued on Election Day. In eight municipalities outside of the capital people who went to deposit their votes were assaulted in riots.<sup>57</sup> In Villahermosa, Greene loyalists reportedly took armed control of the voting stations. When the *Dominguistas* attempted to re-open them, shooting broke out. As a result of the agitated February 2 elections, twenty townspeople were wounded or killed. Carlos Greene of the "Reds" was declared the winner of those tumultuous electoral proceedings, and though Luis Felipe Domínguez contested the results, immediately taking his protest to Mexico City, President Carranza recognized Greene's victory.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately for Greene, the society over which he would preside as Governor was extremely divided. Disgusted by an electoral outcome they considered fraudulent, Domínguez militants in the National Congress demanded that recognition be withdrawn

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<sup>56</sup> Enrique Canudas Sandoval, *Trópico rojo: Historia política y social de Tabasco, los años garridistas 1919/1934*, vol. I. (Villahermosa: Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 1989), p. 17; Álvarez, *Diccionario enciclopédico de Tabasco*, vol. II, p. 549.

<sup>57</sup> Pérez Bertruy, *Tomás Garrido Canabal*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Ridgeway, "The Cooperative Republic," p. 125.

from Greene's government. Meanwhile, the Greene administration's precariousness increased when a new Chief of Military Operations named Francisco Bertani disarmed municipal police forces and even Greene's escorts, seemingly against orders from the Central Government. When Greene requested a leave to travel to Mexico City in search of assistance from the central government, Tomás Garrido Canabal, now twenty-nine years old, became interim governor.<sup>59</sup>

Still a relative unknown in 1919, Garrido's first stint as governor proved him to be loyal, and gutsy besides. The Chief of Military Operations, Bertani, in alliance with Domínguez militants exercised a coup. Imprisoned and then released per the ruling of a district judge, the deposed *Greenista* government, Garrido at its head, set up their government in the port city of Frontera. Anti-Greene forces then pushed them out of Frontera. After a dangerous fluvial getaway, Garrido and a loyal following established the Greene government in the Barra of Santa Anna, on the Veracruz border. In his four months as interim governor Garrido deepened his relationship with the more radical elements in Tabascan politics. He also demonstrated his political honor by peaceably handing the reigns of government back to Carlos Greene once the legitimacy of his government was recognized.<sup>60</sup> Garrido had successfully negotiated another step on the road to power.

### Steady Strides Forward: The Political Emergence of Tomás Garrido Canabal

In 1920, a powerful collection of generals including Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles and Adolfo de la Huerta rebelled against President Carranza. The revolt was

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<sup>59</sup> Pérez Bertruy, *Tomás Garrido Canabal*, pp. 29, 32.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 33, 38; and Álvarez, *Diccionario enciclopédico de Tabasco*, vol. 1, p. 211.



precipitated by Carranza's selection of Ignacio Bonillas, Mexico's ambassador in Washington, as his candidate for the presidency, a move that infuriated Álvaro Obregón. Having already declared his candidacy, Obregón had hoped to wrest a "reluctant endorsement" from the sitting president. The Plan of Agua Prieta, which, among other things, charged Carranza with violating the Constitution, quickly gained adherents.<sup>61</sup> Governor Greene of Tabasco was one of them.

As the *carrancistas* and *aguaprietistas* struggled for dominance, Tabascan military leaders who had affiliated themselves with the movement to overthrow Carranza, helped install Tomás Garrido Canabal as the provisional governor of Yucatán.<sup>62</sup> Though his tenure was very brief—he served for just over a month between May and June of 1920—it nevertheless enhanced his political prospects and shaped his thinking on social reform. On the one hand, he demonstrated his loyalty to the "Sonoran clan," the faction that crushed the Carranza regime and was fast becoming the dominant political power in the country. On the other hand, Garrido's experience in Yucatán further exposed him to the radical reforms that had been implemented on the peninsula by the Sonoran general Salvador Alvarado. Like Francisco Múgica in Tabasco, Salvador Alvarado had brought a reformist zeal to his position as Yucatán's governor in 1915. By 1920, thanks to the organizing energy of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, a unique brand of socialism was taking shape on the peninsula. Yucatán's state-controlled worker organization known as "resistance

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<sup>61</sup> Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. II, p. 490; Meyer, Sherman and Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, p. 529; and Womack, "The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920," pp. 188-190, 194.

<sup>62</sup> Taracena, *Historia de la Revolución en Tabasco*, p. 377; and Pérez Bertruy, *Tomás Garrido Canabal*, p. 58.

leagues” particularly influenced Garrido, and would become a centerpiece of his administration in Tabasco several years later.<sup>63</sup>

Soon after his gubernatorial stint in Yucatán, Garrido lost a bid to become a federal deputy to his cousin José Domingo Ramírez Garrido, who, along with a number of other prominent revolutionaries, had split off from the PRT.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, in the 1922 election for Governor, Tomás Garrido Canabal would again face off with the cousin who had given him his start in politics. It was an acrimonious race. Each contender tried to argue that his opponent was constitutionally ineligible for the state’s highest office; and aggressive name-calling gave the campaign a passionate hue. Physical altercations between the gubernatorial opponents’ supporters, moreover, claimed several lives.<sup>65</sup>

As a result of violent election tactics, some Tabascan citizens thought it safest to distance themselves from the gubernatorial contest. Commenting on the violent political environment that had taken hold in Tabasco over the last several years, José Silva Mendoza, an elderly merchant from Tenosique, declared his intention to remain neutral in the 1922 elections. In a letter he sent to Garrido Canabal, who had attempted to enlist Mendoza’s support for his gubernatorial campaign, the merchant explained that since partisans on the losing side were wont to “suffer disturbances” afterwards, he had decided

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<sup>63</sup> Pérez Bertruy, *Tomás Garrido Canabal*, p. 59. For a discussion of Salvador Alvarado and Felipe Carrillo Puerto’s influence on the revolutionary politics of Yucatán. See, Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution From Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), especially Part II.

<sup>64</sup> The extraordinary animosities between and within political parties in Tabasco in the late 1910s and early 1920s will not be addressed here, but are explained in great detail in volume one of Enrique Canudas’ *Trópico rojo: Historia política y social de Tabasco, los años garridistas, 1919/1934*; and Ramona Isabel Pérez Bertuy’s *Tomás Garrido Canabal: La conformación del poder revolucionario Tabasqueño 1914-1921*.

<sup>65</sup> In a telegram written by J.D. Ramírez that was printed by the *Partido Liberal de Centla* the candidate accuses his younger cousin of not being a Tabascan, or of having resided for five consecutive years in the state, which would have made him eligible to compete. Garrido Canabal, on the other hand, claimed that Ramírez Garrido’s military affiliation made him ineligible. See, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 1; and Canudas, *Tropico rojo*, pp. 96-98.



that it was better not to get involved in politics. However, he was quick to inform Garrido that, “though you cannot count me among your supporters, neither will I be on the side of your political adversaries.”<sup>66</sup>

If Mendoza’s neutrality was based less on principle and more on economic pragmatism, he may have come to regret his decision not to endorse Garrido Canabal, for when José Domingo Ramírez Garrido dropped out of the race just 29 days into the campaign, Garrido fairly slid into the Governor’s chair.<sup>67</sup> On November 28, 1922 the Tabasean legislature declared that Tomás Garrido Canabal had received an “absolute majority of votes.” His four- year term would begin on January 1, 1923.<sup>68</sup> The final third of this chapter offers an analysis of the beginnings of *garridista* reformism in revolutionary Tabasco.

#### A Will but Not Necessarily a Way: State-sponsored Educational Endeavors in 1923

On the very day his victory was announced, Tomás Garrido Canabal wrote a three-page memorandum to President Obregón. A veritable wish list, the governor-elect’s memo solicited Obregón’s support for a number of state projects. Among the favors he sought was a presidential order to release funds for Tabasco’s Escuela Granja.<sup>69</sup> Established in 1921, the semi-official Escuela Granja was part of a federally funded initiative to promote technical training in agriculture. Located in a “healthy” and

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<sup>66</sup> José Silva Mendoza to Tomás Garrido C., 4 October, 1922, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 1.

<sup>67</sup> National politics significantly influenced the 1922 election in Tabasco. In this arena, Garrido Canabal, who received the endorsement of President Álvaro Obregón, and his powerful Minister of the Interior, Plutarco Elías Calles had a definite advantage over his older cousin. See Martínez Assad, *Breve historia*, p. 123.

<sup>68</sup> “Decreto #27”, *Tabasco decretos del honorable congreso del estado libre y soberano de Tabasco, 1915-1926*, (Villahermosa: Publicaciones de la Legislatura Al H. Congreso del Estado Libre y Soberano de Tabasco, 1984), pp. 239-240.

<sup>69</sup> “Memorandum”, 28 November, 1922, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 2.



“picturesque” spot on the outskirts of Villahermosa, the Escuela Granja was housed in a Porfirian-era Experimental Agricultural Station whose buildings and grounds were appropriate to its educational mission. Unfortunately, despite its lovely headquarters, the school suffered economic privations that seriously hindered its ability to function. In fact, Garrido, a passionate Escuela Granja supporter, had called upon Obregón to order the disbursement of funds on at least one previous occasion.<sup>70</sup>

Budgetary constraints and untimely payments were particularly frustrating for Escuela Granja advocates because the school’s purpose was so lofty. In a June 1922 letter urging Tabasco’s seventeen municipal presidents to underwrite the educational costs of one or two of their locale’s poorer children, José Ochoa Lobato described the Escuela Granja as a locus of liberation and reform. By supporting a child or two at the Granja, Ochoa Lobato suggested, municipal representatives would help elevate the campesino’s degraded existence.<sup>71</sup> Notwithstanding Ochoa’s class-conscious rhetoric, the Granja was not just intended for the children of the rural poor. In a promotional flier signed by the school’s administrators, parents whose children had completed fourth grade were urged to send them to the Granja for advanced agricultural training. Advised that municipal scholarships were available, parents were also informed that for a peso a day their child would receive instruction, housing, food, clean clothes and medicine at the Granja.<sup>72</sup> Many families, of course, could never have afforded to pay \$30 pesos a month for one child’s schooling, so it seems likely that non-pensioned students at the Granja hailed from either middle class or wealthy households.

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<sup>70</sup>Leandro Martínez to Tomás Garrido, 1 January, 1921, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 4; and José Ochoa L. to Tomás Garrido C., 28 June, 1922, caja 4, exp. 1.

<sup>71</sup>“Telegrama a los municipios del estado”, 21 June, 1922, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 5.

<sup>72</sup>Escuela Granja “Simon Sarlat” promotional flier, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 5.

As historians of Mexico have shown with great empirical richness, a central mission of the Mexican Revolutionary State was to educate its citizenry into leading healthier and more “productive” lives.<sup>73</sup> In Tabasco, Garrido and his reformist collaborators were fairly obsessed with bringing schooling opportunities to the state’s poor and illiterate majority; and at the close of its first month in office the Garrido administration approved a comprehensive list of educational expenditures for the year 1923. Totaling more than three hundred thousand pesos, the one-year budget allotted funds for the ninety-plus public schools sprinkled throughout the state.<sup>74</sup> That a generous budget was approved so promptly and in such financially troubled times underscores the Garrido government’s commitment to public education.<sup>75</sup> But the task of improving Tabasco’s abysmal educational infrastructure would be a daunting one, and it would appear that the government was unable to deliver upon its promise to disburse more than \$300,000 to public education.

In March of 1923, less than two months after Garrido signed the public education budget, D. Ocaña de del Angel Cortés, the head of Tabasco’s Department of Education, sent a letter to a high official in Obregón’s cabinet. In it, she painted a very bleak picture of Tabasco’s schooling system. Her three-page missive to General Manuel Pérez Treviño

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<sup>73</sup>See, for example, Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997), and *The State, Education and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982); Stephen E. Lewis, “Revolution and the Rural Schoolhouse: Forging State and Nation in Chiapas, Mexico, 1913-1948.” Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1997; Marcela Tostado Gutiérrez, *El intento de liberar a un pueblo: Educación y magisterio tabasqueño con Garrido Canabal: 1924-1935* (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991); and Elise Rockwell, “Schools of the Revolution: Enacting and Contesting State Forms Tlaxcala, 1910-1930” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation*.

<sup>74</sup> *Presupuesto de Egresos del Ramo de Educación Pública del Estado de Tabasco* (Villahermosa: 1923).

<sup>75</sup> Tabascan historian Enrique Canudas credits the Garrido administration with creating special taxes to support education and argues that despite economic obstacles and political turbulence, some progress was made in Tabasco’s educational sphere in 1923. See *Trópico rojo*, vol. I, p. 119. A treasury balance sheet from the Municipality of El Centro suggests that a modest amount of money accrued to public education

noted that \$300,000 was needed to rebuild schools, repair furniture, acquire books and pay teachers; and she asked the General to use his influence with the president to obtain aid for Tabasco's pressing educational needs. Angel Cortés' statement that "money is needed, and...the government does not have it" would seem to indicate that the Tabascan government was too broke to deliver on its financial commitment to its troubled school system. The neglect of which she spoke, certainly evident in Tabasco's urban centers, was more pronounced in rural areas.<sup>76</sup> The villages, she observed, "completely lack schools and I am not mistaken in saying that in some of them 10% of the population know how to read and write and in others they have not even seen the shadow of a school teacher."<sup>77</sup>

Financial constraints and the patchy availability of schools and teachers presented real obstacles to Tabasco's educational progress in 1923. Interestingly, one educational institution, "La Providencia," which served poor, female orphans and had the magic combination of resources and facilities, came under attack by the Garrido State. Accused of filling the students' minds with prayer and Catholic doctrine, the privately run school for orphans confronted the state head-on in 1923. How young people were trained, and the value systems they were instructed in, of course, was a central feature of Mexican revolutionary reformism. The following lawsuit from Tabasco allows us to consider the

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via a tobacco tax. See, "Balance de Comprobación y Saldos," 28 February, 1923, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 5, exp. 9.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid. The 1923 budget, in fact, located the vast majority of public schools in the capital and the county seats.

<sup>77</sup> Profa. D. Ocaña de del Angel Cortés to Manuel Pérez Treviño, 9 March. 1923, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 6



very real tensions involved as the ideological and structural bases of Mexican society began to change.

### Losing the Battle and Winning the War: A Failed Anticlerical Episode

On July 26, 1923, the directorate of "La Providencia," a Villahermosa-based beneficence association, presented a request for *amparo* before the District Judge.<sup>78</sup> In it, Sahara Saury de Maldonado and her associates (all of whose last names suggest that they were women of wealth and privilege) reported that on the morning of July 11, two policemen had shown up at Saury's residence asking for the key to the association's building on Ayutla Street. The Policemen informed Saury that the Governor had ordered the occupation of the building, which was called *El Orfanatorio* and that housed a school for orphan girls.<sup>79</sup> Saury, who was not presented with a written order, refused to hand over the key before she could confer with her associates, at which point, she claimed, the policeman broke down the door of the building on Ayutla street, occupying several of its interior rooms. The very same day, "La Providencia" associates tried to meet with the Governor. When they were told he was busy, they lodged a written complaint. This too was ignored. Undeterred in their quest for redress, the women petitioned the court for protection. Their suit accused the Governor, the Inspector General of Police, and a sub-lieutenant in the police force of unlawful and arbitrary acts.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> A legal mechanism unique to Mexico whose closest U.S. equivalent is the injunction, the *amparo* exists to protect Mexican citizens from arbitrary and unconstitutional acts taken against them by government authorities. For a brief description of the *amparo* see the 1999 booklet, *Qué es el poder judicial de la federación?*, a publication put out by Mexico's judicial branch to acquaint citizens with their legal rights. For a detailed study of the historical evolution of the *amparo*, see, Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, *El juicio de amparo y el poder judicial de la federación* (México, 1999).

<sup>79</sup> Perhaps at one time the beneficence association, founded in 1902, had run an orphanage there.

<sup>80</sup> Casa de Cultura Jurídica en el Estado de Tabasco (hereafter CCJET), Juzgado Series Amparo, Penal, Civil (hereafter JAPC), amparos 1923, leg. 2, exp. 56

The three accused parties were ordered to issue statements to the court.

Interestingly, the Police Inspector denied any involvement in the case, even though one of his subordinates, Ciro Ríos, admitted that he, his family, and some neighbors had taken up residence in the building given their urgent need of housing. However, Ríos denied having broken doors to enter the property, claiming that the building had been “unoccupied and open.” Officials in the Governor’s office, meanwhile, responded by telling the judge that it was unaware that the building was in use. For that reason, they had seen fit to occupy the premises for a few days while a public school (*escuela oficial*) was installed there. They added that because the association “La Providencia” had a decidedly religious character, the takeover was justified.<sup>81</sup>

The plaintiffs denied that their school for orphans was religious in character and they provided a list of witnesses who could attest to the institution’s civil nature. These witnesses, including Dr. Diógenes López (who, it is worth noting, would be accused of supporting the de la Huerta rebellion that broke out later that year) stated that the school was secular in nature. The government’s witnesses begged to differ. Answering a set of questions submitted by Governor Garrido, the witnesses characterized the women of “La Providencia” as extremely devout, claimed that the orphans were schooled in “Catholic doctrine”, and alleged that on Sundays and religious holidays the children attended mass with their teachers. Some of the witnesses affirmed that the children were made to pray at the beginning and end of the school day.<sup>82</sup>

Religion and political partisanship were fairly well entwined in revolutionary Tabasco, and Garrido Canabal’s *Partido Radical Tabasqueno* (PRT) was identified as the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

most anticlerical. Perhaps because they knew something about the judge's political (or religious) preferences—or maybe because undercutting the credibility of the government's witnesses just seemed the wisest legal strategy--the plaintiffs asked the court to determine the party affiliation of the state's witnesses. All of the government witnesses admitted that they were members of the PRT and that they received salaries or other forms of compensation from the state or municipal government.<sup>83</sup> While the political preferences of the "La Providencia" board were not revealed, that they found it pertinent to emphasize the party affiliation of the government witnesses would seem to suggest that they were of a different political and spiritual suasion than the Governor.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps the judge shared in these differences, or maybe he simply found the women's legal arguments more compelling. In any event, he ruled in favor of "La Providencia," finding the Governor and Sub-lieutenant Ríos, but not the Chief of Police, culpable of unconstitutional acts. Garrido Canabal, exercising his right to "revisión" (appeal) condemned the District Court for violating the constitutional provision that forbade religious associations from providing primary schooling to the nation's children.<sup>85</sup> His appeal would languish in the court for years, during which time Tabasco's anticlerical program accelerated rapidly.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> One imagines, too, that the plaintiffs' witnesses had their own biases. Diógenes López, it will be remembered supported the de la Huerta rebellion that shook Garrido out of the Governor's chair later that year. He was also one of four Tabascans who lodged a complaint against Garrido before the Permanent Committee of the National Congress in 1925, an episode that will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Taking their cue from the sweeping anticlerical provisions contained in Article 130 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution Tabascan revolutionaries implemented a number of anticlerical measures in their state. For instance, in accordance with the constitutional provision that gave state legislatures the power to determine the number of clergy necessary "for local needs," an anticlerical decree was issued in Tabasco in 1919 limiting the number of priests to one for every 30,000 inhabitants of the state. But Tabascan officials added their own legal twist to their anticlerical measures. By 1925 the state decreed that priests officiating in Tabasco had to be married. A 1927 decree, meanwhile, forbade giving religious names to towns, villages, or anything else for that matter. For a list of these and other anticlerical measures taken in Tabasco see,



### Garrido vs. Foucher: Lasting Enmities

Just weeks before the District Court weighed the evidence in the “La Providencia” case, Judge Octavio A. González and his secretary, César Casasús, were presented with another *amparo* petition. This one accused Governor Garrido and the state legislature of violating the constitutional rights of a wealthy heiress in Frontera. Heir and executor of her husband’s mammoth estate situated along the fertile Gulf Coast, Mathilde Foucher viuda de Brito, was notified in June of 1923 that the Tabascan legislature had decreed the expropriation of nearly half of her property. According to the decree, which was publicly posted in the streets of Frontera after its passage in mid-June, approximately 2, 139 hectares of her 5, 119-hectare estate “La Victoria” would be expropriated in favor of the “public interest.”<sup>87</sup>

The sizeable portion of land to be taken by the state would serve three purposes. Just over 203 hectares was to serve as the grounds for another Escuela Granja, the agricultural training centers read about earlier in this chapter. The remainder, nearly 2000 hectares, would be sold off in plots to the destitute residents of Frontera, as well as to establish agricultural cooperatives. The idea to purchase a portion of the Foucher estate was born in the beginning of June when Garrido had attended a popular gathering in Frontera. During the meeting (which was probably organized by the Unión de Estibadores and Jornaleros, a powerful pro-Garrido union in the port city) local residents explained that their poverty was attributable to a lack of a means of subsistence.

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Ridgeway, “The Cooperative Republic,” p. 199; and Martínez Assad, *El laboratorio*, p. 38-39. I will return to the subject of anticlericalism in chapters five and six of the dissertation.

<sup>87</sup> CCJET-JAPC, amparos 1923, leg. 1, exp. 43.

Moreover, the government claimed, poverty had contributed to the tensions that had arisen of late between workers in Frontera. Garrido and the legislature determined to rectify this situation by expropriating a large swath of the Foucher property, claiming that the land in question was “inactive.”<sup>88</sup>

Since a putative goal of the expropriation was to remedy frictions that had developed between working class laborers in the Port City of Frontera, a bit of background is required. A week before the Foucher expropriation decree was approved, unionized and non-union dockworkers had come to blows over which of the two groups had the right to the (seemingly coveted) jobs of dredging the port. Managed by the North American Dredging Company, the dredging work had been assigned to the less costly “free” laborers. The pro-Garrido labor leader, Quintín Arauz, balked, asserting that only unionized workers should receive port-related jobs. Governor Garrido, who happened to be in Frontera as this conflict was unfolding, lent his support to Arauz’s unionized workers.<sup>89</sup>

Although they were vague about the real sources of the worker tensions in Frontera—such as competition for jobs and government favoritism of the port’s unionized workers -- the Governor and legislature used the worker frictions in Frontera to justify the expropriation of the Foucher’s land. The expropriation decree, it was reported, made explicit reference to the labor struggles in Frontera, stating that the frictions that had developed between “free” and unionized workers were, “motivated by the great abundance of poor people who lack a means of subsistence.” Significantly Quintín Arauz’s Unión de Estivadores, Jornaleros, y Campesinos weighed in on Foucher

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Martínez Assad, *El laboratorio*, p. 166.

expropriation case.<sup>90</sup> In a message to the court, signed by more than 600 people, the union urged the judge not to grant the amparo.

Mathilde Foucher's legal counsel, on the other hand, felt that the granting of amparo was more than justified. In a lengthy statement to the court, Carlos Foucher claimed that the State had perpetrated a number of illegalities in decreeing the expropriation of his client's estate. One of his principal concerns was that the decree targeted only one person, Mathilde Foucher. Laws, he reasoned, were designed to be general in character, not specific to individuals. To illustrate this point, Foucher suggested that just because the state had the right to legislate over matters of public health, this did not entitle the legislature to order a contagiously ill individual into quarantine. Likewise, though local legislatures were invested with the power to determine under what circumstances the expropriation of private property would contribute to the public good, it was quite another thing to decree the expropriation of one particular property.<sup>91</sup>

A scant three days after the petition was introduced to the court, the judge ruled in favor of Mathilde Brito viuda de Foucher. Carlos Foucher and Rodolfo Brito Foucher, present when the verdict was announced, no doubt rejoiced.<sup>92</sup> Garrido, who was absent

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<sup>90</sup> This is the only time I have seen the word *campesinos* incorporated into the name of this particular union, and my hunch is that it was included to lend credibility to the union's call for the partitioning of the Foucher estate.

<sup>91</sup> Carlos Foucher also questioned whether distributing land to residents of Frontera, Tabasco's second most important city, violated the spirit of national agrarian laws and the constitutional article on which they were based. According to Foucher, land distribution was a rural phenomenon, not an urban one. In some ways, this reasoning had merit. And yet his own testimony put the Foucher property a good seven km. away from the City of Frontera and described the estate as not only having pasture land sufficient for 500 cows, but forest land from which precious woods could be extracted, precisely the kind of land that was expropriated throughout the republic following the Mexican Revolution. In any event, this was not your classic land distribution case, since it was the government's intention to sell the land as individual plots, not distribute it as *ejidos*.

<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, in 1935 Mathilde Foucher's son, Rodolfo Brito Foucher, who spent the Garrido years in Mexico City, organized a "punitive expedition" to Tabasco. This lightly armed action contributed to



from the proceedings, was outraged. In a letter he sent to the judge the following day, Garrido ferociously condemned the ruling and attacked the judge for his “retrograde ideas.” By granting judicial protection to Mathilde Foucher, of course, the court effectively terminated the government’s plans to partition the land in favor of the poor. This provided proof, in Garrido’s view, that many government authorities were as of yet incapable of comprehending the “suffering of the people.”<sup>93</sup>

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These two *amparo* cases from the summer of 1923 underscore the exceptionally pronounced divisions that characterized Tabascan society in the early revolutionary years. These divisions would be keenly felt in December of 1923, when the de la Huerta rebellion toppled Garrido from the Governor’s chair.<sup>94</sup> Garrido, as we know, emerged victorious from that six-month fiasco. For eleven years he convincingly imposed his unique brand of revolutionary reform in Tabasco. Even so, the discontentment and

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Garrido’s downfall. More immediately, though, Foucher would join the de la Huerta conspiracy, even serving as Governor of Campeche during the period of usurpation.

<sup>93</sup>CCJET-JAPC, amparos 1923, leg. 1, exp. 43. Garrido appealed the case, but apparently the land was never taken from the Foucher family. In 1969, a doctoral student named Alan Kirshner interviewed Rodolfo Brito who was then sixty-nine years old. Brito made reference to the attempted expropriation and confirmed that Garrido had never succeeded in obtaining the property. True to his role as Garrido’s principal antagonist, Brito said that the Governor had attempted to acquire a portion of the Foucher estate for personal enrichment. Alan Kirshner, “Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement” Ph.D diss. New York University, 1970, p. 206. Kirshner’s fascinating doctoral thesis was published in Spanish (and with changes) by SepSetentas in 1976.

<sup>94</sup>The de la Huerta rebellion, which was national in scope, broke out following President Obregon’s selection of Plutarco Elías Calles as his presidential successor. Adolfo de la Huerta, who was the figurehead of the movement, was Obregon’s Minister of Finance and a member of the “Sonora Triangle” along with Obregón and Calles. The movement quickly drew adherents. Observes Jean Meyer, “The military rebellion which broke out in December of 1923 was of unexpected gravity, for two-thirds of the army were in active sympathy with the movement.” Jean Meyer, “Revolution and Reconstruction in the 1920s,” *Mexico Since Independence*, Leslie Bethell, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 206. The rebellion had a particularly strong impact in the southeast. Indeed, during the course of the uprising, De la Huerta spent about a month in Frontera, Tabasco. John W. F. Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1926* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 259. Note: John W.F. Dulles, an engineer who lived in Mexico for sixteen years, was the son of John Foster Dulles.

divisions highlighted in this chapter never went away; they hummed incessantly (albeit with varying degrees of audibility) throughout the Garrido era.

## CHAPTER 3

### A GOVERNING MODEL FOR INSECURE TIMES: REFORM, RETRIBUTION, AND THE MAKING OF THE GARRIDO STATE, 1923-1926

The early years of *garridista* reformism cannot be understood apart from the fractious political culture of revolutionary Tabasco and the de la Huerta rebellion that took hold there. For six months, fighting between de la Huerta forces and the pro-Obregón (qua Garrido) troops wreaked havoc in the state. Not surprisingly, certain actions taken by the rebels in those fateful months became unforgivable acts of treachery in the eyes of the Garrido State. The simple fact that the rebels successfully seized power was enough to spark a taste for revenge, but the execution of the pro-Garrido labor organizer, Quintín Arauz, who promptly acquired the title “martyr of Tabascan socialism,” and the personal attacks on the Garrido family’s considerable assets, made the desire for retribution greater still.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, those individuals who acted “heroically” to defend the deposed regime during the rebellion were poised to reap significant rewards once the *garridistas* regained power. For political clientelism (an exchange common in Latin America whereby a government official, regional boss, or local cacique provides services and protection to their “constituents” in exchange for loyalty and/or votes) remained a prominent feature of Tabasco’s political life in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the assassination of Quintín Arauz, see, Geney Torruco Saravia, *Villahermosa: Nuestra Ciudad* (Villahermosa: Ayuntamiento Constitucional del Municipio del Centro, 1988), p. 536. For a brief note about rebel attacks on Garrido’s father’s assets, see, telegram to Horacio Lacroix from Tomás Garrido, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 7, exp. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Fallaw provides a nice discussion of this political phenomenon in *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 7-8. For a compelling analysis on how political clientelism is expressed in present day (urban) Argentina



The *garridistas*--whose governing agenda had been shelved for the six months that the *delahuertistas* held power—recaptured Tabasco in June of 1924 with both revenge and reform in mind. Government policy in the 1924-1926 period reflects this dialectic. On the one hand, a spate of reform laws covering such areas as labor, housing, and voting rights for women confirmed Garrido's reputation as a socially innovative and vigorous reformer. On the other hand, a number of punitive decrees and violent extra-legal actions directed toward regime opponents exposed the retaliatory face of *garridismo*.<sup>3</sup> These two governing strategies were hardly unique to revolutionary Tabasco. After all, fledgling revolutionary regimes tend to concern themselves with incapacitating the political opposition and consolidating support for the government via a program of social reform. Yet while it may have been a matter of regime survival to link reform and retribution, this chapter argues that the political costs of developing such an approach to governance were nevertheless high.

This chapter explores the multiple and contradictory facets of the early Garrido regime. Innovative, compassionate, rigid and overbearing, the *garridistas* combined revolutionary vision and cacique-style control to consolidate their fledgling government. Tightly woven into this discussion of regime consolidation is an assessment of how

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see Javier Auyero, *Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup>Legal sanctions against de la Huerta rebels were reasonable responses to treasonous activity. For example, a 1925 decree abrogated the political rights of civilian and military supporters of the de la Huerta rebellion. Specifically, those people who had taken up "arms to combat the constitutional government" were to be deprived of the right to vote, run for elected office, or serve public posts at the state or municipal level for a period of ten years. See, Decreto #10, *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Tabasco* (hereafter, *POET*) 2 July, 1925, p. 4. However, the State did not limit its public sanctions to those who willfully aided the rebellion. In a measure that may have been motivated by a dearth of funds in the state treasury, the Garrido government invalidated birth and marriage certificates. Though Decree #4 did not specify whether or not additional payment was due, it stated that all marriage and birth certificates issued during the rebellion had to be re-validated by the Garrido government. (Death certificates provided during the de la Huerta interlude were considered legitimate). The symbolic power that would have accrued to the Garrido State

government policies were popularly received. Let us turn first to the labor sector.

Deeply committed to improving the living standards of Tabasco's poorest members, it might be expected that the Garrido regime met nearly universal acclaim among the laboring classes. This was not the case. As the following section shows, *garridista* labor policies alienated significant segments of the working class.

### The Resistance Leagues: Labor Organization and Political Consolidation

In 1922 a laborer from Frontera named José Pool wrote a letter to Tomás Garrido Canabal. It was Pool's opinion that Tabasco's future governor needed to devote attention to the labor question, implementing laws designed to protect workers without damaging the capitalist class. In short, Tabasco needed a leader who would "establish a just balance between capital and work."<sup>4</sup> Subtly cautioning the gubernatorial candidate against extreme or divisive actions, Pool expressed his hope that Tabasco would have a "lawful and just" governor, who, when it came to addressing labor issues, would surround himself with "honorable people." Pool believed that the government's approach to labor should be "detrimental to no one" and that the law should provide for "EQUALITY, EQUALITY... always EQUALITY."<sup>5</sup>

In 1922, Pool, like many members of Tabasco's working class, pledged his support to Garrido. It is significant, then, that less than two years after writing this

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once it fashioned itself the only legitimate purveyor of Tabasco's marriages and births is impossible to ignore. Decreto #4, *POET*, 19 July, 1924.

<sup>4</sup> One of Garrido's 1922 campaign promises, which Pool was probably offering a variation of here, was the need to "create a balance between capital and labor."

<sup>5</sup> José Pool to Tomás Garrido C., 27 August, 1922, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 4. (Emphasis in the original.)



amiable, if guarded, letter to the soon-to-be governor, Pool became a major critic of revolutionary Tabasco's labor policy.<sup>6</sup> The issue that would come to distress José Pool was the preferential treatment accorded to workers who were affiliated with the state-sponsored worker entities known as the *Ligas de Resistencia*, or Resistance Leagues.<sup>7</sup>

Established by the governing party in 1924, the Resistance Leagues served the dual function of providing an organizational bulwark against political enemies and making good on Garrido's campaign promise to defend worker rights. Organized by profession (i.e. laundry workers, bread makers, stevedores etc.), the Resistance Leagues were established in each of Tabasco's seventeen municipalities. Once two or more leagues were formed in a single municipality, a branch office would be set up, among whose assignments it was to handle administrative matters, organize cultural events, and deal with complaints that arose among the individual leagues. The municipal branch offices and each of their member leagues were grouped under the *Liga Central de Resistencia del Partido Socialista Radical*—The Central Resistance League of the Radical Socialist Party—based in Villahermosa. The presidency of the *Liga Central de Resistencia*, or LCR, was to be occupied by the person who was serving as Tabasco's Governor.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pool's opposition to parridismo will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Tabasco's *Ligas de Resistencia* were inspired by and modeled after the labor federation of the same name in Yucatán. Founded at the end of Salvador Alvarado's administration, the *ligas* were strengthened by Felipe Carrillo Puerto. With Central Headquarters (the *Liga Central*) in Mérida, "the rural *ligas* (and their urban counterparts based in the labor syndicates) would serve as the constituent units of a muscular, ideologically socialist party that would transform productive relations throughout the region." See, Joseph, *Revolution from Without*, pp. 112, 115-116.

<sup>8</sup> Partido Socialista Radical, *Tabasco Actual*, 1929, p. 24; and Liga Central de Resistencia, *Código Obrero*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Villahermosa, Tab., 1934, p. 12. According to Stanley Rex Ridgeway, "the league was intended to forestall any efforts by the CROM (the dominant national labor organization) to control the Tabascan working class, and the *Liga Central* successfully realized this goal." *The Cooperative Republic*, p. 183. In later years, the LCR had a number of disputes with CROM-affiliated Tabascan workers.



Vertically organized and officially linked to the governing party, the stated goal of the resistance leagues, was to “elevate the economic status” of the laboring classes and defend them against capitalist “greed.”<sup>9</sup> Yet in what appear to be the founding statutes, published in the official party newspaper, *Redención*, the LCR revealed itself to be more than a state-sponsored union striving for the material betterment of the laboring masses. It was an eminently political structure designed to give organizational muscle to the Garrido regime. For example, all league members were considered members of the Partido Socialista Radical (PSR), and the General Assembly not only provided a forum to discuss salaries, work hours and strikes, but also who the most viable candidates were for elected office.<sup>10</sup> Mostly concerned with state offices, the LCR also lent its organizational endorsement to politicians at the national level. In 1926, a newspaper correspondent from Mexico City reported on a massive march he witnessed in Frontera in honor of former president Álvaro Obregón. With Garrido and a collection of “beautiful ladies” at its head, the human parade consisted of “more than 4,000 souls, all of them affiliated with the resistance leagues of this municipality.”<sup>11</sup>

In a congratulatory letter he sent to Tomás Garrido in 1924, soon after the LCR was established, R.F. Flores, a political activist from the neighboring state of Campeche, praised the political function of the resistance leagues. This situation was a marked contrast, in Flores’ opinion, to the union movement in the neighboring state of Veracruz, where workers were given “complete support from the socialist government, receiving

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<sup>9</sup> *Tabasco Actual*, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> “Estatutos de la Liga Central de Resistencia del Partido Socialista Radical”. *Redención*, 24 September, 1924,

pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Santiago Ocampo to the *Demócrata*, 11 April, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 6.

attention etc. etc. [but] when it [came] time to help[ing] this government, they [were] the first ones to take up arms against [it], forgetting that the reaction will never be a friend to the laboring classes.”<sup>12</sup> Flores’ mention of “the reaction” is surely a reference to the de la Huerta rebellion, which rocked a number of Mexican states in 1923-1924 and manifested itself with particular force in both Veracruz and Tabasco.<sup>13</sup> There is absolutely no question that in Tabasco, a crucial purpose of the *ligas* was to strengthen the official party by mobilizing the “masses.”

A September 1924 edition of *Redención* offers a preliminary sense of who constituted Tabasco’s “organized masses.” Among the twenty-odd groups listed, there was a mechanics league, a bricklayer league, a baker league, a graphic arts league, a *campesino* league and a milk sellers’ league. The existence of a merchant league suggests that league membership was not limited to “traditional” working class elements.<sup>14</sup> Predominantly a male organization, it also contained women workers. For example, Luz Mendoza from the municipality of Jonuta announced the formation of a League of Cooks, Laundresses, and Small Eatery Workers in 1926, and laundresses were organized in Frontera by 1925.<sup>15</sup> Female teachers joined their male counterparts in the teacher leagues, although it is not certain if male and female teachers met in the same

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<sup>12</sup> R.F. Flores to Tomás Garrido C., 17 September, 1924, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 6, carpeta.

<sup>13</sup> Flores did not distinguish between rural and urban workers in Veracruz when he condemned them for joining up with the reactionaries. However, according to Heather Fowler Salamini, among the Veracruz peasants anyway, “only a small percentage” joined the rebel mobilization. In fact, by “late December the [peasant] league’s leaders had already begun actively recruiting peasants to organize paramilitary units in support of Obregón’s federal forces.” See, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920-1938* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> “Liga Central de Resistencia del Partido Socialista Radical”, *Redención*, 12 September, 1924, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Luz Mendoza to Presidente Liga Central Resistencia, 19 April, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 4; and Irene González de C. to Tomás Garrido, 16 July, 1925, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 7, exp. 1.

venues. Generally speaking, the leagues, like most professions, were segregated by gender.

Laundresses, water carriers and other of Tabasco's poorest workers probably found the social benefits associated with league membership a compelling reason to join. A sampling of the social assurances enumerated in the Worker Code, which was first introduced in 1925, included an eight hour workday (though nightshifts were not to exceed six hours), provisions for establishing fair minimum salaries, producer and consumer co-ops, worker saving accounts, emergency funds, schooling, rudimentary forms of insurance, medical benefits, and monetary payments to the widows and children of deceased league workers. Interestingly, widowers were not specified for the life insurance benefit, even though women also joined worker leagues. However, the provision in the Worker Code that allowed working-mothers to breastfeed without a deduction in pay acknowledged women's presence in the work force.<sup>16</sup>

The documentary record demonstrates that league members and their families meant to take advantage of these benefits. In 1925, a worker named Francisco Méndez wrote to Tomás Garrido (who by virtue of being Governor of Tabasco, was also the President of the *Liga Central de Resistencia*). Méndez indicated that his daughter had died and begged Garrido to order the league treasurer to advance him fifty pesos, presumably to pay for his child's funeral expenses. Méndez asked if he could pay back

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<sup>16</sup> Código Obrero, pp. 11, 28-29, 33, 38, 43. Unfortunately the only copy of the Código Obrero I was able to find is the third edition published in 1934. The last page of this booklet indicates that the Código was first introduced in 1925. It is possible that the reforms I have listed above were not part of the first edition, although other documentary evidence suggests to me that the benefits listed above were at least theoretically available soon after the Leagues were founded. For example, a newspaper advertisement from 1924 informed league workers that they could receive free medical care at a certain doctor's office in Villahermosa simply by presenting their worker identification card.



the sum in 5 peso installments over the next ten pay periods.<sup>17</sup> In another instance, the widow of the president of the Banana Worker's League in Frontera asked for a monthly sum for herself and her son after her husband drowned while loading fruit.<sup>18</sup> Workers in the state capital, moreover, must have taken comfort in the knowledge that should they or members of their family get sick, they could receive free treatment from a local physician simply by presenting their league identification card.<sup>19</sup>

Many Tabascans readily joined the leagues, as countless archived memos announcing the formation of new ones attest. Even so, the government realized that some workers would resist joining, and soon after the leagues were created, the official party newspaper, *Redención*, ran advice on how league members could recruit non-leagued workers. One way was to persuade reluctant workers that joining was the best way to assure their "conservation and defense."<sup>20</sup> In addition, and taking into consideration that many workers were very poor, would-be recruiters could waive dues payments for the months that had transpired between January and the month in which the worker joined the league. (An initial membership payment of one peso was followed by a monthly collection of dues.) The LCR would also investigate ways to economically promote league membership through propaganda in all of Tabasco's "pueblos." These and other

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<sup>17</sup> Francisco Méndez N. to Tomás Garrido C., 28 November, 1925, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 7, exp. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Eldmira Durán Viuda de Rodríguez to Tomás Garrido C., 22 September, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 5. While the outcome of her petition is not known to me, the Código Obrero stipulated that the widows of workers who died in work-related accidents were entitled to 25% of their deceased husbands' salary. This entitlement would end if the woman remarried or stopped living "honestly." Her single child would have been entitled to a monetary payment equal to 15 percent of his father's salary, according to Article 125 of the Worker Code. Children were entitled to this benefit until the age of eighteen, although payments to deceased workers' daughters ceased upon marriage. See, Código Obrero, p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> "Aviso" *Redención*, 19 September, 1924, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> The word defense, I would argue, should be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, workers needed to defend their material interests, which had been jeopardized over time due to the asymmetrical relationship between capital and labor. On the other hand, organized workers were needed to shore up the Garrido regime in what remained a politically hostile atmosphere.

“prudent” recruitment strategies were recommended, but if these efforts failed, boycotting and sabotage were permitted.<sup>21</sup>

Coercive measures were, in fact, used. On October 27, 1925 Felipe Ortíz, a bakery owner in Tenosique whose business had been declared “boycotted” by the local league, wrote a letter to the District Judge in Villahermosa requesting an *amparo*. The official charged in the case was Santos Contreras, the President of the Artisans League, who was serving as the interim municipal president of Tenosique. According to Felipe Ortíz, Contreras had threatened to close down his bakery because he did not wish to belong to the league. Not only had he been threatened with business closure, Ortíz added, but with a fine and imprisonment, as well. Furthermore, he had been prevented from unloading the flour he had purchased for his business.<sup>22</sup>

As evidence of Contreras’ harassment, Ortíz provided the judge with a letter he had received on October eighteenth, which stated:

Compañero Felipe Ortíz,

In today’s session of the Artisans’ League it was agreed that by virtue of your not wanting to register as a *compañero* you are terminally prohibited from continuing in your labors as a baker, in effect, you have been declared boycotted.

Land and Liberty,

The President of the Artisans’ League, S. Contreras<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately for Ortíz, the judge dismissed the case. In the court’s opinion, the *amparo* had no legal basis because Santos Contreras was deemed a private citizen, not a

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<sup>21</sup> “Compendio de los Postulados del Partido Socialista Radical” *Redención*, 1 January, 1925, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> “Demanda de Amparo promovida por Felipe Ortiz contra actos del C. Presidente de la Liga de Tenosique” CCJET-JAPC. Amparos 1925, Leg. 1, exp. (sin número).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

government authority.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps Ortíz was familiar with the mechanism of the *amparo* and took advantage of Contreras' interim stint as municipal president to present his petition before the District Judge; in any case, he felt that Contreras had used his position as municipal president to ratchet up the possible punishments. Ortíz claimed, after all, that he had been threatened with imprisonment. The threat of jail time would have had intimidation value coming from the municipal president, certainly, but would have been meaningless coming from the President of the Artisan League.

The pressure that the Artisans League exerted over Felipe Ortíz undoubtedly angered some local observers, but inasmuch as this 1925 dispute involved a single baker in a remote region of the state, any negative repercussions for the Garrido regime would have been minimal. Worker conflicts that erupted in Frontera's export sector, however, were frequently volatile, and due to the active commercial nature of the port, more was at stake for the government politically and economically speaking. It was in Frontera, after all, where the foreign capitalists who were heavily invested in the state economy were most likely to develop their opinions about the stability and profitability of their business enterprises.

#### Controversy at the Port: Labor, Commerce and International Capital

Today, Tabasco's port city of Frontera is a ghost of its former self. Sorry looking fishing boats rock languidly along the wharf, and independent fisherman, while able to eke out a living, complain about poor catches. Run down buildings are reminders of better times. So too the comments of a fisherman I approached during a 2001 visit to

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<sup>24</sup> A skeptic might argue that in a ploy to place him beyond the reach of the *amparo*, Contreras was "conveniently relieved" of his post as Tenosiquies's municipal president when the case against him



Frontera, "Many years ago there was another wharf" he said, pointing off in the distance. "It was very active." Frontera's shallow port, never sufficiently dredged, is one factor that accounts for the town's decline. Yet even with the port's aggravating lack of depth, Frontera once managed to be a bustling port town; its dynamic economy propelled, in large part, by the Tabascan agricultural and forest exports that moved through its harbor to the sea. Barges and steamboats, laden with such valued commodities as precious hardwoods and bananas, regularly occupied the harbor. Foreign and Mexican capitalists frequented the town's hotels and restaurants as their business was being transacted, boosting the local economy. Meanwhile, a vibrant working class movement, which organized for more equitable treatment from the commercial houses stationed at the port, contributed to the port's social and economic dynamism.

For all its vibrancy, however, the worker movement in Frontera was bitterly divided during the Garrido era, and fights that broke out between league members and independent workers sometimes turned deadly. Godfredo Hernández reported on one such bloody worker confrontation in 1926. The clash that broke out between Frontera policemen and non-leagued dockworkers will be discussed at length in the following chapter. Suffice it to say for now that Hernández rued the image problem that Tabasco might suffer abroad as a result of such wanton violence in the port city. Frontera, after all, was a port of importance and enjoyed regular communication with the United States.<sup>25</sup>

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appeared before the judge.

<sup>25</sup> AHFT, Fondo Obregón-Calles, Proyecto Tabasco (hereafter, OCPT) rollo 6, "Informes" exp. 154. Stanley Rex Ridgeway reports that just weeks after this violent incident, a new clash broke out between "free" and unionized workers on the banana docks. When members of the Tabascan Worker Federation started loading bananas onto two cargo ships, league activists threatened violence. Meanwhile, the fruit transport ships remained in Frontera's harbor, their fruit at risk of spoiling. In determining which of the two groups would be permitted to load, Ridgeway reports, "Garrido decided that the Resistance League, as

As Godfredo Hernández surely knew, U.S. business interests in Frontera had a history of disagreement with the *garridista* labor block. In the summer of 1923, for example, tensions arose when labor leader Quintín Arauz warned the manager of the North American Dredging Company, who had been hiring the lower-paid “free workers,” that all workers involved with the dredging of the port had to belong to the union.<sup>26</sup> Bolstered by Garrido’s backing of the unionized workers, Arauz presented the manager with a list of union-approved wages.<sup>27</sup> If these wage amounts were comparable to those recorded in a 1923 worker contract drawn up by Arauz, they must have vexed the North American manager, who was accustomed to paying more modest wages.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, sometime in 1923, a federal port official in Frontera informed then-President Álvaro Obregón that the manager of the North American Dredging Company had complained about the high wages demanded by organized workers, and had even threatened to abandon the project.<sup>29</sup>

In any event, when in 1926 Godfredo Hernández invited President Calles to imagine what the economic repercussions for Tabasco (and Mexico) might be by developing a bad reputation in the United States, he was attempting to undermine the credibility of *garridismo* at the national level; but while Garrido was a controversial

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Tabasco’s only officially recognized labor union, would load the vessels.” See, “The Cooperative Republic,” p. 241.

<sup>26</sup>In this period Frontera’s unionized port workers belonged to the Unión de Estibadores, Jornaleros y Carretilleros del Puerto de Frontera. Arauz was their president.

<sup>27</sup>Martínez Assad, *El Laboratorio*, p. 166.

<sup>28</sup>Although I don’t have precise figures on salaries paid in the export zone in 1923, I would bet that they were significantly less than the wages listed in Arauz’s worker contract (even if we consider that foreign companies sometimes paid more than the local minimum wage). Under the terms of Arauz’ contract, wheelbarrow workers, stevedores and *jornaleros* (whose jobs were not specified) were to receive \$4.50 a day. Winch workers were to be paid \$5.50 and overseers were to receive \$9.00. These wages would be increased by 75 centavos if loading and unloading took place out in the harbor and not from the wharf. Moreover, if the workers were operating from a boat in the harbor, meals had to be provided. See, “Contrato”, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 5, exp. 3.

<sup>29</sup>AHFT-OCPT, rollo 2, “conflictos laborales” exps. 21-23.

statesman, whose governing apparatus and system of labor organization had frustrated many a foreign capitalist with economic interests in Tabasco, Calles knew that Garrido was an economic pragmatist who creatively courted foreign investment. For instance, in 1924, Garrido had invited a group of prominent businessmen and academics from New Orleans to acquaint themselves with Tabasco's abundant natural resources. In fact, Calles himself had been on board to welcome them.

#### The 1924 New Orleans Commercial Delegation to Tabasco

On November 25, 1924, Walter Parker, the Chairman of the New Orleans Association of Commerce, wrote to Governor Garrido to thank him for the "very great hospitality and kindness" the Louisiana delegation had been shown during their two-week visit in Tabasco. Telling Garrido that the delegation members had "discussed the problems of your most fertile section at great length," Parker assured the Tabasco governor that they would "invoke the aid of strong interests in the United States and do what we can to be of service to you and your people." A week later, Parker contacted Garrido again. Enclosed in his missive was a letter from H. Giles Martin from the Delgado Central Trade School in New Orleans. Dr. Martin wished to secure some mahogany samples from Tabasco, which his school would "turn into attractive articles" sure to "attract wide attention among furniture manufacturers throughout the [United States]." Within a matter of months Garrido had issued orders to forward mahogany samples and other classes of wood to Dr. Martin.<sup>30</sup>

Sending off slabs of mahogany to a trade school in New Orleans, which, if promoted effectively might translate into new markets for Tabasco's wood products, was



a small but important way to strengthen Tabasco's friendly new relationship with members of Louisiana's academic and business community. Acting on an initiative he had proposed to President Obregón, in which each month the Tabascan government would sponsor ten men of science, arts and business interested in familiarizing themselves with the state's riches, Garrido hosted a fourteen member travel delegation in 1924. Including college professors, an engineer, a politician, a representative of the New Orleans Banking Association, and, of course, the Chairman of the New Orleans Association of Commerce, the delegation set sail from New Orleans aboard the steamer "Atlantida." So esteemed were the travelers that they received a visit by President-elect Plutarco Elías Calles and his two daughters during a stop in Tampico.<sup>40</sup>

Once in Tabasco, the foreigners' investing appetites were whetted with trips and meetings of various sorts. They were taken to the offices of International Petroleum Company, visited a sawmill (where trunks of mahogany harvested from forests in Tabasco and Guatemala were being prepared for export), and sailed along the Grijalva River from which they enjoyed views of towering banana plants. Later, in Villahermosa, the Governor and deputies from the local congress received the travelers in the government palace. During his welcoming remarks, Garrido took the opportunity to expound on his vision of a productive partnership between the United States and Tabasco. According to the delegation report, Garrido told the visitors, "Tabascans are looking for the help of the United States and particularly the market of the country. The people have had enough of revolution and civil war and are eager to protect the foreign capital that is invested for the development of commerce here." The North American

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<sup>40</sup> Correspondence between Walter Parker and Tomás Garrido, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 6, exp. 4.

<sup>41</sup> AHCT-OCPT, rollo 4; and "Los enviados de la ciudad," 1925, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 8, exp. 4.

visitors, for their part, made evident their wish that the United States would “extend a hand to help” the Tabascans.<sup>32</sup>

Dances, meals (where liquor, not yet outlawed, flowed freely) and a trip to the Palenque ruins in Chiapas rounded out the journey, and if there was any truth to the rumor that the State had executed a “rebel” who had proposed to disrupt their trip, it did not seem to bother the travelers. It would appear, rather, that the delegation left with positive impressions of Tabasco and its government, since several delegation members exchanged letters with Garrido after their return to the United States.<sup>33</sup>

#### There is no Wrath like a Government Scorned: Punishing the “Infidels”

It is telling that a group of foreign businessmen, whose movements were probably closely monitored by the host government, somehow got wind that a rebel had been killed during their stay in Tabasco, for it suggests that Tabasco’s internal political struggles were evident even to mere passers-through.

That Tabasco continued to be embroiled in conflict in the years following the de la Huerta uprising was also a matter of national news, due, in part, to the efforts of a group of Tabascan “exiles” in Mexico City who issued allegations of garridista lawlessness and violence to the press. It seems likely that the self-described “Honorable Tabascans” behind an anti-Garrido editorial in *La Prensa*, published in January of 1925, were the same individuals who presented a series of accusations against Garrido before the Permanent Commission of the National Congress the following month.<sup>34</sup> Submitted

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> “Página Editorial” from *La Prensa*, in AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 8, exp. 5; and *Texto de la Acusación Presentada ante la Comisión Permanente del Congreso de la Unión Contra el Gobernador de Tabasco Lic.*

to the Permanent Commission with the intention of getting Garrido removed from office, the *Texto de la Acusación* was a damning compilation of crimes, including large and small-scale cattle theft, extortion, and political murder. Additionally, the text included information intended to undermine Garrido's revolutionary credentials. For example, the *Texto's* authors reported that the Garrido family was of latifundista extraction and that their properties in Tabasco and Chiapas contained "the largest extension of natural pasture that exists in the entire Republic after the Terrazas [family] in Chihuahua." Despite their vast holdings, the *Texto* went on, the Garrido family had been immune from the land expropriation laws that had broken up the estates of other Tabascan families.<sup>35</sup>

A laundry list of misfortunes befallen Tabascan elites was not bound to get Garrido's accusers very far, at least not among the more reform-minded Congressmen. Perhaps with this thought in mind, the *Texto's* authors cited a land expropriation case that had proved unfortunate not only for the wealthy proprietor, but also for a poor indigenous community. According to the *Texto*, in order to populate sections of the property seized from Mathilde Foucher Vda. de Brito in June of 1924, the Garrido government had set fire to the indigenous pueblo San Francisco el Peal, forcing its now homeless inhabitants to take up residence on the confiscated property of Señora Foucher.<sup>36</sup>

It did not take long for Tabasco's garridista block in the National Congress to submit a rebuttal. On March 15, Tabasco's two senators and three of its deputies issued a

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Tomás Garrido Canabal, por los Señores Aristeo P. González, Dr. Diógenes López, Nicolás Ruiz Bellizia, Mariano Ortiz y Amado Zapata Aguilar. (Tip. Guerrero Hnos.: México, 1925). The anti-Garrido Deputy, Justo A. Santana was likely behind the accusation. See, Enrique Canudas, *Trópico Rojo*, vol. I., p. 144.

<sup>35</sup> *Texto de la Acusación*, pp. 1-2, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. While it is quite possible that the Garrido regime encouraged people to occupy the Foucher estate, the property was never officially seized by the government. According to Alan Kirshner Rodolfo Brito Foucher "had made many powerful friends in Mexico City, including a close relative of Calles. They convinced Garrido to forget Brito's property." *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, p. 207.



statement defending Governor Garrido against the “the absurd accusations” presented to the Permanent Commission.<sup>37</sup> Their report refuted (nearly) point by point the criminal acts attributed to Garrido and his supporters and charged the authors of the accusatory document, Aristeo P. González, Dr. Diogenes López, Nicolás Ruiz Bellizia and Mariano Ortiz, of being rich and reactionary landowners. Printed up as a thick, attractive booklet (probably in late March or April), and no doubt circulated among members of Mexico’s two legislative chambers and beyond, the March 15 rebuttal was accompanied by scores of telegrams and letters attacking the anti-revolutionary orientation of the accusers. The booklet was illustrated with photographs of San Francisco el Peal, presumably to provide “evidence” that the community had not been burned. Among the “exculpatory” pictures was a photograph of San Francisco el Peal’s school children with their two teachers.<sup>38</sup>

A second, and frankly more disturbing, accusation against Garrido hailed from the state of Campeche. Prepared for submission to the Permanent Commission in the third week of March, the *segunda acusación* was gorier in its details. Surely intended to compel the nation’s legislators into action, the report described supposed acts of torture and assassination by Garrido thugs. One of most heart-wrenching episodes cited in the report was the murder of Francisco Thompson and his fourteen year-old son, Federico, at the finca “La Mercedes” in Palenque. Seeing his father cut open and his insides removed, in an act reminiscent of “the ancient sacrifices of the Aztecs,” young Federico

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<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, one of these deputies, J. Aguilar Fiachi, soon switched sides, joining Garrido’s attackers. See Enrique Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. I., p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> *Descargo que Hacen los Representantes de Tabasco sobre las Absurdas Acusaciones que Cuatro Reaccionarios Tabasqueños Hicieron al Lic. Tomás Garrido C., Gobernador Constitucional del Estado* (Imprenta Morelos: Mexico D.F., 1925). The pictures of San Francisco el Peal were supposedly taken on March 19, 1925, soon after the investigation into *garridista* lawlessness began. It is worth noting that San Francisco el Peal, in photos anyway, would have been virtually indistinguishable from other rural communities in Tabasco. Which is to say, if they had wanted to, the *garridistas* could have submitted

began to scream, but “his lamentations were not heard in those lonely [regions]” and Federico was hung from the branch of a tree and thrust violently to the ground before dying. The bodies of father and son were then kicked toward the graves that “they themselves had dug” and incinerated. According to the *segunda acusación*, the overseer of the finca witnessed these atrocities and reported them to authorities in Salto de Agua.<sup>39</sup>

What appears to be a rough draft of the *segunda acusación* suggests that in their desperation to prove Garrido unfit to govern, individuals may have fiddled with the facts. Its accounting of the Thompson murders (though equally horrifying) differs significantly. It says, “Francisco Phosmps [read Thompson] and his son were cruelly assassinated...they chopped them up leaving them in the fields for the animals to eat.” (The principal perpetrators of the crime, it should be noted, were consistently reported as Pio Garrido Canabal and Pio Garrido Llave, Tomás Garrido’s brother and cousin.)<sup>40</sup> I cite this inconsistency not to suggest that official acts of torture and assassination did not take place--the historical record provides sufficient glimpses of politically motivated homicide to convince me that atrocities did, in fact, occur. Rather, it seems likely that both anti-Garrido and pro-Garrido activists invented, embellished and/or denied certain events to achieve desired outcomes.

As the Thompson case suggests, the high-stakes politics and ideological intensity of the era make it difficult to discern where truth ends and fabrication begins. Letters to newspapers from individuals claiming they had been incorrectly identified as victims of

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photos of a community *other* than San Francisco el Peal, or alternately, photos of a *newly created* San Francisco el Peal, and the national legislators would have been none the wiser.

<sup>39</sup> *Texto de la Segunda Acusación Presentada ante la Comisión Permanente de la Unión Contra el Gobernador de Tabasco, Lic. Tomás Garrido Canabal por los Señores Vespaciano Lastra et al.* AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 7, exp. 1.

Garrido lawlessness further confounds the search for "truth." A March 12 statement sent to the Director of the Mexico City based newspaper *Excelsior* by José E. Quevedo highlights this difficulty:

My Fine Sir:

There appeared published in yesterday's newspaper that you direct...an accusation that the *Señores* Aristeo P. González, Manuel Lacroix, Nicolás Ruiz and Mariano Ortíz made before the Secretary of Agriculture against...Lic. Tomás Garrido Canabal, the current Governor of Tabasco, in which I am mentioned as one of the persons from whom Mr. Garrido has stolen cattle to be sold in Yucatán. As this allegation is inaccurate...I believe it fair to clarify the case. For while it is true that on one occasion local forces took 45 young mules and 20 horses from my finca, "El Corozal," I have never known that Mr. Lic. Garrido was behind it and less so that he has benefited from the theft....<sup>41</sup>

The description of the theft strikes me as intentionally ambiguous. While Quevedo exonerates Garrido from wrongdoing, who the "local forces" were that perpetrated the theft at "El Corozal" is left unclear. The culprits could have been Garrido sympathizers, rebels, or simple bandits. It is also interesting to note that while Quevedo distances Garrido from the crime committed against him, he does not extol the governor, as many people who spoke out in defense of Garrido in this period were wont to do. Since one never knew in revolutionary Mexico how long politicians would stay in power, Quevedo's ambiguous statement might be read as a reasoned attempt at self-preservation.

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<sup>40</sup> Untitled (and partial) document beginning, "Quintero Hermanos, les exigieron diez mil setecientos pesos", AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 8, exp. 7. (Note, the last name of Garrido's cousin should read Garrido Llaven, not Llave. It is frequently misspelled in the documents).

<sup>41</sup> Newspaper clipping found in AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 7, exp. 7. The Quevedo case is also mentioned in *Texto de la Acusación*, p. 10, although the number of stolen horses is reported as 8, not 20.



Some letters penned by individuals who wanted to distance themselves from the allegations made by Garrido's enemies reveal more transparent goals. On January 22, 1925, Angel Correa wrote to the director of the newspaper *La Prensa* claiming that "reactionaries or malcontents" had included him in their editorial as a "witness to acts that they falsely attribute to the Governor of Tabasco," and requesting that the paper print his "formal protest." Two days later, Correa, writing from Veracruz, sent Garrido a copy of the *La Prensa* editorial, his protest to it, and a personal letter in which he reported having "fulfilled his responsibility as a friend." He closed his missive by informing Garrido that he was headed back to Frontera, "to resume my commercial operations...remembering that, as you have told me, you are and will be the protector of regional commerce."<sup>42</sup>

Clearly there were individuals who, regardless of their personal opinions about Garrido's governing style, opportunistically sided with the defense; both Angel Correa and José Quevedo would appear to fit this profile. Other individuals, including members of Tabasco's pro-Garrido state legislature, various municipal presidents, and dozens of the *ligas de resistencia* mounted a vigorous ideological defense of the Governor, accusing his attackers of being, among other things, *delahuertistas* and "enemies of the proletariat." That the *garridistas* were able to marshal such an outpouring of popular support may have helped President Calles, who had been entertaining some doubts about Garrido, to dismiss the defamatory accusations.<sup>43</sup> Popular opinion may also have

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<sup>42</sup> Angel D. Correa to Tomás Garrido C. 24 January. 1925; Angel Correa to "La Prensa". January 22, 1925; and "Página Editorial", *La Prensa*, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 8, exp. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Enrique Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. I., pp. 145-148. Surely many—maybe even most—of these pro-Garrido telegrams represented the "true feelings" of their authors. However, as historian Mary Kay Vaughan reminds us, "local conflicts are difficult for the historian to analyze. They are complex and fluid. Real interests are often masked behind revolutionary...rhetoric and associations; real actors frequently operate through surrogates (organizations, politicians and armed henchmen.) See, *Cultural Politics in*

influenced the nation's senators, whose responsibility it was to prosecute or exonerate the controversial governor from Tabasco.

At the end of the day, it may have been the states rights argument propagated by the pro-Garrido faction that saved the Governor's skin. In a piece that appeared in the Mexico City-based *El Demócrata*, Tabascan Senator Horacio Lacroix, Garrido's uncle and a staunch ally, cited constitutional irregularities in the case against Garrido pending in the National Congress. Lacroix's most significant point was that the authority to judge common order crimes rested with the local legislature, not the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. He argued that by accepting a case not proper to its jurisdiction, the National Congress was violating the sovereignty of the states.<sup>44</sup>

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Obviously, Garrido's attackers failed to get him removed from office in 1925. Tomás Garrido Canabal, it turned out, was destined to rule Tabasco for ten more years as a militant *Callista* governor and regional strongman. Yet in 1925 Garrido had reason to be nervous about his political future. The allegations in the *Texto de Acusación* had apparently disturbed Calles. Moreover, as Enrique Canudas argues, Garrido's strong identification with former president Álvaro Obregón caused the new president to question the depth of the Tabascan governor's loyalty.<sup>45</sup> Garrido's unwavering loyalty to Obregón

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*Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), p. 17.

would have additional consequences in 1926, when Tabascans prepared to elect a new governor.

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<sup>44</sup> “Acusación al Gob. Garrido No Esta Ajustada a Ninguna Ley” *El Demócrata*, 13 October, 1925. This clipping was found in, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 8, exp. 5. A longer version of the States’ rights argument can be found in a legal analysis prepared for the Supreme Court, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 8, exp. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Enrique Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. 1, pp. 151-152.



## CHAPTER 4

### POLITICAL STORMS: THE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION OF 1926

Ramón Marengo was eighteen years old when he was taken down in a hail of bullets and left to die at a marina in Montecristo. The events that precipitated the attack on the young man, which occurred on April 10, 1926, are sketchy. However, it would appear that earlier that day Ramón's father, Manuel Marengo, had received a message from Tomás Garrido, which had prompted him to head for the marina. From there, Manuel Marengo was planning to dispatch his son and a skipper on an errand down river, presumably to satisfy instructions he had received from Garrido. Not finding the motorboat, Manuel sent his son to look for it, at which point young Ramón was mercilessly shot upon. Dashing off a telegram to Garrido later that day, a distraught Manuel Marengo indicated that after the attack on Ramón, he too had come under heavy fire. Meanwhile, in a separate telegram to Garrido, Manuel's wife, María Marengo, indicated that her son had been shot as he boarded the boat in question. She closed her short and painful missive by asking for "guarantees and justice."<sup>1</sup>

Understandably brief, and ambiguously worded, the Marencos' telegrams did not identify their son's attackers. However, a letter written by Manuel Marengo, which was printed on the front page of the Mexico City daily *Excelsior* on April 16, attributed the crime against his son (and other individuals in Montecristo) to Garrido henchmen:

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of this month there arrived in Montecristo, where I currently reside, a group of socialists armed with rifles and pistols, led by Eugenio González and sent by Tomás Garrido. [They] arrived in my motorboat "Carmelita" that they had taken to Frontera on the 7<sup>th</sup>. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, at 1:00 in the afternoon, this group killed my eighteen year-old son for the simple act of

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<sup>1</sup>Manuel Marengo M. to Lic. Tomás Garrido C. and María G. de Marengo to Lic. Tomás Garrido C., telegrams #16 and #23, 10 April, 1926. AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 4.

demanding the vessel. They also assassinated Celestino Martínez, encarcer[ated] local public authorities, stripping them of their positions, and jail[ed] and attack[ed] peaceful people. I managed to survive, despite a heavy round of fire that they directed toward me and my family members.<sup>2</sup>

Manuel Marengo ended his damning account by asserting that “complete panic reign[ed] in Montecristo”—a characterization upheld by his wife María who on the same day that the *Excelsior* printed her husband’s report penned a three-page letter to Tomás Garrido. Commenting on the cruel assassination of her son and the attacks against her husband, María Marengo then went on to describe how the perpetrators had shot at her house “without compunction.” What was more, they had brusquely entered her home to search for weapons, terrifying her other children. In closing her lengthy missive, María Marengo wondered what had gone wrong, since her husband had “always spoken well” of Garrido.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it would appear that not three years earlier her husband had helped save Garrido’s life. During the de la Huerta uprising in Tabasco, Manuel Marengo had transported the besieged *Obregonista* governor to Montecristo in his gasoline-powered motorboat, later helping to set up Garrido in Palenque, Chiapas.<sup>4</sup>

Tantalizing, but fragmentary and ultimately inconclusive, statements about arms caches, boats of sunken merchandise, and enemy intrigues, suggest that prior to the attacks of April 10, *garridista* authorities may have suspected that Manuel Marengo was scheming against the government. Certainly a nervous protestation of loyalty to Garrido by Marengo in another April 10 telegram (presumably written just hours before his son’s murder) suggests that Marengo at least *felt* like a man under suspicion.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not

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<sup>2</sup> “Terribles Cargos Que Se Hacen a D. Tomás Garrido y Compañeros” *Excelsior*, 16 April, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> María Marengo to Tomás Garrido C., 16 April, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Martínez Assad, *El laboratorio*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>5</sup> In it, Marengo insisted that “bad enemies” were spreading misinformation about him. Adding that he was “always” at Garrido’s “orders,” he begged Garrido to order some (unnamed) individuals not to harm him.

Manuel Marengo, who lived in the eastern part of the state where anti-Garrido sentiment was strong, had actively worked against Garrido's government prior to the day his son was killed is unknown to me. What is clear is that following his son's murder Manuel Marengo became one of Garrido's most bitter enemies. The rage of this devastated father found diverse outlets. On the one hand, Manuel Marengo—perhaps in connivance with his brother Ramón—plotted to have Garrido assassinated.<sup>6</sup> On the other, it would appear that Manuel Marengo affiliated with a potent anti-Garrido movement that took shape around the 1926 gubernatorial campaign of Colonel Arturo Jiménez de Lara.

I begin this chapter by way of a family tragedy to underscore the terrific personal passions that influenced the Tabascan gubernatorial race of 1926. As this chapter will show, the *garridistas* faced significant local opposition in 1926. And although not every Tabascan who embraced opposition politics in an attempt to bridle the expanding power of the *garridistas* was motivated by an experience as harrowing as that of the Marencos, the accretion of popular grievances against *garridismo* made for an intense electoral cycle in 1926. Yet the disaffection that some inhabitants of Tabasco felt for *garridismo* tells only part of the story: indeed, the 1926 election cannot be properly understood unless it is linked to politics of a broader scale. For as subsequent paragraphs will show, Tabasco's gubernatorial race became an arena of dispute in which different revolutionary factions at the local, regional, and national level battled for supremacy.

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(atropellarme). Manuel Marengo to Tomás Garrido C., telegram #5, 10 April, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 4.

<sup>6</sup>On Marengo's involvement in a plot to kill Garrido see the letter to Tomás Garrido C. from an unnamed individual in Campeche, 12 June, 1926, AGN-TGC, caja 11-I, exp. 9. Other documents suggest that Manuel's brother may have been behind an effort to kill Garrido, see, note to Sr. Santiago Ruiz from and unnamed individual, 5 June, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 7 and Letter to Homero Margalli from an unnamed individual in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, 30 August, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 6.



To a great extent, the mood and tenor of the election of 1926 can be understood by focusing in on the personal stories of Tabascan citizens. Fueled by personal vendettas, perhaps, as much by differences of opinion over the course that the Mexican Revolution was taking in Tabasco, feelings about the election of 1926 were both deeply felt and highly partisan. But the intensity of the 1926 election went far beyond the passionate rivalries of a socially divided populace. This is because Tabasco in 1926 was associated with one of the most pressing national issues of the day: the question of presidential succession.<sup>7</sup> Understood at some level as a referendum on the return to the presidency of Álvaro Obregón, the Tabascan election was influenced by a host of regional and national actors who felt they had a stake in its outcome.<sup>8</sup>

The 1985 book *Tal cual fue Tomás Garrido Canabal*, written by Amado Alfonso Caparroso, places Garrido Canabal at the heart of the controversy surrounding the re-election of Álvaro Obregón. An “insider account,” written by a close personal aide of the former Tabascan governor, *Tal cual* offers an intriguing look at the broad political dimensions of Tabasco’s 1926 election. Suggesting that Garrido (and Tabasco) were made to “pay dearly” for his early and independent call for a second Obregón presidency,

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<sup>7</sup>Garrido, after all, was the first person to publicly announce that Álvaro Obregón should seek a second term as President, doing so in November of 1925. Dromundo, *Tomás Garrido: Su vida y su leyenda*, p. 109; and Caparroso, Amado Alfonso, *Tal cual fue Tomás Garrido Canabal*, (Mexico. 1985), p. 270. The presidential election was not to take place until 1928. However, according to Enrique Krauze, “in 1926 everything pointed to the return of Obregón.” *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, Hank Heifetz, trans. (New York: HarperPerennial Edition, 1998), p. 425.

<sup>8</sup>Enrique Canudas offers a particularly informative analysis of the 1926 election in *Trópico rojo*, vol. I. With a superb level of detail he shows how anti-Obregón/anti-Garrido politicians and military men at various levels of government meddled in the Tabascan election. Among those who threw in their lot with anti-Garrido forces was Calles’ Minister of Government, Adalberto Tejeda (the former governor of Veracruz). Canudas characterizes Tejeda’s involvement in Tabasco’s gubernatorial race as both an extension of his anti-Obregón sentiment and his personal rivalry with Tomás Garrido Canabal. But, and here he is echoing Alfonso Amado Caparroso (cited below), Canudas suggests that Tejeda probably acted without Calles’ knowledge. Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. I, pp. 159, 178-179, and 219.

Caparoso's account accuses a variety of prominent political and military officials in Mexico City of scheming to undermine *garridismo*.<sup>9</sup> One way they did this was to interfere in the gubernatorial elections of 1926. Disentangling of the dense web of political intrigue that surrounded the 1926 elections contributes greatly to our understanding of revolutionary processes in Tabasco, and Mexico more broadly, and Caparoso and the historian Enrique Canudas, whose 1989 study uncovered additional dimensions of the anti-Garrido conspiracy, are to be thanked for offering a rich vein of historical information in this regard. Inasmuch as the political maneuvers emanating from places outside of Tabasco are crucial to the election story, this chapter too, will explore these research avenues. But elucidating local stories, parsing attitudes on the ground, is an equally important methodological goal. For whether it was to avenge the death of a loved one, as was the case with the Marengo family; to defend the regime of the "proletariat", as was articulated by a militantly pro-Garrido baker's league; or to work independently of the resistance leagues, the goal of the free worker movement, Tabascans in 1926 turned to elective politics to achieve their goals.

### The Gubernatorial Election of 1926: The Contenders

The year 1926 was one of impending political transitions in Tabasco. For one, there was the race for the second Senate seat; and the *Partido Socialista Radical Tabasqueño* nominated Tomás Garrido Canabal as their candidate. In order to pursue his candidacy (and so that he might work to promote the idea of re-electing Álvaro Obregón to the presidency) Garrido formally resigned the Tabascan governorship, from which he

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<sup>9</sup> Caparoso, *Tal cual*, p. 270.



was already on temporary leave, on April 2, 1926.<sup>10</sup> Constitutionally ineligible to serve a second consecutive term as governor, and busy with other political objectives besides, Garrido nonetheless wielded enough influence in Tabasco to choose his own successor. The man he settled on was Ausencio Cruz.

At thirty-five years old, Ausencio Cruz was a relatively young man when he campaigned to be governor of Tabasco. Originally from Puebla, Cruz had soldiered in the Revolution since 1913—serving in such diverse places as Puebla, San Luís Potosí, México, Morelos, Hidalgo and Veracruz.<sup>11</sup> While stationed in Tabasco as a federal army captain, Cruz made a favorable impression upon Tomás Garrido who requested of President Obregón in 1922 that Cruz's assignment there be extended.<sup>12</sup> Apparently that wish was granted. By 1923 Cruz was serving as the Inspector General of Police in Villahermosa-- a position he was holding when the de la Huerta rebellion broke out in December of that year.<sup>13</sup> The *Partido Socialista Radical Tabasqueño* nominated Cruz to be their gubernatorial candidate during their March 1926 convention in Villahermosa.<sup>14</sup> Yet despite the "sincere and spontaneous" applause that greeted the proclamation of his candidacy, it was widely appreciated that his selection had merely formalized Garrido's wishes.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Garrido's endorsement gave Cruz's candidacy an air of inevitability.

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<sup>10</sup> Torruco Saravia, *Villahermosa: Nuestra Ciudad*, vol. II, pp. 645-646. Replacing Garrido as Governor was Santiago Ruiz.

<sup>11</sup> "Un Candidato Popular," *México Pintoresco*, September, 1926.

<sup>12</sup> "Memorandum" AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 2.

<sup>13</sup> La Zona Luz, *Tomás Garrido Canabal: El Hombre del Sureste*, folleto 2, 10 September, 1998, p. 3. Cruz's loyalty during the de la Huerta rebellion was disputed during his gubernatorial run in 1926—with his political opponents accusing him of having sided with the rebels, and the Garrido camp dismissing the allegations as preposterous. Had there been a momentary lapse in loyalty to Garrido, any animosity Garrido might have felt for Cruz had clearly dissipated by 1926. On Cruz's supposed de la Huerta connections see, for example, *Boletín Especial Para el Lic. Tomás Garrido*, AGN-TGC-AP-G, Caja 11, exp. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. I, p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> For a description of the atmosphere of the convention see, "Un Candidato Popular"; and Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. I, p. 179.



As one observer put it in an April letter to Garrido, "Ausencio Cruz will be [governor], because this is what you want, but it is truly regrettable that you have not fixed your eyes on a Tabascan."<sup>16</sup>

One Tabascan who felt snubbed by Garrido's endorsement of Cruz was Belisario Carrillo. Purportedly hoping for the gubernatorial nomination that was bestowed on Cruz, Carrillo broke with Garrido in 1926 and launched his own campaign on the "hitherto unknown" *Partido Nacional Radical* ticket.<sup>17</sup> Although a number of prominent politicians endorsed Carrillo's candidacy, his campaign never mustered much strength in Tabasco. Not so the campaign of Arturo Jiménez de Lara. Thirty years old when he entered the governor's race, the Jonuta native had served as a telegrapher during the Huerta period but later joined the constitutionalist revolution.<sup>18</sup> Jiménez de Lara had also served as the secretary to Carlos Vidal, a personal enemy of Tomás Garrido, who in his capacity as governor of Chiapas in 1926 supported Jiménez' gubernatorial bid both materially and financially.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, the state's Electoral Commission disqualified the candidacies of both Carrillo and Jiménez de Lara.<sup>20</sup> Undaunted by the unofficial status of their campaigns, which, in any case, they attributed to the machinations of the *garridista* controlled electoral body, Jiménez de Lara and Carrillo established residences in

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<sup>16</sup>Letter to Tomás Garrido C., April 21, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 7.

<sup>17</sup>Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, pp. 179, 199. Other individuals who purportedly had their eyes on the governor's chair were Rafael Martínez de Escobar, A. Ocana Payan, Amado Pedrero, Manuel Fernández Escobar, and Eligio Hidalgo Álvarez, many of whom were dogged enemies of Garrido. See, Letter to Tomás Garrido C., April 21, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 7. Luis Felipe Domínguez, the constitutionalist general who had served as governor on two occasions during the Carranza era, also planned a run in 1926. See, Atenta Carta Circular, 5 April, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 4.

<sup>18</sup>AHFT-DGG, rollo 27, "elecciones," folios 1467-1468.

<sup>19</sup>Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, p. 184; Caparroso, *Tal cual*, p. 263.

<sup>20</sup>Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. I, p. 188.

Villahermosa and undertook their respective quests for governor.<sup>21</sup> Today, Belisario Carrillo and Arturo Jiménez de Lara are footnotes in Tabascan political history.

However, their combined effort to remove the *garridistas* from the helm of Tabascan politics literally took the state by storm in 1926.<sup>22</sup>

Although the impact that their campaigns had on Tabasco sometimes alarmed him, Tomás Garrido nonetheless downplayed the significance of Belisario Carrillo and Arturo Jiménez de Lara's candidacies. In a letter to his friend Homero Margalli, for instance, he characterized the men as "old school" politicians incapable of drawing a popular following. It was on that score that Garrido belittled Carrillo as a bourgeois element whose candidacy was funded by the same people who supported Félix Díaz for President. Not one to mince words, Garrido described Carrillo's supporters as "perfidious reactionaries" who despised the proletariat.<sup>23</sup>

Garrido also ridiculed Jiménez de Lara. Insinuating that he was simply an instrument in the hands of some unnamed power-hungry patron, Garrido noted mockingly that in running for governor, Jiménez de Lara was merely: "obey[ing] the orders of his protector, who in an attack of indigestion dreamed [of] the entire population of Tabasco prostrate at his feet offering him tribute, without thinking that in Tabasco we don't have *Chamulas* but a liberated and organized people."<sup>24</sup> Although Garrido never named Jiménez de Lara's "protector," his reference to *Chamulas*—a Tzotzil-speaking

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.; Caparroso ridiculed Carrillo's campaign, saying that he rented a house on Madero Avenue on which he hung a large sign with the name of his party, but never bothered to recruit followers. *Tal cual*, p. 275.

<sup>22</sup> Several violent incidents were attributed to their supporters. On September 24<sup>th</sup>, for example, a league worker named Gregorio Jiménez was assassinated by Captain Fernando Aparicio, a Jiménez de Lara propagandist, bringing to three the number of Cruz supporters who had been killed by Cruz's political opponents. AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Homero Margalli from Tomás Garrido, 26 September, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

indigenous population living in the highlands of Chiapas-- suggests that he meant Governor Carlos Vidal.

### Enemies South of the Border

Carlos Vidal had briefly served as the Military Commander and Pre-Constitutional Governor of Tabasco in 1919. Indeed, under his watch, Tabascans had gone to the polls in what had been another contentious election. Yet even though Vidal had complained in 1919 about the bitter partisanship that had “[sown] hate among the Tabascan family,” he was a major contributor to the partisan mayhem that plagued Tabasco’s electoral proceedings in 1926.<sup>25</sup>

The reasons behind Vidal’s interference in the Tabascan gubernatorial election of 1926 are complex. Garrido’s militant defense of a second Obregón presidency rankled people like Carlos Vidal for whom the constitutional principle of “no re-election” was an inviolable maxim of the Mexican Revolution. (So strong was Carlos Vidal’s opposition to Obregón’s reelection that he backed the Serrano-Gomez rebellion in 1927; indeed he would be murdered alongside Francisco Serrano when a plot to arrest Obregón and Calles was discovered in October of 1927.<sup>26</sup>) It also seems likely that the vigorous anti-clerical campaign being carried out in Tabasco disturbed Vidal, since, as Stephen Lewis notes, the governor, “refused to initiate an anticlerical campaign” in Chiapas.<sup>27</sup> However, Vidal

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<sup>25</sup> On Carlos Vidal’s comments about the bitter election environment of 1919, see, Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. I, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Enrique Krauze, *Mexico Biography of Power*, p. 401; and Stephen Lewis, *Revolution and the Rural Schoolhouse*, p. 130.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Lewis, *Revolution and the Rural Schoolhouse*, p. 130. Religion was highly relevant to the campaign even though the Church issue is frequently muted in the documents. (Out of a small mountain of election-related material, I discovered only a handful of documents that explicitly referred to religion: these were written by the *garridistas* who presumably used the religious issue to discredit their opponents). President Calles, of course, had introduced national legislation to enforce the anticlerical provisions of the



had more personal reasons to oppose Garrido and the governing mandate he sought to extend with the election of Ausencio Cruz. According to Caparroso, Vidal resented Garrido for frustrating the political aspirations that his brother Luis Vidal had in Tabasco.<sup>28</sup>

As the earlier document suggested, Garrido considered Jiménez de Lara's candidacy the brainchild of Carlos Vidal. Given that Jiménez de Lara had worked for Vidal—and that Vidal pumped resources into the Tabascan colonel's campaign--the allegation is not all together far-fetched.<sup>29</sup> In any case, by August, Vidal was actively aiding Jiménez de Lara sympathizers in the Chiapan capital. According to a letter sent from Tuxtla Gutiérrez by an individual who for security reasons decided not to sign his name, Governor Vidal had recently armed thirty Jiménez de Lara militants who were headed to Tabasco "to attack *garridismo*." An expeditionary team that included ex-de la Huertista leaders and policemen, it had departed from the Hotel Paco after Jiménez de Lara and members of the local police force had provisioned the men with horses.<sup>30</sup>

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Constitution in June of 1926; so prudent politicians who sympathized with the religious issue would have refrained from flaunting it. In any event, one of the few documents I discovered that links the opposition candidates to church people had the two conspiring to create a scandal on Election Day. Night Letter from Tomás Garrido C. to Diputado Alcides Caparroso, 2 November, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 11, exp. 3. That the allegations came from the Garrido camp might give us pause, but I am not prepared to dismiss the charge entirely—since over the years many people opposed Garrido on religious grounds. (Consider, for example, the 1923 lawsuit initiated against the *garridistas* by the religiously-oriented beneficence association, which I discuss in Chapter Two.)

<sup>28</sup> Caparroso, *Tal cual*, p. 262.

<sup>29</sup> Even before the declaration of the Jiménez de Lara candidacy, in fact, Vidal had been in conversation with anti-Garrido activists about using the resources of his state to combat *garridismo*. At least this is what a June 4 message that Garrido sent to one of Tabasco's municipalities suggests. In it, Garrido claimed that Rafael Martínez de Escobar and other de la Huertista sympathizers had traveled to the Chiapan capital of Tuxtla Gutiérrez to solicit help from Carlos Vidal. Although the wording is too unclear for me to say so definitively, Garrido's message seems to allege that Garrido opponents had offered Vidal Montecristo and part of Huimanguillo (Tabascan municipalities that shared borders with Chiapas) in exchange for his help. "Minuta" 4 June, 1926, AGN-TGC, AP-G, caja 10, exp. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to Homero Margalli from an unnamed individual in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, 30 August, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 6.

Armed with a plan to enter the state from three separate Chiapan border towns, including Pichuelaco and Palenque, Jiménez de Lara and another group set out for Tabasco the following day. The group entering from Pichuelaco was under the command of a thin and mustached man of average height whose son had been killed upon Garrido's orders, and whose brother—local rumor had it—had been among those who had tried to assassinate Garrido.<sup>31</sup> It is quite likely that the commander who took his men into Tabasco from Pichuelaco, Chiapas in August of 1926 was Manuel Marengo.<sup>32</sup>

### A Mighty Convergence: Jiménez de Lara, General Ríos, and the Free Worker Movement

According to the decidedly anti-Garrido newspaper *Excelsior*, when Arturo Jiménez de Lara reached Villahermosa on September 13, he was gratuitously harassed by *garridista* “thugs.”<sup>33</sup> Sadly, that would be but the first of a number of encounters—some of them deadly—that broke out between Jiménez de Lara and Cruz supporters in the coming months. The very next day, in fact, another scuffle ensued while Jiménez de Lara was delivering a speech to his supporters. Unfortunately, documents do not reveal what campaign promises Jiménez de Lara floated in front of his supporters that day. But whatever the nature of his pronouncements, which he delivered from his lodgings near the city's federal military garrison, they drew jeers from the league activists (qua Cruz supporters) who had stationed themselves fifty meters away. Angered by the heckling,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Garrido and travel companions had been shot at in Mexico City in August of 1926. While Garrido sustained minor injuries, three of his companions died in the attack. One of them was a young and idealistic Tabascan named Santiago Caparroso, Alfonso Amado Caparroso's brother. Santiago Caparroso would have a housing colony in Villahermosa named for him, as we will see in Chapter Five.

<sup>32</sup> Although I am speculating here, the description of the commander closely matches that of Manuel Marengo. Moreover, other members of the Marengo family had embraced the candidacy of Jiménez de Lara. Ramón Marengo, for example, was the president of the Jiménez de Lara club in Tenosique. See, Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, p. 211.

<sup>33</sup> “Entró a Villahermosa el Señor A. Jiménez de Lara” *Excelsior*, 14 September, 1926, p. 7.



Jiménez de Lara supporters began throwing stones at the league workers, but things really became violent when a federal lieutenant, Cliserio Torres, opened fire on the purportedly unarmed league activists, killing a worker named José Burelo and wounding others.<sup>34</sup>

Commenting on the events of that day, Garrido activist Manuel Figarola surmised that military subordinates had misinterpreted the orders issued by the senior army officer in Tabasco, General Juan José Ríos, who had recently been assigned as Tabasco's Chief Military Officer.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding Figarola's exculpating remarks, questions about General Ríos' motives in Tabasco were hotly debated in the heady months surrounding the election. Arriving just weeks before Jiménez de Lara's entry into Tabasco, and replacing General Evaristo Pérez, who was widely perceived to be a Garrido sympathizer, it has been argued that Ríos' assignment to Tabasco was part of an anti-Garrido conspiracy emanating from Mexico City.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it seems clear that high-ranking government officials in the capital maneuvered to effect a change in Tabasco's military leadership in the crucial months before the November election. For his part, Amado Alfonso Caparroso attributes Ríos' assignment in Tabasco to the sub-secretary of war, Miguel Piña. He alleges that Piña, a "rabid" opponent of Obregón, took advantage of his boss's absence to effect the change.<sup>37</sup> The historian Enrique Canudas entertains a slightly different theory. He argues that it was the Minister of Government, Adalberto Tejeda,

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<sup>34</sup> Tomás Garrido to Plutarco Elías Calles, 14 September, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Manuel Figarola to Tomás Garrido C., 16 September, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Garrido's opponents had long lobbied to get Pérez removed from Tabasco's highest-ranking military position. See, "Copia del Memorandum," AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Caparroso, *Tal cual*, pp. 264, 285



perhaps in connivance with the Secretary of War, who finagled to get Ríos installed as Tabasco's Chief Officer of Military Operations.<sup>38</sup>

There is simply no question but that Ríos' presence altered the socio-political dynamic in Tabasco. Consider, for example, the effect his arrival had on the labor sector, specifically membership in the resistance leagues. Writing to his cousin Tomás Garrido on September 9, Alejandro Lastra reported that a group of workers in Villahermosa had taken advantage of the arrival of the new *Jefe de Operaciones Militares* to initiate their separation from the resistance league.<sup>39</sup> Just three days earlier, in fact, these disaffected dockworkers had written to Adalberto Tejeda, the Minister of Government, announcing their decision "to form a new institution...called the Tabasco Free Workers League." Boasting 360 "active members" the new organization would "strictly adhere to...constitutional laws"—which, the letter writer insinuated, contrasted to the "exploitation" they had experienced as league members. Clearly sympathetic to their position, Tejeda asked Tabascan governor Santiago Ruiz to afford free workers "the protection that the laws grants to all organized workers."<sup>40</sup>

It was Lastra's opinion that enemies of the Garrido regime were behind the rebellious workers' activities.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, gubernatorial candidate Ausencio Cruz blamed the dismantling of several worker leagues (which, of course, comprised his

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<sup>38</sup>On Adalberto Tejeda's "master stroke" see, Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. I, p. 185. Alfonso Caparoso, for his part, assigns a number of anti-Garrido sentiments to Tejeda, but never attributes the Ríos assignment to him. Just how threatening a presence General Ríos was for the *garridistas* in the tense prelude to the November election is unclear. Numerous memos and messages circulating in the months surrounding the November 7 gubernatorial election accused General Ríos of inappropriately meddling in political affairs. However, other letters, even some written by Garrido sympathizers, portray Ríos as a military officer of rigorous professional standards. The fact that contenders from opposing sides each accused Ríos of impartiality supports the notion that his over-arching goal was to preserve the public order.

<sup>39</sup>Alejandro Lastra to Tomás Garrido C., 9 September, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 11, exp. 4.

<sup>40</sup>Doroteo Pérez to Adalberto Tejeda, 6 September, 1926; and Adalberto Tejeda to the Tabascan Governor, AHFT-DGG, rollo 17, "organizaciones," folio 3.

<sup>41</sup>Alejandro Lastra to Tomás Garrido C., 9 September, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 11, exp. 4.

principal base of support) on the contrivances of his opponents.<sup>42</sup> Their fears were not wholly unfounded. Indeed, Caparroso reports that during the gubernatorial campaign Jiménez de Lara poured money into “*sindicatos blancos*,” surely a reference to the free worker movement. He also accuses Juan José Ríos of attempting to “destroy worker unity” in Frontera; sending the “praetorian” Colonel Enrique Barrios Gómez to the port city to “plant discord” amongst worker groups. While this is certainly not beyond the realm of possibilities, Caparroso’s analysis of the situation in Frontera nonetheless contains several significant contradictions. Describing Frontera as a *garridista* stronghold, which, in many ways, it was, Caparroso insists that Colonel Barrios Gómez never managed to sow discord among the Frontera workers. At the same time he complains about the creation of “*sindicatos blancos*”—the existence of which proves that the worker movement was, in fact, divided at some level. Moreover, he insists that Jiménez de Lara’s candidacy never attracted the attention of port residents. But even if, for the sake of argument, we allow that Jiménez de Lara only attracted the attention of disgruntled workers in Frontera, we still have to admit that he had a following there, however small.<sup>43</sup>

That free workers received vital support from anti-Garrido elements in the months leading up to the gubernatorial election is indisputable. In fact, my own analysis of legal documents shows a strong link between the *larista* movement and the free worker phenomenon. However, examining the free worker movement strictly through the lens of an anti-Garrido conspiracy glosses over the legitimate grievances of disaffected workers. A richer understanding of the free workers and their relationship to the election of 1926

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<sup>42</sup> Ausencio Cruz to Tomás Garrido C., 7 October, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 11, exp. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Caparroso. *Tal cual*, pp. 264, 269

can be gained by carefully examining their specific complaints during this period. We would also do well to remember that tensions between unionized and free workers in Tabasco predated the 1926 election by a number of years.<sup>44</sup>

### The Inseparability of Politics and Labor in Garridista Tabasco

The tensions that erupted between the *ligas* and the *libres* in the 1926 gubernatorial season were no doubt fueled by past grievances. As was discussed in the previous chapter, free workers and the pro-Garrido labor union (not yet called the *ligas*) had come to blows in 1923 over who had the right to the highly coveted jobs at the port of Frontera.<sup>45</sup> That the 1923 turf war ended favorably for the unionized workers, one of Garrido's most important political constituencies, had everything to do with the young governor's backing of them. With their economic interests directly tied to Garrido's political fortunes, the union would pay him back grandly during the de la Huerta rebellion of 1923-1924, when many of their members militantly defended the Garrido regime.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, anecdotal evidence suggests that some *libre* activists had thrown in their lot with the rebels. For example, Fernando Segovia, who had been the captain of

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<sup>44</sup> I develop a brief discussion of worker tensions that erupted in 1923 in the previous chapter.

<sup>45</sup> Caparoso acknowledges that an anti-Garrido union existed in Frontera in 1923, attributing their formation to some shipping companies. But he says they were a resounding failure. *Tal cual*, p. 269. There is simply no arguing that the foreign companies working at the port preferred working with the less-expensive *libres*. For his part, Enrique Canudas draws a link between the foreign companies stationed in the port and the free worker movement in 1926. See, *Trópico rojo*, p. 195.

<sup>46</sup> One Frontera worker who died while defending the Garrido regime against the de la Huerta rebels was Rosario Ramírez, whose mother received a \$45.00 peso a month pension for his sacrifice, see, *POET*, 13 November, 1924, p. 3. The most visible martyr, though, was Quintín Arauz. Treacherously murdered by enemies of the Garrido regime during the final stage of the rebellion, Arauz was the labor leader who had coordinated the campaign against the free workers in 1923. In the year following his death, Arauz's son was given a five peso a day pension, a tidy sum, considering that Tabasco's minimum wage was 1.5 pesos a day. See, *POET*, 18 June, 1925.



the free workers when they faced off with Quintín Arauz in 1923, joined the *delahuertista* movement.<sup>47</sup>

Soon after the de la Huerta rebellion was put down, the Garrido regime established the state-run labor federation known as the Resistance Leagues. Part labor organization, part political machine, the leagues were founded with the dual purpose of improving the material conditions of the laboring classes and bolstering the political project of the *garridistas*. Members of the Radical Socialist Party, it was expected that league workers would endorse *garridista* candidates.

During the 1926 electoral season there would be plenty of opportunities for league members to demonstrate their loyalty; and many of them did just that. In May of 1926, for example, a campesino league in Frontera announced its firm support for *compañero* Ausencio Cruz's gubernatorial bid. The minutes of their meeting, which were signed by dozens of its members, endorsed other *garridista* candidacies too—including that of Tomás Garrido who was running for senator.<sup>48</sup> Another group that committed itself to the electoral fight in 1926 was the baker's league in Villahermosa. Noting that enemies of the regime were attempting to obstruct Garrido's work "in favor of the Tabascan proletariat," the militant group pledged not to "vacillate one second" in their support for him. They also offered to help out if "emergency" situations arose.<sup>49</sup>

While the above-mentioned letters (and others like them) suggest that many league members gladly endorsed pro-Garrido candidates, there is evidence that some individuals were forced to sign political endorsements against their will. Those who

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<sup>47</sup> Martínez Assad, *El laboratorio*, p. 167.

<sup>48</sup> Acta de la Liga de Campesinos del Pueblo de Zaragoza, 18 May, 1926, AGN TGC-AP-G, caja 11, exp. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Liga de Obreros Panaderos to Tomás Garrido C., 11 June, 1926, AGN TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 5.

refused to do so, meanwhile, discovered the lengths to which *garridista* authorities would go to enforce compliance. Consider for example, the case of Belisario Sánchez. When he and other members of a league in Comalcalco refused to sign a Pro-Cruz statement on the grounds that they were Jiménez de Lara supporters, the municipal president interfered with their ability to work.<sup>50</sup> Nor was this an isolated case. Other workers decried the manner in which league workers were compelled to support the pro-Garrido candidate for governor, Ausencio Cruz. Chief among them was José Pool, the most visible representative of the free worker movement in Frontera in 1926.

### José Pool and the Electoral Crucible

In the course of his or her research, every historian encounters an historical character whose story he or she finds particularly compelling, an individual they would like to travel back in time to meet, to ask questions of once the documentary trail has run dry. For me, this individual is José Pool. Though his last name suggests that he was of Maya ancestry, I know little about his background except that he lived in Frontera and self identified as a “poor worker.” Referred to on a number of occasions as a “campesino,” it is possible that he dressed or spoke in a way that his urban contemporaries considered “rural.” In any case, Pool was active in worker circles in the port of Frontera in 1922, when Tomás Garrido was first running for governor; and he contacted the young politician to offer his support, but also his advice.

The advice he gave Garrido, who he presumed would win the governorship, was to pursue a labor policy that was legal-minded and fair—fair not only to the workers, who

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<sup>50</sup> CCJET-JAPC, Amparos 1926, leg. 4, exp. 159.

Pool hoped would benefit from “protective laws”, but also to capital, which comprised the principal source of worker earnings.<sup>51</sup> Pool’s conciliatory attitude toward the capitalist class is interesting—and resonates with the approach that free workers adopted with respect to the commercial sector in Frontera. So I wonder if he may not have been affiliated with the free worker movement when he wrote the letter to Garrido in 1922. I am particularly curious to know if he was involved with the free workers in 1923, when they lost the economic turf-war against the unionized workers as a result of Garrido’s intervention. I have no specific information linking him to the free worker movement prior to 1926, but it seems reasonable to speculate that he identified with their cause from an earlier date. Not only did Pool join the de la Huerta rebellion in 1923-1924—an indication that his support of Garrido was very short-lived—but he was purportedly fighting alongside the free worker militant Fernando Segovia during a battle in 1924.<sup>52</sup>

I have no information about Pool—or the free worker movement for that matter—for the period immediately following the rebellion. It seems likely that their members kept a low profile in 1924-1925, since some of them appear to have joined the rebellion. Undoubtedly many of them had joined the *ligas*. In 1926, however, there was an obvious political opening for the *libres*, and on October 10, 1926, the Federation of Tabascan Workers, an affiliate of the C.R.O.M., named Pool the General Representative of the Free Workers for the city of Frontera. Formalizing his rejection of the league was a matter of no small importance, since the resistance leagues were the only legally recognized union in Tabasco. Even so, the mandate given to Pool in his capacity as the General

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<sup>51</sup> José Pool to Tomás Garrido C., 27 August, 1922, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 4, exp. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Tomás Garrido C. to Homero Margalli, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 5.



Representative of the Free Workers in Frontera was to harmonize relations between league affiliated workers and free workers.<sup>53</sup>

If, in fact, Pool attempted to harmonize relations between Frontera's league and free workers, the effort was quickly abandoned. Ten days after being named General Representative of the Free Workers, he filed a lawsuit on behalf of hundreds of workers from Frontera. The suit claimed that Garrido officials were forcing workers to belong to the resistance leagues against their will and interfering with the free workers' right to work. Significantly though, the disgruntlement aired in Pool's lawsuit went beyond unfair labor practices. Initiated just weeks before the gubernatorial election, in an atmosphere fraught with political tensions, the lawsuit lambasted the resistance league as an instrument of political domination. In particular, the plaintiffs decried the manner in which league workers were compelled to support the pro-Garrido candidate for governor, Ausencio Cruz.<sup>54</sup> Although for the purposes of the lawsuit Pool kept silent as to his own political proclivities, other documents indicate that he was a supporter of Arturo Jiménez de Lara.

José Pool's October 22 lawsuit undoubtedly reinforced his status as a *persona non grata* of the Garrido regime. It hardly seems coincidental, therefore, that Pool's wife, a twenty-four year old prostitute named María Elena Miranda, was detained by police in Frontera just days after he introduced the lawsuit. Local officials justified her detention on the grounds that she had skipped the venereal screening routinely required of prostitutes, but the timing of her arrest is suggestive. Moreover, the harsh treatment she

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<sup>53</sup> CCJET-JAPC, Amparos 1926, Leg. 4, exp. 135.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. For a discussion of the tensions between the C.R.O.M.-affiliated Federación Obrera Tabasqueña and the Resistance Leagues, see, Ridgeway, *The Cooperative Republic*, p. 239.

received while in custody only seems explicable in light of her relationship to Pool. Reportedly beaten and doused with water while in detention, the gross physical abuse that Miranda experienced was more than a prostitute detained for a minor infraction would have expected. Obviously, it alarmed Pool. Convinced that Miranda's life was in peril, Pool dispatched an urgent telegram to the district judge of Villahermosa. In it he begged the judge to order the municipal authorities of Frontera to transfer his wife from her detention site at the Civil Hospital to the federal maritime facility at the port.<sup>55</sup>

Pool's insistence that his imprisoned wife be transferred to a federal facility broaches a topic of extraordinary significance to the electoral campaign of 1926: the sympathy that certain federal officials stationed in Tabasco felt for anti-Garrido activists. In some cases, this sympathy was humanitarian in nature. For instance, on a number of occasions, federal customs guards stationed at the port of Frontera sheltered free worker militants (qua Jiménez de Lara supporters) from *garridista* officials and league workers with whom they were engaged in skirmishes. However, federal authorities sometimes did more than offer shelter to beleaguered anti-Garrido activists. This appears to have been the case when free workers and *garridista* police officers came to blows in Frontera.

### Tensions Boil Over in Frontera

On November 1, 1926, free workers, José Pool among them, clashed with municipal police officers in Frontera, leaving two dead and several more wounded. An escalating dispute between *liga* workers and the *libres* surely precipitated the crisis. For on the day before the deadly encounter, the Municipal President of Frontera and a

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<sup>55</sup>CCJET-JAPC, Amparos 1926, leg. 4, exp. 156.

collection of police officers purportedly fired on a group of the non-leagued workers when they refused to abandon the loading jobs that had been assigned to them by the Southern Banana Company. (Southern Banana, it seems, had decided to hire *libre* and *liga* workers on an alternating basis, but this was not good enough for the league or their political allies who informed a company official that league members needed to be paid regardless of whether they actually loaded any fruit.) In any event, according to the North American consular officer, who witnessed the October 30 attack, around one hundred shots had been fired as the *libres* headed to the dock to begin working.<sup>56</sup>

The next day the situation worsened. Who instigated the November 1 melee that left two dead and five wounded was disputed by the parties involved at the time, and virtually impossible for the historian unwilling to privilege one version over the other to determine now. We may never know who provoked the deadly encounter, but the contrasting versions of it provided below, reveal just how tightly interwoven partisan politics and labor disputes had become in the week prior to the election.

According to a brief telegram sent to Garrido from Fernando Arauz, the militantly pro-Garrido Municipal President of Frontera, "A group of sixty campesinos, so-called *libres*, headed by José Pool, [had] attacked the police, having killed First Sergeant Francisco Javier and gravely injured the second in command, Guillermo Durán."<sup>57</sup> In a fuller rendition of events, which Arauz sent via post, he intimated that his fear that free and league workers might come to blows on the day in question, had prompted him to station police near the federal customs point at the port. He also admitted to positioning policemen outside of the free worker headquarters. It was at the second location, Arauz

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<sup>56</sup> Ridgeway, *The Cooperative Republic*, p. 240.



alleged, that agitated free workers, armed with knives, pistols and sticks, and rebelliously chanting “Death to the [Garrido] government!” and “Up with Jiménez de Lara!” had attacked the municipal police officers. According to Arauz, in an effort to contain the surging crowd, policemen had fired warning shots into the air, but when the crowd continued to advance, police fired in self-defense. Compounding the precarious situation of the police, in Arauz’s eyes, was that customs guards had also fired their guns at them. Complicit in the rebellious activity of the free workers, the guards then harbored the *libres* in the maritime customs compound.<sup>58</sup>

Pool and the other free workers, meanwhile, claimed that it was they who had been assailed by police violence, a version upheld by Godfredo Hernández in a letter he sent to President Calles on the third of November. Reporting that deadly scuffle had ensued after some (non-leagued) dock workers had been detained, Hernández excoriated the police for having opened fire “on a mass of workers for the sole reason of having separated from the league [that] exploited them.” Hernández went on to describe other abuses that were allegedly carried out in Tabasco, including the dreaded “cold baths” to which prisoners were subjected.<sup>59</sup> And even though Hernández bordered on the melodramatic when he compared the current state of affairs in Tabasco to the “Inquisition,” his characterization of the *garridista* police officers as partisan provocateurs is supported by a variety of other documents.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Arauz’s telegram is transcribed in: Tomás Garrido Canabal to Senador Homero Margalli, 2 November, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP, G, caja 9, exp. 5.

<sup>58</sup> “Conferencia con el C. Gobernador Constitucional del Estado”, 1 November, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Godfredo Hernández to President Calles, 3 November, 1926, AHIT-OCPT, rollo 6, “informes”, exp. 154.

<sup>60</sup> Andrea Bautista de Alvarez, for example, reported being harassed by the Atasta police in an October, 1926 lawsuit. It was her firm belief that she was being bothered by the officers because her husband,

Perhaps because he felt the local police officers were destabilizing the port on November 1, the Plaza Chief of Frontera—the highest-ranking military officer in the port—requested that they be confined to their quarters.<sup>61</sup> Although Municipal President Arauz had complied, removing his officers from the street, he was troubled by it. Writing to Garrido on the afternoon of the melee, Arauz noted that federal troops continued to patrol the streets of Frontera, which in his mind contravened Article 129 of the federal constitution.<sup>62</sup> Insisting that his local police force was plenty capable of maintaining order in the city, Arauz asked Juan Jose Ríos, Tabasco's chief military officer, to issue orders to his garrison officer in Frontera to confine the troops to their barracks.<sup>63</sup>

#### Police and Military Provocateurs: Gun-toting Partisans

If the military situation in Frontera had Arauz worried, it was not without reason: in particular areas of the state, military officers were creating serious problems for the *garridistas*. Things were particularly bad in Montecristo. Writing about the situation there in a telegram to Tabascan Senator Homero Margalli, Garrido reported that General Juan García Anzaldúa was “stirring up *ex-delahuertistas* against local authorities, offering them his military support.” Incredibly, Anzaldúa had actually taken the municipal president, Alejandro Canabal, prisoner. Having informed Margalli of the

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Ramón Álvarez, sympathized with the free worker movement and supported the candidacy of Jiménez de Lara. See, CCJET-JAPC, amparos 1926, leg. 3, exp. 96.

<sup>61</sup> Although the document does not name him, it is possible that the Plaza Chief who responded to the November 1 episode was Enrique Barrios Gómez, the Colonel Caparroso accused of trying to divide the different worker organizations in Frontera. See, *Tal cual*, p. 269.

<sup>62</sup> Specifically, Article 129 stipulates that “no military authority may in times of peace perform any functions other than those that are directly connected with military affairs.” See, *Constitution of the United Mexican States 1917*, (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1964), p. 59.

<sup>63</sup> “Conferencia con el C. Gobernador Constitucional del Estado”, 1 November, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 5.

problems unfolding in Frontera and Montecristo, Garrido emphasized how important it was that President Calles be made aware that “bad military men are creating conflicts where there ought not be any.”<sup>64</sup>

Military officers, however, were not the only ones guilty of meddling in political affairs. As evidence obtained from judicial archives makes clear, *garridista* police officers were also behaving aggressively during the prelude to the election. Such was the case when on the morning of November 3 several Villahermosa police officers armed with carbines showed up at the home of Manuela Alcazar and Remegio García threatening them with arrest. Seemingly spared that time, Alcazar and García nonetheless fled their home for fear of being “taken by municipal police officers.” Accusing higher-ups, such as Avelino Salas, the Inspector General of Police, the Municipal President of El Centro, and the Governor of ordering their arrest—García and Alcazar were silent as to what may have prompted such harassment. However, the Jiménez de Lara campaign stationery on which their lawsuit was introduced, offers a very powerful clue.<sup>65</sup>

The interplay between Tabascan police, who were in the employ of (largely) *garridista*-controlled municipalities, and federal soldiers, a good number of which actively intervened on behalf of the opposition, created an unusually tense dynamic in Tabasco. Police officers and soldiers exacerbated what was already a dangerously

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<sup>64</sup> Tomás Garrido C. to Senador Homero Margalli, 2 November, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 5. Significantly, the seditious attitude of General Anzaldúa and his soldiers was not limited to foiling the *garridistas*. According to Fernando Arauz, Anzaldúa and his men were so opposed to a second Obregón presidency that they were willing to plunge the country back into war to prevent it. Fernando Arauz to Tomás Garrido C. 2 November, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 5.

<sup>65</sup> CCJET-JAPC, amparos 1926, leg. 4, exp. 171.



polarized situation in the months preceding the election. What the balance of power would look like on November 7 was anybody's guess.

### Election Day

Tabascan voters reported to the polls on November 7 after a grueling election season. Though the voters were all male, they were otherwise diverse.<sup>66</sup> Rich and poor, indigenous, white, and mestizo, they showed up at polling stations with varied points of view and different political sympathies. They cast their votes for three men: Ausencio Cruz, Arturo Jiménez de Lara, and Belisario Carrillo, of whom only the first was a formally registered candidate. Although it is impossible to quantify the popularity of the three candidates, anecdotal evidence suggests that Jiménez de Lara gathered more popular support than Carrillo, and that if serious competition existed it was between Cruz and Jiménez. The election was clearly the object of manipulation, although on this score, one group of partisans was probably no less culpable than another. Violence and deceit marred the proceedings, and popular sovereignty was undoubtedly compromised. Even so, the accretion of election-related misdeeds in Tabasco was probably no worse than that seen in other Mexican states during the 1920s.

A fascinating letter written two days after the election by Avelino Salas, the *garridista* Inspector General of Police in Villahermosa, sheds light on several of these misdeeds. The level of detail may be attributable to the fact that Salas' report was written for Tomás Garrido Canabal, who was monitoring the election from abroad. Generously describing the events he wished Garrido could have witnessed himself, Salas noted with

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<sup>66</sup> Women had been given the right to vote in municipal elections in 1925, but were ineligible to vote in the gubernatorial election.

obvious satisfaction that the workers had “[fought] for their rights with a blind faith,” undaunted by the sight of “their compañeros dripping with blood, beaten and wounded by [those] reactionary bastards [la canalla de la reacción].” That people were beaten and bloodied on Election Day was apparently due to the determination and ferocity of the opposition groups. Describing the competing sides as “evenly-matched,” Salas mused, “We were two strong groups, face to face, divided by different points of view.”<sup>67</sup>

Partisan politicking was not limited to the Tabascan electorate, however. Indeed, as Police Inspector Salas described it, the military authorities assigned to keep order in Tabasco’s three different electoral districts were actually working on behalf of the particular candidates they favored—seemingly without General Juan José Ríos realizing it.<sup>68</sup> The army, but especially one battalion, had been particularly meddlesome for the *garridistas* on election day, prompting a partisan of Ausencio Cruz to observe, “Despite the reprehensible attitude of federal authorities and Anzaldúa’s 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the triumph has been ours.”<sup>69</sup>

A variety of military men, including General Anzaldúa, gratuitously interfered with election proceedings on November 7<sup>th</sup>. However, the *garridistas* counted on sympathetic generals too. Chief among these was General Horacio Lucero. Indeed, the night before the election, Police Inspector Salas, in connivance with General Lucero, and with the knowledge of another high-ranking figure, secretly installed personnel at the polling stations—in effect putting them in the hands of Garrido supporters. Noted Salas

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<sup>67</sup> Avelino Salas to Tomás Garrido C., 9 November, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 5. The two opposing groups to which Salas referred were the *crucistas* and the *laristas*. The other candidate, Belisario Carrillo, prided himself on running a “serious” and law-abiding campaign and condemned his opponents’ followers for “tumultuously [fighting] in the streets”. See, Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, p. 199.

<sup>68</sup> Avelino Salas to Tomás Garrido C., 9 November, 1926, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 10, exp. 5

<sup>69</sup> [Signature illegible] to Tomás Garrido C., 8 November, 1926, AGN-TGC, caja 114, exp. 8

matter-of-factly, "Once the polling stations were in the possession of our people, our triumph was a forgone conclusion." But Salas knew the opposition would be fierce, and so he surreptitiously put another plan in place. He described it thus:

Once the voting started, the enemy, organized in columns...of no less than 300 men, tried to wrest from us what was already under our control...I should inform you that the police under my command were [supposed to be] confined [on election day]...but it occurred to me to dress up forty of my gendarmes as soldiers, so that these [men] were at the voting stations with the [others]...to defend our rights.<sup>70</sup>

Drawing up this report on November 9, well before the official results were in, Police Inspector Salas nonetheless felt confident to declare victory for Cruz. He would not be disappointed. On November 15, the local legislature issued Decree #23, which deemed the election valid and Cruz the winner.<sup>71</sup> The opposition cried foul, and Tabasco, once again, plunged into chaos.

### Conclusion: From Chaos to Resolution

Infuriated by the Tabascan legislature's decision, Belisario Carrillo accused the local deputies of fraud, and bemoaned the "anarchic state" that reigned in Tabasco. Meanwhile, as Jiménez de Lara vehemently insisted that he had won a majority of votes, his supporters clashed anew with Cruz supporters. In fact, Jiménez de Lara's own brother died in the post-election violence.<sup>72</sup> As chaos mounted, Garrido's opponents in Tabasco and Mexico City angled to have the federal government "restore order" in Tabasco. In particular, they hoped the federal government would withdraw recognition

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<sup>70</sup> Avelino Salas to Tomás Garrido C; Tellingly, Caparroso identifies General Lucero as the only Military Chief who "lent his support to the *garridistas*", *Tal cual*, p. 269.

<sup>71</sup> This decree is reprinted in Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, p. 197.

<sup>72</sup> Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, p. 198, 201, 212. For a fuller description of Tabasco's post-election atmosphere, including the multiple ways in which anti-Garrido elements tried to prevent Cruz's ascension to the governor's chair, see pp. 198-220.



from the Tabascan government, thereby dealing a mortal blow to *garridismo*.

Meanwhile, some of Garrido's most-trusted colleagues had arranged to meet with former president Obregón to inform him of the problems unfolding in Tabasco. As Caparroso tells it, Obregón was "stupefied" by the extent of the anti-Garrido conspiracy and vowed to intervene "in defense of Tabascan sovereignty." Perhaps upon the urging of Obregón (this is certainly what Caparroso's book implies) President Calles issued an official bulletin on November 27, 1926. In it, Ausencio Cruz was declared governor-elect of Tabasco. Stymied in their efforts to oust Tomás Garrido from power, Arturo Jiménez de Lara and Belisario Carrillo left Tabasco. They never returned.<sup>73</sup>

Six months later, General Ríos was pulled out of Tabasco and replaced by none other than Evaristo Pérez, the unabashed admirer of Tomás Garrido who had previously served as Chief Military Officer in the state. An anti-Garrido newspaper run by wealthy Tabascan exiles in Mexico City denounced the change. In an editorial entitled, "Does the Supreme Government Propose the Destruction of Tabasco?" the authors critiqued the new Chief Military Officer as a servile instrument of Tomás Garrido. In contrast, they praised the outgoing Ríos for having attenuated the excesses of the Garrido regime during his eight-month tour of duty in Tabasco.<sup>74</sup> Although the extreme vehemence these Tabascan exiles felt for Tomás Garrido makes it necessary to take their proclamations with a grain of salt, their editorial identifies something important. With Ríos gone, anti-Garrido elements watched another opportunity to weaken the political and social project of Tomás Garrido Canabal evaporate before their eyes. Stronger than ever, the *garridistas* pursued with new confidence their program of social reform.

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<sup>73</sup> Caparroso, *Tal cual*, pp. 284-286.

<sup>74</sup> "El Supremo Gobierno se propone la destrucción de Tabasco?" *Tabasco Nuevo*, June 1927.

## CHAPTER 5

### REFORMING LA FAMILIA TABASQUEÑA: STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS 1927-1930

In 1927, with Ausencio Cruz in the governor's chair and Evaristo Pérez as Tabasco's Chief Military Officer, Tomás Garrido's power was that much more assured.<sup>1</sup> True, Tabascans within and without the state's borders continued to protest the ideological and material manifestations of garridista reformism, but rebellious activity was increasingly brought under control. Federal and civilian personnel stationed in Tabasco appeared less prone to contradict the authority of local officials, and unabashedly pro-Garrido activists occupied most government positions. With fewer internal and external obstacles to surmount, the Garrido regime aggressively pursued its revolutionary program, dramatically expanding its reach in the realms of education, women's rights, housing reform, and infrastructure development.

The social reforms highlighted in this chapter underscore the *garridista* policymakers' intense desire to modernize a society that was, in many respects, little improved since pre-revolutionary times. Faced with entrenched poverty, an abysmal communications infrastructure, and high rates of illiteracy, Tabascan reformers had to be bold in their efforts if they hoped to be effective. Frequently innovative, many *garridista* reforms were generous of vision. In this regard, the campaign to get working class families into their own homes and a monumental effort to educate Tabasco's most

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<sup>1</sup>Even when he did not himself occupy the governor's chair, Garrido was understood to be the one in charge. Indeed, during Ausencio Cruz's term in office it was still Garrido to whom state operatives and citizens were most likely to address their concerns, comments, or requests. (An examination of the footnotes in this chapter will drive this point home.) Garrido's collaborators—Cruz among them—cultivated Garrido's larger-than-life image by constantly attributing Tabasco's revolutionary accomplishments to his social vision. It is therefore unsurprising it was Garrido's face—and not that of governor Cruz—that graced the opening page of *Tabasco Actual*, a 1929 book touting the state's revolutionary accomplishments.



marginalized citizens are particularly noteworthy. But *garridista* reformism could be arbitrary; and individual freedoms — as we have seen in previous chapters — were sometimes circumscribed. Moreover, “social progress” was intimately bound to anticlericalism, an ideological construct that some people found alienating. Operating at full throttle in the late 1920s, *garridista* anticlerical operatives would commit in 1929 what many people consider their most infamous deed: the “massacre at San Carlos.” By closely examining reform policies and the popular reception they received in Tabasco, this chapter aims to expand the empirical basis from which to understand--and appreciate--the ongoing polemic surrounding Garrido’s rule.

### Inauspicious Beginnings: The Great Flood of 1927

Despite the turbulence that surrounded the 1926 gubernatorial election, *garridista* reformism had proceeded apace. One of the more interesting developments was the election of three women to the eight-member Municipal Council of El Centro (basically, Villahermosa). The 1925 decree granting women the right to cast votes in municipal elections also stipulated that women could be elected to municipal councils, provided that they were at least twenty-one years old and possessed “irreproachable moral conduct, perfectly recognized socialist tendencies, and sufficient education.”<sup>2</sup> Significantly, during the first municipal election in which they were eligible to compete, three women gained positions. They were Celerina Oropeza de González, Reynalda Hernández, and Francisca Rodríguez.<sup>3</sup> Historic for its mixed-gender composition, this particular municipal council presided over the affairs of El Centro during a precarious time. For

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<sup>2</sup> *POET*, 14 March, 1925.

<sup>3</sup> *El Esfuerzo de la Provincia: Álbum Fotográfico Nacional*, México D. F., March 2, 1927.



one, the raucous environment created by the tense gubernatorial race meant that the *Ediles* had had to spend a good amount of time trying to “re-establish order” in the city. The electoral crisis safely behind them, the council was confronted with a crisis of even greater magnitude: the flood of 1927.<sup>4</sup>

In October, Tabasco’s second-largest river, the Grijalva, spilled its banks after a period of heavy rain. Described by observers as the worst flood Tabasco had ever known, it inundated the municipalities of Huimanguillo, Tacotalpa, Teapa, and Jalpa. One witness claimed that a full three-fourths of the state’s surface was flooded, and that some ranches and shore communities were submerged in six feet of water. The flood also devastated Villahermosa. Much of the downtown area was inundated, forcing flood victims to take shelter in churches and public buildings. Adding to the generalized misery of the city’s poor residents, many of whom lacked shelter, food, or medicine, was the fact that agricultural goods and firewood were not getting into the city.<sup>5</sup> Reflecting a year later on the devastating (and ongoing) social and economic consequences of the flood, Governor Cruz ranked it alongside the Gómez-Serrano rebellion and the assassination of President-elect Álvaro Obregón as the event of most consequence for Tabasco in the previous year.<sup>6</sup>

But for all its damage, the flood accelerated a fascinating housing initiative in Villahermosa. Determined to get workers onto higher ground, where they would be “safe from future floods,” the government moved to buy large swaths of property located at higher elevations of the city. Purchased by the municipality of El Centro, the properties

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<sup>4</sup> Torruco Saravia, *Villahermosa: Nuestra Ciudad*, vol. II, p. 743.

<sup>5</sup> AHFT-DGG, rollo 10 “Inundaciones.”

<sup>6</sup> Torruco Saravia, *Villahermosa: Nuestra Ciudad*, vol. II, p. 731.

were designated for worker colonies.<sup>7</sup> These would not be typical working class neighborhoods, however, where most of the residents lived in rental properties. The residents of the *colonias obreras* would own their own homes. The *colonias obreras* are without a doubt the crown jewel of *garridista* housing reform, and I will return to them shortly, but first some background on Tabasco's revolutionary housing movement is needed.

### Revamping the Physical Space of the Poor: From Rent Relief to Home Ownership

In June of 1922, a group of *vecinos* gathered in a house on Corregidora Street in Villahermosa where they formed the steering committee of a tenants' union. In a letter informing the Mexican President, Álvaro Obregón, of their organization's existence, the steering committee noted the problem of "immoderate rents" and warned that should the local congress fail to pass a rent law, a rent strike could be declared "in the entire state." The Tabascan tenant's union may have been inspired by the massive tenant protest that had erupted in the port city of Veracruz in March of that year, and which had spread rapidly through the state. Whether or not they had drawn inspiration from the militant actions of their *Veracruzano* neighbors, the Tabascans said they were not prepared "to tolerate more injustices from either the state government or praetorian bourgeoisie." President Obregón responded to the Tabascan tenant union in August of 1922, with the tumultuous events in Veracruz surely foremost on his mind. He assured the tenant organizers that it was the desire of his government to "help...the needy classes" achieve

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., vol II, p. 743.

their just goals. However, he insisted that respect for the law be observed, and warned them against resorting to “violent means.”<sup>8</sup>

Garrido had taken office in January of 1923 anxious to grapple with Tabasco’s pressing social problems. One early accomplishment of his administration was the passage of a rent law in July of 1923.<sup>9</sup> A rental contract drawn up in Frontera between Domitila Bellizia Viuda de Ruiz (proprietor) and Cristobalina Ocampo (tenant) indicates the amount of relief a renter could expect following the passage of the law. Whereas Cristobalina Ocampo had previously paid fifteen pesos for her house on Juárez Street, the forty-percent rent reduction stipulated in the rent law lowered her rent to nine pesos.<sup>10</sup> Another piece of housing legislation, passed a month before the rent law, was also aimed at lowering rents in urban areas. Decree #19 offered a five-year tax exemption to owners of urban lots who agreed to put homes on them. Although the first Article indicated that property-owners eligible for the exemption had to build houses of at least two stories, Article Three suggested that one-story buildings were also eligible for the benefit. Perhaps this was an attempt to meet more rapidly the housing crisis, since the decree stipulated that one-story units had to be built in a matter of six-months in order to receive the tax exemption, whereas the two-story units would have a period of twelve months to complete the construction.<sup>11</sup> Newly constructed units were to be made out of

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<sup>8</sup> AHFT-OCFT, rollo 1, “Asociaciones,” exps. 1-3. On the March 1922 declaration of a rent strike in the port of Veracruz and its tumultuous aftermath see, Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution in the Street: Women, Workers, and Urban Protest in Veracruz, 1870-1927* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), esp. chaps. 4-7.

<sup>9</sup>Torruco Saravia, *Villahermosa Nuestra Ciudad*, vol. II, p. 521. The Governor of Veracruz, Adalberto Tejeda, had passed a rent law in his state two months earlier, in May of 1923. See Wood, *Revolution in the Street*, p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> Contrato de Arrendamiento, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 5, exp. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Decreto #19, CCJET-CL-LET-SCT, vol. E-H, E-4. A group of Villahermosa prostitutes cited the housing shortage in their request for an amparo from the District Judge in the capital. Ordered by the *Consejo de Salubridad Pública* to leave their residences on Méndez Street and move into what was being designated a red light zone, the women underscored the injustice of forcing them to leave their residences



*mampostería* (an adobe/masonry construction), have electricity (where available), and “English-style” toilets and bathrooms.<sup>12</sup>

Fourteen months later Decree #19 was replaced with a similar, but more far-reaching piece of legislation. Unlike its predecessor, the updated decree included reflections on the effect living environments had on the human spirit:

CONSIDERING that the living environment (*medio de vivir*) directly influences the spirit of people, depressing it if it is uncomfortable and elevating it if...it presents the conditions of hygiene and improvement to which every being legitimately aspires...[and] CONSIDERING that the government has an unavoidable obligation to oversee the betterment of its people, and the beautification of its towns [it therefore issues] ...Decree #56.<sup>13</sup>

Its psychological pretensions aside, Decree #56 was a more expansive piece of legislation in a practical sense. It extended the tax exemption benefit for those who built houses on empty lots from five to ten years. Furthermore, individuals who replaced thatched-roof or wooden dwellings with *mampostería* structures were eligible to receive a property tax exemption for a period of eight years. Finally, those who rebuilt one-story *mampostería* structures into houses of two stories or more would receive the tax exemption for five years. The required attributes of the homes were also expanded upon. Not only did the *mampostería* homes have to have electricity (again, where available), English toilets and hygienic bathrooms, but the rooms were to have “the most light and ventilation possible” and each house was to have a front garden.<sup>14</sup>

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“in the exact moment in which there are no homes anywhere.” Implicitly (and perhaps opportunistically) underscoring the housing crunch, the women argued that moving them into an already inhabited neighborhood would involve the displacement of “families of honorable workers and artisans.” CCJET-JAPC, amparos 1923, leg. 1, exp. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Decreto #19.

<sup>13</sup> Decreto #56, *POET*, 13 August, 1924.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Notwithstanding its plan to enhance the conditions of rental units, the real goal of the Garrido government was to get workers into their own homes.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Article Eight of Tabasco's 1926 Labor Law signaled the "public utility" of constructing "cheap and hygienic houses" that workers could pay for in installments.<sup>16</sup> The creation of *colonias obreras* reflected the spirit of this law. Based on the premise that working people should apply their hard-won earnings towards purchasing a home (rather than throwing their money away on rent), the government sold lots to workers in reasonably priced installments. Together with state-subsidized building materials, workers were able to build their own homes.<sup>17</sup>

#### Remnants of a Bolder Time: Visiting Doña Carmen's House

The judicial archive in Villahermosa where I spent four months gathering historical material in 2001 is located in the *colonia* "Jesús García". Founded during the Garrido era as a housing colony for poor workers, many of the homes that were originally built in the neighborhood have long since disappeared. Notwithstanding its changed appearance, during my daily walks to and from the archive I tried to imagine the *colonia* as it once had been. Mentally superimposing the historical information about the *colonia* that I had encountered in archives and newspapers, I pictured the "simple but sanitary" homes built in what was, in the 1920s and 1930s, a fairly remote and undeveloped section of the capital. I imagined their chicken-coops, vegetable gardens, and "English-style"

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<sup>15</sup> The Garrido regime's ideas about working class homeownership may have been influenced by a San Francisco, California based engineer and businessman, P.G. Ferrer who, in a 1924 letter, reminded the Tabascan Governor of his offer to build houses in Tabasco and thus free people there from the "slavery of rent." See, P.G. Ferrer to Tomás Garrido C., 23 December, 1924, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 6, exp. 1.

<sup>16</sup> "Ley de Trabajo," *POET*, 20 November, 1926.

<sup>17</sup> *Tabasco Actual*, pp. 85-86; and "Tabasco," *Redención*, Jan. 6, 1931, p. 3.

toilets. Not least of the images that reeled through my head were those of “robust” working families “freed from the tyranny of rent.” That the worker colony scenes I imagined were based on highly romanticized depictions rendered by Garrido state officials did not lessen their entertainment value. I put my skepticism aside and let my imagination roam.

Later that year I presented a paper on Garrido-era housing reform at the First Annual Congress of Tabasco Historians. In it, I mentioned the working class housing colonies. Following my talk, an anthropologist from the INAH office in Villahermosa approached me and told me about a friend of hers, Doña Carmen, whose family had moved into the worker colony “Jesús García” when she was a girl. After we talked awhile and I mentioned that I was conducting oral histories for my dissertation on *garridista* reformism, she pressed Doña Carmen’s address into my hand, and said, “Tell her that I sent you.” Two weeks later Carmen Acosta Viuda de Montero, aged eighty-four, agreed to let me interview her. We met in the living room of her house in the *colonia* “Jesús García,” one of the few houses built in the late 1920s and early 1930s of which much of the original structure remains.

Born in 1917 on the corner of Sarlat and Cuauhtémoc streets in downtown Villahermosa, Doña Carmen had seven siblings, two of whom were born after the family moved to the *colonia* “Jesús García”. Her mother was a homemaker kept busy with eight children, and her father, a porter, loaded goods onto the trucks that moved between the wharf and commercial houses in the capital. She was between ten and twelve when floodwaters submerged the downtown area where her family lived, and they moved into



the newly established worker colony.<sup>18</sup> Her family's move to "Jesus García" was not supposed to be a permanent one; her parents had planned to return downtown once the floodwaters had retreated. Doña Carmen implied that her father was reluctant to move, given the relative remoteness of "Jesus García." However, when her family arrived in the colony they took advantage of the fertile soil to plant peas, sugarcane, peanuts, peppers, and other crops, and they just ended up staying.<sup>19</sup>

Doña Carmen recalled that the two lots her family purchased in "Jesus García" were paid for in installments of 40 centavos a cubic meter, and that her parents made weekly payments.<sup>20</sup> The house, which was made out of adobe, was located in the center of one plot. Three meters away from the main house there was an adobe bathroom, and though it had no shower, a basin could be filled with well water for bathing. They had a garden, a variety of crops (including one hundred coffee plants), and some animals. She indicated that her family enjoyed much more space after they moved to the colony, referring specifically to the non-enclosed areas that comprised the bulk of their property. There was electricity in the worker colony, although the roads were not paved until sometime after the Garrido regime fell.<sup>21</sup>

"The worker question was very dear to [Garrido]," said Doña Carmen regarding the creation of worker colonies. "He really helped the poor." And while it was her

<sup>18</sup> I put her age at between ten and twelve, because there seem to be slight discrepancies in the dates she assigns certain life events.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Carmen Acosta Vinda de Montero conducted by Kristin Harper, Villahermosa, Tabasco, December 5, 2001. Doña Carmen indicated that her parents had already started building a house in the colony when they moved there in 1929. It seems likely that her parents purchased their lots in "Jesus García" sometime in 1928, when Villahermosa flooded again.

<sup>20</sup> According to L.D. Ramírez Garrido, who wrote admiringly about the worker colonies in 1931, workers were provided with a lot of approximately 900 cubic meters for a weekly payment of two pesos. See, "Tabasco" *Redención*, Jan. 6, 1931, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Carmen Acosta Vinda de Montero.

opinion that Garrido had been surrounded by some unsavory types (individuals who she felt damaged his reputation), she believed that he had had some good people working with him too. One Garrido collaborator who seemed to have earned Doña Carmen's respect was the housing colony administrator, Ana Santa María.<sup>22</sup>

#### Ana Santa María: Garridista Activist Par Excellence

Ana Santa María was a dedicated *garridista* who at one time or other occupied a number of choice government assignments. Loyal, talented, and seemingly indefatigable, she was one of the Garrido-era's most impressive government activists. Indeed, in the same year that she began coordinating activities for the *colonias obreras*, she was serving as treasurer of the *Liga Central de Resistencia*, and a councilwoman for El Centro.<sup>23</sup> In her capacity as administrator of the *colonias obreras* she proved a tireless organizer, literally, in the case of the colonies "Jesús García" and "Santiago Caparroso", supervising their development. In a 1928 memo sent to Tomás Garrido, for example, she reported that a recent delivery of wood had been distributed among the lot owners in both colonies. There was not enough wood for everyone (hence the memo), but there was much excitement and everyone was working.<sup>24</sup>

Her job overseeing the worker colonies was a testament to Ana Santa María's ability and dedication, but her sex was also factored into her success in carrying out this particular assignment, according to the revolutionary educator, José Ochoa Lobato.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the Municipal Council of El Centro elected three more women to serve the term beginning in 1928. They were Ana Santa María, Ana María Vidal, and Sarah M. de Castillo. See, Torruco Saravia, *Villahermosa Nuestra Ciudad*, vol. II, pp. 742-743.

<sup>24</sup> Ana Santa María to Tomás Garrido Canabal, 8 October, 1928, AGN-TGC, caja 131, exp. 10.

While the worker colonies were the inspired initiative of Tomás Garrido Canabal, it was Ana Santa María who was able to “feel and understand the entire program of the social revolution, especially when it came to the working class home.”<sup>25</sup> Whether or not Ana Santa María was more adept than her male counterparts at “understanding” proletarian households, she appears to have relished her role overseeing the domestic development of the working class. In a piece titled “The Workers’ Home” she rhapsodized about the benefits revolutionary reforms had for the disinherited classes. Whereas the worker once labored arduously for a pittance, able to satisfy only his most basic needs, he could now contemplate his fortunate existence alongside his “happy compañera” and in his *own* home. Exceedingly mawkish, her essay placed the worker in a sonorous landscape of chirping birds and laughing children.<sup>26</sup> A romanticized portrait to be sure—one that conveniently elided any number of hardships that worker colony families might have faced—the image nonetheless resonates with some of the memories Doña Carmen recounted about her childhood years in “Jesús García”.

#### Only a Glimpse: Colonias Obreras Outside of the Capital

Despite its preeminence in Villahermosa, the *garridista* effort to promote homeownership among the poor was not limited to the capital city. According to Santa María, throughout the state, land was being divided into lots for the purpose of forming *colonias obreras*. In an essay that appeared in the 1929 book *Tabasco Actual*, she explained that landowners with more land than they were able to cultivate were being

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<sup>25</sup> José Ochoa Lobato, “Organizaciones Obreras en Tabasco” AGN-TGC, caja 131, exp. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ana Santa María’s piece is quoted in, José Ochoa Lobato, “Organizaciones Obreras en Tabasco,” AGN-TGC, caja 131, exp. 10. Emphasis in the original. Interestingly, and despite the presence of women in the labor force, the idealized worker she portrays in the essay is male.



approached (presumably by the government) about partitioning it into plots. These plots were to be sold at "moderate prices" and on "easy payment terms" to the campesinos and workers who solicited them. Perhaps in an effort to encourage other property owners to do the same, she reported that several "honorable" individuals from different regions of the state had agreed to sell portions of their land for the noble purpose of establishing worker colonies.<sup>27</sup> In that same vein, steps had been taken so that empty lots that were not developed within a certain period of time could be sold to workers in affordable installments.<sup>28</sup>

A July 18, 1930 telegram dispatched to Tomás Garrido from the municipal president of Cunduacán, Alejandro Ruiz, seems to lend credence to the claim that working class housing colonies were not merely a phenomenon of the capital. Ruiz reported that on the previous day he had traveled to the *ranchería* "Libertad" at the request of two hundred *agraristas* so as to parcel up plots of land for distribution. It would appear that Ruiz then obtained a commitment from the residents that their houses would be finished by Independence Day, at which point it was hoped that the local legislature might elevate "Libertad" from a *ranchería* to a pueblo. In closing his telegram, Ruiz noted with palpable satisfaction that local campesinos had "converted immense quantities of idle land into a center of production" and expressed his optimism

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<sup>27</sup> *Tabasco Actual*, p. 86. Although I do not have specific details on the transaction, Carmen Acosta Viuda de Montero indicated that the land on which "Jesús García" was built had been purchased from a woman named Dolores Troconis who continued to live on or near the colony. (Dona Carmen remembered getting water from her well). The "Santiago Caparroso" property was purchased from José Hernández Ponz. AGN-TGC, caja 131, exp. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Tomás Garrido Canabal to Prof. Ana Santamaría, 16 October, 1928, AGN-TGC, caja 118, exp. 26.

that small property ownership would move Tabasco toward “material progress” and “desired prosperity.”<sup>29</sup>

### The Great Equalizer? Educational Initiatives during the Cruz Years

The *garridistas*, like revolutionary reformers throughout the Mexican Republic, considered education the basic ingredient of social progress, and a high priority was placed on reforming the state’s school system.<sup>30</sup> At the broadest level this meant training young people for a life of productivity, hence the incorporation of such practical subjects as agriculture and beekeeping into the school curriculum.<sup>31</sup> It also meant emphasizing “rational” (scientifically-based) learning as a means to combat “religious fanaticism.”<sup>32</sup>

It is well known that Mexican revolutionary ideologies considered the Catholic Church an obstacle to “progress.” Alan Knight has observed that, “Catholicism clashed

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<sup>29</sup> Alejandro Ruiz S. to Tomás Garrido C., 18 July, 1930, AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 13, exp. 1. This tantalizing but ultimately elusive glimpse of a rural housing colony leaves more questions than answers about rural homeownership. The telegram indicated that the *municipio* of Cunduacán was involved in the partitioning and distribution of land, but whom did the land actually belong to? Had, as Ana Santa María suggested in her essay, a large landowner sold off some of his/her property for the purpose of establishing worker housing? The telegram from Cunduacán indicated that the 200 *agraristas* who requested the municipal president’s assistance were in the employ of two landed estates, “Reforma” and “San Antonio.” Had the ranchería “Libertad” been carved from one of these large properties? The municipal president of Cunduacán appeared to have secured a commitment from the plot recipients to erect homes in a matter of months. Were building supplies made available to them in the same way they were provided to residents of the housing colonies of Villahermosa? Did the campesinos of Cunduacán pay for their plots? If so, what was the method of payment? Unfortunately, barring additional evidence, my questions about the community of “Libertad” must remain unanswered.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed accounting of *garridista* educational philosophies and programs, see Chapter Two in Martínez Assad, *El laboratorio*. Also see Marcela Tostado Gutiérrez’s rich ethnographic analysis of Garrido-era schooling in, *El intento de liberar a un pueblo*.

<sup>31</sup> These ideas were in concert with the educational philosophy of the national Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). Notes Mary Kay Vaughan, “It was the dominant view of the SEP hierarchy in the early 1920s that education could bring about economic remuneration to the individual Mexican while increasing his or her productive capacity and that of the nation. The underlying purpose of the action school was to encourage greater individual initiative while effectively inculcating habits of work and making more productive the relationship between school and economy.” *The State, Education, and Social Class*, p. 144.

<sup>32</sup> If these ideas were in keeping with the anticlerical bent of Mexican revolutionary reformism, they also harkened back to the positivist educational philosophies of men like Justo Sierra, a political thinker and educational reformer who served a stint as the Minister of Education during the porfiriato. Notes Luis Marentes, “A positivist thinker, Sierra...saw as a duty of education the promotion of scientific thought over



with developmentalism,” which he defines as “an ideology of development” whose proponents “sought to make Mexico a progressive, modern capitalist society, broadly along the lines of western Europe and North America.” Significantly, revolutionary anticlericalism, which blamed the Church for filling people’s heads with “antiquated” ideas, was “paralleled by a renewed stress on the role of [secular] education.”<sup>33</sup> This shift in priorities was powerfully symbolized in Tabasco, where churches, if they were not torn down altogether, were turned into educational venues.

In the *Informe* he delivered during the opening session of the local legislature in September of 1928, Governor Cruz boasted that a “majority of church buildings [had been] converted into schools.”<sup>34</sup> Certainly it made good economic sense to use empty church buildings as educational locales. However, from a sanitary standpoint churches sometimes left a lot to be desired. In any case, this was the opinion rendered by Tabasco’s Director of Education, E.B. Taboada, after a visit to the municipality of Cunduacán in 1928. Visiting the *cabecera* of Cunduacán as part of an inspectional tour of the Chontalpa region, Taboada had particular concerns about a church building that was being used as a school. For one, it lacked toilets--a major deficiency given that many students lived far enough away from the school that they could not easily go home to attend to their “physiological needs.” Also troublesome to Taboada from a hygienic standpoint were the human remains buried under the church floor.<sup>35</sup> Before leaving Cunduacán, Taboada asked the municipal president to remedy these problems.

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‘superstitions,’ something that he saw as particularly prevalent in the peasantry. See, *José Vasconcelos and the Writing of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 2000) p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 500-501.

<sup>34</sup> Portions of Ausencio Cruz’s 1928 *Informe* can be found in Torrico Saravia, *Villahermosa: Nuestra Ciudad*, vol. II, p. 730-738. One Garrido-era photo that I find particularly memorable shows a young male student (Garrido’s son, actually) delivering a speech from an ornate pulpit.

<sup>35</sup> E.B. Taboada to Ausencio Cruz, 30 July, 1928, AGN-TGC, caja 131, exp. 8.



Taboada's activist approach to education reform involved visiting even the "most modest little schools."<sup>36</sup> Here, we can be quite sure, he was referring to Tabasco's burgeoning network of rural schools, a topic on which Governor Cruz expounded during his 1928 *Informe*. Declaring his abiding interest in rural schooling, and the "redemption of the Indian through education," Cruz proudly announced the existence of 158 state-run rural schools.<sup>37</sup>

When we consider just how few rural schools existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Tabasco, these figures are extraordinary. Even so, when it came to rural schooling the Tabascan regime was facing an uphill battle. Consider, for example, the following report from Cárdenas. Written by the local league president, Adolfo Bulnes Sánchez, the report indicated that only three rural schools existed in the entire municipality. Located in three different settlements—Paso y Playas, Ocampo, and Calzadas, with populations of 600, 500, and 700 respectively, the rural schools served a paltry 92 students. While the schools were well organized, and the teachers effective, Bulnes decried their physical condition. He described them as "poorly built hovels" that completely lacked supplies.<sup>38</sup>

Bulnes, who sent these impressions to Tomás Garrido in 1928, proposed ways in which to improve the rural schooling initiative in Cárdenas. These included fining parents of truants—a penalty stipulated in the state's educational law—and better equipping the schools. But it was also imperative to open more rural schools, Bulnes insisted. He

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Torruco Saravia, *Villahermosa: Nuestra Ciudad*, p. 733. It should be noted that the book *Tabasco Actual*, which also reproduces sections of Cruz's 1928 *Informe*, records 178 state-run rural schools. While the inconsistencies with respect to the rural school figures in Cruz's 1928 *Informe* are bothersome, both figures represent a marked increase in the number of state-run rural schools from October, 1926, when María Pérez, Tabasco's then Director of Public Education, reported the existence of 122 rural schools, serving 5,538 students. "Lista de las Escuelas Rurales existentes en cada uno de los municipios," AGN-TGC-AP-G, caja 9, exp. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Adolfo Bulnes Sánchez to Tomás Garrido C., 4 October, 1928, AGN-TGC, caja 131, exp. 10.

recommended that schools be opened in sixteen *rancherías* and two pueblos with “alarming” illiteracy rates.<sup>39</sup> Summarizing Bulnes’ report in a letter he sent to E.B. Taboada several days later, Garrido urged the Education Director to take immediate steps to open more rural schools in Cárdenas and to repair the buildings of those already in operation.<sup>40</sup>

Things were not so dire everywhere. In March of 1928, one Pascual López informed Garrido of his visit to three rural schools in eastern Tabasco. He was pleased to report that the school garden had been fenced in, and that each school had saved roughly fifty pesos—presumably from sales of the school’s agricultural products.<sup>41</sup> Despite the expanding educational opportunities in rural (and provincial) Tabasco, there were precious few schools that went beyond the third grade. As a result, youth from those areas who wanted to pursue post-elementary school studies had to do so elsewhere. If they were girls, they were likely to go to the Dolores Correa School for Campesinas in Villahermosa.

#### The Campesina Boarding School at “Las Blancas Mariposas”

By far one of the most interesting educational initiatives of the Garrido era was the Dolores Correa Zapata School for Campesinas. Founded by the Feminist Club “Carmen Serdán” in 1927, the school remains one of the most iconic educational institutions of the Garrido era. The school was situated on a tree-studded property called “Las Blancas Mariposas” on which sat a large Spanish colonial revival home replete with balustrades

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Tomás Garrido to Prof. Taboada, 9 October, 1928, AGN-TGC, caja 131, exp. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Pascual López to Tomás Garrido Canabal, 25 March, 1928, AGN-TGC, caja 116, exp. 7.



and arched-portals. Located in the Atasta de Serra neighborhood of Villahermosa, the property had been donated to the school's founders by Garrido's wife, Dolores Llovera. Administered by the city council, and, as of 1928, subsidized by Tabasco's seventeen municipalities, its curriculum was supervised by the state's Department of Education.<sup>42</sup>

Looking at photographs of the young women watering their experimental gardens, or posing in their impeccable white uniforms in front of the sumptuous (porfirian-era?) building, it is easy to appreciate the promise and expectation of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>43</sup>

However, *garridista* officials had some difficulty convincing parents to send their daughters there. Writing to Garrido about his recruitment efforts in the eastern half of the state, Pascual López opined his almost complete lack of success there. Local municipal presidents and schoolteachers had joined López as he interviewed the parents of potential matriculates. Yet despite meeting with a "multitude" of parents, he had only managed to recruit five girls, two from Tenosique, two from Balancán, and one from Emiliano Zapata (formerly Montecristo).<sup>44</sup> Writing to López in Jonuta—where, incidentally, he had been unable to recruit even one student—Garrido told López to keep up his recruitment efforts. Deeply convinced of the Dolores Correa Zapata School's value, Garrido frequently recruited students himself.

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<sup>42</sup>"Ayuntamiento Constitucional del Municipio del Centro, Memoria Administrativa del Año de 1928", reproduced in, Torruco Saravia, *Villahermosa: Nuestra Ciudad*, vol. II, p. 744; Torres Vera, *Mujeres y utopía*, p. 125. Visual information on the school was gleaned from *Tabasco Actual*, pp. 55, 57.

<sup>43</sup>The objective of the Dolores Correa Zapata school, as described by its founders in 1927, was to "educate the rural woman, cultivating and fortifying her character [and] transform[ing] her household customs and work practices." See, Torres Vera, *Mujeres y utopía*, p. 125. (The deficiencies that revolutionary reformers projected onto rural households--which were not always accurate from a public health standpoint--is a fascinating topic, one, unfortunately that I cannot explore here.) But the Dolores Correa was also characterized as a rural normal school. *Tabasco Actual*, p. 27. A male equivalent to the Dolores Correa was founded in 1931, and located in the heavily indigenous municipality of Jalpa de Méndez. These rural normal schools were segregated by gender, which is interesting since the Tabascan revolutionary government was so committed to co-educational schooling. Perhaps the gender separation is explained by their being organized as boarding schools.

<sup>44</sup>Pascual López to Tomás Garrido Canabal, 25 March, 1928, AGN-TGC, caja 116, exp. 7.



## Celestina Massange Suárez: One Student's Story

During a visit to Balancán Tomás Garrido recruited four girls to attend the Dolores Correa Zapata School for Campesinas. One of them was Celestina Massange Suárez, who spoke about her experiences in a 2002 interview. One of nine children, Doña Celestina spent her early years living in a *ribera* (a rural, waterfront community) in Balancán. Her father was an overseer on a ranch, and her mother tended to the home. Eventually the family moved to the county seat, where her father was given a job as a police commander. There, Celestina attended elementary school, completing the third grade, which was the highest grade-level available there at that time. She was twelve when a local teacher told her mother that Tomás Garrido was looking for two more Balancán girls to attend a boarding school in Villahermosa. Celestina was immediately interested (her sister Patrona, on the other hand, did not want to go), and so her mother went to speak to Garrido, who, as I mentioned earlier, was present in the municipality. In short order, Celestina and three other girls from Balancán left for Villahermosa.<sup>45</sup>

Celestina Massange would spend seven years studying in Villahermosa, during which time she saw her parents only once. Her first two years at the Dolores Correa were spent at “Las Blancas Mariposas,” but when the school became too crowded, the girls were transferred to the *Escuela Granja*. As she recalled, there were about 140 students at the *Granja*, many of them indigenous girls who did not speak Spanish. The government, she noted, paid for her studies, room, and board, and provided her with shoes. While it is unclear what the curriculum consisted of on the whole, Doña Celestina highlighted the

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Celestina Massange Suárez conducted by Luisa Cámara Cabrales, July 10, 2002, Balancán, Tabasco.

training she received in agriculture and arts and crafts—remembering, for example, that they learned how to weave *sombreros*.<sup>46</sup> They also played sports, which she loved.

School vacations were spent on the premises, tending to agricultural projects, raising chickens, and learning beekeeping. The girls, moreover, working in teams, were assigned household chores. While she confided that, “it was a lot of work,” Doña Celestina nonetheless retains fond memories of her classmates. She also remembered that her teachers were “very good.”<sup>47</sup>

As Doña Celestina told it, Tomás Garrido took a special interest in the school. This was expressed through his active recruitment of students, but also by his frequent visits to the school. While there, he inquired after their diet—even entering the kitchen, which was staffed by five cooks, to peek in the pots. Garrido would say to the cooks, “What are the *chiquitas* eating today?” Asked toward the end of the interview what she thought of Garrido, Doña Celestina, who received her teaching diploma in 1938 and taught elementary school in Balancán for thirty-three years, was silent for a moment. “Well, I owe him a lot....No one’s perfect, [but] I can tell you this, he was one of a kind...the interest he took in [you]. Because what governor goes to a place and asks, ‘What are we eating today?’, eh?”.

### Adult Education in Garridista Tabasco

It is unsurprising that many schooling initiatives in revolutionary Tabasco were targeted at the young. However, the Garrido regime was determined to educate adults as

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<sup>46</sup> In describing the school for campesinas in 1928 the Tabascan educator José Ochoa Lobato indicated that “future rural teachers” received instruction in agriculture, small industries, baby care, and domestic tasks. José Ochoa Lobato, “Fragmento de un Informe” AGN-TGC-caja 131, exp. 13. I assume that they also received training in academic subjects and pedagogy while at the Dolores Correa.



well. To that end, it required that all league workers be able to read, write, and perform simple math problems.<sup>48</sup> Workers who did not already have these skills, were given six months to gain them. If they failed to become literate in that period of time, they risked losing work shifts or even being expelled from their league—a penalty that worried Serapio Cruz who, for reasons of an eye disease, was unable to fulfill the literacy requirement on time.<sup>49</sup>

Workers were, in fact, made to prove their literacy. At least that is what a 1928 report from the Tropical Fruit Stevedores league in Frontera suggests. The report, which touched on a number of issues, closed by evaluating the educational competency of twenty-seven workers. The men were assessed on their reading, writing, and addition skills, but they were also given a series of technical questions relating to their work loading and unloading fruit and asked to classify and determine the grade of a bunch of bananas.<sup>50</sup> Given the fact that bananas were Tabasco's economic life-blood during the Garrido era, it is unsurprising that the regime took a special interest in the competence of workers in this sector.<sup>51</sup> However, as a revolutionary goal, education transcended the realm of the (predominantly) male resistance leagues, to include female workers and housewives.

A 1926 circular issued by the *Liga Central de Resistencia*, for example, ordered the female relatives of league workers to enroll in the night school in Villahermosa.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The director of the school was none other than the indefatigable Ana Santa María.

<sup>48</sup> José Ochoa Lobato, "Las Organizaciones Obreras en Tabasco" AGN-TGC, caja 131, exp. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Serapio Cruz to Tomás Garrido C., 28 January, 1928, AGN-TGC, caja 117, exp. 4. Luckily for Serapio Cruz, Garrido issued orders to the *Liga Central de Resistencia* to exempt him from the requirement for as long as the disease lasted.

<sup>50</sup> "Reglamento Interior," AGN-TGC, caja 118, exp. 24.

<sup>51</sup> On the significance of bananas to the *garridista* economy, see, for example, Stanley Rex Ridgeway, *The Cooperative Republic*; and his article, "Monoculture, Monopoly, and the Mexican Revolution: Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Standard Fruit Company in Tabasco (1920-1935)" *Mexican Studies* 17:1 (2001).

<sup>52</sup> Marcelino Zamudio to Tomás Garrido Canabal, 9 April, 1926, AGN-TGC, caja 114, exp. 7.



Established in 1925 in both Villahermosa and Frontera, these government-run schools (alternately called *Escuelas de Obreras* and *Escuelas Hogares*) trained women in domestic skills and offered courses in the potentially remunerative activities of hat-making, painting, photography, bookbinding, and sewing. Many classes were held during the day, but for those “poor young women” who had to work for a living, there were night schools. Funded by the *liga de obreras*, the night classes were attended by cooks, laundresses, and *muchachas de casa* whose “enthusiasm” for the subjects revolutionary educator José Ochoa Lobato found very moving. Educator and former councilwoman Celerina O. de González was also a fervent admirer of the initiative. “Born of the socialist regime,” she averred, the home economics schools offered women training in a craft or skill and taught them that the “administration of the household is a great feminine profession.”<sup>53</sup> Surely hoping to duplicate their success elsewhere, the government established an *Escuela Hogar Nocturna* in the city of Comalcalco in 1928.<sup>54</sup>

The housing and schooling initiatives described here were intended to better the lives of Tabascan citizens in a practical sense. Certainly the families who moved into *colonias obreras* enjoyed the security associated with home ownership. Yet even the initiatives aimed at conferring minor remunerative skills on poor adults and training children in agricultural techniques could be helpful. For instance, an individual who sold a *sombrero de jipi* (Tabasco’s version of the Panama hat) might contribute a little extra to the economy of the household. Likewise, children who brought home vegetables and fruits from the school garden contributed to the nutritional intake of their families. To

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<sup>53</sup> *Tabasco Actual*, pp. 26, 38, 53; José Ochoa Lobato, “Fragmento de un Informe”. It should be noted that there was also an academic component to the schools, insofar as they offered classes in math and grammar, in addition to learning crafts. See, Torres Vera, *Mujeres y utopía*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>54</sup> *Tabasco Actual*, p. 38.

complement these efforts, the Garrido regime passed a series of decrees and laws designed to combat alcohol consumption: a habit they blamed for draining away precious individual or family resources (among other things).<sup>55</sup> Driven to fill stomachs and protect livers, the Garrido regime also undertook a vigorous campaign to change hearts and minds.

### “God Does Not Exist”: The Ideological Dimension of Garridista Reformism

*Garridista* anticlericalism turned Tabasco into one of the most memorable theaters of the Mexican Revolution. Undertaken with missionary-like zeal, the Garrido government's secularizing mission involved knocking down churches, removing crosses from cemeteries, and encouraging Tabascans to eat beef on Fridays.<sup>56</sup> Anticlerical indoctrination efforts had many venues. Of these, the weekly cultural assemblies that Tabascans were expected, indeed, frequently required, to attend are particularly memorable. Festive educational events that typically included music, artistic performances, and speeches, the *culturales* were held every Sunday in communities across Tabasco. Those in attendance could expect to hear government operatives speak out against religion.

Vividly recalling these assemblies during a 2001 interview with me was eighty-seven year-old América Sánchez, a lifetime resident of the Chontal community Vicente Guerrero. As we sat in front of her home—her son and daughter listening in, and her

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<sup>55</sup> During the Cruz administration the legislature passed a law criminalizing drunkenness. See, “El alcoholismo ha recibido en Tabasco golpes definitivos”, *Tierra y Libertad* (Mérida, Yucatán), July 1930, p. 18. In 1931, a “Dry Law” was passed. See, Ridgeway, *The Cooperative Republic*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>56</sup> The best synthetic treatment of *garridista* anticlericalism can be found in Chapter One of Carlos Martínez Assad's widely-cited study, *El laboratorio de la revolución: El Tabasco garridista* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1979). Also see, Adrian A. Bantjes, “Idolatry and Iconoclasm in Revolutionary

great-grandchildren playing nearby—she reflected on the anticlerical campaigns of the Garrido era. “They had the [cultural] assemblies under some trees; people came and...as there was a church in the center [of the pueblo], what Tomás Garrido did was remove the saints.” Doña América took me by surprise with her next comment. “Why should the saints be there occupying space?” she asked rhetorically. “Saints don’t hear or speak, so they should be removed. He had them burned, and the church was made a school. Many people studied there, even adults studied, and women.”<sup>57</sup>

Some individuals were comfortable with official discourses and policies attacking religious “fanaticism.” But, as might be expected, popular reactions to anticlericalism were as varied as the inhabitants of Tabasco themselves. Certain Tabascans were so offended by Garrido’s anti-Catholic policies that they temporarily abandoned the state. At the other extreme, was an anti-clerical subset that truly relished attacking religion: Alfonso Bates Caparroso, the leader of the militantly pro-Garrido youth organization known as the red shirts, which will be addressed in the following chapter, would appear to fit this profile.<sup>58</sup>

However, between these two poles lay a range of responses. Some individuals cooperated publicly with anticlerical acts—but were privately tormented by them. This was the case of Aristides Prats, who I interviewed for this thesis in 2001. Eighty-two years old when we spoke, he had been a student during the Garrido era. He explained how school events that involved saint burning had been very difficult for him because he

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Mexico: The De-Christianization Campaigns, 1929-1940,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13:1 (Winter 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Interview with América Sánchez conducted by Kristin Harper, August 26, 2001, Villa Vicente Guerrero, Centla, Tabasco.

<sup>58</sup> Kirshner, *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, p. 65. Kirshner Attributes the red shirt leader’s intense anti-Catholic sentiment, which he characterizes perhaps a bit hyperbolically as “sadistic rage,” to Bates Caparroso’s homosexuality.



had been raised in a “fervently Catholic family.” Because he felt like burning saints was a sin, he would try to avoid spattering the flames by tossing his cup of gasoline to the side of the bonfire (that is provided he was not being too closely watched). Even so his role in saint burning had filled him with remorse, Don Aristides told me, and after school he would go “home to pray and ask for forgiveness.”<sup>59</sup>

Some Tabascans sidestepped anti-clerical issues when circumstances permitted. This appears to have been the case in the easternmost municipalities of Tenosique and Balancán, where *garridista* influence was relatively weak. During his brief stint in the Usumacinta Judicial District in 1929, Fortunato Pedrero, an extremely anti-clerical court employee, noted that “religious fanaticism” was alive and well in Tenosique and Balancán. During cultural assemblies, he wrote in a letter to Garrido, special pains were taken to avoid anti-clerical topics, since this angered the crowd. Being in Tenosique one Sunday, Pedrero addressed the crowd that had gathered at the cultural assembly. However, his speech on the detrimental effects of religion, “fell like a bomb.” That some girls in the crowd had called him a “damn fat guy” (*maldito barrigón*) during his speech seems only to have strengthened his resolve to use the cultural assemblies to carry out a “decisive campaign against religion.”<sup>60</sup>

Other than his anti-clerical speeches, I do not know what ideological props Fortunato Pedrero relied on “de-fanaticize” the residents of eastern Tabasco. However, when it came to propagating their anti-Catholic message, the *garridistas* had a comprehensive repertoire of anti-clerical aids to draw from. Anti-clerical themes were developed in newspaper articles, pamphlets, songs, and plays. The *garridistas* also used

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Aristides Prats conducted by Kristin Harper, October 23, 2001, Villahermosa, Tabasco.

<sup>60</sup> Fortunato Pedrero to Tomás Garrido C., 10 August, 1929, AGN-TGC, caja 133, exp. 8.

films in their attempt to turn their subjects against the Church. One of these was the “La Cruz y el Mausser,” which was screened in various parts of the state.

According to a letter written by a horrified group of *vecinos* from Jonuta, the film showed “women giving birth in church sacristies and...bathing in streams in the company of priests.”<sup>61</sup> *Garridista* activists, for their part, clearly relished the film’s unsavory content. An announcement urging “workers and campesinos” in Villahermosa to attend a free screening of “La Cruz y el Mausser,” deployed an anticlerical trope common throughout revolutionary Mexico. Characterizing priests as vile sexual predators, the announcement stated, “If you want to know where the greatest threat to your daughters...wives...[and] sisters lurks, come tonight, 8:00 sharp to the Worker and Campesino Theater.”<sup>62</sup>

In July of 1929, Eusebio Hernández, a league authority in Cunduacán, reported that the film had drawn a surprisingly large audience, noting that the locale where the screening took place was “full” of workers, campesinos, and their families. Brought to Cunduacán by Professor José Ochoa Lobato in conjunction with a fair that was being held there, the film, Hernández observed, had been well received.<sup>63</sup> It is likely that the fair in question was organized to replace Cunduacán’s traditional religious festival. In any case, in one of their more innovative moves, Tabasco’s anticlerical operatives organized a number of secular agricultural fairs (devoted to local products such as oranges, coconuts, and yucca) whose purpose it was to displace the religious festivities

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<sup>61</sup> AHFT-DGG, rollo 13, “problemas religiosos,” folio 1172.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., folio 1174.

<sup>63</sup> Eusebio Hernández to Tomás Garrido C., 27 July, 1929, AGN-TGC, caja 133, exp. 8.

celebrated at various times and places throughout the state.<sup>64</sup> The most memorable one of these took place in Macuspana in 1929.

### Bloody Yucca: The Fair in Epigmenio Antonio

In 1929, spokespeople for the Tabascan government announced their intention to sponsor a fair in Epigmenio Antonio. The fair would celebrate the starchy vegetable yucca, which abounded in those parts. Planned for the last week of August and the first week of September, the yucca festival was timed to displace the religious festivities traditionally celebrated by the community in honor of their patron saint, San Carlos. The announcement of a secular fair did not sit well with a young catechist from the community, Gabriel García. Referred to in the small 1957 volume that immortalizes him as “El Indio Gabriel,” this uncompromising young Catholic urged the people of Epigmenio Antonio to speak out in favor of their religion.<sup>65</sup>

On the morning of August 27, between three or four hundred men women and children from the community gathered at the modest Chapel of the Sacred Heart to sign protest statements, which they then delivered to the yucca festival organizers. Seeing the crowd gathered at the plaza, the teachers from the “rationalist” school together with a number of local functionaries respectfully received the petitions. Only the local deputy, José Ruiz, apparently unable to contain his rage, began a diatribe about corrupt priests

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<sup>64</sup> Martínez Assad, *El laboratorio*, p. 46. Martínez Assad notes that religious festivals in Tabasco's various regions were actually converted by decree into fairs whose names derived from the agricultural item that was most important to the individual pueblos.

<sup>65</sup> Severo García, *El Indio Gabriel: La matanza de San Carlos*. (México D.F., Editorial Jus, 1957), pp. 43-44.



who duped their followers. Gabriel thanked the officials on “behalf of the indignant villagers” and withdrew to the church to await an answer.<sup>66</sup>

Many hours later, after a number of unsuccessful attempts to get Gabriel García to appear before the Municipal President, government agents, now reinforced by federal troops, began firing at the chapel, where a number of Catholics had taken refuge. They also fired at the house where Gabriel García was prayerfully sequestered.<sup>67</sup> Another version of events has the Catholics firing the first shots.<sup>68</sup> Either way, a melee broke out pitching machete and mostly useless rifle-wielding Catholics against government soldiers and gendarmes. Before it was all over, the chapel and three houses where the Catholic resisters had taken refuge were smoldering ruins.<sup>69</sup>

No one knows for sure how many people died that day. An account characterizing the event as the vile outcome of *garridista* anticlericalism reported that seventeen Catholics had perished while ten or twelve of them were injured. This account states that the government suffered commensurate losses.<sup>70</sup> A source sympathetic to the garridistas claimed that the two-hour battle left thirty indigenous resisters dead, while

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 46-47.

<sup>68</sup> Mariano Tovar, *Un pueblo, una causa, un hombre: El problema de México y de América* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Borrasc Hermanos, 1939), pp. 201.

<sup>69</sup> García, *El Indio Gabriel*, pp. 46-48. What transpired in Epigmenio Antonio in August of 1929 was easily the most grisly anticlerical episode of the Garrido era. However, physical confrontations between Catholics and anticlerical operatives were the exception in Tabasco, not the rule. This experience was in marked contrast to the gruesome and protracted conflict that pitted Catholics against the Mexican state in regions of central and western Mexico between 1926 and 1929, and which claimed thousands upon thousands of lives. Michael J. Gonzales offers a helpful summary of why certain regions of the country were spared this fate. He writes, “Resistance to anticlericalism was weak in Tabasco and other...regions where the church had failed to establish a strong institutional presence. In parts of western and central Mexico, however, [where the Catholic Church had had a strong institutional presence since the 16<sup>th</sup> century] Catholicism was embedded into the lives of villagers, and they defended the church.” See, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), pp. 212-213.

<sup>70</sup> García, *El Indio Gabriel* pp. 50-51.

eighteen government combatants were killed.<sup>71</sup> The young catechist Gabriel, who managed to survive the fighting, went into hiding.

Unable to mask his disgust at what he perceived to be the religious fanaticism of Gabriel García, whom he mockingly called “the servant of the Lord”, Mariano Tovar characterized the conflagration on that August afternoon in 1929 as a liberating moment for the people of Epigmenio Antonio. Construction of a *Centro Difusor*—which Tovar described as a “rudimentary polytechnic school”—began immediately and teachers specializing in carpentry, tailoring, saddle-making and other trades were dispatched to the community.<sup>72</sup> The Garrido State’s decision to erect a *Centro Difusor* in the wake of this fiery episode is eerily reminiscent of the Spanish colonial practice of building their churches atop the temple remains of vanquished indigenous groups. Only this time, the purpose of the new edifice was not to bring the Indians into the Catholic fold, but to rescue them from it. Describing the transformation that had taken place in this pueblo comprised of “4000 full-blooded indigenous people”, an official report boasted, “the Tabascan government initiated its renovating labor, educating the Indian and elevating his economic station. The San Carlos Fair was replaced by the Yucca Fair, which is celebrated each year without tithes, alcohol or masses.”<sup>73</sup>

Some inhabitants of Epigmenio Antonio received Garridista interventions enthusiastically. Praising Garrido as a kindly benefactor in a speech he delivered at a local political gathering, Manuel Sánchez Felix remarked, “Yesterday we were practically naked, without land and poorly nourished. Thanks to the efforts of Lic.

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<sup>71</sup> Tovar, *Un pueblo*, p. 201.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 201-204.

<sup>73</sup> AGN-TGC, caja 133, exp. 10.



Garrido and the affection he has for us, we learned how to dress, we know how to read, and we already have our own lands and bread for our children.”<sup>74</sup> His speech was accompanied by others, which, in their adulation of Garrido and national figures such as Plutarco Elías Calles, were similar in tone.<sup>75</sup>

Expressions of gratitude notwithstanding, the ideological orientation of the Garrido regime and the tactics they deployed in attempting to “modernize” the community met stern resistance in Epigmenio Antonio. In 1930 hundreds of *vecinos* from Epigmenio Antonio wrote a letter to the Mexican president in which they accused the local government of thefts, killings and religious intolerance. They reported that a commander from Villahermosa and the local municipal agent forced them carry out hard labor at gunpoint, assigned to tasks which included clearing land plots and moving houses from one place to another. This unremunerated labor was required of them six days a month, in violation of the individual rights guaranteed them by Article Five of the Federal Constitution. In lofty patriotic language they lamented that such injustices could occur in a free and sovereign nation...“where even those of the indigenous race...benefit from the rights of an equal constitution, the immortal work of...Benito Juárez.”<sup>76</sup> By citing the indigenous president Benito Juárez, who helped draft the 1857 Constitution, which, incidentally, the revolutionary Constitution of 1917 altered but did not throw out,

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<sup>74</sup> These self-deprecating remarks appear to reflect the assimilative outcome that revolutionary reformers hoped for from indigenous people--i.e. once indigenous people were exposed to “modern” (qua western) ways, they would reject former customs (now considered “backwards”). Inherent in this formulation, of course, was the belief that campesino/rural/indigenous people lacked “culture and rationality.” For an informative discussion of the assimilative goals of Mexican revolutionary (and Porfirian-era) educators, and the cultural prejudices they held with respect to rural people’s knowledge, see, Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, pp. 26-29. Problematising the remarks of this individual from Epigmenio Antonio seems analytically necessary. Even so, I am not prepared to state that the (western-oriented?) reforms to which he spoke were not somehow meaningful to him.

<sup>75</sup> AGN TGC, caja 133, exp. 10.

<sup>76</sup> AHHT DGG, rollo 20, “trabajos forzados,” folios 1-19



these citizens from Epigmenio Antonio staked their claim to social fairness on the rights accorded them as members of the nation. In their politically motivated complaint to the president, the letter writers from Epigmenio Antonio deployed what anthropologists and other scholars refer to as “strategic essentialism.” By casting themselves in lowly terms (recall their phrase “even those of the indigenous race benefit from...rights”) they underscored the broad equalizing powers of a constitution whose duty it was to protect *all people* from arbitrariness and injustice.<sup>77</sup>

Tabascan governor Asuncio Cruz, when he got wind of the allegations, sent a message to the offices of the Secretary of the Interior, assuring them that the complaints against local authorities were overdrawn. Yes, community members from Epigmenio Antonio had been called upon to build educational centers, something positive for them in any case. As for the assassination charges, he denied them.<sup>78</sup>

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In an attempt to “modernize” their citizens, the *garridistas* appointed themselves the supreme cultural arbiters of the state. Consumed with a very particular vision of what constituted social progress, the *garridistas*, like many Mexican reformers of the revolutionary period, refused to deviate from the ideological path they had carved out, even if it meant alienating large portions of the population. Angrily characterizing religious individuals and communities as “retrograde elements” and “dupes of the

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<sup>77</sup> Deploying essentialist or stereotyped constructions of themselves is a method indigenous activists and intellectuals may use to achieve political goals. See, Lynn Stephen, *Zapata Lives! Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> AHFT, DGG, rollo 20, folios 1-19.

clergy," the *garridistas* nonetheless considered religiosity (among poor Tabascans, anyway) an affliction caused by centuries of exploitation and abuse. For this reason, they refused to abandon the notion that poor and indigenous Tabascans would lead more fulfilling lives if only they could be shorn of their religious ways. Underlying this sentiment, though, was a stubborn refusal to acknowledge that it was possible to claim both a Catholic *and a revolutionary* identity.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>On this possibility see, Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 162; and Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos*, p. 12.

## CHAPTER 6

### AUTHORITARIAN POPULIST GOVERNANCE, 1931-1935: AN ETHICAL IMPOSSIBILITY?

On a campaign swing in Tabasco in 1934 presidential candidate Lázaro Cárdenas marveled at the “profound social interpretation” that the Mexican Revolution had achieved in the state of Tabasco. Tabasco’s indigenous population created a particularly favorable impression on Cárdenas, who commented to a newspaper reporter, “I have yet to find on my trip...the spectacle of nudity, neglect, and misery of the aboriginal classes, which in other regions of the country we are disgracefully accustomed to.” The reporter accompanying the presidential contender as he stumped through Tabasco was similarly impressed, noting that in pueblos on the campaign trail indigenous inhabitants expressed their ideas and gave speeches “without shyness.” “It seems to us” the writer ventured, “they have no complaints.”<sup>1</sup>

Complainers and dissidents are not usually invited to deliver pronouncements at political rallies whose purpose it is stimulate patriotism or garner votes. Certainly the events organized for two of Mexico’s most powerful national figures, Plutarco Elías Calles, and the presidential contender for the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, General Lázaro Cárdenas, were orchestrated to showcase the revolutionary victories that had been attained in Tabasco. Had the reporter for the official party paper, *El Nacional*, chosen to dig deeper, he would have found pockets of discontent among Tabasco’s indigenous population. (Had not certain members of the *Chontal* community Epigmenio Antonio

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<sup>1</sup> “25,000 Hombres Darán la Bienvenida a los Generales Plutarco Elías Calles y Lázaro Cárdenas en Villahermosa”, *El Nacional*, March 25, 1934.



suffered a horrible loss at the hands of the regime?) But the newspaper's aim, that day and others, was to recognize and celebrate the progress brought about in Mexico as a result of the Revolution. And who better than outspoken and patriotic Indians to proclaim the heroic achievements of state-sponsored reform?

This chapter uses statements made by Lázaro Cárdenas during his 1934 visit to Tabasco as a starting point to discuss the political and social incongruities found in Tabasco during the second constitutional governorship of Garrido Canabal (1931-1934). Re-elected in 1930--and in the Governor's chair again in 1931--Garrido continued to pursue the innovative social policies that had characterized his rule since 1923. It is in this period, for instance, that the government established unique educational venues known as *centros difusores* in several rural (and predominantly indigenous) communities; moved to expand the enrollment at the Dolores Correa Zapata School by transferring the educational institution to a larger locale; and created a male rural normal boarding school in the heavily indigenous municipality of Jalpa de Méndez. Populist and empowering, these (and other) reforms acted as leavening agents in a political culture frequently weighed down by arbitrariness, corruption and ideological intolerance.

#### Cárdenas in Vicente Guerrero

On March 21, 1934, Lázaro Cárdenas traveled to the Chontal pueblo Vicente Guerrero in the municipality of Centla to attend an agriculture and livestock fair being celebrated there. Designated the "Day of the Indian," the fair showcased products from Vicente Guerrero and two neighboring communities. Afterwards, Cárdenas was given a tour of the community's *Centro Difusor*, an educational facility that offered indigenous

children and adults training in music, agriculture, the raising of farm animals, carpentry and shoe making, among other activities. Apparently fascinated by the school, the future president stayed there for three hours—peppering students and teachers alike with questions as Garrido looked on.<sup>2</sup>

It is unsurprising that Cárdenas was taken to Vicente Guerrero during his trip to Tabasco. The Tabascan revolutionary regime counted this indigenous village among its revolutionary success stories. (Among the “accomplishments” the *garridistas* attributed to themselves was having turned Vicente Guerrero into an “athiest pueblo” and creating “indigenous feminists” out of women who formerly had “not even used shirts.”<sup>3</sup>)

Garrido visited the *pueblo* regularly, something that has not been forgotten by the people of Vicente Guerrero.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many people retain a deep appreciation for the reforms that were introduced during his tenure. Eighty-seven year old América Sánchez, for example, spoke favorably about the *garridista* anti-alcohol campaign and the regime’s interest in educating women. When I asked her what she appreciated most about the Garrido years, she said, “Everyone went out. When there was a dance, all the young people [went]...very decently...this is the civilization that Tomás Garrido wanted...many

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<sup>2</sup> Canudas, *Trópico rojo*, vol. II, p. 279. For a general description of the *Centros Difusores*, see, Mariano Tovar, *Un pueblo*, p. 195. Since at least 1922, revolutionary educator José Ochoa Lobato had dreamed of sending mobile schools of this type to Tabasco’s rural and indigenous communities. As such, it is possible that the *Centros Difusores* were an outgrowth of this proposal. However, the *Centros Difusores* also bear a striking resemblance to the SEP’s *misiones culturales*. Of the SEP’s “cultural missions” Luis Marentes writes, “More than just rural schools, these missions were whole cultural centers, designed to fulfill a variety of purposes. Through the training provided by them, the poor inhabitants of rural Mexico were supposed to acquire the technical skills necessary for their incorporation into the modern capitalist economy.” See, *José Vasconcelos and the Writing of the Mexican Revolution*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> AGN-TGC, caja 133, exp. 10.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Garrido and his governing entourage traveled widely throughout the state to evaluate educational and economic initiatives or to attend local fairs, special luncheons, and cultural assemblies. Frequently these visits were linked with a campaign swing, the promotion of a new educational enterprise, or the inauguration of a public work. Yet other visits seem to have been motivated by a desire to “convivir”—or share time—with the people; a no less effective strategy for building popular support.



people [came] from Mexico, people [came] from all over. They can get here because there are roads...[it was] very good what Tomás Garrido was doing, very good what he did. But there were people who disliked him.”<sup>5</sup>

A novice interviewer, and overly reliant on my script, I was not perceptive enough to follow-up on Dona América’s comment that there were people in Vicente Guerrero who disliked Garrido. Later, I would learn that the Garrido regime had carried out violent reprisals against a group of people from Vicente Guerrero believed to have been involved in the killing of Garrido operatives in the village.<sup>6</sup>

### The Cacique Factor: Municipal Operatives and Social Control

Not to be unexpected from a presidential contender looking to earn political sympathies, Lázaro Cárdenas vigorously complimented the Tabascan reform programs he witnessed while on the campaign trail there.<sup>7</sup> Even so, his contention that in Tabasco there existed “but one great family,” and that communities were not plagued by

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with América Sánchez conducted by Kristin Harper, August 26, 2001, Villa Vicente Guerrero, Centla, Tabasco.

<sup>6</sup> On August 17, 1931 Garrido alerted a municipal agent in Villa Unión (in the municipality Centro) that a group of individuals from Vicente Guerrero had assassinated their Municipal Agent, Luís Chablé; the police commander, Alejandro Bolaina; and the President of the Cooperative, Basilio de la Cruz. Orders were issued in various parts of the state to hunt down the criminals. Moreover, *ranchería* residents were to be warned that if they harbored the fugitives they would be considered “rebels” and dealt with accordingly. Tomás Garrido Canabal to Sr. Agente Municipal de Villa Unión, 17 August, 1931, AGN-TGC, caja 22, exp. 34. What prompted the men to kill the Garrido operatives is not mentioned, however, Joaquín Ruíz, a bitter enemy of the *garridistas*, writes that the men from Guerrero killed the police commander for having raped and accidentally killed a *señorita*. Joaquín Ruíz, *La Revolución en Tabasco* (México D.F., 1934), p. 56. Other references to the incident—including the assertion that seventeen people were liquidated by the *garridistas* in revenge for Chablé’s murder—can be found in Kirshner, *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, p. 44; and Martínez Assad, *El laboratorio*, p. 207.

<sup>7</sup> There is ample reason to believe that the praise Cárdenas showered on Tabasco and Tomás Garrido was sincerely felt—after all, in the 1934 presidential election in which Cárdenas himself was the official party’s contender, he cast his vote for Tomás Garrido! Garrido was not running, so this was a symbolic gesture. But it was a significant one—one that recognized the unique revolutionary experiment that was unfolding in the southeastern Mexican state.



“divisiveness” and “quarreling,” probably rang hollow to many Tabascan citizens.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, his claim that he had not been a “witness to discord” during his trip was surely more a function of the *garridistas*’ ability to control dissident elements than evidence that Tabascans were a supremely unified people.<sup>9</sup>

The *garridistas* “managed” Tabasco by assigning loyal operatives to monitor activities in communities across the state. Cities and towns had police officers to draw on, but smaller population centers, such as *rancherías*, *pueblos*, or *villas* might be assigned *agentes municipales* whose job it was to keep order and assure that community members were following state directives. Sometimes these municipal agents were from the communities they monitored. But frequently, as was the case with Luis Chablé, the municipal agent killed in Vicente Guerrero, they were sent in from outside. Whether they were locals or “outsiders,” the surveillance responsibilities of these municipal operatives made them palpable figures in the community life of Tabascans.

Eighty-two year old Francisco Sánchez Cruz, whom I interviewed in Vicente Guerrero in 2001, recalled the surveillance activities of the Garrido era. Particularly intriguing was his recollection that two or three people gathered to talk might be suspected of conspiring against the government (*formando política*). His memory that a “detective” interrogated individuals who failed to show up for dances or cultural assemblies was also revealing. Recounting the kinds of questions asked of event absentees--“What do you do at night?” or “Why didn’t you go to the cultural event?” or “Why didn’t you go to the assembly?” or “Why didn’t you go to the dance?”—Don

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<sup>8</sup> “25,000 Hombres Darán la Bienvenida.”

<sup>9</sup> Cárdenas’ quote on the lack of discord in Tabasco can be found in “Carta Abierta de un Trabajador Tabasqueño para el Senador por Michoacán Ernesto Soto Reyes” (México, 1936), p. 11.

Francisco underscored the suspicious, even paranoid, nature of certain Garrido-era operatives.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes local operatives could be downright overbearing. Bartolo Pérez, a farmer from the *ranchería* Playa del Rosario in the municipality of El Centro, complained in a 1934 letter to President Abelardo Rodríguez, that he and six of his *compañeros* were “constantly pestered by the state police for not wanting to show up for the innumerable unpaid jobs that they daily assign us.” Not only were they obliged to open paths two days a week, reported Pérez, but they were called upon to build kiosks for local fairs, dance halls and even airplane landing fields. Pérez noted ruefully that the police commander stationed at the *ranchería* had no compunction about “taking lives” and that many residents “had had to flee to Chiapas,” abandoning their homes and fields.<sup>11</sup>

Municipal agents and police officers, of course, were the necessary underlings in a loyalty-based political network that included municipal presidents, local deputies, federal deputies and senators. The latter lobbied members of the presidential cabinet, their congressional colleagues, and other federal-level officials for policies and favors that benefited *garridista* Tabasco. Local officials meanwhile, including state legislators, but especially municipal presidents (and the police officers and municipal agents in their

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Francisco Sánchez Cruz conducted by Kristin Harper, August 26, 2001, Villa Vicente Guerrero, Centla, Tabasco. Other examples of social control included ordering barefoot subjects to work small jobs, which would enable them to buy shoes, and fining parents who did not send their children to school. Though Sánchez Cruz implied that some of these actions were extreme, for the most part he linked interventions of this kind with social betterment.

<sup>11</sup> AHFT-DGG, rollo 19, “Atropellos de Autoridades,” exp. 402. The unpaid activities to which Pérez referred are highly significant. The *garridistas* frequently required their citizens to donate labor to tasks deemed of the public interest. I examine this phenomenon in, “Revolutionary Reform at the Margin of the Law: The Case of Road Building in Tomás Garrido Canabal’s Tabasco,” *Governors of the Mexican Revolution: Portraits of Courage, Corruption and Conflict*, William H. Beezley and Jurgen Buchenau, eds. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., forthcoming).

employ) kept “order” on the ground. The order they kept, however, often came at a high price.

The historical record for the Garrido era fairly brims with stories about corrupt—even violent--municipal presidents. Pilar Forcelledo, who spoke to me about her childhood in Macuspana during a 2002 interview, recalled that the municipal president there had a reputation for great cruelty. Her family was never bothered by him, she acknowledged, perhaps because he had grown up with her mother. Indeed, Doña Pilar remembered that he would stop by her family home when she was a youngster to ask her mother for a gourd of *posol*. Even so, she recalled overhearing her mother and uncle talking about how this particular municipal president removed “enemies of the regime” from their jail cells during the night, killing them. “He hurt other people, definitely, but never my family, never, no no...other people, yes.”<sup>12</sup> Sadly, this is but one example of municipal-level violence that I could recount. Since people’s most direct experience with government was likely to occur in the municipalities where they lived, it is easy to appreciate the ambivalence Tabascans felt about Garrido’s rule.

In his largely unflattering book about the regime, *Tomás Garrido: al derecho y al revés*, Manuel González Calzada suggests that Garrido may have been ignorant to the “cacique-style tyrannies” that pervaded the municipalities and small rural hamlets.<sup>13</sup> Was Garrido aware of the pervasiveness of arbitrary government in the municipalities? Was countenancing a few bad apples the price that had to be paid to “maintain order” in a

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Maria del Pilar Forcelledo conducted by Kristin Harper. Villahermosa, Tabasco. February 5, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Manuel González Calzada, *Tomás Garrido: al derecho y al revés* (México D.F. 1940), p. 66. Arguing that many municipal operatives were power-hungry opportunists who turned their back on Garrido after 1935, González Calzada partially exonerates the Tabascan caudillo.



sometimes unstable political environment? Was loyalty the primary criterion for maintaining one's position in the regime? Were local officials given the green light to adopt forcible measures if it meant advancing government goals? I suspect that to varying degrees we could answer these questions in the affirmative. Garrido was simply too much "in the know" to have been systematically ignorant of his underlings' actions. Even so, I was struck by the fact that several of the people I interviewed for this dissertation, even when they acknowledged that abuses occurred during the Garrido era, nonetheless distanced Tomás Garrido from unsavory acts. I will reflect on this pattern at greater length in the conclusion—for I think it significant. I only mention it here to underscore the extent to which coercion and arbitrariness undermined the many beneficent policies pursued by the *garridistas*, and hence, the regime's popularity.

In terms of imposing social discipline, government officials could not go it alone. They relied on state-friendly interest groups to promote their social, economic, and political objectives. We have already become familiar with the resistance leagues' role in reinforcing *garridismo*. However, in 1932 a new organization took shape: the *Bloque de Jóvenes Revolucionarios*, otherwise known as the "red shirts."

#### The "Camisas Rojas": Liability or Benefit?

Visually distinctive in their black and red uniforms, the mixed-gender *Bloque de Jóvenes Revolucionarios* was the Garrido regime's most iconic interest group. Comprised of young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, and frequently referred to as the *camisas rojas*--the *BJR* was inaugurated in Villahermosa in 1932, although a series of

party-loyal youth organizations and initiatives had predated its founding.<sup>14</sup> The leader of the *Bloque* was Alfonso Bates Caparroso, the nephew of *garridista* Senator Alcides Caparroso, and the *primo hermano* of Garrido's fiercely loyal young confidant, Amado Caparroso.<sup>15</sup> The Garrido regime's colorful (and controversial) foot soldiers in the war against God and alcohol—they are remembered today for having searched people's homes for saints and *aguardiente* and for their burlesque parodies of the Catholic Church.

During his 1934 visit, Lázaro Cárdenas extolled the *camisas rojas* as “idealistic” and “collective-minded” youth organization.<sup>16</sup> One former *camisa roja* who I interviewed in 2001 expressed similar sentiments, although he was quick to express the reservations he held about the Garrido regime. Born into a prosperous family, Aristides Prats was attending a state-sanctioned private school in Villahermosa at the time that he joined the *camisas rojas* at the age of thirteen or fourteen. Don Aristides recalled that *camisa roja* activities included singing patriotic hymns, marching in formation, performing calisthenics, and attending anticlerical and anti-alcohol speeches.<sup>17</sup> He felt that the young people in the *Bloque* were imbued with the goal of “bringing the country” and economically disadvantaged “youth” to a “higher standard of living.” Notwithstanding these lofty sentiments, Don Aristides reported that membership in the *Bloque* was

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<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of the BJR's founding see, Kirshner, *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, pp. 57-64. One version has it that the Red Shirts were organized in 1932 to militate against the campaign for federal deputy being waged by one of the regime's most trenchant critics—Salvador Camelo Solar. See, González Calzada, *Tomás Garrido: al derecho y al revés*, pp. 59-60. Alan Kirshner, though, counters González Calzada's theory on the origin of the red shirts, in *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, p. 62, f.n. #25.

<sup>15</sup> Calzada, *Tomás Garrido: al derecho y al revés*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>16</sup> “25,000 Hombres Darán la Bienvenida.”

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, he made no mention of the house searches (organized to confiscate saints or alcohol) which gave the group its notoriety. This may have to do with the fact that he found the regime's anticlerical policies objectionable. (See his comments on saint burning in Chapter Five). His young age may account for his not being given this sometimes-uncomfortable assignment.

obligatory, and that young people who arrived late to meetings or missed events ran the risk of arrest.<sup>18</sup>

This was also the recollection of David Velásquez Alberto, who as a young agricultural worker in Comalcalco was required to join the *Bloque*. Like Prats, he indicated that punishments were meted out to those who failed to participate. About forty-men strong (from what I can gather, rural-based *camisa roja* organizations were largely a male phenomenon) the *Bloque* organized in his *ranchería* engaged in military training exercises on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. It was also their responsibility to attend events and conduct house-to-house searches for saints. Asked how people reacted when their homes were searched, Don David observed, “some resisted”—using machetes to repel the visitors.<sup>19</sup> Don David never indicated that he had had any close calls. However, as the following story from another former *Bloque* member suggests, confiscating and destroying saints could be a scary proposition.

### Burning Saints in Amatlán

During my research stint in Tabasco I took a pleasure trip to Villa Tapijulapa in the southern municipality of Tacotalpa. My destination was Tomás Garrido’s vacation home “Villa Luz.” Located in a wooded area and surrounded by sulfur baths, Villa Luz was arguably Garrido’s favorite Tabascan get-away spot. As I journeyed out to the house, I met a municipal employee from Tacotalpa who was escorting the crew of a Tabascan

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Aristides Prats de Salazar. In 1933 Garrido issued orders to the state’s seventeen municipal presidents to encourage the formation of local *Bloques*. By 1935 membership had become obligatory. See, Kirshner, *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with David Velásquez Alberto conducted by Kristin Harper, February 24, 2002, Ranchería Zapata, Comalcalco, Tabasco.



television program to Villa Luz. He asked what brought me to Tapijulapa, and I told him of my interest in Tomás Garrido. Fascinated by the history of his state—he was working on a history of Tacotalpa when we met in 2001—Cesar García Córdoba offered to arrange oral history interviews for me in Tapijulapa. Several weeks later I returned there for the meetings.

My first interview was with ninety-four year old Rubén Camacho. A telegraph operator during the Garrido era, he had also picked up shifts loading and unloading fruit. Seemingly a member of a local resistance league, Don Rubén had also been a member of the *Bloque*. Like David Velásquez, Don Rubén insinuated that he was not a willing member of the *Bloque*—indicating that one had little choice but to participate in the group. So when the municipal president ordered seven or eight members of the *Bloque* to travel to Amatlán, Chiapas, to burn saints, they agreed. (Don Rubén indicated that a refusal of the municipal president's order would have resulted in jail time). Provisioned with horses and guns, the young men set out for Amatlán. Leaving Tapijulapa at eleven o' clock at night, they arrived in the Chiapan town of Amatlán at 3:00 a.m. After eating a snack of coffee and bread, they were given a hammer to break the door of the local church. Once inside, one of the young men enthusiastically climbed onto the main altar grabbing religious adornments, such as "small angels."

By 4:00 a.m. the saints had been stacked by the entrance of the municipal palace. Don Rubén assumed they would set fire to the pile and flee on their horses. But they were taken inside the municipal building where they were to wait until morning. At 8:00 a.m. the school opened and a local teacher handed the children a gourd full of gasoline to throw on the saints that had been mounded in the town-square. When the townspeople realized

what was happening, they descended on the scene with sticks, machetes, and rifles. Meanwhile, the Tabascan contingent was still in the municipal palace, “with nothing but a rifle.” Fearing the angry crowd outside, someone sent off a telegram asking for reinforcement. About an hour and a half later a young man named Manuel Herrera arrived. A talented horn player, he blew his instrument at the entrance of Amatlán (apparently out of sight of the angry villagers). As Don Rubén recounted, “the people of Amatlán believed that the soldiers had come to defend [us]...so we slipped out, got on our horses, and returned [to Tapijulapa]”. Reflecting on the incident, Don Rubén mused, “And that is how we burned saints in the state of Chiapas...we went to even these extremes, because they forced us to.”<sup>20</sup>

It is possible that this story about Tabascan red shirts burning saints in Chiapas made the national news: certainly anti-Garrido newspapers in Mexico City made a habit of reporting on the unseemly behavior of Tabascan radicals. These papers would have a heyday in 1935 when the *camisas rojas* killed five churchgoers in Mexico City.

### Wither Garridismo

On November 30, 1934 General Cárdenas was inaugurated President of Mexico.<sup>21</sup> During the pomp and circumstance of the inauguration ceremony, one group made an especially strong visual impression: the Tabascan red shirts. They had arrived in the Mexican capital two days earlier, following on the heels of Tomás Garrido who had been named to Cardenás’ cabinet as the Minister of Agriculture. Having established

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Ruben Camacho conducted by Kristin Harper with the assistance of Cesar García Córdoba, February 1, 2002, Villa Tapijulapa, Tacotalpa, Tabasco.

<sup>21</sup> Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, p. 602

headquarters in Mexico City (and several other Mexican states besides Tabasco) the red shirts gained visibility—and notoriety—in 1934 and 1935. During Garrido's stint in Cárdenas' cabinet, many red shirts held positions in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, where they were reputed to have answered Garrido's daily query, "Does God exist?" with the response "He has never existed." Of course red shirt anticlericalism was not limited to the office. The *camisas rojas*, whose membership expanded with the participation of young men and women from Mexico City, engaged in a series of anticlerical activities in the Mexican capital. One month after their arrival in Mexico City, in fact, an imbroglio involving the *camisas rojas* broke out in front of a church in Coyoacán. The clash left five Catholics and one *camisa roja*, a young recruit from Mexico City named Ernesto Malda, dead.<sup>22</sup>

His *camisas rojas* frequently excoriated in the press, Garrido survived that particular debacle. However, when Cárdenas initiated his split from Calles—a move that prompted the newly inaugurated Mexican President to ask for resignations in his heavily *Callista* cabinet-- Garrido's political fortunes wavered. After handing in his resignation in June, Tomás Garrido flew back to Tabasco. There, he assumed the directorship of Tabasco's Department of Public Education.<sup>23</sup> However, as he set about directing the educational program that had so distinguished his regime, plans were afoot in Mexico City to uproot *garridismo* once and for all.

With Garrido out of the president's cabinet and former president Calles (Garrido's long-time political protector) out of the country, anti-Garrido activists in Mexico City saw

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<sup>22</sup> Kirshner, *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, pp. 93-105. For a detailed discussion of the Coyoacán affair and its aftermath, see, Kirshner, chapter four.

<sup>23</sup> In a warm letter to the President, Garrido informed Cárdenas of his new appointment: "'As a son of the Revolution, I will work...wherever my services are needed...I am immensely satisfied that in this modest



a political opening and pounced on it. According to John W.F. Dulles, these Garrido adversaries “focused [their] hope on a rather immediate objective. The Tabasco electoral law called for an election on August 18, 1935, to fill the state’s single legislative chamber. By July 18...nine *diputados* and nine substitute *diputados* representing the state’s nine electoral districts would have to be registered in Tabasco.”<sup>24</sup> Calling themselves the *Comite Libertador*, the group planned a “punitive expedition” to Villahermosa in advance of the July 18 deadline.

The group’s leader was Tabascan-exile Rodolfo Brito Foucher, Dean of the Law School at Mexico’s National Autonomous University. Active in the de la Huerta rebellion, Brito’s dislike of Garrido was intense and personal. (You may remember from Chapter Two, that the *garridistas* had attempted to expropriate his mother’s Frontera property in 1923.) In 1935, as members of the *Comite Libertador* prepared their mission to Tabasco, Brito arranged meetings with high-level federal officials to ask for safety guarantees. One of those who received him was Francisco Múgica, the Secretary of Communications and Public Works, who allegedly told “Brito and his followers: ‘you can go calm and confident that General Cárdenas is a man of honor who will not permit you to be assassinated’.”<sup>25</sup>

In John Foster Dulles colorful telling of it, two chartered planes carrying twenty passengers—half of them students—left Mexico City for Villahermosa on July 14. Informed of the expeditionaries’ impending arrival, and concerned about a possible outbreak of violence, federal soldiers had been stationed at the Villahermosa airport. When they arrived, a small contingent of Tabascan residents was on hand to greet them.

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post I will share with the selfless educators of Tabasco, for whom you have had affection and sympathy, the pedagogical responsibilities of the moment’.” Dromundo, *Tomás Garrido, su vida y su leyenda*, p. 165.

<sup>24</sup> Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, p. 651.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 652.

Tabascan drivers, however, had been “forbidden to transport” the *britista* expedition members, so they were forced to walk the mile and a half into town. Once there, Brito and his companions set up shop in the “humble dwelling of a Tabascan worker,” since hotels, too, had been ordered not to accommodate them. Inside their provisional headquarters, Brito began to draw up a slate of candidates to participate in the upcoming election. As Dulles wrote, “From the very start commissions of peasants from all over the state paid calls on the leaders of the Expedition and [Bruto] lost no time in inquiring of these about their secret leaders, studying carefully the attributes of all in order to form a suitable list in opposition to the dictatorship.”<sup>26</sup>

The next day the group took steps to move to more “secure” headquarters. Having decided to proceed to their new location in two separate groups, the first delegation of expeditionaries, accompanied by some local supporters, set out at 10:00 in the morning. Taunted by a large crowd of *camisas rojas*, who “hurled...insults...old fruit and other objects,” the expeditionary members continued their march. However, when they reached a particular intersection, the group encountered another band of *garridistas* headed by former governor and current federal senator, Ausencio Cruz. “Hemmed in from in front and behind,” wrote Dulles, the *britistas* were fired upon.<sup>27</sup> Alan Kirshner posits a slightly different scenario, suggesting that an expedition member, infuriated at being hit by a trash bucket hurled by the red shirts, fired into the air. Once a shot rang out, “All bedlam broke loose.” The clash claimed the lives of five expeditionaries—including the twenty-four

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 652-653. Brito Foucher did not particularly desire political power in Tabasco (he had made his professional life in Mexico City) and Cárdenas would ask him to abandon Tabasco in the wake of the punitive expedition in any case. Brito Foucher’s desire to oust the *garridistas* was based on longstanding political and personal differences with Garrido Canabal.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 652-654.

year old younger brother of Rudolfo Brito Foucher—and seven *garridistas*. Many more were wounded.<sup>28</sup>

President Cárdenas ordered an immediate investigation into the incident. Tensions, however, were becoming unbearable, not only in Tabasco, but Mexico City, where the young expedition members killed in Tabasco had been converted into martyrs. Concerned that a rebellion might break out in Tabasco, the federal government sent several military battalions into the state. By July 22, Cárdenas recommended to the Permanent Commission of the National Congress that state powers in Tabasco be terminated. The congressional body delivered a unanimous vote in favor of the resolution, forcing *garridista* Governor Manuel Lastra to step down. He was replaced by General Aureo Calles.<sup>29</sup> Several weeks later, the newly appointed Chief Military Officer in Tabasco paid a visit to Tomás Garrido, who had remained in Tabasco after Lastra had been deposed. Garrido was encouraged to “abandon the state” and given the assurance that Cárdenas would respect “Tabascan revolutionary achievements.” Garrido agreed, flying into exile in Costa Rica in his signature black and red airplane, “El Guacamayo.”<sup>30</sup>

Reactions to Garrido’s downfall were decidedly mixed in Tabasco. Some people when they learned of the Permanent Commission’s decision organized “festive demonstrations.” A group of disenchanted *camisas rojas*, for their part, burned their shirts when Garrido finally abandoned the state.<sup>31</sup> Aristides Prats remembered these spontaneous outbursts, recalling how celebratory *corridos* had been sung in the market place, and how

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<sup>28</sup> Kirshner, *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 228-235; and Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, pp. 657-658.

<sup>30</sup> Dromundo, *Tomás Garrido, su vida y su leyenda*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>31</sup> Kirshner, *Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Mexican Red Shirt Movement*, p. 237; and Dromundo, *Tomás Garrido, su vida y su leyenda*, p. 122.



disaffected *Bloque* members had tied the sleeves of their red shirts together, creating “large garlands” that were then strewn “from balcony to balcony.”<sup>32</sup> Carmen Acosta, though, remembered that a more somber atmosphere pervaded the worker colony where she lived. “We felt bad, the people who lived here in the colony...you see, many [felt] grateful. I always felt that we paid for the plot and everything, but he did a great favor for the poor.” She also implied that the *garridistas* had meant for that favor to be a lasting one. Once the government had been overthrown, Doña Carmen reported, “Señorita Santa María and a notary...gave out property titles to all the people [in the colony].”<sup>33</sup>

### The End of the Road

Garrido returned to Mexico in 1940 and established his residence in Mexico City. According to his friend and admirer Baltasar Dromundo, he led a “simple life,” socializing with friends such as Lázaro Cárdenas and Manuel Ávila Camacho. Not long after his wife Dolores Llovera died, Garrido himself fell ill. He was taken to California where he died on April 8, 1943 at the age of fifty-two. When he learned of Garrido’s death, former president Cárdenas dispatched a message indicating his desire that he be brought back to Mexico in a military airplane so that revolutionary tribute might be paid to him. When the plane carrying Garrido’s ashes arrived at the Mexico City airfield, Cárdenas and a host of other revolutionary notables were on hand to receive it.<sup>34</sup>

Per Garrido’s wishes, his ashes were taken to Tabasco, and sprinkled on one of its many rivers. Esperanza Baeza, who spoke to me about her memories of the Garrido era

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Aristides Prats de Salzar.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Carmen Acosta Viuda de Montero.

<sup>34</sup> Dromundo, *Tomás Garrido, su vida y su leyenda*, p. 171.

during a 2001 interview, was among the crowd that gathered to watch. “From a small jar they threw [the ashes of] Don Tomás into the Grijalva River.” “Like this,” she showed me, imitating the sprinkling of ashes with her hand. “We went to see that...oh, how the people cried. Because this man was very kindly, he helped the poor, he helped all the poor, he gave them food, he gave them drink, a house to live in, money to buy everything, and they were very upset by his passing....”<sup>35</sup>

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Surely elsewhere on that day, other Tabasans were celebrating Garrido’s final passage.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Esperanza Baeza Baeza conducted by Kristin Harper, December 6, 2001, Villahermosa, Tabasco.

## CONCLUSION

Know then, minds too stiff  
Most often stumble, and the rigid steel  
Baked in the furnace, made exceeding hard,  
Thou seest most often split and broken lie.

*Antigone*

On the eve of the Revolution few would have believed that Tabasco—large portions of which were submerged under water for months at a time and whose inhabitants suffered wave after wave of debilitating epidemic illnesses—would emerge as one of Mexico’s revolutionary “stars.” Yet under the “disciplinary” guidance of Tomás Garrido Canabal’s regime, Tabasco underwent an extraordinary transformation, and the lives of the state’s residents were touched in the process. For numerous Tabascans the changes were welcome. Increased wages and access to schooling, for example, were tangible benefits to which Tabascans could point if they needed a reminder that a Revolution had taken place. And if toeing (or at least tolerating) the party line was the trade-off for attaining a better quality of life, then that was something many people were willing to accept. If it sounds like I am denying Garrido a base of genuine social support, let me be clear: for some Tabascans there was no sense of compromise, their admiration for the Garrido regime was deeply felt, their support of it militantly expressed.

Yet the changes wrought in Tabascan society during the Garrido era disturbed many Tabascans. For some, *garridismo* appeared to threaten their traditionally privileged lifestyles, and wealthier Tabascans who opposed Garrido and the policies he undertook as long-time regional strongman, fled the state.<sup>1</sup> Then again, many Tabascans, regardless of

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<sup>1</sup>It is important to acknowledge, however, that many of the state’s wealthy citizens stayed on in Tabasco, embracing or opportunistically cooperating with state policies, a reminder that wealth alone did not determine whether one accepted or rejected *garridismo*.



their social class, rejected the Garrido regime for its excess authority, bristling at its unbending attitudes towards the Catholic Church and its obsession with ensuring “loyalty.”

Garrido’s most trenchant opponents mobilized to defeat him (and the social project his regime represented) on numerous occasions. Early in his administration, local opponents of *garridismo* joined the de la Huerta rebellion in hopes of dislodging him from the governor’s chair. Only momentarily successful, they would try to defeat him again in 1926—this time by mounting an aggressive gubernatorial campaign against the militantly pro-Garrido candidate, Ausencio Cruz. Both the military rebellion of 1923 and the electoral challenge of 1926 (which occasionally took on the aspect of an armed conflict) presented serious challenges to the political project known as *garridismo*. That the Garrido regime was able to repel these not insignificant threats, was due both to the popular mobilization of its most loyal constituencies, and the intervention of federal authorities, revealing the complex way in which power was mediated and maintained in revolutionary Mexico.

The events of 1923 and 1926, this thesis has argued, served to harden a regime that was already disposed to act aggressively toward its opponents. Suspicious and paranoid (and understandably so) the Garrido regime adopted a defensive governing posture. This is exemplified by the community surveillance measures adopted by the regime. Moreover, defensiveness was institutionalized in structures such as the resistance leagues (founded in 1924), the state-run labor entity that sought to simultaneously empower workers and create a bulwark against enemies of the regime.

*Garridista* labor policies did, in fact, empower some workers, but this empowerment was “regimented,” (to borrow Christopher Boyer’s concept) and therefore partial.<sup>2</sup>

Whether in urban working class circles, rural hamlets, or the commercial sector, the ability to prosper in *garridista* Tabasco was predicated on one’s loyalty to the regime. A defensive (loyalty-based) governing strategy may very well have been the key to the Garrido regime’s survival in the unstable 1920s, but it was not a viable governing strategy in the long term. Moreover, by stubbornly refusing to “negotiate” the religious question in Tabasco, the *garridistas* lost vital support. Many of the people I interviewed for this dissertation suggested that Garrido’s unbending anticlericalism was his fatal flaw. For her part, Esperanza Marín Dehesa, an eighty-three year old former nurse from Balancán, wondered but that Garrido might have stayed in power longer had he softened his stance toward the Church.<sup>3</sup> It is an intriguing hypothesis, one that speaks to Marjorie Becker’s formulation regarding what Lázaro Cárdenas learned from the Michoacán peasantry about governance: “that ideological conformity was not necessary for governmental control.”<sup>4</sup>

### Striking a Balance

It was a sunny afternoon in October of 2001, and I was in the home of Aristides Prats to conduct my fifth interview. We had been talking for over an hour, and the interview was winding down. When I asked if he thought there was something else that people should know about the Garrido era that my questions had not addressed, he said, “Well, the most important thing to repeat to you is that Garrido established for

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<sup>2</sup>Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Luz Esperanza Marín Dehesa Vda. de Castro conducted by Kristin Harper, August 14, 2001, Balancán, Tabasco.

approximately fifteen years a revolutionary dictatorship that exercised excess authority, infringing on people's individual liberties [and] limiting their freedoms...but [there were] good things and bad things. Education for all was a great achievement that history should record, because there were no kids who were not in school, and there were schools for all the state's children."<sup>5</sup>

This observation goes a long way in explaining the irreconcilable opinions about the Garrido era. For the regime that insisted that children receive an education—opening hundreds of schools in even the state's remotest corners (and providing free breakfasts besides)--was the same one that relied on coercion to secure its governing mandate. The government that helped working class Tabascans acquire their own homes, was the same one that sacked the ranches and homes of its "political enemies." The regime that offered all manner of assurances to members of the resistance leagues, curtailed the liberties of working-class Tabascans who failed to join.

Significantly, nearly all of the people I interviewed acknowledged that there were positive and negative aspects of the Garrido regime. Some of the interviewees' interpretations emphasized the regime's accomplishments, while others emphasized what was lamentable about those days. But as I re-read the interviews in preparation for writing the dissertation, I noticed a curious pattern. A number of people, in acknowledging that the regime had objectionable characteristics, nevertheless exonerated Garrido from wrongdoing. Typical of this trend was David Velásquez' contention that Garrido was a "good man, a good governor" but that negative elements had derailed his

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<sup>4</sup>Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*, p. 162.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Aristides Prats de Salazar.



program.<sup>6</sup> While it is true that local operatives implemented punitive measures, and that some of them may have acted in ways that were not condoned by the regime, I was nevertheless intrigued that some people were anxious to distance Garrido—the man—from the administration he dominated.

As I thought about, it occurred to me that for Tabascans of the 1920s and 1930s, Garrido was a palpable figure. He visited their communities, schools, and workshops. He handed them prizes at state fairs, and recruited young people to attend the rural normal schools. He has been described as affable and charming, and to the extent that he had a dark side, this would not have been on display when he was out mingling with the people of his state. Perhaps separating Garrido (who most of the interviewees saw in person at least once during his tenure as Tabascan strongman) from the less savory aspects of his regime gave them permission to acknowledge what was admirable about it. Or perhaps I am simply engaging in psychological projection: longing, as I am, to believe that the unarguably mixed legacy of *garridismo* tended more towards the good than towards the bad.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with David Velásquez Alberto.

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