**The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920)**

The Mexican Revolution was a complex and bloody conflict which arguably spanned two decades, and in which 900,000 people lost their lives.

In 1876, *Porfirio Diaz*, a mestizo general in the Mexican Army took control of the nation, and continued to be elected until 1910. Díaz was an ambitious president, keen to develop Mexico into an industrial and modernized country. While he worked on implementing a capitalist society building factories, dams, and roads the rural workers and peasants suffered greatly.

Díaz reigned using a campaign of bullying, intimidating citizens into supporting him. While civil liberties such as the freedom of press suffered under his rule, the greatest injustice came in the form of new land laws.

In an attempt to strengthen ties with the United States and other influential foreign interests, Díaz allocated land, once belonging to the people of Mexico, to the wealthy. In addition to this, no Mexican was able to own land unless they had a formal legal title. Small farmers were rendered utterly helpless. Many poor farmers wanted the haciendas (large estates from original land grants given by the Spanish) of the wealthy to be broken up and the land redistributed.

Another problem was that in order to encourage modernization, Diaz turned to foreigners. Eventually, most of Mexico’s railroads, mines and industries were owned by British, American and French companies. Diaz valued French culture so much, he tried to replace traditional Mexican cooking with French cooking and traditional Mexican dress with European fashions.

Surprisingly, in 1908, Diaz was interviewed by US journalist James Creelman. In the interview Diaz stated that he believed Mexico would be ready for free elections by 1910. When this interview was published it inspired a rich landowner in northern Mexico to gather supporters around him and attempt to build a political backing of followers that could defeat Diaz in the 1910 election. The landowner was *Francisco I. Madero*. Madero and his followers' slogan was, "effective suffrage and no re-election”. The people of Mexico were inspired and by the time 1910 came around Madero had a very good chance of becoming president of Mexico. Diaz, in an attempt to stay in power, rigged the election and arrested Madero. Madero was soon released, and immediately fled for San Antonio Texas. While in Texas he declared himself president of Mexico and wrote a revolutionary document, *La Plan de San Luis Potosi*. This plan called for a violent revolt on November 20, 1910. The Mexican Revolution began with this call to arms.

The path of the Revolution didn’t run smoothly after that, and the country saw a string of unreliable presidents. In 1911, Diaz fled Mexico and went to live in France where he died in 1915. Francisco Madero, unfortunately, turned out to be a weak leader and failed to implement the land reforms he had promised and that all the lower classes wanted.

In Morelos, south of Mexico City, a revolt began under *Emiliano Zapata,* a mestizo farmer, in which the haciendas of the rich were taken over and given back to the poor indigenous people. In Chihuahua in the north of Mexico, a second revolt was begun by *Francisco “Pancho” Villa*. He organized an army of cowboys and divided up the large haciendas into small family ranches.

Madero was quickly replaced by General *Victoriano Huerta* who had Madero executed within a week of coming to power. Huerta himself was a dictator and was overthrown by *Venustianio Carranza* in 1914.

While many accused Carranza of being power hungry he also lusted after peace. In the pursuit of civil rest he formed the Constitutional Army and had a new constitution written in which he accepted many of the rebel demands.

The official end of the Mexican Revolution is often taken to be the adoption of the Constitution of Mexico in 1917. The new constitution permitted the breakup of large estates and placed restrictions on foreigners owning land. In addition, it nationalized many of Mexico’s natural resources (to prevent the Americans and Europeans from making a profit on them). Church land was made property of the nation. A minimum wage was set, the right of workers to strike was protected. There was only male suffrage, but women did receive certain protections. Women were to receive the same pay for the same type of work. Also, married women could draw up contracts, take part in legal suits, and have equal authority with men in spending family funds.

Despite the new constitution, however, violence continued well into the next decade in Mexico. By 1923, Zapata, Carranza and Villa all had been killed. It was only in 1942 when all the still living Mexican ex-presidents stood on the stage of the town center of Mexico City to show their support to Britain and America in World War II, that the citizens of Mexico saw their first glimmer of political solidarity and a country finally united.