The Different Roads to Rebellion: Socialist Education and the Second Cristero Rebellion in Jalisco, 1934-1939

Los Diferentes Caminos a la Rebelión. Reforma Nacional y la Segunda Cristiada en Jalisco, 1934-1939

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Abstract

When Lázaro Cárdenas came in to office, he inherited a Six-Year Plan that intended to open 12,000 new rural schools. The instruction to be imparted at these schools was to be socialist in its orientations and tendencies. This article focuses on the upsurge in local political violence in the State of Jalisco in response to the educational reform that emanated from the National Government. I highlight the conflicts and confrontations that comprised this phenomenon to illustrate how Mexican citizens understood their rights and made decisions during a period of social agitation.

Key words: Socialist education, political violence, rural teachers, agrarians, the Second Cristero Rebellion.

Resumen

Cuando Lázaro Cárdenas llegó a la presidencia de México en 1934, heredó un Plan Sexenal que pretendía abrir 12,000 nuevas escuelas rurales. La instrucción en estas escuelas tenía que ser socialista en sus tendencias y orientaciones. Este artículo trata en el recrudecimiento de la violencia política en el estado de Jalisco como respuesta a la reforma educativa que planteaba el Gobierno central. Destaco los conflictos y confrontaciones que formaron parte de este fenómeno para ilustrar cómo ciudadanos mexicanos entendieron sus derechos y tomaron decisiones durante un período de agitación social.

Palabras clave: Educación socialista, violencia política, maestros rurales, agraristas, la Segunda Cristiada

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> Children are taught in government schools that there is no God. They are taught to despise their parents and to look upon the state as the supreme authority in their home life and morals. The persecution grows worse. Many of our fine young sons have been killed. They are being killed, secretly, silently. No man knows when his time may come next …. It is of the children [that] we must think. We cannot abandon the children to this program from Moscow. The fires of Bolshevism are burning in Mexico…Men are dying for this now […] Men are dying for their faith as Christians died in early Rome. Mexico has become a land of martyrs.
>
> The Archbishop of Guadalajara,
> Francisco Orozco y Jiménez [2]

During the 1930s, Mexico's postrevolutionary government undertook an ambitious state-building scheme. State projects such as rural schools, for example, represented some of the most important means through which the new ruling party attempted to construct political hegemony. In the "Rosary Belt" of central-western Mexico, where Catholics came to be known for their exceptional religious fervor, the implementation of new federal schooling policy quickly turned into an intense physical, ideological, and spiritual battleground.[3] Believing they had been deprived of their rights as citizens, many ex-cristeros[4] rose up in arms and retreated to the hills to wage an ill-fated military campaign against the Mexican state. Come hell, high water, insurmountable casualties, or offerings of peace, these Catholics refused to surrender to what they deemed an unjust federal government that had stolen the riches of the nation and intended to corrupt the souls of their children.[5]

2 SD, 812.404/1784.

3 The "Rosary Belt," originally coined by Carlos Monsiváis, describes the central-western Mexican states of Jalisco, Colima, southern Guanajuato, Michoacán, Nayarit, and southern Zacatecas. See Fallaw, 2013, p. xx and 32.

4 The term, ex-cristeros refers to the insurgents who fought on the side of the Church during the first Cristero Rebellion of 1926 to 1929. See Meyer (1991) for a thorough overview of the rebellion. For regional analyses on the insurgency, see Butler (2004); Purnell (1999), Tuck (1982) and Preciado Zamora and Ortoll, eds. (2009).

5 SD, 812.00-REVOLUTIONS/198.

The historical literature on this episode classifies the ensuing violence as a guerilla movement comprised of ragtag bandits who aimlessly besieged the countryside, without a plan or the support of locals (Ortoll, 1981, p. 6; Serrano Álvarez, 1992, p. 98).[6] Recent studies, however, have begun to explore the local manifestations of this rebellion in greater depth, revealing a much more nuanced portrait of the mass upheaval and its participants. Enrique Guerra Manzo, for example, has argued that the rebellion more closely approximated a social movement led by rebels promoting specific political plans, which intended to establish alternative social orders founded upon catholic principles and civil liberties (Guerra Manzo, 2005, pp. 514-515). Yet very few studies have actually attempted to analyze the impact of a progressive national reform in a conservative region where Catholics generally followed the orthodox liturgical practices endorsed by the institutional Church, as opposed to the syncretic or folk tradition with strong indigenous strains (Fallaw, 2013, p. 31).[7]

This article explores the debates over the national government's Six-Year Plan on Education during the administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). These state led efforts to eradicate religious education, at the heart of village life, tremendously affected rural communities and provoked violence against rural teachers and agrarians,

6 Jean Meyer (1991, p. 381) has written that the rebels of the Second Cristero Rebellion "were no different than the 'primitive rebels' that Eric Hobsbawn [writes] of given that they organized [their] protest in a pure state, in a country where protest was now not possible since Calles had organized the new state apparatus […]." See Hobsbawn, 1963, p. 5. Gil Joseph (1990, p. 8), however, has noted that the modalities of peasant resistance were not spontaneous or unthinking as Hobsbawn suggested: "They were often inchoate and diffuse […and] they frequently aimed to destroy or undermine, actually or symbolically, the dominant class's authority but proposed no blue print for its replacement." We need to go beyond the basic assumption that the insurgents of the Second Cristero Rebellion were mere social bandits: "Indeed, peasant resistance was all about politics—but popular, rather than elite, politics."

7 Socialist education in Mexico has been well-studied by national and foreign historians, whose works highlight the relationship between this educational project, violence, and other forms of resistance to state projects—but very few specific studies exist for the important case of Jalisco. The work of Pablo Yankelevich (1997, pp. 112-113, 138-139) represents one of the few exceptions. With regard to socialist education, Yankelevich claims that at the highest administrative levels, the reform was meant to effectuate an absolute subordination of the population to the central state: "However, if that evaluation is extended strictly to [the implementation of the program,] it resulted in a disaster."

as local rebels and parish priests worked together to undermine federal schooling policy. In what became increasingly a hostile working environment for supporters and representatives of the postrevolutionary state, I argue that local community grievances, political divisions, and varying degrees of religious sensibilities directly molded the manner in which rural people understood the state's cultural revolution of the 1930s. This ultimately determined whether locals accepted, disregarded, or altered the Six-Year Plan on Education.

The National Discourse on Public Education

The death of president-elect Álvaro Obregón in mid-1928 was perhaps the most decisive event in the political development of Mexico in the postrevolutionary era. This tragedy consolidated the status of President Plutarco Elías Calles as the new "northern star" of the Mexican Revolution and afforded him the opportunity to restructure politics on a national level. Over the course of the next six years, three leaders –Emilio Portes Gil, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, and Abelardo Rodríguez– served brief terms as president, in a political system in which Calles retained power behind the scenes. "With reason, historians have called these years the Maximato," affirms Buchenau (2007, p. 144), "the time in which Calles informally ruled over the country as *Jefe Máximo*."

By mid-1934, however, widespread rumors indicated that General Calles was ready to withdraw from the dominant political position he held in Mexico and take an extended trip abroad. The gossip was quickly dispelled when the Jefe Máximo arrived at the Governor's Palace in Guadalajara to deliver a national radio broadcast in front of ten thousand supporters. Calles announced the dawning of a new era:

> [The] revolution has not ended; its enemies are in ambush seeking to turn its triumphs to defeat; it is necessary that we enter the new era of the revolution, which I will call the era of the psychological revolution; we should enter [and] take possession of the minds of the youth, because the youth and children should belong to the revolution.

The *Grito de Guadalajara*, as this speech came to be known, called upon the "men of the revolution" to rise up and attack its enemies with decisiveness. "[I]t would be sinful […] if we did not snatch the youth from the clutches of the clergy, of the clutches of the conservatives […]," avowed the General, "[t]he future of the fatherland and of the revolution cannot be placed into enemy hands." Calles maintained that it was the

duty of all governments of the Republic, all authorities of the Republic, and all revolutionary elements to carry out this definitive battle, "because the youth should belong to the Revolution."[8]

Shortly after this speech, two deputies submitted a bill to amend Article 3 of the Constitution (which guarantees free public education) to the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR) Block of the Chamber of Deputies.[9] The proposed amendment intended to bestow upon the state (federation, states, municipalities) the duty to impart primary, secondary, and normal instruction as a free public service for all. The instruction to be imparted, however, was to be socialist in its orientations and tendencies. This reform sought, on one hand, to eliminate entirely "religious dogmatisms and prejudices" in schools; and, on the other, to put an end to the system of lay instruction, which the *Partido Liberal Mexicano* attempted to put into practice for more than a century.[10]

On the same day that Calles delivered his speech in Guadalajara, the Minister of Public Education, Eduardo Vasconcelos, addressing the Seminar of Mexico (a group of people organized in the United States to study the social, political, economic, and educational problems of Mexico), spoke in a concise manner about the Six-Year Plan on education to be implemented by the next President of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas: "At the conclusion of the year 1934," the Minister said, "there will be 8,531 Rural Schools functioning in Mexico, and by the end of 1939 these will be increased by 11,000, so that upon the termination of the plan there will be 20,000 rural schools functioning in the country." The Plan provided for the opening of 12,000 of these schools on the following timetable: 1,000 in 1934; 2,000 in each of the years 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938; and 3,000 during the year 1939. To these were to be added an additional 3,000 rural schools that the Federal Government would not financially support, but would only technically and administratively direct. He stated, in conclusion, that ambitious as it was, the Education Plan was not to be left only to the imagination; that it had been scrupulously studied and took into consideration the capacities of the country; and it was not only planned with a great deal of far-sightedness, but also with its feet planted firmly upon the ground. "To demonstrate this," Vasconcelos stated, "fifteen per cent of the Budget of the Nation has been set aside for Public Education at this time, with increases being calculated in the Six Year Plan to raise this appropriation

8 *El Informador*, Guadalajara, July 21, 1934, pp. 1-2.

9 SD, 812.42/269.

10 SD, 812.42/269.

gradually so that by 1939, the Budget for Public Education will have reached 20 percent [of the total]."[11]

The rhetoric deployed by Vasconcelos in front of an audience of American citizens was more than mere ostentatious chicanery aimed at swaying popular perception among foreigners, and was actually put into practice by the Mexican state. For example, at the close of 1935, the Mexican Congress set aside 48,595,000.00 pesos out of a total budget of 287,197,105.15 pesos for 'Education' or 16.9 percent. 'Education' was the second most important expenditure the Mexican state expected to incur that year and was only exceeded by the amount allocated to "War," which amounted to 69,542,614.59 pesos, or approximately 24.2 percent of the entire budget—hardly surprising, considering the reported increase in hostilities, violence, and rebellion plaguing the rural countryside of Mexico. The amount apportioned to 'Education' becomes even more impressive when it is compared to the other categories funded by the Mexican state, categories more commonly thought to be pillars of postrevolutionary state rule, such as agrarian reform. For example, 6.9 percent (20,000,000.00 pesos) was allocated to 'Agricultural Credit' to fund the recently opened *Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal*, 5.2 percent (14,862,056.00 pesos) for 'Agriculture', and 2.7 percent (7,857,416.00 pesos) for 'Agrarian' matters. And even if one were to combine all three of the agricultural allocations, funding for 'Education' still surpasses that category by 5,875,528 pesos.[12]

On July 25, 1934, nevertheless, the passage of the amendment to Article 3 was far from a forgone conclusion. That day, *El Nacional* and *Excélsior* of Mexico City both published editorials presenting the pros and cons, respectively, of the project. *El Nacional*, the official organ of the government, lauded the proposed reform as a means of modernizing the old traditional school system, departing from the dominance of the private Catholic type. It agreed that extending the "progressive socialism" of the present government to penetrate the thought of the schools was in keeping with "the general tendencies of our present legislation and of our administrative practices […]." The Revolution was in need of a complete overhaul. The great social and political struggles of the past were to be integrated into a concrete ideology that would not only undergird the principles of government actions and maintain constitutional order, but would also impart those values onto the younger generation, "which the

[11] *El Universal*, Mexico City, July 25, 1924, pp. 1 and 6.

[12] SD, 812.00/30327.

Fatherland will need in the future."[13] *Excélsior*, however, took a much more pragmatic view of the recent developments that had overtaken the political discourse of the country.[14] The editorial presented a series of thought-provoking questions which sought to challenge the hegemony of the state-sponsored initiative: "How are we going to prepare thousands of teachers, [to] all [be] socialists of the same school, in order not to fall into disastrous educational anarchy? How can dogmatisms be destroyed with another dogmatism?" The journalist complained that the legislator "must tell us precisely to which socialism he refers, for this is of great importance to the success of the reform." The socialism to be adopted, therefore, needed to be consistent so that the socialism taught in one school would not be different from the ideology taught in other schools. "To establish another sectarianism is not the way to go about it," decried the editorial, "[…I]t is as logical as committing crime to stop crime; as using alcoholism to put an end to drunkenness; as expecting sensuality to develop chastity; as preaching robbery to do away with thieves […]." "It would be wise to think of these things," warned the journalist, "before converting ourselves into pontifices of an infallible dogma."[15]

Three months later, Senator Ezequiel Padilla delivered a charged address to the Mexican Senate in response to the critiques leveled at the socialist education program: "The opposition is right," conceded Padilla, "[The] importance of this reform is not pedagogical […it has] enormous ideological importance in connection with the Revolution itself." With the aim of silencing detractors of the educational reform, the senator defined Mexican socialism as "an outcry, a protest against the social injustice of the economic [condition…] which does not discuss a political, nor uphold a religious[,] banner; the Revolution is a struggle against the condition of exploitation in which the working masses live." The speech concretely laid

13 SD, 812.42/269.

14 SD, 812.00/30115. Josephus Daniels wrote in a State Department communiqué that the educational problem of Mexico was developing into an issue of first magnitude, "crowding [everything] else out of news and conversation." And that thus far, it had evolved into a conflict between the numerically superior but intellectually inferior masses, led by the Government, and the intelligentsia and "religionists," led by the clergy and certain pedagogues. "The all-important army apparently has not yet voiced its opinion," observed Daniels, "undoubtedly, however, the Government is determined to maintain the social organization with its basis of indigenous culture, for which the Revolution was fought, and to oppose to end all factions, such as the church, which strives for a perpetuation of class advantages and a stratified society."

15 SD, 812.42/269.

out the ideological underpinnings and justification for the intended reform, which among other things included the elimination of intermediaries -that is to say, non-state officials- in order to deliver the dispositions of the Constitution directly to the workers and producers. Additionally, the clergy was singled out as a political faction that all throughout Mexico's history had controlled "the hearts of the masses." "Fanaticism must be combatted, religion must be combatted with the book, with education, [and] with persuasion," declared Padilla. The senator affirmed that the nation was in the midst of a revolutionary awakening and that Mexican socialist doctrine was advancing by gigantic steps.[16]

By December 1934, the 'reformed' Article 3 was officially enacted into law and state-sponsored socialist education was established to combat religious "fanaticism."[17] And seasoned by years of protest, Catholic groups again took to the streets and sparked boycotts in the cities and countryside (Vaughan, 1997, pp. 34-35).[18] Moreover, this mobilization led to the destabilization of national-level politics. And caught in the throes of a critical battle between Mexico's longtime strongman, Calles, and the new president, Lázaro Cárdenas -who had recently assumed the presidency- the *Maximato* began to show signs of splintering.[19] Yet the approval

16 SD, 812.00/30115.

17 Article 3 of the Constitution, amended on December 1934, now read as follows: "Education imparted by the state will be socialistic, and furthermore will exclude all religious doctrines and [will] combat fanaticism and prejudices, and toward this end the school will organize its teachings and activities so as to imbue in the young a rational and exact conception of the universe and of social life. Only the state -Federation, States, Municipalities- shall impart primary, secondary or normal education. Authority may be granted [to] private individuals who desire to impart education in any of these grades, but [will] always [be] subject to the following norm: I.—The activities and teachings of private schools must follow, without any exception whatever, the precepts of the first paragraph of this article […]." The article, furthermore, stressed that teaching in official educational establishments, as well as primary, secondary, and normal instruction, cannot be administered nor supported by religious corporations, religious ministers, and associations or societies, directly or indirectly, tied to the propaganda of a religious creed.

18 In Guadalajara, for example, the Red Guard of Women of the Left (ARMI) decried that "in these moments […the clergy is] carrying out a clerical 'Boycott' against socialist education." These women subsequently asked for the seditious labor of the clergy to be punished and for the actions of the clergy to be suppressed with all the rigor of the Law. See AHJ, IP-1-935-43-1079, Legajo 1, ff. 50-52.

19 SD, 812.00/30225. Political tensions between the Calles and Cárdenas camps had begun

of the Six-Year Plan, at least for the time being, ensured some form of continuity with regard to the government's policy on education. But at the beginning of the *Cardenista* administration, the post-revolutionary state still remained unable to claim the political loyalty of a large part of its citizens in Jalisco and could only make incremental gains in its efforts to fashion new citizens, and displace local and regional cultures.

The Reform in Action: Teachers, Rebels, and Priests in Countryside

In early 1935, the Archbishop of Guadalajara, Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, granted an interview to *Liberty*, a popular American magazine, where he denounced the recent educational reforms undertaken by the national government. "Our Church [and] our children are under terrible persecution," complained Orozco y Jiménez, "[B]ehind the mask that the government turns on the world today is hatred of God, hatred of everything that is good and decent and that we hold dear."[20] The Archbishop had never been one to back down from publicly stating his opinions to media outlets regarding the ongoing persecution of the Church; however, the imprisonment on the night of 18 October of thirty-one priests charged with the crime of rebellion would force him into hiding in the town of San Pedro Tlaquepaque. Many of the newspapers in different parts of the republic launched sensationalist attacks against the Catholic clergy, while reporting that a plot on the part of priests in Guadalajara had been uncovered. Much of the ink spilled focused on depicting Orozco y Jiménez

> to simmer over a steady fire for months on end; however, in June 1935 the political quagmire reached its boiling point. President Cárdenas was rumored to have given Rodolfo Calles, Minister of Communications, a message for his father that read: "Tell your father, the General [Calles] that I cannot agree with him on the program which was published in the newspapers […] and I will continue my labor program in the present form …. If the General can follow in line with me on this program [,..] we can work together. Calles subsequently spoke harshly of Cárdenas' vanity and widened the breach even more with a public statement released on 12 June, in which he made reference to the Presidency of Ortiz Rubio (1930-1932). If not so intended, the reference to the fate of Ortiz Rubio -who apparently did not follow the advice of Calles and was subsequently forced to resign- offended Cárdenas, who acted promptly to strengthen his position. Therefore, the flare-up between Calles and Cárdenas was entirely due to the refusal of Cárdenas to accept the advice of Calles -whose word for a long time had always been the final and decisive.

20 SD, 812.404/1784.

as the "head of the rebel bands in Jalisco." On a public relations front, this approached the level of catastrophe for the Mexican clergy.

On November 10, 1935, in response to recent events, the then Vicar General of Guadalajara, José Garibi y Rivera, made an effort to distance the High Cleand decisive. During the previo-the this had created animosity--and he state to comabt holds of clericalism. During the previorgy from all radical elements: "[…I] wish to state in the most explicit and definite manner that neither his Excellency [Orozco y Jiménez], nor I, nor the clergy of Jalisco have anything to do with any armed activities." In fact, Garibi y Rivera specifically referenced an official circular -under the date of October 11, 1932- prohibiting any priest from taking part directly or indirectly in such activities, "even threatening them with penalties for disobeying orders […]." "[A]lthough strictly speaking it might be possible that some individual disobeyed this order," lamented Garibi y Rivera, "I nevertheless have the satisfaction of stating that in recent years all have complied with the order […]." The Vicar General closed his plea with a request directed to the President of the Republic. Promoting a politics of conciliation, but not necessarily of acceptance to the new state project, Garibi y Rivera asked Lázaro Cárdenas to use his influence to prevent a hasty judgment of the thirty-one imprisoned priests and to terminate the series of attacks leveled against the high clergy, "since we are not outside the law and since it is not fair that we be treated as outcasts in our own country."[21]

The Second Cristero Rebellion cannot be fully understood without an analysis of the key role that the implementation of socialist education played in inciting the widespread popular rebellion of the period. Despite the conciliatory attitude the high clergy held towards the state, many rebel groups and parish priests interpreted socialist schools as state instruments to suppress, and in certain cases to eradicate, their traditional belief systems. The selective acts of terror rebel groups perpetrated against teachers with the help of parish priests, which frequently took the form of harassment, persecution, and torture, represented immediate acts of protest against an oppressive state they deemed responsible for immorality and poverty.

In the town of Mezquitic, for example, a priest named Norberto Reyes was said to have advised parents from his pulpit to abstain from sending their children to government schools. Described as the most formidable agent with whom the "reaction" counted on, the local priest organized an attack -in collusion with "fanatic" rebels- near the *Monte Escobedo*

21 *El Informador*, Guadalajara, November 10, 1935, p. 2.

of Mezquitic. Romualdo Ávila Vázquez, Director of the Huichol and Cora indigenous boarding school, carefully described how a conniving Reyes informed the local *cabecilla* (rebel leader) about the impending departure of Professor Gilberto Ceja Torres from the area, "so that he could be one of the individuals assaulted." All were said to have perished in the ensuing affair except for the one individual, who, as he lay on the ground, was reported to have yelled the following off the top of his lungs: "Death to the priest and death to all cristeros." Vázquez implored the *Jefe Militar* of the zone to make a visit to the *Monte Escobedo* so that he could become aware of the prevailing situation and then proceed to exterminate the "cristero" parties that patrolled the area.[22]

At *hacienda* La Quemada, in the municipality of Magdalena, the climate was so bleak for the residents that they sent Francisco Mercado all the way to Mexico City to seek a meeting with the President of the Republic. In a hastily hand-written letter, a worried Mercado informed President Cárdenas:

> [I] have already been in this [city] for a few days [and] I would really thank you Sir if you could receive me in your office or wherever you may order to deal with some matters that I have in representation of the people of La Quemada […] and I cannot return without [having] dealt with anything [because] my trip was made with much sacrifice [and] for that reason I beg [of you] that you concede me the meeting I solicit.[23]

The pressing matter Mercado sought to resolve pertained to the declaration of Magdalena's parish priest in his sermon:

> [He said] that [we] should have the courage to defend [our] religion [and that we] should learn to die for it, [and] that if [we] did not have [the] courage to be Catholic, [we] much less [had the courage] to be martyrs […] that to be a martyr you need a lot [of courage and] that [we] did not know how things were [since] the country is preparing for a great movement […].

The representative of La Quemada informed Cárdenas that the parish priests of the region -from San Marcos, Etzatlán, Ahualulco de Mercado, Tequila, San Andrés, and Magdalena- were all having periodic meetings

[22] AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, f. 190.

[23] AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, f. 43.

in the *Cerro Grande* of San Andrés, near a place called "Agua Fría." In fact, there was even a *gavilla* (band) of 15 rebels equipped with weapons who patrolled the same hills. The influence of the local parish priest over the official school was so vast, confirmed Mercado, that it did not have "[…]attendance [because that] same priest has divided children into groups of approximately 10, with people of both sexes [which] he educates [as he pleases]."[24]

The Leftist Block of Teachers of Jalisco, from the nearby town of Amatitán, also wrote a letter to President Cárdenas to denounce the lower clergy's role in inciting people into open rebellion against the socialist school, "that your government has established regulations for […and] which they sometimes [do with] with public insults to authorities […]." The organized teachers complained about the clergy's deceptiveness "with their masks of hypocrisy" and of the numerous abuses they had committed. Their significant influence in the field merited special mention: "[Because] this is where all the priests carry out their insatiable campaign against us the revolutionary teachers with the goal of [having] the children [not] to attend the official schools […]." The teachers, however, declared that an assault against the school was an assault against the revolutionary teachers and therefore against the Government of the Republic.[25] If the rural teachers were truly to become the "soldiers of the revolution," as former President Calles had once remarked, then these individuals needed to ready themselves for an unconventional war against an enemy that did not obey a code of ethics.

The rural teachers, who were underpaid and insufficiently aided by authorities, bore the brunt of implementing the state sponsored socialist education project. Many were intimidated, insulted, assaulted, maimed, and murdered by those opposed to the government's educational program. In the town of Totatiche, for example, a group of five individuals, armed and mounted on horseback, stormed into the classroom of local schoolteacher José Dolores Íñiguez. He was taken about 300 meters from his school, *La Cementera*, where the rebels then proceeded to demand a pistol and money from the teacher. Since he was unable to provide the attackers with what they wanted, the defenseless teacher was executed and the rebels continued onwards to join others that patrolled the area.[26] The tragic death of Íñiguez, however, sparked a

[24] AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, f. 42.

[25] AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, f. 167.

[26] AGN, LCR, 533.3/16, f. 45. It appears that the death of J. Dolores Íñiguez occurred the month before.

lively debate at the Fifth Grand Convention of Mexican Teachers, where the topic of conversation revolved around the great number of similar events said to have taken place in different parts of the country "since the implementation of socialist education." The convention unanimously demanded from President Cárdenas that he order effective guarantees to the rural teachers, "enforcing immediate punishment to the perpetrators of the crimes" and also sought reparation for the damages suffered to widows and orphans.[27]

Shortly after the educational reform was carried out in Jalisco, Professor Silviano Robledo, Director of the Superior School for Children in Arandas, wrote to General Director Alberto Terán to denounce the tenacious propaganda, which the "fanatics" of the population openly carried out against his school. "[It affected the school] to such a degree," lamented Robledo, "that the parents who had their children in the school of my charge, do not send [them] because of the mere fact that it is a socialist school." The propaganda locals undertook was so successful that it had completely decimated student attendance. "On this date they count [on only] two or three children in each group, and because the majority of the inhabitants of this locality are fanatic enemies of the revolution […they] attack the socialist school," complained the Professor. But the recent threats leveled at Robledo, nevertheless, went beyond the realm of the professional and into the domestic: "They [the rebels] threaten us with death, and they give us an example; that they will have to do to us what was done to the [municipal] president of Jesús María; if I do not depart from this population in eight days, with all my family".[28] Like a soldier on the frontlines who just had forsaken the point of return, the professor held his ground and subsequently asked General Director Terán to order the municipal authorities of the town to intervene in matters so that he could carry out the law in reference to scholastic attendance. Robledo was not one to be intimidated by the 'fanatics' and appeared intent on carrying out the dictates of the Revolution.

The teachers of Ixtlahuacán del Río, however, did not figure upon such a positive attitude. Professor J. Jesús Cisneros, Director of the Economic School for Children, decried that three teachers had already been kidnapped and that, "there are [no] more than 13 teachers and […] there is a party of cristeros that patrols in that region." Cisneros begged the President of the Republic to equip the teachers with arms, or at least to provide them with guarantees so that they can effectively

[27] AGN, LCR, 533.3/16, ff. 57-58.

[28] AHJ, IP-1-935-43-1079, Legajo 9.

carry out their educational efforts.[29] In the nearby town of San Cristóbal de la Barranca, Professor J. Cruz García declared that the "fanatics" had recently kidnapped him and what was more, they had even stolen his prized typewriter and other objects, in addition to the the funds he had.[30] While in the historically conservative northeastern region of Los Altos, surveyor J. D. Durand confirmed that the so-called "cristeros" were equipped with supplies and ammunition taken from the Government's own arms and munitions factories.[31] The pressure against rural teachers on the part of "cristeros" in this region, noted Durand, was increasing every day and that they did not count upon the resources needed to effectively combat the detrimental actions of the Church: "[S]ince there are very few teachers that venture to go to work in those places, and those who go cannot develop any [effective strategies], due to the lack of children and the excessive risk on their lives."

One of the biggest obstacles teachers faced was the opposition posed by local town priests. For example, Professor Luis N. Rodríguez, Director of the Federal School in Tonalá, described in great detail the retreats (*ejercicios de encierro*) that the Church was accustomed to celebrate in the town:

> It [just so] happens that during these retreats the priests inspect [the people of the town] before going to sleep, and they [the priests] would say to the individuals who did not have lashes on their back or on any other part of their bodies [that they] should not sleep in company of those who have completed their penitence [and those that did not complete it] would [be] locked up in a separate room and slept alone […and that] late into the night the priests would come [to their rooms] disguised and would drag and scratch that trusting ignorant, [and that] the next day [the victim] would give the horrifying and terrifying account to the rest, who like a dogma believed that event [to be a sign from above].

The parish priest had allegedly organized the entire town: the young ladies, the youth, fathers, and mothers. And catechism was taught to children and adults, and activities were held at the town Church in the morning, mid-day, afternoon, and at nighttime. Everyone engaged in the offering of the fruits, paid a tithe, and paid fees to enter retreats. As a

29 AGN, LCR, 553.3:16, f. 36.

30 AGN, LCR, 553.3:16, f. 35.

31 AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, ff. 132-138.

result of the campaigns priests carried out, more than sixty percent of the town's agraristas, who ten years before organized to obtain *ejidos* [communal land] from the government, had retired from the association, relinquishing their rights.

When the first teachers arrived on the scene to take charge of the local school in Tonalá "an angry mob of *beatas*" (especially pious lay women who wore religious habits) unexpectedly approached the teachers and proceeded to stone them. "[T]he worst of it all," protested Rodríguez, "is that the priests have made the heads of family believe that it is best that children enter stupid into heaven and not wise into hell [and] that the current schools belong to the devil." When Rodríguez himself arrived to the town of Tonalá as Director, there were only 42 students enrolled in the local schools, out of a total student population of about 500 to 600 children. After waging a campaign against the local opposition, Rodríguez was able to increase enrollments to 93 students for daytime courses and 36 students for the newly opened evening courses. But when the schools arranged festivals or meetings with parents, priests undermined their authority by simultaneously organizing outings with children or adults to obstruct the effort of the school. Although the professor appeared to be making some headway, the harsh realities of life in a town controlled by parish priests stifled any true progress made. "[T]his place has always been a protector of cristeros, [and it was] here [that] Lauro Rocha, leader of the rebel movement of this state, was hidden," bewailed Rodríguez. And so strong was the power and influence local priests wielded over the masses that the Professor acknowledged: "Here [the] Municipal and State authorities are not in charge, [here] we fully live in the XVIII century […and] in this town there are periods of the year when the poor only eat once or twice a day; but they do have [money] for the 'alms' of the vampires […]".[32]

The majority of *campesinos* (peasants) in southern Jalisco appeared to be on the side of the teachers and vehemently defended socialist education. On October 2,1935, for example, gathered at the local elementary school, the Local Committee of El Limón proceeded to read a letter from the Government of Jalisco, which read as follows:

> The executive of the State has been carrying out [an] intense labor in favor of [the department of] Public Education […] but unfortunately the reactionary elements, enemies of the Revolution, [have] put

[32] AHJ, Gobernación-4-7129.

> up obstacles to the praiseworthy efforts of the Government. The Committee of the State[,] deeming that it is its duty to cooperate with the Government […urges] this [Local] Committee, so that by all means at its disposal, it insures that attendance at the schools established in that Municipality be abundant, denouncing before Municipal Authorities the parents or tutors reluctant to send their children to the schools, to the end of applying the corresponding sanctions to them.[33]

The "fanatic elements" of this town openly carried out propaganda against the socialist pedagogy to the point that they had infiltrated the rank and file of the P.N.R., the Agrarian Community, and the local town government. As a result, the Committee unanimously agreed, among other things, that "those who belong to the Agrarian Community, and whose children are not in school because of [the threat of] excommunication, [...] should be the first to lose their rights to their lands for palpably demonstrating that they are not in agreement with the Six-Year Plan of our current President Gen. Lázaro Cárdenas […]." The representatives of El Limón intended to unmask "once and for all those hypocrites" with the goal of having Cárdenas realize who in reality were "the real *agraristas*" whose efforts were dedicated to the economic betterment of the people.[34]

Sworn loyalty to the state, however, did not necessarily equate with widespread protection for all of the law abiding citizens of Jalisco. There was a price to pay for the fulfillment of the promises of the Revolution and that debt, more often than not, was collected by rebel forces. From the nearby municipality of Tonaya, Municipal President and Commander at Arms Abraham Uribe wrote to President Cárdenas to report a party of cristeros "that were up in arms" and who had penetrated the Agrarian Community of Los González. Uribe claimed to have resisted the intruders with five comrades, but was in due course overwhelmed by rebel forces

[33] AGN, LCR, 533.3/16, f. 81.

[34] AGN, LCR, 533.3/16, f. 81. The Local Committee was comprised of the Municipal President, Fermín González; the President of the Commissariat *Ejidal*, Francisco Piña; the President of the Municipal Committee of the P.N.R., Ramón Solórzano; and the director the school, Professor Justo Santana. In the course of that meeting, the representatives of El Limón also agreed upon the following: "[T]he parents, [who] belong to the P.N.R., who have children of school age and do not have them [enrolled] in the socialist schools, should be disowned [by] the Party"; and that "any councilman in function that has not fulfilled the above requirements, should be removed from the office that they unworthily carry out, for being the first to attack the orders emanating from the Supreme Government."

"[…and] not being able to resist the pressure of the aforementioned rebels, because [they numbered] greater than forty individuals, we were forced to disperse ourselves leaving two of my comrades dead at enemy hands." Additionally, the letter tells of the cristeros who devoted themselves to the most "despicable" behavior, burned down houses, and destroyed "whatever crossed their paths." The Municipality found itself in dire circumstances, "without homes, without anything to eat and without clothes." Uribe thus sought the help of the President of the Republic so that he might provide the community with the adequate support needed to secure for itself the definitive possession of its lands -lands that community members had spent four years struggling to acquire and that were now in rebel hands.[35]

Francisco Montoya, a representative of the indigenous peoples of Santa Catarina -a town located in the northern municipality of Mezquitic- complained about the lack of schools and effective guarantees from the government, and of the "thousands of sufferings," which the citizens who inhabited this region have endured. Montoya wrote: "[W]e all want to be educated, to be protected, to have in place in our town a detachment that can provide us [with] guarantees, [one] that does not exploit us in the same manner [that] the armed insurgents [do], who are finishing us off [because] they kill peaceful [residents and] they steal our cows […]." The letter was in response to the state's ill-fated attempt to arm five residents from Santa Catarina to defend the town and surrounding area. The representative of the town lamented the wave of repercussions this act set in motion: "[The five individuals] have only compromised us, since [because of them] the rebels rob us[,] kill [our people], and have silenced us […]." As a result, Montoya demanded that the five residents who took up arms should not be permitted to return armed to the town because they lacked discipline and excessively spent ammunition, making such a fuss in the process that it caught the attention of the patrolling rebels -who would then take it out on the peaceful residents. "We [the peaceful residents of Santa Catarina] all have the will to serve the Government," affirmed Montoya, "but [in order for us] to take up arms we need there to be [military] detachments in our towns [and concrete reassurances to actually convince] the majority of the residents to taken them [arms] up".[36]

Many in the countryside took matters into their own hands -instead of waiting patiently for the government to deliver on its promises- and submitted secret plots to state agencies with the intent of infiltrating

[35] AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, f. 93.

[36] AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, ff. 30-31.

rebel forces, strengthening the position of the federal government, and establishing federal schools in "rebel areas."[37] The most comprehensive plot hailed from the town of Santa Rita, in the municipality of Ayo el Chico (Ayotlán) in the Los Altos region of the northeast. In a carefully crafted plan, federal teacher Víctor Contreras suggested using individuals from the state's agrarian communities to establish camps adjacent to this region, "[in] a quantity that is equivalent to 40% of all the workers [… and that the] other 60% of the workers [needed to] be of *alteño* origin" so as to not unsettle the native residents of the region. According to the teacher, the *agraristas* would be provided with instructions to not reveal their agrarian tendencies, but would secretly be equipped with arms so that they could be ready to defend their camps at any given moment.[38] "The *agrarista* elements […]," affirmed Contreras, "will educate the consciences of the poor *alteños* [as to] what the modern workers are[…]." Contreras noted that the region of Los Altos could be one of the most valuable and prosperous areas of the country. And that if presidential measures were effectively applied to it, the region would once again be able to align itself to the constitutional side, "[which] because of a misunderstanding [stemming from] the constitution of Chilpancingo [in] 1813 until the Six-Year Plan[,] Los Altos has always put up resistance to the [liberal] laws [of Mexico]."[39]

The *Rochista* Rebellion in *Los Altos de Jalisco*

The previous section presented a bird's-eye view of rebellion during this period, without emphasizing differences among rebel groups. In

37 AGN, LCR, 551.3:60, f. 26. Eulogio Narváez of Lagos de Moreno, for example, sent a hand written letter to the President of the Republic to offer his services in order to "suffocate those parties of bandits that are said to be part of the Liberating Party of Religious Beliefs." Narváez claimed he had assurances that the leaders of the local rebel forces would accept him into their ranks, whereupon he would be able to infiltrate the group and provide valuable information to the federal forces. Narváez's motivations stemmed from his desire to teach the bandits and those that protect them a "lesson in the most definitive manner" and to assure peace in the region.

38 This would have been significant because, at the time, the region was considered one of the primary strongholds of clericalism. During the previous Cristero Rebellion of 1926-1929, the agraristas were mobilized by the state to combat catholic rebel forces. Over the years, this had created animosity -and a fierce rivalry- among both social groups.

39 AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, f. 100-104.

this section, I specifically focus on the rebellion led by ex-cristero Lauro Rocha in the conservative region of Los Altos, which one contemporary labeled as "the last bastion of clericalism in Mexico."[40] I ask three central questions: Who were the men that followed him? Why did they rise up in arms? What was their ultimate fate? I argue that the rebels who participated in this armed struggle were not simply holdouts from the first Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929), but instead were citizens who promoted an active platform shaped by adverse responses to state interventions, the right to local autonomy, and preexisting religious sensibilities, which had become incompatible with the modern vision for the nation the post-revolutionary state promoted.

At the beginning of 1935, General Carlos Martín del Campo, Secretary of War and the Navy, declared that in the Republic there were no rebels.[41] But in the spring of 1935 Governor Everardo Topete could no longer deny the discontent and disorder brewing in the Los Altos region. In a letter to the personal secretary of President Cárdenas, the Governor decried the lack of protection afforded to the region, "the *Región Alteña* is currently completely unguarded [and I] consider it very dangerous [if the area] continues in that manner […]." Topete stressed that an immense problem would be created if the region were neglected, "since the war the individuals known as 'alteños' waged in the past [cristero] rebellion is too well known." The Governor acknowledged that the mere presence of federal forces in simple detachments, in the settlements of greatest importance, would be sufficient enough to prevent any uprising.[42]

The Military Headquarters of Los Altos voiced its first public warning against the rebels who were in opposition to the Government a month later, on May 15. In a statement published in local newspapers across

40 AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, f. 132-138. The surveyor, J. D. Durand, specifically mentioned that: "Los Altos is the Mecca of Catholic Priests expelled from other places." The Surveyor also stressed that while the priests of the region continued roam around in Los Altos, "children will continue to be distant from the official schools, [and this] represents a serious problem for the nation, since the present generation is growing in the most complete ignorance under the tutelage of the clergy, which is maintaining it not only distant from the educational establishments but also instilling a profound hatred towards civil authorities, in particular those of the State and federal, in general […the] level of ignorance is bigger to the extent that [as] time passes […] the power of [the] Church augments in that proportion, because their spiritual power precisely rests on the ignorance of their adepts."

41 *El Informador*, Guadalajara, January 15, 1935, p. 1.

42 AGN, LCR, 559:6, f. 125.

the region, General Antonio A. Guerrero called upon those who had taken up arms to put behind them all resentment and differences, and to dedicate themselves exclusively to their work: "[I can] assure them [the rebels] that this military zone under my command will afford them […] guarantees, […] so long as their conduct is in strict accordance with this principle," announced the General. "I make the same promise to the small armed groups who are still […] operating in different parts of the state, [who are bothering] the real *campesinos* [peasants] and keeping their defenseless families in anxiety." Guerrero unequivocally made it known to all the rebels that if they did not heed the call to surrender, the full forces of the zone would energetically pursue and punish any insurrectionist.[43]

On April 1, 1935, Lauro Rocha called upon the "valiant" and "suffering" sons of Los Altos to rise up in arms against the National Government. The *rochista* movement had a considerable historical evolution behind it, for they belonged to a world that had long known conflict with the state's local representatives. The implementation of socialist education in Los Altos, however, reignited in the hearts of the *alteños* the desire to fight for the greater glory of God and to protect the youth and their women from "the disgraced revolutionaries of the present, who, perfidious and begging, usurp power with the audacity of the serpent which offers the venom of its fangs with the brilliance of its eyes." The manifesto Rocha circulated, although often cloaked in flowery language and religious allegory, provided great insight into the motivations, grievances, and ideological trajectory that sustained the movement. The Catholic sentiment on the freedom of education echoed in his prose; for example, as Rocha himself expressed: "You know lies are the favorite weapons of our enemies… hypocrites and dissemblers, they deny that there is religious persecution when everyone knows that in Mexico it is a serious offense to be a Catholic, and that for this single offense we are condemned to live as outcasts and sentenced to death."[44]

In the eyes of the rebel leader, the government wished to take possession of the souls of their children in order to make of them hordes of hardened criminals, "taught to kill women, children, and peaceful old people." The *rochistas* feared losing forever "the souls of our children, the virtue of our women, the honor of our youth, the dignity of the home; and, what is even more sacred […] the destruction of the Mexican soul

43 SD, 812.00-REVOLUTIONS/198.

44 SD, 812.00-REVOLUTIONS/198.

[…].” And much like previous rebel movements in Mexican history, Rocha also fought in the name of the Holy Mother of Guadalupe and appealed to the “ardent and self-denying and happy love we all feel towards [her, which] is the jewel and glory and honor of our forefathers and the only noble inheritance for those who follow us in life.” Rocha called upon all men, women, and children, without regard to sex, age, or condition, to “cooperate in bringing to an end as soon as possible [to] this campaign which need only to last long enough to regain our lost liberties.”

The continual degradation of living conditions and the corruption of government officials in Mexico were also cited by Rocha as grievances motivating rebel demands:

> Thieves and rabble, they [politicians] have enriched themselves in such a manner that all our people are in hunger and misery, business paralyzed, industries bankrupt, agriculture unprofitable, while they, the great bandits of Mexico, export tons of gold for deposit in the vaults of banks in Europe and the United States in order to enjoy, some day not far distant, their profit when the furious wave of this seas provoked by them overcomes.[45]

The rebel leader called for the overthrow of the “tyrants” who had stolen the wealth of the nation; that is to say, prominent politicians such as General Calles, President Cárdenas and “all those packs of dogs and treasury robbers.” According to Rocha, these politicians were to be delivered into the hands of the people who would then exact strict justice on each of them. For Rocha and his people, this was the supreme movement, the occasion when they either saved themselves or were forever defeated, “If we heed the call of duty we shall be free, but if we withdraw as cowards, the maledictions of God and the Fatherland will be upon us.”[46]

A contemporary report on the situation in Los Altos revealed that the *rochista* rank and rile to be comprised of one hundred and twenty-six rebels. It is important to note that these calculations represent conservative estimates and do not take into account the increasing number of rebel deaths at the hands of the military. Place of birth was only available for twenty-six of these individuals, which represents approximately 20.4 percent of the enlisted troops. The rebels came from five municipalities in Los Altos: Arandas, Jesús María, Tepatitlán de Morelos, San Miguel

[45] SD, 812.00-REVOLUTIONS/198.

[46] SD, 812.00-REVOLUTIONS/198.

el Alto, and Atotonilco el Alto. Twenty-three of these individuals (85.1 percent) hailed from the municipality of Arandas, while the remaining rebels were equally distributed among the remaining four municipalities. Rocha appeared to be the principal *cabecilla* (leader) of the movement and his immediate forces were comprised of seven additional *cabecillas*. Every *cabecilla* was in command of a *gavilla* (band) comprised of an average of approximately eighteen subordinates. The report indicates that four of the seven *gavillas* patrolled in Los Altos and the surrounding areas; and of those four groups, three received specific orders to carry out, which were the following: the men of *cabecilla* Arredondo served as escorts for Rocha, while the men of Macías had the specific task of patrolling near the principal road, near El Josefina. This made continuous assaults on military trucks that patrolled near León, Guanajuato, possibly. *Cabecilla* Concepción Rizo was assigned the similar task of assaulting cars that toured from Atotonilco. Many of these men were supplied with arms and munitions that arrived through the use of informal networks, which stemmed from to Guadalajara to Los Altos and, at one point, to Veracruz. The leaders of the movement all held regular meetings with Lauro Rocha at Picacho de Ayo or at the ranches of La Mesita, Cerro Gordo, Palmitos, and Támara to distribute cartridges amongst the *gavillas*. The *rochistas* also had spies at the peaks of Cerro de Ayo, Cerro Gordo, Cerro de San Judas, Cerro del Viborero, and Cerro del Caracol. It should be noted that these conservative figures represent a snap shot of the *rochista* rebels in the midst of their decline and do not account for the possibility that at any given time before these figures were recorded, the number of people involved in the movement could have been significantly higher. However, what the figures do effectively demonstrate is despite having their numbers drastically reduced at the hands of increasing military attacks, these rebels retained a great deal of organization and discipline.[47]

A Portrait of a Battle

On September 22, 1935, Guadalajara's *El Informador* reported that *rochistas*, "dissatisfied with the current state of the Republic," raided the population of San José de Gracia in the Los Altos region.[48] The insurgents

[47] AGN, LCR, 559.1:23, f. 118.

[48] *El Informador*, September 22, 1935, p. 1. Two months after, various women -among them Doña Luisita Ruiz Velasco and Josefina Ruiz Velasco- were reported to have acquired ammunition for the rebels. They explained how they acquired some Thompson guns and machine guns for the movement and even said that they acquired them from various ex-deputies. These same women, according to their own confession, were the

quickly overwhelmed local authorities, defeated the rural defense unit (comprised of *agraristas*), and proceeded to commit various abuses and kidnaped numerous individuals from the township. Among those who fell into the clutches of *rochistas* were Enrique Ramírez, who later obtained his freedom and returned to Guadalajara; Gabriel González Tizareño, executed and abandoned on the battlefield; and Lorenzo Reynoso Padilla, the Judge Counsel of Tepatitlán de Morelos, who had travelled to San José de Gracia to assist the High Court of Guadalajara, and whose fate remained unclear. What is atypical about this incident, however, is that the violence was directed towards local officials and judicial representatives and not just rural teachers. In these moments, then, the actions of *rochistas* went well beyond simply engaging in acts of collusion with parish priests, offering additional insight into the arsenal of tactics that rebels forces utilized.[49]

The violent acts of protest committed by rebels, conversely, did not go unpunished at the hands of federal forces and were met with sophisticated retaliation. These insurgents were no longer fighting a guerilla campaign against an undertrained and ill-equipped army as they did during the first Cristero Rebellion; they were now fighting a war against a federal army that had prepared for the possibility of a renewed insurrection. The military intended to severely cripple and suppress the rebel groups as quickly as possible. To achieve this goal, the federal army established military garrison detachments in all of the former "cristero" towns to effectively combat the rebels ability to freely maneuver over rugged terrain, and favored cavalry units instead of a European style army.[50] The deployment of aviation, the use of radio, the construction of new roads and trails, and the laying of telephone lines also dramatically improved the military's capacity to coordinate attacks better, and allowed for greater efficiency in the transmission of knowledge regarding enemy positions and tactics (Meyer, 1991, p. 365).

ones who obtained the ammunition to send to Lauro Rocha. Ruiz Velasco specifically expressed having acquired from the Arsenal of Veracruz about 18,000 cartridges for the rebel cause. See *El Informador*, November 24,1935, pp. 1-2.

49 *El Informador*, September 22, 1935, p. 1.

50 Meyer, 1991, p. 365. For a report on the establishment of detachments in Río Sánchez, La Gloria y Rincón de Molino, Cerro de Ayo, El Josefino, Cabrito, Santiaguito, Santa María del Valle, San Ignacio, Cerro Gordo, and Viborero, see AGN, LCR, 559.1:123, f. 118. The report claimed that with these detachments: "They would quickly be able to localize the bandits and give them a decisive blow."

Nine days after the events at San José de Gracia, Brigadier General Florentino García Carreón released the following statement: "Yesterday, one of the columns that operates in the region of Los Altos and that Brigade General Antonio A. Guerrero personally directs, [...came upon] a party of bandits lead by Lauro Rocha [and] our troops obtained marked success [against them, and] a serious defeat was inflicted on them, causing them to completely disperse." On their part, the military lamented the death of one corporal and six casualties, "all from the 33rd regiment, who today were brought to [Guadalajara] to be healed."[51] The following day *El Informador* published a detailed and vivid account of the battle, which had taken place in the *cerro* "El Viborero" against a force of one hundred and fifty well-armed individuals. Upon clearing the field, federal forces came across twenty-one dead rebels. Among them was Jacinto Angulo, who just days before was accused of assassinating several policemen in San José de Gracia and the above-mentioned González Tizcareño.[52]

The Politics of Conciliation and the Fall of Rocha

On April 12, 1936, the newly appointed Archbishop of Guadalajara, José Garibi y Rivera, wrote his first pastoral letter to the clergy and faithful of the region's Archdiocese. This letter advised all Catholics who desired to make a difference and "participate in the crusade against the terrible persecution carried out by the state," to leave aside the gun and in its place pick up the bible. Any Catholic who refused to pay attention to his call, according to the Archbishop, would not be fulfilling their duty as children of the Church. The duty of all the faithful was to join *Acción Católica*, an organization that would provide individuals with a peaceful alternative to counteract the unfavorable policies of the government. Garibi y Rivera declared explicitly that he would carefully guide the organization so that it would not, under any pretext, take part in political or war-like activities. A very serious problem in the countryside, however, had arisen in recent months; worried about the matter, "His Excellency" said:

> [A]t this time, a great many Catholics are without any kind of organization or discipline in our unfortunate country. The fact that they are without leadership fills me with anxiety, especially when I am painfully aware that some of them have reached the point where they believe that the Catholic cause of the Church in Mexico can only be saved

51 *El Informador*, Guadalajara, November 2, 1935, pp. 1-2.

52 *El Informador*, Guadalajara, November 3, 1935, pp. 1-2

> on the condition that efforts [be] disassociated […] from the bishops themselves[,] and when I say this I pray to God that no one gets the impression that I believe that Catholics should undertake the defense of their rights by violence or arms.

At a time when *rochistas* were fighting an uphill battle against an army that had effectively reinvented itself, the words of the Archbishop signaled the beginning of the end for the "valiant" and "suffering" sons of Los Altos. "I pray to God to safeguard me against inciting anyone to such action [rebellion] because without discussion[,] whether or not such action be licit […] it is not my mission and I cannot nor do I desire to meddle in anything which lies beyond the field of my proper activities," cautioned Garibi y Rivera. "[T]his is the order of the Holy Church [… and] the Roman Pontiff [who] has prohibited priests from taking part in anything resembling an armed movement."[53]

On July 3, 1936, a morally defeated Rocha wrote: "I believe that I will not last a long time […On] my return to this region [of Los Altos], I will find the peaceful people completely changed […] we are [now] living in a completely hostile environment." Rocha attributed the fate he foresaw to several reasons, among them: the great poverty that reigned in the area due to the loss of harvests of 1935; the changing attitudes present among government officials and the clergy; the open efforts some parish priests carried against the rebels; and Archbishop Garibi y Rivera's first pastoral letter, "which has caused us more damage than the government itself." These were no longer the words of a rebel leader who sought the reclamation of lost liberties, local autonomy, and the overthrow of the "tyrants" controlling Mexico. Rocha posed a set of rhetorical questions: "What should we do in this case? Should we confront the ecclesiastical authorities? Scandalize the people? Should I keep pushing towards a sterile sacrifice…or do I convert myself to a chief of bandits? What do I do with those that I have [led] into arms in Los Altos?". Gone were the days when the population regarded him as 'honorable' and non-criminal. "The entire world denounces us," lamented Rocha, "and the ones who do not dare to, even deny us a tortilla" (Meyer, 1991, p. 382). A half-year later, the *cabecilla* (rebel leader) fell before the blazing guns of three army officers while hiding at the home of a friend in Mexico City.[54]

[53] SD, 812.404/1912 1/3.

[54] *The Washington Post*, Washington, D.C., January 1, 1937, p. 3.

Conclusion

This article explored the debates over the national government's Six-Year Plan on Education and analyzed the nature of political violence in Jalisco from July 1934 to December 1939. In the process, I argued that community grievances, political divisions, and varying degrees of religious sensibilities shaped the manner in which rural people understood the state's cultural revolution of the 1930s. The actions of locals in the face of escalating violence in the countryside ultimately determined whether they decided to accept, disregard, or alter the socialist education program. Despite efforts on the part of the high clergy to maintain a neutral attitude towards the state, I showed that many rebel groups and parish priests interpreted socialist schools as state instruments of domination, deliberately designed to suppress, and in certain cases to eradicate, the traditional belief systems of their parishioners. The selective acts of terror rebels committed against local authorities and rural teachers, however, represented clear and immediate acts of protest against a state that many in the rural areas of Jalisco viewed as immoral and unjust. The analysis of the rebellion led by Lauro Rocha in the Los Altos region contributed to a more nuanced understanding of how rebels operated, yielding greater insight into their worldview and motivations for fighting. As a result, these findings challenge the assumption that the ideology of rebels was archaic (in the sense of being antiquated or pre-political) as the historiography has proposed. Instead, the insurgents of the Second Cristero Rebellion were rural people who actively participated in an armed struggle in defense of a sacred way of life, which in the eyes of the new post-revolutionary state had already disappeared, never to return.

Acronyms and References

AGN Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City.

AHJ Archivo Histórico del Estado de Jalisco, Guadalajara, Jalisco.

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