

on gold and silver, will be a weak and unfortunate people and will continue to present to the world the humiliating spectacle of a beggar emaciated by misery and hunger, living in a beautiful palace full of gold and all types of riches which he does not know how to make use of, not even for his own well being and happiness.

Liberals and the Land

Luis González y González (1925–2003)

Following the war with the United States and several more years of turmoil, a new, younger generation of Liberals, including Ignacio Comonfort, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, and Benito Juárez, came to power determined to enact sweeping reforms that they hoped would propel their country headlong into the modern world. After seizing power in the Revolution of Ayutla (1854)—which overthrew Santa Anna for the last time—they immediately issued a series of decrees that came to be known collectively as “La Reforma” (the period of Reform) and would have long-range, and some dire, consequences. Among other things, they sought to transform Mexico’s agriculture. Their failure to realize their dream of creating an enterprising, modern, scientific countryside, as we shall see, would be a major factor in the genesis of the Mexican revolution of 1910.

In the following selection, one of Mexico’s most eminent social historians explains the problems the Liberals sought to overcome, what they hoped to accomplish, and why, in the end, they failed.

The creed of the Reform was defined on the same day the insurgents of Ayutla began calling themselves “Liberals,” and the paladins of the Santa Anna dictatorship Conservatives and “crabs.” That creed borrowed, in true Mexican style, from the fetishes and phobias of European and North American liberalism: the will to riches, freedom, order, democracy and science, and an end to tradition. It also featured a pair of purely national dogmas. One, formulated by Miguel Lerdo in 1856, held that: “Mexico’s soil is some of the most fertile in the world.” The other, in the words of don José María Vigil, maintained that “we Mexicans are unable to effectively exploit the physical and material gifts with which we have been blessed.” Behind our natural greatness we glimpse the work of Providence; in our human failings, the work of History. . . .

The Liberal vision was comprised of a half-dozen freedoms—economic, political, intellectual, religious, pedagogical, and the freedom to work. This version of laissez-faire advocated the suppression of Tyrants, substituting the noble tyranny of the Law; this, in turn, in order to keep itself equidistant

between despotism and chaos, required democracy, understood as government of the people, by the people, and for the people—but only once the people were capable of making good use of reason. Our reformers feared that Mexicans would not fulfill this requirement. “How can we establish and affirm liberal institutions?” asked Castillo Velasco in the Constituent Congress of 1856, “if for the majority of citizens liberty is a chimera and perhaps an absurdity?” . . .

The fact that the Reform was born in the tiny town of Ayutla and was initially led by an hacendado¹ should not lead us to conclude that its authors were farmers. Most had been educated in the city, where they were bureaucrats, doctors, lawyers, journalists, or poets. They were urban, middle-class people of modest means who were not entirely ignorant of country life. Some came by their knowledge of agriculture through childhood experiences; others had associated briefly with peasants during the civil strife [of the early nineteenth century]. Their knowledge of the countryside made them aware of the bad situation of the peasants, but it did not help them to appreciate the true magnitude of Mexico’s agricultural resources. Thus, the Liberals could cling to their idea of a Mexican paradise “where not only is there eternal spring, but eternal too are the elements of life, prosperity, and progress.”

These peculiarities do not exhaust the theme of the attitudes and worldview of the men of the Reform. But they are enough to provide an introduction to the three features of that party: their determination to find the route to wealth through agriculture, their image of the agrarian problem, and (given the timidities of their ideology) the audacity of their agrarianism. While similar governments of Europe heroically resisted the temptation to meddle in rural matters, ours undertook to convert virgin lands into fertile fields, miserable landless peasants into prosperous landowners, victims of peonage into free people, and slaves of myth into men of positive science.

The reformers divided the agrarian problem into several parts. In the technical sphere, they lamented the shortage of labor to cultivate the land, the rudimentary use of fertilizer and irrigation, the backwardness of cultivation, the felling of woods, the lack of capital, and the rickety means of communication and transportation. In the institutional sphere, they decried the abundance of unused land, the Indian communities, the depredations of “barbarians” [nomadic Indians], tithes, the “dead hand” [of the Catholic Church], the latifundio, peonage, civil discord, and the military draft. In the intellectual sphere, they bemoaned the magical and animistic notions of the peasants, their religiosity combined with an indifference toward science, ignorance of the Spanish language in some, and the lack of literacy in all. . . .

In a pamphlet of 1848, attributed to Mariano Otero, there appear words

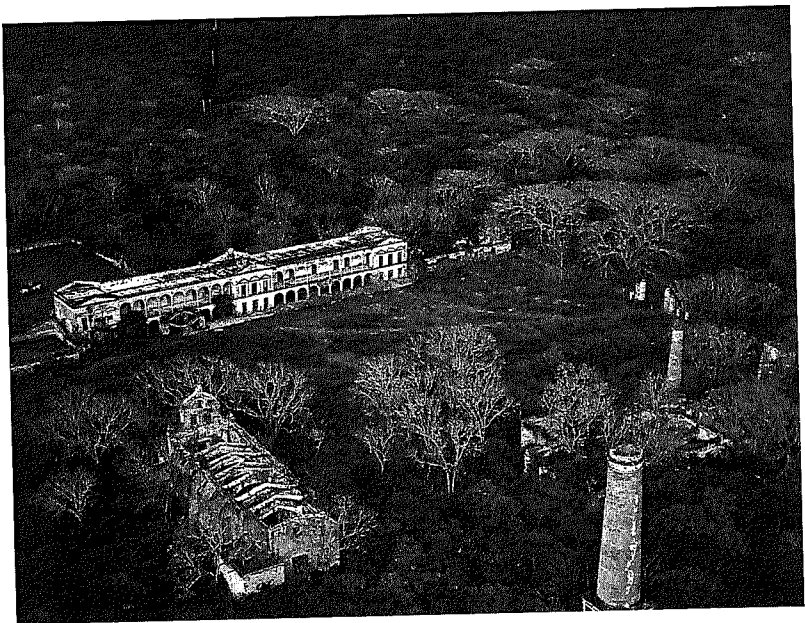
that would later be repeated endlessly: “Until now, all of the discoveries and improvements made in other countries to make agricultural operations faster and more economical have had no effect on the farmers of Mexico.” The tools and the systems of cultivation remained as antiquated as they were ineffective. Very few farmers irrigated and fertilized their lands, and no one knew of the modern methods for procuring water and using chemical fertilizers in their fields. They were men of the past, and even the administrators of the haciendas were afraid of the technical improvements in production methods introduced by the North Americans.

To the farmers’ backwardness was added their lack of capital: agricultural credit banks were unknown, and agricultural income did not permit capitalization. Not even the few wealthy farmers obtained appreciable profits, except when a fertile year was followed by two or three sterile ones, assuming their fields were close to some city or port that consumed or shipped these products. Generally each community, ranch, or hacienda produced no more or less than necessary to satisfy strictly local consumption. To violate this norm was to expose oneself to the risks of overproduction, while failing to cultivate enough to live on might bode famine. . . .

Several factors contributed to this misfortune. One was “the hateful servitude of the system of *alcabalas*” [duties on internal commerce]. Another was the dispersal, shortage, and indolence of the national population. And above all, there was the inefficacy of the means of communication and transportation. The muletrains and oxcarts did not permit agricultural surpluses, for they were expensive, slow and insufficient, making it unaffordable to transport merchandise from the centers of production to the markets of the country, let alone to overseas markets. The lack of railroads, navigable rivers, and shipping was lamentable, and the wretched state of the few existing roads added the final, grim touches to this picture.

To this list of adverse factors we might add rural institutions, which were obstacles to the economy as well as to freedom, democracy, and order. In this category were the “vacant lands” [*terrenos baldios*] administered by Spain during the colonial era, and by the Mexican government from 1821. It was known that these occupied a large part of the country, but their exact location, size, and quality were not known. Most were virgin lands; a few were cultivated by indigenous occupants without title to the property, and a larger portion were frequented by the Apaches, nomadic peoples who made life, agriculture, and livestock raising very difficult in the [northern] states of Sonora, Chihuahua and Coahuila.

The Apaches, who were quite skilled with horses, lances, arrows, and firearms, knew the art of war and were incomparable as hunters. In the middle



The Hacienda Blancaflor, Yucatán. (*Mexico: A Higher Vision* [La Jolla, Calif.: Alti Publishing, 1990], 41.)

of the nineteenth century, when Yankee pioneers began to occupy their lands, they grew enraged to the point that they became the worst threat to lives and fortunes on both sides of the border. . . . In groups of ten, fifteen, or twenty individuals, they would fall upon caravans, haciendas and villages. They would customarily kill the men and take the animals, women and scalps of their victims. Due to their devastating efficiency, the populating of the North was delayed and the few inhabited, cultivated zones were quickly depopulated. . . . [Meanwhile,] Yaqui and Mayo Indians [of Sonora] were on a war footing against possible invaders of their lands. . . .

At the other end of the country, the belief that "Indians only hear with their backsides," put into practice by the landowners of Yucatán, caused the outbreak in 1847 of an extremely cruel race war. For three years there was killing, robbery, and burning without truce and without pity. At the end of that time, it was tacitly agreed that the rebels would occupy the south of the peninsula, and the old masters, with their faithful Indians, the north. The southerners organized free states, invented a new religion, and established amicable relations with the British of Belize. With the weapons given them by the British in exchange for hardwoods, they periodically invaded and devastated the haciendas of their old masters who, for their part, also made frequent incursions into

the strongholds of their ex-servants; any Indians they captured, they sold to the slaveowners of Cuba. These comings and goings of one and the other led to countless evils and to a new agricultural activity: the henequen industry.

The majority of the Republic's sedentary Indians (Nahuas, Otomís, Tarascans, Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Totonacs, Huastecs, etc.) were distributed among five thousand small villages which, instead of considering themselves part of a national whole, seemed like closed worlds. Each one owned a little land of poor quality, which was divided into "fundos" (the place where the village homes were located), "propios" (lands which were supposed to sustain the town leaders), "ejidos" (for the common uses of the population), and "lands of common distribution," used individually by the inhabitants and owned in common. When special protection of the Indians was ended by [the Liberal] regime of juridical equality, the haciendas seized part of the villages' lands, leaving them insufficient land to support the residents and obliging them to sell their labor as day workers. . . .

The stagnant wealth of the clergy, the so-called "dead hand," included property that was movable and immovable, productive and unproductive, rural and urban, all destined to benefit the religious orders, secular priests, seminaries, religious brotherhoods, and educational institutions. According to the calculations of Miguel Lerdo de Tejada . . . the value of those goods at mid-century amounted to around three billion pesos. The fact that they were not for sale was considered harmful to the public treasury and to private enterprise. The public treasury got no revenues from property transactions, and private entrepreneurs could not invest their money in buying properties from among the eight or nine hundred farms the Church rented to private parties, who, in addition to not being able to own those farms outright, did not work them properly.

The individually owned lands were called, according to their size, ranchos or haciendas. The ranchos (small properties) were viewed sympathetically by the leading lights of liberalism; the haciendas, which were over a thousand hectares in size and with populations of more than a hundred, were less well regarded. In 1854 there were 6,092 haciendas and a significantly smaller number of *hacendados*. The haciendas of the North and of the coasts were so vast that it would have taken several days to walk from one end to the other. Ponciano Arriaga, an orator of slow locution and hard phrases, railed against them in the Constituent Congress: "The accumulation by one or a few persons of great landed possessions, unworked, uncultivated, and unproductive, prejudices the common welfare and is contrary to the spirit of republican and democratic government." . . .

"The evidence has convinced me," wrote Luis de la Rosa, "that the system

of cultivating the great landed properties by means of day laborers, who are called *peones*, is very harmful to public morality, and every day it becomes more prejudicial to the interests of the great landowners." The farm laborers worked poorly. They were furnished only with bad food, little clothing, and a hut made of sticks and straw. The worst thing was that they were paid partly in cash and another part in certificates exchangeable in the hacienda stores. Debt servitude was a truly anti-liberal system. In order to cover extraordinary expenses (marriages, baptisms, festivals and funerals) the peon indebted himself to the point of being sold to the patron, whom he could leave only through flight or because another master would pay the sum of his debt. In the first case, he would be pursued by the authorities and sometimes returned; in the second, he would gain nothing.

Administrators and majordomos [overseers] were nearly all the same. . . . They paid little, and punished much. With whippings and beatings they hoped to overcome the perpetual laziness of the peons and to punish their small crimes, above all that of getting drunk on Mondays. However much the Liberals defended the workers—saying that the blame lay with the miserable wage, debt servitude, the grinding workdays from sunup to sundown, and physical punishments—the overseers insisted on their tactics. . . .

The laborer, victim of peonage, was avenged by the bandit, who "never robs the poor /but only gives them money." "Highway robbers," their detractors called them; "heroes of the royal highway," said some Liberals, who recognized the justice of their cause. No one dared to defend them openly, since there was no moral defense for their armed assaults against the lives, properties and honor of landowners and travelers. They gathered for the purpose of murder and robbery. The gangs, which numbered in the dozens in the central states, had no political banner although at times they sought the protection of some political movement so as to avoid risks. At the head of every gang was a "robust captain, browned by the sun and the weather," skilled with horses, ropes, and weapons. . . .

We must not confuse bandits . . . with seditious chieftains or "*pronunciados*," the tireless redeemers of the army in the first fifty years of independence. . . . The sum of all the *pronunciamientos* since the consummation of independence until the Liberal victory is generally given the mild name "civil struggle." . . . Among other evils, this "civil struggle" lubricated the forced military draft which, apart from violating human freedom, robbed agriculture of its best workers. In order to recruit troops—there was already an abundance of officers and chiefs—both the seditious parties and the tyrants would have their "draft commissions" fall upon the pueblos and haciendas. There they would round up the small farmers, selecting the most robust and leaving

weeping mothers, widows and orphans behind. They would then take their new recruits to a barracks, from whence, after some instruction in the use of weapons, they would sally forth toward "all the slaughterhouses of the country," to die without glory, without ever knowing the "cause" they fought for, and leaving their families to fend for themselves.

There is yet a third point of rural life that the Reform condemned energetically: the survival of myth. Indian groups, especially those farthest from the center of the country, were still devoted to . . . a magical, animistic tradition. The rest of the peasantry, if less superstitious, clung to religious beliefs and attitudes that, at least in part, were incompatible with scientific progress. . . .

Superstition was compounded by ignorance of Spanish. Instead of the idiom of the majority, the Indians used poor minority languages. . . . Each ethnic group spoke in its own way, and there were more than a hundred aboriginal ethnic groups. Nearly a million and a half Indians spoke Nahuatl; around 500,000, Otomí; a quarter of a million spoke Maya; an equal number spoke Zapotec idioms; a few less, Mixtec; some 100,000, Tarascan, and smaller groups in some of the remaining tongues: Totonac, Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Huastec, Popoloc, Rarámuri, Zoque, Yaqui, Chontal, and so forth. None of these old languages was written. . . .

The remaining cultivators, although Spanish speakers, also failed to fulfill the requirements of modernity. Their religious ideas were not founded in gospel, were contaminated by superstition, and sanctioned intolerant and backward attitudes. Their secular knowledge was very slight; their lack of letters, total. And they did not even have opportunities to become educated. The children of the countryside did not attend the urban schools, while a school in the countryside was an extraordinary thing. The education efforts of Alamán, Mora, Alcocer, the Lancasterian Society, and other people and institutions during the first half of the nineteenth century, stand out both for the nobility of their objectives and for their failure. . . .

Liberal agrarianism proposed to remake the life of the countryside. With respect to economics, it tried to attract foreign capital, introduce new crops, modernize farming methods, suppress the *alcabalas*, and especially to increase the population, sowing virgin zones with foreign colonists, and building railroads, canals, highways and telegraphs. In social matters, the Liberals called for the survey and sale of "vacant" lands, the distribution of Indian communal lands among their co-owners, the amortization of ecclesiastical property, the division of the latifundios, freedom of labor, and war against Apaches, rebellious Indians, bandits, and troublemakers. The problem in the intellectual sphere it hoped to resolve by secularizing, spreading, and making compulsory primary education, and by creating an institute of agricultural studies. . . .

Writings by Luis Robles, José María Iglesias, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, Francisco Zarco, and Francisco Zamacona show a blind faith in the redemptive and profitable capabilities of modern means of communication, especially railroads. Robles said: "Peace, the increase of the population, equilibrium between public revenues and expenditures, and the export of the various fruits of our soil, are Mexico's necessities: all of them will be satisfied when we have a network of railroads that unites our producing districts with the coasts." Zamacona asserted: "The iron roads will solve all of the political, social and economic questions that the want and bloodshed of two generations have not been able to solve." . . .

By 1856, most European countries and the United States had a vast network of iron rails. Mexico, by contrast, had not even united its capital with its major port. Railroad building began to be taken seriously when the Liberal Party took power. While Ignacio Comonfort was president, concessions were granted to several construction companies. Political discord and the inexperience of some concessionaires retarded the task. The storm passed; new concessions were granted; and the older ones began to bear fruit. On December 20, 1872, at the Peak of Maltrata, the rails that went from Veracruz to Mexico City were united. On January 1, 1873, President [Sebastián] Lerdo de Tejada inaugurated the route. . . .

"Immigration has been the abiding dream of our governments," wrote Juvenal in 1871. Since Mexico had gained its independence it called for agricultural immigrants from the most advanced countries. In the age of Santa Anna very few came for fear of disorder and Mexico's religious intolerance, or so they said. The Constituent Convention of 1856, after heated debates, decided in favor of religious freedom. . . .

Immigration [the Liberals believed,] would bring incalculable benefits to the country: it would improve, for example, the moral situation of the Mexicans, and, above all, it would make our nation "one of the richest agricultural countries in the world." It would also colonize the virgin lands in a matter of years. . . .

Once Maximilian's Empire was defeated, the Liberals crowed: "Everything has changed, the masses of the country want colonization and colonization shall come, because foreigners know perfectly well that the Mexico of today is very different from what it was before." The years passed and the colonists did not come; people grew worried; and Congress passed the law of May 31, 1875, which gave the task of colonization to private enterprise and not exclusively to the State. [Under the terms of the law, the government] offered the immigrants lands at moderate prices with long-term financing, help in acquiring Mexican citizenship, and various economic incentives and privileges. In order

to provide for the first expenditures of colonization, Congress approved an appropriation of 250,000 pesos.

To assist with colonization, the Liberals proposed to divide and sell the *terrenos baldíos* . . . On July 20, 1863, when the republican government found itself in San Luis Potosí, it expedited a general law of alienation of "vacant" lands which hoped to foment colonization and the small property. . . . Among the "illegitimate" owners of vacant lands were indigenous peoples whose lands were "denounced" and adjudicated to the denouncer. . . . The policy of *baldíos* did not favor the Indians, nor did it produce small property owners. It certainly did benefit the great latifundistas, as did the "Lerdo Law." The Lerdo Law had been passed on June 25, 1856 by [Treasury Secretary] Miguel Lerdo de Tejada. It ordered that properties belonging to civil and ecclesiastical corporations be adjudicated to their tenants or, in their absence, to those who denounced them or bought them at public auction. Article 8 of that order exempted the village *fundos* and *ejidos*, but it abandoned to fate the *proprios* and the land of *común repartimiento*, and despoilments were in fact perpetrated. . . .

The Indians opposed all of these measures, both because they lacked the spirit of individualism and because they feared abuses. *El Constitucional* wrote: "A multitude of lands that are called 'communal' and which are cultivated by the Indians on their own account, have passed into the hands of denouncers, leaving the Indians, overnight, without a patch of ground on which to walk, and exposing them to the whims of the new owners." Ignacio Ramírez asked in 1868 that the parcelization of Indian property be suspended, since "communal lands had been usurped through a variety of means . . . , including buying judges and obtaining the complicity of superior authorities."

In the ten years of the Restored Republic [1867-1876], only a few villages had their lands divided; others, through hard efforts, managed to impede the division. These usually lost their lands later. The Indian, owner of his parcel of land, might find himself confronted one day by a cacique who would threaten to take the parcel from him for failing to pay his taxes. The Indian might consult a bad lawyer who was in connivance with the cacique. The bad lawyer would counsel the Indian to sell his land before losing it. The Indian would accept and cede the land to the cacique in exchange for . . . whatever. And this was only one of the multiple forms in which the despoilment was consummated.

The first law of divestment (that of June 25, 1856) sought, in addition to dividing the Indian communities, to take land from the "dead hand" of the Church and divide it up, thereby putting into circulation large amounts of stagnant wealth through a wise strategy which not only would not harm the clergy, but would actually help them. The clergy would be assured of the

proceeds of their capital, and their property would be [improved] simply by changing its form. In addition, this would increase the funds of the public treasury, and bring other lesser benefits. But all of the bishops—if not the parish priests—protested against the law, and were not without influence in its application and results.

The majority of the tenants on the clergy's farms, and small farmers in general, refused to buy church property, some for lack of money, others due to the scruples of conscience. Not a single poor person escaped from poverty thanks to the Lerdo Law; but many rich landowners and merchants increased their fortunes without caring a bit about the excommunications thrown their way by the bishops, who, determined to do themselves in, fomented the wars of the Reform. In reply to that bellicose attitude, and in order to obtain a loan from the United States, Juárez ordered the nationalization of clerical property. The clergy, doubly wounded, remained on a war footing, but when they were defeated, they began to sell pardons at a low price to those who had added to their wealth with that of the church.

No energetic measures were taken against the secular latifundio. The majority of the Constituent Congress of 1856 was deaf to the propositions of men like Isidro Olvera, José María Castillo Velasco, and Ponciano Arriaga. Olvera proposed that the landowners with more than ten square leagues of cultivable land, or twenty of pastureland, be prohibited from acquiring more land. Castillo Velasco asked for the government's help in increasing the number of landowners. Arriaga went the farthest in his celebrated vote . . . in favor of the distribution of "our fertile and currently idle lands among the hardworking men of our country." He proposed that the owners of farms of more than fifteen square leagues be forced to enclose and cultivate them, under threat of losing them; to give *ejidos* to the villages that lacked them; and to distribute lots according to the census, buying the lands of surrounding haciendas for this purpose.

[More than] eighty *hacendados*, all of them "indifferent to political movements" . . . denounced the opprobrious words of Olvera, Castillo, and Arriaga against the sacred right of property; they held that for economic reasons, not merely those of justice, such words must be ignored. Congress, in the end, left the big landowners alone. . . . Apart from confiscating the farms of some of Maximilian's supporters and distributing one of them among 700 day laborers, [Congress] did nothing to demolish the secular latifundio, and nothing to slow its growth.

The Liberals' aversion to the system of peonage was translated into some measures of a juridical nature. It is well known that President Juárez, upon hearing a peon decry the whipping he had received for having broken a plow

blade, ordered the abolition of corporal punishments. Furthermore, Article 5 of the Constitution of 1857 tacitly prohibited debt servitude. [Several state constitutions also included laws favoring resident farm workers.]

Other agrarian problems were attacked at gunpoint. Laws, political measures and campaigns were undertaken to suppress banditry. The laws of December 6, 1856, January 5, 1857, June 3, 1861, January 25, 1862, and April 13, 1869, established methods for judging and punishing brigands. To aid in their apprehension, Ignacio Comonfort created a security guard, and Benito Juárez, five years later, a corps of *rurales*. . . . In 1861, with the name of "Defender of Commerce," the first corps went into battle, and to it were added five more corps in the following decade. *Rancheros* for the most part (and some professional killers), the *rurales* made a considerable dent in the ranks of the brigands.

The campaign against the Indian rebels was very costly indeed. . . . In 1867, President Juárez conceded Yaqui and Mayo lands to Ignacio Gómez del Campo for colonization. The Indians, who did not understand colonization, rose up. [Ignacio] Pesqueira subdued them; they rose up again in 1868 and suffered another defeat. In 1875, José María Leyva Cajeme, mayor of the Yaqui villages, organized a respectable army, carried out a massacre of *yoris* [whites], overcame the governor, and withdrew his region from the realm of the legitimate authorities, organizing an independent state with its own laws and institutions.

In Yucatán, the war against the rebellious Mayas continued sporadically. . . . At the other end of the country, the Apaches renewed their incursions, and the Comanches also began attacks. In Sonora, the generals Elías, Morales, Urrea, Carrasco, Yáñez, Flores, and Pesqueira battled day and night and without much success against the Apache tribe of Cochise. In Chihuahua, Joaquín and Luiz Terrazas won renowned victories, thanks to which they were able to turn their state into the largest livestock empire in the world. [Authorities in] Coahuila and Nuevo León, who counted on the very valuable support of the Kikapu Indians, drove out the Comanches and learned how to handle the Apaches. In 1868, the central government decided to take a hand in the matter. Congress ordered that thirty military colonies be founded in the zone threatened by the "barbarians," with the double aim of obliterating the Indians and cultivating the desert. Each was made up of a hundred well-armed and -provisioned horsemen; half would be members of the army and the others volunteers from the surrounding regions. The colonists were to receive a monthly salary, plots of land, farming tools, and construction materials; in return, they were to strictly observe military discipline, under threat of losing their lands and being made to do forced labor. . . .

War of another sort was undertaken against the ignorance and vices of

the peaceful population. José María Luis Mora had said: "The most necessary element for the prosperity of a people is the good use and exercise of reason, which cannot be achieved except through the education of the masses." Ignacio Manuel Altamirano would say: "What Mexico needs . . . is to open schools of primary education everywhere, in all of the regions of the country, profusely and at once." Justo Sierra asserted that Juárez's greatest dream was of schools, above all those which would rescue "the Indian families from their moral prostration, superstition; from mental abjection, ignorance; from physiological abjection, alcoholism; to bring them to a better condition, though conditions may improve but slowly."

The Constitution of 1857 stated: "education is free." The law of April 15, 1861 ratified the freedom of education and made official education free of charge. The Martínez de Castro law, promulgated on December 2, 1867 and applicable to the Federal District and federal territories, went further in making obligatory the learning of basic literacy and giving education a positivist orientation, inspired by the ideas of Auguste Comte, brought to Mexico by Gabino Barreda. The law of March 15, 1869 rounded out that of December 2, giving special emphasis to the regularization of elementary education. The majority of the states followed the example of the Federal District in expediting laws that declared primary education free of charge, scientific, and obligatory, and they provided for sanctions for parents who were remiss. . . . [However,] such new schools, for economic reasons, were not built in the countryside. . . .

Half of the rural population, the Indians, did not achieve anything and lost what little they had. The missions had been languishing since 1821 and ceased to exist at mid-century. The Liberal regime could not establish schools for Indians. Indians could not attend the schools of the Spanish-speakers because they did not know Spanish and it was difficult to find anyone to teach them. Ignacio Ramírez vainly suggested, among other practical measures, that the Indians be taught in their own languages. Between the native and Mexican races there was a wide gulf of language. The solution was urgent, and practically impossible. The great Liberal generation, led by Benito Juárez, did not solve it and, in the end, failed to realize their dream of transporting the Indian from the remote culture in which he lived to the liberal present.

The defeat of reformist agrarianism has provided historians of both the Right and the Left the pleasure of explaining it. Some say that the agrarian plan of the Reform was not carried out in all of its parts; that it was a trick to force the poor to quench the bourgeoisie's insatiable thirst for glory, comfort, and power. Others, fanatics for discipline, claim that the democratic-Liberal governments had no creative faculty, only a capacity for destruction. Witnessed from up close, between the words and deeds of Liberal agrarianism, instead

of bad faith or ineptitude, one sees the confabulation of different adverse circumstances: the opposition of the clergy, the army and the landowners, the French intervention, the division of the Liberal group into *puros* and *tímidos*, the apathy of the people, the shortage of public funds, and so forth. . . .

Note

1. The nominal head of the Ayutla revolution was General Juan Alvarez, an aging veteran of the independence wars and a large landowner and regional caudillo from Guerrero state. *Ed.*