

Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science

Volume 8

Article 21

1955

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Recommended Citation

Breymann, Walter N. (1955) "Cientificos and the Collapse of the Diaz Regime: A Study of the Origins of Mexican Revolutionary Sentiment, 1903-1910," *Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science*: Vol. 8 , Article 21.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.uark.edu/jaas/vol8/iss1/21>

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THE CIENTIFICOS AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE DIAZ REGIME
A STUDY IN THE ORIGINS OF MEXICAN REVOLUTIONARY SENTIMENT
1903-1910

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The problem of social change has long fascinated students of society. Historians, sociologists, political scientists, and philosophers have directed their efforts toward a better understanding of this intriguing phenomenon. The results of this labor have been varied. Some, and the names of Spengler, Sorokin, and Arnold Toynbee come immediately to mind, have approached the problem in the grand manner and produced broadly philosophical interpretations of the dynamics of social change and of the life histories of civilizations and cultures.¹ Others, in somewhat more modest fashion, have confined their attention to revolutions as a single aspect of social change, and have sought to expose the "anatomy" and reveal the uniformities or "pattern" discernable in violent social upheavals.²

These studies, stimulating in their own right for the panoramic breadth of vision which they impart, are doubly valuable if they provide insights, concepts, or tools of analysis which can profitably be applied to the study of a single revolution, in a particular country, within a strictly limited period of time. This paper is concerned with the application of Arnold J. Toynbee's concepts of Creative and Dominant Minorities to the role of the *Cientificos* in the genesis of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 which destroyed the thirty-four year regime of President Porfirio Diaz.

To be sure, the Mexican Republic, taken alone, does not constitute a civilization in any sense comparable to Toynbee's use of the term. Nor is it certain that Western Christian Civilization, of which Mexico is a part, is in that process of disintegration with which the ascendancy of Dominant Minorities is associated.³ However, if attention is shifted from the macrocosm of civilization and focused on the microcosm of this particular revolutionary movement, one is impressed by a series of striking and perhaps useful parallels.

Dominant Minorities, according to the hypothesis proposed in *A Study of History*, are characterized by a lack of creative energy and original thinking, qualities which are the hallmark of a Creative Minority's contribution to a growing civilization. Instead, Dominant Minorities tend to degenerate to a static, defensive posture of social and mental fixity, in which an attempt is made to retain by force a position of inherited privilege which they have ceased to merit on the basis of creative accomplishment.⁴ This attempt to dominate a situation in which it no longer commands the initiative causes the recalcitrant minority to become a rigid, closed corporation refusing to hand over to other aspirants a share in the oligarchy's jealously guarded privileges. Assuming the role of predatory plutocrats, they become a bureaucracy obsessed with traditionalism and past accomplishments, and affecting a detached, superior aloofness which alienates them from the rest of society and further decreases their ability to adjust to the realities of changing conditions.⁵

¹ See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (2 vols.; New York, 1926-1928), Piterim Sorokin, *Social And Cultural Dynamics* (4 vols.; New York, 1941), especially Vol. III, *Fluctuation of Social Relationships, War, and Revolution*, and Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (6 vols.; London, 1934-1939).

² See the bibliography on the study of revolution in Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1952), 297-315.

³ Creative Minorities, according to Toynbee, are associated with growing civilizations while Dominant Minorities are characteristic of civilizations in the process of disintegration. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, IV, 280.

⁴ For a discussion of Dominant Minorities see Toynbee, *op. cit.*, V. 26-40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-32, 47, 390.

The evidence suggests that the *Científicos* followed a similar evolution in their transformation from a Creative to a Dominant Minority in Mexican political life between 1892 and 1910. From the inception of the group, as the Union Liberal in 1892 up to the sixth election of Diaz in 1903, the *Científicos* had constituted a constructive minority of creative thinkers and reformers, strongly influenced by the currently popular Positivist Philosophy, and making a significant contribution to Mexican political development through their open criticism of the Diaz regime and consistent efforts to bring to Mexico the benefits of enlightened and scientific administration.⁶ As men of exceptional ability, they were responsible for much that was accomplished during the most productive period of the Diaz regime.⁷ Even their detractors were forced to admit that they were the intellectual aristocracy of the country, and should be credited almost exclusively with the great strides made in Mexican economic development.⁸

Then, about 1903, the group abdicated its position of critical opposition, abandoned its reform program, was absorbed into the administration, began to share in the spoils of the regime, and, as selfish defenders of a profitable *status quo*, assumed a role characteristic of Dominant Minorities.⁹ Evidences of this transition are not difficult to find. While Diaz did not immediately surrender the administration into the hands of his former critics, the "anti-*Científico*" complex which had characterized his earlier administration was quietly abandoned. In December of 1902, Bernardo Reys, Minister of War and a violent opponent of the *Científicos*, was removed from his post by the President at the insistence of the *Científicos*.¹⁰ A year later, in 1903, came another indication of the increasing dominance of the *Científicos* in the administration. Both in 1896 and in 1900 Diaz had turned to the National Porfirista Circle, enemies of the *Científicos*, to promote his reelection. Recalling the critical *Científico* program of 1892, he had been careful to prevent another convention of the Union Liberal. Now, however, the situation had changed to such an extent that Diaz turned to the *Científicos* to promote his sixth reelection, and a second Union Liberal Convention was permitted to convene in Mexico City in June of 1903.¹¹

As further compensation for having made their peace with the dictator, on May 6, 1904, the *Científicos* were granted another of their long-standing demands. On that date Diaz permitted the reestablishment of the office of vice-president, a move which he had consistently opposed in the past, since vice-presidents had often been a source of intrigue against the chief executive. The election of Ramon Corral, a *Científico* ally and Minister of *Gobernación* since 1903, was a clear-cut victory for the group.¹²

This change in the policy of Diaz toward the *Científicos* is due in large measure to the changed attitude of the *Científicos* themselves. Abandoning their liberal, reforming impulse and their original ideal of social progress for the good of the nation, they became increasingly materialistic, and turned their talents to converting their influential position within the administration into personal financial gain.¹³ This shift from political reform to the harmless con-

⁶ While references to the *Científicos* as the sinister "brain trust" behind the Diaz regime are numerous, no reasonably complete account of their activities has appeared in English. See Charles C. Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution, Genesis under Madero* (Austin, Texas, 1952), 10-12, and Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (Cambridge, 1953), 52-56, 433-434.

⁷ Testimony of Henry Lane Wilson, United States Ambassador to Mexico. U. S. Congress, Senate, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*. Preliminary report and hearing of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 66th. Congress, 2nd. Session, on Senate Resolution 106 (2 vols.; Washington, 1920), II, 2255; Ricardo Garcia Granados, *Historia de Mexico desde la restauración de la república en 1867 hasta la caída de Porfirio Diaz* (Mexico, 1911), 266.

⁸ Luis Cabrera, *Obras Políticas del Lic. Blas Urrea, recopilación de escritos publicados durante los años de 1909, 1910, 1911, y 1912* (Mexico, 1921), 3-8; Jose Lopez-Portillo y Rojas, *Elevación y caída de Porfirio Diaz* (Mexico, 1921), 263.

⁹ F. Vasquez Gomez, *Memorias Políticas, 1903-1913* (Mexico, 1933), 11ff.

¹⁰ Ramon Prida, *De la Dictadura a la Anarquía. Apuntes para la historia política de Mexico durante los últimos cuarenta y tres años* (El Paso, Texas, 1914), 96-97, 156, 165.

¹¹ Lopez, *Elevación y caída*, 248-254.

¹² Prida, *Dictadura a la Anarquía*, 264; Vasquez Gomez, *Memorias Políticas*, 14.

¹³ Lopez, *Elevación y Caída*, 261.

cerns of influence peddling was more to the dictator's liking. Willing to overlook their economic opportunism, Diaz saw them now as a group whose talents could be useful to his administration without being a source of embarrassment. Their very success in these new intrigues, however, ultimately caused them to fall into the disrepute which is so universally associated with this group in the literature of the Mexican Revolution.¹⁴

Under these conditions it is not surprising to find in the final years of the Diaz administration the development of a system known as *cientificismo*. The system can hardly be described in the usual terms of a political party seeking its share of patronage and spoils. Party politics as such scarcely existed in Mexico at the turn of the century. Toynbee suggests that Dominant Minorities typically detach themselves from the rest of society and affect a detached, almost snobbish aloofness which alienates them from the public generally.¹⁵ The *Científicos* reveal this same esotericism. They had little voluntary connection with the people, did not seek popular support or converts, did not represent the aspirations of the masses of the Republic, had little interest in affairs beyond their personal advancement, and, after abandoning the reform program of 1892, had no established platform of guiding principles.¹⁶

The *Científicos* became, in short, a sort of intra-governmental clique, "brain trust," or corporation directed by a small group of admittedly capable men -- a bureaucratic brotherhood held together by the cohesive power of public plunder and dedicated to the exploitation of the resources of the country, not by means of actual crime, but by official and quasi legal means. Toynbee's description of a "discreetly predatory plutocracy" as representative of Dominant Minorities seems to catch the spirit of *cientificismo* with remarkable precision.¹⁷

Many of the *Científicos* were lawyers. Their influence in government circles enabled them to arrange or "fix" matters in the national palace, legislative chambers, courts, and public offices. Laws were enacted and enforced with careful attention to the individuals involved.¹⁸ Outsiders competing with the oligarchy were in a position of relative inferiority, and were unable to arrange and organize the large-scale enterprises and monopolies which were *Científico* specialties. As a result, they were in great demand by foreign companies to arrange concessions of all types. As a financial and political oligarchy, the *Científicos* recognized their vested interest in the government of President Diaz and were obsessed by the desire to preserve the existing order.¹⁹

In their efforts to maintain an advantageous *status quo* and prevent intrusion upon their preserve, the *Científicos* were obliged to become a closed clique. Their distrust of the masses and their consequent policy of exclusiveness provoked popular references to "*el carro completo*" -- the full car. There were no seats, not even standing room.²⁰ Even though the bureaucracy had grown tremendously and by 1910 included most literate Mexicans, these lesser civil servants were allowed no voice in shaping the *científico*-dominated policies of the administration.²¹ The rising generation of educated creoles was excluded from the

¹⁴ U. S. Congress (Senate), *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, 88, 2254-2255. See also Henry Lane Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes in Mexico, Belgium, and Chile* (New York, 1927), 199.

¹⁵ Toynbee, *A Study of History*, IV, 233-234, V, 390.

¹⁶ Lopez, *Elevación y Caída*, 272-273.

¹⁷ Toynbee, *A Study of History*, V, 40. Representative accusations against rampant *cientificismo* can be found in E. D. Trowbridge, *Mexico, Today and Tomorrow* (New York, 1919), 98; Edward I Bell, *The Political Shame of Mexico* (New York, 1914), 22, and Lopez, *Elevación y Caída*, 273.

¹⁸ Frank Tannenbaum, *Peace by Revolution, An Interpretation of Mexico* (New York, 1933), 100-101.

¹⁹ Luis Cabrera (Blas Urrea), *Veinte Años Despues* (Mexico, 1937), 259; Roque Estrada, *La Revolución y Francisco I. Madero* (Guadalajara, 1912), 25.

²⁰ Trinidad Sanches Santos, *Editoriales de "El País" en 1910, 1911, y 1912*, compiled by M. L. Sanchez (Mexico, 1923), 78. Editorial of July 21, 1910, "El Enigma." See also Francisco Bulnes, *The Whole Truth About Mexico* (New York, 1916), 214.

²¹ Carleton Beals asserts that virtually all literate middle class Mexicans were on the government payroll in some capacity or other. Carleton Beals, *Porfirio Diaz, Dictator of Mexico* (Philadelphia, 1932), 231.

truly important public posts where their more liberal views might have tempered or moderated the harsh Positivism of the Diaz regime.²² This unwillingness to admit younger men and absorb fresh ideas gradually transformed the administration into an old man's government, hopelessly out of touch with the changing spirit of the times.

At the head of this gerontocracy was a dictator already past 80 years of age. Of the 8 cabinet members, 2 were past 80 and the youngest was 55. Of 20 state governors, 2 were past 80, 6 past 70, and 17 past 60. Government office was looked upon as an asylum for loyal patriarchs. These men, reelected and reappointed over a period of 30 years, "owned" their posts with the consent of Diaz and allowed no younger men to trespass. Because of the number of mummies they contained, journalists flippantly referred to the government offices as "the Pyramids of Teotihuacan."

Luis Cabrera summarized the extent of *Científico* domination by 1910 by asserting that both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies were effectively dominated, though often indirectly, by the *Científicos*.²³ Of 51 senators, 25 were *Científicos*. Of 230 deputies, 118 were tools of the *Científicos*. In the supreme court and other high offices the same situation prevailed. After 1900 these bodies were converted into mere subsidiaries of the central *Científico* machine. Cabrera concludes that 75 per cent of the public employees retained their position only through *Científico* influence.²⁴

Thus, it can be seen that after 1903 the *Científicos* adopted another of the expedients characteristic of Dominant Minorities: the tendency to degenerate into a rigid, static, closed corporation seeking to retain their position by force and influence alone.²⁵ Though Mexico was changing, their philosophy of outdated Positivism and economic materialism had assumed the legendary rigidity of the unchanging laws of the Medes and Persians. Although the peripheral membership of the group did increase, the privileged inner circle of the oligarchy refused to admit other and younger aspirants to a share in the direction of Mexico's social and political development.²⁶ The resistance to change expressed in the "full car" psychology is evidence of the degeneration of a Creative Minority into a merely dominant bureaucracy inimical to continued creativity.

The efforts of a recalcitrant minority to retain its hold on the country by direct and forceful means are revealed in the *Científicos'* willing use of the strong arm of the dictator to crush outspoken opponents, and in their resort to a controlled press in an effort to prevent embarrassing criticism. Through Reyes Spindola, owner and editor of *El Imparcial*, the *Científicos* controlled the leading daily newspaper of Mexico City. As the "semi-official organ" of the *Científicos*, the paper prospered accordingly.²⁷ Numerous charges were made that *El Imparcial* received a handsome government subsidy and that, in addition, the *Científico* paper monopoly raised the price of newsprint for opposing papers.²⁸ In addition to *El Imparcial*, *El Debate*, the mouthpiece of Vice-president Ramon Corral, and *El Diario*, controlled by *Científico* Enrique Creel, were used by the group to further their interests. Editors who were too critical and outspoken were forced to lead a precarious opposition existence.

By virtue of their dominant position in the administration, the members of the oligarchy were able to exploit the routine functions of government for their personal benefit. Through the Treasury, they were able to dominate the other government departments by means of a law giving Minister of Finance Jose Limantour, a *Científico*, surveillance over their budgets.²⁹ Through the medium of the

²² Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution*, 27-29; Tannenbaum, *Peace by Revolution*, 132-133.

²³ Cabrera, *Obras Políticas*, 87-116.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Toynbee, *A Study of History*, V, 26-31.

²⁶ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, V, 32-33.

²⁷ Walter F. McCaleb, "The Press in Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, III (1920), 444-445.

²⁸ Cabrera, *Obras Políticas*, 59-68; Carlo de Fornaro, *Mexico Tal Qual Es* (International Publishing Company, 1909), 119.

²⁹ Lopez, *Elevación y Caída*, 267.

Compañía Bancaria de Obras y Bienes Raices, government manipulators were provided with a convenient cloak for their fiscal intrigues. Through the *Bancaria*, officials were able to conceal their identity and to take government contracts or obtain government concessions without undesirable publicity.³⁰

Of the many areas of *Científico* activity, the most significant in arousing *anti-Científico* sentiment was the matter of concessions and monopolies. In the case of foreign concessions, the complaint was that the concessions were excessively favorable and that the *Científicos* received scandalous fees for arranging them. Then too, the *Científicos* were guilty of securing for themselves monopolies of all kinds in violation of Article 28 of the Constitution prohibiting exclusive monopolies. Special protective legislation was enacted to cover their particular products and to guarantee exorbitant profits to the favored few.³¹ In legislation relating to banking, tariffs, taxation, land policy, and the nationalization of railways, the public was convinced that it could see the hand of the *Científico* manipulators. Rumor and scandal were widespread in spite of the fact that many concessions were not nearly as profitable and many administration programs hardly as scandalous as was popularly believed.³²

A catalog of *Científico* misdeeds could be extended to considerable length. The literature of the Revolutionary Era is filled with accusations. The figures and data are seldom dispassionate and are often unreliable.³³ It would be naive to assume that the *Científico* oligarchy was free of guilt. It is beyond question that various members of the group did take advantage of their favored position to grow immensely wealthy. On the other hand, the manipulations of some were popularly credited to the entire group, and *cientificismo* became synonymous in the public mind with the manipulation of public affairs for private plunder.³⁴

That many of these accusations were false did not serve to change the popular stereotype or still the public clamor. In every instance *Científico* motives were assumed to be of the worst. Their dealings as representatives of foreign interests led to the popular impression that they were mere tools of foreign powers, and they became the focus of a rampant anti-foreign sentiment. The armed suppression of anti-foreign demonstrations by the government was interpreted as clear evidence of a sinister relationship between the *Científicos*, the government, and foreigners.³⁵ For those who remembered, the philosophy of the original *Científicos*, that of importing a foreign brand of scientific progress through a use of foreign capital and talent, only added to the growing sentiment that the *Científicos* were responsible for making "Mexico the mother of foreigners and the stepmother of Mexicans."

The *Científicos* of the dominant period, however, were not themselves concerned with their former stature and ideals as a creative minority. Their pride, their arrogance, their contempt for all outside the oligarchy, fed a constantly growing wave of *anti-Científico* sentiment. Under the circumstances, a clash between them and the masses was inevitable. The unsavory details of the past ten years were not easily ignored nor forgotten. From all quarters came the symptoms of a growing discontent.

The Creelman Interview of 1908 had done much to arouse the smoldering resentment. Madero's *La Sucesión Presidencial en 1910* published late in 1908 made him a rallying point for the opposition. Rival political parties began to campaign openly. Books and pamphlets aimed at the oligarchy appeared in increasing numbers. In 1909 Andres Molina Enriquez published his *Los Grandes Problemas*

³⁰ Bell, *Political Shame of Mexico*, 7.

³¹ W. H. Calcott, *Liberalism in Mexico, 1857-1929* (Stanford, 1931) 140. Typical of the accusations are the statements made by Pedro Gonzalez-Blanco, *De Porfirio Diaz a Carranza* (Madrid 1916), 38.

³² U. S. Congress (Senate), *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, I, 1444.

³³ See Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, 433-434.

³⁴ Francisco Madero who led the revolution to overthrow Diaz and *cientificismo* admits that many of the rumors and claims are unfounded and exaggerated. Francisco I. Madero, *La Sucesión Presidencial en 1910* (Mexico, 1911), 123ff.

³⁵ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1911* (Washington, 1918), 353-354.

Nacionales in which, with telling effect, he revealed the extent of *Científico* domination. The regime was able to assure its return to office in 1910 only by resorting to that characteristic device of the Dominant Minority, crude and forceful suppression of the opposition.

The campaign of 1910 should have furnished Diaz and the *Científicos* with ample warning of the approaching storm. The events of that year certainly provided ammunition for the opponents of the oligarchy. It made little difference to the people whether or not all the charges and accusations made against the minority were true or whether their complicity in all the scandals credited to them could actually be established. The significant point was that the public believed the things they heard, and it was this belief that swelled the ranks of *maderistas*. They knew that the door of opportunity was closed to them because of the "full car" policy. They could not speak, write, or publish with impunity. They could not enter politics because the events of the last campaign indicated that in reality politics still were not permitted. They could not hold offices, these were preempted by the *Científico* gerontocracy.

Thus, one of the causes of the revolt that dethroned Diaz was hatred of dominant *cientificismo*, a hatred revealed in the revolutionary battle cry, "Death to the *Científicos*." The revolution was not simply against Diaz as a tyrant, but against the *Científicos* who surrounded him.³⁶ It was a revolt against the social and mental fixity of the closed corporation, against the business monopoly of dominant *cientificismo*, against the rigid preservation of a system of special privilege, and finally, against a philosophy of government, once creative and constructive, but now purely negative and little more than an elaborate rationalization to justify the continued ascendancy of the Dominant Minority. It was, in short, the Mexican repudiation of those qualities which, according to the Toynbee thesis, are universally characteristic of Dominant Minorities.

A letter of American Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson to his government dated November 26, 1910, points up the special vengeance of the masses for the *Científicos*, even greater, perhaps, than their dislike of the dictator himself. He reports, "there is deep animosity on all hands... to the *Científico* group which surrounds the President, and in my opinion, it is only respect and fear of the President which restrains a formidable movement."³⁷

Even as Wilson wrote of a "formidable movement," the revolution was already in progress. Francisco Madero had already issued his Plan of San Luis Potosi calling the people to arms. In spite of the President's last-minute offers of liberal reforms, the revolution spread rapidly, moved beyond control, and triumphed. On May 25, 1911, Diaz resigned the Presidency, and with his fall, *cientificismo* as the institutionalized expression of a Dominant Minority ceased to exist.

One may well conclude that the role of the *Científicos* in the long Diaz administration was an important one indeed. The picture of Pre-revolutionary Mexico can hardly be understood without constant reference to that unique group. Much of the controversy and misunderstanding surrounding the *Científicos* stems from a failure to emphasize the distinction between the group as a truly Creative Minority, and, later on, as a merely Dominant Minority.

It is in helping to point up this contrast that the Toynbee concepts seem helpful. It is granted that any extremely literal application of these concepts to the specifics of the Mexican case is out of the question.

³⁶ Jose Fernandez Rojas, *De Porfirio Diaz a Victoriano Huerta, 1910-1913* (Mexico, 1913), 129.

³⁷ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1911, 367-368.*