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The Indian Policy of Porfirio Diaz in the State of Yucatan, 1876-1910

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THE INDIAN POLICY OF PORFIRIO DIAZ
IN THE STATE OF YUCATAN, 1876-1910

by
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of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
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VITA

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During the course of her academic career, Ms. Carbine has worked at De Paul, Northwestern and Loyola Universities. Currently, she is
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INTRODUCTION

The presidency of Porfirio Díaz, 1876-1910, was a time of significant change in Mexico. For the state of Yucatán, an area which was geographically isolated and far removed from the federal government in Mexico City, the Porfiriato introduced a series of changes which affected the political, economic and social structure of the state. The policies of the new administration had great effect in the Yucatán, which had a long history of quarrelsome, petty officials as its administrators. Also affected by Porfirian policy and goals was the economy of the state which had been dealt several serious blows in the past. The social structure was also altered in some respects, as the henequen economy provided men with the opportunity to improve their status.

At the bottom of Yucatecan society during the Porfiriato was the Maya. For the native population of this state, life under Díaz rule underwent tremendous change from the past. The Mayas presented a serious problem to Yucatecan and federal authorities as they were engaged in a constant struggle to overthrow the white ruling class which governed them.¹ Not only had the Indians caused great destruction to the state during the Caste War, 1847-55, but continued to conduct raids on white settlements beyond the war. During the Díaz regime, General Ignacio

Bravo, with the aid of Yucatecan and federal forces, finally captured the Maya capital of Chan Santa Cruz in 1902. The defeated Mayas continued their struggle up to the final days of the Porfiriato. In June, 1910, for example, 5,000 insurgent Indians attacked the town of Valladolid located 95 miles southeast of Mérida. During the course of the raid, the Maya rebels seized rifles and pistols and instituted a reign of terror. One of their first acts was to brutally murder all principal government employees including the Jefe Político, the Chief of Police and a criminal court judge. The wives and children of government employees were also slain during the attack. It took 2,000 federal, state and volunteer soldiers to crush the revolt under Bravo’s command.

This was one instance of Maya dissatisfaction with their lot under Porfirián rule. The Indian threat was an obstacle which the local and federal governments had to solve if the Yucatán was to develop economically and reach her full potential.

Almost immediately upon assuming office, President Díaz turned his attention to the Yucatán. He had to consolidate his power within the state and establish his authority on a firm basis not only over the Indian population but the local governing class as well. He had to eliminate geographical barriers which had contributed to the political isolation and the almost autonomous rule Yucatecans enjoyed for so long. Díaz’s political and economic goals for the Yucatán could only be achieved if peace and order were first established. The President’s

2Ibid.
4Ibid., 8 June 1910, p. 2.
5Ibid., 9 June 1910, p. 1.
success in integrating the state of Yucatán into the Mexican nation depended upon his ability to deal with the tremendous economic, political and social problems within the state.

The three major problems of Porfirian Yucatán were political, economic and social. All were interrelated because a change in one affected the other. At the heart of the Yucatán's problems were the Mayas who became the victims of Porfirian economic exploitation. They constituted the henequen labor force for the developing sisal industry which was greatly accelerated under Díaz. The development of Porfirian economic and political policies as they affected the Yucatán and particularly the Mayas, constitute the basic topic of this study.

Several questions related to this study include: In what condition did Porfirio Díaz find the Yucatán in 1876? How did he institute change in the political and economic life of the state? What was the President's policy towards the indigenous population of the Yucatán? Was it a policy applied over all Indian groups or was it a policy specifically geared to the Mayas?

In this thesis I hope to provide an accurate picture of Yucatán in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. Specifically, how did the modernization of Mexico affect the state of Yucatán and the native population? I hope to demonstrate that Díaz's conception of progress had far reaching effects in the Yucatán, especially among the native element. Also, the implementation of Porfirian political and economic policies within the state drew it ever closer to the federal government and caused it to surrender some of its former independence to Díaz. It became a real part of the
Mexican nation rather than a geographically removed sector of the country with its own base of authority. In this study the modern clashes with the past as the Díaz government sought to establish itself in the Yucatán.

The sources used to research a study on Porfirian Yucatán include the invaluable Colección Porfirio Díaz, which is available on 300 microfilm rolls at the Universidad de las Americas located in Cholula, Mexico. This archive contains over one million documents relating to various aspects of Porfirian government throughout every state of Mexico. In this collection are letters, telegrams, brief notes, railroad contracts, business affairs, etc., pertaining to all Mexican states. The documents have not been sorted except by year, and it is quite a task tracing the developments of one particular area. It is helpful to have a knowledge of particular events within the state you are investigating, since that is an indication that there is a series of documents relating to the incident. Another problem which often occurs in reading the documents is the handwriting of secretaries and Díaz himself. Typewritten documents become more frequent at the turn of the century, but for the period prior to it, one must rely upon following certain styles of writing and codes. Professor Laures Perry, who catalogued the archival documents chronologically, also provides the key to the Porfirian code in his manual. For my own purposes, I was able to rely upon the correspondence between Yucatecan governors and President Díaz. In this way I was able to follow political developments as they were formulated and applied within the Yucatán. This is the most valuable source available to the student of Porfirian Mexico.

Documentary material other than the Colección Porfirio Díaz
used for this study of the Yucatán was the Archivo del general Porfirio Díaz, memorias y documentos, a 30 volume collection containing a great deal of correspondence relating to the "barbaros" in the Yucatán and also to early political developments in Díaz's first years in office. Gaston García Cantú's El pensamiento de la reacción mexicana, historia documental, 1810-1962, which contained several of the annual messages to Congress from Díaz was also useful, for in his messages the President conveyed his personal attitude toward the Maya population. Some presidential reports are available in addition to this collected work, such as Rapport de général Porfirio Díaz, président des Etats-Unis mexicains a ses compatriotes.

Sources dealing with the Porfirian period in the Yucatán are few, and those that are available rarely cover the later years of the Díaz administration. Three helpful sources relating to specific topics such as geography, legislation and economic development include Eligio Ancona's Historia de Yucatán desde la época más remota hasta nuestros días, a four volume work written during the years 1889-1905, which traces Yucatecan history from colonial days to the early Díaz presidency. Also useful was Albino Acero's Evolución histórica de las relaciones políticas entre México y Yucatán which also treats the state's development up to the early years of the Díaz government. The third and most useful study of specific topics dealing with the Yucatán was the Enciclopedia Yucatanense, an eight volume work which contains lengthy articles which run 200-300 pages. These articles were written by prominent Mexican historians such as Licenciado Fernando Palma Camara, Narcisa Trujillo, Albino Acero, Licenciado Gonzalo Camara Zavala and Gabriel
Ferrer de Mendolea. In this work topics such as the history of legislation, the history of communications, the development of sisal machinery, the Maya cultural heritage, etc., are discussed. This source was not an encyclopedia of facts as we would normally think, but a set of "books" within a general series. Names and dates are provided which might otherwise be unavailable to the researcher of Yucatecan history.

Statistical material relating to the Porfiriato and to the state of Yucatán was obtained from several sources. One useful work was the Anales del Ministerio de fomento de la Republica Mexicana, The Mexican Year Book, 1908-11, Antonio García Cubas's Mexico, Its Trade, Industries and Resources and Rafael de Zayas Enríquez's Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. One recently printed statistical study which is extremely useful in determining the most accurate population count in the Yucatán is Sherburne Cook's and Woodrow Borah's Essays in Population History which contains an essay entitled "The Population of Yucatán, 1517-1960."

Cook and Borah are skeptical of the early census counts taken by the Porfirián government but detect definite improvement in the last count. Their methods included a survey of each partido or district in the Yucatán in addition to parish counts and municipio counts. Their detailed analysis of population trends in the Yucatán from the colonial period to modern times especially as it related to the Maya, was most useful to this study.

Other sources of information consulted for this thesis included works by Porfirián intellectuals and Científicos such as Limantour, Sierra, Romero, Covarrubias, etc. Their accounts were useful not only as representative of their own particular private attitudes, but also because they were the men closest to the President and contributed to
the formulation of his policy. Journalistic accounts of the Porfiriat\O were also of help though used with caution. These included Turner's account of the Yucatán, Baerlein's interviews with Governor Molina and James Creelman's talks with D\O. Mexican newspapers were very useful in providing information on developments in the Caste War, the presidential visit to the Yucatán and its immediate significance. Newspaper material was also useful because it provided interesting coverage of the Church Congresses and their attempts at reform, especially in evaluating the significance of these conferences. The Mexican newspapers also contained some of the arguments of the hacendado class which attempted to defend itself from foreign commentators who criticized Mexicans for their treatment of the Indian. Although many different sources of material were consulted for this study, the most valuable was the Colección Porfirio D\O in Cholula. This barely touched body of information is a gold mine for any student of the Porfiriat\O and may provide a totally new outlook in the future analysis of D\O Mexico.
CHAPTER I

POLITICS IN PORFIRIAN YUCATAN

At the beginning of his administration, Porfirio Díaz aimed to unite Mexico with its many diverse regions and their time-honored traditions. The Yucatán was no exception to this policy as one of the most inaccessible, trouble-ridden areas of the country. The Yucatán Peninsula was noted for its isolation and for its separatist tradition which was caused partly by its geographical features, and until the Díaz period, the Yucatán was far removed from the national sphere of influence. Because of its physical position, the Yucatán has been regarded as the "clearest example of isolation, separatism, and economic woe in the Mexican union."¹

The terrain of the Yucatán did not lend itself to farming staple crops, for except during the rainy season, there was very little moisture for the soil. Although the soil in the interior of the state was more fertile, the land near the coastal region was barren and rocky. Only small shrubs and trees grew in the shallow soil found along the coast.² Locating a fresh water supply also presented a problem for nineteenth-century Yucatán. There were few rivers and surface streams to be found,


so wells had to be sunk which were often seventy feet below the earth's surface. Well water was used not only for everyday needs but also to irrigate the land.3

In spite of its many drawbacks the Yucatán was not totally devoid of resources; in fact, the peninsula was a source of great potential wealth. In the southeast area of the state rich dyes and virgin forests were available, but again, the land was barely penetrable at the turn of the century. Not only was it difficult to reach the area itself, but there was also a human obstacle to consider—bands of rebellious Mayas who inhabited these forestlands and had not been exposed to the "progress and civilization" of the white men who governed the region.4 To the northwest lay the real wealth of the Yucatán, henequen, or sisal hemp which grew very well in the shallow, rocky soil. Fortunately, water doesn't affect the growth of henequen nor do changes in atmospheric conditions.5 Henequen dominated the economy of the Yucatán during the Porfiriato because of its abundance and easily-managed development. It was not, however, the only major export product of the state. In the region of the Yucatán known as Quintana Roo, another valuable export product, chicle, the basic ingredient in gum, was grown. The rich forestlands of the southeast were to be instrumental in contributing to the economic growth of the state.

3 Ibid.
5 Bancroft, Resources and Development, p. 185.
during the Díaz period.

The potential mineral and natural dye wealth were not overlooked as the Díaz administration attempted to end the isolation of the state. However, geographical obstacles were very difficult to overcome and transportation was primitive. Before the introduction of road building and the railroad system were established by Porfirian governors in the Yucatán, there were no highway connections with other areas of the country to facilitate the transport of local products. Railroads were desperately needed to link the state with Mexico City and other states to insure the timely delivery of the Yucatán's most valuable source of income, henequen.

President Díaz concentrated his efforts towards eliminating the physical barriers which hindered the economic development of the Yucatán. During his administration important breakthroughs were made in improving transportation and communications which paved the way for modernization and future prosperity. The work that was undertaken by the Díaz Government took many years to finish, for it was long after his regime that Yucatán's railway system was at long last completed. It was not until 1950 that the Southeastern Railroad, which provided a land link between the peninsula and the northern states, marked the completion of railroad construction in the Yucatán.6

A second major focus of the Díaz administration with respect to ending the isolation of the state concerned the human element.

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In some ways, the President experienced greater difficulty in establishing his personal control over the political machinery of the state than in overcoming its geographical and physical barriers. The methods and means Díaz employed towards bringing an end to both the geographical and human isolation of the Yucatán during his years as President of Mexico, 1876-1910, is the subject of this chapter. How did Díaz change the face of the Yucatán? By what means were the physical obstacles overcome to pave the way for economic prosperity? Lastly, how did the President establish his political machine within the state, and to what degree was he successful in ending the separatist-oriented outlook of local officials? In focusing upon these two important aspects of the Porfirian government's influence in the Yucatán, a picture of Díaz's political control in a single state emerges, and the extent to which the Porfirian political system penetrated the local level of government to its lowest point becomes apparent.

The problems faced by Díaz in solving the transportation dilemma as well as bringing an end to strong regional loyalty were not peculiar to him. Regional loyalties, in particular, have been known to exert great influence upon the economic, political, and social development of a state. 7 This certainly held true for the Yucatán. Once the new president took office in 1876 the state changed considerably as Porfirio Díaz directed his attention to a state which had long been neglected by the Federal Government.

7 Albino Acéretto, Evolución histórica de las relaciones políticas entre México y Yucatán (Mexico: Muller Hnos., 1907), p. 230.
The most important step in bringing an end to the political isolation of the Yucatán was to break the power of the local governors who ruled the state with almost no interference from the national government in the years preceding the Díaz administration. Local politics in nineteenth-century Yucatán can best be characterized as a condition where petty warfare and anarchy were commonplace. Not only did tension exist between the discontented Mayas and their white oppressors, but also amongst local leaders themselves. Civil strife was such a common feature of daily life that one commentator on nineteenth-century Yucatán sarcastically noted the significance of the year 1875, unusual because the year passed without a single revolt. This was viewed as an achievement by citizens who just one year before saw their legislature torn apart by petty quarrels. The political situation became so critical that by November, the Yucatecans found themselves with two legislatures as a result of conflicting interests among legislators. One group situated itself in the capital city of Mérida while the second body established its headquarters in the barrio of San Sebastián. Both groups of deputies attempted to function independently with no success. Order was at last restored in 1875 with the election and approval of both groups going to Don Eligio Ancona as the new governor of the state.

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8 Reed, Caste War, p. 230.

With the triumph of Díaz and his Plan of Tuxtepec, the political situation changed noticeably in the years 1876-77 for the Yucatán as well as the rest of the country. The President wasted no time in implanting his own brand of political power in the state. In January, 1877, he sent his hand-picked spokesman, General Protasio Guerra, popularly referred to as "Coronel del Ejército Regenerador de la Mexicana," to Mérida. Acting as the official special commissioner of Díaz in the Yucatán, it was Guerra's mission to bring a halt to local strife and establish peace throughout the state. His first act was to issue a Manifesto á los Yucatecos which called for political harmony and peace for all. After renaming Mérida's main boulevard for Díaz, Guerra attempted to stimulate and revitalize economic life in the state by investing 20,000 pesos in federal funds into various commercial enterprises within the capital city.

Guerra was the first of many Díaz operatives in the Yucatán. His presence in the capital of the state as the personal representative of the President overrode the authority of the elected Governor Ancona, whose term in office was supposed to have lasted until January, 1878, but terminated with a resignation once Guerra appeared. This marked one of the first signs of change in the Yucatecan political scene. There would be many others to follow. The politicians who had managed to run

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10 Carlos R. Menéndez, Noventa años de historia de Yucatán (Mérida: Compañía tipografía Yucateca, 1937), p. 34.

11 Ibid., p. 61.

12 Ibid.
their affairs with almost complete independence in the pre-Dáaz era became part of the past as the new President tightened his grip on the political machinery of the state. With the appointment of Guerra and the resignation of Ancona, Dáaz took one of the first steps in reorganizing the political affairs of the Yucatán.

Within a short time new elections were in order, and the President called upon the services of loyal Tuxtepec supporter, General D. Lorenzo Vega and the interim governor, Don Agustín del Río to prepare the way in April, 1877. As official correspondence demonstrates, the President was sent detailed reports of the plans for the upcoming elections. The "popular" election was, in fact, predetermined by Dáaz and his advisors.

In this first election in the state since the triumph of Tuxtepec, General Vega, acting in the interests of Dáaz and the Federal Government, sent a telegram to the President naming his personal recommendations to fill the offices of governor and vice governor in the Yucatán. In effect, Vega was soliciting the President's seal of approval when he indicated the suitability of José María Iturralde for governor and Manuel Mendoza for the second slot. ¹³ Vega believed that Iturralde met all the qualifications of a loyal Porfirián governor—he was an honorable man, enjoyed an excellent reputation, and had strong liberal convictions. After receiving confirmation from Dáaz, the candidates were elected by the people to serve until May, 1878. The newly-elected officials won the approval of the state legislature and were dutifully sworn into their

¹³Colección Porfirio Dáaz, 000840, Vega to Dáaz, April 24, 1877.
respective offices. Several days after the election, Vega sent a message to notify the President of the satisfactory election results which he believed would put the state on the Constitutional track. This meant that the Yucatán would follow the guidelines of the federal Constitution and would no longer be permitted to go its own way politically.

Successful Porfirian governors beginning with Manuel Romero Ancona through Olegario Molina were similarly elected to office. The procedure which was begun with Iturralde in presenting a list of suitable candidates to the President was continued. Recommended candidates won the elections which were merely a farce, though on the surface, gave the appearance of popular democratic elections. Behind the scenes was Díaz himself, who either promoted candidates or forced them out of office. Few matters, if any, escaped the President's attention when it came to Yucatecan political affairs.

Of the eight Yucatecan governors who served the state during the Díaz administration, four occupied prestigious positions within the Porfirian army. These included General Octavio Rosado, 1882-86, General Guillermo Palomino, 1886-90, Colonel Daniel Traconis, 1890-94, and General Francisco Cantún, 1898-1902. The four civilian governors, including Iturralde, 1877-78, Ancona, 1878-82, and Olegario Molina, 1902-10, had served in the army in minor capacities and earned recognition from Díaz in other ways. Though not all governors of Porfirian Yucatán were

14 Ibid., 000290, Vega to Díaz, May 5, 1877.
actually native Yucatecans, they all had one feature in common, they were all liberals, which seemed to be a standard criterion for a Porfírian official. All of the Yucatecan governors had demonstrated their loyalty to the President by supporting his Plan of Tuxtepec which espoused the platform of no reelection. Yucatecan governors succeeded one another after serving in office for a period of four years without chance of reelection as Díaz enforced the Plan of Tuxtepec. This enforcement was clearly evidenced in the case of Carlos Peón, 1894-98, who attempted to run for a second term as governor in the year 1897. However, Díaz had other plans for the forthcoming election and successfully cancelled Peón's challenge. The President accomplished this by promoting his own favorite choice for office, General Francisco Cantón. Although Peón was a popular official noted for his achievements such as the construction of the Dirección General Estadística and the initial construction of the Juarez Penitentiary, he was not the Presidential choice for governor of Yucatán. Cantón, a distinguished military figure, received a great deal of attention and popular acclaim. He had the solid support of President Díaz who worked for his candidacy. A demonstration held by supporters of both Peón and Cantón had to be controlled by the police.

15 José Valades, El porfirismo, historia de un regimen (Mexico: Antigua librería Robredo, 1941), p. 41.
16 Méndez, Noventa años, p. 41.
since great friction existed among the crowd as to the selection of candidates. The situation grew out of hand and the National Guard had to be summoned to disperse the demonstrators with several of them killed during the process.

In this particular election there was no chance that Peón would triumph over Cantón, for Díaz was openly on the side of his general. Cantón's popularity with the Yucatecans increased if one can measure it by the many demonstrations conducted in his behalf. The police often incurred difficulty in attempting to impose order among his political supporters. Incumbent Governor Peón realized that his bid for reelection was futile without presidential encouragement and that there was no real possibility that his status would change. He decided not to damage his own reputation and took no strong measures against his rival's supporters. Peón did not wish to excite his opponents nor stir up public indignation against himself. It was safer to operate within the system rather than lose face with the public and incur the hostility of Díaz.

The President was so intent upon having Cantón succeed as governor that he allowed the General to form a political party or organization called the Gran Club Central, Liberal, Porfirista, antireelecciónista. The party was approved by Díaz and in no way did its platform contradict Presidential policy. The organization strictly upheld the principle of no reelection for governors and followed a basically conservative

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18Ibid.
tradition with a strong adherence to the republican form of government. The cantonista party also enjoyed presidential support, a very important factor if it was to survive.

Another political organization was also founded about the same time Cantón's group flourished. This was the Convención Democrática Yucateca, founded by Don Albino Manzanilla. Again the newly founded party posed no threat to the Díaz administration nor to its candidates for public office. The group was credited with breathing new life into the traditional political parties of Yucatán, liberal and conservative. The selection of General Francisco Cantón as governor was virtually assured, for he was admired by the existing organizations and his candidacy was well-received by all.

Peón's decision to withdraw his name from the ballot and defer to Díaz's wish to install Cantón was a wise move on his part, for as it happened, the President removed Peón from office before his term expired and in his place installed Iturralde, a close friend of Cantón's, as interim governor. Peón's political career was not over, however, for Díaz had no real complaint against Peón's performance as governor. After "resigning" from the governor's office, Peón was appointed a seat in the National Congress as an alternative position. Peón accepted the post which made Díaz's candidate for Yucatecan governor a certain success at the polls. The behavior of the President in offering his full support to

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19Acereto, "Historia política," III, 341.

20Mena Brito, Reestructuración histórica II, 176.
his chosen candidate and ending the term of Paón before it was to expire legally, was clear evidence of Porfirian interference in the political affairs of the state. Díaz closely watched and maneuvered all of the Yucatán's political matters throughout his Presidency.

Another instance of presidential pressure in Yucatán's political life occurred in the closing years of the nineteenth-century when Díaz was determined to create a federal territory out of Yucatecan soil known as Quintana Roo. This region was basically a dense jungle which served as a dividing line between Yucatán and neighboring Campeche. Quintana Roo possessed a wealth of its own in producing chicle, which was becoming an important commodity. Life for the men who gathered chicle, the chicleros, was very dangerous, for the jungle was filled with mosquitoes that carried malaria and a variety of poisonous snakes. 21 Quintana Roo was dangerous in yet another way, for it was in this region that the rebel Maya lived and planned their attacks on white settlements outside the jungle. These were the Indians who resisted servitude on the henequen plantations and chose to spend their lives fighting their oppressors.

Díaz desired control of Quintana Roo for two reasons, economic and political. First, the chicle industry would come under the direction of the Federal Government as well as the further development of the area's potential resources which were known to exist but difficult to acquire. The President also believed that the Federal Government would do a much

better job at pacifying the Mayas, a task which Yucatecans had failed to accomplish. The President wanted to colonize the region once it was pacified in the hope of economic development. The job of convincing the disgruntled Yucatecans to accept federal control fell to the newly elected governor Francisco Cantón. It was his task to make the idea of a separate Quintana Roo palatable by voicing the benefits of federal control.

The Maya problem was one which confronted all Porfirian governors in the state and many Yucatecans had participated in campaigns directed against the rebels as well as supplying the state with revenue to conduct the effort. This was a source of contention among them, and carving out a sector of state territory which had taken so much of their energy and funds was not to their liking. Díaz used the Maya issue to justify his position in the matter of Quintana Roo. Yucatecans who opposed the separation fought for their cause. Among them was Cantón himself, who wrote a series of letters to the President begging him to reconsider, and when he refused, the governor requested him to at least allow Yucatán to retain the coastal area north of Tulum for the state, but to no avail. Cantón eventually surrendered to Presidential wishes and realized his fellow citizens would have to act likewise when he said: "la resolución del Gral. Díaz estaba tomado y era imposible

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22 Acereto, "Historia política," III, 346.

23 Reed, Caste War, p. 242.
contrarrestaba," which simply put, meant that once the President made up his mind it was impossible to contradict his decision.24

To insure passage of the Quintana Roo measure in the National Congress, Díaz enlisted the aid of Olegario Molina, a wealthy hacendado and successful businessman. Molina and former governor Peón, now a member of the Congress, acted as spokesmen for Díaz in the Quintana Roo issue. It was Molina who was to profit from Cantón's ineffectual behavior in this instance. Despite public protest the Yucatecan representatives in the National Congress voted unanimously with representatives from other states to create the Federal Territory of Quintana Roo.25

The annexation of Quintana Roo to the Federal Government reflected in great measure, the increasing control of the President in the affairs of Yucatán. First, he demonstrated his power to manipulate local officials by pressuring Cantón to make the idea of a separate territory acceptable to his constituents even though the Governor himself did not wish to see his native state severed. When Cantón hedged and tried to bargain for the region, Díaz called upon a man whose loyalty he maintained although he was also a victim of Porfian maneuvering. In addition to Peón, the President called upon another loyal supporter, Olegario Molina, the persuasive campechano entrepreneur who personally guaranteed Díaz there would be no trouble in Quintana Roo and assured

25Ibid.
Díaz that order and tranquility would prevail in the Yucatán, 26 Molina paved the way for another Díaz triumph in the state. Peón and Molina were rewarded for their efforts on behalf of the President. Both men received huge grants of forestland in the east after the final settlement of the Quintana Roo issue. 27

In the case of Quintana Roo's separation from the state of Yucatán, Díaz successfully overrode local opinion by suggesting that the Yucatecans would not be able to handle the threats of the rebel Mayas since they had already tried and failed. Now it was the duty of the Federal Government to end the Indian menace once and for all. For the second time since his administration began in 1876, the people of Yucatán felt the strong presence of Díaz in their political affairs. Establishing a federal territory on state soil was enough cause to stir the populace, but Díaz went one step further in entrenching federal power in the area by appointing General Ignacio Bravo to oversee the new territory and to command the many troops stationed in the southeast.

With the end of the Quintana Roo matter, it was politics as usual in the Yucatán. Although Cantón always remained loyal to Díaz his days as governor were numbered. He himself realized it for he announced his decision not to run for reelection. Now Olegario Molina was the man of the hour and the presidential choice for governor in 1902. It was apparent that Molina's unpopularity with the Yucatecans for his

26 Colección Porfirio Díaz, 002209, Molina to Díaz, July 7, 1902.
27 Reed, Caste War, p. 242. The author stated the information regarding grants of forestland to Molina and Peón derived from lists of land grants made during the period.
Compromising attitude in the Quintana Roo affair was not a factor in deciding his election. It was, rather, his popularity with the President, not any political platform, that brought the wealthy hacendado Molina to the governor's office. As official correspondence indicates, elections in the Yucatán were always peaceful during the Porfiriato.

A slate was decided upon and sent off to the President for his approval. Then the announcement of a peaceful election was forwarded to Díaz to inform him that an honorable and just candidate was elected by the people and confirmed by the state legislature as was customary. Oftentimes, the President was asked his advice in choosing deputies to the Congress such as in February, 1885, when Governor Octavio Rosado telegraphed Díaz to suggest possible candidates for office. 28 Local politicians also petitioned the President to place their favorites into government positions such as Licenciado Miguel Castellanos Sanchez who wrote Díaz about his brother, a young man who desired a position within the government. 29 Such petitions to the President were frequent.

Judicial officials were also included in the presidential review as demonstrated by a telegram to the President listing various choices for legal positions within the state. 30 Díaz consistently responded in the

28 Colección Porfirio Díaz, 001886, Rosado to Díaz, February 4, 1885.
29 Ibid., 010715, Castellanos Sanchez to Díaz, March, 1885.
30 Ibid., 011327, Manuel Molina Solis to Díaz, March, 1885.
same manner. His replies were often in the form of thank-you notes expressing his gratitude for detailed information about different matters, his appreciation for the suggestion of a possible candidate for office, and lastly, his pleasure with the satisfactory election results. Such was the nature and character of popular elections within the state of Yucatán.

Once a Yucatecan governor served out his term he was generally promoted or rewarded in some way by Díaz. Octavio Rosado, (1882-86), for example once Jefe of the Federal Forces became a senator when his period of office in the Yucatán came to an end. Peón, as was stated earlier, was sent to the National Congress as a deputy from the Yucatán. The only Porfirian governor to achieve great power within the Díaz administration was Olegario Molina, whom Díaz appointed Ministro de Fomento in the year 1907. Molina was permitted to serve as governor and minister simultaneously, traveling back and forth from Mérida to Mexico City. Interim governors were appointed to substitute for the busy official when his presence was required in the nation's capital.

On the surface it appeared that these promotions to the Congress as deputy or senator or to a government ministry were signs of presidential

31 Ibid., 010569 and 01581, Díaz to Palomino, November, 1885.


favor, expressions of thanks for a job well done. As a keen politician, Díaz had his motives for bestowing military honors, local public offices and national prominence among certain supporters. He simply did not allow popular figures to remain too long in one place, no matter how well they functioned on his behalf. Instead he chose to place them in positions where they could remain useful to him but without holding significant power. They could be observed more easily in the capital than in Mérida, for example. Díaz did not alienate loyal followers by casting them aside, but shuffled them from one office to another.

Popular military figures such as Rosado, Cantón, Palomino and Traconis, were transferred from military service to civilian roles, acting as agents of Porfirian policy as governors of Yucatán. Molina, although not a military figure, was no exception to Díaz policy. By the time he was appointed Ministro de Fomento in 1907, Molina was a powerful political figure in the Porfirian Government. He was extremely influential in economic matters and was a close friend of Díaz’s financial administrator, José Yves Limantour. Molina was a sincere follower of Díaz who worked for the government until its collapse in 1911. Even so, Molina too was sent from one place to another under the watchful eye of the President.

Molina’s rise to power had been rapid. The man who became governor in 1902 with the full backing of Díaz was one of the wealthiest hacendados in the nation as the owner of over six million hectares of land.34 Molina’s family origins were humble and his tremendous success

in finance and government was largely the result of his personal ambition and a brilliant mind. He was noted for his keen sense of organization which became apparent in his early youth. As a student Molina founded La Juventud, (1860), a society which was engaged in organizing schools for workers and adults living in the suburbs of Mérida. While he pursued his own courses in philosophy, French, English and law, Molina taught others. 35 During the War of Intervention he served as secretary to General Manuel Cepeda Peraza and at the same time wrote political articles for La Razon del Pueblo and La Guima\ld. After the fall of Maximi\l, Molina and Cepeda Peraza founded the Instituto Literario de Yucatán which opened its doors in the year 1867. 36

Molina's education was broad. As a man of great intellectual capacity, he became both a lawyer and an engineer. His entrance into the political arena came in 1869 when he was elected a deputy to Congress and later Fiscal del Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Estado.

In addition to his interest in political affairs, Molina also became involved in railroad building in the late 1870's. Señor José Rendon Peniche, who was responsible for the construction of a railway system which was to connect Mérida with the port city of Progreso, saw in Molina a potential collaborator on the project and enlisted his aid.

35Bohio, Diccionario histó\r\ica, p. 150.
36Vena Brito, Reestructuración histó\r\ica II, 182.
Peniche’s impression of Molina proved totally incorrect, for work on the railroad was completed in the short span of four years, with the first run made in 1881. For his role in hastening the completion of the railroad, Molina was promoted to the position of superintendent. Serving in this capacity he set out to improve Mexico’s credit abroad by making extensive voyages overseas to negotiate various financial transactions which would benefit the state. Molina was highly successful as a businessman, especially in increasing markets for the exportation of Yucatán’s most valuable asset, henequen. His personal investments netted the financier a tremendous fortune. It was not unusual then, that such a talented and prominent figure as Olegario Molina would go unnoticed by those in the upper levels of government, particularly Limantour. Molina’s ability to increase Yucatecan exports enriched Yucatecan banks so greatly that their assets were second only to banks in Mexico City.  

Both Molina and Limantour shared a common ability at capitalistic enterprises as well as a common belief in the Positivistic outlook of the period. The Minister of Finance relied upon Molina’s advice when making financial decisions. One instance which indicated Limantour’s respect for Molina’s financial ability concerned the condition of the Banco Mercantil which the Finance Minister was considering pouring capital into. Molina urged him not to do this, for in his opinion the bank was on shaky ground.

38 Ibid.
and additional capital was not the answer. He did not think that increased capital from the Treasury would improve the bank's future.\(^39\) Having such an influential friend in the Díaz government provided the ambitious Molina with further opportunities to pursue his political aims.

Now that he had succeeded in business, Molina turned his attention to politics once more. Fellow científico colleagues such as Licenciado Joaquín Casasús and Limantour eventually led to an introduction to Díaz himself. It was Casasús who recommended Molina for the governor's office in the Yucatán.\(^40\) His suggestion of Molina proved timely, since this was the same period in which the Quintana Roo issue was being debated in the state. Since Molina was an outsider as a campechano and had no native loyalty to the Yucatán, it was unlikely that he would adopt the same position as Cantón in promoting the President's cause for the dismemberment of the state.

As governor of Yucatán, Molina deferred to Díaz just as his predecessors in the selection of local officials. Early in his career as governor, Molina was informed by the President that he desired the appointment of a Señor Muñoz as chief of police. Díaz believed that Muñoz had the makings of an intelligent jefe who could organize the police force more effectively. Although Molina never met the applicant himself, he accepted the President's suggestion without question.\(^41\)

\(^{39}\)ibid.

\(^{40}\)Vera Brito, Reestructuración histórica II, 201

\(^{41}\)Colección Porfirio Díaz, 900510, Molina to Díaz, March 6, 1903.
Again, Díaz's presence was felt in appointing men for state jobs that rightfully belonged to the governor. Díaz thus made certain that Governor Molina understood his personal concern with the affairs of the state of Yucatán.

Also like his predecessors, Díaz kept a watchful eye over his new governor. Molina's appointment to the Ministry of Development did not lessen his influence or power, but it did serve to bring the governor into closer contact with the President in Mexico City. A lofty position in the ministry kept the ambitious Molina in frequent contact with Díaz and also required him to spend much of his time in the capital. Whether or not Molina had presidential ambitions of his own is unknown. Although he amassed a great personal fortune and an influential voice in government affairs, Molina seemed to devote himself entirely to his functions as governor and development minister, fulfilling any request the President made of him. Regardless of Molina's display of loyalty, Díaz continued to interfere in Yucatecan politics.

Those who were elected to the governor's office in the Yucatán served the government not only as political agents of the President but also implemented his plans to modernize the nation as well. Díaz worked very hard at modernizing all of Mexico and expected his governors to do likewise. In the Yucatán, all those who served as governor during the Porfiriato contributed to the modernization of their state.

The city of Mérida, which was the capital of the Yucatán, had always been a center of importance. It was here that the captain-general resided and governed the region in the name of the Spanish
After the break from Spain, Mérida continued to be a city of great importance serving as the home of the state legislature and the governor. However, Mérida was highly underdeveloped for a state capital and much work needed to be done to improve its appearance.

The city was very dusty in dry periods and muddy whenever it rained. There was no drainage or sewerage system and during the summer, the tropical heat made the city an unpleasant place to be. In the center of the city was the main square which abounded in peddlers and traders who had traveled over the poor dirt roads surrounding the capital in order to sell their goods. The area to which they came was known as the Plaza de Armas. Here, the most impressive buildings stood, including the Cathedral de San Ildefonso, (built in 1571), the Bishop's Palace, the Palacio Municipal and the Governor's Palace. The wealthy lived in luxurious homes facing the Plaza and also on streets within close range of the city center. Those who were less fortunate lived further out in little huts surrounding the city. This was the city of Mérida before Díaz.

The physical appearance of Mérida underwent many changes under the direction of the progressive-minded Porfirián governors who began to initiate modern improvements within their state. Without exception all of the eight Yucatecan governors of the Porfiriato were in some way

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42 Reed, *Caste War*, p. 12.

involved in the modernization of Mérida and the state. Modernization was the means by which the isolation of the Yucatán came to an end. Three governors whose names were outstanding in changing the appearance of Mérida and the Yucatán were Carlos Peón, Francisco Cantón and Olegario Molina. They have been credited for making many public improvements on a vigorous scale and for bringing greater prosperity to the state because of their achievements.44

Some of the physical improvements included the erection of the new Palacio Municipal de Mérida, the Juarez Penitentiary, the O'Horán Hospital and an insane asylum.45 Mérida's once unhealthy, unclean streets were vastly improved by Molina who paved them and also encouraged better sanitation.46 Molina also built orphanages such as the Instituto de Niños to provide better care for the children of the capital.

Communication and transportation were also improved, when in 1887 the telegraph and later the telephone were introduced.47 In the area of transportation Yucatán's governors were greatly involved with the construction of railroads. Railroad building in the Yucatán was begun early with the administration of Manuel Romero Ancona, 1878-82.

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44 Gustavo Molina Font, La tragedia de Yucatán (Mexico: Revista de derecho y ciencias sociales, 1941), p. 61.
45 Bolio, Diccionario histórico, p. 56.
46 Molina Font, La tragedia, p. 63.
47 Ibid.
It was during his term as governor that the Ferrocarril de Mérida was founded and the groundwork was laid for an effective railroad system which was to link Mérida with other major cities in the state. Eventually Mérida would have rail connections with all important areas of the nation, for Díaz was a president who was deeply involved in the progress of railway construction and his governors shared his enthusiasm by initiating railroad projects which would facilitate the transport of valuable export products and thus improve the state’s economy.

In the Yucatán, Governor Cantón was thoroughly dedicated to railroad building throughout his period in office and much was accomplished because of his interest. In the year 1880, for example, Cantón was able to obtain a railroad concession permitting him to construct a line between Mérida and Valladolid with an additional branch line to Progreso. He devoted his entire attention to this project and successfully completed the line within four years which was earlier than officially expected. When he left office Cantón maintained his interest in the expansion of railroads by selling the concession he held for five million pesos and then reinvesting the money into a new railroad concern known as the Compañía de Ferrocarriles Unidos de Yucatán. The work of railroad construction was carried on by Cantón’s successor, Molina. It was, without doubt, the greatest achievement in transportation

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49Molina Font, La tragedia, p. 63.
which changed life in the Yucatán during the Porfiriato.

In addition to the improved physical condition of the Yucatán and its capital, the state also underwent change in other ways, especially during the governorship of Molina. Immigration was promoted to attract people who had the ability to develop industry and improve agricultural techniques. An effective irrigation system was also in the works. Education was improved and encouraged by Molina who was responsible for the passage of a state law in 1906 which provided for the education of all classes of people within the state. To pay for the cost of the new educational measure, Molina contributed $2,800,000 from revenues acquired by the state treasury in the year 1905. Schools were to be established for the many illiterate persons who worked on the haciendas and ranches.

Besides his interest in educational projects, Molina was also interested in the promotion of scientific discovery. He was responsible for the construction of the Meteorological observatory and the Estaciones Termo-pluvio-métricas which was to serve as a guide for navigators and farmers. Molina also reorganized the judicial system of the state by revising the Código Civil y Procedimientos Civiles and the Ley Organica which dealt with the interior government of the pueblos.

In 1906 Molina was reelected to the governor's office in the Yucatán. He was the first Porfirián governor in the state allowed to succeed himself.

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50 Acereto, "Historia política," III, 350.
51 Ibid.
Molina had succeeded where others had failed and now appeared to reach the apex of his political and economic career. He was instrumental in promoting Díaz's programs to modernize the state and bring the Yucatán into closer contact with the Federal Government.

The President agreed to make a personal visit to the Yucatán in February, 1906. Preparations for the visit began long before the President was scheduled to arrive. Mérida had matured under the direction of the Díaz administration and the work of his governors in implementing the development of the state. Now the capital of the Yucatán was planning to make its debut as a modernized, culturally rich city before Díaz and the rest of the nation. The citizens of Mérida looked forward to the arrival of the President so that he could personally witness the numerous developments which occurred during his administration. According to Mexican historian Moisés González Navarro, the citizens of Yucatán were "especially proud to show Díaz that the Yucatán was not the miserable state of long ago...a disconsolate country had been transformed by the rich henequen fields and the railroad."52

Yucatán had come to enjoy prosperous times under Díaz and the competent governors he selected to run the state, especially Francisco Cantón and Olegario Molina. Wealthy members of Mérida's society who profited from the sale of henequen, railroad investments or some other enterprise, began to travel to Mexico City with many of them purchasing property there.

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for future building purposes. One hacendado, a Señor Robles who operated a henequen plantation near Mérida, noted that he as well as many other wealthy planters traveled to Europe, where they adopted the current fashion of the Continent. Members of Mérida's upper classes were also known to send their children abroad to obtain their university educations rather than study in Mexico.

The citizens of Mérida were honored by the presidential visit. Thousands of people poured into the city for the festivities to insure the success of the occasion. It was decided that the President's wife Carmen and her party would sail to the Yucatán on the First Bismark, while her husband, who was forbidden by law from sailing on a foreign vessel, would arrive with his associates on the gunboat Bravo. Governor Molina directed all his energy towards making Díaz's visit a memorable affair and set about planning a tour. There was to be a grand banquet, a tour of the modernized capital, a visit to one or two henequen plantations and a number of other activities. Special arches were constructed for the event, including one called the Maya Arch to commemorate the great civilization of Yucatán's past. These arches were erected at the expense of the state government. In keeping with the progressive outlook of the científicos the arch was surmounted by a figure of Progress. 55

On February 7, 1906, the President and Vice President, Ramon Corral,

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54 Ibid., 28 January 1906, p. 1.

55 Ibid.
Mrs. Díaz and her retinue, received a gracious welcome from Governor Molina. The party then journeyed to Progreso and on to Mérida where hacendados, businessmen and public servants eagerly awaited their arrival to inaugurate what one observer termed the "comic celebrations." Although no incident occurred to mar the presidential visit, Díaz's safety could not be completely guaranteed where his "iron hand" has lain heavily. Some believed that his "presence among the Indians would be fraught with great personal danger to himself. Nevertheless, the President did not appear unnerved in any way and happily participated in all the events scheduled for him by Molina.

One of the first events attended by Díaz and his party was the opening of the newly completed O'Horan Hospital and the insane asylum. Díaz then visited the recently opened Juarez Penitentiary where it was reported that the convicts greeted the President with enthusiasm. This event was followed by an elaborate banquet attended by Mérida's elite. Molina expressed his feelings and theirs when he proposed a toast to Díaz which praised his achievements. Molina stated:

56Mena Brito, Reestructuración histórica II, 264.

57Percy Martin, Mexico of The Twentieth Century (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1907), p. 52.

58Ibid.

The work of moral, intellectual and material progress which Yucatán is realizing with tireless tenacity is merely a tribute to the greater task of transformation which General Díaz has achieved all over the republic, building up Mexico's credit abroad and establishing peace at home...Mexicans may feel proud of their nationality. 60

When the banquet ended Díaz and the Governor proceeded to the hacienda of one of the Yucatán's wealthiest men, Rafael Peón. His hennequen plantation, which was located ninety kilometers from Mérida, was called Chunchucmil. The planter gave Díaz a tour of his large estate. The President inspected with great interest the modern machinery used in sisal production and was equally impressed with the hygienic standards maintained on the plantation. The President observed the Mayas on this estate, commenting upon their hard-working qualities, their gentle and sensible manner, and a people who were fond of their customs. 61

Molina had gone to great lengths to insure the success of the hacienda tour. He and Peón, the owner of Chunchucmil, had engaged the services of Benjamin Sanchez who had organized a cooperative of free laborers from the pueblo of Halachó. These native laborers performed diverse jobs on neighboring haciendas. 62 Sanchez was paid more than usual to make certain that conditions on the estate displayed the hacienda at its best. Díaz was not to see anything which indicated evidence of Maya slavery on the plantation. 63 Almost overnight, the hacienda Díaz was to

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Xenia Brito, Reestructuración histórica II, 247.
63 Ibid.
tour turned into a model henequen plantation. While inspecting sisal machinery on his tour of the estate, Díaz was deliberately led to several Indian huts which had thatched palm leaf roofs. The cluster of huts resembled a village where 200 hacienda laborers lived in an "atmosphere of general happiness." In reality, the model village was completely fake. If not expressly built for the occasion, the huts which stood on the hacienda were cleaned and "metamorphosed beyond recognition" for the official guest. As one observer commented: 

"Every Indian had been given a sewing machine; every Indian lass had been trimmed out with finery and in some cases...actually provided with European hats." The Mayas who gave Díaz and his wife a grand welcome also presented them with an album as a remembrance of their visit. At an elaborate luncheon given in the President's honor, Díaz praised the progress which the Indian laborers had achieved for the Yucatán. Molina and his friends had succeeded in their deception, for on this occasion the President remarked that

Some writers who do not know this country, who have not seen, as I have, the labourers, have declared Yucatán to be disgraced with slavery. Their statements are the grossest calumny, as it proved by the very faces of the labourers, by their tranquil happiness. He who is a slaver necessarily looks very different from those

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65 Ibid., p. 328.
66 Ibid.
labourers I have seen in Yucatán. 67

Three days after the President's departure from the Yucatán, the jeфа político of Mérida, Augusto Peón, brother of hacendado Rafael, had Benjamín Sanchez arrested. He was taken to a dungeon with no light, little air, and little to eat where he was held incommunicado for five days. He was threatened with death and beaten. 68 Sanchez apparently made great profits from hiring out the services of the pueblo Indians. 69 Perhaps to guarantee his silence in the Chunchochmil affair, Sanchez was forced to sign a document which stated that he had caused grief among his working companions by separating them from their families since these Indians were not indebted to anyone. 70

For the President, this trip to the Yucatán signified the re-conquest of the state, the consolidation of the Yucatecans and their land had been achieved. Now they were under Díaz rule, not complete local control as they had been in the past. This tour was not intended to improve conditions for the native Mayas or to analyze their problems, though effective contact with the Indians would be put to good propaganda use. It was interesting to note that during the course of the President's visit there was a great show of extolling the Maya culture by the very men who wanted to destroy it. The Maya language was spoken to the President at the presentation ceremony and statues of former

67 Ibid.
68 Mana Brito, Reestructuración histórica II, 250.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., p. 249.
great Maya leaders were on display for the occasion. A great fuss was made to portray the glorious heritage of the Indians. Yet there was no real bond between the Mayas and their white rulers. Porfirian policy was not actually one of acculturation, that is, "the cross-modification and fusion of the Indian and Spanish culture." However, Yucatecan planters and Governor Molina were quick to exploit and capitalize upon the greatness of the Mayas when it suited their ends.

CHAPTER II

FROM SUGAR TO HENEQUEN:
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE YUCATAN

The economic life of Porfirian Yucatán depended upon one major commodity, henequen or sisal hemp. This had not always been the case, for once it was sugar which constituted the state's major source of income as its number one export. In this chapter the economic growth of nineteenth-century Yucatán as experienced through the rise and fall of the sugar industry as well as the ascendancy of henequen will be traced. Another important consideration in following the course of the state's economic development is the effect of both sugar and henequen upon the native population who labored on the estates as well as the planters who owned and operated the plantations. Both sugar and henequen changed many lives in Porfirian Yucatán including the Mayas, often with disastrous results.

Under Spanish rule, the economy of the Yucatán was based primarily upon such traditional export products as beef, cattle, hides and tallow which were shipped to Havana; woven cloth and beeswax, (part of the Maya tribute), as well as salt, which were sent to other regions of Mexico; and lastly, dyewood, which was exported to European customers. The War of Independence altered the economy of the Yucatán, with Argentina replacing Mexico as the chief source of meat products for Cuba. Beeswax and cotton were eliminated as a major source of income for the new
government with the abolition of tribute to the Crown. Only salt, 
which was monopolized by a Campeche firm, remained stable.¹ Thus the 
Yucatecans were faced with the loss of their traditional export commodi-
ties and now found it necessary to experiment with other saleable 
products to replace their losses and to guarantee the survival of their 
economy. In the beginning, experiments were conducted in the hope of 
stimulating a coffee and silk industry, but these efforts failed. 
Then Yucatecans turned their attention to sugar and henequen, but it 
was sugar that first rose to prominence in the years 1820-1847. 

Although sugar was not new to the Yucatán, its development 
was prohibited by the Spanish Crown. One of the first recorded instances 
of sugar planting in the Yucatán occurred in 1605 when the Dean of the 
Mérida Cathedral experimented with the crop. However, this isolated 
instance did not serve as a stimulus to further growth. In later years 
"various authorities, and for mixed motives, opposed Yucatecan cultivation 
of the plant."² Several explanations for this attitude include the 
fact that intoxicants such as the cheaply produced aguardiente, could 
be made from a locally produced sugar cane and the Spanish wine merchants 
did not care to have a colony as a competitor. Therefore the merchants 
appealed to the Crown to enact legislation to end the danger of colonial

¹Nelson Reed, The Caste War of Yucatan (Stanford: Stanford 

²Howard Cline, "The Sugar Episode in Yucatan," Inter-American 
Economic Affairs I (March, 1948): 85.
competition. The monarchy sided with the powerful wine merchants and forbade sugar growth in the Yucatán until the War of Independence. Even under the brief rule of the Cortes of 1814 this policy was enforced and sugar was banned because of the constant pressure exerted by the wine merchants of Spain.

Despite official policy, however, small amounts of sugar were grown during the colonial period. By 1823, Yucatecans began to cultivate sugar cane with the full approval and encouragement of the state government. No longer were the sugar planters hampered by colonial policy and freely raised sugar cane as a commercial crop for export successfully until the late 1840's with the outbreak of the Caste War.

It was the state government which replaced Crown authority in the Yucatán and also served as the protector of the sugar trade. Favorable legislation which benefitted sugar interests was enacted to encourage the growth of the new industry. In 1823 the legislature passed a law which made the cultivation of sugar cane and its manufacture free of all duties. The planters were also aided by the local government in that it permitted sugar to be transported freely, no levies were collectible on sugar products. 3

The sugar industry grew in size and importance as former cattle investors and other merchants joined the ranks of the sugar growers in developing the young industry. The need for land also became greater as the enterprise expanded. In time land became a valuable asset and after 1825 sugar haciendas dominated the state. This same year the state

3 Ibid.
government again favored sugar interests with the passage of a law which permitted the governor to give away public lands in the partidos of Sierra Alta and Camino Real Alto to strangers if he so desired, who promised to cultivate sugar cane on the land. The government thus made the acquisition of land in the sugar growing regions easy to obtain. It was necessity which motivated state authorities to act in this manner even though it meant that small Indian rancherias who grew maize were uprooted. As it happened, the rise of sugar competed with the Indian for lands, and the government supported sugar growers rather than the Indians in this instance.

In the Yucatán of the 1820's sugar became an attractive investment, for profits came in rather quickly. In one year, for example, the investor would be able to use his profits to cover the costs of his original investment. A planter who cultivated seventy-five acres of sugar cane could earn 6,000 pesos profit after his first year of operation. Growers who also operated their own distilleries on the haciendas could anticipate an even larger profit from sugar. In the second year of operation, the planter could show 100% profit on his original investment as long as his production costs did not change.

Two problems which confronted the sugar investors were apparent in the early days of development. One of these was the availability of water which was required for the sugar crop. This problem was solved by creating a system of irrigation from an artificial water supply. In

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4 Ibid., p. 90.
5 Ibid., p. 92.
addition to the irrigation system, planters harvested their cane crops
during the dry season so that the maximum amount of rainfall would be
available for the growing season.

A second and perhaps more important problem was the scarcity of
labor to work the cane fields. During the year 1813 a small sugar crop
was completely lost because the Mayas refused to work on the hacienda
voluntarily. The seasonal labor force was not interested in harvesting
sugar even though the planter paid a salary of one real per day. In later
years when sugar was a legal industry and a primary source of income for the
Yucatán, more drastic action was taken by the sugar hacendados to insure
the timely harvest of their crops.

Voluntary labor existed in the early years of sugar development
and salaried Indian labor was not uncommon. However, the majority of
native Mayas were unwilling to work the plantations on a voluntary basis
so other methods of persuasion had to be found. Although the Mayas were
free citizens with the onset of Independence, local officials attempted
to justify forced labor practices. This was not the same as the quasi-
forced system of labor that existed under Spanish rule where the Indian had
the right to choose his master, but instead turned into a system of
debt slavery. The relationship between master and servant would be main-
tained in the Yucatán to guarantee successful cane harvests.

In 1841 the Yucatecan state government again favored the sugar

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6 Ib’d.
7 Reed, Caste War, p. 11.
industry by making the water sites private property. This act was quite a departure from the more protective state government which existed in the 1830's and protected all citizens water rights to satisfy their essential needs. The Mayas found themselves in a dilemma. First, there were those who lost their small maize plots to the sugar hacendados; now their water rights were violated to suit the interests of the planter class. This left the Indians with two bleak alternatives--join the hacendado's labor force or vacate the land.

As the sugar industry became increasingly important to the success of the state economy, the Mayas, including those who already worked on the haciendas, experienced a more rigid lifestyle imposed upon them by the capitalist cultivator and a supportive local government. The state made it possible for the sugar growers to satisfy their labor requirements by reverting to former laws, i. e., the Siete Partidas which permitted imprisonment for debt. The Yucatecan government did not need to institute a debt peonage system based upon new legislation, but exploited laws which had been in existence.

The Mayas were the victims of these outdated debt laws. Those who came to power after independence had been won failed to enact social legislation to protect the Indian or to improve his status. He was declared free but that was all. The first Yucatecan Congress held in the

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8 Ibid., p. 9.

year 1825, declared liberty for all those born within the state, prohibited the introduction of slavery, favored immigration, and guaranteed equality and justice for all. 10 The final version of the state Constitution which appeared in final form that same year, however, amended the clause prohibiting slavery, by stating that those whose servitude dated from the colonial period were not to be considered free citizens of the Yucatán. 11

In reality, liberal thinking did not favor Indian interests. One of the great spokesmen for the liberal cause, José María Luis Mora, 1821-53, believed that the Indian was once capable of self government in the pre-Conquest period, but since that time had undergone changes and in his present state was incapable of governing himself. He was not the equal of the European, according to Mora, who thought the Indian to be "resigned and melancholy," stubbornly clinging to his former customs and totally unprogressive. 12 Mora's view of the Indian implied the superiority of the white race over the Indian whom he regarded as backward and degraded. The Indian deserved the compassion of the white man but not much more. He had little hope of improving his status and in no way could the Indian constitute the basis for a progressive Mexican society. 13 Mora hoped for a fusion of the two races and urged European immigration

11 Ibid., p. 304.
13 Ibid.
to build a progressive nation. The Indian remained in his static position for the present.

In the case of the Yucatán, there were no politicians to legislate on behalf of the Mayas. They were not protected by the law and were thus left to the devices of the state government and sugar hacendados whom the government openly favored. The exploitation of Maya labor accelerated as the sugar economy dominated the state, and no steps were taken to prevent unjust exploitation of the native population. Thus the agricultural economy of the state developed with the help of debt servitude which was to characterize the growth of the future industry as well.

Ignorant Maya laborers were drawn to the hacienda's service by accepting advances on their wages, only to discover later that these debts would never be paid in full. Indians who sought employment on other estates had to produce a document from his former hacendado which cleared him of any debt. Often, however, the hacendado would keep no accurate records of the debtor's payments. Some hacendados kept no books on debts at all. In this manner sugar planters were able to sustain their plantations with a cheap, stable labor force which was bound to the hacienda by debt.

Still another source of hacienda labor came from the state itself.

14Read, Caste War, p. 11.
Although the colonial tribute assessed against a village was abolished by the independent government, a personal tribute replaced it. Indians who could not pay the sum assessed by their local jefe were subject for recruitment as hacienda laborers. Even orphans who were wards of the state might find themselves on sugar plantations. It was not unusual for a planter to bribe an unscrupulous official with 25 pesos for each orphan he provided as labor. The Yucatecan economy was characterized by a labor force bound in debt, both private and public, with little opportunity to regain their lost freedom.

Sugar prosperity continued into the 1840's when competition from Cuba began to overtake Yucatecan production. Although improved methods of sugar production were available, the majority of sugar investors continued to employ methods which had become outdated and inefficient. No attempts were made to increase efficiency in the Yucatán as Cuban producers began to advance in the international market. Cuban competition heralded the downward trend in the price of Yucatecan sugar and the ultimate fall of the industry.

A more serious threat to the survival of the Yucatecan sugar industry was the outbreak of the Caste War in 1847. The Mayas were at war with their white oppressors. The Indians were disenchanted with revolutionary promises that were not kept. The Mayas were certainly not treated as equal citizens and had no voice in government. No improvements

15 Ramón Berzuña Pinto, Guerra social en Yucatán (Mexico: Costa-Amic, 1965), p. 84.
16 Reed, Caste War, p. 11.
had been experienced to change their social and economic status since the creoles had achieved independence from Spain. The Mayas had become the victims of creole injustice, having been robbed of their lands and watching their families forced into debt service. Not since 1761 did the Mayas rebel against unjust treatment by the white population, but now in 1847 the Indians could no longer contain their discontent and resorted to war to regain what they had lost.

The Caste War was largely the result of a clash between two different societies, the Indian and the European. Each society found the other incompatible because each held a completely different point of world view. White men criticized the Mayas for their superstitions and belief in communal property holding. They could not accept the Maya's method of farming small plots of land to produce what food his family needed instead of raising a surplus crop for profit. The Maya's life was based upon ritual and he was not economically motivated as was the European. Concentrated property holding were a main source of division between the Maya and the European. The Indian did not understand the theory of private property held so dear by the hacendados but completely alien to his own thinking. Mayas called their little plots milpas; the land itself belonged to the village or community of Indians that inhabited the area. Each man was free to use what land he needed, to own his own crop and the harvest, but not the land itself. It was the land issue

18 Reed, Caste War, p. 8.
which constituted the basis of difficulties between the Mayas and the creoles of Yucatán.

Private property was the cornerstone of liberalism in the post-
Independence period. Latifundia, or the large estates such as those
owned and operated by the sugar growers of Yucatán, threatened the existence
of the communal landholdings of the Indians. In 1845, the state govern-
ment tried to force the Mayas to pay taxes on property that was held
communally, but the measure met with such great resistance that it was
quickly revealed. At the same time the Caste War broke out in the Yucatán,
Mexico was at war with the United States. While the government might have
been able to ignore a minor rebellion or a raid, it could not remain
indifferent toward the serious effort of the Mayas who began their march
towards Mérida in July, 1847. This was at the same time the North
Americans approached Mexico City. The Caste War frightened the liberal
Mora, who took it upon himself to appeal to the British Government to
help settle the Yucatecan affair. Mora feared the Mayas who now seemed
determined to exterminate the white race. Later Mora decided against
inviting British mediation, anticipating a truce which would recognize
the Mayas collectively and perhaps the possibility of a British protectorate
on Mexican soil. The Indians had to be dealt with individually, Mora
informed Lord Palmerston, and he stated that he would rather see the

19 Hale, Mexican Liberalism, p. 224.
20 Ibid., p. 240.
21 Ibid., p. 241.
22 Ibid.
Yucatán lost than to cede it "to tribes which have scarcely entered civilization." The Yucatán also spurned British mediation on the grounds that the Indians were being supplied with British weaponry from Belize. The Yucatán, therefore, faced war on two fronts; nationally, the Federal Government had to concentrate on the North American problem, while locally it had to conduct the Maya War.

Meanwhile the war effort gained momentum as the Mayas destroyed everything in their path in their attempt to end white domination. Hostilities continued until 1855 when the situation eased up somewhat. Rebel Mayas had been successful in acquiring and maintaining control over huge tracts of jungle territory in the eastern part of the state. The Mayas settled in these areas and established rebel headquarters at Chan Santa Cruz.

For the sugar growers, the Caste War proved disastrous, since many of the battles were fought upon sugar territory. Cane crops were ravaged by the warring Mayas, who also burnt down haciendas as well. The war marked the end of a sugar-dominated economy for the Yucatán. It had been a successful industry which influenced the economic and political scene in the state for over twenty years. After the war, the sugar industry never regained its prominence and new sources of income had to be found.

For the second time since Independence, the Yucatecans were faced

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24 Read, Caste War, p. 8.
with an economic crisis. A substitute cash crop had to be found to replace the ruined sugar industry and save the economy of the state from a total collapse. It was too risky to attempt reconstruction of the sugar industry not only because of the damages incurred by the Caste War, but also the fact that future raids by Maya rebels were a real possibility even though a truce was called. Therefore reconstruction was suicidal. At this point the Yucatecan investors focused their attention on the state’s second important crop, henequen.

Henequen was raised without interruption during the course of the Caste War. It was a crop which did not compete with maize or any other staple for land. One of the most advantageous aspects regarding the planting of henequen was that it grew well in shallow, rocky soil and did not need the fertile soil that most plants require. Little moisture was required to raise henequen also. There are three steps to raising henequen successfully in the Yucatán. One, the field must be cleared for planting; two, labor was required all year round to clean the bunches of leaves called pencas, and three, the cutting of the leaves when the harvest was due. A henequen plant had a lifetime of twenty years although the plant did not mature immediately after planting. It usually took from five to eight years to cultivate plants that produced a lot of fiber for export. 25 Once the fibers had been cleaned and separated by hand, they were shipped to the Yucatán’s buyers. From this material ropes, ships rigging, canal tow ropes, cables, and binder twine were manufactured.

25 Howard F. Cline, "Henequen Episode," p. 34.
Cuba used sisal to make bags and sacks for her coffee exports and was the Yucatán's first major customer until 1843-47 when she was replaced by the United States.²⁶

The first commercial henequen plantation was founded in 1833, although the plant was raised on a smaller basis during the colonial period.²⁷ The industry was based upon the "commercial cultivation of agaves, the processing of their leaves to extract natural fibers, and the sale of fibers in a raw or manufactured state."²⁸ Since it did take up to eight years for the henequen plants to mature, henequen investors decided to incorporate in the early days of the industry rather than risk operating individually. Henequen required a great investment in money and time and was unable to produce immediate profits as sugar cane once did. Gradually, former sugar investors changed their fields over to henequen. In time, other planters established henequen estates. These planters came from various backgrounds: i.e., independent farmers who pooled their capital and switched to henequen, members of the creole and mestizo element who saw an opportunity to make a great deal of money and decided to invest their savings in sisal. The planters began to cultivate henequen in the more settled areas near Mérida and as the industry began to grow, plantations were established beyond the capital city, especially in the northwest area of

²⁶Ibid., p. 43.
²⁷Reed, Caste War, p. 8.
²⁸Cline, "Henequen Episode," p. 32.
the state. 29

As in the case of sugar, henequen development was encouraged by the state government. When North American Consul Henry Perrins introduced a rasping machine, (a device which separated henequen fibers), in the year 1833, it was believed that sisal was on its way to becoming a very profitable investment now that production would be increased with the availability of the machine. 30 Although the Yucatecans were enthusiastic over the possibilities of the rasper, Perrins' machine was unsuccessful in separating the leaves. In 1847, another American, James R. Hitchcock, introduced his rasper to the Yucatán, but this too, ended in failure as a complicated mechanism destroyed the filament of the sisal leaves. 31 In the year 1852, the State offered a monetary reward of 2,000 pesos to the inventor who successfully produced a rasping machine which would separate henequen fibers without destroying them in the process. It was hoped that a more efficient machine would replace the crude method currently in use—separating the fibers by hand. 32 A successful rasping machine which was able to separate the fibers effectively would make large-scale production and full exploitation of the sisal plant possible.

North American inventors argued that it would be impossible to produce a satisfactory rasping device to separate the strong, pulpy leaves. 33

29 Reed, Caste War, pp. 8 and 13.


31 Reed, Caste War, p. 147.


33 Ibid., p. 633.
However, the Yucatecans were not discouraged and continued to work on the problem. Their perseverance was rewarded when Manuel Cecilio Villamor, a native Yucatecan, presented his invention to the state authorities. The inventor was commended for his machine and given the 2,000 pesos promised by the government. Not only did Villamor earn the praise of local officials in his state, but also received a letter of commendation from President Santa Ana at the Palacio Nacional. Although Villamor's invention received praise from the state and federal governments, their acclaim was premature. When put to practical use, the rasping machine developed by Villamor was discovered to have flaws. Hacendados who experimented with the new device complained that many sound henequen leaves were destroyed in the process.

Another invention followed, again by a native Yucatecan. José Esteban Solis invented a machine which also won the approval of the state government and was patented for exclusive use within the Yucatán. Solis's rasper proved more successful than the others had been. It was able to produce 6,342 henequen leaves in 21 hours while Villamor's was only able to separate 1,155 leaves in the same amount of time. At last henequen growers could increase their rate of production and profits. It had taken a series of trial and error experiments by local talent, but in the long run their efforts had been rewarded.

The development of the henequen industry was clearly a Yucatecan

\[34\] Ibid., p. 631.

\[35\] Ibid., p. 633.
phenomenon. Even though some of the inventions had failed to produce the desired effect, inventors were encouraged and praised for their efforts to produce the perfect machine. Yucatán's henequen inventors also enjoyed a favorable reputation abroad for their ability to design efficient machinery for the new industry. When North American investors attempted to establish a sisal industry in Cuba, they purchased machinery from the Yucatán and contracted laborers who were willing to go to Cuba and operate the machinery.\(^{36}\) In addition to engaging the services of the machine operators, the American investors also hired Yucatecan labor to repair the machinery as well. The henequen industry was developed and exploited by the Yucatecans. During the Porfiriato it was one of the few native industries in existence in Mexico. (Others included sugar and grain produced in Chihuahua).\(^{37}\) Since the Porfirián economy was based heavily upon international interests and foreign money, Yucatán's success in developing the sisal industry was a tribute to native talent.

The advancement of the henequen industry brought many changes to the state. New jobs were made available in construction and carpentry, as well as the servicing of machinery as a result of stimulated economic activity within the Yucatán. More tailors were also required for the new class of wealthy planters that developed with the rise of henequen. Most of

\(^{36}\)Gustavo Molina Font, La tragedia de Yucatán (Mexico: Revista de derecho y ciencias sociales, 1941), p. 66.

these new occupations were filled from the ranks of the mestizos of the region, who once they accumulated sizable sums from their own occupations, often invested their capital in henequen and became hacendados themselves. Since the frontier beyond Mérida offered men the opportunity to accumulate wealth from raising sisal, mestizos were now able to join creoles in reaping the profits from sisal hemp. The new frontier area, which was regarded as Yucatán's hope for the future, included the Chenes country and the region to the south, Tekax, Tihosuco, Peto and Tizimin.  

Henequen made fortunes for members of the new elite. In the year 1873, for example, 31,000 pacas, (bales), of sisal were exported to the Yucatán's largest customers, the United States and Europe. This figure rose to 35,000 pacas in 1874, 41,000 in 1875, and 113,000 by the year 1880. During the early years of the Porfiriato, 1877-83, henequen exports increased at an average rate of 25.5% annually. "Green gold," as henequen was commonly called, netted the state $21,936,155.00 in profits for the year 1880, rising to $38,324,504.00 in the year 1891. There was no doubt that Yucatán's prosperity was great as wealth poured into the state and it became clear that the plantation economy was there to stay.

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38 Reed, Caste War, p. 17.
39 Gonzalo Camara Zavala, "Historia de la industria henequenera hasta 1919," Enciclopedia Yucatámense III, 691.
Yucatán's prosperity was secure as the state held a monopoly over the henequen market worldwide.

Just as the sugar industry produced an elite corps of wealthy planters so also did henequen. Often referred to as the "Henequen Kings," or "la clase feudal Yucateca," the new elite began to display its wealth in various ways. Members of the rich planter class built lavish haciendas on their estates and imported expensive French furniture and fine wines from abroad. It was not uncommon for the sisal planter to have a second home in Mérida in addition to his hacienda. The henequen elite closely resembled the sugar barons of earlier days, and like their predecessors, influenced the course of social and political developments within the state. One of the most successful henequen planters of the Díaz period who exemplifies the planter-politician at the height of power was Olegario Molina, who was the most influential member of the henequen elite during the administration of Porfirio Díaz.

Molina's family exercised great control over the exportation of henequen and was very powerful in influencing the economy of the state. The governor-hacendado favored his own interests when he entered into a controversial secret agreement with International Harvester in the years 1900-11. Under the terms of this agreement with Pierpont Morgan, International Harvester was allowed to consolidate the henequen market and in return,

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42 Fernando Benítez, Los indios de México (Mexico: Biblioteca ERA, 1967), p. 27.
43 Ibid.
promised the House of Molina and Company, (founded in 1895), domination of the henequen market to its own advantage. Morgan agreed to make good any losses suffered by Molina's firm and to deal exclusively with his company. This agreement was unfair to other henequen cultivators and it seemed as if Molina was attempting to destroy all his competitors in negotiating this secret contract with International Harvester. According to the plan, Molina was to dump 10,000 bales of henequen on the market at one time. This resulted in a drop of henequen prices which did not favor henequen growers except of course for Molina, who was reimbursed by Morgan. Sisal producers became alarmed with the continued downward trend in prices and were unhappy with the Molina-Morgan contract. They watched as the price of sisal dropped to 10 cents per pound in 1902 to 8 cents in 1903, and by 1911, to 3 cents per pound.  

Henequen hacendados considered Molina's agreement with International Harvester a threat to their interests and decided to take action. They did not accept his explanation for the contract which was that he "wanted volume production at a low figure to prevent foreign competition and broaden the market." The fact was, however, that production did not increase materially nor was there any serious threat of competition on the foreign market to justify the Governor's claims. It was clear to the henequen producers that Molina was merely acting in the interest of his

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family in negotiating the contract with Morgan. He was willing to jeopardize profits to local producers so that International Harvester could corner the henequen market and earn greater profits for Molina who was eliminating all competition. He insured the success of his own operations by forcing other sisal planters out of business by driving prices to the lowest possible level. The governor-hacendado was a ruthless businessman as henequen planters discovered. In 1901 Molina's competitors attempted to organize themselves against further injury from Molina, but it wasn't until 1904 that the House of Guerra y Cía was able to form a syndicate to break the Governor's monopoly. Molina not only exported henequen, but also ran the major bank through which other henequen planters sold their crops. His monopoly seemed complete until the other hacendados managed to thwart his efforts and cause henequen prices to rise once more.

Molina not only influenced the economic pattern of the Yucatán bycornering the henequen market for his family interests but also enjoyed the favoritism of the President in land dealings as well. In 1909, for instance, Molina was adjudicated 2,179 hectares of land which happened to border one of his estates located in the partido of Tizimín. These were ejido lands commonly farmed by the Mayas for generations. Three Maya pueblos were given outright to Molina who sent the local jefe to evict the Indians.

45 Ibid.
from his newly acquired property. The unfortunate Mayas were given three months to vacate the land. One of the Mexican daily newspapers, El País, reported the eviction story, May 3, 1909, and criticized Molina for his actions. The article was sympathetic towards the Mayas, whom, it was stated, "were treated as one kicks out a street cur, without caring whether he will die of hunger or thirst." 49

The Governor decided to justify his position regarding the eviction of the Mayas by expressing his views in the Maz organ, El diario oficial. When the article appeared criticizing Molina's treatment of the Mayas and the violation of property, it was clear that Molina was awarded the property because of his lofty position in government and that the man who made it possible for the Governor to take away the ejido lands from the Indians was firmly behind him. 50

Not all henequen hacendados enjoyed the success and prestige of Molina, but they constituted a powerful elite whose interests were served by the state, especially in matters relating to land. As henequen became big business, land grabbing became more frequent and always at the expense of the Mayas. Other cases of unfair land practices included the removal of thirty Mayas from the pueblo of Tixcanal who were accused by one greedy sisal cultivator of conspiring to remain on their lands even though they were told to leave them. In another incident forty Indian families from the pueblo of Kancabachen, partido of Maxcanu, saw their lands seized from
them in 1907 on the pretext that they were baldios, or public lands that could be sold. 51

Although many henequen planters were unscrupulous in adding to their lands at the expense of the Indians, there were also growers who had legally acquired good-sized haciendas during the early days of the henequen industry. These areas included lands near Mérida east to Chichen, south to Tixcul and Yaxaba and to the northwest near the edge of the coastal swamps. 52

It was this group of cultivators who constituted the base of the henequen elite whose system of land and labor came to dominate the lives and fortunes of Yucatecan society during the Porfiriato.

The Díaz administration did its utmost to cater to the needs of the sisal planters. This was especially true in the area of land legislation initiated by the President which showed favoritism to the cultivators who wished to increase their landholdings at the expense of the Indian. Díaz helped further the expansion of latifundia during his regime which was beneficial to the planters but very harmful to the Indians. 53

Porfirio Díaz embarked upon a new series of land legislation which, unlike that of Juárez, clearly favored the continuance of the large estate system. Díaz claimed land laws were needed to promote successful colonization, and in 1883 a law of colonization was enacted which permitted the govern-

51 Ibid.


53 Ibid., p. 92. The first attempt to break up corporate land holdings both religious and civil, began with the efforts of Juárez and his Reforma, 1855-7. Juárez hoped to popularize individual landholding creating a large body of small property owners who would work the land.
ment to contract with survey companies to locate and measure baldíos. These firms were paid for their services by retaining one-third of the land they surveyed. 54 The law tended to favor speculative interests rather than encourage immigration. In 1894 another law was passed which allowed anyone to denounce and file claim for unoccupied lands without proper evidence of title. Díaz stated that there were four types of public land:

1. **baldíos** - defined as lands never alienated by the nation or destined for public use,

2. **demasías** - lands held by an individual within certain bounds in excess of amounts stated on the deed,

3. **excedencias** - individually-held lands for 20 years or more, bordering on the owner's lawful property, and

4. **nacionales** - baldíos that would be discovered such as lands with an illegal claim or totally abandoned. 55

This particular piece of land legislation gave way for large-scale speculation, for Díaz allowed huge tracts of land to be sold to individuals or companies without having to settle upon the land. Although the President established the **Gran Registro de la Propiedad** to provide property holders the opportunity to register their titles, perfect them, and even to obtain them without documentary evidence, the law had a devastating effect upon the Indian, 56mestizos who understood the meaning of the law registered their estate titles, but the Yucatecan Mayas who did not understand the intent of


55 Ibid.

the law and who lived on common lands in the remote regions of the state, failed to comply with the registration requirements. In the end, it was the Maya who was forced off the land he had farmed for generations as a result of Porfirian land legislation.

In the early days of henequen development, the Mayas did not experience any serious disruption in their lives, they continued to farm their maize crops and raised cattle for their own needs. By the time of the Porfiriato, however, lands were a valuable asset in view of the tremendous henequen profits, so the government guaranteed sisal producers even greater profits by providing land laws amenable to their interests. Thus the Porfirian land laws were a death blow to the Indians because the communal landholding system which had provided the Mayas with a source of livelihood in the past were now lost. It was Díaz's intention to transform Mexico into a capitalistic nation, and neither the Maya nor any other Indian group was to hinder economic progress. The Indian was not a capitalist. In the Maya community rich and poor lived together, and no permanent privileged group existed in the pueblos. Material wealth had no bearing on a Maya's social standing within his own community. The previous legislation of Juárez did not produce a situation where the Indian could obtain a small farm and become part of a large society of farmers. Díaz was not going to wait for the Indian to become a capitalist and thus allowed the Maya

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57 Reed, Caste War, p. 8.

to be robbed of lands for the sake of economic progress.

As a consequence of Porfirian land legislation, the jefes politicos began to evict the Indians from the lands which had been communally held since most of them could not provide evidence of legal ownership. Maya lands located within the henequen zones in the eastern and southern regions of the state were quickly confiscated even though their titles had been confirmed in law. Those who denounced Indian holdings justified their conduct by claiming that the lands were useless to the Indians; these lands did not produce sufficient food for their families, the land was not fit for grazing, and it would be very difficult to divide them into smaller holdings. For the Indian who dared resist and tried to save his land, the penalty could be horrible. In the state of Hidalgo, for example, several spokesmen for a troubled Indian pueblo were seized by local authorities and buried to their necks in a section of the pueblo they were trying to save. The rurales then galloped over them, thus putting an end to their resistance.

Although Porfirian land laws were destructive in regard to the Mayas of Yucatán, they did not completely eliminate the existence of all pueblos in the state. One Porfirian commentator observed that the law of dismemberment served to decrease the size and importance of the communal lands such as the Indian village, making them no more significant than a small hamlet.


or settlement in the last years of their existence. After the passage of the land laws during the Díaz period there remained 154 Maya villages in the Yucatán.

Not all Mayas lost their lands to the henequen cultivators or the speculative companies because of land legislation, though many of them did lose their lands in that manner. In addition to the land which was surrendered because of the failure to produce title, there were also Mayas who willingly sold their lands to a hacienda because the land was not arable or because natural disaster had caused serious damage to their crops. As men without land, the Mayas who lost their property either by law or voluntarily, were forced to seek their livings in some other way, and often they found themselves bound to a henequen plantation.

The Díaz administration not only provided favorable land laws for the benefit of the henequen producers, but in addition permitted the establishment of still another source of land speculation in the Yucatán with the founding of the Yucatán Southeast Company in May, 1899. This concern got under way with assets amounting to one million dollars in silver in order to open up vast tracts of uncultivated lands in the Maya peninsula.

The President also helped the cause of economic progress in the Yucatán by ordering the construction of railroads to speed up the transport of henequen from the plantations to the port city of Progreso, which was

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61 Ibid.

the state's chief port in the age of henequen. Port facilities and mar­
time communications were also greatly improved during the Díaz presidency.
Steamship services made mail delivery much more efficient as well. Díaz
added to the two Mexican steamship lines, permitting the New York and
Cuba Mail Steamship lines, the Imperial German Mail Company, the Harrison
Line and the Pacific Steamship Company to operate in the Yucatán.64

The Federal Government offered further advantages through the
services of the Department of Fomento which prepared up-to-date bulletins
on scientific methods of cultivation, fertilization and irrigation.
Díaz also encouraged the agricultural industry by promoting fairs and
expositions to display native products. The President expressed his great
personal interest in encouraging the economic interests of the Yucatán
when, on his visit in 1906, he publicly stated the hope he had that the
Yucatecans "would soon send abroad not only the unmanufactured fibre but
all articles manufactured from it."65 One such possibility was the large-
scale manufacture of hammocks, which were hand made by Maya women, that
were experiencing success as the New York market began to increase its
demand for them.66 Hammocks were just one of many possible goods that could
be made from henequen fibers for export. With all the recent advantages in
transportation, communication and machinery, Díaz foresaw the possibility
of increased production and higher profits.

64 Ibid.
In conclusion, the economy of the state of Yucatán had undergone several important changes since the period of independence. First, the loss of the traditional trade in beef and beeswax was forfeited, with the Yucatecans turning their attention to the possibilities of sugar cane. With the success of sugar came the increased value of land and the rise of a powerful elite whose interests were promoted and served by the local government. When the sugar industry collapsed with the outbreak of the Caste War in 1847, and ended with an uneasy truce in 1855, again the Yucatecans were forced to rise to the occasion and the henequen boom was underway. As in the case of sugar, a powerful elite rose with henequen which dominated the economic and political scene. This group was best represented by the wealthy and powerful Olegario Molina. The economic drive for capitalistic domination which was accelerated during the Porfiriató, altered the life of the Indian in the Yucatán by pressuring the Indian to surrender to henequen interests. The Indian was the victim of land grabbing in the Yucatán.

The Maya struggle to preserve his world and his land which surfaced with the Caste War continued well into the Díaz administration. It was the Indian's attempt to survive the modern world. The length of the war proved the Mayas' determination to maintain the lifestyle which they had always known and honored. The Díaz Government could not make capitalists of them, nor was it able to suppress the rebel effort until 1902.

Once it was realized that henequen was extremely profitable as an enterprise, the state and federal governments encouraged and protected the interests of the producers to the detriment of the Indian. Díaz offered his
full support to the henequen industry in the passage of land laws, improved transportation and communications. His strong reputation abroad encouraged investment and earned Mexico a sound credit rating. Government efforts to promote henequen interests did not go unrewarded and both the state and the nation profited tremendously from their most important export product.

Although henequen acted against the interests of the native Mayas it did stimulate the economy of the state and opened the way to social mobility, especially for the mestizos. New occupations such as building, carpentry, tailoring, etc., were basically filled by the mestizo population. Once they saved enough capital they too could invest in henequen and become rich. The greatest losers during the henequen boom were, of course, the Indians. Once their holdings were confiscated they had little alternative but to turn to the hacienda for support. As henequen grew in importance, the need for labor increased as well, and again it was the Mayas who were most affected. There was a great need for a sizable labor force to sustain the henequen plantation of the Porfiriato, and once again it was the government that came to the rescue of the planter class.
CHAPTER III
SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN PORFIRIAN YUCATAN
LABOR AND RECRUITMENT

Just as the henequen industry increased the need for land during the Porfiriato, so also did the hacendados require a more substantial labor force. With the increased number of demands from foreign buyers for the Yucatán's "green gold," the planters needed a stable labor force that could work the henequen plantations all year round. Since henequen production was vital to the economy of the state and the nation as a whole, sisal cultivators were assisted in their efforts to obtain laborers by both the state and federal governments throughout the Díaz period. This chapter deals with the methods used by the federal and local governments to aid the planters with their labor problems by providing the hacendados with Maya labor, Yaqui laborers who had been exiled to the Yucatán from the state of Sonora, and lastly, the immigrants who arrived from various countries of the Orient. In addition to the recruitment of plantation labor, the second important aspect of this chapter concerns the experiences of these laborers, particularly the native Maya.

The most important source of labor for the plantations was the local Maya population. Even before the administration of Porfirio Díaz, planters

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had begun to violate prohibitions against involuntary labor and revived laws pertaining to debt servitude in order to fulfill the necessary labor requirements on their estates. A law passed in October, 1843, allowed men to lend their services wherever they chose and to whomever they desired by mutual contract. Furthermore, any debts incurred by the laborer could not be passed on to his sons. Another law, enacted in May, 1847, stated that the servant was free to leave his work in cases where maltreatment was experienced such as a proprietor's attempt to dominate the lives of the worker's family, including his children, brothers or parents. In the year 1863 the government of the state made an accommodation to the planters by repealing these laws.

Five years later, the state legislature of neighboring Campeche made an attempt to clarify different types of labor. According to the law of this state, one type of labor consisted of jornaleros or daily laborers who were paid a predetermined wage agreed upon by the worker and his employer. Secondly, there were the asalariados, or wage earners who were paid on a monthly basis by their employers. Campechan law recognized freedom of labor as was established in the Constitution of 1857 which placed a limit of five years as the period of service an indebted servant could pay off his debts. If the laborer still owed money after that time,

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3 Ibid.

he was permitted to sign a new contract with the hacendado for a maximum of three years of additional service. If, by the end of that period the debt had not been fully paid, it was cancelled and the laborer was free to seek employment elsewhere. The agreement between servant and employer had to be witnessed by the justice of the peace and two other observers who read the document to attest to the fact that the terms and obligations were clearly stated. If the debt servitor died before his contract expired, the document was cancelled and his obligations were not to be passed on to his family. In instances where minors under the age of twenty-one were involved, the consent of the parents or guardians was necessary to validate the work contract.

Once he signed the contract, the laborer was obligated to show respect towards his employer, the mayordomo, and other agents of the hacendado on the estate. All indebted servants were required to be personally clean and to maintain their living quarters to assure the health of all laborers on the plantation. The indebted laborer could not leave the estate freely and was required to carry written permission from the hacendado or mayordomo which stated his destination and time allowed off the estate. If the laborer violated his permit, he would be penalized by having to perform eight days labor on a public works project.

During the Porfiriato, the Campesin hacendados and state officials tried to suggest other means of recruiting labor other than

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5Ibid., p. 194.
6Ibid., p. 195.
7Ibid.
indebted servitude. They sponsored immigration, established an agricultural bank, and founded a school which offered courses in agriculture. In addition, the hacendados hoped to avoid abuses towards their laborers, but this was not to be. Their dependency on this system of labor was too firmly entrenched and their profits too great to risk a labor shortage.

Unlike the state of Campeche, the Yucatán made no attempt whatsoever to curb the abuses of debt servitude or to end it. In this state, debt peonage had become a profitable enterprise in itself, and the legislature tended to sanction the practice rather than eliminate it. When a Maya worker accepted an advancement on his wages or borrowed money from the hacendado for his personal needs, the Indian sealed his fate. Their debt was eternal, for the Maya could never hope to repay this loan. Labor was too valuable to permit the loss of any worker, and so the planters were not particularly anxious to collect payments from their peons.

Another reason which separated the reform-minded Campechanos from their Yucatecan neighbors was the Caste War, a memory which was still fresh in the minds of the population. In its own way, the Caste War of 1847 contributed towards the continuance of the peonage system, for Indians who were regarded as prisoners of war as well as orphaned by the war, were put to work on the henequen plantations. Indians who failed to pay fines and taxes collected by their local jefés were also added to the labor force of some hacendado's estate.8 This source of

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labor satisfied the planters because it allowed them to expand their production. Putting the Mayas to work on the sisal plantations also gave satisfaction to the Federal Government, for if the Indians were busily engaged in the henequen fields, they could not start another rebellion.

In time, however, it became increasingly difficult to apprehend more prisoners of war for the plantations as the Mayas fled deeper into the jungle. Occasionally President Díaz would permit Federal forces to organize expeditions to search out the Mayas, but they did not meet with great success. Often, the soldiers would "triumphantly return, with a great flourish of trumpets—but without any Indians."9 Both Porfirian authorities and Yucatecans were also afraid of another major Maya uprising as the rumor spread that rebels holding out at Chan Santa Cruz intended to hold a grand council of all Maya tribes to plan their strategy for future attacks.10 Rumors concerning secret councils and the threat of more raids caused a great deal of unrest among the people. As one contemporary observer stated:

"Every year they send a threatening message to the capital, promising to make its streets run with blood, and to massacre the last inhabitant; and every year the people quake and turn pale..."11

Such fear, whether warranted or not, provided Díaz with enough reason

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9 Frederick Ober, Travels in Mexico (Boston: Estes and Laureat, 1885), p. 43.

10 Mexico, Ministerio de fomento, colonización e industria, Anales del Ministerio de fomento de la República Mexicana (Mexico: Imprenta de Francisco Díaz de León, 1881), V, 97.

11 Ober, Travels, p. 43.
to maintain federal troops in the Yucatán. By 1893, it was estimated that there were approximately 200,000 "barbáros" in the frontier zone between Campeche and Yucatán, who were inaccessible and could not be regarded as prospective henequen labor.\(^{12}\)

Because most of the Yucatán was devoted to henequen cultivation, other staple crops suffered as a result. Although sugar and beans were raised on lands where henequen did not thrive, it was not enough to meet the needs of the local population. The Mayas were also becoming a burden to feed since they were now spending most of their time cultivating henequen rather than their own small plots of land from which they raised enough food to sustain themselves. By the year 1881, it was evident that there was not enough labor to produce staple crops and the Yucatán was forced to import corn from other regions of Mexico.\(^{13}\)

Immigration was begun in the Yucatán to satisfy two basic requirements. The Yucatán needed settlers who would raise the necessary staple crops such as corn, sugar and beans, and for this reason, made an effort to recruit immigrants, preferably Europeans. Yucatecan hacendados also encouraged immigration for a second reason—as a source of labor for their plantations. Díaz fully supported the immigration movement, and as early as 1877, he informed the National Congress that immigration was imperative to the development of the nation.\(^{14}\) The Yucatecan government

\(^{12}\) González Navarro, Raza, p. 214.


\(^{14}\) Ibid.
favored immigration and in 1883, issued a decree which established a subsidy of ten pesos for each immigrant between the ages of 18 and 50.\textsuperscript{15}

The first sizable group of immigrants to arrive in the state were Spaniards from the Canary Islands. However, not all of them remained in the Yucatán and chose to return home. After the Spaniards, a small contingent of Jamaican immigrants arrived, but this was not enough.

The Campechán government followed the Yucatán's lead in offering prospective immigrants a subsidy. The Campechans stipulated that the immigrants agree to remain in the state for a minimum of two years to qualify for the weekly subsidy.\textsuperscript{16}

The Yucatán experienced greater success with its Cuban immigrants who settled in the state's southern area and began to cultivate sugar. By 1896 the Cubans colonized the towns of Vega de San José, Yalikín and Puerto Morelos.\textsuperscript{17} Besides growing sugar, the Cuban immigrants also produced wine, tobacco and cereals.

On the whole, the effort to attract Europeans to the Yucatán during the Porfiriato was a failure.\textsuperscript{18} The Hispanic peoples who arrived tended to produce the same crops in the Yucatán as they had cultivated in their own countries. They contributed to the production of consumer crops in a small way, but again it was not enough. Therefore, the effort

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 211. (\textit{Myuc}, 85, pp. xxxi-ii).
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., pp. 209 and 211.
to colonize the Yucatán with permanent settlers who would farm the land met with little success. 19

Yucatecan hacendados were more successful in recruiting a second type of desired immigrant, the laborer. Although the Oriental peoples filled the planters' labor requirements, the Yucatecans were highly prejudiced against them, particularly the Chinese, and spoke of them as "peligro amarillo," or yellow menace. 20 There were really no specific complaints against the Oriental as far as the quality of their labor was concerned. However, the Yucatecans regarded the Chinese, the Korean and the Japanese immigrants with suspicion because of the Asiatic heritage. One Yucatecan hacendado equated the Orientals with the Indians in Mexico as those who occupied the lowest position in society. 21 As it happened, the Orientals were disliked by the Indians as well, for many of the Chinese served as bullies and floggers on the henequen plantations. It was also reported that henequen hacendados who wished to appease their Chinese laborers to make certain they would remain on the estate, forced Maya women, some of whom were already married, into undesirable marriages with the Chinese. Women who dared to refuse the hacendado's wishes were beaten or starved until they submitted. 22 The unpopularity of such marriages was reflected in the census records

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 213.
21 Le Prince Roland Bonaparte, Le Mexique au début du XIX siècle (2vols. Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1904), I, 121. Bonaparte was personally acquainted with Díaz and his study of Mexico covers the Porfiriató.
22 John Kenneth Turner, Barbarous Mexico (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 49-51. Turner was out to expose Díaz as a journalist who spent many months in Mexico and Yucatán posing as a wealthy U.S. investor.
of the Díaz period in which only two children of Chinese-Maya heritage were officially recorded in Campeche, and none in the state of Yucatán.23

Rumors began to circulate about the Chinese just as they had about supposed Maya uprisings. One rumor which caused concern was that a naturalized Chinese-Mexican living in Mérida was planning to bring 200,000 more Chinese to the Yucatán.24 It was also reported that several henequen planters were considering a scheme to sponsor the emigration of 600 Chinese families who promised to work on their plantations.25 In the late 1880's, anti-Chinese feelings were apparent in all parts of Mexico and not only in the Yucatán. Attacks on Chinese immigrants were reported in Mazatlan, Sonora and Mexico City as well.26 By 1904, hatred was so strong that Díaz appointed a special commission to study the problems of Chinese immigration in Mexico.27 When the Díaz Government collapsed in 1911, Mexicans again manifested their distaste for the Oriental as evidenced by the massacre of Chinese living in the town of Torreon, a settlement located near the Texas border.28

Many Chinese laborers who had come to the Yucatán to work were

23González Navarro, Raza y Tierra, p. 213.
24 Ibid., p. 212.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 156.
dissatisfied with their choice. Some complained of cruel and unjust treatment on the henequen plantations and accused some planters of branding them with hot irons. Governor Molina quickly denied these accusations publicly. He also defended the henequen cultivators and stated that the Chinese were well-treated and well paid for their services. Chinese immigrants who were unhappy with their lives on the henequen plantations often left them to seek their fortunes in the cities where they would often establish themselves in business such as laundries or perhaps enter domestic service. The henequen planters could not prevent the Chinese from leaving the estate, for unlike the Mayas, the Chinese did not become part of the peonage system. They were not bound to the soil and were able to look for employment off the haciendas. Henequen cultivators did not wish to see their Chinese laborers leave, for they were excellent workers.

At the turn of the century, henequen hacendados encouraged other Oriental groups to emigrate to the Yucatán. Plans were made to transport 500-600 Japanese families to the state, but this failed to materialize for two reasons. First, the Japanese Government forbade its nationals to emigrate to Mexico, and secondly, the Japanese were having second thoughts about leaving their homeland when they read Turner's scathing account of Yucatecan plantation life in his work, Barbarous Mexico, a widely circulated series of articles in the last years of the Porfiriato. 29

29 González Navarro, Raza y Tierra, p. 207.
30 Ibid., p. 213.
Consequently, few Japanese took the risk of coming to the Yucatán. Although they did not come, 200 Koreans came to the state in the year 1905, who had committed themselves to a four-year stay by contract. They proved very satisfactory as henequen laborers and in 1906 Molina and the Yucatecan agricultural society proposed to increase the number of Oriental immigrants. Because of the unpopularity of the Orientals with the local population, this scheme had to be abandoned. The real reasons for the Yucatecans' hostile attitude towards the Oriental are not clearly defined. It is possible that dislike arose from the fact that the Oriental enjoyed an excellent reputation as a worker. He was highly efficient, worked many hours, and was willing to accept low wages in return. Also, it was thought that foreign labor might replace native labor if too many Orientals arrived in the Yucatán. Whatever the true reason, henequen cultivators had to remedy their labor shortage problems in some other manner.

The henequen planters did not have to wait long for an alternative solution, for President Díaz solved their problem for them. He gave the henequen hacendados Yaqui laborers who had been deported from their native Sonora to the Yucatán and the Valle Nacional. The struggle of the Yaqui against the Díaz regime was one of the most tragic episodes to occur in Porfirian Mexico. After a series of hard-fought wars lasting from 1886-90, at a cost of fifty-one million

31 Ibid., p. 214.
dollars to the Federal Government, the Yaqui were forced to surrender their freedom and their lands to the Diaz government. A great number of the Yaqui were captured and sent off to the Yucatán at the rate of 500 monthly. There they were sold to henequen hacendados for $65.00 by "slave" brokers at the docks. These men included federal soldiers, policemen and the rurales who helped transport the Indians from one state to another. All profited from the exile of these Indians whose journey from Sonora was difficult and uncomfortable. After departing Sonora, the Yaquis traveled to the port of Guaymas to San Blas, then overland to San Marcos onto the Mexican Central Railway and at last to the Yucatecan port of Progreso. Once the Indians arrived in the state, anxious planters would make their bids to obtain laborers. There was no attempt to carry on their business in secrecy as hacendados and authorities bargained over the sale of the Yaqui. One Porfirian General, Luis Torres of Sonora, became a millionaire by selling Yaquis who were dealt with as prisoners of war by the Diaz army.

Professor Frederick Starr, an ethnologist from the University of Chicago, met one of these slave contractors on the railway as 83 Yaqui were making their way towards Veracruz. Commenting on the distressing condition of the Indians, Starr observed: "...few realized the hardship

33 Reed, Caste War, p. 127.
34 Harnay, Diaz, p. 275.
and trials which lay before them. We were assured that more than half of them would die before the end of their first year in the Yucatán.  

The voyage generally lasted fifteen days, with ten to twenty per cent of the Indians perishing along the route. Families were separated and morale was very low among the exiled Yaquis; In February, 1908, it was reported that a shipload of Indians jumped to their deaths from the vessel that carried them to the Yucatán, for many decided that death was preferable to life on a henequén plantation.

In addition to the trials that the Yaqui endured on their journey, conditions did not improve once they arrived in the Yucatán. Most of the Indians could not tolerate the tropical climate and reportedly two-thirds of them died within their first year in the state. With the high death rate and the failure of the hacendados to attract sufficient labor to work the henequén fields, the burden of maintaining sisal production on the Yucatecan plantations rested upon the native Mayas.

A very bleak picture of life on the henequén hacienda was offered by journalist John Kenneth Turner in his *Barbarous Mexico* which severely criticized the Díaz administration for its treatment of the Mayas and Yaquis in the Yucatán. Accounts differ as to the degree of severity of life for the plantation Indians, but Turner and other observers

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38 Turner, *Barbarous Mexico*, p. 11.
of Porfirian Mexico agreed that life was difficult for indebted servant. The conditions under which the peons lived directly reflected the commonly held attitude of the hacendados towards the Mayas and Yaquis and indirectly of the Diaz regime. The henequen elite's view of their native labor force becomes apparent in the view of the descriptions of various journalists and observers. The over-all attitude of the planter toward the Indians can be determined by analyzing the motives of the planter class. Did the henequen hacendados exploit the Mayas for purely economic reasons, or were there attempts on the part of the planter to treat the Indians humanely and provide for their well-being? Did the hacendado feel any responsibility to provide education for the Indians? Was it the Indians' nature not to work and become a useful member of society? Also, did the hacendados themselves make any attempts to bring the Mayas into the mainstream of Mexican society during the Diaz period, or was there a deliberate attempt to force the Indians to remain in ignorance of the world outside the hacienda? These are several questions to consider in determining the true condition of the Maya in Porfirian Yucatán and the attitude of the men who shaped their lives.

One of the largest henequen plantations in the Yucatán was visited by an American traveler, explorer and observer, Frederick Ober, who spent two years traveling throughout Mexico. During his journey the author traveled over 10,000 miles and saw remote regions of the country. While in the Yucatán, Ober stated that he was more interested in the natural surroundings of the area and areas of historical importance rather
the "material wealth of the country." Before writing his book, the
author made a second trip to Mexico. Some of his observations concerning
the behavior of the Mayas he encountered are noteworthy. Ober visited
the plantation of Don Alvarado Peon, the owner of San Antonio. This
estate spanned over 1200 acres and was devoted entirely to the cultivation
of henequen. Peon gave his guest a tour of his estate. Ober's strongest
impression of the Mayas was their quiet manner and almost complete
lack of interest outside their immediate tasks. Upon meeting several
Maya women braiding hemp he observed that "They were not a whit curious...
but took our advent without a laugh or questioning glance."41

Another characteristic of the Mayas which impressed Ober was the
apparent superstitious attitude of the Indians. While hunting one after-
noon, a Maya approached Ober to warn him about a dangerous variety of
lizard found on the estate, one that was known to bite men's shadows
as one crossed its path and which also was capable of causing terrible
head pains for its victims.42 The Mayas were believers in witchcraft,
"endowing every kind of creeping thing with some supernatural attribute."43

According to Ober's account of Porfirian Yucatán, there was no
evidence of hardship in regard to the Mayas employed on the henequen estates
he had seen. He noted that the Indians appeared comfortably clothed and
wore sandals to protect their feet. During the hot summer season the

39 Frederick Ober, Travels in Mexico (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1885), p. viii.
40 Ibid., p. 88.
41 Ibid., p. 92.
42 Ibid., p. 33.
43 Ibid.
hacienda allowed the Mayas to build arbors in order to shade their living quarters. The personal cleanliness of the Maya was another characteristic which impressed Ober who stated that "to find a dirty one is indeed a phenomenon." Although there was no mention of oppressive working conditions on the estate, the traveler observed that because of their debts, the Mayas were bound to the hacienda "in a state of peonage which is a mild sort of slavery."

It can be stated that some henequen planters were more inclined to act kindly towards the Maya because of the labor problems they faced and also because of the few immigrants who arrived to ease the labor shortage. Settlers and potential laborers were simply not attracted in great numbers to the Yucatán because of its inaccessibility and its climate. Therefore, the native Indians were of primary importance to the henequen hacendados.

Those who labored on the sisal plantations were sometimes promised free medical assistance. Housing was also provided for the Mayas which was said to have been more livable than in other areas of Mexico. The Mayas were allotted small plots of land to raise fruits and vegetables, and in some instances, the hacendados gave the Indians a small corral to raise domestic animals. Some henequen planters established schools on their estates so that the Indians could receive

44 Ibid., p. 43.
a basic education, though this was not common practice. One wealthy hacendado, Don Ignacio Peon, stated that the Indian had the right to express any grievances he had in the local courts. Their cases were usually withdrawn, however, when the hacendado promised to treat his employees better and the case was then dismissed. Actually, although the justices may have been willing to listen to the Maya's problem, his "excessive conscientiousness has been frowned upon by their superiors." Although some Mayas lived under better conditions than others, there was still the fact that most of them were bound to the henequen plantations as debt servitors. That such an outmoded system was allowed to continue by a government that prided itself on modernization and a sound international reputation seemed inconceivable, and explains why some Porfirian observers compared the condition of the Maya to the serfs of medieval Europe.

The arrangement which existed between hacendados and laborers was based upon the exchange of the Indians' service on the henequen estate in return for the use of a small piece of land on the planter's property. Henequen hacendados sometimes added to the diet of the Indian by giving him coffee for his morning and midday meal if there was one. The land which the Indian received was often the worst land on the estate and therefore the hacendado was not causing himself any serious

47 Ibid., p. 140.

48 Ibid.

49 Gustavo Molina Font, La tragedia de Yucatán (Mexico: Revista de derecho y ciencias sociales, 1941), pp. 73-5.
hardship in parceling out these small sections of land to the peons. The Mayas built little huts for their families from materials found on the plantation. This was the extent of the physical assistance provided by the planter to his laborers.

In contrast to the indebted servants, there were also laborers who were hired on a seasonal basis by the henequen planters. These free laborers earned higher wages than the peons who lived on the estates the year round. Indebted laborers who were able to cut 2,000 henequen leaves daily earned 0.37 to 0.62 pesos for their efforts, while free laborers received 0.75 to 1.18 pesos for the same amount of work. Daily workers did not really enjoy any major advantages over the indebted workers even though their wages were slightly higher. In the long run it was the free laborer who was gradually edged out in the Yucatán. As land seizures became more frequent many of the free agricultural laborers were faced with peonage themselves. For those who refused to adhere to the system, there were few alternatives. Some, however, managed to emigrate to the United States.

One of the qualities of the Maya which partially explained his ability to endure hardship was his strong sense of honesty. As one sisal planter observed, the Maya would rarely deny his debt. Because

50 González Navarro, Raza y Tierra, p. 230.
51 Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage, p. 137.
of his trusting nature the Indian allowed himself to be cast into the unfortunate state of peonage. According to Ignacio Peón, the Indian was aware that by law he could deny his debt, but in his own mind, he was convinced that he would be stealing. In this hacendado's opinion, the status of the Maya in Porfirián Mexico was no higher than that of cattle. The planter was certain that most of the Mayas were mistreated by their employers, as well.

During the Porfiriato, the greatest crime against the Maya was depriving him of his liberty. The Maya actually had no choice in deciding whether or not he wished to remain on the henequén plantation, for there were men who made it their business to track down Indians who fled the estates. A minor government official called Benigno Palma Moreno, who worked in the city of Mérida, had a second occupation as a cochechador. In this capacity Moreno could enter any home he chose without a written order from the magistrate. Although his actions were illegal, there was no record of anyone who challenged the Indian hunter. Fugitives who successfully eluded the cochechadores experienced great difficulty once they left the hacienda. The semi-arid terrain of the Yucatán was not conducive to a runaway, for much of the land lacked fresh water springs and edible vegetation was sparse. The fugitive was usually forced to make his own way once he left the estate and he could not risk being seen on another plantation or in a city.

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., p. 149.
where he might be requested to produce his identification papers for inspection. If the runaway laborer was apprehended, he was immediately returned to the hacienda where he could expect a fine, a flogging, or perhaps death.

Plantation Indians were also subjected to severe treatment such as whipping and branding if they failed to show deference to the hacendado by kissing his hand or failed to meet his quota of leave-cutting for the day. The same held true of the laborers who were bold enough to question the planter or the mayordomo about the amount of his debt or his salary.

Daily life on the plantation followed a strict routine. The laborers were usually required to rise at 3:45 a.m. to begin their day in the henequen fields. Unmarried women spent the day cleaning or cutting the leaves, while married women were only required to spend half their day working in the fields. Sunday, which was the only free day for the labor force, was generally reserved for visiting, courtship and marriages. Indebted peons were not permitted to marry off the plantation, and it was often the hacendado who chose the peon's spouse. Denying the Indian his personal liberty was reflected in many ways during the Porfiriato. Even their free days were controlled by the hacendado. To some contemporary writers, this type of control constituted slavery.


57 Turner, Barbarous Mexico, p. 15.
and the critical publications which appeared in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, particularly Turner's, contributed to the downfall of Porfirio Díaz.

Pretending to be a potential henequen investor, Turner gained access to several sisal plantations and observed first-hand the prevailing conditions on the haciendas of Yucatán. His visit to the large estate of San Antonio Yaxché for a period of two days caused a great stir in Mexico and abroad, for Turner's graphic account of the daily life of the Mayas on this particular hacienda drew attention to the realities of life in the Yucatán under Díaz rule. According to Turner, the Indians were literally slaves on the henequen plantations and conditions at San Antonio Yaxché testified to this fact. The plantation was located fifteen miles west of Mérida, and its owner, who spent most of his time in the capital, visited his estate two to six times each month. 58

This meant the mayordomo primero oversaw most of the operations on the plantation in the absence of the proprietor. The Indians whose lives the agent supervised were out in the henequen fields performing their assigned tasks with the same speed as the temporary laborer. On this particular plantation, men, women and children were required to process 2,000 leaves daily, and if they fell short of their quota, they were whipped.

Medical assistance on this hacienda was very poor. Turner ob-

58Ibid., p. 19.
served several feverish looking young men performing jobs which involved separating the henequen fibers by machine. This was considered to be an easy task compared to working in the fields and was especially reserved for men and boys who were too ill to withstand the rigors of a field job. For at San Antonio Yaxché there was no physician or hospital available to treat the laborers' illnesses. The women were slightly more fortunate than the men, however, for they had a basement hospital in one of the buildings on the estate. The "hospital" Turner described had no windows, an earthen floor, and no beds or blankets. Sick women were given a bare board on which to lie down and nothing more was done to ease their discomfort. 59

Housing for the Indians was nearly as primitive as the medical facilities. Unmarried men lived together in crowded conditions in a structure of stone and mortar which was surrounded by a wall that was twelve feet high. On the top of this wall were bits of fragmented glass to deter any would-be fugitives. Inside the dormitory, conditions were so crowded that one man's hammock touched the fellow next to him. For men who had families, there were tiny huts that served as homes.

Although food was provided by the hacendado, it was barely edible according to Turner, who dined with the laborers his first evening on the estate. He recorded his impressions of a most memorable meal. He watched as workers filed in from the fields and lined up for their dinner. There were no tables and chairs so that the laborers were forced to stand while they ate their meal of beans, tortillas, and fish that was

59 Ibid., p. 21.
so outrid it made Turner sick. 60 This was the only full meal of the day. In the morning the laborer would go off to the fields with a lump of sour dough to serve as his breakfast. This lasted him all day, for generally there was no formal lunch period for the labor force. The workers were too busy trying to meet their quotas and had no time to stop working for any reason. Penetruan leaves could not be cut in a ragged fashion or else whippings would follow. The same held true if the Indian was late for roll call by the campatraz or foreman, who would beat them if the peons were late. This was typical of the dreary life of the Indian laborers at San Antonio Yaxché.

In Turner's opinion, the conditions he personally witnessed constituted slavery, and to further substantiate his claim, he saw evidence of Indians being bought and sold by brokers who catered to hacendados who sought not only field labor but also domestic servants. Turner charged that the Mayas sold for $400.00 spiece. 61 Porfirian police, acting in the interests of the hacendado, either took part in this illegal traffic or averted their gaze while it was conducted. No steps were taken to insure the rights of the Indians. When Turner questioned Don Enrique Zavala, President of the Cámara Agrícola de Yucatán, about the slave status of the Indian, he replied:

We do not consider that we own our laborers; we consider that they are in debt to us. And we do not consider that we buy and sell them; we consider that we transfer the debt, and the man goes with the debt. 62

60 Ibid., p. 23.
61 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
62 Ibid., p. 9.
Turner, of course, refused to accept the explanation Zavala offered, and continued to accuse henequen planters of practicing slavery, which, to his mind, was an extreme form of debt servitude. Turner was well aware that debt peonage existed throughout Mexico not only in the Yucatán, but in milder form. He also realized that everywhere in Mexico authorities recognized the right of the employer "to take the body of a laborer who is in debt to him." 63 The obligation of thepeon to the hacendado must be fulfilled. The fact-finding mission of Turner in the closing years of the Porfiriató epitomized all the faults of the peonage system in the Yucatán.

Turner's position that slavery existed in the state was upheld by some and challenged by others. His published account of his experience in the Yucatán, Barbarous Mexico, caused a great stir in Porfirian Mexico and the government prohibited its circulation as "escritos calumniosas." 64 The greatest critics of the Turner account were the Yucatecan planters themselves, who rejected the journalist's accusations in Mexican newspapers. One hacendado wrote to El Imparcial and informed Turner that he need not have left the United States to discover slavery, and referred him to the lovely status of blacks in his own country. 65 Another Mexican publication, El Universal, also defended the henequen elite, stating that what Turner viewed as a form of slavery, the hacendados regarded as economic progress. Without the labor of the Mayas and other peons there would be no henequen industry in the Yucatán. 66 The Catholic daily,

63 Ibid., p. 13.
64 Ibid., p. 9.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., p. 205.
El País, was invited to send a representative to one of Governor Molina's plantations in order to disprove Turner's charges. Again Molina took it upon himself to act in the interest of his fellow hacendados by acting as their spokesman. Molina impressed the agent sent by the newspaper, and after completing a tour of one of Molina's properties, noted that the Indians were treated very well, that they were all cleanly dressed, were paid on a regular schedule, and received medical care at Molina's expense. All of the investigator's findings were presented in El País. It was noteworthy that Molina was the hacendado who extended the invitation to visit his own estates, for his family was probably the most highly criticized in the state as far as abuses were concerned. Molina himself was often the target of revolutionary pamphleteers for condoning the planters' efforts to suppress the Indians in the Yucatán and was thus entitled to the label of "slaver" in his own right.

Other Mexican journals discussed the issue of hacienda conditions as they affected the Indians in terms of economic need or the inability of the Federal Government to deal with the problem. El Siglo XIX, for example, recognized the fact that slavery existed in the Yucatán, but also felt that the government was powerless to avoid it. Again El Universal took up the debate and stated that slavery existed because the Constitution was not protecting citizens who were born free.

67 González Navarro, "Propiedad y trabajo," Historia Moderna de México IV, 226.
69 Colección Porfirio Díaz, 002756, March 11, 1906, (reprint Regeneración, a revolutionary newspaper.
70 González Navarro, Raza y Tierra, p. 205.
hand, denied the statement made in El Universal, and argued that both
the Reforma and the Constitution protected the laborers.\(^{72}\) La Revista de Mérida strongly criticized abusive hacendados and referred to Molina's greed
in seizing lands that rightfully belonged to the Mayas.\(^{73}\) This arg-
ument touched off still another controversy over Molina's interest in
Indian lands and the charges made by the Chinese laborers that the Governor
had mistreated them.

Journalistic comment on the condition of the Indians of Yucatán
began long before Turner's publication, but this account served to
intensify the controversy and caused other journals, especially La Revista
de Mérida, which carried stories about the tragic life of the Maya,
including their low wages, corporal punishments they received and other
indignities they endured at the hands of the henequen hacendados and
their agents on the estates, to comment upon the situation.

The foreign press also took an interest in the Indian problem
in the Yucatán. On November 18, 1891, Il Secolo of Milan printed a
story of an Indian laborer known as Feliciano Ruizab, who worked on a
Yucatecan plantation. For missing a single day's work, the peon was
whipped by the administrator Soberanis and then by his jailor Marcelino
May. The flogging was so severe that it caused the laborer's death.\(^{74}\)
A follow-up story was carried in a Belgian newspaper, L'indép-

\(^{72}\)González Navarro, Raza y Tierra, p. 205.


\(^{74}\)González Navarro, Raza y Tierra, p. 222.
on November 27, 1891, in which it was stated that the Indians were so accustomed to punishment that Huiab actually presented himself to Soberanis without having to be tracked down by the hacendado's agent. 75 So much attention was given to the Huiab affair that Soberanis was arrested and sentenced to fourteen years in prison for causing the Indian's death. 76 This was the reaction of the Díaz Government to the bad press it was receiving abroad, something that Mexico could not afford. The Mexican Consul in Italy, J. B. Hijar y Haro, publicly denounced the European press for calling attention to supposed atrocities in Mexico, for similar things, if not worse, occurred in Europe as well. 77

As criticisms of the planter class became more and more frequent, the hacendados found it necessary to defend their positions through journalists and authors who would express their thoughts regarding conditions on the henequén plantations. The majority of Yucatecan hacendados believed that the Indians were indolent and unproductive when left to themselves, so the best way to deal with them was to take charge of their welfare by acting as their patrons. Under thepeonage system, the Indians would benefit by receiving a salary and a house and still be able to contribute to the economy of the state. Hacendados dismissed what they termed the "exageraciones de los utopistas," or those who believed that the Indians were a wronged people who deserved better in life. 78 The henequén

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., p. 291.
hacendados believed in the superiority of the capitalist system and that by instructing the Indians in the values of hard work and productivity, they would become useful citizens. This was the same line of reasoning employed by the Díaz administration in exiling the Yaqui to the Yucatán. As "stubborn enemy prisoners of civilization," the Yaquis deserved death, but the benevolent authorities decided that deportation to a distant location where no trouble was likely to occur, was just the right place for the Indians to serve the state.79

As for the henequen planters, they did not think that slavery truly existed on their plantations. In their minds the Indian had voluntarily committed himself to the life of peonage and as such was obliged to honor his debts. During his stay on the hacienda, the laborer's debts increased, because of births, marriages, etc., and he was usually forced to borrow additional sums of money from the planter which caused the Indian to become permanently entangled in the peonage system. In effect, the henequen hacendados were abusing the Constitution, for Article V, Section I stated:

No one shall be compelled to do personal work without just compensation and without his full consent. The state shall not permit any contract, covenant or agreement to be carried out having for its object the abridgement, loss or irrevocable sacrifice of the liberty of a man, whether by reason of labor, education or religious vows.80

79 Ibid., p. 206.
It was the abuse of this law by which debtors became hopelessly entrenched by their financial obligation. There was no way for the peon to pay off his debt in a fair manner to free himself from the hacendado's hold. For the Indians of Yucatán there was no escape.

Another hacendado who took issue with Turner's conclusions was don Joaquín Peón, who challenged the Turner account of Yucatecan life in a letter to the *New York Times*. In his letter, the planter stated that if the henequen business was so tremendously profitable why list fifty henequen kings—why not five hundred or five thousand? He also felt that since Turner spent only a few days on the plantations of Yucatán his experience was limited. If he had visited other plantations, Turner would have seen that the Indians were well provided for, living in nice homes, sowing arable land, raising domestic animals, and were indeed cared for by the planters.81 Such was the idyllic picture of the Mayas described by the planter Peón, the same hacendado who ironically confided to Turner that "the Maya slaves die more rapidly than they are born."82

In addition to the information of Peón, more light was shed on the Indian condition in the Yucatán by Don Felipe G. Cantón, Secretary of the Cámara and a henequen cultivator himself. Cantón also spoke in defense of the hacendados regarding the use of corporal punishment to discipline the peons. He believed that punishment of this nature was necessary if one expected obedience from the Indians. How else could the planter enforce discipline on the plantation? If the laborers were not beaten, he argued,

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81 Gonzáles Navarro, *Raza y Tierra*, p. 296. (The complete text of this letter can be found in Baerlein, *Mexico, Land of Unrest*, pp.11-12).
82 Turner, *Barbarous Mexico*, p. 11.
they would not work. Cantón noted that whipping the Indian was a
customary punishment on the plantations and was certainly no innovation
during the Díaz government. Both young and old were liable to this type
of punishment. Women were obliged to kneel as their foreman lashed them
with a heavy stick or a baton. The hacendado further stated that he never
visited a single henequen estate where flogging disobedient workers was
not common practice. Unfortunately, this appeared to be a shared
attitude among members of the planter class. Their reasoning was that if
everyone did it, it must be alright.

Further information regarding the planter's view of the Indians
comes once again from hacendado Ignacio Peón, whose interview with Special
Correspondent Henry Baerlein of The Times in Mexico supplied substantial
material on conditions in Porfirian Yucatán. According to Baerlein,
Peón was regarded as an able hacendado who was respected by his colleagues.
He discussed the relationship between the hacendados and the Indians and
noted that Mexican laws regarding the rights of citizens were not always
followed in the Yucatán. Although the 1857 Constitution listed the rights
of man in the first twenty-nine articles of the document, these laws were
more of a theoretical statement of rights and liberties rather than an
enforced fact. The laws which supposedly guaranteed all citizens rights
did not always work in the interests of the Indians. According to hacendado
Peón, the law was "far too excellent... for daily use." What he meant was
that the intention of the law was understood but it did not meet the practical

83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Baerlein, Land of Unrest, p. 147.
86 Ibid., p. 140.
needs of daily life on the henequen plantations of Yucatán. Thus, while
the intent of the law was well taken and justly stated in printed form,
it was continually abused by the hacendados whose economic interests were
not served by practical application of Constitutional laws regarding the
rights of citizens. Legislation was slanted to accommodate the economic
requirements on the sisal producers and resulted in the inequality and
unjust treatment of the Indians in the final analysis. It seems, then,
that while the Mayas had laws on their side in theory, there was no one
in the state to enforce them on their behalf. This effort to circumvent
the law meant that the henequen planters were allowed to exploit and brutalize
the Mayas without interference.

While henequen hacendados may have treated their Indian laborers
with greater cruelty than their counterparts in other states of Mexico,
they felt that their actions were justified because it guaranteed the
efficient operation of the estate and a certain profit. Any variations
in the laborer's life such as marriage, births, deaths, illness, etc., could
upset the labor situation on the haciendas. Therefore, every aspect of
the Indians' existence which could affect plantation production was of great
concern to the planter and his agents. The supposed indolence of the Mayas
was merely an excuse to force them into debt service and make them contribute
to the profits of the planter class through their hard labor. At the same
time, whether consciously or not, the hacendados were also forcing the Mayas
to make a contribution to the economy of the state by drawing them into the
capitalistic system to which the planters belonged. An Indian whose only
interests in life were his family and plot of land was of no practical use to
anyone. He was an unproductive citizen who made no vital contribution to the
state or his country. In this way the hacendados assisted the Federal Gov-
eminent in its drive for modernization. The planter acted as an agent in this sense, for the national government, and directly caused the Indian to abandon his old ways and traditions to become a member of capitalist-oriented Mexico.

The planters also aided the government by providing the Indians with useful occupations which solved the problem of how to deal with those who were labeled prisoners of war. No longer would the Yaquis cause problems for Díaz in Sonora, and no longer would the rebel Mayas upset the economy of the Yucatán with their planned attacks and surprise raids. Instead, both groups of Indians had been absorbed into the hacienda system for a lifetime. The Mayas whom Porfirián authorities could not easily subdue continued to raid various areas throughout the years of Díaz rule and were a serious menace to the economic welfare of the Yucatán. Thus the henequen planters were more than willing to be of service by providing the administration with a solution to the Indian threat. There was always room for them on the sisal plantations of the Yucatán.

The religious needs of the Indian laborers were provided for by the hacendados, but oftentimes the priests acted as agents of the planters. Priests assisted the hacendado by preaching sermons concerning the subjects of obedience and discipline. If no priest actually lived on the henequen estate, one could usually be found in a nearby town who would minister to the needs of several haciendas in a district. The hacendado normally made it a point to kneel with his laborers at the sound of the Angelus bell when the day in the field had come to an end. After the prayer, the Indians wished their patron a good evening and the hacendados would respond likewise.  

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[^57]: Ibid., p. 57.
Scenes of this sort provide a great contrast to the experience of Turner, who observed that after kissing the master's hand, the laborer went off to his dinner of beans and spoiled fish.\(^88\)

Only in the cities and towns where social contacts were freer and the social control which hacendados were able to impose was not found, did a more relaxed atmosphere exist which somewhat eased the tension between the white race and the Indian.\(^89\) However, even the Maya who lived with greater liberty in the town or the city were not completely free. They were no more equal to the white men here than the Mayas on the estates, and they were often humiliated by being forbidden to wear their native garb in public or from walking along certain streets or town squares.\(^90\)

Also, the Maya who lived in the town could be drafted into public service and forced to work on projects such as building construction or road work. Local police might also arrest the Indian on vague charges when additional labor was required for one of these public works projects. They might also find themselves working as prison labor if arrested.\(^91\)

So while the Mayas may not have lived the life ordered for him by the henequen planter, he still occupied the lowest rung on the social ladder no matter where he lived in the Yucatán.

Free Mayas who lived in villages or towns that were pueblos, communities where land was held in common, also experienced difficulty

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\(^{88}\) Turner, *Barbarous Mexico*, p. 23.


\(^{90}\) Atkin, *Revolution!*, p. 31.

\(^{91}\) Ibid.
guarding their freedom which could be taken from them so easily. One example of a pueblo town in the Yucatán during the Porfiriato was Piste, where twenty Maya families engaged in agriculture, but were so poor they owned no cattle. Because of frequent raids by rebel forces, the inhabitants of Piste were often forced to abandon their holdings and seek protection in other communities for a temporary period. In the year 1891 Piste was visited by archeologist Teobert Maler, who made a study of Indian life in this small town. He noted that the Mayas in this community operated small maize farms and had no particular interest in making money, except to see to their practical needs. With the little money they acquired, the Maya would often buy liquor or use it as payment to escape guard service. When greater amounts were necessary to finance a wedding, for example, the Indians would sell their lands cheaply or borrow the money from a neighboring hacienda, thus joining the ranks of the debt servitors. Because of the frequent raids on their lands and lack of interest in earning money, the Indians found themselves losing their only valuable asset which they relinquished through their dealings with the landholders. As a result the town of Piste did not advance in any way during the Porfiriato, economically, politically or socially, although the town continued to be classified a pueblo after 1900. Piste demonstrated the inability of the Mayas to cope with the modern world because they refused to accept the white man's values to survive. The natives of Piste tried to keep to themselves, and in doing so, lived in great poverty. When they were attacked,

92 Steggerda, Maya Indians, p. 8.
they had to flee to other communities because they were unable to defend
themselves on their own. The Mayas were vulnerable not only to the rebels
but to neighboring hacendados as well, for the planters would gladly
purchase Maya land for a low sum or lend the Indians money since it would
be to their advantage in the long run. Either the Indians did not understand
what they were letting themselves in for, or otherwise they refused to
accept a way of life that they felt was alien to their own culture.

Piste provided an example that could be used by government authorities
to substantiate their argument concerning the Indian's inferiority. When
he had money he bought liquor, he had no conception of the value of money,
and he did not contribute to society. Piste was not just an example of
an Indian town that one could point to as progressive according to Por-
firian standards. Rather, Piste served as an example of the Maya world
view, struggling to continue its isolated existence in modern Mexico.

Few accounts of Porfirian Mexico discuss the feelings of the
Indian about his position in society or the hardships he experienced on
the sisal plantation. Turner interviewed several Mayas on his trip to the
Yucatán and to the Valle Nacional, (this area was tobacco country), and
provided some insight as to how the Indian regarded his own situation.

Turner asked one young worker if he thought that being a half-timer,
(temporary worker), was better than working full-time on the estate.

The Indian thought not, for the full-time laborer had a place to live
throughout the year and also because the temporary workers were forced to

93 Ibid.
work much harder in his opinion. Then, lowering his voice, the Indian
confided to Turner: "If they worked the full-timers like they work us
they would die." Another Indian laborer told Turner that he worked on
the henequen plantation to avoid starvation off the hacienda. The journalist
then asked both men about running away when conditions became intolerable
and was told that it was no use to attempt it because fugitives were always
cought. According to the Maya laborers, everyone was against them and
there was no place for them to hide. The Indians whom Turner interviewed
appeared to be helpless and resigned to an unpleasant experience from which
they saw no chance of escape. Life off the plantation was in some ways
worse for the Maya, for he was then forced to hire himself out as temporary
labor and as such could not expect the security of a home and a regular
meal that the full-timer had.

Despite the attitude of resignation held by many plantation Mayas,
there were some attempts to strike back at their oppressors. In 1889, for
example, a brief strike occurred in which henequen workers abandoned their
jobs hoping for higher wages. Several years later, another incident which
was much more serious caused the President concern. In November, 1905,
Governor Molina informed Díaz that Pedro Pablo Herrera, who came from the
Indian district of Kanasin near Mérida, led an armed band of Mayas against

94Turner, Barbarous Mexico, p. 23.
95Ibid., p. 24.
the local police which was headed by Porfirio Solis. Molina was disturbed by this incident because he was informed that Herrera was known to have great influence over the Indians in his district. The Governor wanted the names of all Herrera's followers and further information regarding the attack. By December, Molina informed Díaz that Herrera had armed forty to fifty Indians with shotguns and organized his followers into groups of ten. Local authorities killed two of the raiders, imprisoned eight others, and seized eleven of the weapons. The following day the Governor reported to the President once again, stating that the remainder of Herrera's force had been dispersed and that persecution of the leader would continue until all of his comrades were apprehended. Neither Molina nor Díaz would tolerate any insubordination from the Indians and were anxious to prevent any further attempts to organize armed bands of raiders such as Herrera had succeeded in doing. Any armed resistance on the part of the Indians was dealt with quickly and brutally to maintain the peace.

Another serious incident which warranted attention from Díaz was the attack of 5,000 Mayas on the town of Valladolid. Two reasons were given for the brutal attack: one, the Indians wanted the return of their lands, for they had been the "victims of oppression." A second reason was that the white men incited the Indians to rebel because of their own dislike of the Díaz Government.

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97 Colección Porfirio Díaz, 002549, Molina to Díaz, November 29, 1905.
98 Ibid., 002562, Molina to Díaz, December 1, 1905.
99 Ibid., 002614, Molina to Díaz, December 6, 1905.
100 New York Times, 8 June 1910, p. 2.
During the course of this attack all government employees and their families were brutally murdered. Only the mayor escaped dressed as a woman. The rebels seized rifles and pistols, destroyed 22 miles of railroad, and instituted a reign of terror. Díaz called upon General Ignacio Bravo to lead a force of 2,000 men including federal and state soldiers as well as volunteers. On June 9, Bravo reached the settlement of Dzitlas where he launched an attack and reclaimed Valladolid. The rebels who were caught were severely punished and some were executed for their attempt at revolt.

The most significant Indian-directed affair to occur in the Yucatán during the Díaz administration was the Maya War. Essentially, the Maya War was a continuation of the earlier Caste War. The Mayas felt that they had much at stake and struck back at the Porfirián Government whenever they could. Most of all, the Indians wanted a return of their communal lands and their villages. Rebel Indians were aware of the situation of their kinmen on the henequen plantations which also added to their grievances. The free Indians established their own capital at Chan Santa Cruz where they planned their strategy for persistent sustained attack of their oppressors. Until the year 1900, the Mayas conducted surprise attacks on an irregular basis, but in this particular year the depredations of the

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., 7 June 1910, p. 1.
Maya from Yucatán and San Antonio Mayil in the surrounding region forced Governor Francisco Cantón to summon the National Guard. Cantón decided to end these disastrous raids once and for all, and he petitioned Díaz to send in the federal soldiers. 106 Ending the Maya War was no simple task, for the Mayas destroyed roads of communication and ambushed soldiers whenever the opportunity arose. The rebel forces also set poisoned traps along the jungle paths for unsuspecting soldiers. 107 Díaz sent Cantón the assistance he requested, for he also wished to end this on-and-off war. The President, though, had still another motive in mind, for he was interested in the lands occupied by the rebel forces, especially after he read reports of the area's potential wealth. One of General Bravo's officers wrote of the fertile soil where anything would be grown successfully. He also mentioned the abundant forests with its precious woods, the presence of game, and the availability of water. 108 Fighting on both sides was hard, and despite their smaller numbers, the Mayas struggled admirably against the better equipped Federal army. It took Bravo three long years of difficult fighting before he was able to push his way toward the Maya capital and then surrounded the town to force its surrender. The struggle of the Maya ceased for the remainder of the Díaz regime, but it represented an outstanding effort on the part of the Mayas to maintain the simple life of their ancestors on lands they had held for centuries.

106 Lina Brito, Reestructuración histórica, II, 173.
108 Mexican Herald, 19 February 1900, p. 8.
Rebel Indians who inhabited the jungle regions of the Yucatán managed to carry on the struggle that their tribesmen could not. They also kept federal and local forces engaged for many years by conducting their frequent surprise attacks. Maintaining the army cost the Yucatecans a great deal of money. The Mayas were relentless towards the white population they believed exploited and robbed them. Hacienda Indians may have been unhappy with their situations on the henequen estates but continued to work in spite of their difficult circumstances.

For those Mayas who could not bear the burdens of plantation life, alcohol provided some relief. Alcoholism became a serious problem among the Maya during the Porfiriato, especially among the Indians who understood only the Maya language. Another alternative which also developed into an urgent problem during this period of Mexican history was suicide among the Indians.

In conclusion, we have seen the various methods employed by the planter class to obtain labor. Some workers entered the peonage system voluntarily while other Indians were introduced to the plantation system as prisoners of war. Hacendados in the Yucatán tried and failed as far as attracting sizable numbers of immigrants to settle in their state or to work their properties. For each of these efforts there was cooperation between planters and Porfirián authorities on both state and federal levels, including top ranking generals, regular soldiers and local police, who stood

109 González Navarro, Raza y Tierra, p. 236.
to gain from their association directly or indirectly, with the henequen hacendados of the Yucatán.

Also to be considered was the manner in which local interests served the Díaz regime as well, for recruiting labor was not only a lucrative affair, but also served to aid the government by keeping troublesome elements of the population busily occupied in the henequen fields of the Yucatán or the tobacco plantations of the Valle Nacional. Neither Díaz nor local authorities did anything to curb abuses against the Indians by the planter class. The President was motivated by economic and political considerations and therefore was willing to tolerate the dubious methods by which hacendados acquired laborers for their estates.

Conditions on the henequen plantations of the Yucatán varied throughout the state and treatment of the Indian labor force varied as well from inhumane to fairly comfortable. Regardless of conditions on the estates, however, the Indians of the Yucatán were not free. The sole concern of most Yucatecan hacendados was profit, not social reform. Therefore, it was basically economic considerations which determined the thinking of the planter class, not humanitarianism, which meant that whatever direction he turned, the Maya of Yucatán saw a difficult and hard life ahead of him.
CHAPTER IV

ACCULTURATION OR GENOCIDE? THE CASE OF THE YUCATAN

During the presidency of Porfirio Díaz, vast economic, social and cultural differences divided the Indians from the white ruling class in the Yucatán. Wherever the Indian worked, in the cities or in the rural areas of the country, his wages were so low that he and his family were forced to live in poverty.1 For the Maya of Yucatán and for the Indians of Mexico as a whole, the Porfiriato was a difficult period for them economically. Economic hardship became more evident as the yearly production of maize, the chief staple crop of the Indian, dropped from two and one-half million tons at the beginning of the period to two million at its end. Beans, which was the second most important crop, as well as a major source of nourishment for the Indians, also fell in production by 25% throughout the Porfiriato.2 Poor harvests and unfavorable weather conditions contributed to the decline in crop production and had taken their toll over the years, leaving the Indians in a very desperate situation. While food prices continued to climb, the wages of the Indian population did not rise, and so the Indians found it increasingly difficult to pay for the food items they were unable to raise on the milpas.


Another factor which contributed to the lowly status of the Indians during the Porfiriato was cultural differences which existed between the Indian population and the non-Indian. Mexico of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not modeled after the Indian's heritage but the European. Many Mexicans, including President Díaz, believed that the nation's salvation depended upon transforming Mexico into a white man's land guided by European values. Some of the country's most prominent citizens, including intellectuals Antonio García Cubas, Adolfo Duclós Salinas and Francisco Bulnes, did not think that the Indians were even capable of assimilating themselves with the white population. To try to integrate these natives was a fruitless effort as far as they were concerned. Científicos, who believed that the Indians were biologically inferior to the white race, argued their case from the tenets of Social Darwinism. This doctrine of white supremacy was popular in Porfirian Mexico and had for its main spokesman the Minister of Finance, José Yves Limantour. According to the Mexican Positivists, the Indian could not be intellectually cultivated and was incapable of making any positive contribution to the nation.

The Indians, however, were not totally without defense, for there were also a number of prominent men who believed in the Indian. These included Governor Enrique Creel of Chihuahua, Matías Romero, Justo Sierra

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4 Ibid.
and Andrés Molina Fernández. To these observers of Porfirian society, the Indians were a vital part of the nation and integration of the Indian was necessary for the successful development of the country.

The Indian Question, that is, whether or not the Indian should be integrated within the framework of Mexican society, was a problem which was often discussed among high ranking sectors of the population. It was a topic that was argued about by intellectuals, politicians, the President, and even the Mexican Catholic Church. Each had an opinion regarding the usefulness or non-usefulness of the Indian population, and made their opinions known through their debates, their writings, and in their actions.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine some of the prevailing opinions and attitudes towards the Indian, particularly in the state of Yucatán. Most important was the attitude of Porfirio Díaz, who was himself of partial Indian origin. Several questions can be asked relating to the attitude of Porfirian Mexico towards the native population. First, what influences contributed to forming the President's opinion of the Indian? Did he listen to the arguments of the intellectuals and the Científicos who occupied important positions within his administration? How was this attitude reflected in the Yucatán? Also significant in determining the importance of the Indian in Porfirian Mexico was the Catholic Church, which made a public effort to outline the problems of this forgotten element of society.

One of the most renowned Porfirian intellectuals to argue negatively in regard to the Indian was Antonio García Cubas, a demographer, an author of various literary and historical works pertaining to the Díaz
period, a member of the Mexican Geographical and Statistical Society, and a corresponding member of the geographical societies of Madrid, Lisbon, Paris and Rome. It was his opinion that the Indians were basically incapable of development as a people, though he was willing to grant that there were some individuals from their number who had successfully assimilated with the white race because of their education or outstanding talents. But such men were a rarity, and the majority of the native races could be categorized as just "more or less civilized." García Cubas then explained that certain Indians, such as those from Veracruz or Oaxaca, were superior to other Indian groups because they displayed talent in farming and cotton weaving. Not so civilized in his estimation, were the Mayas of Yucatán whom he criticized for their superstitious natures, their idolotrous practices, and for devastating a rich country by their uninterrupted uprisings.

In addition to García Cubas' criticism of the Indians because of their tendency towards superstition and idolotry, he also commented upon their strong addiction to pulque, a domestically produced alcohol which could be cheaply made or obtained. From his own experiences, he found the


6 Ibid., p. 28.

7 Ibid., p. 27.

Indians to be physically strong in spite of their poor diets, their unhealthy customs, and the small, damp overcrowded huts in which most of them lived. García Cubas did not believe that the Indians were capable of making any significant contribution to Mexican progress and was one intellectual who promoted immigration as the means to Mexico's development and future greatness. In his mind, the Indian was not a vital part of Mexican society and he looked outside Mexico for people to develop the nation's potential resources.

This pessimistic view of the native population was also advanced by another prominent intellectual of the Díaz regime, Adolfo Duclós Salinas, whose work, The Riches of Mexico, 1893, was a study of the potential resources of the country and how they could be put to best possible use in the future. Duclós Salinas was a strong admirer of President Díaz whom he thought would bring Mexico to greatness. It was to Díaz that he dedicated his findings regarding Mexico's potential development. The Porfirian intellectual argued that the Indians would not contribute to the progress of the nation because they refused to separate themselves from their ancient tribal life and customs, they simply were not interested in joining their race with the more intelligent one. According to Duclós Salinas, the Indians were not lacking in intelligence but they had degenerated since the time of the Conquest and were no longer able to rise above this lowly

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9 García Cubas, Mexico, Its Trade, p. 23.

condition because of the oppression and fanaticism they had experienced. His example was the Maya of Yucatán whom he regarded as semi-barbaric people. In his analysis, he stated that the Indians of the Yucatán were obedient to only two motives, "hate and detestation for the white race and love of the priests." Duclós Salinas felt that the Indian could not conceive abstract ideas. If the Indians were to be regenerated they had two alternatives from which to accomplish this: 1. join the army with the hope that the rudimentary education he would receive there would help him obtain a better position in society, or, 2. the Indian could join industry. If he worked in a factory or a workshop he would be among a more active and intelligent people. In time, the Indian would abandon his native dress, learn the Spanish language, and adopt the lifestyle of the Latin American, "finally acquiring intelligence and development of his moral faculties."

Another Porfirián intellectual who held a dim view of the Indian was Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, who assessed and classified the native races from an anthropological point of view. It was his belief that the Indians were people who were more successful at imitation than for invention. The Indians were affectionate, obliging and unassuming, but these qualities were all that could be said in their favor. Their negative attributes far outnumbered their positive characteristics. The

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11 Ibid., p. 296.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 297.
Indians, stated Covarrubias, were noisy and inclined to be "turbulent and riotous when they feel too much oppressed." He also believed that the Indians were cruel and ruthless in their dealings with white men and should be distrusted as are all those who are conquered. Lastly, this porfirian intellectual felt that the Indians were a people who had been tyrannized for so many centuries that he saw no hope to better their condition within contemporary Mexican society.

Covarrubias thought the Indian had remained stationary since the days of the Conquest and found the greatest evidence of this amongst the Spanish-speaking Indians who spoke the language in the outdated Castilian dialect of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This intellectual did not see any improvement for the Indians under the present regime and expressed the opinion that the Indians had merely traded one set of tutors for another, the viceroy for Maz. He also added that the Indians were better off under the viceregal authority than under the current administration. Covarrubias advanced the view that the Indian's life had not changed radically from the period of colonial rule, and that the native population probably enjoyed greater protection from the king and the viceroy than from subsequent liberal governments which did not concern themselves with the improvement and development of the native.

Despite his personal criticisms of the Indians and their habits, Covarrubias also realized that the Indian was an important segment of

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Mexican society, and observed that since the native population constituted
the broad mass of the proletariat, and as such should be regarded as the
fulcrum of society. At the same time, however, he believed that any
attempt to remedy the present situation of the Indian was like fighting a
losing battle. As he stated in his essay, "Whenever someone thinks of it
(Indian Problem), and attempts to remedy it, he is disdainfully branded a
socialist this being the anathema of the epoch." In the liberal
Porfirian administration, greater emphasis was placed upon the development
of the individual not groups. Those who advocated social improvement for
the masses were not favorably regarded in this individualist-oriented
society. Thus Covarrubias viewed the Indian dilemma pessimistically, though
he offered a proposal of his own to improve the status of the Indian in
Mexico. The intellectual advocated a self-training program for the Indians
by which the natives would glorify their own past, and in so doing, they
would learn to better their futures. This was, of course, a very vague
suggestion from a man who basically did not think there was any method by
which the Indians could fully integrate themselves into Porfirian society.
This simplistic suggestion offered by Covarrubias reflected a detached
concern for one of the most important problems of Porfirian Mexico. His
attitude towards the Indian was not particularly demeaning, but no concrete
solutions were put forth to help solve the plight of the Indian.

Two other prominent Porfirian thinkers also believed, like Covarrubias,

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 25.
that the Indian had exchanged one master for another. These individuals were Guillermo Prieto and Carlos Díaz Dufío. Prieto, 1813-97, was a noted writer, politician, hacendado, teacher and poet who served as Secretary of Hacienda during the Juárez administration and also in the Escuela de Jurisprudencia. Prieto felt that the Independence movement converted the creole rebels into gachupines, (a colonial term for a Spaniard), and he asked the question, "Are we so still?" 20 Prieto saw no real difference between the sort of treatment the Indians received under colonial administrators and that of the present government. The native races were exploited in the present time as much as in former times by the land owning aristocracy, the local shopkeepers, and members of the national and local governments. Prieto saw no change in the Indian's manner of life or in his status from one government to the next. The Indians continued to exist in the present as they had in the past.

Dufío was a prominent economist in the Díaz government and also wrote articles for the journal El Economista Mexicano. He helped to popularize the study of economics as a science. His works include Linantour; México y los capitales extranjeros, La cuestión del petróleo, La vida económica, which is part of Justo Sierra's Mexico, su evolución social, and numerous articles in other publications dealing with economic topics. 21

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20 Justo Sierra, ed., Mexico's Social Evolution, II, 133.

Dufío thought about the Indian problem in the same manner as Prieto but he also believed that the Indians were a degenerate race. He cast the Indian into the role of imitator and the intellectual inferior of the white race. Dufío praised the natives, however, for the attention which they devoted to their work, noting that the Indians were careful and patient laborers. 22 The economist also observed that "Without imagination, aptitudes or preliminary education," the Indian was isolated as if in a melancholic dream," and was doomed to his "atavistic somnolence." 23

The most vigorous criticism of the Indians during the Porfirian regime came from the elite circle known as the Científicos or Positivists. It was this group which popularized the doctrine of white supremacy in Porfirian Mexico. Their belief in the principles of Social Darwinism worked to the detriment of the indigenous races as they sought to apply the doctrines relating to white supremacy and survival of the fittest throughout Mexico. Among the most noteworthy beliefs of this elite was the biological inferiority of the Indians which made them a hopeless and dangerous race. The Indian was thought to be innately inferior to the white man and those who believed in this racist-oriented Positivism hoped that the native population would ultimately disappear from the national scene altogether. 24

One of the leading spokesmen for the Mexican Positivists was the prominent Minister of Finance under Díaz, José Yves Limantour. Although

22 Ibid., p. 105.
23 Ibid.
Limantour tried to minimize his role with the Científico clique by stating that his only contribution to this group was limited to giving advice occasionally on economic matters, his role in determining the ideology of this highly influential corps was very significant, for it was Limantour who reorganized Mexico's finances on a sound basis and according to Positivistic guidelines. The Minister of Finance fully supported the most outstanding goal of the Científicos, material progress. 25

As a Científico, Limantour disdained the native races. In an interview with journalist Henry Baerlein in London, the financial genius of the Díaz government commented upon the indigenous population, stating that the Indians were "so easily contented," that they could be sold for "next to nothing."26 His prejudice towards the native races was again apparent, when at the turn of the century, the Fifth Pan American Congress was to be held in Mexico City. Limantour was concerned about the appearance of the conference and hoped to display Mexico at its finest for the foreign dignitaries who were to attend. Part of the minister's plan directed that all uniformed attendants at the meeting be white men, though many of the delegates themselves were not. 27

Limantour and his Científico colleagues carried their ideas of white superiority even further when they launched a newspaper campaign


to defame the Indians in government-subsidized journals. In 1901 Limantour revealed his personal view of society as a whole at a National Científico meeting. Here he stated that all societies were destined to follow a certain evolutionary process. There were physical and biological laws which governed human nature and the evolutionary process of development. Minister Limantour believed in the existence of natural elites in society, referring to specialists such as himself in the field of economics, and to men of science. It was the obligation of the "natural elites" to develop Mexican society, for the masses, by nature, were racially, physically and socially inferior beings. Therefore, when applied to the native population, Limantour's Darwinist thinking meant that the condition of the Indian was the result of natural determinants and it was also permanent. To Limantour and many other Positivists, race, geography, and climate were the important factors which determined the course of society. There were many men fit to govern a society but the Indians were not among them. Mexico's future development depended upon transforming the nation into a white man's country, and this of course, meant that the native races were not to be fully integrated and kept separate from the rest of society.

Another notable figure who expressed his views on the role of the native races in Mexico was Francisco Bulnes, 1847-1924, who served the

Porfirian administration in the capacity of Deputy to Congress, as a senator and as a member of various numerous commissions dealing with the formulation of mining and banking laws, monetary measures and public finance. In addition, Bulnes was an historian and an engineer. His attitude toward the Indian was essentially based upon racist doctrine. Bulnes stated that he once believed that the native races might have advanced and perhaps claimed a first place among the nations of the world had they not been inferior. Unlike the Dutch or the Chinese, the Indians of Mexico were unable to advance at the same rate agriculturally, and although they were instrumental in constructing many irrigation works for their masters, they never learned to apply these techniques to their own plots of land. Bulnes again attributed this deficiency to natural inferiority.\(^{31}\) Like his contemporary Limantour, Bulnes believed in the doctrine of biological determinism and thought that the Indian was incapable of governing or of performing a serious role in the development of Mexican society because of the fact that the Indians had not advanced as other races had done.

Bulnes also discussed charges that the Indian had been exploited by government bureaucrats and the planter class since colonial days. He stated that neither the colonial administration nor the present government exploited the Indian. The only true exploiter of the Indian, said Bulnes, was the Indian himself. Furthermore, the Indians were incapable

\(^{31}\)Ibid., p. 68.
of dealing with those who took advantage of them. He allowed the hacendados to rob him of his property. Bulnes felt that "according to the decrees of natural history, ethnology, general history and sociology," the Indians belonged to an inferior race. He also attributed the Indian's inferiority to his poor diet of corn, for he was one who believed that wheat consumers were more progressive due to the amounts of phosphorus they absorbed. The Indians did not receive this element from their meals. As a result of his findings, Bulnes was convinced that the Indians' present condition was due to his own defects. Based upon this conclusion, Bulnes assigned the Indians of Mexico a bleak future.

Bulnes firmly believed that the Indians were universally despised in Mexico. As evidence for this argument, he observed that the Indian was addressed in the familiar "tu" form which normally referred to an affectionate greeting when used among equals, but condescension when applied to an inferior. Bulnes also observed that the Indians were usually ordered about as slaves by other members of Mexican society who considered themselves superior to the native races. As for the politicians who venerated the glory of the Indian in their speeches and writings, Bulnes charged them with demagoguery, and felt it would be useful to their political careers to glorify the image of the native population by exploiting the legendary virtues of a once great people. For such types Bulnes expressed his contempt.

32 Ibid., p. 74.
33 Ibid.
All of the negative views expressed by various Porfirian intellectuals regarding the condition of the Indian was not merely confined to those in Mexico City but also penetrated the state level as well. In the Yucatán, the leading Positivist was Governor Molina, whose financial successes won him the close friendship of Minister Limantour. Both men believed in economic progress above all else, and if the indigenous population interfered with that goal there was every justification to subjugate them. Like his predecessor Cantón, Molina believed in the existence of social classes and that everyone in the nation owed President Díaz the greatest respect as the regenerator of the country, no matter who they might be. Molina himself did not use his influential position as governor or as Secretary of Fomento to improve the condition of the Indian in his state. Molina was a hard-core businessman, and as such, his policies clearly indicated his contempt for the backward agricultural techniques of the Mayas whose lands he seized without sympathy and whose labor he fully exploited on his own vast holdings. He operated his henequen plantations on the peonage system favored by fellow hacendados and took no positive steps to incorporate the Indians of his jurisdiction into the mainstream of Yucatecan society. While the situation in the Yucatán regarding the treatment of Indian labor may not have been as extreme as Turner described, (see Chapter III),

34 Colección Porfirio Díaz, 004117, Molina to Díaz, October 25, 1901.

there was indeed evidence which demonstrated that abuses towards the natives were commonplace on the hacendados estates which outraged some contemporary writers to the point where they felt compelled to defend the position of the Indians. One of these defenders was the brother of Olegario Molina, Juan Francisco Molina Solís. Francisco was an academic and a recognized historian who was also a lawyer. Francisco Molina was very much interested in social welfare totally unlike his famous brother, and he worked for the improvement of Indian life through his prolific writings and within the legal framework of the state. He was particularly concerned with the condition of the Mayas who worked on the henequen plantations and he earnestly sought to harmonize the interests of the planters and their laborers by proposing a law which would limit the time of the contract between the two parties, guaranteeing the Indian laborer a sufficient wage for a full day's work. Furthermore, Francisco believed that the workers on the estates should not be required to perform unusually difficult or improper work for their age, and lastly, that employers should not distract women from their family life nor endanger their morality. The very fact that the Governor's brother proposed such a significant piece of legislation, argued Mexican historian González Navarro, confirmed the true condition of the Indians in the state of Yucatán.


38 Ibid.
It also established that it was Juan Francisco, not the politically powerful Olegario, who took it upon himself to act as the spokesman for the Indians' interests and who attempted to introduce legislation to improve the condition of the native Mayas.

Although Governor Molina refrained from publicly criticizing the Mayas of his state, his predecessor Cantón, made no secret of his hostile attitude toward the native population. Cantón was far more severe in his treatment of the Indians than Molina was. His policy tended toward complete destruction of the Indians rather than economic exploitation. Cantón believed that the Mayas were the enemies of civilization and he sought to destroy them. He also viewed the Indian as an inferior and petitioned Díaz for aid to rid the state of their presence once and for all. At the time Cantón made this request he was highly upset, for the Indians were causing havoc for property owners whose lands were periodically ravaged by surprise raids and the fear that was generated by these attacks. Thus while Cantón directly participated in the military campaigns against the Maya, Molina was content to confiscate Indian lands which he could put to profitable use. He also solved the problem of what to do with the landless Indians; he gave them permanent positions on his henequen estates.

In contrast to Cantón and Molina who held a negative attitude toward the natives, was Governor Enrique Creel of Chihuahua. While Creel

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39 Colección Porfirio Díaz, 002188, Cantón to Díaz, May 19, 1900.
was not a great vocalizer of the Indian cause, he believed that the
Indians had potential intellectually. He was well aware of the economic
plight of the Indians within his own state and he sympathized with their
problems. The governor used his political influence in the state legis-
lature to help improve the standard of life for the Indians. In his
estimation, the greatest problem of the Indian was economic and directly
related to the land speculation policies which drove the Indian away from
his former arable fields to less productive soil found in the mountain
areas. Creel realized that this was harmful to their survival and proposed
a homestead system which would allow the Indians to become proprietors
of the land in time. 40 This was not a hastily organized project, for
Creel first proposed that a Junta Central Protectora be established
which was to protect the Tarahumaras physically, intellectually and
morally, in order to gradually draw them out of the semi-barbaric state
in which they lived. Schools were to be founded so that the Indians
could obtain a basic primary education and learn to become useful members
of the community. 41 Foremost in Creel's program was to instruct the
Indians in their rights, to teach them Spanish, writing and arithmetic.
The Governor believed that it was very important to give the Indians evidence
of "our brotherhood and our interest;" in sum, to teach them the ways of
the white man. 42 Creel presented his plans and ideas for the development of
the Tarahumaras to the state legislature with specific recommendations to

41Ibid., p. 177.
42Ibid.
elevate the Indians. His efforts were well spent, for in November, 1906, his program became law.

Creel's efforts reflected a genuine concern for the welfare of the Indians in Chihuahua and his programs, though paternalistic in tone, were noteworthy in a nation where economic and scientific programs superceded any plans to deal with the social and economic welfare of the native population. Creel's actions were certainly a contrast to those of Molina and demonstrated the differences in attitude from one state to another. What held true for the Maya of Yucatán did not indicate that Indians of other states followed the same path. The condition of the Maya was a situation peculiar to one state which was sparsely populated and depended upon the plantation economy. While Molina and the sisal planters exploited the Indians for their economic worth to the state, Creel took a practical view of the condition of the Indians in his state and correctly assessed their economic and social needs with thought to a sound, gradual program to educate them in areas that would result in their economic betterment in the long run. Creel was willing to give the Indians a chance at a better life while Molina was intent upon immediate profit. Creel also presented an interesting contrast to Molina in that the Yucatecan governor reflected a positivistic point of view. He did not care whether the Indians were assimilated or not.

Another prominent Mexican intellectual who sponsored the cause of the Indian was Licenciado Don Justo Sierra. Sierra was a científico and had served in the Porfirian Government in various capacities as a member of Congress, as senator, head of the Supreme Court and also as a Díaz cabinet officer. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Sierra believed
in the native peoples and felt that integrating them into the society as a whole was vital to the interests of the nation.  

Early in the Diaz presidency, Sierra spoke up on behalf of the Indians, and announced that compulsory public instruction would transform the native race into a "progressive class." Again, the major emphasis was to expose the Indians to the white man's ideas so that they could absorb them well enough to function on his terms in Porfirian society. There was no thought given to the survival of the Indian within the framework of his own rich cultural heritage, nor to allow him to function according to the type of life which best suited him. He had to become a member of the progressive Mexican society of his day or become a non-entity. Education, Sierra believed, would bring an end to the superstition and drunkenness and would also be the first step in drawing the indigenous races into the drive for national progress. Although Sierra was a científico, he did not hold to the belief that the present condition of the Indians in Mexico could be traced to any biological inferiority, but was rooted in social and cultural differences. It was his opinion that the Conquest and the Catholic Church were responsible for reducing the Indians to a state of dependency.

To remedy this situation, Sierra proposed that instructors learn one of the native languages which would provide them with a basis from which they could teach the Indians to speak Spanish. Language was one of

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44 Ibid.
the major factors which presented a barrier to national unity according to Sierra, and to eliminate this obstacle would be a clear sign of progress and a step towards the unification of Mexico. The nation had to solve the problem of illiteracy and could accomplish this goal by converting the Indian into a social asset not a burden. As Sierra noted in regard to the native:

...make him the principal colonist on intensively cultivated soil, to blend his spirit and ours in a unification of language, of aspirations, of loves and hates, or moral and mental criteria, to place before him the ideal of a strong and happy country belonging to all.46

By improving the condition of the native races, educating the Indians and drawing them into the mainstream of Mexican life, Sierra conceived the creation of a national soul.

In addition to his pleas for compulsory education, Sierra also spoke of the need to improve agriculture which he linked to the cause of national progress. Although ten million people were involved in agricultural occupations, agriculture in Mexico had failed to develop significantly, and Sierra thought that the "regressive evolution" of the indigenous people was responsible for this lack of growth.47 He pointed to the wealthy landowners who did not collaborate with the laborers and talk about ways to improve the land. Consequently, laborers did not produce as effectively as they might have. The planters believed in a system of exploitation which was opposed to the basic laws of industry. To the meager salary of the Indian laborer corresponded a poor agriculture. Sierra urged the promotion

46 Ibid., p. 358.
47 Ibid., p. 38.
of public instruction as a solution to agricultural problems and sincerely believed that if the schools, agricultural colleges and experimental stations were made available to the employer and his laborers, Mexican agriculture would advance significantly.  

Because of the efforts of Sierra and the Minister of Justice and Public Instruction, Joaquín Baranda, compulsory education for the federal district and the territories was sanctioned by the National Congress in the year 1888. The following year Minister Baranda called a National Congress of Public Instruction to discuss a program of primary education to be enforced throughout the nation.

The efforts of Baranda and Sierra helped the cause of education in the Yucatán. The Ley General, which provided for public instruction, (July 30, 1887), and the Ley de Instrucción Primaria, (August 6, 1887), infused a new spirit into education and there was great enthusiasm among teachers, both young and old. In 1894 steps were taken to improve conditions in the schools. Modern textbooks, frequent visits by scholarly authorities in Mérida and in the pueblos were in order. A system of examinations for the schools was also instituted. New locations for future schools were proposed so that children throughout the state could receive primary and secondary educations. Between 1901-10, there were 334 primary schools in the Yucatán, with 7873 males and 4909 females enrolled.

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48 Sierra, Mexico, Its Social Evolution, II, 37-8.
51 Ibid., pp. 131-2.
Molina furthered the cause of widespread education by proposing that the quality of teachers should also be uplifted. Speaking to the legislature, the Governor stated that Yucatecan teachers who held the "sacred mission" of educating the people should receive better financial compensation for their efforts. In December, 1902, Governor Molina's measure called the Ley de Pensiones won the approval of the legislature. Because of the Governor's interest in public education, courses were offered in the areas of agriculture, commerce and administration. His plans to further education included the Indians in the remote rural areas of the state as well. The education of rural children was regarded as a difficult task because the laborers often took their children to the fields with them. It was the governor who had the great task of implementing the educational programs of Baranda and Sierra in the Yucatán.

Sierra's faith in the potential ability of the native races, thinking that once they were instructed, the Indians would make a valuable contribution to the nation in agricultural production, made Sierra one of the most notable defenders of the Indian during the Porfiriato. As a positivist, Sierra stood out for his efforts to educate the Indians, a policy which differed greatly from the more doctrinaire Limantour and Molina whose attitudes were shaped by Darwinist thinking.

52 Ibid., p. 132.
53 Ibid., p. 136.
54 Ibid., p. 138.
One last spokesman and defender of the Indian during the Porfiriat...
the Indian in Porfirian society, similar discussions were also taking place among members of the higher clergy in Mexico. The Mexican Catholic Church had once been a very powerful institution in the country until the arrival of Benito Juarez and the Reforma. Juarez and the Liberals did not believe that the Church should possess such vast wealth and influence and therefore inaugurated a policy which aimed to destroy the power and wealth of the Church by attacking their corporate holdings. Several laws which directly affected the Church were: one, the Ley Juarez which was enacted in November, 1855, and which limited the special privileges of the clergy and the military as well as the abolition of special courts. Secondly, there was the Ley Lerdo passed in June, 1856, which dealt with the disamortization of land held in mortmain by the Church. Lands held by the Church were to be sold with the profits of these sales going to the Church itself. The buyer would have to pay a sales tax of 5% to the government. However, Mexican clergymen refused to sell the lands until the Pope issued a statement on the matter. The Liberals decided not to wait for this permission from Rome and began selling the lands without papal consent. In July, 1859, another law provided for "the confiscation of all wealth administered by the regular and secular clergy." The clergy was forbidden to receive gifts of real property. Also, the separation between Church and State allowed toleration of other religions in the nation. Future decrees forbade the existence of brotherhoods and the regular orders, while nuns were encouraged to leave the convents. As a result of these


58 Ibid.
laws, the Church in Mexico suffered not only the loss of property but diminished prestige.

By the time of the Diaz administration, the Church had not recovered the power and influence it had enjoyed before the Reforma. However, President Diaz did not vigorously enforce the legislation of the Juarez regime and instead decided to follow a "live-and-let-live" policy with the Catholic Church.\(^5^9\) His administration tolerated the Church and did not actively seek to weaken the institution any further. Diaz did not interfere with religious affairs and the Church was able to function without harassment from the government. For its part, the Catholic Church was content to act in accordance with Diaz's policy and no serious conflicts occurred between the Church and the Porfirián government.

Although the Church did not antagonize Diaz, this did not mean that it was a silent organization. The Church was the only major institution to become seriously involved in the problems of the rural population and expressed grave concern for the social ills which plagued Mexico's poor. Some of the major problems which the Church attempted to investigate included alcoholism, child mortality, and the lack of education. The most neglected segment of the Mexican nation needed immediate attention and the Catholic Church was going to try to deal with the unhappy condition of the rural people and provide some solutions to ease their discomfort. For this purpose, several Catholic Social Congresses and Catholic Agricultural Congresses were conducted to discuss the social evils which caused the rural

population to live in misery. The first Catholic Social Congress was held in Puebla, February 20 to March 1, 1903; the second in Morelia from October 4-12, 1904, the third in Guadalajara from October 18-29, 1906, and the fourth in Oaxaca, January 19-22, 1909.  

The first Catholic Social Congress which convened in Puebla in 1903, had as its purpose the uniting of all Catholics in Mexico in the spirit of common action and to harmonize the protection and defense of religious social interests by promoting Catholic works. 61 This first session formed the basis for future discussions of the nation's primary social question. At the conferences in Morelia, Guadalajara and Oaxaca, the clergy discussed the conditions which characterized the lives of the Indians and the mestizos who labored on the plantations. The clergymen who attended these meetings were primarily engaged in providing suggestions for social reform intended to improve the status of the Indian and mestizo peons. At the first conference it was decided that annual missions should be conducted to uplift moral standards among the Indians and to attempt to restrain their penchant for liquor. 62 In the area of educational improvement, members of the conference discussed the need for schools on the estates where it was hoped that the peons would not only receive instruction in academic subjects, but also listen to talks dealing with the evils of alcoholism. 63 The first Catholic Social Congress also encouraged the establishment of health care facilities for the Indians and mestizos who

60 José Bravo Ugarte, Historia de México (4 vols. Mexico: Revista de derecho y ciencias sociales, 1944), III, 413.
61 Ibid.
62 González Navarro, "Propiedad y trabajo," Historia Moderna, IV, 266.
63 Ibid.
worked on the haciendas. The Church expressed the hope that the hacendados would cooperate with the Church's goals to improve the quality of life for their laborers.

At the second Catholic Social Congress held in Morelia in 1904, clergymen again spoke on behalf of Mexico's forgotten ones. One of the major questions brought up at this meeting centered upon discovering methods to effectively civilize the native peoples and to improve their status in Mexican society. Also mentioned at this meeting was the criticism of lawyers who had been engaged to defend Indian interests in land disputes and then proceeded to exploit them as well by charging them outrageous fees for their services which sometimes amounted to ten times the value of the land involved in litigation.

In 1906 a third Congress was held in Guadalajara, but this session was not specifically geared to the interest of the Indians. At this Social Congress clergymen encouraged the establishment of workers clubs, remedies for pauperism, a fight against the excessive use of alcohol, support of the Catholic press, and to spread Christian education throughout Mexico. The Indians were the focal point of the Oaxaca meeting, where a specific list of suggestions was offered to "civilize" the native population. These measures included the prohibition of the sale of alcohol on the haciendas, the formation of the Catholic Women's Association to instruct and protect the Indian women, to offer medical care to the native laborers and

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65 Ibid., p. 83.
other forms of assistance to the rural worker.\textsuperscript{65}

In addition to the Catholic Social Congresses, the Mexican Catholic Church also sponsored several Catholic Agricultural Congresses to deal with the problems of the rural areas. The first two Congresses were held in Tulancingo, September 9-12, 1904, and September 4-8, 1905. The third meeting took place in Zamora, September 4-8, 1906, followed by another conference in León, October 21-24, 1908; two in the federal district, October 17-22, 1910, and in December 13-18, 1911, and lastly, in Zacatecas, September 23-28, 1912.\textsuperscript{67} The Bishop of Tulancingo, Mora y del Río, held a conference which was attended by the hacendados in his district with the purpose of discussing measures to improve the moral and material life of the country laborers.\textsuperscript{68} The Bishop hoped that the hacendados would show compassion, love and sympathy to their workers. It was suggested that ideas be exchanged regarding the rural laborers' situation to provide methods of action to deal with the social evils which existed on the plantations.\textsuperscript{69} Bishop Mora proposed that five sessions or committees be formed to treat the problems of alcoholism, to safeguard the existence of the family by encouraging legal marriage within the civil and Church institutions, to discuss the protection of children in the countryside who suffered from misery, ignorance, lack of proper care, poor diet, inadequate


\textsuperscript{67}Bravo Ugarte, \textit{Historia de México}, III, 414.

\textsuperscript{68}\textit{El Páis}, 23 November 1903.

\textsuperscript{69}Ibid.
clothing and intoxicated parents. In Mexico the mortality rate in early infancy was up to 75% at the time of the first Tulancingo Congress.70

The Church was greatly concerned with the breakdown of family life and attributed alcoholism as a major factor. The clergy contended that parents who drank liquor did not properly care for the children, that they were poorly fed, and did not have sufficient clothing.71 In this regard alcoholism contributed to the high infant mortality rate. Also, parents who drank excessively set a poor example to children because of their abusive language and for living together but not married by the Church or the State.72 That is why the Tulancingo Congress took immediate action to combat the problems of alcoholism.

The delegates proposed a series of measures to solve this most urgent problem. It was suggested that no alcoholic drinks be sold on the plantations though pulque could be sold to non-intoxicated persons. All "bars" should be closed by 6:00 P.M. Rancherfas should permit only one store to sell liquor including pulque, and efforts should be made to distribute literature on the topic of the evils of drinking. Furthermore, every plantation should have a place to worship and sermons against drunkenness ought to be preached to the peons. Schools for boys and girls should be established on the haciendas, and diversions such as musicals, games and athletics as well as the occasional singing of patriotic songs ought to

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
be encouraged by the hacendados to assist in the effort to combat alcoholism.\textsuperscript{73} The Congress also encouraged an understanding between the planter and his employees regarding drunkenness. According to this agreement, workers who missed work because of laziness or drink would be docked a half day's salary.\textsuperscript{74}

In addition to these topics, the Bishop urged that the fourth committee discuss means of relieving the miserable state of the field hands who sometimes resorted to thievery to stay alive. One solution proposed was to raise wages, but the hacendados argued that the peons would just spend the extra money on liquor. It was believed that if any improvements were to occur, a moral uplift among the population of the rural areas was absolutely vital.\textsuperscript{75} Another suggestion which was put forth was that blankets be distributed among the laborers so they could save a few pesos. However, this action, claimed the hacendados, often resulted in the peon taking advantage of the planter's generosity. A worker would feign illness thinking he could absent himself from his duties.\textsuperscript{75} While no one challenged the fact that the peons needed some kind of assistance, it was felt that aid should be dispensed with discretion. The fifth committee was assigned the task of evaluating the economic problems of the rural laborers and should suggest reforms to improve the material welfare of the worker.

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\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid.}
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\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid.}, 19 September 1904.
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\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid.}, "El Congreso de Tulancingo," 16 September 1904.
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\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}
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Another important matter taken up by the Social Congresses was the education of the rural children. The measures recommended to solve this great problem included the establishment of rural schools in each region to train teachers in basic education and religious subjects. These teachers should also be able to instruct their students in agriculture, forestry, cattle-raising and fishing. Secondly, hacendados should aid the cause of education by allowing the use of some hacienda land where practical agricultural training could be effectively displayed. The student would provide the raw materials such as seed, but the hacendado should allow the laborer to use the land and profit from his work. Teachers should fulfill the basic requirements needed to provide a sound education and agricultural training. Planters should not employ children under the age of twelve who cannot read or write except in cases of dire necessity.\(^77\)

Other improvements such as a satisfactory wage rate, decent clothing and debts amounting to no more than twenty pesos should become a rule on the hacienda. Peons ought not have to owe the hacendado excessive amounts of money, according to members of the Social Congress. The hacendados should finance the establishment of health care centers on their estates and see to it that the laborers' homes meet basic hygienic conditions. The second Congress also proposed that stores on the plantations sell the peons only the goods they needed at reasonable prices and also encouraged the establishment of savings banks to lend money to the rural laborers. The money was to be provided by the hacendados and other charitable donors.\(^78\)

\(^{77}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{78}\text{Ibid.}\)
Attendance at the second Congress exceeded that of the first conference. It was particularly noteworthy that many specialists gave lectures on matters pertaining to the problems of the rural population. Don José Segura, once a director of the School of Agriculture, delivered an address on forestry. Señor Don Agustín Desentis lectured on the relationship between employers and employees. Señor Francisco Ortiz lectured on wheat cultivation and Refugio Galindo addressed the conference on the matter of loans to the peons. Also present at the second meeting was Doctor Nicolás Ramirez who discussed the serious problem of child mortality. In addition to pointing out the causes for infant mortality, it was proposed that Mexico's Higher Board of Health issue a booklet on health care and instructions to the estate administrators so that they could present this material to illiterate laborers. Each of the five committees formed at the first meeting reported upon various topics dealing with social conditions in the rural areas. In concluding this second meeting, the members of the conference agreed upon a future session which would have a national rather than a local character.

The third Agricultural Congress which met in Zamora in early September, 1906, was conducted in much the same manner as the second conference with a number of experts presenting papers on irrigation, the lowering of rail transport fees to facilitate the availability of fertilizer and other practical subjects. Further resolutions dealing with the situation

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79 Ibid., 7 September 1905.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
of the laborers included the actual outlawing of drunkenness. The Congress proposed to make drunkenness a crime. Furthermore, rewards should be given to workers who did not become intoxicated on Sundays and showed up for work on Monday. This measure was not approved. Again, the members urged that propaganda be distributed on the evils of alcohol and strict prohibitions on the sale of liquor be enforced. To deter the peon from drinking, the hacendado should provide a chapel on the hacienda so that assistance at Mass would prevent the Indians and mestizos from going into nearby towns to drink. Literature extolling alcohol should be forbidden. Recreational centers for the laborers ought to be established to keep the peons occupied for the same reasons. A committee was to be formed to discuss methods of curing drunkenness. Also recommended at the third Congress was the encouragement of legal marriage within the Church and State to end the evils of concubinage. Hacendados were urged not to hire laborers who were living with women who were not their legal spouses in the view of the Church or the State.

The Catholic Social Congresses and the Agricultural Congresses sponsored by the Church during the Porfiriato, can be viewed as both a success and a failure in the final analysis. The Congresses were successful in bringing together clergymen and hacendados to outline the problems of the rural population and suggest possible solutions to end the misery which they endured as a result of their poverty. The Church defined

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
various problems of the peon with a particular view to alcoholism and reasons for the high child mortality rate which included drunkenness on the part of the parents, lack of family life, ignorance of child care, unsanitary homes and lack of vaccines. The Catholic newspaper, El Tiempo, praised the efforts of the Zamora Congress and called it a great success with additional comment that the measures proposed by the Congress were practical. However, the secular newspaper, El Imparcial, was not as favorably inclined in its analysis of the Congresses. This newspaper criticized the Zamora meeting for being too Catholic in its orientation, stating that the conference was nothing more than a meeting of Catholic agriculturalists and that the Bishop who presided over the Congress gave the meeting a semblance of prestige and dignity. The article also charged that the attending priests knew nothing about agriculture and in fact only one expert in this field was actually present, a Señor Zafarino Dominguez. Furthermore, Dominguez expressed the view that too much attention was extended to moral issues rather than to practical matters. The Bishop overruled him. Also, when a Señor Miguel Palacios Roji suggested to the Congress that the job of raising the status of the laborers should be left to the government, the members were scandalized by his comment. The accusations mentioned in El Imparcial were refuted in the Catholic

84 Ibid., 16 September 1904.
85 El Tiempo, 19 October 1906.
86 El País, 19 September 1904.
87 Ibid.
organ El Tiempo, by a "T. Torres," who defended the position of the Church on all counts. Torres answered the charge that too much emphasis was given to moral issues by stating that the uplift of the peons in a moral sense was necessary and that only upon the basis of Catholic doctrine could true justice and harmony be established. 88

The Church Congresses held in the early years of the twentieth-century were significant because the Church was the first major institution to approach the tremendous problems besetting the majority of the Mexican population. The Porfirian Government had no established program of social welfare nor a program for social reforms. The government could not be relied upon to solve matters which affected the Indians and mestizos working on the plantations. In this respect, the Catholic Church in Mexico took a great burden upon itself in attempting to define the major problems and suggesting possible solutions to ease the condition experienced by many of the rural laborers. This in itself was a notable accomplishment. However, some comments can be made in regard to the Church's methods to eliminate these problems. First of all, the committees may have been too idealistic in some regards, especially in their forceful attacks on alcoholism. The suggestion, for instance, that chapels be built on the estates to allow the peons to assist at Mass rather than go to the town to drink was unrealistic. 89 Since Sunday was a day of leisure for the laborers, they could easily attend the service and then go to the town to drink afterward if they were so inclined.

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 19 September 1905.
A chapel on the plantation would not necessarily guarantee either the attendance of the worker nor would it prevent him from going to town. Sunday was also a day for marriages and courtships on the haciendas which might also provide the peons with an opportunity and a reason to drink alcohol. Building chapels to solve the problems of alcoholism thus seems an impractical solution on the part of the Congress. Literature instructing the peon on the evils of drinking might have been to some purpose provided the Indians and mestizos could read or understand the language of the propaganda.

Another impractical solution in regard to the problem of alcoholism was that the plantation stores, the tiendas de rayas, sell only necessary goods to the peons at reasonable prices. 90 If the Indians and mestizos were able to obtain whatever they required on the estate, there was no reason to seek a better price elsewhere and obtain liquor at the same time. Again, this suggestion was unrealistic. The tiendas de rayas which operated on many plantations were notorious for exploiting the rural population by charging excessive prices for their goods. The tienda served the interests of the hacendado by assuring him of labor, for the peon who could not pay for his purchases in cash, was extended credit against the commodities. 91 With a larger debt to pay off, it was unlikely that the peon would leave the estate. It was also improbable that a hacendado would lower prices to the advantage of the laborer. The tiendas thus served the interests of the planters in helping them maintain the peonage system and providing an additional source of profit. If the Indians intended to spend money on

90 Ibid., 19 September 1906.

alcohol they could spend it in the company store instead of the storekeeper in the town.

The idea regarding the establishment of recreational centers, schools, organizing theatricals, musicals, etc., was sound and well-intended. However, it would require a financial sacrifice from the hacendado. Considering the profit-minded spirit of the Porfirián era, it was doubtful that the majority of hacendados would be willing to part with a fraction of their profits to uplift the moral and material welfare of their laborers. Many of the committees proposed solutions which cost money, i.e. the savings bank, and it was highly unlikely that the hacendados would be that generous with their money.

There was no evidence that Yucatecan hacendados acted upon the suggestions of the Congresses to improve the physical and material status of the Indians on the sisal plantations. Some planters who were members of the League of Social Action did attempt to improve education, however.92 They established schools on their haciendas to provide the rural workers with an opportunity for basic education. However, the other proposals made by the Church committees such as the establishment of recreational centers, etc., do not appear to have been well taken in the Yucatán. According to Yucatecan historian Gustavo Molina Font, the primary concern of the henequen planters was to safeguard what they had. Another major war such as the disastrous Caste War which might lead to a ruined economy was not desired by the planter class.93 The economic life of the state was regarded

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92Gustavo Molina Font, La tragedia de Yucatán (Mexico: Revista de derecho y ciencias sociales, 1941), p. 52.
93Ibid.
as the most urgent concern of Yucatecan hacendados.94

Another problem to consider in relation to the Church's role in improving the quality of life for the Indians and the mestizo on the estates was the character of the local clergy itself. Members of the higher clergy could intellectualize the condition of the Indian and discuss social reforms, but what of the priest on the hacienda of a particular district? Life on the plantation was nothing like the security of a bishopric. The hacendado often depended upon the country priests to insure a steady, obedient labor force. In fact, the priests played an important role in operating the plantations effectively and smoothly. It was reported that during the administration of Díaz, Indians who worked on the Yucatán's henequen plantations were cared for by priests who were "less the servants of God than of the owner," and who preached obedience and submission to their flocks, consoling the beaten or abused Indians by telling them of rewards in the hereafter and promising a happier existence in the next world.95 The local priests failed to mention the misery of the present life the Indians experienced and offered no words of consolation for the laborers who endured the hardships of everyday life. The native races who worked the estates had nothing to look forward to in their own lifetimes in their present condition.

In addition to the influence they exerted over the Indians on the haciendas, the lower clergy was also influential in politics as well.

94 Ibid., p. 79.
95 Ibid., p. 24.
An American diplomat in Mexico, John W. Foster, commented upon the political unawareness of the Indian in his memoirs of Porfirian Mexico and noted that the Indians did not vote because they were indifferent and because of their lack of education they were also easily led. In regard to the priests, Foster observed that if the Indians did vote, it would be as the priests indicated, because they had the greatest influence over them. In its own way, the clergy was very effective among the Indians but it was more to the advantage of the hacendados or jefes políticos than anyone else. The local priests could not afford to offend the men who contributed to their support. In a practical sense, members of the lower clergy were in no position to implement social reforms as designated by the Church Congresses even if they believed that reforms were urgently needed.

The Church conferences conducted during the Porfiriato did not take up the question of a very pressing issue, agrarian reform. Instead, the clergy dealt with social conditions rather than risk causing offense to Diaz or his associates. There was good reason behind this, for to criticize the agrarian system was to criticize presidential policies. Since the Church was no longer hampered by the laws of the Reforma due to Diaz's failure to enforce them and also the fact that clergymen were also permitted to acquire property through fictitious sales, it was not in the Church's interest to criticize Porfirio Diaz or his policies. Therefore,


97 Quirk, Revolution and Church, p. 17.

98 Ibid.
the Church Congresses concentrated upon the discussion of social conditions and suggested remedies rather than deal with the basic problem of agrarian reform.

Throughout the course of the Díaz regime the Church remained under the watchful gaze of the President. He tolerated the Catholic Church, but he never allowed it to regain its former power and prestige among the people of Mexico. For all practical purposes the Church was an appendage of the Díaz government and owed its continued existence to his good-will. It would have been unwise to vocalize too loudly social causes for which the government expressed little or no sympathy. Even when the bishops decided to hold the Social and Agricultural Congresses, care had to be taken so as not to antagonize the administration or criticize Porfirián policy in relation to the social condition of the masses. Díaz was a keen politician who allowed others to be criticized but never himself. Thus the Church had its limitations during the Porfiriato and had to tread carefully.

The Church deserved credit for undertaking the task of popular reform intended to benefit the Indian and mestizo peons on the plantations. It demonstrated that there was life in the Church and that it had not deteriorated into a dormant, insignificant institution. The clergymen who assumed the great task of sorting out the problems of Mexico's poor and then proposed solutions to improve their moral and material status in a society that was not so inclined. Just why Díaz allowed the Church to plunge into the question of social reform remains unclear. It has been suggested that the President's wife, Carmen, was responsible for the
Díaz's tolerant attitude. Carmen was known to be a highly devout Catholic and helped achieve the harmonious union between the President and the Church. In addition to the proceedings of his wife, Díaz also acted as any smart politician; he wanted the support of all factions in his nation and so it was also politically expedient for him to make his peace with the Church. However, Porfirio Díaz was a president who was always in control of the factions in Mexico, and the Church was no exception. His power over the Church was assured, and although he ceased to strictly enforce the laws of the Reforma, he insisted that all major clerical appointments be submitted to him for approval. Therefore the organizers of the Church Congresses were admirable for defining the problems of the rural population, but were powerless to implement any type of social reform without the support and approval of Díaz. While the Church seemed eager to espouse the cause of the poor Indian and mestizo peons on the plantations, it could not act without the cooperation from the hacendados and from Porfirio Díaz.

Now that several views of some of the Mexican intellectuals and prominent figures of the Porfiriato have been discussed, including the position of the Mexican Catholic Church, it can be seen that there were many opinions and attitudes, pro and con, relating to the position of the Indian in Mexican society and whether or not the Indians were actually capable of becoming integrated into white society. There was no real uniform

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outlook among various individuals or in the Church. In the ranks of the local government also, differences among governors such as Cantón, Molina and Creel as to how the Indians should be treated were apparent. Next there was Porfirio Díaz himself. As the most powerful individual in the country and as someone who was part Indian, his attitude toward the native races was of primary importance as the major policy-maker in Mexico.

Díaz has been described as both a hero and a villain in respect to his treatment of the Indians. While Manuel Gonzales served a term as president, Díaz served his home state of Oaxaca as its governor. He was of Indian background, for he was one-quarter Mixtecan on his mother's side. His acquaintance with the Indians of his state was intimate and friendly. One of his contemporaries noted that the Indian revered Díaz because he lived as they did and he understood them. Díaz had a habit of hunting and sleeping outdoors as a young man, and spent many hours enjoying the companionship of local Indians who joined him on these excursions. In 1855 Díaz became the jefe of his district of Ixtlan and was responsible for recruiting and training Zapotecan Indians for military duty. His ability to deal with the natives on familiar terms proved useful as he quickly organized a local militia which was to serve as the nucleus of the powerful army that ultimately took him to the presidency. 101 To the Indians with whom Díaz had personal contact, it appeared as if he had a magnetic control over them, acting not only as their chief but someone who

101 Beals, Porfirio Díaz, p. 64.
possessed "almost supernatural qualities, becoming to them as a god of war."102

This flattering view of Díaz also was substantiated by journalist James Creelman, whose interview with an aging Díaz was a strong contributory factor to the revolutionary cause. Creelman also claimed that Díaz had a great rapport with the native population. He offered some details of the President's early career when he served as the jefe of Ixtlan, stating that the Indians of this region were known to be ignorant and cowardly, and laughingly referred to as the "joke of the countryside."103 These Indians were regarded as a lost cause, so much so, that the state refused to accept them in the National Guard. Díaz, however, was willing to try his hand at organization and "exhorted the despised mountaineers to make themselves fit to defend their villages."104 He drilled them in military exercises and athletics. Díaz also established a school to teach his personally drilled officers how to read and write. He was successful in transforming his Indian recruits into excellent soldiers, when Díaz returned to Oaxaca in 1876, he again appealed to the Indians for military service in his bid for power. He organized three battalions in Ixtlan and took Oaxaca, then went on to victory in Puebla with his triumphant forces.105

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., p. 65.
In the early days of his career, Díaz successfully cultivated the Indians of his region and was able to instill in them his own sense of discipline by the force of his strong personality.

As Díaz became more powerful politically and involved with the problems of public administration, he seemed to lose the rapport he once shared with the Indians. Díaz had changed since the time he kept company with his Indian hunting companions in Oaxaca. Now he was president of a nation, one who was also intent upon making his country a major power in the tradition of the United States and Europe. He abandoned the habits of his youth which had endeared him to the native peoples for the more sophisticated, urbane lifestyle of the European.

When cases involving land disputes were brought to the President's attention, Díaz shifted the responsibility elsewhere. Indians who appealed land decisions were met with indifference from Díaz and the Chamber of Deputies. In some cases, there were punished for filing complaints. 106 In February, 1904, for example, the administrator of the hacienda of Yautacpec requested a decision in his dispute with the Indians who claimed their lands had been unfairly seized. Díaz chose to refer the matter to the Governor of Guanajuato, for he did not wish to make the decision himself. 107 In passing the responsibility of decision-making in this case to a local official, Díaz could not be criticized if the verdict met with disfavor. The President was willing to listen to complaints but at no time did he commit himself to a particular side nor did he display any sympathy


107 González Navarro, "Propiedad y trabajo," Historia Moderna IV, 208.
for the landless Indians. The hacendados were more likely to win their cases over the Indian in any regard.

It was apparent from his land legislation that Díaz did not think the Indians were capable of improving agricultural output for the state, or if they were potentially capable, he did not have the time or the patience to wait for the natives to abandon their primitive methods of farming for more modern techniques. Therefore the President put his faith into the European immigrant to stimulate agricultural growth in Mexico. Díaz did nothing to alleviate the situation of the Indians. The unfair seizure of lands to accommodate the economic desires of the planter class was destructive to the Indians' welfare. The President made no attempt to replace what he had taken away.

The Mayas of Yucatán fought very hard to keep their lands, and in 1891 and 1892 there were riots in the districts of Maxcanú and Péto by Indians who refused to allow the division of their ejidos. In 1896 Díaz made some effort to curb land abuses and speculation by enacting a law which gave poor laborers ownership of the land they already held and to the pueblos which were already established. 108 Another law enacted in 1902 provided

...que desautorizó el deslinde de baldíos por compañías, prohibió el pago de subvenciones con baldíos y facultó al ejecutivo federal para reservar parte de éstos, con destino a usos públicos, colonias y bosques. 109

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109 Ibid.
However, Díaz's attempts to curb abuses regarding land came too late, for the damage was already done. Also, despite the President's good intentions, abuses continued in the state of Yucatán. His remedies came too late to be effective, for the President's land policies, which were geared towards making unused lands agriculturally productive and profitable, caused the Indians to suffer the greatest losses. They were the victims of Díaz's drive for national progress. It was Díaz's policies which ultimately forced them into servage and a lifetime of plantation labor.

Though Díaz may not have intentionally set out to ruin the lives of the native peoples, his legislative measures directly affected their livelihoods and did not work to their advantage.

Foreigners who were acquainted with Díaz believed that the President was the friend of the common people and that he was unjustly blamed for the wrongs suffered by the Indians. One of the Porfirian apologists suggested that the abuses against the Indians were committed without the President's knowledge and that he had been "badly advised." 110 Another Díaz admirer observed that the President regarded himself as the "father of his ethnologically and socially variegated people." 111 A North American who was a personal friend of Díaz's wife commented that she was unaware of any problems among the hacienda Indians. In this observer's view, the native people seemed contented and respectful in the relation-

110 John De Kay, Dictators of Mexico (London: E. Wilson, 1914), pp. 6-3.

ship they had with the planters. She also added that Porfirio Díaz knew his people "as no other Mexican ruler has ever known them." 112

Other North American writers and commentators who met President Díaz tended to think very highly of him. Anthropologist Frederick Starr believed that Díaz owed his greatness to the Indian blood he possessed, which the scientist thought contributed to the formation of Díaz's strong character. 113 According to Starr, Díaz realized what the problems of the Indians were and that he always saw to it that there was at least one person in each Indian town who could speak Spanish and the native dialect so that the Indians could comprehend what was happening in their communities. This local agent was to act in the capacity of secretario for the town and aid the Indians in their dealings with strangers. 114 Díaz may have tried to help the Indians with these local agents to establish better communication, but this would have been difficult to accomplish throughout the nation because of the many native dialects.

Starr believed that the Indians were ignorant, superstitious and illiterate. He also thought that the name of Díaz was probably the only familiar name to them outside that of their jefe político. 115 It was


114 Ibid.

115 Ibid., p. 18.
doubtful that the Indians even knew the name of their governor. Notions
of government as the white population understood it were vague to them.
However, because the Indian did not understand a great many things
such as the republican system of government, etc., it did not mean that
he was lacking in intelligence. Their neglected state had limited their
range of thought.\textsuperscript{116} Nor was the Indian a law or cowardly figure; he was
conservative, suspicious and poor because he was uneducated. Starr felt
that Díaz was generally inclined to be kind to the natives and knew them
quite well. However, the President failed to help them by developing their
ability and potential talents. He realized that it was much easier to
treat the Indians as children, supervising them as a separate section of
society. According to Starr, this was the cause of Díaz's failure to
integrate the Indians into the nation. He was content to leave them
separated and uneducated. Rather than instruct the Indians to become
responsible citizens of the Republic, Díaz chose to deal with the native
races in the simplest way possible. He was willing to leave Mexico's
six million Indians alone as long as they paid their contribution tax.\textsuperscript{117}
The Indians never learned their duties as citizens outside of their
villages or haciendas. They were never taught to think of themselves as
Mexicans rather than Mayans, Zapotecans, Aztecs, etc.\textsuperscript{118} Through Díaz
legislation, the Indians were given no consideration by the State as their

\textsuperscript{116}Frederick Starr, \emph{In Indian Mexico} (Chicago: Forbes and Company, 1908), p. 82.

\textsuperscript{117}Starr, "The Mexican People," \emph{Mexico and The Caribbean}, pp. 27-8.

\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., p. 28. (This statement is also made by Robert Redfield, "The Indian in Mexico," \emph{American Academy of Political and Social Science Atlanta CXXVIII} (March, 1940); 137.)
towns became depopulated and they were forced to become part of the vast plantation system. Díaz permitted abuses to suit the needs of the planter class.

In the area of education, the President again proved a disappointment in providing instruction for the Indians. His attitude towards them had undergone a marked change, for once he attained the presidency, he ignored them. Yet as Governor of Oaxaca, Díaz founded many schools in his home state and also in Tamaulipas and Chiapas.\footnote{Creelman, Díaz, p. 367.} As President, however, his interest in enforcing and promoting compulsory education and the building of schools to educate the Indian population diminished greatly. When Baranda and Sierra worked for the compulsory education laws of 1888-89, Díaz took no part at all in this effort. His only contribution was to praise the new laws which required children to attend school. Díaz mentioned the fact that there were already 300 children who learned to speak Spanish as a result of the education laws.\footnote{Powell, "Mexican Intellectuals," HAHR, p. 25.}

Nevertheless, Díaz praised the promulgation of education among the native races, the truth was that these well-intended educational efforts never reached the majority of Indians because they were firmly bound to the haciendas and could only attend school if their employer permitted it. Still, there was also no one to enforce the rule that the Indians attend these schools. Although the Federal Government encouraged the spread of education in theory, it did not give the effort its full

\footnote{Creelman, Díaz, p. 367.}

\footnote{Powell, "Mexican Intellectuals," HAHR, p. 25.}
support.121 Basically Porfirio Díaz made very little effort as President to help the cause of educating the Indians and did not see to the enforcement of the education laws throughout the states.

In the Yucatán, educational reforms were implemented due to the interest of Governor Molina. Because of his enthusiasm for widespread education, he encouraged the legislature to increase funding for educational programs within his state.122 Again, however, this was a locally directed project, not the work of Díaz and the Federal Government.

Just as Díaz fell short in the enforcement of the education laws, he also failed to provide the Indians with a basic working knowledge of political affairs, particularly in instructing them in their rights as citizens. Often, the only justice the Indian was aware of was that of the jefe or his hacendado. There was no doubt that the Indian supporters such as Justo Sierra firmly believed that education would eventually solve the problem of a politically ignorant Indian. As it was, however, the científicos, Díaz's elite corps of advisors, and the President himself did not believe the Indians were capable of political instruction.

It is very important to emphasize the economic motives which guided the formation of Porfirio Díaz's Indian policy in the state of Yucatán and elsewhere in the nation. In the many telegrams sent between Mérida and Mexico City, the major points of discussion centered upon

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economic development and occasional requests for favors. But in the Yucatecan correspondence economics dominated the messages as well as the Mayas who were the culprits responsible for the delay of progress in the state. In August, 1900, for example, Díaz was terribly upset when he learned of a delay in the completion of the railroad line he was involved with at the time. Governor Cantón explained that the reason for the delay was that the Southeastern Railway Company had sent several engineers to define the boundaries for the railroad which would occupy Indian lands which had been earmarked for the company in September, 1899. However, this area was considered dangerous by the visiting engineers who had received an advance warning from the local jefe that an Indian uprising was feared imminent. Cantón wired Díaz to determine how to proceed, noting that the land involved was an area where Indian insubordination and the assassinations of several jefés had occurred in the past. Díaz's response to the Governor and to other local officials in such instances was to send in the federal forces to aid local troops control these situations when attacks became too frequent. Díaz spared neither men nor money to rid the Yucatán of its "Indian Problem."

The President considered the matter of the Mayas very important and frequently discussed the situation in his annual message to the National Congress beginning as early as 1879, when Díaz informed the

123 Colección Porfirio Díaz, 003316, Cantón to Díaz, August 10, 1900.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., 002188, Cantón to Díaz, May 19, 1900.
government that as a consequence of the invasions of the state of Yucatán led by the barbarous Indians of Chan Santa Cruz, he found it necessary to reinforce the local militia and delivered additional arms for their use. 126 Again, in April, 1886, Díaz gave a detailed description of a skirmish at Jototchen where soldiers were able to force 2,000 Mayas to retreat after a difficult battle. 127 These were only a few instances where Díaz gave progress reports regarding the Mayas in his addresses to the Congress. The frequency of these reports demonstrates that Díaz regarded the Maya problem as a serious one and made extensive efforts to suppress the rebel forces. Díaz was determined that the Indians submit to his authority and that they adapt themselves "to the uses and customs of civilized life." 128 The President cleverly used the Indian situation in the Yucatán to force through his plans for the annexation of Quintana Roo. 129 He always had an excuse to justify his own position when it came to the Mayas. By creating a federal territory in this region, Díaz stated that the pacification and reorganization of this section of the Republic could be successfully completed. 130

Thus in the case of the Yucatán, Porfirian policy toward the

127 Ibid., 10 April 1886, p. 731.
128 Ibid., 10 April 1900, p. 734.
129 Ibid., 10 April 1901, p. 735.
130 Ibid., 16 September 1903, p. 737.
Indian was a destructive one. For the warring Maya it meant the end of a battle to destroy their white oppressors and the destruction of the isolated tribal government they had established in Chan Santa Cruz. The President showed no sign of friendliness nor abatement of the situation by at least discussing the reasons for Maya dissatisfaction. 131

For those Indians who remained on the plantations of the Yucatán, it was up to the hacendado to determine their fate. For all practical purposes, it was the planter who directly supervised the Indian in all aspects of everyday life. If the hacendado so chose, the Indian would receive religious instruction or primary instruction. He was the real ruler of the Indian, not the local or the federal government.

Local officials were not totally insensitive to the needs of the Indians as demonstrated by Creel who attempted to institute a homestead system in his state. Unlike Molina, Creel had some faith in the Indians and believed that native development would ultimately benefit the nation. His thoughts differed radically from Molina and the Positivists whose only faith was that of scientific economic progress to be achieved with the help of foreign investors and immigrants. In Porfirian Mexico it was generally on the local level that concern and aid was available. If the governor of a state was not interested in social improvements then nothing would be accomplished. The attempts to educate the Indians failed miserably because the federal government failed to enforce legislation. 132

131 New York Times, 7, 8, 9, 10 June 1910.
132 Creelman, Díaz, p. 388.
It cannot be simply stated that the Indians were indifferent to education, they had too much against them.

The intellectuals and Positivists also contributed towards the Indian problem in influencing Díaz's attitude in this situation. At the start of his career the President must have believed the Indians were capable of great accomplishments as evidenced by his effort to construct schools in his state and elsewhere. Also, the fact that his personal experience in providing education and military training for the Indians of his original army reflected a view on his part that the Indian was not a lost cause undeserving of attention. In spite of this, however, the Positivists and especially Limantour, the prime mover of Porfirián economic policy, believed that the last man to bring economic progress to the nation was the native. He was a hindrance not an asset. In this way, the Mexican Positivist helped to alienate Díaz from the native peoples and this resulted in a growing indifference on the President's part toward a wide sector of the population.

Díaz has been accused of genocide by Yucatecan historian Bernadino Mena Brito, who believed that Díaz and Molina were bent upon the destruction of the native races. This opinion is a harsh criticism of Díaz and his government, for it implies the direct intention of the President to exterminate the Indians. Although Díaz demanded obedience to his rule and employed severe measures to achieve his goals, he acted as a military commander, treating both the Mayas and the Yaquis as enemy forces.

CHAPTER V

CIVILIZATION AND PROGRESS

The economic picture of the Yucatán during the Porfiriato was a prosperous one, with the state accumulating the bulk of its income from the profits of henequen or sisal hemp. In the year 1900 alone, the sale of 9,626,872 bales of henequen netted a profit of 431 million pesos.¹ Henequen planters profited greatly from the sales throughout the last years of the Díaz regime, though profits did drop slightly for a short period. Regardless of the amount of profit, it can be stated that the planter class was the recipient of henequen profits, not the laborers who worked on the plantations. The wages of the Mayas and mestizos were very insignificant during the Porfiriato. The average salary of the daily worker or jomalero had shown an increase from 15 centavos per day in the year 1850, to 30 centavos by 1900. However, even this rate varied among the labor force as many hacendados paid their workers according to the amount they produced.² The economic status of the peons reflected no increase during the same period, with the Indians earning the same income in 1910 as in the period of Independence.³


The great drive to modernize Mexico's economy did not serve to benefit the plantation workers, particularly the Mayas who worked as debt servitors. For the Indians of the Yucatán material conditions were as primitive as ever. When henequen planters launched their plans for accelerated sisal production at the beginning of the Díaz regime, they exploited the native labor force more than ever to guarantee large profits for themselves--profits that in no way were intended to reach the Indian or help change his condition. Increased henequen productivity spelled disaster for the Indians who were now pressured to produce their quota of henequen leaves. This was often at the expense of neglecting their own land so that bare subsistence levels were altered. More serious was the loss of land suffered by the Indians during the Porfiriato which contributed to increased henequen production in many instances and greater profit levels for the men who robbed the Mayas of their holdings. Between the years 1878-1912, the Mayas lost 66 ejidos totaling over 134,000 hectares of land.4

One of the most apparent effects of Porfirián economic policies was an overall increase in Mexico's population. During the last decade of the Díaz administration the total population of Mexico reached 13.6 million, "with more than half of the growth occurring during the last quarter of the century."5 In the Yucatán, the population figures increased, but the


5Vernon, Mexico's Development, p. 49.
increase was not as significant as the rate of growth on the national level. The population of the Yucatán at the beginning of the Porfiriato in 1877 was 282,934 and reached 309,631 in the year 1900. By the end of the period in 1910, this figure climbed to 339,531. Overall, the population began to decrease at a rate of 1.1% annually after 1900.

The first national census to be officially undertaken by the Díaz administration was in the year 1895. Although the government census covered the whole peninsula, it was a trial run and had its faults. The census figures of 1910, which was the last census taken before the Revolution, was considered far more accurate and was also the first census to include the territory of Quintana Roo as a separate element. According to the 1910 figures, the population of the entire Yucatán Peninsula was 436,693.

Although population figures grew in the late nineteenth-century, this began to level off because a lag in subsistence agriculture occurred as well as a decline in the promotion of commercial agriculture. In the last years of the Díaz administration, increased wheat, corn, and bean production just barely exceeded the population growth. The situation warranted the importation of corn to meet domestic needs. For the Yucatán

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7Vernon, Mexico's Development, p. 49.
9Ibid.
10Ibid.
11Vernon, Mexico's Development, p. 53.
and Veracruz, it was easier to rely upon foreign markets for certain foodstuffs since the cost of transportation was less than the cost of transporting these products from areas of Mexico which normally produced surplus food.  

The lag in subsistence agriculture affected the Indian population greatly. As the relative price of food rose in the closing years of the Porfiriato, the salary of the peons did not rise along with it. Also, it became very expensive to buy goods from other regions of the nation because of the distance involved in transporting products to the Yucatán. Thus, while the henequen planters and their families could afford to purchase goods from outside areas, the Indians and other poorly paid laborers could not do this. According to Matías Romero, the Indians were fortunate that they were sturdy by nature, for this helped them survive the inadequate diet and shabby housing conditions. Therefore, while the Yucatecan Treasury grew wealthy and the sisal planters became rich, the situation of the Indians during the Porfiriato can only be described as dismal.

In 1907, the Yucatán began to feel the effects of a depression in world henequen prices. The lowering of prices in 1904 and again during

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12 Ibid.
14 Matías Romero, Mexico and The United States (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1898), p. 78.
1907-1908, bankrupted some of the planters who had recently expanded their plantations. Those who were experiencing financial losses abstained from developing new varieties of sisal plants and further increases in production were halted. The reason for the decline in sisal prices was essentially related to Mexico's banking procedures. According to Vernon's analysis, by 1907, the banks were increasing their credit to Mexico's liquid agriculture, renewing old loans as a matter of course until they seemed perpetual obligations. With the shortage of funds in 1907, the margin of safety of the banks was suddenly imperiled.15

In addition to the banking problem, Yucatecan planters were now faced with the appearance of a growing competitor in the international market as the Philippines began to produce henequen which was regarded as superior to the sisal produced in the Yucatán.16 Yucatecan banks were also forced to curtail credit as well, since there were not enough funds. Although the future of the henequen industry appeared bleak for awhile, it was not long before prosperity returned at the onset of World War I. But towards the closing years of the Porfiriato, the economic situation of the henequen planters was grim and the industry static. This depression was a contributory factor in causing some Maza loyalists to wonder whether Porfirián economic thinking was as sound as in the past.17

In spite of their temporary financial setbacks, the henequen growers were still more fortunate than their Indian laborers. Rapid economic

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15 Vernon, Mexico's Development, p. 55.


17 Vernon, Mexico's Development, p. 55.
development caused disruption in Porfirian society. Landowners were unhappy with the depression in world henequen prices, but the dislocation and misery experienced by the Indians in the Yucatán was far more intense than the dissatisfied elite who ruled their lives. A whole way of life had been upset because of the impact of Porfirian economic goals.

While it was true that the lifestyle of the Mayas had been disturbed in the past by the colonial regime and subsequent governments, the exploitation endured by the Indians during the Porfirian period was much more devastating. The Indian of the colonial period enjoyed some protection because of the Church, but this was a moral and legal protection. As was evidenced in the Church Congresses which convened during this period, the moral leadership of the Mexican Church was ineffective and had been greatly weakened over the years. In modern Porfirian Mexico there really was no protection for the Indians at all. The Church was no longer in a position to protect them although it might have been willing to do so.

Still, the Díaz regime intended to keep the Church in its place. The científicos certainly had no interest in promoting the welfare of the Indians whom they thought to be an obstacle to progress. As far as they were concerned, the status of the Indians could remain exactly as it was, for they believed that...

To squander fiscal resources on humanitarian and welfare programs among Indians and mestizos, who were characterized as being unscientific, fanatic and superstitious—seemed an obvious economic and political fallacy.¹⁸

In general, it was the opinion of the Científicos that the Indians were

incapable of any professional occupation and were suited basically to
two forms of labor: field hands or factory laborers. There should be
no time or money wasted on these useless people while Mexico had important
national goals to achieve.

While President Díaz's major focus in the Yucatán's affairs was
primarily geared towards the advancement and prosperity of the region
by means of a booming henequen and railroad industry, he gave equal
attention to the problem of the rebellious Mayas who thwarted his efforts
to fulfill his plans for the state, including the settlement of vast areas
of open land. In his campaign to subdue the Maya forces, Díaz could count
upon the support of the elite planter class that stood to gain from the
subjugation of the Indians. Two years before the fall of Chan Santa Cruz
in 1902, the president of the state legislature, Alvaro de Péon y Regil,
promised that he and other state officials would extend their strongest
efforts to deal with the Mayas once they were suppressed. Péon had
organized a special Junta with the complete approval and support of his
constituents. The primary work of this body was to civilize the Mayas.19
Many distinguished Yucatecans signed their names to a document which re-
lected their interest in the pacification of the Mayas and the work of
civilization. This document was to be included in a future constitution which
gave the special Junta governing powers over the Indians.

The cooperation which existed among Díaz, the state authorities, the
hacendados and the rurales who could be relied upon to aid the planters

19 Colacción Porfirio Díaz, 002092, Péon et. al. to Díaz, May 11, 1900.
quell troublesome Indians, demonstrated their interest in a common cause—to maintain a constant, disciplined labor force on the henequén plantations which provided profits for the economy of the state and the planter class. Also, money was of interest to those indirectly involved with henequén, such as the hunters of fugitive laborers, for example. For Díaz, the plantations provided a solution to dealing with rebels or potential rebels by keeping them occupied on the sisal estates. It also allowed the President to keep in frequent contact with his operatives in the state, thus sealing the ties which had taken Díaz so many years to establish.

Although the Mayas were exposed to modern methods of agriculture on the plantations and also led strictly supervised lives on the estates, Indian customs managed to survive the Porfiriato and after. According to anthropologist Robert Redfield, the strongest evidence of the survival of the Maya tradition in Mexico was the continued use of the native dialect rather than Spanish. In southeastern Yucatán, the Yucatec Maya speak their native dialect as the single language of the region. Redfield's study, as well as that of Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah, indicate that the Yucatán was and remains today one of the most striking Indian areas in Mexico. The geographical regions which are most heavily populated by the Indians include the southern edge of Tamaulipas to the southern area near the Pacific and west to Michoacán and then east to the border of Guatemala. It is this part of Mexico that is referred to as "Indian Mexico." Within the borders of this area are concentrated approximately

20 Robert Redfield, "The Indian in Mexico," American Academy of Political and Social Science Annals CCVIII (March, 1940), 137, and Cook and Borah, Essays in Population History II: 179.
21 Redfield, "The Indian in Mexico," p. 136.
nine-tenths of the Indian-speaking population and it is also the area where traditional customs and local influences strongly pervade Indian life. In the Yucatán's outlying rural areas and also in the small towns, not only the Mayas, but the mestizo population as well, tend to speak the Maya dialect of the region since Spanish is not commonly used in some of the more isolated parts of the peninsula.\(^2^2\) It is in such villages and settlements that many of the modern-day Mayas are to be found. They do not generally live in Mérida. Names provided Redfield with the key to determining where the pure Indian lived. Mestizo and white residents of the region use names that are quite distinct from names commonly used by the Mayas. Indians used their true surnames, such as Pech and Nah, and did not attempt to use the Spanish counterparts such as Pérez or Aguilar.\(^2^3\)

The few Mayas who lived in the cities rather than rural communities showed some signs of modernization and gradually came to adopt the lifestyle of the mestizo and white population in the area they inhabited. In the rural areas, however, where social contacts between the Indian and non-Indian population were less likely to occur, the Indians were inclined to live as they had in the past in the tradition of their ancestors. Also, because they were removed and led more of an isolated existence in the rural regions, the Indians tended to maintain their own language. In some instances, the Spanish-speaking people of the area constituted a minority, and as such had to learn the local dialect in order to transact their business in the Maya community.

\(^2^2\)Ibid., p. 133.

\(^2^3\)Ibid.
The Maya Indians maintained their Indian character or distinctiveness in the area of religion as well as in language. In southeastern Yucatán especially, the Mayas continued to preserve certain aspects of the old religion and used the names of ancient deities. Rituals and prayers were still performed and recited by a priestly group which was also involved in practicing magic. During the Porfiriato the Mayas had not abandoned their belief in the "personalized concept of nature" which was a carry-over from earlier days. The Mayas of the newly established territory of Quintana Roo also preserved the ancient religion mixed with Christian concepts as they were taught by the colonial missionaries. Instead of reverting to primitive forms of pagan ritual, the Indians of this area continued to practice Christianity in the same form their ancestors did in the period of the Spanish Conquest. Change had not reached these people throughout the years. Because of their isolation they had not received the education and religious instruction they might have had if they had lived in more heavily settled areas. The Mayas had not become acculturated while Porfirio Díaz governed Mexico.

It was the village that was the most important element in the life of the Mayas and which contributed to the preservation of their tightly-knit society. Working the land as a collective labor force served as a powerful bond in keeping the Maya society together. It was this type of solidarity and unity that the Porfirián government attempted to destroy.

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24 Ibid., p. 136.

25 Ibid.
Once they left their communal lands the Yavas were forced to deal with "civilized" or modern life in the progressive spirit of the Porfirian period. The Indians were forced to learn how to use money, to speak the Spanish language, and to cope with modern society. However, the Indians still had not become citizens in the fullest sense despite their situation. Some were not interested in fulfilling the white man's expectation that they become useful citizens and failed to adjust as their overlords might have preferred.

Those Indians who became mestizos were often despised by the Indians and looked down upon by the white man. The mestizo was a half caste who had mixed in with the non-Indian population. The mestizo was distinguished from the Indian by his manner of dress and his ability to speak Spanish. White society excluded the mestizos from its churches, fiestas and barrios. The mestizo of the Porfiriato, however, did manage to improve his financial status and become involved in occupations other than agriculture unlike the pure Indian. Now the mestizo who had risen in society in his own fashion could exploit the Indian. Mestizos were builders, carpenters, salesmen and overseers on Yucatecan plantations. They were also permitted to join the army and rise through promotion if they wished to improve their status in society. The mestizo clung to no tradition. If the Indian married outside his own people he was, effect, abandoning the old ways for the new and ultimately assimilated himself in Mexican society.

27 Ibid., p. 261.
The Mayas who chose to remain within the confines of their own society and did not become involved with the non-Indian segment, desired above all else to be left alone. They wanted a return to the past and the ancient way of life, the good old days in a sense. When the Díaz brand of "civilization" arrived in the Yucatán with the triumph of Ignacio Bravo at Chan Santa Cruz, the rebels who had resisted the federal forces for so long were finally forced to surrender. The President and Governor Cantón congratulated Bravo for his success. However, the Mayas were not content to live under federal rule for long. It was curious that that Sociedad Patriótica Yucateca, an organization founded in 1887 after the Yucatecan forces suffered disastrous losses to the rebels at the battle of Tepich, the society's aim was to "foment a new campaign" against the rebel Mayas, to establish a frontier boundary at Belize, and to ransom prisoners. 28 The society's members had fought the rebels for a longer time than the federal forces which arrived in the Yucatán in the late nineties. As a result of their own personal experiences with the rebels, the group withheld its congratulations to Bravo for four years, since they were not as certain as Díaz that the war was truly over. The society presented Bravo with a sword of honor in recognition of his victory. 29

Bravo governed the newly named Santa Cruz de Bravo, now capital of Quintana Roo, as a military camp. The General had balconies added to the single-story buildings which the Mayas had constructed during the war.

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
Barracks were established around the plaza. In addition, Bravo introduced the telegraph and electric lights to southeastern Yucatán, and also constructed a reservoir which had water pumped into it from a nearby cenote (well). Bravo then turned the local church into a prison and filled it with convict labor. 30 He was a ruthless leader feared not only by the Indians but his own men as well. His reputation was somewhat tarnished, however, as reports of his acceptance of graft from lumber and chicle contractors who needed both his "protection" and licenses, became widely known. 31 General Bravo governed his territory harshly and at the same time he implemented Porfirian programs of modernization and civilization throughout Quintana Roo.

Like the Mayas who had been exploited and subjected to the cruel aspects of the Díaz regime at the hands of the henequen planters, the rebel Indians also failed to become "civilized" in accordance with the policies of Bravo and the President. While Bravo's peace lasted for a longer period of time than in previous truces, the war between the Mayas and the white ruling class was not over yet. Rebel Mayas continued their struggle by destroying railroads at every opportunity, interfering with the telegraph system, the water deposits, etc. Anything which the Porfirian government attempted to construct they set out to destroy. The Maya War continued beyond the administration of Porfirio Díaz and into the Madero government. Madero attempted to make peace with the Indians by sending a new governor to nego-

30 Ibid., p. 266.
31 Ibid.
tiate with Maya General Maximo Caulich, but the bitter feelings of the past years were still too fresh in the minds of the general and his forces, so that the new governor and Madero were suspicious characters in their point of view. The truce reached by Madero's government was short-lived and in 1915 the Mayas decided to renew their battle for a return to their old way of life. They found a new leader in Francisco May. The rebels claimed that a recent outbreak of smallpox was a sign of divine punishment in retribution for having allowed Mexican soldiers to occupy the Church of Chan Santa Cruz. 32 The Mayas of this region, which was once part of the Yucatán, were a fiercely independent people. The Mayas rejected all outsiders who attempted to disrupt their community, including the government of Porfirio Díaz.

Mayas who were not as openly rebellious as those in the more isolated regions of the state seemed to accept their fate under the rule of Díaz, but they too, desired a return to their former way of life. Except in the cities of the Yucatán, the efforts of the President and his administrators to civilize the Indians and try to force them to become contributing members of society was a failure. But for the majority of Mayas who inhabited the rural sections of the state and had no real contact with the modern world, loyalties remained strongly local and labor was forcefully obtained. The Indians of the Yucatán, although exploited and robbed by the Porfirian government, as well as by the officials of their own state, managed to survive and preserve their heritage.

32González Navarro, Raza y Tierra, p. 278.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that the Indians of Porfirian Yucatán were treated with indifference and neglect by the government of Porfirio Díaz. There was no concern for the Mayas and the conditions under which they lived during this period as far as the federal government was concerned. The administration took interest in the activities of the Mayas who raided and destroyed white settlements which were viewed as economic losses for the state. Díaz himself professed outward interest in the condition of the Indian when it was politically expedient or would benefit his reputation internationally. Personally, however, there was a great change in the Porfirio Díaz of Oaxaca who shared an intimate, friendly relationship with the Indians of his home state, with whom he lived and worked. Once he became President of Mexico, Díaz's attitude towards the native population showed a definite change, largely due to the influence of his científicos colleagues and advisors. It was men like José Yves Limantour and Governor Olegario Molina who had the President's ear while he reached the height of his power and influenced the formation of his policy, particularly in economics. To these men the Indians were not economically productive and therefore of little or no use to the State. They were useful as beasts of burden but worthless.
otherwise and should not be regarded as potentially productive people who would contribute their share to the community or to their country.

In general, the Indian policy of Porfirio Díaz did change from paternalistic to indifferent. In the Yucatán, particularly, Díaz Indian policy appeared to have two basic aspects. One, the President regarded the rebel Mayas as a warring faction within his government, and here his policy was formed along those lines. Federal troops who were sent into the Yucatán to quell the Maya raids and rebellions treated the Indians as they would any other enemy of the State, for the Mayas who operated a separate government at Chan Santa Cruz were challenging the federal forces as a separate power. They were not interested in becoming part of the Mexican nation and wanted none of Porfirio Díaz or his appointees as their rulers. These Indians attempted to maintain their own culture, their own traditions and their own way of life which they had preserved over the centuries. These Indians had watched the Díaz Government rob them of their lands and leave them with little choice but to work as plantation labor. The Mayas of Chan Santa Cruz refused to give up their freedom and instead chose to live in the remote jungle regions of the Yucatán.

Another aspect of the rebel Maya situation in Porfirian Yucatán concerns the establishment of the federal territory of Quintana Roo. It has been established that Díaz was aware of the potential economic value of this section of the Yucatán and that Yucatecans had failed to bring the area under their control. In forcing the Yucatecans to surrender Quintana Roo to the Federal
Government, Díaz cleverly established his own control over the region on the pretext that only he and the national army could handle the rebels and at long last the area would be open to settlement and economic development. The establishment of this federal territory also meant that Díaz now had a permanent base of authority in the Yucatán Peninsula. He had successfully eliminated the geographical and communication barriers that existed before his terms in office. Quintana Roo allowed Porfirián officials closer contact with the southeast and also provided the Government with an opportunity to further enrich itself. The creation of Quintana Roo was a slap in the face to the Yucatecans who had spent their money and fought for so many years against the rebels. They "voted" to cede the land to the national government and saw their state dismembered to satisfy the political and economic ambitions of Porfirio Díaz.

Economics was a key to the formation of Díaz Indian policy in the Yucatán. The Mayas who were not at war with the government and worked the henequen plantations were the victims of economic exploitation by the hacendado class and indirectly the federal government. The debt servitude system which characterized the sisal plantations in the Yucatán was used to bring prosperity and progress to the state. As henequen became of greater value during the Díaz years so did the degree of exploitation. Laws were ignored or distorted so that hacendados could add to their labor force, voluntarily or involuntarily--it really made no difference
to the planter as long as he had sufficient labor to produce his crop. It was economics that also influenced Porfirián generals and minor agents such as the *rurales* to accept bribes, turn their gaze elsewhere, or directly participate in providing plantation labor for the Yucatán. Debt servitude became a big business in itself, and because of this, the hacendados could count upon the cooperation of the *rurales* or the *cochechadores* who apprehended fugitive Indians from the sisal estates.

Not all of the Mayas lived a miserable life on the henequen estate, for there were some hacendados who believed that they had a responsibility for their laborers and provided them with proper housing, education and religious training. However, these hacendados were few in number. Most Indians were not the contented, docile creatures Díaz said they were in his address to the Yucatecans on his 1906 visit. The hacendado class, represented by Molina, managed to put on a fine show for the President, and he in turn, used it for his own political advantage to convince the foreign press that reports of slavery were exaggerations and that in fact the Mayas were contented and satisfied.

Although the Díaz Government did not possess or even believe in a program of social welfare geared to meet the needs of the Indians, the Indians did have some friends who were willing to speak and act on their behalf, including the Mexican Catholic Church. But this was not enough to guarantee success in Díaz Mexico, for if Díaz was not
interested in social action then very little could be done to alleviate their condition. Unless the hacendados took it upon themselves to improve the material welfare of their laborers, no one else could. The Church was aware of the importance of the hacendados and appealed to them to cooperate in a program of social and moral betterment. But their suggestions cost money and the hacendados were not about to contribute money to a fund which would allow the Indian to buy land, machinery, etc.

Porfirian Indian policy varied from state to state as was seen in the case of Chihuahua. Not all states of Mexico resembled the Yucatán, which was a vital part of the nation's economy. Here, economic considerations dominated thinking—from the governor, the hacendado, and Díaz himself. Politics also were a consideration, but less so once Díaz had eliminated those he had no use for and engineered the election of his own favorites in the Yucatán. Díaz formed his policy toward the Indians as economics dictated. He promoted European immigration and settlement in the Yucatán as he did in other areas of the country and did not rely upon the native element to develop its own potential and contribute to the State in a more productive way than in the past. For Díaz, it was easier to bring in people from outside his country rather than expend any effort educating and training the indigenous population of the Yucatán or elsewhere.

The case of the Yucatán also demonstrated that there was indeed social mobility in Porfirian Mexico. This was particularly
true of the mestizos who assimilated themselves into Mexican society when they purchased lands of their own to grow sisal and entered occupations other than agriculture. From the mestizo element came the Yucatán's tailors, carpenters, tradespeople, etc., who could supply the wealthy planters and their families with goods and services on a greater scale than before. As henequen became a highly profitable industry in the Díaz period, the Yucatecans ventured forth as well, sending their children abroad for their education and to travel. The confinement and isolation of the Yucatán came to an end with Porfirio Díaz.

Díaz was successful in modernizing the state, especially with the introduction of a railroad system which linked the major cities of the Yucatán with other important locations in Mexico. Sisal was easily transported and in greater quantities now that railroads existed and shipping was improved and modernized. Progress had been achieved in many instances, but at great expense to the Mayas of the state. Díaz upset a people who had lived in an ordered world which also gave them an identity. Porfirian policy served to alter the peaceful world of the Mayas in attempting to destroy their communal existence.

The President played a great role in changing the face of the state as well, and in doing so successfully, drew the Yucatán into the national sphere of influence during his administration. It was Díaz who attempted to end the state's isolation. Politically, it
might have proven harmful to his government had the Yucatán been allowed to continue in its own fashion, with friction among the strong, independent-minded politicians who governed the state to serve their own particular interests. Díaz's visit in February, 1906 was actually the culmination of years of gradual manipulation of Yucatecan political affairs by the President and his carefully chosen civil servants who implemented his plans for economic progress. In some ways, the presidential visit might well be regarded as the "reconquest" of the Yucatán.

Firstly, the presence of President Díaz in the Yucatán signified the reconquest of political power within the state as the Federal Government began to impose a firm rule over the locality. As was earlier described, there was a gradual but noticeable increase in the authority of Díaz over local officials. Every appointment, no matter how seemingly insignificant, was subject to his approval. Another feature of increased federal interest in the state was the growth of a large bureaucracy which constituted the Díaz political machine. Favorites such as Molina and Peón had to be rewarded for services rendered and popular military personalities had to be "promoted" and moved about from one place to another. Díaz never gave cause for alienation or offense among his servants. No matter how close one appeared to be to the President, he was carefully observed and kept in frequent contact with his benefactor. Shuffling generals and colonels about in various posts prevented them from establishing any power base of their own, and thus we find men like Octavio Rosado, Daniel Traconis, Canton, etc., frequently moved around. Military personal might find themselves on the battlefield one year and governors the next.
As for the formation of political parties within the Yucatán, it was clear that they existed only because Díaz permitted them to exist. Never were their members opposed to any Porfirián policies. The political organizations existed to promote the President's choices for political office and to insure their elections. Candidates for local offices who enjoyed Presidential favor never lost an election in the state of Yucatán.

Besides appointing loyal military men and civilians who met Porfirián political standards, Díaz was also better able to impose central control over the state by improving communications between Mérida and Mexico City. This brought the state into closer contact with national affairs and ended its former isolationism. The railroad, the telegraph and telephone all served to draw the Yucatán out of its sheltered existence. Molina was aware of the meaning of Díaz's drive towards progress and modernization by forcing the state into the mainstream of Mexican life. On this point Molina informed the President that his visit was of transcendental importance for the identification of this region with the rest of the Republic. ¹ The prominent Mexican historian, Albino Acosta, regarded the presidential visit in similar terms, stating that the presence of Díaz in the Yucatán gave the citizens pride in being an integral part of the Mexican nationality. ² It was evident that Díaz successfully stirred national feelings among the spectators who felt highly honored that the President came to witness their achievements.

¹ Colección Porfirio Díaz, Molina to Díaz, 28 February 1903.
² Albino Acosta, Evolución histórica de las relaciones políticas entre México y Yucatán (Mexico: Imprenta Mullerinos, 1907), p. 5.
For one day, at least, they were no longer Yucatecans but Mexicans. The President had played a great role in changing the face of the state, and in so doing, he successfully drew the Yucatán into the national sphere of influence during his administration. It was during the Porfiriato that the state's isolation came to an end. Politically, it might have proven harmful to his government if the Yucatán had been allowed to continue in its own fashion, particularly where friction existed among the strong, independent minded politicians who governed the state to serve their own interests.

In addition to establishing political control over the Yucatecans, Díaz also met with some success in eliminating the rebels as a threat to progress in the Yucatán. By sending federal forces into southeastern Yucatán, Díaz was able to establish his authority over the state even more firmly, for the Yucatán revealed how weak it really was in not being able to defend its own territory and its citizens from the incursions of the hostile Maya. Yucatecans had given both men and money to defeat the Maya and yet were unable to suppress them after years of battle. Now they also had the additional responsibility of supporting the federal forces, and as mentioned earlier, this matter caused great concern when Díaz attempted to annex Quintana Roo as a federal territory.

During the administration of Porfirio Díaz nothing was achieved for the Indians of the Yucatán. The harsh attitude of the planter class towards the native made improvement almost impossible. When the Governor, Molina, forced his estate laborers to work from dawn until dusk and
treated them as furniture, one could not expect greater cooperation from
his fellow hacendados in improving the quality of life for the Indian. 3
The truth was that the Yucatecan hacendados were not prepared to sacrifice
the loss of valuable labor and sisal profit which the native provided for
them. Planters would not admit to any injustice in regard to their
treatment of the Indian for in their minds they had committed no in-
justice. Disciplinary measures were standard practice and necessary to
maintain order on the henequen plantations of the Yucatán. The Secretary
of the Cámara, hacendado Felino G. Cantón, stated that without the use
of corporal punishment the Indians would do nothing. 4 He also indicated
that this type of punishment was commonplace on the haciendas in his state.
The criticisms of Turner and other journalists were met with counter-
attacks from the planters as well, for the planters felt they were perfectly
justified in the treatment of the native. They skirted over the slavery
issue by noting that the Mayas had voluntarily incurred their debts and
it was their duty to see it through. The Indians who were plantation
laborers because of their status as prisoners of war, such as the Yaqui and
captured Maya rebels, received no sympathy from the hacendados of Yucatán.
The fate of the Indians was of no great concern to their conquerors. There-
fore, in Porfirian Yucatán, suffering and hardship was a way of life for the
Indians on the sisal plantations.

Diaz himself proved a disappointment as far as the Indian was con-

3Bernadino Mena Brito, Reestructuración histórica de Yucatán
4Ibid., p. 252.
cerned, for during his administration nothing was done to improve the political status of the Indians. As Diaz himself stated in his interview with James Creelman in December, 1907, that even though the Indians constituted over half the country's population, they were indifferent to politics. It was the President's opinion that the Indians did not regard themselves as part of the society, that they did not think for themselves and preferred to depend upon those in authority. Diaz traced the roots of this dependency to the Spanish "who taught them to refrain from meddling in public affairs and rely upon the Government for guidance." 5

When the President was asked if he thought that the Indians were capable of higher development, he answered yes. He also stated that the Indians were a gentle and grateful people who had traditions of an "ancient civilization of their own," with the exception of the Yaqui and some of the Maya. 6 Yet this did not prevent them from rising above their abject condition and possibly entering professional occupations such as lawyers or engineers. 7

While it may be true that the dependency of the Indians can be traced to the Spaniards, the fact remains that succeeding governments, including that of Porfirio Diaz, did not take any steps to terminate this childlike

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 262.
state and integrate the Indians into the mainstream of Mexican society. The peonage system which Díaz condoned perpetuated this state of dependency on the part of the native. Also, the economic goals of the Porfirian administration caused the relationship between the hacendado and the peon to deteriorate due to the pressures of rapid economic development in the Yucatán. 8 The Indian continued to depend upon the planter for his economic survival while the profit-oriented hacendados seized communal lands to increase both the size and productivity of their estates. Molina, as has been demonstrated, had no second thoughts when it came time to confiscate Indian lands to add to his already vast estate holdings. During the Porfiriato Indian labor was exploited as never before to guarantee the nation and the planters great profits. In condoning the peonage system, Díaz made it possible for the planter elite to obtain land and labor to spur Mexican economic development. Díaz did not originate the system, yet he did nothing to curb its abuses. In this regard alone the President was no friend of the native races, and though he might boast of Indians who became lawyers, etc., they were a rarity in Díaz Mexico.

The main concern of the President in regard to his treatment of the Indians was obedience. That is what Díaz required above all from them, so that he could provide Mexico with the peace and stability she needed to become a first-rate power using her own resources. The actions Porfirio Díaz took to insure the annexation of Quintana Roo displayed his concern

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for peace and development. In this case he subdued the Indians who were an obstacle to the economic development of an area thought to possess great wealth. President Díaz had gone to great lengths to make certain that the way was paved for the further exploration and development of this long held Maya land of Yucatán.
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Articles


APPENDIX A
APPENDIX A

MAP I: THE STATE OF YUCATAN BEFORE THE SEPARATION OF QUINTANA ROO

Gulf of Mexico

Progreso
Kantunil Kin
San Antonio
Muxil

Valladolid

Tulum

YUCATAN

Tekax
Peto

Chan
Santacruz

Lxcanha
Petacab

Bacalar

Campeche

Belize

BRITISH
HONDURAS

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MAP II: THE YUCATAN AND THE FEDERAL TERRITORY OF QUINTANA ROO
APPENDIX B

SIRVIENTES DE YUCATÁN
(1883-1885)

The following is a statistical survey of indebted servants on the henequen plantations in the Yucatán for a two year period in which Díaz governed Mexico. These figures are those which represent the official count listed in the state archive in Mérida. They are reprinted in Moisés González Navarro’s Raza y Tierra. It is used here to offer some idea of the number of people working as debt servitors across the state. Notice also the increase from year to year as the henequen industry experienced its greatest rise under the Porfirián Government. The figures correspond to each partido or district into which the Yucatán was divided at the time.

<table>
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202
Indebted Servants: Percentage of the Population, 1883 and 1895.

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Source: Yuc, Anexo 18. Yuc, 85, Anexo I.

Reprinted in González Navarro's Raza y Tierra, p. 200.
APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Carol L. Carbine has been read and approved by the following Committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 4, 1977
Director's signature