

# Mexico: The Cristero War (1926–1929).

- It can be seen as a major event in the struggle between Church and State dating back to the 19th century with the War of Reform.
- It is also the last major peasant uprising in Mexico following the end of the military phase of the Mexican Revolution in 1920.



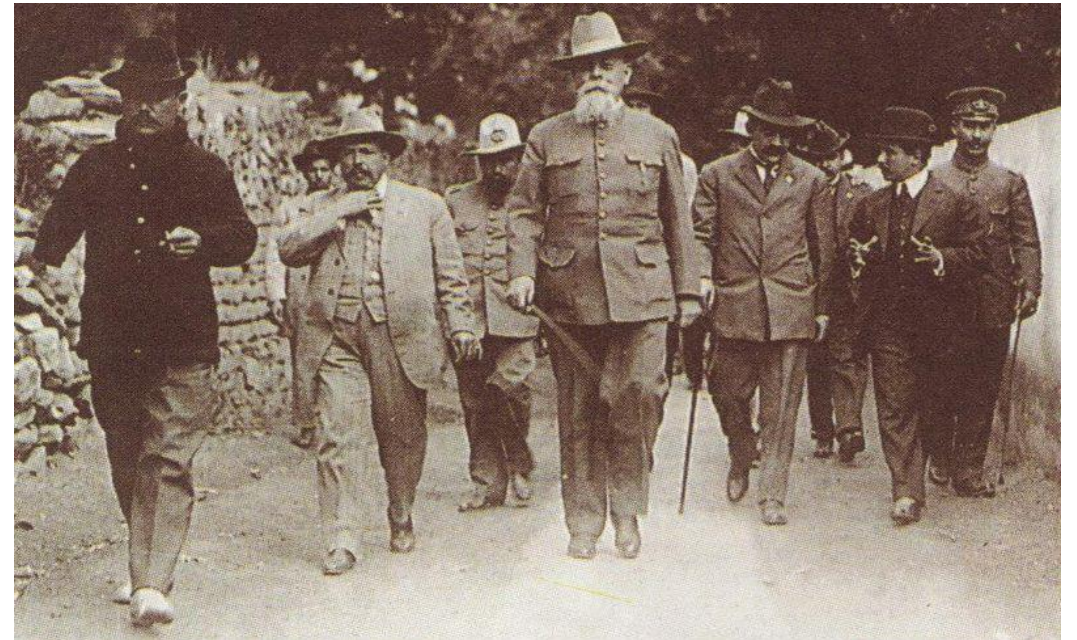
# A reference to The Mexican Revolution which we can look at some other time.

- The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) remains the largest conflict in Mexican history.
- The challenge to the long-serving President of Mexico, Porfirio Díaz unleashed warfare with many contending factions and regions.
- The Catholic Church and the Díaz government had come to an informal *modus vivendi*, i.e. they agreed to disagree, whereby the State did not enforce the anticlerical articles of the liberal Constitution of 1857, but also did not repeal them.
- General Porfirio Díaz, President of Mexico until 1911.



# Two presidents who turned a blind eye.

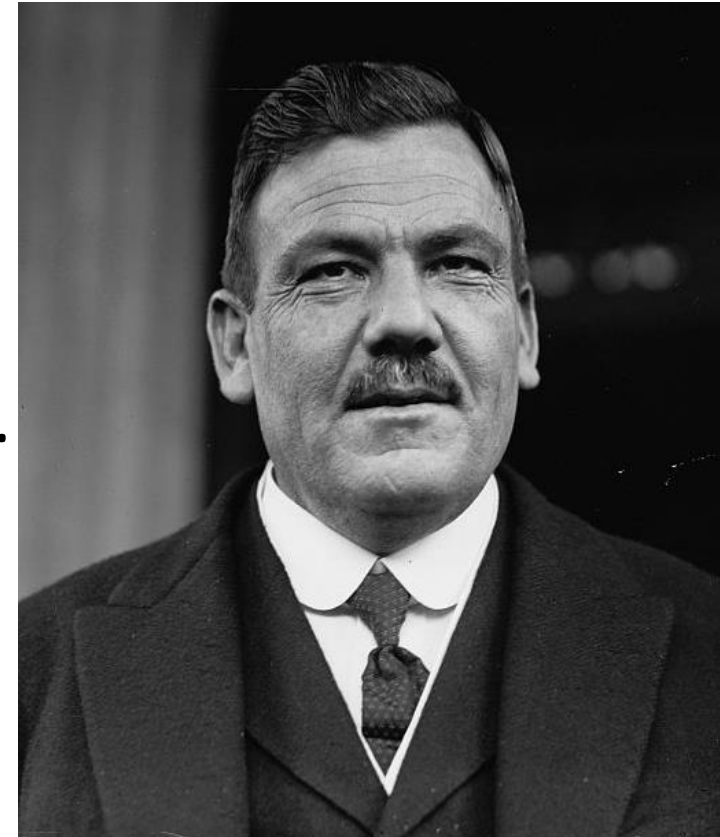
- The Constitution of 1917 strengthened the anticlericalism of the previous document.
- Neither President Carranza (1915-1920), nor his successor, General Alvaro Obregón (1920–24) enforced the anticlerical articles.
- Venustiano Carranza, (centre), the tall and distinguished looking person.
- Álvaro Obregón (left) shown with a cigar in his left hand and his right arm missing, lost in the Battle of Celaya in 1915



# Selective imposition of the laws.

- Obregón effectively applied the secularist laws emanating from the constitution only in areas where Catholic sentiment was weakest.
- This uneasy "truce" between the government and the Church ended with the 1924 hand-picked succession of an atheist, Plutarco Elías Calles .
- The Calles' administration (1924–28) felt its revolutionary initiatives and legal basis to pursue them were being challenged by the Catholic Church.

President Plutarco Elías Calles:



# The full weight of the Law!

- To destroy the Church's influence over the Mexican people, anti-clerical laws were enforced, beginning years of persecution of Catholics which resulted in the death of thousands on both sides.
- Calles taking the presidential oath, with the standard fascist arm gesture:



# Anti- religious fervour.

- Mexican extremists, supported by Calles's central government, went beyond mere anticlericalism and engaged in secular antireligious campaigns to eradicate what they called "superstition" and "fanaticism".
- They desecrated religious objects, persecuted and murdered clergy.



# Strong reaction from the church.

- On July 11<sup>th</sup> 1926 Catholic bishops voted to suspend all public worship in response to the Calles Law, with the suspension taking effect on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1926.
- On July 14<sup>th</sup> 1926, they endorsed plans for an economic boycott against the government, which was particularly effective in west-central Mexico.
- Peaceful protesters standing against President Plutarco Calles' law forbidding public religious practices.



# Cristeros fight back.

- There was a massive, popular rural uprising which was tacitly supported by the Church hierarchy and was aided by urban Catholic support.
- The rebels were called Cristeros.
- Armed Cristeros congregating in the streets of Mexico:





# Brutal Government response.

- Mexican government forces publicly hanged Cristeros on main thoroughfares throughout Mexico, and bodies would often remain hanging for extended lengths of time.



# The conflict brought to an end.

- U.S. Ambassador Dwight W. Morrow brokered negotiations between the Calles government and the Church.
- The government made some concessions, the Church withdrew its support for the Cristero fighters, and the conflict ended in 1929.
- A vintage photo of officers and family members from the Cristeros Castañon fighting regiment.



# Reasonable Law restored.

- The Catholic Church reopened in Mexico by 1929 during the presidency of Emilio Portes Gil, although some anti-clerical government laws remained in force until 1992, when the Mexican government amended the constitution by granting all religious groups legal status, conceding them limited property rights and lifting restrictions on the number of priests in the country.
- Official Seal of the Government of the United Mexican States (Mexico).

