

to carry on as if he had left when he had not and was not about to, and anyway, as everyone knew, would not quit politicking until he lay stiff in his grave. The effect was worse than if he really had died. No politician in the country quite knew how to start acting. Científicos were at a loss whether to pretend the interview had never occurred, or to take it seriously and begin organizing independently for the 1910 elections, bargaining with Díaz for what support they might get. Reformers also worried over a strategy: was the interview a trick to get them to stick their necks out, or a legitimate invitation to bring their informal and amateurish activities into the open and coordinate them in professional parties? By talking about leaving and then not clearing out, Díaz made it hard for Mexican politicians to count on anything. Thus he confused the regular workings of the whole system.

Although in the interview Díaz referred exclusively to national politics and the presidential election of 1910, the confusion he aroused first took effect on the state level. This happened because of the especially complex nature of state political deals, involving deep local interests and clanish loyalties. Normally these deals were like iron. But whenever one cracked and it became necessary to renegotiate who should rule a state, the wrangling was fierce among entrenched local politicians and Don Porfirio's arbitrating agents. Once the exhausted contenders arrived at an agreement, they tried to make it last as long as possible. Through officially selected candidates and rigged elections, the state proceeded in political order. An agreement's durability, however, depended on meticulous attention to all its terms, which in turn depended on their clear definition. The Creelman interview blurred previously clear lines and led to independent movements in 1909 gubernatorial elections in Morelos, Sinaloa, Yucatán, and Coahuila. Officials let politicking get so out of hand that the federal government eventually had to drop its new pretense of neutrality and revert to the imposition of candidates.

The election in Morelos in February 1909 was the first after the Creelman interview in which a serious opposition organized. Ordinarily only the death of a governor in office moved the partners in a state deal to the nerve-racking strain of renegotiation, and that is what happened in Morelos. Governor Manuel Alarcón, having just been reelected for the fourth straight time in August 1908, died on December 15, 1908.² He had stayed in office so long partly because the people of his state respected him. As his replacement, they naturally wanted a man like him. And when,

² *Semanario Oficial*, XVII, 32, 1; 51, 1. *El País*, December 16, 1908.

through a preposterous miscalculation, they were presented with a very different sort, they resisted. Two years later Mexico began laboring through the first of those enormous, heaving spasms that ruptured central authority and let the revolution loose. What happened in Morelos during that national crisis was mainly determined by what had happened there during the 1909 election.

The affair began without a hint of becoming awkward. The December morning when Alarcón died was ten months after Díaz had intoned to Creelman and the ages that fantastic liturgy of self-sacrifice, liberalism, and democracy. There had already been six gubernatorial elections as well as federal and state congressional elections.³ And although there were heated private debates and numerous pamphlets urging the formation of independent parties, no group had publicly appeared to take Díaz at his new, tolerant word. When, therefore, on the afternoon of December 21, the Monday following Alarcón's funeral, a clique of sugar planters, lawyers, and state politicians conferred with Díaz in his presidential office, they assumed their new governor would be elected, like those of the year before, according to the regular procedure: on election day the state government would see that the proper candidate won by whatever margin was considered suitable. Who the candidate was, the conference between Díaz and the state leaders would determine.⁴

Picking a worthy successor to Alarcón should have offered no problem. He was himself a perfect model, a native son whose career knitted firmly and vitally into the region's recent history.⁵ Alarcón had been born in 1851 on Buнавista hacienda, near the village of Santa María, a few miles north of Cuernavaca, and had passed a childhood as poor and hard as Mexico then had to give. Seven years old when the War of Reform broke out, twelve when the French arrived to install Maximilian, he never had the chance to learn more than farming and fighting. At fifteen he joined the local Republican colonel to resist the occupying Imperialist army. His mother found him and brought him home, but he ran off again—this time farther, to Tepoztlán—and joined the Republicans there. After the war, ³ In Hidalgo, Guerrero, Tlaxcala, Puebla, Mexico State, and Morelos, where Alarcón had just won. *México Nuevo*, April 2, 1909.

⁴ For accounts of the conference, see *El Imparcial*, December 22, 1908; *Diario del Hegan*, January 3, 1909; *Mexican Herald*, December 22, 1908; *México Nuevo*, January 2, 1909; *Actualidades*, January 1, 1909.

⁵ In her *Tempest over Mexico* (Boston, 1935), p. 35, Rosa E. King says the people of Morelos wanted "another Indian" for governor, "a popular man." What they meant was a native son.