

Madera 1965: *Primeros Vientos*

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Introduction

Madera, Sierra of Chihuahua, Mexico. Just before dawn on September 23, 1965, a squad of thirteen poorly armed young men who called themselves the *Grupo Popular Guerrillero de la Sierra* (GPG) attacked an army base on the edge of this town of twelve thousand inhabitants, expecting to find some seventy soldiers asleep in the barracks, instead of 120 or so. Eight were killed but five escaped with the help of townspeople into the surrounding mountains. Four soldiers were killed and a fifth died of wounds; a civilian was shot when he disobeyed an order to halt. The governor of the state, former revolutionary war general Práxedes Giner Durán, refused efforts of family members to remove the bodies of the guerrilleros and ordered them thrown into a common grave without shrouds. “They wanted land? Give it to them until they’re full!”

Weeks after the attack, Giner ordered five thousand hectares of land distributed to the Ejido Belizario Domínguez¹ and signed an agreement giving 39,000 hectares to enlarge the Ejido Huizopa, both in the municipality of Madera.² In 1971, President Luis Echeverría distributed 256,000 hectares of Bosques de Chihuahua,³ the guerrilla’s principal antagonist, to form the largest ejido in the republic, that of El Largo, whose members continue to supply lumber to the company

¹ *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*, October 1, 1965, 1.

² AGN, IPS, Problema agraria de Huizopa, septiembre 1965, Vol. 450, Exp. 2.

³ Forests of Chihuahua

to this day.⁴ Various parts of Huizopa were also taken from the lands of Bosques and the biggest local caciques, José Ibarra and Tomás Vega.

Mid-century industrial growth—the so-called Miracle—had long put increasing pressure on campesinos, both landless workers whose demands for ejidos had languished for decades and serrano smallholders confronting encroaching timber barons. The attack on the base developed from a popular movement that had organized direct action grassroots protests: demonstrations, land invasions, marches by campesinos and students throughout the state during the previous six years. The means of struggle were innovative⁵, and incorporated masses of people, urban as well as rural, their political participation not mediated by the usual forms of participation through representation. The militance and persistence of the young women in the rural normal⁶ school of Saucillo was outstanding.

In November 1959, caciques had assassinated a Madera schoolteacher who had been advising campesinos in conflict with Bosques de Chihuahua, setting off a cycle of recurring protests. *Normalistas* joined petitioners for ejidos in land invasions, many of them in the fertile valley of the Río Conchos. Protesters occupied downtown plazas for months at a time. Students from the preparatory schools, the state university, and the normal schools raised both their own demands and those of the campesinos. In the sierra, smallholders and ejidatarios battled caciques allied with Bosques de Chihuahua as they sought to open new tracts to large-scale timbering. Others protested the enormous holdings exempted from the agrarian reform as grazing lands and given certificates of inalienability; the governor was former head of the Cattlemen's Association. These various currents of resistance united in the General Union of Mexican Workers and Campesinos (UGOCM), under

⁴ Luis Aboites, *Breve historia de Chihuahua* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1994), 166.

⁵ Leticia Reina mistakenly locates the first land invasions in the 1970s. Leticia Reina, *Indio, Campesino y Nación en el siglo XX mexicano* (México, D.F.: Siglo XXI, 2011), chapter 2.

⁶ Normal schools provided training for teachers; their students were generally between the ages of fourteen or fifteen and twenty and were called *normalistas*.

the auspices of Vicente Lombardo Toledano's Popular Socialist Party (PPS), whose General Secretary in Chihuahua was the young *normalista* and later schoolteacher Arturo Gámiz García, a member of the PPS youth section, the *Juventud Popular Socialista* (JPS), who had attended secondary school at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) in Mexico City and taken part in the wave of strikes which ended with an army occupation of the dormitories.⁷

The armed component of Mexico's first guevarist group came from the sierra, from people whose propensity for armed self-defense easily loaned itself to the *foquismo* then gaining currency among revolutionaries. Unlike many later armed movements undertaken by students frustrated by their inability to bring about social change through peaceful methods, the roots of the original GPG were endemic to the sierra. I would argue for the importance of the popular movement in its own right and suggest that its direct action strategy prefigured participatory movements from below associated with subsequent decades. To look at the public aspects of the movement, one has to resist its teleological collapse into a narrative focused on the guerrilla, a figure whose glamor eclipses all others.

The attack represented the confluence of two traditions of armed struggle, one being *foquismo* inspired by the Cuban revolution of 1959 and the other dating back to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Apache Wars, when mestizo settlers were given land in return for defending the frontier. These serrano ranchers, who have been described by Alonso, Fuentes Mares, Jordán, Katz, and Orozco⁸ in similar terms, now fought to defend semi-autonomous rural communities in isolated

⁷ AGN, DFS, Versión pública de Arturo Gámiz García.

⁸ Ana M. Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995); José Fuentes Mares, ... *Y México se refugió en el desierto: Luis Terrazas, historia y destino* (México: Editorial Jus, 1954); Fernando Jordán, *Crónicas de un país bárbaro* (México: Asociación Mexicana de Periodistas, 1956); Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Victor Orozco Orozco, *Diez ensayos sobre Chihuahua* (Chihuahua: Doble Hélice, 2003).

hinterlands threatened by the expansion of logging. They had been a major component of Pancho Villa's Army of the North; the Revolution of 1910 began in northwestern Chihuahua.

In the early 1960s, the UGOCM led hundreds of land invasions, marches, and meetings, receiving broad support; federal agrarian officials had ordered the state authorities to satisfy some of protesters' demands, but the state remained adamant. Giner's recalcitrance resulted in the radicalization of protests. In early 1964, the *Grupo Popular Guerrillero* (GPG), led by Gámiz and Salomón Gaytán, whose father had fought for the expropriation of the Babícora and whose land had been taken by the caciques, emerged in the sierra. They withstood repeated attempts by rural police and federal troops to dislodge them, expropriated a cache of automatic weapons, and enjoyed the protection of local campesinos.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 mounted a challenge to the traditional communist parties, the PPS and the *Partido Comunista Mexicano* (PCM), who took their leadership from Moscow. The orthodox parties had long given up on revolution and advocated the negotiation of successive stages, based on the notion that Latin America's mode of production was semi-feudal and must evolve into capitalism to create the conditions for socialism. This strategy tied the masses and their vanguard to an alliance with sectors of the elite, while emphasizing the importance of the urban working class over rural workers and subsistence farmers.

The Cuban Revolution would not have happened without the handful of guerrilla fighters based in the rugged mountains who acted in defiance of the traditional communist party, which only offered support when faced with a *fait accompli*. It also would not have happened without the workers and students in the cities and canefields, whose contribution has been downplayed in the official myth.⁹ But it was the *barbudos* from the sierra and not the party leaders who took power and whose achievement opened the way for a new formulation of revolutionary strategy.

⁹ Julia Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 2.

With *foquismo*, Latin America became a source of ideas; other exports have been Liberation Theology, *la nueva canción*, and dependency theory. *Foquismo* held that a small band of dedicated revolutionaries could demonstrate elite vulnerability and grow into a magnetic center—a *foco*—capable of attracting campesinos, students, workers, and foreign journalists, eventually maturing into a people's army. The initial conditions were unimportant, what mattered was the revolutionary will. This theory received its definitive explication in *Revolution in the Revolution?*¹⁰ written by the French philosopher and journalist, Régis Debray. First published in French in 1967, it would not have been available to the militants of the UGOCM but the ideas were already in wide circulation.

Foquismo implied a dramatic break with existing practices and beliefs. By insisting that the revolutionaries could themselves bring about the necessary conditions for the mobilization of forces sufficient to bring down U.S.-backed dictatorial regimes, the *foquistas* challenged the orthodox doctrine which required the maturing of objective conditions. They also posed an explicit challenge to the traditional party, by insisting the vanguard would emerge in the course of struggle. The image of triumphant *barbudos* entering Havana on tanks proved irresistible to tens of thousands of young people. Their attempts to apply the Cuban model to a variety of circumstances resulted in disaster.

The guerrilla of Arturo Gámiz was among those failures. Gámiz himself seems to have believed the Cuban myth, which he had studied in Che Guevara's *Guerra de Guerrillas*, and he and his companions took the leap between themselves being convinced of the necessity for armed struggle to believing the same masses who mobilized for land invasions were only waiting the signal to rise up in arms. The results were tragic and resulted in repression that drove the remnants of the movement underground. It later emerged in two distinct currents: as a successor guerrilla organization, the GPG–Arturo Gámiz, and in the Committees for Popular Defense, which began as

¹⁰ Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

a movement against political repression in 1972 and went on to fight for union democracy and student issues, whose backbone was the Colonia Francisco Villa, born of an urban land invasion.¹¹

Cuba's support for all Latin American armed movements except Mexico became more pronounced as the U.S. blockade tightened and Cuba had less to lose. Mexico had been the one Latin American government which defied the U.S. in refusing to join the Organization of American States' boycott of Cuba. The Cuban refusal to support Mexican revolutionary movements contributed to the blanket of silence which muffled the Mexican experience for many years. While members of solidarity movements in the U.S. publicized atrocities committed by regimes in Brazil and the Southern Cone, they ignored similar activities in Mexico, where they occurred under a civilian regime.

Agrarian Struggles

The struggle for land has animated generations of revolutionaries but the small farming unit, whether cooperative or not, rarely provides a dignified living. The failure of the ejido system was obvious long before the dissolution of Article 27 of the Constitution, which promised land to the landless, in the early 1990s. The ejidos assumed an impossible burden: to provide social justice and a livelihood to their members, to feed the growing cities and their march to industrialization, and to provide the state with a mechanism for the political incorporation of campesinos. They shared the general political culture of greed and corruption. Their creation did not take into account demographic pressure on lands that were frequently marginal to begin with. Economic conditions in the country as a whole and beyond its borders favor large agricultural extensions geared to foreign markets; the corn and beans subsistence farm in the long run produces only migrant workers. The small plot at best is part of a mixed strategy for family survival: illegally rented out or marginally

¹¹ Orozco, op. cit., chapter 1.

farmed and combined with wage labor, migration, handicrafts, and small-scale retail sales, it provides an additional source of income or food.

The miseries of wage labor must have been a powerful incentive to demand increased land. Working conditions in the expanding lumber industry were grim; accident rates were high in both the *monte* and the sawmills. In the *monte*, the workers camped out for weeks, in danger from animals, falling trees, and other injuries. In town the work was more secure, although poorly paid and dangerous as well.¹² Conditions in mining were even more perilous, tightly controlled, and isolated.¹³ The majority of migrant workers remained caught in a cycle of seasonal migration, with low wages, family separation, and periodic deportation, unable to get ahead.

The destruction of *latifundia* laid the basis for modern Mexico as it freed capital to flow into industry. But changes in land ownership have not brought substantial improvement in the lives of campesinos. The ejidos and smallholders have been isolated as large-scale entrepreneurial agriculture has expanded and captured more of the market. The largest ejido in the Republic, El Largo, in the Madera district, derives little benefit from the its forests; profits go to the companies which control its processing and and distribution.¹⁴

Chihuahua

“Vejar a un serrano chihuahuense es mucho más arriesgoso que injusto, e inútil tratar de imponerle alguna superioridad.” José Fuentes Mares

¹² María Guadalupe del Socorro López Álvarez, “Poder, desarrollo y medio ambiente en el ejido forestal ‘El Largo’ y sus anexos: Chihuahua (1971–1994),” Master’s Thesis, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, 21–36.

¹³ John M. Hart, in *The Silver of the Sierra Madre* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008) discusses the working conditions in the Batopilas mine, just south of the Guerrero District.

¹⁴ See François Lartigue, *Indios y bosques: Políticas forestales y comunales en la Sierra Tarabumara* (México, D.F.: CIESAS, 1983); López Álvarez, *op. cit.*, 38.

The Sierra Madre Occidental is a heavily forested chain of mountains and canyons running north and south between Chihuahua and Sonora. The indigenous people revolted five times during the seventeenth century against Jesuit attempts to concentrate them in villages. Abandoned in 1767, they fled to the sierra and took up nomadic herding, preferring their isolated *rancherías* until the mid-twentieth century.

The first mestizos arrived in search of gold and silver in the 1630s. Nearby ranches supplied beef and tallow and developed into haciendas. Other settlers arrived in the eighteenth century to populate a string of military settlements established to withstand attacks by nomadic Comanche and Apache warriors. Their settlers were given land grants and tax exemption as inducements to remain in inhospitable territory.¹⁵ After Independence, these pioneers battled U.S. incursions, the French Intervention, and the Wars of Reform with no help from a distant federal government, while the California Gold Rush increased pressure on U.S. tribes to move south across the border.

In 1886, soldiers defeated Victorio and the Apache wars came to an end. The truce between smallholders and *hacendados* likewise ended as the haciendas sought to expand, now free from the threat of invasion, and *rancheros* defended their independence. The completion of the railroad linking Juárez with Mexico City led to an export cattle boom and rise in land prices, harming local communities.¹⁶ The *pueblos* resented the railroad for expropriating land, cutting down trees, carrying out minerals, and moving in troops. The railway brought benefits as well and the railway workers bore the germs of socialism, bringing migrant workers into contact with international labor insurgency and contributing to the Revolution of 1910.¹⁷

In 1884, the federal government began to survey the enormous tracts of land which smallholders had used as a commons. The surveyors were granted as much as one-third of the land

¹⁵ Katz, 12.

¹⁶ Mark Wasserman, *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1854–1911* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 104.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

in payment; the rest was sold to investors, many of them foreign. The elite enclosed the commons, depriving smallholders of firewood and pasture; landowners also sought expansion into the military colonies. A political assault combined with the economic threat: in line with Porfirian centralizing policies, local elected political leaders were replaced by *jefes políticos*, often local caciques or outsiders; attacks on the *municipio libre* were among the principal causes of a number of rural rebellions, including the one at Tomóchic.¹⁸

During the Indian wars, the people of the serrano frontier had been constructed as the embodiment of civilization in contrast to savage Indians. Once the savages who defined the serranos as *gente de razón* were gone, the serranos themselves, in their recalcitrant resistance to authority, were constructed as obstacles to progress.¹⁹ Now the elite no longer needed them to fight and coveted their land. In the words of Friedrich Katz, the frontier was becoming a border. The serranos were poor and egalitarian and their frontier democracy depended on a weak state. The culture of armed resistance forged over decades of warfare continued to animate them while the consolidating Porfirian state attempted to impose a monopoly on violence.²⁰

Madera

In 1899, Arizona rancher William C. Greene purchased the copper mine at Cananea, Sonora; he went on to buy dozens of mines and several million acres of timberland in Chihuahua. He also purchased the railway from El Paso to Terrazas, north of Madera, hoping to extend it to provide timber to the Cananea mine. He constructed the sawmill town of Madera in a valley and formed the Sierra Madre Land and Lumber Company. Madera began as a company town, with one hundred

¹⁸ See Heriberto Frías, *Tomóchic* (Chihuahua: Instituto Chihuahuense de la Cultura, 2006).

¹⁹ Alonso, *op cit.*

²⁰ Alonso, 46.

U.S.-style wooden houses, still known as the American barrio, for foreign managers, and another neighborhood, without running water or electricity, for the Mexican workers.²¹

In 1906, Mexican workers at the Cananea mine went on strike, demanding equal pay with U.S. workers and an eight-hour day. The strike turned into a riot, rebellious miners burned company installations, and several people were killed. In response, Greene called on a mob of U.S. vigilantes led by Arizona Rangers and subdued the strikers. The strike exposed the shaky underpinnings of Greene's incipient empire; he went bankrupt in the recession of 1907.²² In Madera, two thousand workers were laid off after working months without pay. Greene's property in the Sierra passed into the hands of the state of Chihuahua, who sold some of it to U.S. investors.²³ These vast holdings, together with the immense landholdings of the family of the newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst, the Hacienda Babícora, were fought over for decades by local campesinos, many of them smallholders dispossessed by expanding haciendas and railroad construction in the 1880s. In the years preceding the 1910 Revolution, the Guerrero District—which Fernando Jordán called the Longitude of War—rebelled again and again.

In 1938, following decades of protest, President Lázaro Cárdenas granted a portion of the Babícora to the *Unión de Veteranos de la Revolución*; gunmen kept the community from taking possession. The following year, they invaded the land and their leader, Socorro Rivera, was assassinated.²⁴

Between 1946 and 1952, during the presidential term of Miguel Alemán, business interests centered around the *Banco Comercial Mexicano* bought sawmills, railways, and hundreds of thousands

²¹ Lartigue, op. cit., chapter 1.

²² Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

²³ Francisco R. Almada, *El Ferrocarril de Chihuahua al Pacífico* (México: Editorial Libros de México, 1971), 158.

²⁴ Noé G. Palomares Peña, *Propietarios Norteamericanos y Reforma Agraria en Chihuahua, 1917–1942* (Juárez: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 1991), 129–131.

of hectares of forests and formed the company *Bosques de Chihuahua*, headquartered in Madera City. The founders of *Bosques* included Miguel Alemán Valdez, former president of the republic; Eloy Vallina, a Spanish empresario who founded the Mercantile Bank, whose descendents include important holders of land in Juárez; General Antonio Guerrero; banker Carlos Trouyet; two former governors, Teófilo Borunda and Tomás Valle; and members of the powerful Terrazas and Almeida families. The company owned nearly 260,000 hectares outright in addition to lumber obtained from private and ejidal owners. The group went on to found Comermex, one of the most powerful financial institutions in the Republic. They constructed several factories in nearby Colonia Anáhuac to produce plywood and cellulose, the latter to fill orders for wood pulp resulting from changes in the paper manufacturing process.²⁵ The Chihuahua group also sold lots to cattlemen although sometimes these were national lands that had been settled years ago.²⁶ Tomás Vega Portillo, José Ibarra Ronquillo, Roberto Schneider, and Alejandro Prieto formed the livestock company, Cuatro Amigos, in 1956, with 250,000 hectares and attempted to dislodge local smallholders.²⁷ Among them, José Ibarra was notorious for his cruelty and for the rapes that he and his sons committed on women of the sierra.

With the aggressive push to extract timber from the forests of the sierra, industrialists backed by state authorities used local caciques, mostly notably the Cuatro Amigos, to appropriate land through intimidation and violence. The land hunger shown by protesters reflected the precarious condition of hundreds of rancheros throughout the area with tenuous titles, many living for generations on lands now claimed by *Bosques de Chihuahua*.

Mining areas such as Batopilas and Dolores, near the Sonora border, had long polluted the surrounding countryside and consumed its forests for timbers and fuel. But the impact of mining

²⁵ Aboites, 160.

²⁶ Aboites, op. cit., 160.

²⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-1-64, L9, H107.

was local compared to that of timbering, whose production was now being exponentially increased to supply the needs of a growing market. The increase in unsustainable lumbering also threatened the survival of indigenous people by eroding the material basis of their culture.

From the UGOCM to the Grupo Popular Guerrillero

Governor Práxedes Giner Durán, who ruled Chihuahua from 1962 to 1966, failed to understand a significant tenet of the regime's success: they governed through negotiation and reforms from above, using them to defuse and deflect struggles from below and only resorting to violence when all else failed. During a time of mass social effervescence when the movement offered ample opportunities for compromise and concession, Giner met protest with repression. Nor did the local caciques mediate between the state and the campesinos; instead they devolved into sheer brutality: rape, torture, kidnappings, the torching of homes, assassination, and the expropriation of land and livestock. It was the affront to the dignity of the campesinos, as much as the demand for land, that fed the revolt that eventually turned into an assault on the state itself. The serranos had long been willing to endure poverty and isolation in return for autonomy; now industrialization was encroaching, behind the guns of the same small-time caciques they had been battling for decades.

An examination of the National Archives reveals the many attempts made by federal officials to mitigate the conflicts generated by the governor's intransigence and that of his henchmen.²⁸ It should be noted the large number of presidential resolutions granting ejidos remained paralyzed at the state level.

Francisco Luján Adame, a Madera schoolteacher and member of the UGOCM, had spent years helping the local campesinos with their petitions for ejidos, including that of Cebadilla de Dolores, where he had been the registered agent since 1949. On November 26, 1959, Luján was

²⁸ See AGN, IPS, Estado de Chihuahua, 21 agosto 1964, Vol. 1025, Exp. 22.

stabbed to death at his home in Madera.²⁹ The UGOCM organized a caravan protesting his murder; six hundred people joined it on the way to Chihuahua City, some 175 miles away. *Normalistas* took to the streets in support striking workers and campesinos. The murder of Professor Luján began a cycle of protest and repression. Shortly afterwards, Álvaro Ríos Ramírez arrived from Mexico City as the state delegate to the UGOCM to continue Lujan's work. It was Ríos who introduced the tactic of long distance marches between cities, land invasions, and occupations of public spaces; he organized the mass meeting in Madera where he, Arturo Gámiz, and the Gómez brothers spoke together for the first time.³⁰

Arturo Gamíz García, who became the General Secretary of the state chapter of the UGOCM and later leader of the *Grupo Popular Guerrillero*, was born in Suchil, northern Durango, in 1940. Little is known of his early life beyond his participation in the PPS youth group and the strike movement at the IPN. He arrived in Chihuahua in 1957 and taught elementary school in La Junta, a sawmill town on the edge of the sierra, until 1959 when he entered the State Normal School in Chihuahua City where he came into contact with activists of the UGOCM.³¹

Pablo and Raúl Gómez Ramírez were also members of the PPS and leaders of the UGOCM in Delicias, the irrigated agricultural district along the Río Conchos. Both were teachers in the rural normal schools; Pablo was also a medical doctor. Both ran for local offices on the PPS ticket in the state elections of 1964.

On December 11, 1962, Arturo Gámiz arrived at Mineral de Dolores to give classes to eighty-five children. Dolores was close to the Sonora border, virtually inaccessible due to lack of adequate roads and bridges, a former mining town dating from colonial times. Gámiz had met the Gaytán brothers, UGOCM activists from the area, in Chihuahua City, who suggested the assignment

²⁹ *El Herald de Chihuahua*, November 28, 1959, 6.

³⁰ AGN, IPS, Antecedentes de Álvaro Ríos Ramírez, Vol. 2930.

³¹ Jesús Vargas Valdez, "Los Olvidados," *La Fragua de los Tiempos*, 18 marzo 2001, <http://www.madera1965.com.mx/buscadocs.html> (accessed April 10, 2011).

to Dolores, which had been without a teacher for some twenty-eight years. Gámiz initially gave classes in the plaza, while the community constructed a building.

The Gaytán family were smallholders who had been dispossessed. The father, Rosendo, had fought with Socorro Rivera for the Babícora. His sons Juan Antonio, Salvador, and Salomón were active in the UGOCM. Salomón and Juan Antonio lost their lives in the armed movement; a third brother, Salvador, participated in both the GPG and in the 1968 successor guerrilla, fought in Guerrero with Lucio Cabañas, and only returned to Chihuahua in 1992.

The nucleus of the ejido Cebadilla de Dolores, near the Mineral de Dolores, was formed in 1948, as the community sought to regain land which had been taken by Francisco Portillo to form the Hacienda Sírupa, granted a twenty-five-year certificate of inaffectability by Alemán. The community pressed for additional land, winning parcels of various sizes over the years. They are now engaged in small-scale logging.³² At some point, Portillo had constructed a barbed wire fence through the town center to keep the townsfolk from watering their animals at a spring-fed pond; that fence was later torn down by activists.

On December 7, 1962, Salvador Gaytán won election as sectional president in Dolores as a candidate of the PPS against the local boss who had held that office for decades and invited Gámiz to the area. The community wrested control of its school, reservoir, and communal orchard from the caciques; they built basketball and volleyball courts and initiated vaccination campaigns. They built a bridge over the Sírupa River. They renewed the petition for amplification of the Ejido Cebadilla, which had languished for a number of years in the hands of the agrarian bureaucracy.³³

³² Registro Agrario Nacional, Chihuahua City, Cebadilla de Dolores, 1160/23.

³³ Archivos Estatales de Chihuahua, Madera: Informes 1957–1979, Informe Presidente Municipal de Madera, Leonel Chávez Reyes, al Director de Gobernación, Vicente Grajedo P., August 5, 1964. This report, which praises the work done by Gámiz and Gaytán without mentioning their names, was submitted after they had risen in arms.

Leaders of the UGOCM directed invasions throughout the state. They invaded properties in Buenaventura and Madera, one of them Agua Nueva, the property of Roberto Schneider, one of the Cuatro Amigos.³⁴

In response, Alvaro Ríos and interim governor Saúl González Herrera came to an agreement: the campesinos would withdraw from all occupied land and provide evidence that these properties were susceptible to distribution. The governor sent the chief of the state police, Lieutenant Colonel Roberto Martínez Noriega, whose report remarked on the breadth of the movement: “It should be noted that the members of this organism, found in various parts of the state, when they carry out the invasions, do not do so according to instructions from a particular leader of the union, but when they see unoccupied land, they invade it as they see fit.”³⁵

The next day, González Herrera sent the leaders of the UGOCM, including Álvaro Ríos, to meet with President Adolfo López Mateos and with Roberto Barrios, director of the Department of Agrarian Affairs and Colonization (Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonización, DAAC) in Mexico City. Ríos promised to bring the invasions to an end; the DAAC promised to send agronomists to comply with existing presidential resolutions, take censuses, and review certificates of inaffectability.³⁶

In February, Pablo Gómez published “El paracaidismo³⁷ in Chihuahua,” where he denounced anti-constitutional fraud perpetrated by big landowners, such as the abuse of certificates of inaffectability for livestock, the simulated breakup of big properties through sale to family members, and the possession of large tracts by foreigners near the U.S. border where such holdings were forbidden. Gómez concluded, “It is not the campesino who invades the land which he got

³⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-20-963, L1, H94–95.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-2, L1, H102–03.

³⁷ Literally, parachuting, a term for land invasions.

from the revolution, it is the landowner who once again steals the land, frustrating the fulfillment of agrarian reform.”³⁸

In March, the Compañía Celulosa in Anáhuac cut off lights and water to the homes of workers who had been fired for organizing a union.³⁹

In view of the inaction on the part of the agrarian authorities, at the beginning of May, campesinos from the ejidos of Zaragoza, Buenaventura, Galeana and Benito Juárez invaded the properties of La Morita and Ojitos, property of Hilario Gabilondo. After their leaders were arrested, they came to an agreement and were set free. Other campesinos remained in jail for months.⁴⁰

In May, Gámiz published a series of articles in *La Voz de Chihuahua*, a small radical newspaper, detailing the misery of rural communities subjected to forced expropriations, human rights violations, and the accelerating exploitation of their forests.⁴¹

Also in May, Giner demanded that the state education department fire Pablo and Raúl Gómez from their jobs as teachers, blaming them for the invasions.⁴² They were reinstated by June 8, but this was not the last time they would be threatened with firing or transfer. The progressive newspaper, *Índice*, published an editorial thanking the governor for reinstating them and, on the same page, published an article by Álvaro Ríos titled, “Governor Giner declares himself defender of the landowners and enemy of the campesinos,” where Ríos accused Giner of having generated a imaginary boundary commission and team of agronomists to fulfill his promises.⁴³

In late May and early June, campesinos invaded San Ambrosio, Agua Nueva, and Rancho de San Carlos, properties of Ignacio D. Siquieros, Federico Cisniega, and Carlos Muñoz Leyva, in the

³⁸ *Índice: Un periódico sin cadenas*, February 2, 1963.

³⁹ *Índice*, March 24, 1963.

⁴⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-3-963, L1, H35–47.

⁴¹ *La Voz de Chihuahua*, May 12, 1963.

⁴² AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-1-963, L6, H–294.

⁴³ *Índice*, June 8, 1963, 2.

municipalities of San Francisco de Conchos, Chihuahua, and Delicias. The paracaidistas were convinced by the army to leave peacefully.⁴⁴

In July, the radical newspaper *Acción* published a letter to the editor denouncing atrocities in the area near Madera, signed by people who had arrived there when the region was abandoned, whose fathers had fought the Apaches, defending with their blood what now was to be taken from them. After forty years they had received a notice from Bosques de Chihuahua giving them fifteen days to leave. One month later, they published the same complaint.⁴⁵

On September 2, 1963, the UGOCM and a group that numbered as many as three hundred campesinos occupied the central plaza in downtown Chihuahua City in front of the DAAC, again receiving massive popular support, including students and *normalistas*. Among their demands were the disappearance of the big haciendas, land reform, the retention of Pablo and Raúl Gomez in their current teaching positions, the release of political prisoners, and an end to logging.⁴⁶ Concerns about excessive logging and its impact on the watershed were not paramount but were present. In the morning they mounted mute protests on the patio of the nearby statehouse and in the early evening they paraded about downtown with banners. One of their banners read: “A cow gets 30 hectares, and us—how many? and when?”⁴⁷ They had a number of inconclusive meetings with the governor, Eduardo Juárez Santos Coy, state director of the DAAC, and Francisco Javier Álvarez, director of the State Department of Education.⁴⁸ These meetings indicated both the pressure exerted on the state by the continuous protests and the state’s attempts to pacify the movement through promised concessions. One wonders how much time Gámiz and the other teachers spent in the classroom.

⁴⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-3-63, L1, H87–90.

⁴⁵ *Acción: Voz revolucionara del pueblo*, July 5, 1963, 1; August 3, 1963, 1.

⁴⁶ AGN, 100-5-3, L-1, H-115, 148.

⁴⁷ Photo, <http://www.madera1965.com.mx> (accessed July 24, 2008).

⁴⁸ AGN, DFS, 100-5-3-63, L1, H110–120.

On September 23, Gámiz met with Vicente Arreola, representing Bosques de Chihuahua, in the office of the state prosecutor, Hipolito Villa Rentería; Arreola promised to put an end to the harassment of campesinos.⁴⁹ On September 25, 1963, outgoing President López Mateos granted a meeting to five leaders of the UGOCM, among them Ríos, Gámiz, and Pablo Gómez, where the promised to study and resolve the situation.⁵⁰

In October 1963, the UGOCM organized the semi-clandestine First Encounter of the Sierra Pancho Villa in Cebadilla de Dolores. Two hundred delegates, among them PPS militants from six states, attended the event. Influenced by Cuba's turn to socialism, participants debated the use of armed struggle to achieve global revolution but finally voted against it. Nevertheless, the First Encounter signalled the beginning of a break on the part of the more radicalized sectors with the PPS, its youth group, and the UGOCM. After the meeting, students destroyed Portillo's barbed wire fence and the army arrested a number of participants, including Alvaro Ríos.⁵¹

The Second Occupation of the DAAC

In January and February, 1964, the UGOCM organized yet more land invasions, with the participation of vast numbers of campesinos, students, and *normalistas*. Some of the occupied properties belonged to the Hacendados of the Revolution, now prosperous cattlemen, among them the families of Antonio Guerrero, Pedro Almada, Rogelio Quevedo, and prominent politicians, Hilario Gabilondo and Ignacio Siquieros; others belonged to Anderson Clayton Company, U.S. cotton growers. The governor responded by closing the normal schools yet again and sending

⁴⁹ AGN, DFS, 100-5-3, L-1, H-202.

⁵⁰ *Acción*, October 3, 1963, 1.

⁵¹ AGN, IPS, Vol. 1305, Exp. 116–124; AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-3-63, L1, H258–59.

soldiers and rural police to clear the land, arresting protesters, sometimes with violence, and accusing their leaders of federal crimes. The opposition intensified.⁵²

On February 6, students of the State Normal School, the *Escuela de Artes y Oficios*,⁵³ and the young women's dormitory went on strike.

On February 19, in an invasion of Casa Colorada, property of Ezekiel Chávez, near Madera City, Arturo Gámiz was arrested and sent to the state penitentiary. He posted bail and left on March 4. In his file, it was noted that he had never before been arrested.⁵⁴

The coming presidential elections added to the tension. Vicente Lombardo Toledano announced the PPS's support for PRI candidate Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and the state section of the UGOCM came under pressure to contain the mass movement. A split in the UGOCM became inevitable, between Gámiz and Ríos, with their advocacy of direct action, on one hand, and national leader Jacinto López, on the other. In 1966, Ríos would be expelled from the UGOCM for persisting in organizing invasions.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Judith Reyes, protest singer, editor of the radical newspaper, *Acción*, and one of the few women in the leadership of the movement, ran for the federal senate under the banner the People's Electoral Front (FEP), a group close to the PCM.

That year the United States ended the Bracero Program, which had provided agricultural work to tens of thousands of Mexican campesinos since the beginning of World War II. Thousands of workers returned to Mexico, many settling in the border states, exacerbating the demand for land and work. The rural normal school of Saucillo, recently moved from Flores Magón, with three hundred female students between the ages of twelve and eighteen, and Salaices, with three hundred males, were under continual surveillance by police and soldiers who held the students under an

⁵² AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-3-64, L1, H321-46, Exp. 32-1-964, L17, H198.

⁵³ A school which combined liberal arts and technical training.

⁵⁴ Archivo Histórico del Supremo Tribunal de Justicia del Estado, Juzgado Primero de lo Penal, Distrito Morales, L49, Causa 28, Arturo Gámiz García.

⁵⁵ AGN, DFS, Versión Publica del expediente de Álvaro Ríos Ramírez.

ineffective but menacing state of seige; nevertheless, the students continued to participate in land invasions.

On February 27, *normalistas* occupied the offices of the DAAC; *granaderos*⁵⁶ and police dislodged them with tear gas and arrested thirty students, including Guillermo Rodríguez Ford and Hilario Cardona, whose detentions, along with that of Alvaro Ríos, became the focus of continual protests. Demonstrators went to the statehouse and when they received no response, broke its windows and battled with the forces of order. Then they began a sit-in at the Plaza Hidalgo where hundreds came and went for months.⁵⁷ All this time, the students sent their rations and supporters baked tortillas for them on the patios of downtown apartment buildings. While exhausting and disruptive to family life, these occupations and invasions provided a forum for new ways of collective living; they should be examined in their own right and not only in terms of their results.

On February 28, in front of the statehouse, demonstrators burned effigies carried in coffins, one representing a *granadero* and the other the governor, with signs that read, “Bad Government” and “Latifundistas.”⁵⁸

Federal officials, less beholden to the local interests of cattlemen, loggers, and other large landowners and hoping to prevent Another Cuba, attempted to diffuse the growing climate of violence, sending federal officials to negotiate with the state; their efforts were unsuccessful.⁵⁹

In March, Pablo Gómez announced his candidacy as substitute deputy in Delicias for the PPS, while his brother Raúl Gómez ran for federal deputy in Guerrero.

On April 6, when presidential candidate Gustavo Díaz Ordaz was finishing his speech in the capital, a student climbed the reviewing stand and attempted to take microphone to demand liberty

⁵⁶ Riot police.

⁵⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-3-64, L1, H438–56.

⁵⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-3-64, L2, H15–18.

⁵⁹ Salvador del Toro Rosales, *Testimonios* (Monterrey: Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo Leon, 1996), cap. 1.

for the movement's prisoners and the crowd went wild. Security forces escorted Díaz Ordaz from the platform; the crowd burned the reviewing stand, scorching the façade of City Hall.

Now the movement had three political prisoners: Hilario Cardona, student, for the occupation of the DAAC and the events on April 6; Guillermo Rodríguez Ford, teacher, for the fabrication of explosives and the 6th of April; and Álvaro Ríos. Ríos was accused of homicide in the death of Roberto Carranza Anchondo, killed on April 24, 1961, in a riot provoked by anti-communist forces against a meeting in support of Cuba. He was also accused of damage to the property of others for the destruction of fences in Cebadilla de Dolores after the First Encounter of the Sierra.⁶⁰

On April 8, Cardona, a student at the State Normal School, made a declaration where, among other absurdities, he claimed to have been making bombs and grenades with Gámiz, Pablo Gómez, and Rodríguez Ford in the woods near Aldama, naming a number of people in the leadership of the FEP. A few days later, he made another declaration in which he insisted that the first was false and that he had been tortured by Daniel Luna, an agent of the judicial police. The torture had consisted of beatings and electric shocks from a cattle prod; his head had been forced into dirty water and his family had been threatened. Cardona remained in jail until November.⁶¹

In April, Pablo Gómez chased down a bus carrying three students from Saucillo, young women determined to take up arms and join the guerrillas in the sierra; Gómez convinced them to return to school.⁶²

On June 2, hundreds of campesinos from northern Durango marched into Chihuahua City, demanding the liberation of Alvaro Ríos.⁶³

⁶⁰ AGN, IPS, Estado de Chihuahua, 21 agosto 1964, Vol. 1025, Exp. 22.

⁶¹ Archivo Histórico del Supremo Tribunal de Justicia del Estado, Juzgado Primero de lo Penal, Distrito Morales, L67, causa 612, 221/64, Jesús Hilario Cardona Rodríguez.

⁶² Archivo General de la Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Fondo Carlos Montemayor, Sección análisis político, Serie ataque al cuartel militar de Madera. Expediente sin número. Entrevista con Laura Elena Gaytán Saldívar, s/f.

In June, students of the State Normal School printed graduation invitations for the class of 1964 without including the governor, traditionally the main speaker at the event, and listing Hilario Cardona among the graduates although he had been in jail since February.⁶⁴

On August 28, the governor, through the state director of education, announced the final closure of the evening normal schools of Chihuahua, Juárez, Ojinaga, and Parral for having fulfilled their mission; there would be no budget for faculty or the creation of new schools. The *Escuela de Artes y Oficios* and the young women's dormitory had already been closed, for being anti-pedagogical. They also announced changes of school for teachers considered as agitators.⁶⁵

In response to the petition to reopen the women's dormitories, Giner replied, "The *normalistas* do not need dormitories: they sleep in the fields with the campesinos demanding land."⁶⁶

When Gámiz was released from jail in March, he took up arms, along with a handful of comrades, and never went back to teaching. The mountains and canyons of northwestern Chihuahua offered an ideal terrain and a population accustomed to armed self-defense. They named the new organization the *Grupo Popular Guerrillero de la Sierra* (GPG).

The rhetoric of the movement was that of masculine prowess; the conflict between Gámiz and Giner took on aspects of a personal dual. In her "Corrido of Arturo Gámiz," Judith Reyes gave the victory to Gámiz, "because he was more manly."⁶⁷

The GPG carried out a series of attacks on detachments of both the army and state police, confiscating weapons and ammunition and rescuing prisoners. According to the report published by former President Vicente Fox's Office of the Special Prosecutor, agents of the Office of National Security were able to infiltrate the circles of students and campesinos in and around the UGOCM,

⁶³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-1-64, L8, H233.

⁶⁴ *Índice*, July 3, 1964.

⁶⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-1-64, L9, H263–65.

⁶⁶ *Índice*, December 22, 1964, 3.

⁶⁷ Judith Reyes, "El Corrido de Arturo Gámiz," *Mexico: Days of Struggle* (Paredon Records, 1973).

but were never able to penetrate the GPG itself, at least in Chihuahua. While security forces regarded the GPG, UGOCM, and their supporters as “communists” and “subversives,” publicly they called them delinquents and livestock thieves. According to the Special Prosecutor, the federal agents assigned to the case lacked sufficient training to analyze the politics of the group or the causes which led them to take up arms.

What seems clear is that the state underestimated their capacity for action and support among serrano communities and that the surveillance was insufficient. No one in the leadership of the GPG’s clandestine group was ever arrested; Gámiz was detained in connection with urban protests but quickly released. The state was helpless to prevent the development of these guerrillas, which contributed to the confidence that led them to assault the barracks.⁶⁸

The first public action of the GPG took place in Madera on February 28, 1964, when they burned a bridge which served the logging industry, leaving a placard that said, “We burned the bridge in support of the *paracaidistas* and we ask for freedom for our imprisoned leaders. We will continue to take drastic measures until our goals are met. Grupo Popular Guerrillero.”⁶⁹

In April, they captured a radio station from the house of José Ibarra in Mineral de Dolores. In May, Salomón Gaytán shot Florentino Ibarra, José Ibarra’s brother, in revenge for the assassination of Carlos Ríos, a Pima indigenous activist with the UGOCM, and went into hiding. The Secretary of National Defense sent a company of soldiers after the guerrillas, who hired guides among the serranos who led them about in circles; the troops resorted to torturing civilians, hanging them from trees, and dangling them from helicopters flying close to the rocks.

⁶⁸ Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado, *Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana*, “Inicios de la guerrilla moderna en México,” [draft] National Security Archives, http://www.criterios.com/Documentos/050_El_inicio_de_la_Guerrilla_Moderna_en_Mexico.pdf (accessed March 15, 2006), 9–10.

⁶⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-5-3-64, L2, H36–37.

In May, 1965, Salvador Gaytán took up arms and left office. He penned a declaration which ended with his promise to lay down arms whenever the authorities brought the caciques to justice. Several successful attacks on soldiers followed, adding to the guerrillas' cache of automatic weapons.

On July 17, the GPG attacked the Ibarra home in the Mineral de Dolores, where the judicial police were staying, burned the house, and debated executing its captives before setting them free, some reports say in their underwear. In his report, Rito Caldera, commander of the judicial police in Gómez Farías, asserted that they had attacked shouting, "Long live the FEP!", "Long Live Palomino⁷⁰!", "Death to Díaz Ordaz!" and that each of them wore a hat adorned with the same small red and black flag.⁷¹

In September, the national magazine, *Sucesos para Todos* (*Happenings for Everyone*), published a three-part article titled "Guerrillas in the Chihuahuan Sierra of Madera,"⁷² reprinted in *Indice*. The story reported on atrocities committed by the caciques and authorities and explained the reasons for the guerrilla. After a brief biography of José Ibarra, the author described an interview in the sierra with Gámiz and Salomón Gaytán, and then gave a detailed accounting of a number of incidents of harassment committed by the caciques and their state and federal accomplices. He described the way the soldiers had gone to the home of Gaytán's mother, Aurelia Aguirre, and hung her eleven-year-old grandson, José de la Luz Gaytán, beating him when he did not answer their questions. They had also created a concentration camp where they took various campesinos, torturing them while their companions searched and robbed their homes.

⁷⁰ Ramón Danzos Palomino, the FEP's presidential candidate.

⁷¹ Archivos Estatales de Chihuahua, Policía del Estado, n. 1772, Exp. VII.

⁷² Daniel de los Reyes, "Guerrillas en la sierra chihuahuense de Madera," *Sucesos para Todos*, September 11, 18, 25, 1964.

The Second Encounter of the Sierra Heraclio Bernal and Its Resolutions

In the city, students from the normal schools founded support groups and some attempted to join the forces in the sierra but returned to town, overwhelmed by the harsh physical conditions. At this point the GPG realized the need for training to incorporate townsfolk.

In January, 1965, while Gámiz was in the Sierra, the state UGOCM split. Supporters of Lombardo wanted to turn towards electoral campaigns, putting a brake on the mass actions. The supporters of Gámiz proposed participation in the elections while continuing the mass protests and building a parallel, clandestine organization for armed campesino self-defense. This tripartite strategy, of mass protests, electoral participation, and armed self-defense, seemed a refusal to choose among alternatives. In fact, the group's goal was to unite the leaders emerging from the mass movement into a political–military *foco* headquartered in the sierra with its own urban support network that would eventually form links throughout the country. This position recognized that the limits of armed self-defense in the sierra had been reached and proposed a national strategy.

In late May, 1965, the Second Encounter of the Sierra Heraclio Bernal was held in northern Durango. Five Resolutions were presented to clarify the GPG's objectives, facilitate their national diffusion, and encourage a leadership to coalesce; they ended with a call for immediate armed struggle. These documents, along with Gámiz's pamphlet, "Student Participation in the Revolutionary Movement" were widely disseminated. Copies are available online on a website dedicated to the group.⁷³

The Resolutions are the only written indication of the ideology that motivated the GPG, although I would argue that they did not adequately reflect the group's ability to maneuver on the ground. The text exhibited a curious mixture of teleological orthodox Marxism and *foquismo*; much of the analysis appears borrowed wholesale from Marxist-Leninist analyses then in vogue. They are

⁷³ www.madera1965.com.mx.

remarkable for their lack of a specific analysis of Chihuahuan history or recent events in Mexico, such as the wave of strikes which had rolled through Mexico City a few years before which Gámiz had participated in. They portray no understanding of the corporative nature of the Mexican state or its ability to coopt autonomous movements through rewards and preemptive reform. In the Resolutions—as in Giner’s Chihuahua—the state offered only *palos* and no *pan*. They contained scathing attacks on the PCM and the PPS and advocated the creation of armed guerrilla groups throughout the countryside. I would suggest that the Resolutions’ failure to account for the state’s propensity to negotiate may have stemmed from the authors’ having taken much of the analysis from a source which did not take Mexico into account.

*The GPG in Mexico City and Beyond*⁷⁴

In early 1965, members of the GPG established a headquarters in Mexico City and engaged in military training, contacted other revolutionary groups, such as the *Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo* in Guerrero, and attempted unsuccessfully to raise money for further actions in the sierra. The person they trusted for military training was a former captain of the Mexican army, Lorenzo Cárdenas Barajas, who claimed to have trained Fidel Castro’s companions during their years in Mexico. Cárdenas Barajas may or may not have been acting on behalf of the National Defense Department.

⁷⁴ Various accounts of these events exist in secondary sources. See Florencio Lugo, *23 de septiembre de 1965: El asalto al cuartel de Madera* (México, D.F.: Yaxkin AC, 2007); Carlos Montemayor, *Las armas del alba: Novela* (México, D.F.: Joaquín Mortiz, 2003); Paco Ornelas Gómez, *Sueños de libertad* (Chihuahua: [n.p.], 2005); Víctor Orozco Orozco, “La guerrilla de los sesenta,” in *Diez ensayos sobre Chihuahua* (Chihuahua: Doble Hélice, 2003); José Santos Valdés, *Madera: Razón de un Martiriología* (México, D.F.: [n.p.], 1968).

In spring, the National Education Ministry announced that certain teachers, among them Pablo Gómez, would be reassigned to schools far from their zone of influence. Raúl had already been assigned to the small town of Ojinaga on the U.S. border.

GPG members formulated the plan to assault the army barracks in Madera while in Mexico City. It was a curious target for a group that had repeatedly announced their battle was with the state and not federal government. This insistence, however, did not accord with the revolutionary aspirations outlined in the Resolutions, which aimed at broader targets. The barracks themselves were provisional and consisted of buildings owned by Bosques de Chihuahua; they housed detachments sent to Madera in pursuit of the GPG itself.

The original plan was to assault the barracks, occupy downtown, take over the bank and the radio station, and broadcast an appeal to local campesinos to rise up in arms. The group counted on acting with some thirty to forty combatants armed with the automatic weapons expropriated earlier. The GPG had been emboldened by previous success and judged that an action of so spectacular a character could lead the campesinos to join them in a popular guerrilla war. Not everyone was comfortable with the plan, particularly Pablo Gómez who hesitated until the last minute.

Two weeks before the attack, Arturo Gámiz and Salomón Gaytan published a letter accusing Giner of cowardice and reiterated that once their goals were met and the local caciques removed and the land returned, they would lay down their arms.⁷⁵

In early September, they left for Chihuahua City, where they met to make final plans. They typed up stencils of the Resolutions of the Sierra and printed them on a borrowed mimeograph machine, calling themselves “Ediciones Línea Revolucionaria” and joking that their ink-stained fingerprints covered the documents. Some of them sequestered a taxi from Torreón to Chihuahua;

⁷⁵ AGN, IPS, vol. 450, exp. 2.

they held the driver for several days then paid him a considerable sum of money and released him. Afterwards, the driver remarked, “They seemed like good kids.”

On the way to Madera, they encountered a number of mishaps. Salvador and Juan Antonio Gaytán travelled for a week through the sierra on foot, without provisions, carrying some sixty pounds each of automatic weaponry, which had been expropriated and stashed in various locations. They were delayed by late summer rains and neither they nor the weapons made it to the assault.

The university students sent to Madera to reconnoiter had attracted police attention, did not find the meeting place, and went back to the capital. Among the information they failed to relay was the fact that there were some 125 troops, not seventy soldiers, in the barracks.

The group that met on the eve of the assault consisted of fourteen people with a pitiful assortment of firearms, including two muskets, a single-loading shotgun, two .22s, molotov cocktails, some dynamite, and homemade grenades that later failed to detonate. The plans had counted on thirty-one people with high-powered weapons. They decided to go ahead, planning to assault the barracks and retreat to the nearby sierra. Gámiz met arguments for waiting for arms and information with accusations of cowardice.

Just before dawn, they formed a semi-circle around the barracks and Ramón Mendoza shot out the lightbulb above the main door. “Surrender! There’s no hope!” Surprise gave the guerrillas an initial advantage. Then they hesitated instead of retreating; troops fell on them from behind and cut off the retreat. The firefight lasted approximately one and a half hours. Army troops killed eight, including Gámiz, Gómez, and Salomón Gaytán. The other dead were eventually identified as Miguel Quiñonez Pedroza, director of a rural school at Ariseáchic in the Sierra Tarahumara; Rafael Martínez Valdivia, a teacher in Basúchil and law student at the university; Oscar Sandoval Salinas, a student at the state normal school; Antonio Escóbel Gaytán, campesino and nephew of Salomón Gaytán; and

Emilio Gámiz García, state normal school student and Arturo Gámiz's younger brother. Of the thirteen, only Pablo Gómez, thirty-nine years old and father of five, was older than twenty-five.

Five guerrillas escaped: Ramón Mendoza into the sierra with the help of a railway worker who shielded him behind the locomotive; Florencio Lugo, with a bullet wound in his leg; Guadalupe Escóbel Gaytán; Francisco (Paco) Ornelas; and Matías Fernández. Both Lugo and Ornelas have published accounts of the events.⁷⁶ Five soldiers were killed and ten were injured. Some townspeople claimed that many more soldiers were killed and secretly buried; the story indicates the respect in which the guerrillas were held.

The bodies of the dead guerrillas were heaved onto the back of a lumber truck and paraded around town in the rain, then dumped on the plaza and left overnight. All were mutilated, sown with machine gun fire, and Gámiz's head was shattered.

General Tiburcio Garza Zamora, Commander of the Fifth Military Zone, arrived with Giner from Chihuahua that day, where the governor had given a press conference stating, "Nothing happened here, absolutely nothing." Family members arrived to claim the bodies; Giner ordered them into a common grave. Only the relatives of Salomón Gaytán managed to bury him separately.

Immediately after the action, the Fifth Military Zone took charge, preventing state and other federal authorities access, forbidding the autopsies required by law, and only cooperating with the federal security agency. Meanwhile, they unleashed a ferocious wave of repression, mobilizing troops and sending planes against the five survivors. Hundreds of townsfolk were arrested and held overnight, bound hand and foot. Colonel, later General, José Hernández Toledo, who presided over the attack on students in Hermosillo in 1967 and the massacre at Tlatelolco a year later, joined the search party with a battalion of parachute rifleman from the Air Force. On September 25, the state

⁷⁶ Lugo, *op. cit.*, Ornelas, *op. cit.*

Congress called on the federal government for aid, enumerating the guerrilla actions of the year before.

On September 30, journalist Victor Rico Galán and photographer Rodrigo Moya travelled to Madera and Cebadilla de Dolores; their sympathetic account was published in *Sucesos para todos*⁷⁷ two weeks later, receiving national attention. The UGOCM, PPS, and PCM condemned the action.

On October 31, 1965, defying military orders, Pablo Gómez's family cleaned the grave and left flowers; five hundred people arrived at the cemetery two days later.

One day before the attack, hundreds of graduates of the normal schools had demonstrated in the Plaza de la Constitución; 202 of them had not found jobs. Among the speakers was Paco Ornelas.⁷⁸ After the attack, demands for justice and against political repression were added to their demands; the demonstrations continued until the end of October.⁷⁹

Aftermath

The breakthrough in the discussion of revolutionary movements of the 1960s and '70s came with the opening of the archives of the National Security apparatus by President Vicente Fox in 2002 which allowed researchers access to long-hidden information. The opening had been intended to discredit the PRI; in fact, the documents demonstrated a depth of corruption and brutality from which the PAN itself could not claim immunity.

⁷⁷ Victor Rico Galán, "Chihuahua: de la desesperación a la muerte," *Sucesos para Todos*, October 15, 1965.

⁷⁸ *El Heraldo*, September 23, 1965, 1.

⁷⁹ AGN, IPS, Vol. 450, Exp. 1, 253.

On September 23, 2003, Carlos Montemayor presented his novel, *Las armas del alba: Una novela*,⁸⁰ a thoroughly researched but fictional recreation of the events, in the Municipal Theatre of the City of Chihuahua, to an overflow crowd including relatives of Lucio Cabañas and Genero Vásquez, revolutionaries from the state of Guerrero. The four surviving attackers shared the platform. Born in Parral, Chihuahua, Montemayor had left the state to study in Mexico City as a young man. He had been acquainted with members of the GPG in Chihuahua City where he had collaborated with the radical newspaper, *Acción*, and he experienced the government's attempt to portray them as criminals as a moment that changed his life.⁸¹ His novel broke the silence that had muffled these events for decades. Montemayor later published *La fuga*,⁸² about Ramón Mendoza's subsequent escape from prison, and a posthumous novel, *Las mujeres del alba*.⁸³ These works opened the floodgates of memory, allowing the public discussion of matters that had been shrouded in secrecy for decades.

The Chihuahuan guerrilla was a turning point between old methods of struggle harkening back to the Revolution of 1910 and earlier battles on the frontier with forms derived from the New Left and its repudiation of orthodox communist movements; it opened the door to a series of armed movements whose demands went far beyond the fulfillment of the agrarian provisions of the Constitution of 1917. In the midst of the so-called Miracle—economic growth, urbanization, and the rise of a middle class—it revealed the depth of discontent, both among campesinos destined to pay the price and among students supposed to be its beneficiaries. Events in Chihuahua and throughout the Republic in the 1960s and '70s shattered whatever remained of the ruling regime's claims to a revolutionary heritage and led the way to autonomous social movements which

⁸⁰ Montemayor, *Las armas*, op. cit.

⁸¹ Monica Mateos-Vega, "Existe otro México clandestino más peligroso que la guerrilla: Entrevista con Carlos Montemayor," *La Jornada*, February 28, 2007, online (accessed May 29, 2008).

⁸² Montemayor, *La fuga* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007).

⁸³ Montemayor, *Las mujeres del alba* (México, D.F.: Grijalva, 2010).

proliferated in the following decades. Los Primeros Vientos—the first winds—swept out the old and made room for the new.