

LAND MONOPOLY IN MEXICO¹

As the Mexican Indians of the XVI century were heathen, they had like other non-Christians forfeited all living rights on the planet and their country had been presented by Pope Alexander VI to the Spanish crown. The Spanish conquerors of 1521 carved the fertile Mexican valleys into *haciendas* (large estates) for themselves as landlords.

Vast numbers of the Indians were divided among the *haciendas* as serfs (*repartimientos*) while other were herded as chattel slaves to work the mines and build the roads. This slave system was enforced by a standing army recruited from Spain which controlled a population less than half of the present. The unenslaved Indians were finally kept quiet by the grant of *egidos* (communal tracts of land) a half century after the conquest.

The humanitarian Egido law was decreed by Philip in 1573 and was designed to protect the remaining free Indians from the greed and cruelty of the Spanish colonists.

During colonial times there were two classes of agricultural Indians in Mexico, the enslaved "peons" (serfs) of the *haciendas* and the free Indians of the *egidos*. The latter might work on the *haciendas* in harvest time but were economically independent of the *hacendados* (great landlords). A third class of hunting Indians was never numerous and was mostly confined to the northern deserts or tropical forests of the coasts.

The first revolution—that of 1810—was democratic and aimed to overthrow the feudal *hacienda* system as well as the Spanish power. It failed in its economic object, for when independence finally came it was under the rule of Emperor Iturbide and the creole *hacendados*. In 1856 President Comonfort nationalized and sold the church *haciendas*. This transfer had little effect

¹Excerpted from *El Latifundisimo; su Origen y su Remedio*, by R. B. Brinsmade, published by the Federal Dept. of Fomento, Mexico City.

upon the feudalism of Mexico, as the church *haciendas* were nearly all sold undivided.

In 1910 at the start of the recent revolution the ownership and value of Mexican granted property was approximately as follows:

CLASS OF LAND	Area of Classes sq. miles	%	Value of Land U.S. currency	
			Sq. mil's	Total of Classes
11,000 haciendas	338,000	44	3250	\$1,100,000,000
18 Land Companies	31,000	4	1300	40,000,000
Other Land Companies	46,000	6	1300	60,000,000
Fundos and Egidos	46,000	6	1300	60,000,000
Small farms	153,000	20	5230	800,000,000
National Lands	153,000	20	Not	valued
Total rural land	767,000	100		\$2,060,000,000

This table shows an astonishing concentration of ownership; 11,000 *haciendas* occupy 44% of the total area and comprise much of the land of first class quality. The average size of these *haciendas* is 31 square miles or 19,840 acres. When, as often happens, one person owns many *haciendas*, his aggregate holdings become colossal.

Thus in Chihuahua Luis Terrazus has some 23,200 square miles, an area greater than Costa Rica; and in Hidalgo the Mexican Central Railroad owns 90 miles through the holdings of Jose Escandon. There are many other huge family holdings.

The 18 greater land companies average a holding of 1,720 square miles apiece, about the size of Trinidad; while a few dozen land companies own 10% of the total area, or half as much as the small farms and 67% more than the *fundos* and *egidos*.

The whole free population of Mexico is thus restricted to one-fourth of the total area, and this of the second quality or worse, while most of the present national lands are mountains, deserts or tropical swamps. Actually a few thousand individuals and a few dozen companies have legal power to lock out a nation of 15,000,000 people from the best half of its own country.

The final condition favoring both family and company land monopoly under Diaz was the unfairness of the tax-assessment due to the fact that the biggest landlords had most to say about

the size of assessments. It seems incredible but instances are not uncommon where small farmers paid on their holdings a dozen times as much per acre as the adjoining *haciendas* of the same quality of land.

Under Diaz the current sophism of the *hacendados* to reconcile compassionate foreigners to the pitiable condition of the peons, was: "Great estates have nothing to do with the misery of the masses, for the Indians wouldn't work the land if they were given a farm a piece." Not only is this assertion false in the light of history, both before and since the Conquest, but anyone can ascertain the truth for themselves by a little travel. I have ridden for miles through flat and rich valleys, owned by absentee millionaires, resident in the State capitals or in Europe, whose only human homes were the hovels found in the *hacienda* enclosures and tenanted by the wretched serfs of the land. The free Indians were restricted to the neighboring hills where they often had in close cultivation slopes as steep and barren as a shingle roof, while just below them stretched the monopolized valleys of poorly-utilized land.

The Mexican *haciendas* are modern representatives of the ancient Phoenician *latifundi*; they are the relics of the evil agricultural system of great estates, owned by absentees and worked by serfs, which ruined Carthage. From Carthage it was introduced into Italy, to later pervert the Roman Republic and Byzantine Empire and almost extinguish civilization in the long recession of the Middle Ages.