

UNIT 11 REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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11.1 INTRODUCTION

Revolutionary movements are harbingers of radical transformations not only politically, but also socially, economically and culturally. In Latin America, the term revolution is more often defined very loosely. It is related to violence, social change or regime change and has even been used in the context of military authoritarian rule. There are four very conspicuous revolutions that can be considered successful in the 20th Century—Mexico (1910), Bolivia (1952), Cuba (1959), and Nicaragua (1979). However, these are considered very rare amongst the wide range and variety of revolutionary movements in Latin America. For, these revolutions have had a tremendous impact not just within those countries and the Latin American region, but on the hemispheric relations and world politics as well. To understand the accompanying social change, it is essential to discuss the causes, course, and outcome of the Latin American revolutions, especially highlighting the peculiarities of Latin American revolutions. Apart from the four successful revolutions, there are other revolutionary movements in Latin America, which are not considered successful such as the Farabundo Marti National Liberation (FMLN) movement of El Salvador and the *Sendero Luminoso* (“Shining Path”) movement of Peru. This unit gives a brief view of the number and variety of revolutions witnessed in Latin America, drawing attention to the similarities as well as the peculiarities of such movements.

11.2 THE MAKING OF A REVOLUTION

11.2.1 Revolution as a Part of Social Change

Many factors that contribute to social change fall in the category of “social mobilisation” i.e. urbanisation, education, mass communication and rising expectations. One factor is the circulation of new ideas imported from other societies (like liberalism at the turn of the 19th Century and Marxism at the turn of the 20th Century) or revived from the pre-conquest eras (like Mexican

indigenismo/nativism or Nicaraguan *Sandinismo*) gives a sense of direction to sporadic and unfocussed social unrest.

Another factor contributing to social change are agents of social change be it foreigners with new ambitions, Latin Americans associated with new institutions or old institutions assuming new roles. Students, Catholic clergymen inspired by the Liberation Theology can be taken as an example. Pressure for change may also be generated by natural disasters, wars, or reaction by the ruling class to a minor incident or protest.

If the political elite is able to share power and incorporate new groups, social change will evolve naturally. But if the elite is unwilling to share and tries to repress the changes, they may take the form of revolution or counter-revolution. While revolution does not result in the displacement of previous systems and participants of the system, revolution involves displacement or dis-establishment of groups representing the upper strata of society. In counter-revolution, it is the groups from the lower strata of society, which are displaced from effective participation in power politics.

In the case of Latin America, the social distance to be bridged in the incorporation of new groups into the polity in the southern cone countries of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay were not very great. This region was not rich in gold and silver and not very exploitable by the colonisers. It was thus settled by Europeans relatively late and also the first to win independence. The population at the time of independence was mostly *mestizo* and homogeneous. Effective working class participation and thoroughgoing redistribution came about through the evolutionary process. Thus economic elite (foreign and domestic) with middle class support backed by the dominant foreign power and the armed forces silenced the lower classes. But in countries like Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia, it was more a revolutionary change accompanying violent confrontation.

11.2.2 Causes of Revolution

As we have seen, revolution is a part of social change. But social change or mobilisation does not in itself lead to a revolution even though it does add to the pressure leading towards it. It is only when there are impediments to an evolutionary change that a revolution occurs. There are many reasons or factors that explain impediments to change.

A low level of political participation, with a great social distance between the elite and the masses is an important factor. The traditional hierarchical structure of society in Latin America with its attendant economic problems has always led to popular discontent. The social hierarchical structure of small elite of European origin with their proximity to foreign powers is vulnerable to the slightest change in the traditional system of authority. Thus the elite would not tolerate any breakdown of this system. Rather than accept marginal change and welcome the development of a middle class that might play a brokerage role, the elite strive to maintain *status quo* and a vacuum in the centre. This ensures that they do not have to allow concessions to middle or lower classes.

Even after independence from European powers, Latin American countries were overwhelmed by foreign domination. Independence was a mere exchange of one master for another. The ruling aristocracy were eager to ensure their security under the clout of a strong country even at the cost of national sovereignty. Major corporations of the United States became an integral part of the power elite of those countries and the US had made it clear that it would intervene militarily

to protect its economic interests. This meant that relatively few families had economic interests to protect and very few had a stake in political order. Thus the US had emerged as the dominant force in Latin America.

Another factor was the physical uprooting of the peasants and the indigenous population in Latin America. The indigenous peoples had been displaced from their traditional territory by Hispanic elites or the US corporations and thus, were deprived of their communally held land. Much of the unrest was a direct result of alienation.

All of these factors resulted in a multi-class alliance in opposition to the ruling elite particularly in Cuba and Nicaragua and to a large extent in Mexico, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic. Most of the Latin American revolutionary movements thus had this in common that they were multi-class popular movements largely agrarian in nature and with no fixed ideology that can be stated to be a common factor.

11.3 SUCCESSFUL REVOLUTIONS

11.3.1 Mexican Revolution

In the Mexican political arena of the late 19th Century, the *caudillo* regime of Porfirio Díaz or Porfiriato was marked by the systematic violation of the principles of the constitution of 1857. He believed that dictatorship was essential to transform a backward nation into a modern one. It was believed that Mexico's economic development depended on attracting foreign capital through special subsidies and concessions. By 1910, US interests controlled 75 per cent of Mexican mines, 72 per cent of metal industry, 68 per cent of the rubber business and 58 per cent of the oil production. Other foreigners controlled 80 per cent of the rest of Mexico's industry. Not only did Díaz court foreign interests, he allowed the clergy to become openly influential in temporal matters, and gave the army a free hand to violate guaranteed civil liberties. Opponents of the regime were either coopted or sent to jail.

Francisco Ignacio Madero, the son of a *hacendado*, issued the Plan of San Luis Potosí in October 1910 asking for political reform and the restoration of democratic principles. The Plan was enthusiastically received. By January 1911, a large-scale insurrection had broken out in the northern state of Chihuahua, led by Pascual Orozco, a local merchant, and Francisco "Pancho" Villa. Madero, who had declared himself provisional president in the Plan of San Luis Potosí returned to Mexico to lead the nascent revolution. The successes of the rebel bands in Chihuahua sparked similar uprisings throughout the country. As early as 1909 in Morelos, the peasant leader, Emiliano Zapata, recruited thousands of *hacienda* labourers and landless peasants to attack the *haciendas* and reclaim the lost lands. By May 25, 1911, Porfirio Díaz submitted his resignation and turned power over to a provisional government.

Madero assumed the presidency in November 1911. The new administration faced insurmountable problems. The fall of Díaz raised popular expectations of far-reaching social reforms, especially land reform. Zapata had come to Mexico City to claim *hacienda* land for the peasants of Morelos, which to him was the only acceptable result of the overthrow of the Díaz regime. Even in the

revolutionary ranks, the revolution meant something different to different sections of the population. Madero soon realised that to the liberals, the Revolution meant political change, but to the revolutionary fighters it meant radical social and economic transformations that Madero would not be able to fulfill. Labour unrest continued and even the Zapatista faction revolted.

Revolutionaries from other areas began to challenge the new government. Meanwhile, Félix Díaz (Porfirio's nephew) and other counter-revolutionaries plotted a military coup. With the aid of loyal troops under Huerta, Madero initially resisted the Díaz forces, but Huerta changed sides and defeated Madero. Opposition to Huerta began to emerge once he assumed power. Zapata and others remained in revolt against Huerta. The latter responded by increasing the size of the military. The country faced other problems. The federal treasury was empty, and each faction began issuing its own currency. Importantly, Huerta's government had not been recognised by the United States. By 1914, Huerta had to resign.

After the fall of Huerta, the country went through another period of civil war and anarchy in which four governments claimed to represent the will of the people: Carranza in Veracruz, Obregón in Mexico City, Roque González Garza (supported by the Zapatistas), and Villa in Guanajuato. Later that year, Carranza emerged as the victorious commander of the revolutionary forces with the support of the US. Carranza presented his draft of a constitution to the congress. The final version of the constitution of 1917, however, gave additional rights to the Mexican people. It was the fruit of the Revolution—an expression of popular will that guaranteed civil liberties, no presidential succession, and protection from foreign and domestic exploitation to all Mexicans.

After formally accepting the Constitution of 1917, Carranza won the presidential election and was sworn into office on 1 May, 1917. Conditions in Mexico were again close to chaos: the economy had deteriorated during the years of civil war, communications had been seriously disrupted, and shortages had led to rampant inflation. Land and labour remained the basic issues for the Mexican people, but Carranza chose to overlook the constitutional provisions dealing with these issues and returned lands expropriated during the Revolution. In 1918 fighting continued in Morelos. The Zapatistas in that area, who had very specific grievances, wanted more than a constitution. However, Carranza's men killed Zapata on 10 April 1919. By 1920 the Mexican Revolution was over with Carranza too being eliminated and General Obregón coming to power.

11.3.2 Bolivian Revolution (1952-1964)

Most of the countries of Latin America had suffered greatly during the Great Depression and Bolivia was no exception. Added to that were the after-effects of the Chaco War (1932-1935) in Bolivia which created outrage amongst the Bolivian population. The War was a result of a border skirmish in the disputed Chaco region with Paraguay. The war effort mobilised a large part of the population of indigenous and *mestizo* peasants, and created a lot of dissatisfaction and social ferment. So much so, the so-far ineffectual left wing could galvanise an outrage against the political system that had produced a war. Several political parties were formed including three socialist parties and two pro-fascist parties. The most talented leadership was from the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), which dropped its fascist tendencies. In 1952, after years of repression of the middle class from the right wing rulers, the MNR organised a revolt against the regime.

Under Paz Estenssoro's presidency in July 1952, the government established universal suffrage, with neither literacy nor property requirements thus increasing the population of eligible voters. The government also moved quickly to control the armed forces, purging many officers associated with past conservative party regimes and drastically reducing the forces' size and budget.

The government then began the process of nationalising all mines of the three great tin companies turning two-thirds of Bolivia's mining industry over to a semi-autonomous enterprise to run state-owned mines, the Mining Corporation of Bolivia (Comibol).

This was followed by a far-reaching agrarian reform. The government decreed the Agrarian Reform Law, which abolished forced labour and established a programme of expropriation and distribution of the rural property of the traditional landlords to the Indian peasants. Only estates with low productivity were distributed. More productive small and medium-sized farms were allowed to keep part of their land and were encouraged to invest new capital to increase agricultural production.

During the first years of the revolution, miners wielded extraordinary influence within the government based on the miners' decisive role in the fighting of April 1952. Miners organised the Bolivian trade union federation (Central Obrera Boliviana—COB), which demanded radical change as well as participation in the government and benefits for its members. The peasants also exerted a powerful influence and the MNR eventually gained control of the peasants.

During the presidency of Siles Zuazo (1956-60) the United States economic aid reached its highest level. Advised by the United States government and the IMF, the Siles Zuazo regime then in power reduced inflation with a number of politically dangerous measures, such as the freezing of wages.

Conflicts within the MNR increased during Paz Estenssoro's second term (1960-64). Paz Estenssoro endorsed the "Triangular Plan," which called for a restructuring of the tin-mining industry demanding the end of the workers' control over Comibol operations, the retrenchment of workers, and a reduction in their salaries and benefits which was strongly opposed by the COB. Moreover, rivalry among peasant groups often resulted in bloody feuds that further weakened the Paz Estenssoro government.

The country faced severe economic problems as a result of the changes enacted by the government. The nationalisation of the mines had a negative effect because of the lack of technical expertise and capital to modernise the ageing plants. Agricultural production too faced a decline in the first years of the revolution. Although anarchy in the countryside was the main reason for the decrease in production, the peasants' inability to produce for a market economy and the lack of transport facilities contributed to the problem. High inflation, primarily caused by social spending, also hurt the economy. The divisions within the MNR seriously weakened its attempt to incorporate the support of the Indian peasants, the workers, and the middle class for the government. In 1952 the MNR was a broad coalition of groups with different interests. The bankrupt economy increased the factionalism within the MNR. Because the majority of the MNR elite wanted a moderate course and the left wing demanded radical change, the polarisation increased and eventually led to the destruction of the MNR in 1964.

During its twelve-year rule, the MNR had failed to build a firm basis for democratic, civilian

government. Increasing factionalism, open dissent, ideological differences, policy errors, and corruption weakened the party and made it impossible to establish an institutional framework for the reforms. Not even the peasants, who were the main beneficiaries of the revolution, consistently supported the MNR.

The MNR had succeeded because it could unify several major political forces of the country: the miners, the armed forces and large sections of the middle class and the peasants, which was the fourth group that emerged after the revolution. The MNR failed for the same reason—it was unable to maintain this coalition.

11.3.3 Cuban Revolution

The Cuban revolution was a unique phenomenon in many respects. It revolved around the personal charisma of Fidel Castro, a young lawyer who successfully carried out a guerrilla warfare that overthrew the military regime of Fulgencio Batista. The aim of the revolutionaries was to redistribute wealth through land reform and Communism. By late 1960, the state owned a significant portion of the means of production. The sense of nationalism led the revolutionaries to turn to socialism away from the United States.

Thus power in Cuba was seized without a revolutionary theory or party, whereas Communism necessitated the presence of both. It was only later in December 1961 that a revolutionary party began to be formed. The first party Congress was held thirteen years later.

In the first sixteen years of the revolution, the Communist Party played no important role but concentrated on the development of mass mobilisation of labour, women, students, farmers and defenders of the revolution. The role of the Party when it was institutionalised in 1975 was simply to co-ordinate and supervise the tasks of the state and mass organisations without administering them. The Communist Party became the locus of political power. The Party, the State and the Government are thus functionally differentiated.

The revolutionaries had inherited a capitalist economy that relied on sugar production controlled in its numerous facets by the US capital as well as an economy that was unable to generate sufficient jobs to absorb surplus labour. In the first two years after the revolution itself, house rents were lowered by as much as 50 per cent, free universal education established, social security made available to all workers, Agrarian Reform Law began the redistribution of land, transportation costs were lowered, and child care centres were subsidised by the state. Critical areas of the economy like banking, export-import operations, and energy were taken over by the state. More than three-quarters of the industry, construction and transportation too was in the hands of the state. Soon health care too became free. Since Cuba did not have material incentives, moral incentives were used to motivate workers. Charismatic authority went hand in hand with moral incentives and mass mobilisation to achieve economic goals. From 1970s, there was a shift towards rational-legal authority in both political and economic spheres.

11.3.4 Nicaraguan Revolution

The dictatorship established under General Anastasio Somoza García in Nicaragua was one of the most enduring in Central America's political history. The most basic reasons for the success of the Somoza dynasty was its control of the US-created National Guard, a mixed military-

police force that monopolised armed power within Nicaragua and a constant cultivation of US support. As long as the economy continued to grow and the traditional elite and the opposition parties got a share in the profits, they largely accepted this state of affairs. The devastating earthquake of 1972 almost caused a breakdown of this entire structural set up, but the system managed to survive with US support. This only served to increase the popular discontent with the Somoza regime. The Sandinista National Liberation Front guerrillas (FSLN) increased their activities. The killing of Nicaragua's leading newspaper publisher and opposition ruler Carlos Fonseca Amador in January 1978 by Somoza's business associates resulted in national defiance and international indignation. A series of popular uprisings and heavy fighting by the FSLN along with international opposition compounded the dictator's problems.

A mediation process led by the OAS collapsed during January 1979, when president Somoza refused to hold a national plebiscite and insisted on staying in power until 1981. As fighting increased, the Nicaraguan economy faced a severe economic crisis, with a sharp decline in agricultural and industrial production, as well as high levels of unemployment, inflation, defence spending, and capital flight. The government debt also increased mostly as a result of defence expenditures and the gradual suspension of economic support from all international financial institutions.

On 1 February 1979, the Sandinistas established the National Patriotic Front (Frente Patriótico Nacional—FPN), which included *Los Doce*, the PLI, and the Popular Social Christian Party (Partido Popular Social Cristiano—PPSC). The FSLN launched its final offensive during May, just as the National Guard began to lose control of many areas of the country. In a year's time, bold military and political moves had changed the FSLN from one of many opposition groups to a leadership role in the anti-Somoza revolt. On 19 July 1979 the Sandinistas entered Managua bringing to an end the longest lasting family dictatorship in the Latin American history.

The five-member junta consisting of Daniel José Ortega Saavedra of the FSLN, Moisés Hassan Morales of the FPN, Sergio Ramírez Mercado of *Los Doce*, Alfonso Robelo Callejas of the MDN, and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, the widow of *La Prensa's* editor entered the Nicaraguan capital and assumed power, reiterating its pledge to work for political pluralism, a mixed economic system, and a non-aligned foreign policy.

The new government inherited a country in ruins, with a stagnant economy and a debt of about US\$1.6 billion. Most Nicaraguans saw the Sandinista victory as an opportunity to create a system free of the political, social, and economic inequalities of the almost universally hated Somoza regime.

The first or immediate goal of the new government was the reconstruction of the national economy. The new government enacted the Agrarian Reform Law, beginning with the nationalisation of all rural properties owned by the Somoza family and their associates representing more than 20 per cent of Nicaragua's cultivable land. These farms became state property under the new Ministry of Agrarian Reform. Financial institutions, all in bankruptcy from the massive capital flight during the war, were also nationalised.

The second goal of the Sandinistas was a change in the old government's pattern of repression and brutality. Most prisoners accused of injustices under the Somoza regime were given a trial

and the Ministry of Interior forbade cruelty to prisoners. Amnesty International and other human rights groups found the human rights situation in Nicaragua greatly improved.

The third major goal of the country's new leaders was the establishment of new political institutions to consolidate the revolution. This was done by abolishing the constitution, presidency, Congress, and all courts through the proclamation of the Fundamental Statute of the Republic of Nicaragua on 22 August 1979. The *junta* ruled under emergency powers. National government policy, however, was generally made by the nine-member Joint National Directorate (Dirección Nacional Conjunto—DNC), the ruling body of the FSLN. A consultative corporatist representative assembly, the Council of State approved laws submitted to it by the *junta*. The *junta*, however, had the right of veto and retained control over much of the budget. The membership of the *junta* changed during its early years. By 1983 the *junta* was reduced to three members, with Daniel Ortega clearly playing the lead role.

Immediately after the revolution, the Sandinistas had the best-organised and most experienced military force in the country, a new national army, the Sandinista People's Army (Ejército Popular Sandinista—EPS), as well as a police force, the Sandinista Police (Policía Sandinista—PS). The FSLN also developed mass organisations representing most popular interest groups in Nicaragua which were instrumental in consolidating Sandinista power over political and military institutions—the Sandinista Workers' Federation (Central Sandinista de Trabajadores—CST) representing labour unions, the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Nicaraguan Women's Association (Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza—AMNLAE), and the National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen (Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos—UNAG) composed of small farmers and peasants.

The new Sandinista government was not universally welcomed. On the domestic front, the ethnic minorities from the Caribbean coast rejected Sandinista efforts to incorporate them into the national mainstream. The United States government accused the government of supplying arms to guerrillas in El Salvador and even supported groups of counter-revolutionaries known as *Contras*. The bishops of the Roman Catholic Church distrusted the Sandinista ideology and although supportive of the anti-Somoza movement during the late 1970s, opposed the Sandinista regime in the 1980s.

In mid-1984, the Electoral Law was passed setting the date and conditions for the election. By July 1984, eight parties or coalitions had announced their intention to field candidates: the FSLN with Daniel Ortega as presidential candidate; the Democratic Coordinator (Coordinadora Democrática: CD), a broad coalition of labour unions, business groups, and four centrist parties; and six other parties—the PLI, the PPSC, the Democratic Conservative Party (Partido Conservador Democrático: PCD), the communists, the socialists, and the Marxist-Leninist Popular Action Movement. On 4 November 1984, about 75 per cent of the registered voters went to the polls. The FSLN won 67 per cent of the votes, the presidency, and sixty-one of the ninety-six seats in the new National Assembly.

Daniel Ortega began his six-year presidential term on 10 January 1985. The Reagan administration ordered a total embargo on United States trade with Nicaragua the following month, accusing the Sandinista regime of threatening United States security in the region. The FSLN government responded by suspending civil liberties. The media of the church as well as the conservative

newspaper *La Prensa* were censored or closed for various periods and the Sandinista government was forced to divert more and more of its economic resources from economic development to defence against the *Contras*.

An additional step toward the solution of the Nicaraguan conflict was taken at a summit of Central American presidents held on 15 January 1988, when President Daniel Ortega agreed to hold direct talks with the *Contras*, to lift the state of emergency, and to call for national elections. In March the FSLN government met the representatives of the *Contras* and signed a cease-fire agreement. By mid-1988, international institutions had demanded that the Sandinistas launch a drastic economic adjustment programme as a condition for resumption of aid. This new economic programme imposed further hardship on the Nicaraguan people. With the country becoming bankrupt and the loss of economic support from the economically strapped Soviet Union, the Sandinistas decided to move up the date for general elections in order to convince the United States Congress to end all aid to the *Contras* and to attract potential economic support from Europe and the United States.

The FSLN government reinstated political freedoms. Many Nicaraguans expected the country's economic crisis to deepen and the Contra conflict to continue if the Sandinistas remained in power. In contrast, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro promised to end the unpopular military draft, bring about democratic reconciliation, and promote economic growth and won in the 25 February 1990, elections. The FSLN accepted its new role of opposition and handed over political power to Violeta Barrios de Chamorro and the UNO coalition on 25 April 1990.

11.4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Generally, successful revolutions (which run through a course without falling prey to a counter-revolution) go through certain definitive phases like transfer of power, redistribution of resources, institutionalisation of the change, and reconstruction/reconcentration.

- i) *Power transfer*: The process of power transfer is not an easy one. The displacement of the old regime calls for its replacement with a new one. The process of reaching an agreement on what kind of government the people want can be a struggle.

In Mexico, after the demise of the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz in 1911, armed struggle continued for 10 years before power was consolidated. In Bolivia the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) which took power in 1952 could not sustain its alliance with the miners and the peasants leading to the tenure of the revolution being very short. The MNR, miners and the peasants could not gain control. In Cuba, consolidation of power was successful because of the mass exodus of the upper class to the United States. In Nicaragua, the multi-class coalition of 1979 began to unravel within the year. The upper class businessmen mobilised in support of the Sandinistas turned to subversion along with the National Guardsmen hand-in-glove with the United States.

- ii) *Class Demolition and Redistribution*: For a revolution to be successful, the colonial hegemonic power backing the ruling elite has to be displaced. This has varied from country to country in Latin America. It means that the external hegemonic power is deprived of some

of the points of access or direct participation in the domestic affairs of the country. In most Latin American countries, the colonial powers and the landed aristocracy are the same.

In Mexico, the revolution dis-established the landowning aristocracy and the Church, which had been a major landowner. It also weakened the business elite with an export-import business and weakened the role of the United States in manipulating the domestic power relationships, giving rise to a national industrial sector. In Bolivia, the landowning aristocracy was displaced along with private interests controlling the tin mines. But in Bolivia, the revolutionary forces accepted the help of the United States with strings attached, instead of making it a target and accomplishment of the revolution. It is this, which became a factor in nurturing a new military elite and the failure of the alliance amongst the revolutionary forces. In Cuba, the US had a major stronghold and thus the revolution accordingly targeted the United States and the military establishment that served it. The nationally oriented business class in Cuba was extremely weak. In Nicaragua, the target was Somoza's dictatorship, his domestic supporters like the National Guard and the United States which was a benefactor of the dynasty. The Catholic Church in Nicaragua at least to begin with was committed to the revolutionary coalition.

Redistribution of Wealth: Redistribution of wealth in a revolution depends on how much wealth is there to redistribute. Cuba was a prosperous country at the time of revolution. Therefore redistribution took the form of the extension of services and Cuba had one of the most comprehensive public health and educational systems in the hemisphere. In Bolivia and Nicaragua, there was relatively little wealth to redistribute.

- iii) *Institutionalisation:* The institutionalisation of a revolution requires an entirely new set of political support groups as well as new constitutions, laws and behaviour patterns. The most important umbrella organisation for new support groups is a political party. In Mexico, the revolutionary political party took shape in 1929 and was reorganised in the 1930s and 1940s and renamed the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). For Bolivia, the MNR was supposed to be the institutionalising vehicle. But the party did not succeed in incorporating the miners or in institutionalising succession. Thus it succumbed 12 years later to counter-revolution. For Cuba, the Communist Party and the revolutionary armed forces were the dominant vehicles of institutionalisation with control in the hands of Fidel Castro. The national political super structure was built on the base of popular organisations. In Nicaragua, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which began in 1959 as a tiny insurrectionary group, was the dominant group at the time of revolutionary triumph. The Sandinista leadership enjoyed strong support of the members of popular organisations representing workers, peasants, women and youth.
- iv) *Reconstruction/Reconcentration:* Revolutions like all other readjustments of power are impermanent. Wealth and power tend to reconcentrate and the power and position of the people from the lower strata of society begins to weaken.

In Mexico, revolutionary leaders became a 'new class'—an economic and political power elite. In Cuba, although Castro and his supporters have avoided an elite status, rank differentiation and privileges have crept into what was once a people's army. Nevertheless, it is generally perceived

that countries, which have undergone revolutions, tend to be more stable than those that have not.

Latin American movements were undoubtedly multi-class in nature. All these movements may not have equally led to social and political change of significance, but what made them revolutionary was the way they involved the masses. The post-revolutionary elite too were state-builders but they created a mass society instead of the factional and fragmented society that existed before. Some historians have tried to downplay the popular and agrarian side of these revolutions but it is clear especially in the case of Mexico, that there were massive and violent rural rebellions. Of course, it cannot be equally clearly stated that the revolutions were 'purely' agrarian in nature. Even the Mexican revolution had non-peasant leaders playing an important role. Pancho Villa's popular army from the North was very different from the peasant villagers who constituted the core of Emiliano Zapata's army from the South.

11.5 SUMMARY

Revolutionary movements in Latin America have been defined in a very loose manner and related to violence, regime change, social change and even military authoritarian rule. This unit gives a brief view of the more successful revolutionary movements in Latin America bringing out the causes, main characteristics and the phases through which they evolved. In Latin America, a low level of political participation and the great distance between the masses and the elite with the elite striving to maintain *status quo* has always led to popular discontent. More so, the United States of America has emerged as a dominant force in the sphere.

11.6 EXERCISES

1. How would you distinguish a revolutionary movement from other social movements? Giving examples from Latin America explain what in your judgement may be termed as a relatively 'successful revolution'.
2. What were the causes of revolutionary movements in Latin America?
3. How far would you consider the Bolivian revolution to be a success?
4. What are the similarities between the phases through which the Mexican Revolution of 1911 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 evolved?
5. Briefly sketch the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and explain its limited success.