

Picturing Politics: the Mexican Revolution

Adam Morton

In 1939 the Mexican artist Jesús Escobedo produced a work simply entitled 'Las clases' that captured in a single composition the history and imagery of the outcome of the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1920. This socially committed artwork contained four figures standing equally side by side and arm in arm: the bourgeois, the soldier, the proletarian and the campesino. The ordering in terms of importance and priority is, perhaps, significant. Equally, the inclusion of neither a female character nor an indigenous member in the group is revealing in terms of assessing 'Las clases' as a representative image of Mexico's post-revolutionary state and society. For me, there is significance in the art work as a window on the historical sociology and political economy of modern state formation in Mexico.

Linked to the People's Graphic Workshop (or TGP) that promoted art to advance revolutionary social causes, the image was used to combat the spread of fascism in Mexico and to disseminate anti-Nazi propaganda. So it came to pass that Jesús Escobedo's image 'Las clases' was used in a political poster with the aim of projecting the unity of the various class factions of the Mexican Revolution in the 1930s, set against the geopolitical backdrop of fascism.

In microcosm then, Jesús Escobedo's depiction of the post-revolutionary state captures one of the paradoxes of the Mexican Revolution: how popular mobilisation and socio-economic transformation subsequently eventuated, through protracted class struggle, in a new form of state domination.

In sum, this example of everyday popular imagery captures two contradictory dynamics, spiralling out of the Mexican Revolution. Namely, how popular demands were both partly fulfilled and displaced by the consolidation of state power in post-revolutionary Mexican politics. This contradictory blend of revolution and restoration would then come to mark the making of modern state formation and capitalist consolidation throughout the twentieth century in Mexico