

## Limits on the Press and Civil Society during the Maximato: The Closing of the *Diario de Yucatán*, 1931–1933

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In October 1931, Governor Bartolomé García Correa and Socialist Party activists violently closed Carlos R. Menéndez's *Diario de Yucatán* for being reactionary. Defenders of the *Diario* denounced the governor for illegally silencing the voice of what today we would understand to be civil society. After a seventeen-month struggle in the courts, the national press, and in Mexico City's bureaucracy, Menéndez prevailed. This article closely examines the conflict, using regional and national archives and abundant contemporary press coverage, paying careful attention to discursive expression of socioethnic inequalities. It reveals significant limits on the regional independent press and the concept of civil society during the formative period in postrevolutionary Mexico known as the Maximato (the 1928–35 era dominated by Plutarco Elías Calles as hyperexecutive or Jefe Máximo). During the Maximato, the postrevolutionary state employed authoritarian measures to centralize power. The Maximato state, however, could not govern without acknowledging both the Constitution of 1917's classical liberal civil rights, such as freedom of the press and guarantees of associational life, and the revolutionary political legacy of popular action against "reaction." In the Yucatecan case, the muzzling of the regional independent press was not simply top-down illiberalism. Yucatecan socialists believed it would help

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create a more egalitarian and inclusive socio-political order to supplant civil society. The *Diario's* exclusivist definition of civil society and the national press's personal attacks on García Correa reflected widespread beliefs that people of indigenous and African descent were incapable of taking part in civic life. While Menéndez eventually prevailed in the courts, it was due more to his economic and cultural capital and prominent Mexico City allies than to legal protections for press freedom or civil-society resistance. The case helps us to understand how the latter two varied so significantly over place and time in postrevolutionary Mexico, and why Tocquevillian notions of civil society require careful qualification when applied to poor, overwhelmingly indigenous regions of Mexico.

**Keywords:** Bartolomé García Correa, civil society, *Diario de Yucatán*, Maximato, Partido Socialista del Sureste, the press, Yucatán.

En octubre de 1931, el gobernador Bartolomé García Correa y activistas del partido socialista de Yucatán cerraron violentamente el *Diario de Yucatán*, perteneciente a Carlos R. Menéndez, por ser reaccionario. Los defensores del *Diario* denunciaron el acto como un intento ilegal para callar la voz de lo que actualmente consideramos la sociedad civil. Después de una lucha de diecisiete meses en los tribunales, la prensa nacional y la burocracia federal en México, Menéndez prevaleció. Este artículo examina de cerca el conflicto, utilizando archivos regionales y nacionales y la abundante cobertura de la prensa de aquellos años, poniendo especial atención a la expresión discursiva de las desigualdades socioétnicas. Este artículo revela los límites significativos de la prensa regional independiente y el concepto de la sociedad civil durante el periodo formativo del México posrevolucionario conocido como el Maximato (la época 1928–35 dominada por Plutarco Elías Calles como hiperejecutivo o Jefe Máximo). Durante el Maximato, el Estado utilizó métodos autoritarios para centralizar el poder. Sin embargo, el Maximato no podía gobernar sin considerar las garantías clásicas liberales de los derechos civiles de la Constitución de 1917, como la libertad de prensa, la garantía de libertad de asociación o la herencia política revolucionaria de la acción popular contra la “reacción”. En el caso yucateco, amordazar a la prensa regional independiente no era un caso de iliberalismo desde arriba. Los socialistas yucatecos creían que el ataque contra el *Diario* sería una manera para establecer un orden sociopolítico más igualitario e inclusivo para reemplazar la sociedad civil. La definición exclusivista de la sociedad civil del *Diario* y los ataques personales de la prensa nacional contra García Correa reflejaron creencias diseminadas sobre que las personas de descendencia indígena y africana eran incapaces de tomar parte en la vida civil. Aunque Menéndez prevaleció en los tribunales, su victoria se debió más a su capital económico y cultural, a más de sus aliados prominentes en México, que a las protecciones legales de la libertad de prensa o la resistencia de la sociedad civil. Este caso ayuda a entender como las dos últimas variaban tanto dependiendo el lugar y el tiempo en la época posrevolucionaria de México, y porque las nociones Tocquevillianas de la sociedad civil requieren una

calificación cuidadosa cuando se aplican a regiones pobres, y abrumadoramente indígenas en México.

**Palabras clave:** Bartolomé García Correa, *Diario de Yucatán*, Maximato, Partido Socialista del Sureste, la prensa, sociedad civil, Yucatán.

On 16 October 1931, the *Defensa Revolucionaria*, paramilitary arm of the Partido Socialista del Sureste (PSS), occupied and partially burned the offices of the *Diario de Yucatán*. What began five days earlier as a voluntary boycott against the newspaper deemed reactionary had turned into a violent attack that claimed the life of an employee. Editor and co-owner Carlos R. Menéndez decried these acts as unconstitutional and a naked attempt by Governor Bartolomé García Correa to silence Yucatecan public opinion. After a seventeen-month struggle in the national press, courts, and federal bureaucracy, President Abelardo Rodríguez enforced a belated Supreme Court order reopening the *Diario*.

During the Maximato, the 1928–35 era dominated by Plutarco Elías Calles as hyperexecutive or *el Jefe Máximo*, the postrevolutionary state monopolized electoral competition within a newly created single party, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR). More ominously, the postrevolutionary state assumed authoritarian aspects: experimenting with corporatism, extirpating religious “fanaticism,” and threatening to curb the independent press as reactionary. Yucatecan governor García Correa cofounded the PNR, which in turn modeled much of its radical ideology and centralized structure on the PSS.<sup>1</sup> The closure of the *Diario* seems a *prima facie* example of how the Maximato’s illiberal tilt imperiled not only the free press but also civil society.

By the latter term, I mean the voluntary organization of individuals based on affinity and interest. In her perceptive analysis of the mid-nineteenth-century maturation of civil society in Buenos Aires, Hilda Sabato argues that a flourishing Tocquevillian associational life co-evolved with a robust free press; newspapers expressed *porteño* public opinion more reliably than dubious elections.<sup>2</sup> In Mexico, recent scholarship generally agrees that the single-party state crafted during the Maximato crumbled in the 1980s and 1990s in no small part because the independent press led by the Mexico City’s *Proceso*

1. Sarah Osten, *The Mexican Revolution’s Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920–29* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

2. Hilda Sabato, *The Many and the Few: Political Participation in Republican Buenos Aires* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), esp. 10, 12, 32, 176, 179.

and *La Jornada* undermined its legitimacy and encouraged the “resurgence” of an increasingly dissatisfied civil society.<sup>3</sup>

This article uses the conflict over the *Diario de Yucatán* to examine the complex relationship between civil society and the regional independent press, and the broader historical context of both. To that end, it draws on previously untapped archives to reveal why and how the postrevolutionary state attempted to close one of Mexico’s premier independent regional newspapers, and examines the campaign to reopen it. By locating key actors within larger social, economic, and political networks, and by considering the role of race, it troubles the concept of civil society and assumptions about the role of the regional independent press.<sup>4</sup> It posits that two factors constrained the press and civil society. First, the Constitution of 1917’s classical liberal protections of press freedom, property, and associational life coexisted uneasily with a revolutionary political legacy of popular action against reaction. Yucatán’s PSS was a major wellspring of this legacy.<sup>5</sup> Second, especially in southern Mexico, barriers of language, culture, and class marginalized many indigenous citizens.<sup>6</sup> At least in southern Mexico, then, a more Gramscian

3. See, for example, Chappell Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Mexican Free Press in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 6. Benjamin Smith convincingly demonstrates that even during the ruling party’s golden age (1940–c. 1976), the press often responded to public demand by covering corruption and misrule, especially in provincial cities as opposed to Mexico City. See Benjamin Smith, *Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940–1976: Stories from the Newsroom, Stories from the Street* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), esp. 6–8, 276.

4. I draw on the Archivo General del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida (AGEY), the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (AGN), and the Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca, Mexico City (FAPECyFT). I have also interviewed family members of García Correa and one member of the Menéndez family, who provided valuable background material. Only one scholarly study of the conflict exists in Mexico, José Miguel Flores Escalante’s fine legal history, “La libertad de prensa en la posrevolución: El amparo al *Diario de Yucatán* (1931–1933),” *Tzintzun* 61 (January–June 2015): 207–44. Both the PSS and Menéndez published long polemical accounts including numerous primary sources. See Carlos R. Menéndez, *En pos de la justicia: La clausura forzosa del “Diario de Yucatán”*; *Historia documentada de los atentados oficiales cometidos contra un periódico independiente* (Mérida: Compañía Tipográfica de Yucatán, 1932); and Comité de Campaña del Partido Socialista del Sureste contra la Prensa Reaccionaria y Burguesa, *La labor negativa y obstruccionadora de Carlos R. Menéndez* (Mérida: Partido Socialista del Sureste, 1932).

5. Felipe Carrillo Puerto was its most important proponent and practitioner. See Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, *Factionalism and the Limits of Identity Politics in Yucatán, Mexico* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2013), 35, 52–54.

6. Nancy Fraser argues that gender inequalities are not somehow “bracketed” from the public sphere, meaning the space between civil society and the state, a notion

definition of civil society is more apt: social actors enjoying privileged access to public life.<sup>7</sup> The stunted nature of civil society in much of Mexico, along with the growing commercialization of the press, helps us to understand why—in the words of Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, and Benjamin Smith—the regional independent newspapers were generally “mouthpieces of the regional bourgeoisie.”<sup>8</sup> The conflict’s process and outcome helps us to understand why the postrevolutionary state usually tolerated the regional independent press.<sup>9</sup>

After briefly reviewing the *dramatis personae*, the conflict’s initial events, and Menéndez’s complex relationship with civil society and the postrevolutionary state, I will trace how and why important sectors of the PSS defined Menéndez’s newspaper as reactionary. The focus then shifts to Mexico City, where García Correa and Menéndez assembled coalitions based on affinity, ideology, and interest to wage a legal, bureaucratic, and press war. In the penultimate section, I show how Menéndez eventually prevailed and how race was weaponized against García Correa in the press. The article concludes by reviewing the conflict’s equivocal implications for our understanding of the regional independent press, civil society, and the state.

### Backstory, 1910–31

Exactly why Governor García Correa ordered the violent closure of the *Diario* remains shrouded in mystery in spite of the episode’s notoriety. Even though the PSS and the independent regional press had a long and combative relationship, both the governor and Menéndez seemed to enjoy a working acquaintance for years until shortly before the Defensa stormed the newspaper’s offices. A closer

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that leaves civil society in even developed, wealthy stable democracies weak. The same could be said for socio-economic and ethnic inequalities. See Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 10–11, 24.

7. See Joseph Buttigieg, “The Contemporary Discourse on Civil Society: A Gramscian Critique,” *Boundary 2* 32, no. 1 (2005), 42; Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), 69–70.

8. Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, and Benjamin Smith, “Introduction: Journalism, Satire, and Censorship,” in *Journalism, Satire and Censorship in Mexico, 1910–2014*, ed. Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, and Benjamin Smith (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2018), 11; Benjamin Smith, *The Mexican Press*, 118.

9. Gillingham, Lettieri, and Smith, “Introduction,” 11.

look at key actors suggests why most revolutionary politicians satanized Menéndez but Yucatecan civil society lionized him and provides some necessary context, but no clear single motive, for the attack on the *Diario*.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Menéndez emerged as the most successful and powerful editor in a very competitive environment. The wealth of the Porfirian henequen export boom made Mérida one of Mexico's most prosperous cities by 1910, and its associational life bloomed with the proliferation of trade unions, mutualist societies, carnival clubs, charities, and philanthropic societies.<sup>10</sup> Mérida's vibrant civil society encouraged an explosion of journalism at the turn of the twentieth century. In the 1910s, economic pressures and the professionalization of the press led to dramatic consolidation. Menéndez proved to be more than just a talented writer and editor; he was an astute and well-connected businessperson able to raise capital in the face of considerable risk. In fact, he thrived at a time of uncertainty, as newspapers evolved from electoral vehicles to big businesses. Making the right political choices still mattered, however, even as professionalization replaced partisanship. The young Menéndez had supported Yucatecan opposition leader Carlos Duarte Moreno and Mexico's Apostle of Democracy, Francisco Madero, against the Porfiriato, forcing him to flee Yucatán. After returning home, his political luck ran out: after briefly supporting Victoriano Huerta, revolutionary authorities forced him into exile again, and he could return to Yucatán in early 1916 only by promising Governor Salvador Alvarado that he would refrain from publishing.<sup>11</sup>

When Alvarado departed, Menéndez, now enjoying the status of a brave journalist speaking truth to power, regained control of his old paper, *La Revista de Yucatán*, which resumed publication on 1

10. Franco Savarino Rogerro, *Pueblos y nacionalismo: Del régimen oligárquico a la sociedad de masas en Yucatán, 1894–1925* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1997), 235–57; Allen Wells and Gilbert Joseph, *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatán, 1876–1915* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 127, 130, 134.

11. Hernán Menéndez, "La construcción de la hegemonía menendista en Yucatán, 1918–1924: Retorno de los Dioses," *Unicornio*, year 10, 500 (26 November 2000) p 1–7: 6; Wells and Joseph, *Summer of Discontent*, 233, 239, 249; Mauricio Bretón González et al., eds., *Diccionario histórico y biográfico de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana and Secretaría de Gobernación, 1990), 7:719–20; Manuel María Escoffé, "La labor de D. Carlos R. Menéndez," *El Yucatanista (EY)*, 18 March 1933, 3.

October 1918. The *Revista* became the first true example in Yucatán of what has been called the industrial press: new technology (rotary presses and graphics, wire services for syndicate features), more advertisements (including classifieds), and a range of topics from sports to cinema.<sup>12</sup> In theory, the industrial press's modern business organization facilitated access to capital. Menéndez's funding came mostly from a small number of investors from the great bourgeoisie, namely Arturo Ponce Cámara, family friend and the dean of Mérida's business community, and the vehemently anti-PSS Manzanilla hacendado clan.<sup>13</sup> Menéndez's resurrection of the *Revista*, along with his exiles and authorship of regional histories, elevated him above his rivals for good. Even the pro-government *La Voz de la Revolución* called him *adalid*, or captain, of the independent press.<sup>14</sup>

Menéndez's metamorphosis failed to convince most revolutionary politicians, who long believed that his business, personal, and familial ties to the old regional oligarchy and to the Catholic Church tainted his journalism. In 1915, the PSS's founder, Alvarado, had confiscated his press to print his own paper, *La Voz de la Revolución*. Alvarado's electoral law of January 1918 required political parties to publish their own periodical, defining the press as inherently partisan.<sup>15</sup> Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1922–23), the PSS's greatest leader, was a former journalist who clashed with his former editor and ex-mentor, Menéndez.<sup>16</sup> After Carrillo Puerto's tragic death in early 1924 at the hands of Delahuertista rebels, the new PSS governor, José María Iturralde, had the offices of Menéndez's *La Revista de Yucatán* burned.

Undeterred, Menéndez refounded *La Revista de Yucatán* as the *Diario de Yucatán*. To avoid any future attacks, he adopted two somewhat contradictory strategies. In the *Diario*'s issue number 1 (31 May 1925), Menéndez abjured “personalistic and partisan

12. Pablo Piccato, “Notes for a History of the Press in Mexico,” in *Journalism, Satire and Censorship in Mexico, 1910–2014*, ed. Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, and Benjamin Smith *Journalism, Satire and Censorship in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2018), 45.

13. H. Menéndez, “La construcción,” 6, 11n22; Ponce Cámara, a former supporter of Duarte Moreno like Menéndez, was almost certainly a crucial source of capital for decades. Menéndez kept a photo of him on his desk. “Los 75 años del *Diario*: La trinidad periodística del siglo XX en Yucatán; Editorial aniversario *Diario de Yucatán*,” *Diario de Yucatán*, 31 May 2000, [www.yucatan.com.mx/noticias/miercole/primerapri310.asp](http://www.yucatan.com.mx/noticias/miercole/primerapri310.asp).

14. *La Voz de la Revolución*, 1 October 1918, cited in H. Menéndez, “La construcción,” 5.

15. Savarino Rogerro, *Pueblos y nacionalismo*, 358.

16. H. Menéndez, “La construcción,” 7, 12n38.

politics.”<sup>17</sup> By adopting the professional ethic of objective journalism, he strengthened his claim to speak for the public good. Menéndez’s posture as a popular tribune was bolstered by the fact that he now relied on readership and advertisements, not political patronage, for his profits. To that end, the *Diario de Yucatán* was legally structured as a modern joint-stock company—one that shared profits with workers.<sup>18</sup> The corporate structure obscured Menéndez’s reliance on the same sectors of the old economic elite for capital. Moreover, Pablo Piccato argues that the constitutional protection of business property shielded the industrial press from state action.<sup>19</sup>

Menéndez’s alliance with the new PSS governor, the moderate Álvaro Torre Díaz (1926–29), was an even better guarantee of the *Diario*’s success. The new relationship of the *Diario*’s managing editor with the state government and Menéndez’s old ties to capital made it very difficult to disentangle his self-interest from his newspaper’s definition of the public interest. The *Diario*’s coverage avoided corruption scandals, political criticism, or poverty during the administration of Torre Díaz, and Menéndez benefited from advertising revenues from the state government, a paid trip to the United States, and perhaps other financial perks.<sup>20</sup> Torre Díaz’s economic backing allowed Menéndez to buy out the Manzanilla brothers’ stock in the newspaper and so regain majority control.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the governor took Menéndez’s counsel and nominated a friend of Menéndez for congress.<sup>22</sup> The two eventually sealed their alliance via marriage of close relatives.<sup>23</sup> During this same time, Ponce Cámara was both a major stockholder in the *Diario*, an intimate friend of Menéndez, and a source of much advertising revenue as head of the parastatal Henequeneros de Yucatán, which monopolized the export of the monocrop.<sup>24</sup> Ponce Cámara held much sway over the business

17. *Diario de Yucatán (DdY)*, 31 May 1925. All translations from Spanish to English are my own, unless otherwise noted.

18. Savarino Rogerro, *Pueblos y nacionalismo*, 271–72.

19. Piccato, “Notes,” 45.

20. Rubén Darío Domínguez et al. to Presidente de la República (PR), 29 April 1927, Obregón y Calles (OyC) 307-Y-2, AGN; Francisco López Herrera to PR, 27 November 1928, Dirección General de Gobierno (DGG) 2.311G, caja 337, AGN.

21. Pedro Echeverría, “Prensa y poder en el neoliberalismo (Yucatán 1982–2001),” (unpublished manuscript), PDF file, accessed 26 May 2015, <http://www.rebellion.org/docs/122501.pdf>.

22. Carlos R. Menéndez to Álvaro Torre Díaz, 25 February 28, Poder Ejecutivo (PE), caja 865, Sección de Gobierno (SG) 2, AGEY.

23. Hernán R. Menéndez, “Herencia oligárquica e historia oficial,” *Unicornio*, year 5, 260 (24 March 1996): 3–7, 7n14.

24. Javier Erosa to Plutarco Elías Calles, 26 March 1927, OyC 307-Y-3, AGN.

community, and after 1920, he set an example of supporting the postrevolutionary state. He also favored moderately progressive, if paternalistic, social policy reflecting his social Catholicism, an ideology that was not incompatible with Torre Díaz's pro-business socialism.<sup>25</sup>

For foes of Menéndez, these ties tainted his claims to speak in the public interest. For them, the editor's quid pro quo with the governor bought his silence.<sup>26</sup> As one enemy of Menéndez put it, the editor was "spokesman for the current 'order' of things."<sup>27</sup> Until the rupture with García Correa, the *Diario de Yucatán* served as a conduit between revolutionary politicians and the business community; it floated policy proposals and covered some stories in the public interest, like calling for better urban planning, improving public health, and controlling public drinking and gambling.<sup>28</sup> If the newspaper represented civil society's concerns to the state, it was much more likely to reflect the opinion of the most wealthy and politically connected sectors of civil society. This, then, was civil society as defined by Antonio Gramsci as opposed to that defined by Alexis de Tocqueville, one that excluded the working poor and indigenous majority.

During this time, García Correa as president of the PSS and then as governor (before the conflict) routinely interacted with Menéndez and his associates. Like other revolutionary Yucatecan politicians of his era, García Correa sought favorable coverage in the *Diario* and responded obligingly to Menéndez's gentle criticism in the public interest.<sup>29</sup> While García Correa idealized Carrillo Puerto and styled himself as the true heir of the socialist martyr's radical tradition, he sought to harmonize relations with the regional upper class—at least until mid-1931. Coexisting with Menéndez was a pragmatic choice, one that generally benefited the governor.

25. Bretón González et al., *Diccionario histórico*, 7:761; Luis Alfonso Ramírez Carrillo, "Epílogo: Empresarios y poder; La metamorfosis de las élites (1937–2000)," in *El cultivo de las élites: Grupos económicos y políticos en Yucatán en los siglos XIX y XX*, ed. Marisa Pérez de Sarmiento and Franco Savarino Roggero (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2001), 234; Luis González, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1934–1940: los artífices del cardenismo* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1979), 132.

26. *EY*, 18 March 1933.

27. Javier Erosa to Plutarco Elías Calles, 26 March 1927, OyC 307-Y-3, AGN

28. Bartolomé García Correa to Carlos R. Menéndez, 7 July 1927, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 20.

29. Bartolomé García Correa to Carlos R. Menéndez, 9 July 1927, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 20–21; Bartolomé García Correa to Carlos R. Menéndez, 3 September 1930, reprinted in C. Menéndez, 22. For examples of other PSS politicians' cultivation of Menéndez's favor, see C. Menéndez, *En Pos* 23.

What, then, explains García Correa's sudden volte-face? Menéndez blamed his mild criticism of mismanagement of the state-run railroads of Yucatán, which defaulted to British lenders, and the crackdown on parochial schools.<sup>30</sup> To be sure, the Maximato's uneasy stability depended in part on limiting international economic tensions and avoiding economic shocks. To that end, Calles had previously ordered García Correa to silence press criticism of the state-run railroad and the parastatal Henequeneros, which owed a huge sum to the national bank (Banco de México or Banxico).<sup>31</sup> In November 1930 and again in June 1931, García Correa jailed Manuel María Escoffié, publisher of the small semiweekly paper *La Lucha*, for criticizing Banxico's handling of Henequeneros's ballooning debt.<sup>32</sup>

Was García Correa simply complying with Calles's orders when he attacked the *Diario*? Almost certainly not. After all, García Correa could simply have arrested Menéndez quietly on trumped-up charges, as he did with Escoffié; other governors did the same.<sup>33</sup> Or he could have offered a carrot in lieu of wielding a stick. Instead, García Correa sought a very public conflict aimed at keeping the *Diario* shuttered for a long time and humiliating Menéndez.

Absent a smoking gun, circumstantial evidence suggests that the dramatic closure was intended by García Correa to bolster his position politically in Yucatán at a time of growing social discontent due to the devastating impact of the Great Depression on the monocrop henequen economy. The attack on the *Diario* also responded to signals from other Maximato governors and demands from within the PSS. Turning first to the Yucatecan political motives, García Correa and other PSS leaders had long used discourses and practices dating back to the revolutionary party's early years to unify the popular base against reaction. However, because of structural

30. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 17, 341–43.

31. Bartolomé García Correa to Plutarco Elías Calles, 6 August 1931, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles (APEC) García Correa, Bartolomé, exp. 67 inv. 2239 leg. 3/5, FAPECyFT; Memorandum para el Señor General de División don Plutarco Elías Calles, del Gobernador del Estado (Memorandum), APEC "Henequeneros de Yucatán," gav. 40 exp. 51 inv. 2687 leg. 5/6, FAPECyFT.

32. Rufus Lane Consul Progreso to Secretary of State (SOS), 5 November 1930, roll 22, Records of the (US) Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Mexico (RDSRIAM) 1930–39; Manuel María Escoffié, *Los bijos de Adan: Novela yucateca* (Mérida: El Porvenir, 1939), 378–83.

33. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 66. On incarcerating journalists to induce self-censorship post-1940, see Smith, *Mexican Press*, 175.

constraints imposed by Banxico and Calles, García Correa could not strike out at Yucatecan hacendados through land reform or by raising wages of hacienda workers. Nor could he realize expansive plans for worker- and peasant-run cooperatives and a modern welfare state.<sup>34</sup> When it came to another putative bulwark of reaction, the Catholic Church, García Correa preferred quiet accommodation, not risky conflict.<sup>35</sup> This left one vulnerable target that could be labeled reactionary: Menéndez's *Diario de Yucatán*.

At the time of the conflict, other prominent politicians seemed bent on muzzling independent newspapers. Radical governor Adalberto Tejeda of Veracruz sought to muzzle a critical daily, *El Dictamen* of Juan Malpica, an old colleague of Menéndez.<sup>36</sup> Earlier in 1931, Governor Luis León of Chihuahua—a close friend of García Correa—temporarily shut down Silvestre Terrazas's *El Correo de Chihuahua* through legal channels. Other governors seemed primed to take on the regional independent newspapers as well.<sup>37</sup> Most importantly, actors close to Calles in March 1931 had indirectly pressured the allegedly reactionary owners of the Mexico City daily *Excelsior* to give up ownership.<sup>38</sup> The Maximato's left wing seemed to be moving toward curbing press freedom, and García Correa wanted to stay in step with his peers.

34. Ben Fallaw, "Bartolocallismo: Calles, García Correa, y los Henequeneros de Yucatán," *Boletín del Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles* 27 (April 1998): 1–32; and Ben Fallaw, "Intellectual Workers, Socialist Shopkeepers and Revolutionary Millionaires: Political Economy of Postrevolutionary Yucatán, 1924–35," in *State Formation in the Liberal Era: Capitalisms and Claims of Citizenship in Mexico and Peru*, ed. Ben Fallaw and David Nugent (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020), 246–72.

35. Ben Fallaw "From Acrimony to Accommodation: Church-State Relations in Revolutionary-Era Yucatán, 1915–1940," in *Peripheral Visions: Politics, Society, and the Challenges of Modernity in Yucatán*, ed. Edward Terry et al. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 237–38.

36. Robert Cummings, "Local Political Conditions: Various Consular Districts [Jul. 31]," 4 September 1931, roll 1, RDSRIAM 1930–39.

37. Jolie Olcott, "Mueras y matanza: Spectacles of Terror and Violence in Postrevolutionary Mexico," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*, ed. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 84n19; DGG 2.095, caja 1, exp. 25, AGN. See also DGG 2.095, caja 1, exp.23, 25, AGN; *Hombre Libre (HL)* 7, 26 January 1931; *HL*, 18 September 1935, 1, 4.

38. Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy: Crime Truth, and Justice in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 68.

### The PSS against Menéndez

While foes pilloried García Correa as an incipient dictator, he always had to answer to his own constituents in the PSS. Key leaders in the party not only endorsed the attack on Menéndez's daily but also might well have planned it. The PSS's selective interpretation of regional history provided more justification than motivation. The *adaliid's* actions during insurrections against revolutionary authorities (Huerta against Madero, Adolfo de la Huerta against Álvaro Obregón and Carrillo Puerto) are a bit murky, although not clearly incriminating. Menéndez's journalism applauded both revolts as restoring law and order; yet Menéndez soon soured on both, supporting Huerta half-heartedly and fleeing Delahuertista-ruled Yucatán.<sup>39</sup> As to his complicity in the death of Carrillo Puerto, no firm evidence existed to back widespread suspicions.<sup>40</sup> If we define reactionary as legitimizing the socio-economic order that excluded the majority of the population—above all, the rural indigenous population—the label might well have seemed appropriate to some veteran PSS leaders. Attacking Menéndez for his reactionary beliefs allowed García Correa to imitate PSS governors Alvarado and Iturralde, and to avenge Carrillo Puerto's death. Alvarado, Iturralde, and Carrillo Puerto formed the holy trinity of Yucatecan revolutionary icons.

Important PSS labor leaders and intellectuals remembered Menéndez's past before 1925. They also looked to the future. For them, the fight against the *Diario* could lay the foundations of a revolutionary new society. This confrontational cadre constituted the Comité de Campaña del Partido Socialista del Sureste contra la Prensa Reaccionaria y Burguesa (CCPRB). Aside from Manuel Cirerol Sansores (a writer, pioneer filmmaker, and key architect of the hero cult of Carrillo Puerto), the other eight directors of the CCPRB were all members of PSS labor unions and cooperatives (bakers, butchers, electricians, bus drivers) in Mérida and its port of Progreso, and most were active in the Defensa. Male urban labor was the key constituency for the attack on the *Diario*. It is doubtful if the CCPRB-led march on 11 October and a rally on 8 November had much impact on the male peasants, women, and children watching. At the latter event, García Correa claimed that Juan Chan, a humble party member with a remarkably common name never heard from

39. Wells and Joseph, *Summer of Discontent*, 249, 250, 262; Application for passport, 20 February 24, PE 795 SG, AGEY.

40. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 72–77.

again, was the first to call for the *Diario*'s closure. True, an all-party assembly approved a demand from the floor by acclamation to expel Menéndez, but during the conflict, the peasant majority of the party remained on the sidelines.<sup>41</sup>

To legitimize the *Diario*'s suppression, the CCPRB published Menéndez's allegedly reactionary writing that documented his "negative and obstructive work."<sup>42</sup> Three charges lay at the indictment's heart: backing the Catholic Church, bourgeois affiliations, and counterrevolutionary activity. On the first count, the *Diario* did reverently cover the Yucatecan clergy and religious festivals.<sup>43</sup> However, in March 1930, when the federal government asked García Correa to investigate the newspaper for violations of anticlerical regulations, the governor let the matter lapse without taking any action.<sup>44</sup> The second allegation against Menéndez—serving as spokesperson of the bourgeois, was even more problematic. Sectors of the grande bourgeoisie—large landowners, industrialists, and bankers—could be found in both the pro-García Correa and pro-Menéndez camps. Under García Correa, the PSS sought to tame, not abolish, capitalism, principally by founding cooperatives to help small producers, and shied away from either nationalization of industry or agrarian reform.<sup>45</sup> Absent a direct assault on capitalism, it was difficult to imagine civil society or the independent press withering away. On the third count—opposing the revolution—the CCPRB tarred Menéndez with responsibility in Carrillo Puerto's assassination because of his old conflicts with the revolutionary martyr. While empirically dubious, the accusation emotionally resonated with the usually hard-hearted Calles, who mourned Carrillo Puerto.<sup>46</sup>

Throughout the conflict with the *Diario*, the Defensa Revolucionaria was the strongest supporter of the closure within the PSS. Its participation helps us understand why García Correa was

41. *Boletín de Mérida*, 9 October 1931, reprinted in C. Menéndez, 187, 207–208, 358.

42. As in the title of Comité de Campaña, *La labor negativa*.

43. Rufus Lane to SOS, 31 October 1931, roll 22, RDSRIAM 1930–39.

44. Bartolomé García Correa to Secretaría de Gobierno (SG), 7 March 1930, DGG 2.090, caja 3, exp. 11, AGN.

45. Partido Socialista del Sureste, *Memorias del Cuarto Congreso del PSS, primer del carácter agrícola-ganadero celebrado en Mérida los días de 1o al 4 de mayo de 1931* (Mérida: Gobierno del Estado, 1931), 85–86.

46. Ben Fallaw, "Los límites de la Revolución: Plutarco Elías Calles, Felipe Carrillo Puerto y el socialismo yucateco, 1921–1924," *Boletín del Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles* 27 (August–December 2006) page 1–32, 8, 12; José María Iturralde to Plutarco Elías Calles, 31 May 1924, APEC "Iturralde, José María," gav. 44, exp. 74, inv. 2939, FAPECyFT

willing and able to go further than other governors in muzzling the independent regional press. Defensa officers played key roles in the CCPRB, and its enlisted men enthusiastically carried out the coercive “boycott” of the *Diario*. The Defensa’s origins suggest what could have replaced civil society. Members sported red shirts inspired by Tabascan strongman Tomas Garrido Canabal’s Bloque Juvenil Revolucionario, young men and women who donned crimson shirts to fight fanaticism by smashing Catholic icons.<sup>47</sup> Groups of Red Shirts sprang up across Mexico, believing that Garrido Canabal’s legions were the revolutionary vanguard of the Maximato. Mérida’s Defensa differed from Red Shirts elsewhere because it recruited from existing strong PSS-affiliated *ligas*, mainly male urban workers and small proprietors organized into PSS cooperatives, supplemented with conscripted (and unenthusiastic) male state employees.<sup>48</sup> Yucatán’s Red Shirts were also unique in Mexico in bearing arms; the rifles and automatic pistols they brandished during the shutdown came from Calles, a gift likely interpreted as the Jefe Máximo’s approval.<sup>49</sup>

While many Maximato politicians like Lázaro Cárdenas praised the Red Shirts, only García Correa deployed paramilitaries against a newspaper.<sup>50</sup> The act suggested to many a systematic attempt to violently undermine a free press and perhaps intimidate civil society. The Defensa had a hand in three murders (besides that of *Diario* employee Homero Medina) and several extralegal jailings and beatings, not to mention shadowing dissidents and some journalists.<sup>51</sup>

47. Tim Henderson, “Unraveling Revolution: Yucatán, 1924–1930” (master’s thesis, University of Texas, 1988), 164; Rafael Loyola Díaz, *La crisis Obregón-Calles y el estado mexicano*, 4th ed. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1991), 130–31; Antonio Betancourt Pérez, personal interview with author, 6 November 1994; Bartolomé García Correa to Calles, 28 October 1931, APEC “García Correa,” exp. 67, inv. 2239, leg. 3/5, FAPECYFT; “Vibraciones políticas de esta semana,” *EY*, 17 October 1931.

48. Defensa roster, 31 December 1930, PE SG 924, AGEY; Antonio Mediz Bolio and José Castillo Torre, *La agonía de Yucatán: Exposición de la actual situación política, social y económica del Estado* (Mexico City: Partido Socialista del Sureste, 1932), 8–9; Martín Méndez to governor, 10 September 1932, PE 951 SG1, AGEY.

49. Mediz Bolio and Castillo Torre, *La agonía*, 8–9; The estimate of three thousand members was supplied by Alfredo Pérez to PR, DGG vol. 5, 2.316(27), anexo 3, AGN; Bartolomé García Correa to Calles, 28 October 1931, APEC “García Correa,” exp. 67, inv. 2239, leg. 3/5, FAPECYFT; *EY*, 17 October 1931.

50. Luciano Kubli, *Cárdenas en Tabasco: Breve reseña de un viaje de estudio* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento, 1935).

51. Mediz Bolio and Castillo Torre, *La agonía de Yucatán*, 8–9; Máximo Canche to governor, 9 January 1933, PE 980 SG 1, AGEY; On alleged murders by the Defensa, see *HL*, 19 September 1931, 1,2; *La Lucha*, 21 May 1932; Félix Rosado Iturralde to governor, 3 August 1932, PE 937, AGEY. See also Rubén Darío Domínguez to PR, 2

Defensa members reportedly told victims, “The boss ordered it”—an ominous authoritarian threat.<sup>52</sup> The Defensa’s martial displays disturbed many PSS members whose antimilitarism was rooted in leftist (especially anarcho-syndicalist) ideology. This militarism might have recalled the federal troops’ repression of the PSS ordered by Carranza in 1919–20 and the mutinous soldiers who killed Carrillo Puerto in 1924.<sup>53</sup> When uniformed Defensa members sporting cartridge belts appeared at the PSS Third Party Congress in May 1930, many delegates yelled, “Out! Out!” and whistled down its commander.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, there was genuine support in the PSS for the Defensa. Most Defensa officers and many enlisted men were veterans of labor activism. Commander Ernesto Cervera battled bakery owners and defended workers’ rights, and some of his lieutenants professed anarchist and communist ideas.<sup>55</sup> While the Defensa’s violence undermined García Correa’s appeal for some, others—particularly among urban labor—could have seen it as empowering. Some PSS leaders, and perhaps even García Correa, saw in the interlocking network of Defensa platoons, cooperatives, and PSS ligas in key sectors of the urban economy the foundation of a corporatist new order to rival civil society.

To that end, the Defensa assault on the *Diario de Yucatán* allowed the PSS to create a powerful, lasting means of countering its influence. On the Day of the Revolution (November 20) 1931, the PSS’s new daily, the *Diario del Sureste*, rolled off the presses confiscated from its rival. Resemblances to *Diario de Yucatán* were many: a network of correspondents across the state providing local coverage, syndicated features from national and international wire services, attractive photos and graphics, and advertisements from local businesses. The main difference was that the PSS’s constituent leagues received glowing coverage, including a special “Workers

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January 1933, AR 525.25/95, AGN. On domestic intelligence gathering, see Escoffié, *Los bijos*, 377.

52. See Escoffié, *Los bijos*, 377.

53. Fausto Martínez Díaz, “Movimiento obrero en Yucatán: El caso de los trabajadores portuarios de Progreso (1910–1929)” (master’s thesis, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Mérida, Yucatán, 2010), 142.

54. *DdY*, 2 May 1930, 1, 2.

55. Nathaniel Weyl and Sylvia Castleton Weyl, *The Reconquest of Mexico: The years of Lázaro Cárdenas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 155; *Diario del Sureste (DSE)*, 11 January 32. Lists of Defensa Revolucionaria, January 1932, PE 952–SG 2, AGEY, checked against biographical information culled from archives; *Clamor del Obrero* and *DSE*, 31 January 1929; and AM Mérida libro 90, AGEY.

Page.” It featured colorful, graphically striking special sections for key days in the socialist liturgical calendar. The *Diario del Sureste* might not have been the “spiritual organ of the Revolution” in Yucatán, but it did serve as an important quotidian presence in the life of party members across the state, spreading news of assemblies and rallies in Mérida—prorevolutionary editorials and essays that could easily serve as grist for local orators long after the *Diario de Yucatán* reopened.<sup>56</sup>

### The Battle in the Capital, the Courts, and the Press

From the conflict’s start, Menéndez dug in his heels and fought back in Mexico City and the federal court system. He telegraphed President Pascual Ortiz Rubio, who dispatched federal troops to prevent a shoot-out between the Defensa and armed *Diario* employees, but stopped short of ordering García Correa to desist. With electricity cut, Menéndez’s two sons jailed, and the Defensa menacing employees (after killing one), the paper could not be printed or distributed. Mérida’s federal district judge could not grant Menéndez’s plea for an *amparo* (injunction to protect his constitutional rights) because both the governor and federal army commanders simply refused to appear.<sup>57</sup> The Maximato’s unwritten rules restrained both the president and federal judge; both feared offending Calles should García Correa have acted with his permission—his defiance of the judge signaled just that. Yet the Jefe Máximo’s true intentions were largely unknown, as he routinely acted through private, off-the-record meetings, often far from the capital. Because of the ongoing henequen crisis, Calles took a personal interest in Yucatecan politics, granting García Correa frequent audiences. As the right-wing Mexico City newspaper *Omega* complained, the wily Yucatecan governor could use Calles’s name as a “parapet” and “sword” without fear of rebuke.<sup>58</sup>

Undaunted, Menéndez planned to prevail via the law, lobbying, and a sympathetic national press. Still, Menéndez faced uncertain odds. Just a few days after the conflict erupted, the opposition newspaper *Hombre Libre* received a federal injunction against the federal district’s government.<sup>59</sup> The editors of *El Dictamen* (Veracruz City) and *El Rayo* (Tepic), however, had to wait up to two years for judicial

56. *Boletín de Mérida*, 9 November 1931, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 358.

57. Flores Escalante, “La libertad,” 212, 216–17, 219–23, 243.

58. *Omega*, 31 October 1932.

59. *HL*, 24 October 1931.

relief.<sup>60</sup> Press freedom seemed up for grabs during the Maximato. Meanwhile, García Correa could fly frequently to the capital to personally bolster his position. Around 13 October 1931, García Correa probably persuaded Calles to withdraw federal troops protecting the *Diario*.<sup>61</sup> The governor's allies in the national congress and the ruling party's newspaper, *El Nacional*, endorsed the boycott and condemned *Diario de Yucatán* for serving the Church and reaction.<sup>62</sup> A few days later, García Correa took advantage of a rift between supporters of the president and the Jefe Máximo, hosting his fellow governors in one of his Mexico City homes to support Calles.<sup>63</sup> For the moment, national events and Calles seemed to favor the governor. Having branded the *Diario de Yucatán* as reactionary and aligned himself even closer with Calles, García Correa seemed unbeatable.

To demonstrate popular support for the paper's closure, the PSS's constituent ligas invoked the revolutionary legacy of popular action against reaction in telegrams to Mexico City. Demands came from PSS "free men [*hombres libres*] fully aware of their rights" to stop Menéndez's sabotage of the workers.<sup>64</sup> The PSS's Alianza de Periodistas, Artes Gráficas y Voceadores del Sureste (journalists, graphic artists, and newspaper vendors) pointed out that the *Diario's* workforce was not unionized.<sup>65</sup> In perhaps the clearest example of how the revolutionary legacy of popular action against reaction was understood to trump classical liberal notions of the rule of law, PSS ligas argued that Menéndez spoke for "bourgeoisie minority" whose rights should be subordinated to the majority's.<sup>66</sup> In a kind of legal legerdemain, the governor and mayors claimed that they prevented the *Diario's* circulation as members of the PSS exercising their rights, not as elected officials.<sup>67</sup>

60. *Excelsior*, 29 August 1935, 2:1, 8.

61. Consul Progreso Rufus H. Lane to SOS, 15 October 1931, roll 40, RDSRIAM; C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 349.

62. *Excelsior*, 14 October 1931, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 72–77.

63. Alfonso Taracena, *La verdadera Revolución Mexicana: Decimaséptima etapa (1931); La familia revolucionaria* (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1965), 1:195; C. Menéndez, 71–73, 256–57.

64. *Omega*, 28 October 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, 256–57; Bernabé Rodríguez to Plutarco Elías Calles, 11 December 1931, APEC Ligas Diversas 6/16, gav. 47, exp. 10, inv. 3199, leg. 6/16, FAPECyFT. The quote is from the PSS announcement in *El Universal*, 18 October 1931, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 86–87.

65. Adrián Valadez to SG, 12 August 1932, Información Política y Social (IPS), caja 65, exp. 7, pp. 14, 28–29, AGN; PSS announcement in *El Universal*, 18 October 1931, reprinted in C. Menéndez, 86–87.

66. Flores Escalante, "La libertad," 236.

67. Flores Escalante, "La libertad," 234.

From mid-October 1931 until the end of the year, Menéndez and his defenders sought to reopen the *Diario de Yucatán* through intermediaries in Mexico City, legal relief, and pressure in the public sphere. All of these efforts explicitly invoked the newspaper's value to civil society and often represented the violent boycott as a fundamentally uncivil act. In Menéndez's words, it was an attack on "decency" itself.<sup>68</sup> As explored in greater detail below, defenders of the *Diario* frequently linked incivility to race, assuming that people of indigenous or African descent were prone to uncivil behavior. Menéndez, for instance, called the attack on *La Revista de Yucatán* in 1924 as something typical of "Hottentot Land," not Yucatán.<sup>69</sup>

At the start of his campaign to reopen the *Diario*, Menéndez sought Calles's support via two influential advocates, Luis Montes de Oca, Treasury secretary, and Alberto Mascareñas, director of the Banco de México. Ignoring Menéndez's career before 1925, aside from his Maderismo, they portrayed him and his newspaper as the very bedrock of Yucatecan civil society, citing its cultural value and the editor's civic virtues—not to mention the paper's importance to the regional economy and the national coffers.<sup>70</sup> Menéndez could also draw on his formidable and carefully cultivated reputation. After his journalistic metamorphosis in 1925, Menéndez received professional recognition from his national and international peers (he was "prestigioso y prestigiado," proclaimed *El Universal*), as well as being accorded manly honor and courageousness ("viril y caballeroso") by proper Yucatecan society.<sup>71</sup> From this professional and social perch, Menéndez could represent himself as a politically neutral guardian of the public's interest, as exemplified by his motto, "Truth is above ideology."<sup>72</sup> Because of his renowned reputation for honorability and professionalism, Menéndez, in his own words, "receive[d] the unanimous applause of the sensible society [*sociedad*

68. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 8.

69. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 7.

70. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 18; F. Barrera Lavalle, "Quién es D. Carlos R. Menéndez," *La Lucha*, 8 August 1925 and 7 November 1925.

71. Francisco J. Paoli and Enrique Montalvo, *El socialismo olvidado de Yucatán* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1977), 315. The "prestigioso y prestigiado" quote is from *El Universal*, 3 November 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 267–69. The "viril y caballeroso" quote can be found in *Excelsior*, 5 November 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 266–67. On honor and journalism, see Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

72. Faulo Sánchez Novelo, *José María Iturralde Traconis, "El Kanxoc": Ideología y política en un régimen socialista yucateco* (Mérida: Maldonado, 1986), 225–26. See also C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 18.

sensible] of Yucatán.<sup>73</sup> *Sensible* is a freighted term that requires interrogation, as it delineates the boundaries of civil society for Menéndez and his supporters. Words like *sensible* embraced a host of positive connotations: not only formal education, manners, and reasonability but also, implicitly, either whiteness and economic privilege or deference to those who possessed them. Ideologically, Menéndez's post-1925 editorial line was nonpartisan but essentially regionalistic, nostalgic, Catholic, and patriarchal. This perspective was widely shared by most of the old elite families of Yucatán, a group that was politically disenfranchised but retained substantial wealth and social capital after the revolution. Much of Mérida's middle class looked up to the peninsular Brahmins as well.<sup>74</sup>

The Jefe Máximo cast a shadow over the entire conflict, and his role as the ultimate arbiter of political conflict shaped the strategies of both sides. Menéndez's intermediaries conveyed to Calles—in Menéndez's own words—his admiration of the Jefe Máximo's "politics of salvation" (*política salvadora*).<sup>75</sup> Unswayed, and perhaps believing Menéndez had Carrillo Puerto's blood on his hands, Calles repeatedly refused Menéndez's son an audience in November 1931.<sup>76</sup> Calles's silence allowed García Correa to invoke the Jefe Máximo's support and repeatedly walk away from attempts to negotiate unless Menéndez agreed to forswear any negative reportage—even when President Ortiz Rubio personally intervened.<sup>77</sup> Calles's inaction also likely explains why the Supreme Court did not accept Menéndez's appeal until April 1932.

With the no apparent resolution in sight, Menéndez departed for Cuba in early 1932, leaving his confederates to litigate and lobby. Menéndez's key lieutenant at the *Diario*, Carlos Escoffié, bonded with the minister of the interior, General Juan José Ríos y Ríos, over

73. Carlos R. Menéndez to Alberto Mascareñas, 8 October 1931, APEC "Mascareñas, Alberto," gav. 51, exp. 161, exp. 3535, leg. 5/10, FAPECyFT On Menéndez's estimation of his own honorability, see C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 19.

74. Asael Hansen and Juan Bastarrachea, *Mérida: Su transformación de capital colonial a naciente metrópoli en 1935* (Mexico: INAH, 1985), 163–64.

75. The quote is from Carlos R. Menéndez to Alberto Mascareñas, 8 October 1931, APEC "Mascareñas, Alberto," gav. 51, exp. 161, exp. 3535, leg. 5/10, FAPECyFT; this document was not published by Menéndez in *En pos*. Perhaps the use of the term "*salvadora*," with its religious connotations, was a sly jab at Calles. I thank William Taylor for raising this possibility.

76. Only Memorandum, 23 October 1931, summarizing arguments in favor of Carlos R. Menéndez, exists in Calles's archive.

77. Adrián Valadez, agente confidencial to SG (hereafter Valadez), 12 August 1932, IPS, caja 65, exp. 7, 13, AGN; C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 91–92, 323–25; *EY*, 9 January 1932.

their shared Maderista past. Ríos dispatched an investigator to Yucatán incognito as a journalist to interview individuals from a cross section of Mérida's society and draft a balanced, objective report on García Correa's administration.<sup>78</sup> Menéndez's supporters apparently arranged most of the interviews and provided a damning dossier, thus assuring an extremely negative report on the Yucatecan governor. Menéndez returned home just as the "secret" report was being widely circulated among the governor's foes, and he received a warm reception from President Ortiz Rubio and Secretary Ríos. Negotiations by intermediaries of García Correa and Menéndez resumed, and now the embattled editor seemed to have the upper hand. Buoyed by this, Menéndez was confident enough to begin construction on a new building.<sup>79</sup>

### Resolution and Race

While losing ground in Mexico City, García Correa was routinely denigrated in the national press. Publications ranging from the staid Mexico City dailies *El Universal* and *Excelsior* to regional independent dailies like Veracruz's *El Dictamen*, to the combative, down-market newspapers like *Hombre Libre* and *La Prensa*, strongly condemned García Correa's actions against the *Diario* and his entire regime, often in very personal, racially charged terms.<sup>80</sup> They depicted the conflict in a simple, compelling narrative of a unified Yucatecan civil society backing the brave journalist against tyranny. As *Excelsior* expressed it, "various sectors of Mérida society" were pressuring the federal government to reopen the *Diario*.<sup>81</sup> For them, Mérida's urban society, which largely still looked up to the old upper class, was synonymous with Yucatán.

The press across Mexico marked the first anniversary of *Diario*'s closure with another flurry of attacks against the governor. The Associated Press of the (Mexican) States and the US-based Associated Press asked the national government to dismantle García Correa's "illegal *cacicazgo*."<sup>82</sup> The shriller voices of regionals newspapers and rabble-rousing Mexico City tabloids claimed that the

78. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 323–25; Valadez; Bretón González et al., *Diccionario histórico*, 662; Centro Social Político Yucateco to PR, 2 January 1933, Abelardo Rodríguez 525.25/95, AGN.

79. *EY*, 30 July 1932, 27 August 1932; C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 324–25.

80. See editorials by "Kiff" (pseud.; Santiago R. de la Vega) and Silvestre Terrazas reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 186–87.

81. *Excelsior*, 9 December 1931, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 189.

82. Reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 249–52.

PSS posed a mortal danger to civilization itself, comparing the party to Russian bolshevism. One Tamaulipan paper called García Correa both a “satrap” (a provincial official in the Ottoman Empire—an orientalist, exocitizing slur) and a “Caligula” who treated the *Diario* like his sister Agrippina. This reference to the reportedly insane, narcissistic emperor who exiled his sister would have reinforced a feeling of superiority among readers who shared a knowledge of classical history.<sup>83</sup>

Some journalists based in Mexico City and northern states represented García Correa as symptomatic of southern Mexico’s inherent social pathologies. For them, states like Tabasco, Yucatán, and Veracruz were prone to domination by petty dictators because their weak civil societies proved incapable of defending their rights.<sup>84</sup> Unsubtle references to García Correa’s supposed (often racial) shortcomings helped explained these defects. For *El Omega*, the “rustic” governor of Yucatán presided over a “brown tyranny” (la tiranía prieta), and indigenous Yucatecans venerated him like a gigantic idol worshiped by their ancestors.<sup>85</sup> The normally circumspect *El Universal* mocked García Correa’s ancestry and populism, calling him “the mestizo incarnation of the popular will and the Maya-Spanish translation of public sentiment.”<sup>86</sup>

Many such attacks directly drew attention to García Correa’s complex ethnicity and underscore the way the postcolonial legacy of race could weigh on postrevolutionary politics. Although García Correa, a successful merchant with normal school and accounting degrees, was considered socially white in his hometown of Umán, he was darker skinned than most other middle-class Yucatecans.<sup>87</sup> Harping on García Correa’s phenotype and presumed ancestry, some in the press called him “the Batab,” the title of a pre-Conquest Maya prince.<sup>88</sup> Santiago R. de la Vega, a northerner writing in *El Universal*,

83. *El Mundo* (Tamaulipas), 2 November 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 281–82. For another use of the word *satrap*, see *El Porvenir*, 19 November 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 286.

84. Clark to SOS, 20 October 1932, roll 2, RDSRIAM 1930–39; *El Siglo de Torreón*, 5 March 1933.

85. *Omega*, 16 October 1931 and 30 October 1931, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 194–95, 200–2.

86. *El Universal*, 21 January 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 184–85.

87. On García Correa’s social location in Umán, see Paul Eiss, *In the Name of the Pueblo: Place, Community, and the Politics of History in Yucatán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 87, 110–12, 125, 136–37.

88. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 249–51; *El Siglo de Torreón*, 7 November 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 280–81.

christened García Correa the “Hombrecito de Gutapercha” (little man of gutta-percha, a brown Malaysian natural latex): “Umán gave him the color of the Maya-Quiche race. Africa his gait and his shady color. Asia his small eyes.”<sup>89</sup> In De la Vega’s diatribe, we can glimpse a relatively rare moment when anti-indigenous and anti-black prejudice erupted out of the realm of gossip, innuendo, and cutting jokes and into the printed word.<sup>90</sup> These attacks dishonored García Correa as a public figure because they appeared in the public sphere and thus threatened to delegitimize him politically in Mexico City.

Menéndez’s close associate, Antonio Mediz Bolio, supplied damaging information about García Correa to writers like De la Vega.<sup>91</sup> In August 1932, Mediz Bolio published *La agonía de Yucatán*, a scurrilous attack on García Correa, discussing his failures in racial terms.<sup>92</sup> For his part, Menéndez, like most journalists, usually avoided using negative, obviously racist language in his writing. Yet his pre-1925 production at times reveals his fears that the revolution loosened necessary social restraints on indigenous people, which could lead to crime and social chaos and perhaps even another “Caste War” or race war.<sup>93</sup> Not coincidentally, Menéndez enthusiastically promoted Yucatán’s mestizo culture with its decontextualized and folklorified indigenous elements; the blue-eyed, light-skinned grandson of a Spanish immigrant would undoubtedly have rejected the charge of racism.<sup>94</sup>

This hammering in the press and the ripple effect of the Interior Ministry’s damaging report, combined with Menéndez’s stubborn failure to accept any limits on his newspaper’s coverage, were all

89. “Kiff,” “El cacique en turno: Hombrecito de Gutapercha,” *El Universal*, 13 March 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 186–87. For another example of anti-blackness used to discredit García Correa, see *Omega*, 21 October 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 254–56. See also “Libertad Bartólica,” *El Universal*, 26 November 1931; “Revolucionarismo bartolense,” *El Universal*, 8 December 31, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 182–83.

90. Diane Nelson, *A Finger in The Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 11, 38, 170–205.

91. “Kiff” never named Mediz Bolio, but he made unmistakable reference to his long nose and to the title of his most famous book. See *El Universal*, 13 March 1932, reprinted in C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 186–87.

92. Mediz Bolio and Castillo Torre, *La agonía de Yucatán*, 5–6, 12.

93. Wells and Joseph, *Summer of Discontent*, 233, 239; Comité de Campaña, *La labor negativa*, 287–91.

94. *La Revista de Yucatán*, 16 March 1919; Paulino Vinajera, *Monografía de la Sociedad Paz y Unión* (Mérida: n.p., n.d.), 14, 65. On mestizo culture, see Paul Eiss, “Playing Mestizo: Festivity, Language and Theatre in Yucatán,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 11, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 242–65.

undermining García Correa's position and likely trying Calles's patience. Still, no resolution was likely during August and early September 1932 due to the turmoil that eventually forced President Ortiz Rubio's replacement by General Abelardo Rodríguez.<sup>95</sup> New interior minister Eduardo Vasconcelos sided with Menéndez.<sup>96</sup> President Rodríguez refrained from intervening, however, still favoring a negotiated settlement in the absence of any indication from Calles.<sup>97</sup>

At this crucial moment, García Correa doubled down instead of folding. At the PNR's national convention held 30–31 October in Aguascalientes, the Yucatecan delegation proposed closing all independent newspapers in Mexico as reactionary. It was received with laughter and quietly expired in committee.<sup>98</sup> Having lost with the political elite, García Correa lost legally. On 19 November 1932, the Supreme Court finally gave Menéndez his injunction, although it delayed issuing it in Yucatán until February.<sup>99</sup>

Undaunted, García Correa asked President Rodríguez to dilute or ignore the Supreme Court's decision.<sup>100</sup> An alarmed Menéndez dispatched his son Ruben to enlist Ponce Cámara, confidant of Calles and a major *Diario* investor, to negotiate.<sup>101</sup> García Correa stalled, but more telegrams from the PSS ligas failed to sway Calles. More Defensa violence against *Diario* property in early 1933 was counterproductive.<sup>102</sup> A second court order on 20 February and President Rodríguez's direct command to the governor allowed the *Diario de Yucatán* to resume publication on 12 March 1933.<sup>103</sup>

### Ambiguous Conclusions

Does the *Diario*'s saga demonstrate that the independent press backed by civil society could overcome a repressive state during the Maximato? In some important ways, the answer is yes. The rule of law

95. Jurgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 162–64.

96. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 327–29.

97. *EY*, 24 September 1932, 10, 17.

98. Clark to SOS, 24 August 1932, roll 2, RDSRIAM 1930–39.

99. Flores Escalante "La libertad," 233–34; C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 1–7.

100. Flores Escalante, "La libertad," 235–36.

101. On Calles's esteem for Ponce Cámara, see various correspondence, APEC "Ponce Cámara," gav. 61, exp. 21, inv. 4546, FAPECyFT.

102. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 332–33; Memorandum, 26 December 1932, APEC "García Correa," exp. 67, inv. 2239, leg. 3/5, FAPECyFT; various correspondence, APEC Ligas Diversas, gav. 47, exp. 10, inv. 3199, leg. 6/16, FAPECyFT.

103. C. Menéndez, *En pos*, 21–22 (app.).

eventually prevailed, in no small part because the press across Mexico exposed the PSS's boycott as a violent, arbitrary act. Menéndez and his allies were able to pressure the federal government by citing the support from prominent sectors of Yucatecan civil society. The *Diario's* ability to weather a long and costly conflict without accepting limits on coverage dictated by the governor discouraged the postrevolutionary state from naked repression of the regional independent press. The demonstration effect was undeniable. Indeed, García Correa paid an extremely high cost; he left Yucatán and public life for good in 1940 in no small part because of the conflict.

Other more troubling conclusions can be drawn from the conflict. The conflict exposed just how unreliable legal protections for the press were. The violent closure of the *Diario* was not the only attack on the independent regional press during the Maximato—it was just the most notorious and probably the least successful.<sup>104</sup> Menéndez was exceptional in having more backing from capital and more allies in the federal government than most publishers. Without these advantages, many newspapers accepted or sought out compromising relationships with officials. Of course, Menéndez did just that with Governor Torre Díaz in 1926–30. Are limits on journalism any less detrimental to the public interest and thus to civil society if they are offered by the press, as opposed to imposed by the state?

Menéndez prevailed in part because he gained the backing of high-ranking officials, including a secretary of interior, and was able to shape the outcome of a supposedly confidential federal investigation of García Correa and then diffuse its findings. Such connections between the press and officials—and there were many more—blur the boundaries between state and civil society. This blurriness raises other questions about the press's relationship with civil society. After reopening, the *Diario de Yucatán* resumed its previous editorial line, promoting—at times through critical policy debates—the public interest. It ran letters to the editor denouncing official abuses and malfeasance.<sup>105</sup> To the dismay of some of Menéndez's defenders in the 1931–33 conflict, however, he praised President Cárdenas's 1937 land reform that broke up large henequen haciendas and was perceived by many Yucatecos to be an arbitrary act that deeply

104. For an excellent study of the press in Mexico, arguing that limits on the press loosened between 1910 and 1940, see Ana María Serna Rodríguez, "Prensa y sociedad en las décadas revolucionarias (1910–1940)," *Secuencia* 88 (2014): 109–49.

105. Manuel Sierra B. to editor, *DdY*, 28 August 1943.

harmed Yucatecan interests.<sup>106</sup> While the *Diario* often accepted paid advertisement from opposition candidates, at other times Menéndez would deny the opposition's requests, as he did in 1942.<sup>107</sup>

Lastly, a careful examination of the conflict suggests that civil society is a concept that must be applied with care in postrevolutionary, postcolonial Mexico. As we have seen, the ideal of civil society (as expressed in the language of Maximato-era Mexico) was invoked by Menéndez and his allies in the press and in negotiations with high government officials to demand respect for the press's independence. But Tocquevillian views of civil society run the risk of overlooking its potential to amplify existing prejudices and class and racial cleavages.<sup>108</sup> We should pay close attention to the exclusions implicit in the notion. Especially in regions with a large indigenous population like Yucatán, civil society was restricted by widespread beliefs that linked civility to race. Indigeneity (and blackness) excluded individuals and entire groups from the definition of "sensible society" invoked by Menéndez. A recent ethnographic study of racism in contemporary Mérida found the *Diario* still in the hands of the same family and still pursuing essentially the same editorial line. It concluded that the *Diario's* coverage of crime, politics, and even the society page preserves a conservative social order that subordinates people of indigenous descent.<sup>109</sup> These sobering conclusions, like this analysis of the conflict over the paper's closure, alert us to the limits of civil society, even as we appreciate its role in the regional independent press's resilience.

106. EY, 19 August 1937.

107. Laureano Cardos Ruz to General Juan Izaguirre Payan, 22 October 1941, Ávila Camacho 544.2/30, AGN.

108. Ariel Armony, *The Dubious Link: Civic Engagement and Democratization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 56–103.

109. Eugenia Iturriaga, *Las élites de la ciudad blanca: Discursos racistas sobre la otredad* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2016), 238–334.