

The Changing Role of the Encomendero as Seen in Valladolid, Yucatan (1543-1579)

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The Castilian king had several ways of encouraging the settlement of the New World. One method used by the Crown was to grant a permit of conquest to an *adelantado*, who in turn appointed captains to spread through his province and subdue the natives. If successful, the Spaniards founded towns¹ and divided the spoils, whether gold or Indians. The conquistadors who acquired the latter in *encomienda*² enjoyed a brief period of supremacy, but when their services as soldiers ceased to be vital, they found their territory invaded by other "representatives" of the Crown, such as the friars and the royal officials.

This phenomenon occurred throughout Spanish America in the sixteenth century, but to observe it better, a particular region should be studied. As an example, in 1526 the Emperor Charles V granted the title of *Adelantado* to Francisco de Montejo and commissioned him to conquer the regions of Yucatan and Cozumel.³ His initial attempts were fiercely resisted by the natives, and in 1542 he appointed his illegitimate son and his nephew to aid in the pacification of the area. Their efforts met with success, and within a few years, four Spanish *villas*⁴ had been established in the Yucatan peninsula:

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1. The term "town" is used in the broader Spanish meaning of the word and includes not only the urban community but also the surrounding hinterland.

2. The term *encomienda* refers to a grant by the Crown in which the recipient, the *encomendero*, pledged to protect and Christianize the Indians, and they in turn owed him tribute. For a thorough explanation, see Robert S. Chamberlain, "Castilian Backgrounds of the Repartimiento-Encomienda," *Contributions to American Anthropology and History*, V, no. 25 (Washington, D.C., 1939), 24-33.

3. Robert S. Chamberlain, "The Governorship of the Adelantado Francisco de Montejo in Chiapas, 1539-1544," *Contributions to American Anthropology and History*, IX, no. 46 (Washington, D.C., 1948), 168; Charles St. John Fancourt, *The History of Yucatan*, (London, 1854), 88-89.

4. A Spanish settlement and the surrounding countryside over which it had jurisdiction; similar to a county.

San Francisco de Campeche, Mérida, which became the capital, Valladolid, and Salamanca de Bacalar. This study is concerned with the conquest and settlement of Valladolid as an example of the development of a Spanish town. The emphasis of the work is on the role played by the *encomendero*: first as a founding father, then as a city planner, and finally as a parasitic senior citizen. Before the Spaniard could settle down as an *encomendero*, however, he first had to conquer the region. Valladolid was no exception; how did it come into being?

Late in 1542 the Adelantado Francisco de Montejo commissioned his nephew to establish a permanent campsite which could take advantage of the port of Conil. Therefore, the nephew took a small force from the newly founded Mérida and made his way toward Chuaca, a village of the Copul Indians, where his uncle the *Adelantado* had fought a battle during his campaign a decade and a half before. The *caciques*, or chieftains, welcomed or at least peacefully submitted to the Spaniards, and after an inspection of the area, Montejo and his captains decided that it was suitable for settlement. The Indian population seemed large and capable of providing the necessary food and service. The soil was fertile, meadows were nearby for grazing, and the lake on which Chuaca bordered afforded good water. And, in accord with Montejo's instructions, Chuaca was not far from the port of Conil.

Montejo the Nephew established camp on the shore of the lake, opposite the Indian town. Designating Captain Francisco de Cieza to command the camp in his absence, he led the greater portion of his men southward to subdue rebellious *caciques* and to secure the area over which he was to hold jurisdiction.

By May, Montejo felt that the Spanish control over the eastern and central provinces was firm enough to justify the official founding of a town. Thus on May 24, 1543, he established a municipality at the campsite at Chuaca, naming it Valladolid, after the town in Castile. He appointed officials and also designated some forty or fifty soldiers as *vecinos*, or citizens and heads of households, assigning them land and Indians in and around the town, over which they would have jurisdiction. The construction of houses and other necessary edifices was begun at once, using the natives for labor. Within a short while, the *pueblos*, or Indian villages, of the province were divided and entrusted to the *vecinos* in *encomienda*.⁵

5. The *repartimiento* was made by the Adelantado's son, Montejo the Younger, assisted by an *alcalde*, Bernaldino de Villagómez, and several

However, Valladolid did not prosper. The area was low and much of it was inundated during the rainy season. Many Spaniards became ill, and hundred of *naborías*, Indians who served in Spanish households, were killed by diseases. The *encomenderos* attributed the deaths to the geographic situation of the town and the climate,⁶ and some of them moved to a *pueblo* in their *encomienda* so as to escape it. A second plague, probably a European disease, hit the region, causing a further decrease in the Indian population. This decline led to smaller tribute returns from the towns in *encomienda*. To make matters worse, the Indians in the district of Valladolid-Chuaca were particularly restless and persistently made attempts to revolt.

By the early months of 1544, the *vecinos*⁷ of Valladolid were convinced that the site of the town was not as favorable as they had thought. They wanted a drier, more healthful area, and the *encomenderos* especially wanted to move to a center of more concentrated population, for their livelihood depended on the tribute collected. Montejo the Nephew hesitated, for he had been ordered to found a town near the port of Conil. But under pressure he finally relented, and on March 14, 1544, the *vecinos* moved southward to the Indian village of Zaqui,⁸ leaving behind a small force in Chuaca to maintain the old municipality until the success of the new one could be determined.

Zaqui proved to be a good choice. The soil was relatively fertile, and water was readily available from two cenotes, or natural wells. The village had been a governmental and religious center for forty villages "within a day's journey,"⁹ and thus its domination by the Spaniards severely limited the overt activities, at least, of the native

members of the clergy. Relación de Valladolid, in *Relaciones de Yucatan*, II, *Colección de Documentos Inéditos de Ultramar* (Madrid, 1900), XII, 6-9, hereafter cited as RY; Robert S. Chamberlain, *The Conquest and Colonization of Yucatan 1517-1550* (Washington, D.C., 1948), 225-226. For a sample title to an *encomienda* granted by the Adelantado Francisco de Montejo in 1544, see Lesley Byrd Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain* (Berkeley, 1950), 203-204.

6. Relación de Juan Vellido, RY, pp. 78-79; Relación de Giraldo Díaz de Alpuche, RY, p. 205.

7. Although the terms *vecino* and *encomendero* have very distinct meanings, they are generally used interchangeably in this work. Most of the early *vecinos* of Valladolid were rewarded for their services by grants of Indians in *encomienda*.

8. The village took its name from its idol, Caquival. Relación de Juan Gutiérrez Picón, RY, 156.

9. Alfred M. Tozzer, ed., *Landa's Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan*, *Peabody Museum Papers XVIII*, (Cambridge, 1941), 59, n. 281, hereafter cited as *Landa*.

leaders.¹⁰ The Spaniards who had remained at Chuaca were soon summoned to join the others, and the municipality of Valladolid was definitely established at Zaqui with thirty-nine *vecinos*.¹¹

The structure of the Spanish town was superimposed over the village of Zaqui. In the center of the community there was a high rock mound or pyramid called a *cu*, which had been the Indians' religious altar. In planning the town, Montejo the Nephew utilized the area in front of it as the *plaza mayor*, and the *cu* also became a convenient rockpile:

Captain Montejo traced out this *villa* from north to south and from east to west; and the streets run from north to south, making great roads of forty feet in width. On the said plaza in front of this *cu* on the southern side there is a church with three naves in the middle, covered with a nice thatch, with its pillars of stone well arched and of hewn stone and masonry; one ascends it by six steps.¹²

The houses of the *vecinos* were built out of similar material and were usually structures of stone masonry with either thatch covered or flat tiled roofs.¹³

While the Spaniards were busily planning and building, the native priests and *caciques*, outwardly submissive, were secretly plotting to annihilate them. The plan included almost all of the villages of the peninsula, but it was in the area of Valladolid that the uprising was the most effective and brutal. The *caciques* waited for an opportune moment, and they chose a time when many of the important officials would be on the other side of the peninsula. In the fall of 1546 the Adelantado and his wife were returning to Yucatan after many years' absence, and both his son and his nephew, along with many colonists, were going to San Francisco de Campeche to meet them. Furthermore, the Maya knew that more *encomenderos* than usual would be in their *pueblos* at this same time, collecting the periodical tribute. Therefore, they chose the night of November 8-9, 1546, and rose up in mass against their Spanish conquerors.

Almost half of the *vecinos* of Valladolid, some with their families,

10. For a description of the municipal governmental hierarchy of the natives, see Ralph L. Roys, *The Indian Background of Colonial Yucatan* (Washington, D.C., 1943), 60-61.

11. Chamberlain, *Yucatan*, 229-230.

12. *Relación de Valladolid*, RY, 19.

13. For a summary of the royal regulations to be followed in the establishment of new towns, see George McCutchen McBride, *The Land Systems of Mexico* (New York, 1923), 107-108.

were caught in their *pueblos*, just as the Maya had intended. Many atrocities were committed: some Spaniards were killed by slow torture,¹⁴ others were sacrificed to the idols and had their chests cut open and hearts torn out. Still others were dismembered and parts of their bodies were carried to neighboring *pueblos* to encourage the Indians in the revolt. Not only were eighteen *encomenderos* killed, but also over six hundred *naborías*.¹⁵

The twenty-two *encomenderos* who were in Valladolid sent word to Mérida for help, and meanwhile tried to hold off the rebellious Maya who numbered, according to one estimate, over twenty thousand.¹⁶ Two weeks after the siege had begun, one of the *alcaldes* of Mérida, Francisco Tamayo Pacheco, arrived with a force of about forty men, most of whom were mounted, and about five hundred Indian auxiliaries. They broke through the encircling lines and entered the town:

When the Captain and soldiers arrived at the town, they found that the few citizens who survived were in great danger. . . . The citizens had not been able to leave the place because the Indians, knowing they were so few, had them partly surrounded. It gave the Indians . . . great pleasure to taunt them day and night. With the arrival of the help Tamayo Pacheco brought, the citizens gave great praise and regained their spirits, and the Indians were taken aback and were afraid.¹⁷

Although there were now over sixty soldiers in Valladolid, the siege was far from over. There were a long series of attacks before the native warriors began to draw off in groups and return to their *pueblos*, determined to defend them to the last against the attacks they knew the Spaniards would now launch in all directions. It was not until March, 1547, after almost four months of continuous fighting, that the surrounding area was relatively subdued.¹⁸

The countryside, especially that around Valladolid, was in a state

14. The Indians tied the brothers, Juan and Diego Cansino, to two crosses and discharged arrows at them throughout the day. Fancourt, 135-136.

15. *Relación de Valladolid*, RY, 20-21; *Relación de Diego Burgos de Cansino*, RY, 168.

16. *Relación de Juan Farfán el Viejo*, RY, 178.

17. *Probanza of Rodrigo Alvarez (1575)* as quoted in Chamberlain, *Yucatan*, 244.

18. *Relación de Juan Cano el Viejo*, RY, 130-131; Frans F. Blom, *The Conquest of Yucatan* (Boston, 1936), 99-100.

of chaos. Spaniards had been killed and their dwellings burned. Plants and animals brought from Europe had likewise been destroyed. Furthermore, the Indian population had been greatly reduced: *naborias* had been massacred by their own people, native warriors had been killed by the Spaniards, and survivors had migrated to distant areas, particularly to the still unconquered Peten Itza.

In an attempt to restore some stability and order to the provinces, the Adelantado Montejo called a council of the *caciques* who had been involved in the revolt, and asked them to state their grievances. Most declared that the incitement of the native priests rather than mistreatment by the Spaniards had been the main cause of the uprising. Only a few Indians made accusations concerning ill-treatment by several Spanish captains, and Montejo saw to it that the Spaniards were reprimanded.¹⁹

The *encomenderos* themselves soon found a scapegoat on whom to place the blame for the Great Maya Revolt of 1546-1547. They wrote to the Viceroy of New Spain, Don Antonio de Mendoza, that the newly arrived Franciscan friars had been living with the Indians in the *pueblos* and that the Indians had revolted "from love of the friars."²⁰ Upon closer investigation of the situation, officials of the Viceroy discovered that the Franciscans had not yet arrived in the vicinity at the time of the rebellion, but they still "kept watch of the friars during the night, to the great scandal of the Indians, and made inquiries into their lives and took away the alms from them."²¹ This incident was only the beginning of a long series of "tattletale" episodes between the two principal forces in the development of the *villa* of Valladolid: the *encomenderos* and the Franciscan friars.

A handful of Franciscans had come from Guatemala and New Spain to Yucatan in 1545 and had entered Valladolid soon after the Great Revolt. Within a short while they permeated the area and were rivalling the *encomenderos* as "caretakers" of the Indians. The friars made demands of tithes and service on the *encomenderos* and their Indians, and the resentful Spaniards initiated the custom of appealing "over the heads" of their rivals as illustrated by the plea to Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain.

Such tactics were not practiced by the *encomenderos* alone, for in retaliation, the Franciscans sent an emissary to the President of the Audiencia de los Confines, Guatemala, Alonso López Cerrato.

19. Chamberlain, *Yucatan*, 251-252.

20. *Landa*, 70.

21. *Ibid.*

This mission probably took place in 1550 since it was in that year that the *audiencia* jurisdiction of Yucatan was changed from Mexico to Guatemala.²² The friars anticipated the *encomenderos* in obtaining the ear of the new royal superior, and their representative gave him a full account of "the disorder and the unchristian conduct of the Spaniards." The friars' representative particularly exposed the violations of the remaining portions of the New Laws of 1542, such as the collection of tribute beyond the orders of the king and the enslavement of the Indians and the enforcement of personal services, such as carrying burdens. The *audiencia* president, López Cerrato, was quick to respond, and he established an "endurable" taxation rate. Furthermore, he "made it known what things belonged to the Indian, after paying his tribute to his *encomenderos*, and that everything should not absolutely belong to the Spaniards."²³

The admonitions to the *encomenderos* seemed to have no effect, however, and so the friars renewed their agitation. In response, López Cerrato sent Tomás López to Yucatan as *Visitador* in 1552.²⁴ The *Visitador* temporarily relieved the *alcalde mayor* of his authority and took over the administration of the colony.²⁵ He reviewed the treatment of the natives and the tribute demanded of them, and as a consequence, he decreased it, informing the *caciques* of each *pueblo* what they would owe.²⁶

In addition to relieving the Indians of some of the pressures of the *encomenderos*, *Visitador* López also tried to aid the friars in their attempts to Christianize the natives. His plan was to concentrate the Indians in the larger towns and to place them, so far as possible, near the monasteries. This action was long remembered by the *encomenderos*:

this Tomás López ordered the said *pueblos* to be abandoned in order to bring them near to the monasteries. . . . And in the *pueblos* which did not wish to leave their sites he ordered their houses to be set on fire. And when he departed from this country he left authority for the monks, the Franciscan friars, to move the *pueblos* which they wished

22. *Ibid.*, 70, n. 316. The *audiencia* jurisdiction was returned to Mexico in 1560.

23. *Ibid.*, 71.

24. Tomás López had been an *oidor* in the *Audiencia* of Guatemala since 1548. *Ibid.*, 71, n. 317.

25. After the end of Adelantado Montejo's rule in 1549, Yucatan and Tabasco were governed by *alcaldes mayores*. *Ibid.*, 71, n. 318.

26. Fancourt, 164-166.

to move near to the monasteries and to burn those whose [inhabitants] were unwilling.²⁷

The friars took advantage of the new authority granted to them by the crown officials and further centralized the native population. Their attempts led to a particularly vehement altercation between Francisco Hernández, a citizen of Valladolid and *encomendero* of Tepich and Chikindzonot, and the friars, led by Father Hernando de Guevara, who had established a monastery in Valladolid in 1553. Hernández preferred charges before the Audiencia de los Confines in Guatemala in 1555, the beginning of a series of actions, charges and countercharges which continued until 1561 when Hernández died.²⁸

The Franciscans steadily increased their influence in the region. Within the boundaries of the *villa* of Valladolid there were four provinces, and the friars established a monastery in the *cabecera*, or capital, of each one. The four were in Valladolid, Tecemín, Cenote and Ixmul.²⁹ However, the *encomenderos* did not stand by idly:

The Spaniards were displeased to see the friars were building monasteries, and drove away the sons of the Indians from their *repartimientos* in order to keep them from going to learn Christianity, and twice they burned the monastery of Valladolid, with its church which was of wood and straw.³⁰

But the friars were not defeated by such resistance, and the monasteries which they built, and rebuilt, were formidable fortresses. The third structure of San Bernardino de Cical in Valladolid was built outside the city and included one of the two cenotes of the town within its walls. It appeared "inexpugnable" and could hold two thousand men with their arms and horses. No wood was inserted in the arches; all construction was done with rock and with stone masonry.³¹ The monastery at Tecemín was also very strong. Its walls

27. Relación de Giraldo Díaz de Alpuche, RY, 209-210.

28. Landa, 70, n. 314. Details of the altercation can be found in France V. Scholes and Eleanor B. Adams, *Don Diego Quijada, Alcalde Mayor de Yucatan, 1561-1565* (Mexico, 1938), xxi-xxvi.

29. Relación de Juan de Benaventes, RY, 122.

30. Landa, 70.

31. Relación de Juan Rodríguez el Viejo, RY, 103; Relación de Valladolid, RY, 37. Judging from their previous experiences with wooden edifices, one wonders if the fortress-monasteries were solely to protect the Spaniards from the Indians, or if they were also to protect the friars from the *encomenderos*.

were like ramparts and were from ten to twelve feet thick. It had a sacristy filled with silk vestments and enough cells for eight or ten friars. Generally, however, there were only two, and sometimes three, friars in residence in the monasteries.

The amount of work required and accomplished by the friars in proportion to their numbers was considerable. For example, the monastery at Valladolid had twenty-nine *pueblos* under it in an eight league radius, and the two friars at Tecemín ministered to twelve villages.³² Within one-quarter of a century, the friars succeeded in building a semblance of a church in almost every *pueblo*. They were built of stone or wood, some with thatch, others with tile roofs. At the front of the church there was usually a gold cross and a damask-covered altar with silver vessels. Often there was an oil retable over it. Music was an important part of the service, and each church had its choir and some had musicians who played the flute and the sack-but.³³ The churches had two bells to call the people to mass, and most had a separate house to lodge the friars when they visited the village. The "rectory" came complete with cord beds and foot baths.³⁴ However, the natives were generally required to go to the monasteries on Sunday and on special feast days. Only occasionally did the friars go to the *pueblos* to perform marriage ceremonies and baptisms and to say mass in the village church.

In addition to building churches the friars also sponsored schools in the larger villages. They trained a handful of Indians in the monasteries and then sent them back to their *pueblos* to teach reading, writing, and the *doctrina*, or catechism.³⁵

The number of friars in the area remained small, but evidences of their activities mushroomed. Such interference in the lives of the Indians was bound to reap the antagonism of the *encomenderos*. In fact the latter opposed any activity which took the Indians from their usual tasks of farming and weaving, for it was these two tasks which contributed to the *encomenderos'* tribute and to their sustenance.

While the influence of the monasteries and the friars increased, the institution of the *encomienda* and the *encomendero* proved to be a tenacious but a fading one. The Spanish *encomenderos* greatly re-

32. Relación de Diego de Burgos Cansino, RY, 166; Relación de Valladolid, RY, 39.

33. An early form of the sliding trombone.

34. Relación de Juan Farfán el Mozo, RY, 170; Relación de Juan Gutiérrez Picón, RY, 163.

35. Relación de Salvador Corzo, RY, 137; Relación de Antonio Méndez, RY, 97.

sented and resisted the attempts of the friars to envelop, both spiritually and economically, the Indians. But the work of the church was part of the crown policy, and they were forced to tolerate it.

However, in 1579 the *encomenderos* had a chance to express their views to the crown, and they made full use of the opportunity. In that year the colonial officials were asked to collect information in order to complete a questionnaire concerning life in their provinces. Toward that end, the Governor and Captain-General of Yucatan and Tabasco, Don Guillén de las Casas, sent a copy of the questionnaire to the *alcalde mayor* of Valladolid, Don Sarmiento de Figueroa, who in turn distributed it to the *encomenderos* residing in that *villa*. These *relaciones* have special significance to this study, for along with the answers on geography and Indian life, the Spaniards managed to insert their grievances.³⁶

Their most outstanding complaint was the fact that the tribute from the Indians had decreased considerably in the past twenty years. They continued to collect a chicken, a pound of wax, one-half *fanega* of corn, and a certain number of *mantas*, or woven cotton cloth, from each family head,³⁷ but the fact remained that the diminishing population offered fewer tributaries. The statistics offered by the *encomenderos* proved their point. One stated that his father had had six hundred tributaries whereas he had only one hundred forty,³⁸ and another said that the number paying tribute to him was now one hundred instead of three hundred. As a result the number of *mantas* paid was reduced. To give an idea of the reduction, one *encomendero* stated that twenty years before, fifty *mantas* rather than the present eighteen had been collected, and another had collected eighty-five rather than seventy *mantas*.³⁹ The amount of tribute extracted was vital to the *encomendero* because he usually sold it to boats from Honduras and Guatemala and used the proceeds to support his family and household, arms and horses. Also with this money he paid the tithe, the support for the *doctrina*, and the *alcabala*, or sales tax, which together, according to one Spaniard, took one-third of his tribute.⁴⁰

36. Howard F. Cline, "The *Relaciones Geográficas* of the Spanish Indies, 1577-1586," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XLIV (August, 1964) 341.

37. *Relación de Blas González*, RY, 117.

38. *Relación de Diego de Burgos Cansino*, RY, 166.

39. *Relación de Juan Farfán el Mozo*, RY, 170; *Relación de Juan Cano el Viejo*, RY, p. 132.

40. *Relación de Juan de Benavides*, RY, 125; *Relación de Diego de Burgos Cansino*, RY, 166.

The reduction of the Indian population was the major grievance of the *encomenderos*, and most of them placed the blame on the friars. The primary target was the fact that the friars had moved the Indians from their old *pueblos* and collected them in central villages, "placing them where they wished, in places neither as healthy nor as comfortable as where they had lived."⁴¹ The *encomenderos* reported that many Indians died because of a change of climate and waters, and others "became sick with sadness" and so filled with nostalgia that "in their thoughts" they wanted to die.⁴²

Several, although comparatively few, recalled that the centralization of the Indians had been initiated by a *vistador* sent by the *Audiencia* of Guatemala, Don Tomás López:

he compelled them to move and to leave their houses, fruit trees, cultivated lands, in order to go to the monasteries to be doctrinated and taught in the things of our holy Catholic faith, and those that did not want to move voluntarily were moved by force and against their will, burning their houses and cutting the trees and plants. . . which they themselves had planted.⁴³

Another reason that the *encomenderos* gave for the diminution of the Indians was that they had been overworked by the friars "in the sumptuous monasteries which they have built."⁴⁴ One *encomendero* blamed a fifty per cent reduction in the population of his *pueblos* on the construction of a monastery. Furthermore, the work had caused many of the Indians to flee to the mountains, and some had gone to the islands in the bay of Ascensión. Another Spaniard lamented that the friars continuously built new edifices, not taking into consideration the seasons when the natives should be planting and harvesting their crops. This "lack of consideration" had brought about a shortage of food for the Indians, and although the *encomendero* did not say so, for the Spaniards too, because they were completely dependent upon the natives to supply them.⁴⁵

Most of the relators who contributed to the questionnaire mentioned the relocation of the Indians as the primary cause of their decline; but some named other factors, most of which could be attributed, at least indirectly, to the friars. The tributary of one Spaniard

41. Relación de Valladolid, RY, 30.

42. Relación de Juan Gutiérrez de Picón, RY, 163.

43. Relación de Juan Farfán el Viejo, RY, 187.

44. Relación de Alonso de Villanueva, RY, 202.

45. Relación de Valladolid, RY, 30-31.

told his lord that the Indians were no longer allowed to indulge in their special drink which had kept them healthy just as wine did the Spaniards. Several *encomenderos* went into more detail and described the beverage made out of honey, water and the root of the balche plant, and the accompanying rites which involved inebriation, purgation and feasting. One of the original *encomenderos*, Juan de Farfán, stated that the population decline was due to a lower birth rate, for the friars did not permit the Indians to have more than one wife or to divorce her at will. The Spaniard enumerated the grievances of the Indians and then perceptively commented: "and because they have taken from them all the above mentioned. . . they are dying, and it seems to me that it could be because liberty is a great thing."⁴⁶

The *encomenderos* wanted the Indians to be free to produce tribute and to reproduce, but they were not interested in their "liberties" in any modern sense of the word. The same *vecino*, Juan Fartan, complained that the Indians were so favored and pampered by the religious and by the royal officials that they had become shameless and cunning, "especially those that are servants of and have been with friars, because they think that knowing how to read and write, they are equal with the Spaniards." Farfán further stated that these Indians tried to breed trouble and sometimes caused the Spaniards to be fined.⁴⁷

Probably the *encomenderos* realized that theirs was a precarious existence, and they lashed out at all threats to their continued position, whether friar, Indian or royal official. Furthermore, they opposed those Spaniards who attempted to branch into other occupations rather than to live off of the tribute of the Indians. The *encomenderos* particularly decried the growing indigo industry, for the Indians were needed for its cultivation at the same time that they should be tending their own crops of maize, and it had resulted in famine. Juan de Benavides, the *alguacil mayor*, or bailiff, of Valladolid, stated that if the king did not prohibit the cultivation of indigo, a greater diminution of Indians would take place, and Juan Cano el Viejo added that it was not only detrimental to the native workers, but also to the Spanish entrepreneurs, who were deeply in debt and could not make a living from it. Cano dramatically emphasized that "if it did not cease, it would be the cause of losing these provinces."⁴⁸

46. Relación de Juan Farfán el Viejo, RY, 187-189.

47. *Ibid.*, 191; Relación de Giraldo Díaz de Alpuche, RY, 212.

48. Relación de Juan Cano el Viejo, RY, 133-134; Relación de Pedro

The *encomenderos* were also perturbed because several Spaniards were trying to turn the nearby salt beds into a profitable industry. The entrepreneurs forced the Indians to work the beds, sometimes mistreating them, and then they sold the salt to boats from Honduras, Havana, and New Spain. The salt industry was creating a shortage of that staple in Valladolid, and "it would be a service to God and to his Royal Majesty to order that no more salt be taken from the land, and that each take salt for the sustenance of his house."⁴⁹

From these examples one can see that the *encomendero* resisted change in the economic system. He was part of a fading institution, but rather than "diversify," as he was later forced to do, he chose to fight the forces which threatened him. It was a losing battle, for the prosperity of the system was dependent upon the number of Indians available to the Spaniard. The figures speak for themselves. In 1544 the tax roll indicated that there were fifteen thousand and ninety-four tribute-paying Indians in the jurisdictional area of Valladolid, whereas the *relación* of that *villa* in 1579 estimated a figure closer to eight thousand.⁵⁰ The *encomendero* blamed the diminution on every possible source: the Franciscan friars, crown officials such as the *visitadors*, struggling entrepreneurs, and the "sickness of sadness" brought about by deprivation of accustomed climates and habits. Going back further, he might also have mentioned the disease brought by the Europeans, the suppression of the Great Maya Revolt, and the migration, or more truthfully, the escape of some Indians. Nor could the Spaniard obtain new *encomiendas*, for the crown, at least theoretically, absorbed those whose successors died out.⁵¹

Not only did the *encomendero* feel stifled by the forces around him, but he was officially limited by the King's laws. Almost from the first he had felt controls concerning the extent to which he could use the Indians. The New Laws of 1542 had forbidden him to enslave

de Valencia, RY, 147; *Relación de Juan de Benavides*, RY, 121; *Landa*, 117, n. 357; Chamberlain, *Yucatan*, 332. There were more than forty-eight indigo mills in Yucatan at this time, which had cost as much as 2,000 to 3,000 pesos apiece, according to Francois Chevalier, *La formation des grands domaines au Mexique* (Paris, 1952), 88.

49. *Relación de Giraldo Díaz de Alpuche*, RY, 215.

50. Chamberlain, *Yucatan*, 342, *Relación de Valladolid*, RY, 22.

51. Although the number of crown *encomiendas* was increasing in most of New Spain, McBride notes that of the one hundred and thirty *encomiendas* in Yucatan and Tabasco in 1572, none were reserved to the King, McBride, 53, Table I.

the natives or to require personal services of them.⁵² Subsequent decrees reinforced these controls,⁵³ until by the laws of 1573, it was evident that the whole concept of the *encomienda* had changed. It was no longer a form of *senorio* or a system of vassalage, but simply the cession of tributes by the crown, under its limitations.⁵⁴

This study of the struggle for survival of the *encomenderos* in Yucatan reinforces the conclusions reached by Lesley Byrd Simpson concerning central Mexico :

In its reduced status the *encomienda* was allowed to survive. . . , the negligible sums collected by the *encomenderos* from their vanishing Indian subjects were no longer of much interest, and it was the easier and wiser course for the Crown to blink at the irregularities by which the *encomienda* continued to exist . . . although it was not definitely abolished until the eighteenth century, by the end of the sixteenth it had ceased to exercise any vital function in colonial life.⁵⁵

As the controls of the friars were partly responsible for the diminution of the Indians, that decline, plus the controls of the crown, reduced the importance of the *encomenderos*. Perhaps the phrase of the *encomendero*, Juan Farfán el Viejo, could be applied in both instances: "They are dying and it seems to me that it could be because liberty is a great thing."⁵⁶

52. Henry Stevens and Fred Lucas, eds., *The New Laws of the Indies* (London, 1893), xii-xvi; Simpson, 123-144; Henry Charles Lea, "Indian Policy of Spain," *Yale Review*, VIII (August, 1899), 143-144.

53. Note the *Real Provisión* of 1549 and the code framed by Tomás López in 1552, Fancourt, 162-166.

54. Silvio A. Zavala, *La Encomienda Indiana* (Madrid, 1935), 182.

55. Simpson, xii.

56. *Relación de Juan Farfán el Viejo*, RY, 189.