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# Collaboration and Conflict: Organized Labor, Business, and the State in Post-Tlatelolco Mexico

Joseph Umberto Lenti

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**COLLABORATION AND CONFLICT:  
ORGANIZED LABOR, BUSINESS, AND THE STATE  
IN POST-TLATELOLCO MEXICO**

by

**JOSEPH UMBERTO LENTI**

B.S., History, Northeastern University, 2001

M.A., History, University of New Mexico, 2005

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
History**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my family, old and new.

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It has become almost cliché to say that a scholar accrues many debts when researching and writing, although in my case the adage seems to apply. (*Except for, perhaps, the scholar part.*) This project, and more broadly, my education, was completed only through the generosity of droves of people who've supported me during the span of my student career at Northeastern University then the University of New Mexico. Originating from a seminar paper written in the Fall of 2005, this project grew and saw its development nurtured and often corrected by Linda Hall, she who has been a true friend and mentor to me since my arrival at UNM nearly a decade ago. Through her edits and revisions of my work, her advice and ideas, our countless excursions, sporting events, and lunches in the U.S. and Mexico, and her endless generosity in writing letter after support letter on my behalf, Linda guided me along the academic path and made my journey to the ranks of the professional historian a rich, fulfilling, and joyful experience.

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**ABSTRACT**

1968 was a year of opportunities and challenges for the Mexican state. While some in government busied themselves with preparations for the Games of the XIX Olympiad to commence in October, others focused on diffusing student unrest that had festered on the nation's campuses and was threatening to spread to the streets. In the interest of preserving civil order and conveying an international image of stability in Mexico, authorities opted to confront dissent firmly. Skirmishes between student-led groups and government forces escalated until culminating in the killing of hundreds of protestors in the Tlatelolco district of Mexico City on October 2, 1968. Tlatelolco, henceforth, would be considered by many as a *parteaguas*, or watershed moment, for the way it exposed the authoritarian nature the Mexican ruling regime.

This dissertation challenges the status of Tlatelolco as watershed by examining changes witnessed in tripartite (state, organized labor, and business) relations in Mexico during the period 1969-1976, or the years that immediately followed the massacre of October 2, 1968. Here it is contended that after that seminal moment it was not students but organized workers, those from the civil sector most ascribed with historical symbolism and that deemed most capable of destabilizing the regime, that became the chief target of state rhetoric and primary beneficiary of

public policy. This hypothesis is tested by investigating periodicals, union literature, ministerial records, and labor suits in order to: a. deduce what factors motivated the Mexican state in the creation of labor policy; b. understand the major labor disputes of the era while giving attention to internal rifts within the sectors; and c. analyze the behavior exhibited by state authorities in their functions as mediators between the forces of labor and capital.

Moreover, this dissertation shows how organized workers after Tlatelolco reaped real benefits from a history-conscious executive and a reformed labor establishment. The New Federal Labor of 1970, conceptualized and implemented in this period, is assessed for the ways it impacted workers' lives in substantive ways. Other political reforms of the era that galvanized unionists to push for democracy and oppose state control are also considered, yet this analysis demonstrates that state goals were multifaceted and not mutually exclusive. While politicians like Luis Echeverría preached democratic reform and showed themselves more permissive of rank-and-file dissent among workers vis-à-vis their predecessors, they also coveted the chance to revive a form of "collaborationism," meaning a symbiotic, reciprocal relationship that strengthened their respective positions with top union brass reminiscent of an earlier time. On the whole, this dissertation weighs the merits of rhetoric as presented in state and union missives against reality as exposed in economic data and the records of labor conciliation and arbitration boards. Tripartite relations are evaluated herein inside a larger state campaign to pay the political costs of 1968 by solidifying traditional values and making grand overtures to an original constituent of the Mexican Revolution.



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## PRINCIPAL ACRONYMS USED IN THE TEXT

CCE	Business Coordinating Council (Consejo Coordinador Empresarial)
CFE	Federal Electric Commission (Comisión Federal de Electricidad)
CNIT	National Chamber of Manufacturing Industries (Cámara Nacional de la Industria de Transformación)
Casa	House of the World Worker (Casa del Obrero Mundial)
CONASUPO	National Popular Subsistence Company (Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares)
CONCANACO	National Confederation of Chambers of Commerce (Confederación de Camaras Nacionales de Comercio)
COPARMEX	Confederation of Mexican Owners (Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana)
CROC	Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants
CROM	Mexican Regional Labor Confederation (Confederación Regional de Obreros de México)
CT	Congress of Labor (Congreso del Trabajo)
CTM	Confederation of Mexican Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de México)
FAMOSA	Factories of Monterrey, Inc. (Fábricas Monterrey, S.A. de C.V.)
FAT	Authentic Workers' Front (Frente Auténtico del Trabajo)
FTNL	Nuevo León State Workers' Federation (Federación de Trabajadores de Nuevo León)
INFONAVIT	National Worker Housing Institute (Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores)
JFCA	Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board (Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje)
NLFT	New Federal Labor Law of 1970 (Nueva Ley Federal del Trabajo)
PEMEX	Mexican Petroleum (Petróleos Mexicanos)
PNR	National Revolutionary Party (Partido Nacional Revolucionaria)
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional)
SME	Mexican Electricians' Union (Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas)
STFRM	Mexican Railroad Workers' Union (Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana)
STPS	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social)
SUTERM	United Electric Workers Union (Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana)
TD	Democratic Tendency (Tendencia Democrática)
UNAM	National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)

## INTRODUCTION

For most of the past century, the First of May has not been a day for relaxation in Mexico. *El Día del Trabajo*, or Labor Day, has been observed on May 1 in that country since at least 1913 when the radical labor organization Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker) called a pro-worker demonstration in Mexico City that attracted the support of thousands of working class men and women. The connection between the First of May and the cause of the working class worldwide goes back farther than that. First celebrated in Chicago on May 1, 1887 and proclaimed the International Day of Labor by the Second International Socialist of Paris in 1889, May 1 has since been used as an opportunity to take to the streets to honor the sacrifice of the “Haymarket Eight,” those workers punished in Chicago, some executed, for their participation in events that followed a national strike waged on May 1, 1886, and advocate for contemporary causes of workers everywhere.<sup>1</sup> Labor Day, thus, has not been understood as a day to refrain

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<sup>1</sup> The following is a summary of the story of the Haymarket Eight, aka the “Martyrs of Chicago,” as told by Priscilla Murolo and A.B. Chitty. On Saturday, May 1, 1886, about 350,000 workers at more than 11,000 establishments across the United States went on strike in favor of the eight-hour workday. In Chicago, the mass of 65,000 strikers led by Anarchist labor organizers staged weekend rallies and parades that compelled local police by Monday, May 3, to wage “counter-attacks” and fire upon a group picketing the McCormick Harvester Works, killing at least four strikers. In response, leaders of the city’s eight-hour coalition scheduled a protest meeting for the evening of May 4 in Haymarket Square. A few thousand showed up, though the crowd had dwindled to a few hundred by the time the police arrived to disperse the gathering sometime after ten o’clock p.m. As the police entered the square, someone – the culprit was never identified – threw a bomb and killed one officer and wounded another sixty-six, seven of whom later died. For several weeks the police rounded up labor activists by the hundreds. Meeting halls and residences were raided, entire families were jailed, and evidence of incendiary plotting was seized and planted when it could not be found. Newspapers reported daily on the police department’s progress in solving the ‘crime of the century.’ On May 27, eight Anarchists – August Spies, Albert Parsons, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, Louis Lingg, Samuel Fielden, Oscar Neebe, and Michael Schwab – were indicted for conspiracy to commit murder. Their trial began on June 21, 1886. Testimony revealed that only two of the defendants, Spies and Fielden, were present when the explosion occurred, a fact deemed irrelevant by a prosecution disinterested in ascertaining who had actually thrown the bomb. “The Anarchists,” according to Murolo and Chitty, “had been indicted for their radicalism and militant leadership of the eight-hour movement, not for their actions in Haymarket Square.” As the state’s attorney told the jury: “Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial. These men have been selected, picked out by the grand jury and indicted because they were leaders...Gentlemen of the jury, convict these men, make examples of them, hang them and save our institutions, our society.” With stakes so high, all of the defendants were convicted. Neebe was sentenced to fifteen years; the others were condemned to death. The governor of Illinois commuted the sentences of Fielden and Schwab to life in prison just days before their scheduled executions. On the night before the execution, Lingg took his life. The other four – Spies, Parsons, Fischer, and Engel – went to the gallows on November 11, 1887. In death, the Haymarket Eight became instant martyrs of the labor movement and some 25,000 marched in their funeral procession. Yet, their convictions and executions dampened the vitality of the U.S. labor movement for years to come and contributed to the decline of the Knights of Labor, then the nation’s largest labor organization, that saw its membership shrink from 750,000 in 1886 to just 20,000 in 1896. See Priscilla

from work, although this is the purpose of the holiday in the United States that celebrates it in September removed from its anarcho-syndicalist and socialist origins. In contrast, Labor Day elsewhere, and particularly so in Mexico, tends to be cut in the militant cloth of the “May Day” tradition and is most often associated with worker solidarity, cross-class animosity, and, not infrequently, violence.

By May Day standards, May 1, 1970 was an exemplary show of working class resolve. Demonstrations were carried out that day in a reported seventy-nine countries including in Spain, where street protests defied the Franco regime’s long-standing ban on Labor Day festivities and provoked clashes with local police, and in Thailand, where pro-worker observances had been outlawed since 1956. Events in communist nations were characteristically vigorous. Cubans commemorated May 1 by wielding machetes and cutting cane in support of the national effort to produce ten million tons of sugar annually. A fireworks display was given over Beijing’s Tiananmen Square and thousands of workers paraded in Moscow’s Red Square to celebrate the occasion. Hundreds of thousands more mobilized in Soviet-bloc nations, alternately inspired to support the international workers’ cause and to oppose the expansion of the war in Vietnam and U.S. military presence in Cambodia.<sup>2</sup>

In no country, however, was the First of May more vigorously celebrated in 1970 than it was in Mexico. Upwards of one million workers took part in parades, demonstrations, speeches, and strike activities in cities stretching the length and width of the Republic: in Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta, and Ciudad Guzmán in the West; in Minatitlán and Orizaba in the East; in Hermosillo in the North; and in numerous central and southern cities including Salamanca, Ocotlán, Toluca, Ameca, and most notably, in Mexico City – the nation’s capital. All who participated, it was reported, took to the streets to commemorate the eighty-fourth anniversary of the strike in Chicago, show solidarity with the worker struggles of the past and present, and to thank president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz for having delivered them the New Federal Labor Law of 1970, the

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Murolo and A.B. Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short, Illustrated History of Labor in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 126-127.

<sup>2</sup> See articles: “Fue Conmemorado en el Mundo, el 1o. de Mayo”; “Con Desfiles, Manifestaciones y Huelgas, Celebró el Mundo la Fiesta del Trabajo,” *El Nacional*, May 2, 1970, 1/3.

NLFT – a new and comprehensive labor code meant to rewrite the terms of workplace relations in Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

Coverage of the day's events in Mexico City described the actions of participants and those of the Mexican president almost heroically. Readers of the nation's major newspapers were told that at 9:40 a.m., Díaz Ordaz hoisted the Mexican flag up the flagpole of the Plaza de la Constitución, the gargantuan central plaza of Mexico City better known as the Zócalo.<sup>4</sup> Díaz Ordaz then marched half the length of the plaza until he reached the doors of the National Palace, viewing along his walk workers dressed in their union colors and many toting a symbolic NLFT under their arms.<sup>5</sup> He ascended to the balcony of the palace. From there, he, flanked by Fidel Velázquez, long-time leader of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, Edgar Robledo Santiago, president of the Congress of Labor, Salomón González Blanco, Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, president of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, and other members of the presidential cabinet could view the assembly gathered below. From that perch they also saw the banners that draped the walls of the buildings that abutted the Zócalo's four sides. In the enormous print of the hanging signs, the president and the other principal figures of the labor establishment likely felt their efforts to appease Mexico's working class validated as they could read the following phrases: "The New Federal Labor Law, one conquest more of the regimes of the Revolution deserved of the applause and recognition of the workers of the Federal District"; "Thus it [the regime] honors the Martyrs of Chicago"; "Thus it [the regime] complies with Mexico"; and "Thank you President Díaz Ordaz."<sup>6</sup>

After a few congratulatory words imparted from above, the parade commenced at 10:03 a.m. The massive procession organized itself into five columns led by thirty-nine

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<sup>3</sup> See editorials: "Primero de Mayo"; "'Presidente Obrero de México' Así lo Afirmaron los Trabajadores", *Ceteme*, May 2, 1970, 1/12.

<sup>4</sup> Enrique García Bernal, "750 mil Trabajadores en la Imponente y Brillante Parada Obrera de Ayer," *El Nacional*, May 2, 1970, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Guillermo Velarde, "Tardó Tres Horas en Pasar la Columna de Trabajadores," *Excélsior*, May 2, 1970, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Enrique García Bernal, "750 mil Trabajadores en la Imponente y Brillante Parada Obrera de Ayer," *El Nacional*, May 2, 1970, 4. Spanish reads: "La Nueva Ley Federal del Trabajo, una conquista más de los regimenes de la Revolución que ha merecido el aplauso y reconocimiento de los trabajadores del D.D.F."; "Así se honra a los Mártires de Chicago"; "Así se cumple con México"; "Gracias, señor Presidente Díaz Ordaz."

female marchers dressed in white and bedecked in the Mexican flag. This troop of “beautiful little ladies,” as described by a reporter for *Excélsior*, formed a sort of “feminine war band” with one marcher for every labor confederation, federation, or union affiliated into the Congress of Labor, the nation’s umbrella body of organized workers.<sup>7</sup> Trailing this group were five compact columns of workers, two representing national unions: the Federation of Public Service Workers’ Unions and the Union of Cinematic Production Workers, and three from national confederations: the Confederation of Mexican Workers, the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants, and the Mexican Regional Labor Confederation.<sup>8</sup> Sprinkled throughout these columns were large placards that conveyed the collective gratitude of these important labor players. Marchers leading the Congress of Labor’s contingent carried a placard that read: “In honor of Pro-Worker President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz for having bequeathed us a better, more just, and more dynamic labor law. May 1, 1970.”<sup>9</sup> Members of the Federal District Workers’ Federation hoisted a sign that stated: “Yesterday Juárez the Reformer; Today Díaz Ordaz the Fulfiller.” Members of the union’s Local 4 tap-danced on “showy rhythmic tables with canes.” *Cetemistas*, members of the CTM, echoed the theme of the president’s revolutionary compliance. They marched in the parade and conveyed the message in large print that: “The best homage to those who struggled for social justice is the New Federal Labor Law that is today brought to life by the loyal interpreter of the Mexican Revolution, Licenciado Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.”<sup>10</sup>

Several unions distinguished themselves through the creativity of their displays. Local 1 of the Union of Cinematographic Industry Workers fashioned a placard in the form of a filmstrip and sustained it by balloons that kept it at a regular height. The sign simply thanked the Mexican president for bringing the NLFT to fruition.<sup>11</sup> The National

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<sup>7</sup> Guillermo Velarde, “Tardó Tres Horas en Pasar la Columna de Trabajadores,” *Excélsior*, May 2, 1970, 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Enrique García Bernal, “750 mil Trabajadores en la Imponente y Brillante Parada Obrera de Ayer,” *El Nacional*, May 2, 1970, 4. Spanish reads: Homenaje a Presidente Obrero Licenciado Gustavo Díaz Ordaz por habernos legado una ley labor mejor, más justa y más dinámica. 1o. de mayo de 1970.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Spanish reads: Ayer Juárez el Reformador; Hoy Díaz Ordaz el Realizador; sacó vistosas tablas rítmicas con bastoneras; El mejor homenaje a los luchadores por la justicia social es la Nueva Ley Federal del Trabajo que hoy pone en vigor el fiel intérprete de la Revolución Mexicana, señor licenciado Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Education Workers' Union, Mexico's largest trade union with over a quarter of a million members, presented a large and orderly contingent that, to once again borrow the nomenclature of local reports, was led by "beautiful little ladies" that carried green, white, and red flags.<sup>12</sup> Some unions built floats in addition to painting placards. The Mexican Petroleum Workers' Union displayed a car in the shape of the March 18 refinery located in the Mexico City district of Azcapotzalco. Employees of the Federal Electric Commission built a platform on a trailer with a replica of Apollo 11 and two satellite tracking towers. When the trailer stopped in front of the balcony of the National Palace, two men dressed as astronauts emerged from module and saluted the executive cadre of onlookers above.<sup>13</sup>

At 1:20 p.m. that afternoon the parade finally concluded. Observers commented that the massive procession, at more than three hours long and involving approximately 750,000 people, was the most brilliant Labor Day parade witnessed in Mexico since the first one of 1913.<sup>14</sup> The immense enthusiasm and participation was attributed to the realization amongst workers about the new rights the NLFT would grant them as well as a desire on their part to thank the law's principal author: President Díaz Ordaz. Díaz Ordaz felt the adulation of Mexico's organized labor hierarchy in person in a post-parade ceremony held in the National Palace. In a speech, Edgar Robledo Santiago, president of the Congress of Labor, called the president a "soldier of the national dignity."<sup>15</sup> The NLFT, Robledo felt, was the "the best instrument of our struggles" and "the cleanest flag of social justice created by the Mexican Revolution." Its realization he attributed to the wise direction of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz – a vigorous and patriotic defender of the Revolution's institutions.<sup>16</sup> Later, Robledo awarded the president a plaque on behalf of the more than three million workers affiliated with the organization. It read, quite succinctly: "Gustavo Díaz Ordaz: Pro-Worker President of Mexico." In addition, the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Specifically, the SNTE claimed 266,000 members in 1972.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Mexico's participation in the Apollo 11 moon landing was a significant point of national pride.

<sup>14</sup> "750,000 Trabajadores en un Desfile Grandioso y Emotivo," *El Universal*, May 2, 1970, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Juan Chávez Rebollar, "Presidente Obrero, lo Declararon los Trabajadores" *El Nacional*, May 2, 1970, 1.

<sup>16</sup> "Patrones y Obreros Deberán Usarla y Cumplirla con Cabal Honestidad," *El Universal*, May 2, 1970, 7. Spanish, in full, reads: ...mejor instrumento de nuestras luchas y que orgullosamente la consideraremos como lo más limpia bandera de justicia social creada por la Revolución Mexicana, a través del pensamiento rector del esforzado y patriota defensor de sus instituciones: Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

president was given gold and silver medals to commemorate the promulgation of the new labor code.<sup>17</sup>

Díaz Ordaz appeared visibly moved by these gestures. He received the honors with modesty and profusely thanked the members of the Congress of Labor for the “undeserved honors” they had always granted him. He proceeded to state that his *oberismo*, “worker-ism,” was not electoral propaganda; it was, he alleged, a product of the “revolutionary conviction” that he manifested for “a healthy, vigorous, and autonomous trade unionism.”<sup>18</sup> Directing his message at the *patrones* (the employers) in the room, he commended them for permitting the creation of the new law and thanked them for their future cooperation in complying with its provisions. He spoke to labor leaders next, extending them a similar request for responsibility. “While a gun is more powerful,” he cautioned the unionists in his midst, “with more feeling of responsibility it must be managed, with more care it must be used, with more nobility it must be harnessed.”<sup>19</sup>

Díaz Ordaz’s optimism that workplace relations in Mexico would benefit from the NLFT set the tone for subsequent messages emitted that day in a post-ceremony press conference. Some labor partisans, however, could not help but doubt employers’ commitment to respecting the terms of the NLFT. Such concerns were well founded for much existed in Mexican history to suggest that the opposite – that employers, out of a lack of awareness, or worse, outright antipathy to it, would not heed the new law and its provisions – could very well occur. Salomón González Blanco, Minister of Labor and Social Welfare joined the train of presidential congratulators that day though he too signaled a need for public officials to be vigilant in monitoring employers’ adherence to the law.<sup>20</sup> The minister’s skepticism echoed concerns long voiced by leaders of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, some of whom wrote in the organization’s weekly newspaper the following day that although the passage of the NLFT was a positive

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<sup>17</sup> Guillermo Velarde, “Mensaje a Patrones y Obreros, Tras el Desfile,” *Excélsior*, May 2, 1970, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads:

<sup>19</sup> Juan Chávez Rebollar, “Patriótica Exhortación del Primer Mandatario,” *El Nacional*, May 2, 1970, 1. Spanish, in full, reads: Mientras más poderosa es un arma, con más sentido de responsabilidad debe manejarse, con más cuidado debe usarse, con más nobleza debe aprovecharse.

<sup>20</sup> “La ‘Ley Díaz Ordaz’,” *El Universal*, May 2, 1970, 1.



development for the Mexican people, much remained to be done. The federalization of additional labor tribunals, the promulgation of a new social security code, and the establishment of a forty-hour week in Mexico were responsibilities now incumbent upon the Regime of the Revolution, the newspaper's editors felt.<sup>21</sup> It thus appeared that despite outward appearances, optimism over the law's ability to alter workplace relations in Mexico was guarded. Concerns expressed by officials inside the presidential cabinet and within the nation's most prominent labor organizations on the very same day of the historic new law's implementation evidenced a lingering mistrust between the factors of production. These concerns also foreshadowed the major battles that would define the terms of labor and capital relations in the years ahead.

*MASS POLITICS, COLLABORATIONISM, AND RHETORIC IN THE HEGEMONIC PROCESS*

What drove upwards of one million Mexicans to participate in the First of May parade on May 1, 1970? What, for that matter, motivated the Mexican state to re-write the terms of workplace relations in the country and implement a new labor code on that same day? Queries posed by Kevin J. Middlebrook in his 1995 work, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism*, provide clues to the aforementioned questions. Central to Middlebrook's analysis are two lines of inquiry. First, he asks, 'how does a political elite maintain broad popular support even while, over decades, it constrains broad popular movements?'; and second, 'how do governing elites maintain control over mass participation?' To shed light on these questions, Middlebrook introduces the concept of postrevolutionary authoritarianism, a system of government that emerges from a cataclysmic revolutionary scenario and is distinct through the presence of three factors: a. the prominence of agents of "mass actors" in the new regime, be they workers, peasants, or other organized sectors of the labor force; b. the requirement that the political elite continually assert the legitimacy of its position by glorifying the revolution from which they have emerged and through the use of mass politics, which are large-scale political actions organized at the state-level and requiring the mobilization of mass actors; and, c. the government and official party's need for

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<sup>21</sup> Editorial, "Primero de Mayo," *Ceteme*, May 2, 1970, 1.

institutions and the for the continual mobilization and control of mass actors in electoral and other operations.<sup>22</sup>

With this framework of postrevolutionary authoritarianism, Middlebrook analyzes the course of state and organized labor relations in postrevolutionary Mexico, subsequent to a decade-long civil war waged between the years 1910 and 1920. Ultimately, he contends that in Mexico a postrevolutionary authoritarian regime flourished wherein mass actors were included in the ruling coalition by a government that espoused an ideology linked to the revolutionary experience to legitimate its control, and worked to develop a hegemonic party and a bureaucracy to serve its interventionist agenda.<sup>23</sup> Once having cemented its control, the postrevolutionary regime set about looking for allies and found in the organized labor movement an easily mobilized mass actor. Consequently, the government oversaw the creation of an alliance with several of the nation's most powerful (though certainly not all) labor organizations rooted in the reciprocal exchange of material and legal favors from the state in exchange for political loyalty from the unions.<sup>24</sup> This arrangement, which I term collaborationism and understand herein as the historical tendency of the state and organized labor toward a symbiotic relationship to strengthen their respective positions, henceforth developed in a way that saw legislation and other union-friendly conditions handed on down from high in exchange for wild, "spontaneous" shows of mass politics percolating from below.

By layering collaborationism over Middlebrook's postrevolutionary authoritarian model, one begins to understand the political and social context that inspired the creation of the New Federal Labor Law and the massive show of worker support that accompanied its implementation on May 1, 1970. Still more, one may contend that in collaborationism may be seen a mutually beneficial (though highly unequal) alliance

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<sup>22</sup> See Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5-10.

<sup>23</sup> I agree with this idea, expressed by Charles L. Davis in his review of *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico*, by Kevin J. Middlebrook, *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 1 (March 1996): 220-221.

<sup>24</sup> A similar idea is expressed by John Womack, Jr. in his review of *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico*, by Kevin J. Middlebrook, *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 553-554.

between the state and the privileged elements of organized labor that helps explain the durability of the twentieth century Mexican postrevolutionary regime.

This contention necessitates a discussion of the ways that authority is established and, as importantly, maintained by a regime over time. Most scholars of post-1920 Mexican history agree that the legacy of the Mexican Revolution was a legitimizing ideology that afforded successive ruling regimes the authority and power necessary to rule. Little attention was paid to people's consent, a factor not undervalued in this study. The findings presented in this dissertation are framed within the boundaries of the following maxim: legitimacy enables authority and authority breeds hegemony. In this instance, Philip Corrigan's essential query on hegemony takes center stage, for it is apparent that: "The key question is not 'who' rules, but rather 'how' rule is accomplished."<sup>25</sup>

Beginning immediately after the cessation of war in 1920, Mexican regimes historicized the recently completed decade of revolution in a way that consolidated drastically differing political positions into broad binaries. In short, after 1920 one became either a revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary depending on political stances vis-à-vis those of the regime or, very often, those of the Mexican president. Former adversaries were strongly encouraged to find common ground in their support of "revolutionary" priorities. The complexities of diverging political positions did not abate immediately, although many rough edges were smoothed and bitter animosities softened in the interest of post-war reconciliation and national unity. The formation of the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) in 1929 from upwards on one hundred groups representing widely ranging interests resulted from the participants' willingness to compromise in exchange for peace, but also demonstrated their shared desire to control the process of political succession in Mexico. The PNR, in short, was designed to facilitate the domination of the political system by a modern oligarchy. It "...was born, then," according to historians Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, "not so much to dispute at the ballot box with its adversaries over the right of the revolutionary group to

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<sup>25</sup> See Philip Corrigan, *Social Forms/Human Capacities: Essays in Authority and Defiance* (London: Routledge, 1990), 264-268.

exert power, but rather to discipline the heterogeneous coalition that constituted the revolutionary group and to formally fulfill the rituals of representative democracy.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite this monumental development, the creation of the PNR and the establishment of the ‘official’ sectors of civil society (worker, peasant, and popular/professional) inside the party structure was not the culmination of the postrevolutionary regime’s hegemonic goals. Mass politics that occurred, in most instances, over fifty years after the creation of the PNR reinforces the belief that hegemony is a perpetual process that is never truly concluded. Hegemony, to quote Florencia Mallon, is “...a set of nested processes, constant and ongoing, through which power relations are contested, legitimated, and redefined at all levels of society.” “Hegemony is,” she clarifies, “...hegemonic process: it can and does exist everywhere, at all times.”<sup>27</sup>

Mallon’s thesis applies nicely to a political climate in post-1920 Mexico wherein a historical dialog of revolutionary glorification and commemoration was “constant and ongoing” and wherein shows of mass politics surfaced “everywhere, at all times.” That this version of political domination proved so durable and, arguably, successful, testifies to the power of the revolutionary metonym as well as the effective manipulation of the revolutionary legacy by the ruling regime and its political and societal wings. Machine guns and tanks were unnecessary to assert the will of the Mexican ruling regime for the better part of five decades. Incidents of resistance and rebellion were unceasing, yet no events witnessed prior to 1968 challenged the Mexican state’s grip on society in any substantial way.<sup>28</sup> One might surmise, thus, that a process described by E.P. Thompson as “cultural hegemony” existed wherein elites who lacking an iron clad control of the lower classes relied upon a system of “pomp and public ritual” to create consent and maintain hierarchy.

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<sup>26</sup> Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 77.

<sup>27</sup> Florencia E. Mallon, “Reflections on the Ruins: Everyday Forms of State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico,” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, eds, Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 70.

<sup>28</sup> The most substantial challenges to state authority during the years 1920-1968 were the Cristero Rebellion of 1926-1929 and the Saturnino Cedillo Revolt of 1938. Neither, however, threatened to topple the regime in any serious way.

The contentions that stability in postrevolutionary Mexico was: a. the product of repeated, large-scale shows of political loyalty; and, b. that nation states are maintained through the consent created from a process of cultural hegemony rooted in ‘pomp and public ritual,’ are likely to meet resistance from scholars not as comfortable as I in affording mass politics and state rhetoric historical salience. Historian Jeffrey M. Pilcher, for example, is skeptical about granting “political rituals” any real importance in influencing day-to-day life in Mexican society. Writing in his 1998 work *Que Vivan Los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*, Pilcher states:

To achieve a social consensus, Mexicans had to feel a sense of belonging within the national community. Mass media and school curricula provided obvious channels for forging a national culture, but television shows and civic lessons often had limited connection to everyday life. Political rituals in particular, such as rallies and elections, held little real significance in an authoritarian government.<sup>29</sup>

As Pilcher sees it, certain cultural elements (food, in particular) have been more effective venues for the Mexican state to establish hegemony in the twentieth century than have been political rallies or even elections. Ultimately, Pilcher ascribes little real social value to shows of mass politics in Mexico – and he is not alone in this belief. Elaine Carey similarly mitigates the value of mass politics in her 2005 book *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico*. According to Carey, “street democracy” or shows of political protest waged in 1960s Mexico by unsanctioned groups had longer-lasting political impact than did shows of mass politics orchestrated by state-allied organizations.<sup>30</sup>

Pilcher’s and Carey’s arguments, though they must be commended for questioning the social resonance of authoritarian political strategy, are challenged by my findings. This dissertation contends that state-sanctioned episodes of mass politics that funneled mass actors onto jammed streets and plazas to conduct demonstrations, march in parades, hand out leaflets or distribute charitable items – all in support of the ruling

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<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Que Vivan los Tamales: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 123-124.

<sup>30</sup> See Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

regime – had a powerful sway on determining the course of political life in twentieth century Mexico. This is not to say, however, that the tactics of mass politics employed by the Mexican regime and the official party did not yield diminishing returns as time passed. They did – and one may see mounting evidence of reduced state influence across the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in the increasing reliance on *acarreados*, or “those carried-in” to pack the crowd and inflate the appearance of popular enthusiasm for state or union goals. Nevertheless, episodes of mass politics formed central parts of labor establishment strategies and produced real benefits for state as well as union actors – a contention this dissertation aspires to prove for the post-1968 period.

Moreover, this analysis departs accepting the central importance of speech in establishing the legitimacy and maintaining the power and authority of a ruling regime. Words, at least in the context of postrevolutionary Mexico, mattered. And words took on added significance in the sort of “post-apocalyptic” world Mexican officials and opinion makers imagined themselves to be fashioning in the post-1920 period. More than perhaps anything else, this is a study of rhetoric and an examination of the “culture wars” waged between well-defined sectors of civil society that battled for supremacy in postrevolutionary Mexico and continued to do so after 1968. “Culture wars,” as defined by Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, are battles in which values and collective practices of modernity are at stake. Culture wars, they explain, are fought using a range of instruments including legislation, civil disobedience, demonstrations, and sometimes physical violence, though words and images are the most common weaponry employed. Invariably, these conflicts unfold with the combatants voicing increasingly radicalized rhetoric, the purpose being on both sides to “define one’s own cause and the values espoused in its support, and to define the ‘enemy’ in terms of the negation of those values.”<sup>31</sup> So extreme and all-pervasive can this process of rhetorical inflation be, that it can come to constitute a kind of “virtual reality, quite independent of the complex and nuanced relationships” that actually exist between the opposing sides.<sup>32</sup> Although the authors developed their culture war framework observing the Catholic and anticlerical

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

milieu of nineteenth century Europe, it is a concept easily applied to a postrevolutionary, and, more specifically, a post-1968 Mexican stage whereupon two well-defined sectors of civil society – *sindicalistas* (unionists) and *patrones* (employers) – did battle at public forums, in the press, on workshop floors and behind picket lines to capture the hearts and minds of the Mexican public and win allies in the Mexican regime.

#### *TLATELOLCO AND THE NLFT AS PREEMPTIVE REFORM*

Understanding the massive Labor Day parade as it was – a state-sponsored and state-orchestrated episode of mass politics – is helpful but requires further assessment of what prompted upwards of one million Mexican workers to take to the streets and march on May 1, 1970. Essentially, collaborationism is a *quid pro quo* arrangement and provoking actions necessitate mass responses. In the case of the Labor Day parade of 1970, the nation's organized labor infantry was mobilized to march in support of the NLFT – a major piece of legislation that stood to benefit their lives directly. Put another way, unionists were required to undertake a mass action to show, in the most public way imaginable, their great appreciation to the nation's political leadership for their heartfelt efforts to improve the lives of the Mexican working class.

Granting that the basic operating dynamic of collaborationism was at work on May 1, 1970, a more interesting question to consider becomes: *What provoked the Mexican state to create a new labor code in the first place?* In this regard, the concept of preemptive reform as outlined by political scientists Kenneth M. Coleman and Charles L. Davis is a useful analytical tool. Coleman and Davis define preemptive reform as “a co-optative response by political elites to their fears of uncontrolled political mobilization by the less advantaged elements of society.”<sup>33</sup> Preemptive reform as a political response may develop in one or both of the following manners: a. with substantive reform that sees public policy reoriented toward providing more public or private goods to potentially disruptive social sectors; or b. via organizational reform that creates new, albeit typically circumscribed, opportunities for participation in the decision-making process for discontented sectors. Coleman and Davis assert that most historical instances of

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<sup>33</sup> Kenneth M. Coleman and Charles L. Davis, “Preemptive Reform and the Mexican Working Class,” *Latin American Research Review* 18 (Winter 1983): 3.

preemptive reform have had both substantive and organizational dimensions, yet the latter form has appeared more frequently due to its primary role as a symbolic measure designed to appease vocal elements in society and increase solidarity between rulers and the ruled.<sup>34</sup>

The question of whether the NLFT was an example of substantive reform, organizational reform, or a combination of both, is one that is considered in depth in subsequent chapters. More germane to the current discussion is a focused analysis of why reform was passed at all, and what factors, if any, did the creation of new legislation intend to preempt. Here, the thesis of Coleman and Davis is directly applicable. They write: “Preemptive reform efforts reflect an intention to institute that degree of change, apparent or real, necessary to preserve essential features of the existing institutional order.” There is a disclaimer:

The concept of preemptive reform, however, need not be taken to imply the existence of an internally coherent oligarchy (or bourgeoisie) that acts rationally in defense of commonly perceived and objectively shared interests. At most, it implies the existence of a group of decision-makers who share the belief that to do nothing may be to do too little.<sup>35</sup>

The compulsion to act amongst government officials of the late 1960s was the product of their familiarity with the workings of the authoritarian polity in which they had been reared – a system that put reciprocal agreements in place to govern relations between the state and the most crucial sectors of civil society. For decades the system had proven its efficacy but by the late 1960s the nation’s political elites recognized that stability could only be preserved by balancing coercion “with at least a modest response to the grievances of those who might act against the *institucionalidad vigente*,” i.e., the “institutional norm.”<sup>36</sup>

What forced the Mexican political elite to pursue reform in the late 1960s? This dissertation views the events that occurred on October 2, 1968 in the Tlatelolco district of Mexico City as the fulcrum upon which state action and political reform enacted in Mexico subsequently hinged. In the more than four decades since the tragic happenings

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6.



witnessed on October 2, 1968 in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, the status of ‘Tlatelolco’ as a *parteaguas* or watershed moment in Mexican history has been vigorously disputed. Most scholars now concede that the student movement created an opening – be it political, social, or both – for a generation of Mexicans to exploit, yet there is room still for debate.<sup>37</sup> Enrique Krauze recently opined that the legacy of 1968 remained “uncertain” for the ways its ideological inheritors failed to consolidate its potential. He granted that those events contributed to democratizing the country though he felt that the “irreverent” qualities of the historic movement coupled with the riddled state of the contemporary Left in Mexico prevented crediting the students of 1968 with any significant achievements.<sup>38</sup> This message echoed one conveyed earlier by Eric Zolov who viewed 1968 as a “turning point” in modern Mexico but cautioned that to lionize the students as “heroic youth doing battle against antiquated, reactionary systems of thought and power” risked overlooking the “messiness” of the movement.<sup>39</sup>

The findings presented herein contribute to said debate because they are predicated on the belief that the sequence of events that culminated at Tlatelolco represented a decisive moment that altered the nation’s modern political culture. This is not to say, however, that the tack of reform subsequently adopted by the government derived only from pressures exerted by student actions. It did not. Student protests called into question the revolutionary credentials of the Mexican state and its legitimacy as rightful heir to that legacy, yet they did not occur in a vacuum. Political reform

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<sup>37</sup> Elaine Carey afforded the student movement of 1968 immense cultural importance for the ways it questioned presidential authority and challenged ingrained discourses that made women subservient to men and youth to elders. She credited the breach that this challenge created with spawning future social movements that tested traditional family structures and raised cultural issues once deemed taboo. See, again, Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005). Others gave more emphasis to the strictly political openings created by the movement. Sergio Aguayo placed the massacre at Tlatelolco inside a long, yet understudied, history of political violence in Mexico and prefaced the notion that gradual public awareness of the state’s misdeeds would one day force widespread political reform. See Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *1968: Los archivos de la violencia* (Mexico City: Reforma, 1998). He was right and his suspicion was confirmed by journalists Julia Preston and Samuel Dillon who credited the events of 1968 with sparking a desire for democratic change in an entire generation of Mexicans and igniting a gradual thirty year process that ousted the party that ruled the nation for seven decades. See Julia Preston and Samuel Dillon, *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> See Enrique Krauze, “El Legado Incierto del 68”, <http://www.lettraslibre.com/index.php?art=13179>.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Zolov, “Showcasing the ‘Land of Tomorrow’: Mexico and the 1968 Olympics”, *The Americas* 61:2 (October 2004), 187. I garner Zolov’s impression of the movement’s “messiness” from his review of *Plaza of Sacrifices* in *The Americas* 63, no. 1 (July 2006): 161-162.

implemented after Tlatelolco also conveyed the Mexican state's desire to counter deeper-seated threats to its authority that emanated from other societal sectors and most importantly, from organized workers who had militated at heightened levels since the late-1950s.

Mexico witnessed extraordinary economic growth in the post-World War II decades, sustaining Gross Domestic Product growth rates averaging six percent annually during the so-called Mexican Miracle from 1941-1980.<sup>40</sup> To unionists, this period of unprecedented growth appeared the product of the tripartite labor system established by Article 123 and seemingly perfected during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940.) In this arrangement, workers felt central to the processes of development, and fittingly, they saw their salaries rise concomitantly with corporate profits while reaping social benefits. The role of organized labor in the nation's industrialization process was thus understood as determinant, and as such union leaders ensured workers that their priorities were at the top of federal and state government agendas.<sup>41</sup>

To their dismay, however, labor leaders saw their sector's status relative to capital decline as the Mexican Miracle reached full maturity in the 1950s. Scholars trace this loss of standing directly to the state's adoption of Import Substitution Industrialization, an economic strategy requiring the kind of massive capitalization not achievable domestically.<sup>42</sup> The implementation of ISI, although it oriented the state towards greater intervention in the economy, kept Mexican development dependent upon foreign capital. Recognizing their advantages, domestic but even more so foreign investors negotiated favorable terms that put little pressure on them to accommodate the demands of labor. Unprecedented economic growth rates were touted while the rising inequities between

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<sup>40</sup> Luis Ángeles, *El PRI en el gobierno: El desarrollo de México 1930-2000* (Mexico: Fundación Colosio, 2003), 120-121.

<sup>41</sup> Francisco Hernandez Juárez and María Xelhuantzi López, *El sindicalismo en la reforma del Estado: Una visión de la Modernización de México* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 23.

<sup>42</sup> In a nutshell, Import Substitution Industrialization, or ISI, was a trade and economic policy based on the premise that a country should attempt to reduce its foreign dependency through the local production of industrialized products. ISI, though tinkered with in the 1930s, was adopted wholesale in Latin America and Mexico only after World War II and typically featured protective barriers to trade (tariffs), an overvalued currency to help manufacturers import capital goods like heavy machinery, and a discouragement of direct foreign investment, though this final characteristic was not a feature in the Mexican model.

corporate earnings and workers' salaries were masked. Labor leaders told workers to celebrate the efforts of their unions that continued to win wage increases and other economic incentives, but worker joy rang hollow as real wages fell and purchasing power plummeted. Figures endorsed by the Fondo de Cultura Económica demonstrate that the real average daily wage (adjusted for inflation) attained by the Mexican worker during the period 1954-1963 paled in comparison to what was earned by those working a decade earlier. Workers' daily wages reached a nadir of just 18.86 pesos in 1956, though the average figure otherwise hovered between 44.61 (in 1955) and 57.98 (1962) during the decade referenced above.<sup>43</sup> Men and women feeling the pain of their declining economic status gradually became conscious of their shared malaise, and by the late 1950s a discourse pervaded shop floors alleging the government's preference for employers over workers. Worker chatter about the government's (and their unions' coziness) with business threatened the survival of the collaborationist norm that had guided relations between the state and organized labor since the 1920s. For a state system that derived its authority directly from its perceived legitimacy as inheritor of a Revolutionary legacy, such doubts represented substantial threats to the continued political and cultural hegemony of the state and official party.<sup>44</sup>

In the decade that preceded Tlatelolco unionized workers in diverse sectors demanded better wages, safety, medical, and housing provisions, and the right to elect union leaders. Sometimes their efforts were rewarded – relative worker income rose markedly after 1961 – though typically their voices were silenced, occasionally by their

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<sup>43</sup> Figures attest to the notion that the labor sector as a whole fared better both during the decade prior to 1954-1963 as well as during the subsequent decade-plus (1964-1982,) a trend continuing until workers' daily wages began a precipitous decline following the economic catastrophe of 1982-1983. Again, see chart compiled by Hernandez Juárez and Xelhuantzi López, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Moreover, according to Isabelle Rousseau, the mere fact of economic success during the period challenged the structural integrity of the state and party apparatus: first, by diminishing the power and authority of the presidency by virtue of reducing the dependence of state and municipal government on the federal government for financial assistance, and second, by displacing members of the official party with business leaders, the “sons of modernization and development,” as the primary instruments of negotiation between social groups. Rousseau concludes that this process unfolded in such a manner that by 1970 the federal government and the PRI were still the predominant political organizations, but had become, as a result of the consolidation of an autonomous capitalist class, less and less effective at employing traditional resources to persuade or control the business sector. See Isabelle Rousseau, *México: ¿una revolución silenciosa?: élites gubernamentales y proyecto de modernización, 1970-1995* (Mexico: Centro de Estudios Internacionales, 2001), 66.

employers, but just as often by their own unions and by state authorities.<sup>45</sup> The resurgence of popular labor unrest hinted at the contradictions inherent in the Mexican state's development strategies and cancelled the relative labor peace that characterized the past two decades. Worker militancy, in contrast to student activism, posed a real threat to topple the regime. The state was required to respond. It would be organized workers, therefore, the sector most ascribed with historical symbolism and deemed most capable of destabilizing the regime, that would become the chief target of state rhetoric and primary beneficiary of preemptive measures after Tlatelolco.

### *SIGNIFICANCE, STRUCTURE, AND METHOD OF THIS STUDY*

#### Significance

This dissertation assesses how the state sought to pay the political costs of 1968 by solidifying traditional values and making grand overtures to an original constituent of the Revolution. First, state goals are evaluated through an examination of government and official party rhetoric and policy of the early 1970s. Following this, state goals are cross-referenced in contemporary union literature to confirm the existence of formal syndical support for government positions and programs. Together, these approaches reveal that after Tlatelolco, both state and organized labor leaders saw value in restoring collaborationism as a symbiotic, reciprocal relationship that could strengthen their respective positions.

My research and analysis augments the extant body of scholarship on modern Latin American labor history by chronicling the details of post-Tlatelolco tripartite (state-labor-business) relations and by exploring major theoretical constructs that guided the experience of organized labor in Mexico in the twentieth century, primarily collaborationism but also, to a lesser extent, revolutionary unionism and anarcho-syndicalism. This is not a biography or simple political history. Indeed several personages stand out as central to the narrative, but it is the body of the Mexican state itself and not that of Fidel Velázquez, Luis Echeverría, or, Rafael Galván, for example,

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<sup>45</sup> Statistics show that organized worker activism, at least as reflected in the volume of strike petitions approved at the federal level, showed a marked drop-off between the 1958-1964 and 1964-1970 presidential terms. The reasons for this perceived decline in worker militancy during that period are explained in Chapter One.

that is the primary subject of the analysis. Conceptualizing the postrevolutionary and post-Tlatelolco Mexican state as body is appropriate for an analysis rooted in theoretical concepts of corporatism, paternalism, and collectivism. Employing these conceptual frameworks allow for a more nuanced understanding of the ways that unionized male and female workers, who in spite of historically-derived prescriptions that mutually subordinated them as parts of the revolutionary body, bucked the hierarchical structure and voiced their displeasure through the filing of labor suits or their participation in unsanctioned strikes and independent unions. In this regard, my dissertation also reveals that labor conflict was perpetual and came from all sides, a fact permitting me to contend that employer opposition and unsanctioned worker activism represented counter-hegemonic forces that challenged state objectives.

My work will contribute to several historiographical debates currently waged on the topic of Tlatelolco and its long-term political significance. On the whole, my dissertation weighs the merits of rhetoric as presented in state missives and union literature against reality as exposed in periodicals and the records of labor mediation boards. Archival sources demonstrate that organized workers after Tlatelolco reaped real benefits from a history-conscious executive and a reformed labor ministry. Moreover, my thesis means to accompany, not defy, prevailing interpretations that consider political reforms of the era vis-à-vis the ways they galvanized unionists to push for democracy and oppose state control. Scholars have shown that the “democratic opening” as promised by President Luis Echeverría encouraged the emergence of reformist groups inside the tightly regulated organized labor movement.<sup>46</sup> Yet, my analysis demonstrates that state goals were multifaceted and not mutually exclusive. While democratic-minded policymakers were willing to permit rank-and-file dissent among workers, they also

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<sup>46</sup> Excellent works that link political reform in the period with the rise of democratic unionism in the automobile, electrical, and steel industries, respectively, include: Kevin J. Middlebrook, “Union Democratization in the Mexican Automobile Industry: A Reappraisal,” *Latin American Research Review* 24:2 (1989): 69-93; Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *¡Esto puño sí se ve! Insurgencia y movimiento obrero* (Mexico City: Ediciones el Caballito, 1987); and most recently, Michael D. Snodgrass, “How Can We Speak of Democracy in Mexico?: Workers and Organized Labor in the Cárdenas and Echeverría Years” in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Luis Echeverría and Lázaro Cárdenas*, eds. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 159-173.

coveted the opportunity to revive a *modus vivendi* with top union brass reminiscent of an earlier time.

### Structure

The dissertation consists of two preliminary chapters (Introduction and Chapter One,) nine subsequent chapters grouped into three parts, and a Conclusion. The Introduction has historically framed the project and explained its central theses, methods, and terms. Carefully defining terms, specifically, collaborationism, is indispensable for this study departs with the belief that the maintenance of good relations between the state and organized labor, or more accurately, between the state and the leadership of organized labor, was an integral component toward establishing the legitimacy of each sector. Chapter One provides historical background that describes the foundation and evolution of the Mexican labor establishment and places collaborationism at the heart of postrevolutionary Mexican state and organized labor relations.

The chapters that form Part One determine the salience of the events of 1968 on subsequent behavior displayed by the Mexican state toward the organized labor and business sectors. Chapter Two demonstrates the diversity present in sectoral opinions toward student and government activities, and then narrates the story of the passage and implementation of the New Federal Labor Law on May 1, 1970 – a watershed development that influenced future state, labor, and business activities. Chapter Three examines the presidential campaign of 1970 as it represented the Mexican state’s most visible attempt to regain the legitimacy it deemed lost from prolonged social unrest. Chapter Four considers how state maneuvers to increasingly intervene in the nation’s economic life were meant to appease organized labor then assesses popular and business hostility to said efforts.

Part Two of the study analyzes alterations made to the “Revolutionary Body” and the discontent changes often provoked. Chapter Five shows how the relationship dynamic of collaborationism was restored after Tlatelolco via the resurgence of class, collectivism, and paternalism as indispensable components of tripartite relations. Chapter Six shows that changes made to the revolutionary corpus were begrudgingly accepted and episodes of owner and worker resistance were omnipresent. Chapter Seven continues the theme of

collaboration and conflict by paying attention to the ways that female unionists, though they represented integral pieces of the renewed collaborationist dynamic, also challenged state and organized labor efforts to restore a previous relationship dynamic.

Part Three tests the merits of the allegation launched by employers that organized workers of the period enjoyed special favor from federal labor authorities. Chapters Seven and Eight alike test the notion that contemporary unionists formed a “labor aristocracy” that exerted an undue and damaging influence on the nation’s economy. Chapter Eight assesses the ways that the New Federal Labor Law of 1970 altered basic terms of workplace relations by reforming the legal structures of collective contracting, the right to strike, and federal labor tribunals. Reforms in the new labor code pertaining to employers’ health and safety requirements are also scrutinized, as are the findings of federal labor authorities that ruled on personal indemnification and unlawful termination suits. Chapter Nine continues this analysis by assessing the power of the collective contract in contemporary labor relations, then challenging employer accusations of bias through a consideration of independent and company unionism and the frequent campaigns waged by workers for salary increases. Finally, Chapter Ten assesses how actions carried out to free unions from centralized and *charro* control represented a counter-hegemonic workers’ movement that tested the syndical bureaucracy and the terms of collaborationism at large.

### Methodology

This is, as previously explained, a project concerned with language. Words mattered in the context of the legitimacy challenges posed to the ruling elite, and this project looks closely at union, business, and state rhetoric of the period. Most prominent herein is an analysis of the *prensa obrera*, that is, the “workers’ press” composed of the publications of state-allied trade unions and large labor confederations of the period. Analysis of *Ceteme*, the weekly publication of the CTM, and *SUTERM*, the monthly publication of the General Union of Mexican Electrical Workers is crucial in this regard for they conveyed an editorial alliance with the state that promoted their mutually shared goals, as well as belied the powerful independent current that ran through their memberships. More importantly, the content of *Ceteme*, for example, was exemplary of

most other state-allied union publications for the bulk of its column space was given to covering happenings at union meetings, narrating the details of strikes across the nation, commemorating important anniversaries and eulogizing fallen labor leaders, offering lessons on worker politicization, thrift, health, and morality, describing terms of collective contracts reached between unions and companies, and, condemning the activities of labor unions editors deemed counter to the interests of the official labor movement. It is for this reason that *Ceteme*, *SUTERM*, and other publications of the workers' press stand at the center of my methodology and inform its central findings.

This project, however, does not ignore the voices of the disenchanting segments of the trade union movement. *Bandera Roja*, *Nueva Solidaridad*, *Por Qué?*, and other antiestablishment magazines produced in the period juxtaposed the dominant line espoused by most union journals that tended to be moderately, if not strongly, in favor of state positions and policies. Use of daily newspapers of all political stripes is central to this work both for and in spite of the heavy doses of subjectivity they contained. Editorials printed in newspapers of the era tended to either strongly support or harshly criticize actions of the Mexican state and/or labor establishment. Much insight may be gleaned from analyzing the editorial pages of the post-Tlatelolco era press, as well as reports on the most important political events and the basic meat and potato issues that concerned contemporary unionists.

Archival sources are similarly central to the work and government documents contained in Galleries Two, Three, and Six of the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City (AGN) provide insights on state economic and social objectives. The records of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, particularly its vast collection of labor suits filed with federal and local labor tribunals, founds Chapters Eight and Nine. Additionally, Gallery Three of the AGN houses federal cabinet records of the Internal Affairs, National Patrimony, Treasury, and Presidency ministries. Recently declassified documents in the AGN's gallery of Political and Social Studies (Gallery Two) has enabled me to construct a general chronology of state efforts to repress unsanctioned labor activity. Finally, primary sources at Condumex – a repository of materials containing historical documents provides insight into understanding the nature of the



political economy established by the Mexican Revolution that was deemed in such dire need of restoring after Tlatelolco.

Finally, a word on orthography and the use of idiomatic expressions in the text. This dissertation routinely employs terms in their original Spanish in lieu of translating them in a way that better preserves the richness of the world of trade unionism in twentieth century Mexico. (One exception, however, is the use of *unionist*, the English translation of *agremiado* or *sindicalista*, which appears regularly and refers to one who is enrolled in union ranks.) More generally, terms including *compañero/a* (meaning partner or comrade) and *patrón* (best understood in this context as employer) sometimes appear. Someone belonging to specific organization union may be called a *ctemista* (if belonging to the CTM,) a *sutermista* (if belonging to the SUTERM,) or something else signifying their professional affiliation. One who belongs to a union of railway workers would be a *ferrocarrilero*; if part of an oilworkers' union, a *petrolero*, etc. This works similarly for those who belong to the official party, the PRI, who are termed *priístas*. Moreover, there are terms emanating from the rich lingo of *la grilla*, i.e. the “chirping” of Mexican politics. First and foremost, there is the *charro*, a derisive term for union leaders whose origin and meaning is explained in Chapter One. There are also *esquirolas*, meaning, strikebreakers or scabs brought in by the company to oppose workers' actions. Supporters of ownership might sling similar epithets; those who are not actually employees but who appear alongside striking workers may be *cachirules* – a name implying that they are union stooges and not a legitimate part of the movement. Terms like *acarreados*, who were literally “those carried-in” by bus or other means to pack a demonstration or in the case of *plañideras*, to bolster the mourning presence at a funeral, also appear and are distinctly part of the Mexican labor lexicon. Finally, legal and technical terms germane to the 1970s workplace appear in their original language. A *pleito* is a labor suit filed by workers against their employers, as well as *operario*, roughly meaning a floor or a “blue-collar” worker, and *empleado*, signifying one who works in the office or a “white-collar” employee. The significance of these and other terms are explained in subsequent chapters.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**THE COLLABORATIONIST PIPELINE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE**  
**MEXICAN LABOR ESTABLISHMENT**

What was the *modus vivendi* policymakers wished to restore with organized labor's leadership after 1968? From where and how did it emerge? Answering these questions is critical toward establishing the salience of this project, being that it is predicated on the dual notions that first, Tlatelolco was a *parteaguas* that influenced subsequent political behavior and, second, that the state considered improved relations with the organized labor movement one of its top priorities in the post-1968 period. Narrating a history of the evolution of the labor establishment, that is, the bifurcated structure composed of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and all the state and municipal level government labor bodies, i.e. the labor bureaucracy, and the organized labor milieu of state-allied confederations, federations, and unions known collectively as the syndical bureaucracy in postrevolutionary Mexico gives insight into these questions.

*THE FOUNDATION OF THE LABOR BUREAUCRACY*

The official history of Mexico's Ministry of Labor is summarized for online browsers on the homepage of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare in the following way:

During the Porfiriato (from 1876 to 1911) land was almost the only source of wealth in Mexico and was concentrated in the hands of a small sector of society in a way that provoked the limitless exploitation of field workers. The working day was at least fourteen hours long and salaries were very low; men, women, and children were submitted to subhuman conditions. After assuming the Presidency of the Republic, as a consequence of the armed movement of 1910, Francisco I. Madero decreed on December 18, 1911 the creation of the Department of Labor...in order to resolve labor conflicts under a fundamentally conciliatory rubric. During the administration of Venustiano Carranza in 1915 the Department of Labor was incorporated into the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the legal framework for the labor contract was created. Two years later the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States was promulgated within which Article 123 decreed the following rights of workers: the fixing of a maximum eight-hour workday; the indemnification of an unlawful firing; the right to associate and to

strike; and the establishment of norms regarding [a system of] welfare and social security.<sup>1</sup>

Mexico's current Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, one could henceforth surmise, surged from a powerful and widely held antipathy about the injustices suffered by workers nationwide. The rights granted to workers in Article 123 of the Constitution of 1917, it likewise appears, were measures that sprung from a 'revolutionary' experience that endeavored to resolve basic iniquities that plagued the employer-employee relationship in prerevolutionary Mexican society.

Undeniably, this recounting of history has a strong factual basis; Mexico during the thirty-six year regime of President Porfirio Díaz took on a neo-colonial character as it was primarily an exporter of raw materials and an agricultural bastion.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the official history of the labor establishment ignores the contributions made by one of its crucial actors. Kevin Middlebrook offers a less hagiographic recounting of events when he emphasizes the role of organized labor in the emergence and growth of the postrevolutionary nation's labor framework. As he sees it, the workers' rights written into the Constitution of 1917 were not inserted to respond to "subhuman conditions" Mexican employees routinely suffered, but were instead gifts given to organized labor by convention delegates who convened to draft the constitution against a backdrop of revolutionary political mobilization and with the memory of the Mexico City general

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<sup>1</sup>Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, [http://www.stps.gob.mx/bicentenario\\_plantilla/Elementos/ConoceSTPS/Quienes\\_somos/Quienes%20somos/historia\\_stps.htm](http://www.stps.gob.mx/bicentenario_plantilla/Elementos/ConoceSTPS/Quienes_somos/Quienes%20somos/historia_stps.htm) (accessed August 11, 2011). Spanish, in full, reads: Durante el Porfiriato (de 1876 a 1911), la tierra era casi la única fuente de riqueza en México y estaba concentrada en las manos de un pequeño sector de la sociedad, lo que provocaba la explotación desmedida de los trabajadores del campo. Las jornadas laborales eran de por lo menos 14 horas diarias y los salarios muy bajos; hombres, mujeres y niños eran so-metidos a condiciones infrahumanas. Tras asumir la Presidencia de la República, a consecuencia del movimiento armado revolucionario de 1910, Francisco I. Madero decretó el 18 de diciembre de 1911 la creación del Departamento del Trabajo, dentro de la entonces Secretaría de Fomento, Colonización e Industria, para solucionar los conflictos laborales bajo un esquema fundamentalmente conciliatorio. En 1915, durante el mandato de Venustiano Carranza, el Departamento del Trabajo se incorporó a la Secretaría de Gobernación, y al mismo tiempo se elaboró un proyecto de ley sobre el contrato de trabajo. Dos años después fue promulgada la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, que en su artículo 123 decretó los siguientes derechos de los trabajadores: La fijación de la jornada máxima de ocho horas; La indemnización por despido injustificado; El derecho de asociación y de huelga; El establecimiento de normas en materia de Previsión y Seguridad Social.

<sup>2</sup> For more elaboration, see José Mancisidor, *El Movimiento Social en México. Cuadernos Obreros No. 10* (Mexico City: Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, 1986), 22.

strikes of 1916 fresh in their minds.<sup>3</sup> Middlebrook's analysis of the development of the federal labor ministry shows a similar lack of nostalgia for the process. In December of 1917 the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Labor was established, and although the ministry was proclaimed as the central actor in the standardization and uniform application of labor law, it lacked real power to enforce federal labor law in areas where state law superseded it. Federal labor law's lack of jurisdiction in the states was no oversight; the Constitutional Convention rejected exclusive federal jurisdiction over labor matters largely due to delegates' fear of treading on the political autonomy of local governors, many of whom had recently been generals and commanded the allegiance of large numbers of still-armed men.<sup>4</sup>

The refusal of Convention delegates to tread on states' rights and permit exclusive federal jurisdiction over labor matters produced serious political problems. Individual states enacted some ninety different laws and decrees between 1918 and 1928 to codify the provisions of Article 123. Legal standards and institutional arrangements varied confusingly from state to state and conflicts arose frequently between federal and local authorities over who had responsibility for mediating particular strikes or contract negotiations. Conflicts in industrial areas with inter-state scopes such as railroad transportation were particularly contentious as employers in Puebla and Veracruz, among other states, shunned local laws in favor of federal norms (or vice versa) depending on the letter of which law benefited them most in that particular instance. When workplace disputes arose they were settled in the home state's civil court and by judges who were generally conservative and friendly to business interests.<sup>5</sup> In short, the federal and local distinction of labor law in Mexico in the 1920s created a bureaucratic mess which employers easily took advantage of. Not surprisingly, the uniform application of labor law and the creation of a federal labor code was a major priority of most labor organizations in the 1920s.

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 47-48.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 57.

In the absence of a federal labor law codifying Article 123, a number of states created local conciliation and arbitration boards (JCAs) in accordance with the Article's clause 20. In most cases the boards functioned as the court of last resort in conflicts over which they had jurisdiction, and they heard both individual and collective labor disputes. Initially, after 1918, JCAs were hamstrung by Supreme Court decisions that deprived JCAs of binding authority and did not let the boards resolve individual worker grievances, only collective conflicts. These positions were reversed in 1924 at the behest of President Álvaro Obregón who pushed through the change to strengthen relations with the Mexican Regional Labor Confederation, the CROM, then the nation's largest and most influential labor organization. Even with this development, the federal and local distinction in labor law in Mexico persisted into 1925 and constituted a flaw that Obregón's centralizing-minded successor, Plutarco Elías Calles, was committed to correcting. Finally, under Calles's strong tutelage, the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JFCA) was created in 1927 and given undisputed authority to resolve questions arising in the nation's most pivotal industrial sectors.

Officially, the JFCA was created to empower federal authorities to decide on the legality of strikes that the labor ministry did not have jurisdiction over. In this instance, however, the backstory provides even more insight into the historical process. According to Middlebrook, the JFCA was born specifically so that the government could legally intervene and end a strike that was then being waged by the Confederation of Transportation and Communication Workers, a powerful union of railway workers, against Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México, the country's most important railroad company. When the Supreme Court ruled that the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Labor, then headed by the same man – Luis Napoleón Morones – who led the CROM, lacked the authority to declare the strike illegal, Calles created the JFCA to resolve the conflict. The JFCA's first action was to declare the strike illegal. Calles's action was of questionable legality until the passage of the necessary constitutional reforms in 1929.<sup>6</sup>

By 1927 the influence exerted by the CROM and by Morones personally over the government was well known. The creation of the JFCA enhanced that influence

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

furthermore as it gave the state and the Minister of Industry (Morones) a modicum of control over the railway workers – a sector it had not previously been successful in co-opting. JFCAs benefited the organized labor movement as a whole; the tripartite composition of the boards gave workers representation in the administration of labor justice, thus providing them with an important channel for the resolution of disputes outside of the workplace. Moreover, by removing employee-employer conflicts from the judicial system and giving government officials a deciding role in their resolution, the organization of conciliation and arbitration boards increased the labor movement's ability to translate its growing political importance into workplace gains. Finally, the conciliation and arbitration boards operated outside of the regular judicial system – a boon for a Mexican working class that saw the civil courts as conservative and historically aligned with business interests.<sup>7</sup>

Most importantly, perhaps, the creation of the JFCA in 1927 formed part of a trend that expanded the federal government's authority over workplace relations and, more generally, increased its capacity to intervene in the regulation of the Mexican economy. These were trends that the major organized labor players of the 1920s applauded. These trends were further developed with the creation of the 1931 Federal Labor Law, or, LFT for short. Prior to its passage, proponents of the LFT argued that a unified federal labor code was necessary for two reasons: first, to codify basic rights granted to workers in the 1917 Constitution, and second, to regulate labor matters under a single federal law. The former goal was accomplished though the latter largely failed to eliminate idiosyncrasies that persisted in the application of labor law at the local (i.e. state and municipal) levels. Nevertheless, the 1931 code served the federal government and the official party, the PNR, because it increased the power the government had over deciding labor-capital disputes and inspired unions to smooth out kinks in their relationships with state authorities and become more reliable members of the “revolutionary family.” Moreover, the increased scope of federal government involvement in labor-capital relations necessitated the creation of a new agency, the Autonomous Department of Labor, which was established in December of 1932 and fulfilled the expanded functions

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 57.

of: a. seeking solutions to labor conflicts; b. overseeing the enforcement of the new labor code; c. registering labor and employer organizations; d. regulating and inspecting work contracts; e. and developing a social welfare policy in the labor sector.<sup>8</sup> This new body, although ostensibly “autonomous” from presidential oversight, answered to a higher power and was the immediate predecessor to the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) – a cabinet-level agency created in December of 1940. With the establishment of the STPS, the nation’s foremost labor authority finally forsook any pretension of functional autonomy from the federal executive and became the state-building partner that policymakers had long dreamt it could be.

Making the labor bureaucracy a cabinet level agency gave the federal government additional power to intervene in the mediation of worker-employer conflicts, making post-1940 STPS officials (and sometimes the president himself) the focal points of negotiations in contract disputes and strikes. The STPS’s role in this area, says Middlebrook, evidenced the postrevolutionary Mexican state’s continued impulse to maintain an interventionist role in labor affairs.<sup>9</sup> Indeed the STPS was entrusted with carrying out a broad range of activities and its mandate increased with the passage of the New Federal Labor Law (NLFT) in 1970.<sup>10</sup> Endowing the STPS with a broad agenda and wide-ranging powers made sense in the context of the Mexican state’s revolutionary strategy, for only with a firm grasp on the regulation of labor-capital relations could an interventionist-minded regime carry out its ambitious program of social reform. Economic interventionism as a form of political economy is a central theme of this dissertation due largely for the ways that it, having emerged in the early postrevolutionary period and having lagged during the 1940s and 1950s, was revived after 1968 and was returned to prominence in government rhetoric and policy in the post-Tlatelolco era.

#### *THE FOUNDATION OF THE SYNDICAL BUREAUCRACY*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>10</sup> Many of these new or expanded functions are discussed in this dissertation. For independent analysis, see Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (hereafter STPS), *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición* (Mexico City: STPS, 1970).

To understand the history of the evolution of the labor establishment in postrevolutionary Mexico it is likewise necessary to describe the emergence and progression of the syndical bureaucracy, the organized labor milieu of state-allied confederations, federations, and unions. Trade unionism in Mexico was not always the tightly regulated, highly circumscribed social movement that it became in the mid-1920s. In the earliest phases of the Revolution, Mexican trade unionism was led by the House of the World Worker (Casa,) a largely urban-based organization established in September 1912 and comprised primarily of unions of oil, electrical, and railway workers.<sup>11</sup> The Casa was anarcho-syndicalist in nature, stressing an egalitarian union structure, worker control of industry, profit-sharing, and increased state intervention in the economy. The Casa was well known for its commitment to “direct action,” meaning, strikes in place of government mediated negotiations. Yet the Casa’s fierce commitment to autonomous action did not signify an apolitical stance; the Red Battalions it formed in urban areas were critical in the military victory of the Constitutionalist faction led by Venustiano Carranza.<sup>12</sup>

The Casa-government military alliance, so crucial in determining the outcome of the Revolution, proved fleeting. Leading Constitutionalist politicians actively cultivated an alliance with moderate elements in the emerging organized labor movement while at the same time forcefully opposing labor radicals inside the Casa. Among the most important breaking points happened in August 1916 when President Venustiano Carranza used army troops to smash a general strike called by the Casa in Mexico City, and later when oil workers affiliated with the Casa rejected a partnership with the Carranza state

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<sup>11</sup> Casa, as an abbreviation for the House of the World Worker (Casa del Obrero Mundial,) is used here instead of the more commonly employed COM. Historian John Mason Hart informs me that the term Casa derived from the experience of the *círculo* (circle) in Pre-Columbian and Spanish societies during which conclaves were held at night around a candle by very poor peasants, and later workers, before electricity. It was with the advent of electrification and the moving of the meetings indoors that members began to refer to their groups as casas, being that they were welcomed in and felt at home. Meeting in casas, they experienced mutual support and fellowship, imbibed meals and drinks, and were provided temporary housing, and later, even education. It is because of richness of the term Casa, and in light of the sterility of the acronym COM, that I have chosen to use it in the text.

<sup>12</sup> For a concise summary of the effect of anarcho-syndicalism and anarchism on the development of the working classes in Mexico, see John Mason Hart’s *Anarchism & the Mexican Working Class, 1860-1931* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).



due to the close alliances it maintained with petroleum and other company owners. Additional rifts were yet to come.

The federal constitution signed in February 1917 split the organized labor movement. The most hard-line Casa members calling themselves “utopians” rejected the Constitution of 1917 outright, arguing that Article 123, though it gave workers real rights, was contradictory because it afforded the government too much power in settling workplace disputes by way of its presiding over state labor mediation boards. In their defense of union autonomy, the utopians were countered inside the Casa by those who called themselves “pragmatists.” Led by Luis Morones, a mechanic employed by the Mexican Light and Power Company and founding member of the Mexican Electricians’ Union, the pragmatist faction of the Casa held that the Constitution was sufficiently *obrerista*, or “pro-worker,” and that labor should reject the ideological rigidity associated with the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist traditions and embrace tactical flexibility.<sup>13</sup>

The utopian-pragmatist division present in the Casa by 1917 mirrored a fissure in the Mexican trade union movement as a whole. Eventually, the pragmatist faction led by Morones defected from the organization and formed itself into the CROM in May of 1918. As head of the new organization, Morones recognized organized labor’s tactical and numerical weaknesses and contended that to overcome those deficiencies, workers needed to build political alliances with elite groups in order to achieve their basic goals.<sup>14</sup> In August 1919 he forged a secret pact with presidential candidate Álvaro Obregón in which he promised to mobilize full CROM support for Obregón in the 1920 presidential election in exchange for privileged political access, the creation of (and CROM influence over) a separate labor ministry, and presidential support for labor legislation codifying the provisions of Article 123. These developments and the formation of the Mexican Labor Party in December 1919 signaled organized labor’s definitive entrance into

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<sup>13</sup> Myrna I. Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 240.

<sup>14</sup> Middlebrook, 77. In this regard, Morones was right. In addition to the relatively limited size of the organized workers’ movement, the dispersion of urban and industrial work force among a number of small- and medium-sized enterprises in diverse economic activities made the formation of large, politically and economically influential unions extremely difficult. In this dispersed workforce, the prevalence of paternalistic worker-employer relations in smaller workplaces further complicated organizational efforts in many economic activities.

national politics and marked the end of its independence from the state. The pipeline of collaborationism – a tight and reciprocal political relationship between the Mexican regime and the dominant segments of the trade unionist movement – had been laid. There was little room for diverging worker positions in its flow. Suddenly, the anarcho-syndicalist position that had defined the Casa and dominated the movement only five years earlier was deemed anti-national, even villainous. Henceforth, any radical (meaning, unsanctioned) worker activity was counter to the goals of the Mexican Revolution.

After the creation of the staunchly pro-state CROM, Casa's radical positions were targeted for extinction by government and business authorities. Joint state-business crackdowns on oil worker militancy after 1918 demonstrated a shared goal on the part of industry and government to eliminate revolutionary syndicalism from the ranks of the working class.<sup>15</sup> Some who clung to the principles of direct action and a nonpolitical labor movement sought to pursue their goals in the General Confederation of Workers (CGT,) formed as a national organization in 1921. Even with this development, though, anarcho-syndicalism as a political alternative ceased to be a major player on the nation's organized labor stage by as early as 1921. Certainly by the mid 1920s, the voices of most workers expressing such positions were drowned out in a climate that conflated employer-employee conciliation with nationalism, though some radical oil workers' unions remained anarcho-syndicalist into late 1920s and continued to sparked regular battles with employers on the topic of co-management even into the late 1930s.<sup>16</sup>

Still, radicalism carried weight with the working classes, a truth made evident by the fact that *cromistas* (members of the CROM) voiced rhetorical radicalism even as Morones moved the organization toward an increasingly subordinate position vis-à-vis the Mexican state. The proud, combative history of trade unionism in Mexico was widely celebrated and episodes of workers' resistance in the prerevolutionary period – specifically, the 1906 copper miners' strike at Cananea and the 1907 textile workers' strike at Río Blanco – were identified in speeches as important precursors of the 1910

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<sup>15</sup> Santiago, 233.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

Mexican Revolution. Furthermore, CROM leaders made continued rhetorical demands for operational autonomy even while identifying an alliance with the governing elite as one of the organization's primary goals. In light of these facts, it is more appropriate to consider the ways not that the historical radicalism of the organized workers' movement in Mexico was crushed, but rather, the ways that its messages were co-opted by the postrevolutionary state and the syndical bureaucracy.<sup>17</sup>

Real rewards were distributed in addition to praise though not all workers were privy to receive them. Certainly for the average Mexican worker, it paid to be unionized – a fact as true in the 1970s as it was in the 1920s.<sup>18</sup> The CROM and Mexican Labor Party were crucially important sources of mass support for a still fragile regime in the 1920s, and the CROM, although it falsely claimed 1.5 million members in 1925 and two million in 1928, was by the late 1920s the largest and most politically influential labor organization in Mexico.<sup>19</sup> Its stature enabled it to win real benefits for its members – CROM efforts saw the first collective labor contract in the history of the country signed in 1925 – as well as for its leader Morones, whose eccentric tastes and lavish lifestyle is now the stuff of legend in Mexican political and labor history.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the CROM created national federations in industries in which none had previously existed, namely amongst teachers, printers, textile, sugar, and port workers. But for all of its privileges and successes in the 1920s, the CROM and Morones never succeeded in establishing a strong presence in the strategically important railroad, electricity generation, and

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<sup>17</sup> Santiago describes how the anarcho-syndicalist “gesture” was incorporated into the postrevolutionary political dialog. Using a vivid analogy, she sees the ideology of anarcho-syndicalism “absorbed” into the dominant nationalist discourse of the day. Piecing the following story together via a series of oral testimonies, Santiago writes that in August 1925, a giant assembly of *rojos* or “red” workers gathered to hold their last “prolonged and violent discussions.” They marched to CGT headquarters and deposited their *bandera rojinegra*, the red and black flag of worker protest, in a public acknowledgement of defeat. Then the closing act took place. “One by one,” an elderly informant told Santiago, “hundreds of reds pricked their fingers with a pin and let their blood drip onto the white middle stripe of the flag around the eagle and the serpent.” “How many hundreds signed it? How many thousands? I couldn’t tell you, but [the white] was covered... with our blood.” Thus, concluded Santiago, the men officially dissolved the last anarcho-syndicalist oil union, though what was similarly apparent to her was that: “If the switching of the flags marked the death of anarcho-syndicalism in favor of nationalism, it was obvious that these men felt revolutionary Mexico still owed a great debt to its workers.” See Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil*, 310.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapters Eight and Nine for elaboration.

<sup>19</sup> Middlebrook, 80.

<sup>20</sup> Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 77.

petroleum industries.<sup>21</sup> These workers had a strong labor market position that gave them leverage and had anarchist influences that compelled them toward democratic governance and political independence. They along with workers in the burgeoning steel industry formed the first, true “labor aristocracy,” described by Michael Snodgrass as the segments of the industrial working class that were “highly skilled, well paid, heavily unionized, politically active, and nearly always men,” and their unions were harassed by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Labor when it was under the command of Morones in the late 1920s.<sup>22</sup>

Morones’s inability to influence railroad, electrical, or oil workers’ actions either as Minister of Labor or CROM Secretary General confounded state plans to dictate the flow of workplace relations in those crucial sectors. The creation of the JFCAs by President Calles in 1927 remedied this oversight because it gave each board’s business, labor, and state representatives exclusive jurisdiction to rule on employee-employer disputes and removed from the process local judges who were less predictable and, thus, more likely to rule in a manner unfavorable to the state. With the JFCAs and later the JFCA in place, the collaborationist pipeline was completed. The bonds between organized labor and the state were now cemented, and the potential benefits of that alliance made clear. In the era of tripartite labor relations, the CROM and its successor at the top of the syndical bureaucracy, the Confederation of the Mexican Workers, would capitalize on its tight relationship with the federal government and exert inordinate power over the regulation of workplace relations in Mexico. Federal and local conciliation and arbitration boards henceforth listened to employee-employer conflicts, needing only a

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<sup>21</sup> Middlebrook, 80.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Snodgrass has paid significant attention to union activism by steel workers in postrevolutionary Monterrey. Steel workers, he believes, comprised part of the labor aristocracy for they possessed the qualities cited above. Steelworkers, along with miners, railroad, and oil workers, also benefited from the fact that their histories were better documented, archived and researched than most Mexican workers, whose stories remain to be told. Despite these facts, Snodgrass maintains, these groups may be viewed as representative of the workers’ movement as a whole. They were exceptional segments of it, certainly, and largely perceived themselves as such, nevertheless their histories are worthy of telling for they stood at the vanguard of the workers’ movement and their experiences reflected the achievements and setbacks experienced by workers during the watershed decades of the 1930s and 1970s. See Michael D. Snodgrass, “How Can We Speak of Democracy in Mexico?: Workers and Organized Labor in the Cárdenas and Echeverría Years” in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Luis Echeverría and Lázaro Cárdenas*, eds. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 159-173.

two-thirds majority to rule in favor of an employee petitioner or an employer respondent. In the early years of the JFCA's existence business owners stewed with anger. "*Rige la camarilla!*" ("The cabal rules!"), it must have appeared to them as ruling after ruling came down (at a rate of nearly four to one during one six year stretch) in favor of the worker petitioners.<sup>23</sup>

*THE INTERREGNUM: REVOLUTIONARY UNIONISM IN THE AGE OF CARDENISMO*

The syndical bureaucracy's dominance over workplace relations or the workers' movement in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s was never absolute. The CROM, as previously discussed, did not succeed in establishing a strong presence in some strategic areas of industry like railroad transportation, electricity generation, and petroleum wherein workers maintained strong anarchist influences that compelled them toward democratic governance and political independence.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the CROM's grasp over the movement was undercut when Morones was implicated in the July 17, 1928 assassination of former president and current president-elect Álvaro Obregón.<sup>25</sup> The fall of Morones, aptly termed the *desmoronamiento* or "crumbling" by Mexican political historians, did nothing less than usher in the decline of the CROM whose power was staked to the influence and political connections of its boisterous leader. Even with the weakening of the CROM, the success via subordination blueprint for large labor confederations in the postrevolutionary period had been sketched. The prospects for future collaborationism and mutually beneficial relations between large labor confederations and the state were good, though new threats would emerge to threaten the supremacy of that dynamic.

The weakening of the CROM after 1928 created opportunities for workers' gains outside the purview of the syndical bureaucracy. Workers made waves across all industrial sectors, and particularly so in those that had operated free of CROM or state tutelage. Powerful sector-wide unions were formed in the nation's most crucial areas of

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<sup>23</sup> Specific figures given later in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> Middlebrook, 80.

<sup>25</sup> It was common knowledge that Morones opposed Obregón's bid to return to office as he coveted the presidency for himself.

industry; the Mexican Railroad Workers' Union was formed in 1933 followed two years later by the creation of the Mexican Petroleum Workers' Union in 1935. Another crucial development was the formation of the General Confederation of Mexican Workers and Peasants (CGOCM) in 1933 by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the noted Marxist intellectual and leader of the National Teachers' Federation who defected from the CROM in order to free part of the workers' movement from government control and implement democracy within union ranks. Unified and driven by a class consciousness characteristic of the 1930s Depression-era members of the CGOCM and the other major industrial unions revived the movement's prior commitment to direct action by striking frequently in pursuit of basic workers' rights.

The near-constant agitation of teachers, petroleum, railway, and other industrial workers challenged the goals of a Mexican state still under the command of Calles, who, although no longer president, continued to dominate the national political stage from several ostensibly subordinate positions. While serving as president from 1924-1928 and while acting as *Jefe Máximo*, or literally, "First Chief" of the Revolution from 1928-1934, Calles helped draw the blueprint for state-labor collaborationism and voiced sentiments on labor topics that mimicked those conveyed by Carranza in 1916. Essentially, Calles felt that the pursuit of class interests and the pursuit of national interests were contradictory. Harmony between labor and capital was necessary, he believed, so long as that meant subordinating the interests of the majority (labor) to the minority (capital.) To Calles, strikes were not inalienable rights granted to all members of the Mexican proletariat, but were treasonous activities that disrupted commerce and defied the goals of the revolutionary state. Class struggle as pursued by workers' militancy, was, in short, antinational behavior. It could not be permitted.<sup>26</sup>

The ascension of Lázaro Cárdenas to the presidency in 1934 marked the end Calles's ten-year reign over the Mexican political establishment and created a critical rupture in the collaborationist pipeline. As president, the Michoacán governor and former PNR leader manifested a position toward organized labor and economic development markedly different than those of his predecessors. Whereas Calles, according to historian

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<sup>26</sup> Santiago, 324.

Myrna I. Santiago, subscribed to a capitalist development project that minimized class conflict through state management, Cárdenas encouraged workers to push to achieve “equilibrium” via the inclusion of worker co-management and profit sharing clauses in their collective contracts with employers.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Calles, being “...unable to conceive of an alternative interpretation of the Constitution, much less the notion that workers represented the national interest,” compromised with capital and squeezed labor in the interest of reaching an equilibrium between the factors of production he felt was optimal to the nation’s industrialization goals. Cárdenas, on the other hand, believed equilibrium could only be reached by guaranteeing workers’ rights and by permitting workers to pursue (via strikes) a “level ‘equity and social justice’” needed to produce the stability that true development required.<sup>28</sup>

By 1935, the rift between Cárdenas, the Mexican president, and Calles, still the *Jefe Máximo* in the opinion of many, forced the Mexican political establishment to a point of introspection. Calles operated behind the scenes encouraging violent fascist organizations including the Gold Shirts to harass groups of radical, and specifically, communist, Jewish, and Chinese workers. Speaking on the floor of the Mexican Senate on June 11, 1935 against a backdrop of unprecedented labor agitation, Calles voiced positions that forced any remaining neutral parties to take sides.<sup>29</sup> There, the founder of the PNR expressed his conviction that the national party needed to reign in the “non-conformists” within it if it wished to prosper and advance. The identity of the non-conformists was not a mystery; they were those radicals who formed themselves into the “left wings” of the political spectrum and whose actions were driving the nation to ruin.<sup>30</sup> Calles then cited a few recent episodes of strikes, citing their devastating effects on the population as a whole. He criticized contemporary labor leaders for their vanity. “Nothing,” he believed, “is as vain as these organizations and their leaders. In them there

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Government data shows that in 1934 there were 202 registered strikes involving a total of 14,635 strikers. These numbers were dwarfed in 1935 when 642 strikes erupted involving 145,212 strikers. See Pablo González Casanova, *La Democracia en México* (Mexico City: Editorial Era, 1969), 233.

<sup>30</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, *La Constitución de la Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (Mexico City: INEHRM, 1986), 34. Spanish reads:

is no ethic, nor even the most elemental respect for the rights of the collective.”<sup>31</sup> These self-interested individuals, he felt, were deceiving Mexican workers and pushing them to strike to the point of treason. Labor leaders and organizations that undertook such activities, thus, threatened the nation and subverted its potential for development. We “soldiers of the Revolution,” Calles determined, were required to defend its cause against these threats.<sup>32</sup>

Calles’s words of June 11, 1935 provoked the great fervor of the legislative body that heard them and heartened the CROM that stayed loyal to its governmental patron. Yet, Calles’s speech served to alienate him from the dominant rift of workers’ movement for good. The threatening and censoring tone of the speech, some claimed, turned the majority of workers’ organizations against Calles and guaranteed the triumph of the Cárdenas position on labor.<sup>33</sup> Responses were immediate. A joint declaration signed by the Mexican Electricians’ Union, Mexican Mining and Metalworkers’ Union, National Union of Telephone Workers, Mexican Railroad Workers’ Union, and other important non-CROM affiliated unions appeared in major Mexican newspapers the following day, June 12, 1935. Its highlights read:

Mexico’s organized worker and peasant movement...protests energetically against the declaration of General Calles...and declares that it will defend the rights of the working class...those that it itself obtained...and will not rest in advocating for the economic and social betterment of the salaried workers...; The strike movements condemned in these declarations, [those that] respond to a collective malaise and a state of social injustice, are phenomena that occur on high by those who represent the capitalist interests. The strikes will stop when the bourgeois system in which we live is transformed...; Mexico’s organized worker and peasant movement...declares that it will oppose any transgression of its rights, using, at the necessary moment, the general and nation-wide strike as its mode of defense against the possible implantation of a fascist regime in Mexico..<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 35. Spanish reads: Nada tiene el egoísmo de las organizaciones y sus líderes. No hay en ellos ética, ni el más elemental respeto a los derechos de la colectividad.

Una huelga se declara contra un Estado que extorsiona a los obreros y les desconoce sus derechos; pero en un país donde el gobierno los protege, los ayuda y los rodea de garantías, perturbar la marcha de la construcción económica no es sólo una ingratitud, sino una traición.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 41. Spanish, in full, reads: El movimiento Obrero y Campesino organizado de México, representado por las Agrupaciones que suscriben, protesta enérgicamente por las declaraciones del general Calles, que aparecen en la prensa de hoy, y declara, que defenderá los derechos de la clase



Groups adhering to the ideas published in response to the Calles Declaration convened shortly after to form the National Committee for Proletarian Defense, the immediate precursor to the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) formed in February 1936. The genesis of the CTM had immediate ramifications; most importantly, it brought the official demise of the CROM as the nation's primary labor front and ended the political careers of Calles and Morones, both of whom were charged with various crimes and sentenced to informal political exile by Cárdenas in 1936.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the creation of the CTM signalled the erasure of the collaborationist model of state-labor relations for the organization's Declaration of Principles explicitly precluded collaboration with the government and was opposed to the intervention of "third parties," meaning, the JCAs, in labor disputes.<sup>36</sup>

These radical stances, however, would never truly be taken by the CTM despite the heavy dose of anarcho-syndicalism injected into its foundational rhetoric. The CTM's initial strategy mixed idealistic principles with pragmatic action, for while its official motto called "For a "Classless Society" and its members demanded "the abolition of the capitalist system," appended language stated that it was necessary to combat imperialist domination and achieve the political and economic freedom of the country before pursuing those ultimate ends. The CTM was also careful to point out in its Declaration of Principles that it did not seek to abolish private property, nor was it communist. What the

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trabajadora, obtenidos por ella misma, como son el de huelga sin restricciones, el de asociación sindical revolucionaria y otros; y no descansará en propugnar por el mejoramiento económico y social de los asalariados.; Los movimientas de huelga, condenados en esas declaraciones, obedecen a un malestar colectivo y a un estado de injusticia social; son fenómenos que sólo pasan por alto quienes representan los intereses capitalistas. Las huelgas terminarán cuando se logre la transformación del sistema burgués en que vivimos.; El movimiento Obrero y Campesino Organizado de México, atento al momento histórico que vive, declara que se opondrá a toda transgresión de sus derechos, utilizando, en el momento preciso, la huelga general en todo el país como único medio de defensa contra la posible implantación de un régimen fascista en México. Y ante la amenaza de ver lesionados sus intereses, declara su firme propósito de mantener la unidad de clase.

<sup>35</sup> Calles and Morones were charged with conspiring to blow up a railroad, arrested, and deported to the United States on April 9, 1936 along with Calles's personal secretary, his son Alfredo, and Luis León and General Rafael Melchor Ortega – two of the last highly influential *callistas* (supporters of Calles) remaining in Mexico. See Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power, A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1997), 436.

<sup>36</sup> Hobart A. Spalding, *Organized Labor in Latin America: Historical Case Studies of Urban Workers in Dependent Societies* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 122.

CTM was, according to its leaders, was an organization that had to cooperate with progressive elements to combat the forces of creeping fascism and pursue a form of national development that would allow it to secure its long range goals.<sup>37</sup> Together these factors suggest that even while the CTM was in its organizational phase it was already embarking on a new, albeit slightly revised, course of collaboration with the government that subsequent congresses would ratify into its central principles.

The CTM's reluctance to pursue a true autonomy from the state was due to the real friendship it enjoyed with the president during the Cárdenas *sexenio* (six year administration.) Organized workers, in general, enjoyed state favoritism with Cardenas and became, according to one labor historian, a "senior partner" in the nation's corporatist political regime.<sup>38</sup> These were heady days for the unionists who won repeated victories over employers in their mobilizations. Raw statistics paint a clear portrait. An average of 478 strikes were waged during the years 1934-1940 involving an 61,422 workers annually. Of the strikes that reached the federal arbitration phase and were ruled upon, 1,596 (seventy-nine percent) were won by employees and merely 434 (twenty-one percent) by employers.<sup>39</sup> The joys of material gains won by workers were enhanced by the respect and reverence they felt for Cárdenas who greatly juxtaposed Calles, he who had once called striking oil workers "ingrates" and "traitors." Unionists were eager to show their support for their ally in Mexico City and many felt a personal connection to him. In this context a type of syndicalism Michael Snodgrass calls "revolutionary unionism" was born wherein large trade unions guaranteed their members favorable conditions from the state in exchange for their functions as "vehicles of cultural engineering and political integration."<sup>40</sup> These "...so-called revolutionary unions," he has written, "also became schools for the making a new Mexican working class, one that was

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> See Joe C. Ashby, "The Dilemma of the Mexican Trade Union Movement," *Mexican Studies* 1:2 (Summer 1985), 284.

<sup>39</sup> According to data compiled by Guadalupe Rivera Marín, there were 2,030 strikes adjudicated by the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board during the period 1935-1940, of which 1,596 (seventy-nine percent) were ruled in favor of the employee petitioners. See Spalding, *Organized Labor in Latin America*, 124.

<sup>40</sup> See Michael Snodgrass "'We Are All Mexicans Here': Workers, Patriotism, and Union Struggles in Monterrey" in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 328-329.

like General Cárdenas himself – hardworking, clean living, patriotic, and loyal to the National Revolutionary Party (PNR).”<sup>41</sup>

Revolutionary unionism, though it conveyed a more pro-worker feel than had been the norm since 1917, was still collaborationism, meaning, it was still a state-labor pact designed to bring mutual benefit to both sides of the alliance. The CTM was the most important political ally the Cárdenas state and official party had after 1936 and its ability to mobilize its members proved crucial in discouraging action on the part of those who opposed the oil expropriation act of March 18, 1938. Furthermore, the CTM supported Cárdenas’s chosen successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, and its conduct in the heated presidential contest of 1939-1940 that brought victory for official party’s candidate set the precedent for its future role in elections.<sup>42</sup> In this way the CTM merely replaced the CROM as the primary political ally for the governing elite and hard-liners reemerged within the new syndical bureaucracy to question the movement’s independence. Even Vicente Lombardo Toledano, he who had formerly broken from the CROM in order to free the labor movement from state control, embraced a close relationship with the Cárdenas regime while serving as the CTM’s first Secretary General from 1936-1941. His stance angered the most radical parts of the CTM and convinced the Mexican Electricians’ Union to secede from the organization in November 1939. Lombardo Toledano’s vision of collaborationism, however, was guarded and put him at odds with the majority of CTM leaders who desired even closer ties with the government. Inevitably, Lombardo Toledano was replaced by Fidel Velázquez who, while at the helm of the CTM for much of the next six decades, set the organization on a course of government adherence that branded the specific form of state-labor collaborationism this study focuses on.

#### *FIDEL VELÁZQUEZ AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE LABOR ESTABLISHMENT*

Fidel Velázquez Sánchez was born on May 12, 1900 in San Pedro Azcapotzaltongo (today Nicolás Romero,) State of Mexico. He was the fifth of seventeen children born to Gregorio Velázquez and Herlinda Sánchez, seven of whom died as

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<sup>41</sup> Snodgrass, “How Can We Speak of Democracy in Mexico?”, 229.

<sup>42</sup> Middlebrook, 94.

children. Fidel's father, Gregorio, was the administrator of a small ranch and was one of the most respected men of the village, taking the post of municipal president on several occasions. Young Fidel was put to work at an early age cutting alfalfa and tending to the family's five cows. He was educated only until the end of primary school. "The rest," he once remarked, "he learned from life."<sup>43</sup> He lived this way until the age of fourteen when the violence of the Revolution forced his family to flee their home for the capital in search of safety. The family's stay in Mexico City did not last long, for Gregorio, a "man of the field," was not accustomed to city life and quickly moved the family to Tlaxcala, later Puebla when he found work on a timber ranch. There, Fidel worked alongside his father as a machine assistant until Gregorio was killed in 1918 in the crossfire of renewed violence that pitted forces loyal to Carranza, then the Mexican president, against those loyal to Obregón, who was formerly Carranza's top general and who had taken up arms against his former patron.<sup>44</sup>

With the death of his father, Velázquez, who himself was injured in the skirmish, returned to the capital and immersed himself in the world of working class syndicalism through his attendance at Casa meetings. While employed at a milk factory in the blue collar neighborhood of Azcapotzalco in 1921, he first put the radical ideology he had learned into action and confronted owners on behalf of the company's 800 workers. He implored his co-workers to support his efforts to form a company union with anarcho-syndicalist rhetoric sprung straight from the Casa, now CGT, handbook. By late 1923, however, Velázquez, though still young in age, demonstrated a political savvy well beyond his years that eschewed the radical positions he had learned at Casa gatherings in favor of the advantages workers could garner by allying themselves with government forces. He was fired for his perceived agitation, though his real political influence enabled him to regain his job and set about organizing the Union of Dairy Industry Workers, a company union with the propitious acronym UTIL, meaning "useful." By leading UTIL, Fidel inserted himself as union representative into the larger Federation of

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<sup>43</sup> Augustín Sánchez González, *Los Primeros Cien Años de Fidel: La histórica controvertida de la figura política más duradera del siglo XX en México* (Mexico City: Editorial Patria, 1997), 19. Spanish reads: Lo demás lo aprendí de la vida.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Federal District Workers' Unions, then affiliated with CROM. It was from that moment onward that Fidel realized that the strength of his group and his continuity at the head of it depended upon government support. It was then, according to political satirist José Luis Trueba Lara, that he would begin to learn the secrets of Morones, the tricks of power that would enable him and the workers he supported to mutually prosper with the government.<sup>45</sup>

The implication of Morones in the 1928 assassination of Obregón rocked the halls of the syndical bureaucracy and sent his subordinates scurrying to demonstrate their ideological distance from their disgraced leader. In February 1929 a group of five led by Velázquez published a manifesto entitled "Why we separated from the CROM" wherein they launched various charges at Morones and hurled the epithet of "DINOSAUR!!" at him because of his long reign at the head of the organization.<sup>46</sup> Morones responded to the attack on April 30, 1929 defiantly, contending that "The CROM..." having "...all the characteristics of a corpulent oak, of strong and large roots and a gigantic trunk..." was a tree from which "five miserable worms" emerged.<sup>47</sup> One supporter disagreed with the characterization made by Morones. These 'worms,' he retorted, were not traitors but in fact were *cinco lobitos*, or, "five little wolves" that "...soon, very soon," he warned Morones, "were going to eat all the hens in your corral."<sup>48</sup> Thus were born the five little wolves with Velázquez dubbed the "prodigal little wolf" for leading the break with Morones.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> José Luis Trueba Lara and BEF, *Fidel Velázquez: Una biografía* (Mexico City: Times Editores, S.A. de C.V., 1997), 23-24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. Spanish reads: "Por qué nos separamos de la CROM;" "¡¡DINOSAURIO!!"

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. Spanish, in full, reads: La CROM tiene todas las características de un corpulento roble, de fuertes y grandes raíces y gigantesco tronco; de ese tronco partieron cinco miserables lombrices, ¡qué curioso resulta saber que esas alimañas se arrastran, porque no saben, porque no pueden caminar, tienen nombre propio! ¡Asombroso! Esas lombrices que se fueron se llaman Fidel Velázquez, Fernando Amilpa, Jesús Yuren, Luis Quintero y Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. The "supporter" who dubbed them the five little wolves was Luis Araiza. Spanish, in full, reads: En pocas palabras, voy a contestar su insolente y baja apreciación. Torpe de usted, Morones, que en su calenturienta imaginación ve lombrices, profunda equivocación, porque lo que usted califica de lombrices, son cinco lobitos que pronto, muy pronto, le van a comer todas las gallinas de su corral.

<sup>49</sup> Sánchez González writes that all of the five little wolves were of popular origin and worker extract, except, paradoxically, Velázquez, who was of peasant roots. In addition to Velázquez, known as the *Lobito Pródigo*, there was Jesús Yurén Aguilar, the *Lobito Financiero* who never wavered in his loyalty to Velázquez and led a long and fruitful life in the syndical bureaucracy as virtual Number Two in the CTM as well as head of the Federation of Federal District Workers' Unions. Fernando Amilpa, the *Lobito*

The defection of the Velázquez *junta* likely did not rankle Morones too much initially. The defecting twelve unions were relatively insignificant as they were, aside from Velázquez's dairy workers, mere trolley car operators, soft drink workers, and workers of the Panteón Español – a posh cemetery located in Mexico City. Much more damaging to the CROM than the loss of these minor unions were the spots on the newly formed JFCA given to Velázquez and the others by president Emilio Portes Gil, who was greatly appreciative of their break with Morones. From these positions the five little wolves exerted great influence in determining the legality of strikes and in the drafting of the Federal Labor Law of 1931. Moreover, each little wolf used his position to effectively recruit members and unionize workers from diverse industries.<sup>50</sup> Velázquez most of all capitalized on his post using it as a platform to advocate for positions that appealed to workers and employers alike, including the institution of shorter days and wage-salary reductions to create new jobs. Velázquez also pushed for the creation of a national labor confederation, a goal that when realized in 1933 via the birth of the Federal District Chamber of Labor and its insertion into the PNR, illustrated the force of his collaborationist vision and signaled his arrival as a national-level politician.

Despite the status of Lombardo Toledano as the intellectual author of the CTM, the dominant figure in the history of the organization was Velázquez. While serving as CTM Secretary of Organization from 1936-1941, Velázquez used that crucial post to build a network of state and regional federations loyal to him.<sup>51</sup> Backed by President Ávila Camacho, Velázquez won the election and succeeded Lombardo Toledano as CTM Secretary General for the first time in March 1941. He ran for reelection in 1944, won, and upon resuming office violated the basic postrevolutionary tenet of no-reelection for just the first of nine times he would do so. He held the mantle of leadership until 1947 when he was replaced by Fernando Amilpa y Rivera, an occasional rival of Velázquez but someone ultimately committed to maintaining a close state-CTM alliance. Returned

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*Intellectual* posed the most serious challenge to Velázquez inside the syndical bureaucracy and was a hero to some on the left. The last two little wolves – Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga, the Lobito Diplomático, and Luis Quintero, the Lobito Gris – were of lesser significance in the twentieth century organized labor story in Mexico.

<sup>50</sup> See Sánchez González, Chapter One.

<sup>51</sup> Middlebrook, 113.

to power in 1950, Velázquez would never again relinquish control, winning re-election eight more times and holding the Secretary General position consistently from 1950 until his death in 1997.<sup>52</sup>

The Velázquez CTM, in other words, the CTM post-1941, jettisoned the brand of collaborationism that typified the Cárdenas/Lombardo Toledano years. The era of revolutionary unionism thus appeared an interregnum in the story of state and labor relations in the postrevolutionary period for organized labor had not prior to 1934, and would not after 1940, enjoy the level of autonomy from the state it maintained during those years while still remaining politically potent. A more pliant syndical bureaucracy emerged after 1940 but not for reasons suggesting personal weakness on the part of organized labor's leader. Velázquez, as understood by most labor historians, was the arch-pragmatist who developed his own brand of politics by observing the fate that befell others who butted heads with the revolutionary elite. Velázquez personally witnessed the terrific crash of Morones when he challenged the Portes Gil administration; he stood nearby as Lombardo Toledano embraced communism and regretted the CTM's ever-increasing subordination to the state, thus alienating himself from party and union leaders. These were first-hand lessons that instilled in Velázquez an ideology Kevin Middlebrook calls "conservative nationalism," meaning a political strategy that committed him to realizing the revolution's egalitarian goals within the established order and made him deeply loyal to the "party of the revolution."<sup>53</sup>

As such, Velázquez was hesitant to challenge presidential administrations and was an avowed anti-Communist. His loyalty paid dividends for the CTM via seats in the PRI, the Mexican congress, federal and local conciliation and arbitration boards, and a bevy of other political posts for its members. These seats, accurately referred to as *posiciones* or "positions" because they were not by elections were in effect political subsidies paid to the CTM for its loyalty to the ruling regime. Subsidies also came in the

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<sup>52</sup> In total, Velázquez took charge of the CTM on ten separate occasions, having been elected Secretary General nine times, serving from: 1941-1944; 1944-1947; 1956-1962; 1962-1968; 1968-1974; 1974-1980; 1980-1986; 1986-1992; and 1992-1997, the year of his death; and having held the position in a non-elected way from 1950-1956. In all, he controlled the CTM for a fifty-four of fifty-seven years during the span 1941-1997. See Jorge Mejía Prieto, *Fidel Velázquez: 47 años de historia y poder*. México: Editorial Diana, 1991.

<sup>53</sup> Middlebrook, 113.

form of hard currency. State-allied labor organizations in twentieth century Mexico were tied both financially and politically to the ruling regime. The CTM, like the CROM before it, though a numerically large organization, was formed initially of small company- and plant-level unions organized into heterogeneous state and regional federations. This decentralization severely hindered its mobilizational capacity when it was forced to compete against more unified and, thus, more powerful, unions of oil, railroad, and electrical workers. Substantial funds were required to connect distant network of workers and union dues, when they were actually collected, proved woefully insufficient.<sup>54</sup> For the CTM to stay potent and keep leverage against unionists in the labor aristocracy outside support was necessary. Thus emerged as early as 1936 a tight financial bond between the Mexican state and the CTM, among other state-allied labor confederations and unions. The state's subsidization of this portion of the organized workers' movement increased with time, and although exact numbers are impossible to obtain, some observers estimated that by the 1970s direct government financial subsidies to the CTM ranged from 500,000 to several million pesos annually.<sup>55</sup>

The positions and monies given to unions from the state kept their bargaining power large, but also kept them dependent on a government benefactor. The Mexican state's sponsorship of the syndical bureaucracy, however, was not a sign of its benevolence; political and financial subsidies were part of a collaborationist bargain that benefited both sides of the arrangement. The government's immense "investment" in the CTM greatly improved the prospects of its social and industrial development goals. The dramatic political shift in developmental priorities implemented after 1941 could have been derailed had an unwilling syndical bureaucracy opposed it. Instead, the Velázquez CTM supported President Ávila Camacho's industrialization program wholeheartedly despite the ways it tightened procedural requirements for strike petitions and modified federal labor law to limit workers' right to strike. For its loyalty the CTM was rewarded

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<sup>54</sup> Middlebrook, 99. Middlebrook explains that financial support has been essential to the CTM because of its longstanding inability to compel affiliated unions to make membership dues payments. Not even during the salad days of the syndical bureaucracy could CTM officials solve the dues question and the portion that dues represented in total confederation income dropped consistently, ultimately representing as little as one-fifth by 1967.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.



with thirty-two seats in Congress and received funds badly needed to finance the confederation's nation-wide operations.<sup>56</sup>

Conservative nationalism was in vogue by the early 1940s and in June 1942 Mexico's most important labor organizations including the CTM, CROM, CGT, and Mexican Electricians' Union affirmed that strategy by pledging to avoid strikes, limit wage demands, and increase productivity during the wartime emergency.<sup>57</sup> The details of this agreement, called the Worker Unity Pact, flew in the face of the most basic ideals of direct action and further alienated the radical elements that remained in the syndical bureaucracy. However, the number of legally recognized strikes in the federal-jurisdiction industries rose sharply in 1943 and 1944, largely due to wartime inflation and the imposition of restrictions on collective actions that reduced workers' efficacy in bargaining with employers.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, conservative nationalism was firmly entrenched by this point and new shows of state-labor collaborationism were coming. The Industrial Labor Pact reached in 1945 between the CTM and the National Chamber of Manufacturing Industries, an organization created to represent manufacturing firms supportive of ISI in Mexico, declared labor and capital's shared goals of avoiding strikes, restraining inflation, and attracting foreign investment. Loudly assailed by Lombardo Toledano who was prone to histrionics when decrying organized labor's capitulation to business, the Industrial Labor Pact did in fact prove that national priorities had changed and that the regime of the Revolution was more committed to the cause of industrial development than it was to addressing social issues.<sup>59</sup> In this change of focus, it similarly appeared, the Mexican state had a pliable, albeit powerful, labor partner to work with.

#### *DISSENT CRUSHED ON THE RAILS: THE RAILWAY WORKER CHALLENGE*

The conservative nationalism shown by the syndical bureaucracy in the 1940s consolidated the labor establishment of the 1940s into the form that it would maintain in subsequent decades. Pragmatic collaboration was henceforth the norm, though its

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<sup>56</sup> Spalding, 129.

<sup>57</sup> Middlebrook, 113.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>59</sup> Jose Luis Reyna and Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *La clase obrera en la historia de México: de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines a Adolfo López Mateos, (1952-1964), Segunda Edición* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, UNAM, 1996), 19-20.

durability continued to be tested – and often on the nation’s iron rails. It may be stated in a real sense that postrevolutionary state-labor collaborationism was forged on Mexico’s railways, for it was a *ferrocarrilero*, or railway workers’ conflict in 1927 that moved Calles to create the JFCAs and thus establish federal jurisdiction in resolving workplace conflicts in that crucial industry. Similarly, it was the resolution of another melee amongst railway workers nearly two decades later that ushered in near complete government control over that industry’s workforce.

The nation’s most important railroad company, Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México, was nationalized in 1937, although workplace conflict continued between members of the Mexican Railroad Workers’ Union (STFRM) and state-appointed administrators who ran the system. Worker militancy inside a state-owned industry put the CTM, to which the STFRM was affiliated, in an awkward position. Ideological tension inside the confederation reached a boiling point by January 1947 with STFRM members clamoring for direct action and resumed radicalism inside the organized workers’ movement as a whole. The radical-moderate division pushed the STFRM to secede from the CTM in late February. Elections held the following month to choose CTM leadership drew the ire of the STFRM representatives and for good reason; prior to the election, CTM leaders manipulated voting procedures so that each member union of the CTM was afforded one vote, thus reversing the statutory requirement that affiliated unions’ accredited votes equaled their total membership. The electoral strength of large national unions like the STFRM, hence, was greatly diminished; the importance of the small but numerous company- and plant-level unions that formed the Velázquez faction’s base of support, on the other hand, was enhanced. In this way Velázquez was able to guarantee the victory of the moderates’ preferred candidate, Fernando Amilpa, and the loss of the radicals’ choice, STFRM Secretary General José Luis Gómez Z.

The CTM under Amilpa continued the collaborationist course set by Velázquez and even tightened relations with the government by requiring that all CTM members join the PRI – the newest permutation of the official party formed in 1946 – or face expulsion from their unions. Reformed rhetoric provided further evidence of the CTM’s change in direction. “For a Classless Society,” the CTM’s official motto since its

inception in 1936 was changed to “For the Emancipation of Mexico,” a slogan that removed the class-based component from its mission and better expressed its modern purpose of aiding the state in industrializing the nation and reducing its dependence on imported goods.<sup>60</sup> Opponents of the Amilpa-Velázquez faction did not take these changes lying down. Led by Gómez Z., a mass of organized workers coalesced into the Coalition of Worker and Peasant Organizations, which by mid-1948 boasted over 800,000 members and rivaled the CTM as the most important labor organization in the country.<sup>61</sup>

The status of the new coalition as a viable alternative to the CTM, however, was challenged by internal divisions within its most important union – the STFRM – and the only tenuous control Gómez Z. had over its 90,000 members. Additionally, because the coalition swam against the current of the labor establishment, it was forced to operate according to rules set by its adversaries in the STPS, the federal labor ministry. An election was mandated for control of STFRM in which Jesús Díaz de León, the state’s preferred man, was declared the unofficial winner. Workers were outraged and resisted, though Díaz de León seized control of union offices with the help of STPS allies. Díaz de León then set about altering internal procedures in ways that consolidated decision-making power in the union into his own hands. Labor opponents and radicals were purged from the STFRM, some arrested. He waged a vicious smear campaign against Gómez Z. that succeeded to tarnish his reputation with the union’s rank and file. Statutes passed in September 1949 altered the process of electing union leaders from a direct to indirect format in which union members voted only for their corresponding local and national representatives. Moreover, the tradition of secret balloting that had been in place in since the union’s founding in 1933 was replaced with open balloting, a system wherein union members voted on ballots they were required to sign.

Together, Díaz de León’s actions were referred to as the *charrazo* in reference to his enthusiasm for Mexican popular rodeos and horsemanship (*charrería*.)<sup>62</sup> Díaz de

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<sup>60</sup> Sánchez González, 107. According to the author, this change signified the cancellation of whatever leftist influence the CTM claimed even on paper. “The end of the original CTM,” he writes, “was approaching” – a shift in values that tolled the bell for Lombardo Toledano whose open rift with Amilpa made clear the Marxist roots he had planted in the CTM had by 1947 become passé.

<sup>61</sup> Middlebrook, 118.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

León, hence, formed the prototype for subsequent *charros*, a term that literally means “dudes” or “cowboys” but when used in the context of organized labor connotes a union boss who is in the service of the state and is open to bribes or other forms of inducement. The practical consequences that the charrazo had on the once-famously democratic union ensured that the new political order rested on state power. Naturally, the new state-allied version of the STFRM became a reliable supporter of the PRI and saw after 1952 its top officials receive coveted political posts while simultaneously directing the union.<sup>63</sup> Overall, the charrazo resulted in the STFRM becoming a top-down and un-democratic union similar to thousands of other run-of-the-mill CTM outfits that formed that organization in the 1950s.

By 1950, the CTM’s place at the pinnacle of the organized labor movement in Mexico was undisputed, though other national confederations arose (some sponsored by the state itself) to challenge its supremacy.<sup>64</sup> Boasting a membership of 1.6 million workers – seventy to ninety percent of all the nation’s unionized workers, according to one estimate – grouped into some 4,200 unions, the CTM roll featured twenty-one national unions including the STFRM, the Mexican Telephone Workers’ Union, and the Mexican Petroleum Workers’ Union (which rejoined the confederation in 1954.) The inclusion of these unions on the CTM’s rolls gave it a new presence in heavy industrial sectors in addition to its traditional bastion of support in the light manufacturing, communication, tourism, and entertainment sectors.<sup>65</sup> With the CTM guiding the movements of so much of nation’s workforce, episodes of labor agitation sharply declined and an average of only 108 strikes annually were witnessed during the six-year presidential term of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952,) and 248 during the term of Adolfo Ruíz Cortines (1952-1958.) Such numbers represented a significant drop when compared to those seen during the Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho sexenios, which saw 478 annual strikes (from 1934-1940) and 387 (from 1940-1946) respectively.<sup>66</sup> Reduced worker

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>64</sup> Most important of the groups created to serve as counterweights to growing CTM power was the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC,) sponsored by the state in 1952 and intended to be both loyal to the PRI and hostile to the CTM. See Middlebrook, 150-151.

<sup>65</sup> Spalding, 132.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 139.

activism in the post-war era, however, was not only the outcome of CTM domination; government authorities exercised their power to intervene in union affairs and presided over conciliation and arbitration boards in ways that diffused potential labor conflicts before they could reach the strike stage. These legitimate functions on the part of state officials sometimes complemented extra-legal actions they took to employ strikebreakers to discourage anti-establishment positions and generally keep unions “in-line.”<sup>67</sup>

War-time unity pacts, the cooptation of historically independent unions of railroad and petroleum workers, and the ascendancy of the CTM after post-World War II yielded a period of relative labor serenity difficult to sustain. Worker activism rates showed a sharp uptick during the presidency of Adolfo López Mateos spiking to an average of 403 strikes waged annually during the years 1958-1964. Most workers of the time mobilized against spiraling inflation, though many others protested the repressive and undemocratic nature of the syndical bureaucracy that ruled their working lives. Railway workers once again led this fight for it was they or their *compañeros* who had been most viciously expelled from syndicalism years earlier. The *charrazo* of the late 1940s had enraged this most radical segment of the trade union movement then, and many held a grudge.

By 1958 the railroad industry rank and file clamored that they were grossly underpaid. This gripe further rankled the average railway worker who also believed that his or her union official did not act with her best interests in mind.<sup>68</sup> An ad-hoc commission to address these issues was formed in June 1958 and Demetrio Vallejo, a well-known union activist from Oaxaca and former member of the Mexican Communist Party, was elected to lead it. Vallejo assailed STFRM leadership and demanded the ouster of *charros* he claimed had been bought by Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico, the state-owned railroad company. Vallejo’s position garnered wide support, and when a demand for a salary increase of 350 pesos/month was not met by the company, workers began a series of escalating strikes beginning with a partial “sit-down” on June 26, and culminating with a general strike on June 28 which found the support of unionized

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>68</sup> Female railway workers, called *rieleras*, formed an important part of the railway workers’ challenge of the late-1950s. For more information, see R.F. Alegre, “*Las Rieleras: Gender, Politics, and Power in the Mexican Railway Movement, 1958-1959*,” *Journal of Women's History* 23:2 (June 2011): 162-186.

petroleum workers, teachers, and students across the nation. The general strike caught the attention of President Ruiz Cortines, who succeeded to have the strike lifted that same day by coaxing the opposing sides to agree to a 215 pesos/month salary increase.

The salary increase abated tension temporarily, though the vexing question of union governance remained. On July 12 STFRM members held a special convention and elected Vallejo Secretary General of the union. The vote was not accepted by the STPS that had the sole legal authority to certify union elections. Dismayed but not disheartened, workers called for a strike on July 31 in defiance of the labor ministry's ruling. The strike lasted two hours and again provoked solidarity strikes by sympathetic unionists. Subsequent harassment and intimidation failed to sway the workers' position, forcing the government to agree to hold new elections for the union's leadership position. On August 6, the workers' choice was indisputable; Vallejo won in a landslide.<sup>69</sup>

Vallejo's tenure at the top of the union was destined to be rocky as he was committed to rooting out *charrismo*, specifically the cooptation of union leaders by state and company officials in the union's upper echelons. Furthermore, Vallejo vowed to pressure the company to further increase wages and provide housing and medical benefits to railway families. Two strategies to raise revenue in Vallejo's opinion were to: a. raise passenger rates; and b. terminate subsidies given by the state to United States mining and metal companies – neither of which would be pursued by the company or federal government. By March of the following year, 1959, STFRM members were ready to resume militancy. A March 25 strike moved newly-elected president Adolfo López Mateos to order the military and police in to break up strike activities with tear gas and clubs. Approximately 10,000 workers were fired and 800 prisoners taken, many on the grounds that they were communist agitators.<sup>70</sup>

The harsh repression and arrest of striking workers in August 1959 effectively ended the railway workers' challenge to the labor establishment. Of those arrested, Vallejo was among the most harshly punished as he was convicted of sedition and

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<sup>69</sup> Dan La Botz cites totals showing that 60,000 of the 100,000 eligible workers voted in the contest with the final (improbable) tally showing 59,749 votes for Vallejo, and just nine votes for the government candidate. See Dan La Botz, *Mask of Democracy: Labor Suppression in Mexico Today* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 72.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-72.

sentenced to eleven years and four months in prison.<sup>71</sup> With the defeat of the railroad worker insurrection, the primary grass-roots threat to the collaborationist norm in state-labor relations was stamped out. Subsequent years saw a further crystallization of this dynamic into the institutional norm, though a rebellious streak continued to burn in the chests of unionized workers. Into the 1960s the CTM held its place at the head of the syndical bureaucracy and federal and local JCAs discouraged workers from undertaking strike actions in most instances. The resurgence of worker activism seen during the López Mateos administration, thus, appeared an anomaly by the latter part of the decade as only 124 strikes were waged annually during a Gustavo Díaz Ordaz administration (1964-1970) in which the government clamped down on worker activity by rejecting strike petitions at historic levels and unions operated almost entirely reliant on the labor establishment for funding and other political subsidies.<sup>72</sup>

Another crucial development during this period was the formation of the Congress of Labor, or CT, in February 1966. The establishment of the CT achieved the long-standing goal of the labor establishment to unite organized labor into a single organization closely tied to the PRI. Furthermore, the CT, which in 1973 grouped thirty-plus of the nation's current and former most important labor confederations and unions into a single entity, was the perfect articulation of collaborationism as it was the principle vehicle for articulating the "official" labor movement's political and economic demands.<sup>73</sup> The CT also provided the ruling regime and PRI an enormous support base easily mobilized for elections or other episodes of mass politics. Not surprisingly, the CT was heavily dominated by the CTM that claimed between 2.5 and three million members by 1970.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Spalding, 140. Remarking on the fluctuation in labor activity witnessed between the 1958-1964 and 1964-1970 sexenios, the author remarked "It is clear that proportionately fewer and fewer workers are able or willing to voice *legal* protest."

<sup>73</sup> Editorial, "A la Clase Trabajadora, Al Pueblo de México, Al Comité Nacional del Partido Revolucionario Institucional," *Ceteme*, October 25, 1969, 5. The principal organizations forming the CT in 1973 were the: CTM, CROC, Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado, STFRM, CROM, Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalurgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana, STERM, Federación de Trabajadores del Distrito Federal (FTDF), Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (SME), STPRM, STPRM, Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT), Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana, Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematografica de la República Mexicana, and SNTE, Mexico's largest single union, amongst others.

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Even with the consolidation of the labor establishment nearly completed, the resurgence of labor activism in the late-1950s and 1960s hinted at the contradictions inherent in development strategies adhered to by the contemporary Mexican state. Charros, mindful not to bite the hand that feeds, defended the state's development program and tried to quash rank and file dissent by painting it with broad brush strokes of red. When speaking about the railway workers' challenge in 1958, Fidel Velázquez was curt and revealing. In his view, the communist pedigree of Vallejo in the context of Cold War politics provided the nail in his coffin. Organized labor's maximum leader sounded positively *Calles-esque* when he judged that:

Vallejo and his associates only want to create a create a climate of agitation in benefit of their communist theories; already there is no doubt that they are Communist because they themselves have removed the mask and have let everyone see their red-ness; they are seditious because Valentín Campa, Demetrio Vallejo, Dionicio Encinas, Othón Salazar, Agustín Sánchez and others have said in distinct tones that they are not in agreement with the present regime but instead, they are against it.<sup>74</sup>

The position of Velázquez, in short: to fight your union was akin to fighting your nation. To the aging veteran of the syndical wars of 1920s and 1930s, the Mexican state and the large confederations of working class trade unions were one and the same. Collaborationism, in his mind, was a simple equation that required each element, on occasion, to show unconditional support for the other's side. The government would fight to defend its labor partner when it was attacked, much as the CT or CTM would mobilize to defend the regime when its status was threatened. 1968 and the challenges that that watershed year presented to both the Mexican state and the syndical bureaucracy would create opportunities for each faction in the relationship to prove its commitment to the collaborationist cause.

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<sup>74</sup> Trueba Lara and BEF, 72. The authors quip that for his attack on railway workers Velázquez was rewarded a seat in the Senate. Spanish reads: Vallejo y sus socios sólo quieren crear un clima de agitación en beneficio de sus teorías comunistas; no existe ya duda de que sean comunistas porque incluso ellos mismos se han quitado la careta y han dejado ver todo su rojismo, son unos sediciosos, porque Valentín Campa, Demetrio Vallejo, Dionicio Encinas, Othón Salazar, Agustín Sánchez y otros, han dicho en distintos tonos que no están de acuerdo con el presente régimen sino en contra de él.



**CHAPTER TWO**  
**COLLABORATIONISM REWARDED: STATE AND ORGANIZED LABOR**  
**RECIPROCITY**

1968 was a year of opportunities and challenges for the Mexican state. While some in government busied themselves with preparations for the Games of the XIX Olympiad to commence on October 12, others focused on diffusing student unrest that had festered on the nation's campuses and was threatening to spread to the streets. In the interest of preserving civil order, and, as importantly, in the interest of conveying an international image of stability in Mexico, authorities opted to confront dissent firmly. Fearing that outsiders would view political agitation as evidence of institutional weakness, officials more often chose a hard line over compromise in their dealings with protesters. Prolonged political agitation by student groups that summer moved the government, and particularly Secretary of Internal Affairs Luis Echeverría, who was charged with preserving domestic security, toward increasingly severe action as the start of the Olympics approached. Relations between the state and student groups grew worse after July 22, when street clashes first broke out between police and rioters. Subsequent confrontations waged between Mexico City student groups and military and police elements during the days of July 26, 27, and 29 were violent and resulted in several deaths, numerous injuries, and the imprisonment of student demonstrators. In an effort to pacify the situation, Echeverría proposed on August 22 a closed-door dialog with leaders of the movement but his proposal was rejected by the National Strike Committee that demanded that talks be public and conducted with media representatives present.

The extent of the movement's size and strength was put on full display on August 27 in a 300,000 person demonstration that dominated the capital's most visible thoroughfares. Protesters marched from the posh neighborhood of Polanco to the city's central plaza carrying banners that detailed their cause. Once arriving at the Zócalo, participants hoisted the *bandera rojinegra*, the red and black flag of protest and the international symbol of worker's militancy, up the plaza's flag pole. A security force composed of military personnel, police officers, and firefighters was called in to disband the massive demonstration and succeeded to do so in the early hours of August 28. Later

that morning, city bureaucrats were mobilized to remove the seditious and ‘Communist’ flag from the nation’s most sacred civil space. Days later, while giving his Fourth Annual Government Report on September 1, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz conveyed his opinion that while freedom of expression was guaranteed in Mexico, political dissent was unwise because it threatened the nation’s stability. Speaking to critics on all sides, Díaz Ordaz declared: “We have been so tolerant that we have been criticized for our excessive leniency, but there is a limit to everything, and the irremediable violations of law and order that have occurred recently before the very eyes of the entire nation cannot be allowed to continue.”<sup>1</sup> Those unsympathetic to the student cause applauded; their president had expressed a firm position at long last. Members of the National Strike Committee, on the other hand, strongly objected. They considered the president’s message scolding and a blatant threat.

Popular protest continued in the following month emboldened by the president’s warning. On September 17, a National Strike Committee missive assured that the movement which was originally raised to protest the unlawful incursion of government forces in the nation’s university life, had evolved into an authentic and popular social struggle waged to reestablish rights guaranteed by the Mexican Constitution. With this language, federal authorities deemed the student challenge no longer tolerable and too dangerous to permit to subsist less than one month before the eyes of the world would be fixed upon Mexico.

The following day, September 18, soldiers invaded Ciudad Universitaria, home of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the national ‘command center’ of student agitation. Dozens of students, professors, and university employees were detained in actions that drew even the ire of some *priistas* (members of the ruling party) who expressed their agreement with the protests voiced by the university’s rector Javier Barros Sierra. The government’s aggressive actions and blatant violation of the constitutional guarantee of university autonomy convinced Barros Sierra that his position was no longer sustainable. He announced plans to resign on September 22 but was

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 45.

convinced by university leaders to rescind his resignation days later. On September 24, violent street clashes waged between students and soldiers left several dead and wounded on the streets of the northern Mexico City neighborhood of Santo Tomás. These actions propelled military forces to occupy the nearby installations of the National Polytechnic Institute. More violence ensued on campus and students and faculty were detained en masse. Once again, the principle of university autonomy was broken and the propensity of the government to violently quash dissent was viewed as further proof of its dictatorial and repressive character.<sup>2</sup>

Mexican soldiers left Ciudad Universitaria on October 1 after thirteen days of occupation. In a spirit of conciliation, National Strike Committee leaders were asked to call an end to the student strikes at UNAM, the National Polytechnic Institute, and other schools, and return to classes. They rejected these pleas and instead planned a meeting for the afternoon of the following day, October 2, to be held in the Plaza de la Tres Culturas in the working-class district of Tlatelolco. National Strike Committee representatives met with Barros Sierra and government emissaries at the Rector's home at 10:00 that morning to try to set terms for a future dialog. They asked specifically for the immediate withdrawal of troops from university facilities, the cessation of violence, and liberty for all those apprehended during the army's occupation of UNAM. Their demands were not accepted. Student organizers then turned their attention to the demonstration planned for later that day.

The following chronology of the events that occurred at Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968 is based on a summary of eyewitness accounts.<sup>3</sup> By 5:15 p.m., a large gathering had assembled in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. National Strike Committee members could view the mass of people from the terrace of a third-floor apartment in the Chihuahua residential building that overlooked the plaza. The size of the demonstration was estimated at around 5,000 and dozens of undercover agents were sprinkled amongst the mass of men, women, and children. Speakers addressed the assembly but their words

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<sup>2</sup> The summary of events of summer 1968 is drawn from Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*; Edgar Gómez Bonilla, "Cronología de movimiento estudiantil en Puebla y la ciudad de México, 1968," *Tiempo Universitario. Gaceta histórica de la BUAP* 10:14 (October 2007); and, Gustavo Castillo García, "Tlatelolco, el infierno," *La Jornada*, October 2, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Again, see Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico* and Gustavo Castillo García, "Tlatelolco, el infierno."

were often drowned out by the sounds of helicopters that flew overhead. At around 6:15 p.m., a number of army units arrived at the plaza, ostensibly in order to prevent demonstrators from entering a nearby building that was known to hold political prisoners. Flares appeared in the sky. Everyone looked up. Suddenly, without warning, soldiers advanced on the crowd. Shooting began. The chaos of the scene made it difficult to locate where the first shots came from, though eyewitnesses later confirmed that they originated from military weapons. All hell broke loose in the moments that followed. The massive crowd scrambled in terror as machine gun and rifle fire zoomed in all directions. Many noticed, some felt, the presence of snipers stationed in windows of government housing units high above the plaza who rained gunfire down on the unsuspecting mob.<sup>4</sup> The bloody scene witnessed in the plaza extended into the crowded halls and tiny apartments of nearby housing units where several combatants were killed in shoot-outs with military personnel. The terrible confrontation lasted until the dawn of October 3.

The balance of the events of October 2-3, 1968 remains a point of heated contention. Undoubtedly hundreds of demonstrators were detained at Tlatelolco by federal and municipal forces that formed the Olympic Battalion – that which was raised to defend the general population from threatening elements. A more polemic topic is the number of casualties that resulted from the events of that afternoon and evening. Officially, the Department of Federal Security reported thirty-nine civilian and two military deaths. Forty-one total fatalities is a significant death toll and one that certainly qualifies the events of Tlatelolco as a ‘massacre.’ Yet, the number of thirty-nine greatly contrasts with the number of 325 killed civilians that was commonly cited by government opponents. The exact total remains unknown to this day, but the great disparity seen in the evaluation of the size and scope of the events is crucial in contextualizing the difference in initial understanding about their impact. In the days that followed, the Díaz Ordaz government resorted to old habits and blamed the confrontation on provocation by Communist youth groups. Talk was heard about a temporary suspension of individual

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<sup>4</sup> Writer Gustavo Castillo García notes that the identity of the snipers is still a controversial question. According to government reports, the gunmen were student agitators that served to provoke the military into an armed confrontation. But no evidence, he adds, exists to corroborate this accusation. A much more popular theory is that the gunmen were army sharpshooters ordered to incite violence by randomly targeting demonstrators.

liberties but no such drastic action could be taken on the eve of Olympic festivities. The student representatives, at least those who remained alive and unconfined, were understandably shell-shocked and scared. Some regrouped in the days that followed and announced on October 9 an “Olympic Truce” to be observed for the two-week duration of the games. It was in this climate of violence, fear, and shock that the Mexico City “Olympiad of Peace” was convened by President Díaz Ordaz on October 12, 1968.

#### *COLLABORATIONISM IN THE WORKERS’ PRESS AND MAINSTREAM MEDIA*

The horrific confrontation witnessed at Tlatelolco did not extinguish student activism in Mexico. Still, after October 2 the Mexican student movement would never again count on the popular force and numbers it possessed prior to the killing and imprisonment of hundreds of its core members. In the months that followed, students returned to classes at the nation’s major universities and did not, in general, resume the kind of aggressive activism that had become commonplace that summer. In this regard, Mexican authorities could find some solace that harsh repression succeeded to delimit radical militancy to the margins of the movement. Furthermore, the use of military force to quash protest on the eve of the Olympics was a measure that pleased important sectors of Mexican civil society and especially that of organized labor that had for months prior to October 2 called for decisive force to combat dissent.

The workers’ press in the weeks that preceded and followed October 2 reveals strong organized labor support for the federal government. The position of the official labor movement was made crystal clear in a letter to the editor entitled “Manifesto to the Nation” the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) published on September 2. In short, the document summarized organized labor’s understanding of student activity and explained that the CTM, as “a product of the Revolution that professes only the body of ideas of that social movement of 1910,” could not remain indifferent before the grave threat that undermined social peace and political stability in Mexico.<sup>5</sup> Indifference, it elaborated, would be contrary to the very nature of an organization that was “a permanent

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<sup>5</sup> Confederación de Trabajadores de México, letter to the editor, *Tribuna Obrera*, October 21, 1968. Spanish reads: ...un product de la Revolución, que profesa como único ideario el de ese movimiento social de 1910, mismo en el que inspira su pensamiento y acción, en su lucha permanente por la libertad y el orden legal, con justicia social...

factor in the progressive action of national life.”<sup>6</sup> The CTM, therefore, driven by perceived historical obligations and, very likely, by resentment over the recent appropriation of the *bandera rojinegra* by student protesters in the Zócalo, felt obliged to counter those “foreigners” and “bad Mexicans” who acted as “active communist agents” and had manipulated students into attacking the regime. Enemies were advised that the organization would use syndical action, to whatever extent necessary, to put an end the anti-juridical and anarchic climate that they wanted to bring to the nation. All adversaries were warned that the CTM would “unmask and destroy native or foreign agitators” that wanted to harm the nation by corrupting the values of its youth. This was a task, they explained, that would be accomplished through a firm alliance with President Díaz Ordaz who, together with the nation’s workers, formed “a common front so that order and truth supported by reason and law could shine.”<sup>7</sup>

The CTM’s pledge of solidarity with the government enticed the other pillars of the establishment to make a similar show of deference. The September 19 missive entitled “*AL PUEBLO DE MEXICO*” (“To the People of Mexico”) represented a unified condemnation of student dissidence in Mexico by the three official sectors of the PRI. Writing as the self-proclaimed “representatives of the majority forces of the nation,” union leaders of the rural, worker, and popular and professional sectors expressed their support for the government’s decision to dispatch the army to seize control of the UNAM campus. In the document, it was reasoned that it was the leaders of political groups of diverse ideologies inside the university, and not government officials, who were guilty of violating university autonomy, for they were the ones who had occupied buildings and turned the campus into a center of operations against the legitimate and democratic institutions of the nation. It was these agitators who had impeded the renewal of classes and prevented “real students” from pursuing an education. This kind of action could not be tolerated for it contributed to “idleness” and was “a waste of resources and time.” It

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid. Spanish reads: ...eso implicaría contrariar a su propia naturaleza, como factor permanente de acción progresista en la vida nacional.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: ...desenmascarar y destruir a los agitadores nativos o extranjeros, de toda clase de facciones, que crean anarquía y desdoro para México, desquician los valores de su juventud y ponen en peligro la sólida consolidación de nuestra Patria.;... un frente común, para que el orden y la verdad, apoyados en la razón y en el derecho resplandezcan.

also risked producing a “scientifically, technically, and personally inept generation” that would not be able to fulfill the functions that the nation demanded.<sup>8</sup> The decision to invade was taken only after all means of persuasion and lawful recourses had been made available to, and rejected by, students, teachers, and employees of the university. The army’s occupation of UNAM was not, hence, an act of force or a violation of the tenet of university autonomy. It was understood by the nation’s political establishment as a necessary measure to reestablish the true function of the university.

As seen above, Mexican political and labor leaders mostly encouraged the aggressive tactics used by the state to counter student protest. In general, government repression at a relatively small scale was condoned. But even when mass violence finally arrived to Mexico, organized labor remained nonplused. The October 7, 1968 edition of *Tribuna Obrera*, the weekly newspaper of the Congress of Labor, made no mention of the violence that occurred at Tlatelolco just days before. The following week, the newspaper ran several stories that made reference to October 2, though not directly. One piece reported that the executive committee of the CTM met on October 6 to discuss “violent disturbances” that had recently occurred. At the meeting committee members unanimously responded to the call of unity made by CTM leaders Fidel Velázquez and Jesús Yurén Aguilar, and agreed to hold meetings at the state levels to “drive the cetemista proletariat toward the firm and profound decision to work for the greatness of Mexico and maintain the working class’s firm unity around the Revolutionary regime over which Licenciado Gustavo Díaz Ordaz presides.”<sup>9</sup> In that edition’s editorial section, Congress of Labor opinion makers also ran a piece entitled, perhaps not ironically, “Mission Accomplished,” wherein the successful inauguration of the Olympic Games was praised as proof of the nation’s current state of civil and economic stability. Mexico’s leaders were congratulated for bringing the world’s most important sporting

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<sup>8</sup> Sector Obrero, Sector Agrario, and Sector Popular de la Partido Revolucionario Institucional, letter to the editor, *Tribuna Obrera*, October 21, 1968, 2. Spanish reads: El ocio, el despilfarro de recursos y la pérdida de tiempo en luchas ajenas al interés estudiantil, nos colocan en el riesgo de producir una generación inepta en la ciencia, la técnica y el humanismo, que está reclamando nuestro país.

<sup>9</sup> Editorial, “Ocurrirán Asambleas Cetemistas de Orientación en Todo el País,” *Tribuna Obrera*, October 14, 1968, 4. Spanish reads: ...conducir al proletariado cetemista hacia la firme y profunda decisión de trabajar por la grandeza de México y mantener firmemente la unidad de la clase obrera en torno al régimen de la Revolución, que preside el licenciado Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

event to the nation. Organizers could not have chosen a better day to inaugurate the games – October 12, after all, being the *Día de la Raza*, or, Day of the Race in Mexico. Neither could they have picked a better venue, they determined, than that of Olympic Stadium at UNAM, making, once again, a perhaps not-ironic reference. These triumphs, editors concluded, were achieved “In spite of the inconsequential and insidious vociferations of elements that tried to disparage the success of the Olympics...”<sup>10</sup> Mexicans, it was assured, held no rancor toward those who tried to disgrace the nation. Rather, they now basked in the glory of overcoming “innumerable obstacles” and the achievement of turning Mexico into “an oasis of peace” and the sporting capital of the world.

Worker periodicals heaped praise on Mexican leaders for successfully bringing the Olympics to fruition and diffusing threats that endangered the nation’s forward advancement. The messages printed in the workers’ press echoed those run in the majority of major publications. Most who have undertaken analyses of journalistic coverage in the Tlatelolco era have concluded that mainstream media functioned, as a whole, at the service of the government. One need only scan the coverage of the events of 1968 to notice an overwhelming journalistic and editorial bias for the government’s cause over that of the students. With few exceptions, contemporary periodicals defended the military occupation of the universities and opposed the right of students to counter police force. The nation’s largest newspapers applauded forceful government action and in their editorials gave Díaz Ordaz virtual *carte blanche* to order what was ‘necessary’ to counter threats. Certain periodicals provided venues for dissenting opinions, though typically these spaces were available for purchase and not freely provided. This was the case for the Mexico City daily *El Día* which received payment for publishing a September 19 letter to the editor entitled “To the President of the Republic” condemning the “shameful”

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<sup>10</sup> Editorial, “Misión Cumplida,” *Tribuna Obrera*, October 14, 1968, 3. Spanish reads: No obstante las inconsecuencias e insidiosas vociferaciones de elementos que trataron de desprestigiar el éxito de la Olimpiada...



and “unconstitutional” military occupation of UNAM and signed by 200 of the nation’s most noted cultural leaders.<sup>11</sup>

On October 3, few newspapers published memorials to commemorate those fallen at Tlatelolco as was commonly done following the death of prominent individuals. An important exception was seen in *Excélsior*, the large Mexico City daily that distinguished itself from its competitors through a reporting of events that was more impartial. Readers saw on the front page of that newspaper’s October 3 edition only a black rectangular graphic with the Spartan caption: “¿Por Qué?” (Why?) This image by cartoonist Abel Quezada Rueda has haunted observers ever since. Nevertheless, *Excélsior* of the period could not be called anti-establishment. Neither it nor any other major newspaper reported casualties on October 3 that greatly diverged from official state figures. Perhaps the general chaos and utter shock that surrounded the events of October 2 obfuscated journalistic accuracy. Still, the inadequacy of the immediate coverage was astounding. *El Día* showed itself particularly apologetic of civil violence. It reported that the military and police elements responsible for the killings were provoked by agitators and that federal legislators fully justified the use of force to combat “the participation of national and foreign elements that pursue anti-Mexican objectives.”<sup>12</sup>

According to Blanche Petrich, the observable journalistic preference for the government over the student cause was more than merely literary; it was nothing less than a critical source of state authority and legitimacy. In her opinion, the complicity and obedience afforded the state by the owners of the modes of communication was an historical factor that helped sustain Mexican party-state authoritarianism for seven decades. To cultivate complicity and enforce obedience, the government turned

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<sup>11</sup> Carlos Monsivías, et. al., letter to the editor, *El Día*, September 20, 1968, 6. Those who signed the September 19 condemnation included well-known painters, poets, musicians, actors, architects, scientists, photographers, and writers, among them Carlos Monsiváis and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla. Collectively, the group denounced the government for the myriad ways it had violated the Constitution and specifically cited its: a. unconstitutional use of the army; b. suspension of individual guarantees (in violation of Articles 1, 9, and 29;) c. cessation of university of autonomy; exercise of repressive measures in place of democratic dialog (Article 8;) closing of the democratic process in the country; and its illegal, arbitrary and unconstitutional detainment of functionaries, researchers, professors, intellectuals, employees, students, and parents whose only crime was to find themselves in the Center of Studies at the time it was occupied by the Army (Articles 1 and 20).

<sup>12</sup> See Edgar Gómez Bonilla, “Cronología de movimiento estudiantiles en Puebla y la ciudad de México, 1968.”

journalists into snitches, libelers, and character assassins. If that was not enough, newspaper owners were threatened, censured, bribed, or pressured fiscally into compliance. All of these pressure tactics served the state well during an era of widespread social critique. Petrich writes: “The newspapers were generous with [printing] the many voices of the most rancid conservatism; on the other hand, they neglected mention of those activists who undertook the most significant struggle of their century.”<sup>13</sup> Many, though, saw through the deception, and she notes that the public outcry in the period was unequivocal; the Press had been bought! And the newspaper owners, those who “fell over themselves” at their banquets applauding “the firm hand” of the president, had revealed themselves as stooges and indifferent to the public’s opinion.<sup>14</sup>

The initial reporting on the events of October 2 showed that the mainstream press had failed to immediately contextualize the gravity and scope of Tlatelolco. This miscomprehension was not remedied with a year’s reflection. Neither the October 2, 1969 editions of *El Universal* or *Excélsior* included any editorial remembrance of the events perpetrated one year before. What editors did address suggested that their priorities lay elsewhere. Editors at *El Universal* cited the generous work done by the National Popular Subsistence Company, which was a major priority of the official labor movement, but called upon the government to do more to curb the scarcity of goods and halt price increases.<sup>15</sup> They criticized owners for industrial practices that hurt the masses and personally assailed the 26,000 members of the National Chamber of the Assembly Industry for their “reproachable attitudes and immeasurable ambition for unlawful gain.”<sup>16</sup> Against such threats, editors stressed, “Actions, not words,” were needed toward the end that consumers did not suffer more. And who was to defend the masses from such exploitation? Editors suggested that it was incumbent upon governmental authorities to provide an “authentic protection and a real defense” so that abuses would be limited.

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<sup>13</sup> Blanche Petrich, “¡Prensa Vendida!” *La Jornada*, October 2, 2008. Spanish reads: Los periódicos fueron generosos con las múltiples voces del conservadurismo más rancio; omisos, en cambio, para quienes protagonizaron con su activismo la lucha más significativo de su siglo.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Editorial, “Aumento de Precios,” *El Universal*, October 2, 1969, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: ...causan enormes perjuicios a la colectividad con sus reprobables actitudes y desmedidas ambiciones de lucro indebido.

*Excélsior* similarly ignored the first anniversary of Tlatelolco and advocated issues that reflected its priorities. The various opinion pieces run on October 2, 1969 showed that that newspaper's editorial staff had fixed its gaze largely beyond Mexico's borders. Opinion pieces addressed the topics of: a. Operation Intercept, a program implemented by the United States government to counter the flow of narcotics into the nation from Mexico; b. the impotence of the United Nations to alter U.S. military action in Vietnam; c. Richard Nixon's recent plea for public support for military expansion in Asia; d. the prospect of future U.S. colonization of the Moon; and, e. the celebration of the centennial of the birth of Gandhi.<sup>17</sup> No coverage of events held to honor the anniversary of the Tlatelolco was reported in *Excélsior* on October 2 or the following day, although the paper did honor the first anniversary of the military *junta* that took power in Peru on October 3, 1968. Editors praised actions taken by those in distant Peru and called the movement a triumph that brought "militant nationalism" to the nation.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the movement that they witnessed on their doorsteps a year earlier, and that which had reached its dramatic climax on the very morning they were commemorating, was not deemed worthy of mention.

Certainly, the immediate gravity of the events witnessed at Tlatelolco was recognized and written about in some news outlets. *Por Qué?* magazine did not hesitate to call the events genocide. Editorials that filled its pages greatly juxtaposed those that appeared in major news outlets. Writing on November 29, 1968, Mario Menéndez Rodríguez argued that the massacre witnessed at Tlatelolco could not be denied. If it were, he cautioned, Mexico would become an immense "Plaza of Graves."<sup>19</sup> In the same edition, Urbano Cortés ascribed the happenings of Tlatelolco similar importance. To him, the repression that filled the summer of 1968 and reached its climax at Tlatelolco conclusively demonstrated that the nation's formal government structure had corroded.

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<sup>17</sup> See Editorial Section in *Excélsior*, October 2, 1969, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Editorial, "Un Año de la Junta Peruana," *Excélsior*, October 3, 1969, 4. According to Eric Zolov, the junta seized power to preempt the imminent takeover of the government by guerrilla forces and then deflated much of the movement's appeal by implementing a radical, leftist policy agenda. See Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 229.

<sup>19</sup> See Editorial section in *Por Qué?*, November 29, 1968, 4. The analogy has a more literary quality in its original language, as "Plaza de las Tres Culturas" rhymes well with "Plaza de las Sepulturas."

“The Official Apparatus is Bankrupt,” wrote Cortés, and finally, with the people’s eyes wide open, it had become apparent that the only thing that had been ‘institutionalized’ by the Institutional Revolutionary Party was “the indefinite permanency of the cabal the forms the ‘revolutionary family’.”<sup>20</sup> Issues run in subsequent months struck similar notes of urgency. A headline announced that the “Constitution Has Died” and one writer pondered if the state of fear, lawlessness, and repression that currently gripped Mexico put the nation and its people on the brink of a new 1910.<sup>21</sup>

But strong government criticism of the ilk seen in *Por Qué?* and other anti-establishment periodicals did not pose a significant threat to the authority of the Mexican state or the PRI. State officials largely believed that the readerships of these periodicals were, in general, dominated by those who directly participated in the student or other dissident movements.<sup>22</sup> Policymakers were far more concerned with dictating the discourses that would fill the workplaces, classrooms, or kitchens of those individuals they considered to constitute the ‘true Mexican people,’ be he (or she) a loyal unionist, a law abiding student, or a patriotic housewife. Collaboration with the major modes of information was thus deemed a crucial component in the state’s campaign to control the terms of the national political discourse and minimize the psychological impact of the events of October 2. The grossly inadequate and inaccurate coverage of that day, and the general failure to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the event were part and parcel of the mainstream and workers’ press’s historical lack of independence and continued state of subordination in the post-Tlatelolco period.

Judging from these phenomena, one could very well call into question the appropriateness of the term “post-Tlatelolco,” for based only on mainstream media and workers’ press coverage there appeared little to suggest that the events of October 2, 1968 marked the definitive end (or beginning) of an epoch in modern Mexican history.

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<sup>20</sup> Urbano Cortes, “El Aparato Oficial Está en Quiebra,” *Por Qué?*, November 29, 1968, 10. Spanish, in full, reads: Pero no es solamente el PRI el que se halla en bancarrota; es todo el aparato oficial el que está en quiebra, porque el pueblo ha abierto los ojos, convenciéndose al fin de que el PRI no es partido, ni revolucionario, y que lo único que institucionalizó fue la permanencia indefinida de la camarilla que integra la “familia revolucionaria.”

<sup>21</sup> See Editorial, “La Constitución ha Muerto,” *Por Qué*, December 27, 1968, 3-9; and Carlos Ortega G., “¿Estamos en Vísperas de un Nuevo 1910?,” *Por Qué*, February 7, 1969, 6-8.

<sup>22</sup> Future happenings suggested that the government underestimated the impression that the anti-establishment press could make on the general Mexican populace.

How then, one could ask, could any event that was barely acknowledged in the majority of media outlets represent a watershed moment in the history of a nation? It is my contention that the inadequacy of media coverage of the happenings of October 2, 1968 suggests their true significance. I endorse the connection identified by Blanche Petrich between journalistic obedience and complicity and the maintenance of state authority and legitimacy.<sup>23</sup> It is my contention that that alliance stood alongside the state's alliance with organized labor – itself founded upon notions of deference and loyalty – as critical pillars of its strength. The general understatement of the significance of Tlatelolco as seen in the press coverage was significant because it eroded the veneers of independence proclaimed by the mainstream media establishment and organized labor movement, and exposed the intricate connections that linked the Mexican state with these important sectors of civil society.

#### *A LACK OF SOLIDARITY BETWEEN ORGANIZED WORKERS AND STUDENTS*

Petrich contends that the preference shown by owners, editors, and journalists for the cause of the government and against that of the students largely defied public opinion. A similar contention cannot be made, it appears, when assessing the nature of coverage seen in workers' press publications. In general, the evident bias for the government seen on the pages of organized labor's major periodicals appealed to the typical reader of such publications. Who was the typical reader of *Ceteme*, for example? He or she was one of the nearly 2.5 million workers organized into a union that was affiliated with the nation's largest labor confederation, the CTM. Or, in many cases, *Ceteme* was read by the spouse, child, sibling, or any one of the millions of relatives of union members who may have found in its pages information about government social programs that directly impacted their lives. The typical reader of *Ceteme* or *Tribuna Obrera*, therefore, was a unionist and thus a member of a privileged class in Mexican society that's fate was directly tied to the fate of the Mexican government. History had dictated that the well being of the organized workers' movement in Mexico was intricately linked to the well being of the government that emanated from the Mexican Revolution. And the reverse was advertised as similarly true; the Mexican state could not prosper without the support of its most important

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<sup>23</sup> See Blanche Petrich, "¡Prensa Vendida!" *La Jornada*, October 2, 2008.

societal sector. As such, the typical reader of union literature did not empathize with the struggle raised by Mexican students in the summer of 1968.

The question of who, exactly, instigated the movement of 1968 is crucial. The student activism that culminated that summer did not occur in a vacuum; unionists and peasants had militated for rights at heightened levels since at least the late 1950s. However, the episodes of July to October 1968 were specifically the domain of the Mexican student movement. As a rule, these events were the outcome of actions raised by largely middle-class, largely youthful members of the nation's privileged classes. They were not the product of organized worker or peasant activism nor were they waged by those from the masses of urban poor. This distinction is crucial in the way that it absolved the Mexican state in the hearts of many for the harsh repression it inflicted upon participants of the movement. Federal forces acted to crush the movement at Tlatelolco brutally, but in their actions large and important segments of society saw necessary measures to diffuse a threat that endangered the overall progress of the nation. Government partisans saw in those protagonists killed on the nation's campuses and on October 2 only subversive elements. They were either foreign or domestic proponents of strange ideologies who acted at home to undermine nationalist goals or they were remnants of the unpatriotic bourgeois class that had somehow managed to survive the mass cleansing process inflicted upon them by the Mexican Revolution so long ago. In any case, they were dangerous and needed to be dealt with.

Oral testimonies collected by Elena Poniatowska in the months preceding the massacre at Tlatelolco confirm that a lack of solidarity divided those in the student movement from the many workers or working-class citizens. Many took umbrage at the students for agitating instead of taking advantage of their educational opportunities. José Álvarez Castaneda, a jitney driver roiled with resentment towards those he shuffled up and down Mexico City's main arteries. He told Poniatowska: "I didn't get any kind of a formal education because my folks couldn't afford to send me to school. But if education nowadays is the sort that produces students like that, I'm glad I didn't go to school. I've never in my life seen such disrespectful, vulgar, foul-tongued people."<sup>24</sup> Clemencia

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<sup>24</sup> Poniatowska, 79.

Zaldívar de Iglesias, a housewife, spoke to Poniatowska with particular scorn for the privileges modern students enjoyed. She remarked: “In every other country in the world, adolescence is a temporary stage youngsters go through – it only lasts a few years. But here in Mexico, you’re a callow youth and a ‘student’ just as long as you please. There’s no end to the privileges students have.” Continuing, she cited a recent incident at UNAM led by a student who had not received his diploma despite having been enrolled in the university for fifteen years. “Do you call that being a student?” She demanded.<sup>25</sup> Pablo Lara Vértiz, a Mexico City tailor, surely concurred. He remarked to Poniatowska that “In my day you didn’t call a bunch of bums and degenerates students.”<sup>26</sup>

Neither did everyone who studied at the nation’s schools and universities support the student movement. Andrés Montaña Sánchez related a tale that was prototypical of the working-class student who attended a theoretically free preparatory school but still struggled to pay the transportation and opportunity costs (i.e. those accrued from the act of studying rather than wage-earning) that middle and upper class students easily met. Montaña left his home in Ciudad Sahagún, state of Hidalgo, at five o’clock in the morning each day so as to arrive at Vocational 1 in Mexico City by seven. He rode a second-class bus to cut down on travel costs. This measure saved his parents money though it substantially extended his daily commuting time. One morning in mid-August of 1968 he arrived to campus expecting to take his final exams in math, physics, chemistry, electronics workshop, design, and technology. Instead, he found the school closed due to a student strike. As he told Poniatowska, “I was hopping mad because I knew all the material very well.” The school was closed indefinitely. Shortly afterwards, his father, a worker at the National Railway Car Factory, heard a report of the student strike on the radio. After that, he refused to give Andrés bus-fare to school reasoning that “Those kids are rebels!” He told his son: “I’ve worked too hard for my money for you to waste it running around the streets in the city.”<sup>27</sup> It is unknown whether Andrés returned to school after that.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

The resentment felt by many toward the student activists did not come from differences in priorities – students, after all, were demanding basic political reforms that could have benefited the great majority of Mexicans. Workers were told by their maximum leaders that the essence of student demands did not matter. Their cause was waged illegally and thus it was illegitimate. This talking point was hammered home by no less than Fidel Velázquez, unofficial spokesman of the official labor movement. On July 26, he went on record and echoed the government’s position by criticizing the “professional agitators” who were using the increased publicity that surrounded the upcoming Olympic Games as an opportunity to embarrass the nation.<sup>28</sup> On July 31, he convened his Executive Committee and declared the organization’s support for the demands of the student class, which were labeled as just, but only when they were submitted through adequate channels.<sup>29</sup> Mexico’s students, therefore, were determined to be acting unlawfully by not respecting the channels of dissent provided by the law. Importantly, Velázquez also saw them as petulant and privileged. “It is not admissible in any way,” he concluded, “that select social groups try to break established social order by using privileges that the rest of the population does not enjoy.”<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the movement’s illegality, labor hierarchs stressed the elitist and foreign character of the student cause. Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga was quoted in the September 14 edition of *Ceteme* and could not hide his disdain. He pledged: “The CTM will impede the penetration of extremists that try to sow disunity in the country.” He lamented that it was foreign elements who “constructed [rebellion] in the style of Paris,” and now, as he saw it, “...not only did Paris send us feminine fashion, but also the subversive elements that [now] barricade themselves in the street with urban service buses.”<sup>31</sup> The CTM’s position that a large proportion of the Mexican student population

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<sup>28</sup> Agustín Sánchez González, *Los Primeros Cien Años de Fidel: La histórica controvertida de la figura política más duradera del siglo XX en México* (México: Editorial Patria, 1997), 168.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: No es admisible, por ningún concepto, que grupos sociales determinados, pretendan romper el estado de cosas establecidos, aspirando con esto a privilegios que no disfruta el resto de la población.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 170. Spanish reads: La CTM impedirá la penetración de extremistas que tratan de sembrar la desunión del país.;...construyeron (los estudiantes) la moda de París, porque ahora París ya no solamente nos envía la moda femenina, sino también los medios subversivos, barricadas en la calle con camiones de servicio urbano.



had been manipulated by nefarious elements that were foreign, and apparently, “feminine,” was not altered after October 2. Velázquez was unmoved by the carnage of Tlatelolco. He declared on October 5: “The events of Tlatelolco demonstrate that more than just subversion, the rebellion is against progress and the general development of the nation. There is not a student problem, rather, there exists an intent at rebellion or subversion that must be stopped at its origins.”<sup>32</sup> The CTM chief was probably not the only labor figure to find a measure of satisfaction in bloodshed. Sugar leader José María Cruz seemed to relish the raw display of government force. “To the assault of the agitators,” he boasted, “we will answer with the closed fist.”<sup>33</sup>

The words of Velázquez, Cruz, and others suggested that a strong affinity bound members of the organized labor bureaucracy with those in the federal government. In the pride they exhibited over aggressive military action, labor officials hinted that they saw the use of government force as an affirmation of their own strength. By typecasting all of those who participated in demonstrations, campus sit-ins, and street skirmishes as Communist pawns or elitist youth, labor leaders preyed on the nationalist and class-conscious tendencies of the average Mexican worker. Velázquez employed both of these tropes when he spoke on November 4. The events of this past summer confirmed to him that “the youth is not apt to acquire the vote at age eighteen, proof of that being that they let themselves be dragged along by subversive elements that engendered the student movement.”<sup>34</sup> To Velázquez student activists represented all of the things that the Mexican worker did not. They were criminals who did not respect the spaces for political action provided by their government. They were elitist and unpatriotic because they were seduced by foreign and anti-Mexican ideologies. And they were young and impressionable which meant that they did not have the necessary maturity or resolve to resist being dragged into criminality by subversive elements. In each of these ways, they contrasted the Mexican worker – he who found strength through loyalty, an identity

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: “Los sucesos de Tlatelolco demuestran que más que una subversión, es una rebelión contra el progreso y el desenvolvimiento general del país. No hay problema estudiantil, sino más bien existe un intento de rebelión o subversión que hay que atajar desde su nacimiento.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: A la embestida de los agitadores, contestaremos con el puño cerrado.

<sup>34</sup> See Edgar Gómez Bonilla, “Cronología de movimiento estudiantil en Puebla y la ciudad de México, 1968.” Spanish reads: ...la juventud no está apta para adquirir la ciudadanía a los 18 años, prueba de ello es que se dejaron arrastrar por elementos subversivos que engendraron el movimiento estudiantil.

through class, history through the legacy of the workers' struggle, and pride through a love of nation. With so little in common, apparently, the Mexican worker was hard pressed to sympathize with the cause of the student activist. The dead did not matter. What mattered above all else was the preservation of the party-state that had been formed by a Revolution waged precisely to protect the interests of the Mexican worker and his family.

Still, though, Velázquez did not speak for the entirety of the organized labor movement in Mexico, as much as he wished. Several influential individuals and organizations gave student demonstrators qualified support. Perhaps most important was the rhetorical support students received from Mexican Electricians' Union, a CTM affiliate but an organization with a left-leaning reputation that was historically established. On August 24, the union released a statement that declared: "We agree with the students when they reject any foreign infiltration (of whatever persuasion) as in the case of the CIA, that tries to create the myth that Mexico is saturated with Communists."<sup>35</sup> Strong personal reasons likely drove union leaders to make these remarks as their union was often the target of state accusations alleging Communist infiltration in their ranks. Furthermore, the union, widely known by its acronym, the SME, advocated a political line that reflected positions promoted by the CNH on the topics of nationalization and increased state control of industry. These points of commonality convinced the SME to formally express its support on September 4 for a movement that it determined had subsumed political and social issues beyond only those related to university life in Mexico.

And there were other unionists who saw past general class differences and empathized with those who agitated for political rights. Evidence of non-conformity with the government's hard line repression of students emanated from even the most elite corners of the worker's movement. Just prior to the Tlatelolco massacre, Díaz Ordaz received a letter drafted by "a group of petroleum workers" that expressed *petroleros'* general disapproval of government action. The letter, which was signed collectively, and

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Estamos de acuerdo con los estudiantes cuando rechazan cualquier infiltración extraña (sea cual sea su tendencia) como en el caso de la CIA, que trata de crear el mito de que México está saturado de comunistas.

thus, anonymously, juxtaposed the official line of government support adhered to by the workers' union leaders, or those that formed the Executive Committee of the Mexican Petroleum Workers' Union.<sup>36</sup> But even within that elite cadre of labor leaders there were signs of unease. The union's Secretary General Juan José Ortega Loera was personally moved by the killing of several of his union members' children by army and police authorities. He wrote Díaz Ordaz after October 2 and expressed to the president his feeling that it was "...useless to destroy the lives of young Mexicans who represent the future of Mexico."<sup>37</sup> Jesús Reyes Heróles, who then served as Director General of the national oil company, *Petróleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX) likely shared Ortega's grief. He attended the funeral of a daughter of a *petrolero* killed at Tlatelolco.

There were still other displays of non-conformity inside the labor establishment and party-state. On October 5, Lázaro Cárdenas threw his moral weight behind the cause of non-violence. He pled to both authorities and university members to bring an end to the conflict, but energetically condemned the use of state repression to counter student demands. Overall, though, the official stance of both the labor establishment and party was strongly supportive of the government's tack. On October 4, members of the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Mexican Congress, approved a resolution proposed by deputies of the PRI and the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution that endorsed the measures taken by the Executive "to guarantee the peace" and against "subversive action."<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, members of the minority National Action Party and Popular Socialist Party abstained from signing the document. In general, the Mexican Congress failed to call for dialogue between student and government representative, but was instead the epicenter of rhetorical opposition to student agitation. Scores of *priísta* legislators used their turns at the podium to hiss venom at known members of the National Strike Committee or launch accusations against faculty or administrative sympathizers of the movement including Herberito Castillo or Javier Barros Sierra. In their invectives, legislators stressed the notion that any violence conducted against

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<sup>36</sup> Fernando de Garay, Alberto Márquez Salazar, and Mariana Vega, *PNR, PRM, PRI: Esbozo Histórico* (Mexico City: Biblioteca Fundación Nacional Colosio, 2003), 171.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Again, see Edgar Gómez Bonilla, "Cronología de movimiento estudiantiles en Puebla y la ciudad de México, 1968."

military or police forces constituted an action that was anti-Mexican. Agitators were cast as traitors, as seditious pawns of a foreign conspiracy. Nothing short of harsh reprisals were needed to guarantee the peace and stability of the nation.<sup>39</sup>

Harsh reprisals, to say the least, were imminent, and when they finally arrived on October 2 leaders of the Mexican political and labor establishments cooed approvingly. Still, though, as has been shown, not all organized workers agreed that the merciless execution of Mexican youths was the proper course of action to combat dissent. Unionists did, after all, hold the right to organize and the right to voice their concerns militantly close to their hearts. Many as well, and particularly those who took part in the railway worker strikes of 1958-1959, had seen government repression close up and could empathize with the cause of the students and university workers who now made demands for democratic and political reforms similar to those they voiced a decade before. To those who felt this way, the government's democratic qualities had been called into question by the events of recent years. Furthermore, the Mexican state's credentials as a "revolutionary" body were made suspect because it had shown itself intolerant of criticism and more than willing to violently repress even lawful forms of dissent. Each of these trends, according to Agustín Sánchez González, were epitomized by the Mexican state's gorilla-like approach to answer student protests. In a relatively brief time, the student mobilization that culminated in the summer of 1968 succeeded to not only challenge federal authority, but it also questioned the very legitimacy of the ruling regime.

*COLLABORATIONISM REWARDED: THE NEW FEDERAL LABOR LAW OF 1970*

Mainstream and worker periodicals may not have reflected it, but the year that ensued after the events of October 2, 1968 was far from tranquil. Formal student activism continued, albeit at a much smaller scale. Informal protest surged and numerous underground organizations arose that would mutate in the coming years into full-blown guerrilla movements. Perhaps most unnerving to the government was the trend of "land invasions" carried out in rural and urban settings by peasants who demanded the return of lands they deemed to be rightfully theirs and unlawfully confiscated by private or state

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<sup>39</sup> de Garay, et al., 171.

actions. Amidst all of this seething discontent, unionized workers kept largely peaceful relations with owners. Leaders of the official labor establishment savored the relative peace inside their sector, but surely noticed that worker satisfaction was precarious. The delicate balance that union leaders maintained between stability and chaos had always given them agency in their dealings with federal authorities. In a post-Tlatelolco context wherein the Mexican state could ill afford to add widespread worker unrest to its laundry list of civil concerns, the organized labor position appeared stronger than ever.

Organized labor's loyalty would be rewarded in due time. In December 1968, barely weeks after dust settled at Tlatelolco and the successful completion of the Olympics, Díaz Ordaz submitted a presidential initiative to Congress meant to begin a process of replacing the 1931 Federal Labor Law, obsolete in many regards, with an updated code. Worker excitement and determination to see a new labor law put into effect was palpable in the months after the initiative was presented. A cartoon run in *Ceteme* on January 11, 1969 showed a worker standing under the banner of the "New Federal Labor Law." A sledgehammer rested on his shoulder and was readied to fend off any comers that threatened his rights. Threats were omnipresent. Men in suits were depicted hiding behind a rock wall. They appeared crawling on their bellies, and one held a pistol while he prepared himself to pounce on the worker. The caption read: "In spite of all the ownership maneuvers, the workers will defeat them."<sup>40</sup>

And workers had good reason to be confident that they would prevail for they had the entire political establishment of the Mexican party-state seemingly in their corner. On February 26, 1969, PRI president Alfonso Martínez Domínguez spoke to workers gathered for the CTM National Committee's 74<sup>th</sup> Regular General Assembly and assured them as much. There, he found a perfect venue to remind delegates about the party's historical labors on their behalf:

The PRI, I repeat, is the party of workers' rights and of the working class, [as well as] is the party of unity and revolutionary struggle; it is the party that has brought, brings, and will bring the transformation of Mexico. It is the party of *Mexican-ness*, of national sovereignty, of justice and peace. It is the party of the people, that unites all Mexicans by their most positive acts and insists on extending the

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<sup>40</sup> Editorial, *Ceteme*, January 11, 1969, 2. Spanish reads: A pesar de todas las maniobras patronales, los trabajadores venceremos.

conquests of the peasants, the middle class, and the workers, opening the channels so that the all the country is served by the ideology of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>41</sup>

Recognizing in turn workers' place in the revolutionary family, Martínez declared that "We know – the whole country recognizes – that the working class, that the CTM, in its long life, has carried forward a permanent history of loyalty to the institutions of the revolution, to its doctrine, and to its men."<sup>42</sup> Martínez then turned his attention to the topic of the federal labor legislation that was pending in Congress. He stated: "...the PRI determinedly supports Mexican workers and the CTM in their fights and in their aspirations to achieve a new Labor Law...", a legislative priority that he called "a step forward" and "a sign of the imperative" pressing need for workers to enjoy a greater portion of the national wealth.<sup>43</sup>

Martínez's rhetoric before CTM leaders demonstrated the PRI's desire to restore the bonds of collaborationism that had formerly linked the party with organized labor. Martínez stroked the egos of proud cetemistas by recognizing their crucial place in the Revolutionary family and trumpeted their enduring commitment to the development of modern Mexico. In his comment about a more just distribution of national wealth, the CTM found assurance that the PRI endorsed one of its top legislative priorities to obtain profit-sharing clauses in the next labor code. Even by that early date, passage of the pending labor law was, for all intents and purposes, a foregone conclusion being that the PRI overwhelmingly dominated the federal legislature and verbal support by

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<sup>41</sup> Editorial, "El PRI Respald a los Trabajadores en su Petición de una Nueva Ley del Trabajo," *Ceteme*, February 26, 1969, 4. Spanish reads: El PRI, vuelvo a repetirlo, es el Partido de los derechos de los trabajadores y de la clase obrera y es el Partido de la Unidad y de la Lucha Revolucionaria; es el Partido que ha hecho, hace y hará la transformación de México. Es el Partido de la mexicanidad, de la soberanía nacional, de la justicia y de la paz. Es el Partido del pueblo, que une a los mexicanos por sus actos más positivos y se empeña en extender las conquistas de los campesinos, de la clase media y de los obreros, abriendo los canales para que sirvan al país con el ideario de la Revolución Mexicana.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Spanish read: Nosotros sabemos – el país entero lo reconoce – que la clase obrera, que la CTM, en su larga vida, suma una historia permanente de lealtad a las instituciones de la revolución, a su doctrina, a sus principios y a sus hombres.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Por ello, el PRI apoya resueltamente a los trabajadores de México y de la CTM en sus luchas y en sus aspiraciones por lograr en una nueva Ley del Trabajo, una vida con más decoro y dignidad; una vida en que sus derechos estén más firmes y claramente definidos...; La nueva Ley del Trabajo, que a iniciativa del Presidente Díaz Ordaz, estudia en Congreso de la Unión, es un paso adelante y es también un signo de la necesidad imperiosa, impostergable, de que los trabajadores participen con mayores seguridades de la riqueza nacional.

representatives of most major political parties had already been pledged.<sup>44</sup> The legislative action that remained was more a matter of negotiating certain controversial details of the bill, including profit-sharing, rather than debating its fate. Still, Martínez's language attests to the importance ascribed by party leaders to demonstrating to workers their crucial participation in the legislative "fight" that would ensue.

Nearly a year after it had first appeared, the presidential initiative had finally worked its way through the legislative process and had morphed into bill form. It was scheduled for its first public reading on October 30, 1969. *El Universal* reports that hundreds of unionized workers packed the balconies and spilled into the antechambers of the Mexican Congress building that day to hear the new provisions and show their support for the 889 articles that would form the new labor code.<sup>45</sup> A train of speakers filed to the podium to support the proposed legislation. Included among the proponents were union officials as well as representatives of the powerful business advocacy groups the National Commerce Confederation and the National Confederation of Industrial Chambers, many of whom either spoke or submitted written briefs of support to the members of the delegation. Seemingly all who spoke that day agreed with the initial rationale of the president that passage of the proposed legislation was desperately needed to institute a national labor code that would be more dynamic and, on the whole, better for workers and owners.<sup>46</sup>

The proposed legislation read that day put forward several mandates that were meant to alter the fundamental relationship between worker and owner in Mexico. Some of the most significant changes proposed involved the work week and employee compensation. Time limits were imposed on shift lengths, though the imposition of forty-hour work week was not established. The workday would continue to be eight hours

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<sup>44</sup> In the coming months, *Ceteme* would report that members of the Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana, Partido Popular Socialista, some independent legislators, and even members of the PAN went to CTM headquarters to express their support for the legislation, further attesting to its inevitable passage. See Editorial, "La Nueva Ley Federal del Trabajo Vendrá a Reafirmar el Progreso Socio-Económico del País," *Ceteme*, November 8, 1969.

<sup>45</sup> Demetrio Bolaños Espinosa, "Presentan la Ley Laboral. Primera Lectura Ante los Diputados que la Discutirán el Próximo Martes," *El Universal*, October 31, 1969, 13. The final version of the New Federal Labor Law included 890 articles, not 889, in addition to twelve transitory articles found at the end of the code.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

during the day but was limited to seven hours at night. Employees were guaranteed one day of rest during the work week and were granted mandatory double-time pay if they chose to work on their off day. Workers who opted to work on Sunday were guaranteed time-and-a-quarter pay. The legislation also proposed to expand the table of recognized workplace related illnesses from forty-nine (as cited in the existing law) to 160 possible infirmities that the worker could claim as job-related.<sup>47</sup> Stipulations were also included to greatly increase worker indemnifications for the contraction of sickness. The reformed labor code was also intent upon expanding the scope of its protections to new segments of the work force. Article 331 of the bill afforded full federal protections to domestic workers and entitled them to such basic rights as breaks.<sup>48</sup> Inventors were protected in the new law and were offered arbitration and mediation rights in the contentious arena of royalties.<sup>49</sup> Even the interests of professional soccer players as workers were heeded. Article 295 of the bill prohibited the transfer of *futbolistas* from club to club without the athlete's expressed consent.<sup>50</sup>

The proposed reforms to the 1931 Federal Labor Law were meant to modernize the legal framework that governed worker-owner relations in Mexico. Employees and employers publicly applauded the creation of an updated code, although owners grumbled in private about the legislation's perceived bias for the rights of workers over their own – a truth, they felt, that was evident from the inclusion of profit sharing language in the legislation.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, provisions were set to punish owners who did not comply with social responsibilities mandated by the law. Article 878 of the bill inflicted penalties of up to 10,000 pesos on employers who did not provide scholarships

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<sup>47</sup> The final draft of the code that became law listed 161 infirmities claimable by the worker as job-related. See Article 513, Tabla de Enfermedades del Trabajo, in the NLFT.

<sup>48</sup> STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición* (Mexico City: STPS, 1970), 275.

<sup>49</sup> Demetrio Bolaños Espinosa, "Presentan la Ley Laboral. Primera Lectura Ante los Diputados que la Discutirán el Próximo Martes," *El Universal*, October 31, 1969, 15. See Article 163 in the NLFT.

<sup>50</sup> STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 268.

<sup>51</sup> The proposed legislation as much as the final law was in fact wishy-washy on the subject of profit sharing and, in fact, attested to a powerful trend of labor law to pursue revolutionary-derived goals of social justice and labor-capital equilibrium de jure, without mandating the de facto conditions to make those goals reality. Article 117 of the NLFT mandated that workers will share in the distribution of company profits but that conditions were to be determined by the yet to be established Comisión Nacional para la Participación de los Trabajadores en las Utilidades de la Empresa. Article 118 ordered the new commission to realize studies to know the national economic conditions and create a "reasonable" plan. See STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 213-217.



or sustain schools that federal law required they provide the children of their employees.<sup>52</sup>

While the legislation was being read, Luis M. Farías, top *priísta* in the Chamber of Deputies, referred to the concerns of business that the new law would hinder industry by forcing investors to flee the nation. He recalled that the same concerns were expressed in 1931 on the eve of the passage of the original labor code, but assured the public that Mexico's industry and economy had grown precisely after the time the current law went into effect. As he saw it, the new law would also be a "vigorous stimulus for the economic and industrial growth of Mexico."<sup>53</sup> Detractors disagreed, but Farías felt the new law would create a better business climate at home for by improving the condition of the Mexican worker, the condition of the consumer would also improve. And since consumption was necessary to the growth of industry, Farías reasoned that no industry could prosper when surrounded by worker misery. "To widen the base of consumers in the country," thus, was to "strengthen industrial development and sponsor economic growth."<sup>54</sup> For as much, Farías and all *priístas* supported the bill and looked forward to the "overflowing benefits" that its passage would bring to the national economy.<sup>55</sup>

These sentiments were mimicked closely by Fidel Velázquez later that day. He spoke to the press and forwarded the belief of the labor movement that the new law would permit worker-owner relations to be conducted in a way that assured social peace amongst the factors of production. Velázquez rejected the accusation that the new law would hinder industry, and he chided owners for making the implication even after having been given such input into the legislative process. In essence, he saw the new law as simply reinforcing the validity of rights that were formally given to workers, although

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<sup>52</sup> STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 475.

<sup>53</sup> Demetrio Bolaños Espinosa, "Presentan la Ley Laboral. Primera Lectura Ante los Diputados que la Discutirán el Próximo Martes," *El Universal*, October 31, 1969, 15. Spanish reads: "...tenemos plena confianza que esta nueva Ley, contra lo que dicen sus detractores, también será un estímulo vigoroso para el desarrollo económico e industrial de México.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* Spanish, in full, reads: No puede prosperar una industria si se encuentra rodeada de miseria, porque la producción, para crecer, requiere de consumo y son los trabajadores mismos quienes se convierten en consumidores, cuando reciben salarios justos y remuneradores. Ampliar la base de consumidores en el país, es fortalecer el desarrollo industrial y propiciar el crecimiento económico.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* Spanish reads: Por eso, los diputados de esta Legislatura somos partidarios de la aprobación de la iniciativa presidencial, con las modificaciones propuestas por las Comisiones, porque sabemos que su vigencia redundará en beneficio de la economía nacional."

he conceded that it assigned some new rights in the areas of collective contract negotiations and the distribution of corporate profits.<sup>56</sup>

Velázquez likely understated the impact that the pending legislation would have on regulating the terms of labor and capital relations in Mexico. At the very least, he failed to mention the ways that the legislation directly responded to the most important priorities of organized labor. Jesús Yurén, who was a federal Senator as well as Secretary General of the Federal District Workers' Federation, addressed his members on October 28, 1969 and exhorted them to fight for equity in the collective contract process and for “the better distribution of profits” toward the goal of “true social justice as proclaimed by our grand Confederation.”<sup>57</sup> Not coincidentally, it was these objectives that were among those most directly addressed in the new legislation – a fact Yurén was surely aware of when he spoke days before the proposed law had its first public reading on October 30.

After the legislation was publicly unveiled, labor leaders beamed with pride over what they felt was the government's clear preference for the worker cause. On November 8, *Ceteme* ran the headline: “1936: History Repeats Itself,” making a reference to the famous confrontation witnessed that year between the Nuevo León business class and Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas. In that conflict, business leaders grouped into the powerful Junta Patronal de Monterrey countered a glassworkers' strike that was ruled legal by the state's Arbitration and Conciliation Board by shutting down production state-wide. The lockout provoked a visit by Cárdenas to the industrially crucial region. He listened to representatives of labor and capital and after hearing both sides sympathized with workers and issued the following reprimand to local businessmen: “Those owners that feel fatigued by the social struggle can deliver their industries to the workers or to the government. That would be patriotic; the work stoppage, no.”<sup>58</sup> Clearly, CTM opinion makers saw similarities between the intransigent ownership position of then and now. They wrote that that the ownership sector had always maintained its opposition to any

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Editorial, “Debemos Luchar por una Justa y Real Repartición de Utilidades de las Empresas,” *Ceteme*, November 1, 1969, 2. Spanish reads: la mejor distribución, en cuanto corresponde, a la participación de utilidades y traiga aparejada una verdadera justicia social como lo pregona nuestra gran Confederación.

<sup>58</sup> Editorial, “Año 1936: La Historia Vuelve a Repetirse,” *Ceteme*, November 8, 1969, 2. Spanish reads: Los Empresarios que se Sientan Fatigados por la Lucha Social, Pueden Entregar sus Industrias a los Obreros o al Gobierno. Eso será patriótico; el paro no.

type of collective or individual improvement for workers. Historically, it had countered workers' rights "by reflex," wielding the same tired old arguments and warnings that industry would flee the nation if such 'excessive' worker privileges were granted. "The same whimpers of poorly paid professional mourners" were now being heard within coalitions that had formed inside Congress against the passage of the law. They would fail, editors proclaimed, because like their predecessors who faltered in the pro-worker climate of cardenismo, they now faced a Mexican state that was also friendly to the workers' cause. With the worker-friendly provisions included in the newly proposed labor code, the "whipping" that Cárdenas gave owners of yesteryear seemed destined to be repeated.<sup>59</sup>

The New Federal Labor Law (NLFT) was approved by Congress on December 23, 1969 and put into effect on May 1, 1970. The state and party had complied. Labor's bosses were now obliged to return the favor. A piece entitled "What is the Institutional Revolutionary Party?" appeared in *Ceteme* on May 30, 1970 and reminded workers about the revolutionary nature of the Mexican party-state. The PRI, it told:

...is a political organism that sustains the principles of the Mexican Revolution. Its object is to conquer and maintain public power by means of the public's support to drive national development, raise the standard of living of the population, and consolidate national sovereignty. The PRI is a permanent coalition of the fundamental revolutionary forces of the Mexican people.<sup>60</sup>

With the revolutionary status of the official party freshly imprinted in their minds, workers could see the mechanics of collaborationism in action. The same issue of *Ceteme* described how disgruntled Mexico City bus drivers had decided to delay a strike they were planning so as not to coincide with another high-profile sporting event that Mexico was set to host – in this case, the 1970 World Cup, which was to be staged between May 31 and June 21 of that year.

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<sup>59</sup> Editorial, "Es ya Tradicional la Inconformidad del Sector Patronal en Todos los Tiempos," *Ceteme*, November 8, 1969, 2. Selected passages of original Spanish read:... los mismos lloriqueos de plañideras mal pagadas;... como un latigazo en la propia cara del sector patronal de Monterrey...

<sup>60</sup> Editorial, "¿Qué es el Partido Revolucionario Institucional?," *Ceteme*, May 30, 1970, 4. Spanish reads: El Partido Revolucionario Institucional es un organismo político que sustenta los principios de la Revolución Mexicana. Tiene por objeto conquistar y mantener el poder público mediante el sufragio para impulsar el desarrollo nacional, elevar el nivel de vida de la población y consolidar la soberanía nacional. El PRI es la coalición permanente de las fuerzas revolucionarias fundamentales del pueblo mexicano.

The bus drivers grouped into Local 14 of the Federal District Workers' Federation followed all the proper legal channels mandated in the NLFT. They drafted a strike petition (*emplazamiento de huelga*) and planned to file it with the Conciliation and Arbitration Board of the Federal District and company management. The complaint listed all the ways that bus owners violated terms of the new law. The complaint also stated the drivers' intention to strike if owners did not conform to the terms of the new law and grant additional concessions that they demanded including a base salary of eighty pesos a day and a percentage of all ticket sales they collected.<sup>61</sup> But when the members of Local 14 met, they agreed to wait until after the soccer tournament ended to begin their strike and suspend bus service. According to section leader Joaquín del Olmo, his members were unanimous in the idea "that the nation is first," and that they would not "make a spectacle before the eyes of the world..." With the best interests of the nation in mind, they agreed to file their strike petition after the World Cup concluded.<sup>62</sup>

Bus drivers of the Federal District were confident that they had the law on their side in their struggle. They were resolved to pressure owners to meet their demands and comply with the terms of the new labor code. Nevertheless, they were wary of exercising their rights as workers to the detriment of Mexican commuters. In their functions as metropolitan and long-distance bus drivers, *camioneros* of Local 14 were among those most relied upon for transporting soccer aficionados to cities across the nation. A camionero strike waged in the midst of an international sporting event had the potential to cause a huge disruption in travel and thus greatly embarrass the Mexican state. Once again, as it was in 1968, the successful hosting of a sporting event in Mexico was deemed paramount to the government's modernization and development goals. Many in Mexico also saw psychological importance in a successful tournament; nothing less than national pride was on the line. That unionized workers would perform their jobs seamlessly during

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<sup>61</sup> Editorial, "Después del Campeonato de Fútbol: Se Empezará a Huelga a las Líneas de Autobuses de Distrito Federal," *Ceteme*, May 30, 1970, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Sobre esta misma cuestión, el diputado Joaquín del Olmo, dirigente del transporte y Jefe de la Sección 14 de la FTDF, señaló que la asamblea, en forma unánime, estuvo de acuerdo en que primero es la Patria, y que no se especulará ante los ojos del mundo, y por ello esperarán los trabajadores la terminación del evento del mundial de fútbol, a punto de iniciarse, y que luego presentarán sus pliegos de peticiones ante las autoridades del Departamento del Distrito Federal por los conductos debidos y de acuerdo como lo dispone la Ley Federal del Trabajo.

a time when the destiny and pride of Mexico was at stake was expected by state and labor authorities who had so recently, and so generously, rewarded them.

The delay can be understood as a show of gratitude by workers to the Mexican state for the NLFT. Beyond merely bus drivers, there appeared to be a general moratorium on labor activism during the three weeks the World Cup was held, as little of note was reported in the workers' press. As in 1968, a year of historical tranquility on the official organized labor front, demands created by an international sporting event in Mexico convinced government and labor leaders that their cooperation was crucial while the nation was in an international fishbowl.<sup>63</sup> Government officials determined that sports enthusiasts who saw the games in person or watched on television had no need to witness the quotidian realities of political dissent or worker-owner conflict in Mexico. They were to enjoy their time in Mexico to the fullest, and they were to leave the country with the impression that Mexico was a modern and politically stable nation that was an attractive vacation destination, or, even better, an excellent site for future investment.

Mexico's organized labor movement fell in line and acceded to quell its demands while the tournament continued. Still, though, there were grumblings in union ranks. The complaints lodged by Mexico City bus drivers exemplified the concerns of unionized workers in the period in general. Unionists of all stripes demanded higher wages and accused owners of non-compliance with terms set in the new law. Reports from the workers' press demonstrated that it did not take long after the implementation of the labor code for ownership 'shenanigans' to resume. *Ceteme* reported that Puebla business owners petitioned the state's court for dispensations to free them from their obligation of constructing housing for their workers. Velázquez was not surprised by their behavior. He stated: "The owners have been studying the Law so that they can violate it and be protected by claiming that its terms are unconstitutional. It's natural that they do that. That has always been their policy; they acted that way when the Law of 1931 changed the

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<sup>63</sup> Analysis conducted by Kevin J. Middlebrook found that only 145 strike petitions were filed at the federal level in the year 1968. This is a number that if accurate (Middlebrook notes the possibility that information on federal-jurisdiction strikes may be incomplete for 1968) would represent a remarkable anomaly when positioned next to the number that preceded it – 1,661 in 1967 – and the number that followed it – 1,361 in 1969. See Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 164-165.

minimum wage system.”<sup>64</sup> Confusion about the requirements of the law may have been at the heart of the matter. Employers argued that it was unconstitutional because it obligated them to construct housing for worker’ ownership rather than rental as was mandated in Article 123 of the Constitution. Velázquez considered this argument invalid, and he explained that the new law required employers to build housing only when rentals were not available. In any event, the events in Puebla confirmed to Velázquez that despite the new law, continued struggle was necessary to guarantee that each term of the labor code was fully applied.<sup>65</sup>

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A new Federal Law Code had already become law, yet CTM leaders advocated that the fight for worker justice continue. Workers were warned about complacency. They were instructed, as they had been before, that there never had existed, nor would there ever exist, a period of “ruinous tranquility”; “Under the regime of the Revolution there has always been struggle and as a result, development, reform, and steps forward.”<sup>66</sup> Struggle was the everlasting duty of workers if they wished to combat the injustices owners had historically inflicted upon them. Yet, the message from labor leadership down to the individual worker was to direct his ire at his employer, not the state. With the passage and implementation of the NLFT the state had proven itself an ally of the Mexican worker. Unionists were thus to battle owners by exercising the rights recently codified into law by government officials friendly to their cause.

The message emitted by organized labor’s leadership to its members stressed partnership and collaboration with the Mexican state. An analysis of official rhetoric in the immediate post-Tlatelolco period suggests that that feeling was shared by labor and

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<sup>64</sup> Editorial, “¡Una Embestida más! Mañosamente los Patrones Luchan por Derogar la Nueva Ley Laboral,” *Ceteme*, June 6, 1970, 1/8. Spanish reads: Los patrones han estado estudiando la Ley para violarla y ampararse por supuestos actos inconstitucionales que atribuyen a la Ley. Es natural que eso hagan. Esa ha sido su política de siempre; en esa forma actuaron cuando la Ley de 1931 y cuando hubo cambio el régimen de los salarios mínimos

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Spanish, in full, reads: Hemos dado por hecho que habremos de encontrar oposición de la parte patronal para la aplicación de la nueva Ley. Eso es lógico. Nada en esta vida se obtiene sin esfuerzo. La obligación del movimiento obrero, es luchar por la plena aplicación del nuevo Código Laboral.

<sup>66</sup> Editorial, “El PRI Respalda a los Trabajadores en su Petición de una Nueva Ley del Trabajo,” *Ceteme*, February 26, 1969, 4. Spanish reads: Bajo el régimen de la revolución siempre ha habido lucha y en consecuencia, desarrollo, reforma y pasos adelante.

party-state officials alike. In the coming years, government officials would notice that the climate of social hostility that characterized the 1960s would not abate quickly (a topic to be addressed in the next chapter.) Yet, the major source of social instability would never emanate from the organized labor sector, despite increased levels of labor militancy post-1970 (another topic subsequent chapters will cover.) This chapter narrates a story suggesting that although university students and other parts of the popular and professional sector of Mexican civil society voiced the loudest demands for rights and reforms, it was organized workers who benefited most directly from their efforts. After Tlatelolco, the Mexican party-state desired to restore the fabric of important social pacts that could solidify its standing. In this context, peace with the nation's militant university students was not a real priority. The size and scope of their cause was mitigated in the mainstream press and almost entirely ignored in union publications. And when dissent was reported upon, it was most often done so with 'foreign and 'seditious' brushstrokes. Few practical measures were taken by government officials to appease student agitators; they simply did not factor into the party-state's mission to rehabilitate the genetic strands of the postrevolutionary Mexican corpus.

Unionists, on the other hand, who had shown so little sympathy for the student cause while the nation's security forces worked to crush it, were essential to the task of restoring party-state legitimacy. To them, the government offered the New Federal Labor Law that went into effect on May 1, 1970. More was required, though. Nothing less a complete transformation in governing ideology was needed to convince organized labor that it was the government's priority after decades of neglect; nothing less than the complete restoration of the political economy of the Mexican Revolution would regain worker trust and loyalty. In 1970, an election year, the political airwaves were jammed with rhetoric that promised workers these things and more. The future looked bright for the cause of organized labor in Mexico in the post-Tlatelolco period.

## CHAPTER THREE

### COMBATING THE CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY

“The Mexican Revolution and the Constitution of 1917: Upward and Onward!”

Presidential candidate Luis Echeverría’s  
political slogan as expressed on October 21,  
1969

Cárdenas rests, clothed in the effusive sobs of Mexico, and by decree of the people [he lies] in the monument erected to the Revolution, in the heart that moves the Mexico of our days. Workers and peasants of the nation, forever united but indissoluble since Cárdenas, today we shed our tears in homage of revolutionary fraternity...His life – by thoughts and actions that promoted justice and independence in the nation – is an exemplary lesson for all Mexicans...<sup>1</sup>

Editorial in *Ceteme*, October 24, 1970.

Events occurring at Tlatelolco on October 2 finally severed the shroud of state infallibility in Mexican civil society. Due to the conflicting nature of reports produced by official and non-official sources, the facts of what occurred that day are difficult to ascertain. Speculating about the impact of those events on political society is similarly difficult, although the reformist character of the Echeverría candidacy launched barely one year later suggests that the student movement shaped the nation’s political discourse and forced the state to alter its methods of political conduct.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say, however, that the state’s tack of reform derived only from pressures exerted by student protests. It did not. Rather, political reform in the post-Tlatelolco period represented the Mexican state’s attempt to counter a much larger and deeper-seated threat to its authority emanating from other societal sectors. The government repression of the student movement fueled an already potentially incendiary situation, but as the previous chapter shows the seeds of Tlatelolco were planted well before the questions of university

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, “Lázaro Cárdenas: Una Lagrima, Un Impulso,” *Ceteme*, October 24, 1970, 1/5. Spanish reads: Arropado con el llanto de México, Cárdenas descansa, por decreto del pueblo, en el Monumento erigido a la Revolución, en el corazón que mueve al México de nuestros días. Obreros y campesinos de la Patria, unidos desde siempre, pero indisolublemente desde Cárdenas, vertemos hoy en su homenaje una lágrima de fraternidad revolucionaria...Su vida es una lección ejemplar para los mexicanos, con sus pensamientos y sus actos el país creció en justicia y en independencia.

<sup>2</sup> Arturo Gálvez, *La Industria Petrolera en México. Una Crónica. Tomo III. Crisis del Crecimiento y Expansión de Petróleos Mexicanos. (1970-1988)* Mexico City: Petróleos Mexicanos, 1988, 32.



autonomy and democratization first began to burn on Mexico's campuses. It is in this context that the Mexican state entrusted Luis Echeverría with combating the crisis of legitimacy that beset it.

### *LUIS ECHEVERRÍA AND THE CAMPAIGN OF THE REVOLUTION*

Luis Echeverría Álvarez was born on January 17, 1922 in Mexico City. Yet Echeverría was the product of a family with deeply entrenched Mexican roots extending the length of the Republic, from Sonora to Jalisco to Oaxaca. He was educated in public schools and in 1945 attained a law degree from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where he taught for a short stint. In 1946, he began his political career by joining the PRI. Loyal party service reaped rewards, enabling him to ascend to the post of chief of staff (Oficial Mayor) to the Minister of Public Education in 1954 and to obtain the same position in the PRI in 1957. In 1958, Echeverría was named by President Adolfo López Mateos as Undersecretary of Internal Affairs, a position he held until November 19, 1963 when he replaced Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, who left to campaign for president, at the top of the ministry.<sup>3</sup> Echeverría continued to serve as Minister of Internal Affairs in the Díaz Ordaz administration and held the post until assuming the presidency on December 1, 1970.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Echeverría followed conventional PRI channels to power. As Minister of Internal Affairs he occupied the most important cabinet position and most natural springboard to the presidency.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he was "tapped" by Díaz Ordaz in the manner traditional to presidential succession in postrevolutionary Mexico. But in spite of Echeverría's long record of federal service, he was a little known national figure when he began his pre-campaign for president on October 21, 1969. This is not to say that he was completely unknown; he attained infamy within certain circles for his participation in the government repression of the student movement of 1968 and was deemed by many to be

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<sup>3</sup> At the time, Mexico's Minister of Internal Affairs was charged with overseeing the domestic functions of government, including the electoral system, and preserving domestic security.

<sup>4</sup> Editorial, "Síntesis Biográfica del Hombre Revolucionario que Regirá el Destino de Nuestra Nación," *Ceteme*, October 25, 1969, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Four out of the five presidents holding office in the period 1946-1976 served as Minister of Internal Affairs in the cabinet of their predecessor. The exception was Adolfo López Mateos (president from 1958-1964) who served as Minister of Labor and Social Welfare in the administration of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines.

one of the public figures most culpable for the blood spilled at Tlatelolco.<sup>6</sup> Still, mainstream Mexican society had little exposure to Echeverría for he had never held a publically elected position. Because of his relative anonymity, Echeverría carried out a campaign that astonished observers as much for its vigor and determination to reach obscure and remote audiences as for the candidate's effort to distance himself from his predecessor's administration. As he tirelessly crisscrossed Mexican territory over a nine-month period in a manner reminiscent of the campaign Cárdenas had undertaken nearly four decades earlier, he referred to that former president on a daily basis and affirmed his resolve to change the direction of the nation over the next six years.<sup>7</sup>

The reformist character of the campaign represented the Mexican state's grudging acceptance of the nation's turbulent social climate and desire for change. Echeverría was reared in the midst of the supposed economic *Milagro* of the postwar period and was well aware of the shortcomings of the nation's development program. To him, society-wide unrest confirmed the contradictions inherent in the model that brought economic expansion, but to the inordinate benefit of the business sector and detriment of workers and peasants. The inequity in wealth and power distribution that accompanied national development was not lost on Echeverría nor the national leaders of the PRI, many of whom felt immense pressure upon them from state and regional worker, peasant, and popular and professional organizations. The PRI granted Echeverría the party's nomination with the tacit expectation that he would correct the nation's development model and resolve the gap in the distribution of revenue so prevalent in previous administrations.<sup>8</sup>

Newspaper coverage the following day roundly praised the PRI's selection of Echeverría. Reports claimed that widespread shows of celebration could be seen around

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<sup>6</sup> Oral accounts collected by Elena Poniatowska confirm that eyewitnesses personally blame Echeverría, along with President Díaz Ordaz, Mexico City Police Chief Luis Cueto Ramírez, and Minister of Defense Marcelino García Barragán, for the death of an estimated 325 youths at the hands of police and army personnel. See Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Cosío Villegas, *El estilo personal de gobernar* (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, S.A., 1974), 16. Echeverría did not break with the PRI traditions mandating him to laud previous governments; it was the regime that he praised (the distant Cárdenas era and not that of his immediate predecessor) that differentiated him from his forerunners.

<sup>8</sup> Gálvez, 33.

the country and that the nominee spent many of the following days receiving a train of well-wishers who went to his office to congratulate him in person. *El Universal* editor Antonio Lara Barragán wrote that owners concurred with the selection of Echeverría, evidenced by the numerous verbal statements given by leaders of the National Confederation of Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of Industrial Chambers, and other major business organizations expressing support for the nominee and confidence in his ability to confront the tasks that faced the nation.<sup>9</sup> Other *El Universal* staffmembers covered the events and did not hide their approval. Demetrio Bolanos Espinosa told that the forty-seven year old Echeverría, he of the “brilliant revolutionary career” and “strong political personality,” had so impressed the great majorities of the nation that they nominated him to the highest office.<sup>10</sup> José Rigoberto López described jubilation in the capital over the fact that for the first time a native son of the Federal District was on path to become president of the Republic.<sup>11</sup> Jorge Coca P. felt that Echeverría’s personal qualities inspired confidence in his ability to lead the nation. Echeverría had a pleasant character to complement a persistent nature. “As such,” he continued, “he appears like an old acquaintance that always has on the tip of his lips good advice and a smile.” The nation, he surmised, would be in good hands under his stewardship, for he was, after all, a family man who had raised eight children with his loving wife María Esther Zuno.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Elias Chávez reported that the overwhelming feeling amongst those he interviewed was that “He is the best,” although he could not help but note that some were concerned about “student problem” he would surely face.<sup>13</sup>

Echeverría was well aware that there were some who did not approve of his candidacy. From the start, he tailored his campaign to meet these challenges. To contemporary observers, his early campaign rhetoric signaled a drastic change in the direction of government policies. When speaking to the international press corps for the

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<sup>9</sup> Antonio Lara Barragán, “Según Industriales, Comerciantes y Artesanos, se ha Logrado un Acierto,” *El Universal*, October 23, 1969, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Demetrio Bolaños Espinosa, “Echeverría, Precandidato. Simultáneamente Manifestaron Ayer su Decisión los Tres Sectores del P.R.I.,” *El Universal*, October 22, 1969, 1.

<sup>11</sup> José Rigoberto López, “Apoyos de los Estados,” *El Universal*, October 22, 1969, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Jorge Coca P., “Datos Biográficos,” *El Universal*, 17. Spanish reads: Así, resulta ser siempre un viejo conocido quien también tiene siempre a flor de labios un consejo y una sonrisa.

<sup>13</sup> Elias Chávez, “La Opinión del Pueblo,” *El Universal*, October 22, 1969, 1.

first time as a candidate on October 21, 1969, Echeverría was asked to define his political position. His answer was concise: *La Revolución Mexicana y la Constitución de 1917: ¡Arriba y Adelante!* – “The Mexican Revolution and the Constitution of 1917: Upward and Onward!”<sup>14</sup>

Echeverría thus inaugurated his campaign by referencing one of the two major tenets that would become hallmarks of his administration: an intention to restore the primacy of the Mexican Revolution and the Constitution of 1917 in government. Before continuing, though, the second tenet that defined Echeverría’s campaign rhetoric called *tercermundismo*, or “third-worldism,” deserves some attention. Echeverría’s commitment to *tercermundismo* may be best understood as a populist strategy designed and employed to broaden his base of support and legitimize his presidency. Echeverría consolidated the “third-worldist” and anti-imperialist sentiments he first uttered on the campaign trail in the Letter of the Rights and Economic Obligations of States, which he formulated in 1971 and unveiled at the Third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, convened in Santiago, Chile in December of 1972. The manifesto, thereafter known as the Echeverría Letter, declared the inviolability of various principles including: a. the right of nations to choose a political system; b. the sovereignty of each nation over its natural resources and the right to nationalize and determine fair compensation; c. the right of nations to regulate foreign investment and the operation of multinationals; and d. the right of underdeveloped nations to receive preferential treatment from developed nations.<sup>15</sup> The rest of the letter consisted of fairly vacuous language about peace, culture, and amicable relations amongst states, but its main points were potent. It had wide appeal and matched the dominant discourse of third-world advocates who challenged economic domination in a post-colonial world.

The Echeverría Letter put the Mexican president on the world’s human rights and development radars. It also won him support at home and particularly from sectors of

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<sup>14</sup> Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (hereafter DGIPS), Fondo Secretaría de Gobernación (hereafter SG), Box 867, Folder 1, Volume 1, “Índice Cronológico de Discursos, Alocuciones y Entrevistas. Precampaña Presidencial de Luis Echeverría Álvarez, 21 Oct-15 Nov 1969, Discurso Ante los Corresponsales Extranjeros, 21 October,” 1.

<sup>15</sup> Editorial, “Rockefeller en América Latina. Echeverría: Portavoz del Fascismo ‘Anti-Imperialista’,” *Nueva Solidaridad*, July 24, 1974, 2-3.

Mexican civil society that contended that their own subjugation was partly the product of state apathy. The success of this tactic was nominal, however, as it appealed to only a small minority of professional groups, typically those with established leftist tendencies. The most significant adherents of echeverrista tercermundismo were not workers per se, but rather the nation's teachers, part of the popular and professional sector and organized primarily into the National Education Workers' Union. Echeverría acted to build his leftist credentials with teachers by overseeing sweeping reforms to the national education system. Even public textbooks were revised positioning Argentine-born communist Ernesto "Che" Guevara at the center of Mexican history – a measure that provoked the wrath of the Catholic Church and private industry.<sup>16</sup>

Echeverría's third-worldist advocacy had some limited appeal for voters. A much more fruitful immediate political strategy was the candidate's spoken commitment to restoring the political economy of the Mexican Revolution. In his first speech as pre-candidate, Echeverría addressed an organization steeped in revolutionary memory and historical significance – the National Peasants' Confederation. Speaking before the delegation, Echeverría asserted that the first stage of agrarian reform had been realized; the redistributive phase of the Revolution was complete and peasants had attained land.<sup>17</sup> The current task, he stressed, was to implement a second stage of agrarian reform: the exportation of production.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the campaign, Echeverría excited peasants with rhetoric that echoed their sacred mantras and paid homage to their heroes. In

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<sup>16</sup> José Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana 2: La Vida en México de 1970 a 1982* (Mexico City: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, 1992). The fervency of teacher support for tercermundismo endured across Echeverría's term in office and was visible when the National Education Workers' Union convened the First International Congress of Third World Educators from August 5-8, 1975 in Acapulco. There, delegates echoed the president's tercermundista rhetoric while affirming their resolve to educate third-world children to fight imperialist exploitation, celebrate their national cultures, and end the cycle of dependence in their home countries. In a written communiqué to the teachers, Echeverría sent a firm exhortation to the delegation, demanding that it continue to wage a daily struggle to construct a better future for the three-quarters of humanity that inhabited the developing world. Not surprisingly, given the low priority teachers commanded on the party-state's agenda, Echeverría did not attend the congress in person. [See AGN, Luis Echeverría Álvarez (hereafter LEA), Secretaría de Patrimonia Nacional (hereafter SPN), Box 916, Folder, "Primer Congreso Internacional de Educadores del Tercer Mundo, 5-8 Ago. 1975", documents: "En Cuanto a la Protección e Incremento del Patrimonio Cultural"; "Mensaje Telefonico del Presidente de Mexico, Lic. Luis Echeverría Álvarez desde Alejandria, Egipto a los Delegados Asistentes al Primer Congreso Internacional de Educadores del Tercer Mundo".]

<sup>17</sup> AGN, DGIPS, SG, Box 867, Folder 1, Volume 1, "Índice Cronológico de Discursos, Alocuciones y Entrevistas. Precampaña Presidencial de Luis Echeverría Álvarez, 21 Oct-15 Nov, 1969," 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Anenecuilco, Morelos, birthplace of Emiliano Zapata, Echeverría tailored his message accordingly. He stated that there, in the home of the social crusade for the oppressed campesino class, his revolutionary convictions were confirmed.<sup>19</sup> The *campesinos* of Morelos had ignited the struggle that enshrined in Mexican society the hallowed principle that the land belonged to those who worked it. They were the true protagonists of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>20</sup>

By preaching the primacy of agrarian issues and reiterating that the principal debt of the Mexican state was to the peasants of the nation, Echeverría gained widespread support from the official agrarian sector. This support would prove crucial early in his presidency, and most peasant unions supported the passage of the Federal Agrarian Reform Law in April 1971. Echeverría's stance that it was necessary to re-establish the centrality of revolutionary ideology in a state system that had strayed from its principles had appeal beyond the agrarian sector. In his effort to reconnect with the ideology of Cárdenas, Echeverría made bold and symbolic overtures to workers as well as peasants. When speaking before miners and railway workers, Echeverría customized his message, often remarking that their predecessors at Nacozari and elsewhere were the original perpetrators of change.<sup>21</sup> Speaking to members of the Mexican Railroad Workers' Union, one of the nation's most powerful labor organizations, Echeverría declared the Mexican Revolution was fought on rails and railway workers contributed to the greatest and most

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<sup>19</sup> AGN, DGIPS, SG, Box 862, Folder 5, Volume 32, "Índice Cronológico de Discursos, Alocuciones y Entrevistas. Campaña Presidencial de Luis Echeverría Álvarez, Morelos, 4-9 Junio, 1970," 79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 80. The near consensus of union support for Echeverría's agrarian policy is apparent in the documentation of the Permanent Agrarian Congress, an organization founded on October 19, 1973 and composed of representatives from groups including the National Peasants' Confederation (CNC,) the Independent Peasant Organization, and the Mexican Agrarian Council, among others. Nevertheless, this support did not mask the reality of widespread discontent on the nation's *ejidos* (village communal lands,) a topic referenced briefly in footnote 61 of this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Echeverría's mention of Nacozari surely pleased both miners and railway workers, as it referred to the city of Nacozari de García, an important copper mining area in Sonora from the prerevolutionary period to the present, and paid homage to the heroic act of Jesús García Corona, the Mexican railroad engineer who was killed on November 7, 1907 when he prevented a train that had caught fire and was loaded with dynamite from exploding in the village of Placeritos de Nacozari. Legend has it that García was relaxing while he noticed that hay on the top of the roof a train car containing dynamite had caught fire. Fearing for the lives of workers and townspeople, García drove the train six kilometers out of town before the dynamite exploded, killing himself and twelve other railwaymen and bystanders, but sparing the population of the town. García's heroic act led the townspeople to rename the town in his honor, calling it Nacozari de García, and today numerous streets, plazas, stadiums, community centers, and other public places all across Mexico bear his name.

significant phases of the Revolution. As such, the Mexican state owed them an historical debt and would continue to work intensely “for the rehabilitation of the system and the betterment of its workers.”<sup>22</sup>

The theme of compensating workers for their historical role in Mexico’s development was referenced ad nauseum throughout the campaign. Before trade unions, Echeverría emphasized the need to restore social justice in the productive process, a message that incorporated organized labor’s long-favored watchwords of equilibrium, harmony, and balance. Echeverría’s social justice mandate derived directly from organized labor’s rhetoric, which had issued such a call long before the candidate took to the campaign trail in October 1969. Opinions expressed in labor literature of the 1960s confirmed a growing recognition amongst workers that the fruits of the Mexican Miracle were becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. In February 1969, the editors of *Ceteme* lamented that although Mexico’s commitment to social justice was as old as independence, evidenced by the “call of Morelos” a century and a half earlier, owners continued to prevent the implanting of a true regime of social justice.<sup>23</sup> In their view, owners clung to a posture still ingrained in the old circle of exploitation that circumscribed the Mexican worker. They pointed out that for as long as it had existed, the CTM had been fundamental in the nation’s economic development process. And although its members never renounced their legitimate rights as workers, they had been respectful of the limitations that a process of development poses. Owners, on the other hand, had not, but instead had seized every opportunity to upset the harmonious balance between the forces of production that was the basis of social justice.

Echeverría’s strong rhetoric about re-establishing balance in the production process pleased organized labor. A huge headline in the October 25, 1969 issue of *Ceteme* announced: “Luis Echeverría A. Candidate of the Cetemista Workers.” There it was reported that Echeverría was designated pre-candidate for president at the Assembly

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<sup>22</sup> AGN, DGIPS, SG, Box 867, Folder 1, Volume 1, “Ante una comisión del Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la Republica Mexicana, 22 Oct,” 12. For more examples of campaign rhetoric ascribing trade unions with revolutionary significance, see AGN, DGIPS, SG, Box 862, Folder 5, Volume 32, “Indice Cronologico de Discursos, Alocuciones y Entrevistas. Campaña Presidencial de Luis Echeverría Alvarez, Morelos, 21 Oct-15 Nov 1969.”

<sup>23</sup> Editorial, “Moderar la Opulencia y la Indigencia,” *Ceteme*, February 8, 1969, 1.

of the PRI National Council held on October 22, and editors confidently predicted that the PRI – “Our Party” – would officially nominate him to the presidency in full concordance with the three sectors: worker, peasant, and popular/professional.<sup>24</sup> Supplementary articles claimed that “true satisfaction” was inspired in the Mexican proletariat by the decision of CTM leaders to endorse Echeverría and dedicate the workers’ movement to ensuring his election. Speaking on behalf of workers, Fidel Velázquez cited a “spotless patriotism” in the candidate complementing his revolutionary core, strong personality, absolute commitment to defending the well-being of the nation, and above all, a close connection to the workers of whose problems he understood and to whom he had delivered himself to the task of forging a Mexico forever ascendant and better.<sup>25</sup>

CTM support for Echeverría was not unconditional, but enthusiasm for the candidate seemed genuine. To Velázquez, Echeverría’s revolutionary credentials were confirmed in a meeting he hosted, attended by the Coordinating Council of the Congress of Labor, the nation’s umbrella workers’ organization of which the CTM was part. There, the candidate spoke to the brass of organized labor and reiterated his position that the upward march of the Mexican workers’ movement could not be detained, nor could the advancement of new agreements governing relations between capital and labor be halted. This was a pledge Echeverría wanted to stress in the event he arrived at the presidency. Satisfied, Velázquez did not delay in formally declaring CTM and Congress of Labor support for Echeverría in a stirring speech laden with historical symbolism and revolutionary rhetoric. Labor’s “Boss of bosses” then promised that the workers’ movement would fight vigorously to ensure Echeverría’s election, which he deemed a

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<sup>24</sup>See Editorials: “Luis Echeverría A. Candidato de los Trabajadores Cetemistas” and “Nuestro Partido, Postulará a la Presidencia de la República al Lic. Luis Echeverría Alvarez” in *Ceteme*, October 25, 1969. The de facto practice of presidential succession at this time meant that the outcome of the nomination process was not in doubt. Assurance that the delegation at the national convention would vote to nominate Echeverría was further solidified by the fact that over one-fifth of the 5,000 plus delegates in attendance, representing all three major sectors, were CTM members.

<sup>25</sup> Editorial, “Con los Obreros a la Vanguardia Nuestro Candidato Confía en el Desarrollo Económico-Social del País,” *Ceteme*, October 25, 1969, 16. Passage is drawn from words of Velázquez, original Spanish reads: acendrado patriotismo...las altas dotes de revolucionario íntegro, su recia personalidad, su entrega absoluta al trabajo en bien de los intereses de la nación y sobre todo, su estrecha convivencia con los trabajadores de los cuales conoce sus problemas y a la vez también su entrega al trabajo por la forja de un México siempre adelante y mejor...



certainty, for he was “a candidate not only of the revolutionary sectors, but of the people in general...”<sup>26</sup>

The nation’s primary labor organizations heaped unanimous support on Echeverría during the period of his precandidacy. In an editorial entitled “Luis Echeverría, el Hombre,” *Ceteme* editorialists opined that: “With *Licenciado* Luis Echeverría, the CTM renews its pact with the Revolution, a pact that it fundamentally tries to advance more quickly and more extensively, so that it culminates the unrealized goals and accelerates social justice...” Echeverría, they elaborated, was a man of firm convictions, a man who would not diverge from the supreme duties assigned to each Mexican. He was a man to “decisively and bravely bear the standard of the holy cause of the Revolution.” He was capable of carrying out its postulates and widening the reach of the Revolution through concrete works, something they concluded that was desperately needed in a crucial hour for Mexico.<sup>27</sup>

The same issue of *Ceteme* also demonstrated political backing for Echeverría from the Congress of Labor, over which Velázquez then also presided. In a full-page advertisement addressed “To the Working Class, the People of Mexico, and the National Committee of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional,” Congress of Labor scribes presented a history of the workers’ movement in Mexico that positioned Díaz Ordaz, who then oversaw the process of amending the Federal Labor Law of 1931, at the culmination of a glorious narrative celebrating the deeds of “the intrepid warriors” that fought against the Porfirian reaction, the House of the World Worker, and the “patriot” Venustiano Carranza.<sup>28</sup> In such a heroic narrative, they concluded, only a man with revolutionary credentials as firmly established as Echeverría’s had the clear and decisive manner

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<sup>26</sup> Editorial, “‘Unidos con Nuestro Partido y con Ud. México Continuará Adelante’...F.V,” *Ceteme*, October 25, 1969, 4. Velázquez was widely referred to as the “Boss of bosses,” a moniker which simultaneously conveyed respect and contempt for the power and influence of the long-time leader.

<sup>27</sup> Editorial, “Echeverría, El Hombre,” *Ceteme*, October 25, 1969, 4. Spanish reads: Con el Lic. Luis Echeverría, la CTM renueva su pacto con la Revolución, pacto que propone fundamentalmente a hacerla avanzar más de prisa y hacía adelante, para que culmine las metas inconclusas y acelere la justicia social...;...a él, abanderar con decisión y valentía la santa causa de la Revolución, concretando en hechos objetivos sus postulados y ampliando sus alcances, ya que tan importante es el programa, como el hombre que lo interpreta fielmente y lo ejecuta...

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

necessary to bring about the socially just processes of reform that the working class demanded and the people required.<sup>29</sup>

The ringing endorsement given Echeverría by the pillars of the organized workers' movement indicated a desire to restore the fabric of collaborationism that had formerly characterized the relationship between workers and the state but had waned somewhat in recent times. Echeverría's campaign rhetoric demonstrated that the desire was mutual and that the PRI and Mexican state recognized the importance of reconstituting goodwill with organized labor. On October 26, Echeverría addressed a raucous assembly of workers gathered for the VIII General Congress of the Federal District Workers' Federation. Flanked by Velázquez and the union's Secretary General Jesús Yurén Aguilar, Echeverría spoke to the crowd of over one-half million that filled the Felipe Carrillo Puerto Auditorium and spilled into the nearby Plaza de la República. First, he referenced the recent attempt to explode dynamite on the steps of CTM headquarters: "I felt it as if it had been on the doors of my home." He then sought to clarify his labor credentials. He admitted he was not "of pure worker extraction" nor did he have a long "political life" (experience in elected office). Nonetheless, he claimed to harbor a deep personal connection to workers developed over twenty-four years of following in the footsteps of his hosts Velázquez and Yurén in their struggles for the workers' rights. Echeverría concluded by declaring his revolutionary resolve. The fundamentals of the Constitution of 1917, he maintained, were still valid, and he ended his speech with a promise to continue the perpetual fight of the "Old Constituents of 1917" for the wellbeing and progress of the Mexican worker.<sup>30</sup>

Addressing worker, peasant, and popular and professional unions had long been the meat and potatoes of politicking in Mexico. Echeverría continued and expanded this tradition by working exhaustively to win syndical support prior to receiving the party's nomination. Over the course of barely three weeks, from October 21 to November 13,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Widespread syndical support for the nomination of Echeverría appears via the half- and quarter-page advertisements featured in the October 25, 1969 edition of *Ceteme* and placed by various unions comprising irrigation, road, construction, meat, public sector, cinematographic, liquor, sugar, and petroleum workers.

<sup>30</sup> Editorial, "Cumpliré lo que Ofrezco: Apasionada Fe Obrerista Manifestó LEA en el VIII Congreso FTDF-CTM," *Ceteme*, November 1, 1969, 5. Spanish reads: El atentado dinamitero que estalló a las puertas de la CTM lo sentí como si hubiese sido en las puertas de mi casa.

1969, Echeverría made the rounds of society's three major sectors: meeting with unionized peasants in Morelos, Puebla, and the Federal District; with popular and professional groups, including the nation's umbrella organization, the National Confederation of Popular Organizations, the National Charro Federation, students, university faculty and other intellectuals, federal senators, teachers, state employees, taxi drivers, and economists; and most notably with an impressive array of labor organizations including the CTM, the Revolutionary Workers Confederation, the Mexican Railroad Workers' Union, The Mexican Petroleum Workers' Union, the Puebla State Workers' Federation, workers of the Refinería 18 de Marzo, and others. No faction of civil society was deemed too insignificant; Echeverría spoke to groups outside the traditional sectoral framework including Mexican citizens residing in the United States, working-class urban neighborhood associations, members of the Mexican Legion of Honor, the National Matadors' Union, the Nisei Association of Mexico, and members of the national soccer team, no doubt in anticipation of the 1970 World Cup scheduled for the following June and hosted by Mexico.

Upon accepting the nomination on November 15, 1969, Echeverría spoke before the members of the PRI's National Executive Committee and repeated the message he perfected in union halls. He assured party leaders that he was committed to adjusting the priorities of the Mexican state and altering the course of national economic development. He admitted that the Mexican Miracle was flawed and that the macroeconomic benefits of development were negated by socio-economic inequality. He then looked back historically. He noted that in the prerevolutionary period there existed a misery without limits for most Mexicans. Yet, considering how much the Revolution achieved, he concluded that there was no reason that poverty should persist. To remedy the situation, Echeverría counseled that now was the time to build a more just structure on the Revolution's broad foundations. The task, although not easy, could be achieved by calling on capitalists to be "nationalist businessmen with a social vision." Those that refused this call and lacked a clear idea of their social responsibility, he contended, were not true men of business. As for foreign investment, it would continue, but capitalists

would now have a mandate to respect the laws and customs of Mexico by reinvesting their profits into new fields of domestic production.<sup>31</sup>

With these words, Echeverría made official his reformist call for social justice and renewed nationalism. The following day, November 16, 1969, he officially launched the “Campaign of the Revolution” with the full weight of the party and official sectors behind him. Beginning in Querétaro, the campaign endorsed the continuity of the Revolution, as embodied by the ruling regime and official party, while simultaneously arguing for the necessity of reform. Development would continue but the direction of industrialization would follow a more socially responsible policy. The Mexican state would also reorient its strategy of financing development; new sources of foreign capital would still be sought but the goal was to move toward eventual self-financing. By promising reform of the nation’s development policies, Echeverría appealed to the most symbolic sectors of Mexican civil society, namely peasants and workers. Their centrality to the campaign focus was evident from its rhetoric, which promised a new stage of agrarian reform for peasants – one that would usher in the exportation of production via new partnerships between agriculture and industry – and housing, social security, and other benefits for workers.

Similarly, the campaign conciliated other sectors of the populace including those sympathetic to the student and youth movements. In this vein, Echeverría called for a moment of silence at the Universidad Nicolaita de Michoacán to honor those killed at Tlatelolco. This gesture enraged not only students, many of whom blamed Echeverría for the massacre, but also members of the military establishment, especially General Marcelino García Barragán, then Minister of Defense, who expressed the discontent of the army to President Díaz Ordaz. From that point on, each subsequent moment of silence called for by Echeverría was prefaced with the disclaimer that it honored killed military personnel as well as students.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gálvez, 24-25. The cited quotations come directly from Echeverría’s acceptance speech of November 15, 1969. Full text of speech found in: Luis Echeverría Alvarez, “Protesto como candidato del PRI a la presidencia de la República,” in *Pensamiento y doctrina*, Vol. 4, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Mexico City: Partido Revolucionario Institucional, 1970).

<sup>32</sup> Fernando de Garay, Alberto Márquez Salazar, and Mariana Vega, *PNR, PRM, PRI: Esbozo Histórico* (Mexico City: Biblioteca Fundación Nacional Colosio, 2003), 174-175.

Thus, the 1970 presidential election represented the joint effort of the PRI and the Mexican state to expand the big-tent of political representation and to break decisively with the past. The new Mexican state Echeverría promised would be reform-minded though it would pursue development in a postrevolutionary context. The planned ubiquity of the Revolution in post-Tlatelolco state's operations was heard in rhetoric made during a campaign swing through Nuevo León in April of 1970. There, in Monterrey – the epicenter of northern Mexican industry – Echeverría paid homage to the state's industrious citizens whom he praised for having constructed a prosperous society with their own talent and own hands, though he also ascribed the progress of modern Nuevo León to the Revolution and the work of the people as a whole.<sup>33</sup> Rhetoric of this type underscored a central message of the campaign: that each citizen, as an inheritor of the Revolution, had a moral and patriotic responsibility to contribute to the nation's economic development and correct its social ills. Much work needed to be done, and citizens were counseled that it would be necessary to maintain the harmonious cooperation of all the nation's sectors while the social movements that had enabled prosperity and political stability before were reinvigorated.

Facilitating this process meant that some Mexicans would have to make sacrifices for the common good. This message was directed squarely at the business sector of Nuevo León, and particularly the business owners that formed the renowned Grupo Monterrey that challenged Mexican state hegemony over industrial policy in the age of Cárdenas and periodically in the post-1940 period. When addressing this bastion of private sector power in Mexico, Echeverría remained on point. He stated that modern private enterprise in Mexico was borne of the Revolution and was hence subject to its social mandate. It was the Revolution that “cancelled our feudal past, salvaged our natural resources, and put in motion the productive forces that established and firmly maintained the favorable conditions and ample guarantees for investment.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it was not inappropriate to require its primary beneficiaries to share its rewards. Unbridled profits and the unequal distribution of wealth via the absence of profit sharing were

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<sup>33</sup> AGN, DGIPS, SG, Box 862, Folder 1, Volume 23, “Indice Cronologico de Discursos, Alocuciones y Entrevistas. Campaña Presidencial de Luis Echeverría Alvarez, Nuevo Leon, 12-17 Abril, 1970,” 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

anachronistic to the causes of national and social development. The candidate promised that should he have the honor of being president, his administration would rectify the situation by proceeding with the strictest adherence to the revolutionary morale which stressed the common good and pursuit of social justice.<sup>35</sup>

Echeverría's call for sacrifice posed a direct threat to the business sector but endeared him to organized labor – both leadership and rank and file. Still, worker cynicism emanating from decades of government neglect was pervasive. Worker discontent was a factor CTM leadership recognized and worked to combat. In the days prior to the election of July 5, 1970, CTM leaders exhorted members to turn out in support of Echeverría. At a breakfast hosted by the Congress of Labor, Velázquez addressed the delegates and members of the press in attendance with a message of confidence:

The Mexican workers will respond at the voting booth and with political support to the call made by our candidate, Licenciado Luis Echeverría Álvarez. As always, the Mexican worker accepts the responsibility that is afforded him in the revolutionary process of the country. Not a single Mexican worker will refuse the call to unity and action made by Luis Echeverría Álvarez, candidate to the Presidency of the Republic.<sup>36</sup>

Echeverría issued a similar call to civic duty in a television spot aired on election eve. In a message full of optimism, he argued that political abstentionism weakened the force of the citizenry and halted the progress of the nation. “There is neither liberty nor progress,” said Echeverría, “without the integration and direction of the majority.” Nothing was worse than apathy, he felt, concluding that he preferred one voted against him than not at all.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Editorial, “Mañana: Fiesta Cívica del Pueblo. Los Mexicanos Votaremos en Favor de los Candidatos del P.R.I. por ser Garantes de los Ideales de la Revolución Mexicana. En las Urnas Arrasaremos a la Reacción y a sus Candidatos,” *Ceteme*, July 4, 1970, 2. Spanish reads: En las urnas y con la acción laboral, responderemos los trabajadores mexicanos al llamado hecho por nuestro candidato, licenciado Luis Echeverría Álvarez. Como siempre, el trabajador mexicano acepta la responsabilidad que le corresponde en el proceso revolucionario del país. Ni un solo trabajador mexicano rehuiré el llamado a la unidad y a la acción hecho por el Lic LEA, candidato a la Presidencia de la República.

<sup>37</sup> Editorial, “La Abstención Política Debilita la Fuerza Ciudadana y Frena el Progreso del País,” *Ceteme*, July 4, 1970, 1-2. Spanish reads: Sin la vinculación y la orientación de la mayoría no hay libertad ni progreso.

But in spite of the unified refrain issued by organized labor and the government, Mexicans opted not to vote in the 1970 presidential election in record numbers. To Echeverría, whose electoral victory was never realistically in doubt, this turn of events must have been distressing. Certainly the candidate was aware the regime had opponents, though he may have underestimated the extent of popular cynicism toward the political process. The modern Mexican state as illegitimate and anti-patriotic was a sentiment frequently expressed in dissident literature of the period. An article run in the anti-establishment magazine *Por Qué?* on the eve of the election expressed these feelings quite concisely.<sup>38</sup> Titled “Why it is Useless to Vote,” the article offered poignant reasons for Mexicans to abstain from casting a ballot that weekend. According to author Carlos Arreguín, voting was useless because national elections were farcical pageants designed to convince foreign powers that the crimes perpetrated in Mexico were committed by legitimately-elected authorities.”<sup>39</sup> One could deny the government bureaucracy legality by abstaining and thus impeding “new ‘tlatelolcos’, new robberies of the country, new repressions and new jailings.”<sup>40</sup>

Opposition to the regime, although intense, was not strong enough to derail the PRI machine. Echeverría emerged victorious – and with ease. He defeated his rival Efraín González Morfín of the National Action Party by a margin of better than six to one.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Por Qué? Revista Independiente* was published weekly and sold at the low cost of two and a half pesos (roughly three times the cost of a metro ticket) in order to maximize its availability to the popular classes. The magazine proved itself to be a formidable political player during the period under review and it often saw its runs looted or its staff members assaulted by state partisans. For this reason, many of its contributors wrote using pseudonyms, some notable exceptions being Demetrio Vallejo, Federico Emery U., and Mario Menéndez Rodríguez, each of whom wrote articles from their prison cells in Lecumberri Federal Penitentiary. Menéndez, who was jailed in 1970 for being editor of the controversial magazine, continued to edit *Por Qué?* while imprisoned. The tone of the magazine was, without exception, critical of the regime and its articles were devoted to exposing corruption, accusing public officials of wrongdoing, calling for the release of political prisoners, criticizing the presence of foreign business power and monopolies in Mexico, alleging outside and particularly CIA influence in Mexican foreign relations, challenging the independence of the mainstream Mexican press, ridiculing the electoral system, and bringing attention to pressing social issues of the day including the repression of civil rights, demographic explosion, inflation, and hunger in Mexico. *Por Qué?* was also committed to exposing the unlawful interconnectedness between the state and allied labor unions.

<sup>39</sup> Carlos Arreguín, “Porqué es inútil Votar,” *Por Qué?*, July 2, 1970, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. “...estamos impidiendo nuevos ‘tlatelolcos’; nuevos robos al país, nuevas represiones y encacelamientos.”

<sup>41</sup> de Garay et al., 176. Presidential endorsements from the leftist PPS and conservative, military bastion of the PARM were not new for PRI candidates. Díaz Ordaz carried the banner of both parties while running for office in 1963-1964. Officially, Echeverría garnered 11,970,893 votes to González Morfín’s 1,945,070.

But while it is true that the election demonstrated the continued electoral force of the PRI whose candidate also captured the nominations of diverse groups including the Popular Socialist Party and Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution, continued hegemony over the nation's political system was not the only goal of the Campaign of 1970. The Campaign of the Revolution had a more ambitious agenda: to restore the state's ideological sway over the populace. By actively promoting a reformist message that emphasized the centrality of the ideology of the Mexican Revolution in modern life, the state and PRI hoped to appeal to vast segments of the masses that clung to the legacies of Madero, Carranza, Zapata, and Cárdenas. In the opinion of many workers, peasants, teachers, students, and others, the modern Mexican state had diverged from the principles of the Revolution and its heroes. This position was shared by the party's current standard bearer, Echeverría, who in spite of his claims to the contrary succeeded to convince that few that the return of revolutionary ideology was imminent. Widespread voter apathy in the election of July 5, 1970, confirmed the great disenchantment amongst the masses toward government and indicated to the state that its mission to reestablish itself as legitimate heir to the legacy of the Mexican Revolution remained incomplete. It was in this context that the death of the last hero of the Mexican Revolution, Lázaro Cárdenas, on October 19, 1970 presented a golden opportunity for the Mexican party-state to stride towards its objective.

#### *THE DEATH OF LÁZARO CÁRDENAS AND THE MYTH OF THE REVOLUTION*<sup>43</sup>

The death of Cárdenas precipitated a national outpouring of emotion. Thousands of citizens participated in the events honoring the fallen president that culminated on Wednesday, October 21, a national day of mourning, when 50,000 people gathered to bury his remains beneath the south-east column of the Monument to the Revolution in the Plaza de la República, Mexico City. There, he joined presidents Francisco Madero, Venustiano Carranza and Plutarco Elías Calles in both literal and figurative containment. The official management of the Cárdenas funeral reveals the Gustavo Díaz Ordaz

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<sup>43</sup> Analysis of the funeral of Lázaro Cárdenas is adapted directly from Amelia M. Kiddle and Joseph U. Lenti, "Co-opting Cardenismo: Luis Echeverría and the Funeral of Lázaro Cárdenas," in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, eds. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 174-189.



government's desire to control the ways in which his memory could be used by promoting the idea of the revolutionary family and the linear progression of the Revolution. It also signaled to incoming President-elect Luis Echeverría Álvarez the strength of the populist alliance Cárdenas had been able to construct during his period in office. At the time of his death, Cárdenas retained the allegiance of broad sectors of the population, and Echeverría saw that by appealing to the traditional supporters of *cardenismo* he might be able to attract a similar base of support.<sup>44</sup>

The loss of Cárdenas was an emotional blow many in the nation felt personally. *Ceteme* conveyed the emotion of the union member simply: "The Nation in Mourning."<sup>45</sup> Based on the historical role Cárdenas played in furthering the cause of organized labor in Mexico, workers' despondence was understandable. Messages of condolences from unions around the country poured in and filled the pages of newspapers in the weeks following his death. *Ceteme* published several eulogies summarizing the impact of Cárdenas on the nation's workers. One recalled that it was Cárdenas's support for labor that enabled the birth of the CTM in February of 1936.<sup>46</sup> Equally important, they added, was the intrepid defiance he showed toward the business sector while in office. This attitude was best exemplified in his decision to seize possession of foreign petroleum assets on March 18, 1938. Editors reminisced that he, "...serene, but determined, expropriated for Mexico the petroleum during a period when there was fear of confronting the power of foreign monopolies and enormous economic pressure from abroad." Cárdenas did it, they exclaimed, and in the process he achieved the economic independence that produced the industrialized Mexico of today and tomorrow.<sup>47</sup>

The official positions of labor as conveyed in *Ceteme* did not belie the profound sense of loss felt by the average union worker, many thousands of whom journeyed to the Plaza de la República to pay their respects. The death of Cárdenas, the symbolic father figure of the masses of workers and peasants, caused great sadness but also presented the

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<sup>44</sup> Cardenismo as a political framework is defined in Chapter One of this study.

<sup>45</sup> Editorial, "La Patria de Luto," *Ceteme*, October 24, 1970, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Editorial, "Lázaro Cárdenas: Una Lagrima, Un Impulso," *Ceteme*, October 24, 1970, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Por ultimo, sereno, pero decidido, expropia para México el petróleo, en una época en la que era temerario enfrentarse al poder de los monopolios extranjeros y a la enorme presión económica internacional. Cárdenas lo hizo, y el México industrializado de hoy, que consolida a partir de entonces su independencia económica, se lo agradece en nombre del presente y del porvenir.

Mexican state and Echeverría an opportunity to mobilize the former president's supporters. In an editorial that appeared in *Excélsior*, Froylan M. López Navarez pointed out that the death of a leader did not necessarily mean the death of a cause.<sup>48</sup> In his comments to reporters on the night of Cárdenas's death, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, President of the PRI, called on all sectors of society to keep the memory of Cárdenas alive by continuing the progressive march of the Revolution.<sup>49</sup> He offered a justification of the administration's policies as the linear progression from, and inheritor of, cardenismo. The stance adopted by Echeverría when he was a candidate emphasized the importance of continuing cardenismo, but also stressed that it was necessary to re-establish the centrality of ideology in a state system that had strayed from its principles.

Various aspects of the ceremonies organized by the government reveal its efforts to comfort distraught cardenistas and demonstrate its revolutionary credentials and legitimacy to the masses. The photos that show Cárdenas's coffin surrounded by former presidents reinforced his place in the revolutionary family, and those that pictured Díaz Ordáz and Echeverría flanking the coffin symbolically expressed their desire to show the legitimacy of the progression of leadership in the PRI's one-party system. Other elements of the state funeral were also didactic. In recognition of the significance the nationalization of the oil industry had for the country, the first honor guard to stand at attention beside Cárdenas's coffin comprised members of the Mexican Petroleum Workers' Union. While Cárdenas's body was being embalmed on the night of October 19, the members of the union executive who had arrived at the Cárdenas residence to pay their respects asked that they be permitted the honor of performing this first guard when the body returned to the home. Bearing the organization's standard, they stood silently beside the coffin of the president whose decision to nationalize the oil industry remained, in the eyes of the people, a symbol of the pursuit of sovereignty and social justice. Meaningful not only to oil workers, the relevance of the expropriation transcended social categories; a middle-class woman waiting in line to pay her respects at the Chamber of

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<sup>48</sup> Froylan M. López Navarez "Los Dolientes," *Excélsior*, October 21, 1970, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Martínez Domínguez's comments appear in *Excélsior*, October 20, 1970, 14 and *El Universal*, October 20, 1970, 14.

Deputies recalled that she had given her jewelry to the government in 1938 to help pay for the indemnification of foreign oil companies.<sup>50</sup>

In both words and actions, there was no mistaking the fact that Echeverría wanted to channel the memory of a unifying political figure to help mend a fractured nation. Once in office, Echeverría continued the practice he had begun while campaigning and referenced the national hero Cárdenas on a near-daily basis. Echeverría adopted Cárdenas as a model from the beginning of his presidency, always attempting to emulate the common touch his predecessor enjoyed with the masses. In order to confirm his nationalism, Echeverría ordered Mexican foods to replace foreign dishes and wines at state functions. To fashion himself a man of the people, he often eschewed the business suit in favor of the popular guayabera shirt; his wife, Mexican first lady, María Esther Zuno, dressed in Tehuana costumes *a la* Frida Kahlo sparking great ridicule in the Mexican press.<sup>51</sup> These aesthetic efforts were largely unconvincing, and many resented Echeverría for the openly ambitious attempt he made to replace their beloved patriarch.

Others resented him for different reasons. To those on the extreme left, Echeverría's attempt to win praise from the left by resurrecting Cárdenas was misguided because in their eyes, not even he was immune to attack. Writing in *Por Qué?* on November 5, 1970, Rafael Tinoco presented an obituary of the fallen president that was diametrically different from those that appeared in main-stream and official labor periodicals. Tinoco explained that although it was a custom of the petty bourgeoisie to heap praise and ascribe virtue to one of their own at death, workers could not tolerate such conduct because for them "it is necessary to speak the truth." Therefore, he felt obliged to narrate the origins of the "myth" of Cárdenas and identify the erroneous sources of his near-deification in society.<sup>52</sup> He wrote, lamentingly:

Lázaro Cárdenas has been elevated to the status of upper-level saint on the iconographic altar of the dominant class and its government... As such, the oligarchic bureaucracy calls him: 'creator of the new Mexico', 'reformer of the nation's basic structures', 'defender of the humble', 'Paladin of the peasants', 'he who gave the land', 'defender of the workers', 'the only one who could solve the problems of the people', 'sacred *Tata* of the poor', 'dispenser of all possibility of

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<sup>50</sup> *Excelsior*, October 21, 1970, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Augustín, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Rafael Tinoco "El Verdadero Cárdenas," *Por Qué?*, November 5, 1970, 3.

life and work', 'enemy of the powerful', 'anti-imperialist', 'liberator of the economy', 'expropriating nationalist', 'undisputed chief of the Mexican people's struggle for liberation', 'kind hearer of the dishonorable', 'he who could obtain freedom for political prisoners', and on and on endlessly... That is the myth of Lázaro Cárdenas, of the Army General, of the ex-president, of the ever-loyal government functionary...<sup>53</sup>

The author then remarked that the false praise heaped upon Cárdenas had devastating effects upon society. First, ritualistic belief in the myth that Cárdenas was a sort of messiah, a "miraculous saint" to whom all social advancements could be attributed, succeeded to transform "a mere government functionary," someone who had "been the most loyal servant of the state bourgeoisie," into the only hope for change for the Mexican masses.<sup>54</sup> Such blind devotion, he added, made citizens into "impotent spectators and beggars waiting in hope that their problems be solved 'from the heavens'..."<sup>55</sup> A second, and perhaps even more injurious outcome of the "myth of Cárdenas" was that it castrated Mexican politicians, in effect turning them into "dirty servants" and "silent accomplices" of the "powerful and disciplined instruments of repression." Here, Tinoco launched a potent allegation that condemned the Mexican state's appropriation of the revolutionary legacy and derided it for enslaving the nation's people. In doing so, he tapped into an increasingly vocal current that challenged the PRI's

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Lázaro Cárdenas ha sido elevado a la calidad de santo mayor en el altar de la iconografía de la clase dominante y de su gobierno. Miles de artículos y discursos de los señores de la burocracia gubernamental y de sus valedores han tendido a 'demostrar' una figura útil a la clase dominante, con la cual investido a Cárdenas. Así la burocracia oligarca lo llama: 'el creador del México nuevo', 'el reformador de las estructuras básicas del país', 'defensor de los humildes', 'el paladin de los campesinos', 'el que dio la tierra', 'el defensor de los obreros', 'el único que podía resolver los problemas de los mexicanos', 'el sagrado Tata de los pobres, dispensador de toda posibilidad de vida y de trabajo', 'el enemigo de los poderosos', 'el antiimperialista', 'el liberador de la economía', 'el expropiador nacionalista', 'el jefe indiscutido de la lucha liberadora del pueblo mexicano', 'el bondadoso escucha de todas las desgracias', 'el que podía obtener la libertad de los presos políticos' y así, hasta el infinito... Eso es el MITO de Lázaro Cárdenas, del GENERAL DEL EJERCITO, DEL EX-PRESIDENTE, DEL SIEMPRE FUNCIONARIO DEL GOBIERNO, DE TODO GOBIERNO.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. On page 6, we see a photo of President Cárdenas heading a group of Mexican and Northamerican army engineers surveying a piece of terrain. The photograph's caption defies the impression conveyed by the image of a strong and independent Cárdenas. It reads: General de un ejército oligarca, Cárdenas ha sido el más fiel servidor de la burguesía gubernamental.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads, in full: EL MITO es algo profundamente contrario a la dignidad personal de los mexicanos, transformados en imponentes espectadores y en expectantes limosneros en espera de que 'desde el cielo' se resuelvan sus problemas, que un Tata lo señale con su dedo divino y lo unja de un poco de poder para robar y colocarse dentro de la oligarquía parasitaria.

claim as the sole proprietor of the revolutionary cause, and accused the party-state of co-opting the nation's history to pursue its own bourgeois-inspired ends. To Tinoco, Cárdenas was a prime player in this process of manipulation, thus making his memory an impediment to progress in Mexico. In the post-Tlatelolco context, apparently, not even the memory of *Tata* Cárdenas and the Mexican Revolution could be held beyond reproach if true democracy and social justice were to be pursued.

The lack of reverence that some showed Cárdenas guaranteed that his ideological devotee would receive similar rebuke. Add to the fact that Echeverría was the government official singly most associated with events perpetrated on October 2, 1968 and icy relations between the state and dissident groups were guaranteed. From the moment his Campaign of the Revolution was launched in October 1969, Echeverría incurred the wrath and ridicule of an unforgiving left. Regular pieces run in *Por Qué?* and other publications unfriendly to the regime were unanimously skeptical, constantly challenging the candidate's egalitarian rhetoric and his promises to restore an equilibrium and social justice to society. Writers were not moved by his diatribes against powerful capitalists and the forces of first-world exploitation, nor were they impressed by his stated commitment to restore the ideals of the Mexican Revolution to government. A comic strip by Barreto run on December 4, 1969 concisely iterated popular skepticism. A tongue-in-cheek piece entitled "¡Mexico Enjoys a Current Revolution!" began by showing a fiery Echeverría offering a promise and a disclaimer. "Sure, there remains much to do!" the caption read, prompting Echeverría to chagrin, "Well, we are not all supermen." He regained his composure in the next panel, though, employing pyrotechnics and proclaiming with a fist held high: "Nor are we vulgar demagogues to hide it!"<sup>56</sup>

Opening the strip by mocking Echeverría's penchant for hyperbole enabled the artist to illustrate other tragic similarities between prerevolutionary society and the status of the contemporary nation. Virtually all the ills suffered by the nation in the late-*Porfiriato* were given parallels in the present day. There it was reasoned that the land

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<sup>56</sup> Barreto, illustration: "México Disfruta de una Revolución Actante!," *Por Qué?*, December 4, 1969, 24. Spanish reads: Claro que aún falta mucho por hacer!; Pues no todos somos superhombres.; ¡Ni vulgares demagogos para ocultarlo!

problem, that which was so often declared resolved by agrarian reform, had actually endured, evidenced by the image of a greedy *latifundista* in modern attire grinning broadly while smelling new land opportunities: “\$nif, \$nif, \$nif.” The notion that the Revolution had brought an end to outside exploitation of Mexican resources was similarly mocked, and emblems of Ford, DuPont, Kodak, Union Carbide, General Electric and other North American companies called attention to the plethora of powerful foreign business interests then operating in Mexico. Next, the question of workers’ rights was contested. Prior to the Revolution workers had no voice, “Nor did unions exist,” it told, prompting a character donning a sombrero and bearing the unmistakable visage and trademark dark-glasses of Fidel Velázquez to respond: “...Unless they were *Charros*.” “I’ve returned,” he then snarked malevolently. Lastly, the strip challenged the authenticity of the democratic evolution brought by the Revolution. A panel read: “...Those [Porfirian] government workers needed thirty years to become rich...,” to which a young boy responded: “Today they only need six...,” conveying the dominant cynicism of the day with a particular poignancy.<sup>57</sup>

The above-referenced pieces articulated radical and openly angry positions toward the Mexican party-state and its representatives, past and present. A somewhat less polemic but still incendiary take on the candidacy of Echeverría offered by Demetrio Vallejo was printed in *Por Qué?* on December 18, 1969. In the piece entitled “Echeverría Speaks: Demagoguery or Reality?,” Vallejo doubted Echeverría’s commitment to political openness and democratic reform and scoffed at the slogan of “*¡Arriba y Adelante!*” The PRI’s continued effort to validate its existence by positing a living connection to past heroes irked Vallejo even more. In his words:

Our heroes have been converted into a myth by ‘revolutionaries’ that we hope do not bite their tongues upon pronouncing their names. It is true that we have to respect them, invoke them, venerate them, and imitate their grand virtues, but [we must do so] for what they did, not for what they left to do. They were revolutionaries in their own time. Today the world is divided into two systems: capitalist and socialist. These two opposing realities have created a distinct situation from the world in which they lived and fought. To invoke our heroes in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 24-25. Six refers to the number of years in a presidential term. Original text of selected quotes read: Ni existían los sindicatos.; A menos que fueran charros.; ¡Vuelvo!; Aquellos funcionarios necesitaban treinta años para hacerse ricos.; Hoy sólo necesitan seis.

the spirit of continuing to realize what they did as ‘revolutionaries,’ is anachronistic and jingoist. For that reason the students are right when they invoke Lenin, Che Guevara, and others alongside our heroes, because those figures represent not only the ideals and aspirations of a nation, but rather of all humanity. The doctrine that they sustained was and continues being internationalist. That is the difference.<sup>58</sup>

Vallejo’s critique echoed a dominant theme of the times that resented the conventional wisdom that the state and the PRI were rightful heirs to power by way of their political descendancy from the Mexican Revolution. In his message he made the case for internationalism and in doing so ironically hinted at the *tercermundista* rhetoric espoused by Echeverría. But few who opposed the regime were persuaded by the themes repeated ad nauseum by the candidate. Aside from the occasional paean offered to socialist icons like Che Guevara and Mao Zedong, there was little practical meat to substantiate Echeverría’s self-proclaimed leftism. The persistent attacks launched against Echeverría in the pages of *Por Qué?* hindered his and the PRI’s efforts to show ideological solidarity with the left.

Words levied by Vallejo proved particularly injurious, for he, along with Valentín Campa, was the face of the famed railway workers’ strike of 1958-1959 that laid bare the vast chasm in priorities that existed between rank and file workers and the leadership of state-sanctioned unions.<sup>59</sup> From his confinement in the notorious Lecumberri Federal Penitentiary, located in Mexico City, Vallejo held court with fellow inmates, many of whom had been detained since 1968 for their involvement in that year’s political upheaval. There, he also kept contact with the outside world through his writing of a

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<sup>58</sup> Demetrio Vallejo “Habla Echeverría: ¿Demagogia o Realidad?,” *Por Qué?*, December 18, 1969, 19. Spanish reads: A nuestros heroes los han convertido en un mito las bocas de los ‘revolucionarios’ que no se muerdan las lenguas al pronunciar sus nombres. Es verdad que tenemos el deber de respetarlos, invocarlos, venerarlos e imitar sus grandes virtudes, pero por lo que hicieron, no por lo que dejaron de hacer. Ellos fueron revolucionarios en su tiempo. Hoy el mundo está dividido en dos sistemas: el Capitalista y el Socialista. Son dos realidades opuestas que han creado una situación distinta del mundo en que ellos vivieron y lucharon. Invocar a nuestros heroes con espíritu de continuidad de realizaciones como lo hacen los ‘revolucionarios’, es anacronismo y patriotería populachera. Por eso los estudiantes tienen razón cuando junto con nuestro héroes invocan a Lenin, al Che Guevara y a otros, porque éstos no representan sólo los ideales y aspiraciones de una nación, sino de toda la humanidad. La doctrina que sustentaron fue y sigue siendo internacionalista. Esa es la diferencia.

<sup>59</sup> Vallejo’s efforts to detach the Mexican Railroad Workers’ Union from the grasp of government-backed charros and his pro-Communist politics led to his arrest in 1959. Charged with various crimes including sedition, Vallejo was sentenced to serve over fifteen years in federal prison.

near-weekly column for *Por Qué?* wherein he maintained a vigilant critique of the Mexican state and its routine violations of workers' rights. Vallejo's political and cultural significance was undeniable, and it was not a coincidence that president-elect Echeverría intervened to procure early release on August 13, 1970 for Vallejo and Campa who had by then become living-martyrs and icons of the student and independent workers' movements.

Echeverría took to the campaign trail, courting popular and leftist support. With Cárdenas's death in October 1970, this effort was intensified. By the time Echeverría took office that December, it had been fine-tuned into a new ideological paradigm that, although impossible to stomach by some, greatly appealed to those most fastened to historical legacy. Leaders of peasant and worker organizations applauded the candidate's message of reform for it heralded a new identity for Mexico, one that positioned it in stark contrast to its recent self. From where Mexico would derive its "new identity," however, was not new but rather quite old; it was the Mexican Revolution. Speaking at his inauguration on December 1, 1970, Echeverría confirmed this orientation in an address that was well received for its uncharacteristic brevity and clarity. As he had stated countless times before, social development in Mexico would continue, but would henceforth follow a direction guided by ideals of fairness and social justice. In the speech's key passage, the new president reasoned that "To encourage the conservative tendencies that have surged from a long period of stability equated a denial of the heritage of the past. To repudiate conformity and accelerate general evolution, on the other hand, is to maintain the energy of the Revolution."<sup>60</sup> Thus concluded the Campaign of the Revolution, but the Mexican state's rhetorical effort to improve its reputation with the major sectors of civil society would continue.

#### *THE DEMOCRATIC OPENING AND ORGANIZED LABOR*

Echeverría channeled the intense energy he demonstrated on the campaign trail effectively to the National Palace and Los Pinos, the presidential residence, making his first year in office an important period of legislative activity and reform. Demonstrating an almost indefatigable work ethic, Echeverría's enthusiasm impressed many, as did his

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<sup>60</sup> Augustín, 18.



rhetorical commitment to reforming the Mexican political system from the roots. There was seemingly no nook or cranny of the nation's life in which he did not intend to intervene. Turning his attention toward the chaos in the countryside, Echeverría sought to make his mark on the question of land reform, declaring in speeches that his administration would move to "the second stage of agrarian reform." He railed from the podium against the idea that the *ejido*, the village land collective, was an economic and social disaster, promising government support to augment harvests, increase cultivated acreage, and make Mexico self-sufficient in food supplies while beginning a new phase of agricultural exportation. Initially, Echeverría's headline-grabbing promises prefaced action, demonstrated through the creation of numerous agrarian-based agencies and the passage of the Federal Agrarian Reform Law in April 1971. These decidedly-*cardenesque* measures endeared the president to the leadership of the CNC, the nation's largest peasant organization. But syndical praise for Echeverría often belied popular resentment, as was demonstrated by the persistence of land invasions waged by peasants to forcefully demand the distribution of new lands or recover lands they deemed unlawfully confiscated.<sup>61</sup>

Responding directly to the sectors most associated with the events of 1968, Echeverría took great pains in his first year to open a dialog with disenchanting intellectual and student sectors, and he conceded them some of their most pressing demands, including a limited version of university autonomy and the release of a number of high-profile political prisoners. Government toleration and conciliation with the left formed a central part of Echeverría's much heralded *apertura democrática*, or democratic Opening – a rhetorical strategy that, according to historians Hector Aguilar Camín and

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<sup>61</sup> Upon taking office on December 1, 1970, Echeverría inherited a precarious ejidal system that was challenged by a series of protracted, often violent, episodes of land seizure by peasants. One well-publicized occupation involved a group of over two hundred peasants from the ejido of Atencingo, Puebla, who halted production at the ejidal-owned sugar plant beginning in June 1967. During negotiations that culminated on October 2, 1968, ejidatarios, CNC officials, and representatives of the Union of Cane Producers debated issues concerning the lack of peasant access to credit and technical training. Not surprisingly, these very issues composed the crux of echeverrista agrarian policy, and the National Rural Credit Bank and the National Ejidal Promotion Fund were designed specifically to modernize ejidal life and increase the productive capacity, not to mention profitability, of peasants. See AGN, DGIPS, SG, Box 1526C, Folder 13, documents: "IPS, 10 Junio 1967, Estado de Puebla, Información de Atencingo" and "IPS, 21 Jul 1967, Estado de Puebla, Información de Puebla".

Lorenzo Meyer, was not meant to undermine the “essential goodness of the Mexican ‘legacy,’” i.e. the regime descended from the Mexican Revolution, but was instead a reform needed to amend mentalities and practices inside the government that social unrest had exposed as outmoded.<sup>62</sup> They explain: “It [the democratic opening] was a response to the demands of ‘updating’ the legacy, in order to preserve whatever was preservable. The idea of ‘letting things change so that everything remains the same’ went hand in hand as an attitude and a perception, with the very anachronism of some of the major governmental policy decision.”<sup>63</sup>

But, as was witnessed inside the agrarian sector, the initial gains produced by the democratic opening did not diffuse anger toward the state that emanated large swaths of the student and intellectual sectors. Scathing journalistic attacks launched against the regime never ceased while Echeverría held office and the persistence of anti-establishment rhetoric in the early years of the sexenio convinced the Mexican government that aggressive measures to oppose dissent were still necessary. By 1971, student activism had resumed though it did not, nor would it ever, match its pre-Tlatelolco level of intensity. It was deemed threatening to state stability, nevertheless, and government repression revealed that the democratic opening had a real ceiling of toleration. In this regard the impact of 1968 was acute, for as realization about the massacre spread, so too did society’s general uneasiness about ruthless government repression. In post-Tlatelolco Mexico, hence, the state was forced to employ subtler measures to counter groups and individuals it deemed subversive. The Department of Federal Security expanded to counter foes in the period. Federal agents were assigned to infiltrate student meetings and union halls, representing a quieter (and sometimes more effective) way to diffuse threats than did anti-riot squads or strike breakers. Students, unionists, and other astute observers cried foul and identified government moles in their midst. The Mexican state denied these activities publicly trying to appear politically

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<sup>62</sup> Hector Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 207.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

tolerant and to regain a measure of legitimacy that had been lost over a decade-plus of sectoral discord.<sup>64</sup>

Paramilitary groups also sprung to life in this period, most notably in the form of the *Halcones* (Falcons) who violently met student protestors on the streets of Mexico City on June 10, 1971. On that day some 30,000 students assembled in the downtown Tlaxpana neighborhood of the city and marched in solidarity with students who were protesting repression at the University of Monterrey. In actuality, Eric Zolov tells us, conflicts at that university had already been resolved but a splinter group of radical students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico decided to go forward with the unauthorized march to reassert the notion that taking to the streets was still an effective measure of student protest.<sup>65</sup> Goals of the march were muddled but the enormous scale of the crowd affirmed that anger still simmered at the political system. As the march began, scores of policemen stood idly by. Tensions, however, were raised when members of the known paramilitary group *Halcones* arrived and attacked the unarmed protesters (many of high school age) with spiked boards, baseball bats, and guns.<sup>66</sup> The result of the clash left between nine and fifty demonstrators dead (according to which report one accepts) and wounded hundreds more.<sup>67</sup> The violence evoked painful comparisons to clashes witnessed in 1968 but also demonstrated a new breed of tactics the government would use to indirectly counter dissent and, in effect, wage a “dirty war” against its citizens.

Seeking to offset a public outcry against yet another brutal crackdown of civil protest in Mexico, Echeverría responded quickly. Appearing on television that evening, he promised that those responsible for the violence would be punished. To observers, his anger and commitment to free expression seemed genuine as he acted in the coming days to remove a slew of officials from power including Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, former

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<sup>64</sup> For an analysis that describes echeverrista policy toward students and intellectuals as highly contradictory but generally more permissive of dissent, see Roderic Ai Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

<sup>65</sup> Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 191.

<sup>66</sup> Zolov, 192.

<sup>67</sup> The number accepted by Zolov – fifty – appears high in comparison to that forwarded in other accounts.

national leader of the PRI and current Regent of Mexico City.<sup>68</sup> “Whoever falls, falls” confirmed Echeverría in a nationally televised interview.<sup>69</sup> Subsequent action in the coming months, however, disappointed those who demanded answers and justice. The government’s investigation was inconclusive and no perpetrators were charged. Ultimately, as was the case in the last months of 1968, basic questions went unanswered. The public was left only to speculate: Who were the Halcones and where did they come from? Many assumed that in spite of his public recriminations, Echeverría privately approved the launch of the Halcones against the demonstrators.<sup>70</sup> Contrasting rumors circulated that the Halcones were linked with industrialists in Monterrey, some of whom had criticized Echeverría’s pledges to redistribute wealth and were resolved to embarrass him by discrediting his democratic opening. Other theories abounded and some contended that the Halcones were in fact formed and funded by the CTM, an allegation which provoked Fidel Velázquez to famously respond: “The Halcones do not exist because I don’t see them.”<sup>71</sup>

The confusion that surrounded the incident and the prospect of a strong social reaction against the regime jolted the machinery of mass politics into gear. Quickly, the constituent pieces of the national political corpus convened to plan a show of public support to surpass anything seen even in 1968 – during that summer and fall of extreme discontent. On June 11 representatives of the three official sectors – worker, peasant, and popular and professional – met at PRI headquarters just one day after and mere city blocks from the neighborhood where blood had been shed the day before. There it was decided that a massive demonstration was necessary to show the “conscientious support” and solidarity of the “revolutionary social sectors” for the government of Luis Echeverría and against the “declared enemies of Mexico, be they Mexicans or otherwise.”<sup>72</sup> Party

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<sup>68</sup> Aguilar Camín and Meyer, 208.

<sup>69</sup> Noted television journalist Jacobo Zabludovsky posed the question to Echeverría “Caiga quien caiga?”, to which the president answered: “Categoricamente sí, Jacobo.” See Laura Itzel Castillo Juárez, “Recordanda a Heberto,” *La Jornada*, April 5, 2002.

<sup>70</sup> Though definitive proof has never surfaced, this remains the position of most observers. See analysis in José Luis Trueba Lara, *Fidel Velázquez: Una biografía* (Mexico City: Times Editores, S.A. de C.V., 1997).

<sup>71</sup> Laura Itzel Castillo Juárez, “Recordanda a Heberto,” *La Jornada*, April 5, 2002. Spanish reads: Los Halcones no existen porque yo no los veo.

<sup>72</sup> Editorial, “Respaldo Absoluto al Régimen de la Revolución Mexicana,” *Ceteme*, June 12, 1971, 8. Spanish, in fuller form, reads: ...que merece en todo momento el firme apoyo de todos los sectores sociales

delegates belonging to the CTM affirmed their support for the actions taken against students who they judged “have zeal for nothing except the subversion of order.”<sup>73</sup> Velázquez elaborated on his organization’s position in an address to the assembly. He told that the position of the CTM would be identical to that it had adopted when it faced “similar occurrences” in 1968; it would energetically condemn disturbances provoked by “agitators who have taken possession of the conscience of the certain student groups” and would support the Mexican regime and its current president, Luis Echeverría.<sup>74</sup> Adding that there was no justification to disturb the peace during a time when Mexico’s “rhythm” of growth was the fastest in its history, Velázquez believed that the workers’ movement could not remain “contemplative” when facing those who show contempt for peace, justice, and progress, nor would it continue supporting higher education with financial subsidies – an amount he estimated at 600 million pesos annually – while students chose to attend violent acts instead of pursuing their studies.<sup>75</sup>

Photographs taken of the June 15 demonstration confirm that it was indeed massive and, very possibly, the largest demonstration of its kind ever held that point, as was asserted by Velázquez. Packed from end to end in the Zócalo, demonstrators waved placards indicating their union affiliation and expressing their support for the Mexican president. Scanning the photographs featured in *Ceteme* and major Mexico City dailies one sees the predominance of *cetemistas* (members of the CTM) in the crowd and specifically members of the Federal District Workers’ Federation. One may also see, however, contingents from the peasant and popular and professional sectors present in

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revolucionarios para poner coto a tantos de manes de los enemigos declarados de México, sean Mexicanos o no.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, read: La Confederación de Trabajadores de México fija a sí su postura ante la actitud asumida por estudiantes que no tienen otro afán que el de subvertir el orden, provocando desórdenes como el ocurrido el jueves de la presente semana, condenable por todos conceptos.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: Lo postura de la CTM sigue siendo la misma que adoptó frente a acontecimientos similares ocurridos en 1968: de condenación enérgica a los disturbios provocados por los agitadores que se han adueñado de la conciencia de cierto grupo estudiantil, y de respaldo al régimen del licenciado Luis Echeverría Alvarez.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: El movimiento obrero no puede permanecer en actitudes contemplativas frente al desacato a la paz, a la justicia y al progreso, ni puede seguir contribuyendo económicamente al sostenimiento de las casas de estudio como lo hace, porque, aparte de las contribuciones regulares que dá, hay una que el movimiento obrero se impusó: el uno por ciento de su salario, que representa 600 millones de pesos anuales, que se están tirando a la calle a causa del abandono de los estudios por asistir a estos actos.

significant numbers.<sup>76</sup> Speeches were given to remind attending members of these sectors about the remarkable slate of reform enacted by their president in just one-half year in office. Alfredo Bonfil, Secretary General of the National Peasants' Confederation, summarized the impact of Echeverría's reforms on the agricultural sector. He cited the recent passage of Federal Agrarian Reform Law two months earlier and emphasized that more than 90,000 hectares had been distributed to date – a land allotment he claimed that benefited more than 1,500 rural workers.<sup>77</sup> Bonfil stressed the importance of societal peace as a tool for agrarian advancement and for as much, he affirmed the peasant sector's unconditional support for the president. Jorge Preisser followed Bonfil at the podium and spoke on behalf of the National Confederation of Popular Organizations, the nation's largest and most diverse labor organization. Purportedly speaking for millions of professionals, Preisser endorsed the kind of repression recently witnessed on Mexico's streets. "In a city as large as this," he stated, (referring to Mexico City,) "peace by means of a firm hand of government is essential." "What is it that the agitators want?" he implored the audience. "To break the march of progress? To compromise the national interest and security?"<sup>78</sup> None of that could be tolerated, he concluded, if social reforms and economic development were desired in Mexico.

The third sectoral figure to take the podium was Arturo Romo, representative to the Congress of Labor, the umbrella organization for most national and regional trade union confederations. Romo began his speech by affirming the Mexican worker's militant resolve to protect the course of social revolution and change charted for Mexico by Echeverría. In just six months, he related, Mexico under Echeverría had lived the life of an entire sexenio, witnessing the realization of a new agrarian law, fiscal reforms, an expanded social security system, better control of credit institutions, expanded foreign commerce, better public dialog, democratization, university autonomy, educative reform, and a new Federal Labor Law, the latter of which he judged a "vigorous breath for labor and progress."<sup>79</sup> Romo assured the president that the work he had undertaken had the full

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<sup>76</sup> See photograph in *Ceteme*, June 19, 1971, page 7.

<sup>77</sup> Editorial, "Se Manifestó el Pueblo Ante su Presidente Leal a México," *Ceteme*, June 19, 1971, 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

support of the millions of workers organized into the Congress of Labor, all of whom, the speaker noted, were cognizant of the clear dangers that such nationalistic and revolutionary work implied.<sup>80</sup> From where these “dangers” emanated from was similarly clear. Opposition to the president’s reforms flowed from “foreign interests” – those “instincts of power, ambition, and luxury” that constituted “a radical mutation of those values and national hierarchies” that acted in the well being of the Revolution and social justice.<sup>81</sup> It was in these forces, logically, that the source of the conspiracy witnessed five days earlier was found. The working class thus demanded: “Enough of the provocation and conspiracies against the government of the Revolution! The harm, the violence are arms of the counterrevolution.” The Mexican worker would do his part, Romo assured, as he was: “with Mexico and with President Echeverría!; with order and the dominion of the law toward economic development and social justice!; against provocateurs and extremists!; and, against those who sowed disorder and anarchy to interrupt the revolutionary process of Mexico!”<sup>82</sup>

Of all of the day’s speeches, of course, none was more anticipated than that of Echeverría – the political figure who stood to lose (or gain) the most from the events of June 10. In a real sense the prestige of Echeverría’s entire political program was at stake for the Corpus Christi incident not only challenged his government’s alleged new tolerance for political dissent, but also weakened his authority by means of the confusion and finger pointing that emerged inside his inner-circle on the matter of assigning blame for the incident. Echeverría sought to diffuse these crises in his words to the sectors. He began by reaffirming the presence of a “democratic opening” in Mexico. He stated: “I

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: Los intereses creados que está usted golpeando; los intereses extranjeros, los instintos de poder, de ambición y de lujo que usted frena con su conducta ejemplar, la vida austera de un auténtico líder de México; todo ello significa una radical mutación de los valores y la jerarquías nacionales para bien de la Revolución y de la justicia social.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: “¡Basta de provocaciones y de conspiraciones contra el gobierno de la Revolución!

La injuria, la violencia, son armas de la contrarrevolución; El Pueblo de México quiere paz y tranquilidad para trabajar. Los obreros, los trabajadores, en sólida unidad, con la nueva ley de trabajo en la mano, y con decisión inquebrantable estamos: Con México y con el Presidente Echeverría; Con la unidad revolucionaria para el progreso de México; Con el orden y el imperio de la ley, para el desarrollo económico y la justicia social; Contra los provocadores y los extremistas; Contra quienes buscan el desorden y la anarquía para perturbar el proceso revolucionario de México.

have never solicited unconditional applause from my compatriots. The right of the people to dissent and demand that their leaders adhere to the Constitution and the laws is the essence of democracy.”<sup>83</sup> Still, the president felt that free expression needed limits and could not be condoned when forwarded outside the juridical order or merely to sow discord in society. Such tactics, he opined, weakened the nation and were counter-measures waged by clandestine groups, provocateurs, and reactionary politicians to counter the struggle undertaken by the “progressive” elements of the nation (referring to, specifically, the official worker, peasant, and professional sectors) to amplify social justice and pursue a fuller sovereignty in Mexico.<sup>84</sup> Any one of these groups, one could infer, might have been behind the violence perpetrated on June 10. Their actions would not be tolerated.

Echeverría concluded his address to a friendly audience with rhetorical flourishes and promises. “Mexico will not back down.” He pledged. “It would be unforgivable if we permitted that a handful of irresponsibles cancelled the national hope. Those who have provoked or unleashed the violence are enemies of harmony and progress. Against them is risen the people’s indignity.”<sup>85</sup> Echeverría’s speech, though exculpatory in essence, was far from a formal denial of personal or state involvement in the incident. The tone of his speech – filled with revolutionary rhetoric but ultimately vague on the topic of culpability – confirmed the purpose of the demonstration. The PRI did not convene the massive gathering to counter allegations about Echeverría’s involvement in the events that transpired on Corpus Christi Day. Rather, the demonstration was meant as a show of the party’s solidarity with its embattled president regardless of his role in the incident. Each of the day’s speakers attempted to deflect criticism away from the regime by either

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<sup>83</sup> Editorial, “¡Ni un Paso Atras! México no Retrocederá...” *Ceteme*, June 19, 1971, 4. Spanish, in full, reads: Nunca he solicitado el aplauso incondicional de mis compatriotas. El derecho del pueblo a disentir de sus gobernantes y a exigirles el acatamiento de la Constitución y de las leyes, es la esencia de la democracia. Dentro del orden jurídico todo está permitido Cuando la autoridad o los ciudadanos se apartan de él, sobreviene el caos o la dictadura.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Socavar la concordia es debilitar a México. Los sectores progresistas de la Nación, los que aquí se expresan por su propia voz, saben bien a quienes aprovecha el desorden y la suspensión del diálogo. Conocen a los enemigos de la lucha que hemos emprendido por la ampliación de la justicia social y por la plena soberanía de México.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: México no retrocederá. Sería imperdonable que permitiéramos a un puñado de irresponsables cancelar la esperanza nacional. Quienes han provocado o desatado la violencia son enemigos de la concordia y del progreso. Contra ellos se levanta la indignación del pueblo.



impugning the motives of the victims of the assault (the student demonstrators) or slinging accusations at outside groups (foreign and/or domestic industrialists) who may or may not have been implicated in the day's events.

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The PRI's giant public spectacle and Echeverría's decision to unseat officials and merely imply their culpability in the Corpus Christi incident did not satisfy the hunger of those who demanded that culprits be identified and that prison time be served. Such demands were increasingly voiced in the press wherein the incident was commonly referred to as the Corpus Christi Massacre, or, on occasion, the "little October 2," in reference to the October 2 massacre perpetrated at Tlatelolco nearly three years earlier. Ultimately, the political fallout from Corpus Christi weakened Echeverría by questioning the sincerity of his democratic opening. Moreover, finger pointing in the administration and the PRI exposed that severe rifts had formed inside the Revolutionary family as a whole. Echeverría's "Campaign of the Revolution" and the death of Lázaro Cárdenas served the PRI and the Mexican state that used the events to try to establish a populist alliance much like the one that had served Cárdenas while he held office. New reforms were implemented and old alliances restored to a very real degree, yet the controversy that surrounded Corpus Christi made evident the importance of continuing the discourse of revolutionary vindication as spoken so vociferously by leaders of the state and official party after Tlatelolco. In response, the official sectors activated the machinery of mass politics. The Congress of Labor and other official sectoral elements resolved to wage a massive demonstration to defend the revolutionary qualifications of the Mexican state and its maximum leader in the wake of another tragic episode of civil violence. Echeverría and the PRI leadership approved; the labor establishment had complied once again. The standard operating procedures of collaborationism hence called upon the state and official party to return the favor. A campaign to combat another crisis of legitimacy was required anew.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **“THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC THUS PAYS ITS DEBT...”: PATRIMONY AND ECONOMIC NATIONALISM IN STATE-ORGANIZED LABOR RELATIONS**

Cananea is historically linked with the Mexican Revolution and the with the workers' movement. The government of the Republic thus pays its debt with the initiators of the Revolution and organized labor, recognizing that it [the working class] must be the basis of an economic development policy imbued with social justice, because the redistribution of revenue is an economic mirage if it does not support an authentic labor movement, strong, independent, and conscious of its class and social responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

From speech of National Patrimony Secretary Horacio Flores de la Peña given to announce the government's purchase of a majority interest in the Cananea Mining Company, August 27, 1971.

Election to the ultimate office did not dampen Luis Echeverría's need to restore the government's legitimacy with selected components of civil society. As Chapter Three describes, Echeverría, once elected, appeared committed to following through on campaign promises and re-establishing a revolutionary norm inside the government's policy rubrics in some very real ways. Legislative reforms implemented and presidential decrees emitted in the first six months of the sexenio directly addressed demands vocalized by leaders of the three major sectors of civil society – peasant, popular and professional, and labor. Moreover, the new president sought to convert campaign rhetoric that stressed the importance of restoring revolutionary principles in state commercial and industrialization philosophies into action. He was very explicit in this regard: completing such a mission meant returning the Mexican state to the shape and form it comprised

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<sup>1</sup> AGN, LEA, SPN, Box 862, Folder 766/170, “Mexicanización de Cananea, 27 Agosto 1971”, 3. Ibid., 3. Spanish reads: Cananea está ligada históricamente con la Revolución Mexicana y con el movimiento obrero. El gobierno de la República paga así su deuda con los iniciadores de la Revolución y del obrerismo organizado, reconociendo que éste debe ser el sostén de una política de desarrollo económico con justicia social, porque la redistribución de ingreso es un espejismo económica si no lo respalda un obrerismo auténtico, fuerte, independiente y con conciencia de clase y su responsabilidad social.

prior to 1940, before the ideals of the Mexican Revolution were diluted and eclipsed by foreign and “unpatriotic” models of development.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter assesses the way that presidential- and cabinet level-led discourses of economic nationalism and national patrimony influenced the nature of state-organized labor relations in the early years of the Echeverría presidency. The Echeverría administration hit the ground running in the area of economic nationalism and acted in its first years in power to bring hundreds of companies under state control by way of nationalization or “mexicanization” (the purchase of a majority interest in a company by the state.)<sup>3</sup> To be clear, the Mexican state after Cárdenas had not been idle on the nationalizing front. In fact, it had moved toward increased economic interventionism as early as 1960 when President Adolfo López Mateos oversaw the purchase of the electrical system and later that decade when it took numerous steps to consolidate control of the petroleum industry. Still, the Echeverría sexenio represented a drastic acceleration of the process. By the time Echeverría left office in 1976 he had overseen the greatest expansion of state control over economic activity in the history of the Republic, a feat only surpassed by his successor José López Portillo who left office in December 1982 having presided over a parastate apparatus that had ballooned to an unwieldy 1,155 entities.<sup>4</sup>

Organized labor generally supported increased government interventionism in the economy in the post-Tlatelolco period. Government maneuvers in the area of oil control show that discourses on nationalization and patrimony pre-dated 1970 and even 1968, and preface the importance of inserting the influential politician Jesús Reyes Heróles into the nationalization orbit of the Echeverría sexenio. Subsequently, the process that led to the “mexicanization” of the copper industry is examined in order to demonstrate syndical compliance with state strategy. Chiefly, though, this chapter examines the multivocal

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<sup>2</sup> Echeverría’s belief that the Mexican state had veered from revolutionary ideals in the post-1940 period was well established by the time he took office on December 1, 1970. Return to Chapter Two for further explanation.

<sup>3</sup> See “Going Private – A Special Report; Mexico Sells off State Companies, Reaping Trouble as Well as Profit,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> And even this number may be on the low end. John Mason Hart tells me that Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado, president of Mexico from 1982-1988, told him in a private conference that he privatized over 1,200 parastate companies and his successor, Carlos Salinas Gortari (president from 1988-1994,) another 250 more.

discourse that surrounded nationalization of the period by providing a summary of leftist opposition to state efforts at revolutionary redemption, and by assessing the diversity of contemporary understandings about political economy as evident in the positions of various state, organized labor, and dissident actors.

*JESÚS REYES HEROLES, OIL, AND THE NATIONAL PATRIMONY*

The Mexican state confronted the new crisis of legitimacy that the Corpus Christi incident created much in the way it did with that precipitated by Tlatelolco – in an indirect manner. It did not tackle the problem head-on by appeasing the most disgruntled sectors of students and intellectuals. Rather, it doubled-down efforts to appeal to its most dependable constituency – organized labor. State efforts to cement alliances with the official labor sector had bore fruit after Tlatelolco – a fact made evident by the central role of the Congress of Labor in the pro-state rally of June 18. Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, (he who by way of his position as Regent of Mexico City became the scapegoat for the blood spilled on June 10, 1971,) earlier served as PRI president from 1968-1970 and consistently voiced labor friendly sentiments while leading the party. As former head of the Federation of Public Service Workers' Unions he had a labor background that gave him a fair amount of credibility with workers. His successor, Manuel Sánchez Vite kept up the rhetorical pro-labor posture, although evidence shows little worker enthusiasm for the former law professor and Hidalgo governor's leadership of the national party. His replacement, on the other hand, though also a law professor and therefore not of the workers' sector, provoked genuine syndical excitement.

Jesús Reyes Heróles was sworn-in as PRI president on February 21, 1972. In his speech to take the reigns of the PRI he echoed themes new and old promising to purify the ranks of the party and reforge revolutionary processes that would enable *priistas* (members of the PRI) to confront "...provocateurs...who try to unleash forces to justify a rigid state of capitalism."<sup>5</sup> Instantly, it appeared, the ultra-nationalist factions of organized labor found a friend in government. After attending the ceremony, Fidel

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<sup>5</sup> Editorial, "Cambios en el Comité Nacional de Nuestro Partido," *Ceteme*, July 29, 1972, 4. Spanish reads: Debemos intensificar la formación de cuadros orientados en los principios revolucionarios y enfrentarnos unidos a provocadores, a quienes pretenden desencadenar fuerzas para justificar un estado de rígido capitalismo.

Velázquez offered his take on the new party chief, purportedly speaking for the entire organized labor movement. His initial feelings toward Reyes Heróles were kind and he called him “intellectually one of the most valuable treasures Mexico has” and “one of the best exponents of the ideology of the Mexican Revolution.”<sup>6</sup> To the labor leader, therefore, Reyes Heróles’s credentials were impeccable and he predicted that the new PRI leader would enable the Party to surpass its goals in many senses. Opinions expressed in the mainstream press conveyed similar hopeful notes. Editors at *Excélsior* embraced the “activist” character of Reyes Heróles’s speech while those at *El Universal* hoped that his proposed changes would help to fix “contradictions” some had cited to be present in the party.<sup>7</sup>

The pleasure shown by Velázquez and others over the appointment of Reyes Heróles surged from the latter’s long and proven commitment to revolutionary idealism. Since he first joined the party in 1939, Reyes Heróles articulated a kind of ultra-nationalism that endeared him to ideologues in the party’s political ranks and labor sectors. His early radicalism never diminished across the next three and a half decades, serving to ideologically color a stretch of public service during which he represented his home state of Veracruz in the Chamber of Deputies and held high-level positions in the Labor and Presidential ministries, Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico, the Mexican Social Security Institute, and most recently in PEMEX, where he served as Director General.<sup>8</sup> In each of these roles, and through extensive teaching and writing, Reyes Heróles excited passions by advocating reform and articulating notions of nationalism and class consciousness derived directly from the Mexican Revolution. As head of the

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<sup>6</sup> Editorial, “El C. Fidel Velázquez Opinó: El Nuevo Dirigente del P.R.I. Continuará la Obra del Partido,” *Ceteme*, February 24, 1972, 4. Spanish reads: Licenciado Jesús Reyes Heróles es político e intelectualmente uno de los valores más destacados que tiene México, y además es uno de los mejores exponentes de la ideología de la Revolución Mexicana.

<sup>7</sup> Editorial, “PRI: Hora del Realismo,” *Excélsior*, February 22, 1972, 6; Editorial, “Cambios en el PRI,” *El Universal*, February 22, 1972, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Reyes Heróles’s political career, pre- and post-1972, surely represents one of the most prolific in Mexican history. A public feud with Echeverría cost Reyes Heróles his command at the top of the PRI in September 1975, but did not end his relationship with the president who saw fit to appoint him Director of the Mexican Social Security Institute. Reyes Heróles regained good graces in the administration of Echeverría’s successor, José López Portillo, and was given control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a position he held until 1979. After a three-year hiatus from public life, Reyes Heróles returned to high government prominence in the administration of Miguel de la Madrid, wherein he served as Minister of Public Education from 1982 to 1985.

official party, Reyes Heróles in effect assumed the role of propagandist-in-chief, a position his character and professional pedigree made him well suited for.

Reyes Heróles's long political life gave his supporters much to relish, but it also provided his detractors plenty of material with which to condemn him. Criticisms claiming that Reyes Heróles was intolerant to worker activism were commonly levied at him while he led PEMEX. Reyes Heróles had had rocky relations with organized labor, both its allied and non-allied components, during his tenure, yet his sharp political acumen and his drive to clean out corruption inside the company's administration enabled him to enjoy reasonably good relations with the uppermost labor representatives. This commitment was one that rank and file workers applauded, for they were acutely aware of the rampant embezzlement in the industry and the prevalence of PEMEX officials profiting through the sale of contracts (*venta de plazas*) to labor unions. The practice was so widespread that in 1969 leaders of the Mexican Petroleum Workers' Union began a purification campaign to remove corrupt officials guilty of eliciting kickbacks.<sup>9</sup> Reyes Heróles was on the hunt as well, and his "moralizing" mission incited strong confrontations, namely with a functionary known as "Don Five Percent" who demanded that percentage for each contract he granted to oil worker unions.<sup>10</sup>

But union and executive agreement over the need to root out corruption inside PEMEX did not preclude confrontation between oil workers' unions and the state. *Petrolero* activism was omnipresent in the mid and late-1960s, when upwards of one-third of all unions that constituted the Mexican Petroleum Workers' Union were involved in labor disputes. Rapid industrial growth in the period tested relations between workers, business, and the state, and much worker agitation can be attributed to industrial growing pains. Nevertheless, strained labor relations may well have emanated as much from the over- as they did from the under-exploitation of resources. There is no question that Reyes Heróles was committed to expanding the industry; during his tenure, PEMEX installed three major facilities – two on land in Chiapas and one off the coast of

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<sup>9</sup> See Victor M. Ruiz Naufal, *La Industria Petrolera en México. Una Crónica. Tomo II. Gestación y Consolidación de Petróleos Mexicanos, 1938-1970* (México: Petróleos Mexicanos, 1988), 423.

<sup>10</sup> Alejandro Sobarzo Loaiza, "Jesús Reyes Heróles y su paso por petróleo Mexicanos," in *Jesús Reyes Heróles y el petróleo*, ed. Jesús Reyes Heróles (Mexico City: Asociación de Estudios Históricos y Políticos Jesús Reyes Heróles, A.C., 1992,) 12.

Campeche – that increased the total production of basic petrochemicals from 397 million tons in 1964 to 1.933 billion tons in 1970.<sup>11</sup> But by advocating a rational exploitation strategy that emphasized tempered production to maximize the supply period of the resource he considered critical to Mexico’s self-sufficiency goals, Reyes Heróles butted heads with union leaders who interpreted the government’s decision to pace production as a hesitancy that hurt the Mexican worker by denying him gainful employment opportunities.

Reyes Heróles also advocated technological modernization of the industry to more efficiently extract the resource. While in office he oversaw the creation of the Mexican Institute of Petroleum to study the scientific and technological development of the industry, and research conducted there yielded techniques that showed stunning results in reducing production costs.<sup>12</sup> But here once again, his commitment to efficiency put him at odds with the unions as his desire to streamline production costs meant inevitable cuts in the labor force. Needless to say, well entrenched oil syndicates that derived power and influence from the size of their ranks and their perceived indispensability to the functioning of the industry were not impressed by the PEMEX boss’s desire to reform the extraction process so that its human labor needs were comparable to those of other nations.<sup>13</sup> Neither did union bosses and workers find his rhetoric on the topic of sacrifice very appealing. They scoffed when he reasoned that just as the administration would not skimp on providing benefits to workers that they rightfully deserved, neither should workers impede the growth of a socially important industry with excessive labor demands. This sort of rationale typified the call to sacrifice frequently issued by Reyes Heróles, who counseled oil workers that they should temper their zeal for personal gain for the good of the nation.<sup>14</sup>

In directing PEMEX, Reyes Heróles also harbored nationalistic sentiments that proved antithetical to the presence of foreign capital in the industry. Being only a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter One of the edited volume cited above.

<sup>13</sup> Reyes Heróles cited output and labor figures to show that PEMEX occupied five to ten workers in the production of each barrel of crude oil, whereas other international businesses occupied only two to four. Again, see Sobarzo Loaiza, 14.

<sup>14</sup> See works and commentaries included in Eugenia Meyer, ed., *Jesús Reyes Heróles: Obras Completas, Tomo 2* (Mexico City: Asociación de Estudios Históricos y Políticos Jesús Reyes Heróles, A.C., 1996).

parastate, or partially state-owned company, PEMEX was in no position to reject outright private or even foreign capital in its day-to-day operations. Reyes Heróles recognized the criticality of private investment to the realization of social development projects and never attempted to remove all foreign capital from the company. Still, the PEMEX chief took measures to reduce its influence by purchasing certain petroleum assets from foreign-owned companies at various times during his tenure. As a whole, these measures were applauded, though they met the requisite skepticism from the left. The PEMEX purchase of three Northamerican-owned companies in June 1969 provoked the ire of *Por Qué?* columnist Carlos Ortega G. and prompted him to raise the following questions: *Wasn't the oil already ours?; Were we all duped in believing that we owned the oil after Lázaro Cárdenas decreed the expropriation of the holdings of all foreign companies that exploited the subsoil of Mexico?*<sup>15</sup> Although Ortega was aware of various legal maneuvers that enabled foreign capital to re-infiltrate the Mexican industry, he nonetheless contended that Article 27 never mandated the state to award compensation for the rightful reclamation of its natural resources. “Did Jesús Reyes Heróles, director of PEMEX and ‘ideologue’ of the Revolution, forget what Article 27 of the Constitution ordered?” he inquired plaintively.<sup>16</sup> In light of the author’s strong opinions on the subject, it is no wonder he concluded that the most recent payment of 225 million USD by the Mexican state to Northamerican companies represented a “Fraudulent Nationalization” and merely another political tool designed to confirm the sovereign and brazen character of the “Revolutionary family.”<sup>17</sup>

Leftist skepticism aside, Reyes Heróles’s performance at the head of PEMEX was in many ways ideologically congruent with the goals of the framers of the Constitution of 1917. His actions to annul the odious risk contracts (*contratos-riesgos*) that had permitted foreign investment to return to prominence in the Mexican petroleum industry support

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<sup>15</sup> Carlos Ortega G., “El Petróleo Mexicano. 225 Millones Para Una ‘Nacionalización’ Fraudulenta,” *Por Qué?*, June 27, 1969, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Olvidó Jesús Reyes Heróles, director de Pemex e ‘ideólogo’ de la Revolución, lo que ordenó el artículo 27 de la Constitución?

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



this contention.<sup>18</sup> The annulment of the remaining risk contracts on February 27, 1970 represented a political boon to the Díaz Ordaz administration and to the government functionary – Reyes Heróles – that directed the process. For many Mexicans, the founding and enduring existence of these contracts was objectionable legally and symbolically. There was merit to these sentiments. The risk contracts granted concessions to foreign companies in clear violation of the terms set forth in the 1958 Governing Law to Article 27 and they represented a great affront to national pride by increasing foreign control over the nation’s most prized resource. Reyes Heróles did not hide his pleasure when he announced their annulment. He remarked with glee that the president’s decision to nationalize the industry reflected the nation’s confidence in its own technical know-how and financial security to maintain existing installations and develop new resources.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, he preached that the elimination of the last five risk contracts (twelve of the original seventeen had been canceled within months of their initial signings) eliminated pressures, “emanating above all from the United States,” that had tried to permit the return of foreign capital in the petroleum industry.<sup>20</sup> With legal arrangements that had for twenty years appeared as “...an opprobrious stain inside the nationalized industry...” finally removed, Reyes Heróles declared the days of foreign manipulation of Mexican oil to be over.<sup>21</sup>

In directing PEMEX during a period of exceptional growth and exacerbated labor tension, Jesús Reyes Heróles helped consolidate state control over the petroleum industry and, thus, restored to the Mexican corpus a central piece of the national patrimony. The

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<sup>18</sup> From 1949-1951, during the presidency of Miguel Alemán, the Mexican state was driven by a desperate need for capital and entered into risk-contracts with mostly Northamerican companies. The contracts gave foreign companies a foothold into the Mexican oil industry by permitting them to build and operate off-shore drilling installations, in return promising them full reimbursement for their initial outlays and fifteen percent of their proceeds for a period of twelve to fifteen years. Such contracts also required PEMEX to sell all or part of that facility’s production to the investing company.

<sup>19</sup> Analysis taken from words of Jesus Reyes Heróles quoted in *Jesús Reyes Heróles y el petróleo*, ed. *Jesús Reyes Heróles*, 54-55. Spanish reads: La decisión del presidente Díaz Ordaz respondió al sentido auténtico de la nacionalización de la industria petrolera y se fundó en la capacidad de los técnicos petroleros mexicanos y los recursos financieros de la institución para hacer frente directamente a estas explotaciones.

<sup>20</sup> Ruiz Naufal, 424. Spanish reads, in full: Con la realización de los mismos se habían tratado de eliminar las presiones, sobre todo el gobierno de los Estados Unidos, encaminadas a que se permitiera el retorno de capitales extranjeros a la industria del petróleo, y aunque en cuestión de meses se cancelaron doce de los contratos pactados, los cinco restantes se mantuvieron, durante casi veinte años, como una oprobiosa mancha dentro de la industria nacionalizada.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

patently-revolutionary objectives pursued by Reyes Heróles while leading PEMEX appealed to members of a society that, according to Emma Ferry, had historically understood natural resources as inalienable possessions of the kingdom (later nation-state) and viewed property as patrimony to be held intestate by the monarch (later president) and passed on to future generations through inheritance.<sup>22</sup> This desire to preserve the patrimony, though it had been a “highly charged ‘root metaphor’” in place in Mexico since the colonial period, was articulated with the experience of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>23</sup> Certainly, postrevolutionary society understood petroleum as constituting one of those “inalienable” resources over whose control was crucial toward preserving the national patrimony – a fact evident in the language of Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917. Consolidating domestic control over the nation’s oil supply, hence, formed the central component of postrevolutionary Mexican nationalism and bolstered arguments made against foreign penetration in the industry.

This mission was elevated yet again in 1934 with the onset of cardenismo in Mexico. Thereafter, with the efforts of Cárdenas to rewrite the nature of property relations by distributing land, link Mexican sovereignty to national control of subsoil resources, and support workers in their battles with employers, questions of national patrimony were brought to the political foreground. Historian Myrna Santiago explains that oil workers of the 1920s and 1930s, nationalistic and class- and environmentally-conscious, understood the Revolution as an episode undertaken primarily to vindicate the cause of the Mexican worker. Workers at El Aguila and elsewhere, for example, they who struck often to force the hand of their foreign employers, “...turned nationalism into a synonym of class struggle, reaffirming the class nature of the Revolution itself and the

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Emma Ferry, *Not Ours Alone: Patrimony, Value, and Collectivity in Contemporary Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 10-11. Ferry provides us a broader definition of patrimony in its Mexican application. She says on page 13: In current usage patrimony denotes collective, exclusive ownership by a social group, often organized or conceptualized as a patrilineal kin group. To describe something as patrimony places limits on its exchange by classifying it as ideally *inalienable*; such patrimonial possessions are meant to remain within the control of the social group that lays claim to them and usually to be passed down intact from generation to generation. These ‘objects’ often include landed property, so-called cultural properties, and, in the case of Mexico, subsoil resources.

<sup>23</sup> Ferry, 10.

role of labor in forging it...<sup>24</sup> Their actions were motivated by their sense that the “revolutionary ideal” was fading in the face of oil companies’ belligerence and the state’s failure to enforce constitutional provisions on labor (Article 123) and state control of natural resources (Article 27.)<sup>25</sup> The relentlessness of oil worker militancy, as we well know, would reap rewards. By March 1938, incessant labor-capital conflict threatened to bring production of that crucial commodity to a halt. President Cárdenas, hoping to avert a general strike in the industry but as desperate to save the legitimacy of the revolutionary apparatus he was trying to consolidate – that which would be lost if he let foreign oilmen continue to flaunt Mexican law – ultimately sided with the workers.<sup>26</sup> His announcement on March 18, 1938 declared that the “machinery, installations, buildings, pipelines, refineries, storage tanks, means of communication, tankers, distribution stations, ships, and all other properties of the foreign companies” was henceforth property of the Mexican state and was the expropriation decree that validated the decades’ long struggle of the Mexican oil worker. “It was in this context,” says Emma Ferry, “that languages of patrimony acquired particular efficacy in mobilizing labor in support of the postrevolutionary state and the PRI.”<sup>27</sup> The achievements of Reyes Heróles in the arena of oil, though hardly as dramatic as those of Cárdenas some thirty years earlier, were also pleasing to organized labor. To the unionist of the 1970s as much as of the 1930s, Mexico’s natural resources – and particularly its oil – formed part of the national patrimony. State control over these assets was the preferred condition.

#### *ECONOMIC NATIONALISM AND THE IDEOLOGY OF THE REVOLUTION*

Soaring rhetoric that demanded the preservation of national patrimony moved organized labor and, as importantly, caught the attention of state and labor establishment officials who desperately sought to shore up their revolutionary credentials after a series of public relations setbacks culminating at Tlatelolco. Reyes Heróles’s nationalist credentials were, except in the opinion of those on the most implacable left, beyond reproach. Therefore, he was a logical choice to lead the PRI and spearhead the state’s

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<sup>24</sup> Myrna I. Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 296-297.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Santiago, 338.

<sup>27</sup> Ferry, 201.

political and rhetorical drive to reappropriate tenets and ideologies historically ascribed to the Mexican Revolution. Reyes Heróles conveyed the Mexican party-state's economic strategy writ-large in the post-Tlatelolco period by advocating increased state control of the nation's oil resources while accepting the indispensibility of some foreign capital investment. Such a philosophy fit fairly well into Echeverría's *tercermundista* framework because it positioned Mexico inside a movement that witnessed expanded state involvement in economic affairs worldwide. The reach of this spread of Keynesian philosophy extended beyond the planned economic models in place in the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba to spread to all regions including Asia, Africa, and Latin America, even penetrating Western Europe and North America. Measures implemented in another ascendant petroleum player, Venezuela, by president Rafael Caldera paralleled those enacted in Mexico and moved that nation toward greater state control of the industry. In Chile, the socialist regime of Salvador Allende oversaw a thorough reorganization of the nation's economy that fully nationalized certain sectors – including the highly contested copper industry – and altered others, namely agriculture, through the imposition of mixed, private-public, economic models.

Increased state intervention in the economy in Mexico responded not only to international trends, but also to domestic pressures that had been exerted in varying degrees of intensity for at least the past decade. Popular literature produced in the immediate post-Tlatelolco period confirmed a strong desire on the part of the disenchanted left for a removal of foreign economic influence from Mexico and a return of hands-on government control of the national economy. A scathing article from late-1969 entitled “Santa Annas of the Twentieth Century. Mexico in Foreign Hands” compared the performances of Antonio Ortiz Mena and Octavio Campos Salas, then heads of the Treasury and Industry and Commerce ministries, respectively, to that of Antonio López de Santa Anna, the often-president of Mexico in the nineteenth century reviled for his failure to protect Mexican territory from North American encroachment. To Carlos Ortega G., the author of the piece, the present-day officials were no better than Santa Anna since they too acted to deliver large portions of the national patrimony (in their cases industrial assets, not land) into foreign hands. Calling them the worst ministers

of the past sexenio – quite a charge considering how much Echeverría was despised by the left for his role in Tlatelolco – he concluded that the “anti-patriotic attitude” of Campos Salas and Ortiz Mena brought increased desperation to the humble people of Mexico and that history would severely judge the actions of “these mortgagers of Mexico.”<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, accusations levied from the far left claiming that the Mexican state was wedded to North American business interests were mimicked in official labor periodicals of the time, although pieces tended to celebrate how far the current regime had come in separating itself from failed policies of the past or lay blame on owners for perpetuating the current state of economic manipulation. A triumphant piece run in *Ceteme* on November 15, 1969 announced that the Mexican state had overcome the anachronistic principles of economic liberalism through the creation of institutions like the National Productivity Center, an institution praised for bringing together all sectors of the production process to solve problems and counter technological unemployment. Developments such as this prompted the writer of the piece toward celebration. Today, he declared, the modern state is the principle distributor of social justice, as “the unilateral demonstrations of will that in the past only benefited one part, have been substituted with a democratized decision making process.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, such a development demonstrated the state’s new found commitment to egalitarian decision making and formed part of a larger trend in government toward democratization and away from, we may perhaps infer, the laissez-faire dictates of bourgeois capitalism.

Still, however, many in organized labor saw more warning signs than signs of hope. The Mexican state’s pro-labor rhetoric did not mask the reality of increasing economic hardship for the majority of the sector. Arturo Romo of the Vanguardia Juvenil spoke at the CTM’s 74<sup>th</sup> National Council and predicted that the Mexican economy was moving toward monopolism. He stated that rising prices were indicative of the increased

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<sup>28</sup> Carlos Ortega G., “Santa Annas del Siglo XX. México en Manos Extranjeras,” *Por Qué?*, December 25, 1969, 7. Spanish reads: Campos Salas y Ortiz Mena ha resultado, quizá, los peores ministros de los últimos sexenios. Con su antipatriótica actitud están llevando al pueblo humilde – la mayoría de los mexicanos – a una situación desesperada. La Historia habrá de juzgar severamente a estos hipotecadores de México.

<sup>29</sup> Editorial, *Ceteme*, “El Estado ha Superado los Anacrónicos Principios del Liberalismo Económico,” November 15, 1969, 5. Spanish reads: ...las manifestaciones unilaterales de voluntad que antaño sólo beneficiaban a una parte, han sido sustituidos por la democratización de las decisiones.

domination of industry and markets by an increasingly exclusive club of owners and posed a problem against which salary increases were merely a temporary solution. He praised the works of Fidel Velázquez to shed light on the problems of scarcity and inflation and commended the calls made by then-candidate Echeverría for an “auto-revolutionary critique” to fix structural defects in the present system. “One of those [defects], *compañeros*,” Romo told his audience:

“...one of the causes that sponsors this impudent speculation, is the position in which private initiative is located; under absolute control of the bank, that which permits it to control a great part of industry as much as of commerce, and with that, being located in this privileged situation private industry can in this manner arbitrarily fix prices that it judges convenient for articles that it produces; that it co-produces in groups that are in direct relation with the private banking system.”<sup>30</sup>

As long as this situation persisted, he reckoned, the state would be powerless to halt speculation. Romo thus concluded that the only possibility for meaningful change was to embark on the course promoted in recent months by Echeverría and long before by Velázquez to alter drastically the nation’s political, social, and economic structures to permit the Revolution to advance more rapidly and in turn, let flourish the terms of the Constitution of 1917.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Editorial, “Nuestra Economía va Hacia el Monopolismo,” *Ceteme*, May 2, 1970, 3. Spanish reads: Una de ellas, *compañeros*, una de las causas que propician esta desmedida especulación, es la posición en que se ubica la iniciativa privada; en el control absoluto de la Banca, permita asimismo el control de gran parte de la industria, de gran parte del comercio, y con ello, la ubicación en situaciones privilegiadas de la iniciativa privada que de esta manera puede fijar su arbitrio los precios que juzgue convenientes para los artículos que ella produce; que ella produce en connivencia grupos que están en relación directa con la Banca Privada.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* In his message to workers, Romo referenced a long-standing preoccupation of organized labor about the intimate relationship that existed between private capital and banks. Private banks had long been vilified by labor leaders for being discriminatory toward the working class and excessively profit driven. During the Echeverría sexenio, this animosity gained in intensity and was heightened by a newly revived worker patriotism that derided the banks for being “in-bed” with foreign capital. Anger precipitated action, and various attempts were launched to establish a workers’ bank to rival existing institutions by offering workers low-interest loans, mortgages, and credit. (See Jesús Michel Narvaez, “Lo Consideran un ‘Atentado’,” *Universal Gráfico*, April 24, 1974.) These efforts ultimately failed, although plans for a workers’ bank to manage deposits, offer loans and mortgages, and provide funds to CT members who were unemployed, in need of technical training, or involved in strike activities were announced in 1976. (See articles in *Ceteme*, February 7, 1976.) Furthermore, organized labor experience a delayed gratification when President José López Portillo, espousing similar motivations, announced the nationalization of the nation’s entire banking system on September 1, 1982. This measure proved disastrous and precipitated re-privatization in the early 1990s.

Romo's message hinted at a complete reshuffling of the nation's political economy so as to be concurrent with the tenets of the Mexican Revolution as he understood them; at the very least, it called for state control of the banking sector. Contemporary directives of this kind often called for increased economic nationalism, although demands specifying what industries the state should seize control of and to what degree of control the state should exert were rarely made clear. To help contextualize this lack of specificity, it is fitting to reconsider the historical nature of the nationalization process in Mexico, for one hundred percent control of an industry by the state had never truly been achieved nor even attempted in practice. What was the norm in both pre- and postrevolutionary Mexico was a mixed economic system wherein two well-defined public and private sectors coexisted to invest in the production, sale, and regulation of a good.

The historical basis of the Mexican economic model was described by Fernando Páz Sanchez at an Economic Development and Administrative Reform Seminar organized by the PRI on November 13, 1974. There, Páz Sanchez explained that "since the time of the Aztecs," government in Mexico had been involved in economic matters through both its direct investment in industry and its channeling of private resources to drive social development. In terms of the first function, the government often acted as a financial partner with private capital, but was usually the minority investor, rarely fronting more than one-third of the total capital invested in a select industry. With regards to the latter function, government in Mexico had always considered its intervention in the economy integral to fulfillment of its social objectives. Páz Sánchez explained that this mandate was always present but had been articulated with even greater clarity by the Mexican Revolution. Because of that momentous event, he concluded, the Mexican government saw fit to consolidate its grasp over greater swaths of the economy and exert increased control – albeit always inside the "variables of a capitalist economy" – over basic industries deemed crucial to the national well-being.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> AGN, LEA, Secretaría de Programación y Presupuesto 658 (hereafter SPP,) La Política de Inversiones Públicas en México, Primer Seminario para el Estudio del Desarrollo Económico y Reforma Administrativa, IEPES, PRI, por Fernando Paz Sánchez, November 13, 1974, 2-3. Spanish reads: Así pues, el papel que desempeña el sector público en el proceso de desarrollo es muy relevante, pero la

The position expressed by Páz Sanchez was rhetorically compatible with the official line of the Mexican party-state in the post-Tlatelolco period, which emphasized that intervention by the state in the economy was a beneficial condition, for the government descended from the Mexican Revolution continued to act with the best interests of the favored segments of society in mind. But once again, the degree to which the Mexican state was required to exert “control” over a resource to be revolutionarily compliant was open to debate. Politicians, economists, and lawyers of the 1970s entertained these questions in their efforts to historically support increased or decreased government intervention in national commerce.

Those who argued for a limited government role in the economy found backing in an early memorandum distributed by Francisco I. Madero shortly after he took the reins of the presidency in 1911. Submitted to the governments of the United States and several other nations on February 15, 1911, the memorandum conveyed three major messages: first, that Madero had led a “national insurrection” in Mexico to topple a government he deemed tyrannical and illegitimate; second, that he desired to assuage the concerns of ally nations with a promise to recognize and respect the validity of all international treaties “contracted by the Government of Mexico with foreign corporations or individuals” before November 30, 1910; and finally, that he would order the the full compensation of damages and harms suffered by foreign citizens residing in Mexico upon official recognition of his government by the recipient nations.<sup>33</sup> In these promises, one saw guarantees of protection for, not threats against, foreign properties and interests. The document contained few signs of hostility to worry foreign governments or investors and was reportedly well received by foreign chancelleries. Yet, it conveyed a basic economic philosophy that scarcely resembled that which would be written into law in 1917 and was contradictory of that instituted in the postrevolutionary period. Writing in June of 1930

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responsibilidad de la política que orienta y encauza las inversiones es mucho mayor, cuando de ella depende el manejo de los recursos naturales, los energéticos y las industrias básicas, que imprimen a la inversión pública en nuestro país un carácter que rebasa los marcos usuales con que se examina esta variable dentro las economías capitalistas.

<sup>33</sup> Condumex, Fondo CMXV-3, Impresos de Federico González Garza, 1930-1931, Folder 1. Juan Sánchez Azcona, “Los Postulados Internacionales de la Revolución,” *Gráfico*, June 9, 1930. Spanish reads: ...explicando la insurrección, fijando normas humanitarias al desarrollo de la operaciones bélicas y ofreciendo garantías a las personas e intereses extranjeros vinculados en la República.



Juan Sánchez Azcona, who wrote the memorandum on behalf of Madero, contended that the “father of the Mexican Revolution” never harbored nationalist ambitions on economic matters and that his memorandum, which Sánchez tagged as the first “first diplomatic document of the Revolution” had been intentionally suppressed by a Mexican state that had moved toward an increasingly hands-on and nationalist posture in the management of the economy.

Abundant historical research leaves no question that the Mexican state adopted an increasingly nationalist posture on questions of land and resource control in the early period of postrevolutionary consolidation.<sup>34</sup> Nor is there debate about the undeniably belligerent position maintained by the government toward private enterprise in the era of cardenismo.<sup>35</sup> The effects of three decades of contradictory policies that mixed two-parts protectionism with one-part liberalization on the nation’s political economy, however, are less established. There is no question that the Mexican state’s often haphazard economic course yielded results; the nation’s industrial capacity expanded monumentally between 1940 and 1970. But the level of social discontent present in 1968 – on a scale not seen since the latter years of the 1920s – attests to the notion that the promise of national advancement was not sufficient to allay the anger of large segments of society that were not privy to the comforts macroeconomic expansion provided.

One of the the most disenchanting groups was, ironically, organized labor, a sector that should have experienced the benefits of industrial growth most directly. The sources of union discontent in the pre-Tlatelolco period were diverse but sprung perhaps most directly from the realization of business’s fortified position vis-à-vis relations with the Mexican state. The establishment of the *maquiladora* (originally, minority-owned foreign corporations, typically assembly plants) system on the U.S.-Mexico border sharpened the pain that accompanied the perceived demise of collaborationism in important ways. First, it caused labor charros to groan about the tendency of border-area factory owners to employ female laborers, believing that they required lower wages, were more easily

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<sup>34</sup> On the questions of oil and banking confrontations, see Linda B. Hall, *Oil, Banks, and Politics: The United States and Post-revolutionary Mexico, 1917-1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> For insight on the Mexican state’s confrontations with business during cardenismo, see Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey: Workers, Paternalism, and Revolution in Mexico, 1890-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

controlled, and were less likely to unionize, and second, it suggested the practical abandonment of economic nationalism as a philosophical priority in the nation's industrial development philosophy.<sup>36</sup> An examination of the legal evolution of the system gives merit to the latter conclusion. Consider the following chronology:

1966 – The Border Industrialization Program authorized minority-owned foreign corporations to establish assembly plants in border region to manufacture products for exportation.

1971 – Maquiladora Industry Legislation permitted maquiladoras to operate in all of Mexican territory and abolished the requirement that installations be majority-owned Mexican entities.

1975 – Acuerdo 101-1001 permitted one hundred percent foreign ownership of corporations operating inside Mexican territory, except in the textile industry, and removed administrative and fiscal stipulations deemed as hindrances to investment in Mexico.<sup>37</sup>

On the positive side, the gradual loosening of legal restrictions brought stunning growth. During the Díaz Ordaz administration, the burgeoning sector consisted of twenty-four maquilas employing 3,866 workers. Legislation passed in 1971 eliminated the requirement that Mexican-based capital compose the majority of investment and opened the door for rapid expansion of the industry to 364 establishments employing 52,473 workers. Growth rates accelerated in the coming years and new and ever-more liberal legislation officially eschewed any protectionist pretensions. Mexican policymakers celebrated the rapid expansion of an industrial sector that reached 542 establishments and 658,069 workers during the administration of José López Portillo (1976-1982).<sup>38</sup>

But even while the maquiladora sector advanced in its growth, Mexican policymakers clung to a rhetorical strategy that promoted revolutionary idealism through economic nationalism. The rhetorical platform that the PRI would pursue in the coming

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<sup>36</sup> Studies have demonstrated that a degree of unionization in female-dominated industries did occur, but the evolution of the maquiladora sector progressed largely apart from the organized labor movement. See work of Cirila Quintero Ramírez cited directly below. Also, the predominance of female labor in border factories countered the objectives of an organized labor movement that presented a history and collective ethic that was quintessentially male in important ways. For a more detailed analysis, see Chapter Seven of this study.

<sup>37</sup> Cirila Quintero Ramírez, *La Sindicalización en las Maquiladoras Tijuanaenses, 1970-1988* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990), 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

presidential administration was fine-tuned at a meeting it convened on June 26-27, 1970 in the Mexico City suburb of Naucalpan de Juárez. There, on the eve of that summer's presidential elections, elite priístas met in conference and reached the conclusion that the industrialization of Mexico would maintain the Mexican Revolution as its point of departure.<sup>39</sup> It was then understood that the Legislation of 1917 was the decisive aspect that formed modern Mexico because it established a juridical mark that governed the country's "nationalist economic development and [its] balance between the public and private sectors."<sup>40</sup> Continuing, party members affirmed that the Mexican state, as a "legitimate product of the Mexican Revolution," began the constructive phase of nation building with perfectly defined ideas to utilize the nation's natural resources for the benefit of all, and that those resources, especially non-renewable resources, constituted one of the bases of current and future development. For that purpose, they reckoned such resources needed to be exploited in a rational manner by the state in conjunction with private capitalists who had, since the implementation of policies of import substitution, responded nobly to the government's stimulus to industrialize Mexico within a framework of national protection.<sup>41</sup>

*"¡NI UN PASO ATRÁS!:" MEXICANIZATION AND THE DEBT REPAID*

The party-state's re-stated commitment to a mixed economic system promised organized labor benefits that were more than merely symbolic. In fact, organized labor stood to benefit greatly from increased government intervention in commerce because an expanded parastate apparatus inserted government, and by extension, the entire labor establishment, more intricately into the inner workings of the economy. From that privileged position, powerful state-allied organizations like the CTM could exert great influence over economic questions of tariffs, trade quotas, and price-controls, as well as pressure the state more effectively on labor matters concerning wages, benefits, and collective contracts. There were also benefits to be had by the state in this arrangement. Assuring organized labor a seat at the economic negotiating table meant restoring a

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<sup>39</sup> Partido Revolucionario Institucional, *Reunión Nacional Para el Estudio Del Desarrollo Industrial de México: Ponencias I* (Mexico City: Instituto de Estudios Políticos Económicos y Sociales, 1970), Xxv.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Xxvi.

relationship of symbiotic reciprocity. Organized labor, grateful as it would be, would then pledge its allegiance to the regime, in the process reestablishing the important bonds of collaborationism that had formerly profited both elements.

Echeverría understood this equation and he tried to rally workers by inciting their nationalist consciences and promising state management of vital national industries. Echeverría spoke in Colima on December 4, 1969 and referenced the revolutionary aspect of state control: “Petroleum, electricity, the iron and steel industry, are vital lines of business for the progress of the nation and constitute the basic industries in which progress rests.” These industries, he pledged, “will remain in Mexican hands” for they “form part of our national being.”<sup>42</sup> Echeverría expanded on that dialog months later by referencing the ways that government control of the mining industry would enable the state to fulfill its revolutionary commitment to workers. Speaking in Monclova on April 20, 1970, he stated:

The Mexican state, the revolutionary state of our country, will continue encouraging all efforts to mexicanize the mining industry [through] the acquisition of businesses, because before all, and above all the interests and investments that [these measures] promote, their linkage with workers will be the factor that lets them maintain a social policy in accordance with the greater interests of the nation.<sup>43</sup>

This clear government intent toward nationalization pleased workers but concerned capitalists, many in North America, who feared that the favorable investment climate that Mexico had hosted since the end of World War II was changing.

But for all of his rhetorical bluster, Echeverría was not prepared to institute in Mexico large-scale industrial socialization to the degree that was occurring elsewhere in the region. In reality, Echeverría could not have overseen widespread nationalizations in Mexico even had he wanted to, for strict state control and management of the economy

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., xiv. Original quote, in full, reads: *Petróleo, electricidad, siderurgia, son renglones vitales para el progreso de la nación y constituyen las industrias básicas en las que descansa el progreso. El petróleo, la electricidad y la siderurgia seguirán en manos mexicanas. Sólo a Mexico corresponde su manejo y su desarrollo, porque forman parte de nuestro ser nacional. En ello no sólo no daremos un paso atrás: daremos muchos pasos adelante.*

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., xii. Spanish reads: *El Estado mexicano, el Estado revolucionario de nuestro país, seguirá alentando todo intento de mexicanización de la minería, de adquisición de empresas, porque ante todo, por sobre todos los intereses e inversiones que ellas promuevan, su vinculación con los trabajadores será el factor que las haga mantener una política social acorde con los intereses superiores del país.*

was not congruent with terms of political economy established by the Mexican Revolution. Understood another way, organized labor, having established its historical preference for a mixed economic system and constituting the state's most valued audience simply would not have approved. Echeverría, though he often mimicked Chilean president Salvador Allende in his nationalistic and anti-imperial rhetoric, was driven less by a desire to turn Mexico into a socialist bastion and more by goals of proving to the nation's most important (and most ideologically centrist) sectors his government's restored commitment to revolutionary compliance. There would be no military coup d'état in Mexico resembling that which toppled Allende's government in September 1973 and the transitions of companies or entire industries to partial state control were largely cordial and uncontentious.

In this regard, the nationalization, or rather, the "mexicanization" of the copper industry in 1971 is emblematic.<sup>44</sup> National Patrimony Secretary Horencio Flores de la Peña addressed the press on August 27, 1971 and announced that the Mexican state had entered into negotiations to purchase a controlling interest, 50.98 percent, in the Cananea Mining Company. He explained that upon obtaining majority control of the company the Mexican state would oversee the sale of roughly half of the acquired assets to small, domestic investors, 9.81 percent to Cobre de México, another 9.81 percent to Banco Nacional de México, and the last 5.88 percent to Cananea Mining Company employees. He spoke confidently about the successful completion of the deal and remarked that purchase of the company was ideologically in line with the state's broader economic strategy because it put a basic product for its development under the control of Mexican-owned companies that, although still counting on a degree of foreign capital, now had access to the best export markets and modern technologies. Furthermore, domestic operation of the company promised increased production, and he outlined a program to invest billions of pesos to boost the company's annual output from 42,000 tons of copper to over 140,000 in the next five years.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> A note on Mexicanization: when the state acquired majority control, meaning a minimum of 50.01% of an entity's holdings, then that industry or company was said to be "mexicanized."

<sup>45</sup> Jorge Coca P., "Reivindicación del Cobre. La Compañía Minera de Cananea Quedó Ayer Mexicanizada," *El Universal*, August 28, 1971, 11.

Alongside being ideologically in line with the Echeverría state's economic philosophy, the mexicanization of the company had great symbolic significance: Cananea had been the location of the 1906 miners' strike that was an important precursor of the revolution. Thus it was fitting that the state now acted to complete a revolutionary process of reducing foreign control of Mexican resources on one of the sites where some maintain the Revolution began. As such, Flores de la Peña posited that the mexicanization of the Cananea Mining Company "...achieved a fundamental advance in the historic process by means of which Mexico and Mexicans have recovered their subsoil riches," for Cananea remained until that day, "...the only important mining company in the country wherein national capital was not the majority."<sup>46</sup>

Lastly, the significance of the action to Mexican workers was emphasized. Virtually all unionists were versed in the legacy of Cananea, and more than miners celebrated the first sprout of militant syndicalism waged to protest the exploitation of Mexican workers by foreign industrialists. As such, the Cananea Miners' Strike of 1906 formed a central component of workers' lore in postrevolutionary Mexico. Flores de la Peña recognized this fact and integrated it prominently into his message:

Cananea is historically linked with the Mexican Revolution and the with the workers' movement. The government of the Republic thus pays its debt with the initiators of the Revolution and organized labor, recognizing that it [the working class] must be the basis of an economic development policy imbued with social justice, because the redistribution of revenue is an economic mirage if it does not support an authentic labor movement, strong, independent, and conscious of its class and social responsibility.<sup>47</sup>

In short, by arguing that state control of the mining sector was a central component of a national economic development policy imbued with ideals of social justice and favorable to the growth of a strong and class-conscious workers' movement, Flores de la Peña issued a challenge meant to at once ignite workers' patriotism and indicate the Mexican state's debt to the labor sector. This civic call-to-arms was characteristic of the worker-centric rhetoric routinely espoused by Echeverría, Reyes Heróles, and other state and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: "...se logra un avance fundamental en el histórico proceso por medio de cual México y los Mexicanos han recuperada las riquezas de su subsuelo...la única empresa minera importante del país, en la cual el capital nacional, no era mayoritario.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 3. For Spanish, see quote in footnote 1, page 1 of this chapter.

labor officials in the period. The message that workers had built modern Mexico in alliance with a supportive state, and that such an alliance was in need of renewal if future prosperity and growth were desired, was conveyed with increased frequency after Tlatelolco. Unionized workers could then see in the state a defender of their cause and an ally in their battles with business. State officials pointed to government purchases of strategically important and symbolically endowed companies like that in Cananea to verify this condition of renewed collaborationism. With nationalization, miners were declared rewarded; “The government of the Republic thus pays its debt to the initiators of the Revolution and of organized labor...”<sup>48</sup>

Evidence exists to suggest that the government argued its case convincingly to elements on both sides. *El Universal* reported that the announcement of the state’s acquisition of fifty-one percent of the company provoked spontaneous demonstrations of joy seen seldom times before in the state of Sonora. To the townspeople of Cananea, it felt, the action qualified as the single most important development in the past sixty-five years, (or, in all the time elapsed since their ancestors waged the historic strike that marked the birth of the national organized workers’ movement.<sup>49</sup> Roberto Elzy Torres, mayor of Cananea, informed local residents of the actions with a joyous front-page announcement printed in *El Heraldo de Cananea* on August 28, 1971.<sup>50</sup> The same newspaper opined three days later that the positive repercussions of the president’s decision to mexicanize the Cananea Mining Company would directly benefit the Mexican people “by opening the doors to Mexican investment in mining on a large scale.”<sup>51</sup> Others supporters of the action referenced the positive impact it had on resolving tense labor negotiations between members of Local 65 of the Mexican Mining and Metalworkers’ Union and management and producing a collective contract that would govern workplace relations for the next two years.<sup>52</sup> Members of the Cananea Chamber

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> “Manifestaciones de Júbilo en Todo Sonora,” *El Universal*, August 28, 1971, 1/11.

<sup>50</sup> Roberto Elzy Torres, letter to the editor, *El Heraldo de Cananea*, August 28, 1971, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Editorial, “A Propósito de la Mexicanización de la Empresa Mineral Local,” *El Heraldo de Cananea*, September 1, 1971, 1. Spanish, in full, reads: La benéfica repercusión de la autorización del Pres de la Rep LEA, para llevar a efecto de la mexicanización de la CMC será una realidad de progreso en beneficio directo del pueblo de México, al abrir las puertas a la inversión mexicana en la minería a grande escala.

<sup>52</sup> See Marcelo Carrillo, “Razonando,” *El Heraldo de Cananea*, September 8, 1971, 1/6.

of Commerce felt similarly and endorsed the nationalization with a written statement. Writing in their September 1971 newsletter, members of the commercial organization stated that they “greatly applauded the measure of the President” and believed that it constituted “one of the most positive acts of the first year of the government.” For their part, the merchants elaborated, they would thus continue insisting that federal authorities establish a refining plant in Cananea so as to further enjoy the benefits of “our mineral” (meaning, copper) as well as prepare for the future mining of areas in nearby Nacozari.<sup>53</sup>

Others employers showed themselves supportive of the action as well. This attitude was not surprising given that the official justification for purchasing the company directly addressed the wants and goals expressed by mine owners earlier that month. Speaking before the General Assembly of the Mexican Chamber of Mining on August 9, 1971, Jorge Larrea, president of the Chamber, cited the proven benefits of mexicanization for owners, not the least of which he said were access to new technological resources, stable and moderated prices, and increased profits. Still, though, government intervention in mining could do even more, and he called on the state to drastically increase investment to stimulate industrial growth and enhance production to increase exports.<sup>54</sup> Larrea’s desire to increase exports was justified; financial statistics from 1970 show that the Mexican mining industry as a whole was underproductive in the area of exportation, reaping a total of just 3.2 billion pesos (about 256 million USD) from sales abroad.<sup>55</sup> The paucity of this figure, stunningly low for a nation as mineral rich as Mexico, was reflected in the performance of copper that represented just 2.2 percent of the nation’s

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<sup>53</sup> Cámara de Comercio de Cananea, “Referente a la Mexicanización de la Cía. Minera de Cananea, S.A. de C.V.,” *El Heraldo de Cananea*, September 11, 1971, 1. Spanish, in full, reads: Aplaudimos grandemente la medida del señor Presidente, creemos que ha sido uno de los actos más positivos del primer año de gobierno, por nuestra parte seguiremos insistiendo ante las autoridades correspondientes, para lograr que se establezca en Cananea una Planta Refinadora de Cobre, tomando en cuenta la producción de nuestro mineral y además las futuras exploraciones de ‘La Caridad’ en la región de Nacozari.

<sup>54</sup> Larrea addressed the members of the Mexican Mining Chamber on August 9, 1971. See “Cámara Minera de México Asamblea General 1971, Tercera Parte,” *Boletín Financiero y Minero de México*, August 26, 1971, 1/5; “Cámara Minera de México Asamblea General 1971, Cuarta Parte,” *Boletín Financiero y Minero de México*, August 27, 1971, 1/11/12.

<sup>55</sup> “Volumen y Valor de la Exportación Minero Metalúrgica de México – 1970,” *Boletín Financiero y Minero de México*, August 27, 1971, 11.



total mineral exports for 1970.<sup>56</sup> It was in this context that the words pronounced by Flores de la Peña only weeks later must have been encouraging.

Even some foreign mine owners were on board with mexicanization. President of Anaconda Company John B. Place went on record stating that the decision to sell to the Mexican state was entirely that of the company's. Citing the company's sound financial situation – it had recorded profits of around sixty million USD the previous year – he understood why some were puzzled by the sale. He answered inquiries telling that Anaconda directors found it economically attractive to take on the Mexican government as a financial partner to co-fund the company's future restructuring plans. When asked if the process was similar to the forced acquisition of copper companies recently witnessed in Chile, Place's answer was unequivocally no. The difference, he told reporters, "was like night and day."<sup>57</sup>

Electrical workers did not get as much rhetorical credit as miners, but they too had written important chapters in the narrative of organized labor in Mexico. It was electrical workers, after all, who formed the Mexican Electricians' Union in 1914 – the oldest of the major national unions and one of the most influential in determining the outcome of the revolutionary conflict. But unlike workers in other primary economic sectors, *electricistas* never unified into a single national union, as did petroleros, for example. Rapid industrial and social development in Mexico created employment for workers in the sector, but rival unions competed bitterly for public and private contracts. Separate agreements that awarded the Mexican Electricians' Union (SME) and the National Electrical Industry Workers' Union exclusive rights to labor contracts created by the Central Light and Power Company and Federal Electric Commission (CFE,) respectively, quelled confrontations in the sector temporarily. But nationalization of the electrical industry by President Adolfo López Mateos on September 27, 1960 reignited friction by bringing Central Light and Power under majority state management and forcing the SME to brush up more closely with its adversaries, the newest foe being the Electric Workers Union of Mexico – an organization created by the consolidation of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Jorge Coca P., "Reivindicación del Cobre. La Compañía Minera de Cananea Quedó Ayer Mexicanizada," *El Universal*, August 28, 1971, 1/11.

fifty-two unions and headed by the ardent nationalist Rafael Galván Maldonado. The subsequent decade was riddled with *electricista* conflict and battles waged within the CFE by members of the two prevailing CFE-affiliated unions proved particularly hot. Unfortunately for the SME, its two competitors saw fit to temporarily conciliate their differences, sign a Unity Pact, and join their ranks into a single organization called the United Electric Workers Union (SUTERM) on October 26, 1972. The creation of SUTERM represented an alliance of SME's two primary rivals and threatened its bargaining position even further. And although SME and SUTERM would not cease to militate alongside one another inside the CTM, their rivalry burned intensely and demonstrated the richness and complexity of the official organized workers' movement in the post-Tlatelolco period.<sup>58</sup>

Both being members of the CTM and organizations firmly fastened to the revolutionary narrative and tradition, the SME and the SUTERM mutually lobbied the Echeverría state for increased government intervention in the economy. On this topic SUTERM was unequivocal. Mexicanization was simply not enough; nothing less than one hundred percent government control of the nation's electrical assets would suffice. This position was regularly expressed by union leaders in the first year of the organization's existence. According to the editors of its monthly publication, the importance of state intervention in the economy was a fact confirmed in Mexican history. Nationalization, as they understood it, was the outcome of a revolutionary equation that factored the "deep-seated nationalist sentiment of workers, peasants, and the poor" on one side, against "the inexistence of a national bourgeoisie strong enough to confront imperialism and exploit the nation's resources" on the other. Fortunately, though, the problem was solved by the presence of a "nationalist-revolutionist state" that turned itself into, *by necessity*, the principal economic manager. State control of the economy did not succeed to erase every trace of imperialism from the national reality, they conceded, although it did serve to end the "long colonial night" by charting Mexico on its own path toward national development. State nationalization policies, therefore, were part of the

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<sup>58</sup> The complex history of syndical conflict in the electric power generation sector is covered in Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *¡Esto puño sí se ve! Insurgencia y movimiento obrero* (Mexico City: Ediciones el Caballito, 1987) and is expanded upon in Chapter Ten of this study.

nation's very "physiognomy" and were too important to tamper with. No discussion of policy reversal via privatization could be tolerated. "Not a single step backward on the matter of nationalizations!" they declared, borrowing one of Echeverría's most often voiced catchphrases. More, not less, government control of industry was needed to truly put industry at the service of the nation and its masses of workers, peasants, and the poor. And less, not more, foreign control of industry was required to safeguard the nation's critical resources against outside manipulation. Only steps forward to nationalize new industries would prevent the breach that was created in Mexico by imperialism from widening.<sup>59</sup>

On these basic principles, SUTERM and SME members were largely in agreement. Old grudges, however, died hard, and the two primary unions of electrical workers kept bitter relations during the Echeverría sexenio. One point of contention was the ownership status of SME's primary employer; Central Light and Power was a parastate and not a fully nationalized company like the CFE. To *sutermistas*, therefore, their compañeros in SME served a questionable master and injured the Mexican people by acting to block the cause of industry-wide unification. This was a message SUTERM leaders delivered in person to Echeverría and to José López Portillo, then CFE director, when they came to inaugurate the union's national headquarters on May 8, 1973. SUTERM Secretary General Francisco Pérez Ríos elaborated that the Central Light and Power Company was objectionable not just because of its semi-private status, but also because the company maintained a degree of foreign ownership. In fact, only 4.5 percent

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<sup>59</sup> Editorial, "Ni un Paso Atrás en Materia de Nacionalizaciones," *SUTERM*, October, 1973, 4-5. Relevant selections of the original text are: El imperialismo no fue borrado de nuestra realidad nacional, pero se le arrebataron recursos básicos, industrias estratégicas dentro del marco general de la economía. El país se recuperó a sí mismo. Las nacionalizaciones rescataron, no sólo riquezas que eran nuestras por legítimo derecho, sino, lo que es más importante, la dignidad y la esencia nacional...; ...México tiene una fisonomía propia y disfruta de un considerable grado de independencia dentro del panorama latinoamericano, precisamente debido a la política de la Revolución y, en particular, a la política de nacionalizaciones...; ...Se habla por estos días de entregar a la llamada iniciativa privada empresas estatales o paraestatales. Y ya sabemos lo que eso significa. Detrás de la expresión 'iniciativa privada' se esconde una burguesía cuenta-chiles, que no tiene ni ha tenido nunca recursos propios, y que sólo puede prestar nombres desteñidos al imperialismo para salvar apariencias legales. Hablando en plata, todo México sabe que, en última instancia, sería el capital financiero internacional el beneficiario de operaciones de ese tipo. Y el imperialismo ensancharía la brecha nunca completamente cerrada de su presencia en el país. México sería la víctima. ¡En materia de nacionalizaciones, ni un paso atrás!...; ...Es necesario reorientar la gestión de las empresas nacionalizadas con criterios de verdadero servicio a la Nación, a los obreros, a los campesinos, al pueblo pobre, que son quienes, precisamente, constituyen las mayorías nacionales...

of the company's shares in 1973 were owned by foreigners – Canadians, mostly – but state acquisition of those shares was a big deal to SUTERM leaders who called the measure urgent and argued that as long as Central Light and Power continued operating as a mixed business it would continue violating Article 27 of the Constitution that reserved for the nation exclusive domain over the electrical industry.<sup>60</sup>

The then and future presidents of Mexico heard these arguments and nodded approvingly. At a press conference weeks later, López Portillo raised the subject again and confirmed to reporters that a small percentage of Central Light and Power shares were owned by non-Mexicans and that the presence of foreign ownership in the nation's electric industry was indeed unconstitutional. But the situation was one he was emphatic about remedying and he was confident that the nation's financial authorities would find a solution. The entire industry, he exclaimed, could be "honestly mexicanized" in the next two months.<sup>61</sup> Yes, some snags to nationalization existed, he admitted, mainly in the form of a disagreement over share prices that challenged negotiations. Still, nothing would deter Mexico from its goal; the Central Light and Power Company would be part of the national patrimony by summer's end. The industry would be nationalized and it would be achieved through negotiation and not with force. Such a method would both honor the man who charted the course thirteen years before – López Mateos – as well as help further "dilute the image of an expropriating Mexico."<sup>62</sup>

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Though López Portillo's grand announcement would not come to fruition, his rhetoric fit inside the echeverrista philosophy of nationalization. The Mexican post-Tlatelolco state took measures to expand its influence in determining the nation's future economic course but did so by observing the rules of business. The Echeverría state treaded lightly on the fine line of nationalization. It celebrated its patriotism and sovereignty when promoting the mexicanization of certain industries, but confirmed its economic liberalism while purchasing companies and touting the benefits of a mixed economy.

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<sup>60</sup> Editorial, "Tarifas Electricas con Justicia Social," *SUTERM*, October, 1973, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Editorial, "La Prensa Nacional Comenta lo Dicho por el SUTERM," *SUTERM*, June, 1973, 15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

Nationalist rhetoric espoused by politicians and state maneuvers to expand the parastate apparatus pleased organized labor. State words and actions signaled a return of revolutionary norms that would bolster unionized workers' privileged position vis-à-vis owners and give them increased agency in determining the course of the nation's economic life. Actions that brought the copper industry under majority control of the state, for example, provoked syndical, even popular, celebration and were applauded by organized labor's hierarchy in the pages of the workers' press.<sup>63</sup> State commandeering of industry in the 1970s was seen as congruent with the economic norms established by the Mexican Revolution. Re-establishing revolutionary norms promised to bring a large role for workers who had once fought the Mexican Revolution, and had since developed modern society by literally building its infrastructure and perpetuating its industry. Mexican policymakers promoted such a message and in doing so spoke directly to the wants and desires of a sector they were desperate to woo back into the fold of compliance. These rhetorical lines reaped benefits, mainly in the form of official syndical support for the regime, but satisfaction was not universal. True conciliation with the extreme left was never achieved and dissent raged across the Echeverría sexenio fueled by a resentment over the state's preference for a specific (albeit a very large) segment of the labor movement it deemed corrupt, anti-democratic, and in the employ of domestic and foreign business interests.

The promotion and implementation of a mixed economic model in the Echeverría sexenio represented another effort on the part of the state to rekindle revolutionary-era norms and reestablish a species of collaborationism that would mutually benefit the state and the pivotal organized labor sector. Although the mixed economic philosophy implemented by the party-state in the post-Tlatelolco period was not socialism, neither was it unfettered free-market capitalism nor even the tempered-liberal economic model established by the Constitution of 1857. Its character as a product of the revolutionary experience in Mexico was authentic.

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<sup>63</sup> Curiously, however, *Ceteme* made no mention of the Flores de la Peña press conference in editions that bookended the August 27, 1971 announcement of the state's purchase of Cananea Mining Company.

Ultimately, the government's embrace of a mixed economic system defined by increased state intervention, oversight, and control of industries and resources was a strategy partly adopted to excite organized labor with the prospect of a more prominent place at the economic negotiating table. Seated at the table, unions hoped they could command a stronger position in their dealings with business and exert greater influence over the nation's overall economic course. A fortified labor position was also attractive to the Mexican state, as it believed that by regaining organized labor's confidence it would improve its position with the working class as a whole and garner the benefits of improved legitimacy.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**RECONSTITUTING THE REVOLUTIONARY BODY: CLASS,  
COLLECTIVISM, AND PATERNALISM IN POST-TLATELOLCO  
TRIPARTITE RELATIONS**

It is high time Sir, as you said in your speech, that the rich leave the Institutional Revolutionary Party. You know well that we did not get along with them, nor did we put them in the PRI. The PRI, we understand, is a party of the people, of the workers, of the peasants, of the middle class, of all those who are identified with the Mexican Revolution. The rich do not have to be there, and not only are we in agreement that they leave the Party, but also that they leave the public posts that they shamefully occupy under the protection of the Party.<sup>1</sup>

Fidel Velázquez speaking to Jesús Reyes Heróles in a speech to convene the Eightieth General Assembly of the CTM National Council, February, 1972.

Steps that saw the Mexican state “preserve the national patrimony” by increasing oversight and control of industries in the late-60s/early-70s excited organized labor because they promised unionists a more integral role in the decision-making processes of national economic and industrial expansion. In contrast, owners resented the state’s tendency toward increased economic intervention as they believed that any expansion of government influence in the economy signaled parallel gains for organized workers – the post-Tlatelolco state’s preferred sector. Concerned owners of the period chagrined still more as the federal government moved to increase its control over the structures of labor mediation in ways that, not surprisingly, were interpreted as meddlesome and representative of its bias for labor over capital.

This chapter examines the creation of several federal organisms in the Echeverría sexenio to determine how their existence formed part of a state strategy to reconfigure a paternalistic role over the regulation of organized labor and business relations. These

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, “Ante el Presidente del CEN del PRI. ‘La CTM Reclama el Primero Puesto para Luchar Contra los Enemigos de la Revolución y de México’ – F. Velázquez,” *Ceteme*, February 26, 1972, 1. Spanish reads: En buena hora señor, como usted lo ha dicho en su discurso, que salgan los ricos del Partido Revolucionario Institucional. Usted sabe bien que con los ricos no nos llevamos, pero además, tampoco los metimos nosotros al Partido Revolucionario Institucional. El PRI, entendemos, es un Partido del pueblo, de los obreros, de los campesinos, de la clase media, de todos aquellos que están identificados con la Revolución Mexicana. Los ricos no tiene qué hacer allí, y no solamente estamos de acuerdo con que salgan los ricos del Partido, sino también que salgan de los puestos públicos que bajo el amparo del Partido por desgracia están ocupando.

developments restored a previous norm and marked an increase in state power that proved beneficial for the labor movement, for an invigorated *paterfamilias* at the head of the corporatist structure was an asset that gave it increased leverage in its negotiations with business leaders. This chapter also notes the expansion of federal social services in the period, once again positioning state action inside a larger rubric of renewed paternalism and improved relations with the organized labor sector.

Following this, the analysis turns to assessing how the state sought to pay the political costs of 1968 by solidifying traditional values and making grand overtures to an original constituent of the Revolution. State goals are evaluated through an examination of government and official party rhetoric and policy in the period. Subsequently, state goals are cross-referenced in contemporary union literature to confirm the existence of formal syndical support for government positions and programs. Attention to the monthly publication of the United Electric Workers Union, the nation's largest electrical workers' union, is crucial in this regard for in its pages was conveyed an editorial alliance with the state that belied the powerful independent current that ran through the union's membership. Together, these methodological approaches reveal that after Tlatelolco both state and organized labor leaders saw value in restoring collaborationism – the historical tendency of the state and organized labor toward a symbiotic and reciprocal (though not necessarily equal) relationship to strengthen their respective positions. The restoration of collaborationism via the resurgence of class, collectivism, and paternalism as indispensable components of tripartite relations in the period is the subject of this analysis.

#### *“CONVIVENCIA” AND TRIPARTITE LABOR RELATIONS*

Reforms made to the structures of the labor mediation system unnerved owners and for good reason. Since it was first established in 1927, the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JFCA) had been advertised and widely believed to be an organism established to defend workers' rights and protect employees from exploitation at the hands of employers in select industrial sectors deemed strategically vital or having an



interstate character.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the foundational language of the JFCA stressed objectivity, and the tripartite structure of the bodies – integrated by an equal number of worker and owner representatives and a government representative who presided over the commission – was often touted as representative of the government’s commitment to promoting social peace and harmony between the forces of production.<sup>3</sup> But the early trajectory of the JFCA suggested a state bias for the interests of workers over owners. This trend was not surprising given that the commission flowered during the height of revolutionary unionism. During the years 1935-1940, government representatives typically swung their decisive vote toward the cause of labor, ruling in favor of worker petitioners by a rate of nearly four to one.<sup>4</sup> Unquestionably, JFCA rulings in favor of workers proved critical components in the process that ultimately produced the Cárdenas state’s nationalization of the oil industry on March 18, 1938.

In this context, business owners of the 1930s could have been excused for concluding that the scales of justice were tipped against them in the arena of labor-dispute resolution. The tide appeared to shift with economic expansion in the 1940s, and future labor representatives condemned what they viewed as an observable preference on the part of government to favor the interests of capital over those of labor. It was this

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<sup>2</sup> The story is more complicated than this. JFCAs were created in 1927 in part so that the Calles government could exert a degree of control over resolving workplace conflicts that emerged inside the railroad industry – a labor sector that the Supreme Court had previously ruled the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Labor had no jurisdiction over. See Chapter One for more information.

<sup>3</sup> Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje, [http://www.stps.gob.mx/07\\_justicia\\_lab/01\\_jfca/jfcainternet/index.htm](http://www.stps.gob.mx/07_justicia_lab/01_jfca/jfcainternet/index.htm) (accessed September 17, 2009). Spanish reads: Es un Tribunal con plena Jurisdicción, de composición tripartita, integrada por igual número de representantes de trabajadores y patrones y uno del gobierno, de conformidad con la fracción XX del artículo 123 constitucional Apartado "A", que tiene a su cargo la tramitación y resolución de los conflictos de trabajo que se susciten entre trabajadores y patrones, sólo entre aquéllos o sólo entre éstos, derivados de las relaciones de trabajo o de hechos íntimamente relacionados con ellas, y su competencia está determinada por la fracción XXXI del artículo 123 constitucional y por el artículo 527 de la Ley Federal del Trabajo. Other pertinent text reads: La función cotidiana de la Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje es impartir justicia, promoviendo la paz social y armonía en las relaciones laborales, mediante la conciliación y el arbitraje Garantizando a trabajadores y patrones o empleadores de las ramas industriales y empresas de jurisdicción federal, respeto a la Ley, transparencia, certeza y seguridad jurídica en la resolución de los conflictos laborales.

<sup>4</sup> According to Guadalupe Marín Rivera, there were 2,030 strikes adjudicated by the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board during the period 1935-1940 of which 1,596 (seventy-nine percent) were ruled in favor of workers. See Hobart A. Spalding, *Organized Labor in Latin America: Historical Case Studies of Urban Workers in Dependent Societies* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 124.

worker sentiment about a governmental bias for business that inspired the CTM to call for organizational reform in the late-1960s.<sup>5</sup>

The creation of the National Tripartite Commission, made up of worker, owner, and government representatives, represented a state offering to appease organized labor by re-injecting class notions into the quotidian labor-capital relations. The planned creation of the commission was announced at a May 17, 1971 meeting that lasted nine hours and brought together an impressive array of worker, worker, and government representatives. Echeverría convened the gathering with a speech that stressed the cooperative and revolutionary aspects of the planned twenty-five member commission, to be composed of ten worker representatives, ten business representatives, and five government officials representing the Labor, Treasury, and Industry and Commerce ministries, as well the Attorney General's office and the National Institute for Rural Community and Popular Development.<sup>6</sup> In his address, Echeverría espoused a familiar theme on the importance of *convivencia*, or harmonious coexistence between the factors of production.<sup>7</sup> He reminded listeners that Article 123 of the Constitution of 1917 established the precedent of shared responsibility in the decision making process and assured members of worker and business organizations the best possible defense of their rights by granting them direct participation in the decision making process.<sup>8</sup> As he saw it, the commission would continue that tradition, and he beamed confidence in its prospects for success based on the cooperative attitudes recently exhibited by the worker and business sectors in the face of current economic challenges. Through cooperation with the government and the peaceful coexistence of sectors mutually "conscious of their national responsibility," the commission was poised to become a crucial tool "in the analysis, study, and planning of the questions that derive from our social and economic development."

The National Tripartite Commission was to be an advisory board that would counsel the federal executive and national legislature on questions of economic policy. It

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<sup>5</sup> Editorial, "Como se Integran las Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje," *Ceteme*, August 2, 1969.

<sup>6</sup> Jorge Basurto, *La Clase Obrera en la Historia de México. En el régimen de echeverría: rebelión e independencia* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983), 37-38.

<sup>7</sup> Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, ed. *Revista Mexicana del Trabajo*, 1-2 (Jan. – Jun. 1971): 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

was not afforded legislative power that superseded congressional action, and therefore was not the kind of policymaking body – *directed from above* – that Echeverría often criticized. Yet in spite of Echeverría’s protestation, its composition and goals confirmed the corporatist quality of the postrevolutionary Mexican state. The commission resembled the National Minimum Wage Commission, National Profit-Sharing Commission, National Human Resource Industrial Development Council, and several other federal bodies then in existence because of its tripartite structure.<sup>9</sup> The Echeverría government’s proven commitment to providing adverse functional groups a venue within which to compete, always under the watchful guidance of the parent-state, affirmed that a corporatist ethic remained in place to structure government in the period.

But the Echeverría state was not a perfect corporatist specimen; formalized class conflict of the kind permitted, albeit moderated, in the post-Tlatelolco period is rarely a facet of traditional corporatist typology. Jorge Basurto tells that tripartite negotiation to resolve labor disputes had a long history in Mexico. Presidents Madero, Calles, and Cárdenas each convened conventions to recognize the adverse interests of the sectors and reach resolutions, yet Calles, like Carranza before him, saw class and national interests as contradictory, a point famously made during the well publicized feud he carried on with then-president Cárdenas in 1935. Calles, in short, believed in harmony between labor and capital so long as that meant subordinating the majority (labor) to the minority (capital.) Furthermore, he interpreted class struggle as sectional and anti-national, hence treasonous, and like others from the revolutionary generation, he subscribed to a capitalist development project for Mexico that minimized class conflict through state management. Cárdenas, on the other hand, though he did not envision the destruction of capitalism, believed that the constitutionally established goal of “equilibrium” between labor and capital could only be reached by guaranteeing workers’ rights and permitting workers to push for the inclusion of worker co-management, profit sharing, and collective contracts in their dealings with employers.<sup>10</sup> Manuel Ávila Camacho, who succeeded Cárdenas in 1940, was less supportive of progressive worker demands but nonetheless extended the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>10</sup> Myrna I. Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 324.

state's embrace of tripartite policy by writing that negotiating technique into the Pacto Obrero Industrial, a 1945 accord inspired by a shared desire on the part of the state, organized labor, and business to develop Mexican industry under the rubric of economic nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

Post-World War II development demands in Mexico spawned a new *modus vivendi* in tripartite labor relations. Employers increasingly intervened in labor matters and constantly increased their influence with the state at the expense of workers. In time, their larger role in determining national economic policy undermined the revolutionary-inspired rhetoric that argued for the potential benefits of class conflict. What was good for business was advertised as good for the nation at large, representing another message that when naturalized into the dominant discourse further served to muffle the volume of class conflict in labor relations.<sup>12</sup>

An analysis of speech used to announce the creation of the National Tripartite Commission in 1971 suggests a renewed comfort with promoting three-way contestation in labor relations. Minister of Labor and Social Welfare Rafael Hernández Ochoa spoke after Echeverría that afternoon and repeated the president's plea for cooperation in the industrial process. But cooperation meant compromise, and both officials targeted their messages to employers. Hernández asked that they create an atmosphere in labor relations that supported productivity, not so that the worker produced more earnings for the business, but rather so that better relations between the factors of production could be fostered.<sup>13</sup> Echeverría had earlier issued similar calls for business leaders to inject their operations with nationalist and humanitarian sentiments. The president did so again at the meeting by arguing that their failure to distribute profits equitably caused economic inequality and halted national progress. With the commission the government would be better equipped to coordinate the forces of production and eliminate contradictions in the national economic structure that placed the interests of one sector above the collective

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<sup>11</sup> Jose Luis Reyna and Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *La clase obrera en la historia de México: de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines a Adolfo López Mateos, (1952-1964), Segunda Edición* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, UNAM, 1996), 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Basurto, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, ed. *Revista Mexicana del Trabajo*, 1-2 (Jan. – Jun. 1971): 84.

interests of the nation. Compliance with these goals demanded from everyone “a decidedly patriotic attitude.”<sup>14</sup>

With these words, the state’s leading labor authorities appealed to the nationalistic sentiments of owners by asking them to think less of personal profits and more about the communal benefits industry could bring. Hernández warned that a sustained “prosperity” built upon the sacrifice of the majority would not be permitted by the principles of the Mexican Revolution, as “the well being of the workers is a fundamental requisite of an authentic national development...” Without it, he warned, “economic imbalance and social injustice” would continue.<sup>15</sup> He then reminded his audience about one of the principal determinations of Article 123 – that work was not an “article of commerce” but rather a right – and scolded them for creating an economic climate that jeopardized that right by putting thousands of employees out of work through industrial mechanization. That being the case, he commanded all elements of the labor and ownership sectors to place un- and under-employment at the top of their legislative agendas, and to promote worker training and state industrial decentralization strategies to help mitigate these pressing problems.<sup>16</sup>

With the National Tripartite Commission, the penchant of recent governments to muffle the presence of class conflict in labor relations seemed destined for reversal. Echeverría here was reviving the custom of bringing workers, the state, and employers together in one organism for resolving labor disputes. Though strong opposition to this development surely existed, ownership representatives present at the May 17 meeting expressed confidence that this new breed of collaboration would yield mutual benefit for all economic sectors. In a joint presentation, José Mendoza Fernández, Vicepresident of the Confederation of Industrial Chambers and Mario Suárez, Secretary General of the Regional Confederation of Workers addressed the problem of industrial concentration that would later become a central focus of the new commission. United, ownership and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>15</sup> Editorial, “En una Reunión de Nueve Horas, no es Posible Resolver Problemas que por Muchos Años no han Tenido Solución,” *Ceteme*, May 22, 1971, 2. Spanish reads: ...el bienestar de los trabajadores es requisito fundamental de un auténtico desarrollo nacional, porque de otras manera, no habría desarrollo sino desequilibrio económico e injusticia social.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

labor leaders decried the enormous imbalance in the development and living standards seen in the Federal District and in the majority of the nation's other urban areas. Industrial concentration in the Valley of Mexico brought negative results, including rising land prices, a constant need for new and increasingly costly public works projects, and perpetual shortages of water, garbage, and drainage services for the residents of the capital area. Creating new industrial centers in other urban areas, they argued, could ease these problems, as well as preface the decentralization of the nation's education, financial, and justice bureaucracies.<sup>17</sup>

Another major issue to be taken up by the commission involved the reinvestment of corporate earnings. Coverage of the event reveals considerable worker anger about the tendency of employers to pocket profits rather than to reinvest in the expansion or modernization of their companies. That afternoon, worker representatives objected to this practice, complaining that it contributed to the general under-productivity of Mexican industry. Even worse, they claimed, it deprived citizens of employment by not spurring the creation of new jobs.

But in spite of some cross-sector backbiting, the dominant tone of the day showed three-way consensus on the need to combat Mexico's industrial inefficiency to the benefit of both the labor and business sectors. Many owners who attended the forum expressed agreement with workers and state officials on key matters of industrial development, and particularly on the need to expand the nation's industrial apparatus through the creation of new industrial centers. Representatives of the National Confederation of Chambers of Commerce went so far as to ask for federal legislation to coordinate the industrial decentralization programs the government would develop.<sup>18</sup> Other business representatives opted for a more combative position and showed themselves particularly committed to retain control over the direction of their investments. Manuel Espinosa Yglesias, president of the Mexican Bankers' Association, for example, defended the right of owners to invest corporate earnings as they saw fit, and he used his platform at the

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<sup>17</sup> Antonio Lara Barragán, "Creación de las Bases Para una Prosperidad Perdurable. Debatieron Ante el Presidente, Funcionarios y Representantes del Capital y del Trabajo," *El Universal*, May 18, 1971, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Editorial, "Once Acuerdos Fundamentales en la Reunión del Lunes en Palacio," *Ceteme*, May 22, 1971, 8.

meeting to scold the workers' movement for what he deemed its petulance. He demanded that workers stop fighting for "a piece of cake" when they had before them "the great cake of opportunities that Mexico offered."<sup>19</sup> *Ceteme* editors later took issue with this outburst. In a written reply, they mocked the idea of unlimited prosperity and ridiculed Espinosa's "great cake" as a bounty that had formerly been enjoyed only by only a privileged few who jealously guarded the nation's economic power in their hands. This prosperity, they wrote, would no longer be viewed from afar by workers. Workers would now demand to participate in it by taking advantage of their legal rights.<sup>20</sup>

The charge that the patronal failure to maximize production hurt workers had a long history tied to some of organized labor's most central demands. Unionized workers had not been awarded a forty-hour work week in the New Federal Labor Law, nor did they receive the guarantee of two-consecutive days of rest that they had for so long demanded. These omissions had irked CTM boss Fidel Velázquez. In the forty-hour work week, he saw the key to solving the nation's employment problem. He reasoned that businesses could (and still would) operate seven days a week even with the forty-hour clause in place, but by limiting the maximum number of hours an employee could work, owners would be forced to give employment to other workers.<sup>21</sup> Many unions, he explained, including those that represented electrical, railway, petroleum, beer, cement, paper, sugar, rubber, and even bank workers who represented "...the most reactionary sector, the only chapter that has not evolved since 1886..." already had a forty-hour work week and enjoyed its benefits.<sup>22</sup> Velázquez bragged that during the past ten years, CTM efforts had succeeded to write the forty-hour clause into the collective contracts of over 1,000 businesses that employed its members.<sup>23</sup> He signaled that the CTM would continue to militate for the insertion of the forty-hour work week – with pay of forty-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Don Manuel Espinosa Yglesias, defendió a sus empresarios que reinvierten sus utilidades y exhortó a los obreros a no pelear por una tajada de pastel, 'cuando tienen ante sí el gran pastel de oportunidades que ofrece México.'

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: El gran pastel que sólo disfrutaban los empresarios privilegiados que tienen en sus manos el poder económico, porque los trabajadores no más lo ven de lejos sin participar de él.

<sup>21</sup> Editorial, "La CTM Continuará su Lucha por la Reforma al Art. 123 Constitucional," *Ceteme*, June 6, 1970, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: Y es más, los empleados bancarios, que es el sector más reaccionario, el único capítulo que no ha evolucionado desde 1886, cuenta con la jornada de 40 horas.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

eight hours – in the NLFT and he counseled empresarios that by inserting the reduced work week into their operations and by guaranteeing workers two consecutive days of rest, they would profit from the increased efficiency and productivity a refreshed worker would bring.

The creation of the National Tripartite Commission indicated to labor leaders like Velázquez that their priorities had excellent prospects for realization in coming years. The initial response shown by organized labor hierarchs to the creation of the body was overwhelmingly positive. Labor leaders took advantage of the Echeverría government's predilection for tripartism and proposed a litany of new federally organized commissions in the early part of the Echeverría presidency.

At the same May 17 meeting, Jesús Yurén, Secretary General of the Federal District Workers' Federation and one of the original founders of the CTM, recommended that a tripartite national employment service be created to propose measures to prevent technological displacement of workers and generate new industrial jobs. Blas Chumacero, Secretary General of the Puebla State Workers' Federation and another big-wig in the CTM, addressed the issue of worker productivity. As he saw it, worker under-productivity resulted from poor business strategies; as production began in the heart of the business, it was there where it needed to be augmented. Such an interpretation countered ownership's argument that low worker output resulted from exaggerated labor agitation that needlessly sowed discontent in workers. Chumacero's position, however, did not represent a strict critique of the ownership class, but rather a call to ameliorate labor and capital priorities to the benefit of both sectors. The logical solution, he felt, would be the creation of a National Productivity Commission with tripartite representation to study and to integrate the factors of production.<sup>24</sup>

Numerous other hot-button issues were addressed at the meeting, including worker housing, training, environmental contamination, economic competitiveness, and the most polemic topics: salary and price controls. On these latter topics, owner and worker representatives bitterly disputed the creation of tripartite commissions to regulate

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<sup>24</sup> Editorial, "Once Acuerdos Fundamentales en la Reunión del Lunes en Palacio," *Ceteme*, May 22, 1971, 8.



worker compensation and the cost of goods. Understandably, the premise of state involvement in the setting of wages, let alone prices, was anathema to most in the private sector. Still, it was not a concept entirely absent in Mexican history. Fernando Yllanes Ramos, representing the Confederation of Industrial Chambers, said businessmen were disposed to negotiate on the subject but “without distractions,” in an unmistakable reference to the syndical factor that owners deemed so counter-productive. Salvador Barragán, Secretary General of the Mexican Petroleum Workers’ Union, iterated the overwhelming desire of organized labor for mechanisms to more equitably distribute wealth and guarantee workers “an adequate and constant purchasing power.” This result, he said, could be achieved through the creation of a system that automatically adjusted worker salaries to reflect changes in the prices of basic goods.<sup>25</sup>

Not surprisingly, the meeting concluded with a resolution to create a price control commission in the future. Realization of this promise took time, but when the Mixed National Committee for Salary Protection was created in April 1974, it represented a victory for organized labor in several respects. It confirmed the Echeverría state’s commitment to permit increased worker involvement in economic and labor matters, as well as empowered union representatives to directly intervene in the tackling of problems related to price gouging, hoarding, and inflation – economic matters that were formerly settled by state-business negotiations conducted in private. Once again, labor leaders cooed approvingly and touted minimum wage commission as yet more concrete evidence of a restored union between the working class and the government. In the words of Fidel Velázquez, the committee represented “the most vigorous alliance” between the state and organized labor to benefit workers and their families, a group he numbered at some twenty-five million persons.<sup>26</sup>

### *CLASS AND THE REVOLUTIONARY BODY*<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Antonio Lara Barragán, “Creación de las Bases Para una Prosperidad Perdurable. Debatieron Ante el Presidente, Funcionarios y Representantes del Capital y del Trabajo,” *El Universal*, May 18, 1971, 7. Spanish reads: ...un poder de compra adecuado y constante.

<sup>26</sup> Basurto, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Much of this chapter’s remaining discussion is adapted from my essay: Joseph U. Lenti, “A Revolutionary Regime Must Put the Interests of the Majority First’: Class, Collectivism, and Paternalism in Post-Tlatelolco Mexican Tripartite Relations,” *The Latin Americanist* 54 (Winter 2010): 163-182.

The National Tripartite Commission and other tripartite boards created in the period demonstrated the Echeverría state's willingness to facilitate contestation between diverse class interests on pressing economic and labor matters. Organized labor applauded this trend because it bolstered official labor's voice in the policymaking process. Business leaders, conversely, resented tripartism because it reduced their ability to shape policy and fostered a class-based discourse they saw as destructive to the national economy. The ascension of Jesús Reyes Heróles to the top of the PRI also did not bode well for business. As a long-time leading figure in national politics and as former head of the state-owned oil company *Petróleos Mexicanos*, Reyes Heróles advanced a brand of political economy infused with strong nationalist notions. As Director General of PEMEX Reyes Heróles was committed to a mixed (public-private) investment model but oversaw the purchase of foreign-owned petroleum assets in the country. As a result, his tenure was interpreted by some as adverse to the interests of business.

Reyes Heróles's introductory rhetoric as PRI president, however, required no use of the imagination; it was overtly hostile to owners. In his speech given to take the reins of the PRI on February 21, 1972, Reyes Heróles challenged the right of the rich to belong to the official party of the Mexican state. He spoke to party members and reminded them that their's was an "anti-imperialist party" that pursued the cause of the oppressed. In his view, the PRI had always worked with the state to direct the economy and bring order to a nation where "many Mexicos, ranging from the Mexico of hunger to the Mexico of lavishness, have formed." In Mexico, he continued, there was a tradition where "the entrepreneurial state" managed large sectors of the economy toward the promotion of private industry and the creation of public investments that benefited the nation as a whole. Public enterprise, thus, was a "transformative factor of the national reality..."; it filled a "decisive role" in national development.<sup>28</sup>

Recent developments had encouraged Reyes Heróles that the entrepreneurial state led by Echeverría was fulfilling its "decisive role" and adequately directing Mexico's social development. For the modern PRI to do the same, Reyes Heróles surmised that it

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<sup>28</sup> *Excélsior*, February 22, 1972, 1/24.

was in desperate need of purification; that it needed to remove “infiltrators” from its “revolutionary ranks.” The identity of those “infiltrators” was not a mystery – it was those who diverged from the dictates of Revolutionary ideology. He announced that “We,” because we are members of the PRI, “have an economic and social line of thinking that convinces us that Revolution and personal economic power are not reconcilable. Neither the economically powerful nor those who serve them have a place in this party!”<sup>29</sup>

This highly polemic speech ignited a firestorm in political circles as it got to the core of understandings about class, corporatism, and the Revolutionary body in modern society. María del Carmen Carreño and Bobadilla Peña, both prominent officials inside the National Confederation of Popular Organizations took issue with Reyes Heróles and defended the right of the wealthy to belong to the PRI. This discourse further disheartened owners who now felt themselves assaulted on multiple fronts: from their workers, who had begun to mobilize against them armed with a restored class solidarity; from the state, that granted the labor confederations concession after concession in order to restore collaborationism; and now from the PRI, which worked to win voter loyalty by mimicking the government’s pro-labor positions.<sup>30</sup>

Fidel Velázquez was, in contrast, impressed by the words of Reyes Heróles and invited him to address the 80<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the CTM National Council later that month. There, *cetemistas* received Reyes Heróles with a standing ovation and Velázquez introduced him by declaring his organization’s enthusiasm for the new PRI chief’s ideas. He began: “It is high time Sir, as you said in your speech, that the rich leave the Institutional Revolutionary Party.” Referencing history he stated: “You know well that we did not get along with them, nor did we put them in the PRI.” This was a logical conclusion for Velázquez to reach in light of his opinion that: “The PRI, we understand,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> 1972 internal party statutes stipulated that large-scale employers of labor could not belong to the PRI. The practical result of this stipulation meant that owners could not vote in the party’s state or national councils or hold positions on the National Executive Committee. Owners of large companies were thus prohibited from taking part in the party’s internal decision making processes that guaranteed that the three “revolutionary” sectors of civil society – worker, peasant, and popular and professional – would determine policy in Mexico. See David Schers, *The Popular Sector of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional in Mexico* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, The David Horowitz Institute, 1972), 174.

is a party of the people, of the workers, of the peasants, of the middle class, of all those who identify with the Mexican Revolution.”<sup>31</sup> Thus there could be no room in the party for a class of people that did not share the same dictates and ideology of those foundational groups. Excluding them from public life, therefore, was appropriate.<sup>32</sup>

Reyes Heróles received his ovation and followed the labor magnate with a speech that endorsed the primacy of the traditional sectors to the Revolutionary program. In workers he saw a young and vital movement that was the ideal vehicle for institutional change. He echoed Velázquez’s determination that workers represented a pillar of Mexican society, though he also stressed the value of cooperation with adversaries. Cooperation was a necessary tactic to achieve the profound, even “radical,” reforms that the administration and PRI were undertaking.<sup>33</sup> These somewhat mild sentiments were sharpened months later in a speech he gave before residents of Gustavo A. Madero and Azcapotzalco – two of Mexico City’s most characteristic delegations. There, Reyes Heróles spoke to an estimated 2,000 residents of the districts and iterated the official position of the party he led. He informed them that the PRI shared their values and was against those who possessed excess property to the injury of those that lacked it. He listed PRI priorities in a way that resonated with local *vecinos*. “We want less water for those who waste it, so that there be more here; we want less upscale housing developments so that there be fewer shacks here; we want less expenses and waste so that there be more jobs.” Turning to labor specific issues, he pledged that the PRI would not permit employers to pay workers a wage below that established by law, nor would it let “those who have much” allow those who have little to suffer inadequate education, health, and transportation services.<sup>34</sup>

#### *COLLECTIVISM IN THE WORKER HOME AND BODY*

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<sup>31</sup> Editorial, “Ante el Presidente del CEN del PRI. ‘La CTM Reclama el Primero Puesto para Luchar Contra los Enemigos de la Revolución y de México’ – F. Velázquez,” *Ceteme*, February 26, 1972, 1.

<sup>32</sup> It was well known that Velázquez engaged a vicious public feud with Echeverría and at times Reyes Heróles in this period. His vigorous rhetorical approval of Reyes Heróles’s words, therefore, should be understood as further evidence of official organized labor’s desire to restore collaborationism.

<sup>33</sup> Editorial, “...‘Convencido de la Fuerza del Movimiento Obrero Mexicano por su Acción Continuada’...,” *Ceteme*, February 26, 1972, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Editorial, “El P.R.I. Contra Quienes Poseen Bienes en Exceso: Reyes Heróles,” *Ceteme*, July 29, 1972, 1.

Official support for increased government intervention in labor relations did not waver in the first half of the Echeverría administration. Neither did the dissemination of PRI propaganda that incited worker' notions of class solidarity. As president of the PRI, Reyes Heróles often cited the obstacles that the sin of greed presented to the advancement of Mexican society, and in his rhetoric the question of whose conscience was most stained with guilt was never in doubt.<sup>35</sup> The emphasis given to class-antagonism and calls made for personal sacrifice by Reyes Heróles and other state and party officials in the period attested to their desire to reconstitute certain genetic strands of the revolutionary body. Worker demands asking for increased state involvement in organized labor-business relations showed a similar desire to reestablish that historical norm. Together, state and organized labor rhetoric that emphasized the importance of class, nationalism, and social justice demonstrated a powerful longing to revive certain principles that formerly guided state and labor relations, one of which was collectivism.

The unique brand of collectivism that developed inside the postrevolutionary organized labor movement in Mexico was perhaps most distinguishable by its vertical and hierarchical tendencies. Mexican unions, in general, were not democratic organizations. Nevertheless, members showed deference to their leaders and took care of their own when help was needed. Mutual aid funds – collectively administered accounts that had roots in medieval corporatist societies – continued to function and remained dear in the hearts of modern unionists. Historically, mutual aid funds were formed from worker contributions and were administered to help workers and family pay unexpected costs such as medical bills or funeral expenses. Union mutual aid funds in the 1970s maintained that basic function.

The creation of the United Electric Workers Union (SUTERM) formed from the merging of two rival electrical worker unions in 1972 provoked great consternation in members who worried what changes would be made to their union accounts. Members' questions were answered and fears assuaged in the pages of the union's first monthly newsletter. *SUTERM*, No. 1, from May 1973 informed that all permanent employees of

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<sup>35</sup> Eugenia Meyer, ed. *Jesús Reyes Heróles: Obras Completas, Tomo 2* (Mexico City: Asociación de Estudios Históricos y Políticos Jesús Reyes Heróles, A.C., 1996), 59.

the Federal Electric Commission (CFE) – the state-owned company to which SUTERM had the primary labor contract – were automatically registered in the union’s general fund. Retired workers were registered as well, though they had to renew their subscriptions within ninety days. Furthermore, dues would remain the same – ten pesos weekly – as would the amount paid to beneficiaries of fallen workers: 125,000 pesos to relatives of active members; 75,000 pesos to relatives of retired members.<sup>36</sup>

The benefits workers could gain by paying into the mutual aid fund were constantly promoted in the workers’ press. *SUTERM* published frequent rolls of deceased electrical workers and listed the amount paid to their families by the union fund. These lists were often accompanied by photographs that showed somber-looking widows receiving checks from union officials. One photo that ran in *SUTERM*, No. 2 showed Echeverría handing a check to a very elderly woman, likely the mother of a fallen employee. The caption of the photo, which read: “On the March the Union’s Mutual Fund,” actually understated the symbolic value of the image.<sup>37</sup> In this scene, a *sutermista* (SUTERM member) observed nothing less than the president of the republic providing for a co-worker’s loved one. Perhaps, it was hoped, the worker even saw in the image the head and symbolic father of the Mexican people literally caring for the well being of one his weakest children.

Workers saw in mutual aid funds tangible benefits of collectivism in union life. They saw their leaders collect and organize the funds in a way that guaranteed that they and their families would not face tragedy alone. In the administration and dispensation of funds, workers felt pride and camaraderie knowing that their efforts would benefit a *compañero* in his or her time of need. Such swells of solidarity were especially comforting to workers in a time as socially transcendent as was the post-Tlatelolco era. In this context, most (not all) unionized workers rallied around a corporate identity that unified them with their leaders, the state, and with each other against their historical enemies in the business class. In this context of moral and societal flux questions raised about the composition of the Mexican state became more salient than ever. The resulting

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<sup>36</sup> “Fondo Mutualista del SUTERM,” *SUTERM*, May, 1973, 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> See photo in *SUTERM*, June, 1973, 24.

controversies waged over basic questions including the appropriateness of permitting wealthy individuals membership in the PRI, were addressed by policymakers who pleased organized labor with resolutions that showed a renewed state empathy for the plight of the worker.

Questions of moral economy, specifically, debates about the debt owed workers by the Mexican state, pervaded popular discourses carried out in hardscrabble urban settings where politicians advertised the state's restored commitment to the cause of the unionist. But in those locales which had long represented the nuclei of organized labor's powerbase, official messages reached diverse ears. When Reyes Heróles spoke to the residents of Gustavo A. Madero and Azcapotzalco in July 1972 his words may have been heard by more non-unionized or "free" workers than unionists. Such individuals were not "workers" by the definition ascribed by labor authorities, but instead formed part of a massive laboring underclass that worked part-time or temporary jobs without the benefits and protections of union membership. They puzzled policymakers by operating just beyond the control of the official labor establishment.

Even more distressing to the nation's political and labor elites were inhabitants of the *predios* – understood herein as hastily-assembled residential communities, sometimes shantytowns – that began to dot Mexico's urban landscapes with the rural exodus in the mid-twentieth century. The typical *predial* (resident of a predio) was a recent arrival to the city who had been displaced from his or her home by a loss of land or lack of economic opportunity in the countryside. Once congregated in or on the fringes of the urban areas, these internal migrants often replicated patterns of communal organization that formerly structured their native villages. Many prediales also gained fame for their ingenuity, occasionally powering blocks of houses with pirated electricity or providing themselves transportation with stolen city buses. In their existence, they unnerved authorities because they were impossible to group into a specific sector. They were neither workers nor peasants nor middle class professionals. Prediales were nearly undetectable by formal mechanisms because they operated almost entirely outside the corporatist structure. Consequently, they were almost a non-factor in the postrevolutionary state's moral economic equation.

In the eyes of labor authorities prediales represented more of a threat than an opportunity because they exhibited little demonstrable drive to unionize themselves during the period under review. Why? The answer was simple: demographics. In 1970s Mexico there were simply not enough union jobs available to all who wanted them. Mexico's population in the post-war period grew disproportionately to the ability of organized labor to incorporate new workers into the movement, causing the rate of unionized workers as a percentage of all workers in the national labor force to plummet from a high of 9.1 percent in 1950 to 7.3 percent in 1969.<sup>38</sup> After Tlatelolco, organized labor's leadership continued to exhort the laboring class to organize. The CTM's weekly publication *Ceteme* frequently printed a call to free workers to "Defend yourself from owner' exploitation, use your constitutional rights, join a union." This demand was invariably followed by language from Article 123, Part XVI affirming the constitutional guarantee that "Workers as much as owners will have the right to join together in defense of their respective interests, forming unions, professional organizations, etc."<sup>39</sup>

Economic realities of the period suggested that those calls were disingenuous. This statement is given credence by probing the CTM's push for a forty-hour week a bit deeper. When commenting on the issue, Velázquez often referenced the notion of equity in opportunity for workers – a concept that he believed underlined core institutional values stressing collectivism amongst workers. But the spread of a 'help-your-compañero' ethic was not the only objective of these policies. Organized labor also pursued the very material goal of job creation in its drive to have maximum hour policies instituted at the industry-wide or individual business level. The imposition of a maximum forty-hour work week created additional founts of employment because once

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<sup>38</sup> Hobart Spalding, *Organized Labor in Latin America: Historical Case Studies of Urban Workers in Dependent Societies* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 138. Spalding garnered his numbers from government sources though they may have been overly conservative. A more recent assessment contended that 15.2 percent of the Mexican workforce was unionized in 1970. See Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 154.

<sup>39</sup> Consult *Ceteme* during the years 1970-1976 for numerous re-prints of this message.



implemented, workers could not work longer even if they wanted. This restriction created a production vacuum that could be filled by newly hired union workers.<sup>40</sup>

Even with labor gains, unemployment was a day to day reality for much of society in post-Tlatelolco Mexico. Even unionists sat idly by waiting for employment. Such was a natural byproduct of population expansion that greatly outpaced the nation's industrial expansion. For context, consider that during the period 1960-1969 Mexico experienced its highest rates of population growth, averaging 3.35% annually during that period.<sup>41</sup> This colossal expansion which increased Mexico's population from just under thirty-five million in 1960 to over forty-eight million by 1970 was celebrated by some as tangible evidence of the nation's economic and social maturation.<sup>42</sup> Optimists saw demographic growth as both the product and source of economic expansion, a rationale that permitted one to conclude that as many as 600,000 new jobs would be required annually to meet the needs of an expanding populace.<sup>43</sup>

While some touted the benefits of rapid demographic growth, others feared the nation approached a critical demographic mass. In the opinion of Jesús Yuren, who ran one of the nation's largest unions, the Mexico City-based Federal District Workers' Federation, the demographic question represented one of the most fundamental challenges workers of the 1970s faced. In his opinion, rapid population expansion was increasing the size of the economically active population at an unsustainable rate. According to CTM statistics, in 1965 12.5 million citizens were involved in wage earning activities in Mexico. In 1970, that number had grown to fifteen million and it was projected to surpass eighteen million by 1975. As a result, Yuren concluded it was necessary to create new employment for at least 650,000 workers a year, a feat not

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<sup>40</sup> Editorial, "La CTM Continuará su Lucha por la Reforma al Art. 123 Constitucional," *Ceteme*, June 6, 1970, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Luis Ángeles, *El PRI en el gobierno: El desarrollo de México 1930-2000* (Mexico City: Fundación Colosio, 2003), 14.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed official statistics confirmed social advancement. During the cited period the nation's infant mortality rate dropped from 74.2 to forty-nine deaths per 1,000 live births, while the nation's Gross Domestic Product hummed along increasing at an average rate of 6.65 percent annually. See Ángeles, (cited above,) 23.

<sup>43</sup> See *El Día*, April 24, 1974.

achievable in his opinion being that modern industry failed to sufficiently expand and was guilty of underproduction that hindered the creation of new jobs.<sup>44</sup>

Skeptics like Yuren needed only to look to the fringes of any large urban center to corroborate their concerns. There one saw waves of peasants arrive daily in search of work. Indeed industrial development in the cities could not keep pace with the dual phenomena of sky-high birth rates and the methodical flow of migrants from the countryside. In the Federal District alone, inward migration coupled with natural, yet unprecedented, rates of reproduction meant population expansion that nearly quintupled the metropolitan area's population in just three decades, growing from 1.8 million in 1940 to 8.8 million in 1970.<sup>45</sup> In the shanty-towns hastily constructed on hillsides of the city and surrounding areas, throngs of unemployed and under-employed persons languished. In their very existence, haphazard and disordered, they called attention to the failures of the postrevolutionary state to provide for the displaced throngs of the countryside. In the necessary lawlessness they employed to survive, they questioned the ability of organized labor to provide gainful employment for all who sought it.

Demographic explosion and its effect on the power of the Mexican organized workers' movement formed a primary topic of discussion at the CTM's 9<sup>th</sup> National Congress convened on April 21, 1974. Cetemistas followed a fairly quotidian agenda at that meeting although many of the sessions held over the course of the three-day congress broached new topics related to the subject of population growth and its impact on the Mexican worker. Participants openly fretted about the effects that rapid population expansion would have on the negotiating power of their unions. This was a legitimate concern for an organized workers' movement that had long derived strength and benefits from its status as an indispensable and irreplaceable component of the production process. In contrast, the growing urban hordes excited owners who saw in them a virtually limitless reservoir of cheap and manipulatable labor.

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<sup>44</sup> *El Universal*, May 18, 1971, 1.

<sup>45</sup> See *VI Censo General de Población* (1940) and *IX Censo General de Población y Vivienda* (1970). According to these sources, the exact population increase of the Federal District during those years was 488 percent as it grew from 1,802,679 residents in 1940 to 8,799,937 in 1970.

The issue of population growth represented one of the main preoccupations of the Mexican state and organized labor in the 1970s, a fact reflected in ministerial records and labor periodicals of the era. Attendees of the 9<sup>th</sup> National Congress vigorously debated the demographic issue from alternating perspectives, with the objective of ensuring that excess labor did not injure the unionist cause by depressing wages. When discussing the issue, cetemistas tapped into a popular contemporary discourse that questioned the morality of transitionally or provisionally employed workers forming families. Media sources from months later confirm that this discourse intensified into a full-fledged campaign with a message to workers that was unequivocal: do not produce more workers if you can not sustain them.<sup>46</sup> This mandate represented the major effort of organized labor to combat the challenges of a demographic situation that threatened its interests, and, in the words of a CTM spokesperson, preserve the liberty and dignity of the Mexican worker.<sup>47</sup>

Preserving the liberty and dignity of the Mexican worker was not a responsibility entrusted only to the leadership of organized labor; it was also conferred upon the individual worker himself. Appealing to the moral conscience of workers was not new. Since the modern labor movement first sprouted in Mexico from the rocky soils of Cananea unionized workers had regularly been asked to make personal sacrifices for the good of the proletarian cause. What made this particular directive unique, however, was its intrusive and intimate nature. It fixed the gaze of organized labor's leadership directly into the worker home and instructed workers, for the first time in the history of the movement, to not reproduce. Such a mandate represented a stark reversal from the confident pro-natalist tone that characterized labor and state rhetoric in the headiest years of economic expansion. Unlike their predecessors, unionists of the 1970s were ordered by their leaders to limit the size of their families as a show of "paternal responsibility." This directive, it appeared, was gender specific, as it required that the father of the family abstain from future procreation so that his children may "live in a world where they may find remunerative work and can subsist with dignity and honor."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See *Ultimas Noticias*, May 14, 1974.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> See *El Día*, April 24, 1974.

The exercise of paternal responsibility was considered crucial to perpetuating the workers' movement in Mexico and CTM officials sought to instill their specific brand of parenthood in workers. In pursuit of this goal, family planning conferences were held to remind workers that children brought a financial responsibility. One such conference was sponsored by the Mexican Industrial Petrochemical Workers Union on February 9, 1975 and convened at CTM headquarters in Mexico City. Manuel Ñique, Director of the Family Planning and Development Unit of the Regional Inter-American Organization of Workers frightened the gathering of 200 by describing an almost-doomsday scenario wherein Mexico would have by the year 2000 over 120 million inhabitants crammed onto just eleven percent its of cultivable land. In order to avoid sentencing Mexico's next generation to such a difficult future, Ñique asked parents to contemplate the ramifications of producing children the nation could not support. Do not think to yourself that because "I earn well now and can buy them anything" that I should have children, he told his listeners. Rather, tell yourself that "it is more important to think of the world that your children will receive."<sup>49</sup> Children, it seemed to Ñique, were a blessing that should come to the working family in moderation – and only to those that could afford them.

The language preferred by labor leaders stressing collectivism through personal sacrifice and paternal responsibility positioned the ethos of organized labor as a corollary to the domestic goals of the party-state.<sup>50</sup> Like the state itself, which was conceptualized as resembling a corpus with the Mexican president at the head and the sectors of society forming the vital organs, so too was the labor movement depicted as a body. Union literature drew further parallels, telling that just as Echeverría watched over his children – the peasants, school teachers, and widows of Mexico – so too did Fidel Velázquez provide for the trolley car driver and assembly-line worker. In their actions the patriarchs served similar functions: both were fighting to shield their progeny from the evils of the greedy *patrón* and the deceit of the dastardly foreigner. Strong leaders, mutually inspired in the precepts of the Mexican Revolution, were important, but thomist theory advised

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<sup>49</sup> Editorial, "Hombre y Mujer, Deben Tomar Conciencia para Tener un Hijo," *Ceteme*, February 15, 1975, 1.

<sup>50</sup> During this period the Mexican state implemented a large-scale parental responsibility campaign that witnessed the government distribute condoms for the first time in its history.

that only as a unified whole could the body withstand such threats to its existence. To survive, each constituent part had to eschew individualism in favor of dependence.

*THE PATERFAMILIAS RESTORED: THE STATE AS PROVIDER*

In the language and directives cited above we may read a form of social birth control that the CTM wished to impress upon its members. The tones of the debate reflected the general timbre of political discourse in the period – interventionist and paternalist. That the leaders of organized labor moved in this direction during the period was not surprising for the Mexican state extended its reach into the personal lives of Mexican workers after Tlatelolco by broadening its control over national industry.<sup>51</sup> In a similar vein, the state expanded its political influence by regulating the nitty gritty of workplace relations inside newly created tripartite authorities such as the National Tripartite Commission and the minimum wage committee. Both of these tacks were part of a larger state campaign to increase its authority in society through the psychological and practical reestablishment of its place at the head of the Revolutionary body.

Alongside the changes it implemented to its economic and labor apparatuses, the Mexican post-Tlatelolco state took drastic measures to expand its social services as well. Its goals in this process were the same and state efforts to embolden itself benefited certain societal sectors at the expense of others. The Echeverría state drastically expanded the National Popular Subsistence Company (CONASUPO) which oversaw a network of government-subsidized *tiendas populares*, or popular stores.

The popular store was not a new idea. A system of subsidized stores to combat food shortages, end the poor distribution of products, and prevent abnormal fluctuations in the market had been in place in Mexico since the Subsistence Market Regulatory Committee was organized in 1938. The system survived into the 1940s and flourished under the mantle of the National Distributor and Regulator which financed vendors willing to operate popular stores and sell government furnished products at a mark-up of no more than ten percent. Not surprisingly, this system was roundly endorsed by the

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<sup>51</sup> Actions that brought the copper industry under majority control of the state, for example, provoked syndical, even popular, celebration – as described in Chapter Three. CTM leaders praised the words of the president in his First Annual Report and printed passages pertaining to the process of “mexicanizing” the mining industry. See coverage in on page 5 of *Ceteme*, September 4, 1971.

CTM that asked that the government increase the number of stores located near union locals. Also to be expected, the regulator was opposed by owners who argued that the government was instituting price controls by fiat and using the guise of social protection to create monopolies out of companies that could afford to operate at low profit margins. By the mid-1940s budget increases augmented the power and presence of the regulator and raised the ire of the National Confederation of Chambers of Commerce, the nation's umbrella commerce organization that saw in it "an alarming degree of state intervention in the market and private sector."<sup>52</sup>

The Mexican state's embrace of unfettered industrial development after World War II reversed the trend of paternalism in government economic policy. Policies implemented during the presidency of Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952) demonstrated the ethos of the period to reduce price controls and limit government involvement in the realms of food subsidization and distribution. Law was changed in 1947 to permit regulator distribution centers to sell merchandise to any business instead of limiting sales to popular stores. Gradually, the government stopped funding the regulator altogether and existing popular stores became independent. Other government institutions evolved along similar lines, always prefaced by the rationale that post-war conditions required the state to facilitate rather than direct the market as it had done during 1930s. Economic reorientation evoked criticism, notably from Daniel Cosío Villegas who accused Alemán of abandoning the "very heart of the Revolutionary experience."<sup>53</sup>

Years later Echeverría revived the counter-revolutionary claim once lodged by Cosío Villegas. Departing from the standpoint that there had occurred a "settlement" of ideology in the time between 1940 and 1968, Echeverría as president claimed to work to re-chart Mexico on a course he felt was more congruent with revolutionary ideals.<sup>54</sup> The promotion and expansion of CONASUPO after 1970, therefore, may be understood as yet

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<sup>52</sup> Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 34-36.

<sup>53</sup> John W. Sherman, "The Mexican Miracle and Its Collapse," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, eds. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 575. For an excellent analysis on the role of food distribution in postrevolutionary political economy in Mexico, see Enrique C. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico: the Political Uses of Food since 1910* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000.)

<sup>54</sup> Luis Suárez, *Echeverría en el Sexenio de López Portillo: El caso de un expresidente ante el successor* (Mexico City: Editoria Grijalbo, S.A., 1983), 206.

another part of that effort because it demonstrated a renewed state commitment to protecting the nation's most vulnerable (and, not coincidentally, most populous) classes from the caprices of the powerful.

Unionized workers, however, never represented the nation's most vulnerable class – a fact well documented by Michael Snodgrass.<sup>55</sup> Nor were they the primary targets of state beneficence for federal food distribution programs had traditionally maintained a rural emphasis.<sup>56</sup> Popular stores established during the Echeverría administration, however, were organized en masse in Mexican cities and benefited urban as much as rural workers. Urban workers, therefore, fit squarely into the post-Tlatelolco state's larger discourse of paternalism and customers of CONASUPO stores were unwitting recipients of official propaganda that portrayed them as dependents of a benevolent provider who protected them from dangerous elements bent on exploiting them. This message resonated with organized labor's top brass because it conveyed a familiar social theme.

CONASUPO was promoted in the pages of the workers' press during the years 1970-1976. Advertisements in *Ceteme* instructed: "Compañero: Defend Your Salary..." by shopping at a "cooperative store and taking advantage of the goods that CONASUPO offers at fair prices." Advertisements then listed the unit of sale and prices for basic articles that were below market rates. Items advertised typically included (with prices, in pesos, corresponding to October 1976): rice, one kilogram – \$6; sugar, two kilograms – \$4.60; coffee, 250 grams – \$5.80; bean, one kilogram – \$5.50, evaporated milk, one kilogram – \$1.25; bread, forty grams – \$0.15.<sup>57</sup> The benefits of CONASUPO were also touted to workers in person. CONASUPO Director Jorge de la Vega Domínguez was a regular invitee at labor functions and delivered messages that promoted the organization as a safety net that protected the working classes against market fluctuations and social unrest that was beyond their control.

Workers were moved by these messages, but also saw tangible benefits in their own stores. Organized worked in tandem with their unions and the federal agency to

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<sup>55</sup> See Michael D. Snodgrass, "The Birth and Consequences of Industrial Paternalism in Monterrey, Mexico, 1890-1940," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 53 (Spring 1998): 115-136.

<sup>56</sup> 190 of the 688 NDR stores in Mexico in 1945 were located in Mexico City, thus giving it a city presence that made it a factor in the life of the typical urban worker. See Moreno, 34.

<sup>57</sup> Editorial, "Compañero: Defiende Tu Salario," *Ceteme*, October 9, 1976, 15.

establish popular stores to service their needs. *SUTERM* describes one such process that was undertaken by electrical workers in Celaya, Guanajuato, in June 1973. According to the report, throngs of city residents mobbed a newly opened CONASUPO store and emptied its shelves within four hours. At the time of the article's writing, the store was accruing sales of over 12,000 pesos a day but the daily mob's voracious appetite for the low-priced goods made apparent the insufficiency of the store's size and volume. Celaya *sutermistas* seized the opportunity and asked their union's Secretary General Francisco Pérez Ríos for help in acquiring a piece of land that abutted the location of the current store. Pérez Ríos obliged and issued electrical workers a loan from the SUTERM's Housing and Social Services Fund to purchase the property. Next, the workers petitioned CONASUPO for permission to install a store. That request was quickly granted and accompanied by a startup loan of 250,000 pesos. All 210 members of the Celaya local then pooled their resources to cover the loan, thus, in essence, becoming shareholders in the enterprise. The store's future success was deemed a certainty by writers of *SUTERM* and the union's National Committee congratulated its Celaya members for "...the effort that they make to fight the every more worrisome cost of living increases."<sup>58</sup>

The story told above demonstrated that popular stores were understood as assets that benefited the worker's wallet as well something that could provide him or her extra income. Most importantly, the overarching theme of the popular and syndical store was its ability to protect the working family against economic chicanery. CONASUPO, as commonly described in official rhetoric, represented a counterweight against the wickedness of hoarders and speculators in Mexican society who through treasonous acts enriched themselves by manipulating the people's access to basic goods. Again, this very public, class-based discourse echoed common polemics of the period that turned so-called hoarders and speculators into popular boogeymen. Diatribes launched against these shadowy creatures became useful vehicles to curry popular support for labor priorities. And support was palpable, a fact that enabled the CONASUPO system to grow to 11,000 stores in 1976 from one-tenth that number in 1970.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Editorial, "Los Electricistas de Celaya Contrarrestan la Carestía," *SUTERM*, August/September, 1973, 14.

<sup>59</sup> AGN, LEA, Banco de México, Box 1113, "El Gobierno Mexicano," Septiembre 1-30, 1976, 49.



Still, social agencies like CONASUPO fell short of meeting workers' demands in important ways. CONASUPO entrusted government officials to distribute basic goods and imposed earning limits on retailers, but it did not establish price controls on all its merchandise. In May 1973, SUTERM leaders cited this omission and called on all unions to unify in their fight against an increasing cost of living. Union leaders granted the government had taken some admirable measures but determined that they were not enough.<sup>60</sup> By June of the following year SUTERM leaders wrote that price hikes reached intolerable limits. From their perspective, the roots of the crisis were easy to locate: they were the structural flaws that weakened the nation's systems of product distribution and commercialization. According to them, industrialists and merchants thrived in this corrupted framework by taking advantage of cracks in the system to fix prices at their whim. The prevalence of foreign investment in Mexico also created problems as it introduced "parasites" into the country that retarded the development of national industry and commerce.<sup>61</sup> Organized workers, SUTERM leaders warned, could not sit idly by in the face of such a threat. Neither could free workers who were equally injured by commercial manipulation. "The time to act had arrived!" They declared. "It is imperative to control prices in a radical and drastic manner." In this task the government had an opportunity to affirm its revolutionary credentials; "A revolutionary regime must put the interests of the majority first."<sup>62</sup>

SUTERM iterated its demands in a June 7, 1974, manifesto sent to the president and hundreds of peasant and worker organizations. The document began by asking Echeverría to punish those who worked to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. "Enough with abuses and provocations!" Union leaders exclaimed. SUTERM then appealed to workers and peasants to pressure the government to pursue the stated ends. This was an important task; nothing less than the Mexican Revolution demanded it.<sup>63</sup> Finally, the SUTERM manifesto presented a series of demands that constituted a veritable wish-list of organized labor. Included were requests that the federal

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<sup>60</sup> Editorial, "Criminal Carestía de la Vida," *SUTERM*, May, 1973, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Editorial, "El SUTERM Demanda Medidas Efectivas Contra la Carestía," *SUTERM*, June, 1974, 12.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

government: a. establish price controls on articles of basic consumption; b. create a technical commission to study, set, and monitor prices; c. make the production and distribution of basic articles its exclusive domain; d. expand the operations of CONASUPO, putting additional supply centers under the control of workers and peasants; e. put all supply centers under state control and free from monopolistic activities ‘that the hoarders, shop-owners, and the rest of the sharks carry out’; and f. immediately revise the price of medicines and nationalize the pharmaceutical industry.<sup>64</sup>

Some of labor’s requests were met to varying degrees of satisfaction. Most notably, the Echeverría state implemented a series of freezes on the prices of goods of basic necessity. One plan approved by the National Tripartite Commission on June 24, 1974 presented a fourteen point strategy to help protect worker salaries against shifts in the market. The plan resolved the commission to create a sliding scale to automatically adjust salaries and pledged the commission to consider additional wage increase in the future. More immediately, the plan listed fifty-three items whose prices would be temporarily regulated by the Secretariat of Industry and Commerce. Among the listed items were food staples including milk, tortillas, beans, eggs, chicken, vegetable oil, rice, evaporated milk, and bread; kitchen items including purified water, soap, sugar, salt, soft drinks, matches, cornmeal, and flour; clothing items including dresses and shoes; and some “non-essentials” like cigarettes and coffee.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, though, the price mandates dictated from on high withered under the pressures of the popular market. Reports abounded in the days that followed telling of merchants who ignored federally established price limits. In Monterrey, a merchant had his entire stock of beans – estimated around 800 kilograms – seized by inspectors of the state’s Industry and Commerce department because he sold the product at a price above the 6.5 pesos a kilo rate set by the government.<sup>66</sup> It was reported that other vendors in Monterrey were widely disregarding price limits and were selling goods, sometimes at two and three times above the established limits, to customers who were panic-buying in order to prepare for shortages they deemed imminent. This kind of price-gouging could

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See coverage in *El Norte* (Monterrey, N.L.), June 25, 1974.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

be witnessed even in the city's CONASUPO stores where vendors allegedly sold vegetable oil at elevated prices.<sup>67</sup>

Organized labor clamored for state action to combat rampant inflation and the Echeverría state responded by expanding CONASUPO and placing temporary price freezes on certain items. Substantial wage increases for unionists were also won in September 1973 and September 1974, and although they were the fruits of organized labor activism the assistance of Echeverría was pivotal in both instances. These measures pleased workers but were ultimately judged insufficient as the cost of goods remained tied to fluctuations in the world market and out of the hands of state officials who were empowered only to regulate their mark-up and not base cost. For as much, the lack of permanent price controls was cited by union officials as a crucial deficiency in tripartite relations. Editors of *Ceteme* worried that in the absence of price controls efforts to control wages would be futile for workers would be ever compelled to demand wage hikes to meet ever escalating costs of survival.<sup>68</sup> The desire to write such a provision into law drove a good deal of the union activism witnessed in the period under review. Organized workers, therefore, may have conveyed satisfaction with state efforts to increase its influence over the nation's economic and labor functions, but they remained vigilant to demand more from a government they perceived as sympathetic to their cause.

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The post-Tlatelolco state that was imagined by policymakers – one that firmly directed the nation's destiny and was not beholden to any class of investors or industrialists in its decision making powers – appealed to an organized labor movement that was historically inclined to favor government intervention in economic matters. Federal efforts to expand the labor establishment, permit class negotiation in tripartite relations, and the return of state paternalism were trends that inspired organized labor's leadership because they promised to bolster the standing and influence of that very "revolutionary" sector. Syndical leaders hence saw in the executive a partner and ally in its ageless battles with what they saw as the forces of greed, manipulation, and anti-

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<sup>67</sup> See coverage in *El Norte*, June 28, 1974.

<sup>68</sup> Editorial, "Un Positive Informe de Gobierno del Presidente Luis Echeverría," *Ceteme*, September 7, 1974, 7.

nationalism. They cajoled rank-and-file workers to demonstrate an air of patriotism and class solidarity reminiscent of an earlier time. Formal worker compliance in the early 1970s made it appear that the Mexican state had effectively, at least initially, “changed its recipes” to offset potentially explosive labor unrest.<sup>69</sup> Judging from the perspective of labor hierarchs in Mexico it appeared that with Tlatelolco *‘The time to act had arrived!’* With the perceived return of a revolutionary-era political and now moral economy imminent, organized labor felt confident that the mechanisms were in place to assure that the noble sacrifices it had made to build modern Mexico would finally be rewarded.

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<sup>69</sup> “...changed its recipes” is a reference to terminology used by Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer who wrote: The crisis of ‘68 was...a bloody announcement that times had changed without [the government] having changed its recipes to confront them. See Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *A la Sombra de la Revolución* (Mexico City: Ediciones Cal y Arena, 1989), 241.

## CHAPTER SIX

### OUTSIDE THE CORPUS: BUSINESS AND STATE-LABOR TENSION

Business leaders, in contrast to official labor's leadership, saw the promised return of Cárdenas-era labor relations as a prospect adverse to their interests. Remarks made by state and party officials questioned their very right to belong to the official party, and in their view the return of state paternalism along with federal efforts to expand the labor establishment and permit class negotiation in tripartite relations were dangerous developments destined to upset the dynamic that had governed state-business relations for decades and produced economic prosperity. This chapter pays attention to other pivotal issues that distanced employers from the Mexican state in the post-Tlatelolco period. A narration of the death and remembrance of a national business icon introduces the argument as it conveys the general acrimony that typified state-business relations in the period. Incident described herein support the notion that business owners were secondary players in the state's campaign for revolutionary redemption in the period. As done elsewhere, this chapter understands the Mexican state as body and aims to properly place owners on the postrevolutionary and post-Tlatelolco national corpus.

To do so, the origins of popular understandings of owners as "bad Mexicans" are discussed at length, as are the roots of contemporary allegations that owners were greedy, exploiters of labor and the marketplace, unconcerned with newly legislated workers' rights, and unpatriotic. This chapter zeros in on hostilities that characterized labor establishment-business conflict in the city of Monterrey, that very heart of Mexican industry in the twentieth century, during the period under review. In essence, this chapter mirrors its predecessors by working to expose the critical impacts that the newly minted form of state-organized labor collaborationism had in altering the nature of tripartite relations in post-Tlatelolco society.

*"...IT IS NOT A CRIME TO CREATE...:" THE DEATH OF EUGENIO GARZA SADA*

Since the mid-nineteenth century, no group in Mexico has been more synonymous with industrialism and prosperity in the modern nation than the *regiomontanos*, or those from the city of Monterrey.<sup>1</sup> And within that group, no family has captured the mystique

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<sup>1</sup> A *regiomontano* is someone who hails from Monterrey, which literally means "King's mountain."

of entrepreneurialism and corporate benevolence better than the Garza Sada clan. A true regiomontano dynasty was born in 1890 with the founding of the Cervecería Cuauhtémoc (Cuauhtémoc Beer Company) by Isaac Garza and Francisco G. Sada. Their business partnership led to their formation of family ties and Isaac married Francisco's sister Consuelo. This business and familial partnership had great historical impact, as their heirs branched out into new industrial sectors and formed a powerhouse that exerted a great influence over the destiny of the city and the entire region.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps more than anyone else, Eugenio Garza Sada embodied the grandeur and influence associated with the twentieth century industrial dynasties of Monterrey. Born on January 11, 1892, Eugenio was the fourth child of Isaac and Consuelo. The Mexican Revolution upended life when it arrived in Nuevo León in 1913 and forced Eugenio's father to suspend operation of his businesses and move the family to safety across the border. This experience proved seminal in the formation of young Eugenio who, according to one biographer, learned the value of hard work by holding several odd jobs including that of movie theater attendant, and then flourished as a student culminating his education in 1917 with a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Eugenio returned to Monterrey to join the family business after graduation and with the general cessation of military violence in Mexico. In the decades that followed, Eugenio and brother Roberto alternated at the head of the family's beer empire, but distinguished themselves by founding a number of subsidiary and new companies among which most notably was the steel giant Hojalata y Lamina de Monterrey (HYLSA) in 1943.

The brothers were also lauded for their social and civic works. Employees of their various businesses took part in company societies that provided them and their family members health benefits and other perks. Workers of the Cuauhtémoc and Fábricas Monterrey (FAMOSAS) plants and their kin were provided medical services before the creation of the Mexican Social Security Institute in 1946. Similarly, beer, steel, and other workers that formed the Garza Sada legions were furnished with employee housing beginning in 1957, over a decade before that provision was mandated in the New Federal

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<sup>2</sup> See Abraham Nuncio, *El Grupo Monterrey* (Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1982).

Labor Law and fifteen years before the government created the National Fund Institute for Worker's Housing in 1972. The Garza Sada family also gave generously to support hospitals, schools, sports and other public programs in Monterrey and around the state. Eugenio sowed perhaps his most lasting legacy in 1943 when he sponsored the creation of the Monterrey Technological Institute to permit Mexican youths to receive a first-class technical education without leaving the country. 'Tec de Monterrey' was indeed excellent and was often referred to by Garza Sada as the "love of his loves."<sup>3</sup> He presided over the institution's Board of Regents until his death.

The Garza Sada family and particularly Eugenio inspired wide admiration and reverence in the Monterrey community. Unfortunately, regiomontanos were deprived of their favorite son in a most shocking way. As Alicia Ortiz Rivera tells it, Garza Sada, his driver Modesto Mata, and his bodyguard Bernardo Chapa drove along Quintanar Street in downtown Monterrey on the morning of September 17, 1973 when their automobile was abruptly intercepted by a pick-up truck. Two armed men, both young, jumped from the truck and attempted to enter Garza's Sada's vehicle. One of them succeeded and grabbed hold of the eighty-one year old magnate. Shots were exchanged between the attackers and Chapa that killed both he and Mata. Fearing for his own life, Garza Sada pulled an old pistol that he carried from his jacket and fired off rounds. His shots went astray but the return gunfire did not. He died where he sat.<sup>4</sup>

Coverage of the death of Garza Sada filled Monterrey and most national newspapers the following day. The daily *El Norte* conveyed the sense of shock shared by readers. The assault was immediately understood for what it was, a botched kidnapping. *El Norte* reported on September 18 that the assailants were connected to the guerrilla organization known as Liga Comunista "23 de septiembre," a group named for actions consummated in Chihuahua on that date nearly eight years earlier.<sup>5</sup> In just the one year's time the group had been in existence, it had orchestrated several high-profile kidnappings

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<sup>3</sup> Ramiro Flores, "Así era Eugenio Garza Sada," *El Norte*, September 18, 1973, 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Alicia Ortiz Rivera's *Eugenio Garza Sada* (Mexico City: Planeta de Agostini, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> The group was formed in late-1970 via the fusion of various armed socialist movements. Upon its inception, the nascent group's leaders took as their name the date of an attack on the Madera military barracks in Chihuahua led by the noted university professor and guerrilla fighter Arturo Gámiz perpetrated on September 23, 1965.

as well as the hijacking of a Mexicana de Aviación jet that was en route to Cuba with over one hundred passengers on board including two children of a then prominent Governor. These actions, and in particular the latter which was believed to have received the support of Castroist Cuba, proved highly successful for 23 de septiembre. The Mexican state paid the group healthy ransoms for the hostages as well as released political prisoners that it had named. Garza Sada had known he was in danger. Monterrey police had been aware of plans by criminal organizations to kidnap the magnate since at least 1971.<sup>6</sup>

Reports of the incident that brought the death of Garza Sada were greatly outnumbered by stories submitted to honor his life. Hundreds of letters of condolence addressed to his widow Consuelo Lagüera, their eight children, and forty-four grandchildren flooded the pages of *El Norte*, *El Sol*, and the other major Monterrey newspapers in the days that followed. Letters sent to console the Garza Lagüera family praised Eugenio's business and social accomplishments, and the vast reach of his business empire was reflected in the diversity of those who purchased newspaper space. One is hard pressed to find a tribute to Garza Sada placed by an individual or entity without a business connection to the deceased. Quarter-page ads bought in *El Norte* by Fundidora Monterrey and Banco Comercial Mexicano de Monterrey as well as by U.S. corporate giants like Union Carbide and First National City Bank of New York honored Eugenio, who had been at one time or another, a major shareholder or a key board member at their companies. Other tributes were placed by those who worked for him. Separate half-page ads were placed by the corporate unions of workers of the Cuauhtémoc and FAMOSA plants and the workers of Conductores Monterrey and Fábricas Monterrey. Management at Garza Sada's own companies as well spared no expense to publicly honor their patrón. Both the Cervecería Cuauhtémoc, the company founded by his father in 1890, and HYLSA, the steel giant he created in 1943, purchased full-page ads to commemorate the magnate in the days following his death.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Intentan Septiembre Negro," *El Norte*, September 18, 1973, 1.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about Garza Sada's surviving family members and vast business connections see "Sepultan hoy a don Eugenio Garza Sada," *El Norte*, September 18, 1973, 1.



Some who sent condolences also used their message as a platform to condemn the ‘vile’ and ‘cowardly’ acts that caused his demise. Ramiro Flores wrote in *El Norte* on September 18. Summarizing his character in the most glowing way, Ramiro Flores told that Garza Sada was, although rich, austere and a man of few words. He was also progressive and “more revolutionary than they say.” “Who can doubt?” he asked, “...what he, before anyone else in the Republic, gave to his workers that the government now tries to take from them?” It was Garza Sada, after all, who constructed and sustained the first schools, day care centers, and hospitals for his workers. And it was exactly this proven social commitment that made his murder so disheartening. “It must have been cowards that killed don Eugenio,” he felt, because he was, above all, a “*valiente*” (a brave/strong man). This fact was corroborated in the writer’s opinion by Garza Sada’s famous stance against the government’s assault on the private sector. “Who can...,” he asked, “forget the period in which Lázaro Cárdenas, as President of the Republic, openly attacked private industry?” Fortunately, Flores explained, “It was precisely don Eugenio who confronted him [Cardénas.] He confronted him and obliged him to rectify his tendency.” Such a valiente, he concluded, did not deserve to die at the hands of “delinquent cowards.”<sup>8</sup>

The incipient anger toward the government noticeable in the opinion of Flores would grow in Monterrey in the coming days, nourished mainly by inflammatory comments made at Garza Sada’s burial. The funeral procession and burial witnessed in Monterrey on September 18, 1973 was truly a remarkable event. Those who bereaved the deceased began the day by viewing his body as it was laid in state on the campus of his beloved Tecnológico de Monterrey. From there, it was taken to the Church of the Purísima where it lay alongside the caskets of Chapa and Mata, those loyal servants whom *El Norte* reported would accompany Don Eugenio all the way to the grave.<sup>9</sup> After

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<sup>8</sup> Ramiro Flores, “Así era Eugenio Garza Sada,” *El Norte*, September 18, 1973, 2. Spanish reads: ...Más revolucionario que muchos que se dicen...;...¿Quién duda que él? Primero que nadie en la República, dio a sus trabajadores, eso que ahora novedosamente nos saca el Gobierno?;...¿Quién puede, por ejemplo, olvidar la época en que Lázaro Cárdenas, como Presidente de la República, se lanzó abiertamente contra la empresa privada?;...Pues fue precisamente don Eugenio quién le hizo frente. Le hizo frente y lo obligó a que rectificara su tendencia. ¿No es ser valiente eso? ¿Merecía, pues, morir a manos de cobardes delincuentes?

<sup>9</sup> “Hasta la tumba acompaña su chofer a don Eugenio,” *El Norte*, September 19, 1973, 1.

a mass was heard for the departed, a procession was held to transport the remains of Garza Sada for burial. Large crowds of an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 sullen men and women joined the funeral procession as it left the church. President Echeverría and two of his ministers were included in the multitude. They trailed the hearse as it reached the Panteón del Carmen cemetery at about 5:30 that afternoon.

There, the crowds did not disperse despite a driving rain. Under raincoats and umbrellas, those who had gathered to pay their respects to the Garza Sada heard separate eulogies from speakers who represented the sectors of civil society most touched by his life's work. First to speak was Ismael Villa, a student at Tec. He told the bereaved that don Eugenio had seen in the youth of Monterrey all of the hopes of the nation. In his example, Mexican youths could find the path to honor. Next, Gerónimo Valdez, leader of the Workers Union of the Cuauhtémoc and FAMOSA Society spoke. He praised Garza Sada calling him an "exemplary man" and commended his former boss for always respecting labor rights and for displaying a fair and generous attitude toward those who worked for him.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Ricardo Margáin Zozaya, local businessman and leading member of the Monterrey chapter of the National Chamber of Commerce came to the podium to remember Garza Sada from the perspective of another employer. His speech began with a customary message; Don Eugenio was both an industrial magnate and social visionary. He was wildly successful in business but never let the pursuit of personal gain cloud his indefatigable will to serve his community and the nation.

He then moved into the crucial part of his oration. Margáin told the massive crowd and Echeverría, who listened within ear-shot of the speaker, that the death of the great man could have been prevented. That the armed assassins who, with "poisoned minds," killed don Eugenio were on the loose was not the major concern of the regiomontano. Rather, it was the fact that these criminals were able carry out such a vile deed that truly alarmed city residents. In the opinion of Margáin, such criminal elements acted with impunity only "when they have lost respect for authority; when the state has stopped maintaining public order; when it has not only let the most negative ideologies have free reign, but also permits them to harvest their negative fruits of hate, destruction,

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<sup>10</sup> "Acompañan millares a D. Eugenio," *El Norte*, September 19, 1973, 1.

and death.”<sup>11</sup> The repeated attacks waged on the private sector in recent years confirmed this situation to Margáin. They were assaults waged “without any other apparent end than to foment division and hatred between the social classes.” These assaults threatened key values held dear by Mexican society and challenged the right of one to pursue economic gain. Social conflict, in other words, was deemed by Margáin as bad for business.

According to Margáin, the government had a responsibility to stamp out dangerous ideologies that threatened the nation’s social harmony and economic welfare. It had a responsibility to end the disorder that could bring anarchy to the nation. To begin this task, Margáin recommended that authorities look for threats in the universities, on the nation’s campuses “that have become a no-man’s land where better guarantees are granted to delinquents than to law-abiding citizens.”<sup>12</sup> Margáin counseled them to implement there and elsewhere a “very simple,” albeit a painful solution. He urged the Mexican government to take, “. . .with the gravity that the case demands, energetic, adequate, and effective measures to restore confidence in the Mexican people.” “Some want to invest their capital,” he explained, “but they fear doing it. . .” Others rightfully ask where the nation is going and what kind of future awaits their children.<sup>13</sup> The government needed to do more to soothe the nerves of its people. It needed to foster a political climate that was conducive to social and economic advancement. The death of Garza Sada made clear that the time for firm government action had arrived. Without it, Margáin warned that the nation risked being destabilized by dangerous agitation and criminal activity. This duty he deemed “unavoidable;” Mexico’s future was at stake.

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<sup>11</sup> “Urge poner hasta aquí,” *El Norte*, September 19, 1973, 1. Spanish reads: Sólo se puede actuar impunemente cuando se ha perdido el respeto a la autoridad; cuando el Estado deja de mantener el orden público; cuando no tan sólo se deja que tengan libre cauce las más negativas ideologías, sino que además se les permite que cosechen sus frutos negativos de odio, destrucción y muerte.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: Por doquier vemos el desorden instituido que casi parece desembocar en la anarquía, se suceden los choques sangrientos; las Universidades se encuentran convertidas en tierra de nadie; se otorgan mayores garantías al delincuente común que al ciudadano pacífico que se ve sujeto a atentados dinamiteros, asaltos bancarios, destrucción y muerte, eso es lo que los medios de comunicación nos informan cada día, cuando no tenemos que sufrirlos en carne propia o en la de familiares o amigos.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Urge. . .con la gravedad que el caso demanda, medidas enérgicas, adecuadas y efectivas que hagan renacer la confianza en el pueblo mexicano. Unos desean invertir sus capitales, pero temen hacerlo, otros los industriales y comerciantes quisieran fortalecer su confianza en el futuro por que se trata del futuro de la patria. Los más, se preguntan con legítimo derecho hacia donde va la Nación y cuál será el porvenir que les espera a nuestros hijos. . .

The significance of the oration given by Margáin at the funeral of Eugenio Garza Sada was recognized immediately, if not for any other reason than because of its audacity. The speech was extensively covered in all major Monterrey newspapers on September 19 and it was referenced in varying degrees in other big city newspapers as well. In many instances, the full text of the speech was printed in a full-page ad jointly purchased by the Monterrey Chamber and other business-advocacy organizations that formed the nucleus of the Nuevo León industrial and entrepreneurial elite.<sup>14</sup> The following day, another Monterrey business owner took a paid jab at the regime in an open letter addressed “To Public Opinion” printed in a number of Nuevo León newspapers. In this statement, Guillermo Rocha, hotel owner and president of a regional hotelier association, berated the government for pursuing foolish objectives. Rocha referenced the assassination of Salvador Allende witnessed in Chile just days earlier on September 11, 1973, but the death of the Chilean president was not his main concern. In his opinion, what was happening on Mexico’s own streets was more pressing. He wrote:

On this day, September 17, 1973, I put my personal flag at half-mast. Not because of the national mourning decreed by the government or for the death of the President of Chile, Salvador Allende: in any case, there have been more proximate and wrenching reasons in our own country...earthquakes and floods, for example, that were not deemed deserved of the mass expression of solidarity [afforded] from a national mourning.<sup>15</sup>

Rocha resented his government’s preoccupation with the events in Chile. Very likely, he resented Echeverría’s bold statements to condemn the military coup that overthrew the

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<sup>14</sup> The Margáin Zozaya oration, entitled “Urge poner hasta aquí,” was printed in full in *El Norte* and other major newspapers across the country on September 19, 1973. The advertisement was purchased and the speech was endorsed by the following organizations: Cámara Nacional de Comercio de Monterrey, José Luis Coindreau, President; Cámara de la Industria de Transformación de Nuevo León, Humberto Lobo, President; Centro Patronal de Nuevo León, Francisco Garza González, President; Centro Bancario de Monterrey, Bernabe A. Del Valle, President.

<sup>15</sup> Guillermo Rocha, letter to the editor, *El Norte*, September 20, 1973. Spanish reads: En este día, 17 de septiembre de 1973, yo pongo mi bandera personal a media asta. No por los motivos del duelo nacional decretado oficialmente, o sea por la muerte del Presidente de Chile, Salvador Allende: en todo caso, había motivos más próximos y desgarradores en nuestra propia patria...terremotos e inundaciones, por ejemplo, que no merecieron, por lo visto, la expresión masiva de solidaridad de un duelo oficial.

socialist Allende and his highly publicized efforts to usher Allende sympathizers out of the country.<sup>16</sup>

None of that mattered to Rocha. The life of a great man had been stolen much closer to home. And this man was a countryman with values and achievements that he judged superior to those of the foreign politician. He clarified:

No, my mourning on this day is like that of many other Mexicans who think that it is not a crime to create something, that it is not a crime to create jobs, that it is not a betrayal of the nation to provide one's own effort, imagination, and capital to convert ideas into reality...my mourning, I mean, is for a man that knew how to embody all of these things while imprinting them with a seal of deep social brotherhood: don Eugenio Garza Sada.<sup>17</sup>

It was hence the very values and achievements of Garza Sada that cost him his life. Rocha then echoed Margáin and levied blame at the government for permitting the tragedy to occur. "He was the victim, ultimately, of a government that, at the end of three long years, has been sterile in works but – and this for sure – rich in demagogical declarations that have awaken resentments and caused disunity, jealousy, and mutual distrust amongst Mexicans." It was this government, he seethed, "...that which so energetically labors (from the comfort of six thousand kilometers) in defense of a minority of Chilean people guilty of having brought their country to the deepest political, economic, and social abyss in its history....," that now vacillates in protecting the rights, peace, and tranquility of the immense majority of Mexicans – its owns citizens! – who desire to have the opportunity to work and prosper.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Echeverría even sent the national jet to fly the widow Hortencia Bussi de Allende and other members of the deceased president's family out of Santiago to safety in Mexico City on September 16. See stories in *El Norte*, September 18, 1973.

<sup>17</sup> Guillermo Rocha, letter to the editor, *El Norte*, September 20, 1973. Spanish reads: No, mi luto en este día, como el de muchos otros mexicanos que pensamos que el crear algo no es delito, que el abrir una fuente de trabajo no es un crimen, que el aportar esfuerzo, imaginación y capital propios para convertir las ideas en realidades no es traición a la patria...mi luto, digo, es por un hombre que supo encarnar todo ello imprimiéndole el sello de su profundo sentido de hermandad social: don Eugenio Garza Sada.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Spanish reads: No es cierto que haya sido víctima de unos vulgares secuestradores frustrados.; ...Fue víctima de los eternos sembradores de discordias y del odio de clases: de los que, al no saber crear, destruyen: de los que no toleran el éxito ajeno y, en su impotencia, pretenden suplir el trabajo y la libre iniciativa por el recurso engañosamente seductor del socialismo, para luego presumir de empresarios a costa de libertad y el esfuerzo de los demás.; ...Fue víctima, finalmente, de un gobierno que, al cabo de tres largos años, ha sido estéril en obras pero – eso sí – rico en declaraciones demagógicas que han despertado resentimientos y causado la desunión, el recelo y la desconfianza mutua entre los mexicanos.; ...que se

## *OWNERS AND CORPORATIST AMBIVALENCE*

The message promoted by Margáin that the Mexican state had been ambivalent at best, ineffectual at worst, in its efforts to counter domestic terrorism rung true with business elements nationwide but was especially powerful in Monterrey. In Rocha's critique was seen another potent allegation that the Echeverría state was sympathetic to ideologies, namely socialism, that were antithetical to the Mexican entrepreneur. In many a businessman's opinion, these characteristics of the ruling regime bred social discontent and sowed chaos that was bad for their bottom line. Furthermore, the Echeverría state was judged guilty of fomenting a class consciousness in workers that was similarly dangerous. Through its creation of the National Tripartite Commission and its efforts to nationalize large segments of the economy, owners feared that the regime was espousing class-based rhetoric that had the potential to spark widespread labor unrest. Some of these fears appeared well founded as levels of popular and syndical agitation spiked sharply in the years 1973-1974, the so-called *Años de Huelga*, or "Strike Years."<sup>19</sup> But heightened labor activity in the period should not have surprised anyone who considered it in the context of an increasingly dire economic situation. The great majority of union activism in the period was waged over basic meat-and-potato issues, e.g. a forty-hour work week, alleged contractual violations, demands for higher wages, etc., and not toward ideological ends. Nevertheless, enraged industrialists accused Echeverría as they had Cárdenas four decades earlier of intentionally inciting workers and for creating an unfriendly business climate.

In this context, the botched kidnapping and resulting murder of Eugenio Garza Sada seemed to encapsulate everything that was wrong with the regime. Employers were well aware that they were not the favored sector in government and party rhetoric. Echeverría had lectured them repeatedly as a candidate and then as president about their patriotic responsibilities to observe the legal rights of workers. He heaped unqualified

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yergue enérgicamente (desde la cómoda de seis mil kilómetros) en defensa de una minoría del pueblo chileno culpable de haber llevado a su patria al más profundo abismo político, económico y social de su historia, pero que se muestra vacilante cuando se trata de proteger aquí, en su casa, en México, los derechos, la paz y la tranquilidad de la inmensa mayoría cuyo deseo es tener la oportunidad de trabajar y progresar.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Ten for detailed analysis.

rhetorical support on the labor movement and recited in his first Presidential Address given on September 1, 1971 the myriad ways that the NLFT had already benefited workers. Since the labor code's implementation in May 1970, he told, 195 collective contracts had been revised, the legal contracts that governed the sugar, alcohol, and textile industries had been renegotiated, and various commissions had been created to see worker safety, hygiene, and housing provisions realized, among other benefits.<sup>20</sup> In the same breath, he exhorted owners to comply with the law and fulfill their civic duties. Remarks made by Jesús Reyes Heróles upon taking charge of the PRI in February 1972 provoked a debate that questioned the very right of the rich to belong to the official party. The issue that had led to the remarks of Reyes Heróles was that some members of the party's preferred sectors had become quite wealthy, and exceedingly so in some instances. This was certainly the case for Rubén Figueroa Figueroa who headed the Alianza de Camioneros de la República Mexicana, a transportation union created in 1955 that represented over 5,000 owners of buses and trucks nationwide in 1970. Figueroa's access to the PRI was made possible by his organization's membership in the National Confederation of Popular Organizations, the umbrella organization of the popular and professional sector. The popular and professional sector, although widely understood as the "third" and least historically endowed part of civil society (behind the organized worker and peasant sectors,) had become by 1970 the most diverse congregation of groups formed collectively inside the Party. It was, according to David Schers, "a catch-all designed to include all those who may be members of the PRI and do not belong either in the National Peasant Confederation or in the working class unions."<sup>21</sup> The National Confederation of Popular Organizations was a more inclusive, umbrella-like organization than the National Peasant Confederation or the CTM and as such its membership numbers rivaled those of its peer organizations in other sectors. In 1972 it was composed of more than fifty constituent national organizations grouped into thirteen different branches of activity or profession.<sup>22</sup> Within its ranks, public school teachers and

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<sup>20</sup> Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, ed. *Revista Mexicana del Trabajo*, 3-4 (Jul. – Dec. 1971): 11.

<sup>21</sup> David Schers, *The Popular Sector of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional in Mexico* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, The David Horowitz Institute, 1972), 174, 2.

<sup>22</sup> See Schers's Chapter Eight.

other public servants formed the largest professional cohorts. Teachers, over 266,000 of them, were organized into the National Education Workers' Union which in turn was grouped into the Federation of Public Service Workers' Unions. To further muddy the waters, the Federation of State Workers Unions, though an affiliate of the National Confederation of Popular Organizations, was also affiliated into the Congress of Labor, thus making teachers, at least technically, part of the worker's dialog.<sup>23</sup>

There were no similar in-roads for employers to gain voice in the PRI's policy-making machinery. Of the thirteen branches delegated by the National Confederation of Popular Organizations, there were several that offered political representation for business owners but only theoretically. Merchants, owners of transportation vehicles, industrialists, and small farm and ranch owners were afforded their own branches and welcomed into the organization. But business organizations that were in the confederation tended to be small enterprises with less than 100 employees. This restriction meant that the Garza Sadas of the world were not welcome, but the typical owner of the radio station, restaurant, gas station, and bus company had access to the channels of political power. Access to political power meant that union representatives could effectively advocate for their members' interests. Confederation officials, like those of the CTM, pled their members' concerns before state authorities and solved their problems through compromise. Schers gives an insightful example of this *modus vivendi*. *Transportistas* (transportation industry workers) may have, for example, demanded the government to authorize higher fares. The Party, fearing a public backlash over increased commuter expenses, would publicly oppose it, in effect dooming the passage of the fare increase in congress. The issue would then be settled privately. Congress could then, perhaps, vote to authorize greater public subsidization for fuel, thus offsetting the industry's major operating cost.<sup>24</sup>

Preventing the inclusion of wealthy patrones in the Party and granting political access to small-scale entrepreneurs fit the ideological schema of the post-Tlatelolco Mexican state. How then, do we rationalize the role of the transportation giant Rubén

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<sup>23</sup> Schers, 127.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-175.



Figuroa in the PRI in the 1970s? The answer, Schers contends, is owing to the size of his union and its political influence. In short, Figuroa's Alianza practiced its own breed of collaborationism with the Mexican state. When Luis Echeverría took to the campaign trail he and his entourage were escorted by eleven Alianza buses and several dozen of its drivers. On another occasion, Alianza furnished over 2,000 buses at a cost of 150 pesos each to transport political supporters, many of whom were paid or coerced to attend (popularly termed *acarreados*), to synchronized political events around the country. In many cases, the bus company owners were not compensated for their expenses.<sup>25</sup>

Collaboration with government authorities reaped transportistas benefits. Bus company owners were in turn granted influence over the processes that created new lines of transportation. They exerted this influence to institute stricter regulations for permits and prevent the licensing of aspiring companies, in the process creating a near-monopoly on the industry. Alianza members were also routinely awarded *posiciones*, basically government positions or party support for an elected office.<sup>26</sup> Figuroa himself is perhaps the best example of this system of reciprocity. He served as federal senator from the state of Guerrero while he chaired a commission that directed the irrigation project of the Balsas River basin. Later, he won the governorship of Guerrero in a famous series of events that saw him kidnapped by the noted guerrilla group Partido de los Pobres while campaigning for office.<sup>27</sup>

Despite his extensive political and business connections, Figuroa's corporal identity was still essentially that of a unionist. His drew more power (and probably reaped as much profit) from his connections to the National Confederation of Popular Organizations and PRI than he did from his status as business owner. Traditional owners may have been excluded from the official political channels of civil society, but that did not prevent them from exerting political power through commerce organizations. The

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 172-173.

<sup>27</sup> Partido de los Pobres (Party of the Poor) led by Lucio Cabañas apprehended Figuroa on May 30, 1974. He was held by the group until September 8 of that year. The details of his liberation are disputed. Some claim he was freed in a brazen police rescue; others contend he paid the group handsomely for his release. The kidnapping of Figuroa delayed his governorship of Guerrero by a year (he was elected in April 1975) though in the meantime he joined the chorus of elite and middle class Mexicans who skewered Echeverría for being excessively tolerant of dissent and not acting more decisively to crush the known radical groups that operated in the nation.

major powerplayers of the Mexican industrial and commercial orb congregated inside large national organizations like the National Chamber of the Assembly Industry, the National Confederation of Industrial Chambers, and the National Confederation of Chambers of Commerce (CONCANACO). These lobbying groups had long pressured the Mexican state to influence decisions on prices, wages, tariffs, and trade policy in general, and continued to do so after 1968. Local organizations served their members by furnishing them personal credit reports, commerce reports, transportation and tourist publications, and by assisting them with such services as debt collection. Some local organizations even had clout in dictating national policy. Certainly the priorities of the Monterrey chapter of the National Chamber of Commerce were regarded in most policymaking decisions. Likewise for the Mexico City chapter that was almost a century old by 1969 and boasted a membership of over 25,000 associated firms, making it the oldest and one of the most important local commerce organizations in Latin America.

The National Chamber of Commerce in particular remained a major political force in the post-Tlatelolco period. On October 29, 1969, President Díaz Ordaz attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the organization's Mexico City headquarters. There, confederation president Francisco Cano Escalante explained to the Mexican leader that his organization was born just a few months after the nation institutionalized itself in 1917 and had advanced steadily across the decades to represent 262 local chapters. Cano Escalante then lauded the president for practicing a dignified foreign trade policy and for instituting a program of socioeconomic development that had surpassed national shortages and overcome international financial pressures. In all, he praised Díaz Ordaz and his government for the political economy it had maintained. Those abroad admire the balance of Mexico's mixed economic system, he assured, and he pledged that "We in all sectors," knowing its benefits, would continue to work with the state to guarantee that the Mexican economy kept expanding at a record pace.<sup>28</sup>

#### *CLASS AND SECTORAL RIVALRY IN MONTERREY*

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<sup>28</sup> *Boletín Financiero y Minero de México*, October 30, 1969, 12. Spanish reads: En el exterior se admira el equilibrio de México en un sistema de economía mixta.

In general, the harmonious nature of the business-state relationship that was so praised by Cano Escalante in 1969 diminished after 1970. It is indisputable that the national discourse of heightened class consciousness spearheaded by Echeverría and echoed by others in government drove a wedge between the Mexican party-state and the ownership sector. Various scholars have considered the goals and authenticity of Echeverría's class-based discourse and some have ascribed populist goals and strategies to the president.<sup>29</sup> Echeverría occasionally employed class-based (even populist) rhetoric to sympathize with the masses and restore their faith in the revolutionary credentials of the ruling regime. Yet, the fact remains that the model of political economy adhered to by Echeverría never matched the radical nature of his promises. Yes, the Echeverría state increased the parastate sector by bringing various industries under state control, but nationalization most often took the form of "mexicanization" and was a process achieved through purchase not force – as explained in Chapter Four. Echeverría reforms, therefore, should not be strictly termed populist. They were largely pragmatic and the products of compromise. They were rarely as decisive as popularly envisioned. Ultimately, Echeverría's promises and reforms fit more appropriately into a uniquely Mexican dialogue of revolutionary redemption than they did into the then prominent supra-national discourses of Third World and class vindication. Nevertheless, the propensity of Echeverría to vocalize support for leftist leaders like Castro and Allende painted him as a socialist in the eyes of many in the business elite.

By the same token, the era's heightened sensitivity to class and nationalism made many owners in Mexico vulnerable to ideological assaults as well. As Abraham Nuncio explains, business leaders in Monterrey, because of the exceptionally close business and cultural ties they maintained with Northamerican investors, had always had to answer charges that they were stooges of foreign capital. These accusations multiplied in number and intensity in the 1970s. In their defense, Monterrey owners did not deny that they accepted some foreign capital investment. Instead, they asked critics to consider their

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<sup>29</sup> Authors of the essays contained in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, eds. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010) do precisely this. For an excellent take on the real and rhetorical importance of populist pretensions in Echeverría's administration, see Alan Knight's chapter, entitled "Cárdenas and Echeverría: Two "Populist" Presidents Compared" in previously cited volume.

successes in channeling foreign investment into corporate profits that were spent to improve worker's conditions and finance domestic development.<sup>30</sup>

This retort was valid. The crucial contribution made by the Grupo Monterrey and the entire business establishment of Nuevo León in funding national development in twentieth century Mexico could not be denied. Various figures were bantered about in public and in the press but the real impact of Nuevo León business upon national development was substantial. Ultimately, the basic premise of the argument made by employers in Nuevo León – that citizens of the state paid more in taxes to the federal government than they received in public investment from it – was correct. Nuevo León industrialists answered allegations that they were “enemies of progress,” lacking in feelings of “social solidarity,” or just plain selfish with statistics.<sup>31</sup> Figures compiled by the major commerce organizations of the state showed that taxes paid by private initiative in Nuevo León constituted eleven percent of total federal revenue in 1976 – a disparity in light of the fact that citizens of the state constituted only three percent of the national population. Furthermore, employers argued that there was a disparity in the ratio of return versus contribution they received from the federal government. According to their figures, the government invested 1.54 billion pesos in infrastructural and other improvements in Nuevo León in 1976, a return that represented less than one-fifth of the state's tax payment of 8.14 billion pesos. Federal budget numbers further confirmed Nuevo León's importance to the national economy. Public figures showed that while federal investment increased by twenty-two percent annually during the period 1970-1974, it had only risen by an average of eight percent in Nuevo León during that period. Citizens of the state of Nuevo León, thus, had just cause to complain; an eight percent annual increase when factored against the inflation rate of the period represented a real decrease.<sup>32</sup> Local entrepreneurs were right to juxtapose public investment in their state and other northern states against that in Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Tabasco, southern states

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<sup>30</sup> Nuncio, 13.

<sup>31</sup> “¿Monterrey...Culpable?”, *El Norte*, October 18, 1976, Insert. In 1974, the annual fiscal revenue of the federal government was 71.999 billion pesos, of which the State of Nuevo León contributed 8.135 billion.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

that received about two pesos in federal government spending for every peso that they paid in taxes.<sup>33</sup>

In perhaps no city was the ideological friction between labor establishment and business leaders more heated than it was in Monterrey, as made evident by discourses surrounding the Garza Sada death and burial. Similarly, anecdotal evidence might permit us to conclude that in no city was the survival and independence of the small and medium-sized businessman more sacrosanct than it was in Monterrey in the 1970s. Recent national wage battles were interpreted there with disdain and union gains accepted begrudgingly. By 1974 it was common to infer open hostility in the words and actions of commerce leaders toward the labor establishment and the cause of organized labor. This hostility was conveyed and bolstered in the press. *El Norte*, the city's largest newspaper, observed the holiday of May 1, the International Day of Labor, contemptuously. A front-page editorial left no doubt about the publisher's political stance. Entitled "Efficiency," the opinion piece assailed "known voices" for using the holiday to "reiterate old lies and half truths" that accused businessmen, producers, and industrialists of manipulating the market and undermining the national economy. Antagonists it alleged were also distorting the truth by contending that the worker sector was worse off in May 1974 than it had been the previous summer – before it received an across the board wage increase of twenty percent. These polemics necessitated a response. *El Norte* editors wrote: "To produce more, in an environment of harmony and confidence, is the only recipe to defeat scarcity and its immediate consequence: an increased cost of living..."<sup>34</sup> The source of the nation's inflation problem, therefore, was understood clearly. Economic sickness in Mexico was diagnosed as being the result of poor management of the national patrimony by state officials, in spite of what "demagogues" alleged to the contrary. The cure for

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<sup>33</sup> This is according to Juan Manuel Beltrán who has worked as a political analyst for Confederation of Mexican Owners (COPARMEX) and the Business Coordinating Council (Consejo Coordinadora Empresarial). His writings regularly appeared on the COPARMEX website: <http://www.coparmex.org.mx>.

<sup>34</sup> Editorial, "Eficiencia," *El Norte*, May 1, 1974, 1. Spanish, in full, reads: Este periódico considera oportuno repetir que las leyes naturales de la Economía continúan teniendo vigencia contra todos los decretos y discursos demagógicos que traten de torcerlas. Producir más, en un ambiente de armonía y de confianza, es la única receta para vencer a la escasez y a su inmediata consecuencia: la carestía. Pero además no asesinar a impuestos a productores y consumidores. Y administrar con decencia y eficacia al enorme patrimonio del pueblo puesto en manos de empresas oficiales. Estas encabezan, curiosamente, la carestía mediante tarifas y precios dictados al capricho, en el van afán de llenar ese barril sin fondo.

economic malaise appeared similarly clear: let manufacturers “...produce more in a climate of harmony and trust.”<sup>35</sup> Let the nation’s businessmen, editors pleaded, remedy the nation’s ills by conducting their business free from disruptive state and worker interference.

That the typical Monterrey businessman saw the presence of the labor establishment in his operations as intrusive was not surprising; the historical development of labor-capital relations in Nuevo León took on a life of its own when viewed in comparison to other industrial centers of the nation. Episodes of syndical militancy in the 1930s did not reorder the industrial power structure of the city to the extent desired by organized labor. Business owners assembled into the Grupo Monterrey continued to dictate the terms of labor-capital relations in the region though they often did so benevolently. Owners built employee loyalty by awarding their workers wages and social benefits that were superior to those garnered by workers in other settings. Corporate propaganda and social programs instilled in workers the perception of the ‘company as family’ – a message that once internalized fostered a climate of workplace harmony that often diffused worker discontent and produced unrivaled earnings.<sup>36</sup> The kind of industrial paternalism practiced by Eugenio Garza Sada on the factory floors of Cervercería Cuauhtémoc, for example, enabled area employers to stay in the good graces of workers.<sup>37</sup>

Economic prosperity and the general abatement of employee-employer hostility in Monterrey after 1940 ushered in the end of state interventionism. Labor-capital relations were hence free to advance independently of any pressures exerted by labor establishment authorities. This is not to imply, however, that unionism could not thrive in Monterrey in the post-war period. It could and it did. It continued to do so into the 1970s, albeit in a uniquely Monterrey way. Of the 504,934 persons classified as economically active in 1976 in the city, an astonishingly high number – 309,000, roughly sixty-one

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: ...producir más, en un ambiente de armonía y de confianza.

<sup>36</sup> Abraham Nuncio, *El Grupo Monterrey* (Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1982), 36.

<sup>37</sup> For a magnificent case study of these dynamics in action in Monterrey, see Chapter Three of Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey: Workers, Paternalism, and Revolution in Mexico, 1890-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 54-81.

percent – of them were unionized.<sup>38</sup> A fact equally as astonishing: of that organized labor force more than 200,000 workers – nearly two-thirds of it – militated in the ranks of company unions (*sindicatos de empresa*) that were tightly controlled by corporate executives and normally loathe to engage in hostile activities against their employers.<sup>39</sup>

The predominance of company unionism in Monterrey represented a thorn in the side of the official labor movement in the 1970s that it was bent upon removing. Labor officials slandered company unions in myriad ways. They derided them as *sindicatos blancos*, or “white” unions because they were composed of ‘ghost’ workers who formed a hollowed shell of Mexican unionism. Metaphorically, these ghosts abandoned their corporal bodies when they sold themselves to the owner who directed all aspects of their union’s operations. They were also understood as “white” as opposed to “red,” meaning that they were passive stooges rather than hostile militants.

The canvass of the workers’ movement in 1970s Mexico was diverse and especially so in Monterrey where company unions (ghost or otherwise) remained the major force in local labor-capital relations. This historical predominance of company unionism in the Mexican north juxtaposed the surging of official unionism in the post-Tlatelolco period and created conflict. The roots of conflict were numerous, but perhaps no cause was more central than a basic divergence in philosophy that pitted the traditional commitment of the area’s business class to corporate autonomy against the labor establishment’s new found knack for interventionism in labor-capital relations. The NLFT empowered government labor and union authorities to intervene in the internal decision making processes of companies in numerous and distinct ways. Mandatory

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<sup>38</sup> Nuncio, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. According to Nuncio, the conciliatory relations kept between company unions and management in Monterrey alienated union members from their counterparts in the state-allied workers’ movement. Members of company unions mirrored their CTM or CROM brethren by affiliating themselves into large national organizations to bolster their negotiating positions. Most importantly, company union members in Monterrey were grouped into the National Federation of Independent Unions, an organization that in 1979 advocated for 480 unions, over 150,000 workers, and managed 1,500 collective contracts. Company unions also formed subgroups of industrial workers in a similar effort to strengthen their bargaining stances. In Monterrey, various groups formed to consolidate unions of workers of the city’s top industries. They were: ALFA group – workers of the steel industry; CYDSA – chemical and petrochemical workers; FIC – glass industry workers; and GIC – employees of the Grupo Industrial Cuauhtémoc. Still, despite the structural and organizational likeness of their unions to those in the official workers’ movement, company unionists were viewed by many as “opponents” of the Mexican worker in the 1970s because they acted outside the tutelage of the Congress of Labor or the CTM.

profit-sharing provisions, for example, undercut industrial paternalism in ways that re-wrote the terms of employer-employee relations in corporate settings. In Monterrey, where the regiomontano worker profited from industrial paternalism more so than most, labor reforms were often unwelcomed.<sup>40</sup> Clashes were unavoidable.

#### The Gasolinera Conflict of 1974

Still, large populations of northern workers did not pledge their allegiance to employers. In Monterrey, official unions exerted influence on the local economy through the presence of nearly 1,000 chapters representing upwards of 100,000 workers by the late 1970s.<sup>41</sup> Unions classifying themselves as “independent,” meaning they were free from Congress of Labor or CTM patronage, or “democratic,” i.e. opposed to the strict hierarchical structure imposed from above on state-allied unions, composed the third strand of syndicalism in Monterrey in the period. This strand was relatively small but not insignificant. The boisterous activities of non-allied unions of miners, university students, and electrical workers exerted pressure on the operations of official labor to the extent that some alleged Fidel Velázquez resorted to sponsoring ghost unions as a counterweight to offset the growth of independent unionism.<sup>42</sup> These two types of unionists took advantage of newly legislated worker rights and filed grievances against their employers with federal labor authorities in Nuevo León and elsewhere in unprecedented numbers in the 1970s.

A report printed in *El Norte* on June 22, 1974 summarized the situation in Nuevo León during that period of historical worker activity. 306 strike petitions were filed with the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board in May alone. Of this number, eighty percent (245) were filed by unions affiliated with the CTM with the remaining twenty

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Snodgrass explains that industrial paternalism in Monterrey formed as a tactical response to militant unionism and fears of government regulation. There, company funds were established to rival state-run funds, and well-financed company cooperatives offered genuine rewards that outweighed the risks of labor activism. These developments helped workers in Monterrey forsake unions in favor of company sponsored cooperatives and bred a good deal of worker loyalty to their employers. See Michael David Snodgrass, “The Birth and Consequences of Industrial Paternalism in Monterrey, Mexico, 1890-1940,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 53 – Patronage, Paternalism, and Company Welfare (Spring 1998): 119-121.

<sup>41</sup> Again, see Chapter One of Nuncio, *El Grupo Monterrey*. In his discussion, he draws much information from Carmen Lira, “Férreo control patronal del sindicalismo Monterrey”, *Uno más Uno*, October 4, 1979.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. A similar contention is made in José Luis Trueba Lara, *Fidel Velázquez: Una biografía* (Mexico City: Times Editores, S.A. de C.V., 1997).



percent acting under the tutelage of other large confederations having union representation in the state.<sup>43</sup> *El Norte*, not surprisingly, understood the CTM's hyperactivity cynically. It reported that strikes were raised to protest matters of salary, collective contracting, and benefits, and that they were scheduled to explode in the area's hotels, restaurants, printing shops, bakeries, butcher shops, markets, food-production plants, plumbing and carpentry shops, hardware stores, bookstores, pharmacies, dairy facilities, construction firms, woodshops, clothing stores, and gas stations. This analysis was accurate, but the newspaper saw conspiracy in such panoply of activity. It deduced that the CTM, in pursuit of selfish ends, was threatening the regional economy by holding vast swaths of the private sector hostage to the prospect of the strike. Fortunately, it was relieved to report that much of the CTM's grandstanding was diffused before it ignited into action as 128 of the 306 strike petitions filed with the local JCA were declared non-existent and thus cancelled. Of those that remained, only ten strikes were carried out in May and the remaining hundred-plus files stayed active into June. June, however, would bring a new wave of conflict. 202 strike petitions were filed with the JCA that month with the majority, once again, being the product of CTM activism.<sup>44</sup>

The looming presence of the strike hung like a cloud over Nuevo León entering the summer of 1974. Area owners complained about worker ingratitude while consumers fretted about the decreased access to goods they deemed inevitable with production lapses. For one group – *gasolineros*, owners of gasoline stations – worker intransigence had reached a breaking point and required a response. Gas stations owners were resolved to counter worker agitation with a show of collective might. Not one of the state's eighty-six gas stations opened on Friday, June 6, 1974. Owners reasoned that the *paro* (typically used to denote an unsanctioned or "wildcat" strike but better understood in this scenario as a lockout) was a necessary measure of defense against the illegal and unjustified strike planned by CTM leaders across the state.<sup>45</sup> Stations, they promised, would be reopened

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<sup>43</sup> These included the National Confederation of Popular Organizations, the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants, the General Confederation of Workers, and the National Federation of Independent Unions.

<sup>44</sup> "Emplaza más la CTM," *El Norte*, June 22, 1974, 7-B.

<sup>45</sup> *Paro* is more literally translated as "work stoppage" although I have opted to use the term "lockout" so as not to confuse an employer's decision to stop production with the workers' strike.

the following day at 5:00 p.m., but owners warned of the prospect of future lockouts if the CTM continued along its insolent track. Addressing the situation, Nuevo León Governor Pedro Zorrilla Martínez told reporters that although the lockout called by gas station owners was illegal, (meaning, it was conducted without the approval of state labor authorities), he condoned their course of action as a necessary measure to counter strong-arm tactics used by the CTM in recent months.<sup>46</sup> Days later, Zorrilla affirmed his support for the owners' position. He told the press that more than eighty percent of the state's gasolineros adequately covered their responsibilities to workers. They were, thus, justified in employing bold measures to combat the "extortionist" strategies employed by worker organizations in the state.<sup>47</sup>

Gas stations were re-opened as promised the next day, June 7. Owners resumed service at their stations and permitted CTM members to return to work though plans for a union-wide strike at each of the city's forty-seven gas stations remained in place, scheduled to commence June 11 at noon. As the scheduled strike date approached nervous tension gripped the streets of Monterrey. Trains of cars clogged the city's congested thoroughfares on the evening of June 10 as drivers hoped to fill-up in anticipation of the impending gas shortage they deemed inevitable. Naturally, the prospect of depriving local motorists and industrialists gasoline in a city as economically important as Monterrey caught the attention of federal authorities. PEMEX Director General Antonio Dovalí Jaime weighed in. He instructed gasolineros in Monterrey that the unilateral suspension of service they had undertaken days earlier was illegal as it was implemented without PEMEX approval and was thus a violation of contractual terms they adhered to with the national oil company. He warned owners that if they followed through with their threats for future lockouts and again deprived gasoline to city residents, PEMEX would retract generous fiscal concessions that they currently enjoyed.<sup>48</sup>

The scolding given gas station owners by the PEMEX boss did not intimidate them. Manuel García, head of the Monterrey Chapter of the National Union of PEMEX

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<sup>46</sup> *El Sol*, June 7, 1974.

<sup>47</sup> *El Sol*, June 10, 1974.

<sup>48</sup> *El Sol*, June 11, 1974.

Distributors affirmed the resoluteness of the ownership position. He told the press on June 10 that even if a single *bandera rojinegra* was hung at one of their establishments, Monterrey gasolineros would call an indefinite lockout that would be observed by PEMEX retailers nationwide – most of whom, he claimed, were abiding similar extortionist tactics by CTM elements.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, the CTM was moved by the government's position as it understood full well that the negative impact of a gas workers strike was a risk authorities were not willing to take. Furthermore, collaborationism required that organized labor occasionally temper its demands in the interest of preserving economic stability. As such, leaders of the CTM's state apparatus, the Nuevo León State Workers' Federation (FTNL,) acceded to additional negotiations. The strike was postponed and re-scheduled for June 13 giving state labor authorities an additional forty-eight hours to broker an agreement and avert crisis.

Accusations and insults continued to fly between station owners and unionists in the days that followed. In tripartite talks organized by the local conciliation and arbitration board, owners held fast to the position that the CTM was inciting gas station employees to militate with false allegations of contractual violations and intimidation tactics meant to force non-unionized workers to join its ranks. Owners asserted they were not against their workers unionizing, only that they were opposed to the presence of outside elements that needlessly agitated workers or pressured them to join a union. In the event of a strike owners promised to poll their workers to see who among them wished to be part of the CTM. The matter of worker choice represented to owners a pivotal issue that complicated labor-capital relations not just in Monterrey but nationwide.<sup>50</sup>

June 13 arrived and still no conciliation. The situation, though, took an unexpected turn when CTM officials failed to appear at a mandatory conciliation and arbitration board hearing scheduled to precede the outbreak of the strike. In response, Homero Martínez, president of the local board, declared forty-four of the CTM's strike petitions invalid, leaving only three files active that the CTM had earlier filed extensions

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<sup>49</sup> *El Sol*, June 10, 1974.

<sup>50</sup> *El Sol*, June 11, 1974.

for. Owners interpreted this development suspiciously. García remarked that the non-appearance was characteristic of the organization's penchant for political chicanery. Of the strike petitions that remained active he remarked that although three was a small number, gasolineros remained firm in their intolerance. He repeated his warning that should even one bandera rojinegra fly from a Monterrey gas station on June 17 (the new strike date), local owners would call a lockout that would deprive the entire city of gasoline for an indefinite period.<sup>51</sup>

The small businessmen who owned gas stations and confronted organized labor in Monterrey had powerful allies around the state. The zero-tolerance position iterated by Manuel García had great appeal to the business elite of Nuevo León who gathered in Monterrey on June 14 to discuss the situation. There, members of Monterrey chapter of the National Chamber of Commerce expressed their mutual disgust over the current tone of labor-capital relations in the state. According to Eduardo Hovelman, Director of the group, the tack currently adopted by the CTM was nothing less than illegal; it was of an antisocial character that upended social order. "Commerce in general," he explained, "reproves in an energetic form the gangster-like syndical practices that utilize the right to strike in an abusive way that has fostered phantom unions to blackmail the merchant."<sup>52</sup> Strong measures were necessary to combat this threat and protest the "undoing" (*zozobra*) in which the area currently lived as a result of the massive strike petitions filed by the CTM. To counter syndical intransigence the 150 voting members of the chamber voted unanimously to conduct a general work stoppage of their own, to be carried out by the organization's nearly 6,000 members on Tuesday, June 18. This tactic, they explained, was not intended to disrupt order in the city but was an indispensable measure to demonstrate the collective disgust (and power) of the area's commercial forces. Commercial shut-down would also pressure local and federal authorities to sponsor a better climate of business investment in the state. In the event that the shut-down did not

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<sup>51</sup> *El Sol*, June 14, 1974.

<sup>52</sup> "Protesta por huelgas masivas. Parará el comercio el Martes," *El Sol*, June 15, 1974, 1. Spanish reads: El comercio en general reprueba en forma enérgica las prácticas sindicales gangsteriles al utilizar el derecho de huelga en forma abusiva que ha propiciado que sindicatos fantasmas chantajeen al comerciante. Hovelman went on to explain that some businesses such as pharmacies would remain open so as not to endanger the public.

achieve these goals, merchants of the city were then resolved to stop paying taxes to force proper government collaboration with business.<sup>53</sup>

The massive shut-down planned by Monterrey business owners for June 18 garnered wide attention. On June 15 commercial leaders addressed a nervous public and summarized business's goals in carrying out the action. Hovelman clarified that: "The assembly was a clear demonstration of the anguish that exists amongst merchant class because of the obstacles it [faces] in its legitimate right to work, serve, and contribute to the well being of society and the country."<sup>54</sup> José Luis Conindreau, President of Monterrey chapter of the National Chamber of the Commerce, endorsed this position. He told that the area's businessmen harbored a collective frustration over the government's failure to properly intervene in labor-capital relations and were inclined toward drastic measures. The decision to call the work stoppage, therefore, was taken essentially: "...to protest the zozobra in which [the businessman] lives, because he has seen the principle of law constantly corroded creating a situation of chaos and instability."<sup>55</sup> Corruption and criminality inside organized labor was also cited as forcing the hand of business. Commerce leaders in Nuevo León widely understood union bosses in the state as "gangsters." This was a comparison Hovelman and Coindreau had no qualms about making. They pleaded with state authorities to exercise proper measures to: "...eradicate the gangster-like practices and the use of the right to strike in an abusive form that has fostered phantom unions to blackmail the merchant by means of strike petitions that have nothing to do with social reality."<sup>56</sup>

Nervous tension again abounded in Monterrey on the eve of the shut-down. Consumers rushed local stores on June 17 in preparation for impending commercial

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> "Paro comercial habrá el martes", *El Norte*, June 16, 1974, 1-B. Spanish reads: La asamblea fue una clara demostración de la angustia que existe entre el comerciante por los obstáculos que está teniendo en su legítimo derecho de trabajar, servir, y contribuir al bienestar de la sociedad y el País.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Ello para protestar la zozobra en que se vive, porque se considera que cada vez con mayor grado se ha vendido rompiendo el principio del derecho creándose una situación de caos e intranquilidad.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Pedimos que mediante el ejercicio de la autoridad se erradiquen las prácticas sindicales gangsteriles y el utilizar el derecho de huelga en forma abusiva que ha propiciado que sindicatos fanasmas chantajeen al comerciante mediante emplazamientos que nada tienen que ver con la realidad social.

blackout. Stores met customer needs by staying open late into the night.<sup>57</sup> That afternoon, José Campillo Sáinz, Secretary of Industry and Commerce, arrived to Monterrey to plea with merchants to reconsider the action they had scheduled for the following day. He delivered members of the Monterrey Chamber of Commerce a petition from Echeverría asking that the body work diligently to find an alternative to the shut-down. Echeverría's plea fell upon deaf ears, though, as commerce leaders were past the point of patience in their dealings with the state's labor apparatus. The gasoline workers strike scheduled to ignite at 2:00 p.m. that afternoon was also on the secretary's itinerary. Worker action in this instance, however, was delayed yet again as the Monterrey Conciliation and Arbitration Board granted the worker's federation another two day extension (*prórroga*) thus pushing back the planned strike until midday of June 19.<sup>58</sup> That evening, Campillo sat down with Coindreau and Governor Zorrilla who chronicled for him a litany of acts they felt that were perpetrated in "gangster-like" fashion by the CTM to promote chaos and instability in local commerce.<sup>59</sup> By day's end, it had become clear to the Secretary that the position of local owners was unyielding; the shut-down could not be averted.

The atmosphere in downtown Monterrey on June 18 was described by local observers as resembling a "mid-week Sunday" in that it was calm, quiet, and the principal arteries of the city were deserted. On that day, upwards of 10,000 establishments – many more than the 5,846 officially registered with the Monterrey chamber – refused to open in solidarity with local commerce. Owners agreed to pay their employees though their doors were locked and their lights were off. The solidarity that binded *comerciantes* together in the face of a common threat was no more evident than in the image of the Frutería La Victoria, a produce market that had been open for business consistently – twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week – for the past thirty years. Passerbys of the famous fruit market saw a giant tarpaulin draped over its booths, thus symbolically "closing its doors" for the first time in a generation.<sup>60</sup> Visitors to Monterrey were also greatly inconvenienced by the display of commercial unity. Hotels stayed closed causing over

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<sup>57</sup> *El Norte*, June 17, 1974.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *El Norte*, June 18, 1974.

<sup>60</sup> *El Norte*, June 19, 1974.

2,000 tourists that arrived to Monterrey to leave the city and move on to nearby locations in search of lodging.<sup>61</sup>

Observing the situation early that morning, city business leaders declared the commercial shut-down of June 18 a stunning success. They confidently estimated that commerce in Monterrey would lose in the area of thirty-five million pesos as a result of the massive action.<sup>62</sup> Economic loss was never an attractive prospect, yet commerce leaders judged the hit taken by the local economy as a necessary evil toward forcing the Mexican state to fully recognize the troubled state of labor-capital relations in the area. Fidel Velázquez evaluated the day's events quite differently. Speaking from Mexico City the following day, he termed the merchants who closed their doors in Monterrey "delinquents" for it was they, and not workers, who effectuated illicit work stoppages to the ends of denying local citizens rights granted to them by law. Said intransigence, according to Velázquez, demanded justice. He pledged that the CTM would continue along its path of strikes as well as hold a great demonstration in Monterrey to support future strikes that were planned against gas stations, restaurants, and hotels in the city. This was a course of action he felt was obligatory to combat the owners of Monterrey who continued to try to live "in an environment of privilege at the cost of the working classes."<sup>63</sup>

Velázquez's typical hyperbole and classist interpretation of events in Monterrey was even more concisely articulated in the pages of his personal mouthpiece, *Ceteme*. The weekly reported on June 22 that the various struggles waged by cetemistas in Monterrey gas stations, hotels, and restaurants over matters of collective contracts were

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. In a separate but not unrelated incident, a group of vendors operating in the city's central Mercado Juárez announced they would hold their own shut-down to protest the unfair conditions given to CTM-affiliated vendors who operated on the market's floor. According to the claimants, merchants affiliated with the CTM did not pay a single *centavo* for the space they occupied. Free vendors, in contrast, claimed that they paid between 150 and 600 pesos monthly in rent according to the size of the booth they occupied. Furthermore, CTM affiliated vendors were not "harassed" by local inspectors to the extent that others were, a freedom which, they alleged, kept non-unionized operators constantly vulnerable to eviction and enabled cetemistas to gradually become the majority in the market. The rivalry played out on the market's floor, which, according to *El Norte* scribes, bordered on the brink of violence, was emblematic of a larger conflict waged daily between free and unionized workers in the city. Again, see *El Norte*, June 19, 1974.

<sup>62</sup> *El Norte*, June 18, 1974.

<sup>63</sup> *El Norte*, June 20, 1974. Spanish reads: ...los patrones de Monterrey pretenden seguir viviendo en un ambiente de privilegios a costa de la clases proletarias.

historic clashes, undertaken to protest “...the eternal reactionary and antinational policies of the business group of Monterrey.”<sup>64</sup> Raúl Caballero Escamilla, Secretary General of the FTNL, summarized the situation for *Ceteme* readers and reaffirmed the traditional and historical anti-worker attitude of the reactionary group based in Monterrey. None of the businesses cited in strike petitions, he alleged, paid their workers the federal minimum wage nor did they pay them overtime pay as was afforded to them by law. Employers in Nuevo León also failed to grant their employees legally-mandated social security, workers’ housing, vacation, profit-sharing, and retirement benefits.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, many fostered ghost unions that undercut their employees’ abilities to procure basic rights granted them by law. In all, the Monterrey charro concluded that these crimes, so common of the Grupo Monterrey, could not go unchallenged. He advised those in the business class that “we will explode unending strikes” until they altered their defiant stances.<sup>66</sup> Compañeros in Monterrey were further assured that their efforts found the full and absolute support of their organization’s National Executive Committee. Massive demonstrations were promised and future strikes were planned – all in order to combat those who threatened the well being of the Mexican worker and challenged government authorities by ignoring federal labor policy.<sup>67</sup>

This being said, the commercial shut-down of June 18 necessitated a worker response. At 10:00 a.m. on the morning of the next day, June 19, the oft-threatened and just as often delayed Monterrey gasolinera strike was finally carried out at four local stations. Bandera rojinegras were hung and labor activities ceased. Later that day, members of the National Union of PEMEX Distributors gathered and sought to make good on their promise of intolerance. They conferred with other gas station owners and scheduled another city-wide lockout to be carried on Saturday, June 22 if the Monterrey Conciliation and Arbitration Board had not by that date declared the current strike

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<sup>64</sup> Editorial, “La C.T.M. Contra Quienes Pretenden Mantener sus Privilegios, a Costa de los Trabajadores,” *Ceteme*, June 22, 1974, 1. Spanish reads: ...actitud esta que habla por sí solo de la eterna política reaccionaria y antinacional del grupo empresarial de Monterrey.

<sup>65</sup> Editorial, “Ante el Problema de las Gasolineras. Los Trabajadores Cetemistas, Jamás Renunciarán al Derecho de Huelga: Licenciado Raúl Caballero,” *Ceteme*, June 22, 1974, 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Editorial, “La C.T.M. Contra Quienes Pretenden Mantener sus Privilegios, a Costa de los Trabajadores,” *Ceteme*, June 22, 1974, 8.



nonexistent. Their request elicited skepticism from the board's president Homero Martínez who stated that such a ruling was not possible to emit in just seventy-two hours.<sup>68</sup> Owners objected and in doing so, ironically, voiced a complaint commonly lodged by union officials about the sluggish pace of the board's decision making process. The workers' strike proceeded in the coming days free from government censure and the prospect of the city-wide lockout threatened by owners loomed on the horizon.<sup>69</sup>

On June 21, a typically scorching early summer day in Monterrey, local gasolineros reaffirmed their intention to shut off pumps the next day and deny local motorists gasoline to protest worker strikes they deemed illegal. Local labor authorities worked furiously to determine the legality of the strikes and avert another costly gas station shut-down. PEMEX officials again intervened. The company issued a public statement verifying that it was entirely non-aligned in the local conflict between workers and owners. Yet, in a phone call placed by PEMEX officials to the National Union of PEMEX Distributors, Monterrey representatives were reminded that any unsolicited lockout they might conduct would incur penalties including and up to the retraction of fiscal concessions and the loss of operating licenses.<sup>70</sup>

Monterrey owners withstood government pressure better than most; a long history of state and business animosity in the region had given them skins nearly impermeable to the jabs of government officials. Threats from PEMEX officials, therefore, were not enough to convince gas station owners to reconsider their positions. Relenting in this instance would mean that local business owners retreated on two major engines that had historically driven labor-capital battles in the region: namely, the questions of worker choice and the murky syndical status of employees in local industries. Fidel Velázquez spoke to these questions in his statement of June 19. He stated that yes, the majority of gas station (as well as hotel and restaurant) employees in the city were legitimate members of the CTM and as such their workplace demands were perfectly in compliance with federal labor law.<sup>71</sup> Local owners felt otherwise, as did local opinion makers, some

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<sup>68</sup> *El Norte*, June 20, 1974.

<sup>69</sup> *El Norte*, June 21, 1974.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *El Norte*, June 20, 1974.

of whom, writing in the nation's bastion of industrial paternalism and company unionism, expressed the feeling that the right to strike, although constitutionally guaranteed, was only to be exercised by legitimate workers and "not by pirates."<sup>72</sup> When the right to strike was manipulated by outside forces, they concluded, it was no longer a sacred right but rather an arm of extortion, a vile crime, a factor of anarchy and social dissolution, an attack on the economy, and a mockery of our institutional regime.<sup>73</sup> All of these perversions of justice they identified as alive and flourishing in Nuevo León to the great detriment of the economy and people of the region.

On the eve of the promised lockout, gas station owners determined to settle the worker choice and syndical status questions in a very logical manner: by simply asking their employees what they wanted to do and who they were affiliated with. Pedro Treviño, owner of Central Gasolinera, one of the four gas stations paralyzed by strike activities, assembled his employees at 5:00 p.m. to vote in the presence of local labor authorities. The questions posed to them were: *Are you in accordance with the strike conducted here?*; and *Do you desire to join the CTM in the future?* Treviño reported that he had twenty employees. Forty-three registered a vote that afternoon. Each of the twenty employees that Treviño listed voted no on both questions; they unanimously rejected the strike and refused to join the ranks of the CTM. Of the other twenty-three who voted Treviño claimed he did not recognize a single one. When interviewed, the twenty-three gave diverse professions at the store including pumpers, greasers, car-washers, and drivers. Yet when they were asked by labor authorities to corroborate their votes, not a single one provided a name, reported a domicile, or consented to have a finger-print taken.<sup>74</sup> Not surprisingly, the votes of these "supposed employees" went counter to those on the store's official payroll; they voted unanimously in favor of the strike and in favor of CTM inscription.

In due time, the facts of the bizarre situation came to light. *El Norte* reported the following day that a registered worker of the station claimed to have seen the same group of men assembled together that morning at a restaurant where employees were being

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<sup>72</sup> Editorial, "Legalidad e ilegalidad," *El Norte*, June 20, 1974, 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *El Norte*, June 22, 1974.

polled on similar questions of worker choice and union affiliation. Another confirmed that a city bus had been used to ship in the nearly two dozen individuals to deceive labor officials and steal the election. The false employees were hence not only revealed as *acarreados*, or those “carried-in” by the union to inflate perception of its strength and numbers, but were also slandered as *cachirules*, a term used to mean “scabs” but one that more literally translated to “illegitimate children” or, more crudely, “bastard sons.”<sup>75</sup> The CTM’s tactics succeeded to fool no one. One employee claimed that the “cetemista theater” was the worst pantomime he had ever seen.<sup>76</sup>

June 21 concluded with the farce and CTM shenanigans fully exposed, yet worker strikes continued into the morning of June 22. Owners went on record and held fast to their promise of a city-wide lockout, now scheduled to go into effect at 2:00 p.m. that afternoon should local labor authorities fail to declare the strikes non-existent before then. The state’s top commerce figure Eduardo Hovelman raised the ante. He told the press that morning that Nuevo León’s owners were now considering a total commercial and industrial shut-down to protest the state’s passivity toward syndical corruption and the slowness of labor authorities in resolving labor-capital disputes.<sup>77</sup> The episode witnessed at Central Gasolinera the evening before, however, laid the groundwork for eventual resolution and averted such action. Gas station owners at the remaining three striking stations replicated the scene witnessed at Central Gasolinera and polled their workers on the morning of June 22 under the supervision of JLCA authorities. The results they received confirmed what they already suspected to be true: that their stations had been seized by *cachirules* who were not real employees but CTM-plants installed to tip the balance of power in its favor. The next day *El Norte* trumpeted the results. The “FINAL TALLY” was published in a front-page table.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Cachirul* comes from *cachirulo*, a word for, among other things, a patch sewn on a garment to repair a tear in the fabric. Here, we may infer *cachirul* to signify someone or something that is used to fill a void – much like ‘scabs’ who are brought in to fill a void when production is stopped due to a workers’ strike. Consideration of a more current definition of the word is also enlightening. According to the Real Academia Española Diccionario de la Lengua Española, Vigésima Segunda Edición of the Real Academia Española, *cachirul* is a distinct Mexicanism that is derived from *cachirulo* but specifically means: a. *peineta pequeña*; or b. *hijo ilegítimo*. It is from the latter definition that I derive my understanding of the term.

<sup>76</sup> *El Norte*, June 22, 1974.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> “MARCADOR GLOBAL,” *El Norte*, June 23, 1974, 1.

<u>Gasoline Stations on Strike</u>	<u>Gas Station Workers</u>	<u>CTM Members</u>	<u>Cachirules</u>
Central Gasolinera	20	0	23
Mercado de Abastos	18	0	25
S. Bernardo Reyes	14	0	21
Servicio Monterrey	11	0	13
Total	63	0	82

As could be inferred from the results, the four gas stations shut down by strike on June 19 employed a total of sixty-three workers. Curiously, 145 votes were cast – a fact that led observers to conclude that eighty-two votes were cast by CTM stooges. The strikes themselves were thus understood to be the product of *cachirul* agitation, a fact that infuriated not just the owners of the paralyzed stations but the region’s entire business community. Quantitative evidence, it appeared, now existed to corroborate ownership’s claims that the organized labor movement led by the CTM had acted criminally and in a “gangster-like” fashion to influence the terms of labor-capital relations in the area.

Monterrey owners were right to accuse the CTM of manipulating the business climate with strikes or planned strikes that were often illegally waged. They were right to denounce the maneuvers of “phantom unions” that used monkey business and aggression to clog the docket of the state’s labor board and sabotage business in the state.<sup>79</sup> On the hot pavements of city gas stations, therefore, one saw a microcosm of a larger battle fought on thousands of settings nationwide between the CTM and the business class. This was a battle that Mexico’s most powerful unionist movement had fought hard (and won) in Monterrey before. Its efforts this time, although they included tactics that were far from admirable, would again pay off.

After tallying the votes cast by gas station workers, owner and union representatives reached a resolution. Tripartite authorities gathered in the offices of the state headquarters of the PRI on June 22 and worked late into the night. At 11:30 p.m., a deal was finally brokered that ended the Monterrey gasolinera strike and averted the massive lockout promised by local business owners.<sup>80</sup> Raúl Caballero, the top CTM

<sup>79</sup> “Denuncian maniobras,” *El Norte*, June 22, 1974, 7-B.

<sup>80</sup> Editorial, “Fin al Conflicto de Gasolineros de Monterrey,” *Ceteme*, June 29, 1974, 6.

figure in Nuevo León, committed his charges to lower the bandera rojinegras and permit operations to resume at the four gas stations paralyzed by strike activities. In exchange, the CTM received much. National Union of PEMEX Distributors representative Filiberto Jiménez Orozco granted permission to gas station employees to form an industrial union, being that they worked in the same industry but performed different jobs, and he pledged that the PEMEX distributors' union would recognize the validity of gas station workers to demand collective contracts.<sup>81</sup> Immediately, the obvious inequality of the accord astonished observers. In a column published the next day, Ramón Garza expressed open amazement. How could it be, he inquired, that despite losing votes at four gas stations by a combined count of sixty-three to zero, the CTM still managed to obtain an agreement that committed all employees to become affiliated with its state organization, the FTNL?<sup>82</sup> How could it be, that despite presenting 'fakers' that fooled no one in the voting process, the CTM still succeeded in achieving its ultimate goal of enforcing mandatory union inscription? These questions puzzled Garza. He concluded that: "By Losing, the CTM wins."<sup>83</sup>

Like Garza, gas station workers interviewed in the coming days were incredulous at the outcome of the negotiations. Employees repudiated the agreement reached by their bosses' representatives and some lamented being sold to the CTM. Others cited their right to free association and pointed out that they had no desire to join the ranks of the CTM due to the good conditions, benefits, and salaries their employers already granted them. Rubén Martínez, an employee at one of the recently re-opened stations, summarized a position many workers shared toward the organization: "The CTM's activities," he considered, "waste time and don't produce anything."<sup>84</sup> Martínez was also indignant that an agreement was signed without worker input. The perception that worker choice had been violated was widespread, and not just amongst gas station employees. A spokesperson for the National Action Party in Nuevo León condemned the agreement

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<sup>81</sup> *El Norte*, June 23, 1974.

<sup>82</sup> Ramón Garza, "Perdiendo gana la CTM," *El Norte*, June 23, 1974, 1-B.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *El Norte*, June 25, 1974. Spanish, in full, reads: Las actividades cetemistas quitan tiempo y no reditúan nada; además para firmar el convenio con la C.T.M. los de la Unión debieron haber contado con nuestra opinión.

calling it a complete refutation of authentic syndicalism. “In no way,” he declared, “can owners and labor leaders make a pact with respect to the interests and rights that are exclusive to the worker.”<sup>85</sup> Negative reactions to the agreement continued to pour in the coming days. *El Norte* related on June 27 that owners whose stations faced future strikes promised to sell their businesses if worker affiliation with the CTM was enforced. José Gracida, owner of the station S. Bernardo Reyes explained that he and his colleagues were resolved to sell their businesses before permitting a CTM “...intervention that no one asked for.”<sup>86</sup> Workers too promised action. Some vowed to quit if the distributors’ union insisted on affiliating them into the FTNL. Others discussed the possibility of forming their own union to offer workers an independent and autonomous alternative.<sup>87</sup>

Partisans of business similarly loathed the agreement and saw politics behind it. Ernesto Leal Flores, editor and director of the staunchly pro-business *¡Óigame!* wrote on June 25 that the gasoline agreement was a “monument of confusion and violation of the Law.” Leal Flores, though writing for a friendly audience of business partisans, criticized both ownership and labor elements, noting that the accord revealed the distributors union’s as much as the CTM’s complete lack of appreciation for the free will of the worker. What it also showed well, he felt, was the keen sense of political survival harbored by its creators. As he saw it, the CTM was, “naturally,” part of the PRI. That being the case, an agreement such as that reached on June 22 was attractive for any move that expanded union ranks also promised to benefit the official party of the Mexican state. It was no wonder, therefore, in a setting like Nuevo León where an anti-state, pro-business ethic had long been nurtured by political opponents in the National Action Party, that an agreement so anti-democratic in nature would receive the quick approval of the state’s political and labor authorities, virtually all of whom were members of the PRI. “And what to say about the political party that sanctioned such an anti-revolutionary and non-democratic agreement in its own offices and before its maximum state authority?” Leal Flores asked with biting invective. “What does it say as well about the bureaucrats

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<sup>85</sup> *El Norte*, June 25, 1974. Spanish reads: De ningún modo pueden pactar patrones y líderes respecto a intereses y derechos que son exclusivos del trabajador.

<sup>86</sup> *El Norte*, June 27, 1974. Spanish reads: ...su intervención sin que nadie se la pida.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

and high-level authorities, including our own governor, that sanctioned a pact that contains so many legal incongruities?”<sup>88</sup>

The curious way that the conflict was resolved enraged gas station employees and flummoxed editorialists like Garza and Leal Flores. Regiomontano entrepreneurs, on the other hand, were probably less confounded by the unusual resolution for they had long resigned themselves to operating in a political system weighted against them. Commercial partisans saw all of the inherent flaws of the system at work in the unlawful way that the dispute was resolved. Editors of *El Norte* termed the resolution process a “Mockery” and wrote that although the right of workers to freely affiliate was heralded by both sides throughout the course of the dispute, it was exactly that principle that was forsaken in the drafting of the resolution. They cited the clear language of Article 358 of the NLFT mandating that no person can oblige another to join or not join a union.<sup>89</sup> Yet, it was precisely that obligation that was enforced upon gas stations workers by employer and union representatives. The accord was, hence, illegal. Worse than that, it was an insult to all of those it feigned to benefit. “The comedy that cetemistas and gas station owners presented...” they concluded, was “...a mockery of the rights of the worker and of all the citizens of the state that deserve more respect.”<sup>90</sup>

What Monterrey business figures saw as a “mockery” of justice those in organized labor’s upper echelons saw as validation. To CTM opinion makers, the gasolinera conflicted was more than a local dispute; it was part of a century-long struggle waged by the Mexican worker against the greedy and exploitative ownership class encrusted in Monterrey. The episode showed that the insolence of the Grupo Monterrey had not abated since it was so famously checked by Cárdenas four decades earlier. To

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<sup>88</sup> See reprint of Ernesto Leal Flores, “El convenio gasolinero, monumento de confusiones y violaciones a la Ley,” *¡Óigame!* and featured in *El Norte*, June 25, 1974, 5-A. Spanish reads: ¿Y qué decir del partido político que ha sancionado en sus propias oficinas y ante su máximo jerarca estatal un acuerdo tan poco revolucionario y democrático? ¿Qué decir también de los funcionarios segundos y autoridades superiores como el propio Gobernador, que han sancionado un convenio que contiene tantas incongruencias legales?

<sup>89</sup> Article 358, in its entirety, read: A nadie se puede obligar a formar parte de un sindicato o a no formar parte de él. Cualquier estipulación que establezca multa convencional en caso de separación o que desvirtúe de algún modo la disposición contenida en el párrafo anterior, se tendrá por no puesta. See STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición* (Mexico City: STPS, 1970), 279-280.

<sup>90</sup> Editorial, “Convenio o burla,” *El Norte*, June 25, 1974, 1. Spanish, in full, reads: La comedia que presentaron los Cetemistas y gasolineros se intrepeta como una burla a los derechos del trabajador y a toda la ciudadanía de este Estado que merece más respeto.

this day, *Ceteme* editors lamented, the Grupo Monterrey relies on false accusations and threats to halt the upward ascension of the revolutionary Mexican worker. It shows the same ancestral hatred of organized labor in 1974 as it did in 1936 and continues to accept the validity of only those unions it calls “independent” and exercises control over.<sup>91</sup> That business owners of the area continued to cling to their historical airs of privilege only served to strengthen the resolve of the CTM – “an organization of firm and permanent struggle, of a revolutionary and invincible force.”<sup>92</sup>

#### Assessing the Gasolinera Resolution and Aftermath

In context, the Monterrey gasolinera conflict of 1974 was a relatively minor incident which involved a mere one hundred or so workers and only four city gas stations. Nevertheless, it is a paradigmatic episode in whose details of conflict and resolution were evident many of the issues that defined labor-capital relations in the post-Tlatelolco period. Much can be gleaned from analyzing further the manner in which the dispute was resolved. Gas station owners in Monterrey contended prior to the resolution June 22 that their workers, the real ones, did not want to be enrolled in the state’s labor federation. They oversaw a vote demonstrating that one-hundred percent of individuals registered as employees voted against forming an affiliation with the union. Yet, negotiations were concluded with a result that did not reflect any of these conditions. On its surface, the accord seemed to make no sense as it went against the publicly asserted will of workers and owners alike.<sup>93</sup>

How, then, might we understand the agreement that forced the mandatory inscription of unwilling workers into the CTM? Critics alleged that the PRI and the CTM, acting in cahoots, forced through a resolution that benefited their organizations at the expense of local business. This line of reasoning had validity but failed to consider the advantages that the deal provided owners as well. Given the perpetual state of labor conflict and strikes in Nuevo León at the time, it was likely that all sides desired a return of normalcy to the workplace. Exasperation with the situation, if present, would have

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<sup>91</sup> Editorial, “En 1974 se Repite la Rebelión Patronal en Monterrey,” *Ceteme*, June 29, 1974, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: ...la CTM es una organización de lucha firme y permanente, revolucionaria y de fuerza incontestable...

<sup>93</sup> *El Norte*, June 24, 1974.



softened the positions of representatives, thus making the dominant dynamic of the negotiations not unbridled collaborationism but sound pragmatism. Publicly the deal was uneven as it required the federation to cease strike activities at four local gas stations while it forced the distributors' union to concede all gas station workers in the city to the ranks of the CTM. The public terms of the deal, though, probably belied "behind the scenes" factors that were decisive in its creation. The deal may well have also included a secret agreement that committed the CTM to shelve plans for a general strike that would have disrupted production and upended life in the area more than the closing of a few isolated gas stations.

This "hardball" form of negotiation, were it present, may be understood more as a demonstration of *quid pro quo* than a form of blackmail. All sides, not just labor, stood to benefit from compromise. The negative impact of the CTM's private secession would be offset and surpassed by a well-publicized victory that gave it public prestige and strength: two of the most important weapons it could yield in its dealings with business. Owners too would favor compromise; 'business as usual' being the goal, owners would be willing to make concessions to labor if it meant averting costly worker agitation and preserving a more profitable state of harmony at the workplace. Finally, compromise between the sectors would represent the ideal conclusion for state officials, being that they, perhaps, stood to lose the most from sustained economic disruption. In this scenario, the deal brokered between the distributors and the CTM might be understood best for the ways it was a compromise between labor and capital and diffused labor-capital tension in other economic sectors.

To the great dismay of owners, however, the conciliatory spirit that emerged to settle the gas station conflict did not extinguish the intense union activism that then burned in Nuevo León. Even after it was given generous concessions by owners in the gasolinera negotiations, the CTM persisted in its threats of future strikes if worker demands were not met in other industries. Barely two weeks after forcing the hand of gasolineros, the CTM strong-armed regional owners to revise the collective contracts of

over 500 culinary industry workers employed in Nuevo León hotels, restaurants, cafeterias, and bars by once again dangling the threat of general strike.<sup>94</sup>

Organized labor and the CTM in particular was emboldened by the public victories it had won over owners in Monterrey and nationwide. It then sought to harvest its new found political capital into new victories. At 12:01 a.m. on the morning of June 26, 1974 a series of synchronized strikes carried out by over 45,000 workers at over 400 textile companies exploded across the nation. The industry-wide strike, coordinated by the CTM but co-sponsored by all of the major players of official syndicalism, struck Nuevo León particularly hard. There, over 4,000 workers employed at several factories in the state left their posts in solidarity.<sup>95</sup> The striking workers, most members of the Union of Mexican Textile Industry Workers, a CTM affiliate, hung the bandera rojinegra at their worksites and demanded that various provisions including the forty hour work week, higher wages, better vacation and retirement packages, paid technical training for employees, and scholarships for children of workers be written into the legal contract that governed the Mexican textile industry.<sup>96</sup> In their demands was seen the full gamut of organized labor's operational objectives at the time. Conversely, one heard in the response of owners many of the talking points that grounded their arguments of the day. Owners rejected the worker position on financial and humanitarian grounds. Many argued that in tough economic times they simply could not afford to grant workers higher wages and additional benefits. Others asserted that the workers' demands were socially irresponsible. By increasing workers' salaries, they contended, the cost of producing fabric would rise, thus creating a burden that would fall inevitably on the shoulders of the Mexican consumer.<sup>97</sup> Granting workers' demands, therefore, would be a measure that although benefitting a few, would hurt many more. Mirroring their counterparts in other industries, textile producers thus confronted massive worker mobilization by slandering the characters of its participants. Unionists, they deemed, were privileged, unrealistic, and selfish – not qualities typically understood as revolutionary.

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<sup>94</sup> See *Ceteme*, June 29, 1974.

<sup>95</sup> See coverage in *El Norte*, June 27, 1974.

<sup>96</sup> *Ceteme*, June 22, 1974.

<sup>97</sup> *El Norte*, June 27, 1974.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### COLLABORATION THROUGH SUBORDINATION: WOMEN, WORK, AND ORGANIZED LABOR

If the perception of class differences made business owners difficult to the place on revolutionary corpus, female workers likewise confounded labor establishment officials in the post-Tlatelolco period, though for different reasons. Male workers were subordinated within the superstructure of labor, but the subordination of female workers was even more acute. Labor leaders and rank and file workers alike, seeing practical benefits in restoring the collaborationist dynamic in their relations with the Mexican state, embraced an invigorated *paterfamilias* at the head of the federal structure and supported the presidency en masse after Tlatelolco.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will show that the measures of rhetorical and practical support offered by the government for organized labor's gender paradigms confirmed its own commitment to currying favor with workers and restoring an alliance rooted in revolutionary tradition. Verbal and printed rhetoric show that the species of reinvigorated collaborationism that characterized relations between organized labor and the state in the post-Tlatelolco period had gendered consequences for working women and men. This analysis demonstrates that the subordination of the female to the male worker in the labor movement was viewed as natural, as yet another necessary compromise towards the grand advancement of the Mexican working class.

#### *HISTORICAL PARADIGMS AND THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF WOMEN'S WORK*

1975 was proclaimed by the United Nations International Women's Year. During its deliberations, the UN General Assembly explained its hope that by marking such an occasion, the universal recognition of the principle of equality of men and women, "de jure and de facto," would be strengthened, "and that the steps needed to improve women's status would thus be intensified, since discrimination against women is a

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<sup>1</sup> Such shows of deference by *charros* and workers, it is argued elsewhere, were not alien inside a labor movement that had since the 1930s organized itself around a principle of collective strength through individual conformity.

recognized social fact, elimination of which calls for immediate action by everyone.”<sup>2</sup> In pursuit of these goals, Mexico was assigned a central role as Mexico City was tapped to host the International Women’s Year Conference in June. Some government opponents regretted the choice and lamented that Echeverría’s “false” promotion of a progressive Mexico was gaining traction with international observers.<sup>3</sup> Others felt differently. According to Hilda Anderson Nevárez, cetemista and Secretary General of the Workers’ Federation of Women’s Organizations, the designation was well deserved as women in Mexico benefited from a system of organized labor that gave them the same opportunities and respect as militants as it did men. Although Mexican women, she admitted, had yet to enjoy the full benefits of de facto equality, they had played a meritorious role in all of the fights waged by the CTM for the emancipation of the worker.<sup>4</sup>

To continue to strive toward this goal, Anderson Nevárez’s group partnered with the CTM to host a three day National Women’s Assembly in February 1976 to discuss contemporary juridical questions and increase awareness of women’s exploitation in the workplace. The workers’ press used the climate as pretext to celebrate organized labor’s “historical defense of female worker’s rights.” 1975 issues of *Ceteme* were filled with stories praising women’s integral contributions to the organized workers’ movement and on one occasion CTM chief Fidel Velázquez noted how cetemista women had often worked harder than men in their efforts to advance union life in Mexico.<sup>5</sup> The spirit of Women’s Year seemed contagious, even influencing the organizing strategies of the CTM that made overt efforts to recruit previously ignored women to its ranks from the overwhelmingly non-unionized clothing and food service industries.<sup>6</sup>

María Esther Zuno, wife of Echeverría, did not wait until Women’s Year to start advocating for women’s rights. As First Lady of Mexico, Zuno had long supported juridical equality for female workers, focused especially in rural areas. In her speech to

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<sup>2</sup> Inter-American Commission of Women, *News Bulletin of the Inter-American Commission of Women*, no. 31, September, 1974 (Washington, D.C.: Pan-American Union, 1974), 28.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Cristina Tamayo and Soldedad Moreno, “Año Internacional de la Mujer. Demagogia o liberación?,” *Bandera Roja*, March, 1975, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Editorial, “Reconocimiento de la CTM a la Labor de la Mujer Trabajadora,” *Ceteme*, January 18, 1975, 1/8.

<sup>5</sup> Editorial, “Importancia de la Asamblea Femenil en Febrero,” *Ceteme*, January 18, 1975, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Editorial, “500 mil Mujeres Explotadas en el Comercio, Industria del Vestido y en los Restaurantes,” *Ceteme*, January 18, 1975, 4.

convene the conference tribunal, she contended that women of the world confronted a “depressing alternative” to become merely reproductive beings and renounce their social creativity, or sacrifice their maternity and abandon their family. Such a “crippling disjunction,” warned the mother of eight, must be overcome if women were to realize their full potential. Zuno granted that “oppressed men” still formed the majority of the world’s population, but women, she noted, who in addition to suffering the lack of basic material essentials and cultural isolation, also supported the weight of discrimination inside the family. There she saw the root of all types of discrimination and injustice, so it was exactly there that the fight had to begin. Zuno applauded Mexico for passing laws meant to erase all vestiges of discrimination, but contended that the real integration of women in society could not be achieved by juridical orders. “The translation of equality before the law into reality,” she felt, required “the establishment of equal social conditions, equal opportunities in education and employment, and, in a word, a true transformation in the economic and social structure of a world configured by men.” It fell to the state, therefore, “to enact the measures to orient public opinion toward the elimination of prejudices that suggest female inferiority.”<sup>7</sup> Future opportunities for women would not be restricted by law, nor would they be hindered by social convention. Lecturing the media, she insisted that it end the “anachronistic sentimentality that presents woman as the paradigm of abnegation, as the sum of all anguishes and suffering,” in a call that sparked hearty applause from her listeners.<sup>8</sup>

Zuno’s message was by no means radical. She predicted that the achievement of women’s full equality, inside legally established frameworks, was an indispensable component toward the development of an authentic and permanent social peace.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, she advocated a large federal role in the settling of social questions, in this

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<sup>7</sup> “Alternativa Mutiladora: la Mujer Creativa o Madre. Abrió la Señora de LE la Tribuna Internacional,” *Excelsior*, June 20, 1975, 14. Spanish reads: La igualdad ante la ley, para traducirse en hechos reales, requiere del establecimiento de igualdad de condiciones sociales, de igualdad de oportunidades en la educación y en el empleo, en una palabra, de una transformación verdadera en la estructura económica y social de un mundo configurado por los varones...;...Corresponde al Estado y a la sociedad generalizar las medidas para orientar a la opinión pública hacia la eliminación de los perjuicios que postular la inferioridad femenina.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: ...del anacrónico sentimentalism que presenta a la mujer como paradigma de la abnegación, como suma de todas las angustias y todos los sufrimientos.

<sup>9</sup> Hugo Jiménez, “Fin a la Desigualdad Entre los Pueblos,” *El Universal*, June 20, 1975, 1/7.

regard endorsing the Echeverría's state's preference for a political economy of government intervention. Perhaps Zuno, because of her position, was hamstrung in the extent to which she could diverge from the official gender platform of the party-state. Still, she advanced an understanding of gender roles that demanded strict equality in the workplace, not the acceptance of fundamental difference as had been previously advocated. Ultimately, Zuno stressed that women, in spite of distinct biological roles that submitted them to men in the home, should not be considered inferior while outside it.

The notion of gender complementarity had by the 1970s become a near truism ingrained into all aspects of Mexican society, proclaimed with rhetorical consistency in official messages and worker literature. In state and organized labor missives, a message of male superiority was mutually conveyed as the home was described as a microcosm of society where the man (a unionized industrial worker, ideally) replaced the state as the practical and symbolic head of the family. The words of Zuno described above challenged the message of women's supporting role in the home and society regularly conveyed by public officials of years past.

By 1964, Fidel Velázquez frequently reminded his underlings about women's important, albeit auxiliary, status in the fight for workers' rights. Addressing the CTM Congress in June 1964, Velázquez declared that: "In women, men have their best allies in the present and future permanent struggle for enforcement of rights acquired and bestowed by law." He proceeded to call on all female *cetemistas* "to act decisively, side by side with the men of the CTM, to fortify the ranks of the organization and to achieve just economic and social reforms."<sup>10</sup> Such was also the nature of the message delivered by Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to listeners in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas when he campaigned for president earlier in February of that year. Then, the candidate articulated sentiments that were likely shared by those in attendance. "Modern life," he stated, "demands the presence of women in various activities, in those that the man is incapable of offering or where she can complement him advantageously..." Without her assistance, he elaborated,

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<sup>10</sup> Inter-American Commission of Women, *News Bulletin of the Inter-American Commission of Women*, no. 25, June, 1964 (Washington, D.C.: Pan-American Union, 1964), 8.

man could not attempt anything “great, noble, fertile, or lasting.”<sup>11</sup> “Women,” he alleged, “had also been helpful in the very male task of revolution building, and would continue to be, for woman, be her a teacher or not, was by nature an irreplaceable educator, indispensable as much in the home as in the workshop, laboratory, office, or in social work.”<sup>12</sup> Díaz Ordaz concluded by stating his commitment to advance the cause of the Mexican woman, promising to honor her as a way of honoring Mexico. To reach those goals, he pledged: “...my wife and I will join efforts: she will put [forth] her love and tenderness, and I my unbreakable will to serve Mexico.”<sup>13</sup>

The patronizing quality of the messages emitted by Velázquez and Díaz Ordaz would not have been surprising to anyone informed on the history of women’s work in Mexican society. Debates over women’s rights in the workplace were couched in terms that described women’s status as workers as secondary to their role as homemakers or caregivers to children. Those who militated for the rights of workers prior to 1910 articulated a proletarian platform that was not gender specific, but nonetheless advanced the cause of establishing the supremacy of the male worker over his female counterpart. The worker’s struggle was deemed vindicated with the military success of the Constitutionalist faction in the Revolution and the insertion of Article 123 in the Federal Constitution of 1917. In that document and in the Federal Labor Law of 1931, the primacy of the male to the female worker in Mexico was practically codified. Both codes established protections for women and children in the workplace, but by fixing on the rights of organized labor – a predominantly male movement – the laws subordinated women’s priorities to men’s. By the time of the establishment of the CTM in 1936, the workers’ rights movement in Mexico had embraced a more strictly gendered message,

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<sup>11</sup> José Vallejo Novelo, ed., *Derechos de la Mujer Mexicana* (Mexico City: XLVII Legislatura del Congreso de la Unión, 1969), 5. Spanish reads: La vida moderna reclama la presencia de la mujer en variadas actividades, a las cuales lleva donde que el hombre es incapaz de ofrecer o que cuando menos lo complementan ventajosamente; sin su concurso no puede intentarse nada que sea tan grande, noble, fecundo y perdurable.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Bien que no sea maestra, la mujer es siempre, por naturaleza, educadora insustituible. Este tipo de acción femenina es indispensable lo mismo en el hogar que en el taller, en el laboratorio, en la oficina, en el trato social.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: La mujer es, por muchas razones, la raíz de la patria; honro a la mujer como un modo de honrar a México. Para alcanzar las metas, mi esposa y yo conjugaremos los esfuerzos: ella pondrá su amor y su ternura, yo pondré la voluntad inquebrantable de servir a México.

one that advanced the cause of a man's right to earn a wage sufficient to provide for his wife and children. In this narrative the trade union, understood as an inviolable fact of the Revolution, was depicted as a quintessentially masculine institution dedicated to defending the rights of male workers.

But unionized male workers who adhered to this vision harbored unrealistic expectations, for little in Mexican history corroborated the sanctity of the male "breadwinner." Working class families in Mexico had seldom subsisted upon the single wage-earner model, a fact that the process of rapid industrialization after the Revolution did little to change. Women's wage labor, as demonstrated by Suzie Porter, had been since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a major factor in Mexico's industrial apparatus. Female workers worked to survive.<sup>14</sup> In her study, Porter traces the participation of women workers in Mexico City industry from the Porfiriato to the establishment of the Federal Labor Law of 1931. She demonstrates that in 1879 the material conditions of urban women were such that they were obliged to work and that they situated themselves primarily in the female dominated industries of cigarette and clothing production – sectors that were publicly perceived as women's work. By 1930, women were present in a much wider variety of industries, but their motivation to work remained the same – economic necessity.<sup>15</sup> This narrative corrects historically held assumptions about women's wage work in Mexico that it was negligible to industry, and that the wages earned by women were not essential to their family's livelihood.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Introduction of Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>16</sup> These findings coincide with those of Helen I. Safa who contends that wage work in western societies has been historically understood through a gendered lens that rarely questions the motives of men's work (for it is assumed men will be employed) while viewing women's work outside the home as optional. See Helen I. Safa, *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 37. To Safa, this gendered double-standard is the outcome of what she terms the "myth of the male breadwinner," a powerful norm in capitalist nations rooted in the disadvantages posed to women by their dual productive/ reproductive roles. As she describes it, employed women are assumed to be responsible for domestic chores and child care, while men's responsibilities in the home are minimized in favor of their primary role as wage earner. Designating the man as primary breadwinner, therefore, reinforces male control over female labor, which is largely confined to the home and reproductive sphere. Moreover, female domestic labor, by virtue of being non-wage work, is devalued in this system and thus carries little prestige in a capitalist setting that confers greater status and privilege on income-earning activities. (*Ibid.*) In Safa's model the modern capitalist setting subordinated women's work to men's out of necessity, given that the historical development of industrial capitalism altered the



## *CHRONICLING WOMEN'S WORK IN OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS*

Because of the heightened visibility of women's political activism in the post-Tlatelolco period, chronicling the history of women's wage-work in Mexico became a politically sensitive task. For its part, the recently established Center for Historical Studies of the Mexican Workers' Movement joined the 1975 festivities honoring women by producing an anthology of articles that narrated the nineteenth century experience of women in the workplace. Citing the difficulties faced by yesterday's *obrero* in her efforts to juggle the tasks of worker and mother/wife, deal with low salaries, overcome exploitation and discrimination at the workplace, and gain entrance into worker's associations, editors of the volume hoped to instill in the reader an appreciation for the challenges overcome by women in procuring their right to work.<sup>17</sup>

The celebratory tone that pervaded the language of the editorial committee was not surprising, for it was a group that included Secretary of Labor Porfirio Muñoz Ledo as president; President of the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board, Fernando Zertuche Muñoz as vice president; Luiz Araiza and Bernardo Cobos Díaz representing the CTM; and Miguel de la Madrid, then Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and future president of Mexico. As it was, the Center for Historical Studies, connected to the labor ministry, the federal labor mediatory board, and the official labor movement, could not claim independence from the nation's labor establishment. Still, the editors did not deny the existence of parallel travails faced by female workers of yesterday and today. Furthermore, they demonstrated an atypical autonomy inside the upper echelons of the

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dominant form of patriarchy from a system that was anchored in the private realm of the home to one based in the public spheres of the workplace and the state. The proliferation of women's wage-work in this process served to challenge what was then deemed an almost biological status of men as principal providers for the family. This development forced the state to intervene by creating laws that afforded men preference over women in the workplace. The heated debates still waged today over the origins of women's oppression address these very issues, and while some scholars maintain that the family remains the crucible where the notion of woman's subordination to man is forged, others, including Safa, add that a woman's dependence on a male breadwinner owes as much to legal and political mechanisms instituted by the state as it does to a gender ideology learned at home. (Safa, 38-39). This understanding of gender subordination derives from (and endorses) a feminist definition of patriarchy which views men's domination of women as the product of legal mechanisms, political arrangements, or cultural values. In this contextualization, the various arenas for gender subordination – the home, the workplace, and the state – work in tandem to repress women and maintain men's status as primary providers.

<sup>17</sup> Centro de Estudios Históricos del Movimiento Obrero Mexicano, *La mujer y el movimiento obrero mexicano en el siglo XIX: Antología de la prensa obrera* (Mexico City: CEHSMO, 1975), 7.

Mexican party-state by including articles demonstrating the prevalence of Marxist and socialist strands in 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse about women and work in Mexico. In the process, they rekindled an ideological legacy that the ever-more conservative labor establishment had hoped to obscure. Yet in spite of these minor divergences from official state positions, the editors largely towed the government line with regards to their ultimate conclusions on the status of women and work in Mexico. In essence, the volume contended that much had changed for the nation's female workers in the past century, and all for the better.

Reprinting nineteenth century accounts from worker periodicals describing the obstacles and inequalities once faced by women workers served to depict a stark contrast between the debased condition of women's work then, and the supposed dignity of female labor 100 years henceforth. Chronicling the exploitation of female workers in Porfirian Mexico celebrated the subsequent creation of labor legislation that protected women and marked advances brought forth by the Mexican Revolution and its regimes. But when considering the goal of the project – to contrast the two epochs and trumpet modernity – the failure to rebuke, nor even reference, the outdated gendered paradigms that saturated the writings in the volume was telling. Perhaps the most effective function of the volume was to call into question the extent to which the Revolution actually served to change historical understandings of women's work.

That exercise, however, was not pursued, and state-sanctioned accounts as a rule overstated the impact that the Revolution had on altering the experience of women's work in Mexico. A prime example of state triumphalism was presented in *Derechos de la Mujer Mexicana*, published by the 47<sup>th</sup> Mexican Congress in 1969, a year before Echeverría took office. This propagandistic history dismissed women's participation in the Mexican workforce prior to the Revolution as minimal. Women's wage-work during the decade of Revolution, it reported, also failed to develop due to the economic and political upheaval that warfare occasioned. In the various narratives included in the volume, the rise of the female worker was only possible with the success of the Revolution in 1917. Thereafter, women entered the salaried workforce in greater numbers, and their commendable work performance helped them gain consideration as

subjects worthy of equal rights to men.<sup>18</sup> Finally, we are told that by 1930 women were openly integrated into industry and commerce and were consistently proving their full physical and intellectual capacity in the production and distribution processes. These achievements the authors attribute to helping affirm the validity of women's work and necessitating its protection in the 1931 labor code.<sup>19</sup>

Inserting the advancement of workers, and in this case, women workers, seamlessly into the glorious revolutionary narrative was a tendency common to most official or state-sponsored publications. With this trend in mind, the issue of the above referenced documents' integrity as valid historical sources warrants discussion. The political origins of the 1975 book have already been established. As for the latter 1969 work, it was published by the Mexican Congress and 100,000 copies were distributed freely to the public. The volume's twenty credited contributors were all women, consisting of nine federal Deputies, five lawyers, and various other professional women. The editorial committee, in contrast, consisted entirely of men, and of the six members five were federal deputies. The printing of the volume in the immediate wake of Tlatelolco in 1969 was also significant, for we can assume that the authors were at a minimum aware of the widespread disenchantment amongst women made evident by their unprecedented political participation in the student, peasant, and worker activism of the period. Based on these qualities and on the unanimity of tone in the volumes, it is logical to conclude that the documents represented efforts at political outreach by state-commissioned groups desirous of trumpeting the benefits brought to women by the Revolution its subsequent administrations.

Less hagiographic accounts do not ascribe the Revolution or the postrevolutionary state so much agency in improving the lot of women workers in Mexico. For Suzie Porter, indeed, the Revolution ushered in new ways of speaking about women's work in the public sphere, but the rhetorical focus of the debate did not center on the question of equality for female and male workers. Instead, it shifted from a discourse less associated with questions of morality and more directed toward addressing new material conditions

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<sup>18</sup> Vallejo Novelo, 63.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

of modern women. It was thus the changing material conditions brought about by Revolution, and not cultural shifts in understanding about the morality of women's work, that inspired practical and legal improvements for women in the workplace.<sup>20</sup> Public questions about the morality of women's work, she adds, continued to be posed after the Revolution, though the venue for such queries fell from the spheres of media and politics to land directly on the workshop floor. It is in this regard that Porter believes that the Mexican Revolution did not represent "a pivotal moment" for women, for as women went to work they were accompanied by discursive constructions of who they were.<sup>21</sup>

*WOMEN AND LABOR LAW: THE REALITIES OF THEORY VERSUS PRACTICE*

Cultural stasis may have prevented a major shift from occurring in understandings of women and wage-work, but it remains true that the Revolution ushered in drastic changes in the legal status of women in Mexico, both in the workplace and in the political life of the nation. This shift challenged deeply ingrained cultural tenets about the role of women in the public sphere. In the coming decades, women's undeniable significance in the processes of industrialization, modernization, and the party-state's campaign to institutionalize the ideology of the Mexican revolution reaped them legal benefits, although the granting of basic political rights took time and women had to wait until 1946 and 1953 to be enfranchised at the municipal and national levels respectively.

An analysis of presidential-level speeches from the 1960s and 1970s confirms that even after several decades of Revolutionary development, a full legal and juridical status for women equal to that of men was not the official rhetorical goal. Women still had to justify their participation in work or politics through demonstrations of domestic proficiency. Speaking on the stump, Díaz Ordaz the presidential candidate pedantically remarked about women's gradual incorporation into the nation's public sphere, claiming that the granting of political rights to women, "without diminishing some of her traditional household functions, has to be seen as a step closer to the better fulfillment of

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<sup>20</sup> Porter, xi.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., xix. The Mexican Revolution may have marked a shift in the formal power of the language of morality in the public sphere, but the relevance of morality within the factory persisted. Put even more simply, even the egalitarian pretense of the Mexican Revolution and the radical, thoroughly modern rhetoric of the workers' movement could not stamp out the centrality of gendered notions of labor and assumptions about the proper place of women in the public sphere.

her elevated social and moral mission, that which strengthens and dignifies man in the vigorous fight for his existence.”<sup>22</sup> In his view, therefore, the primary benefit of women’s realization of political rights emanated from her newly fortified status to assist men. Six years later, Luis Echeverría pursued the nation’s highest office proclaiming a similarly gendered message. Before the PRI’s Female Assembly in Monterrey on April 12, 1970, Echeverría thanked the loyal *priista* women for their participation in the nation’s modern political life. He cited their efforts as vote counters in past elections and informed them that their political contributions placed them at the heart of the Party. He described such acts as constituting a great sacrifice, “an intense activity that helps raise a new Mexico together with the traditional activities of men...” Like his predecessor, Echeverría saw fit to cite the particular qualities of the Mexican woman as an asset to the nation.<sup>23</sup> Mexico benefited greatly, he remarked, from the traditional virtues of women, for today women speak frankly, “...as they have always spoken in the bosom of the home to the child, to the brother, [or] to the husband...” about the problems that beset the nation.<sup>24</sup>

The female activists that convened in Mexico City in June 1975 had already gained the most basic political and juridical rights, but state language of the kind featured above suggested that although women were rhetorically praised as key cogs in revolutionary processes, they were never afforded true equality with men. The messages of Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría similarly conveyed an understanding of women’s role as primarily domestic, and women’s political rights as at best complementary to men’s. Why then, considering the explicit pains taken in the Constitution to mitigate sexual

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<sup>22</sup> Vallejo Novelo, 5. Spanish reads: Su incorporación a la vida política del país, sin mengua alguna de sus tradicionales funciones hogareñas, ha de verse como un paso más para el mejor cumplimiento de su elevada misión social y moral, que fortalece y dignifica al hombre en la reciedumbre de la lucha por la existencia.

<sup>23</sup> AGN, DGIPS, SG, Box 862, Folder 1, Volume 23, “En la Asamblea Femenil, Monterrey, N.L., 12 Abril.” Spanish reads: ...nos vienen a dar una aportación que no solamente valoramos en todo lo que significa en lo cuantitativo, en el mero computo de los votos de las próximas elecciones, sino ante todo porque nos viene a enriquecer y a dignificar estas actividades publicas de México, en las cuales los varones queremos ser dignos de los héroes que han guiado las grandes corrientes constructivas de nuestra historia y de quienes en la lucha armada llegaron al sacrificio, a una intensa actividad que creó el México nuevo junto con la actividad tradicional de los varones, han venido las integrantes del ahora Sector Femenino del país a darnos esa aportación de las virtudes tradicionales de nuestras mujeres, quienes saben hablarnos, como en el seno del hogar han hablado siempre al hijo, como en el seno del hogar han hablado siempre al hijo, al hermano, al esposo, en esos términos nos vienen a hablar, con la misma franqueza, de los problemas que aquejan a nuestro pueblo.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

inequality in the public sphere, were women still publicly subordinated to men by presidential candidates more than five decades later?<sup>25</sup> Gender theory offers clues in this regard, and we would do well to adhere to notions advanced by feminist scholars that women's subordination is established at various levels and in various arenas: in the family, where women are charged with domestic responsibilities; in the workplace, where women are segregated into poorly paid, unstable jobs; and in the state, where legal mechanisms and public policy restrict women's right to hold property and earn wages.

This line of reasoning has great validity but requires substantial qualifiers to be appropriately applied to postrevolutionary Mexico. Great attention was given to women-specific issues in the Constitution of 1917 and in Article 123 in particular. In essence, Article 123 was designed to give the Mexican worker, male and female, the most full protection and most full control over their primary possession: their labor. Considered by some to constitute the most radical aspect of the Constitution of 1917, Article 123 afforded workers basic rights including the maximum eight-hour workday and six-day work week.<sup>26</sup> Article 123 also established the framework of the tripartite system of labor mediation that provided each sector (state, organized labor, and business) equal representation in the adjudication process and served at times as an effective mechanism toward resolving disputes sparked over questions of salaries, collective contracts, social security provisions, and worker's protection clauses, among other things.

Article 123 represented a true piece of social legislation, a mechanism that gave women and children benefits and protections that were extraordinary for their time. Sections Two, Three, and Five provided safeguards for women and child workers under the age of sixteen. Similarly, these groups of workers were prohibited from performing tasks deemed to jeopardize their safety. Children under the age of fourteen were banned

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<sup>25</sup> The question of women's political rights was frequently addressed in the original version of the Constitution of 1917. Ignoring specific labor conditions for the time being, women's issues were addressed in at least the following sections: Article 3 eliminated sexual preferences in education; Article 4 guaranteed men and women the right to work; Article 5 guaranteed men and women the right to fair compensation and prohibited involuntary labor; Article 20 granted women validity as witnesses in court; and Article 27 guaranteed equity to men and women in the distribution of national riches. See Vallejo Novelo, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Vallejo Novelo, 65. Mexican officials regularly referred to Article 123 glowingly, emphasizing its revolutionary character. A good example is in *Derechos de la Mujer Mexicana*, wherein the authors label Article 123 "the pride of the revolutionary vision of the Constituents of Querétaro, they who placed Mexico at the world vanguard of the guarantees for salaried workers of both sexes..." See Vallejo Novelo, 35.

from work altogether, for it was believed to be in the best interest of the nation that children up to that age be educated rather than participate in the workforce. Article 123 also guaranteed female workers maternity leave for the health and well-being of the mother and child, as well as, we can deduce, that of the nation. The maternalist priorities of Article 123 were also reflected in the Legal Contracts established in 1925, the blanket regulations for entire industries that included the provisioning of maternity leave, nursing stations, and later day-care centers for female workers in the cotton, sugar, and other agricultural industries.<sup>27</sup>

Women, ostensibly, had more cause for celebration when social security provisions were written in Article 123 in 1942 that obliged employers to provide healthcare coverage to workers and their families. But whereas the insertion of social security in labor law was a victory for the working mother, who now had guaranteed access to basic medicines for herself and her children, it also represented an affirmation of a gendered ideology about work that hurt her cause for equality. When discussing social security, state-affiliated sources described its programs as god-sends to the Mexican family and as one of the most generous efforts of the Revolution in favor of urban and rural workers.<sup>28</sup> By providing “the working man and his family” medical insurance, a pension, workman’s compensation, training, and other social loans, social security was credited with protecting the working class against sickness, misery, and death.<sup>29</sup> More often than not, however, social security was referenced in the context of its benefit to Mexican women and mothers. According to female collaborators who wrote in *Derechos de la Mujer Mexicana*, “The Law of Social Security...widened and consolidated the rights of women with respect to their special protections as workers, [a] protection that goes beyond the centers of work to grant [her] social well-being inside marriage as a mother and a worker.”<sup>30</sup> In this understanding, the primary benefits of social security derived from the impact it had on the female worker’s home, not her job.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: La Ley del Seguro Social, promulgada en 1942, amplía y consolida los derechos de la mujer respecto a una protección especial como trabajadora, protección que va más allá de los centros de trabajos para otorgar bienestar social dentro del matrimonio, como madre y como obrera.

The realization of social security legislation, therefore, was understood to represent an overture to women – a benevolent gesture on the part of a Revolutionary state that was committed to meeting the needs of its mothers and children. Women’s status as workers was thus protected by the Constitution, but in the gendered qualities of its laws, historical understandings about the different functions of men and women in the workplace were reinforced.

Another factor that must be considered as influential in determining the de facto condition of the female worker in Mexico is the place of masculinity and male honor in formal worker activism (*sindicalismo*). Here, gendered analyses of women’s work in settings outside of Mexico are useful, and studies by Deborah Levenson-Estrada and Heidi Tinsman insight offer particular insight on the subject. In her study of workers in 1970 Guatemala City, Levenson-Estrada found that women, in spite of their omnipresence in the factories, had their participation in unions routinely impeded by men.<sup>31</sup> Tinsman’s analysis of working class mobilization in rural Chile in the 1960s and 1970s has a very different perspective, but notes similarities in the ways that women were excluded from union participation. The common thread between these two analyses is masculinity and its importance in conceptualizing trade unionism. Regardless of which of these Latin American setting one fixes upon, qualities of militancy and solidarity, as well as defiance to authority, have been traditionally conceptualized as masculine. According to Tinsman, working-class mobilization in Chile encouraged a confident defense of male honor, and provided workers, “who did not believe themselves equal to the *patrón*,” an outlet through which they could assert themselves and procure material and psychological benefits for themselves and their cause.<sup>32</sup> Workers in these settings found moral authority in the righteousness of their cause – to defend the male right to provide for his family – and were emboldened to stand up to abuse from the boss.<sup>33</sup> Women’s

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<sup>31</sup> Referenced article is Deborah Levenson-Estrada, “The Loneliness of Working class Feminism: Women in the ‘Male World’ of Labor Unions, Guatemala City, 1970,” in *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*, eds. John French and James Daniels (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 208-231.

<sup>32</sup> Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950-1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 108.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



participation in trade unions thus challenged popular understandings of *sindicalismo* as representing the working class man's recourse to domination.

The cultural roots of women's diminishment in the labor movement have already been addressed, but as pertinent to this analysis is the overt political techniques that prevented women's equality in Mexico's modern organized labor movement. Established in 1918, the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM) was the first truly national labor confederation established in the postrevolutionary period. The CROM included women in its ranks, and even stated that the active recruitment of women was one of its goals. But the CROM courted unskilled female workers while excluding women from skilled positions.<sup>34</sup> Women joined the CROM in substantial numbers, although many more opted for the General Organization of Workers which was more likely to organize skilled female laborers and integrate women into leadership positions. In contrast, the CROM made little effort to incorporate women into its hierarchy, even in the most women-dominated areas of its activities. This tendency is corroborated by the fact that in 1925, 40,000 tobacco workers were integrated into the CROM. Yet this group, which militated for the rights of its largely female workforce, was led by an executive committee formed of six men and just one woman.<sup>35</sup>

The subordination of women to men in the CROM was emblematic of a larger process underway in postrevolutionary Mexican society. The loss of women's status inside the organized labor movement was corollary to the loss of public visibility and prestige of women's work after the Revolution. Women of all industries faced gendered obstacles to union advancement as the glass-ceiling that covered organized labor after the Revolution grew thicker. The workers' movement, which owed so much to the contributions of women's wage-work before the Revolution, began to assume an ever-increasing quality of manliness that linked *sindicalismo* with a man's right to provide for his family and to combat unjust and unpatriotic elements of business. After 1918, this was the dominant message espoused by the official labor establishment in Mexico, and as CROM power waxed, women's priorities in the workers' movement waned. Not

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<sup>34</sup> Porter, 96-97.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

surprisingly, women's numbers in the workforce declined rapidly, shrinking from one-third of industrial workers in Mexico City in 1920 to just twenty-four percent in 1930.<sup>36</sup> Women's rate of participation in the formal labor force continued to drop after 1930, and by 1970 only 16.4 percent of Mexican women identified themselves "economically active," as registered in the federal census. When speaking of this precipitous drop-off, Mexican officials have attributed it to increased rights and salaries for workers after 1917, an evaluation that endorses the notion that the realization of a breadwinner wage permitted women to leave the workforce and return to the home.<sup>37</sup>

*THE DIFFERENTIAL IN PRACTICE: THE MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN WORKERS*

The process that removed so many women from the wage-earning sphere was multifaceted. In addition to discrimination they faced within the structure of organized labor, women had also to contend with the institutionalization of a state narrative that minimized their historical position in the worker's movement. Postrevolutionary regimes heaped praise, honor, and financial reward on miners, electrical workers, petroleum workers, and railway workers – professions that were vastly male – in recognition of their role in inciting and fighting the Mexican Revolution. The contribution of women workers in fomenting revolution, on the other hand, was largely ignored.

Conceptualizing the postrevolutionary state as essentially masculine fit the goals of a young and tenuous regime intent upon projecting strength and unity. In fact the Mexican Revolution represented a major social transformation, and women participated directly in the struggle and acquired new legal rights after the war. Nevertheless, women, according to Jean Franco, saw their position subordinated to that of men in the postwar period. As she states: "The Revolution with its promise of social transformation encouraged a Messianic spirit that transformed mere human beings into supermen and constituted a discourse that associated virility with social transformation in a way that

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>37</sup> Others, however, see a different possibility, a less triumphant process that saw unions' exclusion of women force them out of the public workplace and into the informal domain of "homework," a sector of the economy composed of thousands of women who carried out piece-work or contract labor at home and as such beyond the gaze of federal authorities and the protections of labor laws.

marginalized women at the very moment that they were supposedly liberated.”<sup>38</sup> The realization of the new society envisioned by the state, therefore, required that the architects of the regime construct a national identity that “was posited on male domination.”<sup>39</sup> Such a strategy, I believe, may be as efficiently applied to understanding the hyper-masculine character later adopted by most of the organized labor movement, and represents a better conjecture than does the hypothesis often proffered by scholars that Mexico in the period was simply, by nature, “anti-woman.”<sup>40</sup>

Where women’s work was better recognized was in the area of revolutionary realization – or carrying out the goals of the Revolution after the cessation of war.<sup>41</sup> Public officials of the 1960s and 1970s carried a torch lit by their predecessors, routinely celebrating the women who brought the Revolution to the countryside through their service as cultural missionaries and teachers in the tortuous first stages of postrevolutionary nation-building. In this regard, women’s service was described as valiant albeit almost instinctual, and as a natural extension of their maternal function of educator in the home. It was logical, therefore, that women would come to dominate the teaching profession in Mexico after the Revolution and would advocate their cause in great numbers as members of the National Education Workers’ Union. But women’s activism as teachers, apparently, was not sufficient to demonstrate their solidarity with workers. Like students, teachers were deemed outside the large umbrella of a workers’ movement that understood them as members of a white-collar profession, despite their

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<sup>38</sup> Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 102.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> This is the position taken by Liliana de Riz who corroborates her conclusion by citing passages from from Octavio Paz’s seminal study of Mexican identity, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, first published in 1950, wherein Paz contended that women in Mexico confronted daily a “machista framework” that inhibited their social, psychological, and economic advancement. Elaborating, Paz asserted that “the ideal of manliness consisted of never ‘backing down’... of not permitting the outside world to penetrate one’s intimacy”. De Riz transposes this passage upon the organized labor movement in Mexico to explain the prevalence of manliness as its dominant ethic. See Liliana de Riz, “El Problema de la Condición Femenina en América Latina: La Participación de la Mujer en los Mercados de Trabajo. El Caso de México,” in *La mujer y el trabajo en México (antología)*, ed. Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (Mexico City: STPS, 1986), 26. In both instances, I feel that the applications of Paz’s observances by de Riz, although grounded in undeniable psychological truth, do not capture the ideological complexity of organized labor’s foundational principles that derived equally from cultural and political precedents.

<sup>41</sup> The crucial participation of women in the national education reform project of the 1920s and 1930s has been well documented by scholars such as Mary Kay Vaughan and Patience A. Schell, among others.

very poor compensation. Teachers' exclusion from the workers' sector was a distinction endorsed by the PRI in assigning them to the popular and professional sector rather than that of organized labor.<sup>42</sup> In this rubric, teachers were lumped into a broad and often incongruous mass where they were forced to militate alongside professions that often did not share their ideological or material priorities.

The most significant manifestation of women's political activism in postrevolutionary Mexico, therefore, was not recognized as constituting workers' activism. Teachers may not have been "workers" per se, but that did not mean women inside the workers' movement could not serve an educative role. A glance at the rosters of the National Committee of the CTM for the periods 1968-1974 and 1974-1980 is indicative in this regard. In both instances, only two out of the forty-plus executive positions were held by women, a small fraction that attested to the continued minimal presence of female leadership in the organized workers' movement in general.<sup>43</sup> The positions that women did hold were also suggestive of a trend that ascribed women an inherent pedagogical function, perhaps evidenced by the election of Guadalupe Martínez de Hernández Loza as Secretary of the Workers' Education Institute.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Recall that the National Education Workers' Union, the nation's largest union with 266,000 members in 1972, was grouped into the Federation of Public Service Workers' Unions which was an affiliate of the National Confederation of Popular Organizations and not the CTM or another working-class labor confederation.

<sup>43</sup> Photograph, "Comite Ejecutivo Nacional Electo Para el Periodo 1968-1974. Adorna estas planas...", *Ceteme*, April 21, 1974, PAGE?; and Photograph, "Comité Ejecutivo Nacional de la CTM 1980," *Ceteme*, May 4, 1974, PAGE?

<sup>44</sup> See *Ceteme*, April 27, 1974. An analysis of women's presence in federal politics offers a barometer with which to measure the status of female leadership inside the organized labor sector. Four women served as federal senators during the Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría administrations spanning the years 1964-1976. These numbers, although meager, are significant if one remembers that not a single woman served in the Mexican senate prior to that. The number of female legislators in the Chamber of Deputies over the same period also increased, rising from a mere seventeen during the presidency of Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964) to twenty-five and thirty-two during the administrations of Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría respectively. See Victoria E. Rodríguez, ed., *Women's Participation in Mexican Political Life* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), 12. From Table 1.1, "Women's Representation in the Last Sixteen Mexican Congresses." The expanded presence of women in federal political life grew consistently, thrice doubling, according to one study, during the periods 1946-1958, 1958-1964, and 1970-1982. See page 168 of Roderic Ai Camp's essay, "Women and Men, Men and Women: Gender Patterns in Mexican Politics," in Rodríguez volume previously cited. This remarkable growth is explained, first, as a product of the granting of increased political rights to women after 1940, and second, by the phenomenon of teacher unionization as a springboard into political life.

When judging the degree of women's participation in the nation's organized labor movement since World War II, scholars have described their position using diminutives. Liliana de Riz mentioned the involvement of women in trade unions only in a footnote, characterizing it as "precarious" and remarking that a greater proportion of women than men worked in non-unionized jobs. Those that were unionized, she added, rarely occupied leadership positions.<sup>45</sup> These casual observances were not developed further by the author, although the body of her essay offered clues to substantiate the remark. To de Riz, it was no accident that women's work was concentrated in areas of the lowest compensation. Nor, she elaborated, was it strange that female occupations were the worst paid jobs and the least desirable: "the woman has a secondary position in industry, and the segregation she suffers in the labor market is tied to salary differentials."<sup>46</sup> Men and women were afforded differences in pay because the sectors of industry with the most ample demand for manual labor had become "feminized" over the last two decades (mid-1960s to mid-1980s) and thus understood as the domain of women's work. As was the case in the nineteenth century, industrial sectors understood as women's work were those that afforded their participants the least prestige and the most meager compensation. In this context, men were not likely to fill even open positions.

The period assessed by de Riz was one of rapid industrial growth in both the heavy and light sectors, with the expansion of the latter concentrated in cities near or bordering the United States. During this period the rise of the *maquiladoras* in the north provided women wage-earning jobs in record numbers, a fact confirmed by the increase of women classified as "economically active" from eighteen percent in 1960 to twenty-eight percent in 1980.<sup>47</sup> But how much did this economic expansion improve the status of Mexican women in the workplace? A statistical analysis of women's work in the period reveals that common conceptualizations about women's employment remained rooted in traditional gender norms that conflated a woman's age and civil status with responsibilities in the home and her availability in the workplace. The IX General Census

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<sup>45</sup> de Riz, 41-42.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid. Spanish reads: la mujer tiene en la industria una posición secundaria, y la segregación que sufre en el mercado de trabajo está vinculada a salarios diferenciales.

<sup>47</sup> Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, *La mujer y el trabajo en México (antología)*, 7.

for 1970 reported that only 16.4 percent of women in Mexico conducted activities in the formal labor market in that year, a percentage comparable to women in Nicaragua (17.0), Chile (18.2), and Brazil (18.5), but well below that of women in Panama (25.7), Argentina (24.5), and Venezuela (22.6).<sup>48</sup> This statistic, although tagged with a heavy qualifier explaining that activities conducted by women in the home or in family businesses were excluded, was significant in that it revealed that Mexican women were confined to the home in a greater proportion than their counterparts in some other Latin American settings. The breakdown of women workers into age groups was also revealing: of the 16.4 percent of Mexican women classified as economically active, the great majority were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine, with the cohort twenty to twenty-four showing the highest rate of women's employment at 24.1 percent<sup>49</sup> That young women were the norm in Mexican industry in 1970 was not surprising given that single women comprised 54.1 percent of the nation's total female workforce and outnumbered married women nearly five-to-one in the largest group for women workers, ages twenty to twenty-four.<sup>50</sup>

Mexican women's participation in the workforce may also derive from the concentration of women into specific industrial sectors. According to the same census from 1970, light industry (*industrias de transformación*) was the second most common sector of work for wage-earning women: 18.1 percent of Mexican women worked in light industry, compared with forty-three percent in the service sector and 13.5 percent in commerce.<sup>51</sup> More useful to this analysis, however, is an inspection of the type of women's work within the sector. In her analysis, de Riz reports that sixty-one percent of women employed in light industrial work were concentrated into five principal areas, in decreasing order of importance: clothing, processed foods, machinery assembly,

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<sup>48</sup> See de Riz, 24, specifically: Table One – Rates of Female Participation in Selected Latin American Countries, 1960 and 1970, Percentages.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 30. Specifically, see: Table Two – Mexico: Active in Workforce Rates for Age Groups, by Sex, 1970.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 24. Specifically, see: Table One – Rates of Female Participation in Selected Latin American Countries, 1960 and 1970, Percentages.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 30. Specifically, see: Table Two – Mexico: Active in Workforce Rates for Age Groups, by Sex, 1970.

electronics assembly, and footwear.<sup>52</sup> Of this group, the clothing industry represented the great locus for women workers, employing 29.1 percent of the entire female workforce employed in light industry. Furthermore, clothing represented the only area in the sector wherein women workers outnumbered men by a significant margin: of the 206,401 total workers, 130,129 (sixty-three percent) were women.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, with regard to the other traditional domain of women's work, tobacco manufacturing, the statistics showed that in 1970 women were greatly outnumbered by male workers who by then composed nearly ninety-one percent of the industry's over 90,000 employees.<sup>54</sup>

But in spite of tobacco's apparent masculinization, the statistics cited above proved a great concentration of women's factory labor into a handful of select industries. This trend corroborated the notion that certain sectors were deemed friendlier to women, if not their primary domain, and thus used a division of labor that considered one's sex in the hiring and job-assignment processes. As referenced earlier, labeling a profession women's work usually ushered in a loss of prestige and wages. This trend is borne out in the statistics. Women working in the clothing industry were paid poorly compared to workers in other sectors, and to those in the pharmaceutical, chemical, and paper industries in particular. Nearly half (46.1 percent) of women involved in the clothing industry earned less than 500 pesos bi-weekly (*quincenal*), and 84.2 percent less than 1,000 pesos. These percentages stand out in contrast to only 27.8 percent of male workers who earned less than 500 pesos in a fortnight, and 64.1 percent less than a 1,000.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the area of primary concentration for women's work compensated the majority of its workforce very poorly compared to their male co-workers and female *compañeras* in other industries.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 31. Specifically, see: Table Three – Rates of Women Active in Work Force According to Civil Status, 1970. The predominance of single women workers in Mexico stands in great contrast to statistics from developed nations like France, England, Denmark, and West Germany, where married women represented on average two-thirds of the female workforce. Information cited from *La Opinión* (Buenos Aires), February 15, 1974.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 39-40. Specifically, see: Table Seven – Workers in Light Industry Distributed in Subgroups by Sex, Percentage Distribution in Each Sex and Among Sex and National Total.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Not surprisingly, automotive assembly was another light industrial sector dominated by men. The *IX Censo General de Población y Vivienda* reported that ninety-one percent (49,400) of the 54,279 workers employed in the industry in 1970 were men.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 42. Specifically, see: Table 9 – Mexico: Percentage of Workers and Artisans in the Lowest Wage Sub-groups of Light Industry in Which the Participation of Women in Significant: By Sex, 1970.

The wages of women workers in the palm-goods industry, though a relatively minor area of manufacturing, demonstrated this phenomenon even more vividly. In 1970, 4.3 percent of women in the light industrial sector were employed in the production of palm products. Together, they constituted 46.3 percent of the industry's total 41,715 employees, making it the second most female-populated industry (after clothing) based on proportion of the total workforce. Not surprisingly, perhaps, it was also the worst compensated sector, affording 97.7 percent of its female employees and eighty-five percent of its male employees less than 500 pesos bi-weekly.<sup>56</sup> Miserly wages were probably the result of the product's limited profitability, but the preponderance of women in the workforce likely contributed to a diminished prestige for that type of work that hurt male as well as female workers.

#### *CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S LABOR ACTIVISM: EPISODES OF RESISTANCE*

Feminist scholars who alleged the continued exploitation of women in the Mexican workforce met a constant challenge from partisans of the Mexican state. The vigorous critiques of the type launched by de Riz and others alleging women's precarious status in the workplace and the labor movement were countered by those who defended the government and cited the increased presence of female workers in diverse economic sectors as an advancement that rose directly from the protections afforded women in Article 123. To state enthusiasts, the newly fortified position of women in the Mexican labor market proved on the one hand, "how the regime of the Mexican Revolution has opened its doors to the labor and social well-being of the woman, and on the other, how she has responded with loyalty to the level that our Revolution bestows upon her."<sup>57</sup> Still, in spite of unrelenting triumphalist rhetoric that claimed otherwise, female workers toiled in a system that philosophically privileged men's labor over women's.

Wage statistics also demonstrate that women employed in the light industrial sector were grouped into certain manufacturing jobs that paid them less than their male coworkers. Furthermore, the jobs women held were largely unskilled, entry-level

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> The "state enthusiasts" are the authors in *Derechos de la Mujer Mexicana*. See text on page 63 for corroboration. Spanish reads: como el régimen de la Revolución Mexicana ha abierto sus puertas al trabajo y al bienestar social a la mujer y, por otra, cómo ésta ha respondido con lealtad al nivel que nuestra Revolución le consagra.



positions that afforded them little job security. Such workers, therefore, represented the most vulnerable element of the Mexican workforce, and the combined factors of their youth (recall that the largest cohort of female worker was between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine), dominant marital status (single), and their lack of children ensured that the typical female worker experienced a greater degree of abuse than her male counterpart. As such, women in the factory were the very embodiment of the “last ones hired, first ones fired” typology, and the practical reality was that Mexico’s powerful organized labor movement offered these workers very little in the way of protection.

Nevertheless, unionized women made waves in the post-Tlatelolco period. High-profile strikes carried out by workers in female-dominated textile industries showed that women were willing to militarize and confront management to improve working conditions. One such strike, carried out by workers of the Inter-American Industrial Group (commonly called Rivetex) exploded on the morning of August 11, 1972 in Morelos. There, 310 workers of the company’s business suit department (*Departamento de Confección*) ceased labors and picketed outside the factory. Local newspapers reported that the strikers, of whom four-fifths were women, were driving about the city soliciting help over loudspeakers and lobbying the nearly 700 employees from other departments to shut down operations. Together, these actions threatened to expand the strike to well over 1,000 workers and paralyze the company’s profitable production of cashmere clothing. The bone of contention was the workers’ demand for changes to the existing collective contract that governed company-worker relations.

*La Voz*, a Cuernavaca daily that covered the event, routinely ridiculed the legitimacy of the workers’ cause. According to the newspaper, the chronology of the conflict progressed in the following fashion: In February of that year, the workers, organized into the Unified Union of Suit, Dress, and Tailoring Industry Workers, signed a collective two-year contract with the company. On August 3, the union, which was affiliated with the CTM but was acting independent of its tutelage, filed a Petition with Intention to Strike with the state’s conciliation and arbitration board that listed twenty-three violations the company had purportedly made to the collective contract in the areas of social security compensation and wage reduction, among others, and expressed the

union's intention to strike if the company did not concede to new modifications. Rivetex executives answered, claiming they had fulfilled its obligations to workers and would continue to do so, while not accepting amendments to the existing contract. Talks were held on August 8, 9, and 10 under the aegis of the local conciliation and arbitration board, but the sides were unable to reach an agreement. The strike commenced as promised on August 11. Company and worker representatives met on August 19 in a meeting that again produced no resolution. According to *La Voz*, the company addressed the twenty-three complaints one by one, each to varying degrees of satisfaction, yet a settlement was not reached and hostilities were destined to continue due to the "frankly intransigent attitude" demonstrated by union leaders acting under the counsel of notorious local malcontents including Jorge Viveros Reyes, not an employee of the company but a law student at the Autonomous University of Morelos.<sup>58</sup> In the absence of a settlement, the Arbitration and Conciliation Board intervened on August 22 and declared the strike non-existent, in essence ruling in favor of the company. Reacting to the ruling, *La Voz* editors approvingly reported that the "The resolution of the board was founded in the strictest juridical reasoning..." The ruling also had public safety merit, in that it "put a stop to, once and for all, the agitation and uncertainty that subversive elements" have tried to create in Morelos.<sup>59</sup>

A strike can be declared non-existent by labor authorities for a number of reasons. Once done so, a strike is deemed illegitimate and in violation of Federal Labor Law. In the case of Rivetex, union members were castigated specifically for their failure to announce the strike to company officials twenty-four hours before its scheduled outbreak. Workers were ordered by the local conciliation and arbitration board to return to work on August 23. Few did. Most chose to assemble instead in front of the Government Palace in Cuernavaca to voice their demands for changes to the collective contract before Morelos Governor Felipe Rivera Crespo, a perceived ally. *La Voz* editors mocked the

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<sup>58</sup> "Que la inmadurez de los Líderes de los Trabajadores de la 'Rivetex' solo les ocasionaron innumerables Daños. Hoy finaliza el plazo fijado por la Junta de Conciliación para que retornen a sus Labores," *La Voz*, August 23, 1972, 1/3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. Spanish reads: La resolución de la Junta fundada en el más estricto razonamiento jurídico, resulta de salud pública para poner coto de una vez por todas, a la agitación e incertidumbre que elementos subversivos pretender crear en el Estado de Morelos.

demonstrating workers, “the majority women,” who continued to wage a quest to alter their contract under the guidance of “little leaders” who deceived them. The next day, the newspaper’s pity for Rivetex workers grew. It told that a small group of self-proclaimed communists had taken advantage of the good faith of women workers and were destined to hurt their income and injure their families. Editors commanded the women to return to their jobs, to reflect on their situation, and to stop being “managed like puppets” and incited into lawlessness by “little leaders who think they are geniuses.”<sup>60</sup>

After the company announced on August 29 that it had fired all 310 striking workers, editors derided workers for their immaturity and the ways they had failed their families. To them, it was painful to think that seventy men and 240 women had lost their jobs because of the vanity of green leaders that dragged them into an unjustified strike and continued the conflict even after having won a resolution to the major points of contention. Now unemployed, editors asked:

And in the future, what will those parents do that now confront the reality of the lack of a secure income? What will those young mothers do without the economic support of a job that was lost because they let themselves be taken in by a negative bunch of show-offs? What will they answer when they solicit another job and have to tell where they worked before?<sup>61</sup>

Such commentaries criticized men and women equally, for both sexes were indicted for letting poor judgment deprive them of their ability to provide for their families. Arguably, however, the fired female workers of Rivetex were scolded on different, more personal, levels, for their labor activism was not deemed as valid as was men’s. Their activities, in contrast to those of their male counterparts, were understood to be driven more by ignorance than by politics. Such was the rationale to explain a gathering of former Rivetex workers in Cuernavaca’s main plaza on September 9. According to *La Voz* staff writer Fermin Gutiérrez, passerbys and tourists were disgusted by the scene that

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<sup>60</sup> *La Voz*, August 25, 1972.

<sup>61</sup> “El Día de Ayer los 310 Obreros de la Rivetex Fueron Dados de Baja en el Seguro Social. La Intransigencia de los Líderes así como de sus Asesores hizo Víctimas a los Trabajadores que se dejaron Engañar,” *La Voz*, August 30, 1972, 2. Spanish reads: Y en lo futuro, ¿qué harán esos padres de familia que ahora se ven de pronto ante la realidad de no tener ni un sueldo seguro? ¿Qué harán las jóvenes madres de familia sin el sostén económico del empleo, que fue perdido por dejarse llevar por líderes negativos y altamente exhibicionistas? ¿Qué harán al solicitar otro empleo y al responder en qué lugar han trabajado últimamente?

was played out in the city's most public area. There, onlookers saw a small group of "señoritas" being bamboozled into thinking that their actions would have influence on the government. At the head of this "shameful spectacle," which saw women wave banners, bang pots, and don raggedy clothing, was Jorge Viveros, the "good-for-nothing" rabble-rouser who had tricked his women into believing false ideas.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, the tactics used by Viveros and Rivetex women in front of the Government Palace were effective. Governor Rivera Crespo intervened to broker a deal between the company and the union on September 15. In the negotiations the company, clearly fearing the financial setbacks inherent in firing its workforce, acceded to most of the union's major demands including the reinstatement of all fired workers (including strike leaders), payment of forty-five percent of wages lost during the strike, a restructured seniority system, and re-inscription of those previously fired in the social security system. On the whole, the Rivetex strike, though widely derided in the press, not supported by the CTM, and deemed illegitimate by the state's labor authority, ended in a draw. Workers were unsuccessful in restoring wages reduced by the company to offset maintenance and renovation costs, but succeeded in re-negotiating parts of the collective contract. The strike also showed Morelos to be a hot spot of worker agitation, and emboldened non-affiliated and disgruntled CTM-affiliated unions to conduct actions independent of the labor monolith. Perhaps most important of all, the conflict at Rivetex showed that female unionists could successfully mobilize and pressure management to grant them better working conditions.

Many of the same challenges Rivetex women confronted in their efforts to work and organize were also faced by female workers of Luxor, a rug and carpet factory located in the industrial Mexico City suburb of Texcoco. Like their compañeras in Morelos, women formed the vast majority of the workforce at the Luxor plant. Additionally, they also sought to detach their union from a large labor confederation, in this case, the Revolutionary Workers' Confederation, they felt did not properly represent their interests. Their decision to strike in February 1975 was driven by a desire for

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<sup>62</sup> Fermin Gutierrez V., "Borchornoso Espectáculo de los 'Rebeldes' frente al Palacio de Gobierno," *La Voz*, September 10, 1972, 1.

syndical independence from the confederation as well as material demands for the reinstatement of dismissed workers, an employee lounge, salary increases, and full or partial control of the company by the Mexican state. Furthermore, female workers were driven to mobilize out of a desire to combat the exploitation they experienced as women.

In May 1975, three months into their strike, Luxor workers spoke to Cristina Tamayo, a staff writer at *Bandera Roja* – a staunchly pro-worker monthly – and conveyed to her their reasons for striking. Answering questions anonymously and collectively, workers told that they worked from 7:00 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. weaving rugs on manual machines. Except for a one-hour lunch break, they had no other scheduled breaks during the course of the nearly eleven-hour day. They could leave their machine to use the restroom, but with permission. They were paid based on what they produced, and one worker in the basic rug department reported that she received sixteen pesos for every square meter of rug she completed. Over the course of two days, she could typically complete a rug of 6.8 square meters, an output that garnered her about fifty-five pesos a day. Those who worked in the deluxe rug department earned slightly better, although they complained of ill-treatment and humiliation at the hands of their male supervisors who called them “stupid pigs” when they made a mistake and cursed at them when they cut their hands in the looms.<sup>63</sup>

Asked about the requirements to work at Luxor, the women said there were none. Most admitted they could not read. The great majority of the 200 person workforce (of which maybe twenty-five were men) was unmarried women, most under the age of thirty. When asked about the company’s policies on pregnancy and its compliance with federal labor law provisions on maternity leave, many scoffed. One remarked: “Look, when you are pregnant they take away your job until you have the child, and later return it so that they don’t have to pay you anything. One worker has been here seven years and is still part-time because they have taken her job away for being pregnant and that time doesn’t count.”<sup>64</sup> Such a tactic brought the company significant savings. By firing the pregnant

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<sup>63</sup> Cristina Tamayo, “LUXOR: una marcha de mujeres obreras,” *Bandera Roja*, May, 1975, 8.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Mira, cuando quedas embarazada te quitan el trabajo hasta que tienes el niño, luego te lo vuelven a dar, así ellos no pagan nada. Una tiene 7 años de eventual porque la han quitado de trabajar por quedar embarazada y ese tiempo no te lo cuentan.

employee, it avoided paying her maternity leave. By re-hiring her after the baby was born, it saved on the costs of training a new recruit.

Pregnancy was an obvious hardship for female workers, although the comments of Luxor employees suggested that working while pregnant was easier than the subsequent child rearing in an era of economic strife. Tamayo asked several workers about their family situation. Their answers were revealing. A middle-aged woman, one of the few in the factory, told her: “I have five [children,] already grown, but now it is difficult to have so many. Well, before it was also, but look, I’ve always gone with the example of one dress a day and the next the same, all to support my children, but now it is harder because everything is more expensive so you can’t make it.” Hearing this, a younger employee, not yet a mother, responded affirmatively: “With so many kids you can’t work or manage them because who’s going to look after them? I only want two and nowadays there are many ways to avoid having more than you want, but then there are men who will leave you if you don’t have children.” Tamayo turned to another worker for her opinion. “What do you think of that?” She queried. She replied:

I think that that was the case earlier because a woman was more, as they say, glued to her husband, and he told her what to do. Women were more ignorant. They were stupider. They were afraid of their husbands and now we see it’s different because if a husband tries to tie his wife down, she’ll dump him and get a job. Before it wasn’t like that. Nowadays, with children, he sees this. He has to understand how things are and that he can’t dress them, or feed them, or anything.

“Then who cares for your kids while you work?” countered Tamayo. “My mother,” the worker responded. “Others pay for day care. We asked for a day care before but they didn’t give it to us.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Yo cinco, ya grandes todos, pero ahora está difícil tener tantos, bueno, antes también porque mira, yo siempre he andado como retrato, un día un vestido y otro día el mismo, todo para mantener a mis hijos, pero ahora es peor, todo está muy caro, ya no se puede.; Con muchos hijos ya no se puede ni trabajar para manejarlos, porque ¿quién los cuida? Yo solamente quiero dos, ya hay muchas formas para tener no más los hijos que una quiera pero luego hay hombres que si la mujer ya no tiene hijos la dejan.; Yo creo que eso era antes porque las mujeres estaban más como quien dice pegadas al marido y lo que él decía era lo que se hacía; había más ignorancia, la mujer estaba más tonta, le tenía miedo al marido y ahora ya vemos que no, porque si les pega pues ‘lo pasan a botar’ y se ponen a trabajar antes no era así. Ahora en eso de los hijos se explican las cosas. El tiene que entender que a como están las cosas no se puede vestirlos, ni educarlos ni nada...

Next the conversation turned to the women's participation in the work stoppage. Tamayo asked the group what their families thought of their involvement in the strike. One worker said her parents initially tried to discourage her by telling her that it was very dangerous for a girl to take part in the front-lines. She convinced them to let her continue, however, by telling them that all her compañeras were there and she could not abandon them. For another worker it was not so easy. "Look," she explained:

I am eighteen and have a lot of problems with my family, they don't want me to go to the meetings because a lot of people say that we are agitators and that I run a lot of risks. They scold me because I come home late and I don't tell them where I went and my mother asks me 'Why are you late?' Well, because I went somewhere and didn't tell anyone because then you wouldn't let me go. I tell her that you can lose your job and that it's the only way I have to help her now, because once I'm married, 'who knows?' I'd like to keep working, but sometimes there are boys who when you date them say you can but after you marry them tell you no.<sup>66</sup>

Industrial work and the political excitement that sometimes accompanied it, apparently, was something of a temporary reprieve from the drudgery of domestic life that might await all women, at least in one employee's opinion. It was likely, however, that many of her coworkers already toiled in a daily routine that piled housework and childrearing tasks on top of a long day at the factory. Old or young, married or single, mothers or not, a relatively small but growing percentage of Mexican women held wage-earning jobs in addition to carrying out the bulk of domestic tasks. When asked about the dual burden (called "double exploitation" by *Bandera Roja* editors) that women suffered, Luxor employees resented the monopoly women were perceived to hold on housework. "As it is now," opined one worker, "I believe that almost no one opposes that a married woman keeps working to help out with expenses, furthermore if the couple shares the work evenly, well, better than that they understand each other." "You're referring to housework?" Tamayo clarified. "Yes, I think that men must help at home, because there

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Mira, tengo 18 años y muchos problemas con mi familia, no quieren que venga a los mítines porque mucha gente dice que somos agitadores y que corro muchos peligros. Me regañan porque llego tarde y no les dije adonde iba y mi mamá me dice ¿por qué llegas tarde?, pues porque fui a tal parte y no te dije nada porque luego no me dejas ir. Yo le explico que se puede perder el trabajo y que es la única forma que yo tengo de ayudarla ahorita, porque de casada, ¿quién sabe? A mi me gustaría seguir trabajando, pero luego hay muchachos que de novios dicen que sí y cuando se casan siempre no.

are those who say that to be in the kitchen is a ‘woman’s thing’ but when they know how hard the work is then they don’t yell so easily.” This was a sentiment few contested. “I also think that men should help at home, it’s a very hard job, and above all they should help with the washing,” added a coworker.<sup>67</sup>

Based on the answers that female workers of Luxor gave to Tamayo, *Bandera Roja* editors believed that three months of militancy against the company had helped the women undergo a process of radicalization that positioned them against customary forms of thinking about women and work in Mexico. They stopped production, held outdoor meetings, published flyers, and raised funds to continue their pressure campaign against a company they believed was exploiting their labor. As importantly, they spoke to the public in an effort to raise awareness of inequality in the workplace and worked to build solidarity with female workers of other companies who suffered similar exploitation. This sort of labor activism, that which pursued social as much as political and economic ends for female workers, greatly surpassed the limited efforts waged by the CTM and other pillars of the labor establishment to improve women’s working conditions.

#### *WOMEN’S LABOR ACTIVISM: COLLABORATIONISM ENDORSED*

The Rivetex and Luxor episodes described above are enlightening though exceptional. The great majority of unionized industrial women operated accorded to the dictates set by the large state-allied labor confederations and the government. Collective contracts that placed formal limitations upon women’s work by restricting them to secretarial or office work, for example, advanced the labor establishment’s mission to favor the male breadwinner.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, such contractual language confirmed the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Como está todo ahora, yo creo que ya casi nadie se opone a que uno siga trabajando de casada para ayudar al gasto, además si en todo los dos ponen igual, pues mejor se comprenden uno al otro.; Sí, yo pienso que los hombres deben ayudar en el trabajo de la casa, porque hay quienes dicen que meterse a la cocina y ayudar en la casa es ‘cosa de mujeres’ pero cuando se sabe lo que cuesta hacer el trabajo de la casa entonces ya no se grita tan fácilmente.; Yo también pienso que los hombres deben ayudarnos en el trabajo de la casa, es un trabajo muy pesado, sobre todo que nos ayuden a lavar.

<sup>68</sup> Scrutinizing one collective contract amongst many, the terms of the contract remitted for approval to the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board on April 22, 1976 by owners of the Compañía Constructora Canales and representatives of the National Union of Mexican Construction Workers, Plumbers, and Affiliates formally established a sexual division of labor by stipulating that “women [female employees] will always be of legal age, and [will work] only in office labors.” AGN, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (hereafter STPS), Delegación Federal del Trabajo (hereafter DFT) No. 3., Box 1183, Folder D.III/201:710.1(6)/52, Comparencia de los Representantes de la Compañía Constructora Canales, S.A. y



presence of a gendered ideology about work via the attempt to demarcate tasks within the profession based on sex. Fortifying a sexual division of labor approximated an effort to marginalize women's participation in the organized labor movement by restricting them to lower paying jobs. This process may be viewed as at least partially successful if we consider the relatively low proportion of unionized women in industry and the paucity of women in leadership positions inside the labor movement.

Restricting women's access to top-tier jobs and leadership positions inside unions, we remember, was nothing new, as it had occurred since at least the formation of the CROM in 1918. Yet the specific motivations that drove men's efforts to subordinate unionized women in the 1970s had changed in the preceding five decades. To labor leaders operating in the post-Tlatelolco period, recent events showed that organized labor had lost much of the clout it once possessed. The heightened levels of syndical agitation in the late-1950s and 1960s showed that the organized labor movement's decline in corporate status was widely recognized by workers. In this context, the increasing presence of women, unionized or otherwise, in industry, like the excess labor force in urban areas, was a phenomenon that threatened the understandings of the male worker as the indispensable factor in the nation's production process. In the post-Tlatelolco world, organized labor showed a commitment to reviving the notion of the working (that is, unionized) man's indispensability to the nation's industrial advancement. The demarcation of work based on sex in collective contracts, therefore, is merely one facet of a campaign to restore the prestige and social status of a male-dominated movement with a well-defined philosophy about work and gender.

These generalities, I believe, may be applied in understanding the nature of women's labor activism in post-Tlatelolco Mexico. Reading *Ceteme* in the post-Tlatelolco period, one could construe that female worker activism was rare. But reaching such a conclusion without considering the subjectivity of the publication would be erroneous. *Ceteme* had identifiable political objectives and was closely allied with the

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del Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Construcción, Plomeros, Similares y Conexos de la R.M. – C.T.M. – Presentando Reglamento Interior de Trabajo Para su Remisión a la H. Jta. Fed. de Conc. y Arbitraje. Submitted by José Muñoz Espinosa, Inspector Federal del Trabajo, Ciudad Juárez, Chih., April 22, 1976., 1-2.

Mexican state. Furthermore, *Ceteme* was hardly the only record of worker activity in that period. The strike waged at Rivetex was not mentioned in *Ceteme*, nor was that at Luxor. Neither fact is surprising, given that Rivetex was carried out without CTM authorization and Luxor workers belonged to the Revolutionary Workers' Confederation, not CTM. *Ceteme* editors did give a rare reference of women's activism on February 15, 1975, when they could not help but mention the massive ongoing strike waged by over 1,000 female cetemista employees at the telephone company Teleindustria Ericsson plant outside of Mexico City. To their "female companions in struggle" CTM hierarchs sent their warmest congratulations for "...their combative spirit and the decided defense they make of their rights as union members and the working class."<sup>69</sup>

In general, when women's labor activism was reported in the workers' press, it was done so filtered through a gendered lens that stressed the emotional aspects of women's political actions. A report from June 8, 1974 described a massive demonstration launched by the women's branch of the Federal District Workers' Federation to inform women about the crucial roles they played in combating the nation's economic ills. Inviting women of the capital to join in solidarity with the cause of the worker, the organization endeavored to fight the current shortages of foods and basic goods in society by integrating urban housewives into the CTM. Women's participation in the movement, the writer concluded, would in turn instill in new converts the realization that they, as keepers of the home and as "merchants, industrialists, and business women," had the economy of the nation in their hands.<sup>70</sup>

We find a similar message promoted in the propagandistic congressional publication *Derechos de la Mujer Mexicana*, which, despite including a section entitled "La Mujer en la Vida Sindical y el Artículo 123," practically ignored women's modern syndical activity and instead focused on their historical participation (which it relegated to mere moral support) in the early crucial episode of labor activism at Cananea, and the

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<sup>69</sup> Editorial, "1,200 Obreros de Teleindustria Ericsson en Huelga," *Ceteme*, February 15, 1975, 1. Spanish reads: ...a las compañeras cetemistas de Teleindustria Ericsson por su espíritu combativo y la decidida defensa que hacen de sus derechos sindicales y de clase.

<sup>70</sup> Editorial, "Amas de Casa Ejecutarán una Acción Concreta Contra la Carestía de Vida," *Ceteme*, June 8, 1974, 8.

protections afforded female workers by Article 123.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps motivated by nothing more than a public obligation to recognize women's contemporary participation in union life, the volume included a single generic photo of women marching in a Labor Day parade. The caption itself was revealing as it read: "Organized in unions for the protection of her rights, the female worker enjoys the guarantees granted her by the Federal Labor Law. This animated group of workers is seen forming itself into the traditional First of May parade."<sup>72</sup> From its relegation of women's historical and contemporary participation in the labor movement, we may well deduce that to the authors of the volume, these female marchers represented the perfect archetypes for women in the labor movement as a whole. They were patriotic and obedient, anonymous and submissive.

Still, to advance the cause of the unionized worker in Mexico, strong women were sometimes deemed necessary. In this regard, the official labor movement occasionally employed female-specific qualities like sexuality to aid its efforts. We turn to a major union's coverage of the events of May 1, 1973 for insight. *SUTERM*, the monthly publication of the United Electric Workers Union, covered the newly minted union's first participation in the traditional Labor Day parade extensively. It reported that over 15,000 union members including industrial workers employed at the companies of General Electric, Kelvinator, and Eveready took part in the festivities to salute President Echeverría and demonstrate the solidarity of the Mexican electrical workers' cause. Many participants also represented the Federal Electric Commission, the primary employer of SUTERM members, and among this contingent were hundreds of female employees who worked in office positions. Union women formed the "Float Brigade" and were largely responsible for the impressive cortege the union presented. A photograph accompanied the article and depicted female suteristas marching in unison, waving the Mexican flag in donning matching outfits of glittery miniskirts and sleeveless tops. The photograph's caption read: "The flashy spectacle of our beautiful little comrades of the national offices,

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<sup>71</sup> Vallejo Novelo, 62.

<sup>72</sup> Vallejo Novelo, 68. Spanish reads: Organizada en sindicatos para protección de sus derechos, la mujer obrera disfruta de las garantías que otorga la Ley del Trabajo. Este animoso grupo de trabajadores es visto al acudir, el primero de mayo, a incorporarse al tradicional desfile.

impeccably dressed, waving flags that together form the colors of our nation's standard, of our war stripes...put a distinctive note to the parade."<sup>73</sup>

Looking more like drum majors than militants, these women exerted a unique image of strength that fit the model of gender complementarity promoted by the official labor movement. They were unionists, yes, but their strength was not derived as much from their status as workers as from their abilities to support their male compañeros. Their sexy appearances and proud countenances were also useful assets. Placed at the front of the parade line, women symbolically led the cause of the electrical worker in Mexico. Although their efforts were described as auxiliary, and with more than a hint of condescension, the nature of their performance in the parade defied many of the commonly held assumptions about women in Mexico. In their sexuality they conveyed strength, not submission; in their confidence, one saw power not weakness. SUTERM women who led their union's procession were far from the "paradigm of abnegation, and the sum of all anguishes and suffering," that María Esther Zuno criticized. They were not the militant women of Rivetex and Luxor who demanded sexual equality in the Mexican workplace, yet they nonetheless contrasted with the self-sacrificing and submissive qualities so often ascribed to women in Mexico.

But even those women who militated and took up arms against their employers were subjected to historical prescriptions. Media perceptions of female labor activism were often sexualized – and not just by those who opposed it. *Presente!*, a progressive weekly based in Cuernavaca, celebrated the contractual revisions won by female textile workers with a cartoon entitled "David versus Goliath Once Again, Rivetex versus Women Workers."<sup>74</sup> The image conveyed a message of worker strength that was problematized, arguably, by the qualities the artist ascribed to the protagonists. In the image, "Goliath," who represented the vanquished executives of Rivetex, lay on his back. He had a long dark beard, wore a short-sleeved shirt, and hair covered his exposed limbs.

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<sup>73</sup> Editorial, "El SUTERM Aportó Numeroso Contingente en el Desfile del 1o. de Mayo," *SUTERM*, June, 1973, 11. Spanish reads: El espectáculo vistoso de nuestras bellas compañeritas de Oficinas Nacionales, impecablemente uniformadas, portando banderas que en conjunto forman los colores de nuestra enseña patria, de nuestras bandas de guerra, y los compañeros de la Brigadas y el Almacén, portando sus uniformes de labor y sus cascos, pusieron una nota distintiva en el desfile.

<sup>74</sup> Hodioc, illustration: "Otra Vez David Contra Goliath, Rivetex vs Obreras," *Presente!*, September 24, 1972, 1.

“David” stood quite obviously for the female workers of the company. She trampled on the body of her fallen rival. She held a slingshot in the air, but was dressed in a sleek black dress so short that the upward motion made her slip exposed. She wore lipstick and had a bob-cut that made her resemble more an upper-class flapper than a working-class proletarian. Certainly, the David in this image resembled the women of Rivetex even less than the Paul Bunyan-like Goliath did the company’s owners. And although she was sexy and certainly strong, she hardly resembled the typical female factory worker. What she did beautifully, however, was capture the complex and often contradictory understandings of unionized women and their place in the post-Tlatelolco organized workers’ movement.

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Much about the evolution of the working class in postrevolutionary society gave male policymakers and labor officials cause to celebrate. As the official narrative had it, workers, by way of unionization, legal gains, and collaboration with the government, achieved strength and leverage in their dealings with business. This fortified worker position vis-à-vis owners provided men access to a breadwinner wage that enabled women to leave the factories and devote their energies to the task of cultivating that bastion of Mexican society, the home. Furthermore, the rubric of postrevolutionary state-building – itself inspired in a highly gendered narrative of heroic masculine virility – shepherded women away from factory labor and toward professions men deemed more congruent with their inherent nurturing qualities. From these perspectives, the masculinization of organized labor not only made sense politically, but also fit the philosophical objectives of patriarchally-inclined state and labor officials.

Still, the fact that women took part in the Revolution and in the historical organized labor movement in Mexico was never realistically in question. Further confounding the discussion is the fact that women’s participation in factory work had increased substantially by 1970, even rebounding to prerevolutionary levels, though the vast majority of these workers were not unionized. The issue at hand, therefore, is the manner with which women’s participation in the formal labor sector was treated by the male-dominated labor establishment after Tlatelolco. Women’s priorities continued to be

considered biologically distinct from those of men. As such, women workers were not afforded equality in the movement. It is further suggested that a conversation of strength and political unity, and not merely an inherent “anti-woman” attitude harbored by the Mexican state, eventually designated syndical activity in the postrevolutionary and post-Tlatelolco periods as principally masculine pursuits. The male-centric discourse that surrounded the Mexican Revolution pervaded subsequent understandings of labor organization, producing a paradigm about industrial work and gender that, although never completely disappearing, was in need of renovation in the post-Tlatelolco period. In this context, the increased presence of women in industry belied efforts waged by the labor establishment to privilege the male worker, to emphasize the importance of women’s work in the home, and to restore “traditional” gender values. It is not surprising that Mexican women after 1968 participated in the formal labor force and in some cases were unionized at lower rates than their female counterparts in other Latin American settings.

In all, this chapter demonstrates the ways that the organizational precepts of hierarchy and subservience – those that defined the structure of organized labor as a whole in the postrevolutionary period – were reinforced at other levels of the workers’ movement after Tlatelolco. Official sources worked in tandem to mitigate the contemporary role and historical memory of women’s labor in the advancement of the Mexican workers’ movement. Such processes continued to serve to subordinate women to men, in spite of their ostensible legal and juridical equality, within a movement that stressed hierarchical harmony and deference to authority toward the achievement of mutual goals. Yet there continued to be conflict and defiance within and against the organized labor movement, and women’s participation was a factor in these struggles.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### 'THE LABOR ARISTOCRACY,' PART ONE: THE ALLEGED STATE BIAS FOR LABOR

In Monterrey in the 1970s, newspapers went to press and journalists worked on May 1 – the International Day of Labor and a national holiday. This situation differentiated Monterrey newspaper personnel from their colleagues in Mexico City who were given the day off in honor of the Mexican worker. Many of nation's largest newspapers including *El Universal*, *Excélsior*, *El Día*, and other capital city dailies did not produce editions on May 1 during the period 1970-1976. Monterrey's largest newspaper *El Norte*, in contrast, did, and in the reports, op-eds, and humor pieces it ran was evident an editorial hostility toward the day and its significance. A cartoon run to observe Labor Day 1970 was particularly evocative. Entitled "Deservedly...", the image depicted two slobs, more or less, lounging on a city sidewalk. They were both unshaven with wild, unkempt hair. One was missing teeth and the other had his shirt undone. He with the checkerboard-smile was turned toward his partner and made a query. The response he received was brief but spoke volumes. The caption read: " – Well, I'm just here bro' ... celebrating Labor Day." <sup>1</sup>

*El Norte* readers needed little additional information to infer the meaning of the illustration. The characters depicted in the image were not to be understood as vagrants, despite their sloppy appearances, but workers. And, one could reasonably infer, they were unionized, thus giving them the luxury to abstain from productive activities on that day. Freed from work, they opted to lie about in the streets – a perfectly acceptable activity for workers on their off-day, though the pictorial and textual tone of the cartoon begged the reader to wonder how their actions on the holiday were different from those they conducted on any given workday. A clear message was conveyed; the typical unionist was lazy. Even more so, he was entitled. In a city like Monterrey where notions of entrepreneurialism, hard work, and industriousness formed integral parts of the collective identity, such mediocrity was particularly distasteful. The regiomontano reader was to see

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, illustration: "Dignamente...", *El Norte*, May 1, 1970, 2-A. Caption reads: – Pos, Aquí no más mano... festejando el Día de Trabajo.

in the sloth and entitlement of the characters threatens to the future prosperity of Mexican society. Their lethargy was to be combated at all costs even if it meant shunning a national celebration and working through the holiday.

Included as well that May 1, 1970 edition of *El Norte* was an insert from the local weekly *¡Óigame!* that harshly criticized the new law for the ways it hurt Mexican commerce. The pro-business/anti-worker tone of the paper was made evident in just its headlines. It announced: “The False Redemption of May 1<sup>st</sup> – Tragic Agony of the Small Industrialist!” The byline elaborated: “The Labor Aristocracy and the Consortiums Finish off the Medium Industrialist...,” a depressing reality, it posited, made possible by the “...The growing conquests of the nation’s unionized workers...” Furthermore, *¡Óigame!* writers concluded that Mexican entrepreneurialism was threatened by yet another institutional force – the federal government – and in particular, the PRI, that which “Without Fixing a Goal,” arbitrarily “Accelerates or Halts Our Development.”<sup>2</sup> In the view of Monterrey opinion makers the small businessman in Mexico faced powerful adversaries in his quest for survival. His repression had visible roots – and they were well-entrenched.

This chapter works to uncover the source of complaints of the ilk expressed by Monterrey and other Mexican owners in the period under review. First, the chapter explores the roots of ideological apprehension toward New Federal Labor Law of 1970. Here, attention is given to contemporary polemics that provide insight into understanding why many deemed the pursuit of a philosophy of social justice as antipathetic to the interests of the Mexican businessman. Next, the discussion turns to the rhetorical and practical importance of key juridical changes, specifically, alterations to the terms of collective contracting, the right to strike, the system of federal labor tribunals, and the implementation and enforcement of new workers’ safety and hygiene provisions. Finally, this chapter gives attention to the notion of the unionist as a privileged worker. Individual labor suits are examined to demonstrate how one’s labor status may have benefitted him in the filing of worker indemnification or unlawful termination claims. Overall, this chapter assesses the validity of accusations launched so often after Tlatelolco alleging

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<sup>2</sup> “La Falsa Redención del 1º. de Mayo...,” *¡Óigame!*, May 1, 1970, insert.



that unionized workers composed a sort of “labor aristocracy” that acted solely in pursuit of individual ends and at the great expense of the nation’s business class and population as a whole.

*“THE FALSE REDEMPTION OF MAY 1<sup>ST</sup>”: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND COLLECTIVE CONTRACTS, THE RIGHT TO STRIKE, AND THE FEDERALIZATION OF LABOR TRIBUNALS*

On Social Justice and Collective Contracts

The notion that labor law in Mexico was prejudicial to business was widely promoted in the period under review. Such a generalization, although popular, should not have been accepted wholesale. Major qualifiers challenged the conjecture that labor law in Mexico had historically worked in the interest of the employee and against the employer. The federal labor codes of 1931 and 1970 established the rights to negotiate collective labor contracts and to halt labor activities, but these were not rights that pertained only to, nor exclusively benefited, workers. Collective contracts protected the interests of employers as much as guaranteed the terms of employment for workers. Furthermore, Part 19 of Article 123 of the Constitution of 1917 recognized the rights of employers to call a lockout (*paro*) when they had determined that the economic conditions of the market necessitated a temporary suspension of activities, thus giving owners a legal instrument equivalent to the workers’ strike (*huelga*.)<sup>3</sup>

A look at the language of the federal labor law as it stood on the eve of reform is also useful. Although it had undergone sixty-three revisions since its introduction in 1931, one was hard pressed to notice an overt bias for one side of the production process over another in the labor code. The document’s first articles established basic principles; the laws outlined in the code were to be observed across all the Republic and their application was the sole responsibility of federal and local authorities (Article 1,) and relations between the state and public service employees would be regulated by civil

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<sup>3</sup> Legal scholar Francisco Ramírez Fonseca pointed out these facts to confront the commonly voiced complaint of owners that federal labor law had historically privileged the rights of workers over their own. See Francisco Ramírez Fonseca, *Obligaciones y Derechos de Patronos y Trabajadores: Comentarios y jurisprudencias* (Mexico City: Editorial PAC, 1985), 7.

service laws that the state emitted (Article 2.)<sup>4</sup> Articles 3 and 4 provided basic definitions for the worker and employer. Article 3 defined a worker (*trabajador*) as... “any person that loans to another person a service that is material, intellectual, or of both types by virtue of a labor contract.” According to Article 4, an owner (*patrón*) was “any physical person or moral (entity) that employs the services of another by virtue of a labor contract.”<sup>5</sup> Subsequent articles made basic provisos for the rights of workers. Article 6 clarified that no labor activities (meaning strikes, etc.) could be impeded when licitly waged. Only when worker actions attacked the rights of third parties or injured society, the law stated, did labor authorities have the right to impede said actions. Finally, Article 7 elaborated that workers were free from threat of substitution or removal while they had cases pending with federal labor authorities or while they were inactive from work due to causes related to illness.<sup>6</sup>

Together, these introductory articles affirmed the worker’s right to labor free of obstruction or fear of inequitable termination, yet they could hardly be slandered as excessively pro-worker or biased against the interests of capital. These basic, introductory expressions of workers’ rights, however, would give way to more ideologically-charged concepts in the subsequent labor code. Injected into the opening section of the New Federal Labor Law of 1970 was a concept that had not been prominent in federal labor law to that point: social justice. The tone of the text contained in Articles 2 and 3 of the NLFT was notable. Article 2 read: “Labor regulations tend toward the achievement of equilibrium and social justice in worker and employer relations.” Article 3 further announced: “Labor is a right and a social duty. It is not an article of commerce; liberty and dignity is demanded by those who loan it and it must be effectuated in conditions that assure life, health, and a decorous economic level for the worker and his/her family. Distinctions between workers based on race, sex, age,

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<sup>4</sup> Alberto Trueba Urbina and Jorge Trueba Barrera, *Ley Federal del Trabajo Reformada y Adicionada*, 63<sup>a</sup> Edición (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1969), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: es toda persona que preste a otra un servicio material, intelectual o de ambos generos, en virtud de un contrato de trabajo...; ...es toda persona física o moral que emplee el servicio de otra, en virtud de un contrato de trabajo...

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

religious creed, political doctrine or social condition will not be able to be established.”<sup>7</sup> The inclusion of social justice ideals and righteous principles in the revised law had impacts, it appears, that were more than rhetorical. Inclusion of this sort of language gave organized labor a symbolic thrust that it aimed to exploit in future relations with owners.

Organized labor’s post-Tlatelolco desire to drape all labor-capital relations under a banner of social justice is most evident in the language of the collective contracts established in the period. Collective labor contracts were legal agreements reached between a specified group of workers organized into a union and the ownership of a single company or multiple companies that employed a designated group of workers. The document was produced via negotiations held between labor and corporate representatives and was organized into three distinct sections: a. the Cover (*Envoltura*) – that related the conditions that spawned the birth of the contract and outlined clauses relative to its duration, modification, and termination; b. the Regulator (*Normativo*) – which listed the names and residences of all *titulares* (designated representatives of the contractual entities) and specified the conditions of work including salaries, work-schedules, holidays and vacations, required safety measures, and terms of social programs, amongst many other items; and c. the Obligatory Element (*Elemento obligatorio*) – that stated the available measures to use to enforce compliance of the terms fixed in the Regulator.<sup>8</sup> Union representatives and management drafted the terms of the contract but it was subjected to scrutiny by state and federal labor authorities before enactment. With government certification, the contract acquired full legal authority to dictate labor-capital relations between the listed contractees for a period established in the document, typically, two years.

Very little in the language establishing the collective contract, however, indicated a bias for workers over owners. The rights to modify, suspend, and terminate collective

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<sup>7</sup> STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición* (Mexico City: STPS, 1970), 8. Spanish, in full, reads for Article 2 – Las normas de trabajo tienden a conseguir el equilibrio y la justicia social en las relaciones entre trabajadores y patrones; and for Article 3 – El trabajo es un derecho y un deber sociales. No es artículo de comercio, exige respeto para las libertades y dignidad de quien lo presta y debe efectuarse en condiciones que aseguren la vida, la salud y un nivel económico decoroso para el trabajador y su familia. No podrán establecerse distinciones entre los trabajadores por motivo de raza, sexo, edad, credo religioso, doctrina política o condición social.

<sup>8</sup> Baltasar Cavazos Flores, *Manual de Aplicación e Interpretación de la Nueva Ley Federal del Trabajo* (Mexico City: Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana, 1971), 267.

labor relations were guaranteed owners and workers alike in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII of the NLFT respectively. The collective contract was defined nearly identically in the two codes, yet some important alterations were noticeable. Article 42 of the 1931 Federal Labor Law and Article 386 of the NLFT Law mutually defined the collective contract as an “...agreement reached between one or several trade unions and one or several employers, or one or several unions of employers, toward the end of establishing the conditions by which labor must be lended...,” though the latter code clarified that it would regulate relations “...in one or more businesses or establishments.”<sup>9</sup> Follow-up articles showed variations that were more interesting. Article 43 in the 1931 code explained that: “Any employer that employs workers belonging to a union will have the obligation of reaching a collective contract with that union when it solicits it.”<sup>10</sup> Article 387 of the NLFT reproduced the language but included an addendum giving workers *carte blanche* to exercise the right to strike as consigned in Article 450 of the current law.

Clearly significant, the additional language referenced above mimicked a tone evident elsewhere in the new code suggesting that labor law in the post-1970 period would have an action-friendly bent. Article 426 of the NLFT specified that unions and owners would henceforth be able to solicit conciliation and arbitration boards to modify labor terms set in collective contracts when either: a. economic conditions exist that justify it; or, b. an increase in the cost of living provokes an imbalance between capital and labor.”<sup>11</sup> No similar language was found in the guidelines set for modifying collective contracts in the 1931 statute.<sup>12</sup> Even still, this did not signify a bias in favor of one side or the other. The new code guaranteed employees and owners similar access to federal arbitration, and, it was only in the assumption that an “imbalance” (*desequilibrio*)

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<sup>9</sup> STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 286. Spanish reads: Contrato colectivo de trabajo es el convenio celebrado entre uno o varios sindicatos de trabajadores y uno o varios patrones, o uno o varios sindicatos de patrones, con objeto de establecer las condiciones según las cuales debe prestarse el trabajo en una o más empresas o establecimientos.

<sup>10</sup> Trueba Urbina and Trueba Barrera, 33. Spanish reads: Todo patrón que emplee trabajadores pertenecientes a un sindicato, tendrá obligación de celebrar con éste, cuando lo solicite, un contrato colectivo.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 296. Spanish reads: Cuando el aumento del costo de la vida origine un desequilibrio entre el capital y el trabajo.

<sup>12</sup> See Title Two, Chapter Ten on Modifications to Labor Contracts in the 1931 Federal labor Law. See Trueba Urbina and Trueba Barrera, 76.

in the distribution of profits between labor and capital invariably benefited owners that one could read an inherent bias for workers in the language of the law.

Other aspects of the new law, however, gave critics grounds for legitimate concern. In particular, an owner's rights to modify, suspend, or terminate a collective contract was curtailed in the NLFT. Article 427 of the NLFT, like Article 116 of the previous code, gave owners the right to legally suspend collective labor contracts when: a. a lack of primary materials existed by no fault of their own; b. they lacked the necessary funds to continue operation and could prove financial insolvency; c. a condition of excess production existed with relation to economic and market conditions; d. they suffered a demonstrable lack of cost-effectiveness and a poor exploitation of resources on the part of the company and workers; e. unforeseen circumstances arose requiring the suspension of labors; f. they suffered physical or mental incapacitation (the latter specified only in the 1970 code) or death; and, g. the state was deficient in providing contractually guaranteed administration or services indispensable to the functioning of the company.<sup>13</sup> What the 1970 code did not include, however, proved most worrisome to employers. The NLFT deprived owners of the right to suspend a collective contract with workers who contracted a contagious illness or failed to fulfill the terms of the labor agreement due to arrest or imprisonment, powers previously granted to them in Article 116 of the 1931 Federal Labor Law.<sup>14</sup> The pain of this injury was compounded by the fact that Article 430 of the NLFT made all employers' suspension decisions subject to review by the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board, which was henceforth empowered to overturn the decision, dictate compensation terms, or reinstate workers after considering factors such as the probable period of the suspension and the possibility of the suspended workers finding new jobs.<sup>15</sup>

By diminishing an owner's power to suspend a collective contract with his employees, the NLFT empowered the labor establishment which was now more integrally involved in workplace relations. This trend was seen even more dramatically in the limitations the NLFT placed upon owners in the area of rescinding collective

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<sup>13</sup> Trueba Urbina and Trueba Barrera, 77; STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 297.

<sup>14</sup> Trueba Urbina and Trueba Barrera, 77.

<sup>15</sup> STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 298.

contracts with workers. Employers operating after 1970 had powers to fire unionized workers that were circumscribed when compared to what they possessed prior to the passage of the NLFT. According to federal law, pre-1970 patrones could fire employees protected by collective contracts for myriad of reasons, including: a. if the worker consented; b. upon the completion of the job for which the contract pertained; c. upon the partial or total close of the company and during times of work force contraction; d. for reasons of physical or mental incapacitation of the the worker; e. for loss of confidence in the worker by the employer; and f. in the event that the employer suspected the worker had committed a sinister act causing financial loss to the owner.<sup>16</sup> These powers were not granted owners in the NLFT, and the new labor code further stipulated that should an employer be forced to rescind a collective contract for unavoidable financial reasons, he was to cut employees with the least seniority first (Article 436) and compensate all justly terminated workers with three months of compensation (Article 437.)<sup>17</sup>

The NLFT, thus, greatly reduced the suspension and firing power that employers exerted over employees who labored under the rubrics of collective contract. This fact formed part of a larger trend of the revised code that handcuffed employers in their decision making powers and placed the resolution of personnel questions in the hands of federal labor authorities. Undoubtedly, this quality of the new law bolstered the presence of the collective contract in workplace relations. As significantly, it appeared to many unionists to reinforce the spirit of workers' vindication that they contended had greatly lagged in the four decades since the 1931 Federal Labor Law first articulated it. This spirit is ubiquitous in post-1970 labor agreements. An example of this was found in the collective contract reached between members of the union "Librado Rivera" and the executives of the Veracruz-based companies Aluminio and Inmobiliaria Aluminio to govern workplace relations from March 1973 to March 1975. Page one, Article 3 of the contract included the following language, lifted in part directly from the the introductory language of the New Federal Labor Law:

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<sup>16</sup> See Article 118 in the 1931 Federal labor Law and Article 434 in the NLFT. See Trueba Urbina and Trueba Barrera, 88 and STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 299, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 300.

The rules of work are designed toward achieving balance and social justice in worker-business relations. Labor is a right and a social duty. It is not an article of commerce, it demands respect for the liberties and dignity of those who conduct it and it must be undertaken under conditions that assure life, health, and a decent economic level for the worker and his family.<sup>18</sup>

The twenty-eight page document included no similar language affirming the social rights of owners. The companies' owners were contractually granted the right to demand respect from their employees – Article 51, Clause B obligated workers to "...lend their services to the companies subordinately" – yet the contract made no reference of the right of owners to secure their and their families' economic and physical well-being as it had done for workers.<sup>19</sup>

Many collective contracts featured lofty pro-worker rhetoric but they were not partisan script. Collective contracts were the products of labor-capital negotiations and were subjected to the rigors of approval and certification by federal and local labor authorities. They were, as such, bilateral documents that were designed to represent the will of the worker as much as the will of the owner. Still, owners alleged that they operated at a distinct disadvantage to workers in the negotiating process. Baltazar Cavazos Flores, law professor and then head attorney for the Confederation of Mexican Owners (COPARMEX) alluded to this injustice in a 1971 manual he produced to interpret the legal and practical ramifications of the new labor code for business. In the document he opined on the origins and current utility of the collective contract in Mexican labor law. He explained that the concept had emanated from foreign doctrines; in particular, it derived from nineteenth century German and French juridical traditions that regulated workers' wages. To Cavazos, though, the mechanism's foreign derivation and age were only part of its problems. As he saw it, the collective contract was also

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<sup>18</sup> AGN, STPS, Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje (hereafter JFCA) No. 12 – 1973, Box 1310, Folder "Emplazamiento a Huelga planteado por el Sindicato Librado Rivera Conexos y Similares de Aluminio Vs. Las Empresas Aluminio Inmobiliaria Aluminio." Collective Contract. "Contrato Colectivo del Sindicato "Librado Rivera" de Trabajadores en General Conexos y Similares de Aluminio, S.A. de C.V. y las Cmpñías Aluminio, S.A. de C.V. e Inmobiliaria Aluminio, S.A. de C.V.," December 11, 1972, 1. Spanish reads: Las normas de trabajo tienden a conseguir el equilibrio y la justicia social en las relaciones entre trabajadores y Empresas. El trabajo es un derecho y un deber social. No es artículo de comercio, exige respeto para las libertades y dignidad de quien lo presta y debe efectuarse en condiciones que aseguren la vida, la salud y un nivel económico decoroso para el trabajador y su familia.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13.

“inadequate” in because it represented each day less a testament of the wills of owners and more an expression of the supremacy of workers’ priorities.<sup>20</sup> He judged the collective contract in contemporary Mexico such an imbalanced instrument that it had even invalidated its name. The title “collective” was no longer applicable, he felt, and “Professional Labor Pact” was a more appropriate moniker being that the instrument was artificially weighted to benefit the ‘professional’ core of workers, i.e. unionists, and offered very little for non-unionized employees.<sup>21</sup>

Strictly speaking, Cavazo’s latter determination had legal merit – Article 386 of NLFT, we remember, defined the collective labor contract as an agreement reached to regulate the terms of employment exclusively between a union and one or more employers.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the prevalence of the exclusion clauses which were made legal in the 1931 Federal Labor Law and inserted in the preponderance of collective contracts created thereafter, created closed or union shops that required employers to hire only unionized workers (Article 234) and dismiss workers who lost their union membership (Article 236). Moreover, exclusion clauses routinely articulated that employees could not discharged, transferred, or promoted without union approval, and that none but the highest administrators and professionals were exempt from union membership.<sup>23</sup> Irrespective of these facts, Cavazos calling the collective contract a strictly pro-worker legal structure was a somewhat inaccurate analysis for the lawyer to make. Yes collective contracts were designed to regulate the terms of employment for unionized workers, but they also often made provisions for non-unionized workers hired by the company to fill immediate labor needs. The typical collective contract stipulated that employers compensate these employees, classified as either temporary workers or part-time workers, with the same wages and benefits they gave union members – the obvious goal being to discourage the company’s hiring of low-cost (scab) labor alternatives.

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<sup>20</sup> Cavazos Flores, 266.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>22</sup> See language of Article 386 as included in footnote 9 of this chapter.

<sup>23</sup> Historian Myrna I. Santiago points out that the insertion of exclusion or closed shop provisions in collective contracts was a point of particular contention between oil worker unions and companies in the early and mid-1930s. In these battles workers struck often and were routinely supported in their demands by the executive, as presidents Abelardo Rodríguez endorsed the closed-shop provision and Cárdenas promised to expand its presence in future contracts. See Myrna Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 321.



This qualification aside, Cavazos was largely correct to conclude that the collective contract was a legal instrument created in the spirit of benefiting the nation's unionized workers. The holder of the contract was, after all, the union, and no individual, ad-hoc, or unrecognized worker's organization had a legal right to demand from their employer the creation of a collective contract.<sup>24</sup> The union's exclusivity of the collective contract and the mandate imposed upon employers to hire only union members represented to Cavazos prime examples of syndical privilege at work in Mexico.

Organized labor partisans confronted cynics and allegations with statistics. Writing in *Revista Mexicana del Trabajo*, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare's quarterly publication, in 1975, Miguel Barona de la O. and José Luis Huerta Cruz admitted that syndical groups, "...because of their force, unity, and organization...obtain better benefits."<sup>25</sup> Yet the authors defied those who asserted that legislative advancements in the labor sector had only benefited a minority of unionized workers. They reported that salaried workers represented sixty-two percent of the nation's workforce, and of that number nearly ten million (thirty-nine percent) were organized under collective contracts. Taking into account that the salaries of those workers supported an average of 2.8 people, Barona and Huerta calculated that there were at least thirty-eight million Mexicans who based their existence on company wages. And of this mass, they added, the majority benefited from social programs such as social security and the National Worker Housing Institute created to improve the living conditions of the working class.<sup>26</sup>

With these considerations in mind, the authors argued that the nation was in need of more, not less, unionization efforts to permit a larger nucleus of workers and their dependents to enjoy its advantages. Furthermore, the nation required more collective contracting for with each new contract in place the nation moved closer to eliminating industrial practices that objectified workers by turning them into dispensable

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<sup>24</sup> Cavazos Flores, 281.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: Ciertamente es que por su fuerza, su unidad y su organización, los grupos sindicalizados obtienen mayores beneficios; pero en ningún momento se justifica frenar o dar marcha atrás en las conquistas logradas por esos sectores, argumentando que no se extienden a toda la población.

<sup>26</sup> Miguel Barona de la O and José Luis Huerta Cruz, "Consideraciones sobre la contratación colectiva," *Revista Mexicana del Trabajo*, 1:5, ed. Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (Jan. – Mar. 1975): 128.

commodities. Collective contracts often prohibited companies from instituting salary and benefit ceilings that discouraged workers and enabled employers to replace them with cheaper alternatives.<sup>27</sup> Some contracts went farther still in demarcating the terms of employment and the NLFT limited the independence of employers in hiring and firing decisions. As such, Barona and Huerta, like many other unionists, praised recent labor reform as pursuing basic ideals of social justice.

### On the Right to Strike

The NLFT established that collective contracts could be born of two processes: first, by means of a company granting the request of a union or unions whose members constituted less than half of the total workforce; and second, by way of a strike undertaken lawfully when union workers represented more than half of company employees. In the first instance, the realization of the contract was not guaranteed by law. Owners who employed a majority non-unionized workforce had no legal obligation to negotiate terms of employment with unions in their employ. Collective contracts were sometimes in place to regulate corporate relations with unionists who performed tasks central to the company's operations, but more likely collective contracts were born from strike activity waged to pressure ownership to the negotiating table.

Article 387 levied on owners the responsibility to create collective contracts if their unionized workers demanded it and guaranteed unionists the right to force the issue. Its language read: "The employer who employs workers belonging to a union will have the obligation of reaching a collective contract with the union when it solicits it. If the employer refuses to sign the contract, the workers will be able to exercise the right to strike as consigned to them in Article 450."<sup>28</sup> Article 450 confirmed that the worker's right to strike first established in Article 123 remained a central precept in Mexican labor law. The definition of what a strike was did not change. Article 440 of the NLFT as much as Article 259 of the 1931 Federal Labor Law defined the strike as a legal temporary suspension of labor brought about by a coalition of workers. The most significant change

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 286. Spanish reads: El patrón que emplee trabajadores miembros de un sindicato tendrá obligación de celebrar con éste, cuando lo solicite, un contrato colectivo. Si el patrón se niega a firmar el contrato, podrán los trabajadores ejercitar el derecho de huelga consignado en el artículo 450.

between the legal codes was seen in defining the acceptable parameters of the strike. Subsection I of Article 450 of the NLFT listed the acceptable pretexts for workers' strikes and sanctioned any activity conducted to: a. achieve balance between the diverse parts of production, harmonizing the rights of labor with those of capital; b. obtain from an owner the fulfillment of a collective contract or demand the revision of its validity period; c. obtain from an owner the fulfillment of legal contract; and d. wage a 'solidarity strike' in support of an outside movement waged to achieve one of the goals denoted above.<sup>29</sup>

Except for some minor textual differences, these stated objectives largely mirrored those listed in Article 260 of the 1931 code save for an important difference: clause V of Article 450 of the NLFT sanctioned strikes waged to "Demand the fulfillment of legal dispositions regarding the sharing of profits..."<sup>30</sup> Formally sanctioning strikes waged to demand fulfillment of profit-sharing clauses responded to one of the most important priorities of contemporary organized labor movement. Changes to other parts of the law similarly provided workers with a wider berth to strike. Most importantly, the NLFT removed a central provision found in Article 269 of the 1931 Federal Labor Law stipulating that a workers' strike could be ruled "non-existent," i.e. invalid and struck down by labor authorities if it could be declared to contravene terms established in a collective labor contract.<sup>31</sup> This language, clearly, gave employers great latitude to challenge any strike activity for most workers' actions were waged to contest conditions that were contractually established. The NLFT included no similar mechanism for employers to challenge the validity of workers' actions – a fundamental omission in the labor code that suggests that by 1970 it was understood amongst labor authorities that workers could strike to demand the revision of collective contracts whose validity (*vigencia*) had not yet expired. This change, I might argue, further hints that by 1970 labor authorities had acknowledged as fact the right of workers to continually move to revise equilibrium, even if it meant challenging contractual terms that were in place for the foreseeable future.

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<sup>29</sup> See STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 302.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Owners who suspected that the post-1970 labor climate had shifted against them may have found evidence of bias in other sections of the NLFT as well. Article 451 stipulated that a strike required a simple majority (half plus one) of workers to force contractual talks but did not specify on the composition of the striking force.<sup>32</sup> This omission gave the clause a nebulousness that owners deemed injurious to their interests. As Baltasar Cavazos, lawyer for COPARMEX, saw it, language in the new law did not make it necessary “to distinguish if the workers were free or unionized” when declaring a majority.<sup>33</sup> Unionized workers could, therefore, recruit the assistance of free (i.e. non-union) workers to assist in their campaigns. This was a curious situation being that free workers who were not technically covered in collective contracts stood to gain nothing from the creation of a contract between ownership and the union. Their participation in a strike waged to force contractual negotiations, therefore, seemed illogical. *Why would non-unionized workers go on strike and risk losing their jobs to participate in a cause that did not benefit them?* Just as much, perhaps, the participation of free workers in organized labor activity irked Cavazos and the business owners he represented because it constituted labor agitation that needlessly disrupted the production process and hurt the Mexican economy. In this way, once again, the new labor code appeared to nourish the corporal tissue of syndical privilege to the direct detriment of business in Mexico.

The NLFT limited employers’ powers to challenge the validity of strikes raised to contest contractual terms and gave workers a wider berth to strike, but did not deprive owners of all legal weapons. The NLFT maintained the state’s prerogative to curtail the workers’ strike in the event that a work stoppage had adverse social effects. According to Article 466, the right to strike was limited for workers in the transportation (men and women working on ships, airplanes, trains, buses, and other transportation vehicles) and public health (in hospitals, sanatoriums, clinics and other health care facilities) sectors.<sup>34</sup> Article 467 gave federal authorities the power to require that a minimum number of workers remain on the job, so that the work suspension did not harm the general

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 308.

population, and Article 468 stipulated that workers who persisted in striking against federal orders could be replaced with temporary personnel whose installment would be guaranteed by public force if necessary.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, at least, the NLFT, like the code it replaced, appeared a fairly neutral document that could not be easily denigrated as favoring one side of the production process over another.

#### Federalization of Labor Tribunals

The NLFT spawned a climate of reform that opened the door to yet another long demanded goal of organized labor: the creation of new federal labor tribunals. Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Boards (JFCAs) based in Mexico City were first established in 1929 as a means to give the federal government more say over who could strike and when. As described in the Introduction, ex-President Calles forced through the creation of the boards after a Supreme Court decision ruled that the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Labor did not have jurisdiction over labor conflicts in the railroad transportation industry, thus depriving the federal government the power to nix workers' strikes in a crucial economic sector where its major labor associate, the CROM, had made few inroads into. Not surprisingly, railroads was among the first of five industrial sectors put under federal jurisdiction with the creation of the JFCA in 1927.<sup>36</sup> Article 359 of that code specified that newly established special divisions of the JFCA would be permanent, assigned a number, structured along tripartite lines with an equal number of labor and capital representatives and a single government representative, and have exclusive power to render decisions on disputes that arose inside select industries deemed pivotal to the nation's industrial health and territorial security.<sup>37</sup> JFCA special divisions were also given sole jurisdiction over workplace conflicts that arose in industries with an interstate presence as well as industries regulated by legal contracts, national-level agreements that

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<sup>35</sup> The obvious reference here is to the conflict that will occasionally erupt between striking workers and *esquiroles* (scabs.)

<sup>36</sup> The other industrial areas originally placed under federal jurisdiction were mining, hydrocarbons, marine and maritime zone activities, and other federal-concession transportation activities. See Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 54-55.

<sup>37</sup> Remolina R. Oqueñi, "Federalización de los Tribunales del Trabajo," *Ceteme*, November 23, 1974, 3.

established umbrella terms to guide workplace relations across entire industries, not merely from company to company.<sup>38</sup>

The prevailing logic that drove the creation of JFCA was a belief that because the specified industries were of such an enormous strategic importance to the nation as a whole, it was logical that the regulation of workplace relations inside of them had a federal character as well. In subsequent years, new concerns fueled organized labor's drive to add new areas of to JFCA jurisdiction. The passage of the 1931 Federal Labor Law, though intended to do with any jurisdictional inconsistencies by regulating labor matters under a single federal law, was not immediately effective and questions remained. In this climate of bureaucratic confusion members of the labor establishment raised a near-constant case to create additional divisions so that new areas of industries were brought under part or exclusive federal jurisdiction. Driving official labor's actions was a belief that the labor mediation system that preserved the distinction between federal and local jurisdiction made the resolution of union and worker petitions raised on the local level subject to political manipulation by governors and regional business elites. The CTM voiced this position concisely shortly after its creation in 1936, a logical development since that organization derived its principal source of influence from its alliance with the national political elite and possessed a strength that varied considerably from one state to another. The CTM's constant demands for greater federalization, therefore, made sense for each newly established JFCA promised to increasingly centralize the adjudication of workplace conflicts and produce more reliable and, naturally, friendlier decisions to the cause of the cetemista.

Irregular but important victories in this battle were achieved. First the textile and later the electrical power generation industries were brought under federal jurisdiction in 1933 and 1940 respectively. In 1942 several new areas of work were federalized including the cinematographic, rubber, and sugar industries, as well as companies or institutions operating under federal concession/contract or operated directly or in a decentralized form by federal government. Finally, and most recently, the petrochemical,

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<sup>38</sup> Industry-wide collective bargaining agreements existed predominantly to regulate work in manufacturing and agricultural sectors, and in 1975 six branches of the textile industry as well as the entire alcohol, wool, rubber, and sugar industries had such contracts in place.

steel and metalworking, and cement industries were subsumed into the JFCA in 1962, thus federalizing the lion's share of the nation's most significant economic sectors.<sup>39</sup>

The CTM maintained a consistent call for increased federalization throughout the 1960s though its pleas in this regard went largely unheard, at least initially. New JFCA special divisions were not written into the labor overhaul that went into effect on May 1, 1970 and Article 527 of the NLFT was identical to Article 359 of the existing code, with minor exceptions.<sup>40</sup> Both codes listed the following twelve areas as falling entirely or partly under federal jurisdiction:

- a. mining and hydrocarbon industries;
- b. petrochemical industry;
- c. steel and metalworking industries;
- d. electrical power generation industry;
- e. textile industry;
- f. cinematographic industry;
- g. rubber industry;
- h. sugar industry;
- i. cement industry;
- j. railroad industry;
- k. companies that are administered directly or in a decentralized form by the federal government; and,
- l. companies or ancillary companies operating under federal concession or federal contract.

Federalization of new areas of industry was pursued vigorously by organized labor's brass after 1970 driven by the belief that despite the sweeping changes made to the labor code, local conciliation and arbitration boards continued to function at the personal whims of their presidents. CTM writers editorialized that these "whims" exposed workers' to vices and contradictions that were at the root of severe iniquities.

Federalization, they advocated, would make decisions less arbitrary as well as bring justice more rapidly and effectively. Syndical clamoring for federalization reached a crescendo on May 1, 1974, when the supposed one-million strong conglomeration of

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<sup>39</sup> See chart in Middlebrook, 54-55.

<sup>40</sup> New language added specified that companies that execute work in federal zones or territorial waters; conflicts that affect two or more federal entities; and that collective contracts that have been declared obligatory in more than one federal entity (i.e. *leyes-contratos*) would also fall under federal jurisdiction. See Trueba Urbina and Trueba Barrera, 187; and Title Eleven in STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*.

cetemistas demonstrated in cities across the nation in support of the measure and various other official priorities.<sup>41</sup>

Pressures exerted by organized labor moved the state toward action. In December of that year, a presidential initiative proposed changes to Article 527 to put the automobile manufacturing, pharmaceutical, pulp and paper, vegetable oil, food processing, and bottling industries under exclusive federal jurisdiction, as well as solidify federal control of the railroad and other interstate sectors that were under only partial state jurisdiction.<sup>42</sup> Defending his proposal on December 23, Echeverría stated that the enormous expansion of JFCA jurisdiction was congruent with the increased participation of his government in labor-capital matters in general. Furthermore, he saw the change as necessary toward achieving other national goals, including those of encouraging increased domestic and foreign investment in industry and strengthening labor organizations at the national level.<sup>43</sup> The ambiguousness of these connections were clarified by J.N. García, chief legal counsel for the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS). As he explained, the presidential initiative was beneficial because future workplace conflicts brought before the federalized tribunals would henceforth be decided free from “regional political influences,” a factor that García and Echeverría, surely, understood as contrary to the goals of the federal government.<sup>44</sup> Naturally, CTM brass applauded the proposal as well. Velázquez declared the initiative a social advance. It was logical, he remarked, that since the application of labor law was federal so too should be the application of justice.<sup>45</sup>

Congress approved the initiative shortly after with little resistance. New JFCAs were created but gradually. Not everyone in the syndical sphere, however, supported the measure. A popular position amongst those who formed the ranks of independent unions

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<sup>41</sup> See Editorial, “Cárcel para Quienes Medran con el Hambre del Pueblo: Congreso del Trabajo,” *Ceteme*, May 4, 1970, 8.

<sup>42</sup> See coverage in *Ceteme*, January 4, 1975, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Spanish reads: ello es menester garantizar, dentro de las normas de equidad y de justicia, el equilibrio de los factores de la producción, adecuar las inversiones nacionales y extranjeras a las necesidades de esa nueva estrategia y propiciar el robustecimiento de las organizaciones sindicales a nivel nacional.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. Spanish reads: porque los conflictos que en ellas se presentan podrán desprenderse de la influencia de políticas regionales.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



was that the federalization of new industrial sectors was a development that further submitted their non-allied unions to labor establishment domination.<sup>46</sup> Estéban Juzaino saw nothing but conspiracy in the process. He wrote in *Bandera Roja* in June 1975 and chided the process, commenting facetiously that “now, instead of labor matters being ‘conciliated’ in the local boards of the states, they will be treated in the federal conciliation board in the Federal District.” As he saw it, the measure was designed to preface the “implantation” of an industry-wide collective bargaining agreement (*contrato ley*) to regularize worker-employer relations in certain key industrial branches and thus stymie powerful independent unions whose priorities would be subordinated to those of state-allied unions that comprised the two-third parts necessary to sign the contract.<sup>47</sup> Federalization, he felt, was a “maneuver of the syndical bureaucracy” meant to solidify its control over key industrial sectors where unions beyond its control had begun to assert themselves.<sup>48</sup>

Despite some opposition emanating from independent unionists, official labor overwhelmingly endorsed federalization in the middle years of the Echeverría sexenio. Why? The organized workers’ movement understood well that its power was rooted in its close alliance with the federal government and official party and not in local and regional authorities. Just as state-allied unions had staunchly supported the nationalization of industry and increased state intervention in the economy, so too did they praise government measures to exert control over new areas of labor-capital relations.

#### Enforcing Worker Safety and Hygiene Provisions

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<sup>46</sup> Estéban Juzaino, “La Industria Automotriz: Entre el charrismo y la crisis,” *Bandera Roja*, June 1975, 3. Spanish reads: En lugar de que los asuntos laborales sean ‘conciliados’ en las juntas locales de cada uno de los estados, serán tratados en la junta federal de conciliación en el Distrito Federal.

<sup>47</sup> Legal contracts were created when two-thirds of a given sector’s registered employees were in favor of regularizing work conditions for all companies involved in that industry.

<sup>48</sup> Juzaino, in the article cited in footnote 47, wrote specifically of the powerful independent unions in the automotive industry and named those operating at the DINA, Nissan, and Volkswagen plants in the Toluca and Cuernavaca areas as having particular influence. Spanish reads: ...tendrá como primer resultado abrir el camino a la implantación del contrato-ley en la rama, mismo que al ser impuesto desde arriba, tenderá de inmediato a fortalecer los márgenes de maniobra de la burocracia sindical, ya que ella controla más de los dos terceras partes de los obreros de la rama automotriz, necesarios para firmar el contrato-ley. Also see: See Kevin J. Middlebrook, “Union Democratization in the Mexican Automobile Industry: A Reappraisal,” *Latin American Research Review*, 24:2 (1989): 69-93.

The creation of new federal labor tribunals with exclusive mediation jurisdiction over entire sectors of industry was a development that was ideologically in-line with the collaborationist platform of the state-allied workers' movement in the post-Tlatelolco period. New language in the NLFT that increased demands on employers to ensure the safety of their employees at the workplace likewise encouraged official labor though it impacted all of Mexico's workers, not only those organized into trade unions. Since the first worker safety provisions were written into Article 123 of the Constitution of 1917 the Mexican employer had been charged to ensure the health of his employees. The notion that owners were responsible for the wellbeing of their employees responded directly to demands made by workers prior to and during the Revolution, and the delegates at Querétaro were mindful of the dangers faced by workers who toiled in mines, oil-yards, and factories without the provision of safety equipment. For as much, worker safety was a deeply seated emotional issue to organized labor, although it resembled other facets of labor law in that the de jure demands placed on employers often contradicted the de facto reality experienced by workers. Enforcing owners' compliance of worker safety provisions was thus a major priority of organized labor in the twentieth century.

Language written into the NLFT forced greater employer compliance of safety and health provisions. The NLFT also required companies to install new, safer equipment at their own expense and create education programs to train workers about new safety and hygiene provisions. Finally, the NLFT vastly expanded the range of ailments that workers could claim were job related – from fifty in the 1931 Federal Labor Law to 161 in the 1970 version – strongly endorsing the notion that the performance of industrial labor in the modern period incurred psychological as well as physical risks for the worker. Owners objected to the new requirements as much because of the costly technical changes they mandated as the spirit of the law they deemed to be prejudicial to their interests. Like the new labor code as a whole, some alleged, the new safety provisions seemed to privilege the interests of labor over capital. This was a position Raúl Merino Ramos, Director of the Mexican Academy of Labor and Social Welfare Law, took issue with. Merino, writing in the quarterly journal of the STPS, commended the NLFT for

reinforcing the idea that entrepreneurs inherently incurred a risk in their activities. Naturally, he wrote, they as business owners were obliged not only to pay their employees a salary, but also to “repair” the damages that the performance of that duty inflicted upon them.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, assuring worker safety was a goal Merino felt was in the best financial interest of any owner for a safe workplace produced fewer injuries that incurred costly workman’s compensation payments and required less investment on the part of the employer to train replacement workers.

Improving worker safety hence was a goal some saw as beneficial to all parts of the production process. But although laws protecting workers had long been on the books, their enforcement was irregular. The NLFT strove to reverse this situation by amping up federal oversight and forcing owners to comply with them. Safety inspection reports filed by federal labor officials in the post-1970 period scarcely resembled the skeletal, largely pro-forma evaluations submitted in earlier times. It was not unusual to find pre-1970 reports that omitted such basic information as the names of the worker and owner representatives to the Permanent Safety and Hygiene Commissions, company-level bodies charged with monitoring safety conditions on the shop-floor. Using an enhanced form, post-1970 inspectors submitted reports that meticulously listed the names of the worker and company representatives to the safety and hygiene commissions and verified the company owner’s registration status with the Mexican Social Security Institute. Contained therein was information that listed the company’s affiliated union, if any, and detailed the number, sex, names, and positions of unionized and non-unionized workers. Post-1970 reports also complied better with federal law mandating the identification of foreign workers, and they tended to be more thorough in describing work place conditions – detailing the types of floorings, ceilings, etc. – and the types of equipment and machinery used. Finally, inspectors acted more carefully after 1970 to report the number and nature of industrial accidents suffered in the past year. In general, post-1970 detailed the types of safety apparatuses present on shop floors – anti-fire shields, insulated wiring, safety goggles, boots, etc. – and gave specific orders to owners

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<sup>49</sup> Raúl Merino Ramos, “Riesgos de Trabajo y Autoridades del Trabajo y Servicios Sociales”, *Revista Mexicana del Trabajo*, 4, ed. ed. Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (Oct. – Dec. 1970): 19.

to ensure their compliance with federal law ranging from the installation of motor guards on equipment to the hanging of No-Smoking signs.<sup>50</sup>

Not surprisingly, although the *de jure* law had been altered, the *de facto* reality still lagged behind. Despite enhancements made to the inspection process and increased government scrutiny of workplace conditions, workers' bodily safety was not instantly guaranteed because of the legislative achievement of May 1, 1970. Safety inspection reports from as late as 1975 reveal that many companies had yet to comply with NLFT regulations that had by then been on the books for five years. An inspection report of the Puebla-based company Productos Alimenticios la Morena (Morena Food Products) submitted to Federal Labor Delegation No. 7 (State of Puebla) on November 3, 1975 was exemplary in this regard. The report told much about company life beyond merely matters of industrial safety. It was signed and submitted by the federal labor inspector in conjunction with the union and corporate representatives. According to their report, Morena was a cannery that packed mainly serrano and jalapeño peppers in addition to some tomato, onion, carrot, pineapple, and vegetable and vinegar oil products. The cannery was a medium-sized and private enterprise that had eighteen production workers (fourteen men, four women) in addition to thirty-one other employees (twenty-five men, six women) involved in office and management roles. The report specified that the production workers were organized into the General Packing Industry and Affiliated Workers' Union of Puebla, a member of the CTM, and that a collective contract governed workplace relations. The office workers were classified as "free-employees," indicating that they were not unionized and did not have a collective contract.<sup>51</sup>

As for Morena's compliance with terms established in the NLFT, the report conveyed a record that was hit and miss. The company was praised for providing its employees housing and social security coverage, as well as having implemented an eight-hour workday with one-hour lunch break, weekly rests, vacations, and Saturday pay for

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<sup>50</sup> This conclusion is drawn from an evaluation of documents contained in: AGN, STPS, Dirección General de Inspección Federal del Trabajo (hereafter DGIFT), Boxes 1641-1644, 1646. Report. "Departamento Seguridad Industrial, Visitas de Inspección de Seguridad Industrial. Acta Num. XXXXX. Fecha XX/XX", 1970-71.

<sup>51</sup> AGN, STPS, DGIFT, Box 1079, Folder 13/100D-V11-75-11/1. Reports: "Informe de Labores Correspondiente al Mes de Noviembre Uno y Dos. – Deleg. – Puebla, Pue."; "Acta de Inspeccion Inicial a la Empresa 'Productos Alimenticios la Morena, S.A.'" , November 3, 1975.

floor/production workers classified as *operarios*. The company did not, however, oversee a profit sharing program as mandated by federal law. Money had been set aside for this purpose during the period November 1, 1973 – October 31, 1974, but it had been “liquidated” for unknown reasons.<sup>52</sup> As for the company’s safety record, it was similarly deficient. The company operated with old machinery and failed to create a worker-training program to instruct new and existing employees of modern safety practices. Company executives were also cited for their failure to install fire and smoke detection equipment as required by law. They were ordered to immediately remit to state labor authorities a plan for compliance as well as show evidence that they had installed metallic protection to shield workers from chemical dust. Finally, Morena management was instructed to hang signage to remind employees of the company’s anti-smoking policy and obligatory use of safety equipment including boots, gloves, and aprons.<sup>53</sup>

The Morena report resembled the great majority of others conducted in that period. Post-1970 workplace inspections were intensive, typically lasting two to three days, and virtually all reported some degree of non-compliance on the part of ownership. Federal labor inspector Mario César Guillén covered all the bases when he inspected Productora de Papel, a paper company located in San Nicolás de los Garza, Nuevo León in 1975. In the six-page initial inspection he filed with the Federal Labor Delegation No. 3, Guillén reported that the company was private, made cellulose and other derivative products, and operated with a federal tax identification number.<sup>54</sup> His report informed that the company met federal requirements in several ways. The company had a permanent safety and hygiene commission that met monthly and was equipped with adequate fire extinguishers, though it lacked a sprinkler system. Guillén’s report also included a copy of the collective contract that regulated workplace relations between management and the company’s 271 operarios – all of whom were male, unionized and members of the National Union of Mexican Paper, Cardboard, and Cellulose Industry

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1200, Folder D.IV/201;700(16) “75”/15. Report. “Productora de Papel, S.A. Inspeccion Inicial Ordenada por el Director General de Inspeccion Federal del Trabajo. Inspeccion Inicial”, 1.

Workers, a CTM affiliate, and all but one of whom were full-time, permanent workers.<sup>55</sup> Guillén's report showed that the company also employed a large cadre of other workers classified as *empleados*, a term implying white collar, typically administrative workers. Of these one-hundred workers, eighty-eight men and twelve women, all but three were full-time and permanent. None of the one hundred *empleados* were unionized.<sup>56</sup>

The Guillén report, though thorough, was un-extraordinary for its time. Federal Inspector Guillén scrutinized the company for days and reported a mixed record of compliance to federal labor and health provisions. He reported that the company's employees received annual bonuses (*aguinaldo*) and partook in corporate profits in compliance with federal profit sharing mandates. In addition, they had healthcare via their enrollment in the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) as well as had access to housing through INFONAVIT, the National Worker Housing Institute.<sup>57</sup> Where the company was deficient was first, in the area of transparency – the company had no register of owners' or workers' domiciles, and second, in some areas of wages. Guillén reported that forklift operators earned a salary of 73.56 pesos per day, well below the professional 86.10 pesos daily minimum salary set by the National Minimum Wage Commission for Federal Zone No. 25.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the company, according to Guillén, had four persons who worked as cauldron blowers without being licensed to do so.

Shortly after Guillén carried out the inspection, Productora de Papel was ordered to amend the cited infractions. The historical record, however, suggests that federal labor authorities had more interest in identifying corporate deficiencies than in enforcing compliance. A letter written by the company's legal representative to the STPS's General Labor Inspectorate dated June 4, 1976, informed labor officials that because he had not received a response to his request for an extension to comply with federal mandates, company officials would "permit themselves" to collect the required documents in a

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 3. Full name of union is Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de las Industrias Papelera, Cartonera, Celulosas, sus Materias Primas y Derivados de la República Mexicana.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 4. It was (and remains) very common for Mexican companies to host workforces that are divided along *operario/pleado* lines demarcated by union membership for those in the former group, and a non-union status for those in the latter.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

“prudent time” for government approval.”<sup>59</sup> The deficiencies cited by Guillén, apparently, were quotidian, run-of-the-mill offenses of such a caliber that they did not warrant serious state intervention.

Analysis of another report submitted by Guillén begs us to wonder how diligent labor authorities were in seeing the compliance process taken to its conclusion. On December 7, 1975, Guillén was dispatched to inspect Empacadora Regiomontana, a Monterrey-based cannery that employed just two operarios and one empleado, all men and none of whom were unionized. The inspection was completed in one day although Guillén showed the same meticulousness in preparing it as he had done when inspecting the nearly 400 person paper company months earlier. Empacadora Monterrey he reported was a food company involved in the canning of meats, pasteurized milk, and some other vegetable and dairy products.<sup>60</sup> He listed each of the employees names, described their duties, gave their tenure on the job, and reported their daily salaries – all of which conformed to state guidelines.<sup>61</sup> All of the employees labored a maximum of forty-hours per week and were given weekly rests in conformity with the law. They were paid each Saturday and they enjoyed a vacation policy which conformed to Article 76 of the NLFT.<sup>62</sup>

The extent of the company’s compliance extended no farther than there, however. The rest of Guillén’s report shows a litany of violations of federal labor law on the part of the tiny Monterrey cannery. The company was cited for safety failures; it did not have a map showing the location of fire extinguishers nor did it have sprinklers.<sup>63</sup> Neither were there collective nor individual labor contracts in place at the company, not crimes, but certainly not the preferred state of employer-employee relations in the post-1970 Mexican workplace. More serious infractions included: no owner or employee register listing names and domiciles; no formal payscale; no employee time cards or log book; no

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<sup>59</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1200, Folder D.IV/201;700(16) “75”/15. Letter from Sergio Roiz A. to the Dirección General de Inspección, STPS, June 4, 1976, 1.

<sup>60</sup> STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1200, Folder D.IV/201;700(16) “75”/29. “Empacadora Regiomontana,” S.A. Inspeccion Inicial Ordenada por el Director de Inspeccion del Trabajo, Inspección Inicial, December 15, 1975, 1-7.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 3.

evidence of profit-sharing nor payment of annual bonuses; no evidence of worker enrollment in IMSS or INFONAVIT; and a failure to establish mandatory savings or employee training programs.<sup>64</sup> The list of infractions at Empacadora Regiomontana, so long for such a small company, however, was probably the norm at a company of its size. Certainly, federal labor inspectors could have predicted that they would encounter the most deficiencies at those businesses least able to implement newly legislated safety measures and employee programs. It was at small companies like Empacadora Regiomontana, perhaps, where onerous (and expensive) requirements were least likely to be met.

One can imagine that it was exactly this kind of demand on employers, so frequently-imposed in the federal labor code, that small, perhaps family-run companies loathed as an unproductive form of government intervention in their business. Many owners, big and small, refused to comply with government mandates they deemed as burdensome. Based on the inspection reports described above, management at Morena, Productora de Papel, and Empacadora Regiomontana were negligent in meeting their responsibilities to their workers in several regards. But did this mean that these owners were unpatriotic? Perhaps not. A scan of labor inspection reports from 1975 suggests that few companies executed perfect worker safety practices and complied with each safety provision required in the NLFT. Very likely, these owners mirrored their peers at other companies in the gradual pace in which they implemented newly mandated safety reforms.

#### *ASSESSING THE UNIONIST PRIVILEGE IN INDIVIDUAL LABOR SUITS*

Owners of the early 1970s could have been forgiven for concluding that the contemporary legal climate that sponsored the proliferation of collective contracts, liberalized the right to strike, ushered in the creation of new federal labor tribunals, and imposed onerous health and safety requirements on employers was weighted against them. Each of these developments contributed to the general suspicion that the deck was stacked against them in the arena of tripartite labor mediation. Were, then, the allegations launched by owners of a government bias against the interests of business in the post-

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4-6.



Tlatelolco period valid? Was the heralded return of social justice to the Mexican workplace a development that necessarily boded poorly for owners of the era? Previous chapters have demonstrated that a real rhetorical bias was shown by post-Tlatelolco officials for the interests of labor over capital. Did this verbal posturing, however, produce real gains for the workers in their individual battles with employers? This chapter now examines instances of individual worker activism via the filing of labor suits (*pleitos*) to test the merits of these assumptions and address these crucial questions.<sup>65</sup>

#### Personal Indemnification Suits

Workers took advantage of newly awarded rights and filed labor suits with local and federal labor authorities in record numbers in the 1970s. Individual workers raised labor suits to protest employer behaviors they perceived were in violation of basic contractual terms or clauses established in the new labor code. Personal indemnification suits encompassed a good chunk of labor litigation in the period. And workers who took advantage of increased access to labor mediation needed not be members of unions, (though one's labor status may have influenced the outcome of their suit). Trinidad Cruz Rodríguez was not a member of a union when he signed an individual contract for temporary employment with the Federal Electric Commission (CFE) to work as part of a crew clearing weeds about ten kilometers outside of the city of Villahermosa, Tabasco. The job turned bloody on the afternoon of October 25, 1973 when a blow from a co-worker's machete struck Cruz nearly severing the pinky finger from his right hand and opening up a gusher of blood.<sup>66</sup> He was then rushed to a hospital in Villahermosa where he was treated by a doctor who informed him that the finger, being "practically lost" upon arrival, could not be saved. The finger was amputated and the wound sutured.

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<sup>65</sup> Pleito is literally a law suit. However, it is better understood in this context as a labor suit or labor grievance in that it is raised by workers or owners and decided by a tripartite commission rather than a single judge.

<sup>66</sup> AGN, STPS, DGIFT, Box 1082, Folder 13/106-D.X-"75"-9/1/2. Letter from Ignacio Olvera Quintero to José María Esquivel Torres, July 21, 1975, 1. Spanish reads: Viejo a diez kilómetros aproximadamente de Villahermosa, en un momento dado el otro trabajador al dar un golpe de machete para cortar yerba, alcanzó a golpear al trabajador en la mano derecha, notando en seguida que escurría gran cantidad de sangre y que estaba colgada gran parte del dedo meñique, fué llevado a un sanatorio de Villahermosa donde el médico que lo atendió, le informó que el dedo estaba prácticamente perdido, le extirpó los tejidos dañados y regularizó el muñón.

Incapacitated, Cruz was granted six weeks of recuperation time. When he returned to work on December 6 he noted that he carried out his labors painfully and with diminished strength.<sup>67</sup> A subsequent examination by the CFE's Medical Services Department determined that the injury he suffered left him permanently disabled but was not serious enough to prevent him from resuming habitual life activities and continuing his labors on the road crew. Company officials determined that the injury, being a result of work activities, entitled Cruz to indemnification, though the extent of the injury they felt was minimal. The accident was deemed to hinder Cruz's performance by only ten percent – a logical, albeit somewhat Faustian, conclusion given that the worker had lost exactly one-tenth of his manual digits.<sup>68</sup> The company then resolved to indemnify him at a rate established in Clause 27 of the NLFT's Permanent Injury Table of Valuations – a total that would award him 4,013.17 pesos, representing ten percent of 1,095 days of his salary of 36.65 pesos per day.

Cruz took issue with the judgment. He rejected the company's settlement offer and filed a pleito with the federal labor authorities to force the CFE to compensate him at a level he deemed fair and appropriate. For Cruz, a free worker, the wheels of justice moved especially slowly. Twenty-one months after suffering the injury and more than a year and half after disputing the medical evaluation his case was finally concluded by federal labor authorities. A July 21, 1975 letter from Federal Labor Delegate Ignacio Olvera Quintero to José María Esquivel Torres, CFE Southeast Division manager, upheld the company's evaluation. Olvera agreed that the injuries sustained by the worker while on the job constituted a ten percent disability. In accordance with terms set by the law, this entitled him to a compensation package equal to ten percent of 1,095 days of salary, or 4,013.17 pesos as previously determined by the company.<sup>69</sup>

Cruz's labor suit was unsuccessful. His attempt to force his employer to better compensate him for his injuries was denied. Labor authorities saw fit to enforce the minimum terms established by law and award him for injuries sustained while on the job,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 2. Legalese of report reads: Dichas lesiones producen incapacidad orgánico-funcional, parcial y permanente valuada en 10%.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

but the amount was a pittance in the opinion of the aggrieved worker. What may account for this injustice? In this instance, the labor status of the worker becomes crucial. Cruz, though he labored for the CFE with an individual contract in place, was a free worker and not unionized. This differentiated him from the great majority of CFE employees who were *sutermistas* – electrical workers grouped into the SUTERM, the nation’s largest electrical workers union. Constituting the vast majority of CFE employees, *sutermistas* exerted a collective sway over the company that enabled them to write generous terms into the collective contract that governed workplace relations. Certainly, the indemnification package given to Cruz Rodríguez in accordance with the NLFT would have been intolerable to the typical *sutermista*. Clause 61 of the CFE-SUTERM labor agreement put in place for 1974-1976 stipulated that a worker who suffered partial and permanent incapacitation was entitled to receive an indemnification payment equal to 1450 days of salary. The worker could then choose to retire with a pension according to his or her employment history, or return to work if he or she desired so and was capable.<sup>70</sup> Hypothetically, therefore, had Cruz been a member of the SUTERM, his lost finger would have fetched him a compensation check in the amount of 53,142.5 pesos – substantially more than the 4,013.17 pesos he received – and even more still were he to earn a salary commensurate with that of the typical *sutermista*. Other pension terms established in the CFE-SUTERM collective contract, particularly in the area of death compensation, were similarly munificent, though widows of deceased union members were frequently required to raise labor suits to enforce company compliance of them.<sup>71</sup>

Justo Pérez Romero was alive and well when he pondered retiring from the CFE in 1975 after twenty-five years of service to the company. Seeking to put his ducks in order, he inquired about the size of his pension but was shocked to learn that it was significantly less than he expected. Fortunately for Pérez, he was a member of SUTERM and the terms of his retirement were clearly demarcated in the existing collective

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<sup>70</sup> See “CONTRATO COLECTIVO DE TRABAJO. COMISION FEDERAL DE ELECTRICIDAD & SINDICATO UNICO DE TRABAJADORES ELECTRICISTAS DE LA REPUBLICA MEXICANA. 1974-1976,” *SUTERM*, April, 1974, 5-28.

<sup>71</sup> Various labor grievances raised in August 1975 with JFC No. 1 by widows of ex-SUTERM members based in Mérida, Yucatán saw petitioners press the Federal Electric Commission to follow through with collective contract obligations and compensate them for husbands killed on job. See AGN, STPS, DGIFT, Box 1082, Folder 13/106-D.X-“75”-9/1/2, 1975, 1.

contract. Aware of his rights, he went to his union representative and asked that he raise a case with federal authorities to force the company to fulfill its contractual obligations to him. A petition was filed on November 6, 1975 by his union representative with the Federal Permanent Conciliation Board No. 14 located in Mérida, Yucatán. In it, the SUTERM demanded that the CFE honor terms established in Clause 69 of the collective contract and issue Pérez a check for 77,118 pesos – a sum corresponding to amount of twelve days of wages for each of the twenty-five years he had been on the job. The demand was granted and the CFE was ordered to pay Pérez the amount he was contractually owed. Upon receipt of his pension, we can assume, Pérez received an amount akin to a small fortune to the average worker in his area. Pérez, though, was not an average worker. He was a member of one of the nation's premier unions and as such enjoyed a salary – then at 257.06 pesos per day – that distanced him from the typical *Yucateco* who was guaranteed by federal law a minimum daily salary ranging only from 55.40 to 73.20 pesos depending on the location of one's employment and the nature of the work they performed.<sup>72</sup>

#### Unlawful Termination Suits

Another major field of individual action were labor suits raised by workers to protest what they deemed was unlawful termination (*despido injustificado*) of their employment. In this regard, it appears, one's labor status again played a role in the resolution of his or her case. Unionists frequently benefited from the presence of a collective contract that gave them job security. Free workers, on the other hand, often went to work unaware of even the minimum rights guaranteed them by the law. Nevertheless, free workers, like unionists, filed pleitos by the thousands with labor authorities claiming that they were wrongly dismissed from their jobs and in search of proper redress. Cayetano Cárdenas Estrada, a construction worker and member of Local 74 of the Industrial Union of Mexican Cement, Lime, Plaster and Affiliated Industries in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, was fired by his employer Empresa Materiales on October 19, 1974 for demanding an increase in his salary to reflect changes in his job duties.

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<sup>72</sup> See Editorial, "Comision Nacional de los Salarios Minimos. Salarios Minimos Generales y del Campo Que Estaran Vigentes del 1º. de Octubre al 31 de Diciembre de 1976," *Ceteme*, October 9, 1976, 7.

According to labor authority records, Cárdenas was fired after an altercation he had with his supervisor, Pedro Peña, who told him “If you don’t want to work, get the hell out of here!”<sup>73</sup> Peña then dismissed Cárdenas from the job site and promised to see him fired. To this, Cárdenas informed his union of the situation and filed a complaint with Federal Labor Delegation No. 3 claiming that his firing was unlawful and in violation of terms established in the contract between the company and his union. A conciliatory meeting that brought together company, labor, and government representatives was convened on November 4. The meeting concluded with Cárdenas having his job returned to him and the union rescinding its complaint against the company.<sup>74</sup>

Jorge Aviles Nava worked as assistant office manager at the San Luis, Sonora branch of the CFE. On July 22, 1975, he was accused of stealing from the cash drawer where customer payments were collected. When questioned further, Aviles produced a large quantity of money and returned it to company officials. He was promptly fired. Aviles, a member of SUTERM, contacted his union liaison who then approached management and admitted that although Nava was in possession of a large amount of funds, the shortage resulted from an accounting error and was not evidence of criminal activity. This was a risk, apparently, that had long worried the union and it had requested on numerous occasions that the CFE create an overage fund to prevent workers from having to cover shortages out of their own pockets and protect them from false allegations of theft.<sup>75</sup> Aviles stayed fired, however, forcing the union to file an unlawful termination petition with state labor authorities. In testimony given to the Federal Labor Delegation No. 1 in September, local union leader Ramon Juárez Beltran spoke on behalf of Aviles and expressed SUTERM’s belief that the worker had been dismissed for political reasons. Moreover, he felt that the firing had violated Clause 39 of the valid CFE-SUTERM collective contract that required the company to inform the union in

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<sup>73</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1183, Folder D.III/201:710.1(6)/43. Letter from Mauro Muñoz T., Juan Ruiz Jimenez, and Cayetano Cárdenas Estrada to Juan Antonio Morales Gomez, October 24, 1974. Spanish reads: Si no quieres trabajar, yo te mando mucho a la chingada. The in-text translation likely minimizes the force of the retort.

<sup>74</sup> Federal Labor Inspector Juan Antonio Morales Gómez submitted a report on November 6<sup>th</sup> stating that the union was satisfied with the result of the negotiations and had rescinded its complaint against the company.

<sup>75</sup> AGN, STPS, DGIFT, Box 1081, Folder 106-D1 “75”/9/1-2, 1975, 1. Affidavit submitted by Raul Marmolejo Lozano, September 10, 1975.

writing of its intention prior to dismissing a worker. For as much, the union did not consider Aviles fired and had not moved to replace him.<sup>76</sup>

Following the testimony of Juárez, José Vidrio Casillas, superintendent of the San Luis zone spoke on behalf of the CFE. He explained that he fired Aviles after it became apparent that he had used his position to embezzle funds from the company. This was a legitimate and lawful course of action, he maintained, and he cited Article 47 of the NLFT that afforded employers the power to fire employees who violated basic workplace conditions. Federal Labor Inspector Raul Marmolejo Lozano considered the merits of the contrasting positions and emitted a ruling. In his opinion, the facts of the case revealed that crucial aspects of the valid collective contract had been violated. Specifically, he pointed to Clause 39 of the contract that gave the SUTERM power to fill open positions in the company and made the CFE's firing decisions subject to union review. Based on a strict interpretation of this language, Marmolejo had no choice but to endorse the union position. The union did not sanction the Juárez dismissal. As such, the firing violated contractual language and was thus, illegal.

The two cases described above shed light on a larger trend in tripartite labor mediation of the period. In the first case, the worker Cárdenas was dismissed from his job for purportedly refusing to work. In the second case, the worker Aviles was dismissed for allegedly stealing. In both instances, the process of labor mediation ran its course and concluded with the reinstatement of the fired employees. In both instances, the government conceded to the claims made by the workers that they were unlawfully terminated. Cárdenas and Aviles returned to work the following weeks. Employers who ended up on the wrong side of the judgments had cause for concern. To them, the alleged trend in labor-capital relations tending toward the interests of workers over owners seemed ever more real. In the post-1970 era of social justice and worker's vindication, an employee's transgressions appeared irrelevant if a collective contract was in place. In a real sense, owners lacked even the power to decide who worked for them and who they could remove. The employees in question were unionists. They were, one could surmise, entitled to their jobs.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 3.

As much as this perception may have seemed like reality to disgruntled owners in the post-Tlatleolco period, it was not – at least not empirically. Tripartite labor boards of the era did not rule unanimously in favor of employees when resolving unlawful termination suits. Company attendance policies varied, but Article 47 of the NLFT gave employers the right to fire an employee for thirteen separate reasons including “immoral acts in the workplace,” e.g. stealing (Clause 7,) and non-presentation or absence from work without company authorization (Clause 10.)<sup>77</sup> Dozens of cases I have examined show that employers’ decisions to fire workers for reasons of non-presentation were largely upheld by authorities.<sup>78</sup> Owners in the overwhelming majority of these cases cited Article 47 to found their decisions to terminate one’s employment and most conveyed their trust that labor officials would uphold the law and resolve the matter in their favor. The great majority of these owners had their expectations met; their decisions to fire workers were seldom overturned.

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In sum, the sample of individual labor suits analyzed in this chapter challenges the presence of a functioning favoritism on the part of state mediators for the cause of workers over employers.<sup>79</sup> Neither does an analysis of the increased safety requirements imposed on owners suggest any demonstrable trend in law to favor one side of the production process over the other. Undoubtedly, the New Federal Labor Law of 1970 thrust technical demands upon employers to ensure workers’ safety that were construed as onerous and costly. Yet, this fact should not be conflated with altering the spirit of the law or showing a juridical bias for workers over employers. More likely, the law was

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<sup>77</sup> See STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición*, 198-199.

<sup>78</sup> Among others, see AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1180, Folder Clasificación: D.III/201.1(6) Generalidades Trabajo Estado de Chihuahua. Letter from Assistant Manager Centro Artesanal Ciudad Juárez to Victor Manuel Saenz Manzano, May 23, 1973; and AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1183, Folder D.III/201:710.1(6). Letter from Jesús Valencia Bohórquez to José R. Muñoz, May 10, 1973, 28.

<sup>79</sup> Kevin J. Middlebrook concluded as much in a similar, albeit more extensive, study he conducted of labor records for the period. As he saw it, there existed little statistical evidence to corroborate a philosophical bias for labor over capital in the adjudication of labor grievances. These conclusions contrast with those adhered to by earlier scholars who surmised, quite precariously, that the overt pro-labor posture of the presidential administration equated into real gains for workers in their individual contests with owners. Moreover, Middlebrook’s analysis led him to believe that no statistical relationship between the number of strikes raised and the perceived liberal or conservative posture of the presidential administration existed, nor did any correlation between economic variables such as inflation or economic growth and a rate of labor activity. See Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution*, 165-166.

modernized to meet contemporary realities of the workplace more than it was radicalized to favor one factor of the production process over another.

Regardless, employers complained about a state bias for workers over owners as they felt themselves assaulted on multiple fronts – both in labor establishment rhetoric and in select terms of the NLFT. That the NLFT granted workers new legal license to strike and expanded the body of the state’s labor mediation apparatus were developments, many felt, that did not bode well for business. COPARMEX lawyer Cavazos lamented this reality when he summarized the new labor code to owners in 1971. He warned them about the potential pitfalls of tripartite mediation. He wrote:

If the violation of the clause [in a collective contract] can be indemnified voluntarily, so much the better, but it cannot be forgotten that the public interest is becoming a spur that is every day being felt with more force; if a conciliatory agreement is not possible between the two parts, then the ‘third’ [part] intervenes to try to reconcile...the opposing interests, and only in the case that conciliation is not possible, it will act as an ‘arbiter in the solution of the problem.’<sup>80</sup>

The cynical tone of the passage was unmistakable. Cavazos description of the “public interest” as a “spur” suggested that he understood state and union rhetoric on collective benefit and social justice as a hindrance to Mexican prosperity. That he counseled employers to avoid mediation and thus avoid the involvement of a ‘third’ part in the process also hinted at his deep distrust of the government and lack of confidence in its objectivity. Cavazos shared the sentiments of many business owners who believed that the system was weighted against them.

The fears of owners, albeit occasionally overblown, did have some ground to stand on. The rules of the game had been altered in substantive ways with the implementation of the NLFT on May 1, 1970. The NLFT, for example, required employers to report any action taken to dismiss a worker whose behavior they deemed in violation of workplace terms. This was a bureaucratic development that taxed the employer and involved the state in in-house company matters to an unprecedented

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<sup>80</sup> Cavazos Flores, 274-275. Spanish reads: Si la violación de la cláusula puede resarcirse voluntariamente, mejor, pues no hay que olvidar que el interés público es un acicate que se deja sentir cada vez con mayor fuerza; si no posible un arreglo conciliatorio entre las partes, interviene entonces el ‘tercero’, para tratar de avenir en primer término, los intereses controvertidos, y sólo en caso de que la conciliación no sea posible, actuará como ‘árbitro en la solución del problema’.



degree. The concerns voiced by employers, even if they were not bolstered statistically, were partly understandable for it appeared that even business functions as basic as hiring and firing had become government domain in the post-1970 era. The creation of new federalized labor tribunals could be understood in a similar vein, for that too was a development that deprived local actors of jurisdiction over the settling of labor disputes and concentrated power in the hands of a federal body. In some regards, therefore, unionists could have been rightfully accused of forming the labor aristocracy that their critics were so wont to allege. Never, certainly, could unionized workers count on one-hundred percent complicity from state and federal labor authorities; employers frequently won favorable judgements in personal indemnification and unlawful termination suits by citing federal law and pointing to contractual provisions that supported their actions. Yet, when considered together, the NLFT's expanded scope of worker activity and its tendency to centralize the labor mediation process formed trends that offered sufficient cause to at least fan the concerns of business elements who felt as did Cavazos that the rising tide of "public interest" had become a "...spur that [was] every day being felt with more force" in Mexico.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Again, see Cavazos Flores, 274-275.

**CHAPTER NINE**  
**‘THE LABOR ARISTOCRACY,’ PART TWO: WHY IT PAID TO BE**  
**UNIONIZED**

On the morning August 27, 1973, three men who had recently lost their jobs as temporary workers on a federal highway project appeared in the offices of Federal Labor Delegation No. 3 in the city of Torreón, Coahuila. There the men, Angel Jacquez, Claro Frayre, and Roberto Cruz Martínez lodged a complaint with Federal Labor Delegate Salvador Castillo Rivera against Roberto Santos who was the foreman of the road crew they had labored on near their homes in Cuencamé, Durango. As the men told Castillo, Santos gave them “very heavy tasks” and did not pay them the minimum salary nor the seventh-day pay they were entitled to.<sup>1</sup> They called his assignments “inhumane,” and they vowed not to accept them as they were [only] line workers, or *trabajadores de raya*.<sup>2</sup> They demanded that Castillo order Santos before labor authorities to answer for his actions. Furthermore, the men requested that Santos show himself in the local labor offices of Cuencamé, a venue that was much closer to where they lived and one that would require fewer travel expenses. Castillo granted the men’s requests. Santos was ordered by Castillo to appear before labor authorities in Cuencamé on September 5.

Before Santos made his appearance to discuss conditions at the job-site, he took matters into his own hands. On August 29, just two days after Jacquez, Frayre, and Cruz trekked to Torreón to lodge a formal complaint with Castillo, Santos confronted seventeen men who formed the crew that worked at kilometer eight of the highway being built to span the villages of Santa Clara and El Naranjo (both in Durango) and informed them that all labors on the road had been suspended. He collected the tools and equipment in the men’s possession and dismissed them from the work-site, in effect, leaving them unemployed. Three days later, Castillo received many of the recently-fired

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<sup>1</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1180, Folder “Clasificación: D.III/201.1. Generalidades Asuntos Laborales – Comparencia.” Report by José Santos Reyes Gaytán, September 5, 1973, 1. Spanish reads: ...les da tareas bastante exageradas y no se les paga el salario mínimo ni séptimo día...; Se quejan de que el patrón o su representante, si no aceptan las tareas que se les asigna, como dicen, inhumanas, no les acepta como trabajadores de raya.

<sup>2</sup> “Trabajadores de raya” refers in this case to the fact that the men were awarded temporary employment by the government because they were at the top of a list, or, metaphorically, at the front of a line of available workers.

road workers in his Torreón office. There, they requested that he investigate the illegal conditions under which they toiled and asked him intervene to reinstate their jobs and recover lost wages.<sup>3</sup>

These and other issues were on the agenda at the September 5 meeting held in Cuencamé. The site of the meeting was not neutral ground, (it was held in Santos's office,) yet employees and management were given equal opportunity to state their cases before José Santos Reyes Gaytán, an inspector for Federal Labor Delegation No. 3 dispatched by Castillo to investigate the case. Workers reiterated their discontent over conditions imposed upon them by Santos, again calling the nature of the work "inhumane." In his defense, Santos argued that the job performance of the workers was poor and that it did not meet the standards required by the Ministry of Communication and Public Works – the government body that sponsored the project. He explained that according to official specifications for road construction, workers were required to dig holes measuring twelve cubic meters in soft ground, eight cubic meters in semi-hard ground, and four cubic meters in hard ground. Santos testified that he instructed workers only to make holes of four cubic meters, a minimum task, he claimed, that they failed to meet.<sup>4</sup> With regard to salaries, he explained that he adjusted wages according to the minimum salary established in the region in which they worked, (that being eighteen pesos per day in Zone No. 36 Durango, East,) and that the seventh-day pay was included as part of a three pesos bonus given to workers upon the completion of each shift. After six shifts, therefore, workers accrued 126 pesos – a total which, if divided by seven, was eighteen pesos per day, satisfying the minimum wage threshold in the region.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Santos spoke to the issue of the work stoppage and the dismissed workers. He admitted

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<sup>3</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1180, Folder "Clasificación: D.III/201.1. Generalidades Asuntos Laborales", Letter from Diego Beltran Rodríguez, Zeferino Beltran Rodríguez, et. al. to Salvador Castillo Rivera, September 5, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1180, Folder "Clasificación: D.III/201.1. Generalidades Asuntos Laborales – Acta de Investigación," Report by José Santos Reyes Gaytán, September 5, 1973, 2-3. Spanish reads: ...que conforme oficio que obra en su poder en forma de instructivo, de la superioridad, en el cual se ordena la longitud de las tareas que deberán designarse a los trabajadores y que dice que en terreno blando deberá de ser como tarea 12M<sup>3</sup>, en semiduro 8M<sup>3</sup> y en duro 4M<sup>3</sup> y que él en lo general ha asignado a cada trabajador solamente 4M<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 2. Spanish reads: ...ya se asienta, igualmente sí aparece en la lista de raya la proporción a cada día trabajando que es de \$3.00, por lo tanto si un trabajador labora un día, se le pagan \$18.00 más 3.00 (pesos) por concepto de 7º día que suman 21.00 diarios.

that he had shut down the site on August 29 but had done so because of problems that were festering. He blamed Cruz Martínez for agitating workers with distorted truths and riling them up with excessive demands. As for the other fired workers Frayre and Jacquez, Santos explained that Frayre was terminated weeks earlier after he left the worksite for undisclosed reasons and Jacquez and Cruz Martínez were let go for insubordination though they continued to report to work without authorization from labor authorities until the project was suspended on August 29.<sup>6</sup>

The arguments of the road crew workers and Santos were heard by Reyes Gaytán and their merits considered. Reyes Gaytán then proposed a deal. He asked Santos if he would resume construction under the conditions presented by the workers to the Federal Labor Delegation if, in exchange, workers would submit to the orders they received from the Ministry of Public Works (via Santos) without ire or protestation. On this topic, Reyes Gaytán impressed upon both sides that they were mutually workers in the employ of the federal government. It was the Ministry of Public Works, essentially, and not Santos, that was the *patrón*, or boss, of the project. As such, they were encouraged to put aside personal animosities in favor of compromise and, perhaps even demonstrate an air of patriotism. Santos acceded to the labor inspector's wishes. Workers too accepted the terms. Reyes Gaytán then targeted September 11 – the start of a new two-week pay period – for the resumption of labor activities.<sup>7</sup>

The following day, September 6, Reyes Gaytán sent his official report to Castillo. He detailed the resolution reached between Santos and the crewmembers – the crux of which was an agreement that dismissed workers were to be re-hired under the condition that they obey the directives Santos issued them, and that Santos implement working conditions as determined by the public works ministry. The deal was agreeable to both sides. Workers approved of it because it gave them their jobs back – albeit, they remained only temporary workers – and it permitted federal labor authorities to intervene to correct violations they perceived to be present. The deal placated Santos as well because it guaranteed him the subordination of his employees and permitted him to complete the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

project without undue worker agitation or hostility. The report of Reyes Gaytán, though, was not entirely conciliatory. The labor inspector opined that the salaries afforded to the members of the crew were too low even though they met the minimum standards established by National Minimum Wage Commission.<sup>8</sup>

Durango road workers surely shared Reyes Gaytán's discontent with the low compensation they received for their work, yet the wages they received were not trivial parts of their lives. Days after reaching the accord with Santos, members of the Santa Clara-El Naranjo road crew petitioned labor authorities again, this time to recover wages lost during the three-day period they did not work while operations were suspended at the site. Another letter was addressed to Reyes Gaytán and was signed by several members of the road crew including Diego Beltran Rodríguez, Zeferino Beltran Rodríguez, and Margarito Beltran Rodríguez – all residents of Santa Clara and very likely brothers.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, these men considered their lost pay significant. Reyes Gaytán, however, though he had previously shown himself an ally by expressing his discomfort over the question of wages, did not sympathize with the petitioners. He informed them that the workplace dispute had been resolved and future government involvement in the case was not appropriate. He instructed them that any future salary disputes should be taken up directly with their employer, the Ministry of Public Works. This kind of bureaucratic maneuvering did not deter the workers. The workers replied to Reyes Gaytán and confirmed in a September 15 letter their intention to pursue the matter of lost wages with the labor ministry.<sup>10</sup>

The case of the Durango road workers, though small in scope, provides valuable insight into understanding larger realities of contemporary workplace relations. The case's details are illustrative in several ways, but perhaps no more so than for the ways they reveal the intense disparity in benefits and privileges enjoyed by unionized and free

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<sup>8</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1180, Folder "Clasificación: D.III/201.1. Generalidades Asuntos Laborales – Informe Complementario." Letter from José Santos Reyes Gaytán to Salvador Castillo Rivera, September 6, 1973.

<sup>9</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1180, Folder "Clasificación: D.III/201.1. Generalidades Asuntos Laborales," Letter from Salvador Castillo Rivera to Diego Beltran Rodríguez, Zeferino Beltran Rodríguez, et. al., September 11, 1973.

<sup>10</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1180, Folder "Clasificación: D.III/201.1. Generalidades Asuntos Laborales", Letter from Zeferino Beltran Rodríguez, et. al. to Salvador Castillo Rivera, September 15, 1973.

workers. The men who toiled on the road crew described above were, *quite obviously*, not unionized. Classified officially by authorities as temporary workers (*eventuales*), the men, in fact, held an even lower position on the labor establishment's pecking order. They were akin to *peones* (peons) or those selected from a pool of able-bodied individuals to perform a temporary task in the area. Working for the government, men like the Beltran Rodríguez brothers enjoyed some benefits and protections. They were not mere day-laborers (*jornaleros*). They had a fixed salary and did not arrive to work each morning expecting their wages to fluctuate in accordance with the size of the available labor supply. Nevertheless, their employment was dangerous, unstable, and poorly compensated.

Workers complained of conditions that were “inhumane” but did not specify exactly how the conditions imposed upon them were unlawful. Had the workers been unionized, they could have benefited from a union representative or lawyer who could cite each of the safety violations present at the worksite. The workers pursued legal action and achieved a semi-favorable resolution, yet labor authorities did not mandate the creation of worker's safety, hygiene, or training programs as was commonly done in the resolution of union-company disputes. Moreover, actions implemented by Santos showed that the nature of their work was precarious; workers could be summarily dismissed at the whim of a foreman without any immediate legal recourse. And though the intervention of labor authorities secured the workers the return of their jobs, they were still ordered to subordinate themselves and refrain from future militancy. Finally, the wage question, if nothing else, conclusively demonstrated the disadvantaged status of the free worker. The federal labor inspector deemed the wages that the complainants received as insufficient – a logical conclusion for any rational-thinking individual when one considered the paucity of their twenty-one peso daily salary against the nature of the work they performed on sun-baked highways during the heat of the Durango summer. Nevertheless, he was unwilling to assist them to recover lost wages from the work stoppage.

In all, these Durango road workers took advantage of available state resources to protest working conditions, and in the end their litigation yielded fruit. Still, the manner in which this case was resolved left much to be desired for the free workers involved. The

resolution would have been a pill impossible to swallow by the typical post-Tlatelolco unionist. An analysis of formal labor litigation undertaken in the period suggests that contemporary unionists harbored broader ambitions in their conflicts with employers. Moreover, the records hint that the status of one's union was similarly important in determining the outcome of labor suits raised in the period. These and other claims are investigated in the remainder of the chapter.

#### *ASSESSING THE UNIONIST PRIVILEGE IN COLLECTIVE LABOR NEGOTIATION*

##### The Power of the Collective Contract

Certainly the members of the aluminum workers union "Librado Rivera" pursued loftier goals than did their compañeros in Durango when they threatened to strike against their Veracruz-based employers in early 1973. The ambitiousness of their goals corresponded to the strength of their bargaining position. As employees of Aluminio, a company with over 1,500 employees and belonging to the metal conglomerate TAMSA (Steel Tubes of Mexico,) "Librado Rivera" members threatened to shut down operations at a company that produced over 80,000 tons of aluminum a year and was one of the most important manufacturers of that metal in Latin America.<sup>11</sup> Formed into the CROC, the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants, a national labor organization with clout surpassed only perhaps by the CTM, members of "Librado Rivera" were also found at work in nearby shipyards where they put their aluminum-working skills toward the construction of ships in Veracruz harbor. On February 6 of that year, leaders of the union filed a strike petition with the Federal Conciliation Board No. 12 in Veracruz, Veracruz and explained that members of the union would cease labor activities at 11:00 p.m. on March 1 if certain terms they desired were not included in the new collective contract they were then negotiating with management.<sup>12</sup> That same day, executives at Aluminio and Inmobiliaria Aluminio, another aluminum plant that employed "Librado Rivera" members, received a similar letter. The letter had asked management to make changes to

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<sup>11</sup>José Murillo Tejeda, "La Empresa no Concedió las Prestaciones que Solicitaron," *Diario Veracruz*, March 3, 1973, 1/15.

<sup>12</sup> AGN, STPS, JFCA No. 12, Box 1310, Folder "Emplazamiento a Huelga planteado por el Sindicato Librado Rivera Conexos y Similares de Aluminio Vs. Las Empresas Aluminio Inmobiliaria Aluminio." Letter from Moisés Rodríguez Mendoza and Mario Acenjo Carazin to President, JFC No. 12, February 6, 1973.

the labor agreement and invited them to attend meetings to hear their demands. After a month and half of tense negotiations, though, talks were stalled with no positive results achieved. The union then resolved to exercise its right to strike to obtain contractual revisions it felt entitled to. Executives were informed of this intention and reminded of their obligation to cover any and all expenses incurred by workers in pursuit of this constitutionally-protected action.<sup>13</sup>

Two days later, on February 8, management had the opportunity to state its case before federal labor authorities and respond to the strike petition filed against them. Gustavo Ortega O., attorney for the companies, affirmed to officials that company and union representatives had held talks though they had failed to bring positive results. What, in Ortega's opinion, was the reason for the failure? The petitioners he believed were not truly committed to finding "equilibrium" between the company and its workers. In his words: "The demands in question [those made by the union] can be considered in every way exorbitant and unrealistic; for as much, those I represent expressly manifest their discontent with them."<sup>14</sup> Ortega assured that the company remained committed to continuing talks with the union, but only if talks were based on "just and equitable bases" and toward the end of "harmonizing" the rights of labor with those of capital.

Ortega's assessment of the state of negotiations was revealing. He assailed the union's demands as "exorbitant" and "unrealistic," yet he accepted the worker's fundamental right to pursue balance in the production process. That Ortega, a company representative, incorporated the contemporary watchwords of 'equilibrium,' 'just and equitable,' and 'harmony' into his testimony proved that such concepts were impossible to exclude in tripartite discourse of the era. Owners could not promote a strict capitalist, i.e. sterile, pro-business, line and reasonably expect a positive outcome before state officials. Social justice, it appeared, had become a rubric within which all elements were required to operate inside of. Ortega did so and argued ownership's case by deriding

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> AGN, STPS, JFCA No. 12, Box 1310, Folder "Emplazamiento a Huelga planteado por el Sindicato Librado Rivera Conexos y Similares de Aluminio Vs. Las Empresas Aluminio Inmobiliaria Aluminio." Affidavit of Gustavo Ortega O. submitted to President, JFC No. 12, February 8, 1973, 1. Spanish reads: Las peticiones en cuestión pueden considerarse por todos conceptos como desorbitadas y fuera de toda realidad por lo que mis representadas expresamente manifiestan su inconformidad con las mismas.



workers' demands for the ways that they themselves contravened concepts then so ubiquitous and so often lauded as noble and revolutionary.

Why, exactly, did Ortega view union demands as exorbitant or unrealistic? How, for instance, could employers view workers' priorities as adverse to the social goals of balance, justice, and harmony? For potential clues, let us consider the terms proposed in the hotly-disputed collective contract draft presented to the companies by the union in December 1972. The document was a twenty-eight page draft that included a three page payscale setting wages for each job conducted by members of "Librado Rivera." The first section of the document referred to basic moral understandings between the companies and the union. Article 3 (as referenced in Chapter Eight) stated:

The rules of work are designed toward achieving balance and social justice in worker-business relations. Labor is a right and a social duty. It is not an article of commerce, it demands respect for the liberties and dignity of those who conduct it and it must be undertaken under conditions that assure life, health, and a decent economic level for the worker and his family.<sup>15</sup>

Employees were then classified in crucial ways. Article 4 stated that technical experts the company hired (*personal de confianza*) needed not be members of the union. Their number, though, could never exceed more than 2.5 percent of the number of union members at work in the company (Article 10).<sup>16</sup> Provisions were made for the hiring of temporary and part-time workers brought on in various capacities for the completion of determined jobs (Article 9), though the contract stipulated that the hiring of these non-unionized employees required written approval of the union prior to their arrival (Article 14).<sup>17</sup> The company, for that matter, was to make the union aware in writing of all vacancies so that it could furnish the company with an employee within seventy-two hours. In the event that the union could not fill the position within that time frame, the

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<sup>15</sup> AGN, STPS, JFCA No. 12, Box 1310, Folder "Emplazamiento a Huelga planteado por el Sindicato Librado Rivera Conexos y Similares de Aluminio Vs. Las Empresas Aluminio Inmobiliaria Aluminio." Collective Contract (draft) of Sindicato "Librado Rivera" de Trabajadores en General Conexos y Similares de Aluminio, S.A. de C.V. and Aluminio, S.A. de C.V. and Inmobiliaria Aluminio, S.A. de C.V., December 11, 1972, 1. For original Spanish, see Chapter Seven, footnote 18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

company was free to hire an employee though he or she was to be paid a salary that corresponded to the union rate afforded for that post (Article 8).<sup>18</sup>

The union's demand to oversee the hiring and compensation processes demonstrated its desire to solidify its status as an indispensable component of company operations. Requiring the company to solicit its approval prior to contracting a new worker and mandating the company to pay a non-unionized worker union wages were both important safeguards against the company's hiring of low-wage replacement (scab) workers. The contract then turned its attention to regulating the terms of the workweek, yearly calendar, vacation structure, annual bonus, and severance pay for workers. The work week was to have a duration of forty hours for day workers, thirty-seven hours, twenty minutes for those who worked mixed (night/day) shifts, and thirty-five hours for those who worked exclusively at night.<sup>19</sup> Unionized employees were to work a five-day, forty-hour work week and rest on Saturday and Sunday, though Article 31 called for the company to compensate unionized employees for a full seven days of work (fifty-six hours.)<sup>20</sup> Article 39 stipulated that if a worker chose to work on Saturday or Sunday he was to receive triple-time pay. He would then also be entitled to a paid day-off the following week. These were extraordinary demands, out of line with even the CTM's campaign, headed by Fidel Velázquez, to institute the maximum five day, forty hour workweek for unionists with pay of six days, or forty-eight hours.

Article 40 listed the obligatory days of rest. They were as follows: January 1 (New Year's Day), February 5 (Constitution Day), March 21 (Birthday of Benito Juárez), May 1 (Labor Day), May 10, September 16 (Independence Day), October 12 (Day of the Race), November 2 (Day of the Dead), November 20 (Day of the Revolution), December 25 (Christmas Day), as well as other Catholic observances including Holy Tuesday and Holy Friday that typically fell in late-March/early-April. September 1, the day of the annual presidential address, was also to be observed as a holiday, as was December 1 but only every sixth year when it corresponded with the start of a new presidential regime

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

and the federal transfer of power.<sup>21</sup> Article 41 outlined the vacation policy. Employees with more than one year of service were entitled to nine paid vacation days; those with more than two years of service – eleven; more than three – thirteen; and more than four – sixteen.<sup>22</sup> Year-end bonuses (*aguinaldo*) were also cemented as a right of the unionist. Article 48 called for members of “Librado Rivera” to receive an annual bonus to be delivered on December 15 so as to properly anticipate Christmas expenses and in an amount equivalent to forty-five days of their salary. Finally, the contract draft set the terms for severance pay for retiring workers. Article 79 specified that in the case of voluntary termination of employment, the company was to pay the worker fifteen days of salary for each year he had worked up to five years. If he had worked more than five years, he was to receive twenty-five days of salary for each year served.<sup>23</sup>

Further analysis of the collective contract draft referenced above showed empirically that very often, it paid to be unionized. Members of “Librado Rivera” expected to go to work each day enjoying benefits that free workers could only dream of. Based just on the pension clause described above, it was apparent that they left work as well with a security blanket that privileged them in comparison to their non-unionized brethren. An aluminum worker who formed himself into the ranks of “Librado Rivera” and was employed building ships in Veracruz harbor was guaranteed a daily wage of eighty pesos. Hypothetically, therefore, according to Article 79, the aluminum worker could retire after twenty years of service with a severance package of 40,000 pesos – the product of the equation  $80 \times 20 \times 25$  (daily salary  $\times$  years of service  $\times$  days of salary for each year served.) This was a hefty nest egg and must have seemed a small fortune for free workers like the Beltran Rodríguez brothers of Santa Clara, who took legal action and petitioned the Federal Labor Delegation to recover sixty-three pesos of lost salary.

Unionists were not simply recipients of employer beneficence; a collective contract was, after all, a reciprocal agreement that balanced the interests of labor and capital by imposing obligations on both sides of the production line. This contract was no

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 22.

different. Article 51 of the draft mandated workers to observe good conduct and successfully meet the job requirements, loan their services to the companies subordinately, execute the job in the agreed upon manner and with the appropriate intensity of care and neatness, keep all tools in a good condition and return them to the company upon termination of each shift, communicate to the company any deficiencies that existed, and scrupulously guard any technical and commercial secrets whose divulgation could cause damage to the company, among other requirements.<sup>24</sup> Article 52 barred workers from reporting to work drunk or under the influence of any drug save medications prescribed by a doctor. Workers were similarly barred from bringing arms into the workplace.<sup>25</sup>

Yet even with these requirements and proscriptions in place, the collective contract draft that was to govern relations between “Librado Rivera” and the companies Aluminio and Inmobiliaria Aluminio gave substantially more attention to the obligations owed by employers to employees than vice versa. Article 49 listed the general requirements of ownership. Employers were mandated to meet all labor regulations, pay salaries that met standards established in labor law, and provide employees with tools, instruments, and materials needed to fulfill their job functions, a place to store their equipment, and sufficient chairs. Employers were also obligated to refrain from using abusive speech toward their workers, produce a bi-weekly pay stub that specified days worked and salary earned, provide their workers medical assistance and periodic check-ups, and ensure that non-unionized employees treated union members respectfully by suspending those who violated said condition.<sup>26</sup> Several other provisions in the contract prescribed the companies’ specific duties as they pertained to union relations. Owners were obliged to provide the union a comfortable and hygienic place “where refreshments and foodstuffs are sold” (Article 49), make deductions from workers’ salaries and deliver monies immediately to the union (Article 46), cover the salaries of the members of the union’s executive committee (Article 61), and grant employees paid-leave to conduct

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

union duties (Article 84, Clause B).<sup>27</sup> One provision even attempted to enforce corporate reverence for the public status of the Mexican worker. Article 81 called for the company to dispense 70,000 pesos annually toward the purchase of uniforms to be worn by workers in civic parades.<sup>28</sup>

The contract draft emitted by members of “Librado Rivera” to owners of Aluminio and Inmobiliaria Aluminio spanned the full spectrum of contemporary unionist demands. Clauses written into the document were meant to ensure that the companies fulfilled their obligation to union members and met each of the exigencies legislated by the New Federal Labor Law in the areas of worker safety and hygiene, professional and social development, housing, and transportation. Article 55 listed several long-term ailments that workers ran the risk of contracting due to the nature of the work they performed. Aluminosis, anthracnose, heat dermatitis, rheumatism, hemorrhoids, gas inhalation intoxication, dust asphyxiation, and fungal infection were identified as professional hazards.<sup>29</sup> To offset the dangers incurred at the workplace, employers were asked to make on-site medical attention permanently available. Because of the dangerous and unhealthy nature of the work performed at the work-sites, employers were also instructed to observe the rules and agreements dictated by the Permanent Safety and Hygiene Commission – to be composed of company and union representatives and to be funded with company resources and housed on company property.<sup>30</sup> Dangers abounded at the workplace, the draft pointed out, and workers were to be compensated for time lost due to injury. Moreover, workers who avoided injury were to be rewarded. Article 77 proposed that any worker who did not suffer an injury during the course of the year should receive a bonus of 1,200 pesos in addition to the annual bonus they received in December.<sup>31</sup>

Other provisions in the document further affirmed the presence of the unionist’s quest for social justice. Members of “Librado Rivera” assigned owners a “high responsibility” to stimulate the social advancement of the worker’s family. In pursuit of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. See pages 10, 12, 15, and 22-23.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 21.

this mission, employers were asked to provide all children of workers books and school materials (Article 82) as well as award a minimum of twenty education scholarships a year to cover other costs of inscription, uniforms, and school materials. In addition, four scholarships were to be made available to employees who wished to return to school and “better themselves” (Article 63). Companies were also charged to spend 20,000 pesos bi-annually to sponsor the development of sport programs for workers. The social value of athletics to the worker was understood as paramount and any worker injured while participating in sports was to receive full pay while he or she recovered (Article 64).<sup>32</sup> Housing allowance provisions were included in the contract in a similar effort to bolster the worker’s home. Salaries were to be augmented with an additional stipend of 400 pesos a month, to be put by the worker toward rent or a mortgage (Article 65). Workers with more than one year of tenure on the job were to have access to company housing (Article 66). Article 68 reminded employers of their federal obligation to provide worker’s housing and recommended they fulfill their duty by creating a rotating fund to issue loans of 80,000 pesos to workers to purchase a home in or near the city of Veracruz. Employees who did not wish to purchase homes would still have access to the funds, it stipulated, though they were to use them toward the purchase of land.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the worker’s home was not to be unduly disrupted by the burden of commuting. Article 87 of the contract draft obliged the company to provide employees bus service to and from central points in the city at the beginning and end of each of the day’s three shifts.<sup>34</sup>

The ambitious scope of the financial and social perks that members of “Librado Rivera” sought to write into their collective contract was accompanied by a substantial wage demand. A payscale (*Tabulador*) listed each job performed by union members in the companies and assigned it a daily wage. The salary range was broad across the diverse professions, yet even the lowest compensated tasks were rewarded relatively well. According to the payscale presented by “Librado Rivera,” the professions worthy of upper-level compensation in each section of industry (with their assigned daily salaries, in pesos) included:

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 23.

- a. group supervisor (80.70), operator supervisor (76.42), and siphoner (74.25) in the electrolysis department;
- b. first material discharge operator (76.42), first coal discharge operator (76.42), and manifold worker (66.80) in the area of ship/cabin services;
- c. master mechanic (94.12), lathe operator (87.28), mechanic (80.45), and welder, blacksmith, plumber, master painter, and mason (80.00) in the mechanical shop;
- d. master automotive mechanic (94.12), second automotive mechanic (80.45), and electrical automotive mechanic (77.84) in the automotive shop;
- e. casting group supervisor (80.07), D.C. casting molder (71.35), and saw worker (71.15) in the casting department;
- f. master electrician (94.12), electrical welder (87.28), and second electrician (87.15) in the electrical shop;
- g. and finally, warehouse administrator (75.00) and tool shop supervisor (73.62) in the warehouse.<sup>35</sup>

In those same departments, the following professions were tagged for middle and lower-level compensation:

- a. production operator (69.82) and second line sealer (44.99) in the electrolysis department;
- b. operator (58.40), burner cleaner (55.05), and duct cleaner (51.15) in the area of ship/cabin services;
- c. painter (59.98), repairer (59.78), assistant welder, assistant mechanic, assistant iron worker, and assistant mason (51.23), and greaser (51.05) in the mechanical shop;
- d. automotive assistant (51.23) in automotive shop; shipment operator (69.05) and assistant caster (49.08) in the casting department;
- e. type-B electrician (73.63) and assistant electrician (51.23) in the electrical shop;
- f. and lastly, freight yard warehouse administrator (66.14) and warehouse assistant (58.69) in the warehouse.<sup>36</sup>

Other union members involved in non-industrial tasks were assigned the following wages: cleaning-crew supervisor (51.23), on-site nurse (61.16), general operator (58.69), and gardener (51.23).<sup>37</sup> Finally, in each department was employed a cleaning person (*mozo* or *peón de limpieza*). Regardless of the department in which they labored, these

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<sup>35</sup> AGN, STPS, JFCA No. 12, Box 1310, Folder “Emplazamiento a Huelga planteado por el Sindicato Librado Rivera Conexos y Similares de Aluminio Vs. Las Empresas Aluminio Inmobiliaria Aluminio”, Tabulator, 1973, 1-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 3.

workers were assigned salaries of 44.99 pesos per day – the minimum to be received by members of the union “Librado Rivera.”<sup>38</sup>

The wages that members of “Librado Rivera” demanded from their employers were lofty by the standards of the day, especially when considered against wages typically afforded non-unionized workers in Veracruz and elsewhere. Granted, minimum wage figures of the period varied greatly from state to state, and there were even differentiations made inside states between urban and rural areas, but the fact that even the lowest paid member of “Librado Rivera” employed in the ship-building industry of Veracruz cleaning offices and workshops was to receive nearly forty-five pesos a day for his or her work was revealing. Though not a king’s ransom, forty-five pesos was still more than twice the daily salary awarded to the temporary, non-unionized worker in Durango who would toil on a scorching hot road crew later that summer. This is to say nothing of the other vacation, social, housing, and wage-related benefits that the unionist received and the free worker did not receive. These were disparities that employers (including the owners of the companies Aluminio and Inmobiliaria Aluminio) cited when they launched accusations that the modern unionist was privileged, unrealistic, and entitled.

The initial failure of the collective bargaining process hardened “Librado Rivera” members’ resolve. The strike promised by their union was not an empty threat. Although postponed one day, the strike exploded on the evening of March 2, 1973. Local news coverage understood the strike as waged primarily over the issue of employee pay. The strike, reporter José Murillo Tejada wrote, was due to the unwillingness of the company to concede the workers’ demand for a salary increase of eighteen percent; (company officials offered only fifteen percent.) This chasm was non-negotiable according to union leader Moisés Rodríguez Mendoza, who directed operations from Mexico City while in negotiation with company leaders and Labor Department officials. Via telephone, Rodríguez instructed strike committee members to solicit the CROC for assistance, and he warned local observers that the strike would continue indefinitely until an agreement

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1-3.



was reached. Activities at the company halted. Only striking workers that “kept guard in front of the factory” were in motion, news coverage reported.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly the position of the workers overwhelmed company resistance; the strike that closed Aluminio and threatened to halt production at one of Latin’s America’s most important aluminum plants indefinitely lasted just one day. On March 3, barely twenty-four hours after the strike was raised, company officials conceded “Librado Rivera” workers an across-the-board salary increase of eighteen percent as well as a series of the other benefits demanded by the union. Official sources reported that along with the wage increase, union workers were given life insurance benefits up to 80,000 pesos, annual bonuses equivalent to thirty days of salary, loans for 1,000 pesos, and houses for workers varying in price from fifty to sixty thousand pesos depending on the salaries of the workers. Other benefits included scholarships for children.<sup>40</sup> Content with the negotiations, union leaders lifted the strike. By the morning of March 4, life at Aluminio had returned to normal, and a long, costly workers’ strike had been averted.

In mid-April, company and union representatives signed a collective contract that appeased the interests of both sides. The terms of the settlement revealed a give and take between workers and owners that is instructive. By signing the contract, union representatives pledged that employees would observe the instructions of their supervisors and work faithfully under their direction.<sup>41</sup> The contract also gave attention to establishing the subordination of certain technical workers to management, a fact that causes us to presume that previously some technicians’ relations with the company were particularly hostile. In addition, the new contract included language that stipulated that no area be expanded while the contract was in place. In other words, the signatories agreed that no new jobs would be created during the two-year term of the labor agreement.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> José Murillo Tejeda, “La Empresa no Concedió las Prestaciones que Solicitaron,” *Diario Veracruz*, March 3, 1973, 1/15.

<sup>40</sup> José Murillo Tejeda, “Aumento de Sueldo y Otras Prestaciones Lograron los Trabajadores de TAMSA,” *Diario Veracruz*, March 5, 1973, 1/15.

<sup>41</sup> AGN, STPS, JFCA No. 12, Box 1310, Folder “Emplazamiento a Huelga planteado por el Sindicato Librado Rivera Conexos y Similares de Aluminio Vs. Las Empresas Aluminio Inmobiliaria Aluminio,” Agreement between Aluminio, S.A. de C.V. and Sindicato “Librado Rivera” de Trabajadores en General, Conexos y Similares de Aluminio, S.A. de C.V., April 16, 1973, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

Workers' concessions on the matters of subordination and hiring, though, were likely offset by gains made in the arena of wages. In general, the payscale created in the April 16 agreement granted workers the daily wages demanded by their union in its December 12 contract draft with some exceptions. Certain positions were afforded less by the company than initially requested. These included those of the production operator, master automotive mechanic, and shipment operator. In other cases, negotiations produced wages higher than were initially demanded by the union. This was the case for the master electrician and the repairer.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the contract's new payscale pleased workers as it granted them increased salaries to combat rising costs of living. The collective contract reached between the union "Librado Rivera" and executives of Aluminio and Inmobiliaria Aluminio was officially filed in the offices of Federal Conciliation Board No. 12, Veracruz, on May 2, 1973.<sup>44</sup> When considered against the initial demands presented by the union in their December 1972 contract draft, the terms of the new collective contract showed that compromises were reached between company and union officials on crucial issues. Still, the union's inflexibility and ultimate victory on the issue of the eighteen percent wage increase demonstrated its collective clout.

Electrical workers were also powerful. Grouped primarily into the United Electric Workers Union (SUTERM,) a mega-union formed on September 16, 1972 from the merging of the nation's two primary unions of electrical workers, union members staffed the facilities of the Federal Electric Commission almost exclusively.<sup>45</sup> The near-monopoly that SUTERM labor had over the nation's power sector, however, was not supposed to hinder the nation in its imperative task of developing a national system of electrification. In the language of the Unity Pact that formed SUTERM, syndical leaders stated that the organization was the product of formerly competing unions' mutual recognition that the superior need of the nation – to bring electricity to as many Mexicans as possible in as little time as possible – demanded peaceful solutions to labor conflicts.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> AGN, STPS, JFCA No. 12, Box 1310, Folder "Emplazamiento a Huelga planteado por el Sindicato Librado Rivera Conexos y Similares de Aluminio Vs. Las Empresas Aluminio Inmobiliaria Aluminio", Letter (with copy of Convenio attached) from Enrique Arias Solis, Roberto Prado Lovio, and Tomás Torres Damián to President of JFCA, Mexico City, May 7, 1973.

<sup>45</sup> Chapter Ten of this study describes the creation of the SUTERM and the Federal Electric Commission, the state-owned power generation company, in greater detail.

The pact also demonstrated that members of the once-rival unions shared common interests and recognized that with syndical unity they could better advance their professional interests. Creation of a single union of electrical workers, it was said, would enable electrical workers to bargain more effectively with their employers and to produce collective contracts that pushed Mexican society ever closer to a state of equilibrium between the interests of labor and capital.<sup>46</sup>

Based on the terms established in the collective contracts that governed workplace relations between workers and the CFE in the mid-1970s, however, one could argue that *sutermistas* (members of the SUTERM,) because of their exclusive contract, felt very little pressure to temper their demands for the good of the nation. The collective contract reached between the CFE and SUTERM that went into effect on May 1, 1974 was celebrated by the union as a triumphant achievement. The twenty-four pages of the contract were printed in full in the union's monthly newsletter *SUTERM*. There, *sutermistas* saw in print the contractual establishment of general work conditions that were attractive. They included Clause 16, establishing the five day, forty-hour work week; Clause 26, requiring the CFE to construct training sites for workers using funds deducted from their paychecks; Clause 27, specifying that retired workers would serve as instructors in these facilities; Clause 28, mandating the CFE to provide libraries for workers; and Clause 29, obligating the CFE to grant 6,000 education scholarships to children of workers – 4,000 of which were to go toward secondary studies and pre-vocational training in centers of technological development and 2,000 toward preparatory/ liberal arts training.<sup>47</sup>

On the all-important topics of compensation, vacations, and retirement, union members read terms that were quite impressive. Some highlights were, beginning in the area of compensation: Clause 32, Section 1, stating that employees were to work five day, forty-hour work weeks with payment of fifty-six, and Clause 32, Section 7, awarding employees who chose to work on Sunday time-and-a-quarter pay. On the topics

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<sup>46</sup> "Pacto de Unidad. SNESCRM/STERM," *SUTERM*, May, 1973, 6.

<sup>47</sup> "CONTRATO COLECTIVO DE TRABAJO. COMISIÓN FEDERAL DE ELECTRICIDAD & SINDICATO UNICO DE TRABAJADORES ELECTRICISTAS DE LA REPUBLICA MEXICANA. 1974-1976," *SUTERM*, April, 1974, 5-28.

of vacation time and bonuses, there was Clause 52, awarding workers paid vacation time annually in an amount corresponding to their period of service as well as extra salary to cover rent and other expenses incurred while on holiday. The amount of days and extra salary awarded was based on a formula that escalated depending on years of service. Workers, it stipulated, were required to arrange vacation periods with their union representative, and in the event the worker was fired, he was to be paid the amount corresponding to unused vacation days.

Finally, on the topic of retirement and pensions, Clause 69 made full retirement available to the worker at twenty-five years of service and fifty years of age, with full retirement available to any worker with thirty years of service regardless of age. The worker who was physically incapable of performing his or her job was made eligible for full or partial retirement and workers became retirement eligible with ten years of service. The amount of pension (percentage of salary awarded annually to retired workers) was based on the following formula: ten to fourteen years of service = between sixty and sixty-eight percent of salary; fifteen to twenty years = eighty percent; twenty-one to twenty-four years = between eighty-two and eighty-eight percent; twenty-five to twenty-nine years = between ninety and ninety-eight percent; and thirty years (and up) = one hundred percent. Lastly, Clause 69, Section 2 stated that no worker who lacked twenty-five percent or less of years to become retirement eligible could be fired, except in cases of robbery or fraud that were duly proven by management.<sup>48</sup>

Certainly, *sutermistas*, like other unionists attuned to the contemporary discourse of workers' rights and social justice, did not hesitate to demand that their employers fulfill their obligations as established by law. Many of the workplace reforms mandated in the NLFT were evident in the text of the CFE-SUTERM labor agreement, and concern with worker safety and hygiene was especially prominent. Clause 56 mandated the company to create a Permanent Safety and Hygiene Commissions to be composed of representatives of labor and management and to be established at all major work-sites. Clause 59 obligated the CFE to maintain hygienic conditions at all work sites, stock all bathrooms with paper, soap, and purified water, and permit workers to end their shift ten

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

minutes early to attend to matters of personal hygiene. Finally, on the matter of workplace safety, Clause 58 of the contract stipulated that the company was to install First Aid kits in offices, generator plants, substations, shops, and other major work-sites.

Clause 61 addressed the issue of workman's compensation and death. The CFE agreed to compensate the family of a worker injured or killed on the job in the following manner: in the case of the worker's death, the family would be awarded a sum equaling 1450 days of the worker's salary; in the case of total permanent incapacitation, the worker would have the option of receiving 1450 days of salary or choosing a retirement package according to its terms of service; and finally, in the case of partial permanent incapacitation, the worker would be awarded the same package as described above but would also have the option of returning to work if he or she desired so and was capable. The pension that a worker or a worker's family obtained in accordance with the terms of Clause 61 was to be in addition to the monies they would receive from the SUTERM's mutual aid fund. Support of the *mutualista*, however, was not to be the sole responsibility of the union or its members; Clause 70 of the contract required that the CFE contribute 250 pesos per worker, per year to augment the balance of the fund.

Other social justice imperatives were also evident in the CFE-SUTERM collective contract of 1974-1976. Most notably was seen attention to the priorities of housing, access to goods of basic necessity, and social and cultural advancement. Clause 66 mandated the CFE to heap an additional fifteen percent of salary on top of the worker's paycheck to help pay for rent. The CFE was also required to continue to provide housing to workers who currently occupied them at no charge. The utility costs they accrued were also to be covered by the company up to a determined level. Clause 68 instructed the company to create an Electrical Workers Housing and Social Services Fund to further address the problem of housing and improve the general living condition of the worker. Once established, the fund was to provide loans to the union member to make repairs to his home or build a vacation home, purchase an automobile, purchase furniture or other essential items, or construct or renovate a union center. Other provisions in the contract responded to the contemporary situation of rising prices and product scarcity. Most importantly, Clause 76 required the CFE to build consumption centers (*tiendas de*

*consumo*) toward the end of improving the purchasing power of workers and supplying them with steady access to basic goods at low costs. Lastly, the contract revealed the union's commitment to advancing the cause of the working class by promoting social and cultural activities for workers. Clause 71 committed the CFE and SUTERM to contribute equal funds to sponsor an annual event and foster cultural organizations that would "promote general social solidarity activities that fulfilled their legal objectives and class obligations."<sup>49</sup> Clause 72 pursued this mission further as it ordered the CFE to foment activities of physical exertion and sport for workers. This was a mandate that fit neatly inside a dominant strand of the era's social justice dialog that stressed the social and cultural importance of a fit and healthy proletariat.

Members of SUTERM and "Librado Rivera" benefited greatly from their enrollment in powerful state-allied unions but the benefits and privileges they received came with a price. Sutermistas mirrored unionists across all fields of employment in that they gave two percent of their earnings to the union, thus fulfilling an obligation written into their collective contract and paid directly by the enterprise to union's National Executive Committee within the first five days of each month. Considering the large size of the union and excellent compensation received by its members, one can safely conclude that this was not a negligible pot of money. Despite the benefits they received, union members frequently grumbled about the monthly chunk taken out of their paychecks. Allegations were also made about the misappropriation of funds by charros who were routinely accused of building their fortunes by skimming off the top of union funds. Allegations launched by Demetrio Vallejo – the face of the independent union movement in the 1970s – claimed that some CTM leaders of the period paid themselves over U.S. \$600,000 a year.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 27. Spanish reads: ...para desarrollar actividades organizativas de carácter cultural y promover actividades generales de solidaridad social para cumplir debidamente con su objetivo legal y con sus obligaciones de clase.

<sup>50</sup> Hodiac, illustration: "El Movimiento Obrero de las Momias," *Presente!*, October 1, 1972, 1. Others speculated that the top brass of Mexican organized labor took large sums of money from the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT), a pan-hemispheric labor confederation started in 1951 with U.S. government funding and committed to pursuing Northamerican business and political interests by containing radicalism and preventing the spread of Communism inside Latin American working class organizations. This allegation counted at least one historical precedent for support. The Pan-American Federation of Labor started during World War I with the mission to improve relations amongst

Still, unionists generally enjoyed working conditions and benefits that far surpassed those available to the average Mexican worker, i.e., he or she of the non-unionized variety. For these workers, only some of whom labored under the rubric of individual contracts with their employers, it was not uncommon to leave a company and receive a severance package that awarded only two days of salary for each year on the job. Recall that members of “Librado Rivera” and SUTERM were awarded at retirement the equivalent of fifteen to twenty-five days of salary, depending on the length of their tenure, for every year they had served the company. This gaping difference in compensation was merely one factor amongst many that reflected the presence of a large power disparity that distanced unionized from free workers.

#### The Challenges of Independent and Company Unionism and the Salary Question

Collective contracts as a whole reaped organized labor great benefits, but even unionists saw their power dispersed unevenly across the landscape of the Mexican economy. Without question, those who formed the ranks of national industrial unions like SUTERM flaunted more collective clout than did those in “Librado Rivera,” a relatively powerful trade union but one limited to operations in a few select companies. Yet the power disparity between these two groups was partly alleviated for both organizations were affiliates of national labor confederations – SUTERM of the CTM and “Librado Rivera” of the CROC. They therefore wielded a bargaining power that exceeded the strength they could muster as individual unions, however enormous.

Many unionists of the time, however, were not affiliated with the CTM, the CROC, the CROM, or one of the other large national confederations. These workers formed themselves into unions that, much like their counterparts grouped into the organizations just named, pursued the cause of workers’ rights, espoused the rhetoric of social justice, and pressured employers to fulfill the requirements of the NLFT and enter into collective contracts. However, lacking the patronage of a large labor confederation that enjoyed state favor, they did so at a distinct disadvantage.

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labor federations in the Americas, was actually born (with secret U.S. government funding) from the desire of American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers to influence and channel Mexican workers to pressure their government to abandon its neutrality and enter the Great War on the side of the Allies. See Priscilla Murolo and A.B. Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short, Illustrated History of Labor in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 172.

An analysis of the contract draft proposed in June 1973 by the Stevedores Union of the Port of Veracruz to regulate terms of employment between its members and several locally based transport and cargo companies reveals workplace terms that suggest that these dockworkers had a much weaker negotiating position than did their “Librado Rivera” colleagues who built ships on the same piers on which they toiled. Clause 15 touched on the issue of liability and stated that the union was responsible for any luggage lost or destroyed while under its care. Clause 19 addressed the topic of worker death and proposed that ownership award the family of a deceased worker 500 pesos. Finally, Clause 21 addressed the validity period of the contract and stated that the present contract was to remain in place for an indefinite period and could only be modified in accordance with the terms established in the NLFT.<sup>51</sup>

By even moderate standards of the day, these were not terms that could be called worker-friendly. Further, Clause 15 made the union members responsible for on-the-job mishaps. Were a worker to damage, destroy, or lose a traveler’s luggage during the regular of his duties, it was to be his union *and not the company* that would compensate the owner for the lost or damaged good. Should a worker be killed on the job, his or her family was to receive 500 pesos – a trivial payment when compared with the amount (equivalent to 1,450 days of the worker’s salary) the CFE paid survivors of a deceased *sutermista*. Lastly, collective contracts of the period typically had a validity period of two years, a term deemed acceptable by workers because it guaranteed them that they would not have to wait too long before renegotiating it. A contract draft without a defined validity period, therefore, was anathema for it locked the worker into a fixed economic situation and deprived him of any formal recourse to amend his contract to reflect the changing economic realities of the times.

Despite its shortcomings, the collective contract proposed by the stevedores union was not a defeatist document. Those who drafted it demanded that their bosses fulfill certain obligations towards workers that they deemed basic. Language in the contract’s appendix further signaled that union members be reimbursed for travel expenses they

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<sup>51</sup> AGN, STPS, JFCA No. 12, Box 1110, Folder “(D.8)5.12/103/69/72”, Letter from Herlindo Hernández Luna to President, JFC No. 12, June 25, 1973, 1.



incurred while travelling to Mexico City to discuss or revise the contract. Owners were also ordered to up their contribution to the workers' retirement fund by an additional twelve percent. These minor provisions aside, the contract forwarded by the dockworkers' representatives did not stand alongside the labor agreements proposed by members of "Librado Rivera" and SUTERM. The demands it made on employers were modest when compared with those forwarded in the documents cited above. As a result, it was destined to achieve far less for the workers it represented.

What was the source of its impotency? The answer was more a product of politics than it was a reflection of individual worker will. Officially, the Stevedores Union of the Port of Veracruz was a member of the Autonomous League of Maritime and Affiliated Workers of Veracruz Port – an independent organization that functioned outside the tutelage of the Congress of Labor. As a result, it operated without the backing of an institutional powerhouse with the ability to use pressure tactics to influence corporate behavior. Members of the Stevedores Union, hence, although they were fairly numerous and could reasonably count on other longshoremen in Veracruz to support them in shows of militancy, were a local group confined to a single economic sector. Unlike *sutermistas*, for instance, these kinds of unionists undertook negotiations with employers rooted in local priorities. Owners did not enter into negotiations with them fearing that a failure to meet their demands would ignite widespread turbulence in the sector, or worse, precipitate a national strike. The issues at hand were local and their resolution was a goal as desperately desired by owners as it was by workers. The negotiating position of the worker, naturally, was compromised.

This was the case even more so for workers who organized into themselves company unions (*sindicatos de empresa*). Employed by a single entity, a company union was armed with few outside resources, meaning, it could not count on workers in other companies to show solidarity and withhold their labor in support of their cause. As a result, single-company union militancy was rare though collective contracts were routinely in place to regulate the terms of workplace relations. Workers of the paper company Kimberly Clark of Mexico mobilized into a union that procured decent terms from their employer. A quick glance at the collective contract reached between workers

at the plant in Ixtaczoquitlán, Veracruz, and the company in 1975 shows that benefits ranged from good to modest in the areas of the workday, annual calendar, and over-time pay, and from modest to poor in the areas of salaries and vacation time. Based on the contract, the Kimberly Clark worker was contractually obliged to work six nine-hour shifts per week, with an hour of rest included. In addition to not working on Sunday, workers were granted paid holidays on the following days of the year: January 1, February 5, March 21, May 1, September 16, November 20, December 1 (every sixth year,) and December 25. Workers who chose to work on Sunday received full-time pay. Those who volunteered to lend their services on any of the specified holidays received double-time pay.<sup>52</sup> Overall, these were terms that would have pleased most non-unionized Mexican workers but were unremarkable when compared against the benefits assured those who militated inside “Librado Rivera” or SUTERM. Union membership, furthermore, was expensive; members of the Union of Workers of the Kimberly Clark Cellulose and Paper Factory turned over three percent of each paycheck to the union for monthly dues.<sup>53</sup>

Other benefits given by the company to its workers were downright paltry in the context of Mexican unionism. Written into the contract was the stipulation that all unionized personnel be assured wages established by law. As a rule they were, but the payscale revealed that these were miserly wages. The highest paid *operario* was paid well, receiving 120 pesos per day. Fork-lift operators, who brought home 89.30 pesos and refractory masons (eighty-one pesos) also received relatively good daily wages. Others were compensated poorly. The general worker received only 53.60 pesos per day, just barely above the federal minimum wage established for central Veracruz. The vacation structure also conformed to the legal minimum but was substantially less generous than that enjoyed by other unionized industrial workers of the time. Workers with more than one year of service were allowed a paid vacation period of six days (one week). The total was to augment two days a year, each year, until the worker had four years of service and

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<sup>52</sup> AGN, STPS, DGIFT, Box 1079, Folder “13/100D-V11-75-11/1. Año 1975”, Collective Contract of Ingeniería y Fuerza S.A. and the Comité Ejecutivo del Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Fca. de Celulosa y Papel “Kimberly Clark de México, S.A.,” Ixtaczoquitlán, Veracruz, 1975.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

had accrued twelve days of vacation time. The worker would then have to wait another five years before becoming eligible to earn more time, upon which he would be given an additional two days. This system of two additional days for every five years on the job would continue for as long as the worker was employed at Kimberly Clark. A worker with nineteen years on the job, therefore, would be entitled to eighteen paid-vacation days.<sup>54</sup> Contrast this with the vacation structure in place at the CFE – that which gave workers with just three to five years of experience twenty paid-vacation days in addition to a sixty-five percent wage increase during that period to cover vacation expenses – and one notices the privileged status enjoyed by certain elite constituents of the organized labor movement contractually confirmed.

Unionized workers covered by collective contracts were afforded compensation that ranged across a vast spectrum. But just as there were striking variations in the working conditions and benefits the unionist received, so too were there variations in her salary. A quick glance at the wages assigned to members of the unions “Librado Rivera,” SUTERM, and Kimberly Clark shows that those workers were compensated very differently despite all being unionized and all working within the rubric of a collective contract with their employer. Still more, other contracts showed that there were times when the unionist did not enjoy a higher salary their non-unionized co-workers and may have even earned less than they did. A federal labor inspection of the henequen plant La Paloma in Villa González, Tamaulipas conducted in the fall of 1975 reported that all of the company’s 107 operarios – seventy-seven of whom were unionized and thirty of whom were classified as free – were compensated equally.<sup>55</sup> According to the report, everyone who labored on the floor or in another capacity worked six days a week and was granted 57.50 pesos per day, regardless of syndical status or tenure on the job.<sup>56</sup> In addition, all operarios were paid for a seventh day of work, irrespective of the fact of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1200, Folder “D.IV/201;740(24) “75”/18. Report. “Henquenera La Paloma – Acta de Inspección”, October 20, 1975, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Unionized operarios were members of the Henequen, Fibrous Product, and Affiliated Workers Guild of the State of Tamaulipas.

whether they were covered by a collective contract.<sup>57</sup> All employees of the henequen company La Paloma, thus, unionized or free, enjoyed the same working conditions and were afforded the same salary. The benefits of this ostensible egalitarianism at the company, however, may have been undercut by the generally poor compensation given to the workers; their daily salary of 57.50 pesos per day was barely above the 49.30 minimum federal threshold established for the area (Zone 30) in which they worked.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, no employee at the company had been on the job for more than two and a half years – a fact suggesting the possible expendability of even unionized factory workers in a poor, rural region.

In a very different case, the unionists who labored for the Reynosa, Tamaulipas soft drink and gaseous water bottling company Embotelladora del Noreste in 1975 would have been thrilled to earn at the level of the company's non-unionized personnel. Of the company's fifty-three operarios, all members of Local 126 of the nation's largest union of bottling industry workers, all were men and forty had permanent positions.<sup>59</sup> The remaining thirteen were classified as non-permanent workers (*eventuales*), a status implying that one was first in line to receive a newly available permanent position and that one labored under the terms of the collective contract in place between the union and the company.<sup>60</sup> Operarios worked six day, forty-eight hour work weeks but were paid for seven – a pretty standard union perk of the period. Perks in the contract, however, barely compensated for the poor wages operarios received. Company policy dictated that production workers could earn a minimum wage of 66.50 pesos (the minimum threshold for that federal zone) and a maximum of 123.20 per day, though salaries reported in a 1975 federal inspection tended closer to the bottom than the top of that range.<sup>61</sup>

Curiously, even those operarios who earned maximum salaries garnered less than any of the company's sixteen *empleados* (administrative workers,) none of whom were

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<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the report showed that the company employed no *empleados* and that all administrative duties were seen to by the owner, Oliverio Becerra Suárez, personally. *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>59</sup> The fifty-three production workers belonged to Section 126 of Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Embotelladora de Aguas Gaseosas, Similares y Conexos de la República Mexicana

<sup>60</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1200, Folder "D.IV/201:700(24) "75"/8. Report. "Embotelladora del Noreste – Inspección Inicial", August 28, 1975, 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

unionized. Not surprisingly, company executives and managers paid themselves very well – at minimum four times more than even the highest paid operario.<sup>62</sup> What was noteworthy was the fact that even the company’s lowest level office workers and security personnel out-earned its highest-paid operarios. Elizabeth Guevara S. and Maria de los A. Fonseca, who were secretaries at the company and had less than one year on the job apiece, received 2,200 pesos bi-weekly. As empleados of the company, they out-earned only Rolando Azpeitia Rios, an assistant warehouse administrator, and Arturo Casas Berlanga and Antonio Moreno Moreno, both night watchmen who took home paychecks of 1,995 pesos every two weeks. Still, despite their low status on the administrative payscale, each of these employees drastically out-earned even the highest paid operario, who, by contract, garnered at most 1,724.80 pesos over a two-week period.<sup>63</sup>

#### *ASSESSING THE UNIONIST PRIVILEGE IN LABOR MEDIATION*

The cases described above, though but a few pulled from the immense portfolio of syndical activity undertaken in Mexico in the immediate post-Tlatelolco period, are characteristic in their details and resolutions. Workers like those who toiled on the road crew in Durango were not alone in their efforts to petition federal labor authorities to correct unjust working conditions they endured. In just the month of September of 1973, when the brothers Beltran Rodríguez and others argued their case for justice before labor authorities, twenty-six strike petitions were filed with their local Federal Labor Delegation No. 3 based in Torreón.<sup>64</sup> Nowhere, however, was worker activism more sharpened at the time than it was in the greater-Monterrey area, comprising all or parts of the states of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas and served by the Federal Labor Delegation No. 4. Worker activism reached a statistical apex in 1974 when over 500 strike petitions were filed with the conciliation board located in Monterrey in just May and June of that

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 5. According to the report, Lewis Meekins, Director General and company founder topped the list and paid himself 17,500 pesos bi-weekly. He was followed by Marco Flores V., the company’s manager who had five years on the job and earned 11,500 pesos bi-weekly. Finally, Ricardo Macías de la M., sales manager with fourteen years at the company, earned 8,000 pesos bi-weekly.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 6. The superiority of the administrative (non-unionized) workers at this company was affirmed in another way. Night watchmen were required to work on Sunday and were thus guaranteed double-time pay that augmented their paycheck in a way that distanced them yet still from the poorly compensated, yet unionized, operarios.

<sup>64</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 3, Box 1180, Folder “Clasificación: D.III/201.1. Generalidades Asuntos Laborales – Informe mensual de labores”, Report of José Santos Reyes Gaytán, October 1, 1973.

year alone!<sup>65</sup> More broadly, the middle years of the Echeverría sexenio (1973-1974) constituted an era of intense labor activity as workers – unionized and free – took advantage of new access to labor mediation and filed labor suits and strike petitions at levels not seen since the labor rapprochement typical of the “Mexican Miracle” commenced in the 1940s.

Why was there a marked increase in individual and collective labor activity in the post-1970 period?<sup>66</sup> Qualitative evidence suggests that many in organized labor expanded their range of activities in the period feeling the state as their ally and invigorated by recent legal reform. For many unionists, the NLFT appeared to mark the birth of new era of worker vindication that emboldened them to carry the revolutionary banner of social justice and engage in confrontation with their employers. Furthermore, the strong pro-worker tone of party-state rhetoric encouraged activism at both the individual and collective levels. According to Kevin J. Middlebrook the reputation of an administration is important, for when workers perceive their government officials as favoring the cause of labor and harbor greater expectations about the favorable and speedy resolution of their grievances they are more likely to file individual labor suits.<sup>67</sup> Real change, albeit somewhat minor, could be seen in the NLFT to encourage the filing of labor grievances by workers. Article 620 of the NLFT empowered conciliation and arbitration board presidents – always the government representative – to conduct hearings in the absence of one or both of the labor and business representatives. The law still required that a sectoral representative be present at the issuing of the final ruling, yet this change was

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<sup>65</sup> “Emplaza más la CTM”, *El Norte*, June 22, 1974, 7-B. See the discussion in Chapter Five for context.

<sup>66</sup> The answer to this question appears two-fold and is explored in depth in the Conclusion to this study. In short, though, the notion that increased labor activism after 1970 was spurred by a heightened awareness amongst workers toward the rights afforded to them by the New Federal Labor Law is valid but only part of the story. The CTM urged (typically directed) its affiliates to file thousands of strike petitions in 1973 and 1974 at the federal and local levels to counter the Echeverría administration’s support for opposition (i.e. non-allied or independent) labor groups and protest the government’s “relative hostility” toward official unions. In this regard, the climate of political toleration ushered in by Echeverría’s Democratic Opening created a real strain in the fabric of collaborationism and kicked the CTM into high gear – as often against the state as against employers – to protect its privileged status in the labor establishment – a topic addressed in the Conclusion. For further analysis, see Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 171.

<sup>67</sup> Middlebrook, 187. This appeared to be the case during the 1930s when the great majority of unionized workers believed that the Cárdenas government acted in their favor and they filed individual grievances with federal authorities in record numbers.

adopted to reduce the potential for stalling by one side or another and thus expedite the grievance resolution process. By the same token, Middlebrook accepts the likelihood that workers' expectations about the political leanings of a regime might also impact their rate of collective activism. He states: "There is no strong a priori reason for believing that presidential policy determines the volume of strike petitions, although it is certainly possible that labor organizations might increase or decrease the number of strike petitions they file in response to a president's actions."<sup>68</sup>

Certainly, the words as well as the actions of a national leader have influence on the behavior of members of society, and it is not inappropriate to assume that the powerful pro-worker rhetoric expressed by Echeverria and other party-state leaders created a discourse that heightened class-animosity and led to conflict. Business owners tended to decry the discourse for the ways that it furthered the notion that workers were special and deserved of extra rights and privileges. They bemoaned the burdens placed on them by the new labor code and were irked by the increased involvement of federal authorities in their operations via annual labor inspections or the heightened number of *pleitos*, or labor grievances filed by workers to protest working conditions or perceived violations of collective contracts. Many complained that workers, and unions, in particular, were too litigious: that in their zeal to further their individual interests they were obstructing the advancement of the Mexican economy to the detriment of all. Unions, very often, were involved in multiple labor suits at once, often times advocating for the interests of an individual worker while simultaneously challenging company actions it claimed were in violation of contractual terms. Owners detested this hyperactivity on the part of syndical elements. These same owners were also likely to scoff at the process of tripartite labor mediation out of a belief that it was biased or weighted in favor of the worker or workers who raised the suit. Were employers right to harbor such assumptions and make such allegations? Were they right to complain about a federal bias for labor in the process of tripartite mediation? Clues to these questions may be uncovered in the rulings of tripartite bodies.

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<sup>68</sup> Middlebrook, 171.

A cursory scan of the records of the period does not show an obvious empirical government bias for the interests of labor over capital. This is not to say, however, that the rulings of conciliation and arbitration boards were split evenly amongst complainants (workers) and respondents (owners). They were not; labor suits I have examined were decided overwhelmingly in favor of the plaintiffs. Still, this does not indicate a strict philosophical bias on the part of labor authorities for one side or another. Case files often include correspondence emitted from federal authorities in Mexico City to officials working in local arbitration and conciliation offices instructing them to let each side conduct their actions in accordance with the law and let the process run its course without undue delays. This was the message emitted by the JFCA, Strike Division to the president of the Local Conciliation Board No. 12 operating in Veracruz, Veracruz on June 22, 1973. Then, the crux of the matter was that workers grouped in the Mexican Union of Radio, Television, and Affiliated Industry Workers were threatening a strike against the two radio stations that employed them, Radiodifusora X.E.U. and X.E.U.W. After receiving the strike petition, labor officials in Veracruz took the very normal step of consulting the federal Strike Division to determine the legality of the request. The response it received was characteristic. Labor authorities in Veracruz were instructed that: “It is in the interest of this Board that the scheduling of the strike be made in as little time as possible and that this letters rogatory (which gives the local labor authority jurisdiction over the matter) be diligent and sent back quickly, in accordance with Article 453 of the Federal Labor Law;...”<sup>69</sup> Here, one notices that the JFCA made no attempt to avert a workers’ strike but rather stressed the importance of settling the matter in a timely fashion. It understood the strike, thus, as an unavoidable, albeit somewhat distasteful, part of labor relations.

Strikes, as distasteful as they were, were planned and carried out by unions at an unprecedented level after 1970 at the local level. Mammoth actions spanning the nation

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<sup>69</sup> AGN, STPS, JFCA, Box 1110, Folder “(D.8)5.12/103.2/71/73. Año 1973”, Remittance letter from JFCA, Sección de Huelgas to Presidente, JFC No. 12, June 22, 1973. Spanish, in full, reads: Esta Junta tiene interés en que el emplazamiento se haga en el menor tiempo posible y en que este exhorto sea diligenciado y devuelto con brevedad, en los términos del artículo 453 de la Ley Federal del Trabajo; por lo tanto ruego a usted se sirva correr traslado con el pliego de peticiones y autos de iniciación que se le remiten... Also see STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo, Segunda Edición* (Mexico City: Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, 1970), 303-304.



and traversing industrial sectors, however, were seldom seen. For the elite components of the labor movement the strike was often unnecessary. Labor groups of the ilk of the SUTERM needed only to channel the class-based discourse of the era and dangle the threat of a general strike to pressure employers into making important concessions. The union newsletter *SUTERM* chronicled a litany of transgressions inflicted upon electrical workers by CFE officials and celebrated the collective responses they provoked. It reported that sutermitas belonging to Local 1 in the city of Aguascalientes were demonstrating in July 1973 to remove Salvador Ceja, a CFE divisional manager who they claimed was snooping into internal syndical matters with the intent to sow antagonisms inside the union.<sup>70</sup> Sutermita activism, it reported, paid off. Shortly after, Ceja was judged as having violated contractual terms and he was dismissed by CFE director Arsenio Farrell. Just weeks later, sutermitas working for the CFE in the Gulf coast city of Tampico organized in August to protest similar company snooping into union affairs as well as protest other “anti-worker behaviors” exhibited by employers.<sup>71</sup> Members of SUTERM Local 51 in Lagunero, Coahuila rose up on October 17 and conducted a “walk out” (*ausencia colectiva*) in protest of “arbitrary” actions taken by CFE division manager Guillermo García Siller ranging from the implementation unsanctioned changes in their job requirements to the use of police officers as security personnel. Collective worker action again proved successful as the walk out forced management “into line” and enticed the company to meet worker demands.<sup>72</sup> Instances of local electrical worker activism produced local victories but, more importantly, paved the way for larger gains. The generous terms found in the collective contract reached between SUTERM and the CFE in 1974 we may understand as the direct result of pressure tactics exerted by sutermitas on company officials in the months prior to the contract’s creation.

Even as the prospect of the general strike loomed large in the period, the typical strike of the day was a small and essentially local affair involving one union and one employer. Relying on actions instead of threats, smaller unions struck often and profited although their gains were relatively smaller. Be they big or small, unions of the era were

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<sup>70</sup> Editorial, “Acción Sindical. Contra la Intromisión Patronal,” *SUTERM*, July, 1973, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Editorial, “En Tampico, Luchan,” *SUTERM*, August-September, 1973, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Moisés Lara, “Continúan las Agresiones de Empleados de la C.F.E.,” *SUTERM*, October, 1973, 7.

propelled into action to counter similar injustices. And the process that a union was required to instigate with federal labor authorities was the same regardless of its size or bargaining position. Unions of the 1970s raised labor suits by the thousands with federal and local conciliation and arbitration boards to protest violations and force employers to abide by terms established in collective contracts. Analyzing Labor Ministry records yields abundant examples which together give rich insight into the vast milieu of union labor litigation of the era. Several selected cases are now considered for context.

Sugar workers had by the 1970s enjoyed a long syndical tradition in Mexico. Nevertheless, despite their established tendency to be unionized, *azucareros* historically received wages and benefits that placed them on the bottom rungs of the nation's syndical ladder. By the 1970s, though an industry wide collective bargaining agreement (*contrato ley*) was in place to regulate the working conditions for all of the nation's sugar workers, the work remained poorly compensated and afforded little prestige when compared with that in other agricultural sectors. Some *azucareros*, however, worked to improve their conditions by cementing individual contracts with their unions and their employers. Members of Local 119, Branch 2 of the Mexican Sugar Workers' Union who cut and processed cane in Tuxtepec, Oaxaca did just that when they established a collective contract in April 1972 with the sugar plant Ingenio 'Adolfo López Mateos' that employed them. Various terms of that and a subsequent renegotiated contract, however, were ignored outright by the company, moving the union to finally raise a labor suit in 1975 to force the company's compliance.

A November 10, 1975 letter from the union to the president of the Federal Conciliation Board No. 25 based in Orizaba, Veracruz outlined the myriad ways workers' rights had been violated. According to Ramon Begines Gutiérrez, Secretary General of Local 119, the company had broken the terms of the original 1972 collective contract by failing to hire two ironworkers and two teachers, by not constructing two new classrooms, by imposing non-contractually agreed upon demands on the cleaning crew, by failing to furnish each department with potable water, and by hiring personnel from outside the union. Moreover, according to the union, the company was deficient in meeting several terms established in subsequent contracts. It had failed to comply with

federally established worker's safety and hygiene measures, construct a union lounge, grant workers a monthly sugar allotment, purchase land for the construction of athletic fields and allot 35,000 pesos annually for the upkeep of the facility, and administer periodic medical exams to workers. The union chief cited other general workplace realities that distressed his workers.<sup>73</sup> Workers at the plant objected to the disparity in salaries awarded to drivers, the presence of non-unionized workers in various occupations, the recent changes instituted to create a third-shift and alter the payscale to reward seniority, and the delayed manner with which the company distributed pensions to members of a deceased worker's family in violation of the eight-day term established in the NLFT.<sup>74</sup> These violations aggrieved Begines Gutiérrez and the members of his union. Three years of company neglect and the workers had had enough. Labor officials were informed that the members of Local 119 were resolved to strike should the company refuse to alter its behavior and fulfill its contractual obligations.

What happened next at the sugar plant is unclear; the historical record runs cold. Cases I have examined from the period suggest the likelihood that one of two courses of action ensued. Either, a. the federal conciliation board sided with the workers (in full or in part) and issued a ruling ordering the company to fulfill certain contractually established obligations; or, b. it ruled in favor of the company and denied the validity of the workers' claims on technical or lawful grounds. In any case, the possibility that the union made good on its threat to strike was strong. Workers would have been moved to strike if either the company refused to abide by the state's ruling, (a not uncommon occurrence in the period,) or, if the state ruled for the company and struck down their claims for enforcement. Without further documentation it is difficult to speculate on the outcome of the incident, but the specifics of the union's claims suggest that it was highly knowledgeable on the details of its collective contract as well as well-versed in the rights granted to workers in the NLFT. That being the case, we can reasonably presume that the Federal Conciliation Board No. 25 ruled in its favor to force the company's compliance with its contractual obligations and avert the outbreak of a workers' strike.

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<sup>73</sup> AGN, STPS, DGIFT, Box 1079, Folder "13/100D-V11-75-11/1. Año 1975", Letter from Ramon Begines Gutiérrez to President, JFC #25, November 10, 1975.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

This result was the norm for the rulings I have examined from the period. Such was the case when railway workers in Mérida, Yucatán raised a labor suit in the summer of 1975 to force their employer Ferrocarrileros Unidos del Sureste to comply with terms established in their collective contract. In their suit, the workers, belonging to the Mexican Railroad Workers' Union, pushed the company to pay salaries it had withheld while they were on strike. To the tripartite representatives on the Federal Conciliation Board No. 14, the merits of the union claim were clear; the collective contract that was in place prohibited the company from withholding wages from employees who engaged in lawful forms of worker activism. The railroad company was ordered to pay workers all back-wages they lost while labors were suspended.<sup>75</sup>

The matter described above was an open and shut case. Federal labor authorities ruled in favor of the workers because employers were in clear violation of terms they themselves had established with the signing of a collective contract. This kind of “letter of the law” case was extremely common in the period as workers, unionized and free alike, filed labor suits with federal authorities to force their employers to make good on promises that were contractually guaranteed. Workers also took action to challenge their bosses' negligence on fulfilling responsibilities that were legally instituted. In this regard, an employer's failure to meet occupational safety standards and create a safety and hygiene commission at the workplace as mandated by the NLFT was a common bone of labor-capital contention. Countless labor suits were raised in the post-1970 period to protest these deficiencies, some even resulting in the outbreak of spontaneous and unauthorized work stoppages (*paros*, sometimes referred to as “wildcat” strikes) by employees to pressure employers to meet demands imposed on them in the federal labor code. In a great many of these cases, workers' suits were resolved in their favor. Tripartite authorities ruled in favor of petitioners who acted with the law on their side.

Still, workers who mobilized to raise labor suits against their employers could not always count on collaborationism with state authorities. Certainly, workers of Local 67 of the Mexican Mining and Metalworkers' Union who labored at the iron and steel works

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<sup>75</sup> AGN, STPS, DGIFT, Box 1082, Folder “13/106-D.X-“75”-9/1/2. Año 1975,” Ruling of Junta Federal Permanente de Conciliación No. 14 in the case of Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la R.M. vs. Ferrocarrileros Unidos del Sureste, S.A. de C.V., July 9, 1975, 16.

Fundidora Monterrey had cause to suspect the impartiality of the labor mediation process after their conflict with management reached a conclusion in May 1975. There, employees of the factory were met at 10:30 on the morning of April 28 by Roberto Quintanilla Cantú, a federal labor inspector who arrived to investigate a wildcat strike members of the union were allegedly conducting. Quintanilla was dispatched in response to a letter from Leobardo Ortégón Urteaga, chief legal counsel for the company, who wrote the Federal Labor Delegation No. 4 requesting that an inspector come to the factory and instruct workers “that they are working against the collective contract and the Federal Labor Law...” Ortégón also asked labor officials to convey to workers the warning that if they did not return to work, he reserved “the right (to fire them, we can presume) that the Federal Labor Law conferred on him in that respect.”<sup>76</sup> Quintanilla conducted his inspection and submitted his report that same afternoon. In it, he wrote that he went to factory upon official orders and encountered Leobardo Ortégón and Jaime de la Garza, manager of labor relations.<sup>77</sup> There, the company representatives shared with him their opinion that the work stoppage then in progress was illegal as it violated both the NLFT and the collective contract that existed to govern workplace relations. The workers, they continued, had ceased labor in distinct departments in a way that, beyond violating workplace rules, was also injuring the interests of the company they represented.<sup>78</sup> Following this discussion, Quintanilla toured the premises and collected several “free and spontaneous interviews” from employees. He wrote in his report that the striking employers began their shift at 7:00 a.m. but commenced the strike later that

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<sup>76</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1308, Folder “D.IV./342(16)“75”/1. Fundidora Monterrey, S.A.” Report. “Acta Levantada por el C. Lic. Roberto Quintanilla Cantú, Inspector Federal del Trabajo, para Manifestar de un Paro de Labores Llevada a Cabo por los Trabajadores de la Empresa”; Letter from Leobardo Ortégón Urteaga to Manuel Herrera Aveytua, April 28, 1975. Spanish reads: ...que están obrando contra el Contrato Colectivo y la Ley Federal del Trabajo; que los conmine a que regresen a sus labores y en caso de no hacerlo, mi mandante se reserva el derecho que la Ley Federal del Trabajo le confiere al respecto.

<sup>77</sup> Article 540 of the NLFT lists the duties of Federal Labor Inspectors. See STPS, *Ley Federal del Trabajo*, Segunda Edición, 384-385.

<sup>78</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1308, Folder “D.IV./342(16)“75”/1. Fundidora Monterrey, S.A.” Report. “Acta Levantada por el C. Lic. Roberto Quintanilla Cantú, Inspector Federal del Trabajo, para Manifestar de un Paro de Labores Llevada a Cabo por los Trabajadores de la Empresa – Inspección”; Report of Roberto Quintanilla Cantú, April 28, 1975. Spanish, in full, reads: En estos momentos existe un conflicto de trabajo, consistente en que desde un punto de vista ilegal, contrario a la Ley Federal del Trabajo y al Contrato colectivo de trabajo, los trabajadores de la empresa están realizando ‘paros’ en distintos departamentos o secciones de esta empresa y que esto además de violar las normas de trabajo, lesiona los intereses de la Empresa que representan.

morning at 10:00. The strike, some told him, was conducted in accordance with the ruling reached by their union assembly the previous Saturday. They specified that they would not renew their labors until they received further notice from their union.<sup>79</sup>

Ten days later, on May 7, the delegate for Federal Labor Delegation No. 4 Manuel Herrera Aveytua received an interesting letter signed by Francisco Hernández Mota, Local 67's Assistant Secretary General and seven employees of Fundidora Monterrey. The letter expressed the strong opinion of the signatories that the act of inspection conducted by Quintanilla on April 28 "was founded in a series of falsehoods, totally removed from reality..."<sup>80</sup> Not even the names of the workers Quintanilla identified as partaking in the labor strike, they alleged, were correct – an accurate observation as Quintanilla's report included several mistaken names.<sup>81</sup> This kind of mistake should not have happened being that every floor workers wore an identification badge that listed his full name and personnel number. Moreover, the Quintanilla report they contended made the grievous error of placing workers in wrong departments, thus causing some to be "arbitrarily and illegally fired" by the company that used the report as pretext for its actions.

What caused such imprecision, then? The answer was simple to Hernández and his co-authors; Quintanilla had not carried out the Act of Inspection he described in his report. This truth became evident to them on May 6 when Quintanilla returned to the plant and could not identify by face any of the individuals he cited as being on strike in his April 28 report. Again, Quintanilla's vagueness in this regard made sense to those who drafted the letter. Neither "...those workers nor any members of our organization inside the company [had] effectuated any work stoppage..." they declared. In short,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1308, Folder "D.IV./342(16)"75"/1. Fundidora Monterrey, S.A." Report. "Acta Levantada por el C. Lic. Roberto Quintanilla Cantú, Inspector Federal del Trabajo, para Manifiestar de un Paro de Labores Llevada a Cabo por los Trabajadores de la Empresa"; Letter from Francisco Hernández Mota et. al. to Manuel Herrera Aveytua, May 7, 1975, 1. Spanish reads: ...se asientan una serie de falsedades, totalmente alejadas de la realidad...

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. Perhaps merely typos, the report submitted by Quintanilla to DFT No. 4 listed Victorino Facundo and Guillermo Velez Garza as among the workers who participated in the strike. This contention was technically false being that no one by those names worked at the factory, though employees Victorín Facundo and Guillermo Veloz Garza were likely the intended subjects of the report. In contrast, all of the identification numbers of workers involved strike listed by Quintanilla were accurate.

Hernández and the Fundidora employees believed that the errors found in Quintanilla report belied the inspector's sincerity. For as much they petitioned Herrera to nullify said document. As they saw it, the nullification of the report was a matter of social justice for it was the product of a functionary who had worked "outside the law" and committed an illicit act that "left in total abandonment the families of twelve workers" of whom the union was now responsible for.<sup>82</sup>

The pleas made by Hernández and the Fundidora employees were heartfelt but unsuccessful. The Quintanilla report was accepted by Herrera and then remitted to his superior in Mexico City, Javier Hernández Cervantes, director general of the Federal Labor Inspectorate for the Labor Ministry. In his remittance letter, Herrera stated that the Quintanilla report was sufficient and that it confirmed the presence of an unsanctioned (read, illegal) work stoppage at the company. Photographs also existed, he claimed, to confirm that the inspection was carried out though he did not include them in his correspondence. With the unlawful behavior of the workers now legally established, management was justified to punish the offending parties. Their reprisal was severe; after dismissing twelve workers initially, the company released twenty-six more bringing the total to thirty-eight fired workers. Left with no legal recourse, the union of the ex-Fundidora employees decided on collective action to counter the mass firing. 1,200 individuals connected to Local 67 assembled on May 12 and marched through the principal streets of Monterrey. The parade concluded in the Plaza Zaragoza and there its participants convened a meeting directly in front of the Condomino Acero – the building that housed the offices of Fundidora Monterrey's Legal Department.<sup>83</sup> Chants were heard that spoke of workers' rights and social justice. Banners were waved that assailed

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Spanish, in full, reads: ...estos trabajadores ni nadie dentro de la Empresa miembros de nuestra organización, han efectuado paro alguno; la verdad es que dicha persona no verificó ninguna inspección, pues incluso en presencia suya señalo a un trabajador como del Depto. de Estructura cuando este labora en el Depto. de Materias Primas y como estos trabajadores y otras más han sido despedidos arbitraria e ilegalmente por la Empresa, tomando como argumento lo dicho por ésta persona, independientemente de la nulación total de dicha acta, en su oportunidad ejercitaremos las acciones que correspondan a aquellos funcionarios que obran fuera de la Ley y cometen actos ilícitos, en este caso más grave, en virtud de que ha dejado en el total desamparo a las familias de doce trabajadores, de cuya situación hacemos responsable.

<sup>83</sup> AGN, STPS, DFT No. 4, Box 1308, Folder "D.IV./342(16)" "75"/1. Fundidora Monterrey, S.A." Report. "Acta Levantada por el C. Lic. Roberto Quintanilla Cantú, Inspector Federal del Trabajo, para Manifestar de un Paro de Labores Llevada a Cabo por los Trabajadores de la Empresa"; Letter from Manuel Herrera Aveytua to Javier Hernández Cervantes, May 14, 1975.

corruption inside the state's labor mediation framework. In the end, though, workers' appeals to justice and institutional integrity went unheard. The workers fired from the iron smelter were not reinstated.

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The case of the fired ironworkers in Monterrey demonstrated that at times workers – even elite unionists – could not count on state support in their battles with owners. Representatives of Local 67 believed that the federal labor inspector charged with investigating the conflict at Fundidora Monterrey was in the pocket of the company. They alleged that he filed a bogus report at the behest of the company so as to give management legal sanction to fire thirty-eight employees it deemed troublemakers. This narrative is useful because it confirmed the fact that workers could not expect (and never expected) unflinching support from the government in their litigation with owners. Workers who petitioned federal labor authorities never took for granted the outcome of tripartite mediation; recent history had instilled in them far too much skepticism about the revolutionary credentials of the Mexican state and its bureaucratic arms. Still, the post-Tlatelolco climate that was so saturated with the airs of revolutionary redemption made workers more confident than before that they had the law (and those who interpreted it) on their side. Wronged workers and union representatives raised labor suits in unprecedented numbers confident that the day's prevalent climate of social justice meant that government officials would rule in their favor. Many of these idealists also acted having convinced themselves that a revolutionary brand of collaborationism had returned.

Previous chapters have shown that, indeed, collaborationism was restored to a great extent in the post-Tlatelolco period. Nevertheless, one hundred percent consistency between rhetoric and practice was not a realistic prospect. The cases cited above are mostly mundane in their details, and they pertain largely to workers filing suit and threatening strikes to force employers to comply with federal labor law or fulfill/re negotiate terms established in collective contracts. In the majority of these cases, the opinions emitted or rulings handed down by tripartite bodies went in favor of the petitioners.



What can we deduce from this? Did most labor suits raised in the period bring favorable verdicts for workers? Yes, although a large portion of suits were settled privately and did not require a *laudo*, or formal board ruling.<sup>84</sup> Did that signify that the tripartite mediation process of the era was weighted in favor of employees and against employers? Not necessarily. The sum total of analysis suggests that one should not conflate a tendency on the part of labor authorities to rule in favor of complainants with a philosophical bias for the cause of employees over employers. The vast majority of resolutions reached by local and federal conciliation and arbitration boards on questions of workers' indemnification, wrongful termination, wages and compensation, safety and hygiene regulations, and union rights were "letter of the law" rulings that matched the terms dictated in the New Federal Labor Law or upheld terms established in collective contracts. Certainly the new labor code was derided by owners as philosophically biased against their interests, yet it was the law nonetheless. Could some labor officials have harbored institutional prejudices that favored one side over the other? Certainly. Was it possible that some of these officials were influenced in their decisions by an innate desire to compensate for historical wrongdoings or implement social justice? It was possible. But more often than not, tripartite representatives handed down rulings that merely met the standards of the law. This did not mean that they were pro-worker or anti-business. They were, above all else, bureaucrats who fulfilled their function to advance the new law as it was on the books.

The cases cited above represent but a sliver of the total pie of worker activism yet their details and resolutions reflect issues that were pressing across the panorama of the post-Tlatelolco Mexican workers' movement. The cases profiled in this chapter demonstrate that workers raised labor suits with authorities and went to battle with their employers seeking different objectives and wielding weapons of different calibers. Undoubtedly, the goals desired by those who ran Mexico's power grids were loftier than those aspired to by dockworkers in Veracruz when they mutually moved in 1973 to renegotiate the collective contracts that governed their relations with employers. The same differentiation can be drawn between the assets possessed by those who built ships

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<sup>84</sup> Middlebrook, 188.

in Veracruz and those who formed a highway crew in Durango. Each cohort petitioned authorities to intervene in a workplace dispute and raised a suit against its employer in 1973, yet they sought victory with vastly different resources at their disposal. In both instances, questions of union status, collective strength, and bargaining position were the decisive factors in producing the vastly different outcomes.

Well-intentioned unions like those formed by the dockworkers in Veracruz were ultimately ham-strung in their operational tactics because they lacked the high-power patronage of monoliths like the CTM enjoyed by members of elite national unions. Similarly, the members of the Durango road crew, though highly resolved to procure better working conditions at their job-site, were beset on multiple fronts because of their lowly labor status. As temporary, non-unionized workers who toiled without even the minimum protections provided by individual labor contracts, workers like the Beltran Rodríguez brothers were destined to look jealously at the high wages and generous benefits enjoyed by those in powerful and well-funded unions. In a real sense, workers grouped into unions of the ilk of SUTERM, “Librado Rivera,” and the Mexican Mining and Metalworkers’ Union, (though not in this particular instance,) formed a true labor aristocracy for they wielded an immense clout and possessed sufficient resources to manipulate the labor mediation process to their liking. As valued members of the official labor movement in Mexico, they enjoyed the backing of national powerhouse confederations like the CTM and worked to dictate the terms of the Mexican workplace after 1970.

**CHAPTER TEN**  
**COUNTER-HEGEMONIC *OBRRERISMO*: INDEPENDENT UNIONISM IN POST-  
TLATELOLCO MEXICO**

Mexican employers of the 1970s echoed their counterparts of the 1930s when they asserted that a labor aristocracy existed and exerted an inordinate influence over the flow of labor-capital relations in the country. A privileged clique of unionists, they contended, acted selfishly and whimsically, opting on occasion to hold local economies hostage while it pursued anti-national ends. All of this while it received encouragement – symbolically in the form of words and practically in the form of laws – from an ideologically suspect, even socialist, Mexican state!

Aggregate numbers gave business partisans reason to grumble; marked increases in both the number of strike petitions filed and carried out were seen from 1972 to 1973, rising from 2,176 to 5,557 in the former instance, and from thirty-three to fifty-seven in the latter. The numbers stayed relatively the same in 1974, when 5,182 strike petitions were filed and fifty-five strikes were carried out at the federal jurisdiction level.<sup>1</sup> Yet, trends within the statistics undercut any allegation of a quantifiable bias for labor on the part of the state. Workers, to their great detriment, witnessed the lowest percentage of strike petitions ever approved by the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board during the years 1973-1974, the so-called *Años de Huelga*, or “Strike Years,” reaching a nadir of just 1.02 percent in 1973 and improving only slightly to 1.06 percent the following year.<sup>2</sup> The fact that workers threatened to strike at record rates despite facing historically long odds for success is telling. Clearly, the New Federal Labor Law of 1970 gave them new guarantees that they believed could be won via collective action. The nation’s difficult economic situation also clarified for them the need to bring legally guaranteed rights to bear. The great majority of worker activism in the period, thus, was waged over basic meat-and-potato issues, e.g. a forty-hour week, alleged contractual violations, demands for higher wages, etc., and not toward ideological ends. Unions that took action to

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 164.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

procure contractually guaranteed wages or federally mandated safety provisions, for instance, were usually successful in their actions.

Workers that threatened to strike inspired by their president's lofty language on *tercermundismo*, on the other hand, typically failed. For insight, consider that a good deal of the more than 10,000 strike petitions filed at the federal level during the years 1973-1974 may be classified as solidarity strikes, or actions waged in support of an outside movement. Statistically, these petitions had virtually no chance of being approved, despite the fact that they were permissible according to Article 450 of the NLFT. Moreover, workers were driven to militancy inspired by encouraging rhetoric pronounced by a seemingly-*obrerista* president on workers' rights, class solidarity, and union democracy. The pro-worker promises made by Echeverría and other officials after 1968 were heard by more than just those who pulled the strings of the syndical bureaucracy. Workers of all stripes moved to hold the regime to its word, and in their militancy they exposed the gaping chasm that existed between rhetoric and reality. It would become railroad workers who operated outside the boundaries of the labor establishment, or electrical workers who swam against the tide of the syndical bureaucracy, for example, that would bring this paradox to light and most seriously test collaborationism's status as the only path for social justice and workers' rights in Mexico.

#### *THE CHALLENGE OF INDEPENDENT UNIONISM*

An immensely important part of this story, and one that has yet to be discussed, is the role that independent, or, non state-allied unions played in the post-Tlatelolco world of labor-capital relations. Hundreds of unions operated in 1970s Mexico outside of the tutelage of the syndical bureaucracy. These unions did not affiliate themselves with the nation's largest labor confederations, nor were they affiliated with the Congress of Labor, in most cases. Some of these unions opted to go it alone in their battles with employer, though the majority affiliated themselves with one of the handful of labor organizations – the Authentic Workers' Front (FAT,) most notably – that emerged in the period to build a self-governing labor movement free from state control. Member unions of the FAT, for example, vociferously criticized the structural aspects of the labor establishment that kept the majority of organized workers under the thumb of the nation's political elite.

Specifically, the *independentistas*, or those who advocated for an independent unionism in Mexico, criticized the power of the federal and local conciliation and arbitration boards to determine the legality of strikes and derided the arbitrary processes by which political and financial subsidies were awarded to favored unions.<sup>3</sup> Members of the socialist-leaning FAT, surely, expected little government help in their efforts to organize – and even less was forthcoming.

Other structural aspects further obstructed the cause of independent unionism in post-Tlatelolco Mexico. Article 365 of the NLFT outlined the process of registering a union with the STPS, stating that aspiring unions must present: an Act of Constituent Assembly listing the prospective union members' names and residences, as well as the names and residences of the employers to which they were to lend their services; an authorized copy of the union's statutes, and an authorized copy of the Act by which its officers were elected.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent language articulated that: "No corresponding authority will be able to deny registration to unions in compliance with these requirements."<sup>5</sup> The process of satisfying these theoretically simple requirements, however, became a bureaucratic mine field upon which aspiring unions frequently saw their quest to unionize blown apart by bureaucratic chicanery. Typically, when an application was submitted to General Office of Association Registry by an organization that was deemed independent, it fell into the hands of a tripartite board composed of one or more members (a *cetemista*, perhaps; maybe a *priista* harboring an anti-leftist grudge) who were predisposed to oppose it on political grounds. These officials might reject the application outright or cite some sort of technical flaw meant to delay certification indefinitely and, ideally, dampen the will of the applicants to unionize.<sup>6</sup> Thus, although the de jure requirements seemed clear, the de facto reality of registration was often quite different for independent unions.

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion about the ways that Mexico's political elite controlled unions, see Joe C. Ashby, "The Dilemma of the Mexican Trade Union Movement," *Mexican Studies* 1:2 (Summer 1985), 277-301.

<sup>4</sup> Baltasar Cavazos Flores, *Manual de Aplicación e Interpretación de la Nueva Ley Federal del Trabajo* (Mexico City: Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana, 1971), 259.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Spanish reads: Satisfechos los requisitos que se establecen para el registro de los sindicatos, ninguna de las autoridades correspondientes podrá negarlo.

<sup>6</sup> Several cases I have consulted demonstrate the ways that the registration process can be delayed for years on end. For an insightful example, see AGN, STPS, Departamento Jurídico, Box 1165, Folder 9/360(091)“70”/75.

Their efforts to register (and their attempts to unionize as a whole) were complicated by pretexts for denial that were, in the words of one labor lawyer, "as vast as one's imagination."<sup>7</sup>

Independents also lambasted the labor establishment for the ways it had nurtured *charrismo*, the system overseen by co-opted union bosses who served the interests of company and/or state officials. Although it is best left to form the basis of another discussion, it is important to clarify that corruption within the syndical bureaucracy was a primary impetus for the independent unionist movement that emerged in the era. Unionists spoke openly about their leaders' corrupt practices, often griping about how they stole union funds to augment their incomes, which were modest on paper. Many charros had access to union pots that were not negligible; recall that SUTERM members paid two percent of their wages to the union, and as employees of the Federal Electric Commission they were paid very well. Upper echelon unions also expanded their coffers with federal subsidies – sometimes in amounts that exceeded millions of pesos. Skimming off the top of union funds, however, was just one of the ways union bosses earned extra money, critics alleged. Several other methods beyond skimming were pointed to as being used by unsavory charros to fatten their wallets. They included:

- a. bribery – taking payment from an employer or another individual or entity in exchange for actions to diffuse worker activism and/or prevent a strike;
- b. kickbacks – taking payment for the transfer of a labor contract (typically from a national union leader to a local leader);
- c. manipulation – colluding with ownership to agitate workers into unlawful labor activity and receiving payment following their legal dismissal; and,
- d. trafficking – loosely, using the workers or vehicles one has at his disposal to conduct criminal activities, e.g., to transport drugs or weapons as Fidel Velázquez was accused of doing by his most ardent opponents.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> From "Organizing In Mexico. It's Tough, Often Brutal, and it Means Taking on the State," [http://www.ueinternational.org/Mexico\\_info/index.php](http://www.ueinternational.org/Mexico_info/index.php). (accessed September 8, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Tim Rush, "México: Activan a 'Charros' Agentes. Continúan los Intentos de Desestabilizar a Echeverría," *Nueva Solidaridad*, December 1, 1975, 3. On the topic of bribery, some speculated that the top brass of Mexican organized labor took large sums of money from the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers, a pan-hemispheric labor confederation started in 1951 with U.S. government funding and committed to pursuing Northamerican business and political interests by containing radicalism and preventing the spread of communism inside Latin American working class organizations. *Ceteme* was adamant about refuting any allegation the CTM or Velázquez had ties with the CIA. A cartoon run on January 11, 1975 showed a serpent-like creature with a man's face, bearded, and wearing dark shades and a CIA cap leading a group of foreign soldiers to seize Mexican oil derricks. The caption read: "México y Todo el Tercer Mundo, Deben Estar más Alerta que Nunca." See *Ceteme*, January 11, 1975, 3.

Augmenting unionists' hatred of charrismo was the vertical and undemocratic nature of the organizations they formed themselves into. Union democratization was the engine that drove railway workers to contest their union with massive strikes and other labor actions in the late-1950s. The cause of democratization, in general, helped spur the student movement of 1968 and became a cause that most politicians publically endorsed after Tlatelolco. The embrace of democratization was a trend, however, bucked by most leaders of the syndical bureaucracy who argued for the necessity of hierarchy and submission within union ranks throughout the Echeverría sexenio and after in Mexico.

Political fallout from the Corpus Christi massacre raised new questions about the close relationship maintained between the state and the official labor movement. The CTM, we recall, was fingered by many for sponsoring the Halcones, the mysterious paramilitary group that clashed with student protesters on June 10, 1971 and left scores dead in its wake. The CTM's reliance on other types of *esquiroles* – thugs, essentially, who were brought in to oppose worker actions – was well established in places like Morelos and Oaxaca in the period. Railway workers made waves again in the 1970s primarily as part of the Railroad Workers' Union Movement (MSF,) an independent coalition that sought to eclipse the state-allied Mexican Railroad Workers' Union in Oaxaca and free the state's railway workers from government control. Led again by Demetrio Vallejo, the MSF waged a constant polemic against charrismo in the press and via mass demonstrations and public protests. In some instances their actions provoked a violent CTM response. Most notably, MSF members battled a mix of cetemistas and esquiroles in 1971 when they seized several local offices around Oaxaca in protest of union elections they deemed invalid.<sup>9</sup>

The critique of charrismo reached a crescendo by late 1971. Feeling himself mercilessly attacked, Fidel Velázquez, the “*charro de todos los charros*” as he was viewed in the eyes of admirers and detractors alike, responded rather recklessly. Speaking in Tepeji del Río (Hidalgo) in early January 1972, Velázquez stated that the CTM would fight all potential enemies inside or outside of the constitution, if necessary. The CTM

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<sup>9</sup> Editorial, “Fin del Charrismo Lideril en México,” *Presente!*, November 21, 1971, 3.

had an army of workers, he warned, that was ready to combat “subversive” groups, meaning those, in his distinct view, that were not formally tied to the syndical bureaucracy. Quickly, Velázquez’s comments incited a firestorm of criticism for obvious reasons, not the least of which was the rumor that still circulated about the CTM’s links to the Halcones and the Corpus Christi massacre. José Guadalupe Zuno, father of the Mexican first lady, was one who was moved by the statement to go on record and express his distaste for Velázquez and organized labor in general. Velázquez he described as the “shame of Mexican unionism”; union elections were “embarrassing.” To correct these “defects” Zuno advised workers to “overthrow” Velázquez, though he doubted they had the stomach for such a task being that Mexico’s “syndical body,” in his view, lacked vigor. It was hence incumbent upon the president, his son-in-law, to do away with Fidel. Zuno assured that such a show of executive authority would be welcomed despite Echeverría’s frequent pledges not to intervene in syndical matters.<sup>10</sup>

CTM officials came out strongly in defense of their leader when he came under fire in early 1972. On January 20, one hundred prominent cetemistas assembled outside the tomb of Fernando Amilpa, one of only two other men besides Velázquez to ever have led the CTM, and swore an oath to keep their embattled leader in his current post.<sup>11</sup> Despite this show of loyalty, Velázquez’s position was precarious. It was not only Zuno who implored the president to do away with Velázquez, or, more generally, eliminate charrismo from the sphere of Mexican labor-capital relations. Echeverría heard pleas for action coming from all sides during his time in office – as much from the right by owners who detested the extortive techniques they claimed were employed by “gangster-like” union bosses, as from the left by workers who demanded the removal of corrupt leaders and the democratization of union practices. Echeverría tended to offer these demands a sympathetic ear, even voicing similar positions on occasion. In 1970 while on the

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<sup>10</sup> Rosa Rojas, “Fidel Velázquez, es un Defecto de México, Dijo el Lic. José Guadalupe Zuno,” *Presente!*, January 23, 1972, 7. Spanish, selected segments, read: ...acabar con esa vergüenza del sindicalismo mexicano...; El verdadero problema de los obreros consiste en enfrentarse a esas reelecciones vergonzosas.; Definitivamente, al cuerpo sindicalizado del país le falta vigor.; Y esto más que un defecto de los gobernantes, es de los propios trabajadores.; Si el presidente interviene directamente para acabar con Fidel podría ser blanco de las críticas, por inmiscuirse en los asuntos sindicales.

<sup>11</sup> Abraham López Lara, “Reeleccionistas Jurados. Fidel Velázquez, el Indispensable,” *Excélsior*, January 21, 1972, 5-A.



campaign trail, the candidate asked: “How can we speak of democracy in Mexico if in electing union leaders there is no democratic process?”<sup>12</sup> Later, as president-elect, he procured the release of Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa from prison on August 13, 1970, in the process helping foment a new wave of independent unionism. In mid-1972 he invited a group of 600 youths that participated in the events of 1968 to Los Pinos, the presidential residence, in the hopes of demonstrating the “clear and definitive” differences in his government’s thoughts and strategies with those of his predecessors.<sup>13</sup> These gestures and others formed part of Echeverría’s “democratic opening,” a presidential promise that workers, students, peasants, and others interpreted literally and used as their basis to challenge the grasp on power that select groups had held on to for most of postrevolutionary history.

Presidential rhetoric, at least in this case, had real historical impact. Emboldened by the democratic opening, rank and file unionists after Tlatelolco believed more than at any time since the 1910s that they had the right to determine their own syndical destinies. Needless to say, the democratic opening undermined charro hegemony and formed a rift between Echeverría and Velázquez, the top two figures in the labor establishment. This rhetorical matter, once again, had real historical consequences. The sharp increase in federal jurisdiction strike petitions seen in 1973-74 resulted not only from the independent unionist surge, but was also the product of a CTM strategy to urge its affiliates to raise strike actions in protest of the government’s perceived support for opposition labor groups.<sup>14</sup>

But even while the administration showed a relative hostility toward “official” unions, a rhetorical unanimity was nearly always shown between the two elements. Judging by the workers’ press, unionists could not have asked for a better, more tireless, and more sincere advocate of workers’ rights than Echeverría. The message was stressed to the average unionist that the unconditional bonds in the collaborationist chain needed

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<sup>12</sup> Michael D. Snodgrass, “‘How Can We Speak of Democracy in Mexico?’: Workers and Organized Labor in the Cárdenas and Echeverría Years” in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Luis Echeverría and Lázaro Cárdenas*, eds. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 169.

<sup>13</sup> Raul Stanford (AMI), “Intimidaciones Políticas,” *Presente!*, October 15, 1972, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Middlebrook, 117.

to be maintained if the Mexican working class wished to advance. A worker reading her union journal was bombarded with photos depicting Velázquez standing alongside Echeverría (frequently on the presidential balcony, one often applauding the other) and her participation was required at shows of mass politics routinely waged for public consumption. She and her *compañeros* also received instruction about the ways that their lack of a voice in internal union politics benefited their cause.

Virgilio Cárdenas García, a high-ranking official of the General Union of Mexican Electrical Workers (SUTERM,) stressed this point in his union's newsletter in July 1973. Vertical organization, he contended, which was characterized by a centralized decision-making power that governed workers in the same industry, was preferable to horizontal organization wherein unions representing workers of the same profession maintained a degree of decision-making autonomy. The latter form of organization had "certain advantages derived from independence and liberty of syndical actions," yet it could not, he felt, match the type of cohesion and bargaining power that vertical organization offered.<sup>15</sup> Cárdenas alluded to the role of electioneering and corruption in the history of vertical union organization, though it was not a flaw serious enough to make the horizontal alternative preferable for workers. The horizontal option was, in fact, a non-option; it was an "organizational form that belonged to the past" and was "obsolete." Vertical organization was a "concrete need of the workers' struggle" and the only "...answer to the business's gigantism; to the increase of ownership's power."<sup>16</sup>

*GIVING COLLABORATIONISM A SHOCK TREATMENT: THE DEMOCRATIC TENDENCY AND THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS' CHALLENGE*

Many, many sutermistas of the time disagreed with the position expressed in their newsletter in a way that some of their electrical worker brethren understood. Electrical workers, in fact, led the fight for democratization and self-determination in the ranks of the nation's large industrial unions – a fact not surprising given the tumultuous history of unionism in the electrical power generation sector. Electrical workers had, in some ways, fought to preserve their independence from state control since the establishment of the

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<sup>15</sup> Virgilio Cárdenas García, "Formas de Organización Sindical," *SUTERM*, July, 1973, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Spanish reads: ...respuesta al gigantismo empresarial, al aumento del poder patronal.

Mexican Electricians' Union (SME) in 1914, and although the SME formed part of the formal labor establishment through its affiliation into the CROM and then the CTM, it nevertheless ran against the current of the syndical bureaucracy via a horizontal structure that permitted locals to elect their own leaders and negotiate collective contracts without central union oversight. This democratic structure within the SME pitted it against the other primary unions of electrical workers in a way that disadvantaged it in its contest to win government contracts. The nationalization of the electrical industry on September 27, 1960 could have devastated the SME were it not for the incomplete nature of the action; the nationalization resembled more a mexicanization in that some utility companies including Central Light and Power Company – the SME's primary employer – came under only partial state control.<sup>17</sup> As such, members of the SME maintained their freedom to operate independently of the syndical bureaucracy in stark opposition to their compañeros in other electrical workers' unions who were tightly bound by the hierarchical and anti-democratic strictures of the syndical bureaucracy.

SME's organizational qualities gained additional credence in a post-Tlatelolco Mexico wherein the quest for democracy was paramount. Fortunately, they were not the only ones to militate for the cause in the period. Led by Rafael Galván Maldonado, the democratically-organized Mexican Electrical Workers' Union (STERM) maintained a running critique of charrismo that pitted it against the CTM and its primary electrical affiliate, the National Electrical Industry Workers' Union (National.) Conflict in the sector brimmed over in 1970 when the Congress of Labor, pressured by the CTM, expelled the STERM in direct contravention of its statutes. STERM's expulsion from Congress of Labor opened the door for the Federal Electric Commission to commit the equally dubious move of invalidating the contracts it held with the union and allowing them to be scooped up by National, a more reliable labor partner in its opinion. STERM responded by raising a labor suit with the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board. The board's subsequent ruling in favor of National and against the STERM demonstrated the dangers of defying the labor establishment but did not deter Galván and his

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter Four of this dissertation for more information on the conflict in the electrical workers' sector and the creation of the SUTERM.

supporters. Inspired by the injustices suffered by the STERM, workers in 1971 ushered in the revival of the independent unionist cause in Mexico with Galván's electricistas and Vallejo's *ferrocarrileros* leading the charge for syndical reform.<sup>18</sup>

1971 and 1972 saw demonstrations held in cities across the country in support of independent unionism. By July 1972 the National Union of Workers was formed bringing together all major strands of the workers' insurgency, e.g. the STERM, FAT, and MSF, into a single organization sizeable enough to challenge any potential rival.<sup>19</sup> Labor division in the electrical sector posed a real threat to the developmental goals of the state. Echeverría felt himself obligated to intervene, despite his frequent pledges to steer clear of intra-syndical matters. With strong presidential pressure a Unity Pact was signed on October 26, 1972 that merged the STERM, National, and several other electrical worker unions into a single union, the SUTERM.

Immediately, Galván's name was cursed in leftist circles for his apparent capitulation to the labor establishment.<sup>20</sup> By acceding to unification and accepting an executive position inside the new union, he reinserted himself back into the syndical bureaucracy that many of his allies blamed for causing the reduced state of Mexico's working class.<sup>21</sup> Still, the capitulation of Galván and the forced creation of the SUTERM did not end division in the electrical sector – as state and labor officials had hoped. Initially, the new union represented an only tenuous alliance of former enemies that was held together at times by nothing more than a popular enmity toward the SME, the SUTERM's primary rival for supremacy of the electrical sector. In short, SUTERM's formation did not stamp out the desire for democracy and self-determination so prevalent amongst electrical workers. SME forged ahead and the independent streak ran strong in the breasts of workers who had once formed part of the STERM. To combat this current,

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<sup>18</sup> See Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *¡Esto puño sí se ve! Insurgencia y movimiento obrero* (Mexico City: Ediciones el Caballito, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>20</sup> To encapsulate leftist opposition to the centrism of Galván, see the running critique of him kept up by Alfonso Ríos in the pages of *Bandera Roja* following the SUTERM's creation in 1972 and continuing until 1976.

<sup>21</sup> Specifically, Galván accepted the position of President of the Vigilance Commission, which monitored the adherence of employers to labor provisions.

SUTERM leaders instructed electricistas on the benefits of syndical unity – a condition that was, ostensibly, unobtainable without vertical union organization.<sup>22</sup>

But in spite of their best efforts, SUTERM leaders were not successful in convincing all in their ranks that blind submission was in their best interests. A strike carried out by workers at General Electric's Cerro Gordo plant in Ecatepec (State of Mexico) pushed the envelope on the question of syndical democracy and self-determination within the SUTERM. There, an estimated 3,000 workers belonging to SUTERM Local 49 ceased operations on June 13, 1974 and hung the *bandera rojinegra* from company walls. Men and women connected by chains marched around the perimeter and blocked access to the plant's nine entrances. Violence erupted almost immediately as marchers were forced to defend themselves on June 14 from 300 "esquirols and *Halcón*-like types" brought in by the union as a strike breaking force.<sup>23</sup> Blows were exchanged and a worker was gravely injured. The movement withstood this initial onslaught and a second round of violence on July 1. Solidarity committees that formed in nearby schools provided the now-fired workers with food, money, and other logistical support, though most strikers crossed the picket line and returned to work within a few weeks.<sup>24</sup> By September, a group of 550 painstakingly maintained the strike while their prospects for success grew dimmer by the day. On September 26 an accord was reached with management that reinstated all fired employees, except strike organizers, and thus ended the action. Workers put down their banners of militancy and returned to work having made no substantial gains.<sup>25</sup>

What was at the heart of the Cerro Gordo conflict? Workers at Cerro Gordo were driven to strike largely by their refusal to accept contractual terms won by national SUTERM officials in their negotiations with company officials. The nineteen percent

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<sup>22</sup> SUTERMistas heard and read about the better salaries, working conditions, and other contractual terms that their leadership had won for them when compared to those obtained by SME leaders. *SUTERM* editors scoffed at the collective contract reached between the SME and Central Light and Power in their March 1974 edition, summarizing the contract's details and quipping that the resulting terms differed significantly from what the workers had originally asked. The union, they wrote, demanded a fifty-five percent salary increase for its workers; it settled on twelve. See Editorial, "El SME revisó su Contrato Colectivo," *SUTERM*, March, 1974, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Editorial, "Obreros de GE: En lucha contra el imperialismo," *Bandera Roja*, June 30, 1974, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Editorial, "La huelga de General Electric REPRIMIDA," *Bandera Roja*, July 20, 1974, 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Trejo Delarbre, 72.

salary increase and the two hundred new jobs written into the new contract were merely “crumbs” in the opinion of strike leaders.<sup>26</sup> Discontented sutermistas formed an impromptu assembly and elected a representative committee to negotiate with the company directly. The committee, which did not have formal union recognition, published a manifesto days after launching the strike explaining its reasons for militancy and listing its subsequent demands, of which were: a. worker control; b. nationalization of the company; c. an authentic worker democracy; d. an opening of (corporate) accounting books; and, e. solidarity with other workers “in struggle” (i.e., currently on strike.)<sup>27</sup> National union leadership received the document disdainfully. SUTERM officials, always ready to speculate on the communist affiliations of strike leaders, alleged that “strange” elements had seized control of Local 49 and had deceived it into making “ridiculous” demands.<sup>28</sup> An August 1 circular distributed to all SUTERM locals declared that the strike was devised by “enemies of the Mexican working class” who sought only to break the unity of electrical workers.<sup>29</sup>

In reality, official union hostility to the demands of the striking workers was hypocritical. Three of the stated demands repeated well-articulated goals of the official workers’ movement almost verbatim; recall that the SUTERM had called for the nationalization of all electrical power resources in Mexico, and that it had frequently chided the SME for being in the employ an only partially nationalized company. Moreover, the “opening” of corporate books was considered a prerequisite step in the process of writing profit sharing clauses into the NLFT – a major priority of organized labor in the period. Lastly, the workers’ demand for the company’s acceptance of solidarity strikes was one that was, hypothetically, guaranteed by law.

Hence we see the crux of the matter fully exposed: the right of Local 49 to elect its own leaders and directly negotiate with its employers. This was a right SUTERM executives were opposed to granting, though their rationale for refusing it was convoluted. The matter at Cerro Gordo, one partisan wrote, demonstrated that the

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<sup>26</sup> Editorial, “Obreros de GE: En lucha contra el imperialismo,” *Bandera Roja*, June 30, 1974, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Editorial, “Informe Sobre el Conflicto en la General Electric,” *SUTERM*, August, 1974, 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

SUTERM supported the right of local self-determination because it had permitted its members to voice their opinion on contractual matters. The sort of self-determination that the author identified and praised in the SUTERM, however, was limited. Yes, he conceded, the majority had the right to demonstrate and rise in defense of salaries, benefits, union structure, and to protest the hiring of non-unionized workers at the plant, as it had done at Cerro Gordo. But when it came to negotiating with management, the worker's best interest was best pursued by his superiors. Only because of the vertical struggle, that which was "well understood and much better oriented and assessed" by union's national leaders, did the author believe that GE workers at Cerro Gordo received the terms they did.<sup>30</sup> These "favorable" terms, he felt, which included a salary increase of nineteen percent, an additional eight percent housing subsidy, a 700 peso maternity leave bonus, among other items, were the direct product of worker unity and the vertical organization needed to bring that goal to fruition.<sup>31</sup>

The GE workers' strike at Cerro Gordo proved to be the tipping point that ended the fragile peace inside SUTERM. Most importantly, Cerro Gordo, which never had legal authorization and achieved nothing for its participants, exposed the rupture that existed inside the SUTERM's executive committee. Galván openly supported the strike. He kept up extra-official communications with the strikers and even offered them terms of settlement that differed from the official line of the SUTERM central committee.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, he, among others, did not sign the August 1, 1974 circular condemning the movement. Galván's intransigence on the Cerro Gordo pitted him against Francisco Pérez Ríos, Secretary General of SUTERM, whom he branded publicly as the quintessential charro. Clearly, this sort of division inside a union of such central importance to the Mexican labor establishment could not be tolerated.

By 1975, the ouster of Galván from the syndical bureaucracy was demanded by the labor elite. A special congress was called by the SUTERM on March 21, 1975 to debate the Galván issue. Sutermites heard first from Fidel Velázquez who railed against

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Spanish reads: ...lucha vertical, bien entendida y mucho mejor orientada, asesorada por la dirección nacional de nuestra organización...

<sup>31</sup> Amador Robles Santibañez, "La Verdad en el Caso de General Electric 'Cerro Gordo'," *SUTERM*, July, 1974, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Editorial, "La Alternativa de la General Electric," *Bandera Roja*, July 20, 1974, 3.

Galván in an unusually impassioned way. It was high time, Velázquez felt, for electricistas to “...grab a ‘flit’ bomb and finish off the insects that are gnawing away at the unity of this organization.” Grab a broom, he commanded them, and “...take out the garbage from this great house of workers.” The CTM, he assured, was in favor of the expulsion of Rafael Galván and his partners, who, “for the -nth time have betrayed the Mexican workers’ movement and have incrustated themselves in an untimely way in the ranks of this great union.” News reports confirmed that listeners responded positively to Velázquez’s call to arms. “¡Fuera! ¡Fuera!” “Get out! Get out!” They chanted in unison. A parade of speakers followed Velázquez and echoed his aggressive message. Their speeches, however, were superfluous. Galván’s fate inside the SUTERM had already been sealed. A vote was cast and Galván was expelled from the union.<sup>33</sup>

Galván’s expulsion from the SUTERM removed him, for a second time, from a syndical bureaucracy he had attempted to reform from the inside. Future actions on his part to force reform would eschew any effort to work within the dominant super-structure of labor. The expulsion of Galván opened a vein that flowed through SUTERM’s ranks. Some workers who supported Galván defected from the union; others kept their union cards but voiced their support for his cause. Exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, but estimates attribute the pro-Galván faction as representing about one-sixth of the union’s 35,000 members. Suffice it to say a large number of defectors and supporters met on April 5 in Guadalajara and celebrated the first public meeting of a group calling itself the *Tendencia Democrática*, or, Democratic Tendency. There the Democratic Tendency (TD) united under the slogan of “Yes this fist is seen!” – in reference to the closed-fist that was the union crest of the SUTERM – and presented its program of action in words and leaflets, articulating an ambitious agenda with goals that extended beyond the syndical sphere. Regarding its labor priorities, specifically, the TD endeavored to bring: a. syndical independence; b. a general reorganization of the workers’ movement; c. the

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<sup>33</sup> See “Como a Insectos Pide Fidel que se Trate a Galván y sus Seguidores,” *El Universal*, March 22, 1975, 1/6/7. Spanish, in full, reads: ...agarre una bomba de ‘flit’ y acabe con los insectos que están carcomiendo la unidad de esta organización.; Es el momento de que cada uno de ustedes se provea de una escoba para sacar la basura de esta gran casa de los trabajadores.; La CTM está, y lo decimos con toda claridad, por la expulsión de Rafael Galván y socios, que por enésima vez han traicionado al movimiento obrero de México y que en mala hora se incrustaron en las filas de este gran sindicato.



unionization of all salaried workers; d. across-the-board salary increases; e. the creation of a movable salary scale; f. an improved/expanded system of workers' housing, rent freezes, and the municipal control of public transportation; and, g. complete worker control over an expanded parastate sector.<sup>34</sup> Other parts of the TD platform – namely, revolutionary education, agrarian collectivization, and the expropriation of “imperialist” businesses – iterated broader social goals that were in line with those of kindred movements including the FAT, the MSF, and Revolutionary Unionist Movement.

In the following months the TD, a group of approximately 6,000 electrical workers, organized dozens of demonstrations and meetings across the country to criticize the CFE for interfering in syndical matters and protest assaults that its members were suffering at the hands of esquiroles or other hired thugs. On November 15, the TD brought together an estimated 150,000 demonstrators who marched in support of independent unionism, chanting and carrying placards of the variety that read: “Jail the Charros!,” “Death to Fidel!,” and “Porfirio, Pinochet, Franco and Fidel – symbols of fascism.”<sup>35</sup> The march was orderly and moved along Mexico City’s primary boulevards, down Paseo de la Reforma, Avenida Juárez, and Avenida Hidalgo, and culminating at the base of the Monument to the Revolution, just meters from CTM headquarters. There a “sea of red flags” flooded the symbolic space and a train of speakers including Galván, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the legendary president, and Vallejo, rose to a makeshift podium and expressed their support for the development of a new, independent unionism in Mexico free from charro control. Immediately, the importance of the massive demonstration impressed observers. The Mexico City daily *Excélsior*, which was relatively sympathetic to the independent cause, termed it “the first demonstration of free and independent unionism since the tragic repression of 1959,” and the leftist periodical

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<sup>34</sup> Trejo Delarbre, 78.

<sup>35</sup> Antonio Ortega and Antonio Andrade, “Tres Horas de Marcha y Condenas al ‘Charrismo Sindical’,” *Excélsior*, Nov. 16, 1975, 1/13. Spanish reads: ...los charros a la cárcel; muera Fidel; and Porfirio, Pinochet, Franco y Fidel, símbolos del fascismo. The latter placard refers to, along with Fidel Velázquez, former Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz and the noted enemies of the Mexican and international left, Augusto Pinochet and Francisco Franco.

*Bandera Roja* judged it to be, “without a doubt,” the most important march seen in the Federal District since 1968.<sup>36</sup>

Not to be outdone, the PRI held a simultaneous demonstration in the Zócalo under the pretense of rallying support for José López Portillo, who had recently accepted the party’s nomination to run for president in the coming year’s election. Estimates put the size of the rally between 100,000 and 200,000 participants. Composed largely of sectoral elements from the CTM, the National Peasants’ Confederation, and the National Confederation of Popular Organizations, the crowd was also augmented with, (we can assume,) a healthy dose of *acarreados* brought in to inflate the size of the supporting mass. López Portillo addressed the crowd and never mentioned the massive demonstration that convened just a few kilometers away, though parts of his speech revealed his opinion of it. He celebrated the status quo in Mexico and praised the party of Cárdenas and Echeverría, who, tellingly, was not present at the political unveiling of his childhood friend.<sup>37</sup> He expressed his deep pride in taking the mantle of a party that had always fought, and would continue to fight, for the “...causes of the majorities organized around our Constitution that prevail in this country.”<sup>38</sup> With this pledge, López Portillo took a subtle swipe at the independents who pursued ends that he and other loyal priístas saw as marginal, counter-hegemonic, and, as such, anti-Mexican.

Amazingly, considering their proximity to one another, no significant incidents of violence broke out between participants of the November 15 events. Violence, however, would not always be averted when similar competing events were held by state-allied and independent labor factions. A series of demonstrations organized by the TD in San Luis Potosí (January 24, 1976,) Zacatecas (February 21,) and in Mexico City (March 20) incited counter actions by a group calling itself the “Nationalist Tendency,” and

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<sup>36</sup> See “La grandiosa manifestación del 15 de noviembre,” *Bandera Roja*, December, 1975, 3; and *Excélsior* article cited immediately above, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Echeverría was on a diplomatic and trade mission in Guatemala – a fact hinting, perhaps, at the last-minute nature of the event’s planning.

<sup>38</sup> “Los Gobiernos Temen Cuando Tienen Compromisos Vergonzantes con Minorías,” *Excélsior*, Nov. 16, 1975, 1/8. Spanish reads: ...las causas de la mayorías organizadas en torno a nuestra Constitución las que prevalezcan en este país.

occasionally with bloody outcomes.<sup>39</sup> November 15, 1975, thus, was just the first episode in a “cat and mouse” story of mass politics that unfolded over the course of a year with the Mexico City event of March 20 being the most substantial.

March 20, 1976 was an extraordinarily busy day in Mexico City, even by that city’s frenetic standards. Denied a permit from the city for its planned February 28 event, the TD and its allies had additional time to plan for a rescheduled event that was to be the largest show of mass politics ever waged in support of union democratization in Mexico. Again, as had happened the past November, establishment forces held a counter event, this time under the pretense of honoring the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Benito Juárez. The adversaries staked out their regular spots; the TD faction holding ground in the Plaza de la Revolución and the pro-state alliance occupying the Zócalo. Once again, the turnouts were massive with each side hosting crowds in excess of 100,000. Police helicopters flew overhead. Already bustling city thoroughfares were further crowded via the presence of more than 23,000 police officers who did not carry rifles but were well armed with batons and anti-riot gear including tear gas launchers and urban tanks.<sup>40</sup> The militarized state of the city created an atmosphere reminiscent of 1968.

Heated rhetoric was slung from both podiums, though the most pointed jabs came from TD sympathizers who had the most to gain from explicit attacks on the regime. Their adversaries at the top of the labor establishment, in contrast, continued a line of minimizing the independent unionist cause. In speeches, the cause of Gálvan and Vallejo was not mentioned explicitly, though its presence was alluded to. PRI president Porfirio Muñoz Ledo spoke to the crowd and repeated the popular maxim that “a revolution that does not have enemies ceases to be one.” Muñoz Ledo’s inference that the movement that Gálvan and Vallejo led was an enemy was, in fact, an upgrade from the rhetorical line more commonly expressed by officials that mocked the independents as mere minor nuisances on the Mexican political and labor scenes.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Most notably, nine demonstrators were injured by protest-breakers aligned with the Nationalist Tendency in San Luis Potosí on January 24, 1976.

<sup>40</sup> Francisco Jorda, Jesús Rivera, Ignacio Navarro and Saul López, “Elecciones Directas, sin ‘Charrismo’: TD,” *El Universal*, March 21, 1976, 1/18.

<sup>41</sup> For context, see Guillermo Hewett Alva, “Exige Fidel Velázquez. Un Cambio Radical en la Forma de Controlar y Dirigir a los Obreros,” *El Universal*, February 25, 1976, 1/10.

Fortunately, as had happened on November 15 of the prior year, violence was averted on the capital's streets on that March day; the massive police presence in the city saw to that. Subsequent brush-ups between the combatants, however, would not proceed quite as peacefully. On June 12, after feeling all negotiating avenues with their primary employer – the CFE – and their union blocked, the TD called upon its members to strike, an action to begin on June 30. A strike petition was filed with the JFCA wherein the goals of the action were listed. They included: a. the reinstatement of all workers dismissed for political reasons; b. a CFE guarantee of future non-interference in internal union matters; c. the implementation of direct elections inside the SUTERM with universal voting and secret balloting; and d. the immediate nationalization of all the nation's electrical power generating resources.<sup>42</sup> The JFCA acted quickly and decisively. It ruled on June 14 that the strike petition filed against the CFE for alleged violations to the collective contract was unlawful being that the “coalition” (not union, mind you) that filed it did not have title-holding standing to contest terms of a collective contract.<sup>43</sup> TD leaders took the news in stride; they had expected nothing less than complete government opposition to their cause. They proceeded with planning for extra-legal action.

The TD's plans rankled SUTERM leaders but did not intimidate them. Union boss Leonardo Rodríguez Alcaine assessed the prospects of the TD's strike petition accurately when he predicted that the “so-called Democratic Tendency,” lacking legal standing, had little chance of success.<sup>44</sup> The threatened action, he believed, represented only the machinations of a demagogue who was driven to break electrical worker unity and acted without regard for the nation's stability and prosperity.<sup>45</sup> Gálvan's motives, however, could not realistically be described as so nefarious. If nothing else, his subsequent decision to postpone the start of the strike from June 30 until July 16, so as not to interfere with the presidential election scheduled for Sunday, July 4, demonstrated his continued regard for the nation's institutions. Moreover, the postponement revealed

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<sup>42</sup> Trejo Delarbre, 87.

<sup>43</sup> Editorial, “Rotundo Fracaso de Galván,” *Ceteme*, July 24, 1976, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Editorial, “Los Electricistas Cetemistas, Dispuestos a Defender su Organización de los Provocadores,” *Ceteme*, June 19, 1976, 1/5.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Also, see Editorial, “Agresión Fascista al Movimiento Obrero y al Pueblo de México,” *Ceteme*, June 19, 1976, 1/2.

that he still operated using a collaborationist blueprint essentially designed to produce a middle ground upon which Mexican workers and the government could mutually prosper. Gálvan's moderate position on the strike issue brought him the enmity of the extreme left of the workers' movement, those who had criticized him four years earlier for accepting incorporation into the SUTERM. And, although he was slandered by his enemies in the upper echelon of the labor establishment as being a demagogue, Gálvan abided a political ideology of revolutionary nationalism that closely aligned his beliefs with those of Jesús Reyes Heróles, Luis Echeverría, and most members of the TD (and the SUTERM at large, for that matter.)

Straw polls were administered and workers were forced to renounce the TD and swear unity pledges in the run-up to the strike date.<sup>46</sup> According to SUTERM officials, the count demonstrated that the TD was greatly outnumbered by loyalists inside the union, by a rate of five to one.<sup>47</sup> Several large rallies jointly organized by the SUTERM and CTM were held in the hopes of diffusing TD support for the planned action of July 16.<sup>48</sup> SUTERM-CTM opposition had little effect. The first strikes began as scheduled at 6:00 a.m. on July 16 and others appeared intermittently throughout the day.

Overall, the early results of the strike were dismal. Electrical service in some locations was suspended when workers chose the no-show or walk-out routes to support the TD position, but others who attempted to take control of CFE installations largely failed as they were confronted by forces of upwards of 1,000 men in one instance, (in Monterrey,) called in to oppose them.<sup>49</sup> In Querétaro, army soldiers assisted by 200 CFE employees brought in from the nearby city of Tula wore the yellow bracelet of SUTERM unity and kept guard at the company to prevent the entry of TD members. Operations proceeded normally and customers paid their monthly bills without incident. In Puebla, TD supporters met in front of University Hospital at 5:30 p.m. to discuss the failed strike

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<sup>46</sup> TD spokesman Héctor Barba later told the press that over 7,000 sutermitas were suspended for their refusal to take the loyalty oath, a number that SUTERM officials claimed was greatly exaggerated. See "El SUTERM y el CT se Apoderaron de las Instalaciones Eléctricas," *El Universal*, July 17, 1976, 1/8.

<sup>47</sup> Editorial, "Estamos Preparados para las Maniobras de la Tendencia Democrática," *Ceteme*, July 3, 1976, 1/2.

<sup>48</sup> See Gustavo Escodero, "Unidad de los Cetemistas en el Edo. de Morelos, Contra los Provocadores," *Ceteme*, June 19, 1976, 4.

<sup>49</sup> See "El SUTERM y el CT se Apoderaron de las Instalaciones Eléctricas," *El Universal*, July 17, 1976, 1/8.

efforts elsewhere and plot strategy for their own action scheduled to begin promptly at six. Their discussions were interrupted by CTM members of various professions who, given the day off, were given license to heckle TD sympathizers and prevent their entry onto CFE grounds. Similar opposition to the TD cause was witnessed in Guadalajara that afternoon when potential strikers were impeded access to company facilities by large crowds composed only partly of electrical workers.<sup>50</sup> The initial setbacks of the strike were not reversed in the coming days. Hundreds who abstained from work in the first days were fired. The TD's core saw its plan to shut down CFE headquarters in Mexico City derailed by an army battallion that awaited it outside the building's gates. Soldiers prevented protestors from hoisting the *bandera rojinegra*, the red and black flag of worker militancy, on company grounds.

The setbacks suffered by the TD were chronicled and the roots of its failure assessed in the pages of the workers' press. Articles run in the July 24 edition of *Ceteme* celebrated the fact that the CFE had resumed normal administration of electrical service throughout the nation. Reports told of the strike's dwindling ranks and promises of amnesty were made to all remaining members of the TD who "laid down their arms" and returned to the union and their jobs.<sup>51</sup> SUTERM officials emphasized that the union had not entertained any talks of a truce with leaders of TD, whom they viewed as mere "pirates of unionism," and that the action was nothing more than a *paro loco*, or, "crazy work stoppage," carried out without legal authorization and for political ends.<sup>52</sup> The SUTERM's position had full government support. Minister of Labor Carlos Gálvez Betancourt expressed his opposition to TD's actions. The June 14 ruling of the JFCA, he told the press, was correct for the government respected the workers' right to strike but only when it was exercised lawfully; never by means of *paros locos*, meaning "crazy work stoppages." Gálvez, thus, though sympathetic to the cause of the TD whose leaders

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<sup>50</sup> See "En los Estados Ningún Incidente se Registró," *El Universal*, July 17, 1976, 8.

<sup>51</sup> See articles in *Ceteme*, July 24, 1976.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 1-2. Spanish, in full, reads: Ni la tendremos, ni la queremos. No habrá ningún arreglo con los piratas del sindicalismo.

he had spoken to on several occasions, was required by the rules of the labor establishment to reject it.<sup>53</sup>

The tense situation carried on between supporters of the TD and SUTERM-CFE turned violent on the morning of July 26 when the two sides clashed outside CFE offices in Puebla. Reports vary but shots that were exchanged between the two sides resulted in at least thirteen injuries and the death of Juan Guevara Botello, a local police officer brought in to help pacify the situation.<sup>54</sup> *Ceteme* editors saw the gunfight as evidence of the TD's total "moral bankruptcy" and as a harbinger of its imminent fall. The so-called Democratic Tendency, they wrote, was now worthy of the moniker "Terrorist Tendency" for it had resorted to violence in its quest to break the unity of the workers' movement in Mexico.<sup>55</sup> In its defense, the TD claimed that it was the CTM that had sent *pistoleros* (gunfighters) to heighten tension and was responsible for the blood spilt.<sup>56</sup> Blame in this instance, unfortunately, could not be established. In any event, the Puebla incident helped damn the TD cause as it gave fuel to the arguments of its opponents who now assailed it for waging not only an unlawful strike, but a murderous one as well.

Lacking legal validity and facing growing opposition from the public, the TD strike faced an imminent end. TD unity wilted under the combined forces of public opposition and the financial strain of unemployment, which compelled workers to accept bribes offered them by employers and union leaders. On the morning of July 31, barely two weeks after the Puebla incident, Mexican Attorney General Pedro Ojeda Paullada visited TD headquarters in Mexico City's Roma neighborhood to broker peace terms that would enable TD supporters to resume their labors at the CFE. Ojeda emerged from the meeting visibly satisfied. He told reporters that the union's offer to let striking workers resume their jobs unmolested was still on the table, provided that the followers of Galván renounced the TD and recognize the executive committee of the SUTERM. Another condition of the deal was that Galván and seven other TD leaders who had been expelled

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<sup>53</sup> Editorial, "Rotundo Fracaso de Galván," *Ceteme*, July 24, 1976, 10.

<sup>54</sup> See reports in *El Universal*, July 26, 1976.

<sup>55</sup> Editorial, "La Llamada Tendencia Democrática Pro-Izquierdista, se Desploma," *Ceteme*, July 31, 1976, 1

<sup>56</sup> Editorial, "Galván, Nunca ha Sido Electricista," *Ceteme*, July 31, 1976, 1/8.

from the union would not be permitted to return to it.<sup>57</sup> When interviewed shortly thereafter, Galván announced that 10,000 electrical workers from forty-eight sections of the SUTERM would return to work the next day via an agreement that, although not one that produced “vanquished or victors,” was an important step toward the regularization of syndical activities in the electrical industry.<sup>58</sup>

Galván’s first impression of the deal that ended the electrical workers’ strike of July 1976 was highly optimistic. Likely, Galván sugar-coated the terms of a deal that he hardly viewed as satisfactory. To those on the other side, the deal was a resounding victory and represented the defeat of the TD challenge. Opinion makers in the workers’ press gloated over their success in word and image. A cartoon printed in *Ceteme* on August 14, 1976 depicted Fidel Velázquez bedecked in his typical black suit, white shirt, dark tie, and dark glasses standing next to a TD member wearing a t-shirt labeled Democratic Tendency. The TD supporter stood with his left fist raised, though he appeared dazed after having just received a vicious right cross from the labor leader. “Yes this fist is seen...!” He must have wimpered. “Yes this fist is felt!” Velázquez answered, triumphantly.<sup>59</sup> In truth, the July 31 agreement was a SUTERM win and brought barely a temporary truce between the belligerents. Relations kept between the CFE, SUTERM, and the pro-TD minority in the union remained hostile and devolved occasionally into violence. On October 25, union-organized pistoleros confronted workers and prevented their entrance into a CFE building in Torreón for refusing to denounce the TD. Many who remained loyal to the TD cause found themselves fired for “unrelated” reasons.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Humberto Aranda, “Si Vuelven al Trabajo, los de la Tendencia Tendrán Garantías,” *El Universal*, August 1, 1976, 1/20.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. The figure of 10,000 was challenged by SUTERM officials who estimated the TD following to be somewhere closer to 1,000. When speaking to the topic of his expulsion from the union, Galván vowed to continue fighting to restore his and the other seven expelled TD leaders’ places in the SUTERM, thus making another public show of his belief in the essential correctness of the collaborationist dynamic. See Humberto Aranda, “Si Vuelven al Trabajo, los de la Tendencia Tendrán Garantías,” *El Universal*, August 1, 1976, 20. Smiling, Galván added in a self-deprecating manner: “We’re going to see if it suits us to put a charro suit on.”

<sup>59</sup> See Illustration in *Ceteme*, August 14, 1976, 3. Captions read: “!Este puño sí se ve...!; !Este puño si se siente!

<sup>60</sup> Trejo Delarbre, 90.



Organizational changes made inside the SUTERM in subsequent months further hindered the cause of independent unionism inside the electrical sector. By-law changes enacted at the union's Fourth Congress held later that year virtually annulled the legality of sectional autonomy inside the SUTERM and reduced the decision-making power of locals by placing even membership questions in the hands of the national committee.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, the congress re-elected Leonardo Rodríguez Alcaine to another term at the head of the union and voted to alter the union crest by dropping the closed fist that had, by then, become so closely associated with the TD insurgency and replacing it, fittingly, with the toothed-wheel of the CTM.<sup>62</sup>

The causes of the TD's failure to force reform inside the SUTERM were many, though some factors bear specific mention. The strike, according to Raul Trejo Delarbre, failed partly because it was not successful in inspiring the kind of widespread solidarity witnessed in the past and so vital to the success of the student and worker insurgencies as a whole. The great majority of sutermitas remained loyal to the union and opposed the actions of the TD minority. Moreover, members of the SME, although they expressed rhetorical support for goals of the TD, did not halt their labors and stand in solidarity with fellow electrical workers. Only the Academic Personnel Union of UNAM, who called for a work stoppage on July 29, and the Federation of University Unions, who stopped work for two hours the following day, rose in support of the cause of the TD.<sup>63</sup>

The government's position toward the strike was another primary factor that doomed it. As a "non-existent" and, hence, unlawful worker action, the TD strike caused the government to dispatch the army to disband crowds of strikers and protect government-owned installations. Military intervention at CFE headquarters in Mexico City and elsewhere marked the beginning of the end of the Echeverría state's supposed non-interference in syndical matters and publicly aligned the regime with the SUTERM and CTM leadership. Lastly, the involvement of the Mexican Attorney General (which eclipsed that of the labor minister) indicated that the federal government was actively campaigning against the strike and was intervening in a series of events that, although of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 88.

a purely labor nature, were being treated as political matters.<sup>64</sup> All of these factors, according to Trejo, helped subvert the campaign waged by Galván and the TD during the latter half of 1976.

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The defeat of the TD in 1976, though damaging to the cause of independent unionism in Mexico, did not bring its immediate end. Other groups of workers made limited gains in their efforts to contest the Mexican labor establishment. Members of some of the nation's most important unions mimicked their *compañeros* in the railroad sector by pressuring entrenched leaders to step down and instill democracy in union practices. Steel workers of the 1970s successfully democratized their locals though they failed to remove their union's long-time leader, Napoleón Gómez Sada.<sup>65</sup> Overall, the challenge that steelworkers posed to union bosses and employers paid off handsomely as their real wages reached their twentieth century peak in 1976.<sup>66</sup> Automotive industry workers also led the charge for syndical reform by seceding from the CTM on several occasions and re-writing internal statutes in ways that increased members' participation in union affairs and enhanced their bargaining efficacy with management.<sup>67</sup> All of this counter-hegemonic activity, in conjunction with actions led by the Railroad Workers' Union Movement, Authentic Workers' Front, and the Democratic Tendency contributed to a climate that saw strike activity in 1970s Mexico reach a post-1940s high.

Having survived the TD's initial failure, the cause of independent unionism as a whole faced another challenge with the change of presidential leadership in Mexico. After receiving the PRI's nomination for president on October 5, 1975, López Portillo mimicked all the pro-labor sentiments of his predecessors while on his famous *lucha contra el viento* ("struggle against the wind") the yearlong campaign that saw him

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Gómez Sada would head the Mexican Mining and Metalworkers' Union for several decades more, until 2001, when in good charro fashion he handed off the reins of power to his son, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, who continues to preside over the union despite having fled Mexico for Canada to avoid facing charges of fraud brought against him by federal authorities.

<sup>66</sup> Snodgrass, 171.

<sup>67</sup> For more information on the democratization campaigns waged amongst steel workers, see the Snodgrass article cited above. For a detailed analysis of independent unionism within the automotive industry, see Kevin J. Middlebrook, "Democratization in the Mexican Automobile Industry: A Reappraisal", *LARR*, 24:8 (1989), 69-93.

crisscross the country despite running unopposed. But it was not boilerplate labor rhetoric that won him the support of the nation's syndical elite. What most appealed to Mexico's charro set was the candidate's political centrism and his antipathy to the cause of independent unionism. As former Director of the Federal Electric Commission, López Portillo spoke critically of Rafael Galván and maintained warm relations with SUTERM leadership. This posture contrasted him with Echeverría who had upset the labor status quo by permitting non state-allied unions to function relatively free from oppression. Moreover, Echeverría's criticism of charrismo echoed the independent line and was a sticking point in the gears of collaborationism that union leaders were eager to remove.

The impending arrival of López Portillo and exit of Echeverría from the national stage, hence, boded well for the syndical bureaucracy and poorly for workers who challenged the labor elite – a premonition confirmed by actions undertaken in subsequent years. López Portillo dispatched the army on multiple occasions to disband unsanctioned strikes and demonstrations during his term in office. The willingness of the president to use the army to crush counter-hegemonic shows of worker militancy helped bring the demise of the TD and other kindred movements that had emerged in the political opening created by Tlatelolco. Government resistance to the cause of the TD was most pronounced on November 5, 1977 when police and military personnel forcibly dislodged electrical workers and their family members who had waged a six-month long encampment outside a facility in Mexicali, Baja California in protest of the CFE's hiring of non-permanent and non-unionized workers. Ultimately, increasing government authoritarianism and hostility to the TD exhausted its supporters and caused it to disband on September 15, 1978.<sup>68</sup> It would take an ironic historical twist, therefore, to make Echeverría – he with the bloodstains of 1968 permanently on his hands – appear a preferable option for the Mexican labor left by the mid/late-1970s.

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<sup>68</sup> Trejo Delarbre, *¡Esto puño sí se ve!*, 93.

## CONCLUSION

Battles won by workers who formed the independent unionist movement caused some to conclude that the lines of the playing field upon which tripartite relations were contested in Mexico since the Revolution had been redrawn. In late 1975, during the peak of the workers' insurgency, contributors of *Presente!*, a Cuernavaca-based weekly with a well-established bias for the independent movement that operated there, judged that the weight of counter-hegemonic worker activity was crumbling the nation's very political corpus. A cartoon run on December 17 depicted a huge Frankenstein-looking statue in need of repair. The decrepit monster's body parts were labeled with its head representing the CTM, his torso – the SUTERM, his right thigh – the Popular Socialist Party, and his left thigh – the National Peasants' Confederation. One of the workers, the Mexican President Luis Echeverría, clutched tools while he hung from the statue's head, trying to remedy its ills with a simple turn of the screwdriver. "If this botched statue fails us," the president in coveralls warned, "there won't be anyone later to disarm the force that it will acquire." Echeverría's efforts were foolhardy, though, to an observer that watched from afar, making the analogy that: "Like the scarecrows that later scare their own creators, this Frankenstein is ever more dangerous, [and] when it begins to move with the rope that they've given it, we'll see who'll [be able to] stop it."<sup>1</sup>

The image featured in *Presente!* referenced a clear and commonly held notion: that Echeverría, although he had given the independent unionist movement the "rope" it needed to exist via his "democratic opening," was reluctant to permit real reform from altering the labor establishment's status quo. A similar message was conveyed months later when *Presente!* opinionists celebrated a thirty-city strike waged by the Comité Democrático de Telefonistas – a renegade faction of the Mexican Telephone Workers Union – to force the union to renegotiate a fifteen percent salary increase it had recently reached with its employer, Teléfonos de México, the national telephone company.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodioc, illustration: "Monstruos de Agitacion Creados por el Regimen," *Presente!*, December 17, 1975, l. Spanish reads: Si este monigote no nos falle, después no va a haber quien lo desarme por la fuerza que va a adquirir.; Como el espantapájaros que después espanta a sus creadores, este Frankenstein es todavía mas peligroso, cuando empiece a moverse con la  cuerda que le pusieron, a ver quien lo para.

Because of this action, the newspaper determined, “The monolithic giant received a good blow and it’s staggering.” The independent workers’ movement, it continued:

...is a reality that will finish demolishing [the giant] if it stays united, organizes itself, rejects the provocations that will come more frequently from the growing desperation of those who are losing control. Onward fellow telephone workers! Don’t let yourself be deceived by the sirens that sing in concert with Fidel.”<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, in the opinion of independent allies, the interests of the Mexican state, as pursued by the management of the national telephone company, and the interests of the telephone workers’ union, as pursued, in this case, by CTM boss Fidel Velázquez, were one and the same. Telephone workers, they felt, like electrical and railroad workers grouped into similar hierarchical and undemocratic national unions, were forced to battle corrupt union leaders and state officials in their quests to assert control over their syndical destinies and attain a level of prosperity that was becoming increasingly elusive for the organized worker of 1970s Mexico.

Were these assumptions made on the part of pro-independent partisans accurate? In one regard, the answer was no, decisively not. Though there had been advances by the pro-independent forces, the Mexican labor establishment was not yet crumbling. 1976 neared its end and a scant few unionists found cause to rejoice over the gains that five years of mass politics and militancy had brought them in their mission to wrest the labor movement from state control. The combined pressure of independent challenges waged across many industrial sectors had shaken the foundations of the labor establishment, but the collaborationist framework survived intact. More often than not traditional union hierarchies like that of the SUTERM were forced to concede their adversaries very little: neither union democracy, nor the removal of *charros*, nor even the reinstatement of workers who had led oppositional movements took place. Overall, the worker insurgency that emerged during the Echeverría sexenio had only a minimal effect on altering the

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<sup>2</sup> Rosa Rojas, “Se Desmorona el Gigante con Pies de Barro,” *Presente!*, May 4, 1976, 2. Spanish reads: El gigante monolítico recibió un buen golpe y se tambalea. El movimiento obrero independiente es una realidad que acabará demoliéndolo si se mantiene unido, se organiza, rechaza las provocaciones que serán cada vez más frecuentes conforme vaya creciendo la desesperación de quien ve que está perdiendo el control. Adelante compañeros telefonistas no se dejen engañar por las sirenas que cantan a coro con Fidel.

*modus operandi* of state-organized labor relations and served, perhaps, to even embolden the recalcitrance of charros toward the independent unionist position.

On the other hand, were critics of the regime justified in citing the hypocrisy of state rhetoric on democratization and the hollowness of government pledges for reform? Yes, in many cases they were. Various chapters in this dissertation demonstrate that *de jure* measures included in the New Federal Labor Law were implemented and improved basic workplace conditions in Mexico. Moreover, the NLFT gave new spaces for workers to pursue collective interests via increased powers to strike and new guarantees in the arena of collective contracting. Echeverría's democratic opening too meant real *de facto* gains for organized workers, albeit to a far lesser extent than some unionists desired.

But even with the gifts given to rank-and-file workers in the post-Tlatelolco period, the overarching goal of the Echeverría government's labor policy in the period was improved relations with the Mexican labor elite, i.e. those in the upper echelon of the syndical bureaucracy. This study's findings show causality between the labor unrest of the 1950s and 1960s and rhetoric and reform launched by state officials in the post-Tlatelolco period. Working class militancy, as mentioned earlier, was more worrisome for state officials who contrasted it with the vocal, though largely innocuous, middle class and student-led activism that grabbed the headlines. More than merely embarrassing, worker agitation had the potential to halt the economy and subvert national stability. To combat the threat policymakers made organized workers the darlings of state rhetoric after 1968. Scholars including Kevin J. Middlebrook, Michael D. Snodgrass, and Raúl Trejo Delarbre have shown that the democratic opening as promised by Echeverría encouraged the emergence of reformist groups inside the tightly regulated organized labor movement.<sup>3</sup> Yet, my analysis demonstrates that state goals were multifaceted and not mutually exclusive. While democratic-minded policymakers were willing to permit

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<sup>3</sup> Specific works that link political reform in the period with the rise of democratic unionism in the automobile, electrical, and steel industries, respectively, include: Kevin J. Middlebrook's "Union Democratization in the Mexican Automobile Industry: A Reappraisal," *Latin American Research Review* 24:2 (1989): 69-93; Raúl Trejo Delarbre's *¡Esto puño sí se ve! Insurgencia y movimiento obrero* (Mexico City: Ediciones el Caballito, 1987); and most recently, Michael D. Snodgrass's "'How Can We Speak of Democracy in Mexico?': Workers and Organized Labor in the Cárdenas and Echeverría Years" in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Luis Echeverría and Lázaro Cárdenas*, eds. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 159-173.

rank-and-file dissent among workers, they also coveted the opportunity to revive a relationship dynamic with top union brass reminiscent of an earlier time.

The restrained postures shown by Echeverría and Velázquez toward one another during their feud also proved that a dynamic of reciprocity between the Mexican state and syndical bureaucracy was still desired by the principals of those institutions. The rift that formed between the Mexican president and labor's top boss over the issue of union democracy, though real, was not one made clearly visible to workers of the time. If anything, the divide that developed inside the labor establishment was rhetorically denied, as Chapter Ten demonstrates. The paucity of coverage given to the Echeverría-Velázquez feud in the workers' press demonstrates that collaborationism as a guiding rubric of state-organized labor relations endured, and its framework left little room for dissension within the ranks. Velázquez and other major union leaders of the era may have resented government and PRI officials' anti-corruption and pro-democracy diatribes, but they were not ready to wage public war against a party-state system that protected their status and, ultimately, buttered their bread. That the nomination and ascension of José López Portillo to the Mexican presidency helped thaw the icy relations between the Mexican state and the syndical bureaucracy further confirms that the collaborationist dynamic was alive and well into the mid-1970s.

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Like Mexican *charros*, leaders of the private sector hailed the PRI's nomination of López Portillo for president.<sup>4</sup> López Portillo's frequent assertion that he was "neither of the right nor the left" positioned him in stark contrast to Echeverría and pleased businessmen who had tired of five years of sparring with the Mexican president.<sup>5</sup> Without an opponent in the July 1976 elections, López Portillo became the nation's top political figure as early as October 1975 when he received the PRI's nomination, though the July election and the December 1 inaugural were still distant. The lack of any political opposition for the López Portillo candidacy placed Echeverría in a more prolonged state

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<sup>4</sup> "Los Dirigentes del Sector Privado Expresan Confianza en López Portillo," *Excélsior*, September 24, 1975, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Fernando de Garay, Alberto Márquez Salazar, and Mariana Vega, *PNR, PRM, PRI: Esbozo Histórico* (Mexico City: Biblioteca Fundación Nacional Colosio, 2003), 190.

of diminishment than was normal for outgoing *priista* leaders. Echeverría, however, refused to wear the “lame-duck” suit fitted for him. Beginning in mid-1975 and continuing until his last days in office, Echeverría maintained relations with the business community more polemic than during any other time in his presidency. Feeling their priorities undervalued by the federal government, a group of leading employers coalesced into a national coalition called the Business Coordinating Council (CCE) in early 1975 to better advocate for their interests. The CCE, henceforth, became the private sector’s primary interest group in Mexico and would exert real pressure, political and economic, upon the Echeverría and all subsequent regimes that have held power in Mexico.

A petition sent to Echeverría in May 1975 articulated the CCE’s top priority: the privatization of parts of Mexico’s parastate sector.<sup>6</sup> Echeverría rejected this demand while attending the Exposition of Mexican Industrialists on May 8. “The economic policy of the regime of the Revolution will not vary,” he explained, as it had “its origin in the history and in the interests of nation’s majorities.”<sup>7</sup> Speaking the following day, Minister of Internal Affairs Mario Moya Palencia endorsed the president’s position while casting new (although not novel) aspersions on the patriotism of the Mexican ownership class. As he saw it, the CCE’s petition reflected a widely prevalent and “retrograde attitude against the advances of the mixed national economy” on the part of the nation’s employers. Their words, he judged, made it seem that Articles 27 and 123 of the Constitution – “those that assured the participation of the great masses of peasants and workers, not only in the productive aspect but in the distributive aspect of the economy as well” – did not exist for them.<sup>8</sup> Quickly, business partisans shot back in their defense. Monterrey employers denied that the CCE was a force that resisted change.<sup>9</sup> Andrés

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<sup>6</sup> Specifically, the CCE petition asked for the return to private ownership for certain businesses including restaurants and steelworks that the Mexican state had recently taken control of. See: Editorial, “Congreso del Trabajo respalda a Echeverría,” *El Norte*, May 14, 1975, 5-A.

<sup>7</sup> “Oímos a todos; mayoría prevalece – Echeverría,” *El Norte*, May 9, 1975, 1. Spanish reads: Esa ha sido un petición muy persistente, pero la política económica del régimen de la Revolución no variará, ya que tiene su origen en la historia y en los intereses mayoritarios del Pueblo.

<sup>8</sup> “Censura Moya a empresarios,” *El Norte*, May 10, 1975, 1. Spanish reads: ...una actitud de retroceso frente a los avances de la economía mixta nacional...; Tal parece que para los empresarios no existieran los artículos 27 y 123 de la Constitución, que aseguran la participación de las grandes masas campesinas y obreras, no sólo en el aspecto productivo, sino también en el distributivo de la economía.

<sup>9</sup> “Empresarios refutan a Moya,” *El Norte*, May 11, 1975, 1.



Marcelo Sada Zambrano, the Director General of Grupo CYDSA, Latin America's largest producer of PVC piping, addressed the XIII Pan-American Congress of Sales and Marketing Executives in Mexico City on May 13 and implored some 300 in attendance to combat the government's slandering of the entrepreneurial sector, "the most harassed of the institutions in contemporary society," by taking to the airwaves, to the classrooms, and to the streets in its defense.<sup>10</sup> Their continued silence, he warned, could have dire consequences. Their activism, on the other hand, could stop Mexico's advance toward "totalitarian collectivism."<sup>11</sup>

Sada Zambrano's fears were widely shared but were largely overblown. The nation was not creeping toward socialism, despite the claims of its most devout capitalists, though recent economic indicators did give Mexicans cause for concern. Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer cite data showing that in 1975: Mexican gross domestic product had almost no growth, real wages fell below 1972 levels, private investment shrank for the first time in five years, the nation's balance of payments deficit had quadrupled since 1971 and the public sector deficit was seven times greater, and underemployment affected forty-five percent of the economically active population.<sup>12</sup> This fiscal downturn drastically altered the economic mood of the country from that of the late-1960s, when at the end of the "Mexican Miracle" GDP growth still hummed along at an average annual rate of six percent. The "five bad years" since 1970, combined with the trend toward nationalization and the animosity that cloaked most of the business sector's dealings the Echeverría administration deterred capitalists from investing in the country and provoked a capital flight that economists cautiously estimate in the area of ten billion USD.<sup>13</sup> This financial coup d'état waged by bankers, entrepreneurs, and merchants – all irate over an "Echeverría populism that was more verbal than real" – squeezed the national treasury and forced the government to "float" the Mexican peso,

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<sup>10</sup> "Avanza el proceso destructor de la libre empresa mexicana," *El Norte*, May 14, 1975, 5-A. Spanish reads: ...la más acosada de las instituciones en la sociedad contemporánea.

<sup>11</sup> "Sada Zambrano señala error de las empresas," *El Norte*, May 14, 1975, 5-A. Spanish, in full, reads: Y esto resulta intolerable. Porque la libertad individualmente ejercida, reconocida y sancionada por el Estado de Derecho, es obstáculo difícil en el camino del totalitarismo colectivista.

<sup>12</sup> Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 203.

<sup>13</sup> Abraham Nuncio, *El Grupo Monterrey* (Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1982), 58.

i.e. remove the fixed exchange rate with the U.S. dollar (which had stood at 12.5 since 1954) and let its value be determined on the world market as of September of 1976.<sup>14</sup>

The measure sent Mexican consumers reeling as the peso was devalued by as much as sixty percent within just one week of the announcement. In the days that followed, *Time*, the U.S. weekly news magazine, weighed the Mexican state's publicized reasons for floating the peso against the on-the-ground impact of the move. Mexican Minister of the Treasury Mario Ramon Beteta announced that the measure was a necessary precaution to counter the nation's mounting trade deficit (which then stood at 3.7 billion USD,) high foreign debt (13 billion USD,) and stubborn inflation that had recently averaged fifteen percent a year. Also, he referenced a decline in tourism that tourist industry operators linked to the artificially high value of the peso vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar. Defending the measure, Echeverría said: "In the end, there will be more jobs, more production, more exports and more tourism." Some potential down-sides of the move, according to the report, had already manifested themselves; the price of imported consumer goods like refrigerators and color television sets had risen dramatically overnight, rising twenty and thirty percent respectively. To ease the burden, Echeverría promised raises for workers, civil servants and pensioners – a tactic that foreign observers judged would surely compound the nation's already dire inflationary situation.<sup>15</sup>

In general, workers needed no formal announcement from their union leaders to notice that their paychecks had decreased buying power. Still, the damage that the humiliating measure inflicted upon the state would have been greater had it been properly acknowledged in the workers' press. The government's plan to float the peso was easily the most salient item announced by Echeverría in his sixth and final annual report delivered on September 1, 1976, yet it was ignored in the pages of the nation's largest union journal. *Ceteme* editors praised Echeverría's epic six-hour long speech in their

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<sup>14</sup> Aguilar Camín and Meyer, 202.

<sup>15</sup> "Mexico: Down Goes the Peso," *Time*, September 13, 1976. Online edition. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,914587,00.html> (accessed October 16, 2011). The *Time* report also described the practical impact of the decision upon the bottom lines of U.S. investors who had poured billions of dollars into peso-dominated bonds and savings accounts. A hard fiscal analysis was given: At the old exchange rate, for example, \$2,000 would have bought a 25,000-peso bond that at 12% would pay interest equal to \$240 a year. At 20 pesos to the dollar, the bondholder's principal has shrunk to \$1,250, and his interest to \$150 a year.

September 4 edition and cited parts of it relevant to the cause of the Mexican worker, including a proposed expansion of National Popular Subsistence Company and a redoubled government effort to fight speculation and hoarding in the merchant sector.<sup>16</sup> Incredibly, *cetemista* opinion makers made no mention of the government's plan in an omission that, although glaring, was not surprising in view of the rhetorical fidelity always shown by the CTM toward the Mexican state.

Organized labor's foot soldiers were given another opportunity to display their loyalty a month later when sentiments expressed by Echeverría in Monterrey ignited yet another war of words between president and the elite of the nation's business class. There, in the capital of Mexican industry, Echeverría attended numerous groundbreakings, oversaw a highway construction project, and visited the Monterrey Technological Institute – one of the nation's premier universities. A trip he made to Fomerrey #3, a former shantytown on the outskirts of the city since converted into a government housing project, made the most headlines. Echeverría spoke off the cuff to the community's residents and praised them for improving their lives through common work and solidarity. He also commended Pedro Zorrilla Martínez, the governor of Nuevo León who stood next to him, for his government's hand in the process. All that remained in the way of prosperity for the people of Fomerrey, he then insisted, were the "rich and the powerful" who, driven by greed and counseled by emissaries of the past, refused to channel their resources toward the public good. "Great concentrations of capital" were not justified, morally speaking, if they were not oriented toward bettering society. It was not enough, felt Echeverría, "to create effective factories;" it was also necessary that the rich and powerful and the industrial bankers of Monterrey channel their resources toward solving the problems of their fellow man. Those who denied this moral function were "profoundly reactionary;" they were enemies of the progress of the people who could not be called Christians.<sup>17</sup> This message, Echeverría reminded his listeners, was one he first

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<sup>16</sup> See *Ceteme*, September 4, 1976.

<sup>17</sup> "Visita el Primer Mandatario el Fraccionamiento Popular Fomerrey No. 3. Hace el Presidente Echeverría un Llamado a los Ricos para que den a su Capital un Sentido Social Moderno, a Fin de Evitar Explosiones Sociales," *El Norte*, October 16, 1976, 5-A. Spanish, in full, reads: El gran capital concentrado no se justifica moralmente hablando si no se orienta a resolver problemas de sus semejantes. No basta con crear fábricas eficaces; es necesario canalizar los recursos económicos de los ricos y poderosos, de los banqueros

articulated as a candidate, had repeated in his oath of office, and now, lacking just forty-five days until the end of his presidency, still espoused with conviction.

Immediately, public rejections of the Echeverría challenge emerged. A coalition of business groups led by the Monterrey chapter of the National Chamber of Commerce jointly published a letter in the city's major newspapers denying that they lacked feelings of social solidarity, that they were selfish, that they were enemies of progress, and that they were, somehow, un-Christian. They stressed their efforts to work productively with the state's governor – Zorrilla, an Echeverría ally – and cited fiscal statistics showing that Nuevo León employers shouldered an inordinate portion of the nation's tax burden.<sup>18</sup> Their impassioned response garnered them strange bedfellows. Manuel Salazar Ávila, who wrote for *Presente!* (a newspaper not typically prone to support the ownership cause) questioned whether “don Luis” was overly fond of sensationalist headlines, or, if his efforts to keep Mexico in a permanent “state of undoing” were deliberate.<sup>19</sup> How else, he surmised, could one make sense of the “cordial” speech delivered by the president and filled with such “caring” adjectives as “reactionaries,” “enemies of progress,” emissaries of the past,” “egoists” and others.<sup>20</sup> Ávila stressed that *Presente!*, in criticizing Echeverría, did not wish to defend the Monterrey Group, but wanted only to emphasize that all Mexicans – *patrones* and peasants alike – suffered equally under the weight of an authoritarian regime bent on forcing its personal convictions upon all.

Echeverría's tongue-lashing of the Monterrey Group also inspired shows of support, and particularly from reliable labor figures. Napoleón Gómez Sada, a *regiomontano* and long-time leader of the Mexican Mining and Metalworkers' Union felt, as did Echeverría, that Monterrey was filled with “enemies of progress, not only of the State of Nuevo León, rather of the country.” He warned these ‘enemies’ against thinking that the outgoing administration was powerless; the Echeverría government had until its final minute to act in the nation's interests and nationalize their companies.<sup>21</sup>

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industriales de Monterrey, a resolver los problemas de sus semejantes; ... aunque crean industrias, son profundamente reaccionarios y enemigos del progreso del pueblo.

<sup>18</sup> “¿Monterrey... Culpable?,” *El Norte*, October 18, 1976, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Manuel Salazar Ávila, “Echeverría vs. ‘Ricos de Monterrey’,” *Presente!*, October 26, 1976, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> “Proponen nacionalizar empresas de Monterrey,” *El Norte*, October 19, 1976, 1-A.

CTM officials, not surprisingly, were also pleased with the president's class-based rhetoric. Raúl Caballero Escamilla, Secretary General of the Nuevo León State Workers' Federation, defended the president's remarks and challenged the "lie" that local employers paid an unfair amount of taxes. The riches produced in the state, he contended, came from the efforts of its workers and not from the vanity and delusions of its industrialists and bankers.<sup>22</sup> Fidel Velázquez referred to the speech during his weekly press conference with a similar air of approval. The men of the Monterrey Group "...only think of their personal interests and never of that of the collective," he lamented, and rather unsurprisingly given that in his view there was little difference between the region's present employers and those reprimanded by Cárdenas forty years earlier for their lock-out action. "In spite of everything," the labor principal pronounced as the Echeverría government entered its final month and as he prepared himself for a new phase at the top of the syndical bureaucracy, "The Revolution continues its march."<sup>23</sup>

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If the Revolution that Velázquez identified was still active, did it still benefit the Mexican worker to whom it was so often ascribed? One routinely saw a case made for the affirmative in the pages of the workers' press. The October 2, 1976 edition of *Ceteme* celebrated the victories won by workers in recent years. Editors congratulated Congress of Labor and CTM leaders, President Echeverría, and the thousands of cetemistas who had recently waged strikes for the twenty-three percent across-the-board wage increase that their combined efforts had procured. This increase, they explained, was not won for the sole benefit of cetemistas but rather for the entire Mexican working class, a group they judged was composed of the nearly six million workers who labored inside the nation's minimum wage system.<sup>24</sup> Editors also praised member unions for their generosity in contributing to the organization's construction fund. Nearly twelve million pesos had been collected and plans were in place to begin building a new CTM

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<sup>22</sup> Editorial, "Los Empresarios Rezagados, no son ni Representan a Monterrey," *Ceteme*, October 23, 1976, 1/8.

<sup>23</sup> Gustavo Escudero Mendoza, "La CTM Apoya al Sr. Presidente, en la Condena a los Patrones de Monterrey," *Ceteme*, October 23, 1976, 1/8. Spanish, in full, reads: Esos señores sólo piensan en función de su interés personal y jamás en el de la colectividad.; ...la Revolución sigue su marcha.

<sup>24</sup> See: *Ceteme*, October 2, 1976, 8.

headquarters as soon as possible.<sup>25</sup> Alongside its celebratory function, the October 2, 1976 edition of *Ceteme*, (which, true to form, did not make mention of the massacre perpetrated at Tlatelolco exactly eight years before,) also conveyed a call for continued action. Members were praised for their previous, successful, campaigns to federalize labor tribunals though renewed efforts were required.<sup>26</sup> The workers' assistance was also deemed crucial in the CTM's ongoing quest to expand the purview of the Federal Consumer Advocate's Office – the body that monitored aspects of the production, distribution, and commercialization of goods in the country.<sup>27</sup>

By referencing recent gains and outlining future priorities of organized workers, *Ceteme* officials measured their own performance at the end of the Echeverría sexenio and argued for their continued importance to the cause of the Mexican unionist. Working hand-in-glove with the Mexican state, it was easy for them at the head of the nation's most influential labor organization to identify changes they had helped bring to fruition since the political trauma of 1968 forced the state toward preemptive reform. The New Federal Labor Law was described as a crowning achievement for the Mexican working class though it hardly signified the end of workers' gains; much more had been won since May 1, 1970. Previous chapters show that the Echeverría government directly addressed the needs of workers via the creation and/or expansion of public programs such as the National Popular Subsistence Company, that protected the purchasing power of consumers, and National Worker Housing Institute, which provided housing for many salaried workers. Moreover, public sector employment was increased by sixty percent during this period, dramatically raising public expenditures on health and education benefits for state workers.<sup>28</sup> Medical coverage as provided by the Mexican Social Security Institute was extended from twenty-four to thirty-six percent of the population, and the president decreed three exceptional wage increases during the period: 1973 – eighteen percent; 1974 – seventeen percent; and a twenty-three percent increase after the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Editorial, "Las Autoridades del Trabajo, Nunca Actúan con el Espíritu de la Ley," *Ceteme*, September 4, 1976, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Editorial, "Nuestra Central Demanda Total Control de Precios," *Ceteme*, October 2, 1976, 1/8.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth M. Coleman and Charles L. Davis, "Preemptive Reform and the Mexican Working Class," *Latin American Research Review* 18 (Winter 1983): 8.

devaluation of 1976.<sup>29</sup> These measures, which according to political scientists Kenneth M. Coleman and Charles L. Davis were directed squarely at the nation's organized workers, were not merely organizational or rhetorical gestures. They were major policy concessions on the part of the state toward the Mexican working class. They had real impact on workers' lives and placated organized labor with a high degree of success.

Still, was the typical Mexican worker better off in 1976 than he had been in 1968? Economic data suggests not. The Echeverría administration's penchant to expand the public sector and to spend freely during the period 1972-1975 revived Mexico's economic growth, temporarily, but at the cost of the stability of the national currency. The nation's external debt surged after 1973, making its much lauded price stability impossible to sustain – a challenge compounded by the openness of the national economy to inflationary pressures imported from the United States and elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> Inflation ensued and rates which averaged five percent during the years 1971 and 1972 skyrocketed upwards reaching twelve percent in 1973 and as high as twenty-four percent in 1976.<sup>31</sup> Many of the labor battles waged during this period and described herein were sparked by inflation and the challenge it posed to workers' basic ability to earn a wage and provide for their families. Joblessness and unemployment peaked during this period as well despite the growth of numerous industrial sectors. Employment gains brought through the creation of large factories in the expanding *maquiladora* sector, for example, were offset by the loss of employment in small shops that were driven out of existence by larger enterprises.<sup>32</sup> At the end of the day, the economic goals of the Echeverría government, though infused with the watchwords of “mixed,” “equilibrium,” and “social

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Detailed descriptions of the notable wage increase battles of the period have been cut from this analysis for brevity's sake. A quick encapsulation of the issue, however, may read in the following way: In contrast to its failure to legislate the forty-hour week into law, organized labor was often successful in its efforts to procure wage increases for unionists of the period, though its victories in this arena were mitigated in the context of economic turmoil and rampant inflation. Beginning in December of 1972, inflationary pressures manifested themselves in Mexico. The origins of the problem were multifaceted but difficulties emanated primarily from the Mexican marketplace's relatively rigid supply of goods and from shenanigans pulled by distributors operating at the regional down through the local levels.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. The worst of the inflation situation was yet to come. Average annual inflation rates would hover between eighteen and thirty percent during the period 1977-1980, to mention nothing of the astronomical rates they would reach in the 1980s when hyperinflation brought the Mexican economy to the brink of complete devastation.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 7.

justice,” closely resembled those of earlier regimes that were committed to a capital-intensive, output maximization development strategy that privileged the needs of employers over their employees. Workers were thus left to militate simply to procure working conditions already guaranteed them by law, all the while suffering inflation and feeling their standard of living precipitously decline.

Unionists too, those “privileged” elements of the working class, also felt their standing vis-à-vis owners worsen in the post-Tlatelolco period. Despite juridical guarantees outlined in the NLFT and elsewhere, the Mexican unionist struggled even to exercise some of his most basic rights – including the right to strike. Chapters Eight and Nine use case studies to qualitatively challenge the contention that unionists prevailed over employers in Mexican post-Tlatelolco tripartite relations. Chapter Ten does likewise, though it uses quantitative data on strike approval rates to reject the assumption that the unionist was a favored sociopolitical and economic actor after Tlatelolco.<sup>33</sup>

How may we understand the paradox, then, that despite diminished prospects for victory, unions filed strike petitions at record rates in the post-Tlatelolco period? This phenomenon, I believe, is at least partly understandable by returning to one of this study’s principal contentions: *words mattered*. The perpetual war of words waged between politicians, particularly Echeverría and PRI president Jesús Reyes Heróles, and the entrepreneurial sector during the 1970s strengthened the leaders of the syndical bureaucracy by publicly aligning the nation’s maximum political figures with the cause of the Mexican worker as pursued by their unions. Moreover, government action taken after Tlatelolco, namely the creation of the NLFT, the mexicanization of certain

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<sup>33</sup> Figures compiled by Kevin Middlebrook and cited in Chapter Ten confirm that historically low strike approval rates were witnessed during the Echeverría administration. Middlebrook’s extensive analysis of labor ministry records for the period 1938-1993 also shows that the highest strike recognition percentage occurred during the conservative presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho, 1940-1946, and particularly during the years 1943, 1944, and 1945 when 66.3 percent, 66.5 percent, and 40.7 percent of all strike petitions were approved, respectively. Moreover, the percentage of recognized strike petitions was higher during the sexenio of Díaz Ordaz than during the more liberal presidency of Echeverría that followed it, being 3.0 percent and 1.9 percent respectively – two extremely low figures when compared with the high, though highly anomalous, rates witnessed in the mid-1940s. Middlebrook’s data, in short, challenges any assumption that the percentage of strikes recognized as legal was, as a rule, higher during “liberal” than during “conservative” presidencies. No strict correlation may be made between the perceived ideology of a regime and the strike approval rate. See Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 165-166.



industries, and the periodic imposition of price controls or wage increases, motivated unionists of all stripes to raise labor suits and file strike petitions at unprecedented rates.

This study's rhetorical analysis of the workers' press and other media outlets suggests that preemptive reform implemented by the state after 1968 largely worked; discontent was mostly quelled inside state-allied unions in a way that permitted the government to pursue its developmental goals relatively free from industrial disturbances. Furthermore, the attention I give to official state and labor publications demonstrates that a rhetorical public concordance existed between the labor and syndical bureaucracies during the period 1968-1976 but was noticeably stronger after 1975, a fact owing as much to Echeverría's well publicized spat with the private sector as to the challenge that independent unionism posed to the positions of elite unions and their leaders. It thus appears that it was for reasons of self-preservation and in spite of the fact that Echeverría showed relative tolerance to the cause of independent unionism, that a robust form of collaborationism emerged in the 1970s to foster a state-organized labor consensus of a kind not seen in Mexico since the 1930s. It was the expectation of state support and not the proven existence of it that drove workers continually to seek gains even as their prospects for success in mediation dwindled to historically low levels. It was rhetoric as much as reality that guided the majority of organized labor activity in the era. Words, in short – those both spoken and in print – had real impact on influencing the thinking, actions, and lives of the millions of men and women who formed themselves into the unions of post-Tlatelolco Mexico.

Neither the era's economic distress nor the independent unionist movement that surged in the period fundamentally upset the collaborationist dynamic that had tied the official workers' movement to the Mexican state since 1920. Neither inflation, nor unemployment, nor authoritarianism deterred the syndical bureaucracy from assembling unionists and other elements together in shows of mass support for the regime. On a cold evening on December 1, 1976, a large gathering of organized workers, peasants, and members of the popular sector huddled together outside the National Auditorium to cheer on the transfer of presidential power that was occurring inside. After the ceremony, many bade farewell to Echeverría, the now-former president, as he descended the building's

front stairwell, and thanked him for his efforts “to realize revolutionary works.”<sup>34</sup> Such a show of patriotism and solidarity, *Ceteme* reported, was only possible amongst a people that enjoyed economic stability and had not suffered the ill fates of neighbors who had fallen into militarism and fascism, and had toiled without the ability to live a life of dignity and justice as was purportedly enjoyed in Mexico.<sup>35</sup>

Thus things appeared to the bulwark of the workers’ press; the “dirty” war, the repression of independent unionists, and the declining social status experienced by most of the working class during the past six years were publicly ignored. With the transfer of power, the collaborationist machinery had been mobilized and the acceptable limbs of civil society welcomed the pro-business López Portillo to the presidential chair with open arms. In all the time elapsed since the watershed events of 1968 exposed the Mexican state to unprecedented criticism and demands for reform, its hierarchical and undemocratic labor structure was largely unchanged. Fidel Velázquez, the CTM, and the majority of power-players in the Mexican labor establishment endured. The revolutionary corpus remained intact.

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<sup>34</sup> Editorial, “Los Cetemistas de sus Vallas, Dieron un Firme Apoyo al Presidente Lic. José López Portillo,” *Ceteme*, December 4, 1976, 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

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