

THE MEXICAN LABOR MOVEMENT: 1917-1975

by

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The new attention given to the study of the history of the Mexican labor movement has not been accidental. Forgotten for several decades by political scientists and historians, this topic has taken on a new urgency. This has been partly because recent research in Mexican history has stumbled upon reservoirs of information in the course of attempting to answer the question, what has been the participation of the workers in the recent evolution of the Mexican state? It has also been due to the growing impact of independent trade unionism on national politics, and to the labor movement's need to find in its past the historical consciousness which official versions of labor history have attempted to obscure.

The history of Mexican trade unionism has oscillated between two extremes: the submission of the trade unions to the state, and the repression of the independent movements which have tried to extricate themselves from that situation. One of the characteristic features of the Mexican state since its formation has been its close relationship with the trade unions, which have served in turn as bases of support and as instruments for diluting the autonomous self-organization of the workers. Even the characteristics of trade union organizations, their programs and their political participation, have depended — with a few notable exceptions — on the needs of the state. This has been the case throughout the twentieth century, but it has been especially clear during the crucial moments in the evolution of the Mexican state, particularly during the regimes of Obregón, Cárdenas, and, most recently Echeverría.

Some of the factors which have determined the subjection of the labor movement to the state include a nationalist ideology which even the independent trade unions have accepted without question, the close relationship between union leaders and the government, and the lack of appropriate and effective tactics among leftist groups. The state, in turn, intent on maintaining a strategy of industrial development at all costs, has concentrated on its relations with the trade union bureaucracy and has achieved the demobilization of the workers through a combination of concessions and repression, using the former in small doses to weaken discontent and the latter when this discontent could no longer be contained. In Mexico, the state has rendered workers powerless by organizing them and incorporating the unions into official politics. This has happened with the two most important labor federations: the

Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), which have supported the actions of whoever has been President, have carried out electoral campaigns, and in general have controlled all outbursts of union independence. The state-party-union formula, characteristic of populist systems, has been the fundamental structure of the Mexican system. This essay outlines the development of the Mexican trade union organizations and their ties to the state.

From its birth in 1912 the Casa del Obrero Mundial was dominated by anarchist currents. Starting as a center for philosophical discussions, this institution became the embryo of a trade union. One of its creators would later note that in the Casa, "reformist trade unionism of a Marxist-socialist hue was left aside and attention was centered on . . . anarcho-syndicalism, without an ounce of bourgeois or proletarian politics" (R. Salazar, 1972a:11). In their supposedly apolitical stance the leaders of the Casa attempted to remove themselves from the struggles between the groups which were fighting for power, but they also removed the workers from the political struggles.

After the victory of the constitutionalist (Carrancista) forces in 1914, the idea of establishing an alliance with the victors won out in the Casa. At first Carranza rejected the pact with the Casa, both because he considered that it "releged on the Fatherland" and because he felt he did not need its support. However, when Carranza's forces were pushed out of Mexico City by Zapata and Villa, Carranza's lieutenants (especially Alvaro Obregón) with better political vision sealed the pact with the Casa del Obrero Mundial. Thus, in February 1915 the leaders of the Casa promised to "suspend trade union and syndicalist organizing and enter into a different phase of activity in view of the urgent need to propel and intensify the revolution" (R. Salazar, 1972b:79). The Casa appointed a "revolutionary committee" which cemented the alliance with Carranza, who in turn agreed to issue laws which would benefit the workers. The collaboration of the Casa with Carranza marked the alliance of the labor movement with the bourgeois wing of the "revolution" in exchange for a few concessions. The Casa organized its members into the Batallones Rojos (Red Battalions), which were six military units made up of almost ten thousand men, to defend the constitutionalist government. Thus, "the urban workers, led by a handful of opportunist leaders, experienced a period of complete confusion. Unable to form an independent proletariat and to put forward a program for society based on their own class interests, they were overcome and strangled by the forces imposed upon them externally; thus they were driven to join those whom they considered the strongest, that is, the Constitutionals" (Córdova, 1973:16). Grouped into the Batallones Rojos, the workers from the Casa demonstrated that they had a great capacity for organization, but they used their strength to combat their class brothers, the peasants headed by Villa and Zapata in revolt against Carranza.

Not all sections of the labor movement agreed to the pact with the government. Some anarcho-syndicalist groups refused to join. Rank and file workers were divided, as many did not want to enlist in the Carrancista ranks. For Jean Meyer (1971:12), the collaboration of the Casa del Obrero Mundial with the government was "a fatal step which would place the Mexican labor movement under the tutelage of the government, a tutelage which has persisted until today." Later, when the Casa began to be a nuisance, the Carranza regime

brought about its disappearance.

Between 1915 and 1916 a wave of strikes engulfed the whole country. The elementary school teachers, the trolley car operators, the electricians, and in the state of Mexico the miners, all went on strike, some of them led by the Casa del Obrero Mundial. The government did not intervene at that point, but when workers demanded that their wages be paid in metallic coin and not in paper during the monetary crisis of 1916, Carranza severely repressed the trade unions and the leaders who supported this demand. This repression brought about the demise of the Casa.

In 1917 while the most outstanding labor leaders were still in prison, the convention in charge of drafting a new constitution included in the document some labor demands, concretely in Articles 27 and 123. Although Carranza was not in agreement with these articles, he was forced to accept them in order to avoid the resurgence of an organized opposition. However, while he signed the Constitution, Carranza did not make any concessions which hurt the interests he represented. He accomplished the consolidation of the Mexican bourgeoisie as the class in power.

For a long time, labor leaders had expressed the need for creating a central union federation which would include all the various isolated labor groups. In 1916, the Federación de Sindicatos Obreros del Distrito Federal (FSODF) called a labor congress. The Confederación del Trabajo de la Región Mexicana was the result of that congress and Louis N. Morones, who represented the FSODF, was elected the leader of the new organization.

Meanwhile, Carranza was concerned about staying in at least partial control of organized labor. Through the governor of Coahuila, Gustavo Espinoza Mireles, he issued a manifesto-invitation to a labor congress which took place in Saltillo, Coahuila, on May 1. Some organizations did not attend as they did not approve of the Carrancista maneuver to control the labor movement. After long discussions, the delegates from eighteen states agreed to form the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM).

From its origins, the CROM revealed itself to be closely tied to the state. As for its principles, "it formally accepted the class struggle, but it limited itself to the economic sphere; tactically it adopted the anarchist direct action strategy (limited, of course, to the economic struggle and excluding all use of violence). It left the door open to political participation. Since hard work had been done to discredit revolutionary principles in the working class, this political action had a bourgeois content. The CROM political action was aimed at gaining concessions, not building a proletarian revolution or struggling "for the organization and politization of the working class" (Iglesias, 1970:43-44).

The CROM's policy was guided by several young leaders who made up the Grupo Acción, headed by Morones. The centralization of power was thus formalized within the labor organization. In 1919 the Grupo Acción created a Labor Party to support Alvaro Obregón's candidacy for President. When Carranza was murdered and Adolfo de la Huerta became provisional President, the CROM and the Labor Party accepted large sums of money from Obregón and Calles in return for CROM backing.

Obregón's election as President in 1920 allowed the CROM leaders to achieve two of their objectives: official support and posts within the government apparatus. Celestino Gasca and Luis N. Morones were named respective-

ly Governor of the Distrito Federal and Director of Factory Supplies and Military Provisions. In 1921 and 1923 a series of strikes exploded which were neutralized thanks to secret agreements between Obregón and the CROM leaders. However, in 1921 the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT) was founded, headed by the anarcho-syndicalists Rosendo Salazar, Rafael Quintero, and José G. Escobar. The CGT supported the railroad and trolley car operators' strikes and confronted the CROM, thus initiating a stage of ideological division of the labor movement.

When Obregón smashed several strikes promoted by the CGT, especially the trolley car operators' strike in 1923, the CGT decided to openly oppose the government. On that occasion, the authorities opened the jails so that convicts backed by the army could act as scabs in the trolley operators' strike; this resulted in the death of several workers. The CGT got the support of Adolfo de la Huerta, who was also opposed to Obregón, although for different reasons. For his part, Obregón backed the CROM for some time — until various acts of his regime, among them the assassination of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Governor of Yucatán, brought about a cooling off of relations between the CROM and the President. By then, the leaders of the CROM had acquired the administrative posts which they would keep during the succeeding regimes.

Having set the foundations for its own development, the constitutionalist regime turned its attention to securing the "conciliation of classes." By that time, the CROM had lost its combativeness. In May 1924 CROM leader Reinaldo Cervantes declared that his federation had changed its tactics: "no longer will destructive demonstrations proclaim the rights of workers . . . today all features of the confederation are true to the broadest justice . . . it is not a matter of destroying capital, it is a matter of consolidating labor and capital" (R. Salazar, 1938:138). Not long before that Calles, who was already a candidate for President, had declared that, "the trade unions today are in charge of limiting capitalism's absolute power, serving at times to protect it from possible attacks which might destroy it" (Iglesias, 1970:98). The future President announced his policy: to control the trade unions through the CROM, to insure order and a social base for the development of production.

When he was sworn in as President, Plutarco Elías Calles appointed Morones as Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Labor. In the same 1924 elections, 12 deputies and three senators belonging to the CROM won seats. Morones, in his double role as labor leader and government official, systematically favored the CROM-sponsored unions and persecuted those not belonging to this federation. If before strikes had served to consolidate the CROM, now Morones considered them to be damaging. A few weeks after being appointed minister, he referred to a railroad strike declaring that, "the government will not put up with these procedures." Meanwhile, the CROM experienced its period of greatest growth: between 1920 and 1924 its membership grew from one hundred thousand to one million.

The union would play the role of maintaining a truce between labor and capital, so that the regime could develop a policy of attracting investments. The declarations in August 1925 by the secretary of the FSODF, who was a member of the CROM, were very explicit: "workers must not become systematic enemies of capitalism, but rather should only demand with full moderation and equanimity, as they have done up until now, that their rights be re-

spected — rights which they recognize are intimately tied to reciprocal obligations . . . foreign capital will always be welcomed by organized labor represented by the CROM, which will provide it with all kinds of facilities for better investment, thus furthering the policy of the national government presided by Citizen General Plutarco Elías Calles” (R. Salazar, 1938:200).

In order to justify his arbitrary resolutions constantly in favor of the CROM’s interests (which were the state’s interests), Morones created the *Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (Arbitration Boards). In 1928 Obregón again ran for President and won, but he was assassinated in July of that year. The rivalry between Obregón and Morones was well known, and so the latter was blamed for the assassination, although nothing was ever proven against him. Nevertheless, the CROM was definitely weakened by its direct confrontation with Obregonism and interim President Emilio Portes Gil. Various trade union groups split from the CROM when they sensed Morones’ political decline, and at the end of Calles’ term Morones had to resign his ministerial post.

Having lost prestige and having been undermined by Morones’ excessive authoritarianism, the CROM began to prove unable to provide the regime with the support it needed. Corruption within the confederation and the clear connivance between the latter and the federal government resulted in the CROM’s gradual loss of its militants; some unions even decided to publicly disown it.¹ On the other hand, Calles’ policy, based on a mixture of despotism and paternalism, was somewhat unique. Years later he would define his view of the labor struggles in the following manner: “Workers need the lessons of experience. They need to clash among themselves. If before this there should be an attempt to unify them, it would be useless. Simple convincing is sometimes seen by them as resistance and not guidance, because a sense of reality is only acquired through one’s own experience. Therefore, I consider it necessary that the workers prove through hard practice what is feasible and what is utopian and inconvenient. It is useful for the workers to clash among themselves. From that will result, in a short time, a fertile lesson: that nothing is possible without the unification of the masses” (Córdova, 1974:23).

The world crisis of 1929 wreaked havoc on the Mexican economy. Silver was depreciated and exports to the United States declined. The government established the National Chamber of Labor to deal with the strikes which began to appear along with the economic recession. Since the “constructive epoch” of the revolution required the solid organization of all its forces, Calles in that same year created the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR); its birth accelerated the disappearance of the Labor Party which had been an appendage of the CROM.

Since the time of Morones, the employers and the union groups had felt the need to establish legal norms for the institutional resolution of labor conflicts. In November 1928 a *Convención Obrero-Patronal* organized by the CROM had come out in favor of a labor code. On August 28, 1931, President Pascual Ortiz Rubio issued the *Ley Federal del Trabajo* (Federal Labor Law, hereafter referred to as “the law”), which regulated Article 123 of the Constitution. There was nothing “especially new” about this law; as Clark (1934: 215) notes, “its chief merit lies in the fact it is federal. It is more conservative, on the whole, than many of the state labor laws and than many of the accepted prac-

¹To study in detail the rise and decline of the CROM, see the second part of Basurto, 1975.

tices in labor-employer relations.”

The most important feature of the law was the requirement that companies sign contracts with their workers. Two weeks before the law's approval by Congress, the employers' organizations objected to this point by saying: "The employers' group maintains that neither jobs, nor the workers' opportunities to keep them, will be guaranteed by the fact that the law requires that contracts be perpetual; on the contrary, the effect produced will be unemployment" (cited by M. Salazar, 1970:115). In fact, the contracts did not present this danger; on the contrary, they contributed to the stability of labor relations. In the motivation for the law it was pointed out that "in collective contracts resides the guarantee of order, of discipline, and of harmony in the relations between capital and labor . . . the trade unions make the relations between workers and employers more harmonious, just and orderly, permitting the elaboration of a permanent formula for class peace . . ." (cited by Corona, 1971: 53).

Instead of being a guarantee of free union organization, the Ley Federal del Trabajo became one of the best instruments for the control of the labor movement in that it made the government the omnipotent judge of all strikes and demands. On top of this, the application and interpretation of the labor legislation was always left up to the authorities. Proof of this was the case of the trolley car workers in the federal district. As soon as the law was approved, they demanded extra wages for overtime since under an agreement signed in 1925 they had been forced to work a half-hour extra each work-day without added pay. Although Article 123 of the Constitution as well as the newly-created law guaranteed them the right to receive double pay for overtime, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Labor decided that the company did not have to comply. It argued that due to the country's difficult economic situation the workers should endure the sacrifice and not push for their demands. The situation persisted until 1940, when this unjust decision was revoked (Pedrueza, 1941:353-354).

Not only was legal control over unions formalized, the state also perfected its institutional collaboration with the labor organizations. In June 1932 the Cámara del Trabajo de Distrito Federal (Federal District Chamber of Labor) was created. This was the first attempt at national unification in which both the Federación Sindicalista del Trabajo (FST) presided-over by Fidel Velázquez, and the old CGT participated. With the Cámara del Trabajo the government wanted to achieve a labor movement sufficiently unified to be of value in the coming presidential election (Clark, 1934:261). Nevertheless the unification attempt was not successful, since the CROM and the Confederación Sindical Unitaria de México (CSUM) abstained from participation. The CSUM was created in 1929 thanks to the efforts of the Communist Party and it failed on various occasions in its attempts to merge with the CGT.

By 1932 the reformist CROM was on the decline. The CGT's "revolutionary syndicalism," according to Iglesias (1970:69), "did not amount to anything other than a bourgeois position, as it isolated the worker from the political struggle, preventing him from understanding his situation vis-à-vis the other classes and history, and therefore from acquiring a consciousness of his role as a vanguard." That is, while unlike the CROM, the CGT did not depend organically upon the state, its ideology coincided with that of the "Mexican Rev-

olution." Years later the CGT even adopted an explicitly anti-communist posture and allied itself with Calles and the CROM to combat Lázaro Cárdenas' reformist program.

In September 1932 Morones accused Vicente Lombardo Toledano, secretary general of the FSODF, of propagating "exotic ideas" (i.e., "alien ideology"). The next day Lombardo resigned from the CROM and in March 1933 he organized the "purified-CROM," as it was called by its members, made up of unions which had split from Morones' CROM. In its program, the purified-CROM declared trade union independence from the state. In October this organization and several others joined to form the Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos Mexicanos (CGOCM), which during 1933 and 1934 promoted several strikes and even a national work stoppage in demand for better wages. However, later the CGOCM paid more attention to its alliance with President Cárdenas than to the needs of the working class.

By then the interim government of Abelardo Rodríguez was coming to an end (Ortiz Rubio had resigned in 1932). Rodríguez, who said he was on the side of the proletariat, summed up his pragmatic policy in one phrase — "the ideal formula, our slogan for struggle in economic matters, shall be: eight hours work, eight hours leisure, eight hours rest, and eight pesos minimum wage" (cited by R. Salazar, 1958: 337). When the members of the CGOCM challenged the policy of Abelardo Rodríguez, the latter launched a campaign of persecutions against the union.

The only noteworthy accomplishment in labor affairs by Rodríguez was the establishment of minimum wages, although he took pains to point out that the raises in wages would not hurt capital. In a letter to industrialists on August 29, 1933, he stated that they would, "on the contrary, . . . mean many benefits, as the wage raises will be compensated by higher productivity on the part of the workers, and in exchange the entrepreneurs will receive the great benefits of increased consumption within the country" (cited by Iglesias, 1970:107).

The main points of support for the regime of the revolution had deteriorated. The labor movement, for its part, was divided after the split between the CROM and Lombardo's group. The mass politics posed by Cárdenas required a labor movement which was organized and independent but loyal to the government. After 1933 "the coincidence of interests produced collaboration, and collaboration produced the permanent unity between the state and the working masses: such was the process which led in short time to the institutionalization of the policy of the Mexican Revolution" (Córdova, 1974:72).

Cárdenas sought to consolidate the state as the directing force of the national economy, subordinating to it all the productive forces. For this, he proposed to the workers that they organize themselves into unions. His populist policy was not designed to leave power in the hands of the working class. As Córdova (1974:62) has pointed out, Cárdenas "wanted the workers to get power, on the condition that they organize and discipline themselves as a class; but he did not admit that this might signify the possibility of *taking* power itself. Cárdenas did not see any danger in the fact that workers would *enter* into power. He had come to the conclusion that revolutionary power could not be sustained for long if the workers were not *made the partners* of the state, if they were not also turned into a ruling force, together with the others which

likewise should be partners in the task of exercising power." Thus, Cárdenas expected the workers to share power with the employer class and in this manner his apparently emancipating policy revealed itself as conciliatory.²

Faced with the spectre of foreign intervention in the economy, Cárdenas called for united support for the administration from all sectors. In his electoral campaign he warned that capitalism would always take advantage of the slightest division in labor. He said that peasants and workers should unite despite all obstacles. He called on the trade unions to support his "Six-Year Plan."

In contrast with the anti-union stance of Abelardo Rodríguez, Cárdenas exhorted the workers to strengthen their organizations. In the first year of his government, a movement for wage increases spread throughout the country. In 1934 there were 202 strikes, compared to 13 during 1933. By 1935 the strikes numbered 642. "The lightning of the workers' strike illuminates everything," wrote Rosendo Salazar (1958:354). On June 11, 1935, former President Calles declared that many of the strikes were unjustified and that they constituted an ungrateful response to the government's policies.

The next day the CGOCM responded that Calles' declarations were a provocation, aimed at initiating an era of repression against workers. The main trade union organizations except for the CGT and the CROM (i.e., the Cámara Nacional del Trabajo, the CGOCM, the CSUM, the FSODF, the graphic arts union, the miners, the telephone workers, the trolley car operators and the railroad workers) issued a manifesto stating that the strike movements "are due to a collective malaise and to a state of social injustice" and warned that they could declare a general strike "as the only means of defense against the possible implantation of a fascist regime in Mexico." The union organizations met between July 12 and July 13 and agreed to form the Comité Nacional de Defensa Proletaria (CNDP), which issued a manifesto giving support to the Cárdenas government and calling on all trade union groups to participate in a Congreso Nacional de Unificación. On December 22, over thirty thousand workers from the CNDP held a mass demonstration in support of Cárdenas. The CROM and the CGT formed an Alianza de Trabajadores Unificada to defend Calles and used anti-communist arguments against the "agitation" in the trade unions. (The CGT's anarchist doctrine had become anti-communist and a year later it collaborated with the employer's organizations in the struggle against the workers from the glassworks plant Vidriera Monterrey (Iglesias, 1970:68).

Cárdenas got the support he needed to continue his policy of reforms, in spite of the opposition presented by the Calles group. He felt that the labor unrest could be resolved through institutional means and that this would result in the strengthening of the state and improved national productivity. He expressed this in responding to Calles on June 12, 1934, when he said that strikes were part of the process of accommodating workers and employers and that while they might cause trouble and even hurt the economy, their resolution could contribute to improving the economic situation. Presumably Cárdenas considered the improvement of wages as both an increase in demand for goods as well as an improvement of the volatile social situation.

Between February 17 and February 20, 1936, the CGOCM held its second

²It should be clear that the Cárdenas program remained *capitalist* despite the statements about labor participation (Translator).

and last congress. It was dissolved to become the great central union created by the Unification Congress, which began the next day and lasted until the twenty-fourth of February. At that Congress was born the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), which immediately included more than one thousand unions. Into the CTM entered industrial unions (also called "vertical" unions) like the miners, the railroad workers, etc., as well as regional ("horizontal") organizations such as the state organizations from Jalisco, Michoacán, the Distrito Federal, etc. this mixed composition flowed from the new organization's purpose, which was to unify the majority of workers' organizations.

With the birth of the CTM, the CROM was definitely superceded. (The CGT continued to exist, but as a minority organization and grew increasingly weak.) Thus, the Cárdenas government had accomplished one of its key objectives — now it could count on an organized mass movement which in no way constituted a threat to its own stability, quite the contrary, it consolidated the government. Since its founding, the CTM expressed its pro-government credo by declaring its unconditional support for the Cárdenas regime. One incident on the day of the appointment of the CTM executive committee anticipated the lack of democracy which would prevail later on in the CTM. A Communist, Miguel Angel Velasco, who was proposed by the majority of organizations present to fill the position of organization secretary, had to cede that post to Fidel Velázquez, the CGOCCM candidate. The latter group had threatened to withdraw if Velázquez' candidacy was rejected. Vicente Lombardo Toledano was elected secretary general; he too was a leader of the CGOCCM and the main promoter of the CTM.

In March 1936 a group of entrepreneurs and bankers warned the President to beware of the dangers which agitation among the workers might bring for the country's stability. The masses, they said, "are natural elements which when unleashed respect no authority, government, laws, or institutions." Cárdenas replied that the strikes would be harmful only if they were to go beyond "the limits of the law and the economic capacity of the employers" (cited by R. Salazar, 1972a:209). The president was sure that this would not happen, for having a labor federation which supported the state's policy, the control of the workers was no problem.

On April 6 the mail train from Veracruz was dynamited and derailed; the responsibility for the sabotage was attributed by many to the Calles group. Four days later Plutarco E. Calles, Luis N. Morones and his collaborators Luis L. León and Melchor Ortega, were expelled from the country. On the twelfth, the CTM held a demonstration in Mexico City in support of Cárdenas to which were taken the incinerated remains of the three railroad workers killed in the dynamiting incident. In that year there had been 674 strikes, and in 1937 there were 576. The strikes promoted by the pro-government unions, especially the CTM, did not go beyond the "limits of the law" as laid down by Cárdenas. Among the most important were the strikes against the San Rafael Paper Factory, which lasted six months, against the light company, and against Standard Fruit. All these strikes were decided in favor of the workers; the strikes by workers and peasants against the ranches of La Laguna were brought to an end with the expropriation of the lands in the area and their conversion into ejidos (R. Salazar, 1972a:247).

The strike against the Vidriera Monterrey in February, 1936, was countered by the entrepreneurs of that city with an employers' lockout, but Cárdenas' personal intervention solved the conflict. On that occasion the President made known his *Catorce Puntos* (fourteen points), in which he reaffirmed that the state would regulate the national economy; he chided the employers for their lockout and suggested that, "entrepreneurs who feel fatigued by the social struggle may hand over their industries to the workers or to the government. This, and not a strike, would be patriotic."

While the victorious strikes strengthened the CTM, various tendencies within the confederation began to express their differences. In June 1937 the members of the CTM who belonged to the Communist Party temporarily split from the confederation, arguing that there had been a violation of the statutes and that there was a lack of democracy. This move weakened Lombardo and left him practically alone against the Fidel Velázquez Fernando Amilpa group. And, in fact, Lombardo had become isolated. While his power had rested on the influence which he could develop from the rank-and-file, he could not consolidate his worker base. Anguiano explains that

Lombardo really did not have his own social base with which to support himself at a given moment, since his ties with the masses were never consistent, because to relate to the workers he was dependent on the union leaders following his orders. These union leaders depended increasingly on the bureaucratic clique which had been developing within the CTM and whose interests and influence Lombardo had fostered. The power of the Amilpa and Velázquez group was not based on fantastic speeches and grandiose slogans or on impressive mass meetings; rather it had been developing through the day-to-day work of organization and bureaucratic imposition (Anguiano, 1974:124).

"As the influence of the Communists was reduced, 'Fidelismo' [support for Fidel Velázquez] gained ground and became stronger . . . [while] the CP remained in its old sectarian and intransigent line, Lombardo lapsed into Fabian complacency in the face of the corrupt and class-collaborationist leaders. Lombardo, in spite of his privileged position as the head of the CTM, made no serious effort to create new workers cadres to replace the old ones who came from the CROM and other organizations already showing signs of decay" (Fuentes Díaz, 1959:339). A few months later, at the end of 1937, the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) changed tactics and decided that the international situation (especially the imminent Second World War) and the pressures exerted by the United States on the Mexican government made "unity at all costs" necessary; the PCM returned to the confederation, but the divisions within the CTM would not disappear.

Even with its internal disputes, the CTM continued to effectively carry out its role of supporting Cárdenas. The mass mobilization in March 1938 on occasion of the oil expropriation was proof of this. In May 1937 a strike had exploded against the U.S. oil monopolies. The Junta Federal de Conciliación (Federal Arbitration Board) ruled in favor of the Sindicato Petrolero and the companies sought an injunction, which the Supreme Court refused to grant them. The oil companies then refused to accept the court decision, leading the government to expropriate the foreign companies' property and nationalize the oil industry on March 18, 1938.

To command respect for its nationalist politics, Cárdenas' government had to counterpose a solid popular front to the foreign interests. In December 1937

the President proposed the re-structuring of the PNR, the official party, which thereafter was named the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM). The mass organizations backed the presidential initiative and became an organic part of the reformed party, into which one could no longer enter individually but only through one of the sectors into which the party was divided. The PRM was not born as a complement to, nor in opposition to the mass organizations which already existed (in particular the CTM), but as an organization which grouped all of them together. Through this party reform, Cárdenismo was able to impose and institutionalize its policy: the state, through the PRM, as the organizer of the masses. The participation of the CTM in the party was illegal, as labor legislation did not allow trade unions to act in politics. But the leaders of the labor confederation overcame this barrier by insisting on the need to consolidate a "popular front." Nevertheless, the members of the PRM did not have a chance to constitute a proletarian alliance that would allow them to control the party, for according to the statutes, each sector (worker, popular, peasant, and military) was isolated from the rest and had contact only with the center.

In September 1938 trade union representatives from fourteen countries constituting the Congreso Obrero Latinoamericano met in Mexico City and agreed to create the Central de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL), which according to its creator, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, "gradually became the most important force of opinion on the American continent" (Lombardo Toledano, 1964:19). The CTAL organized various congresses in the decade of the fifties and then disappeared in 1964.

Although it was able to control the workers, Cárdenismo — as one of the prerequisites which made that control possible — provided immediate benefits to the workers. Rivera Marín has pointed out that "between 1935 and 1940, the buying power of wages grew at a pace with the rises in the index of the workers' cost of living. There were even years like 1939, when the buying power of wages was higher than the cost of basic food and clothing" (Marín, 1961:263). In contrast to these short-ranged improvements, the workers did not gain a political ideology nor a program of their own in the course of their struggle for better wages. They continued to support and follow the leadership provided by the state. The last great demonstrations took place in 1938, during the epoch of the expropriations; at that time the process of consolidation of the CTM came to a stop. Thereafter it dedicated itself to its own perpetuation as the organic instrument of the state. With the bureaucratization of the trade unions, it was not the workers, as Cárdenas claimed, but the union leaders who became the government's partners. Cárdenas' policy toward the masses resulted in the corporatization of the Mexican state.

In February 1939 the CTM's Consejo Nacional Extraordinario declared its support of General Manuel Avila Camacho's candidacy for the next presidential term. Lombardo would later express the following opinion: "the CTM would make alliances, pacts, with other sectors of the people, with other institutions, even those alien to the proletariat (worker-employer pacts), with the goal of adding up the forces which could, at a given moment of the country's evolutionary process, easily lead to the triumph of Mexican society itself, which has been committed to the struggle for the betterment of the producing masses for a quarter of a century" (cited by R. Salazar, 1972a:275). As is obvious, the founder of the CTM was not interested in the triumph of the prole-

tariat but of "Mexican society." The CTM's participation in the 1939 elections was consistent with Lombardo's aim of defending the cohesion of the Mexican state, which was being threatened by Juan Andrew Almazán, the candidate of a rightist opposition. The CTM created the Frente Popular electoral to support the PRM, while Lombardo and Fidel Velázquez toured the country organizing rallies in support of Avila Camacho. On July 7, 1940, eight senators and twenty-four deputies belonging to the CTM were elected along with Avila Camacho.

On February 27, 1941, the Segundo Congreso General Ordinario of the CTM decided that Fidel Velázquez should be Lombardo's successor as secretary general. Speaking to trade union representatives, the country's new President demanded the unity of all in "one single united front," at a time when serious international conflicts were unfolding. In his inauguration speech, Fidel Velázquez promised to cooperate "loyally, sincerely, openly, and disinterestedly with the government of General Manuel Avila Camacho." Avila Camacho inherited a government with a controlled trade union movement and, desirous of eliminating any possible conflicts, his regime was characterized by repression of the workers.

In March 1941 Avila Camacho modified the Federal Labor Law so that workers could be fired for participating in "illegal" strikes; the new law made the procedure by which strikes could be formally legalized more complicated and subject to government control. All work stoppages were forbidden in companies of "great social importance." The Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado (FSTSE) was stripped of the right to enter into union alliances, and workers employed by the state were deprived of the right to have sympathy strikes (Semionov, 1972:119). As a result of these measures, the rank-and-file workers were, in effect, silenced. They no longer had channels through which to express their opinions. The CTM at that point docily accepted the official policy and, far from analyzing or questioning the changes in federal law, applauded them without reservation.

Under Avila Camacho, the "crime of social dissolution," was defined and became, because of its ambiguous terms, the favorite legal instrument of the state in the persecution of political dissidents and union leaders for thirty years. The spectre of anti-communism haunted the country. In September 1941 federal troops murdered eight workers from a union delegation which had sought a hearing from the President. According to Semionov (1972:121), the funerals of these workers were "the most important political action of the Mexican proletariat during the years of the Second World War."

The Confederación Proletaria Nacional (CPN) and the Confederación de Obreros y Campesinos de México (COCM) were created in 1942. Meanwhile, the state used its participation in the Second World War to limit workers' actions. In May 1942 the CTM called its members to abstain from striking for the duration of the war and to leave the solution of labor disputes in the hands of the authorities. The following month, the main labor federations (CTM, CROM, COCM, CPN, etc.) signed a "workers' solidarity pact" in which they agreed not to strike for the duration of the war and to collaborate with the government in supplying resources to satisfy military needs. These same organizations constituted the Consejo Nacional Obrero, an adjunct to the Ministry of Labor formed at Avila Camacho's suggestion to gather in one institution

all labor groups. The attempt failed. The council lost prestige and eventually disappeared.

Labor unrest persisted because of the rising cost of living. Between 1941 and 1943 prices in the federal district rose by 60 percent and wages only by 20 percent. In 1943 the textile workers and the miners called strikes which won wage gains. There were also a series of railroad strikes and numerous popular demonstrations. On September 7 the Supreme Court handed down a decision to the effect that strikes constituted violations "of the work discipline."

At the end of the war on April 7, 1945, the Confederación de Cámaras Industriales (CONCAMIN) and the CTM announced that they had "agreed to unite at this decisive hour for the destinies of humanity and our fatherland to struggle together for complete national economic autonomy, for the country's economic development, and for the elevation of the material and cultural living conditions of the masses . . ." They agreed to renew the war-time "patriotic alliance . . . for the defense of the nation's independence . . ." (Alcázar:117).

The labor representatives promised to suspend the protests against the rise in prices and to stop pushing for the gains that the workers had been demanding. A worker-employer commission was established with powers to suspend any strike for ten months. In Mexico City alone, this procedure was used in 164 disputes.

In 1947 the reelection of the executive committee of the CTM was once again a cause for conflict. The Communist Party, which was back in the organization, tried to place Luis Gómez Z. in the secretary general's post, while Fidel Velázquez' group proposed Fernando Amilpa. Seeing themselves at a disadvantage, the Communist-led unions including the railroad workers' union, headed by Valentín Campa and several other organizations which supported Gómez Z.'s candidacy split from the CTM to create the Confederación Unitaria del Trabajo (CUT), which was not successful. Thereby the group of "the five" long-time CTM leaders (Velázquez, Amilpa, Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga, Jesús Yurén, and Luis Quintero) were left in absolute control of the CTM. Lombardo Toledano supported Amilpa, but the Communists' departure meant the loss of what little backing he had left. Soon after, the CTM split from the CTAL and broke with Lombardo Toledano all together. It thus eliminated whatever might have remained of its populist strategy and even changed the motto on its seal: instead of the early concept "for a classless society," it became "for the emancipation of Mexico." Its leaders strengthened their commitments to the official party, which by then had undergone a new transformation. A few months earlier, the PRM modernized its structure: it decentralized some of its functions and widened its organizations in the states; it eliminated its military sector for tactical reasons and admitted a new "popular" (government employee) sector to become the present-day Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

In order to consolidate the country's industrialization, the government of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) carried out a policy which favored entrepreneurs and hurt the working class more than ever before. This period was characterized by wage cuts, repression of the slightest outburst of discontent and, above all, support of "*charrismo*" in the trade unions. The secretary general of the railroad workers' union, Jesús Díaz de León, alias "*El Charro*,"³ developed a

³The Mexican "charro" is a very *macho* expert horseman and dandy (Translator).

policy of collusion with government and repression within the union which has served as a model for the trade union bureaucracy ever since. *Charrismo* is a particular form of trade union control which is characterized by: a) the use of the repressive forces of the state to support a trade union leadership; b) the systematic use of violence; c) the permanent violation of workers' union rights; d) misuse and theft of trade union funds; e) dishonest dealing with the workers' interests; f) connivance between union leaders and the government and capitalists; g) corruption in all its forms (Alonso, 1972:98). The continuation of charrismo in Mexican trade unions is not only the result of the personal influence of labor bosses, and the lack of opposition on the part of rank and file workers but mainly the result of the close relation which exists between the state and the trade unions. Since 1940, the Mexican government has been able to depend on a disciplined trade union organization which is an integral part of the state and which allows the state to exercise control over unionized workers.

In 1949 Lombardo Toledano tried to unite the Sindicato Minero (miners' union) and other unions into the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM); this organization met with little success. In 1948 a currency devaluation provoked an increase in the price of basic consumer goods and discontent spread. The main federations, headed by the CTM, reaffirmed their unconditional support for Alemán's government. In the railroad workers' Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros (STF) there arose a movement to throw out Díaz de León and to prevent an army take-over of the union's locals in Mexico City. The assaults on trade union locals became customary, and in 1949 the trolley car workers and oil workers suffered similar acts of aggressions. On January 20, 1951, five thousand striking miners from Nueva Rosita, Coahuila, were repressed after they disavowed their charro leadership and walked from Coahuila to Mexico City to demand better economic conditions. This was the policy pursued by Miguel Alemán, who at the end of his term in 1952 was honored by the CTM with the title of "Mexico's Number One Worker."

Alemán's repressive policy was followed by the conciliatory style of Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, who in time resolved close to forty thousand labor disputes through "friendly agreements" (Díaz, 1959:347). This policy, both paternalist and authoritarian, permitted the continuance of charrismo. In 1954, there was another attempt to unify labor union organizations, with the formation of the Bloque de Unidad Obrera (BUO), in which the CTM, the CGT, the CROM, the miners' and railroad workers' unions, and others took part. The state did not participate directly in this new attempted alliance; that is, there was no immediate interference, as this time the initiative for unification came not from the government but from the union groups. Nevertheless, the BUO was designed to function within the PRI, not independent of it. The currency devaluation in 1954 and the policy of "assignment of resources" to stimulate industrial development were severely cutting into workers' standard of living. Charro leadership was not capable of representing the workers' demands.

This critical situation came to a head in February 1958 when movements for trade-union democracy sprung up among the telegraph workers, the teachers from section IX of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE), sections 34 and 35 of the Petroleros (oilworkers), and the railroad

workers in the STF. The contradictions of Ruiz Cortines' regime became apparent: at the same time that he made small concessions to the workers he also jailed the workers' independent leaders.

Within the PRI, the BUO proposed Adolfo López Mateos as candidate for President for the 1958-1964 term. López Mateos was then Secretary of Labor, so he was not a stranger to labor problems. He was well aware of the number of labor disputes he was inheriting from the Ruíz Cortinez regime. In his campaign, López Mateos promised to respect the rights of workers, especially the right to strike. After his inauguration, it fell to him to resolve some of the conflicts which appeared in early 1958, and all but one of them were resolved through negotiations and institutional means, but not without recourse to repression to keep the oil workers' and teachers' unions under government control.

The railroad workers, who went so far as to pose the independence of the unions from the state in a direct confrontation, were another story. Having won some wage gains, the railroad workers proceeded to democratically name a new union executive committee headed by Demetrio Vallejo. In February, 1959, the government refused to raise wages again, so on March 29 the railroad workers responded with a general strike. The López Mateos regime declared that the strike was "non-existent" and federal troops proceeded to occupy the railroad installations and to arrest hundreds of workers, while the state imposed its own unrepresentative executive committee on the union. The railroad workers' movement shattered the relative stability the regime "of the revolution" had maintained for so many years. When it found itself unable to channel the conflict within institutional limits, the government repressed it. The railroad strike movement is probably the most important challenge to the system of the PRI that took place after 1940. Although it posed the question of autonomy from the official unions, it did not reach political or ideological independence with respect to the principles which govern the Mexican state (Alonso, 1972:178).

The repression of the railroad workers' movement weakened the labor movement as a whole in the years which followed. In 1960 the Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio (Revolutionary Teachers Movement — MRM) which grew out of the 1958 teachers' mobilization, defended the election of democratic leaders in section IX of the SNTE. In September of that year, the nationalization of the Mexican Light and Power Co. mobilized thousands of electrical workers in support of López Mateos' regime. López Mateos tried to revive the unity achieved during the nationalizations in the Cárdenas era. But there are substantial differences between the oil nationalization carried out by Cárdenas and the nationalization of electric energy undertaken by López Mateos.

On December 4, 1960, a new labor confederation independent of the CTM, the Central Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) was formed. It claimed to have almost four hundred thousand members and was made up of the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (SME), the Sindicato de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana (STERM), the Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (CROC), the Federación de Obreros Textiles, the Federación Obrera Revolucionaria (FOR), the printers' Unión Linotipográfica, and the Sindicato de Telegrafistas. The CNT differed with some of the CTM's

positions, but defended official nationalism and proposed "independence" only from the employers and from the state. President López Mateos was present at its formation.

In 1961, the police put down a telegraph workers' strike in Mexico City. At about the same time, the Cananea miners won a 50 percent wage hike. In mid-year, the national bourgeoisie embarked upon a furious anti-communist campaign which the state took advantage of to persecute various union movements. On July 16 a caravan of (religious) pilgrims was incited by provocateurs to attack the site where a congress of the MRM was meeting with the pretext that the teachers gathered there were anti-clerical. In August, Fidel Velázquez announced that he would not seek re-election, but in April 1962 he was re-appointed to head the CTM for another six years. In February 1962 Luis Gómez Z., now an ally of the CTM union bureaucracy, was installed as secretary general of the railworkers union; he was repudiated by a majority of the union, but the workers feared repression and did little to show their discontent.

On November 21, 1962, Article 123 of the Constitution was amended to regulate profit-sharing. This measure sought to turn the workers into consumers of the products of their own industries and the employers were thereby given a new weapon with which to buy off workers' militancy. This does not mean that the salary level of the workers increased with the application of the profit-sharing system, or that the law itself was always enforced. In reality, the sharing of profit was a demagogic pretext for not increasing the real salary of workers and for making them think that the well-being of the company where they work would benefit them. The Employers' Confederation declared that if applied, the amendment would be "an objective element [which] will remove and help proscribe the class struggle" (*Política*, 1962). The reform also established that minimum wages would be set by federal councils instead of at the local level. Frequently the tactic of putting companies into "receivership" was used to stop strikes. Using this method, the government took charge of the company in question, arguing that because it was of public utility it could not be paralyzed by a strike. Then the government settled the strike by directly imposing a solution on the workers. Thus various protests were mediated, such as those of the airline pilots and stewardesses.

The beginning of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz' regime (1964-1970) was marked by a doctors' strike. The Alianza de Médicos Mexicanos demanded a general revision of wages and a halt to administrative repression against striking doctors. On September 1, 1965, in his yearly presidential address, Díaz Ordaz ordered the doctors back to work and threatened to prosecute them for "homicide by negligence," illegal association, job desertion, failure to render services, and intention to commit a crime, if they did not end the strike. In the face of these warnings, and after several leaders were arrested and many doctors beaten, the doctors gave in.

In February 1965 the government organized the Asamblea Nacional Revolucionaria del Proletariado which formalized the unity between the state and the charro leadership. This labor congress appeared as the organization responsible for this unity. Given the lack of a unified workers' federation (the BUO had disappeared) the labor congress carried out the task of unifying the different trade union groups with the state. On May 1 of that year, Díaz Ordaz

commented that "the workers' unification is starting to be a promising reality — not in a federation per se, but in the ideals, the principles, the goals and the mutual help needed to reach them" (*Política*, 1966). What he did not say was that the ideology of the labor congress was not proletarian, but representative of the charro leadership. In November of that year, the CTM created the Sindicato Nacional de Empleados del Comercio (SNEC) to which three million workers would be affiliated.

In November 1967 the CTM's congress (called "Fidel's Olympics" in trade union circles because it was moved ahead a year due to the 1968 Olympic Games) re-elected Fidel Velázquez for yet another term. During Díaz Ordaz' administration a "hard line" policy was followed against all insurgent trade union movements. The federal district truck drivers and the oil workers, among others, suffered effects of this policy. The 1968 student mobilization moved beyond the framework of students' struggles to win popular support among some sections of the workers and created a crisis in the Mexican government unlike any since 1959; the result was the brutal repression of the movement in October 1968.

The process of industrialization which developed with particular speed in Mexico after 1940 caused a constant rate of inflation, which in turn, drastically impoverished workers. The economic concessions gained by workers during Cárdenas' regime were gradually eroded. At the same time, the economic strategy of the Mexican state, which consisted of industrialization at all costs, entered into crisis in the final years of the decade of the sixties. At that point, the government of the revolution required various changes to be able to sustain itself. The man in charge of undertaking them would be Luis Echeverría, who in the course of his regime (begun in 1970) has had to confront the conservative sectors of the bourgeoisie who have not accepted the need for such changes.

Echeverría's job was to save the Mexican capitalist system from the crisis which engulfed it and to revitalize the role of the state as the arbiter of social forces in conflict. One of his first measures was the establishment of the National Tripartite Commission in May 1971 as a consulting body to include union, employer, and government representatives. The Tripartite Commission was designed to study and propose solutions to the problems of productivity, unemployment, high prices, housing, etc., and represented the most polished and functional example of the corporatist style which characterizes the Mexican state (by corporatism we mean the assimilation into the state of the different social sectors by areas of activity). The Tripartite Commission and other bodies of this type are designed to express the state's strategy of "class conciliation" for a higher ideal of "national unity," which seeks to harmonize the interests of the workers with those of the capitalist class. The Echeverría administration has carried out a policy of concessions to the workers, seeking by these means to channel the outbursts of discontent in the trade union movement. The main achievements of this policy have been the creation of INFONAVIT; an agency which builds workers' housing, fights for the forty-hour week for state workers, and struggles for wage increases which are also aimed at combatting growing inflation and preventing the further loss of workers' buying capacity. Thus, the state has become judge and jury, arbiter and conciliator of the class struggle in Mexico.

On the other hand, the growth of industry and the consolidation in Mexico

of state monopoly capitalism have posed other contradictions. Development has only been possible at the cost of rising inflation and unemployment, and although these are factors which the government has tried to attenuate, it cannot resolve them fully. That is, the concessions which the state has made to workers are not sufficient to improve the situation of the working class. The loss of purchasing power has made the workers seek non-institutional means to resolve the situation. Thus the charro trade union leadership has entered into a crisis, and attempts have been made to organize workers outside of the official control mechanisms.

Between December 1971 and January 1972, the electrical workers' Sindicato de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana (STERM) and student groups went on "marches for union democracy" in nearly fifth localities across the country. These events have marked the beginnings of a new worker insurgency. Alarmed by such developments which have threatened the stability of the trade union bureaucracy, in January 1971 Fidel Velázquez declared that, "in the CTM and in the labor movement there shall always be an army prepared to carry out open struggle, be it constitutional or not." Velázquez was trying to stay ahead of the radicalization, and at the same time threatening any groups which got out of line. His unexpected declaration, suggesting that the CTM would not respect the legal framework should it find it adverse to its interests, was supported by the president of the PRI, Manuel Sánchez Vite, who was removed from that post soon thereafter.

Under Echeverría's regime, workers have embarked on two types of struggles against trade-union charrismo: the first inside unions controlled by the spurious leadership, and the second working outside for the creation of independent unions free of official control.

The first type of struggle — to achieve union democracy — is illustrated by the electrical workers' efforts. Throughout the first half of 1972 the STERM workers fought a resolution by the Comisión Federal de Electricidad which had signed an exclusive contract with a charro electrical workers' union headed by Francisco Pérez Ríos. The conflict was resolved by means of conciliation when Echeverría brought about the unification of the two unions (the STERM led by Rafael Galván, and the charro SME union) into the Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana (SUTERM). The electrical workers' experience proved that the spurious charro leaders are not about to tolerate reforms which will undermine their power, and that conciliation is a poor way to resolve union problems. The conflicts within the SUTERM did not take long to appear. The charro faction of the former SME and would-be charro bureaucrats of the former STERM systematically opposed the democratic resolution of labor conflicts; in the case of the General Electric strike, the charros defended the employers' arguments, while the democratic union leadership defended the workers. The ex-STERM tendency suffered all sorts of attacks, and in February 1975 Galván and other leaders were expelled from the SUTERM by a fake union congress controlled by the charros. This set loose once again the mobilizations of electrical workers struggling for a democratic union and of other sectors of the society which supported such a demand. Thus, the electrical workers' fight became the most important struggle of the independent trade union movement. The electrical workers' struggle implied the possibility of winning to its independent banner the demands and the

solidarity of other independent trade unions. However, this struggle ran the risk of being compromised by the reformist leadership of the democratic electrical workers who are grouped in the *Movimiento Sindical Revolucionario* (MSR). Using a nationalist-reformist ideology, the MSR was trying to organize an independent labor confederation. The MSR's position coincided to a large extent with Echeverría's modernizing and nationalist program.

The railroad workers, for their part, headed by the *Movimiento Sindical Ferrocarrilero* (MSF) tried to regain control of their union. The MSF is led by Demetrio Vallejo who was freed from prison during the first months of the Echeverría regime. In 1972, the MSF took control of union locals in several cities, but was evicted by the Army, in some places such as Monterrey, with extreme violence. In 1973 the MSF won the elections for the executive committee of the railroad workers' union, but the charro leadership refused to recognize their victory and anti-democratically imposed one of their people. The government supported this action, and at the inauguration of the charro Tomás Rangel Perales as union president, Secretary of Labor Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (a member of the reformist wing of the Echeverría regime) was present to back by his attendance the electoral fraud which had been committed against the railroad workers. Nevertheless, as in the case of the SUTERM, the campaign for union democracy was able to mobilize great sectors of workers who would continue to struggle for rank-and-file control of their organizations.

Along with the struggles for union democracy, there appeared movements which have sought the independence of workers' organizations. This happened with the bank employees who the government did not allow to form a trade union as well as with the National University Workers' Union, which held a three-month-long strike in 1972; with the workers' movements at the Rivetex textile plants, and Ayotla, the Chrysler Subsidiary Automex workers, and so forth. Most recently strikes led by independent groups of workers took place at the Saltillo steelworks and at the Nissan auto works, as well as in the unionization of instructors in various universities around the country.

Faced with this upsurge of independence within the labor movement, Echeverría's strategy has shown strong contradictions. The reforms which he has promoted need a popular base which he does not have. He cannot undertake a mass policy in the style of Cárdenas, because in order to secure the support of the workers, Cárdenas first promoted a democratization of the trade unions, while Echeverría has not attacked the charro leadership on this front. On the one hand, he has tried to lessen the influence of the trade union bureaucracy by granting relative freedom to independent trade unions, by permitting the unification of the electrical workers, and by removing Sánchez Vite from the PRI after the latter came out in support of Fidel Velázquez' statement. But on the other hand, he has maintained the power of the charros by naming one-time union leader Luis Gómez Z. general manager of the national railroads; by backing the electoral fraud in the railworkers' union; by repressing various independent strikes; by backing the weak wage demands promoted by the CTM, and by supporting the charro faction in the SUTERM. Echeverría does not want to, or cannot afford to, lose the sympathy of the bureaucratic trade union leadership. When he addressed an assembly of the CTM in February 1971, he was longwinded in his praise of its boss Fidel Velázquez saying: "How clear, how direct, how vigorous, how loyal to the interests of all

workers of Mexico are the achievements of Fidel Velázquez! It is the Fidel Velázquez of his youth! It can be understood that this is painful for the enemies of the labor movement in Mexico As long as the Mexican Revolution has labor leaders, peasant leaders, and leaders of the popular sector, or public officials, who have risen from the masses of these three great sectors of our population, its future is assured" (cited in *Punto Crítico*, 1972:22).

For their part, the charro leaders reaffirmed their role of collaborating to promote industrial development and the employers' peace of mind, even at the cost of the workers' interests. Fidel Velázquez was very precise when he noted in an interview in 1973 that "we do not aspire to workers' control, but to the participation of the workers in management decisions. Management and workers participate in production and both have a right to participate in these decisions, because [otherwise these decisions] often hurt the workers and benefit only the bosses" (*Solidaridad*, 1973).

The trade union system is presently the weakest point in the Mexican corporatist state. As the deterioration of the CTM continues, independent groups are organizing and winning gains for the workers. Workers who struggle for trade-union independence run the risk that the reforms which they promote will only serve to strengthen the state, to renovate its structures, as long as they do not go beyond the policy of class collaboration. However, proportionally as solidarity among workers spreads, the isolation of labor struggles will decrease and the simple reform struggles will be superceded. As a worker at the Nissan auto factory said after the strike in early 1974, "the mobilizations demonstrated the participation of all workers in the strike, and they gave proof of the support of other independent workers' organizations and of other social strata, whose participation in the movement showed us that it is not impossible to win the support of these other groups *outside* of the struggle, but that it is necessary to win them over through the struggle" (Trejo and Meza, 1974).

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