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THE MEXICAN CHARRAZO OF 1948: LATIN AMERICAN LABOR FROM WORLD WAR TO COLD WAR

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses labor history in Mexico in the years before, during and immediately following the Second World War. The author argues that the intervention by the Secretaría del Trabajo y Provisión Social in the Sindicato Ferrocarrilero in 1948 marks a major turning point in the trajectory of Mexican labor. He suggests the possibility that a number of other countries experienced similar, dramatic upheavals in labor relations at around the same time, and explores the implications of this possibility for theories of comparative labor movements. The paper begins with descriptions of the left-right splits in the Mexican labor movement at the end of the Cárdenas period, and the effects of the War on Mexican labor. The author goes on to discuss the restructuring of the Mexican state and economy during this time and in the immediate post-War period, and describes in detail the cluster of events in Mexican unionism around the Charrazo. The paper concludes with a section on possible similarities in other countries and with some speculative remarks raised by the comparative questions.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo discute la historia laboral en México en los años anteriores, durante e inmediatamente después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. El autor argumenta que la intervención por parte de la Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social en el Sindicato Ferrocarrilero en 1948 marca un cambio crucial en la historia de las relaciones laborales en México. El autor sugiere la posibilidad de que otros países experimentaron un trastorno dramático similar en sus relaciones laborales por la misma época, y explora las implicaciones de esta posibilidad para teorías comparativas de movimientos obreros. El trabajo comienza con descripciónes de las divisiones entre izquierda y derecha en el movimiento obrero Mexicano al final del período de Cárdenas, y de los efectos de la guerra sobre las relaciones laborales en México. El autor pasa después a la discusión de la reestructuración del Estado y la economía mexicanos durante este período y durante el período inmediatamente posterior a la Guerra, y analiza el impacto del Charrazo en el sindicalismo mexicano. Se concluye con una sección sobre posibles similitudes en otros países y con algunos comentarios expeculativos suscitados por las cuestiones comparativas.

Introduction

This is, in a very real sense, a working paper. I have not yet finished all the archival work necessary for a full comprehension of the events described in this paper. Nevertheless, it seemed worthwhile to set forward some of the preliminary results in order to stimulate the comparative questions which underlie the broader project of which this is a part.

Arguably, the intervention by the Mexican Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social in the Sindicato Ferrocarrilero in 1948 was one of the most important events in recent Mexican labor history. It gave birth to the widely used term "charrismo," a word which is now indissolubly associated with Mexican unionism as a description of its less endearing characteristics and as a critique of its limitations.[1] It marks, I would venture to argue, a major turning point in the trajectory of Mexican labor.

To focus on the Charrazo is, despite the widespread use of the term, to suggest a less than orthodox periodization of Mexican labor history and, implicitly, to raise a number of issues about the utility of endogenous frameworks for the explanation of labor history in Mexico. As I suggest in the concluding section on international comparisons, there is a *prima facie* case for exploring the possibility that a number of countries, in the Americas and possibly elsewhere also, experienced similar and similarly dramatic upheavals in labor relations in the years immediately following the Second World War. This has interesting, if somewhat unclear, implications for theories of comparative labor movements.[2]

The organization of the paper will be as follows: a section will describe the left-right splits in the labor movement at the end of the Cárdenas period, and will follow through the effects of the Second World War on Mexican labor. The restructuring of the Mexican state and economy during this time and in the immediate post-War period will be described. Then there will be a section describing in detail the cluster of events in

Mexican unionism around the Charrazo. I will then briefly describe what I perceive to be similarities in other countries. Finally, the paper will conclude with some speculative remarks raised by the comparative questions.

The Cardenista Legacy

The formation of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) in 1936 was one of the great events of the Cárdenas Presidency (1934-40) and of the history of the Mexican working class. Led by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a new militant organization was built out of the ashes of the long since moribund CROM. During the heady days of the Popular Front policies of the Communist Parties, the early years of the Cárdenas Presidency saw an impressive wave of union organizing. Strike activity rose to an unprecedented high.

Mexico in the 1940s is overshadowed by the legacy of Cardenismo. Much that occurs has to be seen as a reaction to, and "rectification" of, the radicalism of the Cárdenas presidency. The 1940s see the period of institutionalization following on the mobilization of the earlier period. In some ways this switch had already begun in 1937-38,[3] but the shift certainly became much more pronounced after 1940.

When the CTM was formed in 1936 it was, to a large extent, independent of the state, and entered into alliance with the state as an "equal" partner.[4] Nor did the CTM have a monopoly of representation of organized labor. Although in disarray, the CROM still retained important nuclei of workers, particularly in the state of Puebla. And the anarcho-syndicalist CGT continued to control an important minority of organized labor. Internally, the CTM was riven by deep divisions between the Fidelista group and the Left and Communists.

The CTM at this time (and to a considerable extent throughout the post-War period) was composed of a large number of relatively small unions, mainly in traditional industries in the Distrito Federal. This was the stronghold of Fidel Velázquez and the *cinco lobitos.*[5] With the notable exceptions of the electricians and the teachers (who had been organized previously), one of the major changes on the labor scene in this period was the formation of national industrial unions in railways (1933), the Mining and Metalurgical union (1934) and in the petroleum industry (1935). These sectors had been known for the continuing presence of strong anti-CROM elements.

In this overall panorama of increased mobilization and militancy, the forces of the left, and in particular of the Communist Party, gained positions of considerable strength. Nevertheless, while they were overwhelmingly concerned with maintaining their alliances with the centrist forces represented by Fidel Velázquez and, more ambiguously, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the CP and the more militant industrial unions were driven at times into open conflict with the moderates. For example, at the founding convention of the CTM, the Communist leader Miguel Velasco, was elected to the post of organizational secretary. The Velázquez clique threatened to withdraw from the organization if he was seated, and the Communist Party, in the first of a series of conciliatory moves, withdrew Velasco's name.[6] In another conflict between the two forces, after stormy debates at the Fourth National Council in 1937, the Communist Party-affiliated unions broke away. Each group claimed to be the CTM. The Communists claimed that they represented some 367,000 workers, while those unions remaining in the Lombardista CTM represented merely some 292,000 workers. The Lombardista forces were in agreement about the number of unions remaining, but claimed that only 139,000 workers had left the organization. The difference between the two totals centered on the smaller unions. Both sides agreed that the national industrial unions which had pulled out represented some 67-69,000 workers; but how many workers were represented by the smaller unions

which had left with the Communist Party was a matter of considerable dispute.[7] Whatever the exact figures, there can be little doubt that the Communist Party at this time controlled about half of organized labor in Mexico. Shortly after the split, the leader of the Communist Party of the USA, Earl Browder, intervened and persuaded the Mexican Communist Party to return to the fold. This they did, under the slogan "Unity at all costs."[8] As events would show, the next decade would see a continuation of the tensions between the Communists, the militant industrial unions, the Lombardistas and the *cinco lobitos*.

The policy of "Unity at all costs" has been seen, particularly by left-wing critics of the Communist Party, as a fatal error. As Valentín Campa said, "... the politics of 'unidad a toda costa' placed the CP at the tail of Lombardo Toledano and Fidel Velázquez, at a time when these were already to be found at the tail of the government. President Cárdenas promoted this policy. The subordination of the union movement to the state apparatus led to the charrismo from which we now suffer."[9] Of course, in the general climate of popular fronts, it is difficult to see how the Communist Party might have followed a different policy. Moreover, as I shall argue in the course of this paper, the real origins of charrismo have to be sought in a later period of Mexican history.

The tensions within the CTM continued, and by the end of the War, the CTM appeared to have lost much of its former strength. President Avila Camacho adopted a policy of supporting other trade union organizations as a counterweight to the CTM. The combination of internal dissent and lack of forthright government support meant that by the late 1940s observers felt that the CTM might well suffer the fate of earlier worker organizations and disappear as a major force on the union scene.[10]

Rectification

The Mexican state faced a number of challenges during the War. There was the issue of the "rectification" of a number of aspects of Cardenista policy. This was particularly the case in the agrarian sphere and, relatedly, in the matter of Church-state relations. The Unión Nacional Sinarquista (UNS) was a powerful movement and was, in many ways, implacably hostile to many aspects of government policy. According to Jean Meyer, the Sinarquistas were initially greatly opposed to Mexican participation in the War, though they rapidly changed their line after Pearl Harbor.[11]

Without doubt, the 1940s saw the taming of the major peasant organization, the Confederación Nacional de Campesinos (CNC). There was an attempt to restructure the official party from within to give greater weight to the "middle sectors" with the formation of the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP) in February 1943.[12] The CTM remained as the single bastion outside the immediate control of the President and the inner circle of PRI politicos. It represented a potential challenge to the monopoly of power of the official party. This threat was, I shall argue, removed with the Charrazo of 1948. The functions of the Charrazo were multiple: direct political control by the PRI over the CTM; disciplining of the labor movement as a necessary step towards economic growth; more directly a breaking of the big industrial unions; an attack on the Communist Party; a break with the remnants of Cardenismo; a demonstration to the US that Mexico would be a dutiful Cold War ally.

The Political Context

The Presidential elections of 7 July, 1940 were marked by violent clashes and a number of deaths.[13] The "opposition" candidate, Almazan, had considerable support

among railway workers, the right-wing Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), and entrepreneurs. There was some fear of a possible revolt.

In general the incoming administration of Manuel Avila Camacho faced a number of political threats, mainly on the right. The Partido de Acción Nacional was formed on 14 October 1939 and the Unión Nacional Sinarquista on 23 May 1937. The UNS had widespread support in many rural areas. On the fringe right there were groups like the Camisas Doradas. More generally, capital, both domestic and foreign, treated the government with, at best, a considerable degree of reserve. In 1938 the entrepreneurs had described the PRM as "una amenaza para la democracia" and in 1939 Excelsior had described the second 6 year plan being propounded by Lombardo Toledano as "totalitarian".[14]

In the face of this opposition, the government of Avila Camacho adopted a policy of "Unidad Nacional." In effect, this was a series of moves to distance itself from the Left and to reassure the Right. In this sense, the post-War developments in the field of labor clearly had their origins in the "rectification" of Cardenista "excesses". The new President made a statement that the Communists would not participate in the government, and stressed the need to give investors confidence.[15]

The State and the Center

In the period between 1938 and 1943 Avila Camacho moved ahead with a major restructuring of the official party which placated certain sections of the industrialists, brought the middle classes directly into the party and brought the CNC under state control. At this juncture there was little need to take any direct steps with regard to labor. The incorporation of the Left and the unions had been initiated under Cárdenas and was carried along by the momentum of the Popular Front policies of those days. The War

years saw the rise of the "middle classes" within the Mexican political apparatus.[16] The formation of the employers' organization, CANACINTRA, in December 1941 was a key step in creating an organization which could be said to represent the "national bourgeoisie," even though there may well have been serious doubts about its representativeness.[17] It was a key step in breaking the previously monolithic opposition to the government by organized industrialists.

Another major move was the creation of the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP). This was principally a vehicle for the organization of middle class support for the regime. It was run by professional politicos. As the Chilean ambassador to Mexico, Pablo Neruda, said at the time, "si hay un sector obrero y un sector campesino, dime, por favor, cual es el sector popular?"[18]

At the same time, the peasant organization, the CNC, was brought under close government control by means of the selective appointment of professional politicos to key leadership positions.

These moves did not simply add up to a perfecting of a corporatist structure set in place by Cárdenas. They amounted to a virtual silent revolution by the middle sectors and the professional political bureaucracy to reorganize the state apparatus on its own behalf.[19]

These moves to incorporate the middle classes into the revolutionary state did not provoke opposition from the Left. On the contrary, the inclusionary aspects of the reforms were consonant with the nationalism and popular front orientations of most of the Left. These policies fitted in well with Lombardo Toledano's general anti-imperialist position, his support of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) and the Partido Popular. These policies have to be seen in a wider context than merely the Second World War. As Isserman has demonstrated for the United States, so also for

Mexico was it the case that Popular Front policies and nationalism in one form or another were "natural" policies for the Communist (and non-Communist) Left.[20]

Nevertheless, there is some indication that the alliance between state and organized labor was already under some strain. On the 25th of February 1941 the Senate passed a resolution to "struggle against the PAN, the PCM, and Bassols." (Bassols was a leading independent Leftist who had been a minister of Cárdenas' cabinet.) And Avila Camacho at this time tended to support labor confederations other than the CTM.[21]

Notwithstanding all these moves to conciliate the entrepreneurs and the middle sectors, the official party still came under criticism from employers and the PAN. These criticisms, however, never really developed into a sustained campaign.[22]

In the international sphere, particularly in US-Mexican relations, the Cardenista period had been one of considerable tension. Shortly after assuming power, Avila Camacho moved to reach agreement on the still outstanding issues of petroleum expropriation and the foreign debt, and by 1941-42 a rapprochement with the USA had been achieved.

Finally, another major accomplishment of the period was the further institutionalization and professionalization of the military.

Mexico's Entry into the War

It appears that initially there were widespread anti-US and pro-Axis sentiments in Mexico. Only the Left and the government were pro-Ally. In the 1930s the Spanish Civil War had reverberated through Mexican domestic politics, with the anti-Cardenista elements tending to equate opposition to the official party with support for the Axis powers.[23]

It therefore behooved the government to take a cautious line on the War. On May 13, the Mexican oil tanker "Potrero del Llano," steaming in the Gulf with full lights, was torpedoed by a German submarine. A few days later the same fate was suffered by the "Faja de Oro". On the 22nd of May 1942 the Mexican government announced a "state of war" with the Axis powers. There was a subtle legal distinction between being in a state of war and being at war with the Axis powers.[24]

From the point of view of the US, the importance of Mexico in narrowly military terms was as a cover against a possible Japanese attack from the Southwest. The US military wanted radar coverage for the approaches to California (until the end of 1942) and bases for air reconnaisance. The Mexican government and ex-President Cárdenas were insistent that there be no US troops on Mexican soil and that military co-operation be limited to technicians and the supply of US equipment.

Conscription for military service in the Mexican army was controversial and resistance was never entirely overcome thoughout the War, though it should be mentioned that a number of Mexicans enlisted directly in the Armed Forces of the United States. Mexico, unlike Brazil, sent no combat forces with the exception of a squadron of fighter planes which saw brief service in the Far East at the end of the War.[25]

The War and the Mexican Economy

The principal effect of the War on Mexico was that it transformed the economy of that country into an appendage of the US war machine. Mexico supplied strategic goods, mainly minerals, to the US and in exchange the US announced that it would sell essential goods to Mexico. There were a number of difficulties in the implementation of this agreement.

There was a substantial reorientation of Mexican trade patterns. In 1937-38 Mexico had one-third of its trade with Europe and 56% with the USA. By 1940 the USA accounted for 90% of Mexico's foreign trade.[26]

Mexico was also a major supplier of food for the US market, and provided large numbers of braceros for United States agriculture. There was an agreement that there would be 4000 braceros in 1942; by 1944 this had grown to 62,000. Some estimates of the number of agricultural workers who went North during the War run as high as 309,000, with a figure of some 219,000 Mexican migrants.[27]

The overall effect was a dramatic stimulus to economic, and particularly industrial, growth. This growth nearly doubled the industrial labor force (see table). At the same time, it was accompanied by an acceleration of the inflationary pressures which had begun in 1937 and 1938. Like other Latin American economies, Mexico experienced widespread shortages of consumer goods and of capital and intermediate goods. US supply of these items was always difficult.

While overall employment levels rose markedly during the War, supply difficulties sometimes caused local problems and layoffs. Moreover, as the table indicates, real wages suffered a dramatic decline. This occurred in the context of considerable speculation and conspicuous consumption by the wealthy elites of Mexico City.

In such a situation, the no-strike pledge by the CTM announced in May 1942 (together with a pact not to raid other unions' jurisdictions signed in June 1942) imposed a considerable strain on the Left. Support for the Allied War effort of course was the principal reason for the no-strike pledge, just as it was in the United States and elsewhere. However, with workers essentially unprotected from the worst effects of the war economy, there was considerable rank-and-file restiveness. Not surprisingly, despite--or perhaps because of--the no-strike agreement, the latter part of the War saw an explosion of industrial militancy, with strike levels reaching an all-time high in 1943 and 1944.

Although real wages were the principal cause of most strikes, there were also a number of inter-union disputes, strikes resulting from the blockage of the port of Veracruz in 1943 due to the inability to obtain essential spare parts for the machinery, and a number of strikes in the petroleum regions to assert the political power of the union in the selection of candidates for local office. In one strike in a mica producing enterprise in Oaxaca--mica was used for the production of radios--the strikers were accused of being Communists, even though Communist Party members were at that time adhering to the no-strike pledge.[28]

The resolution of these conflicts was not always easy and on occasion led to violence. In a widely publicized incident, on September 23, 1941, striking workers at the Materiales de Guerra factory were fired upon by the Army and ten pickets were killed.

Strikes, moreover, were but one aspect of widespread and increasing tensions directly linked to the War effort. The Communist Party began to experience a decline in membership, and the national industrial unions began to pull away from the CTM. In addition to the strikes, 1944 also saw widespread rioting about shortages and inflation. Later that year, in July, the announcement of new social security legislation brought spontaneous rioting in downtown Mexico City as workers protested the payment of their quotas.

By 1946 the relationships between the CTM and the PRM had become very tense. There was substantial opposition within the CTM to Alemán's candidacy. However, Lombardo Toledano had decided to back Alemán to the hilt, and in subsequent years went to great lengths to defend him against his detractors.

Meanwhile, the internal rivalry within the CTM continued unabated. By the end of the War a three-way split had developed in Mexican unionism. The national industrial unions, with Valentín Campa and Gómez Z of the railway workers at the head, wanted to destroy the CTM and create a new and more militant labor central. The *cinco lobitos* were

intent on retaining power within the CTM and on continuing their policy of alliance with the government and with the drive for increased industrial production. Holding an uneasy intermediate position between the two were Lombardo Toledano and the Communists, arguing that the unions should remain in the CTM, and trying to outmaneuver the Fidelistas within the organization.

Labor in the Immediate Postwar

In addition to the general factors producing rank-and-file unrest in the Mexican working class, there were also a number of industry-specific grievances. Of immediate concern are the problems in the big industrial unions.

The situation on the railways was deplorable. The stock had never been properly renovated after the Revolution and the disorders of the 1920s and now, with the increased demands placed on it by the War, was in a terrible state. Nor had the experience with workers' control in the Cardenista period proved very successful. There was a real problem of labor discipline. Politically, the railway workers could not be counted on to support the government, divided as they were between supporters of Almazán and those who supported the Communist Party (and later, CP dissidents). As part of its War-time cooperation with Mexico, the United States had sent a railway mission to help with the technical problems on the railways, though this commission found it extremely difficult to avoid entanglement in the internal politics of union-managment conflicts. Management on some of the lines (for example, on the SudPacífico) was spoiling for a fight.[29] With more labor than they wanted (one estimate was that one-third of the existing labor force was surplus to requirements) and feeling that the unions needed to be taken down a peg, some managers openly welcomed the possibility of a strike.

In the petroleum industry, the unification of the many small unions into a single national union had operated by way of unifying contracts upwards, and once again there was an upsurge of labor militancy. The replacement of PEMEX director Jesús Silva Herzog by Bermudez was the signal for a government attempt to clean up the industry. The attack began in 1946 when, on the outbreak of a strike, the government sent in troops to control the oilfields. Both Fidel Velázquez and Lombardo Toledano had opposed the strike, and the Communist Party had accused the petroleum workers of being led by trotskyists. However, while this discredited the incumbent union leadership, it appeared to do little to diminish militancy among the rank-and-file. In December 1947 the Petroleum union left the CTM after a bitter dispute over the 1946 strike.

In mining, US demand for minerals had dropped sharply in 1944, and this had led to substantial redundancies in the industry (see table). This situation of generalized discontent was mobilized by the union leadership in the years immediately after the War in a series of strikes in the industry which caused considerable alarm to government and employers, and which were seen by some observers as signalling a major offensive against the government.

All these labor problems militated against the expressed desire on the part of the government to attract foreign capital. The pacto obrero-industrial signed in 1945 by the CTM and CANACINTRA was quite explicit on the desirablity of attracting foreign, particularly US and Canadian, capital into Mexico. But the prerequisite of increased foreign investment was stability on the labor front.

Labor problems were to be exacerbated in 1947 by a concerted move on the part of the Left to challenge government policy. This involved three interlinked developments: (1) the internal struggle within the CTM between the Lombardistas and the Fidelistas, ending with the expulsion of the Lombardistas from the CTM; (2) the formation of a solidarity pact between the three national industrial unions; (3) the creation

of the Partido Popular. These changes in the union panorama were to result, in 1949, in the formation of a new rival labor central, the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM), but by then it was too late. The charrazo had intervened.

The Charrazo[30]

In 1947 Gómez Z sought election as secretary general of the CTM. Failing in his bid to gain the top office in that organization, he pulled the railway union out of the CTM and on the 20th of March, together with the streetcar workers and the telephone workers, formed the Confederación Unica de Trabajadores (CUT). It was clear that the other big industrial unions would join in opposition to the CTM and, on January 10, 1948, the Railway, Mining and Petroleum workers' unions signed a solidarity pact.

At this point, on February 1st, 1948, Gómez Z stepped down as general secretary of the railway union. In his place was elected a colorless individual by the name of Jesús Díaz de León, nicknamed "el Charro" for his proclivity for dressing in the traditional Mexican cowboy style. The general assumption was that Gómez Z would continue to rule from behind the throne, with Díaz de León as a pliant instrument. On September 28 Díaz de León produced a surprise. He accused Gómez Z and a former secretary of finances, Pedro Sánchez Castorena, of financial irregularities. Apparently they had been shifting union funds to the CUT without explicit authorization. However, instead of taking his accusation to the *comité de vigilancia* as was normal practice, Díaz de León chose to take the case to the Procurador General de Justicia. Warrants were issued for the arrest of the accused. Gómez Z's supporters in the union reacted. The *comité de vigilancia* removed Díaz de León from his post and reinstated Gómez Z as secretary general. A confused situation reigned in the union for several days, with supporters of Díaz de León (and, it was rumored, police) seizing the union offices, and with both sides appealing to the

Ministry of Labor for official recognition. On the 27th of October the Ministry of Labor pronounced in favor of Díaz de León.

One can only speculate about the motives which led Díaz de León to take this course of action. Whether he acted at the direct instigation of the government cannot be said. Whatever his motives, the effect was dramatic. He carried through a major purge of the militants within the union and delivered a now tame union back to the CTM. The solidarity pact had received a devastating blow. Charrazos against the other industrial unions followed in short order. By 1950 the situation was completely under control. The Petroleum and Mining unions had returned to the CTM and the projected new labor confederation, the UGOCM, was still-born.

Meanwhile, from 1946 and through 1947 discussions continued on the Left over the formation of the Partido Popular. This was particularly difficult because of the tensions and suspicions between the Communists and Lombardo Toledano on the one hand, and the Communist dissidents and independent Leftists on the other. Nevertheless, progress was made and the Partido Popular was officially launched in June 1948. It had all the potential of becoming a genuine mass party.[31]

In 1947 and 1948 the struggle within the CTM finally came to a head. At the Fourth Congress of the CTM in March 1947 the CTM passed a resolution calling for the formation of the Partido Popular and pledging CTM support for the initiative. At the same time, the conference was addressed by Miguel Alemán, who stressed the need for a "política de orden y progreso;" and the CTM changed its slogan from "For a Society Without Classes" to "For the Emancipation of Mexico."

Some of the Lombardistas in the CTM were expelled in 1947, and Lombardo Toledano himself was expelled in 1948. The Lombardista unions formed the Alianza de Obreros y Campesinos de México (AOCM) in March of 1948.

At this time the correlation of forces hardly appeared to favor the CTM. Although the Fidelistas now had exclusive control of the CTM without the necessity of dealing with a sizeable Left-wing minority for the first time since the organization was founded, they were numerically weak and most observers felt that politically they were weak also. At this time, it is estimated that the CTM had about 100,000 affiliates, compared to the 200,000 members of the three industrial unions which had signed the Solidarity Pact of 10 January 1948, and compared to the estimated 130,000 members of the AOCM. In addition, other labor confederations and the non-affiliated textile workers counted another 400,000 workers.[32]

There appeared to be a window of opportunity. If the Left could come together into a single union confederation, with the key role played by the big industrial unions, and simultaneously build a mass party of the Left, the PRM's monopoly of power might be broken. The entire nature of the Mexican political system would be profoundly altered. The CTM would become a minor part of the union scene and union support for the government would no longer be taken for granted. This was not to be.

The charrazo in the railway union was followed by similar charrazos in the petroleum workers' union in 1949 and in the Mining and Metalurgical workers' union in 1950. A decisive defeat had been inflicted on the most important unions in the country, and the official party could now push ahead with its economic and political project. The basis for the Mexican 'miracle' had been laid. The UGOCM was never granted official recognition and was still-born. The Partido Popular never was able to realise its potential and rapidly assumed the minor role in the political system which it has held ever since.

Could there have been any alternative outcome? Was there a real window of opportunity in the 1942-48 period? Or would the Cold War have swamped any attempt at independent unionism and a restructuring of the Left? And why did Lombardo Toledano stay in the CTM long after it must have been apparent that--with the big industrial unions

having disaffiliated --he could not hope to win against the *cinco lobitos* ? Again, one can only speculate on Lombardo's motives, but it seems plausible to argue that his policy of anti-imperialist unity led him to reject what he saw as being an overly confrontationist policy adopted by the industrial unions. The logic of Lombardo's analysis of the Mexican situation demanded that he seek an illusory alliance with "the progressive national bourgeoisie" and hence with the government. In the end, Lombardo was simply incapable of breaking with the government and working for a genuinely independent union movement. The weight of Mexican history and a Stalinist view of class collaboration combined to close the window of opportunity.

What seems important to stress is that the moves taken to reassert government control over the labor movement in 1948 were not a simple repetition of some supposed system of political alliances between a controlled labor movement and the state. The days of the CROM had gone. What was at stake in the 1940s was a rather different prize. Now, the issue was economic development and the control of wages in a potentially inflationary economy. For the devaluation of the peso to have its desired effects, wage increases had to be held in line, and this meant that the combatant and relatively autonomous unionism which seemed to be on the point of emerging in 1948 had to be nipped in the bud. Union discipline had broken down during the War (though it is important also to remember the impact of the Cardenista mobilizations in increasing labor insurgency) and the charrazo was the key to its reestablishment. In this sense, the charrazo marks a real turning point in Mexican labor history and represents a rupture with a past system of labor control and the denial of other historical options.

The War had three effects as far as this process is concerned: (1) it prolonged the alliance between the Left, organized labor, and the state which had emerged with the popular frontism of the Cárdenas period. The slogan of "Unidad a Toda Costa" accurately captures the deeply ingrained desire on the part of the CP and of Lombardo Toledano to

avoid class confrontationist policies and to seek to paper over differences within the labor movement as long as was possible (and longer than was sensible). (2) The War accelerated the "rectification" process. Whether this "rectification" was inevitable, and how fast it might have occurred are not easy questions to answer, but the increased ties with the US arising out of the War do seem to have pushed events in that direction. (3) The War was also directly responsible for increasing discontents within the working class, and thereby for generating the wave of industrial militancy which developed from 1943 on.

The War also had a broader and more nebulous impact. It had been fought as a war of "democracy" against dictatorship. With the coming of the Cold War, and the equation of Fascism and Communism under the label of "totalitarianism," labor militancy and democracy were seen as incompatible. Perhaps unlike the Brazilian case, the question of "democratization" was not, in any direct sense, a serious issue in Mexico. Mexico was not defined as a dictatorship like Brazil or Argentina. However, like the other countries in the region, the approaching end of the War clearly signalled the approach of a new era of development under US hegemony. In so far as this was identified as part of the world-wide victory of "democracy," this was as much an issue in Mexico as elsewhere. And as in the other Latin American countries, the solution to the problem posed by labor and the Left was what might be called "authoritarian democratization."[33] Insofar as an autonomous labor movement was a possible threat to economic development and political stability, this was sacrificed under the banner of a fight against "Communism". In the Mexican case "democracy" came to be redefined as manipulated elections, one-party rule, and the establishment of a corrupt and authoritarian system of labor control. But since Mexico's commitment to the camp of the Western Democracies was unswerving, this redefinition of terms was swallowed without hesitation.

The International Dimension

There are a number of parallels or coincidences between Mexican labor history in this period and that of several other nations. I find these parallels disturbing, since my own theoretical inclinations tend towards the use of endogenous models of social change, and a stress on the diversity of developmental paths experienced by different countries. On the whole, I find "world-systems" explanations unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons.[34] Nevertheless, there are seemingly close paralells in the history of these countries and these need to be explained.

One country whose labor history closely paralelled that of Mexico in this period was the United States. Perhaps this should not be surprising given the close connections between the two countries and between the CIO and the CTM. The waves of union organizing in the 1930s in each country were of largely unskilled workers who had been left out of previous organizational efforts, and these union drives took place under pro-labor presidents in a period when the international Communist movement was committed to a popular front policy.[35]

Communist Party policy tended not to be differentiated between countries, and this necessarily provides one element of commonality between the experiences of the labor movement in different countries. It is as yet unclear what effects the Hitler-Stalin pact had on Latin American Communist Parties. It is clear that it profoundly disoriented the US Communist Party, and there is every reason to suppose that the Mexican experience was similar. The Communist Parties suffered from the War in two waves. Firstly, the abrupt reversals of policy with the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact and its subsequent collapse with the German invasion of the Soviet Union exposed CP militants to charges that they were little more than tools of Soviet foreign policy. These rapid reversals, and the confusion they engendered, seem to have produced a momentary

crisis in the Party and a corresponding weakness in its popular support. However, with the entry of the Soviet Union into the War, the Communist Parties could wholeheartedly adopt those Popular and National Front policies which were so congenial to them. But the unswerving devotion of the CP to the Allied War effort was, in time, to produce a second, and more serious, wave of disenchantment with the Party. Increasingly, numbers of union militants came to feel that their economic interests were being sacrificed in the name of a far away war without any corresponding sacrifice by the entrepreneurial and middle-class sectors of society. As the Party continued its no-strike policy into the mid-forties, the growing groundswell of rank-and-file industrial militancy presaged a new challenge to the Party's working class support.[36]

The Post-War Reconstruction

The War brought about a realignment of world politics. The center of power shifted from Europe to the confrontation between the two Great Powers, both brought back into international politics by the War after the inter-War decades of isolationism. The latter years of the War were marked by conscious efforts to plan for, and reshape, the political institutions of the post-War world. In this process of growing super-power hostility trade union movements came to play an increasingly important role.

The holders of power in the West were increasingly preoccupied, in the years 1944-48, with the spectre of Left-wing and Communist mass movements acting as agents of the Soviet Union. In Italy, Greece and France the War and the Resistance had seen a dramatic increase in the strength of the Communist Parties and these were serious contenders for power. Only a bitter civil war and military intervention by the British eliminated the threat of a Communist government in Greece. In France and Italy the Left was both weaker and more divided; nevertheless, there too it appeared to pose a serious

threat to the process of national reconstruction. In England the end of the War saw a landslide victory for the Labour Party with its program of social-democratic reforms. And in the US itself, a group within the CIO campaigned for the creation of a labor party and a break with the Democrats.

In all of these developments, trade unions played a central role. Consequently, particularly with the attempts to establish international trade union organizations at the end of the War, these organizations became intensely politicized and an arena for Cold War politics. Rival union confederations began to operate, for the first time, on an international scale. Western governments became closely involved in this struggle for control of the international union movement, channeling funds and giving public support to those organizations with an acceptable political line.[37]

This was a struggle with a global dimension and Latin America formed one of the important battlegrounds. The background for these labor conflicts had been prepared throughout the continent in a manner not dissimilar to the experience of Mexico. In Venezuela, Chile and Cuba, left-of-center governments had stimulated the growth of union militancy, whereas in other countries (Peru, Brazil and Argentina) the end of the War saw the removal of dictatorial governments, political liberalization, and an upsurge of union militancy. There were many important differences between the various counties, of course; but common to all were the strains and expectations caused by the War. Everywhere real wages had dropped in the face of inflation. The increased stimulus to industrialization had led to a rapid expansion of the industrial labor force. The conditions for industrial militancy--grievances plus mass organization--were in place. Politically, the War had discredited dictatorships and favored the cause of "democracy"--a cause with which the Left and the Communist Parties closely identified themselves. Throughout Latin America, the stage was set for a turn to the Left. A window of opportunity was being

opened in country after country. By 1948 these windows had been slammed shut in the major countries of the region.

Clearly there were important differences between countries, both in the nature of the challenge posed by labor and the Left in the mid-forties and in terms of the resolution of the crises of the late forties. It is by no means my intention to suggest that the Mexican case is in any way paradigmatic. Indeed, one purpose in writing this paper was to stimulate other scholars to consider the differences between the Mexican experience and those of other countries.

Underlying this descriptive task of elucidating the details of a very under-researched period of Latin American labor history is a series of complex problems of interpretation. Are we dealing with a number of discrete, separate "national" histories or is there some common dimension? Did "external" factors completely overshadow "internal" developments, or were they interrelated in some more complex manner? What was the role of the US in all this? These are questions which can only be satisfactorily answered with further research. In the meanwhile, I will offer a few tentative hypotheses.

Explanations

In the end, what are the factors which explain the remarkable similarities among these countries? Firstly, the War had similar effects on most countries: a period of austerity producing labor unrest; and a generalised set of expectations about the reshaping of a new world order in which "democracy" would prevail; the War also provided a further stimulus to industrialization in some countries, and prepared some Latin American nations for more deliberate efforts at macroeconomic planning in the context of the new expanding world economy. The emergence of ECLA should be seen in this light. The post-War period saw the emergence of the US as the hegemonic power in the

West in a way that had only been implicit previously. America broke away from isolationism and assumed a major world role. Part of this was the emergence of the conflict with the Soviet Union. This was translated into the ideology of the Cold War and the witch-hunt for internal enemies who were agents of the Soviets. The anxiety about the enemy without was displaced onto the enemy within. This hysterical attitude to the Communist Parties may not have been entirely rational, but it did however, have a useful function: it provided the ideological vehicle for a devastating onslaught on Left-wing unions, both in the USA and elsewhere. There is some suggestion that political actors throughout the Western hemisphere at this time felt that a Third World War was imminent. Such a fear seems to have been one of the motives behind Gonzalez Videla's crackdown on the Chilean Left in 1948. And it is apparent that the US Embassy in Mexico was keenly concerned to see how labor in that country would behave in the event of a renewal of hostilities.

One interesting question for the Latin American cases concerns the precise role played by the US in the attack on the Left. Was the US directly involved? If so, how? (This was before the big AIFLD programs, though Serafino Romualdi was clearly active.) It was certainly the case that the AFL had always been active in Mexican labor, and that at the end of the War it stepped up its activities, with the approval of the State Department.

However, Mexican unions, with the possible exception of the CROM, were generally suspicious of, and hostile to, the AFL. The CIO had better luck in establishing links with the CTM, and sent a number of observers and delagates to various CTM and CTAL meetings. However, in the opinion of the US Embassy in Mexico, Mexican labor leaders were, with the significant exception of Lombardo, generally too caught up in their particular concerns to be much interested in international affairs.[38]

There seem to be three basic models for thinking about the relationship between events in Latin America and the US: (1) There was a coincidence of interests between the internal needs of Latin American states to deal with the Left and union militancy in the

post-War period of industrialization, and the desire of the US government and private investors to see an attack on Communism and a better "climate for investment;" (2) there was some sort of ideological hegemony such that certain ritual acts on the part of Latin American states were more or less de rigeur; (3) there was some sort of direct intervention by the US government to contain communism in Latin America. Of course, these three explanations are by no means exclusive. It is particularly important to consider the kind of evidence which would support or disconfirm each of these models. It is the third model--that of direct US intervention--which is both most controversial and, in principle, most amenable to direct proof. If one could find policy documents of the US government, or trustworthy statements by key policy-makers, to the effect that the containment of communism was (a) a key objective and (b) was to be pursued either directly through agents in the labor movement or indirectly via pressure on Latin American governments, one would be some way along the road to a confirmation of this model. I must confess that, to date, I have yet to find any documentary support for the second part of the proposition. Of course, this may simply mean that the files have been thoroughly vetted and any such material removed.

Moreover, even if such material could be found it would be necessary to show also that these efforts by the US government had a discernable effect on the evolution of Latin American labor movements. Were these measures effective, and would not the Labor movement have evolved in that direction anyway? The evidence to date from Mexico indicates both that US government efforts were generally ineffective (though they may perhaps have been more effective in other Latin American countries), and that they had little direct impact on the development of Mexican unionism.

There is a final point. Even if one is inclined to accept the direct intervention model, it is still necessary to evaluate its relative importance vis-à-vis the other two models. These models are intrinsically harder to deal with. To demonstrate the existence of a

coincidence of interest is not necessarily to show that such a coincidence of interest actually led to the action in question. Similar objections apply to the notion of ritual acts of propitiation in exchange for favorable treatment.

However, it is possible to be too rigorous in the application of standards of proof. In the end we come down to the informed, though necessarily imperfect, judgment of the historian. My own inclination in the case of Mexico is to believe that (i) attempts at direct intervention by the US government certainly existed, but were largely ineffective; (ii) the bulk of the explanation must lie in the coincidence of interest between the macroeconomic needs of the Mexican government and the US fears of communism; and (iii) that the ideological climate of the Cold War played an important, though probably minor, role in shifting the terms of Mexican political discourse to the right. Certainly the US embassy in Mexico followed labor developments with attention and concern, and was certainly relieved when the decision was made to crack down on labor militancy. That the Mexican government, at least in part, did this to propitiate the US is possible, though I doubt that it was, in any direct sense, an important factor.

In the end we are left with the conclusion that the industrial development of Mexico, together with the need to restrain the expectations raised by the emergence of the new post-War world of "democracy," had presented the Mexican state with a difficult problem. A militant labor movement appeared to threaten the hegemony of the official party and to erode the basis for what was to be the Mexican miracle. Control of labor had slipped out of the hands of the state and the possibility of an independent labor movement had been placed on the agenda. Whether this would have imperiled capital accumulation in a dependent country like Mexico must be a matter of judgment: what is certain, however, is that the challenge of labor was defeated with the Charrazo of 1948. As a direct consequence Mexico enjoyed a twenty-year period of rapid growth and

political stability. Authority and not democracy was to be the keynote of the post-War counter-revolution.

NOTES

[1] For a typical "definition" of charrismo, see A. Alonso, El movimiento ferrocarrilero en México, Mexico, ERA, 1972, p. 98.

[2] To see 1948 as a watershed in Latin American labor history may perhaps require a revision of the common schema which sees a populist expansion in the 1930s and 1940s followed by a wave of repression in the 1960s and 1970s. The analysis presented here makes no reference to the concept of "populism," and refers instead to the class alliance policies of the Left. This may possibly be a verbal quibble. Secondly, since the analysis focusses on an element of commonality between different countries, and moreover, one that depends on the impact of "external" forces, it may be thought that this paper implies a dependency or world-systems perspective. While I am cognisant of the force of such approaches, I believe that they can sometimes blur very real differences in national situations and thereby underestimate the importance of differences in class structure and organization as explanatory variables. Of course, not all dependency theories imply this, as is obvious from F.H. Cardoso and E. Faletto, Dependency and Development, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979.

[3] A. Michaels, "The Crisis of Cardenismo," Journal of Latin American Studies, vol. 2, part 1, May 1970.

[4] S. León, "El Comité Nacional de Defensa Proletaria," Revista Mexicana de Sociología, vol. 40, No. 2, (April-June 1978).

[5] The so-called *cinco lobitos* were Fidel Velázquez, Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga, Fernando Amilpa, Jesús Yurén and Luís Quintero. On the origins of this group see A. Hernandez, Le Mecánica Cardenista, vol. 16 of Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1979.

[6] A. Hernandez, op cit.

[7] Ibid, p. 161.

[8] The relevant document was reprinted with an introduction by G. Pelaéz and H. Laborde, La Política de Unidad a Toda Costa, ACERE, Mexico, 1980.

[9] V. Campa, Mi Testimonio, Mexico, Cultura Popular, 1978, p. 136.

[10] WNA, RG 59, Box 5043. Airgram, Thurston to State Department, 7 Nov. 1946. The breakaway of the petroleum workers' union from the CTM "has caused a sensation in labor and political circles and the conservative press is predicting that it forecasts the dissolution of the CTM."

[11] J. Meyer, El Sinarquismo, Mexico, Joaquín Mortiz, 1979.

[12] L. J. Garrido, El partido de la revolución institucionalizada, Mexico, Siglo XXI, 1982.

[13] A. J. Contreras, México 1940, Mexico, Siglo XXI, 1977.

14 Garrido, op cit, p. 242.

15 L. Medina, Del Cardenismo al Avilacamachismo, (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, vol. 18), Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1978.

16 I use the term "middle classes" in a loose sense, for want of precise data on the characteristics of these social strata. While this is clearly unsatisfactory, both the lack of data and the considerable theoretical problems entailed in pinning down the term "middle class" preclude any simple solution.

17 WNA, RG 59, Box 5042. Letter from Messersmith to Carrigan, Department of State, April 11, 1945. "An examination of the list of industrialists shows that there were only three of any importance...The rest of the so-called industrialists there were mostly small people in the drug and pharmaceutical business whom Lavrín got in...Lavrín...runs a medium sized drug manufactoring business in Mexico and...is essentially extreme left and in my opinion communistic and...was one of the favorite instruments of [the Soviet ambassador] Oumansky."

18 Garrido, op cit, p. 325.

19 Garrido, op cit.

20 M. Isselman, Which Side Were You On?, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1982.

21 Garrido, op cit, p. 308, p. 317-318.

22 Here there appears to be a major difference from the Brazilian experience.

23 B. Torres, México en la Segunda Guerra Mundial (vol. 19 of Historia de la Revolución Mexicana), Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1979.

24 R. A. Humphreys, Latin America and the Second World War, 1942-45, London, Athlone, 1982.

25 Torres, op cit.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Archivo de la Nación, Mexico, Secretaria del Trabajo y Previsión Social, boxes 95-96.

29 WNA, RG 59, Box 5044. Memo of conversation between E. NcCully and E. Vandercook.

30 Accounts of the charrazo may be found in L. Medina, Civilismo y Modernización del Autoritarismo, (vol. 20 of Historia de la Revolución Mexicana), Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1979; B. Hernández, "Del pacto de sindicatos industriales a la represión" in E. Suárez Gaona (ed.), Memoria del Segundo Coloquio de Historia Obrera, (2 vols.) Mexico, CEH SMO, 1979, vol. 2; F. Barbosa Cano, "El Charrazo contra el STPRM" in J. Woldenberg et al, Memorias del encuentro sobre historia del movimiento obrero, (3 vols.)

Puebla, Universidad Antónona de Puebla, 1980-81, vol. 2; Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, "El golpe al movimiento ferrocarrilero de 1948" in J. Woldenbery, op cit, vol. 2.

31 F. Barbosa, op cit.

32 L. Medina, op cit.

33 Cf. J. Almino, Os Democratas Autoritarios, São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1980.

34 See I. Roxborough, "Unity and Diversity in Latin American History," Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol. 16, No. 1, May 1984; I. Roxborough, "The Analysis of Labour Movements in Latin America," Bulletin of Latin American Research, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1981. I am broadly in agreement with the critique of world systems theory presented in M. Zeitlin, The Civil Wars in Chile, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984.

35 See the very interesting article by H. Levenstein, "Leninists Undone by Leninism: Communism and Unionism in the United States and Mexico 1935-1939," Labor History, Vol. 22, No. 2, Spring 1981 for the early period, and M. Isseman, op. cit. for the ups and downs of the CPUSA during the War. I am unaware of anything of equal quality on the Mexican Party. M. Márquez and O. Rodriguez, El Partido Comunista Mexicano, Mexico, El Caballito, 1973, provide a useful introduction.

36 Garrido, op cit, p. 317.

37 G. Busch, The Political Role of International Trades Unions, London, Macmillan, 1983.

38 WNA, RG 59, Box 5044. Letter, Dickinson to State Department, 11 February, 1949.

MEXICO

Year	GNP growth	Cost of Livng increase	Real wages	Strikes	Workers in Mining	Workers in Manufacturing
1939		28.2	100	303	49,704	
1940		28.4	90.47	357	48,403	
1941	10.2	29.4	86.01	142	52,158	568,052
1942	10.0	34.0	71.80	98	51,245	
1943	6.3	44.4	72.61	766	53,400	
1944	7.8	55.8	57.63	887	49,776	
1945	4.1	60.0	54.64	220	40,499	922,258
1946	4.2	74.8	49.75	207	40,793	

Sources:

B. Torres, México en la Segunda Guerra Mundial, (Vol. 19 of Historia de la Revolución Mexicana) Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1979.

J. Bortz, "El Salario obrero en el Distrito Federal, 1939-75," Investigación Ecónomica, No. 4, 1977.

J. Wilkie, The Mexican Revolution, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967.

MEXICO: From the Second World War to the Cold War

1934-40	Lazaro Cárdenas President
1940-45	Manuel Avila Camacho President
1946-52	Miguel Alemán President

1941

February	CTM statement in favor of participation in War
1 March	Fidel Velázguez replaces Lombardo Toledano as Sec Gen of CTM
May	Union Nacional Sinarquista declaration against support for Allies
July	Agreement with US to export strategic materials
August	CP switches line to support Allies
9 November	US-Mexican agreement on oil compensation
5 Dec	CANACINTRA formed
7 Dec	Pearl Harbor
14 Dec	Sinarquistas declare support for Government

1942

February	Miners leave CTM
14 May	"Potrero del Llano" torpedoed
25 May	No strike offer by CTM
28 May	Declaration of "State of War'
April-July	Demonstrations and riots about inflation and shortages in Monterrey, Veracruz and Mexico City
8 June	Pacto Obrero
3 Aug	Compulsory military service; isolated rebellions

4 Aug	Bracero agreement
5 Dec	Agreement with US on foreign debt
Sep 42-Feb 43	Battle of Stalingrad

1943

February	Formation of CNOP
July-Aug	Demonstrations about cost of living
Winter-Spring	Strike wave

1944

Spring-Summer	Widespread demonstrations and rioting about shortage and inflation
20 July	Social Security riots
2 November	Lombardo Toledano, Bassols, Encina (CP), etc. form Liga Socialista de Mexico

1945

7 April	Pacto Obrero Industrial

1946

April	Strike in Petroleum industry
10 July	Petroleum workers' union leaves CTM
19-20 Dec.	Strike in Petroleum industry

1947

2 January	IV Convention of Petroleum workers' union; Charrazo in Petroleum workers' union? Re-affiliation with CTM
20 March	Gomez Z forms Confederación Unica de Trabajadores (CUT)

26-28 March	IV Congreso Nacional of CTM: changes slogan from "Por una Sociedad sin Clases" to "Por la Emancipación de Mexico"; CTM agrees to form Partido Popular
3 October	XXXII Consejo Nacional of CTM: opposes participation in Partido Popular; various Lombardistas expelled
10 October	Demonstration against cost of living increases by railway union
8 December	CTM leaves CTAL
December	V Convention Petroleum workers' union; change of leadership; leaves CTM

1948

7 January	Lombardo Toledano expelled from CTM
10 January	Solidarity Pact between Railway, Mining and Petroleum Workers Unions
1 Feb	Jesús Díaz de León (el Charro) elected Gen Sec of Railway Union
3 March	Formation of Alianza de Obreros y Campesinos de México (Lombardista)
22 April	PRI announces anti-Communist campaign
21 June	Formation of Partido Popular
21 July	Devaluation of peso
28 September	Díaz de León accuses Gómez Z and Pedro Sánchez Castorena of financial irregularities
12 Oct	Comité de Vigilancia removes Díaz de León from post
27 October	Ministry of Labor recognises Díaz de León as Gen Sec of Railway union ("Charrazo")

1949

I8 June	Devaluation of peso
22 June	Lombardo Toledano forms Union General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM)
1 December	VI Convention of Petroleum Workers' union; Charrazo

1950

January	Petroleum workers' union returns to CTM
15 May	Rigged National Convention of Mining Union