

# Twenty-five years of Mexican political life

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An examination of obtainable figures on income distribution in Mexico conclusively shows a marked polarization of Mexican society. In 1968, 50 percent of low-income families received a scant 17.08 percent of available income, whereas the upper 10 percent enjoyed fully 40 percent.<sup>1</sup> Though this is certainly not an exceptional situation in Latin America, the fact is that whereas political instability has been the predominant note in almost all countries of the region, such is not the case in Mexico. Here, social polarization and stability have gone hand in hand. The explanation resides largely in the process of affirmation and modernization of Mexican authoritarianism which emerged from the revolu-

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1. Banco de México, *La distribución del ingreso en México*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico City, 1974, p. 8.

tionary struggles in the early part of the century. This system of political control, whose immediate origins are to be found in the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, acquired its present basic characteristics between 1929 and 1938—that is, in the period from formation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) to the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM)—, reaching full maturity after World War II. Since then, its structural changes have been few, and none of them substantive.<sup>2</sup> Thus, at the commencement of the second half of the century, the political control system was already fully institutionalized. Its principal elements are: a dominant official party constituted by three sectors encompassing the major labor, peasant and middle class organizations, plus a fourth sector, big business, which is also fully organized, though left out of the Party for ideological reasons. The conflict of interests between sectors is minimized by State action, which from the beginning assumed the role of indisputable arbiter of a political process whose aim was to

2. I have developed this theme more broadly in "Continuidades e innovaciones en la vida política mexicana del siglo XX. El antiguo y el nuevo régimen". *Foro Internacional*, vol. XVI, no. 1. El Colegio de México, Mexico City, July-September, 1975, pp. 37-63.

give maximum momentum to the country's economic growth in a frame of industrialization based on import substitution.

Mexico's foreign relations were a factor of instability for many years, but as of 1942—that is, dating from Mexico's alliance with the United States in the war—the problems created by Mexican revolutionary nationalism were practically surmounted. For reasons of geopolitics, and its role in the international process of capitalist production, Mexico became an integral part of the U.S. sphere of influence. From acting as a destabilizing factor, relations with the United States became an important prop of Mexican stability inasmuch as the national projects of the governments of both countries coincided in essential matters. The cold war which followed dismantling of the alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States reached one of its crucial points in 1950. North Korean troops had entered southern territory and the clash soon led to direct confrontation between the U.S. Army under United Nations cover and the newly created armies of the People's Republic of China. The United States then launched a world crusade against what it considered a communist project for world conquest, whose main arena had shifted from Europe—the communist guerrilla in Greece, the takeover by the Czechoslovakian communists, the Berlin blockade, and so forth—to Asia. The United States thus became the chief bastion of the status quo and of world counterrevolution. Latin America, Mexico included, was dominated by anticommunism and resistance to all progressive movements, which did not prevent Mexico from disagreeing with the United States—in reaffirming its international doctrine—on points not vitally important to its northern neighbor, relating mainly to the nature of the inter-American system.

The radical heritage of Cardenism was virtually liquidated by 1950; all possibilities of a "fourth position", about which there had been some speculation a dozen years before, were forsaken, to be replaced by the idea of a "national alliance" for development. Mexico's official goal was to build, in the shortest time possible, a consumer society in the U.S. image, even though its benefits would be enjoyed by only a small part of that society. To achieve this, the political control apparatus disciplined the labor force, reducing its demands to a minimum, and at the same time turned to foreign capital in search of aid. The country's doors were again opened to foreign enterprise, though now it was invited not to exploit natural resources but to build part of the industrial complex that would provide the growing domestic market with consumer goods.<sup>3</sup> Direct foreign investment—80 percent flowing from the United States—climbed from 566 million dollars in 1950 to 1,081,000,000 dollars ten years later, to 2,822,000,000 dollars in 1970 and over 3 billion today; foreign debt growth was even more marked, currently standing at 5 billion dollars.

3. Regarding this "national project", see Rafael Segovia's essay, "México in the year 2000", in *Development models in Latin America*. German Foundation for International Development, Berlin, 1974, pp. 185-201.

World political and economic development in the 'fifties and 'sixties strongly favored Mexican stability, but obviously the final explanation of this phenomenon is to be found not abroad but in the internal political control apparatus, whose main characteristics are those of an authoritarian system: basic control of organized political factors—labor unions, business organizations, et cetera—in the hands of those holding executive power. Leaders of political organizations have been able to discharge their function only to the extent that they keep the confidence of the country's top authority; the support of rank and file members may be important but is not decisive, and the actions of leaders are therefore more responsive to the demands of the Government than to those of their organizations' membership. Major political decisions have almost always been taken at the summit and imposed on the commonality. Political life has been governed not so much by an ideology as by something less structured, a mentality, which has allowed those responsible for management of the political system a broad margin for manipulation. Lastly, mass participation in the political process has been sporadic and almost always controlled; demobilization and depolitization are systematic, and although repression is not a main feature of the system, it is used openly and unrestrictedly when dissident elements attempt to violate the basic rules and create legitimate alternatives for independent mobilization of important social groups.<sup>4</sup>

Such authoritarian control of political life has deep historical roots, but was perfected during the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship and acquired its present lineaments after the Revolution. It was then that the electoral process—reduced to its purely symbolical aspects—became a legitimating element of prime importance; when the official party emerges (and hundreds of autonomous political organizations disappear), the (three) sectors are created as the party's new base and, lastly, the relationship of private enterprise and labor representatives with the State is established. By 1940, the institutional framework of the political process is almost completely formed and only small changes were made in subsequent years: the army was removed from the dominant party and placed outside the electoral setup; the "popular sector" was strengthened by creation of the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP); elements of radicalism—the Cardenist heritage—were eliminated from the dominant party's programs, and the autonomy and frictions of base organizations were reduced by transforming the PRM into the Partido Revolucionario Institucional in January 1946. Registration was used to control small opposition parties, permitting operation of the "loyal opposition" (Partido de Acción Nacional—PAN—, Partido Popular\*—PP—) and obstructing the action of uncompromising op-

4. Juan Linz, "An Authoritarian Regime: Spain". Erik Allardt and Yrjö Littunen (eds.), *Cleavages, Ideologies and Party Systems. Contributions to Comparative Political Sociology*. Abo Tidnings och Tryckeri Aktiebolag, Turku, Finland, 1964, pp. 291-341.

\* The name was changed to Partido Popular Socialista in 1960. The initials PPS are used in the rest of the text. (Ed.)

ponents (Communist Party —CP—, “Sinarquists”, and others).

Few changes have been made in this scheme since 1950. The major innovations since then relate primarily to expansion of the electoral base. Women were given the vote in 1953 and in 1970, all Mexicans over the age of eighteen. In regard to political parties, registration of the Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana (PARM) was accepted in 1954, thereby increasing “legitimate” opposition parties to three: the PAN, initially to the right of the dominant party, the PPS to the left, and the PARM, made up of former “Constitutionalist” army men, with a position close to, but more to the right of, official currents and openly anti-communistic.

However, the regime’s democratic image had to be shored up by electoral results themselves. (President) Adolfo López Mateos understood this and in 1962 introduced a noteworthy —though not altogether logical— amendment to Constitutional Article 57 by which “party deputies” were created alongside properly elected deputies. The advantages of this new type of representation, reserved only to the registered parties, consisted of granting a minimum of five seats to those obtaining at least 2.5 percent of the total vote. One more seat was awarded for each additional 0.5 percent of the vote until a total of 20 was reached. This modification in electoral procedures did not apply to the Senate —where the PRI’s predominance remained untouched—, but only to the Chamber of Deputies. In the 1958 elections for federal deputies, the PRI obtained 153 seats, the PAN six and the PPS, one. With electoral reform the picture was modified as follows: the PRI obtained 175 seats in 1964, the PAN 20, the PPS ten and the PARM, five. The situation in 1967 was exactly the same except that the PARM won its first seat by majority vote and increased its representation to six.

Precisely because of this feeble existence of opposition parties, excepting the PAN, (President) Luis Echeverría considered it advisable to introduce a new change whereby the total minimum vote needed for a registered party to claim seats in the Chamber of Deputies was reduced from 2.5 to 1.5 percent. In the elections of 1973, the PRI won 188 of the 194 positions in dispute by majority (later obtaining the Tehuacán district which had been in litigation), the PAN four and the PARM, one; the remainder of opposition posts was covered by “party deputies”, by which mainly the PARM and the PPS benefitted as the only parties finding it difficult to meet the 2.5 percent minimum needed to be represented in the Chamber (the first obtained a meager 0.81 percent in 1970 and the second, 1.35 percent). This last electoral reform went beyond a mere change in percentages and gave all national parties access to radio and television, as well as representation and voting power in all instances and levels of the electoral process, which meant effective representation not only in the Federal Electoral Commission, but in local and district committees and at the polls, thus

making electoral fraud in favor of the dominant party more difficult, at least in urban centers. The measure was especially advantageous to the PAN as the only party with nationwide organization capable of appointing representatives to a large number of the instances thus opened. All this encouragement given—the opposition was not gratuitous but quite logical: to channel the frustration of citizens not identified with official policies through accepted parties, thereby reducing the potential dangers of alienation, which without some means of expression could lead to violent, disruptive actions.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the system contains informal institutions, as strong as, or stronger than, its formal establishments. A typical example is caciquism, until recently the dominant, though not exclusive, form of control over political processes in rural areas. The cacique acts as mediator between the local government and the rural community. In exchange for the assurance of tranquility in its area, the local government and, in the event, the national Government, relinquishes certain rights in the exercise of power in favor of the cacique. The cacique’s presence is unquestionably more evident in the less developed areas inasmuch as his capacity for effective intermediation is linked to his economic pre-eminence, obtained through marketing control of the region’s commodities, land monopolization, and so forth. According to certain observers, the power of caciquism as a political phenomenon has diminished in recent years as a result of the country’s process of economic modernization.<sup>6</sup>

What is apparent is that the big cacique-dominated structures —those encompassing a whole state—, which characterized the early postrevolutionary years, have begun to give way before the growing centralization of power. There are several examples: in 1958 the Federal Government weakened the dominion in San Luis Potosí of Gonzalo N. Santos, heir to the structure created by Saturnino Cedillo. A year later the power of Leobardo Reynoso in Zacatecas began to crumble. Since the death of General Lázaro Cárdenas, his family’s influence in Michoacán has dwindled. Sánchez Vite’s predominance in Hidalgo recently suffered a blow from which it possibly may not recover. In short, the anti-cacique battle has been a recurrent theme in official policy. There is no doubt that it is an anachronistic form of political mediation and not an essential part of the current system of political control, but it is also true that there is still a long way to go before its definite extinction can be proclaimed. The other face of the coin is the lack of vitality of certain formal institutions. An example is the nonexistent balance of

5. In relation to recent electoral reforms and their content, see Rafael Segovia, “La reforma política: el Ejecutivo Federal, el PRI y las elecciones de 1973”. *Foro Internacional*, vol. XIV, no. 3. El Colegio de México, Mexico City, January-March, 1974, pp. 28-54.

6. Roger Bartra considers that the crisis of caciquism has started, *Caciquismo y poder político en el México rural*, ed. Siglo XXI, Mexico City, 1975, pp. 13; see particularly Appendix 1, pp. 195-199. An excellent study of the rural political process is David Ronfeld’s *Atencingo. The Politics of Agrarian Struggle in a Mexican Ejido*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, Cal., 1973.

powers: Congress and the Supreme Court do not discharge the function assigned to them in federal theory because they lack the power to do so.

Mexico's stability has depended essentially on the control exerted by the country's top leaders over the demands and actions of the three sectors forming the dominant party, and over the entrepreneurial sector. The relationship between sectors and State is obviously different in each case and the difference is marked by the capacity of each to press for its demands before the political authorities and to impose sanctions when such demands are not attended. Generally speaking, substantive political decisions are taken by the State and the role of the sectors is rather more reactive, backing, modifying or vetoing such decisions.<sup>7</sup> This capacity to modify, and especially to veto, depends chiefly on the strategic position of the sector or group in question. Inasmuch as the basic commitment of Mexican Governments in the past quarter of a century has been to maintain a high rate of economic growth, business groups have much more power than the others because of their strategic importance in the process. The middle class, or organized labor, however, has greater bargaining possibilities than the peasants, who have been relegated to the bottom of the political and social pyramid.

Economic evolution of the farm sector is not examined here in detail, but in order to understand the peasants' scant political force it must be pointed out that by 1950 a clear decision had been adopted to favor the private sector of agriculture over the ejido, that is, the Cardenist land policy was terminated. It was now a question of encouraging the "efficient" —read private— landowner on whom depended the rate of farm commodity exports, basis of the new industrialization process. By 1950 the official investment in agricultural infrastructure was outstanding, geared mainly to benefit the private sector. The mean capital investment of private landholders had then already reached 1,164 pesos\*, as against the meager 735-peso average maintained by ejido farmers for almost ten years. After contributing half of national agricultural production in 1940, the ejido's share dropped to 37 percent a decade later.

The modernization of agriculture by this means —which by 1970 had placed 75 percent of irrigated land in the hands of private owners— did, in fact, achieve a substantial increase in production, but failed to assimilate the entire rural labor force; of the 8.3 million Mexicans gainfully employed in 1950, 4.8 million were engaged in agricultural activities. Fortunately for those responsible for this policy, there was a safety valve which for years served to reduce rural pressures: emigration to the United States. Under the terms of the migrant labor agreement, 5 million Mexican workers entered the United States from 1942 to 1964, but the number of illegal migrants following them appears to have been much

greater, increasing sharply after the agreement was ended in 1964.<sup>8</sup> In spite of mass deportations, which in 1954 reached 640,000, the number of illegal Mexican workers in the United States continued to be high (the figure today is perhaps one million).<sup>9</sup>

There was a dramatic change in land distribution policy during the López Mateos Administration; in this six-year period —at least at the beginning— 16 million hectares were distributed. The reason appears to have been the growing unrest fostered by small independent organizations. Infrastructure investment, on the other hand, lost its former drive —the decline really started in the last years of the Ruiz Cortines Government— and the percentage of the federal budget allocated for irrigation dropped from 9.8 in 1953 to 3.6 in 1961; though it later moved up again, previous levels were not reached. Official priority was awarded to industry. This policy was maintained during the Días Ordaz Administration. As a result of the investment slowdown, the primary sector as a whole (farming, livestock-raising, forestry and fishing) grew at a mean annual 3.6 percent in the 'sixties, compared with the industrial sector's 8.9 percent increment. Agricultural production growth in the decade was unable to keep ahead of natural population expansion, and the problem became critical.

Rural production in recent years has been insufficient to meet industrial requirements and it again became necessary to import foods —4 billion pesos in 1974—, which aggravated balance of payments problems. Unemployment also increased; the underemployed rural population in 1970 was about 3.6 million persons, or some 60 percent of the underemployed or jobless believed to exist at the time. Sixty percent of the rural population had a mean annual income of 1,625 pesos or less, a highly unfavorable situation compared with the national average, then placed at some 8,750 pesos.<sup>11</sup> The Echeverría Government decided to increase economic resources for the countryside and seek solution to the problem of land endowments issued during past Administrations but never implemented (30 million hectares). To date, eight million hectares have been awarded and a backlog of documents equal to 17 million hectares resolved; in addition, land has been acquired from private owners for distribution where it is most needed.<sup>12</sup> The political decision

8. The main features of the recent agrarian reform process can be found in Salomón Ekstein's *El ejido colectivo en México*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico City, 1966, pp. 30-81.

9. Karl M. Schmitt, *Mexico and the United States, 1821-1973. Conflict and Coexistence*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1974 pp. 212-220.

10. Manuel Gollás and Adalberto García Rocha, "El crecimiento económico reciente de México" (mimeo.), paper presented at the fourth International Congress of Studies on Mexico, Santa Barbara Cal., October 17, 1973, pp. 21-22.

11. *Idem*, pp. 28-29.

12. Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior, *México: La política económica del nuevo gobierno*. Mexico City, 1971, pp. 37-39. Regarding land distribution, see statements by Augusto Gómez Villa nueva in *Excelsior*, Mexico City, October 3, 1975.

7. Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Decision-Making in an Authoritarian Regime: Theoretical Implications from a Mexican Case Study". *World Politics*, vol. XXVI, no. 1, October 1973, pp. 28-54.

\* Exchange rate: 12.50 pesos to one U.S. dollar.

to counteract past trends by increasing investment in rural areas and raising farm commodity price supports is clear, but the results are less so. Agrarian reform has reached an impasse.

Such neglect of the agricultural sector, especially injurious to ejido farmers and 3.3 million landless farm laborers, could have produced explosive situations—the objective causes were there—and yet this did not occur. The Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) continued to maintain adequate discipline throughout the countryside—the ejido, though often scantily productive, continues to subordinate the ejido farmer to the Party and official policies—and alternate organizational nuclei that might have capitalized the peasants' difficult conditions were suppressed, either by force—assassination of the Morelos agrarian leader Rubén Jaramillo in 1962—or by a combination of repression and cooptation, as in the case of the activities of the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM), led by Jacinto López, based mainly in the North and in the state of Veracruz. When in the 1950s and 1960s the UGOCM organized land invasions and hunger marches, repression was used against it, but agrarian reform was reactivated as well. Internal division of independent organizations has been another effective tactic, clearly demonstrated in the case of the Central Campesina Independiente (CCI). The CCI was created in 1963 by a group of leaders linked to the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional and in a certain sense to Cárdenas, for no less a purpose than forming a nationwide farmers' organization to the left of the CNC. The CCI's main strength was in the North, in the states of Baja California, Sonora, Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Coahuila and Durango. Its ambitious plans for speeding up agrarian reform did not get very far; in 1964, one of its leaders, Alfonso Garzón, succeeded in splitting the incipient organization and his group immediately established close relations with the Administration, later entering the official party and submitting to its discipline. The independent wing, on the other hand, led by Ramón Danzós Palomino, came up against constant obstruction, including the arrest of its leaders. In late 1974, in the presence of President Echeverría, the CCI joined the CNC, the UGOCM and the Congreso Agrarista Mexicano in the so-called "Pact of Ocampo", to unify the policy of agrarian organizations under official leadership.

In conclusion, agrarian reform and the enclosure of benefitted peasants within the CNC—and in the paramilitary ejido organization known as Defensas Rurales—have not done the Mexican peasant much good, but in exchange has made him one of the strongest pillars of the PRI and of Mexican political stability in general.<sup>13</sup> Rural guerrilla activity, to which considerable attention was devoted in recent years, was confined to the state of Guerrero and motivated

by local rather than national problems. A combination of "civic action" and systematic persecution by federal troops weakened the movement to the point of extinction.

Numerically, urban workers constitute the country's second largest organized force. Some 42 percent of the labor force was engaged in industrial activities and services in 1950. Its strategic position in the production system more than compensated for its slight numerical inferiority, and its political participation was more efficacious than the peasants'. Urban workers were able to maintain a higher living standard than that of farm workers since not only did they enjoy better wages but were the first to be covered by state social security services, provided at more efficient levels than in rural areas.

The political action of urban workers in the past quarter of a century depended largely on their form of organization, dissimilar from the one imposed on the peasants. To begin with, though there was a dominant organization, it was not the only one. The precursor was the Casa del Obrero Mundial, replaced by the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) in 1918 and the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) in 1936. However, despite the efforts of Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the CTM, which in 1940 claimed a membership of one million workers, was unable to unify the labor movement. Its smaller rivals, the CROM and the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT), maintained their identity and fairly soon some of its own national unions broke away and have since followed their own course: miners, railroad workers, electrical workers, and others of lesser importance.

All post-Cárdenas efforts at unification have been lukewarm and the explanation is probably of a strategic nature: a single labor federation would have stronger bargaining power than the State and employers find desirable. The existence of a relative dispersion of labor forces permits the State, if necessary, to neutralize certain organizations with the help of others. On the other hand, such relatively privileged unions as petroleum workers, electrical workers and railroad workers find it undesirable to unite with the workers of small industries, which make up a large part of those affiliated with the CTM, whose bargaining power is much weaker than that wielded by the members of the labor elite.

The years immediately prior to 1950 can be characterized as a period of great dispersion of the labor movement, due chiefly to the fight to eliminate Cardenist leaders from the more important unions. By 1947, the CTM was definitely in the hands of the "moderate" fraction, headed by Fidel Velázquez, following expulsion of the Lombardo Toledano group. As of that moment the slogan of the CTM would no longer be "For a classless society", but "For the emancipation of Mexico". Anticommunism rapidly took over Mexico's labor movement and political life; to offset the trend, Lombardo organized the Alianza Obrera Campesina Mexicana

13. François Chevalier, "Ejido et stabilité au Mexique". *Revue Française de Science Politique*, vol. XVI, no. 4, Paris, 1966, pp. 717-752.

in March 1948, which joined the Central Unica de Trabajadores (CUT), created the year before with miners, petroleum workers and railroad workers. This was a recourse of the left, but the Government stepped in and in a combination of repression and cooptation, destroyed the alliance.<sup>14</sup> Cut off, Lombardo created the UGOCM in 1949, in which some miners and petroleum workers remained, but the State refused it recognition. Soon the big national unions broke away, leaving the UGOCM with a small peasant base and Lombardo outside the labor movement.

The CTM moderates had consolidated their position by 1950. Repression and "charrism" —the imposition of leaders obedient to the orders and interests of Government circles— had shaped a labor policy which demanded relatively few of the benefits Mexico appeared to be enjoying from its nascent but noteworthy industrialization. In April 1952, the minority labor wing —Confederación de Obreros y Campesinos de México (COCM), Confederación Proletaria Nacional (CPN), CUT and the Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT)— organized a new union within the official party: the Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (CROC). A year later the Federación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (FROC) was incorporated. The CROC claimed half a million affiliates, though the CTM granted it no more than one hundred thousand.

It did not take the big unions led by the CTM long to react. In 1953, in the city of Guadalajara, they agreed to form a bloc, constituted in March 1955, made up of the CTM, CGT, CROM, Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado (FSTSE), Federación de Trabajadores del Distrito Federal (FTDF), miners, railroad workers, petroleum workers, telephone workers, textile workers, and even actors. This impressive force became the Bloque de Unidad Obrera (BUO), which though showing scant dynamism, was the dominant labor organization of the moment.<sup>15</sup>

Though there were conflicts between the BUO and the CROC, both maintained strict discipline in their relation with the State. Their capacity to control their members was put to the test in the crisis of 1953 and 1954, when the end of the Korean War and the inflationary spiral, sharpened by a monetary devaluation in 1954, posed the urgent need to offset the steady loss in workers' purchasing power since the end of Cardenism. The CTM then raised the threat of a general strike and the country was flooded with strike notices (32,000). But finally, when labor authorities accepted an average 10 percent wage raise —as against 24 percent asked by the CTM—, calm was restored (only 160 strikes broke out) and the power of labor unions —and the State— was reaffirmed.

14. Marcelo Miquet and José Luis Reyna, "Introducción a la historia de las organizaciones obreras en México: de la Casa del Obrero al Congreso del Trabajo" (mimeo.). El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Sociológicos, Mexico City.

15. Ibid.

Real wages at last began to rise in 1955.<sup>16</sup> However, it is precisely at this time that a major crisis in relations between labor unions and between certain labor unions and the Government took place. The movement endangering the system of labor union control stemmed from the rebellion of several groups of railroad workers against acceptance by their formal leaders of a relatively low wage raise. The independent and militant stand taken by the railroad workers was shared by another traditionally turbulent group: the organized teachers. To the discontent of both was added the marked restlessness of petroleum and telegraph workers and a student movement. The railroad workers' protest was based on the fact that their wages fell below those being earned by the other big unions.<sup>17</sup> In the face of union leadership indifference, they created a new, militant organization in 1958, called the Grand Commission for a Raise in Wages, headed by a railroad worker from Matías Romero (Section 13 of the union), Demetrio Vallejo. Despite official opposition, the insurgents soon took over the union and immediately called for readjustment of company rates so that it could cope with long-term union demands. Readjustment was a very serious matter, involving an increase in industrial freight rates, and the company refused to accept it. Faced with a possible railroad strike, the Government by-passed negotiation and in March 1959 moved in to destroy the railroad workers' movement and independent unionism. The army arrested the top union leaders, together with hundreds of workers, and attempts at resistance were put down with bayonets and bullets. This hard line was justified to "public opinion" as an unfortunate but necessary answer to a communist conspiracy against existing institutions.<sup>18</sup> This forcible lesson again revealed to the labor movement as a whole the dangers of reclamatory action not endorsed by the State: with the State, something could be achieved; outside and against the State, nothing.

The purge of insurgent elements affected not only the railroad workers but the other unions that had been more or less active at the time: petroleum workers, teachers, and telephone and telegraph workers. Repression served to reinforce the position of disciplined leaders, who in the period of crisis were on the side of the authorities.

As of 1958, the CTM, in particular, and the BUO, in general, reaffirmed their control over the reclamatory action and policy of organized workers, but not completely. In 1960, with the President's consent, the group outside the BUO broadened its base in contraposition to the increasingly more powerful CTM by creating the Central Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT), which was then joined by the CROC FROC, Sindicato de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana (STERM), Sindicato Mexicano de Electricista

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Antonio Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero de México 1958-1959*. Ediciones Era, Mexico City, 1972; Demetrio Vallejo, *La luchas ferrocarrileras que conmovieron a México*, Mexico City, 1967

(SME), Federación de Obreros Revolucionarios (FOR), and the linotypers. The new federation claimed 350,000 affiliates as against the million and a half members said to belong to the BUO (of which over 1.2 million belonged to the CTM). In the final analysis, this division in the labor movement (fostered or simply accepted by the Administration?) favored its control by the State.

By 1966, a disciplined labor movement, which in exchange for biennial revision of collective contracts gave its unlimited support to the PRI and, above all, to the Chief Executive, decided to close ranks somewhat more firmly. The BUO and the CNT were dissolved and the labor confederations and major national industrial unions—30 in all—were incorporated into the Congreso de Trabajo, which in 1967 claimed a membership of 3 million workers.

No conflict of any importance has arisen since 1966, nor has there been any significant modification in the structure and nature of the organized labor movement. During the student movement of 1968, or in similar events such as the disastrous march of June 10, 1971, the labor movement mobilized its rank and file and gave the Government full support. In exchange, the Government agreed to enforce the profit-sharing obligation and, given the inflationary upsurge of 1973, accepted annual readjustments in collective labor contracts. To be sure, it has not been altogether smooth sailing; currents of renewal in the labor movement have not disappeared and such unions as the STERM, perhaps with a official approval, have stood up to the CTM. Further, new unions, as for example the one set up in the Volkswagen company, have broken away from the CTM and insurgent labor groups and parties have recently been formed: the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo, affiliated with the World Labor Congress, Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores and the Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores. However, these groups—like the company unions in Monterrey—represent a minority and threaten neither the CTM's pre-eminence nor official control over organized labor as a whole.<sup>19</sup> After twenty-five years of labor policy and sporadic crises, the dependence of organized labor—a minimum part of the labor force—on the Governments of the Revolution has been maintained and strengthened. The relative autonomy of such organized labor leadership has permitted that its cadres emerge largely from the working class itself—unlike the case of the CNC—and that its senior officials perdure in their posts beyond the six-year limit for renewal (obligatory on the other organizations composing the dominant party). In substance, CTM-Government unity, which has impeded the existence of an important independent labor movement, is essential to perpetuation of the authoritarian character of Mexico's political life.

The historian Andrés Molina Enríquez had already point-

19. Manuel Camacho, "La huelga de Saltillo. Un intento de regeneración obrera". *Foro Internacional*, vol. XV, no. 3. El Colegio de México, Mexico City, January-March 1975, pp. 414-415.

ed out in the early years of the century that the essential evil of Mexican society resides in its marked and terrible polarization. The creation of a vigorous middle class was the dream of many revolutionaries, particularly those of the Sonora group. It was regarded as the ideal foundation on which to build the political stability of postrevolutionary Mexico. There is no doubt that the middle class—no matter how it is defined—grew at an extraordinary pace in both absolute and relative terms. González Cosío estimates very approximately that this class or stratum accounted for barely 8 percent of the total population in 1900, expanding steadily so that sixty years later it had more than doubled its size to 17 percent.<sup>20</sup>

The middle classes have grown and the country has maintained its stability; does this prove Molina Enríquez' theory? The answer cannot be given as categorically as the question would suggest. On the one hand it is true that statistically the country's postrevolutionary governing cadres emerged chiefly from the middle class.<sup>21</sup> This class now has a mobility unknown to it before 1910. But it must also be borne in mind that from the beginning certain of its most active elements, far from being captivated by the programs of the Revolution headed some of the more spectacular opposition movements, endowing them always with a tone of moral indignation and a call to regeneration of national political life. Examples of this are numerous: the action of the Liga de la Defensa de la Libertad Religiosa, inspired by José Vasconcelos, the movement for university autonomy, the Partido Acción Nacional, the support drummed up for presidential candidate Juan Andreu Almazán, and so forth. As of 1941, the middle classes of Mexico, with the exception of the Sinarquist movement in the Bajío region—which though peasant-based is directed by middle class elements—and the Henriquist mobilization of 1952, entered a phase of understanding with the Government. It is no coincidence that this occurred just when social reform experiments terminated, industrialization was initiated and Nazi-Fascism defeated. The student and teacher protest movements of the 1950s found little response in their own class, but it cannot be ignored that the Henriquists and the Panists won nearly 24 percent of the total vote in the presidential elections of 1952, obtained largely in urban zones, that is, where the middle class is centered. The PAN obtained slightly under 10 percent of the vote in 1958, moving up to almost 11 percent in 1964, practically 14 percent in 1970 and 14.7 percent in 1973. This means increasing rejection of the action of the Governments of the Revolution by certain middle class groups. If the city vote—the only area where electoral competition with the dominant party has some meaning—is examined carefully, an even more interesting phenomenon is observable: the PAN obtained 28.7 percent of the total vote

20. Arturo González Cosío, "Clases y estratos sociales", *México, 50 años de revolución*, vol. II. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico City, 1961, p. 55.

21. Peter Smith, "La movilidad política en el México contemporáneo". *Foro Internacional*, vol. XV, no. 3. El Colegio de México, Mexico City, January-March 1975, pp. 386-395.

in 1973 in the 35 largest cities and its force in some was even greater: 59.5 percent in Puebla and 39.3 percent in the Federal District and metropolitan area.<sup>22</sup> There can be no doubt that PAN supporters are essentially urban and pertain to a middle class that despite the supposed benefits received from the Revolution, is dissatisfied, though not to the extent that it will go from electoral dissidence to more substantive protest; it should be noted, however, that on certain occasions its more active members have taken to the streets.

The political action of the heterogeneous middle strata is very difficult to control; although the PRI's "popular" sector has the task of encompassing it within official parameters, it is without the means to do so. There are no ejidos or labor unions to impose political discipline on its assorted components. Aware of this, the Governments of López Mateos and Echeverría carried out the electoral reforms of 1962 and 1973 to channel middle class discontent—about which they were adequately forewarned—,<sup>23</sup> precisely through the loyal opposition (especially the PAN) and thereby avert outbursts of anomic violence, that is, normless fury. The protests of Henriquists in 1952 gave way to the teachers' crisis of 1958-1959 and then to the upheaval of November 1964 (coinciding with the inauguration of the Díaz Ordaz Administration), which involved doctors giving service at the hospitals run by the Institute of Social Security and Services for State Workers (ISSSTE). After nearly nine months of agitation, the doctors of the public sector achieved an increase in income, but not the survival of the independent organizations formed in the process (Asociación Mexicana de Médicos Residentes e Internos—AMRI— and Alianza de Médicos Mexicanos—AMM—). With state backing—which included the use of force—, official agencies overcame the crisis, prevailed, and restored the discipline so adamantly sought by the Administration.

The following explosion of middle class discontent was not long in coming and turned out to be much more serious and difficult to control than the previous ones. The galvanizing force this time was the great mass of students in the nation's capital and certain provincial cities. It is unnecessary to describe the events from July to October 1968; the relevant bibliography is abundant.<sup>24</sup> What is interesting to stress is that confronted with more widespread protest, expressed by elements not yet incorporated into the labor

force—who, consequently, could not be threatened with dismissal—, the Administration was unable to find an appropriate formula for maintaining discipline. Faced with the intransigence and arrogance of the purely repressive action of the capital's authorities, the students and other middle class elements showed a surprising capacity for organization and the use of lawful means of petition to discredit the Díaz Ordaz Government before other middle class groups. In the end, the Administration showed such paucity of imagination that it had to resort to one of the most brutal and unnecessary acts of repression since the massacre of Sinarquists in León in the 'forties.

The repercussions of what happened on October 2, 1968 in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Tlatelolco) have not yet died down. When, in January 1970, the army occupied Durango to put an end to a student movement that had paralyzed the city in demand of new terms for exploitation of the Cerro del Mercado mine, great care was taken not to use excessive violence. The task of re-establishing harmony fell to Díaz Ordaz's successor, who made great efforts to disassociate his Government from the preceding regime's actions. This took the form of a "democratic opening", subsidies to universities, and other measures. All of which did not prevent the recurrence of a crisis on June 10, 1971, similar, though on a lesser scale, to that of '68, or the outbreak of violent conflicts in the universities of Puebla, Sinaloa and Guadalajara, to mention only the major events. The potential for conflict in the relation Government-middle classes has not disappeared.

The crisis of 1968 is important not only because it revealed the authoritarian nature of the regime to social sectors that had considered themselves more or less safe from its negative effects, but also because elements situated at the radical extremes of the student movement refused to accept the demobilization following repression and introduced an element characteristic of the political life of several Latin American countries, but from which Mexico appeared to be in no danger: the guerrilla. It is true there had been guerrilla activity before 1968, but in seemingly isolated cases: the actions of Rubén Jaramillo in Morelos in the 1950s, or the attack on Ciudad Madero, Chihuahua, in September 1965. These outbreaks had their origin in local problems, but in 1970 guerrilla action assumed a national character. The public became aware of the existence of such leftwing urban guerrilla organizations as the Movimiento de Acción Revolucionario (MAR), Frente Urbano Zapatista, the "Lacandones" group, the Liga 23 de Septiembre, Liga 15 de Julio, and others. Several spectacular kidnappings and assaults, accompanied by arrests and political assassinations agitated public opinion. It can be affirmed that this opened a new phase in the history of middle class opposition to the regime. These movements succeeded in establishing relations with another, different current, the rural movement led by two schoolteachers, first Jenaro Vázquez and later, Lucio Cabañas. However, counterinsurgent operations did not permit them to develop or to act as the catalytic agents of a

22. Rafael Segovia, "La reforma política: el Ejecutivo-Federal, el PRI y las elecciones de 1973"; Luis Medina, et al., *La vida política en México, 1970-1973*: El Colegio de México, Mexico City, 1974, pp. 64-67.

23. Francisco López Cámara, *El desafío de la clase media*. Joaquín-Mortiz, Mexico City, 1971.

24. Evelyn P. Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1974, pp. 185-240; Elena Poniatowska, *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Ediciones Era, Mexico City, 1971; Ramón Ramírez, *El movimiento estudiantil de México, julio-diciembre de 1968*, 2 vols. Ediciones Era, Mexico City, 1969; Luis González de Alba, *Los días y los años*. Ediciones Era, Mexico City, 1971; Jorge Carrión, et al., *Tres culturas en agonía*. Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, Mexico City, 1969.

political movement involving mass action, and some of their doings have been capitalized by the right.

Guerrilla action or attempts to form new parties do not yet present a serious challenge to the State's capacity to control the major sectors of Mexican society. This opposition has failed—because the State thwarted it—to establish an organic relationship with peasant, worker and even middle class groups. Upon assuming the direction of the PRI's National Executive Committee in February 1972, Reyes Heróles referred to the disruptive potential of the middle classes and asked his party to adopt a new policy in this regard; such a policy has not been solidified.

The Mexican upper middle class is distinguished from its Latin American counterparts by, among other factors, the destruction of its big landholding antecedents in the 1910 Revolution. The revolutionary Mexican State did not emerge as an "executive committee" of the bourgeoisie, which to a large extent was foreign. However, by the 1930s, a modest Mexican entrepreneurial class began to take shape, connected more with industry than with the land, and in certain cases, lead by revolutionaries turned businessmen: Obregón, Aarón Sáenz, Almazán, Abelardo Rodríguez, and others. The political peace achieved at the close of the Cárdenas Administration, and the economic opportunities created both by the weakening of foreign enterprise following petroleum expropriation in 1938 and World War II, provided the necessary impetus for the emergence of a new, vigorous entrepreneurial group in the second half of the century,<sup>25</sup> not too closely tied to the authors of the Revolution. The division of labor between this group and the State in the project of industrialization was then clearly marked. The State would devote its efforts to creation of the necessary infrastructure—communications, irrigation, energy—and to maintenance of labor discipline through political control and social security. Business would work to satisfy the consumer market. However, this does not mean that the arrangement was made in complete harmony. Negotiations between State and big business have been constant and frequently conflictive, since whereas the Government must adapt its policies to the demands of the coalition over which it presides and whose interests cannot always be conciliated, the State upholds the need for a "mixed economy" as the only way to have the necessary sphere of action to govern the multiplicity of interests on which it rests.

The private enterprise-State relationship has developed at two levels. On the one side is the aggregate of formal business organizations, that is, chambers of commerce and of industry, the bankers' association, associations of exporters and importers and of insurance companies, confederation of employers, and others. Parallel to this network of formal

organizations is another, informal and perhaps more powerful: the groups formed around certain big businessmen and activities. In some cases these groups identify not only with a leader but with a given region; a typical case is the "Monterrey group", whose activities, though centered in the state of Nuevo León, extend to other states as well.

When the Revolution destroyed the old order, the Mexican bourgeoisie—already obscured by the overwhelming presence of foreign enterprise—lost much of its political power. The new State kept it at a distance and to a large degree was able to impose its own development project, triggering innumerable conflicts and tensions which reached a peak with the Government of General Cárdenas. Since then, the logic of the economic process has given increasingly greater power to the entrepreneurial group and shortened the distance separating it from the project of the country's political leaders. President Cárdenas was able to say to Monterrey businessmen that if they were not prepared to accept this project, they could turn their companies over to the workers, but this was not possible twenty years later with the relative increase in entrepreneurial power vis-à-vis the State. From 1960 to 1962, López Mateos encountered the open resistance of businessmen because of his attempt to modify the tax system so as to prevent the concentration of income beyond prudent limits. The State at that time had bought up the electric power companies, relations had not been broken with the new Cuban government even though it had declared itself Socialist, and the President had defined his Government as "leftist within the Constitution"; all this set in climate of agitation and leftwing activity (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional). The business response was to diminish its rate of investment—a weapon already used successfully against Ruiz Cortines—and launch a propaganda campaign that climaxed in 1962 with a mass demonstration in Monterrey against the free textbook for primary schools.<sup>26</sup>

A similar situation was created at the beginning of the Echeverría Administration, due largely to another tax reform project, a bill on foreign investment, and official differences with the Monterrey group. The tax reform finally introduced turned out to be a mere adjustment affecting mainly the middle classes and the bill on foreign investment was largely limited to reaffirming existing provisions in this area.

The relation between Government and business organizations, which by law constitute the channels of communication between the two sectors, has passed through several phases in recent years. In view of the fact that during the Cárdenas Administration, and even in subsequent years, chambers of industry and commerce were the spokesmen of opposition to state intervention in the economy, the Government, in 1942, encouraged the formation of the Cámara Nacional de la Industria de la Transformación (CANACINTRA), encompassing medium-scale businessmen depen-

25. Sanford A. Mosk, *Industrial Revolution in Mexico*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Cal., 1950, pp. 21-52; Raymond Vernon, *The Dilemma of Mexico's Development*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, pp. 154-164; Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964, pp. 219-221.

26. Olga Pellicer de Brody, *México y la Revolución Cubana*. El Colegio de México, Mexico City, 1972, pp. 51-84.

dent on state protection to survive in competition with big business; the CANACINTRA obviously showed itself favorable to state economic action. The differences between the CANACINTRA and its former rivals, the old chambers of commerce and industry, have diminished since the 1960s, but not disappeared.<sup>27</sup> With the CANACINTRA, the State can be sure that, save in extreme cases, the business sector will not unite in a common front against it.

Everything seems to indicate that the local importance of certain groups in the formulation of state and municipal policy is much greater than that held by private enterprise at national level. Obvious examples are those of Nuevo León or Puebla, but even at this level entrepreneurial action is not always homogeneous. The Puebla case is an apt illustration. The political action of private enterprise is developed through several groups. There is, in the first place, the so-called traditional group: the Centro Patronal de Puebla, made up of local, highly conservative businessmen, which has been engrossed by the Cámara de la Industria Textil de Puebla y Tlaxcala and the Asociación Textil de Puebla y Tlaxcala. This group created its own political organ, the Comité Coordinador Permanente de la Ciudadanía del Estado de Puebla. Then there is the "Puebla group", which originated in the assorted activities of William Jenkins in the 1920s and now encompasses the Banco de Comercio, under the management of Espinosa Iglesias, the big automobile distributors, and newspaper, radio and television companies controlled by Rómulo O'Farril, Gabriel Alarcón and García Valseca, respectively. This group, and the representatives of the Monterrey group operating in Puebla through the Hysla plant, hold an equally conservative position, but is distinguished from the traditional group for certain local political purposes. Lastly, there is the foreign group in such important enterprises as Volkswagen, Parke Davis and Síntesis Orgánica. In spite of their enormous economic power, foreign businessmen tend to avoid adopting positions in local politics, but in the final analysis they are closer to the Puebla group than to the traditional group. Though less powerful economically, the traditional group is more combative in local politics. When, as a result of the student riots provoked by the left in 1973, pressure was brought to bear from above on Governor Gonzalo Bautista O'Farril to get him to resign, the Comité Coordinador unleashed a campaign against the Federal Government because O'Farril is one of them. However, combative or not, the business forces in Puebla determine local political activity and no one can govern without their support. During the past state elections, the PRI had to accept the businessmen's choice for mayor of Puebla and a man meeting with their approval as state Governor. Although the political influence of economic power is perhaps more evident at state than national level,

27. Marco Antonio Alcázar, *Las agrupaciones patronales en México*. El Colegio de México, Mexico City, 1970; Flavia Derossi, *The Mexican Entrepreneur*. Development Center of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, 1971; Robert J. Shafer, *Mexican Business Organizations*. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, N.Y., 1973.

the phenomenon is accentuated the next step down, which is where the cacique is found.

This rapid review of the Mexican political process in the last 25 years permits an attempt at certain conclusions. The first, and perhaps the most important, is that the political control system has suffered no substantive modification. Economic changes—which really have effected a notable transformation in the country's physiognomy—have been absorbed by the political institutions created by the Revolution. Crises in this period have been few, though some have been spectacular, but in no case did they endanger the group in power, especially since the division created by Henriquez in 1952, the last time the "revolutionary family" underwent an important internal split, was healed. This does not mean the absence of political struggle, which is inevitable, but fighting takes place within the dominant party, with almost no citizen participation. They are muffled battles between the various power groups generally headed by cabinet members, which invariable form in a given Administration, and are sharpened on the eve of the nomination of the dominant party's presidential candidate. The manifestations of these struggles are almost never apparent to the public, due to the esoteric language employed by politicians, designed precisely for the purpose of keeping outsiders away from the daily power game.

Those who have held the office of Chief Executive have played the role of leaders of a coalition encompassing all important groups in the economic growth process and, in consequence, have had to give satisfaction, albeit minimal, to all of them. However, there can be no doubt about the preponderant role assumed by the organized business sector which holds the key to the economic process. Accordingly its sanctions capacity is greater and the State's response to its requirements is the most satisfactory of all. Notwithstanding, this response to business demands cannot be entirely satisfactory without running the risk of undermining the coalition on which the system rests. This accounts for the sporadic—though not substantive—conflicts between the official and the entrepreneurial sectors.

Lastly, no analysis of the present political system can fail to mention, as one of its central characteristics, the marginalization of a considerable part of the citizenry, made up of those who do not belong to the CNC, nor to labor unions nor to professional or business organizations. It is composed of that 40 percent of all wage-earners who do not receive even the minimum wage. The weakness of the "loyal opposition", together with the systematic obstruction of the work of proselytizing and organization that the radical opposition attempts to carry out, have impeded the independent mobilization of these groups, for which the system makes no provision. These masses, perhaps half of the active population, exist as a real object of politics, but with no short-term possibility of becoming the subject. On them rest the whole apparatus we have tried to analyze in this article and there are no signs that their condition will change.