

# Mexican State Development Policy and Labor Internationalism, 1945–1958

NORMAN CAULFIELD

---

**SUMMARY:** The Mexican state's drive toward industrialization during World War II and the post-war years required the cooperation of organized labor. Central to this policy was the role played by American trade unions, which cooperated with US government agencies in providing financial and logistical support for Mexican trade unionists who complied with state development policy. The interests of American labor leaders, US policymakers and Mexican modernizing elites converged in an attempt to eradicate radical unionism and promote US hegemony in the western hemisphere. This study builds upon works that treat the earlier activities of US labor in Mexico.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Since the days of the Mexican Revolution a relationship has existed between organized labor in the United States and Mexico. Although the radical wing of the American labor movement influenced the Mexican working-class movement during the period, the impact of the reformist American Federation of Labor (AFL) grew more important, as labor, corporate and US government officials joined and pursued policies to contain the nationalism spawned by the Revolution.<sup>1</sup> This relationship took on

<sup>1</sup> This interpretation is powerfully advanced in Gregg Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder? The American Federation of Labor, the Mexican Revolution, and the United States, 1910–1924* (Berkeley [etc.], 1991). For a contrasting interpretation of the AFL's role in the Mexican Revolution see Philip Taft, *The A.F. of L. in the Time of Gompers* (New York, 1957), pp. 320–333. Taft views the growing interest of AFL leaders in Mexico as an expression of genuine labor internationalism. Sinclair Snow's *The Pan-American Federation of Labor* (Durham, NC, 1964) views Gompers' efforts as an attempt to counteract US business in the western hemisphere. Jack Scott, *Yankee Unions, Go Home! How the AFL Helped the U.S. Build an Empire in Latin America* (Vancouver, 1978), and Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969) both stress US organized labor's integration into the foreign policy apparatus of the United States. Harvey Levenstein, *Labor Organizations in the United States and Mexico* (Westport, CN, 1971) discusses the limits of Gompers' internationalism, but fails to connect the AFL to US foreign policy objectives. For discussion and analysis of the American labor movement's radical wing's influence on Mexican workers and their organizations, see Diana K. Christopoulos, "American Radicals and the Mexican Revolution, 1900–1925" (Ph.D., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1980); John M. Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860–1930* (Austin, 1978); Donald Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution* (Austin, 1995);

greater significance after World War II, as US government officials created a more central and aggressive role for organized labor in foreign policy. Organized labor's more active participation in foreign policy matters coincided with the Mexican state's drive toward industrialization and the US government's deeper involvement in the Mexican economy.<sup>2</sup> As Mexican presidents Manuel Avila Camacho (1940–1946) and Miguel Alemán (1946–1952) sought to abandon the radical nationalism of the Lázaro Cárdenas era (1934–1940) and attract foreign resources rather than expropriate or regulate them, a conservative shift in state labor policy developed. The state's commitment to a rapid program of industrialization resulted in restricting labor opposition to its policies, holding down wages, suppressing the right to strike and greater control over trade unions and their leaders.<sup>3</sup>

Acting as instruments of US foreign policy, American labor leaders played key roles in helping the Mexican government carry out these policies. The outbreak of the Cold War facilitated their efforts, as anticommunism served as a powerful ideological weapon in the campaign against labor militancy. For US officials and American trade union leaders, the taming of the Mexican labor movement was part of a global effort to undermine leftist-leaning unions. Through the *Organización Regional Intra-Americana de Trabajadores* (ORIT) and the US Embassy, American trade unionists provided cooperating Mexican labor leaders with logistical and financial support to neutralize forces within Mexico's working-class movement that opposed state development and labor policy. This strategy included undermining the influence of Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the *Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina* (CTAL) and facilitating the imposition and entrenchment of so-called *charros* (government-controlled labor leaders who relied on force to maintain themselves in power).

The period beginning with the closing months of World War II and lasting until 1954, laid the foundations of US labor policy toward Mexico, which continued throughout the remainder of the decade and on into the 1960s. These cornerstones included isolating and ousting communist trade union officials from leadership posts as well as blunting the influence of economic nationalists within the Mexican working-class movement. This practice involved an intensive information program directed at "Americanizing" the trade union culture of Mexico. The distribution of films,

and Norman Caulfield, "Wobblies and Mexican Workers in Mining and Petroleum, 1905–1924", *International Review of Social History*, 40 (1995), pp. 51–76.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the increased managerial role of the US government in the Mexican economy, see Stephen R. Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development: The United States and Mexico, 1938–1954* (Wilmington, DE, 1995), pp. 105–119.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution* (Baltimore, 1995), p. 160. Also see Viviane Brachet-Marquez, *The Dynamics of Domination* (Pittsburgh and London, 1994), pp. 83–111, for an overview of the state's conservative shift in labor policy.

books, newspapers, news bulletins, and the subsidization of Mexico's largest labor federation, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (CTM) were part of an attempt to implant among Mexican workers an idealized version of the trade union movement in the United States. The promotion of collective bargaining, the sending of Mexican trade unionists to the United States to study English, US history, labor economics and statistics, all helped to create an institutional structure compatible with US interests.

Both the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) backed US trade and economic measures toward Latin America. Their leaders viewed unrestricted trade, minimal state economic intervention and private sector development as ingredients necessary for economic expansion, which they believed would result in a higher standard of living for the Mexican people. The result would be more purchasing power for Mexicans, who in turn would buy more goods manufactured by American workers. These ideas were the same as those of Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL during the Mexican Revolution. In the early Cold War years, the US trade union leadership continued Gompers' labor internationalism by forging a stronger partnership with corporations and government officials in the expansion of American economic interests and the eradication of radical unionism abroad. The result was the US labor movement's alliance with trade union leaders in foreign countries who collaborated with modernizing elites.<sup>4</sup>

Since the 1960s scholars of the Latin American labor scene have increasingly turned their attention to the relationships among unions, the state and foreign powers.<sup>5</sup> The ongoing transformation of the global economy has highlighted the importance of this complex set of relation-

<sup>4</sup> Gompers' labor internationalism and its ties to US economic hegemony in Latin America are explained in Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder?*

<sup>5</sup> Early studies of this dynamic are: Radosh, *American Labor and U.S. Foreign Policy*; Snow, *The Pan-American Federation of Labor*; Levenstein, *Labor Organizations*; Scott, *Yankee Unions*; and Henry W. Berger, "Union Diplomacy: American Labor's Foreign Policy in Latin America, 1932–1955" (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, 1966). More recent studies are: Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder?*; Peter Weiler, "The U.S., International Labor, and the Cold War: the Break-Up of the World Federation of Trade Unions", *Diplomatic History*, 5 (1981), pp. 1–22; Hobart A. Spalding, Jr, "The Two Latin American Foreign Policies of the US Labor Movement: The AFL-CIO Top Brass vs. Rank-and-File", *Science and Society*, 56 (1993), pp. 421–439; and Cliff Welch, "Labor Internationalism: U.S. Involvement in Brazilian Unions, 1945–1965", *Latin American Research Review*, 30 (1995), pp. 61–89. In addition to these works, Ian Roxborough's essay "Labor Control and the Postwar Growth Model in Latin America", in David Rock (ed.), *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Post-War Transitions* (Berkeley [etc.], 1994), contextualizes the efforts of Latin America's modernizing elites to harness labor militancy within economic development strategies that increasingly relied on foreign capital. This theme is expanded upon in Jon V. Kofas, *The Struggle for Legitimacy: Latin American Labor and the United States, 1930–1960* (Tempe, AZ, 1992). More specifically, Kofas focuses on the labor dimension of the Cold War, and relies heavily upon US State Department records to document the formation of ORIT and the AFL-State Department's anti-CTAL campaign.

ships. However, recent studies of the Mexican labor movement, which include coverage of the early years of the Cold War, have focused primarily on the internal dynamics of trade unions and their relationships with the state and political parties while ignoring the dimension of labor internationalism.<sup>6</sup>

By examining the process of labor internationalism during the early Cold War years, this study hopes to fill a gap in understanding a crucial period in the history of the Mexican labor movement. Central to this objective is discussion of how US government, ORIT and AFL money and assistance consolidated the position of *charros* in important national unions. What follows is an attempt to link issues such as the fragility of the CTM during the 1940s, the erosion of Lombardo's power, the mechanics of the *charrazos* in 1947–1951 and, especially, the role played by the American government and organized labor from the United States in the post-*charrazo* consolidation, a poorly understood episode in Mexican labor history.

#### BACKGROUND: THE MEXICAN STATE AND LABOR DURING WORLD WAR II

Mexico's entry into World War II sharpened already existing divisions within the Mexican labor movement, as the state committed to rapid industrialization through foreign investment and a political program of national unity. The pro-labor policies and the intense political conflict that characterized the Lázaro Cárdenas era ended. In its place, the administrations of Avila Camacho and Miguel Alemán promoted worker-employer collaboration. To enforce cooperation, the state amended federal labor laws that restricted the right to strike and imposed harsh penalties on strikers, which stipulated long jail sentences for anyone attempting to "dissolve" society through strikes in industries of "great social importance".<sup>7</sup>

This policy paralleled the emergence of a new industrial elite which worked in close association with the government to formulate policies. War contracts, tax breaks, falling wages and monetary favors created a symbiotic relationship between the state and industrial elites, all within

<sup>6</sup> Although Brachet-Marquez, *The Dynamics of Domination* and Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution* offer keen insight and detail of Mexican trade union politics during the early years of the Cold War, they both fail to address the issue of labor internationalism, which included the interventionist role of ORIT, the AFL, the CIO and the impact these forces had upon the Mexican working-class movement historically as well as within a contemporary context. Mexican scholars of the labor movement generally fall into the same category. While the essays in Victor Manuel Durand Ponte (ed.), *Las derrotas obreras, 1946–1952* (Mexico City, 1984), analyze leftist setbacks and defeats in the petroleum, railroad and mining unions during the Alemán sexenio, they fail to link this dynamic to Lourdes Quintanilla's study, *Lomabardismo y sindicatos en américa latina* (Mexico City, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution*, p. 160.

the terms of a dependent relationship with the United States.<sup>8</sup> These new conditions clashed with the organizational and political momentum Mexican labor had established during the Cárdenas years. Despite the state's pleas for "national unity" and its accommodation with foreign capital, the working class continued to demand the "Mexicanization" of the economy through government expropriation of foreign-owned enterprises. The state and its CTM trade union allies sought to moderate workers' demands for nationalization by emphasizing the necessity of foreign capital for national development.<sup>9</sup> Workers opposing state development and labor policy were called "traitors" to the nation and "agents" of international movements bent upon destroying national unity.

Struggling within this dynamic was Lombardo Toledano, whose increasing failure to enforce labor discipline along with his openly declared Marxism, led to his formal resignation as secretary-general of the CTM in February 1941.<sup>10</sup> Although Lombardo supported the state's industrialization program, he opposed unconditional foreign capital investment. As a Marxist, he invoked the contemporary international communist line, one that viewed the Mexican industrial and financial elites as progressive forces in an underdeveloped nation dominated by imperialism. Lombardo believed that Mexico had first to sweep away the vestiges of feudalism and create a truly national bourgeoisie. This could only be done through an aggressive industrialization program, in which foreign capital would play an important role. But foreign investment would be invited only to benefit Mexico.<sup>11</sup> These ideas conflicted with those of the government, which welcomed a larger role for foreign capital in the industrialization program.<sup>12</sup>

Although Lombardo continued to exercise influence within CTM structures because of his support of the state's industrialization program, union workers, however, continued to strike, largely due to runaway inflation and the Avila Camacho administration's imposition of a *de facto* wage freeze.<sup>13</sup> In an attempt to quell the unrest, Lombardo, the government and

<sup>8</sup> Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, p. 159.

<sup>9</sup> Kofas, *Struggle for Legitimacy*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Paul Millon, *Mexican Marxist: Vicente Lombardo Toledano* (Chapel Hill, 1966), pp. 138–139.

<sup>11</sup> See Francie Chassen de López, *Lombardo Toledano y el movimiento obrero mexicano, 1917–1940* (Mexico, DF, 1977), and Millon, *Mexican Marxist*, for an examination of Lombardo's politics, philosophy and career as a trade union leader.

<sup>12</sup> Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in James D. Cockroft, *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation, and the State* (New York, 1983), p. 154. For detailed study and analysis of wage developments, especially in Mexico City, see Jeffrey Bortz, *Los salarios industriales en la ciudad de México, 1939–1975* (Mexico City, 1988). Both Cockroft and Bortz document that from 1939 to 1946 the manufacturing workers' real wage dropped 50 per cent because prices for basic necessities increased by 300 per cent. Economic data generated by the Mexican government is also found in National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, State Department Records, Record Group 59 (hereafter NARAW, SD Records, RG

the CTM leadership met with a group of Mexican industrialists in June 1944 and proposed binding arbitration of all labor disputes to solve the growing "strike problem". Immediately he received criticism from the CTM rank and file and local union leaders who charged that he "was killing the right to strike".<sup>14</sup> Lombardo replied that "dissident elements" were trying to destroy "national unity". He added that they served the interests of foreign governments that attempted to disrupt Mexico's plan for national development.<sup>15</sup>

While Lombardo, the CTAL and the CTM's principal leaders adhered to this policy, dissension within its ranks continued to grow. At the CTM's January 1945 annual convention, an opposition group emerged. Iván José Rivera Rojas led the *Bloque Revindicador de la CTM* (Revindication Bloc of the CTM) and denounced the CTM's leadership as "government stooges" and "traitors to the working class".<sup>16</sup> Despite widespread rank-and-file dissatisfaction with its policy, CTM leaders and Lombardo's CTAL sought closer cooperation with the state and continued the no-strike pledge. Accordingly, they agreed to renew the war-time "patriotic alliance for the nation's independence" through a Labor-Industry Pact.<sup>17</sup> Lombardo, the CTAL and CTM leaders stressed the "necessity for a complete and lasting agreement between labor, capital, and management". They endorsed the position of José R. Colin, president of the National Chamber of Commerce (CONCAMIN) that "help from foreign capital to aid private enterprise was in the best interests of the nation".<sup>18</sup> In September 1945, the CTM and CONCAMIN formed a "Committee to Prevent Strikes", to ensure labor peace and carry out the government and industry's plan for national development.<sup>19</sup>

Rank-and-file groups within CTM unions responded by creating organizations called *depuradas*. These groups sought the "purification" of the CTM by agitating for union democracy and autonomy.<sup>20</sup> The rising dissension within the CTM's ranks paralleled Mexico's increasing economic ties with the United States and the advent of the Cold War, which prompted American government officials and labor leaders to seek greater involvement in Mexican labor affairs.

59) 812.5045/1037; US Embassy to the Secretary of State, 5 April 1944. The report indicated that, between 1941 and 1943, prices in the Federal District rose 60 per cent while wages increased only 20 per cent.

<sup>14</sup> *Excelsior*, 14 June 1944.

<sup>15</sup> *El Popular*, 17 June 1944.

<sup>16</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.5041/1-1845; Henry F. Holland to the Secretary of State, 16 January 1945.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 812.504/2-1545; Ailshie's "Interpretive Comment on Mexican Labor", to the Secretary of State, 15 February 1945.

<sup>18</sup> *El Popular*, 24 March 1945.

<sup>19</sup> *Excelsior*, 21 September 1945.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 December 1945.

AMERICAN UNIONS AND ORGANIZED LABOR IN MEXICO,  
1917–1945

The renewed interest of American trade unions in Mexican labor affairs in the post-war era built upon the work begun during the revolutionary period by Samuel Gompers and other AFL leaders. In part, the AFL's response to the Mexican Revolution involved its opposition to radical unionism spawned by the social upheaval. Of particular concern for the AFL was the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), its chief rival in the United States, which had made organizational inroads among Mexican miners working in the borderland regions and northern Mexico. Inside Mexico, the IWW cooperated with labor groups such as the Casa del Obrero Mundial, which advocated workers' control of industry and the overthrow of the state through a general strike.<sup>21</sup>

In the process of opposing this tendency, Gompers and the AFL supported the *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM), an organization founded in 1918, and which ideologically emulated the AFL. The CROM, like the AFL, promoted the organization of workers around the concept of "business" unionism, which rests upon the acceptance of capitalism and the relations that develop between workers, employers and government as a result. Samuel Gompers described it as "trade unionism pure and simple", a struggle for higher wages and benefits, and excluding the notion that workers form a class with widely shared interests. In 1919, the cooperation between the CROM and the AFL produced the formation of the Pan-American Federation of Labor (PAFL). Although the CROM willingly participated in the PAFL, it did so as a junior partner. The AFL dominated the organization, which openly promoted US economic expansion in the western hemisphere, fulfilling Gompers' call for a "labor corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine.

Working through the CROM and the AFL, the Mexican government successfully suppressed labor radicalism on an organizational level in the 1920s. During the 1930s, however, radical unionism in Mexico experienced a revival with the Cárdenas government's expropriation of the foreign-owned oil companies and landholdings. While the AFL opposed the Mexican state's actions, the CIO gave its tacit support for the expropriation decrees. CIO President John L. Lewis followed the Gompers legacy of supporting higher wages in extractive industries to enable Mexicans to purchase goods manufactured by American workers. At the start of the Cold War, when US business looked increasingly to Mexico and Latin America for new markets, outlets for capital investment and access to raw materials, American trade union leaders fully embraced the ideas of the Gompers legacy. The friction that had characterized the AFL-CIO relationship of the 1930s withered at the end of World War II, as both federa-

<sup>21</sup> Caulfield, "Wobblies and Mexican Workers", p. 52.

tions united to support US economic expansion abroad and the establishment of anticommunist unionism.<sup>22</sup>

The astonishing expansion of the US economy during World War II reinforced the faith held by American trade unionists in the fundamental soundness of the capitalist system. At the war's end, union leaders rallied around the idea that continued United States economic prosperity was related directly to the expansion of trade abroad. CIO official Philip Murray praised the July 1944 Bretton Woods agreement, declaring that it represented the "best guarantee of an expanded world trade that will afford protection to American businessmen, markets to American farmers and jobs for American workers".<sup>23</sup> Jacob S. Potofsky, chairman of the CIO's Latin American Affairs Committee, in 1945 told the Ways and Means Committee of the US House of Representatives: "As we look at the U.S. economy one thing is clear; our country is set up to produce, in several lines, more goods than we ever have consumed here or are likely to".<sup>24</sup> World War II institutionalized cooperation between organized labor and American industrialists. Although US industrial relations exploded in 1945–1946 with the outbreak of massive strikes, Murray and Potofsky's statements indicated that the open collaboration between unionists and industrialists would be carried over into the post-war and Cold War years, at least in foreign policy matters.

Reinforcing the collaboration was the acceleration of the trend of US economic domination, which resulted from the effects of the war. The United States had displaced Europe as chief exporter and importer in Latin American trading relations.<sup>25</sup> In the immediate post-war years, US investment continued to flow into the extractive industries of the region, with less than 20 per cent going to the development of manufacturers. The investment strategy toward Latin America corresponded with the American trade union movement's long-term policy toward US business expansion in the region. As long as workers south of the border did not take manufacturing jobs from American workers, unions supported government and corporate policy objectives in the western hemisphere. Stanley Ruttenberg, Director of Research and Education for the CIO, confirmed this line of thinking in 1947, stating that "over 3 million jobs in America were dependent on foreign trade". He added "that maintaining foreign markets for our goods and importing vital materials necessary for our industrial production will play an essential part in keeping our industrial potential".<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> On the differences between the AFL and the CIO with regard to Mexico in the 1930s, see Levenstein, *Labor Organizations*, ch. 10.

<sup>23</sup> *CIO News*, 12 March 1945.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Scott, *Yankee Unions*, p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> As cited in *ibid.*, p. 195.

## LOMBARDO, AMERICAN UNIONS AND MEXICAN NATIONALISM

An important component of this policy was opposition against economic nationalism in all of its forms. Both US policymakers and American trade union leaders believed that economic nationalism invited communist penetration.<sup>27</sup> In Mexico the policy translated into attacks against Lombardo and the CTAL. Lombardo's CTAL supported protectionist tariffs and state-directed development of basic industries. Lombardo's strident economic nationalism combined with his openly declared Marxism and control of the CTAL, made him a special target of US government officials and trade union leaders. During the war, US diplomats used their good relationship with Sidney Hillman, then vice-president of the CIO, and, for a time, member of the War Production Board (WPB), to block links that Lombardo was trying to forge with US labor.<sup>28</sup>

Among the leadership of the AFL and the CIO, only John L. Lewis expressed sympathy for Lombardo's position, which the newspaper *El Popular* articulated in a running campaign to convince its readers that the former CTM chief headed a coalition of labor and capital to give the nation the best opportunity to industrialize.<sup>29</sup> Lombardo failed to persuade US diplomats in Mexico that he welcomed American capital as an integral part of Mexico's industrialization program. Too many times he had spoken of the "dangers of American capital", which were summarized in his resignation speech before the 1941 CTM Congress when he stated: "If we are to continue to be squeezed by the great Yankee monopolies as one squeezes an orange [. . .] the price of the peso will be fixed by the producers, merchants, and bankers of the United States."<sup>30</sup>

As early as 1943, US diplomats and trade union leaders attempted to neutralize Lombardo and undercut the CTAL's influence in Latin America. Through the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) with Nelson Rockefeller as its coordinator, the US government initiated a policy of financing the extension of union activities into Latin America. The goal was to cultivate elements within the Latin American labor movement that were sympathetic to US interests in the region. This policy became even more urgent when Lombardo and the CTAL led the Mexican opposition to the US Clayton Plan, unveiled at the February 1945 Chapultepec Conference in Mexico City. The Plan promoted lower tariffs for American

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>28</sup> Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>29</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.00/9–2144; "Conversation with Lic. Alejandro Carrillo, Editor of *El Popular* and Prominent Mexican Labor Leader", Ailshie to Secretary of State, 21 September 1944.

<sup>30</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.504/2273; Ailshie, "Memorandum of Conversation with Mr. Lombardo Toledano by a member of the Staff of the Embassy", 17 April 1944.

products and the free and uninhibited investment by foreign capital in the region. Lombardo and the CTAL condemned the plan as a conspiracy to promote uncontrolled investment by American capitalists, which they argued would result in the continued “backwardness” of Mexico and the Latin American region.

Although Lombardo had helped discipline labor during World War II, his Marxist convictions and strident opposition to American capital in the post-war era led to efforts by Mexican and US officials to undercut his influence and power within the working-class movement. Even before the outbreak of World War II, supporters of Avila Camacho felt uneasy about Lombardo’s openly declared Marxism. As early as 1940 they had considered using force to oust him as CTM general secretary and installing the more moderate Fidel Velázquez.<sup>31</sup> Later, after resigning his CTM post, the Avila Camacho government and the industrialists relied upon his continuing influence and leadership skills to hold down wages and enforce a no-strike policy. At the end of the war, however, officials in the Miguel Alemán administration acquiesced in US efforts to weaken Lombardo and undermine the CTAL.

In the campaign against Lombardo and the CTAL, Mexican government officials and trade union leaders cooperated with Serafino Romauldi, the AFL’s chosen inter-American representative. In 1946 Romauldi made two trips to Mexico and Latin America, meeting with government functionaries and trade union leaders. Romauldi’s objectives were to gain the support for US economic expansion in the region and making contacts with pro-US unionists to establish a new hemispheric labor organization to rival the CTAL. Because Lombardo headed the CTAL and it was affiliated with the Soviet-created World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), both Romauldi and the US State Department viewed it as a communist-directed organization. AFL Vice-President George Meany clearly identified Romauldi’s mission when he said: “it was up to the AFL to see that the workers of Latin America understand our philosophy”, adding that “it is our desire to create a solid front among working people of the hemisphere and to see to it these people do not listen to the mouthings of those who receive their orders from Moscow”.<sup>32</sup>

To pressure Lombardo, AFL leaders relied on Robert Haberman, an American living in Mexico and with a long history of contact with trade union and government officials there. Dating back to the founding of the CROM, Haberman had worked closely with the government of Alvaro

<sup>31</sup> NARAW, SD Records, Central Files, 800/850.4; Information on Lombardo’s proposed ouster by Avila Camacho supporters was given to American Consul, George P. Shaw by FBI agent Gus Jones on 11 January 1940. Jones received his information from an informant, Francisco de la Garza, of San Antonio, Texas, a close friend and confidant of President Avila Camacho.

<sup>32</sup> George Meany, “Pan-American Day Address”, cited in Serafino Romauldi, *Presidents and Peons: Recollections of a Labor Ambassador* (New York, 1967), p. 47.

Obregón to help break militant strikes and deport foreign-born radical labor leaders.<sup>33</sup> In 1938 Haberman cooperated with the AFL and the CROM in an attempt to rescind the Mexican government's oil expropriation decree.<sup>34</sup> He openly criticized Lombardo and the Labor-Industry Pact and claimed that its aims were "protectionist" and against the true "national interests" of Mexico.<sup>35</sup> Lombardo denounced Haberman as an "agent of U.S. Imperialism" and demanded that the Mexican government deport him back to the United States.<sup>36</sup>

Lombardo, however, faced more serious challenges from within the ranks of the CTM. CTM *depuradas* attacked him and other leaders as "corrupt", "racketeering" and betraying the working class by continuing the war's no-strike pledge.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, American labor leaders escalated their attacks on Lombardo. The AFL's George Meany criticized the CTAL's structure and Lombardo's methods as "dictatorial" and "undemocratic". He also called for the breakup of the CTAL and the creation of a new hemispheric federation.<sup>38</sup> Lombardo responded to Meany's attacks by accusing the AFL of attempting to buy the support of Mexican labor leaders.<sup>39</sup> He also charged that leaders from rival Mexican federations, such as the CROM, were fighting over the funds that had been provided for the founding of a hemispheric organization to challenge the CTAL.<sup>40</sup> Lombardo went even further, when he attacked the AFL as an instrument of a "Yankee Imperialism" that attempted to rollback the gains made by Mexican workers.<sup>41</sup>

To counter growing rank-and-file discontent, the Mexican government and the CTM moved to further isolate Lombardo and initiate campaigns to remove "autonomists" and "independents" from key union leadership positions and replace them with *charros*.<sup>42</sup> During an August 1947 trip to the United States with CTM officials, President Alemán met with AFL president William Green and discussed the possibility of creating a hemi-

<sup>33</sup> For an account of Robert Haberman's activities in Mexico during the 1920s, see Gregg Andrews, "Robert Haberman, Socialist Ideology, and the Politics of National Reconstruction in Mexico, 1920–25", *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 6 (Summer 1990), pp. 189–211.

<sup>34</sup> NARAW, SD Records, Central Files, 812.6363/3523; 812.6363/3524.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *El Popular*, 31 July 1945; also see *CTAL News* (Mexico City), August 1945.

<sup>37</sup> *Excelsior*, 12 February 1946.

<sup>38</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.504/6–2146; Ailshie to the Secretary of State, 21 June 1946.

<sup>39</sup> *CTAL News*, 24 June 1946.

<sup>40</sup> *El Popular*, 1 August 1946.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 August 1946.

<sup>42</sup> For an excellent analysis of the collaborationist policies of the CTM during this period see Jorge Basurto, *Del avilacamachismo al alemanismo* (1940–1952), vol. 11 of *La clase obrera en la historia de México* (Mexico, 1984), pp. 72–76; and Virginia López Villegas-Manjarrez, *La CTM vs. otras organizaciones obreras* (Mexico, 1983).

spheric alternative to the Lombardo-controlled CTAL.<sup>43</sup> On 5 January 1948 the Thirty-third National Council of the CTM met and ratified the expulsion of Lombardo. The Council also passed resolutions that forbade CTM members from belonging to Lombardo's newly-created Popular Party and participating in "incidental" committees protesting the high cost of living in Mexico and the American Clayton Plan.<sup>44</sup> Delegates at the meeting also resolved to suspend relations with the CTAL and the WFTU, as long as Lombardo served as president and vice-president of those organizations.<sup>45</sup>

The government then unfolded its *charro* strategy, which began with the election of Jesús Díaz de León as general secretary of the Railroad Workers' union. Immediately upon taking office, Díaz de León accused former union head Luis Gómez Z. of having embezzled several hundred thousand pesos from the union's treasury. Before the union could investigate the charges, Díaz de León involved the *Procuradería de Justicia* – district attorney of the Federal District – in the matter. On 14 October 1948 Gómez Z. and several hundred union members met to discuss what they called "the state's involvement in the internal life of the union". Díaz de León, leading 100 policemen disguised as railroad workers raided the meeting and arrested Gómez Z., while federal soldiers occupied four other railroad workers' locals in Mexico City.<sup>46</sup> As the railroad workers' union fell to *charro* leadership, the *charrazo* campaign gained momentum and became immersed in the politics of labor internationalism.

#### THE AMERICANS AND CHARRO ENTRENCHMENT

In their campaign against the opposition, state officials and CTM *charros* enlisted the cooperation and financial support of ORIT, US trade unions and the American government. US trade union activities in Mexico and Latin America escalated as a result of the firm unity reached by the AFL and CIO on foreign policy matters. This facilitated the efforts on behalf of US State Department officials to undercut the influence of the Lombardo-controlled CTAL, which up to this point had received support from the CIO. The AFL-CIO cooperation translated into a firm commitment to advance ORIT in Latin America and sever relations with the CTAL. In a confidential circular to consular offices in Latin America, the US State Department reported on its potential impact surrounding ORIT activities: "CIO participation makes it impossible for the communist-led CTAL to utilize alleged support or sympathies from any important United States

<sup>43</sup> NARAW, SD Records, 812.5043/8–1547; letter from S. Walter Washington to the Secretary of State, 27 March 1947.

<sup>44</sup> *El Nacional*, 10 January 1948.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Antonio Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero en México: 1958–1959* (Mexico, 1979, 3rd ed.), p: 75. Also see Mario Gill, *Los ferrocarrileros* (Mexico, DF, 1971), pp. 146–151.

labor organization.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the circular discussed the cooperation in terms of the finances that some of the larger CIO unions could deploy in support of ORIT objectives.<sup>48</sup>

With ORIT’s support, the CTM organized a “pact of friendship” and “bloc of unity” with other labor federations, which included the *charro* leaders of miners, petroleum and railroad workers’ locals. The participants pledged to fight communist and “subversive” activities within their own unions, and they received official labor status from the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI).<sup>49</sup> To consolidate their ranks, they planned to raid smaller unions and incorporate them into the CTM structure. The financial assistance that the CTM received from the US government-funded ORIT to carry out this strategy was timely. It arrived when the Mexican government had curtailed subsidies to the CTM and all “friendly” labor organizations, most of which relied on state financial support for their existence.<sup>50</sup> Fidel Velázquez, general secretary of the CTM, personally requested assistance from the CIO’s Latin American representative, Ernst Schwarz, who assured him that ORIT’s resources would be available for CTM operations in the absence of Mexican government funding.<sup>51</sup>

The leadership and the rank and file of the Miners’ and Metallurgical Workers’ Union (SITMMSRM) had been particularly outspoken in their opposition to the government’s salary freeze and *charrazo* campaign. Communists such as Adan Nieto led rank-and-file resistance against government post-war readjustment policy. The government wanted to oust Nieto and other leftists and convince companies like the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO), which by 1950 controlled about 65 per cent of all mining firms operating in Mexico, that it could maintain labor peace and thus guarantee low wages. It moved to impose *charro* leadership on the miners’ union at its Sixth Convention in May 1950.

At the convention, Secretary of Labor Manuel Ramírez Vázquez packed the meeting with illegitimate delegates and used police and thugs to exclude the duly-elected ones. With Vázquez’s delegates in the majority, the convention elected Jesús Carrasco as the union’s new general secretary. In so doing, the *charro*-controlled convention expelled Lombardista supporter and Fundidora Monterrey steel mill employee, Antonio García

<sup>47</sup> NARAW, SD Records, Record Group 84, Dept. of State Inter-American Affairs, Regional Circular no. 4, post files 560, 5 May 1951.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.06/9–1153; Stephansky to the Secretary of State, 17 March 1954. For a discussion of the importance of state subsidies to Mexican labor unions see Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution*, pp. 72–106, and 109.

<sup>51</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.067/9–1153; Stephansky to Secretary of State, 17 March 1954.

Moreno, General Workers' Confederation official Agustín Guzmán, and Adan Nieto. Fearing the rank and file, Carrasco then moved to suspend the rights of the more militant locals: No. 14 in Nueva Rosita; its subsection in Cloete; No. 28 in Palau; and Nos. 97 and 123 of La Consolidada, S.A.<sup>52</sup>

However, imposing *charrismo* on the entire membership of the miners' union presented problems. The union represented workers in different private and state-owned mining companies and metalworking plants throughout Mexico. Within union locals there existed distinct occupational specializations, different contracts, wage and benefit levels, and working conditions. These conditions produced a tradition of strident intraunion rivalries and separatist movements. Accordingly, the excluded delegations, protesting Carrasco's actions, held a rival convention and elected García Moreno as general secretary of the new National Miners' Union. It advocated autonomy, opposition to wage freezes, freedom of political affiliation for its members and solidarity pacts with other industrial unions. The government reacted to the rank-and-file insurgency by notifying employers that Carrasco's union had exclusive bargaining rights. It then used police to break up dissident meetings and cooperated with employers in firing workers who resisted Carrasco's authority.<sup>53</sup>

Despite widespread intimidation and repression, the rank and file continued to fight. The peak of the resistance occurred during a strike against ASARCO's Nueva Rosita facility that began on 12 June 1950. ASARCO had been a symbol of foreign economic domination since the days of the Revolution, and workers had struck in its mines and smelters on countless occasions. They frequently called for ASARCO's expropriation. In northern Mexico ASARCO controlled powerful subsidiaries, such as Carboníferas Sabinas and Mexican Zinc. Managers and executives ran the company towns and bribed public officials, including the police and the military.<sup>54</sup>

The rebel National Miners' Union, which represented 5,800 members of Local No. 14, demanded wage increases, better safety in the mine, more holidays, construction of roads between the mines and local towns, recognition of occupational diseases, housing and a farm to grow food for the miners' families. ASARCO refused to meet the demands and the Committee of Conciliation and Arbitration declared the strike "illegal". Rather than force a confrontation, however, the government urged that ASARCO and the rebel union sign a contract. ASARCO agreed, primarily because the recent outbreak of the Korean War had boosted the price of various metals 60 per cent. Although ASARCO wanted production to continue at Nueva Rosita, nonetheless it was unwilling to abide by the new

<sup>52</sup> Basurto, *Del avilacamachismo*, p. 246.

<sup>53</sup> Federico Besserer, Victoria Novelo and Juan Luis Sariago, *El sindicalismo minero en México: 1900-1952* (Mexico, 1983), pp. 51-53.

<sup>54</sup> Armando Rodríguez Suárez, "¡Nueva Rosita! Drama y Ejemplo de Hombres Dignos", in Marió Gill (ed.), *La huelga de Nueva Rosita* (Mexico, 1959), pp. 67, 113.

agreement. After three months of laboring under such conditions and exhausting all legal recourse through the Committee of Conciliation and Arbitration, miners at Nueva Rosita went on strike.

Their defiance of the arbitration process prompted the government to seize the initiative. Fearful that the Nueva Rosita strike might trigger other sympathy strikes, the government confiscated the union's funds. It also shut off gas and electricity, closed the miners' local consumer cooperative, and enlisted the support of the local Chamber of Commerce, which prohibited local merchants from selling food to the strikers. The government then declared martial law and ordered the army into the area to protect replacements running the operations. Within the repressive atmosphere, "red-baiting" of local union leaders escalated. The secretary of labor accused the strike leaders of being communist agitators and the local clergy attacked the strikers from the pulpit.<sup>55</sup>

The propaganda campaign took its toll. By the end of December, 3,600 of the 5,800 union workers had returned to their jobs. This happened despite a Christmas Day breaking of an effigy *piñata* of Jesús Carrasco by miners' children. As they broke the *piñata*, the miners' children shouted: "Long live the right to strike! Death to Jesús Carrasco! Death to the scabs!"<sup>56</sup> When the desperate miners and their families marched to Mexico City in January 1951 to redress their grievances, police beat them and made arrests. With the government's complicity, ASARCO black-listed hundreds of miners and helped to entrench Carrasco in power. Rank-and-file union members opposing the government's intrusion into labor's affairs were labeled "communist", "corrupt" or "unpatriotic".

In an attempt to consolidate their rule, *charro* leaders of the miners' union, working through ORIT and the CTM, invited Paul Reed, the United Mine Workers' Union of America (UMWA) international representative, to visit Mexico in 1953. With ORIT money and the support of Serafino Romauldi, the AFL's Latin American ambassador, Reed attempted to convince the miners to join the CTM and take measures to remove communists from their unions. Reed's lack of spoken Spanish and knowledge of Mexico's labor movement initially presented problems, as he failed to convince the miners to join the CTM. However, he managed to negotiate an agreement between the American government's United States Information Service (USIS) and the miners' union.<sup>57</sup>

The agreement provided for the distribution of films and forty projectors for use in miners' locals throughout Mexico. The films represented the best of US Cold War propaganda. Their themes were stridently anticommunist and focused on the dangers of militant unionism, while extolling

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.062/8-453; Stephansky to Secretary of State, 4 August 1953.

the virtues of business unionism. The USIS also printed and distributed pamphlets and donated fifty books to a new labor library in San Luis Potosí.<sup>58</sup> While successfully opening miners' locals to USIS propaganda, Reed proposed the formation of a Latin American miners' federation that would function under ORIT authority. Reed also instructed ORIT representatives to "root out" communist and independent elements within the unions' locals, and he pledged funds for the campaigns of *charro* candidates in local union elections.<sup>59</sup>

The strategy produced the desired results. American dollars helped to elect a substantial number of anticommunist union officials, some of whom had won posts at the national level. Soon after the 1953 elections, ORIT provided finances for all new *charro* leaders to visit other locals for the purpose of identifying and eliminating communists and independents. Cooperating with mining company management, the *charros* succeeded in obtaining the dismissals of about twenty-four active Communist Party members and the transfer of many militants, independents and communist sympathizers to places where they would be less influential among the rank and file.<sup>60</sup>

Despite *charro* maneuvering, the independents and communists remained in many mining locals. In the states of Coahuila and Chihuahua, local leaders aligned with Lombardo and the CTAL attempted to counter ORIT dollars by offering the national union \$1,500 in disaster relief for the families victimized by a disaster at the Dolores Mine in Michoacán during April 1954. They also invited the miners' union on a paid trip to the WFTU Congress in Vienna, and emphasized that there were no ideological commitments with the acceptance of the invitation.<sup>61</sup>

With more funds at their disposal, ORIT neutralized the CTAL's maneuvering. Through its widely circulated Mexico City newspaper, *Noticiero Obrero Interamericano*, ORIT effectively portrayed anti-*charro* elements within the miners' union as *Lombardistas* and called them "communist agents" in the service of the Soviet Union. Complementing the ORIT propaganda offensive was Paul Reed's constant use of American dollars to entice the miners' leadership, which eventually led to the national union's flat rejection of the CTAL's invitation. Lombardo's political isolation also contributed to Reed's success. After supporting government wage freezes, no-strike pledges by unions, and using the power of the CTM's bureaucracy to stifle rank-and-file participation in the making of union policy, Lombardo had lost much credibility with the nation's workers. Cooperating with the US Embassy, Reed acted as a liaison for the awarding of grants and stipends for miners' leadership to visit the

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

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.06/10-1454; Stephansky's Semi-Annual Labor Report to the Secretary of State, 14 October 1954.

United States and receive training in the practice of business unionism. Through US dollars, Reed and ORIT helped to further entrench the national union's *charro* administration of Filiberto Rabalcava.<sup>62</sup>

The CTM and ORIT registered similar success in other unions. The Federal Workers' and Federation of State Workers' unions established closer relations with ORIT, and once again the resources commanded by the American-backed organization proved crucial. The unions' leadership became "associates" of the US Embassy's American Cultural Institute. The leaders attended English classes free of charge and collaborated with the Americans in the development of a new course in industrial relations at the National University of Mexico.<sup>63</sup> The unions' presidents, Abelardo de la Torre and Florencio Maya, both made frequent trips to the United States on USIS Leader Grants, where they established cordial and working relationships with US public employee unions, like the postal workers.<sup>64</sup> While in the US, Federal Workers' union president Abelardo de la Torre received extensive training in business unionism, studying labor statistics, collective bargaining, safety inspection and wage and cost-of-living indexes.<sup>65</sup>

The Leader Grants were an outgrowth of the Mutual Security Act, which empowered President Truman's "Point Four" programs, initiated in 1949, and designed to fight communism in developing countries with US economic expansion. Sections 516 and 528 of the Mutual Security Act called on the United States to encourage the development of "free labor" union movements. Specifically, this strategy involved identifying pro-US, anticommunist trade unionists to send to the United States for training. The Leader Grants were part of a broader strategy to assist in the struggle against communist and independent unionists, a category that included nationalists, socialists and intransigent unionists.<sup>66</sup> Leader Grant recipients stayed in the United States for six-month periods, in which after three weeks of intensive English, they studied labor economics, statistics and history. Grantees spent their final weeks observing operations of unions and visiting places of work.<sup>67</sup>

When labor leaders returned from training in the United States, ORIT and USIS financed travel and lectures for them throughout Mexico. An outgrowth of these activities led to the formation of an association of labor

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

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 812.06/3-1754; Stephansky to the Secretary of State, 17 March 1954.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 812.06/11-2652; Report from Windsor Stroup, American Labor Officer in the US Embassy in Mexico to the Secretary of State, 26 November 1957.

<sup>66</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 84, post files 560, "Policy Guidance regarding Labor and Manpower Aspects of Technical Cooperation Program", a confidential policy statement from the Acting Administrator to Technical Cooperation Country Director, All Missions, 5 March 1952.

<sup>67</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.06/10-1454; Stephansky's Semi-Annual Labor Report to the Secretary of State, 14 October 1954.



Figure 1. Portrait on the title page of an announcement of a biography of Samuel Gompers (probably 1903) (Collection IISH).

leader grant recipients, called *el Círculo Samuel Gompers*.<sup>68</sup> Instrumental in founding the group was former anarchist and trade union leader, Rosendo Salazar, who in 1957, with USIS and ORIT money, published a biography of Samuel Gompers entitled *Samuel Gompers: presencia de un líder*. With ORIT's cooperation, USIS distributed the Gompers biography free of charge to locals of public employee and miners' unions.<sup>69</sup> The USIS coordinated these activities with a larger propaganda offensive inside Mexico. With ORIT and USIS dollars, Mexican and American labor leaders published dozens of books, articles and pamphlets that extolled the virtues of business unionism and partnership between government, industry and organized labor.

<sup>68</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.06/11-2657; Stroup to the Secretary of State, 26 November 1957.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*; Salazar had opposed Gompers and the AFL's activities during the early 1920s when he was an important intellectual leader of the anarchosindicalist *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT). As early as 1926, however, he began working with the reformist CROM.

*Charro* success in “cleaning house” of rebels, independents and communists depended heavily upon financial assistance from ORIT. The money helped the CTM initiate new newspapers in areas of the republic where none had existed previously. Dollars from large American industrial unions also constructed a new CTM office building and headquarters that provided adequate space for ORIT and CTM activities. The new building was instrumental in the CTM’s efforts in absorbing the smaller, struggling unions. Through ORIT money, many of these unions enjoyed logistical support and staff for the first time. The new labor center also gave the CTM visibility and a new legitimacy *vis-à-vis* other unions and federations that opposed state development policy.<sup>70</sup>

Between 1954 and 1957, government officials and *charro* leaders put their extensive business union training into practice when they settled close to 40,000 labor disputes. Most of the contracts provided for minuscule wage increases and in some cases, like the railroad workers, unions settled for nothing.<sup>71</sup> And, although the number of “official” strikes declined during the same period and *charro* union leaders successfully employed the business unionism of their American counterparts, rank-and-file discontent continued. Workers continued to protest wage freezes, no-strike pledges and attempts to discipline them in the workplace. As workers’ incomes stagnated and the distribution of wealth skewed upward, rank-and-file union members joined insurgent movements within the established trade unions and federations in opposition to *charro* leaders. Despite the financial backing of ORIT and American labor unions to *charro* leaders in teachers’ state employees and communications workers’ unions, many of whom had received Leader Grants and training in the United States, rank-and-file protest erupted in these organizations in 1958.

The insurgent movement among communication workers began on 6 February 1958, when 7,000 telegraph workers walked off the job in protest of the Secretary of Communications and Public Works (SCOP) violation of contract work rules. The secretary had transferred what he called thirty-seven “communist agitators”, to posts outside Mexico City. Strikers called for a 50 per cent pay increase and defied government and *charro* demands for a return to work by cutting off the Federal District’s internal telephone services. The strike gained momentum when nearly 500 international telephone operators struck, severing communications with dozens of countries. On 15 February 160 Radio Chapultepec employees and hundreds of telegraph workers who operated direct lines in banks and aviation companies began walking picket lines. As postal workers threatened to join their ranks, *charros* desperately sought a solution to the conflict.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 812.06/6–657; Stephansky to the Secretary of State, 6 June 1957.

<sup>71</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.06/3–2057; Stephansky’s 1956 Annual Labor Report, 20 March 1957.

<sup>72</sup> NARAW, SD Records, RG 59, 812.0621/3–1258; A. Kramer, labor attaché of the American Embassy, to the Secretary of State, 12 March 1958.

Working with the *charro* leadership of the Federation of State Workers' union, the Secretary of Communications revoked the transfer order and petitioned the government for a modest wage increase. The secretary's action infuriated the *charro* leadership. Instead of negotiating, the *charros* denounced the secretary's concession to "communist agitators" and insisted that no negotiations should take place until the strikers return to work. The strikers responded by sharply criticizing the union leadership for not representing genuine worker sentiment. The government, trying to avoid making martyrs of the strikers during an election year, timidly watched as *charro* leaders attempted to defuse the situation during a 16 February 1958 Mexico City meeting.<sup>73</sup>

Chairing the meeting was Federation of State Workers' Union General Secretary Abelardo de la Torre, a former Leader Grant recipient and prominent member of the *Círculo Samuel Gompers*. Workers shouted him down as he attempted to speak and offer them a meager 7 per cent wage increase. Strike leaders stood on chairs and denounced the unions' leadership as "traitors". The speakers repudiated the leadership's authority and declared that only they should represent the membership in negotiations with the government. As the walkout progressed, the strikers clandestinely received financial support from rank-and-file supporters of other unions. The expression of solidarity ultimately led to the formation of a new union, the *Alianza*. Immediately the press and the *charro* leadership orchestrated a propaganda campaign to discredit the *Alianza* by calling it an "unpatriotic" and "communistic" organization. The Cold War rhetoric eventually produced cracks in the *Alianza's* leadership, and pressure mounted for a negotiated settlement. The strikers finally accepted the original offer of a 7 per cent wage increase, but under the name of the newly-created *Alianza*, and not the *charro*-led union.<sup>74</sup>

While the real wages of all federal public employees had fallen 50 per cent between 1938 and 1952, teachers' salaries suffered a worse fate. Urban primary school teachers, especially the 15,582 of Mexico City, experienced acute inflationary pressures.<sup>75</sup> In 1956, after suffering attacks from *charros* and failing to win wage increases, rank-and-file members of the National Education Workers' union (SNTE) decided to organize an independent faction within the union much like the CTM *depuradas* of the major industrial unions during the 1940s. Under the leadership of Othón Salazar, a former member of a Communist Youth organization, rank-and-file teachers formed the *Comité de Lucha y Democratización*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* Kramer reported that Mexican government officials were concerned that forceful intervention in the strike might produce martyrs for the strikers, something the ruling party did not want during an election year.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Aurora Loyo Brambila, *El movimiento magisterial de 1958 en México* (Mexico, 1980, 2nd ed.), p. 29.

Based in the Federal District, the *Comité de Lucha* attempted to regain control of their local unions from the *charro* leaders. When the national union refused to conduct elections and called for the dissolution of the rank-and-file committee, the insurgents held their own convention. With over 15,000 Mexico City teachers in attendance, they elected Othón Salazar as general secretary. The committee asserted that the national union leadership had betrayed the Mexican Revolution and, accordingly, had changed its name in late 1957 to the Teachers' Revolutionary Movement (MRM). The teachers' actions generated a "propaganda" offensive by the National Teachers' union *charros* and Unity Bloc leader, Jesús Yuren, a Leader Grant recipient and *Círculo Samuel Gompers* member. *Charro* leaders received support from US officials working in Mexico who expressed concern about the growing discontent among Mexico's lower classes and the "communist influence" within trade unions.<sup>76</sup> Jesús Yuren and others accused Salazar and the Revolutionary Movement of being part of a "plan of an international character", bent on destroying national worker unity, and creating a climate of anarchy.<sup>77</sup> Despite the attacks, the strike continued and received support from parents, students and other unions, such as the electricians and railroad workers. The unity expressed by rank and filers prohibited the *charros* from recruiting strike-breakers, and thus forced the government to grant a substantial enough pay increase to end the strike.

### CONCLUSION

The financial support given to the CTM by American unions and ORIT enhanced government control of the labor movement. It aided the state, through political linkages and violence, to keep in check militant and independent trade union activists during a crucial juncture in Mexican history. As the Mexican state moved ahead with its industrialization program in the following decades, and in the process increasingly accommodated foreign capital, the labor strategy designed in the early years of the Cold War remained a cornerstone of state development policy.

That policy began with Mexico's entry into World War II, when the state, the CTM and its collaborators sought to hold down wages and restrict the right to strike. Militant strikes and calls for the nationalization of foreign-owned enterprises highlighted rank-and-file resistance to these policies. As wartime state development policy continued after the conflict's end, opposition groups within the CTM joined new federations in an attempt to challenge its domination of the labor movement.

As this process unfolded, the Mexican state enlisted the support of organized labor from the United States to rid trade unions of militant and

<sup>76</sup> NARAW, SD Records, Central Files, 712/8-2985; 712.00/8-2958; telegram from the US Embassy in Mexico City to the Department of State, 29 August 1958.

<sup>77</sup> Loyo Brambila, *El movimiento*, pp. 46-49.

independent elements. American labor movement officials exercised their traditional role that dated back to the revolutionary period, that of acting as liaisons for American corporations and the United States government. The US labor movement embraced the American government's post-war trade and economic policies, which were punctuated with a strident anti-communism. In advancing the interests of American capital, US government officials and trade unionists joined forces in assisting pro-US, anti-communist Mexican labor leaders to neutralize and undermine forces that favored economic nationalism over state development policy.

Caught in the middle of this dynamic was Lombardo and the CTAL, which US trade union and government officials viewed as obstacles in the carrying out of American foreign policy objectives in Mexico and Latin America. As a Marxist, Lombardo became vulnerable to attacks by Mexican and US trade unionists who used Cold War rhetoric to reduce his influence within the labor movement. Although Lombardo was an economic nationalist who opposed unchecked foreign capital investment, his alliance with Mexican industrialists and state officials in the attempted imposition of no-strike pledges and *de facto* wage freezes, put him at odds with the rank and file. These factors combined to weaken Lombardo's influence and remove him from the labor movement's center stage, which helped to facilitate the growth of *charrismo*.

Mexico's role in the post-war international division of labor, that of providing raw materials and inexpensive labor markets for more economically advanced countries like the United States, ultimately depended upon the state's open manipulation of trade union officials and the use of force against intransigent rank and file. In carrying out its development and labor policies, the Mexican state benefitted from the involvement of US trade unions, which exercised a crucial role by providing financial and logistical support and filling an ideological vacuum with the anticommunism of the Cold War. In the decades that followed, these factors solidified organized labor's leadership's support of a state development policy that increasingly favored capital, both foreign and domestic.