34

Unions, Workers, and the State in Mexico

edited by
Kevin J. Middlebrook

Unions, Workers, and the State in Mexico

Unions, Workers, and the State in Mexico

Edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook

Printed with the assistance of the Tinker Foundation

U.S.-Mexico Contemporary Perspectives Series, 2
Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies
University of California, San Diego

1991

Printed in the United States of America by
the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies
University of California, San Diego

ISBN 1-878367-02-1

Trejo, Raúl. 1985. "El poder de los obreros." In *México ante la crisis*, edited by Pablo González Casanova and Héctor Aguilar Camín, vol. 2. México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno.

Trejo Delarbre, Raúl, and José Woldenberg. 1985. "Sindicatos y proyecto nacional en la crisis de hoy." In *México: Presente y futuro*, edited by Jorge Alcocer. México, D.F.: Ediciones de Cultura Popular.

Unzueta, Gerardo. 1983. "Crisis en el partido, crisis en el movimiento." In *Historia del comunismo en México*, edited by Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo. México, D.F.: Grijalbo.

UOI (Unidad Obrera Independiente). 1984. *Tesis Proletarias II*. México, D.F.: Claridad.

Valle, Eduardo. 1984. "A nacionalizar la revolución," *Insurgencia Popular* 101 (June).

Vallejo, Demetrio. 1957. *Las luchas ferrocarrileras que conmovieron a México*. México, D.F.: Ediciones del Movimiento de Liberación Nacional.

Zapata, Francisco. 1986. "Sindicalismo, ideología y política en Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán." Paper presented to the International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Boston, October 23–25.

K. Middlebrook (ed.), UNIONS, WORKERS and the STATE IN MEXICO, U. of California, La Jolla, 1991

7

Independent Trade Unionism in Mexico: Past Developments and Future Perspectives

Enrique de la Garza Toledo

A groundswell of labor mobilization began in Mexico in the early 1970s, characterized by a common opposition to the country's dominant labor structure. This upsurge of independent labor mobilization came in two distinct waves: the first, from 1970 to 1980, peaked in 1976; the second, from 1980 to 1987, peaked in 1983 before entering a period of steady decline.[1] When the first wave began, it seemed that the official labor movement born of the Mexican Revolution was in the final stages of decay, but nearly two decades later *charro* unionism[2] clearly survives despite its many problems. The independent labor movement has consolidated its hold in areas such as university unions, but it has been

Translated by William B. Heller and Kevin J. Middlebrook.

[1]This chapter examines only the period from 1970 through 1987. Since 1988 the Mexican organized labor movement has entered a new stage in its development, a subject beyond the scope of this discussion.

[2]The term *charrismo* was initially used to refer to "false" unionism—imposed from above, corrupt, and directly dependent on the state. In the late 1970s, however, the idea that *charro* union leaders rule with the consent of the rank and file began to gain acceptance, and the term *sindicalismo charro* (literally, "cowboy unionism") was abandoned in favor of *burocracia sindical* ("labor bureaucracy"). However, portrayals of labor unions as organizations and their leadership as bureaucracies are too narrow because unions in Mexico form part of the postrevolutionary regime.

An alternative term is *sindicalismo oficial* ("official unionism"), although this term does not distinguish between legally constituted unions and legally recognized but politically independent organizations. However, among sectors of the working class where great effort is expended in attempts to escape from the control of corrupt, politically dependent labor leadership, *charrismo* is the term commonly used to refer to unions linked to the postrevolutionary regime. In this essay, then, "official unionism" is used interchangeably with *charro* unionism.

unable to establish itself as a viable alternative to traditional forms of political-labor control. Nor has it been able to exert effective influence over the direction of state labor policy, national labor relations, or Mexican political economy more generally.

For the purpose of this analysis, the independent labor movement can be divided into two major sectors: the first comprised the traditional proletariat in public-sector industries and university unions; the second comprised workers in modern industries (steel, automobile manufacturing, and metalworking) that were badly affected by industrial retrenchment in the early 1970s. The first group subscribed to old nationalist and statist ideals, and its activities were directed toward changing state policies; the second group's actions were directed toward the workplace and transformations in the labor process.

Independent unionism in Mexico is currently in a state of crisis. Nationalist-statist groups have been hard hit by the combination of reduced state economic intervention and the opening of the economy to transnational capital, while industrial workers suffer the effects of industrial restructuring. This chapter examines the evolution of sociopolitical forces born believing that state control over the Mexican working class was in its final stages. In the end, those forces not destroyed politically by the established regime were obliged to become part of an institutional framework that, although precarious, serves to contain labor movement activity in Mexico.

THE CHARACTER OF INDEPENDENT UNIONISM

Independent unionism, as it was understood in the 1970s, was an implicit challenge to the official union organizations characteristic of *charro* unionism. Official unions, according to some students of the insurgent labor movement (see, for example, Leal 1976), are an important element in the concept of corporatism (or semicorporatism)—the maintenance of control over the Mexican working class through organizational structures.[3] From this perspective, the principal reason for initiating an independent labor movement was to cut ties to such official organizations as the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the Labor Congress (CT), and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). However, it later became clear that simply ending organizational ties of this kind was no guarantee of unions' effective independence from the state. In fact, independence from the state began to be seen as less

[3]See for example, Leal 1976. A description of corporatism simply as political control through organizations is too narrow to qualify as theory. This concept, as it is used in Mexico, makes no reference to modern studies of neocorporatism and the crisis of the social state. In Mexico, "control through organizations" implies that unions share responsibility for the proper functioning of the state. It also means that labor relations within individual firms are no longer the exclusive domain of unions, but that such relations are increasingly subject to, and influenced by, state policies.

important, even irrelevant, and by the mid-1970s important groups in the independent labor movement (such as the Nuclear Industry Workers' Union [SUTIN] and the Union of Workers at the National Autonomous University of Mexico [STUNAM]) sought membership in the Labor Congress (de la Garza 1984b). Moreover, defining independent unionism simply in terms of its opposition to official labor structures was too narrow a focus because there was another independent labor movement that, while also uncompromised by collusion with official organizational structures, was directly dependent on industrial management. The Federation of Independent Unions (FSI) exemplified this second, management-co-opted strain of independent unionism.

The independent labor movement's fight against the official labor structure was not necessarily intended to break up organic relationships; rather, it sought to transform unions' internal dynamics by increasing worker representation and influence in the decision-making process. Of course, not all official labor unions are equally authoritarian, although the frequent absence of democratic governance in such organizations reflects the principal characteristics of Mexico's highly centralized postrevolutionary regime. Thus the labor insurgency (*insurgencia obrera*) was mainly a democratizing movement. The fact that it sometimes engendered authoritarian organizational forms (as in the case of the Independent Worker Unit [UOI]) did not invalidate its original principles. Economic and democratic struggles often went hand in hand, and a transformation of labor's relationship to the state was implicit in the democratic fight. From this perspective, then, independent unionism was also a movement against state policies (see Camacho 1980).

THE RISE OF INDEPENDENT UNIONISM

The independent labor movement began as an attempt by part of the unionized working class to democratize unions. The movement first manifested itself in a break with Labor Congress-style unionism. Of course, democratization initiatives and/or dissident unions' secession from official labor organizations had occurred frequently ever since the 1930s. Examples include the break between the Mexican Electricians' Union (SME) and the CTM shortly after the latter was created in 1936; the secession of the railroad workers', mining and metalworkers', and petroleum workers' unions from the CTM in the late 1940s; the creation of the Unitary Workers' Confederation (CUT) in 1947 to represent dissident labor organizations; the formation of the Revolutionary Teachers' Movement (MRM) in 1955–56, followed by labor militancy in the railroad industry and democratizing movements in other major unions; and secession from the CTM by the Diesel Nacional (automobile industry), Euzkadi (rubber industry), and Aeroméxico (transportation)

unions in the 1960s. However, democratizing mobilizations grew considerably in number and scope after late 1971 (see figure 7.1).

The groundswell of democratizing movements actually began with three significant mobilizations that carried through to later years. These initial manifestations of the labor insurgency were the Ayotla Textile movement (1970), the Chrysler movement (1969) (Quiroz 1981), and protests against the official railroad union leadership led by the Railroad Workers' Union Movement (MSF). These mobilizations did not result from falling real wages or agitation by student activists; rather, they reflected workers' discontent with the new working conditions imposed by incipient industrial restructuring (see Pérez Arce 1979).

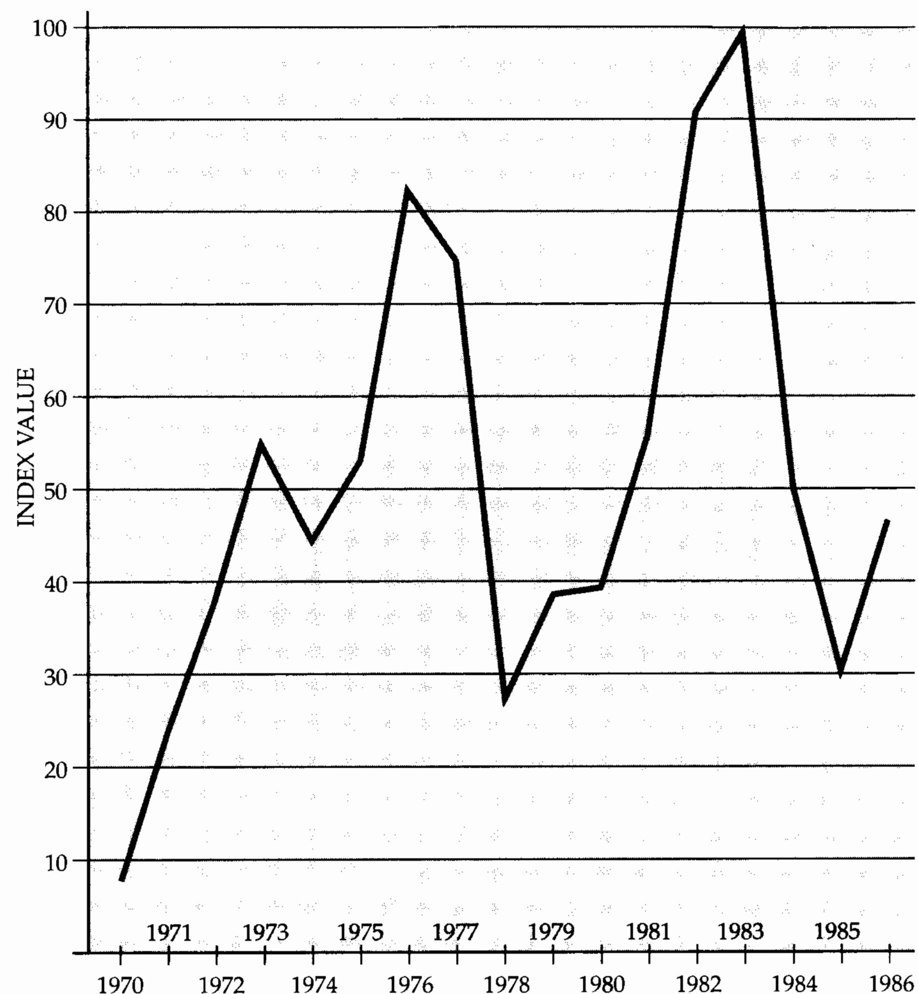
Railroad workers provided the most important example in the early struggle for union democratization when Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa, two democratic leaders of historic stature, were released from prison in 1971. The MSF (soon followed by the Democratic Tendency [TD], a dissident movement within the General Union of Mexican Electrical Workers [SUTERM]) represented the traditional proletariat portion of the labor insurgency. This form of new unionism neither stressed nor was motivated by labor conditions.[4] Instead, it sought to increase labor's direct influence over the formation of state policies by creating a political labor movement with functions similar to a political party. As such, it was among the last manifestations of a union tradition dating from the 1930s (represented by such national political leaders as Vicente Lombardo Toledano) that recognized the reality of class conflict and sought to make capital's relationship to labor a direct concern of the state. In terms of its position in the labor process, the movement's class composition[5] was characterized by its weak workplace identity; it was centered in universities, continuous-flow production activities (such as electrical power generation), and backward industries with loose shop rules (such as the railroad industry) (Campos and Sánchez Daza 1986).

[4]See Woldenberg and Trejo 1984. Nor was this early phase of democratic labor mobilization motivated by economic conditions. In terms of wages, 1970 was not a particularly bad year for the working class; the real weekly minimum wage (in 1970 pesos) rose from 351.95 pesos in 1969 to 419.22 in 1970 (see table 7.1), surpassing the highest level reached during the period of "stabilizing development"—the period from 1955 to 1970, characterized by high growth rates, low inflation, and rising real wages. Industrial wages fell marginally between 1969 and 1970, declining from 734.17 to 734.01 pesos, but the data for 1971 show no significant relationship between democratic mobilizations and either falling wages or rising unemployment.

[5]Class composition or formation refers to the whole complex of relationships ranging from the labor process to social composition, culminating in political formulation. The major determining factor explaining the political behavior of a particular class composition is not always its position in the productive process. In the case of the "revolutionary nationalism" movement, tradition and history were more important considerations than position in the productive process. However, such traditions may have been less important to workers in heavy industry during the "stabilizing development" era, perhaps resulting in a closer relationship between worker militancy and developments in the workplace.

FIGURE 7.1

The Struggle for Union Democracy, 1970-86[a]



[a] Only those union conflicts involving public opposition to "official" unionism or its restoration were classified as struggles for union democracy. Index calculated in reference to 1983 (1983 = 100), when eighty-four such conflicts occurred.

Sources: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico), *Movimiento obrero, 1970-1980; Información obrera*, various years; *Información sistemática*, various years; *Entorno laboral*, various years; Servicios Informáticos Procesados, A.C., newspaper archives.

The modern industry part of the independent labor movement originated in the period of national economic crisis that began in 1971. Inflation and unemployment increased, and real wages (which had increased steadily in the 1960s) lost momentum. Heavy industry, an important source of sustained growth in the previous decade, reached the limits of its technological base and suffered productivity problems. Workers' day-to-day discontent with the industrial production process in activities such as automobile manufacturing, the steel industry, metalworking, and so forth, grew more intense, and workers' concerns were often manifested in new wage demands and democratic struggles against official labor structures. As these struggles grew, the movement generated its own demands, strategies, and organization, culminating in the ideological and organizational alternatives represented by such distinct groups as the UOI and the Proletarian Line (LP).

The democratic unionism movement was not the initiative of a working class that thrived on conflict, nor was it the simple consequence of material conditions or the result of specific leaders' actions. Rather, it was shaped by material demonstrations of the relationship between the political world and the labor movement (any labor conflict in a major industry in Mexico immediately becomes a political problem), and by the working class's native traditions and world view. The network of patron-client relationships that had linked labor to the state during the period of stabilizing development in the 1960s came under pressure in the 1970s. Although the Mexican working class had no major democratic tradition, the new reality of unemployment and stagnant salaries in the 1970s also undermined expectations of continued prosperity forged in the 1960s, resulting in increased frustration for the majority of the working class. These developments constituted a significant change in the conditions that had allowed the official labor movement to maintain its control over the rank and file. It is therefore insufficient to examine the simple relationship between wage rates and democratic movements without considering the effect of expectations — formed during a previous period marked by relative prosperity — of constant and general improvement in working conditions and living standards.

Democratic movements did not invariably advance from economic demands to local challenges against official unions, and then to wider confrontations with the state and its repressive apparatus, the judicial system, the penal system, labor policies, or any of a wide range of state and political entities and situations. The traditional proletariat current of independent unionism, for example, was based on a nationalist-statist tradition associated with former president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40). It was a platform that attracted considerable intellectual interest, principally from the political left, and it became an ideology for the common worker. For railroad workers, it was an ideology rooted in the union [illegible] imprisonment of

Campa and Vallejo; for electrical workers, it was a set of beliefs associated with their nationalist, statist rhetoric conceived during their years of glory in the 1930s.

The independent labor movement was born during a period of declining material conditions. However, worsening conditions were somewhat ameliorated by expectations of improvement, expectations that had formed the basis for general labor peace during the 1960s. Under these conditions the Railroad Workers' Union Movement had a catalytic effect; it brought together disparate local elements to form the decade's first national labor opposition movement, and it operated in tandem with the remnants of the 1968 student movement — still active in 1970–71 in some areas of the country. It was a time when protests erupted all across the social spectrum: labor fronts, peasant fronts, popular fronts, and student fronts. Student activists contributed ideological and global perspectives that other movements were still incapable of formulating for themselves.[6]

Cycles in the Development of the Independent Labor Movement

Prevailing wisdom holds that insurgent unionism came to an end in 1977 with the defeat of the Democratic Tendency. However, if the labor insurgency is defined as an independent, opposition labor movement fighting for democracy against the official labor structures, then the prevailing wisdom is in error. Democratic labor movements (excluding the economic battles waged by independent unions) have occurred in two distinct waves since 1970 (see figure 7.1). The first wave began in early 1970 and peaked in 1976, while the second peaked in 1983. Although two major sets of labor actors were active in both periods, the importance of each varied over time. Moreover, each cycle had ascending and descending phases: in the first period, the ascending phase lasted from 1970 to 1976, descending thereafter to 1980; in the second cycle, the ascending phase went from 1980 to 1983, with the descending phase continuing from 1983 to 1987.

The First Wave: Principal Characteristics of the Labor Opposition

The first wave of democratic mobilization began with Luis Echeverría's presidency (1970–76) and continued through the early years of José López Portillo's administration (1976–80). These administrations had distinct national programs: Echeverría pursued shared development and a democratic opening; López Portillo focused on wage ceilings and

[6]See de la Garza et al. 1986, which shows that the student movement did not end in 1968 but was carried on outside Mexico City in an even more radical form.

an Alliance for Production. Echeverría presided over the initial manifestations of a structural economic crisis, especially budgetary difficulties and an erosion of the state's social welfare role. Nevertheless, emergency wage increases in this period were sufficient to preserve real wages despite an increase in the annual rate of inflation from 5.3 percent in 1971 to 28.9 percent in 1977. The real weekly minimum wage (in 1970 pesos) rose from 397.53 to 495.32 pesos between 1971 and 1976, while the real weekly industrial wage increased from 756.28 to 1,130.96 pesos over the same period. Open unemployment, however, nearly doubled between 1970 and 1976[7] (see table 7.1).

Between 1971 and 1976, the first growth period for independent labor mobilization, the number of legally recognized strikes grew at nearly the same rate as the democratic labor movement. The increase in national and local labor-employer conflicts (including but not restricted to conflicts involving independent unions) also closely paralleled the rise in democratic conflicts (see table 7.2). Not all prodemocratic labor movement actions were expressed in strikes, partly because of the legal obstacles to such movements. Nevertheless, the percentage of total strike actions motivated by democratic principles rose from 14 to 36 percent between 1970 and 1976, reaching a high of 53 percent in 1975. The incidence of strikes by the democratic labor movement approximately paralleled the overall incidence of democratic conflicts during the 1970–76 period (compare figures 7.1 and 7.2).

Democratic labor movements were confronted with diverse obstacles, and in some years (in 1978, for example) nearly half of these struggles involved violence. The problem of violent resistance against the democratic movement has been underestimated, especially by those who envision a labor movement dominated by a hegemonic (in the Gramscian sense) *charrismo*. Nevertheless, physical violence—in the form of police repression, strikebreakers, agitators, and so forth, resulting in arrests, injuries, and death—was a constant element in democratic labor struggles (see figure 7.3). The level of violence directly corresponded to the intensity of the democratic struggle, although the first wave of democratic mobilization was worse than the second in terms of absolute levels of violence. The percentage of all democratic labor conflicts involving physical violence increased from 14.3 percent in 1970 to 22.9 percent in 1976, peaking in 1977.

Of course, not all violence against labor opposition movements was physical. There was violence in labor conciliation and arbitration tribunals, which for political reasons often failed to recognize democratic union executive committees, classified strikes as illegal (nonexistent), and denied support for dismissed workers. Nor was the state, with its

[7]See Tello 1979. It is possible that the existence of a prominent labor opposition movement prompted the Echeverría administration to keep real wages rising.

TABLE 7.1
WAGE, INFLATION, AND UNEMPLOYMENT PATTERNS, 1940–86
(BASE = 1970)

Year	Real Minimum Wage	Real Industrial Wage	Annual Rate of Inflation (percent)	Average Nominal Wage Increase (percent)	Unemployment[a]
1940	208.53	494.77	—	—	—
1945	142.55	463.38	—	—	—
1950	163.42	520.35	—	—	—
1955	192.97	508.13	—	—	—
1960	223.51	585.99	—	—	—
1965	298.11	680.07	—	—	—
1966	302.82	706.54	—	—	—
1967	323.27	709.44	—	—	—
1968	381.24	759.65	—	—	—
1969	351.95	735.17	—	—	—
1970	419.22	734.01	—	—	3.7
1971	397.53	756.28	5.3	—	4.3
1972	448.06	815.40	5.0	—	5.0
1973	420.00	875.91	12.0	—	6.9
1974	462.59	927.26	23.7	—	7.0
1975	466.16	894.16	15.2	—	8.6
1976	495.32	1,130.96	15.8	18.24	7.0
1977	516.10	974.59	28.9	10.60	7.1
1978	498.43	942.66	17.5	12.40	6.4
1979	492.35	932.88	18.2	14.05	6.1
1980	459.01	902.08	26.4	23.56	3.5
1981	469.44	861.50	28.0	29.96	3.6
1982	415.68	964.87	58.9	31.44	4.1
1983	344.04	710.18	104.2	26.90	6.3
1984	—	321.03	65.4	30.0	6.2
1985	—	327.28	63.7	33.0	4.6
1986	—	—	105.7	—	5.0[b]

[a]Percent of economically active population unemployed in the Federal District.
[b]Data through August 1986.

Sources: Garavito 1986; data on average nominal wage increases are from Dirección General del Cuerpo de Funcionarios Conciliadores, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social.

repressive police, military, and judicial tools, the only entity to use violence against the democratic struggle. Companies themselves instigated acts of physical violence on a number of occasions, using strikebreakers or groups of outside agitators (an especially common tactic in conflicts involving urban and intercity transportation drivers, as well as in the cases of medium-sized industries in Naucalpan, Ecatepec,

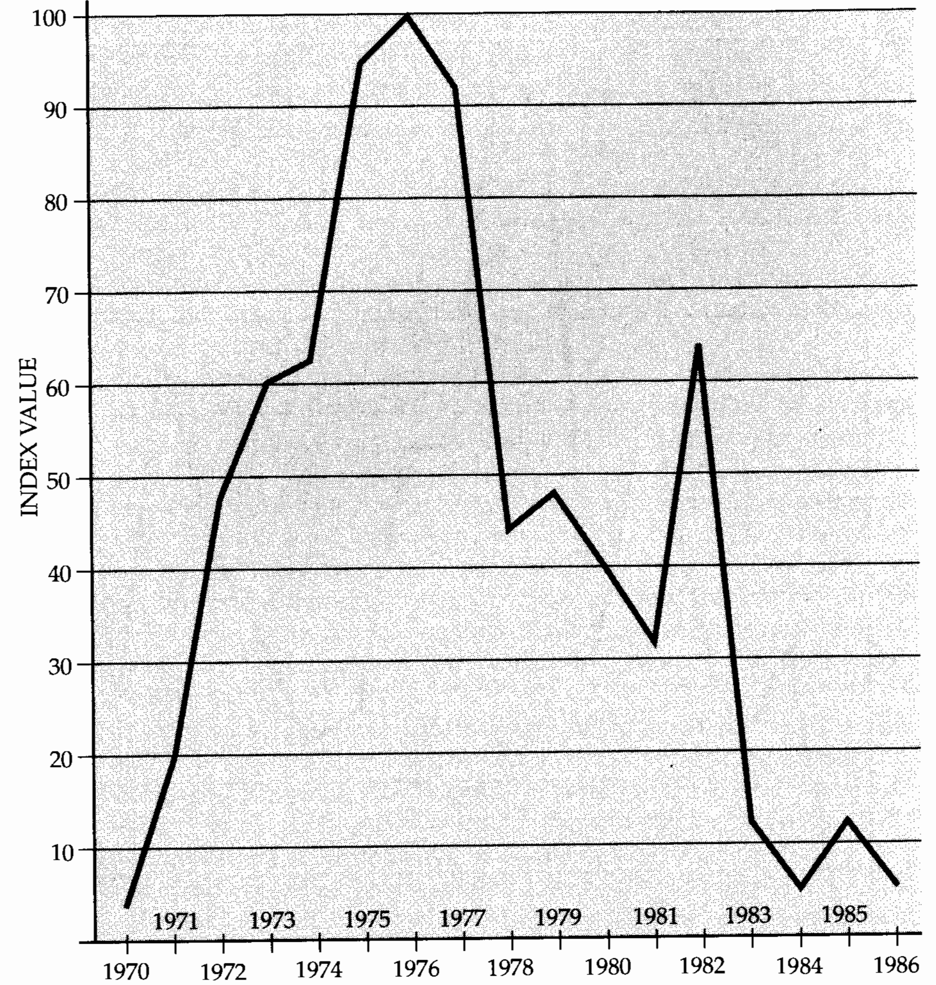
TABLE 7.2
STRIKES AND WORK CONFLICTS, 1971–85

Year	Federal Jurisdiction		Local Jurisdiction[a]		Total	
	Strikes	Work Conflicts	Strikes	Work Conflicts	Strikes	Work Conflicts
1971	36	NA	204	NA	240	NA
1972	33	7,680	170	NA	203	NA
1973	57	6,380	136	NA	193	NA
1974	55	6,554	337	NA	392	NA
1975	84	7,240	236	34,105	320	41,345
1976	107	7,610	547	35,785	654	43,395
1977	128	9,895	844	40,483	972	50,378
1978	87	7,904	1,273	39,313	1,360	47,217
1979	141	6,346	1,239	38,987	1,380	45,333
1980	93	4,875	1,339	39,320	1,432	44,195
1981	108	6,245	1,066	43,119	1,174	49,364
1982	222	19,271	1,971	52,403	2,193	71,674
1983	489	19,609	978	52,316	1,467	71,925
1984	423	19,645	457	46,599	880	66,244
1985	264	16,440	NA	NA	NA	NA

[a]State-level jurisdiction
NA = Not available
Sources: Presidencia de la República, *Informe presidencial*, various years; Secretaría de Programación y Presupuesto, *Anuario estadístico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, various years.

FIGURE 7.2

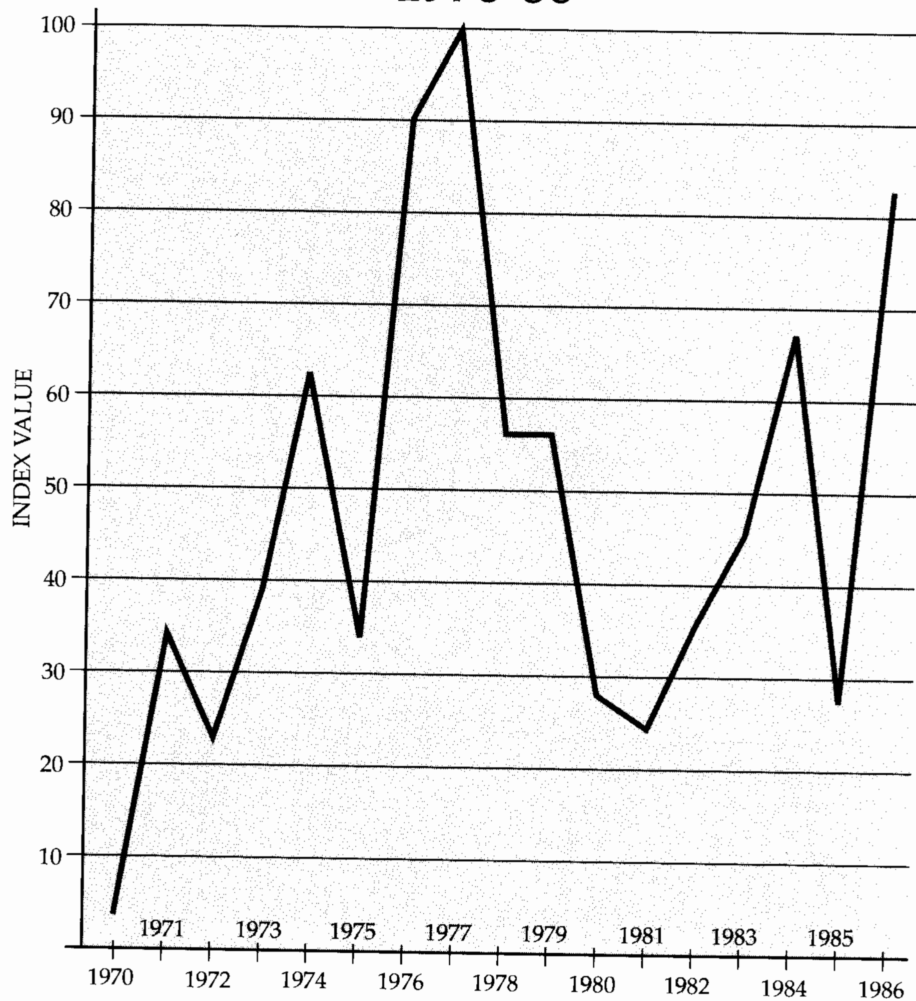
Strikes in Support of Union Democracy, 1970-86[a]



[a] Includes only those strikes involving public opposition to "official" unionism or its restoration. Index calculated in reference to 1976 (1976 = 100), when thirteen such strikes occurred.

Sources: See sources listed in figure 7.1.

FIGURE 7.3



[a] Index calculated in reference to 1977 (1977 = 100), when eighteen acts of physical violence were committed against movements for union democracy.

Sources: See sources listed in figure 7.1.

and Azcapotzalco in the state of México) to suppress labor opposition. Sometimes the use of violence against workers was orchestrated by official labor leaders, jealous of their power and fearful of being displaced by the democratic movement.

Although the 1970–80 period of labor insurgency included a number of conflicts in the automobile manufacturing, steel, metalworking, and mining industries, these sectors generally registered even higher levels of conflict during the post-1980 wave of labor mobilization (see table 7.3). The level of conflict in universities (and in the education sector in general) increased considerably until it reached its peak in 1976. This period was marked by the creation of new university unions and their battles for legal recognition, but preschool, elementary, and high school teachers' activities were severely curtailed, having gone through only a brief spurt of activity very early in the 1970s. The level of conflict in land transportation also remained high, as it did in the textile, chemical, and related industries, with peaks in 1973 and 1976. Labor conflicts in the banking industry and the federal bureaucracy did not occur with any real intensity until the post-1980 period.

The universities were generally the most important focus of unrest during the 1970–80 wave of independent labor mobilization, accounting for between 9.4 and 22.8 percent of all conflicts. Land transportation, which produced 28.6 percent of all democratic conflicts in 1970, accounted for only 12.9 percent in 1976. The chemical industry's share of all democratic conflicts fell from 28.6 percent to 14.3 percent over the same period. In terms of overall national influence and catalytic and unifying effects, however, the most important battles involved electrical workers, railroad workers, and the universities. Table 7.4 shows the evolution of democratic union struggles in these different economic activities over the 1970–86 period.

In terms of the regional distribution of democratic struggles, the Mexico City metropolitan area (the Valle de México) was consistently the site of the greatest proportion of conflicts (a minimum of 30.6 percent of all democratic conflicts in 1974 and a maximum of 62.5 percent in 1977). The second greatest proportion of conflicts was concentrated in the northern and central regions (excluding the Mexico City area) (see table 7.5). The maximum number of conflicts in the Mexico City metropolitan area and in the central region occurred in 1983, while 1976 was the most active year in the south-southeast, and 1981 was the most active year in the center-north. In the north, the most active periods of conflict came in 1972, 1976, 1978, and 1983 (see table 7.6).

The descending phase (1976–80) of the first period of democratic struggle coincided with the first half of the López Portillo administration, a time of economic recession (particularly 1977–78) followed by economic recuperation (1979–80). The struggle for union democracy

Table 7.3

Struggles for Union Democracy in Selected Economic Activities, 1970–86[a]

Economic Activity	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Automotive, steel, metalworking, and mining industries	28.6	9.5	15.6	8.7	8.3	17.7	5.7	4.3	8.7	18.8	15.2	21.7	14.5	17.9	18.2	23.3	10.6
Education (including universities)	0	14.3	9.4	10.9	19.4	20.0	22.8	2.9	17.4	18.8	21.2	7.8	10.5	3.6	11.4	23.3	6.4
Land transportation (including railroads)	28.6	9.5	12.5	21.8	22.2	4.4	12.9	7.9	4.4	12.5	9.0	9.8	10.5	14.3	6.8	3.3	8.5
Textile industry	0	9.5	18.8	6.5	2.8	8.8	5.7	3.2	0	0	0	7.8	3.9	3.6	4.5	10.0	14.9
Chemical, pharmaceutical, cement, ceramics, petrochemical, and food and beverage industries	28.6	19.0	18.8	17.4	19.4	11.1	14.3	11.1	21.7	12.5	12.1	15.7	10.5	7.1	15.9	10.0	6.4
Public administration, banks, and insurance companies	0	4.8	9.4	4.3	0	4.4	6.7	3.2	13.0	6.3	9.1	3.9	23.5	17.9	18.2	10.0	14.9

[a]Percentage of all struggles for union democracy in a given year. Columns may not add to 100 percent because not all economic activities are included in which such struggles arose.

Sources: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), *Movimiento obrero, 1970–1980; Información obrera*, various years; *Información sistemática*, various years; *Entorno laboral*, various years; Servicios Informáticos Procesados, A.C. newspaper archives.

Table 7.4

Index of Struggles for Union Democracy in Selected Economic Activities, 1970–86[a]

Economic Activity	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Automotive, steel, metalworking, and mining industries	13.3	6.6	33.3	26.7	20.0	53.3	26.7	46.7	13.3	40.0	33.3	73.3	73.3	100.0	53.3	46.6	33.3
Education (including universities)	0	18.8	18.8	31.3	43.8	56.3	100.0	12.5	25.0	37.5	43.8	25.0	50.0	18.8	31.3	43.8	18.8
Land transportation (including railroads)	16.6	16.6	33.3	83.3	66.6	16.6	75.0	41.7	16.6	33.3	25.0	41.7	66.6	100.0	75.0	8.3	32.3
Textile industry	0	28.6	85.7	42.9	14.3	57.1	57.1	28.6	0	0	0	57.1	42.9	42.9	28.6	42.9	100.0
Chemical, pharmaceutical, cement, ceramics, petrochemical, and food and beverage industries	30.0	40.0	60.0	80.0	70.0	50.0	100.0	80.0	60.0	40.0	30.0	80.0	80.0	60.0	80.0	40.0	30.0
Public administration, banks, and insurance companies	0	20.0	20.0	13.3	0	13.3	26.6	13.3	20.0	13.3	20.0	13.3	80.0	100.0	80.0	20.0	46.7

[a]Index for each economic activity calculated in reference to year during the 1970–86 period when the highest number of conflicts occurred (highest year = 100).

Sources: See sources listed in table 7.3.

TABLE 7.5
STRUGGLES FOR UNION DEMOCRACY BY REGION, 1970–86[a]

Region	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Mexico City																	
Metropolitan Area	71.0	57.0	32.3	59.5	30.6	57.0	43.8	62.5	43.8	53.3	57.6	59.6	56.1	52.5	48.5	52.0	66.0
Veracruz	0	0	6.5	2.4	8.3	0	15.1	0	0	0	0	0	1.8	0	5.7	4.0	0
Central Zone[b]	0	4.8	22.6	4.8	16.7	9.5	5.6	10.0	8.7	3.3	12.1	4.2	10.5	12.5	8.1	8.0	8.0
South-Southeast Zone[c]	0	4.8	0	4.8	19.4	7.1	12.3	12.5	4.4	10.0	3.0	0	3.5	8.8	0	16.0	8.0
Center-North Zone[d]	0	0	3.2	9.5	2.8	7.1	6.8	7.0	8.7	13.3	6.0	12.0	5.3	3.8	6.4	0	4.0
Northern Zone[e]	0	14.4	25.7	7.1	13.8	11.9	9.6	10.0	30.4	13.3	12.1	10.6	8.8	11.3	10.8	4.0	6.0
National[f]	29.0	19.0	9.7	11.9	8.3	7.1	6.8	2.5	4.0	6.6	9.0	12.6	14.0	11.3	21.6	16.0	8.0

[a] Percentage of all struggles for union democracy in a given year. Columns may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.
[b] Hidalgo, Querétaro, Puebla, Morelos, Tlaxcala, Estado de México.
[c] Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Guerrero, Colima.
[d] Guanajuato, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Durango, Michoacán, Jalisco, Nayarit.
[e] Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Sonora, Sinaloa, Baja California Sur, Baja California Norte.
[f] "National" category includes conflicts involving two or more states, including democratic struggles by railroad workers.

Sources: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), *Movimiento obrero, 1970–1980; Información obrera*, various years; *Información sistemática*, various years; *Entorno laboral*, various years; Servicios Informáticos Procesados, A.C., newspaper archives.

TABLE 7.6
INDEX OF STRUGGLES FOR UNION DEMOCRACY BY REGION, 1970–86[a]

Region	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Mexico City Metropolitan Area	12.0	29.0	24.0	60.0	26.4	57.6	76.8	79.2	24.0	38.4	45.6	66.6	76.8	100.0	43.4	31.0	79.0
Central Zone[b]	0	10.0	70.0	20.0	60.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	20.0	10.0	40.0	20.0	60.0	100.0	30.0	20.0	40.0
South-Southeast Zone[c]	0	11.1	0	22.2	77.7	33.3	100.0	55.5	11.1	33.3	11.1	0	22.2	77.7	0	44.0	44.0
Center-North Zone[d]	0	0	16.7	66.7	16.7	50.1	83.5	50.1	33.4	66.8	33.4	100.0	50.1	50.1	33.4	0	33.0
Northern Zone[e]	0	33.0	88.8	33.3	55.5	55.5	77.7	44.4	77.7	44.4	44.4	55.5	55.5	100.0	44.4	11.0	33.0

[a]Does not include conflicts involving two or more states. Index for each region calculated in reference to year during the 1970–86 period when the highest number of conflicts occurred (highest year = 100).
[b]Hidalgo, Querétaro, Puebla, Morelos, Tlaxcala, Estado de México.
[c]Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Guerrero, Colima.
[d]Guanajuato, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Durango, Michoacán, Jalisco, Nayarit.
[e]Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Sonora, Sinaloa, Baja California Sur, Baja California Norte.

Sources: See sources listed in table 7.5.

decayed during this period, but then so did the incidence of violence against independent unions and democratic movement strikes. The number of legal strikes grew during this phase, reaching a maximum of 1,432 in 1980. Most of these conflicts were concentrated in the automobile manufacturing, steel, metalworking, and mining industries; a much smaller number occurred in the textile, land transport, and chemical industries. University struggles, which declined in 1977–78, increased again in 1979 and 1980.

The general decline in the intensity of democratic struggle after 1976 followed the defeat and virtual elimination of the electrical workers' Democratic Tendency. Railroad workers lost their influence as a rallying point and organizational alternative even earlier. One consequence of these developments was that regional protest movements lost momentum, and thus an even greater percentage of opposition activity was concentrated in the Mexico City area and the central region.

It is difficult to quantify accurately the size of the democratic union movement during the 1970s. In 1978 the Labor Congress claimed some six million members, while one million workers belonged to unions not affiliated with the CT. Of these one million "independent" workers, the 150,000 members of the employer-controlled Nuevo León National Federation of Independent Unions (FNSINL) and the 38,000 members of the Federation of Independent Unions (FSI) did not form part of the labor insurgency. Nor did members of the Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CTC), the Confederation of Mexican Workers (COM), or several smaller organizations of this kind. Some authors argue that only 300,000 workers participated in the labor insurgency during the late 1970s (Peláez 1978). The UOI claimed some 150,000 affiliates in 1978 (Camacho 1980). About 40,000 workers belonged to the Federation of University Workers' Unions (Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores Universitarios), and some 30,000 steelworkers belonged to independent unions (Alafita 1977: 115–118).

The 1970–80 wave of democratic mobilization featured two major currents in the labor movement. These currents were best expressed ideologically and organizationally by the Democratic Tendency and the Revolutionary Labor Movement (MSR) on the one hand, and by the Independent Worker Unit and the Proletarian Line on the other.

DEMOCRATIZATION UNDER THE BANNER OF "REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM"—The modern Mexican working class is the product of postrevolutionary traditions of state economic intervention and state corporatism. Those sectors of the working class concentrated in traditional state-owned industries (including railroads, electrical power generation, and the petroleum industry) belong to a "revolutionary nationalist" tradition[8] that reached its zenith in the 1930s, a tradition that also had adherents within the established regime and the authoritarian "social state."[9] The best example of revolutionary nationalism in the labor movement was provided by Lombardo Toledano's leadership of the CTM in its early years. Lombardo promoted a type of political unionism (within the confines of the state) that sought to shape major national policy decisions while promoting workers' interests. The "National Unity Pact" (a popular-front strategy of the early 1940s) and the "Industrial Labor Pact" (a wartime alliance between labor and business in the mid-1940s) were products of this approach. Revolutionary nationalism found fertile ground in the electrical and railroad workers' political and cultural traditions. Despite some initial setbacks, revolutionary nationalism became the principal theme of insurgent unionism in the early 1970s.

The labor insurgency that emerged during this period sought to exploit two overlapping crises in Mexico: the crisis of the social state, and that of a system of capital accumulation rooted in a fixed technological base and industrial relations pattern. The first crisis involved the nature of the state itself, with important repercussions for the economy and for the structure of social control. It was a crisis of the Mexican state's identity, its capacity to intervene in the economy, and its ability to act in favor of subordinate classes, the traditional means of regulating class conflicts. The second crisis was material, rooted in fiscal problems that exhausted the state's capacity to reconcile political legitimacy and capital accumulation. Thus the labor insurgency became more than an alternative to state policies designed to overcome these crises; it represented a movement in favor of a "new-old" mode of state operation and economic organization.

When the democratic movement began in the early 1970s, it was not clear what group would establish leadership among newly independent unions. Labor opposition movements at Chrysler and Ayotla Textile were suppressed, and protesting transport drivers (members of the Free Labor Unions [SOL]) never had the capacity to lead a broader movement. But the position of railroad union dissidents was strengthened when Campa and Vallejo were released from prison, and the MSF was formed in 1971 with representatives from twenty-nine of the union's thirty-six local sections. In the same year, conflict broke out over control

[8]The hegemony of "revolutionary nationalism" refers to its centrality as the prevailing ideology, as manifested in the postrevolutionary regime's political orientation and its dominant social base. However, reference to this concept does not imply that all the social forces involved with the policies and orientations associated with revolutionary nationalism are necessarily committed to it ideologically.

[9]See de la Garza 1984a. The term "social state" refers to a state that recognizes social classes and their inherent contradictions and that mediates class conflicts through social spending and economic intervention, as well as through the creation of a corporatist system of organizational control.

of the electrical workers' collective contract. On November 14, 1971, dissident electrical workers organized the first national demonstration (meetings were held in forty cities) in solidarity with labor movement independence.

The intensity of the democratic struggle increased markedly in 1972, although it was still concentrated in the electrical and railroad industries and in the Revolutionary Teachers' Movement. The use of violence in support of MSF protest actions (takeovers of local unions and other confrontations led to military intervention) undermined the railroad workers' leadership role in the democratic movement, and primary leadership passed to Rafael Galván's electrical workers. The second demonstration in solidarity with labor movement independence was held in forty-eight cities on January 27, 1972, at the instigation of dissident electrical workers, the MSF, and the Authentic Labor Front (FAT), and a third national demonstration was held on April 27, 1972. Galván's Mexican Electrical Workers' Union (STERM) and the MSF formed the National Workers' Union (Unión Nacional de Trabajadores) later that same year, and diverse worker, peasant, student, and popular front organizations blossomed throughout the country (especially in Puebla, Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Durango, and Zacatecas).

The key year during the first wave of insurgent unionism was 1976, but it was also the beginning of the end for the period's predominant labor group. There were major mobilizations in support of the Democratic Tendency in Guanajuato, Mexico City, and Tampico, and insurgent unionism was particularly important in major industrial centers such as the Mexico City area, Ciudad Sahagún (Hidalgo), Cuernavaca, Toluca, Monterrey, and Puebla (but excluding Guadalajara). Protest movements were led mainly by workers in major industries (railroads, electrical power generation, automobile manufacturing, steel, and the chemical industry); commercial and agricultural workers were largely absent from this process. As democratic mobilizations spread across the country, they were confronted by increasingly violent resistance—especially in the Mexico City metropolitan area and in Guerrero. Protests by transportation workers met with particularly strong resistance by employers and the state. The Democratic Tendency called a strike against the Federal Electrical Commission after Galván's leadership group was expelled from the SUTERM, but the strike was declared illegal and the army thwarted a planned work stoppage—marking the beginning of the end for the Democratic Tendency.

The Democratic Tendency made its strongest attempt to become a viable alternative to "official" national labor organizations when it joined with some two hundred other groups to form the National Front for Popular Action (FNAP). The FNAP represented a major change in opposition tactics vis-à-vis the "official" labor movement. The labor

opposition initially sought to create alternative organizations to represent workers' interests, but the FNAP was formed not as a parallel body but as a forum for diverse opposition currents sometimes *within* "official" unions. In addition to the Democratic Tendency, the FNAP included the National Autonomous University of Mexico's Union of Academic Personnel (SPAUNAM), former members of the Independent Labor Front (Frente Sindical Independiente) in Yucatán, the Association of Sugar and Sugarcane Producers (Asociación de Productores de Caña de Azucar), and several unions in the Mexico City area. The FNAP adopted the most important sections of the Democratic Tendency's 1975 "Declaration of Guadalajara" (calling for democratic unionism, the nationalization of strategic industries, the restructuring of existing state-owned enterprises and increased state economic intervention under worker supervision, and the creation of sectoral and national industrial unions) as its statement of principles. However, the FNAP exercised little real influence and soon disappeared. It never received support from important labor sectors such as steel and automobile industry workers, and only a small proportion of its member organizations were labor unions.

By giving precedence to national political conflict over class struggle, and by adhering to the belief that the Mexican regime might develop along noncapitalist lines, the Democratic Tendency, the FNAP, and later the Revolutionary Union Movement maintained their intellectual ties to leftist movements active in the 1930s and 1940s. They joined Lombardo Toledano in characterizing Mexican society as semicolonial, and they adopted the view that revolution in developing countries is necessarily rooted in nationalism. The means of unifying revolutionary goals, therefore, was the reactivation of the Mexican Revolution and its goals of social welfare and nationalized industry. Those groups that pursued union democracy under the banner of revolutionary nationalism believed that nationalizing industry would lead toward socialism. This perspective revealed a profound inability to comprehend that capitalism and planning had been compatible for decades, as had capitalism and state social welfare policies. But by the 1970s in Mexico, that compatibility had entered a period of crisis (Jiménez 1975).

STRUGGLES BY "STABILIZING DEVELOPMENT" WORKERS—A second labor opposition movement developed parallel to "revolutionary nationalist" groups after 1975. It emerged on the factory floors of modern industry (including the automobile manufacturing, steel, metalworking, and consumer durables industries), the pillar of capital accumulation during the period of stabilizing development. Although this movement responded in part to wage and employment concerns, it mainly represented workers' resistance to pressures imposed by the production

process in modern industry. "Stabilizing development" workers[10] were generally younger and more socially diverse than those associated with revolutionary nationalism. Unlike their counterparts in some state-owned enterprises, these workers generally lacked direct experience with Cárdenas-inspired political ideologies because the industries in which they were employed had relatively little importance in the 1930s. This was the case, for example, with the automobile manufacturing and telephone industries.

The first democratic opposition movements in this class formation emerged in the automobile manufacturing industry. Protests broke out at Diesel Nacional (the state-owned car and truck manufacturing operation) in 1961, at Chrysler in 1969–70, at Nissan and Volkswagen in 1972, and at Ford in 1975. Between 1970 and 1978 the automobile industry experienced thirty-nine strikes (J. Rodríguez 1981). Although General Motors and Ford were most affected by strike movements, none of the ten major automobile manufacturing companies escaped strikes and/or other conflicts related to the struggle for union democracy. Protesting workers in these firms pursued issues closely linked to the labor process (including demands for reductions in the intensity of the production process, shorter workdays, and improved health and safety conditions) (Roxborough 1983). As a result this section of the democratic labor movement developed characteristics, forms of organization, and political orientations that set it apart from "traditional proletariat" groups.

The democratic labor movement began somewhat later in the steel and telephone industries. The steel industry in particular was characterized by considerable technological heterogeneity, and antiquated plants came under increasing pressure to raise productivity. Worker dissatisfaction erupted at several major plants as management intensified production rates and the pace of technological change. Although foreshadowed by a 1971 conflict over management's dismissal of workers, the struggle for democratic unionism at Fundidora de Monterrey began in earnest in 1972. Workers vigorously resisted company efforts to restructure production, which involved layoffs, the elimination of contract provisions favorable to unionized workers, changes in wage scales, and increased reliance on subcontractors. Because the work force was highly concentrated, conflicts that began in specific departments quickly became the focus of generalized worker unrest, and conflicts over democratic governance and working conditions increased in intensity through 1978–79 (M. Rodríguez 1982).

[10]The term "stabilizing development worker" refers to employees in technologically modern industries in which labor-employer conflicts typically focus on productivity and work process issues. These workers are generally young, and they are employed in firms created since the 1940s. They have less contact with—and less historical memory of—the nationalist and reformist struggles of the 1930s.

The democratic labor groups in the steel industry allied themselves with diverse political groups, but the Proletarian Line proved most successful at placing shopfloor demands in a national political context (San Juan 1984). Proletarian Line emphasized organization in the workplace as the central element in labor negotiations, and it had an important role in democratic struggles at the Altos Hornos de México (AHMSA) and Lázaro Cárdenas-Las Truchas steel plants. For example, when a rank-and-file protest broke out at AHMSA in 1975–76 over workers' access to fringe benefits and profit sharing, Proletarian Line was able to win control over the local union. In 1977 LP led the union in its first strike against company management in forty years (see Garza 1982; Basurto 1983) and unrest quickly spread to other steel plants and mining companies as Proletarian Line pushed for the development of stronger workplace organizations in local unions. Similarly, when a strike broke out at the Las Truchas plant in 1977, department-level worker assemblies rapidly developed as a rival power base to the "official" union leadership's executive committee. This shift in internal union power facilitated the Proletarian Line's victory in the 1978 union elections (Bizberg and Zapata 1984). However, the LP's presence in the industry came under vigorous attack by the National Mexican Mining and Metalworkers' Union (SNTMMSRM), and it finally lost control over the Las Truchas union following an unsuccessful strike in 1979.

The Proletarian Line also played an important role in the telephone industry. A democratic opposition movement won control over the national union in 1976 when workers repudiated the incumbent leader's support for an unfavorable wage settlement. The telephone workers' union seceded from the PRI (see Basurto 1983) and the democratic leadership emphasized the development of department-specific wage and work rule agreements. The Proletarian Line supported this strategy and advocated shop-level worker assemblies, permitting it to develop a broader support base among the rank and file.

Despite the significance of political organizations such as the Proletarian Line, the Independent Worker Unit was the most important organization active among "stabilizing development" workers. The UOI, founded on April 1, 1972, was not a unifying political force on the order of the Democratic Tendency. Nevertheless, it had greater organic cohesiveness than the TD and did not lose its importance when the labor insurgency began to subside in 1976–77. Despite the fact that its support was limited principally to the Mexico City metropolitan area and the central region of the country, the UOI was the most important independent labor organization in Mexico in the late 1970s, embracing nearly fifty individual unions and approximately 150,000 workers in such key activities as automobile manufacturing, metalworking, textiles, rubber production, aviation, and land transport. It represented workers at a number of major companies, including Volkswagen, Nissan, Diesel

Nacional, Renault, Mexicana de Aviación, Euzkadi, Rivetex, and Acros. The UOI was successful in negotiating the first contract that specified a forty-hour work week (in the rubber industry), and the first independent national industrial union was organized under its auspices (see Basurto 1983; Acedo et al. 1979). The UOI continued to expand as the "revolutionary nationalist" labor opposition declined after 1977. The UOI's strategy was to free unions from "official" labor organizations and, at the same time, to avoid contact with other currents within the democratic labor movement. Its struggles were generally marked by a greater focus on economic questions and labor conditions than on attempts to influence national policies (Sánchez 1980), allowing the UOI to declare itself apolitical and independent of all political parties.

In summary, then, the first wave of union democratization between 1970 and 1980 was comprised of two overlapping currents. The "revolutionary nationalism" current (including the MSF, FAT, and university unions) began to decline noticeably after 1977. The ideas associated with this tendency were adopted by the SUTIN (as well as by the CTM and the Labor Congress, which in 1978 renewed their calls for strong state economic intervention and an increased role for union-owned enterprises), and thus continued to live on. However, because of its dominant ideological position in the independent labor movement, the gradual decline of the revolutionary nationalism current induced a general deterioration of the labor insurgency.

In contrast, the "stabilizing development" current was shaped more by the characteristics of the production process in modern industry (especially by companies' efforts to increase productivity despite the limits imposed by social relations and technology) than by political concerns. Worker resistance to increased work intensity and the incipient restructuring of labor-employer relations proceeded at a different rate than the democratic labor movement as a whole. As a result, although the "stabilizing development" current emerged late in the first wave of union democratization, its influence continued to grow even after other tendencies began to decline.

THE SECOND WAVE: CRISIS AND RETRENCHMENT IN THE LABOR OPPOSITION

Mexico's deepening economic crisis shaped the evolution of the labor insurgency after 1980 (de la Garza 1987). The first manifestations of this crisis appeared in the mid-1970s, although López Portillo's 1976 "Alliance for Production" program (involving organized labor's agreement to limit wage demands and the private sector's commitment to control prices) and petroleum export revenues contributed to economic recovery and rapid growth between 1978 and 1981. But growing public-sector indebtedness and serious government budgetary problems led to national financial crisis in 1982. The de la Madrid administration's (1982–88) attempts to "rationalize" the public sector included large-scale dismissals of government employees, the sale or closing of many state-owned enterprises, and a sharp reduction in public-sector investment. The government also enforced a highly restrictive wage policy that, in a period of record inflation rates, resulted in the rapid erosion of workers' income. For example, the average weekly industrial wage (in 1970 pesos) fell from 964.87 pesos in 1982 to 327.28 pesos in 1985.

The consequent decline in domestic demand exacerbated productivity problems and forced managers in private firms, state-owned companies, and transnational enterprises to undertake a broad program of industrial restructuring. Specific measures included massive layoffs, the elimination of contract clauses that limited the rate of production to protect workers' interests, the decentralization of production facilities so as to undercut unions' bargaining leverage, the closing of inefficient plants, and widespread attacks on democratic labor leaderships. Discontent among "stabilizing development" workers increased sharply between 1980 and 1983, although the labor opposition played a largely defensive role during this period. The Nuclear Industry Workers' Union, the last remaining representative of the revolutionary nationalism movement, also failed to slow this general assault on labor; it suffered a definitive defeat in June 1983.

As was the case with the first wave of union democratization, there was no strict correlation between wage patterns and labor protests after 1980. The years in which wage levels fell most sharply, 1984 through 1986, were marked by relatively few democratic protests. Strikes led by democratic unions peaked in 1982 (see figure 7.2). Nor was violence against democratic movements as severe a problem as it had been in the 1970s; the level of violence was high in 1984 and 1986, but in 1983—the year in which democratic movement activity was highest—only about 10 percent of all conflicts involved violence (versus 44 percent in 1978). A higher proportion of democratic struggles was concentrated in the automobile manufacturing, steel, metalworking, and mining industries between 1980 and 1983 than in the 1971–80 period (see table 7.3), although many of these conflicts were defensive in nature and eventually ended in defeat for democratic unions. University unions were also very active in the early 1980s, while the land transportation, textile, and chemical sectors were much less so. One important new development was the emergence after 1982 of democratic movements among bank workers and public-sector employees in response to government austerity measures and large-scale dismissals. As in the 1970s, over half of all democratic conflicts during this period were concentrated in the Mexico City metropolitan area, where protests peaked in 1983 (see table 7.4).

RESISTANCE AND RETRENCHMENT AMONG "STABILIZING DEVELOPMENT" WORKERS—The automobile manufacturing industry once again figured prominently in developments affecting "stabilizing development" workers in the 1980s. The industry underwent a process of radical restructuring as transnational firms constructed high-technology production facilities in northern states (especially Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, and Sonora) and shifted their focus from the depressed domestic market toward the export of motors and finished vehicles to the United States. Workers at these northern plants were young and without significant previous industrial experience, and they were hired at lower wages and under less favorable contract conditions than their counterparts in older manufacturing plants (Sandoval 1986). At the same time, company managers aggressively restructured existing production facilities in central Mexico. Nearly ten thousand workers lost their jobs in vehicle manufacturing between 1981 and 1986. Wages and benefits were cut, work shifts shortened, and job descriptions redefined as management sought to lower production costs and increase production flexibility. Ford closed two of its three plants in the Mexico City area in 1985–86, and during a long strike in 1987 it temporarily closed its Cuautitlán plant, then rehired many of its former workers there at lower wages and fringe benefits and under much less favorable contract terms. Renault also closed its automobile manufacturing plant at Ciudad Sahagún, Hidalgo, in 1986.

Democratic unions unsuccessfully resisted these management initiatives. The General Motors union in Mexico City fought a bitter 106-day strike in 1980 to win legal control over the firm's new northern plants, but this movement ended in defeat (Aguilar 1980). Similarly, workers conducted two long but ultimately unsuccessful strikes to prevent the closing of the Renault plant (see Aguilar 1983; Concheiro 1987). The UOI was also incapable of resisting the combined impact of economic crisis, retrenchment in the automobile industry, and its conscious isolation from other opposition movements, and by the late 1980s it had lost virtually all of its former strength.

A similar process occurred in the steel industry. Restructuring began in the industry in the late 1970s as the Lázaro Cárdenas-Las Truchas project was completed, AHMSA built a new plant, and Fundidora de Monterrey modernized several operations. However, as crisis enveloped the world steel industry in the early 1980s and Mexico's economic situation worsened, severe retrenchment shook the industry. As in the case of the automobile industry, large-scale dismissals occurred and work agreements were substantially revised to increase both efficiency and management's control over the production process. The most dramatic moment came in 1986 when the de la Madrid administration closed the state-owned Fundidora de Monterrey as part of its program to reduce the state's economic role (Ortega 1986).

Despite a number of triumphs in the 1970s, democratic union leaderships came under great pressure as a result of industrial restructuring. The Proletarian Line was particularly affected by these changes because its position in the industry was closely linked to union influence over the production process, and the LP slowly lost ground as "official" unionism regained control in several major steel plants.

THE REMNANTS OF REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM—Although the Democratic Tendency finally disappeared in 1978, the Nuclear Industry Workers' Union adopted the mantle of revolutionary nationalism. However, the SUTIN never rivaled the Democratic Tendency in numerical strength (in 1983 it represented only four thousand workers), strategic influence, or the prestige of its national leadership. The SUTIN was also forced to struggle against the de la Madrid administration's policy of reducing the state's economic role. Moreover, the SUTIN's actions reflected a change in strategy by the labor opposition: rather than rejecting "official" unionism outright and attempting to develop parallel labor organizations (as the Democratic Tendency did in the early 1970s), by the late 1970s and early 1980s many opposition groups had concluded that the "official" union movement reflected an important segment of the working class and a potentially valuable ally, and as a result elements such as the SUTIN joined the Labor Congress (see, for example, Woldenberg 1980).

Nonetheless, the SUTIN played an active role in challenging the government's austerity program. In 1982 it joined the STUNAM and other unions influenced by leftist political organizations to form the National Committee for the Defense of the Popular Economy (CNDEP), and in 1983 it took the lead in the formation of the Union Unity and Solidarity Pact (PAUSS). Neither of these coalitions lasted long, but they were important participants in the June 1983 national protests against government austerity measures and debt repayment policy.

THE *COORDINADORAS*: A NEW TENDENCY?—The formation of the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE) in December 1979 marked the emergence of a new kind of opposition organization in Mexico. The CNTE originated in the Revolutionary Teachers' Movement of the 1970s and a teacher-led protest movement in Chiapas against inflation and the social dislocation caused there by development of the region's petroleum resources in the late 1970s. Teacher discontent with the National Education Workers' Union (SNTE) leadership and growing concern about salary levels sparked widespread protests throughout Mexico, but the most active teacher opposition movements were located in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero (Hernández 1983). Thus the CNTE was the outgrowth of a grassroots movement rather than the creation of any particular political organization. It

brought new strategies to the labor opposition movement (such as the June 1980 national march and sit-in), and it unified other popular organizations under its leadership—although it was not as successful in this role as either the TD or the UOI.

The CNTE has remained active throughout the 1980s, but its national influence has gradually diminished.[11] Its social base in southern Mexico is predominantly among rural teachers who sometimes are important leaders in their local communities, but the CNTE has not been able to link its concerns regarding salaries and internal SNTE practices to the grievances of rural marginals and peasants. This combination of disparate goals could transform an internal union protest movement into a broader opposition coalition involving peasants and villagers. Indeed, the CNTE's greatest potential strength is its close ties to popular groups at the local level. On the other hand, the organization's principal weakness is that it has failed to develop a stronger territorial base.

CONCLUSION

As the democratic labor opposition movement evolved after 1970, different factors determined which organizations played a leading role. "Revolutionary nationalism" groups sought to restore the guiding principles of the Mexican Revolution (Navarro 1983). The failure of this approach represented a crisis of the historical pact linking the postrevolutionary Mexican state and the organized working class, especially those segments of the working class concentrated in state-owned industries. Revolutionary nationalism will live on as part of the labor movement's political culture, but it is no longer relevant to the political and material conditions of contemporary Mexico. The triumph of technocratic political and economic orientations and the state's inability to serve as a mediating force to limit class conflict make unlikely the rebirth of an opposition movement organized around the concept of revolutionary nationalism.

The influence that "stabilizing development" workers exercised over the independent labor movement was, in turn, undercut by industrial restructuring in leading modern industries. The strength of this group lay in its ability to articulate the workplace problems associated with complex manufacturing processes. But the redefinition of plant-level labor-employer relations as part of post-1982 industrial restructuring—changes in work rules (the elimination of contract clauses and departmental regulations limiting work intensity and the movement of workers on the shop floor), the introduction of new technologies and organizational forms, setting wages and fringe benefits by high-level govern-

[11] In early 1989 the CNTE experienced a considerable resurgence as a result of its success in mobilizing the support of broad urban sectors, a new development in the history of the independent labor movement.

mental decree rather than through plant- and industry-level bargaining—reduced unions' influence in the production process in many industries and seriously weakened democratic leaderships.

It remains to be seen whether new movements emerge in these sectors that are capable of formulating organizational, political, and ideological models to challenge capital for control over the redefined production process. It is important to note in this regard that the process of economic restructuring has produced new tendencies within the working class. For example, a new proletariat has emerged in northern Mexico comprised largely of young women without extensive labor or union experience and often represented by labor organizations that are paternalistic in style. In contrast, workers in firms that have successfully modernized their operations represent a segment of the working class with much more experience; they have had mixed success in confronting the political and economic challenges of the late 1980s. The National Telephone Workers' Union (STRM) and the recently formed Federation of Goods and Services Unions (Federación de Sindicatos de Bienes y Servicios), in whose creation the telephone workers' played a leading role, are the most prominent examples of this phenomenon within the "official" organized labor movement.

The CNTE, however, represents the type of opposition organization that has performed best during Mexico's post-1982 economic crisis. The CNTE is a simplified, territorially based organization that promotes grassroots democracy and independence from political parties. It reflects more directly than previous opposition groups the tensions between a highly centralized state and an increasingly complex civil society. Similar opposition groups include regionally organized electoral protest movements in northern Mexico and ecology movements in the state of Veracruz (where the development of the petroleum industry has seriously damaged the environment) and in Mexico City (arguably the most polluted urban area in the world). Organizations such as these cut across class lines and are less vulnerable to factory closings and worker layoffs than traditional democratic opposition groups. They are also less prone to co-optation and control by the state.

The economic and political conditions prevailing in contemporary Mexico significantly limit the potential of working-class struggle. However, crises in the traditional social state and in industrial production reveal the new potential of opposition movements rooted in civil society, an arena that the corporatist state is less and less able to control. Numerous societal groups might eventually be able to unite and direct future democratic opposition movements, but their leadership capabilities must be demonstrated in the course of concrete struggles. Mexican society, currently in a process of realignment and rebirth, is open to new alternatives. Material constraints are real, but they do not fully predetermine future options. The capacity of political and social

forces to understand their own potential has always been considerable; it is perhaps even greater now.

REFERENCES

Acedo, Blanca, et al. 1979. "UOI." In *Segundo Coloquio Regional de Historia Obrera*, vol. 2. Mérida, Yuc.: Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero Mexicano.

Aguilar, Javier. 1980. "Historia sindical de General Motors y la huelga de 1980," *Revista A* 1:1 (September-December): 3–16.

———. 1983. "La industria del automóvil; crisis e incertidumbre laboral," *Solidaridad* 92 (December): 15–25.

Alafita, Leopoldo. 1977. "Sindicalismo independiente en México: Algunas indicadores, 1971–1976." In *Memoria del Primer Coloquio Regional de Historia Obrera*. México, D.F.: Centro de Estudios Históricos del Movimiento Obrero.

Basurto, Jorge. 1983. *En el régimen de Echeverría: Rebelíon e independencia*. Vol. 14 of *La clase obrera en la historia de México*, edited by Pablo González Casanova. México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno.

Bizberg, Ilán, and Francisco Zapata. 1984. "Conciencia obrera y participación sindical en Las Truchas," *Estudios Sociológicos* 2:4 (January–April): 29–50.

Camacho, Manuel. 1980. *El futuro inmediato*. Vol. 15 of *La clase obrera en la historia de México*, edited by Pablo González Casanova. México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno.

Campos, G., and G. Sánchez Daza. 1986. "Modernización: Negociación y respuesta obrera en Telmex y Ferronales." Paper presented to the "Primer Coloquio sobre la Crisis, Procesos de Trabajo y Clase Obrera," Jalapa, Veracruz, October.

Concheiro, Luciano. 1987. "Los trabajadores de Renault y su sindicato: Cronología, 1978–1986," *El Cotidiano* 15 (January–February): 40–43.

De la Garza, Enrique. 1984a. *Contribución al estudio del estado social autoritario*. México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa.

———. 1984b. "Perspectivas del sindicalismo en México." In *México: Presente y futuro*, edited by Jorge Alcocer. México, D.F.: Ediciones de Cultura Popular.

———. 1987. "Crisis y reconversión industrial en México," *Brecha* 3.

De la Garza, Enrique, et al. 1986. *El otro movimiento estudiantil*. México, D.F.: Extemporáneos.

Garavito, Rosalbina. 1986. "Homogeneización salarial, reproducción de la fuerza de trabajo." Paper presented at the "Primer Coloquio sobre la Crisis, Procesos de Trabajo y Clase Obrera," Jalapa, Veracruz, October.

Garza, Dionisio. 1982. "Democratización el la Sección 147 del Sindicato Nacional Minero-Metalúrgico." Paper presented at the seminar "Los Sindicatos Nacionales y la Política Mexicana," Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City.

Hernández, Luis. 1983. "Viva la CNTE, fuera los charros," *Cuadernos de Insurgencia Sindical*.

Jiménez, Rubén. 1975. "El nacionalismo revolucionario y el movimiento obrero," *Cuadernos Políticos* 5 (July–September): 47–64.

Leal, Juan Felipe. 1976. *México: Estado, burocracia y sindicatos*. México, D.F.: El Caballito.

Navarro, Fernando. 1983. "Arturo Whaley y Antonio Gershenson: El principio de resistencia," *El Buscón* 10 (July–August): 25–38.

Ortega, Max. 1986. "El cierre de FUMOSA." Paper presented to the "Primer Coloquio sobre la Crisis, Procesos de Trabajo y Clase Obrera," Jalapa, Veracruz, October.

Peláez, Gerardo. 1978. *Situación actual y perspectivas del movimiento sindical en México*. Puebla: Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.

Pérez Arce, Francisco. 1979. "La insurgencia obrera, 1970–1976." In *Segundo Coloquio Regional de Historia Obrera*. Vol. 2. Mérida, Yuc.: Centro de Estudios Históricos del Movimiento Obrero Mexicano.

Quiroz, José Othón. 1981. "Tecnología, recomposición capitalista y composición de clase en la industria automotriz terminal." In *Segundo Seminario Internacional: Crisis, nuevas tecnologías y procesos de trabajo*. México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Rodríguez, Javier. 1981. "El movimiento sindical en la industria automotriz, 1970–1978," *Iztapalapa* 2:5 (July–September): 67–94.

Rodríguez, María Elena. 1982. "Los trabajadores siderúrgicos en Monterrey." Paper presented at the seminar "Los Sindicatos Nacionales y la Política Mexicana," Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City.

Roxborough, Ian. 1983. "El sindicalismo en el sector automotriz," *Estudios Sociológicos* 1:1 (January–April): 59–82.

San Juan, Carlos. 1984. "La insurgencia sindical en la Sección 147." Mimeo. México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Mimeo.

Sánchez, Sergio. 1980. "Sobre la UOI." In *Memorias del Encuentro sobre Historia del Movimiento Obrero*. Vol. 3. Puebla: Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.

Sandoval, Jorge. 1986. "Consecuencias de la introducción de robots en la industria automotriz mexicana." Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa. Mimeo.

Tello, Carlos. 1979. *La política económica en México, 1970–1976*. México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno.

Woldenberg, José. 1980. "Notas sobre la burocracia sindical," *Revista A* 1:1 (September–December): 35–48.

Woldenberg, José, and Raúl Trejo. 1984. "Sindicatos y proyecto nacional en la crisis de hoy." In *México: Presente y futuro*, edited by Jorge Alcocer. México, D.F.: Ediciones de Cultura Popular.