Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico

GENDER, CLASS, AND MEMORY

ROBERT F. ALEGRE

Foreword by ELENA PONIATOWSKA

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THE MEXICAN EXPERIENCE

William H. Beezley, series editor

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Set in Dante by Laura Wellington.

Para mi madre, Angelica Alegre, mi chascona, Caroline Cooper Torres, y mi chicoca, Penelope Cooper Alegre

Scatter your tears, they're good for the crops.

—Denis Johnson, *Tree of Smoke*

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Foreword

Elena Poniatowska
Translated by Robert F. Alegre

A locomotive at full speed arrives at the station, giving rise to a spectacle that will forever mark the life of a child. As a child Robert Alegre witnessed the train cross the wide lonely plains of Chile and followed its endless trajectory until he reached the station. Perhaps it is in his childhood that we can locate his passion for the subject of the book you are about to read: *Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico: Gender, Class, and Memory.* The railroad movement in Mexico has been the subject of many books, but none as passionately written or meticulously documented as this one. His passion is evident in his concern for every one of the *ferrocarrileros* he interviewed. He expresses empathy for them not just as informants but also as individuals, members of a network the country has buried. In writing about them, Alegre exhumes Mexico's railway men.

When Robert Alegre arrived at my home one afternoon, I never imagined he would commit himself so fully to the Mexican rieleros — and not just to them but also to the women who worked in the system and fought beside their men. The years 1958 and 1959 are fundamental to the history of Mexican workers because Demetrio Vallejo Martínez, the protagonist of Alegre's excellent book, inspired exploited workers in other industries to engage in civil disobedience, paralyzing industries across the entire country.

The railroad union was the bravest of the labor guilds, the most audacious, and the most intelligent. The men were distinguished by their machismo. *"Nobody beats me."* To be a rielero was to be a win-

ner, to be triumphant. All the battles in Mexico in 1910 were won on the trains. Pancho Villa considered them his enemy, which is why he dynamited them, their metal blown to pieces above combatants and soldaderas.

Robert Alegre arrived as a young researcher from the United States. Charming, he smiled. His questions regarding the oaxaqueño leader Demetrio Vallejo were profound. I had no way of knowing that he would become the first-rate intellectual he has become, nor could I know that he would exhaustively research archives and books for all that has been written about the railroads. It was a pleasure to watch him interview workers and union members for hours, joining their cause. Never had these men had such a receptive audience, a person who stood in such solidarity, as they had in the author. In addition to Mexico City, he lived in Puebla, where the Railroad Museum holds the main archive of Mexican railway life and of the movement of 1958.

Robert Alegre visited men and women in their homes, capturing the words of old rail men with praiseworthy accuracy. He traveled to Oaxaca to interview the most committed activists. I did not know that he would be such an obsessive researcher, one who would not stop until he had recovered a reality so important to Mexico: the reality lived by the *ferrocarrileros*.

We Mexicans believed that the *sexenio* of President Adolfo López Mateos (1958–64) would bring a return to the ideals of our great president Lázaro Cárdenas, that workers and *campesinos* would come to gain respect along with a dignified salary. We Mexicans believed that López Mateos, a man of the Left, admirer of Vasconcelos, would favor the working class. Instead he jailed Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa, the leaders of the movement, and they remained imprisoned for over eleven years. Postrevolutionary Mexico decided to persecute its great social movements, forgetting what had caused Madero, Villa, and Zapata to take up arms, forgetting what they owed to the millions of Mexicans who died in combat during the fraternal war that began in 1910.

Before the revolution, Mexico was already a country covered with tracks, and it was the railroad that brought Mexicans together and

brought progress to the provinces. It was a source of pride to be a railroad man. The woman who married one thought she would be treated like a queen. Railroad families were fundamental to the life of the country. The station chief ruled over an entire world, able to communicate via the telegraph to every corner of the earth, to every town in the country, no matter how isolated.

The Mexican Revolution took place on trains, and the locomotive is its grand protagonist. Losing the rails as a form of transportation is one of the great tragedies that occurred in our country. The railroad movement was a starting point in the democratic life of Mexico, breaking with the revolutionary government's vision of modernism and modernity. It instructed us to end our aping of the culture of the United States.

Mexico's powerful men forgot that to govern is to usher in change; they never managed to transform the public ethic, the basis of democratic values. Instead they perpetuated inequality and violence against the poorest Mexicans. And they went further still—perpetuating violence against women.

We should be grateful to Robert Alegre for accounting for women in his book, especially for focusing on railroad women, who had been overlooked by virtually everyone before this study.

The *ferrocarrileros* were nationalistic. They had fought in the revolution and driven the locomotives that pulled boxcars hauling horses and men and women ready to throw themselves into battle. Casasola's photographs show us soldiers and soldaderas on freight car rooftops. These photos remind us of the tragedy of having lost the iron horse as a form of transportation. It's been a great loss to the progress of the country, because it gave our country the infrastructure necessary for the most important advances: communication systems and, for that matter, education.

Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico: Gender, Class, and Memory will be greatly stimulating for any reader. I find the book exciting and, what's more, it *moves* me. Thanks to Alegre I travel thousands of kilometers over rails that link factories to markets, far and wide, throughout my great country. I travel from Sonora to Yucatán, from henequen

plantations to northern mines, and witness how pueblos arise along the tracks and how women approach a window where Robert Alegre sits writing and writing. The women reach to him through the open window, their trays carrying covered apples, sweet bread, and warm corn.

If the train is an iron horse, Alegre is the writer who has demonstrated he can tame the metal machine, who can enter any station in the world and sit along the tracks. Beside his locomotive, all who have passed have raised their eyes and said: "Look, there goes the train. The conductor is an expert. He knows his subject from top to bottom, as do all great historians. The name of the driver is Robert Alegre."

Acknowledgments

I arrived in Mexico in July 1999 at the age of twenty-four with no experience in the country and little knowledge of its history. My aim was to gather enough material to write a thesis on a railroad strike that occurred in the 1950s. That master's thesis, completed at the University of Arizona, turned into a doctoral thesis at Rutgers University, which forms the basis of this book. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who have helped me over the years.

I would like to begin by extending my deepest gratitude to family and friends. My brother, Sergio Alegre, and my sister-in-law, Deana Alegre, were always there for me, whether it was by offering me a place to stay or by giving me a place to leave my books. I am enormously grateful for all that they have done for me. My father, Roberto Alegre, kept encouraging me to write like Ken Follett so that I could make big bucks off of this project. I am unlikely to turn this book into a major motion picture, but I nevertheless appreciate his faith in me. His love of books has been his greatest gift to me. My large extended family in New Jersey, Chile, Belfast, and Portland, Maine, provided all the love and warmth I needed. My mother-in-law, Vicki Tarbell, has provided me with a great deal of love, support, and encouragement over the years. When a Greyhound rolled out of Belfast with a case containing my oral histories, it was Vicki who sped down the highway to track it down. It has been wonderful to get to know Tom and Megan Abercrombie and to watch Maggie and Gridley grow up.

I want to acknowledge all of the support that my close friends in

Jersey provided over many years. Chris Antonini, Michael A. Cintron, Giancarlo Guardacione, David Pomponio, and Chris Romano have provided countless rides, iced coffees, Diet Cokes, and other random gifts to help me get by as a broke student.

This book is dedicated to two women, my mother, Angelica Alegre, and my partner, Caroline Cooper Torres, as well as one future "big mujer," Penelope Cooper Alegre. My mother realized early on that a life of reading and writing would bring me the most pleasure and fulfillment, and she encouraged me when others wondered why I would choose to live in relative poverty and spend my weekends in the library instead of downtown. Caroline has made the last ten years blissful, and she continues to challenge me intellectually and politically. I look forward to a lifetime together. Finally, I wake up every day eager to find out what Penelope will say and do. I love you, chicoca.

None of my writing on the subject could have been completed without the help of rieleros and rieleras, the men and women who worked for the railroad company and continue to live in railroad neighborhoods. Before I ever visited an archive in Mexico, I took a walk in the railroad neighborhood of Colonia Guerrero in Mexico City. It was there that I first met the late Juan Colín, a rielero who was still involved in political activism despite his advanced age and poor health. Later, in Puebla, I would meet two more politically engaged rieleros, José Jorge Ramírez and Antonio Monero. These men provided me with a wealth of information and introduced me to retired rieleros to interview. Later I would meet a group of fiery reileras in Oaxaca. I thank them all for telling me their stories.

I first visited the Centro de Documentación e Investigación Ferroviarias, the principal railroad archive in Puebla, in 1999. Over the years, I developed a close working relationship with its knowledgeable staff. Isabel Bonilla Galindo, Patricio Juárez Lucas, Covadonga Vélez Rocha, and José Antonio Ruiz Jarquín went out of their way to suggest materials. More important, they taught me basic facts about the daily operations of the industry. Our discussions were invaluable. Three scholars at the Benemérita Autónoma de Puebla also offered assistance. Gloria Tirado made her personal archive available to me and assured me of

the importance of the topic when I was first starting out. When I returned to Puebla in 2003, David LaFrance introduced me to Roberto Vélez Pliego, the director of the Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities, who granted me the status of visiting researcher. John Mraz gave me a private viewing of his railroad photographs from the 1950s and provided me with a copy of his documentary on rieleros. I thank them for their generosity.

During my 2003–2004 research year in Mexico, I made a few wonderful friends. Elena Poniatowska, the prominent novelist, invited me to her house when I called her out of the blue to find out if she had conducted interviews with Demetrio Vallejo. When I told her that I was working on a history of the railroad movement, she invited me over to talk. Coincidentally, she was working on a novel on the railroad strikes and wanted me to have a look at the manuscript. Over the years, we have had long conversations about everything from politics and history to fatherhood and family life. I could not thank her enough for granting me copies of the interviews she conducted in the 1970s with Demetrio Vallejo and his niece Lilia Benitez. They have been invaluable sources. In Puebla, Manuel Sánchez Porton, a local journalist and raconteur, gave my partner and me a place to stay for a month. His embellished and longwinded stories of his university years in the 1960s were highly entertaining. Nassira Gamo, a mutual friend, encouraged us to rock and roll.

I ended my research trip in Mexico City where I had the pleasure of meeting Gladys McCormick, Stephanie Ballenger, and Hal Jones. Our conversations on contemporary politics, history, and theory were enjoyable and edifying. I want to thank Gladys for putting up with my questions, for which she always seems to have an informed answer. I would also like to thank Hal for inviting me to give a talk on my project at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard.

Much of what works in this book is a result of exchanges and advice I've had with professors and fellow graduate students at the University of Arizona and Rutgers University. At Arizona, Bert Barickman broke me into the rigors of the profession through his high standards;

I came to admire his devotion to teaching. Kevin Gosner offered sage advice and direction, while Donna Guy suggested that I incorporate an analysis of gender into my project. And Joel Stillerman helped me think about the social theory that undergirds Latin American labor historiography. At moments when I was not reading and writing, I enjoyed learning about Brazil from Joanne Tucker and Jeremy Willette and talking politics and poetry with Brendon Bush.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Bill Beezley, who first encouraged me in 1999 to write about the railway movement. I entered his seminar planning to write a paper about the Chilean student movement of the 1960s. At the end of the semester, I was fully committed to this project. Even after I left Arizona to go to my home state, Professor Beezley continued to offer advice, write letters in support of applications, and encourage me to finish. It is a great pleasure to have this work included in the Mexican Experience series, which he edits.

Most of my graduate study took place at Rutgers University, where I came to work with a remarkable group of professors specializing in a number of fields. No one did more for me than Mark Wasserman, my dissertation director. His astute comments, attention to detail, and insistence on clarity improved every page of my dissertation. I also came to admire his ability to balance work and family. I look forward to reading his new work.

Professors at Rutgers provided me with models of politically engaged teaching and scholarship. Temma Kaplan came to Rutgers during my second year in the program and has been a steady source of advice and wisdom ever since. I could not thank her enough for all the time she spent discussing this project and for insisting that I write clearly and passionately. Her own work is a source of inspiration. A colloquium on representation with Joan W. Scott changed the way I thought about history and politics. That course led me to minor in theory, for which I spent a summer reading about poststructuralism with the assistance of Scott. I thank her for taking time out of her busy summer to mentor me and for offering advice on applying for grants. I also came to profit considerably from Jim Livingston's creative readings of Hegel and Marx, and as my minor field co-examiner, he too took time out of his

summer to guide my study in social theory. Nancy Hewitt, whose own work on women's history and labor history I greatly admire, provided insightful comments on my dissertation. Finally, I'd like to thank Ginny Yans for her smart advice and sustained encouragement.

A small group of graduate comrades made New Brunswick more enjoyable. My intellectual growth was tied to countless conversations with a core group of Latin Americanists, which included Kristen Block, Andrea Campetella, Sandra Mendiola, and Greg Swedberg. Daniel Wherley became a good friend whom I could always count on for witty commentary. Jonathon Wharton hooked me up with a job teaching at Steven Institute of Technology. I thank them each for their friendship and support during those years and look forward to reading their work in the future.

Two groups outside of Rutgers helped me think through issues of writing and historiography. I want to thank the cohort of the 2000 Oaxaca Summer Institute on Mexican History, especially Eileen Ford, Michael Matthews, Andrew Paxman, Ageeth Sluis, and Eddie Wright-Rios. Bill French and Ann Blum provided insight throughout the month. I would especially like to thank Andrew Paxman for his critique of the introduction. I am very much looking forward to his biography of William Jenkins.

The committed group of historians associated with the Conference on the History of Women and Gender in Mexico has provided a wonderful environment to share my work. I always have a blast at the conference, which is in large part due to the people who attend. Mary Kay Vaughn and Heather Fowler-Salamini have provided a great deal of encouragement throughout the years. And I have profited from conversations with María Teresa Fernández-Aceves, Elaine Carey, Susie Porter, and Francie Chassen-López, among many others. I would especially like to thank Susie Porter for her critique of chapter 2.

In addition to these colleagues, I would like to thank the readers who reviewed this manuscript, Susan Gauss and Monica Rankin read the manuscript twice. Each gave extensive and extremely valuable critiques. Their own work is essential for understanding postwar Mexico. Also thanks to the staff at the University of Nebraska Press, including

former editor Heather Lundine, Bridget Barry, Ann Baker, and copy-editor Elaine Otto. Barry Carr and Eric Zolov gave helpful advice during the latter stages of my writing.

In 2009, I moved to Portland, Maine, and joined the faculty of the University of New England, where I have found support from a wonderful group of colleagues. I would especially like to thank Paul Burlin, Steve Byrd, Elizabeth De Wolfe, Brian Duff, Julia Garrett, Jean Murachanian, Jennifer Tuttle, and Eric Zuelow for sharing their ideas on teaching, writing, and publishing. I am also grateful to the Seeds working group, particularly Ali Ahmida, Jenny Denbow, Brian Duff, Susan McHugh, Alicia Peters, Michelle Steen-Adams, and Eric Zuelow, for providing comments on the introduction. Elaine Brouillette, our administrative assistant, makes everything run smoothly. She does an amazing job. And I would like to thank David Carey Jr. at the University of Southern Maine for his friendship and for all of his advice over the past few years.

My education and research have been funded by a number of institutions. A University of Arizona Graduate College Minority Fellowship, along with two years of tuition remission, enabled me to complete my master's degree. Two Rutgers University Excellence fellowships provided a stipend and tuition remission that allowed me to concentrate fully on my doctoral studies. A Tinker Foundation fellowship financed my first trip to Mexico in 1999, which led to a Fulbright-Hays fellowship that financed a year of research in Mexico. A Hewlitt Foundation fellowship provided funding for a month in Oaxaca. The University of New England provided monies to acquire the photographs. I want to thank Diana Montano for locating and attaining the images.

The most important institutional support came before I entered college. In 1993, I was accepted to Stockton State College through the Educational Opportunity Funding program. EOF, which is underfunded and often criticized, helps students from poor families, and often with a poor academic record, enter and graduate college. I had barely graduated high school, but the officers at EOF gave me the chance to go to college. I will be forever grateful to Tony Bethel, Stephen Davis, and Barbara Tilelli for the opportunity.

Abbreviations

BUO: Bloque Unidad Obrera
CEDIF: Centro de Documentación e Investigación Ferroviarias
CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
CTM: Confederación de Trabajadores de México
CUT: Central Única de Trabajadores
CROM: Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana
DFS: Dirección Federal de Seguridad
FNM: Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México
IMF: International Monetary Fund
PCM: Partido Comunista Mexicano
POCM: Partido Obrero Campesino Mexicano
PP: Partido Popular
PRI: Partido Revolucionario Institucional
STFRM: Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de México
UMM: Unión de Mecánicos Mexicanos


QUERÉTARO
HIDALGO
PUEBLA
BAJA CALIFORNIA NORTE
SONORA
Empalme
CHIHUAHUA
COAHUILA
MEXICO
TLAXCALA
Mexico City
BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR
NUEVO
Monterrey
SINALOA
DURANGO
LEÓN
Puebla
MORELOS
ZACATECAS
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SAN LUIS POTOSÍ
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1. Mexico

Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico

Introduction

The Working Class in Cold War Mexico

Geraldo dreams of steam-powered locomotives like those on which he toiled decades ago. He misses their roar and whistle. Retired now for over twenty years, Geraldo awakes from this recurring dream with nostalgia for a life he once lived. The steam engines are long gone, but for this moment he feels the rush of elation he had as a child accompanying his father to the rail yard. It is the same thrill he would later experience when he took a job himself at the yard. At nights he welcomes those old locomotives. "Good God, the steam engines are back. I pictured them as if it were yesterday," he explains. "I dreamed of the steam engine I worked on."[1]

If paternal influence and the lure of locomotives drew men like Geraldo Niño Mendes to railroad work, working-class women held no illusions that they would one day cross the country atop a rolling locomotive. The railroad workers' union, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de Mexico (STFRM), and the company, the Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México (FNM), prohibited women from working in yards or on trains.[2] With few opportunities to strike out on their own, many women opted for the path chosen by Ruth Ramírez, who, following in her mother's footsteps, married a railway man, or *rielero*.[3] When Ramírez married José Jorge Ramírez in the 1940s, rieleros could count on an independent union to fight for regular wage increases. But within a few years, national economic priorities and political machinations would result in a co-opted union, frozen wages, and economic hardship for railway families. Opening her arms to indicate her disappoint-

ment with her shabby dwelling, Ramírez laments, "When I married a *ferrocarrilero*, I expected something more. You expect something more than this. But no, nothing."[4] This book is about rieleros and rieleras like Geraldo Niño Mendes and Ruth Ramírez, whose lives the railway industry permeated. The story of their struggle to make a better life captures a pivotal moment in post–World War II Mexican history.

After World War II, Mexico entered an era of unprecedented economic growth and seeming prosperity.[5] The political system was stable, with the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) firmly entrenched in power. After the tumultuous years of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), when land reforms redistributed nearly 50 million acres of land to hundreds of thousands of landless peasants, labor unions won better wages and working conditions, and the government stood up to foreign oil companies, expropriating them in 1938. The ruling party had shifted rightward, committed to less radical economic development policies. Presidents Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–46), Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946–52), and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952–58) sought to modernize Mexico through state-led industrialization, but they did so by reining in labor, even arresting the most outspoken activists.

Underneath the surface glow of prosperity and modernity there lay growing discontent among workers who felt that Mexico's progress had come at their expense. Working-class families, in particular, felt the impact of inflation, which eroded the hard-won gains of the 1930s, facilitated by widespread union corruption. From 1948 to 1958, PRI-appointed STFRM officials, disparagingly known as *charros*, collaborated with PRI and railroad officials to freeze wages for the rank and file. In doing so, they helped keep freight rates on cargo low and thereby assisted strategic industries that were critical for industrialization, such as mining. Along with PRI officials, STFRM charros instructed the rank and file to accept low wages for the good of the country's economy. In exchange for their compliance, the PRI backed these officials despite allegations that union elections were rife with fraud; in addition to receiving better pay, charros promoted their friends to management positions and rubbed shoulders with FNM and PRI officials at social gatherings.

In 1958 and 1959 discontent erupted when members of the STFRM staged a series of strikes that constituted the most threatening grassroots working-class movement and the largest labor strikes since those during the revolution of 1910. Railroad workers went on strike three times during those two years, demanding not only higher wages but also the transformation of their union into a workers' democracy, which required the end of the collaborationist union politics that had helped solidify postwar PRI rule. After relatively conciliatory negotiations during the first two strikes that resulted in considerable concessions for railroad workers employed by the government-operated FNM, President Adolfo López Mateos (1958–64), unwilling to negotiate better terms for workers employed by private railroad firms, crushed the third strike by calling in the military on March 26, 1959. However strictly strikers couched their demands on the progressive Constitution of 1917, they found that — in the context of the Cold War — exercising their constitutional right to organize and strike appeared radical, even subversive.

Railroad Radicals joins recent historical studies in revising postrevolutionary political history by interpreting grassroots mobilizations as contingent contests between citizens and national politicians.[6] The outcome of the railroad movement was not predetermined by the structure of state-labor relations but was the consequence of individual and collective decisions. Writing on the women's movement in the 1930s, historian Jocelyn Olcott warns us against holding an a priori assumption that corporatist politics resulted in the defeat of grassroots movements: "A narrative focusing too explicitly on the end . . . would ignore the small and large victories and their legacy for women's organizing."[7] A number of recent studies have shown how subaltern actors resisted the centralizing state, but this historiographic trend has until now sidestepped the role that the working class played in contesting PRI rule and has not yet told the story of labor's "small and large" postwar victories. While it is true that the national government eventually suppressed the railway movement by sending police and military officers to arrest striking workers, railway families won tangible benefits. Political scientists who have written about the railway strikes

have focused "on the end," using the repression as evidence of the supposedly inevitable failures that workers have endured with the PRI in power.[8] This study peeks into that contingent period when workers still stood a chance at victory.

I argue that the railroad movement reflected the contested process of postwar modernization, which began with workers demanding higher wages at the end of World War II, led to the imposition of government cronies as heads of the STFRM in 1948, and eventually culminated in the strikes of 1958 and 1959. The struggle signaled railroad men and women's desire for meaningful political inclusion in the planning of the postwar political economy, which in practical terms included the capability of democratically elected union officials to lobby the national government on behalf of the rank and file. This desire equally motivated thousands of working-class men and women in other industries to mobilize and strike during this same period. In laying bare dissidents' ambitious political objectives, *Railroad Radicals* contests studies that depict the movement as motivated primarily by economic concerns.[9]

I understand the railway strikes as a national effort to democratize union and national politics, propelling a movement that incorporated workers from the most powerful industrial unions. It is my contention that the fight for democratic unionism threatened to deliver a direct blow to the PRI's postwar economic agenda by opening the way for the rank and file to demand through the STFRM a redistribution of economic resources. After winning a wage increase in July 1958, railway workers fought to democratize their union, to wrest it away from charros in cahoots with the FNM and PRI. Democratic unionism, they believed, was a right enshrined in Article 123 in the Constitution. The desire for democratic unionism spread among the strongest unions in 1958, as teachers, along with petroleum, telegraph, and electrical workers, sought to depose charros running their respective unions. *Railroad Radicals* captures how these men and women sought to reestablish the power of the working class in postrevolutionary Mexico. In doing so, it enlarges our understanding of Mexican labor history, making clear that gains won by labor during the revolution continued to shape state-labor relations in the postwar era.[10]

During the course of the movement, dissident men and women politicized informal relationships at work and in neighborhoods. Friends, acquaintances, and neighbors became political comrades, mobilizing around class and gender identities based on individuals' relationship to the industry. On streets and worksites, railway men and women created a repertoire of habits, behaviors, and acts that they came to associate with being a proper rielero or rielera. In 1958 and 1959 they drew on these identities, as well as the affective ties made by years of living together, to create a cohesive movement.

Railroad community culture cannot be fully understood without assessing the profound importance that gender identity played in everyday life and during political struggles. Rieleros developed a form of heightened masculinity specific to railway work, as they came to associate their manliness with the mastering of a mobile industrial experience critical to national development and international capitalism. By striking for higher wages and union autonomy they displayed the strength and courage key to their individual and collective masculine identity. Railway women like Ramírez did not reject railway patriarchy but rather made use of it, appropriating masculine codes to pressure rieleros to do right by their families and join the movement.

This study gives rieleras a narrative place in the history of the railroad industry by analyzing the role that gender played at workplaces and in neighborhoods and by chronicling how they participated in the movement. In doing so, it underscores the importance of looking beyond electoral politics to understand how working-class women engaged the public political sphere. *Railroad Radicals* writes rieleras into the history of postwar resistance to PRI hegemony, while detailing how a patriarchal order centered on the industry placed limits on their everyday social and political expression. Ruth Ramírez and thousands of other rieleras participated in the railway movement, but they did so within social regulations set by a patriarchal culture specific to railway work and to railway communities.

From the onset of my research, I faced institutional and social obstacles to learning about rieleras. First, archival records, reflecting the gendered character of railroad work, focus almost exclusively on men.

FNM records are useful for understanding how the company sought to create respectable spaces for rieleras and rieleros, such as sporting events and dances, but they tell us little about how women experienced these events. Obtaining interviews with women also proved daunting. I found that elderly rieleras in Puebla and Mexico City would not speak to me without their husbands' approval, but husbands often explained that their wives knew nothing of union politics and were therefore not worth interviewing. In most cases, they refused to grant me an interview with their wives. Those men who allowed interviews usually insisted on remaining in the room. Such was the case with my interview with Ruth Ramírez. Fortunately, in the summer of 2004 I learned through a source that a community of widowed rieleras remains active in Matías Romero, Oaxaca, so I took an overnight bus to the former railroad town. In Matías Romero, I recorded the stories of elderly rieleras who continue to view themselves as *vallejistas*—supporters of Demetrio Vallejo, the unlikely leader of the railway movement of the late 1950s.

The failure to document rielera postwar activism is in part a consequence of historians' depiction of women as a conservative force in Mexican political history. As John D. French explains, "Female activism in Mexico was . . . likely to be identified with piety, anti-bolshevism . . . and the defense of traditional gender roles."[11] This caricature helped explain why women did not gain suffrage rights until 1953. In 1994, a collection of essays edited by historians Heather Fowler-Salamini and Mary Kay Vaughn presented a much more complex portrayal of rural women's political participation. Fowler-Salamini and Vaughn encouraged us to investigate how "During the revolution and its aftermath, [social and ideological processes] widened women's spaces [and] subtly altered the patriarchal norms governing women's behavior," a task assumed by Olcott in *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico*.[12]

Through a study of women's activism at the local, regional, and national levels, Olcott expands the sphere of women's political participation in the early twentieth century, debunking the caricature of Mexican women as reflexively conservative. Olcott looks beyond the narrow

issue of suffrage, for women "inhabited citizenship less as a collection of specific laws than as a set of social, cultural, and political practices." Women activists "recod[ed] the cultural meanings of women's labor and community involvement, reframing them as . . . public, civic duties that demonstrated their political capabilities."[13] Rieleras practiced revolutionary citizenship in precisely this manner. When they took to the streets, they inhabited a public, political persona in defense of a civic good, the railway family.

The importance of family to railway communities can be found in company documents. The FNM kept dossiers on every rank-and-file employee from the day they submitted an application to, in most cases, the day they died. The basic application form listed the employee's place of residence, household size, age, and level of education as well as their height and weight. Drawing on this information, we know that the typical railway household included nuclear and extended families. Often a father and a son worked for the FNM and were responsible for providing for mothers, grandparents, brothers, sisters, and even aunts. These webs of dependency became politicized during the strikes, with extended family members joining the struggle. Therefore, in assessing the strength and impact of the movement, we must take into account that for every man or woman on strike, there were nuclear and extended family members who stood to gain or lose depending on the outcome. Since many of these individuals joined demonstrations, hosted clandestine meetings, or in other ways aided the movement, we can be sure that *familias ferrocarrileras* strengthened at the neighborhood level the commitment of STFRM members.

Moreover, I maintain that a dichotomizing Cold War idiom created the conditions for the repression of the movement. I conceptualize this idiom as a dialectical movement joining ideas and actions. It combined a logic that pitted communists against Mexicans and labor against capital (and vice versa) with a set of practices that both shaped and enacted this logic. Acts and ideas, words and deeds, informed one another. This Cold War idiom circulated as rhetoric in newspapers, magazines, and government speeches, as well as in conversations on streets and in homes. Protests, arrests, and physical confrontations emerged as the

material manifestation of ideological divisions. Discourse provided analytical frames for igniting—and perceiving—material acts, such as strikes and arrests, while these actions provided content for newspaper articles and editorials, as well as official speeches, to name a few communicative acts. Both workers and their detractors engaged in physical and discursive exchanges. Both took to the streets, and both used written and oral communication to spread their message to the broader public.

Finally, this study presents the Mexican reception of the global Cold War, showing in particular how it shaped state-labor relations. In contrast to diplomatic studies on the Cold War, this is a street-level story whose protagonists were both national politicians and everyday men and women whose names have been lost to history. The Cold War idiom that they fashioned shaped everyday political discourse, becoming part of the public common sense. Drawing on anticommunist rhetoric that predated World War II, the PRI and other critics casted all detractors of government policy as agents of subversion, intent on overthrowing the state and eradicating capitalism in favor of Soviet-style communism. In practice, red-baiting facilitated the implementation of postwar pro-business industrialization policies, for all opponents could be reduced to communists and hence enemies of the state. The government, the FNM, and the press justified the arresting of men like Geraldo Niño Mendes by accusing them of working in cahoots with Marxist operatives to overthrow the government.

The War on Labor

The PRI's postwar economic policies, which halted or even rescinded labor gains, was all the more surprising to the working class because they had come to view themselves as victors of the revolution of 1910. Scholars have rightly viewed the revolution as largely a peasant struggle for land, but industrial workers joined military ranks and mobilized for workplace reforms with no less zeal than their peasant counterparts.[14] The Constitution of 1917 bore the imprint of labor's direct action, leading to "the most complete and progressive labor laws in the Western Hemisphere."[15] Labor's gains were introduced in Article

123, which when codified in 1931 legalized the right to organize and strike. Dissidents in 1958 and 1959 grounded the legality of their strikes on precisely this constitutional guarantee. After their arrest in 1959, strikers invoked Article 123 to build their defense in court.

The revolution led to a heightened sense of nationalism among railway families.[16] Railroad workers had fought in the revolution and had driven the locomotives that carried military personnel to battles across the country. Photographs, folklore, and oral traditions placed railway workers at the center of revolutionary struggle. The struggle bore fruit in 1933, when workers formed the STFRM. The union strove to attain for workers benefits implicitly promised by the revolution, notably regular wage hikes and a greater measure of workplace control. In the process, the STFRM became a linchpin for the modern Mexican state.

Scholars agree that by supporting Cárdenas, the STFRM helped the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (established in 1938 and changed to the PRI in 1946) solidify its dominance over national politics.[17] When he came to power in 1934, Cárdenas formed a mutually beneficial alliance with the STFRM and other national unions. Cárdenas and STFRM leaders shared the conviction that the government was responsible for generating economic growth and modernization through public investment in industry. To be sure, his commitment to the Mexicanization of the economy became legendary when he completed the expropriation process of the FNM in June 1937.[18]

Cárdenas's populism did not come without a cost to labor, however. In 1938 he turned the administration of the railroads over to the STFRM, creating the Workers' Administration. While the move empowered the union, it also placed the responsibility of disciplining workers on union leaders; furthermore, in exchange for government support, the STFRM and other industrial unions were expected to comply with presidential policies.[19] Cárdenas therefore laid the foundation for state-labor corporatist relations; presidents Ávila Camacho, Aléman, Ruiz Cortines, and López Mateos built on this foundation throughout the 1940s and 1950s, backing labor leaders who supported PRI policies and reined in the rank and file.

The discontent among railway workers that emerged in the late 1950s had its roots in the national government's postwar economic policies. Ávila Camacho took advantage of the patriotic fervor stoked with World War II to create a pact between national labor syndicates and the government, in effect deepening the PRI's close ties to industrial unions that Cárdenas had established. Working-class people and the unions that represented them supported the Allied cause by postponing demands for wage increases, thereby facilitating industrial production and helping to foment national unity. Mexicans of all classes stood united against the fascist threat. The largest unions showed their cooperation when in 1942 they signed the Labor Unity Pact, accepting wage concessions and promising not to strike in order to support the war effort, though scholars have noted that workers continued to strike throughout the 1940s.[20]

When the war ended, STFRM leaders, who were still independent and beholden to the rank and file, expected the government and railway companies to reward members with higher wages for the sacrifices they had made. The STFRM urged the PRI to increase the wages of the rank and file. In addition, the STFRM advocated for the government to invest in national industrialization. By pressing for more and better jobs for workers, the STFRM sought a larger share of the economic pie for the working class.

Labor's proposals coincided with the election of Miguel Alemán in July 1946. Alemán shared labor's desire for a modern, industrialized Mexico, but his industrialization policies conflicted with those supported by the country's powerful unions. When Alemán drew on an emergent nationalist current that condemned the U.S. government for what appeared to be an imperialistic trade policy, he spoke the same language as militant labor leaders who criticized the United States for insisting that Mexico open its doors to American products. But it soon became clear that Alemán's nationalist leanings were aimed at protecting Mexican industrialists, not working-class men and women.

The Cold War context enabled Alemán to fashion increasingly nationalistic industrial policies. This was especially true once it became clear that the United States would fail to provide the necessary aid

and loans to help foment Mexican industrialization. Mexican officials felt slighted because they thought that the United States would reward Mexico for having assisted them during the war.[21] Alemán responded to this rebuff by initiating an Import-Substitution Industrialization strategy to promote and protect Mexican industries through tariffs and trade controls. At the same time, Alemán took advantage of the U.S. government's need for Mexico's assistance in hemispheric politics by cleverly positioning himself—and Mexico—as an enemy of communism. In doing so, he was able to implement trade policies that protected Mexican industrialists from their northern neighbors without being labeled a communist. Contesting the United States in this way enabled Alemán to place himself in the revolutionary nationalist tradition.

The Cold War also provided the ideological framework for the PRI's shift toward political conservatism and the decreased importance accorded to workers' rights.[22] President Alemán's administration was part of a hemispheric shift away from populist governments that had advanced state-financed industrialization combined with voting and labor rights. These governments reined in parties and movements that sought to expand economic opportunities for the working and middle classes.[23] Instead, governments elaborated policies of industrialization that resulted in reduced wages for the working class. Cold War fears enabled politicians, industrialists, and social commentators to develop a language and logic to ostracize and dismiss critics by labeling them communist.

In March 1947, President Harry Truman articulated what has since become known as the Truman Doctrine. Before a joint session of Congress, the president called on the United States to provide financial assistance to Greece and Turkey in order to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining a foothold in the region. After explaining the urgency of the situation in Greece and Turkey, the president said that the United States had a responsibility "to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."[24] The speech had ramifications far beyond Greece and Turkey, for it outlined a new approach to dealing with the Soviet Union and the specter

of communism—namely, the United States aimed to contain the influence of the red menace by directly assisting neutral countries. The Truman Doctrine marked a watershed in hemispheric political culture. The anticommunist surge had a profound effect on American labor, as the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act enabled the president to terminate strikes deemed dangerous to the health of the nation, an ominous precursor to the hemispheric push against labor. In Latin America, governments took advantage of the heightening of anticommunist fears to abandon liberal democracy for more authoritarian forms of government.[25] As historian Greg Grandin explains, beginning in 1947, Latin American "reform parties lost their dynamism, while governments intervened against work stoppages, passed legislation restricting the right to strike, and outlawed or repressed Communist parties."[26] Clearly, Cold War geopolitics strengthened the hand of conservative forces while weakening progressive movements throughout the hemisphere, as the working classes found themselves increasingly marginalized.

Working-Class Insurgency during the "Mexican Miracle"

The period between 1940 and 1960 has customarily been viewed as one of economic stability and social peace that enabled a "miracle" in economic growth.[27] As historian Arthur Schmidt points out, "Between 1940 and 1970, the Mexican economy expanded more than sixfold, and manufacturing output rose by a factor of ten."[28] Compared with other Latin American countries that experienced guerrilla mobilization and even political coups, Mexico between 1940 and 1968 appeared remarkably stable to outside observers or to those deaf to working-class and peasant complaints, as government officials boasted of the country's "stabilizing development." It was not until the government's massacre of student protestors in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Square before the Olympics of 1968 that middle-class discontent with the PRI broadened, leading to increased militancy, including the rise of guerrilla groups in the countryside.[29]

Well before 1968, however, many among the working class had become disillusioned with the PRI's course of economic development and had already experienced government repression, with the mili-

tary arresting strikers and imprisoning family members. Moreover, Alemán's ambitious industrialization programs and policies aimed at capital accumulation masked working-class resentment over drops in real wages and government influence over industrial unions. The rosy portrayal of the country's economy in the press and by politicians did not reflect the hard times faced by workers and their families. Frozen wages on those working in sectors key to national development, such as railway and electrical workers, meant that they now could buy less food and clothing at the market. For them and many other working-class families, the "miracle" appeared to be a mirage.[30]

Considering how widespread working-class mobilizations were in the 1950s, why have scholars neglected to assess the importance of these movements in contesting the postwar political and economic order? Part of the answer lies in historians' justified focus on the revolution of 1910, the first social revolution in the twentieth century. Up until the late 1990s, an overwhelming number of studies in Mexican history focused on the revolution.[31] The period after 1940 was left to political scientists, who agreed that corporatist national politics defused grassroots movements.[32] According to these studies, local and national politics after the revolution became a game played by elite politicians, business people, and corrupt union leaders. Working-class mobilizations, including the railway movement, were seen as rare and unimportant exceptions in large part because they were so often suppressed by paying off union leaders or by arresting protestors.

Up until now, the scholarly literature on the railway movement has drawn primarily from Mexican newspapers, the writings of labor leaders, and assorted pamphlets and other materials of political parties. Scholars in Puebla have collected oral histories of rank-and-file workers, but they have yet to be integrated into a scholarly account of the strikes in its multifarious dimensions.[33] Secondary works draw heavily from Demetrio Vallejo's *Las luchas ferrocarrileras que conmovieron a México*, a biased but highly informative blow-by-blow account of the strikes. Political scientist Antonio Alonso's *El movimiento ferrocarrilero en México, 1958–59*, published in 1972, remains the best of these works. Alonso sheds light on the role of political parties and labor leaders on

the strikes, but he fails to explore how everyday sociabilities in neighborhoods and workplaces enabled rieleros and rieleras to forge a collective identity that would prove crucial to achieving solidarity during the movement.

Two notable works in political science have drawn on *El movimiento ferrocarrilero en México* to comment on the railway movement's role in contesting the hegemony of the PRI in the late 1950s. Evelyn Stevens's *Protest and Response in Mexico* moved beyond analyses of the "decision making process [within] authoritarian regimes" to focus on the strength of movements that countered the PRI.[34] Although she did little more than present a standard narrative of the railway strikes, she took the important step of incorporating Alonso's conclusions into the U.S. political scientist literature, suggesting that scholars should acknowledge the railway movement's role in challenging the postwar political order. Kevin J. Middlebrook has documented in greater detail how the railway movement challenged PRI rule in the late 1950s.[35] Unfortunately, Middlebrook concludes that the repression of the movement was inevitable, failing to fully assess the gains that workers won, such as higher wages and free medical care for families. These gains stayed on the books after the repression, serving as reminders that the independent railway movement came through for *familias ferrocarrileras*.

The line of research inaugurated by Alonso and continued by Stevens and Middlebrook overlooked the political clout flexed by rank-and-file railway men and women. Middlebrook's *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* does argue that political scientists should factor into their analyses the political pressure put on the state by "society," but he depicts labor disputes as battles between union leaders, company officials, and national politicians. *Railroad Radicals* offers a corrective to these institutional studies by placing everyday railway men and women at the center of the story and by arguing that their everyday interactions made possible the solidarity necessary to organize a national railway movement.

One of the main goals of my book is to convey the broad character of working-class activism during the 1950s. Indeed, the railway move-

ment did not unfold in a vacuum. It received critical support from other disgruntled and mobilized working-class families fighting their own battles over workplace and community issues. It would not be an exaggeration to state that 1958 and 1959 saw what amounted to a working-class insurgency in Mexico City along with major sustained demonstrations in large and small urban centers, such as Monterrey, Puebla, Guadalajara, Matías Romero, San Luis Potosí, and even the far northern cities of Empalme and Nogales.[36] Unions in sectors critical to national economic development—including petrol, electrical, and telegraph workers—fought to oust imposed charro officials while demanding that the PRI put the needs of workers ahead of those of business.[37] Labor disturbances were so widespread that in Mexico City even matadors walked off the job.

These protests extended those of the early 1950s, when campesinos and workers in Morelos followed Ruben Jaramillo in fighting for access to land and for greater control of the workplace. During the same period, Miguel Henríquez Guzmán led a faction that split from the PRI over what they considered an abandonment of revolutionary principles. Like mobilized industrial families in 1958, the Jaramillistas and Henríquistas wanted the promises of the revolution fulfilled.[38] Hence the railway movement was certainly not the first to oppose the PRI's postwar economic policies. However, while mobilized campesinos, teachers, and industrial workers caused PRI officials varying degrees of inconvenience and displeasure, only railroad workers could shut down the national economy by striking. As a consequence of their strategic place in the national and international capitalist order, the railway movement constituted the most threatening of the working-class and peasant struggles that unfolded in the postwar era.

Memory Entrepreneurs and the Uses of Oral History

Evidence countering institutional studies that portray the working class as impotent can be found today on streets surrounding defunct railway stations throughout the country. When the PRI privatized the FNM in 1996, investors moved to close most of the stations administered by the state, but the people who toiled on the rails continue to

live in what not too long ago were considered to be railway neighborhoods. In Mexico City, elderly rieleros and rieleras congregate in small groups across the street from the Buenavista station in Colonia Guerrero, where government offices distribute biweekly pension checks. They tell jokes, reminisce about the "good old days" before diesel engines made steam ones redundant, complain about the privatization of the industry, and generally enjoy each other's company. I found similar scenes of gathering railway men and women in Puebla and Matías Romero, two cities that housed major repair yards and stations. I met on porches and in backyards with rieleras in Matías Romero and in community halls and living rooms in Puebla. It is on those streets and in those houses that I came to know many of the men and women whose stories inform and enliven my analysis.

I use oral histories to give a rich portrait of how these grassroots railway men and women participated in the struggle. My study joins those by scholars of working-class communities who have found oral history to be an indispensable methodology, because the voices of workers and their families are often muffled or altogether absent in institutional sources. Oral history has given us access to working-class cultures in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Guatemala, among other places, but this methodology has yet to be rigorously applied to the study of the Mexican working class or of Mexico in general.[39] I use oral histories to provide a view into the intimate, everyday lives of railway men and women, teasing out the intricate habits, routines, and self-perception of people at work and in neighborhoods. In addition, I question the process of memory itself, delving into the meanings of conflicting remembrances. Most notably, interviews have enabled me to write the first study to incorporate rieleras into the history of the industry. The story of their participation is well known in railway neighborhoods, but neither academic nor popular historians have ever told it.

Feminist scholars have found oral history particularly fruitful for subverting or complementing traditional narratives that elide the role of women.[40] With tape recorder and notebook in hand, they have inscribed the stories of a wide range of Latin American women, from Argentine meatpacking workers to Colombian Catholic textile workers,

into the broader narrative of twentieth-century Latin American history. In analyzing the role of rieleras in the railway movement, I hope to add to our knowledge of women's activism in Mexico and in Latin America more generally. Without oral histories, their story could not be told.

I recognize that the interview is a political act. The oral historian invites the interviewee to shape the history of a community, an industry, and even a country. If the histories of communities, institutions, and nations are products of political debates and struggles, then the interviewee becomes a voice in a discursive contest over how to understand and narrate the past. Since rieleras and rieleros were part of a highly politicized community, it should come as no surprise that I found interviewees to be quite aware that they were participating in a historical debate with implications for understanding the present, such as corruption within the present-day PRI or the impoverishment of many railway families. Indeed, in many cases these men and women expressed their desire for the public to know about the courageous struggles they organized against the PRI as well as the hardships they still endure.

The most politicized of these informants are what sociologist Elizabeth Jelin has called a "memory entrepreneur," a social agent "who seek[s] social recognition and political legitimacy of *one* (their own) interpretation or narrative of the past" (italics in the original).[41] Demetrio Vallejo and his niece, Lilia Benitez Vallejo, are two such memory entrepreneurs interviewed by the prominent journalist and novelist Elena Poniatowska in 1972. Poniatowska visited Vallejo regularly during his eleven-year imprisonment in Lecumberri Prison as a result of spearheading the railway strikes, and she became well acquainted with his activist niece. These transcripts—each over two hundred pages long—provide a window into the making of railway activists and reveal insider information of what was said and done by dissident leaders during the movement. As with all of the interviews used in this study, those of Vallejo and Benitez teach us about how people lived "offstage," places obscured by official documents, as well as the meanings that people attributed to everyday past experiences. But they do

so with a political goal in mind: exposing FNM and PRI officials as stale, corrupt, and illegitimate.

There is no easy way to reconcile the interviewee's undisclosed narrative goals with the interviewer's objective of attaining an evidentiary base. My approach has been to treat each interview as a text with multiple layers of meaning.[42] Specifically I ask what are the interviewee's motivations, what was and what is their place in the community, what does the text say about how they want to be viewed, and what does their story tell us about everyday railway culture and politics? Motivations complicate the task of teasing out the transcript's meanings, but they do not invalidate the interview as a historical source. For example, when rieleras insist that they did not participate in the movement and then, in their next breath, describe how they aided workers hiding in mountains by bringing them food or by housing them so they could elude authorities, I conclude that they participated in the movement but that social and cultural factors invalidate their form of participation. Buttressed by scattered newspaper, archival, and oral sources, their involvement becomes a "fact" in the story, and the sociocultural ideology and practice — i.e., railway patriarchy — that negates their form of participation becomes a subject of further analysis.

To say that interviews are produced with subjective interests in mind and are imbued with emotional residues is to recognize what is true of all archival sources. Love letters, court cases, police reports, congressional records, embassy reports — these all express subjective opinions produced within a sociocultural web that shape their articulation. As when assessing traditional sources, I check oral histories against each other as well as against archival sources. When a piece of information provided by an interviewee is either too farfetched or simply uncorroborated by other sources, I use the opportunity to delve into the meaning of the discrepancy or simply warn the reader that the information cannot be corroborated but is nevertheless of interest for what it might tell us about the collective memory of the rank and file.

Such is the case in my analysis of the *charrazo* of 1948, the infamous episode when deposed union official Jesús Díaz de León led a coup

against STFRM leadership and, with the support of President Alemán, became the secretary general of the union. Officials compliant to the government went on to control the union from 1948 to 1958. In chapter 1, I argue that the charrazo symbolized the culmination of a struggle between workers and company and political administrations over how best to industrialize the country. Chronicling the founding of both the industry and of organizations in defense of workers' rights, I show that World War II and the postwar period provided an opening for PRI presidents Ávila Camacho and Alemán to reintroduce policies that would modernize the industry at the expense of workers' salaries and workplace control. These debates were recorded in the minutes of the FNM consultants' meetings, which in the 1940s brought together FNM, STFRM, and state officials to discuss issues ranging from modernizing yards and rails to workers' salaries. These minutes became available after the privatization of the industry in 1997 and have never before been used by scholars. Together with union and company publications, they give us a blow-by-blow account of the debates regarding railroad and national modernization. In addition, I argue that the historical memory of the charrazo has been complicated by the now prevalent view that charros and their supporters were traitors. Rather than present testimonies as straightforward facts, I ask what conflicting oral histories reveal about the event and its impact on the railway community.

Interviews have also been instrumental in enabling me to reconstruct power dynamics within workplaces and neighborhoods. Rieleros and rieleras had a sense of community identity that was rife with tension and conflicts. Women and men cared about one another, but they also fought, bickered, and cheated on one another. Workplace and neighborhood hierarchies exacerbated conflicts and disagreements, which scholars have come to view as constitutive of community.[43] This study demonstrates how railway work—and the railway movement—led to both camaraderie and discord. By plotting the strategies that workers used to overcome or suppress these tensions, I present the movement as a contingent process determined by grassroots activists' organizing.

I show in chapter 2 that despite workplace hierarchies and interpersonal disputes, rieleros and rieleras developed intimate relationships and a cohesive collective culture based on everyday interactions in neighborhoods and at workplaces. I refute the corporatist literature that characterizes labor as docile and impotent during the 1950s by making use of reports from the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), oral histories, workers' dossiers, and the union paper to show that the early 1950s witnessed the birth of a rank-and-file resistance movement to *charro* rule. These dissidents became leaders when the railway movement exploded a few years later. Founded in 1947 by President Alemán, the DFS placed agents at public union meetings and on streets near worksites. As historian Tanalis Padilla points out, these agents often exaggerated threats in order to justify their existence, but even so, the sources are important because they helped shape state policy.[44] In the case of the railroad workers, agents proved to be remarkably prescient.

Chapters 3 and 4 detail the complexity of the world rieleros and rieleras made as well as the obstacles they overcame to organize a mass movement. I show how squabbles, dissent, and repression within the railway community could be productive, enabling rieleros and rieleras to build a national movement. By physically punishing or ostracizing those who did not join, dissident leaders and everyday activists demanded that workers take sides, leading to the enlistment of those who were otherwise apathetic as well as those who were sympathetic to the movement but afraid of getting fired. The threat of public scorn was often the deciding factor in attaining their support. But public humiliation and physical coercion would not have been sufficient to rally workers if there had not already been widespread discontent with STFRM leaders. Chapter 3 argues that the railway movement began as a result of this mass discontent with charro rule, quickly coming to represent a national grassroots movement to democratize STFRM union politics. It ends with the unlikely victory of railway dissidents, as they managed to circumvent charro rule, gained concessions from a direct meeting with President Ruiz Cortines, and finally elected Demetrio Vallejo to the post of secretary general of their union.

Chapter 4 argues that with the rise of Vallejo, expectations among the grassroots rose dramatically, leading men and women to push the new independent leaders to make demands for higher wages. A political struggle for union independence had turned into a movement for economic justice. This struggle became what Antonio Gramsci has termed a "war of position," which in this context refers to the battle between workers and FNM officials to win over public opinion.[45] This war of position took place on both a discursive field that included print media as well as the physical terrain of the city and countryside. In both arenas, activists sought to shape the political debate, persuade the broader public to join them, and pressure the state to give in to their demands. The state and company fought back through editorials, public speeches, and ultimately with brute force. Finally I show that solidarity among all rieleros and rieleras was never fully achieved but was rather always a practice-in-process, requiring constant strengthening and vigilance.

Chapter 5 turns to the repression of the rank and file in March 1959. It argues that the fall of the independent railroad movement was a consequence of the STFRM's decision to strike against the Ferrocarriles de Yucatán, Terminal de Veracruz, Ferrocarriles Mexicanos, and Ferrocarril del Pacifíco, all of which were privately administered. Unlike the FNM, the president had no authorization to unilaterally negotiate — and make concessions — on behalf of private firms. I maintain that Vallejo and STFRM leaders followed rank-and-file calls for agitation against these companies, not the other way around. I argue, furthermore, that the Cold War struggle between communism and capitalism provided an ideological idiom that facilitated the PRI's repression of the movement. While dissidents based their demands on the Constitution of 1917, detractors accused them of following the lead of communists in an effort to ultimately overthrow the government.

Along with chapters 3 and 4, chapter 5 makes use of U.S. State Department records. These documents are extraordinarily revealing because they express sympathy for the very workers accused of communism by the PRI. While the spread of communism drew the concern of U.S. officials, they concluded that the movement was motivated pri-

marily by political corruption, economic deprivation, and workers' desire to control their union. Communist ideology had little influence among workers. In other words, U.S. State Department documents affirm many of the claims made by the rank and file at the time.

This study takes mostly a national view of railway life and politics by placing the stories of everyday activists and organizers within a macro-level narrative of Mexican political economy. This approach is consistent with the unfolding of the railway movement, which covered the entire country, from Baja California to Chiapas. More important, it reflects the economic organization of the industry as embodied by the FNM and the political organization of workers expressed in the STFRM. These were national institutions whose policies evenly applied to employees and members throughout the country. Dissidents in turn made demands that would benefit every railway family in the country. A regional study would fail to capture the extensive reach of the industry, the union, and the movement.

My interviews, however, are principally with rieleros and rieleras from Matías Romero, Mexico City, and Puebla, cities housing some of the largest populations of railway men and women. Because I worked in Puebla's Centro de Documentación e Investigación Ferroviarias (CEDIF), the main railroad archive, rieleros and rieleras there and in Mexico City were simply more accessible to me. As mentioned above, after many months of failing to get women in these two cities to talk to me, I made a trip to Matías Romero, where widows eagerly spoke to me about their lives as rieleras as well as their participation in the movement. I extend the geographic scope with archival material referencing San Luis Potosí and Monterrey, where two of the larger repair yards stood. These sources enable me to add texture to the national story by exploring regional details. This book tells the story of how men and women in these cities came together en masse to temporarily roll back an emerging conservative political and economic order. In hoping to retain the gains made by the working class by the revolution, they found themselves turned into political radicals.

1

"The Mexican Revolution Was Made on the Rails"

Revolutionary Nationalism, Class Formation, and the Early Impact of the Cold War

Pancho slid a cassette into the deck and pressed play. As the tape turned and hissed, he took a seat next to me and closed his eyes. There in the spartan room, with its cold cement floor and modest furnishings, the sound of grinding wheels and released steam from a locomotive engine bellowed. It occurred to me later that it is the same sound that wakes Geraldo Niño Mendes from his sleep, the beautiful music he tried describing to me. As I posed my first question, Pancho opened his eyes and instructed, "Shhh. Listen," closing them again.

I would learn over the years that Francisco "Pancho" Mortera and Geraldo Niño Mendes are not unique in their reverence for steam engines and in their emotional attachment to the world of the workplace. I would also come to understand that Mortera's devotion to the sights and sounds of the railroad is part of a general rielero pride in their place in Mexican history. The steam engine, the locomotive, and those who labored on the rails had from the late nineteenth century been associated with Mexico's modernizing ambition. Mortera, Niño Mendes, and dozens of other railway men I interviewed place themselves, their ancestors, and the industry as principal protagonists in the story of the country's economic development.

If we were to walk from Mortera's house in Mexico City's working-class neighborhood of Colonia Guerrero down Avenida Insurgentes Norte, we would be walking toward the Monumento a la Revolución, a grand arc commemorating the country's civil war. We would

be following the route taken countless times in the past by mobilized rieleros and rieleras, who marched from the railroad yard and station in Colonia Guerrero to converge at the monument. There they would listen to a fiery speech before continuing to the National Palace in the downtown central plaza, or Zócalo, to shout their complaints. Today a defunct steam locomotive stands on the northern side of the monument, a visual affirmation of the industry's key role in the revolution; to rieleros, the engine also affirms their place in that history.

The locomotive on display exchanges history for nostalgia by providing no information about the conflicts that arose with the introduction and development of the industry. In turning the steel object into a public fetish, it masks the contentious history between workers, railroad companies, and presidential administrations. At its inception, the railroad promised to bring local and national economic growth, connecting remote hamlets with one another while integrating them into a national economy. The question for workers as well as for company, government, and, later, union officials was never if the industry should be used to foment economic growth but rather who would stand to benefit. After a brief era of agreement during the 1930s, when President Cárdenas completed the nationalization of the railroad and petrol industries, workers' vision of how best to industrialize Mexico clashed with plans elaborated by railroad officials as well as with the administrations of Presidents Manuel Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán Valdes.

The STFRM and the state agreed on the need to expand industrialization as a measure to expand the economy. All officials endorsed major improvements to the railroad's infrastructure. However, the STFRM diverged from the state with regard to who would benefit from industrialization as well as the role of the union in national affairs. STFRM expected industrialization to benefit workers and their families. Specifically, the union lobbied the state to increase freight rates on minerals to pay for wage increases. Moreover, the STFRM had a national vision, pushing the state to improve the standard of living of the entire working class, not just railway families. In addition, the STFRM expected that economic growth would be coupled with political

access for the working class, both at the level of the workplace and in national affairs. Industrialization should bring about workplace control, while increasing the union movement's clout in national politics. Nationalizing key industries, such as the railroad and electrical sectors, would accomplish the task. Finally, after World War II, STFRM officials couched these expectations in the language of anti-imperialism, criticizing the state for buying railroad equipment from the United States and for keeping rates on minerals low, especially since so much mineral freight headed to the United States. STFRM leaders pressured the state in the name of an idealized community of rieleros, figured by union leaders as collectively victimized by rising inflation combined with low wages.

In the postwar era, the state supported the growth of native industries, but rather than invest in the working class, the presidential administrations focused on investing in machinery and industrial infrastructure; this was especially true in regard to the railroad industry. Rather than empowering the rank and file at the workplace, state officials made the issue of worker efficiency key to discussions of economic growth. In practice, the FNM and the government demanded that workers toil at a faster pace (this was especially true of those aboard trains) without increasing wages. Since workers, especially members of the strongest unions, would not passively stand by while their standard of living declined, the state imposed collaborationist union officials. Finally, the state deepened the FNM's relationship to U.S. businesses that manufactured railroad machinery, rather than propose a plan to build machinery in Mexico, as the STFRM demanded. The divergence between these two views of industrialization proved insurmountable, leading to the 1948 overthrow of the STFRM's democratically elected leaders in a process known as the *charrazo*.

The Railroads in Mexican History

The railway movement of the 1950s was the latest episode in a contested process of industrialization that dated back to the late nineteenth century, when the railway rank and file organized to curb some of the abuses it had endured during the presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876–

1911). A military man who made his name by repelling French invaders on March 5, 1862 (still celebrated with Cinco de Mayo festivities in Puebla), Díaz took advantage of his war exploits to become president in 1876. As president, he sought to transform a country whose infrastructure had been ravaged by decades of civil wars as well as by battles against foreign occupiers. Mexico had fared better against the French than it had against the United States, which annexed Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas in the late 1840s.

When Díaz came to power, the country lacked the basic infrastructure necessary for capitalist development on a national scale. Whereas in the United States and in Western Europe merchants could count on newly constructed railway sytems to transport merchandise over long distances, Mexicans hauled goods on shoddy roads over daunting mountainous terrain. Docks, too, were in a state of disrepair, a further disincentive for investing in the former Spanish colony. Antiquated technology, moreover, ensured an inefficient mining sector. In creating the Mexican National Railways in 1908 with loans from foreign creditors, Díaz sought to construct a truly national marketplace with the hope of bringing Mexico into the modern era, epitomized by the industrializing nations of Western Europe and the United States.[1]

On the surface, Diaz's policies proved wildly successful. In the course of thirty years, cities became connected by railroad tracks extending thousands of miles, as "the locomotive replaced the mule train [and] hitherto local economies were stitched together to form regional, national, even international markets."[2] In the growing cities of Puebla and Orizaba, textile factories began producing for a national market. Meanwhile, mine production increased dramatically, reinvigorating urban centers in central and northern Mexico.[3] Exports, too, experienced growth, leading large sugar estates to expand in Morelos and for henequen plantations to form as economic enclaves in Yucatán. As any observer could tell, it was the railroad that imperfectly enabled the distribution of these and other countless commodities across the country.[4]

Economic development on such a scale resulted in profound social change while leading to the formation of railway communities, encompassing not just those who worked for the industry but all those

impacted by having the railroad run through their town. Wherever railways extended, land values skyrocketed, leading avaricious land speculators to displace indigenous people who had held the land for generations, in many cases before the arrival of Spanish conquistadors in the fifteenth century.[5] Lacking land titles, indigenous communities often found the Díaz administration all too eager to put their land up for sale, enabling Mexican, American, and European investors to acquire large tracts of the country's best land. Finding themselves displaced, indigenous people turned to wage labor. Meanwhile, in cities large and small, a nascent working class formed around industries key for economic growth. Mines, textile factories, and rail yards became principal sites for new collective occupational idenities based on wage labor.

Railway workers experienced class formation swiftly and strongly, as evidenced by their success in organizing representative institutions based on craft specialties. The Mexican Union of Machinists (1900), the Great Mexican League of Railroad Employees (1905), the Confederation of Mexican Railroad Workers (1910), and the Union of Conductors, Engineers, Brakemen, and Firemen (1911) constituted the first labor guilds in Mexico, a point of pride for ferrocarrileros.[6] By the early twentieth century, a distinct railway subjectivity had been formed through everyday interactions at work and in neighborhoods, as well as by the politicization of these exchanges and friendships, as evidenced by the creation of the guilds.

The railroad's influence on the fabric of Mexican life went far beyond narrow economic and political concerns. The smells, sounds, and scenes of hustle and bustle around stations came to signify modernity. The steam engine especially — with its carnival of noise — blasted through the calm of previously remote villages as a fulfillment of Díaz's promises of ushering Mexico into the modern era. If steam engines were a sign of technological advancement, rieleros fancied themselves the incarnation of the modern proletarian man. To be sure, the iron horse and the men in greased overalls who rode atop it became the embodiment of the president's plans for a modern Mexico. Whenever they pulled into a station, rieleros came to perform modernity,

transforming their labor and their machines into a spectacle, a vision, and a promise of Mexico's modern future. In the crowds welcoming the arrival of locomotives stood wide-eyed boys who dreamed of becoming rieleros as well as girls who would one day marry a railroad man and come to see themselves as rieleras.[7]

The distinct quality of railway masculinity can be traced back to the very beginning of the industry, when railroad companies empowered men by excluding women from working on locomotives and in yards. Thus companies defined railroad work as masculine, a subject we will consider extensively in the next chapter. For now it is important to understand that women's exclusion from the industry was based not on some essential biological difference between males and females but on the conscious labor recruiting strategies of the industry.

The company reached out to workers' wives and daughters in the 1940s, giving them advice on running the household while creating respectable leisure activities, such as a girls' basketball team (named Las Rieleras) and monthly dances for young male workers and daughters in the community. In doing so, the company created physical and symbolic spaces for the formation of a rielera subjectivity — ensuring that men and women came to base their very sense of self on their relationship to the industry.

President Díaz faced criticism on several fronts by the first decade of the twentieth century. Upper- and middle-class liberals out of favor with Díaz had grown weary of a political system fueled by graft and personalism, and they clamored for an open, democratic presidential election. In addition to other complaints, peasants resented receiving credits or vouchers — redeemable only at company stores — in lieu of wages, while miners became embittered by the lack of workplace protections and by work days that stretched past twelve hours, including on Saturdays and Sundays. Rieleros shared a critique of the Díaz administration articulated by all dissidents: foreign influence on the economy and society had marginalized Mexicans. The Díaz administration attempted to placate rieleros by purchasing a controlling interest of railway stock and by creating the FNM in 1908.[8] The FNM put an end to hiring practices that favored foreign workers and switched

the operating language from English to Spanish, leading many Americans to resign. These changes were welcomed by the rank and file, but it was too little too late for Porfirio Díaz.

In 1910, rieleros joined a burgeoning nationalist chorus that criticized Díaz for his heavy reliance on foreign investment. The railway industry in particular depended on foreign technology and expertise to function. Rieleros appreciated the work, but they resented that the best paid jobs went to American and British employees. No matter how bright or motivated a rielero might have been, he found there to be a ceiling to his advancement. Engineers and managers were unfailingly American or British. Workers resented foreign dominance of the industry to such a degree that they came to demand the Mexican production of steam engines. Their efforts did not bear fruit until long after the displacement of Díaz, when in 1944 Mexico became the only Latin American country to build a steam engine. Workers named it "La Fidelita," and it is the pride and joy of every rielero. Today it is housed at the Railway Museum in Acámbaro as testament to Mexican ingenuity.

While nationalist sentiment did not cause the revolution of 1910, it certainly informed the list of grievances leveled against Díaz. Rieleros and the masses resentful of the disruptions brought upon them by the railroads would have agreed with historian Alan Knight, who concludes that the industry "wrought a transformation in Mexican society . . . which was inextricably linked to the origins of the revolution."[9] Rieleros embraced revolutionary nationalism as an expression of their disapproval of foreign ownership of the railways, heightened no doubt by their contempt for foreign managers. This became a collective disposition articulated from the revolutionary period forward in railroad corridos, testimonies, and the union press.

Shortly after Francisco I. Madero, an American- and European-educated member of the northern elite, sparked a political movement in 1910 to oust Díaz, rieleros joined masses of peasants and workers who condemned the Porfirian approach for industrializing Mexico.[10] These proletarian and campesino men and women transformed what began as an elite struggle for power into a full-blown social revolu-

tion. Workers and campesinos demanded improved material benefits as well as respect for the men and women who labored in fields and factories. During Madero's and Venustiano Carranza's (1914–15) revolutionary governments, railway workers used their strategic role in the national economy as leverage to gain wage increases and shorter work shifts. Amidst revolutionary turmoil, rieleros walked out on strike in 1914 and, along with electrical, port, textile, and petroleum workers, forced revolutionary generals to take seriously the grievances of the newly formed urban working class. As a result, Carranza made a brief alliance with mobilized workers, recognizing labor unions in exchange for workers fighting on his behalf, grouped as the Red Battalions.[11]

The history of their combative participation in the revolution has been passed down over generations among railway families. Railway women may not have served in the Red Battalions, but they nevertheless identify with the thousands of rieleras who participated in the revolution by sewing uniforms, preparing food, and taking care of families while the men were away at battle. Stories of their ancestors' participation in the social upheaval has served as inspirational folklore that affirms railway men and women's collective place in the heroic narrative of the revolution and in Mexican history generally. Widely circulated photographs of armed railway workers transporting revolutionary generals and militias served as mnemonic devices for generations of railway families thereafter. These images remind them that their predecessors fought for the revolutionary promises articulated in the Constitution of 1917.

The Constitution included the most progressive labor rights in the Western Hemisphere up to that time. Workers had won the right to unionize, the right to strike, an eight-hour workday, the abolition of child labor, and the right to a minumum wage. While their participation in the revolution paled in comparison with the throngs of mobilized peasants who made up the great mass of guerrilla fighters, railway families nevertheless continue to place themselves at the center of the revolutionary narrative.[12] Eager to associate their institutions with the glory of the triumphant revolution, executives at the rail-

road company and PRI have affirmed rielero participation in the war through publications, public monuments, and speeches made by presidents at railroad stations and in public addresses.[13] The locomotive presently standing at the Monumento a la Revolución's entrance embodies such efforts.

Institutional projects that cast rieleros as indispensable to the revolution had contradictory effects. On the one hand, by aligning with the desire among workers and their descendents to gain recognition for their participation in the revolutionary process, the FNM and PRI emphasized that rieleros were essential for the success of the national economy and political system. The effect has been a romanticized and exaggerated view held by rielero communities of workers' role in the revolution and in the economy, which further cemented their loyalty to the industry as they came to internalize their role in the country's history and in the eventual success of Mexican industrialization. Guillermo Treviño, a former activist from Puebla, expresses a common opinion among rieleros and their offspring: "During the revolution, all ferrocarrileros supported the revolution, especially trenistas, who practically made the revolution. Because the Mexican Revolution was made on the rails."[14] Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the company as well as PRI officials played on workers' exalted view of themselves to demand that they make sacrifices — in the form of wage cuts — to aid industrialization. Clearly, the company used rieleros' revolutionary nationalism to push them to work harder, longer, and for less pay.

On the other hand, revolutionary nationalism drew on and reinforced rielero masculinity — workers' view of themselves as distinctively strong, brave, and independent. Their participation in armed conflict placed these qualities into sharp relief. While the company could rely on workers' toughness to execute the physically onerous demands of railway work, rieleros could also draw on these qualities to resist bosses on the job or to organize strikes. Company records reveal that everyday acts of resistance were commonplace. Workers refused orders, stole machinery, drank on the job, and even assaulted supervisors. Such acts of masculine assertion created a culture of confrontation, which undergirded the many strikes and protests organized by

rieleros throughout the industry's history. These acts of collective insubordination are tied to rieleros' revolutionary tradition.

The revolution at first seemed to empower the eighteen autonomous guilds that grouped rieleros according to craft specialties, but it did not take long for the guilds to prove ineffective at cohesively organizing the rank and file.[15] Their interests did not neatly coincide, and they lacked the affective bonds of a well-oiled union. (Office workers did not necessarily share the same interests or work culture as trenistas, for example.) The ineffectiveness of the guild system for orchestrating nationwide protests against railway companies became clear during a series of railway strikes that began in December 1926, extended through early 1927, only to be extinguished through state intervention that same year. In 1926, rumors spread among the rank and file that railway companies intended to lay off workers and reduce wages in order to lower operating costs.[16] Leaders of the UMM, the association of railway mechanics, coordinated a strike in protest against the anticipated layoffs and wage cuts.

The UMM, which had been formed in Puebla in 1905 to become the first rank-and-file association, enjoyed great prestige. Its founding continued to be celebrated with dances, parties, and other commemorations throughout the 1950s, and the association continues to hold a prominent place in railway lore. In fact, a monument of Teodoro Larrey, its founder, was erected in Puebla as part of a weeklong celebration of the UMM in 1950, becoming a shrine for railway men, who regularly visited to pay their respect and admiration.[17] The UMM spearheaded the movement of 1926 and 1927, agitating workers to strike through *Unificación*, which would eventually become *Unificación Ferroviaria*, the STFRM's widely read newspaper and key organizing tool. Associations like the UMM were important vehicles for workers to organize politically. However, their ability to organize effectively against company policies was limited because it was difficult to coordinate across guilds; each association organized and acted autonomously.

The strikes exposed the guilds' vulnerabilities. The disorganized execution of the actions in 1926 and 1927 led leaders to realize that the autonomy that craft associations enjoyed also made it difficult for

them to coordinate workers across specialties.[18] The lack of a centralized body with the authority to represent the entire rank and file led to divisions among them. The Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) took advantage of these divisions by organizing scabs to replace striking railway workers. The head of the CROM, Luis N. Morones, instructed its members to avoid strikes and support the revolutionary government of President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–28). As railway workers were free to choose to follow the UMM or the CROM, many crossed picket lines. Others were arrested, as the government sent federal troops to crush the strike. Opponents of the movement labeled rieleros communists because of the prominent role played in the movement by rieleros who were also Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) activists.[19]

The failure of the strikes — and the mass layoffs that ensued — signaled the need to create one union that would represent all railway workers. Significantly, the government's repression of rieleros in 1927 had broad implications for the labor movement. In the view of political scientists Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, "The result for labor was a corrupt labor movement that crushed independent unions and deradicalized the working class, subordinating labor's activity to the government line regarding capital and labor."[20] But where they find repression and co-optation, historian Michael Snodgrass locates grassroots militancy, arguing that the failed strikes proved to be "a watershed not only for the development of railroad unionism but the entire labor movement in Monterrey," where PCM organizers gained loyal recruits.[21] In Monterrey, the PCM and grassroots rieleros fought against labor co-optation, creating the foundation of what would become strong links between the party and the rank and file for years to come. The same was true in Mexico City, where prominent railroad activists became aligned with the PCM.[22] Rather than acquiesce to government dictums, rank-and-file rieleros organized to build a democratic union to work independently of the CROM and the government.

After two decades of competition and conflicts between craft associations, the repression of 1927 taught railway workers that they needed to join together in order to gain concessions from railroad compa-

nies. As a result, they formed the STFRM in January 1933. The STFRM became the most powerful union in the country with the help of the Ley Federal del Trabajo, or federal labor law, of 1931. The passage of the federal labor law was the culmination of a revolutionary process that conferred to the state greater power in regulating the economy. Moreover, it enabled President Calles to gain the support of labor.[23] In doing so, he began the practice of institutionalizing state-labor relations, deradicalizing the rank and file by giving their guilds — and later unions — greater access to the government. The new law empowered unions by requiring workers to be union members in order to attain and keep their jobs. If workers lost their union status, the law compelled employers to dismiss them. This exclusion clause gave unions the power to fire workers, albeit indirectly.

The STFRM's power expanded greatly in 1934 when the labor department under President Abelardo L. Rodríguez granted it a monopoly on representing the rank and file. This second exclusion clause prevented a rival union from competing with the STFRM for the loyalty of rieleros. These two clauses enabled the STFRM to squash dissent among its members. If members challenged the representational authority of the union, their membership could be revoked, which would lead to their dismissal from work.

Thirty-six locals in cities throughout the country grouped workers in their new union. As a local arm of the national union, each local connected workers and their concerns to national representatives, while disseminating the latest information from Mexico City to the rank and file.[24] In doing so, locals promoted ideological positions emanating from leaders in the capital. For example, STFRM leaders in the 1940s counted on locals to promote economic nationalism and mobilize workers in protests; after the charrazo, co-opted union officals expected locals to restrain disgruntled workers. Due to the highly politicized culture of the STFRM, in small and large cities railroad locals served to organize workers and their families. Rielero and rielera activists in turn sought to influence and organize their neighbors, including those who labored in other industries.

The STFRM proved indispensable to the reproduction of railway

class formation and identity. First, the union, along with the company, decided whom to hire, and it was official union policy to give priority to the sons of rieleros, thereby cementing loyalties to the company and industry over generations. Second, the union strengthened loyalties to the industry and union by stressing that workers and their families had essential experiences and interests based on their class position and association with the railways. This point of view undergirded cultural events sponsored by the STFRM for workers and their families. In Puebla, for example, Local 21 sponsored theatrical productions and concerts, while in Matías Romero, Local 13 held dances on the weekends, attracting members of the broader community. On November 7, each local celebrated "El Dia del Ferrocarrilero" in commemoration of Jesús García, a rielero who gained national fame when he died while preventing a train derailment in the northern town of Nacozari, Sonora. In union propaganda, the story of Jesús García epitomized the self-sacrificing character of the railway worker. In short, union locals functioned as political and cultural centers, generating a vigorously independent railroad culture whose influence was felt throughout cities.

The creation of the STFRM constituted a political triumph for railway families because the union defended workers against unwarranted firings and other abuses while defending the family wage by negotiating a collective contract on behalf of its members. Railway families still regard 1933 as a date of national importance because it bound railway families across the country into a politically powerful organization. The STFRM did more than just fight for wages. As mentioned above, the union fought for workers' children to receive special hiring preference by the FNM, leading to a pervasive sense among railway families that fathers bequeathed a job with the railway to the children as a sort of inheritance. By linking generations within families to the industry, the policy went far toward ensuring loyalty to the STFRM while creating a sense that one was born into the industry. As the first industrial union, the STFRM became an inspiration for workers in other industries, as miners and petrol workers formed their own national syndicates shortly after the founding of the railroad union.[25]

In 1934, just a year after the emergence of the STFRM, Lázaro Cárdenas came to power with a populist agenda, incorporating the country's major unions into the political structure in order to consolidate state power. He changed the ruling party's name from the Partido Nacional Revolucionario to the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) to blur the line between the party and the popular revolution. Historians have shown that Cárdenas enjoyed much less power than revisionist scholarship supposed, as regional political cliques pushed back against Cárdenas's reforms and grassroots groups negotiated centralizing projects, such as educational initiatives.[26] Nevertheless, the state expanded its power, especially in regard to labor, as Cárdenas "sought to organize a mass social base that would permit his administration to increase its political power and undertake a broad program of socioeconomic reform."[27] By supporting industrial unions and conceding to their economic demands, Cárdenas hoped to centralize political power, "reaffirm[ing] the constitutional concept of an active interventionist state, controlling and directing the national economy." The result was an empowered union movement, but one which had to operate within the parameters set by the ruling party. This became clear in 1936, when the Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje, the labor arbitration board, declared a railway strike illegal because the government operated the industry.[28]

Cárdenas's power was further strengthened in 1936 when over 3,000 unions came together under the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), which grouped over 70 percent of the country's urban rank and file, including rieleros.[29] The government greatly benefited from the support of the CTM, and vice versa. In addition to government subsidies, CTM officials could count on the government to persecute its rivals. As a result the CTM gained close to 1 million members by 1940 and "came to hold seats in both houses of the national Congress, occupied governorships . . . [and] controlled the Labor Department."[30] While the new arrangment required that Cárdenas pursue policies aimed at improving workers' conditions, it also enabled the president to stifle dissent.

Cárdenas also sought alliances with socialists. Employing the language of class struggle, Cárdenas legalized the PCM and made common cause with progressive labor leaders.[31] The PCM in turn supported Cárdenas as part of its Popular Front policy of forging coalitions in the fight against fascism. At the CTM's inception, prominent PCM members held positions of authority within the confederation. Historian Barry Carr maintains that "the locus of decision-making in the new body was firmly based in an alliance between *marxisant* intellectual Vicente Lombardo Toledano and a conservative anticommunist *camarilla* (clique) led by union bosses." This pact signaled an emerging willingness among PCM leaders to centralize power within the ruling party and to collaborate with the government. In 1937, the PCM endorsed Fidel Velázquez as head of the CTM and adopted the policy of "Unity at All Cost."[32]

The PCM's decision to back the CTM helped further centralize state power under Lázaro Cárdenas. Cárdenas had lifted restrictions placed on the PCM press and released leftist political prisoners, but in supporting the CTM the PCM unwittingly laid the groundwork for the future marginalization of the independent Left.[33] In hindsight, the PCM gravely miscalculated by backing Velázquesz, for he and the confederation soon came to lead the anticommunist current of the 1940s and 1950s. Red-baiting further strengthened the CTM. As Middlebook notes, the government's practice of opposing opposition labor groups "helped preserve the CTM's political dominance in the labor movement."[34]

Economic nationalism surged during the presidency of Lazáro Cárdenas, reaching its apogee when the administration nationalized the railroad and petrol industries in 1937 and 1938, respectively. After expropriating the railroad industry the year before, Cárdenas handed its administration over to the STFRM, creating the Workers' Administration, deepening the ties between the PRM and the railway rank and file. Without shooting a bullet, the Cárdenas administration managed to nationalize what was perhaps the country's most important industry, a truly remarkable event in twentieth-century labor and economic history in the Americas. The Workers' Administration was tangible proof of the STFRM's political clout and its close ties to the PRM.[35] Most

important, it reflected a shared commitment on the part of the PRM and the STFRM to modernize Mexico through state-led industrialization policies. However, while many among the working class lauded Cárdenas for transfering the management of the railroads to the STFRM, the PCM opposed the Workers' Administration because it feared that it would continue to keep freight rates artificially low, thus continuing to function as a subsidy to industrial monopolies.[36]

Critics of the Workers' Administration proved prescient. It became clear that Cárdenas had saddled the union with a colossal burden. Apart from drowning in heavy debt to foreign bondholders, the union inheritied equipment — from rails and bridges to locomotive engines — in a massive state of disrepair. More than a decade of revolutionary battles, along with insuffient inflows of capital, had resulted in the infrastructure's disastrous state.[37] With their newfound power, union leaders went ahead and did what they had asked previous FNM administrations to do: they hired more workers and raised wages. But it was their attempt to raise freight rates to pay off debts and buy new machinery that proved most contentious.[38]

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, railway activists would continue to push for increasing freight rates, especially for mineral goods. They argued that increased rates were justified because it would allow for improved wages and infrastructural improvements. In addition, they charged that reduced rates on mineral goods, which were largely exported to the United States, constituted an act of imperialism. The grassroots as well as independent STFRM leaders — from Luis Gómez Z. to Demetrio Vallejo — believed that increased rates were necessary to modernize the industry and improve workers' standard of living.

Scholars have identified the last two years of the Cárdenas administration as the period in which the ruling party moved to the right by abandoning its most radical populist policies. After the 1938 oil expropriation caused widespread condemnation among the industrial elite, "Cárdenas called for industrial peace, emphasized class harmony, and sent in the army to put down strikes, at the same time that the rate of land distribution declined."[39] The focus on industrial peace would have

immediate effects on railway industry and its workers. With the STFRM threatening to increase shipping costs for businesses, in 1940 President Manuel Ávila Camacho transferred management of the industry from the Workers' Administration to the FNM. Ávila Camacho initiated the industry's most ambitous railroad improvement plan since Porfirio Díaz, a plan expanded by his successor, Miguel Alemán. Their respective administrations provided funding for laying new rails, fixing bridges and equipment, and importing freight cars from the United States. Both presidents envisioned the railroad industry as serving a central role in the country's economic development, and they expected workers to accept frozen wages for the benefit of the industry.

The election in 1940 of Manuel Ávila Camacho, whom the PCM supported, signaled a conservative shift in national politics. Ávila Camacho condemned the PCM, and his supporters spearheaded an anticommunist campaign, with Maximino Camacho, the president's brother and minister of communication, spying on leftist activists. The labor movement was directly impacted by Ávila Camacho's administration revision of the Federal Labor Code in 1943. These revisions, which sharpened the distinction between legal and illegal strikes, facilitated the repression of strikes.[40]

Ávila Camacho was able to enact these new provisions because he had the support of the left in the war against fascism.[41] The invasion of the Soviet Union by the Nazis in 1941 led Communist parties to create "broad alliances of democratic and antifascist forces and the elimination of obstacles to increased production and the mobilization of human and material resources for the defeat of the Axis powers." The CTM, PCM, and later the Partido Popular, which Vicente Lombardo Toledano founded in 1948, joined with the PRM to combat the fascist threat. Once the war ended, all three organizations continued to back the ruling party, united in their goal of industrializing the country. Despite the increasing anticommunist rhetoric articulated by members of the Ávila Camacho administration, the PCM continued to support the PRM because it maintained that the key to transitioning to socialism was to deepen the Mexican Revolution. The goal was to revolutionize the PRM, not to overthrow it.[42]

Despite his increasing anticommunism, Ávila Camacho continued to find support among the Left. Most important for labor, the CTM signed the Labor Unity Pact in 1942, pledging to suspend strikes and other labor disturbances during the war.[43] Scholars have shown that workers continued to mobilize during the war despite the unity pledge, but the pact nevertheless set the standard for what was expected from the industrial rank and file.[44] Moreover, during the war the government tightened rules governing strike petitions, fined workers involved in work stoppages, and threatened workers engaged in violence during strikes with fines and imprisonment.[45] These policies, intended as special measures to ensure production during wartime, had enduring effects. After the war, presidents Alemán, Ruiz Cortines, and López Mateos would continue to circumscribe labor mobilizations, invoking the need for workers to sacrifice for the national good.

In addition to its impact on state-labor relations, World War II had enduring effects on the domestic political economy. First, it led to an increased focus on state-led industrialization and, second, it linked industrialization to the revolutionary project that began in 1910. As historian Monica Rankin argues in her study of Mexico's participation in World War II, "The Mexican government used the war to begin an industrialization project and used its propaganda as a billboard to sell that project to the public as an extension of its revolutionary legacy."[46] After joining the Allied cause in 1942, Mexican industries began producing for the war effort, which led to the rapid expansion of the industrial sector. By comparing the revolution of 1910 that overthrew the Díaz dictatorship to the war against the Axis powers, Ávila Camacho depicted industrial production for the war as revolutionary. After the war, when Alemán placed tariffs on U.S. imports to protect Mexican industry, he further connected industrialization to the revolutionary goal of political and economic autonomy.[47]

The emphasis on "national unity" constitutes the third legacy of World War II on domestic affairs. As Rankin shows, the Labor Unity Pact was part of a broader effort by the Ávila Camacho administration to unify a country that had been rife with political divisions.[48] The government's propaganda campaign sought to rally the public to

support industrialization by calling on their shared patriotism. The strategy of urging "Unity at All Cost" became politically useful in the Cold War era, when the war against communism came to replace the war against the Axis powers. The enemies now were domestic activists allegedly aligned with an international communist conspiracy to overthrow capitalism.

President Miguel Alemán, who had accepted PCM support during his 1946 campaign, used the Cold War conjuncture as an opportunity to pursue industrialization with unprecedented zeal. Although the war had ended, he expected political parties and labor unions to continue the Popular Front policy aimed at ensuring industrial harmony. Since his policies for economic growth marginalized the working class by demanding that they toil without increases in real wages, Alemán's industrialization policies required the suppression of working-class dissent. The centralized state — formed in part by Cárdenas's incorporation of labor and other mass sectors — combined with the alarm generated by Cold War fears of communism empowered the Alemán administration to enact its industrialization policies at the expense of the working class. Alemán's centralizing ambition was reflected in a change in name for the ruling party: in 1946 the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana became the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI.

The Cold War idiom provided Alemán and his supporters with a logic to define dissidents as communists. Alemán's Cold War use of this logic must be placed within hemispheric context. Although his policies would protect many Mexican businesses from U.S. competition — to the chagrin of American entrepreneurs — Alemán allied with the United States in the fight against communism. As the United States arrested members of the Communist Party and created in 1947 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which would battle communism throughout Latin America in the ensuring years, Alemán established his own organization to secretly shadow domestic groups. Coincidentally founded in the same year as the CIA, the Dirrección Federal de Seguridad targeted members of the independent Left, including those involved in organizing workers.[49] Like the CIA would do throughout the hemisphere and beyond, the DFS would infiltrate Mex-

ican groups who sought to challenge state power.[50] Records reveal that the DFS tracked railway activists closely throughout the 1950s, with agents who infiltrated the movement attending clandestine meetings. By targeting railroad activists — who were often arrested or fired for their dissidence — the DFS facilitated PRI hegemony over the railway rank and file, whose suppression was necessary for modernizing the industry without increasing wages.

Miguel Alemán made the modernization of the railway industry a major component in his overall plan for economic development. Through the Alemán Railroad Rehabilitation Plan, his office provided millions of pesos to repair and replace railway machinery, tools, and equipment. When he toured worksites or inaugurated company sports fields paid for by his railway rehabilitation program, Alemán emphasized that Mexican economic development required a modern railway system and a rank and file willing to sacrifice for the nation. What exactly he expected workers to sacrifice remained unclear until shortly into his term when he insisted that they shelve demands for a pay increase.

Between 1942 and 1946, the U.S. Railway Mission provided a team of experts to advise the administrations of Ávila Camacho and Alemán on how to repair the industry. They advised the FNM on everything from equipment standards to rank-and-file behavior in the workplace. The Railway Mission built on the economic ties between the two countries generated by World War II. During the war, the United States relied on Mexico for minerals to aid in industrial production, while the Bracero Program conferred temporary work visas to Mexicans who signed on to toil in agricultural fields in the western United States.[51] Mexican locomotives and railroad workers were tasked with transporting both workers and minerals to their northern neighbor. It is no wonder then that rieleros perceived themselves as indispensable to the U.S. war effort and to Mexican modernization generally.

The close ties between the two countries' economies brought attention to the FNM. Mexican political and business leaders agreed with their northern counterparts that the railroad industry suffered from woeful inefficiencies. Workers took too long to get the job done, and goods took forever to reach their destination. In order to meet war-

time mineral demands, U.S. advisors suggested that the railroad industry had to be restructured. It took no time for the issue of worker productivity to pit advisors with the Railway Mission against the rank and file.[52] While the rank and file focused primarily on the lack of adequate equipment to account for the problem of inefficiency, U.S. observers placed the blame on workers. "Mission designers," explains historian Andrea Spears, "considered the 'rehabilitation of the personnel and their habits, methods and practices' the most critical component of their railway reforms."[53] It would not be enough to simply repair tracks and bring the latest technology to the FNM workplace; U.S. experts advised the FNM to remake the worker himself. This called for nothing less than an FNM program to mold workers' attitudes, tastes, and psychological disposition.

By fundamentally transforming the railway individual, the FNM would ensure a more efficient employee. But to do so company officials would have to take the extraordinary step of modifying workers' collective contract, a document regarded with reverence by the rank and file. The collective contract had been the product of decades of struggle between workers and railway companies. To be sure, many workers viewed the contract as having been bequeathed to them by their fathers and grandfathers, who had faced physical reprisal and dismissal from work while mobilizing for a contract that would set standards for wages and promotion. In 1944 the FNM tried to unilaterally adjust the collective contract. The new provisions would have allowed the FNM to hire more supervisors without regard for their railway experience while permitting managers to transfer workers without their consent. Most controversially, it transformed a slew of everyday acts — such as mocking or disrespecting supervisors — into infractions. As Spears points out, the proposed changes would have dramatically reduced rank-and-file control of the workplace.[54] Led by their still combative and fiercely independent union, workers met the proposal with militancy, sabotaging equipment and walking off the job. It was clear that the Railway Mission's proposals for modernizing the industry clashed with the rank and file's idea of what railway modernization should look like. The FNM shelved the reforms, and

within two years U.S. experts returned home, bringing the Railway Mission to a close.

Although the rank and file succeeded in pressuring the government not to enact many of the Mission's recommendations, the Avilá Camacho administration did in fact extract concessions. Most important, the STFRM agreed to modify the collective contract. In 1942, FNM general manager Margarito Ramírez "announced a proposal for broad changes in workplace regulations and contract terms." The proposal did not affect wages or hiring but rather increased managerial control over workers by adopting "new disciplinary procedures that defined infractions more clearly and permitted supervisors to punish workers by suspending or dismissing them."[55] The measures reduced rank-and-file control over the labor process.

Although the Railway Mission ended the year President Alemán came to office, its recommendations continued to guide railway officials and members of the PRI for years.[56] Alemán expanded President Avilá Camacho's railway modernization program by turning the industry's rehabilitation into a national crusade. During his term, the national government invested millions of pesos in laying rails, founding new stations, building bridges, and importing equipment from the United States, as well as opening sporting facilities, such as baseball and soccer fields for workers with leisure time to enjoy them. But these improvements came at a price to railway families.[57] While workers appreciated the new equipment and welcomed the president's focus on improving the industry, they denounced Alemán's plan for restructuring workers' contracts. Moreover, Alemán further aggrieved the rank and file by demanding cuts in overtime hours and overtime pay, while demanding that workers increase their productivity. When STFRM leaders complained, Alemán reminded them that workers had to make sacrifices for the country's industrialization. This would become a resounding theme of postwar governments.

The FNM modernization program under Alemán extended its reach beyond bread and butter issues. Underscoring the enduring influence of the Railway Mission, the FNM sought to remake the railway man by inspecting his body, transforming his behavior at and away from

the workplace, and peering into his unconscious. The FNM drew on a medical infrastructure already in place to examine workers for sexually transmitted diseases, pulmonary infections, neurological disorders, and evidence of alcohol abuse.[58] Doctors and nurses at the FNM hospital, Hospital Colonia, would be charged with searching rielero bodies for signs of physical and mental weaknesses that would endanger the worker and, by extension, the industry.

Previously administrations may have viewed injuries and illnesses through the prism of political economy, but during Alemán's term FNM officials politicized disease and ailments. This is because under Alemán's modernization program FNM officials came to regard work- and non-work-related maladies as impediments to the overall efficiency of the industry. The politicalization of disease used physical diagnosis for assessing individuals' performance at work. For example, a deteriorated liver now not only suggested that a worker suffered from alcoholism but that he must be among those who worked inebriated. In this way, a problem specific to the rielero body became associated with the broader problem of the industry and country as a whole. The real problem in the view of FNM officials was not the damaged liver, an indication of alcoholism, but its owner, the alcoholic, who came to be viewed as a symptom of an ailing industry. Doctors provided the expertise to justify dismissing these sick and hapless men.[59] Workers' dossiers show countless cases of doctors submitting recommendations that ultimately enabled the FNM to deem workers unfit to continue on the job. With their release, the industry was one step closer to healing itself.

The psyche joined the body as a site where FNM officials located obstacles to railway modernity. In May 1953, a piece in Hospital Colonia's medical journal explained that certain personalities were predisposed to becoming victims of railroad accidents. The doctor constructed taxonomies of psychological profiles, dividing patients into passive, rebellious, and ambivalent subjects. Workers with rebellious psychological profiles could not accept authority, so they were most likely to cause or be the casualty of a workplace mishap. The doctor concluded that the FNM ought to put applicants through a rigorous examina-

tion, applying the latest technology to assess if a worker was fit for the job. Lie detectors, drug exams, and possibly electric shock procedures should be applied to aspiring rieleros as well as to those already in the system. These tests would have practical applications, as they could be applied for conferring promotions and demotions. Finally, the doctor envisioned a "medical-social" program that would enlist doctors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers in addressing the problem of the defiant worker, the alcoholic, and the general rebel.[60]

Psychological research filtered down to the average FNM official and worker through the company magazine, *Ferronales*, as well as through the union paper, *Unificación Ferroviaria*. By the late 1940s and into the 1950s, letters, editorials, and articles in *Ferronales* discussed psychological ailments as types of normative illness, explaining that psychological treatment could save lives. One piece echoed psychologists' advice by advocating for physical and psychological exams to be taken into consideration for promotions and demotions.[61] The STFRM meanwhile taught members about the importance of psychological health, giving mental disorders the attention previously reserved for diseases such as tuberculosis.[62] Unlike the company, the union opposed the conferment of promotions and demotions based on health reports. To be sure, STFRM officials remained ever vigilant of FNM officials meting out discipline and penalties to workers based on their medical reports.

Anti-Imperialism, Anticommunism, and the Human Costs of Inflation

No one contested the modernization projects of President Ávila Camacho and President Alemán more vociferously than STFRM secretary general Luis Gómez Zepeda and STFRM secretary of organization, education, and propaganda Valentín Campa. These two men became major figures in the history of the STFRM.[63] Gómez Z. earned a reputation as a pragmatic leftist, a critic of capitalism who lacked any clear ideological commitments. Beginning his career as an office employee, he gained popularity with the rank and file when as secretary of education (1940–42) for the union he organized poetry readings and theatrical performances; his popularity catapulted him to the union's top position, secretary general.[64] Throughout the 1940s, he and Cam-

pa instructed workers to adhere to a cohesive worldview that bound all industrial workers by their objective class position.

In contrast to Gómez Z., Valentín Campa was a committed Marxist with roots in grassroots activism, having earned his reputation as a militant rielero in the 1920s with his participation in the strikes of 1926 and 1927, which we have explained played a role in galvanizing workers to form the STFRM six years later. A PCM activist before being expelled in 1940 for refusing to go along with the party's persecution of Russian Revolution leader Leon Trotsky, Campa gave the STFRM ideological direction as the editor of the union paper, which he used to advance Marxian critiques of the PRI, U.S. imperialism, and the economy more generally. In *Unificación Ferroviaria*, he penned Leninist analyses of "yanqui" imperialism, which was facilitated by the Mexican bourgeoisie and the ruling party. There was little subtlety in the presentation. A representative example can be found in the January 16, 1946, issue, where a large picture of Lenin appears above the fold of the paper. Below the photo, an excerpt of Lenin's writings appears, which the editors promise will "help us to understand . . . the assault against the Mexican Revolution," conducted by elements of the Mexican bourgeoisie in cahoots with American investors.[65] Lenin and the Soviet Union stood in contrast to President Truman, who "serves the capitalist imperialism with his reactionary politics."[66] Moreover, American-style imperialism had economic and political effects. Not only did the northern neighbor stymie the Mexican economy but "the United States has become the main protagonist in almost all antidemocratic machinations that occur in the world."[67] In short, by the 1940s Campa was possibly the most influential railroad leader, broadcasting in the union paper STFRM's opposition to capitalism and American imperialism.[68]

American corporations that imported Mexican minerals exemplified "yanqui" imperialism. The union argued that these companies benefited from the peso devaluation of 1954, which reduced the price of minerals as well as the low freight rates charged by the FNM. As noted, the STFRM pushed for an increase in rates in order to pay for infrastructural improvements and increased wages.[69] In an article titled "Yanqui Slander against Mexican Railroads," Cam-

pa condemned "the imperialist politics imposed by the United States . . . [which] during the war bought all of its Mexican products at prices that were low compared to the high priced products they send to us." The reduced freight rates on minerals remained after the war to the detriment of the railroad industry and the Mexican economy. Campa continues, "In the particular case of the railroad [the United States] receives privileged rates imposed by international conventions so that minerals and metals are transported with huge losses to the [FNM], losses worth much more than the investments made by the Railway Mission."[70] The cause of raising freight rates on minerals continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Dissidents in 1958 and 1959 would restore the anti-imperialist critique of Mexico's political economy advanced by Campa and the STFRM in the 1940s but muffled by charros who led the union in the 1950s.

During the 1940s, *Unificación Ferroviaria* regularly informed readers about the gains made by the working class in the USSR—from improved working conditions to the important role that women played in Soviet industry, underscoring the liberating potential of communism.[71] Clearly, the USSR provided an alternative to "yanqui" imperialism and Mexican bourgeois culture. In building their own railroad and manufacturing industries, the USSR served as a model of self-sufficiency, a goal of broad sectors of the Mexican public, including entrepreneurs. Moreover, the union paper emphasized that the Soviet Union placed the working class at the center of their national identity.

Proponents of socialism found an adversary in the Mexican Right, especially the Catholic Church, which had articulated an anticommunist agenda before the rise of Alemánismo. As we have seen, detractors of the labor movement in the 1920s condemned strikers as communists and adherents to a foreign ideology, a rhetorical move that became commonplace in the 1950s. Anticommunists drew on these already existing strains of anticommunism during the Cárdenas administration in the 1930s, denouncing communists and communism as "intrinsically perverse" and "hedonistic" for privileging the material world.[72] In Monterrey, industrialists aligned with the Acción Cívica Nacional sought to discredit Cárdenas by associating him with "dark

communist doctrines that we consider a threat to the home, the country, and to liberty." In 1937, anti-Cardenismo spawned the Partido Social Demócrata Mexicano, which tried to unify the Right against a Cárdenas administration that included communists. The party, fashioning itself a proponent of Enlightenment thinking, especially in regard to individual rights, warned that socialist education would ultimately undermine the family and the nation.[73] The PSDM published its views in major dailies, such as *El Universal*, where it hoped to persuade a middle-class readership.

In the 1940s, President Manuel Ávila Camacho took advantage of World War II to weaken the Mexican Left. Communists were excluded from his administration as Mexico made common cause with the United States against fascism. Anticommunism became heightened with the Alemán administration, whose "anticommunist posture . . . [was] revealed during his first few months in power, represented a solid triumph against the left headed by Lázaro Cárdenas."[74] By the 1950s, anticommunism would become part of the political mainstream, shaping the presidential administrations of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and Adolfo López Mateos.

Anticommunist threats notwithstanding, workers reading the union paper would have had reason to be intrigued by the purported gains made by the Soviet working class. Images of happy, well-fed Soviet industrial workers underscored the decline in the standard of living of Mexican working-class families, whose real wages dramatically dropped between 1939 and 1946. As economic historian Jeffrey Bortz has shown, "The standard of living for Mexican workers in the industrial sector . . . dropped in half in these years."[75] The union tracked the decline of their members' purchasing power closely. In January 1945, the *Unificación Ferroviara* reported that prices on clothing had risen by 700 percent in three years. For example, in 1942 blue jeans sold for two pesos and twenty cents but had gone up to seven pesos; blankets a meter in length were priced at 17 cents in 1942 and now sold for 70 cents.[76] The price of electricity also rose sharply. In fact, complaints regarding electricity costs energized popular protest in Torreon, Saltillo, San Luis Potosí, and Durango.[77]

The union called for the nationalization of the entire railroad industry in order to improve the standard of living of its members and the broader public. One editorial explained at the time that "only the nationalization of all of the country's railroads could stop imperialist yanqui capital" from controlling the Mexican economy.[78] Significantly, the union called for the nationalization of the railroads to be part of a broader plan for the state to invest in native industries, such as textiles and electricity. Government investment in these would benefit Mexico as a whole. This was an inclusive vision that reflected the union's conviction that problems faced by the railway industry and its workers affected the entire nation. Working-class families in particular would benefit from lower priced consumption goods and higher wages.

The FNM turned a deaf ear to workers' economic woes. Instead company officials focused on worker incompetence. Workplace inefficiency, the FNM claimed, obstructed efforts at improving the industry. Substandard productivity caused delays and waste and cost the company millions of pesos in overtime pay. Worker inefficiency cost the company money in overtime, costs that the FNM passed to companies in the form of higher freight rates. Companies in turn raised retail prices on goods. This vicious cycle explained why workers' standard of living had declined. If railway workers were to produce more efficiently, overtime pay would decrease, allowing businesses, workers, and consumers to benefit from the savings in the long run.[79]

The minutes of meetings among FNM executives, PRI representatives, and STFRM officials provide a window into the debate over the railroads, its workers, and their role in the country's industrialization. Throughout Gómez Z.'s tenure as secretary general of the STFRM, the company blamed workers for company deficits, charging that the rank and file worked inefficiently and received inflated wages. Outraged at the allegation, Gómez Z. countered that workers did the best they could with shoddy and outdated equipment, overloaded cargo trains, and perilous work conditions. For the toil that railroad labor placed on their often-injured bodies, they were grossly underpaid. These sacrifices might have been justifiable if the railway operated for the bene-

fit of the poor masses, but the industry primarily served the growth of native and foreign capital.

Moreover, the railroad's role in subsidizing industry was a result of political cronyism at the executive levels of the FNM. The PRI used the FNM to subsidize agriculture and industrial sectors by charging low rates on foodstuffs and minerals that did not even cover transport costs, much less earn a profit. If the FNM was to be used to subsidize industry, then the company should be run as a state enterprise, exempt from abiding by the logic of profit maximization.[80]

These discussions exposed the fundamental ideological disagreements between union and company officials. Both insisted that the problems of the railway industry, such as worker inefficiency and FNM debt, were interrelated and that they must be addressed by a broader plan for economic development.[81] But the union demanded the government to take an active role in workplace relations by mandating wage increases to compensate for the rise in the cost of living. In addition, it maintained that discussions regarding rank-and-file productivity needed to acknowledge that the poor state of the rails and equipment diminished workers' ability to produce efficiently. In a provocative interview published in *Unificación Ferroviaria*, Gómez Z. and Valentín Campa explained that the railways could be repaired and made efficient in six months if the government were to invest heavily in equipment and locomotives. According to their plan, the government would redirect the "four hundred million pesos accumulated during the war, which are used to buy cars, nylon pantyhose, and other luxury goods . . . [and] invest that money in large textile and metallurgy industries, in machinery, materials, and tools."[82] These industries would be nationalized, ending the country's dependence on foreign investment in vital sectors, such as electricity. Clearly, the STFRM envisioned an extension of reforms made during the Cárdenas era that nationalized industries.

This became the de facto "official" position of the union during the tenure of Gómez Z. leading up to the charrazo of 1948. Representatives argued that railway workers could become more efficient but only if the government provided the necessary funding for new

tracks, modern machinery, and more employees to help get the job done.[83] In addition, the FNM needed to get its house in order by promoting ethical executives with knowledge of the railway industry. The STFRM had grown tired of negotiating with FNM officials who received their positions as perks for backing the PRI. Most egregiously from the union's perspective, these politically motivated appointees had little or no background in the industry. In short, the STFRM wanted a complete makeover for the FNM.

With World War II over, STFRM officials saw an opportunity to redistribute the nation's wealth. The profits of private investors who had greatly benefited from the war should be reinvested in Mexico rather than allowed to gain interest in banks. As a first step, Gómez Z. and Campa envisioned the executive branch setting up tariffs on foreign commodities and directing those monies toward industrial development. Specifically, the PRI would commit to producing railway machinery, such as freight cars and diesel engines, which the FNM bought and rented from American corporations. Mexican production of railroad goods would create good paying jobs for the working class while freeing the country from its dependence on foreign investment and consumption goods.

The FNM postwar plan for the industry starkly contrasted with the STFRM's because the FNM planned to raise monies by firing workers and freezing wages. The postwar economic climate required major readjustments, company officials maintained. During the war the company needed workers to put in overtime hours because of the large number of Mexicans traveling to the United States to find work. Labor migration markedly raised the number of passengers using railways.[84] With the war over, the FNM no longer needed the rank and file to work as many overtime hours. In the company's view, reducing overtime hours was a sensible component of a plan to restructure the industry with the aim of increasing efficiency and lowering operating costs. Tellingly, after the repression of the railway movement in 1959, the FNM immediately reduced the number of rank-and-file positions.

Their opposing views over how to improve the industry surfaced during negotiations on the issue of overtime work. Both STFRM lead-

ers and company executives viewed the reduction of overtime pay through the prism of the market economy. While company officials favored the reduction as a necessary cost-reducing measure, the union complained that it disregarded the economic distress felt by workers hit hard by inflation.[85] There was no doubt that workers would be adversely affected by a decrease in overtime pay. Time and again, rank-and-file workers said that FNM wages were so low that they needed overtime pay in order to make ends meet. In addition, workers explained that overtime work was an indirect result of the poor state of railway infrastructure. Men found their pace slowed by busted machinery, rickety rails, and dilapidated bridges. Hence workers viewed overtime as a social and industrial necessity that they expected their union to defend. Accordingly, the STFRM refused to budge on the issue.

By 1947, the struggle came to a head when Manuel Palacios, the general manager of the FNM, and Ramón Beteta, secretary of treasury and public credit and the government's representative at the meetings, expressed their dismay at the excessive reliance on overtime work. As Lázaro Cárdenas's deputy foreign minister in the 1930s, Beteta had been a firm proponent of state-led economic development, assisting Cárdenas in crafting a foreign policy that would complement his ambitious domestic reforms.[86]

In 1946, he managed President Alemán's campaign. By this time, Betata continued — along with the PRI — to support state intervention in the economy, but he stopped short of the STFRM's goal of nationalizing the industry. As the meetings between PRI, FNM, and STFRM officials became heated, Beteta announced the PRI's vision for the industry: "The railways should be administered like a commercial company, one that has obligations to meet and contracts to respect." The PRI had no intention of turning the clock back to the early Cárdenas era and showed little concern with appeasing the STFRM and its members. Beteta made clear as much when he explained that the state intended for the FNM to be run by "a decentralized administration which the government helps, but nothing more."[87] Although the railroad was still operated by the government, officials planned to let it be run as a private company.

The specter of a unified railway community prepared to defend its class interests loomed during the consultants' meetings of the FNM. Although only high-ranking officials were privy to those discussions, the rank and file made their presence known through Gómez Z. Executives understood that they had to proceed "with caution in order to avoid [rank-and-file] agitation."[88] To be sure, Palacios and Beteta knew that a proposal to cut overtime hours could lead to mass discontent. Workers already were frustrated by the decrease in their standard of living. With the end of the war, they expected their incomes and purchasing power to rise and instead found that they continued to endure financial hardship.[89] The STFRM prepared to flex its muscle.

The image of unified rieleros enabled Gómez Z. to threaten company officials that a reduction in overtime hours would lead workers to protest. He insisted that workers had the right to decide whether to put in overtime hours, implying that if the company cut overtime, the rank and file could simply decide not to work *any* extra hours. The rhetorical move was subtle but meaningful, because it reminded company executives of the workers' ability to affect production. FNM general manager Manuel Palacios immediately grasped the insinuation, threatening to leave the room and cut the meeting short. Gómez Z. upped the ante: if Palacios left the meeting, the union would order workers to decline overtime hours for three consecutive days. He reasoned that the action would make company officials realize that without overtime work the system would come to a halt.[90] In short, Gómez Z. threatened a worker slowdown, a drastic measure that railway workers used sparingly in their fights against the company. FNM executives must have expected the union to take a hard position against the reduction of overtime work, and Gómez Z. did not disappoint.

The Cold War and the Charrazo

While the STFRM's hardening stance and Gómez Z.'s threat of a work stoppage would have been cause for concern during any era, Cold War politics made the union's opposition to Alemán's policies appear seditious. As Carr maintains, "Under Alemán a Mexican version of the Cold War closed off interpretations of the revolutionary tradition that

were incompatible with the program of accelerated capitalist modernization embraced by the regime." In 1948 activists formed the Anticommunist Popular Front of Mexico, one of many civilian groups bent on eliminating the communist threat in Mexico and supporting President Alemán.[91] With the Cold War heating up, anti-imperialism, which, combined with robust nationalism, had been a common political posture during the 1930s and 1940s, became marginalized. This development proved ominous for Luis Gómez Z. and Valentín Campa.

The meeting with Palacios that marked the beginning of the struggle between the union and company regarding overtime work would last until 1948 when police arrested Gómez Z., Campa, and others in the STFRM administration. As the issue gained momentum, the parties' positions became more fixed, and room for negotiation diminished. The FNM's plan picked up steam at the June 1947 council meeting of the FNM. Palacios called attention to the wages earned by office workers, detailing the costs assumed by the company for their salaries. He singled out this group in particular because the STFRM had been pushing for a wage increase for office workers throughout the year.[92] The company maintained that this group earned inflated wages by charging for hours that they did not work.[93] By citing the amount the company spent on overtime pay for office workers, Palacios underscored their relative privilege. He explained that the FNM spent 393,895.45 pesos on overtime pay for office workers; employees averaged 509.64 pesos in overtime pay per month, which was more than a yard worker's entire monthly salary.[94]

The collective contract exacerbated the problem because it set no clear structure for assigning overtime work among office workers, as it did for other specialties where overtime was assigned according to seniority. The lack of structure enabled supervisors to assign overtime hours to friends and those in their favor, rather than according to company needs or an employee's seniority or merit. The FNM representative at the consultants' meeting warned that the public would turn against office workers if they continued their insubordination. He explained that the public would "believe that the union will try to block any efforts at reorganizing" the industry and would oppose the

union because the "Ferrocarriles finds itself in an incalculably disastrous situation."[95]

Gómez Z. struck back by threatening that workers would shut down the railways for four days if the company cut overtime hours.[96] Gómez Z. knew that he could count on the support of the trainmen, the most important group of railway workers during a strike because they drove the locomotives. Although workers from across specialties promised to support office employees' efforts to better their standard of living, trainmen proudly occupied the role of vanguard. They took advantage of their ability to organize rallies and speak in defense of their colleagues.[97] Trenistas would go on to lead the clandestine railway movement in the early 1950s as well as the mobilizations of 1958 and 1959.

Whether in formal negotiations with FNM leaders or on the streets during wildcat strikes, labor leaders and grassroots activists portrayed the rank and file as a cohesive community, bound by their railway identity and class interests. During negotiations with the FNM in 1947, Gómez Z. once again employed the notion that economic deprivation and membership in the STFRM created a united community of working-class comrades. He cited trainmen's support of office workers as evidence that they shared common economic interests. Moreover, the STFRM secretary general warned FNM representatives not to anger trainmen, because if they were to follow workplace regulations to the letter, "which would be lawful, it is evident that the system would be paralyzed." In this way, he gave legal justification for a potential work slowdown. Gomez Z. spoke honestly, for it was well known that even though trainmen broke speed regulations and worked past their scheduled hours, delays were pervasive and productivity goals were not met because of the poor state of machinery and rails.[98] Without infrastructural improvements, workers could not produce efficiently. In short, debates over restructuring the railways revealed the insurmountable differences between company and union leaders.

Gómez Z. sought to influence debates over industrialization by reaching out to the broader working class. In 1947 he spearheaded the formation of the Central Única de Trabajadores (CUT) as a way to organize the country's most militant unions. CUT would pressure the pres-

ident to radicalize his industrialization program by nationalizing major industries. An umbrella organization grouping at least thirty-seven labor groups, including the militant electrical, railroad, and telephone unions, the CUT emerged out of disaffection with the country's most powerful union federation, the CTM. In 1947, the CTM continued to back the PRI president, despite Alemán's conservatism. By breaking from the CTM, the CUT sent a clear message to the ruling party: the country's most combative unions aimed to shape industrial policies. More specifically, the CUT advocated for an independent union movement aimed at controlling inflation, increasing wages, and expanding access to affordable housing for the working class. If these goals sounded suspiciously similar to those of the STFRM, it is because they were. In fact, the STFRM spearheaded its founding conference, and Luis Gómez Z. headed its executive committee. In the CUT, we find an example of the STFRM's extraordinary power and ability to shape the labor movement at the national level. By the spring of 1948, the CUT called for "effective price controls, a general wage increase, and trade restrictions that would block imports of luxury goods and prevent the export of such basic commodities as sugar and rice," while mobilizing "against the Supreme Court's antistrike rulings."[99]

In 1947, the government imprisoned Gómez Z. and Campa for absconding with STFRM funds for their personal aggrandizement, silencing Alemán's most influential critics. Gómez Z. and Campa correctly maintained that they had been authorized by union locals to use those monies for organizing expenses incurred by the CUT. But state officials ignored this fact. With Gómez Z. in jail, the STFRM held an election for the post of secretary general. In 1948, the rank and file elected an electrician named Jesús Díaz de Leon, described by DFS agents as "a fat, cigar-smoking man who dressed with distinction, often seen with a cowboy hat."[100] His enthusiasm for rodeos — or *charrerias* — and for dressing in rodeo gear earned him the nickname El Charro.

It took no time for him to attract controversy, however. Shortly after his election, STFRM officials voted to relieve El Charro of his position as union head as punishment for having allowed federal officials to audit the union's books. Díaz de León had invited the government

to investigate outgoing leaders, principally Gómez Z. and Campa, over the charge that they had stolen union monies. His decision to allow police to scrutinize union records led many STFRM members to question Díaz de Leon's judgment, if not his motives; the move was highly unusual and in direct conflict with the union's history of autonomy, which was a source of pride for both the rank and file and union bureaucrats. Because members cherished the independence of their union, those who opposed the charro lambasted him for permitting the government to intrude in union affairs. As a result the STFRM's oversight committee voted to discharge him.[101]

Díaz de León refused to back down, however. On October 14, 1948, he and his retinue of roughly six hundred sympathizers forcibly infiltrated union headquarters in Mexico City. President Alemán, perhaps sensing that the charro would be more accommodating than his radical predecessor, approved Jesús Díaz de León's violent takeover of the union by publicly backing him, an extraordinary move. Díaz de León knew how to repay favors. Soon after his rise to power, Díaz de León announced that he was an anticommunist and backed the Moralizing Railroad Commission, a group within the STFRM that sought to prevent communists from holding office at the local or national level again.[102] In stark contrast to Gómez Z. and Campa, the charro endorsed the president's plans to modernize the rails while freezing workers' wages. In acknowledging the new union administration, Alemán had legitimized a group of brazen rebels who came to be disparagingly known as charros, after their leader. Since the event, the group that supported Díaz de Leon — the October 14 Group — became infamous for its tendency to engage in acts of violence against its opponents and for overtly neglecting the will of the rank and file

The Union Overthrow and Historical Memory

Scholars have since recognized the episode as a defining moment in postrevolutionary history because it enabled "the president to establish control over the labor movement."[103] In *Paradox of Revolution*, Kevin Middlebrook restates the well worn theory of co-optation that has gained currency in accounts of the charrazo and of Mexican labor gen-

erally. He argues, "The blow against the STFRM . . . marked the beginning of a systematic government campaign to establish political control over major national unions, the key to creating a durable base of labor support for the postrevolutionary regime."[104] Since the railway industry was crucial to the country's economic development, President Alemán needed a passive railway leadership to help implement his industrialization policies. The following chapters show that scholars have overstated the ruling party's "control" over labor. The PRI may have had union leaders in their back pockets, but the PRI fell well short of controlling the rank and file.

Scholarly and popular histories, as well as rank-and-file testimonies, portray the charro's takeover as the moment when the union came to be associated with pervasive corruption. This narrative has profoundly shaped historical memory among former workers. Most notably, interviewees tend to deny that they and many other workers supported Díaz de León before the charrazo, when he was regarded as an improvement over Gómez Z. and Campa. If workers were to acknowledge that they supported Díaz de León in the election or, worse, in his attacks on Gómez Z. and Campa, they risked being associated with the union's subsequent downfall. Simply put, since historical memory has constructed the charro as a political crony, compliant to the PRI, it is difficult to find former workers who attest to having supported Díaz de León.

Despite the claims of folk histories and testimonies, it was not immediately clear that the charro would sell out the union. Many of his followers expected him to follow STFRM tradition and resist FNM attempts to weaken the rank and file's clout, and there were good reasons for his followers to expect him to be an independent leader. Díaz de León had a dissident background, having joined the strikes of 1926 and 1927. He gained the respect of his cohort for his skills as an electrician, which placed him among the best-trained workers. There was nothing in his work history that would have indicated that he would be anything less than an honest, dedicated leader. In fact, undercover agents with the Dirección Federal de Seguridad reported that the charro enjoyed the support of a group of workers in Mexico City be-

cause they believed he stood against corruption.[105] Workers had good reason to embrace Jesús Díaz de León before he was ousted for cooperating with the government in 1948, which explains why the charro even enjoyed some support among the rank and file after his infiltration of union offices.

José Jorge Ramírez seems an unlikely figure to offer favorable characterizations of El Charro. As a well-known critic of union corruption who is respected by his peers as an uncompromising activist, Jorge Ramírez does not fit the typical characterizations of Díaz de León supporters—no one could ever charge him with having been a "company man." A former shop worker from Puebla, he became part of the STFRM leadership in the city when the railway movement wrested control from charros in 1958; when the independent union clashed with the FNM, he joined the strike committee in that city. Jorge Ramírez continues to organize retired rieleros to protest decreases in pension pay. Although he loathes Díaz de León for having corrupted the union, he explains that it took time to realize that El Charro was not the honorable man he thought him to be. He and others supported Díaz de León in the 1947 election for secretary general, and they also approved when the charro took over STFRM headquarters in October 1948. He simply believed that Díaz de León was going to clean house and end union malfeasance. They had believed that the charro acted in good faith when he allowed federal authorities to inspect the STFRM's books and investigate whether Gómez Z. had enabled officials to misappropriate members' funds. Moreover, Díaz de León had convinced Jorge Ramírez that Valentín Campa, whom Jorge Ramírez later came to admire, had betrayed the rank and file. Jorge Ramírez and other supporters believed that by ousting Gómez Z. and Campa, the charro aimed to bring a measure of democracy to the union. When asked whether he supported Díaz de León, Jorge Ramirez responded, somewhat embarrassed given the consensus now that the charro sold out the STFRM, "All of us did, because Díaz de León convinced us, all of us."[106]

Rank-and-file workers like Jorge Ramírez do not figure in studies of the charrazo. While acknowledging that Díaz de León found support in his bid to become STFRM secretary general, scholars general-

ly take for granted that there existed a general lack of approval of the charrazo, concluding that the charro was imposed by the government and supported by a small group of engineers in the capital. Support of Díaz de León by low-level workers living outside of Mexico City complicates the notion that the rank and file was simply co-opted, duped, violently suppressed, or bought off by charro leaders.

A close look at the charro's work-history dossier and a DFS background report reveal why a grassroots leftist like Jorge Ramírez might have supported him. The dossier reveals an ambitious blue-collar worker who had trained to upgrade his job skills and eventually became a prominent union figure with support from major political figures on the left. When he joined the company in 1920, he was hired as an assistant to the workshop mechanic, a job that required few skills. In short order he become a machinist and later an electrician in the FNM division of San Luis Potosí. He resisted joining the white-collar sector of the company. Since it was common for the best trained among the rank and file to join FNM administration, Díaz de León would have earned respect among his cohort for having stuck with the rank and file.[107]

But the charro was more than just a skilled worker; he was also an activist. Notably he attained notoriety and struck a sympathetic chord with activist colleagues for having been fired when he "abandoned service" during the celebrated strikes of 1926–27. His participation in those strikes still haunted him in 1937, when he petitioned the company to trace his seniority rights back to 1920, arguing that he was wrongly dismissed in 1928. Díaz de León had gained a reputation as a genuine activist by this time, which is evidenced by none other than Valentín Campa lobbying Lázaro Cárdenas to place Díaz de León as president of the STFRM's mixed comission on penalties. Finally, undercover agents with the DFS had him pegged as a member of the PCM because he counted Campa and other prominent communists as friends.[108] Campa no doubt felt betrayed when Díaz de León accused him and Gómez Z. of misappropriating union funds in 1948, but leftist activists like Jorge Ramírez had no reason to suspect that El Charro would soon disavow his leftist past and work in cahoots with the FNM to defang the union.

Thousands of workers quickly came to resent the charros for their unwillingness to fight for wage increases. By 1950 protests against charrismo emerged in Monterrey, Aguascalientes, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Tampico, Matias Romero, Oaxaca, Jalapa, and Tierra Blanca. Most harrowing, three disgrunted union members threated to assassinate Díaz de León or to derail his train next time he traveled. Security agents summed up the charro's defiant attitude: "He has no problem risking his life if necessary because he has the support of the president of the republic. . . . He expects the president to resolve the situation."[109] Armed guards shielded him from the increasingly disillusioned rank and file. These early acts against charrismo have little place in corporatist accounts of labor history. By positing a co-opted union movement, scholars have clearly given short shrift to the contested character of charro rule.

It is understandable that Jorge Ramírez remains reluctant to admit that many railway workers mobilized against the charro from the day he occupied STFRM offices in 1948. He would have known what federal agents reported: "All workers were upset [with the charrazo] because they didn't vote for him."[110] Hence Jorge Ramírez's assertion that all workers supported Díaz de León during the October 14 coup is clearly a misrepresentation, a rhetorical move designed to shield himself from the indignity of joining the "wrong side."[111]

Interviews with other former workers illustrate the mass disillusion with the charro after his removal for inviting the government to inspect the STFRM's books. José María López Escamilla, known as Don Chema, was an activist who eventually became a supervisor. Today old-timers view him as a sellout for having become a white-collar FNM official, dismissing him as a charro behind his back. His testimony is useful for understanding the collective memory of the rank and file, because in distancing himself from any association with charrismo, Escamilla simply rehearses what has become a narrative ritual, the individual and collective disavowal of El Charro and charrismo generally. Recalling how he and a group of workers came to Díaz de León's defense, applauding the arrest of Gómez Z. and Campa, Don Chema insists, "All other specialties supported [Gómez Z. and Campa]." Es-

camilla figures himself and his cohort as disoriented amid a political imbroglio beyond their control, a situation that absolves them of responsibility: "When the army took over the worksites there was a tremendous amount of confusion among workers."[112] Don Chema defended Díaz de León in 1948, but today he revises the terms of his support.

There are surely countless memories of the charrazo among old-timers, but it is enough to review these two to get a sense of the complicated workings of memory — the use of memory to recast the past and preserve one's reputation in the present. In Jorge Ramírez's story, we find the charrazo as bamboozle and the rank and file as its gullible but honorable fool. Don Chema, in contrast, places blame on the nameless mass of trenistas, long since forgotten. The first story offers cover for the collective mass of workers; the second story scapegoats a group accepted by most as traitors, the dissident trainmen who attempted to undermine the union in 1945. Their refusal to accept their support for charrismo, even in its early phases, may very well be accurate, or it may be a way of discursively distancing themselves from the scene of the crime, from implicating themselves in weakening their beloved union.

Conclusion

Francisco "Pancho" Moretera, Don Chema, José Jorge Ramírez, and their colleagues found that they had become key protagonists in the postwar debate over national economic development and the railway's role in industrializing the country. The charrazo represented the reassertion of state power over labor in the service of the ruling party as well as business interests, including those in the United States. By 1951 officials compliant to the ruling party held sway over the petrol workers' union and the mineworkers' union. They, too, would be called charros, which now became shorthand for any union leader — regardless of industry — in the pocket of the PRI. Unlike in the era of Porfirio Díaz when labor found itself neglected by the president, the working class had a voice in Ávila Camacho and Alemán's governments, but it was a muffled voice, appropriated by imposed union officials. In stark contrast to the Porfiriato, workers could invoke the Constitution of

1917 to pressure postwar presidents to make good on the revolution's promises. To be sure, throughout the 1950s, workers would clandestinely organize to reclaim the revolution as their own.

The postwar debates over rehabilitating the industry and the country took place on discursive fields that provided varying degrees of access to policy makers. At the consultants' meetings, high-level officials representing the PRI and FNM made it clear to union officials that Ávila Camacho and Alemán planned to fight the STFRM to improve conditions for business. At this level, the postwar debate was clearly between powerful men. The idea of a politically homogeneous railway rank and file proved critical for the union at meetings with company executives and government officials. It allowed STFRM leaders to make demands on behalf of a supposedly cohesive workforce, and when these demands were challenged, it enabled them to issue warnings of potential work stoppages or strikes. These threats were not simply imaginary, for the discursive formation of a railway community was produced in conjunction with the grassroots, as the rank and file mobilized for salary increases for office workers and against the social costs enacted by pervasive inflation. This was their alternative vision for industrializing Mexico. On the street and at worksites, the rank and file mounted protests and staged slowdowns once it became clear that President Alemán intended to impose his will on workers, supporting Jesús Díaz de León's takeover of the union in 1948. However, those who opposed the leadership of Gómez Z. and Campa backed Díaz de León, proving that while workers may all identify as rieleros, they may profoundly disagree about union politics. José Jorge Ramirez's efforts to cover these fissures—years after the fact—further demonstrate the seductive, disciplinary power of the "railway community" as an idealized political identity. As we will see, workers formed a sense of cultural identity based on their workplace and neighborhood interactions, but it would take the work of grassroots organizers to turn this shared sense of collectivity into a cohesive political movement. We now turn to the story of how ordinary railway workers overcame their divisions in order to organize a mass movement against charros, FNM officials, and the PRI's postwar industrialization policies.

2

"Born into the Railway"

Patriarchy, Community, and Underground Activism in the 1950s

Sometime in the early 1930s, a Zapotec woman from Mogoñe, Oaxaca, took her twelve-year-old son, Demetrio Vallejo Martínez, to find a job at the railway station, where she sold food to hungry men on lunch break. In these men she must have seen a career path for her son, a job with a steady wage, benefits, and prestige. Although she mainly spoke Zapotec, she knew enough Spanish to persuade the station manager to take on Demetrio as an assistant. As she sold the produce that she and her husband harvested on a nearby farm, she kept her eye on Demetrio, who quickly grew fond of his job and dreamed of becoming a telegraph operator for the railway. Little did she know that her boy would become the most prominent rank-and-file leader in the industry's history.

Vallejo followed his sister Isaura on a path to upward social mobility. She had married a railway worker in Salina Cruz, a major railway hub. She soon gave birth to Lilia Benitez Vallejo. Like Demetrio, Benitez lived near the train station, where she played with friends and waited for her father and grandfather—both ferrocarrileros—to punch out. By the time they were in their teens, Demetrio was living in Salina Cruz with his sister and niece and working at the railway yard with his brother-in-law. The railway industry penetrated most aspects of the lives of the Vallejo-Benitez family; they lived near the tracks, depended on the industry for work, and socialized on streets bordering the station.[1]

Demetrio Vallejo took such pride in his work and developed such affection for his colleagues that he decided to become a union rep-

resentative for Section 13 of Matías Romero while he was still in his twenties.[2] When the railway movement came to a head in 1958, he had had well over a decade of union leadership experience. As Vallejo rose meteorically to lead the movement, he realized he needed trustworthy allies as he fought the charro union establishment. It was during those heady days of 1958 that Demetrio Vallejo called on his niece, Lilia Benitez, to join him in Mexico City and help him in the independent railway movement.

Benitez was one of thousands of railway women whom historians have failed to include in the history of the industry. These women joined the movement on unequal terrain, with their male relatives soaking up the spotlight in newspapers and consequently becoming for historians the sole protagonists of postwar labor activism. But women had no less pride in being rieleras than their men did in being rieleros. They participated in an industry indispensable to the nation's economy, but they remember their experiences with much less nostalgia. Wives endured men's tendencies to spend much-needed pesos in bars and on lovers, and they often suffered physical abuse when their husbands did come home. While men cherished their time spent on the rails — often spending weeks away from home — wives complained of loneliness and neglect. Moreover, by the 1950s women's expectations that railway work would provide a decent family wage proved illusory.

This chapter makes two arguments. First, it contends that railway patriarchy — which was based on men's exclusive right to work on trains and in yards — shaped the organization of work and community. Second, it shows that rieleros in Mexico City drew on their shared experiences at work and in neighborhoods to organize clandestinely in the early 1950s. These experiences on the job and in the community would enable rieleros and rieleras to build a broad, national dissident movement in the late 1950s.

Roots of Discontent

From 1948 to 1958, charros refused workers' demands for wage hikes in order to keep rates on cargo low and thereby help strategic industries, such as mining and textiles, which were critical for industrial-

ization. When the rank and file complained, FNM officials and newspapers threw their support behind charros, explaining that higher wages would only hurt the economy.[3] The mobilization of railway families in the late 1950s reflected a well-founded perception that these policies had left them behind.

According to Jeffrey Bortz, "Real wages fell sharply in 1939, reached a low point in 1946, remained exceedingly low until 1952, and did not recover their 1939 level until 1968."[4] Not everyone suffered during this period, however. Economist Clark Reynolds explains that between 1950 and 1957 the top 20 percent of the population became more affluent.[5] The process of transferring wealth from the working class to the affluent directly impacted workers at the FNM, for they saw their real wages decline by almost 40 percent.[6] A study conducted by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in collaboration with economists at the Banco de Mexico and the Nacional Financiera underscored what railway workers already knew: "Industrial and commercial profits . . . increased far more than wages and salaries, and most of the consumption during the period was enjoyed by only a small part of the population."[7]

Wages did increase for some industrial workers, but they failed to meet the rising cost of living. In the mid-1950s, textile, mining, and metal industries made efforts to address the problem of inflation. In order to temper the 10 to 15 percent upsurge in prices in 1955, textile workers received a 5 percent pay raise, while miners and metal workers received 10 percent.[8] Two years later prices soared by another 14 percent. Once again wage hikes offset the effects of inflation for some rank-and-file workers. Textile workers received a 20 percent pay raise, while electrical and metallurgical workers got 12.2 and 12.9 percent raises, respectively.[9] Nevertheless, the U.S. embassy explained that although "industrial wages continue to increase, the general level of real wages still appeared on the decline."[10] If times were difficult for workers despite wage increases, they were much worse for railway families because they did not receive any across-the-board pay raises.

The economy took a turn for the worse in April 1954, when President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines announced the devaluation of the peso, which

worsened workers' already low standard of living.[11] Not only had wages remained stagnant but the devaluation now led to decreased purchase power, as prices rose on food, clothing, and household articles.[12] Lard, coffee, and milk prices rose by over 40 percent, and the cost of electricity rose by over 30 percent. Working-class families faced a dire economic reality while union leaders remained passive, failing to address what U.S. embassy officials described as "widespread . . . genuine discontent and ferment, at least in the industrial sector of Mexico's working people."[13] As we will see, a small group of dissidents in Mexico City would covertly organize to challenge charros reluctant to defend workers and their families.

The World of the Workplace: Unpacking Railway Patriarchy

In order to understand the transition of the railway movement from a clandestine association of disaffected rieleros in 1954 to a broad social movement in 1958, we must understand the world of railroad communities and workplaces, because without affective ties, the movement would not have been possible. Moreover, a study of community relations reveals the importance of women to everyday life and to the movement. Of the more than 100,000 workers represented in 1958, very few were women.[14] Those who worked for the industry were employed primarily as nurses and secretaries, but we do not know how many they numbered. Although there was no official policy preventing women from working at yards and on locomotives, the railway company and STFRM, which held a great deal of power over hiring and firing, did not consider women for those positions. By excluding women from the most prestigious and best-paying jobs, the union and company defined railway work as masculine.

Railway patriarchy drew on long-standing notions of male privilege. Steve J. Stern's concept of colonial Mexican patriarchy as "a system of social relations and cultural values" that conferred authority to men over women's sexuality and labor provides insights into unpacking railway gender ideology.[15] The company and union's practice of excluding women established the supremacy of male labor as a cultural value among *familias ferrocarrileras*. Thus the importance of male

labor came to define relations between rieleros and rieleras at home and in neighborhoods. Differences in life experiences between rieleros and rieleras were thus rooted in a workplace practice that valued the exclusion of women as a cultural imperative.

As in the colonial case, the family served as the primary metaphor for ordering relationships. Just as colonial patriarchy structured relationships among men, with elder males receiving a greater share of social and symbolic power, the collective contract between the STFRM and the FNM stipulated that workers moved up the occupational hierarchy on the basis of seniority and skills. The result was a workplace environment that replicated the power structure in the idealized traditional family, with elder males supervising juniors. The intimacy among workers became heightened for many men who were actual kin—fathers and sons, uncles and nephews who toiled together. For them, the workplace hierarchy paralleled and reinforced the power structure within their families.

The most esteemed men were the conductors, firemen, and machinists, known collectively as *trenistas* (trainmen), because they displayed attributes that men associated with masculinity. They enjoyed the most on-the-job independence because they spent their days unsupervised, pushing their locomotives up mountains and through storms. They received the respect of fellow workers and the community alike. They were key to the industry and, by extension, to the national economy. Their independence made their job all the more coveted, serving as the masculine ideal for all workers.[16] Representations of ferrocarrileros focused primarily on those who worked as trainmen or in the shops.[17] The classic red kerchief and blue denim worn by trenistas indicated that they were something other than your common industrial laborers; they belonged to a special group.[18] Many trenistas became union leaders; in fact, many dissidents in the 1950s were trainmen.

The union and FNM's de facto exclusion of women from these positions of authority reflects a broader institutionalization of patriarchy in the industry, which played out in informal relations between men and women. It also explains, in part, why women did not hold leadership positions in the union, even though they were employed as office

workers and nurses. In turn, women's exclusion from official leadership positions resulted in their absence from accounts of the movement, which focus mainly on union leaders.

A more accurate account of the industry must address all workers — male and female — not just those at the top. The FNM created a labyrinthine system of classification for its employees, dividing the workforce into five branches. Peons (track repairmen and handymen), shop workers, train crews, and communication workers constituted 82 percent of the workforce, while office workers made up the remainder.[19] Despite the relative comfort and prestige of office work, the FNM included office workers among the rank and file, and they were represented by the STFRM. In order to rise out of the rank and file, an employee had to become a "personal de confianza," or a supervisor. The documents show that it often took many years before an employee could climb the ladder from rank and file to supervisor.[20] (And even when a worker was offered a supervisory position, which paid better than any rank-and-file post, he might decline the offer because it would require him to withdraw from the STFRM and enforce rules and reprimands on the very colleagues with whom he had toiled for years.)[21] Within each branch, an elaborate hierarchy existed, which was based on seniority and, to a lesser extent, performance.

Peons constituted the poorest and least educated workers. They felt the presence of the workspace more immediately than others; the railways pervaded all aspects of their lives as well as their families' because the company literally dictated where they lived.[22] If the company needed bridges or tracks repaired at the other end of the country, the peon and his family moved there.[23] Frequent transfers blurred the line between a peon's work and home life. When they arrived at their new work site, these families assembled their makeshift houses — which were sometimes little more than tents — feet away from the tracks. During better times, peon families might share a boxcar allotted to them by the company. These cars, one interviewee remembers, were "like ovens in the summer and freezers in the winter."[24] By providing living quarters, the company ensured an available labor force while making the worker more dependent on the employer. Dis-

missal from work would result in eviction from company housing, a reality that had a devastating impact on peon families during strikes. Through transfers and company housing, the company controlled a peon's time, manipulated his work and social life, and disrupted family relations. To make matters worse, in many of these locations, there were no schools. In such instances, the children either did not go to school or were sent to live with relatives.[25]

As a result of the general lack of training, and in most instances the lack of schooling, peons earned the lowest wages and had the least control over how they could execute their tasks.[26] While trenistas often spent days without a supervisor looking over their shoulder, peons took orders from any worker with more seniority and were therefore always under supervision.[27] Their tasks ranged from revamping rails to guarding warehouses, from fixing bridges in isolated areas to signaling conductors of emergencies. When an extra hand was needed to unload cargo, the peon did the job. All day they toiled outside, confronting the hazards caused by the combination of inclement weather and heavy machinery. When not doing odd jobs, they repaired tracks, lifting the heavy steel and setting it down with crossbeams.

Peons supported the railway movement in large numbers because they had been severely affected by the charrazo in 1948 and the STFRM's subsequent turn from a combative to compliant union. Peons had secured a wage increase in 1945, under the leftist leadership of Luiz Gómez Z., who was ousted from the charrazo.[28] But when charros took over the union in 1948, they agreed to a collective contract that included provisions allowing the FNM to transfer peons at will. In doing so, charros poorly represented the most vulnerable members of the union, making clear to peons that they could not count on union leaders to pressure the company to improve these difficult and dangerous working conditions.[29] In 1958 peons joined their union brothers and sisters in the movement for union democracy.

If peons enjoyed the least workplace control among the rank and file, station agents stood among the most respected of STFRM members. For starters, the company allotted a section of the railway station to serve as living quarters for agents and their families.[30] Although the

housing was considerably more comfortable than that granted to peons, it was not without its hazards. Families of agents lived on company premises and were therefore vulnerable: if the company found an agent guilty of a grave infraction, he and his family could lose their housing. In addition, family members breathed the fumes of burnt coal released by locomotives, and children had to take care when stepping outside, for trains presented a constant danger.

The line between workplace and home became obscured for railway families. How could it be otherwise, when tracks and locomotives served as a playground for their children? After a child's sixteenth birthday, it seemed inevitable that he or she would sign on with the FNM. Such was the case for Juan Broissin Uribe. Born in 1935, he grew up living in a station in Chiapas, where his father was station chief. When Uribe turned sixteen, he joined the union, asking to be employed under the supervision of his father. He continued to live in the station until he married in 1960.[31] Guadalupe Acosta, the daughter of a station agent in Hidalgo, expresses her upbringing poetically: "I was born into the railway."[32] Since her family occupied rooms attached to the station, she associates hearth and familial bonds with the railway industry. She would fall asleep as a young girl to the sounds of train whistles, the grinding noise of breaking locomotives, and the rustling footsteps of workers scurrying about. Predictably, when she came of age, she went to work in the offices of the FNM. In the 1960s, when women took on more prominent roles in the industry and union, she became a union activist.

Carlos Salazar Ramírez, a track repairman from Puebla, also describes himself as having been "born into the railway."[33] Railway tracks served as a playground for Salazar Ramírez and his friends in the neighborhood. Christmas was special for railway boys and girls, as they anxiously awaited locomotives to pull into the station with gifts sent from fathers stationed throughout the country. The expectation that boys like Salazar Ramírez would work for the railroad helped the workforce reproduce itself. They brought with them knowledge of labor struggles transmitted to them by their parents. Little wonder then that many railway leaders followed in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfa-

thers, and many railway wives joined strikes in the tradition of their mothers and grandmothers.

Most workers, however, did not experience the extreme connection between home and work life familiar to peons and station agents. Geraldo Niño Mendez, the shop worker from Puebla discussed in the introduction, joined many of his colleagues who lived in railway neighborhoods near stations. Shop workers' families rarely received company housing. Nevertheless, they shared peons' frustration with the company's failure to provide the necessary training and equipment to meet production demands. Shop workers in the 1940s and 1950s knew that the FNM put a premium on efficiency because the company frequently published articles in *Ferronales* giving shop workers advice on how to increase their productivity and how to avoid accidents.[34] Worker efficiency promised to be the midwife of Mexican modernization.

Shop workers did not need to read the company magazine to know of their importance for the smooth functioning of the system, however, for the very distribution of repair shops made it clear that they were indispensable. The company had repair shops at strategic points along rail lines, usually near principal stations. Repair shops existed in Mexico City, San Luis Potosí, Puebla, Monterrey, and Matías Romero. They concentrated large numbers of workers who repaired and cleaned train cars, machines, and their parts. They included mechanics and carpenters, welders and errand boys. Workers performed strenuous and specialized tasks, but with the exception of mechanics, the company provided little training, expecting workmen to teach each other. This was a major point of contention for Niño Mendez, who resented the fact that the FNM expected him to learn on the job without proper training. When he gained experience and seniority, FNM managers expected him to teach novices how to place parts onto locomotives and repair machines. Niño Mendez regarded the lack of formal training as a way for the company to save money, putting the burden of training new workers on the rank and file.[35]

On-the-job training bonded workers while making their jobs more difficult. More important, the lack of formal training reduced opportunities for promotions, keeping wages low.[36] In addition to inadequate

preparation, shop workers complained about their lack of autonomy. Like peons, they had to ask supervisors for permission to carry out even minor tasks. Shop workers were even prohibited from talking with bosses. One retired worker complained, "We couldn't interject in [supervisors'] discussions, because they were older and had a higher rank. We could only talk to each other."[37] Because workers generally valued self-assertion and independence, associating it with masculinity, their subservience to supervisors was likely experienced as demeaning and emasculating.

To be sure, workers associated workplace autonomy with masculinity, and no workers had more autonomy and flexed as much bravado as trenistas. All interviewees explained that trenistas took pride in their machines as no other workers did. They expressed control over the locomotives, tailoring parts to reflect their own particular style. Conductors such as Mexico City activist Juan Colín modified their whistles to make a distinctive pitch, each trying to make his whistle sound unlike any other. The distinct pitch of a conductor's whistle enabled loved ones to know if it was their husband, father, or friend who was pulling into the station. As one worker recalls, a wife or friend could often identify a conductor by the whistle, calling out, "Oh, Juan is arriving."[38]

As a result, the machines themselves conferred a romantic quality to workers' lives and gave them a sense of control over their labor. Their desire to exert control at the workplace suggests a parallel with their determination to establish their authority at home, especially over their wives. Men's control over women's bodies manifested in beatings, demands for sexual fidelity, and the expectation that women would be relegated to the home, birthing and caring for children, while men worked, socialized in bars, and pursued lovers. The metaphorical parallel between railway machinery and women is reflected in workers' conferral of gendered diminutives, such as *negrita* or *morenita*, to locomotives.[39] They prized the access and control they enjoyed over their equipment just as they valued the power they held over the body of their wives.

Trenistas also romanticized their jobs by emphasizing their independence from bosses. Supervisors regularly disciplined workers, fining

them for delays, insubordination, or simply not following workplace rules. Nevertheless, workers at the time and in oral histories idealized workplace culture by stressing their freedom. This is particularly true of trainmen, who felt a sense of adventure and independence because they spent entire days traveling without supervision.

Trenistas used this opportunity to put on performances of virility, such as jumping on and off of moving cars, to the delight of those waiting at stations.[40] Bosses regularly tried to curb such behavior by fining them for delays and charging that they drove carelessly. But trainmen engaged in bureaucratic combat by taking the matter up with union representatives, who contested the fines in the Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje. These low-level battles formed the daily drama of railway life for trenistas. Their willingness to fight bosses and assert their independence further contributed to the belief that they were more masculine than most men.

Efforts to modernize the railway in the 1940s and 1950s placed pressure on all workers to increase production, but engineers felt the call for efficiency most profoundly. When a train was late, it was the engineer who risked being accused of purposely causing the delay to earn overtime pay.[41] (The charge became politically contentious in the 1950s, as workers put in extra hours because, as one former rank-and-file member recalls, "the regular salary was not enough to live on.")[42] Officials blamed the engineer for tardiness regardless of the myriad causes that may have contributed to the delay, such as the poor performance of trains, unreasonably ambitious schedules, or the incompetence of fellow workers. The company fined engineers if they failed to gather their crew two hours before departure to discuss the day's timetable.[43] If a fellow worker was late, the engineer had to bring it to the company's attention, while suffering a penalty for not gathering his men.[44]

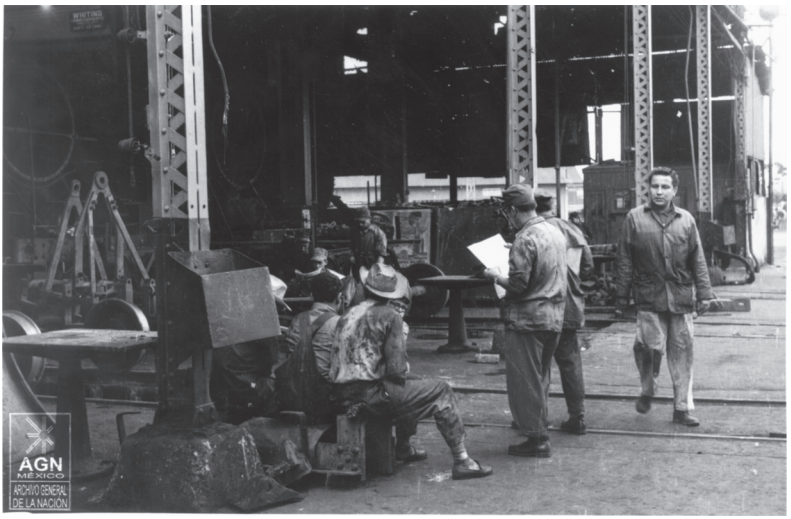
The engineer was not alone in reporting co-workers who broke company rules. To be sure, the FNM enforced regulations by making all trainmen responsible for alerting supervisors if a fellow trenista proved incompetent. These reports were central for ensuring the rank and file's adherence to company regulations. They served to hold trainmen accountable by encouraging them to inform supervisors about any mis-

takes made by colleagues, who were often friends. Trainmen policed one another in order to avoid punishment.[45] Reports also helped prevent injuries by making trainmen more dependent on each other. Time wasted taking care of an injury might result in a penalty for delaying the locomotive; hence workers took care of one another to avoid fines.

By absolving itself of blame for workers' mishaps, the company redirected conflict horizontally, among workers.[46] Pancho Mortera (introduced in chapter 1) emphasizes that workers pointed fingers at each other, filing reports to supervisors to avoid company persecution.[47] With a tall, commanding presence even in old age, Mortera's voice and face turn stern when he explains that lazy or incompetent workers were considered *cabrones* by their colleagues, who gave them hell until they improved their performance. The company's policy of penalizing workers individually belied the collective process of railway labor and served to divide workers when accidents and delays occurred. When supervisors sought those responsible for laxness, disagreements and accusations between workers often obscured the company's domination over them.

The company charged the conductor with the responsibility of keeping trainmen accountable. He made sure that the brakemen, fireman, and engineers executed tasks, reporting any violations of the men to the station chief. He would then report to his superiors, who promptly disciplined any employee guilty of an infraction. Punishments ranged from fines for minor offenses, such as tardiness, to jail time for workers charged with causing train accidents.[48] During the railway movement of the 1950s, dissidents pointed to the rise in arbitrary penalties and fines to rally workers against charros.

In addition to managers, the company designated a separate branch of white-collar employees, named "special inspectors." Inspectors shared no occupational interests in common with the rank and file because they were not bound by the collective contract and did not belong to the STFRM. Management could therefore appoint them without consulting the union; this allowed the FNM to pluck union leaders away from the STFRM, luring them with higher wages and greater authority.[49] Inspectors acted essentially as company spies.[50] They investigat-



1. Rieleros and passengers on break in Mexico City at the height of the 1958 protests, August 6, 1958. Courtesy of Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Hermanos Mayo.

ed large and small infractions, from accidents that dented the FNM's finances to petty theft.[51] And charges of theft, no matter how small, could lead to jail time.[52] Trenistas complained about the presence of inspectors, filing complaints with the STFRM.[53] Because inspectors made unscheduled rounds, workers knew they had to be on their best behavior at all times or risk fines or dismissal.[54] The political consequences of the use of inspectors became clear during conflicts between the STFRM and the FNM. In such cases, the union argued that inspectors politicized accidents by charging trainmen with sabotage, revealing the tension that existed between management and the rank and file.[55]

While trenistas were clearly the most esteemed men, yard workers and track repairmen pointed to the perilous quality of railway labor as evidence of their heightened masculinity. They had to prove themselves every day by moving steel tracks, muddying themselves with grease, and stoically enduring injuries. To be sure, injuries were commonplace for all workers; yard workers reported losing limbs as a result of unwieldy tracks slipping from a colleague's grasp, and it was not uncommon for trainmen to fall off moving locomotives.[56] FNM statis-

tics give us a sense of the danger these men faced. For example, there were over 1,400 train accidents in 1957, leaving 159 dead and 8,121 injured, including passengers. While it is unclear how many passengers perished, we know that more than 40 workers died on the job every year between 1951 and 1957.[57]

These everyday hazards became emblazoned on workers' clothes in the form of stains. Miko Viya, a former worker from Puebla, says that workers derived pride from their oil-stained clothes and enjoyed it when people referred to their dirty uniforms. "We had respect for the trade and pride of being a ferrocarrilero. People would call us *chorreados* [soaked], because when we worked [our clothes] were full of oil," he explains.[58] The oil-soaked overalls provided evidence that railway workers performed physically intense work. Photographs of workers from the 1950s affirm the performative quality of railway dress and gestures, as they present trainmen with rolled-up sleeves and exposed muscles, sneering at the camera.[59]

This aspect of railway masculinity became clear to me one day as I visited with Niño Mendes, with whom I spent countless hours walking the streets of Puebla, discussing history and debating politics. Now in his late sixties, Niño Mendes romanticized railway history, placing its apogee in the 1930s, not surprisingly coinciding with the Cárdenas era. Like so many other workers, he had followed in his father's footsteps by joining the industry. He pointed to a photograph of himself with colleagues standing in front of a locomotive, asking me to take a good look at his arms. Railway work had made him strong, a real *cabron*, he explained.[60] The enormous physical exertion required to work in yards led Niño Mendes and his co-workers to think of themselves as stronger, tougher, and more courageous than the average man. (Notice the double edge of the term *cabron*. In Mortera's telling, trenistas applied the word as a derisive appellation, while Niño Mendes reminds us that it could also be used as an accolade.)

Rielero masculinity can be fruitfully compared to the culture of manhood created by Chilean copper miners, as described by historian Thomas Klubock. Both Chilean miners and Mexican railroad workers positioned themselves as the radical vanguard among the work-

ing class, with a history of participating in national politics through each country's Communist Party. Both groups labored for industries considered key for development and consequently created work and community identities that emphasized their role in their nation's prosperity. In addition, rieleros and miners "celebrated the pure physicality of their work and the risk and danger of their struggle in an environment that constantly threatened their lives."[61] Finally, differences in life experiences between men and women in each case were rooted in workplace cultures that excluded women, thereby conferring social and economic power to men.

The railroads, however, differed in important ways from the mines, and these differences greatly affected the form of railway masculinity. First, rieleros enjoyed a remarkable degree of physical mobility. Trenistas exercised a great deal of autonomy while on locomotives, and even the lowly track repairman was often sent to remote locations, miles away from supervisors. Their masculine power and pride was based in part on their knowledge of the labor process, which enabled them to work independently and, during times of labor strife, to shut down the workplace by striking. Moreover, rieleros literally wrestled with steel tracks and moving locomotives, which required a form of expertise and strength unknown to workers in other industries. The symbolic power conferred exclusively to men by segregating the work process on the basis of gender enabled the STFRM to politicize masculinity, casting the rielero as an eager soldier in class war.[62]

The Practice of Community

Railway patriarchy reached beyond the site of production. Interactions at work and in neighborhoods constituted the social material of "community" for railway men and women, and these communities were fundamentally shaped by the patriarchal culture of the workplace. As this culture empowered men over women, it helped create particularly strong affective ties among men. Meanwhile, railway patriarchy came to structure the lives and expectations of women, shaping distinct sociabilities for rieleras. These men and women formed a shared culture on streets and in homes.

The street served as the informal space where individuals associated with the industry came to see themselves as part of a broader local and national railway community. Railway neighborhoods came to be defined as the streets bordering or near tracks, yards, or stations. Through their actions in the streets, men and women communicated to others that they had a stake in the railway industry and in the union — as an employee or as a family member. If the neighborhood, as sociologist Michel de Certeau has claimed, is a unique social space where a dweller comes to be recognized by others by sharing everyday public practices, such as gossiping or going to the store, then railway neighborhoods did more than simply serve as a site for commercial exchange and recreation — they enabled individuals to see themselves as part of a greater whole, a collective.[63]

The neighborhood, according to de Certeau, is a practice: people transform space for particular social purposes, making it distinct from other spaces in a city. For Geraldo Niño Mendez and Carlos Salazar Ramírez, the distinction between railway neighborhoods and other city spaces was obvious. Both men remember the joy of living near the station and watching colleagues walk home; their children ran through the streets and became friends, while business establishments catered to the needs of the rank and file and their families.[64]

The very dynamic between railway workplace and railway neighborhood gave the latter its particular feel, which distinguished it from other spaces. In Mexico City, where the FNM granted workers land and even constructed housing, the connection between the industry and surrounding streets was particularly intimate.[65] Most railway families in the capital lived in Colonia Guerrero, which had housed artisans and working-class folks from its construction during the Porfiriato.[66] Colonia Guerrero was home to Buenavista station as well as Nonoalco, the main repair yard in the city, where faulty equipment and machines were sent for restoration. Hotels and bars lined the streets around Buenavista, catering to railway workers spending the night or having a drink before their next shift.[67]

In Matías Romero, the downtown as well as the streets bordering the railway station catered to ferrocarrileros. Workers could be

seen walking in throngs shortly after the morning whistle signaled the end of the late shift and the beginning of the day. Men clad in oil-stained overalls could be seen receiving their lunch, handed to them by a daughter or son. At night drunken railway men could be found staggering out of watering holes, while trains arrived at the station. These spectacles aided in "the production of [a] territorially bounded form of social solidarity."[68]

Auditory triggers also played an important role in structuring the everyday lives of families. Workers in Oaxaca were summoned to work by bells signaling the beginning of their shift.[69] In his influential study of oral history and working-class culture, Alessandro Portelli explains how in a factory town "the whistle blow . . . becomes the modern counterpart to the church bell, uniting the community around the factory and the machine."[70] A similar process took place in neighborhoods near stations. For example, men and women in Matías Romero recall that there was no need for them to wear a watch because they kept time by the station bells.[71] Bells rang five minutes before each shift, informing families that their loved ones would soon be home and reminding other employees that it was time to get to work. In short, the industry pervaded the auditory landscape of railway neighborhoods, and in doing so added yet another link between railway families, local merchants, and the industry.

To be certain, merchants played key roles in railway neighborhoods. Spaces bordering stations became zones of vibrant commercial and social activities, imbued by sounds and smells emanating from stations. Restaurants, cantinas, and hotels lined the streets next to stations.[72] Narciso Nava and José Jorge Ramírez (introduced in chapter 1) found cantinas to be places to let loose, dance, and drink before returning to work.[73] Proprietors at such establishments counted on railway men's reliable patronage for the success of their businesses, as evidenced by their practice of extending credit to rieleros and naming their establishments after elements relevant to the railway industry, such as The Crossbeam and The Rail.[74] The mere fact that many owners of cantinas chose the names of their businesses with rieleros in mind elevated the status of railway men among all those who lived

on or passed by the heavily trafficked streets surrounding the yards and stations.

Railway workers in Puebla still fondly recall the energy and reverie that existed inside cantinas.[75] When trainmen from distant cities rolled into town, they knew they could find a welcoming place just yards away from the station. Many hotels and cantinas gave credit to railway workers, counting on rieleros to pay them back when they received their pay. When he traveled around the country, organizing workers in 1958 and 1959, Demetrio Vallejo stayed at a hotel in Colonia Guerrero that was near Buenavista station.[76]

Proprietors in less populated localities relied even more heavily on railway workers, and there is evidence to suggest that these small entrepreneurs joined in solidarity with the rank and file during periods of political unrest.[77] During the railway strikes of 1958 and 1959, for example, Carlos Salazar Ramírez received credit and moral support from storeowners in rural areas in the state of Guerrero, where he repaired bridges for the FNM and slept in a tent yards away from the tracks. The relationship between railway families and small businesses in remote areas was reciprocal. Railway families relied on credit from merchants to get by until payday, and merchants gave them credit because they needed their business to keep afloat.[78]

Letters written to the national government by representatives of small communities show that proprietors and non-railway workers who lived in these areas counted on railway families to inject money into the local economy.[79] People in those remote areas were dependent on the railway to deliver food, such as corn and beans, and relied on trains as a cheap form of personal transportation.[80] Workers injected money into remote townships even when they lived shabbily. They spent their money at affordable hotels and exchanged their pesos for food bought from local vendors, many of whom were women trying to sustain their households.[81] Track repairmen such as Salazar Ramírez, toiling in desolate areas, often walked miles after work to find an open cantina or a place to buy a plate of beans, rice, and tortillas. As mentioned, they slept in tents beside the rails or, if lucky, in freight containers provided by the company. Those with long stints

in one location who were not offered containers to use for housing often built shacks out of rummaged wood. All workers relieved themselves outdoors. Lack of services led the union in the 1940s to call for improvements in hygiene. If Alemán expected the FNM to modernize, STFRM officials argued, then the FNM should make bathrooms available to the rank and file.[82] For diversion and a reprieve from their hard work and shabby living conditions, peons trekked into town. In small, isolated towns, the arrival of the train must have sounded like an explosion, and the vision of railway men draped in their classic blue, grease-stained overalls announced the arrival of a raucous party, one cantina owners must have been most happy to host.

As a result of the camaraderie shared by proprietors, townsfolk, and railway men and women, locals supported railway families during the strikes of 1958 and 1959. In remote areas, soldiers guarded the tracks and railway equipment to prevent acts of sabotage by strikers. Since railway families slept in tents and freight cars beside the tracks, soldiers in effect prevented families from accessing their homes, even to cook and sleep. Families picketed in front of soldiers, following directives they received by telegraph from leaders in Mexico City. Proprietors did their part by allowing railway families to eat and drink on credit, and local families afforded strikers a place to sleep when they were kicked out of their company-owned tents.[83]

In larger cities, the physical space of the railway neighborhood also provided cover for workers' excessive drinking and for the long-established practice of cavorting with prostitutes, a pastime remembered by many men.[84] Male workers bonded after work in cabarets and cantinas that lined the streets near stations in Puebla and Mexico City. Guadalupe Monroy, a former Puebla trenista, explains that hired women were rumored to charge railway men a little extra because men's dirty uniforms stained their dresses. Monroy's recollection of "una amiguita" ("a little girlfriend") that he had in one of the city's cabarets is a memory fragment that draws on a broader motif of promiscuity found in interviews with former railway men.[85]

Elderly rieleros continue to value promiscuity as an act that confers status to them *as rieleros*. One interviewee, a man in his early eight-

ies, waited till the end of the interview to confide that he was going to travel that weekend from Puebla to San Luis Potosí to meet his mistress — "una amiga," he whispered with a knowing nod, as his wife stood washing dishes at the other end of the house.[86] It occurred to me that I was witnessing, and participating in, the practice of railway patriarchy. Memories of sexual conquests, drunken revelry, and workplace mastery conveyed to me by male interviewees are fragments of a narrative web that exalts the very practices that emotionally and financially injured women. The narrative act continues women's exclusion in the present day, erasing criticisms of male behavior from the memory of railway life.

The value men gave to sexual promiscuity was passed on to sons and nephews, who often became rieleros. This was certainly the case with Salvador Núnez and his nephew Federico. The elder Núnez, a retired station chief from Durango, boasts that station chiefs regarded access to women to be a job perk. He recalls with nostalgia that women were attracted to station chiefs because they held a privileged status. Men like Núnez were relocated several times during their career: "That is why we station chiefs had so many children scattered."[87]

The case of Federico Núnez, who took a job with the railroad in Bermejillo, Durango, reflects the formative impact that rielero promiscuity — and its value as a positive masculine trait — had on young men. The younger Núnez claims to have had eight girlfriends he would see every night. He explains his plot to meet each young lady in a given evening: "As soon as night fell, there I would go, eh, well bathed, well dressed, *perfumadito*. . . . I had it figured out: there were eight girlfriends, there were four hours, half an hour each. . . . In the *pueblito* everyone would [eventually] know." Infidelity led to conflicts among women. One would declare, "I am the *jefe's* girlfriend," leading another to challenge, "What? What? No, I'm the girlfriend."[88] While women recall those days with frustration, men valued sexualized leisure as particular to railroad culture.

Everyday displays of male heterosexual desire in cantinas structured relations among men. Although women were present at these establishments as servers and sex workers, rieleros remember cantinas as

masculine spaces, where workers traded stories of sexual conquest and performed their heterosexuality by dancing and leaving with women. Even workers who did not want to partake in cantina culture felt compelled to do so in order to avoid being taunted or shunned by colleagues. Niño Mendes felt that he had to drink tequila with his supervisor in order to be "one of the boys" and get a promotion. "It was terrible," he recalls, "because I don't like to drink. I've never been drawn to it."[89] The experience must have been no less agonizing for the reputedly gay worker who was pressured to dance with women to the amusement of snickering colleagues.[90] In these ways the rank and file advanced compulsory heterosexuality, associating it with what it meant to be a proper railway man.

They also boasted of drinking with supervisors while on the job. Rieleros who did not drink would have their masculinity questioned and have difficulty bonding with supervisors, which could affect promotion. Nevertheless, an invitation to the cantina was a gender privilege because workers' wives and women employed as office workers or nurses were excluded. The association of drinking with masculinity extends beyond Mexico, as anthropologist David Gilmore observed in his study of men on Truk Island: "Drinking is the lubricant of the masculine pose . . . an important signal of intent to uphold a manly reputation," an observation no less relevant to reileros.[91]

The importance given to alcohol consumption, pervasive promiscuity, and physical strength had devastating consequences for women. It was not uncommon for inebriated men to beat their wives after a night of revelry. Antonio Moreno, a retired cook from Aguascalientes (and later Puebla), laments: "Workers hit women. I knew a compañero that hit his wife in the head so much that she got a head tumor. She was operated on in Hospital Colonia [railroad hospital] and she died. She didn't leave because of her kids. Another *compa*, his wife always had bruises, her eyes, her face, her arms. . . . He hit her a lot. She was always bruised and pregnant. She died of that. He married another woman. [No one] told him not to beat her."[92] In hindsight, Moreno indicts himself for being among those who failed to intervene, even as he expresses nostalgia for the conviviality of cantina and railroad

culture that provided men the social capital that justified their suppression of women.

Today Moreno is a railroad memory entrepreneur, working with the Museo Nacional de los Ferrocarriles Mexicanos to videotape interviews with retired workers, which will then be housed at the Centro de Documentación e Investigación Ferroviaria, the archive adjacent to the museum. Moreno lives with his wife, children, and grandchildren on a plot of land behind the museum, which sits on the site of a former railway yard. The defunct locomotives stand as curiosity objects on museum grounds, visited by student groups, retired rieleros, and others nostalgic for the roar of the "iron horse." Short and stout with dark leathery skin, Moreno is well into his eighth decade, but he is indefatigable, spending hours contacting retirees, setting up interviews, intent on preserving rieleros' stories. He lists no women among his interviewees, despite their ubiquitous presence in the community then and now.

In the 1950s, rieleras were no less likely than men to be found on the streets during the day. Although the idealized rieleras were married, monogamous, and dedicated to domestic duties, these duties often brought them out, as they visited stations to deliver their father's lunch or went to market to buy groceries. Women married to the lowest paid workers laundered clothes for extra income.[93] At market and on streets, these women socialized and came to think of themselves as belonging to a distinct group. These informal female networks became politicized during the strikes, enabling women to count on one another to cook for striking families, to collect money for families of imprisoned activists, and to stage protests of their own.

The FNM did its part to produce a rielera subjectivity. It sponsored a girls' basketball team, Las Rieleras, whose accomplishments were regularly touted in the company magazine, *Revista Ferronales*. The company also created heterosexual leisure spaces in Matías Romero by holding dances every Saturday.[94] María Orozco recalls the dances she attended in a small park adjacent to the railway station as festive community affairs. "Ferrocarrileros went to the park to dance marimba," Orozco explains, "and in February, they gathered for Fiesta

de San Matías. The women wore tehuano outfits, and the men arrived on horseback."[95] The importance that these dances had for women as a venue for socializing outside the boundaries of their houses can be appreciated by the fact that nearly all women I interviewed remember the dances, but no men in Matías Romero ever mentioned them. Adolescent boys did not have to look forward to dances to have permission to walk in town at night or flirt with women.[96] Clearly everyday double standards resulted in contrasting experiences — and memories — for women and men. Nevertheless, dances, informal gatherings while delivering lunch, and other impromptu socializing connected rieleras with one another, creating affective bonds that sustained women's mobilizations during the strikes.

Young rieleras helped reproduce railroad communities by forming families of their own. Such was the case with Ruth Ramírez, the daughter of a railroad peon, who grew up in makeshift tents adjacent to tracks. It was in one of those peon communities that she came to meet José Jorge Ramírez. It was expected that she would bear him children who would get jobs with the industry. The exalted role given to rielera reproduction was made clear to me when I visited Enrique López's home in Mexico City. He experienced the railway movement of the 1950s as a child. Once he reached working age in the 1960s, he took a job, which he viewed as an inheritance, with the railroad. When I asked about the role of women, he called my attention to a wall in his living room. The room is a shrine to the industry — with pictures of locomotives hanging beside STFRM signs and often with railroad music emanating from stereo speakers. He took down a framed picture of his mother surrounded by children.[97] It appeared in a local paper as part of an article exalting the role of rieleras in the community. The paper explained that having raised twenty-two children, López's mother exemplified self-sacrifice and domestic duty.

If there is a "working-class way of being a man or a woman," as historians Daniel James and John D. French maintain, there are then memories specific to men and women's experiences.[98] In the case of railway communities, whereas many men remember with delight their promiscuous and inebriated lifestyle, rieleras convey a decidedly less ro-

mantic portrait of railway life.[99] They recall that wives and children endured economic hardship while men spent time on the job or in cantinas. For example, rieleras in Matías Romero compensated for their husbands' meager income — and habit of spending pesos at bars — by selling goods at market and by washing laundry.[100] Indeed, Guadalupe Acosta believes that ferrocarrileras derived their common identity in part from shared sufferings. Her mother and other ferrocarrileras she knew often had no money for food and basic necessities while their husbands spent their money on mistresses.[101] When asked why they took to the streets in 1958 and 1959, rieleras explain that they felt invested in the dissident movement's goals of attaining higher wages for the rank and file, as well as subsidized housing and free medical care for families.[102]

Finally, railway neighborhoods also became incubators for political dissent, a space for railway families to develop a politicized working-class identity outside the oversight of STFRM officials. This was of particular importance during the era of charro rule of the union. Typically, the STFRM assumed the role of politicizing the rank and file, but charros were interested in de-radicalizing its members, mobilizing them exclusively in support of the ruling party. Hence during the 1950s dissidents made use of neighborhood spaces — cantinas, residencies, and street corners — to propagandize against charros. In doing so, they created their own political spaces outside STFRM oversight.

The use of the street as a political tool has long-standing precedents in working-class movements. Political scientist Ira Katznelson draws on Friedrich Engels to describe how spaces such as those near the railways can become politicized: "The semi-free space of the neighborhoods," he explains, provide a space "to meet, to proselytize, to organize. In the sharply class-divided spaces of the cities . . . workers become 'conscious of the fact they form a separate class, and have their own interests, policies, and points of view, which are opposed to those of the capitalist owners.'"[103] The process captures how railway neighborhoods served as political spaces that helped create a particular form of working-class identity, one with the railway industry as its geographic and symbolic nexus.[104]

Railway neighborhoods grew in importance in the early 1950s as spaces to organize the rank and file outside the view of company spies and charro supporters. As the national government and the FNM sought to modernize the industry, seeking higher productivity from workers even as wages fell, workers commiserated with one another in streets and bars as well as in their homes. These spaces served as sanctuaries for activists eager to talk to their colleagues about workplace concerns. When the movement displaced charros in the summer of 1958, dissidents moved meetings out of homes and into union halls. STFRM halls in Puebla, Matías Romero, and Mexico City were within walking distance of the train stations and were large enough to accommodate hundreds of members who met weekly.[105]

The presence of union halls in railway neighborhoods made nonemployees, such as wives and daughters, aware of issues that affected the rank and file. During times of labor harmony as well as during times of strife, rieleras could not avoid the politics of the workplace, because issues of wages, housing, and medical care affected how much food rieleras could put on the table, where they would live, and how they would take care of themselves and their children if they were to fall sick. In 1958, women drew on these long-standing ties to the industry to mobilize for higher wages as well as subsidized housing and free medical care for the spouses and children of rank and file employees.

Railway families came to associate the fight for an honest union with a broader struggle to elevate their standard of living. Since most families lived near stations and yards, some took up the fight to gain access to FNM land by squatting. In Mexico City, families formed the Acción Social Ferrocarrilera, which demanded access to land adjacent to the repair yard, which was worth an estimated 12 million pesos. The land was privately owned, however, so activists decided to demand another piece of land, which was owned by the FNM.[106] Since the government owned the FNM, dissidents reasoned that they could invoke the populist promises of the revolution to request company land. Activists argued that the government should confer the plots to them simply because they needed a place to live and the land in question was adjacent to their workplace, the Nonoalco repair yard. Rather than waiting for

a decree, railway families began building houses, with Valentín Campa encouraging squatters to hold their ground. Squatting continued to be a tactic. In November 1957, just a few months before the first major strikes, workers in Local 19 in Mexico City took over a piece of land in Colonia Guerrero.[107] Railway families felt a connection between the world of the workplace and that of the neighborhood.

Clandestine Activism under Cold War Conditions

During the early 1950s, a small group of rieleros across the country drew on their masculine identity to clandestinely organize against the charros in power of the STFRM. In major railway hubs, including Monterrey, Puebla, and Mexico City, workers aligned with the Partido Obrero Campesino Mexicano (POCM) and the PCM attended underground meetings of activists organizing a burgeoning movement. In doing so, these men exhibited traits that workers coded as masculine: independence, combativeness, and a willingness to put their bodies in harm's way—in this case, by risking arrest and imprisonment. They organized in secret spaces closed to women and most other men. Their involvement became all the more dangerous given the hardening Cold War context, as mainstream newspapers regularly reproduced the anticommunist rhetoric articulated by federal government officials.

As we learned in the introduction, the end of the war and the emergence of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 marked a transitional moment in global politics. With the war over and the fascist threat eliminated, Mexico followed a hemispheric trend in singling out communism as a menace to national economic and political stability. The shifting zeitgeist was reflected in changes to the penal code. In 1941, under President Manuel Ávila Camacho, Congress enacted Article 145 to the Federal Penal Code to protect the country from Axis agents, outlawing "speech or writing that carried on political propaganda among foreigners or Mexican nationals."[108] Anyone convicted of disrupting the "public order by causing a 'rebellion, sedition, attempted coup, or mutiny'" would be guilty of social dissolution.[109] The bill met little resistance, either from Congress or from activists, including the PCM, who

reasoned that the law made sense in the climate of World War II and the fight against fascism.

These parties could not have foreseen that in 1951 President Alemán would exploit Cold War fears of communist intrusion by expanding Article 145 to include acts that "tend to weaken the general economy or to paralyze illicitly basic industrial or public services," granting the courts extraordinary powers.[110] It took little imagination to foresee a scenario in which the ruling party would invoke the new law to prosecute political activists.[111] Almost too predictably, the law provided justification for jailing student activists in 1954 and rieleros who went on strike in March 1959. The latter were arrested for violating Article 145's provision against endangering the economy, which strikers did by illegally paralyzing the public railroad industry.[112] Without Article 145, the government would have had significantly less leverage in defusing the railway movement, especially since the right to strike was so powerfully granted by the Constitution.

The global Cold War gave Alemán a logic, a vocabulary, and a justification for monitoring peasant and working-class activists.[113] The evidence suggests that the Alemán administration, with the strong backing of Senator Carlos Serrano, deployed DFS agents to monitor rural and urban grassroots activists in an "anticommunist campaign aimed at encouraging a more sympathetic reception by the U.S. government of Mexican requests for economic assistance."[114] While the connection between domestic and international politics underscores the influence of U.S. economic and political power, the motivations for the surveillance and repression of activists were largely domestic, rooted in the government's policy of promoting native industrialization without commensurate increases in wages.[115] One result of this burgeoning Cold War idiom (discussed at length in chapter 5) was the regular kidnapping of communists.[116] As the Alemán administration's anticommunism grew more virulent, the PCM withdrew its support for the president in 1949.

An incipient movement to displace charros unfolded in cities with major railway family populations. By the early 1950s, disgruntled workers led by railroad activists aligned with the Marxian POCM in Mexi-

co City began organizing to overthrow charros, whom they charged with a host of egregious violations. For one, detractors alleged that charros acted with the FNM to penalize, and in extreme cases fire, workers who invoked the collective contract to contest supervisors. In addition, dissidents alleged that charros were absconding with union funds; specifically, they claimed that STFRM secretary general Jesús Díaz de León was a traitor for stealing over 600,000 pesos from union coffers.[117] Just a few years after the charrazo, these frustrated men became dissident activists, joining the clandestine group Railroad Workers for Union Struggle.

Activists complained that charros did not defend them against unjust workplace penalties, especially punishments meted out to trenistas for arriving late to their destinations. Trenistas challenged supervisors who penalized them for train delays or for traffic accidents, arguing that the company gave them too little time for routes. In order to meet schedules, conductors would have to break speed regulations and face penalties. Prior to 1948, the STFRM presented these arguments to the labor arbitration board. When Campa and Gómez Z. led the union, it often won the reinstatement of disciplined union members. However, after the displacement of leftist leaders, charros more often sided with the company. What's more, workers who protested charros' cozy relationship with the FNM faced dismissal or, at the very least, could expect to be overlooked for promotions.

The best trained and best educated among the rank and file — the trenistas — took leadership roles in the burgeoning movement. If the ability to defend oneself informed railway masculinity, these men were particularly masculine, for they took advantage of their literacy to contest company infractions of the collective contract. According to interviewees, many workers were illiterate, so trenistas' literacy enabled them to read work manuals as well as the collective contract, eliciting the respect of co-workers. Literacy often turned trenistas into leaders. For example, José Jorge Ramírez read newspapers and the contract out loud to his colleagues on lunch break, and co-workers came to him with questions about the contract. It was only natural then for Jorge Ramírez to take on a role as an organizer in the underground

movement of the 1950s. Demetrio Vallejo never met Ramírez, but they shared what became the qualities of a railroad leader: Vallejo read voraciously, and he shared what he learned with his colleagues.[118]

A direct link can be drawn from trenistas' literacy and their radical politics. Marxian thought had been a feature of railroad militancy since the 1920s, when the PCM had been recruiting ferrocarrileros. PCM-affiliated rieleros defended workers against firings and advocated for founding a national railway union. The party was particularly strong in railway cities, such as Mexico City, Monterrey, and Matías Romero and among trenistas, machinists, and telegraph operators. When Vallejo and Jorge Ramírez familiarized themselves with the writings of Marx and Engels, they were following in this tradition. The German materialists were difficult for rieleros to comprehend. Vallejo tried reading *Das Kapital*, but grew frustrated because he did not understand it.[119] Valentín Campa did his best to make Marxism accessible to the rank and file, applying historical materialism to particular concerns of railroad workers. When Campa served as the union's secretary of education, organization, and propaganda in the 1940s, he advanced a Marxian critique of capitalism in *Unificación Ferroviaria*, while reporting on the benefits conferred to workers in the Soviet Union.

Factional disputes within the PCM led to the creation in 1951 of the POCM, whose founders disapproved of the PCM's allegiance to the PRI and its policy of "national unity." Valentín Campa helped found the POCM and became active after his release from jail in 1952. As Campa notes in his memoir, the party included rieleros, petrol workers, miners, and university students, groups that went on to play an active role in the militant actions in 1958 and 1959.[120] In one important respect the POCM revived a critique of the PRI advanced by the STFRM when it was led by Gómez Z. and Campa in the 1940s, namely, that the ruling party represented the reactionary bourgeoisie, which was in cahoots with American imperialists. Imperialism stunted the growth of domestic capitalism, which according to Marx's view was necessary for the transition to socialism. Hence Mexico needed to break its ties to U.S. economic interests and develop domestic industries in order to have an industrial base to socialize in the near future. The POCM's analysis of

the country's political economy as well as its program for industrializing Mexico was a mirror of the STFRM's program before the charrazo.

Many of the workers who organized clandestinely remained followers of Luis Gómez Z. and Valentín Campa, who did not miss a beat when they were released from jail, quickly reaching out to those dissatisfied with charro representation. Campa and Gómez Z. plugged into a movement-in-progress, as railway workers belonging to the POCM, PCM, and PP had been organizing in the major railway hubs of Aguascalientes, Monterrey, Matías Romero, Puebla, Orizaba, Torreon, and Mexico City, calling for the ouster of Jesús Díaz de León and for the reinstatement of workers who had been fired for contesting charros.[121] Their efforts were not in vain, for in 1950 Díaz de León felt such pressure that he agreed to reinstate twelve workers he had fired for protesting by dragging their feet at work.[122] In 1953, Gómez Z. campaigned in Aguascalientes to be reinstated as secretary general of the STFRM. Although he did not prevail, meetings held in support of his candidacy further galvanized activists.

No one did more to bridge the political aims of the POCM with the social world of the railway workers in Mexico City than Juan Colín Padilla, a trenista based in the capital. I met Colín in 1999 outside the FNM building in Colonia Guerrero. A twenty-four-year-old researcher from the United States, I had arrived unannounced, asking about the railroad movement of the 1950s. After I had waited several days for someone to respond to my questions, Pancho Mortera directed me to Colín, who, it turned out, had been organizing in the community for over forty years. A short elderly man with a wandering eye and raspy voice, Colín continued to write his underground newspaper, *El Rielero*, which he had been distributing among the rank and file for decades. Before granting me an interview, Colín tested my knowledge of railroad history, interrupting to correct a date or detail. Once he recognized my serious purpose, he introduced me to retired rieleros in the capital. With Colín's approval, I gained access to individuals who had previously ignored me. For many years, I had no archival evidence to corroborate the information shared with me by Colín and had no way of knowing if he had been as active in the movement as he claimed.[123]

It was only when I gained access to the records of the DFS — housed now at the Archivo General de la Nación — that I came to better appreciate the prominent role he played.

During the 1950s Colín's role in organizing railway workers was not lost on DFS agents. In 1957 agents mistakenly reported that Colín was thinking about running as a POCM candidate for diputado of District 7 in Mexico City; District 7 encompassed Colonia Guerrero, the railway station, the Nonoalco repair yard, and the homes of a good number of railway families.[124] Colín did not belong to the POCM in the early 1950s because he distrusted political parties, but observers believed he behaved like a party cadre, scurrying frenetically around the capital, organizing workers. Years later Colín would explain that he simply wanted to organize his union comrades, not join a national party.[125]

He worked closely with Valentín Campa to become the most influential dissident in Colonia Guererro. Campa would lean on Colín, who had all the traits one came to expect of a trenista — he was well trained, conveyed what he read to his colleagues, and took pride in having many lovers. In a candid moment as we walked around Mexico City in July 1999, Colín boasted that he had more than fifteen children scattered in various cities. His sexual prowess likely bolstered his reputation among men, which aided his ability to recruit members for the movement.

The devaluation of the peso in 1954 affected all working-class families, but due to their organizational strength and political experience, railway activists were among the best suited to bring together activists across industries. In the Valley of Mexico and beyond, the POCM organized campesinos, industrial laborers, bank employees, and office workers.[126] For example, Demetrio Vallejo, unknown outside the Southeast at the time, made alliances with campesino groups affected by the devaluation. Although competition between the three Marxist groups — the POCM, PCM, and PP — resulted in no one party directing the movement, the POCM had more supporters among dissident leaders than any of the other parties.[127]

DFS agents had their hands full keeping tabs on Valentín Campa, who in 1958 and 1959 came to represent for detractors the embodiment

of a global communist conspiracy. Campa organized doggedly, visiting workers in a variety of settings; some meetings were held clandestinely in workers' houses, while others were brazenly public for police agents and company officials to see, such as when he visited stations or held meetings in union halls. It is unclear whether Campa formed and led the Railroad Workers for Union Struggle, as the DFS claimed, but he certainly provided ideological and organizational guidance for railroad activists.[128] We do know that in the early 1950s he visited workers in major railway hubs — including Mexico City, Monterrey, Veracruz, and Oaxaca — where workers would become strong supporters of the strikes a few years later.

By 1953 the underground movement executed militant actions that dissidents would continue to employ throughout the 1950s, leading up to the major strikes at the end of the decade. Audacious risk-taking, such as slowing production, sabotaging equipment, and propagandizing at workplaces in broad daylight, became common among a small cohort of radicals. Disgruntled office workers in the capital passed out fliers reading, "Ferrocarrileros: Not One Step Backwards in the Fight against the 'October 14' Mafia," "Let's Clean Our Union of Gunslingers and Assassins," and "Death to Those Who Have Disgraced Our Union." These activists focused on the ouster of all charros, including the latest STFRM secretary general, David Vargas Bravo. DFS agents reported widespread discontent, remarking that over 90 percent of the rank and file opposed Vargas Bravo.[129]

From the outset, railway activists looked to dissidents in other unions for support and for guidance. Electrical and railway workers turned out to have a common grievance: charro rule of their respective unions. Electrical workers offered inspiration to frustrated railway activists in 1952 when they accused their union representatives of selling them out to company interests. Electrical workers astutely took advantage of the election year, walking out on strike and then successfully pressuring President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines to intervene on their behalf. As a result of PRI intervention, the electrical company granted the rank and file a 15 percent wage increase and placed a freeze on hiring management. (The expansion of non-unionized administration posts an-

gered workers, who complained that if the company could afford to augment the white-collar labor force, it could afford to increase rank-and-file compensation.)[130] The victory provided a lesson for a discontented working class: it would take mass grassroots mobilization to wrest concessions from charro-infiltrated industries. The U.S. State Department presciently predicted that the victory would have "tremendous economic significance."[131]

The railway establishment turned a deaf ear to workers' complaints, justifying activists' continued organizing. On August 7, 1953, the union agreed to help the FNM clamp down on workers accused of causing train accidents or delays, even if they were the result of poorly maintained rails and equipment. The accord between the head of the STFRM and the company represented a major concession on behalf of the union, because workers had been adamantly stressing that faulty equipment, not incompetent workers, caused accidents.[132] As we have seen, workers explained that it was impossible for them to abide by FNM speed regulations without causing delays. Hence trenistas commonly broke regulations, driving over the speed limit on defective tracks, in order to pull into the station on schedule. This practice resulted in accidents, often fatal to passengers and workers, and always costing thousands of pesos in damaged equipment. Workers continued to insist that the company needed to focus on repairing equipment, not penalizing workers. Now more than ever it was clear that the union was in cahoots with the company to discipline the rank and file.

Dissidents fought back. During the early months of 1954, activists in Mexico City applied combative tactics to draw attention to their demand that charros step down from their positions and allow democratically elected leaders to step in. In January, three hundred workers protested outside union offices in Mexico City, undeterred by police presence. Activists argued that if charros were backed by popular support, they would not need police officers to guard union offices. Backed by petrol and mine workers, Nonoalco repairmen formed shock troops to "attack gunslingers guarding union offices."[133] Dissidents distributed a letter they had submitted to President Ruiz Cortines, requesting that he intervene on behalf of workers as he had done for electri-

cal workers, while assuring him that dissidents were not communists; they simply wanted an independent union free of charros.[134]

The president did not intervene. Charros responded to the unrest by making modest concessions to groups of aggrieved workers. When in March ninety Nonoalco workers gathered on FNM property to commiserate on their loss of vacation pay, the STFRM agreed to pay within a week. Later that month, STFRM officials traveled to Torreon to calm workers organizing with PCM leader Julian Orona; union officials brought with them five freight cars of food and clothing to hand out to impoverished railway families.[135] Organizing outside Nonoalco had become so pronounced that the FNM ordered foremen not to let workers leave the worksite during breaks, presumably to limit their contact with dissidents.[136]

The organizing tactics of trenista Luciano Cedilla and Colín reveal how railway neighborhoods could provide cover for political action. Cedilla, who joined Colín as a leader in the resistance movement in Mexico City, threatened to lead a work slowdown after the STFRM prohibited him from holding meetings on union premises.[137] Cedilla and Colín regularly hosted political meetings in Colonia Guerrero, blocks from the Nonoalco repair shop. At these meetings, activists from Monterrey commiserated with their colleagues in the capital, coordinating efforts to align workers from each city.[138] Since the repair yards in Monterrey and Mexico City were among the largest in the country, a slowdown by these workers would severely disrupt the functioning of the railroads.

Charros grew concerned by the discontent in Monterrey. Like their counterparts in Mexico City, the Monterrey dissidents believed that only by deposing charros would they be able to attain higher wages. In September, local and federal police stood guard outside the Monterrey repair yard to prevent activists from sabotaging machinery. The STFRM dispatched twelve officials from Monterrey to Mexico City to meet with local union representatives, fearing that the nearly three hundred workers who had joined the resistance movement in Monterrey would execute a work slowdown.[139]

Over the summer of 1954, workers in Laredo, Saltillo, Durango,

Torreon, and Guadalajara joined comrades in Mexico City and Monterrey in what became known as the *tortuguismo* movement, named after the turtle-like pace at which protestors labored. By dragging their feet at work, they would wreak havoc, causing delays in passenger and freight schedules. Led by Colín and Cedillo, rebels demanded a 100 percent increase in pension pay for retired workers, a 30 percent pay hike for personnel employed in driving diesel trains or repairing diesel engines, paid expenses during trips, and a five-day work week.[140]

The demands reflected widespread grievances, namely, that workers and their families paid the price for the modernization of the railroad. The increase in retirement pay would aid the families of workers made redundant by the introduction of diesel trains; workers who gained greater training and responsibilities by learning to operate diesel trains wanted to receive an appropriate compensation; and all workers could benefit from shifting the focus of negotiations away from workplace efficiency to a discussion of reducing the work week. As a result of the tortuguismo movement, over 1,000 freight cars remained idle in Monterrey rail yards, while nearly 300 cars were inactive in Torreon and Guadalajara combined. Dissidents halted the transport of over 50,000 tons of freight, causing "great damage not only to the shippers, but to the Company and in turn to the country itself."[141] The company estimated that the concessions would cost approximately 45,726,000 pesos.[142]

Charros stood by the FNM, denouncing the tortuguistas as communists seeking to embroil the rank and file in an attack on the national economy.[143] On September 22, FNM Special Service Agents, the company's undercover security personnel, detained four allegedly communist organizers along with nine union members, including Luciano Cedillo. FNM agents delivered them to the police, who booked them for attacking communication lines.[144] By week's end, police officials released the arrested, but more than forty workers were fired by the FNM, including Juan Colín.[145] The U.S. embassy in Mexico ominously reported, "The basic situation . . . was not remedied and further agitation could be expected."[146]

Repression failed to intimidate the most committed radicals. Over

the next few years, they continued to organize clandestinely, gaining ground among several key constituencies; within the FNM they successfully recruited office workers still upset with the company for failing to pay them overtime wages. The POCM took advantage of the dissatisfaction among office, train, and yard workers to form a broader working-class movement, inviting students to join the nascent electrical and railway workers' movements. When in 1956 the PRI staged its yearly Labor Day parade, an event meant to foster labor loyalty to the ruling party, railway radicals aligned with the Committee in Defense for the Railroad Contract (formerly the Railroad Workers for Union Struggle) broke ranks and voiced their disdain for the PRI and the FNM. They were immediately arrested and denounced as communists.[147] Over the next few years, red-baiting became a common practice for the FNM, the STFRM, the PRI, and all opponents of the movement.

Lastly, throughout the 1950s, students from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) and from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico City mobilized alongside their working-class counterparts. Student activists formed the University Student Federation as a political umbrella, mobilizing students to protest increased costs of public transportation and to express public support for dissident union movements. Students in the capital aided working-class activists by attending rallies and fomenting discontent with the political establishment.[148] Although the PCM supported students, and many student leaders had links to the party, there is little evidence to suggest that the PCM or any other party provoked students toward acts of agitation, as the press maintained.[149] Student activists, not the PCM, set their organizing agenda. This would remain true throughout the decade, as students took over city streets in support of working-class families.

Conclusion

As the government deployed the Cold War idiom to justify the monitoring of grassroots activists, rielero leaders drew on their culture of masculinity to resist charro rule and company control. The railway movement did not arise spontaneously in 1958 but had its roots in the

everyday organizing that took place in the early 1950s, as evidenced by the tortuguismo movement of 1954. Some of these organizers, such as Juan Colín, played prominent — though behind-the-scenes — roles in mobilizing workers in Mexico City in 1958. The tortuguismo movement was short-lived, but by putting disaffected workers in contact with one another, it laid the groundwork for future protests.

Although structural economic and political variables (stagnant wages, clientelistic politics) gave workers reason to strike in the late 1950s, everyday interactions in neighborhoods and at workplaces provided the affective bonds that enabled rieleros and rieleras to organize and sustain the movement in the face of repression. In the case of many activists, these relationships were founded on community ties that went back generations, with activists counting grandmothers and grandfathers as rieleras and rieleros. The railway movement cannot be fully understood without an appreciation for the texture of these relationships, a point that activists express in oral histories but that the literature on the strikes has largely ignored.

Women's bitter memories of economic hardship stand in stark contrast to men's nostalgia for the lost world of the railways. Men's longing for a return to a time when they controlled the union and mastered machines must be understood as a type of masculine, working-class nostalgia, a narrative of mourning for the end of an era when working-class men supposedly ruled the workplace. These testimonies give voice to the private desires and public participation of men and women in the labor movement. Oral histories will continue to inform our narrative as we unpack the political juncture of 1958, remaining attuned to how the desires of everyday rieleros and rieleras conflicted with the clientelistic arrangements in place.

3

"Who Is Mr. Nobody?"

The Rise of Democratic Unionism

During the spring and summer of 1958, rieleros put themselves on public display by fomenting a campaign to democratize the politics of the STFRM, which had become a puppet organization of the PRI. Their masculinity was heightened in the form of labor militancy, as their culture of combativeness became a resource for fighting the union and company on the streets and in the newspapers. Dissidents organized two strikes that summer, the first in June and the second in August. These strikes did not occur "spontaneously" after years of "labor peace," as the most popular account of the movement maintains.[1] On the contrary, activists who had been organizing clandestinely tapped into widespread dissatisfaction with charro representatives and declining wages. Workers blamed their economic plight on corrupt union officials. As organizers rallied the rank and file, railway men and women became labor activists, coming to understand that a wage increase depended on getting rid of the charros who controlled the STFRM.

In view of the STFRM's unwillingness to fight for economic concessions, railway radicals organized a fight for democratic unionism. Democratic unionism, as I define it, has two parts. First, it is the practice of carrying out transparent elections for union posts on a regular basis. The rank and file must elect their officials free of coercion. Second, it requires leaders to maintain their autonomy vis-à-vis the company as well as local, regional, and national politicians. Autonomy from the employer and the state empowers the union as a collec-

tive as well as the individual member. At the everyday level, members are more likely to question management or in other ways assert themselves on the job if they know that their union leaders hold no allegiance to the company or government. As a collective, the union wields more power when autonomous, because company and government officials know that labor's greatest weapon — the strike — could be employed if negotiations collapse. Because the PRI's postwar economic policies aimed to ensure a compliant working class by co-opting labor leaders, the democratic union movement delivered a direct blow to the ruling party's hegemony. Just as important, it revealed that many among the working class now questioned the PRI's commitment to the populist principles of the Mexican Revolution, in which thousands of working-class men and women had participated.

Detractors of the movement drew on the anticommunist zeitgeist that emerged in Mexico — and in the hemisphere generally — in the postwar era to marginalize the movement. From the summer of 1958 to the spring of 1959, when police and military personnel crushed the railway movement, politicians, FNM officials, and editorialists deployed anticommunist rhetoric to suggest that a secret core of labor leaders in cahoots with foreign communists sought to turn Mexico into a communist state and satellite of the Soviet Union. Former president Lázaro Cárdenas, who expressed his support of the labor and student movement throughout the period, lamented the tenor of public discourse: "It is necessary for men responsible for governing to ignore the clamoring [of those] attempting to fool the pueblo . . . with an anticommunist campaign that makes victims of those who ask for work to obtain bread, clothes, [and] housing for their families."[2] Cárdenas came to admire the railway movement for its effort to democratize the workplace and push for the broader redistribution of wealth in society.

Rieleros and rieleras were motivated by democratic participation rather than Cold War geopolitics; they practiced democracy through consensus building in neighborhoods and by flooding the streets in protest. With the support of thousands of other workers and citizens whose standard of living had plummeted due to stagnant wages, they took over union buildings and avenues in a number of major cities

and small towns throughout the country. I refer to these extrajudicial forms of protest as direct action. They were extrajudicial because they lacked court authorization, with protestors confronting riot police while congesting avenues and plazas. After exhausting legal channels because of the unwillingness of charros to represent them, dissidents circumvented the law, opting for directly and dramatically appropriating public spaces to convey their demands to the company, government, and public. These protests ranged from peaceful assemblies on company property to acts of violence against FNM equipment. At their most combative, an admittedly few protestors tossed Molotov cocktails at riot police in neighborhoods adjacent to the railways.

On many occasions, the protests stretched beyond railway neighborhoods, with dissidents marching through — and taking over — large sections of cities. The public quality of the protests attracted other disaffected working-class citizens, leading to impressive expressions of class solidarity. Teachers, oil and telegraph workers, and electricians conducted their own protests and expressed their solidarity with railway families by joining picket lines. Students, too, mobilized on behalf of the ferrocarrileros, their participation memorialized in some of the most poignant images of those days.[3] In short, the railway movement spearheaded a tide of disgruntled working-class people inspired by rieleros who fought to democratize their union.

The Political Opening, 1958

There was little suspense to postwar presidential campaigns. Candidates toured the country in an elaborate game whose outcome was all but predetermined. Presidents chose their successors, who then spent the better part of a year pledging their commitment to delivering the promises of the revolution. When speaking to business leaders, they laid out plans for economic development; when in front of campesinos, they promised land distribution; and when facing working-class audiences, politicians pledged to raise their standard of living. By 1958, the working class had grown weary of empty promises.

The presidential campaign of 1958 provided a political opening for various sectors of the working class to pressure the ruling party to

change its postwar economic policies. Labor organizers calculated that it was now time to put the heat on outgoing president Ruiz Cortines and the PRI establishment to choose a populist leader who would break from the pro-business politics in place since the Alemán administration. Traditionally presidents chose their interior minister as their successor, so President Ruiz Cortines caught observers off guard by naming his secretary of labor, Adolfo López Mateos, as the PRI's 1958 presidential candidate. Ruiz Cortines's selection of the populist labor secretary was emblematic of the PRI's ability to make concessions to the popular classes in order to forestall attempts to challenge their rule.

Adolfo López Mateos, whose youth, good looks, and celebrated oratory skills contrasted with the slight, graying, and bespectacled Ruiz Cortines, presented himself as a populist caudillo of the revolution, while the press played up his close ties to labor.[4] At each stop along his campaign route, he reassured disgruntled families that his administration would prioritize the economic concerns of industrial workers.[5] *Siempre!,* a politically progressive magazine in the capital, did its part to support the PRI candidate, explaining that a vote for López Mateos amounted to a vote for the revolution. One article reported on the candidate's stop in Autlán, Jalisco, where he promised to switch the nation's course away from Alemán's conservative policies and return to the populist agenda of Lázaro Cárdenas: "There is a part of the country paralyzed by pain, by misery, by injustice and ignorance," he said.[6]

The Confederación de Trabajadores de México, FNM, and the STFRM endorsed López Mateos and worked hand-in-hand with the PRI to get him elected. In fact, the DFS observed that STFRM officials "take orders from the PRI and its candidate."[7] The U.S. State Department received similar reports, calling López Mateos "the tapped one" whom labor would unequivocally support.[8] By referring to him as "the tapped one," embassy officials alluded to the practice of past presidents selecting their successors. In the view of State Department officials, López Mateos was a wise choice because as secretary of labor he could define himself as a friend to workers and presumably defuse unrest. STFRM charros did their best to prop up the self-fashioned populist with

the Hollywood looks. For starters, they created a railway election committee consisting of high-ranking union officials and headed by STFRM secretary general Ricardo Velásquez Vázquez. Velásquez traveled throughout the country with PRI senators and with the candidate, introducing López Mateos to festive crowds of railway families in Torreon, Aguascalientes, Matías Romero, and San Luis Potosí.[9]

Revista Ferronales instructed workers that it was in their interest to vote for the PRI candidate. The publication presented powerful visual images to substantiate the candidate's populist rhetoric and to provide evidence of rank-and-file support for him. Photographs in the March 1958 issue display workers in Aguascalientes dressed in their classic blue denim overalls with red kerchiefs tied around their necks. Listening attentively to the candidate, they hold signs that read, "Ferrocarrileros with López Mateos." In a separate frame others wear T-shirts with the PRI insignia emblazoned on the chest, above which reads, "Ferrocarrileros." An editorial in May brought the point home: "Never had such a concentration of ferrocarrileros been seen, such as those that presented themselves [for] López Mateos, at his arrival in Aguascalientes, where they enthusiastically received him." Workers wore the uniform, according to another editorial, to "honor the popular candidate." The use of the uniform carried political weight because it lent authenticity to the photographed scenes. As we saw in chapter 2, workers took great pride in wearing their overalls and regarded the uniform as conferring distinction on those who wore it. In the context of the election, the photographs invited rieleros to join their comrades in the crowds and support López Mateos. If one had only these pictures to go by, it would seem that the PRI had the overwhelming support of rieleros. PRI senator Samuel Ortega, who would soon replace Velásquez as STFRM secretary general, enthusiastically introduced the PRI candidate. "For five years," Ortega pronounced in the May issue, "you were Secretary of Labor and during that time we observed you defend our collective interests."

In case there was any confusion about how to vote, *Revista Ferronales* used the June issue to provide clear instructions. The first page showed a calendar with the election date, July 6, 1958, followed by a

reminder that they needed to obtain a voting credential. The last page displayed an image of the candidate from the chest up with this caption: "As a Mexican, you are completely free to vote for the candidate who is best in line with your ideas. But if you believe that the work of revolutionary governments for Mexico's progress should be advanced, if you think that we should conserve our independence and our liberties, and that we should continue to fight for the well-being of all Mexicans, vote for the national candidate for the president of the Republic, Adolfo López Mateos, and for the legislative and senatorial candidates of the Institutional Revolutionary Party."

The PRI may have effectively mobilized railway workers to attend rallies, but it could hardly ensure rank-and-file support for its candidate. Despite pictures of workers attending assemblies in support of López Mateos, the PRI's reputation was declining among workers and students, who increasingly protested throughout the capital, issuing complaints concerning increases in the cost of living. Moreover, oral histories suggest that not all railway workers attended PRI rallies because they were enamored with the candidate. José Arellano, a former railway handyman in Oaxaca and Puebla, joyfully recalls attending PRI rallies not because he supported the ruling party but rather because the FNM gave him the day off work with full pay to attend, and the STFRM provided lunch and transportation.[10] How could he not take them up on the offer? Fidel Tabares Velazco, a former machinist in Oaxaca, is less sanguine about the relationship between the PRI and the STFRM during those days. "The union's job is to defend rights, not to defend those who steal," he explains, "but they would take people to the rallies. All the union cared about was votes for the PRI."[11] Clearly for Velazco the STFRM's blind endorsement of López Mateos was yet one more sign of the union's corruption.

U.S. embassy officials were well aware of the discrepancy between circulated images of mass support for López Mateos and opinions of the PRI on the ground. Officials informed Washington that the Mexican government took measures to cover up fissures that existed among the electorate during the presidential campaign. "Strenuous official efforts," one report explained, "were required to cover up for citizens'

apathy and indifference." The official blamed the masses' apathy on the PRI's unwillingness to effectively respond to the increase in the cost of living. Moreover, the embassy directly linked the party's ineffectiveness with its control over the country's politics. "Without effective opposition," it asserts, "the ruling group of politicians appears to have become smug and overconfident." The telegram notes with concern that citizens mock the administration of President Ruiz Cortines, whose 1954 campaign "promises contrast to actual increases in beans, potatoes, meat, corn, and bread over the last six years." The "average Mexican," it notes, "is painfully aware of their worsening poverty."[12]

An Unlikely Leader

In November 1957 dissident unionists in Mexico City demanded that Ricardo Velásquez Vázquez do his job as union head and force the FNM to increase wages.[13] Months earlier, dissidents at every local in the country had staged protests decrying the continued imposition of charros on their local committees.[14] The protests did not lead to strikes, but they made clear there existed broad discontent with charros. But a defiant Velásquez Vázquez continued to ignore the grassroots, no doubt feeling shielded from criticism because of his close links to the PRI. The union chief declined to present the request for a pay hike to Roberto Amorós, the FNM general manager. Díaz de León, the original charro, was no longer in charge of the STFRM, but the practice that he established of colluding with FNM management against his members' wishes continued.

Nevertheless, by pressuring their charro union head and demanding a pay raise, workers signaled that they were prepared to contest his authority. These acts challenged the legitimacy of STFRM leaders, whom dissidents now publicly accused of collaborating with the FNM. The activists now pressured charros to make their political sympathies public: if charros supported the rank and file, they would petition for a pay hike; otherwise, they would make it clear that they backed the company. It was the moment of truth.

STFRM and FNM officials did not know that organizers carefully calculated the political implications of circumventing charro leaders. Dis-

sidents planned their rejection of charros and the demand for a higher wage to coincide with the presidential campaign of Adolfo López Mateos. For the next several months, railway activists rallied their base around the proposal for a wage increase. They visited work sites, conducted clandestine meetings, and made contacts with other industrial union members, preparing to take advantage of the political opening presented by the national election.[15] Meanwhile, López Mateos planned to ride a populist message to the National Palace. He continued to tour the country, visiting railway yards and city centers, courting the industrial working class by presenting himself as a defender of the revolution. He and the PRI, he assured audiences, remained revolutionary and determined to attend to the needs of "pueblo."[16]

As López Mateos toured railway hubs, railway dissidents in the southern part of the country became attracted to a different type of leader, Demetrio Vallejo Martínez. Vallejo seemed an unlikely candidate to lead the rank and file. Campa, Gómez Z., and the most prominent labor leaders in Mexico City were smartly dressed mestizos. Dark fancy suits, slicked back hair, and sunglasses became the de facto uniform of the union bureaucrat. In contrast, Vallejo owed his short, stocky build to his indigenous ancestry. Whether he dressed in standard rielero overalls or uncomfortably in a suit, he lacked the urbane sophistication of mestizo charros in Mexico City. He also had none of the cosmopolitanism of the intellectual Left, among whom former railway leader Valentín Campa easily mingled. Moreover, Vallejo did not make his home in the capital or any of the country's other large cities. In 1958 Vallejo lived in Coatzacoalcos, which was an important railway town in the state of Veracruz, but it could hardly be mistaken for a city of significance for national or even regional politics in the way perhaps Monterrey and San Luis Potosí were in the north.[17] Hence Vallejo was very much outside of the national political scene and off the radar of the national press as well as the DFS.[18]

Although Vallejo enjoyed the esteem of workers in the southeast when he served as a local union representative in the early 1950s, word of him does not seem to have reached other parts of the country. His anonymity seems to have served him well, however, for it took some

2. Demetrio Vallejo Martínez with reporters in February 1959. Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Hermanos Mayo.

time for STFRM and FNM officials to understand that he posed a serious threat to status quo union politics. Vallejo caught detractors within the charro union off guard when he emerged as one of the main leaders of the movement in the spring of 1958. Surprised by his quick rise to prominence among the grassroots, charros asked themselves, who is "Don nadie"? (Mr. Nobody).[19]

Vallejo's reputation as a hardworking, honest leader preceded him. In Coatzacoalcos he worked with representatives of local unions to lobby for pro-worker candidates in municipal elections; he later extended his local activism to the national labor movement by supporting Gómez Z. in his quest to become head of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México. While with the CTM, Vallejo had helped organize petrol workers in Veracruz, where he claims to have been beaten by police and arrested. Vallejo must have been enthusiastic about Gómez Z.'s candidacy because he also sought to make connections between industrial unions, such as those of the petroleros and rieleros. As we saw in chapter 1, Gómez Z. formed the Central Única de Trabajadores in the 1940s to serve as an umbrella organization that would coordinate actions among the country's industrial unions. Vallejo soon fol-

lowed Gómez Z. and was elected head of the southern wing of the organization.

By this time, Vallejo had earned his stripes as a regional activist, having intermittently held leadership positions at the STFRM Local 13 in Matias Romero since 1936. Local 13 represented workers from the eastern city of Veracruz to the western city of Oaxaca. Workers at Local 13 must have known how important they were for the regional and national economy, for they drove goods from the Pacific coast to ports on the Gulf of Mexico. If his colleagues had not heard of him in the center and the north, those in this highly important local had embraced him as a leader.

Apart from his alleged provinciality, Vallejo's ethnicity may have contributed to his detractors' disbelief in his popularity. Most national railway leaders up until this time presented themselves as urban mestizos.[20] They organized around issues of class, not race or ethnicity. Vallejo also emphasized his class identity over his ethnicity. But when it became known that he was descended directly from indigenous people, detractors and followers alike differentiated him from national labor leaders. In short, his heritage enabled his critics later to apply bigoted stereotypes that portrayed indigenous people as simple and uneducated to claim that the communist intelligentsia easily manipulated Vallejo.[21]

It took a few months for Vallejo to make national headlines because the push for a wage increase first came to the fore in Mexico City in November 1957, when J. Guadalupe López Padilla led his colleagues at Local 15 in demanding that the FNM raise workers' salaries. Before the ascendancy of charros in union affairs, it had been commonplace for workers' salaries to be raised every two years. Therefore, when the FNM failed to raise salaries after signing the collective contract in January 1957, workers became further disaffected at one more concession made by compliant STFRM officials. Workers allied with López Padilla had their demands rejected by STFRM officials, who refused to present them to the company brass.

Activists in Mexico City quickly found support among colleagues in important railway cities, such as Monterrey, Torreón, Apizaco, San

Luis Potosí, and Aguascalientes. Activists at these locals agreed to mobilize workers throughout the country in support of an across-the-board wage increase of 350 pesos — which would have doubled the wage of the lowliest worker.[22] Informing thousands of members across a territory as large as Mexico about their plans took time, which explains why it was not until May 2, 1958, that dissidents met in Mexico City to take inventory of their efforts and to decide on how to proceed.

Grassroots organizing practices strongly contrasted with the bureaucratic, hierarchical, and centralized decision-making of the charro leadership. Between November 1957 and May 1958, rebel leaders emerged in the other large work centers, including Jalapa, Tonalá, Tierra Blanca, and Veracruz. In Mexico City, Juan Colín and Valentín Campa drove the streets near the railway yard in Colonia Guerrero, proselytizing via loudspeakers attached to the roof of a car. Both Campa and Colín had been expelled from the STFRM — Campa for allegedly absconding with union monies in 1948, and Colín for leading the tortuguista movement of 1954. Since the company or union no longer employed them, they had little to lose. Campa held meetings at halls in the capital's principal railway neighborhood, urging workers to unite behind the pay hike demands. On one occasion, workers spilled out of repair yards onto the Alameda Central and marched to the FNM sports field, where an impromptu meeting took place. Demetrio Vallejo, Juan Colín, and Ana Donis de Peréz, one of the few woman dissidents in the official records, spoke to a throng of captivated railway rebels.[23] In each instance, workers transformed company spaces — gymnasiums, sports fields, repair yards, and locomotives — into arenas for political organizing.[24]

Meanwhile, each local created a Pro-Raise Commission that worked outside the official union bureaucracy and communicated directly with the newly formed Grand Pro-Raise Commission, headed by Vallejo. Because elected colleagues led both the local and central commissions, their very formation constituted a direct call to democratize practices at the STFRM. That rank-and-file activists voted for leaders to circumvent official STFRM bureaucrats was nothing short of remarkable. In San Luis Potosí, a major railway city that housed four union locals,

workers met regularly to discuss the wage issue. Even as López Mateos visited the city, workers gathered clandestinely to draft a wage hike proposal.[25] Neither dissident leaders nor the rank and file publicly discussed taking control of the union, however. They focused, instead, on winning a pay raise.

Citizen or Worker?

Drawing on the World War II narrative that asked workers to sacrifice wages to support industries allied against fascism, officials at the STFRM and FNM urged the rank and file to put their responsibilities as citizens before their needs as workers. Wage demands reflected the self-interest of workers, but as citizens they ought to prioritize the stability of the economy as a whole. By discursively positioning the railway company as a national resource, officials and other critics of the movement created the conditions for acts of resistance, defiance, and rebellion against the FNM to be condemned as traitorous, an affront to the government and fellow citizens alike.[26] Both the new secretary general of the STFRM, Samuel Ortega, and Roberto Amorós, the general manager of the FNM, dismissed dissidents' demands, rebuking them for attempting to circumvent official STFRM channels. Tellingly, it is difficult to discern a difference in the comments made by these officials. Both Ortega and Amorós echoed instructions given to workers since at least World War II, stressing that rieleros needed to "make sacrifices" for the good of the national economy. Both officials stoked the fear that increased wages would have a disastrous effect on the industry and the economy in general: higher salaries for workers would result in elevated costs for the FNM, which in turn would inflate rates for companies transporting their goods via rail.[27] Increased costs for companies would slow hiring and raise costs on commodities. Consumers would ultimately suffer from rising prices. In order to prevent the unfolding of such a bleak set of economic events, officials urged workers to behave as citizens concerned for the national economy rather than as workers worried about their household expenses. Whatever economic plight workers might suffer, the interests of the country should take priority, a point reiterated in newspaper ed-

itorials.[28] In taking such a stand, company and government officials equated the interests of the industry with the interests of the nation.

Ortega no doubt felt his power questioned by the incipient democratic unionism practiced by those who supported their local Pro-Wage Commission; otherwise, he would not have organized a study of the finances of the FNM to ascertain whether the company could afford to deliver a salary increase.[29] While we do not have access to what Ortega's intentions might have been, he likely intended the study to justify dismissing the request because it was well known that the FNM had been in the red for years. The FNM could not afford to raise wages without increasing rates on cargo, which would have repercussions for national economic growth. Hence when Ortega presented his team's conclusions to the Grand Pro-Wage Commission, no one could have been surprised that it found the FNM unable to afford to grant a 350 peso a month increase to its employees.[30] Even though Ortega used the study to dismiss dissident demands, it is nonetheless significant that charros agreed to the study in the first place. By doing so, they conferred legitimacy to the movement, providing an opening for further negotiations in the near future.

In his classic history of those days, Demetrio Vallejo accused Ortega of stalling in order to "block and frustrate the work of the Grand Commission . . . with the intention of dissolving it."[31] Moreover, he accused Ortega of ordering secret agents and riot police to stand outside the union hall to intimidate dissidents. Vallejo and the dissident leaders viewed the study as a farce.[32] Their cynicism seemed justified when Ortega disbanded the Grand Commission and informed its leaders that local section officials would take over the duties of organizing employees. The STFRM, in short, reasserted its role as the sole arbitrator of rank-and-file interests.

Company and government officials continued to invoke the idea of the "selfless worker" to justify denying dissident demands. Ortega suggested that workers should stop complaining about the increased cost of living and be proud that by accepting lower wages they helped the country progress.[33] Workers had to make sacrifices, Ortega explained, because "we think that as patriotic citizens and workers, we can wait

for the rehabilitation of the industry, which will bring economic stability to us and the nation."[34] In urging workers to act as patriotic citizens, Ortega once again sought to differentiate between their needs as workers and their responsibilities as citizens. That Ortega, the union head, sided with the company powerfully demonstrates how blurred the institutional line between the STFRM and FNM had become.

The labor official joined critics of the movement by portraying railway workers as a privileged sector among the working class.[35] FNM officials in particular emphasized the company's benevolence toward its employees. Workers' admittedly limited access to company housing, as well as their access to hospital care when injured on the job, demonstrated how privileged they were when compared with other blue-collar workers.[36] The company magazine responded to workers' demands in paternalistic style, explaining that FNM officials had put the company in a precarious financial position by spending 65,300,000 pesos on a company hospital, schools, and a recreation center, all of which would benefit workers.[37] Throughout the period *Revista Ferronales* ran articles describing various company expenditures on behalf of its employees, in many cases itemizing the costs assumed, from the construction of soccer fields to the provision of subsidized foodstuffs available at the few company stores in Mexico City.[38] In addition to these benefits, the company magazine also praised Roberto Amorós for initiating a literacy campaign among workers, further developing the image of the company as benevolent. Such programs were unavailable to workers in other sectors and represented real company concessions.[39] In light of these projects and the FNM's fiscal insecurity, disgruntled workers appeared as ungrateful and unpatriotic.[40] Workers countered that stores were poorly stocked and that many workers, especially trainmen, found themselves too exhausted from work to take advantage of the recreational facilities.[41]

The promotion of Samuel Ortega to the post of STFRM secretary general had not helped matters. Ortega lacked credibility with the rank and file because he had no experience in the industry, neither as a worker or as a manager. Workers had grown tired of the PRI placing politicians with no railway experience in positions of power in the union

and FNM. Ortega's promotion was therefore an egregious affront to workers who had questioned this controversial practice. Moreover, it was clear that Ortega had political aspirations that conflicted with his responsibility to represent workers. His conflict of interests was confirmed in 1958 when he ran as the PRI candidate in the senatorial race in Tlaxcala.[42] His political ambition no doubt accounted for why Ortega, in accepting the position of STFRM secretary general, had pledged to cooperate fully with the government.[43] Observers understood Ortega's PRI candidacy to be a clear indication of clientelism.[44]

Workers expected him to defend them against criticisms from other political bodies. If a conflict between railway workers and the FNM emerged in Tlaxcala, who would he defend: business interests or the rank and file? As a senator he would have to represent both, but as union head his entire allegiance would be to his members. Even observers outside of the STFRM admonished the PRI for conferring the important position of STFRM general manager on Ortega, who, one critic maintained, was a "false leader without professional or union credentials. . . . [He] was designated from outside the STFRM and he was confirmed . . . by politicos and other false leaders, instead of looking for support from true workers."[45]

Ortega's lack of legitimacy among the rank and file proved to be an insurmountable obstacle. Vallejo went on the offensive, announcing that there was no need to further study the finances of the industry because the Grand Pro-Raise Commission had already conducted a thorough review and concluded that the FNM could afford to offer their blue-collar employees a raise. In addition, he reminded the representatives that they were entrusted to carry out orders from their respective locals and should not concede to Ortega without authorization from the rank and file. Therefore, the commission had a responsibility to continue its organizing work despite Ortega's threats. Finally Vallejo urged members to calculate the importance of the political conjuncture embodied in grassroots unrest, warning, "It is very dangerous to underestimate the general discontent among workers."[46]

Regional charros, with closer ties to the everyday rielero than charros in Mexico City, understood that concessions had to be made to dis-

gruntled activists, lest they physically take over union buildings. As a result, local charros agreed to demand a wage increase. Even more remarkably, after a closed-door meeting, local charros wrote their own wage demand and presented it to Ortega on May 20. The petition called for a 200 peso per month increase for each full-time worker as well as for retired workers.[47] The measure was clearly meant to undermine the growing popularity of the Grand Commission and to persuade workers to stick with the official union. Amorós countered that the FNM would respond in two months while it conducted its own study of the company's finances.[48] Local section leaders deferred to Amorós.[49]

Matías Romero and the Southeast Plan

Workers in Matías Romero, however, proved noncompliant and made a definitive stand for democratic unionism. Despite what Vallejo recalls as "fear and confusion" among many, Matías Romero's Local 13 decided to continue organizing outside official union channels. They voted to reject the STFRM's proposal of a 200 peso increase, which was under review by the company. Instead, they resubmitted that workers deserved a 350 peso hike. In addition, they voted to depose two charro representatives who managed the finances of Local 13, choosing dissidents as replacements. They agreed to present these changes to STFRM officials while mobilizing sections in the southeast to prepare to defend the accords. Finally, they called for the union to recognize the new leaders as legitimate representatives of Local 13.[50]

This last demand extended the objectives of the movement. Dissidents had gone from issuing a narrow set of demands (a wage increase) in May 1958 to calling for the union to recognize popular leaders with no ties to the STFRM's clientelistic politics. With dissidents now demanding a change in the political status quo, they took the first step in building the movement into one with an explicit political goal: to bring democratic unionism to the STFRM.

It is significant that resistance to charros found such strong support in Matías Romero. Unlike Mexico City, which had an array of industries, each with its own history and neighborhoods, citizens of Matías Romero held a particularly strong affinity for the railway because the

city developed as a result of the introduction of the industry. The city took its name from an Oaxacan native who went on to become Porfirio Díaz's foreign minister and worked tirelessly to promote foreign investment in the Mexican railway industry.[51] As the largest employer in town, the FNM sponsored dances and sports for its workers and for town residents during the 1950s.[52]

Margarita Orozco, a longtime resident of Matías Romero and a member of a railway family, recalls how she attended dances in a small park adjacent to the railway station. Dances were festive community affairs. A vallejista woman, whose husband worked for FNM and supported the railway movement, explains that Matías Romero "didn't have its own life, just the railway. There were no schools here . . . just the railway."[53] In addition to providing employment and leisure activities to the people of Matías Romero, informants remember that the industry created bungalows as company housing for English railway managers.[54]

By the 1950s, the English managers were gone, but the fancy bungalows still stood near the railway station as a constant reminder of the class differences between officials and the rank and file. If workers needed any more reasons to resent company officials for their declining real wages, they could walk past the local casino, where supervisors gathered to relax and test their luck.[55] The economic disparities between managers and workers may have played a role in the creation of class resentment among the rank and file, but it alone cannot account for why it was workers in Matías Romero rather than those in Puebla or Mexico City who took the extreme step of circumventing charros by organizing independently.

Perhaps Matías Romero workers took the lead because the mobilization by petrol, electrical, and telegraph workers in Mexico City already had authorities on alert.[56] Organizers may have perceived that railway officials increased their vigilance once dissidents in the capital pushed for a wage increase in November 1957. Railway workers in the capital had seen riot police and military guards unleashed on mobilized teachers and students that winter, so they would have had reason to proceed with restraint.[57] Situated in the southern state of Oaxaca, Matías Romero simply provided more cover for clandestine organizing.[58]

In June 1958, dissident leaders in Matías Romero physically took over Local 13, occupying the building. They then dispatched organizers to union sections throughout the southeast, entrusting them to "orient, organize, and prepare" the rank and file.[59] Leaders visited locals in San Luis Potosí, Aguascalientes, Torreón, Monterrey, and Veracruz, where workers had been organizing for months, to spread the word of the actions in Matías Romero. A sense of urgency prevailed, as leaders sought to take advantage of the political opening made possible by the national election as well as by workers' discontent. Organizers expected the entire rank and file to ratify the dissidents' petition for a wage increase. Failure to do so, they worried, threatened to undermine whatever legitimacy dissidents in Matías Romero claimed to enjoy. In addition to persuading local sections to ratify the petition, organizers informed workers that they should be prepared to strike in the event that authorities should reject it.[60]

Organizers hurried to spread the word to ferrocarrileros throughout the country that a group in Matías Romero proposed to challenge the charro union and company head on.[61] On June 11, 1958, workers in Veracruz voted to present the FNM with an ultimatum: the company had ten days to concede to the 350 peso raise and to recognize the new leaders of the locals as the sole representatives of the rank and file.[62] They gave the FNM until June 26 to come to a decision, after which time workers would deliver a series of general work stoppages. The first stoppage would occur on June 26 and would last two hours; the stoppages would then be extended by two hours every day thereafter until the company conceded. Since the locals that first signed the petition were in the southeast, the committee named the petition Plan Sureste, or Southeast Plan.[63]

The importance of the presidential campaign of 1958 continued to loom large.[64] With the July election just a month away, organizers took advantage of López Mateos's positioning of the PRI as the party of the populist revolution. Valentín Campa, the longtime railway leader who was ousted with the charrazo, met with Vallejo and other rebel leaders throughout the time of the movement. Although he no longer worked as a railway man, he continued to take a leadership role, conducting

meetings and working closely with Vallejo on strategy. Campa reports that railway dissidents planned their demand for a wage increase and their consequent protests to coincide with the national elections. "The Pro-Raise Commission," Campa explains, "agreed to initiate [work] stoppages in June, a week before the general presidential, senatorial, and legislative elections . . . with the objective of taking advantage of the political situation."[65] The political opening of the national election presented a remarkable opportunity for dissidents to make demands that in a nonelection year might have been dismissed out of hand.[66]

Roberto Amorós failed to grasp the determination of railway radicals who felt that a democratic union and a concomitant wage increase were within reach. With charros out of touch with grassroots concerns, they failed to give FNM officials an appreciation of the pervasive desire for higher wages and honest union representation among rieleros. In the June issue of the company magazine, Amorós warned readers that the "demands will bring ruin to industry, since it is their source of work and in their collective interest." Nevertheless, he informed readers that he would take sixty days to review the demands, promising to use the time to study the finances and technological needs of the industry.[67] Clearly Amorós failed to understand how pervasive discontent had grown among the rank and file and that dissidents were not prepared to wait two months for the company to conduct its study.

What had started as a demand for higher wages had turned into a national movement for democratic unionism. Ten days later, just four days before the deadline, thousands of railway workers throughout the country voted to democratize the STFRM. Colleagues in other southeastern railway towns and cities, such as Tonalá, Veracruz, and Tierra Blanca, joined the movement.[68] Workers in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Acámbaro (Guanajuato), among others, also backed what had become an unprecedented challenge to the charros in power and, by extension, the ruling party that worked with them.[69] Undercover DFS agents warned superiors that workers were prepared to battle against FNM management and to directly petition the president.[70]

Significantly, activists remained committed to obeying legal protocols in presenting their demands and were not yet calling for the resig-

nation of all charro representatives. For example, dissidents conducted a financial study of the FNM to prove that if it were to raise cargo rates, they could afford to raise wages.[71] While it is true that they had elected new leaders and deposed charros at regional locals, they were not yet demanding national STFRM bureaucrats to step down. Nevertheless, Ortega must have interpreted the ouster of regional representatives as a threat to his own authority, for he refused to take sides with the dissidents, charging that only regional union bosses aligned with the official STFRM enjoyed the authority to submit a request for higher wages.[72] With Ortega refusing to submit the demands, dissidents went over his head, directing their demands to Amorós and personally urging him to conduct negotiations to prevent the impending stoppages.[73] Once again, the FNM general manager questioned the legitimacy of activists, declaring that he could not meet with them because they did not have the authority to represent workers. Amorós would meet only with STFRM secretary general Samuel Ortega.[74]

Vallejo and organizers in the southeast prepared to strike. They rushed to organize workers throughout the country, sending telegraph notices of the planned actions to locals in the north and arriving at locals in the south and center of the country. Vallejo personally visited work sites in the center and southeast.[75] Though leaders were confident that they enjoyed widespread support among the rank and file, they could not be certain that people would take the drastic step of walking off the job, which would challenge the authority of STFRM representatives and the president, who supported the charros.

Anxiety overwhelmed dissident leaders the night of June 25. Vallejo would later recall, "On our faces signs of insomnia were noticeable. No one could sleep well that night, wondering whether we would suspend work at the precise moment, for failure would mean, at the very least, our dismissal from work."[76] At 10 a.m., June 26, telegraphs began arriving from across the country announcing that workers had walked off the job. When news came from Mexico City that trains stood still, organizers rejoiced, but it was only once they received word that sections throughout the northern part of the country had participated that they realized the impact of their movement.[77]

With enthusiasm becoming palpable, it became clear that support for democratic unionism was widespread. Workers shut down the entire railway system for two hours.[78] Office workers joined their denim-clad counterparts in an act of solidarity among railway workers not seen since the days of the revolution.[79] The company's last-ditch efforts to prevent the strike, such as cutting down telegraph lines, proved ineffective. Of the twenty-nine STFRM locals, only three refrained at first from participating in the action—locals in Chihuahhua, Coahuila, and Monterrey.[80] But these locals joined the following day when strikers shut down the rails from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mexicans unaware of the suffering endured by the working class would come face-to-face with disgruntled railway men and women as they took over city streets and rural roads in protest.

Solidarity on the Streets

Across Mexico there emerged "a wave of restlessness among students, teachers, and labor," a U.S. State Department official in Mexico reported.[81] As the strike continued, workers of various unions joined young people to make their presence felt on city streets as well as in remote towns. Men abruptly put down their tools and walked off the job, leaving tracks unfastened and bridges in disrepair.[82] The sight of the collective force of workers, family members, and their supporters protesting turned Mexico City into a stage where a coalition of working-class industrial workers voiced their outrage at the PRI. After years of charro rule and decreased real wages, workers demanded union democracy as a measure to resist the negative effects of postwar modernization policies.

Rieleros received widespread support from other workers eager to democratize their respective unions. Members of electrical, petrol, telegraph, and teachers unions joined university students in celebrating the rielero victory. On one June night in Mexico City, roughly 3,000 activists from various unions filled the FNM gymnasium, a palpable expression of working-class solidarity.[83] These activists, young and old, had concluded that charros' autocratic practices enabled the PRI's postwar antilabor politics. In the railway movement they found

3. Electrical workers and teachers march beside railroad workers, June 28, 1958. Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Hermanos Mayo.

hope that their own institutions could become democratized. In short, it became clear that dissidents aimed to overthrow STFRM charros and that doing so would benefit the working class in general.

Telegraph, electrical, and light workers suffered no less than railway families from the PRI's policy of keeping wages low to encourage industrialization. The rise of retail prices led to an estimated 14 percent increase in the cost of living in 1957, while wages remained stagnant.[84] Frustrated with their plight, more than 7,000 telegraph workers had staged a wildcat strike in February, closing down the Department of Communications. The telegraph strike had been the first of the major strikes of 1958. Railroad and telegraph activists inspired electrical workers, who in April won a 15 percent wage increase and the reduction of work hours after threatening to strike.[85] And in Monterrey, light workers struck from June 16 to July 9, leaving the city without power for stretches of time.[86] Like railway dissidents, telegraph and light workers demanded a pay hike and the ouster of charro union officials.[87] Unlike railway workers, electrical, telegraph, and light workers did not have the ability to shut down the national economy simply by refusing to work. Hence lacking the leveraging power to depose

their charro representatives, telegraph workers settled for a 15 percent wage hike.[88]

Rieleros still take pride in the clout they wielded, and those who experienced those heady days express idealized memories of them. One important trace present in many of these recollections indicates that a sense of euphoria pervaded work sites, as workers took pride in asserting themselves publicly on streets and in front of colleagues, friends, and family. Enrique Ochoa suggests that workers may have perceived the strike as a personal and collective triumph: "I installed [speakers] in a car in front of the station. . . . I started to talk. And I noticed that everything was normal, with only minutes left for the strike. But a yard trolley passed and stopped on a rail that was not in use. . . . Another passed and it stopped. Workers came out yelling happily: 'We don't hear Mexico City,' and 'We don't hear Monterrey,' and 'We don't hear Durango.' The telegraph stopped and the railways shut down. Well, I have to tell you that it was tremendous—something that has never been seen, a terrific unity."[89] Likewise, Eliazor Tijanero, a shop employee in Mexico City, recalls that workers walked around with pride and had a renewed spirit.[90]

The euphoria was an emotional response to a *political* victory. Manuel Meneses Domínguez remembers the dissident movement as a fight for democratic rights when delegates arrived in Puebla to publicize the Southeast Plan. Comrades welcomed them in workshops and yards, and workers requested an assembly to air their news. The local secretary, a charro, declined the request because he opposed petitioning the FNM for a wage increase. Meneses Domíguez recalls that he and his co-workers circumvented charro officials that day and created a Pro-Raise Commission in Puebla. As the movement unfolded, they supported the Southeast Plan as word of it made its way north from Oaxaca, welcoming it as an act of grassroots democratic unionism. "When workers are offered a clean and generous fight that seeks to reestablish their rights, they respond in an organized fashion."[91] For Meneses and other activists, the June strikes still represent a moment of unity and excitement at the democratic possibilities ahead.

On June 27, Meneses joined thousands of colleagues across the coun-

try in making good on their promise to walk off the job if their demands remained unmet. They shut down the country's rail system for four hours. As a result, FNM general manager Roberto Amorós went to the negotiating table with dissident leaders. In a gesture meant to signal that dissidents had not displaced charros, STFRM officials attended the meeting. Amorós agreed to a wage increase of 180 pesos a month, well short of the 350 pesos that activists proposed.[92] Moreover, retired workers would not receive the increase but instead would be offered an 800 peso buyout, a concession that fell far short of the dissident request that retired workers receive a monthly increase.[93] Furthermore, the proposal did not mention the timely revision of work contracts in the future, a critical issue for activists, for workers pointed to STFRM leaders' refusal to revise the collective contract as evidence of their corruption. If dissident leaders were to remain true to those they represented, they needed to assure strikers that they would secure the timely revision of contracts; otherwise, they would be no better than the charros. Because Amorós's concessions fell short of meeting expectations, the next day, on June 28, workers walked off the job for six hours.[94]

That night Amorós, Ortega, and the leaders of the Grand Pro-Raise Commission met again to arrive at an agreement. Commission leaders agreed to lower their request to 250 pesos, but only on the condition that the raise be retroactive to the beginning of the year.[95] Amorós responded that the company was willing to sign on to the proposal if workers promised not to request a wage hike the following year. Commission members could not concede to freezing wages. On the other side, company officials argued that the stoppages caused unacceptable delays, frustrating passengers and costing millions of pesos in losses.[96] The losses continued to mount when on June 29 a stoppage shut down the industry from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.[97] The FNM fought back, firing leaders from locals in San Luis Potosí, Nuevo Laredo, Orizaba, and Tamaulipas.[98] But the FNM's dismissal of strike leaders proved ineffective. On June 30 dissidents shut down the rails for ten hours.

It is important to stress the illegality of the strikes. This initial shutdown, as well as those that followed in 1959, failed to get authorization

from the Junta de Conciliación y Arbitraje, the labor court whose job it was to settle disputes between the FNM and the rank and file. The Junta considered cases from both state and federal unions and was key to resolving disputes between railroad workers and the company, the former represented by an STFRM representative. The arbitration board reviewed myriad cases, from workers fired for theft seeking reinstatement, to conductors appealing penalties for train delays, to petitions from the STFRM seeking authorization to conduct a general strike.

Kevin Middlebrook, who has studied grievances and strike petitions more thoroughly than any other scholar, has found that overall grievance petitions did not vary greatly in number between presidential or union administrations, with the important exception of when charros controlled the STFRM. For example, the Workers' Administration of the late 1930s and early 1940s did not experience significantly more grievances than FNM administrations during the more conservative Aléman period that followed. Nevertheless, "the frequency of disciplinary grievances declined in 1949, rose in 1958 when the union was again democratically governed, and fell in 1959" after the repression of the movement.[99] This data suggests that charros were less willing than previous union administrations to submit petitions to the arbitration board. By 1958, dissidents had little use for the arbitration board, because they could not count on charros to issue wage demands. Moreover, since dissidents were not legal representatives of the rank and file, they could not petition the arbitration board. Dissidents therefore circumvented the legal process altogether.

By executing a wildcat strike, they pressured the president either to side with the FNM and charros to repress the strikes or to negotiate directly with strike leaders. The strategy made sense because historically presidential administrations directly intervened to settle strikes that would impact the national economy. This was especially true when political considerations were at stake. In short, the political conjuncture of 1958 provided an opening for dissidents to conduct an illegal strike with the hope that the president would intervene in their favor.

President Ruiz Cortines clearly sensed that workers and company officials were far from arriving at a settlement, for he sent word

through Amorós that he wanted to meet with strike leaders at the National Palace.[100] At 6:15 p.m. on July 1, leaders from the commission met with Ruiz Cortines and Amorós, and the president assured workers that he was a friend of rieleros, that he had reviewed their petition, and that he had arrived at a resolution that would treat both parties fairly.[101] The president offered FNM workers a monthly increase of 215 pesos; retired workers would receive a monthly increase of 100 pesos.[102] The president made no stipulations on future contracts. The STFRM could—as their members expected—negotiate a new contract, with another pay hike, with the expiration of the collective contract in 1959.

With the offer on the table, representatives felt intimidated by the president and by the grandeur of the National Palace.[103] How could they turn down an offer made by the president himself? Vallejo insisted that he wanted to take the offer to work sites for members to vote on it, but other representatives overruled him, considering it imprudent to ask the president to wait for a rank-and-file vote.[104] There on the National Palace floor the independent railway representatives accepted the president's offer. Rieleros would go back to work immediately. Dissidents had done the seemingly impossible. They had circumvented charros, met with the president, and won a hefty wage boost for themselves and their union members. The victory would have no small impact on the FNM's operating budget, since it "raised the annual wage bill an estimated 213,000,000 pesos."[105]

U.S. embassy officials did not receive Ruiz Cortines's negotiation with railway dissidents kindly. American officials concluded that widespread labor insurgency served as evidence that the PRI had lost touch with its popular base. The political system, the ambassador explained, suffered from ineffectiveness because for years leaders had been insulated from widespread criticism and did not have to face grassroots hostility. The embassy judged, "After years of almost undisturbed control [the] ruling group seems devoid of leaders equipped by experience and character to handle [the] fast developing labor situation." The PRI's incompetence became all the more obvious during its negotiations with railway workers. The embassy concluded, "The government's handling of the strikes has been marked by indecision, lack

of plan, and final resort to out-dated and ineffectual methods characteristic of discredited capitalist employers." The lack of a plan resulted in methods that the embassy judged to be not only "outdated" but also "reactionary."[106] In brief, the embassy viewed Ruiz Cortines's decision to repress the strike, only later to concede to a wage hike as a sign of ineffectual, personalist politics.

The embassy also criticized Ruiz Cortines for failing to present a clear policy on labor unrest, pointing to events in June when the president first supported charro leaders only to then hold a closed-door meeting with dissidents. "In such a climate," the embassy official lamented, "every sort of rumor spreads rapidly and the public is left with [a] sorry spectacle of a drifting, leaderless, and impotent government." Part of the problem consisted in the president's own ambitions and the inability of his closest advisors to force his hand to take a strong position against or for labor democracy: "President, in his ambition to leave office with an unblemished record and to be recorded as a great statesmen in Mexican history, has permitted himself to be pushed around by new, rougher elements, and he lacks aides strong enough to force him to make decisions."[107] Clearly the embassy considered the labor insurgency to be part of a broader national political crisis, caused in large part by entrenched corruption within the PRI and worsened by an inept presidential administration, whose members proved more interested in self-aggrandizement than in political stability.

The dissident victory signaled the end of Ortega's term as secretary general of the STFRM. On July 9, at the urging of Ruiz Cortines, Ortega resigned from his post at STFRM headquarters in Mexico City and was replaced by Salvador Quezada Cortés, who had worked as a conductor from 1917 to 1947, when he earned a promotion to a management post.[108] The choice of Quezada Cortés demonstrates that dissidents had made headway in convincing STFRM officials that workers would not stand for the practice of assigning people with no railway experience to union posts. The new secretary general reduced union dues as well as the salaries of STFRM officials. In addition, he promised to pressure the company to invest in housing for workers, promising to "stay in permanent contact with the country's ferrocarrileros" while

remaining "loyal to the government of the revolution."[109] While Ortega's resignation and the pay raise constituted significant gains for the rank and file, Quezada was no grassroots representative. Activists regarded Quezada as the latest charro, having been tapped, not elected, to his post. Understanding that the movement possessed momentum, dissidents now pushed for the total overthrow of charrista politics.

Direct Action for Union Democracy

Between July and August 1958, the railway movement transitioned from demanding increased wages and other fringe benefits to calling for the democratization of their union. This transition in goals elicited conflicting reactions: widespread enthusiasm among students and labor groups in Mexico City and other industrial centers, and a rise in articles and editorials in the mainstream press by political and business leaders accusing labor and student activists of participating in a communist-led insurgency. These accusations would continue steadily until the repression of the movement in the spring of 1959.

Soon after President Ruiz Cortines's July concession, charros hunkered down in their offices, preparing for the worst. In Mexico City DFS agents reported that charros stacked sandbags against doors, walls, and windows at STFRM headquarters, expecting dissidents to come marching down the street to occupy the building.[110] Charros realized that however dramatic the June victory for higher wages may have been, they still held power in the STFRM, a fact that would rankle disgruntled members. Activists had won a wage hike, but their leaders had not acquired any official standing within the union hierarchy. Vallejo's successful negotiation with the president did, however, leave charro officials in a severely weakened position, which explains why they surrounded themselves with sandbags at union headquarters.

Charros were right to be suspicious. The president's direct negotiation with strike leaders granted them legitimacy. As a result, the rank and file paraded in the streets in restless enthusiasm, signaling their appreciation for dissidents' democratic practices as well as their willingness to combat FNM policy. Shortly after the July resolution, they organized to overthrow charro leaders once and for all. Activ-

ists aimed to broaden the democratizing process that had originated during mobilizations in June.

As described above, intransigent charro delegates of certain local sections who refused to submit a wage-increase petition had already been removed and replaced by railway dissidents. These local actions provided evidence that charros could be deposed when broad rank-and-file support could be counted upon. Emboldened, on July 12 activists attended the VI Convención General Sindical Extraordinaria (CGSE), a meeting held with the purpose of electing a new STFRM executive committee.[111] To no one's surprise, delegates at the CGSE chose Demetrio Vallejo as the new secretary general of the STFRM, informing charros that they had to turn over union headquarters in Mexico City as well as union documents and archives to independent union leaders. The CGSE delegates gave charros until July 26 to comply with the order; otherwise, dissidents would instruct the rank and file to stop working; workers were to remain at their positions but simply stop what they were doing. Dissidents planned the stoppage to take place from 10 a.m. to noon on July 31; from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on August 1; and from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. on August 2. The stoppages would take place every day thereafter for four hours until charros stepped down.[112]

Unwilling or unable to imagine the rank and file mobilizing in a rational defense of its own interests, editorialists and politicians came to the conclusion that workers had fallen victim to movement leaders' manipulative tactics. The narrative formula, which would become circulated throughout the year, saw Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa as calculating communists bent on destroying the economy and leading Mexico toward a socialist apocalypse.[113] Former president Lázaro Cárdenas expressed his frustration with this line of criticism: "'The error made by tendentious and ignorant anticommunist leaders is mistaking the poverty and desperation of those who live in the pueblos for 'communism.'"[114] The former president's reflection on the anticommunist discourse that emerged could have been written by one of the thousands of men and women who took over the streets in protest in the summer and fall of 1958.

Charros and their supporters had reason to be concerned, for the

strikes amounted to a direct call for union democracy. Unlike the June strikes, the August actions were strictly political, as workers made no demands for economic concessions. As Vallejo would later assert, the August strikes took place to "defend a right: [the right to] choose and depose our leaders." In July and August, the streets of Mexico City became politicized, with workers and students claiming them as their own. These demonstrations showed in high relief how dissatisfied workers and students throughout the city had become with their declining standard of living and with the PRI's response to their economic deprivation. Teachers and students joined workers from the petrol, electrical, and telegraph industries in supporting the railway movement. On July 19 these groups once again poured into the streets, marching from the Monumento a la Revolución to the Plaza de la Constitución, or the Zócalo, in front of the National Palace, voicing their support of the Southeast Plan.[115]

These sites are significant, for they provided a visual and physical reminder to protestors that their ancestors had fought in the Revolution of 1910 and had won the right to strike. From the perspective of workers and students, the Constitution and the revolution, not communism, provided the historical context and legal justification for the summer strikes. As we have seen, these sites were of particular import for railway workers, for their folklore stressed that revolutionary railway men played a critical role in making the revolution a success by driving trains to transport soldiers.[116] Elena Poniatowska cogently describes the symbolic importance of the Zócalo for grassroots street politics: "The Zócalo is the center of the country, the navel. The tall windowpanes of the National Palace open to the most political plaza in the world because from below signed petitions, denouncements, and insults are cast at the president."[117] In the Zócalo, activists cheered while rielero leaders, as well as student and petrol workers, took to the stage to criticize Salvador Quezada and the charros.

The discontent with the national government was not limited to workers and students. To make matters worse for the PRI, two days later bullfighters protested in another part of the city, threatening to

conduct a strike of their own.[118] They were followed by petrol workers, who, inspired by the example of railway dissidents, called for the resignation of charro leaders in the petrol union and for government recognition of independent petrol workers' representatives.[119] Clearly, the railroad strikes energized an increasingly militant labor movement, as unions representing a large segment of the working class publicly backed the railway radicals.[120] Moreover, the mobilization of students suggests that discontent encompassed sectors of middle-class youth as well.[121] When over 10,000 of these activists filled Arena México in the capital, they found themselves at the vanguard of the largest working-class movement in postrevolutionary history.

On August 2, 1958, rieleros carried out the planned stoppages.[122] Two days later, teachers and telegraph workers joined them in solidarity strikes, followed by the Mexico City locals of the petrol union.[123] If Kevin Middlebrook is correct in stressing the indispensable role of the STFRM for solidifying the PRI's dominance in national politics, then dissident demands to depose charro leaders indirectly challenged the PRI's authority as well.[124] The government's response suggested that PRI officials felt the railway movement challenged the ruling party's legitimacy. Riot police surrounded strikers, and leaders reported that "secret agents" followed them on the streets, a suspicion confirmed by DFS documents.[125] In response to fears of repression, negotiations became less formal, with Vallejo and Amorós holding meetings in cars, streets, and houses.[126] According to Vallejo, in these meetings Amorós expressed his concern that the strikers called into question the authority of the Ruiz Cortines administration.[127] Meanwhile, authorities had infiltrated union buildings, the police had manhandled strikers, and newspaper editorials alarmed readers that the railway movement had brought anarchy and chaos to the capital.[128]

The principal concern of the company and government, however, appeared to be Demetrio Vallejo. The new leader's ability to mobilize thousands of workers across the nation solidified his stature as a powerful political figure. Vallejo differed from more mainstream leftist leaders because he focused on attaining the support of teachers as well as electrical and petrol workers. His enormous popularí-

ty along with his refusal to comply with PRI directives posed a threat to the ruling party. Roberto Amorós attempted to defuse the threat that Vallejo represented by insisting that Vallejo refrain from seeking the post of secretary general of the STFRM. Amorós conceded to holding an election, but Vallejo could not be on the ballot. It no doubt appeared an unreasonable request to the average rielero who had supported Vallejo as the leader and the logical choice to head the union.

Meanwhile, workers continued to practice direct action in Mexico City, where they occupied by force the national STFRM headquarters in Colonia Guerrero. Colonia Guerrero bustled with activity during the railway movement, as it was home to STFRM national headquarters as well as Nonoalco (the railway workshop) and Buenavista (the main train station in the capital). Nonoalco and Buenavista were within walking distance of the union headquarters of the electrical workers, making it easy for railway and electrical workers to meet and organize. Within walking distance stood Tlateloco Square, the plaza that would become famous as the site where a student protest in 1968 was violently repressed by the military. Tlateloco served as a popular center of working-class recreation in Colonia Guerrero.[129] Early in August, neighbors witnessed workers scurrying through Colonia Guerrero as they organized meetings and protests that ultimately led to the dissident takeover of STFRM headquarters on August 2. On that night, residents saw more than 100 riot police officers and armed secret service agents break down the doors of the union building to force out rieleros and rieleras. The next day *Excélsior* reported that fights broke out between police and a small number of workers. Three railroad workers were killed by police officers that night. Surprisingly, there is little mention of the killings in the DFS archive, and although newspapers at the time covered the story, they did nothing to investigate who was at fault. The killings faded from the news, even as Vallejo denounced them as assassinations.[130]

Violence certainly intensified in August, and there appeared to be an impending labor insurgency brewing. According to the August 3 *Excélsior*, police found Molotov cocktails and rifles in the possession of railway protestors, which if true underscores the radicalization of

some activists; if untrue, it would further demonstrate the paper's role in framing the protestors as subversives. There is reason to believe that the report may have not been exaggerating. According to Lilia Benitez, the railway leader's niece, Vallejo carried a gun during those days, and former workers have recalled their use of Molotov cocktails to defend themselves against deployed infantry and riot police.[131] Police arrested workers who resisted the night of August 2, including Guillermina Lira Rodríguez, a ferrocarrilera who was found with a gun. Vallejo evaded their grasp as he disappeared during the commotion. Officials would spend the next few days knocking on doors in Colonia Guerrero searching for Vallejo. Hotels popular with railway workers were searched as well after word got out that the leader stayed in neighborhood hotels when in town.[132] But who in Colonia Guerrero would give up their beloved leader?

Despite the arrests and the killings, strikers continued to appropriate streets to advance their politics of independent unionism. At Buenavista station, protestors carried placards denouncing Quezada, insisting that only Vallejo could get them to return to work. The FNM baseball field was flooded with strikers and military personnel assigned to keep workers from getting out of order. Meanwhile, university students joined workers once again in taking over the Monumento a la Revolución, signaling that protests had expanded to include some among the middle class. The students and railway workers were arrested, but their demands could not be erased from public consciousness.[133]

Workers in traditionally powerful unions rallied around the railway movement. Electrical, telegraph, and petrol workers and teachers gathered to discuss whether they should conduct sympathy strikes. The teachers in Mexico City decided to back the railway strikes, shutting down schools in the capital until the government recognized Demetrio Vallejo as the STFRM head. The electrical workers voted against a sympathy strike, but they did allow Vallejo to conduct meetings at their union hall. The use of the union hall was critical because STFRM union buildings were infiltrated with police and charros.

The government's determination to stop Vallejo shows that officials had not fully appreciated the level of his grassroots support. As one

worker commented at the time, "El Compañero Vallejo" was more than just a leader; he "is a symbol for us. We won't let the government impose on us when we are in the right. He is our leader and he defends our interests."[134] The strike persisted, with workers making good on their threat of staying out until the FNM and the government recognized Vallejo as their leader. With over 100,000 workers mobilized, Vallejo refused to give in to Amorós's request that he step down.[135]

An Emblematic Memory: The Politics of Shame

Women were no less important to the movement than the men who scurried the streets organizing, a fact not lost on Demetrio Vallejo, who sent a general call to local union leaders to reach out to women.[136] Undercover police reported that Vallejo stressed to men the need for rielera support in order for the strikes to succeed. In fact, in 1959 he ordered representatives to offer money to rieleras in Monterrey, whose husbands' wages had been docked for striking. It is no wonder that like their male counterparts these women came to identify as vallejistas. Women in the capital agitated under the banner of the Feminine Railway Movement, and in a sign of feminine solidarity, teachers joined them in protests.

Women did not need instructions from leaders in Mexico City to join the movement, a point made clear by a dramatic event spearheaded by railway women at a critical moment in July 1958, as activists organized to depose charros. Even today, railway men and women widely remember the story of a group of militant rieleras in Cárdenas, San Luis Potosí.[137] It is remarkable how many interviewees from Puebla, Mexico City, and Matías Romero remember it as essential to the narrative of the railway movement, offering it as an example of women's courage and activism.

The story of the women from Cárdenas is an example of what Steve J. Stern has called emblematic memories, frameworks that "purport to capture an essential truth," serving as an "anchor that organizes and enhances the meaning of personal experience and knowledge."[138] By relating the tale, interviewees produce knowledge of women's involvement in the railway movement, and in the process women's par-

ticipation becomes an "essential truth" not found in official accounts of the strikes. The episode has since become a point of pride for rieleras, serving as a grassroots alternative narrative that punctures the official, masculinist story of the strikes. The memory of this particularly feminine form of direct action reminds us that the movement encompassed families and entire communities.

The story begins on a July afternoon in 1958, when rieleras confronted rank-and-file supporters of charro leaders who decided to cross the picket line and move locomotives out of the station. The local Cárdenas strikebreakers received reinforcements of soldiers and scabs from the nearby city of San Luis Potosí. As news of the strikebreakers spread, railway women marched toward the station.

Federal troops occupied railway workshops and offices, and they were prepared to send soldiers to surround the tracks. But the ferrocarrileras and women held their ground. The women quickly transitioned from aid workers sympathetic to the strike to combative activists, even as the men were said to have wilted from fear of the soldiers. When one woman acquired a speaker system to harangue strikebreakers and rally the crowd, railway men warned the women that they were not permitted to hold a rally without the government's permission. The women defiantly replied, "We don't need it; we trust in Article 9 of the Constitution; we know our rights."

By employing shaming rituals, women urged workers operating the trains to join the strike. The most provocative instance involved a woman who directly contested the authority of her father, Florencio Ruiz de la Peña, one of the scabs maneuvering the train out of the station. Ruiz de la Peña's daughter called on him to step down from the train and join the protesters, pleading with him to spare his children the indignity of having a scab for a father. Five women joined her, and each warned their men not to go down as traitors.

As the sense of urgency grew, the scene turned into a rally. The women raised the stakes by lying across the tracks to prevent the movement of the locomotives. In so doing, women politicized their bodies, wielding them at the company and the state, embodied by the soldiers. "Would the machinist dare to thrust the train over his own daughter,"

they yelled. Those women who decided not to lie down threw coins and stale tortillas at the scabs operating the trains.

Frustrated by the intransigence of the scabs, the women backed away and formed a circle around Doña Ramona, a fellow dissident. As the circle opened, Doña Ramona faced the machinist and lifted her skirt and screamed, "Put them on, coward! Let's see if then you learn to fight like the men." Obviously, pants in this ritual serve as a metonym for masculine attributes, such as courage and toughness, which scabs lacked and the women possessed. In the end, the women's shaming tactics worked, for scabs pulled the train back into the station as the women cheered. The action stands as one of the many small victories attained before the repression of the railway movement in 1959.

"Shaming rituals are a means of fighting back and nonviolently undermining the legitimacy of the authorities," argues historian Temma Kaplan, a longtime scholar of women's movements. When women use shaming rituals to single out the incompetence, corruption, or general failures of male authority figures, they guard and reinforce norms and expectations placed on men by society. Railway women resorted to shaming rituals to remind men that they had an ethical responsibility to protect their wives and families by fighting for higher wages. In such cases, women took on normative masculine attributes, such as courage and toughness. By claiming that those who took sides with the FNM were "without pants," rieleras questioned workers' masculinity. Like their male counterparts, they took active roles, put themselves in harm's way, and challenged men in power to behave like men. The aggressive behavior of the rieleras during the strikes has made such an impact on railway workers' collective psyche that it is not uncommon for interviewees to comment that ferrocarrileras "had more pants than some of the men."

The story of the mobilized women from Cárdenas becomes more significant in light of the fact that there is a similar story of women in Oaxaca who laid on tracks to halt scabs. The correspondence between these two memories indicates that the stories are more than simply a retelling of an event.[139] They function to include rieleras in the narrative of the movement, exalting their participation by suggesting that

in some cases their courage exceeded that of men. The listener comes to understand that these events, whether they occurred precisely as remembered or not, testify to women's role in the national working-class movement of the summer of 1958.

The August Victory

As women egged their men on to continue striking, soldiers occupied railway stations and guarded strikers from sabotaging tracks. Meanwhile, telegraph workers and teachers staged wildcat sympathy strikes in Mexico City. Militant working-class demonstrations encompassed other major cities, as petrol and electrical workers joined students on picket lines and improvised marches. The government tried to maintain order, arresting over 100 protestors, whom they labeled "instigators." On August 3, a throng of protestors marched from Colonia Guerrero, down Avenida Juarez, to the National Palace. Riot police met them with tear gas and batons, clubbing their way through the crowd. In Morelia and Mexico City, soldiers occupied railway stations and offices as activists fought with scabs. In the capital, over 7,000 protestors met at the Monumento a la Revolución, as women clashed with police amid more billowing tear gas.[140] Fearing continued losses, business leaders pressed the government for a speedy resolution. Quezada responded by promising reforms, such as the elimination of charros, the reduction of dues, and the creation of a savings fund for the rank and file in exchange for Vallejo agreeing to withdraw from seeking the secretary general nomination, an unacceptable stipulation for the rank and file.[141] Workers would have viewed Quezada's proposed reforms as major concessions just a few months earlier, but the political climate had quickly and dramatically changed. Demetrio Vallejo informed Quezada that only the rank and file and the president could force him to withdraw as the leader of the STFRM.

On August 5, 1958, Vallejo negotiated a settlement with the FNM brass.[142] Amorós agreed to have police and STFRM officials vacate union buildings throughout the country and promised that strikers would not be punished. Moreover, police would release workers who had been jailed during the protests. Most important, Vallejo and Amorós

agreed to a transparent union election that would take place between August 12 and 20.[143] After ten years of charro rule, rieleros would finally have the opportunity to vote for an independent secretary general.

It is worth noting that the negotiation process demonstrated the intimate connections between the FNM, charros, and the PRI. FNM general manager Roberto Amorós could guarantee the release of prisoners only by counting on the backing of PRI officials who could arrange it. If Amorós could grant union elections, then it follows that charro union officials deferred to the FNM general manager and hence were not independent.

Dissident leaders assured the grassroots that democratic unionism had arrived and that a fair election would take place. The rank and file suspended the strike and got back to work. In late August, when the votes came in, Demetrio Vallejo had received 50,000 votes more than José María Lara, the candidate associated with charrismo.[144] There are no good voting result figures. Political scientists Antonio Alonso and Max Ortega maintain that Vallejo received 59,760 votes to María Lara's 6 votes. Lara's vote figure seems far-fetched considering that he won Local 37 in Merida. No one contested Vallejo's vote total. Most impressive, Vallejo won thirty-six of thirty-seven locals, an extraordinary outcome that not even his fiercest enemies contested.[145] The rank and file had shown that it overwhelmingly supported Vallejo and the democratic unionism he represented. From this moment on, miners and petrol workers looked to rieleros for inspiration and advice on how to overthrow the charros who controlled their unions.[146] Rieleros had blazed a path toward industrial democracy — an ominous development for both charros and industrialists.

Conclusion

By August 1958 it became clear that charro attempts to undermine dissident workers by figuring them as subversives failed. Rieleros not only exhibited their masculinity by combating charros, but they cashed in on their struggle when the president conceded to their demands. Women, meanwhile, drew on the very masculine codes men constructed to shame the most timid rieleros to respect the picket line. With the

charros effectively overthrown, the movement would now take aim at the FNM, which was managed by the party in power.

Officials at the U.S. embassy, who hoped President Ruiz Cortines could prevent mass working-class protests, viewed the STFRM election as a referendum on the corruption that pervaded the PRI. On August 28, the ambassador wired a detailed telegram to the State Department summarizing the political climate of the southern neighbor: "Discontent among poorer classes is widespread . . . owing to constant increases in cost of living, without compensatory wage increases." The situation was urgent for the PRI because the "poorer classes" aimed their criticisms directly at the ruling party and were beginning to question its ability to provide the benefits promised by the revolution. Furthermore, the telegram condemned the PRI for neglecting the impoverished masses: "Disillusionment with the revolution is deep as poorer classes [of the] last generation watch politicos gaining in wealth while mouthing [about] struggle for the masses."[147]

Reporters and commentators, having tracked the labor mobilizations by teachers, oil workers, and electricians throughout the year, offered informed and astute conclusions about the railway strikes and their consequences for national politics. One writer provided a particularly subtle analysis: "There's something . . . that distinguishes these railway strikes . . . from the strikes of Cárdenas times, [which] had exclusively economic objectives. The railway strike, in contrast, had political origins and motives. It was, in concrete terms, a strike against the PRI."[148] After ten months of organizing and taking to the streets against charristas politics, dissident leaders and the railway movement won an impressive victory—a democratic leadership emerged after ten years of charro rule. By wresting control of the strongest union in the country, grassroots activists had delivered a mighty blow to PRI postwar hegemony. This contingent historical moment found workers exhilarated and prepared to win more concessions. We now turn to the story of how everyday rieleros and rieleras pressured union leaders to meet rising expectations among the grassroots.

4

The "War of Position"

The Making of a Strike

Mariachi bands filled union locals across the country, singing and strumming their guitars for workers celebrating the return of democratic unionism. The day after the election of Demetrio Vallejo to the post of STFRM general secretary, workers walked off the job, not on strike but to welcome their new, independent union leaders. Rieleros had proven to be the ultimate *cabrones*, the main machos, having beaten the suit-and-tie-wearing charros by leaning on one another and shutting down the rails. Their wives, sisters, and daughters — no less elated — took leading roles, making use of masculine codes to push their men to fight. These men and women celebrated their own efforts in the grassroots movement that was just getting started.

Rather than placate union activists, the August victory further radicalized railway families. Rieleros and rieleras came to embrace the virile militancy exhibited by rieleros who clandestinely organized in the early 1950s. Workers became more rebellious with their newfound independence at work and within the union, using their clout to support demands now made by teachers and students, as well as petrol, telegraph, and electrical workers. Women and men continued to take over city streets, turning them into sites of political theater. Independent STFRM leaders — far from directing the rank and file — now had to figure out how to contain their enthusiasm. The new leadership had to juggle negotiating with railroad companies while restraining a militant rank and file ready to strike at any sign of company inflexi-

bility. In the context of railway gender ideology, the company now appeared effeminate — vulnerable, unable to ward off demands made by rieleros and rieleras. How could Vallejo and other STFRM leaders temper grassroots militancy without seeming to be in cahoots with the government?

This chapter argues that FNM and STFRM officials spent the last months of 1958 engaging in a war of position, presenting their case in periodicals and on streets in order to win public support. Philosopher Antonio Gramsci's concept of war of position is useful for understanding how railway activists battled the FNM for public support through the use of the press and by occupying public spaces. For Gramsci, the war of position describes defensive tactics employed by workers against the ruling class.[1] These tactics can be violent, such as trench warfare, or nonviolent, such as boycotts. In either case, activists must engage civil society and win over the masses, including other workers, in order to be victorious. This last point underscores the contingent quality of social identity — that it is not given but made — as well as the contingent character of political struggle. Workers do not share essential interests that automatically lead them to support working-class movements.[2] Labor activists must win workers as well as others to their side. In 1958 and 1959, railroad and other striking workers constructed a sense of unity based on their struggles to democratize their respective workplaces and union. The challenge was to persuade those not engaged in industrial labor to view their movement as just.

For railway workers, winning the war of position amounted to attaining the support of people who did not have a stake in working-class struggles, such as peasants, students, and professionals. This realization led union leaders as well as grassroots activists to push their message by appropriating public spaces. They wrote political messages on walls, handed out leaflets, displayed banners on city streets, and published editorials and ads in newspapers. In short, workers understood the need for cross-class solidarity, and they were savvy in using the press in fighting the war of position.

The Cold War provided the ideological ground on which the war of position took place. Through articles and editorials in press out-

lets that served the interests of the ruling party, PRI and FNM officials continued to accuse movement leaders of orchestrating a communist conspiracy. This and the following chapter draw on *El Universal* and *Excélsior*, two Mexico City–based newspapers that were particularly supportive of the PRI and proved instrumental in associating railway leaders with international communism. In her study of the anticommunist press in the postwar period, historian Elisa Servín argues that newspapers such as *Excélsior* and *El Universal*, which had battled the Mexican Left since the 1930s, made an alliance with the government of Miguel Alemán.[3] These newspapers exemplified the practice of what analysts of Mexican media have signaled as the discursive reproduction of the ruling party's power. They did so by circulating "unified messages and symbols reinforcing regime legitimacy in a one-way communication flow moving from rulers to their mass of subjects."[4]

Beginning in the 1930s, PRI officials bribed journalists and editors to publish articles that framed policies in a favorable light. In addition, newspapers published government-produced articles, disguising them as news.[5] When it came to attacking the Left, newspapers were able to condemn activists in much more strident terms than PRI politicians, who sought the backing of labor. As Servín points out, "The press was then a space for the expression of a strident anticommunist discourse, contributing to the increased intolerance for *red communists* among the general public." Moreover, anticommunism was closely linked to the U.S. press, whose editorials were often reprinted in Mexican newspapers via the Associated Press and the United Press International. The ties between the U.S. and Mexican press led to the latter adopting the United States' "bellicose anticommunist hysteria."[6] Since our purpose is to demonstrate how the PRI used the press to influence the public — not to offer a representative sample of media coverage — we limit our analysis to *El Universal* and *Excélsior* precisely because they were known to condemn communism and support the PRI.[7] Editorials and articles in these papers provide evidence of the discursive battle between detractors of the railway movement and workers.

Anticommunism was not limited to the political and economic elite. This chapter shows that a vocal minority of workers opposed the move-

ment for what they viewed as its association with communism. These individuals should not be dismissed as victims of government propaganda, nor were they exhibiting false consciousness. Although critics overstated the influence of communism on the movement, many of the leaders were in fact associated with either the POCM or the PCM. The anticommunist rank and file did not need the press to point this out.

The times were ripe for confrontation. With the contract negotiated by President Ruiz Cortines in July 1958 set to expire, January 1959 occasioned yet another round of contract negotiations between the STFRM and the FNM. Emboldened activists sought to expand their demands to include those who walked beside them, their wives and children. Through the fall and winter, the now independent union pressured the FNM to include provisions in the new contract that would provide families with medical benefits and subsidized housing.[8] Clearly the rank and file expected their new leaders to connect community needs with workplace demands. Domestic life was inseparable from the workplace.

Apart from pursuing the demands of the rank and file, STFRM leaders had to figure out a way to persuade the government and the public that their cause was just and that the FNM could afford to pay for a new wage increase and other benefits. The result was a discursive struggle for the hearts and minds of the public, a contest fought as much through newspaper editorials and ads as through negotiations and protests. Union and company leaders forwarded their respective arguments in all the major papers, even buying ad space to make their case more prominent. The rank and file maneuvered to have their views known by speaking with reporters, writing to newspapers, distributing pamphlets, and carrying signs with their messages.

The battle between railway workers and the PRI pitted two versions of democracy against each other. Workers viewed democracy as including the right to elect their own leaders as well as the right to mobilize for higher wages and expanded benefits. For workers, the Constitution of 1917 and its defense of the right to collectively bargain and to strike provided the legal basis for democratic unionism. All workers — including those who belonged to Marxist parties, such as the

PCM and the POCM — framed their fight for wages, company housing, and medical care in the language of nationalism. For these activists, including Demetrio Vallejo, the movement embodied the democratic, populist impulses codified by the Constitution. Their democratic union should have been a source of national pride for all Mexicans.

The PRI viewed democracy in procedural and bureaucratic terms. Party officials framed democracy as the right to choose between ruling party candidates and their opponents. PRI-istas expected workers and citizens to express their opinions through designated bureaucratic bodies, which would in turn lobby the PRI. The policy allowed PRI officials direct contact and influence over union leaders, as we saw in the previous chapter when President Ruiz Cortines met personally with Demetrio Vallejo in 1958, negotiated a settlement to the strike, and soon after permitted a democratic union election.

Workers' vision of direct democracy countered corporatist labor relations as it was practiced midcentury. As Collier and Collier note, an effective corporatist state allows for union leaders to represent their constituencies well enough to prevent widespread grievances while reining in their most progressive demands. The state agrees to concessions in exchange for labor peace.[9] By midcentury, charrismo had perverted the corporatist model — leading to the collapse of the hegemonic relationship between unions and their members. In 1959 rieleros threatened to overthrow the corporatist model as it related to labor — requesting the recognition of autonomous leaders prepared to demand sizable concessions.

The Politics of Expectations

The railway rank and file expected the independent union to take an aggressive approach when negotiating the 1959 contract with the FNM. Expectations ran high. When independent STFRM leaders took power in August, they inherited petitions and complaints that charro leaders had disregarded since the 1948 takeover of the union.[10] Station managers who had been wrongfully dismissed during charro rule expected redress from the FNM. Train dispatchers anticipated a long awaited wage increase. A large number of workers, especially the unskilled

track repairmen, demanded indemnification for relocation costs incurred for moving throughout the country to fix bridges, repair tracks, and carry out menial tasks. Finally telegraph, shop, and dispatch men awaited supplementary pay that they were owed for overtime work.[11]

The independent union began its tenure in August with a mixture of elation and wariness — elated because they had overthrown charros but on guard against charro resistance to the new union. Upon taking power, Demetrio Vallejo instructed local union leaders to move into their offices and not invite local authorities. When charros were in power, it was customary for union locals to celebrate with local bureaucrats, but vallejistas were understandably unenthusiastic about celebrating with pro-charro politicos, who had been calling for the repression of the movement. It was imperative that vallejistas move into their offices immediately because rumors circulated that charros planned to abscond with monies, furniture, and whatever else of value they could hoard. In Nonoalco, 300 workers rushed to union headquarters to celebrate and guard against charros.[12]

The new STFRM General Executive Committee went on the offensive against those who had controlled the union for the previous decade. They began by firing members who had supported Salvador Quezada in the union election, fearing that charro supporters would attempt to sabotage the movement by disrupting the workplace. Specifically, vallejistas worried because FNM general manager Ricardo Velásquez Vázquez encouraged charros to take over STFRM buildings.[13] These concerns were not unwarranted. Throughout the country, small factions of charros organized to undermine the independent union. In a few months' time, vallejistas would have to use "picos y palos" (sticks and picks) to fend off charros trying to take over a union building in Mexico City. Moreover, the pro-charro Alianza de Ferrocarrileros Católicos and the Club Maquinista red-baited Vallejo in the press and at work, accusing him of spreading communism.[14]

The STFRM had much work to get done while it fended off detractors. All workers counted on leaders to renegotiate the collective contract, which expired in February 1959. As explained earlier, a major sticking point of the settlement between dissidents and President Ruiz Cor-

tines in 1958 included the provision that workers would be allowed to negotiate a new contract when the present one expired. Workers had viewed the 1958 settlement as simply a stopgap measure to provide an immediate wage increase until the anticipated contract negotiation of 1959. When Vallejo won the union election in 1958, expectations rose further. Workers now assumed that the 1959 contract would deliver a more comprehensive set of wage increases and workplace improvements to compensate for years of stagnating wages and poor treatment.

The independent union met expectations by securing benefits for some of the rank and file shortly after the democratic union election of 1958. Station managers, who had been hit especially hard by charrista politics, were the first to reap the benefits of an independent union. In the fall of 1958, the STFRM successfully pressured the FNM to rehire the many station managers who had been fired for criticizing charros in the early part of the decade. In addition, the union fought for station managers who were in charge of express trains because they had not received a wage increase in three years.[15] These major concessions helped reassure members that new union leaders were prepared to deliver on their promises.

In September 1958 the newly elected STFRM gained a 10 percent pay increase for station managers, garnering over 3 million pesos in back pay.[16] Train dispatchers who worked on the express line obtained a pay increase of 32 percent. Workers who were disgruntled by having to pay their own relocation costs were compensated. Finally the salaries of shop and telegraph workers, who believed they should be well paid because they were among the best trained, were raised by 15 percent.[17] These were important gains, but they were targeted, benefiting workers who had suffered particularly egregious affronts. The majority of workers did not benefit from these provisions.

These gains reflected the STFRM's goal to have salaries meet the rising cost of living for all workers. Ten years of conciliatory union politics and frozen wages required the union to fight for significant pay increases in order to improve the economic situation of workers immediately and to convince the rank and file that dissident leaders would continue to represent their interests. By quickly gaining ben-

efits for some workers, the union suppressed worries that power and status might corrupt new leaders. In short, union leaders in Vallejo's administration took a combative stance toward the company that many of the grassroots regarded as part and parcel of the union's history and mission.[18]

Along with economic benefits, workers expected the democratic union to take a stand against their poor treatment by supervisors. After the election of dissident leaders in August, workers asserted more everyday power at the workplace. Observers recognized that workers wished to be treated with dignity and respect. Trenistas, who complained that they were wrongly blamed — and docked wages — for delays, welcomed the independent leaders, as did track repairmen, who objected to bosses sending them to remote areas with shoddy equipment, poor pay, and against their consent. One journalist sympathetic to the movement explained that with the independent union, the rank and file would no longer have to endure unjust penalties and harassment by bosses. Echoing the sentiments of workers, the writer accused charros of not fighting for shop floor improvements and of refusing to represent injured workers. "Vallejo," in contrast, "walks beside workers."[19]

The STFRM used its newfound clout to support nonrailway causes, whether those of other industrial workers or of the broader public. Efforts to extend the railway movement's influence beyond railway issues are significant. At the very least, it demonstrates that the union and its members considered themselves to be a political vanguard, able to use their collective power to spearhead political change beyond the point of production. The boundaries between workplace and community struggles were porous and fluid. An example of such was evidenced in San Luis Potosí where, the DFS reported, the STFRM lent "moral and economic support to the Unión Cívica Potosina," a group battling the entrenched cacique governor, Gonzalos N. Santos. Workers halted production at the San Luis Potosí repair shops for several hours, and conductors refused to move locomotives out of the station. DFS agents concluded that Vallejo's "intention is to support all groups that rebel against . . . the authorities."[20] The STFRM was careful not to

negotiate on behalf of the anti-Santos movement, advising Potosinos to protest the governor as citizens, not as workers. But clearly railway workers in San Luis Potosí supported the anti-Santos faction. By halting production, they powerfully demonstrated their importance in the functioning of local commerce. It is plausible to conclude that their actions won the esteem of people not associated with the railways who disliked Santos. To be sure, the authorities expressed concern because "Potosinos believe that [rieleros] can be the factor that determines civic and political triumph" over Governor Santos.[21]

The STFRM also backed teachers as well as telegraph, electrical, and petrol workers' movements, all of which sought to overthrow the charros of their respective unions. In Mexico City, teachers joined the fray when a dissident group of primary school teachers broke away from the official teachers' union, the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Educación. Led by Othón Salazar, the Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio staged a series of strikes between April and December 1958, demanding a 30 percent pay increase to offset inflation. While teachers throughout the country suffered with inflation, this group in Mexico City was able to successfully mobilize. With more than 15,000 maestros on strike, Local 9 added to the general labor disruption—and sense of insurgency—in the capital.[22]

Othón Salazar became a key labor leader during these heady months, working closely with Demetrio Vallejo and leaders of other dissident workers' movements. In fact, following the lead of rieleros, dissident teachers threatened to strike if not allowed to democratically elect leaders of their union.[23] Petrol workers employed by the government-run Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) followed by executing a hunger strike. They too demanded the replacement of charros with democratically elected officials. Just as reileras joined railway men on picket lines, petrol workers' wives confronted police on streets, suffering tear gas attacks.[24]

Finally, students from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Instituto Politécnico Nacional joined these working-class groups. In addition to protesting the rise of bus fares disproportionately affecting students and the working class, students at the Politécnico de-

manded that school authorities resign and military personnel leave campus, as well as improvements in teaching and assurance that the government would not persecute activists under Article 145 of the penal code, the infamous "social dissolution" statute.[25] Students stood side by side with working-class men and women as riot squads descended on them.[26] These protests alarmed DFS agents, who concluded that Demetrio Vallejo had become a symbol of general militancy by providing inspiration for students and estranged workers of all industrial unions run by charros.[27]

Democratic railway unionism resulted in enthusiastic workers. One shop worker claimed that productivity grew substantially, a highly subjective claim for which there is no evidence to support. According to his estimate, workers repaired twenty cars more an hour after the union elections. They labored with greater ease and satisfaction, he said, knowing that union leaders would represent them against the bosses in case of a dispute. This remembrance is more important for what it suggests about the memory of democratic unionism than for assessing worker productivity. Supposed gains in productivity serve as examples of the positive effects of democratic unionism on worker morale while underscoring the benefits of workplace control for the industry.

Although there is no documentary evidence to support claims of increased productivity, archival sources do suggest that the rank and file gained greater control of the workplace, as the STFRM filed a greater number of worker grievances against supervisors than their charro counterparts. Workers' grievances against the company increased after the union election of 1958, only to decrease after the fall of Vallejo in 1959, clearly suggesting that the brief period of union democracy radicalized the rank and file at the workplace as well as on the streets.[28]

Guillermo Treviño Flores and Carlos Salazar Ramírez, both of whom worked in Puebla, affirm that workers became enthused equally by their newfound independence as by the August 1958 wage increases. Treviño waxes nostalgic about how the movement unified workers, remembering that "an overwhelming unity existed, almost the whole workforce was vallejista." An outpouring of grassroots support for a clean union had led Vallejo to the leadership of the STFRM.[29] Salazar

Ramírez remembers that the new union elated workers because it won wage hikes. Vallejismo "was a positive thing for us" because with charros at the helm, workers' real wages had drastically fallen. With charros, "We were earning almost nothing!" he recalls.[30] The connection between politics and economics could not be clearer to these men.

Who Owns the Revolution?

Railroad activists conducted a campaign to portray their movement as enjoying the support of everyday workers and their communities. By emphasizing the grassroots and democratic character of the movement, they drew a sharp contrast with the political protocol of the STFRM and the national government — institutions that were increasingly viewed as authoritarian. The large-scale mobilization of railway workers and others proved subversive simply because it contrasted with the autocratic practices of the PRI and union. Hence the very nature of the railway movement could be perceived as an affront to the government, the company, and charro officials.

More practically, the STFRM continued to argue that the FNM could afford to pay workers higher salaries while offering their families medical care and housing. Union and FNM officials debated in detail the financial state of the industry. Company officials insisted that the FNM could not afford to grant workers additional benefits. During Ruiz Cortines's administration, the company spent more than 2 million pesos to repair rails, bridges, shops, equipment, and terminals.[31] Renovation costs and concessions to workers, company officials claimed, resulted in a deficit of 1.5 million pesos. The FNM needed to tighten its belt by reducing its operating budget and by increasing worker efficiency.[32] Railway movement leaders countered that private firms and the FNM could pay for the proposed wage increase and benefits by raising freight rates on industrial goods, such as steel, carbon, zinc, and iron, a proposal highly contested by industry and company officials alike.[33]

The fight over freight rates was not new, as we have noted. Since World War II, the STFRM had argued that freight rates on minerals and industrial goods remained artificially low, constituting less than the cost of shipping. During the war, the government had maintained

that the subsidy was necessary to support the United States in its fight against the Axis powers. With the end of the war, there seemed to be no reason to maintain the subsidy. Nevertheless, charro leaders shelved the proposal to raise rates because the PRI warned that higher prices would cut into the earnings of industrialists and thus negatively affect economic growth.

In 1958 and 1959, the independent union argued that it was long overdue for Mexican and U.S. companies to pay for the true cost of shipping, reviving the critique issued by Gómez Z. and Campa during the 1940s. This proposal once again became a hotly contested issue in 1959. The STFRM conducted a study detailing the FNM's budget, which concluded that raising freight rates would enable the FNM and private railroad firms to boost wages.[34] Like Margarito Ramírez before him, the new general manager of the FNM, Benjamín Méndez, dismissed the study and reiterated the long-held position that increases would hurt industry and impair the economy. By proposing that the FNM raise rates, the union acted unpatriotically. Disagreements between the STFRM and PRI over freight rates proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to negotiating wage increases over the following months.

Vallejo insisted that the company could raise wages if it made cuts elsewhere; for instance, it could fire management personnel as a cost-cutting measure. For years the company had resisted laying off management, focusing instead on ways to make the rank and file more productive. But the FNM could no longer ignore grassroots pressure. Remarkably, in February 1959 the company dismissed 500 managers.[35] It was an unprecedented victory for the STFRM. Nevertheless, the company still claimed it could not afford the demands that workers were preparing to make, including a 16.66 percent wage hike as well as subsidized housing and free medical care for families.

STFRM leaders focused on swaying PRI officials, especially the president. They sought to cash in on Adolfo López Mateos's campaign promise of running a pro-labor administration. In December 1958, the union presented the recently inaugurated president with its study of the FNM's finances, urging him to raise rates on minerals.[36] Union leaders had remained optimistic that the president would prove to be

a friend of labor, so they were disappointed to learn that the president had decided to deny their proposal.[37] By declining to back the union's proposal, the president indirectly propped up the FNM.

With the president and company standing firm against wage increases, charros decided to use the country's newspapers to denounce the railway movement. Company officials and pro-charro workers wrote editorials against Vallejo and other officials in the newly independent STFRM, accusing them of orchestrating a plot to turn Mexico into a communist state. Detractors warned that the 1958 strike was the first step in what dissidents hoped would turn into a communist revolution.[38] Charros had red-baited railway dissidents throughout the 1950s, but in 1959 they turned the volume up, portraying Mexico as a country in crisis on the verge of experiencing a Leninist revolution led by Demetrio Vallejo.

Workers did not stand idly by. They made strategic use of the Popular Front narrative that figured railway workers as indispensable to the national economy; they used this portrayal to persuade the public that they were worthy of a pay raise and of honest union representation.[39] In addition, they portrayed the movement as overwhelmingly grassroots, countering the perception that sophisticated communists manipulated naïve workers. Most important, activists insisted that the movement held true to the goals of revolutionary nationalism embodied in the Constitution of 1917 and the memory of the revolution.[40]

As pressure mounted against the movement, they insisted that their demands were fair because they embodied the principles of the revolution. Strikers insisted that patriotism and deference for the revolution bonded railway workers with other citizens.[41] Time and again, union leaders and activists linked their movement to the revolution, invoking the Constitution of 1917 to argue that workers had the right to strike for a pay hike. At every turn, the STFRM abided by established labor law—hardly an act of Leninism, as detractors claimed. As one worker put it at the time: "We are neither communists nor agitators. Since our union won't act [on our behalf] we must take the initiative. . . . We do not have leaders."[42]

Mobilizations on busy city streets punctuated the battles waged in

periodicals. Strikers deployed a counterplot to contest the official story, appropriating avenues by carrying signs, painting political messages on company property, and chanting songs in public. In Puebla, workers put on a community dance after Vallejo's ascent to union head, appropriately naming the event the "Dance of Victory." Treviño Flores, a yard worker and PCM activist, informs us that the railway ballad "La Rielera" "was always a musical source in dances and in struggles." Railway families listened to the revised vallejista version of "La Reilera," which exclaimed, "Viva Demetrio Vallejo, whom we will support to represent our workforce, our union home. I am a rielero. I came to fight."[43] *El Universal* reported that workers and families in Mexico City marched from Buenavista station — the main railway station in the capital — to the Plaza de la Constitución singing "La Rielera," accompanied by a musical band.

LA RIELERA

I have my pair of pistols
To go out and travel
One is for my love
The other is for my rival.

Yo soy rielera.

All of the machinists
Cannot have a woman
Because they work at night
And cannot see them.

Yo soy rielera.

When the conductor says
That it's time to move
I take him his lunch pail
With which he is going to eat.

Yo soy rielera.

In the military trains
I am going to wait for my man ["mi juan""]

So that he gives me the wad
That every fortnight he receives.

Yo soy rielera.

Adios boys from Laredo
Gómez Palacios and Torreon
They now go to fool around.

Yo soy rielera.[44]

LA RIELERA VALLEJISTA

I am a rielero, I have a plan
It's about the Southeast, we are going to win,
And if they tell me they are going to pay,
We will triumph!

Viva Demetrio Vallejo,
Whom we will lift
To preside over the rank and file
And our union home [*hogar*].[45]

The revision of "La Rielera" demonstrates the political uses of folk songs as well as the playful improvisation of the rank and file. The affection and commitment to Vallejo among workers is movingly captured in the second stanza. Workers promise to carry Vallejo to the position of secretary general, while the union is metaphorically figured as a place of safety by the word *hogar*, meaning home.

In these ways, railway families articulated an alternative narrative that served to idealize their value to the country's political process and economic development.[46] By advancing arguments for increased wages and control over the workplace, they figured railway workers as patriotic and humble but alienated by years of abuse and neglect. They portrayed themselves as politically independent and the movement as vigorously democratic, repudiating critics' claims that communist autocrats misled naïve workers. The rank and file were well aware that the mainstream media had taken the side of the company, and they continued to respond on streets and in newspapers. During

4. Workers on boxcar used to display political propaganda. The message reads, "Comrades, Don't Buy Turncoat Papers." Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Hermanos Mayo.

one demonstration, strikers responded to these characterizations by shouting, "Down with the reactionary press!" as they marched onward singing railway songs.[47] In another case, a railway family wrote, on the freight car in which they lived, "Don't buy newspapers that sell us out."[48] Photographs reveal that protestors paraded with effigies of charros and wrote the names of arrested or fired workers on coffins. These creative responses demonstrate how protesters constantly resisted PRI and FNM narratives of the movement. Even as their editorialists railed against rieleros, newspapers published workers' condemnation of the press, offering opportunities for activists to get their point of view across to the broader public.

Solidarity and Scabs

With former dissidents now in charge of the STFRM, the broader union movement benefited. STFRM assistance proved especially important to other industrial unions because they were still run by charros. DFS agents continued to monitor teachers and miners, as well as petrol, telegraph, and electrical workers.[49] The STFRM offered them inspiration as well as financial support. With over 100,000 members, the

union could gather significant amounts of money to assist other dissident movements, as evidenced when rieleros donated 5 pesos each to the teachers' movement. Although the donation upset some rieleros because they felt pressured to donate their hard-earned money, union members nevertheless coughed up pesos for their teacher activists.[50] In addition to receiving money, petroleros and electricistas also made use of STFRM buildings when in trouble. In at least one instance, petroleros sought shelter at an STFRM building during a protest in Mexico City, successfully eluding police.[51]

In displays of masculine bravado, railway activists literally put their bodies on the line in defense of their petrol comrades. On August 29, 1958, a few days after Vallejo's election, rieleros assisted dissident petroleros in breaking into the PEMEX union building in Mexico City. Petroleros demanded what railway radicals had just won: an independent union, free of charros. As petroleros awaited President López Mateos's response to their request for a transparent union election, thousands of workers and students filled the main artery in Mexico City, congregating at the Monumento a la Revolución and marching toward the famous equestrian statue (*El Caballito*) at the corner of Juárez and Reforma Avenues. Soldiers locked horns with protestors, shooting into the crowd and ultimately injuring at least fifty demonstrators. Protestors countered by hurling Molotov cocktails at charging officers.[52] Four students were seriously wounded, and one worker was shot dead. The U.S. embassy reported that ambulances screeched through the streets all afternoon. PEMEX workers in Veracruz, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosí closely tracked the protests in the capital, eager to overthrow petrol charros.[53] The injuries sustained by rieleros reinforced the notion that they were exceptionally manly and thus had the responsibility to lead the working-class movement.

Indeed, the STFRM proved critically important in getting the various unions and working-class groups to work together. Vallejo and rielero leaders, for example, met with Austín Sánchez Delint, secretary general of the electrical workers' union, to encourage electricistas to engage in solidarity strikes in support of the teachers' movement. As noted, Othón Salazar, the leader of the teachers' movement, had close

ties to STFRM leaders. In fact, the STFRM leadership received daily reports from Salazar, and the STFRM invited activist teachers to speak and make their case to rieleros at stations and union halls. To ease the financial costs of organizing, the STFRM allowed teachers to ride trains free of charge, to FNM officials' chagrin.[54]

Support for the railway movement extended beyond teachers, electricistas, petroleros, and telegraphistas. STFRM leaders understood the movement needed widespread working-class support if it was to do battle with the FNM because the PRI still paid heed to popular opinion. In Mexico City, J. Guadalupe López Padilla, the author of the Southeast Plan and now head of Mexico City's Local 15, scurried about the capital visiting workplaces. His efforts paid off, as he successfully attained the support of various working-class groups, including bakers, the Industrial Furniture Workers' Union, the General Union of Workers and Peasants, and the School of Drawing and Modeling, as well as the Women's Vanguard and Democratic Union of Mexican Women.[55] These disgruntled men and women pledged support to the railway workers' movement in exchange for STFRM support of their own initiatives. They attended each other's protests, turning rallies into expressions of widespread working-class discontent. When Othón Salazar spoke at STFRM rallies, he made palpable the solidarity between workers and teachers.[56] At most demonstrations, teachers would have been joined by many of their students, who in turn received support from the STFRM in their protests against bus fare hikes. Many of the students' parents, especially if they belonged to an industrial union, would have also been in attendance during these rallies. Clearly the railway movement served as the nexus of a broad, national working-class movement. The solidarity expressed by other groups only strengthened an already militant railway community.

Not everyone backed the activists, however. Critics told a story of rank-and-file discontent with the militancy of the railway movement as it evolved in 1959. Some disliked the movement from the beginning, while others slowly became estranged by what they perceived as dissidents' overly strident rhetoric. Although the overwhelming majority of the rank and file supported the strikes of 1959 and embraced Vallejo as

their leader, defectors existed, and they mattered. To be sure, after the PRI repressed the movement in March, scabs became useful witnesses for the government, which arrested, tried, and imprisoned organizers.

Emasculating Tactics and Labor Anticommunism

Working-class activists became the targets of anticommunist criticism from labor groups aligned with the ruling party. Pro-company workers in cahoots with charros joined the Workers' Unity Bloc (BUO), a coalition headed by Fidel Velázquez, notorious for his support of the PRI. Formed in 1955 to serve as a bulwark against communism, its "sole purpose was to legitimize agreements drawn up by industry, charro-controlled unions, and the government."[57] In 1958 and 1959, the BUO ran full-page ads in major newspapers denouncing the railway movement for its autocratic leadership and alleged links to international communism.[58] The continued targeting by police of communist activists paralleled the rhetorical struggle played out in the press. Although Treviño Flores exaggerates when he complains that "at that time it was easier to get let out of jail for having committed robbery or murder than for being a communist," he nevertheless captures the sense of persecution felt by communists during the 1950s.[59]

Workers allied with the reform party Partido Popular—alienated by the STFRM's militancy—had little tolerance for POCM and PCM activists in the movement. PP members agreed with PRI officials who called for workers to continue to sacrifice wage increases for the benefit of industrialization. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a prominent Marxist intellectual and labor leader, led the PP and was a fierce supporter of the Popular Front strategy of finding a middle ground between labor and business.[60] Lombardo Toledano publicly denounced railway activists. (Their disagreement with the dissidents had its roots in the 1942 Labor Unity Pact, discussed in chapter 1.) After the government repressed the movement in 1959, a contingent of ferrocarrileros enlisted with the PP justified the government's actions by arguing that Vallejo had been manipulated and duped by communists, especially Valentín Campa.[61] This had in fact become the Partido Popular line on the railway movement.

At workplaces and on city streets, anticommunists locked horns with colleagues supportive of the railway movement. Disagreements led to violence. Protesters assaulted and publicly shamed rieleros who opposed the movement, the archival record and collective memory reveal. Both pro- and anti-Vallejo informants recall that turncoats faced ostracism and even beatings if they crossed the picket line.[62] Shortly after the August 1958 STFRM election, the U.S. consulate reported a rise in confrontations between activists and pro-charro rank and file. In one incident, a vallejista in Guadalajara allegedly hammered to death a Quezada supporter in a street fight that left twenty workers injured, with the skirmish ending only when federal troops intervened. Vallejo denied that a vallejista had been responsible for the killing, but there was no denying that violent acts proliferated.[63]

Anticommunists were no less confrontational. DFS agents reported that deposed charros, as well as PRI Deputy Manuel Moreno Cárdenas, instigated confrontations between strike breakers and vallejistas. Moreno Cárdenas traveled throughout the southeast organizing anti-vallejistas into "comités de oposición," or opposition committees. Moreno Cárdenas found followers among charros and supporters who had been fired when dissidents took over the STFRM in August. Vallejo fired these workers for siding with charro Salvador Quezada against the movement, but now they stood on the sidelines lurking, organizing against the independent union. Moreno Cárdenas did his part to tap into their discontent by leading them to red-bait dissidents, dismissing Vallejo as a "tool of communists who manipulate him."[64]

Movement activists countered by employing what I will call *emasculating tactics* against strikebreakers. Emasculating tactics, as I view them, draw on a culture of masculinity to figure opponents as lacking in manhood, even suggesting that they are feminine. Emasculating tactics are necessarily conducted for a public, because a man's reputation resides among a community. Hence an emasculating act could be executed for an immediate small audience, but in order to achieve the desired result, word of the act must circulate widely among the community. It is important to stress that the victim need not feel emasculated, because the tactic may fail. For example, workers allied with

strikebreakers during the railroad movement may have considered that a scab proved to be manly for enduring a beating, even as the perpetrator walked away thinking that he had emasculated the scab. In this case, the emasculating tactic may actually strengthen a scab's claim to manliness—at least in the eyes of fellow strikebreakers. Nevertheless, the act was meant to communicate that the subject lacked the attributes required of a manly rielero.

Emasculating tactics differ in important ways from shaming rituals. While both draw on normative gender roles and are executed as a form of public spectacle, shaming rituals call into question an individual's masculinity without insisting on his essential lack of manhood. For example, the scab shamed by his daughter in Cárdenas in 1958 could regain his manhood simply by joining the strike. Emasculating tactics, in contrast, necessarily insist that the subject lacks the attributes required of a proper man. This explains why emasculating acts in the case of rieleros so often disfigured the victim's body—to align his physical appearance with his essential, inner deformity. The violated body came to signal the scab's innately defective character.

In 1958 and 1959, radicals charged that strikebreakers lacked the moral and physical strength to contest the company and join the movement. In a number of cases, protestors assaulted scabs and, in doing so, demonstrated that strikebreakers were weak and vulnerable—unmanly traits according to rielero culture. Although the degree of violence and harm exacted ranged from verbal attacks to gunplay, in each case dissidents verbally and physically undressed scabs as cowardly. In many cases, dissidents altered the strikebreaker's body, either by cutting his hair or by damaging his clothes, powerfully demonstrating his powerlessness.

Control over one's body was key to railway patriarchy. Part of men's power resided in their claim to have control over women's sexual choices while exalting their own sexual autonomy—prescribing monogamy for women and practicing promiscuity. In those moments of public humiliation, when workers beat up strikebreakers, the scab was publicly reduced to a supposed womanly state, lacking control over his body.

Many of the confrontations between vallejistas and strikebreakers occurred shortly after dissidents took over the union in August 1958. Dissidents felt empowered, and some no doubt sought revenge for abuses exacted by charros when they were in power, during which time charros had been implicated in beating up and even assassinating dissidents.[65] In September, for example, pro-Vallejo workers in Monterrey confronted their supervisor, a charro supporter. After beating him, the men clipped his hair, leaving him bald. Once they were done with the supervisor, they turned on the rank and file who supported him. They, too, paid the price for rejecting vallejismo; the men left them bruised. The supervisor went into hiding. The tensions were so great in Monterrey that the federal government sent army troops to protect managers from the very men they were supposed to supervise.[66]

Most dramatically, activists tarred and feathered scabs.[67] In Puebla, they poured grease on detractors, covered them with feathers, and forced them to walk more than ten city blocks from the railway station to the Zócalo.[68] In one instance, vallejistas waited for the locomotive conducted by Rosen Iñigo Olvera to arrive in Mexico City. When he stepped off the train, a group of workers nabbed him. In short order, they tarred and feathered him.[69] His body, sullied with grease, became a billboard advertising his lack of manliness. He was too cowardly to strike and too weak to defend himself against the mob. These rituals indicated just how little room for negotiation existed for those reluctant to join the movement. Many workers must have felt like Gil Morales Hernández, a former carpenter from Puebla, who explains, "I was obligated to support the movement. You were obligated because you had to express solidarity."[70]

Antonio Moreno, a political moderate with no ties to the POCM or PCM, has no remorse for scabs who faced beatings from co-workers: "We all went on strike in 1959. We had here in Puebla a number of workers who had their heads shaved. They left them bruised, and they put tar and feathers on them. They treated them as traitors to the movement. They exhibited them on the streets. There were only two or three, those discovered for being traitors to the movement."[71] Moreno carefully distances himself from these acts without disavowing them.

By asserting that all workers went on strike, he places scabs outside of the rank and file, a discursive move that provides a rationale for tarring strikebreakers, whom he portrays as traitors. Just as critics of the movement portrayed workers as outsiders and traitors to the nation, activists considered scabs turncoats to a greater collective cause.

Demetrio Vallejo and the STFRM did not order or in any way direct the attacks against anticommunists—not necessarily out of altruism but because doing so would provide ammunition to opponents. On the contrary, DFS reports explained that Vallejo dispatched respected leaders to union locals, charging them with restraining the unruly rank and file. These leaders reminded workers that the STFRM had promised during negotiations not to seek retribution against charros and their supporters. Leaders also hung fliers at union halls requesting that workers refrain from attacking strikebreakers and show the public that dissidents are "generous and humane." Vallejo worried that if the grassroots continued to attack scabs, the "pueblo would turn against [him]."[72] Taking the lead, Vallejo announced that the STFRM would stop firing supporters of Salvador Quezada.[73]

Vallejo's concession did little to comfort strikers like Don Chema, introduced in chapter 1 as a former trainman who supported the PRI and union charros. Don Chema affirms the testimony of other informants who remember having been pressured to join the movement: "There were two sides: you were either with Vallejo or you exposed yourself to being ridiculed, joked about, and pressured by your compañeros."[74] Don Chema refused to join the movement because its "leaders sought to directly confront the government" through strikes. He especially abhorred activists' aggression against other workers. "In the assemblies," he explains, "those who stood up against [the dissidents] were taken outside *a golpes*," or with force.[75]

Unlike Don Chema, former vallejista Narciso Nava justifies ostracizing colleagues who refused to fall in line. At the same time, his comments reveal that even those who supported the movement, such as he, felt pressured to *siguir la corriente*, or go with the flow. His testimony affirms Don Chema's claim that workers were seen as either for or against the movement. There was no middle ground.

Alegre: Did you support the movement?

Nava: I tell you I wasn't political. I didn't like politics. So one did what one had to do.

Alegre: And what did you have to do?

Nava: Well, siguir la corriente. If ten workers said yes, you weren't going to say no.

Alegre: But what if one wanted to work?

Nava: No, your compañeros would reject you. The word would go out about the scab who was on the side of the company.

Alegre: But perhaps that person needed the money.

Nava: No, no, no . . . there were always people against the movement. No one asked you what you thought and not everyone thought alike. Everyone had his own way of thinking, and you were free, free to think.[76]

Free to think, but not free to cross the picket line.

These remembrances reveal that divisions existed—then and now—between those who supported the movement and those who took sides with charros. Both informants agree that workers felt pressured, but they reach opposing conclusions on whether such pressure was justified. Don Chema and Nava were both trenistas; as part of the railway worker elite, they were among the best educated and paid and did not need a raise as urgently as most among the rank and file. Don Chema believed then and now that dissident pressure was tantamount to intimidation, and he deplored it for degrading public discourse. His allegiance rested with charros, whom he would join in the 1960s after they retook control the union. In fact, Don Chema would become a charro leader himself. Nava was also no militant. On the contrary, he stresses that he wasn't interested in politics, and he distances himself and the rank and file from political ideologies. He backed the movement because he felt committed to union solidarity. To be sure, many workers walked off the job out of a sense of manly obligation, as a sign of solidarity with their friends and neighbors who needed a pay hike to put food on the table.

Most workers were neither communist nor anticommunist. Most sought practical reforms and joined the movement because they viewed it as representing their interests. Some workers who rejected communism on ideological grounds did so because they found secular humanism incompatible with Catholicism. Antonio Moreno reflects on how communists tried to reconcile their political and religious beliefs:

Alegre: Did you have communist friends?

Moreno: No, I knew who they were. We knew who they were. I didn't follow their ideas. They loved being reds. According to them, they were the greatest union leaders.

Alegre: How could they be communist *and* religious?

Moreno: Very simple. Some would say that God doesn't exist, but in their houses they had saints. In the street, they were communist, they were red, but in their houses they even held masses! Priests would go to their houses to baptize their babies. They acted like they didn't believe in God. They couldn't be communists and be believers. But deep down they were as Catholic as anyone.

Alegre: Are you a believer? Did you go to mass?

Moreno: I always have been. That's why I tell you I couldn't accept the ideologies. There were masses in the railroad workshops. In Puebla, I tried to have mass . . . but the union was against it. Union officials said churches were for masses. I wanted to do it in the workshop, but they opposed it.

Most frustrating to Moreno and others like him, critics failed or refused to acknowledge that an activist could support the movement without holding communist sympathies:

Alegre: Many newspapers, *Excélsior* and others, claimed that workers were atheists and supported the Soviet Union.

Moreno: The newspapers exaggerate. Those of us who work know more than journalists. Journalists don't live with the workers. We do. We didn't talk about ideology.

Although Moreno's claim that workers did not talk about ideology may have been true, they surely knew that Vallejo and other leaders belonged to the POCM or PCM. Unlike critics in the press, Moreno and other rieleros practiced an inclusive and pragmatic sort of politics — they were willing to include communists into their fold as long as they shared pragmatic goals and conducted themselves honorably. Moreno explains:

> **Alegre:** Was Vallejo a Marxist?
>
> **Moreno:** Yes.
>
> **Alegre:** Why did people follow him then?
>
> **Moreno:** Because he was honest. He never tried to scheme anyone. He fought for the good of all. He had his ideas, but he wasn't a rebel. His thoughts were pure. Compañero Vallejo would have been an eternal leader because everyone supported him. He never cut deals with the company even though the company offered money to union leaders, money during contract negotiations. It was the custom.[77]

Vallejo's righteousness and incorruptibility are legendary in large part because charros had for so long worked at the service of the FNM and the PRI. Whatever Vallejo's views on communism, workers nostalgically recall that "he fought for the good of all."

The February Strike

By February 1959 the majority of workers voluntarily supported the movement and had risked their jobs and physical well-being by striking. Their courage paid off. In the course of a summer, dissidents had won major victories. Independent leaders had negotiated a successful settlement to the contract dispute, gaining a 215 peso increase in July. More remarkably, in August 1958 they had become the first and only union to overthrow charros. In February 1959 Vallejo and the other members of the union leadership responded to grassroots expectations for better pay and expanded benefits for family members by demanding that the FNM deliver another wage hike. In addition, they demanded housing and medical subsidies for family members as well. If vic-

torious, these provisions would profoundly improve the lives of the railroad men, women, and children. With widespread support from other working-class groups, the rank and file once again readied itself to combat the company and government.

STFRM leaders had reason to believe that the contract could be settled without more strikes and street fights. They may have sincerely expected President López Mateos to make good on his campaign promises. If he had done so, he would have sent a strong message that he would fashion his presidency and the PRI's policies after the pro-labor, populist President Lázaro Cárdenas, breaking from the conservative politics of the postwar period. Certainly railway leaders had reason to be optimistic. In a meeting on December 26, the president had cordially welcomed them to his office and, DFS agents reported, indicated that he sympathized with workers. The president in fact assured STFRM representatives that he believed their wage demands to be reasonable and thought the contract could be settled amicably. Leaders left the meeting convinced that López Mateos would endorse increases on FNM cargo rates in order to offset the cost of workers' demands.[78] Moreover, Vallejo believed that López Mateos would usher in a new era of labor rights.[79]

New FNM representatives, however, were less agreeable than the president and prepared to make negotiations more contentious in 1959 than they had been in 1958. Among his first acts as president, López Mateos named Benjamín Méndez the general manager of the FNM, replacing Roberto Amorós.[80] Since the federal government ran the FNM, the general manager and the president worked closely in resolving sticky labor disputes. Railway families would be disappointed to learn throughout 1959 that Méndez would be less accommodating than his predecessor. Amorós had made a habit of publicly denouncing the railway movement while remaining willing to negotiate secretly behind closed doors. In 1958, Amorós had conducted negotiations with union dissidents in cars and private residences as well in the more formal setting of the National Palace. He later helped orchestrate the backdoor deliberations that eventually led to Ruiz Cortines granting FNM employees a wage increase in 1958. Méndez put an end

to behind-the-scenes bargaining. By appointing Méndez, López Mateos ended the practice of informally negotiating with union leaders.

Upon taking office, Méndez emphasized that the country counted on workers to help modernize the railway industry by putting their demands for higher wages on hold. Through the company magazine, he reiterated what FNM and PRI officials had asked of railway families since World War II: workers had to make sacrifices in order for the country to industrialize. Most important for the STFRM, Méndez stressed that rates on minerals would not be increased.[81] The rank and file, he wrote, would have to bear the company's restructuring with workplace discipline and a patriotic attitude.[82] In short, the FNM intended to turn back the clock and reestablish the conciliatory union-company relationship that existed before the dissident movement took over the STFRM.

Like presidents Ávila Camacho, Alemán, and Ruiz Cortines before him, López Mateos rejected the STFRM's proposal to increase freight rates as a way to redistribute wealth from industries to rieleros and their families. Workers at Local 14 in Mexico City believed that a strike would force López Mateos to reconsider. It had worked a year earlier with President Ruiz Cortines, who did not have López Mateos's pro-labor reputation. It was time to cash in on the promises made by the president when he visited rail yards and stations during his campaign for the presidency.

Oral histories suggest that it was at this moment when union leaders began having difficulties controlling grassroots protests. Rank-and-file activists itched for a speedy resolution; they preferred striking in lieu of prolonged negotiations, which would inevitably lead to compromising some of their demands. Vallejo, knowing how difficult it had been to democratize the union, urged restraint, asking members to allow the STFRM to continue negotiations. Vallejo considered a strike to be imprudent because there had been no violation of the collective contract.[83] He instead proposed seeking a resolution with the company concerning rates on commodities, promising to explore the possibility of calling a strike if conciliatory measures failed.[84] Meanwhile, J. Guadalupe López promptly set out to attain the support of dissident

teachers and petrol workers, as well as CTM and CROM leaders, in case contract negotiations failed and workers decided to strike.[85]

Méndez took an obdurate stance against raising freight rates.[86] When STFRM leaders received word of Méndez's position, they quickly returned to the combative style that had brought them acclaim and power in August. The union presented the following demands on January 17: a monthly raise of 16.66 percent above the 215 peso increase for all union members; 52.5 million pesos a year for medicine and medical attention for workers' families; a savings plan; 60,000 units of company housing for workers' use, or 5 pesos a day for rent.[87] Union leaders estimated that the benefits would cost the company an estimated 210 million pesos, which could be covered by a rate increase on minerals. Predictably the company rejected the demands, leading once again to a confrontation between the rank and file and the FNM.[88]

For the first time, the STFRM joined the grievances of members employed by the FNM with those of their counterparts from a private railroad company, Ferrocarril del Pacífico.[89] The decision to include workers at Ferrocarril del Pacífico reflected union leaders' sense that the STFRM now enjoyed substantial political power.[90] But the union took a risk in joining the grievances of members employed by a public company with those employed by a private one. When confronting the FNM, the union could pressure the government to abide by its populist rhetoric. Managers at Ferrocarril del Pacífico had no such allegiances to "the people" and had no obligation to express sympathy for, or revolutionary solidarity with, workers. In short, the STFRM took a major risk by linking the demands of workers at FNM with those at Ferrocarril del Pacífico, escalating the pressure on the president to intervene.[91] The union planned a strike for February 25, 1959.

The railway movement flexed its muscle on the streets and in newspapers, but the arguments put forth by dissidents did little to win over commentators whose editorials appeared daily in the national press.[92] In fact, as the movement grew in strength and determination and the government grew more inflexible, commentators sided with the company and openly condemned the strikers.[93] By late February 1959, articles no longer questioned the legitimacy of FNM officials' position.[94]

The company, editorials affirmed, could not afford to raise wages and confer medical coverage to railway families.[95] Echoing the opinion of government officials, one commentator matter-of-factly condemned strikers for developing a "movement of agitation," contrasting rieleros with the government, which sought to "promote order and tranquility" in the capital.[96]

In addition to the discursive battles that took place in newspapers, the railway movement had to contend with how to incorporate into their negotiations workers from two more privately administered firms, Ferrocarriles Mexicanos and the Ferrocarriles de Yucatán.[97] All workers belonged to the STFRM, but the union now had to conduct negotiations with four employers and acquire a consensus with workers at a public company and those at private ones. The difficulty of juggling these lines of negotiation became clear when, one day before the strike, STFRM representatives of workers at Ferrocarril del Pacífico decided to abruptly withdraw their demands. Workers at Ferrocarriles de Yucatán, who were clamoring for a 50 percent raise, also suspended their petition. With demands from workers at private firms shelved, the STFRM could focus on settling the FNM contract.[98] There exists no documentary evidence that explains why labor leaders retracted their demands. Perhaps government officials forewarned STFRM leaders in the capital that the president was unwilling to mediate between private employees and the union.

Although Pacífico and Yucatán workers suspended their demands, the STFRM required them to join their FNM comrades in protest. When the STFRM ordered the threatened strike on February 25, 1959, railway workers at private companies helped their FNM compañeros shut down the industry, as they had done during the two previous strikes. Workers employed by the privately owned Ferrocarril del Pacífico, Ferrocarriles de Yucatán, Ferrocarriles Mexicanos, and the Terminal de Veracruz walked off the job in solidarity.[99] They did not stand to benefit from a victory, but they were nevertheless obligated to strike because they were union members. Their participation in the wildcat strikes reflects the organizational strength of the STFRM. Workers employed by private companies could waiver on whether to stick to their own

demands, but the STFRM insisted that all of its members strike in support of the FNM rank and file. As railway families and their supporters picketed outside stations in major cities, those in remote areas simply protested beside the tracks. Meanwhile, the government dispatched military troops to protect FNM property at both major and remote railway sites. Workers found themselves face-to-face with the repressive force of the state.[100]

For a nationwide movement to succeed, there must be a great deal of coordination among union leaders, and these leaders must find ways to communicate every turn in negotiations to their members. Local union leaders in cities and remote areas far away from STFRM headquarters in the capital needed to be briefed a few times a day on the progress of negotiations. These local leaders relied on up-to-date information, often sent by telegraph, in order to rally their members. It was imperative for the STFRM leadership in Mexico City to disseminate the union's official position regarding wages and other demands to locals across the country in order to guard against rumors spread by the opposition. By February the press and the FNM relentlessly condemned the movement, egging the government on to arrest strikers. Leaders needed to urge members, who were reasonably intimidated, to remain unified as negotiations continued. Leaders did their best to meet workers face-to-face. Vallejo and other committee members traveled to stations throughout the country to mount rallies. Joined by Valentín Campa, Vallejo visited workers at stations in Orizaba, Veracruz, and Monterrey, where some workers had been growing restless, wanting to engage in acts of sabotage against company equipment. Other leaders went as far north as Guadalajara, Empalme, and Mazatlán to agitate for the cause. According to DFS reports, union leaders visited every station in the country.[101]

As railway families, students, and supporters from other industrial unions filled Zócalos across the country, the Junta de Conciliación y Arbitraje convened to hear the STFRM's case.[102] STFRM lawyer Mario Pavón Flores argued that workers had the right to strike because negotiations over the contract had hit a wall. He contended that the action was legally sound because the Federal Labor Law and the Con-

stitution protected the right to strike.[103] To Vallejo's shock, the labor arbitration court determined that the strike was illegal because the union failed to present documents proving that workers voted in favor of the strike.[104] With the strike deemed illegal, the government could now lawfully arrest strikers for engaging in a criminal conspiracy against the FNM.[105] STFRM leaders maintained that the union had not held a vote to determine whether the majority supported a strike, not because leaders feared members would vote against striking but simply because there was no precedent for doing so.

Workers perceived the judge's decision to be a glaring violation of their constitutional rights, since the court's requirements were not specified in the Constitution or in the Federal Labor Law. In their opinion, the judge caved in to political pressure. After the court's decision, the mainstream press began describing protests as criminal.[106] Vallejo did his part to win over reporters, sitting down with journalists in Mexico City's Restaurant Hollywood to discuss the hardships faced by the working class, but mainstream editorials continued to denounce the movement as communist.[107]

Grassroots unrest could not be suppressed by a court's decree or by unfavorable print, however. Some STFRM leaders proposed to go back to work, but rank-and-file expectations had to be taken into account before unilaterally calling off the strike. Vallejo warned that cutting the movement short might cause workers to turn against the union, and leaders might be perceived as traitors. Many workers were already upset at STFRM leaders for reducing their wage demand in July 1958 from a 350 peso a month raise to a 215 peso a month hike. DFS agents reported that brakemen in Mexico City had grown frustrated with Vallejo's insistence on negotiating and adhering to the letter of the law. They had also decried Vallejo's condemnation of acts of sabotage. The STFRM had responded to grassroots urgency by forming shock troops and a strike fund in case of failed negotiations and government repression.[108]

Memories of the charrazo must have influenced discussions. Leaders could not settle for a watered-down contract with few gains, because their members might very well accuse them of selling out, much as charros had done throughout the 1950s. Vallejo weighed the chances

that the government might repress the strikes against workers' desire to continue to picket. The STFRM had very little room to maneuver. Their rank and file remained militant, even as detractors in the press called for a government crackdown. Vallejo, continuing to have faith in López Mateos, proposed to union leaders that they appeal directly to the president, as dissidents had done with Ruiz Cortines. It was a last-minute tactic to buy time for the union before deciding whether or not to continue the strike.

Never underestimate the efficacy of personalist politics, STFRM leaders learned. Mario Pavón, the union lawyer sent to negotiate with the president, must have had some impressive powers of persuasion. Remarkably López Mateos granted FNM workers the 16.66 percent a month wage hike they sought, as well as medical benefits for family members. In addition, the president agreed to establish a committee tasked with providing workers with clean and comfortable housing, as was their right based on Section 12, Article 123 of the Constitution. The government would provide the monies for building these houses. Valentín Campa stresses that this was the first time that Section 12 had been enforced by the government, turning the successful negotiation into a landmark moment in the country's labor history.[109]

Equally as significant was how the government proposed to fund these benefits: by raising freight rates.[110] As we have seen, workers had demanded the raising of freight rates since the 1930s, and the issue became a rallying call for Valentín Campa and the STFRM leadership of the 1940s. By agreeing to raise rates, López Mateos had not only made a major concession to workers at the expense of industry; he had also made a significant turn away from the policies of presidents Alemán and Ruiz Cortines, at least in regard to the railroad industry.

These were major concessions, payback for a decade of deprivations endured by railway families. The president did deny the request that the company develop a savings fund for workers' families.[111] A significant wage hike, medical benefits, and housing funds were generous enough, especially considering that the labor arbitration board had declared the strike illegal, giving the president the legal prerequisite necessary for arresting strikers. The president's conciliatory intervention

surprised everyone, not least of which members of the press who had cast the demands as outrageous and unpatriotic. STFRM leaders who feared a government crackdown and mass arrests could breathe a sigh of relief. At 7 p.m. on February 26, the arbitration judge presided over the contract settlement, giving railway employees twelve hours to return to work. Workers had to punch in no later than 7 a.m. the next day.[112] Railway men and women rejoiced.

Conclusion

Adolfo López Mateos did not have to wait for the labor arbitration board to declare the strikes illegal; he could have invoked Article 145 of the penal code, the "social dissolution" law, to justify a mass arrest of strikers. Instead he negotiated directly with union leaders, granting them unprecedented concessions. In so doing, he demonstrated the flexibility of the democratic authoritarian system. PRI leaders up until this point avoided naked physical repression, despite the costs of concessions. These gains were to cost the FNM a great deal of money. Already burdened by a deficit of 410 million pesos, the wage increases represented an additional cost of 33 million pesos, raising the overall wage expenditures to 125 million pesos. The cost for workers' housing amounted to an estimated 30 million pesos, while medical care provisions came in at 62 million pesos. Officials at the U.S. embassy worried that the government would drastically increase freight rates to cover these costs, negatively impacting American corporations. Workers were unconcerned with the details, a U.S. official explained: "All that they know is [what] they have been promised. . . . If they do not get this money they are likely to cause even greater trouble in the future."[113]

As the strike ended, workers once again reaped the benefits of democratic unionism and direct action mobilization. Once again pressure from below had forced union leaders to challenge the government. For the second time in less than a year, the workers' plan of action brought major gains that seemed like a pipe dream just a year before when charros were in power. In August they had won an independent union; in February they received a pay hike and family medical insur-

ance. Rieleros and rieleras had experienced the power of worker and community militancy.

It was unclear whether the STFRM had won the "war of position," uncertain whether the public would have backed the repression of the movement had the president chosen to arrest STFRM leaders rather than give in to many of their demands. The struggle for public sympathy would continue for another month, as railway workers at privately managed businesses prepared to fight for the gains won by their FNM-employed colleagues. They were going into unchartered territory, for up until now no demands had been issued to the private railroad companies. The government's response would have profound consequences for railway families as well as for the future of the labor movement.

5

Railroaded

The Cold War Idiom in Practice

Before Adolfo López Mateos could settle into his new role and transition from minister of labor to president, he faced a country rapidly dividing along class lines. Hundreds of thousands among the urban working class, confident they now had an ally, took to the streets to continue their struggle for increased wages, while less vocal but nonetheless influential segments of the middle class now joined business, government, and media elite in deriding the blue-collar masses. Anticommunist hysteria surged as students in major cities stood beside working-class men and women in support of disgruntled workers. As mobilizations grew more militant, popular opinion turned against working-class families, with detractors accusing labor leaders of hoodwinking members into backing leaders bent on overthrowing the government to advance a communist revolution.

As workers strategized to organize their latest mobilizations, they witnessed the triumph of a cross-class insurgency in Cuba. Led by Fidel Castro on New Year's Day 1959, bearded guerrillas drove tanks into Havana, joining urban revolutionaries in ousting the U.S.-backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista. Grassroots activists throughout Latin America would soon echo the sentiment expressed in Lázaro Cárdenas's wistful journal entry: "Cuba, with its revolution in the Sierra Maestra, headed by doctor F. Castro, offers hope."[1] Within months Cuban revolutionaries would enact some of the most comprehensive reforms in modern history, greatly raising industrial wages, lowering rents, and distributing unused land to campesinos. Just as the Cuban Revolution later

became an example of what was possible for many among the Latin American working-class, peasantry and for the Left in general, it became a threat to large landowners, industrialists, and those in power. Fidel Castro would not declare himself a Marxist-Leninist until 1961, so Mexican authorities had no reason to worry that he would inspire a communist revolution in Mexico. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the success of the Cuban Revolution heightened politicians' concerns about conspiratorial plots, while providing inspiration for Mexican activists.

This chapter argues that a dichotomizing idiom created the conditions for the repression of the movement in 1959. I conceptualize this Cold War idiom as a dialectic process combining discourse and practice—neither precedes, but rather they come into being together, informing and shaping one another in an ongoing process. Rhetoric shaped how the public understood protests, while protests informed the content of discourse. Both components were ideological and material—and therefore analytically inseparable. As discourse, rhetoric pitted labor activists against capitalism and against the state, and vice versa. While this logic had been extant (as we have seen) since at least the Cárdenas era, it had gone from a marginal position of the Right to the stance of the ruling party and the administration in power. This logic enabled the PRI to cast all detractors of government policy as agents of subversion, intent on overthrowing the government and eradicating capitalism in favor of Soviet-style communism. Discourse materialized in objects and artifacts, such as newspapers, magazines, and fliers. As practice, physical mobilizations enacted ideological disagreements between opponents. Opponents could be agents of the state, such as police who arrested or judges who tried protestors for their activism; or they could be others among their own class, such as when scabs and strikers clashed. When those among their own class fought, they nevertheless drew on the Manichean logic that positioned strikers as communists and their detractors as nationalists.

The Cold War idiom has continued to affect workers' memories of rieleros as misunderstood and misidentified as communists. Although oral histories with rank-and-file workers figure activists as pragmat-

ic and disinterested in party politics, my interviews with local leaders complicates the emblematic memory of misidentification. I show that even as most workers proved disinterested in Marxism, movement leaders aligned themselves with the Marxist POCM. The desire to portray the movement as pragmatic while acknowledging the Marxian politics of the leaders appears as an essential tension in the struggle over the memory of the movement. While I focus on a few rich interviews that I collected, they represent sentiments widely shared among retired rieleros.

Railroad workers refused to let critics define their movement as ideological at the time. They sought practical, material gains, not the implementation of abstract precepts. Up until 1959, they had been remarkably successful in attaining concrete financial gains without calling for the overthrow of the state or economic system. Quite to the contrary, the movement sought the fulfillment of promises inscribed in the Constitution of 1917 — namely, the right to organize and to strike in defense of their class interests. Their successes were extraordinary. After the democratic union election in August 1958, a second strike against the FNM in February 1959 resulted in one more pay hike as well as the FNM agreeing to pay for medical services for workers' wives and children. In addition, the company agreed to provide housing or housing subsidies for families. These were the most significant concessions won by railway families in the history of the industry.

Headed by the democratically elected Demetrio Vallejo, the union had won an unprecedented victory, but it benefited only workers employed by the government-run FNM. In February the STFRM urged workers employed by firms unaligned with the FNM — the Ferrocarriles de Yucatán, Terminal de Veracruz, Ferrocarriles Mexicanos, and Ferrocarril del Pacífico — to shelve their demands for higher pay, perhaps forewarned that the government would suppress strikes against private firms.[2] These workers bit their lips and returned to work without the gains conferred to their FNM colleagues. It did not take long, however, for them to grow restless. They faced a tall institutional constraint: they contested independent companies who, unlike the PRI, had little interest in obtaining the support of the masses. How could activists

5. Rielera leader addresses crowd of workers, February 1, 1959. Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Hermanos Mayo.

mount a battle against private firms when the government would not directly negotiate with their managers as they had with strikers employed by the FNM? How could they deflect the widespread charge of communist manipulation? And how could dissident leaders rein in the rage and enthusiasm of the rank and file to avoid a confrontation with the private companies and with policemen ordered to suppress strikers? These were the thorny questions that faced every rielero and rielera.

The Beginning of the End

That only FNM workers triumphed with the president's decision in February would ultimately undermine the movement. Pacífico workers still waited. The decision taken earlier by local STFRM leaders to extend the timetable for independent firms had cost them because the president acceded only to FNM demands. The situation strained the union because it had to negotiate once more with the president, who now had to consider the interests of private investors.

In March workers from the Ferrocarriles Mexicanos, Ferrocarriles de Yucatán, and the Terminal de Veracruz joined their comrades at the Ferrocarril del Pacífico in demanding a contract that granted them a 16.66 percent raise and company housing.[3] The demands made by workers at the four privately owned companies demonstrated in bold relief the pervasive enthusiasm and sense of power held by railway families. It had been nearly a year since the Southeast Plan had been clandestinely written in the house of a Mexico City railway family, bringing a movement that had simmered in secret meetings, cantina culture, and street life into national politics. Workers at private companies now prepared to fight. Much had changed in a year.

Meanwhile, divisions emerged. Many union members employed by the FNM reluctantly supported the strike against private firms, while many others opposed the action. They feared that a strike against private capital would provide the government with an alibi for suppressing the strike. Their concerns were confirmed when columnists who had written in support of earlier strikes condemned the plan to mobilize against the private lines. Key leaders echoed rank-and-file apprehension, with even Demetrio Vallejo expressing concern that a strike

might backfire. Everyone opposed to the latest mobilizations predicted they would lose what we have called the "war of position"—the struggle to retain the support of the masses, especially, but not exclusively, people not connected to any of the large industrial sectors. In particular, workers had attained the support of segments of the lower middle class, including secretaries, vendors, and small business owners, as well as middle-class professionals and homemakers whose opinion mattered to the press and the PRI. How many more demands could the workers make, and how many more times could they inconvenience their passengers by shutting down the rails, before supporters turned against them?

Divisions regarding this question provided an opening for the most militant activists to undermine the authority of Demetrio Vallejo and others who opposed further strikes. Political scientist Max Ortega argues that the government stoked divisions among railroad leaders. Most notably, it did so by forging an alliance with Luis Gómez Z., the former STFRM leader who had been deposed with the charrazo. In an ironic twist of fate, now Gómez Z. worked with the government to undermine the STFRM and the vallejistas. He would become a powerful ally for the government because he enjoyed the loyalty of many rieleros in the capital. While it is unclear how much he can be credited for exacerbating existing divisions, he continues to be viewed by vallejistas today as a sellout.

In contrast to Gómez Z., Valentín Campa continued to mobilize workers with the goal of executing a general strike. To be sure, no figure earned a greater reputation for radicalizing railroad activists than Campa. Like Gómez Z., his position as an STFRM leader in the 1940s and his imprisonment as a result of the charrazo conferred to him a great deal of credibility as an authentic leader. Campa was no longer a member of the STFRM in 1958 and 1959, but he continued to garner respect from leftists in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Puebla. Although he found few admirers outside of these hubs, with workers averse or disinterested in Marxism resenting his effort to influence workers, his role as a POCM leader enabled him to influence rielero leaders because many were aligned with the party.[4]

Campa emerged as a controversial backroom player, accused of circumventing Vallejo and the STFRM leadership while prodding militants to push for strikes at the private firms. Activist Juan Colín recalls many instances in 1958 and 1959 when Campa intervened behind the scenes without Vallejo's consent, egging workers on to walk off the job. On more than one occasion, Colín claims, Campa misrepresented himself as Vallejo, calling leaders in cities far away from the capital, ordering them to tell their members to strike. These local leaders, having never met Vallejo and perhaps having never heard his voice, were easily convinced that they had received an order from their union leader. According to Colín, Campa considered Vallejo too timid at times to lead a proper revolt.[5]

Valentín Campa saw himself as an organic intellectual leading a vanguard revolutionary movement against the bourgeois state. The railway movement, he believed, had the potential to serve as a catalyst for a broader revolutionary mobilization of the urban working class. His bellicose posturing did not sit well with Vallejo, whose primary interests were in securing benefits for the rank and file. While Campa and Vallejo agreed that the movement's demands were justified because they were secured by the collective contract and by the Constitution, Vallejo placed little emphasis on the abstract arguments of Marxian theory.

For all of Vallejo's efforts at fashioning himself as a Marxist intellectual, citing *Das Kapital* in conversations with Elena Poniatowska, he preferred to invoke the Constitution when arguing for democratic unionism and fair wages.[6] Vallejo's fidelity to the Constitution mirrored the sentiment of the rank and file, who were more interested in having the promises of the revolution fulfilled than in waging a war against capitalism. The tension between the two men led to unfounded rumors among activists in the capital that Campa circumvented Vallejo and gave the call for the strike in March.

Although Campa did his best to shape the course of the independent union movement, his success in doing so was greatly exaggerated by the press, which often portrayed him as the real leader of the movement and accused him of manipulating Vallejo. Despite these ex-

aggerations, his involvement was significant. Vallejo did not know of Campa's machinations until after the movement's repression, a revelation that irreparably damaged their relationship, with Vallejo refusing to speak to Campa when they were held yards apart in Lecumberri prison throughout the 1960s.[7] The rift between them must have been especially painful for Vallejo, who, Juan Colín claims, looked up to Campa for his intellect and for his contributions to the railroad union before the charrazo. Indeed, the two met regularly to plan the times and designate places for protests in 1958 and 1959.[8] Colín, who hosted countless meetings in his house in Mexico City, witnessed Campa's efforts to persuade Vallejo to call strikes when the latter preferred further negotiation.[9] Vallejo faced precisely this predicament — to strike or to extend negotiations — in March 1959. The decision would have profound consequences for the families of more than 100,000 members of the STFRM.

Due to the strategic importance of the railroad industry and the militancy of the movement, throughout the year the president had negotiated directly with movement leaders. In March, once again the STFRM charged its attorney Mario Pavón Flores with the task of negotiating with the president on its behalf.[10] Union leaders must have known that they were taking a risk by trying to negotiate better terms for workers at private companies, because they instructed Pavón to limit the union's request to the 16.66 percent wage increase that workers at the FNM had won, taking company housing and family medical care off the table.[11] Workers at the private companies would presumably have to wait.

President López Mateos was under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) — an international bank created at the end of World War II to assist fragile economies — to reject FNM workers' wage demands as a condition for a loan. In 1958 the Mexican government had pledged to the IMF that it would rein in inflation by curbing public expenditures, particularly on railroad workers' wages. After Ruiz Cortines agreed to wage increases in the summer of 1958, the Mexican government "promised the IMF group that after the conclusion of the new contract . . . railroad rates would be raised to cover current operating expenditures . . . [while giving] unions as little ground as

possible for excessive wage benefit demands as everyone knows that the National Railways are operating at a great loss under the present rate structure."[12] López Mateos would have put himself in quite a predicament had he followed the IMF's agenda. This would have agitated Mexican industrialists, and if he had followed the bank's advice and rejected workers' wage demands, he would have enraged the rank and file. Domestic and international pressures no doubt shaped the president's negotiations with the STFRM.

After meeting with López Mateos, STFRM attorney Pavón prematurely announced that the president had agreed to grant the concessions. Although we have no way of knowing if the president came to an agreement with Pavón, we can reason that Pavón must have at least believed that they had agreed to a pay raise, for there would have been no benefit in misrepresenting the president's position. Private workers were overjoyed. It seemed for a moment that the STFRM had attained yet another major victory for its members. Railway families were on a remarkable roll. In July 1958 they had won an unprecedented wage increase, which they followed by ousting corrupt union officials and replacing them with democratically elected leaders in August. The latest victory would have accomplished the nearly impossible by wresting major concessions from privately owned firms.

If the victories in 1958 were hard fought, the struggle against private firms would be insurmountable. The day after attorney Pavón announced that he had struck a deal with the president, FNM general manager Benjamín Méndez cancelled negotiations, declaring that no agreement had been finalized.[13] Although Méndez did not have jurisdiction over the private companies against which workers mobilized, he served as the president's spokesperson on railway issues. Méndez's role as interlocutor on behalf of the publicly operated FNM as well as the private firms demonstrates the blurry line between the position of the FNM, PRI, and the private firms. In essence, Méndez, a public employee with the ear of the president, negotiated with the STFRM regarding the union's contract with the independent companies. It is unclear why López Mateos called off negotiations. The president himself released no comments, and his evasive behavior angered workers.[14]

By withdrawing from discussions, the president gave railway families two choices: the rank and file could go back to work, or they could conduct an illegal strike. On March 25, 1959, workers at Ferrocarril del Pacífico and Ferrocarriles Mexicanos struck, and colleagues at the Terminal de Veracruz joined them the next day. By March 27, a wildcat strike disabled the entire railway system, as FNM workers, joined by students, took to the streets in solidarity.[15] The national economy halted as freight cars loaded with everything from corn and grains to textiles and minerals remained unmoved at stations. Passengers, too, stood stranded.

Strikers had reason to believe that the president would grant them their demands. After all, presidents had intervened in their favor three times in less than a year. In each case, the president could unilaterally negotiate with strikers because his administration operated the FNM. The PRI had no such discretion over the affairs of the private firms. The distinction became apparent hours after workers walked off the job on March 25, as the government immediately took measures to end the movement. The labor arbitration court declared the strike illegal and granted companies permission to hire scabs and to fire recalcitrant employees.[16] The FNM followed by circulating an announcement that gave workers forty-eight hours to return to work. Those who refused were to be dismissed.[17] Strikers who returned had to go before an FNM panel and sign a document stating that they regretted participating in the strikes. No worker could return to work after the grace period without signing it.[18] Making matters worse, the FNM took advantage of workers' distress by voiding their seniority rights, in effect diminishing their access to promotions and, in so doing, reducing future income.[19]

The signing of the document amounted to a public confession, a mea culpa for participating in the independent union movement. It underscores the invasive reach of suppression during the Cold War, with the railroad company disciplining workers' psyches and exacting emotional pain for their insubordination. As in the trials conducted a few years earlier against suspected communists in the United States by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, railroad

workers' confessions were a form of public spectacle. By demonstrating the powerlessness of the remorseful activists, the procedure rendered them impotent.

Some found ingenious strategies for remaining loyal to the strike while protecting themselves against arrest. A group in Nogales, for example, reportedly fled to the United States.[20] José Jorge Ramírez feigned an illness to create an alibi for not returning to work and for retreating from protests. He visited the doctor complaining of sudden chest pains just as the military arrived at the station in Puebla. As his activist comrades ran from the police or landed in military camps, Ramírez languished at a doctor's clinic in Puebla. He stayed out of work as long as he could before making a break for the railway yard the morning when the forty-eight-hour deadline was set to expire. He takes no pride in eluding arrest and returning to work. "We betrayed Vallejo. We betrayed the movement. All of us," he tells me teary-eyed in his kitchen in Puebla over forty years later.[21]

Peons faced a particularly harrowing situation because many of them lived in company-owned encampments, which consisted of tents, makeshift houses, or boxcars.[22] Station managers, who lived adjacent to stations in fairly comfortable housing, faced a dilemma, too. Both had to decide between crossing the picket line and keeping their jobs and houses or standing in solidarity with their comrades by refusing to go back to work. Those who continued to strike risked the military physically removing their families from their homes.[23] According to Guadalupe Acosta, the decision was particularly tormenting for one ferrocarrilera who was pregnant during the strikes. Facing the possibility of finding herself homeless, she urged her husband to respect the picket line and stay loyal to his comrades.[24] She would rather lose her home than see her husband give in and side with strikebreakers. Although we have no way of proving the veracity of this anecdote, its principal function is to emphasize the strength with which wives were committed to the movement. By the end of April, the families of over 700 workers in Chihuahua had been thrown out of company housing. Authorities found that families were quickly "becoming a problem in those communities having a concentration of railway installations."[25]

Once the arbitration court deemed the strike illegal and the president withdrew from negotiations, the task of cleaning the streets of the mobilized masses fell under the purview of the minister of interior, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, who had been recently appointed by López Mateos. Popular historian Enrique Krauze maintains that it was Díaz Ordaz "who would execute the day-to-day business of power in the country" during the López Mateos administration.[26] The president, Krauze suggests, lacked the authoritarian disposition necessary to discipline protestors, the very working-class constituency that he had courted just months earlier. It is possible—perhaps likely—that Krauze's claims are an exaggeration, a reading based on Díaz Ordaz's role as president during the student massacre of 1968 and of López Mateos's bohemian persona. Even so, it is noteworthy that the same man who ordered the arrest of rieleros and other activists in 1959 presided over the assassination of students less than a decade later.

On March 28 the government replaced workers with soldiers. Work centers became militarized, with military personnel assisting rieleros who had returned in moving locomotives out of stations.[27] Soldiers also infiltrated union buildings, arresting over 5,000 strikers; meanwhile, government and company officials labeled STFRM leaders who had not returned to work as antigovernment rebels.[28] Photographs of soldiers escorting leaders and protestors to military camps capture workers' powerlessness in the face of the brute force of the state.[29] In seemingly no time, rieleros and rieleras had gone from being hailed as pillars of the nation to being maligned as enemies of Mexico.

Railway workers from across the country found themselves imprisoned in military camps, while the most militant remained defiant. In Torreon, nineteen people were arrested for burning freight cars; in Durango, militants destroyed a rail bridge; in Coahuila, radicals covered tracks with stones to prevent locomotives from leaving the station; and in Mexico City, dissidents blocked entrances to worksites, even as soldiers stood prepared to arrest them.[30] Military Camp 1 outside of Mexico City became infamous because it held Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa, but FNM documents indicate that camps existed in other regions as well. For instance, military personnel es-

corted strikers from Matías Romero to an army base in nearby Salina Cruz, an important railway town.[31] Since strikers held in military camps could not return to work in time to meet the deadline, the FNM fired many of them.[32] Others released on bond decided not to go back to work but continued to organize, only to land back in jail and lose their jobs later that summer.[33]

Not all newspapers participated in red-baiting. The press in Sonora criticized the government for its overly aggressive clampdown. *El Pueblo* of Hermosillo lambasted the government for sending troops to remove men, women, and children from union buildings at gunpoint. In addition, the paper condemned the practice of holding workers incommunicado and for never issuing a formal arrest order. In Nogales, *El Noreste* defended strikers at Ferrocarril del Pacífico. Supporters of workers at Pacífico empathized with the "at least 1,500 former Pacífico rail workers and their families in Empalme and Nogales [who were] without any means of subsistence."[34]

In retrospect, the STFRM miscalculated when it scheduled the strikes to coincide with Holy Week.[35] The public had been on the side of strikers in 1958 when they demanded pay increases and an honest union, but the context had changed in just a few short months. Detractors of the movement had effectively sullied the reputation of dissident leaders, representing them as stubborn and incorrigible fat cats. By staging strikes during Holy Week, dissidents seemed to prove right editorials that alleged workers were more concerned with their own well-being than with the greater good. Opponents were quick to point out that the strikes negatively affected people in both cities and remote regions. In Mexico City officials worried that a strike that lasted eight days or longer would lead to food shortages but that the situation would be exacerbated in rural areas.[36] People from the countryside wrote letters to President López Mateos in exasperation, warning that the strike threatened to destroy the rural economy.[37] Indeed, the strikes exacted an enormous cost on the economy as a whole, leading to an estimated 71 million pesos in damages.[38]

The timing of the strikes put the movement in jeopardy of losing whatever public support it still enjoyed, for the strikes inconvenienced

people of all classes who relied on the railways during the holiday. The press ran stories of travelers stranded in isolated towns, waiting for trains that never arrived. The reports underlined the strikers' insensitivity to passengers, who were at no fault for the dispute between the companies and the union. However, some strikers bore more of the blame than others. Critics accused union leaders of following orders from the USSR, victimizing inconvenienced passengers. Communist leaders were ultimately to blame, not the naïve and poorly educated workers.[39]

By March 28 the STFRM leaders prepared to accept defeat, with Vallejo arranging a meeting with the secretary of labor, Salomón González Blanco, after which he would call an end to the strikes. Despite lacking political leverage, Vallejo demanded that the government readmit fired workers who had been evicted from their houses and release workers from jail. In return, the union would call off the strike. With work centers surrounded by soldiers, the STFRM was in no position to make demands.[40] Nevertheless, González Blanco agreed to arrange a meeting between union leaders and the companies' representatives.[41]

The encounter never occurred. At 5 p.m. on March 28, undercover police officers arrested Demetrio Vallejo in Mexico City at a restaurant adjacent to STFRM headquarters as he waited for González Blanco and officials from the independent firms.[42] The movement had been extinguished the day before with the military takeover of work centers, but Vallejo's incarceration marked the end of the independent union.[43] It also permitted the reemergence of charrismo. The STFRM's democratic days were over.

With union leaders in jail, FNM officials moved to fire workers whom they had long wanted to dismiss.[44] Company records show that the FNM used the repression of the strikes as an opportunity to fire employees with physical disabilities, with records of union activism, or those who simply had a history of arriving late to work and performing poorly on the job.[45] In at least one case, as strikers were rounded up and imprisoned, the FNM replaced a highly skilled machinist with a soldier. The soldier, with no railroad experience, had been employed as a scab when the strike broke out.[46] It surely pleased the FNM that the

soldier earned a lower wage than the veteran employee he replaced; as was the case with all scabs, he filled the position of a fired striker with seniority.

Many workers contested their dismissal for years, arguing that the company used their participation in strikes to do away with jobs it viewed as redundant, thus reducing payroll. In doing so the FNM leveled a mighty blow against workers' families, for the sons and daughters of fired workers would no longer receive preferential treatment for job openings. The FNM was not alone in using the strike as an opportunity to fire workers. Pacífico officials reportedly saw the strike as a blessing in disguise, enabling them to fire 6,000 of their 9,000 rank-and-file workers, while Terminal de Veracruz and Ferrocarriles Mexicanos fired nearly half of their employees.[47] It is unclear exactly how many workers were fired in total. Valentín Campa estimates that 10,000 were let go, while sociologist Ian Roxborough puts the number at 20,000.[48] However many workers were fired, entire families lost access to employment at the railroads. The memory of the loss continues to haunt the men and women living in railway neighborhoods today. Men who lost their jobs for striking are remembered for their self-sacrifice and for remaining loyal to the vallejista cause.

Some activists came to believe that American imperialism shaped the outcome of the strikes. Years later Valentín Campa wrote that a reporter from the politically liberal magazine *Siempre!* had received classified information from a high-level government official indicating that a CIA agent named Dean Stephanski had arrived in Mexico sometime in late February or early March to advise the Mexican government on methods for repressing the movement.[49] Campa suggests that the expulsion in 1959 of two Soviet ambassadors is evidence that the government weighed geopolitical concerns in addressing the movement. Moreover, Campa intimates that President Eisenhower, who visited with López Mateos in Acapulco just a month before the strikes, may have had a hand in the repression. He explains that U.S. investors, presumably with interests in the private firms targeted by the March strikes, worried that the demand for company housing would severely cut into their profits.[50] At the Acapulco meeting,

Eisenhower called on López Mateos to secure U.S. investments by putting an end to the movement. Once the strikes were extinguished, the Eisenhower administration along with the IMF helped strengthen the Mexican peso.[51]

The imperialist thesis, which claimed that the U.S. government played a major role in suppressing the strikes, held currency among activists at the time of the repression as well as years later. In 1959 it became the official position of the POCM. (This is no surprise given that Campa was on the POCM's governing board.) POCM leader Miguel Aroche Parra denounced the repression as an act of imperialism in the early 1960s.[52] Guillermo Treviño reiterates this claim in John Mraz's documentary, *Hechos sobre los rieles*. I have not found any archival evidence connecting the CIA to the strikes, but some railroad activists that I interviewed in Mexico City and in Puebla still believe that the Acapulco meeting between the two presidents led to the repression of the movement. In retrospect, it helps explain why in 1999 — standing outside a restaurant in Colonia Guerrero — one retired worker asked to see my identification and posed the following question: "How do I know you're not with the CIA?"

"Mysterious, Suspicious, and Threatening": The Bolshevik Specter

In 1959, the state and the FNM orchestrated an intense publicity campaign aimed at portraying railway leaders as communists who manipulated the rank and file. Detractors of the independent union movement deployed a Cold War idiom, a discursive binary framework and practice that labeled all working-class people as either nationalist or communist. Supporters of all dissident movements — including those organized by teachers, petroleros, electricistas, students, and others — were seen as communists. Those opposed to these movements were hailed as guardians of the national good. This campaign created the conditions for the repression of the movement.

Critics overemphasized the role of ideology and underestimated the movement's adherence to the principles of the revolution. Most railway families continued to base their demands on the rights accorded them by the Constitution, not the promise represented by the USSR.

More specifically, they invoked Article 123, which affords workers the right to organize and the right to strike. In so doing, they grounded their movement on the law of the land, affirming the legitimacy of the state. In fact, Vallejo himself repeatedly grounded his arguments in legal and moral terms. The strikes were morally justified because they were granted by the country's most venerated document. His appeals, if anything, were nationalistic.

There is insufficient evidence to suggest Mexican officials feared a communist incursion. U.S. State Department records do reveal that the Mexican government had been following the actions of Cuban rebels since at least 1956, when Fidel Castro, Ciro Redondo García, Universo Sánchez Álvarez, Ramiro Valdés Menéndez, and Reinaldo Benítez Nápoles lived in Mexico as refugees from Fulgencio Batista's Cuba.[53] (They would all go on to play leading roles in the Cuban Revolution.) The Mexican government had already identified at least one of these rebels as a communist in 1956: "Director General of Security has stated that [a] recently uncovered Cuban plot against Batista had communist connections. [This] belief [has been] fortified by the presence among plotters of one Ernesto Guevara Serna, said to be a well-known Argentine communist, recently a political refugee from Guatemala."[54] The mere mention of the unknown red, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, indicates the Mexican government's keen interest in identifying foreign communists in order to protect the public from their influence.

Three years later, when Cuban revolutionaries ousted Batista, Mexican officials were experiencing their own confrontation with the most powerful segments of the working class — not just in Mexico City, but wherever railroad, electrical, and teachers' unions existed. According to Juan Colín, railroad leaders also followed the news of Cuban revolutionaries. In fact, in 1958 dissidents had planned to strike on July 26 in honor of the 1953 attack on the Cuban Moncada Barracks led by Fidel Castro.[55] Castro, who had hoped that the attack on the barracks would spark a rebellion against Batista, was found, arrested, and tried. After Batista granted Castro amnesty in 1955, he fled to Mexico to plot the revolution. It was during this time that DFS agents followed his move-

ments. In 1959 Castro and the revolution provided Mexican activists and authorities alike with an example of what a well-planned and expertly executed movement could accomplish.

Detractors sullied the reputation of railway leaders and undermined the railway movement by associating leaders with the USSR.[56] The interests of railway leaders, it followed, conflicted with the interests of Mexicans and with the revolutionary nationalism articulated by the Constitution. By linking railway leaders to communism, opponents effectively charged them with promoting a foreign ideology and aiding a foreign state.[57] While the PRI offered a Mexican vision of economic development and political stability, radicals fomented anarchy by subscribing to the exotic and dangerous politics of Marxism.[58] These critiques belied the democratic character of the movement, as well as its grassroots support, in favor of a conspiratorial analysis that centered on Soviet infiltration of the STFRM.

There is no way to know for certain how sincere opponents of the movement were in labeling activists communists. It is true that many activist leaders embraced communism. As explained, members of the PCM and POCM held leadership positions in the STFRM and were therefore key to organizing the movement and executing the strikes. But these organizers constituted a decidedly small minority of the movement. A broader view would have recognized that the PCM's "important base within the railway workers' union was decimated" in the 1940s and remained weak throughout the 1950s.[59] The PCM activists who participated in the strikes allied with members of the POCM. But the vast majority of the rank and file held no political affiliation. Nevertheless, detractors focused on this slim but vocal minority who expressed communist sympathies.

Fidel Velázquez, head of the CTM, emerged as one of the principal labor antagonists of the railway movement. Through the BUO, he condemned union leaders for their "unpatriotic" attacks.[60] The BUO placed ads in Mexico City newspapers to inform readers that the movement was run by demagogic leaders who aimed at subverting the state. The BUO's comments gained weight when read beside those of FNM officials, who warned readers not to "underestimate the actions of com-

munists who agitate . . . taking advantage of circumstances to provoke riots."[61]

Commentators wrote bluntly about their concern that communists directed the railway movement. One piece, appropriately titled "Vallejo, a Communist Agitator," asserted, "Workers have forgotten their place as Mexicans and have embraced doctrines which oppose the Mexican Revolution. . . . Communists are laughing at laws and openly acting against the spirit of the nation."[62] This view positioned strikers against the interests of the nation as embodied by the gains of the Mexican Revolution. Comments like these marginalized democratically elected union leaders while preparing the groundwork for their ultimate arrest. The U.S. embassy summed up the communist hysteria: "The CTM hierarchy, supported unanimously by the Bloque Unidad Obrera, [began] applying a communist label to any dissidents in the trade union movement regardless of the degree of validity."[63]

Another common move was to idealize workers as humble and hardworking but naïve and easily hoodwinked. Critics continued to call on workers to reject the extreme demands imposed by union leaders, especially Vallejo, who was increasingly portrayed as a Bolshevik. In patronizing style, they suggested that those who led the movement took advantage of the nonintellectual mass of workers.[64] These were the decent, honorable workers who had made economic sacrifices for the railway industry and for the country's modernization but who were now being led astray by Vallejo into a confrontation with the state.[65] If the official narrative depicted the movement as a contest between communist leaders and worker-citizens, Vallejo was then the head communist, a Lenin among Bolsheviks, whose ultimate intentions were to turn Mexico into a Soviet satellite state. Subtlety had no place in the public debate. For example, a caricature in a major newspaper depicted the union leader with a hammer and sickle emblazoned on his arm.[66] A month later, a commentator in the same pages took it a step further, warning that Vallejo planned to install a dictatorship to replace the existing political system.[67]

The image plays off an ad placed earlier in the month which claimed that Vallejo led a conspiracy against the government. The ad accus-

es, "The dissident union is fanatically communist." It mentions Vallejo's meeting with a representative of the Guatemalan government, who was purportedly a communist sympathizer. Readers would have known that Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz had been overthrown in 1954 for allegedly holding communist sympathies.[68] Hence the allusion to Guatemalan Marxists was yet another effort to portray the railway movement as manipulated by foreign interests. Bringing the point home, the ad characterizes the meeting as "mysterious, suspicious, and threatening," attributes that became attached to Vallejo by implication.

Workers rejected this characterization of their beloved leader, a longtime political activist with a history of resisting company rules and questioning the authority of his superiors; the Vallejo they knew was honorable and a nationalist.[69] One commentator at the time explained: "For the majority of the public, the new leaders of the STFRM, Demetrio Vallejo and others, are names that are beginning to become identified with an era that announces that it will be clean and honest. For rieleros of the entire country, those names were already well known and they were always associated with . . . rebellion against corruption."[70] Clearly Vallejo's reputation convinced most workers that as head of the STFRM he would transform the union into a democratic institution and defend the interests of its members.

The same qualities that conferred legitimacy and honor to Vallejo among his colleagues also served to make him a rogue in the eyes of company officials. If his co-workers exalted him for resisting company rules, FNM officials viewed such behavior as a sign of a troublesome employee and grounds for demotion and dismissal. Throughout his tenure with the FNM, the company sought to punish Vallejo by lowering his rank and cutting his pay. Each time, the STFRM successfully defended him.[71] Vallejo's skill in resisting supervisors and winning battles in court magnified his status as a disruptive employee but increased his standing among union members.[72] In short, no smear campaign could alter Vallejo's history of honorable service to union affairs, nor could it reduce the esteem in which the rank and file held their democratically elected leader.

The intimidation and arrest of male activists opened a space for rieleras to lead the movement, revealing what had been true all along: women were vital to the political struggle. One woman in particular rose to prominence with Vallejo and other major STFRM leaders behind bars—his niece Lilia Benitez. She had been one of the many dissidents that the military apprehended, but unlike her uncle and other male activists, she was permitted to leave.[73] It is unclear why she was released. Perhaps the police assumed that women did not belong or were of little importance to the movement. In any case, she came to be Vallejo's main source of protection and support while he was in jail, taking responsibility for informing vallejistas about his plans for the movement.[74] As a young woman, Benitez looked to Vallejo for protection from an abusive husband; later she would find employment at the STFRM through her uncle's connection.[75] With Vallejo's arrest, functions had been reversed, with Benitez playing the role of protector.

Benitez joined rieleras throughout the country who stood in solidarity with the movement after the police arrested strikers. These memories reflect the gendered character of memory discussed in chapter 2. For example, elderly railway women remember a tough, committed activist named Virginia López López as having been the most prominent vallejista in Matías Romero. López, who had been a friend to Vallejo, was rumored to have hidden him at her house when he visited in June and July 1958 to organize workers. When police arrested strikers, López led women in Matías Romero in providing food to dissidents hiding at the edge of the city. Her actions led to a lasting reputation, as evidenced in the testimony of Maria Hernández Orozco, who remembers López as able a leader as any rielero: "Virginia was very strong. She didn't care, she would confront any man."[76] When men were taken away, López and other ferrocarrileras in Matías Romero became all the more indispensable.

That no men remember Virginia López López underscores how gender structured the movement and how it continues to structure the memories of railway men and women. More specifically, the testi-

monies of women in Matías Romero suggest that a parallel leadership structure existed in that city, with men following orders from male union leaders and women seeking counsel and inspiration from other women. Moreover, these women politicized what they most controlled on a daily basis: the kitchen. Cooking and feeding became a political act, as women secretly delivered food to their male kinsfolk hiding in the hills. The politics of the kitchen became inseparable from labor politics.

Women's organizing strategies in response to the incarceration of their male loved ones did not appear out of thin air, nor were they the spontaneous, unplanned acts of a brave few. When women protected men from police raids or delivered food to those in hiding, they drew on long-established social networks and everyday practices that took place daily in railroad neighborhoods across the country. Women knew one another as neighbors, from interactions at the marketplace and at stations, as mothers whose children played together, and through marriages. It was common for women to join sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law whose husbands also worked for the railroad. Since entire families worked in the industry, women entered the movement collectively. Along with their neighbors, they politicized their families and social networks to mobilize against the company.

As women in Matías Romero aided their men hiding in the mountains, Benitez gathered her bearings and headed out of the Military Camp 1 in Mexico City. As she exited the grounds, a woman recently released from prison hurried after her with news that military officers had beaten Vallejo, a claim supported by U.S. embassy reports.[77] Benitez remembers, "We had barely stepped out the door [of the jail] when the woman told us, they have just roughed up Señor Vallejo, they left him for dead, dragged him away . . . to the hospital."

At this point in the transcript, Benitez converts to heroic mode, demanding an explanation from the general in charge of the military camp. This moment in the oral history transcript marks her emergence as a dissident leader. She collected money for Vallejo's legal fees from men who had returned to work, and she held meetings to inform vallejistas about their leader's situation. Afterwards she would return

to Mexico City to let Vallejo know the latest news. Benitez displayed the political skills of a seasoned organizer, contacting national newspapers, such as *Excélsior* and *Últimas Noticias,* to inform them that officers had beaten her uncle. She had particular success with *La Prensa,* which published a bulletin that she wrote. Editors at other newspapers were less welcoming. When reporters tried to get her story out, editors changed or omitted news of Vallejo, kowtowing to unnamed political officials. Benitez recalls one reporter's explanation: "Look, señorita, it's not that we don't want to help; we give the editors the information, but unfortunately they change the information or they don't publish anything because there are orders from above that nothing is to be published about Vallejo's movement. . . . When they edit, the reports that we write are lost."[78]

Although Benitez could not count on newspapers or the public to support her and the movement, she did find political solidarity among rieleras. In particular, Señora Marina, a secretary employed by the FNM and a member of the railway union, stuck by Benitez while she worked to collect aid for her uncle's day in court in March 1959.[79] Señora Marina had been a dedicated vallejista; she had offered her secretarial skills to Vallejo free of charge and had been with him during protests. FNM officials fired her without explanation when they discovered her involvement in the movement. Despite losing her job, Señora Marina seemed to have had no regrets about striking because she continued to participate in the movement, selling her television and encyclopedia set and vending food to raise money for Vallejo's defense.

As Vallejo and other rieleros continued to languish in jail in the summer of 1959, Benitez led railway families resisting their continued imprisonment. One day, as she chanted *vivas* for her uncle, guards escorted Vallejo from the military camp to the penitentiary. Prisoners who had not been formally processed began a hunger strike.[80] Outside the camp, Benitez led men and women in spreading the news of this latest form of resistance. She explains, "We were in the streets, passing out propaganda, holding meetings wherever we could. The police chased us out of one place and we went to another. It was a tremendous effort to see if we could save the prisoners."[81] Clearly, Benitez

6. Rieleras wait as leaders negotiate the end of the strike, February 25, 1959. Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Hermanos Mayo.

takes pride in recounting her militant behavior and in subverting gender norms by playing the role of the combative activist in defense of vulnerable railway men. For this brief moment Benitez and her militant compañeras took on attributes of normative masculinity. They were some real *cabronas*!

The movement to release the prisoners crystallized when Benitez and others formed the Comité para la Liberación de los Prisioneros Político, which was exclusively composed of rieleras, presumably because their male friends and relatives were in jail, hiding, or afraid of getting arrested. The women visited stations to collect donations from workers to sustain the resistance. Station agents opened their doors, permitting Benitez on work sites where she ate with men and urged them to contribute money. Her status as Vallejo's niece surely aided her in getting access to the traditionally male space of the railway yard, as it was well known that she was in direct communication with her uncle. Nonetheless, Benitez preferred to be known for her commitment to the resistance movement rather than for being Vallejo's niece. She admits as much by stressing that many workers did not know that she and Vallejo were related. Benitez wants to be regarded for her actions, independent of her relationship to Vallejo or any other man for that matter.

The Cold War Crime of "Social Dissolution"

On April 13, 1959, authorities moved Demetrio Vallejo from the military camp to the infamous Lecumberri penitentiary in Mexico City and indicted him under Article 145 in the Federal Penal Code. Along with sixty-five other railroad dissidents, Vallejo was charged with "social dissolution, attacking the general system of communications, endangering the economy, coercion or interference with public policy, and employing threats under constituted authority."[82] The crime of social dissolution alone carried a minimum sentence of five years. The judge who presided over Vallejo's case later explained that social dissolution applied in cases in which "a foreign idea, programs or plans . . . threaten Mexican sovereignty. The ideas could be written or spoken as long as they incite one or more persons to subvert

the nation; to disturb public peace." The judge explained that the law also applied to actions that "give material or moral support to foreign invasion."[83] In short, the law criminalized the communication of thoughts, attitudes, and political views that authorities perceived to undermine PRI rule.

The court not only recognized but actually lauded Article 145 for constituting an inherently political piece of legislation. The judge presiding over Vallejo's case defined "social dissolution" as a political crime because it "concerns the juridical and political structure of the state." Since the strike threatened the security of the country, the judge explained, it undermined the state. In this way, the court reasoned that strikers, and especially organizers, were guilty of threatening to undermine Mexico's economic and moral foundation. Vallejo's lawyers countered that the court had it backwards: it was Article 145 that threatened the nation by subverting the Constitution, especially Article 123, which guaranteed the right to organize and the right to strike.[84] The judge offered no legal rebuttal. Article 145 remained the law of the land, and "as long as the political regime exists," the defendants were guilty. The judge's comments revealed the enormous power that the PRI wielded over the judicial branch.

Cold War anxiety over communist infiltration provided the court with political cover for incarcerating Vallejo. The prosecutor argued that Vallejo served the interests of the USSR and pointed to Vallejo's membership in the POCM and his close ties to other POCM leaders as proof of his intention to overthrow the state. "The goal of the PCM and POCM is to bring about a socialist state and communism—following Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin," the prosecutor charged. Members of these parties "infiltrate workers' groups and encourage them to seek class rights given to them by the Constitution." They aim to "control and conquer public power and destroy the state, turning Mexico into another China, Poland, and USSR." The prosecutor unwittingly affirmed the case made by dissidents, namely, they sought "class rights given to them by the Constitution."[85]

The prosecutor's logical incoherence did not weaken his case with the judge, who, in lockstep with critics in the press and government,

reprimanded STFRM leaders for wielding Marxist ideas against the Constitution. When the judge cited a PCM pamphlet that called for the abolishment of capitalism as proof of Vallejo's subversive intentions, he failed to consider that Vallejo and Campa had had a falling out with the PCM years earlier and would have had nothing to do with the writing and distribution of that pamphlet.[86] By outright ignoring or trivializing the difference between the POCM and PCM, the judge proved incapable — or unwilling — to recognize that divisions existed among activists and that these divisions mattered. Just as organizers and workers followed no singular ideology, no one group directed the movement. The tensions among factions resulted in the frenzied, seemingly improvised quality of militant acts — such as the physical assault of a scab or, on a larger scale, the decision to strike against private firms. These acts may have seemed impulsive to the casual observer, but those in the know understood that they were the result of conflicts and negotiations among workers and leaders themselves.

The press's barrage of editorials accusing Vallejo of manipulating the movement had made an impression on the court. The judge repeated claims made by the national press that workers were pawns of Marxist organizers. The agitators, he concluded, used psychological tricks to take advantage of working-class people's perception that they were poorly treated. "Agitators exist who charge the administration with cost of living, devaluation of peso, and poverty," he explained. Union leaders as well as POCM and PCM members wrongly blamed the PRI for the "social, economic, and political phenomena that affect the classes with most needs." In brief, the economic hardship felt by the majority of working-class people should not be attributed to PRI policies. It is notable how the judge's comments perfectly echoed criticisms leveled for months against protestors by PRI officials.

Vallejo and his lawyers decided that the best way to undermine the "social dissolution" charge was to establish that Vallejo did not have the power to coordinate the strikes and therefore could not be guilty of attempting to overthrow the government. Vallejo's lawyers did their best to separate their client from the strikes by methodically pointing out that Vallejo did not write the Southeast Plan, the manifesto

composed in the winter of 1958 that propelled the railway movement and led to the overthrow of charro authorities.[87] This was, of course, a specious argument, testament to how truly desperate Vallejo's case had become. While it was true that Vallejo did not write the manifesto, he had been the face of the movement throughout the summer and fall. Vallejo gained national exposure while propagating the Southeast Plan, and it brought him national credibility as a railway leader. He quickly became the leader of the movement, which is why he won the 1958 union election in a landslide. There is no wonder then why Vallejo's lawyer was unable to convince the courts that Vallejo did not play a leading role in planning the strikes.

Vallejo faced the complicated task of explaining the complexities involved with organizing a national strike, the impossibility of establishing complete consensus, and, most important, the power of the rank and file to pressure leaders to strike. The discursive noise — the battle for the "war of position" — that reverberated in the press further added to the difficulty of explaining how grassroots workers radicalized the movement and pressured national organizers. Vallejo was sincere in stressing that no one leader could manage the rank and file and that the grassroots had taken control. But it was too much to ask the court to separate Vallejo's role as the secretary general of the STFRM from the coordinating efforts that brought about the March strikes.

For months after his arrest, Vallejo insisted that, contrary to what press reports indicated, he did not lead workers to render the system inoperable. Union locals operated independently. Vallejo especially distanced himself from the strikes at the Ferrocarriles Mexicanos and Terminal de Veracruz, maintaining that the press was wrong to link him to those actions. But prosecutors admonished Vallejo for mocking the court when he insisted on proof that he organized the walkouts. Everyone knew he led the strikes the way that everyone knew that the Earth revolves around the Sun. He therefore bore responsibility for the financial harm done to the company and the national economy, as well as for inconveniencing passengers.

Prosecutors presented company and union documents, as well as newspaper accounts and worker depositions, to convict Vallejo of so-

cial dissolution. STFRM memos in which the strikes and their consequences were discussed proved that Vallejo orchestrated the strikes. Moreover, by presenting company circulars warning of the strikes' illegality, they demonstrated that Vallejo had led workers to act knowing that they would be breaking the law. Workers could stay on the job to face acts of retaliation from strikers or walk off the job and face arrest. In addition, newspaper articles that named Vallejo as the leader of the strike proved that his influence was public knowledge. Finally, prosecutors submitted reports that the government had expelled USSR diplomats who had supported the strikes. Although these reports did not directly link Vallejo to the Soviet diplomats, prosecutors nevertheless insisted that they proved Vallejo to be guilty of serving "dangerous foreign interests," a crime under Article 145. Years later, Campa would explain that Vallejo had no links to the Soviets and had certainly never been to their embassy.[88]

The court proceeded by issuing subpoenas for workers to testify against Vallejo. Prosecutors deposed Miguel Serrano Rodríguez, a retired worker from Guadalajara, Guillermo Haas Rodríguez, a former railway activist from Tierra Blanca, and César Márquez Gómez, a former dissident from Mexico City. Hass Rodríguez and Márquez Gómez had supported the railway movement in 1958 and had served as STFRM representatives in the capital. During the 1958 mobilization, Márquez Gómez had escorted Vallejo around Mexico City, introducing the young Oaxacan to workers at union halls and in people's houses. He had been especially influential, having served as part of the Mexico City contingent that met to write the Southeast Plan. Both Hass Rodríguez and Márquez Gómez had been disgruntled with Vallejo during the course of 1959. Márquez Gómez became angered when Vallejo relieved him of STFRM duties for reasons that remain unclear. In February 1959 Hass Rodríguez penned an "open letter," denouncing Vallejo for raising union dues and for supporting a workers' cooperative, from which leaders allegedly stole.[89] He railed against Vallejo and the strikes on television and radio.[90] It is likely that these men rejected the movement's heightened militancy after Vallejo became head of the STFRM. In fact, many former dissidents to this day fault Vallejo and the move-

ment's leaders for backing strikes at the private firms, even if Vallejo had been pushed to do so by the restless and militant rank and file.

Márquez Gómez betrayed Vallejo by assuring the court that the STFRM leader was the "principal director" of the March strikes. Hass Rodríguez went a step further by charging that Vallejo and his supporters intimidated railway workers into striking. He explained that those who were reluctant to join marches and walk off the job feared reprisals if they did not fall in line with dissidents, which was true but hardly relevant to the charge of social dissolution. Both men assured the court that Vallejo ordered the strikes of March 1959. Hass Rodríguez explained that rumor had it that Vallejo did not want to strike at first, but decided to call the walkout after intense debate with STFRM leaders.[91]

After months of depositions, the presentation of press clippings, and vague links between foreign ideologies and Vallejo, the judge focused on an internal STFRM telegram that Vallejo had sent on February 25 to a representative at Local 33 in Mexico City as evidence that Vallejo disregarded national law. Vallejo acknowledged in the telegram that the national arbitration board declared the strike illegal, but he nevertheless instructed leaders at Local 33 to direct a walkout in the capital. Presumably, he sent similar telegrams to other parts of the country. How else could workers from as far away as Chihuahua, Chiapas, and Guerrero synchronize walkouts on the morning of February 25? In short, the telegram proved Vallejo's organizational command over rank-and-file protests.[92]

The judge compared Vallejo's role in the strikes to that of a worker sabotaging a machine. Vallejo destroyed capital by shutting down the entire railway system. The strike choked the internal market, halting the distribution of basic foodstuffs. Agricultural producers resented that the strikes ruined their perishable commodities, as loaded freight trains stood unmoved when workers put down their tools and walked out of yards and stations. Industrial representatives complained that costs rose with every shipment delay. The private sector viewed the strike as an economic crime. Like a lowly employee causing a train wreck by dislodging a rail, Vallejo wielded those under his control against the national economy and the PRI.

For drawing on "foreign ideas" and disrupting the national economy, Vallejo received eleven years and four months in prison and an 11,800 peso fine. For their part in organizing the strikes, other STFRM leaders based in Mexico City also received draconian sentences. STFRM secretary of organization Gilbert Rojo Robles was given eight years and ten months with a 9,700 peso fine. The court served POCM member Miguel Aroche Parra with eleven years and two months in jail along with an 11,800 peso fine. Roberto Gómez Godínez, who had been present in Mexico City when the Southeast Plan was written and in 1959 was head of the STFRM's council of security and investigation, received seven years and six months in prison with a 9,150 peso fine; activist Enrique Caballero Zaraté received five years and four months in jail and a 6,700 peso fine. Each defendant could choose to serve an extra month in jail in lieu of paying the fine.[93] For detractors of the movement, justice had been served. In the view of union and student activists, the PRI had betrayed the revolution by making political prisoners of democratically elected union leaders.

In the end, the court could not — and did not want to — believe that the rank and file held as much or more power than their leaders. But Vallejo's version of events, however self-serving, resonated with grassroots activists then and now. Years later, Rafael García Venega, a former yard supervisor in Nazareno, Durango, advocated for a bottom-up analysis of the strike: "The police asked me many questions: if I belonged to the Communist Party, if we had ordered the strike, because I was charged with having sabotaged the rails, with social dissolution, for being a communist. . . . It was said that the police were going to execute us. I denied all the charges and declared that the railroad movement was a result of an accord agreed upon by all of the union sections, that it was hardly a result of Vallejo's unilateral order. He carried out what the union sections of the Republic agreed upon in their assemblies."[94]

García Venegas gestures toward the enduring controversy over the role of communist ideology in the movement. This tension is articulated as a memory of misidentification.

Workers' memories of the movement reflect the prominent role that the accusation of communist influence played at the time. Rank-and-file interviewees went to great lengths during our exchanges to downplay the role of communism in the movement, while leaders acknowledge that most of them belonged to the POCM and were influenced by Valentín Campa.[95] Grassroots activists then and now acknowledge that Vallejo considered himself a Marxist or communist while rejecting the charge that the movement found inspiration in Marxism. For example, Narciso Nava portrays communists who participated in demonstrations as bit players, even outsiders. Insisting on the ideological purity of those who constituted the base of movement, he emphasizes that the rank and file sought workplace justice, not the pursuit of political abstractions.

Earlier we discussed Steve J. Stern's elaboration of what he calls emblematic memory—mental frameworks that "purport to capture an essential truth." These memories are not single remembrances of individuals but rather collective narratives meant to impart meaning on individual remembrances.[96] Emblematic memory should be thought of as flexible structures capable of containing conflicting remembrances. In the case of the railway movement, the collective memory of red-baiting represents an emblematic narrative. The conflicting remembrances contained in the red-baiting narrative mark it as a site of tension, capturing the continued unease over communist influence on the movement among former dissidents. When former workers use oral histories as platforms to stress that they were not motivated by the communist cause, they participate in a memory struggle of proper identification. The case of rieleros may prove to have resonance among workers during the Cold War era in other countries in the hemisphere.

My interviews with Narciso Nava, José Jorge Ramírez, Juan Colín, and other activists are indicative of former activists downplaying or dismissing communist influence while leaders affirm that communists led the movement. Both groups agree that leaders ultimately

could not control the masses of mobilized rieleros and rieleras. Narciso Nava articulates what so many workers believe, namely, that Vallejo was more interested in defending workers' interests than in advancing a communist agenda.

Alegre: So what did you think of Vallejo, of the movement?

Nava: Well, I tell you, one saw the pros and cons. You saw that they fought in favor of the workers, which is what Señor Vallejo did. But he had cronies, people who were with him, they were cronies. In general, all workers wanted to support Señor Vallejo, because he fought for something just.

Alegre: The press accused him and the movement of communism?

Nava: Well, I tell you, that's political. He was the secretary general of the union. People latched on to him, like Señor Campa, people that were strong figures on the Left. Because, as I tell you, the railway was a very big industry, the biggest there was in Mexico.

Alegre: So the press, when they called workers communists . . .

Nava: No, not workers, the movement, those who led it. Workers weren't on the Right or the Left. Workers were workers. The movement was treated as . . . leftist because of the leaders that attached themselves to him, to Señor Vallejo. But that was in Mexico City, there, at the government level, not at the level of workers. The worker either supported or did not support the movement.

Alegre: And what did they do to you if you did not support . . .

Nava: Nothing, nothing.

Nava's testimony contains residues of the political struggle between the movement and its detractors in the 1950s. His remembrance follows the rhetorical strategy used in 1958 and 1959, which portrayed Vallejo as a democratic leader and his followers as pragmatic, while dismissing a few prominent activists in Mexico City as conniving and ideologically driven. These cronies sullied the reputation of their leader and their movement. Nava fails to acknowledge Demetrio Vallejo's well-known membership in the POCM because doing so would lend weight to critics then and now who associate Vallejo with commu-

nism. Clearly the struggle over the memory of Vallejo and the movement continues to this day.

But communism did have its appeal to many male activists, including Vallejo, and these men came to look up to Valentín Campa. This was especially true of activists in the capital and in major railway hubs, such as Monterrey and Mexico City, where Campa often spoke at rallies and at informal, sometimes clandestine, meetings.[97] José Jorge Ramírez, for example, fondly remembers going to Autonomous University of Puebla in the 1950s to listen to Campa lecture on labor issues. Campa impressed Jorge Ramírez during the talks. "He talked about socialism, communism," Jorge Ramírez explains, "to improve society, not just for workers but in general."[98] The words "in general" refer to Campa's concern with uplifting the working class as a collective. His political vision extended beyond the economistic desires of the railroad rank and file. As discussed in chapter 1, in the 1940s Campa sought to build a broad working-class coalition to improve the standard of living of the average Mexican. These ideas helped Jorge Ramírez make sense of his life and of the socioeconomic obstacles that he, his coworkers, and ordinary people endured.

The railway movement and Vallejo in particular radicalized Jorge Ramírez, leading to his political awakening and to his involvement in the movement. The movement exposed and attracted him to leftist politics, and he became a lifelong activist. "I didn't sympathize with the Left or the Communist Party until the movement of 1958," Jorge Ramírez explains. "Vallejo," he declares approvingly, "he was a communist!" His respect and admiration for Vallejo (and later for Campa) made him curious about Marxism. Jorge Ramírez supported Vallejo because of the gains that he had fought for and ultimately helped acquire for workers, but once he learned about Vallejo's politics, Jorge Ramírez sought to learn about Marxism. He did so not by reading abstract tomes but by attending rallies organized by the PCM and the POCM and by seeking out communist leaders.

On the surface, Jorge Ramírez's radicalization appears to follow the script told by detractors of the movement who claimed that railway activists led their members astray. What these critics failed to grasp,

however, was how Jorge Ramírez and others like him made Marxism and radical politics their own by setting aside abstractions and petty squabbles between communist groups. Instead they focused on what Jorge Ramírez calls "the improvement of society," or the economic and political empowerment of the working class. Jorge Ramírez came to identify himself as a Marxist, but he belonged to no party.

Nevertheless, Vallejo's commitment to Marxism and membership in the POCM remains an uncomfortable truth among former activists. Many workers, such as Carlos Salazar Ramírez, prefer to discuss Vallejo's fight for a democratic union and higher wages rather than his ideological predilection. He explains that Vallejo's communism "was a government thing. The person who stands up is labeled an agitator. Anyone who wasn't with the government was called a communist. Vallejo was called a communist. He had his ideas, but he helped us."[99] Salazar Ramírez exonerates Vallejo of the communist charge, chalking it up to a government ploy to smear him. He stops short of describing Vallejo's ideas because to do so would require that he accept Vallejo's communist ties, which would amount to capitulation to the movement's critics. Whatever Vallejo's ideas, they served to improve the lives of every rielero and rielera, which is what ultimately matters to Salazar Ramírez and the countless railway men and women who continue to identify as vallejistas.

Remembrances recounted by former leaders give depth to the emblematic red scare narrative. Juan Colín, one of the trainmen who organized the failed tortuguismo movement of 1954, was a principal organizer in the capital. As we saw in chapter 2, he had close ties to both Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa, hosting them in his house and driving them around Mexico City to meetings at stations, yards, and union halls. His testimony captures the impossible task of locating accountability for the movement's accomplishments and failures. Did the movement fail because communist leaders duped the rank and file into increasing their demands? Or did workers pressure leaders to strike, thus cutting their own throats? Colín takes both positions.

On the one hand, he recognizes that the rank and file radicalized their leaders—not the other way around—pushing Vallejo and local STFRM leaders to order strikes.

Alegre: Why did the movement fail?

Colín: The movement didn't succeed because compañeros wanted to solve everything with strikes. They went on strike for any little problem. So the people at the bottom pressured the leaders. That's why we failed. . . . Leaders wanted to find a solution for everything. Workers would say we are going to strike. And we would say, you can't because we have to do this and that first.

On the other hand, he affirms charges made by critics, namely, that outsiders linked to Marxist parties controlled the movement. Colín can be viewed as an outsider because he had no official role within the STFRM after his ouster in 1954 and had little clout among the less politicized workers.

Colín: Well, Vallejo and Campa agreed on many things, but the truth is Valentín took advantage of Vallejo's trust. He took advantage . . . of the workers, and that's why we failed. Valentín called for strikes without Vallejo's input. They told people to go out on strike. People would later ask Vallejo, and Vallejo would say, "I didn't order anything." They fooled people using Vallejo's name. Since it was by phone, people didn't realize it.

A number of interviewees speculate that Campa manipulated Vallejo, but Colín was one of the few people who could verify the claim because he was an associate of both men during the movement. We can have no way of knowing whether Campa had as much influence on the movement as Colín maintains. But his testimony does reveal that even high-ranking activists shared the government's concern that ideologically driven "outsiders" directed the movement. Unlike critics in the press and government, however, Colín distinguishes Vallejo from the "outsiders"—in Colín's account Vallejo retains his purity as a well-meaning victim of repression.

Colín struggles to reconcile these two conflicting memories—the autonomous, radicalized rank and file pressuring their leaders to strike versus the manipulating outsider, Campa, duping workers into striking. "The POCM drove everything," he explains, only to contradict himself in the next breath. "Workers made the decisions. They had

their meetings and we [the leadership] had ours." Exasperated, he concludes, "Vallejo did not order the strike. It was the government; the company and the government planned a lockout. The army wouldn't let workers enter the workplace. The best example: here in Buenavista station agents went to work, but the company and army told them to go away. The company ordered the strike." Colín's confused testimony echoes the chaotic events at the time, as workers found themselves having to decide whom to believe. Forty years later, Colín cannot clearly indicate whether blame for the movement's demise rests with the rank and file or with the leadership.

Conclusion

After a year of hard fought battles against the FNM, the independent STFRM found itself pressured to attain major wage increases by members employed by private railroad companies. These members, who had gone on strike throughout the year in support of their colleagues employed by the FNM, believed they deserved the same benefits enjoyed by their friends who labored for the government-run firm. Their decision to strike against the privately managed Ferrocarril del Pacífico, Terminal de Veracruz, Ferrocarriles de Yucatán, and Ferrocarriles Mexicanos doomed the movement, giving the government the necessary cover to send troops to stations and arrest dissidents.

The government's use of a Cold War idiom marked a new relationship between the PRI and the working class. While working-class activists felt that the PRI had a responsibility to make good on the promises that the Constitution of 1917 made to workers, the PRI deployed the language of the Cold War to condemn labor activists. Detractors in the press and government cast railroad men and women as communists, whereas they saw themselves as guardians of the populist revolutionary tradition. The government drew on the language of the Cold War—which posited a Manichean struggle between labor and capital—to justify its repression of rieleros.

Oral histories mark a continued struggle over the memory of the movement. Rank-and-file interviewees and leaders alike portray the movement as just and driven by the grassroots. Even when they ac-

knowledge the role of communist activists, they conclude that the rank and file shaped and determined the course of the movement. Juan Colín fails to reconcile depictions of the movement as communist and portrayals of it as pragmatic. These competing narratives formed the basis of the discursive struggle at the time and continue to haunt memories of the movement.

Finally, it is notable that the Cold War idiom had no clear role for women: the battle between communists and patriots was cast as a contest between men. Women, idealized as apolitical homemakers, had no place in the narrative. This may explain in part why Lilia Benitez and Señora Marina were released from prison while their male colleagues languished in jail. There was simply no frame of reference for imagining these women as militant activists. Women's absence from the Cold War meta-narrative also explains why former rieleros and rieleras anchor their memories of persecution around the stories of former railroad men. Women found themselves unlikely to be charged as agents of the USSR seeking to overthrow Mexican capitalism.

Women's political invisibility became a source of power for rieleras when the PRI deployed soldiers to railroad stations. Women found themselves with more freedom of movement than rieleros, whom they now protected, bringing them food while in hiding and collecting funds for legal defenses. For a moment, the repression loosened the railway patriarchal order, as men went into hiding or publicly apologized for striking, returning to work as their leaders remained incarcerated.

Conclusion

Rethinking Postwar Working-Class History

When the federal government sent the military to occupy railroad stations and yards, while arresting and caging rieleros in military camps, the ruling party used force to truncate a debate over how best to industrialize the country. As in the days of Porfirio Díaz, workers in 1958 continued to complain of shoddy equipment and poor working conditions, while accusing the government of growing the economy on the backs of railway men and women. Mexican company managers and compliant union representatives may have replaced the abusive foreign managers of the Porfiriato, but they nevertheless kowtowed to the president and his policy imperatives. By the 1940s, those policies tried to defang labor unions in order to freeze wages for the benefit of private industry, which, as in Díaz's time, promised to bring Mexico into the modern era.

Much had changed since the nineteenth century, however. Most important for our story, the Mexican Revolution had radically empowered the industrial working class. As Jeffrey Bortz has shown, workers had won major concessions from state governments—including a minimum wage and the right to collective bargaining—before rebels had even put down their rifles.[1] These dramatic changes in state law became granted in the Constitution of 1917, which gave all workers the right to organize and strike, while ending child labor and providing the right to a national minimum wage. When in 1938 President Lázaro Cárdenas conferred management of the railroad industry to workers who led the FNM, he affirmed the primacy

of labor to the country's political economy. But in tying the strength of industrial unions to the state, Cárdenas also greatly empowered the ruling party's ability to stifle labor dissent. The administrations of President Ávila Camacho and President Alemán exploited the relationship between the PRI and industrial labor that Cárdenas founded, demanding that workers accept a decreased standard of living in order to prop up businesses. Because the railroad industry played such a strategic role in developing native industries and in facilitating the export-import markets, rieleros and their families felt the brunt of the PRI's postwar economic policies.

Railroad Radicals has departed from previous studies by incorporating everyday rieleros and rieleras into the story of the strikes. The focus on institutions — such as the STFRM, FNM, PRI — and their leaders has led scholars to ignore how the rank and file pushed leaders to more militant positions. For example, Antonio Alonso concludes that the movement failed because of decisions made by the STFRM: "Comprehending neither the dominant [capitalist] system nor the essential character of the railroad struggle, the leadership of the railroad union could not propose an adequate tactic for defending and consolidating the union triumph." When Alonso does mention the rank and file, it is to lament their false consciousness, their failure to understand that "their authentic interests are opposed to those of the state and the dominant class." Hence he prescribes, "What is needed is the action of an authentic working-class revolutionary party that attends to workers' real interests, their historical interests, that sheds clarity on the moment until it conceives of an adequate way to confront the interests of the capitalist class that imposes itself on political power." This revolutionary workers' party would politicize and organize the working-class masses.[2] Although scholars have avoided the Leninist thrust of Alonso's analysis, they nevertheless maintain the focus on union leaders and agree with Alonso that the movement was ultimately a failure, almost predetermined by the structure of a corporatist system. In so doing, they fail to assess the profound consequences of the movement on postwar politics as well as on the individual lives of rieleros and rieleras.

The first conclusion to draw from this study then is that working-class people meaningfully shaped the postwar political arena by contesting the PRI's economic policies, which counted on corrupt union leaders to suppress their members' desire for wages to rise in accordance with the cost of living. I have shown that large sectors of the working class, primarily those associated with the country's largest industrial unions, revolted in major cities and small towns throughout the country. Moreover, previously classified DFS documents have enabled me to detail how community organizing in the early 1950s created a network of activists who went on to become leaders during the strikes. The study demonstrates that the railroad movement directly shaped the political economy of the late 1950s, extracting major concessions from the FNM through the intervention of President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and President Adolfo López Mateos. Significantly, López Mateos agreed to pay for these concessions by raising freight rates—a demand that workers had been making since the nineteenth century.

Due to the ultimate repression of the railway movement, scholars have underestimated the way that the independent union left a lasting mark on the lives of railway men and women. Most significant, railway families won enduring benefits, such as medical care for spouses and children as well as limited company housing. The housing concession enacted for the first time Section 12 of Article 123 of the Constitution, which mandated providing comfortable and hygienic housing for their workers. Improvements in housing and health care remained permanent. In addition, the wage increases that had been won in July 1958 and February 1959 remained on the books as a legacy of the movement's accomplishments. These gains came to be enjoyed by thousands of rieleros and rieleras who joined the company after 1959. As a result, railway folklore has turned Demetrio Vallejo into a working-class hero. He embodies their memory of the movement as a triumph, however truncated by government aggression. Future studies should assess how working-class movements shaped the postwar political economy as well as the lives of activists and their families, even when they failed to attain their primary demands.

The important role of rieleras in the railroad movement emerges

as a corollary to our first conclusion. After showing that women were central to everyday railway community and culture, *Railroad Radicals* documents their participation in the movement of the late 1950s. In doing so, it suggests that working-class women belied the stereotype of women as reflexively conservative. Rather, they engaged the political arena as boldly as their male counterparts. Future studies of Mexican working-class women in the postwar era could profit from conducting oral histories with female activists.

This study has also shown that the railway movement sought to conserve the gains that the working class had won with the revolution. Activists and their critics shared a vocabulary and a set of citizenship claims based on the revolution. Their mutual investment in the revolution enabled activists to frame their movement as legitimate and to make their case to the broader public. Detractors who claimed that the movement sought to overthrow the government or spark a socialist revolution failed to recognize the reformist character of the movement or workers' intent on upholding the rights of the Constitution of 1917. Theirs was no call to arms against the capitalist order. The same was true of teachers as well as electrical, telegraph, petrol, and mine workers who mobilized in 1958 and 1959 to oust their union charros. In the context of Cold War geopolitics and the PRI's turn to the right, their demands and actions now seemed subversive. Demetrio Vallejo, Lilia Benitez, and the tens of thousands of rieleros and rieleras who joined them had become railroad radicals for seeking the fulfillment of the revolution.

We must conclude, therefore, that the Cold War had a profound role in shaping the outcome of the railroad movement. Even before the Cuban Revolution, a Cold War idiom reemerged in the postwar period, providing antilabor forces with a worldview that served to marginalize working-class activists. This frame of reference included a vocabulary along with a set of metaphors and visual representations that shaped and were shaped by concrete actions, such as protests, arrests, and everyday interactions on streets and in workplaces. Words like *marxismo* or *communismo* became shorthand for *subversive* and were used to associate dissidents with an international movement to overthrow capitalist states. In the months leading to the repression of the railroad

movement, company executives, PRI officials, and newspaper editorialists made use of a global Cold War narrative to delegitimize activists. This study chronicles this early instance in the broader hemispheric Cold War battle. After the Cuban Revolution, the war would heat up, with reformers turning to armed insurrection. Compared with guerrilla armies that populated mountains from Mexico to Argentina from the 1960s forward, railroad radicals looked moderate indeed.

The Cold War did not *determine* the outcome of the railway movement, however. The STFRM made a strategic mistake when it supported strikes against the independent Ferrocarriles Mexicanos, Ferrocarriles de Yucatán, Terminal de Veracruz, and Ferrocarril del Pacífico to be conducted on Holy Week. These strikes against private firms gave railroad companies cover for firing strikers who refused to cross the picket line, while justifying the government for imprisoning FNM leaders and effectively extinguishing the boldest grassroots challenge to the PRI's postwar rule.

As in the case of Chile in the early 1970s, when workers pressured President Salvador Allende and other leaders to concede to radical demands, rieleros took control of the movement in 1959.[3] It was the rank and file that pressured the STFRM to support workers at independent firms who demanded that their employers confer wage increases in alignment with those won by their colleagues employed by the FNM. This conclusion is supported by Elias Teran Gómez, who headed the FNM between 1938 and 1940 and became a critic of the unruly grassroots mobilizations of 1959: "What happened was that people became more radicalized than Vallejo, everyone wanted to go further than Vallejo, and, for me, there was a certain anarchy. There was no longer strong leadership with Vallejo. If Vallejo gave a peso, someone asked for two, another for three. I think that that was the heart of the matter. Vallejo was gaining strength that included petroleros and teachers. They would have created an independent organization that our government would not have welcomed."[4] The government feared the emergence of an independent labor movement composed of the most combative unions, and the destructive and disorganized actions of rieleros in 1959 provided the government with a rationale for repressing the movement.

The grassroots had been loyal to STFRM leaders, but they maintained their independence and ultimately resisted efforts from leaders in Mexico City, Vallejo among them, to get them to shelve their demands. Executing the strikes on Holy Week further weakened their already fraying support. These two strategic miscalculations — striking against private firms and doing so during Holy Week — led to their collective demise. Railroad activists had lost the war of position.

These miscalculations suggest that the union leadership — as well as the parties to which they belonged, the POCM and PCM — failed to educate the rank and file about the political stakes of conducting strikes against independent firms on Holy Week. It is the job of union and political leaders to persuade workers to refrain from actions with little or no chance of succeeding. This failure underscores the limited power of union and political leaders during the movement. Certainly the POCM's influence over the movement was disproportional to the number of rieleros who were members of the party, in large part because its members often held prominent roles in the democratized STFRM. As influential as they were in crafting STFRM strategy, union and political leaders were overwhelmed by grassroots enthusiasm. And it was the grassroots that ultimately decided on what tactics to employ.

This book also demonstrates the enduring influence of the Mexican Revolution, with its promises etched into the revered Constitution. Railroad leaders did their best to deflect charges that they followed Soviet dictates by grounding their demands on the Constitution and on Mexican labor law. When revolutionaries drafted the Constitution of 1917, the Bolsheviks had just begun to dismantle the czarist regime in Russia. Communism as an ideology had yet to become the global force it would be in the 1940s. The absence of a struggle between U.S. capitalism and Soviet socialism allowed Mexico to fashion a constitution out of an eclectic mix of ideological and social referents, from liberal representative democracy to indigenous landholding traditions. In the 1920s and 1930s, socialists could base their claims on the Constitution and present socialist goals as having roots in Mexican struggles. But the Cold War enabled Mexican politicians, industrialists, and company managers to associate workers' demands based on constitutional guar-

antees with Marxism, a foreign ideology promising working-class liberation. In doing so, they positioned strikers as threats to the nation. By charging them with sedition, or "social dissolution," the government reframed the Constitution, willfully ignoring its most progressive labor provisions. This bold move was facilitated by the Cold War political context. Future studies should likewise pay heed to how the Cold War context reconfigured interpretations of the Mexican Revolution, from both above and below. I suspect that many conflicts were either rooted in, or expressed as, differing interpretations of the revolution.

By 1959 the battle between railway activists and their detractors turned into a struggle over representation, a contest we have called a "war of position." Each side strove to represent the other as undemocratic and illegitimate. The STFRM presented itself as a grassroots democracy, beholden to the average, impoverished, but proud railway man. The STFRM contrasted its democratic practices with the closed politics of the PRI, which promoted the sort of nepotistic policies that would allow for PRI senator Samuel Ortega, who had no railway experience, to serve as FNM general manager. Each side charged the other with violating the principles of the revolution. Railway dissidents charged the PRI with jettisoning the revolution's promise of providing for the working masses by siding with business interests over the needs of the people. The PRI charged dissidents with choosing communism over revolutionary nationalism. Since this ideological struggle took place on the field of representation, future studies should be attuned to the politics of language and how actors mobilized and manipulated vocabulary for political ends—figuring activists as subversives, for example. The site of language is the site of struggle.

Significantly, not all workers supported the movement. I have located the divisions that existed among the rank and file preceding the charrazo; divisions continued during the 1950s and during the strikes. *Railroad Radicals* calls attention to how divisions became subject to the disciplinary effects of community—how workers who did not support the movement became victims of verbal and physical abuse. To do justice to the complexity of the movement, I have rejected the idealization of activists as well as the denigration of those who took sides

with the company. After all, the latter were often motivated by their desire to put food on the table.

Workers who supported the movement did more than just march in protest. They demonstrated their media savvy by latching on to FNM and PRI depictions of rieleros as humble, hardworking, and crucial for modernizing Mexico. Railway dissidents appropriated this "official story" to forward a critique of the company and to justify their militant mobilization. They made use of the FNM and PRI's portrayal of rieleros as indispensable, but amended the official portrayal by drawing on the STFRM's combative history. Dissidents went on to suggest that the FNM, PRI, and media offered an incomplete narrative of the movement and of railway activists. If it was true that workers were key to the country's economy, then they deserved to be properly compensated. The appearance in newspapers of workers' voices and perspectives demonstrates how newspapers offered an opening for alternative narratives, even as editorials vigorously repudiated workers' arguments.

The ability of dissidents to appropriate official portrayals of the rank and file demonstrates the malleability of such narratives while reminding us to eschew simplistic analyses that describe government discourses as unyielding structures. In addition to disseminating their perspectives in print, railway men and women publicly contested the FNM and PRI by propagandizing on streets, in union halls, and anywhere they could find an audience. Yet pointing to the ways in which workers revised official stories does not invalidate critiques of the government's actions at the time or in any way exonerate the company and government from injustices perpetuated against ferrocarrileros and ferrocarrileras. By the time railway workers shut down production at privately managed companies in 1959, they could no longer count on the press to offer them a venue to articulate their position, and physical spaces available to organize and propagandize had become limited to union halls and worksites. When the police and military apprehended strikers, railway families learned that the PRI plan would—in the last instance—use force to favor capital over the working class.

As the police arrested workers and soldiers occupied stations and yards, the government wasted no time in recruiting a new generation

of charros to head the STFRM. They sought someone with rielero credentials, a leader who opposed Vallejo and could round up anti-vallejistas to run the trains and swiftly get the system up and going. They found such an individual in Luis Gómez Z., the very same man who had been overthrown as STFRM secretary general in 1948 and endured arrest on a trumped-up fraud charge. Ever the pragmatist, Gómez Z. in 1959 reclaimed his power within the STFRM by facilitating the repression of the railway movement. He had become a charro and is remembered as such by the men and women who nostalgically recall the days of vallejismo.

Government repression put an end to the most militant working-class movement in postrevolutionary Mexico, but the PRI could not inhibit the spread of discontent with its postwar policies. Vallejo continued his activism from behind prison doors, lambasting the PRI in the pages of *Política*, a popular progressive magazine. Dissident rieleros continued to meet on the streets of Mexico City with the hopes of reviving their movement, with longtime dissident Juan Colín advancing critiques of the ruling party in his new monthly paper, *El Rielero*, in the 1960s. When I first met Colín in 1999 on the streets of Colonia Guerrero, a small group of men and women gathered around him to pick up an issue of the paper, eager to read Colín's analysis of the FNM's privatization. For these activists, the battle for Mexican democracy had continued unabated since the 1950s.

The PRI's failure to contain the influence of the railroad movement and to prevent the disaffection of the masses came to the surface with the dramatic—and tragic—events of 1968. On October 2, just days before the opening of the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, soldiers blasted random shots into a crowd of students protesting in Tlatelolco Square, killing dozens. Popular histories credited the student movement—and the Tlatelolco massacre—with unmasking the authoritarian mask of the PRI, which up to that point had enjoyed political and cultural hegemony. This perspective may ring true with middle-class academics and journalists who participated in the student movement or with foreign observers who could connect events in Mexico with militant student movements in the United States, France, and Czechoslovakia, among

other places. But this study has shown that ten years before the Tlatelolco massacre, a nationwide working-class movement had contested the PRI. For working-class activists, the PRI's authoritarianism had become apparent in 1959 when President López Mateos arrested dissident leaders and stood by as employers fired countless workers.

Finally, this study challenges historians to revise postwar political history by giving working-class men and women credit for contesting the PRI's political and cultural hegemony and for inspiring students to mobilize in 1968. Student activists acknowledged the influence of the railroad movement when they demanded the release of Demetrio Vallejo, called for the release of all political prisoners, and pushed for the immediate abolishment of Article 145. One student leader at the time made the connection between the labor and student movements explicit when he roused an audience of student demonstrators: "From the tragic consequences of railroad workers, teachers, telegraph workers, the students of Sonora, Morelia, Tabasco, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto Politécnico Nacional, today you yield the fruits of their efforts."[5] The roots of government clandestine surveillance and repression of student activists and guerrilla groups in the 1960s and 1970s can be found in the actions of DFS agents monitoring labor activists in the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1960s the repression became more brutal with the secret incarceration and disappearance of militant activists.

Workers have labored to sustain the memory of the movement. These memory entrepreneurs can be found sharing smokes at union halls, talking politics at the old Buenavista station in Mexico City, and chatting on porches and in backyards where men and women lament the privatization of the industry in 1997 that led to the downsizing of railway personnel. Despite the divisions that existed at the time, today it seems everyone claims to have been a vallejista. Several decades since the fall of the movement, retired rieleros and rieleras continue to associate it with honest unionism and economic justice. The desire for political and economic democracy continues to motivate activists from the industrial northern border to the Mayan fields of Chiapas where, as in the 1950s, young and old are busy making their own history.

Notes

Introduction

1. Interview with Geraldo Niño Mendes, by author, Puebla, January 2004.

2. Prior to the 1960s, women worked primarily as nurses. In the 1960s the FNM began employing women as office workers. Never did the company employ women to work on trains or in repair yards.

3. Railroad workers were known as *rieleros* or *ferrocarrileros*; railway women were known as *rieleras* or *ferrocarrileras*.

4. Interview with Ruth Ramírez, by author, Puebla, February 2004.

5. Mexico experienced significant economic growth and industrialization in the 1930s; industrialists built upon this foundation during the postwar period. Cárdenas, *La industrialización mexicana durante la Gran Depresión*, 9–12.

6. Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*; Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*; Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*; B. T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements*. For a cultural take on postwar dissent, see Zolov, *Refried Elvis*.

7. Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, 25.

8. For a study that includes a discussion of the railway strikes in the context of the corporatist state, see Berins Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*; other works on Mexican corporatism include Fagen and Tuohy, *Politics and Privilege in a Mexican City*; Craig and Foweraker, eds., *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico*; González Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico*; Hamilton, *Limits of State Autonomy*; Hansen, *Politics of Mexican Development*; Needleman and Needleman, "Who Rules Mexico?"; P. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power*.

9. Roxborough, *Unions and Politics in Mexico*, 25.

10. Those interested in the history of Mexican labor should consult the following essential works: Anderson, *Outcasts in Their Own Land*; Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution*; Carr, *El movimiento obrero y la política en México* ; French, *A Peaceful and Working People*; Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*; Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*; Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*. For recent studies that analyze the gendered character of both the labor process and working-

class culture, see the essays by María Teresa Fernández-Aceves, Heather Fowler-Salamini, and Susan Gauss in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, ed. Olcott, Vaughan, and Cano.

11. French, "Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico," 177.

12. Fowler-Salamini and Vaughn, eds., *Creating Spaces, Shaping Transitions*, xxi.

13. Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, 6, 20.

14. Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*; Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*; Joseph and Nugent, eds. *Everyday Forms of State Formation*.

15. Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution*, 8.

16. See interviews in *Yo soy reilero . . . ": Imágenes de identidad de los ferrocarrileros poblanos* and *Los ferrocarrileros hablan*.

17. Anguino, *El estado y la política obrera del cardenismo*; Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*; Roxborough, "Urban Labour Movements in Latin America since 1930"; Basurto, *Cárdenas y el poder syndical*; Ashby, *Organized Labor under Lázaro Cárdenas*.

18. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 124; Roman, *Railroad Nationalization and the Formation of Administración Obrera in Mexico, 1937–1938*; Ortiz Hernán, *La locomotora Cardenista*.

19. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 56.

20. Semo, *El ocaso de los mitos (1958–1968)*, 76. Susan Gauss explains that "small, isolated strikes [took] place all over Mexico" between 1940 and1945. Gauss, *Made in Mexico*, 101. Also see Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 113–14, 214–15.

21. Gauss, *Made in Mexico*, 170–71.

22. There is a burgeoning literature on Cold War Mexico. See Blacker-Hanson, "Cold War in the Countryside"; González de Bustamante, *Muy Buenas Noches*; Cueto, *Cold War, Deadly Fevers*; Servín, "Reclaiming Revolution in Light of the 'Mexican Miracle'"; Bachelor, "Miracle on Ice"; Fein, "Producing the Cold War in Mexico"; Zolov, "¡Cuba Si, Yanquis No!"

23. Joseph, "What We Now Know and What We Should Know, 20.

24. "Truman Doctrine: President Harry S. Truman's Address before a Joint Session of Congress, March 12, 1947," *http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp* (accessed July 6, 2011).

25. Greg Grandin points to military coups against elected officials in Peru and Venezuela. Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, 8. For a useful article on the hemispheric political shift to the right during the period, see Bethell and Roxborough, "Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War," esp. 177–79.

26. Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, 8.

27. Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov, eds., *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 8; for the 1950s, see Pellicer de Brody and Mancilla, *Historía de la Revolution Mexican, 1952–1960*.

28. Schmidt, "Making It Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, ed. Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov, 26.

29. Blacker-Hanson, "Cold War in the Countryside"; Servín, "Reclaiming Revolution in Light of the 'Mexican Miracle'"; Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Za-*

pata. For a scholarly account that situates the student massacre within the context of the 1950s labor movements, see E. Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*.

30. Automobile workers remained an important exception, as their wages "remained significantly higher than those found in nearly every other economic sector." See Steven J. Bachelor, "Tolling for the 'New Invaders': Autoworkers, Transnational Corporations, and Working-Class Culture in Mexico City, 1955–1968" in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, ed. Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov, 283.

31. For a mapping of the literature on the postwar period—with an emphasis on cultural history—see Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov, *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 3–22.

32. See note 8.

33. See *Los ferrocarrileros hablan*; Tirado Villegas, *Relatos del Interoceanico* 2.

34. Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico*, 12, 99–126. One work that emphasizes the important role of the rank and file in shaping the movement is Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 219. Max Ortega's *Estado y Movimiento Ferrocarrilero* covers much of the ground explored by Alonso.

35. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*; on the challenge that organized labor posed to the PRI, see also Roxborough, *Unions and Politics in Mexico*.

36. Political scientists Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier refer to later and less militant labor mobilizations as a "labor insurgency." Berins Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, 601.

37. On teachers, see Loyo Brambila, *El movimiento magisterial*; Peláez, *Las luchas magisteriales de 1956–60*.

38. Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*; Servín, *Ruptura y oposición*.

39. Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory*; James, *Resistance and Integration*; James, *Doña María's Story*; Klubock, *Contested Communities*; Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists against Terror*; Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*; Winn, *Weavers of Revolution*. Greg Crider's 1996 dissertation, "Material Struggles: Workers' Strategies during the 'Institutionalization of the Revolution' in Atlixco, Puebla, Mexico, 1930–1942," makes extensive use of oral histories.

40. Berga Gluck and Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*; James, *Doña María's Story*; Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory*; Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*; D. Carey, *Engendering Mayan History*.

41. Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, 33.

42. Studies employing oral history have tended either to emphasize the deconstruction of texts or to approach the interview as a repository of facts. I use both methods in this study. For the deconstructionist approach, see James, *Doña María's Story*; Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory*; for the latter method, see Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*; Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*.

43. The literature on community formation in Latin America is vast. For an excellent analysis, see Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*.

44. Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*, 17.

45. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 238, 243.

1. "Revolution Was Made on the Rails"

1. Fuentes Díaz, *El problema ferrocarrilero de México*; Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 124.

2. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution: Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants*, 1:80. The classic study on the railroads in the Porfirian era remains John H. Coatsworth, *Growth against Development*.

3. On the railroads' impact on the state of Morelos, see Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, 42; See also Chassen-López, *From Liberal to Revolutionary Oaxaca*; Wasserman, *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution*, 76; and Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border.*

4. Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment*, 15–20. Haber details the impressive growth of the mining sector as a result of the development of the railroad industry. Haber draws on Coatsworth, *Growth against Development*, 97–99.

5. As John Hart points out, "For the campesinos, that 62 percent of the population that worked the land, [the railroad brought] economic disfranchisment, social dissolution, and violence." Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 157.

6. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 17–18.

7. For reflections on the introduction of the railways and its impact, see Archivo de la Palabra, Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José Marialuis Mora, interview with José Luna Lara, by Alexis Arroyo, March 1916. Fictional accounts that convey the atmosphere of railroad communities include Fernando del Paso, *José Trigo*, and Poniatowska, *El tren pasa primero.*

8. Arturo Grunstein Dickter, "El surgimiento de los FNM, 1900–1913: era inevitable la consolidación monopólica?" 194–97.

9. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 80.

10. See Bortz, *Revolution within Revolution*; Carr, *El movimiento obrero*; Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, esp. 52–73 and 312–15; Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 43. Alan Knight argues that historians have misinterpreted workers' mobilizations as movements for political liberation when in fact workers simply sought unionization and an improved standard of living. See Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 128–50.

11. Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens*, 238.

12. For a romantic portrayal of railway workers' participation in the Revolution written by a rielero, see Barrios, *El escuadrón de hierro.*

13. Ortiz Hernán, *Los ferrocarriles de México*, 2:65–76. Official government publications publicized the indispensable role of ferrocarrileros during the Revolution. See D'Estrabau, *El ferrocarril.*

14. Mraz, *Hechos sobre los rieles.*

15. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 76

16. Barrios, *El escuadrón de hierro*, 116.

17. "Boda de Oro a la Unión de Mecánicos Ferroviarios," *El Sol de Puebla*, August 28, 1950.

18. The railway movement of the late 1920s is the subject of Barrios, *El escuadrón de hierro.* See also Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 35, 136.

19. Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance*, 125.

20. Berins Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, 219.

21. Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance*, 125.

22. Elías Barrios and Valentín Campa are two examples. See Campa, *Mí Testimonio* and Barrios, *El escuadrón de hierro*.

23. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 51.

24. Mexico City houses three locals: sections 15, 16, and 17.

25. Valentín Campa stresses this point in Mraz, *Hechos sobre los rieles*.

26. Vaughn, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*; Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked the Earth*; Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos*; B. T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements*.

27. Middlebook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 87.

28. Hamilton, *Limits of State Autonomy*, 121, 149.

29. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 91.

30. Berins Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, 240.

31. On the challenges of forging alliances in Monterrey between the PCM, the PRI, and labor, see Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance*, 166–201.

32. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 53, 55.

33. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 47–48.

34. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 101.

35. On the politicization of the industry and for a discussion of the disastrous state of railway infrastructure inherited by the Workers' Administration, see Kuntz Ficker, "El triunfo de la política sobre la técnica: ferrocarriles, estado y economía en el México revolucionario, 1910–1950."

36. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 56.

37. On the intractable problem of railway infrastructure, see Guajardo Soto, "Hecho en México: el establonamiento industrial 'hacia adentro' de los ferrocarriles, 1890–1950."

38. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 124–25.

39. Berins Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, 246; on the political shift to the right during Cárdenas's last years in office, see Hamilton, *Limits of State Autonomy* and Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (February 1994): 73–107.

40. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 118.

41. On fascism in Mexico, see Navarro, *Political Intelligience*, 123–32.

42. Navarro, *Political Intelligience*, 109, 199.

43. On the Labor Unity Pact and labor, see Jones, "'The War Has Brought Peace to Mexico,'" 123–25.

44. See introduction, note 16.

45. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 70.

46. Rankin, *¡Mexico, la patria!* 258.

47. In addition to Rankin, see Gauss, *Made in Mexico*.

48. Rankin, *¡Mexico, la patria!* 220–22.

49. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 145.

50. For a history of Mexican intelligience bureaucracies, especially during the postwar era, see Navarro, *Political Intellegience and the Creation of Modern Mexico*, esp. 150–186

51. Spears, "Rehabilitating Workers," 72.

52. *Ferronales*, February 1946.

53. Spears, "Rehabilitating the Workers," 74.

54. Spears "Rehabilitating the Workers," 88–89.

55. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 128.

56. Campos Ríos, "El proyecto de modernización ferrocarrilera de Miguel Alemán," esp. 56–58.

57. For an overview of railway restructuring, see D'Estrabau, *El ferrocarril*, 133–40.

58. *Ferronales*, February 1950.

59. The collective contract allowed for the company to dismiss workers who were physically incapable of performing their duties.

60. *Revista Médica del Hospital Colonia* 1, no. 1 (May–-June 1953). For a concise overview of health services for railroad workers, see Guillermo Fajardo Ortiz, "Tres notas sobre la historia de los servicios hospitalarios para los ferrocarrileros," in *Memorias del tercer encuentro de investigadores del ferrocarril*.

61. *Ferronales*, March 1948.

62. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, October 14, 1950.

63. Campa was expelled from the PCM in 1940 as part of an intra-party political struggle, during which Campa and others were judged guilty of "Trotskyism"—deviating from the party line of seeking reformist measures. On Campa and the PCM purge, see Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 60–79

64. Spears, "'When We Saw the Fruits of Our Labor,'" 319.

65. "Lenin," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, January 16, 1946.

66. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, May 16, 1946.

67. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, June 1, 1946.

68. On his role in the 1926 and 1927 railroad movement, see Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 33–42.

69. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, October, 1, 1945.

70. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, July 1, 1946.

71. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, April 16, 1946.

72. Pacheco, "¡Cristianismo Sí, Comunismo No! Anticomunismo Eclesiástico en México," 145.

73. Sherman, *The Mexican Right*, 61, 72–73.

74. Servín, "Propaganda y Guerra Fría," 19.

75. Bortz, *Industrial Wages*, 198.

76. "Participemos todos en la batalla contra la Carestía!" *Unificación Ferroviaria*, January 1, 1945.

77. "El encarecimiento de la energía eléctrica choca con la repulsa Popular," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, October 1, 1945.

78. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, April 16, 1946.

79. "Mensaje del Gerente General: la seguridad—tarea administriva," *Ferronales*, September 15, 1946.

80. Luis Gómez Z. and Valentín Campa articulated this position on the pages of *Unificación Ferroviara* throughout the year, and as we will see below, Gómez pushed this policy at the consultants' meeting of the FNM. See an interview with Gómez Z. published in the union paper, "Opina el sindicato sobre los problemas del transporte, entrevista con los compañeros Gómez Z. y Valentín Campa," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, February 16, 1946.

81. Gómez Z. and the STFRM insisted on the need for railway machine parts to be made in Mexico in order to reduce costs and facilitate industrialization. Articles in the union paper stressed this point, but Gómez Z. also insisted on native industrialization during the meetings of the consultants to the FNM; see CEDIF, Consultants to FNM, Junta Extraordinaria, August 26, 1946.

82. "Opina el sindicato sobre los problemas del transporte: entrevista con los compañeros Gómez Z. y Campa," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, February 16, 1946.

83. CEDIF, Consultants to FNM, Acta #16, January 16, 1946.

84. The STFRM condemned the treatment of braceros by U.S. employers, adding to the list of complaints that it had against the people they called "yanquis." See "Bárbara explotación de braceros mexicanos en paìs vecino," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, January 1, 1946.

85. Railway workers joined other working-class groups to protest the standard of living. See "La batalla contra la carestía de la vida," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, June 1, 1946. In Jalapa, railway, hotel, restaurant, factory, and electrical workers threatened to strike in opposition to their lack of purchasing power. See "Movilización contra la carestía el 7 de Junio," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, May 16, 1946.

86. Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute*, 202–203.

87. CEDIF, consultants to FNM, Acta #22, February 6, 1947.

88. CEDIF, consultants to FNM, Acta #22, February 6, 1947.

89. STFRM representatives made clear that their members expected compensation for their role in the war effort. See CEDIF, consultants to FNM, junta ordinaria de los representates de consultantes de la FNM, May 6, 1946.

90. "Las tarifas ferrocarrilera y la carestía de la vida," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, January 16, 1947.

91. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 147–48.

92. "Refutación a una circular de la comisión eventual de Oficinistas," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, July 1, 1947.

93. CEDIF, consultants to FNM, junta extraordinaria de consultantes a FNM, June 1947.

94. CEDIF, consultants to FNM, Acta #25, June 6, 1947.

95. CEDIF, consultants to FNM, Acta #25, June 6, 1947.

96. CEDIF, consultants to FNM, Acta #25, June 6, 1947.

97. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, February 1, 1947.

98. CEDIF, consultants to FNM, Acta #25, June 6, 1947.

99. CEDIF, consultants to FNM, June 6, 1947, 117.

100. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrileros, Extp. 26–1–48 H 1 L 1.

101. Medin, *El sexenio Alemanista*, 99.

102. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 171.

103. Medin, *El sexenio Alemanista*, 101.

104. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 136.

105. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrileros, Extp. 26–1–48 H 82 L1; also see "Juntas secretas de dirigentes de Trabajadores," *Excélsior*, October 16, 1948.

106. Interview with José Jorge Ramírez, by author, Puebla, February 26, 2004.

107. Employees were divided into white-collar and blue-collar branches. Office workers, trainmen, workshop employees, and nurses were designated as "blue-collar" and as such were members of the union.

108. AGN, DFS, Extp. 26–1–48 H 1 L 1, February 1948.

109. AGN, DFS, Extp. 26–3–50 H 404 L 4, May 20, 1950.

110. AGN, DFS, Extp. 26–1–48 H 1 L 1.

111. Those who opposed Jesús Díaz de León took out a full-page ad in *Excélsior* denouncing his infiltration of union headquarters and making their dissent public. See "Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana: ¡Protestamos contra un brutal Atentado!" *Excélsior*, October 15, 1948; "Lio Ferrocarrilero," *Excélsior*, October 18, 1948; "Cada momento se complica mas la pugna intergremial en los F.F.C.C.," *Excélsior*, October 19, 1948.

112. Yanes Rizo, *José María López Escamilla "Don Chema": Testimonios*, 48–49.

2. "Born into the Railway"

1. Interview with Demetrio Vallejo, by Elena Poniatowska, Mexico City, 1972.

2. Demetrio Vallejo, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

3. Roberto Amorós, "Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México: a todos los trabajadores Ferrocarrileros," *Excélsior*, August 4, 1958, and "Contra los intereses de México," *Excélsior*, August 16, 1958.

4. Bortz, *Los salarios industriales de la Ciudad de México*, 270.

5. Reynolds, *Mexican Economy*, 80.

6. Bortz and Aguila, "Earning a Living," 125.

7. Rutgers University, Alexander Library, Robert J. Alexander Collection, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, May 11, 1963, box 17, folder 49.

8. National Archives at College Park, Maryland (hereafter NACP), Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, U.S. embassy, Mexico, Annual Labor Report 1956, March 20, 1957, 812.06/4–2456.

9. NACP, RG 59, U.S. embassy, Mexico, Quarterly Labor Report, March 18, 1958, 812.06/3–1858.

10. NACP, RG 59, U.S. embassy, Mexico, Quarterly Labor Report, January–March 1958, 812.06/6–1758.

11. NACP, RG 59, 812.06/4–1955, April 19, 1955.

12. NACP, RG 59, 812.01/9–2055, September 20, 1955.

13. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/6–1654, June 16, 1954.

14. This figure does not include retired workers who collected pensions and participated in demonstrations. Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 129.

15. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender*, 21.

16. See interviews in *"Yo soy reilero . . . ."*

17. For an example of how the image of the rank-and-file worker in overalls gets reproduced as the dominant image of the "authentic" railway worker, see Mraz, *Imágenes ferrocarrileras: una visión Poblana*.

18. Interviewees regularly mention the pride and status conferred to those who wore the trenista uniform. See interviews in *"Yo soy reilero . . . ."* Niño Mendes still regrets having not ascended to the rank of trenista because he always wanted to wear the uniform. Interview with Niño Mendes, 2004.

19. Villafuerte, *Ferrocarriles*, 5.

20. Eleazar de los Santos García, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 4. García joined management after thirty-one years of service.

21. For example, FNM managers asked Narciso Nava, a trenista from Puebla, to be an inspector. He declined out of loyalty to his co-workers and friends. Interview with Narciso Nava, by author, Puebla, April 2004.

22. The FNM explained that peons faced daily dangers and gave advice on how they could avoid injuries. See "La seguridad de los peones de via," *Ferronales*, June 1950.

23. Villafuerte, *Ferrocarriles*, 15; *"Yo soy reilero . . . ,"* 46.

24. Interview with Juan Colín, by author, Mexico City, May 1999.

25. Interview with Jorge Ramírez, 2004.

26. *Unificación Ferroviara*, August 1, 1946.

27. Villafuerte, *Ferrocarriles*, 17.

28. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, July 16, 1945.

29. Villafuerte, *Ferrocarriles*, 27.

30. Roca, *Km. C-62*.

31. Juan Broissin Uribe, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3.

32. Interview with Guadalupe Ácosta, by author, Mexico City, July 2004.

33. Interview with Carlos Salazar Ramírez, by author, Puebla, May 2004.

34. The articles demonstrate that the company was well aware of the dangers that employees faced on the job. See "Eliminemos la peligrosididad al trabajo con oxi-acetilero," *Revista Ferronales*, July 1950.

35. Interview with Niño Mendez, by author, 2004.

36. Interview with Eleazar Tinajero, by author, Mexico City, June 1999.

37. Interview with Rodolfo Sánchez Feria, in *"Yo soy rielero . . . ,"* 129.

38. Interview with Miko Viya, in Tirado Villegas, *Relatos del Interoceanico 2*, 9;

interview with Colín, by author, 1999; interview with Niño Mendes, 2004. Mendes drew a sketch of a whistle and explained how conductors modified it according to their tastes.

39. For a fictionalized account of this practice, see Elena Poniatowska's "Métase mi prieta, entre el durmiente y el silbato," in *De noche vienes* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1979), 145–73.

40. Interview with Francisco "Pancho" Mortera, by author, 1999.

41. Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance*, 117.

42. Interview with Manuel Meneses Domínguez, in *"Yo soy rielero . . . ,"* 145.

43. *Revista Ferronales*, March 1957.

44. Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (hereafter AFC), Extp. 661, 513.1/5.

45. Interview with Mortera, 1999.

46. This process appears to be acute among workers engaged in piece-rate production. See Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent*, 66–67.

47. José Pinzon Guevara, Puebla-Transportes, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 2.

48. Dossiers reveal that workers faced the constant threat of dismissal, even if they were successful in gaining reinstatement. Alberto Basurto was fired three times for delays; Romero Cruz López was fired for causing a train accident, as was Lamberto Caballero López. See Alberto Basurto, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3; Romero Cruz López, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3; Lamberto Caballero López, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 4.

49. Jesús Madrid Chabolla, Puebla-Transportes, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 1. It took Madrid thirty-one years to have an inspector.

50. Workers' dossiers provide a rich and detailed view on the police functions performed by inspectors. See Pilar Dominguez Juárez, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, letter from Inspector to Superintendent, April 13, 1937, Puebla-Transportes, box 1.

51. For instance, an inspector tracked the actions of Lorenzo Rocha, rank-and-file employee of no acclaim, writing him up for not paying a vendor for a beer. The document notes that he had been seen stealing in the past. Lorenzo Rocha, Puebla-Transportes, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 2.

52. José Campos González received two months in jail and a 20 peso fine for stealing a piece of steel worth a little less than 3 pesos. FNM internal memo, José Campos Gonzalez, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3. For the union's position, see "Encarcelar a los trabajadores," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, November 30, 1950, and "Distinción para Ferrocarrileros," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, February 28, 1950.

53. AGN, Miguel Alemán Valdés, Extp. 452, 513/70.

54. Those whose judgment lapsed faced dismissal. Adam Cortés Ceballos was fired on December 19, 1950, for stealing after having been investigated by an inspector. It is a testament to the strength of the union that he was reinstated fifteen months later. Adam Cortés Ceballos, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 4. Also see Archivo Estatal de San Luis Potosí, FNM, Extp. 7–29-L-331.

55. See "Calumniadores," *Unificación Ferroviaria*, May 18, 1945.

56. Carlos Bernal Romo, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3. The company magazine reminded workers to obey regulations in order to prevent accidents. See *Revista Ferronales*, March 1957.

57. This figure includes passengers and workers. *Estadística de Ferrocarriles y Transvias*, 245–51.

58. Interview with Miko Viya, in Tirado, *Relatos del Interoceanico 2*, 11.

59. See photos in AGN, Fototeca, Hermanos Mayo Collection.

60. Interview with Niño Mendes, 2004.

61. Klubock, *Contested Communities*, 138.

62. Similarly, textile unions in Puebla during this period "tied class action to the social construction of the violent, male, unionized textile worker."

Gauss, "Working-Class Masculinity and the Rationalized Sex," 186–87.

63. De Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 9.

64. Adulio Arenas Antón, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 1.

65. *Unificación Ferroviaria*, March 1, 1948.

66. Johns, *The City of Mexico in the Age of Díaz*.

67. Interview with Salvador Zarco, by author, Mexico City, July 1999; interview with Colín, by author, 1999.

68. Interview with Guadalupe Monroy, in Tirado, *Relatos del Interoceanico 2*, 20–21.

69. Interview with Esteban Rodríguez, by author, Matías Romero, July 2004.

70. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 170. The classic statement on the relationship between the industrial workplace and the structure of people's daily routines is Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism."

71. Interview with Miguel Rodríguez, by author Matías Romero, July 2004; interview with Julio Martínez, by author, Matías Romero, July 2004.

72. For a list of hotels in Mexico City, see interview with Viya, in Tirado, *Relatos del Interoceanico*, 13.

73. Interviews with José Jorge Ramírez, Antonio Moreno, Narciso Nava, Fidel Vásquez, Juan Colín, Carlos Salazar Ramírez, all by author. See also interview with Monroy, in Tirado, *Relatos del Interoceanico 2*, 19–21.

74. *"Yo soy reilero . . . ,"* 18; interview with Antonio Moreno, by author, Puebla, July 2004.

75. The importance that the city gave to its rank-and-file railway men can be

gleaned from its coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of the first railway craft organization, the Unión de Mecánicos Mexicanos. Speeches, dances, and parties took place throughout Puebla, including at the main cinema and theater. See *El Sol de Puebla*, August 28, 1950.

76. Interview with Vallejo, by Poniatowska, 1972.

77. In 1946, hotel, restaurant, and factory owners supported a railway strike to protest the rise in the cost of living. See *Unificación Ferroviaria,* May 16, 1946.

78. Interview with Salazar Ramírez, 2004.Ramírez spent months in remote regions of the country, repairing bridges and tracks as a company peon.

79. AGN, Miguel Alemán Valdés, letter from Colonia Comité of Monterrey to Miguel Alemán Valdés, 451, 513/10. An association of neighbors petitioned the president to build homes on land belonging to the FNM; a letter from a president of a local cooperative of producers in Yucatán explains that the railway "improved the lives of people in the pueblo" and helped business. Also see AGN, ARC, v. 663, 513.7/5; records of the FNM consultants substantiate that people who lived near railway tracks often understood the railway to be national property, which justified their act of squatting on FNM grounds. See CEDIF, consultants to FNM, Acta, no. 15, January 7, 1946.

80. The president of the Maestros del Estado de Puebla pleaded with President Adolfo López Mateos to construct stations in small towns, which he described as being "at the margins of civilization." Without the railway, the letter claimed, "the area will collapse." See AGN, Fondo Adolfo López Mateos, Extp. 567, 513.2/6. The union was aware of that poor people relied on trains for affordable transport. See *Unificación Ferroviara*, December 1, 1958.

81. A letter from a representative of ranchers in Michóacan explains that for one year they have been asking for a railway station. They rely on the railway for traveling and for shopping because it is affordable. Without a station, they will continue to live in misery. See AGN, ARC, 659, 513/63.

82. *Unificación Ferroviaria,* January 25, 1941.

83. Interview with Salazar Ramírez, 2004.

84. Interview with Antonio Moreno, by author, 2004; interview with Jorge Ramírez, 2004. Valuable studies of Puebla ferrocarrileros that employ oral histories include Tirado, *Relatos del Interoceanico 2,* and Márquez González and Ruiz Jarquin, eds., *Relatos del Interoceanico 4*.

85. Interview with Monroy, by Tirado, in *Relatos del Interoceanico 2*, 20–21.

86. Interview with anonymous, by author, Puebla, 2004.

87. Roca, *Km. C-62*, 91.

88. Roca, *Km. C-62*, 91.

89. Interview with Niño Mendes, 2004.

90. Interview with Moreno, by author, 2004.

91. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, 68.

92. Interview with Moreno, by author, Puebla, March 2004.

93. Interview with Rosa Arellano, by author, Puebla, February 2004.

94. Interview with Arellano.

95. Interview with María Hernández Orozco, by author, Matías Romero, July 2004.

96. Interview with Hernández Orozco, by author, 2004; interview with Maria del Cielo Watanabe, by author, Matías Romero, July 2004.

97. Interview with Enrique López, Mexico City, July 2004.

98. French and James, eds., *Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers*, 6.

99. For anecdotes that speak to issues of railway masculinity, see Centro de Investigaciónes Históricas del Movimiento Obrero, *Los ferrocarrileros hablan*.

100. Interview with María Estel Medina, by author, July 2004; interview with Watanabe, by author, 2004; interview with Hernández Orozco, by author, 2004.

101. Interview with Acosta, by author, 2004.

102. Interview with Fuentes, by author, 2004; interview with Ruth Ramírez, February 2004; interview with Hernández Orozco, 2004.

103. Katznelson, *Marxism and the City*, 151–52. He quotes Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 273.

104. On neighborhoods as incubators of political protest during the revolution, see Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens*.

105. Interview with Colín, by author, 1999; interview with Jorge Ramírez, 2004. Colín and Ramírez were STFRM representatives before the 1948 charrazo.

106. AGN, Dirección Federal de Seguridad (hereafter DFS), Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–956, H 232, L6, February 24, 1956.

107. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrileros, Extp. 26–1–1956, H 232, L6, February 24, 1956; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrileros, Extp. 26–1–57, H 341, L9, November 29, 1957.

108. Stevens, "Legality and Extra-Legality in Mexico," 62.

109. Jones, "Social Dissolution," 9.

110. Jones, "Social Dissolution," 12.

111. Article 145 had been used to prosecute student activists in 1955. See Pensado, "Political Violence and Student Culture in Mexico."

112. Critics of Article 145 denounced it in 1958 because the government could wield it against railroad activists. See *Siempre!* October 1, 1958.

113. For a study on the use of the DFS in monitoring peasant communities, see McCormick, "The Political Economy of Desire in Rural Mexico."

114. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 147.

115. The Alemán administration received a good deal of support from the United States to set up its intelligence service, including guidance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. For a discussion of United States–Mexico relations during the Alemán period, see Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico*, esp. 182–86.

116. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 191.

117. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–3–950, H 449, L5.

118. Interview with Vallejo, by Poniatowska, 1972.

119. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 122.

120. Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 213, 234.

121. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–3–950, H 110, November 10, 1950.

122. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 100–1–14–50, H 128.

123. His importance is alluded to in Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 115. Alonso states that Colín was considered an "instigator of the movement."

124. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958, H 8, L9, January 23, 1958.

125. Interview with Colín, by author, 1999.

126. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 204, L 3.

127. NACP, RG 59, 812.06/4–1955, April 19, 1955.

128. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–953, H 209, L 1; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–953, H 162 1, L 1; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–953, H 159, L 1.

129. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–53, H 70, L 2.

130. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/7–2352, July 23, 1952; NACP, RG, 812.062/2–2152; NACP, RG, 821.0062/2–452; NACP, RG 59, 812.062/1–2952, January 29, 1952.

131. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–852, February 8, 1952.

132. Gill, *Los ferrocarrileros*, 156–57.

133. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 169, L 2.

134. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 219, L 2, January 25, 1954; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 279, L 2, February 1954.

135. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 30, L 3, March 13, 1954; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 125, L 3, March 1954.

136. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 53, L3.

137. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–954, H 216, L 3, July 11, 1954.

138. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 206, L3; AGN, 26–1–954, H 216, L 3.

139. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 235, L3; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 251, L 3, September 1954.

140. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/9254, September 1954.

141. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/10554, October 1954.

142. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/10554, October 1954.

143. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/10554, October 1954.

144. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 260, L 3, September 23, 1954; NACP, RG, 812.062/10–554, October 1954.

145. NACP, RG, 59, 812.06/4–1955, April 1955; interview with Colín, by author, 1999.

146. NACP, RG 59, 812.06/4–1955, April 1955.

147. NACP, RG 59, 912.61/5–256, May 1956.

148. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–954, H 58, L 4, 29 October 1954; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–955, H 76, L 5; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–1955, H 211, L 4, February 11, 1955.

149. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/4–1756, April 17, 1956.

3. "Who Is Mr. Nobody?"

1. On labor peace, see Brachet-Marquez, *The Dynamics of Domination*, 107. Anto-

nio Alonso frames the movement as "spontaneous struggles." Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 99.

2. Lázaro Cárdenas, "November 29, 1958," *Apuntes*, 3:66.

3. Comprehensive visual documentation is housed at the AGN, Fototeca, Colección Hermanos Mayo.

4. Popular historian Enrique Krauze describes López Mateos as "the first genuine orator in the history of the modern Mexican presidency" in his *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 626.

5. Raul Trejo and Anibal Yañez, "The Mexican Labor Movement, 1917–1945," 147.

6. "*Siempre!* April 2, 1958; NACP, RG 59, 812.06/II–2157.

7. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–957 H 305 L 9; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–1957 H 361 L 9.

8. NACP, RG59, 812.06/II–457; NACP, RG 59, 812.06/6–657; NACP, RG 59, 812.06/II–2657.

9. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–957 H 381 L 9; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 387 L 10; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 52 L 10; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–1958 H 30 L 10; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 42 L 10.

10. Interview with José Arellano, by author, Puebla, March 2004.

11. Interview with Fidel Tabares Velazco, by author, Matías Romero, 2004.

12. "Telegram from the Embassy in Mexico to the Department of State," Mexico City, August 29, 1958, in U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, American Republics, Volume V*, 841 (hereafter *Foreign Relations*, 5).

13. See Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 110; Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 27.

14. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–957 H 96 L 8, January 1957. For Orizaba, Veracruz, see AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–957 H 213 L 9, September 1957.

15. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 410 L9; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 8 L 9, January 23, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 16 L 10.

16. *Revista Ferronales*, May 1958.

17. Unless otherwise indicated, this discussion is based on Elena Poniatowska's 1972 interview with Vallejo.

18. See Demetrio Vallejo, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

19. Partido Popular, *El Conflicto Ferrocarrilero*.

20. There is no study on ethnicity among labor leaders. This claim is based on my readings.

21. *El Universal*, February 26, 1959. One illustration in the very same issue of *El Universal* exaggerated Vallejo's short stature and dark complexion, an allusion to his indigenous background.

22. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 8 L 9, January 23, 1958;

AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 16 L 10, January 28, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 52 L 10, February 23, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 54 L 10, February 26, 1958.

23. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 340 L 10; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 5 L 11; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 1 L 11; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 13; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 350 L 10.

24. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 103 L 11.

25. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 52 L 10, February 23, 1958.

26. *Revista Ferronales*, June 1958.

27. *Siempre!* October 29, 1958.

28. *Excélsior*, July 22, 1958.

29. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26 1 1958 H 30 L 10; Extp. 26 1 1958 H 221 L 10.

30. *Revista Ferronales*, December 1958 and February 1959.

31. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 6.

32. *Excélsior*, August 5, 1958.

33. *Revista Ferronales*, June 1958.

34. *Revista Ferronales*, November 1958.

35. *Revista Ferronales*, February 1958.

36. *Revista Ferronales*, January 1958.

37. On FNM expenditures, see *Revista Ferronales*, January, February, June, and September 1958; *Excélsior*, April 6, 1958.

38. *Revista Ferronales*, June 1958.

39. On the literacy campaign, see *Revista Ferronales*, January 1946, February 1946, September 1949, and April 1958.

40. *Excélsior*, June 30 and August 1, 1958.

41. Interview with Niño Mendes, March 2004.

42. *Excélsior*, July 18, 1958.

43. NACP, RG 59, 812.06/2–2557, February 27, 1958.

44. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–1958 H 30 L 10, February 19, 1958.

45. *Siempre!* August 20, 1958.

46. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 7.

47. Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 111.

48. *Revista Ferronales*, July 1958.

49. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 30.

50. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 6, 9.

51. Chassen-López, *From Liberal to Revolutionary Oaxaca*, 51–56.

52. Interviewees, especially women, stress the importance of dances and STFRM-sponsored parties for creating a sense of community. Interview with Fidel Tabares Velázco, by author, Matías Romero, August 2004.

53. Interview with Maria del Cielo Watanabe, by author, 2004.

54. Interview with Estel Medina, by author, August 2004.

55. Interview with del Cielo Watanabe, by author, 2004.

56. *El Universal*, February 7, 1958.

57. *Siempre!* September 1958.

58. Interview with Jorge Ramírez, 2004.

59. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 10.

60. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 188 L 10, April 1958.

61. Matías Romero workers' FNM personnel dossiers are full of memos that track workers' participation in the railway movement. See the dossiers of Juan Ernesto Broissin, box 3; Felix Alvarado Hernández, box 2; Hector Casanova Martínez, box 4; César Carbajal Vallejo, box 4; Eleazar de los Santos García, box 4; Adam Cortés Ceballos, box 4; Adulio Arenas Anton, box 1; Adrian Cruz Cabrera, box 5, all in CEDIF.

62. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 33–34.

63. Organizers named the petition in Veracruz. Veracruz and Matías Romero belonged to the same rail line, so workers from these cities interacted regularly and were part of the same social milieu. See Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 112.

64. AGN, ARC, 660, 513/148.

65. Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 144.

66. Handelman, "The Politics of Labor Protest in Mexico," 8–9.

67. *Revista Ferronales*, June 1958, 6.

68. Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 112.

69. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 34.

70. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 23 L 11, June 12, 1958.

71. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 54 L 10, February 26, 1958.

72. Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 111.

73. Gill, *Los ferrocarrileros,* 163.

74. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 18.

75. Interview with Vallejo, by Poniatowska, 1972.

76. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 19.

77. *Excélsior*, June 30, 1958.

78. Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 115.

79. See Archivo de la Palabra, Instituto Mora, interview with Luna Lara, 1916.

80. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 35.

81. NACP, RG 59, 812.06/1–3059.

82. Interview with Salazar Ramírez, by author, Puebla, March 2004.

83. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 113 L 11, June 28, 1958; *Siempre!* August 6, 1958; *Excélsior*, June 30 and July 22, 1958; Loyo Brambila, *El movimineto magisterial*.

84. NACP, RG 59, 812.06/3–1858.

85. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/4–1158, 11 April, 1958.

86. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/6–1958, June 1958; NACP, RG 59, 812.062/7–958, July 9, 1958.

87. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–1158, February 11, 1958; NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–858, February 8, 1959; NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–1958, February 19, 1958.

88. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–1558, February 15, 1958; NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–1358, February 13, 1958; NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–1758.

89. Interview with Enrique Ochoa, in *"Yo soy Rielero . . . "*

90. Interview with Eliazor Tijanero, by author, Mexico City, June 1999; newspapers reported on workers' newfound elation and confidence. See *Excélsior*, July 19, 1958.

91. Interview with Manuel Meneses Domínguez in *"Yo soy reilero . . . ,"* 149–51.

92. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 132 L 11; *Excélsior*, June 28, 1958.

93. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 119 L 11; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 132 L 11.

94. On solidarity, see AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 94 L 11, June 26, 1958; *Revista Ferronales*, July 9, 1958.

95. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 38.

96. *Excélsior*, August 2 and August 16, 1958.

97. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 138 L 11.

98. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 38.

99. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 195.

100. *Revista Ferronales*, July 1958.

101. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 20.

102. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 258 L 11.

103. Interview with Vallejo, by Poniatowska, 1972.

104. See Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 19–20.

105. Taylor, "The Mexican Elections of 1958: Affirmation of Authoritarianism?" 737.

106. "Telegram from Embassy," *Foreign Relations*, 5:841–42.

107. Ibid.

108. Salvador Quezada Cortés, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

109. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 47; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 254 L 11, July 12, 1958.

110. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 214 L 11, July 8, 1958.

111. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 21–1–958 H 275 L 11, July 16, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 231 L 11, July 17, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 281 L 11, July 17, 1958.

112. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–1958 H 16 L 12; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–1958 H 301 L 11; *Excélsior*, July 30, 1958.

113. Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, 3:48; *Excélsior*, July 23, 24, and 27, 1958.

114. Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, 3:65.

115. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 237 L 11, July 19, 1958; *Excélsior*, July 20 and July 29, 1958.

116. See interviews in *"Yo soy reilero . . . "* and *Los ferrocarrileros hablan*.

117. Poniatowska, *El tren pasa primero*, 59.

118. "Una huelga ordenada por la Union de Matadores," *Excélsior*, July 20, 1958.

119. "Amenazan con paros las secciones 34 y 35 del STFRM, por lios Sindicales," *Excélsior*, July 29, 1958.

120. Conservative observers regarded the protests as a sign of a national crisis. See *Excélsior*, July 23, 1958.

121. *Excélsior*, July 27, 1958.

122. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–1958 H 27 L 12; *Excélsior*, August 3, 1958.

123. Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 125–26.

124. See Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 153–55.

125. *Excélsior*, August 3, 1958; Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 62–63; Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 29.

126. Interview with Elias Tehran Gómez and Juan Colín, by author, Mexico City, July 1999.

127. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 29.

128. *Excélsior*, August 4, 1958; Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 208.

129. See *Excélsior*, August 5, 1958.

130. Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 124.

131. Interview with Colín, by author, Mexico City, 1999; interview with Niño Mendes, Puebla, May 2004.

132. *Excélsior*, August 4, 1958.

133. *Excélsior*, August 5, 1958.

134. *Excélsior*, August 5, 1958.

135. It is impossible to know exactly how many workers joined the movement. Guillermo Treviño puts the number at 210,000. I use the conservative figure of 100,000, which is the approximate number of STFRM members at the time. If one were to include workers in other industries who joined the protest, the number would be much higher. Treviño's testimony can be found in Mraz, *Hechos sobre los rieles*.

136. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 180, L 14, January 9, 1959.

137. The story is related in Gill, *Los Ferrocarrileros*, 176–179, and in "La participación de la mujer en la lucha ferrocarrilera, 1958" (Colección "La mujer en la lucha obrera", Cárdenas, San Luis Potosí, n.d.).

138. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds*, 4, and *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*, 68.

139. Interviews with Medina, Hernández Orozco, and del Cielo Watanabe, 2004.

140. Columbia University, PCM Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, folder 27, frames 1542–43.

141. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/8–558, August 6, 1958.

142. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 159 L 12; *Excélsior*, August 8, 1958.

143. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/8–558.

144. *Excélsior*, August 24, 1958; Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 76; Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 129. Neither charros, PRI officials, nor FNM management challenged the election.

145. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/8–2758, August 27, 1958; NACP, RG 59, 812.062/8–2258, August 22, 1958.

146. See interview with Miguel Aroche Parra in Mraz, *Hechos sobre los rieles*.

147. "Telegram from Embassy," *Foreign Relations,* 5:840–41.

148. *Siempre*! August 20, 1958.

4. The "War of Position"

1. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 229–33. On "war of position" and pluralist social movements, see Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 136–38.

2. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 158. Here Laclau and Mouffe revise Gramsci, who insisted on essential class interests.

3. Servín, "Propaganda y Guerra Fría," *Signos Históricos*, 19.

4. Hughes, *Newsrooms in Conflict*, 50.

5. Fromson, "Mexico's Struggle for a Free Press," 130.

6. Servín, "Propaganda y Guerra Fria," 21, 22.

7. If a broader study of many newspapers were to find a more nuanced portrayal of the railway movement in the press as a whole, it would not alter my argument. The key is that the PRI used the press to combat the railway movement.

8. *Excélsior*, January 16, 1959.

9. Berins Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, 585.

10. The excitement and renewed strength of the grassroots was chronicled in Mexico City's premier cultural and political newsweekly, *Siempre!* on September 17, 1958.

11. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 25.

12. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 265 L, 12 August 26 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 269 L 12, August 29, 1958.

13. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 313 L 12; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 100–9–1–1958 H 80 L 2.

14. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 362 L, November 16, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 22 L 14, December 5, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 45 L 14, December 17, 1958.

15. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 79–80.

16. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 122.

17. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 36.

18. Worker testimonies in *"Yo soy reilero . . . "* and *Los Ferrocarrileros hablan* affirm that they viewed Vallejo as following in the combative tradition of the STFRM, a tradition jettisoned by charros. Workers also point out that ferrocarrileros were combative even before the formation of the STFRM in 1933. For a popular history of the most important railway strikes of the 1920s, see Barrios, *El escuadron de hierro.*

19. Interview with Roberto Huerta, by author, Mexico City, June 30, 1999.

20. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 22 L 14, December 5, 1958.

21. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 25 L 14, December 15, 1958.

22. Loyo Brambila, *El movimiento magisterial*, 18, 36–37.

23. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/9–458.

24. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/8–2858.

25. Loyo Brambila, *El movimiento magisterial*, 68

26. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/8–2458.

27. NACP, RG59, 812.062/9–458.

28. Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 195.

29. Tirado Villegas, *Quiero morir como nací*, 70.

30. Inteview with Salazar Ramírez, March 2004.

31. *Revista Ferronales*, September 1958.

32. Villafuerte, *Ferrocarriles*, 27; *El Universal,* February 11, 1959.

33. The FNM offered artificially low rates to industrial companies moving these metals. During World War II, the U.S.-owned Ferrocarril del Pacifico carried petrol and agricultural goods to the United States. Over 12 percent of its fleet shipped goods exclusively to the U.S. market. See Villanueva, *Ferrocarriles*, 161, 165–66.

34. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 89–92. On the relationship between artificially low freight rates and FNM's budget deficit, see Barcena, *La realidad en los ferrocarriles de Mexico.*

35. *Revista Ferronales*, February 1959; *El Universal*, February 11, 1959.

36. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 89.

37. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 40.

38. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 302 L 12, 5 Sept 1958.

39. *Excélsior*, January 18, 1959.

40. Interview with Niño Mendes, 2004; interview with Moreno, 2003; interview with Nava, 2004.

41. *Excélsior*, February 11, February 14, 1959,

42. *El Universal*, February 7, 1958.

43. Tirado Villegas, *Quiero morir como nací,* 73.

44. *El Universal*, February, 22 1959.

45. *Corrido histórico Méxicano: voy a cantarles la historia (1936–1985)*, tomo 5 (Mexico: Editorial Porrua, 1998), 138.

46. See AGN, Fototeca, Colección Hermanos Mayo, "Huelga de los Ferrocarrileros," envelope no. 12609.

47. *El Universal*, February 22, 1959.

48. AGN, Fototeca, Colección Hermanos Mayo, "Huelga de los Ferrocarrileros," envelope 13.313.

49. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/1–2059, January 20, 1959.

50. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 290 L 12, August 30 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 302 L 12, September 5, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 L 12, September 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 256 L, February 14, 1959; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26 1–958 H58 L 13, 1959.

51. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–58 H 294 L 12.

52. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/12–1858.

53. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/8–2958.

54. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 L 12, September 1958.

55. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 132 L 26, January 15–17, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 259 L 15, January 1958.

56. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 214 L 14, February 1, 1959.

57. Caulfield, "Labor Control in the Declining Mexican Revolution," 221.

58. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–2459, February 24, 1959; *Excélsior*, February 25, 1959.

59. Tirado Villegas, *Quiero morir como nací*, 42.

60. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 190, 214–15; Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 188.

61. *El Conflicto Ferrocarrilero* (Mexico City, 1959). PP members who worked for the FNM as trenistas, station agents, and telegraph operators wrote and signed this pamphlet.

62. Newspapers reported vallejista attacks on pro-charro workers. *Excélsior*, August 13, 1958.

63. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/9–458, September 4, 1959.

64. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 377 L 25, November 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 25 L 14; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–1958 H 12 L 14, December 5, 1958; AGN, Extp. 26–1–958 H 19 L 14, December 1958.

65. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–955 H 243 L 4, February 18, 1955.

66. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/9–1158, September 11, 1958.

67. See Rosendo Iñigo Olvera, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

68. *Excélsior*, August 11, 1958.

69. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 300 L 12.

70. Interview with Gil Morales Hernández, by author, February 2004.

71. Interview with Moreno, by author, 2004.

72. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 305 L 12, Sept 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 302 L 12, Sept 1958.

73. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 313 L 12.

74. Interview with José María Escamilla, by author, June 2004.

75. Yanes Rizo, *José María López Escamilla "Don Chema": Testimonios*, 61–62.

76. Interview with Nava, 2004.

77. Interview with Moreno, by author, 2004.

78. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 86 L 14, December 30, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 88 L 14, December 31, 1958.

79. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 103 L 14, January 19, 1958.

80. *Revista Ferronales*, no. 12, December 1958.

81. *El Universal*, February 11, 1959.

82. *Revista Ferronales*, no. 12, December 1958.

83. *El Universal*, February 18, 1959.

84. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 38.

85. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 93 L 14.

86. *El Universal*, February 11, 1959.

87. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 39–40; *El Universal*, January 18, 1959; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 159 L 14.

88. *Excélsior*, February 11, 1959. Méndez explained that for every peso earned by the FNM, it spent 1.3 pesos. Hence the FNM operated in the red and needed to make cuts, not take on the increased costs that a salary adjustment would require.

89. *El Universal*, February 19, 1959.

90. The fact that Benjamín Méndez continued to negotiate with the STFRM added to the perception that workers were in a position of strength. *Excélsior*, January 21, 1959.

91. *El Universal*, February 27, 1959.

92. Soon after Méndez announced the FNM could not afford to raise wages, articles appeared in the press that affirmed Méndez's position and lambasted the position of the STFRM. *Excélsior*, February 24, 1959. In *Excélsior*, February 12, 1959, a reporter described ferrocarrileros as "antipatriotic" and concluded that their demands were based on a "criminal egoism."

93. *Excélsior*, February 14, 1959.

94. *El Universal*, February 27, 1959.

95. *Excélsior*, February 24, 1959.

96. *El Universal*, February 22, 1959. Other articles denounced the STFRM's "socialist" position. "Socialismo de estado vs. libre empressa," *Excélsior*, February 14, 1959.

97. Problems between railway workers and the Ferrcarril del Pacifico had been brewing for at least four years before the STFRM sought benefits for their members in 1959. In 1955, for instance, workers at Ferrocarril del Pacifico asked President Ruiz Cortines to intervene on their behalf and pressure the private railway company to give the rank and file 150 pesos more each month. The president disappointed them. See AGN, ARC, vol. 658, 513/10 and AGN, ARC, vol. 658, 513/19.

98. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 109 L 14, January 8, 1959.

99. *Excélsior*, February 17, 1959.

100. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–249, February 24, 1959.

101. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 206 L 14, January 31, 1959; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 205 L 14, February 17, 1959; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 150 L 14, 1959; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 206 L 14, January 31, 1959.

102. Meanwhile, the police in the capital was busy threatening workers and their supporters that they would face arrest if they protested. Reporters from *Excélsior* took sides with the police, explaining that workers presented a "threat to the country's economy." See *Excélsior*, February 21, 1959.

103. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 155 L 14, January 21, 1959.

104. *El Universal*, February 26, 1959; Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 41.

105. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–2559, February 25, 1959.

106. *Excélsior*, February 24, 1959; *El Universal*, March 2, 1959.

107. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 220 L 14, February 19, 1959.

108. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 58 L 14, December 21, 1958; AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–958 H 30 L 14, 1958.

109. This article made it incumbent upon companies with 200 or more employees to create a housing fund for employees. For Campa's comments, see his interview in Mraz, *Hechos sobre los rieles*.

110. On the gains won in February, see Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 105–106.

111. Vallejo, *Las luchas*, 42–43.

112. AGN, DFS, Fondo Ferrocarrilero, Extp. 26–1–959 H 58 L 15, February 26, 1959; NACP, RG 59, 812.062/2–2659, February 26, 1959.

113. NACP, RG 59, 812.061/3–259, March 2, 1959.

5. Railroaded

1. Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, 3:91.

2. I will refer to these firms as "independent" because they were separate from the FNM, which operated about 80 percent of the country's rail system.

3. *El Universal*, March 8, 1959. Terminal de Veracruz was a train station in the state. The FNM, Ferrocarriles Mexicanos, and Ferrocarril del Pacifico owned its stock, but it was managed independently of the three companies.

4. Juan Colín and José Jorge Ramírez, railway leaders in Mexico City and Puebla, respectively, identified as Marxists and held Campa in high esteem. Meanwhile, workers who did not want the movement to associate itself with Marxist parties, such as Narciso Nava and Antonio Moreno, viewed Campa as a self-interested pest. Interview with Juan Colín, by author, July 1999; interviews with José Jorge Ramírez, December 2003 and February 2004; interview with Nava, May 2004; interviews with Moreno, January and March 2004.

5. Interview with Colín, 1999.

6. Interview with Vallejo, by Poniatowska, 1972.

7. Interview with Elena Poniatowska, by author, June 2004.

8. Campa details his role in the movement in his autobiography, *Mí Testimonio*. Vallejo confirms Campa's involvement. See Vallejo, *Las luchas*.

9. Interview with Colín, 1999. Colín's role as organizer during the movement, including the use of his home for meetings attended by Demetrio Vallejo, is mentioned in Gill, *Los Ferrocarrileros*, 164.

10. *El Universal*, March 9, 1959.

11. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 105.

12. NACP, RG 59, 812.061/3–259, March 2, 1959.

13. Gill, *Los Ferrocarrileros*, 191.

14. Interview with Moreno, 2004.

15. *El Universal*, March 26, 1959; Vallejo, *Las luchas*.

16. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/3–3059, March 30, 1959; *El Universal*, March 27, 1959.

17. *El Universal*, March 26, 1959.

18. Marcelino Aquino B., Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 1; Carlos Bernal Romo, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3.

19. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/4–259, April 2, 1959.

20. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/3–3059, March 30, 1959.

21. Interview with José Jorge Ramírez, 2004. Company records suggest that others may have faked sickness in order to avoid making the decision to cross the picket line and go back to work. Emilio Borges Brioso, a warehouse worker in Chiapas, claimed to be sick between March 16 and April 24, 1959. CEDIF, FNM personnel dossier, Emilio Borges Brioso, Matías Romero, box 3.

22. On the peons' living conditions, see Villafuerte, *Ferrocarriles*, 17.

23. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/4–159, April 2, 1959. This was a concern for Carlos Salazar Ramìrez, whose family lived in a tent in a remote town. Interview with Salazar Ramírez, 2004.

24. Interview with Guadalupe Acosta, by author, 2004.

25. NACP, RG 59, 712.00/4–3059, April 30, 1959.

26. Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 632.

27. Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 632; Gill, *Los Ferrocarrileros*.

28. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/3–3059, March 30, 1959; *Revista Ferronales*, April 1959. Police arrested 700 strikers in Guadalajara and Torreon. See *Siempre!* April 15, 1959.

29. Marcelino Aquino B., Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 1; Carlos Bernal Romo, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3. These dossiers document the existence of soldiers at stations during the strikes.

30. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/4–159, April 1, 1959.

31. César Carbajal Vallejo, a trainman from Matías Romero, was jailed for over a week at the Salina Cruz military encampment. He was one of the many workers permanently fired from the FNM for participating in the strikes and refusing to sign a confession. See César Carbajal Vallejo, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3.

32. Marcelino Aquino, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 1. Aquino was hired as a scab to replace a fired worker and is a good example of how the FNM scrambled to hire replacements for jailed workers. The following workers were fired. Octavo Bonilla del Rivero, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3; San Luis Potosí, box 7; Francisco Espinosa Villalobos, Matías Romero, box 6; Hilario Badillo Leos, San Luis Potosí, box 7; Daniel Cinta Valencia, Matías Romero, box 3; Ildefonso Aquino Castillo, Matías Romero, box 3; Octavio Bonilla del Rivero, Matías Romero, box 3; Adan Cortés Ceballos, Matías Romero, box 3; César Carbajal Vallejo, Matías Romero, box 4; Eleazar de los Santos Garcia, Matías Romero, box 4; Francisco Rodriguez Barrientos, San Luis Potosí, box 11; Francisco Espinosa Villalobos, Matías Romero, box 6; Obdulio Arena A., Matías Romero, box 1; Adrian Cruz Cabrera, Matías Romero, box 5; Gildardo de la Herrera, Matías Romero,

box 5; Roland Alfaro Germaño, Matías Romero, box 5; Felix Alvarado Hernandez, Matías Romero, box 2; Hector Casanova Martínez, Matías Romero, box 4.

33. NACP, RG 59, 712.00/6–3059, June 30, 1959.

34. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/4–1459, April 14, 1959.

35. "Ferrocarriles Nacionales," *El Universal*, March 25, 1959.

36. In 1958 an article in the FNM magazine calculated that the FNM transported 500 million passengers during Holy Week. Buenavista Station, the principal railway hub in Mexico City, hosted 280,000 passengers a day. FNM employed all of its locomotives during Holy Week. See *Revista Ferronales*, April 1958.

37. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/4–159, April 1, 1959; President López Mateos received letters from people in small towns near Texacoco explaining how the railway enabled them to move their products to the capital. AGN, Fondo Adolfo López Mateos ALM, v. 568, 513.3/4. The president received letters from people in Ocotlán, Puebla, who complained that the strike violated their right to ride trains. AGN, ALM, v. 567, 513.1/3. A letter from rural Puebla explained that without the railway, the "area will collapse, commerce needs the ferrocarril." AGN, ALM, v. 567, 513.2/6.

38. A study that the government intended to present at Vallejo's trial had arrived at this figure. NACP, RG 59, 812.06/8–2459, August 24, 1959.

39. Vallejo, "Agítador comunista," *El Universal*, February 25, 1959.

40. "No se paradán dos dias que duro la huegla," *Excélsior*, February 24, 1959.

41. González Blanco later announced he had no intention of meeting with STFRM leaders to negotiate a settlement. *Revista Ferronales*, April 1959.

42. *El Universal*, March 29, 1959; Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 119.

43. Campa notes that the general strike continued until April 12, which overstates the rank and file's position. By this time the government had already effectively put an end to the strikes by occupying workplaces. Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 248.

44. This was particularly the case in Monterrey, where FNM officials sought to fire up to 1000 yard workers. NACP, RG 59, 712.00/5–1959, May 19, 1959.

45. FNM fired Octavio Bonilla del Rivero, an STFRM representative, on March 30 for his role as an "instigator." Octavio Bonilla del Rivero, Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 3.

46. This soldier, Marcelino Aquino B., became a full-time FNM employee. He replaced Carlos Bernal Romo, a striker with no left hand. FNM documents reveal that company officials found Romo's involvement in the strikes an opportune reason for not allowing him to return to work. Marcelino Aquino B., Matías Romero, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF, box 1; Carlos Bernal Romo, Matías Romero, box 3.

47. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/7–1059, July 10, 1959.

48. Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 250; Roxborough, *Unions and Politics in Mexico*, 25.

49. Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 252.

50. Interview with Campa in Mraz, *Hechos sobre los rieles*.

51. Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 253; for more on Campa's views on the role of the United States on the strikes, see Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 155–57.

52. On the POCM and anti-imperialism, see Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 152–53.

53. NACP, 912.61/6–2656, June 26, 1956.

54. NACP, RG 59, 912.61/6–2756, June 27, 1956.

55. Interview with Colín, 1999.

56. President Ruiz Cortines had been warned in 1954 that communist activists associated with the POCM had successfully organized railway workers in Guadalajara. The memo named Valentín Campa and Luis Gómez Z. as Marxist agitators. AGN, ARC, v. 659, 513/19. Former railway workers Jesús Padilla Soto recalls that the PCM had support from Section 13, Matías Romero, the section to which Demetrio Vallejo belonged. Padilla Soto, *A los ferrocarrilers Nacionales se los llevo el tren*.

57. "Discute Vallejo sus planes con una junta comunista," *El Universal*, August 25, 1958; "Vallejo y sus correligionarios conspiran," *El Universal*, February 9, 1959; "Abajo los usurpadores," *El Universal*, February 25, 1958.

58. "La secretaría de trabajo obra con apego a la ley," *El Universal*, August 30, 1958.

59. Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 139, 189.

60. BUO's ads ran regularly in *El Universal*. See "Superación de las clases proletarias," *El Universal*, December 2, 1958; "Contra la Patria," *El Universal*, February 27, 1959. The paper supports BUO's claims that the STFRM manipulates its members.

61. González Camacho, *Las luchas*, 21.

62. *El Universal*, December 2, 1958.

63. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/3–2659, March 31, 1959.

64. *El Universal*, February 24, 1959.

65. *El Universal*, February 27, 1959.

66. *El Universal*, February 25, 1959.

67. *El Universal*, March 18, 1959.

68. *El Universal*, February 9, 1959.

69. Those who opposed dissidents marveled at Vallejo's rise to power. Jesús Padilla Soto, for instance, maintains that Vallejo was a "Mr. Nobody," known primarily in Oaxaca and Veracruz. Padilla Soto, *A los ferrocarrilers Nacionales se los llevo el tren*.

70. *Siempre!* March 1959.

71. Demetrio Vallejo, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

72. Interview with Colín, by author, 1999.

73. Interview with Benitez, by Poniatowska, 1972.

74. Interview with Poniatowska, by author, 2008.

75. Interview with Benitez, by Poniatowksa, 1972.

76. Interview with Maria Hernández Orozco, by author, 2004.

77. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/11–1959, November 19, 1959.

78. Interview with Benitez, by Poniatowska, 1972.

79. Benitez does not give Señora Marina's last name.

80. Interview with Vallejo, by Poniatowska, 1972.

81. Interview with Benitez, by Poniatowska, 1972.

82. NACP, RG 59, 812.062/4–1759, April 17, 1959.

83. The following discussion of Vallejo's trial can be found in Vallejo's work dossier, which is held under lock and key at CEDIF. The document is well over a hundred pages and details the legal arguments in great detail. It also includes the depositions of witnesses who testified against Vallejo. See Demetrio Vallejo, Carcel Preventiva, D.F., and Extp. B-61 4032/59, Supreme Court, August 26, 1970, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

84. The press had reported that critics denounced Article 145 as unconstitutional and argued that it violated the Constitution. "Contra el delito Social," *Siempre!* October 1, 1958.

85. The following discussion can be found in Demetrio Vallejo, Carcel Preventiva, D.F., Extp. B-61 4032/59 and August 6, 1970, Supreme Court, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

86. Days earlier the press had reported that Vallejo was plotting a coup to overthrow the government. "Vallejo contra Mexico," *El Universal*, March 18, 1959.

87. *El Universal*, September 18, 1959.

88. Interview with Campa in Mraz, *Hechos sobre los rieles*.

89. Ortega, *Estado y movimiento*, 92.

90. Demetrio Vallejo, Especial no. 1, 522/59, January 1, 1960, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

91. Demetrio Vallejo, Deposition of Guillermo Haas Rodríguez and Cesar Márquez Gómez, Grupo Especial no. 1, 522/59, November 30, 1959, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

92. Demetrio Vallejo, Carcel Preventiva, D.F., and Extp. B-61 4032/59 and August 6, 1970, Supreme Court, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

93. Carcel Preventiva, D.F. and Extp. B-61 4032/59, August 6, 1970, Supreme Court, FNM personnel dossier, Collection of Prominent Figures, CEDIF.

94. Roca, *Km C-62*, 126.

95. Interview with Nava, 2004; interview with Salazar Ramírez, 2004; interviews with Moreno, 2004; interview with Huerta, 1999; interview with Mortera, 1999. Former railway activists who identified as Marxists lament that the majority of workers were uninformed of Marxism and lacked a revolutionary critique of the PRI and capitalism. Interview with Colín, 1999; interview with Niño Mendes, 2004.

96. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*, 68, 105–107.

97. Campa, *Mí Testimonio*, 244–51.

98. Interview with Jorge Ramírez, 2003.

99. Interview with Salazar Ramírez, 2004.

Conclusion

1. Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution*.

2. Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 155, 179, 180.

3. On Allende and the labor movement in the 1970s, see Winn, *Weavers of Revolution*.

4. Interview with Elias Teran Gómez in Mraz, *Hechos sobre los rieles*.

5. E. Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*, 74.

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