

346

**THE SINARQUISTA MOVEMENT**  
**WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PERIOD**  
**1934-1944**

BY

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis has two principal objectives: firstly, to provide a systematic account of the evolution of the Sinarquista Movement in Mexico from 1934 to 1944 and, secondly, to evaluate the extent to which the Movement was instrumental in the shift to the right of the Mexican Revolution.

The first part of the thesis outlines the historical and political context in which the Sinarquista Movement appeared. It argues that the *modus vivendi* that came out of the 1929 agreements between the Church and the State, which brought to an end the Cristero rebellion, was broken by the left-oriented government of Lázaro Cárdenas, which alienated the Catholics and exasperated the propertied classes. Against this background took place the consolidation of Catholic organizations.

The following three chapters then trace the evolution of the Sinarquista Movement from its inception in the Mexican political scene, to its apogee after the 1941 presidential elections and, to its collapse and fragmentation in 1945. Each chapter considers the relations and the perceptions of the Church, the Government and the United States. In each case, the analysis is organized around two critical developments: the changing character of the Mexican régime and, the growing concern of the Catholic conservative sector, the power behind the Sinarquista Movement, about the radicalization of the Movement, which threatened to compromise the Church. Part three seeks to evaluate

Synarchist organization and ideology. It argues that the failures of the Mexican Revolution in agriculture and in education provided the conditions for the success of Synarchism among the poorest Mexican masses. It nevertheless also argues that because of the lack of alliances with other nationalist groups and of a precise programme of action, the fate of the Movement ultimately rested with the actors that manipulated it.

## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS</b>	8
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	10
<b>PART ONE THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND</b>	14
<b>CHAPTER I THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE (1923-1934)</b>	15
I The End of the Cristero Rebellion	26
1 The Modus vivendi	26
2 Calles and the persecution of the Church	29
3 The political nature of the Cristiada	30
4 Modus vivendi vs. modus moriendi	35
II The Presidential Election of 1934	52
1 Socialist education	57
2 Catholic reaction	61
Endnotes	74
<b>CHAPTER II THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT CÁRDENAS</b>	86
I The Organization of the Masses	89
1 The workers	89
2 The peasants	108
II Relations with the Church	117
1 Religious persecution	121
III The Rise of the Secular Radical Right	127
1 The Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista	129
2 The CPRM	135
3 The CCM and the UNVR	136
4 Cedillo	139
IV Church-State Détente	142
Endnotes	147

	<u>Page</u>
<b>CHAPTER III PRE-SYNARCHISM</b>	159
I "La Base"	162
1 Objectives and tactics	165
2 Relations between the "Base" and the League	166
3 Organization	169
i Regional division	
ii Sections	
iii The leadership of the Base	
iv The secret leaders	
4 Activities	177
i "The spiritual reconquest of Tabasco"	
ii The Base and labour	
5 The Decline of the legions	187
6 The birth of Synarchism	193
i The Manifesto of the organizing committee	
ii The UNS and the Base	
iii The rise of Synarchism	
iv The UNS and the 1940 elections	
Endnotes	220
<b>PART TWO CHRONOLOGY OF THE MOVEMENT, 1934-1945</b>	228
<b>CHAPTER IV EMERGENCE IN THE POLITICAL SCENE 1939-1940</b>	229
I The UNS and other Nationalist Groups	230
II Synarchism Survives the Elections	241
III The decline of the Nationalist Right	245
IV The leadership of Abascal	254
V Militaristic Organization	267
VI The Government's Response	273
Endnotes	279

	<u>Page</u>
<b>CHAPTER V THE FALL OF SALVADOR ABASCAL</b>	287
I Division in the UNS	287
II The Colonization of Lower California	289
III The Leadership of Torres Bueno	297
IV The Rôle of the American Clergy	308
V The removal of Abascal	313
1 The UNS, the Base and the American Embassy	313
2 The UNS and the government	320
VI The Crisis of 1943	328
1 The "fatal blunder"	329
Endnotes	339
<b>CHAPTER VI DIVISION OF THE UNS</b>	351
I The Collapse of the UNS	351
II The Split Between the UNS and the Base, 1945	352
1 The "dissidents"	360
2 Consequences	360
i Division and confusion	
ii Disorganization	366
III The Partido Fuerza Popular	366
IV The 1945 Elections	370
V Synarchism in 1947	373
Endnotes	382
<b>PART THREE IDEOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION</b>	385
<b>CHAPTER VII IDEOLOGY</b>	386
I The Synarchist Concept of the Ideal Régime	386
II The Synarchist Movement and the Second World War	391



	<u>Page</u>
III Synarchism and the Mexican Political System	409
1 The peasants against the official agrarian policy	417
2 Synarchists and ejidatarios	419
IV The UNS and the Agrarian Problem	425
V Synarchism and Socialist Education	433
1 Synarchism and education	435
VI The Abandonment of Socialist Education	442
Endnotes	447
<b>CHAPTER VIII ORGANIZATION AND MYSTIQUE</b>	<b>456</b>
I Synarchist militia	456
II The Synarchist Movement and the Cristeros	458
III The Synarchist Organization	461
1 The committees	462
2 The leaders	466
3 Finances	469
IV The Synarchist Programme	472
1 Municipio	477
V Synarchism and Labour	481
VI Synarchism and Catholicism	486
VII Synarchism and the Defence of the Church	490
VIII Synarchism and Nationalism	499
1 Synarchism and the United States	502
2 The Synarchist mission	503
IX The Synarchist concept of the State: Christian Social Order	504
1 An ideological framework	510
2 Hispanidad	513
Endnotes	517
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>525</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>531</b>

### LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACJM	Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana
ARM	Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista
CCM	Confederación de la Clase Media
CGOCM	Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México
CGT	Confederación General del Trabajo
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina
CPRM	Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana
CROM	Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México
LNDLR	Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana
PRUN	Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Nacional
UNS	Unión Nacional Sinarquista
UNVR	Unión Nacional de Veteranos de la Revolución
VNM	Vanguardia Nacionalista Mexicana

### List of abbreviations used in the Notes

AGN	Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City. Followed by the section (ramo), series, file (expediente), and document number.
FO	The British Foreign Office Archive in the Public Record Office, London. Followed by the series and file number and the document reference in brackets.
INAH	Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Followed by the series and microfilm number and the cataloguing number in brackets.

NAW

The National Archive of the United States,  
Washington, D.C. Followed by the Record Group  
(RG), Record of the Office of Strategic Services  
(OSS) Number, and document number.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the politics of Mexico over a ten year period, during which emerged a political phenomenon that in the first half of the twentieth century was common to all the Western World. This phenomenon was the rapid expansion, after the First World War, of popular, nationalist movements, which were authoritarian and without ideology, which can be collectively classified under right-wing radical movements.

Until recently, historians of modern Mexico tended to neglect the years 1920 to 1940 and concentrate upon the first phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) or upon the deeds of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). During the last ten years, however, an attempt has been made to rectify this imbalance. The most important contribution has been the remarkable account of Jean Meyer of the Cristero rebellion. Other examples are the Colegio de México's *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, especially volumes VII to XIX, and Campbell's study of the Mexican radical Right.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, understanding of the subject is still rudimentary and incomplete, and the knowledge that has been assembled in this regard is not sufficient to formulate more than a few tentative conclusions as to its true nature. Besides, its novelty suggests that an attempt to situate it in an historical perspective must, by necessity be tentative. In spite of this, it is hoped that this thesis will contribute towards a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Despite the assertions of those who saw Synarchism as a peripheral phenomenon in the contemporary history of Mexico, the history of the Synarchist Movement from 1934 to 1944 gives prominence to the significance of the rôle played by this movement in the political swing to the right of the Mexican Revolution since 1940.

Very few studies have been dedicated to the Mexican Right, and even less to individual organizations. In Mexico, as in most other countries, the right had a negative appearance; more specifically, it emerged as a reaction to the Mexican Revolution and to the social changes that it promised, especially against the Marxist turn that the Revolution adopted in the thirties. On the other hand, the Mexican Right was characterized by its xenophobia and an exacerbated hatred of the United States. Another element was its contempt of democracy and the reluctance to submit to the normal process of decision making to achieve the changes desired. Thus, the Mexican Right can be defined as ultranationalist, anti-parliamentarian and anti-marxist.

However, the Right in Mexico was not a monolithic movement. On the contrary, a brief glance reveals that one of its main characteristics was its fragmentary nature and its incapacity to achieve cohesion, which would have provided it with the necessary means to pose a viable threat to the government. It was only the Synarchist Movement which succeeded in attracting a large number of followers; yet, as we shall see, Synarchism was unable to forge a sufficient basis of support to seize power. The

fact that it had a religious foundation was a fundamental factor that contributed to its failure. Above all, at the time when it was at the peak of its strength, Synarchism was an organization directed towards promoting the interests of the Church, devised and upheld with the aim of recovering and retaining her privileges and her position in Mexican society, as a response to the threat that the Mexican Revolution presented her.

We chose the Synarchist Movement as the organization in which to analyse the conflict of interests - religious, political and social - that shaped the opposition of the Revolution, since this was the group that caused the most concern, at home and abroad. Synarchist dominance of the opposition after 1940 was so dramatic that we were drawn to find out how it rose to that position and why it collapsed so swiftly. In so doing we became aware of the ignorance and misconception that has surrounded, and still continues to surround, the subject.

It is impossible to understand the growth of Synarchism without reference to the political and social conditions that prevailed in Mexico after the Cristero revolt, during the presidency of Cárdenas, and the development of the Regime from 1929 onwards which was inextricably linked to the advancement of the Right.

An additional benefit to be derived from studying the life of an important movement such as the Synarchist movement is that it allows the analyst to address one of the cardinal problems of the Revolution: the rôle of the peasantry. Contrary to the traditional view that the

Mexican Revolution was a successful peasant revolt, which through subsequent agrarian reform provided the rural masses with substantial material rewards; more recent accounts, such as Meyer and Alvear Acevedo, have suggested that the masses were simply mobilized by the national bourgeoisie to overthrow the Ancien Regime only to be brought under the tight control of the ruling class once they aspired to goals of their own. They have emphasized the manipulation of the rural masses in the Revolutionary period and popular resistance to the régime which was manifested in the Cristiada and the Synarchist Movement.

We do not pretend that our study even begins to settle that issue, but we hope that it sheds some light upon it in the context of the Synarchist Movement.

This thesis is not methodological or conceptual. It is, however, above all, a political history of a unique phenomenon in contemporary Mexican politics, which has not been told sufficiently. The objective is to attempt to bridge this vacuum in the History of Mexico.

#### ENDNOTES

1. For the works by these and other authors mentioned in the introduction, see the bibliography at the end of the thesis.

**PART ONE**

**THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND**



## CHAPTER I

### THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE (1928-1934)

The years 1929 to 1935 correspond to the emergence of an important political phenomenon: the consolidation of the Mexican political system.

The Cristero rebellion (1926-1929) was the last drama of the Mexican Revolution and, also, the last violent act in the tense and usually misunderstood Church-State relations.

The Church never forgot the lessons of the Cristero revolt. It distanced Catholics, even more, from the Government; but most significantly, it created division, first among laymen, then among the clergy and, finally, between the two.

As the conflict evolved, the Church moved from a position of tacit approval of the rebellion, to one of moderation that made possible, in 1929, an eventual agreement with the Government to end the conflict. After 1929, the upper hierarchy of the Church, obeying papal orders, did not wish to unleash another costly and unpredictable open war, nor did it wish to let down the many Catholics who demanded violent action to recover the rights of the Church. The next step in the policy of moderation was the organization of the Catholic laity for positive social action.

Calles was the dominant figure in Mexican politics for almost ten years. After he left the Presidency in 1928, he pursued his idea of the Revolution from behind

the scenes by manipulating, controlling and even replacing the President.

The relative peace in Church-State relations came to an abrupt end in 1931. The resurgence of the conflict was originally confined to a regional level and did not immediately seem to threaten the basic state of relations. But, after the persecution spread to the rest of the country and, finally, to the capital, the situation of the Church had worsened so much that in the opinion of the Apostolic Delegate the Church had ceased to exist in Mexico.

Calles was challenged by revolutionary radicals who demanded fulfilment of the social reforms contained in the Constitution. He had to listen to them in order to preserve his power and unite the Party. The concessions he granted were essentially anticlerical; the most important of which were legislation limiting the number of priests and reforms in education.

We analyse, here, the series of events that led, from the signing of the agreements of 1929, which established a *modus vivendi* between Church and State, to the renewal of persecution in 1931 and the way in which Catholic opposition was organized.

We begin by giving an interpretation of the nature of the *modus vivendi*, underlining the divisions and pressures that threatened its existence. We then proceed to describe the way in which religious persecution was renewed. We conclude this chapter with an exposition of the organizing process of Catholic reaction.

The historical study of these events is fundamental to the understanding of the evolution and the nature of Catholic political opposition, in that it provides its ideological background and conforms its framework. Synarchism was not the product of spontaneous generation, but the result of a long and exacting process that made possible its sudden appearance.

### **I. The End of the Cristero Revolt**

After 1921, the Obregón and Calles governments became increasingly involved in frequent and serious conflicts with the Church hierarchy and lay leadership.

When, in 1925, the Episcopacy reacted to President Calles' covert support of an Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Mexican Church with a Mexican patriarch linked to Mexican nationalism,<sup>1</sup> and when in 1926 Archbishop José Mora y del Río reaffirmed the hierarchy's refusal to accept Articles 3, 5, 27, and 130 of the 1917 Constitution, Calles acted to implement the Constitution. He began the deportation of foreign-born priests, closed convents, secularized education, and demanded the registration of all priests with the Government in order to regulate their "professional conduct".<sup>2</sup>

Lay Catholic leaders organized the National League for the Defence of Religious Freedom (LNDLR), to "reconquer religious liberty" by all means possible, including armed force. An estimated 20,000 rebels, known as "cristeros", were mobilized between 1926 and 1929, in order to fight in the name of "Christ the King".<sup>3</sup>

As spontaneous armed movements spread in various states, the League mobilized its organization to unite these small movements into unified struggle for the recovery of religious liberty.

The objective of the movement which was centred in the western states was not to overthrow the Government, but to win recognition for "essential religious liberties".<sup>4</sup> Once religious liberty was won, the war could be over.<sup>5</sup> But it soon became obvious that religious liberty could not be sufficiently ensured if the Government was not defeated.<sup>6</sup>

The League was neither dependent on, nor the responsibility of the prelates or the Church in general. It asserted its Catholicity and its submission to the teachings of the Encyclicals in relation to the exercise of social action. In this respect, it was compelled not to exceed Catholic doctrine and Catholic principles.<sup>7</sup> It was a novel institution; representatives of other Catholic institutions were invited to form the League. It was not, however, a confederation of Catholic organizations.

Hence, the League presented a petition to the Mexican hierarchy on 26 November 1926, asking for the Episcopacy's approval of armed defence and to enable priests to serve canonically as military men.<sup>8</sup>

The League has always argued that the Episcopal Committee<sup>9</sup> approved the petition with the reservation that it could not authorize priests to function as military men but would give permission for the clergy to minister to military forces.<sup>10</sup>

According to the public declaration of the episcopal authorities and with the attitude they adopted from the outset to the religious conflict, that is, extreme tactfulness with respect to anything that might suggest their participation in it, it could be said that if they were always cautious never to appear as promoters or instigators of armed rebellion, they did give their support to it the moment they saw in it the possibility of obtaining the establishment of a social order in line with their ideology. An argument in favour of this would be that they did not oppose, in principle, Catholics "making use of their civil rights", or organizing themselves to defend what they considered their "essential rights", even by means of armed force.<sup>11</sup> Besides, church authorities had participated, more or less actively, in the development of the conflict - not always complying with Rome's instructions - until it ended in armed struggle.

Not only were the bishops consulted when the organization of the armed movement began, but being aware that a rebellion against the Government was in process, they did not do anything to stop it, once it had broken out. Yet, there is a logic behind this attitude: Pope Pius IX's apostolic letter **PATERNA SANE SOLLICITUDO**, of 2 February 1926<sup>12</sup> which instructed them to hold themselves entirely aloof from every kind of political party, came out at the very same time that they were considering an obligation to repudiate the rigorous application of the articles of the Constitution.

The position of the Episcopacy was clear. Initially,

it gave its support, though not openly, to the League in the organization of the armed rebellion, as long as it saw in it the possibility of success, and even backed its leader,<sup>13</sup> who was instructed to go to the United States to obtain economic aid and moral support for the struggle; but when the movement declined<sup>14</sup> and it became obvious that it would fail, it withdrew that support leaving it to its fate, and, what is more, later on, without consulting the League, negotiated with the Government, through its representatives, a "modus vivendi", seizing the opportunity that the new Government of Portes Gil represented.

Archbishop Pascual Díaz later declared that the League had solicited hierarchical support; but affirmed that although the Episcopacy did not stop the movement, neither did it give its approval to the armed conflict. The hierarchy, he said, had no reason to interfere in the League's affairs, since it was at liberty to conduct itself and defend its rights in its own way.

A partial settlement of the religious difficulty and the resumption of services in the Catholic churches of Mexico followed soon after the inauguration of President Emilio Portes Gil. The new president declared on 1 May, 1929:

"No religion will be persecuted, nor is the Government guilty of any persecution of any sect. Liberty of conscience will be respected as heretofore. The Catholic clergy, when they wish, may renew the exercise of their rites with only one obligation, that they respect the laws of the land as the ministers of other denominations are doing."<sup>15</sup>

On 9th June, 1929, having received approval from the Pope to undertake negotiations, Archbishop Ruíz Flores and Bishop Pascual Díaz y Barreto returned to Mexico from exile in the United States.<sup>16</sup> During the next couple of weeks, intense diplomatic negotiations took place, with peace looking nearer every day. The prelates had two meetings with Portes Gil, a friendly one on 12th June, and a tense, disconcerting one the following day.<sup>17</sup> Like the bishops, the President faced strong opposition from his own camp. He received messages from the most intransigent anticlericals, labour and Masonic groups urging him to continue his hard line on the clergy.<sup>18</sup>

Had it not been for the efforts of influential foreigners, American Ambassador Morrow<sup>19</sup> in particular, an agreement would perhaps have been more difficult to arrive at. He manipulated his contacts with the Mexican hierarchy, the Vatican, Portes Gil, and the American State Department.

To avoid further friction between president and prelates, he himself prepared drafts for both sides and delivered them personally, suggesting that parties refrain from meeting again until they had read and approved each other's statements. On 17 June, the basis for a settlement was approved, and on 21 June the Pope signified his acceptance.

The President declared that neither the Constitution nor the Law nor the Government wished to destroy the identity of the Catholic Church, or of any cult, or to intervene in any way in its spiritual functions; he

emphasized, however, that he had a responsibility to see that the laws were upheld and to hear complaints based on "improper application of the laws".<sup>20</sup>

With reference to certain articles of the law which had been "poorly understood", he explained:

- (1) the Government was not to register ministers who had not been named "by a hierarchical superior of the respective religious creed",
- (2) religious instruction was prohibited in public or private primary or higher schools, but it could be imparted within the church precincts,
- (3) all residents of the Republic, and therefore the members of any church, "may apply to the appropriate authorities for reform, repeal or issuance of any law".

Archbishop Ruíz y Flores issued a statement declaring:

"the conversations have been marked by a spirit of mutual good will and respect and that as a consequence of President Portes Gil's statement "the Mexican clergy will resume religious services pursuant to the laws in force."<sup>21</sup>

These statements brought to an end three years of bloody war. In the words of an analyst:

"[The Cristiada] terminated with neither a bang or a whimper, it simply melted away in the wake of the arreglos."<sup>22</sup>

But the arreglos did not end the divisions inside



both camps; on the contrary, they were exacerbated. And the evolution of those divisions determined attitudes and the course of events.

The Cristero revolt was decisive in establishing the official position of the Church in Mexico. Before 1926, the traditionally oriented conservative segment headed by Archbishop Leopoldo Mora Y del Río, dominated the Church Synods. Under his leadership, the hierarchy which supported militant action was in control of Church policy and a truce with the Government was not feasible.<sup>23</sup>

There was a change in the Church's official stand after the death of Mora y del Río which allowed Church moderates under Bishops Pascual Díaz Barreto and Leopoldo Ruíz y Flores to come to power.

Monsignor Díaz had been working on a settlement with the Government long before 1929.<sup>24</sup> His opposition to the armed movement was known. He felt that the suspension of cults had failed, and that a continuation of it could lose forever its position among the people and only a truce could restore to the clergy some leadership in Mexican society.

There was a lack of unity of action in the Episcopacy itself, in the sense that very early in the conflict, there were a division of tendencies: one, represented by Archbishop Ruíz y Flores and by Archbishop Díaz y Barreto, favoured peace; the other was completely opposed, favouring continued war, and included Archbishop José María González y Valencia; Archbishop Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, and bishops Leopoldo Lara y Torres and Jesús

Manríquez y Zarate.<sup>25</sup> In general, the tendency was not to give in until the laws were reformed. However, it was felt that although the aim of the Cristero movement was to obtain religious liberty, it could not be sufficiently ensured if the Government was not overthrown.<sup>26</sup> Yet, because of the strong support the government was getting from the Americans (evident during the Escobar rebellion) it was impossible to bring that action.<sup>27</sup>

The "conciliatory" faction, with the Apostolic Delegation in Washington, convinced the Pope that the war could bring no practical good for the Church. The "intransigent" faction, especially the League, believed that even if the overthrow of the government was not achieved, they would win freedom, freedom of the Church, and of all the essential human rights. According to them, the change in the Episcopacy's attitude was the result of American pressure: when armed resistance erupted, the White House decided to back Calles and his Government.<sup>28</sup>

To the League and its supporters, the agreements were ill-timed because

- (1) the **Guardia Nacional** (the Cristero army) could successfully continue waging a guerrilla war, their forces were not strong enough to confront the Government in open combat;
- (2) the economic situation was weakening the Government; Wall Street banking circles told the Mexican Government that the rebellion should be finished because the country was no longer able to service its foreign debt;

(3) the army itself had been tragically divided by the Escobar rebellion.<sup>29</sup>

In relation to the third point, the evidence seems to suggest the contrary. The swift and crushing defeat of the military rebellion<sup>30</sup> not only struck a final blow to the Obregonist opposition, but it also ended the expectations of elements opposed to the federal government and to "callismo."<sup>31</sup> General Gorostieta, Commander-in-Chief of the Cristero forces, assessing the situation thought that theirs had worsened rather than improved with the uprising. This was not immediately apparent, he observed, but after closer examination, that was the likely conclusion: this uprising was bound to fail, like the previous one in Veracruz in 1927,<sup>32</sup> because they lacked in ideals and the leaders and officers lacked integrity and commitment. Once defeated, Calles would return to face the Cristeros with a strong and disciplined army, proud of its victories; while they would still be in the same precarious position.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Government could not definitively defeat the Cristeros in the western states, neither could the League's forces gain further momentum or material support from other regions of the country.<sup>34</sup> Of the estimated twenty five thousand men in rebellion against the Government in 1927, only eighteen thousand were well armed while the rest had virtually no equipment.<sup>35</sup>

It would appear, therefore, that by 1929 the situation was blocked, with no side able to win. The central government finally understood that by re-

establishing liberty of worship, it could disarm the Cristeros, which it did. Gorostieta knew this when he said: "the moment they open the churches, you will abandon me".<sup>36</sup>

#### 1. The Modus vivendi

Though the contentions of the Church and the State had seemed irreconcilable, at least in theory, the moderates from both sides agreed on a truce, a **modus vivendi**, that temporarily brought the conflict to an end.

The agreement was, as one writer put it:

"simply an understanding that depend(ed) upon the state of mind of relatively few men."<sup>37</sup>

As there was no treaty or concordat, and as the fundamental issues had not been solved, the future relations of the State and the Church rested on the attitudes of the parties concerned.

The result of what the League branded as merely "a sort of armistice",<sup>38</sup> meant that the division among lay Catholics and the Clergy was to be damaging for decades. The thrust of union, remarked Wilkie, was shattered by surrender of goals.<sup>39</sup> The State, on the other hand, had conceded little and gained time to consolidate its position in a difficult period.

This becomes more obvious if we understand the conflict not so much as a religious-anti-religious debate, the climatic outcome of the long-standing conflict between church and state in Mexico, but as a political issue.

The major works have viewed the rebellion as an

outcome of the Church-State conflict, and have imputed responsibility for the violent struggle to one or more of the rival groups. Quirk and Bailey, for instance, both concluded that the conflict was the result of a century-old struggle, an inevitable confrontation because:

"both showed an equal lack of tolerance for the ideas of others. It was impossible to reconcile the extreme claims made for the rival ideologies. [It was] a clash of incompatible and mutually exclusive ideologies, not of politicians, the result was a total test of where the grater power lay, and the greater power lay with the Government."<sup>40</sup>

By concentrating his study on the ideological nature of the conflict, Quirk confined it to the highest levels of both hierarchies. He viewed the Cristero rebellion as a by-product of the ideological conflict and thus the study of the rebellion itself is eluded because of its insignificance.

Bailey, on the other hand, centred his study on the actions of the élites, both Catholic and revolutionary, to account for the outbreak, development and consequences of the rebellion. He focused on two related conflicts: first, the perennial enmity between the Catholic Church in Mexico and the Mexican revolutionary state which reached its climax in 1926 and led to the Cristiada; and second, the internal division of the Mexican Catholic Church caused by the determination of Catholic militants to destroy the regime created by the 1910 revolution.<sup>41</sup> But, by focusing on these conflicts which he argued "help explain the cause and significance of the Cristero

rebellion", he relegated the Cristero phenomenon to a secondary plan.

Jean Meyer focused for the first time on the Cristeros. For him, the Cristeros were the victims of the Church-State conflict, in that the two powers sought to obtain the maximum advantage from the Cristero insurrection, and thus played with the fate of the rebels. In 1929, when the agreements were reached "the only vanquished were the cultivators".<sup>42</sup> Meyer's conclusions are in total contradiction to those of Bailey and Quirk. For him, the motivation behind the insurrection was religious; the massive support of the movement demonstrated the allegiance of the peasants to the Church.

Conversely, Quirk attributed the insignificance of the revolt to the failure of the Church to achieve the spiritual conversion of the countryside. And again, contrary to Bailey, Meyer characterizes the rebellion as "an exclusively rural event."<sup>43</sup> The League was never able to impose its leadership over the movement, and he sees as damaging and harmful to the Cristeros the instances when it attempted to interfere.<sup>44</sup> The Cristeros were on their own; they developed their own leadership and programmes. They did not lose the war, but were abandoned by the Vatican and the hierarchy:

"They were essentially peasants fighting a peasant war for their faith and in opposition to the domination of the middle and upper classes, regardless of their geographical location or religious attitudes."<sup>45</sup>

However his concern for the Cristeros biased his

opinion towards the hierarchy and the Vatican. He may disagree with their decisions, or their specific actions and judgements, but he should not accuse them of incompetence, opportunism and self-interest.

## 2. Calles and the persecution of the Church

What made the Government persecute the Catholic Church so relentlessly?

The policy that Calles followed was an attempt to integrate the Church into the Mexican political system. He solved the universal problem of how to keep control over the country after a revolution, by creating a monolithic political party, the National Revolutionary Party, or PNR, identified with the administration and charged with preventing any man or group becoming strong enough to challenge him, thus suppressing any alternative to his power.

The process of restructuring the nation and of forming a modern national identity were still incomplete. Consequently, the attack on the Church had to match the level of her social influence, which was great.<sup>46</sup> The fundamental problem was one of power and it was during this period that the contemporary political system, its institutions and its ideology, was settled. The three years of the Cristiada constitute a dividing line between the period and the emerging middle classes struggled to assert their dominance and the period when they firmly consolidated their power.

Between 1929 and 1935, the modern state was growing.

Any compromise with the Church would have seemed dangerous to it while the Mexican people remained attached to their traditional attitude towards the Church and the State, as well as to the notions of legitimate power, honour and justice. The Mexican State attacked the Catholic Church not because the latter was counter-revolutionary, but because the revolutionary leaders aimed to establish a strong nationalist state.

It could not tolerate any rivals, whether political parties, foreign economic interests or an independent institution which claimed the allegiance of the majority of the Mexican people.

With the absence of political parties during the twenties, the Catholic Church, her organization and social Catholic ideology, was perceived as the most pressing internal threat.<sup>47</sup>

### 3. The political nature of the Cristiada

The political nature of the Cristiada stands out when studying the political background, the rise and the apogee of Calles.

The conflict was an international affair in two ways: in the technical sense, insofar as the Catholic Church was an international institution under the authority of the Vatican which even after the loss of its temporal power had not ceased to maintain diplomatic relations with governments, and also because of the practical effect it had on the United States-Mexico relations. The American Catholic community was sympathetic to the cause of the



Mexican Church and pressed the American government to intervene in the conflict on behalf of Mexican Catholics.

Moreover, the United States government was complaining about the provisions of the Constitution that jeopardized American financial and business interests, particularly those in the oil industry. Furthermore, there was still the unsettled question of compensation for the land expropriation and damage incurred by American citizens during the Revolution.

Interventionist propaganda was active in Washington and Calles was aware that domestic insurrection could lead to foreign intervention. To prevent that from happening, he had to show a firm hand, that he had power and that the laws would be vigorously enforced.<sup>48</sup>

Calles, no doubt, must have been tempted to pursue the Cristero war to a successful conclusion, once it started. But there were several serious problems that threatened to undermine his position and his plans for the future of the revolution and the country.

In 1928, Calles became aware of the problems that a peaceful transition of power to Obregón would encounter. Obregón was favourable to negotiations and peace.<sup>49</sup> He worked to make peace coincide with his return to the presidency. He had a very strong rural base of support, and he counted with important bankers who would act as good officers between the Government and the oil companies.

The radical block, most notably Tejeda and Morones, was totally opposed to any compromise; it had practically

managed, in 1926-1927, to control President Calles and forced him to adopt an even greater antagonistic attitude towards the Church. Hence, the problem for Calles was Obregón, who wanted to appear as the peacemaker.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, Obregón's peace efforts were disrupted by the radicals, with Calles' support, and thus, had to be postponed.

On 1 July 1928, Obregón was re-elected President; on 17, he was assassinated by a young Catholic. Though he had acted of his own accord, there were strong suspicions that Morones and his group had been involved.<sup>51</sup>

Peace had to be put off until a better time. Calles' uppermost preoccupation was to survive the terrible crisis that the disappearance of Obregón implied, bringing as it did, to an abrupt end, the plans for an alternating dyarchy, which was expected to provide political stability to the country.

The assassination of Obregón accentuated the division between the Obregónista faction, deprived of its triumph, and the Callista faction, kept in place, against all odds by the political genius of its leader.

It is not our aim to provide a detailed account of the intricacies of the political manoeuvres of Calles; of his recognition as the Supreme chief of the revolution; of the elimination of Morones; or the creation of the PNR. Nevertheless, it is important to consider in broad terms those that affected and influenced the development of church-state relations. Hence, we will see how the religious conflict served on different occasions to seek

the consolidation for the political system and, at the same time, brought about new forms of Catholic resistance and peaceful confrontation.

The political vacuum left by Obregón meant that Calles had to solve many problems before he could assert his power, and thus the religious problem was somewhat relegated. Meanwhile, Rome waited for the power struggle between the factions to settle and for the regime to be firmly established, before it could negotiate.

Calles and Portes Gil, the interim President, did everything to delay the inevitable confrontation with the Obregónista faction, which was planning a military rebellion. They tried to suppress the Cristeros to avoid having to fight two wars. But as the situation there had reached a stalemate,<sup>52</sup> they decided to fight the rebellion headed by General Escobar.

Calles knew of the campaign, both of the plans and of the identity of the rebels. Following the example of Obregón, who, in 1923, had known of the De La Huerta uprising but decided not to open the attack, so as not to make martyrs of the rebels; Calles did not move. He was waiting for a moral justification to eliminate, once and for all, the obregonist elements. The rebellion provided it. He had already divided them, now he would suppress their military base.

With the attention of the nation centred on the political battle taking place in the PNR convention, the rebellion broke out. The victorious government hurried to restore the peace process with the Church to prevent a

relapse of the civil war if the Cristeros were still fighting by the time of the presidential election. Ambassador Morrow was also of the opinion that the State was unlikely to restore peace, despite the efforts of the President and the military, if the religious question was not settled.<sup>53</sup>

General Gorostieta saw in the forthcoming elections a possible way out from the stalemate. In January 1929, he had got in contact with José Vasconcelos, the popular independent candidate. Vasconcelos told him that they should join forces the day after the elections: by so doing, he intended to demonstrate the dishonesty of the Government at the ballot box, before any uprising.<sup>54</sup>

Certainly, it was not the first time that the elections would be rigged; but the presence of armed Cristeros changed the whole situation, since the Vasconcelos movement, if it obtained their support, would cease to be the peaceful, vulnerable, popular movement it was, to become a fearsome insurrection.

The Government realised the seriousness of the situation and resorted to the only possible solution; the resumption of the cult, which would disarm the Cristeros and thus, Vasconcelos.

Vasconcelos was very conscious of the military-political reality of Mexico; he did not build up false hopes about the democratic game. Instead, he saw himself as a new Madero destined to restore democracy by means of a popular revolt that would put an end to corruption and absolutism. Hence, the importance of the Cristeros for

Vasconcelos.

It was not, therefore, surprising that he had felt seriously hurt when, in July 1929, President Portes Gil was able to announce a peaceful settlement to the conflict, that stemmed from the negotiations that had taken place between the Government and the Catholic Church.<sup>55</sup>

There is no doubt that the solution of the conflict was of great political significance. Portes Gil was aware that the conflict transcended more politically than religiously. If the assassination of Obregón had made it imperative to find a solution, in order to survive; now, Calles was at liberty to devote himself to shape the political scene according to his wishes: the "maximato" as a political system was born.

#### 4. Modus vivendi vs. Modus moriendi<sup>56</sup>

The agreements pleased the extremists of neither side. While a group of "irreconcilable" bishops, led by Bishop Miguel de la Mora, of San Luis Potosí, opposed the Primate's position, ardent radicals, headed by Governor Tejeda of Veracruz, took exception to the attitude of the President. The League complained that the Government did not live up to its amnesty, and claimed that from the return of the peace, in order to prevent the Cristeros from ever rising again, a campaign of systematic assassinations of the leaders was undertaken.<sup>57</sup>

The League appealed directly to the Pope to nullify the agreements.<sup>58</sup> The opponents became so menacing that

Apostolic Delegate Ruiz y Flores, and Archbishop Díaz issued a public letter condemning dissident elements. It read:

"In any such situation as this it is most unwise for either party to the agreement to boast of victory; the arrangement attempts to conciliate both parties, the only possible way of forming a truly national Government. Not only is it essential to avoid aggressive statements, it is also important to cooperate in all government activities as far as one's conscience as a Catholic permits. The Church does not want a change of government or any part in the government; it is trying by purely legal means so to change the laws that they enjoy in other countries."<sup>59</sup>

As the protest continued, Archbishop Díaz declared, in September 1929, that the *modus vivendi* was not an issue for debate. From the moment the Pope had made his decision, every Catholic priest and bishop was forbidden to criticise publicly the accord, or to disparage those who in any way represented him.<sup>60</sup>

After 1929, the leaders of the Mexican Church followed an attitude of moderation and reserve, with full papal approval. It involved a double policy. On the one hand, it was necessary to put an end to the activities of the most extreme and intransigent Catholic elements, so as to avoid government reprisals against the whole Church. On the other hand, it was urgent to find new ways of channelling that militancy to work in an acceptable manner for the establishment of the rights and privileges of the Church. Any new religious organization should stay out of politics and armed resistance, and be limited to religious

matters, only. Therefrom was created Mexican Catholic Action (A.C.M.). The main objective of Catholic Action was to bring under the control of the Church authorities the organized activities of Catholic laymen.

Nevertheless, not all bishops agreed with this idea; Bishop Lara y Torres, fierce opponent of the agreements, wrote, in 1930, numerous and bitter letters criticizing the plans of the Apostolic Delegate to make of Catholic Action a purely religious association. He was convinced that its rôle should be political as well as social.<sup>62</sup> He argued that these activities could not be confined to the layman, because it was impossible to form the conscience of citizens without moral laws; the Church, sole interpreter and judge, should have them under its control.<sup>63</sup>

In the end, Catholic Action remained within the limits set by the Pope and the bishops, and was at the forefront of cooperation with the hierarchy in the programme of re-evangelization.<sup>64</sup>

The activities of Catholic Action are not the subject of this study and are only mentioned in relation to those events that determined, later on, the development of Synarchism. Despite the discontentment of the radicals of both sides, the truce established by the agreements of 1929 lasted two years.

During this time, relations between Government officials and the Church hierarchy were cordial. The conciliatory attitude of the Church was shown when the Apostolic Delegate condemned the assassination attempt on

the newly elected President Ortiz Rubio, as "an immoral deed which dishonours the nation".<sup>65</sup>

From 1929 to 1935, Calles, acknowledged as the supreme Chief of the Revolution, was the strong man behind the presidency. This was a period of economic difficulties and opposing factions at the top. It was an era of popular disdain for the leaders, their corruption and scandalous life. The religious problem was in abeyance and the Government could renew it at any time. With the Callista army in power, the anticlerical pressure group was at its peak and it put pressure on the Government to break the truce. There were violent attacks on the Church in the press controlled by the army.<sup>66</sup>

From 1929 to 1931, the *modus vivendi* seemed viable but the Callistas incessantly hindered the President's programmes in various states, especially in Veracruz and Tabasco.

The era of relative peace in Church-State relations came to an end in June 1931. The resurgence of the conflict was originally a regional affair that did not seem to threaten the national status quo. Governor Adalberto Tejeda of Veracruz, Minister of the Interior under Calles in 1927 when the Cristero rebellion started, and a staunch anticlerical, signed a law setting the number of priests in the state at a ratio of one per one hundred thousand inhabitants. That permitted only eleven priests for the whole territory of the state.<sup>67</sup>

Tejeda declared that the clergy had only pretended to submit to the government with the object of regaining



the opportunity to subvert the institutions of the nation. He claimed that the Mexican people had no need for the clergy, and added that Veracruz would be governed according to a "revolutionary" criterion, and would enact a law that replaced the "lenient" provisions of 1926 (i.e. the famous "Calles Law" which regulated certain Articles of the Constitution; in this case Article 3 and 130, which dealt with the Church). Tejeda accused the President of tending towards increasingly more conciliatory and conservative policies and hence, departing from a "true revolutionary spirit" - in other words, the extreme anticlerical radicalism of Calles.

President Ortiz Rubio's administration was astonished by governor Tejeda's move; the President, like his predecessor, Portes Gil, had tried to maintain national equilibrium in religious affairs. They had sought to dissuade governors from sponsoring any type of law likely to cause disturbances. But, as Brandenburg clearly noted:

"The last word in law enforcement resides in the head of the Revolutionary Family [...] Calles exercised his Family authority by viciously turning upon the Church while president and then, out of public view in 1929-35 condoning state governors who all but eliminated Catholic institutions and influence in many provinces of Mexico [...]"<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, no definite solution could be found if Calles did not recognize religiously motivated strife as detrimental to internal coexistence; or obviously, if Calles lost his political influence.

Illustrative of this, is the fact that Tejeda

justified his policy to Calles, not to the President. He explained that the new law would make possible the fast elimination of fanaticism.

He charged Catholic groups with disobeying the laws by their involvement in agrarian and labour matters.<sup>70</sup> The people were terrorized by the series of actions against them: Catholics and their priests were shot; their churches were bombed, burned and ransacked by policemen and anticlerical mobs.<sup>71</sup>

The seriousness of the conflict affected the already strained relations between the authorities of Veracruz and the Federal Government. Through Manuel Padilla, Supreme Court Justice and close to Tejeda, the President suggested that the law limiting the number of priests could provoke further unrest in other parts of the country, because it would be perceived as an attempt by the Government to exacerbate religious passions and establish a state of unrest.<sup>72</sup> Padilla added:

"The President wishes, through me, to request in cordial and friendly manner that you display good will and cooperate effectively with the Federal Administration, by the slight modification of the law [...]"<sup>73</sup>

Neither the clergy nor the Catholics remained passive at the new provocation. They protested to the President; appealed to the Minister of the Interior and presented their disapproval to Congress. The decision of the lower courts said that there was "no direct injury" that implied violation of the guarantees offered by the constitution.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, it is arguable that, contrary to that

decision, the severe restrictions implemented impaired the liberty of Catholics in the exercise of their faith. Still, President Ortiz Rubio, in the short time he had been in office, failed to build a basis of support of his own in Congress, and in the PNR. The Callistas dominated both the cabinet and the government. Consequently, he found no possible strategy, and in early July, he had to recant and announce:

"The federal executive power in my charge has absolute respect for the sovereignty of the states and the exercise of the faculties that our Constitution concedes to them"<sup>75</sup>

Soon after, other states began to limit the number of priests or to prohibit them altogether. Between 1931 and 1934, most states enacted limitations on clergymen,<sup>76</sup> so that by the end of 1934, less than five hundred priests were allowed. This meant, concluded an historian:

"For the first time in Mexican history the Church could legitimately complain of religious persecution."<sup>77</sup>

On 12 December 1931, the elaborate celebrations of the four hundredth anniversary of the Virgin of Guadalupe took place in Mexico City. Twenty seven archbishops and bishops and nearly two hundred priests officiated at the services; at least half a million people attended the celebrations. Many members of the cabinet participated in the organization of the event.

Two days later, Congress, on a PNR motion, protested against these demonstrations and condemned the presence

and participation of government officials. Calles enjoined the president to abandon his conciliatory policies; and in the next cabinet meeting he reprimanded them and eventually forced them to resign.<sup>78</sup>

At the end of the month, Congress decreed that only one priest for fifty thousand inhabitants could officiate in the capital; that was equal to a total of twenty four priests for the entire city.<sup>79</sup> This was very significant because, for the first time, the decree associated the Government with the anticlerical trend that so far was present only in the radical states.

The church vehemently protested; Archbishop Díaz y Barreto appealed to the President, but he was disavowed and the cult was suspended in Mexico City.<sup>80</sup> Yet, in February 1932, seeing that events were turning in the direction of 1926, Archbishop Díaz announced that he would comply with the law, and instructed his priests to return to the churches.<sup>81</sup>

The Church had changed tactics: instead of bitter opposition to the oppressive legislation, she would comply with the law in the hope of eventually finding an alternative. Apostolic Delegate Ruíz y Flores condemned resorting to violence in his pastoral letter of February 1932. This was followed, in the ensuing months, by pastoral letters from the bishops banning priests and Catholics from helping any rebel force.<sup>82</sup> Some went as far as excommunicating the rebels and those who might collaborate with them. In July, the Apostolic Delegate declared that the Pope formally condemned armed

resistance, as well as any written or oral propaganda advocating it.<sup>83</sup>

On 29 September, 1932, Pope Pius XI promulgated his encyclical **ACERBA ANIMI**, denouncing the violation of the agreements and ordered observance of them again. The Pope analysed the development of the religious persecution since his encyclical **INIQUIS AFFLICTISQUE**, OF 18 November 1926, and the reasons had led him to accept the 1929 agreements. He criticized the Government for violating the **modus vivendi**, particularly in its attempts to destroy the Church in the renewed wave of persecution which began in December 1931.<sup>84</sup> The Pope made a distinction between illicit cooperation with the laws and forced submission to them. He indicated that temporarily, the clergy would have to yield protest, for it was better to have some churches open and some priests ministering to the people, than none at all. He showed how the legislation had worsened since 1929 and reaffirmed the banning of armed resistance, which on no account would be undertaken in the name of the Church.<sup>85</sup> He concluded by exhorting Catholics to remain close to the hierarchy and work within Catholic Action.<sup>86</sup>

The encyclical infuriated the Government. On 2 October, 1932, Congress demanded the deportation of the Apostolic Delegate, on the grounds that he was an "undesirable alien", because he owed his allegiance to a foreign sovereign: the Pope. Two days later, he was arrested and banished.<sup>87</sup> The Government intended by this action to show clearly to the Vatican, that the contents

of the encyclical were unacceptable and provocative, and as it had been done in the past, made an example of the Apostolic Delegate.

Renewed repression of the Church in 1931 and 1932 gave an impetus to those who had always rejected the *modus vivendi*. It vindicated the cause of those *cristeros* who had never surrendered. After 1932, their activities had increased so much that there was talk of a "second *cristiada*".<sup>88</sup> The League continued to plead with the episcopacy for a harsher stand. It requested that Catholic Action be put under its control, so as to organize more efficiently the opposition to the Government. Although the Pope had banned discussion and criticism of the agreements, the League continued its campaign of agitation. Moreover, some prelates did not stop accusing the episcopacy; Bishop Lara y Torres wrote, on 25 March 1932, a long protest to the Pope, criticizing the Apostolic Delegate and the Archbishop of Mexico, for having approved the agreements, which, in his mind, had not benefited the Church, and pleaded for the resurgence of armed resistance. He was aware of the limited possibilities of overthrowing the Government, but he argued that it could be weakened and its position undermined; therefore, the Church would be in a better position to negotiate. The Pope was not impressed and, some time later, Bishop Lara y Torres was removed and later resigned.<sup>89</sup>

## II. The "Legión"

With the outburst of renewed persecution in 1931, moderate Catholic leaders found themselves in a dilemma: on the one hand, armed opposition had no chance of success while the army remained loyal to the Government - and there was no indication that this would change, particularly after the introduction of reforms to make it more professional;<sup>90</sup> on the other hand, due to the restrictive laws in place that excluded Catholics from active political participation in the established system of decision-making, they were unable to work openly for the amelioration of the fate of the Church.

Despite the promises Calles had made in his last address to Congress, in September 1928, concerning the acceptance of opposition parties in the political system, he would not yield ground to the Church.<sup>91</sup> Thus grew the conviction to organize political pressure secretly. The structure of Catholic Action was unsuited to undertake that enterprise, because of its close links with the Church. What was needed was an organization which, while working for the interests of the Church, could not be directly identified with her in any way. The relationship between the leadership and the hierarchy would remain secret. The idea had already been hinted at by the Pope in a letter to the bishops in early 1932. On that occasion he advised the episcopacy to encourage the laity, wisely and with no commitment of its own, to form a political group which, without bearing the epithet of Catholic, would be ruled by Christian principles and

assured the defence of God and the Church.<sup>92</sup>

Archbishop Ruiz y Flores had envisaged the formation in each diocese of highly disciplined and dedicated action groups, which would pursue the said objectives. These groups would exert pressure at the local level on political officials, by means of protests, petitions and legal resources, with the aim of relieving the Church of her difficult situation. Their task was to teach social action, propagate ideas and educate in the exercise of civil rights.<sup>93</sup>

There was the conviction that, given the impossibility of creating a Catholic political party, help would essentially have to be found at the local level and hope that local changes would gradually build up into national changes.

The Pope expressed his concern about the possibility that certain Catholic elements could take advantage of the absence of the Apostolic Delegate to provoke violent confrontation,<sup>94</sup> and that this type of organization could be useful in channelling the grievances of militant Catholics.

Opposition to the creation of a new organization came from bishop Lara y Torres, in particular. He argued that the need for it did not arise, because there was already the League, which could carry the desired function.<sup>95</sup> The League, he maintained, was the only organization of social action that, for its strength and its reliability, was widely known and covered the entire country. Monsignor Lara y Torres pointed out that another organization



besides the League and Catholic Action, would increase division and confusion among Catholics.

However, the opinion of the Apostolic Delegate and of the majority of the bishops with regard to the League was of distrust, and they thus believed that it could not possibly operate effectively in various dioceses.<sup>96</sup> What is more, the Holy See was of the opinion that the League ought to change its title and its leaders before it could take care of public action,

"for it would be natural for the Government to distrust and persecute any activity that involved the name of the League, and, consequently, persecute the Church, whom the Government suspects to agree with or be committed to the League."<sup>97</sup>

Thus, the need to find an alternative outlet for the grievances of discontent Catholics, became an urgent matter at the end of 1932. It was at this time, that the bishops took an important and transcendental decision: they installed in the minds of Catholics the idea that they were entrusting the Church to them. They were to take on the responsibility to defend the Church on the only ground still available to them: the social and civic. The hierarchy, however, made it clear that they (Catholic laymen) should not count on the clergy to direct or approve of any social organization.

A secret organization, the "Legión", appeared at the end of 1934. It rapidly spread throughout the country. Its creation and growth were surrounded by mystery. But its legacy was very important for what was to follow at

the end of the thirties: Synarchism. It is, therefore, necessary that we should spend some time considering the development of the Legion.

The Legion was made up of young and devout catholics; trained in the **Congregations of the Holy Virgin**, under the direction of Antonio Santacruz.<sup>98</sup> They vowed loyalty to the organization and the Church. Those who belonged to it had to take a formal oath of secrecy, to defend Mexico against its main enemies (Freemasonry and international Judaism), and to obey the orders of their superiors, provided they were not contrary to morality and justice.<sup>99</sup> The survival of the Legion rested on secrecy, to prevent the possibility of repression. Hence, the structure adopted had the "cell" as its key composing factor.<sup>100</sup> This meant that each local group remained secret to all others, thus, reducing the risk that if one were uncovered, the entire organization would be imperiled.

The overall direction of the Legion rested with a Supreme Council integrated by devout laymen, well disposed to observe the instructions of the church hierarchy, to whom the organization owed its existence. The Supreme Council made the decisions, but these were subject to the veto of the Church authorities (the apostolic delegate and the archbishop of Mexico.)

The Apostolic Delegate and the Episcopacy (except the bishop of Durango, José María González y Valencia) gave their blessing to the Legion, once the question of secrecy was clarified, since secret societies were forbidden by the Catholic Church.<sup>101</sup> For one could not definitely vow

absolute obedience to unknown leaders, nor pledge to maintain secrecy in all circumstances, without committing a grave sin, because that pledge and that secrecy could conceal a crime. Hence, the oath of obedience would hold whenever that which was commanded, was licit in itself, and did not infringe the legitimate rights of others. As for secrecy, it was not binding when the church authorities inquired about the activities of Catholics, as long as they were related to matters of the faith or of morality.<sup>102</sup> A secret society understood in these terms did not fall into the ban of the Catholic doctrine. Therefore, the hierarchy had no further objection. Obviously, the clergy and the members of Catholic Action could not belong to it.

The structure of the Legion was the following: a leader, or jefe, at the top, with nine subordinates under him; meeting in council every week. Each one of the nine could recruit up to ten officers, who did not know each other, since they only met individually with their superior, once a week. Each of these ninety could recruit, in turn, up to ten soldiers who did not know each other and, followed the same procedure to receive orders.

This made a total of one thousand légionnaires. Yet, none of the three divisions needed to be filled; what mattered was to bring in "good, sincere and responsible people" and to conduct, through this élite, the social life of the population.<sup>103</sup>

In theory, a legion comprised ten sections, corresponding to an equal number of activities; so that

each legionnaire was classed according to his occupation. The first four were socio-professional (owners, workers, artisans, peasants); the others were technical (propaganda, etc.) However, most of these never materialized. Subsequently, an eleventh section was created; the **National Synarchist Union (U.N.S.)**.<sup>104</sup>

The first three years were devoted to attracting as many people as possible, from factories, universities, offices and villages. When the legions passed to Mexico City, in 1935, many members of the liberal professions joined, especially doctors and lawyers (like Manuel Gómez Morfin, later leader of PAN). This was a result of the vacuum left by the League in the field of social and political action, when it became apparent that the League would never reappear in its former shape.<sup>105</sup> Salvador Abascal, future leader of the Synarchist Movement, operated in one of the ten legions of Morelia, where he made a name as an excellent organizer and propagandist.<sup>106</sup>

Recruitment was done with as much care as daring, and secrecy seemed to have effectively preserved. The Legion was involved in some direct action of limited scope; like disrupting public and political gatherings, and exploding stinking-gas bombs in public places.<sup>107</sup>

The Legion also participated in public opinion. Articles were written giving guidance about social Catholic doctrine under the Legion's assumed name: **Oscar Calderón Alvarez**; the initials of which, O.C.A., stood for Organization, Cooperation, Action.<sup>108</sup>

After a certain time, the ranks were disillusioned,

and frequent defections followed. The motive was that legionnaires got tired of doing unadventurous things. Orders were seldom dangerous and often naïve.<sup>109</sup>

Penetration proved to be difficult for various reasons. Most legions never effectively got filled. In general, they were only formed among friends and trustworthy neighbours, so that it was impossible to exchange lower ranks between them.<sup>110</sup>

Besides, few members had any charge of responsibility in the government. There never was an official corps of teachers; nor was it possible to penetrate the army. Therefore, the activities they could engage in were too vague and simple to interest the majority much longer.<sup>111</sup>

The leaders did not take long to realize the futility of their actions. They soon became better organized and developed an ideology based on the principles of social Catholicism outlined in Pius XI's encyclical **QUADRAGESIMO ANNO**, of 15 May, 1931.

Before we can continue with the evolution of the Legion and its subsequent activities, we must stop to consider the events that were taking place in the overall national scene. Important transformations were taking place at the heart of the Revolutionary Family. Ideological confrontation threatened to undermine the position of Calles and his followers. The challenge was coming from the left: eventually from a man identified with it: Lázaro Cárdenas. The differences and the background to the inevitable confrontation between the two men and the two camps, emerged at the Second National

Convention of the ruling party, in December 1933. To these events we now turn.

## **II. The Presidential Elections of 1934**

The presidency of Ortiz Rubio came to an abrupt end in September 1932. He had removed certain officials closely affiliated with Calles, the Supreme Chief, who immediately withdrew his political support and abandoned him until he was engulfed by political crisis.<sup>112</sup> On 3 September, Congress designated an interim president: General Abelardo Rodríguez.

President Rodríguez declared that he would devote his efforts to unifying the Revolutionary Party, as well as the army.<sup>113</sup> He resolved to collaborate with Calles, or at least, not hinder his plans for consolidating and strengthening the political forces that had rallied in the PNR; an area where the party had not achieved great success. This objective grew in importance as the PNR Convention neared, for the new presidential candidate would be designated there; and lay out the political principles that guided his future activities.

Rodríguez' interim presidency was, in fact, brief: on the one hand, he owed his nomination to Calles and, on the other, barely a year after this, he faced not only the authority of the Supreme Chief, but also the presence of the PNR candidate (the future president). Therefore, his mission was to prepare and make possible a peaceful transfer of power to the new president. The way he chose to do this was by not interfering in the political

problem; he left Calles to deal with it, and simply followed his instructions.<sup>114</sup>

President Rodríguez saw himself as an administrator and tried to make a practical distinction between the political and the administrative, leaving the former to the politicians.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, most members of his Government still consulted Calles on matters related to the running of the administration and on questions that were more the province of the executive.<sup>116</sup> In other words, despite his attempts to distance himself from political matters, the mere presence of Calles raised many a problem and rendered his endeavours impossible. Nowhere was this more clear than in the question of education.

Application of the educational philosophy of the Constitution of 1917 had been the second most important source of conflict between Church and State which disrupted the *modus vivendi* of 1929. Both parties held permanently pronounced opposing views. The Government had introduced a programme of sexual education as a forerunner to socialist education. Narciso Bassols, Minister of Education under Rodríguez, implemented it in 1933; while Calles, and later Cárdenas, personally called for the radical enforcement of the latter in 1934.<sup>117</sup>

Bassols set about reforming the educational system, with some emphasis of the economic aspect of rural education. His policy provoked bitter and serious opposition, particularly in his attempts to impose sexual education.<sup>118</sup> Resistance came from several quarters: parents' associations, teachers, the education bureaucracy

opposed to reorganization, the Church and the press. The extent of the protest was such that Bassols had to resign - despite having the support of the President. He was appointed Minister of the Interior, but after a short while, he resigned and withdrew from the Government.<sup>119</sup>

According to Francisco Gaxiola, personal secretary to President Rodríguez, his resignation followed a disagreement with the President regarding the intensification of religious persecution. Bassols went to see the President, after conferring with Calles and Cárdenas, to advise him of the need to act anew on the religious question, this time with more extreme measures against the clergy, urging local governments to limit, even more, the number of priests allowed in each state. The President, however, did not accept the radicalization of anticlericalism,<sup>120</sup> since he believed that his government had been acting in "revolutionary" manner and clerical action was nullified in accordance to the existing law.<sup>121</sup>

"Significantly, as he withdrew, Bassols pointed out that sex education was only the whipping boy. The real issue was socialism in education and clerical agitation for nullification of the newly proposed reform of Article 3 of the Constitution."<sup>122</sup>

In reaction to agitation by the Catholic hierarchy against the reform of Article 3, President-elect Cárdenas and the PNR leader were instructed by Calles to ask the President to expel the Archbishop of Mexico, Pascual Díaz. Rodríguez refused; yet, by the end of October, Portes Gil,



the Prosecutor General, was instructed to investigate the conduct of the clergy. No action was taken against Díaz, but on 7 November, orders were issued for the arrest of the Apostolic Delegate, Ruíz y Flores, and bishop Manríquez y Zárate, on the grounds that they had incited rebellion against the Government.<sup>123</sup> Portes Gil was to write some years later that Calles had intended, by exerting pressure on President Rodríguez - precisely through Cárdenas - to deport Archbishop Ruíz y Flores and Pascual Díaz, as well as other prelates, to stir up a new revolt, so that he could appear as the only saviour of the régime which was due to start in December 1934.<sup>124</sup>

However, Calles had other reasons besides embroiling Cárdenas in an unsolvable problem: he knew that he had to lead to keep control over Cárdenas. The anti-Catholic attack might not only serve to forestall the proletarian revolution advocated by the radical element of the Party, including Cárdenas, but to unify the Party and gain control of its alienated factions, by resorting to the only deep conviction common to all the revolutionaries.<sup>125</sup>

On 21 July 1934, Calles raised the issue of education, personally, in a speech he gave at Guadalajara.<sup>126</sup> He called upon the people to begin a new period of the Revolution, which he described as the "psychological revolution." He said that the Revolution should take possession of the minds of children because youth belonged to the community and to the Revolution, he demanded that the clergy be driven out of education. Hence, the conflict was transferred to a field where it

was probably more inevitable: education.

From 1924 to 1934 Calles kept Mexico in agitation; he succeeded in placing himself as the Supreme Chief of the Revolution, but failed in his attempt to implant the "maximato" as a viable political mechanism for restoring stability - as president Ortiz Rubio's resignation illustrated - and therefore, failed to re-establish social equilibrium (which had been disturbed by resignation, modernization and his encouragement for violent anticlericalism).<sup>127</sup> Calles had become, in fact, the grand elector and, hence, the most important figure for the **presidenciables** (i.e. those cabinet ministers who had strong possibilities of becoming presidential candidates). During the course of the "maximato", it soon became obvious that against the background of the non-enforcement of the principle of effective suffrage, if the president did not determine his successor he lost not only that prerogative, but also the faculty to rule during his own term of office. Important politicians were "presidenciables" and when their future was being decided by political elements and groups alien to the president's will - as during the "maximato" - their political interests did not necessarily lead them to accept the designs and policies of the president. Consequently, a president that did not decide who was to succeed him lost the fundamental political instrument to impose his authority and, at the same time, the possibility to govern.

In his last address to Congress, Calles had called

for an end to experimentation and for the need to redress the economy.<sup>128</sup> He warned that thereafter he would not tolerate any condition that imperiled the institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>129</sup>

It is in this light that the persecution of the Church must be seen. By 1933, Calles had successfully dealt with all political opposition from within the Revolutionary Family (the Escobar, Portes Gil and Ortiz Rubio faction). Moreover, he knew that state governors who persisted in challenging the central authority, even over religious affairs, would soon dispute the PNR's policies on economic and social issues. Therefore, he focused his attention on solving the ideological problem.

#### 1. Socialist Education

The Second National Convention of the PNR took place in the city of Querétaro, in December 1933. The Convention clearly revealed the existence of two ideological tendencies and two different political conceptions that were brought together under the same political framework, which they both accepted as the only one of significance to attain and preserve power. On the one hand, there was what was often referred to as "callist economicism". This was a conservative socioeconomic stand, based on the assumption that progress was a function of the national budget, and which tried to put an end to radicalism in the social and economic fields, which it saw as an obstacle to the creation of an environment of security and confidence, necessary to foster an increase in national income. On the other hand,

there was social radicalism which claimed to be socialist and aimed at a policy of social defence, increasing rather than checking national expenditure, particularly in agrarian reform, and which demanded the introduction of socialist education by the State.<sup>130</sup>

In the Convention, a six-year plan was drafted in very ambiguous and general terms whereby definite confrontation between the two groups was avoided; though there was little doubt that in some of the basic issues the strength of the PNR radicals became more apparent.

In education, in particular, the radicals succeeded in including in the plan a demand for revision of Article 3 of the Constitution, so as to specify that primary and secondary education should be based on the principles of the "socialist doctrine that the Mexican Revolution supports,"<sup>131</sup> thus changing what the original project proposed, namely, secular education, with a rationalist and anti-religious interpretation but excluding an ideological stand.

Calles and President Rodríguez strongly opposed the inclusion of socialist education in the convention. Rodríguez even went as far as asking the PNR directorate not to support the resolution at the convention.<sup>132</sup> The "callistas" were immediately aware of the social, political and economic connotations of establishing socialist education. No less significant than their opposition to socialist education was the antireligious impetus they suggested, which Calles himself had bluntly raised in his Guadalajara speech - though he neglected to

specify whether education had anything to do with progressive labour legislation or agrarian reform.<sup>133</sup> Thus, Calles intended to establish a new education, secular and anticlerical, but, at the same time, because of his conservative socioeconomic views, he necessarily opposed socialist education. His speech was nothing less than a confession of his "étatiste" doctrine.<sup>134</sup>

Consequently, the Six-Year Plan adopted by the Convention was more radical than Calles would have liked, but he was forced to accept it or face hostility and dissidence inside the Party. The Plan tended to formulate the socialist ideals of the Revolution; it embraced strong elements of nationalism, "indigenismo", anti-capitalism, xenophobia, anticlericalism and authoritarianism.<sup>135</sup>

Beyond the ideological differences, all the participants in the convention were united in the belief that whatever course was set, the PNR was the sole instrument through which it could be achieved.

Three major elements came out of the Convention: deference to Calles' supreme leadership: a six-year programme that after the amendments introduced by the radicals could become the basis for a real revolutionary adjustment against the background of callist reaction and, a presidential candidate, Lázaro Cárdenas, who both callistas and radicals - especially "agraristas" - trusted.

The Plan reiterated the concept that:

"The fostering of public instruction must be one of the essential functions of the State [...] the genuine and

direct representative of the collectivity [...] for the State cannot admit [that through] a false and exaggerated concept of individual liberty [private individuals be allowed to establish and direct] educational institutions outside the control of the State."<sup>136</sup>

State control over primary, secondary and private education encompassed such matters as the "scientific and pedagogic orientation" of school work, the "social orientation" and the "non-religious and socialistic" requirements of State education.

The theoretical position of the State and the Church regarding education appeared to be irreconcilable on three main issues:

- (1) the State was definitely moving towards a government monopoly in education, which the church viewed as tyrannical usurpation, since she had the right to teach religion to Catholic children;
- (2) the Government's intention was to bring up the child as an entity of a social and economic, but not of a religious community. In contrast, for the Church, the object of education was to preserve the Catholic faith of the children and the salvation of their souls;
- (3) with regard to the content, the State excluded religious teaching and sought to "instil in Mexican youth a rational concept of the world and of social life". For the Church, religion was an essential part of education and, together with moral education, it could not be separated from intellectual

education.

Futhermore, the Church believed that when the State declared that education "shall combat fanaticism and prejudice," it was anti-religious and, more specifically, anti-Catholic, because "fanaticism" to most Mexican radicals was synonymous with Catholicism. Therefore, eradication of fanaticism was another way of destroying the Catholic Church.<sup>137</sup>

## 2. Catholic Reaction

Since January 1934, Catholics had been aware of the imminence of the law on education. Long before this was ratified (13 December 1934) the Apostolic Delegate, then living in exile in the United States, sent instructions to the Mexican Episcopacy recommending that the hierarchy follow a course of concerted action, in dealing with the menace;<sup>138</sup> whereupon, the Archbishop of Mexico, Pascual Díaz, addressed a circular to all the prelates of the country wherein he summarised the implications of the project of reform of Article 3, contained in the Six-Year Plan.<sup>139</sup> Mgr Díaz alluded to the Apostolic Delegate's instructions and asked the bishops for their opinion on five specific points:

- (1) what attitudes should the Prelates assume in respect of the reform of Article 3?
- (2) what general orientations should be given to the faithful and by what means?
- (3) what special instructions should be given to parents

and guardians?

- (4) what special instructions should be given to school principals and teachers? and
- (5) what means should be used to intensify religious education and counteract the effects of government propaganda?<sup>140</sup>

In a letter to Bishop Lara y Torres (10 February, 1934) Mgr Diaz outlined the conclusions of his request to the Episcopacy. He hoped that bishops would adopt his instructions of 5 February - or issue similar ones in the sense that priests should intensify religious instruction and admonish parents that they would be considered unworthy of receiving the sacraments should they fail to give their children Catholic education, or fail to remove them from schools where the "danger of perversion" existed. He added:

"The majority of the Venerable Episcopacy is of the opinion that, for the time being, pastoral letters should not be issued; and it seems to be the opinion of His Holiness, according to the Bishop of Tulancingo, in view of the fact that the Holy Father clearly told him that 'parents are the ones who should speak out' and adduced as reason for this to avoid exacting the wrath and reprisals of the enemy".

He went on to say:

"it is understood that the parents will say that which they have learned from the Bishops and Priests."<sup>141</sup>

Bishop Lara y Torres disagreed that the Bishops



should be silent, because it was for them to set an example and speak out, publicly, against the Government's plans for education, which was what the faithful expected them to do. Failing this, he observed, priests and faithful would continue to be divided about the interpretation of their orders.<sup>142</sup>

After the resignation of the Minister of Education, Narciso Bassols, in May 1934, and the withdrawal of his programme of sexual education, the controversy between Church and State centred on the broader issue of socialist education. Archbishop Díaz denounced, in his Pastoral Instructions of 30 April, the dangers of openly establishing anti-Catholic teaching. He said that the amendment ended the neutrality towards religious matters inherent in laicized education and imposed a doctrinal bias on public instruction. Archbishop Díaz condemned Socialism as the enemy of religion and urged Catholics to make use of all legal means to prevent the implementation of socialist education; he reminded parents and teachers of the risk of excommunication; he warned school principals that if they tolerated socialist teaching, they would be deemed guilty of abetting heresy.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, he stated:

"no Catholic can be a Socialist without gravely falling short of his duties; nor can he belong to the PNR, since it had declared itself to be openly socialist and, what is more, atheistic."<sup>144</sup>

Calles was infuriated by the Archbishop's pastoral message. He attacked the Church | *in* his Guadalajara

speech of 20 July, declaring that the future of the Revolution could not be turned over to enemy hands, in other words, to the Church:

"With all perfidy the reactionaries say, and the clergy affirms, that the child belongs to the home and the youth belongs to the family. That is an egoistic doctrine because the child and the youth belong to the community, they belong to the masses; it is the Revolution that has the imperative obligation to attack this sector, to take possession of consciences, to destroy all prejudice and to form a new national soul."<sup>145</sup>

In reply to this speech, Bishop Manríquez y Zarate, the most outspoken critic of the revolutionary regime, issued his **"Third Message to the Civilised World"** from his exile in the United States, where he had been living since 1927. He exhorted all Catholics to take up the challenge and oppose, with all their strength, the realization of the "judaic-masonic plan of which Mr Calles is the worthy bearer". He urged parents to save their children from falling prey to the revolution, and to pick up the challenge launched by their enemy.<sup>146</sup>

On the impending threat of socialist education, the Apostolic Delegate sent a message of protest to all Catholics insisting that they should be united in the defence of the rights of the Church, which were theirs too. Catholic opposition should be the work of the laymen themselves. With reference to the freedom of religion guaranteed in Article 24 of the Constitution, Mgr Ruíz y Flores complained that all the federal laws since 1926 had made the exercise of that freedom impossible, by

despoiling and expropriating churches and limiting the number of priest allowed to officiate.<sup>147</sup> In the opinion of the Apostolic Delegate this was not surprising considering what Cárdenas was saying in his election campaign: he declared that Mexican people were no longer misled by empty phrases such as "freedom of conscience", "freedom of education", and "economic freedom", because they understood the first to stand for clerical dictatorship; the second, for reactionary dictatorship and; the third, for capitalist dictatorship.<sup>148</sup>

Mgr Ruíz y Flores was concerned about the type of tyranny that the repudiation of religious freedom would lead to, and he reminded Catholics:

"There are rights prior to and superior to any constitution, rights which the latter should respect and defend: religious rights, the right to educate one's children, the right to life, the right to private property and all other natural rights. Any law impairing these rights is unjust and void."<sup>149</sup>

Mgr Ruíz y Flores concluded his message by telling Catholics that it was their duty to organise themselves as a disciplined body, so that they could assert those rights, independently of the Church authorities.

The response of the Government consisted of issuing an arrest warrant for the Apostolic Delegate, and of printing six hundred thousand copies of a study prepared by Emilio Portes Gil, Andrés Serpa Rojas and José Cenicerros, entitled "The Conflict Between the Civil Power and the Clergy," wherein an attempt was made, on legal and

moral grounds, to defend the opposition of the Mexican State to the Church.

When Cárdenas assumed office, he declared his intention to encourage socialist education by Revolutionary teachers, who would take an active part in promoting the interest of peasants and workers.

The new President had always been anticlerical. For his first cabinet, he appointed such well-known enemies of the church as General Mújica, Rodolfo Elías Calles and Tomás Garrido Canabal. His views on the Church and religion had been laid out during his campaign. He stated:

"I will not permit the clergy to intervene in popular education in any way, for this is the exclusive faculty of the State. The Revolution cannot tolerate the clergy's continuing to utilise the youth of the country as instrument with which to divide the Mexican nation. Nor can it tolerate their converting the rising generation into enemies of the working classes. The clergy asks for liberty of conscience merely to make for itself a new instrument of oppression and to keep down and to subdue the just desires of the people for liberty."<sup>150</sup>

He increased his attacks on the Church during his first year in the Presidency. While previous governments had expropriated 117 churches and buildings belonging to the Church, between 1931 and 1934; in his first eighteen months alone, he seized 350.<sup>151</sup>

In February 1935, his Government passed a law prohibiting the sending of religious material through the post. The law proclaimed a policy of combating fanaticism

by all legitimate means, so as to achieve the spiritual liberation of the people. Moreover, restrictions on the number of priests reached a peak in 1935: in September of that year, a total of two hundred priests was allowed for the entire country and, in at least half of the states, no priests were allowed at all.

It was evident that the increased persecution of the Church in 1934 and 1935 had a profound effect among militant Catholics and favoured the development of a radical right. There were a great many people who demanded a more radical response to the Government's behaviour. At the end of 1932, the League had broken off. Hence, the Legion seemingly provided an outlet for militant Catholics. Yet, in 1934, the hierarchy became aware of the shortcomings of the organization as it stood, to represent the position of the Church and, thus, to prevent the resumption of hostilities. This conclusion was drawn from the recent outbreaks of armed resistance during 1933 and 1934, by various Catholic groups, as well as the renewal of propaganda activities by members of the old League and cristero elements.

Indeed, since the beginning of the conflict in 1932, there had been an increase of Catholic guerrilla bands. Several rebel groups, claiming to be the revival of the cristero national guard, carried out sporadic guerrilla activities in the province.<sup>152</sup>

The PNR's project of reform of Article 3 and Calles' speech at Guadalajara, in July 1934, in particular, increased the pressure for armed resistance, so much so,

that in November several ex-cristeros and league members announced the formation of an army of popular liberation which, notwithstanding the disapproval of the majority of the clergy, obtained many followers. The rebels claimed to be fighting for family and property; the preservation of which, they maintained, was essential to Mexico. Their principal objective was to overthrow the régime dominated by Calles.<sup>153</sup> The revolt never posed a serious threat to the Government and, in 1937, the movement was finally suppressed.<sup>154</sup>

The hierarchy then realised that it had to take the initiative if it was to prevent the mass of irate Catholics from taking over its lead. The Legion had been in existence for two years and had proved an inadequate instrument for the hierarchy to control discontentment. It had been useful, however, in channelling the grievances of a group of young Catholics who needed a way to express their feelings; but it, certainly, was not an organization able to contain the force of the majority of the Catholic population upset by the threat to its religion and expecting an immediate change.

It thus became necessary to adapt the organization so that it could become useful in alleviating the immediate difficult situation of the Church, in relation to socialist education, and to find a solution to the aggregate problem that the revolution posed; as well as, eventually, providing a way to reassert religious rights in the social and political spheres. To this end, the organization would have to follow some of the ideas

contained in QUADRAGESIMO ANNO: adopt a corporative structure, in order to penetrate all levels of society; pursue the establishment of social justice, not only for the proletariat, but for all the other sectors of society, too. It would be secret for two reasons: first, to prevent the danger of suppression and, second, to conceal its links with the clergy. Thorough discussion and planning were made difficult by constant government surveillance and the fact that most major prelates were in exile.

The characteristics of the new organization stand out from the correspondence of the Apostolic Delegate with Archbishop Díaz y Barrueto and others. In a letter to the Bishop of Tabasco, Mgr Ruiz y Flores noted down that what would be required was "an imposing organization composed of all Catholics" that should make its power felt in the Government.<sup>155</sup> He stressed that much more would be attained by means of "a compact, numerous and disciplined organization."<sup>156</sup> Leadership was of paramount importance so that the organization could be effected and discipline preserved.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, once the various groups of parents, students, teachers, children, workers, etc., were organised, they would need a real chief, a leader,

"because without leadership time is lost, energy wasted and there is the danger of discord."<sup>158</sup>

Mgr Ruiz y Flores believed, however, that it was equally important to have a council that could pull the strings from behind the scenes. This council would be

integrated by laymen and perhaps have a priest as its ecclesiastical adviser. In his relations with the Church, the leader should allow himself to be guided with regard to the principles that he should uphold and defend.<sup>159</sup> The council would be responsible for the collection and administration of funds, and it would be sufficient that it reported "with prudence to the prelates the work it was doing."<sup>160</sup>

The organization should have as wide a base as possible. Nevertheless, vigilance was of the utmost importance to ensure that the organization did not incur physical reprisals from the government and did not injure the Church by revealing its links with the hierarchy.<sup>161</sup>

While Ruíz y Flores did not advocate armed insurrection, he did say that the hierarchy should neither encourage nor prohibit such eventuality:

"I think it would be highly inadvisable to talk of this and I do not venture to say a single word. Your Grace might perhaps say something to the effect that it is not our task either to approve or to disapprove. That belongs to politicians,"<sup>162</sup>

and insisted that those who favoured the resort to force were free to do so, so long as they did not drag in the clergy or the Church and that they should not take a step of that kind unless they felt very sure of their ground.<sup>163</sup>

Mgr Ruíz y Flores also suggested that the Jesuits be entrusted with the setting up of the organization along the lines expounded and, to keep it under control, they



should assist with all discretion not only as advisers but also as organizers and counsellors.<sup>164</sup> In his letter to the Father Provincial of Mexico, the Apostolic Delegate made clear this intention:

"I take the liberty of stating, beloved father that your body more than anyone else must help us to defend the sacred rights of the Church, more persecuted now than ever in our country. Hence, I sincerely believed that the fathers of the Society should advise, organise and assist in every way they can, either by sitting on the boards of established associations, either as advisers, assistants, counsellors, etc., on those established or on new ones as they are created, by which they will render a great service to the Church [...]"<sup>165</sup>

The excellent preparation and strict discipline of the Jesuit priest made the Society the best Order to supervise the new organization. Moreover, their loyalty to the Episcopacy and to the Pope guaranteed their obedience, minimising the risk of it turning into another League.

Thus, at the end of 1934, the organization known as "The Base" appeared. The Base was set under the direction of a secret council of distinguished Catholic laymen. This council was called *alto mando* (supreme council), and its president the *Jefe Nacional* (National Leader, or Chief).

The Legion functioned as the core of the Base and its members continued to travel the country to recruit new followers. The cellular structure of the legions was retained, as were the socio-economic divisions and the

geographical distribution. The Base was, in fact, a restructured Legion, but with a tighter grip by the supreme council, in close collaboration with the Episcopacy.

Because of its secret nature and of the constant threat of government reprisals, its activities were limited to gradual and partial changes; instead of tackling all obstacles at once, it concentrated on those liable to be removed, recognising the inevitability of others.<sup>166</sup> Thus, the idea was to accept society as it was and hope to change it step by step.

The Base was the instrument devised by the religious leadership to confront the political problems of its group. It was a positive endeavour to provide lay Catholics with the means to fight for the amelioration of the difficult religious situation and, at the same time, replace the League whose tendency towards armed revolt and its disobedience of the hierarchy, threatened the interests of the Church.

The evolution of Catholic opposition between 1929 and 1935 resulted from the way in which the Mexican Revolution was progressing. With the end of the Cristero rebellion came the break up of radical Catholic strength; the hierarchy of the Church adopted a more moderate and conciliatory policy towards the Government.

During the period of conciliation, 1929-1931, there was virtually no radical religious activity; but the following four years of friction and challenge intensified its sturdiness. It was then that the church hierarchy

devoted its efforts to contain this increase, within the limits of political feasibility. An important phenomenon was taking place, the strengthening of Catholic opposition. All the groups that had emerged to oppose the attitude of the State towards the Church, from the liberal legislation of the nineteenth century, to the Constitution of 1917 and the collision of the 1920s, were converging to organise themselves. To this end, the Church hierarchy first set up the Legion and, subsequently, the Base, which, as we shall see, had a determining role in the formation of the Synarchist movement, in its development and, indeed in its collapse.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ledit, S.J. *Le Front des Pauvres*, Montréal, Editions Fides, 1954, p. 32; Alicia Olivera Sedano, *Aspectos del conflicto religioso de 1926 a 1929. Sus antecedentes y consecuencias*, México, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1966, pp.100 -105; Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada*, México, Siglo XXI, 6ª edición, 1980, Vol. II, pp.148-150.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, op. cit., Vol. II: 261 - 262; Luis Balderrama, *El Clero y el Gobierno de México. Apuntes para la historia de la crisis de 1926*, México, Editorial Cuahtémoc, 1927, Vol. I, p. 49; Antonio Uroz, *La Cuestión Religiosa en México*", México, s.e., 1936, pp.89-93.

<sup>3</sup> Jesús Degollado Guizar, *Memorias*, México, Editorial Jus, 1957, pp.259 - 263; Meyer, op. cit., Vol. I: 315, Vol. III: 107.

<sup>4</sup> Alicia Olivera Bonfil, *Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra y su interpretación del conflicto religioso de 1926*, (Entrevista), México, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1970, p.33.

<sup>5</sup> Emilio Portes Gil, *Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana*, México, Instituto Mexicano de Cultura, 1964, p.568.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance the plans for a cristero constitution; Vincente Lombardo Toledano, *La Constitución de los Cristeros*, México, Librería Popular, 1963; Olivera de Bonfil, op. cit., p.22.

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive history of the League, see Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, *El caso ejemplar de México*, México, Editorial Jus, 1966; Olivera Sedano, op. cit., pp.111-112.

<sup>8</sup> Olivera de Bonfil, op. cit., p. 22; Alberto María Carreño, *El Arzobispo de México, Exmo. Sr. Dr. Don Pascual Díaz y el Conflicto Religioso*, México, Ediciones Victoria, 1943, 2ª edición, p.95.

<sup>9</sup> The Episcopal Committee had been founded in 1926 by the Apostolic Delegate, Monsignor Jorge Caruana, on learning that Calles was going to expel him from the country. This committee would replace thereafter the apostolic delegate in decision making. In this manner, a "through" representation would be achieved within the Episcopacy, which would coordinate the activities of all the diocese. The committee became, thenceforth, a common forum for the discussion of the policy of the Episcopacy, and its existence would be crucial in the following years; Carreño, op. cit., p.16; Palomar y Vizcarra, op cit., p.146.

<sup>10</sup> Antonio Rius Facius, **Méjico Cristero, Historia de la A.C.J.M., 1925 - 1931**, Méjico, Ed. Patria, 1966, pp.133-134.

<sup>11</sup> Carreño, op. cit., pp.95-96; Olivera de Bonfil, op. cit., p.23.

<sup>12</sup> An English translation of **Paterna sane** can be found in William F. Montavon, **The Facts Concerning the Mexican Problem**, Washington, National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1966, pp.48-51.

<sup>13</sup> Ruíz y Flores, loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup> The armed movement began to decline, mostly, when the principal zone leaders died, as well as other of less importance, but who constituted an essential element for the sustainment and advance of the Cristero crusade; the decline was also due to the lack of able military leaders and, therefore, to the lack of strategic organization, as well as to the acute shortage of funds and ammunition.

<sup>15</sup> J. Lloyd Mecham, **Church and State in Latin America. A history of politico-ecclesiastical relations**, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1966, p.401.

<sup>16</sup> Mr. Ovey reported to the Foreign Office that he considered that the principal factor which had led to the settlement were: "the success of the Government in crushing the revolution this spring [Escobar rebellion] and the impetus which I imagine must have been given to the Pope by the settlement of the Italian question", FO 420 278, [A 4711/336/26], Mexico, 27 June 1929.

<sup>17</sup> Meyer, op. cit., Vol.II: 333-342.

<sup>18</sup> John W. Dulles, **Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936**, Austin, Texas University Press, pp.41-54; Portes Gil, op. cit., chapter VIII and IX for messages refuting the agreements.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the American mediation see: Walter Lippmann, "Church and State in Mexico: the American Mediation", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. VIII, No. 2, January 1930, pp.186-207; Stanley R. Ross, "Dwight Morrow and the Mexican Revolution", **Hispanic American Historical Review**, Vol. XXXVIII, November 1958, pp.506-528; L. Etahn Ellis, "Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy", *ibid.*, pp.482-505.

<sup>20</sup> Mecham, op. cit., p. 402; David C. Bailey, **Viva Cristo Rey! Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico**, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1974, p.311.

<sup>21</sup> Mecham, op. cit., p.403.

<sup>22</sup> Jim Tuck, **The Holy War in Los Altos: A Regional Analysis of Mexico's Cristero Rebellion**, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1982, p.175.

<sup>23</sup> James W. Wilkie, "The meaning of the Cristero Religious War against the Mexican Revolution", **A Journal of Church and State**, Vol. VIII, 1986, Spring, p.226.

<sup>24</sup> Carreño, op. cit., pp.126-145.

<sup>25</sup> Olivera de Bonfil, op. cit., p.33.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; Abbé Alphonse Lugan, "Church and State in Mexico", **Current History**, February 1931, p.672.

<sup>27</sup> Ledit, op. cit., p. 37; Lorenzo Meyer, **Los inicios de la institucionalización. La política del Maximato**, México, El Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo 1928-1934), 1978, p.73.

<sup>28</sup> Olivera de Bonfil, op. cit., p.35.

<sup>29</sup> Meyer, op. cit., Vol. II:365; Olivera de Bonfil, op. cit., p. 37; Rius Facius, op. cit., p.364. According to Portes Gil, division in the army had occurred before; first, when Obregón nominated Calles to succeed him, second, with the restructuring of the army itself by General Amaro, and third, with the assassination of Obregón in 1928, **Quince años de política mexicana**, México, Editorial Botas, 1954, p. 232. For the restructuring of the army, see: Virginia Prewett, "The Mexican Army", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. XIX, No. 3, April 1943, p.613.

<sup>30</sup> For an account of the rebellion, see: L. Meyer, op. cit., pp.64-84, and Portes Gil, **Quince años ...**, op. cit., p.232.

<sup>31</sup> Tzivi Medin, **El maximato presidencial: historia del Maximato (1928-1935)**, México, Ediciones Era, 1982, p.51.

<sup>32</sup> Generals Francisco Serrano and Arturo Gómez attempted a military revolt in 1928; for details of this revolt see: Jean Meyer, **Estado y Sociedad con Calles**, México, El Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo 1924-1928), 1977, pp.131-144.

<sup>33</sup> Calles was appointed Minister of War at the beginning of the Escobar rebellion, on 3 March 1929.

<sup>34</sup> Carlos Alvear Acevedo, **Episodios de la Revolución Mexicana**, México, Editorial Jus, 1988, p.338; René Capistrán Garza, "La Iglesia Católica y la Revolución Mexicana", **Mañana**, 7 April, 1950.

<sup>35</sup> Partido Nacional Revolucionario, **La Gira del General Lázaro Cárdenas. Síntesis ideológica**, México, P.N.R., 1934, p.93.

<sup>36</sup> Meyer, *La Cristiada*, op. cit., Vol. I:289.

<sup>37</sup> Lippmann, op. cit., p.187.

<sup>38</sup> Mecham, op. cit., p.403; Carreño, op. cit. p.63.

<sup>39</sup> Wilkie, op. cit., p.231.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1920-1929*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973, p.143.

<sup>41</sup> Bailey, op. cit. p.ix.

<sup>42</sup> Meyer, op. cit., Vol.III: 319.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.219.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "Facing the masses no other institution enjoyed the same prestige and moral power as the Catholic Church [...] The only institution which, because of its economic vigour, its armed force, its structure, its international support, was capable of successfully opposing the ecclesiastical giant, was [...] the State."

(Luis Gonzalez, *Los Artifices del Cardenismo*, México, El Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo 1934-1940), 1970, p.70.

<sup>47</sup> Donald J. Mabry, "Mexican anticlerics, bishops, cristeros and the devout during the 1920s", *A Journal of Church and State*, Vol. XX, 1978, p.88.

<sup>48</sup> Calles considered as treason the chronological coincidence between the religious conflict and the difficulties with the United States; aggravated since January 1926 (Expropriation Law). For the government the collusion between the church and a foreign country, the United States and the oil companies, was an oft-times experienced event, that proof was not required; Alfonso Toro, *La Iglesia y el Estado en México*, México, Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1927, p.384; Ricardo J. Zevada, *Calles, el Presidente*, México, Ed. Nuestro tiempo, 1971, p.41.

<sup>49</sup> Fernando Robles, *Un Surco en el Agua*, México, n.p., 1970, Vol. I:409, quoted in Jean Meyer, *La Christiade, l'Eglise, l'Etat et le Peuple dans la Révolution Mexicaine (1928-1929)*, Paris, Payot, 1975, p.73.

<sup>50</sup> Meyer, *ibid*, p.69; for Obregón's position see: J. Pérez Lugo, **La cuestión religiosa en México**, México, Centro Cultural Cuauhtémoc, 1927, pp.412-417.

<sup>51</sup> Portes Gil, **Quince Años...**, *op. cit.*, p.32; Jean Meyer, **Apocalypse et Révolution au Mexique. La Guerre des Cristeros, 1926-1929**, Paris, Gallimard, p.62; Charles W. Hackett and J. Lloyd Mecham, "The Assassination of President-Elect Obregón", **Current History**, September 1928, pp.1026-1028; "El movimiento obrero mexicano: el sindicalismo mexicano: los inicios" Unpublished paper by the **Instituto Panamericano de Alta Empresa**, México, (P) DPN-40, November 1977, pp.25-27.

<sup>52</sup> Meyer, **La Cristiada**, *op. cit.*, Vol. I:289; Romana Falcón y Soledad García, **La semilla en el surco. Adalberto Tejeda y el radicalismo en Veracruz (1833-1960)**, México, El Colegio de México, 1986, p.187; Salvador Abascal, "Lázaro Cárdenas. Presidente Comunista (1934-1940)", **La Hoja de Combate**, 12 September, 1987, p.12.

<sup>53</sup> José Vasconcelos, "El Proconsulado", in **Memorias**, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982, Tomo II, p.759; Meyer, **La Christiade**, *op. cit.*, p.73; Medin, *op. cit.*, p.68; J. Murray to Foreign Office, FO 371/20640, [A/2871/2872/26], 23 February, 1937.

<sup>54</sup> Vasconcelos, *op. cit.*, pp.700-701.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.760-761.

<sup>56</sup> The term "modus moriendi" was coined by Bishop Leopoldo Lara y Torres in a letter to the Apostolic Delegate, criticizing the "modus vivendi"; the letter is printed in Mgr. Leopoldo Lara y Torres, **Documentos para la historia de la persecución religiosa en México**, México, Editorial Jus, 1954, p.739-745.

<sup>57</sup> Olivera de Bonfil, *op. cit.*, p 39; Wilkie, *op. cit.*, p.231.

<sup>58</sup> Palomar y Vizcarra, *op. cit.*, pp.43-44; see also the report of Mgr. Lara y Torres to pope Pius XI on the religious situation in Mexico after the agreements, in Lara y Torres, **Documentos**, *op. cit.*, pp.750-801.

<sup>59</sup> Abbé Lugan, *op. cit.*, p.673.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.674; Carreño, *op. cit.*, p.399; Meyer, **La Cristiada**, *op. cit.*, Vol. I: 356 fn. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Meyer, **La Cristiada**, *op. cit.*, p.367.

<sup>62</sup> Lara y Torres, *op. cit.*, pp.739-745.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.733-734.

<sup>64</sup> Ledit, *op. cit.*, p.95.



<sup>65</sup> Abbé Lugan, op. cit., p.674.

<sup>66</sup> Meyer, *La Cristiada*, op. cit., Vol. I: 354-355; Falcón, op. cit., pp.172-254, for attacks by General Tejada.

<sup>67</sup> Ledit, op. cit., p 105.

<sup>68</sup> Public telegram addressed to Portes Gil, 13 April, 1929, quoted by Falcón, op. cit., p.254.

<sup>69</sup> Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1964, p.170; Lara y Torres, op. cit. pp.869-872.

<sup>70</sup> Falcón, op. cit., p.258.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp.263 and 265; Lara y Torres, *ibid*, p.877; Dulles, op. cit., pp.529-530.

<sup>72</sup> Falcón, *ibid.*, p.259; Meyer, *La Cristiada*, op. cit., Vol. I: 336.

<sup>73</sup> Falcón, *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> The decision stated:

"As the law only limits the number of priests of each cult and does not concretely and individually legislate against the faithful or believers, it does not impose directly any obligation or prohibition that restricts their liberty to profess their belief, nor does it prohibit the exercise of their cult or the religious practice of the same [...]"

(*El universal*, 23 January, 1932).

<sup>75</sup> Lorenzo Meyer, op. cit., pp.132-144; Guillermo Palacios, "México en los años treinta", en Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, *América Latina en los años Treinta*, México, U.N.A.M., 1977, p.528.

<sup>76</sup> Joaquín Blanco Gil, *El Clamor de la Sangre*, México Editorial Rex-Mex, 1947, pp.425-430.

<sup>77</sup> Henry Bamford Parkes, *A History of Mexico*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1960, p.355.

<sup>78</sup> Miguel Alessio Robles, *Historia política de la Revolución Mexicana*, Colima, Universidad de Colima, 1983, 4<sup>a</sup>. edición, pp.361-371.

<sup>79</sup> Ledit, op. cit., p.106.

<sup>80</sup> Lara y Torres, op. cit., p.1011; Carreño, op. cit., p.977; Alberto María Carreño, **Pastorales, Edictos y Documentos de Mons. Pascual Díaz**, México, Ediciones Victoria, 1938, pp.343-350.

<sup>81</sup> Carreño, **El Arzobispo de México**, op. cit., pp.453 and 620.

<sup>82</sup> Meyer, **La Cristiada**, op. cit., Vol. II: 359.

<sup>83</sup> Lara y Torres, op. cit., pp.989-990.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.960.

<sup>85</sup> The **Pontifical Instructions** of 1st January 1932, are printed in Meyer, **La Cristiada**, op. cit., Vol. I: 369-370; see also Lara y Torres, op. cit., pp.947-995.

<sup>86</sup> Ledit, op. cit., p.109; Thyne to Foreign Office, Rome, 1st October, 1932, FO 420 284, [A 6732/56/26].

<sup>87</sup> Francisco Javier Gaxiola, Jr., **El Presidente Rodríguez (1932-1934)**, México, Editorial "Cultura", 1938, p.409; Ledit, op. cit., p.110, gives details of the arrest; see also: Thyne to Foreign Office, Rome, 2 October 1932, FO 420 284 [A 6776/56/26].

<sup>88</sup> Meyer, **La Cristiada**, Vol. I: 367-368.

<sup>89</sup> On the justification of the use of force, see: Lara y Torres, op. cit., pp.964-965; on the resignation see: Meyer, *ibid.*, p.360 fn.

<sup>90</sup> On the professionalization of the army see: Virginia Prewett, op. cit., pp.616-617; Edwin Lieuwen, **Arms and Politics in Latin America**, New York, Praeger, 1961, pp.100-121; Gloria Fuentes, **El ejército mexicano**, México, Grijalbo, 1983, pp.118-122; Jorge Lozoya, **El ejército mexicano**, México, El Colegio de México, 1976, p 52.

<sup>91</sup> México, Congreso de la Unión, **Los Presidentes de México ante la Nación. Informes, manifiestos y documentos**, México, Imprenta de la Cámara de Diputados, 1966; Vol. III: 805; Gaxiola, op. cit., p.13.

<sup>92</sup> Lara y Torres, op. cit., pp.986 and 988.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.895.

<sup>94</sup> Carreño, **El Arzobispo**, op. cit., pp.557-558.

<sup>95</sup> Lara y Torres, op. cit., pp.984 and 1005.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp.1006-1007.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.997; for various instances when the Holy See advised the League to change its name and its leadership, see: Carreño, op. cit., pp.86, 368 and 431.

<sup>98</sup> Ledit, op. cit., p.118; Jean Meyer, **Le Synarquisme: un fascisme mexicain? 1937-1947**, Paris, Hachette, 1977, p.35.

<sup>99</sup> Salvador Abascal, **Mis recuerdos, Sinarquismo y Colonia María Auxiliadora**, México, Editorial Tradición, 1980, p.122.

<sup>100</sup> Ledit, op. cit., p.118.

<sup>101</sup> See for instance: Pius VIII **TRADITI HUMILITATI NOSTRAE**, 24 May, 1829; Leo XIII **HUMANUM GENUS**, 20 April, 1884; and the article "Secret Societies", in the **New Catholic Encyclopedia**, Washington, D.C., 1967, Vol. XIII: 383-384.

<sup>102</sup> Ledit, op. cit., p.119.

<sup>103</sup> Abascal, op. cit., p.122.

<sup>104</sup> Unión Nacional Sinarquista "Hechos y causas que motivaron un cambio en la Jerarquía Secreta de la O.C.A.", México, December 1944, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (I.N.A.H.), Serie UNS, microfilm No. 115 [12.3.18], pp.1-2; Abascal, *ibid.*, p.140; Meyer, **Le Synarquisme**, op. cit., p.36.

<sup>105</sup> Abascal, *ibid.*, p.134.

<sup>106</sup> Meyer, **Le Synarquisme**, op. cit., p.35. N.B.: Salvador Abascal was the national leader of the U.N.S. from 6 August 1940 to 12 December 1941.

<sup>107</sup> Ledit, op. cit., 118.

<sup>108</sup> Abascal, op. cit., p.134.

<sup>109</sup> On one occasion, for instance, they were asked to throw a stone on one particular side of the Cathedral; each legionnaire waited to see who threw his stone, so that he could do the same and not feel that he was doing something silly; Abascal, op. cit., p.135.

<sup>110</sup> UNS, "Hechos y causas...", op. cit., p.3.

<sup>111</sup> Abascal, *ibid.*, p.141.

<sup>112</sup> Gaxiola, op. cit., pp.37, 38; Portes Gil, **Autobiografía**, op. cit., p.663.

<sup>113</sup> Gaxiola, op. cit., pp.55-56; Lorenzo Meyer, op. cit., p.163.

<sup>114</sup> Lorenzo Meyer, *ibid.*, p.163.

<sup>115</sup> Abelardo Rodríguez, **Autobiografía**, México, Editorial Novaro, 1962, pp.142-146.

<sup>116</sup> Gaxiola, op. cit., p.118; Rodríguez, op. cit., p.159.

<sup>117</sup> James W. Wilkie and Albert Michaels, **Revolution in Mexico: years of upheaval, 1930-1940**, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1968, p.199.

<sup>118</sup> "El programa educativo de México", in Armando Labra, **Narciso Bassols**, México, Editorial Terra Nova, 1985, p.40.

<sup>119</sup> Gaxiola, op. cit., pp.105-106; text of his resignation from the Ministry of Education, in Armando Labra, op. cit., pp.51-60.

<sup>120</sup> Gaxiola, *ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.108 and 109.

<sup>122</sup> Wilkie and Michaels, op. cit., p.202.

<sup>123</sup> Gaxiola, op. cit., p.427; Portes Gil, **Autobiografía**, op. cit., pp.130-133; for text of the arrest order see his: **La Lucha entre el poder civil y el clero**, México, s.e. 1934, pp.131-133.

<sup>124</sup> Portes Gil, **Quince años...**, op. cit., p.507; Gaxiola, op. cit., p.427.

<sup>125</sup> Wilkie and Michaels, op. cit., p.203. N.B.: When we talk, in this study, of revolutionaries, we use the word not in its European sense, but in the Mexican one, that is, to designate the men who participated in the Mexican Revolution, or who see themselves as the heirs of it.

<sup>126</sup> **El Nacional**, 21 July, 1934.

<sup>127</sup> T.G. Powell, **Mexico and the Spanish Civil War**, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1981, p.10; Anatol Shulkovsky, **México en la encrucijada de su historia**, México, Fondo de Cultura Popular, 1968, p.64; G. Palacios, op. cit., p.523.

<sup>128</sup> **Los Presidentes de México**, op. cit., Vol. III: 805.

<sup>129</sup> John B. Williman, "Adalberto Tejeda and the Third Phase of the Anticlerical Conflict in Twentieth Century Mexico", **A Journal of Church and State**, Vol, XV, Autumn 1973, No. 3, p.450.

<sup>130</sup> For a more detailed study of the two ideological positions, see: Medin, op. cit., pp.130-140, Guillermo Palacios, op. cit., p.531, and Arnaldo Córdova, **La política de masas del Cardenismo**, México, Editorial Era, 1974, pp.46 et seq; M.C. Meyer and W.L. Sherman, **The Course of Mexican History**, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.592.

<sup>131</sup> Gaxiola, op. cit., p.302; Partido Nacional Revolucionario, **Plan Sexenal**, México, P.R.M., 1934, p.85; Gilberto Bosques, **The N.P.R. of Mexico and the Six-Year Plan**, N.P.R. Bureau of Foreign Information, Mexico, 1937, paragraphs 165-170; Consul General Rees to Foreign Office, FO 371 22779 [A/8891/84/26], 29 November, 1939.

<sup>132</sup> Victoria Lerner, **La educación socialista**, México, El colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo 1934-1940), 1979, p.71; Gaxiola, op. cit., pp.305-311.

<sup>133</sup> **El Nacional**, 21 July, 1934.

<sup>134</sup> Lerner, op. cit., p.75.

<sup>135</sup> Gilberto Bosques, **The N.P.R. of Mexico and the Six-Year Plan**, Mexico, Bureau of Foreign Information of the National Revolutionary Party, 1937.

<sup>136</sup> Earle K. James, "Church and State in Mexico", **Foreign Policy Reports**, 3 July, 1935, pp.113-114.

<sup>137</sup> Mecham, op. cit., p.407; "Memorandum on the Religious Question in Mexico", FO 420 289, Enclosure No. 57," 23 February, 1937. For instances of religious bias in education, see: Francis C. Kelley, **Blood Drenched Altars**, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1935; and Charles S. MacFarland, **Chaos in Mexico. The Conflict of Church and State**, New York, 1935.

<sup>138</sup> Lara y Torres, op. cit., p.1082; Ledit, op. cit., p.73

<sup>139</sup> The amended text of Article 3 read:

"Education imparted by the State shall be socialist, and in addition to excluding all religious doctrine shall combat fanaticism and prejudice, for which purpose the school shall organize its teachings and activities in a manner to permit the creation of a rational and exact concept of the universe and social life in the mind of youth. Only the State - the Federation, the States, and municipalities - shall impart primary, secondary and normal education [...]" (Diario Oficial 13 December 1934).

- <sup>140</sup> Lara y Torres, op. cit., pp.1082-1083.
- <sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.1086.
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp.1086-1089.
- <sup>143</sup> Ledit., op. cit., p.74.
- <sup>144</sup> Portes Gil, *La Lucha entre el poder...*, op. cit., p.122.
- <sup>145</sup> *El Nacional*, 21 July, 1934.
- <sup>146</sup> José de Jesús Manríques y Zárate. *Voz de aliento*, México, n.p. 1936, p.19; and, *El Socialismo*, México, Ed. PAGF, 1936.
- <sup>147</sup> **Mensaje de protesta del Exmo. y Rmo. Sr. Delegado Apostólico Leopoldo Ruíz y Flores a los católicos mejicanos.** San Antonio, Tex., 30 December, 1934.
- <sup>148</sup> The Apostolic Delegate made reference to the speech Cárdenas gave at Taxco, Guerrero, on 10 May, 1934; the speech is partly reproduced in Hilda Muñoz, *Lázaro Cárdenas*, México, Archivo del Fondo, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976, pp.139.140.
- <sup>149</sup> Ruíz y Flores, loc. cit.
- <sup>150</sup> Partido Nacional Revolucionario, *La Gira del General Lázaro Cárdenas. Síntesis Ideológica*, México, P.N.R., 1934, p.93.
- <sup>151</sup> Alvear Acevedo, *Lázaro Cárdenas...*, op. cit., pp.244-257.
- <sup>152</sup> Meyer, *La Cristiada*, op. cit., p.367.
- <sup>153</sup> Joaquín Blanco Gil, *El Clamor de la Sangre*, México, Editorial Rex-Mex, 1947, pp.425-430.
- <sup>154</sup> Degollado Guízar, op. cit., pp.277-278; Meyer, *ibid.*, pp.366-373.
- <sup>155</sup> Circular of the Apostolic Delegate, issued at San Antonio, Texas and adress to the Bishop of Tabasco, quoted by Portes Gil, *La lucha...*, op. cit., p.122.
- <sup>156</sup> Letter from Leopoldo Ruíz to Raquel Salinas, 7 September, 1934, *Ibid.*, p.123.
- <sup>157</sup> Letter from Leopoldo Ruíz to Pascual Díaz, 7 September, 1934, *Ibid.*
- <sup>158</sup> Letter from the Apostolic Delegate to Raquel Salinas, 2 September, 1934, *Ibid.*, p 124.

<sup>159</sup> Leopoldo Ruíz to Pascual Díaz, loc. cit., *ibid.*, p.123.

<sup>160</sup> Letter from the Apostolic Delegate to Raquel Salinas, 2 September, 1934, *ibid.*, p.124.

<sup>161</sup> Letter of Leopoldo Ruíz to Pascual Díaz, loc. cit.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Letter of the Apostolic Delegate to Julia Fragoso, 12 September, 1934, *Ibid.*, p.129.

<sup>164</sup> Letter from the Apostolic Delegate to Pascual Díaz, 16 October, 1934, *Ibid.*, p.127.

<sup>165</sup> Letter of the Apostolic Delegate to the Father Provincial, 16 October, 1934, *Ibid.*, p.127.

<sup>166</sup> *Ledit*, op. cit., p.120.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RÉGIME OF PRESIDENT CÁRDENAS

The presidential campaign of Lázaro Cárdenas clearly reflected, from the start, his intention to form his own basis of political power at the national level, by attracting the support of peasants and workers. Cárdenas came into close contact with the masses, expressing in his speeches and conversations his desire to elevate them to a level of decisive action in the formulation of national policy.

His accession to the presidential candidacy had been the result, to some extent, of his political tact and judgement of the oligarchical struggle; the possibility of confronting Calles, the Supreme Chief, also implied the need for labour mobilization. The choice of Lázaro Cárdenas as presidential candidate has been explained by Nathaniel and Sylvia Weyl in the following terms:

"As the party convention neared, the victory of Cárdenas appeared to be a foregone conclusion. The army backed him on the assumption that anyone with such a long and distinguished service would represent the view of the officer group. His military activities in about a dozen states gave him national political strength. His uncompromising stand in favour of land distribution had won him the support of the radical agrarians and the bulk of the peasantry. The growing left wing, hailed him as its choice. Cárdenas' signed services on behalf of labour organizations won him the friendship of the trade unions. If pro-Catholic leaders, such as Cedillo, favoured Cárdenas, Tomas Garrido Canabal, chief of the anticlerical and professedly socialist



Red Shirts movement of Tabasco also attached himself to the Michoacan general's camp. Cárdenas undeviating opposition to the political activities of the Catholic Church was a source of support from anticlerical revolutionary groups.<sup>1</sup>

The President-elect proclaimed that the system of collective labour contracts should be strengthened until it became exclusive and he urged the adoption of a closed shop ("clausula de exclusión) which would eliminate the actions of unorganized labour, and the abolition of company unions. He gave his interpretation of the mandates of the Six-Year Plan and promised that he would give all aid to co-operative organization in the republic, which would enable the workers progressively to control the sources of wealth and productive instruments and which he saw as the ideal of the socialist doctrine of the Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

Ramón Beteta observed that the Six-Year Plan had one especial aim: to change the economic conditions of the country for the benefit of its labouring classes, so that they might live in dignity and comfort, a fuller life. He affirmed that the Plan was more than a political platform used to attract votes, it rather implied self-criticism and was a revision of the revolutionary proposals, ideals and principles.<sup>3</sup>

Future events were to demonstrate that Cárdenas took the Six-Year Plan seriously; in fact, the major share of his economic policy was simply to put into effect the dictates of the Plan.

The new administration harboured most of the sincere

and staunch anticlericals in the country. President Cárdenas himself had followed a radical anti-church policy when Governor of the state of Michoacán; Portes Gil, the new Foreign Minister, as Governor of Tamaulipas, as interim President and as Attorney General in the previous administration, had a long anticlerical record; Narciso Bassols head of the Treasury, was the leader of the anticlerical campaign in education; Rodolfo Elías Calles, Minister of Communications, closed all the churches in his native state of Sonora; General Mújica, Minister of National Economy, conducted anticlerical campaigns in Michoacán and Tabasco, and was seen as Cárdenas' ideological mentor; Garrido Canabal, Minister of Agriculture descended on the capital for the inauguration with thousands of his "Red Shirts" who had practically wiped out the Church in the state of Tabasco.

Carlton Beals reflected on the new government:

"the Church has less to hope for from the new administration than from any previous one. The Cárdenas government is moving left."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, those Mexicans who had found the P.N.R. state under Calles oppressively burdensome could not have felt at all relieved with Cárdenas' Presidential campaign. In May 1934 he made clear that he intended his administration to intervene in all aspects of production, consumption, culture and education.<sup>5</sup> He believed that arbitrary exercise of power on behalf of the working class constituted democracy's purest form. When he became President he declared that with a more equitable

distribution of wealth, a rise in living standards, a provision of equal cultural opportunities and the access to power for "the working majorities", he would be underscoring the basic principles of "true democracy."

Although Cárdenas is better known for his efforts in agrarian reform, to consider the effects of his government on the middle-class and on the radical Right, it is more appropriate to examine his rôle in the organization of labour and the evolution of the urban proletariat.

## **I. The Organization of the Masses**

### **1. The Workers**

Under Obregón and Calles, the revolutionaries became more aware of what it meant to govern a mass society, the product of a revolution of the kind Mexico had experienced. They were more conscious of the implications and, above all, of the perspectives that lay ahead. Their will to remain in power was unquestioned; such determination held them together. However, the effects of their policies would eventually divide the two strong men.

The revolutionaries had succeeded in establishing themselves as the undisputed hegemonic force in Mexican politics, keeping a firm grip on society. Their predominance after the Revolution was evident from the fact that all the major conflicts that the country experienced after 1917 were between members of the "revolutionary family", with the sole important exception of the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929).

Despite their hegemonic power, they failed to fulfil

the aims raised by the Revolution. The Revolution had involved a gigantic mass mobilization which they had used to take power. But gaining power was no guarantee for retaining it and for changing the State; what was needed was to maintain the continuous support of the masses, so as to justify the policies followed and confront the forces of the opposition.<sup>6</sup>

If it is true that this support was never absent, it assumed "gratuitous" character: that is, the masses got very little in return. This negative trade-off concealed extremely serious dangers to the revolutionary state, making essential the recovery of a mass policy if the revolutionary processes was to continue.

The Revolution had advanced the defence of the rights of the workers and had given them a political guarantee by inserting them in the Constitution of 1917, under Article 123. The aim was to extend the benefits of economic progress to the large urban population, so as to ensure the future industrial development of the country. Constitutional guarantees plus the possibility to improve their lot sufficed to ensure labour's support of the new regime.

Under Calles, the workers enjoyed better economic conditions than ever before; though, this was only relative and had been achieved through strict subjection of the labour movement to the designs of the political groups that sustained the leaders, and through the shameless manipulation of the workers' demands to preserve their unrestricted allegiance to the same groups.<sup>7</sup> The

Revolution had intended to take advantage of that allegiance and use it as a driving force for economic change. The State was the only actor capable of ensuring the disappearance of the old privileges and only the State could recover for the nation the resources still in foreign hands. However, no change could be dictated nor be justifiably pursued if the working masses were not behind the regime.

In the opinion of some of the "revolutionary family", like Cárdenas and Tejeda, that driving force had ceased to be operative when the manipulation of the workers had departed from, or had postponed the original objectives of social change. Hence, they argued, that while on the one hand, the possibility was lost to turn the State into a true agent of social and economic reform, on the other hand, new demands were adopted before the initial objectives had been attained, in an attempt, they claimed, to find an agreement with the old enemies. In other words, they considered that the State had not been able to fulfil its rôle as agent of economic and "spiritual" development of the country, because the revolutionary groups continued to be unable to implement the mass policies of the Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

Cárdenas, for the first time in post-revolutionary Mexico, though at the local level, as Governor of Michoacán, had made the State a real mass leader; he sought to organize the working masses and fuse their interests with those more general interests of the State; this was the most effective way, in his view, of attaining

the objectives of state-managed development as proposed by the drafters of the 1917 Constitution.<sup>9</sup>

With Cárdenas as President, the masses would re-adopt the rôle of "driving force". All revolutionaries had been aware of this since 1913, but Cárdenas intended, as he incessantly repeated during his Presidential campaign, to change them from being a passive and defenseless element, that politicians could dispose of at will, into a powerful force to be reckoned with.<sup>10</sup> The programme of social reforms that Cárdenas envisaged not only attempted to satisfy the interests of the masses, but above all, to make it into a social force, organized under the aegis of the State, the future of which depended on this. For Cárdenas, there was only one way to achieve this objective: labour should constitute a rightful subject of Mexican politics. For him, there was no other way to ensure the institutionalization of the Revolution.<sup>11</sup>

Cárdenas' six year administration drastically changed the country's existing social and political structures. To achieve all his political plans, the President needed a strong labour movement. When he came to power, the workers were disorganized in a multitude of federations, confederations, independent unions, etc. The big unions were either discredited (CROM, Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana), weak (CGT, Confederación General del Trabajo) or just did not have sufficient political force to aspire to dominate the labour scene (CGOCM, Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México). Only by forming a single labour union that comprised all

the unions in the country would political-interest divisions among local organizations be avoided:

"the government has the revolutionary and moral obligation to support and stimulate the information of such a front, so that it enjoys positive autonomy and be free from all political fluctuations. The organization of the workers will bring about the development of the national economy when labour obtains its due share in production".<sup>12</sup>

The labour movement did not rush to support Cárdenas; instead, the CGOCM continued to organize warily and to wait for results. With Cárdenas barely in office, a rash of strikes broke out.<sup>13</sup>

Calles waited for President Cárdenas to take some action that would indicate that the President was still of the same opinion as the Supreme Chief. But Cárdenas bided his time. He invited Calles to come to the capital to discuss the current labour agitation. They met on 8 June 1935, and apparently, the President told Calles that in response to the attitude adopted by the workers and the division that had emerged in the Chambers (a radical, socialist and cardenist "left-wing" that ignored the rule of the official party, the PRM, directed by Calles) he would make a declaration to bring them under control.<sup>14</sup> But Calles told the President that it would be better if he made the call to stop the agitation and the attempts to divide the two men, because, Calles argued, Cárdenas had hoisted the labour flag during his Presidential campaign.<sup>15</sup>

On 11 June 1935, a group of senators led by Ezequiel

Padilla met with Calles. The Supreme Chief condemned the divisions and accused those who stirred up discord, especially between him and Cárdenas. He condemned labour leaders for the recent strikes, which he said were unjustifiable and detrimental to the prosperity of the Nation and to the stability of the Government itself. "We are going backwards", he said, and added, menacingly, that events were taking a turn reminiscent of the period of President Ortiz Rubio.<sup>16</sup> Because the statement was to trigger a break between Cárdenas and Calles, it is quoted, together with the President's reply, at some length:

"For six months the country has been shaken by strikes, many of them entirely unjustified. The workers' organizations in many cases are making themselves examples of ingratitude, for strikes hurt capital much less than they hurt the Government, because they cut off from the State its means of prosperity. Thus the good intentions and the tireless work of the President are constantly obstructed [...] it is unfair of the workers to cause this damage to a Government headed by such an honest and sincere friend of labour as is General Cárdenas [...] I know the history of these organizations since they were created; I know their leaders, both old and new. I know that they do not agree among themselves and that they are torn in opposite directions by Navarrete [of the Labour Chamber] and Lombardo Toledano [head of CGOCM], who are responsible for this confusion. I know of what they are capable, and I can state that in all this agitation there are lively ambitions involved, very dangerous in people and organizations without adequate preparations. They are risking the economic life of the nation, without responding to the President's generosity and definite pro-labour inclinations [...] Strikes are



declared against a State which oppresses workers and denies their rights; but in a country where the Government protects them, aids them, and surrounds them with guarantees, then, to disturb the economic progress of the nation is not merely ingratitude; it is treason."<sup>17</sup>

President Cárdenas instructed Luis L. León not to publish the declarations in **El Nacional**,<sup>18</sup> the semi-official government paper; but other dailies did. **El Universal** headlined the event with the title "Calles Makes Sensational Declaration". Another wrote: "Patriotic Declarations of General Plutarco Elías Calles". At the end of the text, Padilla wrote: "We have had the rare opportunity to hear the voice of a great statesman". Some might have thought that the word of the "great statesman" would be enough to settle the matter. His word had been the norm and his directions were, for many years, virtually orders. However, Calles was no longer the strong man he was thought to be, and the colour of the country's political landscape had changed.<sup>19</sup>

The new energy that cardenist radicalism represented had been taking shape, and though not moving away from the principal ideas, the socialistic accent had been stressed and sought, above all, to eliminate the tutelage of the Supreme Chief. Cárdenas believed that there could be no efficient government if the President was constrained by, or impotent before an individual or a group. In May 1940 he wrote:

"In the government only one political force must excel: that of the President of the Republic, who must be

the only voice of the democratic aspirations of the people."<sup>20</sup>

Cárdenas did not respond immediately to Calles' declarations. He waited to see how much sympathy Calles still commanded. On the very same day that these appeared in the press, 12 June 1935, the officers of the Mexican Electricians' Union called all the other local branches and independent unions to an emergency meeting.<sup>21</sup> From the meeting came the unanimous resolution to condemn Calles, accusing him of being a traitor to the Revolution and an enemy of the Mexican working class.

On 14 June 1935 came the President's reply:

"With regard to the labour difficulties which have risen during the past few months, which have resulted in several strikes, I consider that they are the result of the adjustment of the interests represented by the two factors of production. If they cause some uneasiness, and even temporarily injure the economy of the country, when settled reasonably and with a spirit of equanimity and social justice, they contribute, with time, to making the economic situation more stable, since their rightful solution brings about better conditions for the workers, obtained within the economic possibilities of the capitalist sector.

[T]he Federal Executive is resolved to fulfil the programme of the Revolution and carry out the dictates of the Six-Year Plan without regard for the alarm expressed by representatives of the capitalist class. At the same time, it is my duty to say to workers and employers that both will enjoy all guarantees within the law or unnecessary agitations. In the working out of such programme, I have full confidence in the labour and peasant organizations of the country, and I

expect that they will know how to act in good will and the patriotism which the legitimate interest they represent demand of them [...]"<sup>22</sup>

Within the next few hours, the working masses took their protests to the streets, pledging support to Cárdenas and demanding the departure of Calles and the callistas. Overnight, Calles was out and Cárdenas in. The majority of the Chamber of Deputies voted unanimously to support Cárdenas. It took him only one year to overthrow an apparently firmly entrenched conservative political machine without resorting to military rebellion or political assassination.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the fact was that callism had been slowly wearing itself away, and by 1935 it was more of a weak structure than a dynamic action, a force more apparent than real, an impressive decor, more than a deep rooted experience.<sup>24</sup> Cárdenas, who had been working to build his own basis of support, through agitation especially, could collect the fruits of the Maximato, both the positive and the negative, in order to create his own personality and his own directives. The next day the composition of the new cabinet was announced. Garrido Canabal and other callistas were thrust out of public life.<sup>25</sup> General Cedillo was called to replace Garrido at the Ministry of Agriculture.

Instrumental in the fall of callismo had been General Saturino Cedillo, who had bitterly opposed Calles' efforts to enforce the anticlerical laws and to introduce secular education in his state of San Luis Potosí. He became identified as the defender of culture, of religious

freedom, and of youth.<sup>26</sup> He had been the first important army leader to come out openly for Cárdenas during the 1933 manoeuvres for the PNR Presidential nomination.<sup>27</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most significant consequence of the Calles-Cárdenas break was the united front of the labour movement. The threat that Calles would oust Cárdenas from power if the latter did not alter his conduct and reduce the working class to impotence, which occurred in June 1935, simply accelerated the unification of the working class.<sup>28</sup> Calles' declarations led the larger unions to sign a long-pursued joint pact, called temporarily **the National Committee for Proletariat Defence**. The Committee openly stated:

"The contracting parties declare that they are against collaboration with the capitalist class and that they will act in accordance with a revolutionary policy and with the principle of the class struggle."<sup>29</sup>

CROM, opposed to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, made common cause with Calles. But the days of the CROM as the government's labour pillar had passed. The struggle against Calles served, to a large extent, to weaken the CROM and to unify the labour movement around Lombardo Toledano. Other groups besides CROM devoted themselves to attacking the policies of Cárdenas and the Committee for Proletarian Defence. The "**Accion Revolucionaria Mexicanista**" of General Nicolás Rodríguez, also known as the "**Gold shirts**", created disturbances that were used to expose the "communist" threat of cardenism.

Cárdenas and organized labour were now partners. The

binding link between the two seemed to be the desire to fulfil the promises of the Revolution. The immediate benefit that the workers got from their bond with the State was a new and lasting modus vivendi with the employers. This became apparent when, in February 1936, the President travelled to Monterrey to give his personal support to a strike against a glass factory; his ultimate aim was to define the rules of the game between the factors of production and between these and the government.<sup>30</sup> Cárdenas introduced, on 11 February 1936, what became known as "the Fourteen Points", defining his position with regard to labour, industry, and employer-worker relations. The President stated, emphatically, that the organization of the workers, like that of the peasants, was indispensable for the enforcement of the laws of Mexico. The fourteen points were:

- "1. The government will cooperate with labour and capital in the solution of their problems.
2. A united labour front should be organized, since strife between rival labour organizations themselves is detrimental to the government as well as to the workers and employers.
3. The government is arbiter and regulator of social problems.
4. The demands of labour will be taken into consideration only as they come within the limits of the ability of the various industries to pay.
5. When labour's united front is organized, the government will deal with it to the exclusion of minority groups which might choose to continue.

6. Employers shall have no right to intervene in the affairs of labour organizations.
7. Employers shall have the same right as the workers have to associate themselves into a united front.
8. The government desires the further development of industries with the nation, since it depends upon their prosperity for its income through taxation.
9. Current labour agitation is not due to the existence of communistic groups, since they are so small they have no real influence in the affairs of the nation. The real cause of labour agitation is the fact that the just needs of the labouring masses have not been met, and the labour laws have not been carried out faithfully.
10. Small groups of communists do exist within the country - as they do in Europe and the United States - but their activities in Mexico do not endanger the stability of our institutions nor they alarm the government, and they need not alarm the industrialists.
11. More harm than the communist has been inflicted by the fanatics that assassinate teachers, fanatics that are opposed to the observance of the laws and of the revolutionary programme and, however, we must tolerate them.
12. The attitude of the employers of Monterrey is duplicated in centres such as La Laguna, León, the Federal District, and Yucatán.
13. Capital should be very careful not to continue provoking agitations because these would come to constitute a rallying point for political interests, and this would bring on civil warfare.

14. The industrialists who do not wish to continue to operate because of the demands of the unions can turn over their industries to their labourers or to the government, for it to operate. This would be a patriotic step, but simply to close down the factories would not be."<sup>31</sup>

Thereafter, the labour movement was thus definitely wedded to politics, that is, to the state, and vice versa:

"In bolstering the position of labour, the government had strengthened itself against the influence of foreign interests in the economy, projected a powerful instrumentality in the form of the trade union to offset the emerging strength of locally controlled industry, but at the same time it had maintained its control over the instrumentality. The union was another vehicle of growing control of the economy, to be used as the government saw fit".<sup>32</sup>

Though the President continuously denied that his programme had any relation to Communism,<sup>33</sup> his public statements glorified the class struggle, and Marx, Lenin and Stalin were praised as apostles of a modern religion for the salvation of mankind.<sup>34</sup> Yet, his expropriations in the Laguna District and in Yucatán were not part of a communistic movement aimed at overthrowing the social order guaranteed by Mexican institutions, but the realizations already embodied in Mexican legislation and pursued by all the governments of the Revolution.<sup>35</sup>

Cárdenas believed in the rights of the workers to organize and strike to obtain their share of the social product; he was prepared to utilize the power of the state

to assist the workers in their demands. He maintained that the modern concept of the nation and function of the state and labour legislation required universal extension of the principle that in cases of doubt the state should intervene on the side of the weaker party, because to give equal treatment to unequal parties was not to impart justice nor to give equity; the rôle of the state was "to achieve balance among the factors of production."<sup>36</sup>

Besides, he told employers that if they were unable to readjust their policies to assist the workers, they could expect their businesses to be nationalized.

The Cárdenas government recognized the existence of a proletarian class whose interests were opposed to those of the employers and the President proposed the intervention of the state on behalf of the workers.

The rôle of the state was one of intervention in economic production as an element of control, supervision, and balance, and the formation of the government with participation of all the social classes in a functional, democratic system. This is a popular front state attitude with elements of corporatism. The Cárdenas "socialistic" state consisted of government regulation of privately owned productive property for the good of all the classes in a mixed ownership society.

Cárdenas realized the political importance of the labour movement when, at the time of the break with Calles, it lent its support and endorsement. Thenceforth, he pursued his efforts to create a united labour front. The Six-Year Plan set out the outline: it sustained the



class struggle and sought the collaboration of the working class to achieve its ends. At the same time, the state should intervene when required "to prevent the oppression of the class aided by the union."<sup>37</sup>

Cárdenas strove to create a popular front: to this end he modified the structure of the official party, the PNR, and called it the party of the Mexican Revolution, or PRM.

The main task of new party was:

"the preparation of the people for the establishment of a workers' democracy as a step towards Socialism."<sup>38</sup>

The new party appeared on 11 December 1937; it was made up of four sectors: military, labour, peasant, and popular. The military sector was transitory. The popular sector included all who did not belong to any of the other sectors, and was intended to be the voice of the middle class which Cárdenas hoped to sever from its attachments to Capitalism.

Cárdenas knew that the revolutionary programme could not be carried out by decree; he needed the support of a powerful labour movement to eliminate conservative opposition:

"If the theory of government as the arbiter of class conflict was appropriate to a society in equilibrium, that of a conscious alliance between the state and the working-class organizations applied to a society in transition towards collectivist forms."<sup>39</sup>

In early 1936, Cárdenas bluntly told labour that he

wanted it united. A congress was held and a new labour confederation, the **Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM)**, was formed. Under the leadership of Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the CTM had a Marxist orientation, but nevertheless represented urban workers in the nationalist revolution. The CTM was government controlled and, along with CNC, the **National Confederation of Peasants**, represented the organized base of the revolution's popular urban sector. Consequently, the new workers' organization became one of the main components of Cárdenas' political power structure and of the PRM, in which it was known as the "labour sector".

The object of the CTM was stated by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, its leader and most influential thinker, to be as follows:

"The CTM is a national labour front for the struggle between the classes at the service of the Mexican workers."<sup>40</sup>

The attitude of the CTM became one of collaboration with the government, and, in particular, with the President. Labour was going to create a popular alliance to defend the interests of the Mexican Revolution. This policy of government intervention on behalf of the workers was reiterated by the CTM in April 1937:

"The proletariat knows well that under the capitalistic system it is impossible for it to receive all it produces, but there is the possibility of utilizing the Government to enforce the articles of the Constitution, which would alleviate the situation of the masses of workers."<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the CTM and the administration were tied together and were dependent on each other.

Lombardo Toledano claimed that the programme of the confederation had not been, from the beginning, solely confined to the interests of the proletariat but to the interests of all the people. For this reason, the CTM carried out alliances with groups other than the proletariat.<sup>42</sup>

President Cárdenas told the CTM at its first congress, on 24 February 1938, that the collaboration of labour, stimulated by government actions, required that the efforts of the proletariat be developed in a consistent and unified form to end internal controversies that had led to exhaustion of its forces, to the great detriment of proletarian unity and national production.<sup>43</sup>

In the same way that the CROM had served the interests of Callismo, so did the CTM with regard to Cárdenas. The régime put all its means at the disposal of the confederation - guarantees for union activity, money grants and persecution of the "enemies" of the CTM. López Aparicio pointed out that, at times, the entire force of the government seemed to be put at the service of the CTM.<sup>44</sup>

The Lombardo-Cárdenas parallelism was translated, at the same time, into political action. Lombardo Toledano and the other CTM leaders had declared, in their manifesto of 12 March 1936, that the Confederation did not intend to assume public office. Yet, the truth of the matter was

that many public positions were filled by leading members of the CTM. The directorate of the Confederation was, perhaps, not entirely sincere when it claimed the contrary, or did not keep its commitment, because the labour leaders of the CTM did obtain seats in the Senate or the Deputies, and the weight of the Lombardo organization, together with the CNC was a decisive factor in elections for governors, mayors, municipal governments, Congress or state representatives and, chiefly, in the political campaigns for Presidential elections.<sup>45</sup>

The CTM was characterized as a national labour front within the class struggle, at the service of Mexican workers, pledged to fight at the time, not for the transformation of the system of private property and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but simply for the fulfilment of the provisions of the laws resulting from the Mexican Revolution.<sup>46</sup>

This new partnership between labour and government worried the middle-classes and was reflected in some of the most important written works of the period. It was clear that they feared social upheaval as well as excessive state power. Samuel Ramos observed in "El Perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en México":

"The dominant tone in Mexican politics in recent years had been radicalism. Demagoguery has taken upon itself the propagation among the masses of extremist social doctrines that lack roots in Mexico, and which, given our national circumstances, are simply utopian."<sup>47</sup>

In 1936, Luis Cabrera, a traditional liberal,

published a summary of his reflections on the course that the Revolution was taking under Cárdenas. In 1930, he had been exiled when he openly criticized the Obregón-Calles system, in a famous conference, at the National Library, on the Twentieth anniversary of the Revolution.<sup>48</sup> Liberals saw in Cárdenas the "sovietization" of the country. Cabrera wrote that Mexican society and its constitutional government were disintegrating under the onslaught of Cárdenas and his supporters:

"They want to revoke the 1917 Constitution, which they call antiquated and useless, in order to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat based on a classless society"<sup>49</sup>

Impressive as the organization of the nationalist revolution was, during the Cárdenas era, significant opposition to it arose among nationalists of other types. As Victor Alba has suggested, some of their attacks reflected middle-class hostility to the economic direction of the revolution.<sup>50</sup>

The government was attacked because of its anti-capitalist tendencies and its excessive economic isolation. Some, like Gómez Morín, argued that without economic development, the revolution would ultimately fail. In 1939, he organized the National Action Party, or PAN, which represented Catholic nationalism, and favoured private enterprise and the Church.<sup>51</sup> Mexican conservatives were equally anxious; they blamed the "extremist" policies and the "irresponsible" labour movement, for disrupting the nation's economy, oppressing

the middle and upper classes, and generally implanting bolshevism.

The Mexican Right contrasted its own fervent nationalism with the PNR's alleged internationalism. In their view, Cárdenas threatened to destroy the country's sovereignty by subjecting it to foreign, namely, Soviet domination.

For the traditional Catholic Rightist, the only way Mexico could survive as a nation was if it turned to its historic traditions, based on, and intimately connected to, the Catholic faith, and thus prevent a communist takeover:

"Only paranoid, traitors, or other irresponsible people, [...], attack the concepts which sustain Mexican nationality: family, religion, property, patriotism. Wicked are the clenched fists that prepare to strike the Fatherland. Wicked are the arms that raise the red and black flag, for rather than being a symbol of proletarian redemption as claimed, it is really the symbol of Jewish imperialist penetration throughout the world. Wicked are the voices that sing the internationale as a substitute for our national anthem. It is not necessary to be a Rightist to curse these abominable attacks. It is only necessary to be Mexican".<sup>52</sup>

## 2. The Peasants

A very odd and very significant aspect of the labour movement during the Cárdenas administration was the fact that the peasants, who made up the largest, and perhaps the most important, economic sector of the country, were not at liberty to join with industrial labour because the

major peasant organizations were controlled by the official party.

As early as 1936, Cárdenas had attempted to create a counterbalance to the CTM.<sup>53</sup> He prevented any merger of peasants and industrial labour groups, thus assuring that Lombardo Toledano and the CTM under his leadership, never became strong enough to escape government tutelage:

"Cárdenas' handling of the problem of peasant organizations was characteristic of his method of statecraft: never to put all his eggs in one basket. While strengthening the unions through the establishment of the CTM, he kept the peasants' and civil servants' unions out of the CTM and directly under the sponsorship of the official government party."<sup>54</sup>

The President maintained that the CTM should refrain from calling a peasant congress because:

"Due to the special situation of the peasants, the Government that sprung from the Revolution has always looked upon itself and still does so, as obliged to sponsor their organization."<sup>55</sup>

He added that:

"[...] should the Confederation of Mexican Workers or any other similar organization, in competition with the Government action, attempt to organize rural workers for its own account, far from succeeding in this, it would only incubate the germs of dissolution, by introducing among the peasantry internal conflicts, which have been given such fatal results in the case of the industrial proletariat."<sup>56</sup>

The President wanted to form a national peasant

league without direct reference to any existing federation. He intended to tie the organized peasantry to the central bureaucracy. On 9 July 1935, Cárdenas instructed the National Executive Committee of the PNR to formulate a plan of action for organization of the peasant upon being given land by the government. He pointed out that the lack of organization in most units of the country had led to conflicts and to delays in the distribution of land. The President was convinced that the PNR was the proper agency for the unification of the peasantry: it would aid in implementing the agrarian legislation and, in conjunction with the government, help to raise living standards.<sup>57</sup>

The plan should be drawn up according to the following bases:

- a) The Committee should call conventions in every State of the Union for the purpose of having but one Legion of Agrarian Communities in each unit of the nation, each **ejido** to have two elected delegates to the convention of unification.
- b) After the League of Agrarian Communities had been organized in all the States, the National Executive Committee of the PNR was to call a Great Convention to form the Peasant Confederation, which would be the central organ of the scheme.
- c) The National Executive Committee should proceed to formulate drafts for laws on peasant life insurance, insurance against agriculture sickness and accidents,



insurance against loss of crops, and all other laws tending to insure the social and economic well-being of the members of the Peasant Confederation.

The conference confirmed that the new confederation would be set up by the government and would function in an "open spirit of class struggle". By using the PNR apparatus in this manner, Cárdenas secured the support of the movement for himself and prevented any politician from exploiting it for his own political designs.<sup>58</sup>

There had been continuous division within the Revolutionary family as to what course agrarian reform should take. By the end of the Second PNR Convention in 1933, two distinct groups had emerged: the "veterans" and the "agraristas".<sup>59</sup>

The veterans, led by Calles, believed that the distribution of ejido land should be determined and that efforts should be made to create a large number of small holdings for middle-class independent farmers. The agraristas, on the other hand, intended to make the ejido not a transitory, but a permanent, feature of the Mexican agricultural system. They demanded the complete socialization of the land.

Cárdenas seemed to advocate a "middle-of-the-road-course" as could be inferred from his programme, which favoured both small, privately owned plots and collective farms. In reality, however, he was more of an agrarista as was revealed by his actions in the Laguna region, and later in other regions.

In a speech he gave at Torreón, the capital of the

northern State of Coahuila, on 30 November 1936, he explained collectivist agriculture:

"In the early stages of the Revolution there may possibly have been some people in whose mind the ejido was but a mere supplement to the wage-earning system and insufficient in itself to guarantee the land labourer the economic independence that is the foundation of every civil liberty. But this view exerts no influence whatsoever on the fulfilment of the duties of the Government today. In the past, groups of peasants were given worthless parcels of land without tools, equipment, credit or organization. This was indeed meagre fruit after the great sacrifices made. The ejido, so conceived, would have resulted in disillusionment and in giving the landlords yet another excuse to reduce to a still more wretched level wages that are already wretched enough [...] But the nation's concept of the ejido has been entirely different [...] The ejido shoulders a double responsibility: as a social system, it must free the peasant from the exploitation to which he was subject under both the feudal and the individualistic regimes; and as a mode of agricultural production, it must yield enough to furnish the nation with its food requirements."<sup>60</sup>

With the arrival of Cárdenas to the presidency, the whole idea of agrarian reform and agricultural organization changed.<sup>61</sup> During his term of office, he distributed almost twice the amount of land given to peasants prior to his administration. He presided over the distribution of 17,906,429 hectares, almost all in the form of ejidos, to 811,105 recipients. By the end of his term, in 1940, ejidos accounted for one-half of the country's total farmland and over one-half of the arable land under cultivation. Arnaldo Córdova reckoned that,

during this period, land distribution affected 18.4 million hectares and benefited more than a million peasant families, who received credit, arable lands and were politically and economically organized, culminating, in 1938, in the creation of the National Peasant Confederation, or CNC, the object of which was to serve as an instrument of peasant defence and a means of peasant political participation.<sup>62</sup> The CNC was successful because it worked with the total support of the State, and accomplished real reforms.<sup>63</sup>

Land distribution under Cárdenas meant the end of the hacienda system as the dominant economic and political institution of the country. Arthur Whitaker commented that his rule marked the high point of the agrarian emphasis of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>65</sup>

In November 1935, about a year after becoming President, Cárdenas gave agrarian reform the green light, affirming that the ejido would be the base of it, while at the same time he publicly condemned the callista approach.<sup>65</sup> The Cárdenas concept of the ejido was bold and unprecedented. For the first time, the predominant agrarian structure, the hacienda, was declared illegal and the decision was taken to hand them over to the poorest peasants.

In order to create a powerful and permanent social group, peasants would be backed with credit institutions and adequate political and agricultural organizations. To achieve this aim, the first step was to expropriate the most productive zones; thus breaking the prevailing

agrarian structure. There were many areas affected: at the top of the list were the Laguna region in Durango and Coahuila, Valle de Mexicali in Baja California, Los Mochis in Sinaloa, El Mate in Tamaulipas, Valle del Yaqui in Sonora, the sisal haciendas of Yucatan, the coffee plantations of Chiapas, and the rice and citrus properties of Lombardía and Nueva Italia in Michoacán.

The process of expropriation and confiscation turned the State into the owner of the lands, and the peasant (ejidatario) its beneficiary.

The ejido had, for Cárdenas, several implications: the peasant, by demanding, and obtaining, ejidos, broke off with the economic tie that bound him to the master. Consequently, the rôle of the ejido was not as an economic complement of the salary; instead, because of its extension, quality and system of exploitation it should be sufficient for the absolute economic liberation of the worker; creating, thus, a new agro-economic system.<sup>66</sup> This idea involved not only the concept of "revolutionary" justice, but also an economic one, that of production. Cárdenas sincerely believed that the creation of a large ejidal sector would be economically beneficial, since it would lead to an increase in production, and would be more responsive to government economic policy than the private sector would.<sup>67</sup>

The project of agrarian reform was marked by its magnitude of scope (it affected not only the crop areas, but the entire national territory); of method (besides distribution and restoration, internal colonization would

also be used and new centres of agrarian production would be opened. Cárdenas also introduced a new way of organizing the ejidos: as collective production units); of legal coverage (recognising that "peones acasillados" could request land.<sup>68</sup> Besides, a new expropriation law, subordinated to reasons of public interest, was enacted); of resources (creation of the Bank of Ejidal Credit; increase of resources to the Agrarian Department, etc.); but especially, of conception (the State would provide everything: planning, organization, research, instruction, communications, services, etc.)

At the end of the Cárdenas administration, the policy of ejido distribution, through the institutions created ex profeso, effectively gave the government control over areas of commercial agriculture and, because of the magnitude of the distribution, it enjoyed a very significant basis of support.

From an economic point of view, the experiment of land distribution had surpassed the president's expectations. The sudden increase in public expenditure, the constant deficit of over 40% of the budget for the years 1936 and 1937, plus a debt of 87.6 million pesos to the Banco de México sustained a price rise already swollen by a fall in agricultural output and productivity. The country was living beyond its means; no relation was kept between the state of the economy and the need to build up the capital requirement for economic growth.<sup>69</sup>

The British minister in Mexico summarized the initial effects of the administration's incentives on land

distribution:

"Whereas he used to have his regular wage, small though it may have been, his house and a piece of ground to cultivate for his own use, the peasant whose demand for a smallholding has been satisfied is now thrown on his own resources. Hampered by lack of capital for purchase of seeds, farm implements, etc., he becomes disillusioned, and many have abandoned their holding to seek work elsewhere.

Whatever justification there may be for the slogan that 'the land is for the tiller of the soil', the general effect of the policy appears to be that no one, with the possible exception of some local political bosses, has benefited. Not only are the landlords impoverished, but the working of the system is uneconomic, both for the smallholders and the community in general [...]. The net result appears to be that production has gone down, with the consequent increase in prices for the town dweller. Furthermore, crops such as henequén, sugar cane etc., can only be economically grown on large estates, and are definitely unsuitable for cultivation on smallholdings"<sup>70</sup>

In political terms, however, the reform was very successful. The hacendado class - or more accurately, the ex-revolutionaries turned land owners - was almost eliminated and the hacendado became a thing of the past. Furthermore, the cardenist agrarian reform strengthened the State, politically. The "master" disappeared, but was replaced by a burdensome bureaucracy that stretched from the executive chief ("comisario ejidal") to the offices of the Ministry of Agriculture. According to Tannenbaum, a friend and admirer of Cárdenas, the president never intended this outcome. His ideal, he wrote, was a

different one: a Mexican nation based on the autonomous and independent government of the people, where each individual could possess an ejido, could be free from exploitation and could actively participate in the affairs of the community.<sup>71</sup>

However, there was a serious flaw in Cárdenas' scheme: the honesty of the authorities. The truth of the matter was that the ejido bound the peasant to the State rather than to the land, an argument later raised by Synarchism. State paternalism entailed, in general, subjection. Instead of becoming a freer man, the peasant became political capital:

"The tendency becomes increasingly evident to give the ejido the character of a cooperative farm, and to make the state in practice, if not in theory, a vast monopolistic landowner"<sup>72</sup>

The government of Cárdenas knew that it needed proletarian unity to pursue its programme of social reform. Furthermore, it understood that it should solve the religious problem if the rural masses, which the church still influenced, were to be brought firmly behind the government. The break with Calles also increased the exigency for a religious peace as it forced Cárdenas to look for support outside the revolutionary family.

## **II. Relations with the Church**

The PNR "socialist" education programme of 1933-1934, along with President Cárdenas' anticlericalism in 1935,

produced new militancy among lay Catholics. This encouraged the hierarchy to reject compromise with the government despite more religious persecution. Cárdenas, as early as 15 January 1935, hinted that his government was only concerned with the observance of the law and had no ulterior motive to attack the religious sentiment and creed of the nation. He declared, somewhat ambiguously, that the Catholic problem was not the preeminent problem of the country; the enemy, he said, was fanaticism, not religion.<sup>73</sup>

He distinguished between honest religious beliefs and religious fanaticism. He defined fanaticism as prejudices which keep the youth in ignorance and impede the progress and prosperity of the country. He denied the existence of religious persecution in Mexico; and stressed that the government was only interested in respect of the laws.<sup>74</sup> The inference was clear: if the clergy stayed out of politics and did not attack the social reforms of the Revolution, then he would allow religion a place in Mexico.

In June, in a collective pastoral instruction addressed to "the workers and peasants throughout the Republic", the bishops advised Mexican labourers:

"to proceed decisively to the great work of organizing our country on the basis of the Corporation [...] The world is presently disenchanted with liberalism; it will soon grow weary of Communism; the Catholic idea begins to give life and strength to social and economic organization which recognizes corporatism as its basis."<sup>75</sup>



At the same time, the government continued to convert church properties all over Mexico to official use. On 4 September 1935, the **Diario Oficial** published the "**Ley de Nacionalización de Bienes**", which comprised all decrees, laws, and agreements published by the previous governments defining which goods of the clergy belonged to the nation. It clearly established the principle that goods used for religious purposes were the property, not of the Church, but of the nation. The law defined as possessions of the nation all the goods destined for use in churches for a public cult, including buildings and seminaries involved in religious propaganda, administration or education.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the prevailing tense situation, in September, the entire Mexican hierarchy petitioned the president to bring about the reform of the Constitution so as to guarantee the right of religious instruction in private schools, to prohibit schools from imparting anti-religious instruction, to authorize religious associations to own property, and to abolish all provisions contrary to the principle of religious freedom.<sup>77</sup> And again, on 18 October, fourteen archbishops and bishops signed a petition on behalf of the entire clergy asking for the abrogation of the "**Ley de Nacionalización de Bienes**" and the modification of the anticlerical aspects of Articles 3, 24, 27 and 130 of the Constitution. They particularly asked that private schools be allowed to teach religion, that religious liberty be restored, by abolishing penalties against the Church, and that religious associations be allowed to own the real and personal

property necessary for their sustenance and the public worship.<sup>78</sup>

The reply of the government came on 5 November. The Minister of the Interior, Silvano Barba González, issued a decree whereby the government once more blamed the Church for extorting the goods of the nation in return for promises of happiness after death. It charged the Church with denying religious liberty to others and of treachery to the fatherland. The decree proclaimed the desire of the government to free the youth from all dogma, and restated, unequivocally, that all the laws would be enforced as they stood.<sup>79</sup>

The Church reacted to this rebuff by the President, by issuing two pastoral letters, in both of which she stigmatized Socialism as well as Communism as being a "dissolving doctrine"<sup>80</sup> In the first one, she condemned Socialism in education:

"No Catholic can be a socialist; Socialism being understood to mean any system, economic, philosophical, or social, which in one form or another does not recognize the rights of God and the Church, nor the natural rights of all men to possess the goods which they have acquired through work or have inherited legitimately; or which foments hatred and unjust strife amongst classes.

No Catholic can learn or teach Socialism, nor cooperate directly in the learning or teaching of it since it contains many errors condemned by the Church.

Parents are forbidden to put their children in any college or school which teaches Socialism".<sup>81</sup>

A few days after the publication of this pastoral letter, the hierarchy published another open letter addressed to president Cárdenas. This communication made reference to the government's rejection of its earlier request for constitutional reforms, and made several demands:

- "(1) restoration of churches seized or closed since 1914;
- (2) authorization for the construction of new church buildings;
- (3) abolition of state legislation limiting the number of clergy allowed to function;
- (4) authorization to open seminaries;
- (5) restoration of church annexes for use as homes and offices for priests;
- (6) termination of anti-religious instruction in schools and removal of all anti-religious propaganda from these institutions."<sup>82</sup>

In January 1936, the hierarchy addressed a letter to the clergy and laity reminding Catholics to repudiate secularism and to avoid socialist education under pain of mortal sin.<sup>83</sup>

#### 1. Religious persecution

At the head of the government's anticlerical campaign was Tomás Garrido Canabal, former governor of the state of Tabasco and leader of a leftist militant group, founded in 1932, the **Bloque de Jóvenes Revolucionarios**, better known as "**Red shirts**", which had been instrumental in the

virtual eradication of the Catholic Church in that State.<sup>84</sup>

While the Mexican Government was interested in destroying the economic and political power of the Church, the militant Red Shirt movement was determinately atheistic and bent on extirpating all religious beliefs. This was a movement which Cárdenas described as:

"truly idealistic because they think in a collective manner and because they advocate the common good and happiness of everyone. The Mexican Revolution, [he added], has had a profound social interpretation in Tabasco, which we should imitate with valour and sincerity."<sup>85</sup>

During his campaign tours, Cárdenas visited Tabasco where, after reviewing thousands of parading Red Shirts, he called the state a "laboratory of the Revolution".<sup>86</sup> He vehemently praised the youth of Tabasco, for it was:

"[C]onscious of its duties and more ready to carry them out than to demand its rights. A youth, healthy, industrious, forged in the shop-floor and fields, is the element which should replace the old revolutionary generation in the public life of the country. The youth of Tabasco is truly idealistic, because it has collective thought and achieves the well-being and happiness of all.

A youth that has unified its aspirations and even its external appearance, in the crimson blouses and black trousers that it wears, so as to provide a more perfect keynote of organization and of discipline,"<sup>87</sup>

Cárdenas wished that other States of the Republic would emulate the existing organizations of Tabasco, because "Tabasco is the bastion of the Revolution", and

added that it would not be long before similar organizations sprung up throughout the country, if Tabasco provided its help and assistance.<sup>88</sup> He expressed his admiration for the work of Garrido Canabal in the organization of workers and peasants:

"In Tabasco, [he declared] one could breathe an air of enthusiasm, of discipline and of openness [because the Governor had undertaken the great social task of eliminating fanaticism] which blinds the spirit of the people [...]"<sup>89</sup>

For over a decade, Garrido had been the absolute dictator of the destinies of Tabasco. Yet, Cárdenas proudly and publicly admired him, because:

"men like Garrido [he said] had known how to respond to the trust and responsibility that the Revolution had confided them."<sup>90</sup>

When Cárdenas became President, he gave Garrido the Ministry of Agriculture. Garrido descended on the capital with a contingent of his dreaded Red Shirts;<sup>91</sup> thus turning the worst fears of Mexico City's Catholic middle class into chilling reality.<sup>92</sup> They took posts at the Ministry of Agriculture and carried on anticlerical agitation which soon resulted in bloody clashes.

Townsend once asserted that "there was a certain soulagement among upper and middle class circles" with the incumbent cabinet; in fact, however, there was terrible apprehension as to how far the "leftist" policies of the new administration would go.<sup>93</sup> With the rapid growth of Garrido Canabal's organization in Mexico City, clerical

and conservative opposition hardened.

On 30 December 1934, heavily armed Red Shirts held an antireligious meeting in the atrium of the Church of San Juan Bautista in Coyoacán, one of the Capital's boroughs.<sup>94</sup> They fired on Catholics as they were leaving mass, killing several and wounding many.<sup>95</sup> One Red Shirt was lynched in the ensuing riot. The president sent a wreath to his funeral<sup>96</sup> and in his New Year's message to the nation, repeated his determination to enforce strictly all anticlerical legislation. Six months later, the president pardoned all Red Shirts arrested in connection with Coyoacán killings.<sup>97</sup>

On 8 January 1935, a group of university students demonstrated outside the National Palace demanding the resignation of Garrido Canabal and the dissolution of his militant organization.<sup>98</sup> After the rally, they gathered outside the organization's headquarters where a violent confrontation was unleashed, leaving ten students hurt.<sup>99</sup> The following day, Cárdenas condemned "clerical agitation", accusing the Church of exploiting any action of the "revolutionary" groups to turn it into violent confrontation. He proceeded to ban all public demonstrations of protest against groups of different ideology or "confessional" ideas.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the president instructed the Minister of the Interior to ensure:

"[that] only the PNR could engage in political and social activities aimed at strengthening the ideals that constitute the bulwark of the Revolution and that are norms to all the revolutionaries".

This point illustrates the close relationship that existed between government and party and is an indication of Cárdenas' open attempt at controlling and checking garridista militancy.<sup>101</sup> Some Red Shirts left the Capital for Tabasco. Cárdenas had changed his mind about the desirability of spreading their action throughout the Republic.

Nevertheless, despite curbing anticlerical excesses in Mexico City, neither Cárdenas nor the PNR backed away from their harassment of the Catholic Church.<sup>102</sup> Throughout 1935, church desecrations and anti-Catholic violence continued in earnest. State governments confiscated religious buildings and used them for secular purposes:

"Throughout the year 1935, hardly a week passed when a church or religious building was not being expropriated by the government."<sup>103</sup>

During that same year, nineteen of the thirty-two Mexican bishops continued to be in exile; and the Red Shirts were allowed by federal authorities to continue attacking religion in the provinces.<sup>104</sup>

On 3 March 1935, some five thousand Catholics demonstrated against the government in Guadalajara; when they reached the City Square they were shot at by the police, the Red Shirts and others from the buildings surrounding the square. Six Catholics were killed and many arrests were made. The Interior Minister justified the killings of "fanatics" and "cristeros" on the grounds that they had joined forces to protest against the

Executive Power of the State of Jalisco.<sup>105</sup>

Many were the means employed to "defanatize"; but they all shared a common denominator; the attack and destruction of the Catholic Church. **El Nacional**, the semi-official government paper, was relentless in its condemnation of the Church and the clergy: it featured anti-religious propaganda, as did the radio broadcasts of the PNR in this respect, Ignacio García Tellez, the Minister of Education, declared that he would make every effort to destroy the Catholic Church; and emphasized that socialist education meant:

"[that] youth should fight the capitalist régime to establish the proletarian dictatorship."<sup>106</sup>

Renewed protest led to more violent clashes and more arrests.<sup>107</sup> However, Catholics refused to give up their cause.

In Tabasco the régime of Garrido Canabal was overthrown by violence. A group of young Tabascan exiles, led by Rodolfo Brito Foucher, returned to the state to organize an opposition party for the local election. It seems that they had the blessing of two cabinet ministers, General Francisco Mújica and Luis Rodríguez, but no patent official support.<sup>108</sup> After a violent clash, in Villahermosa, between the exiles (**Comité Liberador del Estado de Tabasco**) and some of Garrido's followers,<sup>109</sup> popular support for the expedition increased throughout the country. Within days, Congress withdrew recognition of the state government, and the governor, a Garrido



nominee, resigned. Shortly after, Garrido Canabal went into exile.<sup>110</sup>

### **III. The Rise of a Secular Radical Right**

Catholics were not the only group disenchanted with the policies of Cárdenas; those most upset were the small and medium industrialists, the middle classes, a large number of older army officers, the remaining hacendados, and those other members of the rural community who were disillusioned with the way in which the President carried out agrarian reform.

Industrialists were concerned that, with the support of the CTM, Cárdenas decided to expropriate their companies. They organized a national structure of employers' associations, the **Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana, (CPRM)**, which was formally constituted in 1936.<sup>111</sup> The middle classes also dreaded the growth of a workers' state, and those on fixed incomes suffered from the acute inflation of the years 1936 and 1937. In the Army, many senior officers were worried about the power of the CTM, and suspicious that Cárdenas might eventually replace the army with worker and peasant militias.<sup>112</sup> Their fears were fuelled by the CTM and the Communist Party, both of which pressed for the creation of such militias and whose propaganda gave the impression that they exercised more influence than was in fact the case.

In the rural sectors the hacendados were not alone in their hostility to President Cárdenas' commitment to

generalize land distribution. Their views were shared by certain members of the landowning community: the administrators and foremen who stood to lose their privileged position, those "peones acasillados" who felt more secure as wage earners than as responsible ejidatarios, and the tenants and sharecroppers for whom their landlords had been a significant source of credit and who had come to regard the government's agricultural credit banks as inadequate substitutes. Agrarian dissatisfaction was heightened by the continuing friction between the Church and the State and by the government's insistent support for the implementation of socialist education, which together caused a resurgence of Cristero upheaval.<sup>113</sup>

Disenchantment with the administration on the part of all these groups, both rural and urban, did not, however, lead to the growth of important opposition political parties. The nature and the strength of the régime made any attempt in this direction futile. There were, however, small right-wing organizations and pressure groups which took advantage of the fears of the middle class of the CTM and of Communism. Their financial backing came for the most part from industrialists, merchants and small businessmen, and a few politicians who had a personal interest in supporting them (Cedillo, for example). The most important organizations were: the **Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista** (Mexican Revolutionary Action), or ARM, founded in 1934 by Nicolás Rodríguez, a former general in Francisco Villa's army; the **Unión**

**Nacional de Veteranos de la Revolución** (the National Union of Revolutionary Veterans), or UNVR, established in 1935, whose strength was in the army; and the **Confederación de la Clase media** (Confederation of the Middle Class), formed in 1936.<sup>114</sup>

Although the largest of these organizations had branches in several state capitals, often in association with the local office of the CPRM, they were numerically and financially weak. The most important was the ARM, which at its height, in 1936, had several hundred members and drew up to five thousand sympathizers to its parades. But the following year, Nicolás Rodríguez, was sent into exile after being involved in political violence and his organization was officially banned.

#### 1. The Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista

The ARM, or "gold shirt", was found in March 1934 by General Nicolás Rodríguez, as a paramilitary organization inspired by Mussolini's black shirts, allegedly prompted by former President Abelardo Rodríguez with the support of Calles,<sup>115</sup> in order to keep the workers under control, particularly after Calles had become more conservative and more distrustful of Lombardo Toledano and the trades union movement.

General Rodríguez had fought with Villa in the early stages of the revolution and maintained that his organization directly descended from Villa's élite cavalry units known as "dorados". By identifying his men with Villa's units, Rodríguez sought to obtain recognition as an authentic revolutionary group, and to attract the young

and adventurous to his ranks.

The ideology of the ARM was ultranationalist and anti-communist with hues of anti-Semitism. Its main activity consisted in breaking up strikes.<sup>116</sup>

From the start, the ARM was branded fascist, an accusation that the organization vehemently denied; on the contrary, they argued, the dictatorship of the proletariat was but a fascist dictatorship with another name:

"The rule of a master who does with the proletariat what he wants".

"Fascism and the dictatorship of the proletariat resemble each other, [...], because they both attack the very foundations of human liberty; they both turn man into a pariah, into a worthless thing."<sup>117</sup>

General Rodríguez asserted that they were the foes of the leaders that brought disorder to the country; and that they condemned false revolutionaries.<sup>118</sup>

The gold shirts were the natural beneficiaries of the large labour unrest that the government encountered during the years of the depression. The funds for the ARM came from capitalists, industrialists and big business.<sup>119</sup> Writers on the left and those closely associated with cardenism, have always maintained that the true and sole source of funds was the Nazi party, acting through a complicated network of underground organizations, directed from the German legation.<sup>120</sup> However, no evidence has yet emerged to confirm this assertion.

The ARM represented the reaction of the Mexican middle-class to the threat of a rising urban proletariat.

Its motto was: "Mexico for the Mexicans"; the middle-class, the chief beneficiary of its nationalism. It claimed that this class had been historically responsible for progress and social change, constituting the most advanced sector of the population.<sup>121</sup>

The gold shirts epitomized the reaction against the threat of a socialo-communist revolution in the country. They feared a judeo-communist plot to undermine the Mexican nation and her traditions. The ARM's nationalism and its opposition to the labour demands, exemplified by the series of strikes that characterized Mexico in 1935, sprang from the adoption by the government of an alien ideology: Russian Socialism.<sup>122</sup> It averred that, in Mexico, the basic struggle was between nationalism and Communism.

The gold shirts did not survive long enough to seriously challenge the government of Cárdenas, but they did manage to gain much more notoriety than their numbers warranted. The main feature of their nationalism was a vociferous hatred of the Jews and of the communists. In their speeches and manifestoes, they condemned "International Judaism", and pledged that they would go to any length to combat Jewish activities in Mexico. They demanded that the President limit the number of Jews living in Mexico, deprive them of Mexican citizenship; and to ban them from participating in politics. He also promised to present a petition to the President asking that all factories under Jewish control be turned over to Mexican labour.<sup>123</sup>

Though anti-semitic in appearance, mention of the Jew and of Jewish interference was, for the most part, equated with the peril of Communism. Statements like:

"The only thing that stands out against this chaos [the social situation in the country] is the corrupt leaders's communistic desire to submit [the Mexican people] to the enslaving yoke of Jewish Russia"

and:

"The dictatorship of the proletariat has never existed and cannot possible exist. What there is, is Jewish revenge against a past of proscription and ostracism which deceives the masses and, on the pretext of the class struggle and of the socialization of the means of production launches them against the highest moral values and against property";<sup>124</sup>

were intended more to arouse attention to the communist tendencies of the régime and the labour leadership, than to a real Jewish problem.<sup>125</sup>

The gold shirts differed from the more religious oriented Right, in that as representatives of the middle-class, exposed to the economic and political values of classical liberalism and disquieted by the perceived imminence of a socialist takeover, they found the Constitution of 1917 at the root of their misfortunes. In their Manifesto of 4 March 1936, they declared:

"Politically, our Constitution is a carbon copy of the Constitution of 1857, and in this respect, it lags one hundred years behind, and has only

served to foster dictatorships and revolutions [...] We accept in its integrity, together with the chapter on individual rights, the law of 6 January 1915 and Articles 27 and 123 of the Constitution, but we ask that all the others be urgently revised [...] The Constitution is not in force, and except for Articles 27 and 123, the rest is, or almost, worthless. It is no exaggeration to affirm that we find ourselves at present at the same juncture where the Revolution encountered the government of General Porfirio Díaz; people do not vote because they are not allowed to."<sup>126</sup>

The religious Right, on the other hand, considered the Reform movement of the Nineteenth century, and indeed the events that followed Independence, as the cause of the inevitable doom of the nation. Contrary to the religious Right, the ARM affirmed that they intended to continue the work of Hidalgo, Morelos and the founders of the Reform and the Revolution: Juárez, Madero and Carranza. What is more, the ARM made no reference in its programme to the Catholic Church; nor did it allude to religion, except when it demanded freedom of worship:

"The Revolution did not include in its programme a religious problem. The problem that eventually emerged as religious has been artificial and set up for purely political purposes [...] We do not take the defence of any religion; but we think that belief in a superior world should not be the subject of persecution. Religion, whichever it is, is a moral prerogative, that the assaults of the authorities cannot reach. We reject religious fanaticism; but we also reject political fanaticism and revolutionary fanaticism which have produced so many blatant lies and deceptions to mislead our people. The religious problem is as big a lie as

the communist lie. Relatives of the top leaders of Mexico, have always been religious, and with few exceptions, capitalists."<sup>127</sup>

The history of the ARM during the thirties can be divided in two periods: during the first, from its foundation to November 1935, it operated mainly in the Capital and received some official support - at least tacit - but this decreased gradually. As part of Cárdenas' battle for supremacy against Calles, in 1935, the President looked for ways to suppress the ARM; the opportunity came on 20 November 1935, when a "gold shirt" rally ended in violent confrontation with left-wing opponents. There were six deaths and fifty injured; this event caused so much public indignation that the government opted to suppress the organization.<sup>128</sup> Cárdenas accused the ARM of concealing the true nature of its tendencies behind a mask of nationalism:

"The activities of these groups only serve to create divisions amongst the workers and to raise obstacles to the development of the social programme of the Revolution. There is no need for a nationalist campaign in a country such as Mexico where all the citizens fulfil their duty to the country [...] In all cases, it is the work of the government to coordinate the common force in order to create new sources of production to establish just division of wealth. For these reasons, the government has the best claim to guarantee a sentiment of nationalism".

The second period began in November 1935 and ended with the *pronunciamiento* of General Cedillo in May 1938; during this period, it operated in the provinces, particularly in the North.



## 2. The CPRM

The difference with the religious Right lay in the fact that the secular Right lacked a previously established structure and the hierarchic system of the Church, which made it a fragmented movement with no coordination.

Nevertheless, despite being more fragmented and lacking in central direction, the secular Right found some cohesion in the **Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana**. As an organization, it was similar to the associations of chambers of commerce and industry, but its nature was different. While the latter were more technical, the CPRM was more concerned with looking after the interests of its members in relation to the workers. The CPRM became really active in 1936, after the introduction of Cárdenas' reform in 1935; and, in particular, when it became apparent that the CTM counted on the support of the government to intensify its activities in Monterrey.

The CPRM was essentially set to make propaganda in favour of the employers and to finance various other organizations of the Right. Besides these activities, it worked as intermediary between the financial interests of the secular Right and the various organizations that acted as the backbone of the movement. The revenues came from various sources; especially from Mexican firms, and in particular the industrial groups of Monterrey; and American oil companies. It appears that the sums provided were considerable.<sup>130</sup> At the beginning of 1935, the ARM,

subsidized by the CPRM, had proliferated to the extent that, in 1937, the CPRM could push it to rise up in arms against the government; a campaign that culminated, in 1938, in the Cedillo rebellion.

The support that the CPRM gave to the ARM was, primarily, to help an already established organization. However, the subsidies provided were perhaps more destined to create and foment new ones.

Since the CPRM was composed of business and professional men, it did not take care of agitation campaigns and political activism; its role was one of propaganda and finance. It functioned as an intermediary between Mexican business and foreign sources and the secular Right movement. A great deal of its financial assistance went to another organization founded in 1936, the **Confederation of the Middle Class**, the CCM.

### 3. The CCM and the UNVR

While the CCM was mainly concerned with the organization of the secular Right in the cities, another group, the **National Union of Revolutionary Veterans**, or UNVR, was charged with the rallying of peasants and other rural groups, ideologically set on parallel lines.

The manifesto of the CCM provides a coherent expression of the indignation and the objectives of these groups:

- "a) The aim of the Confederation of the Middle Class is the improvement of the moral and economic conditions of the workers of that class, and of all the other workers in Mexico.

- b) Communism - or Scientific Socialism - is an unrealizable utopia and a divisive force among the Mexican people.
- c) The working conditions of civil servants are intolerable. They can be dismissed at the time, and are forced to make "voluntary donations" and ascribe to certain social and political views.
- e) Cottage industries no longer complement larger industries or supplement family incomes. Instead they are exploited by a small number of middlemen to the detriment of both larger industrialists and the working class.
- f) The army still lives like a nomadic tribe and the middle ranking officers are underpaid.

The confederation of the Middle Class therefore recommends:

- a) the organization of middle sector pressure groups;
- b) the creation of "white collar" unions
- c) the full implementation of Article 123 of the Constitution;
- d) an end to the use of the unions for political purposes;
- e) that capital be protected from unjustified attack, and that the legitimate demands of labour be met;
- f) respect for both the gains already made under the agrarian law and for small property; the creation of agricultural colonies for those villages lacking land; and the immunity from further loss of properties already affected by the agrarian laws;

- g) respect for seniority within the army and a salary increase for middle ranking officers financed by eliminating wasteful expenditure;
- h) the promulgation of a Civil Service law requiring that civil servants be sentenced by a court of law before they can be dismissed;
- i) the organization of consumers' cooperatives among cottage industrialists in order to reduce the cost of their raw materials, and also of credit unions among them, so that they do not fall into the hands of money lenders, and mutual insurance schemes".<sup>131</sup>

The aim of the **Unión Nacional de Veteranos de la Revolución**, formed in 1935, was originally to procure land concessions for its members. As time passed, it slurred over the requirement, for potential members, to be revolutionary veterans, and directed its effort to combat Communism and defend "the right to private property." In 1936, President Cárdenas granted them land; but, apparently, that only encouraged them to cause more agitation and to increase the number of members.

The UNVR, like the CCM, received most of its financial support from the CPRM.<sup>132</sup> The CCM, shortly after its creation, contacted the UNVR and from then onwards, made common front. Apart from its relationship with the CCM, and through it with the CPRM, the UNVR worked with the gold shirts until its dissolution in 1936. They both took part in the violent events of 20 November 1935, which led to the banning of the ARM. When Congress and various other groups accused the ARM, the UNVR vociferously

demanded that no judgement should be made before a trial to establish the validity of their accusations.

The Left condemned all these organizations and demanded their dissolution; the Communist party and the Mexican Popular Front, among others, argued that their elimination would be "for the protection of the general public."<sup>133</sup> The Left invariably labelled them fascists, falangists, and enemies of the Revolution and of the people of Mexico. Nowhere was this accusation made more clear than in the context of the Cedillo revolt. The study of this revolt exceeds the object of this chapter. Nevertheless, it is important to appreciate the rôle of Cedillo as a point of convergence for the radical, non-religious Right.<sup>134</sup>

#### 4. Cedillo

General Saturnino Cedillo was the last "caudillo" in Mexico. After the Revolution he built an impressive power based in the state of San Luis Potosí, that made him an important political figurehead at the national level.<sup>135</sup>

Although he was considered a "conservative", in 1933 he backed the candidacy of Cárdenas to the Presidency, advanced by the Left. He apparently felt that in so doing he would be serving his own ambition; which proved to be correct at the time of the Calles-Cárdenas crisis, during 1936, when he put the strength of his several thousand soldiers behind the President.

Once Calles had been ousted, Cedillo could set about establishing a position from where he could lead the opposition against the left-wing extremism fostered by

Cárdenas and his administration. To achieve this, he realized that he needed to attract the various right-wing groups. Eventually, from 1935 to 1938, he succeeded in being their exponent.

Given the inherent "personalistic" nature of Mexican politics, it was not surprising that, as the radical Right evolved, it looked for an individual on whom to place its hopes. When Cedillo was called to the Ministry of Agriculture, in June 1935, he became the link for all Mexican rightists. He already had a reputation of moderation towards the Church and trusted that he could count on its support in a crisis; however, he concentrated his efforts rather more to consolidate and manipulate the secular Right. His close relationship with the secular Right was overt with respect to the gold shirts and the UNVR, and secret with the CPRM and the CCM.

In terms of numbers, the ARM, at its peak in 1935, had several hundred members; the CCM and the UNVR, probably counted upon only a few hundred paid-up members each. But, in the absence of any alternative, Cedillo felt that these and other minor right-wing groups offered a core for a potential opposition coalition to the "official" party, the PNR, in the 1940 elections, and cultivated their leaders from 1936 onwards.

Because of his links with these organizations, the Left accused Cedillo of fascist leanings. It claimed that Cedillo was actively supporting "reactionary" elements who were plotting to establish a fascist dictatorship in Mexico. Vincente Lombardo Toledano accused the CCM and

the UNVR of involvement in it. As a result of these allegations, proceedings were taken against the two organizations. On instructions from the President, however, the two organizations were allowed to resume their activities.<sup>136</sup>

Furthermore, the UNVR could hardly be described as fascist; it lacked a logical ideology, and its numbers did not pose a serious threat to national security.

As for Cedillo's meetings with the German and the Italian embassies, nothing substantial came out of them;<sup>137</sup> and there is no indication that they came to his assistance when he finally rose in arms.

Cedillo maintained good relations with the gold shirts. When the President disbanded the ARM, in 1936, and forced them to seek refuge in the northern provinces, Cedillo was able to help them, by allowing them to operate from his state. He allowed them to print much of their propaganda in San Luis Potosí; yet, Nicolás Rodríguez refused to offer him his support on collaboration in his schemes.<sup>138</sup>

Relations between Cedillo and the religious Right were never as strong and as open as those he held with the secular Right. Supporters of the latter, unlike the religious Right, did not oppose all aspects of the Revolution. Consequently, since Cedillo was a revolutionary, the religious Right did not entirely trust him.

Cedillo had taken some steps, since 1932, to win the support of the Church. At the peak of religious

persecution, San Luis Potosí was a haven for Catholics. At the time when most states were limiting the number of priests, a quarter of the priests in the whole country were harbored there. He was also opposed to socialist education and continued to prevent its introduction in the state, in spite of Cárdenas' personal commitment to the policy. In fact, in an attempt to appeal to the hierarchy and to certain Catholics, he invited Catholic schools to settle in San Luis Potosí, in violation of Article 130 of the Constitution.<sup>139</sup> However, the official policy of the Church was still conducted by a moderate hierarchy. After 1936, the government of Cárdenas began to loosen the restrictions on the Church, with the important exception of education, so that, by 1938, when Cedillo was forced into an uprising, the current was against him, in respect of massive support by the Catholic Church. Its leaders were not prepared to compromise the achievements they had reached since 1935, in exchange for the doubtful promises of a local caudillo.

#### **IV Church-State Détente**

In February 1936, the President began to change course vis-à-vis the Church. He denounced the errors of those who emphasized:

"[...] the religious problem above all the problems of the national programme [...] Anti-religious campaigns will only provoke a prolonged resistance, and will definitely retard economic growth."<sup>140</sup>



A month later the President declared that it was the duty of his administration to further the social and economic programme of the Revolution and not to promote anti-religious campaigns. Mecham noted that this was the reason for the President's decision to temper the severity of the anticlerical, and even anti-religious assaults.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, according to the British minister in Mexico, there was little doubt that:

"[...] while no pressure is put upon him by the United States Government, the importance of not unduly antagonising American Roman Catholic opinion, as exemplified by the Knights of Columbus, must have been brought tactfully to his attention on more than one occasion."<sup>142</sup>

The President's pronouncements were followed by a statement from the Minister of the Interior, Barba González, explaining that the policy of the administration was to respect freedom of conscience, so long as the practice of religion did not violate federal and state laws in effect.

In the next few days, governors of several states issued decrees permitting the reopening of churches. The massacre in March 1936 of a "cultural brigade" by the exasperated populace of San Felipe Torres Mochas seems to have precipitated this decision.<sup>143</sup> In April, churches were opened in Mexico City and Veracruz, in May the American Embassy persuaded the authorities to allow a public funeral for Archbishop Pascual Díaz, and in the course of the summer, churches were opened in Nayarit and Jalisco.

The trend of the government towards a more conciliatory policy was met by a personnel change in the Church hierarchy that contributed significantly towards modifying the opposition of the church vis-à-vis the Cárdenas administration. Following the death of Archbishop Díaz and the resignation of Archbishop Ruíz y Flores as Apostolic Delegate, Luís Martínez was appointed Archbishop of Mexico (20 February 1937) and acting representative of the Vatican (9 August 1937). This allowed him to give unified guidance to the national hierarchy. He believed in moderation in the defence of the Church's rights and interests. He offered no criticism of governmental policy and no condemnation of constitutional provisions.<sup>144</sup>

Pope Pius XI then decided to soothe the difference with the Mexican Government; on 28 March 1937, he issued the encyclical **FIRMISSIMAM CONSTANTIAM** [On the Religious Situation in Mexico]. He suggested that cooperation might be possible. All Mexican priests were urged to assume responsibilities in the field of social service and to concern themselves with the conditions of the poor:

"who too easily become prey of de-Christianizing propaganda, with the mirage of economic advantages presented to them as a reward for their apostasy from God and from His Church."<sup>145</sup>

The Pope emphasized, in particular, the advantage of a Catholic Action programme over the use of violence as a means of defending the rights of the Church in Mexico. The encyclical stressed the social function of private

property as well as the positive efforts of Catholic Action to solve agrarian and labour difficulties. At the same time, it advisedly refrained from attacking the Mexican Revolution. The Pope only admonished Catholics not to sacrifice their religious principles for temporal advancement. Lyle C. Brown commented:

"Thus Mexican priests were instructed to evidence concern for the socioeconomic welfare of the masses and to develop Christian laymen who would protect the interest of the Church in the political field. As a general guideline, it appeared that Rome was calling for a policy of flexibility instead of the traditional, doctrinaire rigidity with which Mexico's clergy previously had approached the problem of Church-State relations."<sup>146</sup>

Hence, relations between the Church and the State were at a turning point, although many contradictions throughout the country still remained.<sup>147</sup>

A new crisis in Revolutionary unity was generated by problems arising from Cárdenas' rapid redistribution of land to the peasantry and stimulation of organized labour to strike for its rights, especially in the foreign-owned oil industry which was finally expropriated by the government on 18 March 1938. The religious issue receded as the government faced these new problems in the late 1930s.

The "Base" organization had little political participation between the years of 1934 and 1937, because the anticlerical measures of the Cárdenas administration, gradually became less radical and attempts were made to

prevent confrontation. It was not until 1937 that, within the dynamics of a profound and renewed awareness of the faith and as a reaction to the effects of Cárdenas' social and economic policies, Synarchism emerged. It soon became apparent that Synarchism was the fiercest nationalist attack that the revolutionary régime had yet to face.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel and Sylvia Weyl, **The Reconquest of Mexico: The Years of Lázaro Cárdenas**, London, Oxford University Press, 1939, pp. 109-110.

<sup>2</sup> Inauguration speech of General Cárdenas, 30 November 1934, in: **Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas, 1928-1940**, México, Siglo XXI, Vol. 1, 1978, pp. 138-146.

<sup>3</sup> Ramón Beteta, ed., **Programa económico y social de México (Una Controversia)**, México, n.p., 1935, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Carlton Beals, "Burning Saints in Mexico", **The Nation**, Vol CXXXIX, No. 3625, 26 December, 1934, p. 735.

<sup>5</sup> Cárdenas quoted in Juan-Simeón Vidarte, **Todos fuimos culpables**, México, n.p., 1973, p. 805.

<sup>6</sup> Arnaldo Córdova, **La Política de Masas del Cardenismo**, México, Ediciones Era, 1974, pp. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> A. Córdova, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas, **Obras, Apuntes I, 1913-1940**, México, Universidad Autónoma de México, 1972, pp. 229-231.

<sup>9</sup> For a summary of Cárdenas' performance as governor of Michoacán, see Enrique Krauze, **General misionero, Lázaro Cárdenas**, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987, pp. 33-77.

<sup>10</sup> Javier Romero, "Cárdenas y su Circunstancia", in Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos públicos**, México, Siglo XXI, Vol. 1, pp. 50-51.

<sup>11</sup> "Sindicatos y Fortalecimiento Obrero", revista **Tiempo**, 29 March, 1988, p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> A. Córdova, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Alicia Hernández Chávez, **La Mecánica Cardenista**, México, El Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, período 1934-1940), 1979, p. 49. For an analysis of the rôle of strikes in cardenist thinking, see Arturo Anguiano, **El Estado y la política obrera del Cardenismo**, México, Era, 1975, pp. 75-77.

<sup>14</sup> Salvador Abascal, Tomás Garrido Canabal, **Sin Dios, Sin Curas, Sin Iglesias, 1919-1935**, México, Editorial Tradición, 1987, p. 244.

<sup>15</sup> Enrique Krauze, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> Enrique Krauze, **Plutarco Elías Calles**, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, (Biografías del Poder), 1987, pp. 136-138.

<sup>17</sup> **El Universal**, 12 June 1935; Carlos Alvear Acevedo, **Lázaro Cárdenas: El Hombre y el Mito**, México, Editorial Jus, 1961, pp. 108-110.

<sup>18</sup> Luis L. León was the Editor of **El Nacional**.

<sup>19</sup> Alvear Acevedo, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Arnaldo Córdova, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Hernandez Chavez, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>22</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 166-67; Alvear Acevedo, op. cit., pp. 120-122.

<sup>23</sup> Kreuzer, **Lázaro Cárdenas**, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> Pablo González Casanova, **La Democracia en México**, México, Ediciones Era, 1965, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> For the composition of the new cabinet see Hernández Chavez, op. cit., p. 54, and Kreuzer, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>26</sup> Carlos Pereyra, **Breve Historia de América**, Madrid, n.p., 1941, p. 857.

<sup>27</sup> The British Embassy evaluated the rôle of Cedillo thus:

"In the crisis of June 1935 the fact that [Cedillo] sided with President Cárdenas probably accounted for the latter's success"

(Murray to Anthony Eden, 31 December 1936, FO 371 20640 [A 1206/1206/26]); see also Hernández Chávez, op. cit., p. 49 and chapter III; Nathaniel and Sylvia Weyl, op. cit., p. 163; John W.F. Dulles, **Yesterday in Mexico: a Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936**, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1961, p. 571.

<sup>28</sup> Confederación de Trabajadores de México, **Informe del Comité Nacional, 1936-1937 México**, n.p., 1938, pp. 65-65.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Joe C. Ashby, **Organized Labour and the Mexican Revolution under Lázaro Cárdenas**, Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina Press, 1967, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> Rosendo Salazar, **Historia de las luchas proletarias de México. 1930-1936**, México, Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1956, p. 189; Hernandez Chavez, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>31</sup> **El Universal**, 12 February, 1936; Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 191-192.

<sup>32</sup> Simon G. Hanson, **Economic Development in Latin America: An Introduction to the Problems of Latin America**, Washington D.C., The Inter-American Affairs Press, 1951, p. 503.

<sup>33</sup> President Cárdenas declared:

"[...] It is a lie that the organized workers and peasants are engaged in destructive activities [...] They know how far we can go; they know that there sometimes is need to wait until this régime, until the Revolution which they themselves created, can realize entirely its programme for raising the economic and cultural conditions of the Mexican people [...]"

(Ezequiel Padilla/Cárdenas interview, 12 and 13 May 1935, in Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 153-161.)

<sup>34</sup> Alfonso López Aparicio, **El Movimiento Obrero en México; Antecedentes, Desarrollo y Tendencias**, México, Editorial Jus, 1952, pp. 215-216.

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Foreign Relations, **The Mexican Government in the Presence of Social and Economic problems: Tour of the President of the Republic, (Monterrey-Tampico-Guadalajara)**, Mexico, Press of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, 1936, No. 1, pp. 11-12.

<sup>36</sup> Departamento del Trabajo, **La Obra Social de la Actual Administración que preside el G. Lázaro Cárdenas**, México D.A.A.P., 1936, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Partido Nacional Revolucionario, **Plan Sexenal, 1934-1940**, México, 1934, p. 46; Luis González y González, **Los Artifices del Cardenismo**, México, El Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, período 1934-1940), 1979, p. 172.

<sup>38</sup> Nathaniel and Sylvia Weyl, op. cit., p. 347.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>40</sup> Confederación de Trabajadores de México, **Informe, 1936-1937**, op. cit., pp. 63-65.

<sup>41</sup> Confederación de Trabajadores de México, **La CTM y la Carestía de la Vida**, México, 1937, n.p., pp. 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> Ashby, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 277-281.

<sup>44</sup> López Aparicio, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>45</sup> Alvear Acevedo, op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>46</sup> Confederación de Trabajadores de México, C.T.M., 1936-1941, México, Talleres Tipográficos Modelos, n.d., pp. 31-33.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Ramos, **El Perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en México**, México, Espasa Calpe, Colección Austral, 10<sup>a</sup>. edición, 1982, p. 125.

<sup>48</sup> Luis Cabrera, **Veinte años después: balance de la Revolución. La campaña presidencial de 1934. Las dos revoluciones**, México, editorial Botas, 1938, pp. 112-114.

<sup>49</sup> Eugenia Meyer, **Luis Cabrera, teórico y crítico de la Revolución**, México, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1972, pp. 54-56; Luis Cabrera, **Un ensayo comunista en México**, México, Obras Completas, Ediciones Oasis, 1975; Lesley Byrd Simpson, **Many Mexicos**, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1952, p. 333.

<sup>50</sup> Victor Alba, **Las Ideas Sociales Contemporaneas en México**, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960, pp. 226-228.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur P. Whitaker and David C. Jordan, **Nationalism in Contemporary Latin America**, The Fress Press, New York, 1968, p. 46.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Salvador Novo, **La Vida en México en el período presidencial de Lázaro Cárdenas**, México, Empresas Editoriales, 1964, p. 77.

<sup>53</sup> For a history of peasant unification see: Moisés González Navarro, **La C.N.C. en la Reforma Agraria**, México, El Día en Libros, 1985, 3<sup>a</sup>. edición, pp. 81-96.

<sup>54</sup> Hernández Chávez, op. cit., p. 165; Henry Bamford Parkes, **A History of Mexico**, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1960, pp. 402-403; Virginia Prewett, **Reportage on Mexico**, New York, E.P. Dutton, 1941, p. 62; James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie, **México visto en el siglo XX (Entrevistas de Historia Oral)**, México, Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, 1969, pp. 319-320.

<sup>55</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 194-196.

<sup>56</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas, **La Unificación Campesina**, México, Biblioteca de Cultura Social y Política, 1936, pp. 10-12.

<sup>57</sup> Rosendo Salazar, op. cit., p. 211; Alvear Acevedo, op. cit., p. 170.



<sup>58</sup> Cárdenas, *La Unificación Campesina*, op. cit., pp. 8-9; Anatol Shulkovsky, *México en la encrucijada de su historia*, México, Fondo de Cultura Popular, 1968, p. 185; Arturo Anguiano, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>59</sup> Tzivi Medin, *El minimato presidencial: historia política del maximato, 1928-1935*, México, Ediciones Era, 1982, pp. 140, 141.

<sup>60</sup> Message to the Nation, 30 November, 1936, in Cárdenas, *Palabras y documentos*, op. cit., pp. 225-232.

<sup>61</sup> Rosa Elena Montes de Oca, *The State and the Peasants*, in José Luis Reyna and Richard S. Weinert, editors, *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, Philadelphia, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977, p. 50.

<sup>62</sup> Córdova, op. cit., p. 106; J.W. Wilkie, *The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change since 1910*, Berkeley Calif., 1970, pp. 180, 194; Clark W. Reynolds, *The Mexican Economy: Twentieth Century Structure and Growth*, New Haven, Conn., 1970, p. 139; Ankerson, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>63</sup> The basic concept of the CNC is that everyone who works in agriculture should belong to it. Once an ejido is formed, its members must elect a Comisariado Ejidal (executive committee), who will legally represent them before agrarian authorities, and a Comité de Vigilancia (supervision committee). Both the Comisariado Ejidal and the Comité de Vigilancia automatically belong to the CNC. Moisés González Navarro, *La Confederación Nacional Campesina*, México, Costa-Amic Editores, 1967, pp. 82-85.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur Whittaker (ed.), *México Today*, Philadelphia, the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, Vol. 208, March 1940, p. 45; Krauze, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>65</sup> Unlike Calles, Cárdenas considered the ejido as quite distinct from the private smallholding and planned to make it just as important a unit of agricultural production as the other. He even intended to make it more important when he declared that the ejido should be the main supplier of the nation's food; see, Cárdenas: *Palabras y documentos públicos*, op. cit., pp. 226-228.

<sup>66</sup> Kreuze, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>67</sup> Virginia Prewett, op. cit., pp. 173-175; Clark W. Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 175-180.

<sup>68</sup> *Peones acasillados*, as defined by the *Diario Oficial* were:

"those persons receiving day wages or rations and day wages, who lend their services in a permanent way on rural properties, occupying houses which are

the property of the owner of the land without paying rent", and had traditionally not benefited from the right to petition land.

<sup>69</sup> Krauze, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>70</sup> Murray to Eden, Mexico, 31 December 1935, FO 371 19794 [A1331/1331/26]; Virginia Prewett, op. cit., pp. 145-149; Weyl and Weyl, op. cit., pp. 186-187.

<sup>71</sup> Frank Tannenbaum, "Lázaro Cárdenas", in *Historia Mexicana*, Vol. X, October-December 1960, No. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Gallop to Eden, 11 September 1937, FO 371/20638 [A 7240/213/26]; for Cárdenas's agrarian policy see Arnaldo Córdova, op. cit., pp. 107-111; Jorge Vera Estañol, *La Revolución Mexicana; Orígenes y resultados*, México, Editorial Porrúa, 1957, pp. 733-734; Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Extremos de América*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1949, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> *El Nacional*, 5 March, 1935.

<sup>74</sup> *El Nacional*, 17 February, 1936.

<sup>75</sup> The instruction was based on Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical QUADRAGESIMO ANNO, which outlined:

"The proper way to save the world from 'amoral liberty' was not to be found in class struggle and terror, nor in the autocratic abuse of state power; but rather in the spreading of social justice and Christian love throughout the socioeconomic order [...] True property should be restored to the world by means of the principles of a wise corporatism that respects the correct social hierarchy [...]", (in Eucardio Momigliano, *Tutte le Encicliche dei Sommi Pontefici*, Milano, dall'Oglio editore, sesta edizione, 1959, pp. 943-944).

<sup>76</sup> *Diario Oficial*, 4 September, 1935.

<sup>77</sup> Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada*, México, Editorial Siglo XXI, Vol. I, p. 363; *New York Times*, 10, 12 and 18 October, 1935.

<sup>78</sup> Lyle C. Brown, "Mexican Church-State Relations, 1933-1940", *A Journal of Church and State*, Vol. VI, spring 1964, p. 212; Albert L. Michahels, "The Modification of the Anti-clerical Nationalism of the Mexican Revolution by General Lázaro Cárdenas and Its Relationship to the Church-State Détente in Mexico", *The Americas*, Vol. XXVI, 1969, No. 1, p. 42; *New York Times*, 18 October, 1935.

<sup>79</sup> **El Nacional**, 5 November, 1935.

<sup>80</sup> Murray to Eden, 23 February 1937, **Memorandum respecting the Religious Question in Mexico**, FO 420/289 [Enclosure No. 57].

<sup>81</sup> Pastoral letter of 16 January 1936, published in the **New York Times**, 17 January 1936.

<sup>82</sup> **New York Times**, 28 January, 1936.

<sup>83</sup> Alberto María Carreño, **Pastorales, edictos y documentos de Monseñor Pascual Díaz**, México, Ediciones Victoria, 1938, pp. 207-223.

<sup>84</sup> For a history of the policies of Garrido Canabal, see Carlos Martínez Assad, **El Laboratorio de la Revolución, el Tabasco Garridista**, México, Editorial Siglo XXI, 1979; Salvador Abascal, **Tomás Garrido Canabal, Sin Dios, Sin Curas, Sin Iglesias, 1919-1935**, México, Editorial Tradición, 1987; Alan Kirschner, **Tomás Garrido Canabal y el Movimiento de los Camisas Rojas**, México, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1976.

<sup>85</sup> **Excelsior**, 20 April 1931.

<sup>86</sup> This speech was made at Villahermosa (capital of Tabasco), on 25 March, 1934. Cárdenas said:

"I firmly believe that we are in front of a real laboratory of the Mexican Revolution, where the spirit and customs of the people of Tabasco, yesterday subjugated by fanaticism and alcoholism, have now been transformed into personal pride and domestic happiness; into a collective conscience free from myths and lies and into racial vigour [...]"

"The people of Tabasco have been freed from clerical opium, ignorance, and vice, and they have begun to consummate an epoch of controlled economy".

(Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 122-124); see also, Hilda Muñoz, **Lázaro Cárdenas**, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976, p. 131.

<sup>87</sup> Speech at Emiliano Zapata, Tabasco, on 6 March, 1934, text in Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 116-117; see also Weyl and Weyl, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>88</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas, op. cit., 6 March 1934.

<sup>89</sup> Speech at Campeche, Camp., on 8 March, 1934; text in Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 117-118.

<sup>90</sup> Speech at Villahermosa, Tabasco, 25 March 1934, text in Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 122-124; Abascal, **Tomás Garrido Canabal**, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>91</sup> Tzvi Medin, op. cit., p. 149; Abascal, *ibid*, p. 222.

<sup>92</sup> Weyl and Weyl, op. cit., p. 161; Eduardo J. Correa, **El Balance del Cardenismo**, México, Talleres Linotipográficos "Acción", 1941, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> William, C. Townsend, **Lázaro Cárdenas: demócrata mexicano**, Grijalvo, México, 1976, p. 87.

<sup>94</sup> Correa, op. cit., p. 23; Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>95</sup> **Excelsior**, 31 December, 1934; Farquhar to Simon, 15 January, 1935. FO 420/287 [A1032/659/26]; A.P. Prince, "La question religieuse du Mexique et le président Lázaro Cárdenas", in **La Vie Intellectuelle**, 25 October, 1936.

<sup>96</sup> **El Nacional**, 3 January, 1935; Abascal, **Tomás Garrido Canabal**, op. cit., p. 233; Manuel Gonzalez Calzada, **Tomas Garrido al Derecho y al Revés**, México, 1940, pp. 87-89.

<sup>97</sup> Alan M. Kirshner, op. cit., p. 72; Correa, op. cit., p. 23, Martínez Assad, op. cit., pp. 219-226.

<sup>98</sup> Weyl and Weyl, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>99</sup> Hernández Chávez, op. cit., p. 47; Alvear Acevedo, op. cit., p. 93; Manuel González Calzada, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>100</sup> **La Prensa**, 9 January 1935; Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 146-147; Abascal, op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>101</sup> Javier Romero, "Cárdenas y su circunstancia", in Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, p. 60; John B. Williman, "Adalberto Tejeda and the Third Phase of the Anti-Clerical Conflict in Twentieth Century Mexico", **A Journal of Church and State**, Vol XV, No. 3, 1973, pp. 452-453.

<sup>102</sup> T.G. Powell, **Mexico and the Spanish Civil War**, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1981, p. 15; Abascal, op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>103</sup> Albert Michaels, op. cit., p. 40; Alvear Acevedo, op. cit., pp. 243-257.

<sup>104</sup> Abascal, op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>105</sup> Abascal, op. cit., p. 241; Michaels, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>106</sup> **El Hombre Libre**, 21 January 1935.

<sup>107</sup> For details of other events, see Salvador Abascal, op. cit., pp. 242-244.

<sup>108</sup> Martínez Assad, op. cit., pp. 227-229; Abascal, op. cit., pp. 251, 252; Kirshner, op. cit., pp. 129-130; Dudley Ankerson, **Agrarian Warlord**, the Northern Illinois University Press, 1984, p. 153; Dulles, op. cit., p. 652.

<sup>109</sup> Kirshner, op. cit., p. 148; Correa, op. cit., p. 69, Ankerson, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>110</sup> Dulles, op. cit., pp. 650-658; Murray to Hoare, 16 July 1935, FO 371/18706 [A 6866/363/26]; Kirshner, op. cit., pp. 124-159; Carlos Martínez Assad, op. cit., pp. 230-237; Abascal, op. cit., p. 259; **Excelsior**, 11 and 12 August 1935.

<sup>111</sup> Joseph Ledit, S.J., **Le Front des Pauvres**, Montréal Fides, 1954, pp. 186-188; Manuel Fernández Boyoli and Eustaquio Marrón de Angelis, **Lo que no sabe de la Rebelión Cedillista**, México, 1938, n.p., p. 52.

<sup>112</sup> Frank, L. Kluckhohn, **The Mexican Challenge**, New York, Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1939, pp. 215-228; Gallop to Eden, 12 August 1937, FO 371/20639 [A6201/527/26]; Prewett, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>113</sup> Meyer, op. cit., Vol 1, pp. 367-368; Joaquín Blanco Gil, **El Clamor de la Sangre**, México, Rex-Mex, 1947, p. 16.

<sup>114</sup> Mario Gill, **Sinarquismo, su origen, su esencia, su misión**, México, n.p., 1962, pp. 9-20; José Luis Piñeyro, **Ejército y sociedad en México: pasado y presente**, Puebla, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1985, p. 54.

<sup>115</sup> Marcos Mena to President Cárdenas, 12 April, 1936, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 541.1/41, Legajo No. 2; M. Halperin, "Under the Lid in Mexico", **Current History**, November 1934, p. 170. However, Nicolás Rodríguez denied any links with Calles. He declared that he had always been an enemy of his and that he was first persecuted by callista elements. If he did not attack Calles afterwards, when he had fallen, it was because his own protegés (i.e. Cárdenas) took up the task themselves; see: Nicolás Rodríguez to the Editor of **El Sinarquista**, El Paso, Texas, 3 October, 1939.

<sup>116</sup> However, Nicolás Rodríguez declared that such a rumour was purely anti-ARM, propaganda. He said:

"The Idea of the ARM is not to attack strikers, much less before the Department of Labour has ruled whether they are right. If we have been involved with the Communists it is

because their goal is to replace the present régime in Mexico by a Soviet system which goes against our Constitution and customs" (Dulles, op. cit., p. 629).

<sup>117</sup> **"Manifiesto de la Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista (Los Dorados) a la Nación"**, México D.F., 4 March 1934, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 541.1/41, Legajo No. 2.

<sup>118</sup> General Nicolás Rodríguez to Luis I. Rodríguez, 7 December 1935, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 541.1/41, Legajo "Encuentros Sangrientos".

<sup>119</sup> **El Universal**, 8 August 1936.

<sup>120</sup> Fernández Boyoli y Marrón de Angelis, op. cit., p. 103; Mario Gill, **La Década Bárbara**, México, n.p., 1970, p. 93; Verna Carlton Millan, **Mexico Reborn**, Boston, Houghton, 1939, p. 243.

<sup>121</sup> ARM **"Ideología y Tendencia de los Dorados: Su Programa de Nacionalismo Social Mexicano"**, December 1935, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 541.1/41, Legajo "Encuentros Sangrientos, D.F."; Harry Block/Nicolás Rodríguez interview, **Futuro**, February 1936, quoted in Mario Gill, **La Década Bárbara**, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

<sup>122</sup> **Excelsior**, 1 January 1935.

<sup>123</sup> ARM, "Ideología y Tendencias...", op. cit.

<sup>124</sup> **"Manifiesto de la A.R.M."**, op. cit.

<sup>125</sup> "It is not the revolution which delivers the country into international Jewish hands, whose undermining theories, disguised under the name of Socialism, is Communism, and enslave and exploit our Indians, and later get rid of them like dirt" (Nicolás Rodríguez to Dolores Torres, Mission, Texas, 28 June 1938, AGN, Ramo Presidentes Cárdenas, Expediente No. 541.1/41.)

<sup>126</sup> A.R.M., **Manifiesto**, AGN, op. cit.

<sup>127</sup> A.R.M., **Manifiesto**, AGN, op. cit.

<sup>128</sup> For an account of the events see Dulles, op. cit., p. 646; Mario Gill, **Sinarquismo**, op. cit., p. 24-25; Legajo "Encuentros Sangrientos, D.F." in AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 541.1/41; for a

photographic account see, Gustavo Casasola **Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana**, México, Editorial Trillas, 1962, Vol. III, pp. 2126-2127.

<sup>129</sup> **La Prensa**, 28 February 1936; Luis I. Rodríguez to Antonio F. Escobar [ARM Secretary of press and propaganda], 21 April 1936, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 541.1/41, Legajo No. 2; Lázaro Cárdenas, "Declaraciones del Presidente de la República a los representantes de la prensa nacional, 27 February 1936", in L. Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 194-194.

<sup>130</sup> Fernández Boyoli y Marrón de Angelis, op. cit., pp. 266-272.

<sup>131</sup> **Declaración de Principios, Programa de Acción y Estatutos de la Confederación de la Clase Media**, México, n.p., 1936, in Ing. Gustavo Saenz de Sicilia (President of the CCM) to President Lázaro Cárdenas, 3 June 1936, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 437.1/512; **El Universal** 21 June, 1936; Fernández Boyoli y Marrón de Angelis, op. cit., pp. 251-255.

<sup>132</sup> Boyoli and de Angelis sustained this charge by publishing a letter of Saenz de Sicilia to Ing. Carrasco of the CPRM, referring to the financial aid the CCM was receiving from the CPRM, op. cit., pp. 62-66.

<sup>133</sup> Arturo Ramírez (General Secretary of the Mexican Communist Party) to Luis Rodríguez, 10 October 1936; and: Felipe Gratacos y Ramón Verduzco (Frente Popular Mexicano del D.F.), 23 October 1936, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 437.1/512.

<sup>134</sup> For a study of the Cedillo revolt see Dudley Ankerson, **Agrarian Warlord**, op. cit., pp. 170-191.

<sup>135</sup> Hernández Chávez, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>136</sup> For Lombardo Toledano's accusation of the UNVR "fascist plot" see Gallop to Eden, 5 August 1937, FO 371/20639 [A5928/527/26]; and for the reaction of the President, see [A6194/527/26], 11 August 1937; see also: Hugh G. Campbell, **La derecha radical en México, 1929-1949**, México, SepSetentas, 1976, p. 63; Boyoli y de Angelis, op. cit., pp. 25-26; Ankerson, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>137</sup> Murray to Eden, FO 371/20639 [A1873/527/26], 24 February 1937.

<sup>138</sup> Ankerson, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>139</sup> Fernández Boyoli y Marrón de Angelis, op. cit., pp. 173-175; Dulles, op. cit., p. 626; Weyl and Weyl, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>140</sup> Speech given at Ciudad Guerrero, Tamaulipas, on 16 February 1936; text in Cárdenas, **Palabras y documentos**, op. cit., pp. 192-93.

<sup>141</sup> J. Lloyd Meham, **Church and State in Latin America, A History of Politico-Ecclesiastical Relations**, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1966, p. 409.

<sup>142</sup> Murray to Eden, FO 420/289 [A1871/1871/26], 23 February, 1937.

<sup>143</sup> For details of the events in San Felipe Torres Mochas, see Townsend, **Lázaro Cárdenas: demócrata mexicano**, op. cit., p. 134; Cárdenas, **Obras I**, op. cit., p. 346; Lyle C. Brown, **Mexican Church-State Relations**, op. cit., pp. 215-216.

<sup>144</sup> Lloyd Meham, **Church and State in Latin America**, op. cit., p. 410.

<sup>145</sup> Pius XI, **On the Religious Situation in Mexico**, Washington, National Welfare Conference, 1937, pp. 12-13; D.G. Osborne to Foreign Office, Rome, 30 March 1937, FO 371/20640 [A2493/1871/26].

<sup>146</sup> Lyle C. Brown, **Mexican Church-State Relations**, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>147</sup> Murray to Eden, 5 May, 1936, FO 371/19792, [A2307/296/26]; Frank Tannenbaum, **Mexico: The Struggle for Peace and Bread**, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1960, pp. 134-135.



**CHAPTER III**  
**PRE-SYNARCHISM**

The Synarchist movement, born in 1937 as a reaction to the "communistic" and anticlerical programme of the revolution, did not constitute the only force of internal resistance confronting Cárdenas. Yet, the strength of its organization, the size of the masses it controlled and mobilized, the success of its newspaper, and the nationalist, authoritarian and religious nature of its ideology, made it the principal adversary of cardenism.

The system of socialist education instituted by Cárdenas had a profound effect on the religious Right in Mexico. The "Base" organization, which comprised the faction controlled by the Church hierarchy, had been established at the end of 1934 to meet the then potential threat of the new régime; and when socialist education was introduced, it grew enormously.<sup>1</sup>

One of the first steps taken by Cárdenas' Minister of Education was to change textbooks to adapt them to the socialist code.<sup>2</sup> A group of inspectors was set to check ideological conformity. At the beginning of 1935, the new Minister of Education, Ignacio García Tellez, famous for his statement that he would go to any lengths to destroy the Church, inaugurated the First Congress of the Proletarian Child, and declared that in government centres of education, the word "ADIOS" should be replaced by "SALUD, CAMARADA."<sup>3</sup>

By attacking the educational system, Cárdenas was

intent on rooting out completely what he called the Church's method of self-preservation: evangelization. The President decreed in early 1935, that if private schools did not impart socialist education they would be closed down. Some time later, he declared that only the State could give primary, secondary and normal education.<sup>4</sup>

Although the President had made, since 1935, some concessions to appease the Church, in the form of allowing the reopening of some churches and lifting the restrictions on the number of priests, on the question of education he remained unyielding. His attitude in this respect was evident when, on 29 March 1935, a riot took place in the village of San Felipe Torres Mochas, Guanajuato. Apparently, the local clergy incited the people to attack members of a federal cultural mission which was carrying out educational activities. Eighteen were killed. Cárdenas rushed to the scene, and after a hasty inquiry, he entered the church, mounted the pulpit, and harangued the audience, defending the programme of socialist education and vilifying clerical opposition. His intentions, he stressed, were to take the programme to every corner of the country.<sup>5</sup>

The systematic opposition of the Church to the reform of Article 3, can be illustrated by a pastoral letter signed by Archbishop Ruíz y Flores and thirty four other prelates which was released in December 1936. The letter followed previous papal instructions strictly prohibiting Catholics all contacts with socialist schools, either as employees or as parents. Although stressing that Catholic

opposition should be limited to passive resistance, the letter warned:

"Socialism as well as communism whose fatal consequences we are witnessing in other countries, are irreconcilable enemies of the Church".

Cárdenas' answer to the pastoral letter was to submit to Congress a request for an unprecedented subsidy for educational purposes, which included plans for the creation of two thousand primary schools within the next year.<sup>6</sup>

The rapid advancement of Cárdenas' plan to establish a socialistic educational system in Mexico, led to an upsurge of Right wing opposition. During 1935 and 1936, the "Base" recruited thousands of members. However, consternation heightened among these and other militant Catholics, as repression of their activities intensified, in a way that reminded them of the early thirties when the government had reneged upon some of the promises of the 1929 agreements. This growing anxiety was later described by Juan Ignacio Padilla, a legionnaire and future leader of the Synarchists. He was introduced to the "Base" in March 1935, by a former leader of the League, who, like many other of its members, decided to submit to the Church hierarchy. Padilla joined the Organization because he saw in it the means to express his total dissatisfaction with the course Mexican society and politics were taking under the rule of Cárdenas.<sup>7</sup> What was this organization? What was its structure? Who made it? How did it operate? We must analyse this organization which lay at the core of

the Synarchist Movement.

## I. "La Base"

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista was born in 1937 in the city of León, in Guanajuato, but it was the secret organization known as "Legión" or "la Base", which gave birth to it.

It is difficult to penetrate the mystery of the foundation of this famous organization, because although we have the testimonies of many a participant, we do not possess sufficient information about the founders. Indeed, those who subsequently rose to become leaders of the Synarchist movement (José Trueba Olivares, Manuel Zermeño y Pérez, Salvador Abascal and Juan Ignacio Padilla) affirmed that they joined the legions in 1935, but admitted that it had been in existence for a year.

Calles' "Grito de Guadalajara", of July 1935, in the heart of the Cristero region, stirred up Catholic indignation. Catholics decided to respond vigorously. Encouraged by the hierarchy to fight on their own initiative for the freedom of the Church and against Communism, they set | to found a new organization adapted to the new political and religious situation.<sup>8</sup> A certain Manuel Romo, a teacher at Guadalajara, founded the legions in 1934. He lay down the bases, but the aims and means took some years to be defined. Only the fixed idea of resuming the struggle for religious liberty drove the first group, which included some former cristeros, who expected a revival of armed revolt.<sup>9</sup> However,

disagreement about the means of action soon emerged. The leadership of the organization, the Supreme Council, was divided into two camps: on the one hand, there was the group headed by the creator and founder. It sustained that the legions were technically conceived to establish a Christian Social Order in Mexico, from above; power would be attained according to the path marked by the circumstances. It would not tolerate its achievements being undermined by devoting the organization to activities incongruous with its nature. On the other hand was the second camp, headed by Antonio Santacruz, who won over the intellectuals of the Secret Council to approve of his plan to turn the new organization into a socio-mystical association aimed at developing a plan of religious apostolate and of social deeds.<sup>10</sup>

The leadership of the Base rejected, outright, the eventuality of resuming armed struggle; whether because it was following the advice of the hierarchy or, because the memories of the failure of the Cristiada were still fresh. The result was that those interested in the resurgence of an armed revolt withdrew to pursue it on their own.

From Guadalajara, the organization spread rapidly to other states: first to Mexico City and Querétaro, and later to Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, Puebla, Aguascalientes, Coahuila, Oaxaca and Colima.<sup>11</sup>

The fast expansion of the legions throughout the Republic was facilitated by the sense of frustration that invaded Catholics, in view of the wave of government

anticlerical policy, and by the generation that came out of a reorganized Catholic Association of Young Mexicans (ACJM).<sup>12</sup>

The "Base" was developed in Querétaro; several of its more active leaders came from there, like Gonzalo Campos and José Antonio Urquiza. Though the idea of the legions originated in Jalisco, the birthplace of the Cristiada, it was in Querétaro that the organization defined its principal characteristics. The city of Querétaro had not been seriously affected by the previous anticlerical legislation. The suspension of the cult did not bring out the upheaval experienced in other places, because the governor had tolerated, throughout the hostilities, priests continuing to officiate privately, a fact openly and publicly known. Indeed, Catholic organizations had escaped complete disruption and, from the end of the war, the ACJM resumed its activities under the energetic direction of Gonzalo Campos, who succeeded in implanting it in the middle-bourgeoisie (professionals), and the middle-classes.

It was not until 1932 that, with the arrival of a new governor, real religious persecution began in Querétaro. In 1934, the State Congress limited the number of priests to one for two thousand inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> This measure deeply upset Catholics, but all tendency to react violently was absorbed by the ACJM which was the only one ready to reply. However, since its new statutes prevented it from getting involved in political action, it greeted more favourably the idea of participating in a new organization

for the defence of religious liberty.<sup>14</sup> Just as it did in 1926 with respect to the League, it provided, in 1934, the men that swelled the numbers of the legions, many of whom became officers in the new association.

1. Objectives and tactics

The adherents of the organization were obliged to take an oath on the Bible, to defend Church and homeland, to combat atheistic Communism, to work for the establishment of a Christian Social Order, according to the orders of the Church, as stated in the encyclical QUADRAGESIMO ANNO, of 1931, to obey without question the orders of the leaders - except if they defied Christian morality - and to maintain absolute secrecy about the activities of the legions.<sup>15</sup>

The new organization adopted the communist tactic of working in secret cells. The intention was to penetrate all sectors of the country's economic life, and gain control from the inside. The mission of the legionnaires required total devotion. It was not a question of preaching revolution, nor of destroying unjust structures, but rather of building the social awareness of the Mexican people, based on the assumption that a people conscious of their rights and duties, produced a just government working for the common good. The new movement, contrary to political parties, did not seek power to impose the structural changes deemed necessary; instead, it believed that individual conversion would inescapably bring about the essential transformations. Consequently,

participation in the electoral process and the resort to violence were ruled out. The exclusive choice of social and political action did not constitute the main feature of the Base, however. Many legionnaires accepted non-violence only as a temporary means to recruit the maximum number of people, with the view of eventually embarking, when conditions would be more favourable, upon seizing power. The fact that the Base was structured under somewhat militaristic lines, and that it was devoted to the establishment of a Christian Social Order, appealed to many, who, like Padilla, were of the opinion that the end would ultimately justify the means:

"The path chosen was that of public-spiritedness (patriotism), peaceful or violent, according to the exigencies of the struggle. If it was necessary to kill, one would do it, provided that the maxima of tyrannicide were fulfilled. Mexico was overrun with petty tyrants that should be toppled down by the resolute will of a people on the move".<sup>16</sup>

This idea was, in fact, close to the one held by the League and, it would not be unwise to think that many more Catholics were attracted by it, rather than theory of "spiritual conversion", which helps to account for the immediate success of the legions.

## 2. Relations between the "Base" and the League

All testimonies agree that the organization experienced an immediate success. Padilla talked of ten thousand members in the city of León;<sup>17</sup> in Querétaro, all levels of society were involved; in Mexico City, there



were around one hundred thousand members, in Puebla, Guadalajara and in other cities of the central states, the organization was established in a very short time, less than a year. Nevertheless, because of the secrecy, it is difficult to estimate with any degree of accuracy, the strength of the Base; Padilla and Abascal put the numbers at several hundred thousand, which seems exaggerated. However that might be, it is reasonable to assume that it benefited from contributions from other Catholic organizations, such as the League and the ACJM.

The League, having lost the war, and disowned by the hierarchy, would have seen some of its followers breaking away to join the ranks of the legions. However, this is a qualified assertion since, as Meyer pointed out:

"Its history is not well known because it was defeated; because it fought in secrecy, it has remained obscure; dissension followed defeat; the leaders dispersed; the Church was determined to let fall into oblivion and silence an organization that had resisted her policy of conciliation".<sup>18</sup>

The works of Palomar y Vizcarra illustrate, to a certain extent, the activities and policies of the League, as well as its relations with the hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, they do not give any indication of the contacts and exchanges between the League and the Base. However, a circular dated 30 July 1936, addressed to League members, forbade them to participate in the new organization. The document is important because it sheds some light on the attempts to find a common ground between

the two associations:

"Never has the pressing need for a thorough integration of all the Catholic forces been so felt. Therefore, it is imperative that such union, such integration be secured so as to regain liberty. To that effect, approaches have been made with official elements of the legions.

There is, however, one apparently insurmountable obstacle to reach an agreement: mutual trust; essential if we are to work together to regain our liberty. Because of the secret nature of the legions, their members are bound - even before they become so - by institutional secrets and oaths that make it impossible to establish that understanding, and puts the League, which is not secret, at an inferior level that, were we to accept it, it would mean suicide.

Indeed, in these circumstances, the legions are in a position to learn about all the plans and designs of the League or of any other non-secret organization; the contrary not being the case. Hence, if the same individual belongs to both Institutions, in the event of a possible clash over contradictory orders issued by both the organizations, the one given by the legions would prevail, or at least, irreparably upset the organization and functioning of the League.

Consequently, we wait to find a solution to this delicate point; but, in the meantime, we remind all members of the League that [...] they should not join the legions [...] those individuals who wish to continue in the League should withdraw from the legions, keeping, as it is due, the oath of secrecy that they have sworn."<sup>20</sup>

Whereas in 1926 the League had obtained a pontifical ban on the secret organization "Unión Popular", also known as "U";<sup>21</sup> ten years later, it had to protect its own

integrity against infiltration from the legions. As it transpires from the circular, the situation was different in that attempts were made to prevent defections to the Base. Furthermore, even some of the staunchest supporters of the League, like Mgr Lara y Torres, realized, after 1934, that it was no longer capable of continuing the struggle.<sup>22</sup>

There was also the concern that the Base recruited legionnaire candidates from the same social classes and in the same geographical areas as the League: the officers belonged to the middle-bourgeoisie (professionals), the ranks to the petite-bourgeoisie (tradesmen, craftsmen, etc.).

### 3. Organization

The accounts of the Synarchists who participated in the Base and the documents contained in the records of the National Synarchist Union, allow us to understand its functioning.

1934 was year when Catholic organizations began to operate again. The Parents' Union, for example, undertook several demonstrations against the promulgation of the reformed Article 3, which introduced socialist education. At the same time, the legions were created in an attempt to penetrate all aspects of social, economic and, indeed, political life. Because of the constant menace of government reprisals, the organization was set up along secret lines.<sup>23</sup>

In the initial stages, the intention was that each

legion would comprise one thousand men, divided into groups of ten. In reality, most legions never reached those numbers; there were legions of four or six hundred members. Each legionnaire was individually chosen according to his activities for the cause of the Church; and only when there was certainty that that individual could be relied on, would he be asked to take the oath. Juan Ignacio Padilla, for instance, seems to have been chosen for his active participation in anti-socialist-education demonstrations. Abascal had a family history of close relations with the Church, or with Catholic organizations; he had at one time been a seminarist himself; his grandfather was devoted to the work of the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Conferences; his father had been an important member of the "U"; and he (Abascal) had worked with, and received help from, members of the Council of the Michoacán Division of the legions -although he was, obviously, not aware of this at the time.<sup>24</sup>

i) Regional division

As the Organization grew in importance, divisions were formed, corresponding to the existing political division of the country.

Thus, there was the Division of Jalisco, that of Querétaro, of Guanajuato, etc. A National Directorship was also set up, in Mexico City, and every year, the leaders of all the Divisions met to elect one of them to the post of Supreme Leader.

## ii) Sections

The primitive structure became more complex with the introduction of sections. It was, probably, at this stage that the term "Legión" was dropped for that of "la Base", which soon became the only one to designate the Organization. The formation of sections was intended to permit infiltration in all sectors of society; labour, in particular. Twelve sections were contemplated, following socio-professional criteria, though the majority never materialized. Several sections dealt with the transmission and verification of orders, while others were solely devoted to propaganda activities and recruitment. Salvador Abascal belonged to one such section from 1935 until 1940, when he took over the National leadership of the Synarchist Movement which was, incidentally, section eleven of the Base.

When he joined the Michoacán division, in April 1935, he was put in charge of ten secondary councils for their promotion. In September, he began work outside Morelia, setting out councils among peasants.

The leader of each legion, following his own advice, had the authority to carry out defensive or offensive measures and activities; but always within the bounds of "sound judgement"; thus preventing any legion remaining inactive and breaking down.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of April, 1936, Abascal was sent on a special mission by the National Leader, Julián Malo Juvera, to convey the news of the existence and the aims of the Organization, to Archbishop Ruíz y Flores, Apostolic Delegate, exiled in the United States, and to

ask for his blessing and that of all the other prelates of the country. Some time later, he was given the responsibility of founding legions where none existed, especially along the northern border, and to strengthen those in the weakest states. This task would take him from one extreme of the country to another. His rôle was that of "fundador y visitador"; he had absolute power to establish the structure where it was absent and, where it existed, to provide assistance to the corresponding leader in order to extend his ~~scope~~ of action inside his state.

It was not until 1937 that it was decided to create a visible section destined to make public the doctrine of the Organization. This section, section Eleven, eventually became the Synarchist Movement, or UNS. The birth of the Movement did not signify the end of the Base; it was only one of its sections, albeit the most important one, but still strictly dependent on the Supreme Council of the Base.

iii) The leadership of the Base

Each section had one person in charge, responsible to the Division leader, at the State level, or to the National leader, at the National level.

A Secret Council was set up comprising nine persons "who should be the most senior and worthiest of the institution"; who controlled, organized and ruled over the entire Organization, and who chose, every year, the Secret National Leader, and advised him on the appointment, or extension of the appointment, of the National Leader of section Eleven.<sup>26</sup> On account of the very considerable

importance that the UNS took within the Base organization, special significance was given to the nomination of its leader, since a vote of two thirds plus one of the Supreme Council was required to choose a candidate.

For the election of the National Leader of the Base, the Division leaders had their say; together with the Secret National Secretariat, they made up the Great Council which proposed to the Supreme Council the candidates from whom it had to make its choice.

#### iv) The Secret Leaders

Despite the provisions made to settle conflicts of authority that might arise between the leaders, the Base rapidly became the object of two or three personalities who were in command from 1934 to 1944. The reason for this was that in a nine-member council, it was not hard for a smart individual to impose his views, nay his will, and to have appointed at the head of the Divisions and of the UNS, the men of his choice. Indeed, the Division leaders, gathered in Council, would back, very naturally, the candidacy presented by the Secret Leader, who had appointed them in the first place; hence, the organization favoured, as Abascal and Padilla constantly stressed, the individual most talented at manipulation.

In 1934, among the Division chiefs, three stood out: Gonzalo Campos, of Querétaro, José Antonio Urquiza, of Guanajuato, and Antonio ~~Santacruz~~, of Mexico City. It was from this select group that the National Leaders came. But most influential of all was Santacruz, not least for his favorable position in Mexico City. Manuel Romo the

founder, was not, probably, a very strong character, because he was replaced from the leadership very soon, and virtually nothing is known about him. Julián Malo Juvera replaced him sometime in early 1935. A man of 55 or 60, he had been a maderista and was, in the words of Abascal, whom he admired:

"a good-natured person and a real gentleman, generous and ready to recognize the merits in others. He was an intelligent, sensible and courageous leader."<sup>27</sup>

Malo Juvera had a significant influence in the conception of the UNS; he was prompt to realize that the Base needed some kind of public outlet if it were to succeed, as we shall discuss later on in this chapter.

Gonzalo Campos, leader of the Michoacán Division, took the leadership from Juvera in September; he was 34. His leadership developed during the period of formation of the UNS; he resigned in 1939, suffering from cancer. He appears to have been a highly praised man. Both Abascal and Padilla expressed nothing but admiration and respect for him.<sup>28</sup> Campos came from a wealthy family of hacendados, who had distributed, Abascal tells us, the main part of their estate to their labourers before the agrarian reform. A convinced Catholic, he joined the ACJM to become its diocesan agent. This put him in contact with many militant groups of Catholic Action, of different social backgrounds, from where he chose officers for the Base. He also belonged to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Querétaro, where he strove to establish a



Christian labour union, dependent on the Base. The assignation of socio-professional sections to divide the work of the legions was his idea. He maintained relations with American Catholics and was the coordinator of the preparatory work for the Synarchist movement. He died in 1943.<sup>29</sup>

José Antonio Urquiza, of the Guanajuato Division, was the son of a wealthy hacendado who had lost a great part of his lands during the Revolution. He was in charge of reorganizing one of the family properties in Guanajuato, where he was assassinated on 11 April 1938. That made him the most revered martyr of Synarchism. He was particularly concerned with relations with the American hierarchy. In September 1937, he had travelled to Washington, accompanied by his brother and by Abascal, where he met American bishops, especially Monsignor Burke, the Secretary of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, to discuss the legions and the future Synarchist movement, to ensure that the latter would not encounter any encumbrance in the southern American dioceses.

Contrary to what was argued by the detractors of the Organization, Urquiza never travelled to Europe, nor did he visit Spain.<sup>30</sup>

The early disappearance of Gonzalo Campos (aged 43), and of Urquiza (aged 35), no doubt gave Antonio Santacruz the possibility to run the Base according to his own views, for many years.

Antonio Santacruz belonged to a wealthy porfirian family that enjoyed excellent relations with high ranking

Church officials. He was a chemical engineer, proprietor of several pharmaceutical laboratories and other property in Mexico City. He dominated the levers of command of the Base, and consequently of Synarchism, practically throughout 1939 to 1944. He came repeatedly into conflict with the leader of the UNS, Abascal, in particular. Padilla coined a phrase to describe him and those who surrounded him in the Supreme Council; he called them "los ratones."<sup>31</sup> This is how Abascal depicted him:

"[He] was undoubtedly a very clever man. But with the time I began to realize that his principal strength did not lie precisely on his brightness, but on his social position, instead [...], on his exhibitionism, and, above all, as the essence of his personality, on his unlimited capacity for intrigue [...]"<sup>32</sup>

Santacruz also had great responsibilities within the Church; he became president of the Congregations of the Holy Virgin, which endeavoured to Christianize the labour sector. He knew several members of the episcopacy well, like Mgr Luis María Martínez, Archbishop of Mexico; he was in constant contact with the Jesuits, especially with Father Eduardo Iglesias, who later became the spiritual counsellor of the Base.

After the death of José Antonio Urquiza, he took on the Base's official representation to the American hierarchy, and appeared as the true leader of the UNS with the American embassy. He became the Secret Supreme Leader in 1940, though he was the power behind the previous leader, Felipe Coria, who lasted only one year, 1939 to

1940.

Some important features of the leadership of the Base can be inferred from the previous exposition: the leaders belonged to the same age group, the same social class, and they all had contacts with, and responsibilities in the Church.

#### 4. Activities

##### i) "The spiritual reconquest of Tabasco"

When the Base was consolidated, three years after its creation, it divided the country into sectors. Salvador Abascal was put in charge of the southern sector that comprised the states of Tabasco, Yucatán, Campeche, Chiapas and Oaxaca. He set out to organize his territory and reported back to the Supreme Council with depressing news about Tabasco.

Tomás Garrido Canabal had introduced a law, on 28 February 1925, that prohibited priests from officiating in the State, unless they satisfied certain requirements that they:

- 1) be of Tabascan or Mexican origin by birth, with five years residence in the state;
- 2) be over forty years old;
- 3) be educated in state schools;
- 4) have good moral background;
- 5) be married and;
- 6) have no previous convictions.

When Garrido was defeated, in 1936, after the

expedition of Brito Foucher, garridism fell with him, except for the restrictions on the Church.<sup>33</sup>

Destruction and desecration were widespread and only very few temples still stood in all the state. There were three in the capital, Villahermosa: the Cathedral, turned into a "frontón" (pelota court); another, the church of the Holy Cross, was in ruins, and the church of the Immaculate Conception, turned into a rubbish dump.

The Base wished to spread the newly created Synarchism to all parts of the country; to this end, it intended to use the legions as the principal nucleus.<sup>34</sup> With this order, Abascal returned to Villahermosa, on 16 March 1938, to check on the legions he had founded the previous year. He discovered that they had been able to recruit hardly anybody. The reason he was given was the lack of religious freedom and the distrust and fear of everybody.<sup>35</sup> Whereupon Abascal took on, with the support of the Base, the start of a campaign to obtain the religious liberation of Tabasco. He had a precedent to guide him: in February 1937, at Orizaba and Córdoba, in the State of Veracruz, the people had successfully reopened the temples and reinstated the priests who had been officiating, secretly, in private houses.

His plan was to enter Villahermosa on 12 May, in remembrance of the first victims of callismo, in Morelia, in 1921.<sup>36</sup> Abascal visited ranches and villages around Villahermosa, trying to instil, in a simple and direct way, the desire to recover religious freedom and reassured the peasants that this could be achieved, if they were

prepared to fight a non-violent combat. He insisted that no weapons should be carried, because "they were not going to take the life of anybody, but risk their own for religion". He also believed that only by using the technique of peaceful mass demonstrations could they succeed, because if they were armed and killed someone, Cárdenas would consider them rebels and their task would fail instantly.<sup>37</sup>

Mobilization was done at the sound of indigenous drums. Many peasants had to come from distant places. They would walk the whole day under a torrid sun through rugged roads.<sup>38</sup>

On 10 May, the National Leader, Gonzalo Campos went to Villahermosa to discuss with Abascal the plans of the operation. Abascal relates how Campos approved of them and gave him the liberty to modify them according to the circumstances. The concentration of forces began in the afternoon of 11 May in the village of Tamulté, twenty minutes from the capital; people arrived from various directions and in considerable numbers. A first group of five hundred marched towards Villahermosa, arriving within reach of the centre, at 10.30 A.M. At 11 o'clock, Abascal, heading a four-hundred-strong column, made for the capital; there they met with another column of some one thousand men coming from another direction. They shouted "Viva Cristo Rey!" and declared their readiness to die rather than abandon the struggle. The mass stopped when it reached the city's main square, in front of the Governor's palace. Abascal and others harangued the

crowds and waited for the Vice-Governor to appear, the Governor being away at the time. When he failed to come out, Abascal declared that if he had abandoned his post, then they did not need him any more. They marched to the Church of the Conception, where they set up camp; they remained there until 3 June. Of the three temples still standing in the capital, they chose this one to show their resolution because the cathedral would have been too much of an affront and, the other, the Holy Cross, was on the outskirts of the city. Two legionnaire women, whom Abascal had brought from Córdoba to teach catechism, put a flag where the presbitery had once been and began reciting the rosary. The flag was the Mexican flag with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the centre.

The following morning, another thousand peasants arrived, but they were stopped by the army. Abascal went to "liberate" them and lead them to the temple, which he did; the army did not shoot.<sup>39</sup>

He sent telegrams to the president explaining the reasons for the occupation and of the whole venture, saying that the aim was to obtain complete religious freedom. He said that all the sites that belonged to the temples destroyed by Garrido, would be occupied; and warned that the people would never compromise and accept the law that required priests to marry.

At the same time, the Base mobilized the entire organization throughout Mexico to support the campaign. The press and the presidential palace were flooded with telegrams at the proper moment.

On 13 May, the Vice-governor sent orders to disperse the crowds and distributed a manifesto to that effect. The Minister of the Interior sent the same orders from Mexico. The crowd responded by making a silent march through the principal streets of Villahermosa. Previously, five hundred tracts has been printed and distributed, inviting the residents of the city to join the peasants in demonstrating to the government that Villahermosa was Catholic too; thereby rejecting, categorically, the government and the labour movement's claim that it was atheistic. When the mass of demonstrators reached the church of the Conception, the column was of some ten thousand; the silence was broken by cheers to Christ the King and the Virgin, and a priest was carried to the improvised altar.<sup>40</sup> The following day, the first Mass was celebrated at Tabasco for more that a decade. After the Mass, small groups started to reconstruct the temple, and baptisms and catechism were given. Supplies were both purchased and obtained through contributions.

Meanwhile, threats from the government and the local press continued. There were also attempts by the local government, apparently on instructions from the President, to strike a deal with Abascal: he was to leave Villahermosa, in exchange for granting freedom to another municipality, promising that in the future, religious freedom would also be restored in the capital. Abascal did not accept this, fearing that away from the capital, it would be much easier to crush religious liberty

altogether. He replied by saying that they would leave only when religion were guaranteed in full, and for all the territory.

On 30 May, the Governor ordered the army to surround the church. From that moment, nobody was to be let out and no provisions in. In the afternoon, soldiers opened fire, killing four and injuring many. Afterwards, Abascal and the priest in charge of the Conception were arrested and imprisoned. Later, they were flown out of Villahermosa and taken to Ciudad del Carmen, where they were released. Immediately, Abascal contacted the secret leaders who ordered him to return to Mexico City.<sup>41</sup> In December, Bishop Vicente Camacho returned to his episcopal see. On 1 January 1939, a new Governor had taken office; he made an official statement declaring that religious persecution was unfair and self-defeating.

A completely different interpretation of the events was given by the American journalist Betty Kirk, apologist of Cárdenas:

"On 2 June, 1938, Cárdenas paid his debt to the Church for her support (at the time of the oil expropriation), when six persons were killed in religious riots in the State of Tabasco. That State, under Tomás Garrido Canabal, had been one of the more anti-catholic regions of Mexico, and had suffered severe religious persecution. When the new riots occurred, as a result of Catholics trying to reopen a church, Cárdenas ordered all local authorities to remove the anti-religious legislation in force and to pass new laws, authorising a sufficient number of priests to serve the community, according to the Constitution. He deplored this conflict that he



declared to be anti-patriotic, and reminded Catholics that they could apply to the courts if they were denied justice or if they were persecuted".<sup>42</sup>

When we met Abascal at his home in Mexico City, he defined his experience in Tabasco thus:

"I with my hundreds of peasants were the lay instrument that served to topple over the idols of secularism and of respect for conventions; in their place, we presented to the people the image of the Redeemer and of the Virgin. Yet, my efforts would have been futile, had I not counted with the aid of the catechists. It would only have been a mere civic act, with no transcendence, no spiritual benefit."<sup>43</sup>

ii) The Base and labour

When Catholics of the Base explored the possibilities available to them in the labour front, it was not long before they realized how limited these were. It was difficult to set in motion a religious organization of the type of Catholic Action, since it was compelled to abstain from all political, union and economic activity. They could not contemplate the creation of confessional unions, because the law strictly prohibited it. They therefore decided to work with the existing laws. Labour legislation, they thought, had some positive points; but, in practice, it had only succeeded in submitting labour unions to the control of the leaders, who were subservient to politics.

Official organisms and arbitration bureaux depended on the party in power, where there was a strong left-wing

tendency. The "closed-shop", clause tied the worker completely to the union, and even more so, to the union leader.

In the opinion of the Base, many employers, even Catholic, were more concerned with earning profits than with the social problems raised by modern industry. It would be extremely difficult to suggest to them a solution that seemed to go against their immediate interests and to introduce religious considerations in the management of their businesses. Hence, the idea was conceived of forming parallel organizations of workers and employers; whereby the professional and the religious movement would be kept totally separate, at least on the surface. The inspiration came from the encyclical **QUADRAGESIMO ANNO**.

The congregations of the Holy Virgin had dealt with teaching the catechism. They had recruited many Catholics among the workers, who were rallied in workers' congregations.<sup>44</sup> After the 1929 church-state agreements, they were reorganized on a larger scale.

When the Base was founded, it had been decided to secure a strong recruitment in the labour milieu, particularly susceptible to "communist" propaganda and which had to be stopped. The leadership set two tasks: first, it was necessary to assemble the work force; then, it would train it for the delicate task it would entrust to it. Indeed, the first objective was to penetrate the unions by means of secret Catholic cells. Once settled in, the workers would extend their influence by forming study groups, to gain and train more followers that would

help them place their men in control, in union meetings. The workers that would embark upon this task would need excellent religious and social education; it was therefore a prerequisite to develop, to the highest degree, their adaptability to the environment. The most considerable difficulty they would have to face, was the need to work in secrecy; the state of affairs being such, at that time, that the slightest indiscretion would have serious and devastating consequences.

Original attempts at working through study groups did not succeed. It was then that the idea of an "internado" (boarding school) was adopted. Hence, the House for Proletarian Students was established in the Mexico City district of Tacubaya. The courses lasted six weeks; at the end of which, students went into closed retreat and joined the labour sections of the Base. The school operated between 1 June 1937 and 10 February 1942. Afterwards, it lived out at a slower pace until October 1944.<sup>45</sup> Students came from all corners of the country, but, especially, from the central states. The majority were members of the CTM; though there were members of CROM and of other independent unions, as well.

Soon, the problem of deciding whether to become politically active or not, arose. The Base had very firm ideas about the matter. It maintained that to follow that road would be the ruin of all the effort undertaken, because it implied either succumbing to the government party or being wasted in a fatal and sterile opposition. In fact, the Base argued, those who wanted to join the

labour sector of the official party because they estimated that in so doing they could not come out losing, were definitely worse off, because the party dominated those who tried to be independent. In the end, the only concern of the union was to obtain the largest number of posts in the party; but the nominees were selected by the union bosses and not by the membership. Besides, labour representatives were expected to defend, always, the political actions of the Government. Consequently, the Base concluded, they had different goals, different means and different fields of action. Political action should be subject to the realization of more vital objectives, before engaging in party politics.

The only assessment we have of the school for labour leaders is that of Abascal. Though biased, he was, nonetheless, in a position, as leader of the Synarchists and as member of the Base, to understand the scope of the school. He said that the school had been the idea of Santacruz; that it could not have thrived because of its clandestine nature; and that although some unions were penetrated very positively, particularly in Querétaro, it was usually the case of small unions and the result of covert operations.<sup>46</sup> Most of the leaders who came out of the school were destined for the industries of Monterrey and acted more against "red" leaders than for the establishment of a true social Christian régime. In his judgement, Santacruz' error was to put the school in the service of "legitimate but limited and short-sighted interests" (i.e. the industrial concerns of Monterrey).

Besides, he noted, because of the short duration of the courses and the size of the groups (twenty workers), it was not possible to teach them very much, let alone shape their personalities.<sup>47</sup>

##### 5. The decline of the legions

At the end of 1934, the leaders of the legions had decided to take steps to influence public opinion. Under the pseudonym of OSCAR CALDERON ALVAREZ, they published articles in **El Universal**. These appeared weekly, and in exchange, the members of the legions would buy the paper at least once a week. Yet, after a while, **El Universal** pulled out. The Organization made threats, but to no avail. The Base told the main advertisers to withdraw their advertisements. But, they did not comply.

The leaders thought that a lesson would have to be taught if they did not wish to lose stature and discredit the Organization in the eyes of their followers. Therefore, it was decided to scare the principal advertiser, a large department store, in the centre of Mexico City. The way in which this was done was by exploding stinking-gas bombs, during peak hours. The police caught some of those involved. There was anxiety and disappointment in the ranks and massive desertion ensued.

Many councils completely disappeared; the few that remained had very inadequate lives. There was a widespread belief that the orders issued did not go far enough, that they involved no real danger, and that, in general, they were innocent and silly. For instance, all

legionnaires would be asked to attend High Mass on a particular day at the Cathedral; on another occasion they would be asked to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Guadalupe; on one occasion it was ordered that on a certain day, every legionnaire should pass behind the Cathedral and drop a stone in a precise spot; many passed by just to see who actually dropped the stone. Another time, in Morelia, the order was that each legionnaire should write to a particular teacher, or government official, condemning his anti-Catholic conduct and somehow scare him. But one teacher warned the police and it was not long before some legionnaires were caught when they tried to post their letters. They were taken to the station and detained. Afterwards, several houses were searched without warrant. Those arrested felt abandoned because it took three days before they could go free and then, only after paying a heavy fine.<sup>48</sup>

In Guadalajara something more serious happened: on 6 February 1935, the Commander of the Military Zone made declarations in the press about the discovery of an alleged conspiracy involving a "ridiculous organization established on military lines, from Soldier to Marshal". That organization was, of course, the Base. Several arrests were made, including some of the leaders.<sup>49</sup>

As a result, the Base suffered a major setback in Jalisco, from which it never entirely recovered. In the other legions, vexation, discouragement and fear were rife; thereby causing many more legions to disappear due to desertion; others were reduced to pitiful numbers,

dedicated to the simple task of recruitment and of doing pious deeds.

Because the legions never managed to hold important posts of command, their activities were too general and of simple character, incapable of sustaining, after a while, the interest and the enthusiasm of the majority. Inaction was at the root of the organization's decline. Another element, not without relevance, was the growing phenomenon of rural migration. The Division Chiefs spoke of the frequent number of legionnaires who had gone to the Capital; but who, once there, got lost in the enormity of the city, and the shortcomings of the local legions failed to ensure their loyalty.<sup>50</sup>

It was, therefore, impossible to continue indefinitely in this manner. Abascal summed up the pith of the problem:

"A secret organization which wants to act in the open and still remain secret, most consist of a handful and select commandoes. Were it not so, it would fall apart on inactivity, or would try to occupy its members in some activity that, if it were innocent, would cause disillusion and dismissal; and if it involved some danger, it would be inconceivable that it was not discovered, with catastrophic repercussions."<sup>51</sup>

Was it Catholic morality the main cause of dejection and disbandment? What deterred Catholics from making use of all the means available to a secret organization to defeat its enemy? In any case, assassination and tyrannicide had been entirely ruled out, since, as Abascal ascertained:

"[T]he misfortunes of the Nation did not depend on a tyrant, or on an easily identifiable small group. The Revolution has gained a lot of ground which has allowed it to penetrate and take hold of all social strata; it thus has enough leaders and followers, and sufficient resources of all kinds; plus international support, especially from the United States. Executing Lázaro Cárdenas for his persecution of the Church and for the extensive destruction he has inflicted on material wealth, would have served no real purpose, since someone else would have stepped in in his place and carry on as before, because the orders come from across the Northern border. A secret organization is condemned to die out if it is not devoted to direct subversive action, or if it does not engage in bellicose action. To follow the first - sabotage, kidnapping and "exemplary" executions - it would be vital to do without most of the followers, because they would be more of a dead weight than of an asset. However, with no, or little possibility of seizing power, a purely subversive provocation is always illicit according to scholastic theology and to common sense. In Mexico, it would only benefit the revolutionary régime, eager to be up against a weaker enemy, real or fictitious, in order to carry the tyranny to extremes and stamp out all divergence, even of thought. Militant action, on the other hand, because it is essentially open, would claim for itself, after a while, the public leadership, with supremacy over the secret authority, arguing that the right to command lies with whom assumes the responsibility."<sup>52</sup>

At the National Council of the Legions celebrated in Mexico City, In January 1937, the National Leader, Julián Malo Juvera, summed up the problem facing the Organization: he said that if they did not want to fail and disappear, a public organism should be created to



provide legal and open activity for the great majority, since it was impossible to envisage a real secret activity for the mass. As National Leader, he was in a position to know the exact general situation of the Organization: desertion and frustration were widespread. The ranks failed to understand the need for a secret organization and for secret activities. They wanted an open civic organization against the government of Cárdenas, of the type operating in Monterrey, like "Acción Cívica".

There was indeed a general desire for something open and national. Malo Juvera suggested the foundation of a National political party to fight in the electoral field. He asked the Council to put the question to every Division Leader, to study it and discuss it in the next National Meeting, scheduled for March. The situation did not change during the two month interval, rather the opposite; general disbandment became more acute. Abascal described the Meeting of March 1937 as of "historical importance"

The proposal for a National political party was opposed by Gonzalo Campos, Leader of the Querétaro Legions, who argued that political parties divided, while they stood for unity; opposition political parties were what the PNR needed to give the impression of not being a one-party system.

Campos proposed, instead, a civic organization of all "good Mexicans", that transformed the people and reconstructed the national economy; that should be its initial task, the point of departure. Without it, the salvation of the country was inconceivable. He declared

that they could establish social justice from below, in defiance of the government, in worker-employer relations. Hard working, responsible peasants could change, to a large extent, the internal régime of the ejido, despite official control.

The family was the basis of society. To win it back from the Revolution, ethics had to be reformed. The most pressing problem was that posed by socialist education. Hence, it was imperative to seize power; there was however a belief that this should be done a step at a time, laying the foundations, and not rushing a coup d'Etat, which should only come after the effort of social reconstruction had attained the level permitted by the revolutionary State; consequently, they should not waste time with a political party, that would only be playing into the hands of the enemy.<sup>53</sup>

Malo Juvera accepted the proposal. The only thing that remained was to consider the name to be given to the new association, the place and the date where it should first appear, and what initial steps it should follow. These matters were to be decided in the following meeting in May. In the meantime, Division Leaders were asked to discuss them with their respective councils.

Discussion over the nature of the new organization proved to be a greatly dividing issue within the leadership of the Base, aggravated by Cárdenas' continuous radical policies, which lay down the conditions for an internal crisis, around the strategy to follow. Indeed, two tendencies emerged: on the one hand, there were those

- led by Gonzalo Campos - who wished to fight, by whatever means possible, to seize power; on the other hand, there were those - led by Antonio Santacruz - who wished to preserve the organization as a socio-mystical association, reminiscent of **Opus Dei**, devoted to religion and to the formation of a social-religious awareness.<sup>54</sup>

#### 6. The birth of Synarchism

The secret National Meeting of May 1937 opened with the request by José Antonio Urquiza, Leader of the Guanajuato Division, to select his State as the place for the foundation of the new organization. He declared that there was already a group, a civic association (commonly known as "Group of León") which had been publicly active for a few weeks, made up of friends and fellow legionnaires.<sup>55</sup>

The name of the new organization was suggested by the Leader of the San Luis Potosí Division, Ceferino Sánchez. He argued that since their aim was to fight the anarchy of the Cárdenas régime, they should call it **SYNARCHISM**, of the greek **syn**: with; and **arje**: authority, order; thus, with order, the opposite of anarchy. The name of **Unión Nacional Sinarquista, UNS**, was proposed by Abascal.<sup>56</sup>

The term Synarchism was chosen as the antonym of anarchism, the anarchy of decadent liberalism and atheistic communism against which the Synarchists professed to be marshalling the forces of order and religion in Mexico.<sup>57</sup> The principle of order adopted by Synarchism was Christianity in its authentic Catholic conception.<sup>58</sup> It is an order of Christian democracy, first

under God, then under a God-fearing state. The members of Synarchism were ardent practicing Catholics, disciplined soldiers of a theocratic faith. According to the official doctrine, the movement was born amid an explosion of enthusiasm, faith, and courage.<sup>59</sup> The new word startled everybody:

"The term seemed to us too learned and difficult for the people to understand, but after seeing the enthusiasm with which José Antonio defended it and the reasons he expounded, we accepted it willingly".<sup>60</sup>

José Antonio demanded authorization to hold the first meeting for the foundation of the UNS, on 23 May 1937, at León, Guanajuato. Abascal claims that Malo Juvera, the National Leader of the Base, had chosen him to be the first leader of the UNS, and not José Antonio Urquiza, because, as José Antonio himself admitted, he was not the right man for the job. He was not a good orator, an essential requirement to arouse the masses. He had, in fact, a tendency to stammer. The founders of the "Group of León" (Manuel Zermeño y Pérez, José Trueba Olivares) were expecting that the Base would appoint a renowned personality to lead the new movement, thus providing it with the prestige that their group had lacked. Therefore, when Urquiza told them that the Base had chosen Abascal, an unknown personality in political and intellectual milieux, though he had proven himself in the Base, they were taken aback. They wished to entrust the mission to Urquiza, but he belonged to a well known family of

Querétaro.<sup>61</sup>

Abascal met with Zermeño, Trueba Olivares and Urquiza on the afternoon of the 23, at the Hotel Condesa, in León, to talk about the new movement. He manifested his desire to make of the UNS a "groupe de choc"; to make a frontal attack on the Revolution, exposing all its crimes, spiritual and economic, and to call upon all those determined to combat it, to join the movement. Force, he sustained, would be repealed with force.<sup>62</sup>

His three interlocutors were astounded; they thought that such an approach was inappropriate for the existing juncture, it was too impetuous and would be perceived as subversive. They said that they should confine themselves to talk only of the unity and harmony of all good Mexicans, whatever their ideology, so long as they were prepared to work for the sake of the fatherland, manifested in works of charity and public utility, without the slightest provocation of the Government. Were they to adopt an aggressive attitude, the Government would have an unsurpassed motive to stifle the movement at the outset.<sup>63</sup>

Abascal's idea was, therefore, diametrically opposed to that of Trueba Olivares. There was no possibility of bringing together the Group of León and the leader to be. The dilemma was solved when Abascal relinquished control of the Movement - either of his own accord, as he claims, or convinced by Urquiza - in favour of a member of the group whose convictions were more in line with those of the Base. Abascal decided not to attend the foundation meeting.

José Antonio Urquiza, José Trueba Olivares and Manuel Zermeño presided over the meeting that evening, 23 May 1937, which took place at 49 calle de la Libertad, in León, Guanajuato, with some four hundred people attending, although half that number seems more likely. An organizing committee was formed with Trueba Olivares as president, Rubén Mendoza as secretary and Francisco Ornelas as treasurer. Only the president would have powers to make decisions, the other members only acted as advisers. The committee would be limited to helping in the formation of Synarchist groups in all the country, and would call a national convention that approved the statutes and principles of the Union and chose the permanent officials.

José Antonio Urquiza was assassinated on 11 April 1938. It was assumed at the time that he had been murdered on the direct orders of Cárdenas. However, it later emerged that he was shot by one of his own peons. From that date, Zermeño and Trueba declared him founder, protomartyr and backbone of the Movement.<sup>64</sup> This version was held by the organization until 1944, when the acrid differences that foreshowed a schism inside the UNS denied it. Still, during 1937-1944, the apparent leaders of the UNS argued that the organization was founded by a group of young men from León, from two existing associations. One, called "Nuevo México", founded in 1935, sympathized with the workers; the other was a group of students from Morelia, in Michoacán, called "Círculo de Estudios Vasco de Quiroga".<sup>65</sup>

When Abascal became the National Leader of the Synarchist Movement, in 1940, he did not contradict the official version because he was bound by secrecy and obliged to keep the secret of the Legions. It was not until he broke with the Movement, in 1944, that he felt compelled to reveal some of the secrets of the Organization. Since then, he has always contended that the UNS was the work of the secret leaders of the Legions, but especially, of Julián Malo Juvera and Gonzalo Campos.<sup>66</sup>

However, from the outset, alternative versions about the origins of the UNS were advanced. Basically, all versions - with different variations - fell within two major categories: the first was part of the official doctrine of UNS; it sustained that a group of young Mexican patriots and devout Catholic, disturbed by the moral, political and economic disorder that prevailed in the country, decided to form a union to fight for the establishment of social justice based on Christian principles. The other version claimed that UNS has been set up by the Nazis as part of a subversive conspiracy.

As soon as Synarchism gained in national importance, the Mexican Left rapidly began to spread the version that UNS was of Nazi inspiration. The journalist, Mario Gill, was the staunchest supporter of this version; he affirmed that in its first years, the Synarchist Movement had been an entirely fascist organization.<sup>67</sup> This was also the view held by the Government. *El Nacional* described it in these terms:

"Synarchism represented a regressive movement with very clear affinities

with the foreign interest of the  
expansionist countries under  
totalitarian régimes.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, this version was shared abroad, especially in the United States, where it was propagated by its foreign correspondents stationed in Mexico. They maintained that the UNS was not only Nazi inspired, but that it formed part of the Axis army, thereby posing a serious threat:

[The Axis] has established on the borders of the United States one of the most dangerous Axis centres in the entire world [...]<sup>69</sup>

The version supported by Gill and the Left did not dispute the time or the place of the official version, nor did it question the participation of José Antonio Urquiza, Manuel Zermeño and José Trueba Olivares. It claimed, however, that other persons were present, including a German professor of languages at the Colegio de Guanajuato, Oscar Hellmut Schreiter. It alleged that the Synarchist Movement was a by-product of an Anti-Communist centre established by Schreiter, in 1936, in Guanajuato. Gill adduced that the group was not achieving the success that its founder expected, because, at the time, the people had strong faith in the Revolution and its leaders, but, also because anti-Communism was, in the eyes of the masses, synonymous with anti-cardenism and, in 1936, the masses had a mystical passion for Cárdenas. Therefore, Gill noted, the German had, in fact, chosen an ineffective name for his group. Consequently, Schreiter met with his



"disciples" -as Gill called them - Manuel Zermeño, the Trueba Olivares brothers and José Antonio Urquiza, to reorganize along slightly different lines. Gill alleged that José Antonio had just returned from Spain, where he had fought on the Nationalist side against the Republic, and was able to furnish information about the organization of the Falange and of the Italian Fascist Party. Schreiter would have contributed with information on the National Socialist Party.<sup>70</sup> It was further affirmed that out of these meetings a movement was devised along hierarchical and militaristic lines, subject to the will of a **Caudillo** or **Jefe**, and dubbed with a word never heard before in Mexico: Synarchism.<sup>71</sup>

Mario Gill asserted that all UNS members should receive military training, especially those in rural areas. He deduced that, given the impossibility of founding a Synarchist military school, the leaders would have to call upon Falangist instructors and the training would be given in cynegetic clubs, following the Gestapo method that he said was used in South America. Wealthy Synarchist hacendados would provide the grounds where the training could be practiced, and only their children would be given special military instruction.<sup>72</sup>

In 1945, Richard Pattee wrote that an odd confusion had served to discredit Synarchism and to relate it somehow to totalitarianism: the activities of Schreiter in Guanajuato. This obscure German had founded, in 1936, a small anti-communist group, in which a government official of some importance participated.<sup>73</sup> The only link between

the Synarchist movement and Schreiter was Manuel Torres Bueno [future National Leader of the UNS]. He was a professor of philosophy at a school where Schreiter gave German lessons. Later on, Torres Bueno, having become a lawyer, acted as his lawyer in a non-political action. This fortuitous and casual contact between the two men did not represent an ideological affinity; there was no evidence that Schreiter had any influence on the early stages of Synarchism.<sup>74</sup> Torres Buenos responded to this inference:

"Regarding the proofs mentioned [a legal document, dated 25 September, 1938, in Guanajuato, signed by Schreiter and Torres Bueno, as his lawyer] to show the connection of Schreiter with Synarchism, [...], in 1938, the war had not yet started nor were there any United Nations, and our country had friendly relations with Germany. At that time it was not known that the Communists would soon join the Nazis to destroy Christian Poland. In 1938 Schreiter was an individual like so many others, and it means nothing now, as it meant nothing then, that he may be found occasionally among the persons who requested my professional services. Maldonado, Schreiter, and [Isaac] Guzmán Valdivia had founded in the City of Guanajuato the Anti-Communist Centre, something completely different from Synarchism which was founded in León in 1937, by Catholic students. The proximity of dates and places has been artificially exploited to confuse these two organizations, completely different in their components and in their objectives."<sup>75</sup>

According to Synarchist sources, the Anti-Communist Centre was formed by Callistas to foment trouble for the Cárdenas government, but with the triumph of the latter,

the centre subsided.<sup>76</sup>

We have not been able to find any conclusive evidence to ascertain whether or not Schreiter actually had a significant rôle in the creation of the UNS. The only link between the alleged founders of Synarchism and those of the Anti-Communist Centre, of which Schreiter was admittedly a member, lies in the fact that Guzman Valdivia, admitted by Torres Bueno to have been with Schreiter one of the founders of the Centre, was a frequent contributor to *El Sinarquista* - the official paper of the UNS.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps the most accurate observation in relation to this matter was made by Arthur Whitaker, when he wrote:

"While no intelligent person would rule out the possibility that the UNS, either consciously or unconsciously, served the purposes of pro-Nazi and other subversive elements, it was certain that the organization was no mere creation of such elements, but was, on the contrary, rooted in Mexican experience. What is more, even among its strongest opponents it was privately admitted that the Synarchists' case against the vices of the Mexican Revolutionary régime was a formidable one and that the main strength of the movement lay in the spontaneous reaction of large numbers of the Mexican people themselves against these vices: last-ditch apologists for this régime were merely deceiving themselves or trying to deceive others, when they represented the UNS as merely a product of Nazi-Fascist intrigue [...]

"Consequently, the answer to the question regarding the international significance of Synarchism depended to a considerable extent upon inference, gossip, and speculation. The extremes to which these were sometime carried

is illustrated by the case of one exceedingly fearful and equally humourless critic of Synarchism who, as proof of its pro-Nazi character, solemnly pointed out that the initials of the organization's name, UNS form the German word 'uns'.<sup>78</sup>"

i) The Manifesto of the Organizing Committee

Once the UNS had been officially founded, it was necessary to draw up the programme of action of the Movement, or at least, the principles and the guiding spirit. Hence, on 12 June 1937, Trueba and Urquiza drafted a manifesto that appeared in several towns of the Bajío, and soon began to attract followers. It became one of the basic documents of Synarchism. It put forward the objectives of Synarchism:

"In view of the distressing problems that afflict the entire Nation, it is absolutely necessary that an organization made up of true patriots exists, an organization that strives for the restoration of the fundamental rights of every individual, and that has as its highest objective the salvation of the Fatherland.

As opposed to the utopians who dream of a society without rulers and without laws, Synarchism wants a society, ruled by a legitimate authority - emanating from free democratic action of the people, that will guarantee a social order within which the people may find happiness, not in a selfish manner, but trying that everybody realized the good that each one wishes for oneself [...] It would not be indifferent to any question of social significance; the common good will be its constant concern and it will permanently seek to attain it.

Synarchism is a manner of being and living; a manner of sentiment and work in the face of the problems which

affect the general interest. It is spiritual action, charitable; it is the courage and the will to be always prepared to serve the rest.

A synarchist does not ask anything for himself, he should always be prepared to devote himself to any work that redounds to collective advantage; to lend the support of his physical strength, of this wealth, or of his talent to find an immediate and effective remedy for all that constitutes a social injustice.

The welfare of everyone, public happiness, and the moral and economic salvation of the country demands a price: the sacrifice and the effort of everyone, contributed according to his abilities.

Synarchism is a positive movement, which unifies, constructs, and dignifies: on the other hand it is diametrically opposed to the doctrines which hold postulates of hate and devastation. Synarchism proclaims love for country and will oppose with all its strength systems which pretend to erase national boundaries, in order to convert the world into an immense fief, in which the perverse inventors of these theories may easily rule [...]

The Synarchist Organizing Committee issues a call in this Manifesto to all Mexicans who are ready to work for the glory of Mexico, to those unselfish persons who want to offer their cooperation in order to organize a new society based on justice[...]."<sup>79</sup>

The Manifesto ended with its adopted motto: "**PATRIA, JUSTICIA Y LIBERTAD**" (Country, justice and liberty).

José Trueba Olivares wrote some years later, that the text was not in the nature of a manifesto. It was only a project of one, an outline of what he considered were the leading ideas for a manifesto and for future propaganda. It was José Antonio Urquiza who insisted on publishing it,

because he believed the ideas it contained were sufficient to form the core of the document. The document Trueba formulated managed to synthesize the desires of the group he commanded and the aspirations of the country as whole.<sup>80</sup>

Abascal found the text utopian in several points and ambiguous, lukewarm and too general, in others. He claimed that more than Urquiza, it was Gonzalo Campos who revised it.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the text lay in its vagueness: by avoiding any conflict of opinions, it could almost be given any interpretation and, thus, win the support and adhesion of all social classes. In this way, no direct reference was made to contemporary social, political or economic problems, so that the reader could be at liberty to interpret the "distressing problems that afflict the Nation". Besides, since the document aimed at no particular class, anybody who felt the victim of injustice: dispossessed landlords, hunted agraristas, inflation-hit traders and even entrepreneurs threatened by collectivisation, could respond to the call to "strive for the restoration of the fundamental rights of every individual".

The manifesto expressed what the organization of the Movement had hoped for, namely, to appeal to all Mexicans of "good will" to work for the delivery of the Fatherland. Moreover, the text was reassuring about the Movement's intentions. There was an undeniable sense of goodwill when it declared its sincere desire to solve all social problems, even to the extent of self-sacrifice.

However, looking at the text more closely, it transpires that the Revolution and the Communists, in particular, were the obvious targets; we read that it opposes doctrines of hate and destruction and that it will combat decisively systems that pretend to cancel borders and turn the world into an immense feudal organization. On the other hand, the paragraphs written by Trueba bring out more the dicta of social Catholicism, which attempt to solve social problems on an individual basis, through charity rather than a class struggle.

Undoubtedly, the general language used in the text was that common to Right-wing groups: there were calls to "save" and "sacrifice to the Fatherland", of "social order", of "common good", etc. However, this is not a sufficient condition to label Synarchism a fascist organization, as its critics did. The Catholic, nationalist and anti-communist tendencies, no doubt were suspicious of the Revolution, but it is easy to mistake religions and ultranationalism for full-scale commitment to Nazi or Fascist doctrine.

With the Manifesto as the first pronouncement of its ideological objectives, the UNS began the enormous task of forming a highly disciplined, ultranationalist organization which fulfilled the goals expressed. In the secret National Council of the Legions, in September 1937, Gonzalo Campos succeeded Julián Malo Juvera as National Leader. On 31 March, 1938, José Trueba Olivares resigned the presidency of the Organizing Committee to Manuel Zermeño, for economic reasons.<sup>81</sup> On 4 May 1938, the UNS

National Committee was integrated as follows: Leader, Manuel Zermeño; Secretaries, Juan Ignacio Padilla, Alfonso Trueba Olivares, Feliciano Manrique, Felipe Navarro and Antonio Martinez Aguayo.<sup>82</sup>

ii) The UNS and the Base

Officially founded in May 1937, the UNS grew rapidly to an extent unthought of either by its founders or its foes. In the space of two years, it became a national movement of several hundred thousand members and a force to be reckoned with.

If the UNS benefited from the contingents of the Legions, this transfer should not, however, be overestimated. Many weakened legions had lost a significant number of their ranks through desertion. Besides, it seems that the secret leaders of the legions did not always encourage legionnaires to join the Movement. When they themselves participated in it, they invited their subordinates to follow them. But when, for various reasons, they worked solely at the level of the Base, they tended to keep their troops out of things. So much so, that many of those who joined the Synarchists did not realize, until after 1939, that the UNS had originated in the Legions and that, in fact, it was Section eleven of the organization.<sup>83</sup>

This thus seems to suggest that except for the leaders and a relatively marginal number of convinced members, the great majority of the legions did not adhere to the Synarchist Movement. This was the case of the old



League for the Defence of Liberty, which continued to believe in the feasibility of armed struggle for regaining religious freedom and could not comprehend the reason for this civic, non-violent movement.

On the other hand, the UNS would reach other social strata which the Base had barely touched, like the peasantry. Indeed, Section 3 of the Base had worked in the countryside and had won some supporters, but it was nothing compared to the thousands of peasants that would form the bulk of the Synarchist troops.<sup>84</sup>

In the final analysis, although the UNS was conceived as a section of the Base, it looked, from the start, as a totally new and separate organization: it had its own national leaders, it recruited in different social strata and, at least from an ideological point of view, it appeared more concerned with social problems.<sup>85</sup> What is astonishing is that the leaders of Synarchism, José Trueba Olivares and Manuel Zermeño, did not seek to free the movement from the tutelage of the Base, when it appeared that there was no further need for it. This hesitation was very possibly due to a refusal by the UNS leaders to provoke a split with the Base, with unforeseen consequences. There are two considerations: firstly, they had not yet experienced the weight of a leader desirous to enter political action. Secondly, they expected political and material assistance from the Secret Council: material aid to bear the considerable expenses that the new organization entailed, and political aid to protect them from the dangers that they could face.

In essence, they expected the Base to devote itself entirely to the development of the UNS and that the Secret Council would back the decisions of the Synarchist National Leader. Yet, it was not evident that it would do so. Certainly, the question of who would control and dominate the other was to overshadow relations between the two organizations.

However, since its foundation, the UNS was indirectly controlled by Antonio Santacruz, the prominent figure of the Secret Council, from whom the Synarchist leaders received their orders and the funds that were provided to run the Movement.<sup>86</sup> This became more so when the Movement was forced to move out of Guanajuato, after Governor Luis I. Rodríguez exiled the leaders, on the grounds that their lives were threatened by the CTM and, because he would be held responsible if blood was shed,<sup>87</sup> he wanted them out:

"So intense was the local popular frenzy in response to their declarations that the Governor of Guanajuato, an appointee and puppet for president Cárdenas, drove the Committee from his state, whereupon they established offices in Mexico City and began publication of a mimeographed 'El Boletín' in an effort to develop a national organization".<sup>88</sup>

### iii) The rise of Synarchism

After the foundation of the movement in May 1937, the original members went out to spread it. They were young, cultivated, and intelligent; mostly under thirty-two years of age, they had abandoned lucrative careers as lawyers and civil servants to lead what they hoped would be a

spiritual revival of the Mexican masses.<sup>89</sup> To spread the doctrine, they went from village to village always living as the poorest peasant. In their meagre dress and habits of poverty, they sought to emulate the proselytizing methods of early Christian missionaries. When the Synarchist propagandist arrived at a village, he would assemble the most prominent Catholics and organize them into a cell. Each of them would, in turn, contact five more of the faithful, thus increasing the size of the Movement.<sup>90</sup> Making use of self-sacrifice, martyrdom and military-like training and discipline, the UNS was definitely hierarchical and authoritarian.

The first norm of Synarchist conduct epitomized the spirit of the Movement:

"Hate the easy and comfortable way of life. We have no right to it while Mexico is unfortunate. Love discomfort, danger and death"<sup>91</sup>

Almost every issue of *El Sinarquista* since the death of José Antonio Upquiza contained some reference to the blood being spilled by Synarchists for the glory of God and country. "God", it proclaimed, "requires blood for the salvation of Mexico."<sup>92</sup>

By means of these methods, Synarchism was capable of creating a fearsome popular organization, posing, in the meantime, an embarrassment, even a conflict, for the government. Synarchism secured indirect control in several small towns and villages; however, in the early stages, it grew very slowly as a result of insufficient funds and of government repression. In November 1937, the

Synarchist headquarters in Guanajuato were raided; yet, the police did not pursue the matter very far. The governor, however, gave the leaders a few days to abandon the state. At the end of 1937, the UNS counted nearly five thousand members, and by the middle of 1938, the organization was expanding fully.

In January appeared the first issue of the **"Boletín de la Unión Nacional Sinarquista"**, followed, in June, by **"Sinarquismo"**, a monthly magazine. This magazine became, after the eighth issue, the newspaper **"El Sinarquista"**. It also published **"Orden"** an illustrated monthly magazine. Through these, it carried out an active and skilful campaign in favour of its general principles and particularly on behalf of the liberation of the country, in the interest of the common man, against the domination of the "communist" authorities.<sup>93</sup>

According to Padilla, as the news of the new organization spread, the traditional champions of the Church, like the Cristeros, became interested in and attracted to the new organization.<sup>94</sup> As a result, between May 1938 and May 1939, the numbers multiplied threefold, from ten to thirty thousand. Yet, the results were insignificant when compared with what was achieved the following year, when the organization reached nearly two hundred thousand elements, or "soldiers", as they tended to be called. This impressive increase could be attributed to both internal and external circumstances.<sup>95</sup>

There is little doubt that among the internal causes that contributed to the tremendous growth of Synarchism,

was the rôle played by Abascal which was significant and decisive. He became the most important leader the UNS ever had; he infused vitality and enthusiasm into a considerable national political force. His militant spirit transformed the nature and the perception of Synarchism. Under his rule, its activities were fiery, intense and audacious.

During 1937 and 1938, Abascal worked as organizer and propagandist for the legions; first in his native Michoacán and later in the Northern states. Later on, he founded Synarchist councils in the Mexican communities of the United States, especially in the Southern states, and in Los Angeles, in particular, in November 1937. In May of the same year, he travelled to the South-East of Mexico, where he first obtained notoriety after the success of the Tabasco campaign: he organized and led a march through the capital, Villahermosa, consisting of thousands of peasants, in protest at the anticlericalism of the government. Marches were to be the feature and the nucleus of his Synarchist leadership. He declared some years later that the bloody events of Villahermosa (30 May 1938)<sup>96</sup> convinced him of the possibilities of aggressive, non-violent marches, and in particular, of passive resistance.<sup>97</sup>

The victory in Tabasco gave a boost to the legions, and hence to Synarchism, showing that concrete results could be achieved. It was at this time that Manuel Zermeño assumed the National Leadership; Abascal became the second in command.

On 12 January 1939, Zermeño was stabbed in the back, following a Synarchist rally in Tepic, that was broken up amid violence. As a result of this injury, he was incapacitated for a time. Thereafter, Abascal took over most of the responsibilities of the leadership of the Movement. He remained, until December 1940, a dominant figure. During this period, Synarchism rose from a rather negligible provincial group of twenty thousand men, to be the most important political force of the country, after the official party; this in a country of not more than twenty million inhabitants:<sup>98</sup>

"The cry of blood which first began to be heard in the black earth of the Bajío, and later in Querétaro and Tabasco, and much later in Colima and Yucatan, in San Luis Potosí, in Puebla, Jalisco, etc., provided a veritable explosion which made the entire country tremble".<sup>99</sup>

The impressive growth of Synarchism was influenced by several factors, among which were the political consequences of the presidential elections of 1940 and, especially, the sentiment of frustration and discontent that ensued. No less significant to all Right-wing organizations was the victory of the Nationalist side in the Spanish civil war, and the rise in prestige of European Fascism. Still, it was the figure of Abascal and the dynamism of his personality which determined that growth; in the words of an analyst, he gave a mystical quality to the Movement;<sup>100</sup> which Abascal himself corroborated. He saw Synarchism as a formidable and genuine Franciscan Movement. Power would come later, he

said, and it would come with the inevitable use of force, but more than anything else, it would come as a consequence of:

"the upshot of the spiritual regeneration of the people, the pith of my policy was to throw the people into the arms of the Church; Catholicism is the essence of Mexico, therefore it was necessary that the people deeply lived out again their religion."<sup>101</sup>

Therefore, Synarchism considered that within the essence of Mexico was Catholicism and within Catholicism true freedom, that is, the freedom of acting in good faith and embracing the truth.

Guided by his experience in Tabasco, Abascal began the era of massive Synarchist marches. These were usually carried out without the consent of the authorities, thereby unleashing government persecution:

"Since the danger was constant, because we never asked permission to make our rallies, parades and concentrations, that were many, [...], to the extent that one could say that for a year and half - from August 1940 to December 1941 - we lived in permanent mobilization [...]"<sup>102</sup>

Some writers have found correlation between the arrival of Abascal and the increase of Synarchist martyrdom: in the first couple of years of its existence, there were very few martyrs; but after the "Abascal method" was introduced in 1939, the number rose to seventeen; in 1940, there were thirty eight, and in 1941, thirty two more.<sup>103</sup> Violent death gave the Movement a

tremendous energy and vigour.<sup>104</sup>

The "new method" began in June 1939 when Abascal asked Zermeño to authorize him to "capture" the city of Guanajuato by surprise, in response to the second raid on the offices of the organization by a group of miners, on 8 June.<sup>105</sup>

On 25 June 1939, he captured the town hall (Palacio de Gobierno). By the time the police realized what was happening, there were already one thousand men standing at the doors of the hall; the UNS headquarters were set in a house opposite. The doors were locked from the inside; the Governor was in the building at the time. Abascal explained that they did not intend to occupy the building, they were only going to address the crowds and manifest their discontent about the attacks they had suffered, which had gone unpunished. He prepared a programme with seven speakers, including Manuel Zermeño.

At the end of the rally, Abascal was arrested; this would be one of his many visits to Mexican gaols. He understood very early on that these arrests served to inflame the masses and to win more followers.<sup>106</sup>

These marches, eventually, ended in massacres. Two were notorious. On 10 July 1939, agrarian reserves attacked a group of Synarchists that were propagandizing in the village of Juan Martín, near Celaya; five died and eleven were injured. The following day, the funeral procession was attacked when it made its way through the centre of Celaya; seven people were killed and eight injured. Among the dead was María Teresa Bustos, the



first woman martyr of the Movement and one of the most revered. She died carrying the national flag; as a symbolic gesture of unity each outgoing national leader of the UNS delivered to his successor the flag which she was carrying at the time of her death; it had major symbolic value, even to the extent of mysticism.<sup>107</sup> After Celaya, as Synarchist propaganda spread, all of the Bajío became aware of it and was prompt to adhere. Demonstration followed upon demonstration, increasing in size and in geographical dimension.<sup>108</sup>

Synarchist marches reached huge proportions in 1941. The most significant took place in Morelia, in May, when fifteen thousand Synarchist "soldiers" marched, in strict discipline and in silence; though not the largest demonstration in numbers, it was the most famous because it coincided with the visit of President Avila Camacho. There were many federal troops in and around the city. Yet, although they knew of the march, they could not prevent the Synarchists from entering the city; the sudden appearance of hundreds of Synarchists, with their orators exposing the Revolution and the President that headed it, was an enormous embarrassment to the government.<sup>109</sup>

Zermeño declared:

"Our Movement, eminently constructive, has been, is and will have to be, assertion and life. The Synarchist will never make common cause with those who, seeking personal profit, provoke fratricidal revolutions that put the destiny of Mexico in alien hands which up to now have been the only ones to have decided the fate of the Fatherland [...]"<sup>110</sup>

Abascal ended the rally by expressing that Synarchism was "la Milicia del Espíritu": that is to say, the discipline that each Synarchist must exert over his own acts, before he attempts the vast task to win over and save others.<sup>111</sup>

After Morelia, not surprisingly, the government began to take measures to eliminate Synarchism. Attacks against the UNS multiplied, and demands from different sides were raised for its suppression.

Initially, the government had not taken any important measures to limit the activities of the Synarchists and the violent clashes that took place were usually of local dimension and involved the agrarian reserves; besides the movement was not considered to be of any relative significance to worry the government; in addition, all through that year, all the attention was concentrated on the presidential elections. In fact, the first time that Synarchism was discussed in Congress was in October 1940, when a deputy from Michoacán, Luis Ordorica Cerda, denounced it in a speech. The truth of the matter was that little was known of the Movement.<sup>112</sup>

#### iv) The UNS and the 1940 elections

During the election campaign of 1940, tension was high and revolution was in the air. The two most important candidates for the presidency, General Manuel Avila Camacho and General Juan Andreu Almazán, approached the UNS in an effort to solicit its backing. Avila Camacho, as candidate, wanted to pact with Synarchism,

offering justice to it. The UNS replied that it would neither go with Almazán nor with any other candidate, because it was convinced that there would be fraud in the elections.<sup>113</sup> Abascal declared at a public meeting at Acámbaro, in Michoacán, that Synarchism should not back Almazán or Avila Camacho because:

"they both are branches of the same old, rotten trunk of the Mexican Revolution[...] Participating in the elections would have cost hundreds of lives, with no real benefit."

The facts were to prove him right; in a single day, 7 July 1940, more Almazán supporters died than Synarchists in two years.<sup>114</sup>

The same idea was expounded by Manuel Zermeño on the third anniversary of the UNS, at León, where he said that the elections were only an expedient pretext for an armed revolution already in the making. Communism and all the enemies of Mexico, he said, were waiting for an opportunity to spread anarchy and terror, the only means by which they could reach power. He added:

"our attitude, valiantly patriotic, will never prepare the triumph of Communism in Mexico".<sup>115</sup>

In July 1940, when the presidential election took place, Synarchism had grown and counted 360,000 members.<sup>116</sup> The following month, Abascal was promoted to National Leader. During the presidential campaign, the UNS kept strictly out of it; from its foundation, it had stated that it was not a political party and had no electoral

ambition:

"We do not want to form a political party, words that involve the idea of division. We want to win over all men of all parties: to bring them together to the things that unite us, above those that separate us. For this reason, we reject the political qualification that some pretend to give to Synarchism. We are not a party, and we reject even more the idea of political party."<sup>117</sup>

The Synarchists proclaimed that under the existing circumstances all elections were a farce and that Synarchism was not going to provide credibility for the system by either *putting up* or backing a candidate.

"Synarchism is a civic movement of popular masses that aspires to their legitimate moral and material advancement; it is mainly concerned with the condition of the Mexican worker and peasant[...] Synarchism is not, and does not wish to be, a political party. Its fundamental interest lies in its social programme for the workers and peasants of Mexico."<sup>118</sup>

In the months that followed the elections, there was the prospect of an armed rebellion under the defeated candidate Almazán.<sup>119</sup> Synarchism presented an alternative means to express opposition without resorting to arms; the charisma of Abascal gave thousands of peasants a man to follow. The number of adherents doubled between July and December, reaching half a million.<sup>120</sup>

During this period, Abascal led the Movement to a high degree of militancy; he declared that he would make of every synarchist "a man half-monk-half-soldier", ready

to sacrifice himself. It was during this time that the "Ten Norms of Conduct" were drafted, preaching self-denial for the synarchist soldier.<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, in the early months of his leadership he gave the Movement its rigid militaristic structure, because he argued:

"[Synarchism] had to acquire the mobility, the precision and the flexibility of an army on the verge of battle".

The Government did not perceive the Synarchist Movement as a serious threat until after the elections, when it was apparent that it had become the most important opposition force. It was not until July 1941 that President Avila Camacho sent instructions to all state governors and to the Minister of Defence, pressing them to apply the laws vigorously when dealing with the UNS; he argued that the organization encompassed division of the Nation. Consequently, in order to prevent clashes between the Synarchists and groups of opposite tendencies, the Synarchist leadership should only organize demonstrations when prior authorization by the local authority had been issued.<sup>123</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mr. J. Murray to Anthony Eden, 23 February 1937, FO 371 20640, [A 1871/1871/26.]

<sup>2</sup> Carlos Alvear Acevedo, **Cárdenas, el hombre y el mito**, México, Editorial Jus, 1961, pp.205 et ss.

<sup>3</sup> John W.F. Dulles, **Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936**, Austin, University of Texas Press. 1961, p.626.

<sup>4</sup> Dulles, *ibid.*, p.267.

<sup>5</sup> **El Universal**, 30 May, 1935.

<sup>6</sup> Lyle C. Brown, "Mexican Church-State Relations, 1933-1940", **A Journal of Church and State**, vol. VI, Spring 1964, p.217

<sup>7</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla, **Sinarquismo-Contrarrevolución**, México, Editorial Polis, 1948, pp.85-87.

<sup>8</sup> Fernando Benitez, **Lázaro Cárdenas y la Revolución Mexicana**, Vol.3: El Cardenismo, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976, pp.195-201

<sup>9</sup> Padilla, *op.cit.*, p.92.

<sup>10</sup> Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, **La reforma política y los partidos en México**, México, Siglo XXI editores, 3ª-edición, 1988, pp.25-126; Padilla, *op. cit.*, p.91.

<sup>11</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, **El Sinarquismo, su ruta histórica, ideario y postulados, documentos**, México, Ediciones UNS, n.d., p.26; Vicente Vila, "Abascal, cabeza sinarquista", **Así**, No.34, 5 July, 1914, p.39.

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Rius Facius, **Méjico Cristero. Historia de la A.C.J.M., 1925 a 1931**, Méjico, Editorial Patria, 1966, 436-441.

<sup>13</sup> Mgr. Leopoldo Lara y Torres, **Documentos para la historia de la persecución religiosa en México**, México, Editorial Jus, 1954, pp.814-890.

<sup>14</sup> Rius Facius, *op. cit.*, p.438.

<sup>15</sup> José Trueba Olivares, "Historia, ideales y crisis del Sinarquismo", **Orden**, 25 May, 1951.

<sup>16</sup> Padilla, *op.cit.*, p.86.

<sup>17</sup> Padilla, *op.cit.*, p.89.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Meyer, **La Cristiada**, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1974, Vol.I: 51.

<sup>19</sup> See for instance: Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, **La Acción Católica y la Acción Cívica**, (Junio de 1936), México, Editorial Ara, 3<sup>a</sup> edición, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.115 [12.2.18.]

<sup>21</sup> Salvador Abascal, **Mis recuerdos, Sinarquismo y colonia María Auxiliadora**, México, Editorial tradición, 1980, p.143; for a study of the Unión Popular see, Antonio Gómez Robledo, **Anacleto González Flores, el maestro**, Guadalajara, Editorial Xalisco, 1937; and also: "Anacleto González Flores", in **New Catholic Encyclopedia**, vol. VI, New York, McGraw Hill, 1967, pp.611-612.

<sup>22</sup> "Respuesta de Mons. Lara y Torres a una consulta de Mons. Díaz y Barreto", México, 19 January, 1934, in Leopoldo Lara y Torres, **Documentos para la historia de la persecución religiosa en México**, México, Editorial Jus, 1954, pp.1078-1085.

<sup>23</sup> Alfonso Guillén Vicente, "El Partido Demócrata Mexicano", in Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, **La reforma política y los partidos en México**, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 3<sup>a</sup>. edición, 1980, p.163.

<sup>24</sup> For details of how Padilla and Abascal were recruited, see: Padilla, op. cit., pp.85-87, and Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op. cit., pp.121-122.

<sup>25</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.116.

<sup>26</sup> U.N.S. "Hechos y causas que motivaron un cambio en la Jerarquía Secreta de la O.C.A.", December 1944, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 115 [2.13.18], p.1.

<sup>27</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.129.

<sup>28</sup> Abascal, **La reconquista espiritual de Tabasco**, México, Editorial Tradición, 1972, p.17; Padilla, op. cit., p.91.

<sup>29</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.626.

<sup>30</sup> Mario Gill claimed that José Antonio Urquiza was taught by the falangists, see his **El Sinarquismo. Su origen, su esencia, su misión**, México, editorial Olin, 3<sup>a</sup> edición, 1962, p.41.

<sup>31</sup> Vicente Fuentes Díaz, **Los partidos políticos en México**, vol.II, México, Ediciones del Autor, 1956, p.91; Padilla, op. cit., p.225; Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", revista **Mañana**, No.41, 10 June, 1944, p.44.

<sup>32</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., pp.133-134; see also, Padilla, op. cit., p.91.

<sup>33</sup> For the expedition of Brito Foucher see: Alan M. Kirshner, **Tomás Garrido Canabal y el movimiento de las camisas rojas**, México, Sepsetentas, 1976, pp.122-154.

<sup>34</sup> Salvador Abascal, **La reconquista...**, op. cit., p.15.

<sup>35</sup> Abascal, *ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>36</sup> Salvador Abascal, "En la punta de la calzada", **Abside**, vol.XXIX, 1965, pp.326-327.

<sup>37</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo," **Mañana**, No. 39, 27 May, 1944, p.29.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Ledit, s.j., **Le Front des pauvres**, Montréal, Fides, 1954, p.124; S. Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", **Mañana**, No.39, 27 May, 1944, p.28.

<sup>39</sup> Abascal, **La reconquista**, op.cit., p.46.

<sup>40</sup> Abascal, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Abascal, *ibid.* p.83.

<sup>42</sup> Betty Kirk, **Covering the Mexican Front: the Battle of Europe versus America**, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1942, p.132. Betty Kirk was correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor and The Times; US Ambassador Josephus Daniels wrote in the introduction to her book that she "has admitted her hero worship of Lázaro Cárdenas", p.xv.

<sup>43</sup> Interview H.H. García de León/Abascal, 18 August, 1987.

<sup>44</sup> Ledit, op.cit., p.118.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150.

<sup>46</sup> Rodríguez Araujo, op. cit., pp.125-126.

<sup>47</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.182.

<sup>48</sup> Padilla, op. cit., p.92.

<sup>49</sup> George H. Winters to Secretary of State, Guadalajara, 7 February, 1935, Washington, National Archives, No. 812, Revolutions/156.

<sup>50</sup> Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op. cit., p.141.

<sup>51</sup> Abascal, *ibid.*, p.140.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.141-142.

<sup>53</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.146.



<sup>54</sup> Jean Meyer , **Le Sinarquisme; un fascisme mexicain? 1937-1947**, Paris, Hechette, 1977, p.35.

<sup>55</sup> Padilla, op. cit., p.81.

<sup>56</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.147; Daniel Castro del Valle, "¿Renace el Sinarquismo en Guanajuato?", **Análisis**, edición 98, 1987, pp.6-7; Vicente Vila, "Abascal, cabeza sinarquista", **Así**, no.34, 5 July, 1941, p.39.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur P. Whittaker (ed.), **Inter-American Affairs, 1942; an Annual Survey**, New York, Colombia University Press, 1943, p.27.

<sup>58</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, **El Sinarquismo**, op.cit., pp.37, 39-40.

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth F. Johnson, "Ideological Correlates of Right Wing Political Alienation", **American Political Science Review**, Vol. LIX, September 1965, p.658.

<sup>60</sup> José Trueba Olivares, "Historia, Ideales y Crisis del Sinarquismo", **Orden**, 27 May 1951.

<sup>61</sup> Vicente Vila, *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.148.

<sup>63</sup> Vicente Vila. *ibid.*, p.39; Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", **Mañana**, No.39, 27 May, 1944, p.30.

<sup>64</sup> K. F. Johnson, **Mexican Democracy: A Critical View**, New York, Praeger, 1978, p.152; for alternative views of Urquiza's death, see Mario Gill, op. cit., pp.66-67.

<sup>65</sup> Vicente Vila, "Abascal, cabeza sinarquista", **Así**, No.35, 12 July, 1941, p.40.

<sup>66</sup> H.H. García de León/Abascal interview, August 1987.

<sup>67</sup> Mario Gill, op. cit., p.142.

<sup>68</sup> **El Nacional**, 25 August, 1941.

<sup>69</sup> Allan Chase, **Falange: the Axis Secret Army in the Americas**, New York, G.P. Putnam Press, 1943, p.150; see also "The Menace of Sinarquism", **Mexican American Review**, December, 1941, pp.26-29, 79-81.

<sup>70</sup> Gill, op.cit., p.41; see also: "Informe Confidencial A-3 Sobre las actividades alemanas en México", México, 13 October 1939, and "El Nazismo en México", México, 23 May, 1940, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas, Expediente No. 704. 1/124-1.

<sup>71</sup> This is not exact. In 1915 an engineer called Tomás Rosales published a leaflet entitled: **El Gobierno de Mañana. - República Social Sinarquica**", presented to the Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics. He was a Liberal supporter who advocated "Tolerance" as the solution to the Social problem, See also: Alejo Llamas Suárez. "Origen del Sinarquismo", **Hoy**, 15 November 1941, p.66.

<sup>72</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.62.

<sup>73</sup> His name was Adolfo Maldonado, and he worked as General secretary of the State government of Guanajuato.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Pattee, "Sinarquism a Threat or a Promise?", **Columbia**, Vol. XXIV, January 1945, pp.3-4, 13-14.

<sup>75</sup> Manuel Torres Bueno, **El Sinarquista**, 27 April, 1944; for reproduction of the quoted legal document see **Tiempo**, 21 April, 1944, p.8.

<sup>76</sup> **Orden**, No. 18, April 1944, p.31.

<sup>77</sup> We found no evidence of the activities of Schreiter and the Anti-Communist Centre in either the archives of the City of Guanajuato, or at **AGN**, in Mexico City. The UNS disproved the story in the following terms:

"When they [the accusers] were publicly summoned so that they could prove their statement, evasion and silence were the confession of their fraud",  
(**Orden**, May 1964, p.14.)

Abascal confirmed to me the rôle of Guzman Valdivia as contributor of **El Sinarquista**, when I interviewed him in August 1987; see for instance, copy of speech he made at Saltillo, in the State of Coahuila, on the subject of the colonization of Baja California, **El Sinarquista**, 19 February, 1942.

<sup>78</sup> Arthur P. Whitaker (ed.) , op.cit., p.29; the "humourless critic" was, Mario Gill; see his **Sinarquismo**, op. cit., p.51, for his interpretation of the U.N.S. initials.

<sup>79</sup> "Manifiesto del Comité Organizador Sinarquista al Pueblo Mexicano", León, Guanajuato, 12 June 1937, **AGN**, Colección: Manifiestos del Comité Organizador Sinarquista.

<sup>80</sup> José Trueba Olivares, "Historia, ideales y causas del sinarquismo", **Orden**, 8 July, 1951.

<sup>81</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, **El Sinarquismo**, op. cit., p.26; Vicente Vila, "Abascal, cabeza Sinarquista", **Así**, No. 34, 5 July, 1941, p.40.

<sup>82</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.155.

<sup>83</sup> U.N.S., **Hechos y causas...**, op. cit., p.9.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp.8-9.

<sup>86</sup> Vicente Fuentes Díaz, op. cit., p.91.

<sup>87</sup> Luis D. Rodríguez, son of Governor Rodríguez, told us that his father spoke with the brother of Trueba, who worked in the state government, and convinced him that it would be in their interest to leave the state.

<sup>88</sup> K.F. Johnson "Ideological Correlates of Right-Wing Political Alienation in Mexico", in A. Von Lazar and R.R. Kaufman (eds.) **Reform and Revolution**, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1969, p.146; Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.153.

<sup>89</sup> Albert Michaels, "Fascism and Sinarquismo: Popular Nationalism Against the Mexican Revolution". **A Journal of Church and State**, vol. VII, No.2, 1966, p.239; Kirk, op. cit., p.317.

<sup>90</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 20 February, 1941; Gill. op. cit., p.55; Kirk, op.cit., pp. 317-318.

<sup>91</sup> Unión Nacional Sinarquista, **Folleto para jefes**, México, 1941, p.7.

<sup>92</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 26 September, 1940.

<sup>93</sup> Whitaker, **Inter-American Affairs**, op. cit., p.27; Ledit, op. cit., pp.234-234.

<sup>94</sup> Padilla, op. cit., p.129.

<sup>95</sup> Hugh G. Campbell, **La derecha radical en México, 1929-1949**, México, SepSetentas, 1976, p.110.

<sup>96</sup> See: Abascal **La reconquista**, op. cit., pp.62-67.

<sup>97</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, **El Sinarquismo**, op. cit., p.27; Campbell, op. cit., p.113; Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", **Mañana**, No.39, 27 May, 1944, p.28.

<sup>98</sup> Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op. cit. p.154; Vicente Vila, "Absacal, cabeza sinarquista", **Así** No.34, 5 July, 1941, p.40.

<sup>99</sup> Galo Martínez, **Orden**, May 1961, p.14.

<sup>100</sup> Fuentes Díaz, op. cit., p.92.

<sup>101</sup> Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op.cit., p.190; and "Historia del Sinarquismo", **Mañana**, No. 40, 2 June, 1944, p.46.

<sup>102</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, *El Sinarquismo*, op.cit., p.27; Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No .40, 2, June, 1944, p.47.

<sup>103</sup> A list of martyrs is found in: U.N.S., *Documentos de la Unión Nacional Sinarquista*, México, 31 October 1941, n.p., pp.36-40.

<sup>104</sup> Mario Gill, op. cit., pp.82 et seq.; Campbell, op. cit., p.114; Vicente Vila, "Abascal, cabeza sinarquista", *Así*, no. 36, 19 July, 1941, p.38; Carlos Alvear Acevedo, op. cit., pp.171-173; Albert L. Michaels, "Fascism and Sinarquismo", op. cit., p.246.

<sup>105</sup> S. Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No.39, 27 May, 1944, p.31; *Extracto de las Actas del VII Congreso del Partido Comunista Mexicano* (Teatro Hidalgo, Sesión matutina), México, 30 January, 1939, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, Rollo No.28 [11.7.28].

<sup>106</sup> Abascal, *Mis recuerdos*, op. cit., pp.156-157.

<sup>107</sup> *El Sinarquista*, July 1940; Meyer, op. cit., p.37; Manuel Zermeño to Procuraduría General, Mexico, 14 July, 1939, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, Rollo 28 [11.7.28].

<sup>108</sup> For a detailed list of these demonstrations, see: Padilla, op. cit., p.175; Ledit, op. cit., p.241.

<sup>109</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.82; Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No. 39, 27 May, 1944, p.31.

<sup>110</sup> *El Sinarquista*, May, 1940.

<sup>111</sup> "Being Synarchist is being a missionary; it is sharing the miseries and hopes of the poor; it is striving for their moral and material improvement; it is combatting that which debases or corrupts; it is upholding a faith and an endeavour with no other motive than the common good. Synarchism is unity, is peace, is hierarchy, is militia of the spirit, it is eminently Mexican, and absolutely incompatible with all sectarianism."

(U.N.S. *Programa Sinarquista*, Folleto de la Secretaría de Propaganda, México, 1942, p.6; Padilla, op. cit., 195; U.N.S.. "Diez Normas de Conducta para los Sinarquistas", in *Estatutos de la U.N.S.*, México, Editorial Jus, 1958, pp.29-30).

<sup>112</sup> However, the Mexican Secret Service had been monitoring the Movement since the time of Cedillo, in 1938; see: Eduardo Villaseñor to President Cárdenas, "Informe Confidencial A-3 sobre actividades alemanas en México. 13 October, 1939, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Cárdenas,

Expediente No. 704.1/124.1; Vicente Vila, "Abascal, cabeza Sinarquista", *Así*, no. 33, 28 June 1941, p.22.

<sup>113</sup> Felipe Navarro to Luis Guerrero Nieves, México, 1 July, 1940, I.N.A.H.; Serie UNS Rollo 36 [11.7.36]; U.N.S., *El Sinarquismo*, op. cit., p.27. For a brief portrait of the two candidates, see Fausto Hernández, "El Almazanismo", in U.N.A.M., *Cincuenta años de oposición en México*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1979, pp.55-61.

<sup>114</sup> Salvador Avascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo" *Mañana*, No. 40, 2 June 1944, p.46; *El Sinarquista*, 5 September, 1940, gave a particularly poignant view of the UNS's critical stance on the elections of 1940.

<sup>115</sup> *El Sinarquista*, May 1940; see also: "El Sinarquismo Pacífico", in "*Boletín Sinarquista del Distrito Federal*, Año I, No.3, 15 May 1941, p.10.

<sup>116</sup> Meyer, *Le Sinarchisme...*, op. cit., p.45.

<sup>117</sup> José Antonio Urquiza, on the first public meeting of the Synarchist Organizing Committee, on 23 May, 1937, at León, quoted by Ledit, op. cit., p.234.

<sup>118</sup> UNS, *Programa Sinarquista*, México, Folleto de la Secretaría de Propaganda, 1942, p.30; see also, *El Sinarquista*, 10 October 1940 and 23 November 1940.

<sup>119</sup> For details of the Almazán campaign see Bernardino Mena Brito, *El P.R.U.N., Almazán y el Desastre Final*, México, Editorial Botas, 1941; and Juan Andreu Almazan, "Memorias", *El Universal*, 1 February-24 May 1959.

<sup>120</sup> Whittaker, *Inter-American Affairs*, op. cit., p.27.

<sup>121</sup> U.N.S., *Documentos*, México, n.p., 1941, pp.7-8; U.N.S., *Estatutos*, México, Editorial Jes, 1958, pp.29-30; see U.N.S., *Boletín* No.7, Mexico, 5 March, 1938, for ideological antecedents, AGN, "Colección Manifiestos del Comité Organizador Sinarquista".

<sup>122</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.198; Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op. cit., p.173.

<sup>123</sup> "Comunicación girada con esta fecha por el Señor Presidente de la República a todos los Gobernadores de los Estados y transcrita al Secretario de la Defensa Nacional para su cumplimiento por las autoridades de su dependencia y a la Secretaría de Gobernación para que procure su cumplimiento" México, 31 July 1941, telegram no.46584, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No. 13.

**PART TWO**

**CHRONOLOGY OF THE MOVEMENT, 1934-1945**

#### CHAPTER IV

##### EMERGENCE IN THE POLITICAL SCENE, 1939-1940

Thirty thousand Synarchists in December 1938, three hundred and sixty thousand in August 1940, at the end of Manuel Zermeno's term as leader of the Movement; such was the impressive growth of the UNS after only eighteen months of existence.<sup>1</sup> Even if the numbers are not entirely accurate, there is no doubt that in the space of such a short period, it had become a real political force to be reckoned with.

The apparent strength of the Movement that the numbers revealed, soon left no doubt as to its secret aims. Since its formation, the Communists had not ceased to accuse the UNS of wanting to impose a Fascist government in Mexico. It was not long before the left-wing of the PRM, the CTM, and the CNC were convinced that an organization capable of mobilizing, in a short period of time, some ten thousand men, and to take a city, or other objective, could have very dangerous political ambitions. A paradoxical situation was arrived at by 1940, whereby the leader Manuel Zermeno still believed that he commanded a movement incapable of seizing power, for the time being at least, whereas other nationalist groups and the Government were very much aware of its importance.

## I The UNS and other nationalist groups

Independently of the Communists, the first to recognize the importance of the Synarchist Movement were the nationalist groups that had grown in number during the Cárdenas years, to fight Communism.<sup>2</sup>

Since the beginning of 1939, many of these groups sought to establish close relationships with the UNS. This was the case with the "**Frente Constitucionalista Democrático Mexicano**", of the "**Partido Social Demócrata**"; and, of the "**Vanguardia Nacionalista Mexicana**". These associations resembled each other in their hatred displayed against Communism, their anti-Jewish racism, their admiration for Germany and for Franco's Spain, and their tendency to use violence as a means of action.<sup>3</sup>

Their approach to the UNS was facilitated by a sympathizer, José Trinidad Cervantes, writer of *El Sinarquista*, who could bring them to the national leader. Hence, the president of the *Vanguardia Nacionalista*, Rubén Moreno Padres, was insistent about wanting to have a UNS representative at their meetings. Similarly, the *Partido Social Demócrata* wrote to Cervantes, on 4 February 1939, inviting him to form a nationalist bloc:

"We believe that the organization that you lead with courage and success, which is fully identified with the real opinion of the Mexican people, and staunchly opposes the communist leanings of the present régime, ought to cooperate, preserving its own autonomy, with the other independent organizations, so as to fulfil more thoroughly the objectives set in our respective programmes."<sup>4</sup>



The Social Democratic Party ignored almost everything about the Synarchist Movement; above all, it thought Cervantes was the national leader.

As for the **Frente Constitucional Democrático Mexicano**, founded by army officers, and pursuing the same aim, it contacted José de Jesús Sam López, a Synarchist of the early days and close follower of Abascal, who wrote to Manuel Zermeño for instructions:

"I had the pleasure of meeting Lic. González, a fine person and, in my judgement, he seems a good fighting element: he has given us guidance about how to deal with the gentlemen of the Front, who were in this office to insist that we must adhere to them, All this has been arranged by Lic. González and Sr. Cervantes. As you indicated to us, we have told the Front, without giving up absolutely anything, that we are with them, that we sympathize with their way of being, etc. (diplomacy, nothing else); please, let us know what we should do next [...]"<sup>5</sup>

Even the "Gold Shirts", which had been authorized to resume their activities in the Republic, asked the director of **El Sinarquista**, on 3 October 1939, to issue a press bulletin explaining the reasons for their struggle, and invited Manuel Zermeño to participate in the inauguration of their new premises, on 5 June.<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, all these nationalist groups that concealed behind bombastic declarations the weakness of their numbers, would have hoped to become allied with the UNS which already was a genuine popular movement.

However, the UNS leader, conscious of the strength of

his organization, did not intend to put his men at the service of a nationalist cause to which they did not entirely subscribe to. In March 1939, he explained to the Regional Committee of Tepic the reasons for his reservations:

"We learned of the visit that the President of the 'Vanguardia Nacionalista' made to that city and of the invitation he extended to Synarchism to attend one of their meetings in that city. Our position with regard to the anti-Communist organization that are fighting in Mexico, with so different methods, is simply one of friendship, and does not entail any commitment on our behalf. Heretofore, we have not made any alliance pact with any of them, because we want to preserve the purity of our Movement, keeping it away from the ambition that drives many of these groups, most of which only emerged at the eleventh hour. With 'Vanguardia Nacionalista' we could not easily have an understanding because the kind of nationalism that they vindicate is less extensive than ours, which strives to improve Mexico by encouraging her own sons, something that does not come out in the programme of the vanguardistas, who preach unrestrained violence and similar things with which Synarchism will never agree."<sup>7</sup>

For the same reason, Zermeño had previously rejected, on 20 January, to participate in the **Confederación Nacionalista Democrática** - which already assembled several small groups:

"Because the postulates of the Confederación profess the destruction of the PRM, the CTM, the CNC and the Communist party, because of the leaders that preside over them; at the same time they pretend to bind together organizations which have yet to see the public light."<sup>8</sup>

Not discouraged by these rebuffs, the nationalist groups persisted in their attempts; but it seems that once the UNS had opted to abstain in the presidential elections, it broke all contact with them. After the defeat of Almazán all the nationalist groups disappeared without trace, while the Synarchist Movement flourished.

Finally, it was not so much the recognition by the nationalist groups itself which accounted for the importance of the UNS in national political life; in fact, it became, in competition with the recently created PAN, a spokesman for nationalist-right opinion opposed to Cárdenas and that is why its rôle in the 1940 presidential election was so crucial.

It is important to define the rôle of the UNS's influence on the elections because, contrary to the disbanding of all the other groups and parties formed for the occasion, the Synarchist Movement was, in 1940, a perfectly organized mass movement with some three hundred thousand members of the middle and peasant classes of the central states.

Despite the non-political stand of the leaders until then, it was very difficult not to take sides and, at the start of the presidential campaign, Manuel Zermeño found himself confronted with this dilemma: either he gave up the non-political attribute and backed the candidature of Almazán, by running the risk of launching his men in an armed rebellion if the PRM did not recognize the victory of the opposition, or, he maintained the traditional non-political attitude of the Movement, which amounted to

playing into the hands of Avila Camacho. On the one hand, if he followed the first path and refused to commit himself to violence - since he was convinced that the Government would not accept defeat - he risked losing his troops after the elections; on the other hand, if he gave the order to abstain in the elections, he would come up against the opinion of the militants and thus, risked seeing them leave, too.

Furthermore, the Government needed to obtain the neutrality of this worrisome movement to guarantee a peaceful succession. Indeed, Avila Camacho did not expect to win the support of the Synarchists, but if he could buy their neutrality the Almazán front would be broken and a peasant rebellion avoided.<sup>9</sup>

The actual position of the UNS with regard to the elections was the result of all those contradictions; right up to polling day, ambiguity characterized this attitude. Yet, this ambiguity allowed Zermeño to make a 'tour de force': to turn the neutrality of the UNS to Avilla Camacho while preserving his troops and preventing them from 'taking to the mountains'.

Justification for neutrality was not hard to make; in the context of the Mexican Revolution, the Synarchist view was that anarchy and fraud prevailed; therefore, how was it possible to expect the advent of an honest government? A change of President at the top of the government would not alter things in any way. After all, because the PRM would not respect the people's voice, it was useless to participate in the electoral contest. What the people

needed was not a change of the man at the top, not a revolution which would only install a new figure, but a profound change that emanated from the people themselves. Only from a strong, hard working, moral people would a worthy government arise.<sup>10</sup> For this policy to be coherent it would have necessitated a systematic maintaining of abstention in the 1940 elections. Still, the study of **El Sinarquista** and of the national directives revealed a number of contradictions. In general terms, however, the Movement was consistent with its decision. It never indicated that it would support either candidate.<sup>11</sup> It constantly repeated that the UNS was not a party, that it was not presenting a candidate of its own and, that it would not back either Almazán or Avila Camacho. The fact is that the UNS did not change its attitude during the campaign.

"**El Sinarquista**" of 30 June 1939, gave the official position of the Movement: "We are not a political party," it announced, and on 17 August, it made clear that "we do not have a candidate to nominate." On 7 September, it appealed to the discipline of the Movement and restated its commitment to remain outside the electoral process. It would not participate because the elections would only bring to power a new group.<sup>12</sup>

The position of the Movement was summed up in "**El Sinarquista**" of 1 February 1940, where it also condemned any attempt to rise up:

"We Synarchists must see things with a clear mind. The elections are a foregone conclusion, the Government

has already decided; it lets the people distract themselves by acclaiming a candidate whose victory is impossible. Today, like in all similar occasions of our History, it is the group in power who has elected the president's successor. The promises that the Government gave to respect the vote, even if they were sincere they would be ineffectual. Imposition is an inescapable fact that has no remedy but this: violence. And it is necessary to open the eyes of the people about the futility of an armed movement for the respect of the popular will [...] Synarchists should have no illusions that the presidential elections can set a new state of affairs; and oppose any attempt to disturb the peace of Mexico in an armed struggle for public power."<sup>13</sup>

These excerpts give the impression of absolute lucidity. Nothetheless, at the same time, any mention of the order to abstain is carefully avoided. Quite the opposite, throughout 1939 and until February 1940, allegations of electoral fraud, and assertions of principles were paradoxically accompanied by an appeal to all Synarchists to exercise their right to vote. Thus, Manuel Zermeño called for discipline and obedience of those who militated in the Movement and, at the same time, he ordered the leaders to keep their groups out of the electoral contest; he explained that the "Synarchist citizen has the duty to vote and the right to do it for the candidate he considers less harmful." And added that at the time of polling, all Synarchists should cast their vote.

"But a Synarchist, as a faithful soldier of a discipline and hierarchical group, must forbear to belong to any political party or electoral club."<sup>14</sup>

Throughout this period, the leaders of the UNS made a distinction between the stand of the Movement and the individual attitude of each Synarchist. However, since the majority of the articles printed were negative to Avila Camacho, and more favourable to Almazán, it would appear that the leadership was urging the members to vote individually for the latter.

An important change of position occurred in early 1940. Ostensibly, the same attitude was followed, yet, no more reference was made to voting; rather the opposite, it was repeatedly stressed that voting was useless in the prevailing circumstances of the time.

The correspondence of the national leader with the Committees is no more explicit on the matter. It stressed the need to abstain, but reasserted even in June 1940:

"Heretofore we have not denied our people the right to vote, instead we ask that they remain united in our ranks until the elections."<sup>15</sup>

Only five days before polling day, the position of the UNS was finally made unequivocally clear; all leaders were issued these instructions:

- "1. All Synarchists will abstain from voting next Sunday 7 for any of the registered candidates.
2. If anybody, in private, is determined to exercise his civic right to vote, he will do so for a non-registered candidate.
3. Leaders and notable Synarchists of each place will not go to vote, under any circumstances."<sup>16</sup>

Many areas, however, did not receive the instructions on time. The question arises of how to account for this unequivocal stand.

During 1939 and until February 1940, the leadership of the Movement gave way to its sympathies for Almazán. Both the leadership of the Base and Manuel Zermeño, national leader of UNS, contacted, separately, the candidate, to negotiate the conditions for an eventual support of his candidature. Notwithstanding the personal sympathy that Almazán inspired in them, the officials came out of their interviews unsettled; they soon realized that nothing could be expected of him. They decided, without committing the Movement, to let the members make their own choice, knowing full well that it would go to the candidate of the opposition.

In February 1940, then, the Movement changed its policy after Manuel Zermeño and Avila Camacho came to an agreement. Indeed, the leaders were approached by the Avila Camacho camp in view of obtaining the neutrality of the UNS. A first meeting took place in Querétaro between the Regional leader of Querétaro and a representative of Avila Camacho (Manuel Mendizabal) whereby the latter tried to convey the sincerity of Avila Camacho towards the UNS. The decisive meeting took place some days later between Miguel Aleman and Manuel Zermeño. On that occasion, it was agreed that the future president would undertake to give tenure to the ejidatarios of their plots, in exchange for the promise that the UNS would abstain in the elections.<sup>17</sup> This agreement was kept secret by both camps,



or else, it would have been considered an act of unspeakable treason.

Zermeño found himself, thereof, confronted by the problem of how to secure the individual abstention of all Synarchists, when they had already accepted, with difficulty, that the UNS did not officially support Almazán; besides, the ban on taking part in the political clubs of their choice had greatly shocked them. If, on top of that, he were to instruct them that they should not participate, as ordinary persons, in the election, he would have to expect violent reactions on their part.

One gathers from the correspondence between the national and the Local Committees that these demands provoked resentment and surprise, and the reaction shifted from a state of utter confusion to sheer rebellion. Many local leaders found it difficult to maintain discipline in the ranks. Those militants who entered political clubs, or attended political rallies, did so, they argued, as citizens and not as Synarchists.

Complying with the order to abstain was all the more difficult because of the constant pressure exerted by the almazanistas, the clergy and the PAN, which conspired to change their minds.<sup>18</sup> The almazanistas harassed and threatened them; the clergy condemned abstention according to the norms of Moral Theology; and the PAN did everything to try to convince them to follow it, even if it meant separating them from their organization. Equally aggressive were the attacks of the agrarian reserves.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, on polling day, the order to abstain

was irregularly observed; some committees reported that the majority of their members had complied (e.g., San José Iturbide, Guanajuato); while others declared, on the contrary, that their members had voted for Almazán. Many States gave accounts of disobedience:

"Despite the intense campaign carried out by the District Committee for the NON-PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS, there were many farms under our jurisdiction in the territory of the State of Guanajuato, whose Synarchist members disobeyed the order and voted for Almazán [...]"

The report went on:

"With regard to the villages under our control, situated in Michoacán, we are happy to say that few Synarchists went to vote. However, everybody has turned against us with their criticisms and false testimonies. We were called all the names under the sun: weak, traitors, to have sold ourselves to Camacho, to be the allies of imposition; all the same, we remained unruffled [...]"<sup>20</sup>

In the days that followed the elections the situation was somewhat confused, yet the national leader, more concerned about recovering the unity of his troops than about punishing offenders, expelled from the movement the most notorious rebels and asked local leaders to reinstate all those who had a valid excuse for being dragged by the almazanistas.

Nevertheless, the UNS faced a more serious problem: the refusal by the PRM to acknowledge the alleged victory of Almazán, threatened to trigger off an imminent armed uprising.<sup>21</sup> Confronted with this danger, the position of

the national leader was unambiguous: "NO REVOLUTION", he had incessantly declared since the start of the presidential campaign, and had suspended the holding of public assemblies in all the country while the state of political unrest lasted.

In spite of his orders, there were disturbing signs of revolt spreading in Querétaro. Salvador Abascal, who had just succeeded Zermeño as national leader (on 6 August 1940), was informed that about two hundred men had risen up in arms near the city, from Guanajuato.<sup>22</sup>

Still, the effort put together by all Synarchist leaders was sufficient to pacify the rebels and to put down their arms, except in three municipalities of Jalisco, Michoacán and Guanajuato, where the rebels joined the almazanistas in arms.

To conclude, the fiasco of Almazán and his withdrawal from political life proved Zermeño right, and the movement, which had gone through a serious threat of dissolution during the election campaign, came out more vigorous than before to continue its startling rise through the impetus of its new leader: Salvador Abascal.<sup>23</sup>

## **II Synarchism Survives the Elections**

After the elections of 1940, the same pressures that precipitated the decline of other nationalist groups, also had a profound effect on the Synarchist Movement. However, the Movement did not disappear immediately after the elections, as was the case with the other organizations; it was the opposite; during the 1941-1944

period, it reached great notoriety and its numerous activities were widely commented upon and analysed.<sup>24</sup>

That the Movement soared in the course of that period was partly due to the fact that it was the largest opposition movement during the war years and, the most singular exponent of the radical Right; an event that was cause for concern to the Left. Nonetheless, in retrospect, it can be seen that the organization reached its peak at the end of 1940, and from that moment its growth was minimal. That it did not crumble during that period, despite the lack of growth, and that the rest of the nationalist organizations were in full decline, could be attributed to the nature of the movement, as well as to external factors.

The majority of the Synarchists were devout peasants. Therefore, the moderate stand adopted by Avila Camacho with regard to the Church, tended to ease the causes of discontent of this people and, hence to undermine the interest in the organization; at the same time, Avila Camacho drastically cut land redistribution, which had an adverse effect on Synarchism. Consequently, Synarchists were, on the one hand, more trustful of the Government; on the other hand, since the majority were farmers, Synarchism continued to attract them, because it promised them a plot of land of their own, the most desirable economic aspiration of the Mexican peasantry.

Unlike other nationalist groups, the strength of the UNS lay in its unity and centralist leadership. In the early forties, the Synarchists were increasingly concerned

with containing the advance of Protestantism, the perennial threat of the Mexican Church, that hindered the ultranationalism advocated by Synarchism. The new emphasis put on combating Protestantism was encouraged, not only because it was the stratagem employed by the leaders to keep intact the organization, but also because of the inflow of Protestant missionaries in Latin America during that period, who had been driven out of Asia by the war.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, Synarchism initially found a new impetus when Mexico entered the war, especially with the introduction of a law for compulsory military training.<sup>26</sup> Since early 1942, there had been frequent reference to the need to introduce a system of universal military training; something that the UNS resolutely opposed.<sup>27</sup>

This worried the peasants who felt that the forces at war in Europe and Asia menaced their welfare and peace. Therefore, there was little sympathy for the war among Synarchists and, even less so when their children risked being drafted. When military service became compulsory, they refused to obey, contending that, in the end, the decision to enlist was the responsibility of each Synarchist father.

Nevertheless, once the law was introduced, the position of the leadership was one of obedience, even if it did not agree with it.<sup>28</sup> This attitude led many Synarchists to feel betrayed and hence abandoned the Movement, as transpires from the following passage:

"When, sadly, Mexico became involved in the world conflict, the authorities of the country issued the Emergency Laws, which, according to our tradition of respect of the Law, we observed calmly, particularly when they were not against our conscience and when not obeying them would mean contumacy and treason. Indeed, this attitude of ours, which was the appropriate one in the circumstances, compelled us to adopt a clear posture in line with the Emergency Laws, which restricted our activities; consequently, the enthusiasm of our members was considerably hurt [...]. Yet, what harmed us most was the opposition of the Mexican people to the Law of Compulsory Military Service, which was a novelty to them, and a danger; the danger of having to fight outside the fatherland for something they did not understand, Democracy, which they had never experienced. Many parents and youths affected were hoping that Synarchism would rise against the Law; however, they were very disappointed to hear that the Leader, Torres Bueno had agreed to comply with the order and had asked everybody to remain calm. We all know the effect that this had on many and how many left us. They did not understand that before the individual interest comes that of Mexico which was in a State of War and that we had to be ready to defend her if she was attacked."<sup>29</sup>

Another element that contributed to the strengthening of Synarchism in the early forties was the serious drought that affected several states of the Republic, occasioning widespread famine until 1944.<sup>30</sup>

The damage caused by the fall in production was made worse by the reduction in the import of foodstuffs due to the war. These conditions affected, primarily, the landless peasants, the poorest sector of the Mexican society and the backbone of the UNS.

The various factors that conduced to promote the Synarchist Movement in the early forties were, however, redressed by the series of policies adopted by the Government of Avila Camacho.

Yet, Avila Camacho was not a counter-revolutionary. He did not seek to undo what his predecessors had done before. He pledged himself to uphold the principles of the Revolution, but he played the rôle of the consolidator, rather than the militant. He surprised friends and foe alike by being a skilful, if unsensational, leader, by capably steering his administration through the early domestic political crises and showing leadership in the field of war-torn foreign policy. Class struggle yielded to national unity, agrarian reform to industrialization, and revolution to evolution.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the Movement virtually remained with the same number of adherents from 1941 to 1944.

Although the UNS did not collapse immediately after 1940, like most of the other nationalist groups the first signs of a split in the organization appeared in 1941, and they were to grow broader until they destroyed it. Nevertheless, except for the leaders of the organization, the aggravation of the split remained imperceptible to the majority, until it became apparent in 1944.

### **III The Decline of the Nationalist Right**

With the elections of 1940, the Mexican Right attained the peak of its power. From that moment, it experienced an uneven but constant decline. The religious

Right, exemplified by Synarchism, then reached a stage where it remained for a long time before collapsing. Its demise, however, was more sudden and came just after the elections. The causes of its decline can be classified into three broad categories:

- (1) the moderation of the Government of Avila Camacho;
- (2) the influence of external events; and
- (3) the attraction that PAN exerted on the non-religious Right.

The Mexican Revolution, after the elections of 1940, followed a different course than previously.<sup>32</sup> The Avila Camacho administration began an era of moderation that contrasted sharply with the intense social reforms of Cárdenas. Yet, in spite of the differences between the two administrations, there was no radical reduction in the social achievements realized by Cárdenas. In fact, Cárdenas continued to exert important decision power in the new administration; and later, as Minister of Defence, he was in charge of one of the most sensitive posts of the administration.<sup>33</sup>

Obviously, the waning of the radicalism of the Mexican Revolution had a comparable effect on its radical opponents and on the direction the moderation of the Government took. Perhaps the most important change that the new administration made, with regard to the nationalist Right, was the attitude of the Government towards the Church and religion. This change was anticipated when, in September 1940, as President-Elect,



Avila Camacho declared that he was a believer. By affirming it he became the first incoming President of Mexico, in many years, to openly express having a religious creed.<sup>34</sup> In the same statement, Avila Camacho made further attempts to try to gain influence with the Right, when he declared that he was not a socialist but a democrat; Cárdenas and Vicente Lombardo Toledano would not participate in his Government and no communist would be allowed to intervene in his administration.

Many felt that those pronouncements were addressed to the followers of Almazán who were threatening revolution.<sup>35</sup> Undoubtedly, they did have some soothing effect; yet, whatever their nature might have been, when the President-Elect gave utterance to the words "I am a believer", he provided Catholics with the most comforting words they had heard in an entire generation, betokening the end of an era of suffering. Avila Camacho pursued the line of reconciliation between Church and State by emphasising that the revolution had not intended to destroy religion. Archbishop Martínez gave his blessing to the new government in a public declaration, shortly after Avila Camacho's inauguration. He said:

"I feel certain that freedom of conscience and religious peace, which made great progress in the Cárdenas administration, will not only continue in the new presidential period, but also will be consolidated and perfected [...] I particularly draw attention to the fact that General Avila Camacho is the only President in many years who has declared publicly and emphatically that he is a Catholic and who has recognized that the Mexican people have certain spiritual

needs that can be satisfied only by religious freedom."<sup>36</sup>

This attitude of cordiality towards the Church prevailed during his six years of office. The Church greeted it cautiously but with gratitude. When the administration took office, the hierarchy indicated that it did not wish a change of attitude; the Archbishop told the priests in his archdiocese that they would have to keep watch on the activities of the Catholics under their direction, so that they did not do something that could provoke the Government. In a circular of 15 March 1941, he ordered his priests to make sure that Catholic Action organizations stayed out not only of proper political action, but of social action which was in accordance with the norms of the Holy See and the Mexican Episcopate.<sup>37</sup>

In the autumn of 1941, the Church began to show confidence in the new régime and appeared again in public. In October the canonization of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico was celebrated with great pomp and ceremony ; the celebration was even attended by military officers in uniform. Although the law prohibited such public manifestations, there were no government reprisal like before.

This new relationship between the Church and the State was preceded by a coordination agreement, between the Archbishop and the Government, which served to temper relations, in order to prevent any small conflict getting out of their control.<sup>38</sup> President Avila Camacho was thus able to declare in 1942 that there was no religious

problem in Mexico. A more indicative sign of the improved relations was the return, in 1944, of the most outspoken and implacable critic of the Mexican Revolution, Bishop José de Jesús Manríquez y Zárate, after seventeen years in exile, since the start of the Cristiada.

Undoubtedly, the area of greater conflicts between the religious Right and the Government was that of socialist education.

This had been the fundamental cause of the emergence of Synarchism. Although the amendment of Article 3 of the Constitution was made in 1934, the corresponding enabling legislation was not immediately introduced. Nonetheless, the Government of Cárdenas had proceeded to implement it through its own devices. In November 1939, Cárdenas submitted to Congress, a new organic law on education, that consisted of setting the scope of socialist education. It did not become effective until six months later, after publication in the *Diario Oficial* of 4 February 1940.<sup>39</sup>

Socialist education was the major cause of contention for the religious nationalist Right, as well as for a large sector of the political spectrum of the basically Catholic population of Mexico. It had also been one of the principal themes of the Almazán campaign; although he was not a devout Catholic, he defended the freedom of education that the Catholics sustained; this won him over the support of the sector.<sup>40</sup>

From the outset of the new Avila Camacho administration, Catholics launched a campaign to modify

Article 3, so that socialist education would be abolished.<sup>41</sup> During the first year, he granted legal recognition to the "Unión de Padres de Familia"; created in 1917, immediately after the Constitution was proclaimed, it had fought for years to repeal Article 3. Throughout this time, especially after the start of the Cristero movement, it had become allied to radical right organizations. By granting it official recognition, the President took a further step in his policy of moderation, that contributed to the demise of the nationalist Right.<sup>42</sup>

In December 1941, the President sent Congress a new law on education that replaced the 1939 version. The new law specified that reference to socialist education contained in the Constitution should not be of an anti-religious nature.<sup>43</sup> To carry out the new Education policy, the President appointed a new Minister of Education in September 1941. Octavio Véjar Vázquez replaced the cardenist Luis Sánchez Pontón, long time accused by Catholics for his "communist" leanings.<sup>44</sup> Véjar Vázquez undertook a new policy that put the accent on the spiritual aspects of education.

"There can be no education without the sign of the cross behind it"

and he set about expelling all the Marxists and Communists from the Ministry of Education.<sup>45</sup>

"We need an education that responds to our traditions, to our physical environment, to our social milieu, to our continental destiny; a school where we find our physiognomy, free from foreign influence, specially from

those international currents of dissolution that are felt today. We need a school where there is no hatred or division, as it has been almost since Mexico became independent, a school of love where our nationality is shaped, stripped of all that tends to divide Mexicans and only concentrated on that which unites us."<sup>46</sup>

All these changes, together with the decision to eliminate the federal inspectors in private schools, whose rôle it was to make sure that no religious instruction was taught in those establishments, were sufficient to allow the re-emergence of Catholic schools all over the country. Consequently, the branch of the Base which gathered Catholic teachers devoted to the secret teaching of Catholicism, lost its raison d'être and disappeared.<sup>47</sup>

The overall moderation of the Government's education policy had a favourable effect on other sectors of the Right. Even Salvador Abascal, national leader of the UNS, in relation to Véjar Vázquez said:

"With his words and deeds he promises to be a successor to José Vasconcelos, and, therefore, a decent minister who is going to put an end to a despicable affair".<sup>48</sup>

The non-religious Right also calmed down when the Government of Avila Camacho began a series of political and economic changes that ensured a different direction for the Mexican Revolution. Most welcomed of these was, unquestionably, the attitude towards labour.<sup>49</sup> At the beginning of 1941, in a speech delivered to the Second National Convention of the CTM, the President stated that

the support of the Government would no longer be unlimited, as it had been during Cárdenas' administration, indicating that the workers:

"were in duty bound to show more discipline, adopt a more moderate policy, and cooperate in the national life".<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, Vicente Lombardo Toledano was replaced as general secretary of the CTM by a less ideologically minded Fidel Velázquez, who set about purging the labour movement of all communists, with the aim of uniting all the labour unions of the nation. Lombardo Toledano was, with all certainty, the most abhorred person in Mexico by the Right, even more than Cárdenas was, because they considered him "malicious".<sup>51</sup>

When the new administration came in, Miguel Aleman, Interior Minister, announced what the new tone would be:

"the revolutionaries had accomplished their mission [...] the turn of the administrators has arrived."<sup>52</sup>

Modernization and industrialization were the keynote. With this policy, Mexican entrepreneurs, ignored and repressed by Cárdenas for so long, would be supported, motivated and encouraged by different means; for example, tax concessions for new industries, decreed in April 1941.<sup>53</sup>

Not least important among the changes introduced was a re-appraisal of the legality and the need to grant liberty to the municipality (municipio), for which the Right had so bitterly struggled.<sup>54</sup>

Another element that contributed to the decline of the nationalist Right was the course of the international situation. Many Right organizations received some kind of financial support from abroad, in the late thirties. Initially, a large proportion came from Nazi Germany; the German colony in Mexico had to conduct a compulsory collection from its members. After the end of the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish Falangists residing in Mexico, engaged in similar activities; their propaganda was very effective.<sup>55</sup>

In 1939 and 1940, the spread of propaganda reached considerable proportions; as early as April 1938, the Government of Cárdenas had considered it advisable to dissolve the Mexican branch of the **Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las J.O.N.S.**, and to expel many of its leaders, that it considered were engaged in subversive activities.<sup>56</sup>

These activities consisted of the provision of regular subsidies to the printed press, or for the creation of new publications that they could use to further their own interests. It seems that the German press attaché, Arthur Dietrich, was in charge of Nazi propaganda; he utilised the German news agency **Transocean**, to provide German news at very low cost. The magazine **Timón**, directed by José Vasconcelos, generally carried the German point of view of the war. It expressed that Germany was fighting a war to defend the world from liberal-capitalism and from British imperialism. Publicity was paid by the German firms in Mexico,

specially the Bayer group.<sup>57</sup>

German propaganda activities lessened in July 1940 after Dietrich was declared *persona non grata* and the Government began a general quell. *Timón*, among other publications, was suppressed at that time.<sup>58</sup>

One element of foreign affairs that radically influenced the decline of the nationalist Right was, undoubtedly, the war declaration of Mexico, in May 1942, on the side of the Allies. This had a double effect: the Mexican Government categorically repressed the subversive activities of the Axis, subsidies and propaganda materials were checked. Secondly, the patriotic sentiment that the war generated, brought about general solidarity with the Government, which had been seriously damaged by the dividing tactics of the Right. In conclusion, of all the nationalist organizations of the right mentioned, only one, the UNS survived the War.

#### IV The Leadership of Abascal

After the defeat of Almazán, and in the wave of increasing support and influence of the UNS Manuel Zermeno tried to tackle a problem that was not to be solved until it was too late, and with the near total destruction of the Synarchist Movement, namely the control that the Base still exerted on it.<sup>59</sup> He suggested, from a position of strength after the successes of 1939-1940, that those who were arresting a movement which they regarded too dangerous, should end the dual leadership and place only one absolute chief. Antonio Santacruz, the leader of the



Supreme Council of the Base, seized the opportunity to keep the UNS under his control and suggested the name of Salvador Abascal to take over the leadership of the Movement, whom he considered "loyal, obedient and pliable". Indeed, in the opinion of his companions, Abascal was the most loyal, the most courageous, the most austere and the most disciplined of them all. On 6 August 1940, Abascal acceded to the leadership of the UNS, an organization of three hundred thousand disciplined and resolute members.<sup>60</sup>

Abascal was thirty years old; he was born in Morelia in 1910, the fourth of twelve children, in an old landowning family from the Valle de Santiago, Guanajuato.<sup>61</sup> His father, a lawyer and a declass  landlord, had been a member of the Catholic secret organization "Uni n Popular" (also known as "la U"), at the time of the religious conflict and, found it difficult to support his family.<sup>62</sup> Abascal studied at the seminary and later read law at the university. He began working at an early age to help his family. At twenty-one years old, he was appointed judge at Ayutla, in Guerrero. His opposition to the local caciques (he refused to let free their gunmen, murderers caught red-handed), earned him swift transfers before he resigned in 1932. When the religious conflict started again in 1934, he was contacted and later enrolled by the Legi n, for which he organized and mobilized the existing legionnaires. He did not wait for the order to come, he asked for them; he himself looked for a place where he could put into practice his apostolic anxieties. He went

to Tabasco, where he fought the first great battle of his life for religious freedom, against the tyranny of Garrido Canabal; he re-established Catholic cult in the State. He was offered, in 1937, the leadership of the emerging Synarchism, which he turned down, because the action then envisaged did not match his impetuous style. He travelled extensively throughout the country, organizing and advising Catholic peasants and workers how to confront the communist cells that were implanted in the unions, where he achieved considerable success. He became more involved in the Synarchist Movement when he went to work with Zermeño; after a few months, he made a name as one of the most active propaganda organizers. Under his relentless onslaught, the number of Synarchist committees soared.<sup>63</sup>

Abascal was working in Yucatán, organizing Synarchist groups, when he was summoned to Mexico City. The Supreme Council of the Base informed him that because of the resignation of Manuel Zermeño, he was being offered the leadership of the UNS, which he accepted

"because I was convinced that Zermenño could not hold on to it, and because I felt inside me enormous happiness and a big urge, a call from Above, to complete the work of Synarchism."<sup>64</sup>

Antonio Santacruz had known Abascal since 1935; in 1940, he decided to nominate him the new leader of the Movement.

"Why did he choose me?" Abascal puzzled out, "either because he did not know me, or, perhaps, his advisors, the other members of the council, especially Lic. Emilio Cervi,

suggested it to him; or, because he did not have, at the time, another candidate with popular support."<sup>65</sup>

Abascal was aware, like the Base and the UNS, that an armed movement could only succeed if it had the support of the United States and, therefore, that it was first necessary to develop a public opinion movement, starting with the peasants, who were the easiest to convince because of their dissatisfaction with the agrarian reform, then the workers, then middle-classes and, lastly, the intellectuals. Abascal called it a nationalist nonviolent, mystical struggle. The UNS was an "army in the mystical [Loyola] sense of the word, that served to transform the régime:

"Synarchism is not an organization aimed at seizing power in the literal sense of the word. The sole aim of the Movement is to restore social order in Mexico, destroyed by Liberalism, anarchy and pseud-democracy."<sup>66</sup>

In 1941, the Synarchist crowd, that "spiritual militia" morally moulded by the "Ten Norms of Conduct", organized along military lines (in cuadros, centurias and compañías) by Abascal, marched, saluted, sang and "captured" large cities: León, Morelia, Guadalajara. Under him, the Movement reached its peak; from August 1940 to 11 July 1940, four hundred cities and important towns were the theatre of Synarchist events. Following the orders of "looking for the enemy in his own house" or "at the scene of the crime" - where a Synarchist had fallen, was imprisoned or was persecuted.<sup>67</sup>

Synarchist demonstrations, contrary to what the adversaries of the UNS argued, did not cost the Movement a lot; there was no need for the Nazi money they hinted to rally together fifty thousand men.

"Peasants were poor but they somewhat managed and, the leaders, lived in poverty: they travelled in second class trains and buses, on foot, stayed in the worst hotels, eating thrice nothing, spending a pittance. And the peasants, they bought each week the journal, and travelled on their own expense [...] Risking their lives, the prison, the bullets; no salary, no bureaucracy."<sup>68</sup>

On 18 May 1941, the President, his ministers and the principal ambassadors attended the celebrations of the fourhundredth anniversary of the City of Morelia. The UNS decided to take advantage of the occasion to make show of its strength, and celebrate its own fourth anniversary: twenty thousand Synarchists from the state of Michoacán, who had gathered the previous night, assembled at dawn, to march on the city in military style.<sup>69</sup> Luis Ordorica Cerda, a member of the House of Deputies, commented afterwards:

"The Synarchists have paraded through the streets of Morelia [...] but what hurts us most, we who love the Revolution, is the spectacle of a strong and disciplined column made up, for the most part, of ejidatarios and workers."<sup>70</sup>

The following week, at León-Sinarcópolis (as they used to call it<sup>71</sup>) on 25 May, forty thousand men celebrated the fourth anniversary of the Movement. An American

commentator observed:

"I shall never forget the face of the Mexico I saw there, many thousands but all alike in an intense tragic preoccupation, a look made up of hunger and hope and the excitement of marching with the gold banners, the grand white horses, the drum corps, and also with each other. And it all did make a fine effect. The plaza at León is pure Spanish colonial, with arched colonnades along two sides, and the municipal palace and a great old church taking up one end. Between the two they had built the speakers' stage, and hung a vast Synarchist flag [...] All the while the church bell tolled steadily, a stately background for the jefes's demagogy and the sound of marching feet."<sup>72</sup>

But who was this man capable of "capturing" a city in a matter of hours, and then disperse as if nothing had happened?

No other leader of the Synarchist Movement was more passionate and controversial than Salvador Abascal. People wondered whether he was a caudillo, a mystic, a visionary, a genius, self-complacent, or a madman. His exploits attracted attention and general admiration. American opinion labelled him the "Mexican Führer."<sup>73</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla, himself a future leader of Synarchism, drew his portrait:

"Above everything else, he is a Catholic, a true Catholic who accepts the dogma and the morality of Christ, which constitute the invariable and rigid rule of his life; a true Catholic who accepts, with utter submission, the Magisterium of the Church. A Catholic of the School of St. Paul, who turns his life into a perpetual apostolate: he is intransigent with himself, and often

with others. He is a Catholic who tends to perfection, in the practice of the teachings of the gospels, without due attention to the observance of the precepts. Totally divested of material possessions, he aspires to the spiritual goods and strives, tenaciously, to get them.

He is a misfit. Abascal feels thwarted in the revolutionary and materialistic environment of Mexico. Uninfluenced by the milieu, he strives to change the world where he and his people live [...]. Some see his way of life intolerable and absurd: hard work hours on end, and no concession for any leisure pursuit: cinema, theatre, bullfights, sport, drink, a circle of friends, are all unknown to him. The temple, his home, his work and, his apostolate, made up the framework of his life.

He is restless. He aspired to the priesthood, where he tried to attain the highest degree of Christian perfection [but] his agitation, his humbleness, or perhaps his passionate temperament, made him abandon [it] and turn to the study of the Law for an adequate formation for his secular apostolate. Disappointed by the meanness and misery associated with the profession, he resigned [...]

He is also a mystic and a visionary. His inner life is intense, he submits all his actions, as trivial as they may seem, to God and to divine will. He believes that the decisions he make are inspired by virtue. Hence, he is at the same time brave and audacious."<sup>74</sup>

However, this "genius" was grievously attached to his "defective spiritual formation". Because of the way he lived: his self-sacrifice, his intransigence, etc., he expected other people to act likewise. This brought him many enemies, not least the leader of the secret council and, worried the Government, the Americans and, the

Church. Padilla accused him of falling into "the trap of the perfect ego". Moreover, at every turn of his life, Abascal found himself exposed to crises, deceptions, lack of understanding and bitterness; best illustrated by the experience of the colonization of Baja California - a subject to which we shall return.

Much of the criticism of Synarchism was actually addressed at Abascal. In the short period of his leadership, some sixteen months, he provoked the most specific reactions, produced the most striking Synarchist frenzy, and gave permanent definition to the features and organizational substance of the Movement. It is therefore, essential to study his work. Going back to the day when he took over the leadership of the UNS, the outgoing leader Zermeño introduced him to the crowd thus:

"I have the inmost conviction that Salvador Abascal is the man predestined by God to lead us and with a heart full of happiness and of faith I turn over to him the position of Chief of Synarchism."

Abascal gave the following reply:

"I accept the leadership of Synarchism to better serve my Country. My models shall be the Truebas, the Zermeños, the Urquizas [...] I have never feared that our Movement could fail, I have immense faith that Synarchism brings about a new life for Mexico. I can make my own the final words that Cortés addressed to his soldiers before he set on to conquer Mexico: and so, let us turn the words into actions [...]"<sup>76</sup>

To turn words into actions, that was the aim he set

himself and he intended to achieve it. He received a movement in action: "moved by a powerful mystique that could not be stopped except by ourselves." The official written doctrine was contained in two documents: the **Manifesto** of 1937 and "**the Sixteen Basic Points of Synarchism**".

The new leader summed up this doctrine in an axiom:

"Within the Fatherland, free from foreign powers, the common good prevails over the individual interest,"

and a motto;

"To the Communist cry of 'All proletarians', we say 'All owners'".

The written doctrine of the UNS, except for the assertion of complete Independence, focused, primarily, on the generic solution of the socioeconomic problem, with verbal condemnation of Communism and Liberalism. Undoubtedly, the Movement still lacked definition on many points: what type of organization of the factors of production was needed to fulfil the ideal of "All owners"; what political régime would replace the existing one of "false revolutionary democracy and unnatural federalism"; how to render effective municipal freedom, within a sensible regional autonomy; how to promote real culture and, hence, how to combat barbarism and atheism; how to return to the Church her freedom, her right to education, and so on.

Notwithstanding the need to give more shape to the doctrine, Abascal believed that in so doing, it would only



exasperate the enemy. Besides, he pointed out,

"both our people, even the most simple, and the anti-Mexican Revolution, are aware of where we are going: to the Catholic State, which we know that for natural reasons has to be corporative."

On account of this, he concluded that peasants - the backbone of the Movement - were being persecuted. This only came to show:

"the Revolution was full of rage at the fact of losing those it had always considered a thoughtless and subservient herd."<sup>76</sup>

The attitude he would adopt in the face of this challenge was that of meeting danger head on. Thus, he demanded of the leaders love of danger and death; which he considered essential for the triumph of Truth; and exhorted them to express themselves clearly, directly and without resorting to ambiguity, compromise or conventional methods. It was necessary to convince the peasantry, even at the expense of blood and prison.<sup>77</sup>

Although originally a supporter of the principle "an eye for an eye", in 1938, after the experience of Tabasco, he realized that it was more Christian, more effective and more fruitful, the attitude of the patriot who endangered his own life but did not expose that of the organization. He was convinced that it was the only way to defeat the Cárdenas régime. In fact, he was going back to the position held by the founders of the Movement (Urquiza, Trueba and Zermeño), in 1937, and thus, acknowledging that

they had been right; since Cárdenas would have ordered, at the first violent clash, the immediate suspension of the Movement, or, at least, would have created obstacles.

The approach he adopted, since Tabasco, to captivate the people, was to run considerable personal risks and to be sent to prison as frequently as possible. The results proved him right: in the few months of his leadership, the total number of registered adherents rose from fifty thousand, between 1 January and 21 March, 1940, to four hundred thousand between January 1940 and October 1941.<sup>78</sup> This explains why he felt he was at the top of a tidal wave that he deemed irresistible. He thought he was "the incarnation of Saint Ignatius of Loyola."<sup>79</sup>

Both Alfonso Junco and José Vasconcelos praised Synarchism. The latter said:

"[...] the best banner that the Mexican youth can take in its hands is that of Synarchism."<sup>80</sup>

*El Sinarquista* published, in August 1940, Abascal's new orders: the swift win of the countryside; the organization of numerous concentrations, always by surprise; never provoke the opponent; the leaders should always stand up to danger.<sup>81</sup> It was essential that they bore in mind that what was needed was a second Independence of Mexico, much more important than the first, achieved by Agustín de Iturbide, because at stake was the very soul of the Fatherland: Independence from the United States, a materialistic and anti-Christian power which held the country to ransom, subdued to the Mexican

Revolution.<sup>82</sup>

Abascal was always on the move; every week he got away from the Capital to supervise and attend rallies in towns and villages, and even in farms. He was imprisoned on at least twenty occasions, and his credo was that he would recover freedom of association by organizing meetings and rallies. His plans for the immediate future of the UNS were set out in famous speech: "**Habla el Jefe**"; where he announced that the first stage of Synarchism was not yet completed:

"Recruitment;  
Organization and;  
the winning of freedom of association  
and expression of ideas.

"With regard to recruitment and organization, each Regional and Municipal Committee must now be self sufficient, in order and that the National leader can assign its brigades to those States where Synarchism only has few men. As for acts to win freedom of association [...] National support will always be provided when requested. We have undertaken a truly extraordinary war, never before experienced in Mexico, or in another country; like all wars, we have lost and will continue to lose lives and property; instead we are giving FREEDOM; we are destroying the power that enslaves and maintains the people divided and hopeless. We are soldiers of freedom. We fall not just like martyrs, but like soldiers."

"It would be regrettable, and sad, if we did not lose any life, any personal comfort: **when the enemy is fought in his own trenches, more lives have to be sacrificed.** Marvellous and extraordinary war that of Synarchism! Those who persecute us are our brothers too. Towards them we are not soldiers but missionaries; that is why we have no revenge spirit. As for us, because we are soldiers, our life is

in constant danger, and that is why we must sacrifice it."<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, the Synarchist programme consisted of uniting and organizing the people in a hierarchy, in "militarizing the spirit", that is to say, the effective exercise of the freedom of association and expression, which could only be secured when the dangers associated with any militia were fully accepted. To this end, Abascal intensified the discipline of the Movement and took it through all the tests that, in his opinion, would strengthen Synarchism. "An organization is what its leaders are" he used to say; hence, he expected them to be real leaders at all times; not simple employees with no initiative of their own, but models to the soldiers, courageous, dedicated, humble and loyal. Abascal professed that the final objective of the "concentrations", the marches and parades was not the "literal militarization of the people", instead:

"by making these acts extremely attractive to the senses, through the display of order and discipline, and the profusion of beautiful flags and martial songs, Synarchism will enthrall the people, winning them over to the ideas and sentiments that will militarize Mexico spiritually, and thus attain her liberty, since action inescapably follows thought."<sup>84</sup>

With the publicity of his successes, Synarchism grew with Abascal. Insofar as Abascal epitomized the national values in the opinion of the peasant masses, a personal bond was established with him.

During his period as leader, he took the Movement to

levels of fanatical militancy; he announced that he would make each Synarchist "half-man, half-monk", prepared to sacrifice himself for the organization. He strengthened the military structure of the movement and promulgated a set of strict moral rules which defined his notion of a "spiritual militia". Synarchism thus understood meant the discipline that each synarchist should have over all his actions, before he attempted to convince and save others.

This spiritual militia also presumed deep understanding and total submission to the doctrine, the ideals and the discipline of the Movement. Individual codes of conduct for men and for women were drawn up - **"the Ten Norms of Conduct for the Synarchists"** and **"The Ten Norms of Conduct for the Synarchist Woman"** wherein resided, in their view, the spiritual strength of the Movement.<sup>85</sup>

The significance of discipline and blind obedience to the Movement was nowhere more apparent than in the militaristic organization of the UNS, which Abascal perfected for his celebrated mass events.

## **V Militaristic Organization**

Synarchists were organized along military lines. They were drilled in military discipline, and carried out in military style the peaceful "assaults" of cities and other designated "military" objectives.<sup>86</sup>

It was the duty of each Municipal Chief to organize his people at once in **Cuadros, Centurias and Compañías**:<sup>87</sup>

The **Cuadro** consisted of a Chief of Cuadro, an

Assistant chief and thirty soldiers, in six rows of five men each.

The **Centuria** consisted of a Chief of Centuria, an assistant chief, a first and second assistant, and three Cuadros. Total: one hundred men.

The **Compañía** was a unit composed of three Centurias, four liaison officers, and a chief and assistant chief.

The Cuadros, Centurias and Compañías of the cities were formed through the organization of **Jefaturas** of blocks, sectors and districts. The Cuadros and Centurias of peasants were formed through the existing organization of Rural subcommittees.

The Synarchists were proud of their ability to parade thousands of members into a plaza in segments which arrived at two to three minute intervals. The show of discipline and planning was impressive.<sup>88</sup> Detailed instructions were given regarding mobilization plans and procedure. The surprise factor was of the utmost importance. The instructions for the organization of public functions, marches and rallies were meticulously laid out in the UNS's "**Instructions for Mobilizations and Public Rallies**". Strong emphasis was placed on punctuality and discipline.

It was also stressed that constant training would make the organization of cuadros, centurias and compañías, a permanent reality, and soldiers would grow accustomed to Synarchist discipline.

Mobilizations were carefully prepared: the authorization of at least the Regional leader was needed

for the concentration of contingents; the person in charge of the mobilization fixed each committee the number of militants that it had to send and made clear what were the available means of transportation. Each member paid his own fare.<sup>89</sup> The day and the time of departure of each contingent was equally planned since everything had to go like clockwork. Synarchists were expected to arrive not more than five to ten minutes early. Everything was done by surprise; to this end, lodgings were arranged with the local Synarchists, and were summoned to different places, in closed quarters and were not told of the mobilization until the last moment.

At the head of the column were the Chiefs of the highest category who might be there at the time. If there was any cavalry, it marched at the rear, four in a row; eight rows of horsemen formed a Cuadro. If it was deemed convenient, the eight best horses would be selected to march at the front, distributed thus: first the Chief and assistant chief, preferably mounting black horses; immediately behind them, two other horsemen protecting the banners.

The mathematical precision of the column movements was also rigorously underlined. For this purpose, strict punctuality was required of all members. Surprise was the general rule. Some rules were drawn: when the situation was difficult, the assembly would be announced in a different town, or one or more days in advance, but provided there was no confusion among the members, the general public should never be invited; they should rely

exclusively on their own people to whom orders were passed verbally.

When the contingents were very strong, it was not convenient to summon them all to the same place, but rather to several places, combining the march in such a way that the contingents reached the appointed place at the same time, or that they joined each other with mathematical precision until they all formed one column.

Along the march, contingents distributed at either side of the column, to protect it, had to salute the Chief with absolute uniformity, making the motion without saying a word, and then join the column at the rear. Before the column approached, these contingents had the appearance of mere bystanders. Watchmen were placed at the most critical points, appearing as mere bystanders.

Women were not allowed to form part of the column, nor to cheer or talk. They had to behave like "soldiers". Their mission during the marches consisted of spreading propaganda, assisting the wounded, and walking at both sides of the column, but always on the pavement. They should not be perceived as protecting the column, they were not to run the same dangers as men.

A | safe place was prepared to take care of the wounded, with a Synarchist physician and nurses.

The place where the rally took place had to be carefully selected, and be adequate for the rapid settling of people, so that the formation and the spirit of discipline were not broken. Speeches were few and to the



point, not more than three or four. Only previously accepted speakers were permitted to address the rally. Women were not allowed to do so. Once the function was over, the column dispersed rapidly, in order and silence.<sup>90</sup>

There are two important related aspects worth mentioning: first, the use or carrying of arms, of any kind, was strictly prohibited. The leadership believed that the use of arms could incite their enemies to undue violence that could culminate in civil war. Second, the leadership considered that when the government authorities were fully responsible, and respectful of the law, there was no objection to informing them with due anticipation of proposed Synarchist actions.

The great feasts of the UNS were 12 October, Day of the Spanish Race; 11 July, official martyrs' day; and 23 May, Founding Day. The object of these marches was, according to the Synarchists, to achieve perfect control of their people, so as to prevent disorder, infiltration of extraneous elements and, above all, to develop in them a total sense of order. Synarchism not only combated Communism, but also revolutionary conduct, which, in their view, lay at the root of Mexico's ailments and anarchy.

The strictly authoritarian nature of the UNS was clearly set out in the **"Handbook for Chiefs"**, which stipulated:

"There should be no discussion in the assemblies. All decisions should be made by the Leader, who may request the advice of the members of the Committee; if there should be time for this, he may also ask the opinion of any Synarchists and if the situation

is difficult or grave, he should inform the superior Chief immediately. The general and absolute rule is that **NO MATTER MUST BE SUBJECT TO VOTING BY THE ASSEMBLY.** Our movement is organized hierarchically and therefore the chiefs are the ones who dictate orders and solve all conflicts. Do not forget that the Chiefs are the ones who appoint subordinate chiefs; the soldiers obey.<sup>91</sup>

This was frequently reaffirmed in *El Sinarquista*, as this extract reveals:

"Our meetings have a peculiar style, there are no discussions because we Synarchists have nothing to discuss about, since we agree on everything. In our assemblies there is no deliberation; there is no need. One consults and listens to the opinions of the leaders, and orders are dictated."<sup>92</sup>

The basic inequality of men was emphasized in all Synarchist literature and spread by its newspaper:

"The authority which on earth is exercised by men to govern their fellows has a solid foundation: God, who is the source and sustenance of all human power[...]

"[T]he absurd equality of liberalism and of anarchism has disappeared. Now each man has his own place in accordance with his personal inequality before his fellow men. Each one has a task to perform by himself. All obey superior orders and feel the responsibility of their actions before God and the Fatherland. If you wish to know how to command, learn first how to obey; this should be the rule of Synarchism[...]"<sup>93</sup>

The UNS paid considerable attention to the functioning of this organization. The efficiency and

coordination of the mobilization were the pride of the Movement; yet, at the same time, to its disparaging critics, they were suspicious acts, extraneous to Mexican reality. Some even compared them to the Fascist "assalto" and the Nazi "Sturm."<sup>94</sup> The impressiveness, significance and sheer organization of these marches did not take long to worry the revolutionary leaders, who were not prepared to share their claim to be the sole representatives of the Mexican masses.<sup>95</sup>

## **VI The response of the Government**

Before Abascal assumed the leadership of the Movement not very much was known about the UNS; but with the spectacular growth that the Movement experienced as a result of his tactics of mobilizing thousands of men to "seize" towns and cities, and in particular after the "March on Morelia", the concern of the Government and its related associations mounted, introducing therefore a series of measures to resist it.

A pamphlet of the period drew attention to the implications of the "March on Morelia" of 18 May 1941:

"The events of Morelia must be considered in all their worth, in what they mean symbolically and as an organizing feat, in what they convey and what they refer to in what they contravene and in what they deserve."<sup>96</sup>

Calls to disband the UNS came from a variety of sources: unions, workers' and peasants' leagues, syndicates, as well as from Masonic lodges and political

groups.

Most attacks against the UNS were very abstract, focusing on its alleged Fascist and fifth-columnist nature, and stressing the threat it presented to the Revolution and the working classes. This perception followed very closely, almost literally, the judgment of Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the CTM who described it as "the enemy number one of the proletariat".<sup>97</sup>

The attitude of the CTM had been prompted by President Lázaro Cárdenas who declared at the Fifteenth CTM Congress, on 25 November 1940, in his last year in office:

"Faced with the restoration of the conservative front we must not abandon the battlefields, we must resolutely rectify the errors and deficiencies, so that they are not used as an excuse by retardatory elements of Acción Nacional, of Synarchism or of alleged anti-communism, who take advantage of any discord between the ejidatarios, the workers, the women, and the young people, in order to win over and turn into unconscious victims in the full knowledge that new generations will be sacrificed in bitter fratricidal wars"<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, it was not until after Morelia that a coordinated and rigorous counterattack was set in motion. On 31 July 1941, President Avila Camacho addressed an official message to the State Governors, the Minister of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior whereby they were instructed that:

"In view that Synarchist demonstrations have been effectuated with no legal justification and there

being no sufficient reason to sanction it, but on the contrary with provocations to antagonistic organizations, public demonstrations by the Synarchists must not be allowed without the prior consent of the authorities and, if granted, these should be carried out according to the law, making responsible the leaders of these groups for any violation, who will be severely punished".<sup>99</sup>

The guidelines set out by the President were widely publicized and received the approval of all the revolutionary establishment.<sup>100</sup>

Congress debated the threat that Synarchism posed to the régime. On 14 October 1941, Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar said that the UNS was the fifth column in Mexico and that although it worked under a mystical appearance, the reality was that it worked to a premeditated plan of long date. He warned that if the Reaction was allowed to organize under Synarchism, it would not be long before Congress found it impossible to stop it. He urged his colleagues to close ranks and to form a solid front to defend the Revolution and democracy. Hence, on 31 November 1941, Congress approved the constitution of a group to resist the "regressive tendencies represented by the UNS": the **Comité Nacional Antisinarquista y en Defensa de la Democracia**.<sup>101</sup>

The PRM, very much influenced at the time by CTM elements, defined the UNS as anti-democratic and counter-revolutionary, subversive and aggressive, and an instrument of Nazi penetration and clergy domination. It argued that the success of Synarchism was based on and took advantage of the ignorance, the confusion and the

poverty of the poorest masses. The peasant element was disorganized, isolated and in many parts of the country still had an "impressionable, superstitious and sceptical nature".<sup>102</sup> It stressed that Synarchism had several masters: first, the resentful large estate owners who regretted the loss of the haciendas and aspired to return to the previous status quo and; then, industrial capitalism which opposed organized labour because it stood in the way of development.<sup>103</sup>

The PRM issued a Manifesto signed in Morelia on 3 June 1941 and endorsed by several unions and political associations, condemning Synarchism which it described as being "born dead" ("el sinarquismo nació muerto"). The Manifesto laid down some of the accomplishments and some of the benefits of the Mexican Revolution which were "evident and undeniable"; they only needed to be definitely distributed, multiplied and supported to ensure their complete assertion. The manifesto asked the workers, the ejidatarios, the country folk, the middle class incorporated in the party's "popular sector", the revolutionary women, the young people and the students, and whoever identified with the Revolution, "to be on their guard and act decisively when needed to frustrate the restoring prospects of the Reaction".<sup>104</sup>

One labour organization which responded zealously to the appeal of the PRM was the **Comité Regional de Control Político Ferrocarrilero**, Guadalajara and Sinaloa Divisions. The Committee made a series of proposals, albeit ambitious, to arrest the advance of the Synarchist

Movement and to enlighten and win back those who had been attracted by Synarchism, or who could be so:- establish two Cultural Brigades, under the direction of the Committee, one of which would travel the States of Guanajuato and Michoacán; the other those of Jalisco, Colima, Nayarit and Sinaloa, setting up Cultural Centres in the places they visited. The Brigades would be made up of a leader, an assistant, a doctor or medical practitioner, two nurses, a speaker and a projectionist. The mission of the Brigades would be to visit towns and villages giving cultural and guidance lectures, about the work being carried out by the Federal Government; to proceed to vaccinate those people who required it; to provide free medical examinations, supplying medicines and care; distributing educational books and leaflets, clothes and shoes to the needy; as well as showing educational and entertaining films.<sup>105</sup>

The Committee would oversee these activities from Guadalajara. In the meantime, it would set in that city a soup kitchen for 500 unemployed workers or their dependants and, with the approval of the State Government, form a labour exchange and a recreation centre for unemployed workers. The entire project would be supervised by the Interior Ministry, in order to secure that the practical and effective results of the goals pursued followed a strict orientation.

The President gave his personal approval to the mission and asked the State Governors to "give the Committee every facility for the best realization of its

task."<sup>106</sup> The Interior Minister gave the Committee two thousand pesos for November and December 1941, and promised to look into the possibility of providing a budget of 16,000 pesos per month for the following year.<sup>107</sup>

In the final analysis, the régime became aware that the problem lay in the shortcomings of the revolutionary programme, and in particular of the Agrarian Reform; the efforts to win back the peasantry had to be directed at understanding and satisfying its demands. An apologist of the Revolution summed up the nature of the problem thus:

"The Synarchists are agitating the peasants and this action is grave and dangerous.

Agrarian reform is going through a critical phase [...] This is a trying moment. We need that the peasant remain firmly in his post to defend the Revolution, and through his own work help to fulfil the Agrarian Reform, by raising production; but since the Reforms has not been successful, a large section of the peasantry is in need of urgent attention, which will not be given if Synarchism, the first outbreak of totalitarian infiltration in Mexico, is not cut out at the root.

The régime cannot allow that in those places where Agrarian Reform has not yet come to a head, intervene exotic groups manipulated by the most sinister interests of Mexico, with the purpose of criminally exploiting those who had been the fundamental concern of our social struggle".<sup>108</sup>



### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jean Meyer, *Le Sinarquisme: un Fascisme Mexicain? 1937-1947*, Paris, Hachette, 1977, p.45.

<sup>2</sup> Mario Gill, *Sinarquismo, su origen, su esencia, su misión*, 3a. edición, México, Editorial Olin, 1962, pp.38-39.

<sup>3</sup> Manuel Fernández Boyoli y Eustaquio Marrón de Angelis, *Lo que no se sabe de la Rebelión Cedillista*, México, n.p., 1938, pp.15-31.

<sup>4</sup> Lic. Arturo Amaya to José Trinidad Cervantes, Mexico, 4 February, 1939, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 28 [11.7.28].

<sup>5</sup> Jesús Sam López to Manuel Zermeño, Mexico, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 28 [11.7.28].

<sup>6</sup> Nicolás Rodríguez to editor of *El Sinarquista*, El Paso, Texas, 3 October, 1939, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 29 [11.7.29].

<sup>7</sup> Roberto Jiménez (Comité Nacional) to Presidente del Comité Regional de Tepic, Nayarit, México, 13 March, 1939, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 28 [11.7.28].

<sup>8</sup> Salvador Zermeño to José Trinidad Cervantes, México, 20 January, 1939, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 28 [11.7.28].

<sup>9</sup> Harold Davis, "The Enigma of Mexican Sinarquism", *Free World*, 5 May, p.413.

<sup>10</sup> *El Sinarquista*, 5 September, 1940; Gil. op. cit., p.134.

<sup>11</sup> Luis González, *Los días del presidente Cárdenas*, México, Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, período 1934-1940), 1981, p. 298.

<sup>12</sup> *El Sinarquista*, 30 June, 17 August, 7 September, and 12 October, 1939.

<sup>13</sup> *El Sinarquista*, 1 February 1940.

<sup>14</sup> *El Sinarquista*, 22 February, 1940: "El Jefe del movimiento da órdenes sobre política a todos los grupos"; see also: 22 October, 1940.

<sup>15</sup> Manuel Zermeño to Comité Regional de Ario de Rosales, 10 June, 1940, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 28 [11.7.28].

<sup>16</sup> U.N.S. Circular No.16, 2 July, 1940.

<sup>17</sup> Ariel José Contreras, **México 1940: industrialización y crisis política**, México, Siglo XXI, p. 168.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Sanchez Vázquez (Regional Committee of Chilapa, Guerrero) to National Committee, Chilapa, 4 July, 1940, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.29 [11.7.29].

<sup>19</sup> Jean Meyer, **Le Sinarquisme...**, op. cit. p.399, mentioned the incident of Santa Cruz de Galeana, where eleven Synarchist militants were killed by the reserves on 25 February 1940; for reports of the event see: microfilm No.32 [11.7.32], I.N.A.H., Serie UNS.

<sup>20</sup> Nicolás García (Comité de Puruandiro, Michoacán) to Comité Regional, 15 July, 1940, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.29 [11.7.29].

<sup>21</sup> On the possibility of an armed rebellion see: Consul General Rees to Viscount Halifax FO 420 292, [A 2619/359/26], Mexico City, 3 May 1940; for declarations of Almazán after the elections, see: **New York Times**, 3 September, 1940.

<sup>22</sup> Salvador Abascal to Jefe Municipal de Jerécuaro, Guanajuato, 25 September, 1940; I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.30 [11.7.30].

<sup>23</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla, **Sinarquismo-Contrarrevolución**, México, Editorial Polis, 1948, p.184; for the text of Almazán's resignation to the Presidency see: Juan Andreu Almazán, **Memorias del General...**, **Informes y documentos sobre la campaña política de 1940**, México, Editorial Quintanar, 1941, pp.137-139.

<sup>24</sup> Luis Javier Garrido, **El Partido de la Revolución Institucionalizada**, México, Siglo XXI-SEP, 1986, p. 397.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Shedd, "Thunder on the Right in Mexico. The Sinarquistas in Action", **Harper's Magazine**, Vol.CXC, April, 1945, p.424.

<sup>26</sup> Avila Camacho signed the decree of the state of war on 1 June 1942, see Alfonso Taracena, **La vida en México bajo Avila Camacho**, México, Editorial Jus, 1976, primera serie, p.77; for text of the decree, see **Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, 33 meses al servicio de la Nación. Ciclo Histórico del Presidente Avila Camacho y del PRM, 1940-1943**, México, PRM, Departamento de Prensa y Propaganda, 1943, pp.184-192; the law on conscription was introduced on 1 January, 1943, *ibid.*, p.201.

<sup>27</sup> Allan Chase, **Falange: The Axis Secret Army in the Americas**, New York, G.P. Putnam, 1942, p. 172.

<sup>28</sup> This was confirmed in a U.S. Embassy confidential report which stated that Torres Bueno:

"was hailed before ministry of interior secret police and asked to explain charges that the movement was carrying active propaganda against the draft. He talked in lofty, idealistic terms and said that Synarchists were obeying the law even though the sentiments of many of them were contrary to military training and certainly opposed the idea of sending a Mexican Expeditionary Force to the wars."

(Office of Strategic Services Records, No. 28048, Mexico, 16 January, 1943).

<sup>29</sup> Gildardo González Sánchez, **Informe del Jefe Nacional, 1946**, Serie UNS, microfilm No. 114[ 12.2.17], pp.2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Lesly Byrd Simpson, **Many Mexicos**, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1952, pp.308-309.

<sup>31</sup> Stanley Ross, **Is the Mexican Revolution dead?**, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1966, p.13; Howard F. Cline, **Mexico and the United States**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1963, p.264; William P. Tucker, **The Mexican Government Today**, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1957, p.20.

<sup>32</sup> Albert L. Michaels, "Las elecciones de 1940", **Historia Mexicana**, July-September, 1977, p. 134.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley Ross, op. cit., pp.12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Revista Hoy, 21 September, 1940, quoted in Bernardino Mena Brito, **El P.R.U.N., Almazán y el desastre final**, México, Ediciones Botas, 1941, pp.142-147; Luis Medina, "Origen y circunstancia de la unidad nacional", in Centro de Estudios Internacionales, **Lecturas de Políticas Mexicana**, México, Colegio de México, 1977, p.114.

<sup>35</sup> John Gunter, "Avila Camacho of Mexico", **Harper's Magazine**, October 1941, p. 483.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in John Gunther, "Avila Camacho of Mexico", op. cit., p. 486.

<sup>37</sup> **Gaceta oficial del Arzobispo de México**, April 1941, p. 125.

<sup>38</sup> **Gaceta oficial del Arzobispo de México**, July, 1942, p. 524.

<sup>39</sup> Luis Medina, **Del cardenismo al avilacamachismo**, México, Colegio de México, (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1940-1952, Vol. 18), 1978, p. 347.

<sup>40</sup> Luis Medina, "Origen y circunstancia", op. cit., p.113.

<sup>41</sup> For a list of petitions to reform Article 3, see: **Solicitudes de Reforma al Artículo 3° Constitucional**, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 534/10, Legajo No.18.

<sup>42</sup> Ledit, op. cit., pp.76-77; Luis Medina, **Del cardenismo al avilacamachismo**, op. cit., pp.360-362.

<sup>43</sup> Luis Mediana, *ibid.*, pp. 358-365.

<sup>44</sup> Salvador Abascal, **Mis recuerdos. Sinarquismo y Colonia María Auxiliadora**, México, Editorial Tradición, 1980, pp.200-207.

<sup>45</sup> Salvador Abascal, *ibid.*, p.348; C.F. Kneller, **The Education of the Mexican Nation**, New York, Columbia University Press, 1951, pp.55

<sup>46</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 8 October, 1941; see also, Octavio Véjar Vazquez y Antonio J. Bermudez, **No dejes crecer la hierba... (El gobierno avilacamachista)**, México, Costa Amic, 1965; *Del cardenismo...*, op. cit., p.359.

<sup>47</sup> Ledit, op. cit., pp.80-82.

<sup>48</sup> Ignacio León, "El Sinarquismo y su líder", **Hoy**, 22 November, 1941, p.49.

<sup>49</sup> Jack O'Brine, "Mexican Labour's Swing to Right Cheers Washington as Axis Bar", **New York Herald Tribune**, 18 June 1941; Luis Medina, **Del cardenismo.....**, op. cit., pp.288-290.

<sup>50</sup> **El Popular**, 1 March 1941; Bernardino Mena Brito, **El P.R.U.N.....**, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>51</sup> Luis Medina, "Origen y circunstancia...", op., cit., p.112; **Hoy**, 9 December, 1939, p.7.

<sup>52</sup> Mena Brito, *ibid.*, p.103; Howard F. Cline, "Mexico: A Maturing Democracy", **Current History**, March, 1953, p.138.

<sup>53</sup> Howard Cline, **Mexico, Revolution to Evolution, 1940-1960**, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p.232; Medina, "Origen y circunstancia...", op. cit., p.94; J. Gunther, "Avila Camacho...", op. cit., p.488.

<sup>54</sup> Medina, *ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>55</sup> Brígida von Metz, et al., **Fascismo y antifascismo en América Latina y México (apuntes históricos)**, México, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1984, p.24; John Gunther, **Inside**

**Latin America**, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1942, pp.96-97.

<sup>56</sup> Betty Kirk, **Covering the Mexican Front, the Battle of Europe vs. America**, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1942, p.235; Lois E. Smith, **Mexico and the Spanish Republicans**, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1955, p.205.

<sup>57</sup> von Metz, et al. **Fascismo y antifascismo**, op. cit., p.62 et seq.

<sup>58</sup> Consul General Manett (Mexico City) to Foreign Office, Inter-Allied Publicity Committee, FO 371 24218, [A 3554/3554/26], 12 March, 1940; see also, Taracena, **La vida en México**, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>59</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>60</sup> Padilla, **Sinarquismo...**, op. cit., pp.183-184.

<sup>61</sup> For an account of his early days see his: "Las primeras andanzas" and "En la punta de la calzada", in **Revista Abside**, Vol.XXIX, No.1 (January-March), pp.27-44, and, No.3 (July-September), 1965, pp.310-327.

<sup>62</sup> Alan Knight, "The Mexican Revolution: Bourgeois? Nationalist? Or just a 'Great Revolution'?", **Bulletin of Latin American Research**, Vol.IV, No.2, 1985, p.25.

<sup>63</sup> Hugh G. Campbell, **La derecha radical en México**, México, Sep Setentas, 1976, p.114.

<sup>64</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.183.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Mario Gill, **Sinarquismo**, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>67</sup> Padilla, op. cit., p.199; the "Ten Norms of Conduct" are founded, among others, in **Sinarquía Nacional, El Sinarquismo. Su Ruta Histórica. Ideario y Postulados. Documentos**, México, Ediciones UNS, 2a. edición, n.d., pp.159-160.

<sup>68</sup> Gibson to State Department, "Memorandum on Synarchism", Mexico, 18 November, 1941, O.S.S. No.9544, Record Group No.226, pp.7-8.

<sup>69</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.82.

<sup>70</sup> **La Prensa**, 28 May 1941.

<sup>71</sup> León was declared the "City of Synarchism" in 1939, see: Lic. Manuel Torres Bueno to Feliciano Manrique, León, 18 August 1938, microfilm No.29 [11.7.29], I.N.A.H., Serie UNS.

- <sup>72</sup> Shedd, "Thunder on the Right in Mexico", op. cit., p.420.
- <sup>73</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.83.
- <sup>74</sup> Padilla, op. cit., pp.189-191.
- <sup>75</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 15 August, 1940.
- <sup>76</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., pp.184-186.
- <sup>77</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", **Mañana**, No.40, 2 June, 1944, p.46.
- <sup>78</sup> Meyer, **Le Sinarquisme**, op. cit., p.46, based on data from the UNS Secretariat of Statistics.
- <sup>79</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.83.
- <sup>80</sup> Quoted in Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p.193; see also. Padilla, op. cit., p.133.
- <sup>81</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 8 August, 1940.
- <sup>82</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 12 August, 1940.
- <sup>83</sup> **El Sinarquista**, "Habla el Jefe", 15 September, 1940.
- <sup>84</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", revista **Mañana**, No.39, 27 May 1944, p.31.
- <sup>85</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 3 October, 1940; **Sinarquía Nacional**, **El Sinarquismo**, op. cit., pp.159-161.
- <sup>86</sup> Vicente Vila, "Abascal, cabeza sinarquista", **Así**, No.36, 19 July, 1941.
- <sup>87</sup> Salvador Abascal, **Mis recuerdos**, op. cit., p. 213; **Unión Nacional Sinarquista**, **Instrucciones para movilizaciones y asambleas públicas**, n.p., 1941.
- <sup>88</sup> For an account of the impressiveness of these marches, see Margaret Shedd, "Thunder on the Right in Mexico", op. cit., p.420; and, Padilla, op. cit., p.206.
- <sup>89</sup> Salvador Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op. cit., p.259.
- <sup>90</sup> Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op. cit., pp.284-285.
- <sup>91</sup> **U.N.S.**, **Instrucciones para Jefes**, op. cit., p.16.
- <sup>92</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 24 December 1942, "Celebración de la IV Junta Nacional".
- <sup>93</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 23 May, 1944.

<sup>94</sup> Mario Gill, *La Década Bárbara*, México, n.p., 1970, pp.137-138.

<sup>95</sup> Vicente Vila, "Abascal, cabeza sinarquista", *Así*, No.34, 5 July, 1941, p.39.

<sup>96</sup> *Explicación del Sinarquismo. Pasado y future de México*, R, Colección de "Problemas Mexicanos", [pamphlet], n.p., n.d. [1941?], p.4

<sup>97</sup> Gustavo Abel Hernández Enríquez et al., *Manuel Avila Camacho. Biografía de un Revolucionario con Historia*, México, Ediciones del Gobierno de Puebla, 1986, Vol.II, p.234.

<sup>98</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas, *Palabras y documentos públicos*, Vol.I: 1928-1940, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1978, p.452.

<sup>99</sup> "Comunicación girada con esta fecha por el Señor Presidente de la República a todos los Gobernadores de los Estados y transcrita al Secretario de la Defensa Nacional para su cumplimiento por las autoridades de su dependencia y a la Secretaría de Gobernación para que procure su cumplimiento", México, 31 July 1941, telegram No. 46584, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.544.61/39, Legajo No.13.

<sup>100</sup> Relación de contestaciones dadas por los C.C. Gobernadores de los Estados a la Circular girada por el Sr. Presidente de la República relacionada con el control de actos públicos, AGN, Expediente 544.61/39, Legajo No.16; for a list of other supporters see Legajos No.4 to 6 and 15.

<sup>101</sup> "Acta Constitutiva del Comité Nacional Antisinarquista y en Defensa de la Democracia", México, 30 November 1941.

<sup>102</sup> "El Sinarquismo: He ahí al enemigo!", *Trayectoria* (organ of the Executive Central Committee of the PRM), Año I, No.1, quoted in: J. Miguel Ceceña to President Avila Camacho, Culiacán, Sin., 7 August 1941, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.544.61/41, Folio No.46098.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in "Explicación del Sinarquismo...", loc. cit.; fragments of the Manifiesto were reproduced by the Regional Committees of the PRM, for instance see: "Trabajadores. El Principal Enemigo es el Sinarquismo" (2 August 1941), and "La situación del campesino frente al 'Sinarquismo'" (7 August 1941), of the Regional Committee of the State of Sinaloa, in J. Miguel Ceceña to President Avila Camacho, loc. cit.; "Al Pueblo de Tabasco", in Francisco Trujillo (Governor of Tabasco) to President Avila Camacho, Villahermosa, Tab., 1 August 1941, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No.7.

<sup>105</sup> Comité Regional de Control Político Ferrocarrilero to President Avila Camacho, Guadalajara, Jal., 10 October 1941, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No.5.

<sup>106</sup> José González Gallo to Coronel. Pedro Torres Ortiz (Governor of Colima), México, 17 October 1941, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No.4, Folio No.60312.

<sup>107</sup> Comité Regional de Control Político Ferrocarrilero to Presidencia de la República, 1 November 1941, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No.7, Folio No.58264.

<sup>108</sup> César Marino, "El Sinarquismo", *Mexico Agrario*, Vol.III, July-September, 1941, pp.330-331.



<sup>105</sup> Comité Regional de Control Político Ferrocarrilero to President Avila Camacho, Guadalajara, Jal., 10 October 1941, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No.5.

<sup>106</sup> José González Gallo to Coronel. Pedro Torres Ortiz (Governor of Colima), México, 17 October 1941, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No.4, Folio No.60312.

<sup>107</sup> Comité Regional de Control Político Ferrocarrilero to Presidencia de la República, 1 November 1941, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No.7, Folio No.58264.

<sup>108</sup> César Marino, "El Sinarquismo", *Mexico Agrario*, Vol.III, July-September, 1941, pp.330-331.

cooperating with the new administration. Abascal fiercely condemned any attempts at moderation and rapprochement with the Government; he even envisaged the use of force to seize power.<sup>3</sup> In a recent article, he elucidated on his views on the subject of a coup d'état:

"I was convinced that true liberty [...] would only be gained if the revolutionary government was overthrown and a totally Catholic Régime was set; to achieve this a fulminating national coup was needed, not supposedly democratic elections that will never be won. But the American Embassy suspected it and ruined it, and with the help of two traitors and of many of my comrades of excellent good faith, it succeeded in throwing us out and in changing the course of that Movement which after the Cristiada had been the last hope of Mexico to this day."<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the kind of militancy that the UNS leadership was espousing in 1941, posed a serious threat to the advances achieved by the moderate leaders of the Church.

"Within the hierarchy itself, more than one bishop felt unhappy about the extraordinary growth of Synarchism [...] The good relations between the Episcopacy and the government of Avila Camacho, which had improved after much and patient diplomacy, could be jeopardized [...] [The members of the Base] constantly had to admonish the leaders of the popular movement; who, in turn, reacted more impatiently, declaring that the Base was afraid of everything."<sup>5</sup>

Besides these factors, in the eyes of many people, not least, of Congress, Abascal was perceived as an ally of Nazi and Falangist subversive elements that abounded in

the country, at the time. This was contrary to the political line of the Government and, consequently, the Supreme Council felt it necessary to remove him from the national leadership, so as to give the movement a more moderate image.

However, Abascal was an immensely popular leader, and his removal could undoubtedly bring the split of the movement, or even uncover the existence of the secret leadership of the organization. Hence, his dismissal would have to be handled with extreme tact and ability, so that it appeared to him and to the mass of the organization, that he had voluntarily taken that step. Therefore, in 1941, Abascal convinced himself that he had to leave the leadership of the UNS in order to embark on a new and bold feat. The starting point would be the conquest of the Northwest desert of Mexico and establish there synarchist settlements. It was suggested that Synarchism fulfilled its promises of obtaining land for the dispossessed by opening up new frontiers.

## **II. The Colonization of Lower California**

The project was conceived in August 1941, when Abascal made a successful tour of the Northwestern states.<sup>6</sup> The UNS was, at this time, in full ascent; everything seemed possible, even attaining power.

Synarchist speeches, everywhere, always exalted the colonial past of Mexico. In Sonora, Abascal quoted Cortés, who had given his name to that inner sea; the Jesuit Kino, who founded the short-lived Loreto colony

(1638-1685), in Lower California; the missionary work of the Jesuits, which lasted until the Society was expelled in 1768.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Abascal was not speaking of himself when he talked about resuming the "the task ruined by the forces of evil", and the continuity broken in 1768; he was giving a Messianic connotation, typical of his perception of what the rôle of the UNS should be, to the leader of the movement, commanding over 500,000 militants, desirous to see him President of the Republic. But he got carried away and offered the President, on behalf of the UNS, the opportunity to colonize Lower California.<sup>8</sup> On 11 September, ten days after Abascal presented his offer, the President gave his approval.<sup>9</sup>

Abascal presented to the President a project which contained the following main points:

1. Complete freedom to mobilize the synarchist families that the Movement had chosen;
2. The first expedition, in December 1941, would comprise one hundred families;
3. A second expedition would follow in January or February 1942, with up to one thousand families, if the Government gave priority to Synarchist workers in the construction of the La Paz-Santa Rosalía federal road;
4. Government assistance to carry the settlers from their places of origin to the port of La Paz;

5. Guaranteed complete religious and educational freedom, so that they could have genuinely Catholic schools, with no restrictions or strings attached;
6. Grant possession and later ownership of the national lands that the settlers had chosen, with a rates-exemption of at least five years.<sup>10</sup>

During a meeting between Abascal and Avila Camacho, in late 1941, the President assured the leader of the Synarchist Movement that the Government would pay for the rail and ferry passages of the synarchist settlers. Besides, they would have priority in obtaining jobs in the construction of the trans-peninsular road.<sup>11</sup>

Abascal and his followers were convinced that this mission would provide an excellent and startling example of Synarchist determination and the materialization of Synarchist philosophy. It was an enterprise for the salvation of the Americas and the world: the model Synarchist republic.<sup>12</sup> Thereon, he expected to forestall an American invasion of the peninsula, longtime attracted by its emptiness and by its strategic value.

The political storm raised by the Synarchist project strengthened Abascal's intuition. In October, the attack in Congress was led by Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar who obtained unanimous support for a commission that would approach the President, to demand the banning, not only of the colonization project, but of the UNS itself, which he accused of being a Nazi organization and an enemy of the United States. Yet, the President told the commission

that the Synarchists had the right, as Mexicans, to go to Lower California.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, Abascal was thinking of the one hundred families that would accompany him in December, and of the other two hundred that would follow a few months later.<sup>14</sup> He made scant preparations and, by the end of October, he realized that he had not yet obtained any money, but stated:

"The abstruse reasons of my haste that the first expedition left on 18 December were the following: the innermost certainty that a few days after that date we would not be able to leave, because of the extreme nervousness of the Revolutionary Government following the war events of those days; and the intuition that things should be done as we went along. Indeed, if I had waited - to leave with the first expedition, to have the two hundred thousand pesos that were absolutely essential for the first expenses and to count with good accommodation in Santo Domingo, and with a working schedule planned to the last detail, we would never have accomplished anything. The venture was so crazy that nobody believed in it; and, therefore, I was not helped before I embarked on it. I needed to get going to force many people to cough up."<sup>15</sup>

Synarchist colonization was not limited to Lower California; however, what was done elsewhere, did not count for much. In January 1942, José Trueba Olivares was put in charge of **Villa Kino de Santa María Guadalupe**,<sup>16</sup> a colony on the Gulf coast of Sonora, 90 kilometres southwest of Hermosillo, 12 kilometres from the Gulf of California. In May, 1942, another colony, Salvatierra, was set, 36 kilometres south of Culiacán (Sinaloa). Finally,

local committees founded colonies in Sonora (San José Opodepe) and in Tamaulipas (Nuestra Señora del Refugio). Salvatierra collapsed almost immediately; and although San José and Refugio functioned for four years, their small size meant they had little effect to talk about. After just over a year of Villa Kino's existence, the number of families that composed it shrank from seventeen to eight. And after two years, it collapsed in desperate circumstances.<sup>17</sup> This proved that the settlers in Sonora did not receive any more aid than those in Lower California.

It was on the initiative of Antonio Santacruz that Abascal accepted to lead the migration into the desert.<sup>18</sup>

Taking advantage of his extreme religious sentiment, he was persuaded that his efforts on this enterprise would represent:

"a renewal of the work of the missionaries, interrupted by Freemasonry, indeed, by the Revolution, with the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767."<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, he was also led to believe that by establishing a settlement in Lower California, annexation of the peninsula by the United States would be prevented. Indeed, for some time, the Americans had been obsessed with the possibility that the Japanese might get hold of the Bay of Magdalena, on the pacific coast of the peninsula, and set up a naval base there; Abascal feared that the United States, on the pretence of preventing this from happening, could simply seize Lower California.<sup>20</sup>

Originally, Abascal did not intend to be personally in charge of the expedition; but, in the context of his eventual dismissal, and for his own survival, he agreed, with pleasure. He saw this outlet as the possibility to recover his losses and prepare for a comeback to confound his enemies. Given the chance, Abascal, the national leader, would have concentrated all the weight of the movement behind the foundation of the ideal republic, the synarchist utopia. Abandoned by most, he took immediate refuge and retreated into his extreme, even puritanical, religiosity, which he believed gave him the possibility to accomplish the impossible.

"Though I had a deep vocation to combat the damned Revolution, I would have to resign myself to fight the desert: the change was tremendous. But I accepted it with pleasure, not cheerfully - as Meyer has suggested - as expiation for my sins and for the following reasons:

- 1) by sacrificing myself, the Movement would avoid a split;
- 2) the change of National leader would greatly disconcert our enemies [...];
- 3) Synarchism would be immensely respected and unassailable for its dedication to such a pure and patriotic exploit as the colonization of the California desert;
- 4) God was putting in my hands the foundation and creation of a society that would be Catholic to the core;
- 5) the life of the Colony would be a rich source of experiences that would help to understand the solution to the most serious national problems, political,



economic and even spiritual;

- 6) if I emerged victorious from the Colony, I could come back one day to settle the score with Santacruz and company."<sup>21</sup>

From the start, the settlement suffered various setbacks. The uppermost problem was the same that had jeopardized the efforts of the Spaniards many centuries ago; the lack of water. Everything got more complicated because of the incompetence of the leaders and the settlers, not accustomed to such extreme conditions. Abascal was no settler, no agricultural expert.<sup>22</sup>

He had proved to be a fearsome leader of peasant troops, able to organize massive rallies and take cities by surprise, to march with unarmed contingents against a well equipped army. But when he took charge of a task wherein the economic factors prevailed over the spiritual ones, he was bound to fail. He embarked on this project without ever making detailed estimates and preparations for what was essentially a material exploit. He did not perceive it in these terms. He regarded the whole venture solely in apostolic and providential terms:

"I founded María Auxiliadora in the desert of the southern territory of Lower California, out of spiritual and patriotic necessity which could not be postponed; in the full knowledge that I lacked the technical and pecuniary resources which are essential for the swift success of what is basically an exploit of material order. And there in the desert is María Auxiliadora, living on faith in Providence and preaching to Mexico three things which are in fact only one: detachment from superfluous goods, unlimited and

absolute faith in God and the Virgin, and subjection of the material to the spiritual, the temporal to the eternal [...] The true greatness of María Auxiliadora lies in the resumption of the missionary work banefully interrupted by Freemasonry, that is to say, the Revolution, with the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 [...], a date that marks the true origin of the Mexican Revolution, which is not more than a branch and a by-product of the global revolution."<sup>23</sup>

Abascal advocated that he had been assured that he would receive all the financial backing that an enterprise of such magnitude required; Santacruz, he argued, made specific promises that the Movement could count on contributions from American Catholics, which would serve to sustain the colony while it became self-sufficient.<sup>24</sup> Also, President Avila Camacho and the Government promised to support the colonization project.

Later, Abascal was to blame Santacruz for deceiving him and for being mistaken about the assistance he had been offered.<sup>25</sup> Although it is not clear whether the Government and the Secret Council of the Base acted together to conspire against Abascal, their actions complemented each other.

Nevertheless, when the President announced the assistance his Government was prepared to give the Synarchists, the Left bitterly criticized him, particularly in Congress. On 30 November, 1941, a group of senators and deputies opposed to the President's offer of support to the Synarchists, formed the **National Anti-Synarchist Committee**, conceived to demonstrate the

counter-revolutionary and seditious nature of the movement.<sup>26</sup>

### **III. The Leadership of Torres Bueno**

During the III National Synarchist Meeting, in October 1941, to the surprise of all the synarchist leaders gathered for the occasion, Abascal revealed his plan to take one hundred synarchist families to Lower California to establish a colony there, and, for that reason, he was handing over the leadership of the UNS to Manuel Torres Bueno.<sup>27</sup>

Torres Bueno was a young provincial lawyer, lacking the charisma and the dynamism of his predecessor; but his disposition to comply with the orders he received, made him acceptable to the Supreme Council. He became the new leader of the UNS on 13 December, 1941. He took on the leadership of the movement at a time when colonization was already on its way, with expeditions leaving for Lower California and Sonora. The attention of the Movement and of Mexico focused on the progress of the project which attracted curiosity and anxiety. Hence, initially, the agenda for the new leader was already set by the course of events: to gather all the spiritual and economic strength of Synarchism behind the settlers, since the scheme has been given overriding importance and the reputation of the movement itself was at a stake. Reflecting on the style of leadership of Torres Bueno, Padilla commented:

"the climate of brotherly military companionship characteristic of Abascal's cheerful and audacious leadership, gave way to a stern and plain order, an arid discipline and a strict sense of duty, and even to a melancholic mystique."<sup>28</sup>

Although at the time there was no radical and sudden transformation of the Synarchist movement, a gradual change towards moderation began under Torres Bueno. This transpired from his declarations after assuming office, in the sense that the UNS agreed with him in his programme of increasing national production.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, this was only a statement of purpose; many of Abascal's followers still occupied important positions in the movement and he himself, although secluded, still commanded some influence.

Torres Bueno undertook an extremely significant task, namely, to rid the movement of all violent elements, and adapt it to the new prevailing conditions. This was appreciated by one of his detractors:

"He assumed the leadership of the Movement at a time when all enemy forces, external and internal, conspired to ruin the Movement. He took the helm in the middle of the storm;"

who went on to say:

"Synarchism has always had the leader it has needed at each stage [...] In that hour of danger, which lasted four years, luckily we got a cool, calculating, enigmatic, unshakeable man, divested of all sentimentality and even capable of repudiating friendship when necessary."<sup>30</sup>

Torres Bueno and the secret Supreme Council of the Base, with which he aligned, worked closely to find a solution to the problem of the colonies, which they deemed imperative. No changes could be attempted as long as they did not attain total economic autonomy. Hence, an ultimatum was sent to Abascal, which, in the end, resulted in another more serious problem: his violent withdrawal from the Colony and from Synarchism, in 1944. The consequence of this action sparked off the so-called **internal problem**: the threat of a split in the movement.<sup>31</sup>

Torres Bueno decided to tackle the colonization problem by dealing with the question of selecting potential settlers, The fact that colonization represented a heavy burden on the organization, not only financially, but more important, perhaps, in terms of the sacrifices that those potential settlers would have to make, prompted him to issue a circular to all regional and municipal leaders, outlining the aspects that they should take into consideration, when choosing candidates. The most significant feature of this circular, was the emphasis placed by Torres Bueno to de-mystify colonization. He cautioned candidates:

"[...] life in our Colonies is very tough. There is only room for the most dedicated and devoted, those who have really given their lives for the service of Mexico and of Synarchism [...] It is essential not to eulogize any more the heroic and romantic aspect of colonization; instead, you must consider the great hardship in store for those who embark on this expedition."<sup>32</sup>

The colonization experience eventually appeared at the root of the breaking forces within the Organization. In our opinion, the colonization of Lower California was both a cause and the catalyst for the eruption of the crisis.

We mentioned that on 18 December 1941, Abascal, at the head of 85 families (or 490 persons), left for Lower California to establish a synarchist colony. After many incidents, the Colony of Maria Auxiliadora was founded, near the Bay of Magdalena, consisting of a few improvised huts and some land prepared for cultivation. His certainty of success rested on these bases:

- 1) the Divine Providence,
- 2) the spiritual quality of the men who accompanied him,<sup>33</sup>
- 3) the generous, enthusiastic and unlimited cooperation of all Mexicans,
- 4) the help promised by the Government (transport, jobs, equipment, etc.)

In this spirit he had set out.<sup>34</sup> Yet, there were problems from the outset. When the Government failed to deliver the railway and ship passages, Abascal ordered each Synarchist to pay for his own fare; whereupon, the already scant economies of the peasants, were significantly affected.

Once in the Colony, it soon became obvious that most of the synarchist settlers were lacking in farming experience, and those who did have it, were used to the

rich and fertile lands of the central states.<sup>35</sup>

The lack of funds soon became desperate; besides, the jobs on the construction of the federal road and the contribution from American Catholics never materialized. Abascal criticised the UNS leadership for not delivering to him the funds he continuously requested. Torres Bueno replied that the movement could not become an organization entirely oriented to maintain the colonies; instead, it had a much higher mission.

Differences arose in other areas too. Because of the very trying conditions settlers faced, many decided to turn back. Abascal could not forgive them. He treated them as cowards and deserters, and believed that they should be punished and expelled from the Movement. The leadership in Mexico City regarded them simply as disillusioned, unlucky individuals, not suitable for settler life, but they could still be loyal to the Synarchist Movement.<sup>36</sup>

Years later, a UNS internal report by the National Leader outlined the failures of the colonizing experience; he said:

"There is no doubt that, in the beginning, the colonizing endeavour awoke enthusiasm and gave impetus to Synarchism; but as time passed, the harsh truth revealed many errors that have been the cause of serious problems. One of these errors was the lack of technical and precise preparations for this venture. We left everything to enthusiasm which was not enough to withstand the hardships of the enterprise. Another error was the wrong selection of the Colonists, who were not in their majority farmers, and who gradually

took the road of desertion, followed by attacks on the Movement and its leaders".<sup>37</sup>

By the end of 1942, the differences between Abascal and the UNS leadership, and the split between radicals and moderates became public. In October, Miguel Aleman, the Interior Minister, announced that he had learned that the UNS was experiencing a deep internal crisis, which threatened to split it up.<sup>38</sup>

In December 1942, Abascal returned to Mexico City to attend the meeting of Synarchist Leaders. He had talks with Torres Bueno and the Supreme Council, in which he strongly criticized the course that was followed. They justified their action on the ground that it was the appropriate one to keep the movement alive.

Abascal's response was:

"I never expected Torres Bueno would sacrifice the dignity of the Movement, the historical truth and the purity of the doctrine. He and his people thought they could justify themselves alleging that they were right because they were pursuing the ultimate aim of maintaining the movement alive. If Synarchism had to die like a **Martyr of the truth**, it would not have been long before it reappeared and with increased strength."<sup>39</sup>

He returned to María Auxiliadora even more vexed. Hence, the leadership of the Movement and the Supreme Council feared that he might take advantage of his popularity with the masses to carry out an 'internal coup that would lead the UNS to a kind of neo-Cristero crusade.<sup>40</sup> This could only be detrimental to Synarchism



and to the Church in Mexico; thereupon, the leaders decided to warn all Synarchist units of the danger that an uprising would entail. During 1943, the split between Abascal and the leadership in Mexico City was definite, though not altogether open, yet. In July, he went to the Capital for health reasons. On the way, he came across some back issues of **El Sinarquista**, where he read, to his astonishment and horror, that in the annual celebrations of the foundation of the UNS in the city of León, the names of Hidalgo and Morelos, whom he regarded as traitors, were put at the same level of Iturbide, who was, in his view, one of Mexico's greatest heroes. His indignation increased with the series of articles on the "Good Neighbour Policy", which the paper qualified as "absolutely sincere" and not an American trick. This was indeed a very serious blow to his ego, because he had always considered the United States the perennial enemy of Mexico and; in the case of the Good Neighbour Policy, he had stated:

"I have never believed in the Good Neighbour Policy, nor will I ever do, until the United States convert to Catholicism."<sup>41</sup>

The articles in **El Sinarquista** described the United States as a country of Christian origins and culture. "Nothing of the Sort!", he cried out.

When he arrived in the Capital, he learned that one of his closest followers, Alfonso Trueba, editor of **El Sinarquista**, had been replaced, because he had refused to print pro-American articles. He also learned that Jaun

Ignacio Padilla, whom he had appointed secretary in charge of colonization, just before he left the national leadership, had been also removed.<sup>42</sup> Confrontation with the leader of the Supreme Council, Antonio Santacruz, was inevitable, since Abascal blamed him for all that was happening. He accused him, and Torres Bueno, of the downfall of Synarchism, and warned:

"From this moment I consider myself separated from the Movement; which I will not make public at present, for the good of the Colony, but if the National leaders of the UNS persist in their policy of complete submission to foreign powers [i.e. the United States], and of undermining the Colony, I will openly attack Torres Bueno and you [...]"<sup>43</sup>

After he returned to María Auxiliadora, Abascal condemned the declarations that Torres Bueno had made in December 1943, at the Fifth National Assembly of Synarchist leaders (the *Junta de los Volcanes*, so called, in derogatory terms, because it had taken place in a location near Popocateptl<sup>44</sup>). On that occasion, the UNS leader declared that Synarchism would support Pan Americanism and continental unity. To Abascal this was anathema. Still, he remained in his post at María Auxiliadora and prayed for divine intervention. However, when he learned that Torres Bueno had sent the President a message of congratulation for his three years in office,<sup>45</sup> he burst in anger and wrote to Torres Bueno accusing him of committing an act of treason.<sup>46</sup> He vowed in his *Mémoires* to have envisaged, then, a way to overthrow the National Committee and regain the leadership

by placing José Trueba Olivares as national leader.<sup>47</sup>

Conscious of the threat that Abascal represented, the Supreme Council decided to take the lead. In February 1944, they sent Gustavo Arizmendi, secretary of colonization, to Lower California to summon Abascal to Mexico City. Abascal refused to obey that order and sent Arizmendi back with the message that he was no longer compelled to obey, because he had broken with the organisation since the previous July. In March, the council sent José Valadez to replace Abascal as head of the settlement. Valadez was accompanied by Manuel Zermeño and Father Miguel Madrigal - whom it was thought could have an influence on Abascal, given his devotion, to relinquish his position at the head of the Colony.<sup>48</sup> Father Madrigal, acting on behalf of the Archbishop of Mexico and of the Church, asked him to leave the Colony and abandon everything.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, on 31 March, Abascal handed over command of María Auxiliadora to Valadez. On 9 April, 1944, he left the Colony. Abascal left María Auxiliadora convinced that his work had been undermined and that he had been ridiculed. However, he believed that by abandoning the leadership, the Colony would receive, immediately, all the necessary aid for its prosperity. He turned his anger against Torres Bueno making strong accusations and invectives. What is more, he condemned the entire movement as "just another deceit."

A few days after his arrival in Mexico City, Abascal made a transcendental declaration. Because of its

importance it is quoted at some length:

"Manuel Torres Bueno, current leader of the UNS, has not requited with honesty my attitude of reserve and discretion. Being used to lying and deceiving, Torres Bueno has continued to tell false, and even slanderous, versions of my withdrawal from Synarchism. I no longer have to hide a truth that the people must know.

1. - Last July, I came to Mexico City for a cure and to discuss certain matters of María Auxiliadora; I became fully aware that Torres Bueno and his yes-man, Salvador Narvarro, chief of information of the National Committee, told many lies, and false or unfair judgments of my conduct as the head of the settlement. I have also become aware that they could have supplied the necessary resources for the expedient success of María Auxiliadora, but they systematically withheld them, arguing that there was no money, when in fact there was.

2. - I was, equally, very upset to learn about the exoneration of Benito Juárez, at last year's León rally [...]<sup>50</sup>

3. - For these two motives, I broke with Torres Bueno at a meeting we had in late July [...]

4. - Afterwards, I reproached him, in a letter, a most shameful act: putting on the same level the Christianity of the Mexican people with the "Christianity" of the protestant United States, which he did when he was asked by foreign journalists what Synarchists meant by the words "Christian order" [...]

5. - with regard to the Colony, Torres Bueno continued to invest me with starvation, refusing me everything I asked him, so that I failed.

6. - I seriously considered resuming the national leadership of the movement, relieving Torres Bueno [...]

7. - I have become convinced, unfortunately, that lawyer Torres Bueno has corrupted the organization,

since many of its leaders are nothing but unconditional employees, without personality or mind of their own; content merely because under the policy of the lawyer they run no risk. Those below continue to die and to fall in gaol. Those above are in no danger at all. In view of this I have entirely desisted from disputing Torres Bueno his command; I would be able to count on only a few leaders.

8. - Rumour has it that I left the settlement of my own free will and for health reasons. Both things are totally false [...]

9. - It is said that Synarchism will fight Communism on whatever ground. This is a demagogic means of Torres Bueno to maintain deluded people under his rule. It is also a fantasy that perhaps Torres Bueno and his clique believe in. They believe, or pretend to do so, that when the break between the United States and Russia occurs, [the Americans] will ask of the Mexican Government the annihilation of the Left, whereupon the President will be compelled to call on Synarchism, which, then, if necessary, will take up arms [...] What is needed is that Synarchism be prepared to defeat the revolution that has been dividing Mexico for a century, long before the word Communism was heard in the Fatherland; the revolution will continue to destroy Mexico even if Communism is wiped out from Asia or Europe or the whole world. What is needed is that Synarchism reverts to tell the truth to the people and nothing but the truth. Yet, Torres Bueno will take no such action.

10. - Finally, it has been said that Synarchism will turn into a political party and that it will resist the imposition of an official party. It is very easy to boast about opposing the PRM. The difficult thing is to face the bayonets to defend the vote. If Synarchism turns into a political party, all it will be doing is playing into the hands of the "much-vaunted democracy" and the revolution. The people, in the end, as always, would have been misled. The people

should withdraw from this Synarchism which is only another deceit.

11. - I must ask for forgiveness of the Synarchists, and I do so now, for the very grave mistake I made when I appointed Torres Bueno national leader [...]<sup>51</sup>

We must stop at this point to consider the possible causes that led to the change of direction of the movement, and the adoption of moderation by the leadership.

#### IV. The Rôle of the American Clergy

Many explanations have been put forward for the causes of the change of the UNS towards moderation. Some have argued that, following the defeat of the German army at Stalingrad, the Synarchists pretended to change the exterior character of the organization, in order to join the allies. This view was held by the Left, and the Communists in particular.<sup>52</sup> Other theses sustained that the cause of the internal division was the result of American dirty tricks; arguing that the group that controlled the Supreme Council of the Base had sold itself to the American embassy, thus becoming an American instrument of propaganda for PanAmericanism, which was in tacit opposition with the idea of **Hispanidad**, the core of Synarchism. This was the opinion of the radical faction of the UNS, conveyed by Abascal in the series of articles he wrote in **Mañana** magazine;<sup>53</sup> as well as by Padilla in his book "**Sinarquismo: Contrarrevolución.**"<sup>54</sup>

Another interpretation of the new direction followed

by the UNS was given by Mario Gill in his book "Sinarquismo".<sup>55</sup> In reality, this is a modified version of the Stalingrad interpretation. Gill maintained that the UNS had been, in the early years, a thoroughly fascist organization. He claimed that, initially, the Mexican clergy interfered in the movement, and later, in 1943, unexpectedly, the Synarchist Movement came under the control of the Americal Catholic clergy and, consequently, modified its policy towards the United States and Pan-Americanism. This version was given after the Fifth National Assembly of Synarchist leaders, at the end of which, the national leader, Torres Bueno declared that there was no conflict between Pan-Americanism and Hispanidad. He also expressed his wishes to cooperate with North America in the war.<sup>56</sup>

Some weeks earlier, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen had visited Mexico to participate in a eucharistic congress. Mario Gill and *El Popular*, immediately, associated this visit with the synarchist leaders' new PanAmerican feelings. *El Popular* reported it thus:

"There is no doubt that the recent visit to Mexico of Mgr Sheen, the pro-fascist "black leader" of North American clericalism, contributed to obtain the conversion of the Mexican Synarchists to a new policy in tune with the demands of the situation of the new world."<sup>57</sup>

According to Gill, the UNS was no longer the subtle arm of the "nazi-falangist" conspiracy against Mexico; it had, now, become the instrument of "the most reactionary of Anglo-American imperialism".<sup>58</sup>

Though this interpretation was the most publicized, it contained a number of important misjudgements regarding the so called "**Junta de los Volcanes**", and the influence of Mgr Sheen. First of all, it did not take into account that the UNS had opted for moderation since 1941, when Abascal was removed from the leadership. The change of direction was the result both of the work of the American clergy (in particular, of Monsignor John O'Grady),<sup>59</sup> and of the new tone in Church-State relations, brought about by the Avila Camacho administration, and had nothing to do with Stalingrad, or the defeat of the German army. As an American analyst observed:

"Synarchism was an obstacle to inter-American cooperation, for it was not only hostile to the liberal democracy that characterized Pan American principles [...] but it also maintained a vigorous isolationism that was directly antagonistic to that united action of the American nations against the Axis [...]"

When the position of the UNS on the latter question was untenable by Mexico's declaration of war in June, 1942, the organization acquiesced in the Government's decision [...]"<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, Mgr Sheen's visit did not mark the assimilation of Synarchism by the American Catholic clergy. This view did not appreciate that the UNS was already under the control of the moderate hierarchy in Mexico; and there was a long history of close cooperation between the Mexican and American clergies, with a strong influence of the latter over the former.

At least since the time of the **Cristiada** the American



clergy had intervened, substantially, in the affairs of the Mexican Church, exerting, in particular, a moderating influence.

Hence, the "**Junta de los Volcanes**" did not signify the sudden turn in Synarchist ideology, since the organization had always been under the indirect authority of the American clergy, because of the close relationship of the hierarchies of both countries.

Gill's thesis overlooked this fact. Nor did it consider the attitude of moderation adopted by the Synarchist organization, since 1941, more perceptible in relation to domestic matters, but also showing a gradual turn in Synarchist ideas on foreign affairs. The declarations of "**los Volcanes**" were not a new and dramatic starting point, but, rather, a further step in a development process that had been taking place for many years.

This notwithstanding, American Catholic pressure intensified from 1943, particularly on **El Sinarquista**, which had very slowly changed the tempo of its anti-American attitude. Some of the members of the Supreme Council of the Base feared that the Government of the United States might request the Mexican Government to disband the organization, considering it a danger to the safety of the continent - after all, the American public had been incessantly exposed to stories about the Nazi Fifth Column.<sup>61</sup> They arranged with several American Catholic priests, that a number of the writers on **El Sinarquista** visited the United States, with the idea that

their anti-American style of writing be stopped - what Abascal called a "taming tour" (jira de amansamiento); however, there was no change of attitude on the part of Alfonso Trueba Olivares, the editor of the paper, who was expelled at the end of August 1944.<sup>62</sup>

According to the First Secretary of the American Embassy, Raleigh A. Gibson, the secret council decided, in mid-1944, that the attitude of the Synarchist Organization towards the United States had to be changed, since it was not a good one for either Mexico or the United States:

"[T]he members of the Governing Board of the Sinarquistas [Base] was split on the question of its attitude toward the United States, three members being definite in their stand that the organization should be 100 per cent Mexican that an unfriendly attitude be taken toward the United States. Salvador Abascal came from the colony in Lower California in order to argue for his position, that of an unfriendly attitude toward the United States. The Governing Board held five meetings before a definite position could be determined. The final decision of the Board was reported to a friend of the Embassy to be as follows: The salvation of Mexico is to work with the United States, without losing decorum, we have the best chance at the present time, since American Catholics are taking an interest in Mexico and our problems' [...]<sup>63</sup>

However, he could only say that this change "is believed" to be due to the work of several American Catholic priests in convincing the organization that their attitude towards the United States was not one that was good for Mexico or the United States.

## V The Removal of Abascal

### 1. The UNS, the Base and the American Embassy

At the time the United States entered the war, Abascal passed on the leadership of the Movement to Manuel Torres Bueno, and embarked on a venture that would, reputedly, bring fame to the UNS and glory to him: the colonization of Lower California. He left for the deserts of the Peninsula following in the steps of the Jesuits of the XVII and XVIII centuries and, at the same time, to build a rampart against "American imperialism". The significance of his departure was that he had been halted in his road to power, and the movement restrained, stopped and integrated into the Mexican and continental political systems.

How was the removal of Abascal carried out and how did the organization change its direction?

The conflict of the UNS with the Base had existed from the start, as the UNS grew in importance. The schism that would finally take place on 12 October 1944, had been in preparation for a very long time. It was first apparent in 1940, when Abascal replaced Zermeño as national leader. Some time later, Abascal encountered the same problem Zermeño had faced, namely, the authority of Santacruz and his advisers of the secret Supreme Council. The inevitable question raised by the existence of a dual leadership was one that would eventually lead to the collapse of the movement. The issue was one of control. How long would Synarchism (founded by the Base, but already an out-flanking organization) have to be

controlled by a group of men determined to preclude it from active political participation and to confine it to the framework of Catholic Action? The Right wing revolution, young, nationalistic and catholic-populist collided with the old conservatives.

Abascal pointed out that it was not a question of individuals:

"No, the core of the problem is ideological [...], the secret group advocated an agreement with the United States [...], I thought that our destiny was in our Hispanic culture and in the ideological battle against Yankee imperialism."<sup>64</sup>

He was not mistaken, since Antonio Santacruz was in contact with the American embassy and with Washington; his intention was to get on well with the United States.<sup>65</sup>

Santacruz told the followers of Abascal:

"With Abascal you are on the road to death and, if you persist, you are heading for revolution. Without Abascal we are going to develop an even more important movement, but without all these risks, without all this danger to you every week; we will get on well with everybody, no need to be at war with anyone, the Government and the United States. On the contrary, we must agree with the United States -- because since Pearl Harbour it is a matter of life or death -- and we must infiltrate our Government until we transform it."<sup>66</sup>

In May 1941, the movement ~~asserted~~ that PanAmericanism concealed American imperialism and reasserted its intention to create an international bloc of Hispanic-American States to oppose the United States.<sup>67</sup>

The close cooperation between the Mexican Government and the United States within the framework of continental defence, provided an opportunity to exploit the popular anti-American feeling; which it did, on 20 October, 1941, by warning of the threat of American intervention, of the American designs over California, etc. Meanwhile, Santacruz won the trust of Washington; he told the American Embassy that Abascal would be removed and indicated that a change of attitude towards the United States was imminent:

"Certain positions may have seemed unfriendly to the United States, but the leaders of the movement have manifested their firm intention to modify any policy that could come against the interests of the United States [...]"

"Far from being opposed to the program and policies of the United States [reported Gibson], there is reasonable ground for believing that the Sinarquista leaders may become one of the best points of contact with the Mexican people. They are in close touch with situations all over the country; through them we have an excellent means to reach the masses of the Mexican people. They will also provide a most useful point of contact with the leadership of the Catholic Church in Mexico".<sup>68</sup>

At the time Abascal could only have an intuition of this. Yet, he was effectively overthrown by the Base on 12 December 1941, just after Mexico conformed to the American war line. The Supreme Council had been uneasy about the direction he was giving to the movement. He talked, almost publicly, of seizing power, thereby putting himself in direct conflict with the Supreme Council, and

the Mexican and the American Governments. Abascal left without much ado. Why? According to some analysts, the intervention of Mgr Martínez was decisive.<sup>69</sup> He had long exerted great influence over Abascal (posted many years in Morelia, he was an old friend of the family). He appealed to his religious feelings and to the virtue of obedience. However, Abascal denied this. He declared:

"On this occasion it was not necessary [to call on the bishop]. I alone took the decision which I judged inevitable."<sup>70</sup>

He sustained, however, that the Americans could persuade Mgr Martínez to comply with whatever he was asked because they could threaten him with facing the consequences of divulging that had founded the secret "Liga de la O", which they claimed had never ceased to exist.

Indeed, the Americans believed, incorrectly, that Mgr Martínez had organized the secret group "Unión Popular", which they erroneously called "Liga de la O".<sup>71</sup> An American Naval Intelligence Report could not reflect more accurately the prevailing paranoia of the American services<sup>72</sup> when it fabricated the story that Archbishop Martínez:

"had formed the 'Liga de la O', a secret band of priests on Gestapo lines, to spy on and dissolve the Cristeros, an objective that was achieved. He formed a tight organization that years later, when Spain turned falangist, he could reorganize it as the base for a secret Falangist-Church Order. The 'Liga de la O' is, then, the historic base on

which the Synarchists were organized."<sup>73</sup>

In actual fact, the Church feared that the Synarchist threat could compromise the "modus vivendi". On the other hand, when Abascal contemplated rebellion, he realized that his supporters had been worked on by the Base and, thus, considered that there was great risk of shocking the militants. He believed that his defeat was temporary and thought, as he left to colonize Lower California, of coming back one day, covered in glory, to settle the score with the Supreme Council.

A major crisis was, thus, unexpectedly, avoided. The secret of the internal division was well preserved, since, until 1944, nobody found out anything. What the Synarchists learned was that their beloved leader was handing over the leadership to another militant, to embark on a heroic, patriotic and holy enterprise: the colonization of the desert.

The elimination of Abascal was made easier because the UNS did not approve of personality cult, although militants had a tendency to idolize charismatic leaders like Abascal (no leader before, or since inspired such frenzied excitement). The fact that nobody (except the leaders) knew of the Base's existence, made the move simpler. A majority decision of the council removed him from his post.<sup>74</sup> That could not have been possible but for the duality of command. In 1944, Torres Bueno, who had succeeded Abascal and endorsed the new moderate line, broke with the Base. However, it was too late by then.

The conflict had only been put off by the ousting of Abascal; when it finally erupted, the hour of the UNS had passed.

So, on 12 December, 1941 Abascal left. Two days later the press reported that the UNS intended to rally behind the Government, and give its support to the President, on condition that the country did not enter the war.<sup>75</sup>

In the opinion of the First Secretary of the American Embassy, the man who succeeded Abascal, Manuel Torres Bueno, was considered to be:

"much more aware of the importance of the international situation than Lic. Abascal, who is a fanatical catholic and probably did not take the world situation into consideration. It is felt that it will be much easier for the directors of the Sinarquista movement to control Lic. Bueno and that the relations of the organization with the Government will be improved. This will also mean greater possibility for a better understanding of the organization with the United States."<sup>76</sup>

Santacruz had gone over to the Government as early as 1938, when contacts between the two were established, and since 1941, a sort of "gentleman's agreement" existed between the two, strengthened by his excellent relations with the American ambassador, George Messersmith. His close ties with the Mexican Church hierarchy eased his way to the State Department, through the American prelates. A consideration, indeed, that the President must have weighted to defend the Synarchist colonization of Lower California against congressmen.<sup>77</sup>



"Santa Cruz is [...] a close friend of the Archbishop of Mexico, and it is understood that he keeps the Archbishop informed of the developments of the organization. It is known that the President of Mexico knows of his connection with the organization, since Santa Cruz has called on the President on several occasions, one of which, according to Santa Cruz's own statement to inform the President that he could rely on the organization's support. A report prepared by one of the investigating agencies of the Mexican Government on Sinarquism stated: One truth is evident, they love and respect the President of the Republic, and frequently repeat his political thoughts of national unity and governing for all."<sup>78</sup>

The American Embassy pointed out that the organization should be closely observed, because the sections that made it up were more prone to be won over by the "totalitarian powers". But it added that with the leaders in favour of a friendlier attitude towards the United States, it was evident that the organization could be kept under control.<sup>79</sup> In conclusion, Gibson wrote, the policy of the United States should be to keep contacts of an informal nature with the organization by the Embassy. He believed that past formal contacts over a period of some months had had a useful effect on the policies of the movement; and that through third parties of Mexican nationality, efforts should be made to promote the definite pro-United States attitude that was decided by the Secret Council of the Base, in order that the friendship of the agricultural element could be obtained for the United States. Gibson stressed the importance

that encouragement, and guidance as to policy, should be given to those American Catholic organizations and Catholic priests, like Monsignor O'Grady, who were in contact with the movement, in order that greater influence could be brought to bear on the organization; with the thought in mind that all Synarchists were lay-Roman Catholics and that perhaps one of the best links between the United States and the other American Republics, was the Faith which prevailed throughout Latin America and which had so many members in the United States.<sup>80</sup>

## 2. The UNS and the Government

The manifest strength of the Synarchist movement, the large crowds it mobilized and controlled, often served the Government to check the Left. The Base, in return, could play its rôle of pressure group, speeding up the renunciation of radical policies. The United States thus would no longer have to fear the opening of a "Mexican front".

It transpires, very clearly, from Abascal's writings that he was taken by surprise by the events. In his colonization scheme, he was counting on a constant inflow of people; yet, the UNS decided not to send any more people, which had the effect of a manpower shortage, blocking the growth of the colony and condemning it to failure; and, so, preventing him from returning to power.

In January and February 1942, the National Anti-Synarchist Committee became intensely active, forcing the President to ask the UNS if its designs were to organize Catholics on a totalitarian and anti-patriotic basis. The

reply of the UNS was categorical: it was a purely nationalist movement.<sup>81</sup>

In April 1942, the Mexican and American Governments reached an agreement on the question of oil reparations. This gave Mexico the opportunity to intensify its pro-American propaganda and to become more hostile to the Axis powers. Meanwhile, however, the economic situation of the country worsened.<sup>82</sup>

In the past, these two issues would have given the UNS the ammunition to burst forth. But, as a moderate organization, it stressed that its struggle was directed at restoring Christian Social Order, and had nothing to do with liberal democracy, Fascism and Communism.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, if the national leaders were able to restrain their press; silencing local leaders, who voiced popular grievances, proved more difficult. They attacked the United States on two related issues: they feared that the United States would drag Mexico into the war to turn Mexicans into cannon fodder. When General Cardenas was appointed Minister of War, the Synarchists thought that their fears had been confirmed, since they suspected that he had been called to make the preparations, and using his popularity with the masses, would sell them to the American army. Besides, they blamed the United States for the prevailing shortages of staple commodities (mainly, corn), which they accused the United States of hoarding.<sup>84</sup>

On 28 May 1942, Mexico entered the war and the President called for national unity. The National Anti-Synarchist Committee launched a new attack against the

UNS, which once again received a Presidential warning. The response of the UNS was published in **El Sinarquista** and came in the form of an official instruction to the militants to combat the activities of Axis sympathizers, and to keep watch on those nationals inclined to works against the democratic powers. The article emphasized the President's call to participate in the war effort and in the union of the country.<sup>85</sup>

According to Abascal, this declaration was drafted by Santacruz and the Base and did not express the general feeling of the militants who, like many other Mexicans, sympathized with the Axis, though did not necessarily understand what it meant, and were against the United States. To Santacruz, the geographical factor was definite and, therefore, there could be no safety outside the United States.

The UNS was useful to polarize and contain popular feeling. There were some frictions between the two tendencies which became more marked at the time of the "**Congreso Nacional de Labradores**", in August 1942, where the **Unión de Labradores Mexicanos** was founded.<sup>86</sup> Created by the Base, these associations were conceived to ensure the legal defence of the interests of the peasants by extricating them from the abuses of rural officials and banks. They would, for example, set up experimental farms to serve as examples for the peasants of the regions. But most important, they were to guarantee a source of credit independent from the state banks. A whole system of rural credit would thus be founded. The task for the UNS would

be to educate the peasant, to encourage him to work, to save him from the vices that afflicted the Mexican countryside; it was sufficiently strong to protect him from the agrarian reserves, and to give him confidence to start.

The official declaration stated that the Conference was:

"an act of cooperation of the UNS in the President's war effort policy, and it aims to achieve an increase in agricultural output."<sup>87</sup>

The radicals, on the other hand, spoke in terms of dispossessed peasants for whom the State:

"denies the right to have a property to work on, the means to educate themselves, and the dignity of human persons."<sup>88</sup>

These two conceptions of perceiving problems foreshadowed the future split of the Movement.

The year ended with a hardening of relations between the two factions: the resumption of anti-American propaganda was the consequence of the renewed anti-American feeling of the people, after entering the war. In November 1942, all members of Congress subscribed to the formation of the **National Anti-Nazi, Anti-Fascist Committee**" (an enlarged Anti-Synarchist Committee), to fight the fifth column in Mexico.<sup>89</sup> The Committee considered (though never proved) Synarchism a fifth column which followed in Mexico the lead of the **Falange Española** and used Nazi-Fascist tactics. It warned that its activities were a threat to the nation and were

systematically opposed to good relations between Mexico and other democracies.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, it was echoing the attacks launched by the CTM back in June 1941, when Lombardo Toledano described it as the only authentic fifth column in Mexico, and the number one enemy of the proletariat.<sup>91</sup>

The UNS riposte is summed up in a tract of the time:

"The fifth column in Mexico:  
The Communist Party manipulated by  
STALIN  
The Mexican Popular Front (PRM)  
manipulated by STALIN  
The leadership of the CTM manipulated  
by STALIN  
VICENTE LOMBARDO TOLEDANO manipulated  
by STALIN  
Stalin manipulated by HITLER

Against Communism, Nazism and  
Francoism  
enemies of the people, synarchism  
stands up resolute and  
pacificatory."<sup>92</sup>

In this climate took place, in December 1942, the Fourth National Assembly of Synarchist leaders. On this occasion, one of the speakers insulted the figure of Juarez, bringing down upon the organization strong condemnation from the Communist party, the CTM and the PRM which demanded its suppression. Torres Bueno eventually apologized.<sup>93</sup>

In early 1943, there was considerable discontent among the population arising from the difficult economic situation, attributed in part to the war effort; the fear of joining the American army; as well as for some local motives; all which went to explain the appearance of small armed groups to the south of the Capital.<sup>94</sup> Some senators

blamed the UNS and demanded that it be dissolved.<sup>95</sup> The enquiry however came to a sudden end when the UNS offered to come before the court; the accusers were careful not to take it at its word.

The question of the introduction of compulsory military service, as part of the scope of the war effort, was a more delicate matter to handle for the moderate leadership. Indeed, compulsory military service had never before existed in Mexico, and its introduction in 1942-1943 was widely opposed. In other times, perhaps, it could have been one of Synarchism's battle horses. On the other hand, it might not, because the Movement had always paid court to the army and kept good relations with it; besides, it had a favourable opinion about the principle of military service: hierarchy, discipline, nationalism, cult of the flag, were all themes close to Synarchism. The matter was discussed at the Fourth National Assembly but no clear stance was agreed.<sup>96</sup>

The national leadership thus found itself in a dilemma: the UNS, both leaders and militants, was hostile to the war and to military service, as rumours of a Mexican expeditionary force grew. At the same time, the UNS was, generally speaking on good terms with the army and did not wish to offer a pretext to its enemies. To the charge that the organization was making propaganda against military service, Torres Bueno replied that Synarchists obeyed the law, even if many disapproved of military service and an expeditionary force. This attitude had a negative effect on the Movement, since many

parents and youths expected that the UNS resisted the law; so, when they learned that Torres Bueno had declared that Synarchists would comply with it, and asked them to remain calm, many left.<sup>97</sup>

As for the activities of the anti-Synarchist, anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist committees, they were, for the most part, of an electioneering nature; 1943 being an election year.<sup>98</sup> Diaz Escobar, chairman of these committees, regularly wrote to the President informing him of the Nazi plots of which the UNS was part. Similarly, he published several articles in the United States warning Americans of the dangers of the fascist activities of the UNS. In one of these articles, he labelled the UNS a "Spanish Falange in **guaraches**". He argued that from the start there had been "a firmly established accord between the Nazi organization and the Synarchist Movement."

It seems that the ulterior motive of articles like this was to frighten the Americans; he stated that the colonization of Lower California was a German and Japanese concern; that the Trueba Olivares brothers were "two famous Spanish Falangists" (which was false); that Synarchist mobilization cost more than a quarter million pesos (which was also false); that it received financial aid from Nazis and Falangists to print **El Sinarquista** (also false), which he described as:

"one hundred per cent anti-United Nations and two hundred percent anti-United States"

His final claim was that the UNS already counted with



fifty thousand well organized members in California, and that its activities were:

"A menace to the security of the Western Hemisphere, laying it open to attack from within prepared by the Nazis with the complicity of the Phalanx."<sup>99</sup>

On the other hand, his own organization, he boasted, worked in agreement with labour unions and farm groups and numbered two million members - a figure that under any criterion was largely exaggerated.<sup>100</sup>

Meanwhile, Torres Bueno, in regular contact with the President, wisely steered the UNS according to the line prescribed by Santacruz and succeeded in containing the threats of revolt that began to take shape.<sup>101</sup>

The attitude of President Avila Camacho towards the Synarchist Movement might appear, more often than not, ambiguous. However as one observer noted:

"President Camacho, faced with divided counsels in his Cabinet, and acting in his characteristic rôle of balancer, decided to play the UNS into a position where they would be unable, or would not dare to join forces with really seditious elements such as the Spanish Falange, but would be brought to support his national unity instead. In so doing, he was electing to treat the UNS as the chief potential centre of opposition to his Administration. He was recognizing the opposition as essentially counter-revolutionary, but was banking upon its fundamental Mexicanism."<sup>102</sup>

He was proved to be right; Synarchist support for his policy never stopped, neither in 1942 nor in 1943. What

is more, the UNS toned down its anti-Americanism.<sup>103</sup> At the Fifth National Assembly, Torres Bueno ratified the pro-American turn and declared that the aims of the movement were compatible with Pan Americanism, and friendship with the United States.<sup>104</sup> He made clear that the UNS had never felt the slightest sympathy for the totalitarian régimes and that its foreign policy ideas were those of President Roosevelt.<sup>105</sup>

## **VI. The Crisis of 1943**

This state of affairs continued during 1943-1944 until it was called into question by the disclosure of the crisis between the UNS and the Base. The immediate origins of the crisis went back to July 1943, when Abascal broke with Torres Bueno and the Secret Council, in connection with the failure to provide sufficient aid to the colonies, and because he felt that Torres Bueno had increasingly deviated from the true ideology of the movement; Abascal did not forgive him for whitewashing Juarez and for speaking well of American Protestants, at the time of the annual León rally, in May 1943. The break became public in 1944 when Abascal attacked Torres Bueno for turning what had been a social and spiritual movement into a political party sold to the Mexican government and the United States. He declared that the organization was corrupt, and advised people: to withdraw from this Synarchism which was "only another deceit."<sup>106</sup>

Abascal was expelled from the UNS; but many important leaders (like José and Alfonso Trueba Olivares, Rubén

Mendoza, Rafael Dèveze, etc.) followed him. Hence, for the first time, the bulk of the organization discovered that something was rotten. Disaster was not far off; the number of militants would fall dramatically in a matter of weeks, just as it was estimated that the UNS had approximately 800,000 to one million followers.<sup>107</sup>

1. The "fatal blunder"

The commotion created by Abascal could explain the "fatal blunder"<sup>108</sup> committed by Padilla, then deputy leader, in June 1944.

Padilla, deeply shocked by Abascal's pronouncements of treason, was overzealous to clear the movement. In June there were unverifiable rumours of a general strike organized by the Left, for 5 July, in the event that a labour dispute at Puebla, was not solved. This strike, he warned was insurrectionary.<sup>109</sup>

Padilla inferred from this general strike, that the country would become a Soviet republic. The publication in "El Sinarquista" on 22 June of two articles, entitled respectively "Eso no es gobierno" and "El Sinarquismo hace un llamado al Ejército",<sup>110</sup> set off the fury of the authorities. The first of these declared that the Government was no government at all and that the President was under the influence of forces bent on sovietizing the Republic. The second was a direct appeal to the Army to stand ready in the event of a Communist coup which would be directed to transfer effective power from the Government to the Soviet Embassy.

The worst, from the point of view of the Public

Prosecutor, was the seditious tone of the call:

"We have raised an army of 500,000 soldiers who are resolved to give Mexico a Government with real authority. Can a régime be called a Government when it is presided over by a man who prefers to abandon his people to the mercy of vultures in order not to annoy the vultures?"<sup>111</sup>

President Avila Camacho had more than once irritated the Left Wing by refusing to take action against the Synarchists, however vividly they were described as "Nazis" or "Falangists"; but this time, the Synarchists had gone too far. On 22 June, a ban was imposed on Synarchist meetings in the eight States which were its stronghold and was extended within a week to all 28 States.<sup>112</sup> *El Sinarquista* was suspended and its editor indicted;<sup>113</sup> Synarchist headquarters were searched and an investigation was begun into its activities. Mass demonstrations were held by the Left to acclaim these steps; *Excelsior* declared that national safety had obliged the President to take strong measures at last.<sup>114</sup>

The Foreign Office in London described the situation thus:

"The whole affair represented a disquieting heightening of tension in Mexican politics and further imperiled such chances as remain for the President's policy of moderation."<sup>115</sup>

During the summer of 1944, the government severely repressed the UNS with unparalleled determination. It is not clear why the Government decided to act with such resolve; yet, it is possible that it had done so to take

advantage of the strife within the organization. On the other hand, it could have been a manoeuvre to avoid the embarrassment that a general strike would connote for the government. In any case, the immediate cause was the publication of those articles.

As for the publication of the two articles, there are two possible explanations. The one advanced by the sympathizers of Synarchism stated that it had been an unwise act, lacking in precision and foresight in what it said; but it was done in good faith, "it was God's will and we face the consequences trusting in his Providence."<sup>116</sup> Shortly before, the Supreme Council had assured Avila Camacho that the UNS would cooperate with him. If this interpretation is right, it is possible that when the articles were printed, the President could only have concluded that the moderate leadership was losing control of the organization and, therefore, he decided to curb it.<sup>117</sup>

The other interpretation considered the whole affair as part of a general offensive of the moderate elements of the organization to counter the charges imputed by Abascal, that it had become subservient to Avila Camacho. This was the opinion of Abascal himself. He argued that Torres Bueno and Padilla thought that the time had come to prove Abascal wrong. According to Abascal, Padilla was a courageous but naïve man. He committed a blunder. Yet, as he observed, Padilla took all the risks, while Torres Bueno, if everything went right, would take all the credit; if it did not, he had prepared an alibi, whereby

Padilla would appear as the sole culprit. Torres Bueno had, in effect, gone away from the Capital, and in his absence and without his knowledge, as he later said, and against his express orders, Padilla launched his call.

The call was not addressed specifically or primarily to the Catholic and anti-communist people; instead, it was addressed to the Federal Army, which was, in the opinion of Abascal and other Synarchists, "atheistic, supportive of the government (gobiernista), Masonic, revolutionary and communistic". Abascal blamed Padilla and his colleagues for believing that their call would find favour with the Government and the Army, who would immediately invite the Synarchists to fight Communism together.<sup>118</sup>

Abascal was aware that he could not count with the Army since:

"The Army, created by the Revolution and in the Revolution and nurtured by atheism, cannot stop being revolutionary. It can come into conflict for material interests, but never in defence of an ideal [...]

All the officers are of the revolutionary ideology, totally unable to understand us, least of all to expose themselves for an ideal that they knew would not obtain the approval of the United States [...]

Padilla made a terrible mistake when he appealed to the army to save Mexico from a communist coup d'Etat that he believe was imminent, because a communist coup d'Etat has already been made in Mexico since the triumph of the Reform in 1867 [...]"<sup>119</sup>

Nevertheless, the articles must not be taken in isolation, as a sudden outburst; on the contrary, they

were part of a campaign that "El Sinarquista" had started at least three months before, and since then, almost every issue carried a warning of the imminent communist takeover. In April it had revealed:

"Every day it becomes more clear that there is a communist plan to seize power in Mexico through a coup d'Etat"<sup>120</sup>

In the same month, Padilla wrote an editorial denouncing the "incongruities of the President", where he accused him of asking the peasants for their support in his battle for production, while, at the same time, he allowed the presence of the reservists to continue:

"The farmers could not listen to the President. More significant than his message was the presence, throughout the Mexican countryside, of the armed reserves, with their latent revolutionary hate. At the same time that the wireless was transmitting the appeal of the Government to produce, it informed the Republic of the assassinations and violent acts committed by the reserves in the states of Guerrero and Michoacan. The Government, however, did not do anything to restore law and order, to bring back confidence and peace [...]

"For a very long time, real farmers have been asking for the disband of the reserves; this is ineluctable if the pacification of the countryside and the thriving of our agriculture are really intended. Now, on the occasion of the President's production programme, the campaign has been kept up and redoubled. Nobody listens to us. Except the Reds, because they have deeply resented it, since it is in the reserves that they find the best elements for their agitation and crime, as well as the best support for the day when they attempt their Communist Revolution.

That is why they have yelled and protested. If the reserves were disarmed, their hopes would die. The Government, meanwhile, remains silent and refuses to intervene.

"Is this an attitude congruous with the objectives expressed by the Government? [...] The people genuinely want to produce. We, Synarchists, genuinely want to produce. The only lacking is the sincerity of our Government, so that our intention turns into concrete acts, beneficial to Mexico."<sup>121</sup>

The matter of the two articles of 22 June, came before the Public Prosecutor who indicted Padilla and banned **El Sinarquista**. The charges were abuse to the President, breach of the peace, violation of the law of the press, and treason. Padilla testified on 29 June. He stated that his motive had been to avert the threat of a red revolution, by pressing the President and the army to intervene. He cited the recent cases of Guatemala and El Salvador.<sup>122</sup> On 5 July, the Public Prosecutor denounced Synarchism as a mixture of "Spanish and Italian fascism, of 'Jonsismo' of Ledesma, and of traditionalism of Vázquez de Mella."<sup>123</sup> The UNS was broken up, its paper banned, its archives seized, and some of its leading officials taken into custody.

In the ensuing days there were a number of public demonstrations in support of the Government's decision, the most important of which took place on 9 July, and it involved hundreds of members of the official labour and peasant organizations.<sup>124</sup> The President also received the support of many quarters: Masonic lodges, unions, political organizations, etc., which demanded the definite



suppression of the UNS and of the PAN, which they accused of being Falangist and a front for clerical intervention:

"This Masonic Lodge congratulates you for your patriotic and energetic dispositions [...] which redound to the suppression of the tendentious campaign that the Synarchist Party [sic] and National Action have been developing to discredit the government of the Mexican Revolution [...] and aimed at agitating the Mexican people [by] fanatic elements of the Catholic clergy, manipulated by political elements cast aside for their unscrupulous conduct in former administrations [...]"<sup>125</sup>

The British Legion in Mexico assessed the situation of the UNS as the result of a press campaign that originated in the United States arising from what turned out to be an inaccurate official report;

"Early in the year a press campaign was begun in the United States against the Synarchist Movement in Mexico on the ground that it was Fascist-inspired and directed by the Roman Church. There were good reasons for thinking that these attacks were based on a supercharged but inaccurate report of the United States office of Strategic Services housed in the embassy. The Mexican press followed the scent, and something like a heresy hunt began at a most convenient moment for those in and out of the Mexican Government who were making fortunes on the various black markets, and were only too willing that public attention should be diverted away from their activities. Later in the year the diplomatic personnel of the embassy queried many portions of the above-mentioned report, but in the meantime the Public Prosecutor had banned all synarchist meetings and had taken action against their newspaper.

Possibly by way of riposte, the Archbishop of Mexico opened in

November a counter-campaign against Protestantism, which had some unfortunate but unpublished results [...]"<sup>126</sup>

The internal crisis of the Synarchist Movement and the crisis between the UNS and the Government, hastened that between the UNS and the Secret Council of the Base. The crucial issue was what kind of UNS they each wanted, what its purpose should be, and whether or not it should seize power. Santacruz and the Base wanted to limit the rôle of the organization to one of a pressure group, similar to Catholic Action. Torres Bueno and the majority of the leaders, disconcerted by Abascal's statements, did not intend to stand about, because the bulk of the militants was uneasy and impatient.

By mid-1944, the UNS was submerged in utter confusion. Many of its most popular leaders had broken with the Organization, and remained bitter about it. Week after week, Abascal attacked Torres Bueno and the leaders of the Supreme Council. He accused them of "lying and of anti-Christian cowardliness"; and averred that the UNS was neither national, nor a union, nor even Synarchist.<sup>127</sup> Torres Bueno was unable to refute the charges raised by Abascal, since "El Sinarquista" had been banned and its correspondence blocked.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, the Government ban on Synarchist meetings represented a serious obstacle for the recovery and re-strengthening of the organization, and for stopping its fragmentation.<sup>129</sup>

In 1944, several members of the radical faction attempted an internal coup. Early in November, a group of

dissidents, calling themselves "abascalistas," attended a meeting at the Synarchist headquarters, where they accused Torres Bueno and the acting leaders of the organization. They maintained that he had been responsible for the division of the UNS, by expelling and slandering Abascal; that he had shown lack of courage in resisting the recent Government repression; that he destroyed the most important work the UNS had undertaken: its colonies; and, lastly that he had embezzled 20,000 pesos, which he used to bribe some regional leaders to back him in his conflict against Abascal. They argued that they were the representatives of the "supreme council of the National Synarchist Union", and that, as such, they were sacking him. Since he refused to go, they accused him of revolt.<sup>130</sup> This attempt to be recognized as the legitimate authority of the UNS was instantly rejected as false by Torres Bueno's supporters.<sup>131</sup>

The rebels were astounded to learn that Abascal had declared that he would not back the coup - which could only succeed if he led it, because of his extreme popularity among some of the leaders and the majority of the militants, and which would help to overcome the strong pressure exerted by the obedience with which they had been pervaded. Instead, his religious devotion prevailed and he refused to disobey the official hierarchy of the Church which, at the time, supported Torres Bueno. He stated:

"The best we can do is not to get involved with it [the UNS], nor with any public activity, because it is better to devote ourselves, exclusively, to Catholic action, so as

to put ourselves and the others, under the orders of the hierarchy of the Church."<sup>132</sup>

Therefore, during 1944, the Synarchist Movement suffered a severe split between radicals and moderates which was made worse by the repression of the Government. The consequences were catastrophic. At the end of the year, it was evident that the UNS had significantly lost in strength and fighting spirit; its leaders no longer enjoyed prestige and the organization no longer carried influence over the masses.<sup>133</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> On Avila Camacho's "national unity", see: R.A. Humphreys, **Latin America in the Second World War**, Vol.II, 1942-1945, London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1982, pp.57-58.

<sup>2</sup> Centro de Estudios Internacionales, **Lecturas de Política Mexicana**, México, Colegio de México, 1977, p.79

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Ledit, **Le Front des Pauvres**, Montréal, Fides, 1954, p.263.

<sup>4</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Lázaro Cárdenas, Presidente Comunista", **La Hoja de Combate**, 12 September 1987, No. 240 p.14.

<sup>5</sup> Ledit, op. cit., p.261.

<sup>6</sup> Salvador Abascal, **Mis recuerdos y Colonia María Auxiliadora**, México, Tradición, 1980, p.289; for a report of the activities of Abascal in the peninsula, see: Crl Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada to J. Jesús González Gallo, Mexicali, 21 August 1941, in **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 703/144.

<sup>7</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 18 September 1941.

<sup>8</sup> He presented the project to the President in these terms:

"I propose a plan of immediate cooperation whereby I undertake to found, in the short term, a settlement in the desert of Lower California with thousands of Synarchist families, which will cultivate the land, build the roads and create new industries, and will not entail an expenditure to the federal government, except for the roads. Synarchism can do it, because it relies on a powerful mystique and on the sympathy of all the people to accomplish this exploit."

(Abascal to President Avila Camacho, México, 2 September, 1941, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.544.61/39)

<sup>9</sup> Avila Camacho to Abascal, 11 September, 1941, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Folio No. 53576; Abascal, *ibid.*, p.342

<sup>10</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", **Mañana**, No.41, 10 June, 1944, p.46

<sup>11</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo" *Mañana*, No.45, 8 July, p.64; Juan Ignacio Padilla, *Sinarquismo-Contrarrevolución*, México, Editorial Polis, 1948, p.227.

<sup>12</sup> Secretaría de Colonización, Boletín para la Prensa, México, 21 December 1941, I.N.A.H. Serie UNS, microfilm No.101 [12.2.04].

<sup>13</sup> *Novedades*, 16 October, 1941; *Excelsior*, 29 October, 1941; and, Abascal, *Mañana*, No. 41, loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Salvador Abascal to Avila Camacho, Mexico, 15 November, 1941, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.544.61/39, Folio No. 60295.

<sup>15</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No.42, 17 June, 1944, p.53.

<sup>16</sup> On the colonization of Sonora see: Juan Ignacio Padilla to Jesús Pérez Acosta, Mexico, 29 September 1941, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.101 [12.2.04].

<sup>17</sup> Nathan L. Whetten, *Rural Mexico*, University of Chicago Press, p.514; Abascal, *Mañana*, No. 42, loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Abascal, *Mañana*, No.41, p.44.

<sup>19</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No. 38, 20 May, 1944, p.33.

<sup>20</sup> Abascal, *Mañana*, No.38, p.34.

<sup>21</sup> Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op. cit., pp.435, 455.

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Velasco Gil, "El nuevo moisés. La colonia sinarquista en Baja California," *Mañana*, No.31, 1 April, 1944, p.39.

<sup>23</sup> Salvador Abascal, *Mañana*, No.38, p.33. He later justified this view in his Mémoires:

"Everybody knew, especially the expeditionaries, that this was not an essentially economic venture, because if it had been so, a good place would have been chosen in Veracruz, or somewhere else, and not in Lower California. The expeditionaries also knew, with the rest of the Synarchists, that they were going to the Peninsula to never return, to stay there to live until they die, because that is the only way to colonize a desert country; and that they were going as soldiers, who had wilfully volunteered and joined up, but as true soldiers of a patriotic Movement in an

eminently patriotic enterprise, which they could not renounce, on penalty of being automatically expelled from the Movement."

(Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op.cit., p.445).

<sup>24</sup> Abascal, *Mañana*, No.4, p.46.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Acta Constitutiva del Comité Nacional Antisinarquista y en defensa de la Democracia", Mexico, 30 November, 1941; Harold E. Davis, "The enigma of Mexican Sinarquism", *Free World*, 5 May, 1943, p.415.

<sup>27</sup> Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op.cit., p.309.

<sup>28</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.259.

<sup>29</sup> Torres Bueno made the following statement:

"Lic. Salvador Abascal turned over to me the direction of the U.N.S., as he will leave shortly to organize the colonization of Lower California. I believe it is necessary for me to state that the National Synarchist Union will remain away from all political struggle, and will continue its task of organizing and educating the Mexican people on a purely civil basis. As regards the international situation, the President has already made known his policy. Synarchism, which represents the essential and authentic elements of the Nation, is with General Avila Camacho in his programme of increasing national production, at the same time fostering the moral and material forces on which Mexico's sovereignty is based."  
(*Excelsior*, 13 December 1941.)

<sup>30</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.257.

<sup>31</sup> Padilla to Abascal, 5 August, 1942; Abascal to Padilla, 9 August and 10 October, 1942, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, Rollo No.63 [12.1.221].

<sup>32</sup> J.I. Padilla (Secretary of Colonization) and Manuel Torres Bueno (National leader), to the regional and Municipal leaders of the Movement and the Colonization Secretaries, U.N.S. National Committee, Circular No. 38, Secretaría de Colonización, Mexico, 12 February 1942, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, Rollo No.55 [12.1.14].

<sup>33</sup> Abascal once said:

"I had believed that whoever called himself Synarchist, was a soldier through and through, incapable of cowardliness, strong to bear suffering, slave of his word and very nearly a saint;" (*Mis Recuerdos*, op.cit., p.466; see also Padilla, op.cit., p.227).

<sup>34</sup> A popular song (corrido) written by a worker for the occasion echoed this feeling:

"Madre me voy a la California,  
vengo a pedirte tu santa bendición:  
Lucharé por que sea de mi Patria  
lo que produzca aquel rico girón [...]"

Esas tus tierras, hoy tristes y desiertas,  
convertiremos en un hermoso edén:  
por nuestro esfuerzo serás, ¡oh California!,  
de nuestra Patria requisísimo vergel.

¡Y plantaremos con júbilo indecible,  
en tus alturas, por siempre y con amor,  
la Cruz de Cristo, la eterna, la invencible,  
y de Iturbide la Enseña Tricolor! (Abascal,  
*Mañana*, No.46, 15 July, 1944, pp.53-54).

<sup>35</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.231.

<sup>36</sup> Abascal. "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No.52, 26 August, 1944, p.49, deals with this controversy; see also, Padilla, op.cit., pp.231, 235.

<sup>37</sup> Gildardo González Sánchez, *Informe del Jefe Nacional, 1946*, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.114 [12.2.17], p.3.

<sup>38</sup> *Tiempo*, 30 October 1942, p.8; *El Sinarquista*, 29 October 1942.

<sup>39</sup> Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No.55, 16 September, 1944, p.55.

<sup>40</sup> González Sánchez, *Informe...*, op.cit., p.3.

<sup>41</sup> Abascal, *Mañana*, No.38, loc. cit.; Padilla, op.cit., p.252.

<sup>42</sup> Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, 29 July, 1944, p.52.

<sup>43</sup> Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No.56, 16 September, 1944, p.57.

<sup>44</sup> Gill, *Sinarquismo*, op.cit., p.218.



<sup>45</sup> The message read:

"H.E. The President of the Republic: we congratulate you on your third year in office and regret the insufficiency of sincere collaborators with whose assistance you could have completely fulfilled the programme that you enunciated when you assumed the Executive office promising to govern for all. One of the greatest hopes to which you aspired, national unity, is threatened by the futuristic agitations, which undermine your policy and frustrate your intentions. Mister President, we still expect that the ideals you pursue and that you have often expressed, will come true during the remaining three years of your mandate. - National Synarchist Union." (Torres Bueno to Avila Camacho, México, 1 December 1943, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544. 61/39-I and reprinted in *El Sinarquista*, 9 December 1943).

<sup>46</sup> 1943: Abascal wrote to Torres Bueno, on 23 December

Sr. Lic. don Manuel Torres Bueno. Mexico. - I cannot suppress my indignation about the "Message to the President" published in the paper [El Sinarquista] on the 9th of this month: it suggests either remarkable blindness or an ignominious policy, for its obsequiousness, and extremely dishonourable for its deceitfulness. And both these things have disqualified you to lead a Movement that was a Heroic Movement because it was built with blood and gaols, gladly endured because of an intimate love of the Truth.

I regret that with that shameful act you commemorate the second year of your promotion to the National Leadership promotion which has been the gravest error of my life. Religion, Union, Independence" (Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op.cit., p.652).

<sup>47</sup> "My plan was to resist [being removed from the Colony] and to wait for the next national meeting of leaders to appear in it and convince the assembly of the absolute necessity to replace the National Committee and to appoint, by a select group, a new leader - I would propose Trueba Olivares - that would transform the constitution and the functioning of the UNS so as to provide it with perfect organic unity - eliminating, at a stroke, the "ratones" [members of the secret Supreme Council of the Base] and set up a supreme leadership, not autocratic or tyrannical and irresponsible, but with all the duties of a government "of authority", which is for the attainment of the Common Good." (Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op. cit., p.679).

<sup>48</sup> Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No. 57, 30 September 1944, p.62.

<sup>49</sup> Abascal was asked to sign a written statement relinquishing any temporal and material right over the Colony; this document is reproduced in his: *Mis recuerdos*, op.cit., pp.682-683.

<sup>50</sup> For a comprehensive exposition of Abascal's views on Juárez, see his: *Juárez Marxista, 1848-1872*, México, Editorial Tradición, 1984.

<sup>51</sup> *Novedades*, 17 May, 1944.

<sup>52</sup> Vicente Fuentes Díaz, "¿Hacia dónde marcha la reacción? Los Conservadores cambian de táctica, "El Popular, 17 January 1944.

<sup>53</sup> Salvador Abascal, "La historia del sinarquismo y Apuntes sobre la fundación de María Auxiliadora en la Baja California", *Mañana* (27 may 1943-28 October 1944.)

<sup>54</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla, *Sinarquismo: Contrarrevolución*, México, Editorial Polis, 1948.

<sup>55</sup> Mario Gill, *Sinarquismo: su origen, su esencia, su misión*, México, 3<sup>a</sup> Edición, 1948.

<sup>56</sup> *Novedades*, 11 December, 1943.

<sup>57</sup> *El Popular*, 14 December, 1943; Frank Jellinek, "Watch Mexico", *The Nation*, 25 March, 1944, Vol. CLVIII, p.364.

<sup>58</sup> Gill, **Sinarquismo**, op.cit., pp.154, 221; see also Allan Chase: **Falange. The Axis Secret Army in the Americas**, New York, Putnam, 1943, pp.167-168.

<sup>59</sup> Gibson to Secretary of State, "Memorandum on the Unión Nacional Sinarquista of Mexico", Mexico, 2 December 1941, **NAW**, RG No.226, O.S.S., No.8902, paper No.14456.

<sup>60</sup> A. Whittaker (ed.), **Inter American Affairs 1942**, Annual Survey No.2, New York, Columbia University Press, 1943, pp.28-29.

<sup>61</sup> Allan Chase, op.cit., pp.207-209; Robert Strauss-Hupé, **Axis America**, New York, Putnam, 1941, pp.185, 204-208; Alton Frye, **Nazi Germany and the American Hemisphere**, new Haven Yale university press, 1967, pp.130, 174-175; Juan de Valdivia: "The Technique of Nazi Penetration in Latin America," **Free World**, Vol.I, December 1941, pp.287-294; Dorothy Thompson "Franco, New Axis Chief", **The Nation**, 5 February, 1944, Vol. CLVIII, pp. 158-160; Louis de Jong, "The Americas in Alarm," in: **The German Fifth Column in the Second World War**, London Routledge and Kegan, 1956, pp.104-120.

<sup>62</sup> Gibson to Secretary of State, "Review of the Report of the Office of Strategic Services on the Sinarquista Movement in Mexico", Mexico, 19 June 1944, paper No.18292, in Hadow to FO, Washington, 14 December 1944, FO 371/44478 [AN 56/20/26], p.11; confirmed by Abascal, in **Mis Recuerdos**, op.cit., p.620.

<sup>63</sup> Gibson to Secretary of State, "Review ..." loc. cit.

<sup>64</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 6 November, 1941.

<sup>65</sup> This was confirmed by the First Secretary of the American Embassy in Mexico: Gibson to Secretary of State, "Report on Sinarquismo, as prepared by Monsignor John O'Grady", Mexico, 18 November 1941, **NAW**, RG No.266, O.S.S., No. 9544, paper No. 14324, p.9

<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op.cit., p.431.

<sup>67</sup> Latin American Memoranda, 2nd Series No.42, 8 May 1944 FO 371/38312, p.3

<sup>68</sup> Gibson to Secretary of State, "Report on Sinarquismo", loc. cit.

<sup>69</sup> Jean Meyer, **Le Sinarquisme: un Fascisme Mexicain? 1937-1947**, Paris, Hachette, 1977, p.73.

<sup>70</sup> Abascal, **mis Tecuerdos**, op.cit., p.433.

<sup>71</sup> "Liga de la O" is a corruption of the "Unión Popular", or, simply, the "U," founded by Anacleto González Flores, in 1925. For a study of the "U" see:

Anacleto Gonzalez flores, **El Plebiscito de los Mártires**, n.p, 1939; A. Gómez Robledo, **Anacleto Gonzáles Flores. El Maestro**. Mexico, 2<sup>a</sup> edición, 1947; "Anacleto González Flores," in **New Catholic Encyclopedia**, Mc Graw Hill, 1967, Vol. VI: 611-612.

<sup>72</sup> The Foreign Office commented that American intelligence agencies, O.S.S. in particular, "too often believe what they want to believe and they see sinister forces everywhere". This remark is in Harrow to FO, Washington, D.C., 14 December 1944 FO 371/44478 [AN 56/200/26].

<sup>73</sup> Naval Intelligence Office, Washington, D.C., O.M.I. Confidential Circular, 15 October, 1941, quoted in Abascal, **Mis Recrerdos**, op.cit., p.415.

<sup>74</sup> Ledit, op.cit., p.248.

<sup>75</sup> **Excelsior**, 14 December 1941.

<sup>76</sup> R.A. Gibson to Secretary of State, No.18292, in Harlow to Foreign Office, loc. cit., p.6.

<sup>77</sup> **El Nacional**, 21 October, 1941.

<sup>78</sup> Gibson to Secretary of State, No.18292, in Harlow to Foreign Office loc. cit., p.6.

<sup>79</sup> Gibson to Secretary of State, N<sup>o</sup> 8902, loc. cit., p.2.

<sup>80</sup> Gibson to Secretary of State, No.18292, in Harlow to Foreign Office, loc. cit., p.15.

<sup>81</sup> Ing. Alfredo Felix Díaz E. **Cómo combatir al Nazifascismo en México**, México, Imprenta de la Cámara de Diputados, 1942; Comité Nacional Anti-Sinarquista to President Avila Camacho, México, 2 March, 1942, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.550/9.

<sup>82</sup> Howard Cline, "Mexico: a Maturing Democracy", **Current History**, March, 1953, p.138; Blanca Torres, **Hacia la utopia industrial**, México, El Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo 1940-1952), 1984, p.270.

<sup>83</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 23 May, 1942.

<sup>84</sup> See for instance the report of the Municipal President of Siltepec, Chiapas, notifying that the UNS was distributing anti-American tracts telling the population that the United States, instead of protecting it as the Government and the media claimed, were in fact depriving Mexicans of foodstuffs. Lecadio Gonzalez to President Avila Camacho, Siltepec, Chiapas, 26 December, 1942, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/35, Folio No. 249.

<sup>85</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 15 July 1942

<sup>86</sup> Manuel Torres Bueno to the Regional Leaders of the Movement, "Convocatoria", Mexico, 21 August, 1942, Circular No.3, I.N.A.H., Serie U.N.S., microfilm No.55 [12.1.14].

<sup>87</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 20 August, 1942; U.N.S. Congreso D.F., 18 August, 1942, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 433/316.

<sup>88</sup> For the official view see: Ledit, p.246: and Manuel Torres Bueno to Presidencia de la República, Secretaría Particular, Mexico, August 1942, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expedient No. 433/316, Folio No.35668; for the radical view: Orden, August, 1942, No.3, p.3; Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op.cit., p.552.

<sup>89</sup> **Acta Constitutiva del Comité Nacional Anti-Nazifascista y en Defensa de la Democracia del Primer Distrito Electoral**, México, 15 June 1942, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho Expediente No.550/44-20-8; Vicente Fuentes Díaz, "El Sinarquismo, Edición Chichimeca del Fascismo," *El Popular*, 15 September, 1942; and "Sinarquismo. La Careta 'Anticomunista'," *El Popular*, 3 November, 1942; "El Sinarquismo y la Salud de la Patria", Pamphlet, n.p., n.s.

<sup>90</sup> **Acta Constitutiva del Comité Nacional Antisinarquista y en Defensa de la Demoracia**, Mexico, 30 November 1941. Betty Kirk, "Mexico's 'Social Justice' Party", *The Nation*, 12 June, 1943, Vol. CLIV, p.827.

<sup>91</sup> Gastón A. Hernández Enríquez y Armando Rojas Trujillo, **Manuel Avila Camacho, Biografía de un revolucionario con historia**, México, Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, Vol.I, 1986, p.234.

<sup>92</sup> Copy of tract in I.N.A.H., Serie U.N.S., microfilm No.36 [11.7.36].

<sup>93</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 24 December 1943.

<sup>94</sup> Fernando Casas Alamán to Jesús González Gallo, México, 24 December 1942; and, General Leobardo C. Ruíz to Comandante 25/a Zona Militar (Puebla), México, 21 September 1943, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.559.1/49. In some cases the rebel groups caused some deaths, although they were attributed to Synarchists, there was evidence that they were former almanistas; this report is in Comité Regional de la 7 Zona de la Liga de Comunidades Agrarias del Estado de Zacatecas to President Avila Camacho, Expediente No.545.2/14.31. See also: Luis Median, **Del cardenismo al avilacamachismo**, México, El Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo 1940-1952), 1978, pp.213-216.

<sup>95</sup> Ing. Alfredo Felix Díaz Escobar to President Avila Camacho, Mexico, 30 December, 1942, Expediente No.542.1/783; and México, 8 March, 1943, Expediente No. 559.1/49; AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho.

<sup>96</sup> Abascal was in favour of taking advantage of military service, while Torres Bueno thought Synarchists should avoid it, *Mis Recuerdos*, op.cit., p.593.

<sup>97</sup> Gildardo González Sánchez, *Informe del Jefe Nacional*, 1946, op.cit., p.2.

<sup>98</sup> P.R.M. 33 meses al servicio de la Revolución. Ciclo histórico del Presidente Manuel Avila Camacho y del P.R.M., 1940-1943, México, P.R.M., D.P.P., 1943, pp.89-91.

<sup>99</sup> Alfred F. Díaz Escobar, "The Spread of Synarchism", *The Nation*, vol. CLVI, 3 April, 1943, p.487; and *New York Times*, 23 March 1943.

<sup>100</sup> *New York Times*, loc.cit.

<sup>101</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.262.

<sup>102</sup> Davis, "The Enigma of Mexican Synarchism", op.cit, p.414; Luis Medina, op.cit., p.134.

<sup>103</sup> *El Sinarquista*, 9 December, 1943 (Message of congratulation to President Avila Camacho on the third year of his administration).

<sup>104</sup> U.N.S., Comité Nacional, V Asamblea de jefes, 7 December 1943, I.N.A.H. Serie UNS, microfilm No.68 [12.1.27].

<sup>105</sup> *El Sinarquista* and *Novedades*, 23 December, 1943; Abascal, *Mis recuerdos*, op.cit., p.652.

<sup>106</sup> *Novedades*, 17 May 1944.

<sup>107</sup> Manuel Torres Bueno, "Hechos y causa que motivaron un cambio en la Jerarquía Secreta de la O.C.A.", México, December 1941, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS. Microfilm No.115 [12.3.18], pp.9-10.

<sup>108</sup> The qualification comes from the Catholic weekly *America* of 29 August 1944.

<sup>109</sup> Ledit, op. cit., pp.258-259.

<sup>110</sup> "El Sinarquismo hace un llamado al ejército," and "Esto no es gobierno," *El Sinarquista*, 22 June, 1944.

<sup>111</sup> "Esto no es Gobierno", *El Sinarquista*, 22 June 1944.

<sup>112</sup> *El Popular*, 28 June, 1944.

<sup>113</sup> Procuraduría General de la República, México, 28 June 1944, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 644.61/39.

<sup>114</sup> **Excelsior**, 24 June, 1944.

<sup>115</sup> "Disquiet in Mexico," Latin American Memoranda, 2nd Series No.52, 25 September, 1944, FO 371/38312.

<sup>116</sup> González Sánchez, **Informe ...**, op. cit., p.4.

<sup>117</sup> Ledit, op.cit., p.258; Padilla, p.278. et seq., supported this version.

<sup>118</sup> Interview H.H. García de León/Abascal, México, 18 August, 1987.

<sup>119</sup> Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op.cit., p. 279.

<sup>120</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 6 April, 1943.

<sup>121</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla, "Incongruencias del Presidente", San Luis Potosí, 22 April, 1943; this article is reproduced in: AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.55.1/28.

<sup>122</sup> Padilla, op.cit., pp. 277-278.

<sup>123</sup> Padilla, op.cit., pp.294-295; **El Nacional**, 23 June 1944; Procurador General to Torres Bueno, Mexico, 28 June 1944; 10 July 1944; and, 24 July 1944, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.544.61/39.

<sup>124</sup> **El Nacional**, 10 July 1944.

<sup>125</sup> Logia "Guillermo Aguirre A." No. 4 to President Avila Camacho, Chihuahua, 28 July, 1944, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente no. 544.61/39 Legajo no.5, Folio No.20357; see also: C.N.O.P. to President Avila Camacho, México, 24 June, 1944, Expediente no.544.61/39 Legajo No. 14; Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista "Los Dorados" to President Avila Camacho, Mexico, 28 June, 1944, Expediente No.544.61/39, Legajo no.11.

<sup>126</sup> Annual Report on Mexico for 1944, FO 371 4478 [AN/47926/26].

<sup>127</sup> Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", **Mañana**, No.50, 12 August 1944, p.34.

<sup>128</sup> Torres Bueno to President Avila Camacho, Mexico, 21 August, 1944, AGN, Ramo presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/39, Legajo No. 5, Folio No.24484; Ledit, op.cit., p.259.

<sup>129</sup> U.N.S., "Hechos y causas que ...", op.cit., p.11;  
and, U.N.S., Comité Nacional, Departamento Legal, México,  
24 June, 1944, INAH, Serie UNS, microfilm No.110 [12.2.13].

<sup>130</sup> **El Universal**, 13 November, 1944.

<sup>131</sup> **Novedades**, 14 November, 1944.

<sup>132</sup> **El Universal**, 15 November, 1944.

<sup>133</sup> **Tiempo**, 29 December, 1944, p.3.



## CHAPTER VI

### DIVISION IN THE UNS

#### **I. The Collapse of the UNS**

In April 1944, Abascal had returned to Mexico City; in May, he openly denounced the collusion between the UNS leaders, the Base, the Mexican Government and the American Embassy. Was this a prelude to an attempt on his part to recapture the leadership of the UNS? The Base and the Church, and hence the Government, believed that he was ready to seize power and to exercise it; and that he viewed non-violence merely as a tactical means.

From the beginning of the Movement, many militants had called for precise objectives, otherwise they might leave it.<sup>1</sup> In 1942, after Abascal was removed, some became impatient and demanded to make use of the strength acquired; two years later, even the collaborators of the Base, like Torres Bueno, believed that the UNS should become more politically active, and indeed form a political party.

The Base replied that both the radicalism of Abascal and the political orientation of Torres Bueno would lead to massacre or to failure, because the Government was invincible, since it counted with the support of the United States and the army. The course should therefore continue to be that of working within the law, infiltrating and converting.

The "fatal blunder" of June 1944 had provided the Government with a pretext to finish off the Synarchist

organization, before Abascal could regain it. The danger was very real, as they perceived it, since Padilla, second in command in the Movement at the time, had disobeyed orders, showing that the UNS could elude the Base, changing both its strategy and objectives.

**El Sinarquista** had been suspended and demonstrations were banned; meanwhile Abascal multiplied his assaults in the national press. The UNS was unable to retaliate and to stop the outflow of members. It was not until after the radical leaders had been removed that Torres Bueno broke off with the Base, and sought to stop desertions through political commitment and rediscovered aggressiveness against the Government and the United States.

## **II. The Split between the UNS and the Base, 1945**

The disintegration of the UNS did not end with the removal of Abascal and the radicals from the organization, in 1944. The following year, yet another schism arose which, in some respects, was more serious than the previous one. Until then, the secret leadership of the Synarchist Movement, the Supreme Council of the Base, had been able to keep its control over the organization, through the obedience that the visible leaders paid to it. Despite the great difficulty it had in controlling Abascal in 1941, in the end, he was persuaded, after some gambit, to step down and hand over the leadership to Torres Bueno, who seemed more docile. However, in 1945, the Supreme Council was to regret this decision, because he brazenly

disobeyed it and set himself up as the sole leader of the organization, breaking off with the Base.

The origins of this rupture went back to the start of 1944, when the leadership of the movement was in chaos, after the scathing attacks of Abascal against Torres Bueno. As a result, Torres Bueno decided to submit his resignation on 5 March 1944. This was neither accepted nor rejected by the Supreme Council, but left hanging in the hope that time would heal the wounds. However, in the ensuing months, Torres Bueno began to take decisions unilaterally; decisions that normally required the consent of the Supreme Council. In order to avoid the continued desertion of members, he undertook a more militant campaign in 1944, which was followed by Government repression, in June and July. The Supreme Council was even more anxious when it learned that Torres Bueno was considering taking Synarchism into the electoral process.<sup>2</sup>

The repression of the Government led Santacruz to start conversations with Avila Camacho and other Mexican and American officials, in which he assured them that Synarchism was not subversive and that it would not participate in electoral politics, but would be devoted to founding schools, rural settlements and carrying out religious deeds.<sup>3</sup>

In October 1944, the Supreme Council pushed the matter further by accepting Torres Bueno's resignation. Only his time, he refused to go and, in fact, challenged the Supreme Council. Santacruz attempted to discredit him by calling on the hierarchy to denounce him; but it

refused to do so because it was not its intention to get directly involved with Synarchism.<sup>4</sup> Torres Bueno realized that only if the hierarchy was induced to condemn him publicly, the Supreme Council had in practice no control over the UNS. So, by the end of 1944, Torres Bueno was convinced that there was no reason for the UNS to continue being subordinated to the Base; he therefore informed Santacruz and the Supreme Council that from that moment the Synarchist Movement would be totally independent. He soon obtained the support of the leader of the Base in his native state of Guanajuato.<sup>5</sup>

On 8 October, 1944, the Supreme Leader of the Base ordered Torres Bueno to hand over the leadership to Gildardo González, advocating the need to provide the President with another interlocutor, as Torres Bueno had been damaged by the June affair.

Confronted by Torres Bueno's resistance to hand over the leadership and by the refusal of Gildardo González to accept it, arguing that the order was unfair, and that a change of leader in those circumstances would be detrimental to the prestige of the hierarchies of the Movement, the Base sent armed men to occupy the offices of the Synarchist Movement and also accused him of embezzlement. Torres Bueno reacted by convening the regional leaders of the Base (the Divisions), in Celaya, where it was decided to break with the Supreme Council.<sup>6</sup>

He revealed to his supporters what the Base was and, what it expected from the Movement:

"[The UNS] should abandon completely and for ever all political standpoint, reflexion or action, because, it feels, the slightest political gesture, albeit extremely discreet and well conceived, would cost us the friendship of the American Catholic. However, this touches the core of our Movement, since we have always pretended to be marching towards a Christian Social Order, we have always maintained that power is, as an element of society, more or less an instrument in the service of the objectives we pursue. It is essential that aspiration be upheld."<sup>7</sup>

The Supreme Council took this decision as an act of treachery and immediately mobilized to resist it. It considered the UNS as an inseparable part of the Base, and any attempt to divide them was deemed abhorrent.

Santacruz tried to appeal to the Church, as he had done in 1941 against Abascal; but the bishops declined to give an opinion when he asked them to condemn publicly the UNS. He then resorted to schism, with some success, taking the regions of Querétaro, Aguascalientes, Yucatán and Zacatecas. In court, he won possession of the title "El Sinarquista" for his group.<sup>8</sup>

And so, in February 1945, the Supreme Council got together the regional leaders that remained loyal and elected Carlos Athié Carrasco as the new National Leader of the UNS. The new leader was unknown to the majority of Synarchists because he had never held any important position; he had worked as a teacher in the school for Synarchist leaders in Mexico City, and only a restricted inner circle knew of him.<sup>9</sup>

Because Torres Bueno continued to view himself as the

national leader, two organizations claiming to be the true representatives of Synarchism existed side by side. That led by Torres Bueno, or UNS-MTB, eventually was the most important. Yet, before that happened, a strong battle developed, in 1945-1946, during which the two groups tried to destroy each other. Torres Bueno, however, had the upper hand. The very existence of the dual leadership and the need to maintain the secrecy of the Supreme Council had placed the leader of the UNS, from the very beginning, as the absolute leader of the organization, recognized by all the members and responsible only to God. Thus, when a new leader was chosen, the decision was perceived by the Synarchist masses at large and, indeed, by the outside world, as stemming from the will of the previous leader who, for reasons of his own, had resolved to step down. Consequently, when Torres Bueno broke off with the Base, he was universally known by the rank and file which he had led for three years and which he had addressed on innumerable occasions. The Secret Council and the Base were, on the other hand, totally unknown, not only to the masses, but to the local leaders, as well.<sup>10</sup>

And so, when Torres Bueno made his coup, he carried along with him nearly two thirds of the members, and the local and municipal leaders decided to follow him. They had sworn allegiance and obedience to the leader when they had joined the movement, and, because they ignored the existence of the Base and the Supreme Council, they thought of Athié Carrasco as a usurper, since Torres Bueno had not relinquished his command. Nevertheless, many

regional leaders, who did know of the relationship between the UNS and the Base, followed the orders of the Supreme Council and supported Athié Carrasco, persuading many of their personal followers to rally behind the UNS of Athié Carrasco, or UNS-CAC.

The differences between the two groups lay not only in the personal ambitions of Torres Bueno and his intentions to integrate Synarchism to the electoral process, but in the acute difference of their respective ideologies. The orientation of the UNS-CAC was of rejecting electoral politics, and politics in general; this faction was committed exclusively to solving the social and economic problems of the rural regions and was particularly active in matters such as literacy campaigns and the establishment of market cooperatives. It rejected, above anything else, any tendency to revolt or agitate:

"The UNS, now as ever, condemns violence and declares that any armed uprising, especially in the present circumstances, would be tantamount to betrayal of the Fatherland"<sup>11</sup>

By virtue of the latest schism, Synarchism found itself, in fact, divided into three main factions:

- the most extreme was that of Abascal, who had left the organization in 1944. This group was opposed to any form of compromise with the Mexican Government and sustained a form of militant agitation and opposition, which was constantly on the verge of armed rebellion;

- the moderate faction was led by Torres Bueno; it avoided any kind of violence and wished to channel its opposition to the Government by entering the electoral arena;
- the most conservative faction was the newly formed UNS-CAC which, far from opposing the Government, advocated, instead, to collaborate with it in "all its honourable and just projects." It made a distinction between the Government as "the permanent organ of authority and the Mexican Revolution, transitory accident of our political life."<sup>12</sup>

The radical faction, which neither the national leadership nor the Base controlled, was at a disadvantage to take Synarchism in the direction it envisaged. Although it had a wide following among the masses, the fact that Abascal had refused to lead a rebellion, left the leaders with no alternative but to withdraw from the movement in peace, or to go underground.

Nonetheless, some of its leaders attempted to create their own brand of Synarchism, arguing that differences between the factions were not exclusively about individuals - between Abascal, the Supreme Council or Torres Bueno - but rather encompassed the basic ideas of Synarchism. They declared illegitimate the other two factions and tried to exploit the popularity of their militant action to call a national Synarchist convention to elect the leaders that would bring back unity into the



movement.<sup>13</sup> Although this proposition was put forward by some preeminent leaders of the radical sector (Alfonso Trueba Olivares among others), the fact that they could not count with Abascal implied that it had very little chance of success. Consequently, during 1945 and 1946, the centre of Synarchist activities revolved round the UNS-MTB and the UNS-CAC.

Once separated from the Base, Torres Bueno undertook the formation of his own secret council. He argued that the system of a secret leadership was not intrinsically wrong, but rather the people who made it up.<sup>14</sup> He concluded that since he was the target of the attacks of both the radicals and the UNS-CAC, it was politically appropriate to leave the national leadership, and to proceed to control the organization from behind the scenes, through his own supreme council. In this way, he would avoid, on the one hand, the criticism of the UNS-CAC, which accused him of violating the vows of obedience to the Base; and, on the other hand, the criticisms of the radicals, who blamed him for betraying true militant Synarchism for his own personal gain.<sup>15</sup>

The celebration by the UNS-MTB of the eighth anniversary of the foundation of Synarchism, in León, on 20 May 1945, was attended, according to its officials, by 50,000 members; constituting the most exiguous presence since that celebration was first held.<sup>16</sup>

The occasion was used to announce that Torres Bueno was leaving the leadership and that Gildardo González Sánchez, former regional leader of Puebla, was taking

over. He was chosen because of his close friendship and his blind subordination to Torres Bueno. He was to remain leader for two years.

1. The "dissidents"

Unquestionably, public opinion, already surprised by Abascal's revelations, was even more baffled by the latest blow to hit the organization, and the claim by two groups to be the true representatives of Synarchism. The situation was intensified by the press which, at least in the beginning, admitted the reports of the Athié group, and recognised him as the only National Leader.

Taking into account that the UNS-MTB could not make use of a press organ to guide Synarchists and sympathizers in their favour, they were at a disadvantage to explain what was happening to Synarchism. Greater confusion was added, when the virtually extinct Organizing Committee attempted to intervene.

What were the consequences of all these problems?

2. Consequences

i) **Division and confusion**

One of the tangible effects of Abascal's conduct and of the emergence of Athié's group was the relative division in the Synarchist ranks and the confusion that it instilled in public opinion, the Government and in American circles.

By May 1945, the following groups were considered to be rebellious - from mainstream Synarchism (i.e. MTB) - all, but one, of the groups of Querétaro (the home state

of Santacruz); three of Colima; all the groups of Yucatán (eleven); those of the District of Zamora, and that of Villalongín, Michoacán, seven of Puebla; nearly all of Aguascalientes; one of Tlaxcala, and small groups of other less important States. In total, it amounted to approximately five per cent of the Synarchists.<sup>17</sup>

**ii) Disorganization**

Because of all these difficulties it was natural that the organization of the Movement suffered, and the élan and moral of the troops weakened; due in part to the lack of money to readjust, to the absence of a propaganda organ, and to the reduction in public meetings and visits.

Consequently, according to the report of the National Leader for 1946, the situation at the beginning of that year had been the following:

- i) there were not enough secretaries in the National Committee and those there were had to perform various functions at the same time;
- ii) there were no Deputies, they could not be sustained;
- iii) public activities were still banned, the annual León celebration had been the first one allowed;
- iv) the colony of María Auxiliadora continued to be insubordinate and seditious since the departure of Abascal, despite the efforts of the new leader, Valentín Lozada;

- v) there was still a ban on the circulation of its mail and its propaganda;
- vi) the trial of Juan Ignacio Padilla and **El Sinarquista** was still pending;
- vii) the records and files of the UNS had not been returned from the Prosecutor's office;
- viii) no working programme had been devised for the Leaders and the Secretaries, who went on with the same old rudimentary working system; and
- ix) many leaders were irresolute and tired.<sup>18</sup>

Torres Bueno and his group, which still represented the majority of the Synarchists, set themselves one task: to put a definite end to the prevailing state of affairs, by thoroughly observing Synarchist discipline and loyalty to the principles and programme of the UNS. He instructed his troops to close ranks in order to make the organization more effective and to awaken the initiative and the fighting spirit of the Synarchists. Or, as he put it:

"strict discipline in obeying orders to achieve flexibility in the struggle and cohesion in our ranks."<sup>19</sup>

A plan was drafted to fight the "divisionistas" (i.e. the followers of UNS-CAC). The Secretariat of Orientation and Propaganda emphasized in the set of instructions entitled "**General guidelines to conduct UNS propaganda during the Ninth year of struggle**":

"Our propaganda should inspire in friend and foe the ideas of security and determination in all our acts; let us avoid indecision and hesitation, especially with regard to the internal problems that have affected the UNS"<sup>20</sup>

The same Secretariat of Orientation and Propaganda formulated a working plan against the "divisionistas"; of which the principal sections were these:

1. It asked the Regional leaders to assess and report the situation and the activities of the "divisionistas" in their areas.
2. It demanded that a wide campaign of orientation be set targeting Synarchists, public opinion, and misled groups, covering these points:
  - a) the nature, scope, and meaning of the conflict;
  - b) the groundless accusations and smears directed against the UNS and against its leaders, and hence, refute and defend Synarchism;
  - c) justify the attitude of the Movement in expelling those elements which attempted to undermine the programme of the Movement,
3. The campaign of orientation should make use of all the propaganda means at their disposal (tracts, newspapers, literature);
4. As preventive measures the following were recommended:
  - a) prevent the circulation of the dissidents'

**Bulletin of Information, and of all the propaganda they issued;**

- b) **denounce publicly Athié and all the members of his group, warning all the loyal leaders and soldiers of their activities, so that they would not be misled;**
- c) **expose the limited significance and lack of strength of the dissidents;**
- d) **penetrate their groups so as to be always aware of their activities and plans.**

5. **At the same time that these tasks were carried out, they should be concerned with strengthening their own groups and giving prestige to Synarchism, particularly:**

- a) **by actively working and fulfilling the orders and instructions of the National Leadership;**
- b) **by raising the morale of all Synarchists;**
- c) **by strengthening discipline;**
- d) **by spreading the traditional doctrine of the UNS contained in the "16 Basic Points";**
- e) **by spreading the doctrine of the Church as regards social and political matters.<sup>21</sup>**

The change in leadership was very significant, insofar as it involved the definite affirmation of two attitudes that would mark the organic structure of the Movement, in its new phase: the condemnation of **caudillismo** and the effective selection of the best men for the posts of command.

González Sánchez was the first leader of the Movement to have climbed every step of the hierarchy. Under his leadership, Synarchism entered a period of political maturity, during which the first serious endeavour to systematize life, activity and organization, were undertaken. In the past, the Movement had grown without measure, driven on by an outburst of nonconformity and an urge to redeem the country to a position of grandeur and transcendence.

González Sánchez received the leadership when the Movement was still proscribed. Slowly, but effectively, he succeeded in returning Synarchism to a normal public rôle. He reorganized the regional leadership, by placing young fighters for the most part, with wide political views and with foresight of the political problems the Movement was likely to face.<sup>22</sup>

However, the most important aspect of his term was that, for the first time, it was assayed to draft the statutes of the UNS. He personally collaborated in the commission charged with this task, and presented the results to the VII National Assembly of Synarchist leaders, in December 1945, which approved and promulgated them, early the following year.<sup>23</sup> Only the leader of Querétaro, Antonio Santacruz, was absent from the Assembly.

### III. The "Partido Fuerza Popular"

In 1946, what remained of the Synarchist Movement - the faction led by Torres Bueno - entered electoral politics. Torres Bueno had first proposed forming a party in 1944, but was turned down by the radicals of the Movement, because that implied making concessions to the Government. In fact, one of the charges imputed by Abascal when he withdrew was that Torres Bueno was seeking to turn Synarchism into a political party.

And so, although the UNS-MTB retained strength, the leaders found themselves in an awkward predicament when they decided to take the movement into the national political system, create a party and participate in elections. After all, everybody knew that the UNS had drawn its strength from its outright rejection of the traditional political game. Indeed, one of the key tenets of Synarchism had been that it never formed a political party or participated in elections in any way. José Antonio Urquiza, The Founder of the Movement, had said:

"We do not aspire to form an electoral party, a word that implies in itself a concept of division. We want to win over the men of all parties; to bring them together according to the things that unite us all, above those which separate us. For this reason we reject the political attribute which is given to Synarchism. We are not a party, and we reject even more the idea of political party."<sup>24</sup>

When Torres Bueno became the national leader in 1941, he stated that Synarchism "had never been nor will it ever be a political party."



"Synarchism is not an electoral party [...] Synarchism is not an organization aimed at obtaining political power [...] It is an organization which strives to restore social order in Mexico, and destroy Liberalism, pseudo-democracy and anarchy."<sup>25</sup>

He reiterated this stance, in May 1944, adducing that "democracy does not exist in Mexico."<sup>26</sup>

Hence, the UNS-MTB leaders decided to carry out consultations with the regional leaders to study the plausibility and the chances of a political party. They sent a questionnaire covering several aspects:

- The interest of the various Synarchist groups in electoral politics and, in particular, in the presidential succession, and the official candidate, Alemán;
- whether Synarchists had been pushed to join an official political group supporting the candidate of local politicians, when and with what result;
- whether there were conflicts between the revolutionary politicians, and why;
- what would be the consequence for their members if they were to support the official candidate;
- evaluate the strength of **Acción Nacional** in their region;
- determine the effective strength of the CNC, the CTM, the CNOP, and other groups, like Freemasonry and the Communist party.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, in September 1945, when the country was getting ready for the 1946 presidential elections, Gildardo González announced that the UNS would participate in the campaign, although he did not give any details as to how that would be. This new point of departure, he contended, did not contradict Synarchist principles; but was, instead, a gradual progression, adapted to the prevailing political circumstances.

Moreover, they declared that the new electoral law, soon to be introduced, gave Synarchism the possibility to enter the electoral register. So, in February 1946, the UNS-MTB announced that it was to form its own political party and that it would present candidates of its own in the July elections.

"The decision was taken after carefully considering the present conditions in Mexico, and we have seen that they are very promising, because both the victory of the Democracies and the attitude and the promises of the Government to respect the vote and the determination of the people to see that their rights are respected, have somewhat cleared the political climate and have changed the circumstances that prevailed in previous years. Similarly, we have taken into account the fact that the UNS cannot become a political party because its purpose and field of action would be abated. We have also studied the different existing parties and concluded that none completely coincided with either our aspirations or our principles and that therefore we could not use them for the systematic exercise of our political rights. Lastly, we have considered that to be able to participate actively in accordance with the Electoral Law, it was necessary that we organized in a national political party [...]"<sup>28</sup>

The magazine **Orden** announced the creation of the new party in these terms:

"Synarchism will form a great political party"

"The creation of this party will not affect the nature of the UNS, but rather the opposite, it will serve as an instrument to exercise the political function of a large sector of the Mexican people, who were demanding it as an essential need to satisfy their popular interests."<sup>29</sup>

The party was formed in February 1946, the name adopted was **Partido Fuerza Popular**, with Enrique Morfín González as the first president.<sup>30</sup> The Party published its own newspapers, **El Poder**. The decision to nominate a presidential candidate was put off until the celebration of the party's convention. On 23 March, a national constituent assembly was set and a programme was drafted.<sup>31</sup>

The Manifesto of Popular Force expounded some of the following objectives and principles:

"Full of enthusiasm and faith, the Popular Force Party comes into the political life of Mexico. It enters the Mexican scene as the standard bearer of Social Justice, and as the defender of the dignity and the freedom of the Mexicans. It has not come to divide, or to sow the seeds of hatred; it comes with a National Mission: to unite and bring together all Mexican in the fraternity of a single Fatherland and in the communion of the same ideals: the COMMON GOOD and the true UNITY of the Mexican People.

"Popular Force" does not belong to either the revolutionaries or the reactionaries. It has no compromises with groups or factions and it only

fighters for Mexico. Its position is fundamentally constructive and one of positive work for the benefit of the Mexican Community.

"Popular Force" declares the war on Communism, because Communism attacks the very essence of the Fatherland, human dignity, and it serves a foreign country."

The underlying principles expounded included:

"The absolute reform and amendment of the political system of Government [...] So that the freedom of the municipio be the best protection for the family and the strongest guarantee for the higher political institutions.

We want a State in the service of the Nation, a just Government that loves and serves its people, and that genuinely represents it. We want to get rid of the system of official parties and cacicazgos that constitute a political monopoly and the most outrageous machinery for the violation of the suffrage.

There is no other solution to the labour problem than social justice, always improving it, and providing guarantees to both factors of production [...]

"Popular Force" asserts as the first principle of the national coexistence, the guarantees and freedoms to live and the rights of all the inhabitants of Mexico, and fights for the rule of Law and Justice, where the authorities should set the example and be the first to submit to it."<sup>32</sup>

#### IV. The 1946 Elections

The elections of 1946 resembled those of 1940 in that there were also two presidential candidates of importance: Miguel Alemán, Interior Minister under Avila Camacho, and

Ezequiel Padilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs, representing the most conservative elements of the PRM. When it became clear that Alemán would win the party's nomination, Padilla left the PRM to found the **Mexican Democratic Party** to uphold his candidacy.<sup>33</sup> Before this happened, there were indications that the UNS-MTB might back him. However, during the ensuing months, the Government began its customary process before elections, of neutralizing, or forming alliances with sectors of the Mexican political ambit, to ensure unanimous support for the official candidate. One element of this course of action was to grant certain concessions. The Synarchists, in return for supporting certain of its candidates for various legislative offices, would have complete freedom to conduct their programmes. Besides, they were promised some seats in Congress. Although they were not urged to support the official candidate, in view of the concessions granted, they agreed not to sustain Padilla.<sup>34</sup>

The PRM did not wish the Popular Force to present a candidate because it considered that the UNS still represented the radical Right, whose aim was to overthrow the Mexican Revolution, the very base of the official party. Therefore, not content that the UNS did not support Padilla, it raised the matter of the legality of Popular Force to register. Thus, when the registration period closed, on 7 May, Popular Force was left out. The Public Prosecutor stated that the registration had been denied because it was a confessional party and, hence, not eligible under the Law (Article 130 of the Constitution).<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, on 13 May it was announced that thanks to a special presidential concession both the Communist Party and Popular Force would be permitted to register. This was effected after Popular Force agreed to make some changes to its programme, such as recognizing the "institution" rather than the religious value of matrimony.<sup>37</sup>

The Government could thus express its disdain for anti-revolutionary Synarchism and, at the same time, enter into an alliance with it, that would benefit it in the presidential campaign; but, above all, it benefited Avila Camacho, who appeared as a devout democrat and a generous magistrate, because he had allowed the participation in the elections of both the extreme Right and Left.<sup>38</sup>

The elections were a disaster for the Movement. Many Synarchists were disenchanted with the sudden backtrack that meant participating in the elections; and more desertions followed. This gave some vindication to the claims of the radical faction that Torres Bueno had sold out to the Government. Besides, the disastrous results seemed to sustain the position of the UNS-CAC that Synarchism should stay out of politics, electoral or otherwise. None of the Synarchist candidates to the Senate was elected, and only one, to the Chamber of Deputies, won.<sup>39</sup> But even this small victory was short-lived, because this one deputy resigned from the UNS before one year and became a high ranking Government employee.<sup>40</sup>

## V. Synarchism in 1947

The UNS-MTB, disquieted by the results of the 1946 elections, resumed its attacks against the Government, accusing it of electoral fraud; however, it did so in subdued manner, so as to prevent agitation and to act completely within the law.

In early 1947, the magazine **Orden** stopped writing about the unfairness of the elections and returned to make an appeal for renewed cooperation with the Government, particularly in view of the foot-and-mouth epidemic that hit the countryside and which threatened the national economy. **Orden** undertook an education campaign urging its readers to work with the Government to combat the epidemic.

The UNS-MTB also resumed an attitude of good disposition towards the President; it praised his endeavours to put end to injustice in Mexico, but warned him of the obstacle that local political leaders and the PRI officials represented. Similarly, it adopted a friendlier tone towards the United States, which was very much apparent at the time of President Truman's visit to Mexico, in March 1947; the visit was welcomed by Torres Bueno who urged the Government to adopt a policy of close friendship with the United States.<sup>42</sup>

In 1945, when Torres Bueno contested the control of the Supreme Council of the Base, he sought to win the support of the regional leaders, by promising them greater intervention in the leadership. In December 1946, at the VII National Assembly, a new programme of general statutes

to govern the UNS-MTB was approved. The most significant article (article 31) referred to the national leader; it stated that he should hold office for a period not exceeding two years, and that his successor would be elected by a Board of Directors, the **Sinarquía Nacional**, made up of the regional leaders.<sup>43</sup>

Henceforth, Synarchism abandoned the practice of **caudillismo**, characteristic of the early years, to adopt a more democratic procedure.<sup>44</sup>

The radical leaders who remained in the Movement - because of loyalty to the national leader (Torres Bueno), or out of interest to continue the struggle - were extremely annoyed about the attitude of subservience to the Government that the UNS had embraced since 1947. What is more, many non-radical leaders were troubled by the permanency of Torres Bueno behind the scenes.

Thereupon, the radicals judged that it was fit and timely to go back to the policy of uncompromising opposition to the Mexican Revolution and the Government, and wholehearted **Hispanidad**. They maintained that the elections had caused great dissatisfaction. Torres Bueno, they argued, had been outwitted by the Government. He had said that if Synarchism cooperated with the Government and participated in the elections, it would win a prominent position in the political process, that it could otherwise never reach, were it to pursue with its intransigent attitude. Yet, this offer was never met, thereby upsetting many people in the organization.

The old radical argument about electoral fraud and



the incompatibility of Synarchism with the Government of the Mexican Revolution was reasserted. Whereupon, in April 1947, the Sinarquía Nacional got together to appoint a successor to González Sánchez, for the period 1947-1949. They chose Luis Martínez Narezo as the new national leader.<sup>45</sup>

Under his leadership, the organization underwent a fundamental change in direction. This transition was not immediately obvious. Nevertheless, there were some indications that a change was in progress when, on the occasion of the annual celebration of the foundation of Synarchism, several statements by former militant leaders, including Trueba Olivares, Zermeño and Abascal, were published.<sup>46</sup> This was significant because not since the reappearance of the magazine in 1946, had the views of the opponents of Torres Bueno been printed.

In June, collaboration with the Government was coming to an end. An open letter appeared in *Orden* strongly criticizing the Government for its handling of the foot-and-mouth campaign, and demanding that the UNS cease its cooperation.<sup>47</sup> The following month, Martínez Narezo declared that Synarchism would espouse a more vigorous stand against Article 3 of the Constitution. Synarchist opposition to the amendment on education had been in suspense since early 1946, when some of the dispositions least agreeable to the Catholics had been eliminated.

Martinez Narezo also strove to restore the internal unity of Movement: for which end, he definitely broke with the system of a dual leadership under a Secret Council.

In September, he put in doubt all the authority rights exercised by Torres Bueno. According to the general statutes of 1946, the board of directors, made up of the regional leaders and the members of the National Committee, was the only supreme authority of the organization; hence, he summoned the board to decide between a distinct leadership, and the return to militant intransigence, or to continue with the secret leadership of Torres Bueno and his policy of relative moderation.

Padilla, who was present at the meeting, wrote that Torres Bueno himself proposing that the matter be settled by ballot - he would accept autonomy if there was a majority of three fourths in favour of it. A decisive vote of 28 to 4 gave the victory to Martínez Narezo.<sup>48</sup>

After that meeting, Martínez Narezo began to implement his plans for modernizing Synarchism, by instilling a new militant energy. First, he removed from the posts of responsibility all the unquestioning supporters of Torres Bueno and other moderates, and replaced them with members of the old guard. Torres Bueno was even eliminated from his editorial post at *Orden*.

At the IX National Assembly of Synarchist leaders (11-14 December 1947), the symbolic re-admission of the radical leaders was approved. Abascal said on that occasion:

"I sincerely congratulate you for the new course the organization is taking, and I can say, with no embarrassment, that as it is now directed, it is legitimate."<sup>49</sup>

There were many intellectuals present at that meeting, Alfonso Junco, Jesús Guisa y Acevedo, Antonio Cuadra; and José Vasconcelos sent the following message:

"I have always regarded Synarchism as a sincere effort to establish democracy firmly in Mexico. Synarchism sprang from the heart of the people and has taken shape in a struggle, always heroic on its part, but frequently disloyal on the part of its enemies.

[...] You have been accused of echoing foreign movements, when in fact, you represent the most Mexican of all the political movements of the country

I have frequently made reference to a shortcoming in your political process, and that is, that you have not wanted, or have not been able to form **caudillos** recognized by the entire nation. A political movement requires not only martyrs but leading figures and personalities forged by experience, too. Nevertheless, I believe that your Movement will make itself felt, more and more, in the political development of our Nation."<sup>50</sup>

A clear sign of the renewed intransigence adopted by the Movement under Martínez Narezo was his attitude to the President. We recall that after 1944, the UNS-MTB was, in general, favourable to the President, both to Avila Camacho and to Alemán. Although it had continued to condemn communist infiltration in the Government, when it attacked the Government, it spared the President, arguing that the guilty ones were those who surrounded him, who misinformed and ill advised him. But with the entrance of Martínez Narezo, the old concept re-emerged that the President, as the leader of the Mexican Revolution, was

the source of all evil.

The campaign against the foot-and-mouth epidemic constituted the issue that provided the most ground for attack. The epidemic very seriously hit the rural regions of Mexico in the late forties. The Government adopted a method that became popularly known as "the sanitary rifle", according to which, all the infected livestock and that likely to have been in contact with it was exterminated.<sup>51</sup> This worried cattle breeders because they had to put down apparently healthy livestock. The Government stated, however, that such a strict method was necessary to save the Mexican cattle industry millions of dollars.<sup>52</sup>

The strong Synarchist attacks and its stand in favour of a vaccination programme - also supported by other groups, like **Acción Nacional**, which was pessimistic about the method used, criticizing the high social costs<sup>53</sup> - contributed to exacerbate the opposition of breeders and peasants to the Government efforts, notably, in the Bajío region.<sup>54</sup> Peasant reaction was strong, often armed and sometimes with brutal consequences. Indeed, there were occasions when the health brigades were ambushed and killed.<sup>55</sup>

The Mexican and American Government worked closely together in the campaign and it was on the advice and the aid of American experts that the "sanitary rifle" was introduced, largely to prevent the epidemic from reaching American territory.<sup>56</sup> This gave the UNS the motive to criticise the Mexican and American governments, in line with its renewed anti-Americanism and its rediscovered

**Hispanidad.**<sup>57</sup> Since the United States exerted considerable pressure over Mexico, and partly took charge of the operation, many people in the country got flared up.<sup>58</sup>

The end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties were difficult years for the peasants, marked by the foot-and-mouth epidemic and by migration. The UNS fought this temporary or definite exile (and the discrimination and maltreatment that it involved), but the fact was that people were leaving because they could not do much else.<sup>59</sup>

This state of affairs continued throughout 1947 and 1948, with little response from the authorities. However, as the congressional elections of 1949 approached, it became obvious that this time no agreement would be possible with Popular Force, like in 1946: in 1948 the moderates had gone, and the new leadership was not interested.

The Government, however, took advantage of an incident provoked by the members of Popular Force in December 1948, to exclude Synarchism from direct participation in the elections. The X Annual Assembly ended with a rally convened in the Alameda Central of Mexico City, where the statue of Juárez is situated. Juárez is the representative par excellence of Mexican laicism, and, therefore, to the Synarchists, the greatest villain of Mexican history. There were many speeches vilifying him; and, at some point, the crowd decided to cover the statue with a black hood provoking the anger of the authorities. Before the meeting was over, several

leaders were arrested and interrogated by the police.<sup>60</sup> The PRI used the occasion to send a warning to all its militants to be on the alert, emphasising the implicit danger that the activities of those "fanatics" meant, and asking for unity and the closing of ranks.<sup>61</sup> The desecration of Juárez enraged certain sectors of the public who demanded that immediate reprisals be taken; propaganda was distributed exculpating Juárez and vilifying the "Synarchist anti-revolutionary perpetrators". Unions organized marches and massive demonstrations; Congress passed a resolution condemning the Synarchists and proclaiming the anniversary of Juárez's birth a national holiday.<sup>62</sup>

The Synarchists continued to assail the Government and the President unrelentingly; finally, on 28 January 1949, the Minister of the Interior, Ruíz Cortines, took retaliatory measures. The registration of Popular Force, was cancelled. The decision was justified by the Minister in these terms:

"The unpatriotic activities of the Popular Force Party, its confessional nature, its campaign of proselytism based on stirring up religious feelings, its ardent desire to modify the political organization of the country by means of violence, longing for times that have definitively gone, and the resemblance of its structure to Fascism, have been undeniably established by the sad events of 19 December at the Juárez Hemiciclo, perpetrated by Popular Force and the UNS"<sup>63</sup>

The cancellation of the registration meant that Popular Force could not participate in the July elections.

We have considered the internal reasons of the decadence and collapse of the UNS: yet, it is perhaps more important to realize that 1947 was not 1937; Mexico had experienced religious peace for ten years; the PRM had symbolically become the PRI. Revisionism had really begun with the election of Alemán, in 1946, when all traces of Marxist ideology were virtually absent from the régime. The Synarchist Movement found justification in "red" agitation; but Alemán had nothing to do with Cárdenas, or his followers, in fact, he opposed him. And so, Cárdenas on the Left, and the UNS on the Right, disappeared from the scene, replaced by the PRI and the PAN; confrontation was superseded by the hegemonic compromise of the modern urban sectors.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In 1939, Torres Bueno had brought up this question to the National Leader. He stressed that the U.N.S. should intensify its activities everywhere, because the people who had rallied to Synarchism were asking for concrete and immediate objectives, otherwise they would leave. Manuel Torres Bueno to Manuel Zermeño y Pérez, León, Guanajuato, 14 March 1939, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.28 (11.7.28).

<sup>2</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla, **Sinarquismo: Contrarrevolución**, México, Editorial Polis, 1948, p.303; Joseph Ledit, **Le Front des Pauvres**, Montréal, Fides, 1954, p.265.

<sup>3</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.301.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.304.

<sup>5</sup> Ledit, op.cit., p.265.

<sup>6</sup> U.N.S., **Hechos y causas que motivaron un cambio en la Jerarquía Secreta de la O.C.A.**, México, December 1944, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.115 (12.3.18), pp.12-14, 16.

<sup>7</sup> **Hechos y causas . . .**, op. cit., p.5.

<sup>8</sup> Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op.cit., p. 711.

<sup>9</sup> Gildardo González Sánchez, **Informe del Jefe Nacional, 1946**, México, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 114 (12.2.17), p.5.

<sup>10</sup> Ledit,op.cit., p.265.

<sup>11</sup> José Sam López to Avila Camacho, México, 28 March, 1945, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expendiente No.544.61/39, Legajo No.6, Folio No.8380; **Tiempo**, 20 March, 1954, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> **Excelsior**, 29 March, 1945.

<sup>13</sup> **Novedades**, 2 April, 1945.

<sup>14</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.306; Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op.cit., p.306.

<sup>16</sup> **Excelsior**, 21 May, 1945.

<sup>17</sup> González Sánchez, **Informe . . .**, op.cit., p.6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.7.



<sup>19</sup> Manuel Torres Bueno, Jefatura Nacional, **Boletín**, México, 24 June 1944, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 110 (12.2.13).

<sup>20</sup> U.N.S., Secretaría Nacional de Orientación y Propaganda, **Plan General contra Divisionistas**, México, 29 August 1945, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 110 (12.2.13), p.1.

<sup>21</sup> **Plan General contra Divisionistas**, loc. cit.

<sup>22</sup> José Valadez (Secretaría Nacional de Organización) to Regional Leaders, México, October 1945, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, Microfilm No. 114 (12.2.17).

<sup>23</sup> González Sánchez, **Informe . . .**, op. cit., p.11.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by Ledit, op.cit., p. 234.

<sup>25</sup> **Excelsior**, 3 November, 1941.

<sup>26</sup> **Novedades**, 23 May, 1944.

<sup>27</sup> I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.114 (12.2.17) contains the completed questionnaires returned by all the committees.

<sup>28</sup> Gildardo González Sánchez (Comité Nacional) a los Jefes Regionales, Circular No.1-12, México, D.F., 19 February, 1946, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No.114 (12.2.17).

<sup>29</sup> **Orden**, No. 29, 14 February, 1946.

<sup>30</sup> **Orden**, No.36, 4 April, 1946, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> **Tiempo**, 1 March, 1946, pp.6-7; Padilla, op.cit., pp.323-335.

<sup>32</sup> "**Fuerza Popular**", **Manifiesto al Pueblo Mexicano**, México, 21 February, 1946, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, microfilm No. 114 (12.2.17).

<sup>33</sup> Luis Medina, **Civilismo y modernización del autoritarismo**, México, El Colegio de Mexico (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Periodo 1946-1952), 1979, p.60.

<sup>34</sup> Vicente Fuentes Díaz, **Los Partidos Políticos en México**, México, Edición del Autor, Vol.II, 1956, p.99.

<sup>35</sup> **Tiempo**, 10 May, 1946, p.4.

<sup>36</sup> **Excelsior**, 7 May, 1946.

<sup>37</sup> **Tiempo**, 24 May 1946, pp.4-5.

<sup>38</sup> Medina, **Civilismo y modernización . . .**, op. cit., pp.86-87.

- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.90.
- <sup>40</sup> **Orden**, 25 July 1946.
- <sup>41</sup> **Orden**, 1 May, 1947. The PRM became the PRI on 18 January 1946; see **El Universal**, 19 January, 1946.
- <sup>42</sup> **Orden**, 13 May, 1947; Blanca Torres, **Hacia la utopía industrial**, México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Periodo 1940-1952), 1984, p.170.
- <sup>43</sup> U.N.S. **Estatutos**, México, n.p., 1958, p.15.
- <sup>44</sup> Padilla, op.cit., pp.312-314.
- <sup>45</sup> Gill, op.cit., p.288.
- <sup>46</sup> **Orden**, 12 June, 1947.
- <sup>47</sup> **Orden**, 3 July, 1947.
- <sup>48</sup> Padilla, op.cit., 346; Gill, op.cit. p.288.
- <sup>49</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p. 349.
- <sup>50</sup> Quoted by Padilla, op.cit., pp.349-350; see also: José Vasconcelos, **Breve Historia de México**, México, Compañía Editorial Continental, 1956, pp.563-564.
- <sup>51</sup> **Excelsior**, 22 February, 1947.
- <sup>52</sup> Howard F. Cline, **The United States and Mexico**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1953, pp.346-396.
- <sup>53</sup> **Excelsior**, 29 March, 2 and 20 April 1947.
- <sup>54</sup> **Orden**, 11 July, 1948.
- <sup>55</sup> **Tiempo**, 26 September, 1947, pp.4-5; Gill, op.cit. p.289.
- <sup>56</sup> Blanca Torres, op.cit., pp.252-254, 260.
- <sup>57</sup> Meyer, op.cit., p.210.
- <sup>58</sup> **Orden**, 21 July, 1947; Cline, op.cit., p396.
- <sup>59</sup> Blanca Torres, op.cit., p. 245.
- <sup>60</sup> **Orden**, 26 December, 1948; **Excelsior**, 29 January 1949; **Tiempo**, 9 March, 1950, p.8.
- <sup>61</sup> **El Nacional**, 21 December, 1948.
- <sup>62</sup> Luis Medina, **Civilismo y modernización**, op. cit., pp.188-189; Robert E. Scott, **Mexican Government in Transition**, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1964, p.150; Gill, op.cit., p.291.
- <sup>63</sup> **Hoy**, 5 February, 1949, p.6.

**PART THREE    IDEOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION**

## CHAPTER VII

### IDEOLOGY

#### **I. The Synarchist Concept of the Ideal Régime**

Synarchism, engendered by the Mexican Revolution, represented, the counter-revolutionary response of the ensuing generation:<sup>1</sup> Synarchism appeared publicly in 1937 (though it had been in gestation since 1934, date of the revolutionary "relapse", of the resumption of an elaborate anticlericalism, of the introduction of socialist education), it reached its peak between 1940 and 1941, and faded, but did not disappear, between 1944 and 1948.

The UNS emerged as a national movement, and not as a party, a movement of union, and not of division, of salvation that sought to save the Fatherland from the revolution, the Communists, the Americans, the Freemasons, the Protestants, the Jews (though very little emphasis was placed on them since the issue had no relevance in the rural areas).<sup>2</sup> Its Anti-Americanism was heightened by a moderate irredentism which, historically, was the first to take the defence of the **greasers** (American derogatory term to denote Mexican-Americans), victims of racial discrimination. The Movement called on the religious sentiment of the people, hardened by the continuous Church-State conflict (1926-1929, 1931, 1934-1938), and exacerbated by the renewed anticlerical legislation of a State, that, in 1935, did not allow more than five hundred priests to celebrate the cult in a Catholic country of

some twenty million inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

Synarchists believed that Mexico would be saved by the Catholic faith, the Spanish traditions, the Christian social order and the economics of the "common good".

One observer wrote that the surprising thing about Synarchism:

"(...) was the fact that the Synarchist reaction against the radical Revolution developed great strength among the common people. Indeed, by most accounts, an overwhelming majority of the Synarchists were poor, illiterate peasants (...)"<sup>4</sup>

Both its admirers and its critics agreed that the Movement had "a resilience and vitality which its predecessors lacked"; this, in turn, raised the question of whether the UNS was something more "than the clutching hand, in rigor mortis, of a dying order."<sup>5</sup>

The Synarchist Movement managed to attract nearly a million poor people at the peak of its existence; the question of why it did so, has no simple answer. There are several possible explanations: firstly, there was the nature of the Movement itself, the system of detailed, carefully planned, minutely directed organization:

"It is this highly centralized and hierarchical form of organization, not numerical strength, which makes the Synarchists so strong ( . . . )" <sup>6</sup>

Another explanation sustains that the success of the UNS was in direct relation with the excesses, the abuses

and, fundamentally, the failure of the Mexican Revolution, particularly of the agrarian reform:

"Synarchism is a protest against the excesses and failure of the Mexican Revolution. The vast majority of the Synarchists are rural people, whose problems are closely related to the land and to agriculture. In some areas of rural Mexico there has been serious disappointment with the 'Fruits of the Revolution'. In these areas a great deal of land has been redistributed, but [living standards had hardly changed since the Revolution]."<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, Synarchism provided the reaction with an instrument that could reach down, for the first time, to the very foundation of Mexican life and make an appeal to large sections of the peasantry; an appeal to the profound religiosity of the peasant, his latent anti-Americanism, and his suspicion of "Communist" agitation.

To the Synarchist the colonial era was the golden period of Mexico's history. New Spain prospered and developed under the auspicious authority of the viceroys. It was a period when people, united by a community of language, religion, and ideal, benefited from the material prosperity that was a consequence of the choice of Christian human values.

This notion of History was shared by a number of intellectuals, Vasconcelos and Reyes among them. In his speech to the Mexican Academy of History, Toribio Esquivel Obregón underlined the differences between Anglo-Saxon civilization and Hispano-American culture:

"Glorification of poverty freely accepted as a means to serve our fellow man [constituted] the ideal basis of Hispanic culture"

by contrast, Anglo-Saxon culture chose "the glorification of wealth."<sup>8</sup>

In New Spain, they argued, the right of the State was based not on the force of arms, but on the duty of the crusader to spread Christian culture; he relied on the Church to achieve this goal, and the Church in turn counted on the arm and the organization of the State to propagate the Faith. There was a marvellous harmony of all social classes, united under the paternal authority of the two powers, the temporal and the spiritual, indissolubly linked.<sup>9</sup>

Convinced that the Colonial past constituted the "ideal order", they sought the reasons for its disappearance:

"Modify this state of affairs, establish financial, military or political success as the criterion for evaluating man, make abstraction of the supernatural purpose in that evaluation, and separate, at a stroke, the moral and the material forces, leaving to the latter alone the direction of the State, and we would have created the antagonism between the Church and the State, between the rich and the poor, between the citizen and the government, between one class of society and the other; when tranquillity disappears, wealth disappears and revolution ensues."<sup>10</sup>

They concluded that only through Christian values would the world find peace and a stable organization. At

home, a "Christian Social Order," the ideal Synarchist State, could be established, if those values were recovered.

A careful study of the public statements, of the few documents published by the Organization, and especially of **El Sinarquista** and **Orden**, help to draw an inference on the nature of the Christian Social Order. We must strive to discern the Synarchist idea of the State through their appreciation of different contemporary political régimes, and see which corresponded more closely to that ideal.

However, Synarchists did not conduct an analysis of the institutions of each system. They were satisfied to pass passionate judgements which they tried to validate after the event with sledgehammer arguments, convinced they had shown the flaws of these organizations.

Consequently, in order to appreciate what image the Synarchist State had, we must make a diversion and proceed to study, first, the position of the UNS in relation to the Second World War and the belligerent countries, since the choice of one camp or the other provides a valuable insight as to its preference for a régime; then, we will outline its attitude vis-à-vis the systems of government that surrounded it: liberal democracies and fascist régimes on the one hand; the Soviet Union on the other; and finally, the Mexican system which concerned it more directly; lastly, after this diversion and based on its criticisms of these régimes, we can proceed to delineate a picture of the Synarchist Social Christian Order state,



as it would perhaps have been.

## **II. The Synarchist Movement and the Second World War**

To avoid any misinterpretation and in order not to treat Synarchists as "Fascists" right away, for their support of Germany, it is important to put their position in the context of 1940 Mexico. In fact, the majority of public opinion (the Left included) was, at the beginning of the war, violently hostile to a rapprochement with the United States. The country as a whole did not present the unbroken democratic front that the government's official stand wished to indicate. The administration of Avila Camacho continued the line of its predecessor in foreign affairs, but this policy was as unpopular among the groups which attacked Cárdenas as was his domestic programme. The divisions of opinion that effected such grievous political struggles under Cárdenas were not solved despite the new President's appeals for national unity. On the other hand, the memories of the expropriation of the oil companies (1938) and of the economic difficulties that ensued were still very much in the mind of everybody, and nationalist opinion was very suspicious of the new régime's "good neighbour" policy, launched by President Avila Camacho for economic reasons: the war and the progressive involvement of the United States in the world conflict opened not insignificant possibilities for economic development. This trend of opinion was not confined to the middle classes, since the CTM and the Communist party considered the

United States their main enemy, while the German-Soviet pact was in effect.<sup>11</sup> In fact, according to a Foreign Office Intelligence Report, on the outbreak of war, the Mexican government's antipathy towards the totalitarian States:

"was balanced by a lack of confidence in the democracies as the defenders of law and justice, and this was tinged in Left Wing circles with positive hostility (. . .) In these circles the view tended to prevail that there was little to choose between the contending Powers; and the Government itself adopted an attitude of strict neutrality".<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, while denouncing Fascism and Nazism and condemning Hitler's "New Order", the Left Wing interpreted the war as a struggle of rival imperialism, and Mexico, said *El Popular*, was interested in the triumph of neither. Neither party was fighting for democracy.<sup>13</sup>

President Roosevelt's appeal for American continental solidarity against Nazi penetration was considered in Mexico to be a cloak to hide a strong United States campaign to monopolize Latin American markets. *El Universal* wrote that while Latin American officials might pay lip service to the Roosevelt plan in order to attempt to obtain United States political support, Latin America was actually extremely distrustful of Roosevelt's policies. And added:

"In justice very few Latin American régimes may be termed democratic. The great majority, even before the word was invented, have been totalitarian,

and continue to be. A league of Pan-American solidarity for the defence of democracy against anti-democratic theories therefore lacks basis. The poorest and most decadent systems invented by Europe and Asia can teach us nothing.

"What, then, do the United States Officials repeated invocation for a union for the defence of the democratic systems of the Americas really mean? It is really desired to isolate the markets of the Americas from extra-American interventions. Since this is true, the rôle of the weak nations of the American continent is reduced to that of patients. There cannot be equality of rights when there is marked disequality of strength.

"If many officials of Latin America have hastened to approve the plan President Roosevelt has espoused, and applaud the vast increase of US armaments, it is because they realize that such applause and acquiescence maintains them in power, which many of them hold even at the expense of democracy. The protection of the Western hemisphere against non-American intervention is worth nothing if, coincidentally, there is no defence against the risks of inter-continental intervention. We live an epoch when words serve more to hide thoughts than to express them."<sup>14</sup>

An illustration of the prevailing anti-American feeling could be observed at the time of the announcement that the government had come to an agreement with the United States on the question of setting military bases on Mexican territory. On 1 April, 1941, an Agreement was signed between the two countries which, on a basis of reciprocity, permitted United States military and naval aircraft to utilize Mexican landing grounds for 24-hour

halts.<sup>15</sup>

There was a strong negative reaction to this news; public opinion, left and right, perceived any type of collaboration as a threat of territorial expansion and of cultural penetration by the United States. The traditional suspicion embedded in the memory of the territorial losses of 1847, faction and group political interests, fears of a return of the levy, fear of getting involved in a struggle that the people considered remote and that did not concern it, sympathy for nations capable of challenging powerful ones; all these elements combined to form an opposition bloc to the United States-Mexico military understanding.

Something exceptional happened with the internal political forces whereby a bridge was built over the gap that separated the Left from the Right. Both, although for different reasons, were opposed to military co-operation with the United States. The forces of the Right were not only suspected of Axis affinities, but they also inherited a historical tradition going back to the Nineteenth century. Their opposition to any type of cooperation thus found its *raison d'être* in the perception of a threat of territorial expansion and of cultural penetration by the United States. And if the Right gave signs of animosity in that respect, the Left - official and non-official - also viewed with distrust the approaching struggle. The Communist Party and the higher échelons of the CTM had accepted the Soviet interpretation of the European war

which was formulated, after the Molotov-Ribbentropp pact, in terms of non-collaboration in a war that it described as inter-imperialistic.<sup>16</sup> Division of opinions in the government was also centred around both attitudes. On the one hand, it perceived the American threat; on the other, it realized that if the United States entered the war, Mexico would find it extremely difficult to remain neutral.<sup>17</sup>

In this sense, the Synarchist pro-German sympathies were not exceptional: as a matter of fact, they expressed what many believed in secret.<sup>18</sup> However, this position did not remain constant throughout the war; on the contrary, it evolved even to the point of backing the Anglo-Saxon democracies. The increasing tendency of the Mexican government to lean towards the allies, certainly had a bearing on the change of attitude of the Synarchist Movement and determined the principal stages:

- April 1941 - signature of the agreements with the United States authorizing American aeroplanes to fly over Mexican space and making provision for the setting of military bases;
- 8 April - Mexico issued a decree seizing vessels belonging to the Axis;
- 7 December - Pearl Harbour; the United States entered the war;
- 9 December - the United States declared a state of war with Germany;

11 December - Mexico broke diplomatic relations with  
Axis;

13 March and  
20 April  
1942 - Mexican tankers sunk by German submarines;

1 June - Mexico declared a state of war with  
Germany.<sup>19</sup>

As these events unfolded, Synarchists sided first with one camp, later with another. For the first two years (1939-1940), while Mexico was not particularly concerned with the conflict, the Synarchist Movement was rather indifferent towards the war. This period corresponded to the presidency of Manuel Zermeno.

In fact, so long as the war was confined to Central Europe, the Movement did not show a special interest. Synarchists did not foresee a new global conflict even when Hitler was ready to send his troops into Danzig,<sup>20</sup> and did not even report the war declaration between France, England and Germany. Nor did they mention Hitler's blitzkrieg in Central Europe. The German-Soviet pact offered them the opportunity to hold the CTM and the Communist Party, who were in a predicament to justify the attitude of the Soviet Union, up to ridicule.<sup>21</sup> Besides, they particularly highlighted the Soviet attack on Finland and laughed at the victory of the Russian "giant" who defeated with difficulty the Finnish "dwarf."<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, they were amazed at the sudden fall of France which they perceived as a crisis of men; which resulted from letting her organism be penetrated by

communist ideas. The official circles were overrun by the same ideas and the leadership of France was soon under a government of Popular Front and with Communism, they said, came its consequences: "things that exhausted the economy of France and distorted, disastrously, the patriotism of the People [...]"<sup>23</sup>

Apart from this regret for country they admired, the war, as a whole, did not significantly interest them.

The tone changed from March 1941 when the question of American military bases was raised.<sup>24</sup> Throughout this period, which ended with Pearl Harbour, Synarchists championed nonintervention and hoped to influence the government so that it would disengage itself from the conflict and not follow its neighbour in preparing for war. The breaking of the German-Soviet pact and the German offensive in Russia, undoubtedly played a rôle in Synarchist decisions; which were, until June 1941, wildly anti-American and supported the German cause. Nonetheless, they made a distinction between the German people and its army and the Nazi government, which they condemned. They justified Germany's policy of revenge on the grounds of the iniquity of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>25</sup>

Soon *El Sinarquista* carried more frequent news on the triumphant German offensive in Europe; the British withdrawal from the Balkans, and her defeats in Africa, and the German campaign in the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> The latter event filled them with joy, because they could foresee the utter destruction of Russia:

"Churchill expects us to believe that England is close to victory, defeat upon defeat; that Germany is close to disaster with every triumph of her armies [...] Deception is the democracies' favourite weapon [...] After the sudden defeat of the Belgian, French and British armies in Flanders; after the collapse of France, Hitler offered peace. Mister Churchill replied with contemptuous arrogance that Germany would first have to lay down her arms, and go back to the state of servitude from where it had come out [...] Russia is now the last hope of the large democracies, but Russia will perish more easily than the other countries subdued to the process of abject disintegration imposed by Democracy, Socialism and Communism [...]"<sup>27</sup>

and stated:

"The peoples of Europe, hurt by Communism, join Hitler to destroy the universal plague."<sup>28</sup>

In line with their desire to see the destruction of the Soviet régime, Synarchists revelled in describing the striking advances of the German armies in the Eastern Front, which they believed were welcomed as liberators by the peasants after years of slavery.<sup>29</sup> They continued to report German wins, and on the eve of Stalingrad, they asserted that the victory of Germany over Russia was a prelude to her triumph over England.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, France inaugurated a New Order based on new organizations which replaced, thereafter, political parties, and which involved the natural communities: families, corporations and provinces. Synarchists approved



General Pétain's crushing of the "treacherous" forces of the Fatherland, in particular, Freemasonry and political parties.

At the same time, they reported that the Anglo-Saxon democracies attempted to win over the largest number of allies to their cause by announcing the eight point agreement that envisaged the organization of the world after the war; upholding, after the defeat of Nazism, the right of the people to self-determination in a disarmed world, where wealth would be distributed among all nations. Yet, they wondered what the real meaning of these words was, when the Anglo-Saxon democracies retained the largest share of the world's wealth.

In the end, they concluded:

"the weapons will have the last word in this controversy sustained between two worlds: the world of Germany, Japan, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and other countries which struggle to create a "new order" according to "new ideas;" and the Anglo-Saxon world, which aspires to preserve the "democratic and liberal order."

Their support for Germany was accompanied by a hostile campaign against the Anglo-Saxon democracies, with strong anti-American tones. Synarchists rose up against the "good neighbour" policy and against the progressive commitment of Mexico on the side of the United States, in a conflict that was not hers:<sup>31</sup>

"We do not agree to help England destroy anybody; given that we were not asked to declare war on Hitler's

totalitarianism, we do not understand why we are asked now to help win a dispute that does not interest us.

On the other hand, we do not agree that the Germans and the Italians be overrun simply because these peoples are ruled by Hitler and Mussolini. We do not agree with that because it would be outrageous that in order to free the world from a Cárdenas, for instance, the Mexican people, ruined and vilified by him and the main victim of his Communist régime, had to be subdued."<sup>32</sup>

After all, they argued, England was an imperialist power herself, as her policy in India attested. On the other hand, the American government imposed its point of view on the Latin American countries because it was the strongest; but they advised it to listen to the voices of protest that came from its own public opinion, opposed to the involvement of their country in a conflict so far removed from its shores.<sup>33</sup>

Abascal published a Manifesto outlining the Synarchist international position:

"We are radically and resolutely Mexican and nationalist. We repudiate, because it is despicable, that colonial mentality which only takes Mexico as a satellite country, destined to rotate eternally in a secondary, obscure and miserable orbit. We subordinate everything to the supreme interest and the honour of the Fatherland, to the material and moral prosperity of the Mexican people; regular sacrificial victim of a fierce and belligerent democracy.

From an international political point of view we are not interested in the war between Germany and her allies and England and hers. We do not believe

that England fights for the freedom of the world, nor to save Christian civilization, nor to preserve a democracy which, if it is the one we see, is not worthy of respect [...]

It must be said that England fights for what all domineering nations have always fought: to preserve her power and prestige.

We do not want war with anybody, for or against anybody. After 30 years of enduring an odious and criminal civil war, all we want is order, peace, liberty, justice within our borders and friendship with everybody."<sup>34</sup>

Synarchism condemned Pan-Americanism; and it reminded its supporters of the past American interventionist policies in the Continent, and in Mexico in particular, with the loss of half her territory.<sup>35</sup>

Synarchism also referred to the racist nature of United States policies towards blacks and Mexicans; it denounced the abject treatment **braceros** endured in exchange for miserable wages.<sup>36</sup>

The Movement's anti-American period corresponded, in fact, to the leadership of Abascal; his influence had, without doubt, a lot to do with the extremism of the Synarchist position.

The Third National Assembly of Synarchist leaders, in November 1941, was a watershed in Synarchist positions. Abascal was replaced by Torres Bueno, the radicals were succeeded by a more accommodating faction. José Trueba Olivares defined the new international orientation of the Movement as:

[N]either anti-yankee Hispanism nor anti-Hispanic Pan-Americanism we could not be Nazis: in the Nazi State man is the slave of the State; the present war is the result of the hatred between peoples, and Mexico is, because of her geographic position, at the confluence of Hispanism and Pan-Americanism; it is, therefore, necessary to adopt an attitude of conciliation and to encourage peace."<sup>37</sup>

Several factors contributed to the change of attitude in the leadership of the Movement: the removal of Abascal and his subsequent loss of influence on the National Committee; the United States entrance into the war, pulling Mexico along in its wake (the United States once at the centre of the conflict could not accept along its borders the existence of a "fascist" movement threatening the peace of its neighbour, and likely to exert an influence with disastrous consequences on the rest of the Continent). Hence, by the end of 1941 and early 1942, a press campaign against the Synarchist Movement was in place. Several press correspondents interviewed Abascal and Torres Bueno and published articles, mostly unfavourable to Synarchism, wherein they expressed the hope that the government should keep a close watch on its activities.<sup>38</sup> There was also the increasing pressure of the CTM and other unions, as well as of the PRM, to dissolve the UNS.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, there was the President's determination to increase the country's level of production, originally, as a contribution of Mexico to the war effort; and later on,

in June 1942, as a necessity, after it had joined the war on the side of the Americans.

In these circumstances the Movement could not remain unperturbed. As long as the war constituted no significant issue in Mexico's foreign policy, the Synarchists had a choice; but the moment the United States entered the war pulling in its wake the entire American Continent, it became almost impossible to maintain a contrary position, its very survival was at stake. The Synarchist Movement fully approved the President's plan to increase production<sup>40</sup> and; hereafter a change of attitude towards the United States was favoured which they justified to their supporters in Christian moral terms:

"Christ teaches us to love our neighbour [...], friend or foe. If the United States have been our enemies, all the more reason to embrace their cause."<sup>41</sup>

It is important to note that the suspension of individual guarantees decreed by the President (3 June 1942),<sup>42</sup> banning public and private gatherings without the prior authorization of the authorities, constituted a severe obstacle to the activities of the Movement. With regard to the introduction of compulsory military service, the UNS opposed it, because it saw it as a prelude to direct intervention in the war, with Mexican armed corps fighting with the American troops; they demanded that no Mexican fought outside the national territory."<sup>43</sup>

The Synarchists also participated in "unity rallies"

(pro-unidad) which they gave a purely nationalist interpretation; they considered these demonstrations as an expression of the unity of all true patriots, in support of the presidential orders regarding the battle for production. They did not share the interpretation of the CTM which considered these rallies as a struggle against Fascism.

Nevertheless, in relation to the bracero scheme set up by the government, the Synarchist Movement staunchly criticised it denouncing it as a smoke screen to cover up the exodus of thousands of peasants faced with starvation.<sup>44</sup>

If the Synarchists changed attitude towards the United States, and went as far as to recognize the benefits of American democracy, and to pledge, on the occasion of Roosevelt's visit to Mexico, in April 1943, for a comprehensive collaboration between the two countries,<sup>45</sup> they never diverted from their condemnation of the Soviet Union. Indeed, as time passed and as the Soviet Union occupied most of Central Europe, their attacks became more and more violent against the "Red peril". The Soviet Union was the principal threat to Europe and to the world as a whole. Much as they condemned:

"false doctrines of racism, imbued in a militaristic, active, intelligent and vigorous people, who built the powerful German State after the war of 1914-1918, whose acts of violence and ambitions since the absorption of Austria and Czechoslovakia definitively made them a danger for Europe and for the world."

they did not believe that the Germans should be made the "main enemy" for that sole reason, since:

"Russia, with the apparent weakness it portrayed during the war against Finland, managed to deceive the world. England and the United States considered that the greatest danger to them and to their power was Germany alone, Nazi totalitarianism, and they relegated to second place the soviet danger, which, in a larger scale than Nazism, for many years, crossed the Russian borders and spread through the world by means of a powerful international organization, which has usually been tolerated and even seen with sympathy by the so called democratic nations [...] After the latest events the least that can be said is that Russia constitutes a danger and a threat at least equal to those represented by Germany [...]"<sup>46</sup>

Thus, Synarchists never ceased to expect the destruction of the Soviet Union, productive of Communism in the world. In 1940, the USSR was the only representative of the socialist system and Synarchists thought that by annihilating this régime and implanting a "new order", Communism would disappear for ever. Moreover, one of the grievances that they held against the democracies was letting Communism develop in all countries. To infer like Mario Gill that Synarchists were fascists for their pro-German leanings, would be hasty and simplistic.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, there is an important gap between showing pro-German feelings and wanting to impose the Nazi solution on the country. Besides, Synarchists adopted, as far as Nazism and democracy were concerned, very ambiguous positions. On the one hand, they wanted the victory of

Germany and the implantation of a New Order, while disapproving of Nazism; on the other hand, they often acknowledged the benefits of American democracy while dismissing the system. Only the condemnation of Socialism was absolute.

Certain elements of Synarchist ideology were found in Fascism, but also elsewhere: the definite criticism of party democracy and of elections, the refusal of the Right-Left division, the opposition to all other groups and political parties. Synarchists were opposed to the class struggle, which they viewed as a factor of social dissension; they combated Marxist ideologies because they repudiated nationalism; but they were also opposed to Mexican capitalists, whom they judge timorous and sold to the foreigner. In the Synarchist vision, workers and employers had common interests.

All that is not sufficient to make the UNS a Fascist movement, and other ideological components (especially the Christian social factor), and other methods (the condemnation of violence and the resort to arms) preclude any perfunctory assimilation.

Its contemporaries, opponents of the UNS, saw it as a "Mexican Fascism, as a "fifth column", preparing the Axis invasion of the Continent. The American secret services kept a close watch over its activities and their conclusions were final: the reports of the Office of Strategic Services, and of the embassy and consulate, much as they emphasized the anti-Americanism of the UNS, they



asserted that the UNS did not have contacts with either the Germans or the Japanese.<sup>48</sup>

Abascal protested against those accusations in May 1941 and explained:

"Nazism cannot be our model, it is a specific German revolution, legitimate off-spring of Luther's Protestant revolution. Nor can Fascism, which is, like Nazism, deification of a race by the Government: arrogance that will be punished by the annihilation of Mussolini and Hitler. There is no arrogance that God does not humiliate.

We are called Nazi-Fascist, but in Mexico, there is no other movement more sincerely anti-Nazi than Synarchism. We are radical nationalists and we do not seek abroad models to imitate or masters to serve.

Hitler is the scourge of God, he is a military genius [...] When he had fulfilled his mission, the destruction of Russia, he would incur the same fate of all the instruments of God: he would break like a reed".<sup>49</sup>

And when in 1943 Italian Fascism crumbled, El Sinarquista commented:

"Mussolini and the Fascist party have fallen. That is an example of what happens to an organization that depends on the megalomania of one man. Nazism will disappear with Hitler. Synarchism is essentially different, it is anti-Fascist by nature".<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, the UNS never concealed its enthusiasm for the nationalist victory in the Spanish Civil War:

"What appeared in the beginning as an insane adventure, has become the greatest transformation of the twentieth century".

Years later, resuming his condemnation of Mussolini and Hitler for their fundamental doctrinaire mistakes, Abascal said:

"As for Franco, it is altogether a different matter; I have always considered that the salvation of Mexico would come through the reaffirmation of her Catholic spirit, of her Catholic tradition, and since we have got these from Spain, we must strengthen our ties with Spain, through **Hispanidad**. And it is precisely Franco who has restored **Hispanidad** to Spain. With Spain we have ideological, mystical relations".

That did not mean that Fascist attraction was absent. Juan Ignacio Padilla confessed that it had existed when he said:

"We would not be honest if we denied the influence that totalitarian movements had on Synarchism. Here, like in all other countries, Hitler and Mussolini soon attracted admiration, affection and approbation, not only among ordinary citizens, but also among important officials and statesmen. Of course, the admiration and approbation were not for the ideas and systems themselves, marked by errors and serious human right violations. What was often admired and imitated was the spirit, the unshakeable will of these people, which, under the leadership of undeniably remarkable men, succeeded to rescue their countries from the most ignominious prostration, to a level of astonishing material progress and military might. The external signs, like the salute, the

discipline, and all that was good in those people, such as the national mystique, made an impression on us and we were ready to imitate them."<sup>51</sup>

Had Salvador Abascal not been banished to the desert of Lower California by the leaders of Base, he could have taken the Movement to seize power, with the use of violence if necessary. He had all the attributes of the Leader, and he could have been one. But even then, it would have been difficult to consider the UNS a Mexican Fascism; and if a comparison were to be made, one should look more towards Rumania and the Saint Michael Legion, with its Iron Guard.<sup>52</sup>

### **III. Synarchism and the Mexican Political System**

Synarchism ranked the Mexican Revolution on the same level of what in its opinion was the most intolerable totalitarian régime: the Soviet Union. The UNS had arisen in response to Cardenism, and had openly proclaimed:

"Long live the reaction! We are reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries."<sup>53</sup>

The ideological content of "El Sinarquista" was entirely devoted against the Revolution which inspired Synarchists with hatred, contempt, anger and indignation.

For the Synarchists, the Revolution had not brought any progress to the country; and, thus, they could not support a government which falsely presented itself as the producer of big political, economic and social reforms.

What had the Revolution achieved? asked the Synarchists. Did it establish democracy in Mexico? Did it implement social reforms favouring the distribution of wealth among all Mexicans? Did it succeed in maintaining the peace and order propitious for economic development? No, they replied. Contrary to what the revolutionaries claimed, the Revolution had only managed to destroy the remnants of colonial civilization, without creating a superior order. Illiteracy, injustice, misery and terror continued to dominate Mexico. Ironically, they commented, the Revolution of 1910 had given Mexico a Constitution which, apparently, was one of the most progressive. But they queried if it had been implemented.

Power lay in the hands of the PRM which imposed its own candidates in elections, by whatever means possible. Electoral fraud in all its forms dominated the Mexican electoral system. Fraud began with the corruption of voters, the intimidation of abstentionists, the impossibility of presenting a candidate not approved by the establishment, the falsified counting of votes; and ended, on occasions, with the disappearance or assassination of citizens too keen to defend their rights.

Supposedly, the Constitution protected citizens from abuses of power. But to the Synarchists the reality was different. Everyday, caciques committed, with impunity, all sorts of crimes. Synarchists had their harvests sacked, their cattle stolen, their men tortured, sometimes murdered, for no apparent reason. The murderers of Teresa

Bustos, they claimed, were rewarded for their crime with posts in the administration, where they could go on committing offences undisturbed. Was this revolutionary justice? they asked.

Faced with this kind of injustice, the people traditionally saw no other course of action than to resort to arms; the eternal illusion, the Synarchists warned, was repeated at each time: a "saviour" appeared and obtained the support of the masses who expected that this "caudillo" would set up a more just régime. Unfortunately, the newly arrived did not do better and the people, in the end, bore the cost of these fratricidal disputes.

The revolutionary "gang", as Synarchism denoted it, had come to power without the support of "true patriots", and was determined to keep it by fraud or violence, and to rule the country according to its whims with no regard for others.

The politicians had taken power for their own good, which they could use and abuse at will. From the bottom to the top of the pyramid, political carriers had no other aim than to make a fortune and to climb the rungs that led political men ever closer to the Chief of State. No elected member, waiting to reach the summit, would dare to contradict the decisions of his superiors, lest he disqualified himself from the course to power. His rôle did not consist of defending the interests of the community with the executive, but simply to approve "courteously" the measures he was presented with.

Moreover, the government, they contended, chose its staff from the least commendable and the easiest to buy. At the local level, shady characters filled the positions of municipal presidents, uncouth and illiterate individuals, who knew of no other constitution than that "of their guns." The function of governors or deputies did not always go to honourable men: witness the case of Garrido Canabal, governor of Tabasco, who made a reputation for his abject anti-clericalism.

Blinded by power, this minority of "Freemasons" imposed its idea of democracy, certain to get the support of the "People's representatives;" and so:

"In the name of democracy, the public treasury squanders in feasts and luxuries for the politicians, while the country lacks roads, schools and all kinds of public services.

In the name of democracy, they have mocked in sanguinary fashion the most honest and legitimate aspirations of the peasants of Mexico to own a piece of land.

In the name of democracy, the workers have been forced to endure the oppression of the union bosses and the terror of the closed shop.

In the name of democracy, the most violent religious persecutions have been unleashed in Mexico; intolerable tyranny has been imposed in Mexican schools, first, debasing laicism, and then, anti-national socialism."<sup>54</sup>

Let us consider in succession the key issues the Synarchists held against Mexican democracy.

The land problems of the nation contain the key to

understanding Synarchism. Mexico was primarily a semi-feudal, agricultural nation, hence, the most reliable barometer of the advance of the Revolution was the extent to which land had been distributed among the peasants. The varied land-reform programmes attempted in the three decades after the Revolution, while distributing vast tracts of land to thousands of peasants, had left, nevertheless, the bulk of the landless peasant mass intact.

The agrarian programme had been least successful in the Bajío region, a region where Synarchism had a wide following: Guanajuato, Querétaro, Michoacán, Jalisco and Guerrero.

In these states, explained Whetten,<sup>55</sup> the agrarian programme experienced greater difficulty than in most other states. He suggested that, based on the fact that practically the only source of agricultural credit for the ejidatarios was through the Ejido Bank, whose policy had been to extend credit only to those areas in which there appeared to be reasonable chance of recovering the loans, an adequate index of the success of the ejido programme was to be found in the relative amount of credit extended by the bank. The share of the total number of ejidatarios in the country that resided in these states was 21 per cent, yet, in 1941, they had only received 12 per cent of the credits to ejidatarios granted by the Ejidal Bank.<sup>56</sup> So, the Bank did not estimate that the ejido programme in these states was sound enough to warrant risking any great

amount of funds.

Considering the level of illiteracy of the population provides another indication of the welfare of the country. The percentage of illiteracy in 1940 for all localities in Mexico having less than ten thousand inhabitants was 61.1 per cent. The corresponding average for the five states in question was 69 per cent.<sup>57</sup>

In consequence, from this perspective, the UNS made more progress in the areas where agrarian reform had experienced most difficulty. The Synarchists capitalized on the poverty of the peasant and on his lack of culture. Paradoxically, the UNS emerged among the poor to contain agrarian redistribution at a time of renewed revolutionary feeling (nationalization of railways, expropriation of oil companies, attempts to make the ejido a permanent institution<sup>58</sup>).

Peasant dissatisfaction with the agrarian programme derived from two causes: first, the provincial revolutionary government had lost touch with the masses, in several respects; the leaders had emigrated to the cities where they had become wealthy and, had practically no further contact with the people. The Indian peasant was up against a large number of bureaucrats who denied him loans, and educated his children in a strange manner. Moreover, in some states, during the Cristero rebellion, both the poor and the rich suffered the voracity of the federal army. Disillusioned by the Revolution, many sought a new ideal. Second, the young leaders of the Catholic



party expounded a brilliant nationalism, that captivated the spirit of post-revolutionary Mexico. They used the populism of the agraristas against its former advocates, many of whom had become civil servants of the urban centres.

During the six-year term of President Cárdenas the Mexican Revolution had become a movement of fundamental social significance. It penetrated deeply into the structure of Mexican life. However, with the introduction of socially oriented policies, a division occurred amidst Mexican society. On one side were all the beneficiaries; on the other, those directly prejudiced, including some groups of peasants and workers who, though pertaining to the social groups to which the official policies were addressed, did not obtain any benefit during those years.

The dividing effect of those policies provoked a politically explosive situation, when dissident élites coincided with alienated masses. Hence, agrarian reform was the measure that had the deepest effects, and in particular, because of the speed at which it had been enforced.

Although the number of peasants who had benefited was considerable (over one million ejidatarios<sup>59</sup>), there remained nearly three million peasants with recognized, or pending, claims, for whom there was no good quality land available.

To satisfy their demands, the government considered it necessary to embark, beforehand, on an extensive

programme of agricultural development, rural re-education, public works, banking and credit ventures, irrigation and hydraulic systems, as well as organizing the peasants.<sup>60</sup>

However, the lack of arable lands was not the only element that frustrated the expectations of the peasant; there were other more technical, and even political, obstacles. Of the former, red tape constituted the most serious. There was considerable bureaucratic slowness in the demarcation of limits, a necessary condition for land distribution. This was aggravated by the ever larger number of land petitions sent to the organizations of the agrarian reform.

The lack of arable land and the bureaucratic red tape combined to restrict the extent of the cardenist offensive in agriculture, and hence, left many peasants hoping to receive a piece of land, but uncertain of the future. They, therefore, constituted an available mass for political proselytism. It was the UNS which made the most of the situation.

Many were the political obstacles that frustrated the hopes and aspirations of the peasants and deepened their distrust and fear of the government; yet, we must ponder over the characteristics of the agrarian movement, because in many instances it adopted a dynamic of its own, often intermingling with local interests.

Under the aegis of agrarian reformism caused by government actions, agrarian committees soon became poles of attraction for landless peasants and, political centres

for ambitious individuals aspiring to a political career, or to predominance in the region.

From the confluence of interests between the peasant mass that expected land and the aspiring politician, together with the interest play of local cliques and the corruption of some agrarian officials, supervened an increase in the number of petitions for land, especially over areas that were not legally liable for distribution.

With this state of affairs, tension in the countryside grew, giving rise to complaints about insecurity, sometimes, legitimate, other for political interests.

Agrarian disorder, however, was not confined to the redistribution of land; it also affected those who already possessed it. The problem here was one of credit; the amount granted and its course. In 1936 and 1937 both Ejidal Banks (**Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola** and **Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal**) had substantially increased their credits, but from 1938, the tendency began to change, and consequently, the number of persons and co-operatives ("**sociedades locales de crédito ejidal**") which benefited diminished.<sup>61</sup>

#### 1. The peasants against the official agrarian policy

What did the peasants think of that agrarian reform and of those who benefited from the situation of rural commotion?

The losers were the small owners who had their

property seized; while the ejidatarios, in return for the land they were given, turned against their brothers. On the other hand, rural society could not assimilate readily the ejido system: it was often considered dishonest to ask for the land that belonged to someone else. It was perceived as a disgrace and a degradation. No doubt this was mistaken, but the idea that peasants had of property and of the means to obtain it, did not correspond to the government's, and the results of the agrarian reform, as they experienced it, did not invalidate their idea. They all aspired to have land, but not at any price; they would obtain it by "honourable" means, by acquiring it, or inheriting it.<sup>62</sup> They believed that lack of a clear deed made them vulnerable to the greed of the agrarian superintendent. This is how the leader of the Municipal Committee of Xochimilco described his plight, and this was by no means an isolated case:

"The ejidos of Xochimilco have not yielded, since 1917, the expected return, because the ejidatario, regarded only as usufructuary of the land, having no title deed, does not work it with the same determination, care and interest as he would if it were his. There is no yield because the lower ranking agrarian authorities are bent on maintaining, with no concern for the well-being of the community, incompetent people in the Ejidal Executive Committee, who deal and do illegal business with the stubble, which not only prevent the ejidatario from enjoying the full value of his stubble, but by serving other outside interests, the cattle of Xochimilco is left with insufficient quantities, [...], creating discontent among the people [...]"<sup>63</sup>

It was for this reason, claimed the Synarchists that the agrarian reform failed to rally the Mexican peasantry - and thus prepared the ground for the Synarchist missionaries, who took every opportunity to denounce its faults. The peasants not only showed little enthusiasm for the existing system, but more seriously, they often preferred to withdraw rather than participate in it; and even the beneficiaries manifested their dissatisfaction once they had listened to the Synarchist message:<sup>64</sup>

"A large percentage of peasants in this region (Ario de Rosales) has continuously opposed to come together as ejidatarios and be considered as such, maintaining that they will continue working as share-croppers or tenant farmers in the fields that have been turned into ejidos as share-croppers or tenant farmers [...]"<sup>64</sup>

## 2. Synarchists and ejidatarios

The success of the UNS was proportional to the shortcomings, or the non-fulfilment of the agrarian reform. The Synarchist Movement addressed itself to all those who had grievances and who were often the victims of the reform (small owners, labourers, tenant-farmers), and finally to those who, although they had benefited, found themselves hardly satisfied. This proved, as the Synarchist reasoning went, that the system was alien to the rural world and that it had been imposed upon it. It had been a political undertaking: division and control (by each other) of the peasants; creation and exacerbation of antagonisms, in particular those that opposed small owners

to ejidatarios, comuneros<sup>66</sup> of traditional Indian communities and ejidatarios, tenant farmers and ejidatarios.

The ejidatario was tied to the State through the plot of land he held in usufruct, but did not own. A minority of ejidatarios was armed, in order to control, politically, the countryside: they were known as "reservas rurales", or "reservistas".<sup>67</sup>

President Cárdenas had encouraged the formation and development of rural militias, of which both the army and the peasants disapproved. He vaunted

"I will give the peasants the Mauser they used to make the revolution, so that they defend it, so that they defend the ejido and the school."<sup>68</sup>

The UNS lost a number of militants killed by the "reservistas", mostly in July 1939 and July 1940.<sup>69</sup> The reason for this violence lay in the fact that the Synarchists had infiltrated the ejidos, threatening from within its political structure, challenging the position of the caciques and the PRM:

"[In the region of Ario de Rosales], the Synarchist Union has expanded considerably [...] On occasions even the Comisariados ejidales have become Synarchist, often completely abandoning their duties, and sometimes resigning from their posts."<sup>70</sup>

Synarchists entering ejidos, ejidatarios becoming Synarchists, the movement achieved considerable penetration in conformity with the Synarchist order of

seeking to have their men elected to the posts of ejidal superintendent (comisario ejidal).

Salvador Abascal gave a warning to the peasants:

"Ejidatario, your enemies do not want you to be the absolute owner of the land you have received, that is why they say you should combat Synarchism. The UNS fights to make you the absolute owner of the land, to get you a definite deed."<sup>71</sup>

Declarations of allegiance to the Synarchist creed were always followed by demands for permanent land endowments and by allegations of abuses and persecutions from the local authorities and the reserves. The UNS encouraged its militants to accept the plots allotted, expecting thereby to ultimately turn the ejidos Synarchist; it would then ask them to solicit from the agrarian authorities the registration of the plots, so that they became real private property:

"We, the peasants and ejidatarios of the municipality of Villa, Escalante, Michoacán [...] consider that agriculture will not progress in the Fatherland, as long as possession of the plot of land, for which many of us went to the Revolution, is not secured [...] and as long as we do not free ourselves from the modern leaders who want to add more blood to the price we have already paid for the lands entrusted to us. Therefore, we ask that we are given, as soon as possible, the title deeds; this being one of the reasons why we joined the Synarchist Movement: to insist that the promises of the Revolution are fulfilled."<sup>72</sup>

Thus, the question of why the peasants followed the

Synarchist Movement, challenges the entire concept and system of the agrarian reform.

The village that the agrarian reform had conceived was a bold socio-cultural exploit, administered from the city, according to methods that antagonized country folk; it was a village torn apart by the tragic opposition between small owners and ejidatarios; it begot a rural anticapitalist sentiment, which Synarchism capitalized, understood and expressed.<sup>73</sup>

The union that had been long sought, was intrinsic in its name, **Synarchist Union**:

"Synarchists are united by no other ideal than to strive for the greatness and prosperity of Mexico, and for the spiritual and material welfare of all Mexicans. This ideal could only be achieved on the basis of a real social solidarity that guaranteed the liberty of all, and where the principles of **social justice** attained their highest degree of realization. The ensemble of this things constitutes the **social order**, which is not conceivable without an authority that looks after the common good and has the sufficient moral and material strength to enforce that order. Therefore, the denomination **Union Nacional Sinarquista** was the most appropriate to describe the Movement that emerged to bring together all those who defend authority and social order."<sup>74</sup>

The Synarchist Movement,

"spiritual current that sought the internal and permanent cohesion of the Mexican society, by creating a state of collective consciousness that would be permanently revealed by a true and lasting National Union,"



could serve conservatism, but it could also breed rebellion and even revolution.

The fact that the UNS drew its strength from this ambiguity, that it recruited from the entire rural sector and, that this ambiguity grew more intense, concerned those in the Government, in the United States and among the conservatives, who feared that the Movement could become unexpectedly more radical.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, the UNS carved out an easy triumph by condemning the damaging effects of capitalism and the Revolution, by denouncing the ravages of *caciquismo*, the PRM, the revolutionary régime and the agrarian reform.

The Synarchist Movement spoke the language of the peasants; as a modern political movement, it managed to capitalize on the "peasant tradition", Catholic and national, whose cause it vindicated.

Peasants, as an observer wrote, joined the UNS in large numbers (until 1941):

"Mainly because it has given him something - a status, a position in his own eyes and those of his neighbours. It also had given him a channel for his discontent. Thus, aside from the unmeaning promise of land, the bond which ties the simple Indian to the Movement is an amalgam of the worst and the best passions he possess. There is the black stultifying hate, so disciplined that the object of hatred can be changed at the will of the *Jefe*; but there also is the longing to be somebody, to belong, in a society which so far has not let him be much of anything but a carrier beast. He might even be a martyr; if not that, he can at least march, and sing and hope".<sup>76</sup>

Synarchism, therefore, was a protest against the errors of the Revolution in religion and education - a subject to which we shall return - against the shortcomings of agrarian policy; against the American and urban invasion. All grievances were brought together in one belief, all malcontent country folk organized in one movement. In the great upheaval that the rural world had been experiencing, many forms of socioeconomic structure were destroyed, though not definitively, without replacing them.

The implications of this situation had been the shattering of social cohesion; agrarian reform had created serious division in the countryside, but did not put an end to the misery and the exploitation of its inhabitants. The mass of underprivileged peasants, at the bottom of the rural social scale, did not obtain land. To escape their plight, they could only leave for the cities and the United States (the American war effort required importing hundreds of "braceros") - a drift from the land that was fought unavailingly by Synarchism;<sup>77</sup> or hire themselves out to the ejidatarios.

The UNS made the demands of the peasant its own: complete ownership of the land, work and bread for all, the right to preserve his property, security and dignity. Therefrom, it set up a national movement which showed that the peasants needed outside orientation to get organized, so that they could take on the political system behind the existing social structure. The UNS was successful in this

respect because it knew the countryside, it was aware of its problems and it spoke the same language.<sup>78</sup>

#### **IV. The UNS and the Agrarian Problem**

The ideology of the Synarchist Movement was the reflection of the immediate results of the agrarian reform. It was the point of view of the country folk, the "petits possédants" in the face of the disorder that entailed land distribution; it was the opinion of the underdogs who were subjected to reform which was undertaken without their actual participation. It was also a lack of understanding over the structural change that Cárdenas expected from the *ejido* made to play a new economic rôle in the development of the nation; lastly, it was a pessimistic view of the aims of the Revolution which had, since 1920, made fun of the peasants by promising them "land and freedom," and uniquely satisfying a few privileged ones, only to subjugate them to the government.

The Synarchist condemnation of the agrarian programme appeared in 1938 in an article entitled: "**Campesino: la Revolución te ha traicionado**". The following quotation vividly shows the allurements of Synarchism. Because of the forcefulness of the appeal, it is quoted at some length:

"Peasant: You were living in the peace of your fields when the revolutionary clamour reached your ears [...] The shadow of a leader appeared before you [...] He said to you: 'You are being exploited. The piece of land which was yours has been snatched away from you. Follow me.' And you left the peace of

the fields in order to follow the leader. When necessary, your blood was spilled in the trenches. You wanted a less cruel life for your son, for your wife, for your father. You wanted to be free. That is why you went, with your arms, to the Revolution. A banner was unfurled before your eyes. **The Land Belongs to Him Who Works It.** And another one touched your heart: **Land and liberty.** You, peasant, who loved the land, had a right to own it. You wanted to be the owner of the soil on which your perspiration fell [...] You wanted all that to which you have a right: bread, justice and liberty [...] **LAND AND LIBERTY:** these two ambitions prompted you to fight. And you loved the revolution which came in your aid, which promised to deliver you from slavery. And you followed the leaders with your faith, with your loyalty [...]

The fighting ceased [...] One day you returned to your field. The revolution became a government. A **GOVERNMENT FOR THE POOR**, you thought. A government which was to protect the weak, the exploited, the Indian. And you asked that government for land to be ploughed, to produce crops for you, to enable you to buy clothes to cover your body and bread to nourish you.

And the government did not refuse anything. It replied: the land will be distributed. And it made you an ejidatario. You, on the other hand, must offer blind allegiance to the leader of your village. You, in exchange for what you were given, must join the political demonstrations, must abandon your labours to receive [...] the figurehead who went for your votes. And you formed herd. You became election fodder [...] But you continued firm. **LAND AND LIBERTY:** For those two things you sacrificed everything, even your pride.

You saw how the man from your own class, now a legislator, began to forget you. You saw how he was growing wealthy, how he was giving up his simple manner of speech, his humble

clothes, his friendly gestures. And you saw him become the accomplice of your former masters [...] When you reminded him of his duties, you received kicks and curses. Your apostles, the men who had spring from your own class, were deceiving you. You continued to wait for LAND AND LIBERTY. The large holdings were subdivided. The former owners were exiled [...] And they told you: There it is, for you, the land you work. The ejido emerged: a piece of land that you were to cultivate with your companions. A bank lent you money to buy seed. But the bank was full of overseers. They were not your friends. They were men who would profit from your poverty [...] You knew that you were not able to use the land as if it belonged to you. The land was still another's [...] If you failed to observe discipline, you ceased to enjoy your plot of land. Through the intrigues of your leader, sometimes you were deprived even of the fruits of your labour. You continued to be exploited and poor. You changed masters, that is all [...] The revolution was beginning to betray you. The piece of land that had been offered to you was exploited by the revolutionaries to keep you tied, submissive, enslaved. The revolution had betrayed you then, peasant. The land is not for him who works it, it is not yours. You are not free. It is not given to you, even though you bought it at the price of your blood. Today the collectivistic revolution is directed against you.

LAND AND LIBERTY: two words, peasant, which have been abused."<sup>79</sup>

This pessimistic conception of what the agrarian reform was, from 1917 to 1934, formed the basis of Synarchist ideology which, once expounded, would not subsequently evolve. The Synarchists would only content themselves with denouncing more and more strongly the

failure of Cárdenas' reforms and with launching furious attacks against the measures they estimated insufficient to combat the economic crisis engendered by the outbreak of the world war.

What were the main elements of Synarchist thinking about the agrarian reform?

Their point of departure was that agriculture was the principal source of wealth of the nation. Since 65 per cent of the active population lived in the countryside, in 1940,<sup>80</sup> agriculture should be the top priority of the government, which should devote all its efforts to solve the acute agrarian problem. However, they did not attempt to put forward an explanation as to how agriculture could be a source of development; they simply stated their desire that it should be so. They dreamt of a country that would live in autarky, and this was the reason why they condemned the inflow of foreign capital, which put the country under foreign control, and broke the existing harmony. Consequently, they rejected the idea of development through industrialization.

Synarchists believed that the resources of the country were almost inexhaustible: it was only a question of taking advantage of the thousands of still unexploited lands of the North and the Pacific coast. They categorically affirmed that every Mexican had the right to cultivate his own piece of the national soil; "appropriation that they held as "a condition for the freedom of everybody," or rather, of each family, since

"the formation of the patrimony of the peasant family rests on the ownership of the land."<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, every family that could live in autarky and could sell its surplus in the local market, did not need to sell its labour to an employer who could exploit it and constrain it to renounce its true convictions. The Synarchist concept was one of sheer individualism, pushed to the extreme; individualism which took the name of liberty.

Nevertheless, they did not condemn the distribution of land to the peasants, but rather considered the *ejido* "an imperfect form of property"; which in certain cases should continue to exist as it did during Colonial times, but their desire was that it should become individual property.<sup>82</sup>

And so, distribution of a plot inside the *ejido* was a first step "in the direction of individual and absolute property", which would allow each person to be independent of the State and the credit institutions, so that he could own the produce of his labour, and benefit from economic independence, which they saw as the basis of all freedoms.<sup>83</sup> The aim was not simply to transform the peasantry into a mass of small farmstead owners (*minifundio*), with little or nothing to live on; it was not a question of creating a uniform mass of "dispossessed" as would a collectivization régime, but rather of forming a "landed bourgeoisie that would share in the welfare of the community and the economic security

of the largest number of Mexicans."<sup>84</sup> The new owners should not be left to their own devices and condemned to a humdrum agriculture: the peasant should have guarantees, credit, protection, security and support.

In order to create such stratum, land would have to be found; first, in the still vast unexploited regions of the country, and afterwards:

"If the common good demands the distribution of latifundia, adequate compensation must be granted to those affected; [only the] small property is sacred, Synarchism is opposed to dispossessing small owners who are made worse off to the benefit of the State."<sup>85</sup>

Synarchism rejected outright the reform carried out by the Revolution because it saw it as rendering the peasantry subservient to the government. In this context it rebuked the creation of collective *ejidos* because:

"It is detrimental to production; it maintains the bondage of the peasant, destroys self-initiative and creates a new tyranny over the peasants."<sup>86</sup>

By constantly attacking the collective *ejido*, Synarchists were inevitably ranked with the hacendados and large foreign property owners.<sup>87</sup> However, Synarchists did not spare their disapproval of the latifundia; time and time again, *El Sinarquista* voiced this opinion. It announced that the hacienda was a thing of the past,<sup>88</sup> and remarked:



"The régime of free economic competition gave rise to large misuse of property. While thousands of tons of wheat were dumped in the sea to avoid the ruin of the capitalist concerns, thousands of people died of hunger. The misuse of the right to property leads to collective unrest."<sup>89</sup>

Accordingly, they persistently rejected the accusation raised by the Left of wanting to hand back the latifundia to their former owners.<sup>90</sup> In fact, **El Sinarquista** denounced the abuses committed by capitalists and politicians - whom they saw as the new propertied class.<sup>91</sup>

Their reaction to these accusations was a strong condemnation of the Revolution:

"The Revolution declares that it establishes social justice in the workshop and in the field and that Synarchism, is, instead, the enemy of the ejido and of the union and that it fights for the old hacendados and the owners of the factories. No one can believe the Revolution any more, because in its many years it has not been, and will never be, but this: arrant enrichment of politicians and leaders, who every day have more; misery of the people, who every day have less; persecution of what is good and license for all that is bad: Communist school, public immorality, etc.; **hatred between brothers**, since the army "reserves" do not possess arms to defend Mexico from abroad, but to cut up and despoil with impunity simple ejidatarios; **Totalitarianism, dictatorship, Porfirismo, anti-democracy**, because the people cannot elect even the municipal president, anywhere in the country; slavery of the workers, who have to carry out the whims of the leaders (special fees, demonstrations, elections), for fear of the closed-shop".<sup>92</sup>

Despite their criticism of the misuse of private property, Synarchism did not condemn private property itself:

"[Contrary to Communism] which denies men the right to possess. Communism seeks to destroy private property and to make of everyman a dispossessed one [...]

[By] denying this right, it intends to deprive man of the things he obtained through his labour. Man, by using his strength, seeks to obtain and to own certain things; by getting a job, he earns the right to demand a salary and to dispose of it as he chooses. Therefore, if the worker invests his earnings to obtain a good, this good belongs to him [...] Property must not be abolished. Property must be shared more equitably."<sup>93</sup>

The real problem lay not in property but in the use of it:

"Certainly we defend property as an inalienable and primordial right of man, essential for the peaceful and prosperous life of societies. And as a right, we recognize the faculty all men have to "use" it, as much as their needs for a decent life demand it; but under no circumstance do we defend the "abuse" of this right whereby man sets himself up as an immoral hoarder of wealth, without regard for the methods, or the misery and misfortune of the underprivileged, victims of his ambition. This "abuse" is the real cause of the present state of injustice which we resist and strive to remove from society."<sup>94</sup>

Synarchists had been aware, since 1940, that the development of the country rested on industrialization. However, they rejected this path because it placed the

nation under foreign tutelage and did not allow for the possibility of building a nation of small independent owners. They aspired to a return to Nineteenth century competitive capitalism, where industrial production was still done by craftsmen, and wished to ignore monopolistic, as well as state capitalism.

It was what we might call the "small-owner-ideology" which attracted the masses to Synarchism and secured its success, especially in the Bajío.

#### **V. Synarchism and Socialist Education**

The design of the revolutionary state "to take possession of the minds of children" was incorporated in the 1934 amendment to Article 3 of the Constitution, which established "socialist education". This caused a burst of indignation in Catholic circles which led to the formation of the secret organization "**Base**" to fight what it regarded as the "Bolshevik" government.

For Synarchism, depository of the Catholic tradition, Article 3 remained at the heart of its grievances.<sup>95</sup> The eventual amendment of Article 3 constituted the latest anticlerical measure dictated by the government to contest the influence of the Church. The aim of its instigators was to form a new generation totally removed from the authority of the priest. Synarchists were not long in reacting; Article 3, they protested, was unconstitutional, anti-Mexican, oppressive, obscurantist and retrograde:

"It is **unconstitutional** because it is opposed to the spirit and the letter of the Constitution [...] Article 6 establishes the freedom of expression which presumes the freedom of education; while Article 3 establishes that individuals do not have, by themselves, the right to educate; but in the event that they obtained it, they should conform to the "Ideology" of the State.

It is **anti-Mexican** because it goes against our [Catholic] tradition, against the national sentiment and the destiny of the Fatherland, whose greatness is placed on the glorious Hispanic, Graeco-Latin and Christian tradition.

It is **oppressive** because it denies parents the sacred right to establish schools for their sons [...].

It is **obscurantist** because it pretends to give the youth "a rational and precise notion of the Universe and of life", which entails a denial and ignorance of contemporary culture [...], at a time when scientists are more modest than ever and declare that "we know little or nothing."

It is **retrograde** because [its] defenders [...] proclaim and misinterpret [...] an obsolete science [Socialism], which the twentieth century has surpassed and even declared some of its main assumptions untrue."<sup>96</sup>

Synarchists demanded the respect of the rights of the family in the education of the children because:

"the duty and the right to educate pertain directly to the parents. A basic condition for the stability of the social order is that there must be perfect harmony between the elements that contribute to education, namely, the family, the school, the State [...] The State has the responsibility to provide each member of the

community with the opportunity to educate himself."<sup>97</sup>

In the final analysis, Synarchism especially reproached Socialist education being directed against the Catholic Church, whereby the State denied the traditional right to form the conscience of children and whose influence it intended to oppose.

Synarchists pointed at the results of the new education: by putting boys and girls together, socialist education stifled all sense of decency and ill-prepared women for their future vocation. Moreover, sexual education was an abomination; not only did it wantonly reveal life's secrets, but it also corrupted the soul of young children with obscene images and degrading spectacles.

Besides, revolutionary education formed the new generations in the image of the Revolution. It gave them its principles and its "ideal", namely: corruption, ambition for power, etc. School, they argued, did not teach respect to parents, to be charitable towards the unfortunate, to love and fear God, to help one another; it taught them, instead, the opposite: to hate the Creator, to despise the authorities, to be envious of the more fortunate and to desire their ruin. Perversion was, in a word, the ultimate aim of socialist education.<sup>99</sup>

#### 1. Synarchism and education

The Synarchist stance in education was clear: the abolition of socialist education. It was their belief that

the reform of Article 3 was undeferable, and that it should be drafted according to the terms of the "natural law" and thus bring the nation to the "level of civilization". Putting aside the natural right of parents and the divine right of the Church in education matters, it was urgent, they claimed, to start a policy of harmonization and complementarity between their educational activity and that of the State's.

Education, they emphasized, had to be religious and privately run - the "Escuela Libre" (Roman Catholic school) - and backed by State subsidies.

The aim of Synarchism was to promote culture in order to destroy political subservience and guide the national community towards the attainment of the highest spiritual values.<sup>99</sup>

Synarchist thinking was based on the premise that men live and interact in three societies: the family, the State and the Church. All three, albeit in different manner, intervened in education. But it behove fundamentally to the family and to the Church for natural and divine right; the State had a supplementary rôle, as promoter of the common good.

Parents had a special right in the education of their children. Nature entrusted them not only with the procreation of progeny, but also with their development and progress. Parents had the mission and therefore the right to educate their children; an inalienable right at that, because right and duty were inseparably bound; it

was a right that anteceded any right of the State, and hence, it was inviolable by any worldly authority. However, the right of parents was neither absolute nor despotic, since education had to agree with both the rational nature and the metaphysical end of children.

The Church had the mission and the supreme authority of teaching, she was the repository and the custodian of the faith which redeemed men and nations; she was the pillar and the foundation of the truth. She was given the authority to educate nations and to teach them to observe the divine laws. This authority was not subject to the rule or control of any worldly power, either in its inception, in its exercise, in its objective, or in the means necessary and adequate for its fulfilment.<sup>100</sup>

The State received from God the right to intervene in education not by way of teaching, like the Church, or by way of parenthood, like the family, but because of the authority bestowed upon it to promote the temporal common good, of which culture and intellectual prosperity were a special part.

The State's rôle in education was supplementary. It had to do with the protection of the children's right to receive an education when the duty of the parents was physically or morally wanting because of absence, incapacity or unworthiness. Given that the right of the parents was not absolute, but dependent on the natural law, it was thus subject to the supervision and the legal tutelage of the State, in relation to the common good. In

this case, the State neither replaced nor absorbed the right of the family, but it protected and helped its progress and initiative.

Any aspirations that the State may have had in the sense of setting outlines for the personal education of children, or for controlling it in any way, were unfair and illegal because they violated the natural law. Even more unfair and illegal was an educational monopoly which compelled parents, physically or morally, to send their children to State schools against their Christian moral obligations and against their legitimate preferences.<sup>101</sup>

Because man is essentially a religious being, education could not be neutral, "laic", or irreligious, without being defective and inappropriate to achieve its formative mission. Laic education, far from bringing up capable and efficient citizens, endowed with authentic cultural values, produced disabled spirits, devoid of the religious element, which was, in the opinion of the Synarchists, the only effectively valid one. Anti-religious schooling, which not only ignored God but fought Him, was contrary to nature because it tended to destroy the very source of all spiritual life in man. Coeducation was anti-religious, especially in teenagers; sexual education was anti-religious and evil; so was Marxist education.<sup>102</sup> Education, then, should be religious if it was to consider man in his spiritual integrity and if it was to be formative and not destructive.

Synarchism claimed that if the State did not intend



to change its conception of education, then it should not oblige parents to send their children to its establishments; and concluded that it was better to remain illiterate than to become corrupted. It accused socialist education of being more concerned with "poisoning the soul of the children" than with educating them. It further stressed that national education was in communist hands (they particularly accused the Education Minister, Sanchez Pontón), whereby the school was exclusively utilized for political ends.

If all the criticisms of the UNS arose from violent anti-revolutionary feelings, it is also true that they found a favourable echo in large sectors of the population, not only for their ideological base, but also because of the excesses of socialist education.<sup>103</sup> Of the many groups and organizations that made public their indignation regarding socialist education, the most important were: the Church, the Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia, student organizations, the Partido Acción Nacional, the Partido Nacional Agrarista, almazanista groups, the Unión Democrática Institucional, the Asociación Nacionalista de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, the Confederación de Agrupaciones Independientes and the Partido Nacional Antirreleccionista.<sup>104</sup>

Indeed, it must be noted that teachers, quite aside from the Synarchist assumption that they wanted to corrupt the children, very often had the tendency to confuse Marxist training and anticlericalism, in a word,

elimination of illiteracy and political enrolment for the Left. De facto means were utilized, specially in the rural areas, with the frequent collusion of political caciques. In order to explain this, one must bear in mind that the vagueness of the precept, caused a change in the rôle of the teaching profession, since by accepting as a possible aim the socialization of the means of production, education took shape as a political weapon. So, teachers who wanted to comply with the constitutional order and who went on to apply it according to the best of their knowledge, fell to political activity and became, particularly in the rural communities, local leaders, who led the discontent of the peasant groups.<sup>105</sup>

The social rôle of the teacher was not new, it went back at least to Obregón, and arose from his (the teacher's) close contact with the peasant milieu - often his own - and from his own precarious situation. But it was Cárdenas and his administration who encouraged the teacher's rôle as leader and defender of the revolution. After establishing rural schools, the administration created two institutions aimed at completing and improving the work of the teachers: **the Escuelas Normales Rurales** (rural training colleges) were designed to form future teachers for the peasants, setting them in areas akin to their own backgrounds and in conditions of close mutual influence; the **Cultural Missions** were created as brigades of ideological agitation and to bring up to date the knowledge and methods of the teachers.<sup>106</sup>

President Cárdenas often alluded to the social duty of the teacher. In a speech at Uruapan, in 1939, he said:

"The mission of the teacher ought not to be limited to the confines of the classroom; in the social domain, that mission demands his collaboration for the absolute fulfilment of the programme of the revolution. The rural teacher is the guide of the peasant and the child, and must be involved in the improvement of the people. The teacher must help the peasant in his struggle for land, and the worker in obtaining the wage that the law of each region had set."<sup>107</sup>

In the centre regions of the country where the clergy still had a strong influence on the traditionalist peasant strata, and on the urban petite bourgeoisie,<sup>108</sup> it was certainly not by provoking public opinion in this manner, that the Left wing of the PRM, and the Ministry of Education, would succeed in introducing the changes it desired.

On the contrary, the peasant populations revolted against "socialist" teachers. They followed, it must be said, the advice of the petit-clergy and of the UNS which urged them not to send their children to their establishments.

Teachers risked their lives in teaching socialist education, and especially for defending popular claims. According to David L. Raby, the caciques and large estate owners of the region cut off their ears and sometimes mutilated them as a reprisal for their involvement in demands for land, in the organization of peasants and

workers in co-operatives and unions, and finally, in the fight against them. Their atheism precipitated violence in some States of the Republic, notably Michoacán, Guanajuato and Zacatecas; but it was not the cause elsewhere.<sup>109</sup> In these cases, the ear-cutters and the killers were rebel groups of recalcitrant cristeros.

The Communists naturally blamed the Synarchists for all the atrocities committed against the teachers. However, these crimes should not be attributed to the UNS, or to Synarchism; as one observer suggested, the xenophobia of the communities, the disregard for life in the villages, were sufficient to explain those violent reactions.<sup>110</sup>

## **VI. The Abandonment of Socialist Education**

The Ministry of Education soon recognized that the policy had not only failed to penetrate ideologically the countryside, but also that it lagged behind in the provision of schools for children. By taking primary and secondary education from the Church, the State, which neither had the staff nor enough premises, was less able than in the past to provide all children with education. All these reasons, together with the ideological choices of the government of Avila Camacho, accounted for the progressive renunciation of socialist education, and at the same time, the application of more moderate measures. The UNS saw with some satisfaction this turn of events.

Since its official foundation, the Movement had

organized many public demonstrations demanding the reform of Article 3, and was unabated in its attacks of the Ministry of Education. Until the end 1941, all these protests had no success. However, Avila Camacho announced some changes in his 1941 address to Congress. He acknowledge that "public education was unsatisfactory"; and called upon the teachers to help restore education to favour.

Notwithstanding this, he emphasized that Article 3 would not be modified but that he would propose a reform of its Statutory Law. The statement was followed by the resignation, on 18 September, of Sanchez Pontón, and the appointment of Véjar Vazquez.<sup>111</sup> The reforms enacted by the new Minister bore witness to the new frame of mind of the Government. He expelled from the Ministry many elements judged unnecessary or suspected of leanings that were too leftist; he also had the school texts replaced.<sup>112</sup>

On 26 December 1941, the President asked Congress to draft a new statutory law of Article 3. This modified, in fact, the spirit of that article. Avila Camacho stated on that occasion:

"Article 3 is not Marxist Socialism but Mexican Socialism [...] The education provided by the State must not be anti-religious.

"It is important to recognize that the family has an essential mission in education, since the school must educate children in accordance with tradition, so as to eliminate the petty hatreds and discords from which Mexico has suffered in the past."<sup>113</sup>

The government went further; in 1942, Véjar Vázquez called upon the private sector to collaborate with the government to set up new schools. The Church was given the possibility to recover some of the ground lost. The Minister of Education even spoke highly of the work of the missionaries and the priests.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, without interfering with the text of the law, the Government of Avila Camacho had completely gone into reverse, by expurgating the Marxist dispositions that sustained his predecessor. The resignation of Véjar Vázquez in December 1943 did not signal a return to the old ways, because his successor, Jaime Torres Bodet, pursued the same policy.

Still, all these changes were carried out in a torrent of political passions: the Synarchists criticized the reforms they judged "too timid"; while the Left was indignant at its loss of influence.

During 1942 and 1943, the two tendencies were in confrontation: the Left attacked Véjar Vazquez whom it accused of being "reactionary". Vicente Lombardo Toledano warned the government against the reactionary inclinations of the successor of Sánchez Pontón and pontificated: "either Socialist education or Synarchist education!"<sup>115</sup>

On the Synarchist side, they continued to protest against the upholding of Article 3, but welcomed the government project authorizing the establishment of private institutions.<sup>116</sup>

The Minister did not have an easy road; he had to

defend the new measure in Congress, where he was strongly challenged: whether he had intended to depart from the Marxist principles that should rule education; and deliver the rural school into private hands and grant freedom of religious education. Was the new education not opposed to the teachings of the Revolution?<sup>117</sup>

To water down the practical extent of the statute, the opponents of Véjar Vazquez required all private school teachers and directors to sign a declaration stating that they accepted without reservation the text of Article 3; that in their establishments socialist education would be imparted, that there would be no religious education, no place for religious worship and no religious demonstration whatsoever.<sup>118</sup>

This was the last refuge of Socialist education which could not go on withstanding general condemnation. By losing the support of the Head of the State, the Left could not bring its ideas to victory: Socialist education was a thing of the past.

Although the attitude of the régime had substantially shifted with Avila Camacho, the Synarchists were not content. In fact, they deplored the indifference with which the Minister of Education regarded them, and complained that he did not want to rely on his real supporters:

"There has, unfortunately, been on his part an unwarranted apprehension with regard to the support that he could get from the honest elements of the teaching profession, and the support

that the people would certainly give him if he decided to act energetically against Communism. But he had not done so for fear of being branded reactionary and fascist",

wrote the UNS leader in 1942. He bid the government to choose between Communism and Synarchism; he was annoyed to see:

"There has been a desire to create a kind of revolutionary education which pretends to be equally distant from Communism and Catholics; a sort of compromise all could adjust to. Using word games it rejected the principles of Socialism but pretends to be socialist still [...]

This half-heartedness was out place, he said, since:

"In Mexico there are only two forces which from day to day specify more and more their antagonistic contours, on one side Communism, on the other, the Catholic people of Mexico [...]"<sup>119</sup>

In brief, Synarchism never ceased to vigorously press for the repeal of Article 3; all legislation that rendered it inoffensive was deemed insufficient; they maintained that as long as it was not definitely removed from the Constitution, it could always be brought back into effect.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jean Meyer, **Le Sinarquisme; un fascisme mexicain? 1937-1947**, Paris, Hachette, 1977, p.33.

<sup>2</sup> UNS Boletín N° 8, 12 March 1938, p.8; and Boletín No.9, 24 March, 1938, p.1, in AGN, Colección "Manifiestos del Comité Organizador Sinarquista."

<sup>3</sup> Luis González, **Los días del presidente Cárdenas**, México, Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, period 1934-1940), 1981, pp.144-142.

<sup>4</sup> A. Whitaker, ed., **Inter-American Affairs, 1942**, Annual Survey No.2, New York, Columbia University Press, 1943, p.28.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Shedd, "Thunder on the Right in Mexico", **Harper's Magazine**, Vol.CXC, April, 1945, op.cit., p.419.

<sup>6</sup> Enrique Prado, "Sinarquism in the United States", **New Republic**, 26 July, 1943, p.98.

<sup>7</sup> N. Whetten, **Rural Mexico**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1948, p.487.

<sup>8</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 28 August, 1941.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Blanca Torres, **México en la Segunda Guerra Mundial**, México, Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo 1940-1953), 1979, pp.65-66,; **El Popular**, 27 April 1941.

<sup>12</sup> GB. 1830 - Mexican Intelligence Report, FO 371/30573, 29 November, 1941, P.13.

<sup>13</sup> **El Popular**, 11 and 27 April 1941; **Latin American Memoranda and Economic Notes**, No.70, 3 August 1941, FO 371/26068 (A 5114/281/26), P.3.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in N.P. MacDonald, **Hitler over Latin America**, London, Jarrolds Publishers, 1940, pp.235-236.

<sup>15</sup> **Latin American Memoranda and Economic Notes**, op.cit., p.2.

<sup>16</sup> On the Left's perception of the war see: Manuel Márquez Fuentes y Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, **El Partido Comunista Mexicano, en el periodo de la Internacional Comunista, 1919-1943**, México, Ediciones El Caballito,

1973, pp.240-254.

17 Blanca Torres, loc. cit.

18 Blanca Torres, *ibid.*, p.70.

19 **Revista del ejército**, Nos.9-12, September-December, 1941, p.776; **Tiempo**, 20 May 1942, p.6, **El Nacional**, 23 May 1942.

20 **El Sinarquista**, 31 August 1939.

21 **El Sinarquista**, 7 September, 1939.

22 **El Sinarquista**, 1 January, 1940.

23 **El Sinarquista**, 27 June, 1940.

24 The UNS made clear its views on this mater:

"The American government thinks that in order to win in this struggle, unparalleled in history, it needs the co-operation of all the other American countries, so it comes to us exerts pressure on us, so that under the command of American technicians, we supply everything that is needed, or might be needed, to ensure a victory and spoils of war that will bring us no honour or profit.

We must surrender parts of our soil, so that American technicians build military bases and ensure the defence of the "hemisphere". In the construction of these bases a secret sophisticated armament will be used which we do not know, which we do not build and which we could not operate. Therefore, as bases they would be useless if they are not utilized by the American army. So that these bases work, we must tolerate, in consequence, that the troops of a foreign army take possession of them, while they show us what they will not want to teach us so that we do not make use of them.

Now, to provide bases for that purpose, or simply to allow them, is equivalent to totally surrendering to them: we will be turned into a colony held for a few garrisons [...] ("Guerra, no! Sino Paz con todos los Pueblos. Proclama a la Nación. No debe

- ser enajenado el suelo patrio". **El Sinarquista**, 20 March, 1941).
- 25 **El Sinarquista**, 10 July, 1941.
- 26 **El Sinarquista**, 17 and 24 April 1941.
- 27 **El Sinarquista**, 3 July 1941.
- 28 **El Sinarquista**, 10, July, 1941.
- 29 **El Sinarquista**, 17 July, 1941.
- 30 **El Sinarquista**, 21 August, 1941.
- 31 **El Sinarquista**, 20 March 1941.
- 32 **El Sinarquista**, 24 April, 1941.
- 33 **El Sinarquista**, 17, April, 1941.
- 34 "'Guerra, no! Sino Paz con todos los Pueblos...", loc. cit.
- 35 **El Sinarquista**, 30 October and 6 November, 1941.
- 36 **El Sinarquista**, 1 May and 25 June, 1941.
- 37 Fabián Carpio "Somos ingobernables los mexicanos," **El Sinarquista**, 20 November, 1941.
- 38 **El Sinarquista**, 23 August and 4 December, 1941, gave account of the existence of three hundred American publications unfavourable to the Movement; Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos. Sinarquismo y Colonia María Auxilliadora**, México, Tradición, 1980, pp.272-273.
- 39 Fidel Velázquez to Avila Camacho, Mexico, 12 May, 1941, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.544.61/25; **Mexican Labour News**, Vol.8, Nos.105 and 106, March-April, 1942; Miguel Ceceña (Presidente del Comité Ejecutivo Regional del PRM) to Avila Camacho, Culiacán, Sinaloa, 7 August 1941, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 544.61/41, Folio No. 46098.
- 40 **El Sinarquista**, 8 December 1941.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Manuel Avila Camacho, **La ruta de México**, México, S.E.P., 1946, pp.60-63; **Los Presidentes de México, Discursos Políticos, 1910-1988**, México, Presidencia de la República, El Colegio de México, 1988, Vol. III: 200-201.
- 43 **El Sinarquista**, 30 July, 1942.

- <sup>44</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 27 August 1942. On the "bracero" programme see: Gustavo A. Hernández Enríquez and Armando Roja Trujillo, **Manuel Avila Camacho, Biografía de un revolucionario con historia**, México, Ediciones del Estado de Puebla, 1986, Vol.II, pp.123-124; and **Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación**, No.14, 3a. Serie, Vol.VI, October-December, Mexico, 1980, pp.3-9.
- <sup>45</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 29 April 1943.
- <sup>46</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 17 February 1944.
- <sup>47</sup> Mario Gill, **Sinarquismo. Su origen, su esencia, su misión**. México, 2<sup>a</sup> ed., Editorial Olin, 1962.
- <sup>48</sup> Mr. Hadow to South American Department, Washington, 14 December, 1944. FO 371/44478 (AN 56/20/26): "Review of the Report of the USA Office of Strategic Services on the Sinarquista Movement in Mexico", pp. 5.6.
- <sup>49</sup> Abascal, **Mis recuerdos** op.cit., pp.246-247.
- <sup>50</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 5 August, 1943.
- <sup>51</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla, **Sinarquismo. Contrarrevolución**, México, Editorial Polis, 1948, p.218.
- <sup>52</sup> Eugen Weber, "The Men of the Archangel", **Journal of Contemporary History**, No.1, 1966, pp.101-126; Pierre Milza, **Le fascisme**, Paris, MA Editions, 1986, pp.226-227; Bela Vago: "Fascism in Eastern Europe, in Walter Laquer, ed., **Fascism: A reader's guide**, London, Penguin, 1976, pp.215-247.
- <sup>53</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 1 June 1939.
- <sup>54</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 25 June 1942.
- <sup>55</sup> Nathan L. Whetten, **Rural Mexico**, University of Chicago Press, 1948, p.188.
- <sup>56</sup> Francisco A. Gómez-Jara, **El Movimiento Campesino en México**, México, Editorial Campesina, 1970, p.143.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid. pp.143.144.
- <sup>58</sup> Arnaldo Córdova, **La Política de masas del cardenismo**, México, Era, 1974, pp.97-101.
- <sup>59</sup> **Los Presidentes de México ante la Nación. Informes, manifiestos y documentos de 1821 a 1966**, México, Imprenta de la Cámara de Diputados, 1966, vol.IV, p.130.

<sup>60</sup> G.B. 1830 Mexican Intelligence Report, 29 November, 1941 FO 371/30573; Secretaría de Gobernación: **Seis años de gobierno al servicio de México, 1934-1940**, México, La Nacional Impresora, 1940, p.XVI.

<sup>61</sup> For an evaluation of Cárdenas' credit policies, see: Antonio Manero, **La Revolución bancaria en México**, México, Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1957, pp.215-216; and Jesús Silva Herzog, **Lazaro Cárdenas, su pensamiento económico, social y político**, México, Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1975, p.681; and Manuel Gómez Morín, p.165, in James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie, **México visto en el Siglo XX (Entrevistas de Historia Oral)**, México, Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas, 1969.

<sup>62</sup> Luis González, **Pueblo en Vilo. Microhistoria de San José de Gracia**, México, El Colegio de México, 1968.

<sup>63</sup> Comité Municipal, Xochimilco, D.F., to President Avila Camacho, México, 12 January, 1944, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 404.1/1497, Folio No.1389.

<sup>64</sup> Meyer, *op.cit.*, p.180; José A. Reyes to President, 19 July 1942, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.544.61/39, Legajo No. 7, Folio No. 27777.

<sup>65</sup> Ing. Manuel L. Palmer (Delegado de Promoción Ejidal, Secretaría de Agricultura) to Director de Organización Agraria: "Informe sobre la situación en Ario de Rosales, Michoacán," México, D.F., 30 July, 1941, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 542.1/34, Folio No. 48680.

<sup>66</sup> Member of a common pasture land.

<sup>67</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla accused the President for protecting the reservistas and letting them go unpunished, "Incongruencias del Presidente", San Luis Potosí, 29 November 1941, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 555.1/28.

<sup>68</sup> Speech at Ejido Tres Palos, Guerrero, on 17 May, 1934, reproduced in Lázaro Cárdenas, **Palabras y Documentos públicos**, México, Siglo XXI, 1978, Vol.1: 128-129. In 1928, **El Machete** had protested against the government's intentions to disarm the agraristas, maintaining that "the gun provided the only guarantee for their lands and their lives", **El Machete**, 3 March 1928.

<sup>69</sup> There are several reports of these acts, see for instance a letter from the Public Prosecutor to President Avila Camacho, dated 26 September 1942, regarding the assassination of several Synarchists by the "reservistas", in the village of Ario de Rosales, Michoacán; in **AGN**, Ramo

Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 542.1/34, Folio No.008554; or the letter from UNS Municipal Committee of Acambaro, Guanajuato, dated 16 September, 1941, asking for the prosecution of the "reservistas" that attacked Synarchist peasants, in AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 542. 1/38, Folio No.55138.

<sup>70</sup> See note (65) Ing. M. L. Palmer.

<sup>71</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No. 40, 2 June, 1944, p.46.

<sup>72</sup> UNS Municipal Committee of Villa Escalante, Michoacán, to President Avila Camacho, 6 February, 1941, in AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 542.1/34, Folio No. 2180.

<sup>73</sup> Emilo Portes Gil, *Audobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1964, p.639.

<sup>74</sup> Sinarquía Nacional: *El Sinarquismo. Su Ruta Histórica; Ideario y Postulados; Documentos*, México, Ediciones U.N.S., 1953, p.40.

<sup>75</sup> See: General José Tafolla Caballero to Secretario de Gobernación 30 May 1941, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No. 542.1/34, Folio No. 35139. And also: Gibson to State Department, "Memorandum on the Unión Nacional Sinarquista of Mexico", Mexico, 2 December 1941, O.S.S. No.8902, Record Group no.226, Paper No.14456; and, "Report on the Sinarquista Movement in Mexico", O.S.S., R&A No.843 of June 1943.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Shedd, "Thunder on the Right", *op.cit.*, p.420.

<sup>77</sup> Lloyd Mallan: "Axis Propaganda in Latin America", *Current History*, September 1943, p.37; David H. Popper: "Hemisphere Solidarity in the War Crisis", in *Foreign Policy Reports*, 15 May 1942, Vol.XVIII, No.5, p.57.

<sup>78</sup> Enrique Prado: "Sinarquism in the US", *op. cit.*, p.97.

<sup>79</sup> Fabian Carpio (pseudonym Alfonso Trueba Olivares), in *Sinarquismo*, No.2, July 1938.

<sup>80</sup> The following figures were shown in the 1940 census:

Total population : 19 653 552,  
Total active population : 5 858 116,  
Total rural population : 12 756 883,  
Total rural active population : 3 830 871.

Source: Mexico, *Compendio Estadístico*, Secretaría de la Economía Nacional, Dirección General de Estadística, Mexico, 1947, pp.42, 43, 48.

<sup>81</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 11 January 1940.

<sup>82</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 22 June 1939.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 15 July, 1940.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 22 June, 1939.

<sup>87</sup> The CTM called the UNS "the worst enemy of the proletariat", **El Sol de Puebla**, 7 June 1941.

<sup>88</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 15 July, 1940.

<sup>89</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 24 August, 1939.

<sup>90</sup> This was admitted by Portes Gil in his autobiography:

"Synarchism rebels against the social state engendered by capitalism, whereby a minority retains the wealth, while the majority is dispossessed. It advocated for a fair and just distribution of property and favoured the distribution to the peasants of the latifundia and the idle lands, by means of private property deeds that made them rightful owners of the estate and free as to its future."  
(Emilio Portes Gil, **Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana**, op. cit., p.639.)

<sup>91</sup> For instance, they blamed the régime for creating new haciendas. Cárdenas, they said, expropriated his former associate Garrido Canabal of 150 hectares in Tabasco to give him 9.863 hectares in Veracruz: **El Sinarquista**, 15 January, 1942.

<sup>92</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 10 July, 1941.

<sup>93</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 24 August, 1939.

<sup>94</sup> Salvador Zermeño y Pérez, "Sinarquisno Unico", **El Universal Gráfico**, 9 July 1938.

<sup>95</sup> Hernández Enríquez y Rojas Trujillo, **Manuel Avila Camacho: Biografía ...**, op. cit., p.173.

<sup>96</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 23 October 1941.

- <sup>97</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 23 November 1939.
- <sup>98</sup> Salvador Abascal to Prisciliano Murillo, Mexico, 21 January, 1941, I.N.A.H., Serie UNS, Microfilm No.36 [11.7.36]
- <sup>99</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, **El Sinarquismo. Su Ruta Histórica. Ideario y Postulados. Documentos**, México Ediciones U.N.S., n.d., 2ª edición, pp. 132-133.
- <sup>100</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, op. cit., p.128.
- <sup>101</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, op. cit., pp.129-130.
- <sup>102</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, op. cit, p.131.
- <sup>103</sup> **Excelsior**, 17, 23 November and 16, 18, 30 December, 1939.
- <sup>104</sup> Victoria Lerner, **La educación socialista**, México, Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo 1934-1940), 1979, pp.187-188.
- <sup>105</sup> Luis Medina, **Del cardenismo al avilacamachismo**, México, Colegio de Mexico (Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1940-1952), 1978, p.345.
- <sup>106</sup> Narciso Bassols, **Obras**, México, Fondo de Cultura Eómica, 1964, pp.170-180.
- <sup>107</sup> **El Universal**, 5 August 1935.
- <sup>108</sup> Salvador Abascal, **La Constitución de 1917. Deestructura de la Nación**, Mexico, Editorial Tradición, 1984, p.72.
- <sup>109</sup> David L. Raby, "Los maestros rurales y los conflictos sociales en México (1931-1940)", **Historia Mexicana**, Colegio de México, Vol. XVIII, No.2 (October-December), 1968, pp.214-215.
- <sup>110</sup> Alberto Breaumantz, **La Educación Socialista en México (Antecedentes y fundamentos de la Reforma de 1934)**, Mexico, Imprenta Rivadeneyra, 1943, pp.328-330.
- <sup>111</sup> Luis Medina, op.cit p.357.
- <sup>112</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 30 October 1942.
- <sup>113</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 8 January, 1943.
- <sup>114</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 12 November 1942; Luis Medina, op.cit., pp.358-359.
- <sup>115</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 23 December 1941; **El Popular**, 12 October, 1941; see also: Luis Medina, op. cit., p.369.



- <sup>116</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 8 January 1942.
- <sup>117</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 7 January, 1943.
- <sup>118</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 4 February 1943.
- <sup>119</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 7 May 1942.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ORGANIZATION AND MYSTIQUE

#### **I. Synarchist militia**

It is impossible to appreciate the influence of Synarchism in Mexico without an understanding of its mystical character. The leaders of Synarchism were true mystics. They were men of true religious character. They were unselfish. They were not animated by ulterior political motives and they did not want people in their organization that were animated by ulterior motives.

The life of a Synarchist was totally marked by action. He participated in assemblies at different levels, he marched in regional and national mobilizations; he met his companions at least once a week. Besides, he was concerned about the sale of the journal, the propaganda, the collection of funds, etc. Each militant had his own place and rôle. Activity was intense, particularly in the early years, the years of "synarchisation", when the Movement was oriented towards spreading the doctrine, and winning supporters.

"Synarchism is at the same time SCHOOL and ACTION. Indeed, it is an ACTIVE IDEA that urges us to work with love, to be useful, and to serve others. A Synarchist does not content himself with upholding a doctrine, he lives it out and propagates it with his word and his example."<sup>1</sup>

Entering the UNS was like entering a religion: the member became a new man, he was mobilized like a soldier

and was on the move. Life had a meaning, new hope for those who had been striving to find a meaning to their life. Indian communities, women, children, landless peasants, small owners who felt threatened by the agrarian reform, dissatisfied *ejidatarios*, artisans, etc., were all united in the UNS which offered them a political faith, a secular Catholic action, in a language that was their own. The UNS found the political style of the moment, hence its success and hence the anxiety of its adversaries.<sup>2</sup>

Davis pointed out that the Synarchists capitalized on the enthusiasm that the candidacy of General Almazan had generated at the 1940 presidential elections. The discontent associated with the belief that he had won over General Avila Camacho, the candidate chosen by Cardenas, and the frustration many people felt when he failed to fulfil the promise of an armed revolt if the victory was taken from him,<sup>3</sup> made Synarchism the faction of electoral reform, the honest party which had advocated abstention and predicted fraud.<sup>4</sup>

"The strongest appeal Synarchism makes, and the most dangerous, is to the unrealized ambitions of the Mexican Revolution itself. To the unemployed, and to the discontented and poorer middle-class youth of the cities, Synarchists hold out the prospect of private land ownership through the colonization schemes they have diligently advocated. Throughout rural Mexico they make a strong appeal to the small landholders (and large ones, too) who, rightly or wrongly, fear confiscation of their lands and fear the "communism" of the Cardenas ejidal communities such as the Laguna project near Torreón [...]"<sup>5</sup>

Although Synarchism did not constitute a political party, and its members did not vote in elections, or carry arms, its aim was to reach power. It seems that it would achieve this by winning over the largest number of followers that would insure the success of a takeover.

## II. The Synarchist Movement and the Cristeros

The Synarchists drew their inspiration from the Cristiada:

"The Cristero rebellion, notwithstanding all its faults and its failure, certainly is the most beautiful and brightest moment of Catholicism in Mexico, and the most stunning outburst of faith of our people. It defended highly the banner of our defiance against the enemies of our liberties, and constitutes the shore and the glorious background of Synarchism."<sup>6</sup>

The UNS was intended as an order of Christian democracy, first under God, then under a God-fearing state, and the UNS was most directly descended from the earlier Cristero movement.

Undoubtedly, the ideas of Anacleto González Flores and the Unión Popular, had won more support in the traditional sectors of the large Mexican peasant mass; and it therefore comes as no surprise that Synarchists considered themselves "the genuine expression of the supreme aspiration of the Fatherland", and characterized the Cristero Movement as "eminent movement of popular wisdom and of great sociological influence". Synarchist

tradition had, then, very remote antecedents, which had come to the surface in the Cristero struggle:

"Its most profound characteristics, its doctrinal code, its rigorous configuration and its noble content found, after some years, faithful reproduction in the National Synarchist Movement [...] Even in the provincial origin the affinity is evident, although the UNS --for clear providential designs-- had [...] the opportunity to spread to all corners of the country and beyond."<sup>7</sup>

Synarchists maintained that the **Unión Popular** and the Cristero rebellion had been the authentic origin of Synarchism:

"In style, in the way of being and of living, the Unión Popular, the Cristero Revolution and Synarchism are one and the same thing. With one reservation: the Cristero Revolution was a movement of warriors, while the Unión Popular and Synarchism are movements of citizens. This minor difference apart, purely accidental, the cause of one and the other is the same; just as the former were able to reach martyrdom, we, its followers, have sown the historic course of Synarchism with our martyrs; and yet both for the same reason; for God and country."<sup>8</sup>

Like the Cristeros, the Synarchists were not only ardent Catholics but also disciplined soldiers of a militant theocratic faith. Again, like the Cristeros, they directed their efforts towards the forgotten peasant masses - those who had benefited little from the Revolution. Both movements eventually gained their greatest strength in the Bajío region of Mexico, where, generally speaking, agrarian reform and rural welfare had made least progress. In contrast to the policies of

President Cárdenas, whose objective was the communization of land, the two movements urged the development of small private property. There was another feature of the Cristiada that brought it into harmony with Synarchism: its popular nature. Both had been movements that not only had influence on but originated among the people.

"Appealing primarily to the humble, the Synarchists were markedly anti-intellectual, as the Cristeros had been a decade earlier. Their militancy was in direct line with the intransigent position taken by pre-revolutionary conservatives, and it reflected a strong sense of alienation from the entire revolutionary tradition, perhaps more so than any other single conservative group. In effect, the Synarchists were heirs to that extra-legal approach which the Cristeros had helped to revive, and they weakened the more tolerant forces which had attempted to take full command of the conservative movement in the post-revolutionary period."<sup>9</sup>

It was in fact precisely by its appeal to the credulity and religious fervour of the peasantry, its prowess in organizing "marches" of semi-religious, semi-political character, and its knowledge of the peasant character, that Synarchism was able to forge a radical, popular movement with traits of similarity to the old Cristero movement and flourishing most strongly in those states which were the scene of the Cristero uprisings in the late twenties.

At the same time, however, there were important differences between the Cristeros and the Synarchists. The Cristeros had been openly supported by the higher clergy; later, these same bishops professed no open

backing for Synarchism. Besides, the Cristeros were armed rebels; but the Synarchists called for passive resistance and a return to the organizing principles of the early church fathers.

"Most important of all, the Cristero movement was based on an offensive stand for religion. The Synarchist Movement took a defensive position which challenged the government on the grounds that the Revolution had not fulfilled the promise of a better life for the Mexicans".<sup>10</sup>

The failure of the Cristiada resulted, in the eyes of the Synarchists, from the lack of direction; the leaders ignored basic military strategy. The guerrilla tactics invariably adopted by all the groups was extremely anachronistic and inadequate.<sup>11</sup> Though they died heroically, they did not make the revolution in the military sense, because there was an essential element missing: unity of plan, of hierarchy and of leadership.<sup>12</sup>

Synarchists believed that through the Base and the politico-militaristic structure of the UNS, the deficiencies of the Cristiada would be overcome and their cause would be successful.

### III. The Synarchist Organization

The National Synarchist Union, for reasons of organization, direction, control, and proselytism, divided the national territory:

1) in Divisions, comprising several states of the

Republic, according to the needs of the national leadership; there were six Divisions: of the North, South, South-East, North-East, Central Division, and the Division of the Valley of Mexico;

- 2) in **Regions**, which corresponded, in general, to the States of the federation;
- 3) in **Districts**, which comprised various municipalities, clustered together for strategic considerations;
- 4) in **Municipalities**, which, in general, coincided with the equivalent political division;
- 5) in **Rural zones**, made up various rural committees, united for practical purposes;
- 6) in **Urban zones**, corresponding to city divisions (barrios, colonias);
- 7) in other divisions which included the smallest rural hamlets; and
- 8) in **Sectors**, the internal divisions of the urban zones.<sup>13</sup>

At the head of each of the aforementioned divisions, there was a leader or chief in charge, responsible to his superior chief in the next highest division.

#### 1. The Committees

The entire organization was presided over by a Supreme National leader, or Jefe, an assistant leader, and



a secret committee consisting of ten persons, the National Committee. The UNS was Section 11 of the Base, and until 1945, the Supreme Council of the Base, which appointed, controlled and removed the National leaders, was the highest authority of the Movement.

There were also regional committees, usually corresponding to states, although some states could have more than one regional committee. There were also municipal committees corresponding to the municipalities and there were rural subcommittees.<sup>14</sup>

The committees executed and co-ordinated all synarchist activity; and their duties were to carry out the plans and programmes, assisted by various specialized groups under their command. The committees were under the direction of the respective territorial chief. A committee was composed of a sub-chief and as many secretaries as the development of Synarchist activity required in each territorial division.<sup>15</sup>

Each municipal committee was made up of: a municipal Chief, a secretary of assemblies, a treasurer, a secretary of propaganda, a secretary of organization and statistics, a secretary of youth action, and a secretary of feminine action.<sup>16</sup>

The secretary was in charge of the correspondence, records and all the documents of the Committee.

The treasurer collected a weekly quota from each member, the regular amount to be agreed upon voluntarily by the member.

The secretary of propaganda played, in close

collaboration with the National Secretariat for Press and Propaganda, an essential rôle. The doctrine of the Movement was contained in two basic documents: "The 16 Points" and the "Synarchist Pentologue", which were unflaggingly repeated, commented upon and quoted. Oral or written, public or private, this propaganda was strictly controlled; no tract, poster, or text was printed without the prior approval of the hierarchy. Besides the traditional media, other propaganda methods were employed, such as demonstrations, public rallies and concentrations.

The secretary of organization and statistics divided towns and villages into districts, subdivided in sectors and blocks; a person in charge was assigned to each one. This kind of organization permitted a rapid mobilization of everybody when a meeting or rally was planned. The secretary had to do his best to evaluate the exact number of militants. To this end, he constantly solicited updated information of new groups and new recruits. He was also responsible for the statistics of the subcommittees. In conjunction with the municipal leader, he shared out the work among the propagandists and fixed the schedule of meetings for all the various groups.

By order of the municipal leader, he organized the marches and other public functions, after obtaining authorization from the National Committee.

The secretary of youth action was responsible for the Synarchist youth and small children. His rôle was to instil in them the Synarchist spirit, inspire in them the exhilaration that came from spiritual and bodily health:

Militia and not sport, Latin and not Saxon spirit.<sup>17</sup> He should give special attention to the organization of children who were considered to make excellent propagandists.

The secretary of feminine action had the same obligations as the municipal leader, and she was assisted by the same number of secretaries. The organization was the same: secretariat, finances, propaganda, organization and statistics and youth. She participated in the restricted weekly council of the municipal committee and she convened her own feminine council every week. The duties of Synarchist women were contained in the "**Ten Norms of Conduct for Synarchist Women**". These described the rôle of the Synarchist woman as that of persuading and encouraging her father, husband, brother and son to adhere to the UNS and to fight for its objectives.<sup>18</sup>

Each municipal committee was responsible to a Regional committee and should maintain close contact with it, strictly obeying all orders and dispositions which emanated from the Regional committee. The latter was, in turn, directly responsible to the National Committee.

Committees had to deliberate and rule on applications of membership and suspended provisionally any member upon request of other members, and simultaneously submitted the case to the National Commission of Honour and Justice (which only came into existence until after the break with the Base). Suspension was usually prompted by actions which were detrimental to the progress of the movement.

The organization was effectively set in what we might

call the "synarchisized" regions. In Colima and Aguascalientes, there was a municipal committee in each municipality; in Guanajuato, there were 38 committees for 45 municipalities and countless rural subcommittees: Apaseo controlled 57 in March 1940, Acambaro 67 and Comonfort 30. Michoacan had 73 municipal committees for 102 municipalities and hundreds of rural subcommittees: Puruandiro controlled 54. In Zacatecas, Jalisco, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí and Tlaxcala, the ratio of committees to municipalities was of 75 for 100, 60 for 100, 60 for 100 and 5 for 100, respectively. Guerrero and Morelos followed with 40 for 100. Then came the group of States with between 30 and 20 for 100: Durango, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Puebla, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Hidalgo. The rest fell below 10 for 100.<sup>19</sup>

Besides this structuring, the rank and file was organized along militaristic lines - which we discussed in Chapter IV.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. The Leaders

The chief, or leader of the committee was the depository of the authority of Synarchism within the respective territorial division. It was his responsibility to appoint the sub-chief, the collaborators and the chiefs of immediate lower rank, and to remove them from their charges.<sup>21</sup>

The chiefs, along with their committees made up the hierarchy of the Movement. The National leader had the responsibility of the functioning of the entire system of

chiefs. He was the depository of the supreme authority of Synarchism, the conduct of which was in his charge.

The divisional leader had the duty of co-ordinating the regional organization, each with its own chief. Next were the chiefs at the district, municipal and rural levels. The executive function of the Chiefs along with the committees was to direct, coordinate and execute the orders and programmes that were issued from above.

After 1945, the faculties and obligations of the National Leader were set out in the Statutes of the organization; among these were:

- i) to convene the National Sinarquía - a renamed National Committee - every two months and preside over its work;
- ii) to promote the development and organization of Synarchism everywhere, guiding and directing every activity;
- iii) to submit working plans to the National Sinarquía for its consideration.

Perhaps the most radical innovation introduced after 1945 was that the National leader was no longer appointed, but elected. His term would be for two years and could be re-elected. The election was made by the National Sinarquia in secret and direct ballot. Most of the National leaders were young and the fact that they were removed every two years prevented a personality cult and the possibility that the movement became the instrument of

one of them. The limits of his authority were set by justice, Catholic morality, the good of the Organization and the National Sinarquia.<sup>22</sup>

Synarchist publications stressed the point that the UNS was to be highly stratified, with a definite hierarchy of offices, each taking orders from his superior. The rank and file of the members were urged to have implicit faith in the officials and to render strict and prompt obedience to all instructions. As an illustration, when Salvador Zermeño passed on the leadership of the Movement to Abascal, in 1940, he urged all Synarchists to accept the new leadership with utmost confidence:

"Of us, soldiers, only one thing is expected: to accept his decision and to follow the conduct which he himself, who is our model, has just taught us, that is, to place our entire faith in him who since today is our Chief."<sup>23</sup>

It behoved to the Chiefs to foment and maintain discipline: yet, this should never be achieved by force or coercion, but by persuasion:

"Each chief should make of each follower, a convinced Synarchist, impassioned of our ideals, so that he accepts with joy the discipline of the Organization. Love, persuasion, passion for our ideals should serve to give strength and cohesion to the Synarchist Movement."<sup>24</sup>

After the split with the Base in 1945, the structure of the UNS became more organic by the adoption of the Statutes of 1946.

### 3. Finances

At the outset, the Synarchist Organizing Committee obtained, after exhaustive negotiations with the Base's Supreme Council, a small quantity of funds to set up the organization, while it sought alternative and more independent means of support, so as not to be a heavy burden on the Base. José Antonio Urquiza succeeded in obtaining further aid when the UNS was expelled from Guanajuato and had to move to Mexico City.<sup>25</sup>

Subsequently, the UNS was financed from weekly quotas assessed for each member; from the proceeds of the sale of Synarchist publications - its newspaper, **El Sinarquista**, and the magazine, **Orden**, as well as from individual contributions.

The duties of the secretary of finances of the committee were detailed in the "**Handbook for Chiefs**"; these consisted of the collection of a weekly quota from each Synarchist, the regular amount to be agreed upon voluntarily by the member, together with the extra assessments that were to be made whenever a companion was killed. These extra assessments would be remitted in total to the person designated (usually the widow) by the National Committee.<sup>26</sup>

The funds derived from the regular quotas were allocated as follows: 60 per cent for the use of the Municipal Committee, 35 per cent for the Regional Committee and 5 per cent to be set to the National Committee.

He should also collect the quotas from the rural

subcommittees and dispose of them as follows: 50 per cent should go the Municipal Committee, 35 to the respective Regional Committee and 5 per cent to be sent to the National Committee. The remaining 10 per cent was kept by the rural subcommittee.

The financial means of the UNS were never considerable because it lacked an external source of finance. The members' quota constituted the only permanent resource: these were fixed, as we have mentioned, by voluntary agreement, and paid weekly. However, the Synarchist militant usually had a very modest revenue, consequently his quota could not amount to more than a few cents. The scantiness of these revenues transpires from the extra contribution that was requested when a companion was killed.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, when the UNS issued bonds, 50 for 100, at 5 cents, and the large ones, 1 for 100, at 5 pesos, the militant was unable to pay his quota and, at the same time, buy bonds.<sup>28</sup> This was also the case of the receipts from the sale of *El Sinarquista*: the Administrator of the paper, constantly dispatched memoranda to the rural subcommittees requesting payment for the papers they received. In most cases, the reply came stating that if all members were to pay for the paper, few would be able to read it, since few could afford it.<sup>29</sup>

If the UNS had a shortage of funds, it was because the Base, which could have provided them did so exiguously. Both Zermeno and Abascal had made attempts to free the Movement from the tutelage of the Secret Council,



with no success. It is clear that financial security would have been an inducement to become independent; whether or not the Base used the financial lever to keep the UNS under its control, we cannot definitely tell; however, both Abascal and Padilla, and later Torres Bueno, suggested that this was, indeed, the case.<sup>30</sup>

According to the critics and detractors of Synarchism, the Movement was mainly financed by Fascist and Falangist sources, provided by the Axis powers, Spain, and the commercial interests of these nations in Mexico. This opinion was sustained by the Mexican left, through its charismatic standard bearer, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the CTM, and its newspaper **El Popular**, and by some sectors of the government, the PRM and its official organ **El Nacional**.<sup>31</sup> In the United States, this opinion was spread by American journalists working in Mexico, such as Betty Kirk, Margaret Shedd, Allan Chase, etc., for whom the UNS was a front for Nazi penetration, part of a "fifth-column conspiracy".<sup>32</sup>

Despite these allegations we could find no evidence that any substantial proof was ever submitted. The First Secretary of the American Embassy noted in 1941:

"Many of the critics of the Sinarquista movement in Mexico assume that the movement must have large financial resources. Sometimes they go as far to insinuate that the resources of the organization come from sources that are inimical to democratic institutions. A careful analysis of the situation, however, will show that Sinarquismo has very little money [...] The national office of the Sinarquista movement is greatly handicapped by lack of funds[...] Many

of its workers are contributing their time voluntarily and are depending on their families [...]"<sup>33</sup>

#### **IV. The Synarchist Programme**

The Synarchist Movement opposed the agrarian reform as it had been carried out by the government; but, short of using violence - which it rejected - it decided to endure in silence until other solutions were available, hoping that the Movement would become sufficiently strong in the future to negotiate with the government the readjustment of its agrarian policy. The Movement had a more immediate problem; namely, how to save from despair the thousands of Synarchist farmers who had lost everything; how to keep them interested in the Union and at the same time ask them to continue the struggle.

In order to deal with this difficulty, the Movement drafted a programme of activities which attempted to channel the desires for change manifested by the peasants, by proposing concrete actions to be carried out at village level. This programme appeared as the Synarchist contribution to the government's new policy on agriculture, the President's "battle for production" of 1941, set to satisfy the requirements of the countries at war. It was, indeed, the policy of "National Unity" which attracted Synarchists and encouraged them to wait.<sup>34</sup>

In his 1941 address to Congress, Avila Camacho exhorted the workers to work more and to trust the Law: to abide by the law that their leaders ignored: the moral law

to choose their leaders among honest men. He reminded them:

"Neither the employers nor the workers should forget that they are, first of all, Mexicans and that above class divisions there is the unity of the Fatherland."<sup>35</sup>

Synarchists understood the necessity to stall and to remain within the policy of "national unity" that the President advocated which, in fact, coincided with Synarchist ideology. Among the propositions contained in the programme presented to the Synarchist National Committee, the following are worth mentioning:

"We will create new population centres, like the ones already established in Lower California and Sonora, by moving families to the fertile lands of the country, so that they exploit them and produce the goods that the Mexican people demands; We will cooperate in the construction of bridle paths (caminos vecinales) and in the foundation of rural and urban schools, especially in the Indian communities;

We will go on fighting for the pacification of the countryside, so that we can all devote our efforts to cultivate the land and yield the necessary to sustain us;

We will strive to increase production at all levels until Mexico attains self-sufficiency and ceases to depend from abroad[...]"<sup>36</sup>

Several considerations were necessary to implement the Synarchist programme:

"The 'defensas rurales' must be disarmed; the only way to establish again peace and security in the

fields; or else, to barrack them and turn them into true military corps. The ejidal executive committees must be freely elected by the peasants; the will of the majority must be respected, and the said committees must be designated with absolute independence from political leaders;

Severe punishment must be applied to communist agitators who, by virtue of occupying government posts, resort to official force to despoil ejidatarios of their lands. The plot of land owned by each man must be declared untouchable, and, since it is his only heritage, it is an unspeakable crime to deprive him of it;

Disarming the reserves, securing land tenure and independent rural institutions must permit the allocation of credit for rural ventures, which is the only way to revive land production;

The establishment of positive democracy in our Fatherland, starts in the Municipio [...]"<sup>37</sup>

These points were discussed and analyzed more extensively at the "Congreso de Labradores" (13-15 August 1942), by 104 delegates representing 200,000 Synarchist peasants. The participants were asked to consider and to put forward solutions to several issues; such as, alcoholism and other vices that ravaged the countryside; dealing with the "agrarian reserves"; obtaining credit for Synarchist farmers; ensuring that each peasant household obtained a plot of land of its own; the establishment of the foundations of rural health; improvement of farming techniques; the establishment of rural schools and elementary education.<sup>38</sup>

The conclusions of the Congress gathered, in fact, the principal aspirations outlined in the programme of May

1942, stressing the right of every peasant to own a piece of land, and to be morally and materially assisted in order to come out of their poverty.

The Congress organized a Farmers' Union, the "**Unión de Labradores Mexicanos**" to implement its conclusions, which, as it made clear, would be completely separate from politics, and would comprise legal, technical and financial departments.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to note that in order to put into practice these ideas, it was essential to pacify the countryside; yet, the solution depended on the government and not on **Synarchism**. But, by declaring that the Farmers' Union would be divorced from politics, the National Committee was actually depriving it of the power to exert pressure on the Government. It contented itself with the expectation of eventual changes which it believed were independent from its will - the influence of the moderate faction of the UNS leadership was obviously behind this. On the other hand, it directed its militants to participate in organization activities at the local level that could help improve the living conditions of the communities, without trying to control decisions at the national level.

Thus, the UNS limited itself to a series of specified measures that frequently conflicted with the lack of goodwill of the local caciques.

What did it achieve? For an indication, we refer to the colonization scheme for Lower California and Sonora. Suffice it to say that the Synarchists saw in this venture

a way to prove to the government and to their detractors their ability to solve the agrarian problem of Mexico. They concentrated a lot of their energies on it, but the results, as we have noted, did not match their expectations.

They also had a special interest in the foundation of rural schools. Undoubtedly, Synarchist endeavours undertaken in this field, after 1942, are one of the least known and most difficult aspects to comprehend. Later on it constituted the Synarchist response to the literacy campaign launched by the government in 1944. To that end, they elaborated school programmes and set in place an organization in 1945.<sup>40</sup> These schools were for the most part unknown to the authorities and **El Sinarquista** rarely mentioned their existence lest the authorities intervened.

Nevertheless, all Synarchist contributions, whatever their merit, inevitably came up against one inescapable reality: Synarchists were excluded from agrarian reform, despite the fact that many had lost their lands and found themselves reduced to pauperization. Wherefore, one wonders what was the aim of these measures: either to solve effectively a problem that could only have a solution at the national level, or, paradoxically, to maintain the considerable mass of discontented peasants non-political and passive?

To accuse the Synarchists of standing up for the **hacendados**, as the Left maintained, would be debatable, to say the least. Admittedly, by defending the right to private property, by demanding the non-apportionment of

small properties, and by opposing collectivization, the Movement effectively took responsibility for the interests of the large estate-owners. Nevertheless, after closer examination, it was not so much this type of farming concern that Synarchism defended, than a programme of economic development which the revolutionary régime soon made its own (after Cárdenas): in fact, by advocating the formation of a landed bourgeoisie, by expecting to make the small property a source of economic wealth, and by preventing peasant demands from taking the form of armed rebellion, Synarchism fought, paradoxically, to make positive the results of the agrarian reform. As for the peasant masses, they had not changed their original demands: land and "municipio libre".

#### 1. Municipio

It is interesting to attempt an approach to the theme of municipio by outlining two clearly defined criteria. The first - and the one upheld by Synarchism - corresponds to the *jus naturae* school of law, which conceives it as a natural entity. The other corresponds to the legalistic school which grants the State the means to create it. In this case, it is the task of the lawmaker to establish, by means of positive rules, its activities and determine the requirements that the Municipio must satisfy so as to grant them legal recognition. In this sense, the Municipio is a legal person of public law, instituted by the Constitution and regulated by the law as a territorial entity of the republic.

According to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, a municipio is: "a group of people living on the same territorial jurisdiction, ruled by a municipal government (ayuntamiento) with regard to its local interests." This is understood as a corporation made up of an **Alcalde** (mayor) and several **Concejales** (aldermen) with the purpose of honourably governing a community. Professor Carlos Mouchet alleges that the Municipio is:

"a natural society, intermediate between the family and the State, and coexistent with these two. To consider it only as the creation of the legislator, means denying its true nature and the inherent ends that it must fulfil.<sup>41</sup>

Communal needs determine the function that pertains to the municipio, that is, to protect the rights and promote the development of all its members; to regulate relations between families and organizations; to look after general welfare, advancing the intellectual, moral and material well-being of all. In general terms, the municipio should attend to all the activities that surpass lower administrative entities, on which the common good depends (e.g., public education, urban planning, etc.)

Consequently, the municipio ought to have the faculty to charge citizens with fair taxes, according to their possibilities and to the requirements of the common good. So that the municipio can accomplish its rôle as promoter and custodian of the common good, it must have autonomy. Municipal autonomy comprises two things: the right for the municipal community to elect its "**ayuntamiento**" (municipal



government) and, the freedom of action and of management over the municipal funds. Municipal autonomy does not only mean the right the inhabitants of the municipality have to elect their own authorities - a generally accepted principle - but also the faculty to set the politico-administrative organization of the Municipio, and to determine the powers and the sphere of action of the local government, in harmony with the powers of the state government.

Synarchism advocated the **municipio libre**; it strove to win municipal autonomy, whereby the inhabitants of each municipality designated, in freedom, and without outside intervention, their local governments (**ayuntamientos**) - free of dubious promises or deals, to serve the municipal community for its own good. The financial resources of the municipio should be for the benefit of taxpayers and not the patrimony of caciques.<sup>42</sup>

That these social strata supported Synarchism and consequently stood up for a new bourgeoisie, can be readily explained: the Movement expressed their deepest desire. This did not imply, in practice, that they paid no heed to their current situation; they accepted the ejido plot in the expectation that it would be turned, eventually, into effective property.

Indeed, despite claims made to the contrary, Synarchist ideology did not try to keep the masses out of the ejido and to take away the benefits of the reform; instead, it infiltrated the very core of the agrarian revolution by winning over its beneficiaries. If that had

not been the case, the Agrarian Department would not have devoted so much energy to exclude the Synarchists from the Reform; it would not have persecuted the many small peasants who were "wrong" to expect that the ejido plot would become the rightful patrimony of the peasant family.

For all that, how reactionary really were Synarchist peasants in the rural ambit of 1940 Mexico? The success of the Movement within the ejido points to a different conclusion. In the end, the leaders of the UNS were not completely mistaken in suggesting that the great majority of ejidos would turn Synarchist if freed from the control of leaders and caciques; on account that the Revolution had not succeeded in giving the rural world a mystique and a solid ideology that allowed for the transformation of the countryside. The mystique existed only at the intellectual level, among the *agraristas* that surrounded Cárdenas and not among the agrarian agents who were responsible for implementing the reform.

Moreover, discussions about ideological issues (collectivization vs individual concerns) often escaped the grasp of the majority of the *ejidatarios* who experienced the Reform and who discovered, instead, the cupidity of the executive committees and other caciques in charge of land distribution who, by their attitude, took away any social meaning from that distribution. They had been told that the hacendados were exploiters and that they were the "social defenses"; however, the peasants noticed that the new leaders, who shared their condition and often their beliefs, exploited them just as much and

used the arms at their disposal not to protect but to kill them.

## V. Synarchism and labour

In the opinion of the Synarchists the social policy of the Revolution was blameworthy, for it had caused the political and economic disorder and the impoverishment of the Nation. Architect of the Popular Front, Cárdenas brought the union bosses into the PRM. That was not a measure conceived to defend the "true interests" of the proletariat, they remarked, because the CTM was simply a toy in the hands of the government. like the "red battalions" that Carranza had organized to combat Zapata's "hordes". The government protected the workers but at the cost of their ideological independence.<sup>43</sup>

The Synarchist view was that the ideology imposed on the working class was based on the false and dangerous Marxist theory which:

"if it continued to subdue the working masses, it would inevitably lead them to foreign subservience, to national poverty and to the loss of fundamental values."<sup>44</sup>

Synarchist doctrine repudiated the principle of the class struggle for it was false and tendentious. It asserted the natural necessity of cooperation among classes, according to a higher principle of justice, for the greatness and the strength of the nation. National prosperity meant the welfare of all Mexicans; the enemies of Mexico were the enemies of the Mexican worker. Foreign and international forces were the cause of the misery of

the workers and of the backwardness of the national industry.<sup>45</sup>

The Marxist assumption that all the benefits of the employers and the interests of the shareholders were uniquely the product of the workers' labour, labour that was not remunerated, and hence exploited from them, was considered by Synarchism as an undermining theory because capital had the right to a share of the profits, a just reward for the risks incurred.

In the opinion of the Synarchists, for all the unions' claim to champion the proletarian revolution, the CTM did not, in fact, fight so much to improve the lot of the workers, as for the triumph of world Communism and the establishment of Socialism in Mexico. With the aid of Cárdenas and his administration, which tolerated their activities, they multiplied the number of strikes,<sup>46</sup> with no apparent reason, awaiting the moment to trigger off a general strike, the signal of the "red revolution". Besides, the social advantages obtained after each strike were not desirable; they only contributed to price increases, which affected, in the first place, the workers themselves. In addition to inflation, social disorders disrupted production, which left national producers incapable of fulfilling their commitments and forced upon the Nation greater dependency on the United States.

Manuel Torres Bueno defined the Synarchist view:

"If there is a true defender of the worker, the peasant, and the citizen, that defender is Synarchism. We do not want to foment thereby new

upheaval; we do not want 10,000 strikes per year, like under the previous régime. Let it be known that we only fight for the benefit of the working classes, which is the supreme interest of the nation. We will follow closely the path that leads to the unity of the people, so that they make the decision to fight for their freedom, a freedom that is not an empty work. We are freedom fighters, and since it is imperative, at the present time, to elucidate the concepts and to specify the ideas, we affirm that the war in progress cannot produce a New Order; we profess that this war is not the start but the end of a cycle of mechanization, mercantilism, and materialism."<sup>47</sup>

The belief that the factories should be surrendered to the workers was demagogic. The Synarchists cited the case the railways which Cárdenas handed over to them. The result of workers' management was catastrophic: the number of accidents rose constantly and eventually the company went bankrupt. This was not an isolated case, they hastened to point out, all the concerns entrusted to the workers incurred a similar fate.<sup>48</sup>

The Synarchist Movement stated that by defending the interests of the Nation, they were not attacking the workers; they were, instead, adducing the truth. Because the workers were the slaves of the union bosses, whose sole aim was to make a fortune - as was patently clear in the case of Morones - and to seek power, they placed everything (goods, as well as their own persons) in the service of the government. Under the threat of expulsion from their jobs, the workers were compelled to renounce their deepest convictions, their Catholic faith. They were forced to march on labour day and on any political

occasion; they were not allowed to adhere to the union of their choice, and so forth. They warned the workers that it would be naive to think the introduction of a socialist government would significantly alter this state of affairs and:

"[that] wealth would fall into your hands. It will not [...], but it will end up in the hands of a new capitalist class: that of the leaders, the directors and the State itself."<sup>49</sup>

Because of their condemnation of the unions, Synarchists were often accused of siding with "the enemies of the people". They denied this accusation and asserted that Synarchism desired that the workers preserved all the advantages gained "despite the Revolution", and that they secured for ever a guaranteed minimum wage, and a share in the firm's profits.<sup>50</sup> They added:

"We are friends with the workers and with their defence organization [...]. We aver it necessary to organize all our workers in trade unions [...] so that united they defend and improved themselves. We vigorously condemn man's exploitation. We have condemned hypocritical Liberalism, which surrenders the worker, weak, isolated and defenceless, to the greedy capitalist [...] In the Liberal countries, in the capitalist countries, everything is anarchy and everybody dominated with force. The capitalist dominates the worker with his money and the workers exploit the entrepreneur with their strikes and stoppages, while the government remains impassive, unable to restore order and justice."<sup>51</sup>

In the Synarchist state, all abuses would be dealt with:

"The yoke of the treacherous leaders would be thrown off by the strength of the working masses, inspired by the principles of their faith, their tradition, the brotherhood of classes [...] to open ways for a fresh, liberating and heroic trades union movement."<sup>52</sup>

Synarchism would destroy the principle of hatred that had guided revolutionary trade unionism and introduce:

"A trades union movement that will be the voluntary and permanent union of all workers for the just defence of their interests, without having to be hostile to capital [...] A movement which will devote its strength to the construction of the material and spiritual greatness of the Fatherland, and against the enemies of Mexico and the Mexican worker. The myth of the class struggle will collapse before the beautiful and fruitful reality of cooperation and harmony between the classes."<sup>53</sup>

Despite the attempts to develop an ideology for the working masses, Synarchism did not have the success it expected in that field. The large groups of affiliated trades unions remained closed to this doctrine and UNS penetration was limited to a few independent and minor unions.<sup>54</sup> The leaders of the Movement blamed the failure of their efforts on the closed shop, which gave union bosses the power to expel workers recalcitrant of union discipline. The strict surveillance of union representatives over the political thinking of the workers they controlled, constituted, in fact, an effective barrier against the advance of right-wing ideologies in labour circles.

Many Synarchists experienced this at first hand and ended up losing their jobs. For instance, in December 1941, at Guadalajara, twenty one workers of "Cerveceria Modelo" were sacked for demanding the election of a new union committee;<sup>55</sup> in February 1942, a Synarchist worker of "La Moderna" tobacco company of Monterrey, was expelled and lost his job; he was reinstated in his job after the Arbitration tribunal granted him an "amparo".<sup>56</sup> In July 1943, the Union of Textile Workers of Jalisco declared that it would not tolerate the presence of Synarchist workers and that it would have them expelled.<sup>57</sup>

It is worth emphasizing, however, that more than the vigilance of the leaders it was the hold the Government had on the unions which explained, in the final analysis, the failure of Synarchism to conquer the labour world.

## **VI. Synarchism and Catholicism**

That the UNS had nothing to do with the Catholic hierarchy, was the result of the bitter experience of the religious conflict of the twenties. The Movement, in fact, never had official ecclesiastical advisors, or chaplains. The leaders only had contacts with the bishops in a private capacity (this did not prevent the Archbishop of Mexico from playing a key rôle in the removal of Abascal from Lower California, over whom he had considerable personal influence<sup>58</sup>). The attitude of the hierarchy towards Synarchism varied according to the place since Catholic Action was often at odds with a movement that stole its executives and infiltrated its



organizations.

The UNS talked of establishing a "Christian democracy" in Mexico, "a Christian social order", radically different from the prevailing "revolutionary disorder", rejecting Communism and Liberalism. This was the language of intransigent social Catholicism.

The Synarchist Movement confronted the "evil" forces of the revolution; refused the anti-Christian notion of class struggle, as well as socioeconomic liberalism, which drove towards social and national disintegration. Synarchists advocated the corporative organization of Christian society, according to the principles and traditions of social justice and charity. As the enemy of Communism and Liberalism, Synarchism commended the "Christian Social Order of Christ the King".

To start a new Catholic City, making the state Christian, was the aspiration of the political factions inside the UNS; for the others, the old "Base" and its followers, headed by Santacruz, they wanted first to rebuild a Christian society and people, because, in their view, institutions followed morality. Thus, two different models were in confrontation, neither of which renounced to the idea of a Christian rebirth.

This current of thought of intransigent Catholicism, arose from the French Revolution claiming to be counter-revolutionary; it asserted itself with Pope Gregorian XVI and grew in scale with Pope Pius IX (**QUANTA CURA, Syllabus**).

Synarchism followed this tradition: refusal of the

Reform (both Protestant and Mexican), the Revolution (French, Russian, Mexican), individualism, rationalism and secularization.

This form of Catholicism which condemned commerce and money, left a significant mark in the Mexico of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, and, like elsewhere, generated social Catholicism, a critique of one world and the extolling of another, a utopia of a world corrupted by revolution that an incarnate religion would regenerate.

Tradition was glorified, the present rejected; there was a feeling of anti-capitalist nostalgia for an idealised past society, the ideal of an "organized" society, "organic", made up of "corps", a yearning for the Christian Hispanic empire, which was succeeded by an America divided in nations. Social and ultramontane, these Mexican Catholics resembled, like brothers, the French and Belgian of the Young Right who became Christian-democrats, the Italians, Germans and Austrians, all Christian-social, who were against Socialism understood as the cost of Liberalism. The implication was the introduction of religion in all aspects of life and the institution of the social rule of Christ. It corresponded to the Neo-Thomism of theologians, to a return to the Middle Ages, which they praised and extolled the social organization, and which provided them with the fundamental notion of "the common good".<sup>59</sup>

The search for a third way, opposed to Liberalism and to Socialism, accounted for the ambiguity of these movements, and Synarchism was no exception, it was at the

same time a movement, a party, of unions and deeds, a vast "Christian social order" which resembled the carlo-populism of European Catholic social legitimists:

"Synarchism, like the Cristero movement, was a kind of Mexican Carlist crusade, essentially romantic, rooted in tradition, and feeding on the myth of ancient Spanish glory, with which its adherents identified themselves. Its romanticism was manifest in many ways. The ideals to which its young men were dedicated were poverty, obedience, and loyalty - loyalty to the Catholic Church and to the "true" Mexico, not the "spurious" Mexico of the Revolution, which they confidently told themselves they would destroy. The new Mexico was to be an Augustine City of God on earth, born in blood and suffering."<sup>60</sup>

Synarchism could be defined as a lay Catholic movement corresponding to a Catholic revival from which it fed, and which characterized the Mexico of that period.

On this basis, it won the sympathy of American Catholics, who defended it in their press organs against the accusations of Fascism.<sup>61</sup> The majority of American Catholics were conservative and viewed the Synarchist social programme favourably, in the tradition of the encyclicals *RERUM NOVARUM* and *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*. The religious fervour of this mass movement, the enthusiastic youth and the unselfishness of its leaders, their concern for the poor and forgotten masses, all looked like Catholic Action and did not frighten them, unlike the Cristeros. Even liberal Catholics were, in part, persuaded; especially because the adversaries of the UNS were recruited from the Protestants. The UNS benefited,

therefore, from the fact that it appeared as the popular response to the anti-Catholic aspects of the Mexican Revolution, born and conceived in the climate of religious persecution of the thirties.<sup>62</sup>

## VII. Synarchism and the defence of the Church

By pursuing the reform of Article 3 of the Constitution, Synarchists personally resumed the defence of the Church, although they remained discreet about it for a long time.

If the oath taken by the "légionnaires" brought to the fore the struggle for freedom of worship, the Synarchist Movement, on the other hand, made sure that it was not mistaken with an organization in the service of the Church.

Consequently, denunciation of religious persecution and of anticlerical legislation only appeared at the end of accusations addressed to the Revolution and always with extreme caution.

Thus, in its reproaches levelled at socialist education, the right of the Church in this domain was never alluded; similarly, any mention of the cristeros was virtually absent from its history columns.

It was at the end of 1943 that *El Sinarquista* printed its first direct attack on Article 3:

"Article 3 must be repealed!  
We want the reform of Article 3 of the Constitution. We demand the Catholic Church has not only a decent status in Mexico [...] but a privileged situation, as she justly deserves it

by right, because it was the Church who built our nation."

In Mexico, in contradiction with our background as a people, the Catholic Church has been persecuted and obliged to live in the narrow limits of the temple and the sacristy; she has been denied even of the right to exercise charity; she is not recognized a legal personality; priests, and in fact only those of the Catholic persuasion, are deprived of their prerogatives as citizens [...] despite the fact that the entire country professes the Catholic faith."<sup>63</sup>

Declarations such as these led the left to no longer stigmatize the Movement as Fascist, but ~~now~~ return to its original accusation of "a restored conservative party."<sup>64</sup>

Manuel Torres Bueno issued the following statement in relation to that accusation:

"1. the Catholic Church clergy has, nor had, absolutely no participation in the activities of Synarchism.

2. We are not in the habit of asking for advice, or even for guidelines to any minister, when it is a question of determining our Synarchist activity as citizens. In purely civilian and political matters we, and only we, decide of our affairs.

3. The Mexican clergy had until now maintained the position outlined by the Archbishop of Mexico, totally abstaining from intervening in our affairs, yet having deep respect for the free civic-political activity of each Synarchist.

4. Synarchism is **FUNDAMENTALLY** political action, where the Church cannot, and does not want to take the slightest participation.

The only relationship between Catholic priests and Synarchists is the one dictated by our religion, in taking part in the sacraments and in

the individual direction of our conscience in the metaphysical order.

5. We Synarchists are totally responsible for our action and we do not admit that the clergy be made responsible for a conduct that is exclusively the product of our innermost convictions.

6. Synarchists are determined to prevent that once again in the history of Mexico a struggle that is essentially political in nature, be given a religious connotation.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, after the 1929 "agreements", the hierarchy refused to give official support to the new organization. Officially, therefore, and at the public level, there was no contact between the ecclesiastic authorities and the leaders of the Synarchist Movement.

It is worth recalling that the hierarchy emerged divided from the Cristero war, maintaining very different stances vis-à-vis the UNS. In general, the prelates who were opposed to the League, did not favour the activities of the Movement. Monsignor Placencia y Moreira, bishop of Zacatecas, summed up this view:

"Synarchism is a political movement with the same tendencies as the National League for the Defence of Religious Freedom; the only difference between the two is that Synarchism is not talking at the moment of armed movement, yet, the tendencies are the same. We will not get involved in this, but if someone asks us, we will tell him to abstain".<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, relations with the Church played a significant rôle in the development of the Movement, in particular, the ties that linked the members of the

Supreme Council of the Base to the hierarchy. This was revealed in an internal report by Manuel Torres Bueno at the time of the split with the Base. In this report, he alluded to the relation that the Base had with the ecclesiastical authorities which, not only advised the supreme leaders, but also intervened directly in the internal problems of the Movement.<sup>67</sup>

Monsignor O'Grady reported in his memorandum regarding Synarchism that before the movement was launched as a public movement, the leaders were able to secure assurances from the Church that there would be no interference with their activities. The Church authorities were willing to regard Synarchism as a civic movement. It was a lay movement operated by laymen. The Church would not interfere with it except in the matter of doctrine. This gave the leaders the autonomy that they felt was needed for a real national movement.<sup>68</sup>

He observed that from the beginning, the leaders of the Church in Mexico had not shown any disposition to interfere with the Movement. Most of them were friendly to the UNS. Some, however, had many reservations with regard to it. For instance, the director of Catholic Action in the diocese of León was very strongly opposed to Synarchism. He felt that it interfered seriously with the Catholic Action programme in the diocese. The Coadjutant| Archbishop of Puebla, the national director of Catholic Action in Mexico, also felt that Synarchism interfered with Catholic Action. Nevertheless, he stressed:

"While Synarchism is not under the control of the Catholic Hierarchy of Mexico, it is a Catholic movement. In fact, one might be justified in saying that it bears the earmarks of a new Catholic revival that will reach all the people of Mexico. Synarchism is at pains to emphasize that it is interested basically in the masses of the city and the country."<sup>69</sup>

Undoubtedly, the prelates considered intervening in a private capacity. Luis María Martínez, Archbishop of Mexico, personally knew the Abascal family for a long time and he was instrumental in persuading Salvador Abascal to relinquish command of María Auxiliadora; although he did not hesitate to do so "in the name of the Church".<sup>70</sup> Father Madrigal, the Archbishop's envoy, told Abascal that his departure was in the interest of the Church and for the salvation of the people at large.<sup>71</sup>

At the local level, the clergy played a similar rôle, and perhaps even more so. Officially the position of the Church was one of reserve and non-involvement. Nevertheless, the local clergy did not renounce advising its parishioners. Several testimonies coincide to suggest that in many villages, it was the priest who decided the fate of the Movement in his jurisdiction. If he was favourable, Catholics would proceed to join up; if he was against it, the task of the Synarchist propagandist was considerably more difficult.<sup>72</sup>

It is worth emphasizing, however, that if the UNS progressively adopted a more open stand in favour of the Church, by condemning, in retrospect, religious persecution and anticlerical legislation, the hierarchy,



for its part, strove to dissociate itself from the Synarchist cause. The more aggressive **El Sinarquista** was in its condemnation of the revolution, the more it reasserted its respect for the government of Avila Camacho.

With regard to the Synarchist demand to reform Article 130 of the Constitution, Monsignor Luis María Martínez declared:

"The Catholic Church in Mexico is not related to either the PAN or the UNS, or any other organization of political or civic nature, even though they are composed of Catholic and have Catholic tendencies, because she has frequently asserted and proved with her conduct, her firm and sincere commitment to stay in the spiritual domain.

Consequently, the Catholic Church is not responsible for what the said organizations express or realize, nor does she stand by the opinions or tendencies of Catholic writers or speakers since the true voice of the Church is expressed through her official organs.

The Catholic Church in Mexico has accepted the present legal situation, not because she does not vividly wish the disappearance of a number of legal restrictions which limit at present Catholic activities, but she respects the reality where she lives and knows that all vital processes, both in societies and in individuals, are realized through a slow and methodical evolution.

The Catholic Church in Mexico is prepared, as she has often demonstrated in practice, to collaborate, honestly and effectively, with the Civil Government, for the good of the Fatherland, in the field that concerns her. In this difficult hour when Mexico is involved in a transcendental war that will mark a new direction in human History, I

considered it untimely and anti-patriotic to provoke discussions that divide the Mexican people [...] We must concentrate our energies and enthusiasm to strengthen National Unity, as the President of the Republic has keenly requested, which is the key to the success, the welfare and happiness of our Fatherland."<sup>73</sup>

This statement marked a definite turning point in Church-Synarchist relations. The hierarchy was relatively satisfied with the status quo with the government and did not intend to resume a dispute, preferring to keep at arm's length an ally that had become too embarrassing.

Circumstances were no longer the same in 1944 as they had been 1926: the government did not need anticlericalism to unite the PRM. Extricating itself from the alliance with the Left, it sought the support of the propertied classes. In this context, Synarchist activity was condoned because it favoured the reversal of alliances planned by the government.

President Avila Camacho belonged to the moderate tendency of the Mexican Revolution, a group whose interpretation of the objectives and ultimate aims of the revolution varied significantly with what was orthodox during the days of Cárdenas. And it is in the nature of moderate governments that they adhered to the middle of the road only to the extent that roughly equivalent pressures from both sides operate to keep them there.<sup>74</sup>

Cárdenas' left-wing programme, especially in its relations with the Church and with foreign oil companies, alienated large sectors of American opinion. Yet, under the Good Neighbour policy the two countries were able to

settle their difficulties. On the one hand, the United States exercised forbearance in its reaction to the expropriation of petroleum properties; on the other, the Government of Avila Camacho introduced a period of pause and consolidation in Mexican internal policy. The contrast between the régime of President Avila Camacho and that of President Cárdenas lay in a slowing up, a consolidation of the revolutionary programme, rather than a swing to the Right.

The principal keynote to the Avila Camacho Administration was its emphasis upon national unity. The President seems to have played a waiting game with labour, hoping to align it eventually with his administration in a middle-of-the-road course.

Synarchism attacked Communism, and those elements of the régime that it believed were connected with it (e.g., the CTM). Certain groups in the Administration (Maximino Avila Camacho, Octavio Véjar Vazquez, among others) appreciated the Synarchist attacks against Communism. The President protected the UNS to some extent (for instance, in the summer of 1941, he had found it necessary to denounce Synarchism as "exotic" and separatist because it opposed his efforts at national unity. However, later on, he announced that he had accepted the offer of the Synarchists to colonize Lower California). The reason for this could be that the Administration desired to balance the fanatical leftists element in Mexico with a fanatical rightist element. In other words, it seems as if the Government was taking the stand that the UNS offered a

protection to the Government since it balanced the ultra-leftist factions in Mexico.

By 1944, however, the Administration had succeeded in introducing a series of reforms that managed to hold the left in check;<sup>75</sup> making it unnecessary to play the Synarchist card. The Labour code was revised by forbidding illegal "lightning" strikes. It was a resounding victory for the Government over extremist unions; it stipulated the exact terms under which strikes might be called, and established heavy penalties for violations. The reforms in the Agrarian Law linked the peasant more closely to the soil - by giving individual title to the land he worked on the ejido. It did not abolish the ejidos but gave encouragement to the principle of private ownership. The reforms in the Petroleum Law maintained intact the needs of national sovereignty and national control over national resources, but opened the field to Mexican initiative. The reforms in the railways were to save the roads from bankruptcy.

By and large, Synarchists had opposed all the policies of Cárdenas which they viewed as Marxist inspired. The change of direction instigated by Avila Camacho did not entirely calm down their progressive disposition. Whilst *El Sinarquista* approved of the abandonment of socialist education and the slowing down of collectivization, and the removal of Lombardo Toledano from the leadership of the CTM (1 March 1941) was perceived as a positive sign; criticism of the government, on the other hand, was more poignant as the fate of Mexico

became increasingly more bound to that of the liberal democracies in the world conflict, and as it accepted, too readily, American economic "imperialism" by entering into what they described as "humiliating trade treaties". By an agreement concluded in July 1941, the United States undertook to buy the entire surplus of Mexican strategic minerals, and in November a series of agreements were signed for the friendly settlement of all major questions at issue between the two countries. It was then announced that a reciprocal trade treaty would be negotiated, that financial assistance would be given to Mexico to stabilize the peso, and the United States would purchase newly mined Mexican silver. Mexico agreed to make full settlement of general and agrarian claims by United States citizens and an arrangement was made for the settlement of the oil dispute.<sup>76</sup>

All this ranting and raving at the government was not, however, without object. If the Synarchists were often blinded by their hate of the revolution, they, nonetheless, expressed the frustrations that the agrarian reform had bred in the peasant masses. The working classes, allied and protected by the government, were by this fact unable to take charge of the opposition, which came from a reactionary movement: that was the cause of its success.

#### **VIII. Synarchism and Nationalism**

Synarchists were ardent nationalists and, what is more, patriotic, claiming to be the exponents of Mexico in

the face of all its enemies, internal as well as external.

Although the frontiers of the country were accepted, that did not mean that some irredentist element was not present; Synarchism worked on both sides of the border with sufficient success for the FBI to keep watch on it<sup>77</sup> and to be blamed for the "zoot-suiters" riots in Los Angeles (3 to 13 June 1943).<sup>78</sup>

Synarchism contended that Mexican-American and emigrant were thorough Mexicans and it undertook their defence in the United States. It mounted guard on the border and its dream to colonize Lower California corresponded to the desire to protect the region against American imperialism.

According to Synarchism, the people, second component of nationality, commingled with the UNS: they were both ~~the product~~ of mixed race, born of the fusion of the Indian and the Spaniard of Hispanic culture and Catholic religion:

"The real Mexico does not lie in the cities. It is not in the Capital, in any case, alienated, americanised, false; nor is it in the cities, corrupted by the cinema, the nightclubs, the strident music, where life is faked and simulated. The reality of Mexico, the deep reality, the essence of our authentic being is found in the villages, in the hamlets, on the roads travelled by the Indian alone and before, by the missionary [...]

The people were divided by bad leaders, foreign agents that preached them class struggle and hatred of Spain; they wanted to lead them to apostasy, essential precondition for assimilation by the United States."<sup>79</sup>

The cult of the national flag included all these

themes; through the flag it was national unity which was celebrated, according to the thesis that intended to expunge class differences by the organic restructuring of the people.

Mexico, civilized by Spain and the Catholic Church, has a flag that was given to her after the war of Independence. This flag is green, white and red [...] The three colours represent the CATHOLIC RELIGION, THE UNION OF ALL MEXICANS AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE FATHERLAND".<sup>80</sup>

To hoist the flag was, above all, to denounce the enemy, the communist and American enemies. The black and red flag against the tricolour:

"We refuse all symbols foreign to our nationality. Neither the Nazi swastika nor the Communist red star: Mexico has a symbol and he who does not defend it is a traitor [...]"<sup>81</sup>

"The red and black flag of the Communists represents black hatred, blood, because Communists do not like religion, nor the unity and independence of Mexico; that is why they raise this flag and want to substitute it for the tricolour flag. The Nazi flag with its twisted cross they called swastika, represents Nazi hatred of Christianity. Communists and Nazis are enemies of Mexico, they want to dominate the world and to finish Christianity, to subdue free people."<sup>82</sup>

Thus, Synarchists identified the flag with the nation, with the Fatherland, with Mexicaness ("mexicanidad"): they turned it into a sacred symbol. In all their events, Synarchists waved hundreds of flags, which were at the same time the national banner and the

flag of the Movement. Each time a new Synarchist group was formed, the militants received a flag in ceremony. The blood stained flag of Santa Cruz de Galeana and Celaya - the centre of Synarchism martyrdom - went round the entire country: flag and blood were intertwined.

Raising the national flag was an efficient way to say many things in a symbolic and precise manner; so much so that the government instituted a flag's day (24 February) so as not to be outmanoeuvred by Synarchism.

#### 1. Synarchism and the United States

The kind of nationalism advocated by Synarchism was not held in check, nor was it restrained or silent; it crystallized on a foreign enemy: the United States; on the subject of which, resided the ambiguity of the Movement.

Some leaders, like Abascal and the majority of the militants, were violently and openly anti-American. Others made the same analysis that the government or the PAN did, preaching a policy of friendship with the United States.

"Synarchism is openly anti-American. Its ideology is diametrically opposed to the American ideals of liberty and democracy. Therefore, the Synarchists are bent upon preventing the further extension of American influence in Mexico. In order to arouse chauvinistic sentiment against her northern neighbour, the Synarchists are reviving national resentment of historical wrongs, real and imaginary. The Mexican War of 1846 is played up as Mexico's greatest national calamity and the United States is dubbed 'the invader'. Synarchist publications continually deplore the 'materialism' of American culture. American foreign policy is stamped vile Yankee



imperialism' and the efforts of American Protestant missionaries are decried as a manifestation of aggressive American politics,' designed to undermine Mexico's national unity. Violently opposed to Pan-Americanism, the Synarchists are prone to emphasize that the United States is a country with different customs and traditions, with another religion and a strange language. On the other hand, the Spanish heritage is glorified and Pan-Hispanism is advocated as against Pan-Americanism".<sup>83</sup>

Such was the language that the militants used. On the other hand, calls for Mexican-American friendship reflected the ideas and tactics of the Base.

## 2. The Synarchist mission

The spiritual unity of the Fatherland, the exploitation of the country's wealth for the greatest benefit of the Mexican people, the creation of a new society founded on the eternal principles of Christianity, the solution of the economic problems of the poor, such were the aims pursued by the Movement when it embarked on the colonization of Lower California. Inspired by the attitude of the missionaries and the soldiers, who were prepared to sacrifice everything for an objective.

"Synarchism is the anti-revolution, because the revolution is the anti-Fatherland.

1. The revolution is a disintegrating process which began with the American ambassador Poinsett<sup>84</sup> in 1822 and reached its climax with the latest governments.

2. It institutes a false division, bringing into conflict, deceitfully, revolution with reaction.
3. Synarchism brings National Unity.
4. Synarchism is not the reaction but the anti-revolution.
5. Synarchism is only the fighting instrument of the new generations; it advocates the destruction of the Revolution and the restoration of the Christian order that the revolution has ruined."<sup>85</sup>

**IX. The Synarchist Concept of the State: Christian Social Order**

"Synarchism is struggling for the restoration of a Christian order, and liberal democracy, as well as Nazi-Fascism and Communism, is contrary to this order."<sup>86</sup>

By concentrating their efforts to censure contemporary systems, Synarchists took no care of specifying their concept of the State. Nevertheless, if we consider their criticism of the totalitarian régimes, as well as those of democracy, we can draw a portrait of the Synarchist state: the Christian Social Order.

In a pamphlet published by the organization, and written by Alfonso Trueba, in 1941, entitled **México-1960**, contrast is drawn between the conditions anticipated by the Synarchist state of 1960 and those of the revolutionary period during the forties.<sup>87</sup> Allegedly, the successful passage from one state to the other would have been achieved by the dauntlessness of the Synarchist

leaders, the "bravery of our soldiers", and the "torrents of blood shed in our epic struggle."<sup>88</sup>

**Mexico-1960** represents an already instituted Synarchist state working with improved capability.

In the Synarchist state, power lies in one single individual, probably the leader of the Movement. He would hold absolute power and the houses would only have an advisory rôle, although in this respect Synarchist thought is considerably ambiguous since they stressed the need for control of the executive by the legislature, so as to avoid the dangers of a dictatorship, while estimating it essential to concentrate all power in the hands of one individual. In any case, the existence of a congress was not in doubt: it would be made up of the representatives of the corporations. They drew their inspiration, in this respect, from XIX century right-wing political thinking; although this concept remained very vague in Synarchism.

One democratic institution would be maintained: the **municipio**, which according to Synarchism should be the basis of all the political and civil life of the Republic. Synarchists outlined very thoroughly the organization of this situation:

"Granted full political rights to the family, the group of these domiciled in a city elect the members that are to govern the **municipio** and take charge of the matters that concern them all. The head of each family disposes of a number of votes proportional to the importance of the household he directs. In this way, the municipal community designates the most honest and capable member to run the municipal government."<sup>89</sup>

Unquestionably, it was an authoritarian government that the Synarchists wanted to introduce. All initiative would come from the head of the State who, working for the "common good", would impose all the measures he deemed necessary for the "salvation of the Fatherland". However, the authorities would allow, to a certain extent, political opposition in the independent press, as long as it did not threaten the common good nor did it harm national interests.<sup>90</sup>

The Christian Social Order would rest on three pillars: the Church, the Army, and the People.

In the Synarchist state, the Church would have a considerable rôle: guardian and protector of public morality; she would be concerned with primary, secondary and higher education. She would recover her privileges, particularly the right to private property; and, she would work in close collaboration with the government. There would be harmony between the two powers:

"The Church and the State are two perfect and autonomous societies in their specific purposes. Within the Christian State which Synarchism advocates, they will both coordinate their efforts directed towards achieving the integral happiness of man, but respecting each other's field of action."<sup>91</sup>

The army would be the foundation of the régime, too. However, it would not be the oppressive arm, nor the instrument of the parties, but the strong arm protector of national integrity, created to serve the common good and to secure peace and the rule of Law. The army,

domesticated, would be at the exclusive service of the civilian authorities.<sup>92</sup>

Lastly, the people would be the fundamental support of the State, since the entire policy of the government would have no other aim than their material and spiritual advancement.

The class struggle would disappear; and all patriots, united in the love of the Fatherland, would work in harmony for the development of their country.

Unions would be maintained but they would abandon the revolutionary struggle and would restrict themselves to defend the interests of the workers:

"Each worker belongs to the Synarchist labour union, a trade union corporation created to defend the workers. Synarchist trade-unionism will be national. It will not be subject to any international organization. The reason for its existence shall be the benefit of the workers and the good of the country. In a word: Capital and labour shall be impelled by the drive to serve Mexico and to make her people more powerful, stronger and richer."<sup>93</sup>

With regard to the workers, the Synarchist state envisaged: a share in the profits obtained through the association of the labour and capital sectors; the creation of a savings system and social insurance; the establishment of schools and cultural centres for workers; in general, the paternalistic protection that the State gave to the workers would turn him into a more useful individual for the community, and would make him enjoy a more ordered, more wholesome and more placid life.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, capitalists would be brought to heel. Indeed, Alfonso Trueba wrote, for there to be social harmony, the bourgeoisie would not be allowed to exploit the proletariat:

"The capitalist world will be destroyed and the exploitation of one class by another will be a thing of the past"<sup>96</sup>

Trueba did not make it very clear whether the Synarchist state would nationalize private firms. It rather seems that the Synarchists envisaged limiting the powers of this class by forcing its members to redistribute a share of their profits to the workers, and by erecting a rigorous protectionist system, which would protect the home industry and prevent capital flight. The argument was that the propertied class, having to invest in a country closed to the invasion of foreign capital, would be in a position to lay the foundation of the economic development of the country.

In the new régime, Mexico would be a country of small and middle industries, so as to eliminate the economic and political power of the big concerns, which was tied to international capitalism.

At the same time that they would seek to harmonize capital-labour relations, Synarchists intended to sort out the agrarian question by creating a middle-landowning-bourgeoisie-class, which could broadly live on sufficient large concerns (twenty to fifty hectares): the "**Granjas familiares**".

To meet the demands for modernization that the

agricultural sector would require, the Synarchist state would set up a credit system advantageous to the farmers. It would also devote considerable effort to the education of the peasant population. In the rural schools, the peasants would receive the technical education that would prepare them for a scientific exploitation of the land. Teams of specialists would travel the countryside explaining new techniques, etc.<sup>96</sup>

The State would also devote itself to the systematic utilization of the available agriculture resources of the country; it would undertake extensive irrigation works in the desert areas of the North, and would set up the infrastructure essential for the development of the still unexploited regions.

In order to effect their programme of reforms, the Synarchists counted on the voluntary and generous participation of the entire population. Thus, they were very interested in the means of propaganda (radio, cinema, press), that would permit the state to mobilize the masses; and contribute to what Trueba described as the formation of "the new conscience".<sup>97</sup>

By making full use of the radio network, the Synarchists intended to build morale and patriotism:

"to develop a sense of self-confidence in the Mexican and faith in his country; and to combat the unwarranted feeling of inferiority that had long dominated the free action of the people"<sup>98</sup>

All the resources of the mass-media would be used to launch important education campaigns; a priority would be

the elimination of illiteracy of the masses. In this context, the Church would resume her rôle in education.

Equally, the Church would strive to liberate the masses from their underdevelopment: in collaboration with the State, she would organize health and vaccination campaigns, campaigns against alcohol abuse, etc., in view of radically transforming the mentality and make them capable of embracing progress. The final result of all this intensive collective undertaking would be the prosperity of Mexico.

Behind the Synarchist project stood out the real design of the middle-classes to attain power and bring to heel the two classes that antagonized them: the bourgeoisie and the working class.

In fact, in the Synarchist state, the proletariat would be made harmless; by becoming middle-class, it would lose its revolutionary zeal. By the same token, a bourgeoisie isolated from international capitalism would be more involved in the destiny of the country. Besides, Synarchists did not challenge either the State, or its leader; they were prepared to collaborate with the Church and to acknowledge her an important rôle in the State. Besides, the Christian spirit tempered militant aggressiveness and banned the use of violence.

#### 1. An Ideological framework

Catholicism thus became the official policy of Synarchism; its programme included "maximum respect for the Catholic tradition of our race":



"Synarchism considers that within the Mexican essence is Catholicism and inside Catholicism true freedom, that is the freedom to do good and to embrace the truth".<sup>99</sup>

The first task of Synarchism was to destroy the "false" philosophers, to clear away all modernism, democracy, liberalism, the Reform and the Revolution, thereby making room for the return of spirituality. Only when this was done could Mexico again achieve her former greatness. A programme was ready at hand. Mexico had only to accept as her objectives the "return to our Faith" - the Roman Catholic Church.

Only faithfulness to Hispanic culture, to Hispanidad, and to the political integration of all Hispanic America could free us from hypocritical judeo-yankee imperialism, whose only objective is the destruction of our essence."<sup>100</sup>

The fear that Mexico lost her Spanish heritage and traditions found an ideological framework in the doctrine of **Hispanidad** which appeared in Spain in the early thirties, and whose main exponent was Ramiro de Maeztu, in his book **Defensa de la Hispanidad**.<sup>101</sup>

An editorial in **El Sinarquista** outlined the basic principle:

"All those who have been concerned with dignifying the life of Mexico, as well as those who have wanted to point the way to the real aggrandizement of Mexico, speak of Spain. To put it more correctly, they speak of the work done by the Mother Country during the historical colonial period. She showed us the road and gave us our bearings. So Mexico must cling to its

traditions to find the meaning of its future. Thus, those who feel the desperate uncertainty that today hangs dense and heavy over the nation, want to return to Spain."<sup>102</sup>

Three ties bind Spanish America to Spain: language, race and religion. These are also exactly the differences that separate Spanish America from the English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant United States.

The fear that Anglo-Saxon culture displaced the Spanish heritage led the Synarchists to eulogize Spain and condemn the United States. They also denounced Communism and Soviet Russia, and they regarded both communism and Anglo-Saxon culture as a threat to their cultural heritage.

"The present [...] is opposed to our past. The main values of Hispanic culture have been replaced by the Anglo-Saxon culture. The profound spiritual ideals have been exchanged for economic utility. We severed our ties with Spain in order to adopt the Yankee way of life, and its necessary extension, bolshevism. Therefore, to defend Spain and to defend Mexico is to fight against the degrading influence of both the Anglo-Saxon and the Communist [...]. The policy of the United States and the interference of the Komintern, apparently two contradictory tendencies, are two aspects of the same action against the culture which we inherited from Spain. And what is most regrettable in our present situation, and at the same time the greatest handicap for the defenders of our destiny, is the veiled deceit, the hypocritical complicity of North American capitalism with the Bolshevik imperialism of the Third International. We suffer all the anxieties of an artificial dilemma, of a false conflict, without realising the perfect unity of the two

tendencies [...] The Fatherland is degraded and destroyed just as much by the rightist influence of the Anglo-Saxon as by the leftist one of the Marxist."<sup>103</sup>

What, then, ties the Hispanic nations together? It is religion, the only force that can save them. Beset by bolshevism on one side and liberalism on the other, "they must return to the principles of **Hispanidad** if they are to emerge victorious."<sup>104</sup>

## 2. Hispanidad

From its Nineteenth century American and Iberian origins **Hispanidad** (or Pan-Hispanism) was inseparable from anti-Americanism.<sup>105</sup> An ideological movement of reaction to American expansionism, it was recovered in the Twentieth century, and took on, in Spain and Mexico, a strong maurrassian tone.<sup>106</sup> The main original aspect of Charles Maurras was that he succeeded in amalgamating two tendencies that had been until then very distinct and for a long time even opposite: counter-revolutionary traditionalism and nationalism.<sup>107</sup>

It is important to emphasize that there was a difference between the **Hispanidad** upheld by Synarchism and other organizations, such as Acción Nacional and the Falange, and that of most **Hispanistas**. Many of the latter championed it primarily as a protection against the inroad of "alien" cultures and institutions, as a means of preserving the treasured Hispanic culture. On the other hand, for Synarchism and the others, **Hispanidad** included not only close spiritual and cultural ties with the mother

country, but also a return to the old Church-feudal **status quo**, and perhaps even to old Spanish hegemony - it was also used as a political tool to further the cause of Franco.<sup>108</sup>

"Hispanidad [wrote Arthur P. Whitaker] was a new form of the long-familiar Pan-Hispanism, which was originally designed to bring about the cultural and spiritual reunion of all spanish-speaking peoples under the leadership of Spain. Hispanidad was conservative where the earlier Pan-Hispanism had been liberal, and reactionary where it had been progressive."<sup>109</sup>

From this perspective, **Hispanidad** was really a doctrine about the enemy to fight: the Anglo-Saxon, about stopping decadence by a return to the simple life. Its themes were those of anguish confronted by the threat of disappearing. Mexico was threatened to disappear under the influence of the revolution, from within, and the United States, from without. The loss of national identity was a threat deeply felt by the Synarchist leaders who shared it with their troops.

William B. Bristol said: "The conception of Hispanidad often included the idea of opposition, not only to the political influence of the United States, but also to its influence in moral and religious realms".<sup>110</sup> Hispanidad, in varying degree, stood for conservatism and Catholicism as well as Hispanism, but all of these elements were usually present. Therefore, Hispanidad would take the form of Church-State government.

As we understand it, **Hispanidad** was the community of destiny of peoples related by permanent and dynamic bonds

of ancestry, of language, of religion, of culture and of history, which drives them forward together towards the same universal deed and stand together in the face of equal contingencies in time. Hispanidad was born of the exceptional Spanish manner of fulfilling Catholicism as a norm of individual and collective life.<sup>111</sup> The "essence" of Hispanidad was not a race, it was not a politico-legal identity: the spirit of Hispanidad would be traditional Catholicism in permanent action.<sup>112</sup> Hispanidad rested on the conviction that Catholicism provided the most important source of unity among the Hispanic nations and that a future tightening of the bonds that joined them depended upon a resurgence among its members of militant, uncompromising, exclusivist Catholicism.

The myth of Hispanidad - with all that characterized it: the Hispanic ideal, the Hispanic race, the christian or hispanic knight - constituted, without doubt, one of the basic ideological supports of Synarchism. The myth is projected like a dialectical weapon to revive the catholic-traditionalist interpretation of history, where the philosophy of history turns into magic theology of history. The historic revision implies, thus, the rejection of modernity and, through other ways, the utopian attempt to go back to the tradition of the XVI and XVII centuries. Hence, Catholic and traditional nationalism needed, not so much a revision, as an effective ~~declaration~~ and a practicable adaptation.

Basically, the crisis of Hispanidad, the crisis of tradition, of the missionary spirit of Spain, was the

crisis of religion which, when secularization was forced upon, the "hispanic ideal" disappeared. The crisis of Hispanidad, Maeztu would say, was that of its religious principles. In the final analysis, Hispanidad was the **credo** that could save "Hispanic America" from Communism. It was a reactionary ideology compounded with the most traditional notion of Christianity and defending a christian order. It appeared as an authoritarian answer to liberal "Pan-Americanism" and to the positions of the democratic and socialist left.<sup>113</sup>

Pablo Antonio Cuadra, the Nicaraguan intellectual, wrote on Hispanidad and Synarchism:

"Hispano America is not continental but universal. It is not a matter (as the Yankee wants) of what it contains but of what drives it towards its oecumenical destiny. Not the 'defence of the Continent' but the defence of the **content**. That is, defence of our own being [propio ser], of the very essence of our Graeco-Roman and Catholic civilization. What Dawson summed up in a sentence: Defence of the Faith! and that we have called with Maeztu: **Defence of Hispanidad**"  
"For a large part of America, the bulwark of the defence of Hispanidad is Mexico; and the soldiers of that defence are called, for many, Synarchists [...]"<sup>114</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Boletín No.7*, México, D.F., 5 March 1938, p.1, AGN, Colección: Manifiestos del Comité Organizador Sinarquista.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Fabian Carpio: "Campesino: la Revolución te ha traicionado", *Sinarquismo*, July 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Harold E. Davis, "The Enigma of Mexican Synarchism", *Free World*, 5 May 1943, p.414; see also: Bernardino Mena Brito, *El P.R.U.N., Almazán y el desastre final*, México, Ediciones Botas, 1941, pp.198-199; Ariel José Contreras, *México 1940: Industrialización y crisis política. Estado y sociedad civil en las elecciones presidenciales*, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1977, pp.204-208.

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<sup>5</sup> Davis, op. cit., p.413.

<sup>6</sup> Juan Ignacio Padilla, *Sinarquismo-Contrarrevolución*, México, Editorial Polis, 1948, p.68.

<sup>7</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, *El Sinarquismo. Su Ruta Histórica, Ideario y Postulados, Documentos*, México, Ediciones UNS, n.d., p.17.

<sup>8</sup> Sinarquía Nacional, *El Sinarquismo ...*, op. cit., p.21.

<sup>9</sup> Franz von Sauer, *The Alienated "Loyal" Opposition: Mexico's Partido Acción Nacional*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1974, pp.38-39.

<sup>10</sup> Albert L. Michaels, "Fascism and Sinarquismo: Popular Nationalisms against the Mexican Revolution", *A Journal of Church and State*, Vol.VIII, No.2, 1966, p.249.

<sup>11</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.62.

<sup>12</sup> Salvador Abascal, "Historia del Sinarquismo", *Mañana*, No.59, 14 October, 1944, p.51.

<sup>13</sup> Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Estatutos*, México, Editorial Jus, Enero 1958, pp.9-10.

<sup>14</sup> Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Instrucciones Generales para Jefes Sinarquistas*, n.p., July 1941, p.9.

<sup>15</sup> UNS, *Estatutos*, op. cit., p.11.

<sup>16</sup> UNS, *Estatutos*, p.12.

<sup>17</sup> Nathan L. Whetten, *Rural Mexico*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1948, p.503.

<sup>18</sup> Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Boletín No.6*, 20 March, 1938, AGN, "Colección Manifiestos del Comité Organizador Sinarquista"; Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Dinámica del Sinarquismo*, México, Ediciones UNS, 1955, p.60.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Meyer, *Le Sinarquisme: un Fascisme Mexicain? 1937-1947*, Paris, Hachette, 1977, p.63.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter IV: V.Militaristic Organization, pp.267-273.

<sup>21</sup> UNS, *Estatutos*, op., cit., pp.13-16.

<sup>22</sup> Mario Gill, *El Sinarquismo. Su origen, su esencia, su misión*, México, 3a edición, Editorial Olin, 1962, p.61.

<sup>23</sup> *El Sinarquista*, 15 August, 1940.

<sup>24</sup> UNS, *Boletín No.7*, México, D.F., 5 March, 1938.

<sup>25</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.124.

<sup>26</sup> UNS, *Instrucciones para Jefes*, op.cit., p.11; and Padilla, op.cit., p.155.

<sup>27</sup> Padilla, op.cit., p.155.

<sup>28</sup> Meyer, *Le Sinarquisme*, op.cit., p.63; specimens of these bonds are reproduced in microfilm No.28 [11.7.28], I.N.A.H., Series UNS.

<sup>29</sup> Secretario de Acuerdos to Regional Committees, México, 30 September, 1940, microfilm No. 101 [12.2.04], I.N.A.H.; Series UNS; extensive correspondence on this matter is found in microfilm No.32 [11.7.32], I.N.A.H., Series UNS.

<sup>30</sup> Padilla, op.cit., pp.301 et seq.; Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op.cit., pp.430-432.

<sup>31</sup> See: Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *Cómo actúan los Nazis en México*, México, Publicaciones de la Universidad Obrera, 1941; Fernando Amilpa, *Qué es el Sinaquismo?*, México, Juan Briones, 1948; and *El Popular*, October 1941.

<sup>32</sup> See for example: Mario Gill, *El Sinarquismo ...*, op.cit., pp.220-221; Allan Chase, *Falange: the Axis Secret Army in the Americas*, New York, G.P. Putnam, 1942, ch.8; B. von Metz, et al., *Los empresarios alemanes, el tercer Reich y la oposición de derecha a Cárdenas*, (I), México, Colección Miguel Otón de Mendizabal, No.11, Sep, 1988, pp.223-226; Betty Kirk, *Covering the Mexican Front: the Battle of Europe versus America*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1942; Margaret Shedd, "Thunder on the Right in Mexico", op.cit. pp.416-417.



<sup>33</sup> Raleigh A. Gibson to Secretary of State, "Report on Sinarquism", by Mgr John O'Grady, 19 November 1941, **NAW**, RG No.226, Records of the Office of Strategic Services No.9544, Paper No.14324.

<sup>34</sup> On Avila Camacho's policy of "National Unity" see: **México, Los Presidentes de México ante la Nación**, Mexico, XLVI Legislatura de la Camara de Diputados, 1966, Vol.IV, pp.796-797.

<sup>35</sup> **Los Presidentes de México ...**, op.cit., pp.152-197.

<sup>36</sup> **El Siraquista**, 8 January, 1942.

<sup>37</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 9 October 1941 and 8 January 1942.

<sup>38</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 20 August, 1942; Manuel Torres Bueno to President Avila Camacho, August 1942, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.433/316, Folio No.35668.

<sup>39</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 27 August, 1942, and Manuel Torres Bueno to President Avila Camacho, August 1942, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.433/316, Folio No.35668.

<sup>40</sup> J. Gamaliez Medellín (UNS Regional Leader) to Avila Camacho, Tampico, Tamaulipas, 2 March 1945, **AGN**, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expediente No.534.2/53, describes the work of the Synarchist schools in the region and complains about the threat these faced from local authorities.

<sup>41</sup> Carlos Mouchet, **La legalidad en el Municipio**, Buenos Aires, Talleres El Grafico, 1965, pp.12-13.

<sup>42</sup> **Sinarquía Nacional El Sinarquismo...**, op. cit., pp.60-63.

<sup>43</sup> Jean Meyer, "Los obreros de la Revolución Mexicana: los batallones rojos", **Historia Mexicana**, Vol.XXI, July-September 1971, No.1, El Colegio de México, pp.1.37; **El Sinarquista**, 22 May 1941.

<sup>44</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 18 May, 1943.

<sup>45</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 20 June 1940.

<sup>46</sup> In 1928, the last year of the Calles administration, there were 7 strikes in all the country; whereas in the single year of 1935, there were 642, see: Pablo González Casanova, **La Democracia en México**, México, Ediciones Era, 1976, pp.233-234.

<sup>47</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 2 November 1941.

<sup>48</sup> This view is corroborated by many authors, see for instance Luis González, **Los días del Presidente Cárdenas**, México, El Colegio de México, Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1981, Vol.15, pp.169-170; Enrique Krauze, **Lazaro Cárdenas**, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica. (Biografía del Poder No.8), pp.123-137; Susan Glantz, **El ejido colectivo de Nueva Italia**, México, SEP-INAH, 1974.

<sup>49</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 8 April 1943

<sup>50</sup> Salvador Abascal in **El Sinarquista**, 10 July, 1941.

<sup>51</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 27 May, 1941.

<sup>52</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 18 May , 1943.

<sup>53</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 18 May 1943.

<sup>54</sup> UNS, **Hechos y causas que motivaron un cambio en la Jerarquía de la O.C.A., I.N.A.H.**, Serie UNS, microfilm No.115 [12.3.18], December, 1944, p.2; Salvador Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op.cit., p.182.

<sup>55</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 30 April 1942.

<sup>56</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 19 February 1942.

<sup>57</sup> Comité Nacional Antinazifascista to President Avila Camacho, México, 16 July 1943, Expendiente No.432/284, Folio No.22914; see also: Honorato Carrasco (Centro Patronal del D.F.) to Avila Camacho, México, 29 June 1944, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Avila Camacho, Expendiente No.432.2/110, Folio No.16852.

<sup>58</sup> Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos...**, op. cit., pp.685-686.

<sup>59</sup> Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia: **L'Extrême-Droite en France, De Maurras à Le Pen**, Bruxelles, Editions Complexe, 1988, p.156.

<sup>60</sup> Lesley Byrd Simpson, **Many Mexicos**, Berkely and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967, pp.336-337; T.G. Powell, **Mexico and the Spanish Civil War**, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1981, p.20.

<sup>61</sup> For example: Paul Dearing, "Synarchism in Mexico", **Current History**, Vol.V, November 1943, p.247.

<sup>62</sup> Father Charles Coughlin in his newspaper **Social Justice**, and father Jerome Holland in his **Tablet**, mounted a favourable campaign to defend the UNS, just like the Jesuits did in America and the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

<sup>63</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 4 November 1943.

<sup>64</sup> Mario Gill, **Sinarquismo...**, op. cit., pp.235-255.

<sup>65</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 5 February 1942.

<sup>66</sup> Joaquín Rodarte to Comité Nacional, undated, **I.N.A.H.**, Series UNS, microfilm No.36 [11.7.36].

<sup>67</sup> UNS, "**Hechos y causas...**", loc. cit.

<sup>68</sup> Gibson to Secretary of State, "Report on Sinarquismo...", op. cit., pp.3-4.

<sup>69</sup> Monsignor O'Grady, "Report on Synarchism", op. cit., p.4.

<sup>70</sup> Abascal, **Mis Recuerdos**, op.cit., pp.679-682.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.682.

<sup>72</sup> "Posición de la Iglesia y de los Sacerdotes respecto al Sinarquismo", and "La Iglesia y Nosotros", **El Sinarquista**, No.287 and No.288; declarations of Pbro. José Cantú Corro in **La Prensa**, 3 August, 1945.

<sup>73</sup> "Declaraciones del excelentísimo señor arzobispo Dr. don Luis María Martínez", **Christus**, April 1942, p.301.

<sup>74</sup> Harry Block, "Uncertainty in Mexico", **The Nation**, 28 March 1942, Vol.CLIV, p.250.

<sup>75</sup> Latin American Memoranda and Economic Notes, No.70, 3 July 1941, FO 371/26068 [A 5114/281/26]; Davis, "The Enigma of Mexican Synarchism", op. cit., pp.414; John Gunther, "Avila Camacho of Mexico", **Harper's Magazine**, October 1941, pp.489-490.

<sup>76</sup> G.B. 1830 - Mexican Intelligence Report, 29 November 1941, p.7, FO 371/30573; Blanca Torres, **México en la Segunda Guerra Mundial**, México, Colegio de México (Historia de la Revolución, periodo 1940-1952), 1979, pp.32-39.

<sup>77</sup> Louis Tremelling to FBI, El Paso, Texas, 17 September 1941, File No.64-182, NAW, RG No.226, O.S.S., No.17769. The issue of Mexican-Americans during the war has been studied by Thomas Sánchez who suggests that one of the more intensive studies of the Mexican-American and Mexican populations in Los Angeles was conducted by the FBI between 1943 and 1945 ["Racial Conditions (Spanish-Mexican Activities), Los Angeles Field Division", FBI, Los Angeles, California, 14 January 1944, no file number]. He notes that the FBI's efforts focused on the question of subversive activities by either Axis or Synarchist groups in the **barrio**, the problem of juvenile delinquency (especially that associated with zoot-suiters); race relations between Mexicans, blacks, and whites; the loyalty of the Mexican community to the United States; the influence of Spanish-language newspapers, magazines, and radio stations; the rôle of the Catholic Church; work habits, places of employment, levels of skilled and

unskilled workers, union membership, sources of recreation, and levels of education; and short profiles of political and religious leaders; see his: **The Zoot-Suit Riots**, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1984.

<sup>78</sup> Enrique Prado, "Synarchism in the United States", **The New Republic**, 26 July 1943, p.98.

<sup>79</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 20 February, 1941.

<sup>80</sup> "¡Defendamos la Bandera!", Synarchist tract of 1945, I.N.A.H., Series UNS, microfilm No.110 [12.2.13].

<sup>81</sup> UNS, **16 Puntos Basicos**, number 6.

<sup>82</sup> Synarchist tract of 1945, I.N.A.H., Series UNS, microfilm No.110 [12.2.13].

<sup>83</sup> Prado, "Synarchism in the US", op. cit., p.97.

<sup>84</sup> First US ambassador to Mexico, he introduced Free-Masonry.

<sup>85</sup> Undated Synarchist tract, I.N.A.H., Series UNS, microfilm No.101 [12.2.04].

<sup>86</sup> **El Sinarquista**, 31 December 1942.

<sup>87</sup> **Unión Nacional Sinarquista, México-1960, México, n.p., 1941.**

<sup>88</sup> **México-1960**, op. cit., p.11.

<sup>89</sup> **México-1960**, op. cit., p.34, 54.

<sup>90</sup> **México-1960**, op.cit., p.7.

<sup>91</sup> **Sinarquía Nacional, El Sinarquismo...**, op. cit., pp.139-140.

<sup>92</sup> **México-1960**, op. cit., p.12.

<sup>93</sup> **México-1960**, op. cit., p.24.

<sup>94</sup> UNS, Secretaría de Propaganda, **Programa Sinarquista México, 1942**, pp.22.24.

<sup>95</sup> **México-1960**, op. cit., p.23.

<sup>96</sup> UNS, **Programa Sinarquista**, op. cit., p.20.

<sup>97</sup> **México-1960**, op. cit., p.5.

<sup>98</sup> **México-1960**, op. cit., p.8.

<sup>99</sup> Manuel Zermeño, "Presencia Histórica del Sinarquismo", I.N.A.H. Series UNS, microfilm No.101 [12.2.04]. This idea was inscribed in the "General

**Principles"** of Synarchism; number 4 read:

"We proclaim that there is no interest superior to the Nation's. The classes and groups, as well as the individuals, shall sacrifice their personal interests for the common good and the welfare of the Fatherland. We consider that the destiny of Mexico is bound to that of all the peoples of the Continent and the Europe. We recognize that one is our origin, one our past and one our future. We maintain that the Catholic Religion is the strongest basis on which rests the Mexican Nationality and we recognize as alien all that tends to undermine this unshakeable unity and the greatness of Mexico". (Ibid.)

<sup>100</sup> Abascal, *Mis Recuerdos*, op.cit., p.234.

<sup>101</sup> Ramiro de Maeztu, *Defensa de la Hispanidad*, Madrid, n.p., 1934.

<sup>102</sup> *Sinarquismo*, No.8, April 1939.

<sup>103</sup> *Sinarquismo*, No.8, April 1939.

<sup>104</sup> R. Maeztu, op. cit., pp.298-299.

<sup>105</sup> On the notion, genesis and future of Hispanismo, see the series of articles published by *Revista de las Españas*, Madrid, 1929, cuarto trimestre.

<sup>106</sup> Meyer, *Le Sinarquisme ...*, op. cit., p.139; see also Miguel Rojas-Mix: "El Hispanismo: ideología de la dictadura en Hispanoamérica", *Araucaria*, No.2, 1978, p.50

<sup>107</sup> "Maurrassism" sought a restoration of the former order; it proposed the substitution of an organic society for an individualistic society, the restitution of functions and powers monopolized by the State to the groups and the organized communities, the subordination of the political to the economic and social, the setting up of a hierarchically organized, but decentralized, corporatist state. See: Charles Maurras, *La contre-révolution spontanée*, Paris, H. Lardanchet, 1943, p.73; and "Kiel et Tanger", In his: *De la politique naturelle au nationalisme intégral*, (Textes choisis par F.Natter et C. Rousseau), Paris, Vrin, 1972, p.170. For the ideas of Maurras, see also: Pierre Milza, *Le Fascisme*, Paris, Editions MA, 1986, p.251; and his: *Le Fascisme français. Présent et passé*, Paris, Flammarion, 1987, p.57.

<sup>108</sup> Lois Elwyn Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish*

**Republicans**, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1955, p.176; for a historical evaluation of the differences in meaning between the terms **Hispanismo** and **Hispanidad**, see: F. Carmona Nenclores, "Hispanismo e Hispanidad", **Cuadernos Americanos**, Vol.III, No.3, March-June 1942, pp.43-55; see also: Frederick B. Pike, **Hispanismo, 1898-1936. Spanish Conservatives and Liberals and their relations with Spanish America**, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1971, pp.1-3.

<sup>109</sup> Arthur P. Whitaker, **Inter American Affairs, 1942**, New York, Columbia University Press, 1943, p.26.

<sup>110</sup> William B. Bristol, "Hispanidad in South America", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.XXI, No.2, January 1943, p.321.

<sup>111</sup> See: Asociación Cultural Hispano-Americana, **Voces de Hispanidad**, Madrid, n.p., 1940.

<sup>112</sup> Maeztu, op. cit., p.54.

<sup>113</sup> Miguel Rojas-Mix: "El Hispanismo...", op. cit., p.50.

<sup>114</sup> Pablo Antonio Cuadra, "México, baluarte cultural y reserva moral de Hispanoamérica", **El Sinarquista**, 6 November 1941; see also his: "El retorno de la tradición hispana", in **Acción Española**, 72/73 (1934), pp.409-410.

## CONCLUSION

After the 1929 agreements the Church strove to preserve her apolitical image, and maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the faction organizations that identified with her, in particular, the UNS. From 1942 the Synarchist organization went through a process of internal decline which Church indifference and the Government's strategy contributed to make worse. The modus vivendi guaranteed the Church direct communication with the government. If the hierarchy had explicitly promoted the organization and the success of a political party or faction it could have damaged her interests, restoration above all. The symbolic reconciliation carried out by the Avila Camacho administration neutralized effectively the possibility that the Church united an opposition front around the traditional themes of social defence: individualism and private property. But not even the anti-communist alliance of those years succeeded in dissolving the bases of opposition between the Church and the State.

After 1940, secularization was no longer the explicit objective of the policy of the government removing thereof one of the main sources of conflict between Church and State. The reform in 1945 of Article 3 of the Constitution, which deals with education, was the concrete expression of that change, given that socialist education represented the most perfect attempt of a policy of secularization directed at the social values undertaken by the State.

Mexican democracy was a firm-handed government that recognized in the UNS a potentially subversive and revolutionary organization, which used nationalistic, organic and unitarian ideas, that the PRM wished to monopolize. The UNS was relatively free to play a radical rôle, free to make untenable promises, free to attract those individuals dissatisfied with the absorption and integration by the government of a revolutionary Left. Therefore, opposition to the revolutionary régime was taken up completely by the Synarchist Movement.

"The Synarchists had taken up the government challenge that the Catholic was a traitor to Mexico and had turned this challenge back on a government which they claimed was a tool of Soviet Russia. They also created an ideal of a nation based on Catholicism and order which found response in those disturbed by the upheavals of the thirties".<sup>1</sup>

The UNS had three possible courses of action:

- 1) suspicious isolationism, withdraw to the confines of the countryside and the village;
- 2) revolutionary struggle, impossible without at least the support of the army; and
- 3) compromise, the search for government support, for effective pressure.

In fact, the UNS found it impossible to choose between either of the latter two, because of the conflict between the Base and the Movement; and it took refuge in the first, from where it could eventually re-emerge again one day.



However, isolation was never absolute; national leaders like Zermeño and Torres Bueno were often received by Cárdenas and by Avila Camacho.

The UNS followed methods in accordance to the institutionalist and legalistic spirit of the Movement; supported by infiltration and by putting pressure on the Agrarian Department, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Army. It made use of agitation and propaganda as part of its essentially nonviolent direct action. This nonviolence, marked by numerous millenarianist factors, did not signify a passive attitude. It internalized and channelled a disciplined aggressiveness. Non-violence corresponded, intuitively, to the existence of opposing forces, of waiting and acting. It also revealed the nature of the Movement; a movement of the poorest Mexicans, which translated the rôle of the pariah onto the national political level, with which it identified.

The success or failure of the Synarchist Movement largely rested on the significance of national and international circumstances. The fighting resources and the strength of the Movement were determined by and depended on the numerous actors that were in play, their power, their alliances and antagonisms, and the legal and political rules that governed conflicts and their solutions. The key factors were the United States, the Spanish Civil War, the European, and later the World War.

From the configuration of the forces present, it transpires that the Synarchist Movement had very little economic or political power; it never won the earnest

support of the wealthy (Mexican or foreign). Recruitment was done among the middle classes, the artisans, and especially the peasants.

The peasant was, in the context of the agrarian reform, an ideal subject for manipulation, by the Government and by the UNS. Consequently, the UNS was, in turn, manipulated, on three counts: firstly, by the Base, the secret authority representing the interests of the Catholic conservative sector, which sought to turn the UNS into a pressure group; then, by the Government of Avila Camacho which used the UNS, by taking advantage of it, to defeat the forces of the Left and take down the position of the cardenista group and; finally, by the United States, which sought thereof to strengthen the régime of Avila Camacho to prevent a return to the old cardenista practices, and to fight the establishment of a fifth column in Mexico. The intervention of the United States was to be decisive in removing Abascal.

In all these instances, the Base was present in the person of Antonio Santacruz -leader of the secret Supreme Council, close to the Archbishop of Mexico, and intermediate with the Mexican and American governments.

The UNS thus had to find a compromise between its interests and those of the Government and of the United States, without threatening them. That accounted for the internal crisis that marked the Movement from the outset, since the large popular following it had attracted had done so because of its stance vis-à-vis the Government and the United States; it also explained the contradiction

between the Movement's everyday activism and a long term immobilism.

However, the movement presented neither a positive plan for the solution of Mexico's economic problems nor a blueprint for seizure of power. Because of this lack of programme, the Synarchists were doomed to failure.

Once Abascal was eliminated, unquestionably the only leader capable of mobilizing the movement to seize power, and thereby define its position (total destruction, or an alliance with other right-wing forces), all that remained were untenable promises.

Within Mexico, the UNS participated, before 1940, in the general rise of the anti-cardenist sentiment and forces; afterwards, it became allied, in practice, with Avila Camacho against cardenism and, following the defeat of the latter in the election to the presidency of a civilian and a conservative, Miguel Alemán, the Synarchist Movement lost its *raison d'être*.

In the end, the Synarchist Movement failed because of the very negativeness of its philosophy.

"It has always been the case", wrote Wilhelm Reich, "that the 'ethos' of the few, with their discipline, leads to the incompetence of the large majority of people. Myth and ethos may be heroic, but they are always dangerous, undemocratic, and reactionary measures. It is a question of the character, the will, the conviction, joy of assuming responsibility, and enthusiasm of the broad masses of working men and women. They themselves must be willing and capable of sticking up for their own lives and insisting on the wealth of their own experience. An ethos based on the misery of masses and demanding

such great sacrifices and discipline that only a few are capable of measuring up to it, an ethos that is so severe and continues to be so severe that even those who support it cannot keep the pace, may have an elevating effect; but it will never solve a single objective problem of the social community".<sup>2</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Albert Michaels, "Fascism and Sinarquismo: Popular Nationalisms Against the Mexican Revolution", **A Journal of Church and State**, Vol.VII, No.2, 1966, pp.249-250.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Reich, **The Mass Psychology of Fascism**, New York, Touchstone, 1970, p.306.

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This study relies principally on Mexican Interior Ministry archives and other documents pertaining to the National Committee of the National Synarchist Union. Progress through the literature related to the subject left no doubt that published works illuminated only slightly the central problems with which the writer was concerned, a conviction strongly reinforced by research among the sources now available. Even a partial examination of the literature reveals that the entire matter of Synarchism has received insufficient attention by political analysts and historians. To be sure, large quantities of books, articles, and pamphlets appeared during the late thirties and early forties, but they exhibit the unreliability typical of undocumented expositions. Few have proved truly useful, although they do give one a keener appreciation of the deep-seated alarm over Synarchist penetration.

The use of the Interior Ministry' archives has certain shortcomings that should be indicated. The foremost limitation is the fact that serious gaps exist in the files, especially with regard to Synarchist personalities, as well as to Synarchist activities in the Capital.

Microfilmed copies of selected UNS records are deposited in the archives of the INAH. Extensive reading of these gives a valuable appreciation of the administrative rigorousness of the National Committee; besides the normal correspondence with the committees, it kept up to date records of its numbers and their geographical distribution, and of the sale of the newspaper. There are important internal documents about the workings of the Organization; although many more are missing. There are some 75 microfilms. Unfortunately the organization of these is rather disappointing. There are no data sheets for these materials, and although a provisional hand written list exists, it is in effect very superficial and contains several errors. The works devoted to Synarchism are insufficient: that of Mario Gill is too impassioned and is teeming with inaccuracies; that of Juan Ignacio Padilla, a Synarchist, if it provides a valuable account of the origins of the Movement, it merely evoked the main stages of the UNS, without incorporating them into the global History of Mexico. This is also the case of the mémoires of Salvador Abascal, undoubtedly the most charismatic and influential leader of the UNS. His account is passionate and full of information about his activities in Catholic organizations. It reveals some aspects of the Secret Council of the Base, but unfortunately these are distorted by his personal obsession and hatred of Antonio Santacruz, whom he accuses of betraying the spirit of Synarchism and makes responsible for its ruin. Jean Meyer provides a detailed study of Synarchism on the historiographical lines of his

monumental research on the cristeros. He unravels the ambiguities and contradictions of Synarchism and reveals the veiled conflict that opposed the Movement to the Base, and asks if it was a form of Mexican Fascism; however this question is not fully answered. Joseph Ledit, a close friend of Santacruz, gives the closest version yet, of the Supreme Council of the Base. Nathan L. Whetten and Albert Michaels described, respectively, the UNS during its formative years.

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