

FORTUNATE SONS OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION:
MIGUEL ALEMÁN AND HIS GENERATION, 1920-1952

by

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ABSTRACT

Miguel Alemán, who in 1946 became the first civilian president to represent Mexico's official revolutionary party, ushered into national office a new generation of university-educated professional politicians. Nicknamed the "*cachorros* (puppies) of the revolution," these leaders were dismissed as slick college boys by their opponents. Despite this objection, the rise to power of this new cadre represented a major turning point in the nation's political history. The prior ruling generation, composed of military officers who had faced calamitous violence during the Revolution, had carried out a decades-long social program that sought to address social-economic inequalities, redistribute resources, and draw previously marginalized groups into a politically, culturally, and ethnically unified nation.

The members of the Alemán administration, by contrast, dedicated federal resources to promoting industrial development by implementing protectionist measures and constructing massive public works. Powerful hydroelectric dams and expansive irrigation networks supported large-scale commercial agriculture, while ambitious urban projects, including modernist housing complexes, planned suburbs, and the sprawling University City, symbolized the government's middle-class orientation. Despite these advances, their program came with high social costs: suspended redistributive policies and suppressed political liberties led many to accuse them of abandoning the legacy of social revolution they had inherited, an accusation bolstered by rampant corruption. While their policies fomented impressive economic growth over the next three decades,

their focus on urban industry ultimately contributed to a debt crisis and a capital city overburdened by rapid inward migration.

This controversial policy agenda and ambivalent legacy reflected their collective social formation. Their experiences as politically active students and as career politicians inculcated a sense of pragmatism that set them apart from their military predecessors. Once in office, Alemán and his colleagues exploited the geopolitical circumstances of the early Cold War period to solicit foreign loans as well as private investment, especially from the United States. These leaders fashioned a new image of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Carlos Denegri, a journalist during the Alemán years, captured the essence of this transformation best: “The Revolution,” he lamented, “has gotten off its horse and into a Cadillac.”

INTRODUCTION CADILLAC REVOLUTIONARIES

The generation, a dynamic compromise between the masses and the individual,
is the most important concept of history and, as a result, the hinge on which history moves.
—José Ortega y Gasset¹

Miguel Alemán believed in revolution. Not in “The Revolution” in quotation marks
or with any of the usual adjectives, but in revolution. He never betrayed that.
—Arturo García Formenti²

Miguel Alemán’s presidential inauguration in 1946 heralded the first full generational shift at the highest levels of government since revolutionaries overthrew the oligarchic dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz in 1911.³ Over the prior half-decade, the ruling generation of revolutionary generals had begun to fade from national politics,⁴ but 1946 marked the first year that they went without putting up an electoral fight. The young, university-trained men who came to power with Alemán, most of whom were educated in the 1920s, shared little in terms of social background with the military leaders who had occupied the presidency, cabinet ministries, and upper bureaucracy for thirty-five years. The youthful image of these new functionaries prompted labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano famously to nickname them the “*cachorros* (puppies) of the Revolution.” Their opponents, critical of their lack of revolutionary credentials, dismissed them as mere college boys. Despite their objections, the shift to a civilian ruling generation was a logical step in the ongoing development of the one-party dominant political system. By

¹ José Ortega y Gasset, *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, 1955).

² Archivo de la Biblioteca Mexicana de la Fundación Miguel Alemán (hereafter FMA), Testimonio de Arturo García Formenti, Box 9, Exp. 232, May 20, 1985).

³ Peter H. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 23.

⁴ Edwin Lieuwen, *The Mexican Military: The Political Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Army, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 143-46.

creating a pattern of recruitment that allowed the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) to attract professionalized leaders from one generation to the next, the introduction of a civilian-based political system helped keep the ruling party in power until 2000 without the threat of military or popular backlash.

Nearly all of the men in Alemán's cohort, despite being heterogeneous in class background and regional origin, shared educational credentials that prepared them for lives in politics. This collective trait made them, according to political scientist Roderic Camp, the first generation of ruling technocrats in the twentieth century.⁵ Most had entered the political system through the public bureaucracy, gradually climbing upward while simultaneously pushing the military establishment to the margins of national politics. The *alemanista* political generation established the basic prototype for the kind of men who would occupy national office during the second half of the century, and the administration's policies oriented national economic and political development for nearly four decades. Many of these leaders acquired substantial wealth as a result of their political connections, leading critics to declare the beginning of a new era of rampant corruption in the highest ranks of government.⁶ To this day, the legacy of this controversial *camarilla* (political clique) provokes considerable debate.

Optimistic assessments of the political system and its functions, including the process by which civilians replaced military officials in the executive branch, prevailed

⁵ Roderic Ai Camp, *The Metamorphosis of Leadership in a Democratic Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 156, 164; Camp, "The Revolution's Second Generation: The Miracle, 1946-1982 and Collapse of the PRI, 1982-2000," in *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, ed. William H. Beezley (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 468-479.

⁶ Stephen Morris, *Corruption and Politics in Contemporary Mexico* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 71.

until the government-ordered massacre of student protestors in 1968 compelled scholars to rethink the successes of the revolution and its ruling party. Admirers praised Alemán and his generation as the first to envision their country as a middle-class oriented, urbanized society with impressive industrial capacity. In the estimation of his supporters, Alemán was the first president to pursue a modernizing path that placed supreme priority on growth, one that necessitated fixing bilateral relations with the United States in a state of permanent and fruitful cooperation. Several observers regarded the country's post-World War II development as the next stretch of a linear path from revolution to evolution.⁷ According to this perspective, the three decades of upheaval and social reform from 1910 to 1940 paved the way for ambitious and visionary leaders, including many from Alemán's administration, to usher in the so-called economic miracle that lasted from the 1940s through the 1970s.

Yet even those most eager to defend Alemán acknowledge that his administration introduced an unprecedented level of corruption at the highest levels of government. While prominent politicians lined their pockets, the nation's poorest citizens, supposedly the beneficiaries of its hard-fought revolution, sunk further into poverty and misery. Many have been even less charitable, labeling them counter-revolutionaries who betrayed the movement they inherited.⁸ Alemán's image, both in popular culture and in scholarship, reflects this sour assessment. In 1947, historian and economist Daniel Cosío Villegas targeted the Alemán administration in a scathing appraisal of the PRI, which he

⁷ Frank R. Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964); Howard Cline, *Mexico: Revolution to Evolution, 1940-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 157-59.

⁸ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 183-188.

called “La crisis de México,” and then faced a stern official admonishment that he would not be writing anything of the sort ever again.⁹ Decades later, Luis Estrada’s 1999 satirical film *La Ley de Herodes*, a clear critique of the single-party system as it lay on its political deathbed, used the Alemán years as its historical backdrop, suggesting that the corruption of the 1990s had its origins in *Alemanismo*. The movie’s protagonist, a bumbling bureaucrat named Juan Vargas, became both the victim and perpetrator of unbridled corruption as he failed to bring Alemán’s goal of *Modernidad y Justicia Social* to the remote hamlet of San Pedro de los Saguaros.¹⁰ The most astute critique came during the Alemán years from journalist Carlos Denegri. “The Revolution,” he lamented, “has gotten off its horse and into a Cadillac.”¹¹

The image of corruption has not been the only issue that has fueled criticism of Alemán. Many identify the period in which he governed as a major turning point, where the political system became an increasingly authoritarian and repressive apparatus, aggressive industrial development compromised the interests of the nation’s most vulnerable, the government reversed revolutionary commitments to land and labor reform,¹² and attempts at economic autonomy were swapped for policies that reinforced economic dependency.¹³ While this assessment contains some measure of truth, it is far too simplistic and one-sided. The party and its leadership had, in fact, reduced the scope

⁹ Daniel Cosío Villegas, “La Crisis de México,” *Cuadernos Americanos* 32 (Mar.-Apr., 1947).

¹⁰ *La Ley de Herodes*, DVD, directed by Luis Estrada (1999: México: 20th Century Fox, 2004).

¹¹ Ricardo Perez Montfort, “La ciudad de Mexico en los noticieros filmicos de 1940 a 1960,” *Estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano: Diez ensayos sobre cultura popular y nacionalismo* (Mexico: CIESAS, 2ed, 2003), 219-237.

¹² Rosa Elena Montes de Oca, “The State and the Peasants,” in José Luis Reyna and Richard S. Weinert, eds., *Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977), 53.

¹³ René Villarreal, “The Policy of Import-Substituting Industrialization, 1929-1975,” in Reyna and Weinert, eds., *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, 67.

of revolutionary reform by 1938,¹⁴ and the government had pursued first accommodation, then open cooperation, with the United States during World War II.¹⁵ Moreover, corruption had a deep-rooted history in national politics beginning well before the 1940s. Therefore, at the minimum, many of these claims are ahistorical. Perhaps the most striking limitation of this uniformly cynical characterization is that it does not account for the numerous positive accomplishments of the Alemán administration, and it sidesteps altogether the far more difficult task of uncovering its leaders' complex motives as individuals and as a group.

The divergent impressions of the Alemán administration point to its importance to the nation's twentieth-century development. Lázaro Cárdenas may be the century's most studied president, but Alemán set in place the basic forms of the political system that endured for the remainder of the century, as John Sherman has argued.¹⁶ In many ways, his administration perfected what Mario Vargas Llosa later called the "perfect dictatorship" of the PRI era:¹⁷ it succeeded in empowering the urban middle class, sidelining the military, and using the corporate-structured party as an instrument of

¹⁴ The debate over the characteristics of Cardenismo (i.e. authoritarian vs. popular or democratic; radical or progressive vs. conservative or reactionary) is vast, has taken several turns, and continues to engage scholars; for a brief synthesis of the general trends (e.g. populist, revisionist, post-revisionist) in the historiography of the Cárdenas period, see Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26 (Feb., 1994), 73-107; for a recent synthesis, Susie Porter, "The Apogee of the Revolution, 1934-1946," in *Companion to Mexican History*, ed. Beezley, 453-467.

¹⁵ Ian Roxborough, "Mexico," in *op cit.* and Leslie Bethell, eds., *Latin America Between World War II and the Cold War, 1944-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 194-95.

¹⁶ John W. Sherman, "The Mexican 'Miracle' and its Collapse," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, eds. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 575-620.

¹⁷ Vargas Llosa coined the term, in reference to what he called the "camouflaged dictatorship" of the PRI-dominated political system, in a 1990 debate with Octavio Paz.

political control over the urban and rural working classes.¹⁸ This approach marked a clear departure from the prior generation's efforts to alleviate social-economic disparities and to provide increased opportunities for political incorporation among the nation's poor.

In matters of economic policy, Alemán vigorously pursued a multi-pronged strategy of capitalist development that balanced state protection and foreign investment. His administration's agenda fit within the framework of import-substitution industrialization, an approach aimed at using government protection to bolster domestic production for an expanding consumer market while decreasing dependency on export earnings.¹⁹ The administration erected import limits to promote domestic consumption, invested government funds in industry-supporting infrastructure, and devoted direct subsidies to domestic business. It also borrowed heavily to finance industrial and infrastructural development, especially from the U.S. Treasury's Import-Export Bank, capitalizing on opportunities that emerged in the new, U.S.-centered global economy. Personally inspired by the success of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Alemán simultaneously sought to make his country more economically self-sufficient by expanding the role of the government in economic affairs at the same time that he used his personal influence to entice foreign businesses to pour money into a country that had finally moved past its reputation for being hostile to investment from abroad. Leaders

¹⁸ As Susan Eckstein notes, the party had little independent power and was in most cases subservient to the president; Eckstein, "The State and the Urban Poor," in Reyna and Weinert, eds., *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, p. 24. I borrow the idea of the party as an instrument of control within a presidentialist system, as opposed to the idea that the party was an independent political actor, from personal conversations with Soledad Loaeza and from her unpublished work in progress on Manuel Avila Camacho's failed electoral proposition.

¹⁹ René Villareal, "Policy of Import-Substituting Industrialization," in Reyna and Weinert, eds., *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, pp. 67-71.

coupled this effort with policies aimed at expanding agricultural production through the introduction of hybridized seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and new machinery as part of a global program known as the Green Revolution.

This ambitious economic agenda produced mixed results: on the one hand, it created the structural basis for the impressive growth and development of the next few decades, with especially noteworthy accomplishments in petroleum exploitation, irrigation, hydroelectricity, highway building, tourism development, and urban construction. Indeed, these aggressive efforts at industry protection, coupled with public investment in infrastructure, spurred thirty-five years of sustained economic growth at the unprecedented annual rate of six percent. The visible gains of the administration were unmistakable. Projects ranging from the massive University City of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM) to power-generating dams in the Papaloapan River Valley to enormous urban *vecindades* (middle-class oriented housing and commercial complexes) in the capital to the beachfront high-rise hotels of Acapulco all form a significant part of this generation's positive legacy. In pursuing these initiatives, Alemán became the first twentieth-century president to meld the interests of government and big business into a common purpose.²⁰

On the other hand, the ultimate price of these economic policies was high. ISI, which focused almost exclusively on the production of consumer goods, paradoxically required higher levels of importation of capital goods for industrial production at a time when exports decreased due to a focus on inward-looking development, thus creating a

²⁰ Maria Antonia Martínez, "El modelo económico de la presidencia de Miguel Alemán," in *Gobernantes mexicanos II: 1911-2000*, ed. Will Fowler (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008), 227-262.

balance of payments crisis. At the same time, drained foreign reserves necessitated successive peso devaluations, which in turn created inflationary pressures that made buying basic goods like tortillas and milk difficult for many.²¹ Most importantly, the period marked the beginning of a half-century of rural-to-urban migration that resulted in hastily constructed slums that overburdened the burgeoning capital.²² The political influence of the working class diminished considerably (a phenomenon that contradicted its tradition of popular mobilization and militancy), further allowing the administration to pursue a growth-oriented economic strategy without interference from unions. While it is widely acknowledged that such overly aggressive development policies widened social-economic inequalities and contributed to a debt crisis by the late 1970s, they nonetheless represented a sincere effort to use the instruments of government for the purpose of expanding national wealth and promoting growth.

These initiatives helped project a national aesthetic of modernity and ambition to citizens and foreigners alike. This vision directly corresponded to the Alemán generation's priorities as a group, and informed how its leaders governed in palpable ways. Their drive to transform their country into an emergent middle power also guided their engagement of the ongoing official project to re-define the nation along racial-ethnic lines. Beginning in the 1920s, political leaders and members of the intelligentsia promoted the ideal of *mestizaje*, or racial mixing, as a pathway to political incorporation and cultural inclusion for indigenous and poor groups previously left out of national

²¹ Villareal, "Policy of Import-Substituting Industrialization," 81-83.

²² Eckstein, "The State and the Urban Poor," in Reyna and Weinert, eds., *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, 23-24; Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 102-103.

affairs. Their basic proposition was that citizens would realize their nation's potential when they internalized an identity based on the virtues of their combined indigenous and European heritage. Eventually, this effort came to be reflected in public art, literature, film, education and textbook campaigns, and political rhetoric. While the Alemán-era political and intellectual elite ostensibly remained committed to this effort at reconfiguring national identity around a mestizo mythology,²³ the political establishment in fact embraced a consumerist culture modeled on the post-World War II U.S. middle class.²⁴ Thus, in practice, the members of this generation largely discarded the revolutionary cultural project to create a *sui generis* national identity, opting instead to emulate both the economic successes and cultural aesthetics of the United States. At the same time, out of necessity they confronted the practical realities of indigenous incorporation and acculturation through efforts such as the creation of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI).²⁵ In both cases, the ultimate effort was to place supreme priority on modernity and modernization and, by extension, to allow their country to enter into the company of the world's most advanced nations.

Of course, such modernizing impulses did not begin in every case with Alemán. Industrialization became a priority in the last years of the Cárdenas administration, and the exigencies of World War II drew the previous administration of Manuel Ávila

²³ Several of the essays included in Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) look at this cultural project through different lenses, including film, popular music, schools, and public art; See also Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁴ Julio Moreno, *¡Yankee Don't go Home! Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 179.

²⁵ Stephen E. Lewis, "Chronicle of a Debacle; or, What Happened to the INI's Pilot Coordinating Center in Chiapas, Mexico, 1951-76?" (Unpublished Work in Progress, California State University, Chico).

Camacho away from revolutionary policies such as land reform. What made the Alemán group's members different than their immediate predecessors was the degree of flexibility and choice at their disposal when they defined and then carried out their program. Precisely for this reason – because Alemán and his civilian colleagues, who shared similar backgrounds, mentalities, and goals, set in motion their political agenda with a more extensive array of alternative options – their tenure represented a watershed in the country's modern politics. By permanently setting aside the revolutionary generation's social program, which aimed at redistributing resources, limiting foreign influence, and creating a politically and culturally inclusive nation, they definitively ended the social revolution that began in 1910. Therefore, the central task of this study is to analyze the interplay between the particular motivations of these individuals and the opportunities and constraints of the context in which they lived and governed. In doing so, the dissertation demonstrates not only how, but also why this generation permanently retreated from a commitment to revolutionary reform.

The explanation for this process of decision-making begins with an analysis of their years in school in the 1920s. Unlike their military predecessors, their formation as a *camarilla* (political clique) began not on revolutionary battlefields, but in the halls of Mexico City's elite institutions of higher education, above all at the National Preparatory School and the law school of the National University. Camp and others have identified these schools as primary locations of political recruitment and association.²⁶ This study

²⁶ Roderic Ai Camp, "Education and Political Recruitment in Mexico: The Alemán Generation," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 18:3 (Aug., 1976), 295-321; Jorge Gil, Samuel Schmidt and Jorge Castro, "La red del poder mexicana: El caso de Miguel Alemán," in *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 55:3

builds on this thesis by examining their political activities, intellectual culture, and social lives in these formative years, before moving into an examination of their early career paths prior to achieving national prominence. During their time in school, they developed friendships that formed the basis of their political network. Despite the ongoing turmoil the country faced in the 1920s, including the assassinations of several prominent revolutionaries, the Cristero Revolt, rampant crime, labor strikes, and agrarian conflict, these students lived a remarkably optimistic existence. As many recounted, their time in school took them away from the grim circumstances of the provinces and exposed them to a cosmopolitan capital. This allowed them to develop a distinct set of priorities as a generation. Moreover, their participation in a number of political activities, especially as volunteer activists in José Vasconcelos's failed 1929 presidential campaign, contributed to an ethos that emphasized everyday pragmatism over abstract idealism.

As these young men moved into careers in the public sector during the 1930s, they applied many of the principles they adopted in school. What set them apart from their predecessors was their complete reassurance about where they should place their political loyalties in order to advance professionally. Alemán's career during the 1930s provides an especially instructive case to examine the gradual introduction of civilian political functionaries into the political system. Following his 1929 graduation from law school, he immediately entered the private sector, taking on major cases for mine workers while simultaneously making personal investments, especially in real estate. Almost immediately, he began to ascend the political ranks, eventually assuming the

(Jul.-Sept., 1993), 103-117; Roderic Ai Camp, "La campaña presidencial de 1929 y el liderazgo político en México," *Historia Mexicana* 27:2 (Oct.-Dec., 1977), 231-259.

governorship of Veracruz in 1936 in a special election following the assassination of the governor-elect, Manlio Fabio Altamirano. His governorship provided him and his closest colleagues, many of them from school, a practical political education. Serving as governor allowed him to demonstrate adherence to the Cárdenas administration, to prove his administrative competence, and to move the state's military establishment away from the center of political decision-making without fundamentally upsetting the balance of power. Thus, many of the prevalent themes of his presidential administration, including the reduction in the military's political presence, the priority on subservience to executive authority, and the consolidation of a close-knit group of civilian leaders, were in fact articulated in the prior decade.

Thus, through the combination of formal education in the 1920s and early political experience in the 1930s, this generation came to embody a new kind of national political elite: a group of like-minded, educated, wealthy men who symbolized the modernity that their country was coming to embrace. Alemán, in his political style and owing to his own life story as the ultra-successful son of an assassinated revolutionary general, came to embody the dual image of a rapidly modernizing nation that still clung to the rhetoric of an increasingly distant revolutionary heritage.

Generational Study as Historical Method

Historians have devoted insufficient attention to the study of Alemán and the members of his generation, despite their importance to the twentieth-century political system. The explanation for this absence is twofold. First, scholars have been far more

preoccupied with the bloody struggles of the 1910s, the ambitious educational, labor, and anti-clerical reforms of the 1920s, and the redistributive programs of the 1930s. In contrast to these periods, the Alemán era and its leadership appear conservative, and many contemporary scholars have viewed the permanent shift to the right as the 1910 revolution's Thermidor, the abandonment of a once-promising social movement.²⁷

Second, the period is relatively recent, especially for historians. Only now have the requisite historical sources become available to permit a study of the *Alemanistas* from their earliest scholastic experiences and social interactions through their tenure in office.

This study utilizes a number of primary sources, including those at the private archive of Alemán, housed at the foundation that bears his name. These include a set of oral interview transcripts of former administration officials, governors and congressmen, fellow students, business colleagues, family members, and personal friends of Alemán. The interviews, conducted in the 1980s by a team led by Alemán's son, Miguel Alemán Velasco, provide fresh insight into the process of their social formation as a group, especially during school. No historian has used this valuable collection. Additionally, the transcripts of a series of similar interviews and questionnaires that Roderic Camp conducted in the 1970s, now housed at the Nettie Lee Benson collection at the University of Texas, Austin, further enrich the study. Finally, a small number of oral interviews with surviving individuals who knew Alemán in various capacities offer additional historical insight. Taken together, these sources contain a series of anecdotes and reminiscences that form a clear picture of their lives as students, politicians, business partners, and

²⁷ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 183-188.

friends. These narratives cannot be found anywhere else, since all of the members of this generation have since deceased.

The study also utilizes recently opened (and, in some cases, still unprocessed) intelligence and national security documents in the massive holdings of the *Archivo General de la Nación* (AGN). The partially catalogued documents of the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS) reveal the domestic security concerns of the administration. In coming years, these sources will continue to provide historians with a valuable research tool that complements the sources contained in the *Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales* (DGIPS). This project also draws from the private collections not only of Alemán, but also of members and opponents of his administration. Finally, a significant base of U.S. sources, ranging from the State Department's confidential internal files to the presidential files of President Harry Truman, informs much of the analysis of the Alemán administration's bilateral relations with the United States and elucidates foreign impressions of his administration.

Through this extensive base of primary sources, the study examines the social basis of the formation and rise of the Alemán generation to explain some of the reasons behind its members' most important initiatives, rather than strictly examining the administration's policies and their outcomes. Over the last sixty years, the historiography on the twentieth-century has exhibited what some have labeled a presidentialist bias.²⁸

²⁸ The discussion on presidentialism begins with a now obscure publication, derived from a doctoral dissertation at the University of California-Berkeley: Stephen Spencer Goodspeed, "El papel del jefe del ejecutivo en México", *Problemas agrícolas e industriales de México* VII:1 (enero-marzo, 1955), 13-208; see also Daniel Cosío Villegas, *El sistema político mexicano. Las posibilidades de cambio* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1972); Jeffrey A. Weldon, "El presidente como legislador, 1917-1934," in *El poder legislativo en las décadas revolucionarias, 1908-1934*, ed. Pablo Picato (México: Instituto de

Since the presidency became steadily more important and powerful following the creation in 1929 of an encompassing official revolutionary party, historians have tended to divide the century into six-year blocks that correspond to the *sexenio* presidential terms and to award the president a disproportionately high degree of attention in the historical record. Despite the limitations of presidentialist historiography, its literature certainly has yielded benefits: we have superb biographies of a number of the presidents who served before Alemán, and an acute understanding of many of the patterns in political behavior common to the *sexenios*.²⁹

Moving away from the historiographical trend of presidentialism does not pardon historians entirely from analyzing the rise of an increasingly presidentialist system. Indeed, far more than in the U.S. system, despite similar patterns of institutional organization when compared to parliamentary systems (e.g. bi-cameral legislature, three-branch government, independently elected governors and municipal officials with autonomous authority), the president came to exercise formal power, exert informal influence, and personify the massive institutional structure of the PRI to an unprecedented degree. The peculiarity of the system lay in the fact that the president never served more than one six-year term and thus never relied on the kind of personalist

Investigaciones Legislativas, 1997), 117-145; for examples of presidentialist treatments specifically of the Alemán years, see Blanca Torres, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1940-1952: Hacia la utopía industrial* (México: El Colegio de México, 1979); Luis Medina, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1940-1952: Civilismo y modernización del autoritarismo* (México: El Colegio de México, 1979); María Antonia Martínez, "El modelo económico de la presidencia de Miguel Alemán," in *Gobernantes mexicanos II: 1911-2000*, ed. Will Fowler, 227-262 (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008); Tzvi Medin, *El sexenio alemanista. Ideología y praxis política de Miguel Alemán* (México: Ediciones Era, 1990).

²⁹ Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); Linda B. Hall, *Álvaro Obregón: Power and Revolution in Mexico, 1911-1920* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1981); Stanley R. Ross, *Francisco I. Madero: Apostle of Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); Alan Knight, *Cárdenas and Cardenismo* (unpublished work in progress, St. Antony's College, University of Oxford).

rule that typified other systems in the region. For the better part of the second half of the twentieth century, the other branches of government remained highly subservient to executive authority, and alternative parties on both the left and the right operated as what Soledad Loaeza has called, in reference to the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), the “loyal opposition.”³⁰ Along with the presidency, much of the rest of the executive branch, including the Ministries of the Interior, Treasury, Communications and Public Works, and Economy, also accumulated substantial power. With opposition effectively neutralized and the increasingly submissive corporate party sectors in full collaboration with presidential authority, the power of the executive branch stood at high tide.

For this reason, even a study of the entire group cannot entirely avoid some measure of focus on the figure at the center of national politics, nor should it. As Will Fowler has asserted, presidentialism will endure so long as citizens continue to look to the president for solutions to national problems.³¹ This was equally true in the 1940s and 1950s, since much of the symbolic apparatus of the PRI-dominated political system cohered around the image and life history of Alemán. Considering this, personal and political biography,³² especially in the case of Alemán, anchor much of the narrative, since his own life story almost perfectly captures the trajectory of the nation’s leadership. Nevertheless, the study is neither exclusively nor explicitly biographical in its structure.

³⁰ Soledad Loaeza, *El Partido Acción Nacional. La larga marcha, 1939-1994. Oposición leal y partido de protesta* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), 11; Loaeza, *El llamado de las urnas* (México: Cal y Arena, 1989), 241.

³¹ Fowler, quoted in an interview: Isabel Salmerón, “Si el mandatario es milagroso, seguirá el presidencialismo, in *¡Siempre!* 51:2659 (Feb., 2005), 11.

³² Biography as a historical methodology has experienced something of a resurgence in recent years. The *American Historical Review* devoted an issue to a discussion of the issue. See David Nasaw et al., “Roundtable: Historians and Biography,” in *American Historical Review* 114, 3 (June, 2009).

Rather, it uses the life and career of Alemán as a pathway to an examination of how the collective experiences of the group of national leaders that rose to power immediately after World War II influenced their governing approach.

A generational study, in addition to providing an escape from the historiographical limitations of presidentialism, makes it possible to recognize that the modern presidency, not only in Mexico but across the world, increasingly rested on the advice and counsel not only of formal functionaries, such as cabinet ministers, but also formal and informal advisers in the executive sector. In many cases, this inner circle included members of the private sector, prominent immigrants (in this case, the Italian-born industrialist Bruno Pagliai made numerous investments with Alemán, and served as a kind of liaison between the president and important visitors, entertaining them on his yacht and housing them in his Acapulco mansion), and even representatives of foreign governments.³³ The system under the leadership of the PRI proved no exception: Alemán and his colleagues became the first of several generations of leaders who grew extraordinarily wealthy despite spending the majority of their careers in public office. Partially through the business practices of its members, the administration helped to create a revolving door between the private and public sectors, even though the political and business elites for the most part remained distinct.³⁴ This new economic climate drew

³³ Jefferson Morley, *Our Man in Mexico: The Hidden History of the CIA* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 90-91. Morley outlines the dense network of agents within the inner circles of the administrations of Adolfo López Mateos (1948-64) and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-70) that provided intelligence to the CIA office in Mexico City.

³⁴ Smith, *Labyrinths of Power*, 203, 214; Lorenzo Meyer, "Historical Roots of the Authoritarian State in Mexico," in Reyna and Weinert, *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, 16; Roderic Ai Camp, *Entrepreneurs and Politics in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 22-23; Alex Saragoza,

the official party and domestic business interests into what Andrew Paxman has called a symbiosis, a kind of mutual dependency.³⁵

Changes in media technology, including the introduction of the television, aided in the tightening of relations between the public and private sectors, as Alex Saragoza and Celeste González de Bustamante have demonstrated.³⁶ This, perhaps more than any other factor, was a function of timing. Since television had just begun to emerge as a presence in national life near the end of Alemán's term, it did not have the same transformative effect on his political presence that it would for subsequent politicians in nearly every corner of the globe.³⁷ Nevertheless, it did benefit him financially. He gained a significant share of stock in what became the network Televisa through his relations with media moguls Emilio Azcárraga and Rómulo O'Farrill. As a consequence, he made money at the same time that the PRI developed a close relationship with the media that allowed political leaders to manipulate it to their advantage.

Alemán and subsequent political figures benefited from an arrangement known as the *prestanombre* (literally translated as "borrowed name," but perhaps best understood as a front-man), which allowed them to make investments that, to this day, remain virtually untraceable. The existence of this practice has made difficult the prospect of following many of the investments made by Alemán and his colleagues. Nevertheless, the

"The Media and the State in Mexico: The Origins of Televisa" (unpublished work in progress, University of California, Berkeley).

³⁵ Andrew Paxman, "Espinosa Yglesias Becomes a Philanthropist: A Private-Sector Response to Mexico's Political Turns, 1963-1982," Conference Presentation, XIII Reunión de Historiadores de México, Estados Unidos, y Canadá, October 29, 2010.

³⁶ Celeste González de Bustamante, "*Tele-Visiones* (Tele-Visions): The Making of Mexican Television News," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2006), 16.

³⁷ Bryan McCann, "Carlos Lacerda: The Rise and Fall of a Middle-class Populist in 1950s Brazil," in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83:4 (Nov., 2003), 661-696.

arrangement, which resulted in the enrichment not only of Alemán, but also of numerous public figures during and after his term, became one of the defining characteristics of this group and represented a major incentive for these individuals to pursue careers in public life. Considering the personal stakes that politicians often had in high-level investments, the harmonious relationship between the PRI and much of the business community over the remainder of the century comes as little surprise.

For all of these reasons, prosopography, the method of studying the common characteristics of a group,³⁸ provides an avenue to a new interpretation of how the official party lasted for seven decades with virtually no serious threat to its stability. By analyzing how common experiences and collective mentalities relate to formal political action, this dissertation regards national politics, even in a largely presidentialist system, as something far more complex than the dictates of an omnipotent executive. Such facile political interpretation, as Enrique Krauze has recently asserted, reinforces what he terms *Historia de Bronce*, a mythologized form history that exaggerates the importance of great men.³⁹ In its broadest sense, this study represents an effort to understand how generational change contributed to the ongoing institutionalization of the political system,

³⁸ Lawrence Stone, "Prosopography," in *Daedalus* 100,1 (Winter, 1971), pp. 46-79; the pioneering work on prosopography is Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan, 1957); the pioneers of prosopography in Latin America are, for Spanish America, James Lockhart and, for Brazil, Joseph Love, Robert Levine, and John Wirth; see Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972); Love, *São Paulo in the Brazilian Federation, 1889-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980); Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation, 1889-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977); Levine, *Pernambuco in the Brazilian Federation, 1889-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978); for Mexico, the best example of the use of prosopographical data is Roderic Ai Camp, *Mexican Political Biographies, 1935-2009*, 4th ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

³⁹ Enrique Krauze, *De héroes y mitos* (México: Editorial Tusquets, 2010).

the calcification of the official revolutionary party, and the redefinition of the official goals of the Revolution.

Generations and Revolution in Comparative Perspective

In its basic trajectory of social revolution leading to the creation of a dominant, authoritarian political party, Mexico certainly does not stand alone. The Bolsheviks, for instance, turned from the pursuit of revolution to the task of staying in power almost immediately after their successes in Russia in 1917. From that point forward, the official system produced successive waves of increasingly technocratic leaders.⁴⁰ The Chinese leadership underwent a similar process, and the Communist Party's fourth-generation leaders remain in power today. Certainly vast differences distinguish these three cases from one another, but the common occurrence of clearly identifiable ruling generations that formed around their members' common experiences and backgrounds binds them together.⁴¹ Moreover, in each case, marked transitions from one generation to the next ensured the longevity and durability of the official party. Therefore, the case of the PRI's long-term process of institutionalization has broad comparative relevance and contributes to general theory of the nature of social revolutions.⁴²

⁴⁰ Andrea Graziosi, *A New, Peculiar State: Explorations in Soviet History, 1917-1937* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000), 46-58; Kendall Eugene Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1941: The Origin of the Soviet Technological Intelligentsia* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978).

⁴¹ Richard J. Samuels, "Introduction: Political Generations and Political Development," in *Political Generations and Political Development*, ed. Samuels (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1977), 1-8; Donald Searing, "The Comparative Study of Elite Socialization," in *Comparative Political Studies* 1 (Jan., 1986), 471-500.

⁴² Alan Knight, "Social Revolution: A Latin American Perspective," in *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 9:2 (1990), 175-202; Knight notes that the major studies of social revolution have focused on Asia and Europe and have disregarded, and often misinterpreted (as in the case of Theda Skocpol, the pre-eminent theorist of social revolution), the Mexican and other Latin American cases.

Generational change, combined with a commitment to the principle of no-re-election (a central tenet of the revolutionary movement, inspired by the desire to avoid a repeat of the thirty-five year rule of dictator Porfirio Díaz), helped institutionalize the official Revolution even as the government's policy priorities deviated considerably from the original goals of the various revolutionary factions. Moreover, the orderly transfer of power at regular intervals, even if this orderliness was occasionally facilitated by fraud, allowed the country to avoid some of the negative outcomes seen in other systems. Thus, nothing approaching the personality cults of Mao's China and Stalin's Russia, which produced not only disastrous results during their tenures but also shaky and contentious transitions of power after their deaths, occurred in twentieth-century Mexico.⁴³ Moreover, the introduction of a stable pattern of political recruitment prevented, at least prior to the 1980s, the emergence of an out-of-touch gerontocracy, a factor that had a measurable impact on the decline of the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ Even still, critical government ministries eventually fell into the hands of long-term bureaucrats known as the Dinos, portending the end of the PRI as an effective and responsive governing party.

The transition from military to civilian rule symbolized a transformation of both the structure of the ruling party and the officially stated goals of the revolution it claimed as its own. The idea of a shift toward civilian rule should be defined with care in this context, since it represented something different from the majority of cases in twentieth-century Latin America. In the decades leading up to 1946, the population did not suffer

⁴³ Jonathan Spence, *Mao Zedong* (New York: Viking Books, 1999).

⁴⁴ Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability, and Change in the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Mark R. Beissinger, "In Search of Generations in Soviet Politics," in *World Politics* 2 (Jan., 1986), 288-314.

under a system of personalist military rule on the level of the region's numerous and notorious dictatorships and authoritarian leaders. In fact, well before Alemán and his inner circle came to power, the majority of the basic institutions and protocols of the political system were in place. Specifically, these included the ruling party, the opposition parties (however impotent), electoral procedures, and the corporate bodies that represented various social sectors. For these reasons, Alemán's ascent to the presidency carried with it a great deal of continuity in various respects.

Within the Latin American historiography, military-civilian relations are often viewed as existing in opposition to one another. Peter Flynn, for instance, argues that military takeovers in Brazil have occurred most frequently when civilian leadership and the senior military establishment have fallen out of political consensus.⁴⁵ After 1920, when the Sonoran triangle had firmly taken control of political affairs, military resistance to the government occurred only sporadically.⁴⁶ The last uprising to attract widespread support among officers and soldiers was the 1929 Escobar Rebellion, and Saturnino Cedillo's revolt in 1938-39 in San Luis Potosí was the last such movement of any consequence.⁴⁷ With those exceptions, the gradual reduction of the military's political role occurred without much resistance and even counted on the support of later generals-turned-president, especially Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho. This led Edwin Lieuwen to

⁴⁵ Peter Flynn, *Brazil: A Political Analysis* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978), 83-89.

⁴⁶ Aaron W. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 85, 262-263.

⁴⁷ Romana Falcón, *Revolución y caciquismo: San Luis Potosí, 1910-1938* (México: El Colegio de México, 1984), pp. 264-269; Dudley Ankerson, *Agrarian Warlord: Saturnino Cedillo and the Mexican Revolution in San Luis Potosí* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984).

conclude that the military's de-politicization had been completed by 1940,⁴⁸ even though Ávila Camacho, a division general, won election that year, and despite the fact that the military remained a corporate sector of the official party until 1943. Thus, the cleavage between military and civilian political interests after 1920 was never so pronounced as in other Latin American examples, nor did 1946 represent a rupture punctuated by violence.

Yet if the rise of a civilian ruling generation did not represent a drastic transformation from a fully militarized system to a civilian one, broad structural change did nonetheless take hold. To express the importance of its reorganization, leaders changed the name of the party in 1946, from its second title, the *Partido Revolucionario Mexicano* (PRM) to the designation it has kept to this day, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). Scholars have tended to conflate the three names the party took from the 1929 creation of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR) to the present, as though the changes in title represented nothing more than rhetorical tweaks. To dismiss these name changes fully would be erroneous, since each party differed in its organizational structure, policy priorities, and political context. The move to drop the military from the party's corporate structure in 1946 constituted the most dramatic statement of the place the military would occupy in the next phase of the nation's development. Even if the PRI purported to represent the revolution in its name and rhetoric, dropping the military from its vertically oriented, corporate structure provided an unmistakable statement that revolutionary upheaval was a thing of the past. As Alemán put it in a 1947 interview with

⁴⁸ Edwin Lieuwen, *The Mexican Military: The Political Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Army, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 129, 143-146.

Time magazine, underscoring his attitude to an international audience, “Mexico has had its revolution.”⁴⁹

The reduction in military power and the de-emphasis on its presence in national politics went hand in hand with the rise of a civilian ruling generation. This provided the Alemán group an opportunity to re-define the official goals of the revolution. As numerous scholars have noted, control over the idea of the revolution became one of the keys to the official party’s success in controlling the mechanisms of national politics.⁵⁰ Following the 1910 movement, and especially after the introduction of a one-party system in 1929, leaders recognized the necessity of creating a unifying revolutionary myth. Through monuments, murals, textbooks, film, literature, holidays, and carefully manipulated political rhetoric, officials found creative ways to disseminate a coherent revolutionary narrative designed to simplify its complex history, minimize the importance of internal disagreements past and present (including ones ending in death by assassination), and unify popular memory.⁵¹ This official myth allowed the government to fashion itself as the torchbearer of the revolutionary tradition and to discredit opposition as counter-revolutionary. Ultimately this allowed government officials to apply a kind of circular logic to declare even the most repressive, draconian policies and actions as revolutionary.

Thus, the official revolution came to mean different things over time, usually in response both to contextual circumstances and the changing objectives of national

⁴⁹ Miguel Alemán, quoted in “Mexico: Good Friend,” *Time* (April 28, 1947).

⁵⁰ Guillermo Palacios, “La idea oficial de la Revolución mexicana,” (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, El Colegio de México, 1967).

⁵¹ Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico’s Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 14-33.

leaders. During the bloody decade of upheaval from 1910 to 1920, and especially after President Francisco Madero's assassination during Victoriano Huerta's U.S.-supported *coup d'état* in 1913, the revolutionaries splintered into factions that cohered around substantially different visions of what their movement ought to achieve. By the 1920s, when Pancho Villa, the charismatic commander of the *División del Norte*, and agrarian leader Emiliano Zapata had been vanquished and the Sonoran dynasty had firmly taken control, the revolution came to represent various goals, namely anti-clericalism, capitalism on balanced terms, and vigorous public education campaigns. Cárdenismo in the 1930s oriented the revolution toward minimizing social-economic inequalities, with its most aggressive efforts devoted to massive land reform measures and anti-imperialist gestures, exemplified above all by the oil expropriation. As Monica Rankin has recently demonstrated, the global context of World War II allowed the Ávila Camacho administration to equate the rhetoric of the Allied cause, which centered on the preservation of democracy and the rejection of totalitarianism, to that of the revolution.⁵² After the war, the Alemán generation steered the revolution toward a full embrace of industrialization and urbanization. In doing so, they drew the contours of political culture and public discourse that would endure over the second half of the twentieth century. Consequently, their rise to power represented a watershed in the nation's political history.

From Populism to Technocracy

⁵² Monica Rankin, *¡Mexico, la Patria! Propaganda and Production During World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 4.

The period from the 1920s to the 1960s represented the heyday of Latin American populism. Although populism as a concept lends itself to loose interpretation and flexible definition, a number of factors led to a pattern of leadership common throughout the region during these decades. Beginning in the 1920s, previously unincorporated groups began to gain a meaningful voice in national politics as the result of what Michael Conniff calls a “metropolitan revolution” that occurred from approximately 1870 to 1920.⁵³ Over the next two decades, as Latin America experienced global economic crisis and the effects of World War II, then turned to industrialization, the specter of class conflict became evident. As industrialization increased and several urban centers in the region were transformed through mass migration from sleepy capitals to booming global cities, politicians sought to balance the demands and support of the urban working classes (which advocated policies such as wage reform and union rights) with those of industrialists (who opposed such policies and supported protectionism and direct investment), large landowners (who found the idea of protection of industry toxic to their *laissez-faire*, export-based existence), and the middle classes (who often wanted to distinguish themselves socially from what they saw as lower ranks).

Out of this tangled, contradictory set of political objectives emerged populism, an approach to political leadership characterized by a flexible policy orientation that could shift, for instance, from worker-oriented to pro-industry programs intermittently; a

⁵³ Michael L. Conniff, ed., *Populism in Latin America* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 3-30. The 1910 revolution put Mexico in the vanguard of this process, but it was not the only country in the region to switch from an oligarchic to a mass-based political system: Argentina’s *Union Cívica Radical*, led by Hipólito Yrigoyen, and Brazil’s anti-oligarchic Revolution of 1930, led by Getúlio Vargas, are two additional examples of predominantly middle-class movements demanding increased political incorporation.

Manichean rhetoric that expressed an anti-elite (or, in certain cases, anti-foreign) sentiment and used broadly appealing themes of nationalism or mutual sacrifice to create multi-class, mass-based electoral support; and the presence of a charismatic figure.⁵⁴ Often populists benefited from their ability to monopolize mass communications technology, such as radio and later television.⁵⁵ At various points, numerous countries throughout the region came under the sway of populist leaders. The first administration of Juan Domingo Perón and his personal liaison to the working class, his wife Evita, roughly coincided with Alemán's term.⁵⁶ In Brazil, Getúlio Vargas's return to power in 1951 was fueled in part by both rhetoric and policy aimed at the working class.⁵⁷ The political struggles that led him to commit suicide in 1954 would give impetus to the Brazilian populists Juscelino Kubitschek, Janio Quâdros, and João Goulart. Earlier governments, such as that of Augusto B. Leguía of Peru from 1910 to 1930, and later examples, notably Chile's Popular Front and Popular Unity coalitions, followed a similar pattern of leadership. It is widely accepted, moreover, that the populist governments of Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, which often appeared (in many cases more in rhetoric than policy) to be left-leaning despite supporting relatively moderate, non-threatening reforms for the urban and rural working classes, led to the infamously violent military dictatorships of the 1960s-1980s.

⁵⁴ Alan Knight, "Populism and Neo-Populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30:2 (May, 1998), 223-248.

⁵⁵ Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 89-92.

⁵⁶ Marysa Navarro, "The Case of Eva Perón," in *Signs* 3:1 (Autumn, 1977), 229-240.

⁵⁷ Robert M. Levine, *Father of the Poor? Vargas and his Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Mexico did not share this path with the other republics in the region. Instead, its leadership chose to place the middle class at the center of not only its policy agenda, but also its rhetoric. The choice turned out to be a prescient one, since in the second half of the century the region's middle classes, more than any other social sector, supported militaries across the region in their efforts to stage *coups d'état*, then institutionalize their rule as military dictatorships. The administration's posture toward the working class proved equally critical. Whereas the majority of Latin America's largest nations tempered their commitment to industrial buildup with a concomitant effort to satisfy at least a portion of the needs of laborers and the rural poor, the PRI and its leadership used its vertical structure to keep those sectors at bay.⁵⁸

Although Alemán did not pursue a similar populist approach to his twentieth-century populist contemporaries in his style or policies, he and the other members of his generation cultivated a unique identity as national leaders. More than anything else, he developed a political style to convey the broader changes his administration sought. As his policies gave priority to a modernizing agenda over a continuation of revolutionary social reforms, he simultaneously sought to distinguish his image from that of the revolutionary veterans. Acting as the patriarchal head of the mythic Revolutionary Family, Alemán crafted an image as educated and debonair, but also physically vigorous and even sexually appealing. In a system in which revolutionary leaders had established their legitimacy through military campaigns and where hero cults of leaders like Villa

⁵⁸ Though populist regimes drew support from the working class, in part through pro-worker policies, Roxborough and Bethell note that popular mobilization was thwarted across the region between 1945 and 1948; from then on, working-class reform became a largely authoritarian effort in nearly all of the populist regimes in the region; Roxborough and Bethell, eds., *Latin America Between World War II and the Cold War*, 16.

and Zapata became part of official propaganda and the popular imagination alike,⁵⁹ the rise of a civilian ruling generation created a fundamentally new presidential ideal.

In crafting the image and style of a modernizing president, Alemán sought to demonstrate his vigor and manliness in new ways. Since he could not count military conquests among his accolades, he emphasized his commitment to sports and fitness. Among his favorite activities were golf, weightlifting, gymnastics, swimming, tennis, and baseball. His sexual prowess, made evident by his flings with starlets like Maria Félix (so goes the pervasive rumor) and the nearly constant presence of female companions (a woman named Leonor appears to have been a long-term mistress,⁶⁰ and whispers of a relationship with Nazi spy Hilda Kruger have recently surfaced⁶¹), underscored not only his own appeal, but also broader changes in masculine ideals for leading men. Alemán, representing an increasingly institutionalized and bureaucratized system, did not count himself among the region's populists. Nonetheless, he shared much in common with numerous leaders, ranging from Perón to the Dominican Republic's Rafael Leonidas Trujillo,⁶² each of whom used some kind of display of masculine prowess to establish and perpetuate their power.

The Alemán generation's leaders coupled this comportment with a political style that emphasized technocratic efficiency. The campaign roundtables that Alemán hosted

⁵⁹ Ilene V. O'Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 4-7.

⁶⁰ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 215.

⁶¹ Juan Alberto Cedillo, *Los Nazis en México* (México: Debolsillo, 2010), 15, 33-58, 81.

⁶² Lauren H. Derby, "The Dictator's Seduction: Gender and State Spectacle during the Trujillo Regime," in William H. Beezley and Linda Curcio-Nagy, eds., *Latin American Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 213-240; the most vivid description of Trujillo's sexual magnetism and exploits is to be found in Junot Díaz's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel: Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007).

in 1946 showcased this objective. Whereas Cárdenas, the consummate populist, had traveled, sometimes on the backs of donkeys, and once swimming, to remote pueblos to connect with villagers in his 1934 campaign, and while Alemán's populist contemporaries throughout the region cultivated direct personal links to the working poor, Alemán sought to project himself and his incoming administration as efficient and prepared for the technical challenges the nation faced.⁶³ Thus, while populists derived popular support from their magnetic personal appeal, Alemán and his coterie created a somewhat more distant, off-limits relationship with the population. The campaign roundtables, which allowed Alemán to engage only a limited number of representatives from various social sectors and forced them to come to him (rather than the reverse, a hallmark of Cardenista campaigning), reinforced this strategy. If populism came with its own style, so too did the increasingly technocratic political establishment of the PRI that had its origins in the Alemán administration.⁶⁴

The conspicuous display of wealth formed part of the strategy that these leaders employed to construct this image. Most from the military generation spent their lives attempting to combat the Porfirian system, which had been steered by a wealthy oligarchy representing a small fraction of the population. Therefore, they rarely entered military or political service with much wealth. If they gained it afterward, which frequently was the case, they rarely indulged in the aristocratic lifestyle for which Alemán became known. Alemán's personal wealth was probably the country's worst kept

⁶³ Martínez, "El modelo económico de la presidencia de Miguel Alemán," 234-235.

⁶⁴ Alan Knight, "Populism and Neo-Populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico," in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30:2 (May, 1998), 223-248; McCann, "Carlos Lacerda," 661-696.

secret precisely because leaders did not want it to be one. His large home and office on Mexico City's *Calle Fundición* (now Rubén Darío in the elite Polanco neighborhood), his vacation homes in Cuernavaca and Acapulco, his hacienda in Baja California, hotels in various places, land interests in nearly every corner of the republic, media stockholdings, and countless untraceable investments kept under *prestanombres* fed into his and his generation's image as the inheritors of the revolution's profits. The public display of wealth also helped to underscore the difference between Alemán and many of his populist contemporaries in the region. As the PRI increasingly moved away from a labor and agrarian oriented policy platform, the image of its leadership grew more distant from that of the working class and rural poor. By contrast, populists often made efforts (some more successful than others) to demonstrate the connection between themselves, their governments, and organized labor.

Throughout the region, populism went hand in hand with the structural design of corporatism. In one form or another, several of the Latin American republics pursued the strategy of corporate rule beginning around the 1930s. Corporatism in the region had historical roots stemming from the colonial period, where groups such as the clergy, the military, and indigenous communities were awarded unequal privileges and obligations as corporations. The twentieth-century counterpart represented something altogether different, primarily because it rested on the republican ideal of equal citizenship rather than on a system of enforced inequality, but it nonetheless had some relationship to the colonial system. The basic logic of corporatism is that official bodies representing different interest groups (usually organized around social class) could facilitate those

groups' incorporation into formal politics, providing them an institutional structure through which to express their demands. In the case of Mexico, the structural design of the revolutionary party was meant to ensure not only universal political incorporation, but also the ability to resolve political conflict within the party and to ward off opposition. Each of the parties had its particular design; with the transition to the PRI, the party consolidated its authority over organized labor (represented by the Confederation of Mexican Workers, or CTM) and the rural poor (represented by the National Peasant Confederation), while drawing considerably more influence from the National Confederation of Popular Organizations (CNOP), the organ of the urban middle sectors, especially those in the growing official bureaucracy. In theory, the basic corporate forms of the official party not only ensured that the interests of all social classes were represented formally, but also that the system was flexible and could be reconfigured in response to changes in circumstance.

The theoretical foundations of corporatism seem at first blush to be both practical and benevolent. Nevertheless, it represented a double-edged sword. The same system that functioned to facilitate the mass incorporation of citizens also provided the apparatus with which to dominate them. Because civil society interest groups such as labor unions and peasant leagues actually functioned as arms of the state, their ability to exert independent influence was compromised. In many cases, corporatism was tantamount to authoritarianism. In the case of the Alemán years, the corporate organization of the political system was turned on its head. With the sectors staffed by PRI loyalists who carried out presidential dictates, the opportunity to use the party's unique, expansive

design as a channel for broad-based political participation had effectively been eliminated.

The failure of land reform to achieve greater prosperity for rural residents has long been acknowledged, but more recent work suggests that the urban population was also underserved by the corporatist system. Diane Davis has demonstrated how the inadequacies of corporate governance affected the population of the capital, which increasingly functioned as the motor of national growth. Since residents of Mexico City had to channel their local grievances over administrative, ecological, resource, and transportation issues through expansive and often inefficient national organizations that were unresponsive to local demands, residents of the capital had a disproportionately quiet political voice.⁶⁵ Of course, neither corporatism nor the problems associated with it began with Alemán. Nevertheless, the changes in institutional structure, policy priorities, and political behavior after 1946 confirm that his administration consolidated the authoritarian, corporatist system.

Adapting to a Cold War World

Alemán and his ministers were responsible for guiding their country through the transition from global war to the emerging superpower rivalry of the early Cold War.⁶⁶ The new president, as the leader of one of the hemisphere's most important powers, quickly demonstrated his adherence to U.S. political and diplomatic initiatives by

⁶⁵ Davis, *Urban Leviathan*, 5-6.

⁶⁶ Dina Berger and Monica Rankin, "The Peculiarities of Mexican Diplomacy," in *Companion to Mexican History*, ed. Beezley, 552-560.

embracing Inter-Americanism, declaring his government's support of the Good Neighbor Policy, and making diplomatic gestures to the administration of Harry Truman. This allowed his administration to reap the economic benefits it so eagerly sought from both the U.S. government and that country's investors. Although leaders throughout Latin America criticized the United States for its lack of a comprehensive aid package that rivaled the Marshall Plan, officials in Washington singled out Mexico as the most important republic in the region. The two presidents' mutual visits in 1947 showcased this mutual cooperation and carried historical importance: both trips represented the first official state visit by the president to the other's capital. The degree of fanfare and public enthusiasm in both countries bolstered the successes of the visits: Alemán got vital development capital, and Truman secured the support of a valuable Cold War ally. The extent to which the Alemán administration's decisions bore the influence of the Cold War was also evident in areas beyond bilateral and intra-regional diplomatic and economic affairs.

Relations between labor and government, perhaps more than any other factor, showcased the administration's efforts to adapt to the realities of the Cold War and to distance itself from the populist orientation of *Cardenismo*.⁶⁷ The 1947 purging of former CTM leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano provided the structural basis for later intolerance of labor activism. Despite Lombardo Toledano's public support of Alemán in his 1946 campaign, within one year the administration replaced him with a cadre of loyal cronies, known as the *cinco lobos* and the *charros*, due to their rough-edged cowboy

⁶⁷ Roxborough, "Mexico," in Roxborough and Bethell, *Latin America Between World War II and the Cold War*, 190, 206.

image. Under the tutelage of Fidel Velázquez, who had been head of the CTM since he replaced Lombardo Toledano in 1941, these leaders carried out the infamous *charrazo* of 1948-50, putting down several waves of strikes by railway, oil, and mine workers. In doing so, they effectively ended the CTM's capacity to function as an independent voice in national politics. Lombardo Toledano continued on as the head of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina* (CTAL), ensuring that his influence across the region would endure, but he was thereafter pushed to the margins of his own country's politics, a position from which he never emerged.⁶⁸ Later anti-labor actions, including the 1958 crackdown on rail workers led by Demetrio Vallejo, stemmed from the labor arrangements made by the Alemán administration.

The exigencies of the early Cold War allowed Alemán to strengthen executive-branch authority, a phenomenon seen in the expansion of national intelligence services. Using the recently created United States Central Intelligence Agency as a model, the post-World War II domestic intelligence services under Alemán grew in size and became more professionalized. The 1947 creation of the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS), as Aaron Navarro's recent work demonstrates, not only allowed leaders to monitor potentially subversive activity (especially from the left), but also consolidated considerable authority in the hands of the president, if only temporarily.⁶⁹ The DFS, which fell under the authority of the presidency until the end of Alemán's term, was thereafter managed by the Interior Ministry alongside its other major intelligence agency,

⁶⁸ Luis Bernal Tavares, *Vicente Lombardo Toledano y Miguel Alemán: Una bifurcación en la Revolución mexicana* (México: UNAM, 1994), 161-186.

⁶⁹ Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 11.

the *Dirección General de Investigación Política y Social* (DGIPS), but it retained the political role it took on under Alemán through the 1980s.

The Alemán administration had no choice but to respond to the emergence of the Cold War, but its members had substantial flexibility in how they did so, and they turned the changing circumstances of global geopolitics to their advantage whenever possible. Alemán's efforts to move into the orbit of U.S. economic influence, to draw (or in cases force) organized labor into full-fledged support of an industrialization program that did not appeal to working-class interests, and to expand and politicize the role of intelligence services in domestic life, all reflected an approach that other leaders in the region adopted as well. These actions bolstered the domestic authority of the president, contributing to the PRI's unique configuration as a corporate instrument of executive power. Indeed, through the duration of the Cold War, at the same time that the other major nations of the region, including Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, swung from populism to military dictatorship from the 1950s to the 1980s, Mexico's single-party dominant political system underwent few changes to its structure as a civilian-dominant authoritarian regime.

The *Zeitgeist* of the Miracle

This study analyzes the political dimensions of a moment of significant change, as the devastation of the revolution and the austerity of World War II both gave way to an optimistic if uncertain new era. This change was by no means confined to the political sphere. Rather, deep-seated social and cultural shifts readily appeared and they, in turn,

reverberated back through national political culture. During these halcyon years, the nation, both in reality and representation, began to look quite different. The population transformed from a predominantly rural to an ever more urbanized society. Jet setters, both local and foreign, flocked southward to enjoy pristine beaches, while wealthy investors, also domestic and external, poured money into industrial and agricultural interests. Actors and actresses like Cantinflas, Pedro Infante, Dolores del Río, and María Félix shared the prestige of their Hollywood counterparts during the country's Golden Age of film.⁷⁰

A new cultural ideal, modeled heavily on the post-War baby boomers of the United States, guided the growing middle class. *La Familia Burrón*, the famous comic strip of cartoonist Gabriel Vargas, would later capture the comedy of the nascent lower middle class's adaptation to this new urban life.⁷¹ These cultural changes did not occur independently of political change. Rather, the two reinforced one another, and the Alemán generation's politicians sought to use their authority to promote a middle-class, urban society. While the burgeoning capital city underwent social, economic, and aesthetic changes through inward-looking development,⁷² it also grew outward, thus amplifying the visibility of an increasing trend toward social-economic inequality: to the north, the affluent suburb of *Ciudad Satélite* appeared overnight, while to the east slums began to dot previously uninhabited hillsides.

⁷⁰ Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel, eds., *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 33-36.

⁷¹ Charles Tatum, "La Familia Burrón: Inside a Lower Middle-Class Family," in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 4 (1985); Charles R. Wicke, "The Burrón Family: Class Warfare and the Culture of Poverty," in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 2 (1983).

⁷² Rachel Kram Villareal, "Gladiolas for the Children of Sánchez: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu's Mexico City, 1950-1968," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2008).

Characterizing the time as a miracle, without exploring the limitations of that characterization, merely reiterates the official rhetoric utilized by the PRI leadership in the period. The contradictions in the ISI-based developmental model appeared early, exposing a dark underside to the period not reflected in its overwhelmingly promising economic statistics. Films such as Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (literally translated as *The Forgotten Ones*, but marketed in the U.S. as *The Young and the Damned*)⁷³ and U.S. anthropologist Oscar Lewis's controversial ethnographic analyses, *The Children of Sánchez* and *Five Families*, made a forceful counterpoint to the official version of the miracle. Crime, child abandonment and neglect, domestic violence, disease, and rampant poverty characterized the lives of an increasingly large sector of slum dwellers in the capital and elsewhere, inspiring Lewis to develop a culture of poverty theory to explain its persistence.⁷⁴ His thesis did not sit well with citizens or with national leaders attempting to promote a new phase of development and progress, and, thus, they forced him to leave the country. Nevertheless, his work struck a chord: stories like his remained conspicuously absent from the official rhetoric touting the success of the ongoing revolution.⁷⁵ These contradictions gave rise to a cynicism that would grow and take on new forms over the next half-century. From Abel Quesada's caricatures mocking a decadent, feckless new generation of political opportunists to the groundbreaking novels *The Death of Artemio Cruz* and *Pedro Páramo* by Carlos Fuentes and Juan Rulfo, which

⁷³ *Los Olvidados – The Young and the Damned*, directed by Luis Buñuel, DVD (1950: Ultramar Films, 2004).

⁷⁴ Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House, 1961).

⁷⁵ His other major work concerning Mexico, *Five Families*, used multiple case studies, Sánchez's among them; Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

made unmistakable references to a failed revolution,⁷⁶ popular and elite culture alike began to reflect a growing discontent, one that took the form of a counter-cultural movement in later decades.⁷⁷

None of this should suggest that these sentiments, positive or negative, had everything to do with Alemán or the generation of civilians who surrounded him. Much of the uneasiness associated with modernization and growth predated his administration, and most of these specific cultural forms came into existence afterward. Yet, more than any other group, these leaders led their country down the path it took for the duration of the Miracle period. Moreover, their collective mentalité made them far more adaptive to the post-World War II world. These leaders guided their country through perhaps the most important transitions since the 1910 Revolution wiped away the oligarchic Porfirian dictatorship. A compelling explanation of why these leaders pursued an urban orientation at the expense of the rural population, or an industry-friendly platform that sidelined organized labor, has heretofore eluded scholars. The answer cannot be found exclusively in the personal biographies of these leaders alone, since many, like Alemán, had come from revolutionary families and had championed its causes in earlier decades. Yet it cannot be attributed only to a new global and context either, since this implies that they had few alternate choices, when in fact they had many. Instead, the answer lies in their entire process of socialization and formation as a new political elite. That process began

⁷⁶ Carlos Fuentes, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, trans. by Alfred MacAdam (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991 [1962]); Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Paramo*, trans. by Margaret Sayers Peden (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

⁷⁷ Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1-17.

in the critical decade of the 1920s, when these men first met one another as students in Mexico City as the fortunate sons of the 1910 revolution.

CHAPTER ONE
 COMING OF AGE IN REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO:
 THE BOHEMIAN ORIGINS OF THE ALEMÁN GENERATION, 1920-1929

Many of us – and we have faith in this – will come to occupy prominent positions in our country’s social and political life. They will remain obligated to help those from the group who need it.
 – Pact of the *Grupo H*, National Preparatory School, 1920⁷⁸

The history of the revolution’s second generation begins at the National Preparatory School and the National University in the 1920s, before the official party came into existence. The men who later formed Alemán’s cadre first met in these schools, and their early associations had a significant influence on their political careers and the political trajectory of their nation.⁷⁹ More than any other factor, their formative experiences in Mexico City’s elite institutions of higher education distinguished them from their military predecessors. While many of the students came from the provinces, often from families that had suffered extreme hardship during the revolution,⁸⁰ in school they lived a remarkably different existence. During their time in Mexico City, they not only gained exposure to new ideas and ideologies, but also got a taste of a different way of life, one that was urban, cosmopolitan, middle-class in character, and devoid of both

⁷⁸ Archivo de la Biblioteca Mexicana de la Fundación Miguel Alemán (hereafter FMA), José Pérez y Pérez to Miguel Alemán, Box 20, Exp. 536; FMA, “Grupo H – 1920,” Box 20, Exp. 536.

⁷⁹ Roderic Ai Camp, “Education and Political Recruitment in Mexico: The Alemán Generation,” in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 18:3 (Aug., 1976), 295-321; Jorge Gil, Samuel Schmidt and Jorge Castro, “La red del poder mexicana: El caso de Miguel Alemán,” in *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 55:3 (Jul.-Sept., 1993), 103-117.

⁸⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa, Box 6, Exp. 177, Sept. 12, 1985; Nettie Lee Benson Library, University of Texas-Austin (hereafter NLB), Salvador Aceves Parra, personal communication with Roderic Camp, Jan. 29, 1976.

the rural strife of the revolution and many of the ongoing problems in the capital. Several described their lifestyle in these years as bohemian.⁸¹

Their status as the first civilian political class of the twentieth century and their image as modernizing, technocratic leaders provide a temptation to assume that they had little actual experience with the revolution. For many, the mention of Alemán and his inner circle conjures up an image of privilege and excess rather than one of revolutionary sacrifice. Yet most of the young men in Alemán's cohort had direct connections to the revolution, and certainly did not begin their lives in the fortunate conditions they would later enjoy. In the capital, these relatively poor students witnessed a transformation of the revolution, from the devastating chaos of violence and death that characterized the 1910s to the constructive movement to address extant social questions that took shape in the following decade. As politically active students, they participated in this moment of radical change at its epicenter. Being in Mexico City took them away from the grim circumstances of the provinces, exposing them to a capital city pulsing with optimism – the heart of a country that had just begun to rebuild and reform.⁸² This allowed them to envision their country's future, and their own, in a fundamentally new way.

This combination of academic training and exposure to the implementation programs of the revolution made them unlike any previous academic or ruling generation. Unlike their military forbears, they experienced an eclectic set of intellectual influences that gave them a more worldly perspective. Unlike their academic predecessors, such as

⁸¹ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa; FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios, Box 7, Exp. 192, 1985; NLB, Antonio Armendáriz, interview with Roderic Camp, Jun. 24, 1975.

⁸² FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda, Box 6, Exp. 175, March 20, 1985; FMA, Testimonio de Luis Danton Rodríguez, Box 7, Exp. 203, June 4, 1986.

the celebrated Siete Sabios of 1915 (several of whom served as professors of the Alemán group), they had a more pragmatic orientation, exhibited as a desire to control the mechanisms of government rather than merely to criticize them.⁸³ Their political awakening came gradually and through various activities. Student publications, academic congresses, and literary clubs were among the most common.⁸⁴ The capstone came in 1929, first with a series of strikes that succeeded in persuading President Emilio Portes Gil to grant the National University full autonomy and rename it the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, or UNAM, then with participation in the presidential campaign of former Education Secretary José Vasconcelos. His campaign, which for many represented a renovation of a revolution dying at the hands of a self-interested clique of political opportunists,⁸⁵ ended in failure. Yet while it permanently embittered Vasconcelos, it ultimately drew many of the former students into lifelong political activism.⁸⁶

The friendships they formed in school were every bit as important as their political and intellectual activities. As young students, they naturally devoted a good deal of time to social activity, especially dating. Most came to the Prepa in their late teens and left university by their late twenties. The myriad social activities of these students, which contributed to strong bonds of friendship, complemented their growing political and intellectual engagement and bolstered their formation as a generation. Many of their day-

⁸³ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores, Box 7, Exp. 182, June 10, 1985; NLB, Sealtiel Alatraste, interview with Roderic Camp, Jun. 24, 1975; NLB, Antonio Armendáriz, interview with Roderic Camp.

⁸⁴ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

⁸⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa.

⁸⁶ Roderic Ai Camp, "La campaña presidencial de 1929 y el liderazgo político en México," in *Historia Mexicana* 27:2 (Oct.-Dec., 1977), 231-259.

to-day activities revolved around what might best be described as a set of masculine rituals, such as drinking and pursuing young women,⁸⁷ activities that resulted in shared bonds of camaraderie. The intellectual and political pursuits of this generation were thus bound up in social activities typical of students. A night at a dance hall, for instance, might result in an hours-long conversation on the walk home about a new literary inspiration or plans for an upcoming issue of a student publication.⁸⁸ Both were important: one for defining the collective ethos of the group, the other for bringing its members closer together.

Alemán in School

Alemán had originally come to school, as his father had wished, in 1920. The National Preparatory School, the most prestigious in the country, held a level of prestige comparable to Phillips Andover or Exeter Academy in the United States, and Alemán owed much of his fortune in attending the school to his father and to the Revolution. For the majority of his time at the Prep, he lived in the centrally located Colonia Santa María la Ribera, in the house of fellow students Oscar and Carlos Soto Maynes. The Soto Maynes family had been prominent in Chihuahua, but ultimately fled encroaching Villista troops during the revolution. After initially relocating to Eagle Pass, Texas, the family ended up in Mexico City. Carlos Soto recalled Alemán being very poor, certainly

⁸⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Noriega, Box 6, Exp. 179, April 8, 1985; FMA, Testimonio de Marco Antonio Muñoz, Box 7, Exp. 199, March 6, 1985.

⁸⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa.

too penniless to pay rent.⁸⁹ Victoria Soto de Córdoba, a sister of the Soto brothers, nonetheless remembered Alemán's four years in their house fondly. Both recounted the trying conditions: there were twelve living in the house, and all shared a single bathtub with an external heater, one on which Alemán once burnt himself. She recalled that he functioned as the virtual head of his family since his father was frequently absent and his brother Antonio had died young. At the same time, he became a part of the Soto family, functioning much like another sibling of the two brothers and their sisters. He frequently spent evenings dancing with the family, occasionally joined the two brothers in playing pranks on the younger sisters, and once even took the blame for Victoria when she snuck out instead of completing house chores.⁹⁰

Integration into the Soto family anchored Alemán during those years when his father was away and his family was divided by geography. The Sotos and Alemán remained friends for the rest of their lives. Oscar ascended to the governorship of Chihuahua toward the end of Alemán's presidential term, and Carlos accompanied Alemán on trips to Europe and South America on official and personal business long after his presidency.⁹¹ During their student years in the early 1920s, a number of other lifelong colleagues, including Raúl López Sánchez, Manuel Ramírez Vázquez, and Alfonso Noriega, all lived on the same street and studied together.

Alemán's father, who had been absent for much of his childhood because of his revolutionary pursuits across the country, corresponded with his son by writing letters

⁸⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Carlos Soto Maynes, Box 8, Exp. 213, May 17, 1985. (also Romero C. and Henestrosa on being poor).

⁹⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Victoria Soto de Córdoba.

⁹¹ FMA, Testimonio de Carlos Soto Maynes.

from various parts of the republic. The correspondence reveals a closeness that the two maintained in spite of the long bouts of separation. General Alemán, known to his revolutionary comrades as “El Hule” (the rubber tree),⁹² attempted to send Miguel money whenever possible. One letter from 1920 came with fifty pesos (about twenty-five U.S. dollars⁹³), to be split between Miguel and his brother, Carlos, so they could buy school utensils.⁹⁴ Others came with a promise of future payments.⁹⁵ Money rarely arrived, since the general often found himself in debt.⁹⁶

The senior Alemán insisted that his son push himself in school. In another letter from 1920, the general alluded to an incident that his son had previously relayed to him, which appears to have involved some kind of cheating on the part of another student, or perhaps the outright theft of Alemán’s answers, in an arithmetic class. Warning his son that he would encounter such people throughout his life, he encouraged him not to let it deter his studies. He also promised to send Miguel’s mother enough money to provide the young Alemán with *huampole* or some other medicine to reinvigorate his health, which had become somewhat shaky.⁹⁷ By 1925, the general’s correspondence had taken on an apologetic tone. His letters arrived less frequently, and usually without money. In one letter, he wrote that he had run into a flooded *arroyo* (a wash or creekbed) and damaged roads while moving horses and cars across the Nayarit countryside. He ended the letter

⁹² FMA, Testimonio de Gilberto Limón, Box 18, Exp. 444, March 12, 1985.

⁹³ Oscar J. Martínez, *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 170.

⁹⁴ FMA, Letter, Miguel Alemán González to Miguel Alemán Valdés, Box 20, Exp. 536, Feb. 7, 1920.

⁹⁵ FMA, Letter from Miguel Alemán González to Miguel Alemán Valdés, Box 20, Exp. 536, June 15, 1925.

⁹⁶ FMA, Report by Alfonso Chanona L., Pagador de la Segunda Division de Oriente, Box 20, Exp. 536, July 30, 1924

⁹⁷ FMA, Letter from Miguel Alemán González to Miguel Alemán Valdés, Box 20, Exp. 536, Dec. 23, 1920.

by promising that his commission was coming soon, hinting that money would follow.⁹⁸ His letters, which expressed optimism and melancholy in equal measure, say much about Alemán's family life after he had moved from his hometown of Sayula, Veracruz to Mexico City.

Despite these frequent separations and the persistent lack of resources, Alemán grew up in a tightly knit family and regularly felt his father's presence, even in times of absence. His relationship with his father, even when conducted on paper for long stretches of time, was always close. It had been, after all, his father's preference for his son to choose school over the military. His father's connections also proved beneficial to his legal career. In 1925, as Alemán entered law school, he was placed under the tutelage of Carlos M. Jiménez, a civil judge in Mexico City. Jiménez came to employ Alemán by way of a penal judge and the sub-chief of the Office of Gobernación (Interior Affairs), Guillermo Schulz, who in turn had received Alemán upon the recommendation of General A. Campillo Seyde. The chain of relationships is not immediately clear, but Seyde noted to Schulz (who was then assured of Alemán's employment by Jiménez) that he was recommending the young Alemán as a favor to his longtime friend, General Alemán.⁹⁹ It appears, thus, that Alemán's placement in a first-year law school practicum came as a direct result of his father's personal network.

The elder Alemán's career briefly stabilized during his son's law school years, especially in comparison to the years when Miguel attended the Prep. The Comité Pro-

⁹⁸ FMA, Letter from Miguel Alemán González to Miguel Alemán Valdés, Box 20, Exp. 536, June 15, 1925.

⁹⁹ FMA, Letter from Carlos M. Jiménez to Guillermo Schultz, Box 20, Exp. 536, Dec. 9, 1925; FMA, Letter from A. Campillo Seyde to Guillermo Schulz, Box 20, Exp. 536, no date.

Arnulfo R. Gómez Centro Antireeleccionista Panuquense, which endorsed Gómez as its presidential candidate in 1927, vetted the general as a gubernatorial candidate for Veracruz.¹⁰⁰ That year, General Alemán held the title of Chief of the Party in his home state.¹⁰¹ Finally, in a publication intended for nationwide distribution, Alemán, who signed the document as the Chief of Operations of the State, pleaded for a rejection of the “triumvirate” of Obregón, Calles, and de la Huerta, accusing them of using Bolshevik terror tactics to establish their authority.¹⁰² Despite the improved circumstances of both his own career and the country as a whole, General Alemán, the caudillo of southern Veracruz, was never far from battle, and the 1929 Escobar rebellion ultimately drew him back to the battlefield.

Miguel, who had a reputation for a disciplined work ethic and introverted personality, rarely joined in the weekend trips that many of the students took together, nor was he known for indulging in excessive drinking.¹⁰³ Perhaps his unusually reserved behavior sprung from a constant and justifiable preoccupation with his father’s military activities. Undoubtedly it arose, at least partially, out of his personal connection to the tragic side of the revolution. He had to leave the Prep temporarily in 1921, only a year after he had started, to work as an office assistant in the El Aguila petroleum refinery in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, to support his family. Alemán worked as an office assistant

¹⁰⁰ FMA, Candidatura Pro-Gómez-Alemán, Box 23, Exp. 538, no date.

¹⁰¹ FMA, Confederación Nacional de Estudiantes Anti-Reeleccionistas Pro-Arnulfo R. Gómez, Box 23, Exp. 538, June 8, 1927.

¹⁰² FMA, Miguel Alemán González, “A la Nación,” Box 23, Exp. 538, March, 1923.

¹⁰³ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda; FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios; FMA, Testimonio de Marco Antonio Muñoz.

during his time there.¹⁰⁴ While the temporary disruption to his studies was a one-time occurrence, the necessity of providing his family supplemental income was more familiar. Even as a child, Alemán, whose father was a small-town grocer in Sayula before being swept up in nearly constant revolutionary activity, sold cigarettes, milk, or trinkets, and did various odd-jobs to be able to pay to see his father.¹⁰⁵

In 1929, General Miguel Alemán González died supporting the Escobar Rebellion, whose followers sought to destroy the Callista political machine. Overwhelmed by federal troops, General Alemán died at Soteapan, Veracruz in a raid called the “Mata de Aguacatillo.”¹⁰⁶ While the precise details of his death remain unclear, the most reliable accounts point to a hasty suicide undertaken to avoid execution after he had been encircled by federal troops. His death came as less of a shock to Alemán than the particular method by which he died.¹⁰⁷ It is also evident that his brother, Antonio, also died, most likely by suicide, at some prior point during these years. According to his own children, Alemán never formally acknowledged this.¹⁰⁸ Despite these challenges, Alemán forged on without allowing himself any time off from school. While not known as the most brilliant student of his generation, he pushed through his law program in three years, rather than the customary five, which appears to have been a record shared by only a few

¹⁰⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Rafael Moreno Henríquez, Box 8, Exp. 216, April 18, 1985.

¹⁰⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Evangelina Mendoza, Box 7, Exp. 181, June 3, 1985.

¹⁰⁶ Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 102.

¹⁰⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Beatriz Alemán de Girón, Box 9, Exp. 242, Oct. 11, 1985.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; FMA, Testimonio de Miguel Alemán Velasco, Box 9, Exp. 243, March 29, 1985.

and never bested.¹⁰⁹ It is reasonable to assume that in this tragic phase of his life, his father's wishes for his son to complete his education resonated in his mind.

Alemán relied on his friends to carry him through such trying circumstances. He must not have been alone in this respect, since many of his friends recounted their own turmoil during these years. These friendships, in turn, became the basis not only for their social survival, but also for their political awakening. Examination of their daily social and intellectual activities reveals that these young men developed a common spirit that reflected the particular circumstances in which they found themselves, but also fit within a long tradition of scholastic generations forming inside the higher education system. This trend inhered in the system from its inception during the Restored Republic of the 1860s.

The Legacy of Scholastic Generations

Alemán's ruling generation quickly became known as the "government of the lawyers." In addition to Alemán, a lawyer by training, the members of his first cabinet included nine fellow attorneys (of whom six were professors of law), two businessmen, one engineer, one writer, and only two career military officers.¹¹⁰ While at first glance one might see a reasonably heterogeneous group, the occurrence of higher education served as the common denominator. These leaders based their sense of legitimacy on their academic training, arguing that their rise to prominence represented the next logical

¹⁰⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carillo Flores; FMA, Testimonio de Carlos Soto Maynez; FMA, Testimonio de Arturo García Formenti, Box 14, Exp. 346, no date listed.

¹¹⁰ National Archives and Records Administration, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter NARA, Truman Library), Report from U.S. Embassy, John Snyder Papers, Box 51, Dec. 3, 1946.

step in their country's revolutionary trajectory. The composition of the increasingly powerful executive branch thus marked a radical departure from the previous model. As Camp has demonstrated through analysis of over 700 former law and preparatory school students who entered public positions in the middle and upper ranks, scholastic training mattered immensely at various levels in facilitating contact and recruitment of political functionaries.¹¹¹

This generation comprised various members of several classes within the National Preparatory School and National University that graduated in the 1920s. Alemán's law school classmates, those who entered in 1925, formed the nucleus of the group, but other members of his and subsequent administrations came to the schools in the years bookending Alemán's entering class. While each did not enter or leave at precisely the same time, their tenures in the schools overlapped, thus facilitating contact and collaboration. The examination of the relatively small group that cohered around Alemán provides a richer picture of how this generation formed and how scholastic generations formed and functioned. The stories these men have relayed about their experiences as students provide evidence of the Alemán generation's socialization processes and confirm prior assessments of the importance of the schools. While the base of individuals who attended school together and socialized is much larger, an impressive list of prominent individuals, many of whom were close friends, can be culled from the longer roster of this generation's membership.

¹¹¹ Camp, "Education and Political Recruitment," 295-298.

Beyond Alemán, this group included Antonio Carillo Flores (Director of *Nacional Financiera*, the public development corporation, in the Alemán years, then Minister of Finance, 1952-58, Ambassador to the U.S. and the USSR, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1964-70), Antonio Ortiz Mena (Minister of Finance, 1958-70), Andrés Serra Rojas (Minister of Labor, 1946-48), Braulio Maldonado (Governor of Baja California Norte, 1953-59), Oscar Soto Maynez (Governor of Chihuahua, 1950-55), Ernesto Uruchurtu (Minister of the Interior, 1948 and 1951-52 and Mayor of Mexico City, 1952-66), Adolfo López Mateos (President, 1958-64), Rogerio de la Selva (personal secretary to Alemán as governor and president), Gabriel Ramos Millán (Federal Deputy then Senator from Oaxaca, 1943-47, and Head of the National Corn Commission, 1947-49), David Romero Castañeda (Federal Deputy from the State of Mexico, 1946-49), Alfonso Noriega (the Secretary General then Acting Director of the UNAM, then Director of the National Law School, 1943-45), Manuel Ramírez Vázquez (Minister of Labor, 1948-52), Efraín Brito Rosado (Federal Deputy, then Senator from Veracruz (1940-43 and 1946-52), Alejandro Gómez Arias (Federal Deputy, then Senator from Yucatán, 1949-58).

Academic luminaries Manuel R. Palacios and Andrés Henestrosa also formed part of the generation, and other notable academics, such as Jaime Torres Bodet (Secretary of Education, 1943-46 and 1958-64; Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 1946-51, and Director-General of UNESCO, 1948-52) and Ramón Beteta (Secretary of Finance, 1946-52), came just before, and often gave classes at one or both schools. Torres Bodet had the distinction of being the only person to have served previously in a cabinet position (sub-ministerial positions excluded), and Beteta represented only one of several instructors of

members of this generation who would later enter government ranks (noted anthropologist Alfonso Caso, for instance, became the first administrator of the *Instituto Nacional Indígena*, or INI, created in 1951).

Some distinction should be made between the scholastic generation of the 1920s and the ruling generation of the 1940s. While there is substantial overlap between the *alemanista* group (the political generation that governed at the national level beginning in 1946) and the members of the student group from the 1920s, it should be emphasized that the two groups are not identical or interchangeable. Nevertheless, their interviews provide compelling evidence that many of the leaders from the Alemán governing generation considered themselves part of a distinct generation of students while in attendance at the Prepa and University. Additionally, their testimonies convey a sense that through their various experiences as young men, this group developed an entirely new *esprit de corps* that they carried into public office years later. Their self-identification as an academic generation reflected a trend within the higher education system that has roots at least as far back as the Porfiriato (1876-1911). Therefore, understanding the scholastic influences of the Alemán group necessitates an understanding of the legacies left by these prior academic generations, especially since many of these leaders cited them as major influences in interviews.

The formation of intellectual generations, with many later providing a springboard to national politics, originated in the last third of the nineteenth century. From that point forward, at least three distinct generational waves prior to the 1920s group can be identified. The first example has its origins in a short-lived but highly

influential publication, *La Libertad*, launched in 1878 by Justo Sierra (later Minister of Education in the regime of Porfirio Díaz) and several of his colleagues. According to Charles Hale, Sierra and the rest of *La Libertad*'s editorial staff shared common bonds of youth, personal ties, scholastic experience, and previous collaboration¹¹² Similar bonds characterized the Alemán group in the following century. The group formed in the earliest days of the National Preparatory School, founded in 1867 by Gabino Barreda, Mexico's first disciple of French positivist Auguste Comte. Barreda, who applied Comte's scientific explanations of human development to the Prep's curriculum, had been awarded the task of creating a viable, secular institution of higher education, a goal that up to that point had remained unrealized, by Liberal reformist president Benito Juárez.

The group that formed around *La Libertad*, with Sierra as their intellectual leader, came to rely not only on Comtean ideology, but also on an admixture of others, most notably the social evolutionist theories of Herbert Spencer. Again the experience of the Alemán group, which also embraced an eclectic set of intellectual influences rather than one guiding doctrine, echoes this earlier generation's experiences. This early group's ideas, expressed in the pages of *La Libertad*, rejected what they regarded as the classical liberalism of the Juárez and Lerdo administrations in favor of a "conservative liberalism" (as well as an "honorable tyranny" – both terms representing something of a creative

¹¹² Charles A. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 25-26; Francios-Xavier Guerra, *México. Del antiguo regimen a la Revolución*, vol. 1 (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985), 378-389 and Guerra, *Del antiguo regimen a la Revolución*, vol. 2, 79-100.

exercise in semantics),¹¹³ one that gave priority to utilizing a stronger central government and stimulation of capitalist development.¹¹⁴ They regarded much of Juárez's mid-century Liberal agenda, which sought to eliminate corporate privilege, secularize the government, and create a rural yeoman citizenry, as based on a cult of the individual and on abstract notions of individualism.¹¹⁵ For them, their country's renaissance would come after solving social problems by curing the social body, even if this necessitated temporary authoritarian measures, not by focusing on affording people abstract rights that carried little practical benefit.

This group later became the nucleus of the most influential camarilla to have the ear of dictator Porfirio Díaz. Known as the *científicos* due to their affinity toward an ideology that vaunted scientific development, no doubt a function of their upbringing in Barreda's Preparatory School, these leaders eventually held considerable sway over many of Díaz's policy decisions and even helped to legitimate many of the repressive aspects of the regime by casting them as necessary in their society's ongoing evolutionary process. At first glance, one can see a number of similarities between the Porfirian *científicos* and the Alemán generation. Both formed at least in part due to connections made in higher education; both identified themselves from a young age (most were in their mid- to late-twenties) as scholastic generations and would later use their academic credentials to

¹¹³ Incógnito, "La tiranía honrada," *La Libertad*, 3 October, 1878, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 25-63.

¹¹⁵ For examples of these ideas, see the polemic between Francisco Cosmes and José María Vigil: Francisco Cosmes, "La constitución y el Sr. Vigil," *La Libertad*, September 11, 1878, p. 2; Cosmes, "La constitución y el Sr. Vigil II," *La Libertad*, September 18, 1878, p. 2; Sin autor, "El Monitor y la metafísica," *La Libertad*, July 10, 1879, p. 2; see also Sin autor, "La voz de alerta," *La Libertad*, September 15, 1878, p. 2; Sin autor, "Un pseudo-programa," *La Libertad*, September 25, 1878, p. 2; Cosmes, "La constitución," p. 2; Cosmes, "Verdades," *La Libertad*, September 4, 1878," p. 2.

launch political careers; and both represented a form of technocratic leadership. It remains unclear precisely how much this group influenced the Alemán generation's students. One of Alemán's longtime collaborators, Marco Antonio Muñoz, claimed that Díaz, Plutarco Elías Calles, and Alemán, all of whom have been accused of utilizing some measure of authoritarian rule, represented the nation's three genuine statesmen.¹¹⁶ Yet despite this scant evidence, and despite the various similarities between the two groups, this political generation does not appear to have inspired the future Alemanistas, perhaps because the latter group had parents with direct personal experience in the 1910 revolution, which began as a backlash against the Porfirian system. Rather, the two subsequent academic generations that formed during the first decade of the revolution, from 1910 to 1920, left a far deeper and more measurable impression on the Alemán group.

The 1910 centennial of independence from Spain gave Díaz an opportunity to showcase his nation's promising development and precipitous growth over the prior three and a half decades. It also galvanized the opposition of several groups differing in regional, class, and ethnic origins, to the authoritarian regime as the country moved further into the twentieth century. The revolution of the same year, organized around Francisco I. Madero's Anti-Reelectionist Party, drew these myriad groups, with their distinct goals, into a devastating and confusing series of bloody struggles that lasted for more than a decade. What these rebels – representing sectors as varied as poor peasants, agricultural workers, the urban proletariat, the middle class, and provincial political and

¹¹⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Marco Antonio Muñoz.

financial elites – all had in common was a dissatisfaction with the results of the Porfirian approach to economic policy and political administration.

At the same time that this conflict emerged, a generation within the National Preparatory School, whose members named themselves the *Ateneo de la Juventud* (Atheneum of Youth), formed with the purpose of repudiating the científicos' embrace of positivist education, which they regarded as intellectually stifling and dogmatic.¹¹⁷ Instead, they pushed for a restoration of the humanities in the curriculum of the nation's premier educational institution, the National Preparatory School. Among the leaders of the *Ateneo* were José Vasconcelos, Antonio Caso, and Alfonso Reyes, all of whom became luminaries of the revolutionary intelligentsia.¹¹⁸ Additionally, several of its leaders, especially Vasconcelos, became prominent instructors, administrators, and political functionaries in the education system of the 1920s.

The Ateneístas did more than wax philosophical about the need for a renewed focus on the arts and humanities; they also recognized the importance of acting on their philosophical convictions to achieve broad-reaching change. To this end, they founded the *Universidad Popular Mexicana* in 1912. They organized the university to extend the benefits of higher education to the masses, a plan that embodied their desire to include the arts, culture, and humanities as part of the positive gains of the revolution. The group disintegrated in 1914, largely because many of its members entered government ranks. Just as it dissolved, so too did it inspire the formation of a successor generation – those

¹¹⁷ Enrique Krauze, *Caudillos culturales en la Revolución mexicana* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1976), 46-52.

¹¹⁸ John Schwald Innes, "Revolution and Renaissance in Mexico: El Ateneo de la Juventud," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas-Austin, 1970); W. Dirk Raat, *Positivism in Díaz's Mexico: An Essay in Intellectual History, 1876-1910* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1967).

who have come to be known as the *Siete Sabios*, or Seven Wise Men. This group, which called itself the Society for Conferences and Concerts and which later became known as the Generation of 1915, followed in the *Ateneístas*' footsteps, leaving a lasting impression on the Alemán generation.

Luis Calderón Vega, a founding member of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) and father of current president Felipe Calderón, was responsible for anointing the leading voices of the 1915 generation the "*siete sabios*."¹¹⁹ Its members included Manuel Gómez Morín, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, and Alfonso Caso, the younger brother of founding *Ateneísta* Antonio Caso. If the *Ateneo* group began the move away from the Positivist embrace of scientific study, then the 1915 Generation completed the mission through their professed desire to extend the benefits of the revolution to the realms of culture and the arts.¹²⁰ The group included various intellectuals who would go on to pursue vastly different careers. Nevertheless, three of them – Gómez Morín, Caso, and Lombardo Toledano – became influential instructors for the Alemán group.

As Calderón Vega noted in his influential work, these intellectuals were not bound by an adherence to any common ideology. In fact, much of their influence came from a somewhat contradictory admixture of intellectual influences, ranging from Henri Bergson to Karl Marx. Like their predecessors in the *Ateneo*, they embraced a wide range of intellectual influences and rejected the orthodoxy of the late nineteenth-century positivists.¹²¹ Moreover, their eclectic intellectual interests did not reflect the political

¹¹⁹ Luis Calderón Vega, *Los siete sabios de México*, 2nd ed. (México: Editorial Jus, 1972), ix-xii.

¹²⁰ Krauze, *Caudillos culturales*, 74.

¹²¹ Calderón Vega, *Siete sabios*, 20.

ideologies or programs that they embraced later in their careers. Nevertheless, they, along with a number of other instructors, guided the intellectual development of generations of students, including Alemán's, in the 1920s. Their cohesion as a generation proved especially influential.¹²²

Many from Alemán's generation recalled the immense influence of Lombardo Toledano and Gómez Morín in their educational formation, a remarkable development given the later career trajectories of these two men. Lombardo Toledano, who served the ruling party and endorsed Alemán, was pushed out of his position as leader of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* (CTM, the official corporate body representing the working class within the PRI) in 1947, and founded a leftist opposition party, the *Partido Popular*, the following year.¹²³

Gómez Morín, who became increasingly dissatisfied with the direction of the official party, became the founder and first president of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), which eventually became the right-leaning party, linked to the Church in the public mind, that has won the last two presidential elections. The intellectual pursuits of these two men did not presage their eventual transformations: Lombardo Toledano was known as a spiritualist, and had centrist political leanings; it was not until the 1930s that he fully self-identified as a Marxist-Leninist. Gómez Morín, the expert in banking and finance, onetime Rector of the UNAM, leading founder of the Banco de México, and

¹²² Krauze, *Caudillos culturales*, 222-228.

¹²³ Luis Bernal Tavares, *Vicente Lombardo Toledano y Miguel Alemán: Una bifurcación en la Revolución mexicana* (México: UNAM, 1994).

eventual authority of the conservative PAN, was a leftist who taught Marxist theory in addition to his other courses on philosophy and ancient history.¹²⁴

Members of Alemán's academic generation had favored professors with whom they readily connected or collaborated. The names that most commonly appear, in addition to the aforementioned, are the brothers Caso, Alfonso and Antonio (the former taught anthropology and general legal theory, the latter sociology and philosophy), along with Narciso Bassols, who taught logic and constitutional law and later became a devout Marxist. The multifariousness of the intellectual influences on this generation mirrored that of prior groups. Recalling his courses, Antonio Armendariz noted that he drew influences ranging from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to John Maynard Keynes to Georges Sorel, along with Spain's Generation of '98 and the great Russian novelists (a claim reiterated by others).¹²⁵ Students complemented their exposure to these foreign works with those of domestic authors. In one interview, Alemán recalled influences ranging from the Flores Magón brothers, the anarchists who helped inspire revolutionaries such as his father, to the academic works of Lombardo Toledano, especially his "Ética," and those of Luis Cabrera.¹²⁶ In his memoirs, he also noted the influence he drew from authors ranging from Plato to Erasmus.¹²⁷ Other interviewees confirmed that their training was quite broad, and certainly not confined to one overarching ideology or school of thought. As Alemán put it, they were stuck between

¹²⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios.

¹²⁵ NLB, Antonio Armendáriz, interview with Camp; NLB, Miguel Alemán, interview with Camp, Oct. 27, 1976; FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa; FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios; FMA, Testimonio de Francisca Acosta Lagunes, Box 6, Exp. 180, June 18, 1985.

¹²⁶ NLB, Miguel Alemán, interview with Camp.

¹²⁷ Miguel Alemán Valdés, *Remembranzas y testimonios* (México: Grijalbo, 1987).

positivism and anti-positivism,¹²⁸ perhaps an oblique reference to the combination of scientific texts (such as Marx) and what they labeled as "romantic" influences, such as poetry, to which many other former students referred. Another former student, Dr. Cardiel Reyes, reiterated his claim, noting that despite efforts to the contrary, the positivism so common during the Porfiriato had lingered, and he even counted one self-proclaimed Spencerian (a reference to Herbert Spencer, the leading proponent of social Darwinism, whose popularity in Mexico reached its apex and then faded in the late nineteenth century) among his professors.¹²⁹

The professors of the 1920s generations, especially those at the Preparatory School, tended to judge the revolution and its leadership in harsh terms. Francisco González de la Vega, who later became a professor upon nomination by Antonio Caso, said that the students who went to the Law School actually had better professors in the Prep, owing to their relative distance from the regime.¹³⁰ Sealtiel Alatríste, who served as Treasurer of the Federal District through the majority of Alemán's term, went even further, noting that many of the students cultivated a critical view toward the revolutionary government as a result of their professors' influences. Some students even became embittered about the professors themselves, as was the case with Renato Leduc, who regarded Vasconcelos as a reactionary and a "*cabrón*" and disdained the young Daniel Cosío Villegas as a crooked and prententious teacher, an imposter who, as he put it, "dressed like an Englishman."¹³¹ Nevertheless, Alatríste also noted that this same

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ NLB, Cardiel Reyes, interview with Camp, no date.

¹³⁰ NLB, Francisco González de la Vega, interview with Camp, Jul. 23, 1974.

¹³¹ FMA, Testimonio de Renato Leduc, Box 7, Exp. 185, July 11, 1985.

critical outlook shared among the students ultimately convinced a number of young men from that generation to enter government in the hope that they could effect more constructive, substantial change.¹³²

Beyond the myriad influences described by members of this generation, which ranged from political economy to philosophy to poetry, their most consistent source of cerebral stimulation was the Russian novel. Numerous former students, in describing what they read outside of what was assigned in classes, recalled their fascination with that country's great novelists, from Tolstoi to Dostoyevsky to Gorky. Moreover, Andrés Henestrosa and Manuel Palacios both recalled a lesser-known work, by a more obscure author, that also provided significant inspiration. *Sashka Zhegulev*, a realist novel written by Leonid Andreyev, follows the story of a young telegram writer who took up arms in defense of his fellow workers. Henestrosa and Palacios recalled that they wanted to be Zhegulev because they found parallels between their own experiences and those of the book's protagonist. The students found the broad themes of these novels – hope, rebellion, and social justice above all – to be particularly captivating.¹³³

Perhaps the most tangible evidence of their early politicization was a short-lived but amazingly comprehensive student publication, launched in 1924 by several of the prep school students. They called their publication *Eureka*, a reference to their professed desire to discover new possibilities, and funded the paper largely on the meager allowance that Alemán's father sent him so he could stay in school.¹³⁴ The students used

¹³² NLB, Sealtiel Alatraste, interview with Camp.

¹³³ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa; FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios.

¹³⁴ Camp, *The Metamorphosis of Leadership in a Democratic Mexico*, 159.

this modest income to print the paper at an independent print shop on Belisario Domínguez street.¹³⁵ How long the publication lasted and how many issues were printed remains unclear, because only the first and third have been preserved in archival collections.¹³⁶ These two issues nonetheless reflect the optimism of these young students as they passed their salad days in Mexico City during the Jazz Age.

The editorial staff of the paper included many students who later came to occupy high positions in the Alemán administration. Alemán, credited as the founder, took the position of manager, David Romero Castañeda worked as director, Gabriel Ramos Millán served as the publicity chief, Antonio Ortiz Mena as Editor in Chief, Adolfo Zamora as artistic director, Manuel Palacios as Managing Editor (*Señorio de Redacción*), and Oscar Soto Maynez as Administrator. In all likelihood, many of the positions provided an opportunity for participation among those students who wanted to contribute. Their influence was not particularly apparent on the pages, save perhaps for the selection of the contributions of a wide range of domestic and foreign writers, poets, and critics. The paper, according to the front page, could be purchased both in the school (for ten centavos) and in the street (presumably newsstands, for fifteen centavos).¹³⁷ The paper noted that it was printed at an independent editorial office, at No. 65 Marte, and it appears that José Vasconcelos, at that point the Minister of Public Education, was so

¹³⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios.

¹³⁶ The two issues are housed at the archive of the *Fundación Miguel Alemán*, with a duplicate of the first at the Nettie Lee Benson Library at the University of Texas.

¹³⁷ *Eureka*, Year 1, Issue 1 (hereafter 1:1) (July 8, 1924).

impressed by the publication that he ordered copies for the library of the *Secretaría de Educación Pública*.¹³⁸

The content of *Eureka* ranged widely. A small portion of the paper, which averaged about twenty pages per issue, was reserved for news about events at the Prep and student politics. The rest of the paper reflected the eclectic intellectual interests of the group. Well-known authors and obscure writers, including current students, both received ample attention. Young luminaries with connections to the Alemán group, including future Education Minister, Foreign Minister, and UNESCO chair Jaime Torres Bodet and prominent muralist Diego Rivera, were featured alongside foreign authors such as Henri Duvernois and Miguel Unamuno. Rivera's piece exemplified a tendency in the paper to celebrate the "*don racial*," the supposedly virtuous racial characteristics possessed by Mexicans.¹³⁹ This theme was replicated in an anonymous piece titled "El Flirt," which accused Anglo-Americans from the United States of having no time for the "flirt," an apparent reference to a mistress. Mexicans, by virtue of the "*don racial*," possessed the necessary spiritual and sensual characteristics to enjoy such company, according to the article.¹⁴⁰

Both instances suggest a celebration of the idea of a "cosmic race," an idea promoted vigorously by Vasconcelos. While the notion of *mestizaje*, or racial mixing between Iberian, indigenous, and African populations was not unique to Vasconcelos, his theory of a cosmic race, imbued with all of the best features of these groups, became the

¹³⁸ *Libro de Oro conmemorativo de las visitas de los presidentes Harry S. Truman a México y Miguel Alemán a los Estados Unidos de América* (México: Policía Auxiliar, 1947).

¹³⁹ Diego Rivera, "Sobre la pintura," in *Eureka* 1:1 (July 8, 1924).

¹⁴⁰ No author, "El Flirt," in *Eureka* 1:1 (July 8, 1924).

basis of official propaganda beginning in the early 1920s. In his capacity as Education Minister, Vasconcelos sought to indoctrinate successive generations with the idea that their culture and society would find its salvation in an embrace of *mestizaje*. Vasconcelos found substantial influence in the eugenics movement, which used pseudo-scientific methods to explain human development in terms of racial determinism (he later embraced Nazism and became an ardent anti-Semite). Indeed, an embrace of this concept of the nation's racial composition formed the official interpretation of *mestizaje*, which became promoted in film, music, radio, literature, murals, and public school texts, until a 1992 constitutional revision that officially redefined the nation as pluri-cultural with indigenous roots.¹⁴¹

The paper also contained a number of articles that provide insight into shifts in gender sensibilities that were emerging in the 1920s. The first issue included an exposé on the Escuela Hogar "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" (roughly translated as Home-making or Housewives' School), an institution that trained aspiring housewives in the skills commonly found in home economics courses, ranging from cooking to sewing to table etiquette.¹⁴² The article did not mention the inherent paradox that a school that existed to proscribe women's domestic roles was named for Sor Juana, a nun who in the sixteenth century railed against patriarchal Roman Catholic orthodoxy and for many represented one of the first feminists in the Americas. Another article, attributed to "Moncrayon" (my pencil), titled "Al margen de las pelonas," explored the implications of the short haircuts

¹⁴¹ The opening chapter to Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-26, contains an excellent discussion of official and non-official efforts to create a national ethnic identity beginning in the 1920s.

¹⁴² No author, "Por la Escuela Hogar 'Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz'" in *Eureka* 1:1 (July 8, 1924).

of the 1920s flapper girls, especially whether sporting such a look was sufficiently feminine and whether it could potentially alienate men.¹⁴³

Some of the articles took a more radical, controversial tone. Esperanza Zambrano, in an article entitled "La mujer que trabaja," firmly repudiated the notion that intellectual work might de-feminize women, expressing particular disdain for what she identified as a tendency in society, especially among men, to define women as stupid or docile.¹⁴⁴

Another article in the third issue, called "El wildeísmo," mocked sycophantic imitators of Oscar Wilde. The article accused young men, wearing makeup and speaking in artificially high voices, of being pathetic, disingenuous "maricas" (a derivative of *maricón*, translated as queer) who betrayed the prevailing macho masculine identity. The author, named Albert Meural, did not treat Wilde himself as an aberration of masculine virtue. On the contrary, he regarded the English satirist as a noble intellectual, drawing into relief the lamentable behavior of those whom he regarded as his vulgar imitators.¹⁴⁵

This small sampling, both of the overall number of issues and the content within them, creates the sense that the paper lacked thematic coherency. Nevertheless, what emerges from the pages of *Eureka* is the overarching theme of the cultivation of a vanguard youth that would have both the practical skills and the intellectual fortitude to fulfill the promise of the revolution that their parents' generation had initiated.¹⁴⁶ The initial articles that attempted to explain the purpose of the paper were replete with purple prose, written in a deliberately poetic language that emphasized the possibilities of

¹⁴³ Moncrayon, "Al márgen de pelonas" in *Eureka* 1:3 (Aug. 6, 1924).

¹⁴⁴ Esperanza Zambrano, "La mujer que trabaja," in *Eureka* 1:1 (July 8, 1924).

¹⁴⁵ Albert Meural, "El Wildeísmo," in *Eureka* 1:3 (Aug. 6, 1924).

¹⁴⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Luis Dantón Rodríguez; Alberto Terán, "La ideología de la juventud actual," *Eureka*.

transcending the mediocrity into which the country had fallen. This concern with the improvement of the body politic found reflection in various places; for example, in attacks on a complacent middle class,¹⁴⁷ or on the philistine artistic tastes of uneducated consumers who rejected avant-garde painters like José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The latter critique came in a response by the French artist Jean Charlot, who dedicated the majority of his career to revolutionary art in Mexico, to a lack of public outcry over the vandalism of the Preparatory School murals by the aforementioned artists.¹⁴⁸

Certainly there was some naïveté in the students' publication and the issues it explored, at least to the extent one might expect from young students. The publication's importance lies in what it speaks about these students' self-identification not only as a generation within the prep school, but also its sense of a new kind of generation, a group that had a shared purpose in taking the mantle of their nation's revolution. Years later, members of this generation would recall what distinguished them from their predecessors within the Prep and University. Carrillo Flores, in one interview from the 1970s, confessed that their generation lacked the brilliance of the Siete Sabios, but quickly noted that they had contributed far more to national development. He followed this assertion by claiming that he and his cohort shied away from dwelling on great and lofty ideas, and instead focused on practical solutions to their nation's ongoing problems.¹⁴⁹ Salvador Azuela, the son of famous revolutionary author Mariano Azuela and a member of this

¹⁴⁷ Alberto Terán, "La ideología de la juventud," in *Eureka* 1:3 (Aug. 6, 1924).

¹⁴⁸ Jean Charlot, "La pinturas de la E.N.P.," in *Eureka* 1:3 (Aug. 6, 1924).

¹⁴⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores.

generation, described their group as a "very civic" and "political" generation, further bolstering the notion that their collective mindset and priorities reflected pragmatic rather than philosophical concerns.¹⁵⁰

From this publication and the students' later recollections, it is clear that their idealistic tendencies were tempered by a deepening sense of pragmatism and responsibility. Alatraste said that the harsh assessment of the revolution expressed by their professors helped to fashion their own views, ultimately inspiring them to enter government service. He recalled a course on rural economics, taught by a young Daniel Cosío Villegas, in which the professor noted his profound objection to the creation of an ejido-based rural policy to develop the agrarian sector.¹⁵¹ Similar sentiments corroborated this critical attitude toward many of the most controversial revolutionary propositions. Julio Faesler, a law school contemporary of Alemán, perhaps put it best in noting that they adopted the attitude that ideological dogma should have no place in public service.¹⁵²

The core students from the group, including several who would later follow Alemán to Veracruz when he became the state's governor in 1936, expressed an early interest in electoral politics. In 1924, in their final year at the National Preparatory School, they organized themselves as the *Partido Rojo* to run as a slate for the student government. Led by David Romero Castañeda, the group promoted the following candidates: José Pérez y Pérez as President, Arturo García Formenti as General Secretary,

¹⁵⁰ NLB, Salvador Azuela, personal communication with Camp, July 10, 1974.

¹⁵¹ NLB, Sealtiel Alatraste, interview with Camp.

¹⁵² NLB, Julio Faesler, personal communication with Camp, no date.

Manuel R. Palacios as Vice-President, Adolfo Zamora as Secretary, Santiago Guevara as Assistant Secretary; Marina González as Treasurer, and Lucia Cortez as Assistant Treasurer. The campaign flyer also designated a group of Members at Large (*vocales*): Miguel Alemán, Antonio Ortiz Mena, Felipe Garcia Ramos, León Gómez Díaz, Oscar Soto Maynes, and Augusto Zehnder. Aside from containing a large number of people who would become recognizable names (i.e. Alemán, Ortiz Mena, Palacios, Soto Maynes), the candidate slate also suggests the rising importance of women in political life. Personal testimonies and other documentation suggest a gradually increasing presence of young women in the academic lives of the otherwise male-dominated school system.

The students campaigned on a series of demands that undoubtedly gained widespread popularity within the student body. Several revolved around the issue of student finances, including petitions to provide students free transfers on tramcars and reduced rail fares, more scholarships, discounts at theaters and movies, and breaks to students unable to pay their tuition. This demand corroborates not only what former students said about their relative poverty in interviews,¹⁵³ but also school records housed at the UNAM's Center for the Study of the University and Education that document the extent to which students routinely sought temporary relief from tuition burdens.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the students also called for more literary conferences, scientific and athletic competitions, and invited talks by distinguished intellectuals. Their platform ranged

¹⁵³ FMA, Testimonio de Henestrosa; NLB, Salvador Aceves Parra, personal communication with Camp, Jan. 29, 1976.

¹⁵⁴ Several students had documentation suggesting financial trouble; for example, Archivo Histórico, Instituto de Investigaciones Sobre la Universidad y la Educación, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (hereafter IISUE), Expedientes de Estudiantes, 3766: Andrés Serra Rojas.

widely: classes that formerly were held for six months that had been extended to one year were to be returned to the six-month format, and students could decide unanimously to expedite the finishing of a course by demanding an exam on the spot. The proposal also insisted that students get free medical consultation and hospital stays when necessary, and the ability to bypass the physical education requirement with a successful fitness evaluation.¹⁵⁵

In sum, these activities suggest that the Alemán ruling generation of the 1940s and the Alemán-era scholastic generation of the 1920s, though not synonymous, did more than coincidentally overlap. Rather, the students, especially those who rose along with Alemán through the ranks of the political system, formed as a unique generation through both scholastic and political activity. Nevertheless, this accounts for only a fraction of the process of socialization these leaders underwent. Their personal connections did not occur merely in the realm of formal politics, nor exclusively in the process of engaging in scholarly pursuits. Rather, they rested on a kind of fraternal bond that defined their bohemian existence for the duration of the 1920s. Their friendships deepened their personal relationships with one another at the same time that they helped instill in the group a more urban, middle-class oriented collective ethos.

Camaraderie and Masculinity: Social Life in School

The experiences of these students had a direct, undeniable influence on their later political careers. These experiences represented more than an exercise in personal

¹⁵⁵ FMA, "Planilla que postula el Partido Rojo," Box 39, Exp. 730, May 21, 1924.

networking and political activism. Rather, their day-to-day existence, despite rigorous academic training, was defined by a myriad of social activities. From the outset, a nucleus of ambitious, active students fashioned themselves as a generation. In their first year in the Prep, they designated themselves the *Grupo H*, following a tradition of lettering one's clique in order to differentiate it from those the others.¹⁵⁶ Most of the fourteen original members had nicknames. Alemán was known variously as "El Pajarito," (little bird) a somewhat oblique reference to his restless mind, and as "El Flaco," (skinny) a more obvious reference to his thin physique. Gabriel Ramos Millán, a lifelong friend of Alemán's, was known as "The Blind One," owing to his ophthalmia, and as "Jesucristo," because of his appearance.¹⁵⁷ Alfonso Noriega was "El Chato (shorty)," Oscar Soto Maynez "El Chivo (goat)," and Raúl López "El Conejo (rabbit)."¹⁵⁸

The boys within the H group, which eventually came to include Alemán, José Pérez y Pérez, Leopoldo Chávez, David Romero Castañeda, Gabriel Ramos Millán, and Oscar Soto Maynez, among others, made a pact that if one member came into power or money, that he would extend a hand to the rest.¹⁵⁹ The initial documents produced by the *Grupo H*, including the pact and a manifesto that included thirteen statutes to govern the group, make it clear that they intended to create a kind of fraternal organization. It served no particular social goal and performed no service, nor was it bound to any guiding philosophical or ideological base. Their expressed purpose was to ensure that their friendship provided a safety net for members in need. The group agreed to meet monthly;

¹⁵⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Dr. Gómez (no listed first name) and Modesto Sánchez, Box 7, Exp. 198, March 14, 1985; FMA, Testimonio de Manuel Ramírez Vázquez, March 15, 1985.

¹⁵⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carillo Flores.

¹⁵⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Manuel Ramírez Vázquez.

¹⁵⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Dr. Gómez and Modesto Sánchez.

those who missed two consecutive meetings would be expelled, those who did not live up to their pledge of mutual assistance would be punished (the exact nature of the punishment was never specified), and those who wanted to leave had to appeal to the leadership, and risked a denial of the request.

Ascribing the continued professional and personal associations of these leaders well after school to a pact that resembled an informal fraternal brotherhood would be erroneous. Indeed, it is far-fetched to assume that a boyhood pact could define the formation of a generation of powerful government functionaries. Nevertheless, it points to a pattern of camaraderie and a culture of specifically masculine rituals that guided the creation of a social network. Moreover, undeniable evidence confirms that these early friendships, bolstered by these sorts of arrangements, laid the foundation for political connections and business associations later in life.

The lives of these young men in their school years resemble those of any other school group. It may seem trivial, given that many of them rose to represent the revolution's second-generation leadership and carried out a far-reaching and controversial political agenda, to focus on the exploits of their teenage years and early twenties. Yet dismissing these experiences ignores an opportunity to understand many of these individuals and the generation as a whole. Indeed, numerous interviewees noted that they spent their time socializing at concerts, dance halls, political demonstrations, debates, the movies, the theater, cafés, and the residence halls and homes where the students lived.¹⁶⁰

Through these various activities, they formed into a tightly knit student

¹⁶⁰ NLB, Salvador Aceves Parra, personal communication with Camp; FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa.

community. Many of the students set out on excursions at each chance they got. Ernesto Uruchurtu, most famous as the long-serving Mexico City mayor who came to loggerheads with President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz in the 1960s, became known among his student comrades because he had what they did not: access to a car. The car, it turned out, was on loan to him from the municipal government, for which he worked as a cabaret inspector. With enough peer pressure, they cajoled him into taking it to Cuernavaca for a weekend excursion.¹⁶¹

The rigors of the Prep demanded that its students devote the majority of their time to study, and they took advantage of the infrequent off-hours. They passed that scarce leisure time in local restaurants, sipping coffee by day and drinking in cantinas at night. Several students recalled specific haunts they frequented – a *café de Chinos* called América near the Colegio de San Ildefonso (at that time the Prep’s campus), a Russian eatery where they got bread and vodka on the cheap, the Cantina don Pepe, and a bakery on Belisario Domínguez where they discussed plans for *Eureka*.¹⁶² Trips to the countryside, or to nearby Cuernavaca to relax, became a major priority for the students. These escapades inevitably led the boys to local girls. It was not uncommon for them to serenade young women with their guitars or to take dates to silent movies, dance halls, tangos, and the theater.¹⁶³ Those lucky enough for a second date often went to the girl's house for coffee and cake with her family. Andrés Henestrosa perhaps put it best, saying

¹⁶¹ FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Noriega.

¹⁶² NLB, Manuel Ulloa Ortiz, personal communication with Camp, no date; FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa; FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios.

¹⁶³ FMA, Testimonio de Mary Córdoba de Marín, Box 7, Exp. 184, July 11, 1985; FMA, Testimonio de Dr. Gómez and Modesto Gómez; FMA, Testimonio de Victoria Soto de Córdoba, Box 7, Exp. 202, July 8, 1985.

that despite the bleak existence of their country after ten years of bloody revolution, they lived a Bohemian existence during their time in the capital.¹⁶⁴

Faced with intense scholastic demands, the students occasionally did things that landed them in trouble. Alejandro Gómez Arias, later the president of the *Confederación Nacional de Estudiantes*, recalled an instance that led him to the office of José Vasconcelos, at that time the Rector of the Prep. Gómez Arias, frustrated that he had been removed from the English class of a professor named Stein, hit the professor in a fit of rage. Vasconcelos meted out considerable punishment, but ultimately ruled against expulsion.¹⁶⁵ Even Alemán, known for his innocent demeanor and quiet comportment, occasionally got wrapped up in mischief. In one example, he and Alfonso “El Chato” Noriega, after finishing a particularly grueling set of exams, stayed up celebrating in a cantina. They lingered beyond midnight, which appears to have been a curfew point, when the police came and informed the owner he would have to pay a fine for hosting paying customers beyond that hour. Alemán responded by claiming they were not patrons at all, but friends of the owner who were simply having a beer with him. The police, rejecting his alibi, promptly arrested them. Once in jail, they called Andrés Serra Rojas (who, a quarter-century later, became Alemán’s Secretary of Labor) to come to pick them up. The incident gave him the opportunity to hone his skills as an aspiring litigator. With the right combination of logic and charisma, he got the boys out of their incarceration.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa.

¹⁶⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Alejandro Gómez Arias, Box 7, Exp. 201, Sept. 13, 1985.

¹⁶⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Noriega.

The political causes that many of the students pursued occasionally led them into controversial or even life-threatening situations. Their involvement in political demonstrations in the 1920s provides insight into how their friendships were formed in part around political activism. Moreover, demonstrations and protests also gave them experiences with student activism that would culminate with their participation in two important events in 1929 – the failed presidential campaign of former education minister José Vasconcelos and the successful movement to achieve university autonomy. A 1924 movement to reject plans to install Lombardo Toledano as Rector of the Preparatory School served as an antecedent to the 1929 student movements. Vasconcelos, serving at that point as Education Minister, intended to nominate Lombardo Toledano for the position. The students, according to Manuel Palacios, resisted the idea of someone as ideologically slanted as Lombardo Toledano in the position. By this point, he argued, he had abandoned the admixture of idealistic theories that had once motivated the *siete sabios* in exchange for a hard-line version of Marxism-Leninism. The students marched to the offices of *El Universal* and *Demócrata*, two large papers. Moreover, they stood down a police force led by a particularly vitriolic commander, who suggested he ought to pump the students full of bullets. Palacios chalked the whole event up to cocky and smart-mouthed kids lashing out at authority.¹⁶⁷ In another instance, a number of students joined in solidarity with soldiers who revolted against their commander, a corrupt general. The conflict heated up when military officials loyal to the general beat up a student. According to the poet and writer Renato Leduc, who had been a student in the

¹⁶⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios.

group, the usually polite and reserved Alemán, who then and thereafter gained a reputation for cordiality, felt compelled to scream, "*¡Que chinga a su madre, Gral. Fulano!*" (translation: fuck your mother, Gen. so-and-so).¹⁶⁸

In their descriptions of these various episodes, several of which involved some measure of violence, the former students often wistfully reminisced that they could be so confrontational with police only in the hubris of their youth. To some extent this was true, yet to be entirely dismissive of them would understate the importance of these types of political activities, since they helped to reinforce the camaraderie of the students as they moved from the Prep to the law school of the National University, and as they entered the fray of the 1928 and 1929 presidential campaigns. Indeed, these periodic bouts with authorities and participation in political movements suggest the early and concurrent development of both a political culture and a social network among these students.

The Vasconcelos Presidential Campaign

The 1929 presidential contest between Pascual Ortiz Rubio and José Vasconcelos functioned as a catalyst for the emergence of a generation of political activists who would ultimately form the revolution's second-generation leadership.¹⁶⁹ Many of the students of the National Law School supported Vasconcelos, who had inspired them both as their professor and as the architect of the revolutionary socialist education program. According to testimony from several of the students, many joined because they saw Vasconcelos as

¹⁶⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Renato Leduc.

¹⁶⁹ Camp, "La campaña presidencial de 1929 y el liderazgo político en México," 231-259.

the last hope to correct a revolution that had veered off course.¹⁷⁰ The long shadow that former president Plutarco Elías Calles cast over the political scene, not to mention the increasingly effective political machine and authoritarian government recently brought together in the official party that he had helped to build, provided a source of frustration, even desperation, for the idealistic students. Ortiz Rubio, the revolutionary general, official candidate, and eventual winner, represented to them just another of Calles's cronies. David Romero Castañeda perhaps best captured the image of the Callista machine by saying that the revolution had been taken over by generals who, now comfortably in power, drank cognac and smoked cigars.¹⁷¹ For many students the campaign represented a major turning point in their careers. Its disappointing results made a lasting impression on a number of these young men at the precise moment when they were leaving Law School and entering professional ranks. New ideas, especially the possibility of replacing a broken military establishment with a civilian candidate known for his intellectual prowess and educational achievements, motivated these aspiring young leaders. The campaign thus represented both the culmination of their educational experience and a catalyst of future political activism. Yet even before the campaign had kicked off, the students had already undergone a long and multifaceted process of political formation through the course of the decade.

The 1927 movement to block former president Álvaro Obregón's reelection to the presidency provided something of a dress rehearsal for the 1929 Vasconcelos campaign.

¹⁷⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa; NLB, Ricardo Rivera Pérez, personal communication with Camp, Nov. 21, 1975.

¹⁷¹ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

Many students, who aligned with those who considered themselves "old guard" revolutionaries, found Obregón's ambitions to reassume the presidency in direct violation of the sacred principle of no-reelection, a cornerstone of the revolutionary movement of Francisco Madero and a critical component of the 1917 Constitution. This anxiety was compounded by what many regarded as a plot hatched by Obregón and Calles to solidify their Sonoran Dynasty and to create an unconquerable political machine, over which they would preside as alternating presidents.

Fear of this outcome prompted the re-activation of an Anti-reelectionist movement and party, modeled on the original proposition of Madero nearly two decades earlier. Several students from the Law School attended the fourth National Student Congress in Oaxaca, which had been convened to promote the anti-Obregón cause. In Mexico City, students went further than engaging in pacifist demonstrations and conferences. Palacios recalled demonstrations of more than 10,000, and one gathering in which students, who had been threatened with death by local authorities, descended upon the *Jardín de San Fernando*, chanting "*¡Muera tu madre, Ortiz Rubio!*" (Death to your mother, Ortiz Rubio!) and carrying matches and gasoline to burn the garden in protest of the death of their colleague, Germán (last name unknown).¹⁷² Occasional deaths of fellow students reminded students of the risks of political activism. Efraín Brito reminisced about the death of a fellow student, Ramón Armijo, who had been killed in the 1927

¹⁷² FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios.

campaign while working for Col. Carlos I. Serrano, a Veracruz native who remained close to Alemán through his political career.¹⁷³

On July 18, 1928, Obregón was shot to death at a luncheon in a restaurant in the suburban San Angel district of Mexico City. The assassin, José de León Toral, was a Catholic militant frustrated by the anti-clerical crusades of the Sonoran presidents. While the assassination became a national tragedy, it eased the preoccupations of many about the possibility that the commitment to non-reelection had been eroded, or at least it would seem to be the case. Though Palacios recalls students dancing in joy upon hearing of the fallen revolutionary president, their excitement was tempered in the short run by the somber atmosphere following his death and in the long run by the ultimate result: a consolidation of Calles's informal power. Indeed, Obregón's death allowed Calles to strengthen his grip on his country's politics. In a masterful act that made him appear tactful and minimized his vulnerability to critics (and would-be assassins), Calles declared that he would not seek the presidency, and instead installed a temporary president, Emilio Portes Gil, who, he expected, would function as his puppet.

Recognition of the extension of Calles's power further galvanized opposition from the sectors that had already supported the anti-Obregonista movement in 1927 and 1928. Thus, when the next presidential campaign began to heat up in 1929, many students threw their support behind the opposition candidate, Vasconcelos. In various interviews and writings, several students who decades later achieved political influence explained their reasons for joining up with the Vasconcelos campaign. The candidate, famous as a

¹⁷³ NLB, Efraín Brito, personal communication with Camp, no date listed.

founding member of the *Ateneo de la Juventud* and progenitor of the concept of a Cosmic Race, had served the country through a distinguished career in education, in which he was Director of the National Preparatory School, Rector of the National University, and Minister of Education. In the latter capacity, he built schools, lecture halls, stadiums, gyms, libraries, and dance halls in the capital,¹⁷⁴ along with thousands of rural schools across the republic, helping to extend the benefits of literacy and learning through a vigorous program of universally accessible secondary schooling that the government called socialist education. Thus, many students had at least some personal experience with Vasconcelos, and others who had not encountered him personally certainly felt the impact of his work. Some derived more selfish benefits in the campaign. For instance, Alejandro Gómez Arias, who served in 1929 as the President of the National Confederation of Students, rode with Vasconcelos through the opulent Bosques de Chapultepec neighborhood in the candidate's Lincoln (according to Gómez Arias, a very young Adolfo López Mateos, President from 1958-1964 and a member of a later scholastic generation, was also there).¹⁷⁵ Some students later claimed to have followed Vasconcelos merely because it seemed like the right thing to do, given his leadership role in the construction of the revolutionary socialist education system.

Others had deeper convictions. Many students shared with "old guard" revolutionaries the idea that Vasconcelos could lead an effort to renovate the revolution. Large segments of society, especially peasants and workers in need of material improvement, veterans wanting to see their military efforts transformed into substantial

¹⁷⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa.

¹⁷⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Alejandro Gómez Arias.

reform, and students looking to see their idealism fulfilled, were deeply disappointed with the increasingly authoritarian Sonoran leadership. Many also noted the appeal of Vasconcelos as a civilian. Indeed, many from this generation mentioned their affinity as students to the idea of an early transition from military to civilian presidential leadership.¹⁷⁶

The students, despite forming a sizeable base for Vasconcelos, did not stand in unanimous support of the former Education Minister. Alemán, for instance, was among those who did not figure among his supporters. Palacios argued that Alemán, despite his support of the anti-reelectionist cause, found Vasconcelos too romantic and too radical, and thus ill-suited for the presidency. His support of the Villistas was particularly troubling. He further claimed that Vasconcelos had accused the students of representing a "bureaucratic generation," to which they collectively responded by asking, what was Vasconcelos if not a bureaucrat?¹⁷⁷ Leduc even went so far as to say he was a reactionary and a "*cabrón*,"¹⁷⁸ though he did not state without equivocation that he was against him in 1929. Even some of those who did support him, such as Henestrosa, claim that they knew he stood no chance against the Calles political machine.¹⁷⁹

Save for the minority of students who chose not to support him, the resounding defeat of Vasconcelos at the hands of Pascual Ortiz Rubio, the official candidate, left many students disillusioned. Nevertheless, it also guided many of the senior students into

¹⁷⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Alejandro Gómez Arias; NLB, Antonio Armendáriz, to Camp; NLB, Ricardo Rivera, to Camp.

¹⁷⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Manuel R. Palacios.

¹⁷⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Renato Leduc.

¹⁷⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa.

politics.¹⁸⁰ Henestrosa claimed that above and beyond every other lesson the campaign provided it made his generation aware of the paramount importance of winning in politics.¹⁸¹ Antonio Carrillo Flores, who became Alemán's director of the public development corporation *Nacional Financiera* and later Secretary of Finance and Secretary of Foreign Relations, went further, suggesting that while many students were attracted to the romance and optimism of the Vasconcelos movement, its failure ultimately taught them that to effect change, one must work with the instruments of power, not against them.¹⁸² Therefore, several of the lessons that this group took away from the campaign – a desire to work within rather than against the system, a preference for pragmatism over abstract idealism, and a desire for a civilian system – clearly informed their approach to public administration.

The same year that Vasconcelos suffered sound defeat at the hands of Calles and his chosen candidate, university students pushed temporary president Emilio Portes Gil to grant the National University total autonomy from the government. As Henestrosa would note decades later, some supported Vasconcelos because they felt obligated to do so, but the autonomy movement, which sprouted from a student strike in protest of a grueling trimestral exam schedule,¹⁸³ had more unanimous support, and students acted with profound conviction that only if the university were free from government control would it be able to foment free thought. Unlike the Vasconcelos campaign, which drew in large numbers of students but also polarized the group, the autonomy movement generated

¹⁸⁰ Camp, “La campaña presidencial de 1929 y el liderazgo político en México,” 231-259.

¹⁸¹ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa; NLB, Antonio Armendáriz, to Camp.

¹⁸² FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores.

¹⁸³ NLB, Manuel Ulloa Ortiz, to Camp.

nearly universal favor. One might reasonably speculate that the disappointment of the 1929 presidential campaign was counterbalanced by the success of the autonomy strikes.

Conclusion

The Vasconcelos campaign served as the capstone experience for many of the students who would rise to national prominence in the 1940s. It gave many of them a first taste of the ruthless tactics and frequent disappointments inherent in political activity. In doing so, it fostered a deep appreciation for the pragmatic tools necessary for political survival. Yet well before the 1929 electoral campaign, the experiences that the students gradually accumulated throughout their school years also prepared them for the demands of national politics and, at the same time, instilled in them an ethos that would prove to be remarkably different than that of their predecessors. Much of their political agenda would reflect this shared worldview in subsequent decades.

These scholastic experiences, which took place principally over the decade of the 1920s, represented the first half of their political education at a critical time for their country. The 1920s encompassed a series of profoundly transitional experiences. On the one hand, lingering violence, including the de la Huerta revolt in 1923 and the Cristero revolt of 1926-1929, combined with an increasingly authoritarian government, led many to question what the revolution had actually accomplished. On the other hand, the decade represented a period of rebuilding, one that gave many, including the students in Alemán's generation, a great sense of hope. This ambivalence, or perhaps this balance between optimism and discontent, swayed many of the students into political activities

such as the Vasconcelos campaign. Subsequent developments, beginning with the creation of an official party in 1929, would draw them into public careers.

Thus, the 1930s (or the period from 1929, with the creation of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, to 1946, when Alemán assumed the presidency) marked the second phase of their political education. Now out of the classroom, most of the young men in Alemán's cohort embarked on private careers in law and finance. Many would continue to engage in private-sector activity for the rest of their lives, but they quickly entered public positions as well. Again, the context provided them a series of opportunities and motivations. The new official revolutionary party quickly expanded into an expansive, corporatist entity, creating opportunities for young, civically engaged men to become public functionaries. The members of this growing bureaucracy, along with people who found careers in the growing urban industrial sector in technical and professional fields, formed a large portion of the increasingly important urban middle class. Thus, the rise of the first civilian generation of leadership within the official party coincided with the rise of an urban middle class that, for the first time, grew to become the dominant voice within national politics by the late 1940s. This generation shared many of the same values with this group, and would later channel those priorities into concrete policy during Alemán's sexenio.

In the intervening decade, the student group of the 1920s splintered. A series of events, some of which having come about by pure coincidence, helped Alemán into a series of political offices in Mexico City and then Veracruz. In order to fulfill the obligations of his offices, he brought a small cadre of his closest friends, most of them

from school, to Jalapa, the state capital. They became known as the *Polacos*, a reference to their status as outsiders. Even though Alemán's own provenance was from Veracruz, residents of the state nonetheless treated him as another outsider from Mexico City who had come to take over state politics. His tenure in the governorship (1936-39), though not especially remarkable on the national level, nonetheless represented a major period in his and his generation's evolution as leaders and as preparation for their entrance onto the national stage.

CHAPTER TWO
FROM PREP SCHOOL TO THE PRESIDENCY:
THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF THE *POLACO* GENERATION, 1929-1946

Alemán, along with two of his closest schoolmates, Gabriel Ramos Millán and Fernando Casas Alemán, established legal careers in Mexico City immediately following graduation.¹⁸⁴ Alemán's victories in litigation, most notably a major suit that he won for approximately 400 mine workers afflicted with silicosis, suggested that his career in law held great promise. His advocacy for mine workers reflected his law school thesis on workplace accidents and workmen's compensation law¹⁸⁵ and also most likely stemmed from his two brothers' experiences as mine laborers in the early 1920s.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, it formed part of the revolution's commitment to challenging previously sacrosanct firms on the behalf of workers. During this early phase of his career, he also served as a consulting attorney with the Ministry of Agriculture. Despite his successes as a labor litigator, his legal career endured only a short time, as business and political activity ultimately came to occupy the majority of his attention.

The transition from school to professional life came at a propitious moment for Alemán and his schoolmates. The collective educational and professional experience of their generation provided its members the opportunity to enter into the growing ranks of the nascent urban middle class. Alemán and his colleagues joined other aspiring young professionals in business, law, and technical fields, as well as the rapidly expanding

¹⁸⁴ Roderic Ai Camp, "Education and Political Recruitment in Mexico: The Alemán Generation," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 18:3 (Aug., 1976), 306.

¹⁸⁵ FMA, Miguel Alemán, "Accidentes del Trabajo," Tesis para la facultad de derechos y ciencias sociales, Box 47, Exp. 868.

¹⁸⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Miguel Alemán Velasco, Box 9, Exp. 243, March 29, 1985.

public bureaucracy. Regardless of their family or class backgrounds, the members of this group thus adopted both the professional orientation and the everyday lifestyle of the urban bourgeoisie. Over the course of the next decade and a half, as the middle class grew from a comparatively minor interest group to the dominant voice in national politics, their early professional careers provided them the material support to pursue their political ambitions.

Alemán and Ramos Millán, best friends throughout their years in school together, teamed up to expand their earnings through investments. Together they formed the company Fraccionamientos México, which operated under the slogan, “Don’t fear the six zeroes.”¹⁸⁷ The catchphrase suggested a sense of confidence bordering on hubris. They began by pursuing small projects, first in small residential housing developments in Mexico City. Eventually, those investments grew to pay substantial dividends, ones that they in turn re-invested.¹⁸⁸ In his autobiography, Alemán described Ramos Millán’s business sense as “clairvoyant,”¹⁸⁹ underscoring that his friend functioned as the principal financial strategist in the company. Longtime friend David Romero Castañeda claimed that Alemán, whose primary interest was always politics, functioned as something of a silent partner, while Ramos Millán acted as the real investment maven. In fact, Alemán’s presence, while universally acknowledged, was rarely mentioned or acknowledged on paper.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 129.

¹⁸⁸ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda, Box 6, Exp. 175, March 20, 1985.

¹⁸⁹ Miguel Alemán Valdés, *Remembranzas y testimonios* (México: Grijalbo, 1987), 130.

¹⁹⁰ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

With a small but growing base of investment capital originating from their earnings as lawyers, they bought residential property in Cuernavaca, which soon emerged as a favorite weekend spot for prominent Mexico City residents. They also bought land in what later became the suburb *Ciudad Satélite*, built during Alemán's presidential term. Along with Antonio Ortiz Mena and Carlos I. Serrano, they bought property in the Rincón del Bosque section of Bosques de Chapultepec, the increasingly upscale residential section of Mexico City preferred by the city's elite. At the same time, Alemán and several associates invested money into his home state, including the Hotel Mocambo and related tourist developments along the Veracruz waterfront. He kept the majority of those interests until ascending to the governorship.¹⁹¹ These myriad investments allowed him to pursue his political ambitions without financial worries¹⁹² and provided capital for future investments both during and after his presidency.

As students in the 1920s, Alemán and his friends had defined themselves as part of a vanguard generation. This gave them, as they saw it, a mandate to pursue lives in politics. As leaders within this scholastic generation, they assumed the responsibility of carrying their country into a new phase of political and social development. Alemán's experiences as an attorney, businessman, bureaucrat, governor, and cabinet minister provide insight into a moment that was fundamentally transitional both for this group and for their country. The ambition, vision, and pragmatic skills he and numerous others from his generation acquired in school during the 1920s, coupled with the opportunities for

¹⁹¹ FMA, Testimonio de Justo Fernández, Box 8, Exp. 226, April 4, 1986; FMA, Testimonio de Manuel Suárez, Box 9, Exp. 234, Oct. 9, 1985; FMA, Memorandum, Sociedad Mocambo S.A. de C.V., Box 39, Exp. 720, April 5, 1938.

¹⁹² Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 132.

social and political mobility that emerged during the 1930s, allowed them to move from being poor students to powerful politicians in the decade and a half after their graduation.

Alemán in Transition

A number of important personal changes occurred in Alemán's personal life in these years. In 1929, his father died supporting the rebellion of Gonzalo Escobar. Within a year, his brother Carlos and mother Tomasa moved to Mexico City. By this point, Alemán had invested in several residential properties in the capital and was thus able to provide his mother housing.¹⁹³ According to Tomasa's brother, Pedro Valdés, Alemán was known to be especially protective of his mother, a sentiment that only grew after her husband's death.¹⁹⁴ During his political career, she would occasionally appear, often alongside his and other politicians' wives, to do charity work.¹⁹⁵ Alemán's wife, Beatriz Velasco de Alemán, also helped found the Red Cross in Veracruz as the state's young first lady.¹⁹⁶ In those years preceding Tomasa's relocation to Mexico City, when her son was off at school and her husband's military activities had once again picked up, it appears that she received very modest financial support from family and former associates of General Alemán González.¹⁹⁷

That first year after General Alemán's death proved difficult for the entire family. Miguel Alemán Velasco, the son of President Alemán, noted that he had a letter from his

¹⁹³ FMA, Testimonio de Pedro Valdés and Gabina Damián Reyes de Valdés, Box 14, Exp. 347, date.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ FMA, "Repartió Juguetes Ayer la Señora doña Tomasa Valdés Viuda de Alemán," Box 15, Exp. 369.

¹⁹⁶ Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 341-344.

¹⁹⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Miguel Alemán Velasco; FMA, Testimonio de Pedro Valdés and Gabina Damián Reyes de Valdés

father's brother, Antonio, detailing their hardship and explaining that they would need to sell their cattle back home in Sayula in order to make ends meet.¹⁹⁸ Both of Alemán's brothers worked in mines at one point, living with their grandmother to avoid paying rent, in order to support the family, something Miguel had done at the El Aguila petroleum refinery in Coatzacoalcos.¹⁹⁹ Meanwhile, Miguel forced himself to continue to wrap up his law training and then to establish his career. This period, though hard on all the family members, was relatively brief, since his career, and with it his financial security, began to improve quickly.

In 1931, Alemán married Beatriz Velasco, a young woman studying home economics and known for her domestic proclivities.²⁰⁰ Seven years his junior, Velasco was born in Guanajuato, but her family ultimately settled in Veracruz. The pair met in 1928 in Tampico, where Beatriz was living with her sister, Aurora, and two brothers, Luis and José.²⁰¹ After her father's death, the elder brother, Luis, became the head of the family.²⁰² Alemán became good friends with the entire family, especially her two brothers, and stayed in contact with Beatriz. The two reacquainted in Veracruz, where Alemán frequently had tea with the girl's family.²⁰³ Eventually, she moved with Alemán back to Mexico City, where they lived together. Alemán recounted those years with fondness. The city had severe problems with crime and violence, but the two and their friends nonetheless enjoyed its parks, cinema, and *zarzuela* shows. Beatriz's mother,

¹⁹⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Miguel Alemán Velasco.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Victoria Soto de Córdoba, Box 7, Exp. 202, July 8, 1985.

²⁰¹ FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Noriega, Box 6, Exp. 179, April 8, 1985.

²⁰² FMA, Testimonio de Evangelina Mendoza, Box 7, Exp. 181, June 3, 1985.

²⁰³ FMA, Testimonio de Beatriz Alemán de Girón.

Columba, became a close friend of Alemán's mother, as well.²⁰⁴ Even in these upbeat circumstances, the road to marriage occasionally proved rocky: Velasco once broke up with Alemán because it appeared he had no future, a feeling that was amplified when he spent their wedding savings on a new car.²⁰⁵ Within a few years, her hunch proved incorrect, and in 1931 they wed in a small, modest ceremony in Mexico City's Iglesia de San Cosme. Since neither family had much money to contribute, after the ceremony the attendees were rounded up and taken in rented cars to a restaurant called El Retiro located in front of Chapultepec Park.²⁰⁶ Following that, the two took a brief honeymoon in San Antonio, Texas, where they saw Charles Lindbergh's airplane, the Spirit of St. Louis.²⁰⁷ By this point, Alemán, now comfortably married and professionally established, set his sights on politics.

Several of Alemán's friends recalled his early political ambitions. According to some accounts, those political leanings were coupled with a desire to make money. These tendencies foreshadowed the combination of political power and financial wealth he managed to achieve. One of Alemán's close friends and later a political associate, Manuel Ramírez Vázquez, noted that as early as preparatory school, Alemán recognized that the Ministry of the Interior (of which he served as Secretary from 1940 to 1945) was the ticket to "la grande," presumably meaning the presidency.²⁰⁸ Of course, the idea was not entirely novel: a few presidents had served in the position, most notably Plutarco

²⁰⁴ Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 113.

²⁰⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Beatriz Alemán de Girón.

²⁰⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Carmela Díaz de Vogel, Box 7, Exp. 196, July 18, 1985.

²⁰⁷ Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 117.

²⁰⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Manuel Ramírez Vázquez; FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa, Box 6, Exp. 177, Sept. 12, 1985.

Elías Calles, prior to ascending to the nation's highest office. Yet it certainly was not the stepping stone to the presidency that it became from Alemán onward (Alemán, Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, and Luis Echeverría all served in the position before the presidency, and Ernesto Uruchurtu moved from the position to his long tenure as mayor of Mexico City), suggesting that his hunch about the ministry proved especially prescient. Another long-time Alemán associate, David Romero Castañeda, noted Alemán's early desire to obtain substantial wealth, but also that from their school days onward, his primary interest had always been politics.²⁰⁹

The period from 1932 to 1936 thrust Alemán into a series of short-lived but crucial political positions that culminated in his ascent to the governorship of Veracruz. He and a number of associates first ran for office in 1932. All lost (Alemán having run for federal deputy), save for the veteran politico General Cándido Aguilar, who would later be instrumental in supporting Alemán's bid as incoming governor of the state after the 1936 murder of governor-elect Manlio Fabio Altamirano Mexico City.²¹⁰ Alemán's loss may nonetheless have done more to help than to hurt his career, because it gave him visibility and allowed him to establish valuable contacts, especially with General Aguilar.²¹¹ When Cárdenas came to power in 1934, he awarded the young, ambitious Alemán a seat on the Superior Court of the Federal District. Cárdenas had originally proposed that he serve on the Supreme Court, but age requirements disqualified him from serving on the high court. At this point still relatively obscure beyond a small circle of

²⁰⁹ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

²¹⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Guzmán Neyra, Box 9, Exp. 240, Feb. 21, 1986.

²¹¹ FMA, Testimonio de Silvestre Aguilar, Box 9, Exp. 248, April 23, 1985.

political observers, Alemán's political career had begun. In 1935, Alemán, along with a group of Veracruz politicians, spearheaded the creation of the *Grupo Socialista Veracruzano*, an organization created to sponsor candidates under the umbrella of the PNR. The next year, constituents elected him to the Senate as part of a slate proposed by his newly formed group. His career in the Senate had barely begun when strange turn of events cut his time there short and unexpectedly put him in the governor's seat. This unanticipated development allowed his career to flourish under the aegis of *Cardenismo*.

The Perfect *Cardenista* Governor?

The relatively proximate administrations of Lázaro Cárdenas and Miguel Alemán, separated only by the often mistakenly overlooked tenure of Manuel Ávila Camacho, tend to be described in sharply contrasting terms. At first blush, the image and personality of Cárdenas, the consummate populist, appears to have had virtually nothing in common with that of Alemán, the debonair businessman president. The former became known for a transformative agenda that addressed the plight of the nation's poor, while the latter embraced the ideal of a bourgeois, industrial society. These competing images, while simplifying and exaggerating their differences, nonetheless make *Cardenismo* and *Alemanismo* seem like polar opposites along the spectrum of the country's twentieth-century politics. Thus, it comes as something of a surprise not only that the two had a productive working relationship, but also that under Cárdenas, Alemán sharpened his own political approach as Governor of Veracruz. Alemán's tenure in the governor's office, which lasted just under three years, allowed him to demonstrate loyalty to the

president's six-year plan and a sense of political discipline; to showcase his effectiveness in matters of administration, especially those necessary to implement Cárdenas's policy agenda; and to form an inner circle to serve as a prototype for a future administration. For all of these reasons, by the end of his term he had emerged as a major presence in national politics.

Alemán ended up in the governor's seat in 1936 almost entirely by accident. He and the man originally elected governor in the 1936 election, Manlio Fabio Altamirano, a fellow civilian, had been elected on a PNR-sponsored slate, with Alemán as the Senate candidate. Altamirano possessed formidable charisma.²¹² Known as a fervent orator, he, like Alemán, ran as a representative of a new generation attempting to distinguish itself from the military veterans, several of whom had controlled state-level politics from the earliest days of the revolution. Nevertheless, Altamirano could also be polarizing and prone to creating enemies.²¹³ On June 25, 1936, he was brutally gunned down in Mexico City's celebrated Café Tacuba, which had seen its share of politically motivated assassinations. The killer, still unidentified to this day, staged a successful getaway. The list of possible suspects varies widely, ranging from a conservative local legislator to an enraged cleric to a dissatisfied leftist radical. On July 9, the National Executive Committee of the PNR issued a statement saying that it could hold an internal election to find its candidate within fifteen days.²¹⁴

²¹² FMA, Testimonio de Luis Danton Rodríguez, Box 7, Exp. 203, June 4, 1986.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz (hereafter AGEV), Telegram from PNR National Executive Committee, Exp. 242/541/1, Comité Ejecutivo Nacional del Partido Nacional Revolucionario, July 9, 1936.

A special election ensued, even though Alemán's victory was all but assured, since he had secured the endorsement of the state's political elite. On the night of Altamirano's wake, the state's political elders met at the fallen governor-elect's house in Mexico City to determine who would replace him. A few representatives, most notably Fernando López Arias and José Murillo Vidal, objected to Alemán as the choice. As members of the PNR's State Executive Committee, they threw their support to Alemán's opponent, Veracruz PNR President Manuel Zorrilla Rivera.²¹⁵ Despite the objections of these two leaders, Alemán nonetheless gained enough support to become the official candidate.

Alemán benefited from the endorsement he received from General Cándido Aguilar, a former Carrancista governor who maintained a position of considerable influence in state-level politics, more than from any other supporter. Some considered Aguilar to have been the state's most powerful person.²¹⁶ He, along with Alemán, had reportedly attended the meeting held after Altamirano's wake, where Aguilar made a forceful effort to promote the young, promising son of a celebrated *jarocho* (the name given to people from Veracruz) general.²¹⁷ Indeed, for most of the 1930s, Alemán was hardly known as anything other than his famous father's son. While this initially prevented him from establishing his own political identity, it also provided him an entry into state politics.²¹⁸ The younger Alemán and Aguilar could connect over the military

²¹⁵ Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Presidencias, Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (hereafter LCR), Letter from Juan Martínez Silva, Exp. 544.2/29, Elecciones, Gobernadores, June, 29, 1936; FMA, Testimonio de Fernando Román Lugo, Box 8, Exp. 209, May 29, 1985.

²¹⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Ezequiel Coutiño, Box 6, Exp. 178, Nov. 25, 1985.

²¹⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Rafael Moreno Henríquez.

²¹⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Ezequiel Coutiño; FMA, Testimonio de Silvestre Aguilar.

legacy of General Alemán González, a fact that evidently helped him in his relations with President Cárdenas, as well. The two had been associates since Alemán unsuccessfully ran for elected office in the early 1930s.²¹⁹ While his earliest campaigns immediately following school did not place him into elected office, they ultimately benefited his career more in the long run, since he began to cultivate his long-standing relationship with Aguilar, even though Alemán would later have to create some distance from an ever more domineering Aguilar. As longtime colleague David Romero Castañeda noted, Aguilar's efforts to dominate Alemán only caused the young governor to push the veteran general further away from the center of decision-making in the state.²²⁰

Despite the rift between the two, which does not appear to have transmuted into a major schism, Alemán came to be known for having a conciliatory approach to governance. He maintained productive relations with the state's most powerful revolutionary military leaders, especially Aguilar, Gen. Heriberto Jara (the head of the 26th Military Division), Col. Carlos I. Serrano (a close gubernatorial advisor), and former governor Gen. Adalberto Tejeda, while simultaneously ushering in a new cadre of young, primarily civilian leaders.²²¹ Jara, who became president of the PNR during Alemán's term, counted on the support of the young governor for the position. The case of Veracruz thus demonstrates that the arrival a new political group did not happen all at once in the 1940s; rather, the members of this ruling generation stepped into political

²¹⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Guzmán Neyra.

²²⁰ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

²²¹ Carmen Blázquez Domínguez, *Breve historia de Veracruz* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 194-195; FMA, Testimonio de Luis Dantón Rodríguez.

office during the Cárdenas period, gradually moving the military generation aside without fundamentally or abruptly upsetting the balance of power.

The relations between the “old guard” revolutionary leaders and the newly emergent civilian political class demonstrate that the process of transition in the 1940s from military to civilian leadership at the national level began a decade earlier, as leaders came to power at the state level. The national party leadership assisted in the process of introducing new functionaries. A 1936 circular from Emilio Portes Gil, the President of the National Executive Committee of the PNR and former President of the Republic, instructed state PNR presidents to stamp out pre-candidates with personal ambitions as part of a broader effort aimed at eliminating what he termed “*continuismos*” in politics.²²²

Alemán, who did not have the extensive and loyal personal network of veteran politicians like Aguilar, by his own admission had to rely on the only one he had.²²³ For that reason, he called on a number of the students with whom he had attended school in Mexico City to move to Jalapa, the state’s capital, to help him govern. A few were originally from Veracruz, but the majority came from elsewhere. They came to be known as the *Polacos* (Poles or, more accurately, despite its contemporary pejorative connotation, Polacks), a reference to their status as outsiders that recalled a small community of Polish immigrants that had settled in Jalapa. Those opposed to their presence also labeled them “chilangos,” a reference to people from Mexico City.²²⁴

²²² AGEV, Circular from Emilio Portes Gil, Exp. 242/541/1, Comité Ejecutivo Nacional del Partido Nacional Revolucionario Feb. 1, 1936.

²²³ Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 151-154.

²²⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Luis Dantón Rodríguez; FMA, Testimonio de Justo Fernández; FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa; FMA, Testimonio de Ezequiel Coutiño; FMA, Testimonio de Francisca Acosta Lagunes, Box 6, Exp. 180, June 18, 1985; FMA, Testimonio de Fernando Román Lugo.

The group was relatively small, and several noted that Gabriel Ramos Millán, Alemán's close friend and business partner, was the one who contacted and recruited them. In this respect, he functioned much like a chief of staff for the incoming governor.²²⁵ Alemán appointed the majority as *magistrados*, judges in the state court system. These included Lugo, who had not quite finished law school and came into office at twenty-two years of age.²²⁶ He served alongside Oscar Soto Maynes, Manuel Ramírez Vázquez, David Romero Castañeda, Raúl López Sánchez, and Ernesto Aguilar Álvarez, all of whom had been close friends in school. Numerous others from his school circle received posts in both the executive and judicial branches: Ramos Millán served as an official (*visitador*) in the state's Superior Court of Justice; Enrique Parra Hernández, later Oaxaca's governor, was President of the Central Committee for Conciliation and Arbitration, while Marco Antonio Muñoz served as its General Secretary; Manuel Heredia was Director of the Department of State Assets (*Bienes del Estado*); Rogerio de la Selva was Alemán's personal secretary; and Fernando Casas Alemán became the General Secretary of Government, with Silvestre Aguilar serving as Undersecretary.

From the outset, the group generated skepticism and even some measure of scorn, especially from those who had been shunted aside by this new cadre of young leaders that appeared to have been imposed from forces above and outside the state's traditional political circles. Several of Alemán's contemporaries made reference to the suspicions that the presence of these young outsiders, most of whom had no roots in Veracruz politics, created in the minds of citizens. Alemán in his memoir recalled that many from

²²⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa; FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

²²⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Fernando Román Lugo.

the group, especially the young Román Lugo, attracted a great deal of suspicion due to their age. He nonetheless defended his decision to hire Lugo in spite of his youth because of his political talents (though it is probable that their social and professional ties, coupled with Alemán's desperation for administrative personnel, played a significant role as well).²²⁷ Even one of Alemán's gubernatorial opponents, the independent candidate Amado J. Trejo, expressed doubts about Alemán's relationship to Veracruz. In an article published by the *Frente Revolucionario de Juventudes Veracruzanos* (Revolutionary Youth Front of Veracruz), he argued that Alemán's ascent to the governorship, if it were to occur, would be in violation of a state law that demanded that the candidate live full-time in the state for five years prior to entering office. He also accused the pro-government newspaper *El Nacional* of biased support of Alemán. Since Alemán had been living in Mexico City almost continually since school, and since his business, legal, and political affairs and primary residence were all located in the national capital, in his eyes he was clearly ineligible for office.²²⁸

These criticisms certainly did not fall on deaf ears. Within two years, Alemán had replaced many of the *Polacos* with leaders from Veracruz.²²⁹ Decades later, several contemporaries, including Andrés Henestrosa and Ezequiel Coutiño, accused the *Polacos* of having personal motives of their own, alleging that their primary motivation for coming to Alemán's aid when he was thrust into the governor's office was not only

²²⁷ Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 153.

²²⁸ AGEV, Article by Amado J. Trejo, Exp. 242/547/0, Elecciones, Ley Electoral, y Poderes Federales, July 29, 1936.

²²⁹ Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 151-154; FMA, Testimonio de Francisca Acosta Lagunes.

political but also financial gain.²³⁰ Others claimed that Alemán's own plan all along was to use his good political fortune as a stepping-stone to the Ministry of the Interior.²³¹ Indeed, while some of the inner circle from Veracruz never ascended to the highest echelon of national politics, others, including Fernando Casas Alemán (who served as interim governor after Alemán left to run Ávila Camacho's presidential campaign in 1939 and then in Alemán's cabinet) and Rogerio de la Selva (who carried considerable responsibility as Alemán's presidential secretary), followed Alemán to the capital during his presidency, and underlings, such as future president Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, rose higher within state ranks. However coherent Alemán's plans may seem in hindsight, in reality there would have been no way of mapping out his political future in such linear terms. Nevertheless, what is certain is that Alemán used Veracruz as a kind of "microcosm," as his friend and colleague Marco Antonio Muñoz called it, for his approach to governing the nation a decade later.²³²

By most measures, Alemán's governorship did not look as noteworthy or as colorful as a handful of others during the Cárdenas period, but demonstrates how a disciplined and effective Cardenista governorship functioned. In the first years of his administration, Cárdenas, as part of his effort to rid the country of leaders loyal to Calles, sought to purge a number of *callista* governors. These included Rafael Villarreal in Tamaulipas, Tomás Garrido Canabal and his powerful *cacicazgo* in Tabasco, and

²³⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Emilio Coutiño; FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Henestrosa.

²³¹ FMA, Testimonio de Manuel Ramírez Vázquez; FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

²³² FMA, Testimonio de Marco Antonio Muñoz.

Saturnino Osornio in Querétaro.²³³ Cárdenas succeeded in eliminating some of the most powerful allies of Calles, and then Calles himself. Nevertheless, other governors could not be vanquished so easily, making the process of centralizing executive authority at the national level incomplete and inconsistent.

Cárdenas's sexenio, recognized as the apogee of revolutionary social and economic reform, nonetheless encountered various obstacles that resulted in inconsistent application of his ambitious presidential reforms. Several governors proved either unable or unwilling to tow the line for the president.²³⁴ In certain cases, such as the Yucatán, where Cárdenas sought to implement one of his largest land redistribution efforts, the governorship and state administration were not sufficiently stable to allow a productive linkage between national policy and state-level implementation.²³⁵ In the case of other governorships, such as those of Román Yocupicio in Sonora or Juan Andreu Almazán in Nuevo León, the governors had sufficient local support to resist Cardenista reforms and, by extension, the president's efforts to create a more centralized national government with increased presidential control.²³⁶ Finally, the case of Saturnino Cedillo, the notoriously intransigent caudillo of San Luis Potosí, proved that some leaders could

²³³ Dudley Ankerson, *Agrarian Warlord: Saturnino Cedillo and the Mexican Revolution in San Luis Potosí* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), 149.

²³⁴ William H. Beezley, "The Role of State Governors in the Mexican Revolution," in Jürgen Buchenau and Beezley, eds., *State Governors in the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1952: Portraits in Conflict, Courage, and Corruption* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 10-12.

²³⁵ Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 33-37, 69-74, 100-108.

²³⁶ On Yocupicio, see Adrian A. Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, Del.: SR, 1998), 176-186.

mobilize loyal constituents to mount armed rebellion against Cárdenas, even if the armed insurgency proved ephemeral.²³⁷

Cardenismo, often polemically exaggerated for either its popular-based or its authoritarian characteristics, proved to be a variable and dynamic program. Popular radicalism combined with strong executive rule, while national centralization competed with stubborn regional intransigence, creating a period of governance fraught with contradictions. Nonetheless, with the help of disciplined governors such as Alemán, the president succeeded in implementing an ambitious reform agenda.²³⁸ Other governors stood in the way. Almazán, favored by conservative interests wary of the radicalism associated Francisco Múgica, the presumptive favorite of Cárdenas for the 1940 election, maintained a loyal army in his home state, while Cedillo functioned as one of the last maverick caudillos in an ever more centralized system. These governorships seem more remarkable on paper than Alemán's, which aligned with the national regime rather than opposing it, yet both offer insight into state-level politics during the ambitious and controversial Cárdenas years.

Alemán's governorship can best be characterized as a mirror image of the Cárdenas sexennial plan, and Alemán spared no effort in demonstrating his adherence to the president. He undoubtedly derived political benefit from the general state of agrarian affairs in the second half of the 1930s. At the beginning of his term, the political organizations representing the interests of the rural poor were not only divided, but also

²³⁷ Romana Falcón, *Revolución y caciquismo: San Luis Potosí, 1910-1938* (México: El Colegio de México, 1984), 264-269; Ankerson, *Agrarian Warlord*, 149-151.

²³⁸ The best explanation of the ways that Cardenismo balanced these seemingly contradictory elements is Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26 (Feb., 1994), 73-107.

prone to the violence that typified revolutionary agrarian conflict. Nevertheless, Alemán managed, by the end of his governorship, to unite the disparate Red (radical, self-identifying as socialist), Yellow (pro-reform and Cardenista, but comparatively moderate), and White (explicitly anti-Cardenista) agrarian leagues, and on March 28, 1937, he hosted the PNR-sponsored Congress of Campesino Unification in Jalapa.²³⁹ The stability achieved in the state allowed the federal government to carry out major land reforms. During his tenure as governor, Alemán also managed to promote the construction of significant public works (especially highways), to address ongoing literacy problems, and to give stimulus to the state's tourism industry.²⁴⁰

Alemán proved to be skilled at the pragmatic responsibilities necessary for successful political administration. In certain cases, that meant smoothing over conflicts or accepting limitations placed on his authority, as he had to do in his relationship with Aguilar. In other cases, it meant demanding and exercising increased executive authority, a phenomenon that occurred in spades at the national level. On at least two occasions, he petitioned the state legislature for temporary but nonetheless massive extensions of power. In June, 1937, he proposed a new law that allowed the governor executive privilege to govern with authority over every executive department while the legislature was not in session. He explicitly noted his intention to resolve a rent-control law that had remained unfinished in the legislative term. The legislature granted him the request, and

²³⁹ Blázquez Domínguez, *Breve Historia*, 194-195; Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 155-160; FMA, Testimonio de Marco Antonio Muñoz.

²⁴⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Justo Fernández; FMA, Testimonio de Manuel Suárez.

did so again in December of the same year, thus amplifying his authority in both cases.²⁴¹ Alemán contracted with an attorney from Guanajuato, Ernesto Arnoux Siqueiros, to write some of the centerpieces of his legislative agenda in 1937, including his Housing Law, his Law on Public Assistance and Pensions, and his Law on Expropriation.²⁴² The ease with which Alemán set his legislative agenda into place suggests an efficient, responsive gubernatorial administration, yet this ultimately was not the most striking element of his leadership. Rather, the adherence to the national regime, and to Cárdenas personally, set Alemán's governorship apart from many of the others of the period.

Alemán demonstrated unity with Cárdenas in a dramatic example in 1938, when the president expropriated foreign oil companies and their properties. While in the early 1930s Alemán and Luis I. Rodríguez, then president of the PNR, originally opposed moves toward expropriation, by 1938 it appeared both logical and necessary.²⁴³ Alemán, along with Rodríguez, acted decisively in organizing a conclave of governors in solidarity with Cárdenas's move to expropriate all petroleum assets. The governors of Tabasco, Tamaulipas, and Puebla were the first to join the effort. Alemán, who only two years earlier was a minor figure in state-level politics and virtually unknown outside of Veracruz, presided over the governors' meeting, giving him wide national exposure. The aggressive efforts to align with Cárdenas over the issue endeared him to the president and

²⁴¹ AGEV, Letters from Alemán to Legislature, Exp. 253/012/2 Decreto No. 132, que concede al Ejecutivo facultades extraordinarias en todos los ramos, June 23, 1937 and June 30, 1937; AGEV, Letter from Legislature to Alemán, Exp. 253/012/14, Decreto No. 253, que concede al Ejecutivo facultades extraordinarias, Dec. 14, 1937.

²⁴² AGEV, Ernesto Arnoux Siqueiros to Alemán, Exp. 00/13, Sec. Particular/Gobernador, June 18, 1937; AGEV, Alemán to Arnoux, Exp. 00/13, Sec. Particular/Gobernador, June 24, 1937.

²⁴³ FMA, Testimonio de Luis Dantón Rodríguez.

represented a popular move with his own constituents, since Veracruz possessed the nation's largest oil reserves.

In later years, Alemán faced criticism for displaying opportunism in his support of the expropriation. Before the end of Cárdenas's term, he had retreated from his initially enthusiastic position, a switch that Antonio Carrillo Flores described as an astute, pre-meditated maneuver.²⁴⁴ Suspicions about his motives increased after his administration in the following decade altered the charters that governed PEMEX, the state-run corporation in charge of all oil-related operations, opening it to private and foreign investment. In his posthumously published autobiography, he rejected any implication that his support of the expropriation had been a politically calculated move, explaining that the expropriation, in the context of Cardenismo, had been appropriate measure that represented the culmination of a long social, economic, and political process. Furthermore, he correctly noted that by the 1940s, PEMEX had become an inefficient drag on an economy that had slowed after experiencing earlier industrial impulses during the Second World War.²⁴⁵

Alemán's motives in his initial support of the expropriation and his later retreat from that support symbolized broader transformations in his political approach and priorities. Moreover, the partial privatization of PEMEX during his administration reflected his administration's policy objectives, above all to secure credit from the United States. As with most major policy decisions, doses of *realpolitik*, compromise, personal commitment, and political loyalty all factored in the decision, and undoubtedly Alemán's

²⁴⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores, Box 7, Exp. 182, June 10, 1985.

²⁴⁵ Alemán, *Remembranzas*, 170-173.

move involved a high degree of political calculation. Nevertheless, characterizing the changes in his position over time as a demonstration of a lack of political principle, despite significant structural changes over the course of more than a decade, provides an ahistorical interpretation. The reorganization of PEMEX represented less a betrayal of the Revolution and more a prudent decision to correct the administrative shortcomings of the agency that emerged between the years of the Cárdenas administration and those of his own.

Alemán's successes in creating an administration that proved efficient, disciplined, and relatively popular generated some measure of criticism. Letters written to national officials provide some insight into the types of concerns harbored by citizens. The ones relayed back to Alemán, usually by the Ministry of the Interior, indicate those that the federal government regarded as worthwhile reading. One citizen accused Alemán, upon leaving the governor's office, of accepting numerous bribes, including a half-million pesos (about 94,300 U.S. dollars) from the Jalapa Power and Light company and another 100,000 pesos (about 18,900 U.S. dollars)²⁴⁶ from an association of coffee growers to ensure that their property would not be expropriated, along with another half-million from beer manufacturers seeking to keep their product categorized as a "bebida refrescante" to avoid the elevated taxes associated with hard liquor.²⁴⁷ Other critics alleged that his inner circle made money by manipulating the licensing and taxation of

²⁴⁶ Both peso-to-dollar conversions calculated from data in Martínez, *Border Boom Town*, 170.

²⁴⁷ AGN, LCR, Ramón Murillo Vidales to Cárdenas, Exp. 543.1/28, Charges against Carlos Serrano, Aug. 7, 1939.

alcohol, and others claimed that his administration favored capitalists and large landowners at the expense of the state's poorest residents.²⁴⁸

Another letter sent to Alemán by the Undersecretary of the Interior contained a complaint about the extent of nepotism in the state government. The author listed numerous members of the Alemán and Valdés families in government: Juan Valdés, the governor's uncle and Municipal President in the capital, who had been the official candidate of the PRM; Dr. Carlos Alemán, the Director of Public Assistance (*Beneficiencia Pública*) and Secretary of the Regional Committee of the PRM; Fernando Casas Alemán, the General Secretary of Government (an erroneous claim – Casas Alemán had no actual familial relation to Miguel Alemán, despite the coincidence of name); Xicoténcatl Ley Alemán, the governor's cousin, who had been the only candidate in Cosamaloapam; Frocopio Alemán, the municipal president of Hueyapam de Ocampos and a relative of the governor; Alejandro Alemán, another of the governor's uncles, the Municipal President of Santana Rodríguez; and Gilberto Alemán, President of the Municipal Council of Puerto México, another relative of governor.²⁴⁹

Similar complaints from citizens can be found in the public files of nearly every governor or other major public official and thus must be regarded with a high degree of caution. Complaints from high-profile public figures merit special attention. In one such case, former governor Adalberto Tejeda, a popular and influential public figure, wrote directly to Cárdenas, complaining about the extent of corruption in the state's

²⁴⁸ AGN, LCR, Unnamed citizen to Gobernación, Exp. 543.1/28, Charges against Carlos Serrano, Nov. 30, 1937.

²⁴⁹ AGN, LCR, G. Santos Gallardo, Subsec. of Gobernación to Alemán, Exp. 543.1/28, Charges against Carlos Serrano, July 20, 1938.

government.²⁵⁰ He wrote his letter in mid-1939, just after Alemán had resigned as governor to run Ávila Camacho's presidential campaign, leaving Casas Alemán as the interim governor, but his letter nonetheless critiqued the administration of Miguel Alemán, since Alemán had brought Casas Alemán and the majority of public officials at the state level to power.

The criticism extended beyond Alemán. A military official, Captain Manuel Hernández, also wrote to Cárdenas that longtime Alemán colleague Carlos I. Serrano, a colonel, had robbed the state's treasury and was flaunting his wealth by purchasing two cars and living on his own hacienda. He extended his accusation by saying that Alemán could not intervene in these illegal affairs because Serrano had provided his gubernatorial campaign with 50,000 pesos (about 13,900 U.S. dollars²⁵¹) the prior year.²⁵² This and the other accusations suggest that Alemán not only generated criticism, but that the criticism was over many of the same issues that would damage his reputation during his presidential term and his legacy long afterward.

Alemán's commitment to Cárdenas reached its apex in 1938, first with the oil expropriation, then with the revolt of Saturnino Cedillo in San Luis Potosí. Alemán took an immediate lead in opposing Cedillo's movement. In *El Dictamen*, a leading Veracruz newspaper, Alemán's picture appeared next to Cárdenas's, alongside a manifesto signed in San Luis Potosí by every other governor of the republic denouncing Cedillo's

²⁵⁰ AGN, LCR, Adalberto Tejeda to Cárdenas, Exp. 543.1/28, Conflictos Políticos, Estados, June 27, 1939.

²⁵¹ Martínez, *Border Boom Town*, 170.

²⁵² AGN, LCR, Cap. Manuel Hernández to Cárdenas, Exp. 543.1/28, 25, Charges against Carlos Serrano, Aug., 25 1937.

actions.²⁵³ By uniting disparate agrarian leagues in 1937, Alemán was also able to align the League of Agrarian Communities and Peasant Unions of the State of Veracruz with Cárdenas over the issue of Cedillo the following year. In a May 23, 1938 manifesto, the confederation denounced Cedillo as a money-grubbing, counter-revolutionary, anti-proletarian, pro-imperialist fascist.²⁵⁴ The pileup of adjectives only underscored Alemán's efforts first to centralize the state's agrarian interests, then to keep them committed to the president's interests. Beyond these gestures of alliance with the president, Alemán on numerous occasions demonstrated an ability to appeal to the president's pragmatic sensibilities.

As governor, Alemán faced increasingly aggressive demands for women's suffrage. In a memorandum that he sent the incoming governor, which he also published as an article in *El Nacional*, Portes Gil noted that women had begun to demand the same advances that the working class had achieved with the revolution.²⁵⁵ Indeed, Alemán and other politicians at the time faced a movement for women's enfranchisement that had gained momentum both from the international movement for that cause and from the revolutionary efforts to increase political incorporation across society. A 1936 letter to Alemán from the *Comité Municipal Femenino* (Municipal Feminine Committee) of the

²⁵³ AGEV, "Manifiesto a la Nación," Exp. 476/164/1, Insurrección Cedillista en San Luis Potosí, May 23, 1938.

²⁵⁴ AGEV, Manifiesto, Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos del Estado de Veracruz, Exp. 476/164/1, Insurrección Cedillista en San Luis Potosí, May, 24, 1938.

²⁵⁵ AGEV, Circular from Emilio Portes Gil, Exp. 242/541/1, Comité Ejecutivo Nacional del Partido Nacional Revolucionario Feb. 1, 1936.

PNR in Veracruz, for instance, demanded that women in public office should also be members of the PNR. They claimed that Cárdenas himself supported their position.²⁵⁶

According to Fernando Román Lugo, a former political and business collaborator with Alemán, the young governor also attempted to incorporate former opponents into his government. In the case of Fernando López Arias, a fellow student who had originally supported Zorrilla, Alemán succeeded in drawing him into his fold.²⁵⁷ Alemán appointed him to serve first as a magistrate, before he ascended to the position of President of the Regional Commission of the PNR.²⁵⁸ During Alemán's presidential term, López Arias again became an objector: he helped found the Partido Popular alongside former CTM head Vicente Lombardo Toledano, its leader. Nevertheless, during the late 1930s the two worked closely in Veracruz while Alemán was governor. Their relationship suggests that the student group, while close, did not guarantee cooperation between alumni.

Lugo and Rodríguez both claimed that Alemán ultimately talked Cárdenas into selecting Manuel Ávila Camacho as his successor.²⁵⁹ According to both of them, Alemán correctly simplified the situation for the president: Juan Andreu Almazán had gained considerable ground, but was too conservative and anti-Cardenista. Francisco Múgica, one of the radical voices within Cárdenas's cabinet, would be too polarizing a choice at a time when powerful interests had grown tired of the administration's aggressive reform efforts. Alemán therefore recommended that the president consider a moderate candidate

²⁵⁶ AGEV, Letter from Comité Municipal Femenino del PNR, Veracruz, Exp. 242/542/1, Comités Municipales del Partido Nacional Revolucionario, Jan. 14, 1936.

²⁵⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Rafael Moreno Henríquez; FMA, Testimonio de Fernando Román Lugo.

²⁵⁸ AGN, Presidencias, Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Letter from Juan Martínez Silva, Exp. 544.2/29, Elecciones, Gobernadores, June, 29, 1936.

²⁵⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Fernando Román Lugo; FMA, Testimonio de Luis Danton Rodríguez.

who could generate broad popular support and find a middle road between the other two. Justo Fernández noted that Ávila Camacho, as Cárdenas's Secretary of Defense, had sized up Alemán while the latter was governor, asking the president what he thought of Alemán and his leadership. Moreover, the three apparently rode horses together, corroborating the claim that Alemán and Ávila Camacho had a close and cordial relationship.²⁶⁰

Alemán resigned in 1939 from his position as governor to run Ávila Camacho's campaign, moving with his family to a new home on Calle Durango in Mexico City.²⁶¹ During his partial term as Governor of Veracruz, he developed a series of traits that served him well in his positions of national leadership, first as Minister of the Interior and then as President. Above all, he understood the role of the governorship as one that should be powerful within the realm of state politics and subordinate to presidential authority. This became a persistent theme in his later public offices. For example, Alemán transformed the position of Interior Secretary to one of major influence within the executive branch partially through his relations with governors.²⁶² As president, he demanded discipline from governors, and forced the removal of several who did not fall into line.

Beyond the insistence on discipline, Alemán also proved adept at political networking and public administration. The ability to balance the rise of a new civilian generation and the gradual diminishing of the generation of revolutionary veterans did

²⁶⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Justo Fernández.

²⁶¹ FMA, Testimonio de Beatriz Alemán de Girón.

²⁶² Personal conversation between author and Soledad Loaeza.

not prove easy. The generals did not simply wither away at once. Moreover, the task of managing existing political networks (as well as the dominant, charismatic personalities at the center of them) while trying to build his own circle required a high measure of improvisation on his part, all the more so considering his hasty ascent to the position of governor. For all of these reasons, Alemán, despite the incongruities between his presidency and Cárdenas's, exemplified the ideal Cardenista governor, and the strategies he pursued in Veracruz foreshadowed the kind of leader he would become at the national level.

Back to Mexico City: The Interior Ministry during World War II

Alemán, despite his close and mutually supportive relationship with Cárdenas, ultimately played a part in orienting national politics away from *Cardenismo*. His support of Ávila Camacho's selection as the official candidate represented the first step in that process. The general, known more for his administrative capabilities than his battlefield prowess, proved to be a moderate, transitional candidate and president, possessing neither the radicalism of Múgica, his leading competitor within the party, nor the opportunism and conservatism of Almazán, the most threatening of the opposition candidates. These qualities, coupled with a personality that conveyed a sense of competence, even if somewhat blandly, made Ávila Camacho a superb choice in the eyes of Cárdenas and an acceptable one for the electorate. Nevertheless, the campaign and election day both saw considerable violence, including an attempt on Almazán's life in Monterrey and several

other skirmishes,²⁶³ and it is widely acknowledged that Ávila Camacho's results were padded by fraud.²⁶⁴

For his efforts in managing the campaign, Alemán was rewarded with the powerful Interior Ministry. Heading the most important cabinet ministry during World War II allowed him to make a series of astute decisions that ultimately resulted in his ascent to the presidency. From the outset, Ávila Camacho placed a considerable amount of trust in Alemán's hands. In August of 1940, just before his inauguration, the incoming president sent Alemán to Washington. During his visit, he assured Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles that the radicalism of the Cárdenas period would not be replicated under Ávila Camacho. His trip earned him and Ávila Camacho kudos from the United States. To express his government's positive impression, Vice-President Henry Wallace attended Ávila Camacho's inauguration that December.²⁶⁵ Alemán's trip to Washington, as well as the Vice-President's presence at the inauguration, signaled an opening in U.S. relations and also the rise of Alemán as a major figure in his country's politics. Indeed, a diplomatic mission of this sort would normally fall under the jurisdiction of a country's foreign minister; since Ávila Camacho was still President-elect, he had more flexibility in his choice of personal emissary. Consequently, Alemán increased his visibility to U.S. officials, a phenomenon that amplified after Ávila Camacho threw Mexico's support to the Allies during World War II.

²⁶³ Aaron W. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 45-52.

²⁶⁴ Frank R. Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 93; Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 52.

²⁶⁵ Maria Elena Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies: Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 61.

Ávila Camacho's decision to declare war against the Axis precipitated a series of internal and external political changes. Numerous members of his administration, as well as the general public, had expressed hesitation over entering the conflict, which they regarded as something wholly external to the national interest and to the revolutionary government's goals.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, mutual security and economic concerns drew the two nations closer together, and after German U-Boats sunk the Mexican oil tanker *El Potrero del Llano* off the Florida coast in May, 1942, then the *Faja de Oro* later that month, Ávila Camacho issued a formal declaration of war. His government's support of the Allies helped to end three decades of turbulent bi-national relations that included two maritime invasions and a punitive expedition led by General John G. Pershing, as well as lingering tensions produced by the expropriation of foreign oil assets by the Cárdenas government.

Mexico and Brazil were the only Latin American countries to provide direct military support during the war, with Ávila Camacho sending an air unit called the *Esquadron 201* to the Pacific theater. The squadron, which included around thirty pilots, known as the Aztec Eagles, along with approximately 300 ground crew personnel, toured the Philippines in the final weeks of the war. Its participation represented a largely symbolic gesture of support to the United States. By contrast, Mexico's other contributions, including metals, foodstuffs, inexpensive manufactured goods, and temporary migrant laborers, proved more critical to the war effort. The economic and military arrangements between the two nations also brought domestic benefits, providing

²⁶⁶ Halbert Jones, "'The War Has Brought Peace to Mexico': The Political Impact of Mexican Participation in World War II" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2006), 130.

simultaneous impetus to Mexico's nascent industrial base and its export sector, both of which had flagged through the prior decade of global economic recession.

The circumstances of war increased the relative authority of the executive branch. Ávila Camacho, like many of his counterparts throughout the world, assumed emergency wartime powers. His wartime authority permitted him to quell factional struggles within the official party and to thwart opposition from outside it. Above all, his National Unity campaign sought to undo the polarizing aftereffects of Cardenismo by reuniting opposing factions of the Revolutionary Family, beginning with the orchestration of a public détente between former presidents Plutarco Elías Calles and the man who sent him into exile, Lázaro Cárdenas. The exigencies of the war also allowed Ávila Camacho to bring organized labor in line with presidential authority.²⁶⁷ The CTM, the party's once powerful labor sector, agreed to declare a moratorium on strikes in order to ensure a successful war effort. Finally, the military, despite the role of the officer corps in persuading Ávila Camacho to go to war, diminished considerably in its political authority during the war years. While Cárdenas had made the military a corporate sector with the party's reorganization in 1937-38 in order to keep a lid on potential dissent or rebellion by drawing it closer to presidential authority, Ávila Camacho took the opposite approach, stripping it of its corporate status entirely. By the end of his term, its political role had been circumscribed considerably. The reduction of military presence in political affairs coincided with the rise of a largely civilian-based political class during the Ávila Camacho years.

²⁶⁷ Ian Roxborough, "Mexico," in Roxborough and Leslie Bethell, eds., *Latin America Between World War II and the Cold War, 1944-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 194-195.

The process of consolidating and extending executive authority was not confined to the presidency. During the first half of the 1940s, Alemán redefined the Interior Ministry.²⁶⁸ The extensive formal powers and informal influence he accumulated owed much to the context of the war and benefited his political ambitions considerably. As Interior Minister, Alemán oversaw national intelligence and security services. The domestic intelligence community was transformed during the war from a relatively ineffective presence to a professionalized force,²⁶⁹ and security functions once belonging to other ministries such as Treasury fell under the control of the Interior Minister.²⁷⁰ In the process, the intelligence service and its central agency, the *Dirección Federal de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales* (Federal Directorate of Political and Social Investigation, or DGIPS) also became more politicized.²⁷¹ Through the 1940s, its agents increasingly came to work at the service of the ruling party and the national leadership, allowing Alemán to track political trends and the activities of opposition groups and various social sectors. The expanding intelligence and security apparatus also helped to solidify his relationship with Ruíz Cortines. As the Interior Ministry's *Oficial Mayor*, its third-ranking position, Ruíz Cortines oversaw the coordination of police intelligence-gathering activities, allowing the two future presidents to work together within the ministry.²⁷²

The Interior Ministry was charged with overseeing the business activities of foreigners and held responsibility for the immigration services. Under Alemán's watch,

²⁶⁸ Personal conversation between author and Soledad Loaeza.

²⁶⁹ Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 11.

²⁷⁰ Jones, "The War has Brought Peace," 279-280.

²⁷¹ Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 11.

²⁷² Jones, "The War has Brought Peace," 62.

German and Japanese-owned enterprises and property were confiscated by the government, which provided a steady revenue stream during the war years.²⁷³ The ministry was also responsible for setting up a concentration camp at Perote, Veracruz, for German and Japanese prisoners of war and people with family or ethnic backgrounds of the Axis countries. Despite the hard rhetorical line against the Axis and the punitive measures taken against both foreign nationals and Mexicans of German, Italian, Austrian, and Japanese descent, the Interior Ministry nonetheless made a number of exceptions to its anti-Axis policies. Alemán and other officials in various departments of the Interior Ministry benefited from their relationships with individuals who officially qualified as enemies. In other cases, there was considerable gray area. The wealthy Swedish industrialist Axel Wenner-Gren, for example, invested considerable sums of money in Mexico, even as he was blacklisted by the Allied powers due to suspicions about his relationship to the Axis.²⁷⁴ Subsequent evidence has suggested that the claims about Wenner-Gren's Nazi connections were false, with some indicating that he opposed the Führer. Nevertheless, it is surprising that such a high-profile figure, one who had been blacklisted by the United States and Great Britain, was such a welcome presence in Mexico.

Alemán's relationship to German nationals in Mexico, especially prior to the formal declaration of war in 1942, stirred both domestic and foreign suspicions about his allegiances. Along with a majority in Ávila Camacho's cabinet, Alemán had opposed

²⁷³ Brandenburg, 99.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

Mexico's entrance into the war,²⁷⁵ and throughout its duration he benefited from association with both sides. His relationship with German nationals living or traveling in Mexico can be traced back to an incident that occurred during his last year as Governor of Veracruz. A yacht from the United States, called the *Blue Eagle*, was apprehended in Veracruz by port authorities after its captain appeared to evade their requests to board the ship. In the midst of investigation of the ship, which turned out to have been full of morphine and opium, Alemán intervened and ordered that the Coast Guard allow the ship exit.²⁷⁶ No further inquiries as to why a yacht full of narcotics would be allowed exit at a governor's request were made, bolstering existing evidence of a Nazi-funded narcotics ring that operated in Mexico in the late 1930s.

Other instances corroborate the allegations of association between Alemán and individuals representing the Axis. One pervasive rumor suggests that Alemán accepted a ship full of Jewish refugees from various European countries fleeing the Nazis. After being turned away at New Orleans, as the rumor has it, the ship first sailed to Cuba and ultimately to the eastern seaboard port of Tampico, where the Interior Minister accepted them, collecting a substantial bribe in the process.²⁷⁷ Even Alemán's romantic associations drew criticism. He (along with Ramón Beteta, who would go on to become Alemán's Treasury Minister) had an affair with Hilda Kruger, a German dancer and alleged Nazi spy. While Kruger's Nazi contacts were never proven during her time in Mexico, the public romantic entanglement raised eyebrows at home and abroad. Kruger

²⁷⁵ Jones, "The War has Brought Peace," 108-109.

²⁷⁶ Juan Alberto Cedillo, *Los Nazis en México* (México: Debolsillo, 2010), 60, 81-82.

²⁷⁷ Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 139.

was eventually arrested by U.S. authorities while visiting New York on a dancing tour following her time in Mexico City.²⁷⁸

The extensive range of the Interior Ministry's authority allowed Alemán, along with officials at multiple levels, to decide, often in arbitrary fashion, who could enter the country, and to determine the status of Axis nationals living in Mexico up to and during the war. Alemán and other Interior Ministry officials, including Ruíz Cortines, earned a reputation for accepting bribes from Axis nationals to allow them to avoid prison sentences in Perote, Veracruz or forced resettlement in Mexico City. In doing so, Alemán and other political leaders accumulated cash for future campaign war chests.²⁷⁹

Allegations against other Interior Ministry officials abound. While not directly linked to Alemán, they point to a pattern of cooperation between various departments of the Interior Ministry and Axis nationals. The presence of Abwehr (German intelligence) spy rings in Mexico also occurred largely as the result of relaxed regulations and a culture of bribery within the Interior Ministry.²⁸⁰ Two close associates of Alemán's, Jorge Viesca from the Interior Ministry's Legal Department and a Secret Service agent named Schoeninger, were implicated in a plot to sell arms and manufacturing tools on the behalf of a Japanese firm in Shanghai. Viesca later arranged the departure of Arthur Jost, ex-captain of the *SS Orinoco*, and then collected fifty thousand pesos (about 10,400 U.S. dollars²⁸¹) in connection with the release of the ship's interned German and Italian crews. Oscar Peralta of the Ministry's Immigration Department was also accused of allowing

²⁷⁸ Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 138-140; Cedillo, *Nazis en México*, 15, 35-58.

²⁷⁹ Jones, "The War has Brought Peace," 280-281; Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies*, 171.

²⁸⁰ Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies*, 171.

²⁸¹ Martínez, *Border Boom Town*, 170.

suspected Axis agents to remain in the country, and Secret Service agent Alfonso García González also allegedly had improper dealings with Axis nationals in Mexico.²⁸²

The news magazine *Proceso* made a similar accusation. According to one of its editors, Miguel López Azuara, Alemán offered protection to Dr. Kiso Tsuru, a Japanese magnate acting as an Axis spy in Mexico, because of the former's direct interest of more than 2.2 million pesos (about 460,000 U.S. dollars²⁸³) in Tsuru's petroleum, mining, and commercial enterprises in the country.²⁸⁴ In sum, Alemán's various dealings with Germans in Mexico, along with his associations with pro-Axis agents, point to his complex and central role in World War II politics. His ability to remain officially committed to the Allies while exploiting opportunities for personal gain with the enemy exemplify his shrewdness as he set his sights on the presidency.

An examination of Alemán's career from 1940 to 1945 reveals the ways in which he grew as a political operative within a changing political climate. The Interior Ministry positioned him at the center of national politics, giving him access to everything from foreign business contacts to confidential intelligence. By the end of his term, he had made behind-the-scenes arrangements with the majority of governors for their support and had gotten private assurances that the party's critical sectors would pledge their support of his candidacy when the time came. Even Cárdenas, who was rumored to have favored General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán,²⁸⁵ agreed that maintaining party discipline and unity

²⁸² Ibid., 130, n. 32; Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 162.

²⁸³ Martínez, *Border Boom Town*, 170.

²⁸⁴ Miguel López Azuara, "Hay semejanzas maravillosas González Guevara, buen compensador, Paradoja de las posiciones," *Proceso* 134 (May 28, 1979).

²⁸⁵ Jones, "'The War has Brought Peace,'" 283.

within the Revolutionary Family was more important than his own preferences. Through the campaign, the popular former president's public support of Alemán never wavered. As the world moved from global war to a restoration of peace, Alemán emerged as the likeliest candidate to lead Mexico into a new phase of internal development and international engagement.

The most peculiar facet of Alemán's transition from Interior Minister to presidential candidate was his mystery. Despite holding public office and having extensive formal authority, to this day many of his activities during this period remain the topic of speculation and rumor. His personality, especially his reputation as a debonair playboy,²⁸⁶ was a source of fascination, yet his unclear political sympathies made him something of an unknown quantity. His relationships with the United States and with the Axis, especially Germany, exemplified this. He remained officially pro-U.S. while avoiding being painted as a U.S. lackey, something that plagued his early presidential opponent, Foreign Minister Ezequiel Padilla. At the same time, while officially committed to the war effort against the Axis, he in fact benefited politically and financially from his ties to German interests in Mexico. His background and previous positions on domestic issues made him unpredictable. By most counts, he was considered a reform-oriented, liberal (though by no means radical) leader who sought improved economic and diplomatic cooperation with the United States (though with some trepidation, unlike Padilla).²⁸⁷ Again Alemán displayed a consummate sense of political tactics and foresight. Unlike the majority of his opponents, as well as failed former

²⁸⁶ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 160.

²⁸⁷ Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies*, 237.

candidates for the official party's nomination and opposition leaders, it was nearly impossible to pin him to any controversial position. Through the duration of his term at the Interior Ministry, his politics kept observers guessing, which minimized his vulnerability to criticism from any one interest group, at home or abroad. Yet as his presidential ambitions became public knowledge, Alemán had little choice but to clarify in his campaign the kind of president he intended to become.

The 1946 Presidential Campaign: Civilian Dominance and Technocratic Style

Alemán's time as Interior Minister provided him an opportunity to build support for a run at the presidency. A number of factors aided his rise. The first of these factors was the fact that his principal opponent for the party's nomination, Ezequiel Padilla, generated far more popularity abroad, especially in the United States, than at home. The left dismissed him as too pro-U.S.; the right reviled him for his vigorous prosecution of Catholic militant José de León Toral, the assassin of Alvaro Obregón.²⁸⁸ While Obregón's death was seen as a national tragedy, Catholics saw Padilla's pursuit of the death penalty for the pro-Cristero assassin as an excessive measure. The most vigorous support that Padilla's campaign received came from the U.S. Ambassador, George Messersmith, who praised the Foreign Minister, a personal friend, as competent and effective. His views of Alemán were decidedly more negative. In his estimation, Alemán was an opportunist with little political skill and even less personal virtue.²⁸⁹ His criticisms, which he rarely substantiated with concrete evidence in his correspondence to

²⁸⁸ Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies*, 236-237.

²⁸⁹ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 162-163.

the State Department, were coupled with a more valid concern over Alemán's dubious relationship with the Axis during the war. Despite Messersmith's protests, Alemán had secured the support of higher authorities within the State Department, who recognized that he had the selection locked up.²⁹⁰

The second factor that smoothed Alemán's road to Los Pinos, the presidential residence, was the death of Maximino Ávila Camacho, the outgoing president's mercurial brother. Maximino, the brooding, boastful former governor of Puebla and the state's undisputed political kingpin, had routinely embarrassed his brother with his public vulgarity, chronic womanizing, and violent temperament. He publicly declared that he felt an entitlement to the presidency, owing to the fact that his brother (whose presidency he found preposterous) occupied the post. He also possessed a formidable hatred for Miguel Alemán, to the point that he promised to kill him if his brother were to choose him to be the next president.²⁹¹ As Minister of Transportation and Communications in his brother's administration, he grew wealthy off of privileged access to information, investments, and cuts from private contractors.²⁹² Therefore, he certainly would have had the financial resources for a campaign. Nevertheless, he had failed to piece together a base of political support during his brother's administration, as Alemán had done meticulously. Therefore, it is unclear what kind of presence he would have had in the 1945-46 campaign. In either case, his death removed a notoriously loud obstacle to Alemán's political ambitions.

²⁹⁰ Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies*, 240-241.

²⁹¹ Jones, "The War Has Brought Peace," 276-79.

²⁹² Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 90, 164.

Despite the antipathies that Maximino Ávila Camacho displayed toward Alemán, the two had worked together while they served as governors of their states. Ávila Camacho, in one instance, wrote directly to Alemán about a plot to place dynamite under a train moving from Orizaba to the city of Veracruz. He reported that other men had been arrested previously for similar reasons, and that another man had been taken in for spreading pro-Cedillo propaganda along the line, drawing an apparent link between the Cedillo revolt, railroaders, and the bombing suspect.²⁹³ A reply from the state's Confidential Services office in Jalapa informed Ávila Camacho that it would open an investigation into the event.²⁹⁴ No final report has been located to confirm how the situation ended, but it nonetheless demonstrates a measure of cooperation between the two governors, who would gradually develop a mutual animosity.

The third factor that aided Alemán was his success in securing the support of organized labor. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, whom Ávila Camacho had removed as head of the CTM in 1941, nonetheless remained on the Executive Committee and also served as the moral leader of the union confederation, making his support invaluable. Lombardo Toledano was by no means especially enthusiastic about Alemán, but he had reason to be cautiously optimistic: Alemán had a personal and professional background in pro-labor politics, self-identified as a pragmatic reformist, and came from a revolutionary family. Moreover, during World War II, he displayed his official support for the Allies, but was never especially pro-U.S. More than anything else, he was not Padilla, a man

²⁹³ AGEV, Maximino Avila Camacho to Miguel Alemán, Exp. 476/164/1 Insurrección Cedillista en San Luis Potosí, May 27, 1938.

²⁹⁴ AGEV, Juan Cerdán to Manuel Limón Maciel, Exp. 476/164/1 Insurrección Cedillista en San Luis Potosí, June 6, 1938.

Lombardo Toledano regarded as little more than a yes-man for the United States.²⁹⁵

Therefore, Lombardo Toledano threw his support to Alemán as a last-ditch effort at political survival and because he could not stomach the idea of Padilla in Los Pinos.

Even though Alemán had secured the support of critical party sectors, governors, and Cárdenas, he nonetheless feared that Padilla might end up as the more appealing option to Ávila Camacho, since his international prestige stood at high tide. At the conclusion of the war, Padilla represented Mexico at the 1945 San Francisco conference that laid the foundation for the formation of the United Nations. As he had done before, he made a positive impression on U.S. leaders, generating especially effusive praise from Messersmith. Alemán, troubled by the possibility that Padilla might gain ground, made a shrewd maneuver: by resigning in June, 1945, he forced the hand of Ávila Camacho, even as the president had insisted that possible candidates avoid *futurismos* – open attempts to gather information and drum up support. Since his resignation could signal nothing except a declaration of candidacy, Alemán in essence forced various groups to show their cards early.²⁹⁶ When it became immediately evident that he had the support of sector leaders and governors, along with a positive public image, the rest of the field gave up. Padilla ran a weak opposition campaign for a new party, the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM), while the other candidates, including Federal District mayor Javier Rojo Gómez and General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán (who launched a more formidable effort in 1952), faded from the electoral scene. Ávila Camacho was left with little choice, and Alemán's climb had been cleared from the beginning of all major obstacles.

²⁹⁵ Jones, “The War Has Brought Peace,” 273-276.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 285-286; Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies*, 237-241.

The twenty-one official round table conferences conducted by the Alemán campaign in 1945 and 1946 served both pragmatic and symbolic objectives.²⁹⁷ In practical terms, they allowed the candidate, whose victory was assured in the upcoming July election, to meet with representatives of the party's corporate sectors, along with industrialists, technicians, and engineers. Moreover, they permitted the incoming president to gain specific knowledge of local conditions as well as the desires and needs of constituents throughout the republic. For many reasons, the round-table discussions facilitated a two-way benefit for the new president and the citizenry. He succeeded in gaining technical knowledge and in clarifying the six-year plan his administration would pursue, while citizens gained an understanding of the person who would navigate his country through the post-World War II period.

The round tables underscored the incoming administration's efforts to fashion itself as efficient, modern, and technocratic.²⁹⁸ In this regard, they contained an element of political theater. Furthermore, they allowed Alemán to juxtapose his own style and approach to that of his predecessors, especially Lázaro Cárdenas. Whereas Cárdenas forged his populist image by traveling deep into the remotest villages, often on horse or donkey, to pose while eating tacos and hearing peasant demands, Alemán made one stop per state, usually in the capital city. Rather than reaching out to the masses, he received a representative from each sector who had been nominated by the organization. To convey a sense of personal appeal to counteract the impersonal qualities of the round-table talks,

²⁹⁷ Researchers can consult the proceedings of the roundtables in the following source: *Conferencias de mesa redonda* (Mexico: Fundación Miguel Alemán, 2009).

²⁹⁸ Maria Antonia Martínez, "El modelo económico de la presidencia de Miguel Alemán," in *Gobernantes mexicanos II: 1911-2000*, ed. Will Fowler (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008), 234-235.

Alemán's campaign relied on the sound of the *son jarocho*, the typical popular music from his home state. The bands that played at campaign events always struck up the genre's most iconic tune, La Bamba, thus creating a connection between the candidate and the music of Veracruz.

Alemán's round table talks in part represented an effort at building legitimacy. Nevertheless, one should take care not to disregard them as mere political gimmickry; they became the first step toward a six-year plan that relied on heavy government intervention to support massive industrial, urban, and agricultural development, especially through the promotion of large-scale public works and infrastructure projects. In short, the roundtables represented a marriage of electoral process with economic planning. Since Alemán entered office with clear plan to place a priority on industrialization, commercial agriculture, and urban development, the roundtables facilitated a streamlined discussion between the candidate, technical experts such as engineers, and the public. Certainly spectacle played its part, inasmuch as the roundtables drew attention to the way the Alemán campaign sought to portray itself as modern and technocratic.

Nevertheless, some saw them more as propaganda than as genuine efforts to engage citizens and provide a campaign that was responsive to their interests and demands. Writing to Manuel Gómez Morín, the ideological leader of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), fellow party leader Efraín González Luna commented from Guadalajara in February of 1946 that his city was on the verge of being exposed to the "well-known

routine” of the PRI campaign.²⁹⁹ He also referred to the round table meetings as little more than inevitable meetings among businessmen that wreaked havoc on the host city.³⁰⁰ González Luna expressed dread about what would happen: blocked streets, halted public services, closed schools, and a flood of paid shills in the streets.³⁰¹ At the conclusion of the campaign stop, his bitterness was unconstrained. He considered the roundtable discussions to be nothing more than a “masquerade” put on by the Alemán campaign, and estimated that the whole ordeal in Guadalajara alone had cost over a million pesos (about 208,000 U.S. dollars³⁰²) and that some 40,000 people had been brought in to cheer for the official candidate. He alleged that the campaign paid them ten pesos a head, unless the person had had to ride a horse into town from the countryside, in which case he earned thirty.³⁰³

Despite González Luna’s cynicism, the round table discussions had genuine technical purposes at the same time that they helped Alemán to establish a certain type of persona and dialogue with the population. More importantly, they became the culminating events of a decade and a half of political development for Alemán and his generation prior to his presidency. By the time the campaign drew to a close, the round table discussion had clarified what type of leader Alemán promised to be.

Conclusion: Prelude to a Presidency

²⁹⁹ Archivo Manuel Gómez Morín (hereafter MGM), Efraín González Luna to Manuel Gómez Morín, Vol. 579, Exp. 1862, Feb. 18, 1946.

³⁰⁰ MGM, Efraín González Luna to Manuel Gómez Morín, Vol. 579, Exp. 1862, Feb. 14, 1946.

³⁰¹ MGM, Efraín González Luna to Manuel Gómez Morín, Vol. 579, Exp. 1862, Feb. 18, 1946.

³⁰² Martínez, *Border Boom Town*, 170.

³⁰³ MGM, Efraín González Luna to Manuel Gómez Morín, Vol. 579, Exp. 1862, Feb. 21, 1946.

The period from approximately 1929 to 1946 witnessed the political evolution of Miguel Alemán and his generation. Their rise from idealistic students to powerful government functionaries and prosperous businessmen represented the practical application of the values and priorities they accumulated in school. Alemán's professional trajectory helps chart this transformation almost perfectly. As a young lawyer, he made his name, and the initial basis of his fortune, by advocating for workers. In doing so, he took up one of the central causes of the revolutionary movement. Investing a portion of his income in real estate and other ventures gave him financial stability and laid the foundation for considerable wealth later on. His professional successes, education, and family background catapulted him into a series of bureaucratic, judicial, legislative, and executive positions, signaling his and his generation's entrance into public life.

His three-year term as Governor of Veracruz and the five he spent as Minister of the Interior allowed him to clarify his own governing approach. In both cases, the strategies he pursued foreshadowed many of the features of his presidency. Alemán's years in the governor's office exemplified this shift and incorporated many of the later tendencies of *Alemanismo* in great measure. He proved particularly astute at placating the state's dominant military personalities while simultaneously circumscribing their authority,³⁰⁴ a task he would face once he assumed the presidency. The combination of administrative competence, subservience to executive authority, and preference for

³⁰⁴ Blázquez Domínguez, *Breve historia de Veracruz*, 194-195.

civilian rule reflected many of the central elements of his presidential administration and presaged the kind of leaders he and his colleagues would become by the mid-1940s.

The first half of the 1940s saw a continuation of Alemán's evolving political approach. His various political activities contained some measure of personal opportunism. They also formed part of a broader effort to create the basis for a more productive, industrialized nation that was prepared to enter the post-war world with more bargaining power, especially vis-à-vis the United States. As Alemán transitioned from the Interior Ministry, which had broad but nonetheless highly specific powers, to presidential contender, it became evident that he had used his time in the ministry in crafty ways. At the same time, his governing style and policy priorities owed much to his predecessor's efforts to move his country in a new, rightward direction. Many of the hallmarks of his campaign, and subsequently his presidency, bore the stamp of the Ávila Camacho administration: a more open relationship with the United States, a decrease in the political influence of the military and organized labor, and an increased political role of intelligence services. In short, his term as Interior Minister produced controversies that he would have to confront during his candidacy, but also the basis of his success during the campaign.

The process of creating a civilian-dominant system thus began in the early 1930s and culminated after World War II, and the leaders of the Alemán generation became the central protagonists of this change. This transitional period from early socialization to national prominence allowed these leaders to envision the possibilities of using the instruments of government to pursue change. While 1946 remains the pivotal year in the

shift from a military to a civilian ruling group, the process leading up to that change took place over the better part of the intervening decade, as the new generation moved into the political system and then moved upward from within it. Miguel Alemán emerged as the most cunning, and undoubtedly the luckiest, of that generation. His political calculation in the crucial, transitional first half of the 1940s made him the undisputed leading figure of the official party's first technocratic generation.

CHAPTER THREE
TOWARD A BETTER GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY:
MEXICAN-U.S. RELATIONS AFTER WORLD WAR II

Alemán, newly inaugurated as president, took office at a critical juncture in his country's bilateral relations with the United States. He inherited from his predecessor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, the benefits of an upswing in military and economic cooperation between the two countries that occurred during World War II. He also faced the task of determining the shape that his country's relationship with the United States would take in the immediate years following the war. Ávila Camacho and his administration had taken a number of domestic and foreign policy measures that had been characterized as temporary responses to the exigencies of the war. Alemán encountered an entirely different set of circumstances while in power, ones that provided him greater flexibility in his approach to foreign relations. His decision-making in the sphere of bilateral relations reflected the opportunities and constraints of the early Cold War period and the priorities of his generation.

The Alemán group gave priority to fomenting industrial development and agricultural production rather than rededicating federal resources to the social programs that originated in the 1910 revolution. To achieve this objective, they hoped to draw on the economic resources of the United States as it solidified its position at the center of the new global economy. His approach to bilateral relations, which oscillated between concession to U.S. demands and exploitation of its vulnerabilities, allowed him to carry out his ambitious domestic agenda. The confluence of several important internal and external developments influenced several of their most ambitious and controversial

initiatives, including the decisions to convert the Bracero arrangement into a peacetime program, to revise the charters of PEMEX to secure foreign credit, and to quell labor activism to attract foreign investment.

As the United States made the transition from wartime victor to post-war superpower, its leaders sought with increased urgency to reaffirm its hemispheric alliances to confront the growing threat of international communism. Inter-Americanism, safeguarded by a renewed commitment on all sides to the Good Neighbor Policy, underpinned their efforts. Emphasizing the importance of regional solidarity under U.S. leadership, several Inter-American conferences were held from 1945 to 1947, first in Mexico City, then in Bogotá, San Francisco, and Rio de Janeiro. The U.S. government, beyond these hemispheric matters, also sought to resolve issues specific to Mexico. Moreover, the shaky economic climate of the immediate post-war years compelled U.S. officials to recognize the strategic importance of securing a stable oil supply and a reliable influx of temporary agricultural workers. U.S. Ambassador George Messersmith, writing to Truman shortly after Roosevelt's death, described Mexico as a critical country on the global scale and the most important in the Latin American picture.³⁰⁵

A Tale of Two Visits

Underscoring the importance of their nations' relationship, Truman and Alemán both paid official state visits to other's country in 1947. The reciprocal diplomatic missions showcased the potential for mutual cooperation in the early Cold War period.

³⁰⁵ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 496, Box 1370, Messersmith to Truman, April 17, 1945.

Truman surprised everyone, including his own personal staff, by making a spontaneous gesture before a skeptical Mexican public. During his visit to Mexico City in 1947, he laid a wreath before the monument to the *Niños Heroes*, the fallen boy cadets who, in the last moments of the last battle of their country's disastrous war with the United States a century earlier, threw themselves off of Mexico City's Chapultepec Castle in a dramatic display of national pride. The symbolic act had not been included in the official itinerary of his 1947 visit to Mexico City, and when asked by a reporter why he did it, he replied, "Brave men do not belong to any one race or country. I thought they ought to have the wreath. I respect bravery wherever I see it."³⁰⁶ The press and public alike were struck by this spontaneous gesture of goodwill. His move to recognize the young soldiers was especially timely, since his visit coincided with the centennial of the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-48, which lingered in the country's collective memory.

Truman's folksiness and warmth, so often contrasted with the patrician airs of his predecessor, captivated the Mexican public. He set his diplomatic mission off on the right foot within moments of disembarking from the presidential plane, known then as the Sacred Cow. In a brief statement to an enthusiastic welcoming crowd, he tripped over the word Tenochtitlán, the name of the ancient Aztec city where the capital now stands and a generally daunting word for neophytes.³⁰⁷ The good-humored attempt won the crowd's affection, and above the din one could hear a woman shout "Viva Missouri!"³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 88, Dwight Dickinson's Report for Ambassador of President's visit to Mexico, March 15, 1947.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Milton Brackers, "21-Gun Roar Hails Truman in Mexico: Alemán and his Official Family Lead City's Welcome – U.S. President Gets Medal," in *The New York Times*, March 4, 1947.

Truman's charm offensive lasted the duration of his trip. He made particular efforts to emphasize the virtue of peace. When flying over the region's numerous volcanoes, including Michoacán's smoke-belching Paricutín, he proclaimed, "It's a terrible thing when nature takes it out on human beings, but it's even more terrible when human beings take it out on other human beings. And that's just what we've been doing." He reiterated a similar point when visiting the ancient pyramids of Teotihuacán, noting that if a permanent peace were not achieved, modern human civilization would be doomed to the same ruination as the Aztecs.³⁰⁹

For his part, Alemán went to great lengths to impress upon the U.S. president his country's progress. He treated Truman to full military reviews, parades, and banquets. A lavish ceremony at the Estadio Nacional showcased the dance, music, and indigenous clothing of his nation's various regions, allowing Truman to see plume dancers from Oaxaca, bow dancers from Nayarit, and rattle players from Jalisco.³¹⁰ A marimba band played Veracruz's La Bamba and the Missouri Waltz at a packed U.S. embassy the next day, showcasing the folk music of the home states of the two presidents.³¹¹

The visit had high stakes. Alemán's economic ministers had already submitted a detailed six-year plan to the U.S. government, which included the utilization of significant quantities of capital from the Treasury's Export-Import Bank. They intended the money to go toward a range of ambitious development projects in the areas of

³⁰⁹ Felix Belair, Jr., "Truman Sees America's Fall if World Peace is Insecure," in *The New York Times*, March 6, 1947.

³¹⁰ NARA, Truman Library, Untitled Newsreel, MP 72-35.

³¹¹ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 88, March 15, 1947, Dwight Dickinson's Report for Ambassador of President's visit to Mexico, Untitled clippings, *New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune*, March 6, 1947.

hydroelectric power, irrigation, highway construction, industry, and agriculture.³¹² The most controversial component of the plans, from the U.S. perspective, pertained to investment in oil, which had been managed since the 1938 oil expropriation by the public agency *Petróleos Mexicanos*, or PEMEX. Negotiations on guest labor, civil aviation, and a number of other strategic and commercial issues loomed over the horizon. The 1947 presidential summit in Mexico City, and its counterpart later that year in several U.S. cities, helped resolve many of those issues.

Alemán's visit to the United States three months later reciprocated the success of Truman's trip to Mexico City. While U.S. Ambassador Walter Thurston had suggested early on that his country would be unable to provide the same degree of ostentation to Alemán,³¹³ the two stays in fact shared much in common. Alemán traveled on Truman's presidential plane, dubbed the *Sacred Cow*, and received an official welcome at the White House. He then proceeded to Arlington National Cemetery, where he laid a wreath before the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a clear response to Truman's prior gesture to the *niños heroes*.³¹⁴ The same day, he gave a well-received speech to a special session of the U.S. Congress. The final leg of his Washington visit included a boat trip up the

³¹² NARA, Truman Library, John Snyder Papers, Box 21, Antonio Espinosa de los Monteros to William McChesney Martin, Jr., Feb. 26, 1947; *Ibid.*, President's Secretary's File, Box 88, Dwight Dickinson's Report for Ambassador of President's visit to Mexico, Memorandum, Thurston to Truman, March 6, 1947; *Ibid.*, Memorandum, Thurston to Truman, March 5, 1947; *Ibid.*, Memorandum to White House from Oswald Ryan, Feb. 13, 1947.

³¹³ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 88, Dwight Dickinson's Report for Ambassador of President's visit to Mexico, Thurston to Truman, March 6, 1947.

³¹⁴ NARA, Truman Library, MP 72-33; *El Presidente Alemán Visita a Estados Unidos*, Newsreel.

Potomac to Mt. Vernon, George Washington's home, accompanied by Secretary of State George C. Marshall.³¹⁵

Alemán next flew to New York, where an estimated one million people, undeterred by rain, turned out to wish him well as his motorcade paraded through the city en route to meet Mayor William O'Dwyer. He also made a quick trip upstate, to West Point Academy, where he reviewed troops and delivered a flag from his country's *Colegio Militar*. The tour's next segment took him to the projects of the Tennessee Valley Authority, on which he hoped to model his administration's six-year plan for electrification, irrigation, and energy production. He took time to meet with local farmers, posing for photographs with local children and babies in between tours of hydroelectric facilities.³¹⁶

Alemán wanted to impart the message that his trip was not merely to Washington, but rather to the United States as a whole.³¹⁷ This commitment led him to insist on traveling into the country's interior. He chose Kansas City, near Truman's hometown of Independence. Truman had first entered politics in Kansas City, making his career in the political machine of Tom Pendergast. On his brief stop, the new president accepted an honorary degree from the University of Kansas City's school of law, which he chose over offers from numerous other universities, among them Harvard, Johns Hopkins, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of California (he also accepted one from

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ NARA, Truman Library, Clarence R. Decker Papers, Box 1, de la Selva to Decker, Jan. 25, 1947; Ibid., Decker to Truman, Dec. 17, 1946.

Columbia University while in New York). Truman, noting that his attendance as head of state would be in violation of protocol, could not attend the ceremony.³¹⁸

For both leaders, the trips represented historic firsts. No Mexican president had ever come to the United States on an official state visit. The only previous exchange of visits between sitting presidents occurred when Porfirio Díaz and William Howard Taft met in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso in 1909. Roosevelt had met with Ávila Camacho in Monterrey during World War II, but Truman was the first to tour the capital. Even as the Truman administration aimed the majority of its foreign policy efforts at areas other than Latin American affairs (for example, the Marshall Plan to rebuild war-torn Europe, the Truman Doctrine to ensure Soviet containment, the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the recognition of Israel as a sovereign state), it nonetheless embraced its special relationship with Mexico, even if the rest of the hemisphere did not represent one of its highest priorities.³¹⁹ To underscore how important relations between the two countries had become, Secretary of State Dean Acheson recommended that Truman not plan to visit any other countries in the hemisphere following this trip, lest it seem that he was in Mexico only on a routine stop.³²⁰

Though both trips were regarded as highly successful, they were not entirely absent of problems. During the ceremony at the Estadio Nacional held for Truman, one woman and another young girl were reportedly crushed to death when caught in the chaos of the crowd. Five children also apparently went missing and as many as fifty were

³¹⁸ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 753, Mexico, Truman to Decker, Dec. 24, 1946.

³¹⁹ Ian Roxborough, "Mexico," in *op cit.* and Leslie Bethell, eds., *Latin America Between World War II and the Cold War, 1944-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992),

³²⁰ Find citation.

hospitalized with injuries.³²¹ The accident, noted in the U.S. news, went largely ignored by the Mexican press.

The process of arranging Alemán's trip to Kansas City produced considerable tension. One of the president's advisers, Salomón de la Selva, the brother of Alemán's personal secretary, Rogerio de la Selva, chided University of Kansas City president Clarence Decker for the informal invitation that he, along with Kansas City Mayor William E. Kemp and the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce,³²² had extended to Alemán. Decker's original invitation had offered Alemán a chance to see the heartland, to visit farms, and to increase goodwill between the two countries.³²³ A subsequent letter indicated his desire for Alemán to give his university's commencement address.³²⁴ The casual tone of the letter, though cordial, offended de la Selva. In an openly hostile response, de la Selva scolded Decker for his "preposterous" letter, in which he had offered to send a representative from Washington whom he did not identify to attend Alemán's trip. De la Selva implied that the letter threatened the entire trip and made him regret his earlier eagerness to go to Kansas City, since he had become the butt of jokes about the trip. He implored Decker to start over entirely, ending his correspondence by patronizingly asking if his instructions were absolutely clear.³²⁵

³²¹ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 88, March 15, 1947, Dwight Dickinson's Report for Ambassador of President's visit to Mexico, Untitled clippings, *New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune*, March 6, 1947.

³²² NARA, Truman Library, Personal File, 2766, Box 558, Kemp to Truman, Jan. 29, 1947.

³²³ NARA, Truman Library, Clarence R. Decker Papers, Box 1, Decker to Alemán, Dec. 26, 1946.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, Decker to de la Selva, Jan. 18, 1946.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, de la Selva to Decker, Jan. 23, 1946.

Their correspondence became more cordial over time, beginning with an apology from Decker.³²⁶ De la Selva even extended an invitation to Decker from the rector of the UNAM, ahead of Truman's visit to Mexico City, to receive an honorary degree. He also informed Decker that the Foreign Minister, Jaime Torres Bodet, would nominate him for the prestigious Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor the Mexican government awards to foreigners (Decker never received the accolade).³²⁷

Gradually the two hashed out the details of an acceptable compromise, reducing the original plan for a major event to a short, three-hour ceremony.³²⁸ Mexican dignitaries, including governors Eduardo Vasconcelos of Oaxaca and Adolfo Ruíz Cortines of Veracruz,³²⁹ did not attend as originally anticipated. Governor Phil Donnelly of Missouri came, but his counterpart from Kansas, Governor Frank Carlson, could not because of travel conflicts.³³⁰ An old friend of Alemán's, the wealthy Kansas City resident and Lebanese immigrant Nequib Simón, who had initially offered to pay the 200,000 pesos (about 41,700 U.S. dollars³³¹) to bring the 100-piece Jalapa Symphony Orchestra, the country's best, withdrew his proposal.³³² Decker also expressed his frustration with the lack of publicity from the Mexican embassy.³³³ Finally, de la Selva and Decker argued about the presence of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. While de la Selva insisted that the organization should not be invited, since its members were

³²⁶ Ibid., Decker to de la Selva, Jan. 25, 1947.

³²⁷ Ibid., de la Selva to Decker, Feb. 6, 1947.

³²⁸ Ibid., de la Selva to Decker, March 28, 1947.

³²⁹ Ibid., de la Selva to Decker, March 24, 1947.

³³⁰ Ibid., Donnelly to Decker, April 11, 1947; Ibid., Carlson to Decker, April 4, 1947.

³³¹ Martínez, *Border Boom Town*, 170.

³³² Ibid., de la Selva to Decker, March 24, 1947; Ibid., de la Selva to Decker, March 28, 1947.

³³³ Ibid., Decker to de la Selva, April 19, 1947.

anti-Truman Republicans and would thus contribute to an inhospitable climate for Alemán,³³⁴ Decker believed that while the members had conservative leanings, they in fact were Truman supporters.³³⁵

With arrangements made for a modest ceremony, a measure of cordiality returned, and Alemán arrived by train in Kansas City. This was due, de la Selva explained, to the fact that he feared flying and avoided it whenever possible. He did not deliver the commencement address, but instead received the small number of dignitaries in a small ceremony. At the event, Decker presented Alemán with twenty-four signed and original lithographs of scenes from Missouri and the rest of the Midwest by famed artist Thomas Hart Benton, a Kansas City native.³³⁶ Afterward, Decker and Alemán exchanged pleasant letters of thanks and congratulation for the success of the event.³³⁷ What had begun as a series of diplomatic blunders ended as a successful afternoon event that allowed Alemán to look beyond the confining environment of Washington's diplomatic circles.

The public optimism and ceremonial nature of both visits masked the behind-the-scenes stress caused by unforeseen circumstances such as the series of diplomatic mishaps with the Kansas City visit. The mainstream press in both countries, along with newsreels documenting the trips, emphasized the positive elements of Truman's visit, of which there were plenty. Nevertheless, not everyone offered such effusive praise. *El Popular*, Vicente Lombardo Toledano's pro-labor paper, cautioned readers against falling

³³⁴ Ibid., de la Selva to Decker, March 24, 1947 and Ibid., Decker to de la Selva, March 29, 1947.

³³⁵ Ibid., Decker to de la Selva, March 27, 1947; Ibid., Decker to de la Selva, March 29, 1947.

³³⁶ Ibid., Decker to de la Selva, April 30, 1947.

³³⁷ Ibid., Decker to Alemán, May 8, 1947; Ibid., Alemán to Decker, May 14, 1947.

for Truman's good-natured gestures, for behind them lay the same imperialist drive that targeted weak, semi-colonial countries, including Mexico, that the U.S. had demonstrated before.³³⁸ A cartoon by Martín Antoyo V. echoed this sentiment: Truman grins affably, while his spiraling glasses hypnotize those gullible enough to fall for his charms.³³⁹

This and many other cartoons captured much of the suspicion and cynicism surrounding the visit. Several of them pointed to the face-lift given to the capital prior to Truman's visit. The cartoonist Arias Bernal made several. In one, a portly woman dunks a young girl, labeled as "Ciudad de México," in a washbasin. Meanwhile, two working-class men in the background chat, one whispering to the other, "she's washing her face for the visit."³⁴⁰ In another, a beautiful young woman pouts her lips as she applies makeup. A portrait of Truman sits atop her table, and the caption reads, "I'm washing my face for Harry, because if I don't..."³⁴¹ The caption aptly conveyed the high stakes of his visit. A cartoonist with only the signature Gallo produced one image that juxtaposed what he labeled poetry and vernacular; on the former's side, we see a welcome sign and an official portrait of Truman; on the latter, a winking maid sweeps an unidentified but clearly undesirable thing under the rug.³⁴² Another depicts Truman flying over Mexico City in the Sacred Cow. A sign warning of hoof and mouth disease has been taken down, replaced by one offering him a hearty "Wellcome [sic] to Mexico."³⁴³

³³⁸ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 88, March 15, 1947, Dwight Dickinson's Report for Ambassador of President's visit to Mexico, Untitled Clipping, *El Popular*.

³³⁹ NARA, Truman Library, Political Cartoon Collection, Museum Collection, File 63-970.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, File 63-958.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, File 63-953.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, File 3039.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, File 63-954.

These instances of what is visible and what is hidden, captured in satirical cartoons and evident in surviving documentation about diplomatic gaffes and trampled spectators, serve as a metaphor for the difference between the grand gestures of symbolic diplomacy and the much more difficult negotiations that lay behind closed doors. Indeed, both presidents admitted encountering disagreements, though both turned coy when asked about the specifics of those disagreements, instead emphasizing that they would work them out as good neighbors.³⁴⁴ Both leaders put a positive spin on the issue of occasional disagreements, indicating that they embraced the shared optimism of the post-war period. Consequently, the visits produced positive results. For every negative cartoon published, a positive one reinforced the gains the two leaders had made. *El Universal* ran sketches of the various events of Truman's stay, such as his visit to Chapultepec Castle and the spectacle at the National Stadium.³⁴⁵ *Excelsior* printed another with Alemán dressed as a western cowboy and Truman as Mexico's equivalent, the *charro*,³⁴⁶ demonstrating their mutual embrace of the other's culture as well as the similarities between the two nations' traditions.

Since large diplomatic exchanges often mask the more intricate, behind-the-scenes negotiations inherent in international relations, gauging their long-term accomplishments is difficult. Nevertheless, the evidence of these two summits permits several conclusions. First, both countries invested a tremendous amount of capital and energy in making the visits a success, suggesting a mutual priority. Second, for both, the

³⁴⁴ Milton Brackers, "Truman, Alemán Find some Discord," *New York Times*, March 4, 1947.

³⁴⁵ NARA, Truman Library, Political Cartoon Collection, Museum Collection, File 63-959.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, File 63-956.

visit represented a historic first, meaning that the two countries did not undertake the missions merely to comply with a standing precedent of a courtesy visit. Third, the mutual exchange set the tone for relations between the two countries throughout and beyond Alemán's term. The fact that they occurred precisely at the moment of transition between World War II and the onset of the Cold War was no coincidence. Moreover, they produced a number of measurable accomplishments, including agreements on the direction of the migratory labor agreement and international credit arrangements. The symbolic benefits sought by both sides proved more important. Truman's visit produced a feeling of goodwill toward the affable American president and, by extension, to the Good Neighbor policy implemented by his predecessor. Alemán's trip allowed the U.S. public to see a Mexican president making an effort to improve diplomatic relations through direct engagement with national leaders and ordinary citizens of the United States.

Oil!

The 1938 expropriation of foreign oil interests was a boon for President Cárdenas and a victory for revolutionaries who had fought since 1910 to assert their nation's economic autonomy. In this sweeping act, Cárdenas resolved an ongoing labor dispute and made a profound statement of his country's determination to control its natural resources. Yet even though the expropriation represented one of the supreme achievements of the revolution, it became a source of frustration for subsequent administrations. *Petróleos Mexicanos*, or PEMEX, the public corporation responsible for

all oil exploration, drilling, refining, and sale in the country and abroad, quickly became a bloated, wasteful burden. As the process of import-substitution industrialization steadily necessitated more and more export earnings to offset the influx of expensive imported capital goods, PEMEX should have been in a position to provide those earnings. Instead, it became a drain on the federal treasury. For the new generation of leaders under Alemán, the expropriation's fallout presented considerable challenges to their efforts to adapt to post-World War II realities.

Alemán felt significant pressure on both sides of the oil debate. On the one hand, the expropriation represented one of the keystones of the Revolution. On the other, PEMEX's financial woes burdened his administration from the outset. Opportunities for foreign credit became available after 1945, but to access it, Alemán had little choice but to acquiesce to demands made by the U.S. government to open various sectors of the oil industry. This compelled Alemán to make a series of structural changes to PEMEX, allowing him to overcome the most daunting obstacle to his administration's efforts to secure foreign credit for a wide range of projects, especially in infrastructure designed to support its import-substitution and Green Revolution programs.

At the outset of his term, Alemán's government outlined a proposal to use foreign loans to pursue a number of important development projects, including making PEMEX a solvent public agency. The status of the PEMEX loan was bound together with a host of other development projects. The U.S. government also had an interest in creating in Mexico a stable oil supply, especially with the recent emergence of political turmoil in

Iran,³⁴⁷ and displayed its eagerness to invest in its publically managed petroleum system. Consequently, Alemán secured over two hundred million dollars of loaned capital from the U.S. Treasury's Export-Import Bank (usually abbreviated as Eximbank) over the course of his term.³⁴⁸ Nevertheless, in spite of the two nations' mutual interest in oil development and long-term credit arrangements, the road to acquiring that credit was neither certain nor smooth.

State Department and Eximbank officials were prepared to support an extension of capital for petroleum refining and transportation projects, but both expressed reluctance to provide money for the exploration, development, and production of new sources of oil.³⁴⁹ They had manifold objections. First, State Department officials considered private capital the most efficient manager of petroleum affairs. Secretary of State George C. Marshall, in 1947, pointed to PEMEX's own financial woes as evidence of this. Second, they expressed concern that new exploration and development would continue to exclude private investors, especially foreign firms, and hence saw little incentive in persuading Eximbank to award more loans. In this case, the economic benefit would be limited to Eximbank's interest earnings and would open little in the way of U.S. private interests. Third, they saw the potential for such an arrangement to set a deleterious precedent. According to their logic, if one oil-rich country could nationalize its petroleum industry, expel foreign interests, and then borrow substantial sums of capital from the

³⁴⁷ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, "Petroleum News for the Week Ending August 3, 1951," Latin American News Institute Associates.

³⁴⁸ NARA, Truman Library, John Snyder Papers, Box 48, Address to Mexican Bankers Association, Guadalajara, April 28, 1951.

³⁴⁹ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, Acheson to Steelman, August 26, 1949; and *Ibid.*, President's Secretary's File, Box 112, State Department Aide Memoire, July 6, 1949.

U.S. government to develop its public oil industry, then nothing would stop others in the region, such as Brazil or Venezuela, from doing the same.³⁵⁰ As late as 1949, Secretary of State Dean Acheson expressed this concern to one of Truman's aides, John Steelman.³⁵¹ From 1949 to 1950, these concerns, coupled with disagreements between officials in the executive branch and several prominent congressmen, held up negotiations for a massive extension of credit from Washington.

While Alemán's government had little trouble obtaining the relatively modest quantity of fifty million dollars in credit in 1947, this figure fell well short of his administration's original six-year plan, based on a proposed influx of 240 million dollars of foreign loans.³⁵² The 1947 credit went some distance toward that goal, and his administration was further bolstered by close to eighty million dollars coming from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development designated for the construction of hydroelectric and steam electric stations to generate and distribute electricity.³⁵³ Nevertheless, by the halfway point of his sexenio, Alemán was well off the mark regarding his initial objective. Thus, the two governments entered into negotiations in 1949 for a second loan, one that would be substantially larger. The precise size of the loan proposed by both sides ranged widely and changed periodically, but the State Department's disagreement with the Alemán government's plan to devote significant portions of the loan to the oil exploration and production activities of PEMEX ultimately

³⁵⁰ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, Acheson to Steelman, August 26, 1949.

³⁵¹ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, Acheson to Steelman, August 26, 1949.

³⁵² NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Memorandum, Marshall to Truman, Feb. 27, 1947.

³⁵³ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, Eugene Black to Steelman, Jan. 22, 1952; *Ibid.*, Press Release from International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Jan. 11, 1952.

brought the final sum down significantly. Moreover, the State Department's position from 1947 to 1950 was marked by striking continuity: both Secretary of State George C. Marshall in 1947 and his successor Dean Acheson in 1949-1950 expressed similar convictions and exerted substantial influence on Eximbank.

Negotiations for the loan fell apart on two occasions from late 1949 to early 1950, both at the behest of the Mexican government.³⁵⁴ Ambassador Antonio Espinosa de los Monteros formally withdrew his country's requests on these occasions after it became clear to Alemán that progress on the oil loan would require major compromise. Various internal and external factors, many beyond his control, made matters more complex. A rumor floated through the U.S. embassy in Mexico City that only two figures supported the oil loan within the Alemán administration – PEMEX director Antonio Bermúdez and Treasury Minister Ramón Beteta – and that they supported it only for opportunistic reasons.³⁵⁵ George Elsey, an administrative assistant to Truman, noted that Bermúdez never stopped angling for a loan specifically for oil, even after Alemán abandoned the unproductive effort.³⁵⁶ It is not clear whether or not these rumors had any validity, but they suggest a strong possibility of a lack of unity within Alemán's administration.

The same can be said for the U.S. government. A State Department memorandum noted the problems with the U.S. position within the negotiation process, identifying four related issues. First, some within the Treasury Department thought that the State Department was meddling inappropriately in a Treasury affair. Second, the over-focus on

³⁵⁴ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, Acheson to Steelman, August 26, 1949.

³⁵⁵ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 159, Thurston to Truman, Dec. 10, 1946.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Memorandum by Elsey, Aug. 9, 1950.

PEMEX's status as a public corporation was inconsistent with prior policy, given that the U.S. had loaned Mexico seventeen million dollars for its nationalized railway system with success. Third, the fact that the U.S. could give money for European reconstruction without the chance of repayment but could not provide a reasonably secure loan to Mexico also was inconsistent. Fourth, if the U.S. withdrew from the process, the Soviets might jump at the opportunity to provide their own loan, thus threatening U.S. interests. The communist threat seemed especially realistic since China had already established a steamship route to Mexico.³⁵⁷

The loan also found champions in other figures within the U.S. government. Interior Secretary Oscar Chapman implied that due to mutual interests, perhaps the two countries might work out an oil-for-steel arrangement (one that apparently never took off, making the public statement by such a high-ranking official perplexing).³⁵⁸ Congressmen Robert Crosser and Charles Wolverton, each of whom served at different points as Chair of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce (Crosser as ranking Democrat and Wolverton as his Republican counterpart), both articulated a desire for the loan negotiations to proceed.³⁵⁹ Crosser had initially called on the State Department to take on a more circumscribed role in the process.³⁶⁰ Later, Wolverton's eagerness to finalize the loan negotiations caused some problems, especially when Commerce Secretary Charles Sawyer, on an official visit to Mexico City in 1949, had to sidestep

³⁵⁷ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, MJC, "Mexican Oil Loan," August 17, 1949.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., "Petroleum News for the Week Ending August 3, 1951," Latin American News Institute Associates.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, Acheson to Steelman, August 26, 1949.

questions about Wolverton's vigorous public promotion of a loan.³⁶¹ Even though they occasionally clashed with White House, State Department, and Eximbank strategy (which appear to have been in virtual lockstep), the enthusiastic support from these congressmen probably did more benefit than injury to the process, considering the publicity that their support for the idea drew as high-ranking figures in the congress.

The State Department also used the negotiations as an opportunity to petition Alemán's government to address grievances from U.S. private interests. The most controversial case revolved around a decade-old claim made by the Sabalo Transportation Company. The firm, registered in Mexico but principally controlled by three U.S. investors – Sam Katz, George H. Morris and George Butler, the latter two of the Bank of New York – had been contracted by PEMEX's predecessor agency, Petromex, to conduct drilling operations in the Poza Rica region of Veracruz just prior to expropriation. Once the contracted operations began, Petromex failed to secure proper authorization from the Ministry of National Economy, thus delaying commencement of Sabalo's work beyond the 1938 expropriation decree. Following the expropriation, Sabalo received compensation of an amount that its executives considered to be a substantial under-estimation of its value.³⁶²

The company demanded 4.5 million dollars plus interest to end its suit. After being rejected by the Cárdenas government and subsequently ignored for many years, the Mexican Supreme Court eventually ruled against Sabalo's claims. With the resumption of

³⁶¹ NARA, Truman Library, Charles Sawyer Papers, Box 125, Charles R. Burrows to State Department, Oct. 26, 1949, Decimal File 033.1100/10-2649.

³⁶² NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 159, Memorandum by Elsey, Aug. 9, 1950.

oil negotiations in 1949, the State Department again took up the issue, articulating its official position that four million dollars represented a sufficient quantity to satisfy the company and remove any impediment to bi-lateral relations. The Director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Allen Dulles, warned Bermúdez that the case could hold up negotiations on oil. He asserted that he could use his influence with Assistant Secretary of State Edward G. Miller, along with his brother, Senator John Foster Dulles (both of whom were members of the powerful Sullivan and Cromwell law firm) and his friend, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, to push for a resolution.³⁶³

Miller's presence in the negotiations sparked controversy. Prior to his appointment in 1949 by Acheson as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, he had been an attorney at Sullivan and Cromwell. At the time, Sabalo had retained the firm, with Miller acting as counsel on the case. Several figures, including Congressman Wolverton, viewed his influence in ongoing negotiations with Sabalo a conflict of interest.³⁶⁴ Acheson disagreed. In response to Wolverton's claims, he claimed in a letter to Rep. John Kee, Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, that Miller had been properly vetted and had withdrawn all professional and financial ties to the firm. Undersecretary of State James Webb, in order to assure both governments and the press of Miller's impartiality, acted as the State Department's official representative in the negotiation process.³⁶⁵ This allowed the negotiations to proceed without objection

³⁶³ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, MJC, "Mexican Oil Loan," August 17, 1949.

³⁶⁴ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 296.

³⁶⁵ Archive.org, Acheson to Kee, Sept. 16, 1949, Accessed Jun. 20, 2011, at http://www.archive.org/stream/departmentofstatx2149unit/departmentofstatx2149unit_djvu.txt.

from Alemán's government over the personal or financial interests of State Department personnel.

The negotiations for the loan had finally succeeded by October of 1950. Mexico had rescinded its petition for a direct loan, along with its subsequent withdrawal from ongoing talks over the issue, replacing it with a request for a line of credit.³⁶⁶ The plan worked: the Alemán administration received a credit line extending to \$150 million dollars that would be allocated on a project-by-project basis, as opposed to receiving a lump-sum loan.³⁶⁷ This allowed the United States to refuse funding for PEMEX projects it found objectionable, and allowed the Mexican government to make any legal or operational adjustments in the event that it needed the money for those petroleum projects. Truman personally congratulated Alemán for achieving a massive extension of credit from Eximbank,³⁶⁸ and Ambassador Espinosa de los Monteros lobbied the U.S. government to avoid the term "oil loan," and to replace it with "line of credit," in Eximbank's press reports. This constituted an effort to emphasize that much of the credit was aimed at other constructive areas representing major advances in the process of national development, including agriculture, irrigation, hydroelectric power, highways, and railroads, and to avoid embarrassing Alemán.³⁶⁹ In a press statement, the Eximbank noted that the \$150 million credit line was an extension of the \$50 million already loaned in 1947, and that it was made on the basis of the prompt and full payments made on existing obligations by the Alemán government.

³⁶⁶ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 159, Memorandum by Elsey, Aug. 9, 1950.

³⁶⁷ NARA, Truman Library, Confidential File, Box 41, Press Release, Export-Import Bank, Sept. 1, 1950.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Truman to Alemán, Sept. 8, 1950; *Ibid.*, Alemán to Truman, Oct. 4, 1950.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Memorandum, Webb to Murphy, Aug. 31, 1950.

The difficult oil loan negotiations undertaken during Alemán's term exemplified the opportunities and challenges that both countries faced in the immediate post-World War II context. The U.S. State Department was actively involved in the negotiations, and its officials, including two Secretaries of State, considered the economic interests of U.S.-based private firms a priority. The presence of State Department officials in the discussions, especially in the Sabalo case, generated accusations of impropriety from Treasury employees, the press, and members of congress. Their concerns echoed the basic premise of various critics that the central function of U.S. diplomatic practice has been to promote a form of economic imperialism.³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the negotiations revealed that, far from existing in a state of dependency vis-à-vis its northern neighbor, Alemán and his representatives asserted their country's interests in a forceful and persuasive manner. Although they conceded ground on numerous points, ultimately they succeeded in getting what they needed out of the arrangement. In the process, both countries faced not only conflict with one another, both also internal disagreements about how to proceed. In Mexico's case, both White House and Embassy officials pointed to discord within Alemán's administration. On the U.S. side, Treasury and State officials jockeyed for authority in the proceedings, the former as the agency charged with fiscal policy, the latter as the guarantor of U.S. interests abroad. In sum, the proceedings over the oil issue functioned as a microcosm of the early post-war period, as the United States used economic diplomacy to affirm its leading position in hemispheric affairs, and as the

³⁷⁰ The leading proponents of this position, among historians, are William Appleman Williams, in his seminal work, first published in 1959; see Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988); and Walter LaFeber, a leading voice of the New Left school of diplomacy history; see LaFeber, *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad Since 1750* (New York: Norton, 1989).

largest Latin American republics sought to reconfigure their relationship with the United States to greater advantage.

The Bracero Program: Metaphor for Post-War Continuity

The Bracero program, signed in 1942 as a bi-lateral arrangement to send Mexicans to the United States to serve as temporary replacement field laborers, had originally been characterized as a measure that would end after World War II. Therefore, the successive extensions of the program until 1964, beginning with agreements that Alemán and Truman made in 1947, came as a surprise for many. The transformation of the Bracero program into a long-term arrangement reflected broader patterns in bilateral relations that occurred between World War II and the early Cold War period. Both sides harbored particular motivations for extending the program, and both presidents faced domestic pressures from groups representing contrary interests within the debate. Government officials and academic researchers, including prominent anthropologist Manuel Gamio, persuaded Alemán that the program afforded their country numerous benefits. According to these supporters, Bracero workers could go to the United States to learn proper work habits and to become familiar with the types of machinery being utilized in ISI and Green Revolution initiatives. While gaining these vocational skills, they argued, workers would also adopt proper habits of hygiene, savings, and household management.³⁷¹ The result of these temporary labor exchanges would be more productive

³⁷¹ Michael Snodgrass, "Patronage and Progress: The Bracero Program from the Perspective of Mexico," in *Workers, the Nation-State, and Beyond: Essays in Labor History Across the Americas*, ed. Leon Fink (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), 12-13.

citizens who obtained financial and personal benefits and who, in turn, benefited a growing, modernizing nation.

The program also allowed the PRI to establish and maintain strong bonds of loyalty from municipal officials, ejido leaders, union bosses, and low-level government functionaries, who could derive financial benefit from their participation in the program. Moreover, it could ensure the support of working-class constituents, who continued to be the program's most ardent supporters even long after the U.S. Congress unilaterally terminated it in 1964. In this respect, the Bracero program constituted a part of a broader effort to create an expansive, patronage-based ruling party. Thus, even as some decried the program's violations of basic human dignity,³⁷² Alemán saw it as a potential modernizing program while simultaneously recognizing that it could yield substantial political dividends.

Truman encountered an entirely different set of considerations. Following the war, he faced the task of choosing his side in the pitched battle between farmers, who complained of their considerable financial woes to justify their employment of migrant workers, and organized labor, whose representatives considered the Bracero program both an insult and a threat to U.S. workers.³⁷³ Politicians with constituencies or backers supporting one or the other side also attempted to compel Truman to adopt their point of view. Prompted by Ambassador Messersmith and others, the White House took the twin positions that the Bracero program could help hard-hit farmers weather the unpredictable

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 5, 23-24.

³⁷³ Hundreds of letters to Truman and other administration officials representing both positions are interspersed through the following files: NARA, Truman Library, Official File 407D, Boxes 1232 and 1233.

post-war economy and could help promote a positive understanding of the United States in Mexico. Thus, in their minds the program fit within the scope of the Good Neighbor Policy. The argument from its U.S. supporters was simple: by bringing laborers north, and by safeguarding them against racial discrimination, human abuses, and unfair pay through new legal protections that were non-existent during the war, Mexicans would be less inclined toward Communism at a time when anti-American sentiment was on the rise in other parts of Latin America.³⁷⁴

The Bracero arrangement endured long after the war. Officials created several major revisions to the rules that governed the legal entry of temporary workers into the United States. Both governments harbored suspicions about the feasibility of a fair and beneficial post-war guest labor arrangement. Several unexpected influxes of illegal immigration provoked concern among U.S. officials. In one dispatch, U.S. Ambassador Walter Thurston warned that the El Paso border crossing might need to be shut down due to an overabundance of incoming laborers, a concern reiterated by Senator Clinton Anderson of New Mexico.³⁷⁵ Similar frustrations over unchecked illegal immigration fueled political debate among politicians, labor leaders, and farmers. In 1948, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios even produced a film, called "Border Incident," that criticized government tolerance of large influxes of laborers who had not entered the country in accordance with the legal protocols of the Bracero program.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Snodgrass, "Patronage and Progress," 8.

³⁷⁵ NARA, Truman Library, Confidential File, Box 39, Thurston to State, Sept. 22, 1948; *Ibid.*, Official File 407D, Box 1232, Anderson to Truman, May 26, 1949.

³⁷⁶ NARA, Truman Library, David H. Stowe Papers, Box 6.

The U.S. government's attempts to ensure that Mexican workers received acceptable wages also provoked considerable debate. A 1949 law demanding that employees earn forty cents per hour met with scorn from Texas Governor Allan Shivers, who balked that the decision should be a state's right.³⁷⁷ By contrast, the editors of the *Brownsville Herald* argued that a raise in Bracero living standards would mean a rise in the living standard for everyone, since they participated in the economy as consumers while in the country. They also decried what they regarded as the false stereotype of the lazy Mexican, implying that opponents of wage guarantees used it as a smokescreen to hide their desire to avoid paying migrants the prevailing wage. The paper claimed that if their work ever flagged, it was due to their food options being worse than the "fish-and-grits diet of the deep South Negro."³⁷⁸

The concerns over illegal immigration, unfair labor competition, and wage parity compelled Truman to launch an initiative to study the question of labor. The effort began with the formation of the President's Committee on Migratory Labor in June of 1950, an idea that got mixed support within the federal government. The Departments of State, Labor, and Agriculture all supported the concept. The State Department took the position that the committee would allow the administration to consider total exclusion of migrant labor, which its officials regarded as a positive step, since they considered the Bracero arrangement a national embarrassment. Labor Department officials bolstered the argument, noting that whatever decision the administration ultimately pursued, the

³⁷⁷ NARA, Truman Library, David H. Stowe Papers, Box 6, news clipping, "Shivers Hits 40-Cent Decision: Believes Authority Belongs to State," in *Valley Evening Monitor*, Oct. 19, 1949.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, news clipping, "What! Forty Cents an Hour!" *Brownsville Herald*, Oct. 21, 1949.

committee could absorb some of the scorn from the side whose interests lost. Officials at the Agriculture Department not only concurred with State that exclusion should be considered, but also figured that the formation of a committee could rally public and congressional support behind the idea. The Justice Department objected, noting that thrusting what should be the administration's responsibility onto a committee could ultimately backfire on Truman, especially if the committee's plans were not economically beneficial.³⁷⁹

The political calculations behind the committee's formation reveal a deep concern among administration officials and advisers regarding its potential consequences. One internal memorandum, for instance, pointed out that if the committee were to uncover examples of negligence in immigration enforcement, it could cause embarrassment for the White House.³⁸⁰ Yet despite such risks, Truman formed the committee, whose members included several noted professors, along with the Archbishop of San Antonio. What resulted from the committee's proceedings was a series of recommendations to alter the International Executive Agreement regarding migratory labor, which the two governments first signed in 1942 after Mexico declared war on the Axis. The recommendations called for more reliance on domestic labor; legislation explicitly forbidding employment of illegal immigrants; improved worker housing; the upholding of a minimum wage; improvements in job standards and worker rights; and more oversight in labor management and contracting. The U.S. Farm Placement Service, a

³⁷⁹ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 407e, Box 1234, Memorandum, James L. Sundquist to Roger W. Jones, March 30, 1950.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

division of the Labor Department's Employment Service, would act as labor contractor and mediator in contracting disputes.³⁸¹ The U.S. Congress also voted in favor of establishing reception centers along the border to allow for labor contracting under fairer conditions.³⁸² The successful implementation of these recommendations convinced the Mexican government to support the program's extension.

The committee's recommendations generated the support of the Mexican government and of organized labor in the United States, the biggest domestic obstacle to a migratory labor agreement. William Green, president of the powerful American Federation of Labor (AFL), wrote to Truman to express his favorable assessment of the committee. James G. Patton, President of the National Farmers Union, also endorsed the committee's findings.³⁸³ Labor leaders were especially optimistic about a commitment to providing migrant workers a prevailing wage, since this might persuade farmers to employ domestic laborers instead of their foreign counterparts. Truman and Alemán exchanged a series of letters over the issue throughout 1951. Truman noted his desire to cut off illegal immigration and to reduce the number of incoming laborers. The problem with too many foreign laborers, he argued, was that it drove down wages and thus depressed across-the-board living conditions. After pleas from Truman, Alemán agreed to support the plan for six months.³⁸⁴ Approximately a year later, Truman and Alemán

³⁸¹ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 407D, Box 1232.

³⁸² NARA, Truman Library, Official File 407e, Box 1234, Committee Recommendations, March 1, 1951; *Ibid.*, Report of the Committee, April 7, 1951.

³⁸³ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 407e, Box 1234, Green to Truman, April 16, 1951; and *Ibid.*, Patton to Truman, April 11, 1951.

³⁸⁴ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 407d, Box 1233, Truman to Alemán, July 14, 1951; *Ibid.*, Alemán to Truman, July 27, 1951.

agreed that all immediate problems had been solved, and Truman announced his plan to request more congressional appropriations for the Farm Placement Service.³⁸⁵

Alemán only assented to an extended agreement after being assured that workers would receive equitable and humane treatment. Concern for worker mistreatment – a justifiable concern in light of the evidence – became the central preoccupation of Alemán’s administration in the migratory labor negotiations. For instance, U.S. Undersecretary of Labor Michael Galvin, who visited Mexico in October of 1951 on a goodwill mission, faced questions about an alleged incident in which Bracero workers were fed canned meat clearly designated for animals. Galvin responded that the problem was not a symptom of the failures of the newly constructed Labor Reception Centers. By attempting to deflect blame from the federal government, he tacitly acknowledged that the allegation of the incident’s occurrence was true. He elaborated that a local Eagle Pass judge, Robert Bibbs, who had been contracted to supply food for the center, had purchased the food from someone named Stafford (first name unknown), also from the town, who managed a food plant called the Unión Ganadera de Coahuila on the other side of the border. Evidently, he had also sold similar products as food for patients in an Eagle Pass hospital.

Galvin spun the situation to demonstrate U.S. officials’ concern with the plight of migrant laborers. He issued an assurance that all contracts with Judge Gibbs had been canceled. He also noted a similar incident in Piedras Negras in which U.S. authorities confiscated a shipment labeled dog food, which a supplier had sent to evade certain taxes

³⁸⁵ Ibid., Truman to Alemán, July 25, 1952; Ibid., Alemán to Truman, August 8, 1952.

levied on human food.³⁸⁶ The issue put a temporary damper on an otherwise cordial trip that included meetings with Nuevo León Governor Dr. Ignacio Morones Prieto, Labor Minister Manuel Ramírez Vázquez, and Interior Minister and future president Adolfo Ruíz Cortines.³⁸⁷ In his meetings and press conferences, he stressed his government's commitment to fair treatment. He cited the example of the new recruiting center under construction at El Centro, California, where Braceros would enjoy barracks designed to offer comfortable housing to 1,000 men, along with a kitchen to feed half of them at any time, ample windows, and the highest standards of sanitation and comfort.³⁸⁸

Alemán and Truman arrived at a series of understandings that improved the Bracero program and made it politically and economically tenable on both sides. Their mutual embrace of a peacetime Bracero program, originally a temporary policy to supply replacement labor during the war, enabled an agreement that managed to satisfy competing interests: in Mexico, the debate centered on whether the program represented a setback to the progress workers had made in the revolution or whether it provided an opportunity to make a working class better suited to new domestic industrial plans. In the United States, farmers facing a contraction in food demand and labor unions fearing an economy unable to absorb the post-war influx of workers, especially in a moment of high inflation, squared off on the issue of migratory labor. Through the course of their nearly concurrent terms, the two presidents and members of their administrations made the

³⁸⁶ NARA, Truman Library, Michael J. Galvin Papers, Box 8, news clipping, "Contratarán mas de 60 mil Braceros en 1952," *El Porvenir*, Oct. 3, 1951.

³⁸⁷ NARA, Truman Library, Michael J. Galvin Papers, Box 8, news clipping, "Cordial visita del sub-secretario del trabajo de los EE.UU. al gobernador," *El Porvenir*, Oct. 4, 1951; *Ibid.*, news clipping, *Excelsior*, Unnamed article, Sept. 13, 1951.

³⁸⁸ NARA, Truman Library, Michael J. Galvin Papers, Box 8, news clippings, "Inmediata Ayuda a los Braceros fué Ordenada," *ABC*, Oct. 24, 1951.

program mutually acceptable. Although the program continued to spark controversy until it finally buckled in 1964 under the pressure of union and religious opposition, the Bracero negotiations and the subsequent bi-national accords epitomized a period of cooperation and compromise between the two countries.

Protectionism, Free Trade, and State-Led Development

Alemán identified a major drive toward industrialization as one of his administration's priorities immediately upon taking office. Building on the economic and diplomatic gains of World War II, his administration initiated an industrialization program that was unprecedented in its scope. This economic agenda, much like the shift in U.S.-Mexican relations, simultaneously reflected major changes in international circumstances and the priorities of his generation. By the late 1940s, the major nations of Latin America had embraced the economic strategy of import-substitution industrialization (ISI), adopting protectionist policies to make their economies more self-sufficient and diversified. The geopolitical circumstances of the post-war period made industrialization efforts even more attractive, since the United States could bolster its commitment to hemispheric solidarity and defense through direct loans to Latin American nations.

The industrialization program of Alemán's government thus reflected a region-wide trend, but also represented the product of the Alemán-era technocratic generation. Alemán and other members of his administration, including Treasury Minister Ramón Beteta, based part of their planning on the success of the Tennessee Valley Authority

(TVA), a massive, government-funded project to increase energy production. Indeed, many of Alemán's largest projects, especially the Papaloapán and Morelos hydroelectric dams, were inspired by his visits to the Chickamagua and Wilson Dams of the TVA.³⁸⁹ More importantly, the TVA, an extension of the New Deal legislation, symbolized the possibilities of publically funded development within a largely capitalist framework. Indeed, the Keynesian-inspired policies of the United States in the 1930s, which used government investment to spur employment, stimulate consumption, and build infrastructure, seem to have made an impression on Alemán, who marveled at the TVA as a development model.³⁹⁰

The U.S. government supported Mexico's drive to industrialize through direct loans from the Eximbank, provided that it was done on what officials considered a sound basis with a minimum of potentially destructive protectionism. Several prominent officials gave their own assessments of their southern neighbor's efforts at economic development. In most cases, they asserted that the United States, as the center of a significantly altered post-war global economy, had a vested interest in the promotion of free trade. Commerce Secretary Charles Sawyer, in a speech to the American Society of Travel Agents during a 1949 visit to Mexico City, noted that trade between the two countries had exploded, but was also highly imbalanced. According to him, in 1938 the United States exported 62 million dollars to Mexico and imported 49 million. By 1948, the U.S. sold 520 million and took in 247 million dollars. In his speech, he pointed to his

³⁸⁹ NARA, Truman Library, Motion Picture Archives, Newsreel, MP 72-33; *El Presidente Alemán Visita a Estados Unidos*.

³⁹⁰ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 112, Memorandum, Beteta to Messersmith, Dec. 14, 1946; *Libro de Oro conmemorativo de las visitas de los presidentes Harry S. Truman a México y Miguel Alemán a los Estados Unidos de América* (México: Policía Auxiliar, 1947).

government's wish to keep tariffs low to allow trade in both directions to flow unhindered by tariff barriers, and to encourage more importation of Mexican products by the United States.³⁹¹ He noted that an increase in tourism, coupled with an effort to direct strategic materials to the United States, would help correct the trade imbalance. Nevertheless, he also cautioned that his country would seek strategic materials where they could be acquired cheapest, hinting that any extensions of special wartime arrangements between the two countries were out of the question.³⁹²

Sawyer's visit, while of course not as lavish as Truman's, included its share of fanfare. His trip included a large banquet, a private meeting with Alemán, a dinner hosted by Interior Minister Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, a trip to the pyramids of Teotihuacán, and a fishing trip on Alemán's private yacht in Acapulco.³⁹³ While in Mexico, he also visited Distribuidora Mexicana, S.A., the furniture and office equipment factory of Antonio Ruíz Galindo, Alemán's first Minister of Economy. Sawyer reported his positive impression of the facility: not only was it a modern, productive factory, but it also contained excellent worker amenities, including lockers, showers, gymnasiums, a swimming pool, a spacious cafeteria, and special buses to and from work.³⁹⁴ Ruíz Galindo, whose primary investments were in residential and commercial furniture, had earned a reputation prior to his appointment in Alemán's cabinet as a leader in paternalistic owner-worker relations.

³⁹¹ NARA, Truman Library, Charles Sawyer Papers, Box 125, "Progress in the Americas," U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Oct. 20, 1949.

³⁹² NARA, Truman Library, Charles Sawyer Papers, Box 125, Charles R. Burrows to State Department, Oct. 26, 1949, Decimal File 033.1100/10-2649.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, Burrows to State, Oct. 26, 1949; *Ibid.*, Sawyer to Alemán, Oct. 24, 1949; *Ibid.*, Narrative Account of Sec. Sawyer's Trip to Mexico, Dept. of Commerce, Nov. 7, 1949.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Narrative Account of Sec. Sawyer's Trip to Mexico, Dept. of Commerce, Nov. 7, 1949.

Therefore, the fact that his factory was selected to showcase the nation's industrial progress made sense.

The visit's only hitch came when one of Sawyer's assistants at the Commerce Department expressed concern over a proposed overnight stay in the home of Rómulo O'Farrill, Jr. The unnamed official remarked that while reception at the home of Rómulo O'Farrill, Sr., a media mogul and close friend and associate of Alemán, would be acceptable, a stay with his son would not be commensurate with the prestige of the Secretary of Commerce.³⁹⁵ A memorandum that circulated through the Commerce Department reported that O'Farrill was married to a daughter of Maximino Ávila Camacho, something that had slightly and temporarily decreased the prestige of their otherwise illustrious name.³⁹⁶ This minor disagreement appears not to have hindered Sawyer's trip in any respect, since a later Commerce Department memo said that the Secretary had an enjoyable stay at the younger O'Farrill's home, where the Sawyers even taught Mrs. O'Farrill to play Canasta.³⁹⁷

Sawyer's trip, and especially his public remarks, received wide exposure in the press. Charles R. Burrows, the First Secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, noted in correspondence to the State Department that the visit generated particular attention because normally U.S. officials only speak about ways to sell their country's goods abroad, rather than about how to increase a foreign nation's sales to the United States.³⁹⁸ Thus, Sawyer's assurance that his government would like to see more imports from

³⁹⁵ Ibid., Memorandum, Dept. of Commerce, Sept. 21, 1949.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., Memorandum, Dept. of Commerce, Sept. 8, 1949.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., Narrative Account of Sec. Sawyer's Trip to Mexico, Dept. of Commerce, Nov. 7, 1949.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., Burrows to State, Oct. 26, 1949

Mexico met with enthusiasm, a sentiment bolstered by his assertion that the U.S. population's love of Mexican art, culture, and life would help facilitate the process.³⁹⁹ In his view, the public's desire to travel there and the U.S. business community's desire to buy goods would go far in correcting the trade imbalance. Addressing the recent devaluation of the peso by the Alemán administration, Sawyer expressed confidence that this would further correct the trade imbalance.⁴⁰⁰ Mexico's ability to negotiate the devaluation on its own terms underscored the U.S. government's confidence in Mexico's ability to correct the imbalance. While Alemán had initially wanted to move the peso-to-dollar ratio from 4.85:1 to 8:1, the U.S. proposed 10:1. After successive counter offers (8.33:1 from Mexico, 9:1 from U.S.), the two governments settled on 8.65:1, suggesting U.S. confidence in Mexico's economic potential.⁴⁰¹ Finally, Sawyer emphasized the point that under no circumstance would the U.S. devalue its dollar, as the British government had recently done to the pound sterling.⁴⁰² Indeed, this topic reappeared several times during his visit, most likely because a move to devalue the dollar would reverse some of the effects of the peso devaluation and consequently contribute to the already considerable trade imbalance. Sawyer thus made repeated claims that his government had no intention of altering the relative value of its currency.

Numerous other U.S. officials mentioned their positions on the matters of free trade and domestic protectionism. Guy Ray, the head of the State Department's Mexican

³⁹⁹ Ibid., "Progress in the Americas," U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Oct. 20, 1949.

⁴⁰⁰ Armando Rivas Torres, "Washington Espera un Saludable Efecto de las Devaluaciones: Una Entrevista con el Sr. de Comercio," *Excelsior*, Oct. 22, 1949.

⁴⁰¹ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores, Box 7, Exp. 182, June 10, 1985.

⁴⁰² Leopoldo Ramírez Cárdenas, "No Será Devaluado el Dólar, por Ahora," *La Prensa*, Oct. 22, 1949; No author, "Estados Unidos hallará los medios para que los países escasos de dólares puedan obtenerlos," *Novedades*, Oct. 21, 1949.

Affairs Division, noted to Truman's presidential secretary, Charles Ross, that the United States fully supported Mexico's industrialization efforts, provided that the industry did not require what he called "exaggerated protection."⁴⁰³ Echoing this same general perspective, the U.S. Embassy's Economic Counselor, Merlin L. Bohan, noted in a speech to the Rotary Club of Mexico City that temporary protection was fine, whereas "excessive" protection would ultimately lead to negative consequences. The economy would flourish, he argued, only when a measured level of protection was applied to sound industry, rather than to the production of low-quality articles, and only when it did not contribute to especially inflated prices. He outlined a series of prescriptions for Mexico's economic development, including a recommendation to minimize government intervention in the economy.

Despite his stated preference for minimal government presence in economic affairs, he also acknowledged that a situation of total free trade was impossible at the present stage of economic development in both economies. He further asserted that nobody in the United States wished to encourage a "mercantilist" philosophy, thus indirectly addressing criticism of the uneven and dependent relationship that Mexico had traditionally experienced with his country. He instead argued that his government supported the buildup of machinery for power plants, cement plants, steel mills, textile mills, pulp and paper mills, chemical plants, and food processing factories, among others. Nevertheless, he also encouraged the Alemán government to concern itself with the health of what he opaquely called the separate external and internal economies

⁴⁰³ NARA, Truman Library, Official File 146, Box 754, Ray to Ross, no date.

(presumably meaning the export sector and its counterpart aimed at internal consumption), reinforcing comments made by Secretary Sawyer on his visit.⁴⁰⁴ In hindsight, the comment proved to be astute, considering that the over-emphasis on government-supported industrialization eventually led to a deep debt and balance-of-payments crisis throughout Latin America.

The Alemán administration's economic policies drew not only attention from abroad, but also criticism at home. Treasury Secretary Ramón Beteta faced a harsh reproach in 1951 from Gustavo R. Velasco, the head of the Mexican Bankers Association, at its annual meeting in Guadalajara. In his introductory speech, Velasco criticized the government's meddling in economic affairs, calling it "unconstitutional, uneconomic, and unproductive" and claiming that it contributed to widespread inflation.⁴⁰⁵ Presumably he was making a specific reference to the recent devaluation of the peso, though his critiques most likely applied to the administration's general ISI-oriented policies, given that protectionist policies for domestic industry often drive prices upward. Beteta retorted that the administration's policies were, contrary to Velasco's accusations, sound according to the evidence: national income had risen, taxes remained low, inflation was in check, and currency outflow had halted. He further asserted that a series of price controls ensured that the nation's poorest sectors would not fall victim to

⁴⁰⁴ NARA, Truman Library, Merwin L. Bohan Papers, Box 16, Bohan, Speech to Mexico City Rotary Club, Feb. 12, 1946.

⁴⁰⁵ NARA, Truman Library, John Snyder Papers, Box 110, Foreign Service Report of the Bankers Association Meeting, May 3, 1951.

price fluctuations, pre-empting criticism that Alemán's administration had not done enough for the poor.⁴⁰⁶

Beteta made similar explanations about the devaluation three years earlier, noting that it was a one-time measure to stop depletion of currency reserves.⁴⁰⁷ At the end of the previous year, the U.S. Treasury had authorized a transfer of ten million U.S. dollars to Mexico's Treasury for the cost of 48.5 million pesos in order to shore up its foreign reserves, prompting Beteta to issue some assurance to Treasury Secretary John Snyder that it would not become a pattern.⁴⁰⁸ Snyder, who attended the 1951 meeting in Guadalajara, praised the administration's successes in securing foreign credit and promoting economic development.

The drive toward a protectionist-based development strategy that relied on foreign investment, coupled with periodic crises that necessitated currency devaluation, produced debate and concern at home and abroad. Yet despite the significant disagreements that Alemán's economic agenda provoked, he succeeded in striking a balance between pursuing an inward-looking program of economic nationalism, exemplified by ISI, and engaging a free-trade based global economy. The balance contained inherent contradictions and necessitated compromises, but it allowed his government to pursue an industrial development program while satisfying the investment requirements of the U.S. government. Just before leaving office, Alemán hosted the fifty-four member countries of the Bretton Woods Accords at the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., Box 21, Beteta to Snyder, Aug. 4, 1948; Ibid., Box 21, Beteta to Snyder, Aug. 12, 1948.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., Box 21, Snyder to Antonio Espinosa de los Monteros, Dec. 22, 1947.

and World Bank, its central banking institutions. Snyder complimented Alemán on his efforts, noting in a personal letter the success of the Mexico City summit.⁴⁰⁹ The meeting symbolized the Alemán administration's achievements in defining bilateral economic relations that endured for the next three decades.

Conclusion

Alemán presided over a formative period in U.S.-Mexican relations. Free from the wartime constraints that limited the options of his predecessor, he made both symbolic diplomatic overtures and substantive policy changes that drew the two countries closer together. The Truman administration responded favorably. The foreign relations strategies that Alemán pursued were the outcome of a matrix of contextual factors, including domestic political pressures combined with opportunities to gain credit and capital from the United States. Those opportunities often came with demands, ones that Alemán met in order to see his agenda come to fruition. At the same time, the realignment of bilateral relations reflected the ethos of a ruling generation whose members envisioned their country as a modern industrial power. A closer relationship with the United States served as one of the means to that end.

Alemán deftly manipulated the circumstances of the early Cold War period to his advantage. Even as the United States emerged as a global superpower, its position of economic and political hegemony in Latin America was tenuous. U.S. officials relied on the maintenance of a hemispheric, inter-American alliance as part of the Truman

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., Box 51, Broadcast Transcript, ABC, Sept. 14, 1952.

Doctrine of Soviet containment, providing Alemán some bargaining power as he negotiated agreements on migratory labor, oil loans, and numerous other bi-national issues. Consequently, Alemán could carry out an ambitious domestic agenda while simultaneously building stronger relations with the United States. Other issues that had little relevance to his administration's political designs provided Alemán an opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to positive relations with the United States. The 1946 outbreak of hoof and mouth disease, a consequence of the importation of Brazilian Zebu bulls, required that both governments issue a swift and comprehensive response. The result was a process that lasted roughly the duration of Alemán's term in which scientists and officials from both countries carried out a two-stage response, first with a mass slaughter of cattle either located near the border or potentially destined for the United States, then with a vaccination campaign that succeeded in eradicating the disease. The cooperation demonstrated by both sides earned Alemán's government praise from the scientific and political communities in the United States,⁴¹⁰ which could only have helped his efforts to achieve positive bilateral relations. Through this and other efforts at collaboration, he and Truman resolved many of the lingering issues in the relationship between the two countries.

The two leaders, despite their progress in diplomatic and economic relations, did not succeed in resolving all of the issues that confronted their two countries. The case of Chamizal, a small spit of land created by a change of course along the Rio Grande that

⁴¹⁰ William Dusenberry, "Foot and Mouth Disease in Mexico, 1946-1951," in *Agricultural History* 29:2 (Apr., 1955), 82-90; NARA, Truman Library, Official File 395a, Box 1075, Mexican-U.S. Commission for the Eradication of Foot and Mouth Disease.

occurred after nineteenth-century territorial surveys had determined the exact coordinates of the border, stands as one example. Despite Truman's contention that a largely uninhabited piece of land totaling around one square mile could not possibly mean that much to either country,⁴¹¹ the dispute was not resolved until Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Adolfo López Mateos negotiated an agreement in 1963. The Alemán and Truman governments reached a similar impasse on the issue of civil aviation. Mexico demanded a monopoly on certain routes, stoking the ire of U.S. officials who demanded free competition, a demand that galled their Mexican counterparts, given the subsidies that U.S. carries received. Extended negotiations did not work until 1957, when the two governments reach a mutually satisfactory civil aviation agreement.⁴¹²

These issues, unresolved when Alemán left office in 1952, point to the complex and evolving nature of bilateral relations between the two countries. While his administration did not succeed in correcting all of the challenges it faced, and while subsequent administrations faced myriad other challenges, Alemán and Truman nonetheless set the pace for relations between their nations. The domestic agenda Alemán pursued, especially ISI coupled with the Green Revolution, relied on the supply of capital investment from the U.S. government, along with private foreign investment. This basic platform defined internal development policy, and consequently foreign policy related to the United States, through the 1970s. Thus, the domestic policy and foreign relations

⁴¹¹ NARA, Truman Library, President's Secretary's File, Box 88, Dwight Dickinson's Report for Ambassador of President's visit to Mexico, Memorandum, March 5, 1947.

⁴¹² NARA, Truman Library, George A. Brownell Papers, Box 1, Report on Mission to Mexico, 1948.

approach utilized by Alemán were mutually reinforcing and together defined much of the legacy of his generation.

CHAPTER FOUR SYMBIOTIC REVOLUTIONS: MODERNITY, MODERNIZATION, AND MODERNISM IN CITY AND COUNTRY

The ambitious public works projects undertaken by Alemán during his tenure as president form a considerable share of his political legacy. Stunning urban developments, including a sprawling university campus conceptualized as a city unto itself, an experimental suburb built to attract a growing middle class, and several enormous housing complexes designed to offer every conceivable amenity and service, collectively made a dramatic statement about the Alemán generation's vision of a middle-class oriented society. The development of the beach resort destination of Acapulco, fed by an efficient new highway from Mexico City, underscored this priority. By making urban planning one of its policy centerpieces, administration officials acknowledged the need to confront urban population growth head-on. Yet while these projects were unprecedented in scale and with few exceptions remain intact and functional today, they also masked a hard reality: that even as the middle class grew, working-class and other poor sectors grew far more precipitously. Consequently, the administration's urban planning strategies, which favored the middle class at the expense of the impoverished, became symptomatic of the widening social-economic inequalities that characterized the economic "miracle" of the 1940s through the 1970s.

Changes in land tenure patterns and production modes in the countryside spurred much of the urban growth that occurred beginning in the 1940s. Alemán embraced a commercial agriculture model and a foreign-born Green Revolution, seeking to correct insufficient production through mechanization and the construction of enormous public

works every bit as impressive as their urban counterparts. Powerful dams provided hydroelectric power and irrigated hundreds of thousands of acres of land previously too arid for large-scale agricultural production. Highway construction, along with the modernization of the railway system, further contributed to his administration's legacy of rural development. As in the city, these rural efforts were met with partial success. On the one hand, production of foodstuffs and electricity underwent a manifold increase. On the other, they overextended the capabilities of the federal government, contributing to inflated national debt and an overburdened national treasury. Moreover, agricultural mechanization pushed rural residents to seek new means of survival; new industry pulled them to the city. Ultimately, the shift toward large-scale, commercialized agriculture symbolized a moribund redistributive agrarian revolution.

Taken together, Alemán's record in public works construction represents both the supreme achievements and the disappointing failures of his administration. In one sense, these projects stand as monuments to an era of great optimism. The successes of new industries during his term, in areas ranging from steel to sulfuric acid to consumer appliances such as gas stoves, electric washing machines, and refrigerators,⁴¹³ gave Alemán and his closest advisers reason to envision a prosperous and predominantly urban society. Nevertheless, these successes led them to become trapped in a middle-class paradigm. Consequently, their urban and rural development strategies together created a cycle in which the material existence of the urban poor, whose ranks were multiplied by a

⁴¹³ During Alemán's term, steel production doubled, sulfuric acid output quadrupled, and many consumer appliances were built domestically for the first time; Frank R. Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 268.

stream of rural-to-urban migrants, was aggravated by neglect. Subsequent administrations were left to confront their plight.⁴¹⁴ In sum, these projects left a record of considerable accomplishments that nonetheless were incongruent in many ways with national needs.

The Urban Revolution

Mexico City in the Alemán era looked nothing like the present-day megalopolis. Smaller at the time than London, Paris, New York, Tokyo, and many other major metropolitan centers, it would not emerge for several decades as the expansive mega-city of the sort that has since become a common feature of contemporary Latin America. Still, the 1940s saw the beginning of a gradual process that transformed a comparatively small national capital into perhaps the world's largest urban agglomeration. Immediately following World War II, as import-substitution industrialization and rural modernization programs thrust people from the country into a new urban existence, and as the optimism produced by strong economic performance stimulated concomitant population growth at all social levels, Mexico City grew.

Characterizing the capital before the so-called economic miracle of the 1940s through the 1970s as a place of minor importance would be misleading. Mexico City had long stood as a place of great importance – as the innovative island capital of the Aztec Empire, the epicenter of the sprawling Spanish American colonies, and the showpiece of

⁴¹⁴ Disagreements over how to confront the booming sector of poor urban residents became one of the most contentious political processes in the 1950s and 1960s. A contest between the anti-growth, middle-class aligned mayor of Mexico City, Ernesto Uruchurtu, who despised squatter settlements and opposed subway construction, and the pro-growth, pro-subway President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, eventually led to the former's ouster in 1966; Diane E. Davis, "The Social Construction of Mexico City: Political Conflict and Urban Development, 1910-1966," *Journal of Urban History* 24,3 (March, 1998), 386-400.

Porfirian modernity. The 1910 revolution interrupted much of the progress made in the capital during the turn-of-the-century “metropolitan revolution.”⁴¹⁵ Across the nation, the material toll, seen as burned buildings and piled rubble, hinted at the extent of the human toll: approximately two million, about one in seven Mexicans, perished in the decade of armed combat.⁴¹⁶ The 1920-1940 period witnessed a process of gradual rebuilding punctuated by periodic violence. While peace gradually took hold, Mexico City hardly experienced an urban renaissance. This was largely due to the fact that federal programs and expenditure were directed at rural priorities, ranging from the quelling of the Cristero Rebellion of Catholic Rebels in the late 1920s to the massive redistribution of rural land to peasants a decade later. Not until the 1940s did the city again become the priority it had been in the Porfiriato.⁴¹⁷

Alemán inherited a comparatively lucky situation: a confluence of relative peace, social and political stability, and economic opportunity. These circumstances, combined with considerable personal vision and an administration populated by a new generation of ambitious leaders, resulted in an impressive program of urban development. The specific projects carried out by the administration produced a visible change in the urban landscape, and the vast majority of those projects stand today, not as monuments, but as functional aspects of the city. These projects reflected the social backgrounds of the

⁴¹⁵ Michael L. Conniff, ed., *Populism in Latin America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 6-7.

⁴¹⁶ William H. Beezley and Colin MacLaughlin, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 11; Amanda López, “The Cadaverous City: The Everyday Life of the Dead in Mexico City, 1875-1930” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2010), 121-144.

⁴¹⁷ The best description of the material improvements to Mexico City during the Porfiriato (1876-1911) can be found in Federico Gamboa’s naturalist novel *Santa*, first published in 1903. The novel contrasts the moral decay associated with prostitution against the visible progress of a city in its heyday; Gamboa, *Santa: A Novel of Mexico City*, ed. and trans. by John Charles Chasteen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

Alemanista political class, the opportunities of the post-World War II period, and, above all, the expectation that the city would be growing in the coming decades. Yet even if the explosion in urban construction was meant to preempt rising levels of growth, the specific strategy to do so was anything but predetermined. Ultimately, the pattern of urban development pursued by Alemán, especially in terms of major public works, came to reflect the priorities of his generation more than the needs of the majority of people in the city.

Alemán's urban development programs reflected middle-class aspirations and concerns. Projects such as the *Ciudad Universitaria* (University City, or C.U.), the *Multifamiliares Miguel Alemán* and *Benito Juárez* (large-scale middle-class apartment and commercial complexes), and the suburban Ciudad Satélite (Satellite City) showcased the president's grandiose plans to embrace not only a modernizing ethos, but also a modernist approach to urban design that drew influence from the philosophies of French architect and urban planner Le Corbusier. They, along with infrastructural developments such as the construction of the Viaducto Miguel Alemán (the large, circular viaduct that rings the Federal District) and tourist destinations such as Cuernavaca and Acapulco amounted to a strategy to lay the groundwork for what government officials envisioned as a middle-class, urbanized society. More than any other individual, the architect Mario Pani was responsible for the forms that the administration's urban development projects took.

Pani was the progeny of a well-connected family. His uncle, Alberto Pani, was twice Finance Minister in the 1920s and 1930s and a prominent associate of President

Plutarco Elías Calles in a period that saw the construction of numerous public works, especially an extensive national system of roads. His mother descended from a prominent Porfirian family that held on to its wealth and prestige through the revolution. Over the course of the twentieth century, Pani built numerous large-scale projects, especially in Mexico City, but his most productive years were under Alemán. Pani rose to prominence as one of Latin America's first disciples of modernism to gain international renown. A contemporary of modernist luminaries Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, the Brazilians most famous for their collaboration on the unprecedented construction of the planned inland capital of Brasilia, Pani embraced many of the principles of modernist architecture and urban planning, and his architectural vision of urban development flourished under the tutelage of Alemán.⁴¹⁸

The construction of the massive University City, arguably Pani's crowning achievement, signaled a shift in educational priorities. Since 1921, the Ministry of Education had oriented its efforts toward the creation of a universally accessible educational system with the goal of promoting basic literacy, cultural inclusion, and political incorporation (especially among rural indigenous populations).⁴¹⁹ While not officially abandoning the program of socialist education, Alemán nonetheless devoted far more attention to the university system, pumping staggering sums of money into the

⁴¹⁸ The most extensive information on Pani's life and work, especially the philosophical basis of the massive multifamiliares built under Alemán, can be found in the work of Graciela de Garay at the Instituto Mora. Her work includes written publication, oral interviews, and documentary film; see *Mario Pani, Investigación y entrevistas por Graciela de Garay* (México: Instituto Mora/CONACYT, 2000); *Mi multi es mi multi: historia oral del Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán (1949-1999)* (México: Instituto Mora/CONACYT, 1999), video; Graciela de Garay, "¿Quién pone el orden en la vivienda moderna? El Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán visto por sus habitantes y vecinos," in *Modernidad habitada: Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán, ciudad de México, 1949-1999*, ed. Graciela de Garay (México: Instituto Mora, 2004), 13-68.

⁴¹⁹ Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 4-6.

construction of the C.U. Various presidents, beginning with Emilio Portes Gil, who granted the National University full autonomy in 1929, had grappled with the possibility of creating a single campus to encompass the sprawling UNAM. Alemán's predecessor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, even expropriated the land and signed legislation authorizing its construction, but during the war years never found the resources to fund it.⁴²⁰ Alemán placed considerable priority on carrying out the project, however detrimental the financial consequences may have been.

Alemán secured the credit through the Banco de México, providing it directly to the university's rector, Salvador Zubirán, to expropriate the remaining land and build the site. Securing the land was the first hurdle, but the peasants who lived on it also had to be relocated. To do this, Alemán utilized a legal provision known as the *permuta* (literally exchange) to swap their land for an equivalent amount somewhere else.⁴²¹ The abuse of this loophole (which bears a striking resemblance to the eminent domain law in the United States) forced officials to revise it after Alemán's sexenio. Nevertheless, with this obstacle removed, the project proceeded. The leadership structure of the initiative emanated directly from Alemán, helping to ensure that his pet project moved according to schedule. Carlos Novoa, head of the Banco de México, served as the *Presidente del Patronato* (roughly Chairman of the Board), while another prominent architect, Carlos Lazo, oversaw the construction site.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ *Ciudad Universitaria. Crisol del México moderno* (México: Fundación UNAM, 2010), 83-84.

⁴²¹ Adrián Guillermo Aguilar and Guillermo Olvera L., "El control de la expansión urbana en la ciudad de México. Conjeturas de un falso planamiento," *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos* 6,1 (Jan.-Apr., 1991), 96 n. 6.

⁴²² *Ciudad Universitaria*, 90-92.

Lazo, part of the same generation as Pani, had originally worked at the U.S. firm Delano-Aldrich, which made its mark by planning several Tennessee Valley Authority projects. Despite an offer to remain at the firm, he returned to Mexico after World War II, where he used his foreign credentials to advance professionally. Alemán named him head of the C.U. project, reportedly to the chagrin of Pani, who had expressed an interest in overseeing it. Nonetheless, Lazo, as the former *Oficial Mayor* (third in command) of the Ministry of National Assets (*Secretaría de Bienes Nacionales*), took on the project, gaining a reputation for his paternalistic approach to worker-management relations. A staunch Catholic, he even held Sunday masses and brought in clergy and nuns to offer classes to workers. Following Alemán's term, Lazo was rewarded with the Ministry of Communications and Public Works, where he was instrumental in convincing President Adolfo Ruíz Cortines to finish the project, despite the increasingly burdensome costs it presented.⁴²³

The campus marked a radical departure from the previous installations of the UNAM, which sprawled over various buildings in the downtown sector. In contrast to the previous collection of buildings, the winning design by Mario Pani and fellow architect Enrique del Moral represented a major achievement in modernist architecture. The site, built on an extensive lava bed, contained not only buildings for the various departments that the university comprised; it also contained recreational spaces, residential dormitories, and athletic facilities, including the large stadium used for the university's professional soccer club, the Pumas. To this day, the shaded areas and wooded trails

⁴²³ Lorenzo Lazo, Personal interview with the author, Feb. 1, 2011.

make the university attractive to visitors, even those with no official university function. The idea of a self-contained and self-sufficient space, a kind of total environment that harbored facilities for every social aspect associated with it, served as a cornerstone of the architectural movement that Pani and his fellow Ciudad Universitaria architects put into practice. Pani, Lazo, and the rest of rest of the architects associated with the project also adopted an approach known as plastic integration, which sought to integrate the functionally oriented buildings with aesthetic improvements, in this case a series of important exterior murals and mosaics.⁴²⁴

Prominent domestic and foreign intellectuals participated in the opening ceremony of the C.U. in 1952. José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes, Angel María Garibay, Enrique Gonzáles Martínez, Manuel Gamio, and Jaime Torres Bodet were among the first to receive honorary degrees at the event, which was also attended by foreign scholars Norbert Wiener, John Dewey, Paul Rivet, Alfred Kidder, Otto Struve, and Jean Sarrailh.⁴²⁵ Stunning murals adorned some of the most prominent buildings, which tended otherwise to have austere, rectangular forms. Especially important were David Alfaro Siqueiros's mural on the Rectory and Juan O'Gorman's iconic wrap-around installation on the Central Library. Diego Rivera, the nation's best-known muralist, designed the mural adorning the stadium the following year. The campus also contained a massive statue of Miguel Alemán, a monument to his role in the construction of the campus. The statue, drawing controversy due to Alemán's ambivalent legacy, has since been removed.

⁴²⁴ Lorenzo Lazo, Personal Interview.

⁴²⁵ Miguel Alemán Valdés, *Remembranzas y testimonios* (México: Grijalbo, 1987), 320.

The project yielded unforeseen benefits as well. In the initial stages, O’Gorman replaced his original plan to install a mural with the idea of a mosaic. After securing approval for the proposal, Lazo asked each state governor to supply local stones. He received everything from dump-truck loads to shoeboxes full of rocks. The arrival of the stones became the basis for the first national inventory of its mineral resources. Another positive byproduct of the C.U. project came in the form of a reunion between Siqueiros and Rivera, who had been sworn enemies. According to his son, Lorenzo, Carlos Lazo can claim credit for reuniting the two muralists.⁴²⁶ In spite of his contribution to the project, Rivera nonetheless criticized the architecture of the C.U., complaining that the boxy architecture of the buildings gave students the feeling of being on prison grounds. He was especially vociferous in his criticism of the Rectory, which appeared to him to look like four serapes hanging on a clotheshorse, and the Library, which abandoned Le Corbusier’s innovative layered design to conform to the box-like forms of the rest of the buildings. On the whole he judged that the project blighted the pristine grounds of Pedregal.⁴²⁷

The fanfare of the new facility belied the controversies that spun from its construction. The initial project was not actually completed until 1953 (major additions have been added in subsequent decades). By that point, Adolfo Ruíz Cortines had become president, inheriting a shakier economy than the one Alemán confronted and encountering the overextended government that his predecessor had left him. As former Treasury Minister and *Nacional Financiera* director Antonio Carrillo Flores noted, the

⁴²⁶ Lorenzo Lazo, Personal Interview.

⁴²⁷ Alfonso Taracena, *La vida en México bajo Miguel Alemán* (México: Editorial Jus, 1979), 348-349.

expenditure from the C.U.'s construction contributed to the peso crisis of 1954, and the debt the government incurred (absolved only by decreeing the C.U. national patrimony) helped to precipitate the adoption of various austerity measures.⁴²⁸ Others complained that the relocation of the UNAM from its central downtown location to a more isolated plot in the southern margins of the city proved deleterious to the student body as a political force. More precisely, critics argued that students became more docile as an interest group because they could not organize and militate at the center of the city, where government offices were located and where their visibility would be greatest. The twin side of their argument was that the downtown lost vitality and resources when the large student body moved to the south of the city.⁴²⁹

These controversies formed part of the C.U.'s conflicted legacy, which in many respects is emblematic of Alemanismo. On one side, the impressive campus represented a monumental achievement in its scope and audacity. At the same time, it came at a great cost, prompting observers to consider whether the ends justified the means. Ejido-dwelling peasants, who only a generation earlier had benefited from land reform under Cárdenas, were relocated; students lost the opportunity to learn and organize in the city's vibrant center (and the downtown suffered concomitantly); and the public absorbed the effects of the costly venture over the ensuing decade. Apart from the problems the C.U. engendered, it stood as one of the supreme emblems of the time, in Mexico, Latin America, and globally. Simultaneously, it represented an embrace of modernist

⁴²⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores, Box 7, Exp. 182, June 10, 1985.

⁴²⁹ Peter Krieger, "Body, Building, City, and Environment: Iconography in the Mexican Megalopolis, in *Pictorial Cultures and Political Iconographies*, ed. Udo J. Hebel and Christoph Wagner (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2011), 410.

architecture and urban planning and a shift toward middle-class development efforts. Ultimately, it was the result of collaboration between the political will of Alemán and the vision of Pani and the rest of the architects who contributed to the project.

If the C.U. represented Pani's most expansive effort, then the multifamiliares he built during the Alemán years (as well as the even larger Unidad Habitacional Nonoalco-Tlatelolco, built during the 1960s) stand as his most direct attempts to incorporate the complete ethos of Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse*. In much the same way that he intended the C.U. to encompass the educational, social, and residential needs of its students, Pani designed the enormous housing complexes to contain commercial and social outlets. Within the boundaries of the complexes (the Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán still stands and is fully operational; the Benito Juárez facility was demolished after it suffered major damage in the 1985 earthquake), there were numerous social services, including schools, clinics and hospitals, and child daycare facilities. A range of commercial centers were also constructed, including grocery stores, dry cleaning and laundry services, butcher shops, bakeries, and banks. Recreational sites abounded as well. Community swimming pools and a full cinema (the Multifamiliar Alemán was the first in the country with a movie theater inside a residential complex), along with public gardens, whether for large parties or solitary walks, covered the grounds. Basketball and other sports leagues offered school-age residents a chance to socialize and exercise. Residents even watched games from the windows that looked inward toward the center of the complexes.⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ *Mi multi es mi multi: historia oral del Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán (1949-1999)* (México: Instituto Mora/CONACYT, 1999), video.

Pani intended the multifamiliares to function as cities within the city.⁴³¹ Aside from their innovative philosophical foundations and daring scope, they simultaneously came to represent government plans to confront expected growth and the expectation that this growth would occur in middle-class ranks. They immediately became symbols of the audacity of a modernizing government and exemplars of the progress of a modernizing city. If urban slums became the backdrop for films such as Luis Buñuel's masterpiece *Los Olvidados* and the ethnographies of Oscar Lewis, then the *petit bourgeois* surroundings of the multifamiliares (often called *vecindades*) served as the setting for films such as *Maldita Ciudad*, *La Ilusión Viaja en la Tranvía*, and *Amor sin Barreras*,⁴³² as well as Gabriel Vargas's celebrated comic series, *La Familia Burrón*.⁴³³ These large projects are among the most recognizable material expressions of the ambitions of the Alemanista politicians.

Pani regarded Ciudad Satélite (Satellite City) as the conceptual counterpart to the multifamiliares. The former was a city within the city; the latter, a city outside the city,⁴³⁴ but, by virtue of its name, one within its orbit.⁴³⁵ Alemán approved the plans for Ciudad Satélite in 1948. Residents did not begin moving there until the last year of his term, and construction continued into the late 1950s. In similar fashion to the C.U. and the multifamiliares, Pani and his fellow architects, especially José Luis Cuevas and Domingo

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Charles Tatum, "La Familia Burrón: Inside a Lower Middle-Class Family," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 4 (1985); Charles R. Wicke, "The Burrón Family: Class Warfare and the Culture of Poverty," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 2 (1983).

⁴³⁴ Garay, *Mi multi es mi multi*.

⁴³⁵ José Luis Durán Reveles, "Presentación," *Las torres de Satélite* (Naucalpan: Municipio de Naucalpan de Juárez, 2009), 7.

García Ramos, built Ciudad Satélite according to an experimental design that owed a great deal to various applications of modernist architecture. In addition to Le Corbusier, these architects drew inspiration from the Austrian-born architect Herman Herrey, who conceptualized an urban plan based on circular designs that prevented the need for interaction between pedestrians and automobile drivers. They also looked to Radbury, a city built in 1927 outside New York City, by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, the son of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright, as a model worth emulating. Stein and Wright, known for pioneering the concept of superblocks with so-called “green belts,” built their city to contain self-sufficient subdivisions.⁴³⁶

Le Corbusier, Herrey (who changed his name from Zweigenthal and worked in New York⁴³⁷), and the Radbury project all provided the influence for the design of Ciudad Satélite, located in the Naucalpan area to the northwest of Mexico City proper. Pani and his associates designed the city around large, self-sufficient complexes (*supermanzanas*, or superblocks) bounded by arcing boulevards. Within each, civic, administrative, residential, and commercial spaces formed a social nucleus. In cases where places of employment were attached, the architects considered them wholly self-sustaining spaces.⁴³⁸ In each case, the arcing thoroughfares and roundabout intersections made halting crosswalks and traffic lights unnecessary. This effort represented a practical application of Le Corbusier’s dictum of the “death of the street,” a function of his hatred for the seemingly disorganized, improvised, and confined nature of streets that cluttered

⁴³⁶ Xavier Cortés Rocha, “Ciudad Satélite,” *Las torres de Satélite*, 27-29.

⁴³⁷ Krieger, “Body, Building, City, and Environment,” 410.

⁴³⁸ Cortés Rocha, “Ciudad Satélite,” 29-31.

with sidewalks, cars, trees, and other things he regarded as disorderly.⁴³⁹ Just as large murals adorned the buildings of the C.U., so too did the planners of Ciudad Satélite employ public art to convey a sense of modernity and progress. At the city's entrance on the Periférico from the capital, the towers of Satélite, an installation consisting of five cement towers, alternately painted either in bright colors or white, greets visitors. The towers, designed and built by the sculptor Mathias Goeritz and the architect Luis Barragán, said much about the project and the architectural movement that underpinned it. The angular lines and bold stature of the towers prioritized confidence over subtlety, while the bold colors conveyed a sense of optimism. The simple forms, devoid of ornate decoration, simultaneously suggested unapologetic ambition and straightforward logic.

The austere character of each of these major installations reflected the inherently authoritarian nature of Le Corbusier's plans. For him as well as his disciples in Latin America, major urban architectural and planning initiatives, including the multifamiliares, the C.U. campus, and Ciudad Satélite, would ensure that order and rational planning overtook disorder and irrational improvisation.⁴⁴⁰ This ethic saw its maximum expression in the construction of Brasilia in the 1950s and 1960s. In both the Brazilian and Mexican case, the authoritarian nature of the architecture visually reinforced the equally authoritarian nature of the governments that supported their construction. On a more practical level, the projects also represented the priority of the federal governments in both countries to invest public funds in grand projects that, if not

⁴³⁹ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 109, 120.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 103-117.

aesthetically pleasing, were nonetheless impressive and that served both ideological and pragmatic functions.

The construction of the Ciudad Satélite marked the first major effort to use government funds to reduce urban congestion. Over the course of the six-year presidential term, the Alemán administration developed a political apparatus to study urban development issues and initiate planning endeavors. In addition to building the C.U., the mulifamiliares, and Ciudad Satélite, the administration devoted efforts to a number of other projects: during the sexenio, the Ministry of National Assets supported plans for forty port and border cities. Additionally, in 1952, just prior to his departure from office, Alemán also established the *Dirección General de Planificación* (Federal Bureau of Planning), which conducted studies related to electrification and the construction of communication and transportation networks.⁴⁴¹ Urban population growth and congestion, along with provision of adequate services and infrastructure, represented critical priorities, but the government's concerns did not stop there. Since one of the hallmarks of the Alemán agenda was to bring foreign commerce through tourism, his administration utilized its capabilities in urban planning to attract foreign visitors.

The project that drew the most international attention was the new sector of high-rise resorts overlooking the glimmering bay of Acapulco on Guerrero's Pacific coast. The city had long been victim to political and geographic isolation that gave local caciques extensive power, but renewed interest in the port during the 1940s prompted Alemán to

⁴⁴¹ Cortés Rocha, "Ciudad Satélite," 20-21.

make it the centerpiece of his extensive efforts to promote tourism.⁴⁴² As he did with the C.U. development, Alemán created a chain of command that emanated from him directly to those working on the ground. First, he utilized the Junta Federal that existed prior to his presidency, vesting it with increased authority to undertake urban planning to support the administration's tourism impulses. The Junta operated under the command of another modernist architect, Carlos Contreras, who had intended to create worker housing and facilities to support the burgeoning tourism industry.⁴⁴³

Second, he charged Ramón Beteta, his Treasury Minister, with appointing local kingpin Melchor Perusquía head of the Committee for the Material Improvement of Acapulco and as Chief of Maritime Customs. In this capacity, Perusquía served as middleman between the business community, the national government, and local residents. Officials in government, including Alemán and Minister of the Economy Antonio Ruíz Galindo, had considerable investments in Acapulco, making direct oversight of the project a logical priority. As part of the government's effort to promote the port's development, it awarded generous subsidies and tax incentives to a number of companies to build hotels, golf courses, and commercial zones.⁴⁴⁴

Again in similar fashion to the construction of the C.U., the process of development meant disrupting the lives of the rural residents who inhabited the land. In this case, the government utilized legal loopholes, especially the writ of *amparo*, to shield

⁴⁴² Stephen R. Niblo and Diane M. Niblo, "Acapulco in Dreams and Reality," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 24,1 (Winter, 2008), 33-37.

⁴⁴³ Andrew Sackett, "Fun in Acapulco? The Politics of Development on the Mexican Riviera," in *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*, ed. Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 167.

⁴⁴⁴ Niblo and Niblo, "Acapulco in Dreams," 38-43.

larger estates from being divided into collectively owned ejidos, and relocated existing ejidatarios who lived near pristine coastline to make way for high-rise resorts and the dramatic *Costera Miguel Alemán* promenade. Evidence exists that terrorist violence, including machine-gunning, served as a method of driving indigenous residents from the land.⁴⁴⁵ Moreover, police forced *ejidatarios*, many of whom resisted relocation, to vacate their land by burning crops and houses.⁴⁴⁶ As a consequence of these harsh measures, Acapulco shared with the C.U. an ambivalent legacy.

Acapulco represented a monumental achievement: a modern tourist destination that delighted domestic and foreign travelers with its combination of natural splendor and luxurious amenities, but also came at a high social cost. Many of the initiatives proposed on the behalf of the city and municipality's poor populations, including provisions of potable water and *colonias populares* (working-class neighborhoods with subsidized housing) for rural residents who worked in tourism, never came to fruition. As part of a broader effort to promote hygienic facilities, many local vendors' food stalls were moved to make way for cement facilities. Moreover, local fishermen had to move further off the coast as high-rise hotels began to dot the beach in front of the *Costera Miguel Alemán*.⁴⁴⁷ In sum, the effort to build up Acapulco was part of a broader effort to cater to middle-class tastes and aspirations, focus on urban development, attract foreign attention, and pursue projects of financial interest to members of both the private and public sector. As with development in Mexico City, its success belied the hard truth that such development

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 40-43.

⁴⁴⁶ Sackett, "Fun in Acapulco?" 170.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 169-178.

efforts contributed to social-economic inequality. Despite this uneven development, the city's heyday as a resort destination lasted several decades, during which time the jet-set destination attracted visitors, especially actors, politicians, and businessmen from the United States.

From Agrarian Revolution to Green Revolution

The administration's enthusiasm for urban planning reflected its broader efforts to create an industrialized, middle-class oriented, urbanized society. Industrialists, including longtime Alemán friend Bruno Pagliai and Minister of the Economy Antonio Ruíz Galindo, captained new urban manufacturing centers designed to give Mexico a diversified and self-sufficient economy. Their efforts made urban planning a logical priority. Nevertheless, major economic and social transformation was not confined to the urban sector. Rather, they were inextricably linked to equally transformational changes in rural areas, where the majority of the population still resided and where the largest share of national wealth was still created. The major transformations that took place in both the city and the country occurred in symbiosis, and therefore cannot be treated in isolation from one another. Rather, the dual needs of feeding a rapidly growing urban population and stimulating export earnings compelled the administration to embrace commercialized agriculture at the expense of continued land reform.

Alemán came into office at a moment when agricultural production statistics suggested a need for immediate reform. Wartime guarantees by the United States to buy agricultural products had expired and overall economic growth temporarily slowed. The

administration's rural development program was thus designed to correct these problems while propping up the rest of the government's ambitious economic agenda. Several of its components, including revisions to Article 27 of the Constitution and the adoption of foreign production techniques and capital, led some to accuse Alemán of undoing many of the central components of the country's still unfinished agrarian revolution. While his administration set aside many of the original revolutionary objectives for the rural sector, characterizing its actions only as an abandonment of the revolution oversimplifies the administration's plans and neglects to take into account various contextual changes that occurred over four decades.

Agricultural development after World War II, first in Mexico and later in various other parts of the world, conformed to what later came to be known as the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution had its origins in U.S. Vice-President Henry A. Wallace's six-week stay in Mexico in late 1940. During that time, he attended the inauguration of Manuel Ávila Camacho to demonstrate his government's intention to cultivate positive relations with the incoming administration, which promised to exercise more moderation than that of the previous government of Lázaro Cárdenas. Wallace, touring the countryside in his Plymouth, became especially interested in corn production. The deteriorating conditions he witnessed compelled him to persuade Nelson Rockefeller, then head of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA), to devote attention to the issue.

The Mexican Agricultural Project (MAP), funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1943, established research centers that

allowed U.S. scientists a chance to experiment with corn and wheat yields. A year later, as World War II drew the two nations together, the creation of a U.S.-Mexican Agricultural Commission underscored both countries' mutual agricultural needs. Through the 1940s and into the 1950s, the combination of research initiatives and the importation of hybridized seeds, chemical fertilizers, and mechanical equipment came together to form the first major application of the green revolution.⁴⁴⁸ U.S. researcher Norman Borlaug, who went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, along with fellow scientist J. George Harrar, led research initiatives to develop high-yield grain that was less susceptible to inclement weather or variations in ecological conditions. He gained widespread acclaim for creating a model for developing countries with hunger problems. His work offered a major corrective not only to widespread malnutrition, but also to the country's insufficient production of staple grains. At the same time, he gained criticism for creating environmentally devastating mono-crop agriculture that imposed a commercial agricultural model onto a country that had just begun to adapt to an ejido-based land tenure system.

The Green Revolution proved to be compatible with the Alemanista development agenda. Alemán laid the groundwork for his controversial agrarian agenda by eliminating, revising, or ignoring several components of the 1917 Constitution. Within the first days of his administration, he and his advisors virtually rewrote its twenty-seventh article, amending the definitions of medium and large property on various types

⁴⁴⁸ Joseph Cotter, "The Origins of the Green Revolution in Mexico: Continuity or Change?" in *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Postwar Transitions*, ed. David Rock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 224-240.

of farms or ranches (in every case making the requirement larger). This resulted in more property defined as smallholdings, which thus exempted more real estate from land reform. He also reinstated the rural *amparo* law, which gave landholders a writ to contest pending land reform, a legal provision they were eager to apply. For many, these two legal changes represented a drastic setback to the agrarian reform.⁴⁴⁹ If the Ávila Camacho administration slowed the pace of land reform to focus on marshaling resources for the war effort, then the Alemán administration discarded it permanently by proposing legislation that was tantamount to executive decree. These revisions to the previously sacrosanct Article 27 symbolized a broader shift in the mentality of the national leadership, from one that favored wealth redistribution and social justice to one that gave priority to wealth generation and economic growth. In simpler terms, the Alemán administration's officials adopted the mindset that the government could not continue to redistribute wealth until it created some first.

The showpieces of Alemán's rural public works projects reflected the global economic context in which he governed. Emboldened by the idea that his administration could replicate the successes of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Alemán invested in projects theretofore unprecedented in scope. Efforts such as the massive Papaloapan River basin development project, especially its new hydroelectric facilities, dazzled domestic and foreign observers. The Morelos Dam on the Colorado River and its attendant irrigation network that supplied water to new wheat-producing regions in Sonora represented the application of the Keynesian revolution in economic

⁴⁴⁹ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, Corruption* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources), 183-188.

management; government intervention, whether used to protect domestic industry, correct market imbalances, or provide infrastructure, could aid the development of an advancing capitalist economy. The Falcón Dam, a joint U.S.-Mexican undertaking in the lower Rio Grande Valley to irrigate crops, control flooding, and provide electricity, highlighted a new era in bilateral cooperation. New, expanded, or modernized highways, including the trans-Isthmian and Pan-American routes, connected the Atlantic to Pacific ports, cities to the country, and domestic markets to the United States. Alemán also adapted to the post-World War II economy by utilizing significant foreign credit and capital from the United States, and further underscored his efforts at U.S.-Mexican cooperation by adhering to a joint initiative to eradicate hoof-and-mouth disease.

The enormous irrigation projects in the country's north fed expansive wheat farms, including those that formed the nucleus of Borlaug's research. The effort also formed a logical outcropping of an increasingly prevalent theory that wheat represented a preferable alternative to corn as a staple crop, a position that was advocated by scientists in the United States and in Mexico. The anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who held considerable influence with Alemán, advocated a shift from corn to wheat consumption.⁴⁵⁰ Consequently, wheat production, especially in the northern state of Sonora, exploded in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴⁵¹ This process was further aided by the increasing perception, especially among elite and urban middle class sectors, that wheat represented a better base starch than corn. Consequently, corn consumption came to be viewed by many as something reserved for rural and especially indigenous populations.

⁴⁵⁰ Cotter, "The Origins of the Green Revolution," 235-236.

⁴⁵¹ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 31.

The embrace of wheat production, which formed part of an experiment designed to combat hunger but simultaneously and paradoxically was fraught with class implications, did not halt initiatives to produce more corn. On the contrary, the administration created a new agency, the National Corn Commission, to oversee production increases. Alemán appointed his long-time friend and associate, Gabriel Ramos Millán, as its director. Ramos Millán, a native of Oaxaca, thus coordinated the interactions between private landholders, ejidatarios and other rural residents, and government officials necessary to carry out increased corn production.⁴⁵² In Oaxaca's Papaloapan River basin, the creation of the Miguel Alemán dam permitted not only hydroelectric production, but also controlled flooding that could foment corn production (with the relocation of local peasant populations as the unfortunate byproduct). The development of the Papaloapan basin showcased Alemán's efforts to adopt a TVA-inspired rural development program.

Alemán's rural development program led to a permanent pattern of favoring large-scale commercial agriculture over ejido-based and other collective arrangements. By the 1950s, the Green Revolution had firmly taken root. Officials saw its potential in pragmatic terms, above all as way to increase yields. Their U.S. counterparts, eager to support the endeavor, saw its ideological potential; if it could help foster broad-based prosperity, then it could help stave off Communism⁴⁵³ (a decade later, the U.S. government would reverse its position, using the Alliance for Progress to promote land

⁴⁵² Alemán, *Remembranzas y testimonios*, 283.

⁴⁵³ Cotter, *Troubled Harvest: Agronomy and Revolution in Mexico, 1880-2002* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), 179.

reform as a means of pre-empting possible tendencies toward Communism that may have found inspiration in the Cuban Revolution). Its critics saw it as yet another form of U.S. imperialism eroding the nationalist gains – and the hard-fought material benefits for the poor – of the 1910 revolution.⁴⁵⁴

In either case, mechanized, large-scale agriculture became the basic operating model for the remainder of the century, dashing the hopes of millions of rural poor residents that they might be awarded ejidos. The policies of the Alemán administration produced promising results, as production both for consumption and for export increased. Nevertheless, those increases failed to keep pace with the importation of capital goods for industry. Moreover, the vision of the Alemán years, encapsulated in its grand public works, also gave way to a more timid development model under subsequent administrations. His successor, Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, postponed finishing the development of the Papaloapan basin, making the project a partially successful but ultimately incomplete endeavor.

Conclusion

The promise of creating a prosperous, middle-class based society motivated the leaders of the Alemán era. This vision becomes evident in the projects to which they devoted federal funds. The benefits achieved through these endeavors appeared immediately and in spades. Industrial production skyrocketed, while national electricity output tripled over the course of only six years. Beyond what could be measured in

⁴⁵⁴ Cotter, “The Origins of the Green Revolution,” 239-240.

macroeconomic indexes, these efforts projected a new image, both at home and abroad, of a rapidly developing nation. The initiatives to build public works and infrastructure made an unmistakable statement that these leaders envisioned a modern society capable of producing manufactured goods and raw materials to satisfy both domestic consumption and foreign export needs.

Of course, the results of the Alemanista development scheme do not stop there. Many of the positive effects, in fact, were eventually overshadowed by the negative outcomes, with some appearing much later. First, officials committed excesses at various levels. Alemán, who had major investments in urban industries and real estate in Acapulco and Ciudad Satélite, benefited financially from such policies. Many others in his administration followed suit. Second, the financial costs of the policies created long-term problems. Low levels of taxation, designed as incentives for industry, combined with rampant spending to strain the economy, and much of the Alemanista development agenda was financed by debt. Together, these forces helped spur the devastating peso devaluation of 1954.⁴⁵⁵ Alemán, having been out of office for two years, was shielded from much of the blame.

The Alemán generation's combination of vision, ambition, hubris, and greed fueled these initiatives. Ultimately, they symbolized both the positive gains and negative outcomes of the so-called economic miracle of the second half of the twentieth century. On one side, economic growth, industrial and urban development, and agricultural modernization suggested that Mexico had begun to emerge as a middle power. At the

⁴⁵⁵ Davis, "The Social Construction of Mexico City," 384.

same time, new urban migrants set up squatter settlements and filed into slums, while ejidatarios on the outskirts of Mexico City were forced to swap their land for equivalent acreage elsewhere to make way for *Ciudad Universitaria* and wealthy neighborhoods such as Luis Barragán's hyper-modern Jardines del Pedregal. Collectively, these phenomena reveal more than an ugly side to the economic miracle; they demonstrate the staggering obstacles to achieving a middle-class oriented society through rapid industrialization, urbanization, and agrarian modernization, and the high social cost of implementing such a transformative agenda so quickly.

Yet this partial failure to achieve in full the construction of a modern, middle-class oriented nation, founded on the twin pillars of broad-based prosperity and opportunity for social advancement, should not be construed to mean total failure, nor should it suggest a lack of substantive or positive change. On the contrary, the country changed in visible, even palpable ways, and much of that change came about due to policymaking that reflected the collective experiences of those at the top. Those decisions affected not only the structure of the economy or the functions of the state, both representing somewhat abstract concepts. Rather, they altered the way people lived in the everyday, in rural and in urban settings, irrespective of social class. They transformed the way the nation looked, both to citizens and outsiders, and together constituted a statement about these leaders' complete vision of their society, however incomplete the results may have been.

CHAPTER FIVE
AN UNEASY ALLIANCE: THE TWILIGHT OF ALEMANISMO,
THE SELECTION OF RUÍZ CORTINES, AND THE ELECTION OF 1952

The Alemán administration's policies provoked considerable political opposition, beginning with Vicente Lombardo Toledano's move to form the *Partido Popular* (Popular Party, or PP) in 1947. He was joined on the left by numerous well-known and celebrated personalities, including the muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, along with prominent intellectuals Narciso Bassols, Alejandro Gómez Arias, Andrés Henestrosa, and Salvador Novo.⁴⁵⁶ These individuals and their political allies, including immigrants, embassy officials, and other foreigners from Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, and Spain,⁴⁵⁷ became increasingly attracted to Soviet-styled communism and the Socialist International.⁴⁵⁸ On the other side of the political and ideological spectrum, the *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party, or PAN), led by former Banco de México Director and UNAM Rector Manuel Gómez Morín, clarified its identity as a genuine political party, rather than as a Catholic-oriented social reformist

⁴⁵⁶ Many of these people had personal and professional association with Alemán that extended to his school days in the 1920s; Henestrosa and Gómez Arias had been schoolmates, while Bassols had served as one of his professors; Novo, the famed chronicler of Mexico City and consummate man about town, served as the first director of the *Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes*, created by the Alemán administration. AGN, *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (hereafter DFS), Exp. 327, Leg. 1, (Expediente Vicente Lombardo Toledano, hereafter VLT), Leadership of Partido Popular, Apr. 29, 1948.

⁴⁵⁷ The government in exile of Republican Spain existed first in Mexico City until 1946, before moving to Paris. The government of Lázaro Cárdenas extended it recognition, and numerous exiles permanently established themselves in Mexico.

⁴⁵⁸ AGN, DFS, VLT, "Personas que se sabe militan y hacen propaganda en favor del Partido Comunista," Mar. 26, 1947; *Ibid.*, Report on foreign agents to DFS, Sept. 20, 1947; *Ibid.*, Report on "Amigos de la U.R.S.S." to DFS, Nov. 13, 1947; *Ibid.*, Memorandum on CROM, Dec. 29, 1949.

organization.⁴⁵⁹ Indeed, the PAN increasingly came to reflect the characteristics of Christian democratic parties common in the region and globally.

The two parties attempted to attack the PRI's political hegemony from two opposing ideological poles. The inherent brilliance of the PRI's structure was that it incorporated the majority of the population through its various sector-based organizations, making it difficult for opposition parties to become anything more than fringe movements. Thus, in spite of across-the-board complaints about the Alemán administration, especially rising costs for basic goods and increased tolerance of corruption, his regime for the most part generated tacit popular approval, if not profuse enthusiasm.

Neither the PP nor the PAN, despite being headed by two of the country's leading intellectuals (both of whom had long-standing associations with Alemán), succeeded in gaining much traction in the 1952 election. Surprisingly, the only candidacy that emerged to offer something even approaching a viable alternative to the official party was that of a decorated revolutionary general who used his military credentials to discredit the official candidate. The contest between Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, a long-time Alemán underling, and Miguel Henríquez Guzmán, a former Carrancista, provided a litmus test of the public's overall satisfaction with the Alemanista regime and its results. Ruíz Cortines won with little trouble. His colorless personality and reputation as a relatively unambitious candidate offered the perfect antidote to the excesses associated with Alemán. His win also confirmed that the PRI, as a civilian-controlled, corporatist party, did not face the

⁴⁵⁹ Archivo Manuel Gómez Morín (hereafter MGM), Exp. 172, F26, Manuel Gómez Morín, Acción Nacional Memorandum, Aug. 6, 1948.

threat of destabilization or overthrow from political parties representing either the extreme left or right, nor from the military. The 1952 election, as an affirmation of the public's overall approval of Alemán, thus hinted at the kind of legacy that he would leave as he moved into his post-presidential career.

Political Opposition and Public Opinion, 1948-1952

The Alemán administration grew adept at handling the presence of formal opposition, in part due to increased surveillance and intelligence gathering from both the Interior Ministry's *Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales* (DGIPS) and the newly created *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS), which operated under the direct authority of the president. The increasingly professionalized and politicized domestic intelligence community produced voluminous documentation full of information on the activities of the political opposition and, equally important, how the regime viewed that activity. This coordinated, efficient intelligence service provided administration officials information on what opposition leaders were saying, and where and to whom they were saying them.⁴⁶⁰ The intelligence-gathering services reflected the context of the Cold War, especially in matters concerning the activities of known or suspected members of the Communist Party. The administration kept especially close tabs on Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who formed the PP after being ousted from the CTM leadership during the so-called *charrazo* of 1947-1948. Lombardo Toledano proclaimed that he intended his new party to critique the regime, rather than strictly to

⁴⁶⁰ Aaron W. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 11.

oppose it or condemn its actions.⁴⁶¹ He further noted that the purpose of the party was to contribute to democratic, civic life, making a point to emphasize that he admired many things about the Alemán administration.⁴⁶² To that end, he formed the *Universidad Obrera* (Workers University) to promote cultural and educational advances for the working class.⁴⁶³

The regime, despite Lombardo Toledano's attempt at conciliatory rhetoric, regarded the PP and its leadership as threatening. PRI President Rafael Sánchez Taboada, a general to whom Lombardo Toledano referred as a "leper" and a "lunatic,"⁴⁶⁴ was especially vitriolic in his anti-PP rhetoric. It is possible that it was this hostile response that compelled Lombardo Toledano to run for president as the PP candidate, rather than continue on as the head of an organization designed merely to nudge the official party in its preferred direction. In either case, the relationship between the PRI and the opposition parties set the stage for the contest of 1952. Germán Parra, a former Undersecretary of Economy who served as an informant to the U.S. Embassy, accused the administration of conducting surveillance on anyone deemed suspicious, including not only himself, but also Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho.⁴⁶⁵ Reports filed at the DFS by one of its agents, Arturo Schick G., tracked the activity of Cárdenas.⁴⁶⁶ His report was one of several from 1948 onward that expressed suspicions about Cárdenas's plans to topple Alemán. While

⁴⁶¹ NARA, State Department Record Group 59, Decimal File 812.00 (hereafter RG 59, Series 812.00), Political Conditions, Nov. 16-Dec. 15, 1948, 812.00/12-2748; AGN, DFS, VLT, Speech by Lombardo Toledano, June 23, 1950.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ NARA, RG 59, Series 812.00, Memorandum of Conversation between Germán Parra and Harry Turkel, 812.00/11-3048.

⁴⁶⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 90, Leg. 1 (Expediente Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, hereafter LCR), Report to DFS from Schick, Aug. 6, 1948.

Schick alleged a conspiracy between Cárdenas and Lombardo Toledano, others suggested a joint effort by Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho to launch a coup d'état⁴⁶⁷; others proposed that Cárdenas would lead a coalition of former military officials to overthrow the president.⁴⁶⁸ These sorts of rumors, which reflected the paranoid global culture of the Cold War, framed political debate as the 1952 election neared.

The 1952 presidential contest, and more precisely the other candidacies that it inspired, foretold at least part of Alemán's legacy. As in 1946, various opponents emerged to challenge the legitimacy, if not the formal claim to power, of the official party's candidate. Unlike 1946, the most formidable challenge to the official candidate did not come from within the civilian establishment, but from the military. Miguel Henríquez Guzmán, who had flirted with the idea of a run in 1946, formed the *Federación de Partidos del Pueblo Mexicano* (FPPM) to oppose Alemán's chosen successor. Reports filed at both the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS) and the U.S. Embassy were rife with the suggestion that Henríquez was the favorite of Cárdenas.⁴⁶⁹ Several memoranda went so far as to suggest that Cárdenas and Alemán had hammered out a deal as early as 1946 that Henríquez would be the candidate.⁴⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the reports must be regarded with skepticism, since as early as 1948 they made repeated claims that Cárdenas (conspiring with either Ávila Camacho, Lombardo Toledano, or a coalition of military officers) sought to overthrow Alemán. Cárdenas, while undoubtedly

⁴⁶⁷ AGN, DFS, LCR, Memorandum, Feb. 28, 1951.

⁴⁶⁸ AGN, DFS, LCR, Tomás Fabregas V. to DFS, May 3, 1948; *Ibid.*, DFS Memorandum, Aug. 9, 1948; NARA, RG 59, Series 712.00, Guy Ray to State Department, April 25, 1950, 712.00/4-1850.

⁴⁶⁹ AGN, DFS, LCR, DFS Memorandum, Aug. 15, 1950; NARA, RG 59, Series 712.00, William R. Laidlaw, Second Secretary of Embassy, to State Department, April 18, 1950, 712.00/4-2550.

⁴⁷⁰ AGN, DFS, LCR, Memorandum, Feb. 28, 1951; *Ibid.*, Memorandum, May 30, 1952.

influential behind the scenes as the leading figure of the left wing within the Revolutionary Family, always gave his support to the official candidate in public statements.

Beyond Henríquez, several others threw their hats in the ring as presidential candidates. First, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, despite the decline in his influence under Alemán, competed against the official candidate. Second, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), first formed in 1939, floated its first presidential candidate, Efraín González Luna, a co-founder of the party. Though the membership of the still inchoate PAN encouraged its other co-founder, Manuel Gómez Morín, to run, he declined, leaving the intellectually bright but rhetorically uninspiring González Luna as the only plausible choice.⁴⁷¹ Third, Cándido Aguilar, another former Carrancista general who had been instrumental in Alemán's early career, also declared his early candidacy after a period of putting distance between himself and Alemán.⁴⁷² In a fashion typical of elections during the sexenio cycle, the president attempted to quell the blatant *futurismos* of the candidates with little success.

Alemán benefited from a short-lived effort, officially launched from outside his administration but likely encouraged by several of its officials, to persuade him to run for re-election.⁴⁷³ Whispers about the possibility of Alemán remaining in office joined the chorus of rumors that characterized this and most other electoral cycles. Alemán's son, Miguel Alemán Velasco, claims that the idea came from Rogerio de la Selva, Alemán's

⁴⁷¹ Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 225.

⁴⁷² AGN, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (hereafter DGIPS), Memorandum, Nov. 1, 1950.

⁴⁷³ NARA, RG 59, Series 712.00, Charles R. Burrows, First Secretary of Embassy, to State Department, July 19, 1950, 712.00/7-1950.

long-time presidential secretary (an influential position that bears similarity to the U.S. president's chief of staff). According to him, de la Selva did not want him to run for another six-year term, but rather to prolong his term for a shorter (though undefined) period, thus avoiding constitutional limitations on re-election.⁴⁷⁴ Former administration officials and personal friends commented that Alemán never wanted re-election, and never said or did anything publicly to perpetuate talk of the possibility of staying in office.⁴⁷⁵ Nevertheless, he certainly appears to have harnessed the speculation to his advantage. Ernesto Uruchurtu, the Minister of the Interior at the time of election, suggested that the re-election talk allowed Alemán to maintain political control until the end of his term, reducing the lame-duck period of sharply diminished influence that characterizes the last phase of most presidencies.⁴⁷⁶

He also used it to forestall the inevitable onset of *futurismos* within the party. At the same time that the campaigns of opposition candidates were well underway, Alemán maneuvered to get his own candidate through. Rumors swirled regarding his likely choice. Even decades later, Alemán's former colleagues harbored their own theories about who had actually been Alemán's personal preference. Many suggested Fernando Casas Alemán, the Mexico City mayor who had also served as interim governor of Veracruz when Alemán left in 1939 and who had accumulated considerable influence over unions within the city; others suggested Gabriel Ramos Millán (the head of the National Corn Commission, whose death in a plane crash precluded the possibility of a

⁴⁷⁴ FMA, Testimonio del Lic. Miguel Alemán Velasco, Box 9, Exp. 243, March 29, 1985.

⁴⁷⁵ NARA, RG 59, Series 712.00, "Further Discussion of Re-election and Futuristic Activities, 712.00/7-2850.

⁴⁷⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Ernesto Uruchurtu, Box 10, Exp. 267, April 25, 1985.

presidential run), who had been as close personally as he had been professionally with Alemán⁴⁷⁷; others pointed to Ruíz Cortines, the honest but colorless man heading the Interior Ministry; others looked to Treasury Minister Ramón Beteta, one of Alemán's trusted economic advisors and one of the first technocratic leaders in the political system. The list of names was long: Héctor Pérez Martínez (Alemán's first Interior Minister and former Governor of Campeche), Raúl López Sánchez (Governor of Coahuila and later Navy Secretary), and Nazario Ortiz Garza (Alemán's Agriculture Minister and former Coahuila Governor) were mentioned as well.⁴⁷⁸ Even Antonio Carrillo Flores, a trusted economic advisor to Alemán as his Director of *Nacional Financiera* and Beteta's successor as Treasury Minister under Ruíz Cortines, claimed that Alemán once told him he could be president if he so desired. His reply to Alemán was that he was a technocrat, not a politician. He further protested that even though he knew influential people (ranging from the Rockefellers to the head of the International Monetary Fund), he did not know the right people, such as governors and union leaders, to win the presidency.⁴⁷⁹

Conventional wisdom holds that Casas Alemán was Alemán's top choice, but that his public image as being too corrupt and too confident that he would be chosen⁴⁸⁰ made him unacceptable both to the public, to other voices within the party, and eventually to Alemán. Casas Alemán had apparently secured the informal support of the CNOP, while Ruíz Cortines had captured the CTM's approval. Domestic intelligence and foreign reports also suggested that Cárdenas, and possibly also Ávila Camacho, had leaned on

⁴⁷⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Roberto Barrios, Box 9, Exp. 241, July 7, 1986.

⁴⁷⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Fernando Román Lugo, Box 8, Exp. 209, May 29, 1985.

⁴⁷⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores, Box 7, Exp. 182, June 10, 1985.

⁴⁸⁰ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, Corruption* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 238.

Alemán to go with Ruíz Cortines, something Alemán ultimately accepted. Certainly the possibility exists that Alemán wanted Ruíz Cortines all along and used the talk of Casas Alemán to give the appearance that he had accepted a compromise.⁴⁸¹ The most pressing concern with Ruíz Cortines had nothing to do with his abilities or loyalty, but rather with his health.⁴⁸² Known to some as the “viejito” (the old man) or the “calavera” (skullface), his health was rumored to be quite poor, something aggravated by his heavy smoking. His grey complexion and phlegmatic personality only bolstered preoccupations that he might die in office.⁴⁸³ Alemán’s daughter perhaps described him best as “gloomy.”⁴⁸⁴ These traits contrasted sharply with Alemán’s athletic appearance and youthful vigor.

The choice of Ruíz Cortines, according to former Baja California Governor Braulio Maldonado, was met with a tepid response within the administration, with some of its members displeased with the decision.⁴⁸⁵ Beteta was alleged to have been especially incensed by Ruíz Cortines’s ascent.⁴⁸⁶ In either case, Ruíz Cortines represented something of a compromise candidate between different interests within the Revolutionary Family. The increasingly efficient electoral machine that would ensure Ruíz Cortines’s ascent to office was further oiled by the 1951 Federal Elections Law, which gave oversight and administrative responsibility to the Interior Ministry (of which Ruíz Cortines was chief) for electoral procedures. Despite protests from leading opposition figures, including PAN President Gómez Morín, that the law represented

⁴⁸¹ Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 211.

⁴⁸² Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 238.

⁴⁸³ The best sketch of Ruíz Cortines’s appearance, persona, and health can be found in José Agustín, *Tragicomedia mexicana: la vida en México de 1940 a 1970* (México: Planeta, 1990), 119-121.

⁴⁸⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Beatriz Alemán de Girón, Box 9, Exp. 242, March 10, 1986.

⁴⁸⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Lic. Braulio Maldonado Box 9, Exp. 231, May 7, 1985.

⁴⁸⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores.

anything but a democratic reform, it came into existence with little fanfare. Opposition to the new law, like the opposition candidacies of Henríquez, Aguilar, Lombardo Toledano, and González Luna in general, did little to dent the PRI's domination of the 1952 election. In fact, as early as the mid-term election of 1949, the PAN had seen its hopes of a meaningful response to its allegations of electoral fraud dashed when the Supreme Court dismissed a case brought before it regarding the same issue. The PAN leadership had little choice but to accept the ruling, at least in the short term, and saw no opportunity for redress from the Electoral College, which was staffed entirely by members of the PRI.⁴⁸⁷ Both the changes in electoral laws and the conflicts that electoral procedure engendered point to the Alemán administration's efforts to carry forward the ongoing effort of the PRI to control the country's electoral mechanisms.

This did not mean that the PRI and its leaders dismissed the opposition out of hand. Rather, Sánchez Taboada made significant efforts to discredit Henríquez, whom he regarded as a violent, even murderous person who had little to offer the increasingly evolved, civilian-dominated political system. He also pointed to Henríquez's lucrative contracts, especially in road and rail construction, hinting at corruption as evidence of his unsuitability for the presidency. Rhetorical attacks of this sort were not confined to the party leadership; administration officials also jumped into the fray. In one heated exchange, Henríquez attacked the Alemán administration, fuming to Beteta that the government was responsible for too much unfinished construction. Beteta simply retorted that Henríquez, who along with his brother controlled a sizeable interest in two large

⁴⁸⁷ NARA, RG 59, Series 812.00, Memorandum, Aug. 2, 1949, 812.00/8-1249.

construction firms, had grown rich off of contracts that the government had awarded him.⁴⁸⁸ Indeed, Henríquez, in a similar fashion to Almazán, had achieved considerable wealth by securing construction contracts, which allowed him (again like Almazán) to build a base of political support from rail workers under his watch.

Such exchanges represented the ugly side of the campaign cycle. Sánchez Taboada received criticism for his own self-aggrandizement and pompous behavior in the process of smearing the official candidate's opponent. Henríquez responded in equally harsh terms, calling into question Ruíz Cortines's revolutionary service during the invasion of Veracruz by U.S. Marines in 1914, alleging that he helped the other side.⁴⁸⁹ One piece of Heniquista propaganda, distributed by railway workers who supported the general, detailed a speech to the FPPM that accused Ruíz Cortines of trafficking in cocaine, with the help of the White Cross, during the Veracruz invasion.⁴⁹⁰ Even General Francisco Múgica, once considered to be Cárdenas's top choice to replace him as president, joked that Ruíz Cortines could not harm him, since he had already attacked him once, when he had joined with the U.S. forces in Veracruz.⁴⁹¹ Ruíz Cortines, who had served as an officer stationed in Veracruz during the invasion, provided documented evidence of his military loyalties during the revolution. In the final count, the move to question Ruíz Cortines's revolutionary credentials by offering up unsubstantiated claims that he was a traitor probably backfired.

⁴⁸⁸ NARA, RG 59, Series 812.00, Horace Braun, attaché, to State, July 24, 1950.

⁴⁸⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 489, Leg. 1 (Expediente Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, hereafter ARC), Memorandum, Nov. 23, 1951; *Ibid.*, Memorandum, Nov. 29, 1951.

⁴⁹⁰ AGN, DFS, ARC, Memorandum from Puebla to Pablo de la Fuente, Oct. 31, 1951.

⁴⁹¹ AGN, DFS, LCR, DFS Memorandum, Oct. 31, 1951.

By 1952, it was clear that if the opposition to the PRI had any chance, it would only happen through some form of unification of the candidacies. This prompted Henríquez, Aguilar, and Lombardo Toledano to form a kind of political pact. González Luna, representing a right-leaning party supported by dissatisfied Catholics and segments of the business community not linked to the PRI, did not participate. This hasty unification of the three left-leaning candidates was interrupted by a July riot in Mexico City, followed by the uncovering of a stockpile of arms and an alleged plot in Veracruz, somewhat tenuously linked to Aguilar, to launch an armed resistance to the official candidacy. Faced with the alternative of a lengthy arrest, Aguilar agreed to be absorbed into the Ruíz Cortines campaign, while the credibility of Henríquez crumbled.⁴⁹² Even if Henríquez had been the behind-the-scenes favorite of Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho, any show of public support for the beleaguered opposition candidacy from either of the former presidents would have had negative consequences for the political system and their public images. At this late point, only days before the election, the loosely organized pact between three weak candidacies had dissolved, and the PAN had run an uninspired campaign. These factors, combined with the PRI leadership's (especially from the arrogant Sánchez Taboada) constant barrage of anti-Henriquista propaganda, paved the way for Ruíz Cortines.

The official candidate won by over two million votes, completely eclipsing the other candidates. Nevertheless, the numbers should not be the only measure of the significance of the alternative parties. Henríquez's candidacy represented two important

⁴⁹² Navarro, *Political Intelligence*, 247-248.

factors. First, it signaled a desire among some groups to return to the redistributive policies and revolutionary orientation of the Cárdenas administration. The Alemán administration's rocky relationship with organized labor during his term gave Henríquez a boost, as fear over a continuation of Alemán-era economic policies that gave priority to industry-driven growth and development, even if that meant inflation or substandard wages, made many among the poorest ranks suspicious of Ruíz Cortines. Second, the momentum of Henriquismo exemplified dissatisfaction with the increasingly civilian-controlled, technocratic official leadership. Nevertheless, the failure of the Henríquez campaign to overcome the official party symbolized the consolidation of the civilian political establishment over the military in national politics.

The PAN, which by all counts ran a lackluster campaign, nonetheless made a significant advance in its long-term evolution. By presenting a candidate, it clarified its identity as a political party, as opposed to an organization that would merely lobby the official party to adopt its pro-Catholic and generally conservative positions. The only way to demonstrate that was to compete in electoral contests; 1952 was thus a pivotal year for Gómez Morín and González Luna's party. In sum, the election symbolized the stamp that Alemán left on the political system: the civilian-dominant, middle-class, and urban oriented official party demonstrated that it had achieved some sort of political hegemony, but also that this position of superiority was tempered by various pressures both from within and outside its ranks.

Within the party, the left, personified in Cárdenas, held considerable sway in electoral procedures; outside it, groups ranging from organized labor to the military to

communists to Catholic conservatives all lodged their own grievances against the one-party, corporate system through political opposition. Cárdenas especially stood out as a political lightning rod. On the one hand, he remained a revered figure for the left, even though he made efforts to avoid direct association with Communist organizations. At the same time, he maintained a visible presence both in domestic and international politics. He supported the American Continental Congress for Peace in 1949 (though did not attend its meeting)⁴⁹³ and was one of several prominent delegates (the Alemán administration sent no representatives) to sign the Stockholm Appeal, issued by the World Peace Council the following year.⁴⁹⁴ His presence in national politics, in which he appears to have exercised the greatest influence behind the scenes, proved controversial and prompted U.S. Embassy Secretary Charles R. Burrows to comment that the PRI representing anything but the big, happy revolutionary family it purported to be.⁴⁹⁵

Beyond the realm of internal politics, the transition away from Alemanismo reflected the broader global context of the Cold War. Both the DFS and the U.S. Embassy maintained interest in the activities of known and suspected Communists. The party leadership followed suit. Sánchez Taboada, in a statement that defied the pattern of consistent support for past policies that emanated from the official party, called the ejido-based collective approach to agriculture a failure and an example of communism and suggested that the government should open ejidos to privatization at the same time that

⁴⁹³ NARA, RG 59, Series 812.00, Political and Economic Report for Aug., 1949, 812.00/9-849; Ibid., Report of Political Activity, July 16-Aug., 15, 1949, 812.00/8-1849.

⁴⁹⁴ AGN, DFS, VLT, Comité Mexicano por la Paz, June 10, 1950.

⁴⁹⁵ NARA, RG 59, Series 712.00, Burrows to State, April, 1950, 712.00/5-1050.

the PRI purged its ranks of communists.⁴⁹⁶ The zealous statement, intended to marshal support for Alemán's agricultural reorganization, would have been a grievous misstep outside the context of the Cold War. The circumstances of the Cold War, which created a simplified, Manichean division of the world, undoubtedly helped to marginalize voices such as Lombardo Toledano's and to reinforce the Alemán administration's efforts to align with the United States in economic and political matters and to discard definitively the redistributive policies associated with Cardenismo. Indeed, Cold War exigencies served to debilitate the efforts of those who attempted to attack the dominance of the PRI from the left.

The Playboy President and Skullface

Alemán and Ruíz Cortines maintained cordial public relations and officially supported one another in public settings. In this regard, their relations were consistent with protocol within the Revolutionary Family that had stood since Ávila Camacho's *Unidad Nacional* campaign, which sought to keep the various ideological orientations, policy differences, and personal squabbles in balance within the party and out of the public eye. The effort was a direct response to the public rupture between Cárdenas and Calles, as well as Cardenista and Callista loyalists, that culminated in Calles's forced exile to the United States. Moreover, it dovetailed with Cárdenas's efforts to create a party structure that provided formal political incorporation to competing, class-based social sectors. This helped ensure that disputes between the leading figures in national

⁴⁹⁶ NARA, RG 59, Series 812.00, Memorandum, Aug. 2, 1949, 812.00/8-1249.

politics would take place out of sight. Instead, the public would always see a clear, consistent position. The PRI presidents, while subtly placing blame on their predecessors' failures to build political support, never outwardly denounced them. Alemán and Ruíz Cortines were no exception. Alemán even tried to bring him into his social orbit on the belief that a president's chosen successor should also be a friend.⁴⁹⁷

Yet despite their cordial relations, both men appear to have harbored dissatisfaction with the other's governing approach and personal resentment toward one another. Ruíz Cortines began his presidential term by launching a vigorous anti-corruption campaign,⁴⁹⁸ targeting the previous administration for neglecting to correct wrongdoings at all levels. Campaigns of this sort, which were designed to generate trust with the public, became a pattern replicated thereafter by nearly all presidents at the beginning of their sexenios.⁴⁹⁹ While Ruíz Cortines attacked the past record of corruption (rather than attacking his predecessor directly) to gain political capital, and while that strategy became an institutionalized part of the political process, Alemán nonetheless took great offense. In one meeting, he raged to Román Lugo, a friend from his school days and early career in Veracruz, that his predecessor had betrayed his trust, then swore they would not be discussing Ruíz Cortines ever again.⁵⁰⁰ Andrés Serra Rojas, Alemán's Minister of Labor and another former fellow classmate, plainly stated that Alemán regretted his selection of Ruíz Cortines. The topic of Ruíz Cortines evidently had become a sore spot for Alemán, who pleaded with his former cabinet minister not to ask

⁴⁹⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Romero Castañeda.

⁴⁹⁸ José Agustín, *Tragicomedia mexicana: la vida en México de 1940 a 1970*, 119-121.

⁴⁹⁹ Stephen Morris, *Corruption and Politics in Contemporary Mexico* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 83-101; FMA, Testimonio de Roberto Barrios.

⁵⁰⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Fernando Román Lugo.

him about it.⁵⁰¹ These private statements by Alemán suggest that he found Ruíz Cortines insufficiently grateful to him.

Of course, Alemán was far too astute to say anything negative about his successor that could become public record,⁵⁰² especially since his reputation did not stand to improve from retaliation on his part. Instead, he focused on adding to the positive side of his legacy. The approach proved judicious; Alemán's legacy, even if it was marred by accusations of corruption in his administration, benefited from his positive efforts, especially in tourism, to promote economic development. He kept to himself his overall impressions of Ruíz Cortines, especially what he considered his disappointing austerity and lack of optimism.⁵⁰³

Ruiz Cortínes expressed complaints about Alemán, not only concerning the legacy of corruption that he inherited, but also regarding his predecessor's economic policies and the overall economic situation that Alemán left him with. He evidently resented that Alemán's policies left him with depleted Treasury reserves and too many commitments to expenditure.⁵⁰⁴ He commented to one longtime Alemán associate that he was doing away with Alemán's over-ambitious plans altogether.⁵⁰⁵ At the same time that he expressed these concerns, Ruíz Cortines appears to have harbored a grudging respect for Alemán. In one conversation, he admitted that Alemán could resolve in five minutes what would take him three months.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰¹ FMA, Testimonio de Andrés Serra Rojas, Box 8, Exp. 222, May 28, 1985.

⁵⁰² FMA, Testimonio de Roberto Barrios.

⁵⁰³ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores.

⁵⁰⁴ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda, Box 6, Exp. 175, April 3, 1985.

⁵⁰⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Silvestre Aguilar, Box 9, Exp. 248, April 23, 1985.

⁵⁰⁶ FMA, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

While no rupture in the personal or professional relations between Alemán and Ruíz Cortines ever took place, it appears that members of the two administrations absorbed some of the animosities between the two presidents.⁵⁰⁷ In one case, Ruíz Cortines sent Silvestre Aguilar to inform Marco Antonio Muñoz, a long-time Alemán collaborator then serving as Governor of Veracruz, to sack two state officials – the state treasurer and police chief. Muñoz resisted, noting that the treasurer was good at his job, and that the head of police was there on Alemán’s recommendation. When Aguilar, also a long-standing associate of Alemán from Veracruz, approached Alemán about intervening, he offered no help. Acting as mediator, Aguilar then informed Ruíz Cortines, of Muñoz’s decision. The president subsequently retaliated by cutting Muñoz out of his circle of influence and withdrawing significant federal funding to his state.⁵⁰⁸

Perhaps indulging in some revision of the facts, numerous Alemán colleagues recalled that many, perhaps most, within his government reacted negatively to the choice of Ruíz Cortines from the outset.⁵⁰⁹ Gilberto Limón, Alemán’s Defense Minister and one of only two military officers in his cabinet, described Ruíz Cortines as colorless, bland, and dominated by his wife.⁵¹⁰ According to rumors, even Beteta, one of the most talented policymakers and economic thinkers of his generation, resented Ruíz Cortines.⁵¹¹ Despite the unflattering adjectives about him, Ruíz Cortines had reason to be upset over the lack of options his predecessor left him. Carrillo Flores claimed that the construction of the *Ciudad Universitaria* (CU), at the cost of a 200 million peso (about 41.7 million U.S.

⁵⁰⁷ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores.

⁵⁰⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Silvestre Aguilar.

⁵⁰⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Lugo; FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Noriega, Box 6, Exp. 179, April 8, 1985.

⁵¹⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Gilberto Limón, Box 7, Exp. 199, March 12, 1985.

⁵¹¹ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores.

dollars⁵¹²) debt to the Banco de México, contributed to the sluggish economy Ruíz Cortines faced, and ultimately helped to spur a devaluation of the peso in 1954 (in 1953-54, the government absolved the debt it owed to the Banco de México, claiming that the C.U. was *patrimonio universitario*). He noted that other factors, such as the U.S. recession and the immediate effects of the Korean War, contributed as well.⁵¹³ Nonetheless, the admission by a loyal Alemanista, early technocrat, and major economic policy-maker that Alemán's economic program yielded negative results is especially telling.

Conclusion: The 1952 Election and Alemán's Legacy

The transition between Alemán and Ruíz Cortines precipitated the adoption of the program of *desarrollo estabilizador* (stabilizing development).⁵¹⁴ The basic premise of the program was to decelerate the government's rate of expenditure in economic development projects to minimize debt and overall risk. At the same time, the government did not deviate from the basic goals that germinated in World War II and were aggressively pursued under Alemán: industrial development as part of the ISI model; an agricultural development program that gave priority to mechanization and modernization for the purpose of simultaneously providing export earnings and feeding the growing population; balancing foreign investment with protection of domestic business; and fomenting tourism as a means of economic growth. Furthermore, the

⁵¹² Martínez, *Border Boom Town*, 170.

⁵¹³ FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores.

⁵¹⁴ For an explanation of the anti-Alemanista programs of the *desarrollo estabilizador* programs, as well as their effects in everyday life, see José Agustín, *Tragicomedia mexicana*, 119-132.

stabilizing development model was designed to ensure that even as the government adopted a more austere approach to economic management than the one exercised by Alemán, the leadership did not intend to return to the redistributive, rural-based policies of the pre-1938 era, especially those from the heyday of revolutionary populism under Cárdenas.

Under Alemán, the single-party dominated political system took the form it would keep until the 1970s: a corporatist party that favored the urban bourgeoisie and promoted vigorous capitalist development, albeit a specific form of development that relied on heavy government intervention. In many respects, the model established under Alemán and carried out under subsequent presidencies had inherent paradoxes. On the one hand, the political system was at its strongest, yet its authoritarian qualities gradually eroded its legitimacy, then its stability, and ultimately its authority. In retrospect, we can see the germination of that process in many of the opposition movements of the Alemán era. Similarly, the economic role of the federal government was at its strongest; beginning with Alemán, the combination of domestic industry, foreign investment, and state protectionism produced a so-called economic miracle. Yet, as the decades wore on, mounting debt combined with insufficient export earnings to produce a devastating economic crisis. The size of government and its role in economic affairs, two traditional approaches to measuring state capability, proved to be both the apex and the Achilles

heel of the PRI-dominant system.⁵¹⁵ This ambivalent record drew the parameters of the 1952 election and continues to define Alemán's legacy today.

⁵¹⁵ Alan Knight, "The Weight of the State in Modern Mexico," in *Studies in the Formation of the Nation-State in Latin America*, ed. James Dunkerley (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2002), 212-253.

CONCLUSION
ALEMANISMO, GENERATIONAL CHANGE, AND SINGLE-PARTY RULE

The Alemán generation, as a case study, demonstrates the extent to which socialization patterns determined political decision-making at a critical moment in the nation's development and influenced its political trajectory long thereafter. Alemán's administration, especially in its efforts to embrace U.S. capital, empower domestic business, restrict labor militancy, and purge communist influence, adjusted to the new global and hemispheric political environment of the early Cold War. Leaders in most of the major Latin American countries reacted in similar ways to these shifting geopolitics.⁵¹⁶ Nevertheless, this context does not, and indeed cannot, explain the entirety of the Alemán group's political decisions, considering the range of alternatives at their disposal as well as the scope of their policies. Alemán and his inner circle implemented a transformative agenda that reflected not only the exigencies of the time, but also their social formation, which began in the early 1920s and culminated with their rise to power a quarter-century later.

The administration's decisive shift away from revolutionary social policy presents something of a paradox. After all, these leaders were born in time to witness much of the violence of the 1910 revolution, but were too young to participate in combat. Many, like Alemán, came from revolutionary families that suffered financial hardship and personal loss. Logically, an analysis of the relationship between this collective background and

⁵¹⁶ Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, "Introduction: The Postwar Conjuncture in Latin America: Democracy, Labor, and the Left," in *Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Bethell and Roxborough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-32.

their political priorities should yield the conclusion that their personal tragedies and challenges inculcated an unwavering commitment to extending the revolutionary efforts to redistribute wealth and to assert national control over resources. Yet Alemán and his administration directed their priorities elsewhere, in many cases to the detriment of those who built their expectations around the revolution's promises. Two examples illustrate this transformation. First, amendments to Article 27 of the Constitution exempted property from land reform and reapportioned the relative bargaining power of large landholders vis-à-vis peasants. Second, the *charrazo* of 1948 imposed government loyalists on the CTM's affiliate unions and put down labor movements in the railroad, petroleum, and mining sectors. Both gave juridical and institutional form to the government's pro-industry orientation.

This apparent disconnect between the revolutionary backgrounds of these leaders and their policies favoring business, industry, and foreign investment, lends itself to one of two erroneous positions: either the constraints of the time were so great that the Alemanista politicians had little choice but to move their government to the right and their revolution to its end; or, alternately, they proved so opportunistic that they disregarded both their own personal convictions and the interests of the majority of citizens to pursue a program that benefited an emerging oligarchy of which they formed part. Neither conclusion holds up against the evidence. The former implies a total absence of political empowerment, the latter a complete lack of concern for the improvement of the nation or the welfare of its citizens. Both characterizations fail to capture the motivations of the Alemán generation.

Alemán and his coterie, of course, had no choice but to respond to the limitations and opportunities that the post-World War II milieu imposed on them, and there is no question that they benefited financially as a result of their political careers. Nevertheless, when taken in sum, their political efforts constituted a genuine effort to push their country toward becoming an emerging industrial leader with a predominantly urbanized population and a powerful middle class. The program came at a high social and financial cost and produced mixed results, but was nothing less than sincere. In any case, it represented the product of several decades of social conditioning, beginning around 1920, that drew their priorities away from revolutionary reform and toward an alternative vision of national development.

The National Preparatory School and National University proved to be the seedbeds of this generation's formation. In Mexico City, the students encountered a range of social and intellectual influences that led them to embrace bourgeois attitudes as well as a pragmatic sensibility that later influenced their politics. An examination of their school years reveals conclusively that their tendency toward policies that benefited the urban middle class represented, at least partially, an extension of their experiences as students in the capital. Scholastic friendships formed the basis of Alemán's political network, and the schools became primary locations of political recruitment. Yet to regard the personal relationships between these young men in the 1920s only in terms of the development of a political clique denies the fact that they became friends and remained friends because they shared common backgrounds, values, and goals.

The following decade provided them unprecedented opportunities to advance professionally and financially. The new party, with its inchoate bureaucracy and evolving structure, allowed them to move upward quickly and decisively. They faced none of the danger of choosing the wrong side – the risk that ultimately took Alemán's father's life. Rather, the route to power was far more secure, and the professional careers of Alemán and the members of his school cohort provided a level of prosperity that for many of them was entirely unfamiliar. Through the 1930s, the consolidation of the political system occurred simultaneously alongside the solidification of their political generation. The connection between this collective social existence and the policies that they defined as priorities once in office did not arise out of coincidence.

Thus, the particular plans, prejudices, and self-interest that these leaders carried into office as a generation gave shape to the program they elaborated. By the end of the Alemán administration, that program had left a complex legacy. The framework for a self-sufficient, industry-driven economy, one centered in prosperous cities, fed by productive agriculture, and funded by robust exports, had taken shape. The costs of growing inequality, mounting debt, and depleted reserves appeared immediately, but seemed only to be the inevitable but temporary setbacks common to rapid industrialization schemes. Ultimately, they proved to be permanent structural weaknesses that necessitated economic restructuring and threatened the political legitimacy of the official party. Alemanismo thus produced varied results with unequal benefits and costs for different social groups. In either case, those changes lasted for decades.

Alemán cannot collect the credit or suffer the blame for all political developments from the mid-1940s onward. From Calles he inherited a strong, de facto official revolutionary party; from Cárdenas, a corporate structure to make it functional and inclusive, but also authoritarian; from Ávila Camacho, a move toward industry, a thaw in relations with the United States, and a military that yielded to civilian authority. These inherited legacies notwithstanding, the rise and tenure of this generation represents a major turning point in the nation's political history. Alemán and the members of his administration became the first generation of professionalized leaders within the single-party dominant system who, with skill and flexibility of options, crafted a political economy that lasted to the mid-1970s and in some cases beyond.

From 1946 onward, the PRI took on increasingly anti-democratic characteristics, functioning less as an avenue for popular political participation and more as an instrument of political control for the president. While leaders occasionally resorted to means of repression to assert political authority, as was the case in the 1958 railway worker strikes and the student movement a decade later, these occurrences tended to be exceptional. Instead, authorities sought other mechanisms to secure loyalty and facilitate political process, ones that were undoubtedly nefarious but generally non-violent. The pattern of co-optation, fraud, graft, cronyism, nepotism, bribery, and patronage that inhered within the one-party dominant system permitted the formation of a relatively benign and paternalistic form of authoritarianism. Such informal means became the glue that held it together.

The evolution of the twentieth-century political system reached its final phase under Alemán, as governors and union leaders conceded authority to the president and as civilian technocrats permanently came to occupy the highest echelons of government. The consolidation of the political system brought two puzzling developments. The first concerns how a country with such a robust tradition of popular militancy, culminating in a bloody struggle that toppled an oligarchic regime and created genuine opportunities for broad-based political empowerment, could have ended up with an authoritarian political system that often disregarded the demands and needs of those who stood to benefit from the gains of the 1910 revolution. The fact that, by mid-century, the situation for organized labor looked similar in Mexico to the rest of the largest nations in Latin America is perplexing, considering the country's impressive revolutionary history in the first half of the century.

The second concerns how Mexico became the only major country in the region to have avoided a military dictatorship at some point from the 1960s to the 1980s. While the majority of coups d'état and subsequent military dictatorships, such as those in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil (Central America in the 1980s presents an altogether different matter) counted on various forms of direct and indirect support from U.S. military and intelligence services, those countries' own military forces were overwhelmingly responsible for carrying them out. Yet Mexico, which had in the first half of the century among the most active and powerful militaries in the region, avoided military takeover at a time when they were common occurrences throughout the region. The prevailing interpretation suggests that growing distance between an ever more depoliticized military

and an increasingly dominant civilian-controlled government explains this development.⁵¹⁷ Yet in several Latin American cases, it was precisely this gulf between the military establishment and civilian-dominant political systems that produced the most devastating ruptures.⁵¹⁸

These examples reveal the extent to which a string of paradoxical phenomena marked the development of the political system under the PRI. This system took its unique form for multiple reasons. While many of those reasons remain to be explored, the generational shift that took place in the crucial years following World War II, as Alemán adapted his country to the emerging Cold War and reconfigured the internal strategies of his government, forms a major piece of the explanation behind the development of the twentieth century's most enduring single-party system. Examination of the Alemán group provides conclusive evidence that the social, scholastic, and professional development of a close-knit and powerful ruling generation, whose members cultivated an *esprit de corps* over several decades and worked to turn their collective vision into a set of ambitious reforms, go far in explaining this unique experience with single-party rule.

⁵¹⁷ Edwin Lieuwen, *The Mexican Military: The Political Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Army, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 129, 143-146.

⁵¹⁸ Peter Flynn, *Brazil: A Political Analysis* (London: Westview Press, 1978), 83-89.

EPILOGUE
ALEMÁN AFTER ALEMANISMO

Alemán, at 49, was young enough when he left the presidency in 1952 to pursue an active career over the next three decades. In keeping with precedent, he exercised minimal public influence in electoral affairs and party politics, but nonetheless used his status as an experienced statesman to promote economic development. He spent the remainder of his life as head of the *Consejo Nacional de Turismo* (CONATUR), a governmental department that his administration had created, vigorously promoting a tourism industry that had boomed during his presidency. Alemán certainly was not the first of the twentieth-century presidents to have an important role after his presidency. Cárdenas, for instance, served as Ávila Camacho's Defense Minister following his declaration of war on the Axis, although his presence was most likely used to drum up support for war participation from a reticent public. Even some of the weaker presidents, namely Abelardo Rodríguez and Emilio Portes Gil, both ardent allies of strongman Plutarco Elías Calles, went on to have influential and productive political careers after the presidency. The former continued to function as a political kingmaker in Sonora, while the latter occupied a number of diplomatic and cabinet posts before becoming president of the PNR.

By no means the first president to grow wealthy after office, Alemán nevertheless became a far more visible presence in the business community.⁵¹⁹ His glamorous lifestyle

⁵¹⁹ Alemán was one of the few national political leaders to have occupied a prominent position in the highest echelons of the business community; in most cases, the business elite and the political elite were two distinct groups with little overlap; Peter H. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 203-214.

set him apart from his immediate predecessors and successors, who maintained a bourgeois public image. Whether he was entertaining U.S. presidents at his Acapulco estate, dining with British royalty, yachting with Frank Sinatra, or indulging in the finest accommodations of Paris or Venice with his mistress and entourage, Alemán's persona after he left the presidency was every bit as distinct as his leadership style as president. The former president, as tourism booster, debonair socialite, prominent businessman, and eventually elder statesman, remained an important political presence for decades and shaped his legacy in important ways.

As his country's foremost promoter of tourism, Alemán devoted greatest attention to Europe, where he established several offices to encourage visitors to cross the Atlantic. In 1977, the International Edition of the Official Tourism Gazette, headquartered in Madrid, named him its Personality of the Year.⁵²⁰ Alemán frequently shuttled to South America, the United States, and Europe, often to meet with prominent figures of the tourism industry. In his numerous foreign travels, he displayed consummate cultural sensitivity and curiosity, the products of his many years as a statesman, his personal enthusiasm for touring new places, and his desire to represent his country favorably. He demanded that anyone accompanying him exhibit the same degree of cultural awareness. On one trip to Taiwan, he chided a member of his entourage for his rude attempt to order a Mexican drink from Chinese hosts.⁵²¹ Similarly, on a trip to Buenos Aires, he reminded his longtime friend Carlos Soto Maynez to remember that he was not Perón and Alemán

⁵²⁰ FMA, Testimonio de Arturo García Formenti, Caja 14, Exp. 346, May 20, 1985.

⁵²¹ FMA, Testimonio de Carlos Soto Maynez, Caja 8, Exp. 213, May 17, 1985.

was not Evita,⁵²² a stern suggestion that they act with prudence and modesty as guests in the same building that contained Perón's own apartment. Alemán often traveled with Soto Maynez, the brother of former Chihuahua Governor Oscar Soto Maynez, with whom he had lived while in school in the 1920s. In many cases, his mistress of twenty years, Leonor, accompanied him. The pair frequently met up with the industrialist Bruno Pagliai and his wife, Hollywood star Merle Oberon, in Europe and South America.⁵²³

Alemán and his coterie did not indulge in this glamorous lifestyle merely for hedonistic reasons. Rather, his worldly travels to rub shoulders with celebrities and powerbrokers allowed him to promote his country's attributes in various parts of the world at the same time that he expanded his personal investments. In a 1963 letter to Beteta, who followed his term as Alemán's Treasury Minister by becoming the General Director of the publication *Novedades* (the newsmagazine headed by another long-time Alemán associate, Rómulo O'Farrill), he emphasized that he wanted to give the well-known journalist Howard Kingsbury Smith, who would be covering the event, a grand welcome from the CONATUR delegation at the *Semana de Saludo a México* (Week of Salute to Mexico).⁵²⁴

Beteta, one of Alemán's closest advisors and a rumored presidential possibility in 1952, appears to have served as a connection point between the media and Alemán's tourism interests. In another letter from 1963, Denis I. Duveen of the Duveen Soap Corporation sent Beteta's nephew, Ignacio, a letter saying that a division of his company,

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Archivo Histórico de El Colegio de México (hereafter AHCM), Archivo Particular de Ramón Beteta, Exp. 18, Alemán to Beteta, Aug. 22, 1963.

Fuller Brush Magazine, wanted to do a series on deep-sea angling. He planned the issue to feature Mexico, the Florida Keys, and the Bahamas, but wanted to devote the most attention to Pacific fishing, owing to his successful outings in Acapulco and Puerto Vallarta. Beteta immediately took up the promotional opportunity with Alemán to agree on what sum to invest.⁵²⁵ Others targeted Beteta as a direct conduit to Alemán. Williams Haynes, the owner of the Hotel Prince in Mexico City, for example, approached the former cabinet minister about getting access to Alemán so he could interview him for his upcoming book, *Motor in Mexico—And Have Fun*, to be published by Doubleday.⁵²⁶ These myriad dealings suggest a strong connection between Beteta at *Novedades* and Alemán at CONATUR. Given Alemán's long-standing connections to the *Novedades* ownership, the connection comes as little surprise.

Alemán's reception of foreign dignitaries, especially at his mansion in Acapulco, demonstrates the extent of his personal diplomacy. Trips to visit Alemán at his beach home usually included a cruise aboard his yacht, the *Sotavento*. He and Cárdenas reportedly discussed Henriquismo and the presidential succession aboard the yacht.⁵²⁷ Over the years, numerous celebrities visited him in Acapulco. A radiogram from December 1952 from incoming Vice-President and future President Richard Nixon thanked Alemán for taking him and his wife, Pat, aboard the yacht.⁵²⁸ At other times well into the 1970s, dignitaries ranging from the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Phillip (the

⁵²⁵ Ibid., Duveen to Ignacio Beteta, Jr., Oct. 10, 1963.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., Exp. 18.1, Haynes to Beteta, no date.

⁵²⁷ AGN, DFS, LCR, Memorandum, May 30, 1952.

⁵²⁸ FMA, Nixon to Alemán, Box 50, Exp. 924, Dec. 7, 1952.

Queen's consort),⁵²⁹ Princess Alexandra (her sister),⁵³⁰ former U.S. President Lyndon Johnson and his wife, Lady Bird⁵³¹, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger,⁵³² U.S. Congressman James Roosevelt, the eldest son of Franklin Roosevelt,⁵³³ and singer Frank Sinatra, among others, all visited the gem of Alemán's tourism development efforts. Of course, this style of personal diplomacy, especially toward those who might influence his country's prestige on the world stage, did not begin after his presidency. Rather, his efforts after 1952 formed an extension of a style that he honed while in office. During his presidency, Alemán had a long-standing reputation for hospitality toward foreign investors.⁵³⁴ For example, Conrad Hilton, the patriarch of the family dynasty built on the eponymous hotel chain, wrote Alemán in 1953 to thank him for a meeting at Los Pinos, the presidential palace, to help get the Hotel Continental in Mexico City and the Hilton resort in Acapulco off the ground.⁵³⁵

Of course, Alemán did not reserve his time for leisure only to entertain foreigners. He also maintained a vast network of personal friendships that overlapped with his business and political interests. In many cases, these friends, along with Leonor, accompanied him as a kind of entourage on foreign trips. Among the places they visited were Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Paris, and Venice. She even accompanied him on what would normally be reserved for men: a bear-hunting trip. Along with Jorge Pasquel (the country's pioneering baseball commissioner and a close business associate of

⁵²⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 422, Expediente Bruno Pagliai (hereafter BP), Memorandum, Feb. 15, 1970.

⁵³⁰ AGN, DFS, BP, Memorandum, May 3, 1971.

⁵³¹ Ibid., Memorandum, Dec. 27, 1966; Ibid., Memorandum, Feb. 6, 1971.

⁵³² Ibid., Memorandum, Feb. 23, 1977.

⁵³³ FMA, Roosevelt to Alemán, Box 6, Exp. 159, Jan. 7, 1954.

⁵³⁴ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 189-190.

⁵³⁵ FMA, Hilton to Alemán, Box 50, Exp. 945, Feb. 17, 1953.

Alemán) and Carlos Soto Maynez, they slept in sleeping bags in terribly cold cabins, where Alemán managed to burn the bedding after lighting the *chimenea*.⁵³⁶

The business and personal relationships he maintained after his presidency suggest significant overlap between his administration's policies and his personal financial interests. His relationship with Bruno Pagliai, a naturalized Italian immigrant who took a chance on Mexico after failing to make a satisfactory fortune in the United States, typified his interactions with the business community. Pagliai first entered elite social ranks after joining the famous Jockey Club. His association with the Alemán and Ávila Camacho groups (Ávila Camacho's wife, Soledad Orozco, first hired him at the Hipódromo de las Américas, the capital's elite equestrian racetrack) gave his career a boost. With Alemán's help, he created a steel tube manufacturing company in Veracruz called TAMSA (Tubos de Acero de México) in 1952, which grew to be the country's fourth largest steel producer. He later expanded into other forms of metallurgical production, always centered in Alemán's home state of Veracruz, forming associations with the American aluminum conglomerate ALCOA, as well as Hughes Tools and Taylor Forge. He also spearheaded the creation of an investment society with the West German corporation Siemens, the Wall Street firm Allen and Col, and the Belgian company Sybeta. Finally, he and Alemán invested in the Editorial Novaro, which produced crime mystery novels and comic books. The Treasury Ministry estimated that he earned

⁵³⁶ FMA, Testimonio de Oscar Soto Maynez.

between fifteen and sixty million pesos annually (between four and 4.8 million U.S. dollars in 1954-1975 values⁵³⁷).⁵³⁸

Alemán and Pagliai remained close friends long after his presidency. Pagliai and Oberon housed many of the foreign dignitaries who came to visit Acapulco, including Prince Phillip. Princess Alexandra also visited their house during her visit. When Lyndon Johnson visited in 1971, Pagliai played golf and ate with the two former presidents, along with Antonio Ortiz Mena, the two-term Treasury Minister under the López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz administrations.⁵³⁹ He also donated money to the charity activities of Alemán's wife, First Lady Beatriz Velasco de Alemán, who used his and others' funds to start a school breakfast program.⁵⁴⁰ The relationship between Alemán and Pagliai exemplified the kind of symbiosis between the former president's business interests, those of his closest associates, and his political inner-circle. His relationship with leading figures of both print and television media, especially newspaper tycoon Rómulo O'Farrill and television mogul Emilio Azcárraga, further underscored this relationship.⁵⁴¹ Indeed, his administration was the first in the nation to establish a television transmission and, in subsequent years, both Alemán and his son, Miguel Alemán Velasco, became important shareholders in the dominant network *Televisa*.

Alemán gained a reputation for his commitment to protecting the friends who populated his inner circle, and in return he demanded loyalty (Antonio Carrillo Flores

⁵³⁷ Martínez, *Border Boom Town*, 170.

⁵³⁸ AGN, DFS, BP, Biographical sketch of Bruno Pagliai, no date.

⁵³⁹ AGN, DFS, BP, Memorandum, Feb. 6, 1971.

⁵⁴⁰ Miguel Alemán Valdés, *Remembranzas y testimonios* (México: Grijalbo, 1987), 342.

⁵⁴¹ Celeste González de Bustamante, "Tele-Visiones (Tele-Visions): The Making of Mexican Television News" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2006), 16.

claims to have once told him that he would shoot himself over an accusation of corruption within Nacional Financiera⁵⁴²). During and especially after his presidency, Alemán attracted criticism for his ability to make money as a result of these associations. He tended overwhelmingly to stay silent on the matter, except in private company, where he expressed frustration over the accusations. From his perspective, the personal fortune he amassed never presented any moral dilemmas, nor did he see any incongruity between a life of public service and the accumulation of wealth. On various occasions, he made similar points to his friends, and fulminated against *Fortune* magazine's unsubstantiated claim that he was one of the world's richest men.⁵⁴³

Near the end of his life, he confided to one friend that he considered the current group of PRI technocrats, including Miguel de la Madrid (president from 1982 to 1988), morally bankrupt. As he saw it, his gradual accumulation of wealth over six decades contrasted with the greedy get-rich-quick schemes of the newer politicians.⁵⁴⁴ He reacted coldly to another colleague when they got onto the same subject. Alemán asked him whether he thought he had earned his money honorably. His reply, in which he joked that the only person who makes money honorably is the one who doesn't make any at all, provided Alemán no amusement whatsoever.⁵⁴⁵ Alemán also devoted a share of his fortune to philanthropic efforts, including a sizeable donation to the Academia de la Lengua. Though he spoke candidly and frequently about his desire to establish a

⁵⁴² FMA, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores.

⁵⁴³ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 207-208.

⁵⁴⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Carlos Soto Maynez.

⁵⁴⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Noriega.

foundation to fund various social, economic, and cultural projects,⁵⁴⁶ he never followed through on the plan. Alejandro Carrillo Castro, the current Director of the Foundation, speculates that he did not want to promote a cult of personality that might result from such a venture.⁵⁴⁷

Despite considerable success in business and formal training in law, Alemán's closest friends and colleagues almost unanimously described him as born for politics, a field he understood far better than the legal system or the financial world.⁵⁴⁸ Thus, it comes as little surprise that his interest in the workings of the government and the official party persisted beyond his presidency. He claimed to one friend that he considered himself to have been the most influential voice not only in Cárdenas's choice of Ávila Camacho as his successor, but also Ruíz Cortines's selection of Adolfo López Mateos. The influence he claimed to have exercised in the selection of three presidents appears to have been a source of considerable pride for Alemán, though he openly acknowledged that his influence waned thereafter.⁵⁴⁹

In public, Alemán expressed unwavering support for PRI presidents, upholding a longstanding protocol within the Revolutionary Family. Behind closed doors, he occasionally opined on their undesirable qualities and decisions. He regarded José López Portillo administration's expropriation of all bank assets as less of a nationalization and

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Alejandro Carrillo Castro, Personal Interview with author, Feb. 3, 2011. Carrillo Castro's father, Alejandro Carrillo Marcor, a leader in the organized labor community, was briefly head of the municipal government of the Federal District, before a falling-out with Alemán, and was later Governor of Sonora in the 1970s.

⁵⁴⁸ FMA, Testimonio de Alfonso Noriega; Testimonio Arturo García Formenti; 1985; Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda.

⁵⁴⁹ FMA, Testimonio de Carlos Soto Maynez.

more of what he termed a “statisization,”⁵⁵⁰ suggesting that rather than benefiting the nation and its citizens, it stood to enrich a much narrower political elite. He displayed this level of candor only when confident that no risk of exposure to the press threatened him. As the first president to represent the PRI, Alemán set a precedent in terms of establishing the expectations for how former presidents should behave vis-à-vis their successors. Disagreements, however inevitable, would be expressed beyond public view. This certainly fueled part of his discontent with Ruíz Cortines, who established another precedent, that of sitting presidents smearing their predecessors’ records, especially in the areas of economic management and toleration of corruption, to generate political capital.⁵⁵¹

Final Years and Death

Alemán continued his travels until his last years. The death of Beatriz in 1981 did not slow the pace of his life much, but it did leave him more introspective and somber. Her death came as the result of an aneurysm in the cavity of her left eye, which she had lost some months before. Her health had deteriorated considerably in those last years, and her forced sedentary lifestyle put added pressure on her heart. With her passing, a grieving Alemán lamented that he had shamed her.⁵⁵² As his son later explained, despite

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Stephen Morris, *Corruption and Politics in Contemporary Mexico* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 83-101

⁵⁵² FMA, Testimonio de Miguel Alemán Velasco, Box 9, Exp. 243, March 29, 1985.

his father's known excesses with women, his love for Beatriz never waned,⁵⁵³ and her death took a toll on his wellbeing.

From that point forward, Alemán, known as an athletic, healthy man, a sparse eater and a light drinker,⁵⁵⁴ gradually lost his vigor. Over the next two years, he continued to travel both for his own pleasure and to promote tourism, even as his health began to flag. He visited no fewer than seven medical specialists in the United States, including ones in Boston, Houston, and New York. In the midst of his treatments, he still found the energy to attend the 1982 World Cup in Spain. Nevertheless, this frenetic lifestyle eventually subsided, and he gradually began to move less and to lose his appetite. His doctors in the United States informed him that he had, in addition to prostate cancer, an ailment that resulted in water in his lungs, a condition possibly linked to asbestos exposure. Alemán speculated that it might have been the roof of Los Pinos. He died of a heart attack in 1983.⁵⁵⁵

Upon his death, his children (Miguel Alemán Velasco, Beatriz Alemán de Girón, and Jorge Alemán Velasco), along with a handful of associates, established the *Fundación Miguel Alemán* to perpetuate his personal legacy through philanthropic and research initiatives. The foundation, funded largely by Alemán's own fortune coupled with contributions from his friends within the PRI, continues to promote a number of domestic initiatives. Its primary areas of focus are rural development projects, health

⁵⁵³ Miguel Alemán Velasco, interview with author, Jun. 12, 2007.

⁵⁵⁴ FMA, Testimonio de Beatriz Alemán de Girón; *Ibid.*, Testimonio de Juan González Alpuche, Box 7, Exp. 200, Feb. 26, 1985; *Ibid.*, Testimonio de Antonio Carrillo Flores; *Ibid.*, Testimonio de David Romero Castañeda; *Ibid.*, Testimonio de Arturo García Formenti.

⁵⁵⁵ FMA, Testimonio de Miguel Alemán Velasco.

programs, environmental protection efforts, and tourism investment.⁵⁵⁶ Through these myriad functions, the foundation ensures substantial investment in a number of areas that demand planning and funding. The philanthropic institution that bears Alemán's name ensures that the former president, the first civilian after the revolution and the first to represent the PRI, remains an important presence in national politics and development nearly three decades after his death.

⁵⁵⁶ Judith A. Teichman, "Competing Visions of Democracy and Development in the Era of Neoliberalism in Mexico and Chile," *International Political Science Review* 30, 67 (2009), 79-80.

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