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SUPPRESSING THE FOURTH ESTATE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE
MEXICAN GOVERNMENT AND THE MEDIA, 1900-1940

by

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A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In Partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

Written under the direction of

Mark Wasserman

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

January, 2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This project reconsiders the relationship between the government and media as revealed by the development of national print media organizations in Mexico before and after the revolutionary period, 1900-1940. Historians have long believed that Mexican journalists had accepted payments from the PRI, the party that laid the foundation for its seventy-year dictatorship during this period, in exchange for positive news coverage and to cover up the government's failings. This project challenges this assumption and demonstrates a different history of intense contestation between the state and media organizations. Instead of acquiescing to government officials, Mexican journalists founded new periodicals and used them to defy their authority throughout this time period, often at the risk of their careers and lives. Journalists remained strong activists and worked closely with politicians to pass the reforms they fought for during the Revolution. It was only through the leadership of President Lázaro Cárdenas that the government was able to integrate these defiant reporters into the "Revolutionary Family."

Acknowledgements

Writing a dissertation is largely a solitary experience. It is largely one person working alone on his computer filling up a blank document. This continues day after day. The only way to finish is to find the motivation to keep grinding until one is done. Part of the motivation to finish comes from the support and friends one accumulates along the long journey. The best part of finishing one's dissertation is the chance to thank all the people who helped make journey seem a little less lonely.

The roots of this dissertation come from my first graduate classes at SUNY Binghamton nearly ten years ago. There, I experienced the exciting the world of subaltern studies for the first time in a class taught by the late Donald Quataert. He, along with Nancy Appelbaum showed me there was a way to study and write history that included a wider-range of perspectives than I had experienced as an undergraduate. Elisa Camiscioli was instrumental in me receiving funding for my second year, which gave me the freedom to perfect my work and apply to Rutgers. At Binghamton I worked with my first academic cohort and I am still run the Boilermaker every year with PJ Kuno and Denise Ireton. In exchange for training them to run marathons, they read my materials and made me a better historian.

Rutgers University has a fantastic and vibrant academic community. It starts with the faculty. I have been continually impressed with how important scholars, such as Bonnie Smith, have remained fully engaged with helping my research and career through reading drafts of grant proposals and dissertation chapters. The department is on the cutting edge of developments in the field and it opens many avenues for students to do

exciting research. My main advisers, Mark Wasserman and Camellia Townsend, encouraged and supported me each step of the way. The first faculty member I met on campus was Cami and felt welcomed right away as she honestly shared her thoughts about my career. I have had many dinners at Mark's house as he created a community for the small number of Latin American scholars at Rutgers. They always made time to talk and provide guidance no matter the time of the day. A special thanks to Belinda Davis, who provided help at a crucial moment, which allowed me to push forward with my career and eventually complete my dissertation. As with Binghamton, the cohort at Rutgers provided constant support and I would not have finished without great people such as Danielle Bradley, David Reed, Jessica Criaes, Tara Lyn, Christina Chiknas, and Pat McGrath. In addition, I would like to thank the Mellon Foundation, Rutgers History Department and the Rutgers Caribbean Studies department for sponsoring my research.

Research abroad is hard and a mostly lonely and I need to thank several people for making it easier. The first scholar I met in Mexico was Salvador Salinas in the elevator of our building by accident. This fortuitous meeting led to lifelong friendships with Susan Zakaib, Lindsay Sidders and Kristie Flannery. They have provided continual support, even though I do a poor job of keeping up with them. Laura Alcántara Duque has shown me parts of Mexico City I never would have found on my own. The staffs at the Archivo General Nación, Biblioteca Nacional UNAM, and other libraries in Mexico City showed infinite patience with my poor language skills and did whatever they could to help me find materials.

This past weekend I was reminded that I have to thank Kristen Egan and Amy Avery for their friendship since we were freshmen in college. It's impossible to

summarize ten years of friendship and adventures and being arrested by the Pennsylvania State Park police into a paragraph, so I will not try. Without their friendship and guidance, I would not be the person I am today and I look forward to our future escapades, especially now that Amy has a child.

I want to thank my parents, Sharon and Paul Moss, for their unwavering support. Throughout my entire life, they have given me the confidence to do whatever I want or makes me happy even when they do not understand it. They even surprised me with their adventurousness in coming to visit me several times in Mexico. I will always remember putting them on a bus to see the pyramids in Mexico City and not knowing if they would return safely. For two country bumpkins, they followed me wherever I traveled and ate from the same street vendors. I know I received my iron stomach from my Dad.

Finally, this dissertation would not have been completed with the love of Melissa Yuen. For past four years, she has been my constant partner. She is so good at focusing on the little details and encouraging me to constantly produce excellent work. Whenever I feel like I cannot finish something or that simply one draft is good enough, I remember the standard she holds herself to and know I have to push further. Without her I would not have lived in New York City or Rome. She has plenty of ambition spare and I often need to borrow it. As I start the next leg of my life's journey, I feel good knowing I have a partner who is up for anything.

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Introduction:

On March 17, 1942, the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. The issue included the columns of old and new journalists dedicated to highlighting, as one headline called it, “The Importance of the Work Done by *Excelsior*.”¹ It featured the return of several editors who had been with the periodical at its foundation who reminisced about the early days of the periodical. That this anniversary issue was filled with self-congratulations was nothing new for the periodical. Each previous anniversary had received similar treatment. But this one carried extra significance because throughout the issue the contributors had indicated that the Revolutionary Era had ended and the nation was ready to move to its next stage of development. *Excelsior*’s lifespan mirrored that of the post-Revolutionary period, so it made sense for the periodical to link its own evolution to the nation’s resurrection. It had been born in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and the Constitution of 1917, which guaranteed the freedom of expression and allowed independent newspapers like *Excelsior* to flourish. Over the next twenty-five years, the nation had struggled to rebuild and implement the reforms Mexicans had fought for in the Revolution. The first years experienced halting progress, but by 1942, it seemed like the nation and *Excelsior* had turned a corner. Under Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) the nation had seemingly successfully redistributed land, built government funded schools throughout the countryside, and nationalized the oil industry, along with countless other initiatives designed to improve the lives of poor Mexicans. Simultaneously, *Excelsior* had a roller coaster existence, battling against bankruptcy and forced government closure. This belief

¹ “Transcendencia de la Obra Realizada por ‘Excelsior,’” *Excelsior*, March 18, 1942, 1.

in their shared success was best captured by Félix F. Palavicini, in his article that listed the main political events of the past quarter century. He ended it by writing, “On balance, the nation has absolutely improved. While the rest of the world is on the eve of war, our nation rejoices in its peace, a true peace, of its consciences and its spirituality.”²

On the surface, the combination of *Excelsior* and Palavicini announcing the final achievements and closure of the Revolutionary Era may have seemed strange to readers. They were odd bedfellows as Palavicini had founded *El Universal*, *Excelsior*’s longstanding rival for Mexico’s national newspaper of record. In addition, Palavicini and *Excelsior* had a long history of defiance and repeatedly clashed with government and military officials. Palavicini had worked closely with Francisco I. Madero to overthrow Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship and since the Revolution had been a strong advocate against the role of the military in national politics. This stance had led to his arrest multiple times, seen many of his friends killed by government forces and his exile in 1927. *Excelsior*’s acquiescence makes more sense, due to a government forced closure in 1928, the newspaper had to radically restructure and it no longer maintained the nature of its founder, Rafael Alducín. Since its ownership had been remade into an employee owned cooperative, its stories were much more pro-government in nature. Its celebrations did not mention this change or how Plutarco Elías Calles had threatened it many times, or how the newspaper fought off a government sponsored buyout and had to radically restructure due to a Senate approved boycott of the newspaper’s advertisers. These histories of continual conflict with government officials were not mentioned in this celebratory issue of *Excelsior*. Instead, it focused on creating a narrative of success. The

² “Panorama Político en Mexico en los Ultimos 25 Años,” *Excelsior*, March 22, 1942, 1.

Revolution had been fought, its reforms had been implemented and it was time to move forward.

These stories were not to be the first, nor the last that lauded the success of the Mexican government. Over time, it became an open secret that many national newspapers were subsidized by the government and could not be trusted to provide unbiased news. This control was largely achieved through financial favors not physical repression, through direct government ownership or official punishment for receiving banned information, which were rare events.³ The close friendship between government officials and periodical owners was seen every year at the annual dinner held on Freedom of the Press day where representatives from each group gathered and celebrated the continued friendship of the two groups. In 1968, President Gustavo Díaz-Ordaz, outlined what types of stories he hoped the Press would elevate, “I do not ask for silence, the accomplice of the negative, I ask, simply and straightforwardly, that importance be given to what is most important: the positive...Let’s not hear any more about disorders and crimes in Mexico...Let’s hear alongside this distressing news, about the brilliant successes, the accomplishments, the steps we have taken on the road to progress.”⁴

This co-optation of the Press’s independence was not unique for the post-Revolutionary state. The longevity of the PRI can partially be attributed to its ability to integrate the major sectors of Mexican society and tie them to the state. If the Díaz dictatorship and the subsequent Revolution caused the complete dissolution of these bonds, then the post-Revolutionary Era brought the reestablishment of them. Beginning

³ Chappell Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of the Press in Mexico*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 26-27.

⁴ Rafael Rodríguez Castaneda, *Prensa Vendida: Los periodistas y los presidentes: 40 años de relaciones*, (Mexico City: Editorial Grjalbo, 1993), 21.

with Obregón and ending with Cárdenas, the government nationalized unions (first CROM, then the CTM), school systems, its oil fields and redistributed land to millions of Mexicans. These projects made the state an integral part of every Mexican's life and guaranteed loyalty to the ruling party, first the PRN, then the PMR, and then the PRI. This strategy worked on long-time detractors, such as Palavicini and *Excelsior*. By 1942, both had been essentially nationalized, Palavicini had worked as the director the several government agencies and was currently preparing for a stint as Mexico's ambassador to Argentina. *Excelsior* was a cooperative owned and operated by its unionized labor force, which sent its yearly budget to the government for approval. Neither were the independent entities that they started out as when they entered politics before the Revolution, as with Palavicini, or its immediate aftermath, *Excelsior*.

Over the second half of the twentieth century, as it became common knowledge that the government had been paying for positive coverage, it was forgotten that the PRI's control of the media was a not forgone conclusion in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. Instead, journalists that had played key roles in helping the Constitutionalists win the war were imprisoned for speaking out against the outsized role of the military in the Constitutional Convention. Despite this threat, independent and regional newspapers thrived in the aftermath of the Revolution as editors and journalists sought to take advantage of new freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of 1917. Their many political stances included but were not limited to, pro-Catholic, pro-Labor, anti-Sonoran, or pro-Socialist, which often brought them into direct conflict with the national government and officials that were working to keep the fragile state from delving into chaos once again. Their defiance was not limited to regional periodicals as national newspapers, such as *El*

Universal and *Excelsior*, were repeatedly called before the Mexican Congress and admonished for their reporting.⁵ This journalistic advocacy was not new, the majority of these publishers had started their careers in prior to the Mexican Revolution, but journalists had been emboldened by the fall of Díaz's dictatorship and the return of democracy to the nation. They saw it as their responsibility to restrict the power of the national government and prevent a Díaz-like dictatorship to ever develop again.

This dissertation will reclaim this history of defiance and activism of Mexican journalists over a forty-year period (1900-1940). It will demonstrate that the nation's notions of journalistic activism were developed prior to the presidential election of 1910. Each major candidate, Madero, Díaz, and Bernardo Reyes deployed periodicals in order to spread their messages and communicate directly with their followers. Journalists traveled with candidates to help shape their messages. Their goal was not impartiality but to promote their political beliefs via whichever candidate most aligned with their goals. This meant journalists were more similar to politicians than independent arbiters of truth. They were more loyal to their personal causes than an idea of building non-biased media organizations. Many journalists that rose to prominence during the Revolution, such as Luis Cabrera, Palavicini, and José Vasconcelos, went on to prominent positions in the national government, won positions in the Senate, or maintained their friendships with the officials who had supported their newspapers. They believed direct involvement in politics was the best way to remain relevant and achieve their activist goals.

Following the Revolution, Mexico experienced a significant growth of new periodicals and newspapers. They drew on the activist nature of their predecessors. For

⁵ Arno Burkholder de la Rosa, "El Periódico que Llegó a la Vida Nacional: Los Primeros Años del Diario *Excelsior* (1916-1932)," *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 58, num. 4, April-June, 1995.

example, in the Yucatán region, two newspapers, *El Hombre Libre* and *El Demócrata* attacked the new socialist government of Salvador Alvarado. Five years later, Alvarado's spiritual successor, Felipe Carrillo Puerto would found his own political party and used its self-published newspaper, *Rendición* to counter their criticisms. Regions that were heavily Catholic developed their own newspapers to publicize the harsh government sponsored repression against religious leaders. At the same time, major cities outside of the capital, such as Guadalajara or Monterrey, carried stories of violence, labor strikes, and political opposition. Reading these daily newspapers in any major city would have made it seem like the nation was on the verge of another Revolution throughout the early and mid-1920s. It is not clear whether the editors of these dailies saw themselves as activists or politicians like their more famous Mexico City counterparts but they consistently published the good and the bad of living in post-Revolutionary Mexico.

This diverse and thriving newspaper scene in Mexico captured the chaos and widespread violence that the nation experienced over this same period. They did not need to look hard for these problems as Obregón and Calles' governments had to survive several major uprisings and were accused of murdering their political enemies. Newspaper coverage of these events created a problem for the Sonoran Presidents. They could not project an image of stability and progress when the nation's newspapers contradicted them every day with their large-font headlines. While the presidents themselves stayed popular, Obregón as the hero the Revolution, and Calles' continued support among the working class, periodicals ate away at their credibility and helped to prevent the state from centralizing power. Since the line had been blurred between journalist and politician since the Revolution, this meant those that wrote for newspapers

could be and were treated as political enemies for doing their jobs, simply reporting on the news that had happened. Between the two of them, Calles was much more interested in handling and manipulating the media based on their correspondence. Calles adopted a two-prong strategy in dealing with the media. First, he developed a government agency tasked with supporting newspapers that the government approved of and responding to damaging stories as soon as they were published. Every day the department sent out a memo that informed Calles of the headline stories in all the major papers. Second, as the decade progressed, Calles increased the level of repression directed towards newspapers. What started out as threats during the de la Huerta rebellion in 1923, transitioned into the purchase of deviant newspapers, the exiling of troublesome journalists in 1927, continued with the forced closure of *Excelsior* in 1928, and the foundation of his own newspaper (*El Nacional*) in 1929. These steps reflected Calles' understanding of journalists as political enemies in 1920s Mexico, which meant first he would attempt to buy them off and if that failed, he worked to eliminate them.

This violence ended the chance to create an independent Fourth Estate that could act as a check on the government's power. Calles' repression did not kill journalist activism however; it forced journalists to return to their original roles as working for political causes or parties. The newspaper *El Nacional* was originally founded to generate support for Calles' political party, the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR) and help him promote the candidates he thought he could control. Over time, however, the newspaper found its own voice, and eventually betrayed Calles, becoming an activist for Cárdenas. *El Nacional* was more loyal to a particular set of reformist causes than it was to its founder. *Excelsior* and other important newspapers threw their support behind

Cárdenas in 1933. It simply is not true to say these periodicals lost their independence through subsidies and other financial incentives. Cárdenas' major olive branch to newspaper companies was *PIPSA*, an agency designed to reduce the price of newsprint, one of their largest expenses. However, the program during his presidency was an abject failure. In 1940 advisers recommended that the entire program should be scrapped. *Excelsior* did not print many criticisms of Cárdenas but the newspaper repeatedly hammered his administration for failing to solve the nation's newsprint crisis. Despite this failure, and Cárdenas' rough first years, they willingly campaigned and supported him. Newspapers were not co-opted by the government; they were attracted to Cárdenas' energy and rhetoric and saw their activism reflected in his policies.

Necessary Context of Newspapers and Mexican Historiography

While the dissertation is focused primarily on the relationship between the Mexican government and journalists, it will contribute to several broader themes. First, it will provide a general history of newspapers. Second, it examines the role of journalists as activists. Third, it will summarize the historiography of the Post-Revolutionary era. Within this historiography, I am most interested in the notion of populism and the contradictory nature of the Revolutionary state. The state needed to recentralize its power while increasing Mexican participation in the political process. The dissertation will make a major contribution to the historiography of the Calles era. Both he and Obregón sought to recentralize power in the power in the hands of the national government. Calles, who was a reformer – genuinely wanting to improve the lives of his people – but he required loyalty and acquiescence to his vision and policies. In the end, he became a dangerous conservative to his younger more progressive successor.

The notion of Calles as a populist comes from his support of labor unions. However, the spread and development of independent newspapers was possibly the most populist development during this period. Seemingly anyone, from any region, with any political affiliation could fund and publish a periodical. This created a level of political engagement that could rival the state's work in education, land distribution or the legalization of unions, the major reforms that have been typically associated with populist reforms during this period. In addition, periodicals served as sites of resistance against the state's attempts at intervening in their lives. They gave people a public forum to complain and find others that shared their localized identities. At the heart of the conflict between the government and newspapers was a debate over who could participate in the nation's politics. The government wanted to tightly control its interactions but newspapers acted as a conduit for people in ways that could not be easily controlled.

A history of the media in the U.S.

The development of the modern newspaper is often traced to Joseph Pulitzer, a Hungarian immigrant who ran away from home at the age of 17 to join the Union Army during the Civil War. His career in newspapers started when he was hired to be a reporter for the German language daily, the *Westliche Post*.⁶ In 1872, he bought the St. Louis *Dispatch* and merged it with another newspaper to form the *Post-Dispatch*. Within four years the circulation of Pulitzer's newspaper rivaled that of periodicals that represented the local Democrat and Republican parties. Pulitzer's success was partially driven by his belief that his newspaper would "serve no party but the people: be no organ of Republicanism, but the organ of truth; will follow no causes but its conclusions; will not

⁶ Denis Brian, *Pulitzer: A Life*, (New York: John Wiley: 2001), 9-10.

support the “administration,” but criticize it.”⁷ Others did not share his noble opinions of his newspaper and instead criticized the *Post-Dispatch* for lowering the standards of news coverage as the newspaper exploited stories of murder, sin and sex and for sensationalizing accounts of violence, lynchings, public hangings and dramatic deaths. Despite promoting violent stories, the newspaper had an activist undercurrent. It attacked the city’s wealthy families but was more focused on improving the lives of the middle-class instead of the working-class.

Pulitzer took the profits from the *Post-Dispatch* and purchased a bankrupt New York City paper, the *World* in 1883. He revamped the *World*, and within the first year it had overtaken its main competitors in New York City.⁸ By 1885, its Sunday edition was the largest in size and circulation of any newspaper published in the U.S. It was consuming nearly 834 miles of newsprint per edition.⁹ While his new periodical relied on sensationalism, it quickly developed a social consequence. It championed the free use of the Brooklyn Bridge for laborers who needed it to travel to work, produced a concise ten-point program on tax reform and well developed crusades that attacked the garment industry’s reliance on sweatshops.¹⁰ It’s reporting started explored the lives of New York City’s growing immigrant population and the challenges they faced. At the same time the *World*’s popularity was exploding, changes were occurring in the newsrooms around the country. Newsrooms started to build larger editorial staffs during the Civil War, since they had to collect reports from correspondents in far-flung battlefields. These staffs

⁷ Michael Emery, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media (9th Edition)*, (Pearson: New York, 1997), 172.

⁸ James McGrath Morris, *Pulitzer: A Life in Politics, Print, and Power*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 207.

⁹ Morris, *Pulitzer*, 237.

¹⁰ Michael Emery, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America*, 178.

continued to grow as an upsurge in circulation increased specialization within newspapers.¹¹ By the 1870s each metropolitan paper had a city editor and at least a dozen staffers underneath him. In addition, there were technological improvements in how newspapers were produced. Faster presses became essential as more copies had to be produced with less turnaround time before deadlines. These large machines were held in printing plants and worked by printers, pressmen, and engravers. Originally illustrated by artists, photography became the dominant form of visual media in newspapers, once they perfected the ability to reproduce the pictures produced by their reporters in 1887.¹²

At the same time Pulitzer was securing his supremacy in New York City, his future rival, William Randolph Hearst, had assumed the editorship of the *San Francisco Examiner* in the spring of 1887.¹³ Relying on many of the same tactics as Pulitzer, Hearst quickly made his newspaper the most popular in the area.¹⁴ However, Hearst was not satisfied though with owning the West Coast and sold the *Examiner* and used the profits to purchase a struggling newspaper in New York City. From minute Hearst arrived in New York City, he served notice to Pulitzer by hiring the majority of Pulitzer's staff to work his new periodical, the *Evening Journal*.¹⁵ Everything at the *Evening Journal* was over the top, from its headlines, "Real American Monsters and Dragons," and "Strange Things Women do for Love" to its social crusades, it went beyond other newspapers that

¹¹ Ibid., 179.

¹² Ibid., 192.

¹³ David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 69.

¹⁴ Nasaw, *The Chief*, 77.

¹⁵ Kenneth Whyte, *The Uncrowned King: The Sensational Rise of William Randolph Hearst*, (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009), 345.

just crusaded about social issues and obtained a court order to prevent the city from franchising a gas company.¹⁶

Even though both the *World* and the *Evening Journal* relied on sensationalism to drive business, nothing sold more newspapers than actual news. On days of political importance, such as the day following the McKinley-Bryan presidential election, the *World* and *Journal* sold a combined 1.5 million copies.¹⁷ Fortunately, the editors of the nation's major dailies were gifted with another major story when the Cuban insurrection started in March 1895. Interest in Cuba jumped when the Spanish started to use harsh repressive measures and ordered all Cubans to report to camps adjoining their bases.¹⁸ This policy resulted in the deaths thousands of Cubans and newspapers nicknamed the Spanish governor, Veleriano Weyler, the "Butcher" and compared him to the "bloodthirsty Cortez and Pizarro." While all the dailies competed for information from Cuba, Heart's *Journal* worked the hardest. On February 9, 1898, it published a private letter written by the Spanish Ambassador. The letter referred to President McKinley as "weak and catering to the rabble and besides, a low politician."¹⁹ Six days later the Maine would explode and the *Journal's* front-page headline screamed, "The Whole Country Thrills with War Fever." These stories helped push the U.S. into war with Spain and earned it the well-known moniker, "Hearst's War."²⁰ Even though it was a short war, some 500 reporters, artists, and photographers flocked to Florida, where the U.S. army was mobilizing and to the Cuban and Puerto Rican fronts. Hearst was not one to let his

¹⁶ Ibid., 196.

¹⁷ Nasaw, *The Chief*, 119.

¹⁸ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 100-103.

¹⁹ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 370.

²⁰ Ibid., 200.

employees have all the fun and traveled to Cuba himself and helped to transfer information from his correspondents back to the mainland.²¹ U.S. journalists covered every battle and skirmish. The Spanish-American War was the height of the Yellow Journalism period. Over the next decade this style would fall out of favor as newspapers focused on the more intelligent use of headlines, pictures, and color printing.

Activism Continued

Over the next ten years, the activist notions of the U.S. media shared many characteristics with its Mexican counterpart. This occurred because both countries had experienced the same concentration of wealth in small minority of the population. For Mexicans, large *hacienda* owners and international corporations from the U.S and Britain controlled much of the nation's prosperity. This prosperity came at the expense of local communities whose land would be taken from them in order to build railroads or develop large-scale farming operations.²² This led to a breakdown of the reciprocal nature of the traditional *hacienda* master / peon relationship where the master became wealthy but still provided a minimal level of care for his workers.²³ At the same time in the U.S., the economic landscape had become dominated by trust companies, which often underpaid their workers leading to a rise in inequality. The six largest trusts, steel, oil, copper, sugar, tobacco and shipping controlled more than 2.5 billion dollars in capital.²⁴ The economic inequality spurred the development of an activist press corps. However, their relationship to the nation's political system differed greatly. In the U.S., the majority of

²¹ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 427-428

²² John Coatsworth, Railroads, "Landholding, and Agrarian Protest in the Early Porfiriato," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Feb., 1974), pp. 48-71.

²³ Mark Wasserman, *Everyday life and Politics in nineteenth century Mexico: Men, Women and War*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).

²⁴ Michael Emery, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media (9th Edition)*, (Pearson: New York, 1997), 209.

the important journalists remained journalists through their careers. While their reporting and activism impacted policy, they not did become politicians. In comparison, Mexican journalists, especially those that came to prominence during the Mexican Revolution, often went on to political careers. This was partially a result of their close relationship with Carranza and other leaders in the Constitutionalist movement. In the aftermath of the war, they were awarded governmental posts or support as a reward for helping to secure Carranza's victory.

This separation between government and journalists in the U.S. was limited to the investigative reporters. Both Pulitzer and Hearst had participated in elections at local and national levels and had close relationships with different presidents. Part of Pulitzer's reformist drive came from his defeat in a local St. Louis election. He believed the loss was due to not being part of the Democratic political machine and made it his mission to reform the party that was controlled by the mayor Ed Bulter.²⁵ Four years later, Pulitzer used his New York City newspaper to help Glover Cleveland win the presidential election and put a democrat in the White House. Throughout a grueling campaign, the *World* defended Cleveland from attacks from other newspapers. The deathblow to Cleveland's opponent, James G. Blaine, was a political cartoon in the *World* that ridiculed for Blaine meeting with the nation's "Money Kings."²⁶ Hearst made himself into a politician and one-upped Pulitzer by winning the first of his two terms in Congress in 1902.²⁷ During the Mexican Revolution, Hearst advocated a full-scale invasion. He was severely disappointed with Wilson's decision to only occupy the Port of Veracruz

²⁵ Brian, *Pulitzer*, 44.

²⁶ Brian, *Pulitzer*, 93.

²⁷ Leonard Ray Teel, *The Public Press, 1900-1945*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 8.

and that the U.S. allowed a South American commission to oversee negotiations. Hearst criticized the president, saying, “all of South America was laughing at us.” In addition, he believed, “the Mexicans are far enough to govern themselves under ordinary conditions but not far enough advanced to give themselves as good a government as the United States could give them.”²⁸ These examples demonstrated the close connections Pulitzer and Hearst had with different presidents. These connections were not surprising. Both managed the two largest newspapers in the U.S. and were responsible for driving public opinion. Any political leader would have been foolish to not cultivate their friendship. However, these machinations made Hearst and Pulitzer more similar to the monopolies they fought against.

Journalistic activism in the U.S. media took multiple forms. The major city dailies produced the most information on issues regarding corrupt companies. Pulitzer spearheaded an investigation into Equitable Life Assurance Society, the nation’s largest life insurance company. His journalists discovered that its employees had been using funds paid by policyholders for their own private investments and thereby were building huge personal fortunes.²⁹ This led to a government investigation and new laws for the whole industry. This reformist movement spread outside of New York City. In the mid-west, Chicago’s *Daily News* worked to improve lives by expanding the public services offered by the city. As early as 1890, it advocated the government control of important utilities because “the people have granted away their social functions to private citizens and to corporations which find themselves under the necessity of corruption in order to protect themselves....Abolish special privileges, and very soon municipal corruption will

²⁸ Nasaw, *The Chief*, 229.

²⁹ Emery, *The Press and America*, 210.

in the main disappear.³⁰ The *Daily News* was just one of many mid-western papers that came to prominence during this period. The *Detroit News*, *Cleveland Press*, and *Emporia Gazette* in Kansas City joined it as papers that captured the reformist spirit of the early 1900s.

The activist spirit was not limited to these major dailies. Many Americans had started to turn to socialism or labor unions as a solution to the unequal distribution of wealth. This resulted in an increase of socialist newspapers available in the U.S. Two of the most substantial periodicals were the *New York Evening Call* and the *Milwaukee Leader*.³¹ These and other presses helped grow socialism in the country and the party started to have a relatively large impact on the nation's politics. In 1912, presidential candidate Eugene Debs polled 6 percent of the popular vote and 79 socialist mayors were elected in 24 states.³²

In addition, general interest magazines were seen as places of responsible journalism, against the sensationalized style of daily newspapers. The most popular magazines in this early period were *McClure's*, *Mumsey's* and *Cosmopolitan*, which produced long-form articles based on substantial investigations and were well illustrated. At the turn of the twentieth century, they combined to sell more than 400,000 copies on a monthly basis. Popular magazines' advantage revolved around their national or least large regional following unlike their newspaper counterparts that were limited to a more local audience. This meant newspapers might have a conflict of interest and might not

³⁰ David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 156.

³¹ Emery, *The Press and America*, 212.

³² Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 254.

investigate a local company that was a major advertiser. Furthermore, a national advertiser base allowed them to pay their reporters more, for higher quality journalism. For instance, *McClure's* published Ida M. Tarbell's 19-part series (1902-1904) expose on the "force and fraud" John D. Rockefeller used to build the Standard Oil Company.³³ Tarbell was paid \$4,000 for three articles on Standard Oil per year. This slow approach to publishing was the antithesis of major dailies. It paid off as Tarbell's reporting and other series caught the eye of President Theodore Roosevelt. He reached out to *McClure's* editors and they timed the release of certain stories to help generate popular support whenever one of his reform bills was voted on in Congress.³⁴

The activism in the U.S. was focused on breaking up the power of the trusts that came to control its economy at the turn of the century. Across the country, daily newspapers and specialty magazines called for new and more comprehensive reforms. These had a positive impact on people's lives and help ensure people's basic needs were being met. Unlike Mexican periodicals during this time period, many were apolitical and not associated with a party. They put out the investigation and pressured politicians in general to change the laws. Mexican periodicals were often supported by a politician so their work reflected that person's politics.

Post-Revolutionary Mexico – Centralization vs. populism

Historians have studied few eras in Latin American history as extensively as the Revolutionary Period. Over a forty-year period, Mexico experienced consistent turmoil and general upheaval in its ruling class, which somehow produced a stable single party, *Partido Instituto Revolucionario* (PRI) and a dictatorship that lasted until 2000. While

³³ Teel, *The Public Press*, 16.

³⁴ Teel, *The Public Press*, 17.

recent scholarship has demonstrated the so-called “Perfect Dictatorship” was not as peaceful as historians previously believed, it nonetheless had to resort to violence less than other dictatorships that came to power in Latin America in the twentieth century. At the heart of this scholarship is an attempt to understand the inherent tension between attempts by the ruling class to recentralize power against a population that had purposely destroyed the state during the Mexican Revolution. Initially, scholars such as Tannenbaum, who traveled to Mexico and was a friend of Cárdenas, produced triumphal narratives that declared his friend had successfully implemented many important reforms. His seminal text, *Mexico: The Struggle for Peace and Bread*, was researched and written in afterglow of Cárdenas’ presidency but before the internal struggles of the PRI became well known. For Tannenbaum, government had resolved the tension by acquiescing to the demands of the people and providing governmental reforms.

The next wave of scholarship that developed applied Marxist notions of the state and structural determinism to understand the development of the PRI dictatorship. One of the best works using this approach is Nora Hamilton’s *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico*. Hamilton was interested in how the Mexican state had achieved “relative autonomy” and “progressive orientation” under Cárdenas. Hamilton defined autonomy as independence from internal elites and external large corporations. Following Cárdenas, she believed the PRI gave back these gains and by the mid-twentieth century the state was once again controlled by the elites in Mexican society.³⁵ She believed the incorporation of leftist groups, labor unions and peasant organizations, which were seen as populist actions, left them weakened in the long-term because their

³⁵ Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 4-12.

inclusion created an authoritarian structure. These groups were formed locally but lost their independence when the national state co-opted them.³⁶

The focus on structuralism pointed to another question. If the state acted in the interests of the elite minority, then how did it remain in place if it did not fulfill the needs of the majority of the citizens? Hamilton's notion of co-optation only applied to a relatively minor portion of any state's population so controlling unions was not enough. An influential answer came in the form of Florencia Mallon's *Peasant and Nation* that repurposed Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony to demonstrate how the state is always in a state of flux, as power is constantly being negotiated between different communities or coalitions.³⁷ These coalitions were not stable as internal and external events could transform them. Using a comparison between Peru and Mexico, Mallon demonstrated that in Mexico, coalitions in the Sierra de Puebla and Morelos played a crucial role in the Liberals winning the Wars of the Reform. The Liberals in the national government acknowledged these regions for their participation and rewarded them for their efforts. These negotiations helped to integrate them into the state. Ten years later, Patrick McNamara published research that helped to reinforce this Mallon's contention. He had found the petitions sent by the Sierrans asking for help from the capital. The petitions demonstrated how the region felt a connection to the Mexican state and when the Sierrans felt their pleas were no longer heard they broke away and helped initiate the Revolution.³⁸

³⁶ Hamilton, *The Limits of State Authority*, 36.

³⁷ Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 6.

³⁸ Patrick J. McNamara, *Sons of the Sierra: Juárez, Díaz, and the People of Ixtlán Oaxaca, 1855-1920*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 3.

Mallon contrasted the success of the Mexican state with failure of the Peruvian state to integrate certain regions. Most notably, the indigenous population in the Mantaro Valley had retained its independence throughout the 19th century and felt no loyalty to the Peruvian state. When Peru lost the war against Chile in 1881, the indigenous participated in a guerilla war against the Chileans. However, they were more focused on their own regional independence and at times allied themselves with the invaders against their Peruvian enemies. Once the war ended, Peru had to fight another war in an attempt to forcefully integrate them into the state.³⁹ Mallon's case studies helped to usher in a new way of understanding how states maintained their positions in society. Instead of being all powerful, the state needed to participate in constant negotiations with its various constituents. If citizens did not feel their voice was being heard, then they would no longer feel loyalty and be free to find a new partner that would negotiate with them.

It would be incorrect to treat *Peasant and Nation* as a singular text that ushered in a new understanding of state building in Latin America. Its theoretical underpinnings brought together some of the field's most important scholars. A year earlier, Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent published an edited volume of essays, *Everyday Forms of State Formation*, which revealed the group's work on the interrelationship between the concepts of popular, state formation, and the Mexican Revolution.⁴⁰ Through a series of case studies, the volume illustrates how the relationship between popular culture and state formation is complex and intertwined. They argued these themes could not be split into dichotomies. Furthermore, by featuring James Scott, a postcolonial East Indian scholar, it

³⁹ Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*, 257-262.

⁴⁰ Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds. *Everyday forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

demonstrated the group's desire to look to other scholarship for a theoretical framework.⁴¹ These themes were explored over a diverse set of essays that ranged from moral regulators (*jefatura políticas*), to schools in Tlaxacala, the continued importance of the church in Michoacán, and the consequences of mass literacy. This volume demonstrated that Mallon's work was not an outlier in the field. It was the result of larger conversations with many scholars from various fields. These and other historians that focused on the relationship between state building and popular culture would establish the current dominant model of scholarship, known originally as the New Cultural History.

In 2002, Alan Knight published "Subalterns, Signifiers, and Statistics: Perspectives on Mexican Historiography," an essay that explored the facets of New Cultural History and addressed its main critics. He believed the new historical trend came from seven interrelated themes: subalterns, agency, political engagement, "history with the politics put back in it," mentalities, textual criticisms and interdisciplinary influences. It is impossible to construct a hierarchy of these terms or ideas in terms of importance. For instance, one cannot define "the subaltern" without a discussion of agency or political engagement. These terms are so intertwined that it is impossible to have one without the other. This explains one of the main criticisms of New Cultural History, if one theme is reliant on the others, then they are inherently unstable. Knight puts it simply, "This lack of agreement [between historians] makes debating its utility somewhat difficult: we are trying to home in on a moving target...But we are left with the vexatious qualifier

⁴¹ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

‘cultural.’”⁴² Other historians echoed Knight’s complaints, one of whom wrote, “Perhaps the greatest divergence among the contributors emerges in their assessments of what the new cultural history is, what it does, and how it does it.”⁴³ Ten years after Knight’s article, these criticisms remain in place as historian Ben Fallaw despaired in a footnote saying, “Some students of hegemony seem to relish indeterminacy and fragmentation, at times making their arguments seem opaque to the uninitiated.”⁴⁴ Despite these early teething pains, the themes of the New Cultural Historians would come to dominate the field, to such an extent these debates are no longer seem relevant, it has become understood that it is impossible to do history without popular sources, without including the subalterns, or without questioning agency.

These themes are so ingrained in our historical scholarship that one does not pause to examine it further. Two books that are particularly important to this dissertation are Jürgen Buchenau’s recent biographies of Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles. On the surface, their value is derived from being the most recent biographies on the two most important figures in Mexican politics and they provide the necessary political outline for events that took place in the 1920s and early 1930s. However, Buchenau provides subtle theoretical underpinnings that move these biographies away from typical “Great Man History” in order to explain how Calles was able to recentralize power and stabilize the Mexican state in the 1920s. According to Buchenau, Calles’ relied on nation’s labor unions to cement his political power. The most important of these was the

⁴² Alan Knight, “Subalterns, Signifiers, and Statistics: Perspectives on Mexican Historiography,” *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 37, No. 2 (2002), 139.

⁴³ Susan Dean-Smith and Gilbert Joseph, “The Arena of Dispute,” *Hispanic American Research Review*, vol. 79 no. 2, Special Issue (May, 1999), 205.

⁴⁴ Ben Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 227.

Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM, or Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers), a union committed to securing collective bargaining, higher wages shorter hours, workers' compensation and profit sharing for all workers.⁴⁵ In return for their support in first electing Obregón and then Calles, CROM and other unions were rewarded with national protections. This summary simplifies the situation greatly, for Calles also relied on corruption and violence to eliminate any competition. However, it is telling that ten years following his initial formation of these alliances, Calles had lost the support of the nation's workers and when it came time to challenge Cárdenas, he did not have the weight of the people behind him. Without his support from labor union, his cunning and reliance of violence was no longer enough to maintain his power. His original coalition no longer felt he was a viable leader so they switched sides just as Mallon would have predicted.

Buchenau acknowledges this analysis stands in contrast to the scholarly assumptions that Obregón and Calles had betrayed the Revolution through conservative policies. In order to defend the populism of Calles, Buchenau claimed Mexican society was a "catastrophic equilibrium," a Gramscian term in which "the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born." In order to survive in such a difficult environment, the Sonorans had to acknowledge and respond to popular demands for social change or Mexico would have descended into another civil war.⁴⁶ Its informative that the strongest challenges to Calles reign would come from disaffected generals and Catholics, the two groups that he openly antagonized and tried to restrict their activities. He was not interested in

⁴⁵ Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2007), 99.

⁴⁶ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 82.

negotiating with either group so they repeatedly fought throughout his presidency.

Buchenau's work demonstrates how integrated the New Cultural History has become in historical scholarship. Even if he does not use the exact terms, subaltern, hegemony, or agency, his understanding and explanation for Calles regime implicitly relies on them. They are the hidden foundation for an analysis of Obregón and Calles that goes further than these were charismatic leaders who ruled through force.

Buchenau's major intervention in the historiography is making Calles a populist and putting him the conversation with other Latin American leaders like Argentina's Hipólito Yrigoyen.⁴⁷ Previously, the majority of the scholarship identified the Cárdenas presidency as the start of Mexico's grassroots political system. The majority of the discussions surrounding Cárdenas' populist case can be broken into two cases, first the sincerity of his desires to improve the lives of poor Mexicans and second whether or not the programs were successful. Evidence of Cárdenas' genuine affection for all of Mexico's citizens is best answered with Alan Knight's description of him as a "dour, honest, clean-living, frugal, horse-riding, tree-loving, patriotic president; one who traveled the country incessantly, reaching 'well-nigh inaccessible places,' ... who hunkered down to talk to peasants in dusty plazas of remote Pueblos."⁴⁸ This assessment of Cárdenas is reinforced in my analysis of the newspapers and journalists that covered his presidency. Unlike Calles, who spent the majority of his time near Mexico City, Cárdenas traveled to wherever there was a major strike or trouble with an *ejido*. These trips created a bond between the president and the nation's citizens because he was

⁴⁷ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, xxiv.

⁴⁸ Alan Knight, *Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy? Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 26, No. 1, (Feb. 1994), 80.

willing to meet his constituents wherever they lived. There was no sense of elitism and newspapers sold his populist image throughout the nation. However, there is increasing evidence that his programs were not successful, not due to his vision, but because local officials worked against him to protect their own self-interests. This is best seen in Fallaw's *Cardenas Compromised*, which examines how local politicians in Yucatán rallied public support to reduce the effectiveness of agrarian reform. They were able to control the narrative and present Cárdenas and his allies as outsiders that wanted to overturn their traditional values. In addition, Cárdenas did not allocate enough economic resources to ensure the programs realization. Fallaw demonstrated that Cárdenas believed in this program and personally traveled to Yucatán in hopes of jumpstarting the process.⁴⁹ The populism that has come to define Cárdenas' presidency can be separated into two parts. Many acknowledge his authentic attempts to better people's lives but realize on the practical scale that his grand ambitions often did not come to fruition.

These discussions of populism and when and where it existed in Mexico mostly focuses on land reform and the legalization of labor unions. They have been seen as the two largest groups that fought for benefits following the Revolution. However, this ignores the media, perhaps the largest group of activists working in Mexico during the Revolutionary period. Until the radio started to come into prominence in the 1930s, newspapers were the only form of mass communication available. This went beyond the national periodicals, *El Universal*, *Excelsior*, *El Demócrata*, as every city and region had a local paper that people relied on. In addition, there were numerous specialty periodicals that only covered specific subjects, for example, issues pertaining to the Catholic Church.

⁴⁹ Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 88-90.

Every political creed was represented at some point. Everyday they helped to shape opinions of millions of readers. No newspaper could truly claim to be independent. Simply by reporting the news, they influenced people, demonstrating that whatever concerns the reader felt, someone else shared these concerns. Many Senators and Deputies in the Mexican Congress started their careers as journalists before the Election of 1910. They participated in the Constitutional Convention of 1917. In the chaos of the 1920s, when many had to choose a side, reporting the news and trying to maintain one's independence became a political act. At the turn of the century, journalism became a mode of activism in Mexico, like it had in the United States. Reporters maintained that activist spirit throughout the 1920s, regardless of their relationship or the conflicts they had with the government.

Dissertation Outline

Chapter One demonstrates the crucial role newspapers played in the Mexican Revolution. In 1900, as Díaz's regime was starting to crumble due to an economic recession, periodicals focused on politics started to flourish. The most famous of these was anarchist *Regeneración* produced by the Magón brothers. The number of newspapers only increased as the election approached and it seemed like there was a possibility of an open election. Each of the major candidates relied on periodicals to spread their message and communicate with their allies. Once Francisco I. Madero's uprising forced Díaz to leave the country, his inability to control his message through the media partially led to a coup against his government that threw the country into chaos. The majority of Madero's journalist supporters rallied and quickly joined Carranza's Constitutionalist Army. They worked to maintain Carranza's popularity after Zapata and Villa split, which played a

crucial role in the helping him win the war. Unfortunately, journalists were not rewarded for their sacrifices; instead, many were arrested when they protested the lack of protections in the Constitution of 1917. This hinted a long-term conflict between the government, which was largely controlled by generals and the media.

Chapter Two examines the difficult political landscape periodicals found themselves in following the Revolution. Two new national periodicals, *El Universal* and *Excelsior*, were founded in this period. Both attempted to develop a new model of political independence. They saw their role as watchdogs that could inform voters and help keep the government in check. Politicians saw their independence as a problem since they reported news without thinking about its impact on the unstable country. This left them without much support. In 1920, the nation's political landscape transformed. Obregón led an uprising against Carranza, which ushered in the Sonoran Dynasty. Obregón had previously fought with journalists during the Convention of 1917 but displayed a much more deft hand this time. Instead of jailing his opponents he turned them into ambassadors and sent them on trips to Europe. Furthermore, he tasked his right-hand man, Calles, to create a government agency that could develop connections to the journalist community. They recognized the media was too big to control completely but they could restrain and guide it.

The mid-1920s was a chaotic time for Mexico. Obregón and Calles overcame several large-scale uprisings that forced the generals back to the battlefield. These uprisings were joined by thousands of strikes and other minor clashes that created the perception that they were not in control. In order to take back control, Calles started to rely on repression. He threatened to use the military or purchase deviant newspapers.

Chapter 3 examines how journalists retained their activist spirit in this increasingly repressive environment. They tried to focus on local stories instead of openly fighting with the government. This allowed them to continue reporting the news without drawing too much attention and openly feuding with the government.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that despite Calles' repressive tactics, journalist activism could transform and operate in any environment. Following Obregón's murder, Calles became the *Jefe Máximo* of the Revolution. He used his authority to form a new political party that he could easily control from behind the scenes. As he solidified his powerbase, he began to exile dangerous journalists. The most prominent of these exiles was Palavicini, whose arrest was covered in every major newspaper. This repression forced newspapers to draw on their heritage as vehicles for political parties and social causes in order their activism. One can see this in the coverage of the newly formed *El Nacional*, which was a throwback to periodicals before the Revolution. It was founded to help support the PNR, Calles new political party. It trumpeted the attributes of political its political candidates and attacked any negative news story. This did not mean the newspaper had no agency. When it became clear Cárdenas was a true reformer, *El Nacional* and others switched their allegiance from Calles. Despite the repression, newspapers found a way to retain their agency and still act as sites of resistance.

The dissertation closes with an examination of the role newspapers played in Cárdenas' reform programs. Initially, they served as messengers and stabilizing agents. The first message they broadcasted to every part of the country was that the new president would support the right to strike for all workers. Predictably, this resulted in problems as huge swaths of the country went on strike. It seemed like Cárdenas had

created too big a challenge and would be toppled soon by face an insurrection from his own party. However, the second message newspapers presented was that Cárdenas was still in command of the situation, which helped him stabilize the country. They featured front-page stories that demonstrated he was personally dealing with him traveling the country and meeting with strikers. They transmitted his rallies and declarations, which revealed his continued support to workers. It made it seem like he was in control, even if he was not. Cárdenas recognized the importance and passed several reforms designed to end the nation's newsprint shortage. The story of *PIPSA* revealed the weakness of his programs. Though they were grandiose and heartfelt in structure, local politicians often undercut the programs and prevented them from reaching their potential. In the end, Cárdenas was unable to solve the paper problem and *PIPSA* faced an uncertain future at the end of his administration.

By the end of Cárdenas' presidency, he had completely reversed the strategy of coercion that Calles had previously employed in dealing with newspapers. Instead of fearing government intervention, periodicals had openly asked for help in dealing with the national newsprint shortage. Cárdenas had effectively nationalized these previously independent organizations just as he had with petroleum, land and unions. After forty years of conflict, they were now integrated into the "Revolutionary Family."⁵⁰ Some regional newspapers would retain their local identities, but it would not matter as their hometown political would eventually be brought into the larger structure of the Mexico's

⁵⁰ Frank Ralph Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), 3. More recent scholarship that has explored the concept of the Revolutionary Family is Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies and Other Threats to the Nation: A Political of Comic Books in Mexico*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) and Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

national party. In theory, this was the idealized vision of the government that many journalists had fought for during the Revolution. They wanted a seat at the government table and the ability to shape policy and improve the country. Even when journalists like Palavicini claimed they were independent, their correspondence revealed they had been closely advising or meeting with officials regularly. They got into politics as activists before the Revolution and continued their political work throughout the time period. Cárdenas' presidency and the subsequent cementation of the national party allowed them to remain a part of the government, which was the end goal for many journalists. Palavicini and *Excelsior* saw the 1940s as the end of the Revolution because they had secured their goals and status in Mexican society. They were political actors and had used their power to institute the reforms they had wanted forty years prior.

The Role of Periodicals in the Mexican Revolution (1900-1917)

Introduction:

At the turn of the 20th century, few observers would have picked Mexico as the site for the first nation-wide social uprising of the century. Under the dictator Porfirio Díaz, the nation had experienced its longest period of peace and prosperity since independence. At the heart of this prosperity was the modernization of Mexico's infrastructure. By knitting together his nation with railroads, Díaz enabled land and mine owners to ship products to new markets around the country and eventually the world. Economic prosperity bought the loyalty of Mexican elites and they provided the backbone of his support for more than three decades. Nonetheless, in 1910, the nation fell into a long period of upheaval.

Journalists played a crucial role in sustaining Díaz's regime by not exposing the repression and unfairness that marked his rule. The litany of grievances was long: country people lost their lands to large landowners or politicians; workers endured unsafe working conditions. Journalists throughout the country largely ignored these issues because it was easier for them to take bribes and remain silent than risk arrest or assassination. It was a comfortable arrangement and few resisted this symbiotic system.

At the turn of the century, this relationship began to fracture as activist journalists funded periodicals throughout Mexico. The growth of press protests continued until the eve of the 1910 election. I argue that opposition newspapers played a crucial role in Francisco I. Madero's uprising that ended the Díaz dictatorship. These periodicals served as sites of resistance, initially serving primarily regional audiences giving a voice to the nation's growing discontent with the dictatorship. They spread the notion that a radical

anarchist uprising was necessary to overthrow the nation's inequitable economic structure. Newspapers like *Regeneración* and *El Correo de Chihuahua* linked the struggles of poor Mexicans to workers around the world. This created a sense that their readers were not alone in their struggles and gave them a way to communicate with one another. The press continued to mobilize resistance against Díaz as politicians mounted electoral challenges against his dictatorship. The movement peaked in 1910, as candidates across the nation established their own newspapers to publicize their campaigns. These periodicals refined an activist style of reporting, serving to promote their candidates' interests. Even though Díaz attempted to shut down many of these dissident newspapers, he only partially stemmed the tide.

Newspapers continued to play an important role in affecting public opinion once Díaz left power and Madero became president. Madero could not maintain his coalition and presidency in part because of the continual publication of complaints against his government printed in newspapers, which created a sense of chaos and probably helped inspire General Victoriano Huerta to lead a coup against Madero and to his murder. At this point the revolution splintered and multiple factions vied for control of the nation, each deployed periodicals to generate support. The eventual winner of the war, the faction known as the Constitutionalists, won partially due their skillful manipulation of the media.

The chapter closes by examining the debates surrounding whether the Constitution of 1917 would protect newspapers from prosecution, if they printed complaints against the government. Journalists hoped this would be their reward for helping the Constitutionalists win the revolution, but the Convention denied their request

for protection. Instead, the government continued to manipulate and subsidize its favored newspapers, leaving independent media organizations to struggle and fear. This prevented periodicals from growing past their initial role as surrogates for political candidates or causes and set the stage for continual conflict between the government and independent journalists throughout the post-Revolutionary period.

A note on Sources

This chapter draws on sources from two archives. The first is the Archivo Juan Barragán located at the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas at the Biblioteca Nacional de México. Barragán was a close confidant of Venustiano Carranza throughout the revolution and served as Carranza's secretary of state while his government was in exile. The first section of the archive contains correspondence sent to Carranza and several other high-ranking government officials from 1913 to 1920. The second section comprises Barragán's personal correspondence from after the revolution, particularly his exile in Habana (1920-1931) and his return to Mexico (1932-1973). These documents were entrusted to Barragán to maintain by Carranza and were kept at the National Palace throughout his exile. In the 1940s, the documents were cataloged and made available to researchers.¹ The second archive is the Archivo Histórico de la Defensa Nacional. This contains correspondence from various officials from the revolutionary period including Francisco Madero and Carranza. They were collected and cataloged by a team led by

¹ Amaya Garritz, *Guía del Archivo Juan Barragán*, (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1986), VIII.

Daniel Cosío Villegas at the Colegio de Mexico.² The time period covered by these documents is 1910-1920.

Periodicals before Mexican Revolution: The beginning of Resistance

Early in Díaz's thirty-five year rule, the dictatorship, he largely eliminated any independent media organizations that might challenge his regime through repression and payoffs. He repeatedly jailed critical journalists such as Filómeno Mata who wrote for the periodical *El Diario del Hogar* and had him arrested more than thirty times for criticizing the regime. The arrests were so frequent and predictable that he bragged that his jailers installed his personal bed in the prison.³ While Mata often joked about Díaz's repression, the government's antagonism against the press could turn deadly. In 1890, Díaz's operative assassinated Dr. Ignacio Martínez, an editor working in Brownsville, Texas.⁴ However, repression was not the norm. The majority of Mexican journalists in this era found it easier and more financially rewarding to be subsidized by the president than to be critical of him.⁵ The most prominent of these reporters included Adolfo Duclos Salinas, Rafael Zayas Enríquez, and Winstano Luis Orozco, and they ensured Díaz received flattering coverage in the national newspapers.

However, at the turn of the twentieth century, newspapers became a source of resistance against Díaz, as small, regional newspapers were established. The largest and most widely circulated of these periodicals was *Regeneración*, founded by Ricardo Flores

² Luis Muro, *Guía del Ramo Revolución Mexicana, 1910-1920, del Archivo Histórico de la Defensa Nacional, y de otros repositorios del Gabinete de Manuscritos de la Biblioteca Nacional de México*, (Mexico City: colegio de México, Centro Estudios Históricos, 1997), XVII.

³ Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 1: 39.

⁴ Ibid., 1:40

⁵ Ibid., 1: 41.

Magón. Flores Magón was an Óaxaqueño journalist who participated in the First Liberal Congress held in San Luis Potosí in 1901, which originated the opposition to the Díaz regime.⁶ Joining forces with his brother, he published the periodical and circulated it among other Liberal Clubs across Mexico.⁷ Their newspaper quickly grew and in less than a year liberals held another Congress with the intention of forming a political party to challenge Díaz. This meeting did not last long, because Díaz closed it down and arrested the people who attended it.⁸

This crackdown did not stop the Flores Magón brothers from publishing their newspaper. They escaped to the United States and continued to print *Regeneración* and send it across the border. Their resistance, allied with American and Spanish anarchists, persevered despite the combined efforts of U.S. and Mexican Federal Agents. While abroad, the political sensibilities of the Flores Magón brothers shifted further left, thereby alienating their original supporters. The majority of Liberals wanted to see reforms and a fair presidential election, but few desired the full-anarchist rebellion that the brothers advocated.⁹ Even as the brothers shifted further to left, they continued to support other newspapers throughout Mexico. Over the first fourteen months *Regeneración* referenced or bemoaned the forced closures of over twenty regional periodicals such as *Onofre* (Toluca), *El Pensamiento Libre* (Mérida) and *Vésper* (Guanajuato). This revealed even though Díaz continued to co-opt the national media, there was an opportunity for dissident periodicals to be published inside and outside of Mexico City.¹⁰

⁶ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, (New York: Zone Books, 2014), 83.

⁷ Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 1: 44.

⁸ Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 1:45.

⁹ Ibid., 1: 47.

¹⁰ Lomnitz-Adler, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, 88. The full list of periodicals that Lomnitz-Adler discovered is *El Gorro Frigio*, *Pro-Patria*, and *El Higo del Ahuizote* (Mexico City); *El*

A second periodical that gained traction during this period was *El Jacobino*, which was first published in 1901. It was edited by Daniel Cabrera and took its name from a political club that participated in the French Revolution known as the Jacobins. The original group was left-leaning and supported violent measures to achieve change. For readers who might not have made this connection, it featured an article its fifth issue titled, “¡Viva la Francia!” The article opened explaining the origins of revolution as a “French countryside that was tired of tyranny and exploitation, of deceptions and disgraces destroyed the Bastilla...and shouted the words, Liberty, Equality and Brotherhood.”¹¹ Cabrera described how the French nobility was publically executed. He believed it was possible for a similar revolution in Mexico since the nation had previously created a Constitution in 1857. This constitution demonstrated Mexicans understood the notion of democracy and could create a society where everyone had equality.

The periodical shared the anti-clerical beliefs of the French Jacobins. An early issue featured a caricature of the archbishop of Mexico cowering away from protesters. These protesters are dressed in suits and ties indicating they had desk jobs and were educated. They carried signs that read “Protests from Students,” “Prensa Liberal,” and “Death to the Friars.” The archbishop was drawn comically large, wearing his priest robes vestments and distinctive headdress. Underneath the picture, the caption read “the youth without fear or malice shouted with press, Justice! But the Bishop, dense, big and

Paladín, *Jalisco Libre*, and *El Despertador* (Guadalajara); *El Heraldo* (Aguascalientes); *El Demócrata*, *El So*, and *El Combate* (Hermosillo); *Renacimiento* (San Luis Potosí); *El Reproductor Campechano* (Campeche); *Excelsior* (Veracruz); *La Democracia* (Puebla); *El Pensamiento Libre*; *La Flor de la Esperanza* (Tulancingo, Hidalgo); *La Idea Liberal* (Tlaxotalpan); *Guelatao* (Tampico) *Vésper* (Guanajuato); *La Corregidora* (Laredo, Texas); *El Corsario* (Morelia); and *El Centinela* (Zacatecas).

¹¹ *El Jacobino*, July 14, 1901, Num. 6, 2.

fat, listened to their cry and ignored them.”¹² Behind the Bishop is a man who is hiding underneath his robes. This implied the priest was protecting him from the people punishing him for a crime. This caricature was joined by an article in which Cabrera accused the Catholic Church of creating an ignorant population, especially out in the countryside where the only schools were operated by priests. “Poor Mexicans remain trapped by notions of mysticism they are taught by priests,” he wrote in one issue.¹³ This would be reoccurring criticism by liberals in Mexico. The church made people ignorant because they believed in the magic power of religion instead of accepting new advances in science. The only way for Mexico to progress as a nation was to end the church’s hold over the population.

Over the next ten years, the number of regional newspapers continued to grow. This growth partially occurred due to the severe repression the nation experienced in 1906. Mexicans founded newspapers to publicize their complaints against what they perceived to be an unresponsive government. One of the largest of these was *El Correo* founded in 1902 by Silvestre Terrazas and circulated through the Chihuahua. When it was originally founded, Terrazas supported Díaz and his Chihuahua ally Enrique Creel but in 1906 the message of the newspaper changed dramatically as Terrazas transformed his newspaper and advocated for anarchist uprising in Mexico and abroad.¹⁴ It is not clear the genesis for this change but he possibly became disenfranchised with the lack of

¹² *El Jacobino*, July 7, 1901, Num. 5, 1.

¹³ *El Jacobino*, July 28, 1901, Num. 8, 2.

¹⁴ Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 46.

political opportunities for members of the middle class since Díaz and the Creel family blocked outsiders from government positions.¹⁵

Terrazas was not deterred when he served jail time in 1907 for his defiant stance against Díaz.¹⁶ When he was released he broadened the scope of his newspaper to include international stories. For instance, the same issue in 1909 featured stories about government repression in Italy, Paris and Mexico.¹⁷ These stories demonstrated to his readers that they were not alone in their struggles against inequality. All over the world, workers were raising up to make their lives better. It was time for Mexicans to unite and join this fight.

This first wave of revolutionary newspapers shared a series of similarities. First, they were politically motivated. While newspapers like *El Correo* claimed they were independent, they were designed to publicize the political beliefs of their owners. Terrazas curated which stories would make his periodical as did every editor. The newspapers were activist in nature, trying to influence Mexicans to adopt to new beliefs or practices. Second, they hoped to produce an emotional response from their readers. Cabrera was not interested in providing a fact based discussion as to the validity of Catholicism and its role in the Mexican country. He is trying to sensationalize the issue in order to shock people and motivate them to breakout of their lifestyles. In some ways, these publications suffer from an echo chamber effect. They will largely be read by people who support these editors, so the editor may not face any criticism for overstating

¹⁵ Mark Wasserman, *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1854-1911*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 154.

¹⁶ Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, 47.

¹⁷ “La Catástrofe en Italia,” “Palique Científico,” and Gran Ruina en Yucatán,” *El Correo*, January 5, 1909, 1-2

an issue. Third, caricatures played a key role. These owners had to find a way to communicate their ideas to a largely illiterate countryside. There is a long history of puppet shows and Judas Celebrations in Mexico so caricatures had a nation-wide appeal. The goal of these newspapers was to raise awareness of corruption in Mexico. They were unabashedly political in nature and nobody attempted to hide their beliefs. These editors were politician first and journalists second.

Periodicals and the Election of 1910

The growth of these dissenting newspapers created a sense of optimism among Mexicans that Díaz could be voted out of office in the 1910 Presidential election. The leader of this new movement was Francisco I. Madero, a member of one of the dozen wealthiest Mexican families. His family's financial empire included cotton and guayule haciendas, textile factories, wine distilleries, and copper mines and refineries.¹⁸ In a pamphlet he later published, Madero claimed he wanted to end Díaz's dictatorship while witnessing the brutal repression of protestors in Monterrey.

In order to successfully topple Díaz, Madero needed to cultivate a national public image and publicize his candidacy. To do so, he founded his own periodical *El Demócrata*.¹⁹ Circulated weekly, the newspaper attempted to undermine the Mexican dictator's local support by publicizing the corruption in his government. Initially, it did not advocate revolution. This reflected Madero's liberal constituency who wanted to reform the system without wholesale changes.²⁰ Despite this moderate stance, Madero initially faced repression as his movement gained steam. At one point Díaz officials

¹⁸ Stanley R. Ross, *Francisco I. Madero: Apostle of Mexican Democracy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁰ Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 1:57.

raided his headquarters forcing the editor of *El Demócrata* into exile and Madero barely avoided prison through the intervention of influential friends. The repression did not faze Madero. He quickly founded a new periodical, *Antireelectionista*, under the direction of José Vasconcelos. Madero knew that the press was a key to victory and believed the newspaper would serve as a “formidable battering ram against our enemies.”²¹

In addition to publishing his own newspaper, Madero forged relationships with members of the journalist community. One new ally was Félix Palavicini. His memoir, *Mi Vida Revolucionario*, provides an inside perspective of the role he and other journalists played during the 1910 election. Palavicini revealed how candidates closely managed their periodicals to present the best possible stories and how journalism became a tool for advancing political agendas. One example of how periodicals shaped their stories occurred on July 29, 1910, when both *Anti-Reelectionista* and *El Imparcial* both ran articles about a Madero campaign stop in Guadalajara.

Both articles noted that while Madero was speaking, there were outbreaks of violence between his and Díaz's supporters in the crowd. The following day, Madero sent a letter to Palavicini and told him that he wanted the violence to be construed positively in the paper. Palavicini followed through by manipulating the story and reporting that Madero's followers were innocent and victims of abuse from the police, when their only crime was gathering peacefully to hear him speak. Through his newspaper, Madero made sure his supporters heard the version of the story he wanted them to hear. *El Imparcial*, on the other hand, had a different opinion, as its version framed the riots as a possible threat to the entire nation. This story reinforced the notion that the election of the anti-

²¹ Telegram from Madero to E. Vázquez, August 2, 1907, Archive of Francisco I. Madero.

Díaz candidate would plunge the nation into chaos because the nation's poor could not rule the nation successfully.²² Obviously, this story, reported two different ways, illustrates the built-in biases of any periodicals founded by political candidates. These newspapers were never founded to be arbiters but rather they were extensions of their founders.

Palavicini also wrote in his memoirs about the violence journalists faced during the election. To weaken his opponents Díaz in the fall of 1909 shut down the National Paper and Type Co., which printed several periodicals that supported Madero. This forced Madero to establish new printing presses less than a year before the presidential election. Palavicini was in Mexico City when the government closed the factory and experienced the repression first hand as he rushed to help out once he discovered the closure. When he arrived at the scene, he found out that the editors were charged with printing subversive propaganda. The police confiscated their printing presses and sealed the factory.²³

It is not clear from Palavicini's retelling of the event why the police did not put him or the other workers in jail. While they avoided a prison sentence, they were not out of danger, and many were forced to flee the city in order to escape further harassment. Palavicini left so quickly he did not have time to pack and was forced to rely on several Madero collaborators to successfully make it to the small town of Huixquilúcan, just outside of Mexico City. To ensure his safety, he hid there for more than two weeks. During this period, he had no communication with the outside world. Throughout his exile, Palavicini feared that other Madero colleagues had experienced similar persecution,

²² Felix F. Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, (Mexico: Ediciones Botas, 1937), 56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 70.

but later he discovered that the primary engineers of the movement, Madero and Vasconcelo did not have warrants issued for their arrests.²⁴ Palavicini's experience thus revealed that Díaz recognized the value of media and understood it could significantly impact the upcoming presidential election. In this era, candidates could not reach the general population without the printing of newspapers and pamphlets. By shutting down these periodicals, Díaz hoped to cripple the Madero campaign in Mexico City, preventing the Maderistas from gaining new adherents but, just as importantly, thwarting communication between supporters as many relied on the newspapers to be informed of general news about the campaign.

The closure of the National Paper Co. proved to be an opening salvo in a wave of wider repression against Madero and his activists. As the election date approached, governors throughout Mexico outlawed Anti-Reelection demonstrations. This led to clashes between the police and Maderistas. By the eve of the June election, over 10,000 people had been arrested, including Madero.²⁵ Despite the repression, Madero's journalists continued to publish materials whenever possible.²⁶ Palavicini described it as his moral duty to stay in the capital and continue fighting for Madero. This sentiment was shared by thousands of Madero's supporters scattered throughout Mexico. Palavicini relied on friends to support his efforts since Díaz had destroyed Madero's media apparatus in Mexico City. His main ally was Rafael Martínez, who wrote under the pseudonym "Rip-Rip." Martínez was a veteran of Mexico City journalism and future ally of Venustiano Carranza. Martínez had a long history of criticizing Díaz. He worked with

²⁴ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, 62-64.

²⁵ Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, 1:75.

²⁶ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, 71.

Terrazas at *El Correo* before 1910 and traveled to Mexico City to help Madero win the election.²⁷ Together, they managed to convince a government official to end the closure of the printing presses and reopen the building. When they entered the building, they discovered there were enough materials there to restart the printing presses. They were able to distribute a small number of issues.²⁸ It is not clear from Palavicini's notes how many copies he printed, but these were enough that he felt he was contributing to Madero's campaign. Eventually, Palavicini was no longer able to sustain himself financially and had to leave the city to find work. His story of repression demonstrated the dedication of journalists who worked for Madero. They believed their work was crucial and were willing to face repression for speaking out against the dictatorship.

If a newspaper was not associated with a candidate, then it was possible the editor ignored the election at large. For instance, *El Correo* only gave the election of 1910 minor attention in months leading up to it. Only major stories, Díaz speaking about the nation's issues, a discussion on the Anti-reelectionista party's promises for free education, and a short article announcing Madero's visit to the Chihuahua's capital city made the periodical's front pages.²⁹ Instead, Terrazas continued to focus on his mission of promoting a united global uprising. This meant covering protests in Argentina and Nicaragua as prominently as the upcoming presidential election.³⁰ Terrazas had a long history of criticizing Díaz, so it was not clear why he did not advocate for one particular candidate. He possibly believed that publishing stories on the nation's various problems

²⁷ Wasserman, *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution*, 101-102.

²⁸ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, 72-73.

²⁹ "Palabras de Significacion," January 1, 1910, and "CNTRO Anti-reeleccionista iniciativa para el establecimiento de Escuelas," January 9, 1910 and "El Sr. Madero Viene a Chih," January 12, 1910, *El Correo*, 1.

³⁰ February 8, "Inundación en la Argentina," and "Revolución in Nicaragua," *El Correo*, 1.

would help whichever candidate developed the strongest following. In addition, Terrazas was likely more concerned about his feud with the Terrazas-Creel family in Chihuahua, which he criticized heavily. His periodical demonstrated that editors remained loyal to their political issues, despite the importance of the election.

On the eve of the election, it seemed like the efforts of journalists like Palavicini and Martínez were successful. Everywhere Madero traveled thousands of supporters turned out, including Mexico City, when 30,000 persons marched in front of the national palace.³¹ Díaz would not leave power easily though. In the face of this uprising, Díaz mobilized federal troops to maintain his grip on the nation. Violence broke out across the country as supporters for both candidates clashed. Despite this repression, it seemed as if Madero was going to win, until Díaz played his trump card by calling an end to the election and declaring himself the winner.³² Following his ill-gotten victory, Díaz arrested Madero and many of his followers. Others, like Palavicini, turned their backs on Madero and returned to supporting the dictatorship. It seemed like Díaz would remain in power for another six years.

The Role of the Press in Madero's Rise and Downfall

Madero did not stay arrested for long. Within a month he had escaped and traveled to San Antonio, Texas. He planned to return to Mexico within a month on November 20 to ignite the violent uprising against Díaz. Díaz's secret police discovered the plot and the federal army moved quickly to contain the revolt.³³ However, even Madero did not anticipate the strength of resentment against *hacienda* owners by poor

³¹ Ross, *Francisco I. Madero*, 102-104.

³² *Ibid.*, 110.

³³ *Ibid.*, 120.

campesinos. They heeded his call and rose up against the land holders they worked under. Their scattered revolts quickly coalesced around leaders who organized them into armies. The Díaz's government responded slowly to these uprisings and by time he realized the seriousness of the threat it was too late. On May 31, 1911, less than a year after he won his sixth election, Díaz left Mexico to live out his exile in Paris. Other prominent advisers soon joined him.³⁴ Mexico City was now open for Madero's return.

While in exile and during his return, Madero maintained a close relationship with journalists. This was necessary because the revolution was out of his control initially. The violence in the countryside was not part of the original plan. He needed the media to help guide the revolution to the conclusion he wanted. Periodicals were all too happy to facilitate this goal. They saw him as their new patron now that Díaz had left. The first periodical to join him was *El País*, which sent him a telegram on April 26, 1911 to introduce a reporter the newspaper sought to embed within his organization. The journalist wanted to travel with Madero and provide coverage of his movements through Mexico.³⁵ Madero accepted this reporter, because he provided him access to a national newspaper and could help him control the narrative surrounding his return. This was not his only opportunity to gain allies. Through the month of May letters continued to arrive from many newspapers.³⁶

Some of these letters came from past followers like Rafael Martínez. Martínez had operated pro-Madero periodicals, including one with Palavicini, during the past

³⁴ Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 1: 247.

³⁵ Telegram from Flavio Guillén to Francisco I. Madero, introducing Adela Vázquez Schiaffino, April 26, 1911, Biblioteca Nacional de México (BNM), Gabinete de Manuscritos, Correspondencia Particular de Madero, (Mss., CPM), II, 908-911.

³⁶ Letter from don Alfonso Madero to don Francisco G. Rivera owner of *La Semana Ilustrada y La Actualidad*, May 15, 1911, BNM, Gabinete de Manuscritos, Correspondencia Particular de Madero, (Mss., CPM), II, 1872.

election. Following Madero's arrest, Martínez was also exiled and continued the fight from across the border, founding the newspaper *El Demócrata*. Once Díaz fled Mexico, Martínez sent a congratulatory letter to Madero and asked him to "immediately tell me when the peace treaty is signed."³⁷ Martínez and Madero enjoyed a close relationship. Madero worked with the journalists who supported his campaign. He knew he needed their help to maintain his government.

The Mexican press proved a double-edged sword for Madero. While these journalists helped him topple Díaz and secure his return to Mexico, many played an equally significant role in his downfall. As the new President, he refused to censor newspapers that were critical of his policies. One periodical that openly challenged Madero's authority was *Juventud Liberal: Semanario Politico Organo del Club Reyista Estudiantil* (Liberal Youth: Weekly Political of the Reyista Student). In the first issue, published on August 27, 1911, the editorial board described themselves as group of students who were concerned about the nation's future. In their opinion, Madero had only achieved success through violence and could not develop a coalition to unite the country.³⁸ They supported General Bernardo Reyes, who had been a presidential candidate in the 1910 election. As a general, Reyes represented an authoritative figure who could step in and restore order to the nation. These students feared Mexico would descend into chaos now that the previous strongman, Díaz had left. While they officially supported Reyistas, they supported any strongman as they also mentioned Emiliano Zapata, who was a

³⁷ May 22, 1911, telegram from don Rafael Martínez and D.E.G. Arenas, editors of *El Demócrata*, to Francisco I. Madero, BNM, Mss., CPM, III, 1367.

³⁸ "Nuestra actitud," and "Plataforma Política del C. Gral. Reyes," August 27, 1911, *Juventud Liberal*, 1.

revolutionary leader from Morelos, in positive terms.³⁹ His policies were much further left than Reyes but his military background supplied the leadership qualifications the group believed were necessary.

This desire for a new president was reinforced in their editorials. *Juventud Liberal* editors relentlessly attacked Madero for not being tough enough to rule the country. In their opinion, this weakness could be traced to his family and wealthy upbringing, writing “In general, the men of money, from *haciendas* and industry, of our country, like Madero, are accustomed to see humble people and laborers as beasts of burden and not men.” The writer’s implication was that wealthy Mexicans treated hard work as something that was only for the working class. Thus, Madero would not be able to make the necessary effort to rule the country. This article was followed by a second article that attacked his choice of vice-president, José María Pino Suárez.⁴⁰ *Juventud* clearly disapproved of Madero’s entire administration. Its staff believed Reyes had to return and bring in his own officials.

A second periodical that supported Reyes was *La Lucha: Periodico Publico*. Unlike *Juventud*, this paper did not attack Madero instead, every article was dedicated to advocating for Reyes’ political party. It published articles pleading for the general to return, coverage of a convention dedicated to him and whether his supporters faced public threats.⁴¹ Despite winning the presidency, Madero had to continually defend himself against past opponents.

³⁹ “¡Zapata!” August 27, 1911, *Juventud Liberal*, 1.

⁴⁰ “Quien es Pino Suarez,” September 10, 1911, *Juventud Liberal*, 1.

⁴¹ “El Deber, La Leatad y Las Reinvidiciones,” and “La Convencion Reyista,” and “Los Reyistas,” August 24, 1911, *La Lucha: Diario Popular*.

In addition, Madero received criticism from Catholic students who feared his liberal reforms would harm the church. This was a realistic fear since the church was one of the largest landowners and land redistribution was a major part of his political platform. Some believed he would go as far as arresting priests. One such periodical that defended Catholics was *La Libertad: Semanario Politico*, which hoped to educate its readers to this concern in its first article, writing, “we have demonstrated a war without quarter relentlessly seeking to weaken the Catholic Party...The Liberals currently make a superhuman effort to cause a rift between the countryside and the Catholic Party.”⁴² The journal wanted to form its own political party, so Catholics would have representatives in the government. This party would lead a “complete regeneration of the nation” and heal the wounds caused by the revolution led by Madero.⁴³

These dissenting voices continued to multiply throughout Madero’s presidency. It created a belief that he was not strong enough to lead the country or maintain control over his revolution. Looking at the front page of *El Correo*, one can see how easily Mexicans could have believed their nation was falling into chaos. In one day it featured stories that discussed election fraud, labor strikes and mysterious deaths in the Laguna region. “Fraud in the Elections?” “A strike in the Boquilla Region,” and “Accidents in the Laguna Region.”⁴⁴ Someone reading this newspaper would have assumed the country was collapsing. Even more significant was the periodical’s public support of General Pascual Orozco. This indicated the newspaper and its owner, Terrazas was not fully

⁴² “¡Guerra a los Malos Principios!” May 19, 1912, *La Libertad: Semanario Politico Social*, 1.

⁴³ “El Partido Católico Mexicano,” May 19, 1912, *La Libertad: Semanario Politico Social*, 1.

⁴⁴ “Hubo Fraude en Las Elecciones?” “Una Huelga en la Boquilla,” and “En favor del Gral. Orozco,” *El Correo*, October 12, 1911, 1.

behind Madero.⁴⁵ Like the editors of *Juventud Liberal*, *El Correo*'s editors wanted a strong military man in place either to guide Madero or take over if the new president could not regain control of the nation. While this newspaper was published less than a year into Madero's presidency, people were already looking for a military leader to take command. In addition, it revealed Mexicans were not largely loyal to Madero. They were more interested in supporting his reforms. They saw him as someone who could be easily replaced if necessary.

Madero's followers saw these articles and attempted to counter them. One journalist ally was Luis Cabrera, who, like Palavicini, returned to Madero's side once he returned victoriously returned Mexico. Cabrera wrote in his periodical, *Diario del Hogar*: "the anarchy that reigns in the ideas of the press in dealing with public affairs and even publish, without any criteria, any rumors or news. I can affirm, in effect, that [the periodicals] say they are sympathizers with the Revolution, entirely march blindly and sometimes against their own interests without realizing it."⁴⁶ In this article, Cabrera explained to the various political groups working against Madero that they needed to be patient. Their desires to push through reforms rapidly would work against them. If Madero worked too quickly then there could be a backlash by conservative forces. In conjunction to articles like these, Madero's government generated its own propaganda and bought three important, but bankrupt, newspapers, *El Diario*, *El Imparcial*, and *The Mexican Herald*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "A favor del Gral. Orozco," October 12, 1911, *El Correo*, 1.

⁴⁶ Ruiz Castañeda, *El Periodismo en México*, 270.

⁴⁷ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, p. 140.

These attempts by Madero failed to gain control of the media. His allied newspapers were not able to draw his former supporters back into the coalition that had previously helped him overthrow the Díaz dictatorship.⁴⁸ There were minor uprisings throughout the country. This violence convinced military officials that the country was unstable and it needed more authoritarian leaders. They believed a single leader could enforce the necessary reforms that Madero had been unable to achieve due to his fears of becoming unpopular and losing future elections. The military coup against Madero took place over four days, February 18-22, 1913 as Senators negotiated the power transfer from Madero to General Victoriano Huerta.⁴⁹ As part of the negotiations, Madero and his political advisers were promised safe passage out of the country but the new leaders did not trust them to never return. On February 22, 1913, Madero and his vice-president, Pino Suárez were murdered as they traveled between prisons.⁵⁰ Madero's death thus ended the first phase of the Mexican Revolution. He deftly used the press to help his rise to power but this tight relationship did not continue as past allies turned into enemies once he failed to deliver on promised reforms. Now, his journalist supporters needed to find a new politician to rally behind.

Second Phase of the Mexican Revolution

The governor of Coahuila, Venustiano Carranza, was the first official to announce his state would not submit to Huerta's regime. He issued the Plan de Guadalupe less than two days after Madero's death. The speech honored Madero and promised to enact his

⁴⁸ Charles Curtis Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: Genesis under Madero*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1952), 231.

⁴⁹ Ross, *Francisco I. Madero*, 315.

⁵⁰ Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 1: 489

predecessor's reforms.⁵¹ This spoke directly to journalists who needed a new leader to support. Carranza knew many of the journalists he was speaking to in this speech because he had previously cultivated relationships with them. In the past he had met Cabrera and Palavicini in Coahuila during Madero's campaign and continued to write to them throughout Madero's presidency.⁵² Carranza accessed these relationships immediately. Within a week of Madero's death, he sent instructions to Palavicini to enlist him and his friends as allies.⁵³ Palavicini responded that he and other journalists were ready to support him.

This support from journalists was not surprising. As the governor of Coahuila, Carranza shared many similarities to Madero. Both shared the same home state of Coahuila, came from wealthy families, and had been excluded from the higher levels of politics due to Díaz.⁵⁴ Carranza's first major breakthrough in local politics occurred in 1893, when a group of cattle ranchers within his home district protested the reelection of the state's governor, José María Garza Galán. In order to resolve the situation, Díaz sent one of his closest confidants, Bernardo Reyes, to negotiate with the ranchers. Carranza and his brother were chosen to speak for the ranchers because their family owned the largest percentage of cattle in the herd. In his meeting with Reyes, Carranza was persuasive and convinced him that Garza Galán was a poor choice for governor. Reyes returned to Mexico City and advised Díaz to switch his support to Carranza's candidate. This made Carranza an ally of Díaz and he quickly rose in political circles until 1908,

⁵¹ Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution*, 241.

⁵² Gabriella de Beer, *Luis Cabrera: Un Intelectual en la Revolución Mexicana*, (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984), 79-80.

⁵³ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, p. 156.

⁵⁴ Knight, *The Mexican Revolution: Vol. I*, p. 71.

when it was widely assumed he would be the next governor of Coahuila. At the last second, Díaz switched his allegiance to another candidate.⁵⁵ This reversal caused Carranza to lose the election. Upset over this loss, Carranza joined Madero's Antireeccionista campaign and became one of his closest allies.

Like Madero, Carranza understood the power of the media. In addition to enlisting prominent members of the media, he founded his own periodical designed to publicize his cause. Named *El Constitucionalista*, its first issue was published in December 1913. Its editorial staff traveled with the army through the entire military campaign and printed issues from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Torreón, Saltillo, Monterrey and Mexico City.⁵⁶ Under the direction of Salvador Martínez Alomia, the periodical primarily published Carranza's declarations and information about his armies' movements.

These articles were designed to be informative to his followers since it was the only form of mass communication available to them. If he had an announcement, it was circulated in the periodical. For instance, a February 7, 1914 article printed a list of all the highly ranked officers in Carranza's army.⁵⁷ This information was important to his soldiers since the Constitutionalist Army had a rotating set of officers. Everyday new soldiers and officers would have been joining or leaving the army. This list publicized who were the executive officers so everyone knew their place within the army's hierarchy. It would have been impossible for Carranza and other officers to provide such

⁵⁵ Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution*, 76.

⁵⁶ Ruiz, Castañeda, *El periodismo in Mexico*, 275.

⁵⁷ "Ejército constitucionalista. Personal de generales, jefes v oficiales que componían el Cuerpo de Ejército del Noroeste, en febrero de 1914", *El Constitucionalista*, Hermosillo, Son., Feb. 7 1914, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box I, Folder 11, 54-61.

an update for soldiers without a nationally circulated periodical. As with previous politicians, Carranza used his newspaper to pass along information to his supporters.

Furthermore, he used *El Constitucionalista* to motivate his followers. In the February 24, 1914 issue, he trumpeted that he and his executive council were leaving Hermosillo, Sonora to travel to another city. He provided this itinerary because the Constitutionalist Army suffered several losses to Huerta's Federal Army immediately after Carranza declared his rebellion.⁵⁸ This forced him to retreat to Sonora and hide there for the first year of his campaign. It demonstrated to his followers that their uprising had achieved success and were now winning battles. Now, he and other executives were free to travel and advance the cause. The story ended by describing an immense public crowd that cheered as their train left the city.⁵⁹ This and other articles helped to motivate his soldiers. They either celebrated the army's successes or reminded the soldiers why they were fighting.

The successes trumpeted in *El Constitucionalista* were the first of many as Carranza led his troops to a series of victories against Huerta. While he was not a military man, Carranza allied with many capable generals, especially Alvaro Obregón, Pancho Villa, Felipe Angeles, and Pablo González Garza. They successfully captured Mexico City in August 1914. At this point, Carranza's movement splintered, reminiscent to what happened to Madero, because many believed he wanted to set himself up as President and a future dictator. Francisco "Pancho" Villa and Emiliano Zapata were the most prominent of the defections and they turned their armies against him. This forced Carranza to leave

⁵⁸ Knight, *Mexican Revolution* 2: 22-23.

⁵⁹ "El primer jefe abandona Hermosillo y se dirige a Nogales, Son. Los poderes constitucionalistas", *El Constitucionalista*, Hermosillo, Son., Feb. 24 1914. Archivo de Juan Barragán, Box I, Folder 11, 66-67.

Mexico City and he set up government in exile in Veracruz. He needed his allies within the media more than ever now, since he was fighting for supporters against two of the wars most charismatic generals.

Fortunately, Carranza had established his allies in important posts before he left Mexico City. He made Jesús Urueta the head of *El Liberal*, one of the largest newspapers publishing through the Revolution. Before Huerta's coup, Urueta was a supporter of Madero and a deputy in Congress during his presidency. After Madero was killed, he joined other liberal intellectuals in the capital and began a media campaign against Huerta. Once Carranza defeated Huerta, he made Urueta editor of *El Liberal* and they used the paper to generate propaganda.⁶⁰ In addition, an old Madero ally, Rafael Martínez had returned to the capital and started to publish *El Demócrata*.⁶¹ These newspapers helped to solidify Carranza's support throughout the country by publicizing that the Constitutionalists remained an effective fighting force despite the loss of Zapata and Villa. For instance, the October 7, 1915 edition of *El Demócrata* boldly announced through an extra-large headline that Constitutionalist forces had won a crucial battle against Villa the day before in Sonora, Mexico.⁶² The celebratory tone was enhanced by the fact this was special edition; it was printed only for this momentous event. The accompanying article was more reserved but it stated this victory would allow the Constitutionalist army to drive Villa out of his stronghold in Northern Mexico.⁶³ A month later, *El Demócrata* reinforced the notion that the Constitutionalists were the superior

⁶⁰ Ruiz, Castañeda, *El Periodismo en México*, 276.

⁶¹ Telegram from J.M. Navarro, the first general, communicating the unconditional capture of the personnel *El Demócrata*, México, November 14, 1914, Secretaria Defensa Nacional (SDN), Archivo Histórico de la Nacional (AHDN), XI/481.5/96, 1293.

⁶² "Las tropas al Mando del Gral. Obregón Avanzan Hacia el Edo. De Sonora," October 7, 1915, *El Demócrata: Diario Constitucionalista*, 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1.

option for Mexicans by featuring a story on the collapse of the Zapatista movement in Toluca, a city east of Mexico City.⁶⁴ In the headline, Martínez described the enemy fighters as an unorganized horde that lost to a more sophisticated force. In addition, the article described how random civilians joined the Constitutionlists and helped secure the victory.⁶⁵ This detail reinforced the notion that Carranza's faction had secured the public's support and could possibly have helped motivate people to enlist who might have been hesitant.

El Liberal helped to promote this victorious image but used a different technique than *El Demócrata*. Instead of using bombastic headlines, it filled its newspaper with illustrations and pictures of Constitutionalist figures either in conferences, leading armies, or walking amongst their supporters. This provided a visual guide to the Constitutionalist leaders, which help generate support through allowing readers to see their leaders in action. This was revealed when Carranza captured Mexico City the first time, *El Liberal's* articles featured two full page illustrations of him.⁶⁶ Carranza looked like an intellectual, due to his glasses and the books he held in each drawing. This fit with the impression that he was the brains behind the sophisticated Constitutionalist movement that was fighting against the uneducated rural opposition.⁶⁷ Citizens were more likely to trust this image of Carranza than a faceless leader, such as Villa or Zapata, whose images are notably absent from these articles. Furthermore, these illustrations presented Carranza as a civilized leader unlike Villa and Zapata who were often treated and pictured as

⁶⁴ "Un esfuerzo postrero de las Hordas Zapatistas, por Acercarse a Toluca, las Llevo a un Nuevo Desastre," November 12, 1915, *El Demócrata: Diario Constitucionalista*, 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁶ "Mañana a las 11am Hará su Entrada Triunfa a la Ciudad el Señor Don Venustiano Carranza," and "Al Jefe de la Revolución, al Presidente de la Republica," August 19, 1914, *El Liberal*, 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

uneducated bandits.⁶⁸ *El Liberal* hoped to make it clear that only Carranza was qualified to lead the nation because nobody else had the same qualifications.

Both newspapers worked to create a history of the Constitutionalist movement that dated its origins back to Madero and his initial uprising. In their opinion, Carranza was Madero's only true successor and other leaders were did not have the same legitimacy. Anyone not supporting Carranza was not truly supporting the Revolution. To do so, they provided coverage of the random celebrations the Constitutionalists held in honor of Madero. For instance, on August 18, 1914, they honored the nineteen-month anniversary of his murder. From the article it is not clear why they choose this moment or how many people joined in to celebrate the dead president, but it described how Obregón stepped away from his military duties long enough to attend the ceremony along with important civilians like Palavicini.⁶⁹ The purpose of the event was to make a tighter connection between Madero and the Constitutionalists. *El Liberal* wrote that while Madero had died, his spirit and intentions continued to live on through Carranza. The article claimed that despite Madero's death, the Revolution still had a chance to succeed if the Constitutionalists won the war. They could continue his work. This article revealed that Madero had achieved demagogue status as the author repeatedly referred to him as an apostle.⁷⁰ For the Constitutionalists, the Revolution was a religion, and they had remained loyal to Madero's original vision. Carranza had earned the right to be his successor unlike Zapata or Villa.

⁶⁸ Ilene V. O'Malley, *The Myth of the Mexican Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940*, (New York: Glenwood Press, 1986), 76.

⁶⁹ "La Revolución, Serena, Y Justiciera, inicia la Santa Obra de las Reivindicaciones," August 18, 1914, *El Liberal*, 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

The next month *El Demócrata* provided coverage of another celebration of Madero's memory. According to the newspaper, a procession of Constitutionalist delegates from across Mexico marched down Paseo de la Reforma, the street that runs through the center of the city, to Madero's burial site.⁷¹ Streets and buildings along the path were adorned with flowers and ribbons. The important guest at the celebration was Carranza, who arrived flanked by military leaders. Everyone spoke highly of Madero and referenced how he sacrificed his life to free Mexico from Díaz's dictatorship.⁷² Included with the article were pictures of the significant luminaries that attended the event. The date of this celebration, similarly to previous one mentioned in *El Liberal* one month earlier, had no significant connection to Madero's date of birth (October 30), his death (February 22) or his election to the presidency (November 6).⁷³ Its only purpose was to further cement the connection between Carranza and his Constitutionalist faction to Madero, the original apostle of the Revolution. By publicizing this and similar events, newspapers like *El Demócrata* and *El Liberal* helped to generate support for Carranza. This was necessary because as the Constitutionalist faction began to split, Mexicans had to choose who they would back.

These types of stories ensured that Carranza's propaganda efforts were successful. Using these newspapers, he created a narrative that depicted his enemies as conservatives, even though many were fighting primarily for the radical redistribution of land. These leaders did their best to counteract these stories and Carranza's influence. The Zapatistas set up *Tierra y Justicia* (Land and Justice) after Zapata's rallying cry, *Tierra y*

⁷¹ "Ayear fue Glorificado el Presidente Madero por una Gran Muchedumbre," September 19, 1914, *El Demócrata: Diario Constitucionalista*, 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷³ Cumberland, *The Mexican Revolution*, 30, 241, 181.

Libertad (Land and Liberty).⁷⁴ Using this periodical and flyers, they spread Zapata's Plan de Ayala, which outlined the reforms his group was fighting to secure. Despite these efforts, they were largely unsuccessful in generating support, since Carranza had secured the allegiance of the majority of important journalists. Thanks to these allies, Carranza's propaganda was much more effective. His journalists created a universe where Zapata was a tool of Mexico's Catholic Church, the ultimate symbol of conservatism in Mexico at this time.⁷⁵ Additionally, newspapers like Martínez's *El Demócrata* targeted Zapata's major allies and described them as holdovers from the Huerta regime.⁷⁶ These stories played a key role in preventing neither Zapata nor Villa from garnering much popular support outside of their home territories. These newspapers helped Carranza become the nation's de facto president even though he was operating from Veracruz.

The Constitution of 1917 and Freedom of the Press

Early in 1915, it became clear those Constitutionalist who remained loyal to Carranza were going to win the revolution. Under the leadership of General Obregón, his armies won several resounding victories against the Villistas and Zapatistas and Carranza returned to Mexico City. On May 1, Carranza declared himself President of what he termed the Pre-Constitutional government. Now came the difficult process of enacting the reforms the Constitutionalist leadership had promised their soldiers. Land redistribution and new protections for factory workers headed the agenda, there was a bitter fight behind the scenes as journalists attempted to add freedom of speech to the agenda. They expected this right since they had been long-term supporters of Carranza

⁷⁴ Ruiz Castañeda, *El periodismo en Mexico*, 279

⁷⁵ Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, 2: 213.

⁷⁶ *El Demócrata*, October 6, 1914.

and played a crucial role in the Constitutionalists winning the revolution. However, many quickly learned Carranza and other officials only saw them as tools to be used to secure his agendas. If they wanted to form their own independent media organization, Carranza would not support them. He feared they could topple his government just as Madero's had collapsed under the scrutiny of newspapers. The highpoint of this conflict between the Constitutionalists and media organizations was the arrest of Palavicini. Even though he was eventually released, this established the parameters of the battle. The government would not protect their rights to free speech and it could and would shut down periodicals moving forward if they were deemed a threat to the nation's stability. This ensured the conflict between journalists and the government would continue throughout the Revolutionary period.

Initially, there were no problems for journalists. Carranza's victory was a moment to celebrate and his supporters were duly rewarded. Palavicini took this opportunity to develop his own national newspaper, *El Universal*, which is still in production today. The structure and layout of the paper was copied from the American newspapers.⁷⁷ This gave it a professional, modern style that was new for Mexican periodicals. It quickly became one of the most important papers in the country, providing inside scoops about the Constitutional Convention occurring in 1917. This reliable information was the result of the previous relationship between Carranza and Palavicini. Palavicini then leveraged this connection to establish himself as an authority on the debates occurring at the convention. His editorials were filled with vague mentions of spending time with Carranza and other high-ranking officials.⁷⁸ These private relationships allowed Palavicini to claim he was an

⁷⁷ Ruiz Castañeda, *El periodismo en México*, 285.

⁷⁸ Palavicini, *Mi vida Revolucionaria*, 357.

authority on the events occurring at the convention, and he passed this information along to his readers. His connections thus gave him an early advantage against his competition.

Despite his close relationship with Carranza, Palavicini wanted to operate *El Universal* as independent of Mexico's political power structure. In his memoirs, he provided evidence in hopes of convincing the reader that he attempted to operate his periodical without government support. He possibly wrote this because when the book was published in 1937, he needed to bolster his reputation as a revolutionary who fought against government interference. However, his correspondence with Carranza contradicts this claim of independence. While it was possible he began the operation with hopes of maintaining his impartiality, within three months he was writing to Carranza asking for help. On the January 25, 1917, he wrote a letter to Carranza's secretary, Gerzayn Ugarte, asking for support from the government. His intentions were noble, he makes it clear from the beginning he does not want any more money than what was necessary to buy paper stock and install a printing press.⁷⁹ As the letter continued he lists other financial difficulties *El Universal* has endured over its first three months. It concluded by mentioning his main newspaper rivals, *El Demócrata* and *El Pueblo*, which did not pay rent for their buildings. Palavicini specifically attacked *El Demócrata's* owner and long-time Carranza ally, Martínez for using his newspaper, which was a receiving government support, to earn a profit.⁸⁰ In this letter, Palavicini argued that journalism was a necessary public service, since creating a politically informed citizenry would benefit Mexico's future. Unfortunately, Carranza did not agree and he continued to restrict capital and

⁷⁹ Letter from Félix Palavicini to Gerzayn Ugarte, Private Secretary to Venutiano Carranza," Querétaro, Jan. 25 1917, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box 10, Folder 1, 94.

⁸⁰ Letter from Félix Palavicini to Gerzayn Ugarte, Private Secretary to Venutiano Carranza," Querétaro, Jan. 25 1917, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box 10, Folder 1, 95.

information from periodicals he could not control. As a result of the periodical's lack of political favor, it struggled to remain profitable through its early years.

This goal of running an independent newspaper made it difficult to earn a profit after its early run of success. The second financial problem Palavicini faced was that no bank would support his periodical without the backing of a politician. In his memoir, he provided a letter from a Mexican bank manager, which outlined all the reasons *El Universal* was a poor investment and the bank could not loan him money.⁸¹ At the heart of the banker's reasoning was that Carranza did support publically or privately support *El Universal's* publicly professed independence. In the end, the lender was not strong enough to resist these outside political pressures, and the bank denied Palavicini his funding.

In order to receive monetary assistance, Palavicini simply had to promise to help Carranza's secure his political goals. This was clear in a letter his rival Martínez received from Carranza in January 1917, while the president was still working at the Constitutional Congress. In it, an unnamed official thanks him for using his periodical to campaign for candidates in the upcoming election. Additionally, the letter speaks of an upcoming meeting in Mexico City between Martínez and the official to discuss the continuation of their business relationship with the goal of "changing the impression" Mexicans held of Carranza's favored candidates.⁸² Later that same year, the governor of the San Luis Potosí wrote to Martínez asking him to help the governor's friend build a

⁸¹ Palavicini, *Mi vida revolucionaria*, 354-355.

⁸² Telegram and letters from Rafael 'Rip-Rip' Martínez to President Venustiano Carranza," Querétaro, Jan. 1917, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box 6, Folder 25, 38.

periodical similar to *El Demócrata*.⁸³ This demonstrated that Martínez and his propaganda work were known outside of Mexico City. He was so successful he could commission work from politicians to hoping to recreate the same relationship Carranza shared with his most famous journalist ally. These letters show Carranza was very clear in that he expected periodicals to be a source of propaganda and not unbiased information.⁸⁴

What seemed most interesting from Palavicini's perspective was how close he was willing to come to the line that separated favoritism from neutral coverage of Mexican news. When he first created *El Universal* he wrote to Carranza announcing his new business venture. The letter contained lines similar to the notes received by other journalists who earned money by printing propaganda. Palavicini's letter opened by saying, "one of the most compelling needs of our triumphant party, is to orient the public to the sentiment of our ideas, and convince everyone that the aims pursued are the most noble."⁸⁵ On the surface this sentiment seems no different than other journalists who were taking money from Carranza to create propaganda. However, Palavicini somehow reconciled this goal of changing Mexicans to agree with the Constitutionalist program with the notion *El Universal* should be operated independent from government support.⁸⁶ Perhaps, he believed the reforms sponsored by the Constitutionlists were truly beneficial to the country and needed to be enacted for anyone's personal benefit. This letter presents Palavicini's as someone who saw changing the hearts and minds of Mexicans as a public

⁸³ Letter from Sr. Gabriel Macias to Rafael 'Rip-Rip' Martínez, Mexico City, D.F., August 1, 1917, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box 6, Folder 25, 43.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁵ Letter from Félix Palavicini to Guzman Ugarte, personal Secretary to Venustiano Carranza, Mexico City, D.F., Jul. 28 1916, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box 10, Folder 1, 79.

⁸⁶ Letter from Félix Palavicini to Guzman Ugarte, personal Secretary to Venustiano Carranza, Mexico City, D.F., Jul. 28 1916, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box 10, Folder 1, 79.

service. He did not see these changes as something similar to propaganda, which has a connotation of underhandedness. Someone created propaganda required to be paid since they were acting villainously. Instead, Palavicini saw himself as the noble educator, someone who could usher in Mexico's new equitable society.

Two months later, in his quest to remain independent, Palavicini confronted a more serious consequence than poverty. On March 29, 1917, *El Universal* was shut down and Palavicini arrested. The newspaper stayed closed for the next month as Palavicini fought to be freed from jail. The reason he was arrested was an article published entitled "Las Perrogativas de las Aguilas" (Prerogative of the Eagles).⁸⁷ In this title, the term "eagles" refers to Mexican generals and their desire to become prominently involved in the post-Revolutionary government. In the article, the author Gonzalo de la Parra, exposed several instances where generals had abused their authority during the war. The article did not mention any names, but Obregón, the Secretary of War and Navy, believed it had offended the honor of the Mexican army. Its publication was seen as treasonous and set the chief of police to arrest him immediately even though he was eating with his family.⁸⁸ Beyond the article's perceived insult, Obregón acted swiftly and harshly was his fear the article could affect the army's ability to maintain fragile peace across Mexico. If Mexicans became distrustful of the military, then the country could be thrust back into chaos. This arrest indicated that Mexican generals would resist his efforts to create an independent media organization.

⁸⁷ Chapter 12 of Venustiano Carranza's memiors titled "Palavicini receives applause from the Congress during his defense, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box 14, Folder 37, p 88.

⁸⁸ Chapter 12 of Venustiano Carranza's memiors titled "Palavicini receives applause from the Congress during his defense, Archivo Juan Barragán, Box14, Folder, 37, p 6

The conflict between Obregón and Palavicini was foreshadowed approximately a year earlier when the two argued about the role of the press when they traveled together as part of Carranza's cabinet. As Palavicini recalled, they were in a meeting and discussion shifted to what was the easiest career. As a joke, Obregón claimed the easiest profession was a journalist, since their jobs were to "write about everything without knowing anything and then sign their names."⁸⁹ Palavicini remembered this as a joke but the conversation turned serious as he went back at Obregón to defend journalists. In Palavicini's opinion, the easiest job was to be a "hero." Obregón, believing this was a joke, asked him to explain and Palavicini gave flippant explanation about how wars are won. In Palavicini, a "hero" was someone (in his story, the general) given credit for the sacrifices of other people. Obregón took offense to this description and quickly changed the subject.⁹⁰ This conversation revealed that both Palavicini and Obregón had contempt for each other's profession, setting the stage for their future conflict. The media and the military were opposites in who each one saw the role of information in a democratic society. The military needed to control and keep information secret to be a success whereas Palavicini believed it needed to be free so all citizens could be informed.

Palavicini realized this militarization of political beliefs at the Convention and used a portion of his defense to speak out against the military's rising importance within the Mexican government. Strangely, he was not tried in a court of law. Instead, he spoke before the gathered delegates of the Convention. This gave him the opportunity to defend himself and impact the deliberations surrounding the new Constitution.⁹¹ He defended

⁸⁹ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, p 249.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 382.

himself by claiming he had been anti-military throughout the war and the reason he originally choose to support Madero was because he was politician and not a soldier. For a similar reason, Palavicini joined Carranza's uprising because the Constitutionals planned on creating a democratic government. Their new constitution would ban reelection and prevent another dictatorship from developing. In his opinion, a Mexican democracy would be impossible if the military had a significant role in the government because "the military figures from the past, they have always been hostile to the President of the Republic... The army between us has always had an element of oppression and not an element of democratization."⁹² In his defense, Palavicini challenged his accusers assertions that he had not always supported the revolution. He described himself as a long-term proponent of Mexican democracy and saw the military as a threat to establishing this government. His stance against Obregón and his generals was not anti-patriotic but in-line with his personal revolutionary ideology.

The closure of *El Universal* was another battle against tyranny for Palavicini. This was one reason he chose to defend himself in front of the Convention. He needed to make this stand public and attempt to affect change in how Mexico's leaders viewed the press. At the beginning of his speech he said, "The attacks from a periodical that serves the interests of the public, they can be answered in another periodical, that defends those officials, but this option is not enough, it is not sufficient, they wanted to gag me and that was their intent. They want to suppress my periodical."⁹³ In Palavicini's opinion, the

⁹² Original of the Chapters 1 to 15 of the third volume of the book *Historia del ejército y la revolución constitucionalista* written by Juan Barragán Rodríguez, published in 1946. Archivo Juan Barragan, Box 14, Folder 37, 14.

⁹³Original of the Chapters 1 to 15 of the third volume of the book *Historia del ejército y la revolución constitucionalista* written by Juan Barragán Rodríguez, published in 1946. Archivo Juan Barragan, Box 14, Folder 37, 11.

closure of his newspaper represented the loss of civility concerning political debates in Mexico. Obregón had several newspapers he could choose from to print a rebuttal to the article that angered him. Instead, he decided to end the debate by force and closed *El Universal* and imprisoned its owner. This was behavior reminiscent of Díaz's dictatorship. In order for Mexico to build a functional democracy, its leaders needed to allow political discourse to thrive, without fear of censorship. This would allow all Mexicans to have a stake in the government.

The conflict between Palavicini and Obregón ended without drama. After his speech, Palavicini returned to jail but was quickly released. This occurred because Carranza stepped in and put an end to the conflict. The resolution of this incident was reduced to a couple of sentences as he released Palavicini from prison. On May 1st, *El Universal* reopened for business without incident.⁹⁴ This result did not resolve the conflict. While Palavicini won this round against Obregón, it was the beginning of a long conflict between the military and media organizations.

Conclusions: The Legacy of the Mexican Revolution and Freedom of Press

As officials finalized the Constitution of 1917, they hoped to leave behind the violence of the Mexican Revolution. However, almost immediately armies returned to combat as they had to continue to hunt Zapata and other renegade groups. Uprisings continued sporadically throughout the 1920s, culminating with the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929). In addition, Mexico could not transfer power peacefully between presidents, as Carranza was forced out by Obregón and killed as he fled Mexico City.

⁹⁴ Original of the Chapters 1 to 15 of the third volume of the book *Historia del ejército y la revolución constitucionalista* written by Juan Barragán Rodríguez, published in 1946 Archivo Juan Barragan, Box 14, Folder 37, p. 20.

This cycle of violence continued until 1934, when Lázaro Cárdenas was elected President, and he created a system of peaceful successions.

This violence was not limited to high-ranking government officials or rural outlaws. The arrest of Palavicini indicated that military leaders were not comfortable with independent media organizers publishing disparaging information about them or government programs. They had a logical reason for this fear because the nation was barely holding itself together and easily could fall into another civil war. They had to maintain the peace and any sense of dissent could be disastrous in their opinions. This meant targeting journalists and attempting to recreate the system of coercion and bribery that existed during Díaz's regime.

Their fears were unfounded. In the subsequent years, many more periodicals would be founded including a second national newspaper, *Excélsior*. This paper was even more defiant and independent than *El Universal*. Palavicini was a life-long politician who wanted to protect his own interests. The founder of *Excélsior*, Rafael Aldúcin, truly believed in the freedom of the press and hoped his periodical would help Mexico recover from the war. Aldúcin openly challenged government officials and was called before Congress, just as Palavicini was. They were joined by many Mexicans who had fought in the revolution and now had a vested interest in ensuring the government followed through with their promised reforms. They founded newspapers in order to follow the proceedings and keep their countrymen informed as to what was happening. This was a continuation of the revolution, only now they were fighting with ink, paper and printing presses. Despite the founding of these and other newspapers, the nation did not collapse into chaos.

The fact the country did not fall apart did not ease the minds of government officials. They continued to fear and monitor newspapers. Obregón was elected president in 1920 and he set up a department tasked with observing the nation's periodicals and informing him if any negative articles were written. This set the stage for more than a decade of conflict between the government and media organizations.

The Conflict Continued: Obregon and Calles vs. the Media –

Institutionalization of Media Practices

Introduction:

In the summer of 1917, Mexico's three national periodicals, *El Demócrata*, *El Universal*, and *Excelsior*, presented their readers a freewheeling debate about the country's monetary policy. At issue was that the newly formed Constitutionalist government had to decide how best to pay back the debt it had incurred to various countries in order to win the Mexican Revolution. The argument centered on whether the country should return to the gold standard. Each paper had chosen a particular side and attacked one another relentlessly. In one scathing response, the editors of *Excelsior* questioned whether or not the writers of *El Demócrata* had even seen the government reports on the subject.¹ In addition, journalists were not afraid to challenge and name government representatives whose opinions they disliked. *El Demócrata* was particularly aggressive attacking political figures. Its attacks acquired an international flavor when it wrote that bankers from the United States were “repugnant.”² This debate was one of many that took place amongst the periodicals that summer as periodicals contributed to the public discourse on how Mexico would rebuild following the Revolution. These conversations and criticisms centered on government policies indicated newspapers were ready to play a crucial role guiding the state into the future.

An outside observer could see these public debates as a sign of progress for the relationship between the media and the Mexican government. During the Díaz's

¹ Esperanza Fujicaki Cruz, “Monometalismo y Bimetalismo en la Revolución Mexicana: La estabilización Monetaria a Debate,” in *Temas a Debate: Moneda y Banca en México 1884-1954*, ed. María Eugenia Romero Sotelo et al. (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 220.

² Cruz, “Monometalismo y Bimetalismo,” 215.

dictatorship and the Revolution, periodicals had been unable to freely publish criticisms. Now, it finally seemed like Mexico could develop a true fourth estate that could check the government's power. Newspapers and other organizations could serve as a safe guard for the country and help prevent another dictatorship from developing by challenging its authority. The aftermath of the Revolution was seen as an optimistic moment in Mexican history. The war had wiped clean the political slate and now the country could create a modern state. This meant creating a truly independent media that could hold politicians accountable.

This chapter examines why making the transition from subservience to independence would be difficult for newspapers. As the last chapter explained many journalists and newspapers were funded by politicians before and during the Revolution. Journalists fought for particular candidates and not some impartial notion of the truth. They could be critical of their opponents but rarely did they find errors in their own political parties or causes. For many journalists this was impossible because they were friends or relied on a candidate for patronage. After the Revolution, many wanted to continue those partnerships instead of seeking their independence. Editors wrote to Carranza and professed their loyalty. They saw themselves as allies, and planned to fight with him to accomplish the goals of the Revolution together. Carranza maintained this wartime mentality by enlisting journalists to report to him when other periodicals were critical. This reinforced the belief among officials that dissenting newspapers should be seen as an enemy and punished. This prevented newspapers from taking the risky step of becoming neutral, instead continuing to maintain close relationships with officials that had sustained them through the Revolutionary period.

This pressure on newspapers to remain loyal to the Mexican state did not change when Obregón forced Carranza out of the presidency in 1920. Journalists who had previously been critical of Obregón during his presidential campaign quickly switched to sides to join him. It helped that since the Revolution, Obregón had learned patience in dealing with the media and did not seek revenge against those who sided with Carranza to his bitter end. He knew they needed his patronage to survive, so he could wait them out. Many of Carranza's long-time supporters, Rafael Martínez, Luis Cabrera, and Félix Palavicini, eventually came to him willingly for help. In fact, so many editors wrote to Obregón that he eventually created a new government agency, the Department of the Press, in order to handle to requests for support. In addition, the department was tasked with monitoring newspapers and informing politicians when something critical was published. This would enable officials to react quickly to whatever news stories were published.

For those unaware of the past close relationships between politicians and media members, the creation of a government agency designed to monitor newspapers would seem like an escalation in a conflict. Instead, I believe it signaled the formalization of their symbiotic relationship that began before the Revolution. Journalists had always believed they were loyal to a particular cause or politician instead of a notion of impartial truth. Few wanted to be independent operators. During Carranza's presidency, he relied on an informal network of journalists to inform him of which journalists wanted aid and which were disloyal to his presidency. Once his presidency ended, journalists transformed their political views to align themselves with Obregón and help make his administration a success. Their goal was to be activists and work with the current

structure to improve Mexican society. The election of Obregón and the development of this department did not change their relationship or escalate a brewing conflict. It simply streamlined the process. Journalists largely wanted to work with officials and consistently requested aid. They provided Obregón with a propaganda machine ready to be deployed. Newspapers desired a role in rebuilding the country and Obregon provided them this purpose. Each party needed one another and this department made that relationship much easier. Journalists were not interested in acting as a safe guard, instead, they believed the Constitutionalist leaders they helped win the revolution were the country's best hope for reform.

Newspapers following the Revolution

Following the revolution there was a growth of newspapers throughout the country. Millions of Mexicans who fought in the Revolution needed information about the reform programs the Constitutionlists had promised them. Many had risked their lives and wanted to know when they would receive land reforms or new government programs. They spurred entrepreneurs to develop newspapers throughout the country. One of the most ambitious of these entrepreneurs was Rafael Alducín. Alducín. He was part of a younger generation of journalists that came up working for newspapers but did not have ingrained political allegiances such as Palavicini and Luis Cabrera so he did not join Madero or Carranza in their uprisings. Instead, during the election of 1910 he worked as a low-level editor in Mexico City and at the start of the Revolution founded his first magazine: *El Automóvil en México*.³ This was a poorly timed venture as the country

³ Arno Burholder de la Rosa, "El Periódico que Llegó a la Vida Nacional. Los Primeros Años del Diario Excelsior (1916-1932)," *Historia Mexicana*, 58, num. 4 (Abril-June 2009): 1384.

descended into chaos and it quickly failed. Alducín was not deterred and continued to search for periodicals to purchase. When Carranza victoriously returned to Mexico City, the young journalist purchased several newspapers and their printing presses. Alducín consolidated these holdings and in February 1917, he launched *Excelsior*.⁴

In *Excelsior*'s opening issue, Alducín described why he believed the periodical and other media organizations would play a crucial role in rebuilding the nation. In his opinion no other group could repair the mistrust between Mexican citizens and the government. During Díaz's dictatorship, the government operated in secret and was not held accountable for its actions due to his control over the newspapers. Alducín hoped a strong, independent media would remove this cloak of secrecy surrounding the government. This would allow Mexicans to start trusting their officials once again. Therefore, officials should see media organizations as allies even when they criticize them.⁵

Alducín's target audience for readership was Mexico's emerging middle class which confronted a chance to expand its influence since the revolution had largely destroyed the institutions, primarily landed estates, which allowed elites to previously consolidate their wealth. In Alducín's opinion, this destruction was necessary and provided an opportunity for smaller entrepreneurs, like himself, to rise in society.⁶ These smart, ambitious people would lead the reconstruction of Mexico and they needed information his paper would provide. The country's potential could only be achieved once it created an informed citizenry. By providing impartial information to its readers,

⁴ Burkholder de la Rosa, "El Periódico que Llegó," 1388.

⁵ Manuel Flores, "Al Comenzar," *Excelsior*, March 18, 1917, 1

⁶ Burkholder de la Rosa, "El Periódico que Llegó," 1389.

Mexico's newly empowered citizens could make the best choices for themselves and the nation at large.

Excelsior joined *El Universal* as a second national newspaper that framed themselves as independent periodicals that were free from government interference. However, their outspoken declarations did not spark a larger resistance amongst Mexico's journalists to renounce government support. Instead, many journalists who developed periodicals during this period remained loyal to the political causes they fought for before and during the revolution. Many wrote to Carranza asking for favors since they had helped his movement win the Revolution. The most prominent of these journalists was Rafael Martínez. In early January of 1918, he wrote to the president and reaffirmed *El Demócrata's* loyalty to his administration and promised to use his periodical to help generate support for Carranza's policies, including attacking other newspapers if they published negative stories.⁷ The new president's support was not limited to old allies, even newly founded newspapers wrote to him pledging their allegiance. One such newspaper was *Pierrot* (Sparrow) directed by Rafael Trujillo. He believed they could promote Carranza's reform program similarly as Martínez.⁸ Carranza buttressed this support by continuing to appoint directors to various newspapers. One example was Heriberto Barrón, who served closely with Carranza throughout the Revolution and helped craft his propaganda agenda by writing editorials for newspapers in the U.S. and Mexico.⁹ Following the war, Carranza rewarded him by naming him the

⁷ Telegram from Rafael Martínez, director of *El Demócrata*, to President Carranza (Pachuca, Hgo), January 9, 1918, Mexico, D.F., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/101, 183.

⁸ Letter from Rafael Trujillo, director of *Pierrot* (weekly journal), to President Carranza, January 31, 1918, Mexico, D.F., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/101, 373-376.

⁹ Charles C. Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: The Constitutionalist Years*, (Austin: The University of Texas Press 1972), 373.

director of the state-operated *La República*. As director, Barrón ensured the newspaper promoted the president's reforms.¹⁰ These letters sent to Carranza indicated that the end of the revolution had not changed his generally positive relationship with the media. Newspapers continued to see him their patron and remained loyal to his administration.

International papers that hoped to be distributed in Mexico joined these domestic papers in supporting Carranza. One example was *El Pueblo*, which was published in San Diego. In 1918, the paper hoped to break into the Mexican market and its editor wrote to Carranza looking for support. The editor of *El Pueblo* believed rural Mexicans needed a periodical dedicated to *campesinos*. To earn Carranza's friendship, the editor, Gregorio Velázquez, composed a series of articles that demonstrated his support for the President's agenda. In the first letter Velázquez sent Carranza, he explained how unnamed agitators were traveling around the country and trying to create discontent among the lower class against Carranza.¹¹ Velázquez wanted to use his newspaper to counteract these agitators and help Carranza successfully pass his reforms. *El Pueblo's* editor hoped these sample articles would convince Carranza to invest in his periodical since it was an effective tool to diffuse local dissidents.

The issue of neutrality: one issue about which journalists refused to stay loyal

¹⁰ Letters from the lawyer Heriberto Barrón, primary director of *La República*, to President Carranza commenting about an article published in *El Pueblo* (June 3), June 3, 1918, Mexico, D.F., SDN AHDN, XI/481.5/101, 1462-1463.

¹¹ Gregorio A. Velázquez to President Carranza. Articles sent to the President were "Tempestad en un vaso de agua", "Continúan las inmoralidades del P.L.C.," "Los salvajes de la pluma", "El Presidente y los hombres de buena voluntad" y "El conflicto electoral," April 12, 1915 – March 27, 1920, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Juan Barragan, Box 10, Folder 28, 52.

Carranza's correspondence demonstrated many journalists wanted to work with him. This allowed him to control much of the information published in newspapers. However, the issue of neutrality caused a divide between him and even his closest allies. When the Revolution ended, Carranza needed to decide whether Mexico would join the U.S. and send troops to fight in World War I.¹² This issued divided the journalistic community and their long standing patron. Many remembered how British and American citizens had allied with Díaz and became wealthy through the export of the nation's resources.¹³ For them, the Revolution was fought to overthrow both Díaz and the foreign corporations that had propped up his government. Journalists did not want Carranza to so quickly give up their hard fought independence and return to subservience. Through their correspondence and newspaper articles, journalists sought answers as to whether or not Mexico would remain neutral and independent.¹⁴

The seriousness of the divide between Carranza and his long-term allies was revealed in a series of telegrams to Carranza from his friend Martínez. Their close relationship did not prevent the journalist from trying to influence Carranza regarding Mexico's neutrality. In one telegrams Martínez asked the president to explain the reasoning behind the government requesting a loan from the United States. He wanted to know if this meant the country had "abandoned its neutrality and were now official allies

¹² Cumberland, *The Mexican Revolution*, 395-396.

¹³ Cumberland, *The Mexican Revolution*, 281-282.

¹⁴ There were so many articles written on this topic that Alducín collected them and reprinted a selection of them in an anthology titled *La Revolucion Constitucionalista, los Estados Unidos y El A.B.C.* A.B.C. was an acronym for the nations, Argentina, Brazil and Chile, which were the strongest South American nations at the time. Many hoped Mexico would form an alliance with these nations to provide a counterbalance to American influence.

with the United States.”¹⁵ Martínez believed that if the U.S. approved this loan, it would signify a formal alliance between the two nations. He feared this meant Mexico would be obliged to send troops to fight in Europe. In these telegrams, Martínez was much more combative than his typical messages to Carranza. He was acting as journalist requesting information and not his long-time friend. This was a stark change from any of their other exchanges. The telegram ended by emphasizing the need for immediate clarification from the president because the streets were alive with rumors that the Mexican Senate had already approved this agreement.¹⁶ The issue of Mexican neutrality drove Martínez to challenge Carranza. He wanted to make sure the nation was not returning to war.

Martínez did not limit his search for answers surrounding this issue to Carranza. Two weeks later, the president found out Martínez had sent inquiries to several generals including M. Dieguez. In his message to Carranza, Dieguez explained that Martínez had recently questioned him about Mexico’s future role in WW I.¹⁷ The general advised Carranza that while he rarely sees the value of making public proclamations, in this circumstance, he believed it was necessary to demonstrate to the country that Carranza was in control of Mexico’s foreign politics. Dieguez closed his message by asking him for guidance as to how to respond to Martínez.¹⁸ This telegram reinforced the notion that this was an important of this issue beyond journalistic curiosity. Martínez’s readers were forcing him to question Carranza, since they were concerned and wanted answers.

¹⁵ Telegram from *El Demócrata* (Rafael Martínez) to President Carranza, October 19, 1917, Mexico D.F., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/100, 2710.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2711.

¹⁷ Telegram from General Manuel M. Dieguez to President Carranza, October 30, 1917, Mexico D.F., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/100, 2776.

¹⁸ Telegram from General Manuel M. Dieguez to President Carranza, October 30, 1917, Mexico D.F., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/100, 2777.

A second journalist who caused continual difficulties for Carranza regarding neutrality was Palavicini. Like Martínez, Palavicini strongly supported Mexican neutrality and regularly published stories on international issues. Whenever these articles cast the nation in a negative light, he was reprimanded by officials. This occurred in April 1918, when *El Universal* republished two articles from the Associated Press.¹⁹ These articles detailed a recent trade commission held in Argentina attended by Mexican officials. For whatever reason, the commission failed to broker a trade agreement between the two countries. When Palavicini reported this story, he received a reprimand from Carranza who believed the story presented his government as failure for not securing the agreement. Palavicini did not accept Carranza's criticism, instead defending himself and *El Universal* by explaining his article did not assign blame for either party. It simply provided the facts of the event. Palavicini cited his previous service to the Constitutionals and claimed he would never harm his former colleagues.²⁰ He wanted the nation to agree to trade agreements with fellow Latin American nations because they would help counterbalance the U.S.'s influence on the region. Two of Carranza's former allies, Palavicini and Martínez, believed Mexican neutrality was the best path for the nation. They both pushed international issues in their periodicals even when they upset government officials.

The issue of neutrality and the role the United States would play in post-revolutionary Mexico remained relevant despite Carranza's continued non-answers. When periodicals could not find the answers they sought from him or other Mexican

¹⁹ Letter from Félix Palavicini to don Gerzayn Ugarte, April 20, 1918, secretary to the President, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Juan Barragan, Box 10, Folder 1, 134.

²⁰ Ibid., 134-135.

officials, they began to reach out to their counterparts in the U.S. media. In 1919, a group of North American journalists, which included representatives from *El Heraldo de México*, *Excelsior* and Palavicini attended a luncheon held by George Creel, one of President Wilson's closest advisors and during World War I who the Committee on Public Information.²¹ This agency created propaganda that helped quell the public's resistance to the United State joining the war and sending troops to Europe to fight.²² Creel shared a similar backstory with the majority of reporters that attended the luncheon. Before he went to work for Wilson's administration, he was a journalist and activist and created propaganda for gubernatorial election in Kansas and Colorado²³. Creel represented the same style of journalism practiced in Mexico. They had spent the last seven years using their periodicals to first help Madero, then Carranza win the revolution and enact policies they supported.

Their shared experiences as working journalists who were also political activists possibly emboldened Mexican journalists to feel confident to leave their country and meet with Creel. Taking this meeting would have been in defiance of Carranza since he wanted to be completely in control of everything published in Mexico. It was possible he trusted some of these journalists but others like Palavicini and *Excelsior's* staff had been a consistent problem for his administration. In the end, Carranza did not need to have any fears. According to someone who attended the meeting, Creel asserted President Wilson

²¹ Telegrams from Ignacio Bonillas, R. Huerta y Torres to President Carranza, September-October 1919, Mexico, D.F., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/102, 283.

²² George Creel, *How we advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe*, (London, Forgotten Books: 2012).

²³ Alan Aexelrod, *Selling the Great War: the Making of American Propaganda*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 28.

had complete respect for Carranza's "revolutionary reforms."²⁴ This declaration was heard first hand and the reporters were now free to circulate in their newspapers when they returned home. The official who reported on the meeting to Carranza attributed its success to the honorable behavior of the Mexican press corps.²⁵ In particular, the official credited Manuel Carpio, a reporter for *Excelsior*, for impressing Creel with his intelligence and strong resolve. This meeting occurred because Mexican journalists were not getting the answers they needed from government officials. It revealed reporters did fight against Carranza and other officials when the issue was significant to them. These issues were few and far between but one could see the potential for an independent media that challenged the government.

Whatever problems were caused by journalists questioning Mexico's foreign policy were minor compared to the controversial stories printed in *Excelsior* which discussed the nation's internal political turmoil. Heriberto Barrón consistently complained and made sure Carranza knew whenever *Excelsior* published a controversial article. In one letter from January, 1918, he informed Carranza that *Excelsior* was supporting the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC), an oppositional political party.²⁶ In his opinion, the newspaper had gone out of its way to popularize the party by mentioning it in a series of articles.²⁷ Barrón believed these articles equaled treason and wanted the newspaper punished. He wrote, "I believe sincerely, that after you read the

²⁴ Telegrams from Ignacio Bonillas, R. Huerta y Torres to President Carranza, September-October, 1919, Mexico, D.F., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/102, 284.

²⁵ Ibid., 283.

²⁶ David G. LaFrance, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland: Politics, War, and State Building in Puebla, 1913-1920*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 157.

²⁷ Letter from the lawyer Heriberto Barrón to President Carranza including an article from the periodical *El Pueblo* (January 16) with the title "A las autoridades del sur de EE.UU.," January 18, 1918, Mexico, D.F., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/101, 245.

content of the articles that I sent you, you will not only order the end of *Excelsior's* support, but treat *Excelsior* like an enemy of the government.”²⁸ By highlighting domestic issues, *Excelsior* often received the strongest complaints. This set the periodical apart from other journalists who challenged Carranza but remained largely loyal to him.

Newspapers like *Excelsior* that wanted to write difficult articles had no choice but to rely on sources outside of Carranza's administration. When faced with difficult questions, officials did their best to deflect or give non-answers to questions presented to them by journalists. This reflected the long held distrust officials had for media members. They feared the media and only trusted journalists they could control. One example of their attempt to restrict information from reporters was a telegram sent by an official to *El Demócrata* in reply to several questions the periodical had sent him. In the message, the official was not forth coming with information.²⁹ Instead, he first attacked the questions asked by periodical, explaining they were too short and simplistic. When he did acknowledge questions, he implied the issues were too complicated and he could not provide an answer due to the limited space available to telegrams. The official closed by reassuring the journalists that he had “the absolute confidence in the qualification and patriotic attitude of the President of the Republic and administrators.”³⁰ This telegram revealed the disdain government officials maintained against journalists. Many of them as meddling and did whatever they could to prevent them from doing their jobs.

²⁸ Ibid., 244.

²⁹ Telegram from the governor of Jalisco, E. Egollado, to President Carranza, October 29, 1917, Guadalajara, Jal., SDN, AHDN, XI/481.5/153, 103-104

³⁰ Ibid., 104.

This fear of journalists persisted even though many wanted to help the government. As Alducín described in *Excelsior's* first issue, the press could serve as a bridge between the government and its citizens. The media could demystify government proceedings and allow the people to trust that the country was not returning to a dictatorship. The desire to help Carranza was revealed through in a message sent to him by Palavicini. In the letter, Palavicini claimed that he knew about a supposedly secret conversation between Carranza and Mexico's Ambassador to the United States. While there were no details as to this conversation, Palavicini revealed that he knew the conversation's topic centered on Mexican neutrality. The journalist wanted permission from Carranza to publish the transcript of conversation.³¹ This would have been a coup for Palavicini and *El Universal* but his motivations were supposedly pure. He believed, just as Martínez that Carranza needed to take a public stand on neutrality. Publishing the transcript would provide Carranza an opportunity to speak to the nation. This would quell fears and restore faith in him. Media members were not looking to takedown officials. They wanted to play their role in helping the nation recover from the Revolution.

Outside of the Capital – A case study in Yucatán Newspapers

Within Mexico City, the majority of journalists had sworn fealty to Carranza and his government. Those journalists that tried to operate independently were squeezed financially until they either went out of business or joined the program. Outside of the capital, newspapers had more freedom to remain loyal to their political causes. This occurred in the Yucatán region (1915-1923), which had one of the most radical state

³¹ Letter from Félix Palavicini to don Pedro Fariás, secretary to the President, June 23, 1917, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Juan Barragan, Box 10, Folder 1, 115.

governments in Mexico due to the presence of two socialist governors, Salvador Alvarado (1915-1917) and Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1922-1923). Alvarado was a general from Sonora who occupied the state during the Mexican Revolution under orders from Carranza. As the state's self-appointed governor, he passed several major reforms, most significantly the relaxing of divorce laws (making male drunkenness, infidelity, abandonment, grievous injury and gambling grounds for separation) and the complete prohibition of alcohol by 1917.³² He was followed by a series of minor figures but his true successor was Carrillo Puerto, a Yucatán native and a journalist whose newspaper was closed down on the eve of the 1910 election. He took Yucatán socialism in a more radical, democratic, and agrarian direction. Alvarado worked to break up the large-scale henequen haciendas that kept workers trapped in a never ending cycle of debt peonage.³³ These radical governors created a political environment that allowed local periodicals to thrive. It was reminiscent of the pre-Revolutionary setting where newspapers were representative of a political party or ideology instead of providing general headlines or information about the previous day's events. Often, these newspapers challenged the periodicals in the region that were sponsored by the state government and there were threats of violence. These defiant newspapers were allowed to exist and continued to thrive throughout the time period.

One Yucatán newspaper that regularly criticized the Alvarado and his socialist party was *El Hombre Libre: Contra todas las Farsas* (Free Man: Against all the Farces). The periodical defined a Free Mexican as people who understood their political and

³² Ben Fallaw, "Dry Law, Wet Politics: Drinking and Prohibition in Post-Revolutionary Yucatán," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2002), 41.

³³ Gilbert Michael Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1987), 188-191.

social rights and lived without restrictions (religion, class, gender) that would limit one's decisions. It claimed that the Yucatán population did not have its freedom since they were still restricted by these categories even though they had fought and won the Revolution.³⁴ This meant the newspaper had to educate its readers and help complete the process. This education began on the first page of each issue as the periodical reprinted Article 6 (freedom of expression) and 7 (the freedom of the press). After years of living under Díaz's dictatorship, *El Hombre Libre* believed its readers needed a constant reminder that they were now free. In addition, the periodical used these articles like a shield, as if it assumed a government organization or political party would attempt to shut it down. Any official who opened this newspaper would be reminded on the first page that they could not close *El Hombre Libre* regardless of how much they disagreed with its articles.

These referencing these rights did not protect the periodical from vigilante justice. At various points its writers would discuss how often threats of violence were made against its staff. At one point these rumors became so strong that *El Hombre Libre* had to publish an article refuting rumors that one of its owners had been killed by a prominent member the Liberal Party. While this rumor turned out false, the writer framed this his article around the idea that the newspaper was constantly causing problems for elites who disagreed with the periodical's political stances.³⁵

El Hombre Libre believed education was a key component to freeing the people of Yucatán as their inexperience with freedom would lead them to make bad decisions.

³⁴ "Constitución de 1917," *El Hombre Libre: Contra todas las Fracas*, May 9, 1917, 1.

³⁵ "Se pretendió asesinar al Gerente de 'El Hombre Libre,'" *El Hombre Libre: Contra todas las Farsas*, October 22, 1917, 2.

The newspaper feared a group of people it called the *propagandistas*. They traveled from village to village passing out pamphlets and speaking to an audience and trying to garner political support. Often, they were socialists but it could have been any political party. *El Hombre Libre* believed these people were dangerous since they had no “conscience or culture” and spread “misinformation” which could lead people to making poor choices or even violence.³⁶ In one column, it discussed how the region was on the verge of a caste war due to people traveling from village to village or hacienda to hacienda, rallying *campesinos* to overthrow the existing political structure.³⁷ The periodical listed several instances where people had been attacked by socialists, which threatened the stability of the state. These fears were clearly in the eyes of the beholder. Other newspapers might have believed overthrowing the henequen haciendas as the only solution and seen this violence as a positive.

The next day, *El Hombre Libre* produced a second article on the same theme but focused more on the region’s school systems. In it, the writer began by saying that the area’s children had thus far been saved from the corrupting influence of socialism but *El Hombre Libre*’s readers needed to be vigilant since Alvarado had authorized the hiring of school teachers from outside of the state. The periodical was worried that these teachers had already been indoctrinated in by the “conscienceless politicians and their supporters in the press.”³⁸ The article claimed these instructors were so radical that their counterparts in Europe and the U.S. would be surprised at their pedagogues. The writer saw these

³⁶ “Los Gobiernos y la Opinión Publica,” *El Hombre Libre: Contra todas las Farsas*, May 9, 1917, 1.

³⁷ “El Partido Liberal Yucateco,” *El Hombre Libre: Contra todas las Farsas*, May 9, 1917, 1.

³⁸ “La Farsa más inmoral en Las Esuelas del Estado,” *El Hombre Libre: Contra todas las Farsas*, August 9, 1917, 1.

teachers as a new wave of conquistadors, instead of a bloody war they would remake the society through the state's school system. *El Hombre Libre* was founded and actively challenged the authority of Alvarado's socialist government in Yucatán. This unpopular stance led to the newspaper dealing with threats of violence but it continued to publish even though the region elected a second socialist strongman following Alvarado's recall to Mexico City.

A second newspaper that prospered in this region during this time period was *El Demócrata*, which had been created to help popularize the Partido Democrático Independiente (Democratic Independent Party), PDI. The PDI was founded in 1917 by Tomás Pérez Ponce. Ponce had been a longtime radical and had worked to break the power of the *henequeneros*, the most powerful group of landowners in the region. In 1911, Ponce gave an interview and said, "yes, they are aware!... Deep within them the indebted peons feel hatred and a desire for revenge against their masters and authorities who helped their masters to enslave them."³⁹ On the surface, it would seem Ponce would be supporter of Alvarado who was a socialist with the goal of remaking Yucatán society. However, Ponce saw Alvarado as an outsider, part of the Sonoran ruling party and not nearly radical enough. Ponce had been an anarchist since the early part of the century and had worked with the Magón Brothers so he supported a much more radical government. This was seen in its coverage of the November 1917 elections as it called the recent socialist victories "grotesque" and a "farce."⁴⁰ The article implied the socialists had won through threats of violence. In the writer's opinion, these threats had defeated the

³⁹ Allen Wells and Gilbert Joseph, *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatán, 1876-1915*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 142.

⁴⁰ "Al Pueblo Yucateco," *El Demócrata*, November 4, 1917, 1.

countryside's beautiful hope of a true democracy.⁴¹ The PDI would stand up to the political establishment and work to create a democratic Yucatán, one that was not controlled by Alvarado and his successor Carlos Castro Morales.

The majority of its columns did not reference this political party and it largely focused on discussing the larger questions that Mexico faced now that the revolution was over. This was seen best in an article titled "The Revolution, The Revolutionaries and the Press." In it, the author wrote about his belief that freedom of expression was the most important right bestowed in the new Constitution, an opinion it shared with its political opposite, *El Hombre Libre*.⁴² Thanks to this new protection, *El Demócrata* thought journalists now had the responsibility to challenge politicians and make sure the nation did not return to its reliance on strongman or dictators. *El Demócrata* feared former revolutionary leaders would take control of the government and not relinquish it. The author wrote, "why are the revolutionaries important? They are not Revolution and we need to attack their bad deeds that might restore the despotism. We need to protect our new freedoms."⁴³

El Demócrata followed its own advice and often attacked the government sponsored periodicals. The most significant of these was *La Voz de la Adulación*. *El Demócrata* challenged its general support of the region's large-scale henequen haciendas that owned the majority of the land in the region.⁴⁴ *La Voz de la Adulación* argued they should not be broken up since they provided many crucial services to their communities, such as paying for schools, public gardens, and community festivals and celebrations. *El*

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² "La Revolución, Los Revolucionarios y la Prensa," *El Demócrata*, June 3, 1917, 1.

⁴³ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁴ "La salvación de los Hacendados y 'La Voz de la Adulación'," *El Demócrata*, June 17, 1919, 1.

Demócrata believed these small rewards did not off-set the significant inequalities that the system had created. Furthermore, it highlighted how the article from *La Voz de Adulación* did not clearly state who was operating the government office responsible for regulating the haciendas. *El Demócrata* feared that this office would be staffed by friends of hacienda owners and no real regulation would happen.⁴⁵ Even though *El Hombre Libre* rarely agreed with *El Demócrata*, it too challenged government propaganda. This was seen in an article attacking the director of education for the schools in the newly formed Ciudad Escolar de los Mayas.⁴⁶ This commentary was published in response to an article from a *La Voz del Amo*, where the director discussed his pedagogy and the new school system he hoped to develop. This topic was significant to *El Hombre Libre* so it took a moment point out all the flaws in his plan and reiterate its fear of these outsiders were changing the region for the worst.⁴⁷ *El Demócrata* and *El Hombre Libre* were examples of the thriving periodical industry following the Revolution. One reason they succeeded was that they were more focused on regional politics and did not challenge Carranza's authority in Mexico City. However, both defied the local governor and express disbelief in his policies. This was relatively significant because Alvarado was a Sonoran General who had the backing of the nation's most powerful leaders. Their work was a small example of a larger movement of regional papers working to establish a more open political system.

Presidential Election of 1920 – End of Carranza – role of the media in the election of 1920 – reporting the death – Palavicini's exile

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁶ "La Farsa Educacional," *El Hombre Libre*, August 23, 1917, 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1.

Despite his attempts to control the media, Carranza could not create a positive image of his government ahead of the presidential election of 1920.⁴⁸ This election was crucial test for Mexico's newly founded democracy. The Constitution of 1917 banned reelection so no future president could create a Díaz-like dictatorship. The election of 1920 was the first opportunity to demonstrate the government could transition peacefully once a president's term was completed. In addition to this important precedent, the election would transform the relationship between the government and the press. The main candidates, Alvaro Obregón and Pablo González, were generals from the Revolution and only had contempt or suspicion of the media. Obregón had already arrested one prominent journalist (Palavicini) for criticizing the government. Neither would be open to the establishment of independent newspapers that would be critical of their administration. In addition, many journalists owed their positions to Carranza. If Carranza lost then they would have to decide if they would remain loyal to him or the new president.

The clear frontrunner for the election of 1920 was Obregón. At the end of the Mexican Revolution, Obregón was the most famous member of the Constitutionalist coalition. He was the military genius who had defeated Villa and served an important role in securing many of the liberal reforms embedded in the Constitution of 1917.⁴⁹ In addition, he had lost an arm during the war, which served as a constant visual reminder of his heroism.⁵⁰ Despite his popularity, he stood aside and allowed Carranza to be elected

⁴⁸ Cumberland, *The Mexican Revolution: The Constitutionalist Years*, 398-399.

⁴⁹ Jürgen Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo: Alvaro Obregon and the Mexican Revolution*, (Wiley-Blackwell: New York, 2011), 92.

⁵⁰ Linda B. Hall, *Álvaro Obregón: Power and Revolution in Mexico, 1911-1920*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981), 130.

president and resigned from his post as Secretary of War to return to his farm in Sonora once the war ended. This move served two purposes, first the general was exhausted from the revolution and his wound and needed time to recuperate and spend time with his family. Second, it was much more prudent to have Carranza take the brunt of the criticism as the first president following the revolution. Then, Obregón could return to Mexico City from his farm with a clean slate.

Throughout the revolution, Obregón demonstrated he was savvy political operator in addition to being a good general. He received his first taste of politics in 1916 when the United States launched a punitive expeditionary force into Mexico to capture Pancho Villa. Obregón met with American officials and convinced them that he could capture Villa on his own.⁵¹ This prevented a possible border war with the United States.⁵² He further enhanced his national profile by siding with radicals during the Constitution Convention. His support was crucial in securing the articles that promoted social justice, economic justice and separation of church and state.⁵³ Participating in the Congress solidified his reformist reputation nationally and laid the groundwork for a future presidential run.

The main barrier to Obregón's rise to the presidency was Carranza. Carranza wanted the presidency to remain in the control of civilians. He feared a small group of leaders controlling both the military and the presidency.⁵⁴ To prevent Obregón victory, Carranza used his friends in the media to generate negative propaganda against him. This

⁵¹ Hall, *Obregón*, 153.

⁵² Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo*, 87.

⁵³ Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo*, 89.

⁵⁴ Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: The Constitutionalist Years*, 401-420.

began early in 1919, when Carranza attacked Obregón in a manifesto printed in the nation's major newspapers, *Excelsior* and *El Universal*.⁵⁵ It demonstrated Carranza still had the potentially necessary media connections to prevent Obregón from securing the presidency.

In the manifesto President described Obregón as a candidate that did not have the support of the country. In his opinion, his opponent's candidacy was based only on a small group of military leaders coercing their constituents into supporting him. These endorsements from his friends prevented Obregón from developing a connection with the general population and realizing the problems of everyday Mexicans.⁵⁶ Therefore, it was impossible for Obregón to develop a political program to help them. The lack of a platform demonstrated his political inexperience and he could not be an effective president. Carranza believed Obregón was simply a famous face without the necessary experience to govern.

This manifesto failed as a piece of propaganda despite the wide variety of accusations it made against Obregón. The main problem was Carranza's inability to present an alternative candidate to compete against the general. In the essay, he only mentioned his chosen successor, Ignacio Bonillo, twice and never highlighted his qualifications as a presidential candidate.⁵⁷ The reader of this piece had to assume Carranza purposely chose a weak candidate so he could remain in control from behind the scenes. This manifesto differed greatly then his declarations and other interactions

⁵⁵ Hall, *Obregón*, 205.

⁵⁶ "Manifesto to the nation that raises the spirit of the Revolution of 1913 and its labor in the reconstruction of the country," May 6, 1920, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Juan Barragón, Box 1, Folder 12, 74.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

with the media during the revolution. Those interactions had been more focused and he presented himself as completely in control of the Constitutionalist movement. He still had enough influence to get it printed in an allied newspaper but not enough to deliver a convincing message to the nation.

By choosing such an anonymous candidate, Carranza could not win a fair fight against Obregón. Therefore, he relied on his allies in the media to put pressure on the general. Former journalist Luis Cabrera publically circulated a letter that told other officials he would resign if Obregón was elected as president.⁵⁸ This implied all the politicians who owed their careers to Carranza and Cabrera would lose their jobs, since they would be no longer protected by them. The letter indicated Cabrera respected some generals but Obregón had not earned his trust yet.⁵⁹ In addition, Carranza cancelled the telegraph permits issued to many of Obregón's allies, including *El Monitor Republicano*, the periodical that backed his campaign. This prevented Obregón from communicating instructions and information to his supporters reliably.⁶⁰ These tactics revealed Carranza remained a shrewd manipulator of news stories despite facing Obregón's stronger and better organized campaign.

One area of the press Carranza could not control were periodicals published outside of Mexico City. These newspapers were not operated by his old friends from the Revolution and did not have any qualms supporting Obregón. This is best seen in issues of *La Patria*, published out of El Paso Texas and distributed throughout Northern Mexico. A person skimming the newspaper during the newspaper in the year leading up

⁵⁸ Hall, *Obregón*, 206.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

to election it would have appeared the country the Revolution had not even ended with Pancho Villa dominating its headlines. On January 6, 1919, the *La Patria* announced that Villa had captured the Parral, a small city located 200 miles away from Chihuahua's state capital. In addition, the article detailed how the government had to send 3,000 federal troops to Ciudad Jiménez in order to prevent that city from falling.⁶¹ This story was followed up four days later with another article detailing how the Chihuahua was falling into chaos as people from around the state rushed to the city fearing the advance of Villa's army.⁶² This headline was joined by smaller story explaining how nobody had confidence in the general who was chasing Villa. This article declared that the "Capture of Villa is impossible."⁶³ Three days later, *La Patria* reported that many oil wells had been captured by a group of rebels led by Manuel Paláez in Veracruz and Tamaulipas and a new rebellion in Michoacán.⁶⁴ All these stories occurred within the first half of the month of January and would have convinced anyone reading *La Patria* that Mexico needed new leadership, especially someone with a military background like Obregón. However, the bad news in Chihuahua continued for months on end. This was reinforced in an article published on May 19 as Carranza had lost communication with the city due to Villa's nonstop siege.⁶⁵ In this issue, *La Patria* detailed the dispatching of more troops from other regions of the country to combat Villa. His inability to end Villa's march made him seem weak and the country was ready to look for another leader. To a reader it

⁶¹ "Villa Capturo Parral y Amenaza C. Jimenez," *La Patria: Diario Mexicano*, January 6, 1919, 1.

⁶² "La Intranquilidad en la Ciudad de Chihuahua llega cerca del Panico," *La Patria: Diario Mexicano*, January 10, 1919, 1.

⁶³ "No confía en el Exito del Gral. Agustín Castro," *La Patria: Diario Mexicano*, January 10, 1919, 1.

⁶⁴ "La Región Petrolera va a Huyen Despavoridos los Caer en Manos Rebeldes," and "La Rebelión de Michoacán recibe otro Nuevo Impulso," *La Patria: Diario Mexicano*, January 13, 1919, and January 14, 1919, 1.

⁶⁵ May 19, 1919, "La Situación de Chihuahua es Bastante Grave," *La Patria: Diario Mexicano*, 1.

would appear as if the Revolution was still being fought even though the Constitution of 1917 had been signed two years ago.

These military battles had to share space on the front page with stories about the many strikes that were occurring in Mexico over this period. A small sampling, “There is serious discontent among the Oil Workers,” “The Bolsheviks have invaded Mexico,” “Today there are no periodicals in the Capital thanks to Strike,” and “Benjamin Hill ordered his troops to Open Fire on the Strike Leaders.”⁶⁶ The last story about the use of the army against strikers would have been particularly disturbing to readers. It was one thing to see federal troops deployed to stop Pancho Villa but it would have been scary to know the government was willing to use extreme force to restrict the rights of law abiding teachers on strike. Furthermore, it might rally support to the protestors cause. It would seem like the powerful federal government assaulting defenseless teachers. The fact this occurred in the capital might hurt Carranza’s authority more than the troubles with Villa. It would seem like the government cannot keep its house in order. The next day, May 22, *La Patria* reported that the situation in Mexico was so chaotic that the League of Nation was thinking intervening and saving the country for its “sad condition.”⁶⁷ This was a proposal submitted by Woodrow Wilson and the U.S. to the League of Nations. The article specifically targeted Carranza writing that “he had not demonstrated that he was no better than his predecessors.”⁶⁸ These stories were a small sampling of the negative headlines from *La Patria*. They would have given the

⁶⁶ January 1, 1919, “Es Grave entre los Petroleros el Descontento,” January 22, 1919, “El Bolshevismo invade a México,” May 19, 1919, “No hay hoy periódicos en la capital,” May 21, 1919, “Benjamín Hill ordenó que las tropas dispararan sus armas contra los maestros en huelga,” *La Patria*, 1.

⁶⁷ May 22, 1919, “El Gobierno de Carranza se Bambolea,” *La Patria*, 1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

impression to readers that the nation was falling apart and needed new leadership. While Carranza might have had allies controlling newspapers out of Mexico City, it was clear outside of the capital he had less control to limit the publication of negative stories. This negative press made his campaign against Obregón much more difficult.

Similarly, to the election of 1910, media organizations were playing a critical role in a presidential election. Obregón countered Carranza's offensive by employing traveling reporters who publicized his various campaign stops. Every story published about these engagements highlighted the fact that all social classes were present. These stories were accompanied by photographs revealing the large crowds composed of all kinds of people, from *campesinos* who had come into town from the surrounding countryside to the urban poor in great numbers, to elegantly dressed men and women.⁶⁹ These stories directly countered the narrative generated by Carranza that Obregón did not have wide-spectrum of support amongst the social classes. They revealed how much the nation loved their former general.

The periodical *Omega* believed the media coverage around this campaign was ridiculous. In a satirical column, it explained how Mexican journalists used their columns and newspapers to generate opinions that had no value or impact on Mexican society. It specifically signaled out Palavicini, the piece was titled "Palavicini Auto-agasajo" (Palavicini Automatic Entertainment), as main cause of this constant chatter coming from the press.⁷⁰ The author claimed that journalism in general was a performance in righteous hyperbole, constantly claiming that journalists were the smartest and everyone should

⁶⁹ Ibid., 226.

⁷⁰ "Palavicini Auto-agasajo," *Omega: Periódico Político*, January 14, 1920, 1.

listen to their opinions. Their increased relevance and role in Mexican political society had come out of nowhere. Before the Revolution, they were in the author's opinion nothing better than "vagabond poets" that traveled from town to town taking money from whomever would pay for their thoughts. Out of nowhere, they became significant political commentators, influencing the current election and the nation's future. Now that they have this power they would not let it go and keep it firmly grasped in their "flabby and sweaty hands."⁷¹ This editorial came out of nowhere and did not mention any specific incidents. It was a subject that was not covered again in other issues of *Omega* so it was not clear what precipitated this rant. The only hint was an article in the same issue titled "Anarchy is not a Win," indicating the periodical was concerned the upcoming election and possibility the country would fall back into chaos.⁷² *Omega* might have seen Palavinici and other journalists as responsible for this strong political divide in Mexico.

As the election approached, and it became clear Obregón would win the election, Carranza ramped up repression against Obregón's supporters. Police violently broke up Obregón's rallies and eventually attempted to arrest him in Mexico City. This forced him to go into hiding on the eve of the election.⁷³ At the same time, Carranza moved against Obregón's home state of Sonora. In one of his last acts as president, Carranza declared the federal government controlled the region's water supply, including the crucial Río de Sonora.⁷⁴ He stationed troops on the state's borders and prepared to take control of the river by force if the state's governor, Adolfo de la Huerta, refused his authority. As

⁷¹ Ibid., 1.

⁷² "La Anarquía no es un Triunfo," *Omega: Periódico Political*, January 14, 1920, 1.

⁷³ Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: The Constitutionalist Years*, 411.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 233

Obregón fled Mexico City, de la Huerta, declared his state was in open rebellion against Carranza. Support for the Sonorans quickly coalesced and de la Huerta was the leader of an army marching on the capital. While Obregón was part of the leadership group, he was not in charge of the army because he had resigned his generalship as part of his campaign.⁷⁵ This desperate move by Carranza clearly failed. On May 19th, he was forced to flee Mexico City as Obregón marched to the capital facing little resistance since he had the support of the majority of Mexicans. Carranza fled knowing he was outgunned and hoped to escape to Veracruz. From the port city it was possible that he could have left the country and set up a government in exile. Unfortunately, he did not make it further than the mountains that surround Mexico City where his convoy was ambushed by the rogue general Rodolfo Herrero. During the skirmish he died, but historians do not know if he committed suicide or killed by an enemy's bullet. It is also not clear if Obregón had nothing to do with his death.⁷⁶ The general that led the ambush was employed by Obregón and eventually exonerated after a cursory investigation. Whatever role he played, this was clearly a fortuitous turn of events for Obregón. He now had an open path to the presidency.

Obregón and the Press – continued fear of the media – how does the media react to Carranza's death

Carranza's death ushered in a new era in Mexican politics. For the next fourteen years, it would be controlled by politicians from the state of Sonora, Obregón and his successor Plutarco Elías Calles. Once their presidencies ended, they would influence

⁷⁵ Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo*, 106.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

politics from behind the scenes. Initially, many feared their rise to power could lead to an escalation of the fear and contempt officials held for journalists. These were military men, generals used to their subordinates following orders and restricting how much information was made available. Journalists had to decide if they would remain loyal to Carranza or work together with Obregón to advance their personal goals. Their devotion to Carranza and their independence was challenged immediately since they needed to cover his death at the hands of a Obregón loyalist. They needed to decide if they would join the new political order willingly or continue to maintain their independence.

To help smooth out the difficulties between Obregón and the media, his administration created one of the first governmental departments designed to monitor Mexican periodicals and maintain a steady stream of propaganda. Previously, Díaz and Carranza sustained a group of informal informants tasked with tracking the newspapers. This was unreliable since they did not know when or if they would be receiving information from their informants. By creating an agency and devoting resources to it, the Sonorans guaranteed they received constant updates about what was written about them or other political stories. It was staffed by journalist allies they knew from their home state. This allowed them to quickly react to any story or know which newspaper published dangerous articles. The development of this department was a mixed bag for periodicals. Many needed government support in order to survive and wrote to Calles asking for his help. The constant demand for support was one reason for the department's creation. It supposedly would streamline the process and help get aid to journalists to sustain their periodicals. In the end, it formalized the relationship between periodicals and

the government. Mexican journalists wanted to be part of the revolutionary government. This would allow them to have the largest impact.

With Carranza's death, Obregón and his allies experienced their first media crisis before he was elected president. Instead of assuming the presidency immediately, de la Huerta assumed the role of interim president on May 24, 1920 until an official election could be held.⁷⁷ Over the summer, Obregón needed to handle the media backlash following Carranza's death in order to win the election. The backlash began the day after Carranza was killed with front page remembrances in the major newspapers. *El Universal's* tribute was representative of the majority of stores by featuring a long memorial that listed his deeds: first as leader of the Constitutionalists and then as President of Mexico.⁷⁸ Obregón needed to handle this event carefully. Carranza's death was similar to Madero's murder following Huerta's coup. Both were largely unnecessary, both Huerta and Obregón's coups had resounding popular support at the time they occurred. Killing Madero ensured there would be resistance to Huerta's regime, as he became a martyr that Carranza continually referenced during his uprising. There was a strong possibility that Carranza's death could haunt Obregón's administration.

Initially, it seemed like this would transpire. Every newspaper in the country was obligated to report the story of his death regardless of their political affiliation or past relationship with Carranza. Many though were operated or founded by people who had directly worked for him so few shied away from memorializing the dead president. He was killed on a Friday so over the weekend all of the newspapers in Mexico had the

⁷⁷ Hall, *Obregón*, 246.

⁷⁸ Folder that contains documents relating to Carranza's death, including Publications in *El Universal*, May 22, 1920, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Juan Barragón, Box 1, Folder 14, 3.

opportunity to print biographies of the fallen president. Each of these would have reminded readers that Carranza had led the uprising against Madero, successfully ended the war and returned Mexico to democracy. *Excelsior* highlighted how he rose from humble beginnings, public schooling in the Coahuilan countryside, to become the president of the nation.⁷⁹ Furthermore, *Excelsior* stressed Carranza negotiated with President Wilson and prevented the United States from intervening in Mexico's affairs.

The fact that he had been largely ineffectual as president and failed to bring about any serious reforms was ignored in these stories. The best example of this was the article printed in *El Universal*, which closed its front-page story by writing, "His blood erases all of the man's weaknesses, it cleaned all his stains eternally from history, he will be honored as one of God's precious children."⁸⁰ Before he died, Carranza was fairly unpopular and could not rally support to choose his successor. Now, newspapers such as *El Universal* were leading the charge to forgive his past failures. These headlines drove Obregón and his triumphant uprising off the front page. Instead, the death of his nemesis dominated the news coverage.

The Obregón and his team needed to recreate the Carranza's close relationships with Mexican journalists in order to prevent his death from lingering and hurting the early phase of his presidency. Thankfully, few openly challenged his authority, even among long-time Carranza supporters such as Luis Cabrera who quickly transformed their criticism into support. In a note sent on July 10th, to interim President de la Huerta revealed Cabrera was advising Carranza's remaining family members to settle peacefully

⁷⁹ "Biographia del Señor Carranza," *Excelsior*, May 22, 1920, 2.

⁸⁰ "La muerte del Primer Jefe," *El Universal*, May 22, 1920, 4.

with Obregón over the circumstances of his death.⁸¹ The journalist had used his media connections to help her draft a statement that was circulated in the major newspapers and the Associated Press. While the letter did not go into detail as to what was published, de la Huerta's official was clearly happy, writing at one point, "the publishing of these statements has dispelled whatever public support existed for the old government."⁸² This memo revealed some of Carranza's close confidants had already switched allegiances and were now working for the new administration. In this case, it would be difficult to be too critical of Cabrera since he was helping both sides, securing a good future for his dead friend's family, while helping Obregón quell the factions that remained loyal to Carranza.

Cabrera knew there had been a changing of the political guard and worked to create a close relationship with Obregón despite being critical of him during the presidential campaign. Obregón's government needed to cultivate these relationships in order to prevent sensitive information from harming his presidency. His attempts to restrict information to only trusted sources was revealed in a memo circulated in October which discussed the staged release of government's formal investigation in to Carranza's death.⁸³ This was a potentially inflammatory document that could reignite criticism of Obregón handling of the situation so the administration made sure the first people who saw it were allied journalists. Only those who had demonstrated their loyalty to the new regime would be allowed to write about the investigation according to the memo.⁸⁴

⁸¹ This was necessary since his family had to borrow money for even a modest funeral. Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution*, 414.

⁸² Letter from Devaulo R. Belhia to President Adolfo de la Huerta, July 10, 1920, San Antonio, Texas, AGN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, Folder 104-A-9, 66.

⁸³ Letter to Miguel Alessio Robles, secretary to the President, October 22, 1920, Puebla, AGN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, Folder 104-A-9, p. 56.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

Releasing the report to favorite journalists ensured the administration could control the message and present the best possible coverage.

The memo identified *El Demócrata* as one periodical that was not going to receive any firsthand information regarding the investigation. The newspaper was one of the few to launch its own inquiry into Carranza's death. It even sent reporters to interview locals who might have witnessed or remembered something about the battle.⁸⁵ While the official gave *El Demócrata* grudging respect for their efforts, he saw their work as dangerous since it occurred without government approval. At one point he even had to visit their offices because their investigation became too ambitious and he had to squash several rumors they had printed.⁸⁶ This description of *El Demócrata*'s actions demonstrated its staff remained loyal to Carranza after his death. The administration realized this and attempted to prevent them from receiving any damaging materials.

The periodical was just following the lead of its rebellious leader, Martínez, who had been one of Carranza's most trusted allies in the media. On November 18th, he sent an angry telegram to Obregón demanding to know, "why has [Rodolfo] Herrero, officially charged with the murder of President Carranza, remained absolutely free after he completed this horrible crime, walking through the streets of the Capital and displaying his freedom with impunity...?"⁸⁷ This message demonstrated Martínez's resolve not to cow tail to the new president. He had been resisting military authority before the revolution and would continue now that Obregón was the new president.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁷ Letter from Rafael Martínez to President Alvaro Obregón, November 18, 1920, Mexico, D.F., AGN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, Folder 104-A-9, 111.

While Martínez and *El Demócrata* remained defiant, Obregón worked to defang Palavicini, another potential trouble maker. Less than two weeks after de la Huerta was named interim president, Palavicini received a note from the temporary president explaining he had been selected for an important mission. The administration wanted to send Palavicini on a diplomatic visit to Europe and visit England, France, Belgium, Spain, and Italy. The exact reason or his responsibilities for this trip were not detailed in his correspondence with government officials.⁸⁸ In his memoirs, Palavicini noted he was traveling to Europe to demonstrate to their leaders that the Mexican government was still operational despite the recent turmoil.⁸⁹ As to his reasons for accepting this job, he justified working for his former nemesis by writing that his main priority was helping the nation move past the Revolution and saw himself as politically neutral since he was no longer a self-described “political militant.”⁹⁰

On the surface, Palavicini as an ambassador would not have seemed strange. He had a long history of government service that dated back to before the revolution, which included traveling to France in 1906. Then, his assignment was to research the French system of education.⁹¹ Once he returned to Mexico, Palavicini was given an opportunity to implement those changes as the head of different government operated school systems.⁹² This previous experience demonstrated he was not unqualified to serve as an ambassador despite largely working as a journalist for the past ten years.

⁸⁸ Letter from Félix Palavicini to Cutberto Hidalgo, sub-secretary of Foreign Relations, June 16, 1920, Mexico, D.F., Box 8732, Folder 4-29-12 (I), 27.

⁸⁹ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionario*, p 446.

⁹⁰ Letter from Félix Palavicini to Cutberto Hidalgo, sub-secretary of Foreign Relations, June 16, 1920, Mexico D.F., SRE-AHP, Box 8732, Folder 4-29-12 (I), 28.

⁹¹ J. Sierra, the Secretary of Foreign Relations, to The Secretary of the Interior SRE-AHP, June 22, 1906, Box 8733, Folder 4-29-12(II), 8-10.

⁹² Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionario*, 250.

While Palavicini had previous experience working abroad and past government service made him a logical choice, he was once arrested and jailed by Obregón for articles published in his newspaper. In the time between that arrest and Obregón's presidential election, Palavicini's newspaper had continued to generate complaints from Mexican politicians. In just the last six months, he had received a letter from a high-ranking official who complained of *El Universal's* supposed political independence.⁹³ This administrator was hurt because he considered Palavicini a friend but his paper was consistently reporting negative stories about the government. In his reply, Palavicini reiterated his independence and attempted to deflect attention to other newspapers he believed were causing more trouble.⁹⁴ His reputation as a dangerous reporter was reinforced when *El Universal* published Carranza's manifesto during the election, which outlined Carranza's case that Obregón was a traitor to the nation.⁹⁵ This recent history of publishing difficult articles made it hard to believe de la Huerta hired Palavicini and made him part of the administration because he was the best possible candidate. The journalist had a long antagonistic relationship with Obregón and other generals throughout the Revolution and during Carranza's presidency.

It was more likely they saw him as a threat and de la Huerta sent him on a trip to Europe so he could not harm his or Obregón's future presidency. It is fairly safe to conclude this intention despite no evidence from the correspondence indicating the Sonorans had ulterior thoughts. From his correspondence, Palavicini gave no indication

⁹³ January 22, 1920, Letter from Félix Palavicini to Pedro Gil Fariás, secretary to the President, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Juan Barragan, Box 10, Folder 1, 142.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 142.

⁹⁵ May 6, 1920, "Manifiesto a la nación" by Carranza published in *El Universal*, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Juan Barragan, Box 1, Folder 12, 77-78.

he saw this trip as punishment. In the official documents he sent to home, he portrayed himself as a professional diplomat and a serious representative of the Mexican government. His goal was to convince foreign countries that the turmoil of the revolution was in the past and it was safe for them to begin investing and traveling to Mexico once again.⁹⁶ This comes through in a telegram sent on October 2nd from Madrid. In it, Palavicini explained he had met with Spanish officials. The meeting was a success as the foreign government now officially recognized Obregón as the president of Mexico. Even better, member of the Spanish government now believed they were good friends with Mexico.⁹⁷ He had an additional mission to make contact with foreign newspapers. He hoped to use them to spread propaganda that would accelerate Mexico's improving status. These documents and notes stories from his memoirs indicated Palavicini did not see this position as a punishment. While it seems clear the new regime wanted him out of the country, he excelled in this position possibly hoping to secure a future position with this new Sonoran government.

If Obregón had hoped to push Palavicini out of the headlines, he could not have been happy with the coverage his European tour generated in *El Universal*. Beginning with his arrival in Paris, the newspaper dedicated an article on its front page to his travels. His arrival in Paris was described in spectacular terms, meetings with high-ranking government officials, a banquet in his honor and a tour of historically important battlefields.⁹⁸ A week later the periodical had a notice that described the massive going

⁹⁶ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionario*, 446.

⁹⁷ Félix Palavicini reporting to the Office of Foreign Relations, October 2, 1920, Madrid, Spain, SRE-AHP, Box 13009, Folder 6-14-174, 6.

⁹⁸ "El Embajador Palavicini en Paris," *El Universal*, August 5, 1920, 1.

away party they threw as he was leaving Paris.⁹⁹ In Belgium, Palavicini was personally welcomed by the nation's king, Albert I. *El Universal's* article detailed their conversation where Palavicini thanked the king for his country's sacrifices in World War I. In his response, the king mentioned that *El Universal* was widely circulated and was read by his soldiers while they were defending Belgium against the Germans.¹⁰⁰ Two days later it was revealed that the Mexican government had received a note from several European officials detailing his successes in various political courts. Palavicini's trip had become so popular that the *New York Tribune* had started covering it.¹⁰¹ It was possible Obregón had hoped this trip would humble Palavicini and make him less likely to act out. These meetings would clearly act as a confidence boost to the deviant journalist and he may return to cause more trouble than before.

These examples demonstrated Obregón had learned since his past confrontation with Palavicini. In that incident, he acted too forcibly by arresting and throwing him in jail.¹⁰² This created a strong backlash, which Palavicini used to rally enough support to win his freedom against the country's military leaders. Three years later, Obregón and his allies demonstrated a much defter hand at handling the media. This was necessary since Carranza had successfully cultivated relationships with many of the nation's journalists. Fortunately, the new president was operating from a position of strength, based on widespread public and military support, so he did not need to fear a journalist led

⁹⁹ "El Embajador F. Palavicini saldrá pronto para Italia y Bélgica," *El Universal*, August 12, 1920, 1.

¹⁰⁰ "Cordialísima Entrevista del Embajador Félix F. Palavicini con S.M. Alberto I.," *El Universal*, August 27, 1920, 1.

¹⁰¹ "Brillante Labor del Embajador Félix F. Palavicini en Europa," *El Universal*, August 29, 1920, 1.

¹⁰² Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionario*, 255.

uprising. This allowed Obregón to pick and choose how he dealt with media members. In the case of Palavicini, he quickly found a way to exile him from the country. This demonstrated to the journalist that if he supported the new regime, then he would continue to be rewarded. Both Palavicini and Cabrera had been public servants before the revolution and had demonstrated a desire to continue these positions no matter who was in power. For rebellious journalists, such as Martínez, the Sonorans simply ignored them. His position as president was unassailable and he knew they would eventually need government support to remain profitable.

The Media and Obregón's Presidency

On December 1, 1920, Obregón was officially sworn in as president of Mexico.¹⁰³ By December 22 he had received his first message from an official complaining about an article published by Palavicini. This telegram was only the first and his administration was quickly inundated with messages dealing with media organizations. While many of them were complaints, the majority of them were requests for aid or government funding as many entrepreneurs followed in the steps of Alducín and Palavicini to start their own periodicals. As the number of publishing companies grew, it became impossible for Obregón's administration to keep up on a daily basis of the stories they published through the informal networks Carranza and previous presidents used. Instead, he needed to develop an official government agency tasked with handling matters of the press. It would allow Obregón and other high ranking officials to remain updated as to what stories were published on a daily basis. They could be more responsive and prevent

¹⁰³ Hall, *Obregón*, 249.

negative articles from derailing their policies. In addition, the new department was responsible for his government's early propaganda efforts. It initially printed pamphlets designed to increase support for Obregón's reform programs. The department was staffed with journalists and they used their contacts at newspapers to ensure they published positive stories about the administration.

One of the first media related complaints Obregón dealt with as President involved Palavicini. On December 22, he received a complaint from General Jacinto B. Treviño. Treviño was upset over a series of articles published in *El Universal* relating to the conflict over who would control Mexico's natural resources, particularly its oil reserves.¹⁰⁴ After the Mexican Revolution, foreign corporations that had previously invested heavily in developing these reserves wanted to assurances they still owned them. *El Universal* believed the government should nationalize the oil industry so Mexico could retain its resources and prevent them from being stolen from these foreign corporations. This built on the debates of neutrality from Carranza's presidency.

This was delicate issue for Obregón's government. The Constitutionlists partially owed their victory in the revolution to financial and arms loans from the U.S. The Mexican government later assumed this debt but could not repay the U.S. since it needed to use what money it had to rebuild the country.¹⁰⁵ Due to Mexico's financial reliance on the U.S., Carranza and Obregón could not antagonize them during their presidencies.¹⁰⁶ If any Mexican official threatened to nationalize properties, U.S. might have pulled their

¹⁰⁴ Letter to General Jacinto D. Treviño to President Obregón complaining about *El Universal*, December 22, 1920, Mexico, D.F., AHN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, 707-T-12, 2-3.

¹⁰⁵ John M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 145.

¹⁰⁶ Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: The Constitutionalist Years*, 398.

funding or invaded it had during the Revolution.¹⁰⁷ Treviño feared articles such as the ones printed by *El Universal* would whip up public support for policies that the government could not fulfill. Instead, he believed *El Universal* and other newspapers needed to comprehend the larger consequences of their criticisms before they published them.¹⁰⁸

This complaint reflected the inherent conflict many generals had with media organizations. They could not accept any dissenting voices and treated those that challenged their authority as enemies. Palavicini had a long-standing reputation as a troublemaker so it was easy for Treviño to open his letter with a personal attack of Palavicini's character writing, "this was a scandalous and perfidious campaign that has been spearhead by the discredited Palavicini, an individual without a homeland, and without friends, without any sense of nobility."¹⁰⁹ This opening indicated the nation's generals had not forgotten his previous anti-military comments or his attempts to prevent Obregón from winning the presidential election. Treviño advised the new president that he should limit the amount of information his administration released to periodicals.¹¹⁰ This a policy all Mexican generals and many politicians advocated. They believed restricting information would allow them to retain their position within the government and maintain stability. However, as this letter demonstrated, in the absence of

¹⁰⁷ Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo*, 130-131.

¹⁰⁸ Letter to General Jacinto D. Treviño to President Obregón complaining about *El Universal*, December 22, 1920, Mexico, D.F., AHN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, 707-T-12, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Letter to General Jacinto D. Treviño to President Obregón complaining about *El Universal*, December 22, 1920, Mexico, D.F., AHN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, 707-T-12, 2-3.

¹¹⁰ Letter to General Jacinto D. Treviño to President Obregón complaining about *El Universal*, December 22, 1920, Mexico, D.F., AHN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, 707-T-12, p. 2.

information, periodicals could and would control the narrative. This made it paramount for Obregón to develop journalist contacts he could trust to publish the stories he wanted.

Obregón quickly had opportunities to cultivate these contacts. Less than three months following Treviño's complaints, the president received a series of three personal notes from Rafael Martínez. They were sent over a three week period and demonstrate the journalist was dealing with a time sensitive issue as each letter closed by asking for Obregón to respond as soon as possible.¹¹¹ At the heart of these letters was a request from Martínez for a loan of 2,000 pesos, a significant sum in post-Revolutionary Mexico.¹¹² In the letters, he did not detail why he needed the money, only that it was a desperate situation. It was possible *El Demócrata* or another business venture needed supplies or a new printing press.

These letters created an opportunity to turn one of his biggest detractors into an ally. From the beginning of his career as a journalist, Martínez had doggedly criticized Mexican generals who had meddled in politics. It seemed likely to continue with Obregón's presidency since Martínez had worked closely with Carranza to prevent his victory in the previous election and had written to the new president demanding to know why the general who killed Carranza was allowed to remain free and out of jail. Now Martínez would owe Obregón, which would transform him from an enemy into a supporter. These letters possibly taught Obregón how easy it was to gain supporters

¹¹¹ These are split over two folders. The first letter is – Rafael Martínez to President Obregón, February 4, 1921, Mexico, D.F., AHN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, 217-M-1-ALM-20, 1-3. The second letter is Rafael Martínez to President Obregón, Mexico, March 9, 1921, D.F., AHN, Obregón-Calles, 805-M-1,1-2.

¹¹² March 9, 1921, Rafael Martínez to President Obregón, Mexico, D.F., AHN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, 805-M-1, 1.

within the media. Eventually, newspapers or their owners would need the government's financial support to remain in business. Once they asked for this aid and became beholden to the government, then Obregón, could control them. If a journalist as prominent and well known as Martínez required help, then many others must have needed help.

Another possible ally who requested aid from Obregón was David A. Platt of the LA Times. He was writing to the president to see if they could negotiate a business deal. Platt hoped Obregón would pay to him to publish a series of pro-Mexican propaganda pieces in LA Times. He had previously produced one series and sent it to Obregón for his approval several weeks prior.¹¹³ To emphasize why this propaganda was necessary, he included a three-page summary that detailed the speeches made by several U.S. senators in the past year describing Mexico as a dangerous place. Platt believed his propaganda efforts could counteract these negative speeches and change the American public's perception of Mexico. To reach the widest audience, the propaganda would be published in more than fifty papers throughout the United States.¹¹⁴ Letters from Martínez and Platt demonstrated there were journalists who wanted or needed support from Obregón's administration. Obregón cultivated needed these relationships because he knew a supportive press corps would make it easier to achieve his goals.

These letters and other letters repeatedly plead for Obregón's quick response.¹¹⁵ Much of the correspondence sent to Obregón stored at the AGN does not contain his

¹¹³ David A. Platt to President Obregón, April 5, 1921, Mexico, D.F., AHN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, 729-P-2, 1.

¹¹⁴ David A. Platt to President Obregón, March 8, 1921, Los Angeles, CA., AHN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, 729-P-2, 3.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

reply so it is not certain when or if he ever replied to these journalists seeking his support. Looking only at his correspondence fails to capture the scope of the problem as his Secretary of State, Plutarco Elías Calles received a steady stream of messages asking for help as well.¹¹⁶ In order to solve the problem Obregón tasked Calles with the creation of a government agency to handle these messages and to monitor publications. In addition, the department would monitor national media organizations looking for any articles critical of the government. Every day the department sent out a summary of the stories published to Calles and other loyal politicians who requested it. In theory, this allowed the administration to react to any negative story published. This was as close to a real-time reaction as existed in the 1920s. The creation of the department represented a change in strategy for Obregón. He acknowledged the multitude of media organizations in Mexico could not be controlled through military repression. Instead, he and Calles could cultivate relationships with them and turn them into allies.

Creation of the Department of the Press

Calles took the development of this new department seriously and appointed one of his closest confidants, Clodeveo Valenzuela, as its first *jefe*. Valenzuela was a perfect choice since he had worked as a journalist for the newspaper *Orientación* in Hermosillo, Sonora before joining Obregón's administration in Mexico City. It is possible Calles first met Valenzuela after the Revolution during his stint as governor following the Revolution. The newspaper strongly supported the region's most famous politicians, de la Huerta, Obregón and Calles in their struggle to win the presidency away from

¹¹⁶ There are six folders of letters from periodical owners to Calles at the FAPECyFT, Folder Asuntos de Periodicos, Legos 1-6, Inv. 388.

Carranza.¹¹⁷ The periodical helped to establish the narrative that the struggle over the control of the Sonora River was an issue of state sovereignty and that Carranza was acting as a dictator.¹¹⁸ This reminded many Mexicans of Díaz's actions and helped rally support for the Sonorans across the nation.

In addition to his past experiences as a journalist, Valenzuela had demonstrated he could be a skilled political operative when necessary. Before he became head of the Department of the Press, he helped Calles choose which political candidates the administration would support in upcoming local and state elections. These selections were important as Obregón needed to stack the Congress with allies in order to push through their reforms. Valenzuela had to find politicians who would be loyal to the president and not betray the party once they were elected. In a letter to Calles he explained the *junta's* "goal to achieve the best possible result in the upcoming elections."¹¹⁹ To this end, he had "directed all of the Districts within the State to inform them of candidates who are looking for support from Calles." Included with this letter was a list of candidates with marks noting who Valenzuela had chosen to recommend.¹²⁰ This correspondence demonstrates that Calles knew Valenzuela had the necessary political experience to handle the administration's strategy for the upcoming elections. Putting him in charge of the Department of the Press underscored how seriously Calles took the issue of the media by deploying a trusted operative to lead it.

¹¹⁷ Pedro Fernando Castro Martínez, *Adolfo de la Huerta: la inequidad como arma de la revolución*, (Iztapalapa, Mexico City: siglo veintiuno editors, s.a. de c.v., 1998), 27.

¹¹⁸ Clodoveo Valenzuela and Amado Chaverri Matamoros, *Carranza y Sonora*, (Mexico, D.F.: Casa Editorial "Renacimiento" de Sisneiga y HNO, 1921), 14-15.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Clodoveo Valenzuela to Calles, April 5, 1921, Minister of the Interior, Hermosillo, Son., FAPECyFT, Drawer 75, Folder 31, Leg. 1-2, 5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

The mission of the new department was established in a memo Valenzuela sent to government officials outlining its future activities and projects. It stated the main purpose of the department would be the collection of information on periodicals published throughout Mexico, over 54 periodicals daily. While it never listed which ones specifically, Valenzuela claimed the department would read from the "most transcendent and useful papers of the daily press."¹²¹ This meant his focus was on the national newspapers published in Mexico City, as it was the center of Mexican politics but it would monitor newspapers from throughout Mexico. In addition, periodicals with a reputation of reprinting other papers' articles would be targeted. Valenzuela acknowledged that it would be impossible to cover every periodical in the country but if a minor newspaper caused trouble it would be added to the list.¹²² Once the department had collected all the important stories for the day, the information would be summarized and transmitted daily by way of a telegram known as the *Boletín*, which was sent to whichever government officials requested it.

The archive did not have a listing of which officials received the daily *Boletín* sent out by Valenzuela so the department's overall impact is not clear.¹²³ However, Calles was one official who received the notice daily. No matter his location, whether he was in the capital or on a political trip, he received a telegram detailing the political news

¹²¹ Letter from Clodoveo Valenzuela circulated among government officials titled: Informe Sintético respect de las labors que desaroolla el Departamento de Prensa de la Secreataría de Gobernación, July26, 1921, Mexico., D.F., FAPECyFT, Drawer 70, Folder 75, Leg. 2-21, 116.

¹²² Letter from Clodoveo Valenzuela circulated among government officials, July26, 1921, Mexico., D.F., FAPECyFT, Drawer 70, Folder 75, Leg. 2-21, 116

¹²³ One example of someone who did opt in was General José Alvarez, Telegram sent from General José Alvarez to Clodoveo Valenzuela, March 4, 1924, Torreon, Coah., FAPECyFT, Drawer 75, Folder 31, Leg. 1-2, 52.

printed in Mexico the previous day.¹²⁴ Although the purpose was to keep the media in check, there was nothing obviously nefarious about the information sent in the *Boletines*. The government did not deploy agents throughout the country; instead, they had subscriptions for each of the major newspapers. Frequently, this list was updated to make sure these subscriptions were relevant.¹²⁵ Each telegram opened with information from the national periodicals, which summarized the headlines and the major stories. Each story was presented in a short sentence at most. The telegram concluded with stories from various local papers. Valenzuela did not show any obvious bias in his *Boletín*, and the telegrams read like lists of facts.¹²⁶ The news stories highlighted in the *Boletín* covered a wide variety of topics, but Valenzuela focused on coverage of political upheaval. Elections, protests or rumors of Catholic or Socialist uprisings usually appeared at the beginning of the message.

If these telegrams had an ulterior motive they possibly existed as a general information -gathering service for the government and specifically Calles. At this time, the Mexican government was rebuilding and had not recentralized its authority. Many local *jefe politicos* defied the federal government and sought to retain their personal power bases.¹²⁷ Periodicals were often the best source of information on events from

¹²⁴ Telegram / Bulletin from Clodoveo Valenzuela to Calles, Minister of the Interior, San Luis Potosí, December 22, 1921, FAPECyFT, Drawer 10, Folder 126, Leg. 1-2, 2. This folder contains dozens of examples of the *Boletín*. Each of them follows the same format and there are no significant differences

¹²⁵ Newspapers of the states that are sent to the Department of the Press, these newspapers are read daily, author unknown, 1925, Mexico City., DF, FAPECyFT, Drawer 64, Folder 89, 1.

¹²⁶ Telegram / Bulletin from Clodoveo Valenzuela to Calles, December 22, 1921, Minister of the Interior, San Luis Potosí, FAPECyFT, Drawer 10, Folder 126, Leg. 1-2, 2. This folder contains dozens of examples of telegrams that were sent between Valenzuela and Carranza. There is not anything significant of one or another.

¹²⁷ Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo*, 113.

these regions. For Calles and other government officials, this telegram service was a concentrated packet of information that was irreplaceable.

Beyond collecting information on Mexican politics from periodicals, the Department also began to take the lead on the government's propaganda efforts. The Department would coordinate with periodicals and provide them government notices, declarations, and corrections when necessary. These efforts helped to promote a better relationship by allowing the government to work closer with the newspapers to develop their articles. In addition, officials began to sponsor advertisements in the periodicals. This was a practice that dated back to the Díaz administration. During that time, periodicals often published *gacetillas*, which were government propaganda pieces that were made to look like normal news articles. For instance, if a politician made a speech, he could pay the periodical to make sure it was on the front page and provided positive coverage. In the 1920s, officials revived this practice and it became the dominant form of government subsidy to periodicals over the next twenty years.¹²⁸ In addition, the Department would become the leader in fostering the goodwill of international periodicals. Its overall goal was to promote a positive image of Mexico to the world at large. Valenzuela provided translated of previously published pieces that could be easily published in newspapers throughout the world. These articles created the impression that Mexico had successfully recovered from the Revolution and was a safe place for international investments.

Valenzuela concluded his memo outlining the Department's future by discussing the creation of a government sponsored printing company. The goal of this company was

¹²⁸ Rafael Rodríguez Castaneda, *Prensa vendida: Los periodistas y los presidentes: 40 años de relaciones (Spanish Edition)*, (Mexico, D.F.: Grijalbo, 1993), 45.

to print brochures and books that support the impression the country was successfully rebuilding following the Mexican Revolution. Valenzuela provided a list of the first wave of brochures titled, "Mexico and its Internal Struggles," "Synthesis of the Revolutionary Movements of 1910 to 1920," and "Impossible Restoration," and hinted that many more could be published in the future.¹²⁹ This memo was the realized ideal version of a government agency for Calles. It provided the framework for centralized control over Mexico's increasing number of independent publishers. The Department would monitor the periodicals and collect information on the stories they published. Those periodicals that supported Calles and the government could reward them. The periodicals that published negative articles would be noted and their access to government support restricted until they were brought back into line. This agency was the central point for government-sponsored printing. Within a year of becoming the Secretary of the Interior, Calles had developed a government agency that could begin to bring order to Mexico's decentralized periodical companies that were scattered throughout the country.

Conclusions: The Continued Influence of the Mexican Revolution on Newspapers

In opening issue of *Excelsior*, Alducín declared periodicals had to forge a new identity in post-Revolutionary Mexico. By achieving independence from the government, they could help the country grow and heal the damage of the past seven years of war.¹³⁰ Alducín was joined by thousands of other journalists and entrepreneurs who developed periodicals during this time period. Each believed in their way they were continuing the

¹²⁹ July 26, 1921, Letter from Clodoveo Valenzuela circulated among government officials titled: Informe Sintético respect de las labors que desaroolla el Departamento de Prensa de la Secreataría de Gobernación, Mexico., D.F., FAPECyFT, Drawer 70, Folder 75, Leg. 2-21117

¹³⁰ Burkholder de la Rosa, *El Periódico que Llegó*, 1392.

Revolution and helping the country advance just as Alducín. Many hoped the press could be truly free of government interference.

Within four years however, the dream of an independent media effectively died with the creation of the Department of the Press. The purpose of this department was to monitor and facilitate cooperation between the government and media organizations. While its surveillance component was troubling, it did not have an extensive spy network tracking periodicals. It rarely reported any information that was not publically available. The department paid for newspapers like any citizen and simply summarized the information for officials. The largest impact the department had was on distributing government support to the nation's various media organizations. Many newspapers saw it as a necessity so it was not created in opposition to anyone. They needed and wanted government support in order for their periodicals to continue publishing. People who had defiantly challenged the military's authority, Martínez, Cabrera, Palavicini, willingly asked for help. The optimism of the post-Revolutionary era had been transformed into a similar form of subservience.

This reliance on the government was the legacy of how the newspaper industry developed before the Mexican Revolution. Newspapers were sites of resistance, beginning with Flores Magón Brothers at the turn of the century and continuing through the uprising against Díaz. They served as ways to circulate deviant ideas when it was illegal. However, once they won the Revolution, journalists never figured out a way to evolve out of their original roles. They were no longer sites of resistance because they had helped win the war. People such as Cabrera and Palavicini were insiders now and unable to serve as impartial observers. It is noteworthy that when an issue came up that

was important, such as neutrality, they challenged officials. This harkened back to their origins as deviant journalists but largely they wanted to help, to guide the government they had fought to create advance. They remained loyal, even when someone they disliked was elected president. In reading their correspondence, the criticisms presented by journalists were more suggestions than anything else.

It was not surprising that an outsider, Alducín, founded the most defiant of the post-Revolutionary newspapers. Alducín did not have the shared history of helping to overthrow Díaz's dictatorship or working to create a government. Therefore it was easier for him and his periodical to remain defiant in following the Revolution. He remained loyal to a political cause but his was much more broadly defined: the advancement of a middle class. His newspaper would remain rebellious through the 1920s. This will be explored further in the next chapter and Calles came to power and increasingly took on dictator like authority. As he took on this authority, he violated the partnership between journalists and the government. They no longer had the shared objectives. This created another cause for them to rally around and they transformed back into activists.

Introduction: Newspapers struggle in the Chaos of 1920s Mexico

Despite Obregón's popularity and force of personality, the nation experienced wide-spread violence on seemingly a daily basis. It would have been impossible for anyone in the country to open their daily newspaper and not read about some sort of violence related to politics. This ranged from small-scale acts such as clashes between Catholic Church members or factory strikers against the local police force to the assassination of political enemies such as Pancho Villa or elected presidents, Obregón. From 1923 to 1928 the nation experienced two large-scale revolts, the de la Huerta and Cristero Rebellions and countless minor uprisings led by local caciques or dissatisfied military Generals. Sadly, violence remained the default option for achieving and maintaining one's political power.

This continual violence did not prevent the continued growth of newspapers throughout Mexico. Every major city in the country had a daily newspaper and *Excelsior* and *El Universal* maintained a national presence. Even though they could be targets of violence or political repression, these periodicals continued to churn out information, the majority of it bad news, on a regular basis. The largest newspapers, *Excelsior*, *El Universal*, *El Informador* (Guadalajara), *El Dictamen* (Veracruz) remained relatively independent and produced news content regardless of how controversial the subject matter. So, if a government official publically reprimanded the Catholic Church, they reported on the event and its aftermath. Sometimes, these news cycles could extend for months, like when Monsignor Filippi was exiled for participating in a public Catholic Ceremony. Coverage of this controversy would have hurt the national government's

credibility but demonstrated newspapers were more loyal to their readership that cared about the Catholic Church and its place in Mexican society. It revealed that despite the constant, lingering threat of violence, journalism was still active and viable in Mexico.

Underneath these major newspapers, were smaller newspapers, often dedicated to political causes. This was best seen in *Redención* a newspaper produced in Tabasco, in order to generate support for its socialist governor, Tomás Garrido Canabal. This publication was a throwback to pre-Revolutionary days, when journalists worked closely with politicians to craft their stories. To say smaller newspapers like *Redención* or the Catholic Periodical *La Reconquista* were hugely successful would overstate their influence but they continued to serve their audiences and provide information. These and other more specialized newspapers produced opinions on controversial subject matters that contradicted the Revolutionary government for extended periods of time.

The first half of this chapter establishes the ability of newspapers to remain productive despite the political turbulence of the time period. However, there was the constant threat that the government could step in at any time and shutdown a dissenting newspaper. Calles communicated this possibility when asked Obregón if they should use the military to close *Excelsior* and *El Universal* during the de la Huerta Rebellion. When Calles became president, he made several attempts to purchase national newspapers. The most notable of these was *Excelsior* which suffered from a lack of leadership following the death of its founder, Alducín in 1924. The second opportunity was *El Demócrata*, which was bought by a group of Calles' compatriots. Calles' name rarely appeared in any official documentation but from its correspondence, it is clear he was issuing orders and his friends attempted to execute them. This turned into a disaster, several editors were

hired and fired and eventually the *El Demócrata*'s assets were liquidated when it had to file for bankruptcy. In the end it worked out for Calles, even though he did not get the subservient newspaper he wanted, he did eliminate a newspaper that had been a consistent problem. It would take another five years when he formed his own political party, *Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, that Calles could create his own subservient newspaper, *El Nacional*. These threats and challenges to newspaper ownership demonstrate that Calles was consistently aware of the power of the press and worked to manipulate it to his advantage.

He had to manipulate it because over the second half of his presidency he dealt with several major problems, including the Cristero Rebellion, economic depression, and continued pressure from the US. In order to maintain control, he relied on greater and greater modes of repression. In this increasingly chaotic environment, periodicals became a political target for simply reporting the news. During the trial of the man accused of killing president elect Obregón, Calles seized the offices of *Excelsior* because he believed there was bias in their reporting. This effectively led to the demise of *Excelsior*'s independence as the newspaper could not generate any income from advertisements due to the government sponsored boycott. This occupation was the first attack in a wave of more severe repression as Calles struggled to maintain control over the country.

The chapter opens with the second half of Obregón's presidency and continues through his assassination in 1928. It does not strongly follow a chronological path though as it is necessary to offer some political background and then examine how this context impacts the newspaper industry. These examinations centered on the middle part of the 1920s can bounce around over several years, often based on the availability of the

periodical, but maintain thematic groupings, such as religion, violence or the rise of the socialist party. Regional newspapers did not always act in concert with the federal government or cover major historical events. In order to better understand what the being printed in periodicals, one has to slightly deviate from a narrative driven by national stories. This does not mean one has to disregard these major stories completely. It ends by assessing how Calles managed to stay in control despite the various setbacks his administration experienced. It also set the scene for the more intense repression of the early 1930s.

Latter half of Obregón: Repression begins

Up until the latter half of Obregón's presidency, he and Calles maintained a cozy relationship with newspapers. Through favors dispersed either personally or through the Department of the Press, they received favorable coverage of their policies. The majority of periodicals did not need to be enticed to support the president as the Sonorans succeeded in passing major reforms. Each member of the Triumvirate, de la Huerta, Obregón and Calles played major roles in developing these programs. During his time as interim president, de la Huerta successfully negotiated settlements that led several war heroes, Pancho Villa, Félix Díaz and Pablo González to either lay down their arms or leave the country peacefully.¹ This signaled that the government was hopefully transitioning away from its violent past. Once he became president, Obregón passed several progressive reforms, including recognizing labor unions, land redistribution and rural education programs.² While many of these programs were piecemeal or only limited

¹ Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 92.

² Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo*, 118-124.

to certain regions, they symbolized the effort the government was making. Calles forged a deep relationship with the leaders of Mexico's largest socialist parties, Luis Napoleón Morones and Felipe Carrillo Puerto. They provided the Sonorans with voting blocs of urban workers and *campesinos* in Yucatán respectively.³ They would become Calles' power base in the 1924 presidential election. These efforts combined with subsidies created a peaceful relationship with newspapers. The Sonorans seemed like they were rebuilding the nation, so periodicals were willing to help. Even newspapers with a defiant reputation such as *Excelsior* provided little favors to Obregón's administration to stay on the good side. For instance Rodrigo de Llano, the periodical's lead editor, bought Calles some ties and chocolates for his secretary when he visited New York City in January 1923.⁴

Another presidential election was rapidly approaching, which threatened to throw the country into chaos once again. Obregón, possibly the only candidate who could run and win peacefully could not be reelected. This created a power vacuum and a group of challengers vying to be president. This in turn threatened the détente between the government and periodicals as candidates sought to control their public messages. As the election approached, it seemed like Calles was best positioned to win the presidency. He had the friendship and backing of Obregón (who believed he could control Calles from the background) and major labor union leaders. However, his election would not be straightforward. Everything changed on July 20, 1923 when Pancho Villa was

³ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 99-100.

⁴ Letter from Ignacio F. Herreías a Soledad González, January 2, 1923, New York, NY., FAPECyFT, Folder: 366, Inv. 309, 1.

assassinated on the streets outside of his house.⁵ Villa had been living peacefully on the hacienda that de la Huerta provided him in their amnesty agreement at the time but there were rumors he was planning to renew his career in politics. Newspapers such as *Excelsior* floated this possibility and presented it as an explanation for why he had been killed.⁶ His death produced varied responses by Mexico's newspapers. Many found ways to simultaneously praise and criticize Villa. The conservative *Omega* called him "a gorilla" and "a troglodyte" but ended the story by writing he "was worth more than the great political personalities in power today."⁷ Similarly, *El Univresal* saw his death as "the disappearance of a danger for the peace that the government has ensured up to now with so little brilliance" but also acknowledged that Villa had increased the nation's global recognition.⁸ Many Mexicans believed a Villa / de la Huerta alliance would provide the only legitimate challenge to Calles' candidacy.⁹ These stories demonstrated that the ex-General had remained popular despite his three year retirement.

Suspicion raged throughout the country. From the Chamber of the Deputies to the streets of Mexico City, the majority of people believed Calles had Villa killed in order to prevent him from running for President.¹⁰ Villa's death indicated this presidential cycle would be as bloody as 1920 when Carranza would not peacefully relinquish the presidency and was eventually murdered as he fled Mexico City. This violence would

⁵ Pedro Castro Martínez, *Adolfo de la Huerta y la Revolución*, (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1992), 89-90.

⁶ "Pancho Villa fue asesinado ayer en la ciudad de Parral," *Excelsior*, July 21, 1923.

⁷ *Omega*, July 24, 1923.

⁸ *El Universal*, July 23, 1923 and *El Universal*, July 24, 1923.

⁹ Friedrich Katz, *The life and Times of Pancho Villa*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1998), 772.

¹⁰ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 102.

lead to increased scrutiny of the nation's newspapers as Calles sought to secure his presidency at any cost.

Excelsior was the first newspaper to become a target of Calles' ire early in 1923 when it published several articles accusing him of being a communist. The first was a translation of an article originally published in the New York Tribune written by Boyden Sparkes. Sparkes had traveled to Morelos, a state south of Mexico City, to investigate the impact of agrarian reform on the region. He argued that the new agrarian laws were unworkable, pointing out that once the land was turned over to *campesinos* they received no additional support, so they had no equipment to harvest their crops or ship them to market.¹¹ Sparkes explained these reforms fell under the "Bolshevik" policies of Calles. He clearly used to this terminology to resonate with his American audience, which was in the midst of a Red Scare following the success of the Soviet Revolution in Russia at the end of World War I.¹² It built on fears that the Mexican Revolution would produce similar reforms. Sparkes highlighted the failures of this perceived socialist program and demonstrated to his audience why these programs should never be allowed in the U.S.

Excelsior translated and reprinted this article on their front page with the headline, "Calles, The Hope of the Red Mexicans...Is the most likely to win the Presidency" Underneath the author's byline, *Excelsior* claimed that they received the story via telegram and it was exclusive to them.¹³ By printing this article less than a year before the election, the newspaper ended whatever peaceful relationship the newspaper had

¹¹ D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent*, 452.

¹² Regin Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States, 1919-1943*, (Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), 308.

¹³ "Calles, La Esperanza de los Rojos Mexicanos," *Excelsior*, March 28, 1923.

achieved with Obregón and Calles. By snitching on *Excelsior*, *El Universal* had returned the industry to a prior era when journalists reported to the president whenever someone published something controversial.¹⁴ Each periodical had acknowledged one another as rivals but previously had not tried to gain an advantage over one another by currying favor with government officials.¹⁵ The upcoming election and the expected change of leadership, meant periodicals had to compete for favored status with the new president.

The letter sent to Calles went beyond complaining about *Excelsior* to earn his favor. In it, the *El Universal*'s director tried to demonstrate his loyalty to Calles by helping him dispel the lies that *Excelsior* had published recently.¹⁶ To achieve this goal, the director included several questions Calles could answer and would be reprinted in the paper. He wanted Calles to know *El Universal* was willing to help him solve his possible image problem created by another periodical. Each of the questions were open ended so Calles would have the opportunity to denounce his ties to Communism with each answer.¹⁷ In this letter, *El Universal* claimed it was dedicated to the truth and it hoped to remain impartial. However, it offered itself to Calles and gave him an opportunity to publicize his opinions. As the election drew closer, periodicals were forced to take a stand. Newspapers were either for or against Calles and they had to make their position clear.

¹⁴ Letter from *El Universal* to Plutarco Elías Calles, March 28, 1923, Mexico City, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 161: Asuntos de Periódicos, Inv. 388, leg. 6/6, 271.

¹⁵ Paul Hanna, "Mexico-1921: Culture and the Intellectuals," *The Nation* Vol. 112, No. 2911 (1921): 586.

¹⁶ Letter from *El Universal* to Plutarco Elías Calles, March 28, 1923, Mexico City, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 161: Asuntos de Periódicos, Inv. 388, leg. 6/6, 271.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

This petty bickering between newspapers seems fairly tame when actually compared to the violence that took place during the election. Initially, Calles faced two main challengers. The first was a coalition of disgruntled generals whose influence had waned as Obregón's grew. They resented the fact that neither Obregón nor Calles had served in the initial wave of the rebellion that started in 1910.¹⁸ These generals saw Calles as an inferior military leader and a political radical that did not deserve to lead. This was another possible coalition that Villa would have strengthened with his candidacy.¹⁹ The second group was composed of citizens such as José Vasconcelos, Obregón's Secretary of Education. Vasconcelos had long held a personal dislike of Calles.²⁰ These challengers would not have been too difficult for Calles to overcome if the Sonoran Alliance had held together. Neither group had a nationally recognized leader but that changed when de la Huerta separated from the Sonoran Triangle over Obregón's perceived role in Villa's assassination and his generous concessions to the U.S. regarding mineral rights. de la Huerta's anger was stoked further when after he resigned from his post as finance secretary, his replacement accused him of corruption.²¹ Feeling his honor was at stake, de la Huerta felt the only way to achieve vindication was to enter the presidential election and win. Within a week of his announcement armed revolts broke out across the country.

However, the rebellion never coalesced around de la Huerta. He did provide a manifesto, the Plan of Veracruz, but it did not resonate nationally. Largely, those

¹⁸ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution*, (Austin: University of Princeton, 1961), 188.

¹⁹ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elias Calles*, 104.

²⁰ Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and its Heritage*, (New York: Published by the Century Co., 1928), 468.

²¹ Martínez, *Adolfo de la Huerta*, 96-97.

Mexicans who did fight in the uprising against Calles and Obregón did so because they held a personal grudge against the Sonorans.²² For instance, in southern Mexico, rebels fought for state rights fueled by widespread resentment of Northern rule.²³ In order to retain control of the country Obregón and Calles returned to the battlefield leading federal troops against the rebels. Calles fought in Yucatán where his friend Carrillo Puerto, the governor at the time of the outbreak, had been executed. In the end, the rebellion helped Obregón and Calles clear out many of the regional political leaders that had not joined their coalition.²⁴ This allowed them to replace them with their supporters, which further cemented their control of the nation.

This small-scale uprising had an impact on the feud between *El Universal* and *Excelsior*. Three weeks after rebel officers overthrew the state government in Yucatán on December 21, 1923, Calles sent a telegram to Obregón proposing they take armed action against both periodicals. In his opinion, these “insidious newspapers” were inciting rebellion on a daily basis.²⁵ He wanted them to demonstrate more respect for the current Mexican leaders. Calles closed his message by suggesting they use the Mexican army to take “action against them.”²⁶ This telegram revealed that *El Universal*’s previous attempts to gain favor with Calles had failed. He saw both newspapers as dangerous and wanted to take extreme measures in order to prevent them from causing any more

²² Martínez, *Adolfo de la Huerta*, 104-105.

²³ *Ibid.*, 106

²⁴ Groening, *Mexico and its Heritage*, 145-146.

²⁵ Telegram from Plutarco Elías Calles a Álvaro Obregón complaining about articles printed in *Excelsior* and *El Universal*, January 1, 1924, FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 161: *Obregón, Álvaro y Plutarco Elías Calles: Rebelión Delahuertista*, Inv. 759, leg. 5/16, page 290

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 290.

problems. Calles felt any action was acceptable due to the rebellion. This provided him the opportunity to close down any dissenting voices, including newspapers.

Newspapers Continue to act Defiant / Catholic Press

The possible threat of closure from the national government did not prevent newspapers from continuing to publish and their activist role for their readers. Often this reporting centered on the contentious relationship between the revolutionary government and the Catholic Church. Officials would have preferred to keep this conflict out of the newspapers but editors continued to report on the various skirmishes that occurred between the government and representatives of the Church.

In the months before the de la Huerta Rebellion, there were two religious related disputes that caught the nation's attention. The first occurred in January, 1923 when the national government exiled Monsignor Ernesto Filippi, an apostolic delegate, from the country for violating the constitutional ban on public religious ceremonies. At issue was his participation in a ceremony in Guanajuato where he blessed the first stone in the construction of a new religious monument, Christ the King in Silao. Officials believed this was a statement of defiance against the government, which had banned public religious gatherings that were not a part of regular church functions.²⁷ His expulsion led to protests throughout Michoacán and Catholic homes were draped in black as a sign of mourning. *Excelsior* provided consistent coverage of this situation from the beginning with a solemn description of the ceremony that was at the heart the controversy. By reproducing Filippi's speech at the event, including his emotional closing line, "that the

²⁷ Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion: Michoacán, 1927-1929*, (London: British Academy, 2004), 127.

image of Christ on one of the highest mountains in Mexico would guard and watch over all Mexicans, and touching as He did the clouds, would defy the tempest and the lightning,” the newspaper helped to guarantee the archbishop would receive support throughout the country.²⁸ *Excelsior* and *El Universal* provided consistent coverage of the protests that occurred in Michoacán, which included business closures throughout the state, so this controversy remained in the national spotlight.²⁹

Filippi’s expulsion was the precursor to a wider crack down on Catholic societies that occurred later that year, most notably, in Jalisco where Governor José Guadalupe Zuno declared all confessional unions and mutualist societies illegal. Zuno often clashed with the priests in his state publically in the nations newspapers and provided a list as to which churches had fulfilled his orders and which ones were still in defiance.³⁰ In response, the region’s archbishop, José Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, wrote a defiant retort in *Excelsior* that denied Zuno’s right to interfere with clerical matters, writing, “that any attempt by the state’s government to enforce compliance would endanger the public order, because the slightest indication on the part of the priest would suffice to bring about an uprising against the unwarranted order.”³¹ The same issue of *Excelsior* contained Zuno’s response, explaining that “he would hold the archbishop responsible for any ‘armed religious uprising’ and shall continue to call those individuals who violate the law criminals as I have done in the case of those priests who obstruct the educational

²⁸ *Excelsior*, January 12, 1923, 1.

²⁹ “Cierre del comercio,” and “Una manifestación de protesta ha dado lugar a numerosos incidentes,” *Excelsior*, January 19, 1923, and January 24, 1923, “Circularon hojas de protesta en Morelia and “Los manifestantes que protestaron por la expulsión de Mons. Filippi siguen declarando ante el Juez 2 de distrito de Michoacán,” *El Universal*, January 18, 1923,

³⁰ Ernest Guening, *Mexico and its Heritage*, (New York: Published by the Century Co., 1928), 225-226.

³¹ *Excelsior*, July 24, 1923, 1.

work of the Government.”³² Once again, *Excelsior* refused to shy away from controversy by highlighting the continued tension between the government and religious leaders. Its coverage of these two events maintained the spotlight on the problems and revealed the government’s policies were not completely supported. Much of their readership still retained their Catholic heritage and many wanted additional information as to the situations.

This sustained support for the Catholic Church can be seen in the continued popularity of periodicals dedicated to this subject. It was not surprising that one of the largest and longest running post-Revolutionary newspaper was *La Reconquista*, headquartered south of Archbishop Orozco y Jiménez’s home district in Colima. It was founded in 1918 with the purpose of supporting the nation’s Catholics in the face of criticism following the Mexican Revolution. Its masthead proudly declared “for God and Country” and “Long live Christ the King in its Masthead.”³³ A pro-Catholic newspaper surviving for more than six years following the Revolution was a significant accomplishment due to the anti-church sentiment held by the majority of state officials.

La Reconquista heavily supported the de la Huerta rebellion. Its editorials attempted to frame the uprising as something larger than a disagreement between political leaders upset over the presidential line of succession. To accomplish this goal, the paper repeatedly called the rebellion a revolution, and often said people from all parts of the nation were participating in the fighting. One editorial opened by saying, “A new Revolution surges throughout our poor country with the goal of overthrowing the ill-

³² Ibid., 1.

³³ *La Reconquista*, December 23, 1923, 1.

advised government of General Obregón, who has forgotten his promises, making him a true despot.”³⁴ This editorial never made reference to the region where the periodical was published or the notion of Catholic participation. Instead, it used broad terms, such as the “countryside” or “our country,” to reinforce the point that everyone should be outraged over Obregón and his government. In its opinion, everyone had been mistreated, not just Catholics. Another editorial closed by with, “Mexicans love Mexicans!”³⁵ Despite its Catholic roots and focus, *La Reconquista* was savvy in its attempts to rally support to de la Huerta. It framed the uprising broadly, relying a similar rhetoric from the Mexican Revolution. In the periodical’s opinion, Obregón was a tyrant that needed to be overthrown regardless of one’s connection to the church. This had the possibility of broadening the newspaper’s impact beyond Catholics.

Initially, the newspaper had good news to pass along to its readers. At the end of the December, *La Reconquista* triumphantly declared that the rebels would soon capture Mexico City thanks to a victory in Puebla.³⁶ In the same article, the newspaper said the government of Obregón had already fallen and the US had begun to make deals with the de la Huertistas. However, *La Reconquista* was too hopeful in its description of future success. The rebels march to Mexico City was stopped in Puebla as Federal forces launched a counterattack and forced them from the city. De la Huerta would never get so close to Mexico City again.³⁷ *La Reconquista* was representative of the larger reason the de la Huerta rebellion failed. It lacked centralized figure, someone for the uprising to

³⁴ “Al Margen de la Revolución,” *La Reconquista: Semanario Catolico*, December 16, 1923, 2.

³⁵ “Al Margen de la Revolución,” *La Reconquista: Semanario Catolico*, December 23, 1923, 2.

³⁶ “Mas Triunfos de la Revolución,” *La Reconquista: Semanario Catolico*, December 23, 1923, 1.

³⁷ Keith Brewster, *Militarism, Ethnicity, and Politics in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, 1917-1930*, (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2003), 47. René de la Pedraja, *Wars of Latin America, 1899-1941*, (New York: McFarland & Company, 2006), 279.

rally behind. Everyone who had joined the fighting had lost out to personally to Obregón and Calles' government and hoped to get their own revenge. This lack of unity doomed the uprising. *La Reconquista* represented Catholics who thought they were being persecuted. They may or may not have known who de la Huerta was, just that this was their opportunity to push back against the federal government. The newspaper survived the purge that occurred following Obregón and Calles victory against de la Huerta and continued to fight for Catholics. The March 1 issue in 1925 explored a new wave of persecution against Catholics across the country.³⁸ Its story described the desecration of a church by the federal army. It would continue fight against the government, even though the it had lost the war.

Chaos of Calles' early Presidency captured in Newspapers

On September 28, 1924, the newspaper *El Mundo* out of Tampico, Tamaulipas ran a relatively non-descript headline, "Calles was declared the President."³⁹ Underneath it was a short description of the ceremony and it mentioned that many important figures had congratulated him had come in from around the country. Calles' ultimate triumph was given less space on the front page than a story about a woman killed and whose body was found in a lake.⁴⁰ The most important news of the day was a possible worker's strike at the Dutch owned Corona Oil company.⁴¹ The article detailed how the nation's foremost union, Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM), was working to

³⁸ "Sangriento Motín en Méjico Ocasionado por los Cismáticos," *La Reconquista: Semanario Catolico*, March 1, 1925, 1.

³⁹ "Fue Declarado Electo, Calles," *El Mundo: Diario de la Mañana*, September 28, 1924, 1.

⁴⁰ "Fue Arrojada a la Laguna, Anoche, Una Mujer," *El Mundo: Diario de la Mañana*, September 28, 1924, 1.

⁴¹ Jonathon C. Brown, "The Structure of the Foreign-Owned Petroleum Industry in Mexico, 1880-1938," in *The Mexican Petroleum Industry in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jonathon C. Brown, Et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 10.

convince its members to keeping negotiating but many strongly supported the strike.⁴² This front page captured the chaos of Mexico in the days after Calles' electoral and military triumphs against his enemies. He had secured the presidency but he had a long way to go before he could stabilize the country. This section uses newspapers from throughout Mexico to demonstrate the turmoil of the mid-1920s. These stories demonstrated that newspapers continued to inform their audiences about the problems the nation and Calles faced despite his promise of violence against newspapers that defied him during de la Huerta rebellion. This small group of newspapers is in no way complete but building on the previous section on Catholic press and *La Reconquista* they demonstrate the activist spirit in the Mexican Press Corps remained alive and well despite the political upheaval of the de la Huerta Rebellion. In addition, it offers a reason for Calles' hardline stance against newspapers throughout his presidency. For Mexicans who read these newspapers during this time period, it would not clear whether Calles was in control of the country or not. Everyday new reporting was published, which would make the reader believe the country was on the verge of collapse. Calles may have been forced into restricting newspapers because he had to re retake control of the narrative and present the successes of his administration and not just the continued problems.

The main component of disorder Mexican newspapers reported on was the violence that continued to plague Mexican even after the de la Huerta Rebellion had ended. Every other day it seemed like an official or a civilian was murdered. *El Mundo* captured this violence with a story about a gunfight between police and supporters of the

⁴² "Posiblemente se Evitara la Huelga en la Cia. La Corona," *El Mundo: Diario de la Mañana*, September 28, 1924, 1.

socialist party that just won a small-town local election.⁴³ The headline seemed to oversell the violence as the article mentioned that nobody had been killed. However, it mentioned that there was a chance for future violence to breakout as the new government would take power. This story highlighted the rising profile of the socialist party in the Tampico region and hinted at possible future violence between this new party and older more entrenched local leaders. Another newspaper, *El Correo: Diario Popular de Información*, reported on socialists disrupting the political scene during its coverage of Calles' presidential inauguration. As with *El Mundo*, the paper covered Calles' victory but dedicated equal coverage to the drama of local elections.⁴⁴ According to *El Correo*, the Socialist Frontier Party believed the votes had not been counted correctly in the recent election and there needed to be extensive recounts.⁴⁵ They were not given these recounts, and the local police forcibly ended their protests through threats of violence. The article focused on the fact that the police force was the only group that had easy access to guns since they could use those from the armory.⁴⁶ This would foreshadow future conflicts since the Socialist Party felt it could not achieve its goals through fair elections and would have to arm themselves similarly as the police force. This rise of the socialist party combined with the numerous strikes that were featured in the paper, for instance, three months later the paper would do a series of stories on Agarian leaders and restaurant

⁴³ "Un Tiroteo Entre Obreros y Policías," *El Mundo: Diario de la Mañana*, January 10, 1925, 1.

⁴⁴ "Temense Sublevación al Tomar Posesión P.E. Calles," *El Correo: Diario Popular de la Información*, October 26, 1924, 1.

⁴⁵ "Quedo Desconocido hoy el Comité del Partido Socialista Fronterizo," *El Correo: Diario Popular de la Información*, October 26, 1924, 1.

⁴⁶ "No fue Recogido el Archivo de los Socialistas," *El Correo: Diario Popular de la Información*, October 26, 1924, 1.

workers protesting, made it seem like the country was falling apart again.⁴⁷ These stories would have made Calles concerned that the popular sentiment would overwhelm his presidency before he had to be successful.

El Correo was not the only newspaper that came out in support of the socialist cause. In the state of Tabasco, the governor Tomás Garrido Canabal, had organized his state's workers into a cooperative, Liga Central de Resistencia del Partido Socialista Radical, which was the main branch that led smaller Resistance Leagues throughout the state.⁴⁸ Founded in 1924, membership in Resistance Leagues was initially voluntary, but the majority of all workers and farmers quickly joined. By the 1930s, membership was basically required if one wanted a job in the state. The Resistance Leagues became so powerful that they survived challenges from the nation's largest national union, CROM, which held close ties to Calles.⁴⁹ This led to violence between the two forces and eventually the national government sided with Garrido and upheld state labor laws. One technique Garrido used to educate his followers, sometimes known as Red Shirts, was the creation of a party newspaper, *Redención*. This was a throwback to the journalistic activism pre-Mexican Revolution where periodicals were largely associated with political parties. *Redencion* carried Garrido's message of cultural renovation, antifanaticism, morality and women's rights and frequently printed poems and letters that eulogized its

⁴⁷ "Varios Lideres Agraristas fueron aprehendidos ayer," and "Nuevos Demandas de los Empleados a todos los Dueños de Restaurants de este Puerto," *El Correo: Diario Popular de Información*, February 20-21, 1924, 1.

⁴⁸ Stan Ridgeway, "Monoculture, Monopoly, and the Mexican Revolution: Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Standard Fruit Company in Tabasco (1920-1935)," *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (Winter 2001), 150.

⁴⁹ Ridgeway, "Monoculture, Monopoly, and the Mexican Revolution," 157.

founder, such as “El Hombre del Sureste,” a poem which began, “In the Southeast there is a man of action who bring redemption.”⁵⁰

Each issue of *Redención* was dedicated to supporting the socialist cause both locally and internationally. Front pages often featured stories on what the Resistance Leagues were doing in Tabasco to make workers lives easier. The April 29 issue discussed the construction of a free library in the capital city of Villahermosa, which would provide educational materials free to members of the Resistance Leagues. While not the most exciting news, it was a significant public works project to help make lives better.⁵¹ In addition, there were attempts to legitimize socialism and demonstrate that it was a movement that extended outside of Tabasco by transforming Calles, Obregón and other national leaders into socialists even if they were not. In the November 18 edition, a headline stated that Calles now favored socialism and his socialist beliefs would alter the national government.⁵² This was largely untrue. Even though Calles had a strong relationship with labor, he made sure to never profess support for socialism and as previously mentioned, got mad every time he was publically linked to the party. In addition, *Redención* tried to link Obregón to the Resistance League’s political orientation by rewriting his history in regards to the Mexican Revolution.⁵³ The periodical treated him as a reformer from his earliest days but conveniently ignored the personal wealth he accumulated when he left the government following the war. *Redención* was clearly a

⁵⁰ Ridgeway, “Monoculture, Monopoly, and the Mexican Revolution,” 150, and “Los Besos,” *La Redención*, November 18, 1924, 4.

⁵¹ “Se construirá un cuartel al aire libre entre Atasta y Villahermosa,” *Redención*, April 29, 1925, 1.

⁵² “Se Declarará el Gobierno Socialista,” *Redención*, November 18, 1924, 1.

⁵³ “El Brazo de Obregón: Datos para la Historia de la Revolución Social Mexicana,” *Redención*, April 28, 1925, 2.

newspaper sponsored by a socialist organization but it was not the only newspaper that strongly supported the relative upstart political movement. *El Correo* provided a two page spread so the local socialist party could print its manifesto.⁵⁴ Newspapers were generally providing more information about the local political movements. On one hand this was demonstrated Mexico was moving towards a more open democracy, however, it could also be used to demonstrate Calles was not in complete control

The general sense of disorder surrounding the nation's political scene continued into the 1926 mid-term elections. According to *El Informador*, the largest newspaper in Guadalajara, its home city had descended into chaos and the army was summoned to help restore order. On July 4, 1926, the newspaper reported that all the major streets were closed and only government vehicles were allowed on the streets. The military had to divide the city into zones and set up individual headquarters in order to control the situation.⁵⁵ The next day, the same newspaper reported that the army had also occupied Oaxaca in hopes of restoring peace.⁵⁶ In Oaxaca, the newspaper discussed problems voters faced heading to the polls even after registering. Federal troops had occupied the city in the morning and hoped to establish peace long enough for voters to head to the polls. The article closed by mentioning the newspaper had received information that police had murdered a local official. This story was presented at the end and implied the city may fall back into violence.⁵⁷ A couple days later, *El Informador* happily reported

⁵⁴ "Partido Socialista Frontera Socialista Fronterizo: Manifiesto al Pueblo de Tamaulipas," *El Correo: Diario Popular de la Información*, October 26, 1924, 4.

⁵⁵ "Las tropas Federales Evitaran que se altere el orden hoy durante las elecciones," *El Informador*, July 4, 1926, 1.

⁵⁶ "La Policía de Oaxaca Asesino a los Diputados Locales Dominguez E Ibrarra," *El Informador*, July 5, 1926, 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

that the troop presence in Guadalajara had prevented any serious additional problems from occurring. This allowed citizens to vote without issue.⁵⁸ However, there was no information as to when the siege would end and life would return to normal. The end of the election did not mean the peace would reign though as the newspaper warned that the Railway Worker Union was planning a strike.⁵⁹ This threatened to cripple the region's transportation. *El Informador* followed these stories with a story about problems with the Henequén industry in Yucatán.⁶⁰ Once again, anyone scanning the headlines of the newspaper would believe the country was in complete disarray. Two years following his election as president, Calles could not guarantee Mexicans could go to the polls peacefully.

Attempts to Purchase / Control newspapers

The de la Huerta revealed how far Calles was willing to go in order to achieve his goal of being president. The conflict forced him to choose between his best friend (de la Huerta) and his political patron (Obregón). De la Huerta's rebellion ended with him forced into exile.⁶¹ By choosing Obregón, Calles demonstrated he was willing to sacrifice anything to be president. This included reducing the freedoms available to newspapers. First, he discussed military actions against the nation's two largest periodicals. Second, he attempted to buy and take control of *Excelsior* and *El Demócrata*. This would have turned two possible detractors into two allies. They would have allowed

⁵⁸ "Las Elecciones para Diputados y Senadores al Congreso de la Union, Se Efectuaron Ayer en esta Ciudad, sin Derramamiento de Sangre," *El Informador*, July 5, 1926, 1.

⁵⁹ "Se Agrava La Huelga de las Trenistas," *El Informador*, July 5, 1926, 1.

⁶⁰ "Sigue la Crisis en el Estado de Yucatán," *El Informador*, July 8, 1926, 1.

⁶¹ Martínez, *Adolfo de la Huerta*, 110-112.

him to more aggressively impose his presidential policies on the nation since there would not have been any national periodicals to challenge him.

The attempted purchase of *Excelsior* occurred following the death of its founder Alducín on March 29, 1924. Despite the periodical's open political feud with Calles, there was nothing suspicious about his death as he fell and hit his head while riding a horse in Chapultepec.⁶² At the time of his death, Alducín was the dynamic energy behind *Excelsior's* editorial spirit. He had started the business from nothing in the aftermath of the Revolution and its employees looked to him for inspiration. Whenever the periodical experienced a low moment, Alducín had been there to motivate its journalists and help pull it out of whatever troubles it was experiencing.⁶³ His death was a devastating blow to the newspaper. In addition, several of the original founders who operated behind the scenes either retired or took on reduced roles at *Excelsior*.⁶⁴ The new director was Rodrigo de Llano, who had run the newspaper's New York offices. Under his direction, the newspaper started publishing more international stories.⁶⁵ Just as the nation was experiencing the transition to Calles' presidency, *Excelsior* was forced to create a new identity for itself.

In this moment of change for the newspaper, one of Calles's advisors suggested the government buy the newspaper and use it to promote his presidential campaign. This suggestion came from Francisco S. Mancilla, Secretaría de Gobernación, who wrote to

⁶² "Grave accident to the President of Excelsior," *Excelsior*, March 28, 1924, 1; "Sr. Don Rafael Alducín died yesterday in the night," *Excelsior*, March 30, 1924, 1.

⁶³ Burkholder, "El Periódico que Llégó," 1400.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1401.

⁶⁵ Laura Navarrete Maya, *Excelsior en la vida Nacional*, (Mexico City, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008), 150.

him the day after Alducín died.⁶⁶ The rapidness of Mancilla's letter following Alducín's death indicated the general level of anger government officials held towards *Excelsior*. It took less than 24 hours for an official to propose a takeover once it appeared the newspaper was weak. In his letter, Mancillo acknowledged that the cost to acquire *Excelsior* would be very difficult due to "resistance from Alducín's widow and the director and the editors."⁶⁷ However, he believed they should be willing to pay whatever it took to purchase it since Calles would transform an enemy into a new political resource. This was tactic reminiscent of Carranza's handling of the media throughout the Mexican Revolution as Carranza took over many newspapers when the Constitutionalists captured Mexico City the first time. Mancilla realized brazenly buying or feuding with *Excelsior* would be negative for Calles campaign. Therefore, he ended his message by assuring him that the purchase could be done discretely, without any political ramifications.⁶⁸ Ten days later, Calles wrote a short reply to Mancilla. He succinctly thanked Mancilla for making the suggestion but told him that it was not possible for him to follow through on it.⁶⁹ He did not go into detail as to why his campaign would not purchase *Excelsior* so we do not know the exact reason why he turned down the opportunity. He possibly believed it would generate negative attention and hurt his campaign. This correspondence demonstrated that government officials still retained the notion that periodicals were their enemies if they impeded their personal ambition. In this case, Mancilla believed *Excelsior* was harming Calles' campaign, so he advocated taking

⁶⁶ "Letter from Francisco Mancilla to Plutarco Elías Calles, with his response," March 29, 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPEyCT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 26: *Mancilla, Francisco S.*, Inv. 3400, 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁹ Plutarco Elías Calles response to Francisco S. Mancilla, April 9, 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPEyCT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 26: *Mancilla, Francisco S.*, Inv. 3400, 2.

over the newspaper and eliminating the problem. The better question is why Calles, who only approximately four months ago wanted to use the military to take over the newspaper, balked at this opportunity. It is possible that the answer was that the resistance to such direct action would be too strong and he would waste political capital.

Another possible reason was that Calles had already carved out a special relationship with another periodical, *El Demócrata*. This was indicated in the original memo circulated that outlined the responsibilities of the Department of the Press discussed in the previous chapter. The head of the department, Valenzuela detailed that part of its goal was to foster closer relationships with newspapers published in the capital. This entailed reaching out to editors and explaining to them the benefits of helping Obregón's administration. He had already started this process and indicated the government had a deal with *El Demócrata*. The newspaper would allow the department to basically write articles and publish them without editing them. These articles would look like actual newspaper stories but were really government propaganda pieces.⁷⁰

Valenzuela used the word "utilize" to describe the department's use of *El Demócrata*.⁷¹ This indicated the department had more editorial control over the newspaper than giving it exclusive information to a journalist. The previous chapter featured correspondence describing the financial plight of its founder Rafael Martínez. He possibly made a deal whereby the government assumed partial control of the newspaper in exchange for subsidizing it. This was an important coup, since Martínez

⁷⁰ "Memo circulated by Clodoveo Valenzuela, the boss of the Department of the Press, Titled: Informe Sintético respect de las labors que desaroolla el Departamento de Prensa de la Seceataría de Gobernación," July 26, 1921, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 75: *Secretaria de Gobernaciones*, leg. 2-21, Inv. 5362, 116-117.

⁷¹ Ibid., 117.

had been one of Carranza's strongest supporters. Turning him and his paper into partial allies helped transition Obregón control the government without any major uprisings. It is difficult to understand how much influence the government over *El Demócrata*. For instance, following Villa's death, it was one of the few periodicals to lavish praise on the fallen general. It wrote that Villa, "practically without knowing how to read, did more but much more than so many scholars and members of governments," and "to the humble who groaned under the slave driver's lash, Villa was the avenger; Villa was justice."⁷² While these pro-Villa stories did not mention Calles' potential role in the murder, these flattering obituaries would have upset officials in Obregón's administration. In theory, their alliance should have prevented the newspaper from memorializing Villa so passionately.

Purchase of *El Demócrata*

By the early part of 1923, Calles was not content with partial control of *El Demócrata* and attempted to purchase the newspaper. He did not do so directly, instead relying on a series of intermediaries to buy it. However, from his correspondence it is clear that while Calles may never have owned a direct majority stake in the company, he was the one pulling the strings from the outside. The first associate to acquire the newspaper was relative outsider, Marcos E. Raya. It is difficult to ascertain how close his relationship was with Calles and Obregón. Raya had no military affiliation or connection to Sonora. Instead, he was a wealthy *charro* or cowboy. In 1921, he is best remembered for creating an association of *charros* designed to celebrate and teach horse riding to

⁷² *El Demócrata*, July 21, 1923 and *El Demócrata*, July 23, 1923.

people in the urban metropolis of Mexico City.⁷³ Raya regularly held horse-riding competitions and demonstrations on his property in the neighborhood of *Doctores*.⁷⁴ By 1923, he had become a member of Obregón's administration, signing one letter as *The Presidente de la Comission de Hda* (The President of the Commission of Taxes).⁷⁵ However, he only used this title once in his several letters with Calles. In addition, once Calles became president, Raya was not retained and became president of the municipal council of Mexico City.⁷⁶ Therefore, it is not clear how high his standing was within Obregón's administration or how he became part of the national government since he did not have the traditional shared history of military service or Sonoran citizenship with Calles' larger cohort.

Raya first bought control of *El Demócrata* in November of 1923. The head of the periodical at that time was Vito Alessio Robles. Robles had been possibly just as significant a problem to Obregón and Calles its previous owner, Martínez. In 1921, Robles' brother, José Alessio Robles was murdered in Mexico City. The main culprit was General Jacinto B. Treviño, a friend and supporter of Obregón. Treviño used this friendship in order to escape the murder charge. Robles blamed Obregón to such an extent that he ended his relationship with his other brother, Miguel Alessio Robles who served as Obregón's Secretary of Industry and Trade. This past history made it unlikely

⁷³ Luz María Albarrán y Favela and Luis Albarrán y Pliego, *Luis Albarrán y Pliego: escultor, pintor, y orfebre, 1893-1967*, (Toluca, Mexico: Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura, 2003), 55.

⁷⁴ Luz María Albarrán y Favela and Luis Albarrán y Pliego, 56. These citations come from an artist who was commissioned by Raya to create a sculpture to honor the *charro* culture.

⁷⁵ Letter from M.E. Raya to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles, December 31, 1923, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 10.

⁷⁶ One of the few English sources that reference Maya describe him as the Mayor of Mexico City but that seems like a misunderstanding of how Mexico City was operated. Guide to the American Industrial Mission to Mexico Records: 1924-1948 [Bulk 1924-1925], The New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division, MssCol76.

that Robles would sell to anyone associated with the Obregón's administration. In order to purchase *El Demócrata*, Calles used Raya as an intermediary to cover his eventual acquisition of the periodical.

On November 26, 1923, Robles agreed to sell control of *El Demócrata* to Raya for 220,000 pesos. The purchase included two offices located in Mexico City, newspaper's printing presses, and any subsidiary periodicals owned by *El Demócrata* such as the smaller *El Diario*. When he accepted the offer, Robles made several demands that indicated that although he was selling the newspaper, he maintained affection for his workers and its readers. In order to finalize the sale, Raya had to agree to not fire any employees for at least six months after he bought it. In addition, Raya promised not to raise the price of *El Demócrata's* daily editions and honor the previous subscriptions sold.⁷⁷ These messages indicate Robles' still supported the newspaper's goal but Raya's financial offer was too tempting.⁷⁸

From his correspondence, it is clear Raya did not acquire *El Demócrata* to fulfill a long-held goal to own a newspaper. He quickly distributed the stock options to Calles and two other members of Obregón's administration, Ernesto Ocaranza Llano and Cosme Hinojosa.⁷⁹ Unlike Raya, both held relatively non-descript but significant positions in the Mexican government. Llano was the General Manager of *Ferrocarriles Nacionales de*

⁷⁷ Letter from M.E. Raya to Sr. Ing. Vito Alessio Robles, November 26, 1923, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 1.

⁷⁸ The final purchases are described in these two documents, Letter from M.E. Raya to Sr. Ing. Vito Alessio Robles, December 6, 1923, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 5, and Letter from M.E. Raya to Sr. Ing. Vito Alessio Robles, November 27, 1923, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 6.

⁷⁹ Proof of stock sent to E. Ocaranza Llano and Cosme Hinojosa from M.E. Raya, December 21, 1923, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 8.

México (National Railways of Mexico, FHN) and Hinojosa was the Postal Director.⁸⁰ Eventually, the stock was distributed among eight officials who held close ties to Calles. The top of the list contained the title, "Operation to Buy the Stocks of 'El Demócrata,'" which possibly revealed that these purchases were part of a larger plan choreographed by Calles.⁸¹ While, Raya retained controlling interest, Calles held the second highest value of stocks. The soon to be president, through his associates, now had control of a national newspaper. A letter sent on December 31 indicated the operation was complete and Raya declared it was successful. He claimed that a small infusion of money was required to modernize *El Demócrata* and then it would be easy to operate. In Raya's opinion, Calles would only have to provide a little direction from the top.⁸² This letter revealed that the acquisition of *El Demócrata* had been sponsored and guided by Calles. At the beginning of Obregón's presidency, the periodical was owned by Martínez, a political adversary, but after four years it was now controlled by Calles. Calles had seen a critical periodical as an enemy and took steps to neutralize it.

The correspondence between Raya and Calles in the months following their purchase demonstrated that Calles was one the in charge of *El Demócrata* despite Raya owning the most stock. Calles was regularly updated on the business of the periodical and few decisions were made at newspapers without his permission. For instance, within the

⁸⁰ Biographical details for Ernesto Ocaranza Llano can be found – Elmer T. Howson and D.A. Steel, *The Biographical Directory of The Railway Officials of America*, (New York: Simonons-Boardman Publishing Co., 1922), 377 and Guillermo Guajardo, "Between the Workshop and the State: Training Human Capital in Railroad Companies in Mexico and Chile, 1850-1930," (Paper published at the Munich Personal RePRc Archive, 2009), 17. And Cosme Hinojosa, *Spanish American Postal Convention*, (Washington, DC, Library of Congress, 1922), 281.

⁸¹ Operación de compra de las acciones de 'El Demócrata,' December 15, 1923, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 16.

⁸² Letter from M.E. Raya to Sr. Gral. Don Plutarco Elías Calles, December 31, 1923, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 8.

first two months of owning *El Demócrata*, Raya sent a telegram to Calles asking for permission to close one of its subsidiary periodicals, *El Diario* for approximately eight days.⁸³ Raya had to close it in order to break the resolve of the periodical's unionized employees who were resisting his attempts to reduce the size of its staff. Closing the periodical was meant to be seen as a threat that Raya could close it permanently. At issue were rising salaries and he claimed the newspaper could not continue to earn a profit without a staff reduction.⁸⁴ Raya's telegram demonstrated that Calles was the true manager of these periodicals. He had to receive approval before making any serious decisions.

Calles' immediate purpose for acquiring *El Demócrata* was to use it as a tool to help promote his presidential candidacy. He gave his campaign director, Dr. José Manuel Puig y Casauranc, control of the newspaper. As with the other members of *El Demócrata's* ownership group, Puig y Casauranc was a relative outsider. While he participated in local politics in Veracruz throughout Carranza and Obregón's presidencies, he did not arrive on the Mexico City political scene until 1922 when he was elected Senator of Campeche. He quickly became an important member of Calles' inner circle and was named his presidential campaign manager in 1923.⁸⁵ He would eventually be appointed secretary of education as a reward for helping Calles win the election.⁸⁶ Raya continued to play a role in managing *El Demócrata's* finances but from his correspondence it's clear Puig y Casauranc was kept in the loop and made editorial

⁸³ Telegram from M.E. Raya to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles explaining the situation at *El Diario*, December 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 75: *Raya, Marcos E.*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 4760, 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁵ Roderic A. Camp, *Mexican Political Biographies, 1884-1934*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 1908.

⁸⁶ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 286.

decisions.⁸⁷ In addition to the acquisition of *El Demócrata*, Calles worked to make sure local periodicals promoted his campaign. He put pressure on local caudillos to ensure they were supporting his campaign. This comes through in a telegram sent from General Arnulfo R. Gómez of Durango, a long term supporter of Obregón.⁸⁸ Gómez, possibly resentful of Calles' selection as a candidate as opposed to himself, initially resented Calles' ordering him to produce propaganda but eventually relented.⁸⁹ Calles deploying *El Demócrata* and other newspapers for personal advantage harkened back to prior to the revolution when periodicals used to promote candidates. Then, they were used as sites of resistance against Díaz dictatorship but now they were used to maintain the current power structure. This demonstrated the country's political leadership had no intention of developing an independent press corps. They only saw tools to be used at their discretion.

Failure to optimize the Newspaper

Despite the initial ease of purchasing *El Demócrata*, the operation quickly fell apart as Raya failed to pay off the newspaper's debts. Operating the newspaper was not as easy as he originally claimed. The first sign of trouble was in February, when Calles received a note from an important member of his reelection committee, Romeo Ortega.⁹⁰ Beginning with the election of 1922, Ortega had been responsible for hiring artists and

⁸⁷ Letter from M.E. Raya to Gral. Plutarco Elías, that includes Dr. J.M. Puig y Casauranc being cc'ed into their conversation, February 16, 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 20.

⁸⁸ Pedro Fernando Castro Martínez, *Adolfo de la Huerta: la integridad como arma de la revolución*, (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Iztapalapa, 1992), 99.

⁸⁹ Telegram from A.R. Gómez to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles that includes references to M.E. Raya ordering the general to print propaganda, April 16, 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 75: *Marcos E. Raya*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 4760, 4.

⁹⁰ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 264.

producing propaganda for Calles and the candidates he supported.⁹¹ Two years later, he was managing Calles' election committee and securing important endorsements from labor union leaders.⁹² He was the first person to raise concerns with *El Demócrata* and its finances. In a telegram to Calles, he wrote, "Until yesterday we could meet and celebrate the periodical...today the periodical should definitely stay suspended."⁹³ Ortega went on to describe that there were various financial concerns surrounding Raya's leadership which were preventing the periodical from publishing the necessary articles. He concluded the telegram by telling Calles that bringing in Puig y Casauranc to operate *El Demócrata* would help unlock the periodical's potential to support the campaign.

Romeo's telegram indicated that Calles needed to take a stronger lead in managing *El Demócrata*. Less than two weeks later, Raya provided Calles financial information about how much it had cost to operate *El Demócrata* since the purchase. Included in the letter was a new list of shareholders and how much stock they owned.⁹⁴ Raya gave no reason to justify why he was still shuttling stock options two months after the initial purchase. There was no reason for Calles to request this information, so it indicates he believed Ortega and understood there was a problem behind the scenes at *El Demócrata*.

⁹¹ Telegram from Diputado Romeo Ortega to General Guillermo Nelson describing hiring propagandists, April 22, 1922, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder:: *Ortega, Romeo (Lic. Y Dip.)*, leg. 1-5, Inv. 4193, 1-2.

⁹² Telegram from Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles to Diputado Romeo Ortega discussing political strategy, September, 28, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder:: *Ortega, Romeo (Lic. Y Dip.)*, leg. 1-5, Inv. 4193, 8.

⁹³ Telegram from Romeo Ortega to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles detailing some problems with propaganda, February 5, 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: *Ortega, Romeo (Lic. Y Dip.)*, leg. 1-5, Inv. 4193, 36.

⁹⁴ Letter from M.E. Raya to Gral. Plutarco Elías, that includes Dr. J.M. Puig y Casauranc being cc'ed into their conversation, February 16, 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 20.

Less than a week later, Calles received confirmation that there was a larger problem at the newspaper from a telegram sent to him by the periodical's new director Puig y Casauranc. In this message, Puig y Casauranc explained that Raya had an undisclosed deal with Robles that nobody else in the group knew about. Puig y Casauranc did not present specific details but he had discovered Raya still owed money to Robles for forty thousand stock options.⁹⁵ In addition, Puig y Casauranc had discovered the both *El Demócrata* and *El Diario* had not printed enough articles that supported Calles' presidency. Ortega had received a similar promise from Raya that he would publish these campaign advertisements but then he failed to deliver.⁹⁶ Though he did not trust Raya completely, he believed if Calles wanted to use the periodical as a campaign tool, then they needed to pay off Robles and end this controversy. This letter demonstrated that Calles and his team had lost control of their newspaper. While this was originally intended to be a simple operation, Raya was now taking the blame for its difficulties. Calles assigned Puig y Casauranc to fix everything but it was not clear how much it would cost.

Calles' was not happy with the situation at *El Demócrata* and made it clear in his response to Puig y Casuaranc. First, he believed Robles did not deserve any more money. Calles wrote, "I remember the day we met in the countryside perfectly well, near Xochimilco (a district in the southern part of Mexico), invited by Raya, this was the day we consummated the purchase."⁹⁷ In Calles' opinion, he paid Roble the agreed upon

⁹⁵ Letter from José Manuel Puig y Causaranc to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles via Luis Leon, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 21.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁷ Letter from Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles to J.M. Puig y Casauranc, Gerente del *Demócrata*, February 20, 1924, Torreon, Coah., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 25.

amount that day and had no more financial obligations to the periodical's former owner. Neither he, nor Puig y Casauranc should accept any demands from him.⁹⁸ In addition, Calles commanded Puig y Casauranc to suspend Raya and prevent him from making any significant decisions at *El Demócrata*.⁹⁹ This telegram was Calles' attempt to take back control of the periodical. He empowered Puig y Casauranc to end Raya's reign and allow *El Demócrata* to fulfill the function they originally envisioned for it when they acquired it.

It took two full days but the combined efforts of Puig y Casauranc and Ortega allowed Calles to take back full control of *El Demócrata*. Once they confirmed Raya's suspension and Calles' memory of the meeting with Robles to finalize their acquisition of the periodical, they delved into the periodical's financial records to discover what problems remained.¹⁰⁰ In the end, they discovered that the majority of the information Raya provided was correct. Calles' group, Ocranza, Hinojosa, and others, still controlled *El Demócrata* and its subsidiaries and their stock amounts had not changed.¹⁰¹ As to the Robles situation, Ortega believed it was a private negotiation between Raya and him, so Calles was not responsible for any additional payments. In addition, he accused Raya of pocketing campaign funds and selling advertising space in the periodical that should be dedicated to Calles. Now that they had re-established control of the newspaper, future resources would not be stolen or wasted and it would operate much more efficiently.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁰ Telegram from José Manuel Puig y Casauranc to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles, February 21, 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 21.

¹⁰¹ Telegram from Romeo Ortega to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles, February 22, 1924, Mexico, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: 20: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 34.

¹⁰² Ibid., 35.

At this point, *El Demócrata* had become the de facto headquarters of Calles' presidential campaign. This demonstrated the importance he placed on controlling media organizations and using them to gain support. Growing up in Porfirian Mexico, Calles saw the role the media played in the election of 1910 and the fall of Díaz's dictatorship. His acquisition of *El Demócrata* indicated he had learned this lesson and would do his best to manipulate the media before and during his presidency.

Calles had to buyout Raya in order to gain and maintain full control of the newspaper. This would ensure a clean break from his dysfunctional ownership. He waited until the fall after the election in July, 1924 to begin negotiations. The postponement probably occurred so his team could focus on the election and the de la Huerta rebellion. In the meantime, newspaper's editor, Benigno Valenzuela wrote to Ortega and Puig y Casauranc on February 13, and informed them that he published an editorial supporting the president and calling for an end to the rebellion.¹⁰³ This was the first of several letters assuring them the periodical was functional and helping Calles win the election.¹⁰⁴ The negotiations were further stalled when the new president visited Germany and France throughout the fall before his inauguration on November 30.¹⁰⁵ Surprisingly, Raya was not afraid to play hardball despite his past problems with the newspapers. Two days prior to Calles' inauguration, Raya sent Puig y Casauranc a letter informing him that they had not offered enough money to buy him out.¹⁰⁶ In addition, just as Robles before him, Raya

¹⁰³ Letter from Benigno Valenzuela to Romeo Ortega and Dr. Puig, February 13, 1924, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: *Valenzuela, Benigno*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 5759, 5.

¹⁰⁴ For example: Benigno Valenzuela to Romeo Ortega, January 28, 1924, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: *Valenzuela, Benigno*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 5759, 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 112-113.

¹⁰⁶ M.E. Raya to José Manuel Puig y Casauranc discussing the purchase of *El Demócrata*, November 28, 1924, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 40.

wanted assurances that the employees would be protected. He justified this demand by re-appropriating the language Calles used during his election, writing that the employees of *El Demócrata* were proletariats and the new political regime had promised to protect them.¹⁰⁷ This letter was sent one year after he originally purchased the periodical. For more than a year, drama had surrounded the newspaper and Calles had not secured his ownership. What seemed like simple plan had become much more difficult then Calles had originally planned.

Selling of *El Demócrata*

Six months later, it seemed like Calles had divorced himself from management of *El Demócrata*. On May 27, Valenzuela circulated a memorandum detailing several strategies for raising the newspaper's circulation. His goal was to sell more than 15,000 newspapers in the upcoming months. His plan involved fairly standard goals such as improving the newspapers print quality, trying to extend its reach beyond Mexico City, and to have more self-help columns.¹⁰⁸ At no point did Valenzuela mention Calles or dictate that the newspaper should publish articles in-line with his political party. At one point, he discussed that their printing press needed repairs but there were other necessary materials that had precedence.¹⁰⁹ This implied that *El Demócrata* no longer had a powerful patron ready to step in and fix any problems. Calles had lost interest now in the periodical now there was no longer a campaign to win. The members of his cohort that had been previously assigned to operate the newspaper were rewarded and elevated to

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum from the director gerente Benigno Valenzuela to the employees, May 27, 1925, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 43-44.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 44.

cabinet positions such as Secretary of Education and Interior for Puig y Casauranc and Ortega respectively.¹¹⁰ For whatever reason, Calles had decided to end his management of *El Demócrata* after a year and a half of ownership. It was independent once again, no longer special, just another struggling newspaper in post-Revolutionary Mexico.

Without Calles propping up the newspaper, *El Demócrata* lasted less than a year. On May 20, 1926, he received a note from Alberto Navarro who was handling the liquidation of the company's assets.¹¹¹ Not surprisingly, Mascareñas was an old associate of Calles and had worked closely with him and Obregón in Sonora prior to their presidencies. Once Calles was elected, he empowered Mascareñas to improve the nation's banking infrastructure.¹¹² Therefore the entire process, from the original purchase, to the final sale and liquidation of the *El Demócrata's* assets had been controlled by Calles.

With this letter, the saga surrounding *El Demócrata* had ended. Over a three-year period, Calles and his associates took over a newspaper, used it for their purposes and then released it and then let it fail. These actions reflected his general belief (one that was shared by other Mexican Generals) that newspapers should be used as tools and their independence restricted. For Calles, it was not difficult for him to find justification for the paranoia he felt towards periodicals. At any moment they could publish an inaccurate story or slanderous editorial. These would harm his image and prevent him from achieving his goal to become president. In many ways, *El Demócrata* was relatively

¹¹⁰ Buchenau, 113.

¹¹¹ Letter from Alberto Mascareñas Navarro, el liquidador to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles, May 20, 1926, Mexico, D.F., Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder: *El Demócrata*, leg. 1-1, Inv. 1684, 46.

¹¹² Lenard Ludlow, *Grandes financieros mexicanos*, (Mexico, D.F.: LID Editorial Mexicana, 2015)

lucky. Other newspapers such as *El Universal* or Excelsior faced threats of military takeovers as Calles fought the de la Huerta rebellion. These threats demonstrated Mexico had not escaped the violence of the revolution. Journalists and their newspapers remained targets whenever the nation had a presidential election.

These actions reflected the political style of authoritarian populism that defined the early period of his presidency. In the first two years he pushed through many populist reforms including professionalization of the army, nationalist efforts to control natural resources and the promotion of economic development, education and social welfare.¹¹³ These policies were similar to the changes he made as governor of Sonora, demonstrating he had a long history of supporting revolutionary reforms. However, the flip-side was Calles had to be in complete control. If any person or group prevented him from passing these reforms than Calles eliminated them as soon possible. This resulted in wide-spread bloodshed when he sponsored the assassination of Pancho Villa or the de la Huerta rebellion. It is unfair to compare this violence to his treatment of news organizations but they received the same level of aggression. In Calles' opinion, everyone, including journalists needed to work together in order to rebuild and improve the nation.

Calles and the Second Half of his presidency – Escalating Repression

Calles agreed to the sale and closure of *El Demócrata* despite the role the media played in escalating tensions between his government and the Mexico's Catholics over a six month period. On February 4, 1926, *El Universal* asked José Mora y del Río, the archbishop of Mexico about his thoughts regarding the Constitution of 1917. He referred the reporter to past comments he had made when it was signed, which were highly

¹¹³ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 115.

critical of the constitution. The newspaper reprinted his old denunciation but did not indicate they had been made nine years prior. As Mora y del Río had criticized significant provisions of the constitution, specifically the treasured article 27, it seemed like he was making an open challenge to Calles' government.¹¹⁴ When the archbishop and *El Universal* did not retract or these comments, federal officials declared the statement an act of rebellion.¹¹⁵ This misreported quote and the Calles' subsequent reaction led to a six-month period of escalating conflicts between the government and Catholics.

By July, the situation had gotten out of control as the president had ordered the closure of all monasteries and convents. Federal forces had ordered the expulsion of more than two hundred foreign nuns and priests.¹¹⁶ As the situation escalated, Obregón traveled to Mexico City and advised Calles to soften his stance and meet with church representatives to find a workable solution. On August 21, Calles offered some conciliations regarding the registration of priests but no final deal was made between the two sides. This fragile accord was shattered two days later when *El Universal* quoted Calles and wrote that the two sides were not close to an agreement. The bishops decided to continue their protests against his government. Two weeks later, shouts of "Viva Cristo Rey!" and "Long Live Christ the King!" could be heard throughout western and southern Mexico as Catholics openly rebelled against Calles.¹¹⁷ This uprising, which lasted approximately three years became known as the Cristero. rebellion and lasted three years. While unrest between government and Catholics had existed since the end of

¹¹⁴ *El Universal*, February 4, 1926, 1.

¹¹⁵ Stephen J.C. Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism, 1920-1940*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 79.

¹¹⁶ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 129.

¹¹⁷ Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People between Church and state, 1926-1929*, translated by Richard Southern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 49.

the Revolution, the articles published by *El Universal* clearly escalated it. Calles wanted this fight so he may have been secretly applauding *El Universal's* journalists but it confirmed his and others worst fears that the press could ignite a rebellion and it should be restrained.

The Cristero Rebellion was the first of a series of events that prevented Calles from continuing his reform program in the second half of his presidency. The uprising caused a nation-wide economic depression at the same time Calles was battling the U.S. over oil rights and dealing with an uprising in Nicaragua.¹¹⁸ These major conflicts combined with local issues to essentially halted whatever progressive programs Calles had planned for the second half of his Presidency. These problems were eventually shifted to the background though as the nation prepared for another presidential election cycle in 1928. The nation was already partially in chaos due to the Cristero Rebellion but this election promised more bloodshed as various military leaders battled to be his successor. These tensions were heightened once Obregón officially returned to politics and announced he would run for the presidency once again.

The Election of 1928

The jockeying amongst Generals and politicians who hoped to be Calles' successor started in 1926. The three main initial candidates at the time were General Arnulfo Gómez (Sonora), General Francisco Serrano (Sinaloa), and the union leader Luis N. Morones. All three had held significant positions in Calles' administration and all had large personal loyal followings that could help win an election. The great unknown was Obregón, who had largely left Calles alone and returned to his farm in Sonora for the first

¹¹⁸ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 132-135.

two years of Calles' Presidency. His plans became clearer in the spring of 1926 as he started visiting the capital more often. This gave the impression he was planning another presidential campaign.

The major obstacle for Obregón was the Constitutional Ban on reelection. This was implemented to prevent another Díaz-like dictatorship from developing and possibly the most sacred provision in the document as in contemporary Mexico all official documents are stamped, "sufragio efectivo, no reelección (Suffrage for everyone, no reelection)." The Mexican Congress could amend the Constitution however, and by November 1926, Obregón had convinced enough Senators to change it and allow for non-consecutive reelection and lengthened the presidential term to six years. Surprisingly, few journalists were critical of this decision. In *Excelsior's* front-page story, it said the resolutions were passed because the majority of Mexicans wanted them. This change had generated no popular challengers and in the end the vote was unanimous.¹¹⁹ The nation's newspapers tacitly supported it. Neither *Excelsior* nor *El Universal* wrote editorials complaining about the amendments. This demonstrated that Obregón retained necessary political capital to push through major changes to the Constitution. Now that he could run for president legally, Obregón had become the new front-runner.

Excelsior did provide full coverage of the opposition party created by Gómez and Serrano. In May, Gómez revealed that he would challenge Obregón for the presidency. He declared that the revisions made to the Constitution were illegal.¹²⁰ The opposition named their party the *Antirreeleccionistas* in order to link themselves to the traditional

¹¹⁹ "El senado ha aprobado la refoma de la reelección," *Excelsior*, November, 20, 1926, 1.

¹²⁰ Jennie Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 86.

rhetoric of the revolution and highlight Obregón's revision of the constitution. On June 24, the party's members met and chose Gómez to be their candidate.¹²¹ *Excelsior* provided a full-length article describing this meeting. Placing it on the front page was significant since Obregón had already criticized the political party for not choosing a singular candidate. Doing so advertised to the country that the party was unified and it could mount a legitimate challenge in the upcoming election. Furthermore, *Excelsior* provided full coverage of the *Antirreeleccionista* convention, outlining their platform.¹²² These articles indicated that national newspapers were prepared to provide some coverage of Obregón's of opposition and not treat him as the automatic winner.

Despite their popularity, Calles and Obregón felt the need to stack the deck further to in their favor. As they had in the past, they worked to eliminate the competition. First, they arrested Serrano on flimsy pretexts on October 1 and two days later he was killed by government troops.¹²³ More than 500 Obregón opponents were killed in this crackdown.¹²⁴ One month later, Gómez was executed by a government firing squad.¹²⁵ Mexican newspapers helped them justify these killings by claiming the generals and their supporters were part of a larger uprising against the government. For instance, *Excelsior* never reported Serrano's arrest or anything about the incident until October 4, when Serrano was killed. At that point, it used a quote from Obregón who claimed Serrano and his supporters were "rebels."¹²⁶ This allowed Calles to deploy the

¹²¹ "El General Gómez fue designado candidato," *Excelsior*, June 24, 1927, 1

¹²² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²³ Thomas Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920-1960*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 24.

¹²⁴ Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation*, 86.

¹²⁵ René de la Pedraja *Wars of Latin America, 1899-1941*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 294-295.

¹²⁶ "Declaraciones hechos a la Prensa ayer por el General Alvaro Obregón," *Excelsior*, October 4, 1927, 1.

full weight of the federal army against whatever supporters remained. All the newspaper knew was there was an uprising and several major generals were killed in what it called an “uprising against the government.”¹²⁷

These first stories helped to define the conflict. For the next week, articles repeatedly described Serrano’s remaining followers as rebels. Even if *Excelsior* wanted to develop a different angle to report the story, the remoteness action prevented any independent reporting. The possible rebels were trapped on a mountain (Cerro Cofre de Perote), with no major metropolitan area nearby.¹²⁸ This allowed federal forces to surround them and prevent any journalists from interviewing the them. In addition, captured rebels were killed almost immediately. The English section of *Excelsior* detailed how an insurgent general had been captured and transported to Mexico City, given a military trial at midnight, and killed by 7:30 the next morning.¹²⁹ No reporters had been given the opportunity to interview any prisoners or receive first-hand information from the fighting. The Mexican army had blocked any national journalists from traveling to region so they could not provide a counter-argument even if they wanted. The rebellion officially ended one month later on November 4 when Gómez was killed. His death provided a final opportunity to reinforce the notion they were rebels. *Excelsior*’s headline was “The General Gómez was shot and His Body brought to the capital: with his death the revolt has ended.”¹³⁰ By framing Serrano and Gómez as insurgents, newspapers provided justification for Calles’ possible over-the-top military response. If they had

¹²⁷ “El General Francisco R. Serrano Fue fusilado,” *Excelsior*, October 4, 1927, 1.

¹²⁸ “Flank attack on Rebel forces barricaded on Mount Perote started,” *Excelsior*, October 7, 1927, English Section.

¹²⁹ “Quijano faces firing squad in revolt case,” *Excelsior*, October 7, English Section.

¹³⁰ “El Ex-General Gómez Fue Fusilado Su Cadaver Traído a la Capital,” *Excelsior*, November 6, 1927.

remained political opponents, he would have had to treat them with a relative amount of respect. However once they became military combatants, Calles could kill them without much backlash.

The media's celebration of Obregón's return to politics continued once the rebellion was ended. Over the first half of the year, newspapers covered his various presidential stops. In March he visited the Bajío, the heartland of the Cristeros and urged them to exercise patience until he returned to the presidency. This message was repeated at various stops. Without an opposition party, there was no serious challenge mounted and he received positive coverage of all his speeches. On July 3, *Excelsior* triumphantly announced Obregón victory in the election.¹³¹ It happily reported the election was concluded without violence as more than one million votes were cast. Obregón's victory was so complete that officials claimed he received more votes than his previous presidential campaign.¹³² The editor called for the nation to rally behind the returning president so the nation could complete the goals of the revolution.¹³³ These stories revealed nobody in the press had any concerns with Obregón's victory, despite the legal machinations and the violent techniques he relied on to win.

Obregón's Death and Occupation of Excelsior

Once Obregón was elected it seemed like Calles would transition out of the presidency peacefully. It was possible he was even relieved that he would not have to deal with the pressure of negotiating with the U.S. or ending the Cristero Rebellion. In addition, many assumed there was a handshake deal in place for him to return to the

¹³¹ "Millon y medio de votos para el General Obregón en las elecciones del Presidential," *Excelsior*, July 3, 1927, 1.

¹³² "Tranquilidad en la Republica en el País durante la elecciones federales," *Excelsior*, July 4, 1.

¹³³ "El Presidente electo," *Excelsior*, July 4, 4.

presidency once Obregón's second term ended.¹³⁴ Whatever possible secret plans they had were shattered on July 17, two weeks following the election, when Obregón was murdered by José de León Toral at a luncheon. This set off a period of wild speculation in Mexico City as to Toral motives and whether he acted alone. Calles revealed that under torture Toral acknowledged he was a Catholic radical.¹³⁵ Obregón's murder and the subsequent trial of Toral was a critical turning point in the government's relationship with the media as Calles now faced another serious threat to the nation's stability. Many of Obregón's supporters believed Calles was responsible for his mentor's death and would do anything to stay in power. In order to maintain the peace, Calles had to rely on national newspapers to not exacerbate the situation further. This led him to overreact to some seemingly innocuous reporting done by *Excelsior* and close down the newspaper for a week. This closure was the culmination of the many threats Calles had made over his political career. It set off a wave of repression that continued into the early part of the 1930s. This section will explore *Excelsior's* reporting and the over the top political response from Calles and the Mexican Senate.

Surprisingly, Obregón's death only dominated the country's headlines for a couple of days. His assassination had to share the space in the newspaper with another famous Mexican who died three days prior, the pilot Emilio Carranza, who had set various international distance records for flying airplanes solo. He was a national hero and on July 14 he died when his plane crashed while returning from New York City.¹³⁶ Prior to his death, his return trip had dominated the headlines, so the whole nation knew

¹³⁴ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 358.

¹³⁵ Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo*, 161-162.

¹³⁶ "La Terrible Tragedia Aerea en que Precio E. Carranza," *Excelsior*, July 14, 1928, 1.

about his flight.¹³⁷ His reputation as a heroic pilot was international as the U. S. announced they would extend full military honors to him.¹³⁸ Even after Obregón was murdered, periodicals provided continued coverage of the transportation of Carranza's body back to his homeland. Obregón's coverage was relatively minor since his assassin had been apprehended, identified and he was buried within a couple of days. Due to the long return trip, periodicals continued to report on Carranza for more than a week after his death. On the day of Carranza's body's was returned to his hometown, *Excelsior* had moved past Obregón's death and had reported for the past several days on the various political machinations that followed it.¹³⁹

Initially, Calles did not resort to repression to handle the fallout from his mentor's death. Instead of taking the opportunity to remain president for a second term as many officials asked him to do, he outlined a procedure where Congress would name an interim president and who would hold office for two years.¹⁴⁰ Then, the nation could hold an election and return to the normal presidential cycle. This was a savvy decision, since many of Obregón's supporters assumed Calles was responsible for his death. If Calles had attempted to continue as president for a second term, he may have faced an uprising. He presented these plans to the nation in his last *informe* (equivalent of the State of the Union Addresses) on September 1. Newspapers helped Calles sell these decisions to the nation through their universal praise of the speech. *Excelsior* called it "transcendental"

¹³⁷ "Carranza saldra de Nueva York de Nueva York con Rumbo a la Ciudad de Mexico hoy entre Seis y Siete," *Excelsior*, July 11, 1928, 1.

¹³⁸ "Nationwide Regret over Ace's Death Voiced in U.S.," *Excelsior*, July 15, 1928, English Section.

¹³⁹ Headlines from the July 22, 1928 issue of *Excelsior*, "El Sepelio del General A. Obregón; Renuncio anoche D. Luis N. Morones" and "Llegaron a Tierra Nacional los Restos de Carranza," *Excelsior*, July 22, 1928, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 149.

and reproduced it in its entirety.¹⁴¹ In it, he explained that the day of the *caudillo* was over and the nation could no longer rely on singular personalities to control the nation. Therefore, he had to accept the principles of democracy and relinquish the presidency as dictated by the Constitution.¹⁴² He would oversee the peaceful transition of power and retire from politics. The speech was lauded for several days afterwards.¹⁴³ These stories helped to stabilize the nation following Obregón's death. They demonstrated Calles still remained popular and powerful enough to resist any attempts by people to capture the presidency through force.

Repression against newspapers did not escalate until Toral's trial in November, which led to the Mexican Congress condemning and censoring *Excelsior* for seemingly petty reasons. The trial started on November 3 and *Excelsior* deployed a team of journalists to cover it. Initially, their coverage seemed straight forward and inoffensive. There was nothing political about its multiday and multipage coverage, which included full page pictures of the various figures participating in the trials.¹⁴⁴ The only concern was the possible over sensationalizing of the trial, at one point they called it "the most important trial in the history of Mexico since the proceedings against Maximiliano de Habsburg."¹⁴⁵ However, by publicizing the trial so heavily, the newspaper gave it a sense of legitimacy. As much as Toral was on trial, so was Calles. Previously, he had dispatched his enemies quietly, far from Mexico's capital. This time, his country had to

¹⁴¹ "El Sr. General Calles dirigira hoy trancesdental al mensaje al país," *Excelsior*, September 1, 1.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴³ For instance, "Sensacional Mensaje de Sr. President de la Republica," *Excelsior*, September 2, 1928, 1, "Trascendencia historica del mensaje presidencial, and Mexico Gains despite Risk in Calles Exit, *Excelsior*, September 3, 1928, 1 and English Section.

¹⁴⁴ Examples of headlines: "Toral on Trial," *Excelsior*, English Section November 1, 1928, "Primer Audiencia en el Jurado del L.," *Excelsior*, November 3, 1928, 1, "Principales Figuraas en el Jurado de Lean Toral ante la Camera de Excelsior," *Excelsior*, November 3, 1928, 1.

¹⁴⁵ "Cómo informará Excelsior del sensacional juicio de Toral," *Excelsior*, November 3, 1928, 1.

see justice done publically in front of cameras. *Excelsior* and other newspapers spread the news throughout the nation that the trial was proceeding fairly without any chicanery.

After a couple of days, some members of the Mexican Congress believed that a particular writer, Querido Moheno was not supporting the government. They sent a note to *Excelsior* asking that he be featured less prominently or removed from the periodical's coverage. This was a quick reaction, since the start of the trial he only wrote two articles.¹⁴⁶ Rereading these articles, it is difficult to find any bias. It was possible the Congressman were reacting to his questioning of the lead prosecutor's techniques but there was no particular statement in the article that seemed biased.¹⁴⁷ It was possible they were concerned about how Toral had generated some sympathy nationally during the trial. It was possible officials had overreacted to this sentiment.¹⁴⁸ On November 6, the periodical reviewed in an editorial that it received pressure from government officials to censor its coverage of the trial.¹⁴⁹ The editorial speaks of "certain groups" that were working to limit the periodical's freedom but did not mention why it had been targeted. It implied the pressure had not come from Calles, as the author wrote, "The collaborators of the government should not detract from the democratic program of the Senior President and to the effect, the weighing consideration, the serenity and the prudence, precious in our difficult circumstances."¹⁵⁰ This editorial demonstrated that unnamed officials had

¹⁴⁶ "Mis impresiones del Jurado," *Excelsior*, November 3, 1, and "El Interrogatorio que el Procurador de Justicia hizo ayer a José de Leon Toral, según el Sr. Licenciado Querido Moheno," *Excelsior*, November 4, 1.

¹⁴⁷ "El Interrogatorio que el Procurador de Justicia hizo ayer a José de Leon Toral, según el Sr. Licenciado Querido Moheno," *Excelsior*, November 4, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 401-402.

¹⁴⁹ "Excelsior y la actualidad Palpitante," *Excelsior*, November 6, 1928, 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

complained about *Excelsior's* coverage of the trial but the periodical remained defiant in the face of these pressures.

Whatever the hopes of the writer, his comments were not successful in relieving the pressure on the periodical. Over the next week, several political organizations (Democracy Evolved Party, The Workers Party, Mexicans of Principles Party) wrote to the Mexican Congress and asked them to issue a boycott of *Excelsior* and products it advertised.¹⁵¹ The controversy continued to swirl around the newspaper until November 18, when it was occupied by city police that impeded the printing and distribution of that day's edition. The next day, *Excelsior* printed a story that described how a "score" of officials had presented themselves and prevented anyone or any newspaper from leaving the building.¹⁵² The editors attempted to contact Calles and other high government officials but it was not until 1pm the next day that the police vacated the building.¹⁵³ It was not clear which office sent these men but *Excelsior's* President, José Castellot Jr., had to receive permission from Calles to continue printing the newspaper. This implied the President knew something or had some role in its shutdown.¹⁵⁴ In a "Letter to the Readers" written by Castellot, he described how he called the President and reaffirmed the newspaper's loyalty to Calles and the nation. He claimed the newspaper remained dedicated to same program of national reconstruction that had guided the newspaper since its foundation.¹⁵⁵ While the periodical continued to publish through the whole crisis, this moment represented a transformation in the government's relationship with

¹⁵¹ Burkholder, "El Periódico que Llegó a la Vida Nacional," 1405.

¹⁵² "Se interumpió la circulación de *Excelsior*," *Excelsior*, November 19, 1928, 1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵⁴ "A las Autoridades y a la Opinion," *Excelsior*, November 21, 1928, 1.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

Mexican newspapers. For the first time since revolution, the government demonstrated it could and would impede newspapers from publishing. Furthermore, periodicals would not reopen unless they received permission from officials.

Conclusion: Journalistic Activism in a Turbulent Time

The 1920s continued to be a turbulent period in Mexican politics. While Obregón and his successor Calles had hoped to stabilize the nation, they experienced two major uprisings in a four-year period. In addition, there were countless other political deaths that occurred throughout the country as local bosses sought to maintain their power. In the middle part of the 1920s, newspapers evolved into relatively independent entities that provided continual coverage of this seemingly unending violence. They did not shy away or cover up stories that could be perceived as damaging to local and national politicians. This was a different form of activism than they showed prior to the Mexico Revolution. These newspapers had no desire to challenge Obregón's authority or overthrow the government. Instead, they wanted to capture the day's events and inform their readers. Sometimes these stories, such as the government's clashes with the Catholic Church, could make the national leaders look bad but largely there was no sense of anger in their coverage. Some periodicals, such as *El Correo*, seemed clearly biased, intentionally supporting one political party over others. In the major cities and the important national newspapers, this bias seemed rare.

Out in the countryside, one could still find newspapers that were dedicated to a single cause. This is best seen in *La Reconquista* from Colima and *Redención* from Tabasco. Both these periodicals were dedicated to advancing certain political issues and made no claims to impartiality. Their longevity is the most fascinating feature of both of

them. *La Reconquista* was a proponent of the Catholic Church country that was increasingly hostile to the institution of religion. *Redención* and the socialist party it represented fought openly with Calles and CROM, the largest labor union in the country and won. The fact that these regional newspapers survived during a period of increasing repression demonstrates the continued strength of regionalism throughout this time period.

The intention of daily journalist activism was not to make the government look bad but this was an inadvertent consequence. Reading the newspapers from this time period would make it seem like Calles and Mexico were trapped in a never-ending cycle of chaos. This made the institution of the free press an enemy of Calles and he took steps to limit their freedom. First, he proposed military action against deviant newspapers. Then, Calles attempted to buy out the national periodicals and turn them into propaganda tools for his campaigns. Finally, he occupied and closed down *Excelsior* for an extended period of time. The next chapter will explain how this eventually led to *Excelsior's* bankruptcy and transformation into a worker's cooperative. These attempts at repression were designed to get bad news off the front page and make it seem like Calles' regime had made a positive difference in Mexico.

The shame of this repression was that he really did not need to rely on it. As this chapter has demonstrated the national media had largely supported Calles regardless of what he did. They helped to cover up the political killings of Gómez and Serrano and never challenged Obregón when he made his triumphant return to the presidency. Despite whatever problems Calles faced as president, the Sonorans remained popular and did not need to rely on threaten newspapers to stay in power.

Title: Journalism post-Obregón murder**Introduction: Activism in a Repressive Environment**

The previous chapter examined how the violence of the 1920s impacted the journalistic community. As the nation repeatedly plunged into violent upheaval, journalists faced greater repression from government forces. The cycles of repression could largely be timed by the presidential elections. Whenever the nation faced the difficult proposition of transitioning leaders, blood was shed. Journalists could not escape this violence. Leaders who had participated in the Mexican Revolution founded the majority of the nation's largest publications. Many of them retained their activist notions continued to maintain close relationships with officials or become politicians themselves. However, these relationships and careers were challenged as they faced greater repression from Calles as he won the presidency, and attempted to enforce his progressive reform program.

Following Obregón's murder at the hands of a Cristero sympathizer, the level of repression increased dramatically. There were no longer any checks on Calles' power and he assumed the title of Jefe Máximo of the Revolution. At the same time, the nation was possibly on the verge of collapsing back into a civil war since Calles was unable to end the Cristero Rebellion quickly and the majority of the nation blamed him for the murder of Obregón. These problems were compounded as the reform movement had stagnated once the first waves of the Great Depression hit Mexico. Even though Calles had assumed ultimate political power, his position at the top was unstable from these various threats.

He tried to stabilize his position by consolidating his support within media organizations. This chapter begins by examining the three major changes to journalism in this six-year period (1928-1934). First, there was the expulsion several prominent journalists, including continued thorn in the side Palavacini. These journalists were targeted due to their work with the *Anti-Reeleccionista* party that first challenged Calles in 1928 and the following election in 1930. These journalists were tapping into their activist heritage by directly attempting to influence the political election. The majority of them had originally supported during the Mexican Revolution and saw these elections as chances to put the government back in the hands of a civilian. Second, Calles and the PNR founded their own newspaper, *El Nacional* during the campaign of 1930. *El Nacional* was a throwback to periodicals that were founded prior to the crucial 1910 election that played a key role in Díaz's eventual downfall. Its sole purpose was to promote the party's interests and attack its enemies.¹ It quickly feuded with *El Universal* and *Excelsior* as it worked to win the election for Ortiz Rubio. Once the election ended it continued to spin whatever political issues that occurred in favor of the PNR. It helped Calles maintain the position of Jefe Máximo by treating him as a savior whenever an issue developed. Finally, *Excelsior* had to declare bankruptcy. Instead of going out of business, it transitioned into an employee owned cooperative. Calles played a crucial role in these negotiations, which ensured a new, positive relationship between him and the newspaper. Six years earlier, he saw *Excelsior* as an enemy and asked Obregón if they could use the army to shut it down. Now, he was its savior. These three major changes solved whatever problems the press may have caused Calles moving forward. He had

¹ José Luis Gutiérrez Espíndola, *Un Diario Para la Revolucion. El Nacional en la Historia de Mexico: Tomo I*, (Editado por El Nacional: Mexico, D.F., 1989), 8.

exiled the several difficult journalists and by 1932 he had the support of two major newspapers, one of which he had no choice because he founded it.

Despite these large-scale changes and threats of repression, Mexico's journalists retained their activist tendencies. This is best seen in the foundation of *El Nacional* and the changes at *Excelsior*. *El Nacional* was inherently activist since it was founded to support the PNR and made no claims to provide independent news information. Its first issue covered the beginning of Ortiz Rudio's campaign and described him as "vibrant," a word no one associated with the unknown politician.² This story right from the gate demonstrated to its readers the newspaper was an extension of the PNR. Similarly, *Excelsior* experienced a return to activism despite the process of repression led to the newspaper's transition into an employee owned cooperative. It was now free to shed the foundational belief in independence that it had held throughout the turbulent 1920s. It forged a new identity of being the only national newspaper operated by a union and it supported the politicians who worked for worker's rights. This return to biased coverage of news stories indicated that the early 1920s and the claims for independence by periodical owners stand out as the outliers in Mexico's history. Before and after this period, newspapers functioned as extensions of the politicians and policies they supported. Even following the Mexican Revolution, as Palavicini and Alducín claimed their newspapers were independent, they both corresponded and provided advice to Carranza. The early 1930s represented a return to this advocacy even though it had shifted its support to the PNR, the established political party of the day.

² *El Nacional*, May 27, 1929, 1.

This chapter closes with an examination of newspaper coverage of Lázaro Cárdenas' presidential campaign in 1934. This is a good endcap for this chapter because it highlights that the newspapers were more loyal to the PNR and its potential for political reforms than Calles. At the beginning of the election cycle, the periodicals focused largely on Calles and his role as kingmaker. However, throughout Cárdenas' campaign he quietly gained more attention and support from the newspapers. By the time he was sworn in as President, both had completely dropped Calles from the headlines and had switched their allegiance to Cárdenas. This support foreshadowed a new relationship between the government and newspapers but no major periodical had lost its activist spirit. It had transferred to a new avatar, one they hoped to bring an end to the revolutionary period.

Crackdown of Journalists

The previous chapter examined the uprising led by Generals Serrano and Gómez and the national media's coverage of it. It highlighted how newspapers such as *Excelsior* and *El Universal* helped spin it positively for Calles and helped him remain in power. However, outside of these publications, there was a contingent of journalists involved with their oppositional political party, *Anti-Reelectionista*. This was revealed to a national audience on October 7, 1927, when *Excelsior* reported that ex-Carranza supporter and former owner of *El Universal* Palavicini had been arrested at his home. The article described how police had raided his home under the suspicion he planned on joining the uprising led by the Generals Serrano and Gómez. The police's suspicions were validated when they found him wearing a disguise, which they believe he intended to use to escape

the city and join the General's uprising.³ Palavicini was not the only journalist associated with this uprising, for the former owner of *El Demócrata*, Vito Alessio Robles, had been arrested only a couple of days earlier. These arrests occurred because both journalists had been closely involved in the formation of Serrano and Gómez's *Antireelectionista* party. Their arrests demonstrated that there was an active group of journalists, supporters of Carranza, who continued to offer opposition to the regime.

The participation of Palavicini and Alessio Robles in an oppositional party was not surprising. Both had a long history of resisting Calles' regime publicly. Alessio Robles' most public conflict with Calles occurred during the de la Huerta Rebellion, when he had accused Luis N. Morones, of kidnapping and killing several Mexican Senators.⁴ At the time, Morones was the leader of the Partido Laborista Mexicano (PLM or Mexican Labor Party), which helped Calles secure the labor vote during the 1924 presidential election.⁵ As a reward, Calles gave Morones a cabinet position, Secretary of the Economy, after he won the election. For the next four years, Morones remained a close confidant of Calles. Alessio Robles had the courage to challenge Morones when few in Mexico had the courage to openly attack Calles' allies during the de la Huerta Rebellion. He was joined by Palavicini. He had largely been quiet through the 1920s, but many generals still remembered his anti-military rhetoric from earlier in his career and eyed him with distrust. In addition, both journalists had a long history of fighting for open elections. When Obregón announced his intentions to run for president once again, they did whatever they could to prevent his assumed victory.

³ "Flank attack on Rebel Forces Barricaded on Mount Perote Started," *Excelsior*, October 7, 1927, English Section.

⁴ Ibid., 239.

⁵ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 99.

The story of their involvement in the uprising comes from personal accounts published years after they returned to Mexico following their subsequent exile. Surprisingly, Palavicini did not attempt to distance himself from Serrano or Gómez since he so often worked to distance himself from political failures in his memoirs. However, in this instance, he proudly claimed that he was an original founder of the party. To prove this claim, he presented correspondence between him and other party members in which they hashed out their political platform.⁶ In addition, he wrote that there was much more support for Serrano and Gómez within the military than had been reported at the time. He wrote that the majority of Mexico's generals at the time saw Obregón's presidential campaign as excessive and felt ashamed. However, they wanted to preserve their high-ranking positions so very few spoke out publicly.⁷

Alessio Robles provided a similar account of his role in the opposition party. He begins his account with a story Calles asking him to operate a newspaper sponsored by the national government even though Alessio Robles had a history of working against his associates and policies.⁸ It was possible Calles saw this new periodical as a replacement for *El Demócrata* since that operation had ended in failure and he needed a new periodical to control. Alessio Robles was invited to the president's residence at Castillo de Chapultepec and Calles and Puig Casauranc, who had previously operated *El Demócrata*, asked him to oversee this new endeavor. They attempted to convince him to operate it on their behalf. Alessio Robles declined their offer and told them that the public would not trust any periodical produced by the government.

⁶ Ibid., 496-499.

⁷ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, 486.

⁸ Vito Alessio Robles, *Mis Andanzas con Nuestra Ulises*, (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas Mexico, 1938), 112.

His rejection of Calles' proposal was intended to signal his retirement from politics but he quickly returned to the political arena to help his long-time friend José Vasconcelos secure the *Antireeleccionistas*' presidential nomination. However, Vasconcelos did not want any military leaders to be part of the party so he removed himself from consideration once it became clear that Gómez and Serrano would not leave it. Despite his friend's resignation, Alessio Robles continued to work and support the party's campaign. He worked with Palavicini to broker a deal between the two generals since early days of the party's formation, it was not clear who would be its presidential candidate. Each General believed he should be the party's leader. The journalists played an integral role in the initial negotiations between the generals with the hope of creating a unified party.⁹ Neither candidate was willing to sacrifice their own personal ambitions but thanks to the journalists they agreed to campaign jointly to prevent Obregón's return to the presidency.

Their campaign was disrupted on October 1 when Calles arrested Serrano. Palavicini's significance within the party meant he was one of the first civilians warned by Gómez that a government crackdown was underway.¹⁰ The journalist initially ignored these warnings. He believed the *Antireeleccionistas* had done nothing wrong and would be safe from repression.¹¹ Three days later, he awoke to newspapers displaying the pictures of Serrano and his allies' bodies. Palavicini was stunned at the turn of events, at the start of week he had met with the generals and now they were dead. His status within the party made him and Alessio Robles key targets to arrest and secure at the start of the

⁹ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 340.

¹⁰ Ibid., 342.

¹¹ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, 486

uprising. In order to apprehend him, Palavicini recalled the government sent nine members of the Mexico City police force.¹²

Within Calles' administration, their arrests were framed as saving their lives. Officials believed it was possible they could be killed. Dr. Puig y Casauranc, supposedly spoke to Calles on their behalf and urged him to spare their lives. In the case of Alessio Robles, Calles justified his protection by saying, "If there is one person who can do what he wants against my government, without me being able to shoot him, it is Vito Alessio Robles, because one of his daughters, Carmen, has been, and I believe still is, an intimate, inseparable friend of my daughter. They love each other like sisters."¹³ This is the possible reason why Alessio Robles was arrested but released three days later. Palavicini suffered a much harsher fate. First, he was sent to a military prison. However, once he arrived there was no space for him. He had to sleep on the floor until another occupant was executed and created extra space in his room. In addition, they maintained twenty-four hour guards because middle-aged journalists were a huge threat to escape. Palavicini claimed that hundreds of journalists and associations from around the world wrote to Calles to protest his arrest and declare his innocence.¹⁴ After six days, he was released and placed on train and sent into exile. He would first visit Laredo, Texas but within a month he had moved to Havana Cuba. The next two years he spent in exile, sharing time between Cuba and Paris.

It seems like Robles' personal connection to Calles prevented him from sharing the same fate as Palavacini. In his memoir (which is more focused on Vasconcelos,

¹² Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, 503.

¹³ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 351.

¹⁴ Palavicini, *Mi Vida Revolucionaria*, 503

whom he calls Mexico's Ulysses), he did not mention his arrest or what happened afterwards so it did not leave a significant impact on him. Alessio Robles continued to work for Calles' opposition following the military uprising. He maintained his position as president of the *Anti-Reeleccionista*, party members bided their time until the next open presidential election. Vasconcelos was still living in Europe so they could not mount an effective challenge to Calles' decision to name an interim president following Obregón's assassination. Instead, the Mexican philosopher returned to Mexico in 1929 to be the *Anti-Reeleccionista* candidate in the upcoming presidential election.¹⁵

The election of 1929 and the creation of *El Nacional*

At the same time Alessio Robles and others were planning on forcing Calles out of power for good. The former president was taking steps to create a national ruling party, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR, National Revolutionary Party). Calles wanted to pull all the various revolutionary factions together under one centralized party.¹⁶ He hoped that any disagreements between factions could be handled within the party's organization and hopefully prevent future uprisings such as one that developed around Serrano and Gómez. The party held its first convention at Querétaro, which had hosted the drafting of the Constitution of 1917, symbolically linking the new party to this important Revolutionary moment in March 1929.¹⁷

The convention ended up being relatively tumultuous. Each of the various political leaders that made up Calles' coalition saw this as their opportunity to be chosen as the PRN's presidential candidate. This candidate's victory in the upcoming election

¹⁵ Alessio Robles, *Mis Andranzas*, 140.

¹⁶ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 149.

¹⁷ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 150.

was assumed, so the party was choosing the next president of Mexico. *Excelsior* provided non-biased coverage of the event despite continued fears of interference from government officials. It deployed a reporter to the convention and provided daily updates. The newspapers first headline captured the dynamics of the meeting perfectly, “Saencistas y Ortizrubistas prepare for a rough democratic fight in Querétaro.”¹⁸ The author was referring to the two factions that represented Aarón Sáenz and Pascual Ortiz Rubio. Sáenz had been a long-time adviser to Calles and served as his Secretary of Foreign Affairs. Despite his high standing within Mexican political circles, he was seen as a long-shot since he had pushed through many conservative policies when he served as the governor of Nuevo León.¹⁹ Ortiz Rubio was a relative outsider. He was an ex-revolutionary general but had been out of the country since 1923. As the conference progressed, *Excelsior* provided consistent coverage as to who was seen as leading in the nomination battle.

The excitement of the convention was interrupted on March 4, when the front page of *Excelsior* announced a new rebellion had broken out. Led by General José Gonzálo Escobar and composed of approximately 28% of the military at its height²⁰. At the time, *Excelsior* identified several different generals, Francisco R. Manzo and Jesús M. Aguirre, from Sonora and Veracruz respectively, as the rebellion’s leaders. The uprising effectively ended the Querétaro Convention and Sáenz officially announced he would renounce his candidacy because he wanted the party to present a unified front against this

¹⁸ “Saencistas y Ortizrubistas se preparan para Librar ruda Lucha democratica en Queretaro,” *Excelsior*, March 1, 1929, 1.

¹⁹ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 151.

²⁰ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 152.

new threat.²¹ This announcement was published in *Excelsior* and joined by headlines that publicized Calles return to serve as Secretary of War.²² The rebellion would only last 3 months since Calles had a spy inside its leadership feeding him information about troop movements. Eventually, the party chose a relative outsider Pascual Ortiz Rubio as its presidential candidate. He became the consensus candidate because he had served in the diplomat corps since 1921 and spent the majority of his time outside of Mexico. This meant he had no political enemies and no one could strongly object to his candidacy. In addition, he was seen as passive and therefore easily controlled. He had no powerbase of his own to support himself and would have to rely on Calles. Despite these flaws, many assumed that he would win automatically due to the power of the PNR.

The PRN significantly underestimated the resolve of Vasconcelos and Alessio Robles and their *Anti-Reelectionistas* party. They campaigned hard against the PNR throughout the summer. The highlight of their campaign was Alessio Robles' fiery speech at the *Anti-Reelectionista* convention in July 1929. In his speech he blasted Calles and the PNR, saying the Jefe Máximo had picked the most ambiguous, the least plausible, and the most unable citizen as presidential candidate. He closed by proclaiming that Ortiz Rubio had been chosen because, "having no abilities, he was perfectly equipped to obey hidden orders."²³ Two other prominent ex-journalists, Luis Cabrera and Gerzayn Ugarte who had also worked closely with Carranza ten years earlier, joined him. These journalists represented the old guard of activists that helped to topple Díaz's

²¹ "Suspende sus actividades el Sr. Lic. Aarón Saénz y se pone a las órdenes del Gobierno Federal," *Excelsior*, March 4, 1929, 1.

²² "El Sr. General Calles Ministro de la Guerra: Pidio Licencia para Atenderse El Gral. Amaro," *Excelsior*, March 4, 1929, 1.

²³ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 471.

dictatorship. Against the charismatic Vasconcelos, Ortiz Rubio looked ordinary and out of place. Vasconcelos had long been a Mexican public intellectual who while serving as the head of the National University (UNAM) had influenced the emerging urban middle-class. He had spent much of the post-Revolutionary period in exile and was seen as an outsider working against Calles.²⁴ Furthermore, Alessio Robles challenged Ortiz Rubio's service during the Mexican Revolution. He accused candidate of being a member of Huerta's forces and fighting against the Constitutionalists.²⁵ Ortiz Rubio campaigned across the country but it seemed like the *Antireeleccionistas* would finally win the presidency.

The PNR created a new publication to generate publicity for Ortiz Rubio's campaign. *El Nacional* was launched simultaneously with Ortiz Rubio's campaign on May 27, 1929. Its first editor was Basilo Vadillo. Before the Mexican Revolution, he was a teacher from Colima and Jalisco, two rural states. Following the Revolution, he served as governor of Jalisco and ambassador to Norway, Denmark, and was Mexico's first ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1928. At the PNR's first congress, he wrote the party's official documents, in particular its by-laws.²⁶ Basilo had previous newspaper experience, working as Obregón's publicist during his presidency. This made him the perfect editor to guide the newspaper through this political election.

As the party's official newspaper, *El Nacional's* articles were never intended to be unbiased. This was made clear in its first issue, when it described Ortiz Rubio as the "Popular Candidate," who would "consolidate the Revolution and bring it to the

²⁴ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elias Calles*, 154.

²⁵ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 473.

²⁶ Luis Javier Garrido, *El Partido de la Revolución Institucionalizada: La Formación del Nuevo Estado en México (1928-1945)*, (Mexico City: Siglo xxi editores, 2005), 114.

countryside.”²⁷ Its goal was to generate support Ortiz Rubio and present the party’s message to the nation. In the periodical first months, this message was that Ortiz Rubio, a man few Mexicans knew about, was a so-called “popular candidate.” Repeatedly, they used this title to describe him, in order to create the perception that a majority of voters supported him. In addition, *El Nacional* worked to develop a base that unified nation and cut the various societal differences, such as class, race and gender. The newspaper highlighted the fact that “all social classes had participated in a rally...including more two thousand women,” in their opening issue. Four days later, in its manifesto, the periodical wrote that the PNR’s political program, “contains guarantees for the interests of everyone, intellectuals, bourgeois, proletarians... Ortiz Rubio is working to garner support from all the classes.”²⁸ This sampling of articles demonstrated the consistent message *El Nacional* promoted throughout the 1929 presidential campaign. Ortiz Rubio and the PRN were a candidate and party for the whole nation to rally behind. Everyone would benefit so there was nobody had to fear they would be left behind.

In addition to promoting a message of party unity, the newspaper repeatedly attacked Vasconcelos and Alessio Robles. Over a weeklong period in June, *El Nacional* declared Ortiz Rubio’s opponents were xenophobic, had the brains of a butterfly, critical of the agrarian reforms and capitalists that did not want to help working class Mexicans.²⁹ In addition, it attacked national newspapers; primarily *El Universal* and *Excelsior* claiming that its editors were allied with the *Antireelectionistas* against the PNR. In the article that accused Vasconcelos of xenophobia, it mentioned *El Universal* as an

²⁷ *El Nacional*, May 27, 1929, 1.

²⁸ *El Nacional*, May 31, 1929, 1.

²⁹ *El Nacional*, June 6, June 10, and June 16, 1929, 1.

organization pushing his message. In an article published on July 28, it declared *Excelsior* was “downright hostile towards the Revolution and *El Universal*’s “political stance was similar to that of Vasconcelos.”³⁰ According to *El Nacional*, these newspapers threatened nation’s peace by exhorting their readers to rebel against the PNR and promised they would firmly combat any lies published by either periodical.³¹ *El Universal* came under continued fire as PNR’s periodical complained its owner Lanz-Duret had been bought by Vasconcelos. Its proof was a supposed contract signed by both men that *El Nacional* published on August 30. This contract stipulated that Lanz-Durat would use *El Universal* to promote Vasconcelos and if he won the presidency, then Lanz-Durat would receive a high ranking position in his government.³² *El Nacional* was not simply a cheerleader for Ortiz Rubio and the PNR. It attacked the party’s enemies real or imagined. This was a throwback to the activist nature of journalism prior to the Revolution. *El Nacional* was not interested in an unbiased notion of the truth but presenting propaganda to help its party win.

Despite *El Nacional*’s efforts to generate support for Ortiz Rubio, as the election approached it was not clear he would win decisively. In order to ensure victory, Calles and the PNR had to repress Vasconcelos’ supporters *Anti-Reeleccionistas* throughout the country were arrested or mysteriously vanished. Many were tortured to reveal other members of the party.³³ Vasconcelos tried to draw attention to these arrests and spoke out against it at multiple campaign stops. He exhorted his supporters to continue working in spite of the threat to their lives. In response to Vasconcelos speeches, *El Nacional* tried

³⁰ *El Nacional*, July 28, 1929, 1.

³¹ *El Nacional*, August 29, 1929, 1.

³² *El Nacional*, August 30, 1929, 1.

³³ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 487-488.

to create a counter narrative that the *Anti-Reeleccionistas* threatened the stability of the country. In an October 22 article, the newspaper declared, “antireeleccionistas could ignite a new civil war,” and in early November wrote, “Ortiz Rubio’s supporters were persecuted by blood and fire by Vasconcelos’ hooligans.”³⁴ These stories made it seem like the country was on the verge of chaos again and Vasconcelos and Alessio Robles feared the PNR would use these reports as pretext to suspend the election. However, it eventually went off as planned and Ortiz Rubio overwhelmingly won. The almost hilarious disparity in votes, Ortiz Rubio collected more than 1.5 million than Vasconcelos, demonstrated the effectiveness of the PNR’s suppression of *Anti-Reeleccionista* voters. Alessio Robles recounted how he heard protesters marching in Mexico City fighting with police and shouting that they “wanted to vote.”³⁵ One supporter declared after the election, “Democracy has been assassinated; there were no elections; the assaults prevented them.”³⁶ Outside of *El Nacional*’s biased stories, none of the other major newspapers reported on the violence leading up to the election. By ignoring it, they helped to make this election legitimate.

Vasconcelos and Alessio Robles were not willing to admit defeat. Both fled to Texas following the election. They were joined by Ugarte and hoped to stage an uprising from across the border, reminiscent of Madero in 1910. They went as far as circulating a plan of war among their supporters, which was published in smaller newspapers but none of the national periodicals. The uprising they hoped for never materialized as Calles federal forces apprehended several generals, most notably Carlos Bouquet, who might

³⁴ *El Nacional*, October 22 and November 11, 1929, 1.

³⁵ Alessio Robles, *Mis Andanzas*, 309.

³⁶ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 477.

have supported them. On December 10, Calles made their exile official and sent them a telegram explaining they would not be allowed to return to the country.³⁷ *Excelsior* provided token coverage of Vasconcelos' retreat to the U.S. On December 3, it published an Associate Press story where he claimed "he had not been defeated...95% of the countryside supported him."³⁸ However, this coverage was muted because the major story of the week was a possible strike by railroad workers. This strike threatened to cripple the Mexican economy and dominated the news for the next week.³⁹ The situation became so grave that the newspapers' writers published an editorial pushing the president to give in to the railroad workers demands.⁴⁰ These headlines helped push whatever remaining controversy surrounding Ortiz Rubio's victory to the background. This solidified his victory and ensured there would not be any uprisings in support of Vasconcelos.

Combined with Palavacini's exile, this demonstrated Calles would not allow dissident politicians to remain in Mexico. As opposed to Palavacini's exile, it is difficult to be critical of his decision in this case since they planned to violently overthrow the government. However, defeat of the *Anti-Reeleccionista* party killed any remaining belief in an independent press corps due to the number of high-ranking former journalists that supported the party. Within the periodical community, everyone knew that Calles had forced dissident journalists like Palavicini and Alessio Robles out of the country.

³⁷ Alessio Robles, *Mis Andanzas*, 330.

³⁸ "Vasconcelos se internó en los Estados Unidos," *Excelsior*, December 3, 1929, 1.

³⁹ "Hoy a las Doce Horas Estallara la Huelga," *Excelsior*, December 6, 1929, 1 and "El Frafico en Todo el Sistema Ferroviario del Mexicano fue Suspendido por La Huelga," *Excelsior*, December 7, 1929, 1. These are examples of the headlines published in *Excelsior*.

⁴⁰ "La Huelga del Ferrocarril Mexicano," December 9, 1929, *Excelsior*, 5.

Journalists throughout the country knew they faced a similar fate if their articles challenged his authority.

Jefe Máximo and Calles' continued presence in the Media

Following Ortiz Rubio's election as president Calles remained the nation's most powerful figure. One reason he was able to maintain his position was through media's consistent support of his interference in political issues. Whenever the nation faced a problem, Calles would triumphantly return to the headlines and provide comments that demonstrated he had control of the situation and the public should have no fears. Often times, the lead in for his story would be more prominent than that of the current president's. In addition, newspapers never questioned his actions as an "advisor." In several instances, Calles would appoint himself to a cabinet position. Nobody criticized these blatant power grabs and consistently framed them as positive actions for the country. These stories helped to perpetuate the notion that Calles should continue to maintain this power.

In one of *El Nacional*'s first issues, it published an article that described Calles' continued advocacy for improving the lives of campesinos despite his presidential term ending. The article detailed his travels and the promises he made to various village leaders in Mexico.⁴¹ These stories were followed by editorials that celebrated his presidency, one which concluded by saying "General Calles decided to leave the country in search of medical treatment only when he was sure that his ideas and beliefs were a fundamental part of the new political party he had founded."⁴² This demonstrated the level of sacrifice Calles brought to the presidency, since he placed his service to the

⁴¹ *El Nacional*, May 29, 1929, 1.

⁴² *El Nacional*, August 1, 1929, 1.

nation before his personal health. These articles helped to elevate and cement Calles' influential role in Mexican politics now that he was ready to hand off the leadership role to Ortiz Rubio.

Even after he supposedly stepped away from politics, *El Nacional* continued to promote him as the political savior of the country. This started almost immediately after Ortiz Rubio's presidential inauguration. Weeks after the election, *El Nacional* wrote, "Calles returned in a difficult moment...He is in place to save the Revolution...to contain the disorder and prevent anarchy."⁴³ According to *El Nacional*, Ortiz Rubio's presidency was less than two weeks old and already Mexico was collapsing into anarchy. This article firmly established that the nation could not survive with the ex-president guiding it. At issue was a supposed division within the Senate between various factions. The establishment of the PNR hoped to eliminate these divisions but they remained following Ortiz Rubio's election. *El Nacional's* reporting is the perfect set-up for Calles' triumphant return. The factions are given, nebulous names, the *los rojas* (the reds) and *los blancos* (the whites) and there were no details as to how many members each group had. The periodical reported there were approximately "30 senators who had aligned with the reds," but there were no specifics such as names or the cause of the division within the congress.⁴⁴ It was easy for the periodical for Calles to play the savior role, since the threat was vague. He only had to return to Mexico City and suddenly all the problems were solved. *El Nacional* celebrated by splashing two pictures of him across the front page.⁴⁵ These articles reinforced the notion that Calles was still the most powerful man in

⁴³ *El Nacional*, November 27, 1929, 1.

⁴⁴ *El Nacional*, December 8, 1929, 1.

⁴⁵ *El Nacional*, December 17, 1929, 1.

Mexican politics. The new president was in office for less than two months and he was already relying on Calles help.

El Nacional was not the only periodical that celebrated Calles' continued influence over the nation's politics.⁴⁶ Purportedly unbiased newspapers such as *Excelsior* repeatedly treated him as a hero whenever there was a governmental crisis. This was best seen in its coverage of two major political scandals during Ortiz Rubio's presidency. The first occurred mid-October 1931, when the nation's four most powerful Generals abruptly resigned from their cabinet positions.⁴⁷ This created a firestorm of rumors that they were planning an imminent military uprising. However, *Excelsior* helped Ortiz Rubio to maintain stability by not publishing any information about the scandal until October 15, three days after the resignations occurred, when he and Calles were ready to make a statement. In order to squash any concerns about the government's stability, the President invited Calles to return to his position as Secretary of War. Over a two-day period, Calles dominated the headlines, which never mentioned Mexico's president.⁴⁸ *Excelsior* provided coverage of Calles' speeches, which reassured the nation that he was in control of the situation. No where did the periodical mention Ortiz Rubio or how he was handling the situation. Everyone expected Calles would return and guide the President through these resignations. At no point did *Excelsior* or any other periodical discussed whether Calles' continued influence was a detriment to the long-term notion of Mexican

⁴⁶ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 155.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁸ Sampling of *Excelsior's* headlines – “Calles, Secretario de la Guerra,” *Excelsior*, October 15, 1. “Fueron Aceptadas Las Renuncias de Todos los Secreatrios de Estado y Jefes de Departamento,” *Excelsior*, October 16, 1931, 1. “Hace El Sr. Calles un Elogio del Dejerito Nacional,” *Excelsior*, October 17, 1. “Hay Optimismo acerca de las Designaciones,” *Excelsior*, October 17, 1, all these were front page stories.

Democracy. Instead *Excelsior*, like *El Nacional*, welcomed him back with open arms and saw him as a savior.

Less than a year later, periodicals turned to Calles for solutions again as the nation faced another moment of political crisis when Ortiz Rubio announced his resignation from the presidency. This came suddenly, over a three-day period at the start of September, 1932, Ortiz Rubio went from speaking before Congress to leaving his position. In the days leading up to this announcement, there was no indication in newspapers of any problems. The September 2 issue was largely focused on Germany seizing lands in Europe or the discovery that solar eclipses impact radio signals.⁴⁹ The next day the nation woke up to news that Ortiz Rubio had submitted his resignation.⁵⁰ Two days later, *Excelsior* and the nation turned to Calles for solutions to this latest political crisis. Calles returned and provided an exclusive interview to the newspaper, which provided him the title of Jefe of the Revolution just below the headline. In the interview, he outlined the procedures that the Mexican Congress used to elect a substitute president who would serve out the rest of Ortiz Rubio's term.⁵¹ Joining this article, was a story that detailed a visit between the Calles and the likely substitute president, Abelardo L. Rodríguez. The story reported that Rodríguez first action as president was to travel and meet with Calles at his home.⁵² The symbolism of the new president traveling outside of

⁴⁹ "He aquí lo que pide Alemania a las Potencia de la Tierra and Un descubrimiento de importancia sobre el Radio y los Eclipses," *Excelsior*, September 2, 1932, 1.

⁵⁰ "Formulo su Renuncia el Presidente Ortiz Rubio," *Excelsior*, September 3, 1932, 1 and it happily announced he would take a trip aboard, "P.Ortiz Rubio hara un viaje al Extranjero," *Excelsior*, September 3, 1932, 1.

⁵¹ "Augura el Gral. Calles Tranquilidad Política con el Nuevo Gobierno," *Excelsior*, September 5, 1932, 1.

⁵² "Visita del Sr. Presidente al Gral. P. Calles," *Excelsior*, September 5, 1932, 1.

Mexico City to visit with the ex-president in order to receive his approval was not lost on the periodical's readership.

El Nacional stories framed the conversation around Ortiz Rubio's abrupt departure differently from *Excelsior*. Leading up to his resignation it defended Ortiz Rubio from stories that had circulated surrounding his authority, and on August 30, wrote, "All the rumors are farfetched and intentionally circulated to hurt Ortiz Rubio's reputation, he and Calles have an unbreakable friendship and their relationship is excellent."⁵³ Five days later, this show of support evaporated after he announced his resignation. In its article following his resignation, the periodical framed it as a positive and closed its article by saying, "Fortunately when Mr. Ortiz Rubio realized he was longer in line with the tenants of the Revolution and his authority had declined due to this fact."⁵⁴ *El Nacional* did not prominently mention Calles in this story but it was clear Ortiz Rubio's departure had not caused any problems. The PNR's leadership would make sure the government would continue to function. This event was clearly the height of Calles' role as an unofficial powerbroker. He engineered the downfall of one president and elevated another who was completely loyal to him. This process went smoothly partially due to newspapers that previously designated Calles as the ultimate problem solver and openly celebrated his power by using his title of Jefe of the Revolution. If there was any confusion over who was the most powerful man in Mexico, they were dispelled by these headlines and stories that continued to treat Calles like a hero.

Transformation of Excelsior

⁵³ *El Nacional*, August 30, 1932, 1.

⁵⁴ *El Nacional*, September 5, 1932, 1.

Four years following the formation of the PNR and *El Nacional*, Calles took dramatic steps to turn *Excelsior* into an ally. Even though its original founder, Rafael Alducín had died in 1926, the periodical remained an integral part of Mexico's publishing community. However, his death initiated a period of severe economic problems, which created a revolving door of leaders as different editors (Rodrigo de Llano, José Castellot Jr., Manuel L. Barragán, Abel R. Pérez) attempted to lead it back to prosperity.⁵⁵ In 1932, the company finally found a permanent solution by becoming a worker owned cooperative. For the next forty years, *Excelsior's* employees were shareholders of the company. Company-wide decisions had to be approved by vote by all the members and its budget had to be submitted to the government on a yearly basis. Calles facilitated the creation of this new *Excelsior*, which ensured the newspaper would be supportive of the government and his successors.

The *Excelsior's* financial demise was aggravated by the brief occupation of its offices during José de León Toral's murder trial featured in Chapter 3. This hurt the periodical's reputation and it was no longer able to generate profits from advertisers due to the Mexican Senate threatening to boycott any company that supported *Excelsior*. Once the Senate dropped these threats, it was beset by another controversy when its editor, José Castellot Jr., was accused of working for Aarón Sáenz and using *Excelsior* to promote his campaign to be interim president.⁵⁶ Sáenz was a close adviser to Calles and served as his Secretary of Foreign Affairs. Despite his high standing within Mexican political circles, he was seen as a long-shot for president since he had pushed through many conservative policies when he served as the governor of Nuevo León. After Calles

⁵⁵ Burkholder, "El Periódico que Llegó," 1409.

⁵⁶ Burkholder, "El Periódico que Llegó," 1408.

tabbed Emilio Portes Gil to be president, Sáenz had no reason to continue supporting *Excelsior* and Castellot Jr., left the newspaper.⁵⁷ The periodical no longer had a political ally to help it survive the lack of sponsors. The newspaper might have been able to survive without a powerful patriarch but Mexico was beginning to feel the effects of the Great Depression. This made it much more difficult for it generate ad revenues as Mexicans began to lose their jobs.⁵⁸

In this miserable climate, Manuel Barragán was named director of the newspaper in 1930. His first mission was to patch up the relationship with the PNR and see if the newspaper could receive governmental support. Unlike previous directors, Barragán was not a journalist. His wealth came from owning a bottling plant in Monterrey, Mexico and in one of his first letters to Calles, Barragán sent him a gift of bottled water and ginger ale his company had produced. Barragán hoped Calles would help him sell these products in the capital and build a bigger bottling factory in Nuevo León.⁵⁹ This small gift indicated that unlike his predecessors Barragán wanted to work with Calles instead of fight against him. This attitude was reflected in the articles produced by *Excelsior* during this time period. Barragán explained to Calles that the newspaper would publish a series of articles on “morality.” The articles discussed how people should cooperate with authorities and educators and effectively contribute to the proper orientation of the masses and develop the nation’s prestige to develop the tourism industry.”⁶⁰ The series was designed to boost support in the Mexican government among *Excelsior*’s readers. Furthermore, Barragán

⁵⁷ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 147-148.

⁵⁸ Burkholder, “El Periódico que Llegó,” 1410.

⁵⁹ Manuel Barragán sent to the Jefe Calles two cases of water and ginger ale as a humble gift with the intention of opening a new business, June 22, 1930, Mexico City, D.F., APECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder 76: *Barragán, Manuel L.*, Inv. 526, 1.

⁶⁰ Telegram from Manuel Barragán, director general de *Excelsior* to Plutarco Elías Calles, March 14, 1930, Mexico City, D.F., APECyFT, Folder 24: Inv. 1688, 1.

proclaimed the periodical would reduce the number of stories that featured scandals, personal tragedies, suicides or other articles that fed into people's curiosity.⁶¹ This was an abrupt shift from the original program developed by *Excelsior's* founder, Alducín, whose original goal was to produce a newspaper that its readers could rely on for unbiased information. Now, Barragán was purposely reducing the amount of negative coverage, in order to help support the Calles' government.

Despite these attempts at reconciliation with the PNR, *Excelsior's* financial situation continued to worsen. At the midway point of 1931, the periodical's executive board declared to the Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje del Distrito Federal (Central Board of Conciliation and Arbitration of the Federal District) that it had lost more than 100 thousand pesos that month.⁶² The Central Board of Conciliation had been established in following the Mexican Revolution, when article 123 of the new Constitution guaranteed arbitration rights for Mexican workers. If workers had serious disputes with their employer, the Constitution created a legal process to resolve them.⁶³ *Excelsior* had gone before the board because it had attempted to break its contract with its employees and reduce their salaries 10 to 30 percent. Furthermore, it hoped to negotiate individual contracts with employees instead of collectively.⁶⁴ *Excelsior* was bankrupt and needed permission or help from the government in order to return to profitability.

The newspaper's employees were members of *La Alianza de Uniones y Sindicatos de Artes Gráficas* (The Alliance of Unions and Syndicates of Graphic Artists,

⁶¹ Ibid., 1.

⁶² Letter from Francisco Pizarro Suárez, gerente general of *Excelsior* a the Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje, June 6, 1931, Mexico, D.F., APECyFT, Folder 176, Inv. 176, leg. 1, 1.

⁶³ Juan Pablos, *Agrupaciones y burocracias sindicales en México: 1906/1938*, (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Terra Nova, 1985), 105-106.

⁶⁴ Burkholder, "El Periódico que Llegó," 1411.

AUSAG). This was a large coalition of various unions that represented members of the publishing industry.⁶⁵ It was formed in 1929 and had a strong relationship with the PNR. AUSAG completely refused to help when *Excelsior* attempted to renegotiate its contract with its work force. In a letter, the union's secretary general accused *Excelsior* of exploiting its workers with the intention of satisfying "company luxuries."⁶⁶ In addition, he mentioned that the newspaper had not paid the hospital bills of many of its employees who suffered physical accidents at work. In one instance, one member had lost his hand but had received no support from *Excelsior*.⁶⁷ The PNR was strongly pro-union so these allegations would significantly hurt *Excelsior's* ability to renegotiate its contract if brought before the labor board.

What began as a private dispute quickly moved into the public as the newspaper tried to defend itself in an article published one day after AUSAG refused to discuss the contract. The article explained that the newspaper's financial crisis was "extraordinary." It countered the union's claims that it was acting in the best interests of its employees by explaining its leadership placed their desires ahead of average employees, who would be most hurt if *Excelsior* went out of business. It concluded by saying the newspaper was not at fault for these economic problems, instead, it blamed nation's difficult economic climate.⁶⁸ *Excelsior* hoped workers would understand this fact and negotiate with the newspaper to create a sustainable future. If the periodical went out of business, then the

⁶⁵ Arnaldo Córdova, *La Clase Obrera en la Historia de México en una época de crisis (1928-1934)*, (Mexico D.F.: Primera edición, 1980), 39-40.

⁶⁶ Letter from Mario Rojas Avendaño, Secretary of General of the Alliance of the Unions and Syndicates of Graphic Artists, to the representative of *Excelsior*, June 10, 1931, Editorial Company, S.A., Mexico, D.F., APECyFT, Folder 176, Inv. 1, leg. 1, 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁸ *Excelsior* explica al público en qué consiste su agresión contra las agrupaciones de artes gráficas, *Excelsior*, June 11, 1931, 2.

workers would receive nothing.⁶⁹ This plea did not convince the union and *Excelsior's* employees went on strike from June 14 to June 24, which resulted in the resignation of the newspaper's director, Juan Durán y Casahonda.⁷⁰ By January, *Excelsior* had no choice but to declare bankruptcy and asked the government for a 400 thousand peso loan.⁷¹ This ended the experiment in independent journalism that Alducín started sixteen years earlier. Now, the periodical was reliant on the government in order to survive.

In order to escape bankruptcy and keep the newspaper independent, *Excelsior's* employees came together and argued they should form a cooperative. Each employee would own a part of the business and take part in its decision making process. From his position as Jefe Máximo, Calles played a crucial role in this transition that took place at the end of January. On January 25, Abel R. Pérez, the president of *Excelsior's* board of directors, announced that the paper could not escape its grave financial situation even with a federal loan. Facing this threat, its employees met and the idea of forming a cooperative was born. Two days later, the *Unión de Obreros de Periódicos Diarios* (Union of Daily Periodical Workers) reached out to Calles to gauge whether he would help *Excelsior's* employees save the newspaper. In a letter to Calles, its Secretary General Napoléon Camacho asked Calles to “consider the more than four hundred families that owed their livelihood to the newspaper.”⁷² Camacho closed his letter by writing that it would be unfair for them to lose their jobs due to mismanagement while

⁶⁹ June 11, 1931, “La flagrante injusticia del criterio sindicalista,” *Excelsior*, 1.

⁷⁰ Importantes cambios en la dirección general y en la gerencia de *Excelsior*, *Excelsior*, June 25, 1931, 1.

⁷¹ Burkholder, “El Periódico que Llegó,” 1412.

⁷² Telegram from Napoléon Camacho, Secretary General of the Unión de Obreros de Periódicos Diarios to Plutarco Elías Calles, January 27, 1932, Mexico D.F., FAPECyFT, Folder 24, Inv. 1688, 1.

the owners, who had not paid them fairly for the last several months, escape without punishment.⁷³

Calles made a quick decision to help keep the newspaper open and within a couple of days met with Alfonso Anaya, a union advisor for *Excelsior*, and other executives.⁷⁴ At this meeting, they worked out the details for the creation of a new *Excelsior*, one that was owned by its employees. While the executives agreed, they had to convince the union to agree. Calles was crucial at each step of the negotiation but none more than here. As a longtime supporter of unions since the beginning of his political career, he had clout necessary to guarantee the union's support. This came on February 10, when Luis Barradas, the head of the AUSAG, wrote to Calles and agreed to personally help guide the newspaper into the future and the union would "morally influence" its staff.⁷⁵ Over the next 3 months, negotiations continued over the details of the cooperatives' new set up. On April 29, the cooperative was officially founded.⁷⁶

This was major political coup for Calles. He had been presented the opportunity to transform a newspaper, which had been a constant problem for him throughout his political career into an ally. Unlike the two year debacle that was his partial ownership of *El Demócrata*, there was little threat that this situation would cause any future problems. *Excelsior's* employees essentially owed him for their jobs and if any deviant individuals wanted to cause problems, their unions, which strongly supported Calles' policies, would

⁷³ Telegram from Napoleón Camacho, Secretary General of the Unión de Obreros de Periódicos Diarios to Plutarco Elías Calles, January 27, 1932, Mexico D.F., FAPECyFT, Folder 24, Inv. 1688, 1.

⁷⁴ Héctor Minués Moreno, *Los cooperativistas: El Caso Excelsior*, (Mexico City, D.F.: Edamex. 1988), 33-34.

⁷⁵ Telegram from Luis Barradas, secretary general of the Alliance of Unions y Syndicates of the Graphic Arts, to Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles, February 10 and 17, 1932, Mexico City, D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Anexo, Fondo 03, serie 15, Folder 4: *Alianza Unions Sindicatos de Artes Gráficas*, Inv. 1688, 1-3.

⁷⁶ Minués Moreno, "Los cooperativistas," 34.

regulate them. This was revealed in two of the letters sent to him one year later from Guillermo Enríquez Simóni, Gerente de la Sociedad “Trabajadores de Excelsior” (The Manager of the Society of *Workers of Excelsior*). The first letter, provided details as to how much influence Calles had over *Excelsior*’s day-to-day operation. It largely discussed an upcoming drop in price in price of the daily newspaper to five cents.⁷⁷ Simóni explained this was necessary for it to remain competitive since the majority of other periodicals were sold at that price and only *El Universal* would remain at ten cents. The letter did not ask for permission for this new rate but it was clear Simóni wanted to keep the ex-president up to date on any major changes. It was possible this letter restored Calles’ faith that *Excelsior* would be a profitable newspaper quickly and would not turn into financial boondoggle like *El Demócrata*. Simóni closed the letter with, “We take this new opportunity to restate the sincerity of our gratitude, regard, and respect of you.”⁷⁸ This letter came early in the transition process so it was possible Simóni had been extra diligent in informing Calles about any changes at the newspaper in order to make sure it went smoothly.

A second letter sent in December from Simóni demonstrated Calles remained an important figure for its workforce approximately one year after the restructuring. He wanted Calles’ support in a dispute between the *Excelsior* and another government official. It is not clear from letter the nature of the fight but two phrases demonstrate the employees’ continued loyalty to Calles. It opened by saying, “this cooperative of 279, who know of your previous help,” and he closed with equal praise, “we make efforts to

⁷⁷ Letter from Guillermo Enríquez Simóni and others to Plutarco Elías Calles, February 23, 1933, Mexico D.F., FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder 24: *El Excelsior*, Inv. 1688, 10-11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

keep up with your goodness and generosity.”⁷⁹ With this letter, Simoní wanted to ensure Calles was aware *Excelsior*’s workers had not forgotten his help one year earlier and despite fighting with an official, they remained devoted to the ex-president.

These letters revealed a change in culture at *Excelsior*. Instead of being owned by a firebrand like Alducín, it was now owned by a union. Calles did not have to micromanage the situation because if any journalists criticized him, then the punishment would come from within the union and not the ex-president.⁸⁰ For Calles, this was much better than simply changing the owner, this was a voluntary transformation that permeated the entire periodical.⁸¹ He would not run into the previous problems of managing a newspaper.

This closed a six year period of intense repression, starting with the exile of Palavicini and ending with the bankruptcy of *Excelsior*, which saw Calles remake his relationship with the media. Previously, he had threatened to close newspapers but never followed through. Following Obregón’s death in 1928, he became the Jefe Máximo, the most powerful person in Mexican politics and there were very few checks on his power. He created a new political party so he could better control the nation’s various political factions. This was seen most clearly as he came and went from cabinet positions during

⁷⁹ Office of Guillermo Enriquez Simoní to Plutarco Elías Calles, with his answer, December 8 and 11, 1933 Mexico, D.F. and Tehuacán, Puebla, FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Folder 24: *El Excelsior*, Inv. 1688, 10-11.

⁸⁰ Arno Burkholder de la Rosa, “Forging a New Relationship with the State; the Growth and Consolidation of *Excelsior* Newspaper (1932-1968),” *Secuencia* 73 (2009): 89.

⁸¹ Good information about the operation of *Excelsior* is available from 1968 documents. Since the newspaper was cooperative it had to file information (financial, leadership votes, publishing statistics) regularly with the government. The newspaper entered a period of crisis starting in 1968, so those documents were stored and saved at the AGN. One example is, 1968, “Constituent Bases of *Excelsior*, Compañía Editorial, Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada,” Mexico D.F., Archivo General de la Nación, Dirección General de Fomento Cooperativo, Archivo de la Cooperativa *Excelsior*, cl. 58, cláusula 43, incisos 1-22.

Ortiz Rubio's presidency. The presidents that proceeded him were treated as puppets and nobody challenged his authority. This enabled him to exile troublesome journalists or close reform newspapers like *Excelsior* to better suit his needs.⁸²

Calles took his manipulation of the media to another level with the founding of *El Nacional* in 1929. *El Nacional* was a throwback to the early activist roots of Mexican newspapers as it was directly connected to the PNR and solely tasked with promoting its agenda. It covered the major stories but provided a pro-Calles spin to all its coverage. The same could be true of *Excelsior*. Over a seven-day period the periodical transformed from an independently owned business to a worker's cooperative. Calles and their union were instrumental in keeping *Excelsior* open so it was natural the newspaper would frame future stories positively him and other officials. This would not have regarded a huge change of advocacy for the average *Excelsior* employee who was a member of a union. These employees, journalists, or editors had long reaped the benefits of Calles pro-union stance for a long-time. They would have naturally supported him and his policies. This repression did not end the activist sensibility that had developed in Mexico prior to Calles time as Jefe Máximo. It largely meant a weeding out journalists who openly fought with Calles, like Palavicini, but those remaining pro-Calles periodicals maintained their political activism. They helped Calles remain on the front page of newspapers and preserve his position as Mexico's main political power broker.

Enter the Challenger: Cárdenas' Presidential Campaign

By the latter half of 1933, Calles's power had waned slightly. He did not spend as much time in Mexico City due to the death of his second wife and various painful health

⁸² Arno Burkholder de la Rosa, "Forging a New Relationship with the State; the Growth and Consolidation of *Excelsior* Newspaper (1932-1968)," *Secuencia* 73 (2009): 90-91.

ailments, which led him to travel abroad to find medical care. This led one of his closest advisers to say the Maximato appeared to be “on autopilot.”⁸³ In addition, Rodríguez and the PNR had to deal with the continued economic fallout from the Great Depression. Calles had no sweeping solutions to this problem, so it made sense for Rodríguez to bear the brunt of the negative publicity. However, the ex-president still maintained control over the party and a steady stream of visitors to his house seeking solutions. It seemed like this arraignment would continue into the next presidency as he selected his protégé Lázaro Cárdenas to be the upcoming candidate. However, Calles lost complete control of Cárdenas and on April 10, 1936, Calles was sent into exile. For the next five years, he would largely live in San Diego, California and no longer influence Mexican politics. Even though he had been acting in a reduced role, it was a stunning fall from grace for the ex-president and it signaled Cárdenas would be his own man.

Historians often trace the beginning of Cárdenas’ path to independence from Calles to his presidential campaign. Instead of treating his victory as automatic, he initiated a six-month barnstorming tour where he visited every Mexican state. This was completely unnecessary, since as the PNR and Calles’ candidate he largely ran unopposed. He used this tour to build his popularity and create a loyal political base. When looking at newspapers from this time period, you can see a distinct shift in how the media covered Cárdenas. At the beginning of the election process, newspapers deferred to Calles as they had throughout this time period. Over the campaign, Cárdenas escaped the shadow of Calles and the PNR. This culminated with his landslide victory and

⁸³ Gilbert Michael Joseph, and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Duke University Press: Durham, 2013), 120.

following his inauguration, no major newspaper mentioned Calles in any of their stories. Their celebration acted as changing of the guard. Newspapers now had switched alliances. Cárdenas was officially the new *caudillo* and the periodicals would look to him in times of crisis instead of Calles.

El Nacional started to cover the internal competition within the PNR to name Rodríguez's successor in May 1933. Its early coverage demonstrated Calles still maintained tight control over the party. On May 7, the newspaper reported that a cadre of PNR officials had traveled to Coahuila in order to discuss the nomination with General Manuel Pérez Treviño.⁸⁴ A long-time supporter of Calles and one of the original founders of the PNR, it was assumed by many he was the favorite for the presidential nomination. This story confirmed to many observers that Pérez Treviño would be Calles' choice for president. However, two days later, the Jefe Máximo reached out to an *El Nacional* reporter and said, "This story is completely false and I have not talked to anyone about the nomination."⁸⁵ A week after this interview, *El Nacional* published an editorial explaining it would have "absolute neutrality in the upcoming pre-election campaign. It would not influence its reporters, who had to create strong relationships with all the candidates."⁸⁶ It was possible Calles, or an unknown high ranking official, pressured the newspaper into adopting this neutral tone. The PNR did not want the newspaper to spread rumors about its candidate until the party had made its decision. These stories left no doubt as to who was controlling the selection process and when Calles was ready to name

⁸⁴ *El Nacional*, May 7, 1933, 1.

⁸⁵ *El Nacional*, May 10, 1933, 1.

⁸⁶ *El Nacional*, May 14, 1933, 1.

a candidate, he would release the information. He could defend this decision by arguing it allowed the party to stay unified but its larger purpose was to allow him to stay in control.

This neutral stance was scrapped two days later when Cárdenas announced his resignation from his position as Secretary of Defense and that he would enter the election on May 16. *El Nacional* threw its support behind him immediately and three days later it dedicated its front page to listing his important endorsements from labor and agrarian organizers.⁸⁷ Over the next week, the newspaper solidified its support behind Cárdenas by continually favoring him with front page coverage and burying any stories about Pérez Treviño. For instance, on June 5, it featured a Senator declaring that Cárdenas' reform program already had the full support of members of the Mexican Congress, and they would not accept any compromises or changes to it. They would pass it without hesitation.⁸⁸ A week later, Pérez Treviño realized his candidacy had very little national support, and removed himself from consideration, saying, "At the present time, the country did not advise me to run and told me that I needed to sacrifice my personal ambition for the benefit of Mexico."⁸⁹ For bowing out of the race gracefully, the former frontrunner was rewarded with the Presidency of the PNR. Once Pérez Treviño ended his candidacy, Cárdenas faced no other significant challengers in his quest to be the party's presidential candidate. *El Nacional's* coverage of the internal debate within in the PNR reflected the desires of the party's leaders. Initially, Calles was upset because it seemed like the decision process was out of his hands. He used the newspaper to publically admonish these officials and take back control of the situation. Once Calles had decided

⁸⁷ *El Nacional*, May 19, 1933, 1.

⁸⁸ *El Nacional*, June, 5, 1933, 1.

⁸⁹ *El Nacional*, June 7, 1933, 1.

on supporting Cárdenas, the newspaper quickly transitioned to supporting his candidacy. This forced Pérez Treviño to decide if he would continue without Calles' approval or step aside. In this instance, the press clearly helped to jumpstart Cárdenas' presidential run and prevented any serious challengers by not providing equal or favorable coverage.

The positive coverage of Cárdenas' campaign continued into August. This was an important month because the PNR held local meetings throughout the state. The purpose of these meetings was to gauge how well Cárdenas' message was resonating outside of Mexico City. From these meetings, Calles realized that Cárdenas had strong support among regional leaders, which confirmed his original decision to back Cárdenas. On August 1, *Excelsior* reinforced Cárdenas' position as the front-runner by publishing a speech given by him. In it, he claimed the government's land reform program would end during the next presidential term (1934-1940) because finally he would successfully redistribute enough land to justify ending it.⁹⁰ Only by elevating every farmer's quality of life could Cárdenas or the state declare the program had completed its mission. In the article, the author called Cárdenas a pre-presidential candidate, leaving room for a second candidate to come forward and challenge him.⁹¹ It is possible he made this speech in anticipation of the upcoming PNR meetings. This speech would have played well in them and demonstrated how serious he was as a presidential candidate.

Following this speech, *Excelsior* did not provide any coverage of the upcoming election until the national meeting of the PNR that began on August 20. This was a nearly week long convention held at Queretaro, Mexico. At the meeting, the party officially named Cárdenas its candidate for the upcoming election. However, Calles dominated

⁹⁰ "Tendra Fin el Agrarismo en el Periodo de 1934-40," *Excelsior*, August 1, 1933, 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

Excelsior's coverage at the event as the Jefe Máximo made several public speeches. This is best seen in the August 22 edition of the newspaper when it published Calles' speech in its entirety. It began on the front page under the headline, "Lack of new men and a Program of Government: Political Declarations of Gral. Calles."⁹² This article ran from the front page and occupied entire spread inside *Excelsior*. In the speech, Calles attempted to bridge the differences that he had seen forming between old and new members of the party. He wanted the old guard to create opportunities for the new members so the party could continue to remain relevant. This would reinvigorate the PRN's social program.

Even though the convention was ostensibly about Cárdenas, he either did not make any speeches or *Excelsior* did not publish them. The only headline dedicated to him was as the start of the convention, when his supporters marched outside. Even that headline was shared though, as one of the subheadings referred to Calles receiving a large applause when he entered.⁹³ It read like *Excelsior* still preferred Pérez Treviño as a presidential candidate. It dedicated two front-page stories to him and his assurances that he was not going to run for president. In the first article he mimicked Calles' opinion that the party had to unify for this election and he "clearly and categorically" restated he was happy with his decision.⁹⁴ The next day, the newspaper needed two articles to describe him submitting his official letter of resigning from the campaign.⁹⁵ *Excelsior's* coverage

⁹² "Faltan Hombres Nuevos y Un Programa de Gobierno," *Excelsior*, August 22, 1933, 1.

⁹³ "Protestaron por su Honor los Delegados del Distrito Federal Sostener Al Gral. Cárdenas," *Excelsior*, August 20, 1933, 1.

⁹⁴ "El Gral. Pérez Treviño dimite la Presidencia del N. Revolucionario," *Excelsior*, August 24, 1933, 1, and "Fue Aceptada la Renuncia al Gral. Pérez Treviño y resulto Electo el Cor. C. Riva Palacio," *Excelsior*, August 25, 1933, 1.

⁹⁵ "Fue Aceptada la Renuncia al Gral. Pérez Treviño y resulto electo el Cor. C. Riva Palacio," *Excelsior*, August 26, 1933, 1.

of the this convention was heavily focused on the on the old guard of the PNR, devoting a significant amount of front page space to Calles and his old Lieutenant Pérez Treviño. This indicates while Cárdenas maybe a relatively well-known within followers of the PNR, such as readers of *El Nacional*, he still did not have the same national cachet as Calles.

By December, *Excelsior's* coverage and acknowledgment of Cárdenas had changed completely. Over the first week, the PNR held a second convention. While Cárdenas was selected to be the candidate in August, it was not until three months later that he was officially announced to the nation. As opposed to the previous coverage of national politics, *Excelsior* never mentioned Calles. From the beginning of the convention, writing, "Cárdenas hailed at the opening of the Convention," the newspaper was focused entirely on the presidential candidate.⁹⁶ This continued into the more general articles that discussed the party's upcoming six-year plan (El Plan Sexenal), there was no reference to the Jefe Máximo.⁹⁷ Its support of Cárdenas culminated with a description of Cárdenas walking out on stage and accepting the nomination to chants of "¡Viva Cárdenas!, ¡Rise Cárdenas!"⁹⁸ Surprisingly, *El Nacional* was much subtle in its analysis of the convention. In its lead article it wrote, "Cárdenas declares without subterfuge to assume full responsibility of the government, if I get to preside over it."⁹⁹ The use of word subterfuge was a slight rebuke to Calles, who had ruled from the shadow so long. This change in coverage represented a larger transformation in Mexican politics. For the first time in nearly a decade, Calles was not the main story or the person the newspapers

⁹⁶ "Cárdenas Aclamado al Abrirse la Convención," *Excelsior*, December 4, 1933, 1.

⁹⁷ "Proyecto del Plan Sexenal," *Excelsior*, December 4, 1933, 3.

⁹⁸ "Fue Declarado Candidato a la Presidencia el Gral. Cárdenas," *Excelsior*, December 7, 1933, 1.

⁹⁹ *El Nacional*, December 7, 1933, 1.

looked to whenever there was a crisis. Cárdenas had already eclipsed his mentor, even if nobody realized it at the time or would say it possibly due to fear of retribution from Calles.

Excelsior and *El Nacional* provided strong coverage of Cárdenas' campaign tour through the nation. For instance, his stop in Oaxaca garnered front-page coverage in both newspapers. The event attracted high-ranking officials from across the region, including the state's governor and the president of the PNR. When he spoke to the crowd, Cárdenas emphasized his belief that his campaign needed to reflect the needs of the country and during his travels he had realized what the people needed.¹⁰⁰ After the speech, he walked amongst the crowd and interacted with his supporters. In addition, he met with the members of the Confederación de Ligas Socialistas (The Confederation of the Socialist Leagues).¹⁰¹ This was another key division between Calles and Cárdenas. Since the 1920s, Calles had stridently distanced himself socialism and had become more conservative during his Jefe Máximo phase. This and other meetings with far-leftist politicians demonstrated Cárdenas was more radical than his predecessors. Finally, the newspaper highlighted his modes of transport. He left the campaign stop via airplane, which indicated his elite status, but would travel to Acapulco on a horse, helping him further relate to the common Mexican.¹⁰² These travel arraignments summed up the Cárdenas experience perfectly. He was a political elite who had access to airplanes but did not think highly enough of himself to completely avoid using rural means of transportation.

¹⁰⁰ *El Nacional*, April 18, 1933, 1.

¹⁰¹ "Oaxaca recibe con Jubilo al Gral. Cárdenas," *Excelsior*, April 16, 1933, 1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1.

Excelsior mentioned these details, which helped him to connect to Mexicans from the whole economic spectrum.

This selection of articles demonstrated the role the media played in helping Cárdenas create separation between himself and Calles. The campaign to elect a new president started with Calles taking control of the process in the media but by the convention in December, Cárdenas had taken the reins for himself. His national tour helped to establish himself further. What started out as tentative support quickly turned into a landslide victory. The coverage of the new president indicated a larger shift in the political context of Mexico. While Cárdenas would take on many of Calles' closest advisers during his presidency, he had a reservoir of popular support that none of his predecessors possessed. This allowed Mexico to transition away from Calles and new leader. The nation had a new Jefe Máximo and the press had named him.

Journalistic Advocacy in the Time of Repression

Over a six-year period, the national landscape for newspaper publishers transformed dramatically. After Calles achieved a dictatorial level of authority following Obregón's murder, he set about remaking Mexican politics hoping to create a more stable system. The chapter opened with the formation of the PNR, a political party that would unify the disparate members of his political coalition. He hoped disagreements between groups could be handled internally without the conflicts violent as had occurred recently under with the uprising led by Serrano and Gómez. Not coincidentally, the unifying the factions would make it easier for Calles to stay in control since everyone had to report to him. As he was consolidated his rule in the political realm, he also took steps to eliminate dissident journalists and take complete control of the nation's periodicals. Many old

newspaper enemies, Palavicini, Alessio Robles, and Jesús Urueta, made themselves easy targets by joining an oppositional party and directly challenging him. This created an easy justification for forcibly exiling Palavicini while others, Alessio Robles, left semi-willingly. Following these exiles, Calles founded his own newspaper, *El Nacional* and sponsored the transformation of *Excelsior* into an employee owned cooperative. These actions remade the media landscape and ended threat national newspapers might have provided to Calles' reign.

These changes paid dividends throughout this period. Newspapers helped to perpetuate the notion that Calles was all-powerful and his continued meddling in national politics was not only acceptable but also welcomed. One only has to look at the coverage of the various the political controversies of this time period to understand how often newspapers continued to treat him as an omnipotent adviser or political savior. When many members of Ortiz Rubio's cabinet resigned, threatening the stability of the nation, in rode Calles to save the day. If there was an uprising in the countryside, Calles would come out of "retirement" to be named Secretary of Defense once again. Newspapers reacted to Ortiz Rubio's sudden resignation by checking in with Calles and making sure he was overseeing the transition to a new president. Nobody questioned what role he might have played in Ortiz Rubio's decision to literally leave the country as he left for an overseas vacation two days he left the office. Media organizations helped to propagate the myth that Calles' interference in politics was a good things and nobody challenged him and wrote how he might be detrimental to the nation's development of a democratic government.

However, this continued supplication of Calles did not mean the notion of journalistic activism had died with the exile of a few members of the old guard. After a decade of working towards their independence and attempting to create distance between themselves and the government, this period saw the return of journalists openly supporting candidates and the PNR. The best example of this is *El Nacional*, a newspaper that was founded as a propaganda tool. Its first issue was published to coincide with Ortiz Rubio's campaign and from that point on it shamelessly promoted the party's agenda, including feuding with *Excelsior* and *El Universal*. *El Nacional* tapped into the heritage of the Mexican newspapers that worked to overthrow Díaz or helped to begin the Mexican Revolution by relentlessly attacking Madero. When *Excelsior* became a cooperative it experienced a similar transition into a biased periodical. Calles had been a great friend to unions, one of which now operated it, and helped save the newspaper, ensuring the periodical's gratitude forever. While both newspapers were inherently biased, it did not mean they had lost their activist nature. Instead, it had been refocused and used to help support Calles and his policies.

This politicking could be a double edged sword since it did not belong exclusively to Calles. He could only control the message as long as he was the nation's acknowledged *caudillo* or Jefe Máximo. In 1934, the newspapers switched their support from him to a new politician, Cárdenas. This was not surprising, *El Nacional* was more loyal to the PNR than Calles and *Excelsior* and other papers were got caught up in Cárdenas' revolutionary rhetoric and national campaign. Periodicals had sustained Calles' reputation as a revolutionary reformer even though his activist days had ended approximately ten years prior. Cárdenas' rhetoric matched the activist beliefs of the

newspapers, so it was natural they would end their support of Calles and switch to a new leader. This is best seen in their coverage of the election. At the beginning, they followed Calles' lead, over time, Cárdenas received more and more attention independent of Calles. By the time he finished his campaign, Cárdenas was completely independent, even though he had to adopt members of Calles' inner circle into his cabinet because the media never mentioned the ex-Jefe Máximo in any of its coverage of the inauguration. It would take a couple more years to officially exile Calles but the newspaper articles revealed the nation had no longer supported Calles or his interference in politics.

Chapter 5 – Cárdenas and the Media, a new relationship?

Intro:

Cárdenas' presidential campaign set the stage for him to seize the reins of political power away from Calles and chart a new course for Mexican politics. Since 1928, Calles had overtly and publically controlled the country and no one had been able to challenge him. By staging his own campaign independent of the *Jefe Máximo*, Cárdenas had developed his own powerbase and an identity separate from that of Calles and the PNR. The positive coverage he received from the Mexican media was partially responsible for the creation of this identity. Repeatedly, newspapers such as *Excelsior* featured his campaign speeches and publicized his promises. This marked a distinct change in how periodicals covered Mexican politics. At the beginning of Cárdenas' campaign, Calles was still the most important figure in the party and politics in general. However, over the year, Cárdenas received more and more coverage. By the time the election occurred, he had won by a landslide, without the past forms of chicanery that the PNR had to rely on in the past.

Chapter 5 opens with Cárdenas' inauguration and how the first two years of his presidency were covered by media organizations. Their positive coverage of his policies helped him maintain control of the country despite his bold proclamations to support any workers that went on strike. Predictably, thousands of Mexicans went on strike and it seemed like every day the situation got worse. The turmoil became so serious that it seemed like Calles would rally his old allies and launch a coup against Cárdenas and the nation would collapse into another civil war. Despite these problems, the newspapers never stopped supporting Cárdenas. When he traveled to Monterrey to assist strikers, they

provided coverage of his speeches. When it seemed like Calles was planning an uprising, they publicized Cárdenas' message to 80,000 Mexicans supporters in the capital. Once Calles overstepped his bounds too many times and Cárdenas exiled him, the newspapers made sure there would be no major wave of outrage and quickly pushed the story out of the headlines. Cárdenas came to his presidency with unprecedented public support. However, his first actions as president were to throw the country into chaos. The media served as a stabilizing agent and helped him maintain his authority despite challenges from Calles.

Cárdenas understood the power of the press and wanted to ensure its continued health. One of the main issues facing publishing companies in Mexico throughout this time frame was a newsprint shortage. Since the latter part of the 1900s, one company, San Rafael, had controlled paper production in Mexico. San Rafael built the first large-scale paper mills in the country and quickly consolidated their control over the market. The lack of competition led to a shortage of newsprint and increased prices for publishing companies. Cárdenas sought to nationalize paper manufacturing in order to guarantee this resource for all Mexicans. This decision was politically motivated. Newspapers were the most effective transmitters of his speeches and he was deeply reliant on them to spread his messages. Cárdenas' plans for this newsprint subsidiary went further than providing paper. He hoped to build factories that could revitalize and modernize rural parts of the country. All sectors of the economy would benefit. This section uses government correspondence to tell the story of this department's foundation, dismantling, and uneasy future when Cárdenas' presidency ended. In the end, Cárdenas was not able to solve the paper crisis and the problem continued to hamstring the publishing industry.

The chapter concludes with an examination of a growing divide between journalists in Mexico City and the countryside. Even though he failed to solve the paper crisis, Cárdenas never faced strong criticism from the Mexico City press corps. They strongly supported him throughout his presidency. On the other hand, as his reform projects outside of Mexico City became mired in controversy or failed due to a lack of funding, regional journalists were not afraid to challenge him. They became sites of resistance against the urban invaders that challenged their traditional lifestyles. Cárdenas remained universally popular but due to these journalists, he faced increased scrutiny outside of Mexico City.

Cárdenas Takes the Reigns from Calles with the help of the Media

Since the end of the Mexican Revolution, government officials had feared journalists that they did not completely control. This conflict was foreshadowed when officials did not include any protections for journalists in the Constitution of 1917 even though newspapers played an important role in leading the uprising against Díaz and helping the Constitutionalists win the resulting civil war. Each president, Carranza, Obregón, and Calles, used different techniques in hopes of controlling the media and using it to maintain their power. This distrust continued throughout the 1920s and partially ended in the 1930s when Calles completely remade nation's press corps in the early 1930s. Following this transformation, national periodicals fully supported Calles. They played a crucial role in helping him endure as the Jefe Máximo by consistently framing him as a savior whenever there was a controversy. In addition, they never criticized his consistent meddling or the constant turnover of top officials.

Cárdenas' election in 1934, did not end Calles' reign as the *Jefe Máximo*. While he won by an overwhelming majority, he was still saddled with many of Calles' long-time allies in his cabinet.¹ Calles hoped these officials would restrain Cárdenas' radicals and allow Calles to continue controlling the government from afar. The new president had no interest in being another pawn of the ex-president and sought to achieve his independence immediately. In order to win his power struggle against Calles, Cárdenas forged a new relationship with Mexican periodicals. The begrudging respect they showed to Calles would not be enough, instead, he sought to use them to help transmit his messages to masses. He opened his presidency to them on an unprecedented level and they responded by giving him their unilateral support. This allowed Cárdenas to fully take control of the Mexican government and eventually exile Calles. This positive relationship would outlast Cárdenas' presidency and last for the next forty years.

The possible love affair between Cárdenas and the media was apparent from his first day as president. The celebration surrounding his inauguration had not been seen since Calles in 1924. Following his presidency, one president had been murdered, Obregón, two presidents had been appointed, Emilio Portes Gil and Abelardo Rodríguez, and an unknown dull candidate, Ortiz Rubio, had won the presidency. None of these presidents following Obregón had inspired the nation and it was reflected in their low-key inaugurations, which were consistently overshadowed by Calles. This was not the case for Cárdenas. He received front page coverage of a ceremony that was split over two parts. First, there was a primary service where Cárdenas recited the oath of office. This event was so exciting that *Excelsior* used contradictory words to describe it, "solemn,

¹ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 605.

enthusiastic,” and closed by calling it the “simplicity of democracy.”² His speech following this ceremony was attended by more than 50,000 spectators and he used the platform to set the tone for his administration.³ His most important line was that his administration would “support protestors,” which became the lead headline in *Excelsior* the following day.⁴ This line carried special significance since Calles had largely not sided with Mexicans who went on strike over the past six years. This was an open invitation for all workers to go on strike and *Excelsior* and other newspapers transmitted it to all corners of the nation.

In addition to these speeches and celebrations, Cárdenas reached out personally to the Mexican press corps on the day of his inauguration. While traveling between meetings, he mentioned to assembled reporters that he “wanted to extend to them an open invitation and hoped to cooperate with the press, in anticipation that they could work together to complete his entrusted mission.”⁵ This acknowledgement of journalists was a strong reversal of previous presidents who clashed with newspapers. From the beginning of his presidency, reporters were treated as a welcome presence at the Cárdenas’ residence and not seen as adversaries for the first time since the Revolution. This pulled journalists to his side and secured their support through the early part of his presidency.

This support was necessary, since workers across the country took up Cárdenas’ promise for support. Starting on January 7, workers for the El Aguila Oil Company went on strike and in the coming months were joined by Veracruz’s electricians, taxi drivers in

² “Fue solemne, entusiasta y de sencillez democrática la ceremonia del estadio,” *Excelsior*, December 1, 1934, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴ “Otorgo la Protesta el Presidente de la Republica, General Cárdenas, y Esboza su Programa de Gobierno,” *Excelsior*, December 1, 1934, 1.

⁵ “Espera ayda de la Prensa,” *Excelsior*, December 1, 1934, 1.

Mexico City and railroad workers across the country. These laborers were the first wave as it seemed like the entire country was on strike if one was reading the newspapers and when one dispute ended two more took its place. This wave of labor agitation continued throughout the entire year and the official count by the end of the year was more than 600 strikes involving 140,000 workers.⁶

Cárdenas never wavered in his support of workers but by June, dissenters within his political party started to speak out, including, Calles. For the past six months, the ex-president had been receiving medical treatment abroad and had only returned recently returned. In an article published by *El Universal*, he said, “we have to confront the wave of egoism that is sweeping the nation.” Furthermore, he disapproved the “constant strikes that have rocked the nation for the past six months. Labor organizations are showing in many cases examples of lack of gratitude. In this fashion, they constantly obstruct the good intentions and the tireless work of the president.”⁷ At best, these quotes could be read as an attempt to bridge the divide between conservative and radical factions within the PNR. However, the majority of the country saw this as a repudiation of Cárdenas and his policies. It seemed like Calles was setting himself to stage a coup as thousands of telegrams and a great many persons traveled to his residence to congratulate him.⁸ A day later, Cárdenas hit back and spoke to reporters, declaring “complete confidence in the nation’s workers and would act with all vigor to provide new rights and protections to all workers. I assume this responsibility in absolute good faith and selflessness and good faith.”⁹ This message ended with his signature and conveyed by *El Nacional* and other

⁶ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 631.

⁷ *El Universal*, June 12, 1935, 1.

⁸ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 640.

⁹ “El Jefe de la Nacion hace Energicas Declaraciones,” *El Nacional*, June 14, 1934, 1.

newspapers throughout the nation the next day. The following day, Cárdenas put his words into action and forced his entire cabinet, largely composed of Calles' lackeys to resign.¹⁰ Once again, the nation's newspapers helped smooth the transition and prevent wide-spread panic. *El Nacional* presented multiple articles explaining how these resignations would help the president achieve his goals and how much support he had received since his speech in the previous issue.¹¹ These stories created the perception that Cárdenas was in complete control and there was nothing for Mexicans to fear. They simply had to trust him. These stories also indicated Cárdenas would not be afraid to directly challenge Calles. This was the first round of their showdown and Cárdenas had not backed down.

Newspapers would play a crucial role in their round two battle that occurred six months later. On December 12, Calles made a dramatic arrival into Mexico City with his key Lieutenant Luis Morones. Unlike previous trips, Cárdenas was not waiting for him at the airport, and his absence was notable in comparison to the hardline Callista officials that were in the airport.¹² His return to Mexico set off a wave of protests in the streets and within the halls of the Senate. Over the next two days, several Callista Senators and Governors would be forcibly removed from their posts, accused of subversive activities. Following this censorship, Calles contemplated forming a new political party and openly challenge Cárdenas. He even wrote down these plans but the periodical, *El Instante*, was never published because protestors broke into the building and shutdown the operation.¹³

¹⁰ "Reorganizacion total del Gobierno de la Republica," *El Nacional*, June 15, 1934, 1.

¹¹ "Presencia de Diputados y CC. Senadores," and "Respaldo de Los Obreros y Campesinos," *El Nacional*, June 15, 1934, 1.

¹² Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 559-661.

¹³ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 1.

Soon after, Morones was arrested for storing numerous machine guns, rifles and ammunition, claiming he had the right to distribute the weaponry in order to defend Mexican institutions. Once again, it seemed like Mexico was a verge of collapse. Again, Cárdenas relied on the media to help stabilize the situation. On December 22, Cárdenas spoke to over 80,000 supporters, so many that the heart of Mexico City could not hold everyone.¹⁴ No matter, since *El Nacional* circulated 50,000 copies of his speech while he was speaking. The headline the next day read, “The Verdict from the Nation, on the Lips of Cárdenas,” demonstrated Cárdenas heard the pleas of Mexicans and continued to heed their calls for new reforms.¹⁵ The picture across the top of the newspaper showed the masses holding up banners with a picture of Cárdenas superimposed off to the side. This indelible image would reinforce the notion that he still retained popular support in the nation. Any politician thinking about sponsoring an uprising by Calles would see this image and understand that the former president could not compete with Cárdenas’ popularity.

Following this demonstration, Cárdenas traveled throughout the country offering personal support to strikers. At each stop, the press was there to capture the image of the president, the most powerful man in the nation, shaking hands and listening to complaints from average Mexican workers. One of the largest strikes he visited was located in the city of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. At the beginning of Cárdenas’ presidency, few would have predicted this city as the site of one of the most divisive strikes in the country. The northern Mexican city was home to the nation’s steel and cement industries, which had

¹⁴ “Ochenta Mil Manifestantes,” and “El Zocalo Resulto insuficiente en la Parada Proletaria,” and “Demostraciones de inquebrantables Fe y Ferrea Voluntad,” *El Nacional*, December 23, 1935 1.

¹⁵ *El Nacional*, December 23, 1935, 1.

recovered from the effects of the Great Depression sooner than most regions in the country. This was well known and through the early part of the 1930s, the region's population grew by more than 50% to 200,000.¹⁶ The majority of this growth came from migrant workers. Even American travel guides described the area positively as many saw it as a modern, thriving and providing a welcoming lifestyle to visitors. As a result of this prosperity, it was one of the first Mexican regions to build nightclubs and modern movie theaters.¹⁷

The region's prosperity was best seen through articles published in the English language newspaper the Tampico Tribune. In the early 1930s, seemingly every story featured a large-scale infrastructure project or businesses looking for laborers. For instance, the front page of the March 7, 1931 edition presented articles on the construction of a trans-state highway, a new sugar refinery, a farmer cooperative and notice for 500 workers.¹⁸ These types of positive stories were repeated on a daily basis in the newspaper and stood in stark contrast to the negative news regarding the economy throughout Mexico.

As the region experienced prosperity, workers clamored for pay raises or back pay that had been cut during the recession. At the same time, the new workers had no reason to trust the long-standing Steel Workers Union, which had represented the area since the Mexican Revolution. Therefore, on the eve of Cárdenas' election, the two

¹⁶ Secretaría de la Economía, *Sexto Censo de Población, 1940: Nuevo León*, (Mexico City, 1943), 37.

¹⁷ Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey, Workers, Paternalism, and Revolution in Mexico, 1890-1950*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 168.

¹⁸ "Tampico-Villa Juarez Highway soon to be opened may be Graveled by National Highway Commission General Calles says," "Eight Million Peso Sugar Refinery at El Mante Will be Inaugurated March 14 with Appropriate Ceremonies," and "Farm Cooperative Society Started in Villa Juarez," and "San Pedro has Contract to Supply 500 Men to work in El Mante Canfields," *The Tampico Tribune*, March 7, 1931, 1.

possible stabilizing agents, management and the union, had lost control of the workforce.¹⁹ The conflict continued to escalate as the president emboldened laborers with his first speeches that revealed his general support for their right to strike. Tensions continued to rise over two years and reached a breaking point on February 1, 1936 when workers went on strike and closed down the factory. This strike received national coverage, *Excelsior*, ran a front page story declaring, “Intense Agitation and Alarm in Monterrey; Disturbances Imminent.”²⁰ National fear over this strike increased through the week as *Excelsior* and the local newspaper *El Heraldo* wrote articles framing socialists for the violence that had occurred between workers and management.²¹

As the story garnered national press, there was pressure for Cárdenas to act and find a solution. He responded and personally traveled to the region on February 7. Over a week, he personally participated in the negotiations between the sides. To do so, Cárdenas had commandeered the state’s capital building and issued daily updates that were circulated in the press.²² One article in *Excelsior* noted his calming presence, since over a four day period the streets had been quiet and there was no longer any violence between the two factions.²³ The trip was akin to Cárdenas’ campaign stops as he met with everyday workers and heard their complaints. This was his best strength and played well in the newspapers as *El Nacional* and *Excelsior* provided front-page headlines of him meeting with protestors. This maintained the image of Cárdenas as the caring everyone, who was not afraid to mix with working class citizens. The nation could continue to trust

¹⁹ Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*, 185.

²⁰ *Excelsior*, February 1, 1936, 1.

²¹ *Excelsior* February 5, 1936, 1, and *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*, February 6, 1936 1.

²² “Oíra a Ambas Partes el Sr. Gral. Cárdenas,” *Excelsior*, February 8, 1936, 1.

²³ “El Sr. Presidente fue a Monterrey para Darse Cuenta de la Situación,” *Excelsior*, February 8, 1936, 1.

him, since he was not frightened to leave the National Palace and visit with them.²⁴

Unlike other politicians, it seemed like he listened and recognized their problems.²⁵ These moments were cataloged and transmitted to rest of the nation by the press corps following Cárdenas. These moments provided free propaganda to the president and helped him keep control of the situation.

At these stops, Cárdenas wanted to reassure the whole nation, not just workers that might be contemplating going on strike. A reoccurring theme in all his speeches in Monterrey was the subject of “communism” and what role it played in the current labor strife the country was experiencing. Many Mexicans were still distrustful of this political movement, possibly dating back to Calles or feared intervention from the US. In his first speech when he landed at Monterrey, Cárdenas declared that, “There is no communism in Mexico!”²⁶ These words were emphasized by the subheading on the first page. This declaration was reinforced the next day as Cárdenas repeated the same message.²⁷ He had to reiterate it because fights that had broken out between workers in the city during the previous day. Observers blamed these fights on communists within the union that hoped to exacerbate the situation to their benefit since they hoped to lead a more violent overthrow of the system. Based on Cárdenas’ speech, *Excelsior* promoted a different message, which placed responsibility on workers simply fighting against one another. It emphasized that the incident was localized to this particular strike and there was no need

²⁴ “A Junta Patronal de Monterrey Expuso sus Quejas al Presidente,” *Excelsior*, February 12, 1936, 1.

²⁵ “Plática del Presidente con los Patrones de Monterrey,” *El Nacional*, February 12, 1936, 1.

²⁶ “El Sr. Presidente fue a Monterrey para Darse Cuenta de la Situación,” *Excelsior*, February 8, 1936, 1.

²⁷ “Declara el Presidente que no Hay en Monterrey Agitación Comunista,” *Excelsior*, February 8, 1936, 1.

for the entire country to be concerned about a socialist uprising.²⁸ Cárdenas masterfully used this trip to speak to Mexicans on the local and national levels. To indicate his support for local workers, visited with them and heard their complaints. His repeated reference to communism intended to calm the fears of the larger nation. His message was that the nation was not threatened by outside forces. Mexicans would solve these conflicts internally, and they did not have to fear outside agitators to escalate an already precarious situation.

These stories established Cárdenas' authority as the most powerful man in Mexican politics over a two-year period. The nation's newspapers helped to create the perception that Cárdenas was a man of action by publicizing all of his trips around the country. This perception and political capital would be necessary when he exiled Calles in April of 1936. Cárdenas had previously neutralized two previous attempts by Calles to intervene in the nation's politics. Each time, Cárdenas decided to target and marginalize Calles' supporters without explicitly challenging his previous mentor. However, when citizens of the capital woke up to *Excelsior's* headline on April 7, "Dreadful Catastrophe in the Mexican Railroad," and discovered that the night before a train traveling from Veracruz to Mexico City had been bombed.²⁹ The first reports indicated that several high-ranking officials had been on the train. This event shocked the capital since much of the violence from the strikes had occurred outside of the city. Initially, *El Nacional* was vague in its accusations, saying the perpetrators were a group "who has an interest to provoke a national unease to satisfy their spurious personal appetites."³⁰ The next day, its

1. ²⁸ "Lo ocurrido es Solo un Conflicto Obrero como Caulquiera Otro," *Excelsior*, February 9, 1936,

²⁹ "Espantosa Hecatombe en El Ferrocarril Mexicano," *Excelsior*, April 7, 1936, 1.

³⁰ *El Nacional*, April 8, 1936, 1.

editor was ready to make a bolder accusation, declaring “these cowardly attacks to the tranquility of the country and the honest policy of this administration come from people displaced from the government.”³¹ This was a clear attack on Calles and his followers that no longer had any power in the current political climate. This is a relatively stunning accusation from a newspaper that Calles had funded in order to help maintain his hold over the country. It indicated how far public sentiment had turned against him that his own political party was blaming him for this attack.

Before these insinuations were published, Cárdenas had already placed Calles and his compatriots, Morones, Luis L. León (original editor of *El Nacional*) and Melchor Ortega under guard. The next day, they were placed on a plane and transported to Texas.³² Once they landed, Calles told reporters that he would never return to Mexico. He would largely spend the next six years living in San Diego before his exile was ended by Cárdenas’ successor, Avila Camacho in 1941.³³ *Excelsior* devoted its entire front page to this momentous event and helped to make sure there would not be any serious backlash against Cárdenas. Outside of the main headline, two stories about the Senate’s reaction helped shape the narrative around this decision. Both articles, “Senators Demand the Demotion of Calles for his Traitorous Actions to the Republic,” and “Messages of Congratulations to the President Cárdenas for his Final Decision,” demonstrated that the majority of the nation’s politicians supported the banishment of Calles.³⁴ Furthermore, all the national papers carried Cárdenas’ speech. It highlighted the notion that unity was the

³¹ *El Nacional*, April 9, 1936, 1.

³² Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 674-679.

³³ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 192.

³⁴ *Excelsior*, April 11, 1936, 1.

most important factor in advancing the country's goals.³⁵ By exiling Calles, he revealed would not let anyone, regardless of their previous / current fame, disrupt his program.

In addition, the press helped by quickly moving this story off the front pages. Now, this was relatively easy, Calles and his friends did not make a scene once they landed in the US but the fact that only two days later this was no longer a story implied newspapers purposely buried it. Any further reporting was limited to the next day, for instance, *Excelsior* provided new details as to Calles' trip, a reporter interviewed the colonel that oversaw the Calles flight. He described Calles as "quiet" during the flight.³⁶ In addition, the Senate continued to punish the ex-president, stripping him of his military titles.³⁷ It concluded its coverage by explaining that many of Calles supporters had renounced their old leader. These stories reassured everyone that Cárdenas was in complete control of the country and nobody challenged his authority to exile his former mentor. By April 13th, Calles was no longer mentioned on the front page. The news-cycle had returned to more pressing issues such as fears over communism and various other issues.³⁸ It was as if the nation had already forgotten the former Jefe Máximo. Cárdenas partially owed this fast turnaround to his positive relationship with the nation's newspapers. They minimized Calles' exile by quickly removing his name from the front page. Instead of weakening Cárdenas' hold on the populous, it strengthened it because he was seen as benevolent. His predecessors might have killed Calles but Cárdenas had shown mercy. The positive press ensured the ex-president's shadow no longer lingered

³⁵ "Por Motivos de Salud Publica Salio del Pais P. Elías Calles," *El Nacional*, April 11, 1936, 1.

³⁶ "Calles Taciturno Durante El Vuelo para Brownsville," *Excelsior*, April 12, 1936, 1.

³⁷ "Mañana se Inician los tramites Legales para Dar de Baja al General Calles en El Escalafon del Ejercito," *Excelsior*, April 12, 1936, 1.

³⁸ "Es imposible establecer El Comunismo en el País," and Se Sostendrá El Programa de la Unificación Obrera," *Excelsior*, April 13, 1936, 1.

over the nation and allowed Cárdenas to continue to move forward with his political program.³⁹

This examination of newspaper coverage through the first two years of Cárdenas' presidency highlights the various conflicts he had to navigate. To be fair, he invited much of this turmoil by encouraging Mexican workers to strike from the moment he was sworn into office and continued to support them even as it seemed like the country was going to collapse. This chaos was not dissimilar to what Madero faced once he displaced Díaz at the onset of the Mexican Revolution. He faced pressure to make immediate, radical reforms and he could not keep his support unified. His coalition broke apart and eventually he was killed as conservative forces presented the image that the nation was falling apart. Cárdenas avoided this same fate partially due to his allies in the media. They served two functions. First, they allowed Cárdenas to control his message. They publicized his declarations and presented him personally visiting regions with labor conflict. No one could excuse Cárdenas of not working hard enough to help bring the situation under control or that the situation was even out of control since they president was on top of it. Second, they presented a unified front against conservative forces. Whenever Calles spoke, they were quick to denounce and elevate Cárdenas' response. This prevented the opposition from gaining any traction in the country. Conservatives were consistently marginalized and never seen as a viable option to over throw Cárdenas. From the beginning of this presidency, Cárdenas sought to forge a new relationship with the press and it paid off handsomely as he never faced a serious threat despite the nearly constant turmoil.

³⁹ Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles*, 182-184.

PIPSA and the Belief Paper should be a Natural Resource

From the beginning of Cárdenas' presidency, he realized the power the nation's newspapers to help shape public opinion. His acknowledgement of reporters during his inauguration signaled his hope to create a positive relationship where they would no longer fear repression from the government. Through the first two years of his presidency, this worked out splendidly as newspapers consistently supported him even as the country faced a continual labor unrest. In theory, this meant his propaganda efforts had been exported to the newspapers and he did not have to worry about it. However, there was an underlying weakness to this strategy: the publishing industry had a nationwide paper shortage. This shortage was due to the newsprint industry was controlled by one company, the San Rafael Paper Company, which for the past thirty years had maintained a monopoly over its production. This scarcity threatened to cripple the newspaper industry and in addition several of Cárdenas' education reforms. He hoped to flood the nation with educational materials that would inform the population on new advances of hygiene, technology and medicine. The lack of newsprint was hamstringing his ability to remake the Mexican education system.

Few Mexicans were aware that San Rafael's paper mills could not keep up with the nation's demand for newsprint and publishing materials. This raised the price of this resources and prevented many publishing companies from earning a profit. In order to break this monopoly, Cárdenas embarked on an ambitious effort to nationalize newsprint production. His administration treated newsprint as if it was a natural resource and sought to guarantee that all citizens could have access to it. This effort was not out of line of Cárdenas' larger goals as president. By the end of his presidency, he had more famously

nationalized other resources such as oil, land, and labor rights. These efforts serve as the bedrock of his legacy, as the oil and newsprint industries remain nationalized today.

In order to ensure enough cheap newsprint was produced every year, he funded the *Productora e Importado de Papel Sociedad Anonmina* (PIPSA). PIPSA originally had a two-pronged mission statement. First, the company would purchase newsprint in bulk from international paper mills with the goal of reselling it to newspapers and other publishing houses. No companies in Mexico had the necessary capital reserves to buy in bulk and pay the shipping fees, so this was only an option for the national government. This would provide immediate relief for the publishing industry and allow Cárdenas to move forward with his education reform program. The importation of paper was only meant to be a temporary stopgap. PIPSA second goal was to sponsor the construction of new paper mills in Mexico. This would make the nation self-sufficient regarding its newsprint production. This would guarantee every citizen access to this resource. The general implementation of PIPSA was not limited to the notion of newsprint and its availability. Cárdenas's administration envisioned vast industrial parks that would transform certain regions into high tech manufacturing centers. Money would flow into university programs dedicated to the science of newsprint, from the development of new paper pulps to new manufacturing technologies. Cárdenas treated PIPSA just as if it was a land reform program or labor union, he wanted to completely remake the system and in doing so, transform the lives of Mexicans for the better.

Paper Production in Mexico before Cárdenas' election

Prior to 1890, several smaller firms had controlled the paper market.⁴⁰ These businesses changed hands often since there was not enough demand for paper products to produce a sustainable profit. In addition, their production was often deemed unreliable and considered low quality.⁴¹ In 1890, The Spanish firm Ahedo y Compañía converted an iron foundry to create the first large-scale Mexican paper mill. Later, the company was renamed to Compañía de las Fábricas de San Rafael y Anexas when one member of the partnership left the company in 1892. The San Rafael factory was much larger than its competitors. Previously, the twelve largest factories combined produced one million pesos worth of product. In comparison, when San Rafael became a publically traded company, its initial stock was valued at five million pesos, nearly five times the value of its entire competition. The reason for its success was its modern equipment. The factory was powered by 15 Swiss made water turbines and was capable of producing 12 tons of paper every day. From this position of strength, San Rafael's owners worked quickly to establish a monopoly over the market. They bought their competitors' mills throughout the country and by 1905 only faced competition from a couple of minor firms. Despite the fact San Rafael was a relatively young company it only took fifteen years for it to completely control the market.

To protect its monopoly, the company attempted to integrate vertically and control all the ancillary supply lines related to the paper industry. They bought two haciendas that contained large forests that spread into the local states of Puebla, the Federal District and Morelos. In addition to the forests, they used this vast track of land to

⁴⁰ Laura Espejel López, *San Rafael: Un pueblo y una empresa, Imágenes de su historia en el proceso de trabajo, 1890-1940*, (Centro de Historico: Mexico City: 1990), 33.

⁴¹ Stephen Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890-1940*, (Stanford University Press: Redwood City, CA, 1995), 96.

construct hydroelectric dams so they did not need to rely on other power companies for energy. To complete their control over the market, the owners acquired a considerable stake in the region's railroad company, San Rafael and Atlixco.⁴² They now had control over all stages of the paper production and able to prevent any challengers from usurping their monopoly. In addition, the lack of a competitive stock market helped San Rafael and other Mexican monopolies stay in power. There was no avenue for competitors to raise the necessary capital to challenge an entrenched company like San Rafael. One area where the company faced competition from international manufactures were higher value product lines. It was not worth it for these companies to compete with San Rafael on cheap bulk products since they had to pay for international shipping. Luxury goods could demand a high enough price to justify European companies making these products.⁴³

The difficulty in acquiring newsprint for periodicals was an issue prior to the Mexican Revolution. Newspapers had publicized this problem even before the sharp increase in newspapers the country experienced during the 1912 presidential cycle. On January 4, 1910, *El Correo* of Chihuahua, published an internal letter from its professional group, *Prensa Asociada de Los Estados* (Associated Press of the States). The Associated Press of the States was a group of newspapers that shared the same political ideology and they worked together to ensure each members success. They shared a similar political ideology and promoted the General Reyes, one of Díaz's close allies, as a presidential candidate. Newspapers could be members of multiple associations and *El Correo* was also a member the *Prensa Catholica Nacional* (National Catholic Press).

⁴² Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment*, p 98.

⁴³ Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment*, p 99.

The letter opened by saying the association recognized the difficulty in acquiring newsprint was the most serious challenge facing periodicals in Mexico. To solve it, the group had negotiated a new arraignment that would increase newsprint availability and usher in a “new era for the association’s member periodicals.”⁴⁴ This increase was a result of directly negotiating with the head of San Rafael, José de la Macorra. The de la Macorra family had owned and operated the factory since it solidified its monopoly twenty years prior.⁴⁵ The letter explained that he had explained to the Association how the company’s manufacturing plants were currently undergoing renovations. As the result, they would soon be able to produce much more newsprint and ending the current shortage. The Association believed this would lower the price and help more periodicals turn a profit.⁴⁶

The Mexican Revolution did not help this problem and in 1915 a second major periodical openly discussed the newsprint crisis. *El Dictamen*, the largest newspaper in Veracruz, mentioned the problem in its February 11 edition. It was a small notice but it mentioned the same issues from the *El Correo* article – newspapers could not find enough newsprint and this was forcing them to raise prices.⁴⁷ In this instance, *El Dictamen* had to raise its price 50 cents in order to reflect the high cost. This article highlighted that this problem was not limited to publishing houses. General businesses, such as grocery stores, bakeries and butcher shops, could not advertise their products

⁴⁴ “Prensa Asociada de Los Estados: Carta Circular,” *El Correo*, January 4, 1910, 1.

⁴⁵ Laura Espejel López, “Luces y sombras de un Proyecto empresarial la Compañía Papelera de San Rafael y Anexas,” in *Los Inmigrantes en el Mundo de Los Negocios Siglos XIX y XX*, edited by Rosa María Meyer Cosío, (Plaza y Valdés: Conaculta-INAH, 2003), 146.

⁴⁶ “Prensa Asociada de Los Estados: Carta Circular,” *El Correo*, January 4, 1910, 1.

⁴⁷ “La Crisis del Papel,” *El Dictamen*, February 11, 1938, 4.

because they could not afford the necessary paper supplies.⁴⁸ The notice did not provide any solutions or in depth analysis of the problem, but it demonstrated the Mexican Revolution had only exacerbated the situation. *El Dictamen* was a major periodical and if it was having trouble, then much smaller organizations would not be able to survive.

The Mexican Revolution and its aftermath largely did not impact San Rafael's monopoly on newsprint. According to government data, in 1929, the company still controlled 83 percent of the market.⁴⁹ This was reflective of the larger Mexican economy as many other monopolies that existed prior to the revolution continued to thrive after the war. San Rafael did not evolve or grow the company prior to Cárdenas' presidency since it had not faced any serious competition.

The Creation of PIPSA

As previously discussed, Cárdenas was focused on developing a new relationship between the press and the government. If he had any doubts as to the media's importance, the first two years of his presidency would have eliminated them as he repeatedly relied on national newspapers such as *Excelsior* to publicize his message. Therefore, it came as no surprise that he attempted to return the favor and make life easier for newspapers to operate with the creation of PIPSA. This government led subsidy would relieve newspapers of one of their greatest problems, the lack of newsprint and make their connection to Cárdenas' government even stronger.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁹ Stephen Haber et al., *The Politics of Property Rights: Political Instability, Credible Commitments and Economic Growth in Mexico, 1876-1929*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 175.

Cárdenas started the development of a government operated paper corporation in January, 1936. It is not clear how long this idea germinated but it is possible Cárdenas realized the importance of newspapers after their role in diffusing Calles' attempted coup a few weeks prior. However, it is reasonable to assume, this was priority for the upcoming year since the president received memos right after the start of the New Year. One such memo was sent to Luis I. Rodríguez, Secretary of the Interior, which discussed possible solutions about solving the newsprint shortage. It argued it was necessary for the government to fund this company, since it would help the nation's economy and support the party's political agenda.⁵⁰ The report explained how the price of paper on the international market was currently low but publishing companies could not afford the transportation costs. Especially since many companies still viewed Mexico as an unstable country and charged extra.⁵¹ In addition, any money spent to purchase paper from an international meant this money could no longer be given to Mexican workers. The report argued it was better for this money to remain within the country and spent to improve the nation's ability to be self-sufficient. Finally, it acknowledged that the administration was reliant on newspapers in order to spread its message. Any shortage hampered the president's ability to discuss his plans with the nation.⁵² This report wholeheartedly supported the notion the government to fund and build its own paper mill since it would benefit Cárdenas in multiple ways.

⁵⁰ "Luis Chico Goerne to Sr. Ing. Luis I. Rodríguez (Secretario Particular del Presidente de la Republica), Memorandum: *Fabricación y venta de papel de periódico*," January 8, 1936, AGN, Ramo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, p. 279-280.

⁵¹ Ibid., 279.

⁵² Ibid., 280.

Luis Chico Goerne, the man who commissioned this study was a relatively important public intellectual. He was a lawyer but when he wrote this letter he was serving as President of UNAM.⁵³ In the cover letter, which was included with the report he wrote, “we should not only conserve but strengthen and expand the responsibilities of PIPSA, since it puts in the power of the State the control of an article of primary political necessity, benefiting at the same time thousands of workers, benefits our newspaper companies, and establishes an exemplary precedent against immoderate corporate profits.”⁵⁴ This argument drew on and expanded on the protections granted by Article 27 of the Constitution, which declared all natural resources were the property of the Mexican state. The official reasoned paper was an essential resource and needed to be protected by the government. By forming this company, the government would be establishing an important precedent that it would treat manufactured goods in a similar manner to natural resources. If Cárdenas deemed any product an essential to the nation, then he had the power to nationalize it. Goerne wanted to make sure all corporations, local and foreign, that the state prioritized the well-being of its citizens before their profits.⁵⁵

Cárdenas moved quickly to execute the construction of a government owned manufacturing plant. Within a month of receiving this memo that outlined the benefits of PIPSA, he started negotiations with officials of the state of Morelos to purchase land for a future paper mill. Located south of Mexico City, the location was close enough to capital to supply national newspapers with their needed newsprint. A telegram, sent on January 29, from the region’s officials informed Cárdenas that it would cost five million pesos to

⁵³ Gerad J. de Groot, *Student Protest: The Sixties and After*, (Routledge: New York, 1998), 134.

⁵⁴ Letter from Luis Chico Goerne to Sr. Ing. Luis I. Rodríguez (Secretario Particular del Presidente de la Republica), January 8, 1936, AGN, Fondo, LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, p. 278.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

buy the land and build a factory to compete against the San Rafael Paper Company.⁵⁶ In a follow-up message, a Cárdenas official acknowledged receipt of their message and told the Morelos officials that their proposal was being given strong consideration. This indicated that Morelos was not the only option for the factory and the government was looking at other locations.⁵⁷ By July, it was revealed that the government had received a proposal from Michoacán.⁵⁸ It seemed like the entire nation was aware Cárdenas wanted to build these factories and offered their home state as an option.

A second report published by officials on February 4 demonstrated the administration's long-term commitment to investing in remaking the nation's newsprint supply. This was a longer and more comprehensive report internally generated by PIPSA and outlined the company's ambitious plans.⁵⁹ It touched on every aspect of the business from the purchasing of newsprint, how it was distributed and possibly adding cardboard to the list of products it sold.⁶⁰ However the most ambitious part came at the end where it detailed the future of the company. Its current director, G. Espinosa Mireles, wanted to make Mexican completely self-sufficient with its paper production.⁶¹ To complete this goal, he believed the national government would have to do more than construct a few new factories. Mireles described an ambitious plan in which Mexico would completely

⁵⁶ Telegram from Deputies Adrian Varela, Carlos Lavin and José Sayavedra Ruíz to President Lázaro Cárdenas, January 29, 1936, AGN, Fondo, LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, p. 277.

⁵⁷ Letter from Luis I. Rodríguez to Deputies Adrian Varela, Carlos Lavin and José Sayavedra Ruíz, February 15, 1936, AGN, Fondo, LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, p. 276.

⁵⁸ Letter from Deputy José Solórzano to President Lázaro Cárdenas, July 7, 1936, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, 250-251.

⁵⁹ Letter from G. Espinosa Mireles to Lázaro Cárdenas, February 4, 1936, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 237.1 / 287, 252-266.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 255-263.

⁶¹ Francisco Naranjo, *Diccionario Biográfico Revolucionario*, (Mexico, D.F.: Imprenta Editorial "Cosmos" edición, 1935).

reinvent its entire paper manufacturing process.⁶² This started by sending scientists out into Mexican forests to test which trees produced different styles of pulp and paper. In addition, he wanted to build a large-scale manufacturing center somewhere in Southern Mexico. This project would fit into Cárdenas' larger plan of modernizing the regions infrastructure. These plants and other improvements would benefit the region beyond paper production. Finally, the government would develop a new program at the *Instituto Politécnico Nacional* designed to prepare students for a career manufacturing paper. In order for this project to be successful, the nation needed a staff of homegrown engineers to understand and advance the science behind paper production.⁶³ The plan hoped to provide benefits to all aspects of Mexican society. From the nation's forests, to the creation of new factories, new manufacturing techniques, education programs and infrastructure improvements, the lives of millions of Mexicans could be touched and transformed by PIPSA.

PIPSA's Inability to Solve the Paper Problem

However, the program quickly descended into controversy it was unable to fulfill these lofty goals. Almost immediately there were complaints against PIPSA and its distribution practices despite the good intentions of its supporters. On May 20, 1937 the director of *El Hombre Libre*, Diego Arenas Guzmán, sent telegram to Cárdenas complaining that PIPSA had cut off paper deliveries to his periodical. In the message, he explained *El Hombre Libre* had always paid for their newsprint in a timely manner and

⁶² Letter from G. Espinosa Mireles to Lázaro Cárdenas, February 4, 1936, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 237.1 / 287, 264.

⁶³ Ibid., 264-266.

he did not understand why his shipment had been canceled.⁶⁴ This telegram revealed one of the main reasons why newspapers both supported and feared PIPSA. They needed access to cheap newsprint but their reliance on the government could be used against them. *El Hombre Libre* was one of the few conservative newspapers operating in Mexico City at this time so it made sense politically for PIPSA to revoke its access to the program.⁶⁵ Officials did not want to be providing newsprint to their enemies. Guzman correctly pointed out in his telegram that Cárdenas of hypocrisy since he publically expelled right to free speech while privately attempting to close down newspapers.⁶⁶ In order for PIPSA to achieve its full potential, the government had to make it clear that everyone would have access to this resource. If it restricted it to only those that supported fully supported Cárdenas, than publishers would not trust the program and never fully accept it.

The complaints Guzmán lodged against PIPSA remained relatively private. The first sign to the general public there was a conflict between journalists and PIPSA was an editorial published in *Excelsior* on January 25th 1938. Under the headline, “Again the Paper Problem,” the editorial explained how newspapers still faced a newsprint shortage despite the formation of PIPSA. The editor claimed this was a grave crisis and the salaries and benefits hundreds of thousands of workers within the industry were threatened.⁶⁷ He declared the situation “absurd” and believed PIPSA could not complete

⁶⁴ Telegram from Diego Arena Guzmán to President Lázaro Cárdenas, May 20, 1937, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 237.1 / 287, 239.

⁶⁵ John W. Sherman, *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929-1940*, (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 1997), 94.

⁶⁶ Telegram from Diego Arena Guzmán to President Lázaro Cárdenas, May 20, 1937, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 237.1 / 287, p. 240.

⁶⁷ “Otra Vez El Problema Papelero,” *Excelsior*, January 28, 1938, 5.

due to interference from other government agencies.⁶⁸ According to the editorial, Mexico's Secretary of the Economy, unnamed in the article, had restricted the company from importing only certain luxury paper products in contrast to PIPSA's original mandate. This official hoped to protect the nation's paper mills from increased foreign competition. The editorial believed he had misunderstood the situation, San Rafael and other companies were currently producing at maximum capacity but still falling short. The paper mills would not collapse if the government limited the importation of paper to only cover the gap, which would help protect the entire publishing industry.⁶⁹ This editorial indicated that newspapers were no longer content to wait for solutions. They were going to take their fight against the San Rafael Paper monopoly public.

Excelsior continued to put pressure on the government to increase the flow of international newsprint into Mexico. It wrote several editorials following this first one and continued through the month of February denouncing San Rafael and other paper companies that controlled the nation's paper supply. One example was titled the "The Monopoly Hydra" and detailed how much control the paper lobbyists held in Mexican politics. It identified one group, the National Union of Paper and Cardboard Factories, which largely controlled the market and prevented any competitors to exist.⁷⁰ The newspaper accused this group of raising the price newsprint and other paper products for publishing companies, which forced them to charge more for their products. The editorial painted a picture of everyday Mexicans, not just those that worked in the publishing industry, were suffering due to this monopoly.⁷¹ Again, *Excelsior* placed the blame for

⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁰ "La Hidra Monopolística," *Excelsior*, February 3, 1938, 5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 5.

the situation on the Secretary of the Economy for placing the interests of these factory owners before the general needs of the nation. The editorial comes close to criticizing the beloved president by telling Cárdenas that his cultural programs are in danger if he does not continue the fight against the paper monopoly. If these programs fail, then his presidency would not be able to achieve his goal of transforming the countryside.⁷² With this editorial, *Excelsior* demonstrated it would not back down from a fight with Mexico's paper monopoly and was not afraid to call out Cárdenas in the process.

Pressure from the newspaper industry partially led to full-scale Senate investigation into the San Rafael's business practices. In a front page story, *Excelsior* listed the three major findings from the committee. First, the paper produced in Mexico was inferior to newsprint manufactured in other countries.⁷³ Two, Mexican factories imported more than eighty percent of the pulp used to manufacture paper.⁷⁴ This contradicted the notion that the industry was entirely self-sufficient and opened up the question of why it was okay to import raw materials and not finished goods. Third, the monopoly extracted unreasonable discounts from its distributors, often, forcing them to discount their services up to twenty percent what they normally would charge.⁷⁵ This story ran concurrent with front page article that discussed the ongoing labor unrest occurring in San Rafael's factories, which described the difficult working conditions for employees and how they currently were on strike.⁷⁶ This was a potentially more damaging report since Cárdenas had recently nationalized the petroleum industry

⁷² Ibid., 5.

⁷³ "Presentanse hechos concretos contra el monopolio papelerero," *Excelsior*, February 18, 1938, 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁶ "Algunas de los accionistas de S. Rafael, Acusan," *Excelsior*, February 18, 1938, 1.

due to the poor treatment of Mexican workers from international companies. If he felt the same thing was happening in this industry, then he could be compelled to break up this monopoly. With these two reports, the *Excelsior* clearly believed it had the upper hand in its battle against Mexico's newsprint producers. They hoped this was enough political capital to remove whatever roadblocks prevented PIPSA from achieving its full potential.

Unfortunately, news that the San Rafael and other factories were monopolies was not new. These investigations and articles published in early 1938 echoed the many of the problems originally detailed in reports submitted to Cárdenas approximately 18 months earlier. These reports supported the formation PIPSA with the goal of saving Mexico's publishing industry and the hundreds of thousands of jobs *Excelsior* claimed were in danger. Unfortunately, PIPSA was losing money and for whatever reason Cárdenas and his administration no longer supported it. The company's new mandate was to return to profitability. This was summarized in a memo Cárdenas received on April 20, 1938 from the new head of PIPSA, Palavicini. The former journalist and revolutionary had leveraged his publishing career and now worked as a government official. Palavicini's report to Cárdenas detailed the difficult financial state of the company and explained it had lost money each of the past four months.⁷⁷ These losses led Palavicini to conclude the company should not expand into selling newsprint.⁷⁸ According to him, the company was not financially solvent, and it needed to get its books in order before it could expand its services and possibly accomplish its original objectives.

⁷⁷ Report about PIPSA's financial situation written by Félix Palavicini and sent to President Lázaro Cárdenas, April 20, 1938, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, 151.

⁷⁸ Report about PIPSA's financial situation written by Félix Palavicini and sent to President Lázaro Cárdenas, April 20, 1938, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, 153.

When one takes a closer look at Palavicini's report, it seems as if he had started with the assumption that PIPSA was already a failure and wanted to cut and slash the program. He focused on the problems and did not provide any innovative solutions. In the end, the majority of his suggestions centered on the notion the company should focus on cost cutting measures, which included possibly limiting staff and reducing office space instead of branching into new products that could create new revenue streams or help limit shipping costs.⁷⁹ He was clearly hired to restructure PIPSA and slash the department's staff in hopes of turning the agency into a profitable company. It now had a new mission statement and its original goal of saving the Mexican publishing through the wholesale importation of paper was no longer applicable to PIPSA.

Despite his research, it was not clear that Palavicini was correct about the company's financial state. For instance, he opened the report by detailing that the newspaper *El Nacional* owed a debt of more than 200,000 pesos.⁸⁰ Taken at face value, this seemed like PIPSA was having trouble collecting from the nation's newspapers. However, *El Nacional* was originally created by Calles help publicize the presidential campaign of Ortiz Rubio and the PNR in 1929. The newspaper's purpose was to promote the party and as long as it was fulfilling this goal, than there should not be as much concern over its financial situation. From the beginning of Cárdenas' presidential campaign, the newspaper had publically backed him, especially in his conflicts against Calles. This was not an independent organization like *Excelsior* or *El Universal* that had a responsibility to turn a profit. It was part of a larger political party. Palavicini should

⁷⁹ Report about PIPSA's financial situation written by Félix Palavicini and sent to President Lázaro Cárdenas, April 20, 1938, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, 153.

⁸⁰ Report about PIPSA's financial situation written by Félix Palavicini and sent to President Lázaro Cárdenas, April 20, 1938, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, 151.

have provided the financial details of other periodicals that operated free of government support. This may have provided a truer account of how much money national newspapers owed PIPSA or how much debt the company carried.

Even though Palavicini had reduced PIPSA's ability to import newsprint, he continued the organization's mission to build new factories as revealed in memos sent to Cárdenas in the latter-half of 1938.⁸¹ The first note, sent on July 15, explained to Cárdenas that he had already received the initial plans and estimated budget for a new paper mill. Palavicini projected it would produce over 90 tons of newsprint every day and greatly reduce the stress on the country's limited paper supplies.⁸² The director closed his memo by highlighting the cost effectiveness of this factory, which was being built cheaply due to the manufacturing equipment vender accepting oil as payment from the recently nationalized oil industry.

The information presented in this memo was not completely positive. Palavicini ended it by imploring Cárdenas to throw his support behind the factory project and help remove any possible hurdles. With the president's backing, he estimated the factory could be completed within two years.⁸³ However, this seemed like an overly optimistic projection. Officials had only just picked a location for the factory and had not started construction. This note implied there were other road blocks that needed to be overcome before the building process could move forward.

⁸¹ Letter from Félix Palavicini to President Lázaro Cárdenas, July 15, 1938, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, 142.

⁸² Ibid., 144.

⁸³ Ibid., 145.

A second memo sent from Palavicini's, on October 8, indicated these roadblocks remained.⁸⁴ While the letter begins positively, explaining to Cárdenas that the department had earned a profit of over 100,000 pesos for the month of August, the director reminded the president that he needed his help to streamline the factory's construction.⁸⁵ To illustrate the importance of this operation, Palavicini explained to Cárdenas that the factory would save the country thousands of pesos annually. He believed these savings could be passed along to Mexican farmers and workers who needed financial support. The memo ended with Palavicini asking Cárdenas for a few moments to present his proposal for the factory in person.⁸⁶ Despite the letter's relaxed wording, it was clear Palavicini required to the president's support to complete the project. Without this project, PIPSA would have no purpose and no reason to exist as a government agency.

By October 1939 it became clear that PIPSA would not be able to overcome its early struggles. Despite the optimism surrounding the new factory, newspaper owners still needed relief in order to keep publishing their periodicals.⁸⁷ The situation had become so dire that rival organizations came together in a moment of solidarity. On the last day of the month, periodicals as diverse as *El Universal*, *La Prensa*, *Hoy*, *Excelsior*, and *El Nacional* consigned a telegram that was sent to Cárdenas.⁸⁸ This message did not mince words, its opening sentence read, "We are in imminent danger and will suspend publication shortly if we do not find an immediate solution to this crisis." It named

⁸⁴ Letter from Félix Palavicini to President Lázaro Cárdenas, October 8, 1932, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, 139.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 141,

⁸⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁸⁷ "Resolvio el Gobierno Federal Matar el Monopolio del Papel," *Excelsior*, March 6, 1938, 1.

⁸⁸ Telegram sent to President Lázaro Cárdenas from the editors from "El Universal," "La Prensa," "Hoy," etc." October 31, 1939, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 /287, 84.

PIPSA specifically and called on the department to solve this problem.⁸⁹ This telegram revealed the seriousness of the situation since it was sent privately and signed by fourteen newspaper owners who more often saw each other as rivals instead of allies. By sending it privately, it ensured there would not be a political firestorm like the *Excélsior* editorial. These editors needed a solution and they did not have time to play political games. This crisis was the result of the government's dismantling of PIPSA and high tariffs that reduced the availability of paper imports. Cárdenas and other leaders had given in to the Paper Manufacturing Lobby and forced newspaper owners into a desperate situation.⁹⁰

At the beginning of his Presidency, Cárdenas reached out to journalists and told them that he wanted a more amicable relationship. Through his first two years, newspapers supported him and make sure he was consistently presented positively in national stories. This was essential due to the wide-spread strikes that Cárdenas encouraged and led many Mexicans to believe they were on the verge of another revolution. Periodicals helped to stabilize his regime by creating the image that Cárdenas was in control and making sure the nation saw him out in front of these problems. Without this support, Cárdenas hold over the nation would weaken. Therefore, it made sense when he took steps as president to guarantee their loyalty and ensure they could continue publishing without issues.

The main issue the publishing industry faced was a shortage of newsprint. Since the turn of the century, one company, San Rafael maintained a monopoly over the paper

⁸⁹ Telegram sent to President Lázaro Cárdenas from the editors from "El Universal," "La Prensa," "Hoy," et, October 31, 1939, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 /287, 85.

⁹⁰ Letter from Secretary of the National Union of Producers of Paper and Cardboard to President Lázaro Cárdenas, February 3, 1938, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 / 287, 205-208.

products produced in Mexico. Over that same period, newspapers have complained about lack of newsprint available to them. This constituted their largest expenditure and many could not turn a profit due to high prices San Rafael demanded. Cárdenas recognized this problem and attempted to nationalize paper and make sure all Mexicans would have access to it. In the view of his administration, newsprint was no different than oil or union rights. To solve this problem, he created PIPSA. This company would provide immediate relief to newspapers by importing newsprint from international companies in bulk and reselling it to the country at cost. In addition, it planned to make the nation self-sufficient by building new factories. These would be constructed in regions that needed infrastructure improvements, further benefiting the nation. However, almost immediately, the program was undermined. It never received the necessary funding to order enough newsprint to lower or build the necessary factories. At the end of Cárdenas' presidency, the future of the department was in question. An internal audit suggested the government should liquidize its assets and shut it down.⁹¹ This left the future of the program in doubt and newspapers were forced to search for new solutions to their continued problem.

The Personal Relationship between Journalists and Cárdenas / Rural vs. Urban journalists

Despite these failures with PIPSA, Mexico's journalists never stopped supporting Cárdenas. This can be seen best in their complaints about the newsprint as in their articles they never mention the president as the problem. They always blamed to anonymous government or PIPSA officials instead of the president. This was a reoccurring theme

⁹¹ Investigation submitted by Miguel Angel Menendez, head of PIPSA, to Lázaro Cárdenas, November 2, 1940, AGN, Fondo LCR, Folder 437.1 /287, 1-6.

throughout his presidency, Cárdenas was the Teflon President, his inability to fulfill his promises never damaged his prestige or influence. However, if one read newspapers outside of the capital, one could find criticism of Cárdenas. This reflected a deep divide between regional often located in rural communities outside of Mexico City, and national newspapers, which were largely based in the capital city. Each group of journalists served a dissimilar set of audiences and framed the successes and failures of Cardenismo differently. Urban reporters framed his reform program on notions of civilization vs. the backwardness of the *campo*. To them, Cárdenas was the bridge, the man who could bring modern concepts that originated in Mexico City to the traditional countryside. Journalists saw them as charity cases and fully supported Cárdenas' full scale intervention in the lives of *campesinos*. Initially, regional newspapers wanted the benefits and federal dollars that agrarian reform initially promised. However, many *campesinos* did not support massive changes to their lifestyles and started to protest Cárdenas. The most significant protests took place on *ejidos*, government sponsored areas where land reform was a gradual process overseen by officials. These officials were supposed to guarantee poor farmers could transition into independent landowners. Instead, they corruption was rampant and many operated their *ejidos* like fiefdoms. Regional newspapers publicized these problems and did not kowtow to Cárdenas when he visited their regions.

In order to explore this divide, this section will examine the writings of two female journalists, Elvira Vargas and Concha de Villarreal. Vargas epitomized the Mexico City reporter, who traveled with and befriended Cárdenas. Initially for *El Nacional* and then other newspapers, she most famously championed the president's agenda through her coverage of the expropriation of nation's oil fields and a travel

narrative of trip with the president throughout southern Mexico.⁹² In each of her stories, she made sure to mention how much good the president was accomplishing. Villarreal started her career as reporter for the *Siglo de Torreon*. While there, she criticized the federal government's inability to provide the necessary support for farmers. In her opinion, the majority of Mexicans who received land from the government would lose it quickly due to high interest rates from banks, lack of irrigation and a lack of infrastructure to transport their crops to markets. She never criticized Cárdenas specifically, it was clear from her reporting that these programs suffered from huge problems and needed much more oversight to be successful. Both women wanted more support for the countryside but differed on how it should be delivered. While Vargas saw Cárdenas as completely benevolent, Villarreal witnessed the corruption and problems within the programs first hand. This led her to be warier of government intervention.

Vargas' articles for *El Nacional* reflected the activist nature of the newspaper. She was unafraid to travel the nation and publicize inequality. One of the most important stories she covered for the newspaper was the oil expropriation crisis that occurred in February and March 1938. Conflict between the US and the Mexico over the nation's natural resources was not new. Prior to the Mexican Revolution, the Díaz actively courted international financing to modernize the nation's infrastructure. These countries feared they would lose their investments following the civil war and supported Carranza's Constitutionalist movement because it seemed much less radical than Zapata or Pancho Villa.⁹³ Following the Mexican Revolution, subsequent presidents had to find

⁹² Elvira Laura Hernandez Carballido, "Las Primeras Reporteras Mexicanas: Magalena Mondragon, Elvira Vargas y Esperanza Velázquez Bringas," (Masters Thesis, UNAM, 1997), 6.

⁹³ Linda Hall, *Oil, Banks and Politics: The United States and Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1917-1924*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 13.

the correct balance between the US and meeting the radical desires of their constituents. Cárdenas escalated these tensions when he became president and supported workers and their desire to strike, which included workers for international oil corporations.⁹⁴

Vargas helped to generate support for Cárdenas' ultimate action of nationalizing the oil industry by traveling and visiting with striking workers. These stories were featured in *El Nacional* and revealed to the nation the terrible working conditions in the oil fields. Her first article, established the dangerous nature of working in the oil fields by describing a how a flight the same day as her flight crashed, and its three passengers died.⁹⁵ Opening her article in this manner, created the notion that death could happen at any time for Mexican laborers. Vargas did not travel to Poza Rica to cover this story from an unbiased perspective. Instead in her own words, "I travel with a deep eagerness to end a state of injustice, of inequality, of exploitation; to claim human equality, respect and opportunity for a decent existence [for workers]." ⁹⁶ As she traveled through the work camps, Vargas highlighted the differences between the wealthy American (largely composed of managers) homes and the ramshackle villages of Mexican workers. There was a stark difference in technological comforts, as the American homes benefited from light bulbs and other modern conveniences but the Mexican laborers had no access to electricity. At the beginning of February 1938, Vargas traveled to the Mexican oil fields in Poza Rica. Her purpose was to provide a window to the nation on the horrible working conditions of Mexicans. It had the perfect conditions to elicit outrage from her audience: foreign corporations exploiting the nation's resources

⁹⁴ George Grayson, *The Politics of Mexican Oil*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 14.

⁹⁵ "En Avion a Poza Rica," *El Nacional*, February 12, 1938.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

and treating its Mexican labor force poorly. This helped to rally support to Cárdenas in his coming showdown with oil companies.

Vargas was not content to tour the facilities in Poza Rica. She had the opportunity to interview an American official and used his words to hammer home the indignity of losing these resources to a foreign company. The interview took place on February 11, but the newspaper waited until March 7, at the height of the conflict between Mexico and oil companies.⁹⁷ She started by asking him, “why the company did not comply with Mexican laws and provide decent houses for the local laborers or provide...” Before she finished, he interrupted and replied dismissively that “you need to understand that our best interests [the company] is to take the oil from Mexico, that is the only reason we came here. For this, I, like the other bosses, we have suffered this terrible climate for several years. The company is not here to make a profit and not to provide charity.”⁹⁸ Throughout the interview, Vargas returned to the notion that the foreign company was not following Mexican laws. The official took the bait and repeatedly insisted the company would never change its policies or obey these laws. The arrogance he displayed towards Mexican workers and the nation in general, would have played well throughout the country. On March 16, *Excelsior* declared that Cárdenas had the support of the entire nation.⁹⁹ Cárdenas played on this nationalistic fervor and eleven days later nationalized the oil industry. His speech, published in every newspaper in Mexico, reiterated the themes of Vargas’ interview –oil companies were stealing the nation’s resources, its workers were treated poorly, and they did not respect the country’s

⁹⁷ “La Buena voluntad de las Companias Petroleras,” *El Nacional*, March 7, 1938.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ “Todo el Pueblo Mexicano Dará Apoyo al Gobierno en el Conflicto Petrolero,” *Excelsior*, March 16, 1938, 1.

independence.¹⁰⁰ While one cannot draw a direct correlation from Vargas' articles to Cárdenas' nationalization of the industry, they did help rally support to the president's side. Their coverage of the issues hammered home the point that the president had to take aggressive actions to protect Mexican workers from these foreign business.

In her coverage of the oil expropriation crisis, Vargas framed rural Mexican workers as people who needed to be saved by government intervention. They did not have any modern conveniences, such as refrigerators or radios, or even homes. She wholeheartedly supported Cárdenas' intervention in the countryside to improve their lives. This led her to travel with the president on one of his official trips throughout the Southern Mexico and visit Tabasco, Yucatán, Campeche, and Chiapas. She wrote about her experiences in a travel narrative titled *Por las Rutas del Sureste*. In it, she detailed how Cárdenas personally met with local politicians and offered them aid to help build roads, hospitals, schools and athletic fields. From the beginning, Vargas recognized the vast differences between the metropolitan capital and the rural countryside, writing "Mexico consists of two countries, one that follows the rhythm of progress and another that continues to rely on old traditions."¹⁰¹ She saw the regions outside of the capital as far away from civilization and Cárdenas needed to bring the advances of the capital to them.

Throughout her narrative, Vargas provided in depth descriptions of the remoteness of these regions. Often, they could not rely on modern forms of transportation, and had to resort to trains, rickety boats, or horseback to reach their

¹⁰⁰ "Decreta el Gobierno de la Republica la Expropiación de la Industria Petrolera," *Excelsior*, March 19, 1938, 1.

¹⁰¹ Elvira Vargas, *Por las Rutas del Sureste*, (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial "Cima," 1940), 16.

destinations. These moments capture the physical battle against nature that *campesinos* participated in every day. Vargas dated these struggles back to indigenous Mexico, writing as they entered Yucatán, “The first enemy of the Maya was nature...the Mayas of yesterday are similar to us today, they fought similar battles against death.”¹⁰² This comparison between present and past Yucatán demonstrated that the region had not developed since the pre-colonial period and reinforced the differences between the capital and the countryside. The denizens of Mexico City had tamed nature and no longer needed to fear it as opposed to *campesinos* who still based a daily struggle just to survive. Vargas knew her readers in the capital would respond to these vivid descriptions of poverty. They felt superior to the countryside since they had continued to progress as a society and had not stagnated.

Not all journalists unilaterally supported Cárdenas and the programs he established in the countryside. Concha de Villarreal was an orphan who grew up in Coahuila and became a journalist for the daily newspaper Siglo de Toerreón in 1930. Later founded two periodicals, *El Niño* and *El Correo de la Revolución*.¹⁰³ In 1938, she left the countryside to become a daily reporter for *Excelsior*. Despite her move to the capital, she continued to write about the problems associated with agrarian reform. The redistribution of land was a major component of the Mexican Revolution and it became a foundational part of Cárdenas’ presidency. Over a six year period, he expropriated and redistributed a total of more than 49 million acres.¹⁰⁴ In order to ensure these new farmers

¹⁰² Vargas, *Por las Rutas del Sureste*, 140.

¹⁰³ Helia D’Acosta, *Indiana y Concha: Dos Brillantes periodistas, Dos Trágicos Destinos*, (Los Angeles S.A.: Editorial Regina, 1979), 15-16.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution*, 127.

were successful, Cárdenas parceled the land into *ejidos*, which allowed the land owners to work their individual plots, while maintaining the support of a larger community.

For regional journalists like Villarreal, this redistribution was a major victory and signaled a completion of the revolution. However, such a massive undertaking was ripe for corruption. The biggest culprit was the Banco de Crédito Ejidal, which provided the necessary loans to first time farmers for equipment, seeds and other necessary materials.¹⁰⁵ It quickly became one of the most important organizations in the country since it was the lifeline for many first time farmers and it did not always use its authority benevolently. Villarreal believed the Banco used high interest rates to either lock new landowners into a permanent cycle of debt or steal their land from them. Her proof were hundreds of petitions she eventually published in her book, *México Busca por un Hombre*.¹⁰⁶ These petitions were sent to her because she had created a name for herself as an advocate for *campesino* rights. She received messages from all over the country. These notes complained about high interest rates, inconsistent access to funds, surprise due dates, and loss of land to creditors.¹⁰⁷ The petitions were often signed by the entire community indicating that the bank was not simply targeting individual farmers but holding groups of people hostage by their unfair practices. Unfortunately, Villarreal did not have any concrete solutions. She did not want the banking or *ejido* systems destroyed, since they were necessary for *campesinos* to be successful. She shared many of the reform minded beliefs of Vargas and other reporters but wanted them to be operated more

¹⁰⁵ Tzvi Medin, *Ideología y praxis política de Lázaro Cárdenas*, (Mexico, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1973), 126-127.

¹⁰⁶ Concha de Villarreal, *México Busca por un Hombre*, (Mexico City, D.F.: Libros y Revistas, 1940), 7-55.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

fairly. Villarreal used her position to publicize the various issues with Cárdenas' reform program.

Conclusion

In many ways, Cárdenas' presidency was a repudiation of his mentor, Calles. In seemingly every facet, he strove to do the opposite. Whereas Calles was cold and secretive, Cárdenas was warm and open. Calles preferred to operate from behind the scenes and Cárdenas was out front either speaking to a large audience or meeting with a village leader. They differed greatly in their handling of the press. Before he became president, Calles saw journalists and newspapers as a threat. He threatened to use the army to close down deviant newspapers and then followed through with that threat when he occupied *Excelsior's* main offices. During his first day as president, Cárdenas reached out to reporters and asked if there was anything they needed. They responded to his affection by wholeheartedly supporting him. Their love was unconditional and Cárdenas relied on it through the first part of his presidency. When it seemed the country was in chaos, newspapers consistently framed him positively. Their coverage made it seem like he was always in control. Without their support, it was possible he would have suffered a coup led by Calles or other military leaders.

Cárdenas attempted to return the favor and help out his friends in the publishing industry. For the past thirty years, they had suffered through a shortage of newsprint. This endangered the industry and raised costs for all Mexicans. Cárdenas did not want to help out these newspapers due to altruism. He realized the value of being able to use them to spread his message throughout the country largely for free. They were essentially a propaganda service. In addition, sponsoring a new industry in the country would create

new jobs and allow him to spur economic activity in the poorer regions in the country. However, PIPSA was unable to fulfill these ambitions. Within a year, the scope of the program was dramatically cutback due to lobbying from the paper manufacturing lobbies. They convinced officials that increased competition from the international markets would cost Mexicans jobs. They promised to modernize their facilities, with government support, and finally produce enough newsprint. This became the largest disagreement between the publishing community and Cárdenas. Periodicals repeatedly criticized the administration for failing to act even though they never called out the president specifically. They always targeted an “unnamed official.”

This failure to solve the paper crisis pointed at a larger systematic failure within Cárdenas’ time as president. His programs failed or were not as successful due to in fighting at the local level. Not every Mexican was willing to sacrifice for the greater good of the nation. They had their own personal interests to protect and they weakened his attempts at reforms. This is seen best through the eyes of regional journalists. Many supported Cárdenas and his plans to improve their regions. However, these plans were implemented by regional politicians or officials that wanted to secure their individual fortunes. Regional journalists painted a different narrative of Cárdenas’ presidency than their urban counterparts. They witnessed the corruption that prevented execution enact long-term positive changes. For many their support of Cárdenas never wavered but they fearlessly reported on the problems with his reform programs.

Conclusion / Epigraph

Following Cárdenas' presidency, Mexico experienced sixty years more years of single party rule. His successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, renamed the national party the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), which remains a viable political party today. The friendships that Cárdenas engendered with media organizations played a crucial role in the party staying in power. Events that could led to larger popular uprisings, such as nation-wide Railroad Strike in 1958, Tlatelolco Massacre in 1968, and an extended long-term dirty war (1964-1982), were glossed over in national newspapers.¹ This prevented any outsider or deviant group from gaining enough national support to topple the government. In addition, the behind scenes drama within the PRI was not given proper coverage. From the outside, the PRI looked like a monolith, peacefully transitioning from president to president ever six years. However, recent historical scholarship has revealed that each election brought serious challenges to the party as members battled one another for the right to be president.² A more investigative press corps could have publicized these annual battles turmoil and possibly inspired a politician to break away from the PRI and created a competing party. The failure to properly investigate these and other negative events gradually hurt the media's reputation in Mexico. The media's lowest point occurred in 1982, when President José López Portillo made the decision to withdraw all official funding from newspapers that had been critical of his

¹ See Robert F. Alegre, *Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico*, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, trans. Helen R. Lane, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1991), and Alberto Ulloa Bornemann, *Surviving Mexico's Dirty War: A Political Prisoner's Memoir*, edited and trans. Arthur Schmidt and Aurora Camacho de Schmidt, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), for more information on each of these topics.

² Aaron W. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010).

administration, famously saying, “no pago para que me peguen” (“I do not pay to be hit”).³ This quote finally provided evidence to the public that the government had been supporting publications with subsidies, which further reinforced its distrust of media organizations.

This did not mean that newspapers never published negative stories or every publication was aligned with the government. Throughout the PRI dictatorship there was a relatively diverse selection of periodicals that ranged the whole political spectrum with conservative newspapers co-existing peacefully with the supposedly revolutionary government without serious issue. As long as publishers did not focus too heavily on the fundamental flaws of Mexico’s democratic system, they were given leeway to discuss stories on economic inequality or rightist complaints about official treatment of the Catholic Church.⁴ If complaints were framed respectfully, then journalists did not have much to fear. Officials may have realized the press served as an important stress valve that allowed people to voice their grievances without truly challenging the status quo.⁵

The relatively friendly relationship between the government and press started to breakdown in the 1960s with the massacre of student demonstrators at Tlatelolco Plaza. Journalists were stung and insulted by protestors who shouted “sell-out press” and started to question their role in restricting, manipulating and qualifying information about the student movement.⁶ These journalists that may have started to think critically about their

³ Silvio R. Waisbord, *Watchdog Journalism in South America: News, Accountability, and Democracy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 65.

⁴ Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate*, 56.

⁵ Ilya Adler, “Press-Government Relations in Mexico: A Study of Freedom of the Mexican Press and Press Criticism of Government Situations,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 12 (1993): 16.

⁶ Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate*, 66.

relationship with the government quickly found a champion in Julio Scherer, the lead editor of *Excelsior*. Under his tenure, the newspaper adopted a muckraking approach to its reporting. As one observer recounted, “He made Mexicans discover the existence of a poor Mexico. *Excelsior*, under Scherer, began to depict a bitter Mexico of landless peasants, deprived workers, and the disposed – that unruly Mexico of constant struggle and conflict that had been missing from the pages of the country’s newspapers.”

Emphasizing these types of stories quickly gained notice from the national government and the general staff at *Excelsior*, which as an employee owned cooperative had long supported the PRI. In 1976, after a stormy cooperative meeting orchestrated by the government, Scherer and his team were relieved of their posts. This might have turned out to be a mistake by the government however, as Scherer and many of his collaborators went on to helm several independent periodicals that openly challenged the PRI. The most notable of these was *Proceso*, which quickly developed a reputation of being the main source for information on “closed” topics. The expulsion of Scherer from *Excelsior* created a chain reaction that the government could not control. Within ten years, the number of independent newspapers had grown exponentially and had reawakened the activist spirit of Mexico’s press corps. This process accelerated through the 1980s and 1990s and partially led to the end of the PRI dictatorship in the 2000 presidential election.

This dissertation has demonstrated that the renaissance activist media organizations in Mexico in the late 1960s to 2000 should not be seen as the development of a new ethos. Instead, Scherer and the work of other contemporary journalists drew upon the work of their predecessors from before and after the Revolution, whether or not they realized it. Telling the stories of these forerunners’ is necessary because their work

has largely been forgotten. This is seen in the examination of the fall of the PRI dictatorship quest to understand why it ended. When discussing the role of the media this scholarship often gives credit to a resurgence in independent periodicals that helped to generate populist support against the dictatorship. However, the majority of scholarship has often neglected the historical defiance of newspapers and assumed journalists accepted the payouts from the government in order cover up its misdeeds. This dissertation explains that situation was much more complicated than the common perceptions of how the media operated during the Revolutionary era. The notion of journalistic activism pre-dates the Mexican Revolution and remained a core part of the industry through Cárdenas' presidency. Newspapers served as sites of resistance, and helped to unite people around political issues. Scherer was not blazing a new trail at *Excelsior* by having the periodical discuss social issues; he was fulfilling its original mandate set forth by Alducín in 1917. Mexico had a vibrant history of defiant newspapers, and in this era the government feared them and sought to control them.

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, newspapers played a key role in helping end the Díaz dictatorship and the Constitutionalists eventual victory. The belief that the media should be a forum for activism continued through the 1920s. During this decade, periodicals dedicated to regional political causes and metropolitan dailies sprang up throughout the country. These newspapers had become crucial to the nation's political life because millions of Mexicans had fought in the Revolution. Once they war ended, they needed information on whether the new government passed the reforms they had fought for or if their village had received money for a new school. In order to fulfill this demand for information, entrepreneurs flooded the market with new periodicals. This

dissertation maintains this should be considered a form of populism, and compared to other significant attempts at political grassroots movements of the era such as land reform and national recognition of unions. The growth of newspapers became such a concern that the government created a new department with the intention of handling them. Into the 1930s, the activist spirit remained strong but transitioned into support for Cárdenas. They willingly supported the president and his reform focused agenda. Their support was crucial, since the president needed all of it in order to survive the rocky start to his presidency. Over this forty-year period, newspapers were fully engaged with national politics and worked to make an impact.

The issue remains, how did periodicals transform from sites of resistance against Díaz to helping solidify and perpetuate a new dictatorship for more than seventy years. I think there are three key factors that impacted how the modern Mexican press developed – violence of the era, the notion that journalists should be activists, and capital vs. regional newspapers. First, it is impossible to escape the constant threat of violence during this era, which was captured by the newspapers. On a daily basis, the average Mexican would have read stories about strikes, protests, and election fraud. These regular conflicts were often complemented by large-scale rebellions (de la Huerta, Cristero), assassinations of major political figures (Villa, Obregón) and countless other smaller uprisings. In the 1920s, Mexico was held together by national and local strongmen that retained their power largely through threats of violence. This chaotic situation was compounded military officials regularly interfering with the political sphere. If a general was upset he did not get a chance to run for president, he mobilized troops loyal to him

and attempted to take the position by force. Newspapers that printed negative stories about military leaders faced the same threat.

Beginning with Carranza, newspapers operated under the constant threat they could be shut down if they printed articles that upset officials. *Excelsior* and *El Universal* were reprimanded by the Mexican Congress within the first year of their existence. These threats were heightened during times of nation-wide conflicts. This was especially true following Obregón's murder, which Calles used to justify a crackdown of newspapers and journalists early in the 1930s. This wave of repression was particularly harmful to the development of an independent press corps as it forced out many of the journalists that had ties to Mexico's last civilian leader, Carranza. This indicated to any new or remaining journalists that Calles was their patron and they had to make sure they did not challenge him. It is impossible to write the history of post-Revolutionary Mexico without discussing the chaos of the era. It impacted all sectors of the society, including the media, as a prominent journalist was arrested during the Constitutional Convention of 1917. It prevented the media from developing a sense of neutrality since anything newspapers published was considered a threat.

Second, the fact that many journalists were activists first and reporters second made it impossible for their newspapers to act independently because they had been originally founded periodicals to promote certain causes. The original explosion in Mexican publishing resulted from the surprisingly open and competitive presidential election of 1910. Every major candidate had to establish periodicals in order to help them win and they hired employees that shared their goals. These periodicals produced the prominent journalists, Palavicini, Rafael Martínez, Luis Cabrera, and José Vasconcelos,

that helped to define the industry following the Revolution in Mexico City. For them, it was normal for newspapers to take political stances so many made activism a key part of their future media endeavors. Martínez remained in close contact with his friend Carranza and warned him about other periodicals he thought were attacking his presidency. He believed it was necessary for the press to work with Carranza so they could rebuild Mexico. However, these relationships between officials and journalists were not set in stone. Instead, they were based on shared political stances. Journalists could be critical when politicians broke from these shared positions. Repeatedly, Martínez criticized Carranza for not taking a stronger stance on Mexican neutrality during the WWI and demonstrate that the nation was not a pawn of the U.S. His criticisms demonstrated that journalists were not blindly loyal to politicians. Instead, they were more faithful to the personal causes most important to them. Eventually, many journalists got tired of being limited to advising officials from afar and started their own political careers, most notably Vasconcelos as the Minister of Education, Palavicini as an ambassador to multiple times, and Cabrera was elected to the Mexican Senate.

This belief in activism was a key reason why the press became willing allies of the government and the PRI dictatorship. In Cárdenas, the media had found a champion that reflected all of their political goals. He also had the good sense realize their influence, or at least pander to them anyway, and reach out to journalists during his first days in office. The openness of his regime was a welcome change to the secrecy and repression of Calles. Cárdenas simply made it easy to write positive stories about him because he constantly lived up to people's expectations of an idealized politician. No other Revolutionary president traveled to personally negotiate a settlement between

strikers and management as he did in Monterrey. When his presidency was challenged by Calles, he stepped forward before 60,000 marchers in the Zócalo at Mexico City and told them that he would continue fighting for them. He visited with village leaders across the Mexican countryside, meeting them on their terms and promising them aid. Given his actions, it was easy to see why journalists would have flocked to support Cárdenas. Through his actions as president, he rallied the capital's newspapers to his side. Even newspapers that had been founded by Calles, such as *El Nacional*, switched sides and lauded the president when he exiled his former mentor in order to keep the peace.

Cárdenas attempted to reciprocate the love from the newspaper industry and bring into the revolutionary family. This was contrary to the accepted practice of treating journalists as enemies since the end of the Revolution, especially by the military leaders that came to dominate the nation's politics. The conflict between the nation's generals and journalists stemmed from the soldiers' belief that maintaining secrecy was the key to winning battles. They brought this mentality to politics when many generals made the transition into politics. Cárdenas took an opposite stance. He wanted to make information about his policies more accessible for everyone. To accomplish this goal, Cárdenas attempted to nationalize the publishing industry as if it was a natural resource and protect it so everyone could have access to it. He did so partially because it was in his best interest. His advisers argued persuasively that newspapers were currently the only form of mass communications and a healthy industry was a necessity if the government wanted to circulate information or propaganda. To nationalize the industry, he developed a plan to break the newsprint monopoly that had controlled the production of the nation's newsprint since the 1880s. The program became known as *PIPSA* and is still in operation

today. However, it has garnered a poor reputation over the years and deemed the one of the primary subsidy that was used to control newspapers. For instance, *Excelsior* received a loan in 1986 from *PIPSA* for new equipment.⁷ This was not the program's original intentions. It would have had stronger financial support if the government and Cárdenas had wanted to use it as a program to control newspapers. Instead, for various reasons, the program was hamstrung from its foundation and never achieved its stated goals. By the end of Cárdenas' presidency, he was advised to end the program. The *PIPSA*'s problems were so severe that the only sustained criticism the president dealt with from the media was his government's (he was never mentioned in the articles) inability to solve the nation's newsprint crisis. The basis of the media's support of his government was not initially due to financial rewards. It came from a genuine desire to help fulfill the reform program initiated by Cárdenas and the heritage of activism the industry had inherited. Over time, the government and newspaper groups became financially intertwined but the relationship started with a goal to make Mexico a better place.

Finally, these assumptions about an alliance between the government and media organizations privileges the newspapers in Mexico City and ignores the many local periodicals that dominated the countryside. As a group, these newspapers thrived throughout Post-Revolutionary Mexico. The notion that this rise of periodicals represented another form of populism during this era comes the variety of newspapers available to across the country. Seemingly every city or region had a daily periodical they relied upon for their news. They provided constant coverage of the violence and chaos of the 1920s. Looking over the front pages and headlines today reveals how much turmoil

⁷ Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate*, 32-33.

the nation experienced on a daily basis. It is not surprising that Calles and other politicians tried to control them. The newspaper's coverage of these events threatened their hold over the nation. The periodicals from major cities outside of Mexico City were partially protected as there were too many for Calles to control individually. He attempted to create a government agency tasked with monitoring them but there were no indications the department anything more than read and summarize the information for him. Regardless of how much control Calles wanted to assert over regional newspapers, the task was simply too large.

Regional periodicals were not limited to metropolitan dailies. Many were dedicated to promoting a single political party or the Catholic Church. These remained sites of resistance against the national government despite the fears of repression. The best of examples of these periodicals were found in the state of Yucatán, which had possibly the most diverse range of them in the 1920s. Newspapers such as *Hombre Libre* and *El Demócrata* were founded to fight the socialist government of Salvador Alvarado and his successor Felipe Carrillo Puerto. Both were more conservative and feared Alvarado was changing the region too fast. These periodicals retained the activist spirit of pre-Revolution journalists. The communist government would not be outdone however. In 1924, the new governor Tomás Garrido Canabal, formed Resistance Leagues, which were local groups formed to educate Mexicans in the area about the benefits of socialism. To spread this information, they relied on their own periodical, *Redención*. The Resistance Leagues were so successful that they successfully resisted outside threats from the national government and its sponsored unions. These victories demonstrated how much power the Resistance Leagues had in Yucatán and their unified front against Calles

would not have been possible without a periodical to help spread their messages.

Catholics were a second group of political outsiders that founded periodicals in order to resist government repression during this era. While national newspapers, such as *El Universal* and *Excelsior*, provided steady coverage of major conflicts, they were supplemented by regional operations like *La Reconquista*. These smaller periodicals helped to rally Catholics whenever government repression went too far. This was best seen when the region of Michoacán protested the forced exile of a Mexican archbishop. These large-scale protests were only possible due to Catholic periodicals that publicized this information to their readers.

Regional periodicals remained viable and active during Cárdenas' presidency. Coverage from the national newspapers generally lauded the president for his efforts to implement long-standing reforms. Journalists like Elvira Vargas traveled with the president on his trips to visit villages outside of the and explained to her urbanite readers how the countryside had remained backwards and primitive. She hoped her stories would inspire people to empower Cárdenas improve the lives of the *campesinos*. They clearly demonstrated her privilege as an outsider critiquing the lives everyone outside of Mexico City. Despite Vargas and Cárdenas' best intentions the rollout of his programs was not smooth. They were hampered by the lack of funds, incompetent or dictatorial officials and local strongmen that resented interference in their areas from the national government. These were many of the same problems that prevented *PIPSA* from achieving its full potential. In their coverage of these issues, local newspapers provided a voice to poor Mexican farmers that had hoped to benefit from Cárdenas' reforms but were left bitterly disappointed by the lack of support from the national government. Many

feared they would lose the land they had just received because the nation did not have the necessary infrastructure, such as irrigation or transportation systems, to make a profit. These periodicals usually advocated for more government intervention but it rarely came. This lack of support forced *campesinos* to rely on their local strongmen for help, which recreated the cycles of dependence that existed prior to the Revolution. Periodicals continued to serve as sites of resistance following the Revolution but it was necessary to leave the capital to find them. There was not a single issue that unified them. Each periodical reflected the region and its population. In many cases, they resented government interference in religion and education but looked for support in land reform and infrastructure improvements. The variety of regions in Mexico produced a multitude of newspapers, each dedicated to their local cultures.

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