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Left-wing, democracy, and trade union insurgency in Mexico: nuclear, mining, and metallurgical workers, 1972-1985

Abstract

This article analyzes the history of trade union insurgency in Mexico during the 1970s and the relationship established between the left and the labor class. To do this, experiences of the Mexican National Nuclear Energy Trade Union and those of sections 11 and 147 of the mining-metallurgical trade union are analyzed. In the first case, its relationship with the democratic movement of electrical workers and the current of revolutionary nationalism are observed and in the second its links with the political organization Línea Proletaria, which has a Maoist affiliation. Both currents proposed various strategies that revived the tension existing in the Mexican labor movement in the early century, between those who thought that trade unions should not ally to political parties and instead exert direct action at work and those who advocated for political alliances, which they called multiple action. Both movements converged in the trade union movement of that period, which demanded trade union democracy and demonstrated against the austerity policy imposed by the government, as well as for the defense of natural resources. On the other hand, labor activism was manifested in an environment of greater rebelliousness combined with other social groups, a situation that ascertains advances in the struggles of workers from the industry and services, and its impact on the political, social, and cultural life in the country.

Keywords: Left; Trade Union Insurgency; Trade Unions; Revolutionary Nationalism; Maoism.

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Esquerda, democracia e insurgência sindical no México: nucleares, mineiros e metalúrgicos, 1972-1985

Resumo
O presente artigo analisa a história da insurgência sindical no México durante a década de 1970 e a relação que se estabeleceu entre a esquerda e a classe operária. Para tanto, são analisadas as experiências do Sindicato Único de Energia Nuclear e das seções 11 e 147 do sindicato mineiro-metalúrgico. No primeiro caso, observa-se sua relação com o movimento democrático dos trabalhadores eletricistas e a corrente do nacionalismo revolucionário e no segundo sua vinculação com a organização política Línea Proletária, de filiação maoista. Ambas as correntes traçaram estratégias distintas que reviveram a tensão existente no movimento operário mexicano de princípios do século, entre aqueles que pensavam que os sindicatos não deviam se aliar a partidos políticos, mas, sim, exercer a ação direta no trabalho e aqueles a favor de alianças políticas, naquilo que denominavam ação múltipla. Ambos os movimentos confluíram no movimento sindical do período, que reivindicava democracia sindical e se manifestava contra a política de austeridade que o governo impunha e, também, pela defesa dos recursos naturais. Por outro lado, manifestava-se o ativismo operário em um meio de maior rebeldia que o combinou a outros grupos sociais, situação que comprova o avanço das lutas dos trabalhadores da indústria e do setor de serviços, além de sua incidência na vida política, social e cultural do país..

Palavras-chave: Esquerda; Insurgência Sindical; Sindicatos; Nacionalismo Revolucionário; Maoismo.

Izquierda, democracia e insurgencia sindical en México: nucleares, mineros y metalúrgicos, 1972-1985

Resumen
Este artículo analiza la historia de la insurgencia sindical en México durante los años 1970 y la relación que se dio entre la izquierda y la clase obrera. Para ello, se analizan las experiencias del Sindicato Único de Energía Nuclear y de las secciones 11 y 147 del sindicato minero-metalúrgico. En el primer caso, se observa su relación con el movimiento democrático de los trabajadores electricistas y la corriente del nacionalismo revolucionario y en el segundo su vinculación con la organización política Línea Proletaria, de filiación maoísta. Ambas corrientes plantearon estrategias distintas que revivieron la tensión existente en el movimiento obrero mexicano de principios de siglo, entre quienes pensaban que los sindicatos no debían aliarse a partidos políticos y en cambio ejercer la acción directa en el trabajo y quienes abogaban por alianzas políticas, en lo que llamaban acción múltiple. Ambos movimientos confluyeron en el movimiento sindical del periodo, que reclamaba democracia sindical y se manifestaba contra la política de austeridad que el gobierno imponía, así como también por la defensa de los recursos naturales. Por otra parte, se manifestaba el activismo obrero en un medio de una mayor rebeldía que conjuntó a otros grupos sociales, situación que comprueba el ascenso en las luchas de los trabajadores de la industria y en servicios, y su incidencia en la vida política, social y cultural del País.

Palabras clave: Izquierda; Insurgencia Sindical; Sindicatos; Nacionalismo Revolucionario; Maoísmo.

Introduction

The Mexican left-wing, throughout the 20th century, pursued the purpose of attracting the working class to its ideas and organizations. The search was constant, but the means varied so that we may point out three different periods in the relationship between the left-wing and the working class. The first period comes from the last decades of the 19th century and it ends in the 1920s, and it is distinguished by a different left-wing where it was involved in labor disputes to construct utopian communities. The second period goes from the 1930s to the 1960s, and it was dominated by the Marxist left-wing and the narrow focus on industrial workers and trade union organization. In the next period, which goes until the 1980s and this is the one that concerns us here, the left-wing becomes diversified again and it turn the attention to various social subjects. But the emphasis remained on the labor movement, seeking to regain the leadership exerted in the 1930s, with the purpose of democratizing the existing trade unions and organizing new trade unions independent from State protection (ILLADES, 2008; CARR, 1996; BIZBERG, 1990).

The goal of trade union democracy came, of course, from the fact that in the previous decades an authoritarian and undemocratic leadership was imposed in the labor movement. During the two decades after the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920 there was a boom of workers' organization and struggles, whose most successful period took place during the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). The Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) was then founded by Vicente Lombardo Toledano - the most important leader of the labor movement, Marxist but not a member of the Communist Party - and by major Communist leaders. Those supporting Lombardo and communists joined the Jacobin wing of revolutionary nationalists and they claimed that the labor movement was one of the constituent parts of the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana proposed by Cárdenas. The same party became a State party in the next decades, and after the radical boom, the left-wing was removed from the labor movement and the CTM became a pillar of the official trade union bureaucracy. Trade unions, one by one and without reservation of violence, were left in the hands of spurious leaders, corrupt and authoritarian, who within the Mexican trade union lingo were named

as "charros," and trade union charrismo was known as the politics of labor control which resorted to clientelism and repressive measures so that workers do not protest against the application of dispositions opposite to the interests (TREJO DELARBRE, 1979, 128-131). The subsequent struggles faced democratic trade unionists against charros, and the latter could confidently count on government support.

During the 1970s and the beginning of the next decade Mexico experienced a stage of rise in workers' struggles in industry and services. Trade union insurgency during those years was accompanied by a crisis of trade union charrismo while increasing the importance of the working class in the social and political life of the country. In many places, workers' activism came amid greater rebellion that brought together residents of popular urban neighborhoods, peasants, indigenous communities, and a thriving feminism. Particular clashes and demands often had national resonance. The democratic unionism even promoted a comprehensive reform program in terms of wages and working conditions, social security and public health, and in the development plans to expand and strengthen the public sector and achieve economic independence.

The three main aspects that informed the leftist dissent during the 20th century found expression in various organizations. Revolutionary nationalism, identified with Cardenismo, had its greatest expression in the workers' front with the leader of electrical workers Rafael Galván and the Tendencia Democrática. The Frente Auténtico del Trabajo came from the Christian democracy in its working and radical front. The socialists had various organizations that in turn obeyed the unfolding of the political field after the Cuban revolution and the break between China and the USSR: the Communist Party tried to organize a new working center; there emerged Línea Proletaria y Organización de Izquierda Revolucionaria-Línea de Masas, both of them Maoist; armed groups tried without much success to create workers' cores. The organizational efforts were often hampered by rivalries and sectarianism, although there were also attempts to unify and create national coordination and sometimes there were broad struggle fronts (ILLADES, 2014; TREJO DELARBRE, 1979; MÉNDEZ Y BERRUETA, 2011; ROBLES, 2011). In this environment, the progressive thrust of organized labor groups often became a structuring axis of broader movements.

It is usual to refer to two different moments in trade union insurgency. The first corresponded to the mobilization above all of workers from the electric power generation industry, particularly acute between 1971 and 1977. The most important leader of this moment was Rafael Galván, who advocated to regain the strength of revolutionary nationalism observed in the 1930s and redirect the State on the path traced by the anti-imperialist and popular revolution of 1910. But as the union insurgency gained momentum, so did repression, and this first moment ended when the Democratic Tendency was brutally suppressed in 1976.

The second stage begins with an intensification of labor conflicts. This was partly a continuation of what had been seething from years ago, and it was a struggle to achieve the promises of progress and a greater share of national wealth. But it was also a response to the direct way how the economic crisis affected them. There were signs of crisis since the late 1960s, because the development model of import replacement had exhausted its possibilities. But until 1976, workers' wage continued the upward trend and the government increased social spending. In the following years, due to the need to borrow and the consequent conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the wage was losing its purchasing power (XELHUANTZI LÓPEZ, 2006, 27). The significant mobilization of democratic sectors in the mining and metallurgical trade union late in that decade suggested to some observers that these workers would head the insurgency and trade union democratization in this second moment (*Punto Crítico*[1], 15 marzo 1977, 21). However, even before the devastating debt crisis in 1982, it became clear that workers' mobilization was increasingly defensive until it reached the series of defeats in 1983 that marked the end of insurgency.

The history of trade union insurgency and the relationship between the left-wing and the working class in those years begins to be constructed and this article is a contribution in that direction.[2] We illustrate by what happened to the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Industria Nuclear, which started as a section of the electricians' trade

[1] An independent group of intellectuals and leftist activists began publishing the serial *Punto Crítico* (1971-1989), with the purpose of providing information and analysis that contribute to understand the present and plan strategies to fight.

[2] The theme has been a concern mainly of sociologists and political scientists; besides the works already mentioned, see: Sánchez Díaz (1994); Bensusán y Middlebrook (2013); Novelo (1989).

union and later became a union by itself, and the work of Línea Proletaria in sections of the miners and metallurgists' trade union, various ways how the left-wing was related to workers. The first was linked to revolutionary nationalism, and the second to Maoism. Both were in the field of democratic unionism, but pursued very different strategies. The difference, in a way, revived a tension existing in the Mexican labor movement of the early century, among those who thought that trade unions should not ally themselves with political parties and instead exert direct action at the workplace, and those who advocated political alliances, in which they named as multiple action. This was, as we shall see, the most significant difference in the various strategies.

Of course, the end of trade union insurgency reflects more than the results of the strategies implemented by various groups. The 1980s, according to several authors, was a turning period in which the political and economic tradition that emerged from the 1910 revolution showed "clear signs of weakening." The government had little room for maneuver, as Beatriz García Castro explains:

> (...) due to the growth of external debt, erosion and instability of the Mexican peso, inflationary pressures and oversizing of the bureaucratic apparatus. In turn, the national productive apparatus, aimed at the domestic market and where the energy sector (oil production) was already the productive anchor and the main export product, showed a clear loss of competitiveness (2009, 78).

Consequently, the dynamics of economic growth moved to the export sector while processing industries, when they did not disappear, experienced a monumental restructuring of production and labor relations. For the same reason, workers' struggles also changed.

SUTIN: Chronicle of a forced disappearance

The nuclear industry workers staged one of the most important experiences of the Mexican labor movement in the 20th century between the late 1970s and the early next decade. The address corresponded to a group of activists who had previous experience in leftist politics in the ranks of revolutionary nationalism and the student movement of

1968, which were linked from the beginning to the movement of democratic electricians led by Rafael Galván.

Galván was regarded as a leader representing the political line of revolutionary nationalism, and therefore heir to the mass politics of Cardenismo, who always refused to deviate from the Mexican revolutionary tradition, whereas in that tradition there were "the strongest support for any actual progress in the right historical direction" (GALVÁN, 1990, 181). Hence, he was worried about the fact that domestic issues had "ceased to be analyzed according to the new conception of the Mexican Revolution, the conception that it is a hybrid revolution in which we must impose the proletarian hegemony, the proletarian thought" (Ibid. 183).

The first step towards proletarian hegemony consisted in removing the State-owned enterprises from the capitalist rationale to contribute to consolidate national sovereignty. Galván insisted that the social area of the economy should be strengthened to be able to meet the goals of the Mexican Revolution, which the developmental policies did not regard as a priority. Thus, it could only see the Mexican State intervention as a lever for overall progress and not as a source of wild capital accumulation. As a consequence of this approach, it was proposed to start the reformist struggle for State enterprises; it was also proposed the need to modernize and democratize the trade unions to channel the mission of these companies again. We had to take the fight against charrismo through the unity of the labor movement, while the struggle for housing, transport, and all basic services. Likewise, people thought that the rescuing the trade unions had to be a task done by workers under the consistent practice of trade union democracy.

According to Galván, it was clear that the labor movement had to aspire to raise the organization of national industrial trade unions in all branches of production, hence the struggle for interconnecting the electricity industry and nationalizing it in 1960. These reasons probably led to the organization, in 1964, of the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Comisión Nacional de Energía Nuclear. This organization, which later became known as the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores del Instituto Nacional de Energía Nuclear (SUTINEN), and then the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Industria Nuclear (SUTIN),

sought in 1973 and interconnection with the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana (SUTERM). It was until May 1, 1974 that the SUTINEN was formed as nuclear sections of the SUTERM, achieving recognition of their collective agreement. A tripartite committee was formed, with participation of the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE), the Instituto Nacional de Energía Nuclear (INEN), and the SUTERM, in order to develop a national nuclear plan that would guarantee national independence, the maximum use of natural resources, the minimum cost, and the maximum participation of the national industry. Thereafter, the nuclear trade union coincided with Galván's approach and the struggle that began when he and other leaders were fired. Democratic electricians founded in 1975 the Tendencia Democrática of SUTERM.

The Tendencia Democrática came to unite not only the solidarity of many trade unions, but also peasant and popular organizations, as well as it was present in various states of the Mexican Republic. A proof of this was the act held in Plaza Liberación in Guadalajara city on April 5, 1975, which brought together around 20 thousand workers in order to publicize the "Declaración de Guadalajara," national program of struggle for all workers in the country. The "Declaración" stated: "The country urgently demands the most profound renewal of its trade unions, as well as its agricultural, political, economic, and cultural structures. And this is what will emerge from this historic struggle" (*Excélsior*, 15 abril 1975). It concluded that success might derive from the action of masses together in a revolutionary popular alliance. One result of this mobilization was the Primera Conferencia Nacional de la Insurgencia Obrero, Campesina y Popular in May 1976, which brought together 300 delegations of trade unions and peasant and popular organizations that gave life to the Frente Nacional de Acción Popular (FNAP). The Conferencia adopted a program to reform the Mexican society as a whole; including, inter alia, the expulsion of charros from all trade unions and restructuring of unionism, changes in working conditions, expanding the social security system and construction of popular housing, price control, collectivization of agriculture, disappearance of private education, and adoption of a scientific, critical, and democratic approach to education, and of course, freedom and democratic rights (*Excélsior*, 2 junio 1976).

The administration of Luis Echeverría Álvarez chose to support the charro electrician trade union leaders. The Tendencia Democrática responded by brandishing the slogan "down the switch!" and called on strike in the Comisión Federal de Electricidad, on July 16, 1976. The government resorted to the police in order to prevent the strike. Undoubtedly, despite the movement of the Tendencia Democrática, it was defeated by the government, and repression also reached sections of the nuclear workers, the experience the SUTIN received from the democratic movement of electricians was decisive in its history.

Change in the Nuclear Law

One of the major events that strengthened the nationalist vocation of the nuclear trade union was the proposal to reform the nuclear law at the beginning of the administration of José López Portillo. The reform project intended to "provide the possibility of giving concessions to private capital, especially foreign, exploration and exploitation of uranium mantles located in the national territory" (TRUJILLO PEDROZA, 1992, 33). Thanks to mobilizations and campaigns that marked the threat to national sovereignty, the law was ruled out.

We must also notice the insistence of the SUTIN to promote national independence from uranium mining, defending the position to rely on natural uranium reactors, as the basis of the nuclear program for generating electricity, because "the natural uranium reactors take a much more technologically accessible process, the enriched uranium ones are much more complex and even have in the same process products of plutonium, and therefore military secrets that would not make them available" (VARGAS MENA, entrevista 2014). Using enriched uranium meant that, if there is a lack of plants for uranium enrichment, dependence on the USA would be inevitable, because it controlled and did not transfer the technology required.

The SUTIN struggle was always aimed at trade union democracy and defense of the nuclear industry sovereignty. To achieve this objective, they adopted the strategy of remaining within the existing trade union structure, specifically the Congreso del Trabajo, to which they belonged since 1980. The most radical sectors of the movement qualify this

position as reformist or even neocharrismo, while the government and the business sector qualified them as leftist radicals. But the approach consisted in promoting the democratization of existing labor organizations, until achieving a proletarian program among the workforce as a whole.

Strike in the SUTIN: class unity

The strike triggered by the SUTIN, on May 30, 1983, was a part of the strategy of the independent labor movement to demonstrate for the emergency wage increase and against the economic policy of President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado. In total, there were 3,500 strikes throughout the country. Most came to some not very advantageous solution regarding wage increase, but the strikes by university trade unions and the SUTIN were declared non-existent and ended in defeat.

In that year, the SUTIN had 4,000 members, divided into 3 companies, 2 of them public, URAMEX and the ININ, and 1 private, Radiografías Industriales S.A. The set of members was grouped into sections located in the Federal District, State of Mexico, Chihuahua, Reynosa, Torreón, Hermosillo, Oaxaca, and San Luis Potosí; and there were also delegations in Irapuato, Guanajuato, and Maquixco (SUTIN, 1984).

For separating the workers of the Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Nucleares (ININ) from those of URAMEX, the labor authorities declared nonexistent the strike in the ININ. The rationale for this decision was that one of the workplaces, the Centro Nuclear de Salazar, in the State of Mexico, had not suspended work. At the same time, the authorities pressured workers to accept the settlement offered by the company. The opposition to the trade union leadership was concentrated in Salazar. When the strike was proposed, this opposition argued that there were no conditions to carry it out and that the wage increase would not be achieved. Then, when the strike was overturned, in Salazar people agreed with the decision and even were in favor of accepting the settlement. The dividing tactic had the desired effect.

Then, on June 23, the trade union withdrew from the strike in URAMEX by arguing that the wage increase they received in February that year in the contractual review was the same from June 14, where national minimum wages had increased at the same 15.6%

rate. The administration of URAMEX, under the direction of Alberto Escofet, launched its offensive, declining to receive facilities, arguing that unilateral withdrawal from the trade union and launching criticism without foundation was inappropriate, including mention to the failure of URAMEX, the onerous cost of its activities and the expected low consumption of uranium.

In fact it consisted in, as stated by the General Secretary of the SUTIN, Arturo Whaley, liquidating the trade union due to its avant-garde nature in the trade union struggle and he mentioned that if workers accepted the settlement it would mean that

> (...) unionism would henceforth have Damocles' sword over the mass dismissal. Thus, we see the aggression to the SUTIN as an attack on the labor movement as a whole (...) through the defense of the SUTIN, workers' rights were also defended; the right to strike of the Mexican proletariat, the State enterprise, the exclusivity of the State in the nuclear field, national independence on energy and national sovereignty (CABRERA, 1983).

To consummate the forced disappearance of the SUTIN there was the last blow, which was the approval by the Cámara de Diputados de la Ley Nuclear, on December 19, 1984. The law disintegrated and partially privatized the industry, eliminating the possibility of developing an independent nuclear industry; the Comisión Nacional de Energía Atómica and the trade union also disappeared. The only dissenters were the 16 representatives of the Partido Socialista Unificado de México (PSUM), who were for, since the beginning, extinguishing the current law and the right of the SUTIN to exist and maintain its integrity.

Arnaldo Córdova, representative of the PSUM, explained the reasons for his party to be against the presidential initiative:

> The ultimate purpose of the law, he said, which has never been concealed, is destroying the SUTIN... Those who think that the SUTIN is the enemy of the system are completely wrong... being a deeply democratic trade union, more than its interest as a group it looked at the interest of the nation. In fact, it was a friend of our constitutional regime and patriotic and nationalist traditions of our people. But apparently, for the government courtly loyalty and degrading subservience of citizens were more important than an autonomous and free speech (HERNÁNDEZ LÓPEZ, 1984).

The strike lasted 16 months, during which the SUTIN received the solidarity of independent trade unions and those belonging to official centers, such as the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM). On January 2, 1985, the SUTIN sent a public statement to the parliamentary group of the PSUM, where it thanked for the solidarity received and added:

> The approval of the new Nuclear Law was an act of authoritarianism. Violating the social and legal principles that gave rise to contemporary Mexico (...) driven by our principles and conditions of the country, our participation in the SUTIN was aimed at building a nuclear industry on nationalist and efficiency bases and eradicating corruption and contractualism that served as an axis and an example to national development in economic, social, and political terms, attenuating inequalities and raising the living standards of the majority (...) The present has been hostile to us, but we know that the future will favor us. Our struggle has not been in vain. The way we walked off will be sown and germinated more powerful, longer lasting, in greater numbers, it will enrich the country we want (*La Jornada*, 2 enero 1985).

URAMEX fired all workers and ceased to exist. The ININ continued to operate, but dismissed the workers who supported the strike. The government, undoubtedly, acted to prevent the workers who continued intervening in the direction of this strategic industry. Its actions were driven by fear of losing control in the productive life, and the influence that the SUTIN had in the process of democratic restructuring of unionism, which at that stage was believed to be feasible. Most likely, too, makers of economic politics in the country believed that nuclear power "did not represent in the neoliberal program an alternative to hydrocarbons" (NAVARRO RIVERA, 2014, 68).

Mining, metallurgical workers, and Línea Proletaria

The first stirrings of what would eventually be Línea Proletaria were felt in 1968. College students in Mexico City, who participated in the student movement that year, extended their activism through brigades of popular politics that began to emerge from different schools. The idea of popular politics originated in a pamphlet written by Adolfo Orive and Heberto Castillo, *Hacia una política popular*. Orive was a teacher at the School of

Economics of the National University, who conducted graduate studies in France under the direction of Charles Bettelheim, and focused on the study of China and Maoism. Heberto Castillo was an engineer and he was Orive's professor, belonging to the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional and the organization of professors who participated in the 1968 student movement (PUMA CRESPO, s.f., 5-6).

The position adopted by Política Popular came from the mass line postulated by Maoism. The central proposal consisted in going to the people, not to be cutting edge but to consume their ideas and participate in their movements. The authors of *Hacia una política popular* proposed two alternatives before the rise of social movements: getting connected to the people or getting detached from it. Those who aimed only at reforms were left behind and those who claimed to be vanguard stood in front of the movement; each other remained outside, and further agreed to belittle people's knowledge and struggle capacity. Getting connected to the people implied the unwavering and permanent presence in the struggle for the people to make their own politics, i.e. popular policy (ORIVE, página web).

Students imbued with this view marched into town in small groups. The brigade went, in 1969, mainly to rural areas, and the region of La Laguna, where the two northern states of Durango and Coahuila join, this became an important working center since 1971. The presence in La Laguna linked them with priests organized under the principles of the Liberation Theology, and the association provided them with an invitation to work in Chiapas, with bishop Samuel Ruíz, so that this was one leftist front that preceded and led years later in the formation of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). The militants were involved in land issues, production and credit of the militants. But they also went to the cities, where migration from the countryside to the city had created recently occupied areas, whose settlers supplied the city's job market and demanded housing and basic urban services. Thus, popular organizations and colonies grew and they were named as Tierra and Libertad or revolutionaries such as Flores Magón and Rubén Jaramillo (PUMA CRESPO, s.f., 6-9; CANO, 2015; VARGAS, entrevista 2014).

Alberto Anaya, one of the leaders of Política Popular, went to the city of Durango in 1969. His intent was getting connected to the popular movement there, and advance

the organization of brigades. He did not succeed, so that in 1971 or 1972 he made contact to a leader of popular colonies in Monterrey and went to that city. Settler organizations in that city already had time to exist: Tierra and Libertad, for instance, where converged leftist activists from different organizations, started since the end of the previous decade (VARGAS, entrevista 2014; Punto Crítico, junio-julio 1973, 39).

In this city there was a break in the original group of Política Popular. Adolfo Orive, who had been hitherto in Nayarit and Durango, arrived in Monterrey with brigadiers who came from the intense and successful work at La Laguna. Between Orive and Anaya differences emerged concerning ideological and organizational strategy issues and possibly rivalry with the administration. The main point had to do with how to make decisions: Orive insisted they should be agreed at assemblies; Anaya thought that in practice this method centralized administration in Orive, and it was preferable that decisions were taken in administration groups and then brought to ratification by the bases. Unable to solve the dispute, they proceeded to separation, and thereafter the Anaya's trend was better known as Línea de Masas and Orive's as Línea Proletaria (LP) (PUMA CRESPO, s.f., 11-12).

The second continued with rural and urban work but also entered the labor movement. It was present at important moments of the struggle by democratizing the trade unions of telephonists, teachers, and others. But it was especially in the trade union of miners and metallurgists that it played a leading role between 1975 and 1982. In 1976 it came to the leadership of section 147, the largest of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana. The section grouped metallurgical workers from plant 1 of Altos Hornos de México S.A., in Monclova Coahuila; and later workers joined the plant 2, section 288. In 1977, miners from Línea Proletaria won the election to the local committee (section 11) of Industrial Minera México, in Santa Bárbara, Chihuahua. LP was also strong in section 271, of the Siderúrgica Lázaro Cárdenas Las Truchas, inaugurated in 1976 (MÉNDEZ y BERRUETA, 2011, 148; GARZA, 1987, 203-226; ESTERBAUER, 2013, 7-16; BARRAZA Y MOLINA, entrevista 2014; BIZBERG, 1982). The importance of Línea Proletaria did not lay only in its growth but also in the strategic place it occupied in the steel industry in the development plans of the

Mexican government, and by then the main producers of steel in the country belonged to the State. Although destined to fail, the economic policy aimed to develop the domestic production of capital goods and export (MOLINA, 1987, 256-257). Possibly more by luck than design, Línea Proletaria was located in a strategic position.

The moment this happened had characteristics of its own. Some contemporary observers believed, as we have already noticed, that the flag of trade union insurgency lay in the miners and metallurgists after the defeat, in 1976, of the Tendencia Democrática of electrical workers. To the extent that that assessment was accurate, it also implied a shift in revolutionary nationalism towards other political leftist positions. Some scholars also felt that the miners and metallurgists, and particularly Línea Proletaria, had the advantage of knowing the previous experiences of the Tendencia Democrática and other democratic currents in national trade unions, such as the trade union Movimiento Sindical Ferrocarrilero, active since 1971, so that they could avoid the mistakes that led to defeat (BIZBERG, 1989, 93). At the same time, there were changes in the economic and political situation. The president who came in 1977, José López Portillo, started the wage increase policy and ceased any signs of favoring the opposition to the official unionism. Consequently, the cracks that had widened the scope of action of democratic trade unionism disappeared. The new situation and economic policy also turned requirements for wages into possible clashes with the government and held back the offensive nature of workers' struggles.

The first two sections where the Línea Proletaria came to the local executive power were Santa Bárbara and Monclova. These places had in common their relative isolation, and especially the population depended to a large extent on employment offered by the mines or steel industry. In Santa Bárbara, the miners were almost 40% of the economically active population in 1970, and most of them worked in the mines of Industrial Minera México (in 1975 the company employed 1,200 miners). In Monclova, workers from Altos Hornos de México were around 1/3 of the economically active population in the city in 1970; the opening of plant 2 in the course of the decade significantly increased the proportion (IX CENSO, 1970). Thus, workers' fate was also the cities' fate.

In both cities, the urban population lacked sufficient services, including housing. This feature allowed the LP militants to put to good use its experience in organizing popular colonies. The case of Monclova was particularly severe, as the city's population increased from 45,000 inhabitants in 1960 to 82,000 in 1970, so that the urban infrastructure was exceeded by far (Ibíd.). LP first provided this work of popular organization and by gaining access to workers in Altos Hornos. In Santa Barbara, high school at night became the ideal space for LP organizers to consolidate a group of students who would carry out organizational work in the mines and neighborhoods (ESTERBAUER, 2013, 9; VARGAS, entrevista 2014; BARRAZA, entrevista 2015). The perception of closeness between the residential and labor spaces, even though the actual distance was substantial, allowed that in both places working in the neighborhoods continued besides base work in the trade union.

The link between neighborhood and mine or factory was significant in demonstrations and strikes. In Santa Bárbara, for instance, miners broke a strike in May 1975. The problem had been developing since April, when the company IMM announced the amount of profit sharing and miners accused her of unjustifiably reducing the amount. Section 11, taking advantage that the annual contract negotiations begun, decided to go on strike. The strike ended a month later; workers gained a sum slightly higher for profit sharing (from 3,000 to 5,000 pesos per miner), 13% wage increase, and 50% of wage loss during the month on strike (BARRAZA Y MOLINA, entrevista 2014).

More important that the agreement was what happened during the strike. On April 27, when workers began to protest, they organized a march through the city - including a brief rally in the exclusive neighborhood of engineers, supervisors, and managers of the company - in which there were miners and their families and other neighbors. Already during the strike, the night school organized a committee to support the strikers, and this helped getting expressions of solidarity from organizations and trade unions outside the city. On May 26, about a thousand people marched again and concluded with a rally in the central square. Then, attended by representatives of the popular colonies of San Francisco del Oro and Parral, mining neighbor towns, and also the Comité de Defensa Popular and the city of Chihuahua and the State section of the

Movimiento Sindical Ferrocarrilero (La Cachumba, 5 mayo y 2 junio 1975). Local merchants extended credit to the strikers during the strike, and the radio in the region reported its action favorably. At the same time, many of the young miners who participated in the strike were recognized as dissidents and began working to forcefully organize a more effective trade union action (BARRAZA Y MOLINA, entrevista 2014). The core of this organization, which proceeded cautiously, consisted in the miners who attended high school at night.

Similar events occurred in Monclova between 1975 and 1976. There, LP militants had organized "small boards" of neighbors, where participants discussed the needs of urban services and proposed solutions. Many neighbors were workers or the immediate family of workers from AHMSA, so that the experience was traveling from neighborhoods to the factory. For that reason, when in 1975 the company proposed to extinguish the agreement that required it to build housing, and the committee of section 147 did not oppose, the movement in the neighborhoods and dissent in the trade union converged on the expression of their concerns. At that time, the local executive committee cracked down on dissidents, suspending their trade union rights (ESTERBAUER, 2013, 9-10; GARZA, 1987, 218).

A year later, in April 1976, the company announced the amount that would be devoted to profit sharing. The workers felt it was 74% lower than the previous year, even though the company had declared to have obtained exceptional gains. Gathered in regular meeting, on 3 May, about 2,500 workers forced the general secretary to cite an extraordinary assembly and then came out to march through the streets of the city. The Frente Unido de Colonias, which brought together about a thousand families from the so-called independent colonies, joined the march (*Punto Crítico*, 1° quincena de junio de 1976, 13-14 y 20). The outcome of these protests was the rise of Línea Proletaria to the direction of the section.

In addition to the union of community and work, so to speak, Línea Proletaria used what we might call direct action tactics. The departmental delegates headed immediate action, so that the workers affected solved their problems. In 1975, as a part of the pressure for the trade union to negotiate an increase in profit sharing, the miners in Santa

Bárbara decided for collective absence, taking advantage that the agreement allowed them a maximum of 5 absences per month (*La Cachumba*, 5 mayo 1975). Another common tactic was the slowdowns, which reduced production up to the point that the company was forced to negotiate. Departmental shutdowns were also increased. Virgilio Maltos Long, leader of section 147, thought "there was no day without a departmental strike" (ESTERBAUER, 2013, 9-10). Everardo Barraza reported that while he was a departmental delegate, if the supervisor did not observe any labor agreement, he caught workers out of his department and they were walking downhill until the engineer and the supervisor gave way (BARRAZA, entrevista 2015). Such actions avoided major confrontations, and left in the hands of those involved the consequent decisions and actions.

This approach was consistent with the idea that it should be the masses, and not the leaders, who make decisions. The same Barraza explains that "we inculcate the race to read the contract, we inculcate the race to read the statutes for which it was the leader, everyone was the leader, and this did not comply with anyone. So, this means teaching by learning, then we inculcate it all" (Ibid.). Delegates, thus, initiated discussions with workers in their department and reached decisions. Several young people were fighting with fire and acquiring knowledge and skills to fulfill the work organization and administration.

The other feature of Línea Proletaria was the rejection of direct confrontation and the politicization of conflicts. LP militants regarded as important not to force premature confrontations that would bring down an already weak base, so they prepared carefully and in a hidden way local elections. The same reasoning was applied to situations that could lead to fight against the State, and the workers were not ready for it. LP rejected, as a consequence, subordinating the base work to a party line, because then the workers would be subject to decisions of a leadership alien to them and concerned about the State power. LP postulated that the popular struggle would be prolonged, and workers had to first build their power and then engage in the front for power struggle in society. Sectarianism happening due to this position was harshly criticized by others within the left-wing (BIZBERG, 1989, 90-99; MOLINA, 1987, 276-280).

LP militants preferred to direct their forces towards local and pragmatic demands. But despite its caution, clashes with spurious directions occurred and they brought hard consequences. In 1975, in Santa Bárbara, 13 miners who emerged as "natural leaders," according to Barraza, were punished with suspension of rights and subsequently dismissed. Barraza underwent the same thing soon after being elected general secretary of section 11. His punishment was a result of the challenge that many democratic sections presented during the national congress of the trade union in 1978. Leaders of sections 147 and 271 were also punished. Barraza's substitute was "charrified," because it lacked experience, said Barraza, and its association with Línea in the eyes of the working base weakened the confidence that workers had put in the organization (BARRAZA y MOLINA, entrevista 2014).

Despite the setbacks, the organization continued to advance and exert influence. Between 1977 and 1979, according to a contemporary observer from the metallurgical mining trade union, the sections that headed the opposition to government austerity policies were those of metalworkers in Fundidora de Monterrey, the two plants of AHMSA in Monclova, and Sicartsa in Las Truchas (MOLINA, 1987, 271). Another barrage of strikes in 1981 included Monclova metallurgists and miners in Santa Bárbara. Section 11 even delayed completion because it demanded that the company and the Secretaría del Trabajo recognize stress and neurosis as a disease in mining. In AHMSA, the company blamed the Línea by low production and in 1982 it fired a number of them. The leaders who commanded them were corrupt, as it happened in Santa Bárbara in 1977 (Ibíd., 282-284; BARRAZA y MOLINA, entrevista 2014; ESTERBAUER, 2013, 11-12). Until then, workers were pushing an offensive to change conditions in the production.

But after 1982, as we have already seen, the context changed. Ultimately people felt the combined impact of a deep crisis, an employers' offensive to restructure the industry and work, and the neoliberal policy that privatized much of public enterprises, including AHMSA in 1991 (BIZBERG, 1989, 84; MÉNDEZ Y BERRUETA, 2011, 153-161; ESTERBAUER, 2013, 11-12). However, in 1985 section 271, in Las Truchas, faced other trade unions and organizations in the Mesa de Concertación Sindical while in 1986 members of Línea occupied the direction of section 11 again (MÉNDEZ Y BERRUETA, 2011, 155;

BARRAZA y MOLINA, entrevista 2014). But for all practical purposes, the chances of an offensive and progressive unionism were then nonexistent.

The left-wing spoke of a reflux in the movement. This meant, in many cases, the withdrawal of militants, moderation of positions, and even abandonment of struggles undertaken. The working base, however, remained, because as Barraza explained: "Ebb! That was the slogan [laughs]. Ebb! Where should we hide if we lived there? Lived there, it was our assistance, our organization, our people... where should we took refuge?" (BARRAZA y MOLINA, entrevista 2014). In this regard, in the second half of the 1980s, when much of the left-wing fixed its look on electoral politics, workers on the production front committed to the increasingly unequal struggle against deterioration that involved the crisis and implementation of neoliberal economic policy.

Throughout the previous decade, and even further back, hundreds of thousands of workers chased trade union democracy. Nuclear and steel workers, numerically important, also highlighted the key role played by the industries in which they worked during the Mexican economic developmentalism designs. The trade union of nuclear workers and the trend of Línea Proletaria within the metallurgical mining trade union shared purposes and condition, which was not little thing, but perhaps this was the only similarity.

The SUTIN was born as a democratic trade union while Línea Proletaria had to struggle to establish democracy in those spaces that could carry out their trade union activities. Possibly this difference led to others, among which we point out three main ones. First, the attitude towards the leaders. LP warned its members to act as advisers and not as leaders, allowing the workers themselves to acquire the experience and responsibility to carry out their struggles. The SUTIN, however, assigned more importance to its leadership precisely because it was not inimical to the purposes pursued by the workers; and we must add that Galván was central in the proposals and decisions of the movement. The second difference consisted in the fact that the SUTIN was turned towards a political program ruled by revolutionary nationalism and it covered a direction for social transformation, while LP favored local action exerted with regard to immediate issues whose solution was in the hands of those involved, before the masses materialize

their own political program. The third difference, therefore, concerned the fact that often the tactics of the SUTIN led to actions in order to influence the political field, even supporting the position of a certain group of politicians in government agencies and creating broad fronts of dissident organizations. LP, however, advised not to get connected to political groups or participate in fronts that did not arise from the base itself; it shunned political action in the sense of influencing or playing in government action. Petty differences were probably beyond recognition in the field. But the fact is that direct action was opposed to multiple action, such an old discussion in the Mexican labor movement, was again staged - with a cast and a very different scenario - in the years of trade union insurgency.

It is not our purpose to revive old debates about whether one or another strategy was correct. Truthfully, and crudely, both were defeated. We may conclude better that in perspective and from memory, both contributed to the transformation experienced by the members.

Jorge Bustillos:

> I was always motivated to see the SUTIN as an instrument of transformation, which could collaborate to transform social conditions albeit gradually and slowly... In fact, I think all that movement served to constitute a spectrum of the political and democratic spaces now prevailing in the country. And I think that was what I fell in love with, but I do not believe in anything else. And yes, we turn it into a life project, we had very clear flags and reasons to live and fight... there was a slogan that seeped deep: For population welfare, workers' control of production! (BUSTILLOS, entrevista 2014).

Javier Molina, from Línea Proletaria in Santa Bárbara:

> For me, it was a turning point when I started the fight. My grandfather on my mother's side was a miner and he died of silicosis. My father was a miner and... then he told me: "Well, what do you want being committed that much? They will keep giving, they can come with a bang because you are very involved." And my answer to him was, as I said then: "Yes, but to see Dad... what have we done, what have you done, what have we had? Well, it is a pure poverty, because being poor back then, because we could be poor but fight"... It is very clear for me that it was a turning point and from then on it was a different worldview and life, completely... And then besides, you are watching it, you have other issues like self-esteem and you realize you can do many things that you thought you could not have (BARRAZA y MOLINA, entrevista 2014).

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