

**The President that Never Was: Maximino Ávila Camacho and the Taming of  
*Caudillismo* in Early Post-Revolutionary Mexico**

by

Alejandro Quintana

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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## ABSTRACT

The President that Never Was: Maximino Ávila Camacho and the Taming of *Caudillismo* in Early Post-Revolutionary Mexico

by

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This study analyzes the effects of the machinations of a unique political boss, the product of Mexican political culture at a particular juncture of a political system in the process of formation. More specifically, it focuses on *caudillo*<sup>1</sup> legacies, their evolution, and their influence on the process by which a state-sponsored (official) party was able to dominate the Mexican state between 1929 and 2000. The official party (today known as *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* or PRI) was founded in 1929, in large part to institutionalize a renovated political system that intended to eliminate traditional *caudillismo* in Mexico. This study argues that such *caudillismo* did not completely disappear, but rather the official party pragmatically opted for a strategy that incorporated *caudillos* as part of the machinery of a one-party authoritarian system. The result was a modified form of *caudillismo* in which leaders still engaged in caudillistic practices such as cronyism, corruption, co-optation and coercion, but who were now dependent on and

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<sup>1</sup> Traditionally a *caudillo* was a charismatic leader, often a war hero, who generally headed up a regional patron-client network and whose power limited formal institutions and was maintained by substantial control of the means of co-optation (such as distribution of local government offices, commercial contracts and protection from competition) and coercion (such as the use of armed groups to intimidate those refusing to cooperate with the *caudillo*). The *caudillos*' realm of influence sometimes resembled mini-states within a state, where they operated above the law. The *caudillos* drive to dominate sometimes produced clashes with other *caudillos* as they challenged each other's powers. The result was a political environment in which the strongest, and not the rule of law, often dominated. States in which *caudillos* were in competition were, therefore, often unstable. Such competition also existed between local *caudillos* and national ones, which led to some substantial tensions and conflicts within the context of the consolidation of a new political system after the Americas independence from Spain. Ultimately, the central government was able to dominate, although regional *caudillos* did not totally disappear.

somewhat submissive to the party. Most of these party *caudillos* were former *caciques*<sup>2</sup> who became part of the party elite helping establish the party's domination in their region. While traditional *caudillos* may have faded, these emerging political leaders used such practices to guarantee the party's domination of the state in exchange for political and economic privileges. This contributed to the consolidation of the stable and authoritarian post-revolutionary Mexican state of the twentieth century.

By focusing on Maximino Ávila Camacho (1891-1945), the preeminent *cacique* of the Mexican state of Puebla in the 1930s and a powerful *caudillo* in the 1940s, this dissertation analyzes how the official party empowered *caciques* and utilized their caudillistic attributes in order to stabilize and dominate the Mexican state. Maximino's political career provides an excellent case study because he was one of the first political leaders who built a clientelistic network after the foundation of the official party, thus demonstrating the continuity from *cacique* to *caudillo* and the effect of this on the Mexican political system. Maximino's rise began when President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) appointed him as military commander of Puebla in 1935. One year later, Maximino used this position to secure the official party's dominance in the state of Puebla. As a reward in 1937 the party helped Maximino become governor of that state. Similarly, after organizing a regional coalition and a number of governors in support of

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<sup>2</sup> A *cacique* can be broadly understood as a local version of a *caudillo*. However, more often his authority is based, not so much on a mythical "heroic" or "charismatic" leadership, but on his personal identification with the area under his authority. He is recognized as the patriarch, the head of a kinship group, by members of his community(ies) dominating local means of coercion and co-optation. Often times this "kinship" is constructed artificially through a system of *compadrazgo* (functioning as a political godfather), that is the protector and provider of the wellbeing of his community's families. Due to the patriarchal nature of *caciques* their authority was often local and occasionally regional. Oftentimes *caudillos* began as *caciques*. This causes some scholars to use the terms interchangeably depending on the aspects of authority (regional or national) being analyze at the time. See for example Alan Knight analyzing Saturnino Cedillo in *Citizens of the Pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture* edited by Wil G.Pansters (Amsterdam: Thela Publishers, 1997), 114, 121 and 122.

the party's presidential candidate in 1940, Maximino took over the Ministry of Communications and Public Works (1941-45), which was a prime base for the distribution of favors. As minister, Maximino expanded his patriarchal influence and power beyond Puebla's borders. For example, he used the influence of the Ministry of Communications and Public Works (SCOP) to establish a national clientelistic network that helped him become a major political figure at the national level. The party and the presidents were generally tolerant and supportive of *caudillos*, and even in some cases their abuses, because such relationships helped consolidate a one-party dominated state.

The ambitions and autonomy of *caudillos* made it necessary for the party to establish mechanisms to control them. One such strategy was rewarding loyalty with political office and access to government resources. Another was making it risky for *caudillos* to operate without the party. Therefore, many *caudillos* opted to benefit from the perks available rather than sacrifice anything. The case of Maximino illustrates this. By 1942 Maximino by using the emerging system, in part through distributing contracts via SCOP to his cronies and allies was considered one of the most powerful and wealthiest men in Mexico and he was determined to become president. Yet, he failed to do so. Members of the party elite fearing his personalistic authoritarian tendencies denied him the party's endorsement. Maximino attempted to challenge them, but breaking from the party meant losing access to the resources that sustained his political base. As a consequence, he was forced to remain submissive to the party, while the latter was able to pursue state and party stability. This study allows us to better understand the intricacies of such processes in a formative period of the regime that ruled Mexico for most of the twentieth century.

TO JENNIFER, PAPAEL, MAMINA, AND MEG

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## INTRODUCTION

### State of the Problem

On July 7, 2000 millions of Mexicans poured into the streets across the nation celebrating the “arrival of democracy” and the end of “intimidation, fraud and clientelism.”<sup>3</sup> These sentiments were triggered by the 2000 presidential election that ended seventy-one years of one-party state domination (1929-2000). This event symbolized the end of a long authoritarian era and the expansion of democratic institutions that allowed different political groups to more effectively compete for elected office. The excitement was justified. This was a major step in a long road to consolidate democracy in Mexico.

The ability of the official party to retain power and maintain relative peace and stability in the country has intrigued scholars for decades. The formation and success of a one-party political system was the product of complex and multilayered processes. Different scholars have focused on different aspects of this and the combination of these perspectives generates a broad spectrum that allows us to have a better understanding of this complex political process. This study contributes to this effort. To achieve this, it focuses on one aspect of the deeply rooted authoritarian legacies that contributed to the ability of this party to stabilize and dominate the Mexican state for so long.<sup>4</sup> It argues that authoritarian legacies allowed the party to construct a system at local, regional and

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<sup>3</sup> *The New York Times*, “Mexico’s Democratic Breakthrough,” July 4, 2000, A12.

<sup>4</sup> This study employs Katherine Hite’s and Paola Cesarini’s definition: “Authoritarian legacies are those rules, procedures, norms, patterns, practices, dispositions, relationships, and memories originating in well-defined authoritarian experiences of the past that, as a result of specific historical configurations and/or political struggles, survive democratic transitions and intervene in the quality and practice of postauthoritarian democracies.” See Katherine Hite and Paola Cesarini, eds., *Authoritarian Legacies and Democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 4.

national levels of clientelistic networks that helped create a powerful organization capable of co-opting potential allies and coercing opponents.<sup>5</sup> An interesting aspect of this process is that the party did not create most of these clientelistic networks. Rather, it became the centralizing organization of previously somewhat independent regional networks. These networks were regionally based and often dominated by political bosses, i.e., *caciques* and *caudillos*.

*Caudillo* literally means “head.” Originally it referred to a private militia leader at the service of the Spanish king. In Latin America, the word *caudillo* is strongly identified with powerful and charismatic leaders, often “war heroes” from independence or from any other of the many wars and battles of the nineteenth century (some examples are Simón Bolívar, Vicente Guerrero, Agustín de Iturbide, José de San Martín and Bernardo O’Higgins). Generally, their power was based on a regional patron-client network whose power limited formal institutions and was maintained by substantial control of the means of cooptation and coercion. Their power depended on their capacity to coerce and co-opt competing regional leaders, as well as groups, providing economic benefits to the formers’ allies and supporters in a specific territory. A *caudillo*’s area of control sometimes resembled a mini-state where his<sup>6</sup> personal opinion and judgment were as good as written law, in part, because the actual government could not compete with the *caudillo*’s power and resources.

In the aftermath of independence in Latin America, *caudillos* began to be identified more with the nature of their authority than the origins of it. In other words,

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<sup>5</sup> Wil G. Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987* (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1990), 30.

<sup>6</sup> In the nineteenth century practically all *caudillos* were men. More recently some female leaders have used *caudillo*-type strategies (e.g. Evita Perón, wife of Argentine President Juan Domingo Perón, 1946-55 currently leave in).

their identity was not so much based on the fact that they were charismatic war heroes, but that they were authoritarian leaders in control of a defined territory (e.g., Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina, Antonio López de Santa Anna in Mexico, and Rafael Carrera in Guatemala).

A similar form of authoritarian leader, the *cacique*, is sometimes considered a *caudillo* even though there are generally some differences. Unlike *caudillos*' heroic charisma, the *caciques*' authority was primarily based on his personal identification with the inhabitants of the region he controlled. He was perceived as a sort of patriarch who needed to establish some kind of kinship link with the community. This was often achieved through *compadrazgo* (godparenthood). It was not uncommon for a *cacique* to have hundreds of godchildren. The reliance on a kinship link sometimes limited the capacity of a *cacique* to expand his power beyond a community or small region. A *cacique* could become a *caudillo* if he was able to use his power and influence to expand his realm of influence beyond his kin-based region. Because of this, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between a *cacique* with a substantial amount of influence and a regional *caudillo*. Thus, at times, scholars use both terms while referring to the same leader.<sup>7</sup>

Over time the understanding of these terms has changed. In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910-21) nationally recognized revolutionary leaders were often referred to as *caudillos* (most notably Álvaro Obregón, Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata), while regional leaders became *caciques* (e.g. General Saturnino Cedillo in San Luis Potosí, General Adalberto Tejeda in Veracruz, Tomás Garrido Canabal in Tabasco,

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Alan Knight refers to Saturnino Cedillo variously as a *caudillo* and as a *cacique* in *Citizens of the Pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture* edited by Wil G. Pansters (Amsterdam: Thelma Publishers, 1997), 114, 121-122.

Emilio Portes Gil in Tamaulipas and General Fortunato Maycotte in Guerrero). After the chaos of the revolution and the subsequent instability during which Zapata (d. 1919), Villa (d. 1923) and Obregón (d. 1928), the three major *caudillos* of the revolution, were assassinated, a large number of revolutionary officers favored the foundation of the official party (March 1929). Many of these officers had already secured personal control of substantial territories. In other words, they were acting as *caciques* or *caudillos*. The function of a party would be to provide stability and to create political space where political elites could resolve their differences and promote their political interests in order to present a united “revolutionary” front against reactionary groups or independent regional *caciques* and *caudillos*. As a result, the party secured substantial control of the state while political elites became increasingly intertwined with the political structure of the party. Astute *caciques* and *caudillos* became identified as powerful members of the official party and engaged in authoritarian practices such as coercion, co-optation, corruption and cronyism as means to secure their power and interests, just as the party did in rather symbiotic fashion.

Since its inception, the official party was relatively tolerant of authoritarian practices, in part because it reinforced its own power. In the 1930s and 1940s, labor and peasant leaders joined the party, at times acting as *caciques* whose “territory” was their own organizations. In the 1940s some were nicknamed *charros*. Some examples of this party-base form of *cacique* were Jesús Díaz de León, the 1940s leader of The Union of Railroad Worker of the Mexican Republic, STFRM; Joaquín Hernández Galicia, the 1980s leader of the state owned oil company, PEMEX; and Elba Esther Gordillo, the 1990s leader of the National Education Workers’ Union, SNTE). Thus, not only has our

understanding of the terms *cacique* and *caudillo* changed during the past two centuries, but also the nature of their power and their role in the national political system. As already mentioned, the *cacique* is sometimes considered a *caudillo* even though there are some differences. Unlike the *caudillo*'s authority, the *cacique*'s authority was often based not so much on heroic charisma, but on his personal identification with the inhabitants of the region under his control. He is often identified as a region's patriarch and his relationship with villagers or communities is often based on kinship (*compadrazgo*). The direct relationship between a *cacique* and "his people" can sometimes limit the capacity of a *cacique* to control a vast territory. However, similar to the *caudillo*, a *cacique* is generally the de facto strongman of his realm and can be as compassionate or authoritarian as a *caudillo*. As the term *caudillo* became identified with the authoritarian nature of a leader, the term *cacique* became identified with a leader controlling a small area—a town or a group of towns and its surroundings. Some scholars use these two terms interchangeably although the term *caudillo* has been used more commonly in the twentieth century for authoritarian leaders at both the national and regional levels.<sup>8</sup>

Scholar Wil Pansters regards *caudillos* and *caciques* as "the bridgeheads between the modern and the traditional worlds. Their power is based on ties of a personal nature, but at the same time they form a part of the modern political culture."<sup>9</sup>

This work focuses primarily on the relationship between regional *caudillos* together with *caciques* and the central government and helps explain how this

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Alan Knight in referring to Saturnino Cedillo variously as a *caudillo* and as a *cacique* in *Citizens of the Pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture* edited by Wil G. Pansters (Amsterdam: Thelma Publishers, 1997), 114, 121-122.

<sup>9</sup> Will G. Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla: Formación y ocaso del cacicazgo avilacamachista, 1937-1987* (Puebla, México: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1998), 7.

relationship helped consolidate the one-party authoritarian political system that dominated Mexico for most of the twentieth century. The main argument of this study is that the official party used state resources to support, control, and utilize the power of *caudillos* to help consolidate its political domination at regional and national levels. The official party benefited from *caciques*' and *caudillos*' regional power and their influence over local interest groups. These leaders benefited by aligning with the party in order to receive political, economic, and military resources that the party controlled and the former needed to ensure domination of their regions. This interdependency helped consolidate a stable, and enduring political system in Mexico, even if violent challenges against the regime continued (e.g. the guerrilla warfare in Guerrero headed by Lucio Cabañas in the 1970s). It also, however, limited the development of democratic institutions.

In order to demonstrate this argument, this study focuses on the rise of a *cacique* and his consolidation as a national *caudillo* between 1935 and 1945—a critical period when the revolutionary party consolidated itself as the dominant political force in Mexico. In particular this is a study of the political career of Maximino Ávila Camacho (1891-1945). He was a revolutionary soldier who became one of the first politicians to emerge as a more modern *caudillo* with the support of the official party. In 1935, the official party, with the consent of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), helped create Maximino's political base and assisted him in consolidating his position as the *caudillo* of the state of Puebla. Maximino was a very ambitious man. He was determined to become president of Mexico. Astutely and aggressively, he managed to expand his political influence and become one of the most powerful and influential *caudillos* in the

country, yet the party always managed to keep him under control. At times the party used his national influence and power to neutralize other *caudillos*, as well as other individuals and groups, who rose up against the authority of the party. This loyalty paid off. After joining the ranks of influential members of the party, Maximino became one of the most powerful and wealthiest politicians in Mexico. The complexities of the relationship between Maximino and the official party allows us to analyze the mutual dependency existing between the party and *caudillos*, and how this made it possible for the party to finally tame *caudillos* and stabilize Mexico.

Ironically, according to its founders, the revolutionary party was created to eliminate *caudillismo* and its destabilizing influence. President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) had announced in September 1928 the creation of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR)—as the official party was originally known—to transform Mexico from a country of “one man to one of national institutions and laws.”<sup>10</sup> As the case of Maximino demonstrates, the party was a controlled political arena where *caudillos* could disagree, struggle, and even attack each other, within the parameters established by the party and the revolutionary elite. The party did not eliminate *caudillismo*, but reshaped it in such a way that instead of being a source of instability it became an important source of stability, in part, by guaranteeing the hegemony of the party.

This does not mean that all party members shared a similar political agenda or were forced to obey one political group. In fact, the case of Maximino helps us understand that the party was a somewhat flexible institution where diverse groups competed and challenged each other. This was especially the case during periodic

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<sup>10</sup> José Manuel Puig Casauranc, *Galatea rebelde a varios pigmaliones: de Obregón a Cárdenas, el fenómeno mexicano actual* (México: Impresores Unidos, 1938), 38.

internal struggles to select a presidential candidate. However, once consensus was established and the sitting president announced a candidate all political groups in the party were expected to close ranks and support the candidate in order to guarantee the party's continuance in power. In exchange for such loyalty, *caudillos* received compensation. This allowed for the taming of *caudillismo*, not a minor feat if one considers the frequent military coups against civilian governments during most of the twentieth century in the rest of Latin America.

British Mexicanist Alan Knight highlights the intricacies of the various meanings of the term *caudillo* under the system established by the PNR. He suggests that:

Caudillaje... could assume old and new forms and perhaps, therefore, offers a false impression of continuity; if, however, the term is to be used, it is best to see the revolution, in its popular embodiment, as the last kick of the good old caudillo cause, before local, personal, traditional/charismatic leaders gave way to modern, associational power structures, no less authoritarian, and all the more powerful for their permanent, ultimately bureaucratic character, and their dependent, mass following. Here, rather than with the Porfiriato, we can discern a *genuinely new caudillaje*; or, rather, since the military, caudillo element was temporary and not essential, we can discern new forms of authority, increasingly civilian and bureaucratic, with sound rational-legal foundations; and it was the creation of these, by the revolutionary elite after 1915, which marked the real innovation of the revolution. It was an innovation, paradoxically, which the bulk of the popular movement resented and resisted, even if, over time, they began to learn the new rules of the game and sought to exploit them; and it was an innovation which enabled the revolutionary regime, in subsequent decades, to continue [Porfirio] Díaz's work of economic development and political centralization more surely and effectively than the old dictator had dreamt

of doing.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, a *caudillo* under the official party was a very different political entity than the one that lead and organized a variety of regions across the nation during the politically confusing years that followed independence. Maximino was a post-revolutionary *caudillo* in his use of clientelistic networks to establish a regional political organization infused with his personal charisma and dominated by him. This new style *caudillo* was affected by the growth and modernization of the Mexican bureaucracy after the consolidation of the revolutionary regime in the 1930s and 1940s. This also increased the *caudillo* dependency on the official party.

### **Maximino as a Case Study**

Maximino is one of many of revolutionaries-turned-politicians who used an updated version of traditional *caudillo* practices in order to consolidate their personal clientelistic networks and power. Unlike traditional *caudillos*, however, Maximino was one of the first *caudillos* to create his network with the support and limitations imposed by the official party. Between 1935 and 1945 Maximino evolved from a military general relatively unknown in the Mexican political arena to become a force to be reckoned with at the national level. His political career illustrates the changing nature of the interdependent relationship between the central government and regional *caudillos* that helped consolidate the power of the party. The case of Maximino also allows for the analysis of three important elements of this process: (1) the nature of *caudillos*' personal power, (2) how the regional power of *caudillos* contributed to the consolidation of the

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<sup>11</sup> Alan Knight, "Peasant and caudillo in revolutionary Mexico 1910-17," in *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution* by David A. Brading, David, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 58. Emphasis added.

one-party dominated state, and (3) how the party was able to keep *caudillos* from successfully challenging the authority of the party and thereby destabilizing the state.

Maximino's power, while somewhat independent, required a certain degree of dependence on the official party. The party's tolerance of his abuses of power, as well as corruption facilitated Maximino's consolidation of his own power and wealth and encouraged him to remain loyal to the party. As he became the most powerful and influential *caudillo* in the state of Puebla, he also consolidated a political elite in Puebla that helped him guarantee the stability of the state and its loyalty to the party. Between the end of major hostilities resulting from the revolution in 1917 and 1937 when Maximino became governor, Puebla suffered almost continual political chaos and violence. During these twenty years Puebla had 19 governors. After Maximino, all governors finished out their four year term. Furthermore, all of Puebla's governors between 1941 and 1973 emerged from Maximino's political circle.

In certain senses, Maximino was a product of the party. In others his career was the result of more traditional patterns of patronage. For example, his emergence as a politician had much to do with traditional political patronage via his relationship with President Álvaro Obregón (1921-24). For example, he received appointments as coordinator of Obregón's presidential campaign in Michoacán and became a general as the result of Obregón's intervention. Maximino was astute enough to take advantage of new channels to power and in 1935 he won increased party support after demonstrating his loyalty to President Lázaro Cárdenas, by helping him eliminate the influence of former President Plutarco Elías Calles within the party. Calles had served as a specie of national *caudillo* and expected to play a major role during the presidency of Cárdenas, an

effort that the latter strongly resisted. Maximino's decision to support Cárdenas in his struggle with Calles, reveals the degree to which Maximino was willing to adapt to new political realities in pursuit of his own advantage. With Cárdenas' support Maximino managed to overpower political competition and become Puebla's *caudillo*. His ultimate goal to become president of Mexico, however, was not realized, in large measure, because of the opposition of sectors of the official party's leadership. They blocked his attempt to become the party's candidate, once in 1939 and again in 1945. If Maximino had been a *caudillo* in the traditional sense, he might have orchestrated a coup. Instead, while he competed for larger and larger degrees of influence within the party, he never rebelled directly against the party in order to impose his position by force.

In exchange for his loyalty and support for the presidential candidate in 1939 (who happened to be his younger brother Manuel), he demanded political and economic privileges, including a position in Manuel's cabinet where he could use his influence to expand his personal businesses.

Maximino's political career was a rags-to-riches story. His parents were peasants from Teteles, Municipality of Tlatlauqui. As a teenager at the turn of the century he was a poor muleteer in the Pueblan highlands. By the end of his life he was one of the most powerful and wealthy individuals in the country, worth some 135 million pesos (\$650 million in 2005 dollars).<sup>12</sup> This was an extreme case, but not a rare one. Many revolutionary *caudillos* had similar stories.

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<sup>12</sup> All conversions to current dollar values in this study are approximations. The calculations use the 1938-1945 value of 4.85 pesos per dollar and convert it to establish a 2005 equivalent based on the unskilled wage standard of Measuring Worth.com at <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/compare/index.php>.

Not all regional *caudillos* were as pragmatic as Maximino in exploiting the new system. Some opposed the party leadership and/or the president strongly and generally suffered for it. Sometimes subtle coercion was used, but at times there were outright confrontations if *caudillos* dared use their own political power against the party. This study includes an analysis of two other *caudillos*, Saturnino Cedillo in San Luis Potosí and Juan Andrew Almazán in Nuevo León, who, unlike Maximino, decided to break ranks with the party and challenge its authority. Instead of joining these *caudillos*, Maximino used his regional power to help the party defeat them.

While Maximino is a unique example of how *caudillismo* was adapted and utilized by one particularly savvy politician, it is important to keep in mind that, while an extreme case of authoritarianism and corruption, Maximino's caudillistic practices were a somewhat common phenomenon. Many other *caudillos*, contemporaries of Maximino, collaborated with the party including Gonzalo N. Santos,<sup>13</sup> Dámaso Cárdenas,<sup>14</sup> Tomás Garrido Canabal, and Saturnino Osornio. During the seventy-one years of one-party ruling, other *caudillos* emerged from the party ranks and helped sustain the party in power, at times, via abuses of power and corruption. Examples include the 1976-1982 police chief of the Mexican capital, Arturo "El Negro" Durazo and Joaquín Hernández Galicia "La Quina," the 1980s Secretary General of the workers' union of the state owned oil company, *Petróleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX). Remnants of *caudillismo* even continued after the fall of the one-party dominated state in 2000. For example, as late as

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<sup>13</sup> Gonzalo N. Santos was particularly proud of his violent practices and recorded extensive descriptions of his abusive and authoritarian actions in his *Memoirs* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Like Maximino, Lázaro Cárdenas' sibling Dámaso Cárdenas, often caused the President some discomfort.

2006 Cirilo Vázquez Lagunes, *caudillo* of Tabasco was cultivating the President Vicente Fox's administration (2000-06) in his effort to obtain benefits for himself and his allies.<sup>15</sup>

Regardless of the importance of *caudillismo* in modern Mexican politics, there are only a handful of studies on *caudillismo* after the foundation of the official party. Similarly, Maximino has attracted only a few scholars' attention. This study is an effort to remedy those gaps in order to strengthen our understanding of the complexities of Mexico's historical development.

### **State of the Literature**

By the late 1930s Maximino Ávila Camacho was one of the best-known politicians in Mexico. Apart from countless newspapers and magazines articles, there were a few books published during Maximino's lifetime aimed at boosting his public image. These include Daniel Blumenkron's *General de división Maximino Ávila Camacho. El hombre. El militar. El estadista* (1943) and Luis G. Olloqui Jr.'s *Recorriendo el nor-este* (1942). Both are homage to Maximino and contain limited historical data and practically no critical analysis. Maximino reportedly was preparing a filmed testament to his "creative labor" just prior to his death.<sup>16</sup> It was, however, never finished. After his death Maximino disappeared from the front pages of Mexican newspapers and other periodicals and drifted into a relative obscurity.

Some writers have sought to understand the phenomenon of modern *caudillos* through fictional works. Ángeles Mastretta's *Arráncame la Vida* (1992) explores the struggle for independence by women dominated by self-centered and abusive men.

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<sup>15</sup> Andrés T. Morales, "Secuestran a Hermano del Cacique del Sur," *La Jornada*, May 29, 2006, 6.

<sup>16</sup> "Se Está Haciendo una Película de la Labor Constructiva del Gral. Don Maximino Avila Camacho," *La Opinión*, October 29, 1944, 1.

Mastretta made no secret that her main characters, General Andrés Ascencio and his wife Catalina, were based on Maximino Ávila Camacho and his wife Margarita Richardi. Other novelists had written about *caudillos* who emerged from the revolution, but spent the rest of their lives abusing power and seeking wealth. Notable among them are Carlos Fuentes' character Federico Robles in *La Región Más Transparente* (1958) and Artemio Cruz in *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1964).

Mastretta's work seems to have inspired some scholars who began writing about Maximino in the 1990s. Some of these works discuss Maximino as a negative force during the presidency of his brother Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-46). Two of the best-known examples are Enrique Krauze's *Biografía del Poder* (1997) and Stephen R. Niblo's *Mexico in the 1940s* (1999). A few other scholars have focused directly on Maximino. Ilán Semo's article "Maximino Ávila Camacho en Puebla" (1991) and Jesús Márquez Carrillo's *El tiempo y su sombra* (1997) portray Maximino as a politician linked with proto-fascist ideologies. He is portrayed as the antithesis of Lázaro Cárdenas' progressivism. Perhaps the most in-depth analysis of the authoritarian nature of Maximino's political regime in Puebla and his political legacy are Wil Pansters' *Politics and Power in Puebla* (1990) and Sergio Valencia Castrejón's *Poder regional y política nacional en México* (1996).

So far, however, there are no comprehensive studies of Maximino's political career in relation to emerging post-revolutionary Mexican political culture. The above-mentioned scholars portrayed Maximino as if he embodied extraordinary abuse of power, cronyism, clientelism, and corruption. The present study analyzes Maximino more as Carlos Fuentes presents Artemio Cruz and Federico Robles. As such, Maximino is not

considered an isolated case of abuse of authority, but rather as a manifestation of a new breed of authoritarian and corrupt politicians that are an integral element of the Mexican political system which emerged in the 1930s and 1940s.

Most studies of the emergence of a new political system in Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s often focus on presidents, especially Lázaro Cárdenas.<sup>17</sup> A few other studies have concentrated on the relationship of such groups as confederations of workers unions with the official party<sup>18</sup> or Mexican economic development and the political participation of economic elites.<sup>19</sup> Few studies have focused on *caudillos* after the emergence of the official party.<sup>20</sup> This study will help fill this gap.

Historians have also long debated the nature of the regime that dominated the state after the foundation of the PNR in 1929. Some scholars considered the PNR capable of implementing the revolutionary promise of social justice. Among these scholars are Frank Tannenbaum (1929), Howard Cline (1962) and Frank R. Brandenburg (1965). Other scholars were more suspicious of the emerging regime and warned about

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<sup>17</sup> See for example Luis Medina, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1940-1952: del Cardenismo al Avilacamachismo* (México: El Colegio de México, 1978), Tzvi Medin, *Ideología y praxis política de Lázaro Cárdenas* (México: Siglo XXI, 1987), Luis González y González, *Los Artífices del cardenismo* (México: Clío, 1997), Fernando S. Alanís Enciso, *El gobierno del general Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940: (Una Visión Revisionista)* (San Luis Potosí, México: El Colegio de San Luis, 2000) and Adolfo Gilly, *El cardenismo, una utopía mexicana* (México: Ediciones Era, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> See for example Antonio Rivera Flores, *La derrota de Lombardo Toledano y el movimiento obrero* (Querétaro, México: Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1984), Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig, eds. *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> See for example Howard Cline, *Mexico: Revolution to Evolution, 1940-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), Ariel José Contreras, *México 1940: industrialización y crisis política* (México: Siglo XXI, 1985) and Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999).

<sup>20</sup> See for example David A. Brading, ed. *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Dudley Ankerson, *Agrarian Warlord: Saturnino Cedillo and the Mexican Revolution in San Luis Potosí, 1890-1940* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), Romana Falcón, *La semilla en el surco, Adalberto Tejeda y el radicalismo en Veracruz (1883-1960)* (México: El Colegio de México, 1986) and Salvador Abascal, *Tomás Garrido Canabal: sin dios, sin curas, sin iglesias, 1919-1935* (México: Editorial Tradición, 1987).

an authoritarian state that would threaten the ideals of the revolution. These scholars include Daniel Cosío Villegas (1947), Jesús Silva Herzog (1949) and Octavio Paz (1972). An even darker portrayal of the official party and the Mexican state was common during the “lost decade” (the 1980s which was dominated by an economic crisis). Scholars analyzing the legacies of the one-party state, such as Stephen R. Niblo (*Mexico in the 1940s*, 1992) and Lorenzo Meyer (*Liberalismo autoritario*, 1995), characterized the Mexican state as authoritarian and corrupt and considered it largely responsible for Mexico’s economic and social problems. Other studies are more nuanced as they analyze peripheral interest groups and the limitations of the one-party dominated state. Nora Hamilton (*The Limits of State Autonomy*, 1982) and Kevin J. Middlebrook (*The Paradox of Revolution*, 1995), for example, describe a more vulnerable one-party dominated state. They assert that while the official party is authoritarian, its power is far from absolute and its policies and actions are constantly limited by the need to compromise with a variety of interest groups that range from social and economic elites to peasant and labor organizations. The present study suggests another layer of complexity relating to the dependency of the state on peripheral politicians and political networks.

Not all scholars have perceived the one-party Mexican system as authoritarian. Some have focused on democratic aspects of this system which, although weak, have influenced the development of the state. According to some scholars including Kenneth F. Johnson (*Mexican Democracy*, 1984), Margaret Summers (“Latin American Citizenship” in Hite and Cesarini, 2004) and Joseph Foweraker (“Popular movements and political culture in contemporary Mexico,” in *Citizens of the Pyramid*, 1997)

democratic institutions and practices existed and evolved under the authoritarian one-party system.

A better understanding of the different political forces existing within an apparently monolithic one-party state, suggests that Mexico, as any authoritarian state, can be considered constantly in flux with various forces forcing a re-definition of the state sometimes weakening and some times strengthening democratic institutions and practices. In the year 2000 political forces outside the party were able, for the first time, to defeat the official party in a presidential election. Yet, authoritarian legacies still remain. As previously mentioned, Elba Esther Gordillo and “her” National Education Workers’ Union (SNTE) illustrate this point. In 1992 Gordillo was elected leader of the SNTE, the largest union in Latin America. At that time she announced the end of cronyism and clientelism in a new autonomous and democratic SNTE. Nevertheless, as recently as 2005, teachers were complaining about the lack of voice in what they called the “*cacicazgo* Gordillo.” “The union remains the same,” a teacher commented, “the only thing that they have changed is the caciques, the leaders for life.”<sup>21</sup>

The process of eradicating caudillistic legacies in Mexico has been long and difficult and, it can be argued, is still incomplete. Such practices have certainly evolved since Maximino’s time. However, as democratic institutions become stronger the level of abuse and the number of instances of caudillistic practices are decreasing. Mexico appears to be moving towards a more consolidated democracy.

A consolidated democracy in Mexico does not mean simply fair elections.

Scholars Raymond Buve and Keith Brewster have argued that “in cacique tradition, the

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<sup>21</sup> “El sindicato sigue igual, lo único que han cambiado son los caciques, los líderes vitalicios.” In Claudia Herrera Beltrán, “En 13 años Gordillo acabó con el sueño democratizador del SNTE,” *La Jornada*, May 15, 2005. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

transfer of power rarely depended on the results of the elections as such, because the legitimacy of the cacique and/or his coercive methods (not only military) decided the results beforehand. But in the liberal tradition and after the Mexican revolution elections could give a hint of legal constitutionality to the succession in cacique power.”<sup>22</sup>

Therefore a consolidated Mexican democracy depends more on the capacity of political groups outside of the party to have an opportunity to compete and fairly win elections in competition with the official party.

Political institutions have become more democratic since Maximino’s time. Back then, state institutions were highly controlled by the ruling party. Today more state institutions are increasingly independent. During the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), for example, the Institute of Federal Elections (IFE) ceased being controlled by the ministry of *Gobernación*, the political agency of the presidency. The independence of this institute played a major role in the official party losing its first presidential election in 2000 to the opposition Action National Party (PAN). The possibility of alternation in power by various parties implies an increased accountability for politicians. This is also the product of political competition as a result of which candidates are motivated to expose the wrongdoings of their competitors. It also explains the emergence during the Fox administration (2000-06) of a number of videos and reports exposing corruption by all parties.

The exposure of so much corruption should not be interpreted as revealing new

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<sup>22</sup> “En la tradición caciquil, la sucesión en el poder casi nunca dependía del resultado de las elecciones como tal, porque la legitimidad del cacique y/o sus medios coactivos (no solamente militares) decidían de antemano el resultado. Pero en la tradición liberal y posteriormente revolucionaria mexicana, las elecciones podían dar un tinte legal constitucional a la sucesión en el poder caciquil.” Raymond Buve, “Caciquismo, un principio de ejercicio del poder durante varios siglos,” *Relaciones 96* (Otoño 2003, Vol. XXIV), 31.

levels of corruption, but rather, the exposure and prosecution of such cases actually reflects growing accountability. During Maximino's time, and later, the official party generally covered up the illegal activities of its members.

### **Primary Sources**

Archival data employed to analyze Maximino's career and particularly his relations with the party have been used in order to dissect the nature of the interdependency between the official party and political elites and to better understand its effect on the consolidation of a one-party authoritarian system in Mexico. Locating relevant data was not an easy task. A good number of important archives in Puebla have been destroyed. For example, the most important archive, the *Archivo General del Estado de Puebla*, does not contain government documents from the years 1917 to 1959. The director of the archive, Dr. María del Pilar Pacheco Zamudio, indicated that Maximino ordered the destruction of documents relating to his actions a few days before he left office as governor. Other archivists reported that during the last days of his governorship trucks were parked outside the offices of the government of the state of Puebla and documents were thrown out the windows into the trucks. Reportedly, Maximino sold these documents to a paper company for pulp.

This obvious disregard for archival data is not limited to Maximino. Destroyed documents from the same state archives include years when Maximino was not living in Puebla (1917-35) and years after his death (1945-59). Apparently the destruction of official documents was a common practice among post-revolutionary governors. There

are reports that his predecessor, Governor José Mijares Palencia, also destroyed the documents of his administration before handing over the office to Maximino.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, other archives across the state of Puebla have fallen victim to destruction. According to Juan Manuel Gámez Andrade, head archivist at the Tehuacán city archive, when the city archive ran out of space in the 1990s “old” documents were sold to makers of tamales to make wrappers. In 1997, Professor Victoria Leticia Gamboa Ojeda found documents from *Gobernación* accidentally misplaced in the *Archivo de la Propiedad*. Some years later, when she inquired about them the archivist told her that because those documents did not belong to that archive they were moved out to a patio in order to clear space for other materials. Sun and rain ruined them, so they were sold to *piñata* makers somewhere in the early 2000s.

However, not all documents in the state have been destroyed. For example, materials such as those in the archive of the *Congreso del Estado de Puebla*, although disorganized and incomplete,<sup>24</sup> provide a valuable source of original documents including letters and telegrams by labor and peasant organizations relating to Maximino’s activities as governor.

Other important sources of archival data are the *Archivo General de la Nación* (AGN) and the *Archivo de la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional* (ASDN) in Mexico City. The AGN includes some correspondence between Maximino as governor and President Lázaro Cárdenas, including reports about presidential campaigns and elections, letters and telegrams from peasant and labor organizations attacking or defending Maximino’s actions as governor, and general data about Pueblan politics and state and national

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<sup>23</sup> “Un Cuarto de Millón Dejó de Déficit el Gral. Mijares,” *La Opinión*, February 7, 1937, 1.

<sup>24</sup> These documents were bound in volumes by Governor Mariano Piña Olaya in 1988. However, they are not organized thematically. It appears that the binding was more for show and not to facilitate research.

elections. Especially helpful are *Gobernación* reports from the department of political and social investigations. These include some focused on the government of Puebla which were ordered by the federal government.

Data available at the ASDN establishes the course of Maximino's military career between 1914 and 1929, his incorporation into the ranks of the army, and his participation in the revolution. These military documents help us analyze his relationship with General Benjamín Hill, who introduced him to the revolutionary political elite, including generals Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles (presidents of Mexico, 1920-24 and 1924-28 respectively). During the 1920s Maximino first learned how to consolidate, as well as use and abuse, authority with the support of the federal government.

Substantial information regarding day-to-day political developments in Puebla and Mexico more generally was found in various Mexican newspapers and magazines. The *Diario de Puebla* and *La Opinión* are local newspapers that provide extensive information about *poblano* political developments and Maximino's performance as Governor and Minister of Communications and Public Works. *Hoy*, a national magazine, and the local *Diario de Puebla* published articles and editorials that actually constituted propaganda aimed at improving Maximino's public image.

Since Maximino often manipulated the local media, it was critical for this study to use additional data, including international newspapers as well as material found in archives in Mexico City and the United States. The anti-Maximino newspaper, *Avante* as well as articles from *El Universal* in Mexico City and *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Fortune* and *Time* magazines in the U.S., offered more critical

analyses of Maximino's administrations. This was complemented with archival information found in the AGN and other reports from the U.S. consuls in Puebla. The latter documents are available in the U.S. National Archive and Research Administration (USNARA).

A window into Maximino's governing style, including his circle of cronies, can be found in the memoirs of President Cárdenas and other politicians including Gonzalo N. Santos, José Mijares Palencia, Juan Andrews Almazán and José Manuel Puig Casauranc. These sources were complemented with USNARA reports from the U.S. embassy in Mexico about Maximino and his World War II "blacklisted" financial cronies: Miguel E. Abed and Axel Wenner-Gren. USNARA also includes interviews by the U.S. consul in Puebla of Maximino's business associate William O. Jenkins.

An examination of the reasons why *caudillos* Saturnino Cedillo and Juan Andrew Almazán left the official party and challenged it was facilitated by a combination of sources including newspapers, government reports, and Gonzalo N. Santos' and Juan Andrew Almazán's memoirs as well as secondary sources. The latter were also used to explore the theoretical and historical context of *caudillo* politics in Mexico and to complement our understanding of the presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Manuel Ávila Camacho.

### **Significance of the Findings**

The founding of the official party in 1929 was perceived by some as the end of *caudillismo* and the beginning of government by institutions. Similarly, the 2000 presidential election was perceived by some as the end of *caudillismo* and the emergence of a more democratic Mexico. However, leaders such as Roberto Madrazo, Elba Esther

Gordillo, and Ulises Ruiz as well as numerous *caciques* at the local level, suggest the survival of traditional authoritarian personalities and practices.<sup>25</sup> Like Maximino, their power is supported by a personal use of institutions and organizations rooted in clientelistic networks. Indeed, the continuity of *caudillo*-type political practices into the twenty-first century suggests the importance and relevance of this study.

The capacity of the official party to dominate the state for seventy-one years does not mean that the authoritarian political system did not face serious challenges. Perhaps its most important accomplishment was the capacity to maintain a stable state while eliminating challengers without legal repercussions. For example, in addition to the guerrilla challenge to the government in the state of Guerrero in the 1970s, the most well-known challenge to its authority was the student led demonstrations for democratic openness in 1968. After a long summer of demonstrations a crisis was reached on October 2nd. That day tens of thousands of students and supporters gathered in the Plaza Tlatelolco to challenge the government's authoritarian practices and lack of political openness. The government was afraid of political repercussions and decided to stop the demonstration by using provocateurs and the army. Reportedly the state massacred hundreds of students. While some intellectuals and others condemned this and tried to expose the violence of the political system, the regime remained stable. Strikes by unions and political dissidents, especially members of the far left in the 1970s, were restrained with violence in what is increasingly recognized as Mexico's own dirty war. Again, there were generally no consequences for the perpetrators of this illegal use of force against

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Nayeli Cortés and Hilda Fernández, "Se Encona Enfrentamiento entre Madrazo y Montiel," *El Universal*, October 12, 2005; Claudia Herrera Beltrán, "En 13 Años Gordillo Acabó con el Sueño Democratizador del SNTE," *La Jornada*, May 15, 2005; Nicolás Tripero, "Conflicto en Oaxaca: El Lado Más Oscuro de la APPO," *Reporte Índigo*, October 20, 2006; and Andrés T. Morales, "Secuestran a Hermano del Cacique del Sur," *La Jornada*, May 29, 2006.

citizens. Such impunity not only had its roots in the nineteenth century, but also in the nature of the modernized political system that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century.

The interest of the official party in supporting leaders such as Maximino was at the core of the embedded abuse of power and corruption that became synonymous with the PRI and the government it dominated for seventy-one years. Maximino was not the only politician using the power of the state to establish monopolies, favor associates, or get kickbacks from state projects. Nor was he the only one accused by peasants of taking their lands, by workers of manipulating their unions for the benefit of employers or by the latter for indiscriminate increases in taxes, or by journalists and politicians for targeted assassinations. Like so many others, he never received any public sanctions by the federal government. During his years as governor and minister Maximino was allegedly involved in a number of assassinations and racketeering scandals, but local and federal enforcement agencies failed to investigate such accusations leaving these cases unresolved. It appears that the party protected him and placed him above the law, together with many other politicians, to the clear detriment of a democracy based on the rule of law.

## **Roadmap**

While this study is centered on Maximino's political career, it is important to expand our analysis to understand the relevance of *caudillismo* within the process of creating the political system that dominated Mexico from 1929 to 2000. With this in mind, Chapter I examines the historical context of the survival of *caudillismo* as partially an authoritarian legacy, but also its absorption into the new political system that was

emerging. It analyzes the role of the decline of the colonial system after independence (1821) and its role in the emergence of the nineteenth century *caudillo*-dominated political system. This chapter also focuses on some of the most influential *caudillos* who succeeded in dominating the Mexican state including Agustín de Iturbide (1821-1823), Antonio López de Santa Anna (1833-1855), Juan N. Álvarez (1855-1859) and Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition, it briefly explores the role of *caudillos* during the 1910-1917 revolution and its aftermath up to 1929, the year when the official party was founded.

Chapter II explores Maximino's early years, how he joined the revolution, and his early military career as well as his early flirtations with politics, particularly as a coordinator of Álvaro Obregón's presidential campaign and commander of various military zones. This period illustrates Maximino's apprenticeship in a *caudillo*-based political culture that helped define his political behavior.

Chapter III analyzes Maximino's emergence as Puebla's strongman. It focuses on the years 1932-1937 and analyzes how he constructed his personal political base and how and why Maximino became a favorite of the official party's elite. This chapter also examines the early incorporation of caudillistic practices into the emerging one-party dominated state.

Chapter IV analyzes the period of Maximino's governorship of the state of Puebla (1937-1941). As governor, Maximino used his political base and his newly acquired access to state resources and privileges to strengthen his personal political base and become Puebla's most powerful leader. This chapter also explores the relative independence that Maximino enjoyed in being able to define his own political agenda

within the state of Puebla, even though it, at times, was in opposition to that of the official party and President Cárdenas. At the same time, this chapter explores the limitations that Maximino faced, as the official party blocked his candidacy in the 1940 presidential elections, which risked his loyalty to the party. Nevertheless, he ultimately mobilized his regional power base in support of the chosen candidate who happened to be his brother Manuel.

Chapter V is an analysis of Maximino at the height of his political power (1941-1945). As Minister of Communications and Public Works, many considered Maximino the second most influential politician in the country. This chapter analyzes how modern *caudillos*, regardless of their personal political power, can be above the law, but not necessarily above the party. It also explores some of the mechanisms that the party used to restrain the independence of *caudillos*.

## CHAPTER I

### MEXICO: THE LONG ROAD TO STABILITY

#### *Caudillos and Instability*

For most of the nineteenth century, Mexico, like most countries in Latin America, found itself often incapable of maintaining national stability. An important reason for this was the disintegration of the colonial system and the wide array of political forces and interest groups competing for control of the state. The state was often too weak to make these disparate groups compromise. The result was constant conflict that sometimes erupted in warfare as such groups competed for power and domination of the state.

One important disagreement was about the degree of autonomy to be given to local and regional governments vis-à-vis the authority of the central government. Due to the extent of Mexican territory and the difficulty of communications, the colonial system had allowed for a degree of regional autonomy.

After independence, local and regional leaders expected the expansion, or at least the continuation, of their autonomy. However, leaders in the central government were interested in constituting a stable and cohesive nation. In order to achieve this, the central government needed to expand its power over the regions. Charismatic *caudillos* could be found on both sides of the controversy. For example, in 1823 two major *caudillos* clashed—Agustín de Iturbide, who promoted a strong centralized monarchy, was confronted by Antonio López de Santa Anna, who supported a republican federation. Ultimately Santa Anna prevailed.

Causes of disagreement changed over time with *caudillos* pursuing both personal and ideological agendas, particularly federalism versus centralism and liberalism versus conservatism. The conflict over whether to have a monarchy or a republic was essentially one between centralists and federalists and conservatives versus liberals. Just as Iturbide and Santa Anna symbolized monarchy or republic, *caudillos* often symbolize similar conflicts. Between independence (1821) and the foundation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (1929) *caudillos* were a major factor contributing to political conflict and hence state instability. In the period 1821 to 1867 Mexico had 47 presidents and two emperors. During the same period the United States had only 14 presidents, although it did experience a traumatic civil war. Mexican instability was finally phased out beginning in 1929 with the advent of a one-party dominated state strong enough to suppress outright conflict between the central and regional governments as well as dominate regional leaders who might challenge the central government.

### **The Whimsical State: Mexico in the Nineteenth Century**

The search for a clear explanation for the causes of instability, not only in Mexico but also throughout Latin America, has been a daunting task for historians. Historian Timothy E. Anna observed:

the fact is, we do not understand it [instability]; indeed, scholarship has largely failed even to address it. Other than the ‘chaos school,’ the ‘disintegration school,’ and the ‘*caudillo* school,’ (we will not mention the ‘Mexicans were congenitally incapable of self government school’), there are no overarching explanatory schemes. Well, there is the ‘regionalism

makes things too murky for words school,' but historians are still having trouble putting that one in terms clear enough for consensus.<sup>26</sup>

As we can see, the “*caudillo* school” is but one of several causes adduced by historians as a major factor of national instability. However, as Anna suggests, it should not necessarily be considered the overarching cause.

A number of historians, including the Mexicanist Luis Medina Peña, regard *caudillos* as having little relevance in explaining instability. He, for example, argues that during the nineteenth century the Mexican political system was dominated not by the executive, but by congress. In other words instability was not caused by one man, or competing leaders, but was the product of the constant clashes of opposing factions in congress: royalists vs republicans, centralists vs federalists, conservatives vs liberals, etc.<sup>27</sup> Donald F. Stevens also questions the role of *caudillos*. He argues that economic, social and political variables were more relevant.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the historian Christon I. Archer minimizes the role of *caudillos*. He argued that “instability, implacable hatreds, chronic chaos, and ever impending national bankruptcy”<sup>29</sup> was more affected by the “clashes that involved the politicians, military chiefs, Church leaders, merchants, miners, intellectuals, bureaucrats, and others.”<sup>30</sup>

The main reason why these historians discount *caudillos* as a cause of instability is because they are relying on a common, but narrower, understanding of the term

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<sup>26</sup> Timothy E. Anna, “Demystifying Early Nineteenth-Century Mexico,” *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (winter, 1993): 122.

<sup>27</sup> Luis Medina Peña, “Porfirio Díaz y la creación del sistema político mexicano,” *Istor*, Año V, No. 17 (verano 2004): 62-63, [http://www.istor.cide.edu/archivos/num\\_17/dossier4.pdf](http://www.istor.cide.edu/archivos/num_17/dossier4.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Donald Fithian Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 108.

<sup>29</sup> Christon I. Archer, “Discord, Disjunction, and Reveries of Past and Future Glories: Mexico’s First Decades of Independence, 1810-1853,” *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (winter, 2000): 191.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

*caudillo*. They generally use the term to describe those few military leaders who became chief executives of the Mexican state (i.e. Agustín de Iturbide, Vicente Guerrero, Antonio López de Santa Anna and Porfirio Díaz). However, the term *caudillo* can be understood to include those powerful regional leaders who did not make it to the national palace. Among them we can include Juan N. Alvarez in Guerrero or Juan Francisco Lucas in the Pueblan highlands. By including them, the role of *caudillos* in contributing to Mexican instability becomes clearer. For example, Álvarez led the successful movement to overthrow President Santa Anna in 1855, while Lucas helped Díaz become president in 1876 and contributed to his downfall in 1911.

It is also easier to understand the relevance of *caudillos* to national instability if they are understood as charismatic and military leaders of disparate groups representing competing ideologies and/or interest groups interacting at the regional and national levels within a weak state. This way, the explanations provided by Medina Peña, Stevenson and Archer do not eliminate the relevance of *caudillos*. A broader definition of who constitute *caudillos* includes not only chief executives, but also members of congress and regional leaders, who often selected the representatives of their respective regions. In this way we can see a role of *caudillos* in Medina Peña's argument concerning the role of congress. Similarly, *caudillos* were, to some degree, controlling the flow of products and trade within the territories they controlled as well as had some influence over outside markets. In other words, they also had some relevance to Stevenson's economic argument. As for Archer's argument, *caudillos* were often the leaders of the different interest groups that he perceives as sources of instability. It is important to emphasize that this does not mean that *caudillos* were the sole cause of instability. The achievement

of national stability in a post colonial period is a complex phenomenon and the causes are, likewise, complex. However, the extensive roles of *caudillos* in nineteenth and early twentieth century Mexico make the overall influence of *caudillos* on political developments unlikely to be easily dismissed.

Thus, the role of *caudillos*, as regional strongmen, as well as representatives of economic interests, and ideological movements, can be reasonably assumed. As the English historian David A. Brading argues, they can be “agents of disorder.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, he asserts that “it was the decomposition of the federal state that allowed rural *caudillos* such as Facundo [an Argentinean fictional *caudillo*] to emerge. In Mexico the presence of the army created a paradoxical situation since, if *caudillos* were confined to the backlands, the leaders of the army, especially Santa Anna, themselves became agents of distintegration [*sic*].”<sup>32</sup>

It is their role in weak states that makes *caudillos* especially relevant in terms of national instability. In a weak state the central government cannot always command enough power to resist the military, or the political and economic challenges of *caudillos* within their realms and, at times, even at the national level. This explains why the fall of Mexican presidents during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was so common and *pronunciamientos* so frequent.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots and the Liberal State 1492-1866* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 647. Antonio López de Santa Anna (1794-1876) is one of the most controversial *caudillos* who headed the Mexican state in the nineteenth century. He was a Lieutenant in the royalist forces and later lead the expulsion of the Spanish troops while supporting the first Mexican Empire (1821). In 1823 he headed the movement that toppled the empire and helped create the Mexican republic. He became president of Mexico 11 times between 1833 and 1855. He is also blamed for the lost of Texas in 1837 and the rest of northern Mexican territories (today Southwestern and Western U.S.) to the U.S. in 1845.

<sup>33</sup> *Pronunciamientos* are public challenges to existing governments. They are generally based on a set of grievances against a regime and often used to justify a coup d'état. *Pronunciamientos* can also outline a

After a successful *pronunciamiento*, the leading *caudillo* often became president. Once in power, he generally strengthened his regional power base via alliances with other *caudillos* based on mutually beneficial arrangements. These governments contained the seeds of their own instability, as they were highly dependent on the capacity of the *caudillo* to retain the support of sometimes competing interest groups as well as contentious personalities, including rival *caudillos*. This made the eventual transfer of power especially tricky and often violent. The *caudillo* had to be willing to leave office while still enjoying enough power to name and impose his successor. However, more often than not, *caudillos* were overthrown, leaving little possibility for formal institutions to handle the transfer of power. Thus, the fall of a *caudillo* was often followed by a period of violence as diverse groups competed to take over the central government. This was the case of Mexico particularly in the first fifty years of independence. It would take the emergence of Porfirio Díaz, who dominated Mexico from 1876-1910, to achieve national stability until that gave way to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17. It was not until the late 1920s and the creation of a powerful official party in 1929 representing the surviving members of the revolutionary elite and their allies that there was a return to long-term stability.

### **A *Caudillo* Breeding Ground: Mexico in the Nineteenth Century**

*Caudillos* were an important political force even before the independence of Mexico. The leaders of expeditions that conquered the indigenous peoples of the Americas were sometimes called *caudillos*.<sup>34</sup> The term refers to the “heads” of military

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plan to respond to such grievances and envision a new type of government. *Pronunciamientos* have often been used to gather support from other *caudillos* interested in ousting existing governments.

<sup>34</sup> Brading 1991, 28.

expeditions and eventually was sometimes used interchangeably with another term from the pre-Hispanic Caribbean, that is—*cacique*. As the conquest progressed some Spaniards acquired large estates and control over Indian communities under the *encomienda*, *repartimiento* or *hacienda* systems. Benefiting from long distances and difficult communications these elites enjoyed considerable independence in controlling their regions without much royal supervision. With time, such regional leaders were identified as *caciques*. They often used their regional predominance to establish themselves at the top of a clientelistic system informally representing colonial authority as well as some economic interests.<sup>35</sup>

On September 16, 1810 Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla led an uprising against the colonial government. This was the beginning of protracted warfare that culminated in 1821 in independence for what today is the Mexican republic. New Spain's authorities were basically too weak to form an army strong enough to defeat the uprising. For the most part, the royal forces consisted of small cadres of regular units leading a larger number of provincial militia regiments. In order to expand the royalist forces, the Viceroy Félix María Calleja del Rey (1813-1816) “delegated much of the responsibility for defense to local elites that raised urban and rural counterinsurgency militias.”<sup>36</sup> This decision, while increasing the strength of the royal army, also increased the military influence of regional leaders, or *caudillos*. These leaders, who often times were *caciques*, used Indians and local laborers to fill their militias. The military capability of

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<sup>35</sup> Buve 1992, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Archer 2000, 194.

the royal army was increasingly dependent on these warlords (*caudillo-caciques*).<sup>37</sup>

According to the historian Raymond Buve:

Warlords, as estate owners or *caciques* who could claim the loyalty of municipalities or villages were often the only leaders who could control recruitment of soldiers and see to their maintenance and pay....[T]hey not only expected wealth and autonomy, but might even turn the tables on their ‘employers’ and become patrons themselves.<sup>38</sup>

During this period, *cacique-caudillos*, who could be either royalist or insurgents, militarized Mexico. In 1800 the monarchy had only 9,000 soldiers in New Spain. In 1821 the combined forces of royalist and the insurgent troops “amounted to 75,000 men.”<sup>39</sup>

As Mexico became an independent nation, these *caudillos* complicated the possibilities for any emerging government to establish effective control over the national territory. Some of them demanded the newly independent national government grant them autonomy respecting the right of *caudillos* to control local resources and maintain their personal militias. Governments found it difficult to exercise national authority and thus were often overpowered by opposition from regional interests. The Mexican nation was thus born amid regional, as well as centralist and federalist, tensions that hindered efforts to stabilize the country.

The first major *caudillo* to try to consolidate the nation was Agustín de Iturbide (1783-1824). In early 1821, Iturbide, a charismatic military leader, convinced Juan O’Donojú, the viceroy recently appointed by Spain’s liberal government, to sign the

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<sup>37</sup> Buve 1992, 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

document that recognized the independence of a Mexican government.<sup>40</sup> The document, known as *Plan de Iguala*, stated that Ferdinand VII, or a prince appointed by him, would be the titular head of the “Mexican Empire.” What O’Donojú did not realize was that if the king rejected the plan, a Mexican Sovereign Provisional Governing Junta would appoint an emperor. The king refused to accept the document and the junta named Iturbide emperor as Agustín I (1822-1823).<sup>41</sup> As such he was recognized as the *caudillo* of independence.

The Sovereign Provisional Governing Junta appointed Iturbide emperor with the notion that a European prince would eventually be appointed to replace him. However, it also gave extensive powers to Iturbide. These included:

the command of all land and sea forces, including the appointment of officers from the rank of brigadier down, commandants of provinces, and captains general. He was to be the protector of commerce, navigation, local order, and ports. He was to name the two generals who would be chiefs of the general staff (this was never done). He received the supreme honor of a twenty-one-gun salute and was to have an honor guard of two infantry companies and a military band.<sup>42</sup>

Iturbide did not see this appointment as temporary and used his powers to consolidate his position. However, his political base was severely divided making it nearly impossible for him to consolidate the empire. Pro-monarchists supported Iturbide on a temporary basis hoping that a European prince would be named to replace him. Liberals,

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<sup>40</sup> By 1820 King Ferdinand VII had become intolerably authoritarian. That year troops under Colonel Rafael Riego rose up against the king and imprisoned him. Spain became a liberal federation as stipulated by the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz. All provinces of Spain, including its colonies, were considered sovereign territories and members of a Spanish commonwealth. This arrangement was dissolved in 1823 when Ferdinand VII returned to power, too late to stop the American colonies from demanding independence.

<sup>41</sup> Bazant 1991, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy E. Anna, *The Mexican Empire of Iturbide* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 27.

predominantly antimonarchists, hoped eventually for independence that would lead to the creation of a republic on the model of the United States of America. In addition, except for a few generals who joined Iturbide's movement, the army supporting Iturbide was in effect led by a large number of independent regional *caudillos* unwilling to tolerate Iturbide's imperial ambitions.<sup>43</sup>

These regional *caudillos* curtailed the authority of the emperor whenever possible. They insisted on retaining their rights to appoint city mayors, heads of districts, members of legislatures, and the military officers under their command.<sup>44</sup> Iturbide's strength depended on these *caudillos* and he was incapable of limiting their authority. When he tried to use his imperial powers, some of the *caudillos* rebelled against him causing the rapid collapse of this first Mexican political experiment. The forces that rebelled against Iturbide were commanded by Lieutenant Antonio López de Santa Anna (1794-1876). Eventually Santa Anna became the stereotypical image of the Mexican *caudillo*.

Santa Anna initially became known as the commander of the troops that expelled the last remaining Spanish forces from Mexico after Iturbide's declaration of independence. The ambitious Santa Anna expected the emperor to reward him with the rank of brigadier general and appoint him military commander and governor of Veracruz. Iturbide granted him the rank of general, but refused to give him control of the state of Veracruz.<sup>45</sup> Santa Anna mobilized his troops against the emperor and supported a military *pronunciamento* against Iturbide, known as the *Plan de Casa Mata*, which declared Iturbide a tyrant and called for the establishment of a Mexican republic. A good

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<sup>43</sup> Pedro Santoni, "The Failure of Mobilization: The Civic Militia of Mexico in 1846," in *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (summer, 1996): 170-171.

<sup>44</sup> Raymond Buve, "Caciquismo, un principio de ejercicio del poder durante varios siglos." *Relaciones* 96, Vol. XXIV, (otoño 2003): 29.

<sup>45</sup> Oakah L. Jones, Jr., *Santa Anna* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), 30-32.

number of *caudillos* supported the *pronunciamiento* and succeeded in overthrowing. This was an event that would be repeated many times for the next 100 years.

Santa Anna's main goal appeared to be the acquisition of power and his support for a republic was, therefore, strategic. He understood that the major forces against Iturbide were liberal groups interested in forming a federal republic which had the collateral benefit of protecting the autonomy of *caudillos*. Accordingly, he became the chief *caudillo* who saw to the establishment of the Mexican republic. Overall, his political alliances were practical rather than ideological during the eleven periods he headed the Mexican state (1833-55). Throughout these years he opportunistically changed positions from pro-empire to pro-republic, from pro-liberal to pro-conservative and back again. Santa Anna became one of the most controversial Mexican *caudillos*. Some historians have tried to explain Mexican instability in the early republican period by focusing exclusively on Santa Anna's alleged megalomania. Other scholars see a more complex set of causes. It was during these years of instability and abuse of power that the term *caudillo*, not only in Mexico but also throughout Latin America, became increasingly identified with authoritarian rulers.

Regardless of the image of the invincible *caudillo* that Santa Anna helped create, his defeats were often more devastating than his victories. His years in power were characterized by unstable governments, bankruptcy, foreign interventions (France in 1838 and the U.S. from 1836 to 1845) and the loss of over half of the original Mexican territory. Santa Anna's capacity to remain in power depended mainly on his ability to preserve the loyalty and support of a substantial number of military *caudillos* while

blaming his rivals for every setback suffered by the government. His ability to succeed at this still puzzles some historians.

Santa Anna returned to the presidency for the last time in 1853. By then he had become the victim of his own “glory” believing himself to be a superior human being destined for glory as ruler of Mexico. At this point he developed imperial ambitions. His last presidency (1853-55), while not officially a monarchy, was characterized by its imperial flamboyance and protocols. He became increasingly authoritarian, identified the authority of the state with his persona, hindered freedom of speech, made it illegal to criticize his government, dissolved congress, and transformed federal states into less autonomous departments. Finally, on December 16, 1853, Santa Anna, after acquiring the right to name his successor, received the title of “*Su Alteza Serenísima*” (His Most Serene Highness).<sup>46</sup> But, like Iturbide, he was a head of a state that, although stronger, remained dependent on the support and loyalty of regional *caudillos*. Santa Anna’s abuse of power caused increasing dissatisfaction among many *caudillos* who aligned themselves behind the leadership of Juan N. Álvarez, a *caudillo* from the state of Guerrero.

Like Iturbide and Santa Anna, Álvarez was another veteran of the independence struggle. He fought from the outset of the conflict in 1810 and joined the conflict under the leadership of Vicente Guerrero.<sup>47</sup> He was a charismatic *hacendado* from western Mexico with a considerable regional following. He was also a product of what historian Peter F. Guardino has described as “popular federalism”—the alliance of regional elites

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 126-129.

<sup>47</sup> Vicente Guerrero was a *caudillo* who kept alive the independence movement after the execution of its two original leaders Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1811) and José María Morelos y Pavón (1815). He signed Iturbide’s Plan de Iguala surrendering militia control to the new Mexican Empire. He was president of Mexico in 1829 when he was overthrown by a military coup and later executed in 1831.

who felt underrepresented in Mexico City and were supported by regional villages and municipalities sharing the common goal of autonomy against a centralizing state.<sup>48</sup> This put Álvarez on course to clash with Santa Anna. In March 1854, Álvarez supported the *Ayutla-Acapulco pronunciamiento*. It denounced Santa Anna as a tyrant, but it did not offer an alternative political program. The only purpose was the overthrow of Santa Anna, who was forced into exile in August 1855.

Álvarez was president for only three months (October-December 1855). His basic political ambitions were regional. He appears to have lacked interest in expanding his authority beyond his region and entrusted the presidency to Ignacio Comonfort, a member of a group of young liberals. Instead of *caudillo* heroes of independence, the new liberals were mainly lawyers primarily concerned with establishing strong state institutions capable of enforcing the rule of law under a centralized republic. In support of Comonfort, Álvarez named Benito Juárez, former governor of Oaxaca, as Chief Justice.<sup>49</sup> Comonfort and Juárez were opposed by conservatives who feared a liberal campaign against their large land holdings and the *fueros* (special privileges) enjoyed by the military and clergy. In 1857 the liberals drafted a new liberal constitution. This document increased freedom of expression and abolished slavery, as well as abolished *fueros* and hereditary titles and honors. As expected, conservatives were dismayed. They overthrew Comonfort and established a conservative government led by General Félix Zuloaga.<sup>50</sup> However, under the new constitution, in the absence of the president, the chief justice became provisional president. Benito Juárez denounced Zuloaga's

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<sup>48</sup> Peter F. Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), passim.

<sup>49</sup> Bazant 1991, 30-31.

<sup>50</sup> Alicia Hernández, *Presidencialismo en México y los E.U.* (México: Centro de Cultura Económica, Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, 2002), 18-19.

government as illegitimate and moved to Querétaro to lead a competing liberal government. The young liberals were, in effect, trying to establish a government capable of keeping *caudillos* under state control. However, since the government was established by *caudillos* it remained vulnerable to *caudillos*. The Constitution of 1857 was an important advance, but the state was too weak to enforce it.

Benito Juárez was not a *caudillo* in the military-heroic or authoritarian sense of the word, but he came to be recognized as the *caudillo* of the liberal cause. He was one of the most capable and astute politicians in one of the most turbulent periods of an already turbulent century. He spent most of his time as president leading military campaigns. First, he had to establish his legitimacy by fighting General Zuloaga. This conflict became known as the “Three Years War” or *Reforma War* (1857-59). Ultimately, he managed to defeat the conservative forces and was elected president in 1861. However, the conservatives did not give up. A year after his inauguration the conservatives invited Napoleon III of France to invade Mexico in support of the imposition of Maximilian of Hapsburg as Mexico’s second Emperor (1863-67). Once again Juárez left Mexico City to resist this challenge to the constitution. In 1867 the French were expelled from Mexico and Maximilian was executed. Juárez emerged as the defender of Mexican sovereignty and, as a result, was accorded considerable support as president.

Juárez’s post-1867 presidency is arguably the first somewhat successful attempt to stabilize the country through the systematic consolidation of federal power. He was able to achieve this, in part, by using the executive powers that congress gave him in order to combat the French intervention. Juárez, far from relying on democratic

practices, used his extraordinary authority to appoint his own supporters as governors of the liberated states.<sup>51</sup> In addition, Juárez secured the loyalties of some *caudillos* by co-opting them with state resources.<sup>52</sup> Juárez's accomplishment was that he was able to subordinate "regionalism to nationalism without destroying federalism with centralism."<sup>53</sup>

The period of stability under Juárez offered an opportunity for the first time since independence for the government to concentrate on developing and implementing progressive policies. Juárez "managed to reduce the size of the army by nearly two thirds, build schools, and oversee the construction of the nation's first railroad between Mexico City and Veracruz."<sup>54</sup> At the same time, modernization and its economic benefits increased the capacity of the central state to further co-opt regional *caudillos*. However, modernization also exacerbated and generated some social problems that contributed to the Mexican revolution of 1910-17. For example, the "liberal attack on communally held property [...] seriously antagoniz[ed] Indian communities and provok[ed] a number of rebellions. These outbreaks were violently repressed by the army with the cooperation of *hacendados* who benefited the most from the breakup of native lands."<sup>55</sup> Juárez's government was shaken, but he managed to stay in power leading a relatively stable state. After his re-election in 1871 General Porfirio Díaz from

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<sup>51</sup> "estableció el sistema de coalición con los gobernadores de los estados para la imposición de candidaturas oficiales." In Luis Medina Peña, "Porfirio Díaz y la creación del sistema político mexicano," *Istor*, Año V, No. 17 (Verano 2004): 74, [http://www.istor.cide.edu/archivos/num\\_17/dossier4.pdf](http://www.istor.cide.edu/archivos/num_17/dossier4.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Buve 1992, 18.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Paul H. Garner, "Federalism and Caudillismo in the Mexican Revolution: The Genesis of the Oaxaca Sovereignty Movement (1915-1920)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 17, No. 1 (1985): 118.

<sup>54</sup> David G. LaFrance, *The Mexican Revolution in Puebla, 1908-1913: The Maderista Movement and the Failure of Liberal Reform* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1989), xxiii.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

the state of Oaxaca, challenged the election. He announced the *La Noria Pronunciamiento*, but Juárez was able to prevail.

The sudden death of President Juárez in 1872 contributed to a political vacuum. According to the constitution, the Chief Justice Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada became interim president. Juárez left a much stronger state than the one he found in 1859 and Lerdo was able to pacify the country and control troublesome *caudillos*. For example, in 1873 the *caudillo* Manuel Lozada tried to break away from the republic by establishing a kind of peasant republic in the state of Nayarit. Lerdo sent federal troops and crushed this rebellion. “Lozada was captured and shot, his Indians defeated and many of their lands granted to hacendados.”<sup>56</sup>

Although the Mexican state was developing a stronger central government and more solid institutions, the state still remained potentially vulnerable to challenges by *caudillos*. Lerdo won the 1876 presidential election, but Díaz challenged the results. That year, Díaz issued a second *pronunciamiento* in Tuxtepec. He claimed that Lerdo “illegally interfered in the affairs of the states and localities, misused governmental funds, and jeopardized Mexico’s long-term national interests by giving lenient railroad concessions to foreign contractors.”<sup>57</sup> This time Díaz succeeded. Ironically, his “anti-authoritarian” *pronunciamiento* marked the beginning of 31 years (1876-80 and 1884-1911) of authoritarian rule. Díaz would expand the power of the central government much further than Juárez or, for that matter, any other Mexican president up to that time. Díaz was able to maintain himself in power largely because his government provided considerable political stability and economic progress.

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<sup>56</sup> Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America: 1879-1930*, Vol. V, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 17-18.

<sup>57</sup> LaFrance 1989, xxiii.

It appeared that the more success Díaz had the more authoritarian his regime became. Díaz legitimized his increasingly dictatorial government by having a puppet congress make the appropriate amendments to the constitution. He paid attention to concentrating control of the armed forces under his command, in part, by creating a military academy that allowed him to centralize and expand the national army. In addition, he created a rural police force, known as the *rurales*, in part, to keep regional *caudillos* under control. He complemented such forms of coercion with co-optation. *Caudillos*, businessmen, and politicians friendly to Díaz's regime benefited from foreign investments, infrastructural development and trade agreements.

Furthermore, Díaz continued Juárez's practice of personally appointing all governors and senators, as well as key legislators and mayors. Oftentimes, Díaz gave governorships to *caudillos* in order to ensure their loyalty. In the state of Puebla, for example, there were three important *caudillos* known as *Los Tres Juanes*: Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla, Juan Nepomuceno Méndez, and Juan Francisco Lucas. Díaz considered them loyal to him. They had fought with him against the French and supported his *Tuxtepec Pronunciamento*. He further secured their loyalty by offering them each the governorship. Bonilla was governor from 1878 to 1880 and was followed by Méndez (1880-85). However, Lucas preferred to concentrate on other mechanisms for exercising power and refused the post. Alliances such as these allowed Díaz to maintain the support of sub-regional leaders and that facilitated his control of the nation. When needed, they assisted Díaz by raising militias to reinforce the regular army.

After 1884, Díaz implemented a new strategy to reduce his dependency on regional *caudillos* and centralize the state. He offered positions in the federal

government in Mexico City to those *caudillos* who potentially could cause him trouble. Once again, Bonilla and Méndez benefited from this policy. Finding themselves away from their local bases of power, however, they became increasingly dependent on Díaz, although they did enjoy substantial economic and political benefits. Juan Francisco Lucas understood this and continued to refuse Díaz's offers. He even rejected Díaz's invitations to visit him in Mexico City. Lucas excused himself by complaining about the rigors of the trip and his poor health.<sup>58</sup>

Díaz was not specifically interested in the elimination of *caciques* and *caudillos*. Rather, he utilized their power to reinforce his personal power—in a similar fashion by which the official party eventually consolidated its power after the revolution. Mexican scholar Romana Falcón has argued that during [the Díaz regime] “there was no substantial modification of the distribution of power, the institutional penetration of the state in society, or the restructuring of the national identity; in other words, the three structural features of the agreement by which the “world of the *caudillo*” has been defined.<sup>59</sup>

Díaz also used the interests of foreign capitalists in Mexico as a political tool. Some *caudillos*, such as Luis Terrazas of Chihuahua and Ignacio Pesqueira of Sonora, simply enjoyed too much power in their respective states to be easily coerced or co-opted. They both were large landowners with controlling interests in the cattle business. They appointed themselves governors and later appointed their friends to the post. They generally did not consult with Díaz. However, Díaz did succeed in luring them into his

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<sup>58</sup> David G. LaFrance, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland: Politics, War, and State Building in Puebla, 1913-1920* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 2003), 62.

<sup>59</sup> Francisco Entrena Durán, *México: del caudillismo al populismo estructural* (Sevilla, España: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1995), 92-3.

political circle by becoming the mediator between foreign investors and their business interests.<sup>60</sup>

By 1885 Díaz's authority was well consolidated. In order to reduce his dependency on *caudillos* further he began to appoint military officers as governors of regions where they did not have any roots or political connections. In this fashion, their authority depended ultimately on their good standing with Díaz.<sup>61</sup> Díaz applied this strategy to Puebla by appointing General Rosendo Márquez governor of Puebla in 1885. Márquez, originally from Jalisco, was given the responsibility of reducing the power of the *Tres Juanes*.<sup>62</sup> As the governor moved against the interests of these *caudillos*, they complained to Díaz. He responded by placing the blame on Márquez and replaced him with a military general from Nuevo León, Mucio P. Martínez in 1892. This strategy allowed Díaz to save face as he appeared to be responding to the pressures from the *Tres Juanes*. Meanwhile the new governor advanced the consolidation of Díaz' authority in the region. Mucio P. Martínez, who governed despotically, remained the head of state in Puebla until the fall of Díaz in 1911. The latter found Governor Martínez an important asset and reappointed him governor four times. In an attempt to maintain an appearance of constitutionality, Díaz's appointments were, of course, confirmed by state-controlled elections.

The Mexican scholar, Luis Medina Peña analyzed the interaction of Díaz's authority with that of his appointed governors:

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<sup>60</sup> Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 798.

<sup>61</sup> LaFrance 1989, xxiv.

<sup>62</sup> Romana Falcón and Raymond Buve, *Don Porfirio presidente..., nunca omnipotente: hallazgos, reflexiones y debates, 1876-1911* (México, DF: Universidad Iberoamericana, Departamento de Historia, 1998), 365-366.

The governors were...obliged to accept lists of candidates for federal elected posts that were sent by the President of the Republic; as a counterweight, governors had the monopoly in the selection of candidates for local elected posts, for state legislatures, and for superior courts. But this franchise could not be discharged freely at will, but had to be exercised by virtue of a general purpose: political integration and conciliation.<sup>63</sup>

President Díaz further ensured the maintenance of the loyalty of subordinates, such as Governor Mucio P. Martínez, largely by allowing them considerable leeway. For example, the federal government tolerated abuses of authority that led to personal enrichment. In the case of Martínez:

His 12,000-peso-per-year salary accounted for only a small fraction of his annual income. The governor owned a number of illegal gambling houses and several haciendas. He controlled the meat and *pulque* monopolies as well and farmed them out to concessionaires, including his son, for a price. The governor and his associates also made large sums on kickbacks from the construction of public works in the state. Upon leaving office, Martínez reportedly took some 890,000 pesos from the state coffers and presented the former *jefe político* of Puebla, Joaquín Pita, with another 13,000 pesos.<sup>64</sup>

As the Díaz regime evolved from the base established by Juárez, the former's policies helped establish institutions and policies that facilitated the recruitment of regional *caudillos* in service to the state. Especially important for this study was the

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<sup>63</sup> “Los gobernadores estaban también obligados a aceptar las listas de candidatos a puestos federales de elección que enviaba el presidente de la República; como contraprestación, los gobernadores tenían el monopolio en la selección de candidatos a puestos de elección local, a la legislaturas estatales y a los tribunales superiores de justicia. Pero esta franquicia no podían ejercerla a gusto y placer, sino que debían desahogarla en virtud del propósito general: la integración política y la conciliación.” Luis Medina Peña, “Porfirio Díaz y la creación del sistema político mexicano,” *Istor*, Año V, No. 17 (verano 2004): 76-77, [http://www.istor.cide.edu/archivos/num\\_17/dossier4.pdf](http://www.istor.cide.edu/archivos/num_17/dossier4.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> LaFrance 1989, xxxiii.

ability of Díaz' regime to make *caudillos* aware that there was more to gain by giving up some of their autonomy to the central government than antagonizing Díaz.<sup>65</sup>

The state dominated by Porfirio Díaz, one of the most effective Mexican *caudillos*, enjoyed great stability. This was, in part, because Díaz kept a tight grip on state institutions as well as regional *caudillos*, often with their cooperation. However, the stability of his regime disguised some of the vulnerabilities of the state. Democratic institutions and practices were discredited by their dependency on Díaz' manipulations such as his distribution of elected offices. Nevertheless, in 1908 Díaz declared that Mexico was finally ready for democracy. This raised the expectations of some political and economic elites, among others, who saw the 1910 presidential elections as their way to opt for change democratically.

Dissatisfaction with the Díaz government had intensified particularly over the previous five years encouraging a variety of interest groups to unite against him. Mexicans had suffered the effects of a downturn in the economy since 1905 which had been exacerbated by a series of droughts and frosts in 1907 and 1908. This increased the negative perception that many had of his modernizing agenda. The historian Friedrich Katz has argued that dissatisfaction with Díaz did not represent a rejection of modernization, but rather for many regional leaders "[i]t was 'modernization' at their expense to which they objected, a modernization that consisted of the expropriation of their land, the elimination of their autonomy, and the imposition of centralized control

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<sup>65</sup> Buve 2003, 39.

over their lives.”<sup>66</sup> Many sectors of society felt that they only garnered “the crumbs of Mexico’s economic boom.”<sup>67</sup>

Many political groups, from within and without Díaz’s circle, saw the opportunity for change via the 1910 presidential election. However, Díaz refused to give up power and had himself re-elected for another four-year term. This was the last straw for many those desperate for change. Díaz’s decision to continue in power caused divisions including among his supporters and helped unify his enemies. Francisco I. Madero, a wealthy *hacendado* from the state of Coahuila and the leading challenger in the 1910 election, headed a coalition that eventually opted for insurrection. A weakening Díaz regime grew incapable of coping with the rebellion as it spread. In March 1911 Díaz stepped down.

For a brief period of time the political system remained stable. Madero became president in 1912, but soon it became evident that Mexico would not avoid the instability that often follows the fall of a *caudillo*. One of Madero’s main goals was not to revolutionize the Mexican political system, but rather to reinforce the legitimacy of the government by ensuring the credibility of the electoral system. He tried to demobilize the revolutionary forces that helped him take power. By and large, as a president, he trusted the members of his own educated elite more than revolutionary leaders who “had begun as poor farmers, carpenters, barbers, and blacksmiths with little formal education.”<sup>68</sup> He refused to dissolve the Porfirista legislatures or replace Díaz-appointed

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<sup>66</sup> Katz 1998, 800.

<sup>67</sup> Friedrich Katz, “The Liberal Republic and the Porfiriato,” in *Mexico since Independence*, Leslie Bethell, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 117.

<sup>68</sup> Randall Hansis, “The Political Strategy of Military Reform: Alvaro Obregon and Revolutionary Mexico, 1920-1924,” *The Americas*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (October, 1979): 200.

mayors, governors, military commanders and even *caudillos*.<sup>69</sup> Not surprisingly, some revolutionary leaders felt betrayed. Madero lost their support which increased his dependency on those generals appointed by Díaz. Soon his government was doomed. In February 1913 important elements of the army, headed by General Victoriano Huerta, imprisoned and executed him and his Vice-President, José María Pino Suárez.<sup>70</sup> The disaffected united again against Huerta and this precipitated the most violent period of the Mexican revolution (1913-17).

### ***Caudillos in Flux***

The Madero-led stage of the revolution produced a number of *caudillos* that coalesced to overthrow Huerta. In some parts of the country large armies were formed. These engaged Huerta's troops in formal combat (e.g. Francisco Villa in Chihuahua, Álvaro Obregón in Sonora, and Pablo González in Tamaulipas). At the same time, small-scale guerrilla operations, especially the Zapatistas, engaged Huerta's troops in low intensity warfare in the center and south of the country. Huerta was soon overwhelmed and overthrown in less than a year.<sup>71</sup>

The fall of Huerta created a new political vacuum causing a split in the revolutionary forces once again. On one side were the *Constitucionalistas* led by Venustiano Carranza and supported by Generals Obregón and González. On the other side were the *Convencionistas*, named after the 1914 revolutionary convention in Aguascalientes, led by Eulalio Gutiérrez and supported by Zapata and Villa. What

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<sup>69</sup> See for example, David G. LaFrance, *The Mexican Revolution in Puebla, 1908-1913: The Maderista Movement and the Failure of Liberal Reform* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1989), 104, 108.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>71</sup> Paul H. Garner, "Federalism and Caudillismo in the Mexican Revolution: The Genesis of the Oaxaca Sovereignty Movement (1915-1920)," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1985): 112.

followed, in the words of David Brading, was that “the country simply returned to the pattern of endemic civil war and chronic banditry which had dominated its life from the *Grito de Dolores* [independence] until the accession of Díaz.”<sup>72</sup>

After four years of bloody civil war (1914-17), the *Constitucionalistas* emerged victorious and Carranza became President of Mexico (1917-20). He was a former governor of Coahuila during the Díaz regime and was more interested in political stability than in radical political changes. Thus, for example, the new administration did not change many aspects of Porfirista economic policies. As the armed conflict ended, there appear to be more continuities than reforms emerging from the revolution. According to the British historian Alan Knight, the pre-revolutionary “feudalist” system remained while foreign trade, investment and dependence on the U.S. increased.<sup>73</sup> However, historian Friedrich Katz identifies important sociopolitical changes that facilitated the emergence of a new breed of *caudillos*:

not only Mexico’s political elite but the whole of its political power structure, as well as the old army, had practically disappeared in the years of revolutionary turmoil. The judges, policemen, *jefes políticos*, and Porfirian army of the Díaz period were gone for good. They had been replaced by local authorities who often refused to submit to centralized control and by an enormous army frequently primarily loyal to regional warlords.<sup>74</sup>

A new *caudillo* class was emerging from the ashes of the revolution. They became the

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<sup>72</sup> “*Grito de Dolores*” refers to the alleged outcry of the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla on September 16, 1810 in the town of Dolores, in today’s Hidalgo state. The cleric called for the end of bad colonial administration and an uprising against “*gachupines*” (meaning “Spaniards”). This event is considered the beginning of the Mexican struggle for independence. David A. Brading, ed., *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Alan Knight, “The Mexican Revolution: Bourgeois? Nationalist? or Just a ‘Great Rebellion?’” in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (1985): 5.

<sup>74</sup> Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 730.

*caudillos* that helped spearhead the consolidation of the post-revolutionary state.

This group, nicknamed *Los Sonorenses*, was constituted largely by the leaders of the revolution of 1920. Its leaders included Generals Alvaro Obregón (president, 1920-14), Plutarco Elías Calles (president, 1924-28) and Adolfo de la Huerta (interim president in 1920). Following the caudillistic tradition, this group came to power with a *pronunciamiento*, the *Plan de Agua Prieta* (1920). In it General Obregón accused President Venustiano Carranza (1917-20) of trying to continue in power by imposing Ignacio Bonillas as his puppet president. Obregón enjoyed great respect in the army and Carranza was forced to leave Mexico City only to be murdered a few days later, on May 21, 1920, in Tlaxcalantongo, Puebla.

Obregón became president after General Adolfo de la Huerta's interim presidency. The Mexican historian Héctor Aguilar Camín observed that "At the time he assumed the presidency, Alvaro Obregón appeared as the natural head of that constellation of ambitions and reputations, the first among such equals as Benjamín Hill and Salvador Alvarado, and the focus of agreement and unification of a long list of revolutionaries with undeniable predominance in several states of the country."<sup>75</sup> His was the last successful *caudillo*-led coup against a Mexican regime.

As in many *caudillo*-led governments, the transition of power at the end of the presidential term was a vulnerable moment for the regime. In 1924 Obregón tapped Plutarco Elías Calles to be his successor. However, Calles enjoyed only limited support among the military and some declared Obregón's action a betrayal of his own *Plan de Agua Prieta*. On November 30, 1923 a group of 102 revolutionary generals, led by

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<sup>75</sup> Héctor Aguilar Camín, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), 79.

Guadalupe Sánchez, Rafael Buelna, Salvador Alvarado, Fortunato Maycotte and Antonio Villarreal, staged a coup against Obregón supporting Adolfo de la Huerta for president. This insurrection involved 40 percent of the military forces. Obregón was able to survive this massive challenge thanks to an early tip. He moved swiftly to attack the ringleaders as they began to mobilize. Without further incidents, Calles became president on December 1, 1924.

Not surprisingly, President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) concentrated his administration on strengthening the presidency's control of the military. His Secretary of War, General Joaquín Amaro (1926-30), coordinated a professionalization and institutionalization program for the revolutionary forces. This included the construction of a new and modern military academy in 1926 and the use of European consultants to teach military theory and weaponry while some young officers were sent to study to France and Germany. With the institutionalization and professionalization of armed forces "little by little loyalty to an individual was replaced by loyalty to the institution, ending one of the gravest problems of the old structure of the revolutionary army."<sup>76</sup>

The professionalization of the army was focused on young soldiers, but many old revolutionary *caudillos* still controlled their regions.<sup>77</sup> These *caudillos*, many of whom had limited education, did not learn how to command their armies in Europe, but rather in the rough and tumble politics of their regions. Their loyalty was often secured through the provision of concrete benefits in which these officers often acquired considerable

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<sup>76</sup> "poco a poco la lealtad a la persona fue sustituida por la lealtad a la institución, acabando con uno de los problemas más graves de la vieja estructura del ejército revolucionario." In Martha Beatriz Loyo Camacho, *Joaquín Amaro y el proceso de institucionalización del Ejército Mexicano, 1917—1931* (México, DF: UNAM, Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 144.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

wealth. Amaro continued this practice in order to reduce the risk of military uprisings.<sup>78</sup> For example, the revolutionary leadership licensed these *caudillos* to “tax” wealthy *hacendados*, bankers, storekeepers and merchants. This “tax” was a permit to take from the wealthy. The loose supervision of such activities promoted abuses of authority. Other “fundraising” mechanisms included the kidnapping of wealthy citizens and the staging of mock executions to force ransoms. Often, revolutionary authorities condoned these abuses given the lack of resources to pay the armed groups. In the 1920s many of the *caudillos* who engaged in these practices became the highest authorities in certain states, including Adalberto Tejeda in Veracruz, Lucio Blanco in Coahuila, Saturnino Cedillo in San Luis Potosí, and Salvador Alvarado in Yucatán. Amaro received extraordinary concessions for his services to the regime. During his years as a public servant he acquired a number of large haciendas, including Santa Bárbara and Saucillo in Durango, a number of ranches near Mexico City where he built luxury houses (La Hormiga and El Jacalito) and was also involved in a number of businesses such as the construction company, Compañía Industrial y Colonizadora del Río Mante, S. A., in association with President Calles, Fernando Torreblanca (the presidential secretary), and Rodolfo Elías Calles (son of the president), among others.<sup>79</sup> Thus, while the regular army was increasingly institutionalized, the emerging post-revolutionary political system also incorporated *caudillos*.

It should be noted, however, that not all of these revolutionary *caudillos* belonged to a single political coalition. During the 1920s the state continued struggling to contain dissident forces. One of the biggest threats to the Calles’ regime was the *Cristero* revolt

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 147.

(1926-1929). The 1917 constitution included a series of anticlerical laws designed to limit the political influence of the Catholic Church. They were not initially implemented, but in 1926 Calles decided to use force in retaliation for some anti-regime comments previously made by Archbishop José Mora y del Río. Calles closed religious schools and convents and expelled some 200 foreign priests from the country.

The *Cristero* rebellion was concentrated primarily in the states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, Colima, and Michoacán and its forces were 20,000 strong. Regardless, the movement did not seriously endanger the stability of the regime.<sup>80</sup> The conflict was ultimately settled on June 30, 1929 largely as a result of the intervention of the U.S. ambassador in Mexico, Dwight Morrow. Once the Catholic Church came to terms with the government, the movement lost force and popular support declined. Some of the *caudillos* involved continued fighting throughout the 1930s, but they did not represent a serious threat to the government.

In 1929, at the height of the *Cristero* revolt, the Calles regime survived another rebellion. Generals Arnulfo R. Gómez and Francisco R. Serrano decided to take advantage of the *Cristero* revolt to stage their own. Minister of War General Joaquín Amaro found out about Gómez's and Serrano's intentions early enough to frustrate their plans for a coup. Gómez and Serrano tried to escape, but were captured and executed within days. By the end of the 1920s the revolutionary regime was more in control of the state and nation. The regime had faced coups in 1920, 1923, 1927, and 1929. They were largely caused by disagreements and conflicts within the revolutionary elite. It became evident that the stability of the nation depended on creating a space where the elite could resolve disagreements without impeding the consolidation of a new political system.

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<sup>80</sup> Meyer 2002, 830.

Obregón and Calles had been considering the creation of a revolutionary party that could facilitate this. In addition, they had agreed on Obregón's returning to the presidency. They changed the constitution in order to allow for his re-election which occurred on July 1, 1928. However, on July 17th, he was assassinated during a celebration of the victory.

Obregonistas immediately accused Calles and his Minister of Labor, Luis N. Morones, of being responsible for the assassination. Calles, appreciating the danger for the survival of the regime, decided to step down, name an interim president, and formalize the formation of a revolutionary party.

Obregón was the last president to attempt to be re-elected. No further attempts had occurred, in part, because of Calles' decision to institutionalize the selection of the next president and the transfer of power through a state-sponsored party. In line with this strategy, Calles used his last state of the nation speech (September 1, 1928) to proclaim the end of *caudillismo* and the transformation of Mexico from a country of "one man to one of national institutions and laws."<sup>81</sup> The *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR) was founded in March 1929. The Mexican scholar Lorenzo Meyer has argued that "The central preoccupation of the PNR directorate consisted in giving shape to and maintaining a real consensus among the factions of the coalition through the negotiation of their demands and aspirations, and thus remove violence as method to the solve internal elite disputes."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Puig Casauranc 1938, 38.

<sup>82</sup> "La preocupación central de la dirección del PNR consistió en dar forma y mantener un consenso real entre las facciones de la coalición a través de la negociación de sus demandas y aspiraciones, y desterrar así la violencia como método para solucionar las pugnas internas de la elite." In Lorenzo Meyer, "La institucionalización del nuevo régimen," *Historia general de México* (México: El Colegio de México, 2002), 833.

During the first meeting of the party elite to choose a presidential candidate at the Hotel Regis on September 5, 1928, Calles met with all the top generals at the level of prefecture and made them promise that none of them would present themselves as candidates for provisional or constitutional president. He argued that the candidacy of any one of them would provoke that of others and this could cause deep divisions within the army. Among the military present were Jesús M. Aguirre, Juan Andrew Almazán, Joaquín Amaro, Lázaro Cárdenas, Saturnino Cedillo, Roberto Cruz, José Gonzalo Escobar, Abundio Gómez, Gilberto Limón, Francisco R. Manzo and Francisco Urbalejo.<sup>83</sup> Calles was interested in having General Aaron Saenz succeed him, but *caudillos* within the PNR protested arguing that he was too close to Calles. In order to avoid too much concentration of power in Calles' inner circle, the revolutionary elite compromised on Emilio Portes Gil, former Governor of Tamaulipas. In order to guarantee the agreement, the PNR co-opted General Saenz, by granting him a sugar monopoly in Tamaulipas.<sup>84</sup> Others included General Abelardo L. Rodríguez, who was allowed to monopolize houses of gambling and establish a lucrative tourism business in the state of Baja California.<sup>85</sup> This does not mean that these “capitalist-revolutionaries-*caudillos*” were pushed entirely out of politics. General Saenz served in several cabinet positions in the 1930s and General Rodríguez even became President of Mexico (1932-34).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Loyo Camacho 2003, 166.

<sup>84</sup> Nora Hamilton, “The State and the National Bourgeoisie in Postrevolutionary Mexico: 1920-1940,” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Autumn, 1982): 41.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>86</sup> Not all revolutionary leaders betrayed the ideals of the revolution for personal gain. Some revolutionaries remained committed to revolutionary principles (i.e. social justice). However, most of these *caudillos* lost their influence within the party. They became, by and large, impoverished and forgotten. See for example, Gonzalo N. Santos, *Memorias* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1984), 675; Friedrich Katz,

The PNR eventually became the main channel for the distribution of state resources to underpin the patronage system sustaining the new political system. It participated in governmental functions including control of the congress, distribution of political jobs, as well as the development and implementation of the political agenda. Authoritarian and clientelistic political practices and networks remained, even when transformed by the modernization of the Mexican state, economy, and society.

A new PNR-sponsored generation of *caudillos* emerged in the 1930s. They included Saturnino Osornio in Querétaro, Gonzalo N. Santos in San Luis Potosí and Maximino Ávila Camacho in Puebla. They were revolutionary soldiers and members of the PNR who were yet to benefit in a major fashion from the new political system. In 1935 President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) relied on these *caudillos*, amongst others, to challenge Calles for control of the PNR. Cárdenas won. He sent Calles into exile and effectively destroyed the last national *caudillo*.<sup>87</sup> Cárdenas was then able to consolidate extensive powers in the office of the presidency. Instead of a *caudillo* dominating the party, thereafter the president did, in part, through cooptation, clientelism, cronyism and corruption. After a president's term was over, his successor would control the party. This system guaranteed the peaceful succession of power that traditional *caudillismo* had threatened since independence. However, *caudillismo*, particularly at the local level did not disappear.

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*The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 680; and John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York, Vintage, 1968).

<sup>87</sup> A full analysis of the struggle between Calles and Cárdenas for party domination and its effects on the end of Calles as the last national *caudillo* is presented in Chapter III.

## The Case of Puebla

As the armed phase of the 1910 revolution ended in 1921, the state of Puebla did not have a *caudillo* who could claim complete domination of the region. The most influential regional *caudillo* during the revolutionary era had been a cautious supporter of the Díaz regime, Juan Francisco Lucas. He managed to maintain a certain degree of independence from Díaz and thus survived the initial stage of the revolution. After Huerta assassinated President Madero, Lucas became the leader of the Puebla revolutionaries in the highlands.<sup>88</sup> He died of old age in 1917, but his successor Juan C. Bonilla, was unable to maintain Lucas' control of the other *caudillos* in the state. As the state emerged from the revolution there was no single *caudillo* to impose his authority over other *caudillos*. During the rest of the decade, various factions continued fighting with each other while trying to impose their own governor. Between 1920 and 1933 Puebla had 17 governors, none of whom was able to finish his term. The state was finally stabilized when the official party began mediating the selection of governors.

After the 1935 Calles-Cárdenas confrontation Maximino Ávila Camacho emerged as the clear *caudillo* of the state of Puebla. He represented the new generation of *caudillos* who came to power, in large measure, because of the support of the president of Mexico and the official party. Instead of an independent regional *caudillo* struggling against the central government, his power depended on his alliance with the president and the PNR. His loyalty to both guaranteed his access to power and wealth. In return the regional *caudillo* reinforced the local influence that the party increasingly enjoyed throughout the country. This interdependency played a major role in the consolidation of a one-party dominated state in Mexico until the end of the twentieth century.

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<sup>88</sup> LaFrance 1989, 192.

## CHAPTER II

### THE AUTHORITARIAN WORKSHOP: MAXIMINO'S EARLY YEARS (1891-1934)

#### Introduction

The early years of Maximino Ávila Camacho's life are a window into what made him one of the post-revolutionary elite. They allow us to analyze the evolution of a desperado revolutionary who, like many others, utilized *caudillo* practices to find his own place in post-revolutionary Mexico. He became part of a new political elite different from the mainly plutocratic political groupings of the Díaz years. Many members of this new elite emerged from the lower and middle sectors of society. The stories of many of these revolutionaries are rag-to-riches accounts in which they ultimately not only acquired wealth, but also reached prominent positions of power. For example, President Álvaro Obregón (1920-24) had been a farmer, President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) a school teacher, and President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) had worked as a tax collector and jailer.

The revolution became the workshop where politicians developed political skills. Their families often had no history of political activism and had limited access to education, wealth, or power. Individuals like Maximino were largely shaped by the violent and anarchic events of the revolutionary years of 1910 to 1917. Revolutionary officers, such as Maximino, gained experience in command over largely non-professional troops under loose supervision. The latter allowed for considerable autonomy and also resulted in abusive practices, some to satisfy the soldiers' demands and others to serve the commanders' own interests. A good number of these revolutionary officers formed a

new generation of *caudillos* that would help shape the post-revolutionary political system.

This chapter explores Maximino's early formation and political and military background in the 1910s and 1920s.

### **Maximino's Early Years in the Pueblan Highlands**

During Maximino's early years at the turn of the twentieth century, the Ávila Camacho family was not exactly poor, but, as many families at that time, it struggled to keep afloat. His parents, Manuel Ávila Castillo and Eufrosina Camacho Bello, who married after Maximino's birth, had nine children of which their first was Maximino Ávila Camacho. He was born on August 24, 1891, followed by María, Manuel (born in 1896 and who became president of Mexico, 1940-46), Miguel, María Antonieta, Ana María, Rafael (governor of Puebla, 1951-57), Luis Gabriel, and Eulogio. Don Manuel Ávila Castillo owned a pack of mules for his cargo business which provided a basic income for the family during periods of stability. Maximino, as the elder son, left school after the fifth grade at the private *Liceo Teziuteco* in order to help increase the family's income.<sup>89</sup>

The Ávila Camacho family lived in the city of Teziutlán in Puebla's northeast highlands. It was a traditional colonial town founded in 1552. Its steep streets, white stucco-covered walls, and red clay tile roofs were often covered in fog or dripping with the constant rains that kept the surrounding mountains green and fertile. The productivity of the region was shaped by its geography. Teziutlán was one of the most important portals connecting the state of Puebla with the port of Veracruz. Its products included

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<sup>89</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, foja 3.

fine woods, cattle, vanilla, cereals, fruits, coffee, sugar, and cotton. Don Manuel Ávila Castillo had been attracted by the economic potential of the city where a carting business might prosper.

In 1890, Vicente Lombardo Catti, an Italian entrepreneur, had founded an important copper mining enterprise on the outskirts of Teziutlán. Don Manuel and his son Maximino often worked transporting copper for Mr. Lombardo's company "*La Aurora*" (later the Teziutlán Copper Company). Somewhat ironically, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the grandson of the entrepreneur, would become one of the most important labor leaders in the country while Maximino, the son of the muleteer, would lead an important branch of the conservative anti-labor faction of the official party. At the height of his power in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Maximino would use this fact to insinuate that Lombardo, unlike him, had never toiled, so Lombardo could not understand the needs of the working class as well as Maximino did. Both, the Ávila Camacho and the Lombardo families, however, experienced difficulties when in 1898 the railroad reached Teziutlán undercutting Don Manuel's transport business,<sup>90</sup> while the revolution contributed to the Lombardo family losing the mine. The collapse of their livelihoods may have stimulated Maximino's and Vicente's decision to seek political power in order to influence the economic development of the country. While Maximino opted to insert himself within the conservative elite Lombardo maintained a critical stance towards it.

Teziutlán would help shape Maximino's future in other ways. The region was characterized by its *caudillo*-supported resistance to domination by the cities of Puebla and Mexico. The independence of the region was facilitated because Teziutlán was

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<sup>90</sup> Enrique Krauze, *La Presidencia Imperial: Ascenso y caída del sistema político mexicano (1940-1996)* (Barcelona, Spain: TusQuets Editores, 1997), 39-40.

economically closely linked to the port city of Veracruz and the latter's state capital Jalapa. This ameliorated the region's dependence on the city of Puebla, located in the central lowlands, in the opposite direction from the port. It was in the Pueblan highlands that Maximino joined the rebel forces in reaction to de la Huerta's 1913 coup against President Madero. After the revolution, Maximino would use the traditional independence of certain *caudillos* in this region to secure political alliances as a strategic maneuver in becoming Puebla's *caudillo*.

A complete analysis of Maximino's early years is challenging. Overall, there is a lack of documentation, at the same time much of what is available about his early years is exaggerated or invented. This is, in part, due to the visibility of his later political career that resulted in "interpretations" made by Maximino and/or his supporters in an effort to improve his image or by his enemies to discredit him. Maximino's story, however, is similar to that of many other revolutionaries who elbowed their way into power and wealth, sometimes using questionable means.

During his later years, Maximino often mentioned his childhood struggles as a way to discredit accusations of abuse of power, especially against the working class. He often highlighted his humble beginnings and his hard work to sustain his family as the reason for a work ethic that resulted in the accumulation of wealth. In other words, according to him, he became one of the richest men in Mexico, in spite of working as a public servant, because he was used to saving, investing, and extremely hard work. He often talked about being barefoot and poor, being forced to take a number of jobs including as a cowboy, merchant, bookkeeper, and bullfighter.<sup>91</sup> The beginnings of his wealth, he argued, were based on his creativity, such as experimenting with breeding

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<sup>91</sup> Ortega, "Maximino Avila Camacho No Tiene Ambiciones Políticas," *Hoy*, March 20, 1943, 10.

cattle, as well as growing tobacco and sugar cane beginning in 1900 when he was only nine years old.

Such stories indicate his tendency to romanticize his early years for later political gain. In another example, during the presidency of his brother Manuel (President of Mexico, 1940-46), he repeatedly emphasized that he had been a paternal figure for all his siblings. He held that his father died when he was only 12 years old and he had to support the family together with his mother Eufrosina.<sup>92</sup> However his father did not die in 1903 (when Maximino was 12), but rather on February 6, 1916, when Maximino was 24 years old.<sup>93</sup> It would appear that Maximino was trying to explain away accusations of undue influence over his brother Manuel, as president, as the result of a family's early struggle.

### **The Revolution Reaches Maximino**

Maximino's participation in the revolution is regarded as controversial. In his later years Maximino asserted that he participated in the Mexican revolution from its very beginnings.<sup>94</sup> This has been difficult to corroborate. Before the revolution erupted, Maximino had been working as a postman in Cedro Viejo, Puebla. At the time hostilities started in November 1910, he was a sales representative for Singer sewing machines in the state of Veracruz.<sup>95</sup> Despite his assertion, there is no clear evidence linking Maximino with any insurgent group supporting Francisco I. Madero's political campaign against President Porfirio Díaz (1908-10) or the Madero revolution (1910-11). However,

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Maximino Ávila Camacho to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, June 6, 1916. See also, Hoja de Servicios del C. Maximino Ávila Camacho, in Maximino Ávila Camacho's File, Folder 7, Foja 1593, October 25, 1941.

<sup>94</sup> José C. Valades, "Maximino Avila Camacho Habla Claro y Fuerte Sobre Sus Bienes," *Hoy*, May 22, 1943, 13-14.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

there are a series of letters that he wrote between March and November 1912 in an attempt to join Madero's government. In a letter dated March 1912, he proposed to President Madero that he would create a group of volunteers to serve at the behest of the president. This proposition suggests Maximino's impulsive character since at this point he had no military experience. In spite of not receiving a response, Maximino did not give up. In June he wrote again. This time he announced to the president his interest in volunteering for any dangerous commissions. After receiving no reply, Maximino informed the president in November that he had decided to become a soldier. He added a request for money in order to support and educate his "little brother."<sup>96</sup>

These letters are indeed puzzling. Why would a sewing machine salesman write to the president asking for a job? These letters suggest that Maximino felt that Madero owed him a job for his alleged support during the revolt against Díaz, or, perhaps, he simply saw an opportunity to start a career working for the government. The only evidence available linking Maximino with the early stages of the Madero revolution is Maximino's own assertions. However, there are some indications that perhaps Maximino had some loose connections with Maderismo.

According to Maximino's version, during the years leading up to the revolution he had been a member of a Maderista group in Puebla headed by Agustín del Pozo and Aquiles Serdán. Other members of del Pozo's group included Maximino's uncles Gilberto and Roberto Camacho. The Camacho brothers supported the Madero faction fighting against Porfiristas in the Puebla highlands. Maximino fought with his uncle Gilberto, but the records indicate that he did this after Madero's assassination. Perhaps

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<sup>96</sup> Possibly Manuel Ávila Camacho, the future president of Mexico. Gustavo Abel Hernández Enríquez and Armando Rojas Trujillo, *Manuel Ávila Camacho. Biografía de un Revolucionario con Historia* (México: Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 1986), 54.

Maximino's motivation in writing to the president earlier was the result of his uncles' support of Madero.

The rest of Maximino's military career is equally confusing. Maximino applied to the military academy in November 1912 when he was 21 years old. He submitted his application first to officers at the *Escuela Militar* in Chapultepec in México City.<sup>97</sup> His application was rejected because he was considered too old. Instead, it was suggested he apply to the less prestigious *Colegio de Aspirantes*. After admitting his limited education in his application, Maximino highlighted his ability handling horses as his most relevant skill. He was admitted and was scheduled to begin courses on January 6, 1913.<sup>98</sup>

Maximino's presence at the *Colegio de Aspirantes* was a cause for debate years later. The fact that Maximino appeared matriculated at this school led his enemies to accuse him of having supported Huerta's coup against Madero in February 1913 that resulted in Madero's assassination and Huerta's dictatorship.<sup>99</sup> These accusations were based on the fact that General Bernardo Díaz (nephew of former President Díaz and Huerta co-conspirator) used cadets from the *Colegio de Aspirantes* to storm the presidential palace which led to Huerta's capture and the execution of Madero.<sup>100</sup>

Maximino appeared listed among the cadets because he had been accepted. However, Maximino did not support General Díaz' coup against President Madero because he

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<sup>97</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, Foja 6.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, Fojas 7, 9.

<sup>99</sup> See for example Sergio Valencia Castrejón, *Poder regional y política nacional en México: el gobierno de Maximino Ávila Camacho en Puebla (1937-1941)* (México: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1996), 19.

<sup>100</sup> Calixto Maldonado R., *Los Asesinatos de los Señores Madero y Pino Suárez: como ocurrieron; recopilación de datos históricos* (México: Agrupación pro-Madero, 1922, 29). This book lists the 1913 cadets at the *Colegio de Aspirantes*; Maximino is listed there. It was used as proof that Maximino participated in the attack against President Madero at the National Palace.

never became active at the academy.<sup>101</sup> On the first day of classes, January 6, 1913, Maximino had sent a letter excusing himself on the basis of having to attend to important “family matters.”<sup>102</sup> Nine days later he sent another letter, including an apparently counterfeit note from a doctor, again asking to be excused from classes. This time it was reportedly due to pneumonia.<sup>103</sup> It is not entirely clear why he never attended the school, but when Maximino found out that he had been declared a deserter in mid-January, he left Mexico City for San Antonio Atzintzintla, in the Puebla highlands. In late January 1913—a couple of weeks before Huerta’s coup—he joined the forces of his uncle General Gilberto Camacho who was stationed in that area.<sup>104</sup> It is at this point that Maximino’s military activities are first documented. His uncle was part of the *Carrancista* movement that denounced President Victoriano Huerta (1913-14) as an usurper. Maximino’s first apparent military action, under the command of Colonel Adalberto Guevara, consisted in taking his hometown, Teziutlán, from Huerta’s army. Between 1913 and 1915, his military activities, in general, were mainly limited to the Pueblan highlands fighting for the “Brigada Serdán” commanded by General Joaquín Jiménez Castro.<sup>105</sup> This was a peripheral front in the revolution.

Maximino’s decision to join the *Constitucionalistas* was probably more a pragmatic than an ideological decision. As explained in the previous chapter, after the Huerta coup, the revolutionaries split into two major groups: the *Constitucionalistas* led by Venustiano Carranza and the *Convencionistas* presided over by Eulalio Gutiérrez, but

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<sup>101</sup> “A la Opinión Pública...,” *Diario de Puebla*, March 7, 1936, 4.

<sup>102</sup> ASDN Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, Foja 15, Report of Maximino’s Application to the Colegio de Aspirantes, Letter to Oficialía Mayor January 16, 1916.

<sup>103</sup> ASDN Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, Report of Maximino’s Application to the Colegio de Aspirantes, Doctor’s Note, January 15, 1913.

<sup>104</sup> José C. Valades, *Hoy*, May 22, 1943, 13-14.

<sup>105</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 127, Oficina de Estado Mayor, December 10, 1924.

dominated by Francisco Villa in the north and Emiliano Zapata in the south. In the state of Puebla the southern zone was controlled by Zapatistas, while the north, including the Puebla highlands where Teziutlán was located, was controlled by *Constitucionalistas*.<sup>106</sup>

Apparently, Maximino's loyalty to this camp was not guaranteed. In August 1915 Maximino was accused of treason and expelled from the *Constitucionalista* forces. At that time, he was supporting his uncle, General Gilberto Camacho, who was determined to conquer the city of Puebla and become governor. His uncle had decided to leave the "Brigada Serdán" and join the Zapatistas who were besieging the state capital.<sup>107</sup> Years later, General Hernández Serrano justified Maximino's desertion claiming that he followed his uncle in order to negotiate a truce between the governor of Puebla, General Francisco Coss (1914) and his uncle Gilberto. According to General Hernández, Maximino convinced his uncle to abandoned his gubernatorial ambitions and rejoin the *Constitucionalistas*.<sup>108</sup> Regardless, Maximino was discharged as traitor. However, the confusion does not end here.

Maximino's alleged disloyalty would have meant the end of his military career. However, communications and bookkeeping were difficult in this confusing war. Thus, regardless of an order to expel Maximino from the army signed on August 24, 1915,<sup>109</sup> Maximino received an appointment in the *Constitucionalista* forces in January 1916. President Venustiano Carranza approved this order. Maximino's new post was *Segundo Vocal Propietario del Primer Consejo de Guerra* of the state of Veracruz. A few months

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<sup>106</sup> David G. LaFrance, *The Mexican Revolution in Puebla, 1908-1913: The Maderista Movement and the Failure of Liberal Reform* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1989), 232.

<sup>107</sup> ASDN Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, Fojas 757, Oficina de Estado Mayor, July 31, 1931.

<sup>108</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 146, Letter from General Julio Hernández Serrano to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, November 9, 1920.

<sup>109</sup> ASDN Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Fojas 98, Letter to Secretaría de Estado y del Despacho de Guerra y Marina, August 24, 1915.

later, he was promoted to *Primer Vocal* and by June of that year he was promoted once again. General Pascual Ortiz Rubio reported to Carranza that Maximino showed “competence and integrity” in that post.<sup>110</sup> He was trusted to manage revolutionary appropriations of civil property in that state of Veracruz.<sup>111</sup> Maximino clearly survived a difficult turn of events that while common in the chaos of the revolution could have ended his political aspirations.

### **Maximino’s Unorthodox Military Career**

After the fall of General Victoriano Huerta (1914), the revolution turned more intensively into a struggle between *Constitucionalistas* and *Convencionistas* for the domination of regional and federal governments. This complicated the operations of many state institutions, including the administration of the army. Some soldiers took advantage of this situation. As we have seen, administrative confusion allowed Maximino to remain in the *Constitucionalista* camp after having temporarily deserted to the *Convencionista* forces.

Other irregularities included the right that some generals assumed to grant promotions without approval of their superiors. These promotions were often granted through letters written by a general indicating the new rank of the officer and a brief explanation for the promotion. In part, this practice was accepted as a mean of promptly rewarding revolutionaries for their services or co-opting militia leaders into joining one side or the other in the revolution. However, this practice also facilitated abuse by some generals, such as granting promotions to family members or friends. This phenomenon

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<sup>110</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 139, Letter Pascual Ortiz Rubio to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, November 9, 1920.

<sup>111</sup> ASDN Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, Fojas 756, Oficina de Estado Mayor, July 31, 1931.

was especially common between 1914 and 1917, when the *Constitucionalistas* finally consolidated their domination of the federal government. Maximino was among the revolutionary officers who benefited from this practice.

Of all of Maximino's military achievements during the years of the revolution (1910-21) perhaps the most extraordinary was his rapid ascension through military ranks. He benefited greatly by having joined the revolutionary forces under the command of his uncle. In February 1913, General Gabriel Camacho admitted Maximino into his division with the rank of lieutenant. The reasons for this are not clear. At that time Maximino had a fifth grade education and no formal military training or experience. In the summer Maximino was promoted to Captain.<sup>112</sup> Again, there was no clear reason for this. Prior to that summer Maximino's participation in the revolution was limited to a series of minor battles against Huerta's forces with no major strategic consequences. He fought in the temporary take over of some towns in the Pueblan highlands, including: Tenextatilolla, Oyameles, Calderona, La Rosa, San Juan de los Llanos, Acatzingo, Acajete, and Tecamachalco. During the first half of 1914 Maximino continued participating in some minor battles including Almolonga, Todos Santos, Tepeji, and Acatzingo.<sup>113</sup> On August 4, 1914, he was promoted again, this time to the rank of Major. Three months later he became a Lieutenant Colonel.<sup>114</sup> Years later the army would question these promotions. Apparently they were the result of his uncle's involvement.

In 1916 Maximino, still a Lieutenant Colonel, had his first substantial opportunity to be involved with the revolutionary political elite. In March 1916, under orders from

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<sup>112</sup> ASDN Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 129, Letter by General Antonio Medina to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, June 1913. See also, ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 145, Letter by General Rafael Cárdenas to the Secretaría de Guerra y Marina.

<sup>113</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 141, Telegram, August 2, 1919.

<sup>114</sup> ASDN Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, Fojas 755, Oficina de Estado Mayor, July 31, 1931.

General Alvaro Obregón, Maximino negotiated the surrender of the *Convencionista* General Juan Espinosa de los Monteros in the important capital city of San Luis Potosí.<sup>115</sup> Ironically, he was not promoted for this. However, after this General Obregón became aware of Maximino, who was invited to collaborate with the *Sonorenses*, the political elite from Sonora who led the post-revolutionary government in the 1920s.

Maximino developed a close relationship with General Benjamin Hill, the man known as Obregón's right-hand, a limb that the General had lost in battle.<sup>116</sup> General Hill helped Maximino rise further in the army. In 1916 Maximino requested a leave of absence.<sup>117</sup> When Maximino returned to the army on May 5, 1920, General Hill helped him to return as a colonel.<sup>118</sup> Later, the legitimacy of further promotions would be questioned on the basis of Maximino's undistinguished career. In 1929, an army officer commented during an evaluation of his file that:

The proof of his ranks suffers from serious irregularities if one takes into consideration that he started as a Lieutenant and he does not appear to have exercised the positions of Second Captain, First Captain and Major, nor has he effectively exercised those of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel, only the positions of Brigadier General and Brigade General are justified.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 159, Report to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, March 30, 1916.

<sup>116</sup> Álvaro Obregón lost his right arm fighting Francisco Villa in the battle of Celaya in April 1915. John W. F. Dulles, *Ayer en México: una crónica de la Revolución (1919-1936)* (México: Fondo de Culture Económica, 1977), 18, 104.

<sup>117</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 163, Report by Interim Governor Adalberto Palacios, July 7, 1917.

<sup>118</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 7, Foja 1594, Service Report, Oficina de Estado Mayor, October 25, 1941.

<sup>119</sup> "la comprobación de sus empleos adolecen de serias irregularidades si se toma en cuenta que su iniciación fué como Teniente y no aparece haber desempeñado los empleos de Capitán 2/o, Capitán 1/o y Mayor, ni comprueba en forma debida los de Teniente Coronel y Coronel, obrando únicamente la justificación de los de General Brigadier y General de Brigada." ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, Study Regarding Military Service by General de Brigada Maximino Ávila Camacho, Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, September 1, 1929.

### **Maximino's Political Schooling as an Obregonista**

On June 5, 1916, Maximino requested a license to leave the army asserting family duties following the death of his father. His father had died four months earlier.<sup>120</sup> While he might have attended to some family business in Puebla in the months immediately after the death of his father, he spent most of the next four years involved in politics, mainly working with General Hill in the state of Michoacán. During this time, Maximino got the opportunity to join the revolutionary elite that dominated Mexican politics in the 1920s. In Michoacán Maximino established connections and learned political skills that would help launch his own political career in the 1930s.

1916 was the year of the Aguascalientes convention organized by President Carranza to create the constitutional assembly that drafted the 1917 Mexican constitution. Maximino went to Aguascalientes as an assistant to General Rafael Cárdenas,<sup>121</sup> who was a close friend of his uncle General Gilberto Camacho. During this convention Maximino also became acquainted with important Poblano politicians including Gonzalo Bautista, Ernesto Castro Rayón, and Efrén Gómez Ballestos. They eventually would support Maximino's candidacy for governor of Puebla.<sup>122</sup> It is at the convention that he met General Benjamín Hill.

General Hill invited Maximino to collaborate with him in creating a political platform for General Obregón's 1920 presidential campaign. Under Hill's supervision, Maximino demonstrated keen political abilities. He helped start the *Partido Revolucionario Sonorense* and raised 50,000 pesos for the creation of the *Monitor*

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<sup>120</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 41, Report by Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, June 9, 1916.

<sup>121</sup> No family relation with the future president of Mexico General Lázaro Cárdenas del Río.

<sup>122</sup> Jesús Márquez Carrillo, *El tiempo y su sombra: política y oposición conservadora en Puebla, 1932-1940, una crónica* (Puebla, México: Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, Secretaría de Cultura, 1997), 52-53.

*Republicano*, a newspaper designed to promote Obregón.<sup>123</sup> In 1919, Maximino was spearheading the fundraising in Michoacán through the formation of local parties, including the *Partido Liberal Constitucionalista* and the *Partido Liberal Michoacano*. On April 26, 1919, he moved back to Puebla where he continued proselytizing for Obregón.<sup>124</sup> Shortly thereafter, Hill named Maximino “special delegate in the republic for Obregón’s candidacy.”<sup>125</sup> As such he also helped promote the candidacy of Antonio Madrazo for governor of Guanajuato, an Obregón ally. He arranged for Madrazo to meet influential leaders in the state, including General Rodolfo Gallegos. As chief of military operations, General Gallegos was perhaps the most influential politician in the state of Guanajuato. President Carranza quickly became alarmed by the growth of Obregón’s political alliances and apparently decided to begin harassing his sympathizers.

Carranza’s offensive against Obregón’s supporters was particularly aggressive. In Guanajuato, where Maximino was operating in late 1919 and early 1920, Carranza replaced General Gallegos with General Rafael de la Torre and ordered the detention of Maximino. Maximino escaped from Guanajuato and hid in Mexico City where he continued supporting Obregón’s campaign.

In response to Carranza’s offensive, on April 30, 1920, Obregón announced his *Plan de Agua Prieta*, a *pronunciamiento* denouncing Carranza’s dictatorial attitude and his determination to remain in power. As with most *pronunciamientos*, *Agua Prieta* called for the ousting of the president. Maximino was instrumental in recruiting the

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<sup>123</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 177, Letter General Benjamin G. Hill, February 9, 1920.

<sup>124</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 178-181, Letter General Benjamín G. Hill to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, February 9, 1920.

<sup>125</sup> “Delegado Especial de la Candidatura Obregón en toda la República.” In ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 179, Letter General Benjamín G. Hill to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, February 9, 1920.

*caudillo* of the state of Guerrero, General Fortunato Maycotte, to support Obregón's coup.<sup>126</sup> Carranza ordered the arrest of Obregón and his entourage, which included General Hill and Maximino. Maximino helped Obregón and Hill escape from Mexico City and find haven in Guerrero where general Maycotte helped provide the means for Obregón and Hill to orchestrate Carranza's downfall.<sup>127</sup>

On May 21, 1920, President Carranza was assassinated in Tlaxcalaltongo, Puebla and General Obregón subsequently became president on December 1, 1920. Previously on May 5, 1920, General Hill had helped Maximino rejoin the army with the rank of colonel. At that time, General Hill was Obregón's right hand and considered his potential successor. Maximino probably had high hopes to become a member of Hill's presidential team.

Maximino's political aspirations were high when he returned to active duty, but he suffered a serious set back in September 1920. Three months before Obregón took his oath of office, General Hill died. The circumstances of his death were never clear, but many believed at the time that his political rival, General Plutarco Elías Calles, poisoned him. Calles benefited greatly from Hill's death. He replaced Hill as Minister of War in 1920 and succeeded Obregón as president in 1924. During Calles presidency (1924-28) Maximino became less involved in national politics and apparently decided to concentrate on his military career.

Maximino's military promotions continued. A group of generals refused to accept the imposition of General Calles as Obregón's successor and on December 8,

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<sup>126</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 178-181, Letter General Benjamín G. Hill to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, February 9, 1920.

<sup>127</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 5, Extract from the File of Military Activities of Brigadier General Maximino Ávila Camacho, Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, December 10, 1924.

1923, they announced a military coup. This became known as the *Delahuertista* revolt, which was supported by approximately a third of the army. This precipitated a massive confrontation with the regime. In early January 1924, Colonel Maximino Ávila Camacho was heading the 100th Cavalry Regiment and was ordered to defend the city of Morelia, Michoacán, which was being besieged by the rebel General Enrique Estrada. Among the defenders was Maximino's brother, Colonel Manuel Ávila Camacho. On January 24, 1924, Maximino's, together with other *Obregonista* forces, were defeated. Among the prisoners were the Ávila Camacho brothers. Apparently, General Estrada offered clemency to those prisoners who agreed to sign a document swearing not to fight the rebel forces. What followed is a matter of controversy. According to the official story:

Colonel Manuel Avila Camacho...who was brought first into Estrada's presence, refused to sign the document, even though he was warned that those who didn't do it would be immediately executed. 'General'—the prisoner said—, 'even though I know that my words will take me to the firing squad, I cannot sign, because I gave my word of honor as a soldier of the government and I have only one word....All the soldiers who got this offer accepted it...except for the Avila Camacho brothers...to whom, in spite of the threat, General Estrada gave a safe-conduct pass to leave Morelia immediately, which they did, only to rejoin, as soon as possible, the Obregón forces located in Irapuato, Guanajuato....'<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> “El coronel Manuel Avila Camacho... a quien llevaron primero a la presencia de Estrada, rehusó firmar el documento, a pesar de la advertencia de que quienes no lo hicieran serían fusilados de inmediato. ‘General —dijo el prisionero—, aún cuando sé que mis palabras harán que me lleven al paredón, no puedo firmar, porque dí mi palabra de honor como soldado al gobierno y solamente tengo una.... Todos los militares a los que se hizo la proposición la aceptaron, ‘...menos los Avila Camacho...’, a los que, a pesar de su amenaza, el general Estrada les dio un salvoconducto para que abandonaran inmediatamente Morelia, lo que hicieron para integrarse, tan pronto les fue posible, a las fuerzas de Obregón asentadas en Irapuato, Gto....” In Gustavo Abel Hernández Enríquez and Armando Rojas Trujillo, *Manuel Ávila Camacho. Biografía de un Revolucionario con Historia* (México: Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 1986), 84-85.

Eventually the Ávila Camacho brothers were promoted to the rank of Brigadier General allegedly due to their heroic resistance. Some questions arise however. First of all, why would General Estrada pardon the Ávila Camacho brothers if they were the only two who refused to sign the document? Summary executions were fairly common during the revolution and its aftermath. Thus, their execution would not have been unusual. In addition, Maximino's military files do not mention such heroism.<sup>129</sup> Maximino and Manuel became generals after this, but the reason appears less heroic. This promotion appears to have been the result of President Obregón's request to Congress to promote all officers to their next immediate rank in gratitude for their loyalty demonstrated during the *Delahuertista* revolt.<sup>130</sup> On March 14, 1924, Maximino and Manuel were promoted to the rank of Brigadier General.<sup>131</sup>

### **The Army and Political Authority in the 1920s**

The Mexican Revolution produced a large number of militias anxious to claim some kind of economic benefit for their service. These were led by *caudillos* with informal militia ranks who were not always recognized by the army. Their loyalty was only guaranteed by perks, such as recognition as leaders of a given territory or means to acquire some wealth for them and their followers. Since the political elite could not always satisfy such demands, the 1920s experienced regular military uprisings against the regime. As a way to mitigate this, President Obregón relied heavily on bribes. He was

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<sup>129</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 17-18, Extract from the File of Military Activities of Brigadier General Maximino Ávila Camacho, Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, December 10, 1924.

<sup>130</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 2, Foja 44-46, letter sent by President Álvaro Obregón to Congress, November 27, 1924.

<sup>131</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 10, Oficina de Estado Mayor, December 4, 1924.

known for saying: “no general resists a cannonball of 50,000 pesos.”<sup>132</sup> The cost to the state was obvious. For most of this decade one third of the federal budget was earmarked for military expenses.<sup>133</sup>

Unlike Obregón, President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) was not popular among army officers. He appointed General Joaquín Amaro Minister of War and Navy (1925-1932) with the mission of bringing the army under state control. General Amaro conceived of a program to bring all the militias into a single institutionalized Mexican army. As a consequence, he emphasized the depolitization of the army.<sup>134</sup> He also began a reduction in the size of the army and its budget. In order to achieve this, he dismissed those with military ranks not properly accredited by the federal government and retired a number of officers. During the first months of 1925 alone he had dismissed about 1,000 officers.<sup>135</sup> Between 1925 and 1926, he reduced the budget for the army from 111 million pesos to 79.<sup>136</sup> In addition, in order to reduce the risk of an uprising he established a rotation system for officers, battalions and regiments. This way he managed to eliminate personalist alliances between soldiers and their commanders and the latter with local interest groups.<sup>137</sup> Thus, officers became increasingly dependent on the federal government and less on their personal regional authority. Finally, he created a state of the art military academy in Mexico City, and sent young officers to France,

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<sup>132</sup> John W. F. Dulles, *Ayer en México: una crónica de la Revolución (1919-1936)* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1977), 422.

<sup>133</sup> Martha Beatriz Loyo Camacho, *Joaquín Amaro y el proceso de institucionalización del Ejército Mexicano, 1917-1931* (México, DF: UNAM, Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 122.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 123, 128.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

Spain, Italy and the United States to be properly trained in the most advanced war theory and skills.<sup>138</sup>

General Maximino Ávila Camacho was among the generals who remained in the reduced army which was increasingly controlled by the Ministry of War and Navy. He was constantly being rotated from one military zone to another in different parts of the country. However, he was still allowed to exercise enormous authority not only over military subordinates, but also over civilians within his military zone. These military zones became a sort of *caudillo* workshop for those military men who became politicians in the 1930s. Here Maximino learned to control and manipulate competing local interests. Among the strategies he used was the continuance of a form of taxation employed during the revolution to support troops (i.e. the confiscation of civilian property and goods). The federal government tolerated this because it was considered a means of compensating officers and soldiers. This practice was carried over into the general political culture due, to a considerable degree, to the enormous role revolutionary officers played in the post-revolutionary government. Political Scientist Roderic Ai Camp has argued that “more than three times as many political leaders in the post-revolutionary period were combat veterans compared with the pre-revolutionary period.”<sup>139</sup> During their years commanding military zones, these revolutionary generals, including Maximino, developed authoritarian practices that they eventually employed once they became civilian politicians.

These authoritarian practices help explain Maximino’s rapid rise and eventual emergence as Puebla’s preeminent *caudillo* in the 1930s. They also help explain

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>139</sup> Roderic Ai Camp, *Democracy in Latin America: Patterns and Cycles* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), 67-68.

Maximino's ability to become one of the richest men in Mexico. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1920s Maximino had little power and virtually no wealth. In 1922, for example, Maximino was detained for 72 hours for not being in uniform during a formation.<sup>140</sup> He explained that the reason was that he had no money to buy a uniform. Four years later, when he led the military zone in Chiapas, he was involved in the expensive breeding of pureblooded horses. These fine horses were used to enhance his image, rather than as a business. He displayed them in regional fairs and gave them as presents to important politicians.<sup>141</sup> Maximino's pursuit of wealth continued in the 1930s when he became involved in profitable activities involving gambling and alcohol while acting as head of the military zone in Aguascalientes.<sup>142</sup>

Maximino's first position as head of a military zone was in Arriaga, Chiapas. There, the Ministry of War received continual complains from ranchers and *hacendados*, regarding Maximino's abuses. Accusations included his taking horses and hay for his regiment without compensation for the owners.<sup>143</sup> Other complaints involved mishandling of public money, fraud, and the appropriation of private property. In addition, he often refused to pay for services and products, including luxury cars.<sup>144</sup>

Occasionally, Maximino encountered limits to his abuse of authority. For example, in July 1925:

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<sup>140</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 4, Foja 759, Findings of the Study Regarding Brigade General Maximino Ávila Camacho by the Secretaría de Estado Mayor, November 27, 1931.

<sup>141</sup> David G. LaFrance and Timothy Henderson. *Maximino Ávila Camacho (Governor of Puebla, 1937-1941)*. Forthcoming from Scholarly Resources Publication, np.

<sup>142</sup> ASDN Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 6, Letter from M. Gómez to General Plutarco Elías Calles, Secretary of War, April 5, 1932.

<sup>143</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 1, Foja 20, Oficina de Estado Mayor, December 10, 1924.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

Maximino resented his reassignment [from Chiapas to Coahuila], and in an unguarded moment he wrote a private letter in which he spoke of overthrowing the government of then-President Plutarco Elías Calles and of assassinating the Undersecretary of War, General Joaquín Amaro. As it turned out, the threatening letter ended up in Amaro's hands, resulting in Maximino's being ordered to the national capital where he was placed in the category of '*disponible*'—a kind of military purgatory, without command and awaiting assignment. Maximino was at pains to patch things up with Amaro, sending him gifts including a valuable horse and pistol, and later naming Amaro godfather to his oldest son, Maximino, Jr.<sup>145</sup>

Maximino learned something from this experience never again daring to confront the core of institutionalized power.

Maximino was eventually able to redeem himself primarily by demonstrating his loyalty to Calles during the three major military challenges that Calles confronted during his term in office: The Cristero War (1926-1929), the Escobar revolt against Calles' presidential pick in 1928, and the related Vasconcelos electoral challenge in 1929.

During the Cristero War, Maximino was commander on the states of Colima and Jalisco, in the heart of the Cristero zone. There, he distinguished himself for his brutality against *cristeros*. He became known as a particularly "merciless man of war."<sup>146</sup> This period also demonstrated Maximino's ability to use his power to expand his personal wealth. Between 1928 and 1929, from his headquarters at Juchipila, Zacatecas, Maximino instead of pursuing the rebels, initiated a "campaign" against the livestock suppliers in the region, obligating the butchers to buy their cattle only from him,

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<sup>145</sup> LaFrance and Henderson, np.

<sup>146</sup> Fidel Velázquez in *Los Sexenios: Manuel Ávila Camacho: El Presidente Caballero*, Enrique Krauze producer, Series Mexico Siglo XX, Editorial Clío (1997) (video).

converting himself into the sole supplier of meat in the region. In the more than a year that he was in Juchipila and the surrounding area, he paid not a single cent for forage, pastures, and corn, taking from those who had little to sustain their families. Soldiers reportedly not only took corn from homes, but also whatever they found of value including bedclothes, tools, clothes, and even birdcages. In addition, he distributed local offices to his favorites such as municipal presidencies and military posts. He also detained the most prosperous inhabitants, threatened them with death as alleged rebels, in order to exact monies from them. General Maximino Ávila Camacho was also rumored to have had people shot in public for minor transgressions.<sup>147</sup>

A number of complaints sent to the Ministry of War suggest that Maximino's superiors were aware of such practices. However, there is no evidence that any disciplinary action was taken against him. At most, Maximino was required to reply to the allegations. He generally used them to accuse his accusers. He asserted that such complaints were attempts to discredit him. This lack of accountability can be understood, partially, as the result of the interest of the federal government in securing the loyalty of generals by allowing them to create local fiefdoms and enrich themselves in order to avoid future attempted coups against the central government. Thus, Maximino's behavior was neither unique nor the worst case. In fact during this period a large number of revolutionary generals became virtual *caudillos* in their territories with limited submission to the central government. Among the most famous cases were Adalberto Tejeda in Veracruz, Saturnino Cedillo in San Luis Potosí and Tomás Garrido Canabal in Tabasco. Mexican historian Martha Beatriz Loyo Camacho has argued that post-

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<sup>147</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 5, Letter from vecinos de Mayahua, Zacatecas to President of Mexico Emilio Portes Gil, May 15, 1929.

revolutionary “military chiefs exercised civil authority...they had regional and local power and considered the regiments as their property, which allowed them to pressure the local political power and even the central one to impose their power.”<sup>148</sup> In the case of Maximino, abuse of power was standard, including mock and real executions throughout the 1920s.<sup>149</sup>

Such abuse of authority was accepted by the regime as long as it served the interests of the ruling revolutionary elite in its efforts to consolidate their domination of the nation. Maximino learned during his years as head of military zones, that abuses were permitted and even, at times, rewarded, so long as there was some benefit for the regime. At times, top party leaders stimulated certain abuses. For example, apparently the authorities were interested in castigating José Vasconcelos for running against the official presidential candidate in the 1929 elections. On February 14, 1930 half a dozen of *Vasconcelistas* were taken from prison in Topilejos in the middle of the night, forced to dig their own graves, and hanged. Maximino was considered responsible for this massacre, but he was never prosecuted.

This massacre appears to have been a deliberate attempt by the regime to terrorize the opposition using the excuse that they had been involved in an assassination attempt against President Pascual Ortiz Rubio. On the day he took the oath office, February 5, 1930, he was shot in the jaw—a non-life threatening wound. No connection with the *Vasconcelistas* was ever made, but the regime apparently felt it needed to set an example

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<sup>148</sup> “los jefes militares se desempeñaban como autoridades civiles...Tendían poder regional y local y consideraban a los regimientos como de su propiedad, lo que permitía presionar al poder político local y incluso central para imponer su voluntad.” Martha Beatriz Loyo Camacho, *Joaquín Amaro y el proceso de institucionalización del Ejército Mexicano, 1917-1931* (México, DF: UNAM, Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 86.

<sup>149</sup> See for example, Gustavo Abel Hernández Enríquez and Armando Rojas Trujillo, *Manuel Ávila Camacho. Biografía de un Revolucionario con Historia, Vol. I* (México: Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 1986), 90.

to intimidate those daring to challenge the regime. Maximino was identified by an eyewitness (the Italian Carlos Verado Lucio, who was with the prisoners, but rescued by his consulate before the executions), but the government blocked an investigation and no one was ever charged with the crime. Years later Maximino was asked if he had participated in the Topilejos massacre and he replied: “I am not a rat exterminator.”<sup>150</sup> Seven months after this incident Maximino was promoted to Brigade General (September 1, 1929).

### **The Instability of the State of Puebla in the 1920s**

The pacification and stability of Mexico had been a major concern of the revolutionary regime in the 1920s. The state of Puebla was among the most unstable states at the time. This, it was thought by some of the revolutionary elite, was due to the fact that it did not have a *caudillo* capable of dominating the region. The last governor to enjoy full control of state institutions had been appointed by Díaz, General Mucio P. Martínez. After seven terms in office, he fell with Díaz in March 1911. For the next 22 years 27 governors would be elected or imposed, but none of them would finish their terms in office. The first governor to do this was the first official party-supported candidate, General José Mijares Palencia (1933-37).

During the revolutionary years, the authority of Pueblan governors was eclipsed by the competition between *Constitucionalistas* and *Convencionistas* struggling to consolidate their strongholds in spite of civilian authority. The eventual triumph of the *Constitucionalistas* in 1917 still did not guarantee a stable governorship. Zapatistas (the major *Convencionista* force in the state) remained very strong in the south, as their

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<sup>150</sup> “No soy ningún mataratas.” In Alfonso Taracena, *Los Vasconcelistas Sacrificados en Topilejos*, (México: Clásica Selecta, 1958), 30.

political agenda favoring land reform allowed them continued influence among radical *Agraristas* and various Indian communities throughout the state. This allowed for some regional and local *caudillos* to remain independent of the *Constitucionalistas* and the *Sonorenses* over the next decade.

In addition to the problems caused by the struggle among these *caudillos* and their respective interest groups in Puebla, the state government was further weakened by disputes among the different branches of government. Historian David G. LaFrance has argued:

The Constitution 1917 presented governors with the issue of sharing power with congress and judiciary power....By early 1918, however it became clear that [Governor Alfonso] Cabrera had no intention of ceding jurisdiction to the congress, preferring that it remain an advisory body. Therefore, independent congressmen, led by Gilberto Bosques, forced the issue. After much debate and signals from Cabrera that he was willing to compromise, the pro-Cabrera majority voted to remove his powers in all but the key areas of finance and security (*Gobernación*). The independents, who wanted Cabrera stripped of all such prerogatives, voted against the halfway measure.<sup>151</sup>

Such divisions opened the possibility for *caudillos* to establish alliances with political factions in order to challenge sitting governors, as well as the president.

This situation was further exacerbated by the intervention of the federal government seeking to protect its own interests. For example, when President Obregón decided to impose General Plutarco Elías Calles as his successor, Puebla Governor Froylán C. Manjarrez favored the *Delahuertista* uprising. The day the uprising was announced, December 7, 1923, Manjarrez was immediately arrested by the commander

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<sup>151</sup> LaFrance 2003, 151.

of Puebla's military zone, General Juan Andrew Almazán. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the Pueblan labor leader, was appointed interim governor. This uprising was widely supported by armed groups and General Almazán was in desperate need of support. As a result, he negotiated an agreement with General José María Sánchez, a Pueblan *agrarista* leading an army of radical peasants. General Sánchez had been governor of Puebla in 1921 and saw this as an opportunity to return to power. Sánchez's forces made an important contribution to Obregón's victory in Ocotlán, Jalisco. However, his ambitions complicated the political situation in Puebla. In 1923, General Sánchez felt entitled to oust Governor Lombardo Toledano. He counted on the support not only of his peasant militia, but also of a substantial pro-land reform constituency, which included local legislatures, municipalities, and social movements.<sup>152</sup> However, President Obregón sent troops to Puebla, neutralized Sánchez's political machine, and appointed Alberto Guerrero as interim governor in early 1924.

Another national crisis also contributed to instability in the state of Puebla. The church-state tensions that led to the Cristero War (1926-29) debilitated the position of the Callista Governor Claudio N. Tirado among conservative Puebla groups. Sensing the weakening of Tirado, General Sánchez once again mobilized his political machine in October 1926. He helped the *agrarista* General Manuel P. Montes to replace Tirado. This created problems for the national government. The conservative coalition, concerned with the *agraristas* land invasions, joined forces with the federal government. The federal government sent General Donato Bravo Izquierdo who forced Governor Montes out of office. Bravo Izquierdo was appointed interim government for two years (1927-29). This was the most stable government in Puebla during the 1920s. In March

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<sup>152</sup> Lomeli 2001, 337-350.

of 1928, General Bravo Izquierdo promoted the creation of a revolutionary party—a regional precursor of the PNR—to represent the diverse revolutionary factions that had kept the state in turmoil for over a decade.

The assassination on July 17, 1928 of Obregón, who had recently been re-elected president, inspired the creation of a government sponsored party aimed at uniting major revolutionary factions at the national level. As previously mentioned, under the leadership of President Calles, the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, or PNR was founded in March 1929.

This party rapidly became a powerful military and political force. It brought together a good number of the major regional *caudillos*, including a number of revolutionary officers. The party became the mechanism through which government positions, economic concessions, and military forces would be distributed across the country. This strengthened the power of the party-supported central government, while regional *caudillos* and state governments benefited as a result of special access to national resources. The main purpose of the party was to guarantee the permanence of this coalition in power, but it also meant that *caudillos* had to surrender some autonomy to the party. Distribution of state resources was based on party needs and not on the special interests of independent *caudillos*. Those *caudillos* who decided to break away from the party in order to pursue their own personal interests would be challenged by the party. From now on, a nation-wide institution would eliminate the centrifugal tendencies of *caudillo* regionalism. The party was the principal institution capable of taming *caudillos* in the formers' efforts to consolidate the regime's authority and stabilize the state.

Under the guidance of this new political institution, in 1929 Puebla made a peaceful transition for the first time in over a decade. General Bravo Izquierdo was replaced as governor by Dr. Leonides Andrew Almazán, the brother of General Juan Andrew Almazán, who fought the *Delahuertista* forces in Puebla in 1924.<sup>153</sup>

With the support of the new political machinery, Governor Almazán established a more stable government. The federal government, assisted him in consolidating his own personal power and he rapidly became Puebla's strongest *caudillo*. He consolidated his authority by relying primarily on five main strategies: (1) modernizing and expanding the state bureaucracy in order to improve his control of the various Pueblan regions, (2) co-opting municipal authorities by incorporating them into his clientelistic network; (3) co-opting leaders of labor and peasant organizations with seats in the local and state legislatures; (4) using the military and police to coerce those criticizing or challenging his government; and (5) coopting and coercing the legislature and judiciary.<sup>154</sup>

Governor Almazán was the first governor in Puebla in two decades to govern for more than two years. The establishment of the official party helped stabilize Pueblan politics. It created its own group of *caudillo* loyalists. However, the ambition and greed sometimes undercut obedience to the party. As we will see next chapter, Governor Almazán failed to finish his term in office because he ultimately became unwilling to submit to the authority of the party and political elites in Mexico City.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 350-351.

<sup>154</sup> José Mijares Palencia, *Los problemas del estado de Puebla en conexión con la próxima sucesión gubernamental* (Puebla, México: Talleres Linotipográficos Rivadeneyra, 1932), 21-23.

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW BREED OF *CAUDILLOS*: THE OFFICIAL PARTY AND MAXIMINO IN PUEBLA (1930-1936)

#### Introduction

During his state of the nation address on September 1, 1928, President Plutarco Elías Calles announced the creation of the party of the revolution. The party, he asserted, would represent the principles and goals of the revolution, fight oppression and promote social justice. The party, according to Calles, would transform Mexico “from being a country ruled by one man to a nation of institutions and laws.”<sup>155</sup> However, the party ultimately did not destroy *caudillismo*, nor was it necessarily interested in doing so, regardless of Calles’ rhetoric. The idea was to galvanize the disparate revolutionary strongmen scattered throughout the country into a united and strong support of a new regime. Thus, the foundation of the official party, the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), in March 11, 1929 marked not the end, but the beginning of an important transformation of the role of *caudillos* in the Mexican political system.

The founding of such a party did not originate with President Calles. Prior to his 1928 re-election Álvaro Obregón had privately suggested the creation of a stable organization capable of replacing the ephemeral candidate-based parties and to peacefully negotiate transitions of power between administrations.<sup>156</sup> Calles and Obregón had discussed the need for such an institution to consolidate a stable nation state.

The party began controlling elections as early as 1929. The resulting elected officials were required to support the party and resources were made available to them to

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<sup>155</sup> José Manuel Puig Casauranc, *Galatea rebelde a varios pigmaliones: de Obregón a Cárdenas, el fenómeno Mexicano actual* (México: Impresores Unidos, S. de R. L. Mina, 1938), 230.

<sup>156</sup> Alberto Pani, quoted in Dulles, 332.

help them create and strengthen their political bases. Some of them utilized these resources to consolidate their regional power becoming the virtual *caudillos* of their realms. For this reason, these modern *caudillos* were highly dependent on the PNR.

During the next decade, old and new *caudillos* progressively relinquished their control of elections, government contracts, and their monopoly of the use of force in their realms in exchange for party support that expanded their regional power vis-à-vis competing *caciques* and *caudillos*. This way, the president, as the head of the party, was placed at the top of a series of clientelistic networks across the country. This was reinforced by his control of the legislature and judiciary branches of government. In this fashion *presidentialism* became characteristic of the new political system.

The transformation from a nation led by *caudillos* to *presidencialismo* was not automatic following the formation of the party. For example, President Calles continued acting in many ways as a *caudillo*. His position as virtual leader of the PNR allowed him to control the presidency behind the scenes. During this period, known as the *Maximato* (as a result of Calles' being known as the *Jefe Máximo de la Revolución*), he dominated the presidencies of Emilio Portes Gil (1928-1930), Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930-1932) and Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932-1934) and the first couple of years of the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). However, the latter president eventually confronted and defeated Calles, making the latter the last *caudillo* to dominate politics at the national level.

*Presidencialismo* was supported by a good portion of the political elites—mainly the party leadership in Mexico City and a broad network of regional *caudillos* associated to the party—which coalesced in the official party. This reduced the possibility of

violent transitions of power common under traditional *caudillismo*. The Mexican president was the indisputable head of state, but party members committed to support the president often did so in exchange for presidential favors and the promise that at the end of each presidency there would be an internal re-distribution of power. After the elimination of Calles' influence in the late 1930s, Cárdenas initiated this practice when he tapped Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-46), Maximino's brother, as his successor. President Ávila Camacho enjoyed enough liberty to disagree politically with Cárdenas on a number of issues and generally pursue his own agenda during his presidency.

In the 1930s the party brought stability to those states still afflicted by *caudillos* competing for local domination. Party-supported *caudillos* gained the upper hand in regional politics as they could count on the party's access to national political, economic, and military resources to subdue their regional competition. However, they enjoyed this source of power only as long as they remained loyal and obedient to the party. Some *caudillos* who enjoyed their regional supremacy were tempted to challenge the limitations placed on them by the party. They failed to realize the extent of their dependency on party resources and their fall was generally swift. This would be a lesson for many. Political developments in Puebla during the 1930s help us understand this dynamic.

### **The Official Party and Local *Caudillos***

Dr. Leonides Andrew Almazán (1929-33) was the first governor of the state of Puebla to govern under the PNR. He became a candidate thanks to the support of General Donato Bravo Izquierdo, a Calles loyalist and Puebla's outgoing governor. The triumph of Almazán was facilitated by the extraordinary support that Calles, *Jefe Máximo*

and leader of the party, provided him. Utilizing the resources of the party, Calles co-opted between 70 and 80 members of the Puebla Legislature to help secure Almazán's victory.<sup>157</sup>

During his close-to four years in power, Almazán became an important *caudillo* in the state of Puebla. In addition to the backing of the PNR, he cultivated wide support among peasants and worker organizations through populist policies including land distribution and promotion of workers' rights. Utilizing party and state resources he established his personal clientelistic network. He did not hesitate to place family members and close friends in his administration while making sure that he influenced the nominations of elected officials, from the smallest municipalities to the Puebla Congress.<sup>158</sup> Almazán bribed officials of the electoral board and used the police to guarantee the triumph his candidates. He also used the police to intimidate, kidnap, and torture his critics.<sup>159</sup>

Almazán's corruption and abuse of power was not a new phenomenon in Puebla. Governor Claudio Tirado (1925-26), for example, had been referred to as "the dictator." Tirado tried to create a strong political base by imposing mayors and threatening and, allegedly, also assassinating members of the opposition.<sup>160</sup> His power was based both on loyalty (co-optation) as well as on terror (coercion).<sup>161</sup> However, the diversity of political forces in the state made it difficult for Tirado to remain in power. He did not finish his second year in power. Under Almazán things changed. Governor Almazán had the

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<sup>157</sup> Gonzalo N. Santos, *Memorias* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1984), 333.

<sup>158</sup> Daniel Blumenkron and Luis Campomanes, *Puebla bajo el terror almazanista: el libro rojo de un mal gobierno* (Puebla, México: n.p., 1933), 12-16.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-16.

<sup>160</sup> "Los Atentados del Dictador Claudio Tirado," *El Sol*, October 22, 1926, 1, 4.

<sup>161</sup> AGN, Sección Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, "Report about the State of Puebla," Puebla, March 25, 1927, IPS 314.3 (4.7) 2.

backing of the party, which provided him with access to federal resources, as well as an alliance, via the party, with *caudillos* throughout the state.<sup>162</sup> Towards the end of his term in 1933 he was Puebla's strongest *caudillo*.

Governor Almazán's popularity and power grew so large that he apparently began to believe that he could challenge the party that brought him to power and he began to act independently of the party leadership. In the summer of 1931, he flexed his muscles by bringing together 10,000 peasants from the Peasant Confederation Emiliano Zapata (CCZE). He also began to act increasingly independent of Calles and his regional ally, Bravo Izquierdo. Calles would not tolerate such a demonstration of independence from the party and tried to bring Almazán back under his control. The resulting confrontation between federal and regional powers hit rock bottom on October 10, 1931. That day, Calles, assisted by Senator Manuel Riva Palacios, ordered the assassination of Governor Almazán.<sup>163</sup> While on his way from Mexico City to Puebla, Governor Almazán encountered a roadblock. He ordered his driver to turn around, but as he tried to escape, his car was fired on. He survived the attack and identified Callistas as the perpetrators. He argued that the reason behind this attack was his dispute with Bravo Izquierdo involving the *El Carmen* wheat mill.<sup>164</sup> By doing this, it appears he was attempting to ensure that the conflict was not interpreted as one directly with Calles. Apparently the real reason was the lack of subordination of the Almazán brothers (General Juan Andrew

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<sup>162</sup> These are issues raised by the Almazán challenger in the 1933 elections, José Mijares Palencia. However, the same problems affected subsequent governments including Maximino's half a decade later. José Mijares Palencia, *Los problemas del estado de Puebla en conexión con la próxima sucesión gubernamental* (Puebla, México: Talleres Linotipográficos Rivadeneyra, 1932), 21-22.

<sup>163</sup> "Es Posible la Extradición del General Calles," *Excelsior*, June 23, 1936, 1, 8.

<sup>164</sup> AGN, Section Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (IPS), Report from Agent 2 to Secretaría de Gobernación, México City, December 28, 1931, Esp. 134.

Almazán had become the *caudillo* of Nuevo León) to Calles.<sup>165</sup> Governor Almazán continued challenging the authority of Calles as the former attempted to impose the next governor. Calles influence depended, in part, on his ability to distribute elected offices to his loyalists and Almazán threatened this.

As the battle to name the next governor intensified several aspirants lined up behind Calles and Almazán. General Maximino Ávila Camacho was among those who sought the support of Calles.<sup>166</sup> Calles, however, decided to select a candidate who was a Pueblan outsider. This would facilitate his control over a governor who did not have a regional constituency and political connections. He picked General José Mijares Palencia, who was from the state of Tabasco. Prior to this, General Palencia had worked for Calles as chief of police in Mexico City. Thus, in the best *caudillo* tradition, Governor Mijares Palencia would owe his position to General Calles. Maximino did not give up after this nomination and insisted that he would make a better governor. Calles threatened to send him to command the military zone in Guadalajara, thereby keeping him out of Puebla politics.<sup>167</sup> Ultimately, Maximino did not insist on his candidacy and remained in nearby Mexico City waiting for another opportunity.

For his part, Almazán continued challenging Calles and promoted General Cejudo as his candidate. In response, Calles requested President Abelardo L. Rodríguez publicly announce the candidacy of General Mijares Palencia.<sup>168</sup> Almazán refused to accept this and questioned the legality of the involvement of Calles and the federal government in

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<sup>165</sup> “Es Posible la Extradición del General Calles,” *Excelsior*, June 23, 1936, 1, 8

<sup>166</sup> Gustavo Ariza, *La candidatura del general José Mijares Palencia al gobierno del estado de Puebla: datos y documentos de una campaña popular* (Puebla, México: n.p., 1932), 143.

<sup>167</sup> AGN, FP: Ortiz Rubio, Maximino Ávila Camacho a Pascual Ortiz Rubio, México, D.F., junio de 1932, exp. 2/2597.

<sup>168</sup> Ariza 1932, 233-234.

Puebla's politics, but to no avail. General Cejudo was defeated in the party's primaries. Almazán was forced to either support Palencia as the PNR's candidate or to directly confront the party.<sup>169</sup> He decided to do the latter and supported the candidacy of Dr. Lauro Camarillo from the *Partido Socialista de Puebla*. At the same time, he ordered local officials across the state, many owing their positions to him, to prevent General Palencia's registration on the ballot. He argued that:

It having been alleged...that Mr. José Mijares Palencia is foreign born, I ask you TO ABSTAIN from registering his candidacy while the Consulting Lawyers of this Government present the juridical resolution.<sup>170</sup>

Almazán never legally proved that Mijares Palencia was born in the Dominican Republic as alleged. General Mijares Palencia's Mexican army records indicated that he was actually born in the state of Tabasco.<sup>171</sup> Calles insisted that Mijares Palencia was Mexican and kept him on the ballot. As Almazán had done many times before during his tenure, he tried to impose his will:

The municipal and state authorities of Puebla are clearly composed of *Camarillistas*, to the point that the Committee of the [Almazanista] Socialist Party does not have offices, but their work is executed in City Hall. The official element having been converted into a political faction, the Municipal authority has openly exercised pressure against the Parties that support the candidacies of Generals José Mijares Palencia and Palafox, obstructing their efforts in different ways.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>170</sup> "Habiéndose denunciado ante este Gobierno, que el señor José Mijares Palencia es de origen extranjero, he de merecer a usted se ABSTENGA de hacer el registro correspondiente de su candidatura mientras los Abogados Consultores de este Gobierno presentan la resolución jurídica." In Ariza, 1932, 263-264.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>172</sup> "las autoridades municipales y del Estado [de Puebla] son de filiación netamente Camarillista, al punto que el Comité del [Almazanista] Partido Socialista no cuentan con oficinas, sino que sus trabajos todos se ejecutan en la Presidencia Municipal. Convertido el elemento oficial en facción política, la autoridad Municipal ha ejercido abiertamente presión contra los Partidos que apoyan las candidaturas de los Generales José Mijares Palencia y Palafox, obstruccionando [*sic*] sus labores de diferentes maneras."

A political investigator from the Ministry of *Gobernación* reported on how Almazán's actual manipulation of elections worked:

I presented myself at that place [Zacatlán] at 9:03 AM, finding out that there was a voting place functioning irregularly, since the personnel was incomplete, lacking a Secretary, and those in charge of setting up and registering voters and, in addition, without a single voter present, in the three minutes from the time stipulated by law, there appeared to have voted three hundred whose ballots appeared on the table, there being no appropriate ballot box. At that moment a group of some 60 Mijaristas arrived demanding the legal installation of the polling place, but due to the opposition of the four persons in the polling station, those making the demands took by force the voting site and part of the documents, without anyone having been wounded and without the involvement of federal forces.<sup>173</sup>

Governor Almazán apparently underestimated the influence and power in his state of the new official party.

Subsequently on November 27, 1932, Almazán announced that Camarillo had won the election, while the PNR announced that Mijares Palencia had won.<sup>174</sup> The federal government challenged Almazán's claim and declared that Mijares Palencia had

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In AGN, Section Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (IPS), Report from Agent 12 to Secretaría de Gobernación, México City, November 29, 1932, Esp. 162.

<sup>173</sup> Me presenté en ese sitio [Zacatlán] a las 9:03 horas, encontrándome que allí funcionaba irregularmente la casilla, pues había personal incompleto, faltando un Secretario, los instaladores y empadronador y además, no habiendo presente ningún elector, en tres minutos que transcurrían de la hora que fija la Ley, ya aparecían votadas a favor del candidato Dr. Camarillo como 300 boletas, que aparecían sobre la mesa ya que no estaban provistos del ánfora respectiva. En esos momentos se acercó un grupo como de 60 Mijaristas quienes exigieron que se instalara legalmente la mesa y como su opusieron las cuatro personas que se hallaban en la mesa, los reclamantes se apoderaron por la fuerza de la casilla y de parte de la documentación, no habiendo resultado ningún lesionado, ni intervenido la fuerza federal." In AGN, Section Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (IPS), Report from Agent 12 to Secretaría de Gobernación, México City, November 29, 1932, Esp. 162.

<sup>174</sup> Ariza 1932, 259

won with 156,000 more votes than Camarillo.<sup>175</sup> Almazán challenged this by having the pro-Almazán XXIX Legislature express support for his candidate before a new legislature took office. However, President Abelardo L. Rodríguez sent troops to ensure the inauguration of the Legislature which had been elected with the support of the PNR. Under the protection of federal troops, Mijares Palencia was declared governor-elect. In protest, Almazán resigned as governor on January 5th (three weeks before the expiration of his tenure).<sup>176</sup> He declared the involvement of federal troops unconstitutional and threatening to Puebla's sovereignty. President Rodríguez responded that he:

could not allow, after long and bloody years of revolutionary struggle, that the principle of the effective suffrage be infringed upon by any federated entity and that under the pretext of a badly understood local sovereignty, one pretends to ignore the strength of public opinion to create regimes by which, and through the imposition of individuals, they wanted to prolong their functions as rulers, whose mandate has a precise constitutional time limit.<sup>177</sup>

It is very difficult to know who really won the election. Both sides made use of intimidation of voters and other forms of electoral fraud.<sup>178</sup> The PNR did, however, demonstrate its capacity to influence electoral outcomes even in regions dominated by powerful disaffected *caudillos*.

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<sup>175</sup> Leonardo Lomelí, *Breve historia de Puebla* (México: Colegio de México: Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), 358.

<sup>176</sup> Ariza 1932, 346-348.

<sup>177</sup> “no puede admitir, después de largos y cruentos años de la lucha revolucionaria, que se vulnere en cualquiera entidad federativa el principio de la efectividad del sufragio y que, a pretexto de una mal comprendida soberanía local, se pretenda desconocer la fuerza de la opinión pública para constituir regímenes a través de los cuales, y por la imposición de personas, quieran prolongar sus funciones los gobernantes, cuyo mandato tiene un plazo constitucional preciso.” In Ariza 1932, 351.

<sup>178</sup> See for example, AGN, Section Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Report from Agent Eduardo López M. to Secretaría de Gobernación, México City, November 28, 1932, Esp. 162 and AGN, Section Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Report from Agent 12 to Secretaría de Gobernación, México City, November 29, 1932, Esp. 162.

As a consequence, General José Mijares Palencia became governor (1933-37) assisted by Calles and the PNR. Also, like Almazán, Palencia eventually lost the support of the party and his political influence drifted away. However, unlike Almazán, a prime reason was his loyalty to Calles. He, like many other politicians at the time, was a victim of the struggle between President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) and the *Jefe Máximo*, Plutarco Elías Calles (1929-35) that redefined the political forces within the party.

### **The Party Versus the Last National *Caudillo***

Plutarco Elías Calles was still president of Mexico when on July 17, 1928, José de León Toral, a Catholic fanatic, assassinated President-elect Álvaro Obregón. Obregón, as the most renowned military leader of the revolution, was the principal national *caudillo* in post-revolutionary Mexico. After his assassination, Obregonistas were afraid that President Calles would attempt to continue in the presidency and become the next Porfirio Díaz. However, to the surprise of many, in his last State of the Nation address on September 1, 1928, he announced the he would not take advantage of Obregón's death in order to continue in power. Instead, he announced, as previously indicated, the foundation of the party of the revolution. This, he stated, would transform Mexico "from being a country ruled by one man to a nation of institutions and laws."<sup>179</sup>

On March 1, 1929 many of the most prominent political leaders in the country met in Querétaro to formalize the formation of a government sponsored *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR). However, this did not mark the end of a *caudillo*-led Mexican state. As the virtual leader of the party, Calles continued at lead the Mexican political

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<sup>179</sup> Puig Casauranc 1938, 230.

system. He continued to dominate Mexican politics for seven years after the end of his presidency (1929-36). The party was the principal tool by which he continued in power.

Far from eliminating *caudillismo*, the party became Calles' means by which he consolidated his position as a national *caudillo*. During the *Maximato* legislators, governors, and even members of the presidential cabinet often consulted Calles before taking any political action. In 1930, during Pascual Ortiz Rubio's presidential campaign, Calles threatened to withdraw PNR support if the candidate did not appoint the cabinet members that he had indicated.<sup>180</sup> This situation caused difficulties for President Ortiz Rubio (1930-32). Calles' political influence was so strong that when President Ortiz Rubio tried to oppose him in early 1931, cabinet members began resigning. By October of that year, most ministers had left Ortiz Rubio's government stating they had no confidence in the president.<sup>181</sup> Ortiz Rubio became very frustrated by Calles' intervention and his own lack of power and resigned in September 1932. Calles then imposed a close associate, General Abelardo L. Rodríguez, as interim president.

During the first half of the 1930s, Calles was the most influential politician in Mexico, but even he had to compromise sometimes with other revolutionary elites. Following President Rodríguez's two-year interim government (1932-34), Calles tried to impose his next choice, General Manuel Pérez Treviño. The latter was a well-known member of Calles' inner circle and president of the PNR (1931-33). Nevertheless, some influential politicians opposed his nomination. Among those opposing Calles were powerful *caudillos* including Saturnino Cedillo (strongman of San Luis Potosí), Juan Andrew Almazán (brother of former governor of Puebla and strongman of Nuevo León)

<sup>180</sup> *La Prensa*, November 29, 1935, "Rojos y Blancos en el Gobierno de Ortiz Rubio," 2, 16.

<sup>181</sup> Enrique Krauze, *La Biografía del Poder: Caudillos de la Revolución mexicana (1910-1940)* (Barcelona, Spain: TusQuets Editores, 1997), 368-69.

and Emilio Portes Gil (former president and strongman of Tamaulipas). They maneuvered within the party to mobilize workers and peasant organizations, as well as leftwing members of the legislature to promote the candidacy of the governor of Michoacán, General Lázaro Cárdenas.<sup>182</sup> Since Cárdenas had been a loyal general fighting side to side with Calles during the revolution and enjoyed wide support from mass organizations, Calles agreed to the nomination.

Cárdenas was well known for his progressive policies as governor. In Michoacán he had promoted extensive land reform and fought for workers' rights, including the formation of cooperatives to strengthen workers' economic and political influence. However, in light of Ortiz Rubio's experience, Cárdenas decided to also establish a political platform independent of Calles. He formed alliances with the increasingly anti-Callista leftwing faction within the PNR and the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) the strongest labor confederation at the time. Calles, as he had done with Ortiz Rubio, began organizing a *Plan Sexenal* (Six-Year Plan). This plan was a blue print in which the party, through a national convention, defined the policies of the presidency.<sup>183</sup> Calles had used it to control the agenda of the Ortiz Rubio-Rodríguez presidential term. He was interested in promoting the development of farms and foreign investment to stimulate industrialization. However, Cárdenas' popular base closed ranks during the PNR's Second National Convention, with peasant and workers' organizations pushing for

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<sup>182</sup> FDRLP, Hopkins Papers, Special Assistant to the President, Box 143, F.B.I. Reports—Mexico, p. 50.

<sup>183</sup> “en la discusión y aprobación del Plan Sexenal quedó claro que el sitio privilegiado para debatir las distintas concepciones así como para conquistar posiciones era ya el Partido de la Revolución.” Luis Alberto de la Garza, et al., *Evolución del Estado Mexicano: Reestructuración, 1910-1940, Vol. II* (México: Ediciones El Caballito, SA, 1986), 218.

the incorporation of items into the *Plan Sexenal* that protected their interests, including socialist education, the right to strike, and agrarian reform.<sup>184</sup>

The adoption of the *Plan Sexenal* was an important step for Cárdenas in his efforts to eliminate Calles' grip on the government. Cárdenas' presidency would be characterized by his favoring the interests of workers and peasants and stimulation of their participation in the party in support of the actual president, rather than promoting Calles' interests. However, Calles still enjoyed enormous influence in the formal structures of power. Early in 1935, 45 senators and 99 representatives openly expressed support for Calles, while only 9 senators and 44 representatives supported Cárdenas.<sup>185</sup>

Cárdenas was sworn as President of Mexico on December 1, 1934. He co-existed relatively peacefully with Calles during the first six months. However, on June 12th, Calles became concerned with the growing power of workers' unions as indicated by the sharp increase in strikes. The 646 strikes in 1935 were triple the 202 strikes of the previous year. In an attempt to manipulate presidential policy, Calles accused labor leaders of "provoking and playing with the economic life of the country, without taking into account the generosity and the clear labor identity of the president of the Republic. In a country where the government protects them, helps them and surrounds them with guarantees, they are disrupting the advance of economic construction and this is not only ingratitude, but treason."<sup>186</sup> Calles was attempting, without authorization, to influence

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<sup>184</sup> The first Six Year convention took place in 1929 as a guidance to define Ortiz Rubio's political agenda.

<sup>185</sup> Gustavo Abel Hernández Enriquez and Armando Rojas Trujillo, *Manuel Ávila Camacho. Biografía de un Revolucionario con Historia* (México: Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 1986), 113.

<sup>186</sup> "Están provocando y jugando con la vida económica del país, sin corresponder a la generosidad y a la franca definición obrerista del Presidente de la República.... En un país donde el gobierno los protege, los ayuda y los rodea de garantías, perturbar la marcha de la construcción económica no es sólo una ingratitude, sino una traición." John W. F. Dulles, *Ayer en México: una crónica de la Revolución (1919-1936)* (México: Fondo de Culture Económica, 1977), 583.

the president's labor policies. Cárdenas decided to confront Calles describing his comment, itself, as "disloyal" and "treasonous."<sup>187</sup>

Calles was taken aback by Cárdenas' reaction and tried not to give the impression that he had openly challenged the president. Instead, he responded that "his declarations carried the stamp of the greatest good faith, and welfare of the country and the government, to which a twisted interpretation has been given." He added that "This now has no solution, unfortunately: and I have decided to absent myself from the republic, retiring forever from all political activity. To my friends I recommend that they help the president and serve the country with all loyalty."<sup>188</sup> He left for Los Angeles, California on June 19, 1935.

The House of Representatives and the Senate initially continued to support Calles' positions, but as the year progressed, Cárdenas gained considerable political terrain against Calles. A large number of groups and leaders who had been alienated by Calles' began emerging in support of Cárdenas. As the historian Arturo Anguiano noted:

[b]ehind the *Jefe Máximo*'s shadow a nucleus of people who had been excluded from Calles' *camarilla* began to be created. They were military men and civilians who, at some point, had clashed with Calles. There were military men and allies who saw their interests endangered. Portes Gil, Cárdenas, [Juan Andrew] Almazán, [Saturnino] Cedillo and, even, [former] president Rodríguez, were among the representatives of these new forces....More sensitive than the *Jefe Máximo* they could perceive the discontent that existed in the rural and urban areas, and saw that a social

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<sup>187</sup> Krauze 1997, 438.

<sup>188</sup> "sus declaraciones llevaban un sello de la mejor buena fe, en bien del país y del gobierno, se les haya dado una interpretación torcida." Añadió: "Esto ya no tiene remedio, desgraciadamente; y he tomado la determinación de ausentarme de la república, retirándome para siempre de toda actividad política. A mis amigos les recomiendo que ayuden al presidente y que procuren servir al país con toda lealtad." Calles as quoted by Dulles 1977, 588.

explosion could produce a confrontation between the state and the masses, so their policies should be directed to avoiding that clash and containing it.<sup>189</sup>

Cárdenas was able to circumvent Calles because as soon as he took office, he was carefully changing people in key political positions including governors, members of the legislature, and even generals commanding important military zones. Among these was Maximino Ávila Camacho. Cárdenas appointed him head of Puebla's 19th Military Zone on January 1, 1935. This appointment offered an opportunity for Maximino to expand his personal influence in hometown region while Cárdenas gained a loyal supporter against Calles.

While Maximino was securing the state of Puebla for Cárdenas, he was also expanding his personal influence throughout the state vis-à-vis Governor Mijares Palencia. He also attracted the support of local *caudillos* by using army resources to help support their militias (*Guardias Blancas*). As of January 1935, Maximino was already using these *Guardias Blancas* to bring *agraristas* and local *caudillos* under his control.<sup>190</sup> Maximino's goal was to become the most powerful authority in the state, but he was limited by his jurisdiction. The 19th Military Zone included the central and northern part of the state of Puebla and a part of the state of Tlaxcala. Military zones were not defined

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<sup>189</sup> "Tras la sombra del jefe máximo se empezó a crear un núcleo de personas que había sido excluido de la camarilla de Calles. Eran militares y civiles, que en algún momento habían chocado con Calles. Eran militares y allegados que veían en peligro sus intereses. Portes Gil, Cárdenas, Almazán, Cedillo e incluso el presidente Rodríguez, eran unos cuantos de esos representantes de las nuevas fuerzas.... Más sensibles que el Jefe Máximo, pudieron percibir el descontento que existía en el campo y en las ciudades, y vieron que una expulsión social podría conducir al enfrentamiento entre el Estado y las masas, por lo que su política estaría orientada a evitar ese choque, a contenerlo." In Arturo Anguiano, *El Estado y la política obrera del cardenismo* (México: Ediciones Era, 1975), 41.

<sup>190</sup> "las defensas rurales pasarían a ser organizadas directamente por el cuartel del general de la jefatura de Operaciones Militares, para lograr una operatividad más efectiva de estos grupos armados y evitar su participación en 'conflictos suscitados por motivos políticos.'" Sergio Valencia Castrejón, *Poder regional y política nacional en México: el gobierno de Maximino Ávila Camacho en Puebla (1937-1941)* (México: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1996), 35.

by state boundaries to avoid the head of a military zone from overpowering the authority of the governor. Yet, in the summer of 1935 Cárdenas authorized the transformation of Maximino's military zone to cover the entire state of Puebla. By the end of the summer Maximino, as head of the new 25th Military Zone, was becoming Puebla's *de facto* political boss.<sup>191</sup>

During the next municipal elections (November 1935) Maximino and Cárdenas used the occasion to replace Callistas with their own loyalists.<sup>192</sup> Maximino would seek the support of local *caudillos*, threatening or replacing those who resisted. Loyal *caudillos* were used to ensure that elected offices were filled with supporters. In some cases this process turned violent. During the elections in Huauchinango, for example, Maximino confronted the local *caudillo*, Juan L. Cardona eventually removing him for his refusal to cooperate. In addition, two of Cardona's appointees, Mayor Isaac Vite and Representative Mauricio Quiroga were assassinated.<sup>193</sup>

Maximino's success in Puebla helped strengthen Cárdenas' position with respect to Calles. Similar efforts elsewhere helped secured other states for Cárdenas. These involved Saturnino Cedillo in San Luis Potosí and Adalberto Tejeda in Veracruz. By the summer 1935, a stronger and more confident Cárdenas decided to eliminate another Callista stronghold in his own cabinet. Similar to Ortiz Rubio's cabinet, many in Cárdenas' cabinet were Callistas, including Calles' own son, Rodolfo Elías Calles, who was the Minister of Communications and Public Works (SCOP).<sup>194</sup> On June 15, 1935, Cárdenas announced that he was changing his entire cabinet. The new group was formed

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<sup>191</sup> "Patria y Trabajo," *Hoy*, October 11, 1941, 9.

<sup>192</sup> "Importantes Declaraciones del Sr. General M. Avila Camacho," *Diario de Puebla*, September 14, 1936, 1.

<sup>193</sup> Valencia Castrejón 1996, 51.

<sup>194</sup> "Renunciará Hoy el Gabinete; Las Cámaras, con el Ejecutivo," *El Universal*, June 15, 1935, 1.

predominantly by leaders of the left wing of the PNR including Silvano Barba González in Gobernación<sup>195</sup> and Francisco J. Mújica, who had finished out Cárdenas' term as governor in Michoacán and replaced Calles' son at SCOP. In addition, Cárdenas named the anti-Callista and former president, Emilio Portes Gil, as the new president of the PNR.<sup>196</sup> Cárdenas relied on his Minister of War and Navy, General Andrés Figueroa, to make sure that the armed forces remained loyal to the president. Coordinating this operation was the Undersecretary of War, General Manuel Ávila Camacho. The Ávila Camacho brothers clearly played key roles in the Cárdenas offensive against Calles.

Calles realized that his influence was declining and decided to return to Mexico on December 13, 1935. By then, Cárdenas had made a total of 25 high level changes, including the governors of the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Guanajuato and Durango, as well as in the Legislature and Supreme Court.<sup>197</sup> As a result of this shakeup, Cárdenas was effectively destroying the power of the last national *caudillo* vis-à-vis the state.

Calles thought his decline was temporary, but his return made things even worse. He returned accompanied by the leader of the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM), Luis N. Morones, while Cárdenas prepared the final blow. The ostensible reason was that Morones presence constituted a direct challenge to Cárdenas,

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<sup>195</sup> The U.S. equivalent to Mexico's *Ministro de Gobernación* is the White House Chief of Staff combined with the Secretary of the Interior.

<sup>196</sup> "El Lic. Emilio Portes Gil, Electo Presidente del P.N.R.," *El Universal*, June 16, 1935, 1.

<sup>197</sup> "Cárdenas expulsó a Calles y a varios miembros y antiguos líderes del callismo, entre ellos a Fernando Torreblanca, Manuel Riva Palacio, Agustín R. Patiño, Melchor Ortega, Luis L. León y José María Tapia. Asimismo, el nuevo secretario de Gobernación, Silvano Barba González, el de Guerra, general Andrés Figueroa, y el presidente del P.N.R., Emilio Portes Gil, eliminaron a los anticardenistas que se encontraban en las legislaturas nacional y local, en los gobiernos estatales y en los cuerpos del ejército. Cárdenas destituyó también a los gobernadores de Durango, Guanajuato, Sinaloa y Sonora, de filiación callista. En total hubo 25 cambios de importancia durante la crisis, y fueron convertidos al cardenismo legisladores, diputados, presidentes municipales, la alta administración y los encargados de impartir justicia. El presidente consiguió imponer mayorías en casi todos los estados, a pesar de una resistencia local fuerte; así, se emancipó de la tutela de Calles y acabó con el callismo como fuerza política." Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, *El gobierno del general Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940: (Una Visión Revisionista)* (San Luis Potosí, México: El Colegio de San Luis, 2000), 18.

since CROM was the political enemy of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), Cárdenas' major source of labor support. In addition, Calles made the mistake of publicly declaring that he had returned to Mexico "to defend the Callista regime from the calumnies of which he had been victim during the past six months."<sup>198</sup> A mass protest, coordinated by the CTM followed denouncing Calles' remarks as a challenge to the president and asking for the expulsion of Calles from the country. Next day six senators who had received Calles at the airport were expelled from the Senate, including Manuel Riva Palacio (México), Francisco L. Terminel (Sonora), Bernardo Bandala (Puebla), Elías Pérez Gómez (Morelos), and Cristóbal Bon Bustamante (Sinaloa). Similarly, the high-ranking generals, Joaquín Amaro, Manuel Medinaveytia and José María Tapia, who also welcomed Calles at the airport were immediately removed from their posts.<sup>199</sup> Four days later (December 17th) Calles complained about the government's treatment to his supporters and announced the creation of a new party. Breaking from the party was possibly the worst way to retain power. Soon after, Cárdenas accused Calles and Morones of possession and trafficking in weapons and conspiracy against the regime. After several months of tension, on April 10, 1936, Calles was taken from his home where he was allegedly reading Hitler's *Main Kampf* in his pajamas and sent to Los Angeles. CROM leader Luis N. Morones and Calles' son Rodolfo Elías Calles were exiled with him.<sup>200</sup> Calles was able to return to Mexico only after the end of Cárdenas' presidency.

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<sup>198</sup> "a defender el régimen callista de las calumnias de que había sido víctima durante los últimos seis meses." Calles as quoted in John W. F. Dulles, *Ayer en México: una crónica de la Revolución (1919-1936)* (México: Fondo de Culture Económica, 1977), 602.

<sup>199</sup> Dulles 1977, 603-4.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 620.

Calles' exile was not the end of challenges to Cárdenas' regime. Some dissident revolutionary leaders, who had left or never joined the PNR, organized a coup against Cárdenas. Among the organizers were former Minister of Education under President Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924) and presidential candidate for the opposition in 1929, José Vasconcelos and General Gilberto Valenzuela, an *Obregonista* and the Minister of Gobernación who had been replaced by Cárdenas. The uprising took hold in the states of Nuevo León, Durango, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, Puebla, Michoacán, Tlaxcala, and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.<sup>201</sup> Once again, the Ávila Camacho brothers played an important role in helping Cárdenas contain the situation. Undersecretary of War General Manuel Ávila Camacho coordinated the Mexican army forces from Mexico City, while General Maximino Ávila Camacho suppressed the insurgency in the state of Puebla. They thereby demonstrated once again their loyalty and commitment to the Cárdenas regime.

Maximino expected compensation for helping Cárdenas secure Puebla. In 1932 Maximino had asked Calles for the governorship and the latter had refused. This could be considered Maximino's revenge. In 1936, he made the same request to President Cárdenas who appeared willing to comply.

### **The Official Party and the Emergence of a Renewed Regional *Caudillismo***

Cárdenas supported Maximino's candidacy for governor of Puebla in 1936. This is easy to understand given Maximino's efforts during the Cárdenas-Calles conflict. However, it has also been a cause of some debate by politicians at the time and scholars more recently. Cárdenas' favoring of Maximino is somewhat puzzling, if one takes into

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<sup>201</sup> "9 States Report Uprisings," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1935, 5.

consideration Cárdenas' strong pro-labor sympathies and the fact that he also received considerable support in his battle with Calles from the CTM, one of the largest confederations of workers. Calles had been assisted by the CROM, lead by Morones. In general workers and especially those associated with the CTM considered Maximino their enemy.

As commander of a number of military zones, Maximino was well known for his intolerance of workers' demands and a tendency to use excessive force against strikers. Maximino had been accused of using paramilitary units, or *Guardias Blancas*, to repress workers and peasants.<sup>202</sup> For example, on April 5, 1935, barely three months after Cárdenas appointed him Puebla's military commander, Maximino ordered troops to stop a demonstration organized by members of the Regional Federation of Workers and Peasants (F.R.O.C.)—a CTM affiliate. The clash between the workers and the army left two workers dead and half a dozen injured.<sup>203</sup> Maximino responded by stating that “as commander of Puebla's Military Zone it was an obligation on my part to dictate the necessary means to maintain public order unchanged in the face of violent acts that leaders of a certain organization of workers [FROC] knew how to command from their representatives.”<sup>204</sup> Not surprisingly this increased anti-Maximino sentiment among workers and peasants. They certainly did not expect Cárdenas to support an anti-labor candidate.

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<sup>202</sup> “Cargos a un Jefe Militar,” *El Universal*, May 30, 1935, 1.

<sup>203</sup> “Declaraciones de la C.T.M. sobre la Situación en Puebla,” *El Universal*, May 12, 1936, 1, 8.

<sup>204</sup> “Como Jefe de la Zona Militar de Puebla era obligación de mi parte dictar las medidas necesarias para mantener inalterable el orden público frente a los actos de violencia que los líderes de cierta organización de trabajadores [FROC] supieron cometer a sus representados.” In “A la Opinión Pública...,” *Diario de Puebla*, March 7, 1936, 4.

Cárdenas' support for Maximino, however, has to be understood as part of the former's wider strategy to secure the party's domination of the nation. Cárdenas' inclination to favor workers should not be misconstrued as limiting his overall strategy. Gonzalo N. Santos, a close associate of Cárdenas, once commented that "he had never known any politician who knew better how to dissimulate his intentions and sentiments" the way Cárdenas did.<sup>205</sup> As Maximino was undercutting the power of Governor Mijares Palencia, he maneuvered to control not only workers and peasants organizations, but also *caudillos* and Pueblan politicians. Maximino had a considerable ability and would not hesitate to send troops or use other means of coercion to enforce order.<sup>206</sup> At that time the FROC and the CROM had spent a decade fighting for domination in Puebla's textile zone. Local and federal authorities had tried unsuccessfully to bring these two groups under control. Better than any other local politician, Maximino could help Cárdenas establish the domination of the PNR's elite in the state of Puebla.

In general, Maximino was becoming known for his violent methods, but his political strategies were not limited to repression. He was perhaps most effective in co-opting former opponents. By offering resources and "assistance," he managed to convince large numbers of peasants and workers to support his positions as military commander. As a result, whenever Maximino was accused of abuse of power by some peasant or worker groups he dismissed such accusations as "calumnies" and asserted that he knew "how to protect the interests of the citizens of Puebla."<sup>207</sup> Maximino was, in

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<sup>205</sup> Santos 1984, 576.

<sup>206</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 5, Foja 1211, Letter from Gregorio Flores, Secretario General Comité de Frente Único de Lucha por la Tierra, to President Lázaro Cárdenas, March 18, 1935.

<sup>207</sup> ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 5, Series of Telegrams to President Lázaro Cárdenas, May 31, 1935. See also, ASDN, Maximino Ávila Camacho File, Folder 5, Foja 1218, Letter from Gran Centro Político del P.N.R. to H. Congreso de la Unión, May 31, 1935.

fact, becoming the preeminent political leader in the state of Puebla even before he became governor and this was valuable for Cárdenas.

The increasing support that the party elite showed for regional leaders, such as Maximino, suggests that the party was pursuing a strategy of relying on local strongmen whose power could reinforce the party, rather than largely on leaders of workers' or peasant organizations whose independent control of masses of people could result in potential conflicts of interest or even direct challenges to the party. This created an interesting dynamic that became an integral element in the functioning of the party. In order to reduce regional and national challenges to the party's authority, the party supported regional *caudillos*, traditionally regarded as challengers of the central government.

Cárdenas' preference for strong *caudillos* over labor and peasant leaders was further demonstrated during the national elections for governors in 1936. In the case of Puebla Gilberto Bosques was considered an experienced candidate, friend of labor and, in addition, a good friend of President Cárdenas. In 1922 he was Puebla's Minister of Gobernación under the progressive government of Froylán C. Manjarrez (1922). Between 1934 and 1935 he represented the state of Puebla in the Federal Congress. In this position he proposed what became known as the PNR's "Open Doors" policy. He suggested that workers' and peasant organizations should be incorporated into the PNR. This became a major trademark of Cárdenas' presidency.<sup>208</sup> Political observers at the time, not familiar with the PNR internal developments, and FROC leaders expected Cárdenas' to support Bosques.

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<sup>208</sup> Diario de Debates, Legislatura XXXVI, Año III, Sesión de la Cámara de Diputados, Período Ordinario, No. 11, October 29, 1936.

As soon as Maximino was first mentioned as a potential candidate in August 1935, a good number of workers mobilized to support the candidacy of Gilberto Bosques. In addition to FROC and the Confederation of Peasants Emiliano Zapata (CCEZ), the two largest workers' and peasant' organizations in Puebla, Bosques received the endorsement of the Workers and Peasant Block, the Revolutionary League of the State of Puebla, the United Front of Revolutionary Youth and the Revolutionary Zapatista's Union.<sup>209</sup> In addition, Bosques benefited from the support of deputies who were FROC leaders including Leobardo Coca, Juan L. Cardona and Eduardo Guerra.<sup>210</sup>

For his part, Maximino received the endorsement of CROM, the nemesis of the CTM, a major Cárdenas supporter. And, while the CCEZ supported Bosques, its leader, Miguel Hidalgo Salazar, tried to force the organization to support Maximino. This was another example of Maximino's success in co-opting leaders of mass organizations. However, while Salazar's faction supported Maximino, the majority of the CCEZ affiliates remained with Bosques.<sup>211</sup>

Cárdenas' and the PNR's preference for Maximino became increasingly evident after the PNR's primaries on April 5, 1935. According to most observers, Bosques won the election, but the PNR refused to confirm it. After a month of debates and protests from Bosquistas, predominantly from the FROC, the president of the National Executive Committee (CEN) of the PNR, Emilio Portes Gil, declared Maximino the official candidate for the governorship of Puebla.<sup>212</sup> The PNR declared that Maximino had

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<sup>209</sup> Valencia Castrejón 1996, 47.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>212</sup> "Puebla Estalló de Gusto por el Triunfo de la Fórmula Avila Camacho-Bautista," *Diario de Puebla*, May 1, 1936, 1, 4.

139,348 votes to 29,822 for Bosques.<sup>213</sup> When Maximino publicly accepted his nomination, a wave of protests, strikes, and even violence, including killings, occurred in Puebla.

Workers' and peasant organizations as well as members of the left wing faction of the party, initially believed that the results of the party's primaries were the product of insubordination by party leaders and that President Cárdenas was not aware of this.<sup>214</sup> Dissatisfied workers and peasants sought the support of Cárdenas. A march was organized from Puebla to Mexico City.<sup>215</sup> The march virtually paralyzed all industrial and commercial activity in the city of Puebla.<sup>216</sup> Reportedly, 20,000 protesters marched to the presidential palace and tried to meet with Cárdenas in order to declare Bosques the legitimate winner.<sup>217</sup> "They contended that General Camacho, representing the National Revolutionary [P]arty, had been badly defeated in the primaries by Professor Gilberto Bosques, his opponent."<sup>218</sup> Cárdenas, however, claimed to be sick and did not meet with the demonstrators. Maximino remained the party's candidate. As such he had no challenger in the July 5, 1936 election and was immediately declared governor elect.

It is evident that Maximino's ability to become Puebla's *caudillo* was made possible, in large measure, because of the support he received from Cárdenas and the PNR. In addition to such electoral backing, as an effort to consolidate his position as governor elect, he received federal political support to weaken the position of the Callista

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<sup>213</sup> "El P.N.R. Defilende su Política en la Cuestión Electoral," *La Prensa*, May 14, 1936, 3, 9.

<sup>214</sup> "La Asamblea Política de Jalapa, Ver. se Pronunció Contra el Fallo del P.N.R.," *La Prensa*, May 11, 1936, 3, 15.

<sup>215</sup> AGN, FROC Report regarding Atlixco's labor unrest, Atlixco, Puebla, August 23, 1935. Archivo Presidentes, Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, 444 432.3/1 L2.

<sup>216</sup> "El Gobernador del Estado de Puebla Explica la Situación Creada por el Paro General de Obreros de la F.R.O.C.," *La Prensa*, May 13, 1936, 3.

<sup>217</sup> "Aide of Cardenas Assailed by 20,000," *The New York Times*, May 14, 1936, 13.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Governor Mijares Palencia, as well as the means to coerce and co-opt diverse Pueblan interest groups, including industrialists, local *caciques*, the Catholic Church, and the Spanish and Lebanese business communities. In the aftermath of the Cárdenas-Calles confrontation, Governor Palencia lost many of his supporters including the impeached Senator Bandala and Deputies Alamillo and Torres Navarrete. As Maximino increased his power as he approached his swearing-in ceremony, the outgoing Governor Mijares Palencia was losing practically everything. He even lost his house and his cars after creditors and friends began collecting debts once it was clear that he could not count on resources and privileges from the state government.<sup>219</sup>

Maximino's supporters began harassing those workers and peasants who opposed his candidacy. In the worst cases, *Guardias Blancas* intimidated peasants burning their villages and killing or imprisoning workers and peasants.<sup>220</sup> In addition, Maximino co-opted some of the members of mass organizations. In the case of FROC, perhaps the organization that resisted his nomination most strongly, Maximino approached two leaders, Blas Chumacero and Francisco Márquez, who had publicly denounced him. He offered them posts in his administration if they helped him control FROC strongmen Filemón Escamilla, Leobardo Coca, and Manuel Rivera. On November 1935, Chumacero and Márquez were elected Puebla deputies. Once Maximino became governor, with his support they played important roles helping him dominate workers' and peasants' organizations including the FROC.

The scope of Cárdenas' and the PNR's strategy suggests that Cárdenas and the party were more interested in consolidating the president's and the official party's

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<sup>219</sup> "Patria y Trabajo," *Hoy*, October 11, 1941, 9.

<sup>220</sup> "Declaraciones de la C.T.M. sobre la Situación en Puebla," *El Universal*, May 12, 1936, 1, 8.

domination of the nation than in advancing Cárdenas' progressive agenda, although the latter was not entirely abandoned. One of the most visible common denominators during the mid 1930s party primaries was that those candidates enjoying the support of non-party affiliated workers and peasant organizations did not enjoy the support of the party of its elites.<sup>221</sup> For example, in the state of Veracruz, Senator Joaquín Muñoz, a gubernatorial candidate favored by workers, resigned his candidacy and left the party after finding out that the PNR was actually favoring Senator Manlio Fabio Altamirano, who became governor. Like Maximino, Fabio Altamirano had been opposed by the CTM.<sup>222</sup> Similarly, in Chiapas Deputy Samuel León left the party accusing its head Portes Gil of manipulating the elections in favor of anti-worker candidates.<sup>223</sup>

Some workers and peasant leaders protested such manipulation of the elections and demanded the expulsion of Portes Gil from his position as leader of the PNR.<sup>224</sup> Portes Gil responded to the attacks by accusing his critics of trying to create their own personal strongholds in their home states and proceeded to expel them from the party. Cárdenas supported Portes Gil.<sup>225</sup>

Having flexed its political muscle to control the outcome of the 1935 gubernatorial elections, the PNR obviously could influence those candidates supported by

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<sup>221</sup> "Inconformidad con Varios Fallos que Ha Dado el P.N.R.," *La Prensa*, May 3, 1936, 3, 7 and "Se Ha Iniciado en el P.N.R. una Desbandada," *La Prensa*, May 5, 1936, 3, 7.

<sup>222</sup> "El Diputado Joaquín Muñoz se Separa del P.N.R.," *La Prensa*, May 4, 1936, 1.

<sup>223</sup> "El C. y Dip. Samuel León Refuta las Declaraciones del Lic. Emilio Portes Gil," *La Prensa*, May 9, 1936, 1, 9.

<sup>224</sup> "Una Tempestad Sobre el P.N.R.," *La Prensa*, May 7, 1936, 3, 21.

<sup>225</sup> "Se funda esta enérgica sanción en la necesidad de sentar precedentes de disciplina que sirvan de lección cívica a sus miembros para que posponiendo los intereses particulares y dominando la exaltación que los extravía, tengan en cuenta que su adhesión al Partido que los sostuvo e hizo triunfar en la representación que ostentan, no implica para éste el compromiso de supeditarse en todo tiempo a las exigencias de sus asociados, máxime si afectan al cumplimiento de los principios y Estatutos del Partido. Su protesta contra el fallo del Comité Ejecutivo Nacional es al mismo tiempo contra el mantenimiento de nuestras fórmulas democráticas violadas por los disidentes que figuraron como representativos de la política impositiva del continuismo local." In "Tres Diputados Salen del P.N.R. por Disciplina," *La Prensa*, May 12, 1936, 3, 6.

the party. Even candidates and groups who did not win the favor of the PNR sometimes recognized that it was better to cooperate than continue the battle. In the case of Puebla, Gilberto Bosques did not pursue a campaign against Maximino. The FROC leadership that had organized the demonstration in Mexico City retreated after Bosques conceded. In response to his submission to the party, Bosques was offered a job as the party's director of press and propaganda. This position included the directorship of the state-sponsored newspaper, *El Nacional*. A year later he accepted a post as Mexican ambassador in Paris. He had excellent diplomatic skills and, after a long political career, it is as ambassador that he is best remembered. Among his most celebrated achievements, between 1938 and 1942 was the expatriation to Mexico of Spaniards and Frenchmen escaping the Franco regime during the Spanish Civil War and the Vichy regime during World War II.<sup>226</sup> The alternative of punishment or getting a great job became an effective method used by the official party to secure the obedience of politicians. This strategy became an important tool that helped dominate the political class and further consolidate the one-party authoritarian state.

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<sup>226</sup> For reference regarding Gilberto Bosques experience as a Mexican diplomat see Gilberto Bosques and Graciela de Garay Arellano, *Gilberto Bosques* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1988).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RISE OF THE *CAUDILLO*: MAXIMINO AS GOVERNOR OF PUEBLA

#### Introduction

General Maximino Ávila Camacho became governor of the state of Puebla on February 1, 1937. When he took office, he inherited a bankrupt government from his predecessor General José Mijares Palencia. Apart from an economic deficit of 250,000 pesos<sup>227</sup> (\$1.5 million) cronyism and corruption were rampant. This led Mijares Palencia to destroy his administration's documents before he left office.<sup>228</sup> In addition, the state had been roiled by fierce labor clashes particularly in the industrialized textile regions surrounding Puebla City. In an effort ostensibly to distance himself from the incompetence and corruption of previous administrations, Maximino declared that his administration would be effective, disciplined, and financially solid.<sup>229</sup> At the end of his tenure Maximino characterized his tenure as a role model for peace and development. He left a surplus in the treasury and claimed that the government was no longer corrupt and was staffed with hard-working bureaucrats.<sup>230</sup>

Indeed, by the end of his administration Maximino had demonstrated that he was an effective governor. Between 1937 and 1941, he founded the University of Puebla, rescued the fire-damaged *Teatro Principal* (1761)—one of the oldest theaters on the

<sup>227</sup> “Un Cuarto de Millón Dejó de Déficit el Gral. Mijares,” *La Opinión*, February 7, 1941, 1.

<sup>228</sup> Maximino Ávila Camacho also destroyed his administration's documents before leaving office. Archivists and historians in recent years have speculated that he was motivated by a desire to cover up corruption. As the case of Mijares Palencia suggests, the destruction of documents was a common practice by governors prior to leaving office. In addition, there was the disruption caused by the fact that in the early post-revolutionary period in Puebla governors rarely finished their four-year term as opposition groups often forced them out of office. Indeed, Puebla's state archive has practically no documents from the executive branch of government from 1917 to 1959. Maximino was clearly not the only Pueblan governor intent on covering up the machinations of his period in office.

<sup>229</sup> “Se Hará Justicia a los Malos Gobiernos,” *La Opinión*, February 27, 1937, 1, 6.

<sup>230</sup> Ortega, “Maximino Avila Camacho No Tiene Ambiciones Políticas,” *Hoy*, March 20, 1943, 9.

continent—and renovated the long-abandoned 1648 “Palafoxiana” library (1646) donated by the bishop of Puebla and viceroy of New Spain Juan de Palafox y Mendoza (1600-1659).<sup>231</sup> Maximino also claimed to have cleaned up the state finances. In 1938 he reported a surplus of 4.5 million pesos (\$28.5 million) and in 1941 a surplus of 7 million pesos (\$44.5 million). Maximino also asserted that he had invested 2.5 million pesos (\$16 million) in the creation of 197 schools and 0.5 million pesos (\$3 million), which combined with federal monies paid for the construction of 11 paved roads across the state. In addition, as governor Maximino dedicated 200,000 pesos (\$1.3 million) to water works, especially in the city of Tehuacán, and 272,000 pesos (\$1.5 million) for paving streets, primarily in the city of Puebla.<sup>232</sup>

During his tenure, Maximino’s personal wealth increased substantially and he allegedly had millions of pesos in his bank accounts.<sup>233</sup> If Maximino’s government was as clean as he claimed, one cannot help but wonder how it was possible for him to accumulate millions of pesos on a yearly salary of 16,425 pesos (\$104,000)? Clear cut proof of corruption, however, has been difficult to establish for two main reasons: first, the only data made available to the public were provided by the state government and, second, due to the tradition of destroying state documents at the end of each administration, it became virtually impossible to verify Maximino’s claims or his opponents counterclaims.

Indeed, Maximino’s government does not appear to have deviated substantially from traditional patterns of corruption. He actually had an advantage given increased

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<sup>231</sup> “La Aurora,” *Hoy*, February 15, 1941, 19.

<sup>232</sup> Daniel Blumenkron, *General de división Maximino Ávila Camacho. El hombre. El militar. El estadista* (Puebla, México: n.p., 1943), 30.

<sup>233</sup> USNARA, report from American Consul General James B. Stewart to U.S. Department of State, December 7, 1938, Central Decimal File 1930-1939, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.114 Narcotics/873.

government revenues devoted to public works. These public works appear to have generated kickbacks that allowed him and his cronies to enrich themselves. More importantly, Maximino used this as an opportunity to co-opt and coerce various interest groups in order to consolidate his personal power. He did not hesitate to use government posts, monies, and contracts, as well as Puebla's military resources to consolidate his political base. Hence, while his administration may have been more disciplined and more resources were actually devoted to public works, it appears to be largely in an effort to ensure Maximino's position as the undisputable *caudillo* of the state of Puebla.

In addition, *caudillos* such as Maximino benefited from the PNR's policy (and after 1938 its successor, the PRM or *Partido de la Revolución Mexicana*) to selectively tolerate such corrupt and authoritarian practices. While this tolerance appears, at first glance, to go against the centralizing interests of the party, a closer look suggests that the party ultimately benefited. A powerful *caudillo* as an ally helped ensure the party's domination of a region as long as the *caudillo* remained loyal to the party. At the same time, *caudillos*, like Maximino, appeared to have evaluated the costs versus benefits between cooperating with the central government and pursuing one's own personal interests outside of the party. The stability of the one-party dominated state in this era rested, in large measure, on the party's capacity to guarantee more benefits to loyalists as well as penalties for those who decided to buck or break away from the party.

This chapter analyzes how Maximino struggled with this equation in terms of ongoing cooperation and loyalty to the party even when he deemed it not entirely beneficial to his own agenda. Even though Maximino was clearly desirous of maintaining his own independence and the pursuit of his own and his allies' interests

which, at times, conflicted with that of the national political elites, he invariably remained loyal to the party. Even within the context of the consolidation of a one-party state and the strengthening of presidentialism in this period, Maximino was able to maneuver in order to expand his own power within Puebla and use it as a base to interject himself into the national political scene. In this way Maximino's career helps demonstrate how some regional *caudillos*' helped consolidate the president's and the party's domination of the Mexican state at the same time that some of them derived benefits in expanding their own power and wealth.

### **Dominating Puebla's Political Elite**

Starting the first week of his administration Maximino made clear that he was determined to become Puebla's undisputed *caudillo*. He first targeted those politicians who, although allies, he considered too powerful and hence potential political threats. One of these politicians was Gonzalo Bautista. He had been one of the most senior and influential Puebla politicians over the previous two decades. He had been a leading *Constitucionalista* at the 1917 convention and president of the Pueblan Chamber of Deputies in 1935. During these years, he developed close ties with conservative economic and political groups in the state and at the national level. In fact, he collaborated with the *Jefe Máximo*, Plutarco Elías Calles, in the creation of the Mexican Six Year Plan, 1934-40—the plan that was intended to impose Calles' agenda on President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40). In 1936, Bautista ran for the national senate on the same ticket as Maximino, as a candidate for the official party. Clearly Bautista was a powerful politician and Maximino's potential competitor for political leadership in Puebla.

Maximino was not intimidated by Bautista's reputation and influence. Early in his administration, Maximino began dismantling Bautista's political base and demanded his subordination. For example, at the outset of his governorship, Maximino stated that he did not want to keep Bautista's appointees and supporters in the administration because he asserted that they had turned the Pueblan government into a fiefdom and that they had, like rotten apples, contributed to the corruption of the bureaucracy as a whole.<sup>234</sup> He also manipulated the official party's local nominations to keep some of Bautista's supporters out of public offices. Bautista, implying that Maximino was grandstanding, declared that such actions were actually a sign of Maximino's weakness. The latter responded by describing Bautista's old political base as a "walking corpse."<sup>235</sup> In the end, Maximino outmaneuvered Bautista. The latter, a realist, understood that it was ultimately better to join Maximino than to challenge his authority. During the next four years and beyond, Bautista was Maximino's right-hand man. As a senator, he became Maximino's voice in the federal senate. As a reward for his support and loyalty Maximino tapped Bautista in 1941 as his successor as the governor of Puebla.<sup>236</sup>

In general, Maximino did not tolerate independence by any Puebla politicians without his explicit consent. He was sometimes intolerant even of those actions of his own younger brother Rafael Ávila Camacho, then president of the Pueblan branch of the PNR. Rafael had his own political base since he had been involved in Pueblan politics even before Maximino returned to Puebla in 1935. Rafael was the state deputy from the

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<sup>234</sup> "expresó el Gobernador que ni Bautista ni los suyos que habían hecho del Estado de Puebla un feudo figuran en las plantas de funcionarios y empleados, pues no quiere que suceda lo del cuento de la manzana podrida que pudre, con su contacto, las demás." In "Ni a Bautista ni a los Suyos Puedo Aceptar..." *La Opinión*, April 18, 1937, 1.

<sup>235</sup> "síntomas de debilidad" and "cadáver que anda." *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>236</sup> "La Candidatura del Senador Gonzalo Bautista para Gobernador del Estado," *Diario de Puebla*, November 19, 1939, 1.

city of Teziutlán from 1934 to 1935 and president of the PNR in Puebla from 1935 to 1937. In that position, Rafael helped to garner the party's support for Maximino's candidacy and election as governor. Nevertheless, he lost Maximino's sympathy when in April 1937 Rafael announced that FROC leader Mauricio Ayala had won an election for federal deputy. Maximino wanted to weaken FROC politically because the labor confederation had opposed Maximino in his run for the governorship.<sup>237</sup> As a result, Maximino removed Rafael from the party's regional leadership. Then, in order to win some political capital from the confrontation, he announced that his government was not a dynasty and he would not have family members in government positions.<sup>238</sup> In an effort to regain his brother's support, Rafael became more amenable to Maximino's wishes and thereafter his political career improved. He became mayor of Puebla City (1939-41), Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Economy (1941- 45), Undersecretary of the Ministry of Communications and Public Works (1945), Senator from Puebla in the federal congress (1946-50), and Governor of Puebla (1951-57).<sup>239</sup>

In order to further secure his domination of Puebla's political elite, Maximino also targeted the Pueblan legislature. On his fourth day in power, Maximino asked legislators to visit him in the Palace of Government. At this meeting he asserted it was necessary to establish the ground rules for the relationship between that body and his administration. He assured them that he would work with all of them and "not with *camarillas*" (small groups of deputies).<sup>240</sup> Maximino also did not hesitate very long to

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<sup>237</sup> "Cuales Fueron los Motivos de Renuncia Presentadas al Ejecutivo," *La Opinión*, April 17, 1937, 1, 4.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>239</sup> Rigoberto Cordero y Bernal, *Historia de la Galería de Gobernadores* (Puebla, México: Secretaría de Cultura, Gobierno del estado de Puebla, 2002), 196.

<sup>240</sup> "Gobernará con la Cámara de Diputados y no con Camarillas el General Maximino Avila Camacho," *La Opinión*, February 2, 1937, 1.

demonstrate who was calling the shots, for example, he reduced the legislators' salaries and forced them to publicly support his decision.<sup>241</sup> Control of elected offices became one of his most powerful tools to reduce the political influence of his most outspoken enemies in the legislature, especially FROC leaders Filemón Escamilla and Leobardo Coca. In order to further weaken these congressmen, Maximino targeted mayors and other elected officials from Escamilla and Coca's districts and replaced them when possible with his own people. By the end of his first year in office Maximino had a firm grip on Puebla's political class.

### **The Domination of Puebla's Economic Elites**

Maximino's goal to become Puebla's most powerful *caudillo* also depended on his ability to dominate Puebla's economic elites. As with his strategies with respect to political elites he used a carrot and stick approach. First, he threatened these elites by increasing taxes. He knew that traditionally the economic elites purposely declared low values for their properties in order to pay lower taxes, so in March 1937 he ordered a re-evaluation of properties causing public protests by economic interests.<sup>242</sup> He did not stop there. A couple of weeks later he instituted more tax reforms singling out some industries in order to warn others. For example, he publicly accused the cement and mineral water industries of tax evasion and ordered their taxes increased.<sup>243</sup> In spite of strong complaints Maximino continued using such coercion. Furthermore, he asserted that "businessmen and industrialists who do not comply with his dictates will see their

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<sup>241</sup> "Los Diputados Hacen Una Aclaración y Dicen que No Existe Pugna Entre la XXXII Legislatura y el Señor Gobernador del Estado," *La Opinión*, March 21, 1937, 1.

<sup>242</sup> "Una Brutal Extorsión que son Víctimas los Dueños de Casas...," *La Opinión*, March 30, 1937, 1.

<sup>243</sup> *La Opinión*, April 16, 1937, 1.

businesses converted into [workers] cooperatives.”<sup>244</sup> As a result, the private sector felt increasingly vulnerable to Maximino’s use of power and was forced to openly confront him or seek reconciliation.

Maximino was not simply planning to coerce economic elites. His ultimate objective was to bring the economic elites under his control. After having flexed his political muscle, Maximino switched to “carrots.” Financiers, businessmen, and industrialists who approached him offering political and economic support received the protection of his administration. In March 1938, for instance, he used state resources to help the Pueblan *Cámara Especializada de la Industria Textil* to expand its markets to other parts of the republic and abroad. In addition, Maximino pressured banks to provide credit to help the textile industry improve its distribution system.<sup>245</sup> Capitalists, thus, saw advantages in remaining on Maximino’s good side. In addition, the support and stability offered by Maximino was something of a welcomed novelty. It contrasted with the previous two decades of uncertain business conditions experienced during the violent and unstable revolutionary period and its aftermath.<sup>246</sup>

The influence that Maximino acquired over the economic elites offered him the additional advantage of expanding his personal wealth. His use of state resources in favor of businessmen helped create alliances from which he benefited. The U.S. Consul in Puebla, James B. Stewart, reported on the nature of one of these associations when he

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<sup>244</sup> “comerciantes e industriales que no se sometán a sus dictados, verán convertidos in cooperativas sus negocios.” Ibid., 1.

<sup>245</sup> “Si los Bancos No Llenan su Misión Económica y Social, se Paralizará la Industria Textil,” *La Opinión*, May 29, 1938, 1, 6.

<sup>246</sup> Wil G. Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987* (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1990), 61.

asked William O. Jenkins a businessman associated with Maximino whether the governor was involved in drug trafficking.<sup>247</sup> Jenkins said that:

he did not know, but when asked about Miguel E. Abed, [a Pueblan businessman and] narcotics smuggling suspect, Mr. Jenkins said that the Governor and Abed are very intimate and that the Governor has acquired quite a fortune, probably in the neighborhood of 2,000,000 pesos [\$12.7 million] during the two years he has been in office. Mr. Jenkins said that the Governor had very little when he took office and that he [Jenkins] helped to finance his election campaign by contributing about 40,000 pesos [\$250,000]....Mr. Jenkins says that sometimes he thinks that his relations with the Governor may be too close. However, he is in a position to borrow from the Governor when he needs money for his business and has received loans for as much as 75,000 and 100,000 pesos (\$450,000 and \$600,000).<sup>248</sup>

In addition to controlling the urban economic elite, Maximino targeted the rural elite, including local *caudillos*. To do this, he was required to use more than economic incentives. First, he looked into undercutting political bases. For this purpose, he strengthened the power of Puebla's Ministry of *Gobernación* by creating the office of *visitadores de administración*.<sup>249</sup> These were a type of political inspector who gathered intelligence necessary for Maximino to understand the political landscape of the different regions in the state. Maximino used this information to co-opt or replace government

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<sup>247</sup> William Oscar Jenkins (1878-1963) was an immigrant from Tennessee. During the revolution he functioned as U.S. consul in Puebla and rapidly became a self-made millionaire. He helped finance Maximino's 1936 campaign for governor. Maximino and Jenkins established an informal association with Jenkins providing economic support, while Maximino arranged political favors. One example was related to land reform in Atencingo, Puebla, in the late 1930s. President Cárdenas had ordered the distribution of farmland in the area to villagers. Subsequently, Maximino secured Jenkins' control of the production and trade of sugar and alcohol from those lands.

<sup>248</sup> USNARA, report from American Consul General James B. Stewart to U.S. Department of State, December 7, 1938, Central Decimal File 1930-1939, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.114 Narcotics/873.

<sup>249</sup> Sergio Valencia Castrejón, *Poder regional y política nacional en México: el gobierno de Maximino Ávila Camacho en Puebla (1937-1941)* (México: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1996), 72.

officials loyal to local *caudillos* using the resources of the governor's office. Second, Maximino continued using force when he deemed it necessary. He had the advantage, over most Pueblan *caudillos*, of enjoying the loyalty and support of Puebla's military and the capacity to use it to consolidate his position as the region's strongest *caudillo*. In September 1939, for example, when José María Amador, *cacique* of *Paredón y Palos Caídos* forced pro-Maximino peasants from their lands, Maximino sent troops to that community to return the farms and imprison Amador.<sup>250</sup>

Nevertheless, *caudillos* with strong roots in their regions were a substantial challenge to Maximino. The extent of their local political and economic influence as well as the commitment of local villagers to confront the army on behalf of their *caudillos*, made it difficult for Maximino to effectively challenge them. In some cases, Maximino followed the maxim "If you can't conquer your enemies, join them" and settled his differences with these *caudillos* by negotiating shared power and engaging in collaboration. In one case Maximino agreed to split two deputies' seats with Miguel Barbosa, *caudillo* of Tehuacán. Barbosa's candidate Julio Olaya was elected as a local deputy while Maximino's candidate Julián Cacho was elected as a federal deputy.<sup>251</sup> This way, similar to the way the PRM benefited from its strategic relationship with Maximino, the latter's alliance with Barbosa helped the former strengthen his grip, if not give him total control over the Tehuacán region.

Maximino's stick-and-carrot strategy eventually helped create a substantial political base for him that allowed Maximino to emerge as the most powerful *caudillo* in the state of Puebla. Early in his administration it became apparent that any business or

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<sup>250</sup> AGN, Section Presidents LCR, C959 556.7.7.

<sup>251</sup> Valencia Castrejón 1996, 74-75.

political activity had to be pre-approved by Maximino, so he was constantly being courted by political, economic, and labor elites and organizations. By the end of his administration his personal power had greatly expanded and was not limited to his authority as governor. As February 1, 1941 approached and he was about to turn over his office to Gonzalo Bautista, interest groups continued courting him and not necessarily the incoming governor. The likelihood that Maximino would continue to exercise considerable influence as ex-governor was suggested by the numerous celebrations in his honor at the time of the new governor's inauguration. Maximino was honored by the Spanish community on January 19th, on January 22nd by the Chamber of Commerce, on January 28th by the Pueblan clergy, on January 29th by the consulates of Great Britain, France, Poland, and Lebanon, and on January 30th by Pueblan federal deputies. All these events were widely publicized in the local newspapers while the incoming governor received less attention.

### **Manipulating Public Opinion**

A very important aspect of Maximino's consolidation of power was the projection of a populist image via his careful manipulation of public opinion. Maximino paid considerable attention to controlling the local and national media. Soon after his inauguration, Maximino began to portray himself as a friend of journalists. In a number of public statements he referred to the media as the fourth power of the state. He assured journalists that he would pay attention to their criticisms in order to correct any "abnormalities" in his administration.<sup>252</sup> He also promised regular meetings with journalists in order to fulfill "the democratic goal of informing, not only the people of the

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<sup>252</sup> "El Gobierno del Estado no es un Feudo para Repartirlo entre Amigos y Recomendados; Dijo el General Avila Camacho," *La Opinión*, February 6, 1937, 1.

state, but also the entire republic, [about] the objectives that animate the Pueblan Government.”<sup>253</sup> Regardless of this rhetoric, newspapers were a propaganda tool to help Maximino promote himself and his policies. In public, Maximino talked about freedom of the press and the obligation to report misdeeds by elements in his administration. In private, however, he would harass those daring to criticize his government. At times he even told journalists what to say. For example, on one occasion, he insisted that journalists deny that he was associated with Saturnino Osornio, the infamous ex-governor and *ex-caudillo* of Querétaro. This was in spite of the fact that Maximino had offered a haven to Osornio in Puebla so that he could avoid being charged by federal courts with the assassination of a journalist, Enrique Río Conde.<sup>254</sup>

Early in his political career in Puebla, Maximino understood the importance of having the media under his control. When he arrived to Puebla in 1935, the biggest newspaper in the region was *La Opinión*. At the beginning of his administration as governor, this paper occasionally criticized Maximino, as for example during the tax war that the governor initiated against businesses early in his administration. By the end of his tenure, *La Opinión*'s tone had changed dramatically to generally unconditional support for Maximino. Maximino did not limit his efforts to co-opting existing newspapers. He also unofficially co-founded a paper, *El Diario de Puebla*, which he used as his government's mouthpiece. In March 1935, as head of Puebla's military zone, he had assisted Julián Cacho in establishing this paper to promote the former's candidacy

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<sup>253</sup> “la democrática finalidad de dar a conocer no sólo al pueblo del Estado, sino toda la República los propósitos que animan al Gobierno de Puebla.” In “El Gobierno del Estado no es un Feudo para Repartirlo entre Amigos y Recomendados; Dijo el General Avila Camacho,” *La Opinión*, February 6, 1937, 1.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

for the governorship. Eventually, Cacho got a senate seat through the assistance of a grateful Maximino.<sup>255</sup>

Maximino's generosity ended when criticism began. At times journalists ventured to denounce his most questionable activities. Perhaps the worst accusation was from *El Universal* in April 1939. The newspaper alleged that Maximino was involved in the assassination of the Pueblan journalist José Trinidad Mata.<sup>256</sup> Maximino promptly dismissed this. He often brushed off such allegations as gossip by saying that if such accusations were true, they should be substantiated with proof and with the identity of the accuser.<sup>257</sup> Of course, very few did so fearing Maximino's wrath.

Maximino's experience in controlling local and national newspapers gave him a substantial role in the PRM particularly with respect to influencing the 1940 presidential election. At the state level, the newspapers under his influence covered almost exclusively the campaign of Maximino's brother Manuel Ávila Camacho and the former's handpicked regional candidates. In recognition of Maximino's influence over elections, the Pueblan historian Sergio Valencia Castrejón has characterized Maximino as the "*Gran Elector*." In 1940, for example, Maximino's candidates won the governorship, two seats in the federal senate, as well as seats for 12 federal deputies, together with 16 local ones.<sup>258</sup> Newspapers gave extensive coverage to Maximino's allies, especially Gonzalo Bautista when he ran for governor as well as Noé Lecona and Rafael Ávila Camacho who campaigned for posts as federal senators. Newspapers gave the impression that there was virtually no political opposition since they frequently did not

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<sup>255</sup> Valencia Castrejón 1996, 75.

<sup>256</sup> "Sobre el Asesinato del Periodista Mata," *El Universal*, April 28, 1939, 1, 12.

<sup>257</sup> "Deturpadores Anonimistas que Detesta el Sr. Gobernador," *Diario de Puebla*, February 3, 1938, 1.

<sup>258</sup> Valencia Castrejón 1996, 154.

mention any other candidates. During the presidential election, for example, newspapers closely followed the campaign of Manuel Ávila Camacho while only mentioning his opponent Juan Andrew Almazán negatively. They also accused Almazán of transporting people to campaign rallies to increase their size or the violence of such rallies. They failed to mention that Maximino engaged in similar practices, especially during Manuel's campaign.

One of the most tragic examples of Maximino's coercive practices regarding journalists was the case of the founder and editor of the newspaper *Avante*, José Trinidad Mata. Trinidad Mata had been an avid Maximino supporter since 1935, but by late 1938 Trinidad Mata began to distance himself from Maximino. He disapproved of Maximino's apparent support of President Cárdenas' policies, especially regarding the expropriation of the oil industry. In 1938, Trinidad Mata joined a group called *Union Sinarquista* and condemned Cárdenas' expropriation of the oil industry. In early 1939, this group began supporting General Juan Andrew Almazán while increasingly criticizing the PRM and its candidates. On January 26, 1939, *Avante* tried to create a division between Maximino and the PRM. It declared that Cárdenas would pick Francisco J. Mújica as his candidate and that Maximino and Rafael Sánchez Tapia would revolt against Cárdenas.<sup>259</sup> Maximino, in fact, remained loyal to Cárdenas and Trinidad Mata withdrew his support for Maximino.<sup>260</sup> On April 20, 1939, José Trinidad Mata disappeared. A couple of days later he was found dead by the side of a road. Some newspapers, especially *El Universal*, suggested that Maximino was implicated.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> *Avante*, January 26, 1939, 1.

<sup>260</sup> Jesús Márquez Carrillo, *El tiempo y su sombra: política y oposición conservadora en Puebla, 1932-1940, una crónica* (Puebla, México: Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, Secretaría de Cultura, 1997), 105.

<sup>261</sup> "Sobre el Asesinato del Periodista Mata," *El Universal*, April 28, 1939, 1, 12.

Although Maximino denied it, Trinidad Mata became a powerful reminder of the risks that were involved in challenging Maximino.

Official investigations never found anyone responsible for the murder. The state police simply declared just three days after the assassination that “it has been concluded that it involved radical elements from another part of the country and it is feared that this horrendous crime will remain unresolved, given that those who committed it left no trace that could be used to locate them.”<sup>262</sup> The newspaper *Avante* survived for another year without its founder, but eventually it was forced to close for lack of funds. For the remainder of *Avante*’s life the front page ran a box counting the number of days that had passed since the assassination and criticizing the apparent inaction of the police in solving this crime. Before the paper closed, it publicly alleged that Maximino was implicated.<sup>263</sup> Maximino simply continued dismissing such allegations as “insidious” and insisted on his commitment to solve the case.<sup>264</sup> However, after *Avante* went out of business the case was forgotten.

It is apparent that Maximino understood the importance of the media in creating and maintaining a favorable image with the general public and combating reports of abuse of power and questionable enrichment. Maximino’s success in dominating the media during his governorship was to continue for the rest of his political career.

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<sup>262</sup> “ha llegado a la conclusión de que se trata de elementos radicales venidos de otro lugar del país, y teme que el horrendo crimen quede impune, ya que quienes lo cometieron no dejaron huella alguna que pueda servir para localizarlos.” In “Manifestación Luctuosa en Puebla,” *El Universal*, April 26, 1939, 1, 9.

<sup>263</sup> “El Jefe de la Nación Está en el Tapete Jugando su Última Carta,” *Avante*, August 22, 1940, 1.

<sup>264</sup> “Sobre el Asesinato del Periodista Mata,” *El Universal*, April 28, 1939, 1, 12.

### **The Domination of Labor in the State of Puebla**

During the 1930s a major cause of political unrest and violence in Puebla was the competition for regional domination between the state branches of the two major national labor organizations: the Revolutionary Federation of Workers and Peasants (FROC) identified with Cárdenas and the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM) originally identified with Calles. Historically Puebla had been one of the most industrialized regions in the country, especially in terms of the textile industry. The FROC and CROM competed to dominate local workers' organizations. During the 1920s the CROM was the most powerful confederation of workers. Its leader, Luis N. Morones, was an important ally of presidents Álvaro Obregón (1920-24) and Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28). Its influence declined when Morones was implicated in the assassination of President-elect Álvaro Obregón (1928) and was further damaged when in 1935 President Cárdenas successfully overpowered Calles. The empty space left by CROM in the political structure of the regime was rapidly filled by the CTM, an organization closely associated with President Cárdenas. However, in Puebla CROM remained strong among textile workers. As the CTM branch in Puebla, FROC, attempted to organize textile workers, but CROM workers resisted.<sup>265</sup> The CTM was led by Maximino's nemesis, Vicente Lombardo Toledano.

Maximino's first confrontation as governor with labor was with the teacher's union, affiliated with FROC. In mid-February 1937, he ordered teachers to be constantly rotated in order to diminish their organizational ability. Then, he proceeded to dismiss

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<sup>265</sup> Gregory S. Crider, *Material Struggles: Workers' Strategies During the 'Institutionalization of the Revolution' in Atlixco, Puebla, Mexico, 1930-1942*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison. 1996), 9.

those whom he judged “not competent enough.”<sup>266</sup> This allowed Maximino to replace the militant union leaders with more amenable ones. These changes were purely political since the dismissals were not accompanied by needed reforms to improve education in the state, such as a comprehensive education budget and the training for teachers.

Maximino saw a political opportunity in the friction existing between FROC and CROM. He took advantage of the fact that CROM was somewhat weak and lured its leaders into an alliance against FROC with promises of support and resources. In this way, a Maximino-supported CROM was able to mount a challenge to FROC in Atlixco and San Martín Texmelucan. Since CROM had declined in the rest of the country its stronghold in Puebla became increasingly dependent on Maximino. The latter played both organizations against each other gaining influence as the mediator in the conflict. Meanwhile, publicly Maximino followed President Cárdenas’ instructions to negotiate a settlement. On February 7, 1938, President Cárdenas’ appointee, Antonio Villalobos, and Maximino brought CROM and FROC leaders together to sign a pact of non-aggression. A similar pact was signed again on March 30 of the same year. These pacts were impractical because the organizations did not trust each other and after a couple of days of peace, armed groups began to attack each other. Maximino benefited from this rivalry since a divided labor sector was easier for him to manipulate. Known for his aggressive measures to impose his authority, Maximino, however, only applied lukewarm efforts to bring about a true resolution of the conflict. Maximino’s strategy of undercutting other influential political actors, such as labor organizations, allowed him to maintain his own power supreme.

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<sup>266</sup> El Comité Estatal del PNR Apoya al Primer Magistrado,” *La Opinión*, February 10, 1937, 1 and “Importantes Declaraciones Hizo Anoche el Gobernador...,” *La Opinión*, February 12, 1937, 1.

Since CROM leaders were, by and large, Maximino's allies, he concentrated his efforts mainly on challenging FROC leaders. During local elections in September 1938, after finding out that FROC candidates were particularly strong in certain regions, Maximino, unilaterally and unconstitutionally suspended local elections in the cities of Puebla, Atlixco, Tehuacán, and Texmelucan. He argued that in those regions there were no guarantees of a fair election. This was a clear ploy to keep FROC from retaining its power in the region in preparation for the presidential elections.<sup>267</sup> A federal political inspector reported: "it has been commented upon repeatedly that the suspension is a means to incorporate the political situation and to prepare the future of General [Manuel] Avila Camacho as a presidential candidate."<sup>268</sup>

Not satisfied with blocking elections, Maximino directly attacked already elected FROC leaders. He accused some of illegal activities and demanded their impeachment. In one of these cases, Maximino ordered the arrest on May 24, 1938 of deputy Antonio Castillo. He was a FROC leader and representative of the city of Atlixco. He was accused of being implicated in a shootout and the killing of a worker in the municipality of Axocopan. Before any formal accusation had been made, Maximino informed newspapers that Castillo was guilty and called for "strong enforcement of the law."<sup>269</sup> An indictment followed and allies of Maximino, the Senators Blas Chumacero and Francisco Márquez, FROC insiders, initiated motions in the Puebla Legislature to lift Castillo's

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<sup>267</sup> AGN, Archivo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Report from Agent P.S. 2 to Secretaría de Gobernación, Vol. 162, 311 (4.7) 38, September 11, 1938.

<sup>268</sup> "Insistentemente se comenta, que la suspensión es medida para absorber [*sic*] la situación política y preparar el futuro del General Avila Camacho como candidato presidencial." In AGN, Archivo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Report from Inspector P.S. 2 to Oficina de Información Política y Social, Vol. 140, Exp. 23, July 11, 1938.

<sup>269</sup> "Será desaforado el Dip. Castillo para Poder Consignarlo," *La Opinión*, May 25, 1938, 1.

political immunity. Ultimately the accusation appeared to have been fabricated and a judge ordered his release. He survived an assassination attempt before leaving prison.<sup>270</sup>

Maximino constantly argued that labor leaders worked against the interests of workers and presented himself, in contrast, as a true friend of the workers, who truly understood them and cared for their interests. In November 1938 Maximino declared:

My background as a soldier and as a man of humble origin makes my revolutionary ideology above all suspicion. By conviction and by temperament, I have been a defender of the working classes. For many years I sacrificed my personal tranquility in honor of the freedom and the betterment of our people. None of those who call themselves redeemers of the state could ever be a more sincere friend, or a more loyal servant of the humble classes than I. I am certain that those genuine workers, those who do not belong to the FROC's secretariat, but those who roughen their hands and become exhausted in workshops, will not have to reproach me for a single act of disloyalty, antipathy or hostility. During the time I have been directing the destiny of Puebla, I have demonstrated this through my efforts to respond to all types of social demands and for the betterment of workers.<sup>271</sup>

Maximino, indeed, acted as a friend of some workers and created the appearance that only confederation leaders supported by his administration could truly serve the interests of workers. To further prove this, he reduced the working day for bureaucrats

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<sup>270</sup> "El Ex-Dip. Castillo Declarase Inocente del Ultimo Crimen," *La Opinión*, June 21, 1938, 1.

<sup>271</sup> "Mis antecedentes como soldado y como hombre de origen humilde ponen a cubierto mi ideología revolucionaria, de cualquier sospecha. Por convicción y por temperamento he sido defensor de las clases laborantes. Desde hace muchos años ofendí mi tranquilidad personal en aras de la libertad y del mejoramiento de nuestro pueblo. Ninguno de los que actualmente se hacen llamar redentores en el Estado, podrá ser más sinceramente amigo, ni más lealmente servidor de las clases humildes que yo. Tengo la certeza de que los genuinos trabajadores, los que no forman parte del Secretariado de la FROC, sino aquéllos que encallecen sus manos y agotan su existencia en el taller, no tendrán que reprocharme ni un solo acto de deslealtad, de antipatía o de hostilidad. Durante el tiempo que llevo de regir los destinos de Puebla, les he demostrado mis esfuerzos para servir toda clase de reivindicaciones social y de mejoramiento de los trabajadores." In "Se Dirige a los Trabajadores el Sr. Gobernador del Estado," *Diario de Puebla*, November 30, 1938, 1.

from 9 to 7 hours.<sup>272</sup> He also publicly demonstrated his intention to help solve social problems by creating housing projects and promoting a form of social security. However, his friendliness with labor tended to decrease whenever workers dared to criticize him. For example, on March 15, 1937 during a FROC demonstration a worker criticized Maximino for the rising prices of basic products without a commensurate increase in salaries. Before the worker finished his speech, the police arrested him while the organizer of the meeting apologized for the offense to the governor.<sup>273</sup>

As he worked on creating his image as a true friend of workers, Maximino helped the FROC leaders, especially Blas Chumacero and Francisco Márquez, to increase their control over the organization and decrease the influence of Maximino opponents. In fact, he helped divide FROC and create an alternative branch led by his collaborators. Benefiting from elected posts in state government and support from Maximino, Chumacero and Márquez broke away from FROC on April 1, 1939. Their new organization became known as FROC *depurada* (purged). While the original FROC was still able to retain a considerable number of local unions, its forces and political influence had been weakened enough to diminish its influence over the Pueblan labor movement.

Perhaps one of strongest and more committed Puebla labor leaders challenging Maximino's authority was Filemón Escamilla. Escamilla remained a major annoyance for Maximino throughout his governorship and years after. Unable to completely eliminate Escamilla's influence in Puebla's labor organizations, Maximino allegedly had Escamilla assassinated in 1942. As with José Trinidad Mata and some journalists, the

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<sup>272</sup> "Es Propósito Inquebrantable del Gobernador..." *Diario de Puebla*, March 15, 1937, 1.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

case of Escamilla sent a clear message to labor leaders. Similarly, the benefits enjoyed by Chumacero and Márquez convinced many of the wisdom of supporting Maximino.

### **The Domination of Agraristas and Peasant Organizations in the State of Puebla**

Just as labor leaders were an important political force in Puebla, peasant organizations were also important, particularly for the sheer number of their members. During the 1930s Mexico was still predominantly a rural country. Maximino used coercion and cooptation in an attempt to control peasant leaders and *agraristas*. As we have seen, he did not hesitate to use the *Guardias Blancas* to coerce peasants and their leaders. In order to increase his control over this group, on February 16, 1938, Maximino helped create an organization that allowed for the centralization of the peasant leadership. This organization, the *Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos del Estado de Puebla*, was affiliated with the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (CNC), the PRM branch for peasant organizations. In this fashion Maximino used PRM resources to effectively dominate Pueblan peasant organizations.<sup>274</sup>

The strategy that Maximino followed in order to control *agraristas* and various groups of peasant leaders was, in part, an extension of his tactics in controlling rural *caudillos*. For example, a friend of Maximino, Rosendo Cortés, *caudillo* of Quimixtlán, helped him use the *Guardias Blancas* to aggressively control peasants. On June 19, 1939 it was reported that “peasants from Chalchicomula have been complaining that Federal Deputy Rosendo Cortez [*sic*] is determined to intimidate and terrorize their community, including [through] the assassination of the inspector of alcohol in Papántla. They

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<sup>274</sup> “El Congreso de Unificación Campesina se Inauguró Ayer,” *La Opinión*, March 14, 1938, 1, 5, 6.

estimate that 200 peasants have been assassinated in the past two years.”<sup>275</sup> Similarly, in the region of Zacatlán, Noé Lecona assisted Maximino in controlling that area. The latter, *caudillo* and mayor of Zacatlán, used the state’s political machinery to protect the interests of *hacendados* against the demands for land by *agraristas* and peasant leaders.<sup>276</sup> As was becoming common among Maximino’s allies, in 1939 Cortés and Lecona were elected federal senators.

Maximino also used the Pueblan branch of the federal *Comisión Agraria Mixta* to increase his influence over the peasantry. President Cárdenas employed this organization to administer land distribution during his administration. Maximino used its regional branch as a personal instrument. The distribution of land directly affected the political influence that *agraristas* and leaders of peasant organizations had over their followers. Their main role as leaders was to fight for land for their supporters. This helps explain why Maximino, who while essentially conservative, was a generous distributor of land to peasants. In 1937 alone 45,000 hectares were distributed benefiting approximately 6,000 families.<sup>277</sup>

Maximino was careful to be the one officially granting the land. He would distribute lands to towns sympathetic to him, but he would deny it to those resisting his influence regardless of federal government recognition of land rights by these towns. On May 18, 1937, for example, Maximino scolded the mayor of Malpaís y San Salvador El Seco, in Chalchicomula, for having ordered the distribution of land to local ejidos. The

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<sup>275</sup> “campesinos de Chalchicomula se quejan que el diputado federal Rosendo Cortez [*sic*] está decidido a intimidar y aterrorizar su comunidad, incluyendo el asesinato del inspector de alcohol en Papántla. Ellos estiman el asesinato de 200 campesinos en los últimos dos años.” In AGN, Archivo Presidentes, LCR, Telegram from Vicente Lombardo Toledano to Lázaro Cárdenas, June 22, 1939, Vol. 772, Exp. 541/2135.

<sup>276</sup> AGN, Archivo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Letter from Comunidades Agrarias to Maximino Ávila Camacho, Vol. 140, March 19, 1940.

<sup>277</sup> “Trascendentalísimo Fue el Informe del Sr. Gobernador,” *Diario de Puebla*, January 16, 1938, 1, 6.

mayor had acted in response to federal directives, but without Maximino's approval. As a consequence, Maximino ordered the suspension of the distribution of this land.<sup>278</sup> In this case as in other cases, President Cárdenas did not stop Maximino from manipulating Puebla's land reform program.

Maximino's power over land distribution illustrates the degree to which by the middle of his governorship (1938) he had become the undisputed *caudillo* of Puebla. His political astuteness and the tolerance of the PRM and President Cárdenas gave him enormous power to determine the future of entire villages and landless peasants as well as their leaders. The case that best helps exemplifies this is that of the sugar mills at Atencingo.

The Atencingo sugar mill was one of the largest sugar mills in the country. Its 150,000 hectares belonged to the U.S. entrepreneur William O. Jenkins. This extent of his land was in violation of Article 27 of the 1917 constitution, which promised the return of land to Indian communities, limited the land owned by foreigners, and the holding of large and/or idle lands. Peasants from surrounding villages accused Jenkins of having acquired land by illegal means, including an alleged self-orchestrated kidnapping to obtain ransom money for the purchase of land. However, the historian David G. LaFrance's exhaustive investigation of this case questions the allegation that Jenkins' kidnapping was self-orchestrated.<sup>279</sup> He argued that Jenkins acquired this land mainly via land speculation in the 1920s.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> "Los Campesinos de Malpaís Pidieron Amparo Contra el Gobernador del Estado," *La Opinión*, May 18, 1937, 1.

<sup>279</sup> David G. LaFrance, "Revisión del Caso Jenkins: La Confrontación del Mito," *Historia Mexicana*, Vol. LIII, No. 4 (abril-junio, 2004), 911-957.

<sup>280</sup> "Takes American's Land," *The New York Times*, June 27, 1937, 23.

As early as 1924 the Mexican government sought to take over some of Jenkins' land. Two presidents, Plutarco Elías Calles in March 1924 and Abelardo L. Rodríguez in December 1933, decreed the partition and distribution of Jenkins' lands to the inhabitants of the municipality of Chiautla, but the distribution never took place, possibly because Jenkins' paid substantial taxes.<sup>281</sup> In August 1937, President Cárdenas decided to reinstate these decrees. Jenkins sought the protection of Maximino. Luckily for him, Cárdenas, once again, entrusted land distribution, a responsibility of the federal government, to Maximino.<sup>282</sup> This decision was considered by some as surprising since it was known that Maximino was "virtually a silent partner in Mr. Jenkins' cooperative [in Atencingo]."<sup>283</sup>

However, Maximino ultimately surprised many by ordering the distribution of the land not to Chiautla villagers, as stipulated in the decrees, but to the 5,000 plantation workers, or *acasillados*, that is, Jenkins' employees.<sup>284</sup> Maximino argued that giving the land to the villagers would be a big mistake since they would turn a profitable business into subsistence farms. In addition, Maximino expected to control the *acasillados* through their union. Indeed, he named Blas Chumacero, the ally who helped him create the FROC *depurada*, as the organizer of the Atencingo mill's union. Maximino's proposal was signed into law on October 19, 1937 and the land ceremoniously distributed on November 20th, the day the nation celebrated the Mexican Revolution.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Una Brigada de Ingenieros Hace el Deslinde Ejidatario en Atencingo," *La Opinión*, June 26, 1937, 1.

<sup>282</sup> "Se Ordenó la Repartición de Atencingo," *La Opinión*, August 28, 1937, 1, 6.

<sup>283</sup> USNARA, General Records of the Department of State. Letter from U.S. Consul in Puebla to U.S. State Department, May 9, 1939. Central Decimal File 1930-1939, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 312.115 Jenkins, W. O./I.

<sup>284</sup> "De Preferencia se Darán Tierras a los Cinco Mil Trabajadores del Sistema de Atencingo," *La Opinión*, June 28, 1937, 1, 6.

<sup>285</sup> "Los Peones Acasillados Fueron al Fin Preferidos en el Reparto de Atencingo," *La Opinión*, August 31, 1937, 1.

Maximino's plan worked for the benefit of Mr. Jenkins. Approximately a year later, on December 7, 1938, the U.S. State Department reported "Mr. Jenkins, as the Department probably knows, has been working his sugar properties on a cooperative basis for some months. So far he has encountered no serious labor or other difficulties and appears to be satisfied with the way his business is going."<sup>286</sup>

Chiautla villagers were left with two unimplemented presidential decrees and no land. Villagers continued to challenge Maximino's distribution to the *acasillados* for several decades. A year after the distribution of land, some villagers invaded Jenkins lands, but they were fought off by armed elements of the mill's administration and workers as well as the state police and federal soldiers. Two villagers were killed, seven injured, and many others imprisoned.<sup>287</sup>

Villagers continued fighting for this land for decades. One of their major efforts occurred while Maximino was still governor. On May 4, 1939 about 300 villagers invaded Atencingo confronting 20 gendarmes and 50 members of the military. The incident left four villagers dead, ten wounded, and 75 imprisoned. According to Maximino, the military was protecting the rights of 5,000 Atencingo farmers and workers.<sup>288</sup> The Agrarian Department in Mexico City issued a new instruction giving the land to Chiautla villagers. However, Maximino, with the assistance of Chumacero, fought for the right of the *acasillados*. Maximino and Chumacero visited Cárdenas and

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<sup>286</sup> USNARA, report by American Consul General James B. Stewart to U.S. Department of State, December 7, 1938, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File 1930-1939, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.114 Narcotics/873.

<sup>287</sup> David Ronfeldt, *Atencingo: the Politics of an Agrarian Struggle in a Mexican Ejido* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973), 19.

<sup>288</sup> "Los Sucesos de Atencingo," *El Universal*, May 8, 1939, 1. The numbers from this article are corrected based on a declaration made by Mr. Jenkins in Letter from U.S. Consul in Puebla to U.S. State Department. USNARA, General Records of the Department of State, May 9, 1939. Central Decimal File 1930-1939, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 312.115 Jenkins, W. O./1.

the latter, once again, accepted Maximino's position.

Other U.S. citizens clearly understood Maximino's influence and willingness to support wealthy landowners. In another case, President Cárdenas announced in 1938 the division of the Babicora ranch in the state of Chihuahua belonging to William Randolph Hearst, the U.S. newspaper mogul.<sup>289</sup> Perhaps aware of the Atencingo affair, Hearst visited Maximino in February 1941 and apparently asked for his help. Maximino did not fail him. Two months later *The New York Times* reported that Hearst only lost 18,000 acres "of his million-plus acres."<sup>290</sup>

Maximino emerged during his administration as governor of Puebla as a mediator and protector of landholders. In disputes between large landowners from abroad and peasant communities, Maximino demonstrated his capacity to determine who got what and when. He was able to achieve this, in part, because of his political savvy, but also because President Cárdenas and the PRM allowed him to do so. As long as Maximino remained loyal to the party, his power represented an extension of the president's and the party's control in the state of Puebla.

### **Maximino's Strengthening of the President and the Official Party**

Unquestionably, the nature of the relationship between the conservative governor, Maximino, and the progressive president, Cárdenas, is a challenge for historians. Some have argued that Maximino's authoritarian inclinations allowed him to keep the influence of the central government out of his jurisdiction.<sup>291</sup> Others attribute Maximino's relative strength and autonomy more to Cárdenas' policy of reconciling the different party

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<sup>289</sup> "Mexican Workers Ask Hearst Ranch Land," *The New York Times*, December 21, 1937, 17.

<sup>290</sup> *Time*, April 14, 1941. (Online). <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,932233,00.html>.

<sup>291</sup> See for example Valencia Castrejón 1996, 173.

factions.<sup>292</sup> Both positions appear partially correct, but the collaboration between Cárdenas and Maximino goes beyond regional independence or national political strategies. The interest of President Cárdenas and the PNR/PRM leadership in Maximino was based, in large measure, on their determination to consolidate the hegemony of the party against the increasing power of organized labor. As was pointed out in chapter III, during the 1937 elections the party impeded the election of pro-labor candidates and supported those who, like Maximino, had demonstrated their potential to control the unions in their territories.<sup>293</sup> In short, the leadership gave preference to securing the party's domination of the state over the promotion of a specific "revolutionary" goal.

This strategy allowed sufficient political space for local leaders like Maximino to exercise considerable autonomous power, although within certain parameters. It was essential to secure the *caudillos'* loyalty to the party in order to secure its hegemony. The system that guaranteed this was, in effect, a mutually supportive one based on a high degree of pragmatism expressed through cooptation as well as coercion. The party gradually concentrated so much political power that it made it possible for the revolutionary elite to resist not only opposition from outside the party, but also from within so that even strong regional leaders like Maximino could go only so far in pursuit of their own agendas.

In the case of the relationship between Cárdenas and Maximino, the latter's accumulation of regional power had a practical benefit for the consolidation of the power of the central government. This was demonstrated when Maximino periodically used his power and influence in the state of Puebla to rally support behind the president or to

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<sup>292</sup> See for example Márquez Carrillo 1997, 86.

<sup>293</sup> *FDRPL*, Hopkins Papers Special Assistant to President Box 146, letter from U.S. ambassador in Mexico Josephus Daniels to the Secretary of State, July 5, 1940.

curtail the level of opposition to the regime. The relationship was reciprocal as Maximino benefited from the support of the president and the party to consolidate himself as Puebla's most powerful *caudillo*. This was especially evident during President Cárdenas' nationalization of the oil industry in 1938 and the 1940 presidential election.

### ***The Nationalization of the Oil Industry***

On March 18, 1938 President Lázaro Cárdenas announced the nationalization of the oil industry largely owned by U.S. and British companies. This step was extremely risky and required that the president gather all the political support available to survive national and international pressures. While the PRM helped him maintain considerable support, some interest groups that felt threatened by Cárdenas' policies took advantage of this event to gain international support. Of all these, perhaps the most important opposition came from Saturnino Cedillo, the *caudillo* of San Luis Potosí, who had become increasingly conservative and eager to undercut Cárdenas. Cedillo began denouncing President Cárdenas as a Communist and apparently expected the support of the United States and England in challenging Cárdenas. He openly revolted against Cárdenas on May 15, 1938.

Cedillo's uprising was triggered not only by the nationalization of the oil industry, but was also a part of a larger conspiracy that had been planned for months and directed by Plutarco Elías Calles from the United States.<sup>294</sup> Calles sought the support of conservative elements within the official party that included important revolutionary generals holding gubernatorial offices, especially Román Yocupicio in Sonora, Gildardo

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<sup>294</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, *Obras I. Apuntes, 1913-1940*. Vol. I. (México: UNAM, 1972), 406, and Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, *El gobierno del general Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940: (Una Visión Revisionista)* (San Luis Potosí, México: El Colegio de San Luis, 2000), 54.

Magaña in Michoacán, and Maximino Ávila Camacho in Puebla.<sup>295</sup> It appears that Cedillo and Calles were considering Maximino as a replacement for Cárdenas as president.<sup>296</sup>

As early as January 1938, Cárdenas had been aware of this plot and tried to reach out to those allegedly involved. He first contacted Cedillo, active at the time organizing his militias in San Luis. He had been Cárdenas' Minister of Agriculture, but resigned in January 1938 reportedly because he considered Cárdenas' policies too radical. Cárdenas tried to co-opt Cedillo by inviting him to become the head of the army in the state of Michoacán. As a former member of the presidential cabinet it was a step down and, more importantly, would distance Cedillo from the army based in San Luis and the militias loyal to him. In other words, this was a diplomatic invitation to surrender without consequences. Cedillo refused and prepared for combat.<sup>297</sup>

In response to the possibility that Maximino was implicated in this plot, President Cárdenas traveled in early March to Puebla. He met Maximino in the governor's residence. It is not known what was discussed, but a parade of top Cardenistas followed the president's visit. They included former presidents, Abelardo L. Rodríguez and Emilio Portes Gil, and Generals Gilberto Valenzuela and Joaquín Amaro.<sup>298</sup> After these visits Maximino publicly offered his unconditional support to Cárdenas.<sup>299</sup> Instead of

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<sup>295</sup> Márquez Carrillo 1997, 90.

<sup>296</sup> USNARA, Division of European Affairs, Department of State, Report, May 18, 1938, p. 4, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File 1930-1939, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.6363/3919.

<sup>297</sup> Hugh G. Campbell, *La derecha radical en México, 1929-1949* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1976), 75.

<sup>298</sup> "Ávila Camacho No Será Substituto del Señor Gral. Cárdenas en la Presidencia," *La Opinión*, May 17, 1938, 1, 6.

<sup>299</sup> "Hoy y Siempre, Está el Gral. Avila Camacho con el Pdte. Cárdenas," *La Opinión*, May 25, 1938, 1.

supporting Cedillo against Cárdenas' nationalization of the oil industry, Maximino declared:

if Hidalgo was great proclaiming Independence, and Guerrero is a hero for having politically achieved it, General Cárdenas by proclaiming the "Grito" of economic independence by expropriating the assets of the oil industry is also a hero and his acts belong to the Mexican people.<sup>300</sup>

In addition, Maximino used his power to pressure Puebla's interest groups to guarantee that the state was solidly supporting Cárdenas. When the representative of Puebla's Chamber of Commerce, Adolfo Coghlan, denounced Cárdenas policies as "anti-economic," Maximino responded that complaints such as these did nothing to solve the crisis and simply expressed "selfishness and antipatriotic feelings."<sup>301</sup> The private sector, he continued, should not be concerned so much with their personal gain when even poor children brought their piggy-banks and women their poultry to the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* to support the president. A couple of days later, Ismael Aguilar, the President of Puebla's Chamber of Commerce apologized on behalf of the Chamber and promised that they would give a month's worth of taxes to help the president pay the country's debt due to the expropriation.<sup>302</sup>

However, while Maximino publicly expressed unconditional support for Cárdenas' action, in private he was very concerned about it. His long-time friend and associate in the Atencingo affair, William O. Jenkins told the U.S. Consul in Puebla:

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<sup>300</sup> "si Hidalgo fue grande proclamando la independencia, y Guerrero es héroe por haberla consumado políticamente, el General Cárdenas al dar el grito de independencia económica expropiando de sus bienes a las empresas petroleras es un héroe también y sus actos son los del pueblo mexicano." In "El Gobierno del Estado Respalda la Actitud Patriótica del General Cárdenas," *La Opinión*, March 20, 1938, 1, 6.

<sup>301</sup> "El Gobierno del Estado Respalda la Actitud Patriótica del General Cárdenas," *La Opinión*, April 23, 1938, 1, 6.

<sup>302</sup> "Fueron a Sincerarse los Comerciantes Ante el Gobernador," *La Opinión*, April, 26, 1938, 1.

that when the first note was received from Washington regarding the [oil] expropriation, the Governor, in a panic, immediately sent for him and said that the situation was very bad; that the United States Government might take over deposits of Mexicans in American banks and that therefore he was going to transfer his bank account to Mr. Jenkins. In spite of protests on the part of the latter, the Governor insisted and for several months Mr. Jenkins had in his account \$250,000 in United States currency of the Governor's money.<sup>303</sup>

Maximino probably disapproved of Cárdenas' action. However, his public solidarity with the president reaffirms his pragmatism.

Meanwhile Cedillo's co-conspirator, Calles, understood the importance of the patriotic fervor created by the nationalization of the oil industry and the political capital that this represented for Cárdenas. In addition, many of the regional *caudillos*, such as Maximino, who were expected to support the anti-Cárdenas movement, had already been co-opted by the party. He advised Cedillo not to challenge Cárdenas further because he would be considered a traitor to the nation.<sup>304</sup> In addition, Cedillo's own political situation had changed. Labor and peasant unions, Cedillo's traditional base, were increasingly receiving more political and economic benefits from the PRM than from Cedillo. Once Cedillo broke from the party, a good portion of his followers sided with the president.<sup>305</sup> Internationally, the U.S. was primarily concerned over the rise of Nazism in Europe. There was a disinclination on the part of Washington to support any

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<sup>303</sup> USNARA, report from American Consul General James B. Stewart to U.S. Department of State, December 7, 1938. Central Decimal File 1930-1939, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.114 Narcotics/873.

<sup>304</sup> Cárdenas del Río 1972, 406.

<sup>305</sup> Campbell 1976, 77.

destabilization in Mexico, especially since Cárdenas had indicated that in case of a European war Mexico would support the allies. Cedillo did not pay sufficient attention to any of this and on May 19, 1938, announced his uprising against President Cárdenas. It only took the federal government a couple of months to dismantle Cedillo's militia, hunt down the once powerful *caudillo* of San Luis Potosí, and kill him. The Mexican historian Romana Falcón explains the context of Cedillo's downfall:

During the Cardenista period (1934-1940), important political processes developed: the political and military centralization of politics at the national level advanced notably and the social bases expanded in support of the central government through the organization of workers. All this allowed President Cárdenas to place before the local powers the option to choose between adapting to the new presence of the center, reducing their autonomy, or disappear. Cedillo did not give in; he elected to continue fighting...his decision put the Potosí cacicazgo in the structural impossibility of adapting to the new rules of the game.<sup>306</sup>

Cedillo apparently did not fully understand the new political and military realities of the rapidly centralizing Mexican state. Unlike Cedillo, many other *caudillos*, including Maximino, did and decided to remain loyal to Cárdenas. Instead of being destroyed by the federal government, Maximino continued enjoying the perks that came with supporting the party, especially tolerance and support from the federal government for personal enrichment and the expansion of his power in the state of Puebla.

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<sup>306</sup> “A lo largo del proceso cardenista (1934-1940), se desarrollaron importantes procesos políticos: avanzó notablemente la centralización política y militar a nivel nacional y se expandieron las bases sociales de apoyo del gobierno central mediante la organización de los trabajadores. Todo ello permitió al Presidente Cárdenas poner a los poderíos locales ante la opción de elegir entre adecuarse a la nueva presencia del centro, reduciendo su autonomía, o desaparecer. Cedillo no cedió; eligió seguir luchando...su decisión puso al cacicazgo potosino ante la imposibilidad estructural de adecuarse a las nuevas reglas del juego.” In Romana Falcón, *Revolución y caciquismo: San Luis Potosí, 1910-1938* (México: Colegio de México, 1984), 274-275.

### *The 1940 Presidential Election*

Similar to the crisis produced by the nationalization of the oil industry, the presidential election in 1940 also demonstrated that, regardless of any initial disagreement with the president, Maximino eventually realized he would benefit more by remaining loyal to President Cárdenas and the PRM. Once again, Maximino's support in times when the president and the party were vulnerable helped strengthened the national political elite and thereby their consolidation of the party's domination of the Mexican state.

A major concern for President Cárdenas in preparation for the 1940 presidential election was the increasing division between the left and right factions within the party. In addition, the loyalty of some sectors within the army was questionable. In July 1938, several generals, including Enrique Estrada and Ramón Iturbe as well as Colonel Bolívar Sierra, were expelled from the party for their alleged dubious loyalty to the president.<sup>307</sup> The army lined up behind these officers and offered a banquet to honor them. After this, Iturbe and Sierra organized an anti-Cárdenas campaign in an effort to undercut support for Cárdenas from within the armed forces. At this juncture, Cárdenas appointed General Andrés Figueroa Minister of War and Navy. He was well respected within the army and a loyal friend of President Cárdenas.<sup>308</sup> He began to be considered a potential presidential candidate. However, Figueroa died unexpectedly on October 17, 1936. The important role of securing the loyalty of the armed forces fell to the Undersecretary of War and Navy, a long-time Cárdenas friend and, coincidentally, Maximino's brother, General Manuel Ávila Camacho.

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<sup>307</sup> Campbell 1976, 124.

<sup>308</sup> Gonzalo N. Santos, *Memorias* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1984), 583.

When Cárdenas named General Manuel Ávila Camacho as Minister of War, the Cardenista General Rodrigo Quevedo told Senator Gonzalo N. Santos:

‘Now we don’t have any other way but to support this boy.’ ‘Whom?’ I asked, and he told me: ‘Manuel (meaning Ávila Camacho).’ ‘Supporting him for what?’ I said. ‘For president of the republic,’ Quevedo answered. And I said: ‘He is an undersecretary recently appointed, Brigadier General, I don’t believe he has enough personality.’ ‘We will create it for him,’—Quevedo answered me.<sup>309</sup>

As the competition among potential candidates intensified, some speculated that Cárdenas might support General Francisco J. Mújica, who became interim Governor of Michoacán when Cárdenas left that position to run for president. Towards the end of his term, Cárdenas had brought Mújica into his cabinet appointing him Minister of Communications and Public Works. He was considered Cárdenas’ likely presidential candidate. However, Manuel had some characteristics that were more appealing to Cárdenas. He had no major political allegiances and enjoyed high regard in the army. In addition, Manuel’s apparent lack of political ambitions was thought to be likely to allow him to obtain compromises within the ideologically divided party at the same time he could help guarantee the loyalty of a restless army.<sup>310</sup> In other words, Manuel was considered the candidate with the best chance to keep the party strong and united. Cárdenas convinced the two other leading pre-candidates, Generals Mújica and Rafael

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<sup>309</sup> “Cuando Cárdenas nombró subsecretario al general Avila Camacho y quedó encargado de la Secretaría de Guerra, [el general de división Rodrigo M.] Quevedo me dijo: ‘Ahora no nos queda más camino que apoyar a este muchacho’. ‘¿A quién?’ le pregunté, y me dijo: ‘A Manuel’ (refiriéndose a Avila Camacho). ‘¿Apoyarlo para qué?’, le dije. ‘Para presidente de la república’, me contestó Quevedo. Y le dije: ‘Es subsecretario recién entrado, general de brigada, no creo que tenga la suficiente personalidad’. ‘Nosotros se la haremos’—me contestó Quevedo”. In Gonzalo N. Santos, *Memorias* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1984), 583.

<sup>310</sup> Cárdenas del Río, 1972, 225.

Sánchez Tapia, to step aside and support Manuel's candidacy. The PRM unanimously declared Manuel the party's candidate on November 3, 1939.

Before Manuel's naming as the PRM's candidate, Cárdenas let Maximino Ávila Camacho know that his brother and not he would be the party's candidate for president. Maximino had been determined to become president of Mexico and believed it was his right since he had repeatedly demonstrated his support and loyalty to Cárdenas. But Cárdenas viewed Manuel as preferable apparently because he was more malleable than Maximino. Nevertheless, Cárdenas apparently felt he needed Maximino's leadership to organize the state governors behind Cárdenas' candidate. As a consequence, he sent Gonzalo N. Santos, head of the Senate, and Gonzalo Bautista, Maximino's principal ally in that body, to convince him that his brother was the candidate that the party needed. Santos informed Maximino of the president's decision. He later recalled:

Maximino leapt out of his chair and said, his face red: 'This can't be! My brother Manuel candidate for the presidency of the republic? He has never even been a councilman of our town, Teziutlán, nor has he ever participated in any political party nor does he have the experience nor the prestige to assume the presidency of the Republic; that corresponds to me—Maximino continued stating—I am the eldest in the family, all of whom I have raised from children, I raised Manuel from childhood....I had Manuel ride an untamed donkey and I gave him money. Maximino became angrier in light of his own words adding: 'Manuel is a slab of beef with eyes and I am the governor of an important state, namely, Puebla that used to be a nest of scorpions and that now I have perfectly under control (this is true). Here there is no voice but mine. I made Manuel a soldier

after I had been in the army for years. I will direct the other governors to help all of you, but in terms of my candidacy.’<sup>311</sup>

Maximino was obviously furious. He called Bautista and Santos traitors and pulling out a pocketknife told Bautista that he was going to castrate him. After trying to calm him down Santos and Bautista reiterated that President Cárdenas preferred the candidacy of his brother given the latter’s support from the army, in part, as a result of his service as Minister of War and Navy. In addition, they continued, Manuel was preferable to Cárdenas’ other favorite, Mújica, whom they considered a Communist.<sup>312</sup>

Regardless of Maximino’s presidential ambitions, Bautista and Santos, who together with Maximino and others, led the conservative faction of the official party, convinced him that it was much better to support the president than risk the possibility of a candidacy by a member of the very influential left faction of the party. Maximino faced the dilemma of obeying the president and continuing to promote his interests within the party or breaking with the party and creating his own political organization. Once again, he decided to remain loyal to President Cárdenas and agreed to support his brother’s campaign.

Maximino’s actual efforts to support the candidacy of his brother demonstrated the level of power that he had achieved in Puebla, as well as his disregard for democratic

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<sup>311</sup> “Maximino pagó un salto de su asiento y dijo, con cara roja: ‘¡Eso no puede ser!, ¿mi hermano Manuel candidato a la presidencia de la República? Nunca ha sido ni siquiera regidor de nuestro pueblo, Teziutlán, ni se ha asomado en su vida a ningún partido político ni tiene experiencia ni tiene prestigio para ocupar la presidencia de la República; eso me corresponde a mí—siguió diciendo Maximino—, yo soy el mayor de la familia, a todos los he formado desde niños, a Manuel, de chico le hacía ‘jinetear’ un burro bronco y le regalaba una peseta’, se enardeció más Maximino con sus propias palabras, diciendo: ‘Manuel es un ‘bistec con ojos’ y yo soy el gobernador de un estado tan importante como lo es Puebla que antes era un nido de alacranes y que ahora lo tengo perfectamente controlado (esto era cierto), aquí no hay más voz que la mía. A mi hermano Manuel yo lo hice soldado cuando yo ya tenía años de militar. Yo me dirigiré a los gobernadores para que los atiendan a ustedes, pero en el sentido de mi candidatura.’” In Santos 1984, 647-648.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

principles. On December 30, 1938 he forced members of the XXXII and the incoming XXXIII Pueblan legislatures to sign a *Pacto de Honor*. This agreement unified members of the legislature and the executive branch of government into a single political block recognizing Maximino as its leader for the purpose of coordinating the upcoming presidential electoral effort. It gave the governor enormous leverage to dominate the electoral process in Puebla. The pact demanded that all members of the official party in the legislature, (1) act as a group, (2) recognize Maximino as its sole leader, (3) accept the expulsion of members for the benefit of the whole, (4) limit membership to Poblanos, and (5) explicitly commit to obey Maximino.<sup>313</sup> This pact left few alternatives for those who disagreed with Maximino and, thus, even members of the opposition from within the party such as FROC leaders Telésforo Salas and Leobardo Coca, signed the pact in order not to be politically ostracized. The agreement helped Maximino mobilize support for the election of his brother and also to secure the appointment and election of his loyalists: Gonzalo Bautista as governor and Noé Lecona and Rafael Ávila Camacho as federal senators.

In addition, Maximino organized a coalition of 19 governors to support and guarantee the election of Manuel. On January 16, 1939 he invited them to Puebla to have dinner in his official residence. There he announced that he had already collected 4 million pesos from industrialists and businesspeople from the state of Puebla who intended to support the candidacy of his brother. He added that he expected a similar commitment from all of the governors.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> “Pacto de Honor Avilacamachista de los Miembros de las XXXII y XXXIII Legislaturas del Estado,” *Diario de Puebla*, January 3, 1939, 1.

<sup>314</sup> AGN, Archivo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Report by Agent Cipriano Arriola to Oficina de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Exp.184, 2-1/311.1/, January 17, 1939.

The 1940 election is considered one of the most violent held under the leadership of the official party. With the exception of the 1988 presidential election, perhaps it was also the election in which the party faced the strongest opposition and may even have lost the election. By 1940, a collection of diverse forces opposing the increasing authoritarianism of the PRM gathered around General Juan Andrew Almazán, brother of the former governor of Puebla and *caudillo* from the state of Nuevo León. Concerned by the tight control of the party elite over national politics, he broke from the party in 1938. His campaign denounced “*continuistas*” within the party (those dedicated to maintaining a certain sector of the leadership in power) “who advocate totalitarian dictatorships, for which they try to outwit the popular vote, for the enemies of democracy.”<sup>315</sup> As the historian Stephen R. Niblo has explained “There were important social forces of the extreme right that made the movement significant....Ex-President Calles—from his exile in Los Angeles—was making a major effort to attract both funds and overseas fascist support for Almazán.”<sup>316</sup> However, Almazán attracted more than the extreme right. The significance of his movement was that he was able to attract a wide array of individuals with differing political philosophies. Supporting Almazán hand-in-hand with proto-fascists such as the *Sinarquistas*, for example, was The Union of Railroad Worker of the Mexican Republic (STFRM), perhaps the largest and most independent union in the country at the time. Thus, almost in spite of himself, Almazán represented a variety of forces united against the PRM.

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<sup>315</sup> “que propugnan las dictaduras totalitarias, por los que pretenden burlar el voto popular, por los enemigos de la democracia.” In Juan Andrew Almazán, *Memorias del general Juan Andrew Almazán, informes y documentos sobre la campaña política de 1940* (Diego Arenas Guzmán, Ed. México: E. Quintana Impresor, 1941), 31.

<sup>316</sup> Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999), 88.

The PRM took this threat seriously and mobilized all its political resources to discredit Almazán. In April 1939, for example, Vicente Lombardo Toledano denounced Almazán as a traitor to workers.<sup>317</sup> Similarly, in late August 1939, the federal senate showing a clear bias in favor of Manuel Ávila Camacho accused Almazán of being a reactionary who never really defined which side of the revolution he fought on allegedly supporting whomever was to his personal benefit. Almazán convinced of his popularity in Mexico City challenged the senate to publicly debate their accusations in a rally that he organized in front of the Monument of the Revolution. The challenge was accepted after the anti-Almazán bloc received the support of regional *caudillos*, among them Maximino. The reaction of the official party was so excessive that Almazán was forced to back down. Reportedly, Maximino alone sent 20,000 Avilacamachistas from Puebla to confront Almazán in Mexico City.<sup>318</sup>

According to Juan Andrew Almazán, President Cárdenas, who at that time claimed to be neutral in the competition between the presidential contenders, promised him he would use federal forces to subdue “arbitrary governors,” of which Maximino was perhaps the most obvious.<sup>319</sup> However, President Cárdenas actually failed to respond to provocations by Avilacamachistas. For example, in January 1939 in the town of Chiautla de Tapia, an Almazanista stronghold, Maximino sent people to paint the walls around the town with campaign murals favoring his brother. The inhabitants denounced this. Maximino, in response, began imposing fines and charging extra taxes on merchants

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<sup>317</sup> “Denuncia Lombardo Una Conspiración,” *Novedades*, January 13, 1940, 1.

<sup>318</sup> “Veinte Mil Hombres Irán de Puebla a Contestar el Reto Almazanista,” *Diario de Puebla*, August 25, 1939, 1.

<sup>319</sup> Almazán 1941, 25.

wanting to conduct business in the town.<sup>320</sup> Cárdenas let such irregularities pass without showing any indication that he disapproved of Maximino's tactics.

On December 6, 1939, during a rally in Puebla, Juan Andrew Almazán denounced Maximino's tactics:

The *imposicionistas* truly squander the people's money illegally and constantly using the radio (which is denied to us, against all fairness on the part of the Federal Government); they use disastrous neighborhood roads to shepherd flocks of people for their masquerades, while for us....they do not permit free citizens to gather for our rallies. They oppose the showing of films of our rallies at the movies, and instead, pressure businesses to show everything related to the *imposicionista* propaganda.<sup>321</sup>

As part of his campaign of intimidation Maximino also attacked the interests of FROC leader Filomeno Escamilla, who had become one of the strongest Almazanistas in Puebla. In January 1940, workers from 23 corn mills and 20-corn dough wholesale stores, all belonging to FROC, were replaced by Avilacamachista workers. Workers were told not to show up one day because there were going to be adjustments made to the scales. When they came back the next day, they found that all the locks on the factories had been changed and new workers were at their old posts.<sup>322</sup> In addition, in August 1940 Maximino ordered the seizure of 18 more of Escamilla's corn mills.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> AGN, Archivo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Report from Inspector PS-6 to Oficina de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Exp.184, 2-1/311.1/5, January 8, 1939.

<sup>321</sup> "Los imposicionistas hacen verdadero derroche de los dineros del pueblo; hacen uso ilegal y constante del radio (lo que a nosotros niega, contra toda equidad el Gobierno Federal); usan los desastrosos caminos vecinales para acarrear rebaños de gente forzada para sus mascaradas mientras a nosotros....no nos permiten que los ciudadanos libres concurran a nuestras manifestaciones. Se oponen a que las películas de nuestras manifestaciones sean exhibidas en el cine, y en cambio, hacen presión con las empresas para que se exhiba todo lo relativo a la propaganda *imposicionista*." In "Ante el Monumento a Zapata en Cuautla Almazán Habló a Veinte Mil Personas," *Avante*, December 7, 1939, 1.

<sup>322</sup> AGN, Archivo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Report from Agent P.S. 6 to Secretaría de Gobernación, Vol. 766, February 5, 1940.

<sup>323</sup> "Fue Desbaratado el Sucio Monopolio del Liderzuelo Filomeno Escamilla," *Diario de Puebla*, August 29, 1940, 1.

Maximino used the office of governor not only to dominate institutions to guarantee favorable electoral results, but also to intimidate and demoralize the opposition by illegal use of force. While the campaign was violent nationwide, in Puebla, violence included targeted political assassinations. In addition, the peasant leader, former deputy for Tepeaca, and co-signer of the infamous *Pacto de Honor*, Telésforo Salas disappeared in Puebla on November 3rd, 1939. A few days later Salas' body was found on a roadside in the neighboring state of Tlaxcala. Newspapers in Mexico City accused the government of Puebla of this crime. Maximino denied it, describing the accusation as Almazanista propaganda. He added that, ultimately, Salas' tragic end was due to his own violent lifestyle.<sup>324</sup> *Avante*, the newspaper founded by another alleged victim of Maximino, Francisco Trinidad Mata, reported that Salas had been kidnapped by policemen and pointed out, that as in the Trinidad Mata case, efforts by Puebla's police to solve the crime were limited at best.<sup>325</sup> While both, Trinidad Mata and Salas, were publicly supporting Almazanismo at the time of their assassinations, Maximino continued dismissing any implication of politics being involved in the crimes.<sup>326</sup> The two murders remained unsolved.

Maximino's, and others', tactics of intimidation and harassment against Almazanistas gave rise to violent responses. For example, in April 1939, the mayor of Acatlán, Simitrio Márquez, was killed apparently for obstructing an Almazanista rally.<sup>327</sup> Partisan newspapers contributed to exacerbating the situation. The pro-Maximino *Diario de Puebla* and *La Opinión* preferred to report Almazanista violence, while the anti-

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<sup>324</sup> "El Gobierno de Puebla Tiene el Suficiente Respaldo del Pueblo para Recurrir a Hechos Fuera de la Ley," *Diario de Puebla*, December 4, 1939, 1.

<sup>325</sup> "Un Reto Más, a la Justicia Humana y Divina," *Avante*, December 7, 1939, 1.

<sup>326</sup> "Hace Declaraciones el Gobierno del Estado," *La Opinión*, December 12, 1939, 1.

<sup>327</sup> "El Presidente Municipal de Acatlán Asesinado," *Diario de Puebla*, December 12, 1939, 1.

Maximino *Avante* and some national newspapers reported on the attacks organized by Avilacamachistas. Pre-electoral violence nationwide reached its highest point on June 16. That day Avilacamachistas attempted to assassinate Almazán in Hermosillo, Sonora.<sup>328</sup>

Finally July 7, 1940, Election Day, arrived. The violence was, in part, facilitated by poor electoral practices. As *The New York Times* reported, “The Mexican electoral law provides that the polls shall be run by a committee of citizens selected by themselves among the first to reach voting places. As control of the polls gives an opportunity for chicanery, the election of these committees always gives rise to keen rivalry....The practice of carrying pistols is so widespread, however, that complete disarming of all citizens is a matter almost impossible of accomplishment.”<sup>329</sup> According to some reports shootouts started “from the first hours of the morning.”<sup>330</sup> Armed groups, by and large, although not exclusively, Avilacamachistas, took to the streets and seized voting places, even before they were opened. The national newspaper *Excelsior* reported:

It is appropriate to indicate that the candidate for senator, Alfonso Sánchez Madareaga [Avilacamachista], directed the aggression from the site of the Barbers’ Union located at number 75 Peralvillo Street [in Mexico City], and it was his orders that made it possible that the police, directly or indirectly, were obliged to violently force Almazanistas to abandon, not only the official voting place, but also the one that they had set up.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> “Attempt on Almazán Laid to Rival Party,” *The New York Times*, June 17, 1940, 4.

<sup>329</sup> Arnaldo Cortesi, “Mexico is Tense on Eve of Voting,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 1940, 15.

<sup>330</sup> “Grandes Masas de Votantes Acudieron a las Casillas en Todos los Estados,” *Excelsior*, July 8, 1940, 9.

<sup>331</sup> “Cabe hacer constar que el candidato a senador, Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga, dirigía la agresión desde el Sindicato de Peluqueros, situado en el número 75 de las calles de Peralvillo, y fueron sus órdenes que hicieron posible que la policía, directa o indirectamente, obligara por la fuerza a que los almazanistas abandonaran, ya no la casilla oficial, sino hasta la propia que habían instalado.” In “Dominaron la Situación los Almazanistas en la Jornada Cívica del Distrito Federal,” *Excelsior*, July 8, 1940, 12.

A quick look at the electoral results reveals additional irregularities produced by an apparent desperate attempt by Avilacamachistas and Almazanistas to win the election. For example, in Districts I and II in Puebla the PRM reported receiving 28,151 votes while the Almazanistas reported 48,000. Fraud was obvious because after an investigation it was estimated that these two districts had only 15,000 registered voters. Furthermore, it was also estimated by federal authorities that only 5,000 actually voted in those districts.<sup>332</sup>

Almazanistas were rightly concerned that the PRM's control over the electoral system would determine the results. In order to challenge the official results in court, Almazanistas carried out their own count and send the results to the Congress. However, except for three senators and two deputies, the rest of Congress was openly pro-Avilacamachista and rejected the results of the parallel count.<sup>333</sup> On July 12, 1940 the Counting Assemblies declared Manuel Ávila Camacho president-elect with 2,136,625 votes for Avila Camacho against 128,574 for Almazán. The new congress, composed exclusively of Avilacamachistas, confirmed the results by September.<sup>334</sup> Reports of fraud were widespread, but there was insufficient data available for Almazán to dispute the results in court.

Nevertheless, Almazán traveled to the United States to explore the possibility of organizing a military uprising against the Mexican government. In September he met with Eliot Roosevelt, the son of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Eliot supported Almazán. The latter remembered the former telling him that “since it was understood

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<sup>332</sup> AGN, Archivo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Letter to Oficina de Información Política y Social, Exp.766, July 20, 1940.

<sup>333</sup> Arnaldo Cortesi, “Vote Counts Begins in Mexico Today,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 1940, 6.

<sup>334</sup> “Almazán Paper's Seized in Mexico,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 1940, 4.

that I have on my side part of the army, it was thought that the most convenient approach was a violent ‘coup.’ And that I ought to be assured that on being in Mexican territory leading an important armed nucleus, the uprising being executed and, upon dominating several states, our government would be recognized [by the U.S.] in a definitive form.”<sup>335</sup>

Almazanistas all over the country were preparing for this uprising with part of the organizing falling to some of Maximino’s victims. In Puebla, FROC leaders Filomeno Escamilla and Manuel Rivera led the local movement, while in Mexico City the national effort was coordinated by former Puebla governor, General José Mijares Palencia, coordinator of the Almazanista campaign as well as CROM leader Luis N. Morones.

However, the PRM outwitted Almazán and his allies. While he was dealing with Eliot Roosevelt, Miguel Alemán, manager of Manuel’s campaign, traveled to the United States to meet with high officials in the Roosevelt administration. Alemán obtained the support of the United States government which was concerned about instability in Mexico at a time when the U.S. was considering its participation in World War II. On November 12, 1940 President Franklin D. Roosevelt publicly recognized the election of Manuel Ávila Camacho and confirmed that Vice-President-elect Henry A. Wallace would be at his inauguration. Almazán described this announcement as “a moral blow to democracy.”<sup>336</sup> He never accepted the official results of the election, but on that day he declared that he was renouncing his pursuit of the presidency in favor of the sovereignty

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<sup>335</sup> “que como se entendía que tenía a mi favor la mayor parte del Ejército, se creía que lo más conveniente era un ‘coup’ violento. Que debía tener yo la seguridad de que al estar en territorio mexicano al frente de un núcleo armado importante se nos otorgaría la beligerancia y, al dominar varios Estados, se reconocería nuestro gobierno en forma definitiva.” In Juan Andreu Almazán, *Memorias del general Juan Andreu Almazán, informes y documentos sobre la campaña política de 1940* (México: E. Quintana Impresor, 1941), 72.

<sup>336</sup> Almazán 1941, 79.

of Mexico even though he had been elected president on July 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>337</sup>

On December 1, 1940, Manuel Ávila Camacho took the oath of office in the presence of U.S. Vice-President elect Wallace. This was the first time a high U.S. official attended a presidential inauguration in Mexico.<sup>338</sup> The PRM had demonstrated that in spite of enormous opposition, its political machinery was capable of retaining power and further consolidating its domination of the Mexican state.

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<sup>337</sup> “Almazán Drops Presidency Claim in Mexico; Throngs Cheer Wallace, on Way to Inaugural,” *The New York Times*, November 27, 1940, 1.

<sup>338</sup> “Wallace is Named to Go to Inaugural of Avila Camacho,” *The New York Times*, November 13, 1940.

## CHAPTER V

### “WITH A GUN IN HIS HAND:” MAXIMINO ÁVILA CAMACHO AND THE CHALLENGE TO PRESIDENTIALISM

#### Introduction

During the presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1941-45), Maximino Ávila Camacho evolved from being a powerful regional *caudillo* to one of the most powerful politicians in Mexico. His ultimate goal was the presidency and given that President Cárdenas denied him the nomination in 1939, he was determined to get it from his brother in 1945. In order to ensure success this time, he expanded his political base nationally. In addition, he continued to use caudillistic practices such as violence for political gain, clientelistic networks to secure allies and other supporters, exploitation of public revenues for personal enrichment, cronyism, the imposition of personal opinion (i.e. Maximino's orders) in lieu of the rule of law, and co-optation of influential groups and individuals—including the media—to encourage a personality cult. Maximino succeeded in expanding his power and wealth, but the Mexican president's and the official party's increasing control over the state was an insurmountable obstacle even for a *caudillo* as powerful as Maximino. Maximino did not become president and the party was able to continue to coerce and co-opt him securing his loyalty. The ability of the president and the party to tame *caudillos* was an important factor that secured the party's control of the central government and national stability.

#### Maximino's Use of Armed Force for Political Gain

Manuel Ávila Camacho was sworn in as President of Mexico on December 1, 1940. At this point, Maximino publicly pretended not to have any presidential ambitions

now that his brother occupied the post. He commented that his intention was to finish his governorship of Puebla and “to live in peace,” and that he did “not want to get involved any more in politics once his term [was] over, since he had fulfilled his part [working for the betterment of the nation].”<sup>339</sup> In spite of this comment, other evidence suggests that Maximino continued to be very much interested in becoming Mexico’s next president.

Manuel had become president thanks, in large measure, to the support of former President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40). As a result, it was no surprise that his administration had a strong Cardenista influence. Maximino, who had political differences with Cárdenas, regarded this as an obstacle to exercising his own influence over his brother and was determined to replace Cárdenas as the most potent political leader among the president’s advisers. This was not an easy task. Manuel’s military and political career had depended on Cárdenas since the early 1920s. Nevertheless, Maximino as governor had successfully challenged some of Cárdenas’ policies in the state of Puebla.<sup>340</sup> At the outset of Manuel’s presidency he would attempt to do the same at the national level.

In a conversation in early January 1941 with some of his supporters, Maximino expressed his disdain for Cárdenas and irritation at the latter’s influence in the new administration:

That dork Manuel has betrayed us. He lets himself be influenced by Cárdenas and if before we had a capable and great statesman as *Jefe Máximo* now we have a *Jefe Máximo* of turmoil and chaos [i.e. Cárdenas]. I want...to draft a statement in which, as constitutional governor of the state of Puebla, I denounce external influences on the executive power of

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<sup>339</sup> “El Gobernador Hizo Ayer Amplias Declaraciones,” *La Opinión*, December 28, 1938, 1.

<sup>340</sup> For example, President Cárdenas supported land reform and workers leaders, while Maximino helped large landowners to keep their lands and treated unions with an iron fist.

the federation and demand the rest of the governors support me and I am going to single out specifically Lázaro Cárdenas as the intruder who has placed shackles on the new president in order to continue ruling from Jiquilpan [Cárdenas' hometown].<sup>341</sup>

Maximino's advisers were somewhat taken aback by his plan to challenge the administration. As a result, they convinced Maximino that an aggressive declaration against the president and the ex-president was too risky.<sup>342</sup> After all, no powerful *caudillo* had been able to successfully challenge any administration since 1920. Recent attempts, such as those of Saturnino Cedillo in 1938 and Juan Andrew Almazán in 1940, had demonstrated that no matter how strong the *caudillo*, such attempts were suicidal.<sup>343</sup> Maximino would have a better chance to challenge Cárdenas by gathering support from within the official party. As a result, he set about gaining support from anti-Cardenistas members of the party and, in addition, sought a cabinet position in the federal government as a base from which to challenge Cárdenas.

Maximino did not initially have a specific position in mind, but it was rumored when his brother became president-elect (July 1940) that Maximino was considering the Ministry of War.<sup>344</sup> Later he appeared to prefer the Ministry of Communications and Public Works (SCOP). This ministry was regarded as an epicenter of payoffs and hence offered a better position for Maximino to expand his clientelistic networks and strengthen his candidacy. As governor of the state of Puebla (1937-41), Maximino had successfully

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<sup>341</sup> Gonzalo N. Santos, *Memorias* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1984), 745.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 745.

<sup>343</sup> Saturnino Cedillo, *caudillo* of the state of San Luis, rose up against the Cárdenas administration in 1938. His political base was dissolved by the party. Without enough support, he was cornered and killed by the Mexican army three months later. Juan Andrew Almazán, *caudillo* of Nuevo León, left the party in 1939 to challenge the official party in the 1940 presidential election. Although apparently enjoying enormous popularity, he was declared the loser of the election. This was the end of his political career.

<sup>344</sup> USNARA, Division of Foreign Affairs, Department of State, Letter from the Department of State to Vice-President Welles, August 13, 1940, Decimal Files, 1940-44. RG 59, Stack Area 250, 810.20 Defense/191.

used the development of Mexico's infrastructure and the Puebla's budget to co-opt regional leaders who requested roads, bridges, electricity, water, etc. Project contracts, he quickly learned, were powerful incentives to strengthen clientelistic networks. As head of SCOP he hoped to control and distribute concessions nationwide using the ministry's enormous budget to expand his influence and power at the national level and, thus, secure a political base that could effectively support his presidential candidacy in 1945. First, he asked his brother for the ministry, but much to his dismay, Manuel said no and kept the Cardenista Minister Jesús de la Garza on.

Maximino, however, continued to importune his brother, but Manuel was worried about appearing nepotistic, and about alienating Cárdenas, who supported his presidency. The president was also preoccupied about Maximino's somewhat unsavory reputation. Given Maximino's volatile temperament having him in the cabinet would make governing more difficult for Manuel. Thus, when Maximino's governorship ended on February 1, 1941, contrary to his hopes, no cabinet appointment was announced.

In an apparent attempt to keep Maximino away from national politics, Manuel sent Maximino abroad on a diplomatic mission. Between April and May 1941, Maximino visited the Bahamas and the United States as a representative of the Mexican government. The purpose of this trip was never fully explained. Some newspapers reported simply that Maximino left on a vacation after finishing his term as governor. According to *Time Magazine*, "he traveled...with a semi-royal retinue of 14 people that included, besides his wife and children, a Senator, a translator from the Foreign Office, a newspaperman to handle publicity, [and] a retired bullfighter."<sup>345</sup> Maximino used the trip to promote himself as an influential Mexican politician interested in promoting foreign

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<sup>345</sup> "Labor Draft," *Time Magazine*, March 31, 1941.

investments in Mexico. He visited the Duke of Windsor, Governor of the Bahamas, and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the Bahamas he promised that British interests would be reincorporated into the Mexican oil company<sup>346</sup> and in the U.S. he promised the U.S. Navy access to Mexican ports in its war effort against Nazi Germany.<sup>347</sup> The Duke of Windsor introduced him to Swedish millionaire Axel Wenner-Gren, who was interested in investing in Mexico.<sup>348</sup> Wenner-Gren eventually became one of Maximino's most important financial allies. During this trip Maximino continued lobbying to become a minister. For example, in the middle of the trip, he leaked to the media that upon his return to Mexico he would be appointed Minister of SCOP. President Ávila Camacho denied the report.

Maximino obviously was using the media to pressure his brother. So it was not surprising that as he was returning from the U.S., some of the most important newspapers in Mexico announced that Maximino would be appointed Minister of SCOP as early as June 1st. However, Manuel continued to resist. The latter met with some of the most influential leaders of the country's various political factions to make sure that they would support him to keep Maximino at bay.<sup>349</sup> Specifically on August 10, 1941, at his hacienda "El Encino," he met with José Vasconcelos (a former Obregonista), Luis Cabrera (a Carrancista), Emilio Portes Gil (a Cardenista), and Generals Manuel Pérez Treviño and Joaquín Amaro (both Callistas). After securing their support Manuel told

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<sup>346</sup> "Amend Mexican Oil Code," *The New York Times*, March 22, 1941, 6.

<sup>347</sup> USNARA, Division of Foreign Affairs Department of State, Report, August, 1941, Decimal Files, 1940-45, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.0000 (microfilm).

<sup>348</sup> USNARA, Division of Foreign Affairs Department of State, Report, January 25, 1941, Decimal Files, 1940-45, RG 59, Stack Area 250, 800.20211 Wenner-Gren Axel L./44 1 PS/T1.

<sup>349</sup> *La Opinión*, August 11, 1941, 1.

reporters that there would be no changes in his cabinet and that furthermore any changes would be “according to legal procedures.”<sup>350</sup>

Nevertheless, Maximino did not desist. On August 23rd, the newspaper *Excelsior* declared that on September 1st, during Manuel’s State of the Nation address, the President would announce that Maximino would be appointed Minister of SCOP. The media asked the actual Minister of SCOP (the Cardenista Jesús de la Garza) about this and he reported that he had not been informed of any upcoming changes in the cabinet. Subsequently the matter appeared to be resolved by the president’s comment during his State of the Nation address:

We have realized...that as soon as a citizen acquires a position as a public servant, [there] appears a group that surrounds him, incites him and frequently perverts him. This way... internal struggle within the government is provoked....

I must declare once more that the cabinet has been appointed by my will, without attending, nor even receiving, recommendations from anyone and considering solely [the prospective candidate’s] characteristics....

I understand, then, that what is being more or less obscurely promoted, in terms of supposed changes in the cabinet comes from interested political groups...*I declare that I won’t carry out a single change to satisfy political appetites, no matter who is encouraging them.*<sup>351</sup>

Manuel appeared to be talking directly to Maximino. Furthermore, he denied allegations that Cárdenas was ruling over his administration insisting that he, and not Cárdenas, decided all cabinet appointments and that his brother was not and would not be

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<sup>350</sup> *La Opinión*, August 12, 1941,1.

<sup>351</sup> “Hemos advertido, asimismo, que apenas un ciudadano alcanza un puesto público, aparece un grupo que lo rodea, lo incita y con frecuencia lo pervierte. De esta manera se provocan movimientos de lucha interior en el Gobierno, encubiertos con pretextos especiosos, pero que no son sino resultado de un sordo choque de ambiciones políticas de las facciones por la preponderancia.

appointed.

In a private conversation following Manuel's declaration, Maximino furiously asserted that if Manuel continued to refuse him an appointment, he would physically take over SCOP on October 1st.<sup>352</sup> He did not wait that long. On September 29, 1941, newspapers announced that Jesús de la Garza was resigning as Minister of SCOP due to "health issues."<sup>353</sup> Manuel accepted his resignation and immediately appointed Maximino as successor. Maximino was inaugurated three days later. This turn of events was surprising. Why did Manuel appoint Maximino? How did Maximino manage to convince his brother to do so? As we will see, the explanation demonstrates the continuity of caudillistic practices within the Mexican political system, even at the national level.

What happened was that Maximino, with a gun in his hand, surrounded by armed supporters, walked into the office of the Minister Jesús de la Garza, and literally kicked him out. He then called his brother to announce that he was Minister of SCOP and had already taken possession of the ministry. He asked his brother not to embarrass him by not accepting it and to make his appointment official. This is how Gonzalo N. Santos, the *caudillo* of San Luis Potosí and Manuel's advisor, remembers the event:

At 12 o'clock of that Monday [September 29, 1941], as he [Maximino] had requested, I was waiting in...the Ministry of Communications and Public Works. At that time, there was a great noise outside the building. I looked out to see what was going on and I saw General Maximino Ávila Camacho, governor of the state of Puebla [*sic*],<sup>354</sup> arriving with an escort

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<sup>352</sup> USNARA, Division of Foreign Affairs Department of State, Office of the Military Attaché, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, August 7, 1943, Decimal Files, 1940-45. RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.00.

<sup>353</sup> "El Gral. Maximino Ávila Camacho Designado Srío. de Comunicaciones," *La Opinión*, September 29, 1941, 1.

<sup>354</sup> At this time, former Senator Gonzalo Bautista had already replaced Maximino as governor of Puebla.

of no less than 50 cars and as many motorcycles. He got out of his car and his entire escort did the same. Hurriedly, he entered the patio with a few of his supporters and got on the elevator. Maximino entered the Ministry with an impressive military presence. On his right was my dear friend, *tocayo*, and fellow Senator Gonzalo Bautista [*sic*]; to his left, his secretary Trini; behind him, at an arm's length his two closest bodyguards: *Pascualón*, who was also his chauffeur, and *el Chorreado*, who was from Teziutlán, and the nightmare of [national labor leader] Vicente Lombardo Toledano. Both of them were carrying imposing Thompson sub-machine guns with full cartridges, that is, 100 45-caliber bullets each. All his *lansquenets*, "goldfinches" and secretaries [his full staff] climbed the stairs, Maximino took his position immediately, ordering all those who from now on would be his collaborators to take their respective positions and then told me, placing his hand on my head: '*Pelón Tenebroso*,'<sup>355</sup> now you come with me to the *Palacio* where I will take my oath of office before the president of the republic." Although I am healthy and strong and I am not afraid of earthquakes, I almost had a heart attack. 'How? –I asked– are you taking possession before being sworn in as Minister to the president?' 'I am simply exercising my rights'–he answered–'I don't owe anything to anyone!' For obvious reasons, I considered it prudent not to go with Maximino to the *Palacio*. Maximino was suspicious that President Ávila Camacho, under pressure from Cárdenas, would change his mind regarding his new appointment.<sup>356</sup>

Santos later added that Manuel had told Maximino on Friday that he would appoint him Minister of SCOP that Monday, implying that Maximino took over the ministry after the president had given it to him.<sup>357</sup> What Santos neglected to mention was that Minister de

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<sup>355</sup> "Sinister bald one," as Maximino used to call Santos.

<sup>356</sup> Santos 1984, 754-755.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 755.

la Garza sent his letter of resignation only after Maximino took over the ministry.<sup>358</sup>

There are other inaccuracies in Santos' narrative. According to Santos, Maximino took over the ministry right before meeting with the president to take the oath of office.

However, Maximino did not take the oath the same day he took over the ministry, but three days later on Thursday, October 2nd. It is also likely that Manuel did not promise the post to Maximino the previous Friday, as Santos suggested, but rather by taking over this ministry, he challenged Manuel to oppose this action or accept the appointment. In the end, as Maximino expected, Manuel capitulated.<sup>359</sup>

Maximino's actions would have caused a major scandal if he had not, among other precautions, prepared the media. The newspapers never questioned the contradictions of the president first announcing no changes in his cabinet and then making changes soon after. Nor did they question de la Garza's lame excuse for his resignation. Journalists simply limited their comments to pointing out that Maximino would make a great minister and praised the president's decision.

Conscious of the importance of maintaining the appearance of legality, Maximino pretended that the appointment was his brother's idea. Soon after the president made the appointment public, Maximino stated to the media:

It has been a surprise to me the news that you [journalists] bring to me....As a soldier, I am always committed to fulfill my duty in the post that the government indicates. I have never been a politician. I governed my state...and I tried to do it the best possible way. I am flattered with this appointment to lead the Ministry of Communications, *as you just let*

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<sup>358</sup> "El Gral. Maximino Avila Camacho Designado Srio. de Comunicaciones," *La Opinión*, September 30, 1941, 1.

<sup>359</sup> Adding to the irregularities of these events, Minister Jesús de la Garza refused to attend the ceremony of transfer of power, as it is traditional, and instead asked SCOP Undersecretary Vicente Cortés Herrera to preside over the ceremony.

*me know*, because it is a government agency dedicated to constructive tasks.<sup>360</sup>

Clearly, by ousting the Cardenista de la Garza, Maximino, in the best of *caudillo* fashion successfully challenged the ex-president as well as his brother, and opened the way to expand his influence at the national level.

### **Maximino's Use of Clientelistic Networks to Expand his Influence**

Many politicians were nervous about Maximino's new position and the possibility that he might destabilize the party. One of them, the president of the official party, Antonio Villalobos, declared that conservative forces (that is Maximino and his allies) were attempting to take over the party threatening its revolutionary mission.<sup>361</sup> Others held that the appointment was the beginning of the disintegration of the party.<sup>362</sup> Maximino denied all this. However, most politicians understood that Maximino's appointment signaled possible changes within the party. A confrontation between the left wing [i.e., Cardenistas] and the right wing [i.e. Maxiministas] was feared.

Maximino's campaign against the Cardenistas was supported by many elements of the right wing faction of the party who were resentful of the Cardenistas' influence in Manuel's administration. One of the most influential groups supporting Maximino was the *Grupo Renovador*. This group was formed by former Obregonistas and Callistas,<sup>363</sup> many of whom held high positions in the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Maximino's long time associate and appointee, the federal senator for the state of Puebla

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<sup>360</sup> "Maximino Ávila Camacho en el Gabinete," *Excelsior*, September 30, 1941. Emphasis added.

<sup>361</sup> "Es Inexacto que vaya a Desaparecer el P.R.M.," *El Universal*, October 4, 1941, 1.

<sup>362</sup> "Ibid., 1.

<sup>363</sup> Obregonistas are supporters of Álvaro Obregón, President of Mexico (1920-24) and President elect assassinated in 1928. Callistas are supporters of Plutarco Elías Calles, President of Mexico (1924-28) and "Jefe Máximo de la Revolución," or the real leader behind presidents (1929-35).

Noé Lecona was the link between Maximino and members of the *Grupo Renovador* in the Senate. Lecona was instrumental in obtaining the Senate's approval of Maximino's appointment as minister. In fact, he requested that the Senate publicly demonstrate its support for Maximino by visiting him as a group in the Ministry to congratulate him. The resolution to do so was approved by 56 votes to 2.<sup>364</sup> In the House of Representatives another member of the *Grupo Renovador*, Corzo Molina, introduced a similar resolution. However, House Member Leobardo Reynoso, a Cardenista, argued that it was inappropriate for the Legislature to show unconditional support for an appointee of the president. The motion in the Lower House was defeated 60 to 29. However, the losing 29 members left immediately after the vote to join the senators' pilgrimage to Maximino's office.<sup>365</sup>

Maximino and the *Grupo Renovador* were extremely aggressive in their efforts to influence Manuel's administration. In fact, ten days before Maximino's bold action and two weeks after Manuel denied in his State of the Nation address any changes in his cabinet, the *Grupo Renovador* successfully forced Manuel to replace the Cardenista Luis Sánchez Pontón with the conservative Octavio Vejar Vázquez as head of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP). On September 11, 1941, Sánchez Pontón sent a letter to Manuel resigning his position "due to health issues."<sup>366</sup> This suggests the possibility that Manuel had offered a cabinet position to conservative forces in an effort to keep Maximino out of his cabinet.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> "Felicitación del Senado," *El Universal*, October 2, 1941, 1.

<sup>365</sup> "Opónense los Mayoritarios de la Cámara de Diputados a una Felicitación en Masa," *Excélsior*, October 4, 1941, 11.

<sup>366</sup> "El C. Presidente Aceptó las Renuncias y Nombró a Nuevos Funcionarios," *Excélsior*, September 12, 1941, 14.

<sup>367</sup> The Ministry of Public Education (SEP) had been an important stronghold during Cárdenas' presidency (1934-40) and an important target of Maximino's supporters due to SEP's influence on the ideological

The new Minister of Education, Octavio Vejar Vázquez, was a well-known conservative. He had worked as Chief Justice of the Military Tribunal and later the attorney for Mexico City's Federal District<sup>368</sup> and Mexican Territories. He shared with Maximino a military background and a strong distaste for Cardenistas. Members of the *Grupo Renovador* publicly supported the appointment denouncing Sánchez Pontón's Cardenista background and alleged Communist sympathies.<sup>369</sup> At the same time, they tried to link their anti-Cardenista agenda with Manuel's administration. Francisco Peralta, the First Secretary of the Senate and a member of the *Grupo Renovador*, declared that the president was showing his "intention to have collaborators resembling closer his own policies and program of action."<sup>370</sup> The media also perceived this change as a sign that the regime was moving to the right.<sup>371</sup> However, President Manuel Ávila Camacho did not appear to have substantially changed his position. He continued trusting Cárdenas. Rather than favoring his brother's political group, his presidency was characterized by his efforts to fortify and unite disparate groups within the party under the office of the president. Vejar Vázquez's appointment as SEP Minister was probably an effort on Manuel's part to strike a balance in his cabinet between right wing and left wing PRM representatives.<sup>372</sup>

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agenda of Manuel's administration. Some of the most radical supporters of Cárdenas could be found in SEP and the education campaign. One of the major political tensions created during the 1930s was the successful lobbying by progressives to change Article III of the constitution to promote socialism in the Mexican education system.

<sup>368</sup> The equivalent of the District of Columbia for the city of Washington in the United States.

<sup>369</sup> "El C. Presidente Aceptó las Renuncias y Nombró a Nuevos Funcionarios," *Excélsior*, September 12, 1941, 14.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>371</sup> Gustavo Abel Hernández Enríquez and Armando Rojas Trujillo, *Manuel Ávila Camacho. Biografía de un Revolucionario con Historia, Vol. II* (México: Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 1986), 238.

<sup>372</sup> For more information about Manuel's policy of party reconciliation see Luis Medina, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1940-1952: del Cardenismo al Avilacamachismo* (México: El Colegio de México, 1978), 371-378.

When Maximino took over SCOP, speculation circulated that some senior administrators, most of them Cardenistas, would be replaced.<sup>373</sup> It was also rumored that there were about 1,000 other “sick” people in SCOP. Maximino responded to such rumors by stating “no one should feel sick *except* for those who created their own illness.”<sup>374</sup> Regardless, he replaced most of the SCOP administrative leadership with people close to him. Many of the new staff had worked with him when he was governor. Immediately after that he confronted SCOP’s union leaders. He started by accusing them of being “lazy” because they collected money from workers ostensibly for union dues (1% of their salaries). He labeled strikes as “selfish acts” and accused union activists of trying to stop the development of Mexico’s infrastructure. On October 14, 1941, he convinced Manuel to decree that SCOP would stop paying workers’ dues to the ministry’s union. The unions would now receive their contributions directly from his ministry. Controlling their source of revenue severely undercut the independence of union leaders and strengthened Maximino’s capacity to impose leaders that he could control.

The aggressive way in which Maximino controlled SCOP’s union leaders should have produced a scandal. However, Maximino was able to portray this as an anti-Communist campaign which received wide support including from the U.S. government.<sup>375</sup> Favorable public opinion of his aggressive treatment of unionized workers was possible, in part, because once again he had succeeded in co-opting and

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<sup>373</sup> “La Declaración de D. Maximino Volvió a la Calma a los Empleados,” *La Prensa*, October 6, 1941, 1.

<sup>374</sup> By this he meant those who sympathize with Communism, which, in his mind, also included progressive Cardenistas. “Puerta Libre a La Prensa,” *El Nacional*, October 5, 1941, 6. Emphasis added.

<sup>375</sup> USNARA, Division of Foreign Affairs Department of State, Letter from U.S. embassy in Mexico to the Department of State, October 4, 1941, Decimal Files, 1940-44. RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.00 (microfilm).

coercing the media.<sup>376</sup> Instead of questioning the manner by which Maximino controlled the ministry's workers, journalists justified his tactics as part of a positive "nationalist anti-Communist campaign."<sup>377</sup>

### **Manuel Seeks the Support of Cárdenas**

Maximino eventually succeeded in becoming a new national leader and challenging Cárdenas' political influence. He was increasingly referred to as "the man behind the throne."<sup>378</sup> According to *Time Magazine*:

[A]s Minister of Communications [Maximino]...is Manuel's hatchet man, the fixer, "the man to know" in Mexican politics and finance. Yet no man ever traced any venture of Maximino's to the President's door, and certainly not to his pockets. Labor distrusts Maximino, the peasants sometimes confuse him with Manuel. The president once pointed to the grey hairs on his head and sighed: "Maximino put them there."<sup>379</sup>

President Manuel Ávila Camacho's agenda was neither left nor right, but based on conciliation and party unity. Maximino's determination to shape Manuel's administration forced Manuel to seek out Cárdenas as a counterbalance. In January 1942, three months after Maximino's appointment, Manuel named Cárdenas Commander for the Defense of the Pacific Coast. This gave Cárdenas a formal position in the government.

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<sup>376</sup> Maximino was an expert manipulating the media. He had several paid journalists and helped create a newspaper in Puebla, *El Diario de Puebla*, that he used as a vehicle to promote his interests. In addition, he was known for coercing journalists. The most infamous incident was the assassination of the head of *Avante*, José Trinidad Mata in 1939.

<sup>377</sup> "Purga de Comunistas en la Secretaría de Comunicaciones," *La Prensa*, October 14, 1941, 3.

<sup>378</sup> Comment of Juan Sánchez Navarro, a contemporary of Maximino with extensive business interests, in Enrique Krauze, *Los Sexenios: Manuel Ávila Camacho I, El General Caballero*. (México: Series México Siglo XX, Editorial Clío, 1999) (video).

<sup>379</sup> "Back to the Earth," *Time Magazine*, April 19, 1943.

Maximino did not agree with this appointment and, in an effort to discredit Cárdenas, on February 19, 1942 accused him of challenging the authority of the president because the governors of the states on the Pacific coast met in Mazatlán in a show of solidarity with Cárdenas. Maximino pointed out that these governors were publicly declaring their loyalty to Cárdenas rather than to the president. Interestingly, it has been suggested that Maximino was actually behind the organization of this meeting in order to generate controversy.<sup>380</sup> Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the leader of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), denounced Maximino's plan to undercut Cárdenas.<sup>381</sup> In the middle of all this, Governor López Padilla of the state of Nuevo León organized another meeting to bring together those governors who supported Maximino. The excuse for this gathering was to discuss the development of highways, but in reality it was an attempt by Maximino's supporters to force governors to define their positions with respect to Cárdenas and Maximino.<sup>382</sup> Manuel ignored as much as possible this confrontation and continued seeking the support of Cárdenas. In his State of the Nation address on September 1, 1942, Manuel named Cárdenas National Defense Minister, placing Cárdenas in the cabinet with Maximino.

Maximino's plan for becoming president of Mexico was at risk. In addition to the rising influence of Cárdenas in the cabinet, Maximino was losing the support of the president. Since President Cárdenas' victory against Calles, the power of the president was based on an almost total control of government appointments, the federal budget, the

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<sup>380</sup> *FDRPL*, Hopkins Papers Special Assistant to President, Box 143, "F.B.I. Reports—Mexico," p. 52.

<sup>381</sup> USNARA, Division of Foreign Affairs Department of State, Letter from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico to State Department, March 6, 1942, Decimal Files, 1940-44. RG 59, Stack Area 250, 812.00 / 31912 (microfilm).

<sup>382</sup> "Los Asuntos Nacionales," *Hoy*, March 14, 1942, 8.

legislature, and the judiciary.<sup>383</sup> Given this, it became practically indispensable for politicians to seek the support of the president if they wanted to advance their careers. Maximino appears to have been oblivious of this. He believed that he could force his candidacy instead of seeking the support of the president. His aggressive attitude caused Manuel to use Cárdenas in order to control Maximino. Instead of trying to approach the president, Maximino continued to behave like a *caudillo* by trying to strengthen his personal power in order to bend the president to his will on his road to the presidency.

### **Maximino's Use of Positions of Leadership for Personal Enrichment**

As soon as Maximino became minister, he worked to strengthen the influence of his ministry. During his tenure, SCOP became very effective in expanding electrification, telecommunications, roads, national and international air-travel and the construction of dams throughout the country, as well as the water supply and drainage systems for Mexico City. He achieved this, in part, by convincing Manuel to increase the budget for his ministry. In 1941 alone, the budget tripled from that of the previous year to 163 million pesos (\$784 million).<sup>384</sup> With this enormous budget and his energy in developing project after project, Maximino became the man to see for anyone interested in investing in Mexico's infrastructural development.

The expansion of SCOP increased opportunities for corruption. During his tenure, Maximino became known as "Mr. 6 percent," for the commission he charged to provide concessions for projects.<sup>385</sup> He also became *the* intermediary for Mexican

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<sup>383</sup> Enrique Krauze, *La Presidencia Imperial: Ascenso y caída del sistema político mexicano (1940-1996)* (Barcelona, Spain: TusQuets Editores, 1997), 45-47.

<sup>384</sup> "Notas," *Hoy*, March 21, 1942, 3.

<sup>385</sup> Stephen R. Niblo argues that he was known as "Mr. 15 Percent." In Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999), 140.

foreign investors interested in doing business in Mexico. Reporter Florence Horn, in a 1943 article for *Fortune* magazine, discussed Maximino's role in attracting between 25 and 50 million dollars in foreign investment.<sup>386</sup> This money was not always used in the public interest. She stated that "many well informed Mexicans are convinced that their government has been shy in applying drastic measures that are necessary because politicians themselves, as well as their close friends and *family*, are involved in businesses that will be affected, including speculation, building construction, or the functioning of the racetrack or a hotel."<sup>387</sup> Furthermore, according to Ms. Horn, Maximino was involved in modifying the constitution, which considered gambling illegal, so he could build a racetrack, a two million dollar investment.<sup>388</sup>

Horn also asserted that U.S. investors looking for profitable investments or business opportunities in Mexico knew that they had to cultivate Maximino to have any real chance. In addition to this, Maximino's most important business partner was the Swedish millionaire Axel Wenner-Gren, whom he had met in 1941 during his visit to the Bahamas. Wenner-Gren became part of Maximino's clientelistic network as soon as the latter became a minister.<sup>389</sup> Maximino arranged favorable concessions for Wenner-Gren, thereby reaping handsome commissions from hundreds of millions in investments.<sup>390</sup> These included road construction projects as well as the expansion of the Mexican communications and electrification infrastructure. Furthermore, Maximino arranged for

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<sup>386</sup> Florence Horn, translated from *Fortune Magazine* by *Hoy*, "México: al Año de Guerra," August 28, 1943, 38.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-42. Emphasis added.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-42. Emphasis added.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>390</sup> Pablo Marentes, "Dañina Procuración," *El Universal*, May 18, 2004, Primera Sección.

Wenner-Gren to provide millions in loans under favorable conditions to finance the unstable Mexican economy in early 1942.<sup>391</sup>

Maximino apparently did not see anything wrong with using the ministry as his personal source of wealth and power. He believed it was his implicit right to enrich himself and use the ministry as if it was his personal fiefdom in compensation for his sacrifices while fighting during the revolution, as well as his service to the party and the new political regime, a view shared by many other revolutionary officers turned politicians.

Maximino managed to present the results of his corruption as a sign of hard work and discipline rather than abuse of power. Thus, he was proud of the wealth he had created and displayed it, unafraid of making it known to the public. In an interview with *Hoy* magazine in 1943, he listed the properties and businesses he accumulated during his years as governor and minister. Among other things, he owned Mexico City's slaughterhouse, the cabaret *Circo*, dozens of buildings, a similar number of haciendas and ranches in the states of Puebla and Veracruz, and an island off the coast of Acapulco. The *Hoy* article also mentioned the rumor that Maximino "had distributed concessions to his friends, who also participate in his earnings; that [Maximino] lives like a prince and that [he] wants to be the next President of the Republic."<sup>392</sup> He denied all this. Instead, he explained that he had been born poor, and, after sacrificing for the revolution, he claimed, his wealth was the result of his skill as a businessman.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Harold Callender, "Mexico Fears Cut in Needs From U.S.," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1942, 8.

<sup>392</sup> "que ha repartido concesiones entre sus amigos, quienes a su vez le participan de sus ganancias; que vive usted como un príncipe y que quiere ser el próximo Presidente de la República." in José C. Valades, "Maximino Ávila Camacho Habla Claro y Fuerte Sobre sus Bienes," *Hoy*, May 22, 1943, 14.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-15.

Maximino's corruption reached the point of effecting Mexico's stagnating economy and the well being of Mexicans. He engaged in speculation and manipulation of prices for essential products by taking them off the market. This stimulated inflation benefiting Maximino as he brought the products back to the market selling them at higher prices.<sup>394</sup> This was especially disturbing in 1942 when the government was in the middle of a "unity for peace" campaign in which workers and peasants were asked not to demand increased salaries to meet inflation. "The index of cost of living, according to the Ministry of Economy, was rising rapidly. In March [1943] it was at 219 (based on 100 in 1934); in May it was at 247."<sup>395</sup> Rising prices and inflation only caused the effective shrinkage of salaries right at a time when Maximino's actions contributed to the rise of prices. When reports on speculative practices began to be discussed by the news media, Maximino apparently used his influence with *Hoy* magazine to implicate Minister of Economy Francisco Javier Gaxiola.<sup>396</sup> As historian Stephen R. Niblo has argued, graft was widespread in the Mexican political class of the 1940s and they often used the United States and the sacrifices of the war effort as an scapegoat.<sup>397</sup>

By 1945, at the end of his tenure, Maximino's wealth was conservatively estimated at 136 million pesos (\$655 million).<sup>398</sup> To get a sense of his fortune it is convenient to remember that in 1942 Maximino convinced Manuel to triple the budget of

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<sup>394</sup> Horn 1943, 39-42. Emphasis added.

<sup>395</sup> "El índice del costo de la vida, conforme lo confesó la propia Secretaría de la Economía, se elevaba rápidamente. En marzo estaba al 219 (base de 100, 1934); en mayo estaba al 247." In Horn 1943, 39-42.

<sup>396</sup> "Yo le Hice Ver al Presidente...", *Hoy*, July 30, 1943, 14-16.

<sup>397</sup> Niblo 1999, 130.

<sup>398</sup> Ricardo Pérez Montfort, "Tres prebostazgos en el México posrevolucionario: Luis Napoleón Morones, Maximino Ávila Camacho y Gonzalo N. Santos," *Red de Investigadores Latinoamericanos por la Democracia y la Autonomía de los Pueblos* (1999) (Online), <http://www.ufg.edu.sv/ufg/red/montfort3.html>.

SCOP to 160 million pesos. Basically, Maximino's wealth was almost as large as the ministry's budget.

### **Maximino's Use of Personal Opinion Instead of the Rule of Law**

Maximino's sense of righteousness allowed him to judge and apply punishments as he saw fit with considerable disregard for the law. For example, on October 10, 1944, Lieutenant Antonio de la Lama Rojas attacked the president by shooting at him at the National Palace. Manuel was not wounded. Lama told the president that he attacked him to express his disagreement with the abolition of the status of the military as a political organization associated with the official party. The president did not file charges and ordered his release.<sup>399</sup> Maximino disagreed, believing that an attack on the president deserved a serious punishment. He captured and questioned Lieutenant de la Lama and accused him of being a fascist. The next day, it was reported in the media, that Lama died while trying to escape.<sup>400</sup> This development of events suggests that his death was probably the result of an unofficial execution known as *Ley Fuga*—shot in the back while being forced “to escape.”

Maximino also abused his position to avoid the law in order to satisfy his role as a “Don Juan.” He reportedly had love affairs with whomever caught his eye. One of his bodyguards allegedly always carried a box with jewelry used to seduce women Maximino fancied.<sup>401</sup> He was also known for buying houses for his favorites.<sup>402</sup> Among these women was a Spanish flamenco dancer named Conchita Martínez. Maximino had

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<sup>399</sup> “Se Pretendió Asesinar al Señor Presidente,” *La Opinión*, April 11, 1944, 1.

<sup>400</sup> “Falleció Ayer el Agresor del Sr. Presidente,” *La Opinión*, April 13, 1944, 1.

<sup>401</sup> From a Conversation with Mauricio Pardo Ruiz in Puebla, México, July 7, 2005.

<sup>402</sup> “Murió el General Mexicano de los Mil Fluxes,” *La Esfera*, February 22, 1945, 1, 11.

her husband sent back to Spain after ordering his bodyguards to beat him up.<sup>403</sup> In another case, in December 1942, L. Schwerdtfeger complained to President Manuel Ávila Camacho that Maximino had exacted “a ruinous vengeance against [him].”<sup>404</sup> Schwerdtfeger alleged that Maximino had forced him out of his position as a lawyer for the state-owned railroad company. This was reportedly in retaliation for having helped his nephew, Miguel Mendoza, avoid marrying Maximino’s goddaughter after she became pregnant. Police and gunmen intimidated Mr. Mendoza while Maximino sued him for damages on behalf of his goddaughter and had him jailed.

Maximino’s disregard for the law did not end with his love affairs, but it is an indication of his belief that he was above the law. This attitude also inclined him to ignore all obstacles in his attempt to try to become president of Mexico.

### **Maximino’s Use of the Media to Promote his Personality Cult**

Maximino’s manipulation and abuse of the rule of law made him a powerful politician, admired by his allies, and feared by others. However, his possibilities for becoming president depended on changing his image from that of a ruthless *caudillo* to that of the benevolent leader who could bring order and progress to Mexico. Rumors of his authoritarian and corrupt practices could have negative effects on his presidential campaign, causing unrest among party members and the public in general. He addressed this problem via a media campaign that presented him as beloved by the masses, honored by officials, and dedicated to public service. Indeed, Maximino as Minister of SCOP appeared more often in newspapers and magazines than the president.

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<sup>403</sup> Krauze 1997, 45-47.

<sup>404</sup> AGN, Archivo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho, Exp. 703.2/330.

The media constantly portrayed Maximino as a disciplined hard worker and champion of the people. Rarely did any criticism appear in print. Instead, he was shown inaugurating schools, roads, and housing for workers—which were often named after him, his mother, or his father. The media did not fail to declare that such projects were made possible thanks to Maximino’s generosity. In January 1945 he was shown donating, with one of his associates, the American William O. Jenkins, 36,500 pesos (\$152,000) to Puebla’s Social Security Agency. In another instance, appealing to nationalist sentiments, newspapers reported his association with the beloved comedian Mario Moreno, better known as “Cantinflas,” in sponsoring a Mexican expedition to conquer the Aconcahua, the highest peak in the Americas.<sup>405</sup>

Maximino’s appearances in the media at times bore overtones of a personality cult. After three years as minister, Maximino was referred to as “the second or third ‘strongman’ of Mexican politics” (along with Cárdenas and the president).<sup>406</sup> His inauguration as minister of SCOP on October 2, 1941, and its subsequent anniversaries were celebrated with military bands, tolling bells, parades, and events all over Puebla City. His birthday celebrations were two-to-three-day affairs which included parades, dinner invitations by important organizations, inaugurations of yet more projects as well as *charreadas*.<sup>407</sup> Some newspaper and magazines covered such celebrations over several pages. Similarly, the second anniversary of the death of his mother, Doña Eufrosina, was commemorated as an official event which included the Bishop of Teziutlán, the Archbishop of Puebla, and 14 federal and state legislators. Maximino led the ceremony, not his brother Manuel.

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<sup>405</sup> “Notas,” *Hoy*, February 10, 1945, 4-5.

<sup>406</sup> Hernández and Rojas 1986, 250.

<sup>407</sup> Rodeo-like events featuring *charros* (elegant Mexican cowboys) of which Maximino was an enthusiast.

During his tenure as minister (1941-45), the media often covered his official visits as if he was a presidential candidate. For example, during an official visit to San Luis Potosí in 1942 a reporter wrote: “[A]mong hurrahs and ovations he walked on a ground practically covered with flowers and surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd. Minister Ávila Camacho crossed the grounds of the train station to encounter in a tree-lined promenade thousands more of his supporters who excitedly waited to celebrate him as the highest representative of the Federal Government.”<sup>408</sup> The reporter was not covering any political campaign, as his rhetoric suggests, but simply a trip that Maximino made to San Luis Potosí to supervise progress in the construction of a road.

Maximino’s personality-cult was particularly intense in the state of Puebla. His political associates there played an important role in organizing events and giving laudatory speeches to help create a larger-than-life Maximino. Four years after Maximino’s governorship ended, the mayor of the city of Puebla, Alfonso Meneses, still found it necessary to acknowledge Maximino’s leadership as the cause of anything good that happened there. Using flamboyant and convoluted rhetoric, he portrayed Maximino as a quasi-mythical leader responsible for Puebla’s “prosperity”.

His brow shaded with care, with effort, with dedication, with good faith, always fruitful; Señor Major General Don Maximino Ávila Camacho placed, in the fertile furrows of Puebla, the seeds of work, honesty, inter-labor unity, justice, patron-worker understanding, well-being and progress. All these grew straight and strong when our regional government was in his hands. This has been preserved, and it is still flowering, thanks to the constant attention that, for the good of our *Patria Chica*, this outstanding

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<sup>408</sup> Luis G. Olloqui Jr., *Recorriendo el nor-este. La primera visita al norte del titular de comunicaciones y obras públicas, gral. de división don Maximino Ávila Camacho* (México, DF: La Nacional Impresora, S.A., 1942), 19.

general keeps offering, turning into reality his foresighted statement that he made in his final state of the state address before the representatives of the people and who, after that, continued repeating on many more occasions these words: ‘as a revolutionary and son of the state, in any place and under any circumstance decided by destiny, I will always be ready to obey any call for the contribution of my humble persona.’<sup>409</sup>

As if this rhetoric was not enough, the government of the city of Puebla created the “Motolinia Award” to acknowledge the “civic honor” of those dedicated to the betterment of the state of Puebla. This was, as it turned out, an award custom-made for Maximino. On August 23, 1943, he received this award and was declared Puebla City’s “Beloved Son,” and his name was inscribed in gold letters on the walls of Puebla’s City Hall.<sup>410</sup>

### **Maximino’s Presidential Ambitions and Mexican Presidentialism**

After years of consolidating his power, building up his clientelistic networks, and polishing his image, Maximino expected to achieve the presidency. Using Puebla as his initial base and subsequently his cabinet post, he appeared well-positioned to achieve his goal. In Puebla, any politician aspiring to a political position required Maximino’s blessing. For example, in 1940 Maximino picked Gonzalo Bautista to replace him as governor. Bautista was unchallenged in his bid for this position. He won the election reportedly with 230,235 votes against 0 votes for his opponent, General Rubén García.<sup>411</sup>

In 1944 Maximino again picked a loyal supporter, his first SCOP undersecretary, Carlos

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<sup>409</sup> “Informe de Gobierno Rendido por el Señor Presidente,” *La Opinión*, February 16, 1944, 1.

<sup>410</sup> “El Ayuntamiento Impuso una Medalla al General Maximino Avila Camacho,” *La Opinión*, August 24, 1944, 1.

<sup>411</sup> Sergio Valencia Castrejón, *Poder regional y política nacional en México: el gobierno de Maximino Ávila Camacho en Puebla (1937-1941)* (México: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1996), 155.

I. Betancourt, as next governor of Puebla. Before launching his campaign, Betancourt made a trip to Puebla as Maximino's special envoy bringing a message of mutual cooperation between Maximino and the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM).<sup>412</sup> This was a clear message from Maximino to union leaders to support Betancourt. When Betancourt launched his candidacy four months later, he was unanimously declared the sole candidate at the official party's convention. He was easily elected on July 1, 1944, as there was no other candidate.<sup>413</sup>

Wielding such power in the state of Puebla, Maximino expected to do the same at the national level and succeed his brother Manuel in the presidency. He did not seem to remember that in 1938 he rejected the possibility of having his brother Rafael replace him as governor because, he had declared, "under no circumstances would I commit the absurdity of having a brother of mine replace me as governor of Puebla, because [my government is] not a dynasty."<sup>414</sup> Apparently, Manuel shared some of these sentiments and refused to support Maximino as the party's candidate in 1945.

What Maximino failed to realize was that while he succeeded in taking over the Ministry of Communications and Public Works, there were limits to the amount of power the president and party elites would allow him to acquire. Manuel, for example, permitted him some personal gain, but he would not allow Maximino to dominate the party, nor the office of the presidency. Furthermore, members of the party elite considered Maximino's candidacy for the presidency a threat to their own power as he

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<sup>412</sup> "Discurso del Ingeniero Carlos I. Betancourt," *La Opinión*, January 8, 1944, 1 and "Muy Concurrido Mitin Electoral en Atlixco a Favor de Betancourt," *La Opinión*, January 17, 1944, 1.

<sup>413</sup> "Betancourt fue Declarado Ayer Candidato Único para Gobernador," *La Opinión*, April 24, 1944, 1 and "Fue Electo el Nuevo Gobierno del Estado," *La Opinión*, July 2, 1944, 1.

<sup>414</sup> "por ningún motivo cometería el absurdo de que me sucediera en el puesto de Gobernador un hermano mío," in *Últimas Noticias*, December 5, 1938, 1.

was considered too authoritarian to allow the continuation of the party as a source of political consensus, so they were determined to stop him. By 1945, Maximino discovered that he could not impose his will either on the president or the party elite. Apart from appearing nepotistic, Manuel apparently felt that Maximino was too authoritarian, too explosive, and too divisive to be the candidate of the party the former had worked so hard to keep together. To Maximino's chagrin, Manuel was determined to use the power of the presidency to keep Maximino from becoming the official candidate.

To make matters worse, while trying to pick a candidate, Manuel sought the advice of Cárdenas. Manuel and Cárdenas opted for Miguel Alemán, Manuel's Minister of Gobernación.<sup>415</sup> As Manuel's right hand in the Cabinet, Alemán was perceived as the leader who could best continue Manuel's policies and maintain party unity.

There could not have been a worse choice for Maximino. He had had personal quarrels with Alemán ever since they both were governors (of Puebla and Veracruz, respectively). At one point, as governor, Maximino had felt no need to let Governor Alemán know that he was intervening in peasant and labor disputes in the state of Veracruz. When Alemán's complained, Maximino was annoyed. In addition, Alemán, as Minister of Gobernación, was the titular head of the Cabinet, Maximino's superior, and the intermediary between him and Manuel. Most likely Maximino, "the man behind the throne," found Alemán's authority an impediment to the exercise of his influence over the president. In any event, he let Manuel know that he swore "by their mother's milk" to kill Alemán if Manuel dared make Alemán the official candidate.<sup>416</sup>

As he had been able to wrest SCOP from Manuel's appointee, Maximino

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<sup>415</sup> The U.S. equivalent to Mexico's *Ministro de Gobernación* is the White House Chief of Staff combined with the Secretary of the Interior.

<sup>416</sup> Santos 1984, 833.

expected to do the same with the presidency. Manuel, however, was determined to use all the influence of the presidential office to block his brother's candidacy. In early 1945, he confessed to his adviser, Gonzalo N. Santos that Maximino was "not only my brother, he is my father, but when one is responsible for such an important position as the presidency of the republic you have the obligation to acknowledge the defects of your own father."<sup>417</sup> Manuel prepared to name Alemán as the PRM's candidate in late February 1945.

Maximino, realizing the he would not receive his brother's endorsement, decided to outsmart him. If he would not be declared the candidate, he would make sure that neither would Alemán. He began encouraging the candidacy of Javier Rojo Gómez, Regent of Mexico City. Rojo Gómez was a respected politician who was not considered among Maximino's anti-Cardenista supporters. Politicians on both sides of the party's political spectrum admired him for his administering of the city's government. In addition, as regent, Rojo Gómez had a limited political base and hence would owe his candidacy largely to Maximino. This way, Maximino was expecting to continue to be "the man behind the presidential throne."

As he had done with his appointment as the head of SCOP, Maximino tried to manipulate his brother by controlling public opinion and daring Manuel to expose him. He planned to announce Rojo Gómez's candidacy before Manuel made public his choice. Maximino chose to do this on February 18, 1945 in Teziutlán, his hometown.<sup>418</sup> For the event, he invited major personalities including Ezequiel Padilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gustavo Baz, Minister of Health, and "Cantinflas," the celebrated Mexican

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 828.

<sup>418</sup> Hernández and Rojas 1986, 249.

comedian and leader of the Union of Cinema Production Workers (STPC). Maximino expected that these personalities would help him increase pressure on Manuel to declare Rojo Gómez the official candidate.

While on his way to Teziutlán, Maximino scheduled a stop the day before in Atlixco, Puebla. There he was going to demonstrate his influence over mass organizations by bringing together the Revolutionary Federation of Workers and Peasants (FROC) and the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM). Atlixco was famous for its years of bloody encounters between these two confederations and Maximino lauded himself on being able to control them. Having both groups demonstrating side by side their support for him would be an impressive political achievement. Observers of this event thought that such an impressive demonstration of power could only mean that Maximino was planning to announce his own candidacy.<sup>419</sup>

Maximino's visit to Atlixco included a ceremony declaring him "Atlixco's Most Beloved Son;" a visit to a hospital for the *La Concepción* textile factory; and the inauguration of a school for workers at the *Metepéc* textile factory. After that he would leave for Teziutlán.

The day started as planned. Maximino visited Atlixco's City Hall and unveiled a plaque with his name in gold letters while speeches were made celebrating his contributions as governor and minister. He made a speech, from the City Hall balcony calling for workers' unity for the good of Mexico. During the ceremonies he appeared visibly tired and weak. On their way from City Hall to *La Concepción* he held on to Governor Betancourt's arm as he walked to a car. As they arrived at *La Concepción* hospital he had chest pains and asked to rest. He was taken to a room and ordered his

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<sup>419</sup> "Últimos Minutos de Su Existencia," *El Sol*, February 18, 1945, 1.

entourage to go ahead to the school at *Metepéc*, planning to join them later. However, feeling worse, he asked to be taken home to the city of Puebla. The mayor of Atlixco, Antonio Arellano Garrido and the doctors, Ricardo Campillo Bueno and José Larumbe, accompanied him to his Puebla residence at 22 Oriente 1606. According to a report:

Upon arriving at his house, Maximino went in on his own feet. He went directly to the bathroom to wash his mouth, because in the factory *La Concepción* he had eaten a little snack. Feeling exhausted, he went to his bedroom where he laid back to rest for a brief time. As his illness worsened he urgently asked his assistant Francisco Arriaga to call his doctors Larumbe and Campillo to his chamber....[As Arriaga] stepped out of the bedroom he heard the voice of General Maximino Avila Camacho...in the middle of the death rattles...yelling: Arriaga! Arriaga! As he came back into the bedroom, he found General Maximino Avila Camacho dead.<sup>420</sup>

It was 5:55 PM on February 17, 1945. He was 53 years old.<sup>421</sup>

Many suspected foul play by Alemán. It was rumored then and still believed today by some that Maximino's death occurred "under circumstances that have not been completely discerned."<sup>422</sup> Those familiar with Alemán's political career might have expected this. He had become Governor of Veracruz after Governor Manlio Fabio Altamirano was assassinated in 1936. It was also rumored that 45 of Alemán's political enemies had been "liquidated" as a result of his direct orders.<sup>423</sup> Does this mean that Alemán ordered Maximino's assassination? Probably not. The suspicion of foul play was not shared by those closest to Maximino including his brother Manuel. As Alemán's

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>421</sup> For descriptions regarding Maximino's death see: *El Sol*, February 18, 19, 22 and 28, 1945; *Hoy*, February 24, 1945; *La Opinión*, February 26, 1945.

<sup>422</sup> Krauze 1999 (video).

<sup>423</sup> *FDRPL*, Hopkins Papers Special Assitant to President Box 143, "F.B.I. Reports-Mexico, 59.

chief supporter, Manuel did not want Maximino to become president, but it is highly unlikely that Manuel would have supported the assassination of his own brother.

Maximino's death certificate cited death as a result of a heart attack, which did not surprise those close to him given a history of heart trouble. Such problems had affected not only Maximino, but also his brother Manuel, who had suffered one heart attack during his presidential campaign and two during his presidency. Like Maximino, he also died at a young age in 1955.<sup>424</sup> In addition, Maximino had shown signs of poor health for years. During his April-May 1941 tour of the U.S. it was reported that he visited Baltimore's Johns Hopkins Hospital for a checkup due to poor health.<sup>425</sup> Manuel, while trying to dissuade Maximino from running for the presidency in 1945, had asked his envoy Gonzalo N. Santos to be careful not to upset his brother because he was sick.<sup>426</sup> Moreover, during the three months before his death Maximino was forced by doctors to take time off and he rested at his home in Acapulco in late October 1944.<sup>427</sup> A couple of months before his death, he was also forced to suspend a tour to assess hurricane damages in Yucatán.<sup>428</sup> Around that time, Doctor Galván had recommended that Maximino prepare his will in case of "an eventuality."<sup>429</sup> In fact, doctors did not want Maximino to travel to Puebla the day he died, but due to the political importance of the trip, Maximino disobeyed his doctors.<sup>430</sup>

The news of Maximino's death was received with mixed feelings. Most Mexican newspapers regarded Maximino's death as an irreparable loss. He was portrayed as a

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<sup>424</sup> Krauze 1997, 48.

<sup>425</sup> "Mexican General Visits White House for a Talk," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1941, 19.

<sup>426</sup> Santos 1984, 828.

<sup>427</sup> "Don Maximino está Muy Mejorado," *La Opinión*, October 28, 1944, 1.

<sup>428</sup> "Aplaza su Jira el Secretario de Comunicaciones," *El Universal*, October 20, 1944, 1.

<sup>429</sup> *Hoy*, February 24, 1945, 6.

<sup>430</sup> Hernández and Rojas 1986, 249.

beloved leader who would be sorely missed. Some of the media abroad was less sympathetic. *Time Magazine* reported that “[t]he death of the aggressively ambitious one time cowhand, bullfighter and revolutionary left few sincere mourners among his countrymen.”<sup>431</sup> And, in Venezuela, the newspaper *La Esfera* referred to Maximino in its obituary as a flamboyant “macho,” a womanizer and an eccentric gangster who owned two thousand suits.<sup>432</sup>

In retrospect, in spite of Maximino’s ability to sometimes impose his will at the national level, there were limits as indicated by his failure to obtain the party’s endorsement for the presidency, first in 1939 and again in 1945. Once President Cárdenas and later his brother, Manuel Ávila Camacho, decided to stop him, Maximino found himself stymied. His sudden death makes it impossible to know what would have been the outcome of his support for Rojo Gómez, but the limits to his capacity to control the presidency were demonstrated by his double failure to become the party’s candidate or impose his own selection.

Miguel Alemán would eventually be elected president of Mexico in 1946. While Maximino distinguished himself due to his aggressive and flamboyant personality, a more subtle Alemán did not necessarily mean a less authoritarian or corrupt presidency. As historian Stephen R. Niblo has argued: “President Alemán’s reputation for corruption was legendary...even while he was in office. Indeed, a casual reading of the press of the period amazes the reader. Whatever part of the country the president was visiting, he regularly retired to one of his haciendas on weekends. Even before becoming president

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<sup>431</sup> “Obituaries,” *Time Magazine*, February 26, 1945.

<sup>432</sup> “Murió el General Mexicano de los Mil Fluxes,” *La Esfera*, February 22, 1945, 1, 11.

he had accumulated considerable property in Veracruz.”<sup>433</sup> This suggests that the desire of the party to block Maximino’s presidential candidacy was not based on his corruption and aggressive tactics. Alemán was as corrupt and violent as Maximino. Rather the fact that Maximino was determined to impose his candidacy was a red signal to a party elite determined to secure their own domination of a one-party state.

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<sup>433</sup> Niblo 1999, 290.

## CONCLUSION

On February 27, 1945, only ten days after his death, one of the most important streets in Puebla, “Avenida Ayuntamiento,” was renamed “Avenida General Maximino Ávila Camacho.” The street starts in front of Puebla’s Palace of Government (City Hall) symbolically representing Puebla’s center of power.

The naming of this street after Maximino was an official recognition not only of the ex-governor’s impact on Puebla, but also suggests that his political legacy was expected to remain strong. This event was an opportunity for those in Puebla’s political elite who had been allied with Maximino to keep his networks alive and benefit from them. Attending the ceremony were the members of Maximino’s inner circle: Puebla’s governor, Carlos I. Betancourt (1945-51), the city’s mayor, Antonio Arellano Garrido (1945-48), José García Valseca, director of the newspaper *El Sol* (formerly *Diario de Puebla*), as well as would-be Puebla mayors and governors and members of business, labor and peasant organizations. They stood in front of a large crowd listening to the customary laudatory speeches honoring their leader before unveiling a plaque in honor of the late general.<sup>434</sup> Outsiders, including representative of the federal government, and his brother, President Manuel Ávila Camacho, were absent in this ceremony.<sup>435</sup> Puebla was principally Maximino’s bailiwick. *Maximinismo* continued to dominate Puebla for several decades after his death.

Maximino’s legacy allowed the official party to maintain the clientelistic networks that he established. Mutual support continued between the federal government

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<sup>434</sup> “Honor Póstumo al General Maximino Avila Camacho,” *El Sol*, February 28, 1945, 1-3.

<sup>435</sup> For information regarding the continuity and eventual decline of Maximino’s political machine, see Wil G. Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla: Formación y ocaso del cacicazgo avilacamachista, 1937-1987* (Puebla, México: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1998).

and local authorities as long as Maximino's cronies were able to sustain his clientelistic network. However, at some point in the late 1960s the political legacy of this *caudillo* waned. Important elements of his networks, especially conservative ones, such as the Spanish community, the local Catholic hierarchy and the local members of the Confederation of Employers of the Mexican Republic (COPARMEX) were growing impatient with the authoritarian ways of a political leadership that did not offer much by way of economic or political benefits. Some of the last Maximinista governors, especially Antonio Nava Castillo (1965-1966), Rafael Moreno Valle (1969-1973) and Gonzalo Bautista O'Farril (1973),<sup>436</sup> increasingly resolved political problems by emphasizing coercion over co-optation. The last straw was Governor Bautista O'Farril's statement following the killing of four students by authorities during an anti-government student rally give date. "We will control all subversive and vandalistic acts with bullets," he declared.<sup>437</sup> He then acknowledged that anti-riot police had been instructed to shoot until "order and guarantees" were established for the citizenry. Dissatisfaction reached new heights and the party promptly replaced the governor with Guillermo Morales Blumenkron (1973-1975), an outsider to Maxiministas. This did not necessarily mean that the party disapproved the governor's use of violence. Rather, replacing the governor allowed the party to save some face by putting in place a politician acceptable to disaffected regional elites. The official party understood the importance of balancing coercion with co-optation in order to maintain political support.

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<sup>436</sup> The son of Gonzalo Bautista, Maximino's first successor as governor.

<sup>437</sup> "Controlaremos todos los actos de subversión y vandálicos con tiros, si tiros son los que se lanzan por los grupos de choque hasta instaurar el orden y las garantías a la ciudadanía en general," "David Carrizales, "Proponen la Comparecencia de Bautista O'Farril ante la FEMOSP," *La Jornada*, October 10, 2003.

The official party's reliance on Maxiministas from the 1940s into the 1970s ensured the continuance of abuses of power and corrupt practices that often characterized the seventy-one years of the PRI dominated state. Some Mexican presidents used similar tactics. President Miguel Alemán (1946-52) co-opted and coerced peasants and worker leaders in the service of the party. For example, he used comparable tactics to promote a split between Fidel Velázquez and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the main leaders of the largest confederation of workers in Mexico (CTM). President Alemán's support permitted Fidel Velázquez to consolidate his position as the sole leader of the CTM. Toledano, for his part, was marginalized and slowly fell into oblivion. CTM leader Fidel Velázquez notably declared: "No worker who was a member of the CTM could be part of any party but the PRI."<sup>438</sup> He preserved the relationship between the union and the party until his death in 1997.

President Alemán also allowed personal economic interests to influence his presidency. He invited business associates to work on government contracts receiving kickbacks on contracts to develop Mexico's infrastructure. His cronies were called "*tranprontistas*" because they had "so quickly" made their fortunes.<sup>439</sup> Perhaps the most obvious of his schemes was the development of Acapulco as his personal tourist emporium.

The survival of elements of *caudillismo* helped maintain a culture of abuse of power and impunity. Perhaps the most infamous case was the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco in Mexico City. On October 2nd the military and police allegedly killed hundreds of students and others in an attempt to stop their protests against

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 573.

<sup>439</sup> Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1997), 556.

authoritarianism from gaining further momentum. Only recently has the government investigations begun to establish the facts. In 1968 public opinion singled out the Minister of Gobernación, Luis Echeverría Álvarez as responsible. Instead of requesting an investigation President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's (1964-1970) rewarded Echeverría Álvarez by selecting him to replace him as president. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that President Díaz Ordaz, trained in the art of politics by Maximino, would do so.<sup>440</sup>

The consolidation of the revolutionary party and elite did require the occasional elimination of *caudillos* tempted to use their personal power against the party. As late as 1988, for example, Joaquín Hernández Galicia ("La Quina"), Secretary General of the union of the state owned oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX), challenged the candidacy of the official party's presidential candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Leading a 200,000-strong union, "La Quina" believed himself capable of challenging the party by throwing his support to the Party of the Democratic Revolution's (PRD) candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the former president. However, the PRI was still capable of determining the outcome of elections and Salinas was declared the winner after the vote was stopped in mid-count. As soon as Salinas became president (1988-1994) he retaliated. He accused "La Quina" of illegal possession of arms, sent the army to raid his fortified house, and sent him to prison.<sup>441</sup>

Corrupt and authoritarian politicians are common and can be found in practically any country in the world and are not limited to *caudillos*. There are bureaucrats, among others, who abuse the power of their offices. *Caudillo*-type politicians' abuse of power is

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<sup>440</sup> President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz' political career had begun when Maximino appointed him Puebla's Minister of Labor in 1937.

<sup>441</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Strikes Wane at Mexico Oil Sites; Union Leader Faces New Charges," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1989, A2.

more broadly based on their position as charismatic leaders heading clientelistic regional networks often rooted in the use of co-optation and coercion. In the case of Mexico in the twentieth century their power was frequently reinforced by their mutually supportive association with the official party. Understood this way, the modern *caudillo* can be part of a political elite intent on modernizing the state, as well as the nation.

The economic crisis of the 1980s and the ongoing abuse of power, together with rampant corruption, increased the public's, and some influential sectors', distrust of the PRI and its leadership. The party began losing its capacity to control key interest groups making it more difficult to impose its authority. Finally, it lost the presidential election in 2000. However, examples of caudillistic practices continue to affect the democratizing process in Mexico. In the 2004 regional elections, for example, two victorious candidates from the PRI utilized corrupt and coercive practices to reclaim their regions on behalf of the party. Jorge Hank Ron was elected mayor of Tijuana and Ulises Ruiz governor of Oaxaca. Both used personal networks linked to the PRI to co-opt and coerce various interest groups in order to win their elections. Hank Ron is son of Carlos Hank Gonzalez, considered in the 1970s and 1980s the PRI's "godfather."<sup>442</sup> Ulises Ruiz was closely associated with Roberto Madrazo, the president of the PRI between 2002 and 2005.<sup>443</sup>

From 1929 to 2000 the "taming" of regional *caudillos*, rather than their elimination, helped guarantee continuity in government and political stability in Mexico. Indeed *caudillo*-type politicians still exist in Mexico. It remains to be seen how their authoritarian practices evolve now that the PRI is a skeleton of its former self and

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<sup>442</sup> Jaime Puebla, "Mexico Ex-Ruling Party Claims Two Races," *USA Today*, August 2nd, 2004.

<sup>443</sup> José María Álvarez, "Thousand March Against Oaxaca Governor," *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2007.

institutions, including democratic ones, are becoming stronger and increasingly independent of presidential control.

But, today what is Maximino's legacy? The legacy of a *caudillo* depended on his capacity, or that of his heirs, to sustain his clientelistic networks in close cooperation with the party. After the collapse of the Maxiministas in 1973, Maximino's legacy became more symbolic than real. The last symbol of his accomplishments appeared to be only the plaque which gave his name to that street in downtown Puebla. This last symbol was lost when the PRI lost its domination of Puebla politics in the mid-1990s. In 1996, the candidate of the National Action Party (PAN), Gabriel Hinojosa, defeated the PRI in that year's mayoral election. Almost as soon as he became mayor, Hinojosa unceremoniously renamed the street "Avenida Juan de Palafox y Mendoza," after a seventeenth century viceroy. Ironically, it was an important sector of Puebla's elite under the banner of the PAN, which had been an important support for Maximino that provided the last blow to Maximino's legacy. Today if Maximino Ávila Camacho is remembered at all in Puebla, it is largely as a corrupt and authoritarian politician whose excesses were extreme and whose dreams of the presidency were never realized. That he represented a new type of *caudillo* who helped in the process of consolidating the political regime that dominated Mexico for over seventy years is rarely realized. Such is the fate of Puebla's most extraordinary *caudillo* and one of Mexico's most memorable politicians of the twentieth century.

## GLOSSARY

<b>CNC</b>	Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Peasants' Confederation)
<b>COPARMEX</b>	Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana (Confederation of Employers of the Mexican Republic)
<b>CROM</b>	Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (Mexican Regional Labor Confederation)
<b>CTM</b>	Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican Workers)
<b>FROC</b>	Federación Regional de Obreros y Campesinos (Regional Federation of Workers and Peasants)
<b>LCAEV</b>	Liga de Comunidades Agrarias del Estado de Veracruz (League of Agrarian Communities from the State of Veracruz)
<b>PAN</b>	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
<b>PNR</b>	Partido Nacional Revolucionario (Revolutionary National Party)
<b>PRD</b>	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution)
<b>PRI</b>	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
<b>PRM</b>	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution)
<b>PRST</b>	Partido Radical Socialista de Tabasco (Radical Socialist Party of Tabasco)
<b>PSS</b>	Partido Socialista del Sureste (Socialist Party of the Southeast)
<b>PSTF</b>	Partido Socialista de la Frontera de Tamaulipas (Tamaulipas Border Socialist Party)
<b>SCOP</b>	Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas (Ministry of Communications and Public Works)
<b>SNTE</b>	Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación (National Education Workers' Union)
<b>STFRM</b>	Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana (The Union of Railroad Worker of the Mexican Republic)
<b>STPC</b>	Sindicato de Trabajadores de Producción Cinematográfica (Union of Cinema Production Workers)

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