

**MEXICAN UNION REVITALIZATION IN THE FACE OF DUAL TRANSITIONS:
ADAPTING TO A NEW CONTEXT WITH OLD LABOR LAWS**

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ABSTRACT

Starting in 1982 Mexico embarked on an economic transition that shifted the Mexican market to export-based development. In 2000, as this model was becoming firmly entrenched, Mexico experienced a democratization process. This paper explores and maps the responses and adaptations of labor unions and confederations in Mexico in the face of the country's dual transitions. It employs concepts from the union revitalization literature of the Global North, uses Bensusán's (2004) typology of unions in Mexico, and draws on data from union literature and interviews with union leaders. By employing the concept of the servicing model of unionism, I describe how the previous political exchange between the state and labor unions can be understood as a "corporatist servicing model." The economic transition disrupted the corporatist servicing model, but unions did not engage in revitalization processes due to the combined weakness of their organizations and strength of the government. In the face of the political transition, however, some unions have surprised observers by expanding their use of revitalization tactics. Some unions in the new democratic context are expanding their autonomy and becoming more responsive to union members. Despite this movement toward more responsible, authentic unionism, these unions still refrain from a full, transformative revitalization project. In most cases the government's repressive powers still limit the ability of labor organizations to sustain strong critique of employers or the government. While democracy has allowed some unions to implement revitalization tactics, the political and economic atmosphere continues to limit many unions' desire to implement transformative revitalization projects. Unions' ability to fundamentally revitalize, or to alter their strategy beyond autonomous cooperation with employers, continues to be impeded by the remaining repressive power of the government. This context allows union leaders to use revitalization tactics to

reinforce their positions without fully transforming the union. Thus we see union leaders using revitalization tactics for purposes that are antithetical to the true purpose of union revitalization.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph C. Bazler earned a Bachelor of Arts in History and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics in 2007 from Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. He earned a Master of Arts in the Social Sciences, with a concentration in History, in 2009 from the University of Chicago.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFE	Comisión Federal de Electricidad
CNTE	Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación
CROC	Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos
CROM	Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM).
CT	Congreso de Trabajo
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México
FAT	Frente Auténtico del Trabajo
FESEBS	Federación de Sindicatos de Empresas de Bienes y Servicios
ISI	Import Substitution Industrialization
JCA	Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje
LFC	Luz y Fuerza del Centro
LFT	Ley Federal de Trabajo (1931)
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional
PANAL	Partido Nueva Alianza
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana
SME	Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas
SNTE	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación
SNTMMSRM	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana
STFRM	Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana
STPRM	Sindicato de Trabajadores Petroleros de la República Mexicana
STRM	Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana
SUTERM	Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana
SUTIN	Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Industria Nuclear
TELMEX	Teléfonos de México
UNT	Unión Nacional de Trabajadores de México

Introduction

Union revitalization is an important focus of the contemporary American labor movement. The revitalization strategy was conceived in the United States and in other areas of the Global North as a response to the decline of unions in the face of employer opposition, weakening political strength, and the changing world economy (Hurd 1998). These new challenges to unions brought about the deterioration of the American “servicing model” of unionism, a model where unions adopted a narrow, conservative strategy focused on administering contracts and offering services to members. This model of unionism was founded on the presumption that unions would not face major threats to their existence. When changing fortunes and attitudes did threaten unions’ organizational survival, American unions began adapting and evolving, a process generally known as revitalization. Similar challenges to unions’ organizational survival have occurred in other countries.

Generally the prerequisites for union revitalization exist in many countries: weakened labor movements, strong employers, and the rupture of some sort of historical “servicing model.” However, in each national context, that country’s historical trajectory and legal and institutional structures affect the adoption of the revitalization model in important ways. Mexico’s economic transition initiated a challenge to unionism during the 1980s. Up until this transition, the dominant political party and labor unions maintained what I term the “corporatist servicing model,” a stable set of political relations and exchanges that ensured relative peace and prosperity for unions and the state. During this transition the corporatist servicing model was upended by the Mexican government’s abandonment of a state-led economy and transformation of the country into a market-export economy (Middlebrook 1995: 255-257; Samstad 2002: 5-6). Yet despite the government’s desertion of the corporatist servicing model, state-allied corporatist

unions continued to subordinate themselves to the government, hoping to salvage their traditional servicing model (Burgess 2004). Indeed, even unions previously un-allied with the government joined the attempt to revive aspects of the corporatist model (Murillo 2001). The second threat to the remaining elements of the corporatist servicing model occurred in 2000. That year Mexico underwent a democratization process, as an opposition party won a presidential election for the first time in 71 years. Theoretically the democratic transition could have largely ended corporatist relations between the government, political parties, and unions. But the continuing strength of corporatist labor law suggested that labor unions would largely not change their strategy in the face of the political transition (Bensusán and Cook 2003). In many cases unions did continue their historical strategies, with minor changes, but surprisingly some unions began to alter their strategies and adopt revitalization tactics.

Facing the government's unwillingness to soften the neoliberal blow in the 1980s, why did the economic transition not result in a larger rejection of a corporatist servicing model? The answer lies in the remnants of the old corporatist system and the government's ability to repress unions. What determined union strategies after the political transition, prompting some unions to adopt revitalization tactics while others continued on as they had before? Here the story gets more complicated: while the labor law institutions shape the unions, the unions still have an important ability to change their own strategies; union strategies, as Turner (2007) argues, still matter.

Understanding the theory of union revitalization and the organizational tactics involved therein can help one identify important facets of union strategies, but they do not tell the whole story. During the adoption of neoliberal economic policies, unions were cowed by successive governments that were both willing and able to repress overly militant opponents to the

economic project. After the political transition unions had less to fear from government repression, but still had to navigate the difficult waters of an undemocratic set of labor laws and institutions. I argue that union revitalization tactics can be used in ways seemingly antithetical to the underpinnings of revitalization; these tactics can help unions adapt to a changing context without demanding that leadership truly become more responsive to members. Adoption of these revitalization tactics has been driven by union leaders' dwindling ability to access state resources. But the adoption of union revitalization has also been affected by the government's willingness to crush unions that are overly militant.

Methodology

In an effort to understand the shifting tactics of Mexican unions, I survey the strategies and tactics of three union confederations and four unions. The four confederations include: the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM); the Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (CROC); and the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM). I also briefly address the experience of the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores de México (UNT). The unions researched include the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE); the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (STRM, or telefonistas); the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana (SNTMMSRM, or "mineros");¹ and the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (SME, or electricistas).

Using the revitalization literature as a frame for this research, I will review the revitalization efforts of these unions along four themes: the use of a social justice frame, organizing new demographics, mobilization, and the creation of coalitions with civil society

¹ For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the SNTMMSRM hereafter as the "mineros." Though not the official name of the union, this shorthand is often employed by scholars and unionists alike thanks to the mineros difficult and long official name and acronym.

organizations. First, I will study how some unions are reframing their demands as issues of social justice. Relatedly, I will also explore the extent to which unions are expanding their engagement with broader social issues, such as environmental issues. Second, we shall see the ways these unions are attempting to organize and include workers outside of traditional union demographics. In the US and Global North nontraditional demographics often refer to women, younger workers, non-white employees, and/or immigrant workers; in Mexico the most prominent under-unionized groups are women and younger workers. Third, I will discuss the role mobilization has played in union revitalization in Mexico. Finally, I will explore the extent to which unions are building cross-issue coalitions with other groups in civil society. The unions in this study have differing starting points with regard to these tactics; the SME and STRM have implemented tactics like this in the past, while the CROC, CROM, SNTE, and mineros have generally not relied on these tactics.

For this paper I have drawn on a total of six interviews with members of leadership and experts on these unions and confederations in Mexico City. In the summer of 2012 I completed interviews with leadership from the CROM, CROC, and the STRM. I spoke to a past leader and current adviser to the leadership of the SME, and I also interviewed an academic authority on the SNTE. In addition I have accessed and used a large number of union publications and newspaper sources to track the practices of the unions in recent years.

Organization of the Study

After a quick discussion of union resources I will proceed to lay out the historical creation of the corporatist system in Mexico. These sections will be followed by a more detailed introduction of the unions in the study, and a review of the literature on union revitalization in the US context. After that I will address the economic transition of the 1980s and unions'

responses to this transition. Next there will be a discussion of the political transition and union responses to this transition. Finally I will have a discussion section that will address the significance of union revitalization in Mexico, followed by concluding remarks.

Union Power Resources: Societal versus State

Like many organizations, unions rely on power resources in order to affect the world around them. Locating a union's power resources allows scholars to understand the strength and viability of a union, but also gives us a view of a union's organizational identity. That is to say, defining power resources is an important way to help scholars define a union. This is especially true in the Mexican case, where a union's choice of power resources influences the union's entire overarching strategy, both internally and externally. Before we turn to the Mexican context, then, it is important to examine the concept of power resources as a foundation for later discussion.

In the case of unions, organizational resources tend to be defined rather broadly. Scholars identify money and/or other physical property that can be directly defined in monetary terms as union power resources, but they also note the importance of resources like "internal solidarity" and cohesive group identity, strong networks with other civil society groups, and narrative resources (Levesque and Murray 2010: 338-340). These latter types of resources define a union's capability to actively engage in organizing, bargaining, and political maneuvering, but have no calculable monetary value. Yet these non-monetary resources are increasingly being recognized as necessary to the labor movement. As many have described, the historical foundations of labor movements around the world are shifting, and old sources of power are no longer accessible to unions (Fantasia and Voss 2004: 122-125; Levesque and Murray 2010: 334). In this new context, union power is increasingly being defined not only by its fiscal strength, but also by the capacities and abilities of union members (Levesque and

Murray 2010: 336). More recent conceptions of union power, especially in revitalized unions, now demand that workers be more actively included in workings of their unions. Members in a union are expected to mobilize and organize, politick and police their collective bargaining agreements, and generally seek greater engagement and action from their fellow members (Milkman and Voss 2004: 7).

In the case of Mexico, scholars have placed an important amount of emphasis on identifying the source of union power resources. Mexican unions have historically sought power resources in one of two general arenas: the society at large (“societal” resources), and the state (“state” resources) (Bensusán 2004: 242). Though these terms are relatively straightforward, it is important to realize that in the Mexican context each type of resources comes with some normative underpinnings. These underpinnings derive mainly from the historical experience of unionism in a state-corporatist political system dominated by a single, hegemonic party. With the advent of electoral competition and democratization, however, state and societal resources, and strategies for gaining them, must be understood with greater nuance.

Societal resources are gathered through collective bargaining with employers, engagement with union members, and also strikes and mobilizations (Bensusán 2004: 243-44). In most political systems these sorts of resources come from a union’s internal structures and the strength and loyalty of members, not from national political strategies. In the Global North, a union’s political influence may be able to gain some societal benefits (specifically with regards to the creation of closed shops and automatic payment of members’ dues), but in the end such political maneuverings can rarely create the sort of member buy-in that would result in successful mobilizations or work stoppages. In Mexico, however, provisions in labor law have historically given union leaders the power to coerce members to remain in the unions (La Botz

1992), and could theoretically be used to pressure workers into participating in union activities.² Despite the coercive power labor law gives to union leaders, Mexican unions cannot expect to build true societal resources – internal strength, member engagement, or worker loyalty – through political maneuvering. Union leaders who do not authentically involve members in their organizations will likely find it hard to mobilize anything more than sporadic and infrequent mobilizations. While union democracy is not necessarily a prerequisite for gaining societal resources from rank and file members, societal resources can only really be cultivated by a union that is responsive to worker demands (Tillman and Cummings 1999: 268-269). In this way societal resources are generally given positive normative undertones. A union that develops its societal bases of power is obviously attempting to remain faithful to the best interests of their workers. That is to say, societal resources are gained when unions are doing what most believe a union ought to do.

State resources originate from the government and come in many forms. State resources can come in the form of direct subsidies to union activities or they may be infrastructural resources (i.e. buildings, vehicles, etc.). State resources could also simply be broadly defined political power, which usually comes in the form of elected office or official government appointment, influence on choosing electoral candidates, and other resources that allow a union to influence legislation. For most of the twentieth century state resources were gained by unions collaborating with the corporatist government in Mexico (Bensusán 2004: 242). The corporatist system will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, but for now it is important to know that the government had an extraordinary influence on industrial relations, and that in addition to

² In general many admit national voting occurred in this manner, whereby a worker was given instruction on who to vote for, while their job was implicitly threatened if they didn't do as they were told. La Botz (1992: 33-37) notes that most of the time corrupt union leaders simply ignored the workers most of the time, only taking the trouble to weed out dissidents.

this influence, political elites desired the devotion and cooperation of the labor movement (Middlebrook 1995: 30). Political elites offered union leaders state resources in return for the cooperation of union leaders, but more often did so in order to gain the complicity of these leaders at times when the government imposed policies that harmed workers. While these resources were sometimes directed toward the rank and file, they almost always improved the personal power and wealth of union leaders, either directly or indirectly. Thus state resources became associated not only with political maneuvering, but also with political maneuverings that often sacrificed workers' best interests for the sake of increasing their leaders' personal standing.

Though the strategies of gaining societal resources are fairly straightforward, gaining state resources is trickier to define. The most popular narrative is that state resources come from a union either fully subordinating itself to the Mexican government, or at least bargaining with the government some exchange between the union and government; often the latter also results in what seems to be some style of subordination of union militancy, work demands, etc. (Bensusán 2004; Burgess 2004; Murillo 2001: 117-119). However, industry location in the economy and economic model also provide unions with "structural" power that allows them to access state resources. That is to say, a union that organizes a strategically important industry has greater bargaining leverage over the government (Wright 2000: 962). Before Mexico's economic transition in the 1980s, industry location played a major role in a union's ability to gain state resources; however, this power proved to be a double-edged sword, as militant unions in strategic sectors often became the target of harsh repression (Middlebrook 1995: chapter 4). After the economic transition the strategic value of these industries decreased to some extent, as many of the national industries were privatized. Nevertheless unions in these industries wield greater power than their membership numbers and/or direct political influence would suggest.

Since 2000 Mexico has had a more competitive political system; this transition has altered the concepts of state and societal resources. The advent of electoral competition means scholars can no longer simply assume that an alliance with a political party poses a threat to the organizational autonomy of a union. In turn, a union's ability to gain state resources through party connections does not signal its abandonment of the interests of the rank and file. Many unions have allied with the left-leaning Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), and have thus found themselves consistently in an opposition bloc. As part of the opposition, these unions would find their ability to gather state resources hindered, and would likely be forfeiting their ability to ally with and gain state resources from the ruling party. However, the possibility for unions to become subordinate members of a political coalition still remains, and was seen during the presidencies of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón (2000-2006 and 2006-2012, respectively) (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 51-52). Thus after the political transition seeking political power and political solutions to an issue does not automatically signal that a union is subordinating itself to the ruling party.

Conversely, as we shall see in the cases, we shouldn't assume that attempts to increase societal benefits are undertaken solely for the benefit of improving the lives and position of the rank and file. In this new political context unions of all sorts are increasingly relying on a combination of state and societal resources. Indeed the challenge of the modern, global economy demands that unions focus on building local strength and also national and international strength to influence both society and the political arena (Phelan 2007: 21). It would be unrealistic to expect that any union can focus solely on societal resources and hope to survive in the current era. Nevertheless, each union's goal in building societal resources must be carefully weighed. Just as political maneuvering and obtaining state resources are no longer a simple signal of union

cooptation, developing greater societal resources is no longer an easy sign of actual union responsiveness to the rank and file.

As we shall see in the cases below, labor organizations are expanding their tactics and often seek state and societal resources in ways that do not match their organizations' historical strategy. Yet this diversification does not automatically signal a fundamental change in organization strategy or identity. It is no longer enough to merely note union tactics and classify them as an organization seeking state or societal resources. Rather, we must take a more nuanced stock of the state and societal resources sought by each union. Using the concepts laid out above, we must more deeply compare the combination of resources sought by labor organizations in order to better recognize their true goals in seeking state and/or societal resources. This more careful delineation and comparison of state and societal resources will help us understand the overarching strategy of each labor organization.

The Development of Corporatism in Mexico: The State-Labor Alliance

For most of the twentieth century Mexico's political sphere was defined by a state-corporatist style of interest intermediation, where the interests of many different constituent groups were represented by hierarchical, peak organizations; these organizations then engaged in peak-level bargaining under the auspices of a dominant political party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) (Schmitter 1974: 103-104). The system was slowly built over 20 years between the end of the Mexican Revolution and the end of the 1940s, when the corporatist alliance between labor and the PRI was finally consolidated. As Collier and Collier (1979, 1991: 50-55) note, however, state-corporatism in Mexico was never an entirely rigid system. Indeed, Middlebrook (1995: 341 note 82) eschews using the term corporatist at all, citing the term's imprecision due to overuse; yet Middlebrook admits that certain aspects of the

corporatist concept are obviously present in Mexico's political system. While Schmitter's definition can be helpful, as the coming sections will show, the state-labor alliance in Mexico has undergone many rearrangements and redefinitions. The corporatist label will serve as a helpful frame, but we must keep in mind it does not fully encapsulate Mexico's political system.

The state-corporatist system in Mexico was created after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) in response to the importance of "mass actors" during the struggle. The Revolution was a complicated and protracted struggle, generally defined as an attempt by liberal reformers to unseat the ruling authoritarian president, Porfirio Díaz, and his cronies (Middlebrook 1995: 14). A key factor in the story of the Revolution was the importance of mass actors, namely peasants and workers who had little sway on politics during the Porfiriato. The discontent of these classes had been building for many years. Peasants had lost a great deal of land to expropriation and consolidation by elites during the Porfiriato (Katz 1991: 94-102). The working class essentially came into existence thanks to economic modernization during Díaz's reign, but many experienced terrible working conditions and found few opportunities to escape their position in society (Katz 1991: 105-107). In response to the political uncertainty that occurred after Porfirio Díaz left office in 1910, and certainly due in major part to the long accumulation of grievances against the government, peasants in southern Mexico under the leadership of Emiliano Zapata revolted against the new Mexican president, Francisco Madero, and demanded land reform (Womack 1991: 136). In the North Francisco "Pancho" Villa led an on-again off-again revolt with a heterogeneous army of peasants, workers, the unemployed and middle class militiamen (Womack 1991). In addition, unions in Mexico City grew after the Porfirian limits on their organizations were relaxed; these unions also staged a number strikes throughout the Revolution (Collier and Collier 1991: 119-123; Middlebrook 1995: 18; Womack 1991) and even created

armed battalions to join the military struggle (Hart 1978, cited in Collier and Collier 1991: 123; Middlebrook 1995: 19).

Noting the importance of these actors, the elites who gathered to write a new constitution for Mexico in 1917 eventually promulgated a document that included many protections for workers and peasants. After the end of major hostilities in 1920, post-Revolutionary leaders conceived of and began building a state to represent all groups of society, and consequently one that also was responsible for conciliating and arbitrating the conflicts between classes (Middlebrook 1995: 25). Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution codifies workers' protections, including workers' rights to form unions and to strike, as well as a wide range of other rights, including an eight hour day, a minimum wage, overtime pay, and maternity leave, among other things (Bensusán 2000, cited by Cook 2007: 152 note 5). While the Constitution raised the rights of workers to constitutional guarantees, it was not until the government passed the 1931 Ley Federal de Trabajo (LFT) that the federal government was given jurisdiction over labor matters (Middlebrook 1995: 47, 50-51).

Labor unions became an important force in the political landscape after the revolution for two reasons. First, the working class was an important beneficiary of the state's new active role in society and one of the foci of the state's redistribution efforts (Middlebrook 1995: 20-22). Second, and perhaps more relevant, labor unions were relatively well-organized institutions. While unionized workers represented a very small percentage of the workforce, their location in strategically important industries (especially electrical power generation, oil production, and railroads) gave them power greater than their numbers (Middlebrook 1995: 72). Moreover, other social actors were much less organized than unions (Middlebrook 1995: 72). Thus the social and political importance of labor unions was greater than raw membership numbers might suggest.

The strategic electoral importance of unions was not lost on post-Revolutionary political leaders, many of whom had been generals during the Revolution; they saw labor unions both as an opportunity and as a threat. On the one hand, gaining the political support of unions gave political elites an important bloc of votes and legitimacy in the eyes of the people. On the other hand, a politically independent labor movement could challenge the power of political elites (Middlebrook 1995: 72). As such, political and military elites began to cultivate alliances with more moderate groups of labor leaders even before Revolutionary hostilities ended (Middlebrook 1995: 76-77). More radical anarcho-syndicalist factions attempted to steer the labor movement toward a path of resistance toward political leaders; in the end more moderate leaders like Luis N. Morones gained sway over the movement.

Scholars have focused on the career of Morones as a keystone in the history of labor unions and corporatism in Mexico, and for good reason: the political bargains made by Morones in the 1910s and 1920s, and the motivations that underpinned these bargains, served as a model for the corporatist bargain that was created under Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s. Morones helped found the first Mexican labor confederation to ally with the state, the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM). The CROM was founded in 1918 as a group interested in building the power of labor through any possible means, both political and social.³ Morones and the CROM signed a secret pact with General Álvaro Obregón during the presidential campaign leading to the elections in 1920 (Meyer 1991: 205; Middlebrook 1995: 77). The CROM mobilized its members to campaign in favor of Obregón's candidacy. In return for this aid Obregón gave the CROM privileged access to the political arena, including the formation of a

³ An important prerequisite for the founding of the CROM and for its willingness to ally with the government was the marginalization of anarchist and syndicalist currents within the CROM's constituent unions; this allowed the CROM to be more flexible in its tactics, specifically with regards to working alongside the government (González Gúzman 2012; Middlebrook 1995: 77).

labor ministry over which the CROM had great influence (Middlebrook 1995: 77). The access to political influence allowed the CROM to grow quickly throughout the Obregón administration (1920-24) as well as through the presidency of Obregón's hand-picked successor, Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28). In addition the CROM effectively used its power in the labor ministry to undermine rival union confederations (Middlebrook 1995: 78-79). However, the very power the CROM gained through its political maneuverings also weakened the confederation's autonomy and ability to survive without political privileges. The CROM was never able to leverage its political influence enough to gain footholds in strategic industries (Middlebrook 1995: 80). When the political winds shifted, and the CROM was implicated in the assassination of re-elected President Obregón in 1928, provisional President Emilio Portes Gil systematically worked to undermine the CROM's influence in the government (Middlebrook 1995: 81).

The case of the CROM's early history highlights the important danger political alliances held for labor unions. While there were benefits to be won by gaining access to the political arena and enjoying preferential treatment by the state, overreliance on political maneuverings could undermine a union's ability to survive if it is ever deprived of such privileges. Rather than avoiding this trade-off altogether, however, it would become one of the foundational aspects of the state-corporatist system in Mexico.

Though the Constitution of 1917 set out a number of provisions and protections for workers, the document also left the codification and enforcement of these provisions up to state and local governments. It wasn't until 1931 that the federal government passed the far-reaching Ley Federal de Trabajo (LFT) that the federal government gained some jurisdiction on labor issues, though the LFT still protected the authority of states to enforce labor law (Middlebrook 1995: 50-51, 60). This enabling legislation codified the protections set out by the Constitution,

and also set the framework for a system of labor regulation that would rely on tripartite labor courts (Middlebrook 1995: 60-61). Perhaps most importantly, the LFT created a system that gave labor unions considerable power resources and support from the federal government. But this support in turn offered the government (and consequently the hegemonic party) important influence over the unions.

Collier and Collier (1979) note the corporatist alliance between labor and the government in Mexico was founded on a tradeoff of inducements and constraints. Unions, aware of the pitfalls that exist in an alliance with the government, were offered these inducements to entice their participation in official labor institutions (Collier 1992: 50; Collier and Collier 1979: 969). The LFT included a clause that created monopoly representation rights for unions, meaning that only one union would be allowed to organize any given location. The monopoly representation system is undergirded by exclusion and separation clauses, meaning workers are compelled to join an already present union, and they can only keep their jobs as long as they are members of the union (Roxborough 1984: 146). These clauses gave union leaders important leverage over their own members; leaders could use this leverage to limit internal dissidence by threatening to expel members both from the union and from the workplace.

The whole system was administered by a set of tripartite labor courts, known as the *Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (JCAs). The JCAs were a linchpin of corporatist system; they were one of the most important ways unions could wield their influence. The tripartite panel included one officially appointed or elected member from management, one from labor, and one from the government (Roxborough 1984: 145). A union or confederation that joined in the corporatist system would often have privileged access to these appointments, or find their candidates able to win elections for JCA representative rather easily. In addition, as part of the

corporatist bargain the government could offer its allegiance on the board, thus allowing the union a great deal of power to influence the outcome of workplace issues and worker grievances (Middlebrook 1995: 61-62). While this influence could allow unions to support workers' grievances against an employer, it could just as often be used by a union to discipline its own members.⁴

In return for these benefits, however, the inducements for labor were packaged with state- and party-based controls that allowed the government to constrain unions (Collier and Collier 1979: 969-970; Middlebrook 1995: 8, 29-30; Samstad 2002). The state-based controls rested on the double-edge nature of the inducements listed above. For local unions to organize, and thus access the privileges in the LFT, they had to be "officially" registered by the JCAs. But just as the JCAs could favor unions, so the government could similarly swing its own influence to block the advancement of a union. If a union fell out of favor with the government, the government representative on a JCA could easily switch allegiances. Union certifications could be "lost" or rejected on a number of grounds, and new elections could result in representation by a rival union (La Botz 1992: 44-46, 55-57; Middlebrook 1995: 64). Similarly, strike petitions were controlled by the JCAs, and a strike could easily be deemed "nonexistent" or illegal by the JCAs (La Botz 1992: 49-51). When a strike is deemed nonexistent employees are given 24 hours to return to their jobs, after which time employers are allowed to hire permanent replacement workers; for a strike to be illegal workers generally have to commit acts of violence, in which case the workers would lose their jobs automatically (Middlebrook 1995: 69; Roxborough 1984: 145).

⁴ In chapter 8 of his book, Roxborough (1984) finds what he calls "circumstantial" evidence that unions use the exclusion clause and their privileged position on the JCAs to remove disobedient and/or dissident union members from the union and the workplace.

The above inducements and constraints rest on labor law and governmental institutions; but the corporatist system in Mexico was also founded on linkages, inducements, and constraints between labor unions and the hegemonic party. The party-based controls complemented state controls. The Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) was the first “official” party, founded in 1928 by ex-president Plutarco Elías Calles as a mechanism to expand his personal power (Collier and Collier 1991: 226). The PNR was never able to create strong ties with the labor movement.⁵ However, the successor parties to the PNR had a much stronger connection with the labor movement. Lázaro Cárdenas rearranged the PNR in 1938, becoming the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM); in 1946 the party was again reorganized to become the PRI (Middlebrook 1995: 74). Both the PRM and subsequent PRI were organized into four sectors: the labor sector, peasant sector, “popular” sector, and the military (Grayson 1998: 20; Middlebrook 1995: 93; Samstad 2002: 4).⁶ This institutional framework allowed labor leaders to influence party functions directly; they gained the privilege of being included on electoral ballots as candidates for the PRI; and leaders from PRI-affiliated unions often enjoyed the privilege of serving the government in administrative capacities, most notably on the ruling boards of local and federal JCAs (Middlebrook 1995: 101-105). The PRI also consistently favored union interests against business interests, using a combination of direct and indirect economic policy actions to bolster unions’ ability to gain wage increases from employers. In return for these benefits, union leaders delivered the votes of their members to the chosen PRI candidates, most especially the presidential candidate (Collier and Collier 1991: 239-241; Middlebrook 1995: 153). The unions that joined the PRI became known as the “official” unions, since they were

⁵ A situation that was mostly due to the break between Calles and the CROM after the assassination of Obregón (Middlebrook 1995: 87).

⁶ The popular sector primarily included small- to medium-sized enterprise owners, the middle class, and small landowners, as well as two unions: the union of federal employees (the FSTSE) and the teacher’s union (the SNTE) (Middlebrook 1995: 93). The military sector of the party was dissolved in 1940 (Middlebrook 1995: 93 note 86).

both officially recognized and promoted by the PRI. The Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) stepped into the void left by the downfall of the CROM, eventually becoming the quintessential corporatist union.

Through the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), and during the initial years of incorporation under the PRI, the state-labor alliance was defined by a shared vision of Mexico between leaders of the CTM and President Cárdenas. But the election of successive conservative presidents, Ávila Camacho in 1940 and Miguel Alemán in 1946, and the labor crises of the 1940s and early 1950s resulted in a shift of the corporatist pact. With the more conservative presidents union leaders found themselves faced with a choice: alter their own political opinions to maintain the state-labor alliance, or attempt to break away from the state. In order to maintain their place in the corporatist system during the 1940s leaders of the official unions were expected to limit worker mobilizations, strikes, wage demands (Middlebrook 1995: 112-113). Initially these expectations were created by President Camacho and promoted as a wartime necessity, but after the end of World War II President Alemán continued to demand wage restraint in order to control inflation (Middlebrook 1995: 114). Over time union leaders' attempts to keep wage discipline resulted in a number of internal dissident movements, within the CTM especially; Collier and Collier (1991: 412-413) suggest this militancy was the result of members and leaders who had assumed their belt-tightening efforts were simply a wartime obligation, but were unwilling to continue to do so during peacetime. It was during the resulting labor crises from the late 1940s to early 1950s that the leftist elements of the CTM and other unions⁷ were ostracized and forced out of many unions; after this the CTM came under the control of a "collaborationist, bureaucratized, entrenched, and self-perpetuating leadership clique" (quote from Collier and

⁷ Notably the Railroad Workers' union, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la Republica Mexicana (STFRM) (Middlebrook 1995: chapter four).

Collier 1991: 415; see also Middlebrook 1995: chapter four). These new leaders and their like-minded successors would subsequently dominate the CTM, other smaller official confederations, and a number of official industrial unions in strategic sectors up to the present day. Thus the corporatist system that dominated Mexico from the 1940s to 1990s was not consolidated until these more moderate leaders came to the fore in the official labor movement (Middlebrook 1995: 106).

Official Unionism versus Independent Unionism

After the 1940s two general strands of unionism emerged in Mexico: official and independent unionism.⁸ The concept of official unionism is a bit vague, in the sense that any union that has organized workers has to be officially recognized and registered by the government. Official unions are defined less by their legal status and more by their political location. Official unions were those that were directly connected to the PRI through the labor sector,⁹ which in turn meant these unions had closer and more direct connections with the government. Perhaps the most definite characteristic of official unions was their willingness to employ political exchange to gain benefits from the state, often to the detriment of developing strong, local, societal resource bases among their rank and file (Bensusán 2004: 242; Middlebrook 1995: 253-254).

By the end of the 1940s, when the corporatist pact was being firmly entrenched, labor unions were still relatively divided (Collier and Collier 1991: 414-415), meaning individual unions and confederations had little leverage of their own. In order to make up for this lack of

⁸ Cook (1996) highlights the complexity that is often lost when one relies too heavily on the concepts of “independent” and “official” unionism. Her description of different union strategies cuts across the official/independent dichotomy, and reveals important differences within the category of independent and official unionism. This paper employs the labels as a heuristic tool for understanding the general historical trajectory of unionism in Mexico.

⁹ The SNTE and FSTSE were official unions, but were connected to the PRI through the party’s popular sector.

power, official unions began to seek state resources to offset their weak position in society. Soon official unions were relying almost solely on state resources (Middlebrook 1995: 154). This overreliance on state subsidies and resources created a situation in which union leaders had to balance the interests of two masters: on the one hand, the leaders could only maintain their position in the political arena as long as they delivered votes and labor peace for the President. On the other hand, union leaders also had to ensure that they maintained enough rank and file support to be able to credibly mobilize their workers when the government or party demanded. Balancing the interests of workers and the party was easier in times of economic prosperity: state resources were plentiful and could be passed on to rank and file members.¹⁰

But high inflation, recessions, industrial accidents, and generally poor working conditions would occasionally disrupt the alliance between workers and the PRI. And it was during these times that official unions faced challenges both from below and above. In return for state resources official labor organizations became instruments of political control for the government: leaders were expected to limit wage demands and industrial strife during periods of economic and/or political instability (Middlebrook 1995: 155). If a labor leader was unable or refused to control his workers, the leader was expelled from his position and replaced with a more compliant leader, or the party switched favor to a more receptive union.¹¹ Yet a leader who complied too readily with government policies also ran the risk of losing his ability to mobilize union members and, thus, to extract resources from the state. Often leaders of official unions would use different forms of radical posturing to show their loyalty to union members, but

¹⁰ Even in plentiful times, however, Middlebrook (1995: 166) suggests that essentially every government after 1946 kept a tight leash on strike activity.

¹¹ Before the 1970s the PRI was able to influence internal union affairs in a number of cases, including the case of the Railroad Workers' Union, discussed below. In the years since the 1980s the PRI, and subsequently the PAN, have used criminal prosecutions to remove union leaders who are overly critical. Specifically, the PRI successfully used corruption charges to remove a recalcitrant leader of the petroleum workers' union (Cook 1996), and the PAN unsuccessfully used the same tactic to attempt to remove the leader of the Mineworkers union; both of these instances will be expanded upon in later sections.

simultaneously negotiate with the government to preserve the state-labor alliance (Burgess 2004: 68-75; Collier and Collier 1991: 585-586). Over time this balancing act led leaders of official unions to drift farther and farther from their constituents, focusing instead on cultivating political allies and personal prestige, until many labor leaders ruled their unions in an authoritarian fashion, unresponsive to worker demands.¹² As we shall see later, over reliance on state resources would come to undermine official union leaders' ability to effectively oppose the economic policies of the 1980s and 1990s. Realizing their weakness, many leaders of official unions joined the neoliberal project hoping to survive the changes with their leadership positions still intact.

In contrast to official unions, unions of the independent stripe often sought to avoid the entanglements and constraints of being an explicit ally of the PRI. Defining which unions are "independent" can also be difficult, as some unions would change their position vis á vis the PRI through their history. The SME, for example, was a member of the PRI through its participation in the CTM in the later 1930s, but by 1940 the union had broken its ties with the CTM and the party (Middlebrook 1995: 150). Similarly the STRM was allied with the PRI until 1976, when the union ploughed a new, more independent path for itself (Cook 1996: 186). More recently the Mineworkers' union has shifted from a corporatist union to a more active, critical voice against government repression of workers (see case below).

Before the 1970s independent unions were rare in great part due to the coercive and repressive power of the hegemonic PRI. Between the 1930s and the 1970s a number of unions resisted being subjugated by the dominant party and/or a corporatist union confederation. Some, like the electrical workers union, were able to more or less maintain their autonomy for years.

¹² Pizzorno (1978: 281-285, cited in Cook 1996b: 35-36) describes this as a tension between protecting a unions' long term interests (i.e. organizational power and survival) and members more immediate interests, like wage demands or working conditions.

Many others, however, shared the fate of the Railroad Workers' Union (Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana, STFRM). When the STFRM revolted against the PRI in the late 1940s, staging strikes and protests against the government's wage policies, the PRI crushed the union, replaced some of its leaders and pressured the rest to a more pragmatic, less-critical, less-autonomous position (Middlebrook 1995: 145-147).¹³ During the same period a similar fate befell the Petroleum Workers' Union (Sindicato de Trabajadores Petroleros de la República Mexicana, the STPRM) and the m (Middlebrook 1995: 148-149, Snodgrass 2007: 84). Though the rank and file of the STFRM was able to pressure its leadership to democratize in the late 1950s (Middlebrook 1995: 147), the mineros remained an official, corporatist-style union until the 2000s, and the STPRM continues to be a corporatist-style union.

In the 1970s, however, President Luis Echeverría allowed (and even encouraged) the creation and strengthening of unions more autonomous than those normally allied with the PRI (Cook 1996: 183). In 1970s many of these unions focused their efforts on collective bargaining, hoping to increase their available societal resources while avoiding the pitfalls that political alliance and the corresponding state resources such an alliance could bring. These independent unions strove for "autonomy and economism" according to Cook (1996: 185-187), demanding simply the freedom to bargain directly and solely with their employers on issues of wages, hours, and conditions. Another group of these independent unions subscribed to what Cook (1996: 187-188) calls "Democratic Revolutionary Nationalism." Independent unions who fall under this concept believed in the importance of collective bargaining strength and union political autonomy, but also sought a stronger and sustained role for the government in the economy, following the principles of the Revolution. Though each envisioned a different role for

¹³ For a longer, more detailed narrative of the repression and cooptation of the STFRM, see Middlebrook (1995: chapter 4).

government, the importance of union autonomy and collective bargaining was an important demand for both types of independent unions.

By focusing on collective bargaining and similar societal resources, independent unions were generally believed to be more responsive to workers. It follows that a union that expects to make most of its gains through collective bargaining, strikes, and mobilizations will have to maintain the loyalty and solidarity of its workers (Levesque and Murray 2010: 336-337). As such, independent organizations are usually expected to be more democratic. The SME, for example, cites a long history of internal union democracy (Guadarrama 2012; Murillo 2001: 120). Granted, union democracy is not solely the property of independent unions, nor are all independent unions fully democratic.¹⁴

Yet concentrating on autonomy, democracy, and societal resources meant that independent unions significantly limited their ability to access the inducements set up by the LFT. Official unions generally maintained a firm grasp on seats in the JCAs, through which the official unions were able to adversely influence the organizing efforts of the independent unions (Cook 1996: 195-196). Most independent unions were able to survive these troubles, however, due mostly the fact that they organized workers in important industries. Unions in oil, steel and mining, electrical power generation, and telecommunications benefitted from their employers' positions as either monopolists or strategic industries (Murillo 2001: 118-120; Snodgrass 2007). Though having historical roots in these strategic industries allowed some independent unions to survive, as seen above in the labor crisis of the 1940s, such placement did not automatically protect these unions from government intervention.

¹⁴ As will be discussed in the cases below, the amount of internal democracy in the "independent" STRM is debatable. Furthermore Roxborough (1984) found a number of cases in which the local chapters of official unions had very democratic procedures.

The rise of independent unionism in the 1970s was tolerated by government officials during Luis Echeverría's term because the government greatly needed to improve its legitimacy after the student massacres of 1968,¹⁵ and their existence allowed the president to quiet resistance among official unions. However, eventually the president decided that he could no longer tolerate the independent, critical unions and dissident movements that had arisen during the 1970s. During the recession of 1975-1976 Echeverría needed wage restraint on the part of the working class as well as the electoral support for his successor, López Portillo. Subsequently Echeverría and the government began to favor the CTM and other official unions to the detriment of independent unions and internal union dissident groups (Collier and Collier 1991: 602-603). The change in favor away from independent unions allowed the leaders of the official electrical workers union (the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana, SUTERM) to quash the Tendencia Democrática, SUTERM's internal dissident current, in 1976 (Collier and Collier 1991: 603; Cook 1996: 189). Though a number of independent unions and dissident movements survived the 1970s, the experience of the 1980s and the economic transition greatly affected the strategy of independent unions, especially with regards to cooperation with the government.

New Context, New Concepts

After the PAN won the presidency in 2000 the labels "independent" and "official" began to be less useful. To better represent the different types of unionism in currently operating in Mexico, I will employ the typology created by Bensusán (2004; see Table 1) in the sections that focus on the political transition and post-transition union strategies. Bensusán (2004) identifies

¹⁵ After the massacre of students in 1968 at Tlatelolco, the PRI and subsequent presidents sought out ways to improve their interactions with civil society; supporting the growth of these independent unions was a chance to show the PRI's willingness to allow the development of civil society groups that were outside the party (Collier and Collier 1991: 588-589, 594-595; Middlebrook 1995: 223-224).

three types of unions in the post-political-transition context: state corporatist unions, social unions, and movement unions.

Table 1: Typologies of Mexican Labor Unions (adapted from Bensusán 2004: 245)

Type of Labor Organization	Main Source of Economic and Political Resources	Relationship with the State	Relationship with Employers	Degree of Internal Democracy
<i>State Corporatist</i>	State	Subordination and Support	Cooperation / Complicity	Low
<i>Social</i>	Societal / State	Autonomy and Conditional Support	Cooperation	Medium
<i>Movement</i>	Societal	Autonomy and Critical Positions	Resistance and Conditional Cooperation	High

State corporatist unions rely on the state as their main bastion of resources; they often do not have strong backing from their members; and they are often controlled by labor leaders who are only kept afloat by their ability to suppress challenges to their leadership (Bensusán 2004: 242-243). In essence, unions of this stripe continue the official union tradition of using political strategies to gain some sort of concessions for their members, and they maintain few to no resource bases outside of the political sphere. Because these unions cannot draw power from larger society, they are weak in the face of both government and employer opposition (Bensusán 2004: 262-263). In turn, this weakness means state corporatist unions tend to cooperate with employers (even to the point of creating protection unions for them) and support the state (to the point of subordination of worker interests) (Bensusán 2004: 251; Burgess 2004; Murillo 2001). For the most part, unions that had been “official” during the 1970s and 1980s now fall under the “state corporatist” category, though as we shall see in the cases, confederations like the CROC

and CROM, and unions like the *mineros* have shifted their position since Bensusán's (2004) analysis.

Unions and confederations of the "social union" type cultivate resource bastions from the state *and* from society. Unions of this type are politically active, seek party allies, and compete for seats in elected government. However, they also carefully maintain their autonomy from political allies, and derive important influence from the enthusiasm of their membership (Bensusán 2004: 243-244). This constellation of resource bases allows them to be critical of both employers and the government. However, some social unions have limited their critiques in order to create more cooperative relations with their employers; similarly social unions will at times offer conditional support to the state (Bensusán 2004: 244). In this way social unions are both wary of state control, but are also willing to be pragmatic in their dealings with employers, political parties and the government. Many of the social unions were previously official unions, but began moving away from the PRI and corporatist alliance during the rise of independents in the 1970s and the economic restructuring of the 1980s (Bensusán 2004: 243).

The final type Bensusán (2004) identifies is movement unions, which avoid state-resources and focus on building only societal resource bases (Bensusán 2004: 244-245). Movement unions are critical of government intervention in labor issues, and their relationship with employers is often defined by resistance, bargaining, and conditional cooperation. Though some unions in this study display movement union characteristics, often these unions are forced into adopting less critical stances in order to survive in the current Mexican political and economic climate. Thus, none of the unions in this study fall strictly into this category of unionism. Indeed, the unions that once engaged in this strategy, notably the Frente Auténtico del

Trabajo (FAT), have generally shifted back toward a more social union-style strategy (Bensusán 2004: 244-245, 267-268).

The Unions: Organizational History and the Lead up to the Economic Transition

Because of the power wielded by the PRI throughout its hegemonic period, it is unsurprising to note that many unions in the past fell into the official category. Since the political transition some of these unions have altered their strategies, but many of the previously official unions still employ a state corporatist strategy. By the 1970s eighty-five percent of union members in Mexico were part of the Labor Congress (Congreso de Trabajo, CT), an umbrella organization that united disparate union confederations into one massive organization largely dominated by state corporatist unions (Zazueta and de la Pena 1984, cited in Cook 1996: 181).¹⁶ The early history of each of the unions in this study shows that all of them were at one time either allied with or directly connected to the PRI.¹⁷ The CTM, SNTE, CROC, CROM, STRM, and mineros were all official unions during much of the PRI's hegemonic period, while the SME maintained its autonomy from the PRI. In 1976 the STRM began treading a more autonomous path.

The CTM: An Ideal-Typical Official union

The Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) is the union confederation that has typified the official labor movement almost since its inception in 1936. Populist hero and President Lázaro Cardenas facilitated the creation of the CTM, which united unions that had

¹⁶ All but three of these unions were also members of the PRI; the three exceptions were the SME, nuclear workers' union (SUTIN), and the STRM after 1976 (Cook 1996: 181 note 2). There were of course small unions and confederations that existed outside both of the structures, most notably the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT). That FAT was actively involved as a dissident organizer of autoworkers during the 1960s and 1970s (see Hathaway 2000; Middlebrook 1995: 224, 228; Roxborough 1984: 79, 100-101); more recently the FAT has garnered a great deal of attention thanks to its activeness in transnational union alliances (see Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 75-76; Hathaway 2000).

¹⁷ The SME had by far the shortest relationship with the state, but over the years the union's willingness to cooperate with the PRI has varied.

broken away from the CROM, as well as the CROM's rivals; Cárdenas's goal was to strengthen the labor movement by unifying as many unions as possible under the auspices of one confederation (Middlebrook 1995: 88-89, 91). Ironically, the CTM was originally unified under a dominant ideology of Marxism, but quickly after its founding more pragmatic leaders gained control of the confederation (Collier and Collier 1991: 237; Middlebrook 1995: 89-90). But in 1938 the confederation became an official arm of the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM), a predecessor party to the PRI (Middlebrook 1995: 92-95). This bond eventually led to the marginalization of leftist leaders in the CTM and the confederation's long term alliance with the hegemonic party in Mexico, the PRI (Collier and Collier 1991: 239, 408-412).

By the 1950s the CTM had ensured its political dominance of the labor sector in the PRI (and in the country), and had become the main recipient of state resources through the corporatist state-labor alliance (Middlebrook 1995: 95-105). To tell the story of the CTM is to tell the story of the corporatist arrangement, which has already been touched on above. It is perhaps simpler to argue that the CTM is the confederation after which the concept of an official union was modeled. CTM leaders attempted to balance the interests of constituents and the demands of the state, but over time leaned more and more toward the state, in essence allowing the CTM to become a tool of political control for the PRI (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 17). Though the alliance between the PRI and the CTM was at times complicated, especially during the economic transition, the CTM and PRI consistently returned to their mutual alliance. The CTM's reliance on state resources, combined with the leader's willingness to discipline their membership to gain these resources, led the CTM leadership to essentially abandon attempts to build deep societal resources bases.

At its inception the CTM counted almost a million workers among its constituents across a vast number of industries (Middlebrook 1995: 91). Even after the devastating drop in unionization rates during the 1980s the CTM still claimed almost 860,000 members in 2008 (Zepeda Martínez 2009: 73). Concurrently, however, scholars consistently note that the CTM almost certainly inflates their membership statistics (Middlebrook 1995: 91).¹⁸ Nevertheless, the CTM's size advantage relative to all other union confederations and its willingness to cooperate with the PRI made it the largest and most powerful union confederation throughout the PRI's hegemony; the size advantage and cooperative attitude continue to provide the CTM with a great deal of power in the current period (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 97-98).¹⁹

Finally, thanks to its size and state resources the CTM has historically dominated the Congreso de Trabajo. Founded in 1966, this umbrella organization was an attempt by labor leaders to re-unify disparate labor confederations and unions into one, peak organization (Collier and Collier 1991: 598-601). Soon after its founding, however, many independent unions bucked the influence the CT had over their affairs (Collier and Collier 1991: 599), and the CT essentially became an arm through which the CTM could gather allies to strengthen its own position (Middlebrook 1995: 151-153). Thus the CTM and CT both represented the most ideal typical examples of official unionism, and continued after the fall of the PRI to cultivate a state corporatist strategy.

El SNTE: Large and In Charge

The Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE) has long been the largest union in Mexico, and is generally believed to be the largest union in Latin America. Between 1979 and 1990 the union grew from 600,000 to approximately 1 million members

¹⁸ Roxborough (1984: 28-31) notes that strike data, and indeed most official data on unions, seems suspect.

¹⁹ Bensusán and Middlebrook (2012) argue, however, that the CTM's power is only a slowly waning vestige of its previous influence.

(Cook 1996b: 2). More recent estimates range from as high as 1.4 million members (Gatica Lara 2007: 74), to more conservative estimates of between 700,000 (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 47) and 1 million members (Góngora and Leyva 2008, cited in Bensusán and Tapia 2011: 25). The SNTE was founded in 1943 and has, over the years, played a crucial role of support for the PRI (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 46; Cook 1996: 23; Fernández Marin 2011: 51). The SNTE is the only union in this study that currently organizes members in the public sector. Public sector employment in Mexico is not regulated by the LFT in Mexico, but actually has its own labor code specific to the sector (Cook 1996b: 80-81); thus the organizing and employment environment are very different. For our purposes the two most important differences between the SNTE and the other unions in this study is that the SNTE technically cannot bargain with the government over wages and conditions, and regulations make striking very difficult for the SNTE (Cook 1996b: 80; Murillo 2001: 122). Generally a union of the size and scope of the SNTE would likely have a great deal of bargaining leverage over employers, and thus would likely be able to gather both societal and state resources. Yet the legal restrictions on collective bargaining and striking greatly limit the SNTE's ability to garner further societal resources. Thus it is not surprising to note that the SNTE has focused on cultivating alliances with the government and gathering state resources.

Early in its existence the union hesitated over the question of allying with the PRM, but by 1950 pro-government leaders in the SNTE had taken power and the union overtly connected itself with the PRI (Cook 1996b: 63-64). The PRI rewarded the loyalty of the SNTE with a large number of political offices from the 1950s through the 1980s (see table 3.1, Cook 1996b: 65-66). In addition to elected positions the SNTE was able to gain a large number of its members appointments to work in the Education Ministry (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP), so

many that the union essentially controlled the ministry in the 1970s (Cook 1996b: 85). In controlling the SEP the SNTE had, in essence, captured its employer and diversified the union's political power. Not surprisingly the power the SNTE had in the SEP rankled relations between the SNTE, SEP and President López Portillo (1976-1982), as the SNTE stood in the way of Portillo's plans to reform the SEP bureaucracy (Cook 1996b: 85).

Perhaps due to the massive size of the union, the SNTE has a number of internal dissident groups arise throughout its existence. Most of the early dissident factions were quickly crushed or marginalized (Cook 1996b: 66-73). But in 1972 Carlos Jonguitud Barrios gained control of the union on a progressive platform, leading an internal movement called the "Vanguardia Revolucionaria" (Cook 1996b: 73-76). While his team presented a progressive face to the public, internally Jonguitud Barrios moved to impose high limits on dissent (Cook 1996b: 75). In 1979, however, the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE) emerged in response to a combination of long-standing rank-and-file grievances and openings in political opportunities.²⁰ The CNTE began to demand, among other things, internal democracy and a split with the ruling PRI party (Cook 1996b: 17; Fernández Marin 2011: 53). The CNTE has so far been unsuccessful in gaining its goals at the national level, as the SNTE remains undemocratic (Gatica Lara 2007: 77), but the CNTE continues to oppose the official leader of the union (Fernández Marin 2011: 61; Leyva Piña 2012).²¹

As will be discussed in greater detail later, rank and file discontent in response to the economic hardships of the 1980s led to the removal of Jonguitud Barrios from the head of the union in 1989 (Cook 1996b: 270; Fernández Marin 2011: 56; Gatica Lara 2007: 73). He was

²⁰ For a richer description of the structural, environmental, and political causes of the CNTE, see Cook (1996b) chapters three and four.

²¹ Interestingly, Fernández Marin (2011) has argued that the CNTE has become a sort of "institutionalized" dissident movement, unhappy with the SNTE but unwilling to leave the union to start their own organization.

replaced by Elba Esther Gordillo. Gordillo still rules the union, which continues to be centralized and dominated from above. Yet recently new President Enrique Peña Nieto had Gordillo arrested on charges of corruption (Castillo 2013). While she still ostensibly controls the union, her incarceration and forthcoming trial could eventually end her tenure as leader of the SNTE.

The CROC: Government's Leverage Point against the CTM

The Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (CROC) was founded in 1952 by the government of President Miguel Alemán in an effort to unite disparate labor groups that were both loyal to the PRI government and hostile to the CTM (Grayson 1998: 33; Middlebrook 1995: 250). The unions of the newly formed CROC were generally considered to be more conservative than both the CTM and CROM. Thus the CROC was an official union through the 1990s, and after the political transition was a state corporatist union. For this reason the Alemán government used the CROC to check the power of the CTM in the lead up to the presidential election in 1952 (Middlebrook 1995: 150). The CROC was and continues to be connected to the PRI, and like the CROM has over the years mainly been used by the government as a counterbalance to the larger CTM (Grayson 1998: 61; Middlebrook 1995: 177). For most of its existence the CROC's defining characteristic was its willingness to toe the government's line even when other union confederations attempted to resist PRI domination. The CROC's smaller relative size, however, has meant that the PRI could only gain a small amount of leverage by playing the CROC off the CTM. Though the PRI was sometimes able to gain concessions from the CTM by favoring the CROC, in most the PRI would eventually backpedal from its ploy, as the party was usually not willing to risk losing the electoral support of the CTM (Collier and Collier 1991: 591; Middlebrook 1995: 219)

Most current member unions of the CROC organize service industries, mostly in restaurants, hotels, and other tourism-based industries. The union also includes a number of other industries, including small manufacturing and mining, but the vast majority of CROC affiliates are in the service industry (Ramos Ramírez 2012).²² In 2008 the union had 202 affiliates with approximately 70,000 members (Zepeda Martinez 2009: 76). In 2005 Isaías González Cuevas, a longtime member of the executive committee of the CROC, became Secretary General of the confederation (Suárez 2012). As we will see in the cases below, after 2005 the CROC began altering its strategy, and began to adopt tactics often associated with union revitalization.

The CROM: Small but Still Active

The history of the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) has already been partially told, as the early foundations of the state-labor alliance originated from the interactions of the CROM, its leader and founder Luis N. Morones, and the series of Mexican presidents during the 1920s. Initially the CROM represented unions and members from many different types of unions. Some of the CROM's member unions followed a stricter, anarcho-syndicalist line, while others were more flexible and willing to cooperate with employers and the government (Collier and Collier 1991: 206; Middlebrook 1995: 77). Morones, noting the organizational weakness and small population of unionized workers, believed that political alliances were necessary for the labor movement to gain power (Middlebrook 1995: 77). Consequently Morones ostracized the hardliners in the confederation and led the CROM into a number of political alliances with post-Revolutionary leaders (Collier and Collier 1991: 206-211; Middlebrook 1995: 77-79). Though the CROM signed pacts with different political leaders, the confederation was careful to guard its autonomy. In an effort to protect its political autonomy,

²² For a full list of CROC affiliates, see http://www.stps.gob.mx/02_sub_trabajo/03_dgra/cent_croc.htm.

the CROM created a political party, the Partido Laborista Mexicano (PLM) (Collier and Collier 1991: 206; Middlebrook 1995: 77). Using the PLM the CROM could theoretically provide political support to candidates, but also maintain its political independence.

The CROM's early alliance with President Obregón was fairly fragile, though the confederation cultivated a much stronger relationship with Obregón's successor, President Calles (1924-28) (Collier and Collier 1991: 209-211). The CROM's extraordinary influence during the Calles administration allowed the confederation to capture numerous political offices, both elected and appointed, at the federal and state level (Middlebrook 1995: 79). In the mid-1920s Morones was said to have been the second most powerful man in Mexico, just behind the president (Collier and Collier 1991: 210-211). But the power enjoyed by the CROM came from the confederation's willingness to occasionally sacrifice workers' interests in order to achieve labor peace in the nation. The CROM would quell internal dissident groups and undermine more independent unions. Leaders of CROM member unions eventually became undemocratic, and increasingly leaders began to gather personal wealth in exchange for their union's passivity (Collier and Collier 1991: 215-217; Middlebrook 1995: 78). The CROM's extraordinary political influence created enemies among other groups in civil society, namely peasants and the middle class (Collier and Collier 1991: 223-224). In 1928, the CROM was implicated in the assassination of Obregón before he could take office (for the second time). In this incident the CROM experienced the downside of its reliance on state resources and political power. In response to the implications, Morones and other CROM members resigned their governmental posts, and outgoing President Calles named labor opponent Emilio Portes Gil as interim president (Collier and Collier 1991: 224; Middlebrook 1995: 81). Though the CROM survived this event, the confederation never recovered the levels of power and membership it had during

the 1920s. The consolidation of other labor confederations, namely the CTM and CROC, combined with the fact that the CROM had never been able to organize workers in Mexico's strategic industries (Middlebrook 1995: 80-81), fated the CROM to continue on as a small confederation of secondary importance.

Throughout the intervening years the CROM continued to ally itself with the ruling PRI. The CROM acted as an official union through the 1990s, and until very recently undertook a state corporatist strategy (Bensusán 2004). However, its diminished size meant the confederation generally received fewer favors from the government. The CROM has been most powerful only when the government favored it as a counterbalance to the CTM. For example, President de la Madrid shifted resources to the CROM during the 1983 debt crisis, and Salinas sought the union as a partner in the early 1990s (Middlebrook 1995: 260). In 2008 the CROM had 154 affiliates and 28,000 members (Zepeda Martinez 2009). In 2010, after serving as Secretary General of the CROM for 25 years, Ignacio Cuauhtémoc Palette was succeeded by Rodolfo González Guzmán (González Guzmán 2012). Like many confederations in Mexico, the CROM today has member unions in a number of different industries, but has an especially large presence in the textile industry, small manufacturing, and to some extent the service sector (González Guzmán 2012).²³

The Mineros: Historically State Corporatist

The Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana (SNTMMSRM or “mineros”), founded in 1934, unites a large number of very different types of workers. For the most part, however, its membership can be found in the steel and mining industries (Snodgrass 2007; Middlebrook 1995: 147). The SNTMMSRM was historically an official, corporatist union, due in large part to the government's interference in

²³ For a full list of CROM affiliates, see http://www.stps.gob.mx/02_sub_trabajo/03_dgra/cent_crom.htm.

union internal affairs in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1949, building on internal dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of more autonomous union leaders, the government under President Miguel Alemán manipulated union conventions to ensure the election of pro-state union leaders; these leaders, in turn, modified internal union statutes to ensure they would be able to maintain power indefinitely (Middlebrook 1995: 148-149; Snodgrass 2007: 84). Before the 1980s most steelmaking and mining companies were either owned (partially or fully) by a state holding company, or the state was the largest purchaser of these companies' goods. Thanks to the state support of these industries, the mineros enjoyed many of the benefits of the state corporatist arrangement with labor.

But the mineros also experienced many of the negative consequences of official unionism. Despite longstanding improvements in material benefits to workers, steel and mining companies made little headway on safety improvements to their facilities (Snodgrass 2007: 86). Authoritarian union leaders, most specifically Napoleón Gómez Sada who was Secretary General from 1960 until his health failed in 2000, did little to advance shop-floor grievances (Snodgrass 2007: 86; Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 55). Gómez Sada repelled challenges from an internal dissident movement in the 1970s, thanks in great part to union statutes that limited the power of union locals and centered control of the union in the Secretary General position (La Botz 1992: 76-77; Snodgrass 2007: 86-87). Yet despite marginalizing these dissidents at the national level, in some locations the dissidents were able to maintain influence at the local level (Snodgrass 2007: 87-88).

As we shall see, since the rise of the PAN the mineros union has become much more active and critical of the government, adopting a stance more along the lines of a social union. The mineros are currently embroiled in a dispute with the government and the owners of the

Cananea copper mine, Grupo Mexico. Both of these conflicts will be discussed in greater detail in the case below. The union currently has about 33,000 members.²⁴

The STRM: A Corporatist Union Shifts toward Autonomy

The Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (STRM) was created in 1950 when two private telephone companies merged to form the telecommunications monopoly Teléfonos de México (TELMEX) (Murillo 2001: 117). In its early years the union had two major internal currents. One group demanded internal democracy, and was able to insert statutes into the union's bylaws that restricted the STRM from attaching itself directly to a political party; the second group consisted of leaders and members who wanted to join the PRI and the corporatist state-labor alliance (de la Garza 2002: 7). The democratic current led the union for a time in the 1950s, but by the 1960s the corporatist current, with the aid of management, had defeated the democratic current in the union; the corporatist leaders then ruled until 1976 (de la Garza 2002: 9-10). After coming in to power the corporatist leaders altered union statutes, allowing the corporatist leaders to engage in national politics after 1964. By 1966 the STRM had officially joined the STRM (de la Garza 2002: 8).

TELMEX was nationalized in 1972, but even before this nationalization the company's monopoly status then meant that the STRM enjoyed the benefits of organizing workers in firm with strategic importance in Mexico's development and modernization project (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 98; de la Garza 2002: 12; Murillo 2001: 117). Then in 1976 a rank and file rebellion displaced the corporatist leaders of the STRM, and in their place elected Francisco Hernández Juárez (de la Garza 2002: 9-10; Murillo 2001: 118). In the years immediately preceding 1976 Hernández had come to the fore of the simmering democratic current in the

²⁴ Data on mineros' membership levels can be found at the website of the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (www.stps.gob.mx).

STRM. Thus many believed Hernández would lead the union in a new direction, away from corporatist subordination. Initially the new leader distanced himself from the traditional alliance with the PRI, and democratized many of the decision-making processes of the union (Murillo 2001: 118). However, by the early 1980s Hernández had gathered enough power and allies in the union to ensure his reelection, and consequently altered union statutes again to further reinforce his personal control over the union (de la Garza 2002: 17-19; Murillo 2001: 118-119). As we shall see in greater detail later, in the early 1990s Hernández also drew closer to PRI President Carlos Salinas, though the STRM has since distanced itself from the party apparatus. Currently Hernández still leads the union, having been reelected continuously since 1976.

Though the STRM has never been a massive organization, the union has done an impressive job of steadily increasing its membership numbers since the 1970s. By the late 1980s the union had grown in membership despite the economic crises, and by 2000 organized just under 50,000 workers at TELMEX (de la Garza 2002: 90). Currently the STRM claims over 55,000 members.²⁵ The union's ability to gain new members has certainly been enhanced by the growing importance of telecommunications technology over the past forty years. After the rise of Hernández in 1976, the STRM has generally followed the path of social unionism, building its societal and collective bargaining resources, while simultaneously developing its political and state resources (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 34-35).

The SME: Threats to a Tradition of Autonomy and Democracy

Founded in 1914, early on the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (SME) had a reputation of democracy and political autonomy (Middlebrook 1995: 18, 80). This tendency toward autonomy resulted in the SME's early exit from the nascent CTM (Middlebrook 1995:

²⁵ Data on STRM membership levels can be found at the website of the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (www.stps.gob.mx).

90), but did not limit the union's desire to seek political alliances.²⁶ The SME organized the Central Light and Power Company in Mexico City (Luz y Fuerza del Centro, LFC, or "Luz y Fuerza"),²⁷ one of a duopoly of power generation companies in Mexico, both of which were nationalized in 1960 (Murillo 2001: 119-120). The nationalization of the LFC provided the SME with great political leverage, which in turn allowed the union both to gain favors from the government and to maintain its autonomy from PRI (Bensusán 2005: 555-556). The SME also benefitted from the loosening of repression on independent unions during the term of President Echeverría.

Since the 1970s, however, the SME has faced a number of challenges to its existence. During the nationalization of the 1960s, the government consolidated the country's electrical power generation capacity into two companies. The LFC maintained its own facilities in Mexico City, and the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE) assumed responsibility for power generation in the rest of the country. After the consolidation workers in the CFE were organized by a more pliable union, the corporatist Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores Electricistas de la Republica Mexicana (SUTERM) (Bensusán 2005: 556-557; Murillo 2001: 119-120). The government has attempted to close the LFC a number of times in order to fold it into the CFE, and thus force the SME and SUTERM to merge (likely resulting in the demise of the SME) (Bensusán 2005: 556-562; Murillo 2001: 120).

In 2009 President Felipe Calderón successfully closed the LFC, an event that will be discussed in great detail below. At the time of the political transition the SME organized roughly 53,000 workers (Bensusán 2005: 546), the vast majority of whom were workers at the LFC (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 58; Guadarrama 2012). When the LFC was closed the union

²⁶ The SME was one of the more active supporters of President Cárdenas (Middlebrook 1995: 88).

²⁷ The company was originally called the Compañía de Luz y Fuerza del Centro (CLFC), but was subsequently renamed the LFC after a reorganization in 1995 (Bensusán 2005: 546).

claimed 44,000 members had lost their positions (Muñoz Rios 2009). Currently the union claims almost 42,000 members, though this number likely mostly includes unemployed workers from the LFC.²⁸

The “Servicing Model” in the US and Mexico: A Template for Stability and Decline

Before turning to the economic and political transitions, and union responses to these transitions, it is important first to survey the literature on union revitalization in the Global North. Doing so will help elucidate what strategies and tactics are included under the concept “union revitalization,” but also provide insight into the causes and responses of US unions to changes in the American political and economic context. In the cases I will draw on the concepts laid out below to offer a new way to conceptualize the corporatist system in Mexico, that of the “corporatist servicing model.” Moving forward the tactics and underlying motivations of union revitalization will help frame the discussion of Mexican union responses to the dual transitions.

The topic of union decline in the United States has been the focus of a great deal of attention from scholars and practitioners over the past thirty years. Starting in the 1980s observers attributed the decline of unions in the US to the expansion of the global and globalized economy, an unfavorable public policy swing towards conservatism, and new or newly empowered employer opposition to unions (Hurd 1998: 129-132; Turner 2003: 27-28). While unions had enjoyed growing bargaining power from the 1940s to the 1970s, by the late 1970s the tables had turned; employers increasingly gained relative power over the unions at the bargaining table (Brecher and Costello 1999: 9-10). Justifying their actions as necessary for the survival of their companies, owners and managers slashed employment in many unionized plants. Union leaders, fearing for their workers’ jobs and their own organizational survival, began round after

²⁸ Data on SME membership levels can be found at the website of the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (www.stps.gob.mx).

round of concessionary bargaining. Unions began returning hard-won benefits and wage increases in hopes of at least maintaining the employment of their constituents (Hurd 1998: 129). Despite these efforts, union decline continued unabated.

In the face of these setbacks, by the 1990s some unionists began looking for new strategies to regain their lost prominence. Up to that point unionists had relied on what has been labeled the “servicing model,” where the union serves only as a mechanism for filing grievances and bargaining over wages and benefits. Under this model union members became decreasingly involved in their unions, and union leaders disciplined members who attempted to unseat them from power (Benson 1999).

But this model had no adequate response to employer opposition, the challenges of global economy, and the continuing decline of union membership numbers (Turner 2003: 24). Unions felt their resources diminishing, their ability to effectively bargain collectively with employers decrease, and found themselves less and less able to influence American politics. In the face of these challenges unions began to seek methods to “revitalize” themselves (Phelan 2007; Turner 2003).

The goal of this revitalization was to shift away from the servicing model of unionism toward a broader, more active style of unionism. Taking cues from the successful social movements of the 1960s, the concept of a “social movement union” (SMU) was born (Turner 2005, 2007). A social movement union is in many ways the antithesis of a servicing model union. SMUs engage in issues that extend beyond the confines of the workplace, not focusing merely on wages, benefits, and grievances, but also engaging in larger debates over political, economic, and social justice (Brecher and Costello 1999: 17-18; Turner 2005: 387; Waterman 1998). The SMU model can be understood as the result of a revitalization process, whereby a

union shifts its focus away from the servicing model towards the more active, engaged, broader issues related to social justice. At the same time, however, revitalization isn't a process that simply ends with a new style of organization. The tactics of union revitalization are used not only to revitalize a union but continue to be employed by "revitalized" unions. That is to say, revitalization is both a goal and a long-term strategy: the goal is to revitalize a union, and a revitalized union will in turn include revitalized tactics in its long term strategy.

Scholars have identified a number of tactics that a union can undertake to shift a union toward a social-movement-style organization. Viewing social movement unionism as both a goal and a strategy, leaders hoped that these methods would have two important results. First, leaders wanted to reverse the tide of deunionization, a tide that threatened unions' organizational resources.²⁹ Second, leaders hoped to more fully involve the rank-and-file in the union itself. To reverse the tide of deunionization, unions began focusing on organizing new members, especially from demographic groups that are not considered traditional bastions of unionism. In the American context this meant that unions began to engage with women, youth, non-white workers, and workers in the service sector (Cobble 2001; Cornfield 2007: 245-246; Johnston 2001; Phelan 2007; Turner 2007: 8). For the past forty years the US economy has become increasingly service-based, as corporations have been moving production capacity to other locations around the world. Employees in the service sector have historically been seen as difficult to organize, partially because of the contingent, flexible nature of their work, and partially because they are usually women, African American, or of Hispanic descent, all populations traditionally viewed as "difficult to organize" (Milkman 2006: 115).

In addition to reaching out to new members, unions began to broaden the issues with which they engaged, all through a reframing of the labor movement as a movement for social

²⁹ In its simplest form, a union with fewer members collects fewer dues.

justice (Fantasia and Voss 2004: 129-132; Turner 2005; Waterman 1998: 261). Reframing the movement away from “bread and butter” issues and toward issues of social responsibility creates two important effects for unions. First, the union is able to present issues of labor rights as more fundamental and necessary to a democratic society. The social justice frame allows labor issues to be connected to a larger constellation of societal issues, whereas focusing merely on wage and benefits gains for union members can make the labor movement seem selfish and insular. The second effect of the social justice frame is that it allows unions to more easily create connections and coalitions with groups across civil society (Fantasia and Voss 2005; Johnston 2001). These coalitions serve to reinforce the strength of the labor movement, an important feature that helps bolster the numbers and strength of a labor movement that has been losing members for 30 years. In the end, reframing labor demands as issues of social justice and building cross-issue coalitions can be viewed as two distinct tactics; however, each is more effective when coupled with the other.

In the vein of social movements a final revitalization tactic is mobilization. Realizing their diminishing ability to win demands solely at the bargaining table, unions have started to take their fight to the streets, as other movements have done throughout the 20th century (Turner 2003: 24-27, 2005: 15). Mobilization allows unions to call on (or be called on by) allies across civil society and to bring attention to their struggles and demands. Moreover, mobilization can create and reinforce reciprocal relationships between unions and their allies in civil society. Mobilization also allows unions to literally reenergize their constituents and create excitement among their members. It is no mistake that some of the most popular examples of union revitalization are campaigns that had major mobilization campaigns.

The most popular labor-specific campaign that utilized these tactics in the US is the Justice for Janitors campaign, which successfully organized and won a contract for janitors (Milkman 2006: 155-162).³⁰ This campaign combined a number of revitalization strategies. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) framed the janitors' struggle as an issue of social justice.³¹ Moreover, this campaign focused on an industry largely dominated by Latino immigrants, a population that tends to be underrepresented in unions (Milkman 2006: 159); and Justice for Janitors relied heavily on media events, large rallies, and marches. Though not a large, long-lasting campaign like Justice for Janitors, the protests and rallies against the Seattle Round WTO talks in 1999 also serve as an important touchstone for labor movement revitalization. In this case, effective mobilization and coalitions of labor and environmental groups, the "Teamsters and Turtles" coalition, disrupted the WTO meetings.³²

Despite good intentions, the tactics of union revitalization are not always entirely democratic. One of the important underlying tenets of union revitalization is the need to be responsive to workers, both union and non-union (Fletcher and Hurd 1998; Milkman 2006; Milkman and Voss 2004). Yet one of the greatest debates in the revitalization literature is the role of union democracy. Often union revitalization is a process that begins at the very top leadership of a union, and is imposed upon its members (Sharpe 2004). More specifically, some have noted the importance of limiting union democracy if that union democratically chooses to remain conservative, is not willing to change tactics or attempt to revitalize (Sharpe 2004, Turner

³⁰ After the campaign the organization and solidarity among workers and allies remained so strong that in 2000 the Janitors local even won a strike for a pay raise, something most unions have found almost impossible to do in the past 20 years.

³¹ Indeed even the name "Justice for Janitors" displays this; as Rudy (2004) humorously points out in a chapter title, the campaign was not "Compensation for Custodians" (133).

³² Recently the immigration debate in the United States and Europe has brought together labor and civil society under the banner of social justice. Political and union leaders in Mexico have also weighed in on this debate (CROC 3). However, since Mexico is generally a sending country and a country of transit, advocacy on the part of many unions is often limited to discursive stances on US immigration policy without directing many resources to the struggle.

2005). In the end, many seem to agree that union revitalization and successful union campaigns are often the result of a combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies: the leadership may impose a goal, but the goal must also have member buy-in for any campaign to be successful (Milkman 2006).

The Servicing Model and Mexican Corporatism in the Face of Dual Transitions

The concepts of a servicing model and union revitalization can be helpful in understanding union reactions to Mexico's dual transitions. The idea of union revitalization originated in the American context after an abrupt change in economic and labor relations in the United States; Mexico has undergone two large, historical changes in its economic development model and political system that have had major effects on the national industrial relations model. In the 1980s Mexico's economy collapsed under the weight of foreign debt obligations, beginning an economic transition away from state-led development and toward a neoliberal economic model. The change toward greater openness and market-led growth created an environment that threatened the relatively stable corporatist alliance between the state and labor. Later, after a decade of loosening political structures initiated by the contested 1988 presidential election, in 2000 opposition party candidate Vicente Fox of the conservative, pro-business Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) ascended to the presidency. This political transition ostensibly represents a new beginning for unions in politics, as most hoped it would demolish many of the institutional remnants of the corporatist bargain between the state and labor.

The economic and political transitions in Mexico represented a break with a previously accepted and stable model of labor relations, what I call the "corporatist servicing model." In Mexico the order of these transitions vastly weakened labor: the economic transition undermined the financial resources of the unions, and the lack of labor reform after the political

transitions offered unions few options to improve their status.³³ But the ordering of the transitions doesn't entirely explain why labor did not engage in revitalization during the economic transition, nor why some unions chose to revitalize after the political transition in the face of continuing corporatist relations. Despite the seeming need for revitalization in Mexico during the late 1980s and 1990s, little change in union strategies was forthcoming; indeed some independent unions actually grew closer to the government, ostensibly reducing their autonomy. Then, when the opportunities for strategic change seemed closed after 2000, some unions began to implement revitalization tactics. I now turn to Mexico's dual transitions to understand how these transitions affected unions, and how the unions responded to these challenges. Though the revitalization model can be helpful in understanding the need for revitalization, as we shall see the specific contextual factors shaped unions' desire to revitalize in Mexico.

Economic Transition: The Old Jalopy Gets a Flat

During the 1980s and 1990s Mexico underwent a process of deep economic restructuring. From the 1940s through the 1970s Mexico had embarked on a state-led model of development, Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) (Murillo 201: 92).³⁴ This economic model was an important foundation for the state-labor alliance throughout these decades, as unions benefited greatly from the government's protectionist policies, price controls, and strong social programs (Middlebrook 1995: 220-221). By the mid- to late-1970s the ISI model developed serious problems, namely chronic government deficits, inflation, and inefficiencies in most of the

³³ See Chile for a similar ordering of transitions, an order that served to devastate unions in that country (Cook 2002). Though Mexico's experience differs from Chile in regards to state controls over labor, in many ways Mexico's labor movement seems headed for similarly dire straits: low political power and meager unionization rates, and declining collective bargaining coverage (Frank 2007).

³⁴ Middlebrook (1995: 219) and Murillo (2001: 92) divide this period into two sections, 1940-1956, and 1956 to roughly the mid-1970s, labeling the former a period of ISI and the latter a period of "stabilizing development." Though there are important economic distinctions between the two, each period was defined by active government influence on economic development, and as such they can be thought of generally as one long era of ISI-style development.

national industries (Burgess 2004: 20). High oil prices in the mid-1970s allowed President López Portillo to cover these problems temporarily, but by the end of the decade oil prices began falling, which led to a deep recession in 1982 (Burgess 2004: 20). Upon inauguration in December 1982, President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1986) launched a project to replace ISI with an export-based model of development (Burgess 2004: 21; Middlebrook 1995: 255-256; Murillo 2001: 93). In the 1990s President Carlos Salinas accelerated the neoliberal project, even after the crisis of the 1980s subsided, believing that further integration into the world economy would provide a firm foundation for Mexico's recovery (Burgess 2004: 22). By the end of the twentieth century the export-based neoliberal model had become established in Mexico.

The shift from ISI to a neoliberal economic model presented a deep threat to Mexican unions. The initial threat was mainly economic, but the transition also included challenges to unions' historical privileges. While both the ISI and neoliberal models demanded labor peace, during the period of ISI the PRI government had been able to buy labor peace through direct subsidies to unions and the working class, in essence trading social benefits for wage restraint (Grayson 1998). However, the PRI's liberalizing efforts included efforts at wage restraint without compensatory increases in social spending (Burgess 2004: 74). In fact, throughout the 1980s government social spending dropped sharply, and many social programs were targeted more precisely toward the poor, meaning workers had less access to some of the subsidies they had enjoyed in the past (Burgess 2004: 24). Government wage ceilings, effective in part due to union complicity (as we shall see), resulted in wages that lagged greatly behind production gains. While wage restraint had effectively brought inflation under control by the end of de la Madrid's term, workers' real wages fell drastically throughout the 1980s; though wages improved during Salinas's term, workers never recovered the losses of the 1980s (Aspe 1993: 26, cited by Murillo

2001: 94; Burgess 2004: 23). President Salinas wrested control of the agency that provided housing subsidies to workers (INFONAVIT); the agency had been administered by unions since its founding in 1972 (Murillo 2001: 103).³⁵ While the decrease in state handouts weakened the ability of official unions to gather state resources, the harsh reality of an economy in shambles also limited the effectiveness of militancy and dissidence on the part of independent unions (Cook 1996: 202-203).

But neoliberalism presented a more implicit threat to the organizational survival of unions. Neoliberal principles recast unions as market distortions and “privileged social interests” that wanted to protect their corrupt access to state resources (Cook 2002: 5).³⁶ While charges of union corruption certainly have some merit in the Mexican case, it is also generally true that neoliberal principles see even non-corrupt unions as inefficiencies that unnecessarily hinder market mechanisms. De la Madrid’s wage and spending austerity put a great deal of pressure on unions, but privatizations of state-owned companies especially hurt unions’ power, and thus threatened their survival. President de la Madrid privatized a number of state firms (Murillo 2001: 93), even those in arguably “strategic” sectors like steel production (Snodgrass 2007). During de la Madrid’s tenure over 700 public firms were sold to private owners (Lustig 1998: 105, cited by Burgess 2004: 21). President Salinas continued to privatize firms in his sexenio, attempting to sell off the state phone company (TELMEX), Central Light and Power Company of Mexico City (LFC), the Cananea copper mine, TV channels, and a portion of the petrochemical industry, among other firms (Murillo 2001: 97, 101-102). The privatization of state-owned companies battered some of the most important unions in Mexico (Middlebrook 1995: 256). Without state ownership these unions lost an important source of leverage over

³⁵ Later in his tenure Salinas allowed union leaders to regain control of the agency.

³⁶ Cook (2002: 5) cites a number of sources in making this point, including Cortázar et al. (1998), Birdsall et al. (1998), A. Edwards (1997), Edwards and Lustig (1997), Márquez and Pagés (1998), and IDB (1998).

employers; whereas before these unions could apply political pressure on state managers, new private-sector managers were immune to much of this leverage. More importantly, privatization also came with the threat of rescinding contracts and bargaining new collective agreements, and new owners often took this opportunity to lay off large numbers of a firm's employees.

In addition to the erosion of historical bastions of union power, Mexico began competing with other countries almost purely on the basis of low-wage production. The maquiladora factory model, an in-bond processing and manufacturing method used in Mexico since the 1960s, grew by leaps and bounds in the 1980s and 1990s (Grayson 1998: 29; Morales and Tamayo-Sánchez 1992). For the labor movement the maquila model presented a dual-challenge. First, locating these factories in northern Mexico meant they were a great distance away from the political center of Mexico, the area where unions had focused their efforts many years (Middlebrook 1995: 320). Second, owners and managers often recruited female and young laborers to work in the maquilas, a shift away from the usual demographics represented by unionized workers (de la Garza 2003; Grayson 1998: 86). Though employer opposition to unions in maquila sites has certainly been an important factor, the combination of using "greenfield" sites far from Mexico City and recruiting demographic groups usually not sought after by unions has also contributed to the low unionization rate in maquiladoras (Fairris and Levin 2004; La Botz 1992: chapter 7).

Predictably the national economic crises of the 1980s weakened union bargaining power. But this weakening was exacerbated by the government's shift to neoliberal economic policies. These policies all but signaled the PRI's abandonment of the traditional state-labor alliance. The administration of President Salinas sought to decentralize collective bargaining; he increasingly promoted bargaining between employers and unions at the firm level rather than between

government and unions at the national level. This had the effect of reducing the power of peak union confederations (Cook 1996: 207). Further, when faced with a workplace dispute the government's representatives on the JCAs increasingly sided with employers against labor (Cook 1996: 206). Overall the government began to favor business interests over labor interests (Bensusán 2004: 247-248; Greer, Stevens, and Stephens 2007: 82).

Individual unions and confederations responded very differently to the economic transition. A large number of variables affect union strategic responses to political or economic changes. Organizational characteristics like size and economic location of a union play an important role;³⁷ historical traditions of being an official or an independent union are also pertinent, as are related variables like a union's resource balance (state versus societal). As we shall see, each of these variables played a part in determining unions' and confederations' responses to the economic transition of the 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps most importantly, however, the authoritarian nature of the political regime greatly limited the available strategies unions could viably employ (Cook 1996: 177). The large size of official confederations, like the CTM, CROC, and CROM, made them powerful players, but their low level of societal resources made them weak in the face of a government willing and able to discipline critical unions. Official industrial unions, like the mineros and SNTE, enjoyed the privilege of organizing strategic sectors, but found themselves threatened by privatizations. In the face of these odds, and a relatively strong authoritarian regime, official unions essentially tried to protect the corporatist servicing model as much as possible. As Burgess (2004: 80) describes, the official unions simply sought to "put fuel in the old jalopy." Independent unions, like the STRM and SME, tried to resist the government's actions, but they also fell victim to the government's

³⁷ In the case of union confederations, the size and industry location of a confederation's member unions are the relevant details.

power. In the end many independent unions drew closer to the PRI; in a sense they found themselves jumping onto the fender of the old jalopy (see Table 2).

Table 2: Union Responses to Economic Restructuring

Type of Union (Bensusán 2004)	Economic Transition (1982-2000)	Political Transition (2000-present)
<i>State Corporatist</i>	CTM, CROC, CROM, Mineros	CTM, CROC, CROM
<i>Social</i>	STRM, SME	STRM, SME, Mineros
<i>Movement</i>		

↑ Arrows display unions' or confederations' use of tactics from another union strategy, signaling their movement toward adopting that type of union strategy without fully committing to such a transformation.

Union Responses to the Economic Transition: Patching Together the Corporatist Servicing Model

The strategic responses of the CTM, CROC, and CROM reveal not only their overreliance on government favor and state resources, but also these confederations' willingness to undercut one another in order to gain greater favor with the government. In December 1982 the CTM agreed to new president Miguel de la Madrid's initial stabilization plan (PIRE), which focused on controlling inflation through wage restraint; in return for this support the government agreed to put in place some price controls and initiate some modest social programs to soften the blow to workers (Middlebrook 1995: 259). Within six months, however, de la Madrid had broken his side of the pact and had loosened controls on prices, allowing them to rise and thus weakening workers' purchasing power (Middlebrook 1995: 259). Consequently, the CTM initiated what Burgess (2004: 75) calls official unions' "traditional strategy of radical posturing,"

whereby the CTM would file massive numbers of strike petitions. In the past this tactic had proven effective, especially during pre-electoral maneuvering: the CTM would threaten labor strife to remind the government of the CTM's steadfast alliance, and to implicitly demand greater rewards for the confederation's historical support for the government (Burgess 2004: 70-71). This strategy was also used to influence the economic policy of the government, and in two previous periods (during devaluation episodes in the 1950s and 1970s) the confederation would file strike petitions, or threaten a general strike, but then accept a negotiated settlement in order to avoid the strike (Burgess 2004: 68). In a change from previous presidents, however, de la Madrid responded harshly to the CTM's threat. In retaliation the president began favoring the CTM's main rivals, the CROC and the CROM. The CROC and CROM rivals repaid the government's favor by accepting smaller wage increases than those demanded by the CTM and by opposing the CTM's call for general strike (Middlebrook 1995: 260). Eventually the CTM capitulated and received a minimal wage increase in return for calling off the general strike (Middlebrook 1995: 261).

This initial confrontation served as a model for many other confrontations during the 1980s and 1990s between the CTM and presidents de la Madrid and Salinas. It served to remind the CTM of its dependence on state subsidies, and thus remind union leaders that their allegiance should be focused more on following the will of the state, as they enjoyed their unions' health and stability thanks to state support, not due to the power of the rank and file. By 1985 the CTM and CT had signaled their willingness to negotiate within the bounds of de la Madrid's austerity plan. Though the CTM threatened mobilizations in 1984 and 1987, in each case the confederation backed down with only minor concessions (as happened in 1987) or no concessions at all (as occurred in 1984) (Middlebrook 1995: 262-263). Through much of de la

Madrid's presidential term the official unions struggled to find a response to the changing economic model. The CTM seemed to maintain a belief that sooner or later the government would return to its more traditional model of state-led growth. Indeed all the official unions seemed to believe they would eventually benefit from a future return to pro-worker wage policy as long as they supported the government through the transition (Burgess 2004: 78).

Despite the struggles between official unions and President de la Madrid, and the willingness of the president to favor other unions to the detriment of the CTM, de la Madrid did not limit the political representation of official unions during his sexenio. Rather, the CTM actually gained a number of seats throughout the decade (Middlebrook 1995: 266; Zamora 1990: 135, cited in Murillo 2001: 94 note 5). In addition, Middlebrook (1995: 266-269) argues that the CTM's tactics were also influenced by the organizational weakness of the confederation and the political beliefs of CTM leaders. In his view, after years of relying on intra-elite bargaining the CTM had neither the ability nor the desire to launch true national mobilizations, and anyway its leaders preferred to maintain their privileged place in the party and the government rather than combat what they hoped would be short-term hardships.

Hopes that the new PRI president would soften the blow to unions and workers were dashed, however, when Carlos Salinas was nominated as the PRI's presidential candidate in 1988.³⁸ Upon taking office in 1988 President Carlos Salinas continued economic policies that hurt unions, and also began to chip away at the CTM's prerogatives. At times the CTM toed the government line, as they supported the creation of NAFTA despite the fact that the confederation's leaders believed the pact would actually be harmful for their constituents (Murillo 2001: 100). But Salinas also implemented a price stabilization program, privatizations,

³⁸ Scholars note the visible signals of discontent made by CTM leader Fidel Velázquez when this pro-market candidate was revealed, though he eventually fell into line and supported Salinas's candidacy (see for example Burgess 2004: 85-86).

a reform of pension and housing subsidies, introduced de facto flexibilization in work patterns, and attempted to boost productivity so that it would grow faster than wages (Murillo 2001: 99-105). In each of these cases the CTM attempted to resist these changes, decrying the fact that the stabilization programs and greater flexibility of work decreased real wages. But the CTM was unable to stop the price stabilization program, nor was it able to wrest any concessions for agreeing to privatizations. And the confederation lost control over pension funds and housing subsidies, both of which had previously been important sources of resources for union leaders and members (Murillo 2001: 103-104). In each of these cases, Salinas was able to advance his agenda by switching favor to other union confederations, such as the CROC, CROM, or the new federation created by Salinas and his allies in the independent labor movement, the Federación de Sindicatos de Empresas de Bienes y Servicios (FESEBS). Only when FESEBS allied with the CTM to oppose Salinas's labor law reform was the CTM able to wrest a victory from Salinas (Murillo 2001: 105-106).

As the 1994 elections drew near, however, Salinas and the PRI softened their position in an attempt to regain the support of the CTM and ensure a smooth presidential transition (Burgess 2004: 86-87). The party drew back from reforms that would have limited the power of the labor sector (and thus the CTM) in the party. In addition, the president appointed a new leader to the head of the housing subsidy agency, INFONAVIT, which in turn allowed the CTM to mediate and control this important source of resources. Moreover, the president and PRI backed away from their support of FESEBS, silently reaffirming the CTM's role as the most powerful union confederation. The CTM accepted the bargain, supported Ernesto Zedillo's³⁹ candidature, and

³⁹ Who replaced the initial PRI candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, after Colosio was assassinated during the election season (Burgess 2004: 87)?

were eventually repaid by Zedillo when a CTM official was appointed to the position of secretary general of the PRI (Burgess 2004: 87-88).

In the face of the economic transition the official unions found their overreliance on state resources had weakened their ability to oppose the government in a meaningful way. The state no longer provided the subsidies the CTM had grown accustomed to, and the shift to neoliberalism further weakened union's place in society. Rather than attempt a revitalization effort, however, the official unions felt compelled to maintain their alliance with the state. The earliest signs of the new state corporatist model of unionism, one that would be prevalent after the political transition, came during the elections of 1988 and 1994. Despite implementing policies that harshly limited official unions' power and resources, both de la Madrid and Salinas softened their stance toward the unions in the lead up to the 1988 and 1994 elections (respectively). As the elections approached, both presidents loosened their demands for wage restraint, increased social spending aimed at workers, and returned some of the political appointments that had been previously stripped from union control. In exchange for these palliatives the state corporatist unions agreed to resume their usual role as electoral support for the PRI; though overall the unions exchanged their support for meager resources compared to what they had enjoyed historically. Leaders of state corporatist unions were more blatantly sacrificing workers' interests to protect their own personal power and leadership positions.

The mineros responded to the economic restructuring by maintaining their subordination to the government. When the steel and mining industries were targeted for privatization during the 1980s, the mineros' national leaders cooperated with the government's plans. The national leadership of the mineros' union transparently abandoned the interests of local unions in an attempt to remain in favorable standing with the government. Despite protests by the union local,

the government closed the Fundidora steel plant in 1986, leaving 60,000 members of the miners' union out of work; according to local leaders, Napoleón Sada did not join the local's cause, allowing the national government to complete the plant closure without any official resistance from the union (Snodgrass 2007: 92). Similarly, Sada put up little resistance when the government announced layoffs at another major steel plant outside Monterrey, and said little when the government later declared its intention to close and privatize the Cananea copper mine. In each of these instances more militant union locals very much opposed the government's plans (Snodgrass 2007: 94-95). The pattern of local resistance and national complacency in the miners' union repeated itself throughout the 1980s and 1990s, where the national leadership essentially capitulated to the national government in hopes of maintaining their places at the head of the union. Actions like Sada's are the reason some scholars have been able to boil down their understanding of state corporatist union strategies after 1980 to one simple equation: continuously sacrificing the interests of the rank and file to protect leaders' position and power (La Botz 1992).

For the most part the SNTE responded to the economic restructuring like other official unions: by toeing the government line. Before the 1980s relations between the SNTE and government had soured slightly, thanks in great part to declining wages and government plans to decentralize the educational system (Cook 1996b: 102). During the 1980s teachers also continued to suffer real wage declines, as the vast majority of workers did during Mexico's "lost decade." The Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE) challenged the government's austerity policies, the declining wages of teachers, and reduced government contributions to public education (Cook 1996b: 3). In essence the CNTE hoped to invoke a revitalization strategy in the SNTE, but to no avail. The teacher's union leadership limited its

resistance to the economic changes and drew closer to the government in order to check the progress of the dissident CNTE (Cook 1996b: 275). Despite labor's general distaste for Carlos Salinas, SNTE leaders pledged the union's support for the candidate (Cook 1996b: 267).

Yet the traditional tactics employed union Secretary General Carlos Jonguitud Barrios, aimed at disciplining and controlling locals in advance of the presidential election in 1988 and union's national congress in February 1989, combined with the deteriorating conditions and wages in schools, resulted in a rank and file rebellion against Jonguitud (Cook 1996b: 268-270). Union members staged massive protests in Mexico City, and some locals went on strike (Cook 1996b: 269, 271). These protests included many members the CNTE, but also members who had never before identified themselves as members of the dissident movement (Cook 1996b: 269). The government, hoping to end the work stoppages, forced Jonguitud Barrios to resign and placed Elba Esther Gordillo at the head of the union (Cook 1996b: 271; Middlebrook 1995: 295). Initially Gordillo attempted to mend fences with the CNTE. But her overtures to the CNTE served to divide the dissident group, giving Gordillo time to shore up her own support bases in the union. Soon afterward Gordillo moved to marginalize the CNTE once again (Cook 1996b: 274-275).

Though the SNTE had internal calls for union revitalization, Jonguitud ignored these demands to protect his own position. When Jonguitud proved unable to silence these demands and quell national protests, he was removed in favor of a leader who promised to reassert the union leadership's dominance. Though the actual events differed greatly from the experience of the STPRM (see below), the SNTE is a parallel example of the strength of the PRI government and its willingness to discipline unions. The rise of Elba Esther Gordillo, and the debt she owed

to Carlos Salinas for placing her at the head of this massive union, resulted in a close relationship between the PRI and SNTE up to the political transition.

Throughout the 1980s the STRM remained allied with the PRI, generally refraining from criticizing de la Madrid and his economic model. During the de la Madrid sexenio the STRM allowed real wages to drop for its workers, but did so in large part to preserve the employment levels at TELMEX; indeed employment at TELMEX actually grew almost twofold from 1980 to 1990, and union membership grew along with it (de la Garza 2002: 31). But innovations in telecommunications technology led TELMEX to begin upgrading its systems; the STRM feared that these upgrades would diminish employment levels (de la Garza 2002: 34-36). To resist upgrades and changes in job structures the STRM struck in 1984 and 1987 (de la Garza 2002: 37; Murillo 2001: 118).

In 1989 President Salinas announced his intention to privatize the national telephone company, TELMEX. Rather than face the consequences of a showdown with Salinas, union leader Francisco Hernández Juárez cultivated a conciliatory relationship with the president. Hernández negotiated a deal that would allow the company to be privatized but would protect the jobs and collective bargaining rights of STRM members (Middlebrook 1995: 296; Murillo 2001: 117-119). To cement this deal, and his relationship with Salinas, Hernández even became an official member of the PRI. But some argue this deal was made mostly to protect Hernández's position in the union. Though Hernández reportedly called his constituencies to confirm this deal met their approval, some dissidents in the STRM argued Hernández simply coopted union members with concessions (Murillo 2001: 119).

Though the STRM had maintained some autonomy since the Hernández's rise in 1976, the STRM drew closer to the PRI during Salinas's term. In 1990 Salinas supported Hernández's

newly created union confederation, the FESEBS, and for a time Salinas apparently attempted to use the FESEBS as leverage against the CTM (Middlebrook 1995: 296). Hernández's actions signaled a shift in the STRM's strategy. The union agreed to be more cooperative with both TELMEX and the PRI, offering significant concessions to maintain their organizational survival. But through these concessions the union gained a voice in the restructuring of TELMEX, and protected the jobs of many workers (Bensusán 2004: 267). Moreover, Hernández and the STRM repositioned themselves to gather greater state resources through a close relationship between Hernández and Salinas, and by extension the PRI (Cook 1996: 219).⁴⁰

In the economic transition, then, the STRM began acting more like a social union, wherein the union was cooperative with employers and government, but still attempted to maintain its autonomy. Ironically, though, the union, which had increased its autonomy from the government from 1976 through 1990, reversed course during President Salinas's term and put some of its autonomy at risk in order to gain greater state resources. In some ways the STRM had begun a revitalization process in 1976, but Francisco Hernández quickly began limiting the breadth of this revitalization. In some sense the STRM spent the Salinas sexenio straddling the line between a state corporatist and social union. Once President Zedillo came to office in 1994, however, the STRM began to pull away from the PRI and reassert its autonomy.

Of the cases discussed here, the SME was the most active critic of the PRI's economic restructuring (SME 1988). The SME had gained a great deal of strength during the "democratic opening" of President Echeverría's term (1970-76), and the union was recognized as an important leader of the independent union movement. But during the economic transition the government of President de la Madrid attempted to push back historical gains made by the SME

⁴⁰ Tellingly, Hernández helped to "smooth over" a conflict at a Volkswagen plant in 1992, where a rank and file rebellion was quelled by the government, management, and an official union (Middlebrook 1995: 285)

in its collective contracts (Cook 1996: 200-202; Méndez 1988). At one point the president attempted to shutter the LFC, and thereafter force the SME to combine with the less democratic, less militant SUTERM (Cook 1996: 202 note 37). In 1987 the SME called a strike in response to the government's hard bargaining, a strike the government summarily repressed (Murillo 2001: 121). The following year a more moderate faction of the SME gained control of the union, led by new secretary general Jorge Sánchez (Melgoza 1992: 175, cited by Murillo 2001: 121).

The new leader, perhaps interested in smoothing relations with the government, got the union to endorse Carlos Salinas's candidacy, despite the fact that the SME had historically refrained from such overt support of PRI presidential candidates (Murillo 2001: 121). In return for the SME's electoral backing, in his first year in office President Salinas nationalized the remaining parts of the LFC and promised to keep the company separate from the CFE, thereby saving the SME from a merger with SUTERM (Murillo 2001: 121). The SME also became one of the founding members of FESEBS, and until 1993 the SME and President Salinas enjoyed a closer relationship (Cook 1996: 219; Samstad 2002: 10-11). In 1993, however, a more militant leader was elected to lead the SME, and the union subsequently began withdrawing from wage pacts, increased mobilizations, and threatened strikes (Murillo 2001: 121). In many ways the experience of the SME mirrors that of the STRM, as Murillo (2001) has astutely pointed out. Both unions had been generally employing a strategy of social unionism, but adopted a more conciliatory role to the government in return for concessions in the face of privatizations. The subsequent election of more militant leaders in the SME after 1993 led the union back to its militant ways. The STRM maintained a less confrontational, but did reinforce its autonomy before the election of President Zedillo.

Underlying all of these maneuverings between unions and the government were two important examples of the PRI's willingness to harshly repress unions in opposition. The nuclear workers' union, the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Industria Nuclear (SUTIN), was identified as an independent union of the "Democratic, Revolutionary Nationalist" stripe, meaning union that believed that the state had a duty to direct the economy, own strategic industries, and maintain strong social protections for the working class (Cook 1996: 187-188). Not surprisingly, then, the SUTIN opposed President de la Madrid's economic restructuring plans. When the CTM called for a general strike in 1983, the SUTIN pledged its support, and eventually carried through with its strike despite the fact that most of the CTM's affiliates had negotiated settlements to avoid the strike (Cook 1996: 199). The government responded harshly to SUTIN's strike: the nuclear power company was closed and the SUTIN workers were left without jobs (Cook 1996: 199). The work stoppage gave the government an opportunity to reorganize the firm, to the detriment of the union. SUTIN had never been a very large union, but it had historically been a militant one; after the reorganization, however, the now-minuscule SUTIN was in the hands of an official union leader, quelling all militancy in the organization (La Botz 1992: 83-85).

The experience of the SUTIN highlighted de la Madrid's willingness to repress harshly critical unions. Similarly, early in his president term Carlos Salinas displayed his willingness to discipline errant unions. The Sindicato de Trabajadores Petroleros de la República Mexicana (STPRM) had historically been a corporatist one, and had been able to use both its monopoly power and its ties with the government to extract a number of concessions from the state-run oil company. But during the 1988 presidential election the leader of the STPRM, Joaquín Hernández Galicia ("La Quina"), supported the presidential ambitions of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas

and his breakaway party. In retaliation for La Quina's abandonment newly-elected president Salinas sent the army to arrest La Quina on charges of corruption, and subsequently forced the union to replace him with a more compliant leader (Burgess 2004: 86; Murillo 2001: 112-113). The STPRM organized a strategic sector in the economy, thus boosting its societal resources, and yet the union could not protect itself against a president determined to make an example of La Quina.

Thus the 1980s were not merely a lost decade in terms of economic stagnation, but also in terms of union power and resources. Official unions undercut each other until all had subordinated themselves to the PRI's economic project (Murillo 2001); independent unions attempted to remain autonomous, but eventually both the SME and STRM made political deals with the PRI president to protect institutional resources. By the 1980s the official labor confederations had little power resources outside of the state, and thus had little chance of opposing the PRI for very long. For its part the authoritarian PRI provided unions with examples of those unions that did attempt opposition. Through the culling of SUTIN, the persecution of the STPRM's La Quina, and the gentler removal of Carlos Jonguitud Barrios from leadership of the SNTE, President Salinas provided dire examples of his power and willingness to undermine union opposition to economic restructuring.

The Democratization that Wasn't: Political Transition, Passing the Corporatist Reins

President Carlos Salinas's likely fraudulent electoral victory in 1988 significantly increased the public's outcry for greater democracy in Mexico. In response Salinas began to democratize the PRI's internal political process and undertook a number of national electoral reforms, including establishing a semiautonomous electoral watchdog, the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) (Grayson 1998: 89, 94-96). In 1994 PRI candidate Ernesto Zedillo won a fairly

clean election (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 242; Grayson 1998: 109), but the PRI's lingering legitimacy problems from the fraudulent 1988 elections and the 1994 peso devaluation crisis damaged Zedillo's authority (Samstad 2002: 12). Over the course of his term President Zedillo promulgated new laws that limited the PRI's ability to control elections (Grayson 1998: 139-145); the foundations of the PRI's hegemony crumbled. In 1997 freer elections resulted in the opposition PAN party gaining majority control of the federal legislature (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 243; Burgess 2004: 146). Then in 2000 the PRI lost the presidency as well, as candidate Vicente Fox of the conservative PAN was elected (Burgess 2004: 146).

The slow democratization process had important effects on the labor movement. The independent labor unions benefited from Zedillo's reforms, as these reforms increased unions' political options and also served to blunt the president's traditional ability to repress the independent unions (Samstad 2002: 12). As a sign of this change unions began to defect from the Congreso de Trabajo (CT) and form alternate union confederations. The most important new confederation was the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores de México (UNT), the founding of which was initiated by a number of independent unions as well as some previously official ones (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 243; Samstad 2002: 15-16).⁴¹ After the rise of the PAN, many official unions found themselves in a state of limbo. Without its traditional hegemony the PRI could no longer provide official labor unions with state resources. Indeed it was after this loss of power that it became necessary to describe previously official unions as state corporatist unions. With the PAN now controlling the government, President Fox became the new provider of state resources, which tempted many state corporatist unions into shaky alliances with the PAN (Burgess 2004: 147).

⁴¹ The STRM, SME, and SNTE were all involved in the initial call for a new union confederation, though the SNTE eventually decided to back out of joining the UNT. The FAT was also not present at the founding of the UNT, but joined soon after its founding (Bensusán 2004: 244-245; Samstad 2002: 15).

Despite the massive changes to both the political and labor arenas, true democratization of the labor arena in Mexico would only occur if the major parties agreed to a “pacted” transition, which would include a major reform of the legal and institutional structure of labor relations in Mexico (Bensusán and Cook 2003). Though some of the PRI’s party-based controls were less effective, the national regulatory system for industrial relations had evolved over the years into a system for controlling the labor movement. The government, now in the hands of the PAN, still had control over the apparatus of constraints set out in the 1931 Ley Federal de Trabajo (LFT). Moreover, state corporatist unions enjoyed their status as “legacy unions,” wherein these unions maintained inordinate influence in governmental labor institutions thanks to the legacies of corporatism (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 232; Caraway 2008, 2012). The labor courts in Mexico, the JCAs, are perhaps the linchpin of the remaining corporatist institutions and represent the most influential bastion of official unions’ influence.⁴² The jurisdiction these courts have over union registration, labor disputes, and strikes continues to allow official unions to control the most important aspects of union actions in Mexico; for these reasons Bensusán and Cook (2003: 235-236) argue that true democratization in the labor arena would rest on reform of the JCAs. A true reform of the JCAs would at the very least include dislodging the historical members of these boards, many of whom gained their position through clientelistic relations between official unions and the PRI. A more robust reform would include amending the laws themselves to create greater union democracy; transparency in union activities; a public registry of unions and JCA activities; and could even include the creation of a new, non-partisan set of labor courts (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 235-237; Burgess 2004: 151-152).

⁴² State corporatist unions lost a great deal of direct political power in the 1990s thanks to the electoral reforms of Salinas and Zedillo (for decreases in unions’ elected officials see Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 38-39, Table 4). With the advancing power of opposition parties, PRI candidates for office had to actually be electable, a demand that limited union’s ability to gain representatives in state and federal government (Burgess 2004: 74).

If these institutional changes could be arranged, then the state corporatist unions would wither and dissolve in the face of genuine unionism of social and movement unions (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 230).⁴³ Thus the prospect of labor law reform actually serves to fragment the labor movement. On one side state corporatist unions want to protect their legacy privileges, and leaders of these unions would be willing to trade political support and/or restraint of their members to a party willing to block labor law reform. On the opposite side are the social and movement unions who would benefit greatly if the government had less ability to influence or inhibit their organizing efforts.⁴⁴ This fragmentation resulted in failed labor law reforms in 1997 and 2001 (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 62-69; Cook 2007: 167-173).

What seemed like a democratic transition in the political sphere turned out to merely be an alternation in power with regards to the corporatist labor relations system (Bensusán and Cook 2003). Without labor reform the old inducements and constraints still existed, but in practice these institutions worked in very different ways than in the past (Grayson 2004; Samstad 2002). While state corporatist unions were much more autonomous than they had been in recent years, they gained this autonomy only because the PAN was in many cases not interested in trading material benefits for votes (Bensusán 2006; Samstad 2002). President Fox inherited the reins of the corporatist labor law and institutions; he was able to support unions who promised docility and then use these docile unions to hinder independent unions' attempts to expand their membership (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 253-254, Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 51-52). In order to survive, state corporatist unions have increasingly relied on creating protection unions in maquilas; by blocking independent unions' ability to organize maquilas the state corporatist

⁴³ This theory rests on the assumption that the independent unions could gather the strategic capacity and organizational strength to take advantage of a newer, more level playing field (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 230).

⁴⁴ The SNTE muddles this easy distinction somewhat, as the teachers' union has vacillated between supporting and opposing labor law reform.

unions have gained favor with conservative politicians, and essentially made business leaders the most important creator of unions in the past decade (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 98; de la Garza 2003: 226).⁴⁵

Without the re-founding of labor laws and institutions the democratic transition proved to be, at least in the realm of labor, an alternation rather than any real change or improvement (Bensusán and Cook 2003). Since the PAN simply took the reins of the corporatist labor institutions, one would expect to see little change in the tactics of Mexican unions. State corporatist unions would continue to seek gains through political mediation: leaders' past acquiescence to government demands would have left them with little legitimacy among their constituents, and thus these leaders would be reliant on government support for their continued tenure. Social unions would likely attempt to maintain autonomy, strive to be responsive to workers, and strive for changes in labor law and economic policy. Importantly, social unions would likely continue to be pragmatic in their dealings with the state, for fear that the repressive power of the corporatist labor law would be used to quiet their criticism once again. As we shall see, however, unions reacted to the political transition in novel ways (see Table 3).

Table 3: Revitalization Tactics Adopted by Labor Organizations

⁴⁵ In some ways the PAN seemed to be creating a system akin to “exclusionary corporatism”, where coopted labor leaders control unionized workers, but the government also attempts to keep unionization rates low (O’Donnell 1973; Caraway 2012: 281-282).

Union/ Confederation	Revitalization Tactics Adopted	Goal of Revitalization	Drivers of Revitalization
<i>CTM</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • none 	No revitalization	N/A
<i>SNTE</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • none 	No revitalization	N/A
<i>CROC</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Justice Frame • Targeting New Demographics • Mobilization • Civil Society Coalitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regain legitimacy among members • Bolster political power • Adaptation, not revitalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminished Political Power • Change in Leadership
<i>CROM</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Justice Frame • Targeting New Demographics • Mobilization • Civil Society Coalitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Internal Strengthening” • Regain Legitimacy • Support political action • Adaptation, Not Revitalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminished Political Power • Change in Leadership • Small Membership Base
<i>STRM</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Justice Frame • Targeting New Demographics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Organizational Stability • Revitalization without resistance to employers, government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large Female Membership
<i>Mineros</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Justice Frame • Mobilization • Civil Society Coalitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resist government repression • Revitalization Tactics as Survival Mechanism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Leadership • Government Repression
<i>SME</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Justice Frame • Mobilization • Civil Society Coalitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resist government repression • Revitalization Tactics as Survival Mechanism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing Historical Tactics • Government Repression

The CTM: State Corporatism to the Highest Bidder

During the economic transition, as we saw, the CTM maintained its allegiance with the PRI despite the painful economic and labor reforms enacted by the party. Though the CTM was able to gain a few concessions along the way, the experience of economic restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s highlighted the weakness of the CTM and its leaders' inability to resist the demands of its government allies. When the PRI lost the presidency in 2000, the CTM faced a unique situation: the PRI was increasingly unable to provide state resources; but by the same token the PRI was less able to discipline union leaders by controlling access to state resources (Samstad 2002: 19). The CTM was losing options for state resources, but also had more autonomy than it had had in many years. In the face of a democratic transition that threatened the traditional power resources of the confederation, CTM leaders concentrated on maintaining the corporatist "rules of the game" to limit the advance of social unions (Bensusán 2004: 271-272). In response to the political transition the CTM has adapted their strategy only slightly, in that they cooperated more freely with the PAN during the terms of President Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón. But otherwise the CTM has declined any form of revitalization and only sought to maintain its remaining leverage as a state corporatist union.

In the 1990s the CTM was still the largest union confederation in Mexico, and according to official data still has more members than any other confederation. But the economic restructuring vastly reduced the CTM's membership numbers. Though this trend continued during Vicente Fox's term, after 2003 the CTM's membership numbers rose dramatically. Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán (2006: 134-136, 203-206) noted that the CTM's membership rolls dropped dramatically between 1997 and 2003: in 1997 the CTM had 926,455 members; in 2000 that number had fallen to 896,678; and by 2003 membership had plummeted

to 454,093. After this 60% drop in membership, however, the CTM seemed to grow fantastically and by 2005 had almost 755,000 members (Muñoz Rios 2011); by 2008 the CTM's membership had grown back to 859,000 members (Zepeda Martínez 2009: 76). Though all these sources relied on the official registry at the Mexican Labor Ministry, scholars have not adequately accounted for the CTM's astounding ability to reverse its membership decline (see, for example, Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006). While the confederation has almost certainly been signing protection contracts with employers, it seems unlikely the CTM would have been able to sign so many protection contracts in such a short time. Thus it seems likely that the confederation has somehow artificially inflated its membership numbers, continuing its own historical tradition (see Middlebrook 1995). In spite of the CTM's ability to "reverse" its membership decline, since the early 1980s the CTM has lost most of its power in elected political bodies, now possessing only a fraction of the seats in the Federal Congress in once enjoyed (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 34).

Despite these losses in power resources, the CTM continues to implement a state corporatist strategy. The CTM is still generally considered to be a subordinate labor organization, attempting to eke out what state subsidies it can from mobilizing its diminishing power resources (Gatica Lara 2007: 77; Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 97-98). Whatever positive benefits workers received as members of the CTM under the old corporatist regime are now gone, replaced entirely by leaders' desires to maintain membership levels as best they can while protecting their own positions from the advances of rival union leaders or governmental attack (Gatica Lara 2007: 77). The CTM has maintained its alliance with the PRI, but has been willing to work with PAN as that party has increased its political strength at the local and federal level. During the successive PAN presidencies unions like the CTM, the CROC, and CROM

have found pro-business PAN and PRI officials are more interested in trading political favors with union leaders who are willing create ghost unions (Bensusán 2006).

Debates over labor law reforms have been instructive in understanding the CTM's strategy for organizational survival. In earlier iterations of labor law reform the CTM vociferously denounced provisions of the legislation that would increase transparency, accountability, and internal democracy in unions (Cook 2007: 169-173, 186). CTM leaders denounced the measures aimed at mandating internal union democracy as attacks on union autonomy. Indeed it is certainly ironic to hear the CTM denounce these democratizing measures as a return of unwanted, corporatist-style government meddling in unions' internal affairs, when government meddling in union internal affairs had helped many of these leaders rise to power in the confederations (Cook 2007: 186-189; Middlebrook 1995: chapter four; Grayson 1998: 32-33). Yet most observers believe that the CTM leaders were merely protecting their personal control over undemocratic unions, an integral facet of the corporatist system.

The CTM repeated these arguments in response to the recent successful labor law reform, passed in November 2012 (Muñoz Riós 2012h). The original bill submitted by outgoing President Calderón included a number of provisions that would force increased transparency in union activities, including internal elections, as well as a number of provisions for wage payments and job flexibility that many observers argue would decrease the strength of labor protections and adversely affect workers in Mexico (Aguilera 2012; Israel 2012; Stevenson 2012). As in the past the CTM condemned the transparency rules as "impositions" and a violation of union autonomy; eventually the CTM garnered enough political support to win the removal of transparency measures from the bill (Becerril and Ballinas 2012; Muñoz Riós 2012h). Recently state corporatist unions made their denunciations of transparency by referencing the

struggles of the SME and mineros against harsh government intervention; in doing so the CTM is attempting to adopt a veneer of autonomous, responsive unionism (Becerril and Ballinas 2012). Yet in a revealing turn of events, once the provisions for union democracy had been stripped from the bill PRI representatives from the labor movement (and those closely allied with it) supported the measure (Garcia and Gutierrez 2012). Thus once the threat of union transparency was defeated, the CTM was willing to approve flexibility and wage measures that represented a major setback for workers' rights (Bacon 2012).

The battles over labor law reform highlight the CTM's continued willingness to accept worse conditions for workers in exchange for protecting the power and positions of their leaders (de la Garza 2003). This trend was also obvious during the 1990s, and continued through the PAN presidencies of 2000-2012. The rise of the PAN put the CTM at a crossroads, but their inability to come up with an independent project meant CTM leaders sought to recreate a corporatist bargain with the government as best they could, even as the government was now controlled by the PAN (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006: 165). The PAN's pro-business focus meant that it continued the neoliberal economic policies of previous administrations, and sought to improve the health of businesses at the expense of labor unions (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006: 162; Bensusán 2006).

For the CTM the dual transitions were also a time of adaptation, but in their case it was a continual process of protecting leaders and political bargains in hopes of maintaining their historical privileges, positions, and thus their ability to affect state policy. While it would be incorrect to say the CTM has not adapted its tactics to the new economic and political environment, it would be similarly inappropriate to suggest that these adaptations were anything more than superficial. The CTM survived previous crises in its corporatist alliance mostly

thanks to the government's eventual return to the bargain. In the current context, however, the CTM's strategy seems unsustainable. The CTM has found itself defending fewer and fewer prerogatives in its quest to remain the most important labor interlocutor with the sitting government. But the cost of this struggle has been felt in massive membership losses and large drops in the number of contracts signed by CTM unions. The CTM has been able to survive thanks to its willingness to work with business leaders, but this cooperation has largely led to protection unions, and has done little to improve the CTM's ability to act independently. Yet in spite of its crumbling ability to gain state resources, the CTM has been unwilling to even hint at attempts to revitalize the union. In the end, the adaptations undertaken by the CTM seem to have moved it away from being a trade union and closer to being an agency that provides firms with pliable workforces. Thus while the CTM *as a confederation of unions* is on an unsustainable path, it has found a niche as way for businesses to avoid "real" unions, and under that role its leaders may be able to maintain the organizational survival of the confederation indefinitely.

The SNTE: Where State Corporatism Still Delivers

Through the economic transition the SNTE grew closer to the PRI. Despite the removal of corporatist leader Carlos Jonguitud Barrios and subsequent opportunities for democratic loosening, new union president Elba Esther Gordillo strengthened her hold on the union and continued the state corporatist strategy. The democratic transition meant the SNTE faced the same decision all state corporatist unions faced: what to do now that the PRI was an opposition party. Like the CTM the SNTE continues to rely almost purely on state resources and political power. But importantly, unlike the CTM the SNTE has been able to maintain its ability to gain concessions and even enhance its political power. The SNTE has avoided the weakening influence of the economic and subsequent political transition (Bensusán and Tapia 2011).

Thanks to its size, sectoral location, and political autonomy the SNTE has been able to effectively protect and expand its strength almost entirely through political maneuverings. In essence the SNTE is the only union to still effectively maintain the old corporatist tradition of gaining concessions for leaders and members entirely through political bargaining (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 46-50).

Perhaps the most salient source of the SNTE's continuing power is its massive size and national reach, both results of the fact that education is a nationwide industry. The SNTE has historically been a massive union, and currently still has influence over about a million teachers (Góngora and Leyva 2008, cited in Bensusán and Tapia 2011: 25). Thanks to its size alone the union has a vast cache of societal resources in the form of union dues, through which the union collects millions of pesos every year (Bensusán and Tapia 2011: 26). Moreover, the number of voters the SNTE can influence both directly and indirectly is massive. As Cook (1996b: 21-22) notes, teachers are one of the most important means through which society is reproduced. Teachers can become leaders in the community, and through this leadership can have greater sway on the political leanings of their communities. Thus the SNTE directly manages a large voting bloc, and can informally influence the electoral actions many others outside the union.

Finally, the union benefits from the high job stability teachers tend to enjoy. Early in her tenure Gordillo was unable to resist President Salinas's educational reforms, which focused on decentralizing the education system (Cook 1996b: 176). But the SNTE has since been able to block more recent attempts at education reform. One of the most popularly demanded reforms is linking student performance and teacher evaluations. Such changes focused on testing as a way to ensure needed improvements in the quality of the educational system in Mexico (Pérez Ruiz 2011). But these reforms invariably included the risk that local schools would have greater

power over teacher hiring and firing, and would likely result in the dismissal of teachers who could not measurably improve students' test scores (Bensusán and Tapia 2011:25; Gindin 2011: 114; Leyva Piña 2012; Pérez Ruiz 2011: 76-77). The SNTE opposed these reform measures on the simple fact that one of the union's most important power resources is the union's ability to control hiring and firing practices. By protecting teachers' jobs Gordillo is essentially protecting the foundations of her personal power.

In addition, Gordillo has been able to pacify large portions of the union by ensuring benefits and concessions continue to flow to union members (Bensusán and Tapia 2011: 19-20). Since the 1990s teacher's salaries, benefits, and working conditions have improved while the quality of education has not improved (Leyva Piña 2012); essentially teachers in Mexico are getting pay increases without much improvement in students' test scores (Pérez Ruiz 2011). Many teachers seem to accept the limited democracy allowed to them (generally at the state and local levels) in return for the material benefits they have received from being members of such a strong union (Bensusán and Tapia 2011: 29-30, Leyva Piña 2012). Though it should also be noted that, until very recently, the SNTE has literally been the only union available for teachers. Thus many teachers likely accept the lack of internal democracy in the SNTE because they have no other choice. Nevertheless, it is feasible to suggest that the material benefits teachers have received during Gordillo's reign in the union have at least quieted some who may have dissented.

While material concessions and lack of other union choices have kept the rank and file of the SNTE relatively supportive of Gordillo, the true power of the SNTE comes from its continuing ability to be a force in Mexican politics. In 2000 the SNTE used its voting power to secure promises of state resources from presidential candidates, much the way it had for many years under the PRI, with one important difference. That year the SNTE was still technically an

ally of the PRI, and Gordillo was an up-and-coming member of the leadership of the party. Yet in a cagey political move Gordillo allegedly instructed members of the SNTE to support PAN candidate and eventual President Vicente Fox in the election (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 47; Leyva Piña 2012). This move resulted in great material benefits for the SNTE, including wage increases through Fox's sexenio and positions in the government for prominent SNTE leaders (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 48; Bensusán and Tapia 2011: 19-20; Ornelas 2011). However, Gordillo's willingness to deal with the PAN led to her expulsion from the PRI in 2005, just as she began to make a run for the party's presidential nomination (Davalos and Pérez Silva 2005; Pérez Silva 2005). While unions and confederations like the CTM lost political influence when their party alliances deteriorated (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 49-50), the increasing autonomy of the SNTE has allowed the union greater flexibility in making political bargains with any and all parties that offer concessions to the union. In the closely fought presidential election of 2006 Gordillo essentially traded the electoral support of the SNTE for positions in the Calderón administration (Avilés 2011; Ornelas 2011).

Many have described the SNTE as simply a vehicle for Elba Esther Gordillo's political ambitions, specifically her desire to be president (Leyva Piña 2012; Othón Quiroz trejo 2004). But in early 2005 Gordillo founded a new political party, the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL), as an attempt to increase her personal leverage in the political arena (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 47; Gatica Lara 2007: 74-75). The PANAL remained independent from the PRI, and Gordillo's attempt to increase her personal leverage in the political sphere angered leaders of the PRI, eventually resulting in her expulsion from the PRI. Though small, the PANAL has been able to gain strategic political influence in its short existence. The PANAL ran candidates in the 2006, 2009, and 2012 elections, and in each election gained enough of the popular vote to

continue the party's registration (thus allowing it to continue to draw funding from the state) (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 47-48; Leyva Piña 2012). In presidential election years Gordillo allegedly instructs many of her followers to split their ballot, whereby followers support presidential candidates from a major party but vote in PANAL deputies and senators (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 47; Leyva Piña 2012). In 2012 the cycle seemed to repeat itself. Just one week before the 2012 elections, *La Jornada* reported on a secret plan, codenamed "Agora," through which Gordillo expected to deliver 5 million votes to PRI presidential candidate and eventual victor Enrique Peña Nieto (Avilés 2012b). In 2012 the alleged ballot-splitting initiative was especially successful. In addition to SNTE votes seemingly backing the victorious President Enrique Peña Nieto, the PANAL won a small but important bloc of seats in the federal Congress. More specifically the PANAL won ten seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Though objectively a small number, if the PANAL representatives allied with the largest coalition in the Chamber of Deputies, the PRI-Green Party coalition, the three parties would control a simple majority of legislative body (Ribando Seelke 2012; Urrutia 2012).

The continuing state corporatist strategy of the SNTE rests on a combination of political strength and Elba Esther Gordillo's ability to wield this strength. The union has had to adapt its tactics to fit the newly competitive political arena, but has done so without trouble. The SNTE's virtual monopoly of representation gives it great numerical strength, and thus electoral strength, while the unreformed internal structures of the union allow Gordillo to maintain the authoritarian power over the union.⁴⁶ The small bloc of PANAL representatives also adds to the union's political influence. Gordillo has so far been able to win a great deal of concessions and subsidies from successive PAN governments thanks to the political power of the SNTE. Though the

⁴⁶ In 2011 a new teachers' union was allowed to register with the Labor Ministry, though it remains relatively small in size, organizing roughly 7500 teachers (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 48 note 77).

SNTE has faced obstacles since the political transition (demands for education reform, Gordillo's expulsion from the PRI), the SNTE has been able to move past each impediment and maintain its influence. Thus the state corporatist strategy has yet to fail the union, given them little reason to revitalize. However, new president Enrique Peña Nieto has begun challenging the SNTE's power. By pushing through an important education reform early in his term and then having Elba Esther Gordillo arrested on charges of corruption, Peña Nieto seems intent on undermining the union's state corporatist strategy.⁴⁷

The CROC and CROM: Feigned Revitalization

Historically, the CROC and CROM were official unions, and since the political transition they have generally been viewed as state corporatist confederations, continuing a strategy that focuses on gaining state resources in lieu of building autonomous societal resources (Bensusán 2004: 243). Even after democratization both confederations remained allied with the PRI, though leaders of these unions are quick to note that they invite leaders and candidates from different parties to speak to their congresses, and members are free to vote as they please in elections (González Guzmán 2012; Suárez 2012). However, in 2005 the CROC began to implement some tactics that are commonly associated with union revitalization; at the same time the CROM also began implementing a few similar tactics, but significantly increased its use of revitalization tactics after 2010. These two confederations are initiating new programs to improve workers' lives and skills, they are engaging in larger social issues, they are mobilizing

⁴⁷ This recent development could very well alter the strategy implemented by the SNTE. When President Peña Nieto signed into law the reform of the education system in March 2013, he effectively challenged the SNTE's ability to control teacher hiring. His subsequent attack on Elba Esther Gordillo made the president's stance very clear: he was not interested in granting more concessions to the overly powerful SNTE. How this situation will affect the future of the teacher's union is still unclear, but it certainly represents a rupture with the previous effectiveness of the SNTE's state corporatist strategy. Even as Gordillo faces a legal battle, and the union stands to lose important controls over the teaching profession, the SNTE will almost certainly continue to be a very large union, meaning that for the foreseeable future the SNTE will still have a great deal of political sway. Yet these events are still too recent to know exactly how, or if, the union will alter its strategy in the face of this challenge.

workers more, and they seem to be attempting to strengthen the autonomy of their organizations. These initiatives are driven by a set of factors that have made a pure state corporatist strategy untenable for the CROC and the CROM in the long term.

The implementation of these revitalization tactics disrupts the idea that the CROC and CROM are blindly following a state corporatist strategy, and merely subordinating themselves to a political party or government. Instead, the CROC and CROM are attempting the shift their resource bases, building institutions through which each confederation can access a larger quantity of societal resources. In the end, however, the adoption of these revitalization tactics is merely an adaptation for these confederations, signaling a diversification of their resources but not a full shift to social unionism. In this way the CROC and CROM are examples of confederations that are moving toward becoming social unions in Bensusán's (2004) typology, but have yet to fully commit themselves to political autonomy.

This section focuses on the CROC and CROM jointly because these two confederations face similar problems, and have adapted to the changing political context in remarkably similar ways. The economic and political transition diminished the membership of both the CROC and the CROM, and adversely affected each confederation's political influence. By 2008 the CROC had only 202 affiliated member unions and 70,000 members, while the CROM had a paltry 154 member unions and 28,000 workers under its purview; thus the CROC and CROM represented a mere 3% and 1% (respectively) of the unionized population (Zepeda Martínez 2009: 76); and it hardly needs reminding that the overall unionization rate has plummeted since the 1980s (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006; Zepeda Martínez 2009). Compared to the CTM, which started the 2000s with roughly 800,000 members (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006: 204), the CROC and CROM are diminutive confederations. Through the 1980s the

government bolstered the political strength of the CROC and CROM enough that they could counterbalance the CTM somewhat. Nevertheless, by the 2000s the CROC and CROM had few deputies or senators in the federal Congress (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006: 200-201; González Guzmán 2012; Suárez 2012). By 2003 the CROC had only two and the CROM only one deputy in Congress, and neither had any senators (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006: 200-201). By 2009 the count had not changed (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 38), though in the 2012 elections the Secretary General of the CROC did gain a Senate seat (Freyre Rubio 2012; Ramos Ramírez 2012). Thus the CROC and CROM were faced with a dual issue: they could no longer afford to lose members or member unions, but similarly could not steadfastly rely on their political influence to offset their dwindling membership.

Declining membership and political influence were two causes of the union confederations' alteration in tactics; the rise of new leaders was another. Isaías González Cuevas rose to leadership of the CROC in 2004, and Rodolfo González Guzmán was elected to lead the CROM in 2010 (González Guzmán 2012; Ramos Ramírez 2012). After both of these leaders rose to their positions the confederations began altering their tactics; the confederations began engaging more often with member unions and creating new programs to improve workers' experience with their union and the confederation (Ramos Ramírez 2012). As we shall see, the CROC has adopted more revitalization tactics than the CROM, an occurrence likely related to the longer tenure of Isaías González. Yet both of these leaders come from the traditional path of state corporatist union leaders. The CROC's González Cuevas has been a union leader since the 1960s, and has twice before held political office as a member of the PRI.⁴⁸ Though much younger than González Cuevas, González Guzman was a PRI plurinominal deputy from 2000-

⁴⁸ González Cuevas was a supplemental senator from 1994-1997, and a federal deputy from 1997-2000 (see González Cuevas's official website, http://sitl.diputados.gob.mx/LXI_leg/curricula.php?dipt=329).

2003 (Camp 2011: 1188). While these leaders brought some excitement and change to their respective confederations, they have both certainly been socialized into the role of state corporatist-style union leader.

In the face of diminishing membership, and with new leaders hoping to gain the loyalty of members and member unions, the CROC and CROM have started new programs and initiatives that increase the role of the confederation, beyond just being an organization that seeks state resources. These unions are looking both inside and outside the worker to increase their engagement with issues that affect the daily lives of their constituents. The CROC especially has been increasing its capacity to help workers improve their skills, family life, and combat addictions. One CROC leader described these efforts as an interested in improving workers “internally,” both as workers and as people who have lives outside of work (Ramos Ramírez 2012). To make CROC members more attractive to employers, to improve workers’ ability to contribute to the workplace, and to better enable workers to escape unemployment, the CROC has partnered with the National Education Ministry to supplement workers’ formal education and train them for new types of jobs (Ramos Ramírez 2012; CROC 2012b). The CROM has showed some similar interest in worker training, opening their “Centro de Capacitación Obrera” in the spring of 2012 (CROM 2012b).

The CROC also has a number of educational initiatives that seek to improve the daily and family life of their members. These initiatives focus on more personal issues like family relationships, violence, and drug abuse. The CROC has offered courses on building a “good family” (CROC 2012d) and preventing family violence (see *MANcomunidad* November 2012). Leaders also seem interested in improving the work and lifestyle prospects for the children of its members. To that end CROC member unions in some states have set up summer courses to

complement children's formal education (Freyre Rubio 2012; Ramos Ramírez 2012; CROC 2010c). In addition, workers' "vices" have been targeted by the CROC, as CROC unions at the national and state level have introduced educational programs for the prevention of alcoholism, tobacco addiction, and youth smoking (Ramos Ramírez 2012; CROC 2011b). These programs are buttressed by fairly regular editorials and educational articles in *MANcomunidad*, the CROC's monthly magazine, about the dangers and health issues connected to tobacco and alcohol abuse (CROC 2011f; CROC 2012c). The CROM has also devoted some space in its bi-monthly magazine to combating addictions (Mendoza Flores 2012b).

While these sorts of programs are not exactly new for unionized workers, the fact that the confederations are undertaking responsibility for them is novel. These sorts of programs are exactly the type of programs and subsidies that union confederations used to wrangle from the government (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 16-17). By providing many of them without government subsidies, the confederations seem to be attempting to replace some of the state resources members used to enjoy.

In the Global North global climate change has been an important new issue that has resulted in fruitful alliances for labor unions. For the CROC and the CROM climate change and environmentalism have also become important sites of new advocacy and broadening their respective agendas. Leaders in the CROC described environmental questions as "central" issues for the union (Freyre Rubio 2012), and noted the opportunity (and necessity) that unions be unified on environmental issues (CROC 2011). Rodolfo González Guzmán, Secretary General of the CROM, essentially echoed these sentiments and noted his desire to broaden the CROM's activism in environmental issues (González Guzmán 2012). One of the very specific ways these two unions are addressing climate change is by advocating for the development of "green jobs,"

“green tourism,” and generally encouraging a “green economy.” The confederations see these areas of the economy as growth industries and as the possible future of Mexico’s economy.

While the leadership of the CROM certainly mentioned the green jobs sector, the CROC seems slightly more interested in promoting green jobs, especially green tourism (CROC 2010b, 2010e, 2012a). As a union that often represents service workers, especially hotel workers, green tourism jobs present a great opportunity to link their growing interest in environmentalism with a plan for job creation.

On a broader scale these unions are conspicuously being involved in attending and planning climate change conferences. In 2010 CROC Secretary General Isaías González led a conference in Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, which resulted in a national agreement on climate change (CROC 2010). This agreement included demands for greater research and information on climate change, but also designing economic strategies that are sustainable (CROC 2010). These conferences are an important forum for creating alliances across unions and civil society; the agreement from the conference in Chapultepec Park has a large number of signatures from CROC affiliates, but also includes a number of civil society associations and other unions, including the CROM (“Conferencia sobre Calentamiento Global” 2010). In 2010 the CROC also attended an international conference of unions focused on climate change (CROC 2011), and both the CROC and CROM sent representatives to the UN Climate Change Conferences in Durban (2010) and Cancun (2011) (González Guzmán 2012; see also *CROM Vanguardia Laboral*, November/December 2011).

The engagement of these two confederations with environmental issues shows some promise, but also represents only the first step toward true environmental advocacy. At a policy level these efforts display important new connections between the unions and their counterparts

in civil society, as well as an important broadening of the unions' interests. The CROC has even admitted that the necessary steps to improving the environment may result in certain jobs and industries disappearing entirely (CROC 2011). Yet at the same time these positions are generally in line with the PRI's stance on global climate change, suggesting that the CROC and CROM may just be mimicking the party line. Moreover, many of the workers these two confederations represent are not in manufacturing industries, or other industries that would be hard-hit by new environmental regulations. In addition, though the confederations are signing agreements to further discuss and research environmental issues, neither confederation has put forward concrete ideas how to actually achieve the goals held within their agreements. Likewise, leaders rarely discussed how to engage their member unions and employers on issues of environmentalism and climate change. While the CROC and CROM certainly have increased their engagement with the issues of climate change and the environment protection, as of yet these confederations have only scratched the surface of advocacy.

The issue of "utilities costs" has recently become a major topic in Mexican unions and politics, especially since Calderón closed the LFC in 2009.⁴⁹ The CROC and CROM have partially taken up this banner, demanding that utilities costs be lowered for Mexican citizens (Ramos Ramírez 2012; CROC 2011c; CROC 2011e; CROC 2010d; CROM 2012a). One CROC official noted lowering utilities costs was not just a demand of workers, but a demand of society in general (Freyre Rubio 2012). Yet while the CROC and CROM have spoken loudly and often about "utilities costs," their rhetoric stops short of uniting with the SME in its fight for its workers' employment rights. In many ways, the CROC and CROM can make veiled demands about utilities costs without becoming too critical of the government or seeming too radical. While entering the debate about utilities costs allows these unions to connect with the broader

⁴⁹ This event will be discussed in greater detail in the section on the SME.

demands of society, they only seem to be doing so because it is a safe issue. Indeed, Calderón used the same justification, society's demand for lower utilities costs, for closing the LFC in the first place. The issue of utilities costs has no opponents. Everyone wants the prices for utilities to decrease. And by simply coming out in favor of lower utilities costs these confederations have not committed themselves to any single path through which this can be accomplished. In the end, the CROC and CROM can use this issue to seem interested in broader social issues, while the confederations carefully avoid choosing a side in the political fight between the SME and the government.

Finally, these unions have been taking stances on other social justice issues. Leaders in both the CROC and CROM noted their opposition to the harsh immigration laws of the United States, especially the Arizona immigration law that arose from SB 1070 (Freyre Rubio 2012, González Guzmán 2012). In addition, CROM leaders have noted the need for Mexico to halt the social dumping that has developed since the promulgation of NAFTA (González Guzmán 2012). Certainly each of these issues is important, and shows the unions are thinking more broadly about their role in society, both nationally and internationally. Like the utilities cost issue, however, the CROC and CROM are carefully advancing these issues in ways that do not overtly oppose the government, the PRI, the political system, or the economic system of Mexico. The issue of social dumping comes the closest to opposition to the government, at least in reference to the maquila model of production that was supported by the government. But in this case the CROM framed the issue as a defense of Mexico from mistreatment by other nations, specifically the United States. The immigration issue is similarly situated. Despite the fact that Mexico has a number of its own immigration issues on which these two unions could have advanced a

position, the CROC and CROM stick to reproving the US government for its handling of immigration issues.

Attracting, including, and organizing new constituents is also an important part of a union revitalization project. In Mexico the maquila production system and other types of more flexible work have resulted in a working population that is more likely to be female. The CROM has been especially active in reaching out to their female members and improving the internal gender dynamics of the unions (see CROM 2011a). The CROM began supporting a center for the development of the women in Mexico City. Run by Professor Mary Paz Estrada Acherica, this educational complex has provided community support, education, and training to women for 18 years; more recently the CROM has pledged financial support for the institute (see CROM 2011c). But there is also a campaign within the union to show that women can also be leaders themselves. Just as work in Mexico has often been a male sphere, so union leadership has typically been male-dominated (a common history shared by most unions around the world) (Ortíz 2012). The most often-cited example of this campaign is Maria Mayela Trueba Hernández, the head of the state branch of the CROM in Estado Mexico, and also the first woman to rise to such a position in the CROM. In an interview for the CROM's bimonthly magazine *Vanguardia Laboral*, Trueba noted how difficult it was to be a female leader in a union, and how misogyny still exists among many of the male membership of the CROM (Morales Hernández 2011a; see also CROM 2011b). The CROM did an intensive round of interviews with prominent female members, all of whom reiterated Trueba's points. Each of them conspicuously noted, however, that women most certainly can be effective leaders, and that members should put aside any ideas that suggest otherwise (see CROM 2011b, 2011e, and CROC 2011d).

In addition, the CROC and CROM both reacted to the strength of the student movement YoSoy132 during the 2012 presidential election by increasingly discussing the need to create jobs and unions that will serve the next generation (Mendoza Flores 2012a). The CROC and CROM leaders I interviewed declared the importance of youth and demanded that the country take steps to create enough jobs the next generation (Freyre Rubio 2012; González Guzmán 2012; Ramos Ramírez 2012). Moreover, both organizations desire to have more contact between their leadership and younger members, as well as to get more young members into the leadership structures of the union (Ramos Ramírez 2012; Morales Hernández 2012a).

It is possible to believe the CROC and CROM's independent attempts to engage with traditionally under-unionized populations are a sign of revitalization efforts. However, such tactics also need to be viewed in terms of their actual effectiveness. In naming and exposing these issues in the confederation the CROM *seems* to be directly and unequivocally addressing the discrimination against women. But the CROM's attempts to seek gender equality are framed in the very terms that have historically reinforced gender *inequality*. Moreover, both confederations' courting of youth and students seems to be driven by the rise of the vociferous student movement. Thus in reaching out to Mexican youth the CROC and CROM seem to be reacting to political winds rather than proactively seeking youth involvement. In the end, with regard to unionizing nontraditional groups both the CROC and CROM are saying the right things, but so far neither has initiated truly strong programs towards this end.

Neither the CROC nor the CROM have a strong tradition of mobilization, a characteristic of their historical state corporatist strategy. Granted, over their history the confederations have mobilized at various times, but more often the CROC and CROM would threaten mobilization only in an effort to force a negotiated settlement of an issue, settlements which almost always

came just in time to cancel the planned mobilization. Yet in recent years the CROC has started a school of “Social Unionism” to enhance the mobilization capacity of its member unions, and by extension the CROC itself; the CROM has also had an important hand in creating and shaping this school (see CROC 2011d). In addition, the CROC and CROM have both mobilized in the face of major political events in the recent decade. When President Calderón attempted to remove the leader of the mineros’ union, the CROC mobilized in defense of the mineros’ leader, arguing the government was unfairly repressing the union (Ramos Ramírez 2012).⁵⁰ This sign of solidarity is an interesting case: the CROC went out to protest Calderón’s interference in union internal politics, an issue that strikes at the power of union leaders, but can be especially threatening to a leadership elected through less-than-democratic means. The CROM also joined many of the marches and protests against the new labor reform law of 2012, at times marching with the UNT and other independent unions (“La UNT Amaga con Marchas” 2011). Though neither of these confederations relies heavily on mobilization, their increasing use of the tactic suggests a desire to increase their capacity to use street demonstrations as a source of pressure.

In explanation for its adoption of certain revitalization tactics, CROC leaders noted their desire to show that the CROC is a “different union” than it has been in the past (Ramos Ramírez 2012). For the CROC, attempting to address the needs of workers and their families is a way to gain legitimacy (Ramos Ramírez 2012); it is a way to be more responsive to the everyday needs of members even as the confederation becomes less and less able to win gains at the bargaining table. Indeed the idea behind these revitalization tactics is to improve the “culture” in the confederation, to convert their weaknesses into strengths, and thereby help reinforce the bargaining power of their member unions (Ramos Ramírez 2012). Leaders also noted the importance of “la base” (“the base”) as the source of the CROC’s power (Ramos Ramírez 2012).

⁵⁰ The case of the government attacks on the mineros will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

To this end, the confederation is becoming increasingly transparent in its decision-making, even going as far as publishing their expenses and costs in their monthly magazine (Ramos Ramírez 2012; see *MANComunidad* for monthly expense reports). All of these suggest a labor organization that is attempting to create and strengthen its ties with members to increase the power and legitimacy it receives from society.

Yet in spite of these improvements in their societal bases of power, the CROC has far from abandoned many of its traditional of state corporatist strategies. Though the CROC realized in the 1980s that it could no longer count on government support (Suárez 2012), much of the leadership of the union still believes the political arm of the CROC is virtually indispensable, an opinion no doubt influenced by the Secretary General's recent election to the Senate as a member of the PRI (Freyre Rubio 2012; Ramos Ramírez 2012; Suárez 2012). During the PAN administrations the CROC worked "pragmatically" with the PAN, despite the fact that the CROC is still an official member of the PRI's labor sector (Suárez 2012). During the 2012 presidential campaign Enrique Peña Nieto visited the CROC's national congress, the only union confederation to experience such an opportunity (Suárez 2012).⁵¹ In that election the CROC reaffirmed its alliance with the PRI, though Alfonso Suárez noted the alliance would no longer be based on "unconditional support" on the part of the CROC (Suárez 2012).⁵²

Moreover the CROC's attempt to rebrand itself as a social union has its blemishes. Leaders of the confederation speak warily about over-democratization of the confederation. Two leaders of the CROC noted the weakness caused by the alternation of leaders in the CROC in the 1970s (Ramos Ramírez 2012, Suárez 2012). In the more recent debate on labor law reform, the

⁵¹ Peña Nieto did invite other union confederations to PRI events, and met the leadership of other unions in private conferences, but never visited the congress of another confederation.

⁵² In spite of this promise of autonomy Suárez remained unconvinced that Enrique Peña Nieto would be a good ally for the CROC (Suárez 2012).

CROC joined with other state corporatist unions to denounce the parts of the reform that would have forced unions to be more transparent and democratic. One CROC leader argued that confederation did not fear transparency, but was wary that the government would use such measures to persecute union leaders even if they are democratically elected (Becerril and Ballinas 2012). Moreover, the continuing use of protection contracts by the CROC is a worrisome trend. Though leaders argue these contracts are “better than nothing” for workers (Suárez 2012), these contracts in reality do nothing for workers and only serve to make the union seem more attractive both to political and to business leaders.

The CROM undertook many of its revitalization measures in an effort to achieve “internal strengthening” soon after the ascendance of a new Secretary General in 2010 (“fortalecimiento interno,” González Guzmán 2012). Similar to the CROC, the CROM hoped that by being more responsive to workers and engaging in broader societal issues the confederation would regain some of the credibility lost “by the labor movement more generally” (Morales Hernández 2012b). Yet this internal strengthening is apparently focused on a future plan to create its own political movement (González Guzmán 2012). The CROM continues to be very devoted to its political project, as it believes in the importance of seeking to improve workers conditions both through societal engagement and through political engagement (González Guzmán 2012, Morales Hernández 2011b). The CROM was an important supporter of President Enrique Peña Nieto, and still has a small number of deputies in federal- and state-level legislatures. That the confederation focus continues to be on the political arena, even as its membership has waned so greatly, is revealing. The CROM obviously seems most interested in returning its ability to gain state resources through political maneuvering, and has focused its revitalization tactics on achieving that goal.

For the CROM, these revitalization tactics do signify a new venture into creating and fortifying societal sources of power. However, it seems likely that these tactics are being implemented only to reenergize and reunite the union under its new leadership. Rather than turning toward greater reliance on societal bases of power, the CROM continues to focus much of its energy on building political power and alliances with the President. For the CROM the ultimate goal of their internal and political strengthening is the (planned and hoped for) creation an independent, non-partisan political organization to push labor interests (González Guzmán 2012). According to the González Guzmán, this organization would include unions as well as other civil society organizations, and would create proposals on a broad range of social issues (González Guzmán 2012). While the leadership conceives of this organization in sincere ways, it seems more likely that a political arm would simply improve the CROM's ability to gather state resources. Indeed it seems dubious to believe the CROM would create an entirely new political arm in hopes of engaging more deeply with its current constituents.

In the end both the CROC and the CROM have implemented revitalization tactics not as a fundamental change for their confederations, but in an attempt to adapt to an environment in which their membership levels and political power are dwindling. These two union confederations have not abandoned the corporatist servicing model as much as their previous political allies have abandoned the confederations. The revitalization tactics represent a number of avenues for increasing the societal resources of these confederations, but seem to be designed merely to keep the confederations afloat. In that sense, then, while the CROC and CROM are implementing some of the tactics of Bensúsán's (2004) social unions, they have not committed to a true evolution in organizational strategy.

The STRM: Walking the Line of Social Unionism

The STRM showed a great deal of flexibility during the economic transition, initially fighting the structural changes then offering themselves as a cooperative partner in the privatization and continued operations of the union's main employer, TELMEX (de la Garza 2002; Murillo 2001). The union also has a history of being relatively forward-thinking in regards to female workers, but did so largely due to the fact that the union organizes a sector of employment that is traditionally gendered "women's work" (Milkman 1987: 3, 100). The union entered the new political environment of the 2000s as a "social union" and has done little to change its strategy since (Bensusán 2004). The position of the STRM is delicate, as it has cultivated an identity of cooperation with employers and contributing to productivity and quality improvements (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 252). By appearing too critical of the government or employers the STRM could break this identity, thereby making itself seem less like a collaborator and more like a militant threat. In keeping with this balanced approach, the STRM has reinforced some of its internal revitalization measures, but has generally kept its public critique to minimum, seeking an equilibrium between autonomy and cooperation to maintain its political and organizational autonomy.

In the 1980s the STRM began a set of initiatives to specifically address the issues women were facing both in the union and in the workplace. Their initial goal was to simply bring attention to women's issues, issues that were until then usually ignored by unions and employers (Ortíz 2012). More recently, however, the union advanced its goals regarding gender, and adopted the social justice frame of "gender equality." In doing so the union attempted to redefine the attention on women's issues in a way that deflects arguments about the possible divisiveness of identity politics (Ortíz 2012). In 2009 the STRM started a running collection of

news stories focused on women's experience, naming it the "Mirada y Reflexion con Equidad de Género" (roughly translated: "A Look at and Reflection of Gender Equality") (SEGSTRM and VEGUNT, various dates). In a tactic similar to one used by the SME, the STRM has also highlighted and attempted to leverage the large number of rights for women included in the Constitution of 1917. The STRM often argues that advancing women's rights at work is merely a more complete application of the Constitution (Ortíz 2012). Yet the secondary legislation that is supposed to create enforcement mechanism for these protections, notably the Ley Federal de Trabajo, does not include well-defined parameters for these rights, meaning they often remain unenforced. Without this legislation, STRM leader Rosario Ortíz noted that both businesses and unions are often unwilling to admit their social responsibility to women (Ortíz 2012).

The STRM does not only rely on a social justice frame, but at times also employs a common-sense take on gender equality. As with many organizations in working society, women in the STRM often face difficulty when advancing gender-specific issues (Ortíz 2012). Some members of the STRM worry that focusing on women's issues will serve to divide the labor movement. These unionists believe that simply addressing workers' non-gender-based issues is enough to ameliorate women's issues at the workplace; others take a more discriminatory stance, arguing that women are inherently less able to be effective unionists and union leaders (Ortíz 2012). In the face of these patriarchal arguments the STRM defends the equality of women, but also takes the chance to note that regardless of one's stance on women's "inherent abilities," all should be able to agree that a woman should not be penalized for being pregnant, having to provide childcare, or for attending to other "family responsibilities" (Ortíz 2012). While these women certainly desire gender equality, they note that even a patriarchal system should oppose any form of discrimination against female workers for issues related to family responsibilities.

In addressing issues of gender equality the STRM has sought out some civil society partners, including the international Freidrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation,⁵³ and has also looked to the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁵⁴ for ideas and guidance on advancing gender equality. But for the most part the gender initiatives in the STRM have focused on the dual task of promoting gender equality within the union (Comisión de Acción Política 2009) and the larger UNT confederation (see UNT Conference A, B, C 2012). The goal of these initiatives is to work gender equality and women's issues into other unions through the auspices of the national-level UNT, and subsequently down into collective bargaining agreements at the firm level (Ortíz 2012). As Ortíz noted, having high-level strategies, training plans to get women into leadership, and secretaries of women is fine, but these plans and positions are only really important when they actually *do* things to improve women's experience at work (Ortíz 2012).

The STRM's large project on gender equality is a sign of greater interest in workers' issues, and also represents a way to enhance the support and enthusiasm of the growing numbers of female workers. Despite the important focus of these programs, it must be noted that a large part of STRM's membership is women. So in the case of the STRM these gender equality programs are as much a set of initiatives to support the majority of current STRM members as they are attempts to involve underrepresented members. Furthermore, women have been the most important supports of union President Francisco Hernández Juárez since his rise to the post in 1976 (Martínez 2003).

⁵³ Though the Freidrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation has historically been associated with the German Social Democratic Party, it is currently a private group that engages in various political, economic, and social programs aimed at bolstering civil society in countries across the world (for history and mission statements specific to Mexico, see <http://www.fesmex.org/historia.php> and <http://www.fesmex.org/democracia.php>).

⁵⁴ After 2008 all of CEDAW's initiatives were moved to be under the auspices of the new UN entity focusing on gender equality, UN WOMEN. Though it is conceivable that the STRM is still working with UN Women, as of yet no evidence of links between UN WOMEN and the STRM are apparent.

In addition to the internal revitalization efforts of the STRM, since the economic transition union president Francisco Hernández has proven to be a truly adept political player. His foundation and leadership of FESEBS in the 1990s has already been discussed, and as the leader of this confederation he remained closely allied to President Carlos Salinas (Middlebrook 1995: 296). Then in 1997 Hernández Juárez was elected leader of the newly founded UNT, a position he maintains to this day. After the political transition Hernández Juárez withdrew his membership to the PRI and became allied with the left-leaning Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). Through his association with the UNT and the PRD the leader of the STRM has been behind a number of proposals to reform labor law, most of which included reforms that would improve workers' working lives and diminish the influence of government in union affairs (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 66).

But the leader has also walked a careful line to maintain his union's cooperation with business. Though the STRM threatened to strike in 2012, the union signed an agreement with TELMEX in the hours before the strike would begin (Muñoz Ríos 2012a, 2012g). Moreover, Hernández Juárez's long tenure at the head of the union has led many critics to level charges that the STRM is internally undemocratic (Martínez 2003; Muñoz Ríos 2008; Murillo 2001: 119). Thus the STRM has been able to continue its strategy as a social union. The union continues to limit its critique of the government and seeks to continue cooperative relations with employers. Concurrently the STRM engages in political maneuvering to gather state resources, all while still attempting to remain responsive and protective of union members.

The Mineros: From State Corporatism to Movement Union Tactics in Less than a Decade

The mineros entered the new millennium as a state corporatist union, and few expected the union to change strategies. However, a new leader, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, took over the

union in 2001, and surprised many observers by embarking on a path of strident critique of both employers and the government. The case of the mineros is a difficult one to explain. Since 2000 the union has changed strategy entirely, the national leadership of the union has employed a great deal more mobilization than it ever did in the past and has created strong transnational alliances with other unions. The actions of Gómez Urrutia were surprising, but could be explained as an attempt to gain the loyalty of workers. It is possible that Gómez Urrutia's actions were a short-term strategy, a strategy from which he could have eventually retreated, thereafter reverting to a more traditional state corporatist stance. But since Gómez Urrutia's initial critiques of employers and the government, the mineros' union has been buffeted by struggle and repression from the government. The change in union strategy was initiated by a newly elected union leader who likely hoped to win the loyalty of his constituents, but the strategy was subsequently reinforced by government repression. This repression essentially limited the mineros' possible strategic options, compelling Gómez Urrutia to maintain his strategy of critique and opposition.

In the same year that the PAN ascended to the presidency for the first time, the mineros' leader's health began to fail, and he "bequeathed" the union to his son, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 55; Snodgrass 2007: 102). Gómez Urrutia had never been a member of the union, which should have disqualified him from being Secretary General by the ruling of the union's internal statutes. But his candidacy and ascension to head of the union were ratified in 2001 by Carlos Abascal, President Fox's Secretary of Labor, in a move described by scholars as "arbitrary" (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 55). It is likely Abascal allowed Gómez Urrutia to head the union based on the belief that the mineros' new leader would be as cooperative with the government as his father had been. But from the start of his tenure Gómez Urrutia's leadership has defied easy classification. Early on the union seemed to be headed in

the traditional direction of state corporatism. Gómez Urrutia initially expelled leaders of a union local for outwardly supporting the PRD (Snodgrass 2007: 102), an action that he obviously hoped would dampen internal dissidence. Then in 2001 Gómez Urrutia joined with many unions to oppose a 2001 labor law reform that would have weakened his control over the union (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 55).⁵⁵

But Gómez Urrutia increasingly took stances in defiance of the government, perhaps seeking to gain the loyalty of the mineros. He fought restrictive wage policies set by the Fox government (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 55). In 2005 the mineros engaged in an unprecedented strike action: an international solidarity strike aimed at Grupo Mexico, the company that bought the Cananea copper mine when the location was privatized under President Carlos Salinas. This strike included 10,000 workers across three countries, and was a collaborative effort between the United Steelworkers union (USW) in the United States, the Federation of Metalworkers in Peru, and the mineros in Mexico; the protest was also backed by the global International Metalworkers Confederation (La Botz 2006). On the heels of this strike, in early 2006 an explosion killed 65 workers at the Cananea copper mine (La Botz 2006; Ramos 2006). After this devastating accident Gómez Urrutia brazenly attacked mine operator Grupo Mexico for its lax safety standards, labeling the incident “industrial homicide” (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 55, 57; La Botz 2006; Snodgrass 2007: 102). This accident seemed to serve as the turning point for the union leader. Unhappy with the government’s response to the

⁵⁵ This labor reform included provisions to increase the flexibility of contracts, and generally weaken labor standard in Mexico, but also a number of provisions that would have demanded greater internal democracy in unions, and loosened the grip of official unions on the JCAs (MacDonald 2004; Kohout 2008).

catastrophe,⁵⁶ Gómez Urrutia joined Isaías González of the CROC in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to gain control of the CT in 2006 (Muñoz Ríos 2006).

Yet even at this point Gómez Urrutia's intentions weren't entirely clear. Gaining control of the CT would have been a symbolic victory, but it could also have simply become a way for the mineros leader to gather greater political power and state resources. It is important to note the Gómez Urrutia did not leave the state corporatist CT and join the more autonomous UNT confederation. But if Gómez Urrutia had yet to prove his pure intentions, the government was about to ruin his ability to return to state corporatist strategy. In response to Napoleón Gómez Urrutia's defiant stance, President Calderón attempted to remove Gómez Urrutia from leadership by charging him with a host of crimes, including embezzlement of union funds (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 55-56). Gómez Urrutia declared his innocence, and the mineros reelected him secretary general of their union in 2006.

Despite meager evidence and multiple court decisions in favor of Gómez Urrutia, President Calderón repeatedly issued warrants to arrest the union leader; to escape arrest Gómez Urrutia fled to Canada with the aid of the US and Canadian Steelworkers (Bacon 2012; Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 56).

Since the government's harassment of Gómez Urrutia began, the mineros have moved into the category of a social union (Bensusán 2004), and at times seem to be heading towards being a movement union. In the 2006 presidential election the mineros backed the left party candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), and then did so again in 2012 (La Redacción 2012). The union has also initiated a number of strikes in the intervening years,

⁵⁶ The leader would later suggest the government had colluded with Grupo Mexico, allowing hazardous conditions to continue in order to keep production running (Muñoz Ríos 2010).

protesting the disaster in 2006 as well as the continuing poor safety conditions at Cananea (Bacon 2012; Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 56-58; Snodgrass 2007: 103).

Since 2006 the mineros have also expanded on their links with other unions internationally. Gómez Urrutia's escape from Mexico has allowed the leader to be in personal contact with leaders of both the USW and CSW. These two unions in turn have provided financial support to striking mineros since 2006 (Bacon 2012). In addition, Gómez Urrutia has ascended to a position on the executive council of the new, massive global union IndustriALL, which unites workers from many industrial, mining, and other production industries (De La Redaccion 2012).

Understanding Gómez Urrutia's actions is as difficult as deciphering whether a union leader in Mexico is devoted to his workers and union, or simply interested in the perks that come with being a union leader. Until the government of Vicente Fox began persecuting Gómez Urrutia, the actions of the mineros' leader could have been understood as either devotion to his union or complete self-interest. Indeed Murillo (2001) and Burgess (2004) have both pointed out the fact that new union leaders often increase their militancy to gain the devotion of the rank and file, especially if the leader's ascendance is being challenged.

Whatever Gómez Urrutia's original plans may have been, however, the Fox and Calderón governments made it very clear that they were unwilling to bargain with Gómez Urrutia. With the help of the government, Grupo Mexico has resisted striking workers at the Cananea mine; since the disaster in 2006 and subsequent strike, Grupo Mexico has hired thousands of "contractors" to replace striking workers (Bacon 2012). The government facilitated the workers' replacement by ruling against the mineros' initial strike petitions; to "protect" the mine the government sent troops to create a defensive perimeter around the mine, warding off attempts by

striking workers to occupy the mine (Bacon 2012). Due to the incessant struggle, constant work stoppages, strikes, and even occasional battles with police, miners at Cananea have become fatigued and divided (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 56). The combination of replacement workers and strike fatigue has allowed the CTM to gain an important foothold in the area; the CTM and mineros are still fighting for dominance at the mine (Ramos and Gómez 2012). In their struggle the mineros have little recourse to access state resources, at least as long as the government supports Grupo Mexico and seeks to prosecute Gómez Urrutia.⁵⁷

In spite of consistent rebuffs from the PAN, the mineros have certainly not abandoned all hope of gaining state resources. Switching away from its traditional allegiance to the PRI, the union supported AMLO and the PRD in 2006 and 2012, no doubt hoping AMLO would prove to be an ally if he became president. Similarly, since AMLO's defeat the union has signaled its willingness to work with new President Enrique Peña Nieto, and to join his plan for development, but have stipulated that the government must agree to protect workers' rights (Muñoz Ríos 2013). Since Peña Nieto's victory the mineros now find themselves in dire straits; many of their members have been laid off or replaced, their main political allies remain in the opposition, and their leader continues to rule from the safety of a foreign country. In this way the mineros' union seems to share a number of similarities with the electrical workers (to be discussed in the next section): both face important threats to their organizational survival, and have few options to ameliorate the situation.

The change in the tactics of the mineros seems to stem from two important causes: the militant attitude adopted by Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, and the state's subsequent intervention in favor of business and against the union. Gómez Urrutia's initial critiques of the Fox government

⁵⁷ At this point all the warrants for the arrest of Gómez have been overturned by the court. But new president Enrique Peña Nieto has been silent on the subject of Gómez; Peña Nieto's silence has left many, including Gómez, wondering if he would be allowed to return to Mexico unmolested (Fernández-Vega 2013).

and Grupo Mexico could be an indication of many things, from a personal devotion to responsive unionism to militant posturing aimed at gaining the loyalty of his new union. Regardless of his internal motives, the tragedy at Cananea in 2006 and the government's harsh reaction to Gómez Urrutia's complaints all but forced the union to adopt a social union strategy. The union's ensuing inability to garner state resources has similarly forced it to act increasingly like a movement union. The union began mobilizing and deepening transnational alliances, both tactics identified with union revitalization. Yet so far the mineros have not adopted some of the other tactics that are found in the revitalization literature. The unions' limited outreach to other unions and civil society groups suggests that the mineros still have a relatively narrow strategy in mind, and are not transforming their union in a fundamental way. Nevertheless the union has, through a combination of voluntary and involuntary evolution, become much more responsive and engaged in improving the lives of members. An end to the struggle with Grupo Mexico would likely see the mineros back down from their increasingly movement-union-style tactics, and return to a social union strategy.

The SME: Government Suppression of Overzealous Militancy

Despite the moderation shown by the SME during the privatization crisis in 1989, by 1993 the union had returned to power a more militant group of leaders. Since that time the union has fought back against a number of privatization measures, but has also proved to become rather complacent in its overall strategy. In the 1990s Bensusán (2005: 548) noted that the SME, in an effort to protect its members' positions and privileges, actually became a blocking force for modernization of Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LFC). After the political transition, the union continued its tactics, which rested mainly on organizational autonomy and collective bargaining

strength.⁵⁸ But such recalcitrance was unappreciated by the newly installed PAN. Slowly the SME became more and more like a movement union (Bensusán 2004: 244-245), with a conflictive and critical relationship with its employer, the federal government. Eventually this conflictive relationship became unbearable for the government, and as we shall see President Calderón took an opportunity to rid himself and future governments of the LFC and SME. Interestingly, the SME's reversion to militancy after 1993 showed the union's stubborn unwillingness to adapt its own strategy in the face of consistent threats. In the end, the SME is a case that displays the danger of a union dragging its feet over modernization, and a reminder that the state still has important repressive powers over unions.

In their effort to block privatization of the LFC, between 1997 and 2003 the SME hosted and attended a large number of conferences and marches to build solidarity and support for their cause (Bensusán 2005: 563-567). Further, the union fought off a number of proposed changes to the collective contract with the LFC; these changes would have altered job structures and productivity expectations, but would also have made the union a partner in modernizing LFC (Bensusán 2005: 568-577). For years the costs of running the LFC had been much greater than the revenues gained by the company, forcing the government to cover the losses incurred by the LFC (Bensusán 2005: 588-589; Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 58). The union had a number of opportunities to enter into more cooperative relationship with the LFC management, as the STRM had with TELMEX. Yet at each turn the SME maintained its militancy, at best allowing only minimal, insignificant changes to the collective contract (Bensusán 2005). In some ways this recalcitrance can be attributed to the strength of internal democracy in the union, whereby

⁵⁸ It is rather difficult to separate societal and state resources for the SME, since the union organized a public power company. Thus any resources it got from its employer, i.e. the government, could technically be seen as either societal (as in gained from collective bargaining) or state-based (as in those gained from making deals with the state). As such I will discuss the SME case more in terms of collective bargaining and political maneuvering.

leaders had to maintain the loyalty of their constituencies or else face the possibility of losing their leadership position (Murillo 2001: 120). Yet the government of President Calderón became wary of the SME's continued defiance. Citing the huge deficits the LFC was running, and a taking advantage of a contested election at the SME, in 2009 President Felipe Calderón summarily closed the LFC and fired its workforce (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 59-60; Martínez, Castillo, and Salgado 2009).

The extinction of LFC was a massive blow to SME, whose entire membership essentially consisted of the 44,000 workers at LFC (Bensusán 2005: 546). Since 2009 the SME has been protesting, negotiating, and maneuvering in hopes of getting the government to reopen the LFC, and for the government to honor its contract with the workers. Many of the workers took a severance package offered by Calderón, though slightly more than 16,000 held out and demanded they be given back their positions at LFC or be hired by the CFE, the federal utilities company that took over the service operations of the LFC (Muñoz Ríos 2011). In response to Calderón's attack the SME attempted to assemble a large, cross-societal movement that would demand the reopening of Luz y Fuerza. The union framed their struggle as a struggle for the rights given to citizens of Mexico through the Constitution (Guadarrama 2012). The SME argued that the government violated the rights of the workers and the Constitutional rights of the citizens of Mexico by closing the LFC (Muñoz Ríos 2012f; Guadarrama 2012). As such, the union broadened its specific struggle over jobs to a struggle that they frame as "defense of the Constitution" (Guadarrama 2012). Additionally the SME and their civil society allies have framed this struggle as one of economic justice, noting since the takeover prices have gone up but service has gotten worse (Muñoz Ríos 2012b).

As part of this movement the SME attempted to mobilize workers and citizens across the country. LFC workers mobilized many times in their long battle to regain the jobs lost after the closing of LFC (Muñoz Ríos 2012e), and even protested the government in an attempt to obtain the release of SME members that were arrested while protesting (Muñoz Ríos 2012c, 2012d). The union was very apparently present in a number of rallies for the left party coalition during the 2012 campaign, and joined the anti-PRI protests after the election (Poy Solano 2012). In many of these mobilizations the SME joined with other groups in civil society, including the Asamblea Nacional de Usuarios de Energia Electrica (ANUEE), the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra, and YoSoy132 (Muñoz Ríos 2012b; Poy Solano 2012). Yet in spite of all this mobilizing the SME could not garner enough support to win the “public relations battle” (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 61). In 2011 the Calderon administration and the SME negotiated a final settlement, whereby the government promised the CFE would eventually offer employment to each 16,000 LFC employees who had not taken the severance package (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 62). In return for this final settlement the government finally certified the re-election of Secretary General Martín Esparza Flores, the militant union leader whose initial election had sparked the leadership struggle in 2009 (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 62).

The case of the SME highlights two important issues facing unions in Mexico after the political transition. The first issue is that unions can no longer effectively block modernization and expect their employer to survive. Most unions have learned this lesson, the best example being the STRM, which has initiated very cooperative relations with its employer. The second is that union revitalization tactics, even those that have been faithfully maintained for a number of years, cannot protect a union from repression on the part of the government. Though the

government's ability to repress labor unions has generally decreased (Grayson 2004), the government still maintains important controls over unions' organizational survival. As the cases of the mineros and the SME show, given a minor slip in union procedure, or a momentary struggle of leadership of a union, the government can still find ways to quell especially militant union dissidence.

What about the UNT? Victim of Internal Discord

The final important union confederation that has yet to be discussed is the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores de México (UNT). This confederation, founded in 1997, was initially suggested by a coalition of independent and official unions, including the STRM, SME, and SNTE; eventually, however, the SNTE dropped out of this coalition, and the UNT became a confederation for mostly independent unions (Bensusán 2004: 206; Samstad 2002: 13-14). By 2000 the UNT had over 300,000 members, though most of these members were part of the STRM (Bensusán 2004: 266).⁵⁹ The UNT was founded on principle of anti-corporatism and union democracy (de la Garza 2003: 219; Samstad 2002: 14), and as such was created to be the main rival to the state corporatist CT union umbrella federation (Bensusán 2004, Caulfield 2004). However the UNT quickly ran into internal disagreement about how critical the confederation should be of the government and employers (Bensusán 2004: 266). Though the UNT would offer a number of public policy proposals over the next decade, in the end its major characteristic is its inability to truly rival the CT.

In 2000 the state corporatist union confederations were faced with a new context and important demands for adaptation. This crisis arose from the crumbling of the historical linkages between the CTM, CROC, and CROM and the PRI party. The UNT, on the other hand, had not

⁵⁹ Membership levels are difficult to ascertain for the UNT, since the confederation does not officially register with the Labor Ministry (Zepeda Martínez 2009: 75-76).

existed long enough to have their strategy well defined (de la Garza 2003). Generally the UNT seemed to implement a social union strategy, whereby member unions were expected to cooperate with employers but maintain their autonomy from the government (Bensusán 2004: 243-244), but the UNT has since vacillated between cooperation with and critique of the government. While some member unions have advocated for a more cooperative stance to employers and a less critical stance toward government (for example, the STRM; de la Garza 2003: 224-225), other member unions have attempted to draw the UNT into a more critical discourse against employers and the government (for example the FAT and SME; Bensusán 2004: 266; de la Garza 2003: 224).

Since the political transition the UNT has attempted to deepen its connections to civil society: it convened a national “Social Congress,” which has met annually since 2005, and in 2012 convened an independent assembly to demand and create a new Constitution for Mexico (see *El Congreso Social Blog*)⁶⁰. This Congress gathers a number of civil society groups, including social movements and other unions.⁶¹ But more often than not the UNT’s links to civil society involve being invited to join movements created by its own member unions; that is to say, the UNT has had to rely on its member unions to start movements, rather than the confederation structures being the locus of activity.⁶² The UNT has also been interested in attracting the participation of youth in their movement. This was especially true after the rise of YoSoy132, and the two organizations often participated in each other’s marches and events. The UNT had

⁶⁰ Web address: <http://congresosocial2010mexico.blogspot.com/>.

⁶¹ The Social Congress has been specifically supported by: the CNTE; the mineros section 65; the SME; the Comité Civil Nacional para la Revocación de Mandato de Felipe Calderón; Dialogo Nacional; Movimiento Nacional en Defensa de la Economía Popular; Movimiento de Liberación Nacional; SERAPAZ; Unidad de las Izquierdas; and Radio Chinelo (*El Congreso Social Blog*).

⁶² The university workers union, Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (STUNAM), called for the creation of a “Frente Amplio Social,” a cross-societal-movement that would resist the return of the PRI to power in 2012 (Gómez Mena 2012). The STRM also initiated their own movement, focused on the demands for workers’ rights and lower utilities prices, call the “Movimiento por la Soberanía Alimentaria y Energética, los Derechos de los Trabajadores y las Libertades Democráticas” (STRM 2008).

courted youth support even before the student movement was organized. In 2011, for example, the UNT attempted to energize Mexican youth against a PRI-sponsored labor reform (Sánchez 2011).

However, many of these initiatives serve to unite a few of the same unions and civil society groups in an increasing number of social projects and protest fronts. Though these movements are seemingly separate and have different goals, often one finds them populated with the same groups: the STRM, SME, and STUNAM, as well as a few civil society groups, and often a smattering of student protesters. In many ways this is telling of the UNT itself, which has been riddled with and at times crippled by internal divisions (Ortíz 2012): the UNT can garner small bastions of allies, but has rarely been able to create larger, more encompassing popular fronts. The disagreements between member unions have left the UNT unable to effectively influence the political arena. Moreover, the early growth enjoyed by the UNT reportedly stalled during President Fox's sexenio (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 35-36). While it is still the main rival to the CT, this is mostly due to the fact that the UNT is the only large confederation that is not affiliated with the CT. Importantly, the UNT has generally been unable to loosen the grip that the state corporatist unions have on the access points of state resources. Thus, in spite of creating a more autonomous front for social unions, the UNT has not been able to exert true power of its own in the political sphere. The experience of the UNT and labor law reform is illustrative. Though the UNT has cooperated with the PRD to create a number of labor law proposals, none of these have had the critical, cross-political support necessary to get them passed (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 62-69; Kohout 2008).

Discussion

Thanks to the ever-expanding global economy and the transition of many countries in the Global South to more liberalized, open economies, unions across the world face many of the same threats that inspired the creation of the union revitalization strategy in the Global North. But the experience of dual transitions to liberal economies *and* representative democracy in many countries in the Global South has altered the adoption and effectiveness of union revitalization. During a transition to political democracy unions can benefit from the cancellation of previously restrictive labor laws. Bensusán and Cook's (2003) argument can be expanded to many other contexts in which the state had repressive power over the unions: union revitalization in these contexts demands a "re-founding" of national labor relations, specifically fundamental reform of labor law and regulatory institutions. Reforming labor law institutions opens the playing field, diminishes the repressive capacity of the state, and allows unions to become autonomous from the government.⁶³

But even without a full re-founding of labor institutions, certain ordering of transitions can allow unions to grow and thrive. In the case of Brazil and Argentina, the order of their transitions was particularly helpful to unions. Each of these countries went through the democratization process before embarking on an economic transition (Cook 2002: 3-4). Unions in both Brazil and Argentina played an important role in undermining their respective authoritarian regimes, and thus garnered political and social favor through the democratization process (Cook 2002: 7-9). When unions' organizational resources were threatened by subsequent economic transitions, the unions in Argentina and Brazil were able to resist some neoliberal measures and protect many of their core legal privileges (Cook 2002, 2007: 92).

⁶³ Re-founding labor law of course does not automatically mean that unions will grow quickly or without difficulty, as shown in the cases of Cameroon (Konings 2007), Korea (Suh 2007), and Indonesia (Ford 2007).

Moreover, soon after these transitions unions in Brazil and Argentina benefitted from the rise of friendly Left governments (in 2002 and 2003, respectively). These friendly governments, in turn, refrained from using the vestiges of corporatist labor law to repress unions (Ramalho 2007; Atzenli and Ghigliani 2007).

But Mexico experienced the opposite order of transitions, first transitioning to a liberalized economy and then democratizing. Chile experienced an ordering of transitions similar to Mexico (Cook 2002: 23-26). In Chile this order of transitions devastated unions, thanks to authoritarian leader Augusto Pinochet's desire to undermine labor. Pinochet instituted a labor law that weakened unions' ability to collectively bargain and he sought to limit union organizing, fearing the growth of civil society groups would be a launching pad for resistance to his rule (Cook 2002: 43-44, 2007: 117-118). Yet in spite of the continuing neoliberal tint to Chilean labor law, the current Chilean government does not have the same repressive capabilities still available to the government in Mexico. In an odd twist Mexican unions survived the transitions with far greater membership numbers than Chilean unions (Cook 2007: 148, 193), but Mexican unions also faced far greater threats of intervention by and subjugation to the government.

Using the concepts, tactics, and overall strategy represented in the literature on union revitalization can help identify how unions in the Global South have responded and continue to adapt to their new economic and political contexts. Yet while one can see examples of unions in the Global South implementing certain revitalization tactics, the legal, historical, and institutional structures of each different national context play an important factor in mediating the adoption of a union revitalization strategy. In the Mexican case the economic transition represented a prime opportunity for unions to abandon the corporatist servicing model and initiate strategies to

revitalize their organizations. Yet the historical overreliance on state resources and seemingly overwhelming repressive power of the PRI government circumscribed unions' ability to attempt revitalization.

After the political transition in Mexico, however, there seems to be some opportunity for unions to implement revitalization tactics, allowing organizations to engage in at least a sort of partial revitalization. Scholars have noted the skill with which the STRM and its president Francisco Hernández have navigated the post-transition context (Bensusán 2004; Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012; Murillo 2001). The STRM has carefully balanced its strategy as a social union; the union continues to bolster its societal resources and preserve its political and organizational autonomy, but also maintains a cooperative stance toward employers (Bensusán 2004: 243-244). The STRM's revitalization tactics aimed at creating gender equality are limited to internal union structures. As activists within the union attempt to widen the breadth and reach of gender equality initiatives, the activists find much of the leadership is unwilling to expand these programs for fear of being too critical of the status quo (Ortíz 2012).

While the CROC and CROM have implemented more revitalization tactics than the STRM, the leadership of each of these confederations seems unwilling to take the leap to social unionism. These confederations have implemented revitalization tactics in an effort to diversify their resource bases in the face of declines in membership and political influence. Yet the implementation of these tactics seems to be relatively superficial so far; the confederations and their member unions don't seem to be engaging with their members in fundamentally different ways, and the continued dominance of old-guard leaders suggests that these confederations are not fully devoted to their revitalization project. These revitalization tactics seem to merely be an effort to shore up the confederations' waning political power, especially in the case of the

CROM. While the STRM has shown its willingness to tread a path autonomous from the ruling PAN and PRI, the CROC and CROM have been much less willing to engage in any act that would signal an outright confrontation with their historical ally or the ruling PAN governments. These confederations only opposed the PAN when the party began to threaten union leaders' privileged positions, and they have yet to prove any willingness to diverge from the PRI's political project.

On the other hand, the adoption by the SME and the mineros of a more oppositional, militant form of unionism has seriously threatened these unions' organizational survival. After the political transition the unions shifted slightly toward greater opposition to employers and the government. These unions have increasingly mobilized and attempted to strengthen their access to societal resources. For the mineros this represents a real revitalization process, while for the SME it's a reaffirmation of its previous militancy. In each case the unions even adopted some of the confrontational strategies of movement unions (Bensusán 2004: 244-245). Yet these confrontational strategies drew the ire of successive PAN governments, and eventually resulted in each union being targeted for repression. Despite the general decline in the repressive powers available to the state (Grayson 2004; Samstad 2002), presidents Fox and Calderón were still able to launch devastating campaigns against the SME and mineros. The cases of SME and the mineros serve as a warning to unions in Mexico: while employers and the government are willing to work with autonomous unions, overly recalcitrant opposition and noisy critique may be repaid with harsh government repression.

The CTM plays an important role as a caveat and obstacle to revitalization tactics. By ignoring any possibility of revitalization and continuing to devote itself to a state corporatist strategy the CTM has become a union whose focus is undermining other unions. The CTM's

ties with the government have kept its leaders afloat even as these leaders have seen their real political influence diminish over the past decade (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 97-98). Yet the CTM has been able to maintain some political favor by acting as a replacement for more militant unions. When the government began repressing the SME and mineros, CTM member unions were able to move in and set up shop where SME and mineros locals had previously held contracts. Ironically in many ways the CTM has become a veritable union avoidance mechanism. For decades leading up to 2000 the CTM played an ambiguous role as a representative for the working class, but the confederation seems to be shifting away from this role to a greater extent than ever before. As the CTM's ability to viably act as a representative for the working class wanes, the confederation seems to be evolving into an organization at the service of employers, slowly becoming a ghost confederation of ghost unions.

The SNTE has also continued its reliance on a state corporatist strategy, but has done so largely successfully thanks to the political power the union wields. Until recently the SNTE seemed to be the union in the strongest position to continue its strategy into the future. While the CTM slowly declines, the CROC and CROM frantically shove their fingers in the dike of membership losses, the SME and mineros find themselves clinging to life, and the STRM attempts to balance between protecting workers and cooperating with employers, the SNTE has been able to solidify and strengthen its ability to gather state resources (Bensusán and Middlebrook 2012: 46-50). Yet in a surprising turn of events, in February 2013 PRI President Enrique Peña Nieto enacted a major education reform that undermined one of the SNTE's most prized privileges: their ability to essentially control the hiring and firing of teachers (Avilés and Herrera 2013). Then, in an even more shocking turn of events, the following day Peña Nieto ordered SNTE President Elba Esther Gordillo arrested on charges of corruption and

embezzlement (Castillo 2013). With this dramatic turn of events we are seeing the PRI attacking one of the strongest and most autonomous unions in Mexico. As the story develops it will be important to see whether the PRI is doing so to democratize the union or in an attempt to recapture control over the massive union.

Conclusion

Applying the revitalization literature outside of the United States is no easy task; applying its framework to the Global South is more challenging, given the multitude of institutional, political, and societal differences between the “advanced” democracies of the Global North and the newer democracies in the Global South. The Mexico case makes this difficulty especially apparent. A constellation of political and institutional variables essentially blocked revitalization during the economic transition, the era when it seemed most needed, and despite the democratic transition unions still face a difficult path.

By mapping out the various strategies unions in Mexico currently use we can see that unions adapted to the changing economic and political circumstances in a number of different ways. Using the revitalization literature to engage with the Mexican context allows us to conceptualize the experience of Mexican unions in new and interesting ways, and also poses important questions to the literature itself. To what extent can union revitalization aid a union when it exists in a relatively authoritarian context; that is to say, can unions revitalize in a less-than-democratic context? During the economic transition the answer to this question was “no”, and observers felt prospects were bad for revitalization opportunities after the political transition as well (Bensusán and Cook 2003). But since the political transition some unions have adopted revitalization tactics. The cases of the CROC and CROM suggest unions can revitalize to a minor extent even in a context that demands labor peace and union docility; nevertheless these

cases also show that that confederations can adopt certain revitalization tactics without undergoing a true revitalization process. Conversely the experience of the SME and mineros pose warnings to those unions that become too militant in a country with less-than-democratic labor law institutions. Even with the strong democratic tendencies of the SME, and implementation of social movement tactics by both the SME and mineros, neither union could withstand the focused power of unfavorable labor institutions.

In the end democratic transitions offer important opportunities for union revitalization even in the face of hostile labor law institutions. But the Mexican case shows us that unions under such institutions must carefully balance their opposition to government and employers if they wish to remain viable in the long term. Only unions that can gather enough resources to protect themselves from governmental opposition can truly survive the danger of harsh critique of the government. In Mexico up until recently the SNTE seemed to be the only union that controlled enough resources and power to do as it wished. But as we are currently seeing even the SNTE cannot protect itself from a government willing to take on powerful vested interests. In the current economic context, then, there seem few unions who are truly situated to gather the strength required to be harshly oppositional. While some unions have broadened their use of revitalization tactics, they have done so mainly to adapt to their diminishing political and social influence. Labor organizations like the STRM, CROC, and CROM have shown that unions and confederations can implement some forms of revitalization. Yet their ability to fundamentally revitalize, or to alter their strategy beyond autonomous cooperation with employers, continues to be impeded by the remaining repressive power of the government.

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