How about Us: Workers' Revolution in Parral-Santa Barbara and Ciudad Juárez during the 1930s.

Workers' degree of success during the 1930s, the decade after the armed phase of the Revolution ended, varied according to locale and industry. This study argues that mass unionization and direct action allowed workers to impose their will on political and economic elites on the mining region of Parral-Santa Barbara. There local unions anchored by the Miners' Union, enjoyed unprecedented benefits in the workplace and beyond. The miners' use of direct action and radical pronouncements, although falling short of gaining control of the means of production, probably helped pave the way for their counterparts in the petroleum industry in the 1938 situation leading up its expropriation.[1] Contrastingly, Ciudad Juárez, although remarkable unions' controlled most workplaces, the absence of a strongly unionized anchor industry hindered the maturation of the labor movement.

Regional examinations of the Mexican post-revolutionary labor movement have challenged our understanding regarding organized labor's ability to transform power structures within their communities. Scholars looking at the labor movement nationally have long considered this success the result of benevolent authorities, corporate welfare, and powerful national labor conglomerates.[2] Yet the use of regional and community-based approaches

[1] Myrna Santiago, *The ecology of oil: environment, labor and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pg. 340. Santiago demonstrates that Oil workers' actions led to the nationalization of the Oil Industry

[2] Ruth Marjorie Clark, *La Organización Obrera en Mexico* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1979) presents an overarching analysis of the national labor movement, Alan Knight, "The Working Class and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1920," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 16, no. 1 (May 1984): 51. In this particular article, Knight argues that the Mexican Revolution was not a miners' revolution. In addition, Knight argues that organized labor in their eagerness to access power and form alliances, traded independence and principles. See also, "The Rise and Fall of Cardenismo," in *Mexico since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethall (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1991) argues that organized labor's independence and short-lived power resulted from the federal government's efforts, headed by Cárdenas, to corporatize the labor movement by connecting it to the State apparatus. See also,"Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (Jan 1994): 73-107, in which the author argues

centering their research on workers' lives beyond the workplace have demonstrated a wide array of resistance tools resulting in tangible benefits. In other words, regional studies have revealed the unprecedented power of workers at the local level.[3]

These aforementioned findings question the effectiveness of national labor unions, particularly the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico, or (CTM) in imposing their will on local branches. As Michael Snodgrass in his study of post-revolutionary industrial Monterrey points out, "As regional studies advance our knowledge, the CROM's provincial weakness relative to its muscle in Mexico City becomes increasingly apparent."[4]

Regional studies have also shown that workers at a handful of important industries, foreign owned for the most part, dictated conditions in the workplace. In some cases, unions representing workers in these industries influenced public policy at the state-wide or even at the Federal level as it was the case with the oil workers.[5] This influence led to the nationalization of the oil industry in 1938, "there can be no question that without the oil workers, the industry

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that Cárdenas, despite his good intentions, paved the road for the existing way of channeling discontent, which gave the state effective mechanisms to direct it. For pre-Cárdenas, see Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Labor and the Ambivalent Revolutionaries, Mexico, 1911-1923* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), for how the Constitution, the Federal Labor Law, and National Labor Centrals contradict Revolutionary values, see Kevin Middlebrook, *The paradox of Revolution: labor, the state, and authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[3] For Mexico City see, Robert Weis, *Bakers and Basques: a social history of bread in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), and John Lear, *Workers, neighbors, and citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), for Jalisco's case see, Joseph Howard Green, *Workers, peasants and state-building during the Mexican Revolution: the case of Jalisco* (PhD dissertation: University of California-Riverside 2006), for Veracruz see, Andrew Grant Wood, Revolution in the Streets: women, workers and urban protest in Veracruz, 1870-1927 (Wilmington Del: SR Books, 2001), for the cotton industry see, Jeffrey Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution: Cotton Textile Workers and the Mexican Labor Regime* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[4] Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey: workers, paternalism and Revolution 1890-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pg. 123.

[5] Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.

would have not become Mexican, it was the revolution from below that made all the difference".[6]

But communal studies have also demonstrated weaker unions' ability to take advantage of political and social and workplace milieu to unparalleled levels. These studies show that massive unionization based on community-wide concerns, allowed workers such as musicians, cooks, maids, peasants, teachers, and other underprivileged groups unprecedented benefits during the 1930s.

In short, regional studies have established that organized labor exerted significant power in certain locales and national labor conglomerates relatively little control over local movements. These studies have also challenged the perception that the state had the upper hand in certain labor conflicts, especially in crucial industries. Therefore, it is important to challenge the argument that the privileges extended to labor during this tumultuous period derived from the state's benevolence and industry's paternalism, rather than a response to labor's increasing power.

Nevertheless, local labor power had its limits. In the mining region, organized labor's alliance with powerful political and economic elites, in particular with the state's governor Rodrigo Quevedo (1932-1936), forced union leaders to modify some of their most radical positions challenging the existing economic order. In return, these elites supported workers despite their own ideas regarding labor's place in post-revolutionary Mexico, which differed drastically with those of workers.

[6] Santiago, *The ecology of oil*, pg. 340.

These hegemonic processes did not take place in Juárez. On the border, organized labor and elites engaged in a decade long struggle for power without any compromises.[7] Despite this opposition, organized labor achieved tangible benefits for the working class, including control of the workplace, closed shops, and the right to collective bargaining. This in turn led to wage increases, labor safeguards, and political power in the form of elected positions and political patronage, adequate housing, and other benefits the majority of the population did not enjoy before the Revolution. Here the majority of the population achieved these benefits and accrued this power when they organized into unions. Thus, mass organization at the local level fueled by community-wide based interests paved the road for unions increase of power in the 1930s.

The Drive to Unionization

During the 1930s, workers' federations in Ciudad Juárez and the Hidalgo mining district strived to establish the means to increase workers' power. They did this by uniting workers into local and state-wide organizations and articulating demands that bridged workplace and community interests. As Andrew Grant demonstrated in his study of Revolutionary Veracruz, workers sought to move beyond specific workplace concerns and developed broad-based unions and labor federations. They focused on housing shortages, and expensive and unsanitary conditions to organize the entire community, not just workers. These demands later turned into a radical movement seeking political power.[8] In both regions under consideration in this study,

[7] For a discussion of hegemony in the Mexican context, see Jeffrey Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution: Cotton Textile Workers and the Mexican Labor Regime* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1.
[8] Andrew Grant, *Revolution in the Streets*.

notable drifts toward radical forms of labor resistance occurred, although the degree of radicalism varied by locale.

Organized labor's growing radicalism was vibrant enough to draw comment from the United States' consulate in Chihuahua late in the 1930s. In 1938, American Consul Lee R. Blohm noted labor's impressive political and economic gains over the course of the decade, especially after Cárdenas took office. The consul highlighted labor leadership's determination to develop more power; his report suggested that the leadership's success in achieving "better working conditions and much higher wages" portended an effort to "challenge capitalism." The consul suggested that the leadership might not always have "been properly regarded by the workers themselves," but his report also delivered a hopeful note to the U.S. State Department that the Chihuahua workers were tamer than their union leadership.[9]

The consul's conclusion about post-revolutionary Chihuahua encapsulated what was taking place in other regions throughout Mexico. In Monterrey, Jalisco, Coahuila, Yucatán, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Veracruz, Durango, Nayarit, and other states to a lesser degree, labor activists and radical labor federation leaders appealed to local workers' broad class interests in an effort to organize them into unions.[10] Labor federations undertook strategic campaigns to connect workplace-based organizations to community-based working-class movements. Thus, issues like higher wages and worker control of the workplace were connected to local control of

[9] Lee R. Blohm Consular Report, Labor Notes from Chihuahua, March 13, American Consulate in Chihuahua, vol. 5, 1938, hereafter referred to as 5/1938/ACCC, United States National Archives, College Park, Maryland, RG 84.3, hereafter referred to as 84.3/USNARG.

[10] For Coahuila see, Barry Carr, *El Movimiento Obrero y la Politica en Mexico, 1910-1929* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1981), pg. 45, for Jalisco, see Bary Carr, *Marxism and communism in twentieth century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pg. 32, for the rest, see footnote 4.

consumables, rent regulations, campaigns for the organization of marginalized workers, and other demands.

In the mining district, political and economic elites supported these endeavors as long as they felt they could still control and curtail more radical demands that contested capitalist ownership and their own security. Workers in Ciudad Juárez, on the other hand, faced more obstacles in creating a radical movement.[11] Elites on the border responded to worker's demands with violence. State wide elites, such as Governor Rodrigo Quevedo, his siblings and political operatives, engaged in a decade long struggle against organized labor to defend their own economic interests.

While he was a crucial obstacle to labor radicalism in Ciudad Juárez as it affected his economic interests, Governor Rodrigo Quevedo took a pro-labor stance in Parral-Santa Barbara. In doing so, he was responding to the political and economic strength workers showed through massive unionization and his efforts were also intended to show Cárdenas that he supported the administration's labor policies. Thus, in general, local state officials in the mining region sought to avoid conflict with organized labor. They knew that workers and unions had the power to shut down the mining industry, generating mass unemployment, economic hardship, and reductions in revenue due to unpaid taxes. This meant that Governor Quevedo's economic interests in Parral-Santa Barbara did not clash with those of workers as it did on the border. Different political and economic exigencies in the two areas elicited radically different behavior from local and state officials in each region.

[11] The level of violence varied according to region, for Sonora see, Adrian Bantjes, *As if Jesus walked on earth: cardenismo, Sonora and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington Del.: Scholarly Res. 1998), for Yucatan see, Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: the failure of reform in Post-revolutionary Yucatan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

The Formation of Labor Organizations Federations in Ciudad Juárez

The border had a long history of radicalization going back to pre-revolutionary times. Although an industrial base for unions was limited in this area, the border had experienced radical revolutionary movements like the Magonista movement, going back to 1906.[12] In Ciudad Juárez in the 1930s, radical labor unions and federations seemed to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of their own past. Organized labor took advantage of this rebellious spirit after the armed conflict ended. Unions and federations started to develop from this base and continued to develop steadily at the community level across the 1930s.

The radical Cámara Sindical Obrera, or CSO, formed on November 23, 1930, in the cities of the state of Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and Parral, was the strongest labor organization on the border. The CSO was a statewide labor federation, which sought to organize workers regardless of skill or trade. The CSO in Juárez was formed by the *Union de Filarmonicos de Ciudad Juárez* (Musicians Union), *La Gran Liga Textil Socialista* (The Socialist Textile Union), the *Unión Gremial de Cargadores* (loaders union) and the *Unión de Matanceros* (Butchers Union). These individual unions went back to the 1920s. By 1933, the CSO had already reached out to other trades. Throughout the 1930s, the CSO continued to add other member organizations, such as the *Unión Sindical de Boleros* (shoe shiners), the *Sindicato de Vendedores Ambulantes* (street vendors), the *Unión Sindical de Estibadores del Norte* (loaders), and the *Unión Gremial de Obreros Zapateros* (shoe makers). As is clear from this listing, this was a federation that attended to workers at the bottom of the economic order.

[12] Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.

Notably, they included women's organizations, further showing the CSO's intentions to expand its power base. By 1937, the CSO expanded to more than twenty-two organizations, including the Mexican Communist Party section in Juárez.[13] In 1937, the CSO made an alliance with the *Cámara Unitaria del Trabajo*, the organization representing the PCM, or Mexican Communist Party, in Juárez, as a direct response to the Popular Front spearheaded by Party aimed at expanding their base of support.

By 1938, the CSO's ranks also included electricians, textile workers, bakers, coal workers, domestic workers, musicians, and other professional and non-professional organizations. The CSO on the border made concerted efforts to extend workers' influence by organizing across Juárez. The union possessed charismatic individuals, who realized worker's increase in power depended on large numbers, so they made concerted efforts to extend their sphere of influence beyond Mexico. Miguel Oaxaca (Secretary of the Transportation Workers Union), Pascual Padilla (of the Unemployed or Sin Trabajo Union), and Armando Pórras (Electricians' Union) were three of the best-known and most radical union leaders of organizations forming the CSO in Juárez using transnational approaches.

[13] List of the organizations belonging to the CSO in 1935, Unión Sindical de Estibadores del Norte, Gran Liga Textil Socialista, US de Matanceros del Valle de Juárez, Sindicato de Cantineros, Meseros y Similares, C. Femenil Obrera, US de Boleros, L. de Camp. Y Obreros Forestales, US de Obreros Industriales de Ciudad Juárez, Unión Sindical de Pintores, S. de Cargadores de Almacenes y Similares, US de Locatarios del Mercado Cuauhtémoc, Sindicato de Tensorialistas y Similares, Sindicato de Empleados del Lobby No. 2, Sindicato Obrero. Manufactureros de Adobe y Ladrilleria, Unión Sindical de Expendedores de Carbón Vegetal y Similares, Sindicato de Tablajeros y Similares, Sindicato de Cancioneros de Ciudad Juárez, Unión Gremial de Cargadores de Cd. Juárez, Chih., Unión Sindical de Obreros Industriales de Guadalupe DB, Unión Sindical de Hacheros y Carboneros "Ignacio Zaragoza" del Vergel DB, Sindicato de Madereros y Similares, "Felipe Carrillo Puerto" de Madera, Chih., Sindicato de Ob. Y Camp. "Rio Bravo," Práxedes G. Guerrero, DB, Unión Sindical de Trabajadores De E. y Expendedores De Leche, Sindicato de Panaderos y Similares "Libertad," Unión Sindical de Zapateros de C. Juárez, Chih., Unión de Filarmónicos, Unión Defensa Rio Bravo, Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores "Francisco I. Madero," Sindicato de Cargadores de Almacenes y Similares, Sindicato de Obreros y Empleados de la Cia. Mexicana P. de Luz y Fuerza, box number 1932, Archivo Municipal de Ciudad Juárez, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México, hereafter referred to as 1932/AMCJ.

Armando Pórras led the Electricians' Union through a successful three-year ordeal (1935-1938) to establish a collective contract against the local Power Company (as it was called) managed by the Quevedo clan, which included the two governor's siblings' Jose and Jesus, who respectively held the office of Mayor in Juárez for most of the decade before their removal stemming from a myriad of corruption charges.[14]

Oaxaca began as a labor organizer with the bakers' union in the 1920s, and in the late 1930s, he organized workers in El Paso and Juárez, especially those working at the smelting giant American Smelter and Refining Company (ASARCO) in El Paso.[15] Starting in 1932, Pascual Padilla became the most visible Communist Party operative on the border, as he led the Sin Trabajo Union into a confrontation with local high-ranking officials, which included the use of mass protest and disruption of government events.

The CSO utilized different strategies to influence the community and counteract anti-labor initiatives in the area, which rested on their ability to project power through numbers. This organization had an affinity for using print media to communicate directly to workers, and to encourage direct action in the form of mass protests and strikes to pressure adversaries. It relied on public shows of power that simultaneously inculcated a spirit of solidarity among the labor force and exerted pressure on their counterparts.

One example of the CSO's tactics was utilization of international symbols at massive political rallies to project power and to cultivate a sense of class pride among its members took place early in the decade. In this case, the mayor of Juárez had issued an invitation to labor

[14] For more on Porras, Oaxaca, Padilla, and the Quevedos' removal from office, see Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.
[15] Mario Garcia, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity 1930-1960* (Yale University Press, 1989), 183, and Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 101, 117, 131, 132.

organizations from the Comite Directivo of the '*Fiestas de la Revolución*,' which organized the official celebrations of Labor Day. In response, Silverio Villalobos, Secretary General of the CSO**,** objected to the attempt of political leaders to co-opt memories of the Chicago Haymarket anarchist labor martyrs - "the ones that were sacrificed for us." Specifically, Villalobos wrote that CSO objected that it was improper to accept the invitation to the official celebration because it would be "a sacrilege to the memory of our martyrs on the 1st of May in Chicago."[16] Instead, it insisted that the CSO should organize its own mass protest commemoration as opposed to leaving it in "profane hands." They sought to break with authorities by making it "a celebration by the Cámara Sindical Obrera."[17] The CSO's manifesto and refusal to join the official celebrations shows its commitment to working class autonomy and establishes a framework that situated their struggles within a broad global historical context.

The CSO's embrace of mass action in the form of public demonstrations also showed the organization's ability to mobilize their members in a projection of worker power. The protests exposed local elites' inability to control the way workers articulated their demands. In July 1935, for example, the CSO organized a public protest in downtown Juárez to gain "support from all the resistance organizations in the city to protest and to denounce publicly the presence of a rival company-friendly union in the Rio Bravo Textile Mill."[18]

These public displays of power by unions, which essentially stopped all activities citywide, astonished the United States Consular office. In 1936, U.S. consular officials noted at the effectiveness of the May 1 (Workers' Day) mass meeting in the main plazas of Ciudad

[16] Silverio Villalobos, Secretary General of the Cámara Sindical Obrera to the mayor of Ciudad Juárez, José Quevedo, April 25, 1933, 1933/1318.741/AMCJ.
[17] Silverio Villalobos, Secretary General of the Cámara Sindical Obrera to the mayor of Ciudad Juárez, José Quevedo, April 25, 1933, 1933/1318.741/AMCJ.
[18] *El Continental*, July 12, 1935.

Juárez, commenting that organized labors' show of power made Ciudad Juárez "appear to be a dead village … almost literally true. Speeches were made by labor and political leaders in the main plazas. The number of participants in the demonstrations was impressive and evidenced the activity of the organizers."[19] *El Continental*, a Spanish-only printed newspaper, also noted the success of the May 1st parade organized by the CSO-affiliated unions.[20]

Massive displays of political and social muscle took place continuously to coincide with Mexican or international landmarks of the working class, such as Workers' day, Independence Day, the Constitution's, or the Revolution's anniversary. These rituals gave impetus to the efforts by the CSO to organize sectors of the community, which lacked prior experience in unionizing, such as women, especially domestic workers. This validated the group's claim to be the protector of revolutionary values as unions at the time defined them. In 1938, domestic workers in the area organized into the *Sindicato de Trabajadoras Domesticas de Izquierda* (Leftist Female Domestic Workers' union) and immediately affiliated with the CSO. The Domestic Workers' Union slogan, "for a society without classes," illustrates the CSO adherents' call for a revolutionary trade union movement.[21]

There was a notable effort to communicate inclusiveness in demonstrations, to address existing divisions in the labor force, and to undermine gender barriers. For example, at an April 1935 rally, organizers noted that multiple actors would have a voice "during the course of the demonstration including women representatives of the workers' unions."[22]

[19] Lee R. Blohm, May Day Activities at Ciudad Juárez, Chih. Mexico, May 4, 1936, 5/1936/ACCC, 84.3/USNARG.
[20] *El Continental*, May 1, 1935.
[21] Sindicato de Trabajadoras Domesticas de Izquierda to Octavio Escobar, Mayor of Juárez, June 15, 1938, 1938/741.1318/AMCJ.
[22] Ernesto de la Una, president of the Cámara Sindical Obrera to Dr. Daniel Quiroz Reyes, mayor of Ciudad Juárez, April 24, 1935, 1935/759.1362/AMCJ.

The CSO utilized other tactics to instill pride among workers. One such event was the election of a Workers' Queen, something that might be now criticized for its reinforcement of gender norms, but which could also be seen in the light of working-class pride. The origin of this tradition is unclear, but the meeting place for the celebration was a recognized public space - the Juarez Monument. On May 5th, after a parade, a "little girl", was elected as "the Queen of Workers."[23] These efforts can be seen as an attempt to claim all festivities as a part of workers' consciousness, connecting worker and community as one. This was not local elites' condescending attitude directing workers to feel better about their status as such by throwing them a parade; this was a working-class community continually reminding itself that it needed to occupy public spaces with pride.

The CSO in Ciudad Juárez sought to assert working-class interests as their purview, emphasizing the right of labor organizations to regulate the local political economy. In May 1936, the leaders of the CSO complained of the hardships that confronted working class families because of speculation "by the wealthy merchants from the city and outside the city, and the 'monopolies of SUGAR, RICE, FLOUR, which increased in an extraordinary way the prices of staple articles of food."[24] These campaigns show an expansive conception of the reach of union campaigns. If not revolutionary take-overs of business, these were certainly strong counters to private capitalist marketplace control of the political economy.

By 1937, the CSO established an alliance with the PCM. The latter was acting on orders from Moscow, under the Popular Front, which called for alliances with non-communist leftist organizations and sympathetic states. The U.S. consul in Chihuahua reported on the alliance

[23] Ernesto de la Una, president of the Cámara Sindical Obrera to Dr. Daniel Quiroz Reyes, mayor of Ciudad Juárez, April 24, 1935, /1935/759.1362/AMCJ.
[24] Ernesto de la Una, president of the Cámara Sindical Obrera to the mayor of Ciudad Juárez, José Quevedo, May 26, 1936, 1936/650/AMCJ.

formed by the CSO with other organizations in the city: "A meeting was called by the Cámara Sindical Obrera for the purposes of 'definitely consolidating the proletarian unification of the frontier.' The organizations signing the 'Pact of Solidarity' were the Cámara Sindical Obrera, Comité de Acción Social Ejidal del Distrito Bravo, Cámara Unitaria del Trabajo (communist), Comité Seccional del Partido Comunista de México (Mexican Communist Party), and the Bloque Obrero y Campesino."[25] This alliance by the Cámara Unitaria and the Communist Party with the CSO was a direct result of the Popular Front. Labor's decision on the border to support the national government coincided with the communists' agenda to enter into political alliances once Cárdenas proved sympathetic to labor. Simultaneously, through different mechanisms, legal and illegal, local elites continued to interfere in unions' accruement of power.

Despite these efforts, in Ciudad Juárez, massive unionization allowed workers to use collective contracts to exercise control over the workplace. In addition, collective contracts gave weaker unions comprised of less profitable trades the ability to match elite's economic resources. The struggles to ensure the fulfillment of collectively bargained contracts augmented workers' power as it increased solidarity among them once labor victories in the courts started to take place frequently. Workers in the electric, textile, and baking industries utilized owners' resistance to these contracts to organize strikes throughout the 1930s. After the Federal Labor Law of 1931, unions in Ciudad Juárez strove to master all of the various rules that could give more power to unions, including collective bargaining.[26] In Ciudad Juárez, the local unions belonging to CROM, the dominant labor federation in the area during the 1920s and early 30s, mobilized their members to defend collective contracts in the early 1930s.[27]

[25] Lee R. Blohm, Labor Notes from Chihuahua, Mexico, March 16, 1937, 4/1937/ACCC, 84.3/USNARG.
[26] Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.
[27] Ibid

Labor's efforts to establish collectively bargained contracts forced political and economic elites to react. Business owners' and operators' strategies revolved around delaying the labor collective bargaining process at the local level and taking cases to the state level where perhaps more sympathetic officials would determine the outcome. This usually involved a long conflict that could take up to a year to resolve, which tested unions' resolve and power. This tactic of delaying the proceedings occurred in the case of the La Gran Liga Textil Socialista, the union representing workers at the Textile Mills Commission and Co. in Juárez. La Gran Liga, created on March 26, 1929, originally was affiliated with the CROM, but quickly changed allegiance once the CSO, more radical than the CROM, was formed in 1931.[28] Throughout the 1930s**,** the Liga had a history of conflict with the Textile Mills Commission and Co. due to the latter's refusal to accept a collective contract. [29]

As it was the case throughout Mexico, the bakers in Juárez were also known for their reliance on courts to increase their power. [30] Bakery owners used the same tactics that the textile mills relied on to delay these procedures. Baltasar Adame, owner of the La Fáma bakery, wrote to the Sindicato de Obreros Panaderos, challenging the jurisdiction of the local conciliatory boards**:** "In view of the fact that the Labor Code has just been put in place throughout the country but still lacks confirmation by the Cámara Local de Diputados del Estado of the appropriate sanctions and clauses deemed necessary, and as long as this does not happen we cannot take any

[28] *El Continental*, June 6, 1931.
[29] Ibid, see also, Antonio Castro, Secretary of the Gran Liga Socialista, to Jesús Quevedo, mayor of Ciudad Juárez, September 22, 1930, 1930/679/AMCJ, for the first attempt by La Liga to defend their contract.
[30] Felipe Hernandez, Secretary of the Sindicato de Obreros Panaderos de Ciudad Juárez, to Baltasar Adame, mayor of Ciudad Juárez, September 3, 1931, 1931/692.1190/AMCJ, see also, Manuel Torrero, Sindicato de Obreros y Panaderos de Ciudad Juárez, to Jesús Quevedo mayor of Ciudad Juárez, March 31, 1936, 1936/761.1369/AMCJ.

steps regarding labor issues."[31] These delays, although bothersome and lengthy in some cases, did not preclude unions from relying on the courts as an instrument to increase their power.

The CSO demonstrated its power against bakery owners when the Sindicato de Obreros Panaderos y Similares Libertad accused the bakery employers of violating the collective contract regarding issues of workplace control. The CSO made it clear that the contract stipulated that the unions had control over the price of bread. They also insisted on the "removal of the local inspector who has neglected his job and has made grave errors."[32] On May, 25, 1936, the Bakers' "Libertad" union demanded the removal of the local labor inspector in charge of bakers due to his inability to enforce the contract upon owners.[33] The CROM and the CSO joined together and threatened local bakery owners with a strike if "a new collective contract was not established."[34] On February 24, 1937, the strike was averted once the bakers got a new contract.[35] For the bakers, and most others, the use of the legal framework to advance their interests, did not prevent them from relying on direct action when needed. But this reality did not last as political and economic elites, embodied by Governor Quevedo, his siblings, and political operatives made sure workers stopped on their tracks.

Ciudad Juárez: Power, Radicalism, and Violence.

Communists conducted the most notorious, energetic, and radical actions in Juárez, which allowed the aforementioned elites to unleash an extraordinary level of violence against

[31] Baltasar Adame, mayor of Ciudad Juárez, to Felipe Hernández, secretary of the Sindicato de Obreros y Panaderos de Ciudad Juárez, September 3, 1931, 1931/692.1190/AMCJ.
[32] Secretary general of the Cámara Sindical Obrera, Pedro Díaz, to José Quevedo, mayor of Ciudad Juárez, May 27, 1936, 1936/1374/AMCJ.
[33] Secretary of the Sindicato de Panaderos y Similares "Libertad", to Jesús Molina, the interim mayor of Ciudad Juárez, May 25, 1936, 1936/1374/AMCJ.
[34] *El Continental*, February 20, 1938.
[35] *El Continental*, February 24, 1938.

their leaders and principles.[36] On the border, the presence of Communists launching strikes, organizing sit-ins and walkouts, and engaging in mass protests reveals the significant influence of radicalism, even under the Popular Front, which sought out to contain it by centralizing authority and taking decision power away from local branches.

The height of Communist presence in Juárez came in the late 1930s, which coincided with the Popular Front. In 1937, the CSO openly allied with the Cámara Sindical Unitaria del Trabajo and the Comité Seccional del Partido Comunista de Mexico (Mexican Communist Party).[37] This alliance formally came after years of working de facto on the border to organize workers in solidarity. However, the Communist presence on the border goes back to the beginning of the decade. In 1930, Chihuahua Governor Andrés Ortiz issued a manifesto warning about the presence of Communists within the CSO in Juárez, which illustrates the fear that Communism inspired, and how politicians used it as a scare tactic to misrepresent organized labor in the state. Ortiz noted at the time that the CSO member organizations had "no communist elements" and warned that "those that will be discovered will be terminated from the organization eventually."[38] But Ortiz's announcement contradicted the reality in Ciudad Juárez. Two important local labor organizations with communist affiliations, the Centro Agrícola e Industrial and the Cámara Sindical Unitaria del Trabajo, greatly influenced the city during the early 1930s through political manifestos published in local newspapers and through the distribution of "El Machete," the national Communist newspaper created by the Mexican Communist Party. This union and federation formed alliances with other workers' organizations

[36] Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.
[37] USNARG 84.3, 6/1937:4/ACCC.
[38] *El Continental*, February 18, 1931.

in the area, including the CSO later in the decade, which increased their visibility and made them widely accepted throughout the community.[39]

The Communist-led Cámara Sindical Unitaria, which had been part of the Confederación Sindical Unitaria de México, the national federation of Communist-led unions until 1936, was active in Juárez throughout the 1930s. It had twelve organizations by 1937, including the radical Centro Agrícola Industrial (Peasants and Industrial Workers' union), Plumbers' union, the Unemployed committee, the Deportivo Juvenil Unitario (Youth Athletic League), the Sociedad Femenil de Izquierda (Women Leftist Association) and others.[40] In addition to the Cámara Unitaria, the other, and larger federation, the CSO, allied with Communist, Socialist, and anarchist organizations. Both federations utilized widespread direct action in the form of strikes, walkouts, wildcat strikes, boycotts, massive protests, and public manifestos to increase workers' influence. These actions provoked a reaction from political and economic elites on the border. The CSO was the most important federation in Juárez in terms of membership, boasting thirty-two unions among its ranks, and perhaps more importantly, it galvanized the most radical groups at the border, including the Mexican Communist Party.[41]

Pascual Padilla was the best known Communist organizer on the border. He initially belonged to the CSO and later led the Centro Agrícola e Industrial (1932-1937) as well as the Unemployed Committee (1932-1940). The presence of individuals like Padilla were crucial in the CSO's rise as a political force at the border due to the visibility its tactics garnered, which

[39] Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.
[40] Bibiano Palacios, Secretary of the Cámara Sindical Unitaria, to the rest of the sections of the Confederación Sindical Unitaria de Mexico announcing the new executive committee of the local section in Juárez, 1936/1376.766/AMCJ.
[41] Charles Hershberger, "The Death of Borunda: Alcalde of Ciudad Juárez: Chihuahuan Politics During the 1930s," *Arizona and the West*, 8, no. 3 (1966): 210.

emphasized direct action. Historian Barry Carr has argued that "the Mexican Communist Party played a vital role in the spectacular mobilizations achieved by popular sectors during the middle and late thirties."[42] Pascual Padilla, also known in Juárez as the 'apostle of the proletariat,' led numerous protests, marches, boycotts, and sit-ins on the border. His eloquence and energy attracted workers to him and the communists' cause, at least according to local media. After one of his multiple arrests, workers identifying themselves as communists came out to protest: "Yesterday in Juárez, a colorful manifestation of Communists took place to protest the arrest of Pascual Padilla," noted *El Continental*.[43] The article suggested that Padilla's attraction had to do more with his 'blue eyes' than with his communist ideology, but local authorities did not think so lightly of his potential to further radicalize workers on the border, so they arrested Padilla more than twenty times from 1930 to 1935.[44]

Finally, state authorities in Jalisco, where he also organized, charged Padilla with murder in 1935. This arrest suggests collaboration between anti-labor governors at the time to tame workers since Padilla's actions in Jalisco had nothing to do with his actions in Juárez. The explanation suggesting that Padilla was a local border problem seems more plausible when one looks at the fact that the local federal military commander on the border, Major Loyo, refused to serve the warrant, which suggests federal officials did not agree with Governor Quevedo's way of controlling workers. In other words, dissonance between local and state vis-a-vis federal authorities regarding labor issues impeded local authorities to freely persecute labor leaders. Nevertheless, these repressive actions demonstrate the level of violence that local authorities

[42] Barry Car, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 48.
[43] *El Continental*, September 20, 1935.
[44] *El Continental*, October 18, 1935.

exercised against organized labor in general, but specifically against individuals promoting communist ideology in the state of Chihuahua, whose persecution by the Mexican regime extended into the 1960s. [45]

The case, in which Padilla actively participated, gained notoriety on the border due to the extended media coverage it received. A November 1934 Juárez district attorney official's report accused Communists of rebellion for merely delivering their newspaper to the public at a political rally.[46] The police report never mentions the specific reason that necessitated police presence at the rally and the subsequent arrest of Communist operators.[47] With regards to the arrest of Pascual Padilla, the police testified that Padilla tried to burn the evidence.[48] The newspaper article covering this same incident goes into more detail regarding the types of propaganda that Communist individuals had in their possession. The confiscated manifesto attacked corrupt labor leaders, the religious upheaval in central Mexico (Cristero rebellion), and the socialist education promoted by the federal government, which in the local Communists' minds, did not represent true socialist values.[49]

In addition to distributing propaganda on the streets, Communists at the border made efforts to inculcate a sense of internationalism among workers, which precipitated their persecution on both sides of the border.[50] In 1934, the Centro Agrícola, led by Padilla, issued a

[45] Carlos Montemayor, *La Guerrilla recurrente* (Mexico: Debate, 2007).
[46] Juan Manuel Fabela, federal district attorney to Dr. Daniel Quiroz, mayor of Ciudad Juárez, November 21, 1934, 1934/749.1335/AMCJ.
[47] Gilberto B. Martínez, chief of police to Dr. Daniel Quiroz, mayor of Ciudad Juárez, November 19, 1934, 1934/749.1335/AMCJ.
[48] Gilberto B. Martínez, chief of police to Dr. Daniel Quiroz, the mayor of Ciudad Juárez, November 19, 1934, 1934/749.1335/AMCJ.
[49] *El Continental*, November 19, 1934. For information on socialist education in the state of Chihuahua, see F. Pérez y G. Hernandez, "La Escuela Normal y la Educación Socialista en Chihuahua, 1934-1940," *Memoria* (Enero-Marzo/2010)
[50] Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.

manifesto to the federal government, promoted in the local media, asking for the re-establishment of relations with the U.S.S.R.[51] The manifesto exhorted certain segments of organized labor on the border to have the confidence to take control of the national government through direct action and strike techniques; such demands exposed them to violence by local authorities. Radical unionists associated with the Communists in the Centro Agrícola e Industrial wrote to Josephus Daniels, the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, in support of local textile workers.[52]

After the Popular Front was inaugurated in the latter part of 1935, Mexican Communists modified communist objectives by no longer calling for the takeover of the means of production as their ultimate goal. In 1937, therefore, the U.S. consulate observed, "Labor in Chihuahua is not manifestly communist in principles, and confiscation of property with or without indemnification is not the present design of labor leaders. Many of the latter are, however, radical Socialists and have indicated their views by expressing frequently sympathy with the Russian and Spanish (loyalists) ideology."[53] This examination of Communism in Mexico responded to the Popular Front era, which saw an alliance between the Cárdenas presidency and the Communist party, which inevitably led to a gradual decrease in tone and substance of the latter's demands, something the Consulate highlighted.

In 1937, the general secretary of the Communist party (PCM), Hernán Laborde, visited Juárez from Mexico City. The U.S. consul noted that Laborde talked at a rally about, "the urge to join en masse the Communist Party in Mexico." The consular report also highlighted the presence at the rally of SIMMR (National Miners' Union) Secretary, Agustín Guzmán, and the

[51] *El Continental,* August 2, 1934.
[52] Labor Notes, July 1934, USNARG 84.3, 7/1934/ACCJ.
[53] Labor Notes, February 1937, USNARG 84.3, 15/1937/ACCJ.

Chihuahua City's mayor, Manuel López Dávila, a known radical and an ex-member of the teachers' union. Their presence alongside Laborde illustrates the influence Communists had in certain spheres of the state government, including the municipality of Chihuahua, and in the teachers' unions. Finally, the report emphasized that participants ended the rally by singing the 'International' and delivering the communist salute, which also supports the argument regarding the use of class elements by labor leaders to educate the masses.[54] The presence of high-ranking communist officials in government position at a labor rally in Juárez signified the Popular Front's victory on the border.

Communists in Juárez made efforts to forge alliances with their counterparts in El Paso, Texas as well. On March 9, 1940, a committee investigating subversive activities in El Paso, Texas revealed a letter in which Fran Sener, a Communist Party organizer for the Southwest, expressed the necessity to form alliances with Juárez's workers and their federations.[55] The U.S. communist party had a strong influence in some CIO-affiliated unions in the United States.

American officials reacted with hostility to workers' efforts to extend their influence beyond borders. On March 11, 1940, local authorities in El Paso arrested Miguel Oaxaca, a CTM organizer in Juárez and former leader of the Bakers' Union, and turned him over to immigration officials for deportation. According to the Mexican Consul in El Paso, immigration officials held Oaxaca without probable cause.[56] CTM officials in Juárez clarified that Oaxaca was in El Paso at the invitation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which wanted him to help them organize Mexicans in El Paso. Apparently, none of the current organizers spoke Spanish. On

[54] Report on the political situation in Chihuahua, USNARG 84.3, 5/1937/ACCJ.
[55] *El Paso Herald Post*, March 9, 1940.
[56] *El Paso Herald Post*, March 11, 1940.

March 12, 1940, immigration officials released Oaxaca and he returned 'voluntarily' to Juárez.[57] The arrest of Oaxaca and the letter by Sener in which he reveals the attempt to establish a transnational Communist organization demonstrate the importance that Communism had in transforming workers' identities at the border.[58] In the political and economic elites' mind, this transnational collaboration threatened their power.

In April 1937, the CSO and the Centro Agrícola e Industrial sent letters to Antero Torres, interim mayor of Juárez, clarifying that Pascual Padilla no longer belonged to the CSO or the Centro Agrícola.[59] Padilla immediately formed the Genuino Centro Agrícola Industrial, which quickly adhered to the Cámara Sindical Unitaria. He also continued his involvement with the Unemployed Committee and the Sindicato de Carboneros (coal workers). The importance of the Centro Agrícola's statement distancing itself from Padilla, who throughout the 1930s remained a valuable member of the union, signaled the beginning of the co-optation of the CSO and the Centro Agrícola by local elites. Padilla's removal coincided with the abandonment and eventual coercively induced return of the PCM to the CTM in 1937, which led to the first serious rift in the radical labor movement that led to the Miners' and the Electricians' unions walk out.

Communists' influence in the local labor movement explains the extraordinary violence unleashed against it in Juárez, as it allowed political and economic elites the freedom to attack them without significant repercussions. These elites, through union interdivision, which they largely fomented, extreme violence, and media campaigns against organized labor, successfully halted organized labor during the 1930s.[60] Workers on the border, despite showing higher levels

[57] *El Paso Herald Post*, March 12, 1940.
[58] Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), 45-55.
[59] Miguel Lopez Valencia Secretary of the Cámara Sindical Obrera, to Antero Torres, interim mayor of Juárez, September, 13, 1937, 1937/1392.733/AMCJ.
[60] Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.

of radicalism and organization, than say Miners had ever shown, did not have an anchor union providing the foundation for other that could withstand elites' swift and violent response.

Parral-Santa Barbara

The Hidalgo region, as it is also known, had a long tradition of bootleg mining. This created a culture of independence and challenged private property in the district that continued after the Revolution. According to William French, miners in the mining district did not have a tradition of identifying themselves in terms of a single, homogeneous working class before the 1920s.[61] However, this did not mean they did not possess a long tradition of organizing. Mutual aid societies in Parral, like the Sociedad Mutualista de Obreros "Vicente Guerrero," formed by skilled miners only, had existed since the turn of the last century.[62]

This changed after the Revolution. The "Ricardo Flores Magón" union in Santa Barbara was founded sometime in the early 1920s, and the Vicente Guerrero replaced The Flores Magón union in 1932 due to registration issues, which required unions to maintain a certain number of workers. Despite bureaucratic setbacks, the seeds of union across trade and skill were already in place**.** By 1934, the newly established National Miners Union (STMRM), Section 9 and Section 11, of the new Union were founded with more than 3,000 members from the district. Original union founder, Miguel Felix recalled that Section 11 in Santa Barbara alone had more than 2,000 unionized workers in 1934.[63] In 1934, the Benito Juárez and the Vicente Guerrero unions became

[61] William French, A peaceful and Working People: manners, morals, and class formation in Northern Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Pres, 1996).
[62] Ruben Rocha Chavez, *Tres siglos de Historia, 1631-1978: Biografia de una ciudad Parral* (Taller Grafico del Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua, 1979), 325-328.
[63] Interview with Miguel Felix, July 16, 2010.

Sections 9 and 11 of the National Miners' Union, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Mineros y Metalurgicos de la Republica Mexicana (STMMRM) respectively.[64]

According to Felix, in 1934, these two sections brought together more than 3,000 workers across trade and skill into one locally based workers' federation. Its predecessors had established a blueprint regarding the use of the courts, collective contracts, and direct action to maintain the power brought about by the Revolution. Although the National Miners' Union joined the new CTM in 1936**,** it quickly abandoned the national confederation after the latter tried to impose a political alliance with the national government on its affiliated unions. Miners were not opposed in principle to the Popular Front. However, the undemocratic processes that came to dominate the CTM compelled unions like the miners and railroad workers to abandon the CTM in 1936.[65]

Labor unions and federations in this important mining area sprang up seeking to increase workers' power by uniting, emboldening them to pursue their class interests and resist capital, when necessary, through walk-outs, strikes, boycotts, and legal actions. Community based concerns were part of the overall strategy, but as it happened with the powerful oil workers' unions, workers in the mining region extended their demands by threatening long standing power structures. Workers' support for these radical initiatives led many labor federation leaders to gain access to the corridors of power and become influential actors throughout Chihuahua. Political elites realized that they needed the support of unions to get elected and to maintain political and economic stability. But massive unionization among workers other than miners had to take place first.

[64] Interview with Miguel Felix, July 16, 2010.
[65] Snodgrass, 232-233.

The *Cámara Regional del Trabajo* (CRT), a regional federation, formed in the area in 1933 by *Union de Mecanicos Electricistas y Similares* (Electricians and Mechanics' Union), *Sindicato de Panaderos Ignacio Zaragoz*a (Bakers' Union), and *Sindicato de Trabajadores Mineros Benito Juarez* (Miners' Union), represented the types of labor unions that sought to bridge divisions across trade and skill throughout the mining region. These federations provided an outlet for union members to articulate their demands within the legal framework established after the Revolution. How much organized workers could achieve by contesting employers through that legal framework was unknown at the time, but it is clear that they used these mechanisms to extract all that was possible from that framework through threats and political connections. The limits were not known until later.

The CRT did not join either of the main national labor federations, the CTM or the CROM during the 1930s, which allowed them to remain independent of directives from the national labor leaders' mandates from Mexico City calling for collaboration and rejecting radicalism. The fact that miners joined with other workers in the area represented a break in continuity with the more passive resistance or lack of solidarity that historian William French argues was the dominant position of skilled mine workers towards their fellow unskilled workers throughout the rest of the community before the Revolution.[66]

The two largest and most powerful miners' unions in the area, the "Benito Juárez" and *"*Vicente Guerrero," from Parral and Santa Barbara respectively, joined the CRT. This decision by the local miners' unions strengthened the labor federation, since miners had a long tradition of resistance and unionization. The entire region depended on the mines, which in turn, provided a

[66] French, *A Peaceful and Working People*, 6, 44, 138.

potential base to negotiate on behalf of others.[67] Furthermore, the foundation of the National Miners' Union, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalurgico, Siderurgicos y Similares de la Republica Mexicana (STMMR) in 1934, could have drawn miners toward a perspective that saw their interests as only connected with other miners and with ASARCO. Miners in Santa Barbara-Parral remained in the CRT.

The CRT used class-struggle rhetoric to frame its intentions in the area: "The CRT accepts class struggle as a fundamental premise. It does this without any hatred or spite, and it expects cooperation from other organizations that are alike in thought and action." CRT made it clear that it sought to bridge workers' interests across trades and skills as a means to assert their power. Perhaps more notably, the CRT shows a clear expectation that other organizations in the mining region would join them in making this a class-based struggle. They labeled their adversaries (captains of industry) as greedy individuals with opposing interests. Nevertheless, the manifesto also acknowledged workers' apparent lack of preparation to defend the values of the Revolution, which the federation embodied.[68]

Division among workers in the mining area was not as pronounced at other places. The *Frente Revolucionario Obrero y Campesino (FROC),* which originated in the late 1920s, was composed of the oldest unions in Parral, the Sociedad de Obreros "Miguel Hidalgo," the "*Ignacio Zaragoza"* Union (bakers), and the "*Benito Juarez*" union (miners) before they left to form the CRT.[69] The Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM) eventually coalesced with FROC, combining their ranks in 1936 that strengthened the CTM in the mining area as

[67] Isaac Marcosson, *Metal Magic: The Story of the American, Smelting and Refining Company* (New York: Farah, Straus and Company), 196.
[68] Reference to the author's dissertation, rendered anonymous for the purpose of the peer review.
[69] Juan Berriosabal, secretary general of the Federación Revolucionario de Obreros y Campesinos del Distrito Hidalgo to the mayor of Parral, Joaquin Aguirre, in which the above unions, alongside twelve other organizations, signed a petition requesting local officials to stop the introduction of music boxes in bars and other similar businesses, 1930/Archivo Historico Municipal de Parra, hereafter referred to as 1930/AHMP.

FROC also made efforts to broaden workers' demands beyond the workplace. But they remained relatively independent and radical.

Workers' Power in Parral-Santa Barbara

The use of direct action remains the most visible sign of workers' radicalism and ability to project power, since it exposes elites' ability to control the way workers articulate their demands. Throughout the 1930s, workers used strikes to pressure owners and operators into signing labor-friendly collective contracts which allowed the former to dictate conditions in the workplace and thus tilted the balance of power towards workers. For example, the Miners' Union forced the American Smelter and Refining Company (ASARCO) to sign new collective contracts in 1933, 1935, and 1937; threats and strikes preceded each contract. In Ciudad Juárez, by contrast, there was no working-class hegemonic process because political and economic elites used violence to control workers.[70] This violence notwithstanding, strikes exposed political and economic elites' lack of control over workers and delegitimized their authority on the border. In the mining district, local political and economic elites made sure the Miners' Union demands were met because it was in their best interest to do so, or risk further radicalization.

Workers' power and potential for further radicalization in Parral-Santa Barbara showed in the frequency and magnitude of strikes, walkouts, boycotts, and other radical methods of labor resistance throughout the 1930s. As a response to this newfound radicalism among workers,

[70] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), for a discussion of hegemony in the Mexican context, see Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution*, 1-2 and Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

local and state authorities sided with workers in an effort to prevent them from radicalizing further.

The "Benito Juárez" and "Vicente Guerrero" unions went on strike in 1933, before ASARCO ceded to workers' demand for a new collective contract. In 1935 and 1937, after the formation of the National Miners' Union, Section 9 (Parral) and Section 11 (Santa Barbara) threatened to strike again if the company refused to sign new contracts. These threats forced ASARCO to renegotiate its existing collective contracts, which included raising workers' wages and ceding crucial aspects delineating control of the workplace.

The first strike threat took place in 1933. The Cámara Regional del Trabajo (CRT), representing the "Benito Juárez" Miners' Union, voted to strike against ASARCO in Parral. The twelve-hundred striking workers demanded an increase of twenty percent in their wages. The CRT argued that this demand was justified because a year earlier the federation had accepted a twenty-percent reduction in wages corresponding to the decrease in the price of silver. Now that silver prices had increased, workers wanted to return to the wages paid prior to May 1932. The CRT announced that in the "presence of 300 workers, the municipal authorities and the federal labor inspector approved the strike unanimously."[71] Governor Rodrigo Quevedo intervened and personally led the workers' negotiations with ASARCO. When the corporation acquiesced, workers halted the strike threat.[72]

In 1934, miners' unions across Mexico founded the National Miners' Union in Pachuca, Hidalgo, with the participation of Section 9 and 11 as original founders. Their two locals

[71] Cámara Regional del Trabajo (CRT) to the president of Mexico, Abelardo Rodriquez, October 23, 1933, in Grupo Documental: Abelardo Rodriguez, Vol. 199, Exp. 561.4128.31, Archivo General de la Nación, located in Mexico City, hereafter referred to as 199/561.4128.31/AGN.
[72] Gabriel Chávez, mayor of Parral to President Abelardo Rodriguez, October 27, 1933, Grupo Documental: Abelardo Rodriguez, 199/561.4128.31/AGN.

represented over 4,000 workers. The National Miners' was a diverse organization, but most of the local sections had a long history of independence and use of direct action to pressure elites, including the sections in Sonora, Guanajuato, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León.[73] The Miners abandoned the CTM in 1936, after the latter's' co-optation by conservative labor leaders, but the National Miners' briefly embraced the Popular Front both at the local and national level.[74] The Popular Front increased local sections' power once federal authorities supported them in return for labor's acceptance of their place in the economic structure as subordinate to capital. However, at the national level and in some sections, a handful of the union leaders' rhetoric, and in certain instances, actual demands bordered on radicalism.[75] If unchecked, this radicalism could have spilled out of control and exposed the elites' lack of hegemony as it did with oil workers.

Governor Quevedo realized the potential for further radicalization, so he immediately intervened in favor of workers by enforcing existing labor laws. This placated workers temporarily. Another strike threat was issued during October in 1934. Section 9 (Parral), took advantage of a strike threat from workers of the ASARCO-owned AVALOS smelting company, located in the state's capital, to propose changes to the existing collective contract previously agreed to by both sides. Section 11 in Santa Barbara followed suit. Workers demanded an

[73] Michael Gonzales, "U.S. Copper Companies, the Mine Workers' Movement, and the Mexican Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (1996): 506, Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey: Workers, Paternalism, and the Revolution in Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 34-49.
[74] Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), 90.
[75] Carr, *Marxism and communism in twentieth century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 32, and Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterey*, 179.

increase in their wages ranging from forty to seventy percent and the construction of housing for 1,800 workers and their families.[76]

ASARCO was perplexed at the new militancy of workers. The company objected that "these increases would significantly affect the yearly company's profits and the cost of housing construction would be in the millions of pesos."[77] Finding no sympathy from local and state authorities, ASARCO appealed to the federal level, requesting help from President Abelardo Rodríguez, who they thought might sympathize with the company. The President had issued support for "harmonious" relationships throughout his brief tenure. ASARCO's legal representative wrote: "We beg you to intervene so that workers will stop their strike threat, since workers hastily acted by giving us only a 16-day deadline. This contravenes your wishes regarding the avoidance of labor agitation disrupting the harmony between capital and labor."[78] The fact that ASARCO requested presidential assistance before the Cárdenas regime took office means that foreign corporations expected assistance from the federal government against workers' direct action. The entrance of Cárdenas into national politics changed this presumption.

During the 1934 strike threat, however, ASARCO found that the federal government's role in the negotiations was minimal; Governor Quevedo's political and economic clout trumped the national government's authority in the state. Once Quevedo intervened, the conflict ended. The negotiations also illustrate ASARCO's failure to ensure the assistance of local or state authorities to fend off workers' increasing power. ASARCO eventually acquiesced to the workers' demands. This outcome also demonstrates high-ranking local and state officials'

[76] Ricardo Mora, legal representative of ASARCO, to President Abelardo Rodríguez, September 11, 1934, Grupo Documental: Abelardo Rodriguez, 199/561.4128.31/AGN.
[77] Ricardo Mora, legal representative of ASARCO, to President Abelardo Rodriguez, September 11, 1934, Grupo Documental: Abelardo Rodríguez, 199/561.4128.31/AGN.
[78] Ibid.

hostility to ASARCO and other transnationals in the mining region, a stance which evidently brought them electoral support. More notably, by merely enforcing existing labor codes, Governor Quevedo effectively placed himself as an integral part of the negotiation, which in turn deradicalized workers, who did not feel the need for further militancy once they had his support.

The presence of Governor Quevedo as arbitrator convinced workers to backtrack on their strike threat: "We inform you that workers have proposed the following arbitrators to avoid strike movements: the President, the chief federal labor inspector, or Governor Quevedo."[79] The 1933 and 1934 threats of strike against ASARCO are two examples of how high-ranking political officials intervened in labor conflicts on behalf of workers. In both instances, these conflicts ended when ASARCO agreed to renegotiate the existing contract with Quevedo as arbitrator. The outcome placed Governor Quevedo as one of the beneficiaries because it allowed him to build popular support by picking and excluding labor federations in a way that would advance his political career. However, pressure from organized workers from the mining sector and the Cárdenas pro-labor presidency also forced the governor to acquiesce. Without this pressure, he would have never ceded to workers, considering his conservative credentials.[80] His pro-labor initiatives in the mining district showed President Cárdenas that he supported his labor policies and his overall mandate, which ensured his own political survival. He was a political and military ally of former President Plutarco Elias Calles, Cárdenas's main political adversary. Hence, after December 1934, he needed to demonstrate his loyalty to the new president. Labor peace in the mining districts remained a priority for elites, and while conflicts continued, they never reached radical proportions.

[79] Agustín Guzmán, secretary general of the National Miners' Union, to Javier Gaxiola, chief of staff of President Abelardo Rodriguez in Grupo Documental: Abelardo Rodriguez, 1931, 199/561.4128.31/AGN.
[80] Nicole Mottier, "Drug Gangs and Politics in Ciudad Juárez, 1928-1936," *Estudios Mexicanos* 25, no. 1 (2009): 43

But labor conflict persisted, on December 14, 1934, Governor Quevedo sent a telegram to Cárdenas explaining that miners in San Francisco del Oro, located between Parral and Santa Barbara, had threatened to strike against ASARCO if the latter did not match workers' wages with those of the rest of their operations in the state. Quevedo highlighted the fact that a strike would affect "2,500 organized workers…The company claims that it is losing money, but in my view and that of other experts in the mining business, this might not be the case, thus, I will personally go to see if the company accepts and we can avoid the strike."[81] The strike was averted and ASARCO ceded to workers' demands again, including having to match wages among all its labor force in the state.[82] The outcome demonstrated that Quevedo's intervention on behalf of workers placated them to the point that it prevented them from striking. This shows workers' power because their pressure forced Quevedo to act. However, it also shows the shrewdness of Quevedo and his political operatives at the local level. They intervened in a pre-emptive way to stop the conflict from escalating in 1933, 1935 and 1937.

Officials intervened to prevent unrest when workers at AVALOS first threatened and then went on strike. This conflict north of the district, brought the two local sections into another clash against ASARCO. The action of 1935 to 1937 against ASARCO by unionized workers throughout Chihuahua remains the largest strike movement in the state during this century. It galvanized thousands of workers in different locales against the smelting giant. Workers' engagement in these direct actions proclaimed a new definition of rights and ideals as a component of the Revolution. This conflict resonated throughout the other mining districts in Chihuahua once all of ASARCO units throughout the state also threatened to strike against the

[81] General Rodrigo Quevedo, Governor of Chihuahua to President Lázaro Cárdenas, December 14, 1934, Grupo Documental: Lázaro Cárdenas del Rio, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Volumen 394, Expediente 432.11.3c, hereafter referred to as 394/432.11.3c/AGN.
[82] *El Paso Times*, December 21, 1933.

company if the latter continued to refuse negotiations for new collective contracts, which led to a threat of a general strike.[83]

Furthermore, anti-imperialist sentiment during and after the Revolution made ASARCO an easy target, which allowed posturing local officials to proclaim pro-labor sympathies and still keep their conservative credentials by appealing to nationalism. Silverio Sierra, secretary of the miners' union Section 9 in Parral, stated clearly and directly in a letter to Parral Mayor Valente Chacón Baca that "the intransigence of American Smelting and Refining Company towards the AVALOS workers forced them to radicalize their movement."[84] Despite his conservative credentials as a Quevedista, Baca supported workers in order to contain them. In this particular instance, what started out as a local issue turned into a movement to establish new contracts throughout the state and eventually the nation. Instead of reacting with violence, political elites supported workers and defused an already tense situation.[85]

Political elites sided with labor in the Hidalgo region not out of an inherent sympathy towards their cause once the Revolution ended, but as a response to state and national political exigencies and miners' use of direct action. This potential for radicalism among workers existed since the Miners' Union had sections throughout Mexico with the ability to significantly affect a crucial industry of the national economy. Thus, their source of labor and their high degree of unity made them dangerous. Parral Mayor, Valente Chacón Baca, responded to the threats of strike by making it clear to the miners that he would support them.[86] This favorable response to

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[83] *La Voz de Chihuahua*, December 7, 1934.
[84] Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana, Section 9, Silverio Sierrra to the mayor of Parral, Valente Chacón Baca, February 19, 1935, 1935/AHMP.
[85] Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana, Section 9, Silverio Sierrra to the mayor of Parral, Valente Chacón Baca, February 19, 1935, 1935/AHMP.
[86] Valente Chacón Baca, mayor of Parral, to Silverio Sierra the Secretario General de la Sección 9 del Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana, June 13, 1935, 1935/AHMP.

the strike movement illustrates how local elites gave up some power in order to keep miners from radicalizing.

Local authorities did more than offer verbal support; they backed it up with actions designed to support the strike in other ways. The mayor added that he would provide the necessary guarantees to ensure success of the movement by agreeing to a total closing of bars and billiard halls in Parral for as long as the strike continued. Critically, the mayor "ordered that each one of the local government employees assist with one day's wages from their monthly checks; we have also requested monetary assistance from the local aldermen as well as the support and cooperation of local merchants so that they will not raise prices of first-necessity items."[87] Given that ASARCO paid significant taxes to the local government, which was critical to the municipality's daily functioning, local officials' positions need highlighting. Officials' support for this strike went a long way in expanding the unions' power in the area, since it left ASARCO with no other recourse than to agree to workers' demands throughout the state. Their previous allies, who were local authorities, now supported workers.

In 1935, Section 9 in Parral and Section 11 in Santa Barbara supported this state-wide general strike against ASARCO, which briefly paralyzed the mining industry - the state's main source of revenue. As a response to the potential threat surrounding the general strike, the governor acted immediately. Governor Quevedo arrived at the Hidalgo Mining District promising workers new contracts if they stopped their efforts to paralyze the industry, but this time ASARCO sought out the assistance of the President.

[87] Valente Chacón Baca, mayor of Parral, to Silverio Sierra, the Secretario General de la Sección 9 del Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana, June 13, 1935, 1935/AHMP.

ASARCO considered the labor situation in Chihuahua so dire to capital that in 1937 they sent a letter to President Cárdenas denouncing the National Miners' Union. ASARCO argued that workers demanded the establishment of one contract for all of ASARCO's operations in the nation; otherwise, they threatened to strike. The company explained to the president that the existing contract was previously negotiated only a few months earlier, and that it was not set to expire until sixteen months later. ASARCO also flexed its muscle by telling Cárdenas that it employed 18,810 workers and that wages had gone up fifty percent since 1934.[88] As happened with the powerful oil companies and railroad corporations, Cárdenas did not succumb to ASARCO pressure. This radical positioning provided workers with resounding victories. A 1937 report from the U.S. consul in Chihuahua reveals how the threat to strike and the show of solidarity among workers forced ASARCO to comply and meet the union's demands: "On July 27, 1937, labor leaders through the local press announced that a general strike involving some 17,000 employees of this concern would be called if the company should fail to meet their demands."[89] As a result of this statewide threat of strike, workers won their new contract in 1937. The U.S. Consulate in Chihuahua underscored labor's victories: "Other new contracts with labor were signed by the Santa Barbara unit of the same company and the San Francisco Mines of Mexico in Parral, both contracts calling for an increase in wages and other concessions."[90]

ASARCO's efforts fell on nationalistic ears with Cárdenas, as had happened with the oil companies' cries not to nationalize the industry.[91] On March 18, 1938, Section 9 workers at ASARCO's Parral operations walked off their jobs for four hours in what they called a

[88] A.A. Brown ,ASARCO' superintendent, Unidad Parral, to President Lázaro Cárdenas, July 22, 1937, found in Grupo Documental: Lázaro Cárdenas del Rio, Archivo General de la Nación, Volumen 379, Expediente 432.188/cc, hereafter referred to as 379/432.188/cc/AGN.
[89] Leo Blohm, Consular Report, June 1937, USNARG/84.3, 700/6/1937:6/ACCC.
[90] Leo Blohm, Labor Notes, March, 1937, USNARG/84.3, 700/6/1937:3/ACCC.
[91] For more on Cárdenas' stance on foreign companies, see Adolfo Gilly, *El cardenismo, una utopia Mexicana* (Mexico, D.F.: Cal y arena, 1994).

"revolutionary walkout" in support of Cárdenas' order to nationalize the oil industry. Operations at the plant were completely suspended.[92] The fact that miners called this walkout "revolutionary" shows how workers connected radicalism with the Revolution and the Cárdenas regime. More notably, it shows the potential for radicalization if miners suddenly emulated their oil industry counterparts. One can argue that the decade long Miner's struggle paved the way for oil workers' eventual success. Historian Myrna I. Santiago argues that the unions in the oil industry were significant contributors to its nationalization in1938.[93]

Conclusion

Regional approaches examining workers lives beyond the workplace have challenged our understanding regarding the influence the CTM and the CROM had with their provincial branches. It has also demonstrated how certain workers in crucial industries exercised an extraordinary amount of power in their locales and beyond. On the border, violence led to the co-optation of most autonomous unions within a decade, once elites intervened in unions' elections and appointments of officials. However, workers' control of the workplace, collective bargaining, higher wages, ability to organize, and other benefits illustrates the benefits organized workers achieved after the Mexican Revolution.

In the mining region, miners' struggle paved the way for the nationalization of the Oil industry in 1938. Their constant national work stoppages gave their oil counterparts the foundations to go beyond the usual demands of workplace control and community-based interests. Workers' realized that they could wrestle control of the industry away from elites from

[92] A.A. Brown, ASARCO's superintendent, Unidad Parral, to President Lázaro Cárdenas, March 18, 1938, Grupo Documental: Lázaro Cárdenas del Rio, 379/432.188/AGN.
[93] Myrna I. Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil*, pg. 340.

watching other workers almost achieve it. The struggle of a group of workers laid the ground for the success of others.