

Optimism Betrayed: The Golden Age of Mexican-Spanish Relations, 1931-1939.

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Abstract

Mexico and Spain have had a long and complex relationship since the former achieved independence from the latter at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1836, yet it took almost a century before relations became meaningful and mutually beneficial. The establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931 signified a new era in Spanish politics, and Spain's foreign policy towards the Americas adopted a more pragmatic and progressive approach. In particular, this led to a new era in transatlantic relations towards Mexico. During the next five years, Spain and Mexico developed amicable and cooperative social, economic and political ties.

The military uprising in Spain in the summer of 1936 put the Spanish Republic's international relations to the test, revealing her true friends and allies. Mexico proved to be, beyond any doubt, Spain's firmest supporter, although the relationship was unable to counterbalance the influence of European Non-Intervention, and American neutrality. Mexican efforts to gather sympathy and support for the Republican cause in the League of Nations had little effect. Mexico, along with the Soviet Union, and the contribution of the International Brigades, represented the legitimate Spanish Government's only hope of international support.

Other Latin American countries did not follow the example set by Mexican foreign policy towards Spain during the civil war. Nevertheless, Mexico's stance demonstrated its commitment to democracy, whilst at the same time, showing its independence from the United States. There was an intense interest in the fate of the Spanish Republic, and after its defeat in 1939, Mexico opened the doors to nearly 30, 000 Spanish Republican exiles. They made an important contribution to Mexican cultural life, and became a constant reminder that the Second Republic was truly a significant, though thwarted, step towards the establishment of a democratic regime in Spain.

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This work is dedicated to

Yolanda Ortiz de Zulueta

the most recent victim of
(the study of) the Spanish Civil War,
my life-long companion and beloved wife

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Glossary

AEM	Ateneo Español de México
AGA	Archivo General de la Administración
AGMA	Archivo General Militar de Ávila
AGN	Archivo General de la Nación
AHDM	Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional
AHN-SGC	Archivo Histórico Nacional-Sección Guerra Civil
AHPCE	Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista Español
AIR	Archivo de Izquierda Republicana
AMAE	Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores
CCM	Confederación de la Clase Media
CEDA	Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas
CEFPSVLT	Centro de Estudios Filosóficos, Políticos y Sociales Vicente Lombardo Toledano
CGOCM	Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México
CGT	Confédération Général de Travail
CIER	Centro de Investigación y Estudios Republicanos
CNT	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo
COPA	Confederación Obrera Pan-Americana
CROM	Confederación Regional Obrera de México
CSUM	Confederación Sindical Unitaria de México
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México
FAPECyFT	Fundación Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca
FEE	Falange Española en el Exterior
FE de las JONS	Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista
FET	Falange Española Tradicionalista
FLC	Fundación Francisco Largo Caballero
FPI	Fundación Pablo Iglesias
FUE	Fundación Universitaria Española
FUE	Federación Universitaria Escolar
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JARE	Junta de Auxilio a Refugiados Españoles
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español
PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana
PRO	Public Record Office
SERE	Servicio para la Evacuación de Republicanos Españoles
SHAT	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre
UB	Universitat de Barcelona
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores
UME	Unión Militar Española
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
UNS	Unión Nacional Sinarquista
UO	Universidad Obrera de México Vicente Lombardo Toledano

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On August 17, 1945, the City Hall of Mexico's capital was declared Spanish territory. This extraordinary declaration, along with the corresponding full diplomatic immunities granted by the Mexican government, allowed an official public session of the *Cortes Españolas* to reconstitute the Spanish Government of the Second Republic.¹

The reasons behind this exceptional situation lay in the close relationship developed between the two countries during the previous decade. In order fully to understand the broad picture of the historical links, and the significance of Mexican-Spanish relations at a time of fundamental changes in world politics, a word must be said about the historical antecedents.

In the period that elapsed between achieving independence from Spain and the military uprising against the Spanish Republican regime, Mexico had barely more than a century of history. Throughout this period, Spain played a prominent and, at times, very active role, as for example during the struggle for independence. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Spain's only active involvement was in attempting to prevent Mexican independence. On the contrary, Spaniards played a relevant part in the actual achievement of Mexico's independence from Spain.

As a sovereign state, Mexico owes its very existence to a collective effort in which Spaniards had a major role to play. Spaniards born in the colonial territory were known as *criollos*, whereas those who had been born in Spain were referred to as *peninsulares*. The former group played the leading role in organising and directing the War of Independence from the Spanish Crown, aided and abetted by the latter. Despite this, it is not surprising that some *criollos* did not want the American territories to be independent, while in addition, not all the *peninsulares* were against

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the independence of the colonies. Some key figures emerged from this group, who identified themselves with the independence movement and made important contributions to it. One of them, Francisco Javier Mina, a young military man of the Spanish army, is considered a Mexican hero for his contribution to the war effort in resisting the colonial armies during the War of Independence.² Due to his standing as a foreign fighter for Mexican independence, his name would later be linked to those of Mexican volunteers during the Spanish Civil War. Broadly speaking, thereafter the general pattern of relations between two sovereign nations would be every bit contradictory as they had been when the relationship was between a Metropolis and a colonial possession.

The history of Mexico as an independent state, in concise terms, passed through three defining stages: Independence (1810-1821), Reform (1848-1857), and Revolution (1910-1917). The struggle for independence, which lasted eleven years, culminated in political independence in 1821. Ironically, independence was achieved after an agreement was reached to establish a short-lived Mexican empire. This was an era entirely dominated by the *criollos* elite, with the sole exception of José María Morelos, the first *mestizo* figure in Mexican politics.³

The Reform era, a crucial period, gave birth to the new Republic after three traumatic events. Firstly, there was a chaotic period of internal struggle between the

¹ José Antonio Matesanz (comp), *México y la República Española, Antología de documentos, 1931-1977*, Centro Republicano Español de México, México, 1978, p.13. Julio Álvarez del Vayo, *Give me combat*, The memoirs of Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Little, Brown and Co., USA, 1973, pp.191-192.

² Another prominent Spanish figure justly honoured as a Mexican hero is General Juan Prim. Spain had agreed with France and the United Kingdom to send a joint force to Mexico in 1861; once there, and realizing the true nature of the enterprise, Prim's decision not to fulfil his orders as commander of the Spanish army won the recognition of the Mexican people and government. The UK had endorsed the Spanish attitude. That left only France. The episode would be another traumatic experience for the Mexican nation. See Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, no.25, *Don Juan Prim y su labor diplomática en México*, SRE, México, 1928.

³ Formerly known as New Spain, Mexico's government and economy was dominated by a handful of whites, out of which the European-born were a tiny proportion. A *mestizo* was the offspring of a Mexican native and either a *peninsular* or a *criollo*. To complicate matters further, Morelos was a *mulatto*, the offspring of a black parent and a *mestizo* parent. Timothy Anna, *The Independence of Mexico and Central America*, in Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. III, From Independence to c.1870, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p.77.

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representatives of the two main political projects. The Liberals favoured a federal division for Mexico as opposed to the Conservatives' proposal of a centralised programme for the country. This period of civil unrest was followed by the imperialist war waged against Mexico by the expansionist North American power, which took over half of the Mexican territory (1847-1848), and the struggle against the French military intervention who were attempting to impose the puppet Austrian Emperor, Maximilian von Habsburg (1862-1867).⁴

This episode of Mexican history can be compared, in its final stages, to that which Spain would experience sixty-nine years later, for the Republican regimes of both countries were fighting to preserve the independence of their nations, against the threat of pro-Monarchic military groups allied with foreign forces. In this politically significant period, the principal figure would be a pure Mexican Indian, Benito Juárez, the epitome of a Liberal, whose legacy would permeate throughout the next hundred years of Mexican politics and society, much to the disapproval of the Catholic Church. It was under the Juárez regime that separation between the State and the Church was established, initiating a profound secularisation process.⁵

The third and final stage was the Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, mainly as a fight for social justice and political democracy, and achieved its ultimate goal with the expropriation of the oil industry in 1938, through which Mexico ultimately achieved economic independence. This era is also commonly accepted as the beginning of the 'modern era' in Mexican politics, and was dominated by both *criollo* and *mestizo* figures alike. Particularly relevant is the fact that most of the land seizures and expropriations during this period affected the interests of Spaniards, who were still the principal landowners or *hacendados*.⁶

⁴ An interesting discussion and an account of the ideological debate of this period can be found in Will Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals, 1821-1853*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1998.

⁵ Jan Bazant, *Mexico from Independence to 1861*, in Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge*, vol. III, pp.262-269.

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During all these critical periods of modern Mexican history, a Spanish presence has been clear and more or less influential, either in support of, or opposed to, the dominant political tendency. More accurately, the Spanish influence in the defining stages described above, took the form, with very few exceptions, of resistance to any change of the *status quo*.

The decolonisation process of the Americas began in Mexico in 1810, but it would take over a decade for Mexico to become an independent country, years after the first Latin American republic was established in Colombia in 1811. The reluctance of the Spanish Crown to let go of a precious jewel was to have a long lasting effect on their relations. Once Mexico was an independent country, it would take a further fifteen years for Spain to recognise it as a sovereign nation. This conflictive start was to be the constant feature in dealing with the interests of subjects and citizens of either country.

This would explain why it is not an easy task to avoid clichés when attempting to define Mexican-Spanish relations, for there are few clearer historical examples of ‘a love-hate relationship’. Spaniards in Mexican history have embodied villains and heroes, fathers and rapists, brothers and rivals, accomplices and traitors. As a consequence, contradictory points of view often emerge to explain the presence of the Spanish in Mexico and the role this has played in shaping up the country’s perception of Spain.

At the time when Mexico struggled to consolidate itself as an independent country, Spain was immersed in a series of revolutionary movements that made its internal political life rather convulsive. For most of its history in the Nineteenth Century, Spain’s political life was intensely conflictive, yet some progressive reforms were

⁶ Leslie Bethell, (ed.) *Historia de América Latina*, vol. 9, *México, América Central y El Caribe, c.1870-1930*, Crítica, Barcelona, 1992, pp.78-142.

achieved.⁷ Political turmoil and civil strife were not uncommon, and the Spanish army was the main tool for political change. After the revolutionary period of 1808-1840, and the relatively stable and liberal era of Isabel II, whose reign came to an end in 1868, as the culmination of increasing pressure for democratic and progressive reforms, came a phase with a strong element of republican inspiration and the newly arrived socialist idea.⁸ The attempted democratic revolution was performed by a myriad of political organisations inspired by Pi I Margall and led by General Prim.⁹ The revolutionary movements between 1868-1870 began a brief period of even greater instability and radicalism. The murder of Prim in December 1870 was a terrible blow that shattered the democratic government that had initiated an intense, although somewhat chaotic, phase of progress with a strong sense of secularisation. Amadeo I, a bashful monarch at best, torn by the way political changes were conducted by the revolutionaries, abdicated early in 1873. His departure gave way to the establishment of a short-lived Republican regime in Spain. The First Republic, unable fully to eliminate Monarchist resistance, also suffered from instability derived from the tension between civil and military political elites on the one hand, and by the conflicting Conservative and Liberal programmes pursued by either groups, on the other.¹⁰

The restoration of the Monarchy under Alfonso XII –son of Isabel II- finally brought an era of political stability, accompanied by economic development. The last quarter of the 1800s witnessed a bi-party system designed by Antonio Cánovas del Castillo and fully complemented by Sagasta. The leaders of the Conservative and Liberal

⁷ For a general analysis and a critical view of the traditional perceptions of Spanish history in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Juan Pablo Fusi y Jordi Palafox, *España: 1808-1996, El desafío de la modernidad*, Espasa, Madrid, 1997.

⁸ The dispute about the political regime was not as relevant as the fact that the Republicans pursued a Federal State, against which, wrongly, criticism arose for its supposed attempt against the unity of the nation. See Juan Pablo Fusi, *España. La evolución de la identidad nacional*, Temas de hoy, Madrid, 2000, pp.178-180.

⁹ Some of the prominent figures in this particular period of Spanish politics were Francisco Pi i Margall, Emilio Castelar, Práxedes Mateo Sagasta, and Juan Prim. See Fusi and Palafox, *España: 1808*, pp.53-152.

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parties – Cánovas and Sagasta, respectively- inaugurated the era of government alternation (*turnismo*) that did not, however, represent a real change in power politics. This was a system that can be defined as formal democracy, similar to those established in some countries in the present century. It provided the necessary context to foster economic growth in a period of sporadic industrialisation. This period also witnessed the emergence of the first labour organisations, as a consequence of industrial progress. The establishment of the *PSOE* (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) in 1879, and the Socialist-inspired *UGT* (*Unión General de Trabajadores*) in 1888, was only natural.¹¹ Although initially small, the very existence of the first workers organisations meant the transformation of political life in Spain.¹²

Alfonso XII died in 1885 and his wife, María Cristina, took over as Regent. The end of the Nineteenth Century, however, also witnessed the final deterioration of the former Spanish Empire and the entrance of the United States as a major player on the world stage. The one event that summed up this turning point was the Spanish-American War over Spain's last colonial possessions in the Americas and in South East Asia. A diminished power, Spain was defeated by the growing American imperialist power, and the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines was severely resented on the mainland. Spain was facing internal political turmoil once more.¹³ Throughout the Spanish-American war, Mexico sided with Spain.

Partly as a result of this loss, from 1902, the sixteen year-old Alfonso XIII ruled over a divided country characterised by the impoverishment of large masses of people both in the rural areas and in the cities. These circumstances led to a deterioration in the strength of the Monarchy, contributing to an ongoing withdrawal of support and increasing discredit not only of the government, but most of all, of the Monarchy itself.

¹⁰ Additional pressure was put on Spanish politics by the events in the colonial possessions. In Cuba, for instance, a revolt initiated in 1868 obliged the Spanish Crown to commit numerous resources and troops to remain in control of the island. Fusi and Palafox, *España: 1808*, pp.76-85.

¹¹ *Idem*, p.162.

¹² *Idem*, pp.166-168.

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Meanwhile, at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, Mexico was going through considerable political, economic and social turmoil under the long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Mexican Spanish relations seemed slightly to improve at this stage, but no significant long-term engagements were made to that effect. All that would change as a result of the arrival of the Spanish Republic in 1931. After almost a century of diplomatic relations, Mexico and Spain finally agreed to up-grade their official representations at the time when both countries were heading towards new challenges in their political regimes. In the case of Mexico, the post-revolutionary stability had evolved into a special period of a “strong-man” regime known as *Maximato*. In the case of Spain, the equally significant change of political regime after remarkable municipal elections saw the end of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic in a bloodless and festive episode. During these years of significant internal political development, Mexico and Spain intensified their bilateral relations to an unprecedented level. The identification between the two countries went beyond superficial sympathy and produced effective settlement of claims and mutually beneficial economic agreements.

The aim of this work is to analyse the bilateral relations between Mexico and Spain during the 1930s; specifically during the 1931-1935 period, to examine the political role played by the Mexico during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, and to evaluate the impact of the Spanish Republican exile in Mexico from 1939 onwards.

In this respect there is a gap in the literature surrounding this topic. Although some references are made about Mexico’s help to the Spanish Republic in several published works in English, significantly such as Patricia W. Fagen, *Exiles and citizens, Spanish Republicans in Mexico*, University of Texas Press, USA, 1973, only one book has been devoted to the actual involvement of Mexico with the Republican cause during the Spanish civil war (Thomas G. Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil*

¹³ Fusi, *España. La evolución*, pp.238-242.

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War, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1981). Powell's book is of little value because firstly, it puts no emphasis in the role of the labour movement in order to explain the political ambience of 1930s Mexico; secondly, it dismisses as insignificant both the governmental attitude towards the Spanish republican cause and popular support of the latter, and thirdly, it does not bring satisfactory evidence to support the conclusion that after the Civil War in Spain, a myth was created about Mexican foreign policy towards Spain.

Finally, it is worth noting that even in the literature on this topic in Spanish, there is also a gap regarding both the specifics of Mexican aid and wider popular attitudes during the Spanish Civil War, although innumerable books exist on one of the most relevant consequences of the Civil War for Mexico, that is to say, the exiles and their assimilation into Mexican society. The majority were written by Spanish Republican exiles. The most valuable works from the Mexican perspective are the excellent compilation made by José Antonio Matesanz (*México y la República Española. Antología de documentos, 1931-1977*, Centro Republicano Español de México, México, 1978), although, in fact, did not take into account the period of the Second Republic, and his more recent *Los orígenes del exilio español, México y la Guerra civil española, 1936-1939* (México, Colmex-UNAM, 1999), with a similar span, and Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y Falange, Los sueños imperiales de la derecha española* (FCE, México, 1992), which deals with the Right-wing perspective. More recently, Mario Ojeda's *México y la Guerra Civil Española*, (Taurus, Madrid, 2005), although an updated work from the Mexican perspective, again fails adequately to assess the role of Labour in the Mexican stance. Furthermore, Ojeda overlooks the issue of Mexican volunteers and ignores their status as a group apart from the official position.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with the historical background, including a brief description of the early relations, between 1900 -1930, that is to say, during the revolutionary period in Mexico and the chaotic pre-dictatorship period up to the eve of the establishment of the Second Republic in Spain.

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Chapter II examines how official diplomatic relations, after the establishment of the Second Republic were strengthened and raised to unprecedented level. The analysis covers the period when President Pascual Ortiz Rubio's government attempted the reinforcement of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution: agrarian reform, 'socialist' education, and the taming of the Church and other conservative forces. From 1934, Mexican politics was dominated by the determination of the new President, Lázaro Cárdenas to put a halt to the *maximato* era. Coinciding with the Cárdenas administration, as is shown here, the unification of the labour movement took place under the leadership of Vicente Lombardo Toledano. The alliance between Cárdenas and Lombardo Toledano would be the bedrock on which support for the Spanish Republic would develop both in Mexican domestic politics and Mexican foreign policy. Chapter III analyses the development of Mexican Spanish relations during the period 1931-1935, emphasising the widespread reciprocal interest. Particularly relevant is the contribution of the labour movement in Mexico and the influence the latter had in the strengthening of the broad bilateral relationship.

The official Mexican response to the Spanish Civil War, and the efforts to provide all the necessary aid to the Republican Government in Spain, are analysed in Chapter IV. It might have suited Mexico better "to seek refuge in isolation from European problems, an attitude that its geographical position [would have made] [...] easy to adopt and defend."¹⁴ However, President Cárdenas took a firm stance regarding the legitimate government in Spain. The best known actions are the sale of arms and the purchase of war material on behalf of the Spanish Government, followed by support on the diplomatic front. In this latter regard, diplomatic efforts in the League of Nations in favour of the Spanish Republican Government were made by the Mexican representatives, Narciso Bassols and Isidro Fabela.

¹⁴ 'The Mexican Government in the presence of social and economic problems', Ministry of Foreign Relations, *Mexico and Spain, and the League of Nations*, México, 1936, p.20.

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In Chapter V, the different forms through which non-official Mexican aid was provided to the Spanish loyalists are discussed. Traditionally assumed exclusively to have been a governmental action, the Mexican aid provided to the Spanish Republic had many other sources. Led by Lombardo, head of the Workers Confederation formed in 1936 (*Confederación de Trabajadores de México -CTM*), Mexican Labour was instrumental, alongside the solidarity organisations that sprang up, in encouraging Mexican society to support the Republicans in Spain. The last part of this chapter deals with the issue of Mexican volunteers that went to fight in Spain on the Republican side, a very much neglected issue in the literature.

Chapter VI shows how there was a faction of Mexican society that unequivocally supported the rebel side. The Mexican conservatives allied to the Spanish colony, carried out as many actions as possible in favour of the so-called Nationalists, whom they perceived to be the defenders of traditional Spanish values. In this regard, attention is given to the activities of the *Falange Española en el Exterior* (in Mexico), and the intense anti-Republican campaign in Right-wing Mexican newspapers and public opinion. It is demonstrated that the Spanish Civil War had a major impact in Mexican politics. The formation of the Right-wing National Action Party (1939), was a response to both the progressive and revolutionary policies pursued by Cárdenas, and the growing strength of the labour movement.

The end of the war in Spain, with the triumph of Francisco Franco, was not the end of Mexican aid to the Spanish Republic. Chapter VII demonstrates that the end of the war meant the beginning of a massive influx of Spaniards into Mexico. Around half a million Spaniards fled into France towards the end of the war. Around thirty thousand went to Mexico between 1939-1950. This body of immigrants, many of whom constituted an educated and highly qualified working force, came to symbolise the survival of Spanish Republican ideals. The chapter analyses the Mexican internal debate around the Spanish exiles, the arrival of the first large groups, their temporary refuge, and their settlement in their final destination. Chapter VIII reconstructs and explains the process of integration and the cultural contribution to Mexican life of

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Spanish Republican exiles. After a long, patient and painful waiting for the fall of Franco, many of the Spanish exiles felt either treated or assumed as 'Spaniards in Mexico and Mexicans in Spain'. At the same time as Mexico, in terms both of its government and its people, treated the Spanish Republic in exile as the legitimate representation of Spain, as this final chapter shows, the seeds of rapprochement with Franco's Spain were developing. Accordingly, the chapter attempts to give a sense of the contradictory, if not schizophrenic, policy towards Spain that emerged as Mexico's governments became ever more conservative after the Second World War. Mexico and Spain did not re-establish diplomatic relations until 1977, after the re-establishment of democracy in Spain.

Chapter I

Mexican Spanish relations before the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic.

Diplomatic relations under strain (1900-1930).

The beginning of the Twentieth Century witnessed a brief improvement of bilateral relations between the governments of Alfonso XIII and General Porfirio Díaz, as a consequence of both personal relations established by Díaz's Ambassador to Spain, Vicente Riva Palacio, and Díaz's determination to strengthen European links to counterbalance the menacing American expansionism. Díaz's liberal programme encouraged foreign investment as the main source of capital for development of local industry, regardless of any dependency this might incur. Needless to say that Mexican socio-political development at the turn of the century was influenced by the long duration of his regime -known as the *porfiriato*.¹

The economic growth of the *porfiriato* era was particularly elitist and exclusively benefited the supporters of Díaz. It not only excluded the indigenous groups, but also most of the regional interests represented by small businessmen. However, it was the complete lack of social justice, the terrible working conditions under which labourers had to work, particularly in foreign controlled industries, including mining, rail, and textiles, where English investments were considerable, that sowed the seed for popular rebellion. The living and working conditions of the peasantry were no better than before but rather even more appalling; the *hacienda* system had reduced them to starvation under semi-feudal practices.

¹ Díaz had been democratically elected in 1883, after a failed coup against the legal heirs of Juárez. A military hero against French intervention and heir to the liberal tradition, Díaz was able to concentrate his efforts on economic development and the modernisation of the country. The American perspective on Díaz's regime is in Pauline Safford Relyea, *Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Mexico under Porfirio Díaz, 1876-1910*, Northampton, Massachusetts, 1920. A Mexican interpretation is in Daniel Cosío Villegas, *The United States versus Porfirio Díaz*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1963.

Given their respective internal political concerns, however, neither Mexico nor Spain were particularly interested in pursuing greater rapprochement. The Spanish had not completely forgotten the enormous list of claims they had made after the independence of the former colony. In return, Mexico had not entirely buried the suspicion derived from hostile relations prior to the Spanish finally recognising the Mexican Government. Subsequently, Spain demanded the settlement of an enormous, and certainly fraudulent, list of claims for compensation; an inventory, which, needless to say, Mexico was not prepared to recognize.² Hence, it was only natural for the ill feeling between the two countries to be reciprocal. So it had remained for almost a century. However, some relevant events showed the sympathetic side of the coin, such as the Mexican stand backing Spain in its war against the US over Cuba, although the decision to side with Spain in this case, had more to do with opposing American intervention in Latin America rather than accepting Spanish colonial actions.³

During the celebrations of the Centenary of the Mexican Independence in 1910, Spain had sent a representative, to make a symbolic gesture on behalf of the young Alfonso XIII. Camilo García de Polavieja y del Castillo, Marqués de Polavieja, a prominent figure of the times of the Regency, brought back to Mexico the military uniform that belonged to Morelos and was kept in the Artillery Museum in Madrid. He also decorated Porfirio Díaz with the *Collar de Carlos III*.⁴ However, these polite gestures had almost no impact in the broad bilateral relation, not the least in the every day life of Spaniards living in Mexico.

Most of the rich people in Mexico at this time were Spaniards, but by no means all Spaniards were rich. In fact, the experience of “doing the Americas”, often frustrating and even humiliating, produced a working class component within the Spanish

² AHDM, *México y España durante la República Restaurada*, no. 24, SRE, México, 1985, *passim*.

³ Leslie Bethell, (ed.) *Historia de América Latina*, vol. 9, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp.204-207.

⁴ AGA, FMAE, 277, Leg. 2, Exp.7.

community. When young and ambitious or even desperate Spaniards accepted exploitation at the hands of well-established and rich Spanish residents, the sons of relatives and acquaintances were granted accommodation, food and miserable wages. They were, nevertheless, less miserable than the indigenous Mexican population, but they had to fight for their position against the growing *mestizo* population. This situation also reproduced the existing animosity against the “*gachupines*”.⁵ In a reverse of the fortunes, some Spanish workers, having had some contact with workers organisations in Europe, related their experience and contributed to the awareness of Mexican workers.⁶

The Mexican Revolution, which began shortly after the Centennial festivities, initiated major changes in both the socio-economic and the political situation in Mexico. The former had been characterised by the existence of a system of *haciendas* which had impoverished the overwhelming majority of the population, particularly in rural areas, while a handful of rich landowners, many of whom were foreigners, mostly Spaniards, became richer.⁷

The Mexican Revolution challenged the *ancien régime* and its fundamental ideological, political and social beliefs.⁸ The goals of political democracy, social justice, and economic development that favoured an egalitarian redistribution of wealth, were embodied in the new Constitution, promulgated in 1917. The essence of the new regime was to be defined through the constitutional text, which would recover the main content of the 1854 Constitution and the so-called Reform Laws. It was also to include the demand for restoration of land ownership to the original

⁵ *Gachupin* is a pejorative term for a Spaniard, and is the Mexican equivalent of the Peruvian *Chapetón*, meaning “tenderfoot”; see Rafael Sánchez Mantero, *et al*, *La imagen de España en América, 1898-1931*, CSIC, Sevilla, 1994, pp.197-237.

⁶ Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *La libertad sindical en México*, (1926), Universidad Obrera de México, México, 1974. p.57.

⁷ AMAE, Leg H 1659, dispatch of 25 October 1921.

⁸ Even though there is the opinion that the *porfiriato* and the regime established after the revolution are part of the same historical process, hence they have more similarities than differences, as particular political projects they could not be further apart. For an excellent discussion and a detailed analysis of the origins of the ideology of the Mexican revolution see Arnaldo Córdova, *La ideología de la Revolución Mexicana, La formación del nuevo régimen*, Era, México, 1973.

inhabitants, and would establish a new economic programme as the basis for the country's future development. Thus, secular, free, and compulsory elementary education would be a prime concern. The recognition of the rights of the individual would include the reinforcement of religious freedom. The new Constitution eliminated private property rights for individuals and attributed the ownership of all land to the Mexican Nation. This would provide the Mexican Revolution with its radical character. Likewise, the new agrarian reform was to provide the revolutionary governments with a solid defence against external territorial or similar ambitions, and this was reinforced by the proclamation of the sovereignty of the Mexican Nation over the natural resources within its territory and its terrain. This document was intended to be the main tool through which the goals of the revolution, i.e. democracy, national independence, a higher standard of living conditions and economic development, would be achieved.⁹ These objectives constituted a challenge to traditional and conservative private interests. Reluctant to surrender their privileges, the Catholic Church and the big landowners offered strong resistance against the economic and political reforms instigated by the revolutionary governments.¹⁰

Most Spaniards living in Mexico were part of that privileged group now suffering from the revolutionary impetus through the confiscation of *haciendas*, as well as facing extensive damage to their properties. In 1921, according to the report of the Spanish Minister in Mexico, Luis Martínez de Irujo y Caro, 95% of the rural properties owned by foreigners were Spanish. On occasions, even the assassination of a rich Spanish subject would be assumed to be a matter of social justice and tolerated by the local authorities, who would turn a blind eye to the vigilantes. This attitude of the Mexican authorities was rightly assumed to be an outrage by Spanish

⁹For a detailed account on the Mexican Constitution of 1917 and its legal reforms to the present, see *México a través de sus constituciones*, H. Congreso de la Unión, México, 1994. There have been, however, major changes introduced ever since, particularly during the Salinas administration (1988-1994), for example, in the articles 27 and 130 regarding the property in rural areas and the legal status of the Church, respectively.

¹⁰ AHD, *México y España durante la Revolución Mexicana*, SRE, México, 1985.

representatives.¹¹ However, it was only another example of their reciprocal contempt.¹²

The darkest side of the relationship during the revolutionary turmoil was provided by the attitude of the Spanish Minister during the early and frail –and brief, in part thanks to the Spanish envoy- years of democratic rule after the overthrow of Díaz in 1911.¹³ The presidency of Francisco I. Madero was under threat both internally and externally. Both the American and the Spanish diplomatic representatives represented some of the external threats.¹⁴ In short, the diplomats openly intervened in Mexican internal affairs, actively and effectively conspiring against the government. In 1913, Minister Bernardo Cologan y Cologan had gone as far as asking President Madero to resign given the fact that, according to the Spanish Minister, Madero was unable to control the situation and bring order to the country, and of course this was affecting the interests of Spain.¹⁵ That Cologan was not acting on his own accord was proved by the fact that the Spanish Government immediately recognised Adolfo de la Huerta's spurious government. This further upset the bilateral relations.¹⁶

Once the various revolutionary factions forced out Huerta, and Venustiano Carranza seized power, the entire Mexican diplomatic corps was dismissed. The removal of the Spanish Minister – as well as the American Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson- together with the end of the violent stage of the revolution and the normalisation of

¹¹ AMAE, Leg. H 1659, various dispatches between 1920-1921.

¹² AGA, FMAE, 297, Leg. 5.

¹³ For the analysis of the bilateral relation during this period, see Flores, Oscar, *El Gobierno de su Majestad Alfonso XIII ante la Revolución Mexicana*, Universidad de Monterrey-Senado de la República, México, 2001.

¹⁴ Isidro Fabela, *Historia Diplomática de la Revolución Mexicana*, Tomo I, [1912-1917], FCE, México, 1958, pp.257-267. For a detailed analysis of Mexican foreign relations during the revolutionary period from the international perspective, see Friedrich Katz, *The Secret war in Mexico, Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution*, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

¹⁵ Isidro Fabela, (ed.) *Documentos Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana*, Tomo IX, *Revolución y Régimen Maderista*, Vol. 5, JUS, México, 1965, pp.225-237.

¹⁶ AGA, FMAE, 292, Leg. 1, Exp.26.

rule of an organised and stable government, brought some ease to an otherwise turbulent relationship.¹⁷

As part of the revolutionary wave worldwide, a more radical movement in Russia took further the demands for social change, and had bigger impact in many countries to different degrees. The triumph of a Marxist-led movement was something so far unknown in international politics and presented the world with an alternative solution for extreme social problems. In Spain, for one, the Soviet example encouraged the labour organisations and Left-wing parties to push their political aims further. This, however, was not the first time that such influence had appeared. Late in the Nineteenth Century, a year after the foundation of the Spanish Socialist Party (*PSOE*) in 1879, the followers of Marx led by Pablo Iglesias were pivotal in providing the Spanish labour movement with a distinctive profile. Thus, the orthodox Marxist line prevailed in the Socialist *UGT* and in its various strongholds in Madrid, Bilbao, and Asturias. The followers of Bakunin, on the other hand, were instrumental in the establishment of the first labour organisations in Catalonia, where a strong influence of anarchist ideas would survive, as would be demonstrated by the remarkable case of the *CNT* (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*) founded in 1910.¹⁸ As a consequence, the Spanish labour movement had been historically divided.

The rise of new political organisations, particularly with republican and socialist orientation, further complicated the conflict between traditional liberal and conservative parties. The complexity of the Spanish political spectrum was a sign of modernisation in Spanish politics, whilst effectively producing yet another blurred situation. The system of *turnismo*, in which the two main dynastic parties had agreed to take over power by turns, thus avoiding the dangers of military coups, was in crisis. The electoral procedure, very much in the hands of local *caciques*, seemed to

¹⁷ *House Documents, 1913, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, Washington, 1920, pp.977-1010.

¹⁸ Although the *CNT* was not established until 1910, there was, however, a strong anarchist influence in the labour movement in the late 1800s; see Juan Pablo Fusi and Jordi Palafox, *España: 1808-1996: el desafío de la modernidad*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1997, p.167. A detailed account of the period and the process of formation of the anarchist labour union is in Xavier Cuadrat, *Los orígenes de la CNT, Socialismo y anarquismo en Cataluña (1899-1911)*, Revista del Trabajo, Barcelona, 1976.

be at the base of the growing criticism of the government, and for the first time a campaign against the King, still a popular figure, was initiated.¹⁹

The *trienio bolchevique*, as the three-year period between 1918 and 1921 was known, had led to a two-fold radicalisation of the character of the labour movement, i.e. the anarchist and the socialist tendencies. Inspired by the triumph of the revolutionary faction led by Lenin in Russia, the Spanish revolutionaries saw the opportunity to further their goals by confronting the weakened Monarchy and its regressive government. For a short period, the strength of the Spanish labour movement was enough to propel some of the necessary economic changes, although it was not really achieving its primary objectives. The violent confrontation between the different workers organisations and between these and the successive conservative governments was the main feature of this period.²⁰ As a whole, Spanish society in the early twenties faced increasing political instability. Particularly significant in creating this awareness was the enormous setback in the military colonial strategy in Morocco, after the defeat at Annual in 1921.²¹ Regarding the latter event, Mexican Gen. Francisco L. Urquiza, former Minister of War in Carranza's cabinet, referred to one of the most bizarre episodes in the bilateral exchange. According to Urquiza, living exiled in Madrid after Carranza's death, a group of Mexicans exiled in Tucson, some of whom were Yaqui Indians, were recruited by the Spanish Consulate in Arizona in order to join the Spanish forces that would try to reverse the disaster of Annual.²²

¹⁹ Miguel de Unamuno and Ramón Valle-Inclán were two of the writers who ridiculed the King fiercely as a criticism of the monarchical regime rather than the person.

²⁰ Raymond Carr, *Spain, 1808-1975*, Oxford University Press, 2nd Ed. 1982, pp.497-516; and, Francisco Romero, *Twentieth Century Spain. Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, Macmillan, London, 1999, pp.34-46.

²¹ In July 1921, one of the leaders of the nationalist movement of resistance against Spanish and French occupation in Morocco, Abd el-Krim, produced a devastating strike to the Spanish colonial army in the Rif. With some 9000 casualties and the retreat from around 3000 sq. miles in the Melilla region, this military disaster had the impact of a coda to the 1898 war; Carr, *Spain*, pp.517-523, Fusi y Palafox, *España: 1808*, p.190; and, Francisco Romero, *Twentieth Century Spain. Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, Macmillan, London, 1999, p.46.

²² Francisco L. Urquiza, *Obras Escogidas*, FCE, México, 1987, pp.1038-1042.

Meanwhile, in Mexico, Álvaro Obregón's administration (1920-1924) was the first post-revolutionary regime that was able to start implementation of the urgent socio-economic changes in the country following the Constitution of 1917 and so successfully complete its term in office. Obregón also succeeded in instigating both economic and political reform, and became the most important and popular leader of the revolution, even after his term as president had expired. An era of political stability began, although a certain degree of political uncertainty would remain for another decade. His administration also pursued a proactive foreign policy, where Spain had a special place. After the recognition by the US of his Government, Mexican foreign relations became more stable for a while, including those with Spain, in spite of the growing clerical tension.

The Mexican Government tolerated Catholic activity even beyond the limits set within the Constitution, so long as the clergy did not actually defy civil authority. However, encouraged by the backing of the Holy See, Mexican Catholics attempted to regain their lost privileges. An agreement was drawn up with the Roman Catholic Church in 1924, which allowed a new apostolic delegate to reside in Mexico in exchange for Rome's pledge to appoint as bishops only those Mexican priests who abstained from political activity.²³ The lower clergy felt they had been betrayed. The reconciliation of the two governments did not take into account complaints from the poor priests and the latter's concern about the obstacles the revolutionary regime put before them. Although this would frustrate their spiritual work, this was of little concern to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The agreement made with the government had ensured a *de facto* recognition for the Church, a stalemate in political terms, with no greater compromise than the sacrifice of some of the poorest members of the clergy.

To deal with the "unfriendly" attitudes in Spain, the Mexican Government had a useful device. Since the early 1920s, the economic support of the magazine *Némesis*, published in Barcelona by José María Vargas Vila, had played no small part in the

²³ George Wolfskill, and Douglas W. Richmond, (eds.) *Essays on the Mexican Revolution: revisionist views of the leaders*, University of Texas Press, Austin, c.1979, pp.88-89.

successful image campaign of the Mexican Government. This opportunistic journalist saw the chance to set himself up as the Mexican president's voice in Spain to promote the good image of the new regime. The magazine published by Vargas Vila was a sign of the revolutionary regime, to be identified with cultural activities no less than to influence the public opinion, in a country that hosted prominent political exiles eager to criticize the Mexican Government.²⁴

Although few, the Mexican revolutionary regime also had Spanish supporters. Celebrated as one of the distinguished members of the 98 Generation, Spanish writer Ramón María del Valle-Inclán y Montenegro, was one of them. Valle Inclán had visited Mexico in 1892, leaving many friends there. He then returned in 1921, as a guest of honour of President Obregón for the commemoration of the Centenary of Mexican Independence.²⁵ This time, the eccentric, witty and loquacious character dug even deeper into his passion for the land of revolutionary thrust, and got acquainted with new public figures, such as the rising labour leader Lombardo Toledano.

As elected president, Calles had visited Berlin and Paris in 1924, but avoided Madrid.²⁶ Alfonso XIII questioned the Mexican Minister, Alfonso Reyes, as to why the future Mexican president did not go to Spain. Reyes replied cautiously arguing that perhaps Calles felt that his political orientation was not acceptable for the Spanish Military Directory. The King expressed his conviction that, had Calles visited him, they would have had only an informal meeting, smoked some cigars, and Calles' image amongst the Spanish residents in Mexico would have improved.²⁷

After his term ended, Obregón retired to private business, leaving Plutarco Elías Calles as his successor. Calles continued with the application of the revolutionary programme; his administration (1924-1928) laid the foundations for long-lasting

²⁴ Pablo Yankelevich, *Némesis, mecenazgo revolucionario y propaganda apologética*, in Boletín del FAPECyFT, no. 28, May-August 1998, pp.3-20. AHDM., *Vargas Vila*, Exp.17-7-14 s/f.

²⁵ Santos Martínez Sáura, *Espina, Lorca, Unamuno y Valle-Inclán en la política de su tiempo*, ProdhuFi, Madrid, 1995, p.297; Perea, *La rueda*, p.252.

²⁶ AHDM, EMESP, Leg. 152, 1905-1935, and Leg. 249, 1920-1929.

²⁷ Mauricio Ortiz, *Un mexicano en París*, in Boletín del FAPECyFT, No. 25, August 1997, pp.12-15; Héctor Perea, *La rueda del tiempo, Mexicanos en España*, Cal y arena, México, 1996, pp.415-416.

institutions such as the Bank of Mexico and the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, grandfather of the long-lasting ruling *PRI* (Revolutionary Institutional Party). (See *infra*).²⁸

Mexican politics had entered a phase of stability. The different revolutionary factions had compromised their views to form a common ideal. They did not, however, achieve an agreement without bloodshed. Far from being involved in a smooth transition, the local leaders and *caudillos* of the country found themselves embroiled in endless confrontations, machinations, and rebellions. Each of the various groups professed a specific conception about the ways in which the ultimate aims of the revolution could be achieved. The common tool, broadly speaking, was the so-called ideology of the Mexican Revolution.

According to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, an intellectual and leader in the making of the labour movement, the “(Mexican) Revolution has had a unique characteristic that will save it from its errors: it has been a movement of reconquest of all that is genuinely Mexican.” Praising the exaltation of nationalism as a relevant feature of the revolutionary movement, Lombardo placed this issue as the backbone of, and the unifying element of the new era in Mexican history, well beyond the contributions of the revolutionary leaders and *caudillos*.²⁹ This particular notion was a permanent feature in Lombardo’s analysis and in his ideological and political guidance of the labour movement. (See Chapter III).

²⁸ Calles only founded the National Revolutionary Party in 1929 after the assassination of Obregón, as recognition of the end of the era of *caudillos* and the beginning of the era of institutions. During the years of Cárdenas administration, and after the crisis produced by the clash between Calles and Cárdenas himself, the *PNR* transformed into the Party of the Mexican Revolution in 1938. (See Chapter IV). Finally, in 1946 the *PRM* gave way to the Revolutionary Institutional Party (*PRI*). The latter was established under Miguel Alemán’s rule as Interior Minister, soon to be the first civilian president, and represented the arrival of a new political elite, with predominance of conservative figures. It is relevant to note that the main labour organisation began a long journey into unconditional support of whatever governmental policy it was presented with. With such foundations, the *PRI* established itself as the ruling party that remained in power for five and a half decades. It was not fortuitous that the Alemán administration was characterised by a rampaging political corruption.

²⁹ Lombardo Toledano, *La libertad sindical*, pp.259-260.

In Spain, after a prolonged period of escalating social agitation, Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja seized power on September 13, 1923. As a result of the political unrest prevailing, the dictatorship was, to some extent, accepted. Primo de Rivera was to have two years in which to enjoy this favourable social climate. In trying to develop a policy of collaboration between the different political sectors, including the Socialists, Primo de Rivera's dictatorship transitorily succeeded in achieving economic development, but after the initial successful performance, also contributed to the country's deteriorating situation. For the time being, however, overcoming the military defeats in Africa, in a joint military action with the French army, thus partly restoring the prestige lost in Cuba, together with the initial economic recovery, the short-term accomplishment of the dictatorship also brought some sort of social ease. Perhaps the lure of the latter was reason enough for Spanish society to accept the lesser evil. Or perhaps it was the "Iron Surgeon's" anti *caciquismo*, a policy that attempted to regain control over rampaging political corruption, although more rhetorical than effective, that provided the dictator with popular support.³⁰ Another element of Primo de Rivera's early success was economic growth. His regime's economic policy was largely based on strong intervention of the State in the economy, with protectionist measures, regulatory controls and State controlled companies.³¹

Critical of the Spanish dictator, some famous Spanish personalities visited Mexico during those troubled years, making evident the strong link between the two countries regardless of their political regimes. The gesture included the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset and the novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, who enjoyed an extended trip and wrote a number of articles and books about the Mexican military and the revolutionary movement.³² Given the choice, however, Blasco Ibáñez decided to live

³⁰ Joaquin Costa, "the symbol of the radical regenerationism of the intellectuals", explains Raymond Carr, contemplated a leader "who should combine the virtues of Gregory VII, Porfirio Díaz, the dictator of Mexico, and Hammurabi", that would be the 'iron surgeon' that would rule Spain temporarily, in order to free it from corruption. Carr, *Spain*, p.526.

³¹ Fusi y Palafox, *España: 1808*, pp.227-231; Carr, *Spain*, pp.577-581.

³² AHDM, EMESP, Leg. 200, 1924-1927, *Llegada de intelectuales españoles a México para estrechar relaciones, 1925*.

his life in voluntary exile during the years of Primo de Rivera dictatorship in the US rather than in Mexico, despite befriending Obregón and other leaders of the country.³³

Although critical of the perceived militaristic nature of the Mexican regime, Blasco Ibáñez praised the Mexican disposition to improve its foreign relations. Even though he referred to the Mexican American relationship, his words could have also been applied to Spain. "Mexico's relations with the US during the 1920's were, of course, stormy. But", he concludes, "beneath the storm ran an undercurrent of dialogue and mutual comprehension."³⁴ Furthermore, he refers to the fact that Thomas Lamont, banker of the House of Morgan, declared himself "against the attempt to class (the Mexican) government in with the Soviets", as the State Department had suggested, since Mexico's government "on the whole (when its difficult political situation is recalled) has done pretty well and made progress."³⁵ It was, in other words, a government with which one could do business.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the sudden collapse of the Spanish dictatorship in the midst of the international depression saw a strengthening of the Spanish labour movement.³⁶ Albeit divided by its opposing ideological tendencies, it was now a major predominant feature in Spanish politics. After losing the confidence of his former supporters, such as, significantly, the King and the military, Primo de Rivera resigned at the end of January 1930.

Although similarly troubled by civil unrest, the nature of the problems faced by Spain and Mexico distinctly differed. In the latter country, as a consequence of the fulfilment of the revolutionary programme, relations between the government and the Catholic Church deteriorated. As mentioned above, the revolutionary movement affected important economic and political interests and, therefore, it was only natural

³³ John W.F. Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico, A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1961, pp.22-26.

³⁴ Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, *Mexico in Revolution*, New York, 1922, p.9.

³⁵ *Idem.*

³⁶ Carr, *Spain*, pp.581-590; Fusi and Palafox, *España: 1808*, 243-248; and, Romero, *Twentieth*, pp.59-60.

to expect the representatives of the sectors involved to react against the revolutionary government and its policies. In this sphere, the Mexican Catholic Church, encouraged by the Vatican or otherwise, became highly active in organising disaffected and resentful people to confront the government by whatever means possible, including violence. In this way tensions between the progressive forces and those of the reactionary sectors escalated to such an extent that they led to three years of grave armed conflict between 1926 and 1929.³⁷ Conservative Spaniards condemned the revolutionary process in Mexico because it affected clerical and landed interests and labelled it "the crucifixion of Mexico".³⁸ The *Cristero* revolt in Mexico was praised by the conservative sectors in Spain as a response to the 'anti-religiousness' of the revolutionary movement.³⁹ At the same time, this issue allowed these sectors to summon their supporters to defend "traditional Spanish values" they believed were being threatened by the republican challenge.⁴⁰

The revolutionary and proudly secular enforcement of the 1917 Constitution continued to produce tension. The Law was applied vigorously. This bedevilled relations with Spain. Before the outburst of the *Cristiada*, when the tension was reaching its limits, a State Governor asked Calles whether he had authorised the Spanish priest José Casaponza to say Mass. Calles response was short: "I cannot authorise actions above the Law".⁴¹ Accordingly, irrespective of their mission, no priest, if a foreigner, was allowed to enter the country.

³⁷ In his article *Calles o la decision*, Jean Meyer points out the relevant features of Calles administration and shows how US-Mexican relations and the Catholic rebellion were of incomparable relevance to the rest of the crucial events, and how his determination and revolutionary conviction were his permanent guide. Boletín FAPECyFT, no. 26, September-December 1997, pp.4-11.

³⁸ Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y Falange, los sueños imperiales de la derecha española*, FCE, México, 1992, p.31.

³⁹ There is another version of the attitude of both the Mexican Church and the Vatican, according to which the *Cristero* rebellion was a spontaneous popular movement, often referred to and bitterly criticised by the clergy. See Jean Meyer, *La cristiada, l'église, l'état e le peuple dans la Révolution Mexicaine*, Payot, Paris, 1975. For a detailed account of the *Cristero* war, see David C. Bailey, *¡Viva Cristo Rey! The Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State conflict in Mexico*, University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1974. Regarding the support and manifestations of solidarity of the Spanish conservative Catholics with the Mexican *Cristeros*, see Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo*.

⁴⁰ Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo*, p.41.

⁴¹ AGN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, Grupo 182, Serie 429, Vol. 178-181.

Shortly after his re-election in 1928 as President for a second term, for which the Constitution had to be amended, as non-re-election was a key feature of the revolutionary movement against Díaz, Obregón was assassinated by a radical Catholic. Although not directly affecting bilateral relations, the murder showed how events in one country could have an impact on the other. Spanish Conservative and Catholic partisans used the news of the murder as propaganda for their own ends, pointing out the consequences for Spain, if a similar type of government took over. At the same time, perceived as anti clerical and, worst of all, anti Catholic, the Mexican Government was portrayed as a dreadful regime with which there should be no further contact.⁴²

It was not difficult to understand the level of animosity and distrust that existed between the two governments. Nonetheless, the relations between Mexico and Spain, particularly complex as they were, still had room to be relaxed in other areas, namely in cultural and commercial spheres. In Mexican politics, the murder of Obregón underlined the need to break the pattern of governments led by all-powerful *caudillos*.

For the moment, however, Calles, although not president, remained as the power behind the presidency. Emilio Portes Gil was designated interim president by the Congress in order to call elections. He remained in office for fourteen months and further developed the previous regime's agrarian policy throughout Mexico. Although there was little evidence that Calles was intentionally acting as the power behind the throne, his political status and revolutionary prestige made him the most influential politician at the time, transforming him into a shadow for President Portes Gil. Referred to as the *Jefe Máximo de la Revolución*, like Obregón and Carranza before him, Calles unwittingly inaugurated a special period in Mexican politics. Having no opponent of stature to challenge his political prestige to unify the various revolutionary factions, it is clear that, wittingly or not, Portes Gil was the first of the

⁴² Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *El asesinato de Álvaro Obregón en la prensa española (Aproximaciones a la opinión pública española y su visión de México durante los años veinte)*, in *Revista Papeles de la Casa Chata*, año 2, num. 3, México, 1987, *passim*.

three presidents to 'rule' under the influence of General Calles. Calles became the "needle of balance" for political disputes nation-wide. The so-called *maximato* era was beginning.⁴³

The calling for an extraordinary presidential election, opened the possibility for José Vasconcelos, former Minister of Education, and a well-known *Hispanista*, who was eagerly supported by the Spanish Minister, Manuel de Figuerola Ferrati, Marqués de Rialp, Mexican conservative sectors, and disaffected revolutionaries. The solution for the dispersed revolutionary family was to create a national party, uniting all revolutionary factions and embracing the revolutionary aims contained in the Mexican Constitution. Thus the National Revolutionary Party was born. It was integrated by many small regional parties formed in the wave of the revolutionary movement, and most of local caudillos, but not all of them. As reported by the Spanish Minister, generals Escobar, Manzo and Torres, rebelled against the imposition.⁴⁴

Vasconcelos was defeated in the presidential election, a ballot suspected of dirty management, and Pascual Ortiz Rubio was elected president for the remaining four-year period.⁴⁵ Vasconcelos, Martín Luis Guzmán, and other oppositionists went into exile fearing Calles' persecution.⁴⁶ They both joined other Mexican exiles in Spain, although their respective politics would eventually oppose. Vasconcelos would develop his bitter anti-Calles criticism from Spain, gaining support from Spanish conservative circles.⁴⁷ Similarly, although gradually engaging more into local business and politics, Guzmán frequented liberal circles linked with republican ideas.⁴⁸

⁴³ Arnaldo Córdova, *La Revolución en crisis, La aventura del maximato*, Cal y Arena, México, 1995, pp.89-98.

⁴⁴ AMAE, Min. Edo., Leg. H-2565,

⁴⁵ When the Constitution was modified in 1928, to allow Obregón to be re-elected, the presidential term was also changed from four to six years.

⁴⁶ José Vasconcelos, *Memorias, II, el Desastre, El Proconsulado*, (1a. Ed. 1938) FCE, México, 1982.

⁴⁷ AMAE, Min. Edo., Leg. H-2565.

⁴⁸ Manuel Azaña, *Diarios Completos, Crítica*, Barcelona, 2000, p.145.

Another important feature of the period that eventually becomes relevant was the initial relation between the Mexican and the Spanish labour, in their international connection. The Mexican labour movement represented by the *CROM* participated in international conferences organised by the International Organisation of Labour. Likewise, the *UGT*, led by the Socialist Party, represented the Spanish workers there. In this way, the first contacts between Lombardo Toledano and Francisco Largo Caballero, head of the Spanish *UGT*, took place.

The young barrister Lombardo had been linked to the labour movement since 1918, having attended the foundation of the *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* (Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers), and as a rising figure in the Mexican political life. As a representative of the Mexican *CROM* delegation, Lombardo attended several international conferences linked to the International Labour Organisation, where he established contact with worldwide leaders of the Labour movement. In 1919, significantly, he was present at the Labour International Conference held in Washington to set up the International Labour Organisation (ILO), where he made the acquaintance of Leon Jouhaux, from the French *Confédération Général de Travail (CGT)* and Francisco Largo Caballero, Luis Araquistain and Fernando de los Ríos from the Spanish *Unión General de Trabajadores*.⁴⁹ As a member of the Pan-American Workers Confederation (*COPA*) the *CROM* was under the influence of the American Federation of Labour led by Samuel Gompers, the conservative that strongly opposed the International Worker's Association. As a member of the latter, the *UGT* unsuccessfully sought the possibility of establishing the Ibero-American Workers Federation.⁵⁰

Known as one of the “seven wise men”,⁵¹ Lombardo built an early public career. He was designated interim *Oficial Mayor* (Chief Clerk) of Mexico City in 1921, during

⁴⁹ Amaro del Rosal, *Vicente Lombardo Toledano y sus Relaciones con el Movimiento Obrero Español, Facetas de una vida*, CEFPSVLT, México, 1980, pp.8-9.

⁵⁰ Amaro del Rosal, *Los Congresos Obreros Internacionales en el Siglo XX, de 1900 a 1950*, Grijalbo, México, 1963, pp.383-384.

⁵¹ The other six were Manuel Gómez Morín, Antonio Castro Leal, Alfonso Caso, Teófilo Olea y Leyva, Jesús Moreno Baca, and Alberto Vázquez del Mercado. They all constituted the *Sociedad de*

the Obregón administration, and interim Governor of his home state, Puebla, in 1923.⁵² In both positions, he developed a distinctly progressive governmental policy, particularly in the enforcement of land distribution.⁵³ But his link with labour would prove definitive, although he never abandoned his academic inclination. Lombardo and Largo Caballero would meet again only at an ILO conference held in Geneva in 1925⁵⁴, but it was Antonio Fabra Rivas, Spain's *UGT* representative at the ILO and *PSOE* member, who recommended Lombardo for the preparation of a report for the ILO on the situation of Labour in Mexico in 1926.⁵⁵

The common set of ideas and principles that formed the ideology of the Mexican Revolution, as has been previously described, had its roots in an elementary sense of social justice. The pursuit of its aims, from political democracy to land reform and from economic development to the improvement of both labour and living conditions in general, could not fail to disturb traditional conservative interests. At the same time, or probably because of the latter, the various revolutionary governments were pursuing revolutionary measures, but only up to a point. They did not want to be associated with Soviet Communism, even though some of the novelties of Soviet Russia sincerely attracted their attention. When questioned about his opinion on Bolshevism, Calles replied that "all progressive men are labelled as Bolsheviks"⁵⁶, and when receiving the credentials of the first Soviet diplomatic representative, Alexandra Kollontai, in 1926, he praised the fact that Mexico willingly accepted the freshness of the Soviet project.⁵⁷

Conferencias y Conciertos, informally referred to as *Los Siete Sabios*, which Narciso Bassols and Daniel Cosío Villegas would join later; Raúl Gutiérrez Lombardo, *Apuntes para una Biografía Política de Vicente Lombardo Toledano*, CEFPSVLT, México, 1998, p.8.

⁵² During his short-term governorship Lombardo decreed the banning of bullfights, considering them nothing but a "lucrative business based on the ignorance of the people"; [Vicente Lombardo Toledano] *Obras Completas*, vol. I, Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, México, 1992. p.330.

⁵³ Millon, *Mexican Marxist*, p.17; Francie R. Chassen de López, *Lombardo Toledano y el Movimiento Obrero Mexicano (1917/1940)*, Extemporáneos, México, 1977, p.54; Nathaniel Weyl and Sylvia Weyl, *The Reconquest of Mexico, The Years of Lázaro Cárdenas*, London, 1939, p.79.

⁵⁴ Rosa Ma. Otero y Gama, *Efemérides*, in *Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo I, vol. 4, 1927-1928, CEFPSVLT, México, 1994, p.398.

⁵⁵ Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *La Libertad Sindical en México*, Lucha, México, 1926, p.7.

⁵⁶ [Plutarco Elías Calles] *Pensamiento político y social, Antología (1913-1936)*, FCE, México, 1988, p.103. His response to Bolshevism was given in an interview to *El Demócrata*, on 18 April 1924.

⁵⁷ *Idem*, pp.204-205.

Even though attempts were made to upgrade Spanish Mexican bilateral diplomatic relations after 1913 those were not times, as has been shown, for engaging in diplomatic endeavours other than to remain on the most amicable terms possible, if only cautious and superficial.⁵⁸ Besides, there was a need for a stronger motivation for such a move. Nevertheless, the Mexican diplomatic representative in Madrid, Enrique González Martínez, who arrived in Spain in 1924, had been working to persuade both governments to establish the new diplomatic status, but the truth is that neither circumstances nor the will of the governing elites were focused to that end. The bilateral relations would change, but only when, and if, there existed an evident reciprocal benefit in sight. That was to be provided by the arrival of the Republican regime in Spain.

In the meantime, the pro-Republican movement was spreading throughout the Spanish peninsula; soon it would gain momentum with the beginning of the new decade, the departure of the dictator, and the decreasing prestige of the monarchy. At this point, even the commemoration of the short-lived first Spanish Republic was perceived as a threat by the government.⁵⁹ The decision to relocate the remains of Pablo Iglesias to Teruel, for example, an apparently humble event in April 1930, was reported by the Provincial Governor to the Ministry of Interior.⁶⁰ A less innocuous, and hence more alarming, occasion was given by the return of Unamuno from Hendaye and the crowd that gathered awaiting his arrival at Irún, headed by Indalecio Prieto and the leaders of the local Republican Socialist Party. Unamuno had been in exile, after having conducted a long campaign savagely ridiculing the King during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. The official report played down the meeting, regarding some 5 000 demonstrators as a confused mixture of republican adherents and passers-by coming out of a football match. In his violent speech against both the dictatorship and the Monarchy on 12 February 1930, Unamuno reportedly decided to

⁵⁸ AHDM, EMESP, Leg. 151, 1913-1936.

⁵⁹ The Ministry of Interior (Ministerio de la Gobernación) had particular interest in following up the activities of both political parties, particularly socialist and republican ones, and prominent personalities of these sectors. AHN, Min. Gob., Leg. 45 A, Exp.7-9.

⁶⁰ AHN, Min. Gob., Leg. 45 A Exp.7.

modify the Carlist motto of “Dios, Patria y Rey” (God, Motherland and King) and from then on and forever, he would say “Dios, Patria y Ley” (God, Motherland, and Law).⁶¹

After Primo de Rivera, the King entrusted another General to form government, with the hope of regaining control of the situation. The last remnants of the monarchist government, however, now headed by Dámaso Berenguer, would endure only little more than a year before the arrival of the Spanish Republic. Effectively the continuation of Primo de Rivera's regime, although not as repressive, this so-called “*dictablanda*”, was unable to contain the republican impetus that had permeated the whole of Spain.⁶²

In an attempt to overthrow the Crown and establish a Republican regime, a revolutionary Committee was established in August 1930, and planned an insurrection to take place the following December. Among the signatories of the Pacto de San Sebastián were former Monarchist Niceto Alcalá Zamora, the Radical Alejandro Lerroux, the Left Republican Manuel Azaña, and the moderate Socialist Indalecio Prieto.⁶³ The republican movement would count as its first martyrs, Fermín Galán and Ángel García Hernández after the repression of the revolt in Jaca and the

⁶¹ AHN, Min. Gob., Leg. 45 A Exp.8.

⁶² For a full account of the period, see Shlomo Ben-Ami, *The origins of the Second Republic in Spain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1978.

⁶³ In the official despatch to the Ministry of Interior, the meeting is reported to have taken place on 17 August 1930 in San Sebastian at the premises of the local Unión Republicana, and was presided over by Fernando Sasiain. There, the representatives of the myriad of republican organisations were present. According to the official report those who attended the reunion were Alejandro Lerroux and Manuel Azaña on behalf of the Alianza Republicana (Republican Alliance); Marcelino Domingo, Álvaro de Albornoz, and Ángel Galarza on behalf of the Partido Radical Socialista (Socialist Radical Party); Niceto Alcalá Zamora and Miguel Maura on behalf of the republican liberal right (*derecha liberal republicana*); Manuel Carrasco Formiguera on behalf of the Acción Catalana (Catalan Action); Julio Aigualar on behalf of the Estat Català (Catalan State); and Santiago Casares Quiroga on behalf of the Federación Republicana Gallega (Galician Republican Federation). All the above mentioned, together with the Partido Federal Español (Spanish Federal Party) – which was unable to send a representative while waiting for the decision of its forthcoming congress, constituted the full spectrum of republican elements of the whole country. Recorded as participating on their own account are Felipe Sánchez Roman, Eduardo Ortega y Gasset and Indalecio Prieto. Unable to attend the meeting was Gregorio Marañón, then in France, who sent an enthusiastic letter expressing solidarity with the purposes of the reunion. AHN, Min. Gob. Leg. 45A Exp.8.

general strike in Madrid.⁶⁴ Oddly, the repression of the republican leaders, obliquely demonstrated Mexican Spanish ties. In a remarkable case of the informal connections linking Mexicans and Spaniards, the close relation established between Manuel Azaña and Martín Luis Guzmán was particularly revealing. They met in 1915, during Guzmán's first brief Spanish exile. Together with Cipriano Rivas Cherif, Azaña's brother in law, Guzmán was one of the regular friends Azaña had since the early years of the *Ateneo de Madrid*. The Mexican writer ran away from the group that had strengthened its grip on power after Obregón's murder. Most of Guzmán's novels were based on actual characters and events of the Mexican Revolution; he built a reputation as a novelist and as biographer of Pancho Villa. The irreconcilable terms in which Martín Luis Guzmán had left Mexico were clearly directed against the ruling group – led by Calles. His early acquaintance with Azaña became noteworthy in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when he was a privileged witness of the Spanish drama before the establishment of the Republican regime and an actor in the short-lived democratic experiment. Once he was settled in Madrid, Guzmán seemed well integrated into Spanish culture, and more interested in Spanish politics than some local politicians. After the failed revolutionary events of December 1930 and the consequent repression, Azaña's eventful escape was less exciting and mysterious than popular believe attributed to it. In truth, it was almost dull: he was hiding at Guzmán's house, only yards away from his own house.

Meanwhile, in Mexico, the definition of the new revolutionary programme and the establishment of new institutions largely dominated Mexican domestic politics in the 1930s. The tension between the Church and the State also remained an essential part of their *modus vivendi* in Mexico during this period.⁶⁵ Both the laity and the clergy were aware that in order to deal with it, something more than divine patience and God's will was necessary. Simplistically, some diplomatic and journalistic observers tended to assume that it was Calles' powerful and dominating opinion that prevailed in this matter, but this was not so. The revolutionary family was deeply and firmly

⁶⁴ Fusi, *España. La evolución*, p.252, and Preston, *The coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.33-34.

⁶⁵ Córdova, *La Revolución en crisis*, p.265.

convinced of the terrible influence and the disastrous impact that the Catholic Church had had in the history of the Mexican people. Part of the revolutionary discourse was that the Church had subjected the Mexicans to ignorance, prejudice and exploitation as the best way to entitle them to a better life in the after-world. In the light of this belief, it took little effort to convince the more conscious and determined elements that the best way to contribute to the mental liberation of the poor was by attacking the power of the Church. This would be a step towards their social, economic, and political liberty, following the path of the Reformist movement headed by Juárez in the mid Nineteenth Century.

To clear the air between Church and State was to take more than good wishes. The assassination of President-elect Obregón by a fanatical Catholic was to provide another justification, if needed, for the aggressive policies of the revolutionary governments in dealing with the Catholic Church. Accordingly, irrespective of their mission, no priest, if a foreigner, was allowed to enter the country. In February 1931, Luciano Serrano, sent by the Spanish Ministry of Education to visit Mexico, was refused permission to enter the country. This baffled the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs given that Serrano had a diplomatic passport.⁶⁶ The Spanish Minister in Mexico reported that only after a high level official negotiation, limited authorisation to visit Mexico was granted. The Minister explained to Alba that this was a truly one-off exception, given that it was the law and Mexican officials were determined to apply it.⁶⁷

But Spanish politics were entering a phase that required the undivided attention of the government. Continuing with the crisis, after the resignation of Berenguer in February 1931, a new Council of Ministers was formed, headed by Admiral Juan Bautista Aznar.⁶⁸ The new government called for municipal elections to be held on

⁶⁶ Telegram Alba to Gracia Real, 11 February 1931, AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-34 Exp.20.

⁶⁷ Telegram Gracia Real to Alba, 12 February 1931, AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-34 Exp.20.

⁶⁸ Telegram Minister of Interior to Civil Governors, 17 February 1931, AHN, Min. Gob., Leg. 14 A, Exp.3 *Censura*, 1931. The postponement of elections meant the reestablishment of censorship upon the national press, according to Spanish authorities, because of the ill intentioned and rebel attitude of republican parties and the working classes.

April 12. A number of *concejales* (members of local councils) were to be nominated, without election, according to Article 29, by which unopposed candidates did not face the voters. This clearly favoured monarchist candidates in rural areas where the caciques were powerful.⁶⁹ However, in urban areas, the Ministry of Interior received the confirmation of an outstanding republican performance. The reports of the polls in Madrid did not leave room for doubt: twenty *concejales* for the monarchist coalition, and thirty for the republican-socialist one.⁷⁰

While the majority vote was not for the republican parties, the result was rightly considered an overwhelming triumph, for they did not expect such a turn out favouring them. For the Monarchy, it was a disaster, for it represented the confirmation of a widespread rejection of the monarchist regime. Although the republican parties did not actually win the majority of votes, everybody knew the implications of the forecasts, including the King. On April 14, 1931, the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed, almost 70 years after the short-lived First Republic. Elections for the *Cortes Constituyentes* would take place in June. A new era in Spanish history had begun.

According to the Francoist historian, Joaquín Arrarás, it was Gabriel Maura who wrote the message that Alfonso XIII signed on 13 April 1931 acknowledging that "today I have not got the love of my people".⁷¹ He, nevertheless, resisted relinquishing any of his rights as King, deciding instead to suspend the exercise of Royal power, and "walk away from Spain, leaving her as the only master of her destiny."⁷²

⁶⁹ According to the official records of the Ministry of Interior, those three groups were integrated in the manner of the following classification: Monarchists included *centristas*, *ciervistas*, *conservadores*, *liberales*, *demócratas*, *albistas*, *reformistas*, *otros constitucionistas*, *tradicionalistas*, *independientes* and *indeterminados*. Republicans included *derecha republicana*, *radicales* and *regionalistas*. Anti-monarchists included socialists, communists, independents and indeterminates. AHN, Min. Gob., Leg. 30A Exp.3.

⁷⁰ Telegram 585, 12 April 1931, Madrid, *Gobernador Civil a Ministro de Gobernación*, AHN, Min. Gob., Leg. 30A Exp.7.

⁷¹ Joaquín Arrarás, *Historia de la Segunda República Española*, Ed. Nacional, Madrid, 1956, p.14.

⁷² *Idem*.

Chapter II

The Golden Era of Mexican Spanish Diplomatic Relations.

Y Madrid vestido ya de primavera
Vió flotar airosa en la Castellana
Y sobre el Palacio, en España entera
La nueva bandera, la republicana
And Madrid dressed up in Spring
Saw at the Castellana, proudly floating,
And at the Palace, everywhere in Spain
The new banner, the republican one.
Guty Cárdenas.

The establishment of the Second Republic meant a radical change in Spain's traditional way of succeeding regimes. Acclaimed by popular support after an historical outcome in municipal elections, the bloodless and sudden change had little, if any, resemblance to hundreds of years of Spanish history. However, the Republic of 14 April 1931, in the words of Manuel Azaña, "it was not but a national impulse, a fervour, a promise, a will, if you please; that is, it was everything and at the same time nothing at all."¹

The first important test for the young democracy was to strengthen its new institutions as a means to consolidate the Republican regime. The oldest of the Spanish institutions and the most conservative and reactionary of all, the military and the Church, were determined not to allow the new regime to achieve its democratic and progressive aims. The powerful pair had also the support of the big landowners, the class under threat in Spain's semi-feudal economic structure. Before the arrival of the Spanish Republic, anti-Monarchist opposition had also been anti-clerical, given the identification between the Church and the King. The Republican regime had identified itself with the forces of progress against the conservative tendencies. Thus, land reform, regional autonomy,

¹ Manuel Azaña, *En el poder y en la oposición (1932-1934)*, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid, 1934, p.412.

religious freedom and secularisation of public life were an essential part of the Republican project, very much opposed by the Right-wing Republican organisations, which accepted the Republic only as long as their interests were not touched or removed.

The Right would soon launch new political organisations to defend its interests and to oppose the changes envisaged by the wave of progress and liberalism brought by the republican movement. Within a few weeks, at the beginning of May 1931, a self-defined electoral organisation was established in Madrid, *Acción Nacional*, with the aim of unifying all those who accepted the conservative concepts of Religion, Motherland, Order, Family, Work, and Property.² *Acción Nacional* would also have an impact on Mexican political life with the creation of Mexican branches by the end of the decade.

As soon as the new government of the Spanish Republic was established, both countries willingly changed the status of their respective representations. Thus, the former legations now had the rank of embassies. This was the first official sympathetic and reciprocated gesture made at the start of the new relationship between Mexico and Spain.³ Thus, just three weeks after the proclamation of the Spanish Republic, negotiations between Mexico and Spain on diplomatic representations were defining the new status, in accordance with the new Spanish era. In fact, it had taken a long time to achieve the upgrading of the diplomatic representations. The arrival of a progressive regime, in the form of a Republic in Spain heralded the final accomplishment of a long awaited aim for Mexican diplomats. From the Spanish side, there was a desire to find an ambassadorship for Julio Álvarez del Vayo, a man whose credentials had not been acceptable in the increasingly endangered Weimar Republic in Germany. All that paved the way for the happy agreement.⁴ The *ABC* reported on 5 May 1931, “the

² *ABC*, 2 May 1931 p.21. Their manifesto was published in *ABC* on 8 May 1931, pp.23 and 24.

³ In the case of Mexico, the decision was stated in the Decree of May 12, 1931, signed by both President Pascual Ortiz Rubio, and Minister of State and Foreign Affairs Chargè Genaro Estrada; *Diario Oficial de la Federacion*, 14 May 1931.

⁴ Bowers referred the non-acceptance of Álvarez del Vayo as Spanish Ambassador to Berlin to the fact that “the government of Hitler declared him *persona non grata*”, but at the time of the appointment, Hitler was not yet in power. The non acceptance by the German Government of the prestigious journalist, nevertheless, must have had a political basis, given the deteriorating situation of the democratic government in Germany. Bowers, *My mission*, p.286. In the end Americo Castro was sent to the Spanish Embassy in Berlin. Paul Preston, *Comrades! Portraits from the Spanish Civil War*, p.147.

Minister of State has issued a statement that negotiations have started to rise to Embassy status what hitherto has been the Spanish Legation in Mexico".⁵ Meanwhile, José Gallostra y Coello de Portugal remained as *Chargé de Affaires ad interim*.⁶

The first Spanish Republican Ambassador appointed to Mexico was Álvarez del Vayo, a Left-wing journalist. Acknowledging the ongoing negotiations regarding the official representations, del Vayo's designation was announced by the Minister of State to the press. Included in the press release were other diplomatic appointments, such as that of Luis de Zulueta, who was sent to the Vatican.⁷

The arrival of the Spanish Republican Ambassador was a success in itself. Hundreds of Mexicans and Spaniards gathered to offer a popular reception anticipating the new approach to deal with bilateral issues.⁸ Álvarez del Vayo developed his new post enthusiastically, and indeed, his disposition helped considerably in forging a strong link in Spanish Mexican international relations. He established a particularly fruitful relationship with the former Mexican president Plutarco Elías Calles, who, as we have seen, was especially influential in Mexican politics. Álvarez del Vayo himself acknowledges that his relations with Calles "were of incomparable value in my effort to settle the difficulties between Mexico and Spain."⁹

In the case of the Mexican representation, Mexican diplomatic representative Enrique González Martínez, and his Spanish friends in Madrid had been hoping for his promotion. After all, he had been pursuing the upgrading of diplomatic relations for a long time. His friends had even sent a friendly telegram to President Ortiz Rubio asking this to be his decision. In fact, Ortiz Rubio expressed the hope that the petition could be fulfilled in his cordial reply.¹⁰ Previously, the name of Luis León was mentioned as the more likely Mexican appointment for the ambassadorship in Madrid, given his close relation with Luis N. Morones, the still powerful labour leader.¹¹ However, the appointment of Mexican ambassadors to Spain was to be defined more by domestic

⁵ *ABC*, 5 May 1931, p.25.

⁶ AGA, FMAE, IDD 61, Leg. 569, *Política*, 1931.

⁷ *ABC*, 5 May 1931, p.25.

⁸ AGA, FMAE, IDD 61, Leg. 606.

⁹ Julio Álvarez del Vayo, *The last optimist*, Putnam, London, 1950, p.228.

¹⁰ *ABC*, 10 May 1931, p.42.

¹¹ *ABC*, 6 May 1931, p.38.

political considerations than by simple diplomatic or bureaucratic procedures. The Mexican ambassador would have close allegiance with Calles, and thus be an enemy of those eminent Mexican writers exiled in Spain, such as Martín Luis Guzmán, José Vasconcelos, and González Martínez himself. Alcalá Zamora, President-to-be of the Spanish Republic, was later to acknowledge that González Martínez had “achieved victory without the prize”.¹²

The Mexican Government appointed Alberto J. Pani, former Foreign and Finance Minister, and Mexican diplomatic representative in France, Ambassador to the Spanish Republic. After a long career as a high-ranking official and Minister in the cabinets of Obregón and Calles, Pani thought of this appointment as a temporary post. His appointment was a reward for his loyalty, but he did not enjoy being away from active political life for long. In the ceremony of presentation of the *lettre de crédençe*, he expressed his pride at having been designated by the Mexican Government as the first plenipotentiary ambassador to the Spanish Republic. Furthermore, he proclaimed that words worn down by constant repetition within diplomatic protocol had now recovered their original strength, for the upgrading of the diplomatic representations had a meaning well beyond the limits of courtesy or convenience. He even went on to explain how the establishment of the Spanish Republic was the culmination of the evolution process initiated by the Spanish empire’s former colonies becoming republics at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century.¹³ More concerned by his business interests, Pani never developed diplomatic relations to any significant degree in Spain. Nevertheless, he managed to acquire an important art collection. In this way, the first Mexican ambassadorial appointment in Spain became a formality rather than a reality.

Not only did Pani not engage in a serious diplomatic endeavour in Spain, but he also did not show particular interest in strengthening the bilateral relations beyond formalities, or too keen in the needs of Mexicans living in Spain. As in the case of the detention and expulsion from Spain of a Mexican citizen on suspicion of being in contact with radical extremists Spaniards in Madrid that was reported in September

¹² Enrique González Martínez, *Obras Completas*, pp.783-784, cit in Héctor Perea, *La Rueda del Tiempo*, p.429.

¹³ Embajada de México en España, *Relaciones internacionales iberoamericanas*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1931, pp.11-13. *México y la República Española, Antología de documentos, 1931-1977*, Centro Republicano Español de México, México, 1978, pp.19-20.

1931. He was detained together with a Cuban citizen and they both were considered to be communists. It was said that both of them had been expelled from their own countries for the same reason.¹⁴ The main consideration for expelling Mexicans and other Latin Americans was that they could cause disturbances, usually linked to political activism, normally related with communist and other radical movements. Pani could even justify such an action.

Meanwhile, in Mexico, although the armed conflict between the Catholic Church and the Mexican Government had finished, the Mexican government was still wrestling with a hostile clergy, and, as usual, the perceived anti-Catholicism of the Mexican authorities was used to bolster support for the Monarchist cause in Spain. As the Madrid-based *ABC* reported on 2 May 1931, a group of five Spanish Catholic priests were expelled from Mexico for contravening Mexican laws, which banned foreigners from acting as priests.¹⁵ The so-called religious question would remain a recurrent problem in Mexico during these years, upsetting the response of conservative Spaniards in both countries. Surely this, and other delicate issues would require a tactful approach from the Spanish ambassador.

Julio Álvarez del Vayo soon realised the state of Mexican politics, and established relation with all major players, starting with Mexico's strong man. It was a wise move for del Vayo to cultivate Calles' friendship. It was even more judicious that he did not neglect the formal chiefs, fulfilling his official duties by treating the Mexican presidents with due consideration. Álvarez del Vayo was both attentive and meticulous in developing his duty and made it his custom to invite high-ranking Mexican officials, such as Genaro Estrada, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to dinner at his house.¹⁶ Although Calles was not always inclined to attend, he was always well informed about the guests attending and the relevant topics under discussion at these informal gatherings. Sensitive as was the region for foreign economic interest, a tactful approach helped the

¹⁴ AHN, Min. Gob. Leg. 34 A, Exp.6 and 13. *Expulsiones de extranjeros*, 1931-1933.

¹⁵ The agreement with the Roman Catholic Church in 1924 included the acceptance by Rome of the Mexican legal disposition that permitted only Mexican nationals to act as priests within the Mexican territory. Those involved in the affair were Rafael Álvarez, Bonifacio Castro, Pablo González, Ramón Carvajal, and Ismael Rodríguez, who were expelled on board of the liner *Uvhledam*; *ABC*, 2 May 1931 p.37.

¹⁶ Letter Álvarez del Vayo to Calles 12 October 1931, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv. 218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo Gav.3.

negotiations. Álvarez del Vayo, a journalist with a developed sense of observation, soon decided the best way to come closer to Mexican officials and win the favour of Mexican public opinion. He could hardly have chosen a more emblematic issue and touch so responsive a chord than when he took on writing the name of his host country in the local style. In the Spanish Ambassador's official documents, Mexico was written with an *x* as opposed to a *j*, commonly used in Spain. A simple gesture, very much appreciated by the local population and their authorities, which helped to smooth the path of many claims.¹⁷

The ambassador did not shy away from using any social event as an opportunity for his own advantage.¹⁸ On such occasions he would make the most of his conversations with his guests or companions, particularly with Calles, whom he would cause to recall his years as a teacher being approached by his keenest student. Furthermore, he cherished his opinions and would keep him well informed of the political situation in Spain. Apart from cultivating useful social relations, Julio Álvarez del Vayo also engaged in permanent journeys nationwide, showing genuine interest in Mexican life and in the problems of Spaniards all over Mexican territory. This granted him the appreciation of his country fellow citizens and the respect of Mexican people.¹⁹

In contrast to his Spanish counterpart, Ambassador Pani did not engaged in promoting widespread Mexican Spanish exchanges, and only developed his ambassadorial work in a rather formal manner. Although an admirer of Azaña, Pani preferred the company of Spanish aristocrats and lived in a luxurious residence.²⁰ Hence, when the Spanish Republican Government decorated Pani with the *Gran Cruz de Isabel la Católica*, it was not particularly in praise of his work as ambassador, but more as a result of the level of closeness and friendship achieved between the two countries. Scarcely six months after Pani arrived in Madrid, he was eager to return to active political life in

¹⁷ AGA, FMAE, 9808, Leg. 561, *Correspondencia con la Embajada de España en Méjico*, (1931).

¹⁸ Early in March 1932, for example, del Vayo sent stalls tickets for the opening of the play "La Corona" (The Crown) by Manuel Azaña at the Virginia Fábregas Theatre. This time, however, Calles acknowledged the gesture and regret he could not attend. FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv. 218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo Gav.3 Note Álvarez del Vayo to Calles 1 March 1932.

¹⁹ AGA, FMAE, IDD 61, Leg. 8o., *Expediente personal de Julio Álvarez del Vayo*, (III-s-IV).

²⁰ Manuel Azaña, *Diarios Completos*, Crítica, Barcelona, 2000, p.444.

Mexico. He became Minister of Finance again, in the cabinet of the newly appointed president Rodríguez and later became a member of the Cárdenas cabinet.²¹

Even some Mexican exiles in Spain showed more interest than the Mexican ambassador in Spanish issues. Manuel Azaña put an entry in his Diary on 15 November 1931, mentioning a short trip to Aranjuez in the company of Luis Bello, Cipriano Rivas Cherif, and Martín Luis Guzmán, and the long chat, back in Madrid, about Spanish politics. Azaña clearly pointed out Guzmán's excitement evidently contrasting with his own disdain of the subject.²² As a writer, Guzmán was also very interested in local newspapers, where his articles regularly appeared, and engaging in the newspapers, eventually becoming director manager of *El Sol* and *La Voz*. Guzmán's involvement in local politics, and his links with Azaña and the Left-Republicans also made him a target for aggressions by lerroxist hit men.²³

If Pani's performance as Mexican ambassador in Madrid was merely a pale reflection of the good will of Mexico's leaders, the appointment, in January 1932, of Genaro Estrada would counterbalance the neglect. For his credentials as former Foreign Minister, and his prestige in international politics as the author of the *Doctrina Estrada*, together with his decision to commit himself to the best of his abilities in his new diplomatic post would correspond to the level of commitment showed by the Spanish Republican ambassador. However, Estrada did not happily assume the appointment, although he acknowledged the consideration and distinction set upon him through it. At the first opportunity, he wrote to Calles requesting that he not forget that he assumed the position as temporary "for professional diplomacy is not of attraction to my spirit."²⁴

²¹ With a long experience as a civil servant since 1917, Pani had a typically demagogic performance in politics. In his biographical essays, Silva Herzog symptomatically entitled the relevant chapter as "*Un revolucionario y otro dudoso: Salvador Alvarado y Alberto J. Pani*" (A revolutionary and a doubtful one); see Jesús Silva Herzog, *El pensamiento económico, social y político de México, 1810-1964*, Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas, México, 1967, pp.496-512.

²² Azaña wrote: 'A Guzmán le interesa la política española más que a mí.' (Guzmán is more interested in Spanish politics than me) Manuel Azaña, *Diarios Completos, Monarquía, República, Guerra Civil*, Crítica, Barcelona, 2000, p.364.

²³ Azaña, *Diarios Completos*, entry of 24 December 1932, p.661.

²⁴ Letter Estrada to Calles, 4 March 1932, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.108, Leg.2/2 Inv. 1939, Genaro Estrada, Gav. 30.

Fortunately, for both the Mexican representation in Madrid and the bilateral relations, Estrada soon found himself comfortable in his role as the envoy of a progressive regime very much in accordance with the changes being pursued in Spain. His official reports and his diligent and meticulous performance gave the Mexican embassy an adequate and dignified image. Not every single aspect of the bilateral relations, however, was a token of the closeness and friendship of the two governments, but the disposition towards each other and the willingness to sort out things smoothly justified the optimism. Early on in his new responsibility, Estrada reported the activities of Mexican citizens against the Mexican Government, presumably in connection with Martín Luis Guzmán or José Vasconcelos. Therefore, it was only natural therefore that shortly after arriving in Madrid in 1932, Genaro Estrada would confirm “Vargas Vila will continue to receive the subsidy through the Mexican Consulate in Barcelona”.²⁵ The funding of a magazine disguised as cultural promotion with clear political aims, in all lasted over a decade and, significantly, only ended after the Calles-Cárdenas rift in 1935.²⁶

Diligent in his ambassadorial post, although not always satisfied with the way things developed, Estrada’s engagement in his work went well beyond his customary duties. His was a familiar presence in the Spanish Cortes, but so had been Pani’s. What was new and very relevant was Estrada’s consciousness in apprehending the political situation of the country of his assignment. The official reports regularly sent to Mexico City were thoroughly detailed. They accurately reflected the development of the several political crises he witnessed during his ambassadorship in Madrid. He unveils for the far-away spectator the nature of the different characters and how their interaction had an impact on the political situation in Spain.²⁷ In his political analysis, Estrada pointed out the intentions of Alejandro Lerroux who attempted to “overthrow” the Republican Government, and, in his view, the firm response of the Socialist Party and the *UGT*.²⁸ Estrada was cheerful when he reported the extremely friendly and courteous attitudes of Spanish officials and public in general towards his country.

²⁵ Telegram Estrada to Calles, 4 March 1932, Exp.108 Leg. 2/2 Inv. 1939, Genaro Estrada, Gav. 30.

²⁶ Pablo Yankelevich, *Némesis, mecenazgo revolucionario y propaganda apologética*, in Boletín del FAPECyFT, no. 28, Mayo-Agosto, México, 1998, pp.3-20.

²⁷ *Embajada de México en España (1932-1934)*, AHDM, num. 29, Cuarta época, *La Diplomacia en Acción*, Genaro Estrada, SRE, México, 1987, despatch *El perfil político de Azaña*, Madrid, 9 June 1932. AREM: 34-4-12, pp.131-136.

²⁸ Letter Estrada to Calles, 21 July 1932, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.8 Leg. 2/2 Inv. 1939, Genaro Estrada,

After the initial and successful performance of the Spanish ambassador in Mexico, the del Vayo-Calles relationship proved to be ready for action. During the summer of 1932, after obtaining the essential approval of the Spanish Government after an extensive consultation, del Vayo wrote to Calles with the offer of the Republican Government “with the explicit plea that you recommend it to the (Mexican) Ministry of War.”²⁹ Thus began one of the most important commercial exchanges between Mexico and Spain. Until this point, the traditional character of the bilateral trade between the two countries had been agricultural, with some exchange of raw materials. So far, the trade balance between the two countries was negative for Spain, hence the eagerness to modify the tendency. As for Mexico, the growing dependency of its trade with the US remained a regular concern of the fateful geographical location.³⁰ The economic aspect of the bilateral relations changed during these years, but the ambitious objective of modifying the exchange balance, so as to make Spain Mexico’s most important commercial partner, was far from reached, given the ever watchful American presence in the region, and the natural limitations of the bilateral Mexican Spanish economic relationship. The acute sense of diplomatic operations was one of del Vayo’s main tools in carrying out his duties. While on his way for his summer holiday in Spain, for instance, del Vayo sent a telegram to Calles from the ship he had embarked on at Veracruz: “In the sea, under the continuous attraction/influx of Mexico, my final fervent greeting (is) for the great friend of Republican Spain.”³¹

Del Vayo was on his way to Spain at the time when the Spanish Republic faced an early threat to the new regime, but particularly to the political orientation the Republican Government under Azaña and other Left-Republicans and Socialists, had shown. It came with the attempt of a military coup of 10 August 1932, led by Gen. José Sanjurjo. It was an utter failure, but it unveiled the reactionary nature of the enemies of the regime and their disposition to use violence to regain control of the country.

Gav. 30.

²⁹ Letter Álvarez del Vayo to Calles 31 July 1932, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv. Julio Álvarez del Vayo Gav.3.

³⁰ Concha Pando Navarro, *La colonia española en México: 1930-1940*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Murcia, 1987, pp.62-94.

³¹ Telegram Álvarez del Vayo to Calles 12 August 1932, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv.218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo Gav. 3.

On the day after the failed *coup de état* Álvarez del Vayo was informing Calles about the issue and Calles took the opportunity to send a message to President Azaña through the Spanish Ambassador, advising that Sanjurjo be shot in order to "avoid widespread bloodshed and make the Republic live".³² Manuel Azaña, an intellectual turned politician, had nonetheless a different perception of how to deal with the issue. Considering that bloodshed was not only useless but also counterproductive, he believed that keeping Sanjurjo alive and imprisoned would serve the cause of the legality and legitimacy of the Republic better; killing him would only make a martyr of him and bring supporters to his cause. Countless telegrams and letters were sent to the government by republican organisations stating their reasons or beliefs as to why Sanjurjo should be pardoned or not.³³

During the meeting the Spanish Council of Ministers held to discuss the issue, only Casares Quiroga voted in favour of the death sentence being enacted against Sanjurjo. (Sanjurjo had also participated in the military uprising that was instrumental in the instigation of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera.³⁴) The other council members including Prieto, Domingo and Azaña, voted for commuting the sentence.³⁵ Álvarez del Vayo would later state his belief that, had they followed Calles' radical advice, no other General would have ever dared to launch another rebellion.³⁶

Shortly after the attempt against the Republican regime in Spain, political tension in Mexico between the different factions within the *PNR* gained momentum. Those with power either constituted or were linked to revolutionary factions. Consequently, they had much influence in making important decisions in relation to matters such as cabinet appointments, state governorships and candidacies to either house of Congress.³⁷

³² Preston, *Las tres Españas*, p.261; Álvarez del Vayo, *The last optimist*, p.228.

³³ AHN, Min. Gob. Leg. 2A, Exp.22 and Leg. 18 A Exp.8-12. Most of the communications were made to intercede on behalf of "political and social prisoners".

³⁴ Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Fascism from above, The dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain, 1923-1930*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, pp.49-78.

³⁵ Manuel Azaña, *Diarios, 1932-1933, Los cuadernos robados*, Crítica, Madrid, 1998, p.44.

³⁶ In the account of Álvarez del Vayo, Prieto is mentioned as the only one who opposed the commuting of Sanjurjo's death sentence. Álvarez del Vayo, *The last optimist*, p.228.

³⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of the formation of the Mexican political system, see Rolando Cordera y Carlos Tello, México. *La disputa por la Nación, Perspectivas y opciones de desarrollo*, Siglo XXI, México, 1984.



Although there were rifts within the political elite, major conflicts or rebellions were not as menacing as before. However, the need for real unity was evident, and the unifying factor was Calles. Ortiz Rubio had no other choice but to resign, and he did so on 2 September 1932, when Calles withdrew his support.³⁸

Within a matter of days, the Congress, officially, elected Abelardo L. Rodríguez as Ortiz Rubio's replacement.³⁹ Acknowledging Calles' supremacy, Rodríguez himself openly stated that he considered himself an administrator and not a politician. So, as long as his post of administrator was respected, Rodríguez left Calles free to act as he pleased politically.⁴⁰ Abelardo L. Rodríguez completed the task, finishing the first six-year period for which Obregón had been elected. It was a period of building up institutions, and economic growth, similar to the time of prosperity of the early years of Primo de Rivera in Spain. The years of the *maximato* still had a strong social tendency, although seemingly slowing down the pace enforcing the legal precepts favouring peasants and keeping a submissive labour leadership. The need to take further the revolutionary programme grew, but the so-called revolutionary family was not homogeneous nor had it identical perceptions of how better to serve the cause of revolution, and given the fact that organised opposition was non-existent, the main political confrontations occurred within the governing elite.⁴¹

In the meantime, while in Madrid del Vayo did not loosen his grip on Mexican business. At all times he kept Calles informed about the goings-on in the "Spanish inter-ministerial mission" that had been sent to Mexico by the Spanish Government in order to discover new ways for increasing bilateral economic cooperation.

³⁸ According to the Mexican Constitution, in case of vacancy of the post of elected president within the first two years of an official term, an interim president should be appointed by the Congress in order to call elections. If the vacancy occurs within the final two years, a substitute president should be appointed to conclude the term in office.

³⁹ According to his own account, Pani was on top of the list that Calles had decided to use to solve the substitution. Calles was to propose a list of three candidates to Gen. Manuel Pérez Treviño, president of the *PNR*; those were, first, Alberto J. Pani, Finance Minister; Gen. Joaquín Amaro, War Minister; and Abelardo L. Rodríguez, Industry, Trade and Labour Ministry. However, Pani did not wish to succeed Ortiz Rubio as a result of the sole decision of one man, i.e. Calles, so he begged Calles not to be designed, and proposed Abelardo Rodríguez instead. See Alberto J. Pani, *Apuntes autobiográficos*, t. II, pp.169-170, and Silva Herzog, *El pensamiento económico*, pp.505-506.

⁴⁰ Córdova, *La Revolución en crisis*, p.310.

⁴¹ This is probably one of the few issues where historians of the Mexican revolution coincide. Arnaldo Córdova supports his argument with the aid of Lorenzo Meyer, Rafael Segovia and Alejandra Lajous; Córdova, *La Revolución en crisis*, pp.23-25.

Furthermore, del Vayo wrote *señores* Suanzes and Marchesi letters of recommendation to facilitate their assignment, while keeping Calles informed, as was his custom.⁴²

On September 8, 1932, Manuel Azaña wrote in his diary: "Álvarez del Vayo, who came back from Mexico as a devotee of General Calles, tells me about his triumphs over those lands. He is very enthusiastic about the project of building ships for Mexico in Spain, and he assures me that Calles wants to commission them here."⁴³ Azaña's observation was probably accurate, but the project of building ships for Mexico was not a small business. Apart from providing jobs for the Spanish shipyards, Azaña foresaw that, in the worst-case scenario, that is if Mexico failed to pay, as a creditor, Spain would acquire a new position, more prestigious in the Americas.⁴⁴ Besides, Álvarez del Vayo's interest in strengthening relations with Mexico extended much further than just normalizing the relations between Spain and its former biggest colony. He was convinced of the importance of establishing a new Latin American Spanish foreign policy with Mexico as the essential vehicle of its implementation as Spain's stronghold in the Americas. In support of this, he regarded as highly important the economic interest of the shipbuilding project for Mexico, but went further by acknowledging the importance of setting the basis for a permanent "modern and pragmatic close economic link between the two revolutionary republics."⁴⁵ Thus, his remarks that the previous fictitious *hispanoamericanismo* did not go far enough in his opinion and in which both Mexico and Venezuela would have the same influence were not entirely unwarranted.⁴⁶

Whilst negotiations were under way in Mexico, in Madrid it was necessary to pass a bill, for the proposal of the agreement included the concession to the Mexican Government of a loan from Spain. Before the Cortes could agree to authorise it, an acrimonious debate took place with the fervent opposition of the Right-wing parties.

⁴² Letter Álvarez del Vayo to Calles 30 September 1932, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv.218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo Gav.3.

⁴³ Azaña, *Diarios*, pp.59-60. It is interesting to note from this how deferentially Calles is referred to, as if it was he and not Ortiz Rubio who was the actual president of Mexico. Certainly this was the period of the *maximato*, and it is clear that he was an influential person in Mexican politics, a fact acknowledged both in Mexico and elsewhere.

⁴⁴ Azaña, *Diarios*, 1932-1933, p.111.

⁴⁵ Letter Álvarez del Vayo to Calles 30 September 1932, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv.218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo Gav.3.

⁴⁶ *Idem*.

Strongly arguing against the proposal, and even offensively attacking Mexico, Gil Robles attempted to thwart the agreement, but finally the majority of the Centre-Left coalition approved it. President Alcalá Zamora signed the Decree on 28 December 1932.⁴⁷

In spite of the best of intentions, matters were not running as smoothly as it had been hoped they would. The Spanish commercial mission had a difficult and at times frustrating task to perform in convincing the Mexican naval authorities of the value of Spanish expertise in the field and the economic benefits of the proposed deal. Ironically, major obstacle to be overcome before achieving their aim was the opposition to the project of the former Mexican ambassador to Spain, Alberto J. Pani, and now Finance Minister. Whether because of other arrangements that were more convenient for Pani or simply from jealousy at this achievement, which he could have managed for himself, the fact remains that he did not fully back the initiative. He acted in this way in spite of his previous diplomatic appointment and his fervent expressions for a new and more productive bilateral cooperation. Once all the obstacles were overcome on both sides, the final agreement to build five war vessels of over thousand tons and ten boats of 140 tons was signed on 13 March 1933. They benefited mainly Basque shipbuilding companies.⁴⁸ This sole event demonstrated fully the extent to which Mexican Spanish bilateral relations had reached.⁴⁹ Many other would be thwarted, either by local interests, or political changes in Spain.

⁴⁷ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-963 Exp.94, *Construcciones navales de guerra para México*, 14 Feb 1933.

⁴⁸ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-963 Exp.94, *Construcciones navales de guerra para México*, 14 Feb 1933.

The agreed calendar for payments was thus:

1 Jan 1934	10'000,000 ptas.	2'500,000 pesos	1 Jan 1937	15'315,000 pts	3'828,750 pesos
1 Jan 1935	11'315,000 pts	2'828,750 pesos	1 Jan 1938	17'315,000 pts	4'328,750 pesos
1 Jan 1936	13'315,000 pts	3'328,750 pesos			
Total	67'260,000 pts	16'815,000 pesos			

Plus 5 per cent interest for credit and balance due. Mexican Spanish bilateral economic exchange for the remaining of the decade would be defined around this debt.

⁴⁹ The relevance of the naval contract is shown by the amount of correspondence between the *Comisión Mexicana de Construcción Naval* and the Ministry of War regarding the hiring of workers, payrolls, buying of equipment for the ships and the reports of Mexican personnel in Spain between 1933 and 1936. AHDM, EMESP, Leg. 630 to Leg. 677.

In fact, prior Spanish residents bear no small responsibility in the failure to reach a formal agreement between the two governments, in spite of negotiations being carried out. The trade balance favoured Mexico, and although the Spanish Government pushed the negotiations, the fact that the Spanish residents, mostly traders, found themselves in opposition to the interests of the Spanish exporters complicated and doomed any agreement. No treaty of Friendship was signed, although the failure of negotiations revealed the limits of compromise.⁵⁰

One of the many uncompleted projects was the erection of a monument dedicated to Friendship (the one between Mexico and Spain, that is) to be built in Cuernavaca. This was the same city where the murals by Rivera in Cortés Palace's had offended Spanish pride by their portrayal of the conquest as no less than an outrageous massacre and rape of the indigenous Mexican -Aztec and other local ethnic groups. Likewise, the official textbooks were criticized by the Spanish Ambassador backed by the Spanish colony, for the "distorted and offensive description of the first Spaniards in Mexico".⁵¹ There was also much criticism of the anti-Spanish campaign orchestrated by different groups all over the country. The attitude, which the Mexican authorities adopted in response, gave some reassurance to the Spanish colony and would also be praised as a diplomatic victory. This was to gain the liberal Spanish ambassador the support of the overwhelmingly conservative Spanish colony and its organizations, such as the *Casino Español*. During his two year period as Spanish ambassador, del Vayo's commitment towards the interest of Spain and the Spaniards living in Mexico would rightly deserve the praise of both Mexicans and Spanish alike. The monument was never built, the murals remained in their place at the palace, and the textbooks continued to portray the same savage but truthful image of the conquistadors. Nevertheless, the friendship between Spain and Mexico was stronger than ever, and domestic and foreign visitors, including numerous Spaniards, continued to visit gladly Cuernavaca and its murals.⁵²

⁵⁰ AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-445, Exp.5, *Negociaciones para concretar un Tratado de Amistad*, and Exp.9, *Negociaciones comerciales*.

⁵¹ Letter Álvarez del Vayo to Calles 23 May 1933, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv. 218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo Gav.3.

⁵² Another frustrated venture pursued by del Vayo was the projected visit of President Alcalá Zamora to Mexico. After the initial agreement, because of political circumstances in Spain, the Spanish representation in Mexico dropped the idea; Álvarez del Vayo, *The last optimist*, p.238.

During the period that could have been conveyed as politically stable and even promising for strengthening the democratic-reformist tendencies in Spain, Álvarez del Vayo wrote a rather optimistic letter to Calles, explaining how things were finally heading in the right direction. Moreover, he reassured Calles that Azaña's position was secure and that the knowledge gained from experience of Germany, with the arrival in power of Nazism, had been useful for reaching unity between the democratic and progressive forces in Spain.⁵³ An enthusiastic –overoptimistic, as he would permanently be considered by many of his colleagues- Álvarez del Vayo finishes by saying: *La revolución sigue y hacia la izquierda* (The revolution goes on and towards the Left).⁵⁴

In his reply, Calles said that he was pleased to know that things were going smoothly in Spain and that Azaña had strengthened his position. The old Mexican revolutionary, however, did not waste the opportunity to offer his advice and expressed his opinion that now was the chance for the Spanish Government to clearly show the radical tendencies –he assumed- of the Spanish movement. He urged them to do something that “moves and imposes itself” so that the masses would know with whom their future laid and what future there was for the great Spanish Republic.⁵⁵

An unequivocal demonstration of their ideological affinities, although not very considerate towards the ecclesiastical institution, was Calles' telegram to Álvarez del Vayo on 5 June 1933, greeting personally through him “all the members of the Spanish Government who were excommunicated by the Pope”.⁵⁶ By demonstrating this attitude he was acting in a manner that was not only consistent with his own policies towards the Mexican clergy but also in a way that acknowledged the influence the Vatican had on both countries' ecclesiastical position against progressive reforms. There is no evidence, however, that an actual excommunication was issued against the Republican Government on that day, or any other, for that matter. Nevertheless, that cannot obscure the fact that the Vatican authorities were ostensibly opposed to reformist

⁵³ Letter Álvarez del Vayo to Calles, 23 May 1933, FAPECyFY, APEC, Exp.218 Inv. 218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Gav. 3.

⁵⁴ *Idem.*

⁵⁵ Letter Calles to Álvarez del Vayo, 30 May 1933, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv. 218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Gav. 3.

⁵⁶ Telegram Calles to del Vayo 5 June 1933, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv.218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Gav. 3.

republicanism in Spain and regarded State-Church relations in the same way they had some years earlier in Mexico.

If Álvarez del Vayo was the living embodiment of the new Spanish way of dealing with Mexico and the Americas, it was not just by his own personal inclination. The establishment of the Spanish Republic had effectively brought a new perspective towards the most important issues in Spanish political and social life, and the symbolism of republicanism had become the trademark for reform and modernization.

Another factor relevant for Mexican-Spanish relations, if indirectly, was the fact that American foreign policy towards Mexico was based on the imperialistic Monroe doctrine. Such an approach was evidently in conflict with the new Spanish Ibero-American perspective of the Republican regime. Torn between its two most important foreign relationships, Mexico successfully manoeuvred to remain close to its Spanish heart, but not to far away from American money.⁵⁷

The arrival of Josephus Daniels as American Ambassador in Mexico in April 1933, changed the mood of Mexican-American relations. The work of his predecessor, Reuben Clark, in the ambassadorship, was good, an interregnum for improving the soil, certainly less successful than the “ham and eggs” diplomacy of Dwight Morrow in the 1920s, but good enough to keep the trend. Daniels’ determination to so convincingly pursue President Roosevelt’s New Deal policy, however, was to prove of exceptional and extraordinary importance for the future of this relationship. It was not, nevertheless, solely the Good Neighbor policy that would enable the Mexican Government to develop its revolutionary programme, the latter necessarily affecting American interests. It was a happy coincidence indeed, just as Lázaro Cárdenas acknowledged,⁵⁸ and a relevant consideration before important decisions were made. Nevertheless, it would be very simplistic to assume that concurrence as the sole reason that explains Mexican foreign policy or economic policy under Lázaro Cárdenas.

⁵⁷ Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico between Hitler and Roosevelt, Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1998, pp.33-91.

⁵⁸ Frank Tannenbaum, *Mexican struggle for peace and bread*, Knopf, New York, 1960, p.197; Krauze, *Biografía*, p.470.

As the celebrations of the second anniversary of the Spanish Republic were still festive and optimistic, some hard-core Catholic and Monarchist groups were awaiting the opportunity to show their true colours.⁵⁹ The democratic institutions in Republican Spain seemed to be working, but their major task, to contain the excesses of radical groups, was still to be tested. The fierce political confrontations between opposite parties, however, did not resemble only a pro-Monarchist v Republican struggle. As the Republican Government went further in implementing its reformist and progressive policies, the political tussle became more clearly defined in traditional terms, a Left-wing, socialist and reformist camp v a Right-wing, conservative and reactionary camp. The general elections to the Cortes show the growing tension. The economic situation was stable but feeble. Likewise, the political confrontation between the most radical groups started showing some violent features that escaped the control of both the government and political organisations.⁶⁰

Political tension notwithstanding, the moderate Republican- Socialist coalition governing Spain during the first two years of the new regime manage to pass some relevant legislation favouring the changes long awaited by the Spanish people. The most important issues included the Agrarian Reform, State-Church relations and the Catalan statute. Timid in principle, the legislation approved pointed out the direction towards structural change. However, because of their limited scope they also meant that the Right-wing parties would use them to further antagonise the dissatisfied groups.⁶¹

In contrast to the Mexican experience, and as a response to the Republican challenge, a relevant feature in Spanish politics was the proliferation of Right-wing organisations. The conservative and authoritarian Monarchist, José Antonio Primo de Rivera y Sáenz de Heredia, adopted an ultra-nationalist position. He had become involved in politics as a result of his decision to clear his father's name⁶² and became the leader of the fascist organisation that wanted a totalitarian state in Spain, *Falange Española*. Ideologically identified with Fascism, the *FE* was a clear response to the progressive republican

⁵⁹ AHN, Min. Gob., Leg. 45A, Exp.9, *Segundo Aniversario de la República*, 1933.

⁶⁰ AHN, Min. Gob. Leg. 31 A, Exp.3, *Elecciones generales de diputados a las Cortes*, 1933.

⁶¹ Paul, Preston, *La Destrucción de la Democracia en España, Reforma, reacción y revolución en la Segunda República*, Grijalbo, Barcelona, 2001, pp.83 and 178.

⁶² Preston, *Las tres Españas*, p.103.

movement. It would soon be merged with another Fascist party, the *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista*, led by Onésimo Redondo and Ramiro Ledesma.⁶³

Besides the *FE de las JONS*, the other important Right-wing organisation in Spain was the *Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA)*, led by José Ma. Gil Robles. The *CEDA* was in fact bigger than *FE de las JONS*, and also the combination of different organisations with common aims. After the fall of the monarchy, several groups, both Catholic and Monarchist such as *Acción Católica*, *Confederación Nacional Católico Agraria*, and others, pursued unification. Having witnessed the progressive reforms proposed by the centre-Left Republican coalition, the Right-wing organisations were determined to fight to preserve their privileges. On their unification congress, which took place early in 1933, their declared aim was to defend Christian values, and the revision of the Constitution, particularly regarding education, religion and property.⁶⁴ They had the encouragement of the recent election of Hitler as Chancellor in Germany, and they intended to follow in his steps: to use legal means to seize power and destroy the regime from within. These Right-wing organisations maintained close contact with their Italian and German counterparts.⁶⁵ Gil Robles defiantly declared that a Right-wing victory would herald the end of the Republic.⁶⁶ The *FE de las JONS* and the *CEDA* posed a major threat to the Republic.

Meanwhile, the Mexican revolutionary regime, although progressive and at times radical, was not perceived as such by those Mexican radicals under the influence of the Communist International. During the years of the *maximato* era, the image of a repressive, anti-workers and counter-revolutionary government in Mexico was portrayed in the IC newsletter. Under the title of "Savage terror in Mexico", the International Press Correspondence described the Mexican Government as anti-democratic and totalitarian.⁶⁷ Considered by the International Communist as a repressive regime, in any case, the Mexican Government had no interest in promoting any Communist influence, but had no intention of suppress it either. In fact, having no

⁶³ Stanley Payne, *Falange, A History of Spanish Fasism*, Stanford University Press, California, 1961, pp.38-48.

⁶⁴ Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p.65.

⁶⁵ Claude Bowers, *My Misión to Spain*, pp.74-75; Duchess of Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, Penguin, London, 1938, pp.345-346.

⁶⁶ Bowers, *My Mission*, p.181.

⁶⁷ Inprecorr, January-December 1933, num. 6 p.159.

relations with any local Socialist oriented organisations, the envoys of the IC had created the Mexican Communist Party in 1919, but their work produced no significant result for a while. Perhaps the most relevant event regarding the Mexican CP was the incorporation in the mid 1920s of some activists like Diego Rivera and Alfaro Siqueiros, both with strong current and future Spanish connections. Both Mexican muralists had previously organised the Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers Union, and produced the weekly *El Machete*, which eventually became the Party's newspaper.⁶⁸ By the early 1930s, however, the MCP's influence was very limited.

On the other side of the political spectrum in opposition, the Mexican Right intended to divert the path of the governmental reform, although it lacked any strong political impulse, and no organised party. In fact, it would not be until the end of the decade, strongly influenced by the Spanish experience, and considering the threat that a government like Cárdenas' represented to their interests, that they decided and were able to organise a political party. (See Chapter VI)

A significant event that contributed further to the strengthening of Mexican Spanish relations, was the unfortunate accident in Mexico involving a famous team of aviators taking part in an historical flight. Having set themselves the challenge –a transatlantic flight between Madrid and Mexico City, via Havana- the Spanish pilots Barberán and Collart successfully completed the first and most dangerous part of the flight. In fact, the successful arrival of the Spanish pilots to Havana was an extraordinary accomplishment in itself, leaving the remaining journey as part of a triumphal entrance in Mexico, in which “Mexicans and Spaniards should lose themselves in a mutual embrace.”⁶⁹ Just when both Mexican and Spanish public eyes were expecting an imminent and glorious arrival in Mexico City airport, the lack of news foretold a tragic outcome. The loss of both visual and radio contact with the Spanish crew only minutes away from landing made the anxious onlookers fear the worst. With the passage of time, the sense of hopelessness only increased, and even though there was no confirmation of the crash straightaway, it was clear to everybody that this was what had

⁶⁸ David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Me llamaban el Coronelazo*, p.23; Angélica Arenal de Siqueiros, in *Vida y Obra de David Alfaro Siqueiros, Juicios Críticos*, FCE, México, 1975, p.8; Diego Rivera, *My Art, my life, An Autobiography*, (with Gladys March) New York, 1991, p.26.

⁶⁹ Julio Álvarez del Vayo, *The last optimist*, Putnam, London, 1950, p.238.

happened. On 27 June 1933, there was actual confirmation of the disaster when the bodies of the Spanish pilots were found and the accident became a national tragedy in Mexico.⁷⁰ Soon del Vayo would leave Mexico for his new diplomatic assignment and the new Spanish representative would have to wait a few months to be nominated. The Spanish political situation was giving birth to the antithesis of what had been so far the spirit of republicanism.⁷¹

The Spanish general elections in the fall of 1933 gave the triumph to the Right-wing coalition, and what had so far been intimated became a bitter truth; the liquidation of the economic and social reforms accomplished by the previous government was on the way at the hands of the new government of the Republic. Ambassador Estrada could not help but show his disappointment after the arrival of the Right-wing Government in Madrid. He knew, and so he informed the Mexican Foreign Ministry, that the Lerroux Government was to be not only less friendly but even hostile towards Mexico and its government.⁷²

Social and economic reform was implemented during the first period of Republican Government. The second period, with the Right having won the majority of the seats in the Cortes, was a counter-reformist era. Thus, effectively, the "liquidation of the reforms was an essential part of the liquidation of democracy in Spain."⁷³ Not long afterwards, again it was Azaña, while addressing the crowd of members of the Left

⁷⁰ Various telegrams between Calles and Álvarez del Vayo, 12-27 June 1933, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv. 218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Gav. 3.

⁷¹ Álvarez del Vayo was appointed as the first Spanish Republican Ambassador to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1933, shortly after Spain granted recognition to the Soviet Government. The change of government in Spain, and the arrival of a Right-wing government frustrated the appointment. The first ambassador to the USSR, Marcelino Pascua, was not appointed until after the Civil War had begun; Julio Álvarez del Vayo, *Freedom's Battle*, Heinemann, London, 1940, p.25. The episode of the Soviet recognition by Spain motivated Genaro Estrada's comments to qualify the act as "inadequate, legally wrong, and even imprudent". The *Doctrina Estrada*, proposed by the Mexican diplomat, repudiated such pretence and proclaimed that a government should refrain from recognising others, safeguarding its right to keep or withdraw its diplomatic representatives as a *de facto* recognition. That has been the Mexican foreign practice ever since, and was in the base of its Spanish foreign policy; *Embajada de México en España (1932-1934)*, AHDM, num. 29 Cuarta época, *La Diplomacia en Acción*, Genaro Estrada, SRE, México, 1987, pp.177-183, *El antigobiernismo sistemático del pueblo Español y el establecimiento de relaciones con la Unión Soviética*, San Sebastián, 3 August 1933.

⁷² *Embajada de México en España (1932-1934)*, AHDM, dispatch *La composición del gobierno de Lerroux*, Madrid, 18 September 1933. AREM: 34-2-17, pp.184-187.

⁷³ Bowers, *My mission*, p.117.

Republican Youth gathered at the Coliseum Pardiñas in Madrid on 16 April 1934, who summed up the situation: “We have to start all over again!”⁷⁴

Meanwhile, in Mexico, shortly before leaving, Álvarez del Vayo received a note from the American ambassador referring and editorial of the *Cronos* newspaper in Puebla, in which the work of both ambassadors was praised. “I hope your standing will not be injured by your being classed with me”.⁷⁵ In fact, Josephus Daniels became the most popular American ambassador to Mexico and yet, was unable to establish a closer relationship than the one Álvarez del Vayo had developed with both Mexican authorities and citizens, and his fellow countrymen. Having said that, it would only be fair to acknowledge the fact that Daniels was playing second best in general terms during the del Vayo years, but once del Vayo was gone, he was the most popular and well-received foreign diplomat in Mexico. In spite of his nationality or perhaps because of it, at times he was also regarded as the champion of Mexican conservatives.

Nevertheless, Daniels showed a more liberal view towards Latin America than expected, given his involvement in previous aggressive actions, such as the invasion and bombing of Veracruz in 1914. During the revolutionary period in Cuba in 1933, for instance, the possibility of an American military invasion was again contemplated, namely because of a so-called Communist threat. Josephus Daniels had both the common sense and the ability to contribute to clearing the air. “In our country”, he wrote to the Secretary of State, “and elsewhere people attribute to Communism all the agencies that work evil.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, he recounted the following anecdote about a Cameron of Scotland: “...in his (Lord Lochiel’s) inability to give a definition (of a Bolshevik) satisfactorily to himself, (he) said, ‘Oh well, a Bolshevik is anybody you don’t like’”. “May not the rich and powerful of Cuba, and their allies in the US, and imperialistic officers”, prudently inquired Daniels, “be behind the attempt to hide behind exaggerating the lawlessness of Communists? I do not know, but I submit the question for your consideration.”⁷⁷ This time, at least, there was no American intervention, and Daniels’ contribution to that effect was of no little significance. The

⁷⁴ Azaña, *En el poder*, p.411.

⁷⁵ AGA, FMAE, IDD 61, Leg. 16o. *Excmo. Sr. D. Julio Álvarez del Vayo. Embajador de España. Expediente personal.* (III-s-II), press cutting of *Cronos*, 8 July 1933.

⁷⁶ Memorandum of telephone conversation between the Secretary of State and Ambassador in Mexico (Daniels), 9 September 1933, FRUS, 1933, Vol. V, The Americas, pp.412-413.

⁷⁷ Letter Daniels to Secretary of State, Cordell Hull 9 September 1933, FRUS, 1933, Vol. V, pp.414-415.

closeness between Ambassador Daniels and both President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull was an essential part of his performance as American representative in Mexico. The combination of both teams, the American new dealer and the Mexican *cardenista*, produced the proper recipe to allow the Mexican Spanish foreign policy to flourish.

When del Vayo left Mexico, he did not know his diplomatic mission in Mexico was over. As was customary, the secretaries acting as *chargé de affairs ad interim* would fill in for the ambassadors in their absence. Álvaro Seminario thus covered the six-month period between the departure of del Vayo and the arrival of his successor. In spite of this somehow irregular state of affairs, considering the strong nature of such a link, diplomatic relations between Spain and Mexico were not severed, although further strengthening was prevented by it. Seminario acted as an intermediary between Álvarez del Vayo and Calles when Ramón Franco visited Mexico.⁷⁸ Replying to the official request to meet him, Calles informed the secretary of the Spanish embassy that he “will gladly receive (...) Commander Franco, in Cuernavaca.”⁷⁹

The new Spanish ambassador, Domingo Barnés Salinas, presumably following the advice of del Vayo, also intended to develop as close a relationship with the still *Jefe Máximo*, as his predecessor had so successfully and efficiently done. As soon as he arrived in Mexico early in 1934, Barnés wrote to Calles expressing his delight and privilege in cultivating his friendship, sending also some of the books he had written along with the letter.⁸⁰ As a cold reminder of the *maximato* style, Barnés received a reply written by Calles’ private assistant, Soledad González, who politely acknowledged the words of the ambassador towards Calles, while making it clear that no books had accompanied the letter.⁸¹ Barnés was presented with a much more favourable opportunity to befriend Calles when he had to inform him of the decision of

⁷⁸ Letter Seminario to Calles 23 December 1933, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.2 Inv. 4639, Luis Quer Boule, Gav. 63.

⁷⁹ Telegram Calles to Seminario 6 January 1934, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.2 Inv. 4639, Luis Quer Boule, Gav. 63.

⁸⁰ Letter Barnés to Calles 2 February 1934, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.2 4693, Luis Quer Boule, Gav. 63.

⁸¹ Letter González to Barnés 28 February 1934, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.2 4693, Luis Quer Boule, Gav. 63.

the president of the Spanish Republic to decorate Calles with the *Banda de la Orden de la República*.⁸²

At this stage, the lead in promoting and taking further the bilateral relationship was solely in the hands of the Mexican Ambassador. Continuing his methodical performance, Estrada sent several despatches referring to the case of Valle-Inclán who lived in poverty.⁸³ The Spanish poet, whose pride and perhaps strident style and eccentric way of life rejected the financial support offered to him by the Spanish Cortes.⁸⁴ Valle-Inclán had visited Mexico during the Obregón years in the early twenties, and befriended both Obregón and Calles. Now an old and impoverished man, his situation was of some concern to Mexican officials given the outspoken admiration and declared sympathy of the poet towards Mexico and the Mexican leaders. Eventually, after the increasing deterioration of Valle-Inclán's emotional state and living conditions, vividly expressed in a letter to Calles in March 1934, Estrada got the "all clear" to provide the means for Valle-Inclán to travel to Mexico.⁸⁵ Calles, the strongman of Mexico, resolved for the Mexican Government to pay for Inclán's travelling expenses. Furthermore, he also decided to fund, through the Ministry of Education, a series of lectures during a period of four months and a monthly salary of \$400.⁸⁶ In the end, Valle-Inclán did not go back to Mexico, but his name was already deeply rooted in Mexican cultural life.

During the process whereby the new Centre-Right governments in Spain began dismantling all the progressive reforms carried out by the Left-wing Republican Government, Estrada pointed out accurately that even the excellent bilateral relations with Mexico would be affected.⁸⁷ Similarly, as happened with the various projects initiated by del Vayo in Mexico, the different plans that Estrada envisaged to further

⁸² Letter Barnés to Calles 2 May 1934, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.2 4693, Luis Quer Boule, Gav. 63.

⁸³ Letter Estrada to Calles 28 July 1932, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.108, Leg 2/2, Inv. 1939, Genaro Estrada, Gav. 30.

⁸⁴ Telegram Estrada to Calles, 1 October 1932, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.8 Leg. 2/2 Inv. 1939, Genaro Estrada, Gav. 30.

⁸⁵ Letter Estrada to Calles, 12 March 1934, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.25, Inv. 1345, Genaro Estrada, Gav. 47 (13010302).

⁸⁶ Letter JB (on behalf of Calles) to Estrada, 6 May 1934, APECyFT, APEC, Exp.25, Inv. 1345, Genaro Estrada, Gav. 47 (13010302).

⁸⁷ *Embajada de México en España (1932-1934)*, AHDM, num. 29, Cuarta época, *La Diplomacia en Acción*, Genaro Estrada, SRE, México, 1987, dispatch *La represión a los grupos de Izquierda y el deterioro de las relaciones entre México y España*, Madrid, 26 March 1934, pp.213-217.

strengthen the bilateral relations collapsed with the fall of the Republican-socialist Government. One of the most important of such ideas was the possibility of Spain buying oil from Mexico. Even Spain's main oil supplier, the USSR, was concerned about such a possibility, and sent a commission to Madrid, officially to explore the construction of war vessels in Spain.⁸⁸

As a result of the inclusion of the *CEDA* in the government by the end of 1934, the centre Left parties decided it was time for action. The big labour organisations, Socialist and Anarchist, were pushing for a rebellion to overthrow the *CEDA* government, and a popular uprising was being planned. The leaders of the main parties were doubtful of the success of the action and tried to discourage the masses, but the rank and file were already in the move. The action was planned to take place in October 1934, but the Barcelona and Madrid organisations fail to mobilise the workers. The Asturias workers, led by González Peña and other *UGT* and local *PSOE* leaders, were on their own. Although not entirely convinced of the prospects of success, they were persuaded by the eagerness of the rank and file. They were severely repressed. Barnés Salinas resigned his ambassadorial post in protest at the repression unleashed. Ramón María de Pujadas Gastón, First Secretary of the Spanish Embassy, filled a long period of vacancy in the ambassadorial post as *Chargé de Affaires a.i.* The delay in appointing an ambassador had everything to do with the political situation in Spain and the different perspective with which the new Spanish Government approached Latin America. The lack of Spanish ambassador in Mexico was not only a set back in formal terms. Pujadas being in charge, the previous prejudiced vision of the typically conservative *Hispanism*, regained control of the Spanish embassy in Mexico and filled the reports sent to Madrid.⁸⁹

Cárdenas took office in December 1934, and, given the state of the affairs in Spain, and the lack of Spanish Ambassador appointed to Mexico, a Spanish representation was sent to attend the official ceremony for the handing over to the president elect. The

⁸⁸ *Embajada de México en España (1932-1934)*, AHDM, dispatch *Petróleo*, Madrid, 24 January 1933, AREM: III-1320-5, pp.249-250.

⁸⁹ AGA, FMAE, IDD 61, Leg. 17o. *Expediente personal de Ramón María de Pujadas, Primer Secretario de la Embajada*, III s XII.

Spanish diplomatic representative in Costa Rica, Luis Quer Boule, arrived in Mexico as Ambassador Extraordinary to witness Cárdenas taking office as Mexican president.⁹⁰

At the time, writing from Madrid, Álvarez del Vayo acknowledged Calles' accurate predictions about Spain, and regretted that it seemed unavoidable that Spain had followed the Mexican pattern during the revolutionary turmoil. He was now convinced that "August 10th could and should have saved the Republic. (Because) ever since then it had started to die."⁹¹

The revolutionary movement of October in which the miners of Asturias played a central role was still fresh and del Vayo praises its heroic standing in the face of the political shift towards the Right, as is clear from the inclusion of the *CEDA* in the government. Furthermore, del Vayo considered that, out of all the mistakes the Republicans made, the election of Alcalá Zamora to the Presidency of the Republic was "the biggest mistake of all."⁹²

Appreciating how these political changes in the Peninsula affected the bilateral relation, and, what is more, how in the end there was a political struggle beyond borders, Álvarez del Vayo summed up the situation like this:

"The hatred to the Spanish Left was shown (in times of the Monarchy, and that was only natural) also as unfriendly attitudes toward Mexico. Ultimately, you and us are the same enemy for them (...) everybody on the side of the Left and the revolution in Spain sees Mexico today more affectionately than ever."⁹³

Shortly afterwards, the new Mexican Ambassador to Spain, Manuel Pérez Treviño, was evidently a political exile, after having been Cárdenas' challenger for the candidacy to the presidency. His performance was not very relevant, limiting himself merely to follow protocol in Pani's style. In any case, Pérez Treviño's views were far closer to

⁹⁰ Telegram Calles to Quer 5 December 1934, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.2 4693, Luis Quer Boule, Gav. 63.

⁹¹ Letter del Vayo to Calles, 14 December 1934, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218 Inv. 218 Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Gav. 3.

⁹² Letter del Vayo to Calles, 14 December 1934, FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.218, Inv. 218, Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Gav. 3.

⁹³ *Idem.*

the *lerrouxistas* than to those of the *azañistas*. He was the Mexican ambassador at the time of the military rebellion in the summer of 1936. (See Chapter IV).

Finally, the designation of the Spanish Ambassador to Mexico in September 1935 was a further symptom of the political deterioration undergone in Spain. A close ally of Lerroux, and his protégé, Emiliano Iglesias was a discredited and corrupt politician with no prestige left, about whom the Spanish Cortes had expressed its deep repulsion, and declared their incompatibility with such a person.⁹⁴ President Alcalá Zamora seemed to have no option but to accept the designation, as Lerroux, in alliance with Gil Robles, presented Iglesias's appointment almost as a demand from Mexico.⁹⁵ As a member of the parliament, he even faced open opposition by fellow party members, which bitterly criticised him and officially disapproved his opinion like Martínez Barrio.⁹⁶ Iglesias profited from the previous Spanish ambassadors in Mexico, particularly Álvarez del Vayo, but soon he was to be known for what his was. Needless to say no major contribution to the bilateral relationship was made during his time in Mexico. It was said that Mexico must have had a great deal of affection towards Republican Spain to accept such a character as Spanish representative.⁹⁷ He left after three months in his post, and though he was not as reactionary as Pujadas, his personal actions kept the Spanish representation in the lowest point during the whole decade.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, another crisis was unfolding in Mexico, where the most conservative sectors of the *PNR* in alliance with Calles were concerned about the direction of Mexican politics, particularly as a result of the strengthening of Labour. Perceived as a real threat for the stability of the country during the early days of Cárdenas administration, the rise of an independent labour movement, with the inevitable increase in the number of strikes was at the centre of the dispute. Calles blamed the leaders of the workers, particularly Lombardo, but his attack was intended to reach Cárdenas. Only six months after reporting the formation of Cárdenas cabinet in December 1934, Pujadas reported on the changes made by the Mexican president in

⁹⁴ Niceto Alcalá Zamora, *Memorias*, Planeta, Barcelona, 1998, p.582-583.

⁹⁵ Alcalá Zamora, *Memorias*, p.377.

⁹⁶ Manuel Azaña, *Diarios completos*, entry of 29 October 1931, p.349.

⁹⁷ Juan Simeón Vidarte, *Todos fuimos culpables, Testimonio de un socialista español*, FCE, México, 1973, p.796.

⁹⁸ AMAE, Min. Edo., Leg. R-964, Exp.7, *Actuación del embajador Emiliano Iglesias*.

response to the threat posed by Calles.⁹⁹ Unfortunately for Calles, that was not the end of it, and slowly but surely more of his friends were removed from relevant posts in the Mexican Government.¹⁰⁰ By mid June the crises deepened. On 11 June Ezequiel Padilla- Calles's pet journalist- published an interview with Calles criticising the political situation of the country, blaming the labour unions for the unprecedented number of strikes, and making a veiled threat to Cárdenas by comparing the prevailing situation to that of the eve of Ortiz Rubio's resignation. The following day Lombardo called the formation of the Proletarian Defence Committee to face Calles's criticism, and an 80 000-strong demonstration gathered backing Cárdenas. (See Chapter III). On 14 June, a Cabinet's reshuffle took place. Calles decided to go on a long trip to the United States, and left on 18 June. For the next six months Cárdenas continued his strategy of strengthening his position and successfully manage to get the backing of the Congress to remove *callistas* from governorships and both legislative chambers.¹⁰¹

On 22 December 1935, Lázaro Cárdenas wrote in his Diary that drifting apart from General Calles depressed him, but Calles's inconsistent attitude towards Cárdenas responsibilities obliged him to fulfil his duties as the highest representative of the nation.¹⁰² Firm in his determination not to repeat the sad exhibition of weakness of his two predecessors, Cárdenas defied Calles's influence and decided he should leave the country in order to avoid sterile and likely violent confrontation between his followers and the government. The president's progressive and liberal policies had secured him the backing of the labour movement, which was led by Lombardo and was growing in numbers and strength. (See Chapter III).

Meanwhile in Spain, as most conservative Republicans, Alcalá Zamora's republicanism tended to challenge the political regime in terms of the way of conducting the government rather than its economic and social structure. It was only in

⁹⁹ AMAE, Min. Edo., dispatch no. 140, 17 June 1935, Leg. R-962, Exp.8.

¹⁰⁰ Bulletin de Renseignements de E. Lombard, l'Attaché Militaire (Washington), 5 February 1936, N° 57/V. S.H.A.T. 7N 3373 (Etat-Major de l'Armée - Section d'Information des Attachés Militaires - Mexique), Dossier 2 (l'Armée - l'Aviation, la Marine - les matériels de guerre).

As a result of the political crisis, General Joaquín Amaro, a close ally of Calles, was removed as director of the Military Academy in December 1935. He was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Alamillo Flores, a protégé of Cárdenas. I would like to thank Darren Olley for this information.

¹⁰¹ Alicia Hernández Chávez, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, periodo de 1934-1940, La mecánica cardenista*, Colegio de México, México, 1979, pp.54-60.

¹⁰² Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras, I-Apuntes 1913-1940*, Tomo I, UNAM, México, 1972, p.333.

appearance a matter of his degree of commitment to change Spain's political situation, but he failed to understand the need for a complete transformation of the social, economic, and political spheres. Not a revolution in the traditional violent way, but a profound reform programme modernising Spanish political life and culture. In order to transform the social and political structure, at least some attempt must be made at changing the economic structure. The need for an electoral alliance was evident if the Republican efforts to restore the changes of the early days of the regime were to be rescued. Left-Republicans and Socialists were determined to regain the influence and control of the Cortes in order to achieve the social and economic reforms they wanted.¹⁰³ The confrontation of two opposed inflexible projects, together with foreign intervention, would eventually mean the destruction of Spanish democracy. The Left-Republican and moderate Socialists realised that it was necessary to look for a broader coalition if they were to regain control over the government and the Cortes to ensure the social reforms. They began to envisage a new strategy. It was at this stage that became clear that political struggle implied more than superficial or cosmetic changes. The general elections took place on 16 February 1936, and an historic triumph of the Centre-Left coalition gathered in the Popular Front, seemed to have given the possibility of rescuing the Spanish Republic.

On 20 February 1936, Calles sent a telegram congratulating Manuel Azaña "for the triumph revolutionary ideals and (Spanish) Republic represents your presence in power." Azaña's rather formal and laconic response, perhaps still under the influence of Guzmán, "for the friendship and prosperity of both republics", came on 5 March 1936.¹⁰⁴

Within few months, both political figures were to face unsuspected and momentous events. Exile and war were to determine their fate, in an insinuation of the times to come for thousands of people on the two sides of the Atlantic. But so far, both Mexico and Spain were going through a renovated impetus of social reform, regaining control of their most progressive institutions and gathering the strength to take the changes to unprecedented stages. Both the Mexican and the Spanish people were expecting that

¹⁰³ Helen Graham, *Socialism and war, The Spanish Socialist party in power and crisis, 1936-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.24.

¹⁰⁴ FAPECyFT, Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Exp.216, Inv. 442, Manuel Azaña, Gav. 7.

the good things promised to them would come. In Mexico the revolutionary programme that had lost vigour had to be reactivated. In Spain, the dismantling of the reforms of the first Republican Government was to oblige the new centre Left coalition, and the Popular Front Government, as Azaña put it, to start all over again.

The outcome of the Calles-Cárdenas rift came with Calles being sent into exile to the United States on 10 April 1936, in the company of his close aides Luis León, Melchor Ortega, and Luis N. Morones.¹⁰⁵ On their arrival at Brownsville, they issued a public statement pointing out that Cárdenas Government intended to establish a collective system similar to the Russian.¹⁰⁶ He did not return to Mexico until after Cárdenas's administration ended, and the latter committed all his efforts to fulfilling the electoral programme for which he had been elected. The end of the *maximato* period represented not only the strengthening of Cárdenas in power, but also the speeding up of the fulfilment of the revolutionary programme. Some problems remained though, like the long-lasting religious tension, but Cárdenas had a clear picture of what kind of government he wanted in Mexico. He wanted to improve the living conditions for the poor and the working class, and to do so avoiding any bloodshed and thus finish his term in office with clean hands in every respect. That was to be known as the *cardenismo*.

As a result, the fervent demonstrations of revolutionary zeal shown by some State governments that had further contributed to the mounting tension, particularly in the relations between the State and Church, diminished. The disposition of not allowing unmarried priests entrance to one State, the closure of many churches for no apparent reason, and the general attitude of restraint towards the clergy was significantly reduced.¹⁰⁷ However, in accordance with the Constitution, the Federal Government considered public interests would not oppose the reopening of churches, where they had been closed by local authorities and not by virtue of a Presidential Decree. Murray, from the British Legation in Mexico, reflected on the more tolerant attitude of the new administration towards "religious" questions in a letter to Mr. Eden:

¹⁰⁵ Cárdenas, *Obras, I-Apuntos*, p.339.

¹⁰⁶ Daniels, *Shirt-Sleeve Diplomat*, pp.64-65.

¹⁰⁷ The most radical measures were applied in the cases of the states of Veracruz, under Adalberto Tejeda, Tabasco, with Tomás Garrido Canabal, and to a lesser degree Michoacán, during Cárdenas governorship. The prohibition of single priests to enter the State of Tabasco did not last long, though.

“It is indeed difficult to see why President Cárdenas should have taken over from his predecessor an antireligious policy which, from whatever point of view it is regarded, has been carried too far, cannot possibly contribute to his popularity, and must inevitably have an adverse effect on relations with the United States of America.”¹⁰⁸

Nonetheless, a number of incidents took place during the thirties, particularly involving rural teachers engaged in literacy campaigns.¹⁰⁹ A dangerous episode occurred in the course of the spring of 1936, when one of the cultural brigades organised by the government was attacked in the State of Guanajuato. The religious service finished and the parishioners of San Felipe Torresmochas -now renamed Ciudad González-, encouraged and armed by the priest, violently attacked the group of teachers. The angry mob engaged in a fight that left a dozen dead and a number of injured.¹¹⁰ So delicate was the situation that President Cárdenas himself went to Ciudad González to remedy the situation and to show his determination not to allow repetition of such actions. He forced the priest to leave town because of his promotion of violence.¹¹¹

Although Cárdenas was never really under the yoke while Calles was in Mexico, once he decided that the latter should leave the country, nobody would presume there could be a higher authority in Mexico than its president. The rift in the revolutionary family had a limited impact on Mexico's foreign relations, but it is possible to argue that the change greatly improved the prestige of the local government in international politics. For one, the American Ambassador to Mexico, Josephus Daniels, praised the Mexican president's gallantry and thoroughly dismissed Calles accusations of attempts to establish a dictatorship of the Russian type.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Murray to Eden, March 18, 1936, “Attitude of Mexican Government towards religious questions.” FO371/19792 A2859; Krauze, *Biografía*, p.442.

¹⁰⁹ Similarly to the Spanish Republic, Mexico's education policy was given vital importance. Perea, *La rueda*, pp.37 and 44.

¹¹⁰ Murray to Eden, April 1, 1936, “Religious question in Mexico”, FO371/19794 A3346.

¹¹¹ Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas, 1928-1970, *Mensajes, discursos, declaraciones, entrevistas y otros documentos*, Siglo XXI, México, 1978, pp.206-208.

¹¹² Josephus Daniels, *Shirt-sleeve Diplomat*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1947, pp.59-65.

Mexican-Spanish relations reached an unprecedented level during the years starting with the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931. It can rightly be said that the del Vayo years in Mexico witnessed a closer and more brotherly relationship in the Hispanic-Mexican link, and that his personal relation with Calles was particularly useful and effective in achieving his set aims as ambassador, given the political pre-eminence of the latter.¹¹³ Few diplomats accredited before the Mexican Government were more accepted and were greeted so enthusiastically, by both Mexican authorities and public opinion, than the first Spanish Republican ambassador. His pre-eminence and closeness next to high-ranking officials was almost proverbial. Not even during the years of the most popular American ambassador in Mexico, there would be such distinction.¹¹⁴ Mexican-Spanish relations would prove to be firmly based upon ideological identities and universal democratic principles in international politics. There was justified reason for optimism, as long as the threats were kept in sight and measures taken to safeguard democracy and pave the way to progress.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Pando, *La colonia española*, pp.376-378.

¹¹⁴ On 31 August 1934, Daniels wrote to his friend Claude Bowers, American ambassador in Spain: "This country (Mexico) in a sense is a laboratory for new economic and legislative ideas, most of which I regard as very good." Daniels Papers (The Papers of Josephus Daniels, Library of Congress), cit in Cronon, *Josephus Daniels*, p.30.

¹¹⁵ Describing the international situation of the 1930s, where the world was presented with the alternative, Communism or Fascism, Eric Hobsbawm suggested turning our faces towards Latin America. "Mexico, he wrote, (was) "reviving its great revolution in the 1930s under President Lázaro Cárdenas (...) and passionately taking sides for the Spanish Republic in the Civil War." *Age of Extremes, The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, Abacus, London, 1994, p.171.

Chapter III

Mexican and Spanish politics during the Second Republic.

**"The most familiar objects...are usually those of which it is most difficult to get an accurate description, for familiarity almost inevitably breeds indifference."
Marc Bloch.**

During the five years that elapsed between the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931 and the military uprising in the summer of 1936, the relationship between Mexico and Spain improved greatly, beyond the diplomatic sphere. The exchange of amicable messages transcend formal relations and official representations. That Spanish Mexican relations entered a more civilized era was due to the different perspective and attitude of the Spanish regime towards the region in general, and the work of Spanish diplomats accredited in Mexico in particular. Spanish interests in Mexico were now effectively protected and local authorities began to firmly act against anti-Spanish manifestations. However, the interest in everyday life in both countries was more the result of the identification that Mexican people felt towards Republican Spain. After all, it was Spain that had changed, getting closer to the Mexican ideals and aspirations. This interest increasingly developed with a wide variety of cultural, commercial and political exchanges, and became reciprocal.

Relevant to develop such an interest was, apart from the devoted work of Spanish Ambassador del Vayo, the setting up of pro-Republican and Socialist groups in Mexico, and their relationship with Mexican political and labour organisations.

By the time of the establishment of the Spanish Republic in 1931, Lombardo Toledano, perhaps the most influential Left-wing intellectual in twentieth century Mexico, was the maverick of Mexican Labour. Although from an upper middle-class family, with a Christian philosophical background, Lombardo's humanism soon linked him with the working class and he was influential in developing a new intellectual and progressive orientation in Mexican politics.¹ Lombardo's years in the *CROM* also coincided with the defining years of his intellectual and philosophical formation.² During his time with the *CROM*, as a member of the Executive Committee in charge of political education, he was concerned about educating the workers as the best way to acquire a class conscience, and significantly he engaged himself in studying Marxism. He was never part of the *Grupo Acción*, the clique headed by Luis N. Morones and which he used to serve his personal political ambitions. As Minister of Labour under Calles, Morones aspired to the presidency in 1928 only to be halted by the over powerful Obregón. Nevertheless, Morones retained his grip on a docile labour movement. Although he was never charged with being involved in Obregón's murder, the shade of suspicion never abandoned him. By 1929, at the beginning of the *maximato* period, Lombardo started considering that the *CROM* was being ruined by political corruption, and thus, the labour movement betrayed by its leaders. However, Lombardo did not yet see an alternative way to pursue both the fulfilment of the revolutionary programme and that of the working class in particular.³

As explained earlier, Calles, perhaps unwittingly, after achieving the relative unity of the main revolutionary factions, became the arbiter of their confrontations, thus assuming the role of a supreme judge. Although other presidents were being elected, Calles effectively became the power behind the throne. Calles presided over profound changes in the social sphere, particularly in education, where the governmental stand provoked the violent reaction of the Catholic Church, as we saw in the previous chapter. The *maximato* period served the purposes of the revolutionary family, which developed its quarrels within the framework of the National Revolutionary Party

¹ Robert Paul Millon, *Mexican Marxist-Vicente Lombardo Toledano*, The University of North Carolina Press, USA, 1966, pp.3-29.

² Millon, *Mexican Marxist*, p.21.

³ *Idem*, pp.26-28.

(PNR) since 1929. Nevertheless, Calles's commitment to political democracy was limited. Calles then hampered the revolutionary impetus, and rural communities that suffered a harsh submission to local caciques, mainly paid the burden of the sacrifice. The system of *hacienda*, which was still significant in organising land tenure, had by no means entirely gone, but the revolutionary elite slowed the pace of land distribution. By 1930, Calles declared the agrarian reform over. So far, the revolution had changed the political and social image of Mexico, but the economic structure had seen little alteration. Particularly alarming was Mexico's backward position in terms of foreign economic dependence, which in the midst of the Depression meant foreign trade fell by around two thirds.⁴ Calles's economic conservatism was compensated by his radical view regarding the Church, which he perceived as a reactionary institution to be firmly controlled and deprived of its fanatical influence. The anti-clerical stand was not intended as anti-religious, but as a "new spiritual conquest" to win the younger generation for the Revolution.⁵ This was the ideological bond shared by Lombardo with the revolutionary elite in his engagement for the emancipation of the workers. In this early stage of Lombardo's career as independent labour leader, he also developed his relations with Spanish workers resident in Mexico.

The news of the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in April 1931, reached Mexico in the midst of the *maximato* period, when a tense calm was the norm in Mexican politics. Together with the official celebration of the proclamation of a Republican regime in Spain, there was also popular support from both Mexicans and Spaniards, celebrating the news.⁶ Mexican and Spanish labour organisations strengthened their already established relations, and some Spanish residents in Mexico, normally cut-off from the events in Spain, showed greater interest in what was occurring there. This was an excellent opportunity for many Spaniards to get to know about the ongoing changes and the new realities in their homeland. On the wave of the Socialist and Republican rise in Spain some resident Spaniards organised the Spanish Socialist Group in Mexico to celebrate the first anniversary of the

⁴ Alan Knight, *Mexico, c.1930-46*, p.8, in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. VII, *Latin America since 1930, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean*, edited by Leslie Bethell, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990, pp.3-82.

⁵ *Idem*, p.10.

⁶ The most popular Mexican composer of the time, Gutu Cárdenas, wrote a "corrido" (popular Mexican song telling the story of a real event) praising the arrival of the Republican regime in Spain; Gutu Cárdenas, vol 5, *Sus últimas canciones, La República en España*, Musart, 1978.

establishment of the Spanish Republic.⁷ The group invited Lombardo to give a lecture regarding the role of the Spanish residents in Mexico and their responsibilities concerning both Mexico and Spain. As if to mark the differences in their political preferences, the *Casino Español* refused permission to hold the meeting in its premises, but the *Orfeó Català* gladly granted it. It was the first time that Lombardo had addressed a Spanish audience. Although his words referred mainly to Spain, he took the opportunity to criticise the *callismo* and the failure of the Mexican Revolution. Considering that both Mexican and Spanish workers were facing similar problems, Lombardo declared that what mattered was not the “colour of the banners, but to elevate the living standard of the working class and to improve the distribution of wealth.” He also considered the establishment of the Spanish Republic as the beginning of a real possibility for a revolutionary change in Spain, and expressed his hope for a bloodless change, similar to the one that had produced the Republican regime in Spain.⁸

Regretting not having been able to attend the lecture, Ambassador del Vayo praised Lombardo’s qualities, and described him as “the ablest of the young leaders around whom were grouped the best elements of the trade unions and many intellectuals who were conscious of the importance of backing the Mexican revolution with a powerful labour movement.”⁹ Another special occasion was the first live radio broadcast between Madrid and Mexico City on 21 May 1932. The Spanish President, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, addressed the Mexican audience with a brief but emotive message that put Mexico and Spain in closer contact.¹⁰ Interest in Spanish every-day life became a common feature during the early years of the new era in Mexican Spanish relations. The old antagonism and animosity gave way to an amicable relationship. This change did not occur overnight, but the general ambiance towards Spanish issues was altogether friendlier.

⁷ AGA, FMAE., 9870, Leg. 584, *Política -II- a – General - 1932*, Letter Julio Álvarez del Vayo to Minister of State, 8 April 1932.

⁸ [Vicente Lombardo Toledano], *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo II, Suplemento, 1931, 1932, 1933, CEFPSVLT, México, 2001, pp.29-46.

⁹ Álvarez del Vayo, *The last optimist*, pp.228-229.

¹⁰ Letter Julio Álvarez del Vayo to Minister of State, 1 June 1932, and press cutting from *El Universal*, 20 May 1932. AGA, FMAE, 9870, Leg. 585, *Política -II- b - c - General -1932*.

As part of the improved relationship between Mexico and the Spanish Republic, the latter granted scholarships to Mexican students and teachers.¹¹ The pre-existing exchange agreement for Mexican and Spanish students and teachers was renewed from 1931 onwards.¹² The academic exchanges would continue almost uninterruptedly, even during the difficult years of the relationship.¹³ (See *infra*).

By now a convinced Marxist, Lombardo supported proletarian internationalism, and regularly referred to the condition of Latin American and Spanish workers, comparing and contrasting it with the local situation in Mexico. On 23 July Lombardo delivered a powerful speech sentencing “the road is towards the Left”, in which he insisted on taking the workers demands further. He also criticised the government for having, according to Lombardo, betrayed the Mexican Revolution.¹⁴ Morones reacted by defending the government and accusing Lombardo of attempting to instil “exotic” ideas, i.e. Marxism, alien to Mexican tradition, thus precipitating the conflict and the breakdown of the *CROM*. Lombardo quit both his managerial post and his membership to the *CROM*, and developed a period of intense activism, enthusiastically promoting the setting up of new labour unions with the ultimate goal of uniting them in a powerful confederation. During this period, such an attitude might have seemed unwise, as the influence of Morones and other *callistas* was still considerable. Besides, no real alternative existed to the discredited trade unions, but Lombardo’s determination was resolute. The many fronts on which Lombardo developed his work were expanding.

In August, after the farcical attempted *coup de état* against the Spanish Republic known as *Sanjurjada*, Lombardo wrote a press article on property rights and public interests in Spain, pointing out his believe that strengthening the latter and setting limits to the former could be the first step towards the “emancipation of Spain.” He also urged the transformation of the Spanish regime into a more progressive and

¹¹ Dispatch no. 5, 1 January 1932, AGA, FMRE, *Embajada de España en Méjico*, Leg. 585, *Política-II-b-c-General, 1932*.

¹² Letter García Téllez to Gallostra, 20 April, 1931, AGA, FMRE, *Embajada de España en Méjico*, Leg. 570, *Política-b-c—General-1931*.

¹³ AHDM-III-118-21, *Mexicanos en España*, 1934.

¹⁴ Javier Romero, *Cárdenas y su Circunstancia*, p.69, in the introduction to *Palabras y Documentos Públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas, 1928-1970*, vol. 1, *Mensajes, Discursos, Declaraciones, Entrevistas y otros documentos, 1928-1940*, Siglo XXI, México, 1978, pp.13-84.

revolutionary one.¹⁵ Whether supporting the Republican regime in Spain or not, the Spanish community in Mexico had a clear tendency towards conservatism. Spanish consulates were working trying to improve the image of Spaniards.¹⁶ From time to time, the Spanish consuls had to deal with anti-Spanish campaigns and often faced bitter reactions from radical individuals, particularly in those regions under the influence of ultra nationalist groups.¹⁷ The majority of Spanish residents in Mexico, however, felt the real danger were popular and progressive Left-wing leaning governments in either country, and feared the menace of Communism as a threat to their economic interests.¹⁸ On the other hand, the relationship between both the Mexican and the Spanish labour movements were developed at length during the early years of, and throughout the Second Spanish Republic given the prominence of the Socialist Party (*PSOE*) in Spanish politics, and the strong Socialist influence in the working class leadership in both countries.

In the rise of Mexican labour movement, the old and corrupt *CROM*, which witty workers referred to as *Cómo Roba Oro Morones* (How Morones steals gold), and the back-to-front version of *Más Oro Roba Calles* (Calles steals more gold), gave rise to the *CROM-depurada* (purified), when Lombardo abandoned it, only to be followed by the biggest federations. The programme proposed by Lombardo and approved by the extraordinary convention of the *CROM (depurada)* of March 1933, was ambitious. It stressed the need for internal democratic procedures, and complete independence from the state. Political education of all its members was essential, thus the creation of the *Escuela Superior Obrera* (Workers College) and the “Pablo Iglesias Central Socialist Library.”¹⁹ Its main political objectives were the intensification of land reform, the nationalisation of the oil industry, and the creation

¹⁵ *El Universal*, 24 August 1932, p.5.

¹⁶ AGA, FMAE, 9844, Leg. 709, *Correspondencia con Embajada en Méjico, 1933*, Vice-Consul in Torreón, August 1933; AGA, FMAE, Leg. 627.

¹⁷ AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4, *Correspondencia General, 1935-1937*. In spite of their title, the documents referring to the anti-Spanish campaign in Durango led by one Roberto D. Fernández between July and August 1933, are in this file. Similar campaigns were developed during other years; AGA, FMAE, IDD 61, Leg. 616.

¹⁸ Concha Pando Navarro, *La Colonia Española en México, 1930-1940*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Murcia, 1987.

¹⁹ [Vicente Lombardo Toledano], *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo II, vol. 4, 1933, CEFPSVLT, México, 1995, p.75.

of the Ibero American Workers Confederation. This programme showed a remarkable coincidence, if not actually a Spanish-inspired influence.²⁰

The struggle between the labour leaders was the forerunner of the forthcoming presidential election. Of the three strongest pre-candidates, Carlos Riva Palacio, Manuel Pérez Treviño, and Lázaro Cárdenas, only the latter began an extensive campaign visiting remote places in rural Mexico. He even visited small villages and towns that had never been visited by a governorship candidate, let alone a presidential candidate before. Witnessing the May Day 1933 parade at the Zocalo Square, Cárdenas drew attention to the division of labour organisations, which was not in the best interests of the workers. He was convinced of the necessity of a strong labour movement and was determined to encourage it.²¹ Once the only remaining challenger, Manuel Pérez Treviño, withdrew his candidacy in June 1933, and Lázaro Cárdenas had the full support of the *PNR*, the cynical politician wondered why did he engage so much effort in an electoral campaign with no real opponent threatening victory.²² Cárdenas's commitment to the electoral campaign platform approved by the *PNR* was whole-hearted and eventually confronted him with the Church, local caciques and Calles.

Similar to the main political aims of the reformist biennium in Republican Spain, revolutionary Mexico was engaged in major issues embracing land reform (*Reforma Agraria*), which included land distribution and promotion of the *ejido* system (collective tenure of land); education, in Cárdenas words, *desfanatización*, which necessarily implied Church-State relations²³; and the defence of workers' justified demands whilst promoting the industrialization of the country.²⁴ These issues, however, found contradictory positions and even provoked clashes between the various revolutionary factions. It was not a simple struggle for power, but the

²⁰ Javier Romero, *Cárdenas y su Circunstancia*, p.68.

²¹ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras: I – Apuntes 1913-1940*, UNAM, México, 1972, p.222.

²² Adalberto Tejeda, who in 1938 would be appointed Ambassador to Spain, for the *Partido Socialista de las Izquierdas*, Antonio I. Villareal, for the *Partido Anti-reeleccionista*, and Hernán Laborde, for the *Bloque Obrero y Campesino*, which included the Communist Party, were the other three presidential candidates at the presidential election of 4 July 1934.

²³ Luis Suárez, *Cárdenas: Retrato Inédito, Testimonios de Amalia Solórzano de Cárdenas y nuevos documentos*, Grijalbo, México, 1987, pp.388-390; Gilberto Bosques, *The National Revolutionary Party of Mexico and the Six-Year Plan*, PNR, México, 1937, pp.12-26.

²⁴ Tzvi Medin *Ideología y Praxis*, p.159 and p.178.

confrontation of groups with different degrees of commitment towards the fulfilment of the political project of the Mexican Revolution.²⁵ At the same time, attempting to modernise the country, the *PNR* set out to define a short term programme addressing its major social and economic needs, thus, it set up a governmental programme in early December 1933 to promote Cárdenas presidential candidacy.²⁶ At the time of the Second National Convention of the *PNR* which elaborated and defined the Six-Year Plan, perhaps many of the participants assumed it merely as a letter of good intentions, Calles included. Not so for the presidential candidate who was supposed to fulfil such a programme.

Assuming the Soviet example as the right way to pursue a revolutionary programme, even the International Communist bitterly criticised the Mexican Six-Year Plan (*Plan Sexenal*) as a pitiful forgery of the Soviet Five year plan.²⁷ The truth is that the Mexican plan had little resemblance to the Soviet one, particularly in terms of their objectives, where the Mexican stressed the political rather than the economic aims. It also lacked a regulating board supervising the application of the plan, thus making the Mexican version rather an electoral platform that eventually would become a governmental programme.²⁸

Lázaro Cárdenas was deeply convinced about the social responsibility of the revolutionary governments to deliver what the impoverished masses expected from a self-proclaimed popular and revolutionary government. It was not in vain that he had visited the country in a long, exhausting journey during his electoral campaign.²⁹ Apart from having the backing of the government, Cárdenas had no strong competitor and would obtain a clear victory in the polls the following summer, and was determined to fulfil the Six-Year-Plan.³⁰

²⁵ Arnaldo Córdova, *La Revolución en crisis, La aventura del maximato*, Cal y Arena, México, 1997, pp. James Wilkie and Edna Monzon de Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX*, interview with Lombardo Toledano, p.283.

²⁶ Gilberto Bosques, *The National Revolutionary Party of Mexico and the Six-Year Plan*, Bureau of Foreign Information of the National Revolutionary Party, Mexico, 1937, pp.129-223.

²⁷ *Inprecorr*, January-December 1933, num. 50 p.1113.

²⁸ Gilberto Bosques, *The National Revolutionary Party and the Six-Year Plan*, PNR, Mexico, 1937, pp.44-45.

²⁹ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras, I- Apuntes*, pp.231-305; James W. Wilkie, and Edna Monzon de Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX*, pp.282-284. Once Cárdenas was elected, he kept touring the country during the five months between the elections and his taking office on 30 November 1934.

³⁰ AMAE, Min. Edo., Leg. R-962, Exp.13, *Transmisión de poderes presidenciales en México*.

Away from the official labour organisations and their political agendas, the labour movement led by Lombardo gained in strength under the new *CROM* which soon united with other small syndicates to become the General Confederation of Workers and Peasants of Mexico (*CGOCM*) in October 1933.³¹

Devoted to the process of unifying the Mexican labour movement, Lombardo Toledano founded a magazine dedicated to promote this aim. *Futuro* was initially published every fortnight, starting in December 1933. Its aim was to become a working-class journal through which labour ideas would be expressed and, as the editorial of the first number wrote, it would “offer guidance to the Mexican labour movement”, and above all, “Mexico’s problems will remain the main concern of our work”.³² Significantly, it was to become also the main source of information regarding Spanish Socialists and Republicans for the Mexican working class.

Meetings, conferences, congresses and so on were almost a pass time in Mexico during those agitated days. Every week there was an event to attend, and almost every Sunday, a demonstration. Lombardo’s speeches were part of every day life, and this was only the beginning of an intense period of activism on the part of the working class and revolutionary organizations.³³ One such ephemeral congress was called the Congress of Female Workers and Peasants (*Congreso de Obreras y Campesinas*) that interestingly enough managed to bring together Catholics and Communists.

Apparently, the debates on the situation of women in Mexico showed pretty much the state of things in society: scarce participation of women, radical and opposing points of view, and no practical agenda to be pursued. Blanca Lydia Trejo gave a bitter account of the assembly in the pages of *Futuro*. A controversial character, Trejo was to be a future Spanish Republican campaigner who, nevertheless, would turn into a hostile and bitter critic of the Republic. (See Chapter V). Catholics did not accept her as she was a free thinker, and Communists rejected her as she was a Trotskyite, thus

³¹ A month earlier, between 7-14 September, Lombardo participated in a philosophical debate with Antonio Caso at the National University. The debate was continued in the national press, and its consequences greatly shaped the biggest Mexican University and Lombardo’s permanence in it. See Chapter VII.

³² *Futuro*, no. 1, 1 December 1933, p.3.

³³ Enrique Krauze, *Biografía del Poder, Caudillos de la Revolución mexicana (1910-1940)*, Tusquets, México, 1997, pp.442-443.

she willingly accepted the label reformist. The failure of the congress was due, she concluded, to the “sui generis ‘communism’ prevailing”,³⁴

Given the state of affairs regarding the religious issue in Mexico, Lombardo published an open letter addressed to Jesus Christ. “Anti-Christian people benefit under your shade”, he claims, “as priests from all religions have benefited from serving their gods.” It was undoubtedly an attempt to capture the attention of those abundant sectors of Mexicans who identified with religion but not with the Church.³⁵ A working-class instrument for debate and political discussion, *Futuro* opened its pages to all those interested in current affairs. Thus, written contributions of varied political inclinations were published there, but the Communists stayed away. Traditionally critical of Lombardo’s policies, the Mexican Communist Party refused to collaborate with him, although they would try to influence the masses he led.³⁶

Revolutionary Mexico and Republican Spain were being targeted by opposing sides, but it would be Pope Pius XI who finally labelled the alliance of those evil countries forming The Red Triangle, -Soviet Russia, Mexico, and, by 1933, Spain.³⁷ Not for nothing the reformist government in Spain was facing growing social upheaval due to the resistance of conservative groups opposed to the Socialist- Republican reform programme. The Church opposed the reform of education and the regulation of religious congregations, which meant the reduction of its power and influence.³⁸ Big landowners rejected the agrarian reform and particularly the law of municipal boundaries.³⁹ The Army, naturally allied with these sectors, was particularly concerned about the modernising reform of their sector, which they did not understand.⁴⁰ All these groups opposed the Catalan statute and its provision of limited

³⁴ *Futuro*, no. 2, 15 December 1933, pp.6 and 35.

³⁵ *Futuro*, no. 3, 1 January 1934, p.7.

³⁶ Typically orthodox, the Mexican Communist Party defined its strategy: “*Con Lombardo, nada; con las masas que siguen a Lombardo, todo!* All that changed after the IC VII Congress in 1935.

³⁷ John Cornwell, *Hitler’s Pope*, The Secret History of Pius XII, Viking, London, 1999, p.112.

³⁸ Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War, Reform, Reaction and Revolution in the Second Republic*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp.38 and 53.

³⁹ Edward Malefakis, *Agrarian reform and the peasant revolution: origins of the Civil War*, London, Yale University Press, 1970, pp.186-257.

⁴⁰ Michael Alpert, *El Ejército republicano en la guerra civil*, Ibérica de Ediciones y Publicaciones, Barcelona, 1977, pp.9-14.

autonomy, and developed a permanent propaganda campaign that eventually mobilized numerous groups against the reformist Republican Government.⁴¹

Late in 1933 a divided Left with combined majority seats in the Cortes gave way to a Right-wing Government in Spain. The electoral triumph of the Right-wing coalition produced a government that engaged in dismantling the progressive reforms of the various Centre-Left governments of the first Republican biennium. Furthermore, the most radical members of the Right-wing coalition of the second biennium prepared not just for a continuation of such policies but also for a full take over of the Spanish Republic, in order to establish a government similar to those in Italy and Germany.⁴²

The experience of the division between the Socialist and Communist parties in Germany in 1932, which helped eventually catapult Nazi electoral success in 1933, was very much taken into consideration. The problem of an electoral alliance in Spain was similar in terms of the possible coalition of the main parties, in this case, Left-Republicans and Socialists. The close links between the Spanish *CEDA* and the Nazi party were well known; therefore, it came as no surprise when Gil Robles openly declared that the triumph of his party would mean the final destruction of the Spanish Republic.⁴³ This was alarming for it meant not just the destruction of the political project represented by the government, but also of the regime as a whole.

The so-called “*Bienio Negro*” in Spain clearly showed the new trend in Spanish politics. Although this Spanish conservative biennium was not reflected at first in its relationship with Mexico, it certainly had an impact. In the official quarter this was a low profile period that left various projects unfinished.⁴⁴ Echoing the events in Spain, in February 1934 *Futuro* editorialised its alarm about the threat of a group of Spaniards intending to organise the Spanish Fascist Group of Mexico (*Grupo Fascista Español de México*) in the Northern region of La Laguna, following the steps of José Antonio Primo de Rivera who had formed the *Falange Española* in

⁴¹ Frances Lannon, *Privilege, Persecution and Prophecy: The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875-1975*, Clarendon, 1987, pp.13-22.

⁴² Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p.186 and p.199.

⁴³ Katherine Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, Penguin, London, 1938, pp.273-274; Claude Bowers, *My Mission to Spain, Watching the Rehearsal for World War II*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1954, p.74; Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.120-121.

⁴⁴ Concha Pando Navarro, *La colonia española en México, 1930-1940*, p.44.

Spain.⁴⁵ It was only natural that both conservative Mexicans and Spaniards resident in Mexico supported Right wing oriented organisations, as it was for Mexican workers to be ready to confront them. Considering the empowerment of a conservative government in Spain, a Spanish worker, who signed only as Santiago, sent a letter to *Futuro* and expressed criticism on the way politics were conducted in Spain. "I refuse to join a political party, either Republican or a class party", he laments, but still hoped that the "fraudulent triumph of the Right will finally bring the *Frente Único Obrero*."⁴⁶ Yet, the issue of the unity of workers did not seem to provoke interest in broader coalitions to gain power. For a while, there was still time to write optimistic views of the Socialist future of Spain, such as Jesús de Amber Arruza's homage to the founder of the *PSOE*, "el Abuelo", Pablo Iglesias, which considered the arrival of Socialism anything but a natural law.⁴⁷

In spite of the new political situation in Spain, or perhaps because of it, it was common that Mexican Left wing local organisations, for instance, petitioned Spanish consulates regarding their counterparts in Spain in order to establish direct contact and regular exchanges of information. One such request was from the *Confederación de Ligas Socialistas* in Oaxaca, wishing to establish relations with Spanish Socialist Leagues, the Socialist Party, and the *UGT*.⁴⁸ Over all, the improvement of the bilateral relationship in this period, other than official, was also determined by political and ideological affinities.

The conservative Government in Spain pursued a different foreign policy towards the Americas. It came as no surprise then, that in the report of May 1934, reference was made to Calvo Sotelo's demand in the Cortes for the cancellation of the credit granted to Mexico for the building of ships in Spain.⁴⁹ The polarised positions in Spanish politics also had its parallel in Mexico, but in a reversed form. The harshness of the aggressive Right-wing radicals was directed against the Spanish people, whereas in Mexico the strength of the progressive and reformist groups was the dominant trend. Resisting the growing Right-wing charge against Spanish democratic institutions, it

⁴⁵ *Futuro*, no. 5, 1 February 1934, p.6.

⁴⁶ *Futuro*, no. 7, 1 March 1934, p.25.

⁴⁷ *Futuro*, no. 9, 15 April 1934, pp.28,29 and 34.

⁴⁸ AGA, FMAE, 9845, Leg. 713, Letter replying to *Confederación de Ligas Socialistas of Oaxaca*, 3 April 1934.

⁴⁹ AGA, FMAE, , Leg. 616.

was the rank and file of Socialist and Republican parties who halted the enthronement of a totalitarian regime in Spain in 1934.⁵⁰ The popular insurrection in Asturias in October 1934 was confronted with a terrible repression, which made clear the determination of the Government to prevent any radicalisation.

Meanwhile in Mexico, the end of 1934 was a promising time. Lázaro Cárdenas's inauguration as Mexican president took place on 30 November, and he was ready to deliver on his pre election promises from day one. Although the latter possibility caused great alarm in the Spanish representative, who reported the radicalisation of the Mexican regime.⁵¹

The main working class concerns were concentrated in unifying its main organisations. What was probably the most important single event in the unification process in terms of creating a new organisational structure, were the works of the First Congress of the *CGOCM* (General Confederation of Workers and Peasants of Mexico), held between 24 and 29 December 1934 at the Fine Arts Palace.⁵² If the January 1935 issue of *Futuro* was committed to "contribute to the study of the Mexican Revolution" - probably the single topic most referred to by Lombardo throughout his entire life - in February, the magazine dealt at length with the 1934 October Revolution in Spain; its causes, development, failure and future. They also reproduced Henri Barbusse's article, which appeared in *Le Monde*, where the French thinker compared the problems facing the Spanish proletariat as "perfectly analogous" to the ones Russia's workers had had to face in 1917.⁵³ In Mexico there was a divided opinion on the issue. The radical Left, represented by Lombardo and his followers coincided with the idea that Asturias represented the Spanish way to revolutionary changes. But this stand considered the revolutionary Mexican style rather than the Russian, if not for anything else, for the peculiar social and political characteristics of both Mexico and Spain.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Paul Preston, *La Destrucción de la democracia en España, Reforma, reacción y revolución en la Segunda República*, Grijalbo Mondadori, Barcelona, 2001, pp.225-247.

⁵¹ AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-962, Exp.9.

⁵² *Futuro*, tomo II, nos. 5 and 6, December 1934.

⁵³ *Futuro*, no. 8, February 1935, p.99.

⁵⁴ *Idem*, p.23.

With the principal Socialist and Republican leaders imprisoned, 1935 became the year of undermining the very bases of the Republican regime in Spain.⁵⁵ Ten years after their last encounter, Lombardo Toledano visited Largo Caballero in the Madrid Modelo prison in September 1935. The Executive Committee of the *UGT* met regularly during their imprisonment, and Lombardo attended one of the meetings.⁵⁶ They discussed the political situation of the working classes and the revolutionary movement worldwide. Both Lombardo and Largo were deeply convinced of the inevitability of the collapse of Capitalism and the arrival of Socialism. Largo said he was confident and at ease, as for the future of Spain. He went as far as to contrast the situation of Spain with that of his ill wife whose death was imminent. Both issues have an inevitable outcome, Largo said, sadly my wife will die, but Spain will be saved.⁵⁷ However, the perfect example of the actual misfortunes of the Spanish democracy was the designation of a new Spanish Ambassador to Mexico. Emiliano Iglesias represented the worst of Spanish political life. The corrupt ally of Alejandro Lerroux was sent abroad to be protected from yet another scandal. (See Chapter II). Juan Simeon Vidarte poignantly said that Mexico must have had a great deal of affection for Spain to tolerate such envoy, from whom even the Spanish Cortes had openly dissociated itself.⁵⁸

On the home front, as explained before, the opposing factions struggling for control over the labour movement were represented by Morones and Lombardo. During the May Day celebration in 1935, and as part of the Calles-Cárdenas confrontation, Morones did not miss the opportunity to criticise Lombardo by saying that “he has the obsession of making the social revolution in Mexico.”⁵⁹ And indeed Lombardo was fully committed to social changes favouring the working classes, but the main reason for Morones to have a go at Lombardo was the increasing tension between the two rival revolutionary factions competing for the control of Mexican political life. Only a few weeks later, Lombardo would call the labour movement to back President Cárdenas against the threat posed by Calles, and the National Committee of

⁵⁵ Paul Preston, *La Destrucción de la Democracia en España*, pp.252-279.

⁵⁶ Amaro del Rosal, *Vicente Lombardo Toledano y sus Relaciones con el Movimiento Obrero Español*, CEFPSVLT, México, 1980, pp.8 and 9.

⁵⁷ [Vicente Lombardo Toledano] *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, tomo III, vol 3, 1935, CEFPSVLT, México, pp.439-443.

⁵⁸ Juan Simeón Vidarte, *Todos Fuimos Culpables*, FCE, México, 1973, p.796.

⁵⁹ FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.118 Leg. 4/4 Inv. 1583 *Discursos varios* Gav. 24.

Proletarian Defence was set on 12 June 1935.⁶⁰ Lombardo exemplified the new régime's unique determination to develop a revolutionary policy, essentially similar to all previous revolutionary régimes, but more effective in satisfying the demands of labour.

Given the deteriorating political situation and the unfulfilled demands of the workers, the period of the so-called *maximato* corresponded entirely with the struggle of labour organisations to become independent and grouping as many workers in their fields as possible to push forward the revolutionary programme. This was by no means a one-man job. In this attempt, the cooperation of leaders of different factions and ideologies was needed. The participation of some members of the Communist Party like Hernán Laborde and Miguel A. Velasco alongside opportunistic leaders such as Fidel Velásquez, Fernando Amilpa, Jesús Yurén and others seemed bizarre. However, Lombardo's determination for unity as the best way to get strength was firm. His work as a bridge between those opposing factions in the formation of the *Frente Único* (United Front) proved decisive.⁶¹

During the first six months of the Cárdenas administration, the extent of labour complaints, strikes and workers mobilisations grew significantly. The numerous strikes and labour conflicts nationwide were at their highest point ever: there were 13 strikes in 1932, 202 in 1934, and 642 in 1935.⁶² Calles, who was in the habit of informally influencing some governmental decisions, felt that the agitation of the previous months provoked by the numerous strikes, was leading to chaos, and openly declared his criticism of the working class leaders who were provoking the situation. It was clear that, even though there was no direct criticism of president Lázaro Cárdenas, he was the ultimate target of the condemnation. Given the fact that the working class movement was going through an intense period of activity pursuing its unification as the best way to gather strength to defend its demands, Calles's criticism became a catalytic factor that accelerated the process.⁶³

⁶⁰ Chassen, *Lombardo Toledano*, pp.175-177.

⁶¹ Alicia Hernández, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, pp.142-147.

⁶² Alan Knight, *Mexico, c. 1930-46*, p.13.

⁶³ James W. Wilkie, and Edna Monzon de Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX, Entrevista de Historia Oral*, Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas, México, 1969, Interview with Vicente Lombardo Toledano, p.324.

On his return from a long trip to the US, Calles was interviewed by Ezequiel Padilla, his pet journalist, and accused Lombardo and Alfonso Navarrete, the leader of the railroad workers, of causing the chaos and turmoil. Calles was not criticising Cárdenas directly but declared that the political situation was similar to the crisis that led to the resignation of President Ortiz Rubio in 1932. Unsurprisingly, Pujadas shared the criticism of Calles.⁶⁴

Reporting these events to the Foreign Office, the British representative provided a similar view pictured earlier by his Spanish counterpart. Furthermore, in the brief description of Lombardo included in the 'Leading personalities' despatch sent from the British Legation in Mexico, Rodney Murray wrote in December of 1935:

An able and unscrupulous lawyer who professes communism and who has lately come into prominence as a professional strike-leader. A dangerous personality who may easily obtain political power owing to his growing popularity with the various labour unions.⁶⁵

According to his own perception, Lombardo was a by-product of the Mexican Revolution. "I started thinking about Mexico", he said, "at the time the Mexican Revolution started its building up process."⁶⁶ He was loyal, but to the principles of the revolutionary movement, and through these principles he elaborated the idea of establishing a socialist regime in Mexico by developing them fully. His conviction, typically Marxist, of labour being the basis of any revolutionary action, was particularly consolidated during these years.

The inauguration of the New Year in 1936 in Mexico saw the beginning of the end of the *maximato* era, and the commencement of a new stage in pursuit of the revolutionary programme and the strengthening of the institutions immersed in a process of modernisation. However, it was not a straightforward process. Early in February 1936, the industrialists issued a manifesto declaring illegal the strike in the glass factory in Monterrey, which began on 1 February, and demanded its end, not

⁶⁴ AMAE, Min. Edo., Leg. R-962, Exp.9.

⁶⁵ Murray to Eden, December 31, 1935, "Leading personalities in Mexico." FO371/19794 A1333.

⁶⁶ Millon, *Mexican Marxist*, p.25.

without directing their most acrimonious criticism at Lombardo. Tension increased after the owners of the industrial plants in Monterrey threatened to go on strike (*Paro*),⁶⁷ to show their disapproval of the way the government was being conducted, and in anger called for a strike of their own. There was a perfect match in criticism by Calles and the industrialists, but Lázaro Cárdenas was not ready to concede defeat that easily, nor was Lombardo prepared to miss the chance to show how far the unification process of labour had gone, and how strong it had become.

Addressing a meeting in Mexico City on 6 February, Lombardo, as general secretary of the *CGOCM*, vigorously responded to those criticisms and symbolically defied the industrialists by reading the verse written by the Spanish poet Valle-Inclán fifteen years earlier (see Chapter I). Valle-Inclán had died only on 5 January, and Lombardo took the opportunity to honour him while at the same time threatening the oligarchs, calling them the new *encomenderos*, with the rage of the working class. Lombardo handed over the little banner with Valle-Inclán's hand written verse to the National Committee of Proletarian Defence, which had been recently created to support president Cárdenas in his rift with Calles.⁶⁸ On 8 February, Cárdenas went to Monterrey, where he defended the legality of the strike in a meeting with the industrialists and rejected the notion that there was political turmoil in the country. He confronted the men of money, defended his policies, and further demanded the support of the Mexican rich for the welfare of the nation. On 9 February, he spoke at a demonstration of 18 000 workers. On the 11th, he was ready to meet again with the industrialists and demand from them their support.⁶⁹

The following weeks were tense, but the determination of the president to pursue his social programme favouring the working classes was evident. Coinciding with this presidential determination, the on going process of unification envisaged by Lombardo was gaining momentum. During the last week of February, the congress of workers unification took place, as a result of which the *CGOCM* decided to dissolve itself. The *CGOCM* was collecting the fruits of the three previous years in confronting the corrupt labour leadership of the *CROM* and Morones, the close ally of

⁶⁷ *Historia Documental de la CTM, 1936-1937*, ICAP, México, 1981, p.52.

⁶⁸ *Historia Documental de la CTM*, pp.48-49.

⁶⁹ *Idem*, pp.53-58.

Calles.⁷⁰ Another political triumph for Lombardo was the inclusion of the Communist-led *CSUM* (*Confederación Sindical Unitaria de México*) along with smaller labour federations. Finally, the *CGOCM* was transformed into the powerful Mexican Confederation of Workers (*CTM*), on 26 February 1936. Led by Lombardo, the aim of unifying the labour movement was finally reached as a result of the active participation of the workers and the compromise achieved by the leaders regardless of their ideological affinities. The *CTM* became highly successful in defending the workers interests; an era during which, as a result of its strength, the influential labour movement was living its golden years.⁷¹

After such display of power, and popular support Cárdenas was confident about his future. Nonetheless, believing that General Calles understood the need for him to stop his criticism of the government, Cárdenas disliked the personal distance that had grown between the two.⁷² However, his high revolutionary conviction allowed him to follow a different course from Calles, thus defining their distinct places in history. Cárdenas resisted to the last the inevitability of the expulsion of Calles, but he knew that it was the only option left, given the mounting tension and the real threat to his government. The acts of sabotage, such as the bomb placed at the railroad of the Veracruz train that resulted in many casualties, seemed to have made Cárdenas finally take a decision. On 8 April, he instructed the military commander in Cuernavaca to inform Calles of his decision. A couple of days earlier, Cárdenas had sent general Mújica, a very respected and mutual friend, to offer Calles this alternative: either three generals and a civilian would leave the country or Calles himself accompanied by three civilians would have to leave the country. Calles wanted to know the names of the generals, but Mújica did not know them. Cárdenas had presented him with a cryptic message, which Calles seemed to have understood. He decided to leave along with the three civilians, his closest allies, Luis N. Morones, Luis León, and Melchor Ortega.⁷³

⁷⁰ Francie Chassen, *Lombardo Toledano*, pp.191-196; *Historia documental de la CTM*, pp.61-64.

⁷¹ Hobart A. Spalding, Jr., *Organized Labor in Latin America, Historical case studies of workers in dependent societies*, Harper & Row, New York, 1977, pp.118-129.

⁷² Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras I, Apuntes 1913-1940*, UNAM, México, 1972, p.333.

⁷³ Cárdenas did not unveil the names of the three generals, but he considered that they would not represent a threat to the government, providing Calles was out of the country. What is interesting is the fact that Cárdenas did not consider it a problem for Calles to have remained in Mexico had those three unnamed generals and a civilian been sent instead. In any case, it is clear that the whole episode marked the path not only for Cárdenas presidency, but for future governments, a feature that would

Lázaro Cárdenas believed in the content of the Six-Year plan and was determined to apply it to the best of his abilities. When Cárdenas decided to put an end to Calles' criticism in 1936, however, he did not forget the revolutionary contribution Calles had made.⁷⁴ After successfully resolving the matter of Calles' obstruction and indirect threats to his position as president, Cárdenas strengthened his ranks and prepared to pursue a similarly independent path in his foreign policy. In fact, by doing so, he was simply being faithful to the principles derived from the revolutionary programme and adopted as state policy. For the following two years the unchallenged progressive Mexican Government devoted itself to the implementation of social demands, creating the basis for future economic development.⁷⁵ Cárdenas also developed a merciful and bloodless outcome by dealing with his political enemies in the form of exile, as opposed to the physical elimination pursued by Calles. Hence, Calles was sent to exile. The parallel process of unification of the labour movement on the one hand, and the strengthening of the progressive revolutionary elite in the government on the other, meant the final removal of the hindrance of *callismo*.

The confrontation of Cárdenas with the closest ally of the former Spanish Republican Ambassador del Vayo, Calles, in no way affected the bilateral relationship, which by this time was still going through difficult phases resulting more from the internal changes of government in Spain. (See Chapter II). In fact, it is possible to argue that the political changes in Mexico improved the bilateral relationship, as the ideological coincidences grew deeper. (See Chapter V).

The Labour movement under Cárdenas administration developed more freely. Yet, Cárdenas firm opposition to Lombardo's intention of integrating rural labourers into the *CTM* structure, showed the limits to his pro-labour policy.⁷⁶ A unified workers and peasants organisation would have meant an extraordinary power for the *CTM*.

provide some of the long lasting stability of the Mexican regime; Cárdenas, *Obras I*, pp.337-340.

⁷⁴ Between late December 1935 and early April 1936, Cárdenas often wrote in his Diary, reflecting about Calles past and current attitudes; Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras,, I- Apuntes*, pp.332-341. A selection of Calles political speeches is in: [Plutarco Elías Calles], *Pensamiento Político y Social, Antología (1913-1936)*, Instituto de Estudios de la Revolución Mexicana, FAPECyFT, FCE, México, 1988.

⁷⁵ Tzvi Medin, *Ideología y Praxis Política de Lázaro Cárdenas*, Siglo XXI, México, 1980, pp.114-145.

⁷⁶ Tzvi Medin, *Ideología y Praxis*, pp.84-86; Alicia Hernández, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, p.164.

Instead, the formation of the Confederation of Mexican Peasants (*CCM*) under a discreet *cardenista* direction, served to counterbalance the growing strength and influence of Lombardo and the *CTM*.⁷⁷

The peasants, not being organized as the industrial workers, were still a separate and less influential sector. However, it is important to bear in mind the other relevant characteristic of this period, for the progressive reform of land tenure, in which Cárdenas pursued an impressive redistribution of lands unprecedented at any time during the revolutionary period, also needed the support of organised rural labourers. (See Chapter V).

In any case, Lombardo's aspiration seemed too ambitious for a labour organisation whose principal leaders were not as committed as he was to keeping unity and working towards a common objective. The ongoing struggle between the members of the CP, whose limited influence they wanted to overcome, and the traditional labour leaders that had followed Lombardo since the days of the *CROM-depurada*, such as Fidel Velázquez, and Fernando Amilpa would eventually take its toll.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the *CTM* was the strongest labour organisation in Mexico, and would remain the largest in Latin America for the time being.

Similarly engaged in a crucial period of its political life, Spanish democracy was facing enormous challenges when the two antagonistic projects prepared to fight a general election. After having a particularly intense electoral campaign, the prospects of electing a government based on the coalition of centre-Left parties in Spain also passed through a momentous situation early in 1936.

The decision of the electoral coalition to pursue a Popular Front approach to the election as the best way to ensure triumph over the strong and menacing Right, was probably the only option those parties had to "restore the reforming impetus of the

⁷⁷ Javier Romero, *Cárdenas y su Circunstancia*, Introduction to *Palabras y Documentos Públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas, 1928-1970*, vol. 1, *Mensajes, Discursos, Declaraciones, Entrevistas y otros documentos, 1928/1940*, Siglo XXI, México, 1978, p.83.

⁷⁸ Alicia Hernández Chávez, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Periodo 1934-1940, La Mecánica Cardenista*, El Colegio de México, 1979, pp.148-165.

liberal biennium.”⁷⁹ On the other side of the political spectrum, the Left-wing Republican and Socialist parties had the aim to regain power so as to fulfil their social programme so blatantly crushed by the reactionaries who governed between the end of 1933 and early 1936.⁸⁰ They wanted a second chance to develop their social reforms and to take the appropriate measures effectively to defend them. The general election in February 1936 was to be a cornerstone for both of the projects.

Perhaps the single event that was in the minds of the political leaders during the electoral campaign was the popular insurrection of October 1934. On the one hand, for the Centre-Left parties, Asturias meant a popular insurrection aiming to prevent the coming to power of the extreme Right whilst demanding social justice. On the other, for the Right wing parties, Asturias was evidence of the revolutionary threat posed by the radicalised masses.⁸¹ The decision finally to create a Popular Front electoral coalition was made in December 1935, while some of the leaders of the *PSOE* and *UGT* were still in prison after the Asturias revolt.

On 16 February 1936, the outcome of the general election did not provide a landslide triumph for the Popular Front coalition in terms of votes, yet the impact of the victory was enormous, given the electoral system favouring coalitions. It was a defining moment for supporters of the Popular Front and opponents alike. Faced with the triumph of a Left-wing leaning government, attempts were made by the leader of *CEDA*, Gil Robles, and the Chief of General Staff at the Ministry of War, General Francisco Franco, to convince the Prime Minister to impose martial law and even to prevent a Popular Front Government. The military temptations to take over arose once more. After initial doubts, Prime Minister Portela Valladares refused to engage in such attempts and left things in the hands of the President Alcalá Zamora.⁸²

The scepticism and contradictory nature of President Alcalá Zamora exacerbated the situation. He had been the guarantor of institutional stability, although he was not convinced of governmental policies pursued by the Left wing republicans. A

⁷⁹ Helen Graham, *Socialism and war, The Spanish Socialist party in power and crisis, 1936-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.24.

⁸⁰ *Idem*, pp.180-210.

⁸¹ Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.161-179.

⁸² Paul Preston, *Franco, A Biography*, Harper Collins, London, 1995, pp.115-119.

conservative Catholic, Alcalá Zamora was a former monarchist turned Republican after being convinced of the futility of the Monarchy. Thoroughly convinced of the need for regime change, he was, nevertheless, opposed to radical measures. In his view, some of the progressive reforms of the Republican-Socialist coalition of the first biennium went beyond his conception of a moderate government, particularly regarding the Church.⁸³

The triumph of the Popular Front regime, however, was not a simple thing to deal with, given the various interests, aims, and strategies that its member organisations had, and particularly the internal confrontation between Socialists.⁸⁴ Although at this stage the Spanish Communist party was very small and a lot less influential than its German counterpart, Communist influence made an impact via the new Popular Front policy defined by the Comintern. It was also the moment when the conservative forces, decided to overthrow republican legality were waiting for the right time to strike the decisive blow. The traditional reactionary forces started plotting literally on the day of the election, once the results were known. Military men, the clergy, and the former beneficiaries of the backward system of land tenure had a common goal: not to allow their privileges to be affected by governmental reforms. The marginal victory justified the electoral tactics, but the electoral success did not secure a viable government. The threat of instability was permanent.

Meanwhile, Spanish representatives in Mexico, being less aware about the gravity of the problems faced by the Republican Government, lamented the retrograde attitude of Spanish residents. José María Argüelles Leal, First Secretary of the Spanish Embassy in Mexico, sent a letter to Jesús Navarro de Palencia y Romero, former Agricultural Attaché (*Agregado Agronómico*):

So, there, my dear Navarro, you already know that in Mexico, those of us [Spaniards] who profess Left-wing republicanism, are subjected to a

⁸³ Niceto Alcalá Zamora, *Memorias*, Planeta, Barcelona, 1998, pp.231-234.

⁸⁴ Helen Graham, *Socialism and War*, pp.39-50.

reactionary (*cavernario*) regime, as our colony, honourable exceptions saved, is closer to the Company of Jesus than to that of Azaña.⁸⁵

In the meantime, the turmoil provoked by Right-wing organisations in Spain, seeking an excuse for rebellion, was handled with some difficulty. Besides, the various strikes and the taking over of landed estates made by their own partisans contribute to the disorder. But the fact that the government was divided even for practical matters meant that this was the first weakness to be corrected. The impeachment of the President of the Republic, Niceto Alcalá-Zamora by the Cortes, although he bitterly criticised it as illegal, was the only option to strengthen the regime against the Right-wing pressure, which was keen in thwarting the Popular Front Government.⁸⁶ It was, ultimately, also the recognition that Alcalá-Zamora had been an obstacle for the social-reformist coalition project.

Thus, Manuel Azaña became the second President of the Spanish Republic on 10 May 1936, but the prospects of finally reaching an agreement to form a government were slim. The internal divisions of the Socialist party, the biggest and most influential of the parties constituting the Popular Front electoral coalition, complicated the selection of the best person to succeed Azaña as Prime Minister. Followers of Largo Caballero did not accept the nomination of Indalecio Prieto, a decision that was to have long lasting and even disastrous consequences.⁸⁷

The following months were intense and proved to be crucial for the fate of the Republic. The *CEDA*, Falange, and other Right-wing extremist groups orchestrated political instability. They expected that by provoking agitation against the government, thus increasing political tension, this would pave the way for a military rebellion. There was close contact between Sanjurjo, then in exile in Estoril, with some generals like Emilio Mola, and through the latter with members of the anti-Republican *UME* (Spanish Military Union), such as Colonel Valentín Galarza, and also with some Right wing political leaders like Gil Robles.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ AGA, FMAE, IDD 61, Leg.18o. *Diplomáticos y Cónsules de Carrera en servicio activo en la República Mexicana. Expedientes personales* (III-s-XIII), 12 March 1936.

⁸⁶ Alcalá-Zamora, *Memorias*, pp.408-425.

⁸⁷ Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.61- 63.

⁸⁸ Paul Preston, *Franco, A Biography*, Harper Collins, London, 1995, p.122.

With the triumph of the Popular Front and the return of the progressive republicans to government, it was only a matter of time before the arrival of an appropriate representative to resume the active role towards Mexico and Latin America. After a swift agreement from the Mexican Government, on 9 April 1936 Félix Gordón Ordás was designated as the new Ambassador to Mexico.⁸⁹ Gordón Ordás had been a prominent member of the Radical Socialist Party. Then, along with Diego Martínez Barrio, formed the Republican Union Party in September 1934.⁹⁰ Gordón had also won a seat to the Cortes in the February election, as part of the Popular Front coalition.

On May 28, Gordón reported to Madrid having taken over the Spanish Embassy in Mexico City.⁹¹ Little did he know the restless times he was to face and the relevance of his post in the near future. Although political tension had been increasing in Madrid, his own assignment was a direct consequence of the optimism and confidence of the republicans to be able to fully develop their political programme. In Gordón's speech at the presentation of his credentials, he reassured the Mexican president of the common ideals and aims of Republican Spain and revolutionary Mexico.⁹² This was in fact a perfect mirror image of both the ideological similarities and the nature of the political programmes that the governments of Spain and Mexico were pursuing in the mid thirties. After a long and complicated start, the two republics were, finally, on the verge of bringing about their most cherished democratic and humanistic ideals. There were still some difficult cases, which not even the most persuasive diplomacy could solve. A decade after the *Cristero* rebellion, for example, there were still efforts being made to find out what had happened to the son of a rich Spaniard, Alfonso Díez González, who was captured during the rebellion in the State of Durango.⁹³ Even though it was unlikely that Señor

⁸⁹ AGA Fondo Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Sección México, IDD 61, Embajada de España en Méjico, Leg. 10o. -*Expediente Personal - Excmo. Señor D. Félix Gordón Ordás - 1936 -1939.*

⁹⁰ Paul Preston, *La destrucción de la Democracia en España*, p.271.

⁹¹ Gordón to Minister of State, 28 May 1938, dispatch 93, FUE, FGO, GO 2.1.

⁹² Gordón to Minister of State, 10 June 1938, dispatch 101, FUE, FGO, GO2.1.

⁹³ Letter Anacleto García (Spanish Vice-consul in Durango, Mexico) to Mariano Vidal (Spanish Consul General in Mexico) 23 May 1936, AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4.

Díez was alive after being missing for 10 years, official representations were made not only in his case but also for a myriad of complaints made by Spanish citizens.⁹⁴

By the beginning of the summer, the rumours of an uprising were widely circulating in Madrid, but were generally dismissed as “just rumours” by governmental officials. Nevertheless, the tension accumulated and gained momentum; all that was needed was a spark to light the fire. That came on 13 July with the murder of a member of the Republican Assault Guards, Lieutenant José del Castillo, followed by the immediate reprisal assassination of Calvo Sotelo.⁹⁵ Neither event was reason enough to set in motion a *coup d'état*, but they certainly provided an excuse for the followers of both sides to challenge the government so as to halt each other's radicalism. The Republican Government seemed trapped between the radicalised positions of both Left and Right. Calvo Sotelo, the vociferous anti-Republican reactionary whose goal was to destroy the Republican regime, was the leader of the *CEDA* in the Cortes.⁹⁶ His murder was the final blow that moved half-hearted plotters like Franco to join the uprising.⁹⁷

In mainland Spain, the news of a military uprising came from Melilla on 17 July 1936. So far an isolated manifestation of the plot from an out of the way place.⁹⁸ Then, on 18 July most military garrisons in mainland Spain attempted a *coup* against the government. The military rebels expected to overthrow the government and take over completely in a matter of days. They utterly failed. This initial failure of the *pronunciamiento* was partly due to the popular reaction backing Azaña's Government.⁹⁹ Popular resistance, in addition to the refusal of some military commanders to join the rebellion, made it impossible for the rebels to achieve their plan.

⁹⁴ Despatch no. 366, Mariano Vidal (Spanish Deputy Consul) to Anacleto García, 30 March 1936.

⁹⁵ Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p.274.

⁹⁶ Julio Álvarez del Vayo, *Freedom's Battle*, Heinemann, London, 1940, p.17.

⁹⁷ Paul Preston, *La Guerra Civil Española*, Mondadori, Barcelona, 2004, pp.72-73 and p.75.

⁹⁸ Carlota O'Neill was the wife of Captain Virgilio Leret, Republican pilot in charge of the *Base de Hydros* in Melilla on the day of the uprising. Captain Leret was shot with his close aides; his wife was imprisoned for five years. Her horrifying experience is told in her *Una Mexicana en la Guerra de España*, La Prensa, México, 1964.

⁹⁹ Manuel Aznar, *Historia de la Guerra de España (1936-1939)*, Idea, Madrid, 1940, p.11.

The rebel movement within the Spanish Republic radically polarised Spanish society into two large opposing camps. On the one hand, the Republican side, constituted by Left-wing organisations including socialists, communists, democrats and liberals, supported the government with their popular mass organisations. On the other, the Church, generals and other top-level members of the Army, as well as several monarchist and Right-wing groups, represented the so-called Nationalist side. The latter supported the uprising in order to defend the interests of the elite and, eventually, restore the monarchy. Broadly speaking, therefore, it was a conflict between the progressive forces, allied within the Popular Front Republican Government, against the conservative groups representing the interests of the big landowners, clergy, and military men.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile in Mexico City, due to the longest power cut caused by a strike, only one newspaper was able to report the military uprising in Spain. The workers of the Power Company went on strike between 16 and 24 July 1936.¹⁰¹ However, in spite of the limited newspapers and radio units run on batteries, the Mexican public came to know about the events in Republican Spain within a week of the military rebellion. Two days after the strike was successfully over¹⁰², on 26 July, the *CTM* organised the first demonstration supporting the Spanish Republican Government. The meeting was attended by Republican Spaniards, such as Ambassador Gordón Ordás and, member of the Spanish Socialist Party Anselmo Carretero, who both addressed it.¹⁰³

By this point, the plotters' new plan considered a take-over to be only a matter of weeks. However, the mobilization of masses of supporters of the Popular Front Government was much larger than the rebels expected, and extreme measures had to be taken if they were to succeed. The rebels sought aid from their Italian and German friends. Although they failed at first to convince them to help them out, with a persevering negotiator and a stroke of luck, they finally achieved a favourable

¹⁰⁰ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1986, pp.51-70.

¹⁰¹ José Antonio Matesanz, *Las Raíces del Exilio, México ante la guerra civil española, 1936-1939*, El Colegio de México-UNAM, México, 1997, pp.35 and 36.

¹⁰² On 24 July, the *CTM* organised a press conference destined to explain to foreign residents the reasons for the long strike. Aiming to gain their support, Lombardo went into detailing working conditions of Mexican workers under the American-owned Light and Power Company; see *Historia Documental de la CTM, 1936-1937*, ICAP, México, 1981, pp.156-164.

¹⁰³ *Historia Documental de la CTM, 1936-1937*, ICAP, México, 1977, p.167-172.

solution. Thus the civil strife in Spain was transformed into an international war. The need for solidarity and effective aid for the Spanish Republic became increasingly urgent.

Chapter IV

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the Mexican response in an international context.

Absurdo suponer que el paraíso
Es sólo la igualdad, las buenas leyes,
El sueño se hace a mano y sin permiso
Arando el porvenir con viejos bueyes.
**It is ridiculous to assume that paradise
Is only equality, a good law,
The dream is made by hand and without permission
Ploughing the future with old oxen**
Silvio Rodríguez

1. Mexico's Official Diplomatic Response to the Spanish Civil War

Mexico's foreign policy has traditionally been based on two principles it has developed throughout its history as an independent nation: non-intervention and self-determination. They have been part of the Mexican constitutions ever since 1857, and it was on those principles that Juárez fought the French in the 1860s. After the revolutionary period of 1910-1917, when some countries had not yet recognised the Mexican Government, particularly the US Government, the then Mexican Foreign Minister, Alberto J. Pani, (later the first Mexican Ambassador to Republican Spain, in 1931) developed a defensive and legalistic foreign policy between 1921 and 1923. Calvin Coolidge's Government only recognised Obregón's Government in 1923. During the inter-war period, Mexico's foreign policy started to take the form of a defined doctrine pushing forward its traditional principles. The development of such a doctrine was underway before Mexico was accepted as a member of the League of Nations. Early in 1930, Genaro Estrada, recently appointed Foreign Minister by

President Ortiz Rubio, repudiated, in no uncertain terms, the idea of a government granting recognition to the government of another sovereign country. This, as Estrada pointed out, clearly contradicts the very notion of the principle of self-determination. Therefore, he concluded, the Mexican Government will abstain, from now on, from granting recognition to another government, limiting its action to preserving or removing its diplomatic representatives from any country, without thus implying any judgement in favour of or against such a government.¹ It was Estrada who began to organise a set of principles to be followed by the Mexican governments.² By acting in this way, Mexico was defending its own right to govern in the way it wanted, regardless of foreign wishes, thus giving voice to small nations so far subjected to foreign pressures as to their form of government. To become a member of the League of Nations, Spain, Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan presented Mexico's candidacy in a joint proposal in 1931.³ As a full member of the League since 1932, Mexico's pledge to endorse the principles of the Covenant was wholehearted. It was firmly committed to the promotion of peaceful means to resolve international disputes, and severely criticised the use of force, particularly when two member countries of the League were in conflict.⁴ This was the Mexican attitude in international politics and its stand in either bilateral or multilateral conflicts during the 1930s.

a) The International Context.

The inter-war period was characterised by the different attempts to re-organise both the national economies and international relations. Specific attempts were made to modernise local economies attending to the most needy sectors. The idea of social justice was at the base of these projects, aiming at economic and political progress as the medium to achieve it. Thus, after the "Great War", Italy in the early 1920s, the Weimar Republic in Germany throughout its entire existence, and the Second Spanish

¹ AHDM, no. 39, *Un Siglo de Relaciones Internacionales de México (a través de los mensajes presidenciales)* SRE, México, 1935. See Foreword by Genaro Estrada, pp.iv–vii.

² Arnaldo Córdova, *La Revolución en Crisis, La Aventura del Maximato*, Cal y Arena, México, 1995, p.181.

³ AHDM, *Relaciones Consulares y Diplomáticas México-España, Siglo XX*, EMESP, Leg. 618, Genaro Estrada's reply to the League of Nations, and President Ortiz Rubio's comments on the issue.

⁴ Isidro Fabela, *La Política Internacional del Presidente Cárdenas, Antecedentes Histórico-Jurídicos de la Expropiación Petrolera*, JUS, México, 1975, pp.10 and 11.

Republic, all went through similar processes of economic and political modernisation. Faced with an international economic crisis, these political projects also had similar outcomes.⁵ Coinciding with this feature in Western Europe, the Russian Revolution had also altered European politics.

Particularly relevant is the case of Germany, which had to face those aims within the constraints of the Versailles Treaty, combined with a severe international economic crisis. The German experience of having democratically elected a Nazi leader, when the combined forces of Socialist and Communists were more powerful, was a very persuasive expression of the consequences of divisionism for Left-wing parties.

George Dimitrov, leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party and prominent member of the Comintern living in Berlin, had suffered as the first well-known victim of the Nazi Government in 1933, having been accused of the burning of the Reichstag. Dimitrov's eloquent defence of himself contained such powerful and logical arguments that it had a devastating effect on the Nazi tribunals. The external pressure on the German Government did the rest and saved his life, but the Nazi repression of the Socialists and Communists and the labour unions they commanded was merciless.⁶ Under Nazi rule, Germany had undergone the establishment of a new European order, to be eventually extended the world over.

By the mid 1930s, however, Hitler's Government was still perceived by the Western democracies as a government with which they could do business; it had been democratically elected, was crushing the radicals, and was re-invigorating the German economy; that surely could only mean good news. Implicitly recognising the tight limits the Versailles Treaty had imposed on Germany, the Western Democracies considered it necessary to be flexible and allow some vital space to the defeated nation in its re-constitution. The evident militarism and aggressive nature of the Nazi regime caused certain limited concern but not alarm in the British and French political elites. Furthermore, it could be an ally of great value in dealing with the Communist menace represented by the Soviet Union.⁷ On its own account,

⁵ Paul Preston, *La Guerra Civil española*, Plaza y Janés, Barcelona, 2000, p.48.

⁶ [Georgi Dimitrov] *Georgi Dimitrov accuses...: his final Leipzig speech*, London, Workers' Bookshop, 1934, pp.3-5.

⁷ Santiago Álvarez, *Los Comisarios Políticos en el Ejército Popular de la República, Aportaciones a la historia de la Guerra Civil española (1936-1939)*, Ediciós do Castro, A Coruña, 1989, pp.21-23.

Mussolini's Fascist Italy had long embraced a similar totalitarian rule, which forcefully suppressed Left-wing organisations.

Finally, in the US, Secretary of State for the Good Neighbour policy, Cordell Hull looked to Bolshevik influence to explain threatening attitudes to American interests everywhere, particularly so in Latin America and Republican Spain, in the vein of what Josephus Daniels had criticised as an excuse, three years earlier.⁸ (See Chapter II). The League of Nations, the international organisation that was set up to resolve disputes, faced increasing challenges. By the time of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in October 1935, only a few countries brought up the issue for discussion and demanded an end to the occupation. Mexico was amongst those countries.⁹

In light of the above, it is clear why, at the time of the military rebellion in Spain, it was not difficult for the Western foreign policy makers to define the course of action towards the Spanish conflict. The first few days of the Spanish conflict were very intense and defining. After the initial failure of the military rebellion, the dramatic change in the circumstances surrounding the events determined the fate of both the Republican regime in Spain, and the maintenance of peace in Europe. Both Hitler and Mussolini's decision to support the military rebellion in Spain changed the odds against the democratically elected Government of the Spanish Republic.¹⁰ With their focus on the wider picture, both British and American diplomats and policy makers developed intense activity to elaborate their response in a manner to strengthen peace. They decided upon Non-intervention and Neutrality, respectively, and as a common policy to deal with the issue.

The American traditional policy of Neutrality, aiming at keeping the US out of European issues, was originally a "moral embargo" that became law almost six months after the outbreak of the war in Spain.¹¹ More than just factual reports on the Spanish situation, the information supplied by those diplomats clearly stated foreign intervention. Charge de Affairs Henderson and then Ambassador Davis in Moscow,

⁸ *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers, 1933, Vol. V, The American Republics, Washington, 1952, pp.412-415.*

⁹ Murray to Eden, 31 December 1936, dispatch A 1205, *Annual Report on Mexico, FO371/20639.*

¹⁰ *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series D (1937-1945) Vol. III Germany and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, pp.1-42.*

¹¹ *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers, 1936, Vol. II, Europe, Washington, 1954, pp.471; [Cordell Hull] The memoirs of Cordell Hull, vol. 2, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1948, p.47.*

Ambassador Clark in London, and Ambassador Strauss in Paris permanently reported to Secretary of State Cordell Hull in almost identical terms as Ambassador Bowers did from Madrid.¹² These men, American diplomats who cannot be accused of Bolshevism, advised on the increasing danger that the Nazi-Fascist powers represented for the smaller European countries. However, the State Department, particularly Cordell Hull as Secretary and William Phillips as Acting Secretary, disregarded the official reports from several American diplomats, and pursued a policy favouring the abandonment of the Republican Government in Spain, a democratically elected government with which they had maintained normal diplomatic relations. Furthermore, the regular information regarding the Spanish conflict and its international ramifications was provided by several diplomatic sources. The Western democracies believed that a less radical government in Spain would best serve their economic interests in the Iberian Peninsula. Franco was "perceived as more likely than the Republicans to safeguard foreign investment".¹³ Therefore, although some normal relations with the Spanish Republican Government were to be maintained, and the policy of Non-intervention would theoretically be formal neutrality, in reality there continued to be British partisan work in favour of the military rebel's cause.¹⁴

However accurate these reports were, American diplomats and politicians at the State Department ignored them on the grounds of their being infected with Communist propaganda, but in fact, what they were hiding were their own pro-Fascist views.¹⁵ President Roosevelt himself, a sensible politician and a liberal opposed to the isolationism, and who designed the Good Neighbour policy towards the Americas, failed to assess the urgency of the Spanish conflict.¹⁶ This flaw of abandoning Spain

¹² *FRUS, Diplomatic papers*, Vol. II, Europe, Washington, 1954, *Spain, The Spanish Civil War, I. International Political Aspects*, pp.436-497.

¹³ Mark Falcoff & Fredrick Pike, *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39, American Hemispheric Perspectives*, University of Nebraska Press, USA, 1982, p.21.

¹⁴ Enrique Moradiellos, *Neutralidad benévola: el Gobierno británico y la insurrección militar española de 1936*, Oviedo, 1990, pp.117-188; Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, pp.221-265; van der Esch, *Prelude to war*, pp.72-85.

¹⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁶ It has been suggested recently that President Roosevelt was more committed to the cause of the Spanish Republic than so far recognised. The main argument of this idea is the attempt to send American arms to Republican Spain with the approval of Roosevelt. See Dominic Tierny, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Covert Aid to the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 39 (3), 2004. The frustrated event, however, although linked with Eleanor Roosevelt and some of Franklin Roosevelt's in-laws, does not prove any commitment of the President.

to the hands of its executioners, whilst depriving the Republican Government from obtaining any aid from abroad, had terrible consequences.¹⁷

This policy of Roosevelt's first administration was the perfect match for European Non-Intervention. In spite of the regular and detailed diplomatic reports sent by Claude Bowers to the State Department, American foreign policy towards Spain followed the British criteria. In the case of the United Kingdom, its decision to pursue neutrality was based on two beliefs. In the first place, Non-intervention was a means to avoid a European conflict, and in the second, the hope for a new Spanish Government which would be more convenient for Britain's traditional economic interests in the peninsula. France, under a *Front Populaire* government, similarly constituted to its Spanish counterpart, was initially willing to aid the Spanish Government, particularly having signed agreements to purchase arms in 1935. Due to British pressure on Leon Blum's Government, and the internal criticism in the powerful Right-wing media, France's Popular Front failed to fulfil both its moral and political duties towards Republican Spain.¹⁸

Both policies, Non-intervention and Neutrality, were based on a strategy that considered the possibility of a Communist take-over in Spain, given the strength of the Left-wing groups, the progressive character of the Spanish Republic, and the Soviet support of the latter. Nevertheless, according to the official Anglo-French proposal, the Spanish Civil War should have remained an internal conflict and all of the European countries ought to have kept out of it in order to avoid international involvement and the ensuing risk of war between the European powers.¹⁹ The Soviet Union participated officially in the Non-Intervention Committee, but decided to

Moreover, had he wished to tip the balance in favour of the Spanish Republic, there were many other ways and means to do so effectively. In fact, the evidence produced by Spanish Ambassador Gordón Ordás and some Mexican diplomats points to exactly the opposite.

¹⁷ [Claude Bowers] *My Life, The Memoirs of Claude Bowers*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1962, p.283.

¹⁸ Jean Lacoutur, *Léon Blum*, Homes and Meier, New York, 1982, pp.306-307.

¹⁹ Patricia van der Esch, *Prelude to War, The International Repercussions of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1951 pp.156-164; see also Enrique Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión, El Gobierno británico y la guerra civil española*, Siglo XXI, Madrid, 1996, pp.40-113, and Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, Macmillan, London, 1979.

actively support the cause of the Spanish Government.²⁰ Soviet aid, however, did not reach Spanish territory until after the Soviets had decided they would not be more bound to the agreements of the Committee than any other of the participant powers.²¹

Those who had pointed out the Communist menace saw their worst fears confirmed when the International Brigades were being organised under Communist leadership.²² However, if the organising of the International Brigades was a Comintern initiative, the response rapidly exceeded the expectations and spread well beyond Communist party membership and control.²³ Moreover, although perhaps unknown to most people was the fact that the Comintern itself, engaged in a new approach towards revolutionary tactics worldwide, the so called Popular Front strategy, in which a myriad of political parties would fit, from centre to Left, was worried about “the cause of the Republic”²⁴ Even after the perceived vacillation of the Spanish Government, the Comintern suggested raising the question of forming a new government to effectively defend the Republic, which would include all the parties of the Popular Front, Communist and Socialist.²⁵ The International Brigades became the trench where those non-committed politically the world over found a place to fight for a just cause, and so they did, selflessly engaging in a war far away from their home towns but conscious that their fighting in Spain could prevent a future fight in their own homeland. Not for nothing, the largest contingents in the International Brigade were made up of French, Italian, and German anti-Fascists; but there were also large American and British battalions. Latin American volunteers also arrived, as did others from over fifty countries worldwide.²⁶ There were also a few hundred Mexicans. (See Chapter V).

²⁰ Ivan Maisky, Soviet Ambassador in London, and Soviet representative at the Non-Intervention Committee, gives a fascinating and detailed account of the works of the Committee in his *Spanish notebooks*, Hutchinson, London, 1966.

²¹ Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, p.248.

²² E. H. Carr, *the Comintern and The Spanish Civil War*, MacMillan, London, 1984, pp.22-23.

²³ Devoted to the Popular Front policy, Communist leaders defended the idea of a progressive bourgeois regime; see Palmiro Togliatti, José Díaz, and Santiago Carrillo, *Los Comunistas y la Revolución española, Una antología de textos fundamentales para el conocimiento y comprensión de nuestra historia*, Bruguera, Barcelona, 1979.

²⁴ Telegram Mayor (Comintern, Moscow) to Diaz and Luis (Madrid), 20 July 1936, HW17/27, No. 6484/Spain, 22 July 1936, Most Secret, PRO.

²⁵ *Idem*.

²⁶ For a general view of the International Brigades see Vincent Brome, *The International Brigades: Spain 1939-1939*, London, Heinemann, 1965; for the American and British Battalions, respectively, Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, California, Stanford Press, 1994 and

By early August 1936, Western diplomats had given the Spanish rebels the treatment of belligerents *de facto*, following the German and Italian intervention, and in spite of the strong opposition of the American Ambassador to Spain, Claude Bowers, and other American diplomats. The impression of a radical if not Communist influence gaining control over local authorities in Republican Spain gave substance to the Western perception of a Communist threat.²⁷ There was a long, complex and tumultuous effort made to defend the Republican regime in Spain, in which Mexico's contribution would be unique. (See next section) Nevertheless, by March 1938, Bowers had to report that the Spanish Government "cannot possibly compete against the odds piled up by the unchallenged and open flooding of the Franco Army with material from the Fascist Powers."²⁸ Other American diplomats such as Kirk, then in Moscow, wrote to the Secretary of State in July 1938, referring the Soviet concerns about a general war in Europe, and his positive impression of Stalin.²⁹

However, the policy of Appeasement pursued by Chamberlain gained the day. Germany's rearmament and the occupation of the Rhineland in 1936; the sacrifice of Austria, in March 1938, and then the division of Czechoslovakia in September 1938, were all Hitler's policies supported and approved by the West. Nevertheless, not everybody was convinced that sacrificing yet another country to the Nazi-Fascist alliance was the best way to avoid a broader conflict. Furthermore, in the opinion of US Ambassador to the Soviet Union Joseph Davis, the only way to deal with European business was to bring aid, and support the Soviet Union to strengthen the position of the Western Democracies (France and Britain) to face Hitler. Otherwise, as he wrote to Harry Hopkins in January 1939, it was possible and likely that Stalin, feeling abandoned by those countries would establish an alliance with Hitler himself. Davis concluded that France and Britain, as with the cases of Italy, Poland and Hungary, had "been pushing the Soviet Union towards Germany for ten years."³⁰ Davis' apparent fervent support of Soviet Russia was based on his personal

Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: the British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939*, London: Routledge, 2004.

²⁷ Telegram Strauss to Hull, 4 August 1936, *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers*, Vol. II, Europe, p.459.

²⁸ *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers*, 1938, Europe, Vol. I, p.168.

²⁹ *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers, The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, Washington, 1952, pp.570-571.

³⁰ Joseph E. Davis, *Embajador de Estados Unidos en la URSS*, Editorial del Sureste, Mérida, México, 1944, p.18.

experience of dealing with Soviet authorities and a good deal of common sense. To believe in the honesty and sincerity of the Soviet leaders was only a matter of pragmatism, with no false expectations. The fact remains that the so-called Soviet conspiracy was nothing more than part of the propaganda campaign. 'Soviet influence' in Spain, concluded Álvarez del Vayo, the Spanish Foreign Minister during the Civil War, "was the result largely of the fact that when all the world persisted in denying us our right to purchase arms for our defence, Russia restored us that right."³¹ It was under those circumstances that Mexico pursued its Spanish policy against predominant international opinion and in favour of the Republican cause.

b) Mexico's Assistance to the Second Spanish Republic, the International Front.

Mexico's official response to the military rebellion in Spain was clearly defined by its traditional foreign policy. Mexico's Spanish foreign policy during the second half of the 1930s was particularly intense. Never before had a Mexican Government developed so much diplomatic activity both in the highest tribune of the League of Nations, while at the same time, as we will see, undertaking secret negotiations on behalf of the Republican Government of Spain. In doing so, the Mexican Government pursued effective non-intervention and self-determination, the core of its international canon, as defined by the Estrada Doctrine.

One week before the military rebellion in Spain, a new Mexican diplomatic representative to France was appointed. Adalberto Tejeda presented his credential letters in Paris on 10 July 1936. Little did he know about the intense and delicate mission before him.³² On 20 July, Mexican Ambassador to Spain, Manuel Pérez Treviño, then in France, reported in a brief message to Eduardo Hay, Mexican Foreign Minister: "Madrid, cut off. Situation critical. I believe Government will regain control, though".³³ The next communication came from the Mexican Vice-Consul in Barcelona, Tomás Morales, giving a detailed account of the failed

³¹ Julio Álvarez del Vayo, *Freedom's Battle*, Heinemann, London, 1940, p.78.

³² MAE, AM18-40, Mexique, 34. The rest of the civil servants at the Mexican Legation in Paris, as reported by the Havas Agency on 3 June 1936, included Manuel Escudero, First Secretary, Augustino Fernández Mejía, Second Secretary, and Epigmenio Guzmán, Chancellor.

³³ Telegram Pérez Treviño to Hay, 20 July 1936, AHDM-III-764-1 (1ª Parte) 1936.

insurrection and the popular response to defend legality.³⁴ A few days later, First Secretary Francisco Navarro reported from the embassy in Madrid that Rodolfo Reyes and Pedro de Alba, both Mexican citizens, had asked for and were given shelter in the premises.³⁵

Spanish Republican Ambassador to France, Fernando de los Ríos, made the first official request from the Spanish Republican Government to Mexico on 28 July. Given the success of the British pressure on the French Government to avoid any involvement in the Spanish conflict, the Spanish Republicans were forced to turn towards any other government willing to help them. The day after de los Ríos approached Tejeda requesting Mexico's mediation to purchase arms on behalf of the Spanish Government, the Mexican diplomatic representative was authorised to precede, "providing no international complications with French Government will arise."³⁶ During the first two weeks of the Spanish conflict, when the Republican Government was eagerly looking for arms suppliers with little success, and the real options were starting to fade away, the Mexican stand grew even greater in importance and risk. New diplomatic representatives of the Cárdenas administration were placed in strategic posts with delicate missions to fulfil.³⁷ Mexican diplomats were actively engaged in generating some sort of solidarity for the cause of Spain, which was, according to President Cárdenas himself, the cause of Mexico and of all the democratic countries. For him, Mexico's "behaviour which, according to our judgement, is the one every country should have observed", was the only morally acceptable course in following international law.³⁸ Furthermore, he criticised the western democracies, because:

Under the terms of 'non-intervention', certain European nations shield themselves in not providing aid to the legitimately constituted Spanish Government. Mexico cannot make its own such criteria, for the lack of

³⁴ Dispatch Morales to Hay, 23 July 1936, AHDM -III-764-1.

³⁵ Telegram Navarro to Hay, 28 July 1936, AHDM -III-764-1.

³⁶ Telegram Hay to Tejeda, 29 July 1936, AHDM-III-764-1 (II) 1936-1937.

³⁷ AHDM, EMESP, Leg. 259, *Nombramientos del personal diplomático mexicano acreditado en el exterior* (1905-1936). Appointed as First and Second secretaries to the Mexican embassy in Madrid, were Gregorio Nivón López (Leg. 261) and Francisco Navarro (Leg. 263), respectively, in 1935. They played an important part during the delicate situation produced by the asylum of Spaniards at the Mexican Embassy in Madrid. See next section.

³⁸ *Epistolario de Lázaro Cárdenas*, Vol. 1, Siglo XXI, México, 1974, p.293.

collaboration with a friendly country's constitutional authorities is, in practice, an indirect help -but not for that reason less effective- to the rebels who are threatening the regime that such authorities represent. Hence, that is in itself one of the most cautious ways of intervention.³⁹

Once the Mexican president had established beyond any doubt the official stand towards the Spanish war, Mexican diplomats developed their tasks in their respective areas of responsibility. After having authorised the active involvement of Mexican diplomats to support the Spanish Republican effort, Cárdenas himself took another significant decision. On 10 August 1936, Spanish Republican Ambassador, Félix Gordón Ordás, requested from the Mexican president the sale of arms and war materials. The response was immediate. The Mexican Government would do anything within its power to contribute to the Republican war effort.⁴⁰

A few days after Cárdenas confirmed with the Spanish Ambassador Gordón Ordás the sale of Mexican arms to the Spanish Republic, Álvaro de Albornoz wrote to Julio López Oliván in London and asked him to look after Jacques Marcovici, who was working alongside Mexican diplomats for the same purpose.⁴¹ Then, on 18 August 1936, José Rendón, Secretary of the Mexican Legation in London, requested a licence from the Board of Trade to export arms from the UK to Mexico. The Board of Trade asked whether the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs saw any objection to the issuing of a licence to Mexico for export of arms. The petition included 20 000 rifles and a total of 50 million rounds, for £305,000.⁴² In the Foreign Office there was speculation about the final destiny of the arms, and a scrupulously rigorous procedure prevented the Mexican authorities from purchasing arms in this country. Although British officials were not aware of it, the amounts of rifles and ammunition requested for export to Mexico were similar to those of Mexican arms previously sold to the Spanish Republic. However, the Mexican Government had refrained from allowing the export of any war material to Spain other than that manufactured in Mexico. It

³⁹ *Idem.*

⁴⁰ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras, I-Apuntes, 1913-1940*, Tomo 1, UNAM, México, 1972, p.354; [Lázaro Cárdenas] *Epistolario de Lázaro Cárdenas*, p.290; *México y la República Española*, p.24.

⁴¹ Telegram Albornoz to López Oliván, 14 August 1936, HW12/206 – 065927-S British Intercepts. The Foreign Office immediately noted that Marcovici, a Rumanian, had approached several British armaments firms regarding the purchase of munitions for the Mexican Government.

⁴² Shackle (Board of Trade) to Holman (Foreign Office), August 21, 1936, FO371/20573 W9883.

would only authorise the export from Mexico of war material manufactured in other countries when the governments of such countries were informed of the final destination and accepted it.⁴³

Analysing Mexico's petition, British officials reflected on the fact that Mexico was "shipping large supplies of arms from Vera Cruz (sic) for the Spanish Government, and as you will observe that Vera Cruz (sic) is specified as the destination of the consignment in the present instance."⁴⁴ In truth there was nothing mistrustful about it, given the fact that the port of Veracruz was the only real option for sailing to and from any European destination. There was also no indication that the Mexican authorities were effectively planning to act any differently from their public assertion. In the official reply to Rendón's request, British determination to prohibit the export, direct or indirect, of munitions of war to Spain was firmly stated and, if it was a fact that the Mexican Government was authorizing the supply of such munitions to Spain there would be nothing to prevent fresh supplies purchased in the UK from being sent on to Spain after landing in Mexico, or alternatively used to replace other supplies forwarded to Spain.⁴⁵ The Mexican request to British authorities was not authorised. Moreover, in a secret despatch, the Foreign Office notified the Chanceries in Paris and Brussels of Mexican intentions to purchase arms either in France or Belgium, and asked them to let both governments know what was happening and "hint to them the suspicions which we attach to these orders".⁴⁶

As part of this meticulous fulfilment of their duty, British officials asked Sir R. Lindsay, in Washington, for a verbal communication to the State Department, regarding the suspected supply of arms by Mexico to Spain.⁴⁷ The verbal communication proposed to keep the United Kingdom and the United States of America reciprocally informed about the sales of arms from both countries to Mexico. Perhaps the answer from the State Department was rather disappointing since it stated that for July and August of 1936, the exports of arms to Mexico were

⁴³ Telegram Boal (Chargé in Mexico City) to Moore (Acting Secretary of State), 31 December 1936, *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers*, Vol. II, Europe, Washington, 1954, p.626.

⁴⁴ Shackle (Board of Trade) to Holman (Foreign Office), August 21, 1936, FO371/20573 W9883.

⁴⁵ *Idem.*

⁴⁶ *Idem.*

⁴⁷ Minute of August 26, 1936, FO371/20573, W9886.

“well below the average of the preceding months”.⁴⁸ It was a rather frustrating experience for Mexican officials who were engaged in numerous attempts to mediate in arms-buying for the Republican cause in Spain. Probably the most extreme case was the permanent aim of closing deals and successfully concluding shipping operations in France. The Western democracies were determined not to allow what they perceived as a Communist-sympathetic regime in Spain. Italy’s Fascism was radical, but well within the spirit of anti-Communism. Nazi Germany was even keener to eradicate Communist ideas and influence. Anything would be more acceptable than a Communist oriented regime. Consequently, the foreign offices of the two main promoters of the Non-Intervention policy acted accordingly, preventing any possible aid to the Spanish Republican Government. In spite of the optimism in the triumph of the Republican cause, no diplomatic effort could, it seemed, overcome the anti-Republican alliance.⁴⁹

On 3 September 1936, the British embassy in Paris sent a dispatch to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, briefing them on the Mexican petition to buy arms. They refer to their official response in which they denied the legitimacy of the Mexican request. Simply put, the Mexican request was rejected on the grounds of suspicion of helping Spain. In diplomatic terms, the Mexican Legation was informed that “His Majesty’s Government had learnt from reports published in the press” that the Mexican Government was shipping military supplies to Spain in considerable quantities. In view of their undertakings in the matter, His Majesty’s Government was of the opinion that they could not authorise the issue of a licence for exportation of munitions of war unless they were fully satisfied that they would not then be exported to Spain, either directly or indirectly.⁵⁰

The many attempts to buy arms were constantly thwarted by British diplomacy. The Foreign Office not only prevented Mexico from purchasing arms in the UK, but also effectively persuaded its allies against conducting that kind of business with the Mexican authorities. Colonel Leveque of the Mexican Legation in London had also been making enquiries for similar material in Belgium and France, and the British

⁴⁸ Telegram Mallet to Eden, August 28, 1936, FO371/20573, W9973.

⁴⁹ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras*, p.366.

⁵⁰ Letter from the British Embassy in Paris to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3 September 1936. MAE AM18-40, Mexique, 41.

Embassy in Paris was anxious to inform the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs confidentially of the information in case the *Quai d'Orsay* may have received a similar application.⁵¹ The French Foreign Office did not need much persuasion, since they clearly opposed the *Front Populaire* Government and added pressure from within, in the same way that the overwhelming majority of the Spanish diplomatic corps sided with the rebels. France was not even able to fulfil a small order of war material requested by the Spanish Government, despite the fact that the Franco-Spanish agreement signed in 1935, under whose provisions the request was made, was still in force.⁵² According to the French intelligence service, the two main providers of arms for Republican Spain, at least by the end of September 1936, were Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁵³ The efforts made by Mexican diplomats to fulfil Spanish requests from the eager French sellers were at first met with mixed responses. Finally, the Mexican Diplomatic representative in Paris, later Ambassador to Spain, Adalberto Tejeda, was officially informed of the impossibility of granting authorisation for exporting arms to Mexico. He knew that this was primarily due to political reasons.⁵⁴

Very few of these efforts succeeded, and many of them would be thwarted at the very start or worse, when some agreement had been reached and some down payment had been made, resulting not only in the frustration of the acquisition of essential materials but also in the defrauding of the Spanish Republic which was thus deprived of millions of dollars worth of war materials that never arrived in Republican Spain. Anglo-French promoters of the Non-intervention policy wanted to tighten the grip by entirely controlling the flow of arms to Spain. That is, to Republican Spain. The Mexican Government intended to contribute in pacifying Spain by means of allowing the legal government to regain control of the situation. For the conservative French diplomats the fact that Mexico was openly supporting the Republican Government

⁵¹ *Idem.*

⁵² Jean Lacouture, *Leon Blum*, Holmes & Meier, New York, 1982, p.307.

⁵³ SHAT, 596, 195, Etat-Major de l'Armée - Deuxième Bureau - Section de Centralisation des Renseignements, P/a N° 25.290, Secret, 2 October 1936.

⁵⁴ Letter Yvon Delbos to Daladier (Secrétariat Général - Cession à l'étranger), 13 August 1936, N° 2608, MAE, AM18-40, Mexique, 40.

was clear proof that non-intervention was "*lettre morte*" concerning the government in Valencia.⁵⁵

The Mexican Government issued a communiqué, through its Ministry of National Defence, declaring it unacceptable that the Non-Intervention Committee had attempted to thwart Mexico's efforts in pacifying Spain and pretending to impose its accords on non-European countries, which were not even members of the London Committee.⁵⁶

The fact was that Mexico was interested in the strengthening of the international forum to resolve disputes between countries; therefore, the other relevant front in the international arena was the League of Nations. In spite of its evident weakening as a result of its ineffectual actions towards these delicate issues, it was still the main international legal body to whose rules most countries had pledged to abide. Instructed by their government, Mexican delegates to the League regularly participated in the debates and meetings. They had firmly criticised the invasion of Abyssinia by Italian troops in 1935, and they would devote themselves to pursuing the case of Republican Spain. In the words of John Murray, British Diplomatic representative in Mexico, two major questions of world interest "afforded Mexico [...] the opportunity of clarifying and demonstrating her gratitude towards the League of Nations: [...] the failure of the policy of sanctions to prevent the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, and the civil war in Spain."⁵⁷

Facing American Neutrality and Anglo-French Non-intervention, President Cárdenas praised the aid given by the Mexican Government to the legitimate one of the Spanish Republic as "the logical result of a correct interpretation of the 'non-intervention' doctrine, and of a scrupulous observance of the principles of international morality which are the very basis of the League."⁵⁸ Mexican delegates to the League of Nations put to the Assembly the legality of its stance in the case of Spain and demanded the fulfilment of the spirit of the Covenant of the League contained in

⁵⁵ SHAT, 7N 3373 (Etat-Major de l'Armée - Attachés Militaires - Mexique), Dossier 3 (Notices sur le Mexique, politique intérieure, extérieure, économique et financière, 1916-1939), 2 April 1937.

⁵⁶ *Idem*.

⁵⁷ Dispatch Murray to Eden, 31 December 1936, *Annual Report on Mexico, 80- Spain*, A 1205, FO371/20639.

⁵⁸ *Epistolario de Lázaro Cárdenas*, Vol. 1, Siglo XXI, México, 1974, p.292.

Articles 10 and 11. The Mexican delegation expressed the Mexican interpretation of the concept of non-intervention, how it had to be understood and thus applied by the League. Furthermore, the delegation denounced how the Non-Intervention policy had not only completely failed in keeping other nations away from Spain, but overall, how it had prevented the legal government from acquiring the elements for its defence, to which it was entitled as a full member of the League with full rights.⁵⁹

Discussing the report presented by the Secretary-General of the League of Nations to the XVII General Assembly on October 2, 1936, the Mexican delegate, Narciso Bassols, pointed out the necessity of strengthening the means of the League efficiently to apply the existing judicial rules. International regulations, he stated, must be scrupulously observed by the states under the active and effective surveillance of the League. He criticised as "regression" the legalistic approach in the case of the Spanish conflict, and argued in favour of the Mexican position regarding the latter, not only as a sovereign decision, but also as a moral and lawful act. The Spanish political phenomenon, he urged, had acutely raised the urgency for the League to establish the way to an effective enforcement of rules.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, no actions were taken in accordance with the Mexican perception. Nevertheless, there was to be a new opportunity for the Mexican delegates at the League to take their proposal further. Hence, on 29 March 1937, the Mexican Foreign Ministry issued an official proposal insisting on discussing the issue of the war in Spain in the Assembly of the League, particularly under Article 10 of the Covenant, as a means to strengthen the international organisations and oblige all its members to effectively observe its rule.⁶¹ The Mexican position was also in accordance with the Havana Convention of 1928, and scrupulously observed its canon. But nothing could have been done to convince the big powers to change their attitude. New conferences and assemblies of the League would bring together Spanish Republican and Mexican diplomats in September 1937 and in May 1938, where their common determination was shown

⁵⁹ Isidro Fabela, *Neutralidad, Estudio Histórico, Jurídico y Político. La Sociedad de las Naciones y el Continente Americano ante a la guerra de 1939-1940*, Biblioteca de Estudios Internacionales, México, 1940, pp.262-263.

⁶⁰ Narciso Bassols, *Obras*, p.394; see also *Memoria de Relaciones Exteriores, 1936-1937*, p.28 and *México y la República Española*, p.26.

⁶¹ Isidro Fabela, *Neutralidad*, pp.262; *Memoria de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1936-1937*, México, DAPP, 1939, pp.29-30.

once more.⁶² In the event, the League of Nations proved itself ill-equipped to preserve international harmony, and unable to offer an effective mechanism to resolve differences between States. The Spanish war was the ultimate test for the League of Nations, and it failed miserably.

Latin America, with an obviously strong interest in Spanish issues, fell under the influence of an officially neutral US. The Mexican position was perceived as radicalism, and was not to be pursued. Particularly when Catholic faith was on the cards. The religious issue played as part of the enormous propaganda campaign developed by the so-called Nationalists and their local allies. The same issue was to be systematically referred to in the US, where Catholic votes counted, particularly after Pope Pius XI declared that “a satanic preparation has re-lighted in Spain.”⁶³ The closest position to the attitude assumed by Mexico was that of Colombia, although not held as strongly as in Mexico. Within two weeks of the outbreak of war in Spain, both Houses of the Colombian Congress had unanimously adopted resolutions of solidarity with the Republican Government. Those resolutions sealed the attitude of Colombia through the war, although the issue still caused deep divisions in Colombian society.⁶⁴ Cuba intended to remain neutral but the division was evident: the government held a divided position; Fulgencio Batista and the military supported the rebels, and the civil government of Miguel Gómez and vast sectors of the population, the Republic. The main incident was the impounding of the Republican ship *Manuel Arnús* in November 1936 when on its way to Veracruz to load arms. The *Arnús* odyssey, as Gordón called it, was the main issue during the Spanish Civil War as far as Cuba was concerned. After a tiresome process in which Mexican *chargé d'affaires* in Havana, Oscar Reyes Spíndola, successfully intervened, it was freed to go to Mexico in March 1938.⁶⁵ By then, General Oscar Benavides's Peru broke off

⁶² *Memoria de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, pp.158-160; [Julio Álvarez del Vayo] *Speech of Señor Álvarez del Vayo at the Council of the League of Nations, May 1938*, Union of Democratic Control, London, 1938.

⁶³ Dispatch Osborn (Holy See) to Eden, 15 September 1936, FO371/20539, W11665/62/41. Addressing Spanish clergy and laity exiles, Pius XI significantly mentioned Russia, China, and Mexico as proof of the extended evil menace.

⁶⁴ David Bushel, *Colombia*, in Mark Falcoff and Frederick B. Pike (eds) *The Spanish Civil War, American Hemispheric Perspectives*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1982, pp.159-202.

⁶⁵ FUE, G.O. 21, Dispatch no. 92 dated 7 March 1938, Dispatch 102, 21 March 1938 and Dispatch 127, 18 April 1938.

diplomatic relations with Republican Spain.⁶⁶ Before the Spanish war was over, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Peru had recognised Franco's Government. Mexico firmly and permanently rejected the Latin American proposal (Uruguayan in origin) for mediation in the Spanish conflict. It would have meant a de facto recognition of the rebels as belligerents.⁶⁷

Alongside the secret representations on behalf of the Spanish Government, and multilateral negotiations regarding the war in Spain, Mexican diplomats engaged in bilateral negotiations with Spain to find the best possible way to resolve some of the urgent issues

c) Mexico's assistance to the Second Spanish Republic, the bilateral front

In the tangled atmosphere created around the arms embargo against Spain, not even the public decision by Mexico to support the Republicans was free from speculation. The Mexican Government made explicit its position *vis a vis* the Spanish Republic. Nonetheless, in the case of the Mexican sale of arms to Spain, three different figures were assumed to be accurate. On 28 August 1936, the *Daily Telegraph* carried a paragraph headed "Mexican Arms for Government: Cargo of 50,000 Rifles".⁶⁸ The day before, a ciphered message had been received from Mr. Gallop, in Mexico City, in which he claims to be reliably informed that the consignment "consisted of 40,000 rifles and 20,000,000 rounds."⁶⁹ The real number of Mexican rifles sent to Spain was actually a lot smaller, but whatever the number of rifles in that shipment, the relevant issue was the fulfilment of an engagement assumed with loyalty towards the governmental legality represented by Republican Spain. The actual significance of Mexican arms would be addressed in *Homage to Catalonia*, by George Orwell, who fought under his real name of Eric Blair, and claimed that the "Mexican cartridges were better and were therefore reserved for the machine guns... I always kept a clip of German or Mexican ammunition in my pocket for use in an emergency."⁷⁰

⁶⁶ After a period of ambivalence, Peru effectively broke off diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republic on 22 March 1938.

⁶⁷ Telegram Lay to Hull, 28 August 1937, *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers, 1937*, Vol. I, Europe, Washington, 1954, p.380.

⁶⁸ Shackle (Board of Trade) to Holman (Foreign Office), August 21, 1936, FO371/20573 W9883.

⁶⁹ Gallop to Eden, 26 August 1936, *Supply of rifles to Spain*, FO371/20573 W9804.

⁷⁰ Orwell, George, *Homage to Catalonia*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1938, pp.42-43.

In his State of the Union speech on 1 September 1936, President Cárdenas referred to the sales of arms to Spain:

The Spanish Government sought from my Government through His Excellency the Ambassador Señor Gordón Ordás the sale of war material, a request which was immediately complied with, 20,000 7mm rifles and 20,000,000 rounds of national manufacture being placed at his disposal in the port of Veracruz.⁷¹

Then he added:

The sale has also been authorized to the Colombian Government of 5,000 rifles of 7mm similarly manufactured in this country.⁷²

Western policy makers of the 1930s, often driven by anti-Communist sentiments, did not always present an accurate picture of the aid the Mexican Government gave to Spain, and some historians have reproduced such a vision.⁷³ Furthermore, Mexico being the only other country that openly supported the Republican cause, its stance was used to criticise the Soviet Union. The latter was the main supplier of war material that allowed Republican Spain to put up a fight against Nazi-Fascist assisted rebels. Whether comparing or contrasting both sources of Republican support, part of the criticism regarding the supply of arms was that the rifles were old and practically useless. Another criticism assumed that the delivery of arms was, contrary to the Soviet case, by courtesy of the Mexican Government, or at least a selfless and non-profit action.⁷⁴ The reality was quite different. On 7 September 1936, Gordón Ordás requested from the Ministry of State (as the Spanish Foreign Office was then named) permission to sign a contract proposed by the Mexican Minister of Finance, according to which the purchase of war material, food and other essentials, could be charged against the existing Mexican debt to the Spanish Government. The terms of the new

⁷¹ Gallop to Eden, September 8, 1936, "Reopening of the Mexican Congress", FO371/19792 A7651.

⁷² *Idem.*

⁷³ Thomas G. Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 1978, pp.58-74.

⁷⁴ Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain, The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*, Murray, London, 1998, p.103.

contract put to the Spanish Ambassador by the Ministry of Finance were certainly more flexible than those experienced by Spanish officials with the Soviet Government.

Nevertheless, this was by no means a gift, but a regular business arrangement between two honourable parties, looking for the best and most convenient deal considering the circumstances. According to the terms of the contract to build ships for Mexico in Spain, signed on 14 February 1933, the Mexican Government owed for the credit plus the interest, and had to pay in pesetas, but given the instability of the Spanish currency once the Civil War began, it was impossible to determine the exchange rate. Additionally, the Mexican currency, silver peso, was replaced by a copper-zinc alloy, given the rise in the price of silver, which put the value of the peso above its nominal value. Hence, the Mexican proposal modified the terms of the 3rd and 4th clauses of the original agreement and established a new currency for repayment, golden pesos of 75 cg.⁷⁵ There was no legal reason for the Mexican side to modify the contract. Although an element of convenience could be found in the fact that reaching the new agreement would smooth the process of repayment, whilst at the same time provide certainty to the commercial exchange, it would also prove further commitment to the Republican cause. The selling of arms was essentially a political operation, but it was made strictly under the principles of normal international relations between two countries with special links.

The signing of the new contract was authorised on 28 September 1936, and was put into practice on the following day. Suddenly, the Spanish Republic had acquired an important source of credit in times of emergency. Although they did not lack funds, the option provided by the contract gave certain flexibility to one of the most active Spanish diplomats devoted to the task of buying arms for the Republic. Gordón's mission required accessible cash to seize opportunities that opened up only briefly, given the enforcement of Non-intervention. The Mexican authorities, for their part, were pleased to have reached a reciprocally beneficial agreement, and were prompt to grant loans in cash or materials to see their debt reduced. This is not to say that the Mexican authorities were unduly benefiting from the agreement. The new contract

⁷⁵ *Contrato Celebrado por la Venta que el Gobierno de México hizo al de España, de Armamento*, 9 October 1936, AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-996 Exp.87.

provided a solid base for any commercial and financial exchange with Spain, both in terms of economic certainty –now that the Mexican debt could be re-paid but not necessarily by money transfer- and in extending the aid that the Mexican regime was eager to give to its friend and political ally. However, although some of the rifles that arrived to Republican Spain were in fact old, it cannot be assumed that the Mexican Government sold them. Some of those old rifles, truly museum pieces, were actually bought by the Spanish Ambassador in Mexico, Gordón Ordás, certainly not as his first choice but probably as the only option he was faced with under the circumstances.⁷⁶ Mexico and Spain had not signed a treaty of friendship or assistance, but that was irrelevant when the Spanish request was put to the Mexican Government. The generosity of the Mexican position consisted of the very fact that no other government was ready openly to sell arms to Spain, in the flexible terms on which the sale was conducted, and in the decision to allow Mexican diplomats to act as intermediaries for the Republican Government.

The first, most important, and most publicly advertised cargo of arms sent from Mexico to Republican Spain was on board the Spanish ship *Magallanes*, which, after an epic journey, arrived safely in Cartagena, just in time for the preparation of the defence of Madrid.⁷⁷ The rifles were of Mexican manufacture but not old, as has been commonly believed. Some historians have erroneously assumed that these were the so-called *Mexicansky*, but this was not so.⁷⁸ The Mexican-made rifles were 7mm, whilst both the Russian Mosin and its American-made version Mosin-Nagant, were 7.62mm. It is possible, however, that some American made Mosin-Nagant had travelled from the US to Mexico during the belligerent period of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), and eventually found their way to Spain. The name *Mexicansky*, like some of the volunteers fighting in Spain, and particularly the Soviet advisors, referred to as *los mexicanos*, was a simple cover up used during the first days of the Soviet involvement in Spain. There were other cases where the name of

⁷⁶ Dispatch Murray to Eden, *Annual Report on Mexico, 89- Spain*, 31 December 1936, FO371/20639 A1205

⁷⁷ M. Henri Goiran to Delbos, 3 September 1936, Dépêche 74, M.A.E. Am18-40, Mexique, 16; FO371/20639 Murray to Eden, *Annual Report*, 31 December, 1936.

⁷⁸ Ironically, the model of the Mexican-made 7mm rifles was "*Alemán*", as specified in the first clause of the sale contract of 9 October 1936, AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-996 Exp.87.

Mexico was otherwise used, as in the case of Francisco Pérez López, also known as *El Mexicano*, for no particular reason.⁷⁹

By the end of August, the list of war material unloaded in Cartagena, as reported by French intelligence, included a Mexican cargo with rifles and machine guns; six Russian cargos containing between 150-200 vehicles and their operators, including light tanks and planes with their own pilots and personnel. Finally, the list included an English cargo containing 6 planes of Dutch manufacture, and a Swiss or Norwegian steamer with an undefined arms cargo.⁸⁰

Mexican efforts to provide effective long-lasting aid to the Spanish Republic were systematically thwarted by Western diplomats keen on preserving formal Non-intervention whilst enforcing the undeclared aim of crushing the Republican Government. In Washington there was a close follow up on every suspected arms cargo regarding Mexico, not only in American ports but in Mexican ports as well. This was the case of the *Motomar*, which was preparing its voyage to Spain, loaded with war material for Republican Spain, including American planes purchased by Ambassador Gordón.⁸¹ The pressure of the American Government on the Mexican Government prevented this particular cargo from leaving.⁸² Apart from the difficulties and obstacles Mexican aid had to overcome regarding American neutrality and Non-Intervention, there was another problem for the aid delivery, and that was the insufficient caution with which such help was being organised. The excitement and openness with which the sending of arms to Spain was referred to in the newspapers, namely in *El Nacional*, worked against Republican interests, not only on the propaganda front, but also effectively in preventing new shipments from arriving in Spain.⁸³

⁷⁹ Francisco Pérez López, *Dark and Bloody Ground, A Guerrilla Diary of the Spanish Civil War*, Little, Brown & Co. Boston (Toronto), 1970. In the introduction to this book, Victor Guerrier wrote: "The barbaric genius is what has created the legend of El Mexicano (as Francisco was known by his enemies)", p.14.

⁸⁰ SHAT, 596, 194 Etat-Major de l'Armée - Deuxième Bureau S.E.A. (Alger), E/C. 27 October 1936, N° 1720/J, Secret.

⁸¹ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Embajada Española en Méjico, R-996, Exp.31 *Motomar*.

⁸² Telegram Hull to Daniels, 16 April 1937, *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers*, Vol. I, Europe, Washington, 1954, pp.587-588; Telegram Boal to Hull, 12 July 1937, *FRUS*, pp.592-594.

⁸³ Given the clear opposing stands, regular press reports appeared in *Excelsior* and *El Nacional*, including sensitive information that could be used for purposes other than mere propaganda, particularly in the case of the Republican cause.

The French Army High-Command information service reported the capture of the Mexican cargo destined for the Republican Government by rebel forces late in November 1936. Captured in the Strait of Gibraltar, the Mexican vessel was escorted to Algeciras where the war material was unloaded. It included 22 French Schneider cannons, 356 boxes of ammunition, machine guns and Lebel rifles. No reference was made to the people on the ship.⁸⁴ No more extreme example was the case of the *Mar Cantábrico* in March 1937. Loaded with food, arms, clothes, and some Mexican volunteers, this second cargo was to be lost for the Republicans. The ship was expected and so, intercepted by rebel vessels. They took over the precious cargo – which later moved Franco to refer to “Divine Providence” being on his side- and executed the volunteers. The Mexican volunteers were shot in Algeciras; the only woman was spared, and made her way back to Mexico. (See Chapter V).

The provision of supplies for the Republican Government had to go through the most incredible manoeuvres to avoid the strict surveillance set up by the Western powers. During the first few weeks of the implementation of a total arms embargo to Republican Spain, a complicated net of providers, dealers and transport achieved some effective deliveries. In almost every attempt, the Mexicans played audaciously. Usually, Mexican diplomats were the official buyers, requesting arms, and signing for the cargos. There were also Mexican ships charged with making the final delivery. One of these ships was the *Jalisco*, formerly *Ibai*, and under the command of Mexican captain Manuel Zermeño –whom the French authorities believed was Spanish because his place of birth was Guadalajara.⁸⁵ According to Gerald Howson, Captain Zermeño was in fact a crewmember of the *Durango*, one of the Mexican ships built in Spain, who was entrusted to buy and rename the vessel.⁸⁶ Although many of the attempts of shipping arms for Republican Spain were frustrated or crushed, some of the ships loaded with food, clothes and Mexican-made war material managed to smuggle small American pieces of no relevance for the war effort. Thus,

⁸⁴ SHAT, 596, 194 Note de l'Etat-Major de l'Armée - Deuxième Bureau - Section de Renseignements, 26 November 1936, P/a N° 25.693, Secret, SHAT, 7N 2762 Fonds de l'Attaché Militaire.

⁸⁵ Salengro to Daladier, 22 October 1936, N° D.F. 81.787, S.H.A.T. 519, 189a.

⁸⁶ Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain*, p.103.

Republican ships such as the *Ibai* and the *Sil*, were used to send significant amounts of sugar, chickpeas, and some war material.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, Tejeda remained very active in Paris, and reported the successful acquisition of war material for Republican Spain, although pointed out the need for tanks and planes and the enormous difficulty in acquiring them. So far, he had managed to purchase different military equipment for the Republican cause to the value of 150 million Francs.⁸⁸

If finding ways to provide military supplies to Republican Spain proved terribly complicated for Mexican diplomats, their efforts supporting the Spanish Government seemed contradictory in the light of the granting of asylum to supporters of the rebels at the Mexican Embassy in Madrid. Although a humanitarian gesture in principle, the abuse of the right of sanctuary put to the test the patience and tolerance of the Republican authorities. Perhaps unwittingly, Mexican diplomats became the instrument of anti-Republican militants organised in the Fifth Column.⁸⁹ This was not only the case of the Mexican embassy, but given the close relationship between the two governments, the issue became particularly sensitive. Not having been in Madrid at the time of the military rebellion, Ambassador Pérez Treviño faced a *fait accompli* regarding refugees at the embassy. However, not only did he assume full responsibility, but even encouraged the protection of Right-wing radicals. Soon the Mexican embassy was providing shelter to over 800 refugees, some of whom were

⁸⁷ There were at least seven different contracts through which Mexico sold to Republican Spain over 25 thousand tons of chickpeas, 600 tons of sugar, over 30 million 7mm cartridges, over 20 thousand new 7mm rifles, over three thousand 7mm rifles made in 1934, over ten thousand hand grenades, and a number of Mexican-made war material parts. American made military equipment acquired by Mexico before the outbreak of the war in Spain, thus not included in the American Neutrality Act of 8 January 1937, was also included and sold, in smaller amounts. The latter case prompted the imaginative suggestion that by doing so, and then buying new material, Mexico managed to entirely renovate its military hardware. That was not a viable option and it could not have happened; simply because it was not within Cárdenas's priorities. Given the fact that the payment for those sales was made against the existing Mexican debt with Spain, for the ships built there, Cárdenas's critics referred maliciously to those ships as paid with chickpeas. AMAE, Min. Edo., Leg. R-996, Exp.87.

⁸⁸ Telegram Tejeda to Hay, 10 October 1936, AHDM-III-764-1 (2a. parte) 1936-1937.

⁸⁹ Mary Bingham, wife of the Third Secretary in the Mexican Embassy in Madrid, Juan F. Urquidi, was perhaps responsible for initiating the granting of asylum to Spanish nationals, although, as we saw earlier, Francisco Navarro accepted two well-known conservative Mexican nationals at the Mexican Embassy.

active Fifth Columnists.⁹⁰ His embassy was tainted by what was perceived as an unfriendly attitude towards the Spanish Republic, to say the least.

Pérez Treviño proposed that the local authorities resolve the issue by taking the refugees out of Madrid, but there was no agreement. The presence of refugees in diplomatic representations in Madrid became a serious issue during the first months of the war, and an extra diplomatic pressure on Republican Spain, in this case particularly from the representatives of Chile and Argentina.⁹¹ When the need of an urgent solution became evident, it meant the removal of the Mexican Ambassador.⁹² As if intended to compensate for the damage made, the new Mexican Ambassador, appointed early in January 1937, was Ramon Pérez de Negri, a radical revolutionary who seemed prone to going too far in the opposite direction. At a time when the Republican Government was making desperate efforts trying to convince the Western powers of its democratic credentials, far from any radicalism, Pérez de Negri's appointment did not seem to contribute to such an endeavour.⁹³ Nevertheless, his reports on the political situation in Spain and the evolution of the war effort between January and August 1937 were perhaps the most complete and thorough analysis made by any Mexican diplomat in Spain.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Pérez de Negri reached an agreement to evacuate the embassy and disengage from the hundreds of buildings under the Mexican flag.⁹⁵ Possessed by his revolutionary radicalism, Pérez de Negri suggested to President Cárdenas that he take the opportunity to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, given the fact that the two Republics were

⁹⁰ Telegram Tejeda to Hay, 8 January 1937, AHDM-III-764-1 (2a. parte). Tejeda was only sending the telegram on behalf of de Negri, who was in Paris waiting for his diplomatic credentials to go to Spain.

⁹¹ Telegram Navarro to Hay, 13 August 1936, AHDM-III-764-1 (2a. parte).

⁹² Dispatch Pérez Treviño to Hay, *Informe Confidencial*, 10 October 1936, AHDM-III-764-1.

Although originally a revolutionary, Manuel Pérez Treviño was an anti-Communist who became a close friend and ally of Emiliano Iglesias. They were, coincidentally, diplomatic representatives of their respective countries with each other's in 1935.

⁹³ At the ceremony presenting his credentials to President Azaña, Pérez de Negri was reportedly wearing Mexican revolutionary-like costume, with cartridges belt, and a leather jacket. Azaña was in a morning suit, as was customary.

⁹⁴ Dispatch Pérez de Negri to Hay, *Informe Confidencial*, 17 March 1937, AHDM, Exp.III-765-1 (4a. parte). Strictly from a military perspective, which deals with strategic and tactical military manoeuvres, the reports sent by Colonel Reynaldo Híjar, Military Attaché in Valencia, match those political reports of Pérez de Negri.

⁹⁵ Telegram Pérez de Negri to Hay, 4 February 1937, AHDM-III-764-1 (2a. parte).

the only allies of Spain. Cárdenas wrote a long reply to de Negri explaining his reasons for not proceeding according to de Negri's wishes.⁹⁶

It is clear that the Mexican president did not need a maverick as Ambassador in such a delicate position. Pérez de Negri was removed only seven months after his appointment, leaving the Mexican Embassy in the hands of General Leobardo C. Ruiz, Military Attaché in Paris. During his temporary appointment, Ruiz worked to regain the smoothness of the bilateral relationship. This period served to make stable the otherwise intense relations, then engaged in delicate endeavours. In spite of the difficulties faced by the Republican Government, there was still hope for victory. The decision was made by the Mexican Government to decorate President Azaña, who had previously received the Aztec Eagle Band in 1933. This time Azaña was decorated with the Aztec Eagle Collar, as a symbol of the struggle of the Spanish people.⁹⁷ After some consideration, Cárdenas decided to appoint Adalberto Tejeda as Mexican Ambassador to Republican Spain late in 1937.⁹⁸ Narciso Bassols replaced him in Paris. Tejeda was more identified with both Cárdenas and Azaña's ideology and politics. He remained in Spain until the end of the war, regularly reporting on the military and political situation in Spain.⁹⁹

Apart from the more urgent needs of the ongoing war effort, and with foresight of the need to find a place of refuge for a defeated Republican army had already been glimpsed. Juan Simeón Vidarte was entrusted by Negrín to explore the possibilities of a Mexican refuge.¹⁰⁰ This was in no way a defeatist attitude, but a prudent concern. Late in 1937, Vidarte met with Cárdenas and put before the Mexican President the issue of a possible Republican emigration to Mexico.¹⁰¹ He received ample

⁹⁶ [Lázaro Cárdenas] *Epistolario de Lázaro Cárdenas*, pp.294-295; Centro Republicano Español de México, *México y la República Española, Antología de documentos, 1931-1977*, CREM, México, 1978, pp.30-31. Cárdenas letter to de Negri was dated 10 May 1937.

⁹⁷ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-2656, Exp.3, *Condecoraciones extranjeras*, 22 October 1937. General José Miaja was also granted a distinction. He was awarded the Military Merit, First Class, Green Collar decoration; *Idem*, 23 October 1937.

⁹⁸ AMAE, Leg. R-756, Exp.57, *Protocolo, Facilidades para el paso del General Leobardo C. Ruiz*, January 1938.

⁹⁹ Tejeda's reports between January 1938 and February 1939, are contained in AHDM-III-764-1 (7a. parte)

¹⁰⁰ Juan-Simeón Vidarte, *Todos fuimos culpables, Testimonio de un Socialista español*, FCE, México, pp.788-789.

¹⁰¹ Juan-Simeón Vidarte, *Lázaro Cárdenas, un discurso y tres testimonios*, Valle de México, México, 1971, pp.42-43.

reassurances of a warm reception should the Spanish Republicans go into exile. There was still, needless to say, a well-based hope of victory over the rebels, but as a truly realistic politician, Negrín took the precaution of seeking a safe retreat for loyal Spaniards. In his interview with Cárdenas, the President repeatedly gave Vidarte his opinion on the Spanish Republicans' mistakes. In Cárdenas's view, the first mistake of the Spanish Republican regime was the failure to create a truly Republican army, by means of the removal of suspicious elements. Evidently, the Spanish Republican Government was aware of that, and had begun a process pursuing that aim, although not to the extent and depth required to modernise it sufficiently to make it a proper Republican army. The other relevant mistake, according to the Mexican President, was not to have developed a profound agrarian reform from day one of the Republican regime. "Your greatest misfortune", Vidarte was told by Cárdenas, "was not to have enough time to achieve those two essential reforms."¹⁰²

d) The Home Front

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War propelled an immediate reaction on the part of both public and private sectors in Mexico. A divided society assumed partisan positions. The Cárdenas administration promptly fulfilled the Spanish petition for sale of arms, whilst the labour movement enthusiastically organised the raising of funds for the Republicans and developed campaigns of solidarity for the Spanish people. The conservative press linked with the Spanish community, for their part, developed an opposing campaign, criticising the government position.¹⁰³ Opposition to Cárdenas's Spanish foreign policy, although reduced and limited to an easily identified sector, was present throughout the whole conflict and was by no means trivial. According to a press release which appeared in Paris, in a secret meeting, the Mexican Senate rejected a proposal by Senator Félix Rodríguez to grant extraordinary powers to president Cardenas to continue, within the limits of public funds, the sending of arms to the Spanish Government, and to urge the Mexican Congress to make public its spiritual solidarity.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² FPI/M-Fot 410, Juan-Simeón Vidarte, *Lázaro Cárdenas, un discurso y tres testimonios*, pp.42-43.

¹⁰³ Thomas G. Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1981, pp.58-144.

¹⁰⁴ MAE, AM18-40, Mexique, 41, *A propos des envois d'armes en Espagne*, Paris, Agence Havas, 8 September 1936.

The Spanish conflict was to be permanently present in Mexican society in both Mexican and Spanish circles. The division was no longer by nationality but by ideological or class division. Even in far away places within the Mexican Republic, some Spanish residents showed their loyalty to the Republican regime in Spain. In Tapachula, for instance, in the Southern state of Chiapas, Spaniards had a Vice-Consulate to consult when needing to resolve their concerns. Eduardo Sánchez, the Vice-Consul, had regular contact with Mexico City and was perfectly aware of the military rebellion in Spain. On 24 July 1936, he received the communication of Ambassador Gordón regarding the official communiqué issued in Madrid.¹⁰⁵ A week later, the local labour organisation, the South Eastern Chamber of Labour, affiliated to the *CTM*, sent a telegram as part of the solidarity campaign initiated by the latter.¹⁰⁶

In Northern Mexico, the Vice-Consulate in Durango had a close relationship with the Spanish Ministry of State, as evidence of the extent to which bilateral relations were encouraged at all levels. Regularly, official communications to consulates were made through the normal channel, i.e. the Consulate General and the Embassy in Mexico. This also showed the importance of this city, and the region for Spanish interests in Northern Mexico. The latter, however, did not have an impact in political or economic terms during the war. There was a significant level of trust between the embassy and those consular offices that firmly showed their stand with the Republican Government.¹⁰⁷

Cárdenas's second State of the Union speech to the Mexican Congress showed how much things had changed in a few months, both internally and abroad. Fortunately, the directions of the changes produced in Mexican politics were both favourable to the president and to the most needy sectors. In the section dedicated to Mexican international relations, the first reference was to the case of the Italian-Abyssinian conflict and how the Mexican representatives dealt with the issue at the League of Nations. As expected, Cárdenas criticised the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and explained why the Mexican stand was the only stand compatible with the fulfilment

¹⁰⁵ Telegram Barcia to Gordón, 24 July 1936, AGA, FMAE, 10240, Leg. 4, *Correspondencia 1935-1937*.

¹⁰⁶ AGA, FMAE, 10240, Leg. 4, *Correspondencia 1935-1937*, 1 August 1936.

¹⁰⁷ AGA, FMAE, 10235, Leg.55, *Servicio Español de Información*, 16 April 1938.

of the Constitution of the League of Nations.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, before mentioning the Spanish request for arms, something that had been very much in the public debate and had created great expectation, the president facing Congress mentioned the agreement reached with the Spanish Government over agricultural products. Earlier, during the Spanish “*Bienio Negro*” period, the Spanish Government had passed a Decree banning the importation of Mexican chickpeas. Once the Popular Front Government was in office, the negotiations pursued by the Mexican Government resulted in the end of the ban, and the elimination of a 10% import tax established for chickpeas, and a 20% import tax for coffee; both important agricultural products exported by Mexican farmers.¹⁰⁹

The announcement of this must have smoothed the scepticism of the critical members of the Congress. Indeed, it was possible to refer to the Spanish petition and the presidential decision of selling arms, a delicate issue very much in the centre of public concerns, and receive a standing ovation. The presidential action had been endorsed by Congress, and was certainly supported by popular organizations. However, far from making everybody happy in Mexico, it further antagonised conservative circles, but Cárdenas went further and even did so audaciously. At the official ceremony on 15 September 1936, celebrating independence from Spain, after praising the national heroes that “gave us our Motherland and Freedom”, President Cárdenas also called out “long live the Spanish Republic”.¹¹⁰ That action was not only a significant gesture full of spontaneous sentiment, but also the expression of a profound conviction of the legitimate cause of democracy. A real conviction, about a real democracy; yet the fate of Spain was sealed, as the gesture was made by a supporter whose rhetoric was more powerful than his resources.

Shortly after the successful defence of Madrid, a group of militiamen and women were visiting Mexico, touring in their military uniforms, they paid a visit to the chamber of Deputies.¹¹¹ Amongst them was Caridad Mercader, mother of the future assassin of Trotsky. The group enjoyed the hospitality of the deputies, members of

¹⁰⁸ Isidro Fabela, *La Política Internacional del Presidente Cárdenas*, p.19.

¹⁰⁹ *Idem*, p.20.

¹¹⁰ Enrique Krauze, *Lázaro Cárdenas, General misionero*, Biografía del poder/8, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1987, p.159.

¹¹¹ Murray to Eden, 19 November 1936, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, FO371/20551 W17129

the National Revolutionary Bloc, and of course, of the *CTM*. They understood that the great majority of the Spanish colony in Mexico sympathised with the rebels, and thus appreciated the attitude of Mexican labour, which had threatened to harass them with strikes and boycotts.¹¹²

On his 1937 New Year's Day message to the Mexican nation, significantly, Cárdenas included the aid provided to the Spanish Republican Government, reporting the form of arms sales.¹¹³ Mexican public opinion was kept well informed of the evolution of the war effort, and the extent to which Mexico's government was supporting the Republican cause. Therefore, when significant actions were taken in favour of the Spanish Republic, they would have broad social support. The most significant events included accommodating 500 orphaned Spanish children in 1937, to be protected by the Mexican State, and the invitation extended to a small number of Spanish intellectuals in the same year and later in 1938. The children went to live in Morelia, the capital city of the State of Michoacán. The intellectuals were soon organised and continued their work in the *Casa de España*.¹¹⁴ (See Chapter V).

Once again, when informing Congress about Mexican foreign affairs in 1937, the Mexican president thoroughly explained the reasons for sending a note to the League of Nations on 31 March. Issued on the specific case of Spain, it argued that it was more convenient to ascertain international neutrality, in cases like that of Spain, as in accordance with the principles of the Pact of the League of Nations. Hence, it established a clear distinction between the legitimate governments suffering from aggression, which should be given the aid they were entitled to, and the aggressor groups, to whom it would be inappropriate to provide aid, for them to continue fighting an even bloodier struggle.¹¹⁵ In this, his third State of the Union Speech, as usual, Cárdenas acknowledged the sale of arms to the Spanish Government for the

¹¹² *Idem*.

¹¹³ Dispatch Murray to Eden, 7 January 1937, *Situation in Mexico*, FO371/20639 A527. The value of the arms sales was reported in pesos (\$5,291,166.26) and presumably included the famous 20 thousand 7mm rifles and 20 million rounds.

¹¹⁴ Centro Republicano Español de México, *México y la República Española*, pp.32-33; Fagen, *Exiles and citizens*, pp.22-31; Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, pp.58-102.

¹¹⁵ AHDM, Segunda serie, no. 9 *Las relaciones internacionales de México través de los mensajes presidenciales, 1935-1956*, SRE, México, 1957, p.21.

⁸⁴ *Idem*, p.21.

amount of \$8'200, 078.21, over half a million pounds sterling, and thus reported by the British Diplomatic representative to the Foreign Office.¹¹⁶

The Spanish Embassy praised the indefatigable campaigning in favour of the Republican Government pursued by *El Nacional*, the semi-official newspaper, under the influence of its chief editor, Héctor Pérez Martínez.¹¹⁷ Likewise, Manuel Landin, from the Propaganda Undersecretary in Barcelona, recommended providing all possible graphic material to *El Popular* through the Spanish Embassy in Mexico.¹¹⁸ It was evident that both newspapers had contributed to change the way Spanish issues were perceived, making Spain and its war an everyday matter for many Mexicans.

2. Preliminary Conclusions

When the troubled Spanish Republican Government faced the military rebellion in the summer of 1936, the choice between providing support to a reforming government suspected of Communist influence or accepting a Conservative one aided by the Fascist powers, presented the British Government with no alternative. Given its policy of appeasement, His Majesty's Government soon decided not to intervene to support the legitimate government of Spain. A rebel victory would avoid a Communist take-over, which threatened, in their view, to lead to a Republican Government resembling a "Kerensky regime".¹¹⁹ On this basis, if Fascism was an obstacle to Communism then the existence of a Fascist regime in Spain would be a price worth paying, and Franco was the man for the job. The Right-wing military uprising that stunned the Second Spanish Republic was supported almost immediately by Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. The Republican Government had been democratically elected and maintained normal diplomatic relations with the Western European democracies. However, a decision was taken by Britain and France to pursue a policy of non-intervention in spite of the Spanish Government's request for

¹¹⁶ Dispatch Gallop to Eden, 2 September 1937, *Political situation in Mexico, Summary of the Presidential Address to the Congress*, FO371/20639 A6649.

¹¹⁷ Loredó Aparicio to Minister of State (Barcelona), 24 January 1938, dispatch 49FUE, GO 2.1.

¹¹⁸ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-979, Exp.1, *Embajada española en Méjico*, 20 August 1938.

¹¹⁹ During the Russian revolution of February 1917, power was seized by moderate revolutionaries, amongst whom Alexander Kerensky eventually became Prime Minister. His government, nevertheless, gave way to the radical Bolshevik takeover of October giving the Soviets total control over the government.

help. American policy towards Spain was based on the Neutrality Act, modified in December 1936 in recognition of the new situation. Perhaps behind this attitude was, on the one hand, the fact that Republican Spain's economic and trade relations with Britain, and thus with the United States, had been deteriorating for some time and, on the other, the perception of the Republican Government as too liberal. Only the Mexican Government was prepared to help the Spanish Republic, acting in accordance to its traditional foreign policy and the principles of the Covenant of the League of Nations. The Western democracies considered a less radical government in Spain would best serve their economic interests in the Iberian Peninsula. Franco was "perceived as more likely than the Republicans to safeguard foreign investment".¹²⁰ Therefore, although some normal relations with the Spanish Republican Government were maintained, and the policy of non-intervention would theoretically be formal neutrality, in reality there continued to be British partisan work in favour of the so called Nationalist cause.¹²¹ They also received generous aid in the form of the Non-intervention of the Western democracies, which was undoubtedly highly effective. In addition to this, London, for instance, played a highly visible role in the propaganda war, being the home of continuous anti-Republican, and pro-"Nationalist" publications.¹²²

The two opposing trends of perceiving the conflict and pursuing a Spanish policy during the civil war developed in a complicated manner. Whilst some were seeking formal Non-intervention and neutrality, but were actually influencing the conflict, either directly (Germany, Italy, and the USSR) or indirectly (Britain, France and others), Mexico was openly supporting the Republic. For a while, even Soviet-American meetings would avoid the issue, or only marginally refer to it.¹²³ In the

¹²⁰ Mark Falcoff & Fredrick Pike, *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39, American Hemispheric Perspectives*, University of Nebraska Press, USA, 1982, p.21.

¹²¹ Enrique Moradiellos, *Neutralidad benévola: el Gobierno británico y la insurrección militar española de 1936*, Oviedo, 1990, pp.117-188; Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, pp.221-265; van der Esch, *Prelude to war*, pp.72-85.

¹²² For example, by October 1936, several editions had been published of a pamphlet with the title "A Preliminary Official Report on Communist Atrocities in Southern Spain – Committed in July and August 1936, by the Communist Forces of the Madrid Government". Later, a second and a third report with the same titles were published. A rather cynical publication was made in 1937, after the first aerial bombing warfare practised by the German Luftwaffe with the title "Guernica", being the "Official Report of a Commission Appointed by the Spanish National Government to Investigate the Causes of the Destruction of Guernica on April 26-28, 1937".

¹²³ Telegram Davies to Secretary of State, 10 July 1937, FRUS, *Diplomatic Papers*, The Soviet Union, 1933-1939, Washington, 1952, pp.386-388.

case of Soviet involvement, Stalin's decision to support the Republican Government, once the Non-Intervention Committee proved itself to be a farce, led the Western democracies to fear a possible Communist take-over in Spain. Nothing could have been further from the truth, as the Soviets declared their intention of contributing to the restoration of a bourgeois Republic, an outcome favoured particularly by the Americans and the British.¹²⁴

After the failure of the original plot against the Spanish Government, and when the rebels began their revival through Nazi- Fascist coalition support, the loyalists gathered around the Republican cause became dependant on foreign aid from a variety of limited sources. However, the disparity between the amount and the quality of arms supplied was appalling. The Communists complained, for example, that the aid received through France was insufficient and was arriving too slowly.¹²⁵

In the case of the so-called Communist threat Spain, there has been a great deal of exaggeration about such influence, particularly at the beginning of the conflict, where there was no real Communist influence in the government. Therefore, it is more appropriate to conclude that, as the evidence shows, the strategy followed by the Communists bore in mind both the struggle against Fascism and the defence of democracy, whilst, against the commonly held misconception, the Western Powers, the so called Western democracies, were acting against it. For the Comintern, given the alarming situation in connection with the Fascist conspiracy in Spain, it was decided that the first and most important aim was to preserve intact, at any cost, the ranks of the Popular Front. The call for unity seemed the most sensible thing to do, as any split in the front there would be utilised by the Fascists in their fight against the people. The Communists were also hardening their position towards other Left-wing tendencies, traditionally more influential in working class circles and with the peasantry. The Anarchist movement in Spain would suffer from this particular stand, but not only as a direct consequence of the growing Communist influence, but because the war effort

¹²⁴ Fernando Claudín, quoted in Paul Preston (ed) *Revolution and war in Spain, 1931-1939*, Methuen, London, 1984, p.251.

¹²⁵ Telegram Secretariat (Comintern, Moscow) to Thorez and Marc (Paris), 14 August 1936, HW17/14, No. 6886/France, 15 September 1936, Most Secret.

demanded more committed behaviour from all the parties defending the democratic regime embodied by the Republic.¹²⁶

Apart from the official representation at the League of Nations, and given both the urgency of the Spanish need and the refusal of the Western countries to abide by the terms of the Covenant, Mexican diplomats were instructed to pursue a number of legal actions on behalf of the Spanish Government, such as the purchasing of arms and war material. Preventing the Mexican Government from successfully helping the Spanish Republic was an essential part of the enforcement of the Non-Intervention agreement. To that effect the foreign offices of the Western democracies were working closely together. They succeeded in thwarting any aid the Spanish Government might have received from abroad. This time not even the expectations of their own nationals and their economic interests were good enough reasons to sell arms to Mexico. In the case of Mexico, the propaganda campaign was based on clandestine activities developed by both the Italian, and “more particularly, the German Legation”¹²⁷ (See Chapter VI).

The sales of arms to Spain by Mexico were a regular transaction, albeit under extraordinary circumstances. It was business as usual. The relevance of the Mexican position was ironically catapulted by the attitude assumed by the so-called Western democracies, which hypocritically abandoned the Spanish Government on the grounds of Non-intervention. By honouring its engagements and its compromises within the League of Nations, Mexico stood up for its own principles in an extraordinary manner. Its almost lone position in international politics during a defining decade of the twentieth century gave Mexico some prestige.

The fact that the US Democrat Government was pursuing a softer approach towards its neighbours was also relevant for the success of Mexican economic policy. This achievement, however, owes more to Mexican internal politics than to the Rooseveltian New Deal policy of the Good Neighbour, as suggested by the fact that no other Latin American country pursued such a policy. For once, US-Mexican

¹²⁶ Telegram Mayor (Comintern, Moscow) to Medida (Madrid), 17 July 1936, HW1727, No. 6485/Sp.22 July 1936.

¹²⁷ Dispatch Gallop to Eden, August 5, 1937, *Reported beginning of a fascist movement in Mexico*, FO371/20639 A5928.

relations would not be stretched to their limits, and the claims would be settled at the negotiation table. The Mexican Government was eager to help the Spanish Republic, but not so eager as to compromise its position in the international arena, nor its relations with important partners, namely the US. The limits of the Mexican stand, however, were set by Mexico's strategic use of political pragmatism and ethical considerations. The Mexican position was largely and legally based upon the principles contained in the Charter of the League of Nations, hence the only limits to its actions were set by concepts such as self-determination and non-intervention. Ironically, there were different ways to interpret and to apply those principles.

Chapter V

Mexico Supports the Second Spanish Republic.

Los hombres sin historia son la Historia.
Grano a grano se juntan largas playas
Y luego viene el viento y las revuelve
Borrando las pisadas y los nombres
Men without history are History.
Large beaches are made grain by grain
Then the wind comes and shuffles them
Erasing the footprints and the names
Silvio Rodríguez

1. The Leading Forces of Solidarity and Aid for the Spanish Republic.

The internal political situation in Mexico, where progressive forces were pursuing a programme to bring about social justice, was not very different from that of Spain. However, unlike in Spain, tensions between the opposing political factions were softened because of the overwhelming strength of one of them: the revolutionary government of Cárdenas and the labour movement. Hence, although the political situation was similar in both countries, it can be said that the consequences differed.

The impact of the Spanish Civil War on Mexican society was evident, and so was the division the debate generated. The rapid formation of sides, as we have seen, followed the same pattern as in the Spanish belligerent camps. The official Mexican stand regarding the war was firm and clearly in favour of the Spanish Republic, but it was not only a governmental policy. Even though Mexican society was profoundly divided over the issue, it was obvious that the majority of

the Mexican people were in favour of the legitimate regime and decidedly behind any effort to support the Republican cause.

Most references to Mexican support of the Spanish Republicans emphasise the governmental stand and the gestures of Mexican intellectuals in favour of their Spanish counterparts, whereas in fact, the strongest and most unequivocal decision to support the Spanish cause was shown through the role played by the Mexican labour movement. Under the leadership of Secretary General, Lombardo Toledano, the recently founded Mexican Workers Confederation (*CTM-Confederación de Trabajadores de México*), and the Workers' University (*UO-Universidad Obrera*) linked to it, encouraged Mexican society to support the Republicans in Spain. There were also numerous activities organised by other organisations, such as the ruling *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR-National Revolutionary Party), the Mexican Communist Party, and the organisations formed *ad hoc*, including actions taken by Spanish honorary consulates nation-wide in Mexico. Likewise, whether organisations or individuals, a number of actions involving Mexican nationals took place in Spain during the war years.

In spite of the clear stance of the Mexican government towards Republican Spain, however, the sending of volunteers was not encouraged, yet a few hundred made their way to fight for the Spanish Republic. Some fought within the International Brigades, some in the ranks of the Spanish Popular Army. They were scattered throughout Spain and so was the relevant information regarding them or it was lost. An attempt is made here to put together their story and their names.

a) The Role of the Labour Movement.

Barely a week had passed since the outbreak of the military rebellion in Spain when the most important Mexican labour union organised a demonstration supporting the Republican government. On 26 July 1936, the *CTM* gathered to show its firm stance in favour of the democratic regime in Spain. Lombardo recalled his prophetic words five years earlier there, when the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed. In his usual style, he recalled that when the Spanish

Monarchy had collapsed, rich Mexicans and intellectuals alike rejoiced when the bloodless revolution occurred, as no essential change had been produced. He remembered, how shortly after, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Group (affiliated to the *PSOE*), had asked him to give a speech on this issue, but they were denied the use of the premises of the *Casino Español* in Mexico City, and in consequence they congregated at the *Orfeo Catalá*. Lombardo affirmed that whenever the Spanish Republic stopped being only a formal structure and became a new regime challenging the economic order established in Spain, then the Spanish Republic would stop being a sympathetic cause for the rich and would become a curse for them. Now, he declared, this is exactly what had happened.¹

After Lombardo's, the speech by the Spanish Republican Ambassador Gordón Ordás in the *Teatro Principal* was short but powerful, the kind of oratorical piece required by an already enthusiastic audience wanting to hear about the strength of the Republican workers in Spain, fighting to keep alive the ideal of social justice and a democratic regime. He started by accepting that he was one of those who naively believed in the readiness to compromise of those who, having witnessed the magnificence of 14 April, would be prepared to surrender some of their privileges.² After making a brief summary of the history of the Spanish Republic and the meaning of the Popular Front victory, he vehemently labelled the rebellion as Fascist, and went so far as to say that rather than militarism in Spain, the Republicans preferred Communism.³ Perhaps that remark was a little imprudent, given the criticism of the Republican Government made by the rebels and their Mexican allies. But at this early stage, when the attempt on the Spanish regime had failed, Gordón's confidence in the triumph of the Republican Government was solid, so much so that he ended his speech inflamed, solemnly declaring that this time there would be no mercy for the traitors. From that day onwards, the work carried out by the Spanish Republican ambassador in Mexico found an extraordinary ally in the Mexican labour movement and its leader.

¹ *Historia Documental de la CTM, 1936-1937*, ICAP, México, 1981, pp.212-213.

² *Futuro*, no. 6, August 1936, pp.10-11; *Historia Documental*, p.218.

³ *Futuro*, no. 6, p.12; *Historia Documental*, p.221.

As a political writer, Lombardo's attitude toward Fascism was clearly shown in his numerous press articles and public speeches. He considered Fascism to be but a form of capitalism, even if he recognised "democratic Capitalism" as far preferable to its diseased manifestation, pure Fascism.⁴ Lombardo was very critical of the policies of Western capitalist nations towards the rise of Fascism; therefore, he condemned the vacillation and hesitation of English and French appeasement. These were very Communist approaches to international politics and yet Lombardo was bitterly criticised by the Mexican Communist Party. This is one of the ironies surrounding the personality of a self-styled Mexican Marxist, leader of the greatest trade union the Mexican labour movement has ever known, opposed by both the Communists and the right-wingers, and the most influential man in Mexican politics as far as a progressive government would allow. Only a year after its formation the *CTM* was facing its first schism, which meant the withdrawal of the main industrial labour unions such as the Electricity Power Union (*SME*), the miners and railway unions, and the teachers union. The Mexican CP bore the responsibility for this.⁵ It took the presence of the Comintern envoy, Earl Browder, Secretary General of the USCP, to make his fellow Communists work with Lombardo and the *CTM*.⁶ Throughout the long process of labour unification the Communists' dictum was "nothing with Lombardo, but everything with the masses that follow Lombardo". During the Calles-Cárdenas rift, assumed to be a bourgeois clash, the Communist stance at first was "Neither with Calles nor with Cárdenas"; after the National Proletarian Defence Committee was set up, it changed to "Not with Cárdenas; with the *cardenista* masses, yes". This traditional sectarian attitude of the Mexican CP began to change as a result of Dimitrov's popular front strategy for the Comintern.⁷ Furthermore, the Spanish conflict also worked as an extra element of unification, cementing a rather loose relationship.

⁴ Millon, *Mexican Marxist*, pp.108-109.

⁵ Alicia Hernández, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, p.152.

⁶ James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzon de Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX*, Interview with Vicente Lombardo Toledano, pp.326 and 327; Alicia Hernández, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, pp.162-165.

⁷ Lombardo only met Hernán Laborde, General Secretary of the Mexican CP in Moscow, in 1935. Dimitrov introduced them. Laborde was attending the famous VII Congress of the Comintern. Lombardo was visiting Soviet trade unions. James W. Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX*, Interview with Vicente Lombardo Toledano, 164.

As we know, the first couple of weeks after the military rebellion in Spain were decisive for the development of the war effort. The internationalisation of the Spanish conflict became evident shortly after the unsuccessful coup. More than ever, in view of the growing international encirclement around the Spanish Republic, the leftist press was keen to show the events taking place in Spain. This job was undertaken wholeheartedly by one big newspaper only, *El Nacional*, and the fortnightly magazine *Futuro*, now closely associated with the *CTM* and the *Universidad Obrera* (Workers' College), founded only days before the *CTM* (see Chapter III), devoted its pages to the alarming situation in Spain, particularly reproducing the speeches given at demonstrations and meetings. Anselmo Carretero, a member of the *PSOE* who happened to be in Mexico at the time of the military rebellion, immediately became active in the war effort. Firstly, promoting solidarity for the Spanish Republic, and then later becoming instrumental in setting up the military intelligence service (*SIM*) back in Spain. Participating in one such meeting, Carretero gave a lengthy, albeit emotive, speech. His analytical mind as a trained engineer allowed him to dissect the Spanish conflict as the international struggle towards which it had evolved.⁸ After spending the first few months of the war in Mexico, actively collaborating with the Spanish Ambassador Gordón, and in close contact with the Mexican labour movement, he went back to Spain, where he developed a delicate mission as a politically engaged engineer. He worked within military intelligence at a time when both the rearguard and the divisions in the Republican ranks were a priority.⁹

Although most of the commercial press was in favour of the rebels, including the bigger newspapers *Excelsior* and *El Universal*, with bigger print runs, and usually better means of distribution through the traditional channels, it is no less true that word of mouth remained an effective way of circulating news. Besides, *El Nacional* was permanently to report truthful accounts, clearly siding with the Republican government, and the bigger labour union would also have its voice

⁸ *Futuro*, no. 7, September 1936, pp.15-19.

⁹ Interview of the author with Anselmo Carretero, Mexico City, 7 October 1999.

heard, notwithstanding the odds.¹⁰ By now, it was known that the Mexican rifles had arrived in Madrid, and that the launching of an offensive on the Spanish capital was imminent. The Republican government had left for Valencia, and the *Alcázar* of Toledo was about to be taken by the rebel army. The mystification of the events there would develop into a myth for the rebels.¹¹

Meanwhile, as part of the attempt to raise the consciousness of Mexican workers and their families, the *CTM*'s magazine was making it a regular issue for its readers to learn about the Spanish war. Stressing the fact that the events occurring in Spain could also easily happen in Mexico if not enough effort was made to avoid it, *Futuro* published its first full-issue homage to Spain in October 1936.¹² Some of the Mexicans who had already been in Spain began to write first-hand accounts of the actions there. Some of them would return later as volunteers. Andrés Iduarte, a Left-wing journalist who was living in Spain at the time of the military uprising, compared the Mexican Revolution to the Spanish revolutionary movement of October 1934, which, according to Iduarte, was in the origin of the present conflict. He established the parallels between the two political projects, starting with their main objective, that of social justice. For Iduarte, the two revolutionary movements were facing the same enemy, although the situation in Spain was far worse than in Mexico because there the Fascist Powers were supporting the local reactionaries.¹³ Therefore, he urged Mexican workers to support the Republican anti-Fascist struggle by fighting their local allies in Mexico. The latter was the common ground for Mexican progressive forces. The Spanish war influenced many of the actions of Mexican workers, and even became the catalytic factor for their grouping. A special branch of revolutionary workers, artists and painters developed an essential part of the solidarity campaign in favour of the Spanish Republic. Previously developed on an individual basis, the creation and exhibition of posters developed by young revolutionary artists committed to making an impact on public opinion, became a team effort. Raul

¹⁰ A detailed reconstruction of the conflict in the Mexican press is in José Antonio Matesanz, *Las raíces del exilio Español en México, México ante la guerra civil española, 1936-1939*, ColMex-UNAM, México, 1999.

¹¹ Juan Simeón Vidarte, *Todos Fuimos Culpables, Testimonio de un Socialista Español*, FCE, México, 1973, pp.450-454.

¹² *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 8, October 1936, *Homenaje a España*.

¹³ *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 11, *La Revolución Mexicana y la Revolución Española*, pp.14-17.

Anguiano was a founder member of the Popular Graphics Workshop, (*Taller de Gráfica Popular*) along with Juan O'Higgins, Luis Arenal, and others, which was organised by militant artists to support the solidarity campaign of the Spanish Republican cause early in 1937. They are responsible for many of the posters portraying the war effort, based on the premise of the Spanish war as the fight of the working classes against Fascism.¹⁴

Touring Mexico as part of an international campaign to counter balance the rebels' anti-Republican propaganda, Marcelino Domingo, former Minister of Education in the first Popular Front governments, participated in a gigantic demonstration in Mexico City in February 1937.¹⁵ There, he not only realised the varied and powerful popular support for the Republican cause which existed in Mexico, but the impact of the Spanish war in a far away land.¹⁶ His words motivated some Mexican youth to contribute to the war effort. In spite of right-wing criticism of the Republic, and probably more determined because of it, both Spanish Republicans in Mexico and their supporters continued to denounce the nature of the war in Spain. "Nobody can deny anymore", Domingo said, "what a few people denounced in July 1936, that the war going on in Spanish territory is an international war."¹⁷ Efforts were being made to convince the Western governments of the evident significance of the war, as ample social sectors in their own countries became actively involved defending Spanish legality; but even governments considered as progressive failed to act accordingly. Mexico being the exception, its name became a sort of synonym for the Republican cause, even within Spain. And this put Mexico in a delicate position.

On 31 July 1937, Lombardo gave a speech to a Congress of the *CTM* and denounced the beginning of a Fascist movement springing up in Mexico.¹⁸ Then he placed at the disposal of the Attorney General the material on which his

¹⁴ Interview of the author with Raul Anguiano, Mexico City, 19 October 1999.

¹⁵ *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 13, March 1937.

¹⁶ This was the first such meeting, allegedly attended by 10 000 people. It was organised by the so-called Mexican Popular Front, which included the National Revolutionary Party, the Communist Party, the peasants' organisation (*CCM*) and the *CTM*. It was held at the *Toreo de Cuatro Caminos* (main bull-ring) in Mexico City.

¹⁷ Marcelino Domingo, *España ante el mundo*, México Nuevo, México, 1937, p.158.

¹⁸ Dispatch Gallop to Eden, 5 August 1937; *Fascist activities in Mexico*, FO371/20639 A5928.

allegations were based. As a result, there were police raids on two organisations, the Middle Class Union, and the Union of Revolutionary Veterans. According to Rodney Gallop, from the British Legation in Mexico, the former organisation was in receipt of German subsidies.¹⁹ Although dismissing Lombardo as a Communist, hence "likely to scent out 'fascism' anywhere", the Foreign Office took notice of Fascist propaganda activities in Mexico. Although documents were seized and several individuals arrested, proceedings were abandoned apparently on the direct orders of President Cárdenas, and the two organisations were allowed to resume their activities.²⁰ (The British Foreign Office assumed that there was a Cárdenas-Lombardo conflict "strikingly reminiscent of the Roosevelt-Lewis relationship in the United States).²¹

In general, campaigning for the Republican cause was an indirect way to confront local adversaries, as we have seen, but in doing so, labour organisations intended to elevate the level of consciousness of their affiliates as a means of strengthening their own positions within Mexican politics. The solidarity campaign developed by labour also proved to be valuable encouragement for widening the social and political spectrum of Mexican solidarity towards Spain. Mexican public opinion was divided over Spain as it was over a number of other issues such as governmental policies, workers' strikes, and so on. Thus, in order to gain broad support for its cause, Mexican labour developed an ambitious permanent propaganda campaign.²² In the centre of such a campaign was the exhibition of posters and photographs, which was complemented by the publishing of similar material in *Futuro*. It included a photographic supplement showing the war effort of the Republicans, the destruction caused by the Nationalists and the appalling conditions of the population, although still sustaining optimism towards a victorious end to the war for the Republic.²³ December 1937 was a particularly active time in showing Mexican support of the Spanish Republican cause. The *CTM* resolved to call the second week of December 'The Week of Spain', and

¹⁹ Dispatch Gallop to Eden, August 11, 1937, *Political situation in Mexico*, FO371/20639 A6194.

²⁰ *Idem*.

²¹ *Idem*; the remark was made by W.D. Allen.

²² It must be understood that the word "propaganda" in Spanish means to make widely known, to spread; closer to the original Latin meaning of *propagare*, to propagate, than to the English concept of political advertisement or proselytism.

²³ *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 18, August 1937, p.15.

focused on organizing demonstrations, meetings, lectures, fund-raising events, and publishing even more than previously on the situation in Spain and explaining why the Spanish war was important for Mexico. On 19 December, at the regular venue, the Green Room at the Fine Arts Palace, the presence of American artists, such as Gale Sondergaard, and her husband, film director Herbert Biberman, highlighted the festival. The other guest of honour was Spanish Ambassador Gordón Ordás, and a special guest, the representative of the National Federation of Workers of the Film Industry, Francisco Macen.²⁴ Under the headline “Hollywood stars and Spanish children”, Gale Sondergaard’s speech was reproduced, which pointed out that “normally, I would rather be shot than make a speech, but tonight, on the contrary, I would have to be shot to prevent me from speaking” She then referred to the warm hospitality and friendship shown to her that made her feel one of them and prompted her to address the audience. She explained the various activities developed by the Hollywood Committee of Artists in favour of Spanish children and the collection of clothes and toys made amongst the children of actors –Robert Montgomery, Edward Robinson, Virginia Bruce, Gloria Swanson, Melvyn Douglas, Edward Arnold, and others.²⁵

1938 certainly was a year of achievements for the progressive forces in Mexico. Particularly important was the contribution of the labour movement. In its January issue, *Futuro* featured the international events organised by the *CTM* in favour of the Spanish children suffering in Republican Spain. The editorial, attempting an objective analysis “regardless of political sympathies [...] for one side or the other”, warned of the inevitability of a war in Europe based on the developments of the war in Spain.²⁶ By March, however, the decision of the Mexican government to expropriate the oil industry occupied all the attention and energy of Mexican labour. Shortly afterwards, the decision to transform the ruling party, as a means to show the empowerment of a new political elite and the strengthening of revolutionary principles, passed almost unnoticed. In spite of Lombardo’s involvement in the actual transformation of the *PNR* (National

²⁴ *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 23, January 1938, pp.10-11.

²⁵ *Futuro*, no. 23, January 1938, p.15. Some other North American artists supporting the solidarity campaign in the US that sent their warmest greetings to the event in Mexico City included Boris Karloff, Robert Young, Bing Crosby, Frank Tuttle, Henry Fonda, Bette Davis, Melvyn Douglas, Lionel Stander and Donald Ogden Stewart. *Futuro* no. 23, January 1938, pp.10-11.

²⁶ *Futuro* no. 23, January 1938, p.5.

Revolutionary Party) into the *PRM* (Party of the Mexican Revolution) not even *Futuro* commented on the issue. (See next section)

In the summer of 1938, yet another workers' newspaper appeared as the official organ of the *CTM*. It had an encouraging start with an ambitious plan of two daily editions, including a summary section in English. On the morning of 1 June, *El Popular* emerged "with the focus on the future", as its editorial read. During the rest of the Spanish conflict, *El Popular* devoted most of its international section to the Spanish war, with a rather over-optimistic pro-Republican view.²⁷ *El Popular*, as *Futuro* had been doing for the past two years, included regular contributions from leading Spanish personalities, some of whom lived by then as exiles, such as poet, historian and painter José Moreno Villa.²⁸

Given the increasingly critical international situation, and after succeeding in unifying and consolidating the Mexican labour movement, Lombardo worked for the unification of the Latin American labour movement. In 1938, the Latin American Confederation of Workers (*CTAL*) was created.²⁹ One of Lombardo's major and permanent concerns was the unity of the working-class, as well as the continuous strengthening of Fascist powers and the spread of their influence all over the world, particularly in Latin America. The formation of a Continental labour union would encourage the unity of the labour unions in each country as the first step in Continental unity.³⁰ The Latin American Workers Congress was held in Mexico City between 5-8 September 1938, including representatives of more than a dozen Latin American countries as delegates³¹ and honorary delegates including, significantly; from France's *CGT*, Leon Jouhaux, from

²⁷ *El Popular, Órgano de la Confederación de Trabajadores de México*, Año 1, Tomo I, 1 June 1938, Morning Edition.

²⁸ Moreno Villa arrived in Mexico in 1937, after touring the US in a series of pro-Republican events. A compilation of his works before the exile is in Carolina Galán Caballero, *José Moreno Villa escribe artículos (1906-1937)*, Diputación Provincial de Málaga, 1999.

²⁹ The Continental workers congress gathered only a few days before the Anti-War Congress, also organised by the *CTM* and in which Lázaro Cárdenas participated, alongside many of the delegates to the labour gathering; see Chapter IV.

³⁰ James W. Wilkie y Edna Monzon de Wilkie, *México visto en el Siglo XX, Entrevistas de Historia Oral*, Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas, México, 1969, p.359.

³¹ The main national labour organisations attending the congress were Argentina's *CGT*, Bolivia's *CST*, Chile's *CT*, Colombia's *CT*, Ecuador's *CNO*, and Paraguay's *CNT*. Local or regional workers' organisations included railways, sugarcane and banana plantations, maritime, and others, from Cuba, Peru, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Venezuela. For political reasons, Brazilian labour organisations were legally banned from attending.

Spain's *CNT*, Félix Martí Ibáñez and from the *UGT*, Ramón González Peña. John Lewis attended in representation of America's Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO), at the time rival of the AFL, whose leader, William Green, labelled the congress as "little less than a Communist gathering". Other special Spanish guests included Margarita Nelken, Luis Cobos and Daniel Anguiano.³²

Amongst the various early resolutions of the Latin American Worker's Congress, there was one on Spain. The call to promote broad support for the Spanish working-class and the Spanish people in general throughout the Continent was an essential part of the new organisation's aim. It echoed what the *CTM* and the Mexican labour movement had been doing for the last two years. The Spanish war was indeed assumed to be an extreme case of class struggle, and for the time being, the latter's expression was anti-Fascism, hence victory over the Nazi-Fascist supported Spanish rebels was essential and not only for Spanish workers. After three days of deliberations, the delegates decided to establish the Continental Alliance in a historic gathering at the Fine Arts Palace of Mexico City, resolving among other issues specifically related to their class unity aims, to show their solidarity towards Spanish Republicans fighting against a common enemy, i.e. Fascism.³³ Addressing the congress, González Peña reminded the delegates of the urge to remain truly united so as to face powerful enemies. Surely a lament derived from the troubles with which Spanish Republicans were then dangerously confronted.³⁴

Having a defined position towards the war in Spain, the Mexican government pursued policies tending to explain the nature of the situation and the reasons for governmental decisions. Consequently, many of the initiatives and actions developed by private groups found, in many cases, either the government or labour as the best allies through which to materialise their aims. (See next section).

³² *El Popular*, 9 September 1938, p.5.

³³ Resolution no. 5, On Spain, *CTAL, 1938-1948, Resoluciones de sus Asambleas*, México, 1948, p.21; Cole, G.D.H., *A history of socialist thought*, Vol. 5, Socialism and Fascism, 1931-1939, Macmillan, London, 1960.

³⁴ Dispatch no. 332, Gordón to Álvarez del Vayo, 14 September 1938, *Congreso Obrero Latino-Americano; El Popular*, 5 September 1938, p.5.

Both the Mexican government and labour, were decidedly backing the Republican cause in Spain. The latter even used the argument of defending the Spanish workers, represented by the Spanish Republican Popular Front government, to criticise its local enemies. These actions, whatever their motivations and political aims beyond mere solidarity, encouraged the interest of wider sectors in Mexican society which became eager to contribute in a struggle they genuinely came to feel as their own.

b) Political Parties and *Ad Hoc* Organisations.

The military coup to overthrow a democratic government, because of its progressive policies, was an issue still fresh in the minds of many Mexicans by mid 1936, after Calles had been expelled from the country. Therefore, the military rebellion in Spain provoked an almost immediate reaction from both defenders and critics of the Spanish Republic, both seeing the Mexican government as its equal. However nonchalant most people in Mexico remained regarding an event occurring far away, the development of the conflict into a major international military crisis grabbed the attention of Mexicans gradually but firmly. During the first few months of the Spanish war, when the long-term nature of the war became evident, Mexican conservatives showed their sympathies for the rebels mainly in the media, being better equipped to pursue such action, whilst the progressive forces, relied on the activism of their militants. The political situation in Spain, however, was not at all a new issue, particularly so for Mexican workers affiliated to the *CTM*, whose magazine had regularly followed the evolution of the Spanish revolutionary movement.³⁵ The activity of those Mexican progressive forces would become particularly intense within months and was expressed through a number of new organizations and events. Complementary to the assistance offered by the Mexican government, there were numerous other initiatives from either individuals or groups. The number of supporters of Republican Spain grew by the day amongst the Mexican people. Members of the Chambers of Deputies,

³⁵ *Futuro*, the magazine devoted to working-class and international political issues became the unofficial magazine of the *CTM* when the latter was founded in February 1936. It continued to regularly feature Spanish news, after having devoted a whole issue to the Asturias rising of 1934 (*Futuro*, Tomo II, no. 8, February 1935) and to the electoral results of February 1936 (*Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 2, May 1936).

writers, intellectuals, and a myriad of organizations and institutions such as the Local Congress of the State of Querétaro, the Society of Friends of the Soviet Union in Tampico, or International Red Aid, Mexican Section, are a sample of the widespread involvement of Mexican people supporting the Republican cause. Traditionally more militant, some of the trade unions included the Teachers' National Confederation and the powerful Syndicate of Mexican Electricians (SME), of the American-owned Mexican Light and Power Company. There were all kinds of Masonic groups as well. Amongst the leading personalities in Mexico who unhesitatingly showed their support for the legitimate regime in Spain, was former Mexican ambassador to Spain, Genaro Estrada.³⁶

There was a genuine concern amongst Mexican society towards the well-being of Spanish orphan children; undoubtedly a major issue. There were also legitimate private interests of individuals, such as in the case of Mr. And Mrs. Antonio Zatarain, who volunteered to adopt two orphaned children, even before they had arrived in Mexico.³⁷ Such initiatives were usually dealt with via the various consulates throughout the Mexican territory, in co-ordination with several different organisations set up by Mexican citizens to provide help or relieve the Spanish people from the horrors of war. Some of those were the Spanish People's Aid Committee (*Comité de Ayuda al Pueblo Español*), mostly dedicated to collecting food and clothes, and the Spanish People's Children's Committee (*Comité de Ayuda a los Niños del Pueblo Español*), devoted exclusively to child welfare, both based in Mexico City.³⁸

The work developed by the organised groups to contribute to the Republican effort mainly took the form of humanitarian aid, aiming at collecting food and medicine, clothes and toys for children. Invariably, those groups worked in close contact with the Spanish embassy and the various consulates. Mexicans

³⁶ Dispatch no. 122, Gordón to Barcia, 4 August 1936, despatch 122, FUE, GO 2.

³⁷ Dispatch no. 164, Peña (Spanish Vice-Consul in Mexico) 26 February 1937, AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4.

³⁸ Even though they had similar denominations, they were indeed two different organisations, with their own offices and personnel, which also gives an idea of the extent to which the Mexican people were committed to the Spanish cause. The Spanish People's Aid Committee was located in Bucareli 12, dept. 412, and the Spanish People's Children's Aid Committee was located in Colombia 9 P.O. 1708. Besides, the difference in the actions they were involved in was clear, as shown below.

overwhelmingly constituted these groups. However, there were, besides the groups organised by the local population, a few groups set up by members of the Spanish community. In February 1937, news of the formation of the Spanish People's Children Aid Committee was in the papers. Based in Mexico City, the Committee's aim was simple: fund-raising to help alleviate the difficulties of Spanish orphans. In so doing, the various consular offices urged the Spanish community to contribute. As usual, as it had become for the last five years, the Consulate in Durango issued a public notice asking for co-operation.³⁹ Ironically, two months after the atrocities committed by the German Condor Legion bombing defenceless Basque villages with no military or strategic importance, the Spanish residents were requested by the state official for public works for their contribution to several local city projects, including the Basque *Jai Alai*. No mention was made of the bombing of Guernica, Durango and other small Basque villages reduced to rubble. This showed the different perspectives, concerns, and thus, attitudes towards the events in Spain.⁴⁰ The evidence of the crime pointing to the allies of Franco was obscured by a tremendous Right-wing propaganda campaign aimed at blaming the Republicans.⁴¹

The main activity of both Spanish and Mexican groups supporting the Republican war effort on the far side of the Atlantic was the sending of all types of donations, from money to food, destined usually for relatives and friends who were unable or unwilling to leave Spain. The Mexican port of Tampico had always maintained important commercial activity as an alternative to Veracruz as the main port of entrance to Mexico on the Atlantic. In this city, because of those early trade activities, the Spanish community found a niche for their natural inclinations for business linked to their home country. There, a Sub-Committee of Aid for the Spanish People's Children was established. In the summer of 1937, the latter participated in the national campaign *Día del kilo* (Day of the kilo) in which it was expected people would contribute a kilo of any food product they wished. The campaign was aimed at Spanish storekeepers, who reluctantly contributed the

³⁹ AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4, *Correspondencia General, 1935-1937, Circular no.2.*

⁴⁰ AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4, Circular 3 issued by the Spanish Vice-Consul in Durango, 23 June 1937.

⁴¹ *Reporte oficial de las atrocidades cometidas por el gobierno rojo de Valencia*, Burgos, 1937.

minimum expected.⁴²

There was a rash of associations, groups, committees, and all sort of organizations all over the country, proof of the strong sympathies of the Mexican people.⁴³ The sight of any such committees provoked the natural impulse to contribute, providing the passerby sympathized with the cause of the Spanish Republic. Some of these groups, although genuine, couldn't avoid arousing suspicion. One of those particular groups was created in April 1937, with the specific aim of providing support for the orphans and widows of those who had died on the front line. *Comité Pro Huérfanos y Viudas de los Trabajadores que Luchan en la España Proletaria* (Committee in favour of the orphans and widows of the workers fighting in proletarian Spain).⁴⁴ Although limited, there was some organised aid provided by the few Spanish residents in Mexico who unequivocally supported the legitimate government of Spain. In the port of Tampico, for example, the official Spanish Chamber of Commerce participated in the event commemorating the Sixth Anniversary of the establishment of the Spanish Republic, together with the Spanish Centre and the Spanish Popular Front groups.⁴⁵ There were a number of private initiatives, proposals or simple manifestations of solidarity with Spanish Republicans from all over the country, including remote places in the Mexican Republic, such as Chiapas.⁴⁶

One of the best-known events, and most revealing of the Mexican attitude towards the Spanish Republic, was the welcoming of hundreds of children. Commonly believed to be a personal initiative of President Cárdenas himself, he made clear it was not, although, obviously he firmly supported it. As Cárdenas wrote in his diary, it came "as a private initiative from a group of Mexican volunteer ladies", who approached the government seeking support in trying to contribute to alleviate the burden of Spanish families in the war.⁴⁷ After months

⁴² AGA, FMEA, 10234, Leg. 53, Request to the Spanish General Consulate from the Sub-Committee presided by Abigail Cantú, Tampico, 18 August 1937.

⁴³ Sadly, there were also some who would attempt to cash in on the cause of Spain for personal profit.

⁴⁴ AGA, FMAE, 10234, Leg. 53, Letter -illegible signature- to the Spanish Consulate in Tampico 8 April 1937.

⁴⁵ AGA, FMAE, 10234, Leg. 53, Spanish Consulate in Tampico, 13 April 1937.

⁴⁶ AGA, FMAE, 10240, Leg. 4, *Correspondencia 1935-1937*, 1 August 1936. See Chapter IV.

⁴⁷ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras, I Apuntes 1913-1940*, UNAM, México, 1972, 369.

of consideration and consultation with the Spanish government, and preparations on both sides of the Atlantic, a group of nearly 500 Spanish children were embarked for Mexico.⁴⁸ Initially opposed to the idea of sending Spanish children to Mexico, the Spanish Republican government finally agreed to send an expedition of children, most of whom had lost their parents. Children whose parents were alive were sent on request of the latter to protect their children from the horrors of the war. Some of the adults in charge of the expedition, particularly women teachers, doctors and nurses, also brought their own children in the group.⁴⁹

Thus on 13 June 1937, the Spanish children arrived in Veracruz in the midst of popular rejoicing. This was a very touching occasion, symbolising the Mexican State taking under its patronage the raising of Spanish orphans until the war was over and they could be repatriated to their homeland.⁵⁰ Relatives or friends and acquaintances of their parents claimed some children. Most of them were accommodated in a special boarding school in the capital city of Michoacán, Cárdenas's home state. They would end up being referred to as the "*Niños de Morelia*" as it was in that city where they were placed in the "*Mexico-España*" School. A nation-wide effort was developed promoting the idea of receiving a number of war orphans who would be temporarily taken into the care of the Mexican State.⁵¹ Initially assumed as a temporary arrangement, whilst the war lasted, the children remained in Mexico for longer than expected. However, shortly after the war finished, Spanish residents issued an official petition to President Cárdenas to send the children back to Spain.⁵²

A year after the arrival of the Spanish orphans, the German magazine *Volkskrant*, edited in The Hague, published an ominous article against the Mexican government with the title "Saving the Basque children", suggesting that those

⁴⁸ AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4, *Correspondencia General*, letter of the Aid Committee for the Spanish People's Children, 2 February 1937.

⁴⁹ AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4, *Correspondencia General*, letter of the Aid Committee for the Spanish People's Children, 28 June 1937.

⁵⁰ AGA, FMAE, 9870, Leg. 864, Medical records of the children sent to Mexico, April-May 1937.

⁵¹ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-978, Exp.19, *Méjico/Expedición de niños y maestros*.

⁵² The request was made by pro-Franco Spanish residents organised in the *Casa de Galicia*, the *Casino Español*, the *Club España*, the *Centro Asturiano*, and the *Beneficencia Española*; AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, Exp.550/84.

children were being subjected to outrageous living conditions. To counteract the insidious remarks and unveil the real intentions of the article, in another piece of work for the powerful propaganda campaign, José Loredó Aparicio, Spanish Chargé de Affaires in absence of Ambassador Gordón, joined forces with Mexican officials such as Ramón Beteta, a committed revolutionary, and Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs.⁵³ Another criticism involved those adults in charge of the expedition, as if they had volunteered with the sole purpose of fleeing from Spain. Had this been the case, they can hardly be blamed for wanting to escape from a country at war. However, although it is true that some of those in charge of the Spanish children did not go back to Spain, this was due to the continuation of their duty towards them while in Mexico or, in the worse case, to the “pecuniary abandonment” in which they found themselves.

Those in the first category included the teachers Isadora Martín Gómez, Joaquina López, Eduardo Haro, José Martínez Aguilar, who was in charge of the group, and Dantón Canut Martorell with his wife, Amparo Mollá. In the second case, the nurses Clotilde Bernat and Antonia Seba Villanueva, who were already working.⁵⁴ Finally, amongst those who went back to Spain was Julieta Cabeza, who presented a detailed account of the children’s journey, their arrival and accommodation at a conference in Valencia on 26 November 1937. She also explained the political situation of Mexico and the efforts made by both the Mexican people and its government to support the Republican struggle in Spain. She did not fail to mention the criticism they faced within Mexico, and how the bitterest criticism, which cited the thousands of Mexican children in need who were not receiving anything while so much was given to the Spanish children, was confronted.⁵⁵ The supporters of the Republican cause simply referred to the fact that the Spanish people were at the forefront of the anti-Fascist struggle, which was a fight for the future of all peoples.

⁵³ Dispatch no. 283, Loredó Aparicio to Álvarez del Vayo, 29 July 1938, , AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-2571 Exp.16.

⁵⁴ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-978, *Méjico. Expedición de niños y maestros*, Exp.19, several letters.

⁵⁵ *México y los Niños Españoles, Conferencia de Julieta Cabeza*, Ediciones Amigos de México, Valencia, 1937, pp.5-9.

Meanwhile, visiting Spain shortly after leaving his post as Mexican representative at the League of Nations in Geneva, Narciso Bassols became *Futuro's* correspondent in Barcelona. He did not visit in an official capacity as a representative of the Mexican government, but Spanish Republicans made the most of his reputation and well-known politics. The Spanish Minister of Propaganda, Carlos Esplá, organised a radio broadcast for Bassols to address the general public in Barcelona. Bassols took the opportunity to encourage the morale of the combatants and non-combatants by explaining Mexico's attitude towards Spain.⁵⁶ He praised the Spanish Republic and its progressive government; then he established a parallel between the Mexican and the Spanish governments, and their respective challenges, which in his opinion were perfectly analogous. Thus the continuation of ancient problems such as *latifundismo*, miserable wages, ignorance and fanaticism, and political oppression from traditional conservative forces, forced the need for political, educational, economic and agrarian reforms.⁵⁷

Furthermore, he argued that these problems were not restricted to those two countries, but to all countries struggling for their independence, namely all Latin American countries. Finally, Bassols identified those sectors opposed to such reforms, the local reactionaries, with international Fascism, thus concluding the necessity of the anti-Fascist alliance, in which the Spanish Republic had engaged outstandingly. Guatemala and Uruguay did not support the Republican effort as they were under military dictatorships; it was only natural that Mexico, having a revolutionary government, supported the Spanish Republic in its fight against Fascism. Mexican aid to Spain was not a sentimental matter, but a political necessity.⁵⁸ A few months later, in another radio broadcast from Barcelona, Félix Martí Ibañez addressed the Mexican people on the Day of Mexican Independence. He recounted the history of Mexico and praised the common progressive elements of both Mexico and Spain. Particularly critical of the Western countries who abandoned the democratic regime of the Spanish Republic, he compared Mexico's attitude as the honest response of the new

⁵⁶ *Futuro*, Tercera época, no. 14, April 1937, p.28.

⁵⁷ *Idem*, p.29.

⁵⁸ *Idem*, pp.30-32.

World, only comparable to that of the Soviet Union.⁵⁹ He greeted Mexican freedom and the new born *Hispanidad* (Hispanism) not derived from blood, but from the ideals of freedom in Spain and Latin America.

The Spanish war was also a war of words, and there are no better fighters in such a war than poets and writers. Overcoming the enormous propaganda campaign developed by the rebels and their allies in many countries was not an easy task. To contribute to such an effort, several whole issues and supplements of *Futuro* were dedicated to the Spanish Republican struggle. In August 1937, the entire issue was devoted to Spain, including articles in the form of letters by José Bergamín, *Carta abierta a Victoria Ocampo "Hasta la muerte"*, Álvaro de Albornoz *"Del General Prim al Cabecilla Franco"* where he condemned Franco's betrayal and contrasted his poor image with that of Prim; and poems by Pablo Neruda and Camaposada on the war.⁶⁰ This was not the first or the last of such actions, nor were those writers the only ones, although they were regular contributors, particularly Neruda. Other writers and poets included León Felipe, Rafael Alberti, María Teresa León, Octavio Paz, Gabriel García Maroto, and Mauricio Magdaleno. The close relationship between Spanish Republican and Mexican intellectuals also became more intense and even more productive during the years of the Spanish war, as shown later.

It was around this time that Ramón P. de Negri, Mexican Ambassador to Spain, was removed from his diplomatic post amid criticism, mainly from conservative circles. He went back to Mexico, but far from retiring into private life, he became actively involved in the support of the Spanish Republic. In November 1937, the *Sociedad de Amigos de España* (Friends of Spain Society) was formed, and he became its president. The Vice-President was Alejandro Carrillo, of the *CTM*. The purpose of the new organization, as defined by their public statements, was to provide accurate information about events in Spain, and defend its legitimate government from all the calumnies and unjustified accusations. The society would also endeavour to acquire all possible material aid for the loyal Spaniards

⁵⁹ *Mensaje a México, Discurso pronunciado por el Dr. Félix Martí Ibáñez, en la emisora Radio Asociación de Cataluña, el 16 de Septiembre de 1937, con motivo del aniversario de la Independencia Mexicana*, Ediciones "Los Amigos de México", Barcelona, 1937.

⁶⁰ *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 18, August 1937, p.15.

defending their country.⁶¹ The Spanish Popular Front Group based in Tampico developed an important activity close to the Spanish Embassy and the General Consulate, publicizing the real nature of the so-called “Nationalist cause” and promoting support for the Republican government.⁶²

The Mexican Chamber of Deputies held a Solemn Session to honour the Spanish Republic on 11 March 1938. As usual, the occasion meant the renewal of solidarity with the Republican cause, and strong criticism of local allies of the Spanish rebels.⁶³ Taking advantage of the favourable moment, the reorganisation of the National Revolutionary Party was debated in terms of necessary adjustments to reinforce the main political tool supporting the regime. Thus, in March 1938, Lombardo proposed the transformation of the party into a more ample coalition, to include workers, peasants, the Army, and the so-called ‘Popular Sector’, which amalgamated those groups not included in the other sectors. That decision signified the strengthening of the revolutionary government and its programme.⁶⁴ Narciso Bassols’ decision to go back to Spain was taken in order to stay close to the events of the Spanish war, transmit his impressions to the Mexican people, and contribute to the “formation of a clear class conscience in the Mexican proletariat.”⁶⁵ Taking advantage of Bassols’ assignment in Barcelona, a conference on the oil expropriation in Mexico was organised and held at the *Ateneo Barcelonés* for the Ibero-American Union.⁶⁶

In the meantime, the disorganised way in which, still in early 1938, numerous recipients of the many donations collected without the authorities being notified motivated the Minister of Communications, Bernardo Giner de los Ríos, to complain and ask for public acknowledgment of the donations. He hoped to channel all donations through the Finance Ministry, for the government to remain

⁶¹ AGA, FMAE, 10234, Leg. 53, Letter Ramón P. de Negri to Mariano de la Sota Bidou (Spanish Consulate in Tampico) 24 November 1937.

⁶² AGA, FMAE, 10234, Leg. 53, Letter Quirino S. Moreno (Spanish Popular Front in Tampico) to the Spanish Consulate in Tampico, 27 October 1937.

⁶³ AMAE, Leg. R-979, *Embajada española en Méjico*, Exp.1, *Notas diversas*.

⁶⁴ Vicente Fuentes Diaz, *Los Partidos Políticos en México*, Porrúa, México, 1996, pp.104-106.

⁶⁵ *Futuro*, no. 23, January 1938, p.5.

⁶⁶ *La Vanguardia* 26 April 1938, AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-2571 Exp.16.

in charge and so avoid criticism affecting its prestige.⁶⁷ On the same lines, in later months, following a Spanish suggestion, an agreement was reached between the Mexican and French Post Offices in order to deal with all exchanges between Mexico and Republican Spain.⁶⁸

As previously mentioned, one of the best-known, most enduring and successful episodes of Mexican aid to Republican Spain was the decisive action taken by some Mexican intellectuals towards their Spanish counterparts. During the summer of 1938, a group of Mexican intellectuals headed by Alfonso Reyes – brother of the Conservative Rodolfo and uncle to two Falangists- and Daniel Cosío Villegas, Mexican Minister in Lisbon, invited leading Spanish specialists to go to Mexico, where they could continue their work whilst Spain remained at war.⁶⁹ Although the idea was first suggested by Cosío at the end of 1936, a long process of consultations, a mixture of scepticism and ideological rivalries between the Mexican representative –Cosío, a Conservative- and the Spaniard –Wenceslao Roces, a Communist- prevented the project from being agreed before August 1938. Naively hoping that the war would soon be over with the triumph of the Republican cause, the temporary arrangement took the form of an academic forum in Mexico City with the support of Mexican academia and official funding.⁷⁰ Therefore, the *Casa de España* was set up for José Gaos, Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, Enrique Díez Canedo and other Spanish professors to develop their academic work. Under the direction of Alfonso Reyes –then Mexican Ambassador to Argentina- and Daniel Cosío Villegas –Mexican Minister in Portugal- the *Casa* opened its doors in March 1939, and was in fact an academic outpost of the Spanish Republic. Financially supported by the Mexican Government, *Casa de España* embraced many more Spanish academics than the original thirty enlisted. Given the imminent collapse of the Spanish Republic, the

⁶⁷ AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4, Despach 868, 28 September 1937; *México y la República Española, Antología de Documentos, 1931-1977*, Centro Republicano Español de México, México, 1978, pp.32-34.

⁶⁸ AGA, FMAE, 10059, Letter Alfonso Gómez Morentin (Director General, Mexican Postal Services) to Gordón Ordás, 13 May 1938.

⁶⁹ *El Popular*, 20 August 1938, front page.

⁷⁰ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-996, *Casa de España*, Exp.61, Dispatch no. 313, 20 August 1938 and Dispatch no. 429, 12 November 1938.

Casa absorbed even more Spanish exiles, and was soon to be transformed into the *Colegio de México*.⁷¹

In September 1938, two more congresses met in Mexico, one in Mexico City, and the other one in Veracruz. Once the Latin American workers congress concluded with the creation of the *CTAL*, the delegates, having also been invited to participate, took part in the Anti-War Congress, also organised by the *CTM*. In fact, President Cárdenas had suggested the idea of such a congress while addressing the *CTM* assembly in February. Now, addressing the anti-war congress, Cárdenas expressed his confidence in the ideals of organised labour for freedom as the promoters of peace in their respective countries. Such forces should oppose war and imperialism, concluded Cárdenas.⁷² Attending as a guest of honour was the Spanish Republican Ambassador, Gordón Ordás, who attracted most sympathies alongside the other Spanish Republican delegates. The second gathering was extraordinary. It was the First Congress of Children, organised in the region of Los Tuxtlas, state of Veracruz. The young Mexican participants sent an encouraging message to the Spanish children, “a thousand times our brothers”, together with some photographs showing brave and enthusiastic faces.⁷³

Trying to make the most of the presence of Spanish Republican figures in Mexico, the Mexican Communist Party organised a demonstration with the presence of the French Communist Party representative, Jacques Gresa, the Colombian Communist Party, and the Vice-President of the Chilean Popular Front, Carlos Contreras Labarca. The main speaker at the meeting was Margarita Nelken, who reiterated the need for the anti-Fascist alliance, and urged the Western democracies to rectify their attitude as they were making an enormous mistake.⁷⁴ Perhaps by then, when President Negrín’s proposal for the withdrawal of international volunteers was about to be fulfilled, fewer had the strength

⁷¹ The story of both the *Casa de España* and the *Colegio de México* have been thoroughly explained in Clara E. Lida, *La Casa de España en México*, El Colegio de México, México, 1988, and in Clara E. Lida and José Antonio Matesanz, *El Colegio de México: una hazaña cultural, 1940-1962*, El Colegio de México, México, 1990.

⁷² *El Popular*, 11 September 1938, front page.

⁷³ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. 979, Exp.1, *Embajada española en Méjico*, Letter Candelario Zapo to Gordón, 10 September 1938.

⁷⁴ *El Popular*, 17 September 1938, p.3.

required to pursue Negrín's strategy of resistance. But it was the only remaining resource of the weakened Spanish Republic. For a short while, there still seemed to be hope, a realistic optimism, and the various supplies of the humanitarian aid being sent to Republican Spain kept arriving. The National Committee of Aid to Spain (*Comité Nacional de Ayuda a España*) was established by decree in Barcelona, to centralise and coordinate the allocation of humanitarian aid received from abroad.⁷⁵ Mexican groups supporting the Republican cause in Spain remained active and in high spirits. Two years after the war in Spain had begun, former Mexican Minister to Spain, Enrique González Martínez, expressed the extent to which the Spanish drama affected Mexican society. González Martínez, whose efforts to upgrade the diplomatic representations between Mexico and Spain in the late 1920s and early 1930s had failed and whose pro-Hispanic views did not blind him to an honest evaluation of the political situation in Spain, vividly made an anguished premonition:

I believe, I want to believe, in the triumph of the Republic. [...] But if the Spanish Republic has to perish under the inequity of force, let there be engraved on its ruins: Here lies Spain. For the corpse will not be Spain, but a bloody rag in the hands of international filibusterism.⁷⁶

Mexican society was certainly divided, and even though the debate around the war in Spain further polarised the positions, there was a clear imbalance in favour of the Republican cause, in spite of the power and resources of the pro-rebel sectors. The streets, so to speak, had been taken by the Republican supporters and would remain in their hands for their own sake. This, broadly speaking, meant that overall Mexico sided with the Spanish Republic. This was demonstrated by the wide variety of political, ideological, cultural, diplomatic and local contributions and activities.

⁷⁵ AGA, FMAE, 9872, Leg. 884, *Circular 1775*, Ministry of State, Barcelona, 24 October 1938.

⁷⁶ *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 29, July 1938, *El Crimen de España*, pp.23-25.

2. Mexican Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.

Within days of the military uprising, hundreds of Mexicans and Spaniards volunteered to go to Spain and defend the legitimate Republican Government. The Spanish Government refused their offer because it did not consider it necessary.⁷⁷ The number of Spanish residents volunteering decreased rapidly and considerably. A few months later, the Spanish Consul General, Emilio Zapico, transmitted to the vice-consulates the order of the Ministry of State with the decree of the Defence Ministry to mobilise the 1930 intake as first reserve for the army, but the previous enthusiasm to defend the Republican government had gone from Spanish residents.⁷⁸

When the Spanish military rebellion developed into an international conflict, the people's struggle against Fascism and in defence of a democracy abandoned by its peers was in the hearts and minds of many Mexicans. Whatever the standpoint assumed, it was evident that the armed conflict in Spain attracted both international involvement and attention. A decade that began with enormous enthusiasm and collective illusions after the economic crisis undergone by the leading capitalist power encouraged the revolutionary and progressive element in Western societies towards radicalism in search of improved working and living conditions worldwide. However, relevant for its nature and character was the organisation of the International Brigades, formed by volunteers from more than 56 countries, including only naturally, many Latin Americans, who identified both culturally and politically with Republican Spain. Amongst the latter, the group of Mexicans were not the majority, but the figure reached over 300 volunteers.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ FUE, G.O. 21, *Copias de despachos 1936*, dispatches Gordón to Barcia, no. 122, 4 August; no. 146, 21 September, and no. 147, 21 September 1936.

⁷⁸ AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4, Despatch 899, 16 October 1937.

⁷⁹ AGMA, Guerra Civil, Brigadas Internacionales, 1098- Organización, información, operaciones. The total number of volunteers was around 40 000, although no more than 18 000 were in Spain at one time. Broadly speaking, there were some 10 000 French, 5 000 Germans and Austrians, 4 000 Polish, 3 500 Italians, 2 800 Americans, 2 000 British, 1 200 Yugoslavs, 1 000 Canadian, 1 000 Hungarian, 1 000 Scandinavians, and some other 8 500 from different nationalities, including Latin American, Asian, Soviet, and other Europeans. For a general view of the International Brigades see Vincent Brome, *The International Brigades: Spain 1939-1939*, London, Heinemann, 1965.

The relevance of the participation of Mexican volunteers in the Spanish Civil War is that it shows the level of commitment to the Spanish Republic of different groups within Mexican society. Considering the unquestionable pro-Republican stance of the Mexican Government, official encouragement of volunteers could be assumed as logical. However, in an apparent contradiction, not only there was no official support for organising Mexican volunteers, there was a clear decision to prevent them from going. At least, that was the case of young cadets of the Military Academy, who deserted to go to Spain, as we shall see later on.

Nevertheless, the Mexican Government did authorise some military men to work for the Spanish Republican Army, under contract.⁸⁰ This ambivalence of Mexican officials shows how, on the one hand, there was a small but influential sector, particularly in the military hierarchy, concerned about the consequences of further involvement in the Spanish conflict. Whereas, on the other, the predominant tendency within governmental officials, including the army, promoted under cover support, if not an actual encouragement, of volunteers. There was no doubt what side the Mexican military supported in Spain; it was just a matter of degrees of commitment and calculated risks. After all, there would certainly be groups willing to arrange the sending of volunteers to Spain, as was the case in many other countries.

When the armies of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy backed the rebel forces, the Spanish Republicans received the support of Mexico and the Soviet Union, and massive solidarity from all over the world, expressed in the number of volunteers from more than fifty countries. Most of them were French, Germans, and Italians who saw the need to fight Fascism, and significantly, many came from the United States, and many more from other European countries.⁸¹

Amongst the thousands of volunteers, most of whom joined the International

⁸⁰ AHDM-III-764-1 (2ª parte). Letter sent, on request, from the Spanish Minister of Defence, Indalecio Prieto, to the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eduardo Hay, on 27 March 1938.

⁸¹ For the analysis and account of the American volunteers, see Peter Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Americans in the Spanish Civil War*, Stanford University Press, California, 1994; and John Gerassi, *The Premature Anti-Fascists, North American volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39, An Oral History*, Praeger, New York, 1986. For the French volunteers, see Rémi Skoutelsky, *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas, Les volontaires français dans les Brigades internationales, 1936-1939*, Grasset, Paris, 1998. The most recent work dealing with British volunteers is Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: the British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939*, London: Routledge, 2004.

Brigades, a few hundred were Mexicans. However, like most Latin American volunteers, the majority made their contribution to restore legitimate government and fight the Fascist-supported rebels as part of the Republican Militias. The main reason behind their involvement in the Spanish conflict was their belief in the pursuit of the anti-Fascist struggle. The very decision to become active in the Spanish conflict was bound to create controversy. The debate stirred up in the Mexican newspapers showed the profound division in public opinion.⁸²

But there were other reasons to become involved in the Spanish conflict, as in the case of Mary Bingham de Urquidi. The Anglo-Mexican spouse of a Mexican diplomat accredited in Madrid, was probably the first Mexican volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. Personal circumstances, not politics, made her stay behind after a trip with her family to Jean de Luz from Madrid on 16 July 1936.⁸³ She did not choose to stay in Madrid after the military uprising the following day, but she had no option. She was forced to remain in Madrid to await the reestablishment of safe train services out of the Spanish capital. In the meantime, her first encounter with the initial fighting outside Madrid, the numbers of casualties, and the transformation of the streets into a war zone, changed her mind. Mary Bingham was a qualified nurse from the American Nursing School Mount Sinai in New York. She belonged to the Mexican Union of Nurses, and this enabled her to contribute to the relief of the casualties, which was an evident need during the first days of the conflict. She initially offered her services voluntarily to the Red Cross, but was rejected, as she explained, because the people in charge were not interested in her services, “for they had enough personnel for the short period that the war would last.”⁸⁴ Then she went to Red Aid (*Socorro Rojo Internacional*), where, after a detailed scrutiny, she was warmly received.

Her appearance and manners reflected her class origins and education, and the people in charge were suspicious of anyone who could be acting as a spy.

However, her Mexican nurses-syndicate ID membership card was an “open

⁸² The conservative newspapers *Excelsior* and *El Universal*, with their daily afternoon extras, took side with the rebels, whilst *El Nacional* and *El Popular* assumed the defence of the Republicans. The difference in numbers was significant for the right-wing groups, including the Spanish colony, provided additional funds in the shape of commercial adverts to their favourite papers.

⁸³ Interview of the author with Víctor L. Urquidi, México City, 11 April 2002.

⁸⁴ Mary Bingham de Urquidi, *Misericordia en Madrid*, Costa-Amic, México, 1975, p.33.

sesame". In the world of Spanish workers, the reference given by a Mexican workers union was deeply appreciated. Mary Bingham then worked intensively for the next six months. Due to the lack of trained nurses, she was put in charge of organising the improvised medical facilities, under very restrictive conditions. Her work was truly appreciated by her colleagues and new friends, and they were disappointed when she decided to leave only a few weeks later.⁸⁵ Mary Bingham was trapped in Madrid during the conflict and seized the opportunity to volunteer and contribute in a humanitarian gesture, in the same way she would have done should the war have found her on the rebel side. She was not originally sympathetic to the Left-wing Republicans, but her experiences during the war marked her vision and points of view in a more favourable way towards the Republican government. She did not feel she belonged there, and she left, after offering what she had to give to the cause of the Spanish Republic, and her recollections of those days in Madrid give an excellent illustration of the complexities of the inner doubts and vacillations of many Mexicans, and yet the resolution of many to act.

Amongst those who had absolutely no doubts regarding their going to Spain was Tina Modotti, the Italian photographer who lived in Mexico for several years until she was expelled in 1930, wrongly accused of an attempt on the life of the Mexican president, Ortiz Rubio at his inauguration on 5 February.⁸⁶ While in Mexico, Modotti befriended Communist artists David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo and, through them, was involved with the Mexican Communist Party. At the time of the Spanish military uprising Modotti was living in the Soviet Union. During the war she changed her name to *María* and worked at the International Red Aid (*Socorro Rojo Internacional*) throughout the war. At first she was based in Madrid, and worked in the organisation of the Workers' Hospital of the Fifth Regiment. Then she was involved in the organisation of the Second Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Culture, held in July 1937 in Valencia, where she was reunited with some of her Mexican friends.⁸⁷ Her partner was a well-known Communist, Vittorio Vidali, who had also lived in Mexico and

⁸⁵ *Idem*, pp.80-117.

⁸⁶ Vittorio Vidali, *Ritratto di donna, Tina Modotti*, Vangelista, Milano, 1982, pp.12-14.

⁸⁷ *Idem*, p.31, 41-42.

left when she was expelled from that country. As a member of the Comintern and under the name of *Carlos Contreras*, Vidali was engaged in organising the International Brigades. He also led the Fifth Regiment during the defence of Madrid, but his Comintern duty has provoked suggestions that he was involved in clandestine Communist actions against Trotsky's followers. The division, or rather the antagonism between those two opposing factions in the Republican camp was in the origins of serious problems that, particularly after the armed confrontation in Barcelona in May 1937, provoked the fall of the Republican government headed by Largo Caballero. Formerly a small party, the Spanish Communist Party's strength and influence grew during the years of the war. This further complicated the fragile situation of governmental control, particularly regarding the international perception of Communist influence in the Spanish Republic. The Western powers had defined their policy towards the Spanish conflict, based in the assumption that the Communist threat was a fact. In the words of Bassols, this was the biggest infamy in modern history, with declared Fascists and pseudo-democrats acting in accordance against Spain.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, after the enormous success of the *Magallanes*, having arrived in Republican Spain safely with food, military equipment and other goods from Mexico, the hopes for an actual repetition of the same action were again attempted. Considering that a number of Mexicans had been living in the US before going to Spain, some of them for that very reason were incorporated into the Lincoln Battalion.

Likewise, some American volunteers left from Mexico under a Mexican name, such as Frank Tinker, an American pilot who fought in Spain as Francisco Gomez Trejo.⁸⁹ In fact, as in the case of the rifles known as *Mexikansky*, or the magic code of Mary Bingham, some Americans used the code "I want to go to Mexico" as the secret signal to join the International Brigades under the Lincoln Battalion. Such was the case of Herman Rosenstein, aka Gabby.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 15, May 1937, p.20.

⁸⁹ Frank Tinker, *Some still live: experiences of a fighting-plane pilot in the Spanish war*, Lovat Dickson, London, 1938, p.283.

⁹⁰ John Gerassi, *The Premature antifascists in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39, An Oral History*, Praeger, New York, 1986, p.43.

Unfortunately for the volunteers and for the Republican cause, some attempts to reach Spain were savagely crushed. In January 1937, the *Mar Cantábrico* arrived in Veracruz loaded with war material from New York. In spite of the discretion needed and, perhaps, due to the success of the previous shipment, the lack of secrecy in this case contributed greatly to the disastrous outcome of the journey. The news of a fresh shipment to Republican Spain was everything except stealthy. Fervent supporters could not help but welcome the ship and wish it all sorts of good fortune in its expedition to provide effective aid to Republican Spain. Ambassador Gordón had worked tirelessly to put together the cargo, and the *Mar Cantábrico* was ready to depart with more American and Mexican volunteers. Although the details were not publicly known, the press reported the very existence of the ship and its aim. Francoist forces, undoubtedly informed of the voyage prepared to strike. The *Mar Cantábrico* sailed in mid-February and followed a cautious course. Approaching the Spanish coast early in March, the Captain ordered the change of flags, trying to disguise it as the *Adda of Newcastle*. The *Mar Cantábrico* avoided the rebel trail only temporarily, as the rebels were convinced of the veracity of the secret reports they had. The *Canarias* and the *Almirante Cervera* intercepted the *Mar Cantábrico*, its shipment was robbed, and the volunteers shot in El Ferrol. Amongst the dozens of volunteers from different countries, were five Mexicans.⁹¹ The life of Socorro Barberán, the only Mexican woman, was spared, she was sent to Portugal and later arrived in Mexico to tell her story. The reaction in Mexico to these events intensified once more the division of public opinion, where most newspapers referred to the tragic events as a natural result of adventurism, whilst the government and Spanish Republican supporters were outraged at the atrocity.⁹²

At the time when the journey of the *Mar Cantábrico* was being planned, Néstor Sánchez left Mexico City with José Jaramillo and went to Veracruz. On 3 January 1937, they boarded the *Siboney* for New York, via Havana. The Railroad

⁹¹ José Antonio Matesanz, *Las raíces del exilio*, p.174.

⁹² AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-979, *Embajada de España en Méjico*, Exp.1.

Worker's Union paid for their tickets.⁹³ According to Sánchez' own account, they arrived in New York some time in February. In his memoirs he describes how he and Jaramillo arrived in New York having no idea about what to do or where to go. Three days after their arrival they came across an organisation of Mexican workers (*Mutualista Obrera Mexicana*), where they were given some money and directions to the Brooklyn based *Sociedad de Ayuda a la República Española*. The Sociedad paid for their tickets on the *Berengaria*, which was to depart for Cherbourg and London. He reports that some of his acquaintances on board seemed to him to be spies.⁹⁴ A secretive and reserved attitude prevailed in Sánchez and Jaramillo about the purposes of their trip, hence the distance they kept from those people on the *Berengaria*, a young Dominican man, Rafael Echavarría, an American youth, two women from Czechoslovakia, and some Italians. Furthermore, Sánchez thought the two women were spies. He could not possibly imagine that they would be his comrades in arms in Spain.

On arrival in Cherbourg, they avoided travelling with the group to Paris, escaped the group's detection and boarded the express train. A week passed before they made contact with people they could trust in helping them to go to Spain. Meanwhile, the two were wandering around Paris, one less keen than the other on finally joining the war effort of the Spanish people against fascism. Sánchez became acquainted with José Reus, a Spaniard from Catalonia, who then established contact with Arnold Reed, 'Jack', an American antifascist later to be integrated in the XV International Brigade –the *Lincoln Battalion*- and shot dead at the Ebro. It was 'Jack' who helped him to survive in Paris, who sent him and his friend José Jaramillo to Marseille, and put them in contact with the International Brigade in Spain.⁹⁵ Once in Albacete (the International Brigades' base) Jaramillo was assigned to the *Lincoln Brigade* whereas Sánchez and another Mexican, Silvestre Ortiz Toledo, entered the *Dombrowski Brigade*, as part of the *Rakosi Battalion*.⁹⁶ Néstor Sánchez was in action on different fronts including Caspe, near the Ebro and Teruel; and Sierra Quemada, near Peraleda in

⁹³ Néstor Sánchez Hernández, *Un mexicano en la guerra civil española y otros recuerdos*, Carteles, Oaxaca, 1997, pp.95-99.

⁹⁴ Néstor Sánchez, *Un Mexicano en la Guerra Civil Española*, pp.111-112.

⁹⁵ *Idem*, pp.121-123.

⁹⁶ *Idem*, p.144.

Extremadura. Sánchez sustained three wounds in different actions, and spent some time in hospital. On one of these occasions, a Czech doctor, one of the travelling companions he had regarded as a spy, attended him.⁹⁷

In the account of his actions, Sánchez recalls that in February 1938, after having been injured in Peraleda, he went to a small village, Zalamea de la Serena, near Badajoz, where given his dark skin and the bonnet he had taken from a dead Moor, he was assumed to be a Moor himself. The women of the village furiously attacked him, and only stopped when an Italian volunteer from the *Garibaldi Brigade* interceded for him, and Sánchez was allowed to explain he was Mexican.⁹⁸ He last saw military action in Sierra de Pandols, where his decimated battalion retreated in mid-September 1938.⁹⁹

Other Mexicans in the International Brigades included Tito Ruiz Marín in the *Thaelmann Brigade*, and Bautista, a former Mexican revolutionary combatant who went to Spain because he admired President Azaña.¹⁰⁰ Not only were Mexican volunteers not organised in a single unit, but also there was no communication between them whatsoever. In fact, most of them claim not to have established contact during the war with any other Mexican national, and only during the withdrawal of the International Brigades process did they become acquainted with some. A number of the volunteers were also incorporated into the ranks of the Spanish Republican Army, and thus covered the tracks of their origins as they were inscribed only by their names and rank.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, those who attended the Valencia Congress of Intellectuals in support of the Republic were also engaged in a meaningful solidarity campaign. The Mexican delegation consisted of Mexican intellectuals members of the LEAR (*Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios*-League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers), and others with no affiliation. Octavio Paz, José Mancisidor, Juan

⁹⁷ *Idem*, pp.113-114

⁹⁸ *Idem*, pp.161-162.

⁹⁹ Sánchez was unable to specify the exact day, due to the confusion prevailing and lack of means of communication, Néstor Sánchez, *Un mexicano en la Guerra civil española*, pp.214-218.

¹⁰⁰ *Idem*, p.154-155.

¹⁰¹ Riberto Vega, *Cadetes Mexicanos en la Guerra de España*, Compañía General de Ediciones, México, 1947, pp.53-55.

de la Cabada, and Elena Garro were amongst the *LEAR* members. Some of them only participated in the above mentioned congress and made their way back to Mexico, or at least out of Spain. Others, however, decided to remain in Spain and contribute to the Republican war effort, although not taking up arms, but mainly visiting the fronts and heartening the combatant's morale. One of these cases was Juan de la Cabada, although there is no record of the work he developed, he is known to have remained in Spain for some time. Another participant of the Valencia Congress was the Mexican composer, then director of the Mexican National Symphony Orchestra, Silvestre Revueltas. Working together with Spanish poet Plá y Beltrán, they composed a hymn in honour of the Mexican combatants in Spain, and dedicated it to Col. Juan Bautista Gómez, given his prestige and dedication to the Republican cause.¹⁰²

Blanca Lydia Trejo, travelled to Spain with a diplomatic accreditation as Third Class Consul assigned in Barcelona. With her previous experience as a writer of women workers' causes, she was sent to report on the progress of the Republican war effort with regard to the participation of women. She soon encountered rejection from other Mexican diplomats, who had firmly sided with the Republican government and severely, although privately, criticised the insubordinate anarchists and radicals that were, in their opinion, eroding the Republican war effort.¹⁰³ She arrived at the time of the Valencia Congress of Writers, and whilst there antagonised other Latin Americans, this time Communist supporters. She found a natural refuge with the *FAI* (Anarchist Iberian Federation) and wrote some critical articles about the Communists, which, she was convinced, provoked the Ambassador's request for her removal, on grounds of inefficiency.¹⁰⁴

An unusual case was provided by the military cadet Roberto Vega. His account sheds light on how young Mexican soldiers made their way to Spain. He reveals

¹⁰² *Canciones de lucha, 1936-39, Songs of Battle*, DAHIZ production, 2001, track 4, Part of the lyrics say:

"We abandon the lands of green maize;
From the Anahuac Valley we have come here;
To gain with our blood an unparalleled life."

¹⁰³ Blanca Lydia Trejo, *Lo que vi en España*, pp.23-27.

¹⁰⁴ *Idem*, pp.48-50.

some of the means used to travel to Spain. He and eight more cadets from the Military Academy (*Heroico Colegio Militar*)¹⁰⁵ decided to seek some action in Spain in the summer of 1937. Perhaps in the minds of the young cadets was the recently published news of Mexican volunteers shot by Francoists in El Ferrol, Franco's hometown. Whatever the reason, they decided to keep the necessary secrecy to avoid insurmountable obstacles. They got the money and tickets to go by train to Veracruz and from there to Havana, from an unknown group of sympathisers of the Spanish Republic, possibly linked with the Spanish Embassy. One of the cadets, regrettably, could not remain discreet enough, leaking the news to other classmates leading to a search for the deserters. Five of them were captured on board the train to Veracruz. The other four were taken off the ship, minutes away from departing.¹⁰⁶ The press publicized the incident extensively. Typically, *Excelsior* and *El Universal* criticised the youngsters' decision and implicated ambassador Gordón Ordás. *El Nacional* praised the boy's noble gesture.

The issue divided opinion among both high-ranking military officers, and the Cárdenas cabinet regarding the war in Spain. When the young cadets first pondered the possibility of going to Spain, the main motivation was to gain some combat experience, to see the real world of war, and they saw no better opportunity than fighting against a terrible foe. They wrongly assumed that the Mexican Government, being so friendly to the Spanish Government, would not prevent them from going. If they decided to proceed with caution it was to avoid public attention that could jeopardise their objective. This was, at first sight, a logical opinion. However, they could not foresee that some high-ranking officials at the Mexican Ministry of Defence would be sympathetic to the cause of the rebels. Those members of the Mexican military sympathetic to the Spanish rebels had no intention whatsoever of speaking up for them, but they would definitely thwart any attempt to extend the already uncomfortable Mexican stand in favour of the Republican side. Hence, a lesson should be given to those who were

¹⁰⁵ It is customary in Mexico to add the word Heroic to a city or institution that has proved so in defending the causes of sovereignty and liberty for the country. In the case of the Military Academy, it owes it to the defence made by its young members against the American invasion in 1847. The port of Veracruz, for instance, holds a triple H before its name.

¹⁰⁶ Vega González, *Cadetes mexicanos*, pp.16-23.

pushing for greater radicalisation, even if they were doing so unconsciously.

After interrogations before the Under-Secretary in Charge of the Ministry of Defence himself, Manuel Ávila Camacho, and once they involuntarily gave away the name of Captain Ricardo Balderas Carrillo, who had encouraged them in their intentions, a decision was made: they were to be dishonourably expelled from the Military Academy.¹⁰⁷ Captain Balderas, who had also planned to go to Spain, given his rank, was brought to military justice, and faced disciplinary action. Mexican military authorities were determined not to allow any breach of discipline.¹⁰⁸ Confronted with a vociferous press campaign accusing him of orchestrating the desertion of the Mexican cadets, Ambassador Gordón Ordás reacted by firmly denying any involvement in such an action. As expected, all the Right leaning newspapers, like *Excelsior*, *El Universal*, and *La Prensa*, made a strong case of the issue, and the more radical, like *El Hombre Libre*, even asked for the expulsion of the Spanish Ambassador. The strong defence made by Gordón and the pledge to the Mexican Government reassuring it of the honourable actions of the Spanish Embassy, defused the storm.¹⁰⁹

The young cadets saw their illusions and professional careers in ruins, but their determination to go to Spain nevertheless grew. This time, after recovering from the shocking events, and once they were no longer in the news, they approached the Railroad Union, as Sánchez and Jaramillo had done before, to get hold of the necessary funds. Soon after, they attended a meeting at which Marcelino Domingo, former Republican Minister of Education, was speaking on the development of the war. Had they needed to be convinced any further in their intentions, Domingo's speech would have done it.¹¹⁰ Having learnt their lesson, they set up a new plan. Some time in the autumn, with the economic support of the Railroad Union, four went to Spain, Roberto Vega Gonzalez,¹¹¹ Roberto

¹⁰⁷ The cadets would face the worst possible option, "expulsados con cajas destempladas", "expelled with discordant instruments". Vega González, *Cadetes mexicanos*, pp.24-25.

¹⁰⁸ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, *Informe de campaña de prensa*, José Argüelles to Minister of State, 10 August 1937, Leg. R-996, Exp.105.

¹⁰⁹ *Idem*.

¹¹⁰ AHN-SGC, S.M. Carp.1.108, *Subsecretaría del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Ejército de Tierra*, Exp.22, Fol. 32.

¹¹¹ Néstor Sánchez, *Un Mexicano en la Guerra Española y Otros Recuerdos*, Carteles, México, 1997, p.249.

Mercado Tinoco, José Conti Varse, Humberto Villela Velez, but it is uncertain whether the others did. Out of the group of Mexican cadets, it is known that Conti died in combat in Extremadura, and Tito Ruiz Marín in Brunete.¹¹² Roberto Vega saw action near Alfambra, on the way to Teruel. His unit was under heavy bombing from the German "Condor Legion". After the action ended, and his group was decimated, those who survived were captured.¹¹³ His long confinement seemed about to end in the worst possible way. He was condemned to death, but due to international pressure and in particular, the diplomatic efforts of American and Cuban diplomats, he was saved; although he spent over three years in prison, he returned to Mexico in 1941. He wrote about his experiences including an account of the situation in Francoist prisons.¹¹⁴

Other accounts include the one written by David Alfaro Siqueiros, the foremost figure of the whole group. His memoirs, however, describe in a rather elusive way his role in the war, and give almost no additional information relevant to the participation of Mexicans in the war.¹¹⁵ Siqueiros mentioned his experience as part of the 46th Motorised Brigade, vaguely referring to Extremadura and the 82nd Brigade in Teruel. He was in charge of both brigades at some point.¹¹⁶ Siqueiros has been criticised and even his participation in the Spanish Civil War put in doubt. Nonetheless, there is enough evidence of his being there and his taking part in armed action. The fact that he was a well-known Mexican painter, boastful, and a Communist, fostered fantasies about him. However embellished or vague his description of his time in Spain, the fact remains that he went there to contribute to the war effort of the Spanish Republicans against Fascism. After all, Spain was not Siqueiros' first military experience -he had seen action during the years of the Mexican Revolution.¹¹⁷ In November 1937, while in charge of the 46th Motorised Brigade in Extremadura, General Leobardo Ruiz, Mexican liaison with the Spanish government, summoned him to Barcelona to attend a meeting

¹¹² *Idem*, p.253.

¹¹³ Roberto Vega González, *Cadetes Mexicanos en la Guerra de España*, Compañía General de Ediciones, México, 1948, pp.122-125.

¹¹⁴ *Idem*, pp.124-197.

¹¹⁵ David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Me llamaban El Coronelazo*, Grijalbo, México, 1975, pp.317-354.

¹¹⁶ AHN-SGC, S.M. Carp.2671, *Escuela Popular de Guerra*, Exp.15.

¹¹⁷ *Vida y Obra de David Alfaro Siqueiros, Juicios Críticos*, FCE, México, 1975, prologue by Angélica Arenal de Siqueiros, p.12.

with the Spanish Minister of War, Indalecio Prieto. Siqueiros was commissioned to acquire artillery mechanisms and optical military devices in the US, on behalf of Spain, but as usual, nominally for Mexico. He fulfilled the mission swiftly, but could not help noticing the defeatist attitude of the Spanish Minister of War.¹¹⁸

Although there was no Mexican Battalion, or 'Villa' or 'Cárdenas', as some had intended, there are recurrent mentions of such a contingent, although without substance. They were more wishful thinking; how could there not be a Mexican Brigade in the Spanish war.¹¹⁹ Some of the volunteers were part of the International Brigades, like Sánchez and Jaramillo, members of the *Dombrowsky* and *Lincoln* battalions respectively. Others were members of the *Thaelmann Battalion*, like Tito Ruiz. Some even combined military and political work, such as Lt. Col. Aníbal Gabucio, who held some command with the artillery within the International Brigades during the defence of Madrid. Similarly, although more dedicated to political work, Gastón Lafarga participated in the anti-Fascist struggle. They all knew that the really dangerous enemy was not the Spanish rebel army, but German and Italian intervention.¹²⁰ The overwhelming majority of Mexican volunteers participated by joining the rank and file of the Republican Popular Army, as did most Latin Americans.

Volunteers joined for a number of reasons, whether political conviction, idealism or adventurism. This latter, of course, was the case of a rather limited number of Mexican volunteers. These few cases were given greater relevance than deserved by Thomas Powell, the author of the first book devoted to the role of Mexico in the Spanish Civil War.¹²¹ The case Powell uses to illustrate the shallow motives for Mexicans to find a way out of Mexico is the one of Luis Monter, an aviator who participated in the war for a few months, but died in Madrid in 1938 "apparently by causes non-related to the war", as the Spanish Chargé in Mexico reported. In his despatch, Loredo Aparicio explained that Monter died while in

¹¹⁸ David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Me llamaban El Coronelazo*, pp.340-341.

¹¹⁹ President Cardenas himself had to decline such an honour, declaring that it would be more suitable for a by-gone heroic figure. Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, Tomo I, UNAM, México, 1972.

¹²⁰ *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 15, May 1937, *La Guerra en España*, by Andrés Iduarte, pp.32-35.

¹²¹ Powell, Thomas, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, Albuquerque, 1978, p.106. Additionally, Powell takes for a fact the questionable criticism made by Blanca Lydia Trejo in her book *Lo que vi en España*.

the company of the son of the former Mexican Ambassador to Spain, de Negri. De Negri's stepson had been the cause of some embarrassment for the ambassador while in charge of the Mexican Representation in Madrid. Loredo also reported that two women had visited the Spanish Embassy in Mexico both claiming to be Monter's widow, and stating –strangely enough- that they had news about the Mexican pilot having got married in Spain as well.¹²²

If the case of Monter was not one in which to take pride, there were numerous others worthy of honours of the highest esteem and remembrance. They were undoubtedly the overwhelming majority of the volunteers, not only Mexican. The Spanish Government treated the Mexican soldiers under contract as any regular member of the Republican Army. One of these cases was that of Mexican aviator, Eduardo Verduzco, whose father received 100 000 francs as indemnity for his having died "in war action at the service of the Republic."¹²³ Other Mexican volunteers include Juan B. Gómez, who was part of the Spanish Popular Army in Extremadura, Andrés García Salgado, and Félix Guerrero Mejía, also a member of the Spanish Popular Army, recruited by the Spanish Republican government. Manuel Gómez García was a Mexican aviator. Eugene McCoy went out of a desire for adventure, but while in Spain he became deeply convinced of the justice of the Republican cause.¹²⁴ Other Mexicans in Spain during the war were Pedro Gallo, Raul Anguiano, Juan de la Cabada, Elena Garro, who wrote a book in 1937, Chávez Morado, Pellicer, and others.¹²⁵

Negrín's Government sent the International Brigades out of Spain as a result of a unilateral decision. It was an attempt to finish with foreign intervention, demonstrating the will of the government to keep the conflict Spanish whilst making evident the nature of foreign intervention on the part of the rebels.¹²⁶ On 6

¹²² Loredo Aparicio to Minister of State, 31 October 1938, despatch 420, AMAE, Min. Edò. Leg. R-2571 Exp.16

¹²³ Dispatch no. 418, Loredo Aparicio to Álvarez del Vayo, 31 October 1938, AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-979, *Embajada española en Méjico*, Exp.1.

¹²⁴ *Revista de Revistas*, no. 3992, August 1986, pp.32 and 33.

¹²⁵ Interview of the author with Raul Anguiano, Mexico City, 19 October 1999.

¹²⁶ In the farewell parade of the International Brigades in Barcelona in October 1938, Néstor Sánchez carried the Mexican flag that was clearly seen opening the march, representing the presence of Mexicans and Latin American fighting in Spain, Néstor Sánchez, *Un Mexicano en la Guerra Civil Española*, p.252.

January 1939, a tribute to honour Mexican combatants was attended by the Spanish Republican Minister of State, Julio Álvarez del Vayo, and Juan Comorera, of the Catalan Generalitat. At that event, the Mexican Ambassador Col. Adalberto Tejeda, also recognised the contribution of Mexican volunteers and expressed his hope for the triumph of Republican Spain.¹²⁷ Present in the event was Luis Octavio Madero, Consul of Mexico in Barcelona, who had coordinated the allocation of various Mexican volunteers. Usually, it was the Mexican Military Attaché, Colonel Reynaldo A. Híjar, and General Leobardo C. Ruiz, Chargé de Affairs, who worked as liaisons between the Mexican and the Spanish Republican governments. On 23 February 1939, Mexican newspapers were reporting the arrival of a large group of the Mexican volunteers, survivors of the war. Particularly eager breaking the news, *El Popular* devoted its headlines to greeting those who had come back to the Motherland after having fought in Spain, pointing out the spontaneous demonstrations of support and admiration from the people in the streets.¹²⁸ It also printed a partial list of the volunteers.¹²⁹ In subsequent issues, it would publish interviews and articles written by some of the former combatants. *El Popular* reported that the Mexican volunteers who fought in Spain returned to the Motherland, amongst the spontaneous show of admiration of the people. They listed 34 volunteers returning together.¹³⁰

3. Preliminary Conclusions

The Mexican labour movement decisively supported the Republican cause in Spain not just out of sympathy for a progressive regime which it identified with the one personified by President Cárdenas, but above all because the threats posed by local admirers of the Spanish rebels were real. In doing so, in spreading the word of the struggle of the Spanish workers and their government, Mexican labour paralleled its own struggle, and the defence of the Mexican government, a government with which they identified the fulfilment of their demands. In fact, the Spanish conflict was a mirror in which the Mexican labour movement could

¹²⁷ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, *Méjico*, Leg. R2571, Exp.16, press article in *La Vanguardia*, 7 January 1939.

¹²⁸ *El Popular*, 23 February 1939, front page and p.5

¹²⁹ See full list in the Appendix.

¹³⁰ *El Popular*, 23 February, 1939.

perceive an image of its future should they lose their grip and influence on governmental policies. The warning was clearly issued during the closing session of the constituent assembly of the *CTM*.¹³¹ Such endeavours give clear evidence that large and varied sectors of Mexican society were supporting the Republican cause in Spain. In the case of the *CTM*, the imprint made left no doubt about their perception: in Spain a class struggle was being fought with international dimensions. Furthermore, Lombardo's personal influence and capability in organising independent trades unions, matched Lázaro Cárdenas' own political aim of re-organising the Mexican labour movement as a means to consolidate the political basis for his social policies. On 10 September 1937, Ambassador Gordón decorated Lombardo with the *Encomienda de Isabel la Católica*, for his services in favour of the Spanish Republic.¹³² Evidently, the decoration for Lombardo was in recognition of the work developed by the Mexican labour movement, which influenced and guided much of the general interest towards Spain. During the years of the Spanish Civil War, the beleaguered Spanish Republic and its workers would appreciate the solidarity of the Latin American labour movement promoted by Lombardo.¹³³

The transformation of the National Revolutionary Party (*PNR*) into the (*PRM*) Party of the Mexican Revolution in 1938, on the wave of the oil expropriation and the steady support of Republican Spain was a significant step in strengthening the position of the revolutionary elite. The new feature of the party, apart from the evident return to the most sensitive issues arising from the Mexican Revolution of 1910, was the integration of the army as the fourth sector, along with labour, peasantry, and the blurred popular sector. It was a kind of *Frente Amplio* in the fashion of the Popular Fronts of the 1930s, but obviously, not including other organisations such as the Communist Party or openly Anarchist groups. The transformation of the ruling party was more a definitive takeover by the radical faction in the governing elite that had an impact on the deepening of the reformist policies pursued by Lázaro Cárdenas and heavily supported by Lombardo's

¹³¹ *Historia Documental*, p.99.

¹³² *Futuro*, Tercera Época, no. 20, October 1937, p.12.

¹³³ *C.T.A.L., Resoluciones de sus Asambleas, 1938-1948*, México, 1948, pp.21; Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *What does the C.T.A.L. mean?*, México, 1944; Robert Millon, *Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Mexican Marxist*, p.129; Moisés Poblete Troncoso, and Ben G. Burnett, *The rise of the Latin American Labor Movement*, Bookman, New York, 1960, pp.134-139.

organised Labour.

The Mexican Government's commitment towards the Spanish Republican Government left no doubt regarding its sympathies, yet, the evidence seems to suggest that further engagement was avoided by discouraging the sending of Mexican volunteers to Spain. The internal political situation, although considerably more stable than in previous years, was by no means far from threats of turmoil. The main reason explaining this, on the domestic front, was the cautious attitude observed by those involved in organising the recruitment of volunteers. On the other hand, the official attitude discouraging any attempt linking the government with such activities. There was already a good deal of commitment shown by the Cardenas administration *vis a vis* the Republican cause in Spain, so as to be willing to go further in a policy that could weaken its position. Moreover, regarding the external factor, had the Mexican government openly encouraged recruitment of volunteers to fight in Spain, it would have moved Mexico towards an even more radical position than the one already perceived in the international arena. The Mexican stand was a rather lonely one in the Americas. (See Chapter IV).

In light of the above, it is easy to explain the extreme caution assumed, not only regarding the promotion of volunteering for Spain, but in leaving evidence behind. The participation of Latin Americans in the International Brigades, mainly as part of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, was campaigned for amongst the Hispanic residents in the US. One of the calls to participate came from the Spanish Militia and the American Brigade and was addressed to Spaniards, Hispanic Americans, and citizens of other countries sympathising with the legitimate government of the Spanish Republic.¹³⁴ Mexican volunteers were organised and recruited with some covert encouragement from Mexican military officials. Unlike most of the volunteers who joined the International Brigades, the Mexican volunteers made individual arrangements to fund their trip to Spain. There were several ways of funding the sending of volunteers, from public collections to private donations, mainly from some Mexican trades unions. This

¹³⁴ AGA, FMAE, 10234, Leg. 53, Dispatch Luis Careaga (Spanish Consul, New York) to Gordón Ordás, 10 May 1937.

was the case of the Mexican cadets, and members of the Mexican Army. The Mexican CP financed members of the Communist Party, workers of different origins, and some intellectuals.

The participation of Mexican nationals in the Spanish Civil War has hitherto been an issue almost non-existent within the literature of the period. Regardless of the different explanations for this, whether lack of interest or lack of data, the fact remains that no proper research has been undertaken on the issue. It is generally assumed that there were Mexicans involved in the war, and that they were in their hundreds, but there was previously no single study devoted to the issue. The works that include some information about those Mexicans vary and sometimes contradict each other. The fact that there is no organised archival material available that specifically deals with the topic, unlike in the cases of the British, French, or American volunteers, is a major set back for the elaboration of the full story. Therefore, this is an attempt to contribute to that end. The military sector and the working class were the main sources from which the Mexican volunteers came out to fight in Spain. There were others, particularly within the intellectual and artistic forums; nonetheless, the latter would contribute to the Republican cause in ways other than military action.

The fact that it is impossible to establish the actual number of Mexican volunteers has given rise to very different figures. Nonetheless, the suggestion made by *El Popular* claiming that there were over 700 Mexican volunteers seems exaggerated.¹³⁵ On the other hand, the figure adopted by academic works such as Lois Smith's that estimate only 150 volunteers also seems inaccurate.¹³⁶ Andreu Castells estimate, in his *Las Brigadas Internacionales de la Guerra de España*, that suggests a total of 464 Mexican volunteers, based on a broad report that takes as 500 the total number of Latin Americans, is not reliable.¹³⁷ Other academic works devoted to the participation of Mexicans and Latin Americans in the Spanish civil war, such as Powell's *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, and Gino Baumann's *Los Latinoamericanos*, coincide in a more realistic estimate of around

¹³⁵ *Futuro*, 23 February 1939, front page.

¹³⁶ Lois Smith, *Mexico and Spanish Republican Exiles*, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1955, p.196.

¹³⁷ Andreu Castells, *Las Brigadas Internacionales de la Guerra de España*, p.382.

Chapter V Mexico Supports the Second Spanish Republic.

300 Mexican volunteers.¹³⁸ I have to put the estimate of Mexican volunteers in around 350.

Broadly speaking, Mexico sided with Republican Spain, but although numerically less, there were many Mexicans supporting the rebels. Most of the supporters acted anonymously, as allies of the Spanish conservatives residents in Mexico. Some others were actively involved even as combatants in Spain, as we shall see in the next chapter.

¹³⁸ Gino Baumann, *Los Latinoamericanos en la Guerra Civil española*, Lima, Peru, 1979.

Chapter VI

Mexicans Supporting the Rebels in the Spanish Civil War.

Ojalá que la aurora no dé gritos que caigan en mi espalda
Ojalá que tu nombre se le olvide a esa voz
Ojalá las paredes no retengan tus ruidos de camino cansado
Ojalá que el deseo se vaya tras de ti
A tu viejo gobierno de difuntos y flores
**I wish the dawn may give no shouts that might fall on my back
I wish your name may be forgotten by that voice
I wish the walls may not hold your noises of the tired path
I wish the desire may go right after you
To your old government of flowers and dead**
Silvio Rodríguez

Although the overwhelming majority of the Mexican people had clearly stated their sympathy for the Republican cause in the Spanish conflict, there was nevertheless a section of Mexican society that unequivocally supported the rebel side. Conservative sectors in Mexico had been naturally inspired by traditional Spanish conservative values. These values included the defence of religion –as long as it was orthodox Catholicism - the preservation of family values along the same lines, and the natural right to possession of private property, and were assumed to be the essence of all true Hispanic concerns. After the loss of Spain's last remaining colonial outposts in the late Nineteenth Century, *Hispanismo* became the main ideological tool for maintaining links and regaining some influence in those regions of the former Spanish Empire.¹

¹ For a comprehensive and detailed analysis of this issue, see Frederick B. Pike, *Hispanismo, 1898-1936, Spanish Conservatives and Liberals and their relations with Spanish America*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1971. Within the Mexican debate in the 1920s and 1930s, the anthropologist Manuel Gamio

During the years of the *Cristiada* war, its main Right-wing challenge, the Mexican revolutionary government, albeit not professing any specific religious belief, encouraged the formation of the so-called Catholic Apostolic Mexican Church as a counterbalance to the Catholic Apostolic Roman Church. Given the interference of the Vatican in Mexican internal affairs and its influence upon a considerable section of Mexican Catholics, the Mexican Government used this as a means to persuade the clergy not to continue with its confrontational position. As a result of the Mexican Revolution, the Conservative forces in Mexico had been displaced from the centre of political activity but they remained watching developments closely.² After the revolutionary upheaval of the previous decades, Mexican Conservatives seemed less concerned about their political grouping than their economic survival. Nonetheless, they would still find a way to make their voices heard and their political presence to be taken into account.

However, during this period of Mexican politics, most of the confrontation between political factions and groups took place within the *PNR*, as local *caciques* pledged obedience to the party while remaining in control of their regions. They became the epitome of the cynical phrase "Revolution has done me justice". Locally they continued to exploit the peasants. Politically, those new local *Caciques* were natural allies of the Conservative groups. The alliance between former *hacendados* and modern Conservative civil servants or politicians was at the base of small radical Right-wing groups, such as the Fascist-type *Acción Revolucionaria Mexicana*, known as the *Dorados*, organised in 1933, and in which some middle-class professionals participated.³

led the rather isolated school of *Indigenismo*, which gave more weight to the indigenous part of the Mexican nationality. The more widely spread flow of *Latinoamericanismo* or *Hispanoamericanismo*, which considered both origins, the Indigenous and the Hispanic, in equal terms, included José Vasconcelos, Antonio Caso, Alfonso Taracena, and Pedro Henríquez Ureña amongst others. Francisco Bulnes, Carlos Pereyra, and others defended the banner of the *Hispanistas*. All of them, with the significant addition of Alfonso Reyes and Octavio Paz, would play a part in the subsequent development of the definition of the Mexican stand *vis a vis* Spain and Spanish issues.

² FAPECyFT, APEC, Exp.28, Leg. 1/3, Inv. 1353, *Declaraciones de Plutarco Elías Calles*, Gav. 21.

³ Gustavo Casasola, *Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana*, Vol. III, México, Trillas, 1962, pp.2126-2127.

Having no organised political party as such, the Mexican Right of the early 1930s patronised such groups as the *Unión de Padres de Familia* and the *Confederación de la Clase Media* among others.⁴ They maintained a strong influence on the Mexican press, from where they could openly launch virulent attacks on public figures. The two publications *Excélsior* and *El Universal* became the regular places for the instigation of such attacks. These newspapers had the highest circulation levels of all the Mexican press and pretended on face value to be open to all political and ideological orientations. However, it was evident that, in spite of the occasional appearance of dissident opinions, their general contributors and editorials were at the very least Conservative if not reactionary. The extreme Right also had its own newspapers, such as *Omega* and *El Hombre Libre*, and the magazine *Todo*, which, together with the papers already mentioned, constituted part of the varied publications under the influence of the Right-wing.⁵ Additionally, the growing presence of Spain in Mexico was also reflected in the grouping of Spaniards following the trends in Spanish politics. Thus early in January 1934 the creation of a Spanish Fascist Group in Northern Mexico was reported, following the recent formation of José Antonio Primo de Rivera's Falange in Spain.⁶ Finally, disenchanted with the radicalism of the Cárdenas's government, particularly after the expulsion of Calles from Mexico in 1935, some sectors of the revolutionary family had virtually allied themselves with the so far unorganised Conservatives.

The affinities between the Conservative sectors in both countries, Mexico and Spain, traditionally strong, were further reinforced during these years. A case that illustrates the relationship between the Mexican Conservatives and those of Spain during this period is that of the Reyes family. This family had originally been living in exile in Spain, but after a while they decided to settle and became actively involved in Spain's political and social life. Rodolfo Reyes was the son of General Bernardo Reyes, the former War Minister of Porfirio Díaz, whose family went into exile during the first years of the

⁴ AHDM, no. 7, Plutarco Elías Calles, *El aspecto político de la sucesión presidencial*, SRE, México, 1933.

⁵ After the Spanish Civil War, in 1942, Francisco Carmona Nenclares wrote an article in which he developed the idea of the *Hispanidad* as a Fascist-type elaboration to suit Mexican Conservatism in times of Fascist aggression; see Francisco Carmona Nenclares, *Hispanismo e hispanidad*, in Cuadernos Americanos, no. 3, México, mayo-junio 1942, pp.52-55.

⁶ *Futuro*, no. 5, February 1934, p.6.

Mexican Revolution. General Reyes remained in Mexico and was shot shortly after they left, allegedly wearing a coat that the Spanish King Alfonso XIII had given to him.⁷ Rodolfo went to live in Madrid with his wife, sons, and younger brother Alfonso in 1914. The two brothers would eventually develop opposing views on the Spanish conflict. (See Chapter V)

Rodolfo Reyes permanently installed himself in the Conservative circles of Madrid from 1925, and became active in debating Spanish issues within the *Ateneo de Madrid*, of which he became President of the Hispano American Section in 1932.⁸ Reyes supported the Spanish Republic and reluctantly praised both Socialists and Left-Republicans as they were actively pushing forward political changes whilst Conservative Republicans were being left behind.⁹ He also acknowledged that the disgrace of the Spanish Republic was not the fault of the Republican regime itself, but rather that the crime was the way in which the Republic had been defrauded. Furthermore, he was convinced that the Right-wing alliance of Lerroux-Gil Robles from 1933 to 1935 “could have done everything but did nothing” to save the Republic.¹⁰ In the end, like most Conservatives, Reyes favoured a military uprising on the grounds of the prevailing situation of chaos that had developed following the electoral triumph of the Popular Front in February 1936. Rodolfo Reyes’ family was also involved in local politics. The youngest son, Fernando, who was born in San Sebastian in 1915, a Spaniard by birth and choice, became an active participant in the Falange, and was one of its first members to be imprisoned in 1934. Roberto, the third son out of five, followed in the steps of Fernando and was also a member of the Falange. Roberto, a barrister, was also active in the defence of Falangists between November 1935 and July 1936, and became more involved in the Falange leadership. The eldest son, Bernardo, was more interested in international affairs, joined the Mexican diplomatic corps, and was assigned a position in Paris.¹¹ (See Chapter VII)

⁷ Rodolfo Reyes, *De mi vida, III, La Bi-Revolución Española*, JUS, México, 1948, p.28.

⁸ Rodolfo Reyes, *Cuatro Discursos*, Madrid, 1933, p. 26.

⁹ Rodolfo Reyes, *De mi vida*, p.73.

¹⁰ *Idem*, pp.80-90.

¹¹ AHDM, III-105-8, *Mexicanos en España, Diversos informes de nuestra embajada en Madrid, 1932*.

Coinciding with the Spanish “*Bienio Negro*” government, the preparations for a new group of Mexican students to go to Spain seemed to reflect these circumstances in the selection.¹² By January 1935, the three scholarships had been assigned to Mexican students from the National University, one of whom was to decline for personal circumstances. This led to the proposal that Juan Sánchez Navarro, “a distinguished student of the Faculty of Philosophy and Fine Arts”, be incorporated, together with a Law student, Bernardo Ponce, and Clemente Villaseñor, who pursued studies in Histology.¹³ Sánchez Navarro and Ponce had both participated in the students’ strike at the National University in 1933 during which the progressive forces led by Lombardo Toledano, then director of the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*, were expelled, making the university a Right-wing stronghold, under the leadership of the new rector, law teacher and barrister, Manuel Gómez Morín.¹⁴

Juan Sánchez Navarro y Peón and his friend Bernardo Ponce, both of whose families were typically Conservative, thus went to study in Madrid supported by the Spanish Republican Government. They travelled together in Europe and were supposed to attend the International Congress of Students to be held in Prague in August 1935, as representatives of the Right-wing Mexican Confederation of Students.¹⁵ They had been provided with accreditations as journalists, Sánchez Navarro from *Excelsior* and Ponce from *El Universal*. They arrived in Hamburg on board the *Orinoco* enthusiastic about their visit to Germany; then decided against going to Prague, apparently for economic reasons, and went to Paris instead, via Berlin.¹⁶ In every city they visited, some Mexican diplomatic official accompanied them; in Paris, for instance, it was Renato Leduc who showed the visitors the high lights of the French capital. They finally arrived in Madrid

¹² Previously, during the Left-Republican *Bienio*, some of the Mexican students in Spain included Silvio Zavala, historian, and Mauricio Magdaleno and Juan Bustillo Oro, novelists; all of whom professed sympathy for the Spanish Republic. Zavala had a Spanish scholarship whilst the other two were funded by the Mexican government. AGA, FMRE, Leg. 160. *Excmo. Sr. D. Julio Álvarez del Vayo. Embajador de España. Expediente personal (III-s-II)*.

¹³ Dispatch no 117, Pujadas to Minister of State, 15 May 1935, AGA, FMRE, *Embajada de España en Méjico*, Leg. 652, *Política-II-c- Congresos- Becas- Prensa, 1935*.

¹⁴ Bernardo Ponce, *Cuando los comunistas llegaron al poder*, quoted in Ma. Teresa Gómez Mont, *Manuel Gómez Morín: La lucha por la libertad de cátedra*, UNAM, México, 1996, p.533.

¹⁵ Interview of the author with Juan Sánchez Navarro, Mexico City, 3 July 1997.

¹⁶ Alicia Ortiz Rivera, *Juan Sánchez Navarro, Biografía de un testigo del México del siglo XX*, Grijalbo, México, 1997, pp.118-119.

and, in the absence of Ambassador, Manuel Pérez Treviño, it was Arturo Allsop Vila, Secretary of the Mexican Embassy, who provided the much needed funds. Then, they looked for accommodation in *Hernán Cortés* street, for the latter was, symptomatically, a reminder of their homeland.¹⁷

During their journey, Sánchez Navarro and Ponce stayed in touch with their mentor, Gómez Morín, and shortly after their arrival in Madrid, they informed him that they had already made friends with one of the leaders of *Acción Popular*, Ramón Madariaga (sic) were invited to write in *El Debate*. Soon they had both established contacts with more Right-wing organisations. Sánchez Navarro had a cousin who was an active member of the *CEDA* (Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right). With his cousin acting as mediator, he acquainted himself with more Spanish and Mexican Conservatives living in Madrid, such as Carlos Pereyra, a convinced *Hispanista*, who devoted his work as a writer to spreading the news of the *grandeur* of Hispanic culture throughout Latin America.¹⁸ Together, Pereyra and Sánchez Navarro, visited the different sites where, after the February 1936 elections and the triumph of the Popular Front Coalition, radical Leftists burned churches and provoked violence in Madrid.¹⁹ After a year studying in Madrid, Sánchez Navarro travelled to Santander in June 1936 to enrol in some summer courses at the *Colegio Cantábrico* of the Catholic University, only a few weeks before the military uprising. Meanwhile Bernardo Ponce left for Portugal on vacation.²⁰

Shortly before the military uprising in Spain, the progressive measures of the Cárdenas administration were generating sporadic reactions from Right-wing groups, such as *Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista*, to which firm responses were made in turn, always keeping the balance in favour of the Mexican Government.²¹ The Mexican Conservative

¹⁷ Interview of the author with Juan Sánchez Navarro, Mexico City, 3 July 1997.

¹⁸ *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Memoria de las Secretarías General, 1942*, CSIC, Madrid, 1943, pp.61-62.

¹⁹ Interview of the author with Juan Sánchez Navarro, Mexico City, 3 July 1997.

²⁰ Bernardo Ponce, *Rapsodia española. Una crónica del siglo XX*, Porrúa, México, 1979, pp.23-25.

²¹ Luis I. Rodríguez, one time private assistant to President Cárdenas, then heading the *PRM* gave a speech criticising *ARM* which he labelled as *El Fascismo Criollo* (local Fascism); see Luis I. Rodríguez, *Veinte Discursos*, México, 1936, pp.181-185.

sector justified the need for military action in Spain and pondered about a similar trend for Mexico.

The outbreak of the war found Rodolfo Reyes and his family in Madrid, and soon they were actively involved in the conflict, either protecting some of their Conservative friends and acquaintances, or taking up arms against the Republican Government.²² His son, Fernando, joined the uprising from day one, and miraculously survived the fighting at the Madrid *Cuartel de la Montaña*. He took refuge in the Mexican Embassy, and then fled to France, only to return later and join the rebels as a volunteer.²³ Another son, Roberto, who had also been active before the military uprising, sought refuge in the Mexican Embassy, and followed in his brother's footsteps to join the rebel army as a member of the Falange.²⁴ Meanwhile, the *Falange Española de Méjico* (sic), headed by the Spaniards José Vega and Baldomero Álvarez, expressed its satisfaction for the accurate description of the war in Spain offered by *Excélsior*.²⁵

Probably the most significant case of Mexican supporters of the Spanish rebels is that of Juan Sánchez Navarro, who received the news of the military uprising in Santander while attending a lecture.²⁶ As mentioned earlier, he had befriended students who were members of the Falange, and became anxious about his safety. Not having his passport with him, and mistaken for a Spaniard, he was unable to demonstrate otherwise. Although he requested a passport at the Mexican Consulate in Santander, he had to enrol in the Republican army until his passport arrived. However, his going to the front line came about as a result of his decision to cover up a friend of his, who was a medical doctor assigned to Polientes. This assignment in his hometown would certainly be fatal

²² Mexican newspapers broadly referred to the participation of the Reyes brothers as "sons of Mexican exiles during the [Mexican] Revolution", *Excélsior*, 3 August 1936.

²³ Fernando Reyes also volunteered in 1941 to join the *Blue Division* to fight against the Soviet Union; Rodolfo Reyes, *De mi vida*, p.500.

²⁴ Rodolfo Reyes, *De mi vida*, p. 500.

²⁵ *Excélsior*, 27 July 1936, p.2.

²⁶ Joaquín Sorobell, *Un mexicano en la guerra de España*, México, Mimeo, 1938. Sánchez Navarro returned to Mexico in late 1937, and published his experiences in Spain in a series of articles that appeared in *Novedades* in 1938; he wrote under the pseudonym of Joaquín Sorobell for no particular reason; Interview of the author with Juan Sánchez Navarro, Mexico City, 3 July 1997; Alicia Ortiz, *Juan Sánchez Navarro, Biografía de un testigo del México del siglo XX*, Grijalbo, México, 1997, p.122.

for the doctor as he was a well-known Right-winger. Therefore, Sánchez Navarro agreed to substitute him for a few days. On the way to Polientes, Sánchez Navarro realised the danger of his foolish action, not having the least idea about medicine or even first aid. He spent three days with a militia group, desperately trying to get out of this dangerous situation. So far, nobody had suspected anything but he knew that as soon as there was some actual fighting and wounded soldiers he would be discovered and certainly shot. He managed to convince the Commander of the group to allow him to return to Santander, arguing the need for proper medical provisions, which he could acquire; the Commander reluctantly allowed him to go.²⁷

Once in Santander, he sought refuge at the Mexican Consulate, and waited there for the arrival of his passport. With the help of the Mexican Consul in Santander, Nájera, he soon managed to get his passport from Mexico. When the petition reached Mexico, Foreign Minister Hay ordered the sending of a diplomatic passport, in consideration of his friendly relationship with the Sánchez Navarro family.²⁸ This provided Sánchez Navarro with a golden opportunity to support the Spanish rebels' war effort, given his identification with their cause. He did not hesitate at the request of some of his Falangist friends to undertake some under-cover work. Knowing the highly valued consideration the Republicans held for Mexico and Mexicans, Sánchez Navarro took advantage of his doubly fortunate position both as a Mexican citizen and the holder of a Mexican diplomatic passport.²⁹

During the following months he worked with the network of spies within the *Fifth Column* in Santander, carrying secret documents between different parts of the province. Although he claimed never to have known of the content of the packages he delivered, he acknowledged the effectiveness of the work of the Falangist spies in providing accurate information that evidently benefited the aerial bombing of the port.³⁰ Although concerned about the effect of the bombing on Santander and the civilian casualties; and the

²⁷ Joaquín Sorobell, *Un mexicano en la guerra de España*, México, Mimeo, 1938, 65.

²⁸ Interview of the author with Juan Sánchez Navarro, Mexico City, 3 July 1997.

²⁹ Alicia Ortiz Rivera, *Juan Sánchez Navarro, Biografía de un testigo del México del siglo XX*, Grijalbo, México, 1997, pp.115-151.

³⁰ Joaquín Sorobell, *Un mexicano en la guerra de España*, p.83-87.

bloodshed and violence on both sides, to which he made reference, he naturally criticised with greater intensity that of the “reds”. Sánchez Navarro was finally discovered and denounced, and he would have certainly been shot, had it not been for the Mexican Consul in Santander, Nájera, who, according to Sánchez Navarro, also favoured the Spanish rebels and helped him to get out of Spain on board an English vessel bound for the port of San Sebastian, which was in the hands of the rebels, and then on to Saint Jean de Luz, France.³¹

Although there was no specific reference to it, it was very likely that Bernardo Ponce, given his personal contacts with both Mexican and Spanish Conservatives and his ideological affinities, while in Lisbon undertook to liaise between Falangists and the Mexican Government. Mexican Ambassador in Portugal, Daniel Cosío Villegas, transmitted to Mexico City the proposal made by “important members of the Falange” who, acting separately from the military group, asked for his mediation in seeking a negotiated outcome for the Spanish conflict.³² Evidently, the Mexican Government could not support such a proposal, strictly considering its foreign policy, as Foreign Minister Hay explained to Cosío, given the previous attempt in that direction made by the Uruguayan Foreign Minister, which was firmly rejected by Mexico.³³

Meanwhile, in Madrid, the delicate situation surrounding the Mexican Embassy was nearing a solution. The existence of a number of asylum seekers and Spanish refugees in the Mexican representations in Madrid and Valencia was dealt with by the Mexican Government in the only way they could do, by honouring the right of sanctuary.³⁴ Even though giving refuge to enemies of the Republican regime could be interpreted as a hostile action towards it, the Spanish Republican Government accepted this contradictory attitude of its most fervent supporter. After all, this situation not only affected Mexico; other diplomatic representations, particularly from Latin America, had also accepted refugees. The fact that a significant proportion of those refugees in diplomatic

³¹ Interview of the author with Juan Sánchez Navarro, Mexico City 3 July 1997; Joaquín Sorobell, *Un mexicano en la guerra de España*, pp.93-94.

³² Telegram Cosío to Hay, 1 February 1937, AHDM, *Rebelión en España*, III-764-1 (II) 1936-1937.

³³ Telegram Hay to Cosío, 4 February 1937, AHDM, *Rebelión en España*, III-764-1 (II) 1936-1937.

³⁴ Mary Bingham de Urquidí, *Misericordia en Madrid*, Costa-Amic, México, 1975, p.15.

representations in Madrid effectively contributed to the *Fifth Column* effort was criticised by local authorities. Out of the over 800 refugees in the Mexican Embassy in Madrid, more than 60 were Mexicans who, either supported the rebels, such as the Reyes family, or, as supporters of the Republican regime, simply felt more secure within the premises of the embassy, such as in the case of the writer Pedro de Alba.³⁵ Many refugees, however, although pretending not to be interested in anything but their safety, did not hide their sympathies for the rebels and contributed to some extent to their war effort, at the very least in the propaganda campaign, as part of the machinery of the Fifth Column. A more ambiguous case was that of Mary Bingham de Urquidi, wife of the Third Secretary of the Mexican Embassy Juan Francisco Urquidi, who volunteered as a nurse for the International Red Aid whilst providing refuge to open supporters of the rebellion, such as José Ma. Iraola Aguirre, and his wife, Ma. Josefa Sánchez Tordecillas.³⁶ Bingham developed selfless work in organising medical relief and directly assisting of wounded in Madrid for the Republicans (see Chapter V) and yet, given her personal connections, she also aided many supporters of the rebels.³⁷

It was not difficult for the Republican authorities to be suspicious of the extent to which some Mexicans, who could get safe-conducts to move freely around Madrid, were involved with those well-known Spanish supporters of the rebels who had taken refuge at the Mexican Embassy, such as Alberto Martín Artajo, or the former Spanish Ambassador to Mexico, the corrupt and reactionary Emiliano Iglesias.³⁸ By September, there was severe open criticism in Mexico of the Ambassador, Pérez Treviño about this situation, and some discreet comments in Republican Spain.³⁹ Then, in December 1936, given the number of refugees in diplomatic representations in Madrid (over 5000), Luis Araquistain, Spanish Republican Ambassador to France, wrote about the abuse of the right of sanctuary for humanitarian reasons, which was clearly what had happened in Spain.⁴⁰ He was not criticising the Mexican Embassy, yet Cárdenas decided to remove

³⁵ AHDM, III-1905-7, *Mexicanos en España, 1936*.

³⁶ Mary Bingham de Urquidi, *Misericordia en Madrid*, p.21.

³⁷ *Idem*, pp.285-354.

³⁸ AHDM, III-764-1 (1a. Parte) *Rebelión en España, 1936*.

³⁹ *Excélsior* 12 September 1936, p.5.

⁴⁰ AHDM, *Archivo de la Embajada de México en Francia*, Caja no. 217, press cutting.

his Ambassador in Spain. Pérez Treviño was recalled to Mexico City and Ramón Pérez de Negri was appointed Mexican Ambassador to Republican Spain. Sánchez Navarro was also lucky to have departed by the time of the arrival of this radical Mexican diplomat whose criticism of the attitude of the previous ambassador and his team was outspoken.⁴¹ However, none of the real or invented threats were actually fulfilled, and the Spanish refugees at the Mexican Embassy were safely evacuated from Spain in March 1937. (See Chapter IV)

Nonetheless, when Rodolfo Reyes was constantly harassed by local authorities for his well-known relations with Falangists, particularly after the refugees at the Mexican Embassy had been evacuated, he made a clear declaration that he wanted to “accuse our [Mexican] diplomatic representation [in Madrid] from July 1937 to March 1939” for allowing the “red” government to force a Mexican citizen to relinquish his possessions. According to Reyes, Pérez Treviño was a magnificent diplomat, who had looked after the interests of Mexican and Spanish nationals alike with dignity.⁴² He then launched a bitter attack against the ambassadors, Pérez de Negri and Adalberto Tejeda, who had run the Mexican Embassy during the period he criticised. This criticism, however, clearly shows a highly biased and ideologically charged aspect of the actions taken by Mexicans who supported the rebel side in Spain. It was also reflected in that of the contradictory stance adopted by some Mexican diplomats during the war in Madrid.

The war in Spain, as the British Minister in Mexico had rightly pointed out, was “bound to have serious repercussions in Mexico.”⁴³ The creation of the *Unión Nacional Sinarquista (UNS)*⁴⁴ in May 1937, for instance, was the result of a growing opposition to

⁴¹ AHDM, III-764-2 (2a. Parte) *Rebelión en España, 1936-1937*.

⁴² Rodolfo Reyes, *De mi vida*, p.494.

⁴³ Dispatch Murray to Eden, 30 September 1936, *South and Central America, Confidential*, FO371/19792 A8119, 1936.

⁴⁴ Given the nature of the *UNS*, and the lack of critical studies, it remains an elusive subject. Although its importance is widely recognised, it is generally disregarded as a serious threat for the Mexican regime. Anne-Marie Leinert, for example, showed its Fascist-like ideology and practices, yet she rejected its Fascist character on account of the *UNS* not having attempted power seizure forcefully. However, the case of Antonio Santacruz, as the leader of *La Base*, the secretive clique defining *UNS* actions, reveals the extent of the influence of private businessmen in local politics attempting to subvert the political stability. See Anne-Marie Leinert, *Histoire du Mouvement Sinarquiste: 1934-1944. Contribution à l'Histoire du*

the progressive regime of Cárdenas, and had strong influence from European Conservatism. Set up as a secret society, with ultra-Nationalist orientation, the *UNS* followed in the steps of the *Cristeros* of the late 1920s. In fact, some of the *Sinarquista* leaders were active participants in the *Cristero* revolt, such as Salvador Abascal. Not entirely surprising was the fact that the *UNS* had been organised by the German Nazi Helmut Schreiter as the *Centro Anti-Comunista* in Guanajuato in 1936.⁴⁵ Although publicly rejecting any foreign influence, the creation of *UNS* along similar lines to the Spanish Falange and Italian *Fascio di Combatimento* was only natural, given their shared hatred of Marxism and Democracy. Presenting themselves as a genuine Nationalist movement, Mexican *Sinarquistas* followed in the footsteps of the Falangists, as the latter had done after their Italian and German counterparts.⁴⁶ Inspired in the traditional Spanish Conservative heritage, the formation of *UNS* in 1937, not only coincided with the recent unification of Spanish Right-wing organisations in the Spanish territory under rebel control, but more significantly, was a by-product of the work of the Spanish Falange in Mexico. The forced unification imposed upon the *Falange Española de las JONS*, and the *Comunión Tradicionalista* (Monarchist), which obeyed Francisco Franco's decision to concentrate power and eliminate opposition, however loyal, saw the active participation of Roberto Reyes, by now a top Falangist, alongside the leader of the Falange, Manuel Hedilla.⁴⁷

The extent to which Mexicans were involved in the Spanish conflict was broad, yet most of the time it passed unnoticed. But even when it was clearly shown, the stand of some Mexicans could be deceptive. This situation moved Andrés Ituarte to write a long account of his experiences in Madrid in 1937. This article, which he titled *Un día 13 en Madrid*, was a detailed narrative of everyday life in Madrid during the war. It told of the

Mexique Contemporain, PhD thesis, University of Sorbonne, Paris, 1975; and Brígida von Metz, et al, *Fascismo y anti-Fascismo*, pp.72-75.

⁴⁵ Albert L. Michaels, *Fascism and Sinarquism, Popular Nationalisms Against the Mexican Revolution*, in *A Journal of Church and State*, num. VIII, 1966, pp.234-250.

⁴⁶ Sheelagh Ellwood, *Spanish fascism in the Franco era: Falange Española de las JONS, 1936-76*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1987, pp.14-18.

⁴⁷ Joan Ma. Thomàs, *Lo que fue la Falange, La Falange y los Falangistas de José Antonio, Hedilla y la Unificación, Franco y el fin de la Falange Española de las JONS*, Plaza y Janés, Barcelona, 1999, pp.187-189.

terrible events the local people had to endure, and the almost “sinfully optimistic belief” that eventually France would open its borders to let aid come through. Finally, he was concerned about the Spanish generosity towards Mexicans, a “touching and frightening thing”, given the betrayal and abuse that some fellow Mexicans had committed under cover of the Mexican flag.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, an illustration of the way in which official diplomatic business was conducted in the rebel-controlled zone was given by the response to the Mexican request for the transfer of funds. The honorary Mexican Vice-Consul in Seville, had been unable to send the revenue from tax collection (derived from the 5% of the tariff deposit and other duties paid to the consulate) to the Tax Office Delegation at the General Consulate in Paris since the rebellion of July 1936. The Vice-Consul enquired about the best way to send over 20 thousand pesetas, the total revenue from tax collection for the previous year.⁴⁹ After consultation with the so-called Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Burgos, and the Ministry of the Interior in Salamanca, permission to send this money was denied. This decision was made on the grounds of the Mexican Government’s non-conciliatory attitude towards the rebels, who did not see any reason to be considerate to the representatives of a hostile regime, which, in addition, was continuing to provide material aid to the legal government. Furthermore, “there is no doubt”, they argued, “that countries that have shown sympathy towards our movement –even if they have not yet recognised our government- and practice a neutrality that often favours our cause, cannot be treated in the same way as those countries that are openly hostile, to whom no privileges or courtesy whatsoever must be given.”⁵⁰

The oblivious attitude of the officials involved in this issue is most revealing, for they considered irrelevant the possible benefit to their cause of a positive answer, given the fact that in Mexico, they thought that there were “few supporters of our cause.”⁵¹ As a

⁴⁸ *Futuro*, no. 23, January 1938, pp.26-30.

⁴⁹ Dispatch no. 26, *Instrucciones para desconocer a los representantes de Méjico como tales, Clausura consulados mejicanos*, Seville, 2 July 1937, AMAE, Min. Edo. Leg. R-4802 Exp.11.

⁵⁰ Dispatch no. 1457, Comisión de Hacienda, Junta Técnica del Estado to Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Salamanca, 23 July 1937, AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-4802 Exp.11.

⁵¹ *Idem*.

result of this incident, the Francoist regime took up an official non-cooperation position towards Mexico. On 5 August 1937, the official response to the Mexican request, stated that not only would the Mexican Government not be able to keep its own funds (tax collection-tariff duties) but that all the consular representations should be shut down immediately. The Mexican representatives were not to be granted any right, immunity, privilege or consideration, and were given a minimum period to remove any kind of sign, emblem, or banner or they would be liable to proscription and expulsion.⁵²

Throughout the entire Spanish Civil War, the Conservative Mexican press directed severe criticism against the government's official position and its various policies in supporting the Republican cause in Spain.⁵³ Their favourite target was Lombardo Toledano and what they perceived as the Communist influence he had on Cárdenas and his government. He was also a preferred target since he was the visible instigator of the regime's progressive policies and thus, it was easier to attack Lombardo as an indirect way of attacking Cárdenas.⁵⁴ Every effort made by its allies in raising support for the Republican cause in Spain would be criticised and thwarted if possible. Events such as collecting funds, food, clothes or simply organising conferences or exhibitions were subjected to attacks by fanatics acting in support of their Spanish counterparts. The involvement of foreigners in such actions was not at all alien to the character of the Spanish conflict, as in the case of the conspiracy denounced by Lombardo against an Italian Consul. Supporting his claim with reference to the *New York Times'* correspondent, Frank L. Kluckholm, Lombardo held the Italian Consul in Veracruz, Gustavo Della Luna, responsible for providing vital information to the Spanish rebels regarding the *Mar Cantábrico*. The Spanish rebels captured the Republican ship, loaded

⁵² Dispatch no. 2215, 4 August 1937, *Instrucciones para desconocer a los representantes de México como tales, Clausura consulados mexicanos*, AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-4802 Exp.11.

⁵³ Both newspapers sided with the Spanish rebels, echoing the criticism of Conservative circles in both countries. However, *Excelsior's* afternoon edition, *Últimas Noticias*, regularly published vociferous anti-Republican editorials, whilst *El Universal*, attempting an image of impartiality, opened its pages to pro-Republican articles by supporters such as Lombardo.

⁵⁴ Although the government had its own newspaper, *El Nacional*, and labour organisations had theirs, including publications such as *Futuro*, *El Machete*, and from 1938 onwards, *El Popular*. They all had limited distribution and lacked the resources of the major newspapers. (See Chapters IV and V)

with war material, clothes and food for the Spanish people in the Republican zone, early in March 1937.⁵⁵

A more symbolic attack on the Republican cause took place in June 1937, when the Spanish Republican Government organised an exhibition of posters on the life and struggle of the Spanish people. Using a Mexican student supporter of the rebels as an instrument, the Confederation of the Middle Classes (*Confederación de la Clase Media - CCM*) instigated the destruction of several of the posters. The student was arrested and incarcerated, pending sentence. The *CCM* then turned to the unofficial representatives of the rebels in Mexico, who were supervised by Francisco de Cárdenas from Washington, for assistance to find some means of helping their young supporter. Oblivious to the situation prevailing in Spain, or perhaps believing their own propaganda about the law-abiding God-fearing rebels, they inquired after the possibility of offering the student a scholarship in one of the Spanish universities. De Cárdenas referred the request to Burgos in writing, but it was declined. Burgos regretted not being able to fulfil the request, "considering the way scholarships are granted and particularly the fact that the Spanish universities are now closed."⁵⁶ At the end, the young man was abandoned to his fate.

The link between Mexican Conservatives and Nazi Germans, Fascist Italians and Falangist Spaniards was stronger as the war in Spain continued, as we shall see. The Spanish Civil War effectively brought together Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. In fact, the Axis powers alliance was formed and consolidated during the Spanish war, which was effectively a war of intervention. Italy joined the Anti-Comintern Pact exactly a year after it was signed by Germany and Japan, on 25 November 1937. However, not being a priority in Hitler's immediate scheme of political and military domination, German influence in Mexico and Latin America had a low profile. Concerned with maintaining their interests, Mexican Conservatives found in their support of the Spanish rebels a

⁵⁵ *El Nacional*, 9 April 1937.

⁵⁶ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, *Relaciones Culturales*, 1937, Leg. R-2463, Exp.93, Letter Juan F. de Cárdenas to General Secretary for Foreign Relations, 7 July 1937. Reply from the Junta Técnica del Estado, Comisión de Educación y Enseñanza, 11 August 1937.

means also to defend their own position. Although it was only natural that the members of the same social class make alliances, the traditional values, antecedents and links between members of Spanish and Mexican upper-class sectors galvanized their actions.

Right-wing opposition to Lázaro Cárdenas became the unifying element of pro-Fascist Mexican groups, closely associated and encouraged by the *Falange Exterior* and Nazi German agents. The main organisations were the above-mentioned Confederation of the Middle Class and the *Comité Pro-Raza*, although these organisations were closer to the Spanish Falange than to German Fascism. The *Falange Española en el Exterior* was at the base of the extreme Right-wing organisations in Mexico, having National Syndicalism as a variation of the predominant Right-wing Nationalist tendencies. As explained earlier, the common ground for the reactionary groups, not only in Mexico but also throughout Latin America, was *Hispanismo*. Although the majority of the extreme Right-wing groups held strong Christian values and thus identified themselves with the views of traditional Spanish Conservatives, the more radicalised elements were also ultra-Nationalist, which ultimately meant they were anti-Spanish. However, their actual numbers and influence were limited to some municipalities in the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco and San Luis Potosí.⁵⁷ However, the influence of *Hispanismo* was evident, with the aims equal but means differing: Conservative traditional values based on Catholicism, Hispanism in the case of Mexico; and a glorious imperial past to be resuscitated for Spain.

According to Lombardo, further notice should be taken of the 'secret activities which certain elements connected with Fascism were carrying out through apparently commercial operations with the intervention of the German Legation'. The Stevedores' Union, affiliated to the *CTM*, stated that the Legation was receiving large quantities of Fascist propaganda printed in Spanish, and added that German film companies were

⁵⁷ Examples of such extreme Right-wing groups were the so-called *Liga Nacional Mexicana*, and the *Reintegración Económica Mexicana*. The latter, developed an anti-Spanish campaign between 1933 and 1934. One of the pamphlets signed by one Amador E. Velez, read: "For *REM*, if it is Jewish, it is bad; if it is *Gachupín*, it is worse; if it is *Agachupinado* Mexican, far worse; to wipe them out is the best." (Para *Reintegración Económica Mexicana*, si es Judío es malo; si es *Gachupín*, es peor; si es mexicano *agachupinado*, es muchísimo peor; acabar con ellos es lo mejor." AGA, FMRE, Leg. 627, Política-II-a-General, *Campaña anti-española, 1934-1935-1936*.)

giving private exhibitions of films justifying German and Italian intervention in Spain and that propaganda was being carried out by the German School here.”⁵⁸ Lombardo’s allegations of Fascist activities in Mexico had the Procurator General mobilised with a police raid on the headquarters of the Middle Class Union (which also according to the British Legation was in receipt of German subsidies) and the Union of Revolutionary Veterans. Although documents were seized and several individuals arrested, proceedings were abandoned apparently based on the direct orders of President Cárdenas; the two organisations were allowed to resume their activities.⁵⁹

As part of the anti-Republican campaign, *Todo*, the Conservative magazine written in the trite style of a Mexican patriotic journal and edited by José Pagés Llergo, published editorials criticising the senseless recruitment of Mexican youths just to end up being slaughtered like cannon fodder in Spain as volunteers for the Republican Government. They blamed Roberto Vega González and other cadets from the Military Academy for practising deceit to permit them to join up.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the attempts to encourage both Mexican and Spanish youths to go to fight in Spain for Franco proved more difficult than imagined. It was considered acceptable for second generation of Spaniards to support the military rebellion in Spain, but to actually joining the rebels was an entirely different thing. Spanish *enganchadores* (recruiters), such as Apolonio Hernández, a Spaniard linked with the *FET*, approached Mexican middle class youngsters craving for adventure. Some of those willing to accept the offer of becoming military men in the Spanish rebel army, plus paid expenses, were Rogelio Aguilar, Gregorio Guzmán, and Jacobo Aguirre.⁶¹ Uncovered by journalist Gilberto Rod, the pro-rebel “volunteers” were apparently discouraged from accepting the offer.⁶² Although there is enough evidence to demonstrate the role of Mexican Conservatives and Spanish

⁵⁸ Gallop to Eden, 5 August 1937, “Reported beginnings of a Fascist movement in Mexico” FO371/20639 A5928, 1937.

⁵⁹ Gallop to Eden, 11 August 1937, “Political situation in Mexico”, FO371/20639 A6194, 1937.

⁶⁰ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Sección de América, 1938 Leg. R- 979, Exp.1 Ref. V-Mej, Embajada española en Méjico, press cutting of *Todo* issues of 24 Octubre 1937, and 11 November 1937.

⁶¹ *El Popular*, 3 September 1938, p.7.

⁶² *Idem*; emphasising the nature of the betrayal against the Spanish Republic, *El Popular* referred to *Falange Española Tradicionalista* as *Falange Traicionista Española*.

residents in organising the sending of Mexican combatants for Franco, no case of actual fighters has been documented.

The series of pro-Spanish rebel actions in Mexico, however limited in numbers and scale, had an impact on both Mexican public opinion and the aid effectively provided to the Spanish rebels. On 4 November 1937, the Republican Charge de Affairs in Mexico, José Loredo Aparicio, sent a long and detailed despatch to Valencia about the activities of Spanish Fascists in Mexico. He reported that, acting upon the advice of loyal Mexican and Spanish friends, he had presented the Mexican Government with a memorandum detailing the activities of such groups and how this affected the effective work of the Republican representation and posed a threat to Mexico. He also submitted a copy of the document to the Commission drawn up at the Mexican Congress with the express aim of dismantling Fascist activities in Mexico. José Loredo Aparicio, the Spanish Chargé de Affairs in Gordón's absence, envisioned an alarming situation, given the intense and effective work of the Falangist movement in Mexico, which had initiated a series of campaigns against prominent Spanish Republican supporters all over the country. The loyal consuls in Veracruz and Torreón, for instance, had been subjected to defamatory campaigns with the aim of discrediting them. Similar events had occurred in other cities and included both Mexican and Spanish citizens loyal to Republican Spain. Some of the newspapers they used, Loredo writes, are *El Diario Español*, and *Vida Española*. It was clear that the organiser of the *Falange Exterior* had plenty of economic support and probably some official support as well. The most notable public figures supporting the Falange were Augusto Ibáñez Serrano, head of *Unión Nacionalista Española*, who kept the archive that José Ma. Pujadas, former First Secretary, had taken from the Spanish Embassy before being expelled by Gordón Ordás in July 1936; Braulio Suárez, manager of *Diario Español*; Mario Fernández, Managing Director of the same newspaper; Ramón Guerra and his brothers, and Jaime Adechederra, all of them wealthy traders; and José Castedo, director of *Vida Española*, among others.⁶³

⁶³ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-996, *Embajada Española, Mejico 1937-38*, Exp.20, *Actividades españolas fascistas en México*, Dispatch of 11 November 1937.

Trying to prevent the spreading of rebel influence amongst loyal sympathisers, and having news of such attempts, the Spanish General Consulate in Mexico received, and passed on, communication to the Spanish Consulate in Tampico and Veracruz regarding the Spanish Foreign Ministry's orders that no ship belonging to the Sota Company be allowed to leave any Mexican port, and even proceeding to detain any such a ship and its crew.⁶⁴

Particularly relevant to the encouragement of anti-Republican groups was German influence. According to some of the few studies devoted to the issue, Nazi policy towards Latin America can be divided into two phases. The first one, from the coming to power of Nazism in Germany in 1933 to 1938, and the second one from 1939 until the end of Latin American neutrality during World War II in 1942.⁶⁵ During the first period, Nazi aims in the region included the manipulation of Latin American public opinion regarding the "injustice of Versailles", thus gaining implicit support and influencing governmental policies in the region. Other aims were the improvement of the economic position of German nationals to increase German exports, a shift in the structure of German imports towards essential raw materials in order to enhance German arms production and to use German communities living abroad to serve the Reich by uniting them and keeping them in close contact with their Fatherland.⁶⁶ For the local oligarchy, the German example successfully repressing of progressive forces, with the additional charm of anti-imperialist demagoguery, was very much welcomed.⁶⁷

According to American journalist Allan Chase, Falange Exterior was nothing but a German puppet manipulated by Wilhelm von Faupel, appointed head of the Ibero-

⁶⁴ Circular Emilio Zapico to Spanish Consulates in Mexico, 1 August 1937, AGA, FMAE, 10234, Leg. 53.

⁶⁵ Brigida von Mentz, Ricardo Pérez Montfort and Verna Radkau, *Fascismo y Anti-Fascismo en América Latina y México*, SEP-Casa Chata, México, 1984, pp.5-16.

⁶⁶ Allan Chase, *Falange, The Axis Secret Army in the Americas*, Putnam's Sons, New York, 1942, pp.3-21; Brigida von Mentz, Ricardo Pérez Montfort and Verna Radkau, *Fascismo y Anti-Fascismo*, pp.29-38.

⁶⁷ In this respect, Friedrich Katz assesses the presence of Nazi Germans as a real threat, although dismissing the real strength of it. Lourdes Quintanilla, although apparently criticising Lombardo's anti-Fascist position as Stalinist, acknowledges his contribution, through the CTAL, in preventing the wider spread of pro-Fascist groups. Frederik Katz, *The secret war in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, pp.283-315; Lourdes Quintanilla, *Lombardismo y sindicatos en América Latina*, Fontamara, México, 1982, pp.125-149.

American Institute in 1934, and then diplomatic representative in Franco's Spain.⁶⁸ The Nazi-Fascist supporters of the Spanish military rebels were eager to recognise Franco's government, and thus rushed to do so on 18 November 1936, when they assumed Franco's forces had taken Madrid. After the recognition of Franco's government by Germany and Italy, the sending of diplomatic representatives made the influence of foreign supporters stronger. Thus, General von Faupel, German representative in Burgos became a key figure in dealing with politics within the rebel-controlled zone in Spain. His duty was to guide the rebel triumph and politically prepare the future regime in the shape of the Fuhrer's needs.⁶⁹ Although abundantly filled with numerous details, Chase's account of the German influence in Latin America seems to exaggerate the extent and numbers to which pro-Fascist followers were actively involved in upsetting local governments in the Americas. However, his work is relevant for it contains an accurate description of the activities by which both Spanish Falange and German agents were encouraging and influencing local reactionary groups, such as the *UNS* in Mexico. In a similar case, Hermann Rauschning, pro-Nazi former President of the Senate in Danzig in 1933, and a disaffected Nazi by 1938, described Hitler's real intentions in his book in 1939, making important revelations regarding the Nazi ambitions in Latin America, and disclosing the significant role given to Mexico in the eventual German war effort against the US. Rauschning's book was criticized as mere propaganda, given the pro-Hitler predominant feelings of the time in the US. However, in spite of the invented descriptions of Hitler's first hand references, the exposure of Nazi plans for worldwide domination, was accurate.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Allan Chase, *Falange, The Axis Secret Army in the Americas*, Putnam's Sons, New York, 1943, p.3.

⁶⁹ Memorandum by the Foreign Minister, von Neurath, 18 November 1936, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D (1937-1945) Vol. III, *Germany and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, p.134.

⁷⁰ Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler speaks: a series of political conversations with Adolf Hitler on his real aims*, Thornton Butterworth, London, 1939. Although his work was later discredited as a forgery, and that no actual conversations took place in the quantity claimed by Rauschning, the description he made was in accordance with the events happening at the time. In fact, the recommended text for an unbiased first hand account of Hitler's political views, Otto Wagener's *Memoirs of a Confidant*, edited by Henry Turner, and Rauschning's are strikingly similar. If anything, the perspectives differ from a critical one, Rauschning's, to a supportive one, Wagener's; see *Hitler-Memoirs of a Confidant*, edited by Henry Ashby Turner Jr., Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1985, pp.xv-xix.

The “living space” (*Lebensraum*) demanded in Hitler’s project for a stronger Germany was a concept tolerated by Western European leaders, as long as its territorial ambitions primarily threatened Eastern Europe. However, in the Nazi German strategy, Latin America played a significant role in the medium and long-term aims. Commercial interest in the region became political interest at a time of increasing international tension. Germany needed Latin America to remain neutral by the late 1930s.⁷¹ German economic interests in Latin America decreased after World War I, but were again encouraged during the Nazi period, regaining the pre-World War I level (16.3% Latin American imports, second only to the United States) the fear of a greater German political influence in the region was patent in American circles by 1938. Perhaps taking the idea of avoiding a European war to the extreme, although not considering the sacrifice of the Spanish Republic, the Western countries found themselves closer to the Nazi-Fascist countries, by then clearly identified as the Axis Powers. Ernst Wilhelm Bohle, head of the *Auslandsorganisation* and State Secretary of the German Foreign Office, developed the idea of maintaining contact with German citizens living abroad as a means to infiltrate public opinion in their host countries. Mexico was not the exception; in fact, Mexico was considered a privileged launching base for its geographical location.⁷²

However, some German people in Mexico, far from being Nazi followers or silent supporters of the Nazi regime, were active anti-Fascists.⁷³ Bohle, actively engaged in keeping up appearances of German good will, at least for Western Conservatives, met with Winston Churchill on 2 October 1937 in London. After that meeting, Churchill, who had been critical of the German *AO*, became quiet on the issue.⁷⁴ German influence in South America seemed broader and easier to expand. On 1 July 1938, German diplomats of the region gathered in Montevideo, Uruguay, in an attempt to unify German policy towards the region on all political, economic and cultural fronts. No defined aims and

⁷¹ Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler speaks*, pp.72-74.

⁷² AHDM, III-431-2, *Alemanes radicados en México*, 1940.

⁷³ Letter of the anti-Fascist *Liga pro-Cultura alemana en México*, 1 March 1938, AMAE, Minsiterio de Estado, Leg. R-979, *Embajada española en Méjico*, Exp.1. Headed by Alfons Goldschmidt, the league grouped together Communists and Social-Democrat German exiles.

⁷⁴ *War-crime trials: Nuremberg*, Pamphlet, Germany, 1945, p.19.

means were reached. The antagonism between Bohle and Ribbentrop, German Foreign Minister, was at the base of the disagreement. Bohle's *Auslandsorganisation* pursued undercover partisan work versus Ribbentrop's Foreign Office frontal action.⁷⁵ German activism in the region, particularly after the Conference on Latin America held in Germany on 12 June 1939, followed Hitler's intervention in the *Reishtag* in April 1939, when he referred to Latin America and the US.⁷⁶

The support of Spanish rebels by Mexican Conservatives was logically part of their wider support of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. But the natural ally that provided proper guidance was the Spanish Falange. The combination of all these likely supporters encouraged the formation of extreme Right-wing organisations willing to oppose President Cárdenas and his followers. Given the personal connections between pro-rebel and Conservative Mexicans with well-established Mexican civil servants, and the links between Mexican and American businessmen with Spanish rebels in the US, it is easy to conclude some form of financial support. On 7 May 1938, Gordón Ordás sent yet another detailed report on Fascist activities in Mexico. The Spanish Ambassador referred to the particularly alarming situation that had arisen from the rumours of a possible military insurrection led by General Saturnino Cedillo, given the links he had with extreme Right-wing organisations including Fascists.⁷⁷ In fact, similarly to the foreign support received by the *Sinarquistas* in 1937, General Cedillo, the local cacique in the Northern state of San Luis Potosí, was effectively supported from abroad. His case, however, brought together two apparently reluctant partners, as the *cedillistas* were funded by German and British private money. Nevertheless, their bigger support came from the Spanish Falange, which encouraged their Mexican members and associates firmly to collaborate with the rebels. The possibility of a Franco-style uprising grew stronger. Under increased tension, given the enforcement of the revolutionary programme, shown by the deepening of the land distribution process, and particularly by the oil expropriation, General Saturnino Cedillo, former Minister of Agriculture in Cárdenas' cabinet, the typical cacique in local

⁷⁵ A further Conference was held in November 1940 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, but no agreement was reached.

⁷⁶ Brigida von Mentz, et al, *Fascismo y anti-Fascismo*, pp.17-18.

⁷⁷ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-2571, Exp.16, *Actividades Fascistas en México*.

politics in San Luis Potosí, his hometown, decided to rebel against the government. His criticism against the Cárdenas administration was similar to that of General Calles, regarding the radicalism of the government. The rebellion of May 1938 led by General Cedillo was a direct response to the oil expropriation, as the latter was perceived as the ultimate proof of Cárdenas' Communism. Opposition groups, clearly identified with both Falangists and Nazi-oriented groups, used Cedillo's disaffection with the government. This meant the strengthening of the pro-Fascist movement in Mexico.

In spite of lacking official diplomatic relations, there were some unofficial links between the rebel government and some members of Cárdenas's cabinet. In July 1938, Loredo reported on the work developed by Augusto Serrano Ibáñez as unofficial representative of Franco's government in Mexico. According to Loredo, Serrano Ibáñez had offices at the Portuguese Legation in Mexico City, and was developing his work in favour of the Spanish rebels from there. Loredo reported this situation to the Mexican Foreign Minister, Eduardo Hay. Nevertheless, Loredo quoted some confidential reports informing on the personal relationship between Serrano Ibáñez and Hay, which provides some sort of aid to Serrano's work.⁷⁸

With military defeat imminent, the Republican Government was finally abandoned by Britain and France's governments, which recognised Franco's government on 26 February 1939. This led to the resignation of President Azaña. The Republican camp was further divided and betrayed from within. The coup led by Colonel Segismundo Casado in Madrid on 4 March, crushed PM Negrín's strategy of resistance. The Republican defeat saw the beginning of the Spanish Republican exile in Mexico coinciding with Lázaro Cárdenas' last year in office. This situation, given the political tension developed from the previous year's conflicts effectively marked the pace for the most important political decision of the revolutionary governing elite. The pressure of stronger, better organised, and more determined oppositionists played a significant role in the definition of the official candidate to the presidency. Falangists in Mexico, both Mexican and

⁷⁸ Dispatch no. 277, Loredo to Álvarez del Vayo, 22 July 1938, AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-979, *Embajada de España en Méjico*, Exp.1.

Spanish, openly celebrated the end of the war in Spain.⁷⁹ The celebration was considered a provocation, and the violent reaction of pro-Republican Mexican workers was the justification the Mexican Government needed to expel three boastful Spanish Falangists,⁸⁰ Alejandro Villanueva Plata, Eulogio Celorio and Genaro Riestra, on account of “promoting violence”. As a result, *Falange Española* ceased formally its activities as such in Mexico, although its members found new organisations to devote their anti-Communist sentiment to. However, Cárdenas was not to go beyond strictly necessary preventive measures, and still tolerated new Falangist groups to be formed, as long as they demonstrated no violent behaviour.⁸¹

The pressure of pro-Franco groups for the recognition of his government by the Mexican Government grew stronger. Particularly after the US Government did so. A reluctant and regretful Roosevelt gave the “all clear” for recognition of the Franco regime on 1 April 1939, but not without acknowledging to Bowers that he, the American Ambassador to Spain during the Civil War, had been right all along while criticising American neutrality and European Non-intervention.⁸² In spite of the American recognition of Franco’s government and the increased local pressure to follow the same path, Cárdenas decided to continue his resolute support for the Republican, convinced that it was the right thing to do.

Reporting from New York, Juan Francisco de Cárdenas, who had been engaged in promoting the recognition of the Francoist government in the US and the Americas, referred to the attitude of the Mexican Government regarding the issue shortly after the US recognised Franco’s government. “Our friends” he wrote, “who are in touch with the Interior Ministry, said the issue of recognition has been discussed, and that he (presumably Serrano Ibáñez) has been recognised as the representative of the Spanish Government. Although reluctant about making the first move to obtain recognition from the Mexican Government, de Cárdenas expressed his opinion that the Spanish

⁷⁹ *El Popular*, 31 March 1939, front page.

⁸⁰ AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas-546.2/48.

⁸¹ AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas-546.2/149.

⁸² Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain, Watching the Rehearsal for World War II*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1954, p.418.

Government would accept such a move from the Mexican Government. According to the report, the Spanish representative claimed to have been able to talk to the Mexican Foreign Minister, Eduardo Hay, and the Interior Minister, García Téllez, who had shown a “magnificent courtesy” towards the Spanish residents and himself personally.⁸³

Reporting from his office in New York, the now Spanish Ambassador to the US, Juan Francisco de Cárdenas, wrote to Burgos on 5 April regarding the hand over of the buildings owned by the Spanish Government in the US. According to de Cárdenas, the premises were handed into the custody of both the Colombian and the Mexican governments. However, he refused to accept anything from the Mexican Embassy in the US, so he demanded the hand over from the Colombian Ambassador alone, and the necessary arrangements were made to suit his wishes. It was very unlikely, nevertheless, that the Mexican Ambassador would have agreed to deal with the newly appointed Ambassador of the so-called Spanish State government.⁸⁴

In September 1939, the Spanish Ambassador in Lisbon, Nicolás Franco, sent a detailed dispatch to Burgos stating the reasons why it would not be advisable to send unofficial Spanish representatives to Mexico for the time being. His report was based on the one sent to him by the Portuguese Foreign Ministry. The Portuguese Chargé de Affairs in Mexico had reported to his Foreign Office that “public opinion in Mexico [was] not sympathetic towards the Spanish Government in spite of the strong efforts made by Conservative parties to that aim.” Furthermore, he recommended that it would be better to wait for a few more months, as Mexican public opinion, not being prone to extremism, would change. Moreover, he warned that sending representatives before that happened would cause irritation and be dangerous. He recalled the case of the two Falangists who visited Mexico earlier in the year, one of whom introduced himself as a personal representative of Franco, as only provoking disastrous consequences, such as the assault on the *Casino Español*, and his expulsion from the country by the Mexican Government.

⁸³ Dispatch no. 274, de Cárdenas to Minister of Foreign Affairs in Burgos, 6 April 1939, AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, *Reconocimiento del Gobierno Nacional*, Leg. R-1050, Exp.19.

⁸⁴ Dispatch no. 273, de Cárdenas to Minister of Foreign Affairs in Burgos, 5 April 1939, AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, *Reconocimiento del Gobierno Nacional*, Leg. R-1050, Exp.19.

Symptomatically, the Portuguese Chargé de Affairs in Mexico complained about the *CTM*, which, according to him, undertook far more active policing than the official police, and the espionage service organized by Lombardo, who “professes a deep hatred of all non-Communist Spaniards” through his *El Popular*. On top of this, there was the hatred of all the Spanish exiles against the friends of the Spanish Government.⁸⁵ Finally, the Portuguese report pointed out the Spanish issues pending solution, such as the liquidation of the *Manuel Arnús*, the handing over of Spanish buildings, both cases attainable before the recognition. The Mexican debt on the ships built in Spain had to be dealt with, said the report, only after recognition, ignoring that the issue had already been completely settled.⁸⁶

Although Mexican Spanish diplomatic relations were severed as a result of the Francoist triumph in Spain, Spanish Conservative influence in Mexico was not absent. After the failure of the Falange-supported *UNS* to launch a rebellion against the Mexican Government, Spanish Falangists pursued a more ambitious project. Perhaps its most enduring by-product was the creation of the National Action Party, as the alternate civil outcome to a revolutionary uprising against the government.⁸⁷ According to Manuel Gómez Morín, the founder of the *PAN*, he, and “a group of friends”, began to consider the necessity of creating a political party after the frustrated electoral results of the presidential election of 1928, when he actively supported José Vasconcelos candidacy. But after the disillusioned losing candidate left the country, nothing was done. Gómez Morín only resumed the issue of the new party in 1938. By then, he said, there was an intolerable political situation in Mexico.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Dispatch no. 343, Nicolás Franco to Minister of Foreign Affairs in Burgos, 6 September 1939, AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, R-1019, *Embajada de España en Lisboa*, Exp.19.

⁸⁶ Dispatch no. 42, Gordón to Álvarez del Vayo, 18 March 1939, AGA, FMAE, Leg. 617, *Comercio, Pago Barcos, 1933-1938*.

⁸⁷ For a thorough analysis of the *PAN* and Conservative movements in Mexico in the second half of the Twentieth Century see Soledad Loaeza, *El Partido Acción Nacional, la larga marcha, 1939-1994*, FCE, México, 1999.

⁸⁸ James Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX, Entrevistas de Historia Oral*, UNAM, 1969, Chapter *Manuel Gómez Morín*, p.176.

Gómez Morín accepted that perhaps in the origins of the *UNS* there was some influence of the Falange, but fails to mention the influence of the Falange or any other Spanish party in inspiring his own *Acción Nacional* party.⁸⁹ It was evident that the creation of the *PAN* under Spanish influence and spiritual guidance was the party's most well defined attribute. Amongst the celebrated eighteen original organisers of the party, there were Juan Sánchez Navarro and Bernardo Ponce.⁹⁰ As soon as they were formally organised, they supported Almazán's presidential candidacy, very much in the same terms as Gómez Morín had supported Vasconcelos' candidacy ten years earlier, for the sake of opposition and with no electoral or political programme defined. The radical Right-wing groups *UNS- Cristeros* constituted the rank and file of the new party. Mostly bankers and barristers, as noted before, constituted the leadership.⁹¹ Perhaps it is not entirely accurate to say that Gómez Morín was nothing but a Falange puppet, as it is to say that the Falange was nothing but a German tool, as suggested by Chase. Nevertheless, the evident links between them, such as the sharing of ideological and political aims, undoubtedly place them as close allies. Although the Mexican Right-wing groups had begun a process of unification, they were not yet strong enough so as to effectively oppose the acceptance of a substantial Republican immigration to the country. However, the arrival of thousands of Spanish Republicans in Mexico encouraged the consolidation of such groups, making it more difficult for the revolutionary government to promote the continuation of its progressive policies. Nevertheless, even the anti-Republican and the anti-exile critics were to be divided over these issues. Thus, Conservative *Hispanistas*, such as Salvador Novo, Alfonso Junco, and José Vasconcelos, would assume a pro-Spanish Republican exile stand, if only through a purely racist justification. Some of the anti-Republican Spanish residents, also ironically, welcomed the arrival of Spanish exiles, but they were rather keen to bolster Spanishness in Mexico than anything else.

With Franco's victory considerably assisted by Nazi-Fascist aid, Spain emerged into the framework of a Fascist state. "But the 'New Spain' was in fact the old Spain -a backward,

⁸⁹ Wilkie & Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX*, p.179.

⁹⁰ *La Nación*, no. 2208, 24 September 2003.

⁹¹ David J. Mabry, *Mexico's Acción Nacional, A Catholic Alternative to Revolution*, Syracuse University Press, 1973, pp.16.

agricultural country, with masses of illiterate peasants, little industry, and a small, insignificant middle class, a semi-feudal land, ruled by grandees, bishops, and generals."⁹² The Nazi-Fascist triumph in Spain catapulted a massive exodus of Spanish people.

The presence of Spanish Falangists in Mexico, discreet at first, but more open by the end of the war, proved not only their interest but their confidence in their Mexican counterparts. The end of the war in Spain, made enthusiastic supporters of the Spanish rebels believe it would only be a matter of time before the Mexican Government conceded to a *fait accompli* and granted recognition to the Franco regime. Perhaps not even the most optimistic supporter of the Spanish Republic would have expected otherwise. The logical response of the Mexican Government would have been to normalise its diplomatic relations with Spain. However, president Lázaro Cárdenas' decision not to recognise an armed conquest of power, strictly in accordance with the principles of the Estrada Doctrine, paved the way for a long-lasting tradition in Mexican foreign policy, regardless of the perseverance of Mexican Conservatives and their Spanish allies in pressuring the Mexican Government. The issue of recognition would remain a long-lasting aspiration for the allies of the Franco regime, never to be achieved. If local politics presented a grim forecast for Mexican progressive forces, the defeat of the Second Spanish Republic and the consequent strengthening of the Axis Powers became a defining factor for what was to be done next.

⁹² Dante A. Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers, 1936-1941*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1962, p.237.

Chapter VII

The Beginning of the Spanish Diaspora into Mexico

A dónde van las palabras que no se quedaron
A dónde van las miradas que un día partieron
Acaso flotan eternas como prisioneras de un ventarrón
O se acurrucan entre las rendijas buscando calor
Acaso ruedan sobre los cristales cual gotas de lluvia que quieren pasar
Acaso nunca vuelven a ser algo
Acaso se van y adónde van, a dónde van.
Where do the words that did not stay go
Where do the looks that set out one day go
Perhaps they eternally float as prisoners of a terrible wind
Or they crouch between the cracks looking for warmth
Perhaps they roll down windows like raindrops wanting to go through
Perhaps they are not anything ever again
Perhaps they are leaving, and where are they going, to where do they go
Silvio Rodríguez

1. The End of the Spanish Civil War and the Final Humanitarian Gesture.

During the early 1930s, the establishment of totalitarian and repressive regimes, in different parts of the world, produced the need to find a safe haven for political refugees from the opposition in those countries. In Latin America, the rule of Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, under Fascist-like repressive, corporatist, and anti-Communist lines, was also expelling oppositionists, some of whom made their way to Mexico. In Europe, Nazi Germany's anti-Communist and anti-Jewish regime forced German-speaking refugees into Mexico.¹ Some refugees from Fascist Italy also arrived, such as the Socialist leader Francesco Froli, but the case that captured world attention came from the opposite extreme of the political spectrum. The transformation of Soviet Russia under a more centralised

¹ Needless to say that after World War II the number of European refugees other than Spaniards grew considerably, and included many political writers such as Paul Merker, Bruno Frei, Anna Seghers and Paul Westheim, to mention but a few. Most of these refugees arrived in Mexico by sheer chance.

dictatorship, and not the originally intended proletarian dictatorship, caused the exile of the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky. Looking for undisputed power in the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin saw in Trotsky his most dangerous rival. After years of exile, Trotsky was running out of options when President Cárdenas granted him political asylum in December 1936.² Given that Mexico and the Soviet Union were the only countries supporting the Spanish Republic in its fight against a Nazi-Fascist-supported military rebellion, this unlikely tacit alliance would seem to contradict the granting of asylum to Stalin's archenemy. However, Mexico's action attended more to the nature and principles of international law safeguarding the rights of sanctuary. Nonetheless, shortly after Trotsky's arrival in January 1937, Cárdenas considered it necessary to publicly declare that there was "no change" in the Mexican decision to support the Republican effort.³ However, the issue had some impact as, according to the famous Mexican muralist Alfaro Siqueiros, the Mexican representative at the League of Nations, Narciso Bassols resigned as a result of that political decision.⁴ The granting of asylum to Trotsky did not mean a departure from the Mexican policy towards Spain. On the contrary, the permanent support in the war effort of Republican Spain would, eventually, produce an enduring exodus of Spanish Republicans to Mexico.

a) Organising the Exile.

Mexican supporters of the Spanish Republic, although hopeful of a Republican triumph, had envisaged the consequences of their defeat. Long before contemplating this possible outcome to the war, their concern and their actions were directed to temporary relief. The Civil War in Spain was bound to drive

² Lázaro Cárdenas wrote in his diary that Diego Rivera went to see him to La Laguna, in the Northern state of Coahuila, in December 1936, to request Trotsky's asylum, to which he immediately agreed, considering the feeble position of the Russian revolutionary, and the Mexican tradition of sanctuary "regardless of ideological affinities"; Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras, I- Apuntes, 1913-1940*, UNAM, México, 1972, p.362.

³ [Lázaro Cárdenas] *Palabras y Documentos Públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas, mensajes, discursos, declaraciones, entrevistas y otros documentos, 1928-1940*, vol 1, Siglo XXI, México, p.236.

⁴ In Siqueiros unchallenged version, Narciso Bassols, who was working to improve Mexican-Soviet relations, approached the Soviet Ambassador at the League of Nations, Maxim Litvinov, to that end. On reading the news of the Mexican offer to Trotsky, the Soviet Ambassador asked Bassols: "Is this the Government that entrusted you to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union?"; David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Me llamaban El Coronelazo*, México, Grijalbo, 1977, pp.341-342.

people out of the country at some stage. For practical reasons, the first destinations were other European countries, and given the political and military involvement of some of them in the Spanish conflict, particularly to France and the UK; then, considering the traditional links between Spain and Latin America, to various countries, amongst which Mexico was the most well known destination. As part of their open backing of Republican Spain, both the Mexican Government and broad sectors of the population promoted the arrival of Spanish refugees throughout the war. The first private initiative to collectively receive hundreds of Spaniards in Mexico took place in the summer of 1937. The proposal received the warm backing of the Mexican Government and a great deal of publicity, and was under close scrutiny, as the group of children who came to be known as the Children of Morelia aroused the interest of wide sectors of Mexican public opinion.⁵ Wrongly assumed to be a Cárdenas initiative, he clearly acknowledged that had he been the author of such a project, he would have been proud of it.

However, the idea came from a group of Mexican women who volunteered to provide some relief to Spanish war orphans. The Children of Morelia went through all sorts of experiences, positive and negative.⁶ It was intended as a temporary arrangement that would last until the end of the war. Indeed, efforts were made by the Spanish community to send the children back to Spain once the war was over. Failing to obtain either the authorisation of the Spanish Republican Government, or of the parents, guardians or the people responsible for the children, nothing was done to that end.⁷ Similarly, after a long process coordinating the parties involved, poignantly a group of Spanish intellectuals were invited by their Mexican counterparts to spend some time in Mexico for as long as the Civil War lasted in Spain.⁸ Thus, in the autumn of 1938, a group of newly arrived Spanish lecturers and scientists mixed with some others already

⁵ AGA, FMAE, 10237, Leg. 4.- *Correspondencia general, (1935-1937)*.

⁶ Many works have been devoted to the study of the Children of Morelia, amongst which Dolores Plá's *Los Niños de Morelia. Un estudio sobre los primeros refugiados españoles en México*, INAH, México, 1985, is perhaps the most exhaustive.

⁷ AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, Exp.550/84.

⁸ Both of these issues are dealt with in Chapter V.

living in Mexico as refugees, and were incorporated into the *Casa de España*, a Mexican Government funded project.⁹

Although the first official request made by the Spanish Ambassador Félix Gordón Ordás to the Mexican Government, as early as October 1936, was rejected, this was due to the fact that the Spaniards involved in the petition, the Vidaurrazaga family, were already living in Cuba.¹⁰ A year later, in October 1937, Spanish Prime Minister, Juan Negrín sent Juan Simeón Vidarte on a special mission to see President Cárdenas and ask his opinion regarding the reception of Spanish refugees, "should the need arise". Although dismissing the idea of Republican defeat, the Mexican President's response was warmly positive.¹¹ Gradually, more Spanish citizens arrived in Mexico in small numbers throughout the length of the Civil War. They were not the only refugees received in Mexico. Given the increasing repression for political or racial motives in the totalitarian countries and the countries under their influence, a number of Europeans arrived in Mexico between 1936 and 1938.¹² Mexican Laws did not accept the permanent immigration of workers; hence, the necessary modifications had to be made in order to pave the way for the announced offer of the Mexican President to the Spanish Republicans.

In the midst of the Republican defeat, in February 1939, the massive exodus towards the Pyrenees began. The French Government only allowed unarmed Spanish Republicans to cross the border. There, they were put in concentration camps: Agde, Argelès, Barcarès, Bram, Collioure, Gurs, Rivesaltes, Saint-Cyprien, Septfonds, Le Vervet. The Mexican representative at the League of Nations, Isidro Fabela, wrote to Cárdenas in February 1939 from France, after having visited some of the concentration camps, such as Arlès (One, Two, and Three) Boulou, Amélie-les-Bains and others. He reported that in Argelès, for instance, there were one hundred thousand Spanish refugees, and that over forty

⁹ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-996, Exp.61, dispatches dated on 20 August and 12 November 1938 regarding the formation of the "*Casa de España en México*."

¹⁰ Félix Gordón Ordás, *Mi política fuera de España*, Tomo I, México, 1965, p.775.

¹¹ Juan Simeón Vidarte, *Todos fuimos culpables, Testimonio de un socialista español*, FCE, México, 1973, pp.776-796.

¹² Máximo García Tovar, *De la tradición de asilo al reconocimiento del Estatuto de Refugiado*, MA thesis, UNAM, México, 2000, p.27.

thousand Spanish children had been distributed throughout France. Fabela had visited the Amélie camp on 13 February, and he witnessed how the terrible winds shattered the precarious shelters of the Spanish refugees. He also reported that food and water were often scarce and unhealthy. But, if possible, things were even worse in Argelès, where, according to the Mexican envoy, “sanitary services [were] less than satisfactory.” In fact, the hygiene conditions were appalling if existing at all. Thus Argelès and Arlès were the places chosen by the Mexican diplomats to provide some relief.¹³

Isidro Fabela was deeply convinced by Cárdenas’ decision to offer asylum to a number of Republican Spaniards, not only for humanitarian reasons but also as the logical conclusion to the Mexican stance towards Republican Spain. To begin with, Fabela told Azaña, on behalf of Cárdenas, that he would be most welcome in Mexico, if the time came and should he wish to go there. But the still President of the Spanish Republic did not seem interested in going too far away from Spain.¹⁴ Similar offers were made to Prieto, Negrín, Álvarez del Vayo and virtually all the Republican leaders. Of course, the Mexican offer included “as many Spanish Republicans as possible”, although this was not an easy task to achieve. Nevertheless, considering the strong opposition campaign against the arrival of masses of Spanish refugees, no efforts were spared to make public opinion aware of the circumstances of the Spanish Republicans and their families.

As a reminder of the urge to aid Spanish refugees in concentration camps in France, Andrés Iduarte made a vibrant and dramatic description of the dreadful conditions under which French authorities had put the Spanish Republican exiles, many of whom were also international combatants.¹⁵ While in France, Fabela was told by José Quero Morales, Spanish Under-Secretary of State, that the President of the Cortes, Martínez Barrio, headed the Spanish committee dealing with the emmigration of Spanish Republicans to the Americas. Therefore, Fabela

¹³ Isidro Fabela, *Cartas al presidente Cárdenas*, México, 1947, pp.119-124.

¹⁴ Fabela, *Cartas al presidente*, pp.115-116.

¹⁵ *El Popular*, 6 March 1939.

suggested to Cárdenas, that the Spaniards should make the initial selection, leaving the final decision in the hands of the Mexican diplomats.¹⁶

Meanwhile, on the home front, Lombardo Toledano sent a telegram to President Cárdenas, on behalf of the *CTM*, enthusiastically endorsing Cárdenas's decision to continue support the Spanish Republic. Lombardo also reported on the *CTM*'s decision to collect funds, and to allocate them in France, in order to contribute to the Spanish Republican's relief.¹⁷ Even after the fall of Barcelona, Mexican solidarity was maintained to send humanitarian aid for the Spanish Republic. Mexican Labour echoed the Spanish Republican Government "to resist is to win" strategy. Concerned about the relevance of supporting the Republican cause at this late stage, the *CTM* issued yet another call on 17 February 1939 to its members, urging them to send all the aid possible in order to contribute to the resistance of the Spanish Republicans, as they assumed the anti-Fascist struggle as theirs.¹⁸

Then the *CTM's Consejo Nacional Extraordinario*, which met between 21 and 23 February, dedicated the last day of the meeting to a session honouring the Spanish Republic, "which fights for Liberty and against Fascism", thus setting an example for the new generations and the peoples of the world. Attending the meeting as special guests, were the Spanish Ambassador, Gordón Ordás, and Indalecio Prieto, former Spanish Minister. Lombardo addressed the audience with his usual strong rhetorical resources, playing down the Mexican contribution to the Republican war effort, perhaps also from a more realistic non-triumphal perspective. "Being so far away from Europe, that is geographically, we haven't been able effectively to do something in favour of Spain", he said, "except for the spontaneous contribution of blood and courage of a fistful of fellow countrymen." "Nevertheless", Lombardo continued, "we have done all we could to explain

¹⁶ Fabela, *Cartas al presidente*, pp.124-128.

¹⁷ *El Popular*, 9 February 1939; [Vicente Lombardo Toledano], *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo III, Vol. 9, 1939, CEFPSVLT, 1997, p.53.

¹⁸ *El Popular*, 18 February 1939; [Lombardo Toledano] *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo III, Vol. 9, p.75.

throughout Mexico and Latin America [...] the importance of the Spanish struggle”, and its benefits for the world.¹⁹

Characteristically, Lombardo declared that the Spanish cause was not only the cause of humankind, but that the Spanish struggle marked the beginning of a new era in world history. But bigger efforts must be made to gather stronger forces against Fascism and prevent the return to past times. “Either Fascism takes over the entire world or Democracy is restored in those countries where it has been temporarily lost.” That was why the case of Spain was not yet a lost cause, in spite of the foreign troops occupying its territory. Taking further the regional revolutionary fervour, Lombardo said: “In Latin America, we want to become fighters of the cause of Freedom and Democracy.” Finally, Lombardo praised the special guests, particularly Prieto, who he referred to as “one of the best of ours in Mexico and the world.” (“*Uno de los mejores de los nuestros, en México y en el mundo*”). He then thanked the Mexican volunteers who went to Spain: “our deep gratitude, as you have honoured the national (Mexican) proletariat.”²⁰ He then also thanked Ambassador Gordón Ordás. Lombardo’s confidence could not be shattered by what he saw as a temporary defeat in the Spanish workers struggle for liberty.

However, Negrín’s tactical resistance was not achievable. Although accurate, his approach of resisting until there was an international war, failed to draw the attention of the democracies, which still refused to acknowledge that the confrontation they had so wanted to avoid had already begun in Spain. Britain and France granted recognition to Franco’s Government on 27 February 1939. As a result, President Manuel Azaña resigned his post, and the divisions within the Republican camp deepened further. According to the Constitution of the Spanish Republic, in these circumstances the president of the Cortes should assume the presidency of the Republic. Thus Diego Martínez Barrio became the new Spanish Republican President. Negrín remained Prime Minister and devoted all his efforts

¹⁹ [Lombardo Toledano] *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo III, Vol. 9, 1939, pp.135-137.

²⁰ *El Popular*, 24 February 1939.

to resistance. Ironically, only the Communists backed him.²¹ It seemed as if the Western Democracies had created a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Azaña's resignation also led Ambassador Gordón to resign both his ambassadorial posts, in Mexico²² on 28 February and Cuba on 31 March.²³ Nonetheless, he remained committed to supporting the efforts developed under more critical circumstances by the Spanish *Chargé de Affaires*, José Loredó Aparicio, in the Spanish Embassy in Mexico, dealing with any unfinished business and awaiting further instructions from the Republican Government in exile.²⁴ Gordón Ordás criticised Azaña's decision to resign, which had left him no option but to follow this path. However legalistic this may have appeared to Gordón, his decision was as unjustified as Azaña's, and had a negative impact for the Republican effort, regardless his continuing support of Loredó's new responsibility. There was no need for him to resign, particularly at such a difficult time for the Republican Government. These resignations were part of the growing division and fracturing process of the Republicans, at a time when there was an urgent need for unity to face whatever was to come next. Gordón himself recognised that this also led to a wavering in the Mexican support of the Spanish Republicans, as his request to hand over the Spanish Embassy to the Mexican Foreign Ministry, was met with scepticism, and finally denied.²⁵

Meanwhile, after receiving fresh supplies of war material from Germany, the military rebels' offensive produced several defeats of the Republican Army throughout March 1939. On 4 March, there had been a desperate attempt to reach a negotiated surrender with Franco in the form of a *coup* at the hands of Colonel Segismundo Casado in Madrid against Negrín's Government.²⁶ By this time the rebel army was stronger than ever and had just launched an unstoppable march on Catalonia and the other remaining Republican territories. Moderate Socialists and

²¹ Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, Fontana Press, London, 1996, pp.212-215.

²² Gordón Ordás, *Mi política fuera de España*, Tomo I, pp.780-781.

²³ Félix Gordón Ordás, *Mi política fuera de España*, Tomo II, México, 1967, p.256.

²⁴ Gordón Ordás, *Mi política fuera de España*, Tomo II, p.255.

²⁵ *Idem*, p.259. Previously, Mexican diplomats had been authorised to look after Spanish interests in different countries. In Panama, for instance, in July 1937, and in Peru, in January 1938; FUE, G.O. 21.

²⁶ Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.213-214.

Republican military men regretfully joined Casado's Junta of National Defence, and suppressed the Communists in the vain hope that this would persuade the rebels to make a pact. However, with strong German military backing²⁷ and the Italian army at his disposal to obtain fresh troops, Franco was ill-disposed to accept anything except unconditional surrender.²⁸ The firm decision of the French Government not to allow Soviet military material to reach the Spanish Republicans, finally led to the collapse of the Republican war effort.²⁹ The military defeat also showed the urge to remain united so as to pursue a political endeavour in the international arena as the only option left for Spanish Republicans, whilst attending to the immediate needs of a decimated army and massive civil exodus. However, the consequent antagonism amongst the Republican leadership precipitated the fracture of the Republican command, hence its further weakening.³⁰

With their ultimate demise in sight, masses of Spanish Republicans fled to Alicante in larger numbers, hoping vainly to escape from the terrible repression unleashed by the rebels. An official policy of annihilation and revenge against the Republicans was established under Franco.³¹ Negrín's efforts to resist failed, mainly as a result of the renewed supplies of war material from Germany and Italy, particularly the former. Franco's war of annihilation and the fierce repression unleashed afterwards made the risks of exile seem minimal.³²

The victorious rebel leader announced the triumph of his force on 1 April, and jubilant pro-Franco groups in Mexico were confident that soon the new Spanish

²⁷ *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry*, London, His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1951, p.802.

²⁸ AMAE, Leg. R-832, Exp.1, *Servicio de Información y Policía Militar*, various reports, between January and March 1939.

²⁹ Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain, The untold story of the Spanish Civil War*, Murray, London, 1998, pp.242-243; and Ricardo Miralles, *Juan Negrín, La República en guerra*, Temas de hoy, 2003, pp.300-304.

³⁰ In mid-1939, Manuel Azaña wrote to Ángel Ossorio, former Civil Governor of Catalonia, and Ambassador in Argentina, then exiled in Buenos Aires, a long letter describing the dramatic days of the end of the war, *Diarios Completos*, Crítica, Barcelona, 2000, pp.1258-1276.

³¹ The *Ley de Responsabilidades Políticas* was established by Franco's Government on 9 February 1939, and was intended to punish all those who did not actively support the Falangist *Movimiento* since October 1934. *Fundamentos del Nuevo Estado*, Ediciones de la Vicesecretaría de Educación Popular, Madrid, 1953, pp.324-374

³² Eladia de los Ríos was member of the JSU. Interview of the author with Ms. de los Ríos in Mexico City, 13 August 1999.

Government would be recognised by the Mexican Government.³³ However, as the celebrations of the military rebel triumph in Spain by Falangist supporters in Mexico went on, they caused only greater antagonism and encouraged violence. Particularly provocative was the meeting of the Falange with Italian, German and Portuguese diplomatic representatives in Mexico, and last but not least, a representative of the Interior Ministry, Ricardo Rubio, a minor civil servant, whose presence in a pro-Franco celebration, although merely as an observer, was, nevertheless, severely criticised. Regarding this event of *Falange Española* in Mexico, the Executive Committee of the *CTM* issued a public declaration pointing out its amazement about the meeting of diplomatic representatives of Fascist countries with the Spanish Falange at the *Casino Español*, refusing to believe the version that a representative of the Interior Ministry was present.³⁴ The Spanish Falange, being an armed foreign militia, argued the *CTM*, thus has no right to exist on Mexican territory. Furthermore, the Spanish Falange is incompatible with Mexican autonomy, they concluded.³⁵

The issue of the Spanish refugees grew considerably, not only for the tension created by the Conservative opposition to their asylum in Mexico, but because of reports of the appalling conditions which the refugees faced in France. The *CTM*, then, pondered how to best contribute to President Cárdenas's policy of assisting the Spanish Republicans in French concentration camps. For the *CTM*—that is for Lombardo— the option of granting asylum to Spanish Republicans was an urgent necessity. Accordingly, they decided first, to support the offer of the Mexican Government to give refuge to those Spaniards whose lives were endangered if faced with a forced return to Spain. Secondly, the *CTM* defended the notion that in offering asylum to Spanish citizens, the political affiliation or even professional

³³ *Excélsior*, 3 April 1939. On 4 April, the Interior Ministry issued a communiqué criticising the Falange, and pointing out its relationship with groups in opposition to the Mexican Government, which could be considered as a foreign interference.

³⁴ *El Popular*, 4 April 1939; [Vicente Lombardo Toledano] *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo III, Vol. 9, 1939, CEFPSVLT, México, 1997, pp.175-176.

³⁵ The celebration was considered a provocation, and the violent reaction of pro-Republican Mexican workers was the justification the Mexican Government needed to expel the Spanish Falangists, Alejandro Villanueva Plata, Eulogio Celorio and Genaro Riestra, on account of "promoting violence". As a result, *Falange Española* ceased its activities as such in Mexico, although its members found a new organisation to devote their anti-Communist sentiment to. See Chapter VI. The Interior Ministry justified the presence of the governmental envoy, "exclusively" on grounds of his duties to keep the Government informed.

capacity should not be considered. It was, therefore, not an issue of migration but a matter of a humanitarian nature, and hence not a problem of migrants or settlers. For the keenest supporters of the Spanish cause, it was a question of saving the lives of those who could not find refuge anywhere else but in Mexico. Furthermore, the *CTM* considered that, regardless of the financial support provided by international organisations to the Spanish refugees, it was “an honour and a duty”, to contribute to the aid of those who the *CTM* itself praised as “*la flor y nata*” (cream of the crop) of the Spanish people.³⁶

According to the information of the Francoist Military Police Intelligence Service (*SIPM*), Spanish refugees in French concentration camps would be organised, giving priority to “those Marxists to be taken to Argentina and Chile”. The rest, according to their sources, would be going to Mexico, although the latter country, they said, had refused entry to Anarcho-syndicalist type elements. In the cases of Santiago Garcés, Central Chief of the *Servicio de Inteligencia Militar (SIM)*, Republican Military Intelligence Service, and the chief of the *SIM*'s Catalan section, José Alonso Mayoll (former *Director General de Seguridad*), they concluded, would be going to Mexico.³⁷ Francoist informers were not entirely accurate in their reports. Neither Argentina nor Chile were that keen on receiving more than the few thousands of refugees already in those countries. Secondly, Mexican authorities had not established a quota nor a professional or ideological requisite for the claimants to be admitted as exiles.

The imminent arrival of Spanish Republicans, regardless of their political affiliations, gave the opportunity for Conservative and reactionary groups to criticise the Mexican Government, protesting about the threat posed by thousand of refugees who were supposedly taking on the scarce jobs very much needed by local workers. The *CTM* noted the irony of pro-Franco supporters now apparently defending Mexican workers. However, it also recalled the public declaration of all organisations affiliated to the *CTM* in support of the Mexican Government's decision to grant asylum to the defenders of Spain's democracy and liberty, and

³⁶ *El Popular*, 14 April 1939; [Lombardo Toledano] *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo III, Vol. 9, 1939, p.196.

³⁷ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-832, *Información reservada, 1938-39*, Exp.1, *Servicio de Información y Policía Militar* 7 April 1939.

decided to counter-attack the insidious campaign against the Spanish refugees. Similarly, and more than merely fulfilling his duty, the Interior Minister, Ignacio García Téllez, sent a personal letter to President Cárdenas informing him of his decision to reinforce the public defence of the Government's attitude regarding the Spanish refugees. He did so, given the intense campaign of the Conservative media, which had increased after the arrival of the first two massive expeditions (see next section), and to show his conviction of the justice of the Mexican Government's support of the Spanish Republicans.³⁸ Apart from the efforts in favour of the Spanish Republicans, the Mexican Government still had to guarantee the safe return of a number of Mexican citizens still in Spain. Having no official relations with the triumphant Government of Francisco Franco, Mexico requested the intervention of its Southern neighbour, Guatemala, to protect them.³⁹

The huge flight of Republicans amounted to half a million Spaniards. They left their country hungry, disarmed and dispossessed. Although their new temporary home spared them the horrors of reprisals, it was no paradise. After being subjected to a humiliating arrival in French territory, they were interned in concentration camps. If the French Government of the Popular Front had done close to nothing to help its Spanish counterpart, the new Conservative French Government was to cause much harm to thousands of refugees.⁴⁰ Not only did they have to give up their arms, as the French Government would not allow armed militia in its territory, but they allowed Gestapo agents to seek out important Republican figures and hand them back to Franco's Spain, where they were shot. Up to 12 000 others were sent to German concentration camps, amongst them, former Spanish Republican Premier, Francisco Largo Caballero. The atrocities experienced by the Republicans during the war, were now matched by the atrocities under a French pro-Francoist repressive regime, and Nazi Germany. Most of the Republican leaders also went into exile, and the Franco regime made

³⁸ AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, Exp.546.6/212-13. Letter of 1 July 1939.

³⁹ AHDM, III-426-7, *Mexicanos en España*.

⁴⁰ In 1939, at 17, Eladia de los Ríos spent eleven months in a French concentration camp, and recalls how the Spanish Government, through the *SERE*, paid 10 Francs per refugee, for accommodation and food poorly provided by French wardens. Interview of 13 August 1999.

attempts to capture well-known Republican figures during their French exile. The French Government willingly collaborated in such efforts.

The clear commitment to organise a massive rescue of the Republicans in France was not an easy task. The terrible conditions in which the exiles were living were reported by different sources.⁴¹ Throughout the course of the Spanish Civil War, a series of groups were established with the express humanitarian purpose of relieving the horrors of the war. These groups were set up in different countries and included the American Aid Relief, Swedish Aid for Spain and the British Spanish Aid Relief and other relief efforts. Now, this colourful combination of groups united with the common aim of providing some assistance to those deprived of a normal life and a place to live. The organisation of the massive exile and the provision of shelter and some relief aid was an international effort by private organisations. In this humanitarian gesture, the Mexican Government's decision to accept thousands of refugees was the natural conclusion to its outstanding performance during the war. The Spanish Republicans started a long journey.

Mexican diplomats had been instructed to provide as much help as possible to alleviate the suffering of the Spanish refugees, but above all, the Mexican Government had publicly offered to receive as many refugees as possible into the country. Mexican Minister in Marseilles, Gilberto Bosques, Narciso Bassols in Paris, and later Francisco Aguilar in Vichy, were all instructed to coordinate the evacuation effort.⁴² The process would be long and difficult but worthwhile. In order to organise transport of the refugees, many other issues needed to be dealt with, such as food, clothes and medical assistance. Funds were essential. Mexico neither had sufficient available ships nor enough money to pay for them together with the maintenance of the passengers. Besides, to calm critics, the Mexican Government had announced that no public funds would be spent in bringing Spanish refugees to Mexico. Hence, the only way to solve things was by

⁴¹ Eulalio Ferrer wrote his own experiences in a concentration camp in his *Entre alambradas*, Grijalbo, México, 1988.

⁴² Mauricio Fresco, one of the Mexican civil servants appointed in France, participated in the organisation of the Spanish Republican relief and exile. Other Mexican diplomats included, Bernardo Reyes, and Major Eladio Ruiz Camarillo. Fresco wrote his experiences in his *La emigración Republicana española: una victoria de México*, Oasis, México, 1950.

collaboration with governments or groups interested in participating in such an enterprise. There was no shortage of possible collaborators. To this end, British and American Quakers made an enormous effort toward raising the necessary funds through collections. In fact, referring to the first massive expedition of Spanish Republicans, it was claimed “the biggest achievement of the British aid organisations was the sending of its own refugee ship to Mexico.”⁴³

The divisions between Republican leaders grew deeper during the first months of the Republican exile. The enmity between Prieto and Negrín, in particular, was a significant contributing factor to the divisions that would finally annihilate the Republican effort to facilitate the rescue of the refugees, and later, to re-organise a strong Republican Government in exile. The origins of this conflict can be traced to the time when Negrín decided to remove Prieto in the reshuffle of his cabinet in 1938. After being accused of defeatism by Negrín, Prieto was removed from the Cabinet. Prieto never forgot the incident nor did he forgive Negrín. As Prime Minister, Negrín could not afford to have a defeatist as Minister of War, as he perceived Prieto to be. According to Prieto, the Communists plotted against him.⁴⁴ The confrontation was never resolved and the division produced would affect the Spanish Republican exile. (See next section)

Meanwhile, the disputes between the two factions had a negative impact on the refugee relief. Negrín’s Government established the *Servicio para la Evacuación de Republicanos Españoles (SERE* – Spanish Republicans Evacuation Service) at the end of March 1939, which would work in close connection with Mexican diplomats. The funding destined to such an urgent task was set up with the contents of the *Caja de Reparaciones*, which included the confiscations made by the Government.⁴⁵ A few months later, as a result of a fortuitous event, Negrín’s main challenger managed to set up a parallel service called the *Junta de Auxilio a Refugiados Españoles (JARE* – Spanish Refugees Relief Council), with the bigger part of such funds. (See next section).

⁴³ Jim Fyrth, *The Signal was Spain, The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain, 1936-1939*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1986, p.299.

⁴⁴ Indalecio Prieto, *Convulsiones de España : pequeños detalles de grandes sucesos*, Tomo II, México, 1968, pp.9-85.

⁴⁵ Vidarte, *Todos fuimos culpables*, pp.888-890.

An indication of the degree of tension if not outright hostility between the two groups was revealed by a plea for help. Whilst exiled in La Prasle, Collognes - sous- Salève, Azaña's former personal assistant, Santos Martínez Saura, who was also a member of the Left-Republican Party (*Izquierda Republicana*), wrote to Prieto, who was in charge of the *JARE*, requesting his inclusion on the list of refugees to be allowed on board any ship to the Americas.⁴⁶ Although Martínez Saura had been devoted to organising the refugees' transportation, he had not taken advantage of his position to guarantee passage for himself. Apart from anything else, his contribution to the evacuation was made within the official organisation, the *SERE*, the rival of Prieto's *JARE*, which lacked sufficient funds. Unable and unwilling to hide his bitterness, Prieto refused to help Martínez on the grounds that there were no places available.⁴⁷ This discrimination for political reasons against supporters of Negrín's Government was the same that prevented any member of the Spanish Communist Party from benefiting from the *JARE*. Prieto's *JARE*, although contributing to the protection of Republicans and organising the exile to the Americas, had a rather more political than humanitarian nature.

Besides the official representation of the Spanish Republican Government and the Mexican Government, and those of the Spanish Aid Committees, Spanish political parties also contributed to this effort. The Spanish Communist Party, for instance, used its relationship with its Mexican counterpart and the various labour organisations with which it had close contacts to reinforce the evacuation. They were not only concerned about the future of its members, but were effectively concerned about the fate of the members of the International Brigades, who clearly faced a more difficult situation.⁴⁸ Even the Mexican Government, which was adamant about taking as many refugees as possible, avoided the embarkation of the former International Brigades combatants as a group.⁴⁹ In fact, a petition signed by over a hundred former International Brigaders requesting to be allowed

⁴⁶ Letter Martínez to Prieto, 25 September 1939, AIR, Personal Papers of Santos Martínez Saura.

⁴⁷ Letter Prieto to Martínez, 12 October 1939, AIR, Personal Papers of Santos Martínez Saura.

⁴⁸ APCE, *Sobre la cuestión de los refugiados españoles y de los combatiente de las Brigadas Internacionales*, "2" 4937 (5 ej.) EP./16/VI.1939.

⁴⁹ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-1785, Exp.3, *Política de México con relación a España*, *Nota Verbal* (verbal note), 30 December 1938.

to go to Mexico, was turned down by Narciso Bassols in July 1939.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Cárdenas regarded it to be the duty of Mexico to offer hospitality to the Spanish refugees, and to any person subjected to persecution for political reasons, such as the case of Trotsky had proved in 1937, and many other non-Spanish refugees would prove from 1939 onwards.

The Mexican President proudly reported to the Congress that “the doors of Mexico were opened to the Republican elements”.⁵¹ Even though there were reports speculating upon the end of the Mexican offer of asylum on the grounds of the start of hostilities in France, the fact remains that reinforced efforts were made to help the Spanish Republicans in their exile in France.⁵² In fact, by 1940, Mexican diplomats had rented two properties near Le Menet, in Marseille, and established residences for the Spanish refugees waiting en route to Mexico.⁵³ Thus, the Chateau de Reynard was used to provide shelter to men, whilst the Chateau de Montgrand provided relief for women and children.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the appointment of Luis I. Rodríguez as Minister in Vichy, in July 1940, was a significant development in the effort regarding the evacuation of Spanish Republicans from France. Rodríguez had the specific task of strengthening the protection of Spanish Republicans in France and the organisation of new expeditions of refugees to Mexico, a particularly delicate undertaking, given the military developments and the increasing attempts by Francoist Spain to capture leading Republican figures, such as Azaña and Negrín. Rodríguez not only developed a strong campaign in favour of the Spanish refugees, but also managed to establish an agreement with the French Government in that respect. In an intense encounter with Petain, on 8 July 1940, Rodríguez convinced the French leader to accept the Mexican offer to take the Spanish refugees, and resolve what

⁵⁰ AHDM, Archivo de la Embajada de México en España, Caja no. 243; AHDM, *México y España: solidaridad y asilo político, 1936-1942*, SRE, México, 1990, pp.277-278.

⁵¹ AHDM., no, 9, pp.36 and 37, Fifth State of the Union Speech, 1 September 1939.

⁵² AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-1787, Exp.21 *Actitud del gobierno mexicano*. The report, addressed to the Rt. Hon. President of the Basque Government, in Paris, on 23 September 1939, details a meeting of Bassols with Negrín and Méndez Aspe, where the Mexican Minister supposedly confirmed the decision of the Mexican Government to finish the emigration of Spanish Republicans to Mexico.

⁵³ Although there is no concrete evidence, the funds to let those properties were apparently provided by the JARE, as referred to in *España Republicana* 11 Octubre 1941, cit in Caudet, *Hipótesis sobre el exilio republicano*, p.267, fn. 50.

⁵⁴ Mauricio Fresco, *La emigración Republicana española: una victoria de México*, Oasis, México, 1950, pp.38-42.

was also a difficult situation for the French Government. They agreed to set up a French-Mexican commission that established the requirements of the Mexican proposal, and the final agreement was signed on 23 August 1940.⁵⁵ Mexican diplomats processed over 100 000 applications during the following six months.⁵⁶ Evidently, not all those authorised to embark towards Mexico succeeded. The European war also thwarted this effort. In fact, there were some cases where, after the registration of passengers and been authorised by the local French authorities, all men between 18 and 48 were prevented from boarding. This was part of the collaboration between Vichy France, Nazi Germany and Franco's Spain.⁵⁷

During his commission, Luis I. Rodríguez had an extraordinary experience at a very emotional event, at the time when Manuel Azaña, former President of the Spanish Republic, lived in exile in Montauban. Azaña had been followed by Francoist secret police who intended to kidnap him to take him back to Spain. Franco wanted an exemplary punishment for the man who represented all that he hated. Azaña was living in a small flat, and his health was frail. Reluctantly, he accepted the offer made by the Mexican Minister to move to the Midi Hotel, under the Mexican flag. An audacious attempt was made to take Azaña, under cover, out of France and into Mexico in October 1940. The plot was discovered and the endeavour frustrated. Shortly afterwards, on 4 November, Azaña died. The local authorities would not authorise the use of the Spanish Republican flag at his funeral, thus Rodríguez decided that Azaña was to be buried covered by the Mexican flag.⁵⁸ Minister Rodríguez and the rest of the Mexican diplomats accredited in France were still to face enormous challenges to confront regarding asylum.

⁵⁵ Armando Pareyón Azpeitia, former aid of President Cárdenas, wrote his experiences regarding the Spanish exiles in *Cárdenas ante el mundo*, La Prensa, México, 1973, pp.127-134; [Luis I. Rodríguez], *Misión de Luis I. Rodríguez en Francia*, Colegio de México, SRE, CONACYT, México, 1999, pp.102-144.

⁵⁶ [Luis I. Rodríguez], *Misión de Luis I. Rodríguez en Francia*, pp.xiii-xv.

⁵⁷ Minister in Marseilles, Bosques, to Foreign Minister, Hay, 31 March 1941. Document reproduced in Mauricio Fresco, *La emigración Republicana española: una victoria de México*, Oasis, México, 1950, pp.44-45.

⁵⁸ [Luis I. Rodríguez] *Misión de Luis I. Rodríguez en Francia*, pp.202; Interview of the author with Luis Dantón Rodríguez, 22 December 1999.

Finally, as a preparation for receiving an undefined number of refugees, new legislation regarding the admission of immigrants had been approved. The detailed description of possible immigrants and political refugees seemed restrictive of the latter, and although it was not made to fit the case of the Spanish refugees, its enforcement regarding them had to be flexible, and indeed, it was.⁵⁹

As shown, the effort of Mexican diplomats to provide some relief to as many Spanish Republicans as possible also considered individual cases of former volunteers of the International Brigades. There was no discrimination and no official preferences other than, perhaps, personal.⁶⁰ Organising the exile was a collective work, and, critical of the decreasing activity of the Communist parties in favour of the Spanish Republicans, the Comintern pointed out the danger of such a pattern, and urged its members to provide the Spanish exiles with the necessary support in their French and Algerian concentration camps. This aid to Spanish Republicans and International Brigades was “the most important political and practical problem to face”, therefore, all the sections of the Comintern, but particularly the Spanish and French Communist parties, should concentrate on the solidarity campaign to provide relief to those groups.⁶¹ The Mexican Communist Party played a minor role in this endeavour. The Swedish Aid Committee to the Spanish People coordinated the Spanish Communist Party’s work aiding the refugees in France and the Americas.⁶² They kept on doing this until after the Second World War had officially begun.⁶³

b) The Arrival of Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico.

As noted earlier, the flood of Spanish exiles into Mexico began shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War. Although in small numbers, these first few exiles

⁵⁹ *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, 1 November 1938. *Tablas diferenciales a que se sujetará la admisión de inmigrantes durante el año de 1939*. Also cit in *México y la República Española*, pp.52-54.

⁶⁰ As part of the group of Mexican civil servants in charge of the final selection of Spanish refugees, Mauricio Fresco acknowledged that, although he had “preference for Basques and Catalans, and for intellectuals”, this did not prevent him from fulfilling his job honourably.

⁶¹ APCE, *Sobre la cuestión de los refugiados españoles y de los combatientes de las Brigadas Internacionales*, “2” 4937 (5 ej.) EP./16/VI.1939.

⁶² APCE, *Informe 8939 “Iob.Diaz” 3 ek3/22.X.39*, hand-written note signed by Knut Olsen, 5 November 1939.

⁶³ APCE, *Informe sobre el trabajo del PCE en México*, signed “Marta” on 3 December 1941.

represented the origins of the forthcoming massive exile, the first of its nature in modern history. This also implied the need to make Mexican public opinion more sensitive to the significance of the arrival of thousands of Spaniards to live in Mexico for an unspecified period of time.

Meanwhile, the Negrín-Prieto rift reached unexpected heights following a stroke of luck on the part of Prieto, when a yacht filled with money, jewels, and art works, quietly arrived from Spain and found no claimants for the treasure in Mexico. It was part of the contents of the Bank of Spain's vault, about which many varied and fantastical accounts have been written, referring to the treasure as the so-called "Moscow gold". Fearing the fall of the city into the hands of the rebels, the Bank of Spain transferred its reserves out of Madrid, and the treasure was then divided into five parts. The actual amounts of each part were difficult to establish, but they ranged from between 180 to 260 million dollars. 257 million dollars were deposited in the Bank of France.⁶⁴ Rebel forces on the Catalan border captured another part. An unspecified amount was sent to Moscow, the fate of which has become the subject of much debate and speculation.⁶⁵ A further 250 million dollars were sent to the US. The last part arrived in Mexico on board the yacht *Vita*, and it was the fate of this that was to become one of the main issues that deepened the divisions between the Spanish Republicans in exile.

The *Vita* arrived in Veracruz in March 1939. Although Negrín had delegated José Puche to take charge of the cargo while he was in London, Puche was not informed about the details of the arrival and was absent when the *Vita* was already in Mexican waters. The yacht first made harbour at Tampico, but the captain decided to set sail again immediately for Veracruz since he was anxious to hand over his precious consignment. Meanwhile, President Cárdenas was informed of the urgency of the issue, and the fact that nobody seemed to know of Puche's whereabouts. He then decided to call Prieto, who readily and gladly took

⁶⁴ Ricardo Miralles, *Juan Negrín, La República en guerra*, Temas de Hoy, Madrid, 2003, pp.353. Later, shortly before his death, Negrín made efforts to get the money back to Spain, *Idem*.

⁶⁵ The Soviet Government set up an account in Switzerland with those funds, against which the selling of arms and war material to the Republican Government was made. The intricate story is discussed at length in Ángel Viñas, *El oro de Moscú, Alfa y omega de un mito franquista*, Barcelona, 1979. Some relevant comments are in Miralles, *Juan Negrín*, pp.161-179, and Howson, *Arms for Spain*, pp.121-123.

charge of the *Vita* and its shipment.⁶⁶ The actual details of the cargo were never fully disclosed by Prieto and the treasure became a symbol of the ever-lasting Republican quarrel. Prieto constantly refused to hand over the shipment to Negrín, in spite of repeated requests by the then President of the Spanish Government. Prieto even refused to meet with Negrín for an interview, when Negrín later went to Mexico, although he had written to Prieto beforehand to set up a meeting. Prieto repeatedly turned down Negrín's requests to meet. Prieto had used his influence within the Cortes, and supported his action with a resolution that granted him the legal support and the confidence of the Cortes to control the funds he had confiscated.⁶⁷ Originally destined by Negrín for the relief of Spanish Republicans to be assigned through the *SERE*, on whose *Comité Técnico (CTARE* –Technical Committee for the Aid of Spanish Republicans) was José Puche, the *Vita's* cargo was used by Prieto to fund the *JARE*. Prieto thus acquired a powerful tool that he could wield to influence the future direction taken by the Republican exile.⁶⁸ The confrontation continued for the duration of the exile, making it more difficult to organise not only a strong anti-Franco coalition, but more significantly, it contributed to the failure to establish a government in exile in London, which, eventually, could have aimed at a possible allied intervention in Spain during the Second World War. The Mexican Government stayed out of the conflict, at least until 1942, when President Ávila Camacho, using the extraordinary powers in time of war, created a governmental commission to administer the Spanish Republican funds.⁶⁹

The arrival of Spanish Republicans in Mexico steadily increased after the Republican Government was finally overthrown. Numerous large and small ships with a few Spanish Republican refugees continuously arrived at Mexican ports. But Spanish refugees also made their way via the US, which meant that they would arrive in Mexico by train. The first ship to carry a group of Spanish

⁶⁶ Ricardo Miralles gives a different version, where, on 17 March, Prieto received a cablegram from Enrique Puento, on board the *Vita*, telling him to go to Veracruz. Miralles, *Juan Negrín*, p.333.

⁶⁷ Indalecio Prieto, and Juan Negrín, *Correspondencia*, Fundación Indalecio Prieto, México, 1991.

⁶⁸ Amaro del Rosal Díaz, *El oro del Banco de España y la historia del Vita*, Grijalbo, México, 1977, pp.122-146.

⁶⁹ *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, 1 December 1942. "Decreto que crea una Comisión encargada del control, custodia y administración de los bienes de la Delegación en México de la Junta de Auxilios a los Republicanos Españoles".

Republicans in 1939 to Mexico was the *Flandre*, which, according to the information published by *Excelsior*, arrived on 20 April with between 77 and 169 passengers. The imprecision of the figures would be a regular feature, which would reflect the variations in accounting for the final number of Spanish refugees in Mexico. Some medium-size ships, such as the *Siboney*, and the *Flandre* undertook at least two journeys carrying Spanish exiles. Similarly many other small vessels returned with more refugees throughout the year, such as the *Iseri*, the *Orizaba*, the *Orinoco*, the *Leerdam*, the *Monterrey*, the *Iberia*, and others.⁷⁰ In fact, in its second trip, the *Flandre* took 327 Spanish refugees on 30 May, making the presence of Spanish Republicans almost a regular issue, and the names of well-known Republican figures began to appear in Mexico.

Although the *Sinaia* was not the first ship with Spanish Republican exiles to set sail for Mexico, the story of its voyage has become a classic reference for the thousands of Spanish Republican refugees. Nor was it the biggest contingent of Spaniards bound for Mexico, but their daily experience was recorded in a one or two page newsletter detailing the activities organised by Fernando Gamboa and his wife Susana, who were representing the Mexican Government. As such, the couple were at least largely responsible for, if not in charge of the ship. The journey of the *Sinaia* was the successful accomplishment of the British National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, which had managed to gather the various contributions necessary to achieve that end.⁷¹ The Mexican Government did not have to pay anything but just needed to accommodate some 1 600 Spaniards. They were neither the first nor the biggest contingent to arrive in Mexico, yet those on board became a testing ground for future expeditions.

Nan Green, a former British volunteer in Spain, accompanied the expedition, given her experience, commitment to the cause of Republican Spain and the fact that she could be the interpreter for the British delegation. Her description of the voyage of the *Sinaia* vividly complements the picture of everyday life for the

⁷⁰ AHPCE, Sig. Caja 97/2.1, *Informes (sobre refugiados españoles)*.

⁷¹ Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain, The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain, 1936-39*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1986, pp.299 and 300.

ship's passengers, described in the daily diary that was kept on board.⁷² To begin with, most of the passengers did not know where they were going, and, in fact, did not really seem to care. It was good enough to have left the confines of the concentration camp and to now be faced with a different and hopefully better fate. Not knowing exactly what to expect, the passengers grew anxious when they first approached Veracruz. But the emotion and excitement of a recent encounter with the Hispanic people of Puerto Rico was still fresh in their memory. Nan Green tells of the magnificent reception organised by the Puerto Rican supporters of Republican Spain. Although the American authorities had refused permission for the passengers to set foot on land, a crowd gathered on shore next to the ship and managed to transfer part of the feast they had prepared on board using ropes to manoeuvre roast chickens, loaves of bread, baskets of fruit, cakes and biscuits aboard the vessel. Such was the scene that it was difficult to distinguish whether those on the ship or those on land were more moved.⁷³ The *Sinaia* finally arrived in Veracruz on 13 June 1939, and the nervous and tired passengers, not knowing what to expect, were even more surprised to witness the massive demonstration greeting them. Negrín was there to receive the contingent and went on board to greet them personally before the grand celebration prepared began. High ranking Mexican figures attended the event, from the State Governor, Fernando Casas Alemán, the Interior Minister, García Téllez, and representing President Cárdenas, Alejandro Gómez Maganda, former Mexican Consul in Barcelona, and the representatives of Labour, Alejandro Carrillo, and Lombardo Toledano. They were the familiar faces amongst the 20 000 demonstrators of solidarity towards the Spanish refugees.

On welcoming the Spanish refugees in what came to be known as the first massive arrival of Spanish Republicans in Mexico, Lombardo told the crowd that, if not for the very existence of the traitor Francisco Franco, "our first words would be to give thanks for the bliss of receiving these Spanish workers in Mexico, labourers, artists, intellectuals, journalists, men and women who constitute the cream of the crop of the Spanish people." According to Lombardo,

⁷² *Sinaia, Diario de la Primera Expedición de Republicanos Españoles a México*, UAM-UNAM, México, 1989.

⁷³ Nan Green, *A Chronicle of small beer, The Memoirs of Nan Green*, © Martin Green, Penzance, 1979, pp.81-82.

their very presence in Mexico would suffice to encourage the Mexican people to achieve their complete economic and political independence. Therefore, the Mexican people and the Mexican proletariat warmly received them, according to Lombardo, as they knew they constituted “a treasure for the cause of Spain, the cause of Mexico, and the cause of all free people of the world.” Then, Lombardo, in an unusual remark, promised that no Spanish Republican would be a stranger in Mexico, reminding the crowd “you, Spaniards, are the backbone of our race.”

Then, directing his words towards Mexican workers, he urged them to demonstrate that the Spanish refugees would add to material production and that they had brought cultural and ideological contributions. For Lombardo, the arrival of Spanish Republicans was a double blessing for they constituted the anti-Fascist fighting experience to be held both in Mexico and abroad. Finally, he made scornful remarks about the Spanish residents in Veracruz, and said that they were *gachupines*, not Spaniards.⁷⁴ “They are enemies of Spain, traitors to Spain. They are alien to Mexico, more so, than even those Spanish arriving today, for the latter fight at our side for freedom and democracy.”⁷⁵

Other speakers included Ignacio García Téllez, Mexican Minister of Interior, responsible of coordinating the arrival of the Spanish refugees. García Téllez told the newly arrived that they were received as the defenders of democracy and liberty, and recalled the arrival of the first Spaniards four hundred years earlier in entirely different circumstances. Finally, recalling the presence of numerous intellectuals, he pointed out the work they should develop to contribute to the development of Mexican culture.⁷⁶ In the parade that followed the speeches, the streets of the Port of Veracruz filled with the thousands of Mexicans greeting Spanish Republicans. It was at this stage that Lombardo waved the Spanish Republican flag amidst popular rejoicing, certainly an unprecedented action in modern Mexican history.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Gachupin* is the derogatory word used to refer to a Spaniard in Mexico. Not politically correct. See Chapter I.

⁷⁵ *El Popular*, 14 June 1939. Also in [Vicente Lombardo Toledano] *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo III, Vol. 9, 1939, CEFPSVLT, México, 1997, pp.285-286.

⁷⁶ *El Nacional*, 14 June 1939. Also in *México y la República Española*, p.58.

⁷⁷ Lombardo recalled doing so in a public lecture in 1958, which was attended by Robert P.Millon. See Robert P.Millon, *Mexican Marxist: Vicente Lombardo Toledano*, p.129.

Although no similarly massive receptions were made for the following expeditions, there were still big demonstrations of solidarity welcoming the newly arrived. After the *Sinaia*, the *Ipanema* arrived in Mexico on 7 July, bringing another almost 1 000 Spanish refugees.⁷⁸ Then, the *Mexique*, the biggest of all collective journeys, with over 2 000 Spanish passengers, arrived on 27 July. Then, given the increasingly delicate situation in Europe, as anticipated by the Republican leaders, many other expected expeditions were frustrated. Nevertheless, according to an official report on 7 February 1940, the total number of Spanish Republican refugees who arrived in Mexico during 1939 was 8 150. According to the Swiss Sanitarian Central, however, by September, the total of Spanish refugees who had gone to the Americas was 24 450, including 7 700 to Mexico.⁷⁹ As mentioned, the number of Spanish Republicans was difficult to trace, as the entrance to Mexico by train from the US was less controlled. Their arrival by ship, in contrast, was better controlled, as in the case of the 1 105 Spanish refugees who disembarked from the *Niassa* and the *Serpa Pinto*.⁸⁰

Given the intensity of the anti-Republican refugee campaign, the *CTM*'s National Council decided to counter its fallacious arguments. Exposing the Mexican reactionaries' propaganda, the *CTM* had not only to denounce them but also to take specific actions. Anti-Republican propaganda aimed to scare Mexican people by suggesting that the arrival of Republican refugees would affect Mexican workers' interests; that they would take their jobs, that they would be privileged workers, that they would become the *CTM*'s strike force; that the Mexican Government would have to use enormous amounts of public money to bring them to Mexico, and so on.⁸¹ Defining the nature of the struggle pursued by Spanish Republicans as anti-Fascist, and considering the imminent danger to the Spanish refugees, the *CTM*'s *Consejo Nacional* justified the protection of Spanish

⁷⁸ An account of the journey of the *Ipanema*, as well as a description of the final months of the war in Catalonia and the first months of French captivity are narrated by Silvia Mistral in her *Éxodo*, *Diario de una refugiada española*, Minerva, México, 1940.

⁷⁹ AHPCE, 8293 "1" 2 eje.CP.7.9.40, *Sobre la Emigración*.

⁸⁰ *Memoria de la Secretaría de Gobernación*, September 1942- August 1943, *presentada al H. Congreso de la Unión por el Secretario del ramo*, Lic. Miguel Alemán, Dirección General de Información, México, 1943, p.65.

⁸¹ *CTM* Circular no. 12, 15 August 1939; *El Popular*, 16 August 1939;

Republicans as the only possible logical action to be followed by both the Mexican Government and Labour. Furthermore, it was not only to be consequent with the efforts developed during the Spanish war, but above all, an unavoidable humanitarian gesture. Apart from the regular strong response in the press, this time the *X Consejo Nacional* of the *CTM* decided to grant membership to all Spanish workers, as this would enable them to find jobs more easily, and to consider both Mexican and Spanish cases under equal conditions. Finally, the *CTM*'s decided to call the attention of its members to not fall victim to the Conservative propaganda, which intended to divide the Labour movement through the Spanish Republican issue.⁸²

Some Spanish residents used their organisations to offer help to the recently arrived Republican exiles. Particularly relevant was the case of the Catalan Choral Society (*L'Orfeó Català de Mèxic*). Although still a humble organisation, at least in terms of funding, the Catalan Orfeó provided some relief by offering food, shelter, and most of all a sense of belonging to those Catalan exiles who had no relations or acquaintances in Mexico.⁸³ Eventually, the division between Republican exiles would also reach the Catalan Orfeó, likewise resulting in its division, and the formation of a new organisation, *La Casal Catalana*.⁸⁴ Not entirely surprisingly, some well-known Mexican Conservatives welcomed the arrival of the Spanish refugees, such as Alfonso Junco and Salvador Novo. However, their acknowledgement of the benefit of such a daring decision by the Mexican Government was motivated more on racial grounds. Notwithstanding their acceptance, they of course criticised that part of the Spanish immigration they considered negative, such as the "reds" and Communists.⁸⁵

Likewise, although on slightly similar lines, the Basque community and its organisation welcomed their fellow countrymen. However, that was not the case of most of the Spanish centres, such as the *Casino Español*, the *Centro Asturiano*,

⁸² [Vicente Lombardo Toledano] *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, Tomo III, Vol. 10, 1939, CEFPSVLT, México, 1997, pp.147-151.

⁸³ Lluís Aymami i Baudina, *Crònica*, in *La Nostra Revista*, no. 25, January 1948.

⁸⁴ Miquel Martí i Soler, *L' Orfeó Català de Mèxic (1906-1986)*, Curial Ediciones Catalanes, Barcelona, 1989.

⁸⁵ Alfonso Junco, *México y los refugiados, Las Cortes de paja y el corte de caja*, pp.21-22; also Alfonso Junco, *España en carne viva*, México, Botas, 1946.

and others. After the vivid and emotional welcome, most of the Spanish refugees needed to find an occupation and try to normalise their every-day lives. Some others, hoping soon to return to Spain, did not want to engage in deep or long term commitments, or “*echar raíces*” (put down roots). Driven by the basic demands for survival, those with families in particular were more concerned about everyday life and problems than Spanish politics or any eventual return.

Amongst the large number of Spanish exiles, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, for instance, arrived in Mexico in 1939, aged 24, on board the *Sinaia*. He was a student of Philosophy at the *Universidad Central* of Madrid, with strong literary inclinations.⁸⁶ Sánchez Vázquez, a member of the Socialist Unified Youth (*JSU*), and former member of the Communist Youth, initiated his political and ideological formation in Malaga, after finishing his BA and Teacher Training at the *Escuela Normal* in 1935. He moved to Madrid in that year, and registered at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the *Universidad Central*, where he studied for a year, under the influence of José Ortega y Gasset, García Morente, Zubirín, and José Gaos.⁸⁷

Similarly, Aurora Arnáiz, who arrived in Mexico in 1940, was a member of the *JSU* during the war, and also member of the *FUE* (University Student Federation –*Federación Universitaria Escolar*) at the University of Madrid (*Universidad Central de Madrid*). Her arrival in Mexico meant the possibility of remaining active in her militant position fighting against Franco. Arnáiz arrived shortly before the murder of Trotsky in Mexico City and was living in the house shared by Pedro Checa, Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party, Vicente Uribe, and others⁸⁸ After Trotsky’s murder at the hands of pro-Stalin Communists, the Mexican police put the homes of well-known Communists under surveillance in their search for possible accomplices of the captured assassin, Ramón Mercader. In doing so, they made no distinction between factions within the Communist movement, and monitored these activists for no particular reason other than the

⁸⁶ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Del exilio en México, Recuerdos y reflexiones*, Grijalbo, 1997, p.191.

⁸⁷ Interview by Paloma Ulacia and James Valender with Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez in September 1985, as part of a bigger project regarding the Spanish exiles in Mexico; cit in Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Del exilio en México, Recuerdos y reflexiones*, Grijalbo, México, 1997, pp.185-228.

⁸⁸ Aurora Arnáiz, *Retrato hablado de Luisa Julián, Memorias de una guerra*, Compañía Literaria, Madrid, 1996, p.243.

fact that they were Communists. It was decided that Arnáiz should then move houses, but the possibility of staying with Margarita Nelken, with whom she was acquainted, was ruled out, as Nelken's house was also under police vigilance. Instead, she was sent to live with Constancia de la Mora for a while.⁸⁹

Alongside political factors, the Spanish exiles had to overcome the identity crisis to which they were subjected. Paraphrasing Bernard Shaw's notion of two nations divided by the same language, the newly arrived Spaniards faced the initial shock of the distinct use of their mother tongue.⁹⁰ And even though the Mexican people welcomed them with an almost overwhelming affection, a sense of displacement in many Spanish Republicans was still present. To deal with this issues, and to come to terms with their presumed temporary exile, the Spanish Republicans responded in different ways to fulfil their sense of belonging. Some, assuming their exile was of a temporary nature, gathered only around other exiles, never fully engaging in local life. Others felt as if they were living in Spain whilst living in Mexico, for whom José Gaos developed the idea of the "*trasterrados*" to express this notion of Spaniards such as himself.⁹¹ It is safe to say, however, that most of the Spanish exiles tried to integrate into their host society entirely, although at their own individual pace.

The case of Aurora Arnáiz illustrates this process. As a member of the Spanish Communist Party, she met Tina Modotti and Vittorio Vidali (aka Carlos Contreras) and became good friends with them in Mexico. But she did not cut off herself from the rest of the community of Spanish exiles. Furthermore, she frequently gathered with some of the Mexicans who were involved in making the Spanish exile in Mexico possible, such as Narciso Bassols, Susana and Federico Gamboa, Elena Garro, and her husband, Octavio Paz. Finally, she decided to

⁸⁹ Interview of the author with Aurora Arnáiz, Mexico City, 15 December 1999.

⁹⁰ Sánchez Vázquez referred the amazement with which those on board the *Sinaia* read the welcoming placards of the *Sindicato de Tortilleras*, as the term was used in Spain to refer colloquially to lesbians; Sánchez Vázquez, *Del exilio en México, Recuerdos y reflexiones*, Grijalbo, México, 1997, p.27.

⁹¹ Sánchez Vázquez criticised the concept, as it only considered the Spanish element of Mexico, and not the indigenous part that completes its complex reality; Sánchez Vázquez, *Del exilio en México*, pp.101-118.

enrol in the National University, and remained there after graduating, thus completing her full integration into Mexican society.

For some other refugees, the new location of their residence was of no particular relevance, as they were equally committed to continuing their political work as before. This was particularly so for political activists such as Vittorio Vidali⁹² and Clive Smith, both former International Brigaders, who worked with Lombardo at the *CTAL*, the Latin American Labour organisation devoted to the anti-Fascist struggle in the Americas.⁹³

Salvador Téllez, loyal Spanish Republican diplomat, who had been assigned to Santiago de Chile before the military rebellion was only a temporary exile in Mexico, with his wife Luz Urech. During the war, they had returned to Spain, where he actively joined the Popular Army as a volunteer. Soon he was relieved from his military duty, as the shortage of diplomatic personnel required his work at the Ministry of State.⁹⁴ Once the war was over, they left Spain on the *Flandre* and went to Mexico, although what they really wanted was to go back to Chile. After a short stay in Mexico, but particularly after witnessing the enthusiasm of the Mexican people in receiving the Spanish Republicans, they did not want to leave. However, the new diplomatic post of Salvador Téllez demanded their departure to Santiago, where they remained until 1973. Then another brutal military *coup* against a democratically elected Left-wing government obliged the family to go into exile once more. This time, the exile was not in Mexico City, but in London.⁹⁵ Similar cases were not uncommon in younger generations of liberal and progressive sectors of Spanish origins, Republicans or not.⁹⁶

⁹² AHN-SGC, *Archivo de Historia Oral: El Exilio español en México*, Vittorio Vidali, interviewed by Concepción Ruiz-Funes, Trieste, 1979, Libro: 113, Sign. PHO/10/36.

⁹³ AHN-SGC, *Archivo de Historia Oral: El Exilio español en México*, Smith Clive, interviewed by Marisol Alonso, Mexico, 1979, Libro: 107, Sign. PHO/10/26.

⁹⁴ Interview of the author with Luz Urech de Téllez, London, 7 July 1998.

⁹⁵ *Idem*.

⁹⁶ Historian Lucía Sala de Touron, daughter of Spanish immigrants, also left her native Uruguay and went into exile in Mexico in the mid 1970s. She referred to her own experience as exile at the launching of the book by Rogelio Martínez, *Crónicas del exilio español en Uruguay*, Brecha, Montevideo, 2002, at the Club Español, on 20 May 2003.

Nevertheless, in most cases, the Spanish Republicans who arrived in Mexico stayed there. Eulalio Ferrer Rodríguez, for instance, left Spain defeated and empty-handed, arriving in Mexico in 1940, after being in a concentration camp in France.⁹⁷ Ferrer was one of thousands of young Spaniards who had their lives ahead of them. Given their poor living conditions in the French camps, their option was simple. Many of them became successful entrepreneurs, as Ferrer did. However, not only young people decided to go to the other side of the Atlantic. Asked why did he decided to go into exile at 89, Ignacio Bolívar Urrutia, the eminent Spanish biologist, former president of the *Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas*, and director of the Natural History Museum and the Madrid Botanic Garden, responded on board the ship that took him to Mexico, “to die with dignity.”⁹⁸ An identical attitude characterised the 80-year-old writer Antonio Zozaya.⁹⁹

Víctor L. Urquidi Bingham, a Mexican student in London whose family was in Spain at the outbreak of the civil War (See Chapter V), left Britain in the *Somaria*, which was part of a convoy of 6 ships and 31 freighters in the custody of British warships, in August 1940. On board he made the acquaintance of Severo Ochoa, future Spanish Nobel Prize winner, and Sixto Obrador, famous brain surgeon (*neurocirujano*). They all made their way to Veracruz, via New York, arriving on 2 September. Urquidi Bingham recalled the general ambience in Mexican upper-class circles as very pro-German (*germanófilo*). “My own experience, however, put me on the side of the democratic alliance.” Fortunately, he acknowledged, the Mexican Government had long defined its position since the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.”¹⁰⁰

If for most Spanish Republicans their Mexican exile was fortuitous, there were still many who could not think of a better place to go; such was the case of

⁹⁷ Eulalio Ferrer, *Entre alambradas*, Grijalbo, México, 1988, p.148.

⁹⁸ María Luisa Capella (coord.) *El Exilio español y la UNAM, Coloquio organizado por la Coordinación de Humanidades y el Centro de Estudios sobre la Universidad*, UNAM, México, 1987, p.40.

⁹⁹ *Sinaia, Diario de la Primera Expedición de Republicanos españoles a México*, No. 9, 3 June 1939.

¹⁰⁰ Víctor L. Urquidi Bingham, intervention at the launch of the book *Misión de Luis I. Rodríguez en Francia, julio-diciembre de 1940*, ColMex-SRE-Conacyt, México, 2000, at the Colegio de México on 10 February 2000.

Anselmo Carretero Jiménez. Mexico was not an unfamiliar place for Carretero at the time of his exile, as he had been in Mexico working as an engineer in 1936. In fact, he was in Mexico at the time of the military rebellion in Spain, and became an active participant in the solidarity campaign with the Spanish Republic developed by Mexican Labour. (See Chapter V) Therefore, when the time came to decide where to go from France, Carretero gladly accepted the almost solitary option. During his sixty years of exile, Carretero devoted his energies to academic work, first as an engineer, as he said, to be able to study; then as a historian, dedicating more than forty years to the study of the Spanish nationalities. His books were, and still are, very much appreciated in Mexico by both Mexicans and Spaniards.¹⁰¹

The origins of another long-lasting success story touching both countries can be found in Cándido Souza, Francisco Souza, Julio Souza, Faustino del Castillo and Pablo del Castillo, who arrived in Mexico in 1939. Two of them were professional photographers, and encouraged the other three to join their group. The best that they could do was to start working and make some money. They called themselves the “Mayo Brothers” (*Hermanos Mayo*). Since their formation, the group produced an enormous amount of material and their archives are filled with hundreds of thousands of photographs of Mexican political and cultural life since the late 1930s. Many of their photographs now form part of both Spanish and Mexican national general archives.¹⁰²

As part of the Spanish Republican exile, as previously mentioned, some former International Brigades combatants arrived in Mexico. Although the initial Mexican offer generously included all Republican combatants and non-combatants, Spanish or otherwise, it was decided not to allow the International

¹⁰¹ Carretero expressed the concept of “nation of nations” to define Spain since the early 1970s. Now this concept is widely accepted inside and outside Spain. However, his works are scarcely known in Spain due to unfortunate timing. Besides, Spanish regional politics, particularly in the Basque country, would not allow that concept to prosper, given the common origins of both Castilian and Basque peoples, as proven by Carretero; see Anselmo Carretero y Jiménez, *Los pueblos de España, Introducción al estudio de la nación española*, ENEP-Acatlán, UNAM, México, 1980. Interview of the author with Anselmo Carretero, 7 October 1999. Sadly, Don Anselmo died in 2002, age 93.

¹⁰² As part of a Mexican Spanish joint project, the *Archivo Fotográfico de los Hermanos Mayo* was set up by both the Mexican National Archive (AGN) and the Spanish Ministry of Culture’s State Archives Office in June 1991.

Brigades, as a group, to be sheltered in Mexico. This seemed to respond both to the pressure of Mexican Conservatives, and also to that of the American Government, which, although grateful for Mexico's help with the problem of exiles, was not keen on having perhaps thousands of radical ex-combatants South of the Rio Grande. However, as many of these former combatants were American, they gradually went back home. These "premature" anti-Fascists, as they would be labelled shortly afterwards, were not very welcome in the US. Eventually, some of them returned to Mexico, such as in the cases of James Norman Schmidt,¹⁰³ and Emile Jacobs, who, after a short stay in their homeland, could not bear the hostile treatment any longer. Schmidt settled in a small village in the state of Guanajuato for many years. Jacobs married a Mexican and settled in Mexico City for good.¹⁰⁴

Other former anti-Fascist combatants made their way straight to the Mexican refuge, such as Emile Rosenstein, a Polish medical doctor who joined the *Dombrowsky Battalion* of the International Brigades. After the Republican defeat, he joined the French resistance and fought for two more years before eventually going into exile in Mexico.¹⁰⁵ Unwilling to disclose the details of his ordeal before arriving, however, Rosenstein recalls the active intervention of Gilberto Bosques and Ernesto Madero, both Mexican diplomats, in organising and making possible his journey to Mexico. He arrived in 1942, leaving his French wife, Paulette, behind. He then asked Margarita Nelken to mediate through her Mexican connections so as to make it possible for his wife to go to Mexico too, which finally happened the following year.

The urgent need of all the exiles to earn their living motivated them to take on jobs, establish industries, or become workers in already established ones, immediately after their arrival. Similarly to the organisation and transport of refugees, the immediate needs of the newly arrived were satisfied by a collective effort. In Veracruz, the initial accommodation was offered by the Spanish

¹⁰³ John Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists, North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939 An Oral History*, Praeger, New York, 1986, p.168-169.

¹⁰⁴ Interview of the author with Bárbara Jacobs and Tito Monterroso, Mexico City, December 1999.

¹⁰⁵ Interview of the author with Emile Rosenstein, Mexico City, October 1999.

Republican authorities, which arranged the *Manuel Arnús* for temporary housing, providing food, clothes and some pocket money for the refugees, always supported by the solidarity of local Labour, and the generosity of the local population.¹⁰⁶ In Mexico City, not having to receive massive groups, the organisation rested in the shoulders of the local Committees, coordinated by the personnel of the former Spanish Republican Embassy, to which, as mentioned earlier, also contributed some of the organisations of the Spanish residents.

Soon they would be on their way to live in different parts of the Mexican Republic, particularly in Michoacan, Puebla, and Hidalgo states, not necessarily following a predetermined plan, but on the basis of a broader scheme for developing industries or strengthening economic or educational spheres.¹⁰⁷

Their presence in Mexico had an enduring impact upon Mexican culture and society. They were a living reminder of the prelude to even more terrible things to come. Although most Spanish Republican refugees arrived in Mexico between 1939 and 1942, the flood continued throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, making their presence a familiar element in the new era of Mexican Spanish relations.

c) The Impact

Although the political situation in Mexico was increasingly difficult for the President, he was deeply convinced of the rightness of his decision in favour of the Republicans. Lázaro Cárdenas had engaged in a profound reform of the country and was determined to pursue his progressive policies to the limit of his abilities, as he retained a sincere conviction of the revolutionary cause in which he had been but a soldier. His commitment to restore the rights of the indigenous peoples, as well as the necessary land reform and provision of elementary education to all were part of the Six-Year-Plan approved by the National Congress of the Revolutionary Party to which he was obliged to abide. In doing

¹⁰⁶ Gordón Ordás, *Mi política fuera de España*, Tomo I, pp.

¹⁰⁷ *Memoria de la Secretaría de Gobernación*, September 1939- August 1940, *Presentada al H. Congreso de la Unión por el Secretario del ramo*, Lic. Ignacio García Téllez, DAPP, México, 1940.

so, he met unexpected challenges both in local politics and foreign affairs. His response proved the humble uneducated soldier to be a statesman, something recognised even by his most fervent enemies. His firm stand before the foreign oil companies and their respective governments was perhaps the biggest challenge of all. Nonetheless, Mexican Conservative public opinion accepted the arrival of thousands of Spanish Republicans reputed to be dangerous Communists who posed a threat to the Mexican way of life.¹⁰⁸

The impact of thousands of Spanish Republican exiles was considerable in various spheres of Mexican life and society. It was not, as some exaggerated versions have claimed, responsible for the creation of modern Mexico. This narrow vision of the Spanish Republican influence in Mexico fails properly to evaluate the political, economic and cultural conditions of Mexico at the time of their arrival. The Spanish intellectuals did not act isolated from Mexican society, nor did they engage in creative work on their own. As we have seen, the establishment of the *Casa de España*, then transformed into the *El Colegio de México*, was closely dependent on the effort of Mexican intellectuals, such as Daniel Cosío Villegas and Alfonso Reyes. But these two leading personalities were not working alone. Clemente Villaseñor, Andrés Iduarte, Jesús Silva Herzog, Isidro Fabela, Narciso Bassols, Lombardo Toledano and Manuel Gómez Morín, to mention only the most relevant or influential, were also active.

Although the Spanish Republican exiles were soon incorporated into the ongoing cultural and artistic activities in Mexico, they also remained concerned about the future of their country. During the first few years of the Spanish exile, perhaps the magazine *España Peregrina* was the most representative of the collective works of Spanish intellectuals.¹⁰⁹ They would soon evolve into promoters of such

¹⁰⁸ In September 1939, Cárdenas made a reference to the “long process” of expropriation that began with the 18 March 1938 decree, whose debt (\$ 200,556,732. 66) were a severe constraint for the Mexican Government. Nonetheless, he was deeply convinced of the justice of the expropriation as he was of the granting of asylum to the Spanish Republicans.

¹⁰⁹ One of the first and most comprehensive general works pursued by Spaniards in Mexico and Spain and dealing with the Spanish Republican exile in Mexico was the collective *El exilio español de 1939, 6 tomos*, Taurus, Madrid, published between 1976 and 1978. Other works relevant to the subject include José Luis Abellán, *De la guerra civil al exilio republicano (1936-1977)*, Mezquita, Madrid, 1982. Víctor Alba, *Los españoles fuera de su casa, esquema histórico de España, 1868-1965*, Las Americas Publishing Company, New York, 1968.

activities. Particularly intense was the publishing of books, magazines, and bulletins of the Spanish Republicans, which principally aimed at keeping the exile united and maintaining hopes for an early return to Spain. Unfortunately, the existing division was also reflected in such publications.

The influence of the Spanish Republican exile on Mexican life is evident in many respects, but particularly in the cultural sphere. They made an important contribution to literature, cinema, and the arts in general. However, it is far from having set an entirely new trend in Mexican culture or politics. They have greatly contributed to make them more robust, more mature, as part of the collective effort that such endeavour needed. The process of integration and the cultural contribution made by the Spanish Republicans to Mexican life can also be illustrated by the foundation of Spanish publishing companies. - *Siglo XXI*, *Joaquín Mortiz*, and other successful businesses.

The writers, artists, scholars and politicians at the forefront of the Spanish Republicans have mostly been identified as the Spanish exile in Mexico. However, behind all of them there is the “silent hard-working” majority constituted by workers and professionals.

Politically, the Spanish Republican exiles are also an example of what used to be Spanish politics, as it included Right-wing and Left-wing Republicans, Socialists, Communists, Anarchists, and Galician, Basque and Catalan nationalists. Some of the organisations and newspapers or magazines the Spanish Republicans set up in Mexico include the *Ateneo Español de México*, *Centro Republicano Español*, and their respective newsletters, *Boletín del Ateneo Español de México* and *Boletín del Centro Republicano Español de México*.

The numerous teachers and scientists developed an intense activity almost immediately after their arrival. Ignacio Bolívar, alongside his son Cándido Bolívar Pieltain, already an eminent scientist on his own right, Isaac Costero and Francisco Giral, founded the magazine *Ciencia* (Science), *Revista hispano-*

americana de ciencias puras y aplicadas, in March 1940. Shortly afterwards, Ignacio Bolívar was awarded an honorary doctorate from the National University (UNAM).¹¹⁰ The variety of professions and the quality of their professional capacities lead to public recognition. In the artistic sphere, young actors such as Augusto Benedico, Ofelia Guilmain, Magda Donato, Aurora Molina, Sonia Furió, and many others who were soon working together with old Spanish actor residents, were acclaimed by the Mexican audiences.¹¹¹ In the film industry, evidently, the presence of Luis Buñuel contributed to the ongoing work of Fernando de Fuentes and the maturing of other young Mexican directors such as Alejandro Galindo and Rene Cardona.

Years after the beginning of his exile, and perhaps the most recognised philosopher of the Spanish Republican exile, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, defined the main characteristics of the Spanish Republican exile, first, as political, given its military defeat at the hands of local and international Fascism. Secondly, as numerically massive, unlike most exiles, as it was not only formed by a political or intellectual elite, but by thousands of ordinary Spaniards. Finally, as a reflection of the composition of Republican Spain; firstly, in its territorial composition, as Spanish exiles came from all regions; then socially, as all social classes and sectors are represented (Liberal bourgeois, Middle-classes, workers, peasants, and intellectuals) and finally, professionally, as virtually every profession can be found amongst the Spanish Republicans.¹¹²

An illustrative example of the long-reach of the Spanish Republican influence in social circles of both Mexicans and Spanish residents is the case of Faustino Lastra, a Mexican of Spanish Conservative family. He studied in Spain, but left at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. In 1940 he went to study at the Faculty of

¹¹⁰ One of the most recent works devoted to the contribution of Spanish Republicans to the development of Mexican science is Gerardo Sánchez Díaz and Porfirio García de León, (eds.) (2001) *Los científicos del exilio español en México*, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Sociedad Mexicana de Historia de la Ciencia y de la Tecnología & Sociedad Española de Historia de las Ciencias y de las Técnicas, Morelia (México), 2001.

¹¹¹ *Revista de Revistas*, no. 3995, 22 August 1986.

¹¹² Unpublished conference given by Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez in the opening sessions of the Valencia and Barcelona Congresses on the Spanish exiles in 1999, *60 Años después*. Copy of the paper titled *Del Destierro al Transtierro*, kindly provided by Professor Sánchez Vázquez to the author.

San Bernardo, but the Spanish Consul in Lisbon took his passport away and sent him to Burgos. He alleged his Mexican citizenship, but Francoist authorities replied that both his parents were Spaniards, thus he was too. He was sent to do military service. Lastra recalled that, since there was no Mexican official representation, “they did as they pleased.” (“*hacían lo que les daba la gana*”).¹¹³ After a short while, he managed to escape the barracks and made his way to Portugal via Badajoz. He found a French and a Belgian former International Brigades fighters hidden near the border. They succeeded in crossing to Portugal by bribing the control guards. The guards were ready to let them through as long as they had some money. Lastra had \$3 000 US, and “that was enough for everybody.” (“*había para todos*”). Back in Mexico, he became acquainted with Spanish Communist exiles, and his transformation from a jetsetter into a Communist supporter began. He financially supported many of the Spanish Republicans in exile in Mexico, as well as the Spanish Communist Party. He then went to study Economics in Paris, extending his circle of Republican acquaintances and his support for their cause.¹¹⁴

It must be said that although the overwhelming majority of Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico honoured their host, not all of them followed a pattern of acceptable behaviour during their long exile. A former aide of Lázaro Cárdenas, Luis Prieto, referred to the case of Máximo Muñoz, a Spanish exile who came to own mines in the municipality of Altamirano, in the state of Guerrero. Muñoz had recreated the old cacique-style in organising his business and exploited the workers mercilessly. Cárdenas himself requested presidential intervention in the late 1950s to resolve the inhuman working conditions maintained by Muñoz towards his labourers.¹¹⁵ Although grave, Muñoz’s case was by no means representative of the attitude of the Spanish exiles in Mexico. As Luis Prieto put it, it was just the black sheep of the family. (“*Un negrito en el arroz*”). No doubt there were some other Spanish Republicans who betrayed not only their fellow countrymen, but also the people whose generosity they had enjoyed. By abusing

¹¹³ *El País Semanal*, no, interview of Sol Alameda with Faustino Lastra, p.28.

¹¹⁴ AHN-SGC, Archivo de Historia Oral: El Exilio español en México, Faustino Lastra y Méndez Deya, interviewed by Elena Aub and Enriqueta Tuñón, Madrid, 1980, Libro: 59, Sign. PHO/10/ESP.26.

¹¹⁵ Interview of the author with Luis Prieto, Mexico City, 17 November 1999.

the generous offer of living in peace and liberty, those few Spanish exiles only made the gratitude of the overwhelming majority of the Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico evident. They have become a reference point for the defence of democratic principles, culture, and humanism.

Preliminary Conclusions

There has been much debate over the total numbers of Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico. The first figures produced, frequently over-estimating the number of refugees, have been replaced by more accurate estimates of later years, which have arrived at smaller figures. Although the final total of Spanish Republicans going to Mexico during this era has been put at somewhere in the region of 50 000¹¹⁶ exiles, the actual number is probably well under 30 000.¹¹⁷ However, even though the number of Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico was not as considerable as traditionally thought, there is no doubt regarding the considerable positive impact their presence had in Mexican culture and society.¹¹⁸

The organising of the main expeditions of Spanish Republicans and their arrival in Mexico took place in the summer of 1939. Although it has been suggested that there was a change of attitude by the Mexican Government regarding the Spanish refugees exiled in France, arguably in response to the official outbreak of hostilities in Europe at the beginning of September 1939, this seems lacking in credibility. It is true, however, that some high-ranking Mexican-officials, even some close allies of Lázaro Cárdenas had reservations regarding the convenience of receiving thousands of Spanish Republican refugees. However, this might have

¹¹⁶ Clara E. Lida (ed.), *México y España Durante el Franquismo, Rupturas Formales, Relaciones Oficiosas, 1939-1950*, El Colegio de México, México, 2001; the new count, based on official statistics, leaves the figure at a surprisingly low 17 800 Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico.

¹¹⁷ AHPCE, Santiago Álvarez Gómez, Sig. 1/3.1.1, *Ponencia sobre los españoles en Francia, 1939-1942*. In this work presented in 1991, Álvarez analysed the data presented by different authors such as Michel Fabreguet and Amaro del Rosal, plus the official reports from organisations such as the *SERE* and the *JARE*. He then concluded that the total figure of Spanish Republican exiles to the Americas “did not go beyond 30 000” including Chile, Argentina, Venezuela, Panama, Bolivia, Cuba, the US, and Mexico. Similarly, the estimate of Spanish Republican exiles in the Americas given by the Swiss Central Health (*Central Sanitaria*) in September 1940 was of over 24 000, divided in seven Latin American countries, including Mexico, for which the figure given was 7 000 refugees; APCE, *Sobre la Emigración*, 8293 “I” 2 eje. CP 7.9.1940.

¹¹⁸ An excellent work about the Spanish Republicans in general is in Francisco Caudet, *Hipótesis sobre el exilio republicano de 1939*, Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid, 1997.

been more likely in the case of Ignacio García Téllez, the Interior Minister, whose religious formation, cornerstone of his Conservatism, was similar to that of some of the Right-wing Republicans, than in that of the Minister in France, Narciso Bassols, as alleged. In any case, García Téllez acted firmly in favour of the Spanish Republicans, albeit more concerned about the numbers than any other serious objection towards their arrival. If the number of sailings from France of Spanish refugees was limited, and thus the number of exiles not as high as originally expected, this had more to do with the circumstances imposed upon the organisers, given the state of war in Europe, than a change of policy by the Mexican Government.

It is also true that, although political circumstances had changed in Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas's administration's decision to pursue a specific policy towards Spain was more robust than ever. Nonetheless, the increasing tension between the government and the Conservatives must be borne in mind. As Lombardo explained to the local leaders of the *CTM*, "Mexico's problem [was] not an electoral one; the problem is to know whether Almazán triumphs and all the work done by Cárdenas is dismantled, or if his example will continue for another six years."¹¹⁹ Most revolutionary sectors, and a fervent supporter such as Lombardo Toledano, wholeheartedly shared Cárdenas's vision, and promoted Ávila Camacho's candidacy. Cárdenas' decision to support Manuel Ávila Camacho's presidential ambitions must, therefore, be read in the context of the growing strength of the Right. Likewise, Lombardo's enthusiastic support as the head of the Labour movement can also be explained in these terms. In hindsight, Cárdenas's decision had a negative impact for his own political legacy. Nevertheless, his progressive policies had long lasting repercussions in economic and social terms; in the economic sphere, the nationalisation of the railways and the oil industry, which enabled the transformation of the country's economy from predominantly agricultural to increasingly industrial; in the social sphere, the

¹¹⁹ Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *La nueva guerra europea y el proletariado mexicano*, México, 1939, p.65.

support of the Spanish Republican cause, and the granting of asylum to thousands of Spanish exiles, who became an essential part of modern Mexico.¹²⁰

The era inaugurated in Spain in 1931, with the optimistic vision of establishing a democratic regime aiming at modernising the country through land reform and the separation of State and Church as a means of building social justice, ended up in a leap backwards imposed by Franco and his Nazi-Fascist allies, strongly helped by the inaction of the Western democracies. Under those circumstances, the modest aid provided by Mexico to the Spanish Republic became paramount, both in symbolic and practical terms. Juan Negrín used a Mexican passport to leave France after the German occupation.¹²¹ Manuel Azaña was buried covered by the Mexican flag. Francisco Largo Caballero, in captivity in a German concentration camp in Oranienburg, avoided deportation to Franco's Spain through the intervention of Mexican diplomats. The massive reception of the Spanish Republicans in Veracruz and the tumultuous hero's welcome given to both Indalecio Prieto and José Miaja in Mexico City showed the strong feeling towards everything that the Spanish Republic represented. After a long exile, they both died in Mexico City, Miaja in 1958, and Prieto in 1962. The list of Spanish Republicans who died in their Mexican exile is long, and includes, Roberto Castrovido, Antonio Zozaya, Ignacio Bolívar, Joaquín Díez Canedo, Mariano Ruiz-Funes, Félix Gordón Ordás, Luis Cernuda, Magda Donato, León Felipe, Margarita Nelken, José Giral, Max Aub, Manuel Altolaguirre, Anselmo Carretero, and many, many more. Likewise, the number of significant events linking Spanish Republicans and Mexicans throughout the years is endless. Although the case of Faustino Lastra was exceptional, it showed further the level of influence the Spanish Republicans had in wide circles of Mexican society, including the prior Spanish residents, traditionally Conservative and anti-Republican.

¹²⁰ AHDM, no. 2, Gilberto Bosques, *Historia oral de la Diplomacia mexicana*, SRE, México 1988.

¹²¹ Juan Negrín left France under the name and passport of Mexican diplomat Alfonso Castro Valle, [Rodríguez], *Misión de Luis I. Rodríguez*, Document 429, *Corre peligro la vida de Negrín*, pp.365-366.

Mexico has been able proudly to recall the selfless attitude from which it developed an important element of modern culture. Within Spain itself, it seems that this is still a sensitive issue with which Spanish people still have to come to terms. The Spanish exiles found in Mexico the kind of political circumstances they wished they could have had in Spain to pursue their intellectual and academic interests. Indeed, it has even been suggested that the Spanish Republican intellectuals were better treated than their Mexican counterparts, but no hard evidence has been produced to sustain this view.¹²²

The exiles were soon immersed in the same fate as the Mexican people and the heavy burden of being in exile was at times worsened by some manifestations of anti-Spanish attitudes. Of course, there were very successful cases of Spanish exile, but that was more the result of individual efforts than of a governmental attitude towards them. Aurora Arnáiz, for instance, eventually became a lecturer at the National University (*UNAM*) and in later years Emeritus Professor. She wrote her memoirs in 1997, in which she described her involvement in the Socialist Youth, and the *JSU* during the war years in Madrid.¹²³ Similarly, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez considerably contributed to the development of philosophical studies in the National University and also became Emeritus Professor. His works are regularly referred to in academic circles throughout the country and he is also renowned internationally. In 1989, the Spanish Government decorated him with the *Gran Cruz de Alfonso X El Sabio*.¹²⁴

Eulalio Ferrer developed his career as a publicist, and is commonly referred as the father of advertising in Mexico. However, he never forgot the hardship of exile and remained as committed to the Republican cause, namely Democracy, as ever. Eventually, after a lifetime dedicated to promoting culture and the strengthening of Mexican Spanish relations, his recognition as a cultural benefactor saw him

¹²² Sebastiaan Faber, *Exile and cultural hegemony, Spanish intellectuals in Mexico, 1939-1945*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 2002, pp.21-23.

¹²³ Aurora Arnáiz, *Retrato hablado de Luisa Julián*, pp.31-104.

¹²⁴ Sánchez Vázquez, *Del exilio en México*, pp.39-42.

decorated by the Spanish Government with the *Gran Cruz de Isabel la Católica*.¹²⁵

In general, for the Spanish Republicans exiled in Mexico, the new life they gained offered them a less painful way to live through defeat. Most Spanish Republicans were in the end completely immersed in Mexican society, their children active in politics and even in governmental positions. However, after patiently and painfully waiting for the fall of Franco, many of the Spanish exiles felt treated as 'Spaniards in Mexico and Mexicans in Spain'. They had lost the identity of their early years, but had a life to work for, and represented a new phase in the Mexican Spanish relationship. Eulalio Ferrer summed up thus this circumstance: "I was born in Spain, but I was re-born in Mexico."

¹²⁵ *La Jornada*, 15 July 2003. Ferrer has also been devoted to the cause of the Spanish Republican exiles organised in the *Ateneo Español de México*, of which he served as president in 1979-1980.

Chapter VIII

The Schizophrenia of Mexican Spanish Relations, 1939-1977.

Y cuando despertó,
el dinosaurio seguía ahí.
**And when he woke up,
the dinosaur was still there.**
Tito Monterroso.

Mexican-Spanish relations have traditionally been complex and inconsistent. As a result of the revolutionary movement which began in 1910 in Mexico, an anti-Spanish sentiment emerged once more, almost as strongly as during the years of the War of Independence a century earlier. During the defining years of the Mexican Revolution, the consolidation of a new foreign policy was an essential element both in terms of the principles upon which it was based, and the objectives to be pursued beyond Mexico's frontiers. At the core of those principles and policies were the concepts of Non-intervention and Self-determination. The internal political developments in Mexico, which had originated with the Revolution of 1910, are particularly relevant to the understanding of Mexico's official stance towards Spain in the Twentieth Century, as well as the contrasting positions adopted by influential groups within Mexico itself, such as the emergent progressive Labour movement and the Conservative media. The following decades witnessed cosmetic changes and a superficial normalisation of diplomatic relations whilst the everyday issues faced by both Spaniards in Mexico and Mexicans in Spain were often complicated and dealt with neglectfully.

Throughout the decade of the 1930s, there were unexpected developments in international politics, which had an extraordinary impact on Mexican-Spanish relations. At the beginning of the 1930s, the world was immersed in a great economic slump following the financial crash in the leading capitalist countries, and the forecasts were still gloomy. The political and economic situation in Europe, worsened by the economic depression initiated in the US, rapidly spread towards the rest of the industrialised world. Italian politics were particularly revealing of the way Right-wing organisations were prepared to go when in government, and the German Weimar Republic was struggling to preserve not only its political stability, but also its very existence.¹ As it turned out, resisting the pressure of the strong Socialist party, and its various potential allies, while at the same time learning to deal with the rise of the far-Right Nazi party, was too heavy a burden to bear for a democratic regime subjected to economic strife and dealing with damaged national pride. Still unknown to the greater public, both because of its own secretiveness and due to its treatment as a pariah state, the Soviet experiment was the other ingredient in international politics of the period, arousing both fascination and suspicion.

The tense calm that defined the history of Mexican-Spanish relations, for almost a century, came to an end. All started poignantly in Spain in 1931, where the optimism and joy with which the people brought down the corrupt and senile Monarchist regime, fuelled confidence that it would be possible to build a true democracy. Other peoples shared the optimistic view of the Spanish people at the beginning of the 1930s, significantly the Mexican and the Latin-American peoples. In fact, contrary to traditional interpretations of the period, there were good enough reasons for the common people to be confident and hopeful for the future. How could it have been otherwise, when economic depression had tested to the extreme a traditional way of doing things? True, the Weimar experiment in Germany had ended in failure, but its very failure was teaching important lessons. There must be other ways surely, as the Soviets were attempting in

their own recently backward country, a country which the world was now watching closely. The Soviet experiment seemed to be and it was indeed at the time the only alternative method of solving society's problems. Evidently, many people watched such an experiment with horror, but it is certain that many others were watching from a distance with joy. Whatever the case, both felt passionately about how that experiment would conclude and how it could affect their lives.

The establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931 on the one hand, and the political stability achieved in Mexico in the early 1930s on the other hand, paved the way for a real change in their bilateral relationship, well beyond the status of their diplomatic representations. Diplomatic relations between the Spanish Republic and revolutionary Mexico entered a golden age expressed in ever-closer cultural exchanges, economic agreements, and amicable solutions of bilateral controversies. Although frustrated in the end, there were also preferential trade agreement negotiations that demonstrated a willingness to further strengthen the relationship. Simultaneously, internal politics in both countries were following similar patterns and, up to a point, had some influence on each other's countries, although ultimately the Spanish Republican and the Mexican revolutionary programmes would develop differently. Between 1931 and 1933, during the so-called *Maximato* period in Mexican politics, Mexican-Spanish relations saw the beginning of the new era, where bilateral disagreements were dealt with in an amicable and constructive way. This period also witnessed the improvement of bilateral relations other than diplomatic, as the Spanish Republic became a familiar image of a similar political project which included political parties and Labour organisations with similar aims. Mexican political strongman, Plutarco Elías Calles, and Spanish Republican Ambassador, Julio Álvarez del Vayo, were representative of this period.

However, the resistance offered by Mexican producers and Spanish traders resident in Mexico, however, thwarted the pursuing of reciprocally beneficial agreements. Although some economic and cultural agreements were reached, the change of regime in Spain

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes, The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, Abacus, London, 1994,

during the 1933-1935 Right-wing Government period, and the corresponding changes in diplomatic personnel (the long interim *Chargé*, José Ma. Pujadas, and Ambassador, Emiliano Iglesias) prevented their enforcement and any further development. The continuity of the battered, though still strong relationship, was then in the hands of Mexican Ambassador in Madrid, Genaro Estrada, and later, up to a point, Manuel Pérez Treviño. Although regretting the change of government in Spain, and the consequent change of attitude towards Mexico, Ambassador Estrada concluded that, “even with the political animosity of the ruling group, and far away from the general consideration of the people”, Spain remained “the one country in Europe where Mexico cannot and will [would] not be ignored”.²

During the five years culminating in 1936, Mexican-Spanish relations experienced an increase in commercial exchange under more favourable terms thanks to close contact between officials. Furthermore, ever-friendlier relations were also evident in the cultural sphere, including regular interaction between political parties and Labour organisations. However, the various projects for the development of the economic bilateral relationship and to strengthen Mexican-Spanish friendship did not come to a practical conclusion. Throughout its entire history, the Spanish Republic faced political unrest. While trying to pursue radical economic and political reforms, the Republicans were, at the same time restraining the revolutionary impetus of the Left-wing organisations, and resisting the Right-wing pressure demanding changes to maintain the *status quo*. The election of the Popular Front regime in 1936 again opened the possibility of the fulfilment of new common projects and agreements between Mexico and Spain. This developing strong connection was thwarted with the military rebellion that led to Civil War in Spain in July 1936. Nevertheless, it also contributed to strengthen Spanish-Mexican relations, for the Spanish war, although it divided Mexican society, put to the test the nature of the relationship and the political aims of both regimes. The prospect for taking Mexican-Spanish relations to higher levels was thus frustrated.

p.137.

² AHDM, 34-5-15 (2a. parte), *Embajada de México en España (1932-1934)*, no. 29, 4a. época, *La diplomacia en Acción*, Genaro Estrada, SRE, México, 1987, pp.235-242.

The open aid received by the Spanish military rebels from Germany and Italy, once their attempt to seize power failed, proved crucial to the development of the rightist war effort, and more significantly, to its outcome. The Western democracies contributed with their proposed Non-intervention, as the rebels had to acknowledge: "That, overall, the British stand is favourable to us can be observed in the open, and admirable aid that Portugal is providing to us, given the Portuguese intense economic liaisons with British economic interests in such a way, that has to be admitted that Oliveira Salazar enjoys absolute British approval to help us in the way he does."³ The eagerness of both Germany and Italy to grant recognition to Franco's Government set up in Burgos in October 1936, not only further showed the political affiliations of the Spanish military rebels, but the full commitment of the Nazi-Fascist powers in the struggle in Spain.

As a result of either partisan propaganda or deliberate misinformation, the Communist threat made an impact. A plethora of reasonable suspicions, pure speculations, factual evidence or absurd inventions about Soviet involvement in revolutionary movements all over the world was permanently voiced throughout the entire existence of the Soviet Union. The fear of Communism became a cliché in Twentieth Century international politics. However, it was more the threat that Communism presented to private economic interests, rather than to democracy, which more than once forced the major Western powers to act rather awkwardly in foreign affairs, when trying to justify their motives. Spain in the 1930s was by no means the exception. Since it was difficult to prove the existence of any real Communist threat, it was necessary to create a façade so as to be able to appear concerned about democracy and respectful regarding the domestic affairs of others. During the Spanish Civil War, the most successful route for such a policy took the form of prejudiced Neutrality and partial Non-intervention. Although the Republican Government was eager to obtain the support of the Western democracies, it also tried to find some real support from wherever possible. It is clear that the European Non-intervention and American Neutrality pursued an undeclared objective of protecting

Western economic interests in the Peninsula whilst promoting a political project closer to their values. Democracy was not a concern for these nations in the case of the Spanish Republic,⁴ as it has not been in any case where such a democratic regime drifts towards the Left.

Before a big player decided to enter the game on its side, the Spanish Republic only had the firm response of Mexico. The previous years of comradeship between the Mexican and Spanish Governments had not been in vain. In times of need there was plenty of evidence of solidarity not only from the Mexican Government, but also from the Mexican people towards the Spanish people. The Mexican aid to Spain during the Civil War had multiple fronts; it was developed systematically as diplomatic efforts within the League of Nations or in direct actions, such as the selling of arms, food, and military equipment, and the sending of donations of food, medicines, and clothes, as well as in the volunteers who went to support the legitimate Republican Government. In the end, as expressed by one of the Mexican writers participating in the Congress in Valencia in 1937, Octavio Paz, Spain was considered “nothing else but the transatlantic part of Mexico.”

However, to use the Mexican stand as an exemplar of a rightful and selfless attitude with which to criticise the Soviet position,⁵ would endorse the fallacious Communist threat. On the other hand, to reduce the Mexican attitude towards the Spanish Civil War to no more than a personal crusade by President Cárdenas, and the action of a small group of adventurers who went to fight in Spain, as Thomas Powell does, concluding that the Mexican support for Spanish Republicans was nothing but myth, entirely lacks substance.⁶ President Cárdenas was determined to support a friendly regime with which he and his predecessors had established strong links, and with whom they shared an

³ AMAE, Ministerio de Estado, Leg. R-614, *Informe a la Junta de Defensa Nacional y a la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, Exp.5, *Informe sobre la situación internacional*, Burgos, 10 August 1936.

⁴ As Claude Bowers acknowledges in his book, an overall remarkably useful material, honestly written, his “allegiance as to democracy, that is to say, in this particular case, with the Spanish Republic.” Claude Bowers, *My mission to Spain*, p.4

⁵ Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain*, p.103.

⁶ Thomas G. Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1981, *passim*.

ideology and similar political projects. He did so to the limits of his capabilities, perhaps even stretching those limits. According to Frank Tannenbaum, American historian and journalist, Cárdenas remarked later: "It was my good fortune to have President Roosevelt and Ambassador Daniels representing the American people during my incumbency of the Mexican Presidency."⁷

The progressive policies implemented by the Cárdenas administration had not been originated because of the "Good-Neighbour" policy of American President Roosevelt. Nonetheless, as Cárdenas acknowledged, such a policy made it easier to pursue the Six-Year-Plan of the Mexican Government. Moreover, it was not only Roosevelt's Good-neighbour policy that allowed Mexico to pursue an independent foreign policy, as Frederick Pike suggested.⁸ It is a fact that Josephus Daniels was the perfect envoy to pursue the Good-neighbour readiness to solve diplomatic conflicts in an amicable way. And yet, it was not even the excellent work carried out by Roosevelt's Ambassador to Mexico, which on its own encouraged Mexico to follow a rather lonely path in 1930s international politics. Although these circumstances made it easier, the main reason must be found in the internal situation of Mexico. As explained earlier, during the years of the Cárdenas administration there was a strengthening of the revolutionary ideology within the governing elite, which led to an increase in the depth of the revolutionary policies. Furthermore, coinciding with the latter, the bolstering of a progressive labour movement backing the governmental programme proved instrumental in the achievement of its progressive aims.

The Mexican stance before the Spanish Civil War was entirely consistent with its previous relations during the years of Republican reform in Spain. In fact, the clear ideological affinity between the two Republican projects was the common ground, but there was more than that. It was above all a matter of principles; those principles accepted and signed up to within the League of Nations, which, in theory, all the member states

⁷ Frank Tannenbaum, *Mexico, the Struggle for Peace and Bread*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1960, p.278.

⁸ Frederick Pike, *FDR's good neighbour policy. Sixty years of generally gentle chaos*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1995.

were obliged to honour and pursue. The notion of self-determination and the freedom to establish democracy and legality in their own countries appeared to be accepted by the signatories of the constituent Covenant of the League, although the Spanish Civil War revealed a fundamental disagreement about the terms on which democratic countries might deal with their own political and economic programmes.

The official Mexican response to the Spanish conflict was matched by broad popular support for helping the Spanish Republicans. Yet, the widespread solidarity actions are usually relegated or forgotten. Moreover, recognition of Mexican volunteers who went to fight in Spain on the Republican side is almost non-existent. This, and the issue of refugees in the Mexican Embassy in Madrid (discussed in Chapter III) were part of a darker side of Mexican foreign policy towards Spain in times of trouble. In the case of the former, it was clear that the Mexican Government did not want openly to encourage the volunteering of Mexican nationals. Furthermore, some high-ranking Mexican officials, not entirely convinced of the wisdom of Cárdenas' policy, if not opposed to it, frankly discouraged some volunteers (discussed in Chapter V). The Mexican Government, they assumed, had enough on its plate without having to explain the presence of Mexicans in Spain beyond official representation. Yet, over 300 Mexican volunteers participated in the Spanish war, and numerous official representatives contributed in different degrees to the Republican war effort as part of the official standing of the Mexican Government towards Republican Spain.

Supporters of the two sides in Spain had their respective counterparts in Mexico. However, hard-core Conservatives in Mexico had considerable power in the media, as did Spanish residents in the business community. Both thus wielded influence on Mexican public opinion in general. Nevertheless, for once, they were overpowered by the resolute efforts of pro-Republican groups to win the hearts and minds of most Mexicans. Although the sympathies of Mexican society toward the Spanish fighters were divided, there was a clear preference toward the loyalists. The faction of Mexican society that clearly demonstrated its support for the rebel side, Mexican Conservatives, who allied

themselves with the Spanish colony, did as much as they could in support of the cause of the so-called Nationalists, including the recruitment of “volunteers” and fund raising for the defenders of traditional Conservative Spanish values. In this respect, the general Conservative attitude was illustrated by the activism of the *Falange Española en el Exterior* (in Mexico), and the intense anti-Republican sentiment expressed by certain Mexican newspapers and sectors of the public. Further commitment to the rebel cause was given by Juan Sánchez Navarro, a member of a prominent Conservative family studying in Spain at the outbreak of hostilities. Regarding his involvement in the Spanish war, Sánchez Navarro himself acknowledged, however, that the fact that he used his diplomatic passport to act against and betray a government that had granted him leave to study in their country might be viewed badly (“*Quizá se juzgue mal*”).⁹ (Discussed in Chapter VI).

At the time of the military rebellion in Spain, Mexican Conservatives became aware of the possibility of overthrowing a democratically elected government, particularly one suspected of anti-democratic practices and Communist influences, as they labelled the Cárdenas Government. They immediately supported the Spanish rebels. Hence, those supporting the Spanish military rebellion in 1936 were primarily from Conservative sectors that had always been quick to criticise the Cárdenas administration for its progressive policies. By allying themselves with what they saw as the “good” side in Spain, they were taking a clear stand against the Mexican Government as well. They were the same Mexican Conservatives who had taken offence at the insistence of the government in strictly adhering to the separation of matters of Church and State in accordance with the Mexican Constitution. Furthermore, they opposed the government’s anti-fanatical education programme (*Desfanatización*), as they considered this to be a clear demonstration of the Mexican government’s anti-Catholicism. They had always opposed the freedom of religion, as stipulated in the Constitution, and its enforcement by the various revolutionary governments since the years of Álvaro Obregón’s Government. Many of them even went so far as to support, either openly or clandestinely, the fanatical

⁹ Interview with the author in Mexico City, 3 July 1997.

Cristeros during Calles' administration. Most Mexican Catholics however, like their counterparts in Spain, were not militant, but broadly upheld traditional Conservative values, such as the defence of the family unit and the right to private property. These groups incorporated among their ranks Mexican middle-class professionals and businessmen, with economic interests closely linked to those of their rich Spanish counterparts.¹⁰

The links between the Spanish Falange and Mexican Conservative organisations was clear, and the influential presence of the former in Mexico was evident. Furthermore, the formation of the secretive *Unión Nacional Sinarquista* in Mexico in 1937, coincided with the process of unification of Right-wing parties in Spain. The fact that Franco mastered this unification through subterfuge, repression and effectively taming formerly strong parties, such as the Falange itself, draws an even closer similarity between with the formation of the *UNS* along similar lines in Mexico. The difference in strength and final outcome in these two cases was given by the broad political circumstances in both countries.

According to Sánchez Navarro, Mexico's pro-Republican stand was entirely due to Cárdenas ("*Una cosa personalísima de Cárdenas*")¹¹ However, the accuracy of such a statement is seriously questionable, given the broad popular support shown by the numerous private initiatives favouring the Republican effort throughout the war. Furthermore, different pro-Republican actions throughout the war and the tumultuous receptions for Republican figures and massive expeditions of Spanish Republican exiles in Veracruz from 1939 onwards prove otherwise. But perhaps Sánchez Navarro's perception was based on the fact that not even all of Cárdenas' cabinet members shared the strong view of the President. The contradictory attitudes, and in fact the divided loyalty, of some Mexican civil servants regarding the Spanish Civil War was the product of their personal beliefs, as in the case of Eduardo Hay, and Manuel Pérez Treviño. If an official decision had been made about fully engaging with the Spanish Republic, that did

¹⁰ AGN-182, Álvaro Obregón-Plutarco Elías Calles, Vol. 178-181, Serie 429, *Reclamaciones*.

not actually mean that all the people involved were entirely convinced of the wisdom of it. On the other hand, however, although most Mexican civil servants shared the views of the President, in the case of those who favoured the Spanish rebels there was yet another option. Unlike Hay and Pérez Treviño, others followed institutional policy regardless of their personal or ideological affinities with the rebels, such as Isidro Fabela and Ignacio García Téllez did. They might have been, like Fabela, fervently anti-Communist, and yet thoroughly convinced about the rightness of the Mexican position in the international dispute which he brilliantly exposed and defended in the League of Nations, following Cárdenas' policy. (Discussed in Chapter III).

Mexican and Soviet attitudes in supporting the Spanish Republic derived from entirely different circumstances. The relevant issues to take into account are principles v *realpolitik* in an on-going conflict in the international arena. The end of the war on Spanish soil meant the end of the rehearsal for a general war and the spreading of confrontation. In Spain, the non-existent threat of Communism overshadowed the Western Powers' commitment to democracy. Perhaps the Mexican Government followed principles in an age of pragmatism. Its stance, had the other countries behaved in the way they were expected to, would probably not have emerged as so isolated and so just. The Mexican position in the League of Nations was already rather isolated in 1935, when demanding an active enforcement of sanctions against Italy for having invaded Abyssinia, and even more so in 1936, when the League proved outdated and too weak to defend the Spanish democracy. The outstanding exception of Mexico made its foreign policy uncomfortable for the Western democracies and pinpointed the limitations of the League of Nations as a guarantor of international legality. The justification for not helping the Spanish Republic was no doubt the fear of Communism and sympathy for a Conservative regime, even a Fascist one, as conveniently favourable for both the economic and the political interests of the West. Nonetheless, the threat of a Communist take-over never existed. The former American Ambassador to Republican Spain, Claude Bowers, frankly admitted that there was not one Communist in the Spanish Republican Government at the

¹¹ Interview of the author with Juan Sánchez Navarro, Mexico City, 3 July 1997.

time of the insurrection, not even a Socialist of the mild Besteiro type. "There was not one who could be described as an extremist; not one who was not a republican and a democrat in the French and the American sense."¹²

Likewise, English journalist Vernon Bartlett, permanently criticised Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, and went as far as to accuse the British Government "for cowardice amounting to treachery."¹³ Similarly, although from an entirely different perspective, Winston Churchill was also critical of such policy. None of these criticisms made an impact upon a decision established firmly. The Republican Government was left alone to face the military rebellion, deprived of arms it had previously arranged to receive. Then it was abandoned, hence betrayed, when German and Italian invading armies went to support the rebels, leaving the Spanish Republic defenceless. In the words of American journalist Vincent Sheean, "the word 'appeasement' served as the wing for the ostrich."¹⁴

There were many voices raised from prominent Western politicians and diplomats, not necessarily defending Republican Spain's rights but certainly criticising the policy of appeasement, such as Churchill himself. It seemed that there was yet to be room for another kind of pragmatism. As American Ambassador in Belgium, former Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Joseph Davies, wrote to President Roosevelt early in 1939 reporting that, "[i]n the event of [...] international conflict between the totalitarian and the democratic states, the Soviet Government is, in my opinion, a much more powerful factor than the reactionaries of Europe concede, and might be of the greatest value."¹⁵ Yet there is little doubt that much of the British establishment loathed Communism more than Fascism, reflecting a wider Western European aim of favouring the latter in order to get rid of the former.

¹² Claude Bowers, *My mission to Spain*, p.194

¹³ *News Chronicle*, 13 October 1937. In 1938, Bartlett stood for Parliament as an anti-appeasement independent candidate and won in an area considered a safe Tory seat.

¹⁴ Vincent Sheean, *Not peace but a sword*, Doubleday, Doran and Co., New York, 1939, p.39.

¹⁵ Davies to Roosevelt, 18 January 1939, *FRUS*, The Soviet Union, 1933-1939, Washington, 1952, pp.600-601.

British and French recognition of Franco's Government took place in February 1939 as the natural outcome of a common policy that hoped to maintain Spanish traditional economic dependence upon the former states. In the same way, the United States gave full recognition to the victors' Government during the first days of April 1939. On 1 April, a proclamation signed by President Roosevelt lifting the arms embargo went into effect. A reluctant and regretful Roosevelt gave the "all clear" for recognition of the Franco regime, but not without acknowledging to Bowers that he, the American Ambassador to Spain during the Civil War, had been right all along while criticising American Neutrality and European Non-intervention.¹⁶ Mexican foreign policy towards Republican Spain seemed completely out of tune with the trend established by the Western Powers. However, the Mexican stance should have been the predominant tendency had the legal and moral principles of the League of Nations been enforced.

Once the Spanish Civil War, that is, the rehearsal for the Second World War as defined by Bowers, was officially over, armed conflict between the great powers was no longer avoidable. The opportunity to prevent widespread confrontation, the much-feared nightmare of the Western Democracies, had been missed. The sacrifice of the young Spanish democracy was not enough to appease the gods of war, anymore indeed than had been those of Abyssinia, Austria, or Czechoslovakia. In the broader picture, the Hitler-Stalin Non-aggression Pact was the "last straw" on the road to war. Reluctant to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union, the Western Powers finally closed the door on a different solution other than widespread confrontation. "The second Great War of the twentieth century began in July, 1936", wrote Liddell Hart in 1939. Referring to Italo-German aid in transporting Franco's troops from Spanish Morocco to the Iberian Peninsula, he concluded that those "were the first operations of the present war".¹⁷

¹⁶ Claude G. Bowers, *Misión en España, En el umbral de la II Guerra Mundial*, Grijalbo, México, 1955, pp.430-431.

¹⁷ Liddell Hart, quoted in Patricia van der Esch, *Prelude to War. The International Repercussions of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)*, The Hague, 1951, p.24.

Following the military defeat of the Second Spanish Republic, and facing the certainty of a merciless repression if remaining in Spain, many Spanish Republicans opted for temporary refuge and the uncertainty of exile. Nearly half a million civilians fled to France as refugees together with the defeated army. Tired of the insufferable living conditions in French captivity, many decided to return to Spain, although most Spanish refugees remained in France, suffered horrendous privations. Some joined the French resistance movement. Around 12 000 Spanish exiles were sent to German concentration camps by the Nazi-collaborationist French Government between 1939 and 1942. German companies used others as slave labour.¹⁸ The lucky refugees were on board ships to the Americas, mainly to Mexico. The Spanish Republican exiles who went to Mexico had the opportunity to lead more or less normal lives, and their influence in Mexico flourished from the beginning.

Many of the exiles had a profession in Spain that they were fortunate enough to continue in Mexico, namely as intellectual workers. Perhaps the most renowned industry developed by Spanish Republicans exiled in Mexico was the setting up of publishing companies.¹⁹ Spanish Republican influence on Mexico's cultural and social life was significant. Several Spanish publishing companies were established (*Siglo XXI, Joaquín Mortiz, Oasis*). Teachers, researchers, and artists, all made contributions in their specific areas of knowledge. The new citizens had repaid Mexican society, and gradually, the already established Spanish colony incorporated them. The thousands of Spanish exiles enriched Mexico through entrepreneurial activity and outstanding artistic and cultural contributions. These included filmmaker Luis Buñuel, and poet León Felipe amongst many others. Once more, the identification of the Spanish Republican cause with that of the Mexican revolutionary tradition was emphasised. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of the Spanish exiles living in Mexico were a silent group of labourers in all

¹⁸ About 2 000 survivors returned to Spain. In the endless list of humiliations, they were denied any aid. Furthermore, when the German Federal Republic acknowledged the Nazi crimes and began a process of compensation between 1956 and 1965, this could not be requested by Spanish Republicans, as Franco's government did not recognise them as victims. *La Jornada*, 8 May 2000.

¹⁹ Regarding the Spanish Republican exile in Mexico, there have been a lot of works published by the exiles themselves, but according to Luis Dantón Rodríguez, there is still the need for a comprehensive work on the issue from the Mexican perspective.

fields in both urban and rural Mexico. Their lives, already affected by the nature of exile, and a long one at that, were following the same path as the Mexican people, to the point of completely integrating into Mexican culture and conscience.

To this end the Mexican volunteers that fought on the Republican side also contributed by deciding to write memoirs of their Spanish experiences. Even though they were formally organised, shortly after their return to Mexico, into the *Sociedad Javier Mina* (named after the Spaniard who volunteered to fight for Mexican Independence) the endless enmity and division between the former combatants meant that the society existed on paper only. However, Roberto Vega Gonzalez was one of the few who decided to write about the Spanish Civil War from the Mexican perspective. His is a vibrant account of the horrors of war, and particularly of the physical and psychological torture of being a prisoner in Francoist dungeons.²⁰ Although Néstor Sánchez's memoirs still seem tainted by bitterness at being abandoned by the Mexican Government which, moreover, had denied his re-incorporation into the military and refused to recognise his Spanish military rank, it is, however, an intense account of his participation in the war. In May 1940, Siqueiros recruited him in a murder attempt on Trotsky in Mexico City. According to Sánchez, the plan was never to kill him but to scare him off, and Sánchez readily accepted the invitation given what he called the betrayal by Trotsky's followers during the war in Spain. Both Siqueiros and Sánchez went to prison for their attempt on Trotsky's life and were there when the actual murder was carried out in August 1940 by Ramón Mercader, the son of a Spanish militia woman who visited Mexico during the Spanish war. Gradually, Néstor Sánchez developed his career as a journalist.²¹ Perhaps adding to Sánchez's bitterness was the fact that Vega was given a hero's welcome in Mexico in 1941, and became the second most notorious Mexican volunteer after Siqueiros. Furthermore, contrary to Sánchez's experience, Vega saw the recognition of his Spanish military rank. He then enlisted in the American Army during World War II.²²

²⁰ *EL Nacional*, 25 October, 1939.

²¹ Néstor Sánchez, *Un Mexicano en la Guerra Civil Española*, p.311.

²² *Revista de Revistas*, no. 3991, July 1986, p.22.

The Cárdenas years can be defined as the peak of the State-led development strategy relying on public-sector investment, still heavily skewed toward agriculture, to integrate the national economy. The government's expropriation of all foreign oil operations and nationalization of the oil and petrochemicals industry in 1938, won President Cárdenas widespread praise within Mexico. The country enjoyed strong economic growth and low external debt. Thus initiating Mexico's transition from a primarily agricultural economy to an industrial one. The government-owned strategic industries, including energy, transportation, communications, and some manufacturing, were at the base of its economic development. Furthermore, Mexico's foreign policy, namely towards the Spanish Republic, gave Mexico's international position prominence. The basis of industrialization had been firmly laid down. An era of economic growth was about to start. However, the formation of the Right-wing National Action Party (*PAN*) in 1939, as a response to the progressive and revolutionary policies pursued by Cárdenas, together with the strengthening of the Labour movement, changed the Mexican political spectrum. This internal reactionary challenge was encouraged by the events that had taken place in Spain. The defeat of the Spanish Republican Government and the issue of recognition of the *de facto* Government in Spain was the start of a long process. The newly elected President, a loyal aid of Lázaro Cárdenas, had a mind of his own and other loyalties to attend to. During the early 1940s, Mexico supplied the World War II Allies with war equipment and its own population with consumer goods. The National Finance Bank was reorganized to foster industrial expansion as the beginning of the so called "stabilisation period" prior to the lengthy and superficially successful "imports substitution period." There would be no need for an independent Labour movement or indeed for too radical views by the new administration. The international conflict imposed new challenges to be faced both at home and abroad.

To commemorate the defence of the Spanish Republic, a gathering took place at the Holborn Hall in London on 20 July 1941. Pablo de Azcárate, former Spanish Republican Ambassador in Britain, presided over the event. Negrín addressed an audience of Spanish Republican exiles and British supporters regarding the meaning of the military rebellion

in Spain, five years earlier. Having no doubts whatsoever, Negrín stated that the military uprising in Spain had been the first episode of the ongoing war. He referred to the acceptance of such an idea in wider Western circles by 1941. "We said that five years ago, but found no response in those who could have done something not only to avoid the ruin of Spain, but to prevent the horrors of the present war."²³ The Second World War was the direct result of applying the policy of appeasement towards the Axis Powers, and the origins of such a policy can be traced to the definition of Non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War in 1936. The cost of the misperception, egotism, and the betrayal of the true principles of democracy, was to be very high. But that was the price the Western democracies considered worth paying to prevent the phantom of Communism setting foot closer to their immediate interests.

In Mexico, the new administration would show a different character from that of Cárdenas. It marked a significant moment in Mexican politics at the end of the decade of optimism. On 1 September 1941, during his State of the Union speech, Ávila Camacho mentioned the developing tension between Mexico and Germany and Italy. Then, referring to the international situation, he spoke about Latin America. No mention whatsoever was made about the German attack on the Soviet Union. An event of such magnitude would not have failed to figure in one of Cárdenas's speeches, but these were already new times and new people were in charge.

On 30 December 1941, there was a meeting of the Spanish Republicans at the Fine Arts Palace in Mexico City. They wanted to acknowledge the Soviet support for the Republican cause during the war, and make a symbolic contribution to the Soviet war effort against Fascism by sending an ambulance to the USSR. Speeches were made to recall the beginning of the Spanish Civil War clearly as the beginning of the Second World War. Ramón Lamonedá, Secretary-General of the *PSOE*, exhorted the Spanish Republicans to unite as the only means to regain Spain from the Falangists allied with Germany and Italy. Unable to attend the meeting, Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet who

²³ FPI/M- Fot 50, *Commemoración del 19 de julio, acto celebrado en Londres el día 20 de julio de 1941*,

had organised the Spanish Republican exiles in Chile, sent a written message: "Let us be in the midst of the trembling night, united, more than ever; vigilant, more than ever; firm, more than ever; for Victory does not come but to united, firm and vigilant peoples."²⁴

Finally, Antonio Velao, former Minister of the Spanish Republic, made an eloquent pledge "to say to the World: we have not lost our freedom, it has been taken away from us; to say to Russia: we have not lost our memory; to say to Mexico: we have not lost our heart." Apart from the understandably emotional speeches, under the circumstances, it was thought appropriate that a message be sent to the presidents of Mexico, the United States, England, China, and the Soviet Union. In the case of the latter, a donation was also sent to the Soviet people by way of the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, Maxim Litvinov.²⁵ Part of the message sent to the leaders of those countries read:

In the present struggle, the Spanish people believe they have the right to expect, from those who are fighting for the liberation of all the subjugated countries, the aid necessary for their restless effort to rescue their sovereignty and freedom.²⁶

Both the hope that they would receive assistance and the wait for this help were also to prove in vain.

By the time the new Mexican President, Manuel Ávila Camacho, had to deliver his first State of the Union speech, the Second World War had almost reached its full extent. However, no mention was made of the war beyond the "diplomatic tension" between Mexico on one side and Germany and Italy on the other. Symptomatic of the new political interest and orientation of Mexican foreign policy, no mention was made of the

Hogar Español, London, 1941.

²⁴ FPI/M- Fa 2836, *Los republicanos españoles con la U.R.S.S., con las democracias, por la reconquista de la República*, Comité español Pro-ambulancia para la U.R.S.S, México, 1941, pp.26-31.

²⁵ After collecting funds from impoverished Republican exiles in Mexico, the sum of \$1646.09 US dollars was sent as a gesture of solidarity with the country that helped the Republican war effort the most, now a victim of the Nazi-Fascist-Falangist aggression.

²⁶ FPI/M- Fa 2836, *Los republicanos españoles con la U.R.S.S., con las democracias, por la reconquista de la República*, Comité español Pro-ambulancia para la U.R.S.S, México, 1941, pp.41-42.

German attack on the Soviet Union, even though it had occurred a few weeks earlier.²⁷ It would still take another nine months for the Mexican Government to decide to make a clear move against the Axis Powers, and that would only come after the sinking of two Mexican cargo ships by the German fleet.²⁸ On 28 May 1942, Ávila Camacho addressed the Congress in an extraordinary session to report on the “state of war” prevailing between Mexico and the Axis Powers. World War II had dragged countries from every continent into confrontation.²⁹

As part of a new approach to relations with the Spanish Republicans, Ávila Camacho’s decision to intervene in the administration of the Spanish funds was significant. The *CAFARE*, (*Comisión Administradora del Fondo de Auxilio a los Refugiados Españoles*) created by Presidential decree of 27 November 1942, was now placed in charge of the remaining Republican finances. It was set up with Spanish Republican money, presented by the *SERE* and the *JARE*, although only the former gave a detailed report of its funds and expenses. In an effort to dispel suspicions about the motives of the Mexican Government’s decision to intervene in Spanish Republican issues, the *CAFARE* regularly reported on the work carried out and the distribution of funds. The main beneficiaries included *JARE*, the *Casa-Hogar España-México*, *Colegio Madrid*, and the *Financiera Hispano-Mexicana* (Hispano-Mexican Bank).³⁰

In the midst of the Second World War and the inter-Republican struggle, on 20 November 1943, several Spanish Republican organisations signed a Pact for the restoration of the Spanish Republic. This was the first of the attempts pursued by Prieto to outmanoeuvre Negrín for the upper hand in securing international recognition and backing for the restoration of a democratic regime in Spain. The *Junta Española de*

²⁷ AHDM, no. 9, *Las relaciones internacionales de México, 1935-1956 (a través de los mensajes presidenciales)*, SRE, México, 1957, pp.50-57, First State of the Union speech of President Manuel Ávila Camacho, 1 September 1941.

²⁸ The two ships were, the *Potrero del Llano*, a freighter, and *Faja de Oro*, an oil tanker.

²⁹ AHDM, no. 9, *Las relaciones internacionales de México, 1935-1956*, pp.50-57, First State of the Union speech of President Ávila Camacho, 1 September 1941.

³⁰ FPI/M- Fbb 33, *Comisión de Administración del Fondo de Auxilios a los Republicanos Españoles, Informe de su gestión durante el año 1942-1943*, CAFARE, México, 1943.

Liberación issued a Manifiesto and designated representatives in Latin America and the UK. The Junta showed the deepening of the division within the Republican forces, and the influence of Prieto and his followers on Republican parties.³¹ The public confrontation could not be avoided and the response to the constitution of the Junta was criticised as sectarian by the followers of Negrín.³²

However, the majority of the remnants of the Cortes were by now following Prieto. Álvaro Pascual Leone, Secretary of the Permanent Commission of the Spanish Cortes, who founded “*España con Honra*” in 1943, in order to secure the recognition of the legality of the Spanish Republican Government in exile, pursued the idea of a formal session of the Spanish Cortes in Mexican territory two years. After patiently persevering, he finally received the authorisation from Mexican President, Ávila Camacho.³³ The basis of the legal request made by Pascual Leone, Fernández Clérigo, and other Spanish Republican lawyers was the concept of the war in Spain as an “international *coup d'état*”, which should not be accepted by democratic nations.³⁴ Eventually, the successful meeting of the Cortes, and the formation of a new Republican Government were the causes of the final demise of Negrín at the forefront of the Republican cause.

In mid-1945, numerous representatives of Spanish Republicans in exile gathered in Mexico City to re-constitute the Spanish Republican Government in exile. Their hopes were placed upon a final strike by the Allies against the remaining pro-Fascist government in Europe. They were ready to assume full responsibility and control of the country, providing they received the essential military support, previously denied by the Western democracies. Again, both the internal divisions within the Spanish Republicans and the new international situation militated against the possibility of regaining Spain for

³¹ Juan Bautista Climent, *El pacto de restaurar la República española: entrevistas a Diego Martínez Barrio, Indalecio Prieto, Álvaro de Albornoz y Antonio Ma. Sbert*, América, México, 1944.

³² *Mundo Libre*, December 1943.

³³ *La República Española Existe*, España con Honra, Finisterre, México, 1971, p.16

³⁴ On 15 August 1945, Mexican Foreign Minister, Manuel Tello, confirmed the authorisation for the Spanish Cortes to be able to meet, having been granted the diplomatic immunity required for a legal session; *La República Española Existe*, p.61.

the legal and legitimate heirs of Spanish democracy.³⁵ The international conference held to establish a new organisation to replace the extinct League of Nations was an excellent opportunity for the Spanish Republican Government in exile and its close allies to regain the necessary support to liberate Spain. Again, their expectations were shattered. If Non-intervention and Neutrality had been the contribution of the Western democracies to the tragedy of the Spanish Republic during the Civil War, the new international order arising from the Second World War would be the last nail in the coffin of the best example until then of democracy in Spain. The only consolation was that Franco's Spain was prevented from joining the United Nations Organisation.³⁶

On his return to Mexico in 1944, Gilberto Bosques, who spent a year in Nazi captivity in Bad Godesberg, near Bonn, wrote: "I implemented my country's policy, a policy of help, of material and moral support to the heroic defenders of the Spanish Republic, to the relentlessly brave people who fought against Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Petain and Laval"³⁷ But Mexico had also changed. Mexican politics became more Conservative, and the transformation of the Party of the Mexican Revolution into the Revolutionary Institutional Party was the best proof of such a change.

Lombardo was often held responsible for not having taken the revolutionary programme and the labour movement further; particularly, for eagerly supporting Manuel Ávila Camacho's candidacy instead of that of Francisco Mújica, a proven radical revolutionary. Given the local situation and considering the international war, it has to be concluded that, sadly, he was justified in doing so, although the consequences were to be catastrophic. Lombardo's expulsion from the *CTM* in 1948 was probably the most significant single event illustrating the new tendencies of the Mexican governing elite in the late 1940s, and the revival of a corporative Labour movement. The change of political orientation, regardless of the "ruling" party's ideology is a key issue in understanding the so-called "perfect dictatorship" as the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa labelled it.

³⁵ *Documentos políticos para la historia de la República española*, Col. Málaga, México, 1945.

³⁶ The Mexican proposal not to accept as a member of the new organisation any country whose government had been empowered with the aid of Nazi-Fascist powers had only one case to deal with.

The “Cold War” was to influence if not determine the new trend of Mexican political development. With no diplomatic relations, Mexico and Spain had “back door” liaison, with Cárdenas’s pro-Republican stance as the only recollection of a golden past.

The links of the conservative Sánchez Navarro with Francoist Spain remained a regular issue as he joined the *Cervecería Modelo*, whose owner, Pablo Díez, a Spaniard, did regular intensive business in Spain. In fact, Sánchez Navarro had yet another opportunity to serve the cause of Franco’s regime in 1950, when the informal representative of Franco’s Spain in Mexico, José Gallostra y Coello de Portugal, was murdered in Mexico City. Although a Spanish Anarchist committed the crime, this seemed the result of an obscure event, apparently, more related to personal than political motivations.³⁸

Gallostra, a former Spanish diplomat, had been the ad interim *Charge de Affaires* of the provisional Republican Government in Mexico in 1931. (Discussed in Chapter I) At the time of his murder, however, he was reputedly the unofficial Francoist representative in Mexico. Concerned about the secret code (“*Clave Secreta*”) used to decode official messages from Madrid, the second man responsible for the unofficial representation, Ricardo Jiménez Arnau, panicked about the legal consequences of the discovery of such a document, which could lead to his expulsion from Mexico, and was unable to act. Thus Sánchez Navarro decided he would break in to Gallostra’s house to recover the code. He did, and Franco’s Government rewarded such an action with a decoration for his services.³⁹

Gallostra’s violent death made the front pages of the newspapers, particularly because the police had discovered a report about Mexico, in his possession. The document contained insulting descriptions of both Mexico and Mexicans, and pro-Franco supporters vehemently denied its authenticity. It seemed and was thus assumed to be an official

³⁷ Gilberto Bosques, *Historia oral de la Diplomacia mexicana*, SRE, México 1988, AHDM, no. 2, pp.122.

³⁸ Mauricio Fresco, *La emigración republicana española, una victoria de México*, Editores Asociados, México, 1950, p.7; Alicia Ortiz Rivera, *Juan Sánchez Navarro, Biografía de un Testigo del México del siglo XX*, Grijalbo, 1998, pp.141.

³⁹ Sánchez Navarro received the Spanish *Gran Cruz de Isabel la Católica* decoration in February 1965, in the presence of Franco, who merely referred it to as “well deserved”. Ortiz Rivera, *Juan Sánchez Navarro*, p.142.

report to Franco's Government on the current political and economic situation in Mexico. Given the offence which it produced, even amongst those Mexicans sympathetic to Franco's regime, the Spanish Foreign Minister, Martín Artajo, issued an official declaration denying any links with Gallostra's manuscript. Perhaps Artajo's refuge at the Mexican Embassy in Madrid during the war inclined him not to antagonise Francoist sympathisers in Mexico. After all, they were still hoping to hasten a Mexican decision to recognise Franco's Government.⁴⁰ A period of friendlier relations occurred during the late 1940s and early 1950s, encouraged by a cordial new Mexican openness to private agreements and exchanges. Private artistic exchanges were not uncommon; films and bullfights featuring both Mexican and Spanish figures were regular, and triangular commercial exchanges, via Cuba, remained in effect. In fact, Franco's Spain's diplomat, José María de Doussinague, persistently, although vainly, approached Mexican diplomats to push for recognition.⁴¹ However, the official Mexican stance regarding Spain was clear and firm. At the time of the debate concerning the admission of new members at the United Nations in December 1955, Mexico voted in favour of the resolution in general, which included sixteen countries, but abstained in the case of Spain.⁴² Mexican Ambassador to the UN, Rafael de la Colina, hoped for the understanding of the Spanish people, the "dearest and closest" of all the petitioner countries, for such a position, but recalled the resolution of the San Francisco Conference regarding governments imposed with the aid of the Axis Powers.⁴³

Although official relations between the two governments never existed, in spite of the permanent efforts of Francoist representatives and their Mexican supporters, there were

⁴⁰ President Miguel Alemán's pro-business administration, apart from having marked the era of rampant corruption, was also the time of the closest links with Franco's Spain, yet when asked for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, he could not but point out his limits: "*Pidanme lo que quieran, pero eso no*" (Ask me anything you want, but that).

⁴¹ Víctor L. Urquidí Bingham commented on his personal experience during his participation at the launching of the book by Clara L. Lida (comp.) *México y España en el primer franquismo, 1939-1950. Rupturas formales, relaciones oficiosas*, México, El Colegio de México, 2001, held on 10 April 2002.

⁴² Naciones Unidas. Resoluciones aprobadas por la Asamblea General durante su décimo periodo de sesiones, 20 de septiembre-20 de diciembre de 1955. *Asamblea General. Documentos oficiales: décimo periodo de sesiones. Suplemento No. 19 (A/3116)*, New York, p.58.

⁴³ *México y la República Española, Antología de documentos, 1931-1977*, Centro Republicano Español, México, 1978, p.381.

still some sorts of convenient unofficial arrangements. Soon an air connection would be established, via Lisbon, and Arturo Allsop Vila, for instance, a Mexican diplomat assigned to the Mexican representation in Portugal, used to “come and go” frequently between Madrid and Lisbon. According to Víctor L. Urquidi, “I do not know how he managed, but around 1965, I was in his Madrid office, near the Puerta del Sol.”⁴⁴ The symbolism of Mexican support for the Spanish Republic seemed to have reached the end, but the presence of the Republican exiles was a constant reminder of the principles they represented, and their cause a useful instrument to demonstrate the independence of Mexican foreign policy.

In his speech celebrating the XXXII Anniversary of the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic, Josué de Benito López, President of the Spanish Republican Centre in Mexico, said:

There are so many evident similarities between your struggle and ours. There are so many things that make us close, Mexicans and Spaniards, that it is difficult to distinguish between the ideals that inspired the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and those that would produce, two decades later, the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic.⁴⁵

Addressing León Felipe in a letter, in May 1966, Lázaro Cárdenas recalled the “prolonged and painful historical plight that obliged numerous Republicans to leave and stay away from their Motherland.” That situation however, Cárdenas acknowledged, offered Mexicans the opportunity to “interact” fraternally with Spaniards in both material and intellectual work, making the relationship between the two peoples stronger and deeper.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Interview of the author with Víctor L. Urquidi, Mexico City, April 2002.

⁴⁵ *El Nacional*, April 2, 1963, Cit in Centro Republicano Español de México, *México y la República Española, Antología de Documentos, 1931-1977*, p.446.

⁴⁶ Centro Republicano Español de México, *México y la República Española, Antología de Documentos, 1931-1977*, p.81.

When Lázaro Cárdenas died, in 1970, Manuel Aznar wrote "*Responso a Cárdenas*". There he said that "the spirit of Cárdenas contributed to the division of Spain, and fought against the reconciliation of the Spanish people for over thirty years". Aznar could not help but show the depth of the frustration of the Spanish regime he represented, and the impact of the Mexican stand well beyond simple symbolism. "None of us had offended him", bitterly concluded Aznar on Cárdenas's posture regarding Spain, unable to understand how the Mexican President embodied the respect for Spanish democracy by preserving the essence of the Republican regime. And the traditional Mexican foreign policy towards Spain set up by Cárdenas continued. In September 1975, after the execution of five anti-Franco guerrillas from *ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna – Basque Country and Liberty)* and the *FRAP (Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriótico – Revolutionary Antifascist and Patriotic Front)*, and in spite of broad international petitions for clemency, President Echeverría strongly criticised the repressive Spanish regime and requested the General Assembly of the United Nations, to suspend Spain from its rights as a UN member.⁴⁷

The final breakdown of the Francoist dictatorship ultimately came with the death of the Caudillo in 1975. Even Franco's death was a painful agony, literally and metaphorically, both for Franco and the Spanish people.⁴⁸ An ever-decreasing number of Spaniards were grieving over the imminent loss of the Caudillo, 'for the grace of God'. The majority, however, were impatient to see the man finally pass away, particularly those in exile, who had held a perennial hope that "this year Franco will go" since the 1940s. Spanish society started a slow awakening to full rights. But the sole fact of Franco's death would not be enough for the Republican exiles nor for the Mexican President, Luis Echeverría, to resume diplomatic relations. Echeverría acknowledged that Mexico could not expect Spain to have "what we lack, a perfect democracy." However, if a clear commitment towards democracy was to be made, Mexico would establish relations with Spain, "even

⁴⁷ Naciones Unidas, *Consejo de Seguridad. Actas oficiales. Trigésimo año. Suplemento julio a septiembre 1975*, Documento S/11831, pp.73-74. Also in *México y la República Española*, pp.415-416.

⁴⁸ Preston, *Franco*, pp.775-778.

with a king.”⁴⁹ The death of the dictator only speeded up a process initiated years earlier in which the level of political participation in favour of democratisation produced social tension and the pressure necessary to this end. In November 1975, only days before the death of Franco, President Echeverría attended a lunch organised by the *Centro Republicano Español*. At this meeting Fernando Valera, President of the Spanish Republican Government in exile, José Giral, Minister without portfolio of the Spanish Republican Government in exile, and other prominent Spanish Republicans did not need to question the Mexican President about his intentions regarding Spain. He volunteered his opinion and expressed no doubts whatsoever on the matter and reassured the Spanish Republicans that Franco’s death would not be enough for Mexico to re-establish diplomatic relations with Spain. However, they were all aware of the possible implications of this event. Manuel Martínez Feduchi, Mexican *chargé d’affaires* before the Spanish Republican Government in exile was also present. His presence acted as a reminder that, whatever the outcome, the Mexican political position was always and would remain entirely in support of the establishment of democracy in Spain.⁵⁰ In December 1999, in an interview with the author, former President Echeverría acknowledged that he would have very much liked to have been the one president to re-establish diplomatic relations with Spain. However, he had no doubt that in order to continue to uphold the Mexican policy towards Spain established by Cárdenas, a significant change towards democracy would first have to occur in Spain.⁵¹ It took two more years after Franco’s death, and it was Mexican President José López Portillo who finally re-established diplomatic relations, in 1977, with the newly restored democratic Monarchy.

⁴⁹ *Excélsior*, 6 October 1975.

⁵⁰ *Centro Republicano Español de México*, Banquete ofrecido al Presidente D. Luis Echeverría Álvarez y Da. María Esther Zuno de Echeverría, Mexico, 9 November 1975, pp.37-44. Also in *México y la República Española*, pp.436-439.

⁵¹ The interview took place at the house of the former Mexican President Luis Echeverría in Mexico City, on 22 November 1999.

Epilogue.

Between 1939 and 1975, seven Mexican presidents refused to establish diplomatic relations with Franco's Government. Instead, they encouraged the Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico to continue their struggle for democracy in Spain. Mexico's foreign policy towards Spain was derived from President Cárdenas's decision to pursue Self-determination and Non-intervention, i.e. the principles contained in the Estrada Doctrine, and not just a pragmatic policy. A foreign policy consistently sustained for over forty years must be considered to be based on defined principles and not determined capriciously. That was also the case of the Mexican position towards the invasion of Abyssinia by Italy in 1935, the Japanese attack on China in 1937, the Austrian '*Anschluss*', and the Czechoslovakian partition perpetrated by Germany in 1938, and the Russian attack on Finland in 1940. More recently, the same pattern in Mexican foreign policy was evident in regards to Cuba, Nicaragua, Chile, Grenada, Hungary and Afghanistan, to mention just a few examples of foreign military intervention.¹

Mexico's diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republic lasted for over forty-five years, and served to keep alive the hope not only for the re-establishment of the legitimate government of the Spanish Republic, but above all, for the restoration of a democratic regime in Spain. The last President of the Second Spanish Republic, José Maldonado, and Mexican President José López Portillo, declared cancelled diplomatic relations between both governments on March 18, 1977. Shortly afterwards, Mexico established diplomatic relations with the government of Madrid, a democratic, constitutional Monarchy. This ended thirty-seven years of enmity with Franco's government and almost forty-six years of diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republic —during most of which the Republican Government had been in exile. Throughout this period, there had been a long lasting and sustained political stance, which embraced three generations of Mexicans and Spaniards in a unique relationship. Why was Mexico so eager to support the Spanish Republican Government? Undoubtedly it was a matter of ideology and of principles. The

¹ A comprehensive work of Mexican foreign policy in the Twentieth Century is in Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *75 Años de Relaciones Exteriores*, FCE, México, 1985.

ideology emanating from the Mexican Revolution and principles based upon that ideology were pursued as the only possible way a poor, and therefore non-influential country could have done to show its political independence. In other words, the Spanish Civil War gave Mexico the opportunity to demonstrate to the world how a sovereign State could manage itself, even at the risk of jeopardising its most important foreign relations. The Mexican aid, alongside that of the International Brigades and the Soviet Union, to the legitimate Spanish Republican Government, was not enough to make a decisive outcome in favour of the cause of democratic Spain during the war. It did show, however, the difference between acting in accordance with principles, those supposedly pursued by all the civilised and democratic countries, as opposed to a pragmatic approach used by the Western democracies, ready to deal with a regime, regardless of the lack of democracy and justice, and “open for business as usual.”

Félix Gordón Ordás, former Spanish Republican MP, former Ambassador in both Mexico and Cuba, and one time President of the Spanish Republican Government in exile, was honoured posthumously in his hometown, León, in 2003.² The so-called Pact of Silence, that necessary evil that facilitated the return of political pluralism and democracy to Spain, has started giving way to the recovery of historical memory. Democratic Spain is stronger, and the need to come to terms with what was temporarily forgotten is over. The time for fully re-integrating its exiles is now. In a ceremony to pay homage to Lázaro Cárdenas and his wife, Amalia Solórzano de Cárdenas in Alcalá de Henares, Cárdenas' grandson, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Batel, spoke on behalf of the Cárdenas family to show their gratitude for the honour, and dared to point out that there seemed to be an “unfinished reconciliation” between Spaniards, particularly considering those who lived in exile.³ Echoing these words, Eduardo Vázquez, on behalf of the Spanish Republican exiles, said that in Spain “true reconciliation will only arrive on the day it is clearly stated with whom the reason, liberty and bravery lay, and where the crime and barbarism.”⁴ A few months later, Carlos Fuentes wrote an article in the form of an imagined interview with Lázaro

² *Diario de León*, 25 July 2003. The mural was commissioned by the Vela Zanetti Foundation, and unveiled by the Mayor of León, Francisco Fernández, in an event that became a celebration of the Spanish Republican exiles.

³ *La Jornada*, 31 October 2002.

⁴ *La Jornada*, 1 November 2002.

Cárdenas recalling his presidency and its most relevant features. Evidently, the Spanish Civil War, which saw the solitary action of his government, and the oil expropriation, which caused antagonism between his regime and the US and the UK, formed the cornerstones of Cárdenas' performance. Referring to the arrival of thousands of Spanish refugees once "Spain [had] lost the war against Franco", Fuentes accurately concluded, voicing Cárdenas' views, that, regretfully, "the loss of Spain was the gain of Mexico."⁵

It is, therefore, easy to perceive why Mexican-Spanish relations during the 1930s remain the highest point in the bilateral relationship, as this golden age of Mexican-Spanish relations represented the opportunity to pursue similar political projects. They were thwarted as they lacked the necessary allies to achieve their goals. Seven decades after the Spanish Republican debacle, both Mexico and Spain had entered into similar processes of regional economic integration. Spain has recovered its democratic path long ago, and alternatively elected Right-wing and Centre-Left *PSOE*-led governments. It has also been dragged into the most ambitious economic and political integration project, as part of the European Union. Mexico is more and more distanced from the revolutionary ideals and policies of the 1930s. Although it enjoys a stronger democratic system, under the rule of the *PAN*, it is more economically and politically dependent on the US, evidently including Mexican foreign policy. For a short period during the early 1980s, it seemed the revival of the golden years of Mexican-Spanish relations would occur, but international circumstances and local politics in each country were completely different from those of half a century earlier and no defined move was made by either part to encourage it. Mexican-Spanish relations entered a new era with a formal amicable approach but less committed to a strong engagement.

⁵ *El Pais*, 18 August 2003.

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¹ I thank Darren Olley for the information from this archive.

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Libraries

BLPES

British Library

Colegio de México

Marx Memorial Library

Appendix

List of Mexican volunteers in Spain.

Surname	Forename	Comments
Acosta, or Acosta H. Luz	Isaías	
Acosta	Félix	
Acosta	José	
Aguilar	Rafael	
Alatorre	Miguel	
Alegria	Antonio	
Alfaro Siqueiros	David	Born 1896. Painter. Communist. 46 Brig.SRA Extremadura
Alonso Campillo	Rafael	
Álvarez Alegria	Carlos	
Amal	Angélica	
Ángeles Lizardi	Rafael	
Antonio		aka "El Brujo"
Artazanchez Romero	Rafael	
Asfuera	Antonio	
Barret Pan	Carlos	Peasant
Barrios	Bernabé	aka "Pancho"
Bautista,		
Bauzet Brau	Carlos	
Bedoya		Aka "El Indio"
Bernal	Héctor	
Bingham de Urquidi	Mary	Nurse, Soc. Rojo, Madrid
Braña Blanco	Segundo	Med. Doctor, Madrid
Braqui Beri, Antonio		
Bracho B.	Antonio	
Bruno Aguilar	Rafael	
Cancino	Julio	
Conti Varcé	José	Cadet, SRA
Contreras, Carlos aka Vittorio Vidali		Communist
Cueto Cerda	Alberto	
de la Cabada	Juan	Writer, Valencia
de la Fuente	Domingo O.	
de Lago	Gerardo	Student

de la Llave	Fernando	
de la Mata Guinard	Rogelio	Cadet
Domenzáin Leroy	Miguel	
Escobar Hidalgo	Roberto	
Estela Colaz	Roberto	
Fernández	Julio	
Filemore or Filmore	J. Santiago	
Flores	Sansón	
Franco	Alejandro	Killed at Ferrol
Gabucio y Sánchez Márquez	Aníbal	Born in Tabasco, IB Artillery Section, Madrid
Gallo	José Carlos	Killed at Ferrol
Gamboa	Berta	
Gamboa	Fernando	Painter
García	Felipe	
García	Fernando	
García Lezama	Francisco	
García	Hernán	
García Arana	Ruperto	Killed in Alfambra, 1938
García Lezama	Francisco	
García Salgado	Andrés	Railway worker, Political Commissar
García Torres	Felipe	
Gómez	Benito	
Gómez	Juan Bautista	Born in Veracruz, Cornl. SRA, 86 th . Brig., 20 th . Btn. And 92 th. Brig., Extremadura
Gómez Cuéllar	Antonio	Born in Puebla
Gómez García	Manuel	Pilot
Gómez Montezuma, or Moctezuma	José	Born 20 Nov. 1887, Guadalajara, Mexico, was at concentration camp in San Pedro de Cárdena
Guerrero Mejía	Félix	
Guevara Alemán	Francisco	
Haces Romero	Felipe	
Helguera	Sebastián	
Hernández	Héctor	
Iduarte	Andrés	Born in Tabasco, Journalist
Iñista Poch	Miguel	
Jaramillo Rojas	José	Killed at Teruel, Cuban Btn. XV Brigade
Julio Just	Miguel	
Lafarga	Gastón	
Laduc	Roberto	
Latorre	Miguel	

Lasso Guerra	Ángel	
Llamas or Llanes Collado	Emilio	Assigned Huesca
Lumen	Enrique	
Lumen	Nelly	
McCoy	Eugene	
Madero	Ernesto	Journalist
Mancisidor	José	Writer, Valencia
Martí Buenquechea	Joaquín	
Martínez	Miguel	
Mercado Tinoco	Roberto	Cadet, SRA
Migoni	Francisco	
Modotti	Tina	16 Aug. 1896, Udine, Italy. Photographer Communist. IB Died 5 Jan. 1942, Mexico City
Monter Cecilio	Luis	
Moet Cano	Alejandro	
Mogoni	Antonio	
Muñiz	E.	
Núñez	Dolores	Red Aid, Barcelona
Obregón Blanco	Enrique	1900 Ver. Anarchist FAI, Secretary of Local Fed. Barcelona, Anarchist Group. Killed 19 July 1936
Olavarria de la Fuente	Domingo	
O'Neill	Carlota	
Ortiz Toledo	Silvestre	Rakosi Btn.XIII Brigad, Aragón
Othón Tarabillo	José	
Paz	Octavio	Writer, Valencia
Pellicer	Carlos	Writer, Valencia
Pereira	Miguel	
Pérez Talavera	Leonardo	
Proal Núñez	Héctor	
Pujol	Antonio	
Ramírez, Nicolás		
Razo (or Rasso) Razo	Juan	
Revueltas	Silvestre	Composer, Valencia
Reyes	Alicia	
Reyes	Fernando	Falangist
Reyes	Roberto	Falangist
Rio Urtiaga, or Ubiaga	Juan	
Roel	Carlos	
Romero	Ricardo	Engineer
Ruiz Marín	Tito	Killed at Brunete, Thaelmann Brigade
Ruiz	Eleuterio	aka "El Meji"
Sánchez Hernández	Néstor	Born 1919 in Oaxaca, XIII Brigade,

		Dombrowski, Extremadura, Aragon
Sánchez Hidalgo	Roberto	
Sánchez Juárez	Pablo	
Sánchez Navarro	Juan	Fifth Column, Santander
Sánchez Sobrino	Ángel	Born 19 May 1913 in Mexico City, was at concentration camp San Pedro de Cardeña
Serberos	Francisco	Intl. Brig.
Serna	Cecilio	
Serrano Andonegui	David	aka "El Chivo"
Sirio Martín	José	Killed at Ebro, Pilot
Solórzano	Ricardo	Killed at Ferrol
Suárez Alonso	Vicente	
Talavera	Leonardo	
Tarazona Torán	Francisco	Pilot
Tinoco Mercado	Humberto	
Torices	Santiago	
Trejo	Blanca Lydia	Anarchist
Trujillo Carranza	Antonio	Intl. Brig.
Valencia Antonio	Juan Manuel	
Valenzuela	Manuel	
Vargas Henríquez	Leonardo	
Vega	Alfonso	
Vega González	Roberto	Cadet, Spanish Rep. Army
Videlas Macías	Julio Alberto	
Villanova, (2 brothers)		
Villela	Héctor	
Villela Vélez	Humberto	Cadet, Spanish Rep. Army
Zavala Ceballos	Manuel	Killed at Ferrol
Zoila Gracia (pseud)		Anarchist, FAI

