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Ian Roxborough

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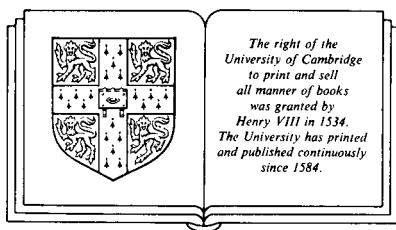
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# UNIONS AND POLITICS IN MEXICO

THE CASE OF THE AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

IAN ROXBOROUGH

*London School of Economics and Political Science and  
Institute of Latin American Studies, London*



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*Cambridge*

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*Melbourne Sydney*

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521102681](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521102681)

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First published 1984

This digitally printed version 2009

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 84-4312*

ISBN 978-0-521-25987-3 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-10268-1 paperback

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## Acknowledgements

The research which is presented in this book was made possible by a grant from the Social Science Research Council and by grants from the universities of Glasgow and London. I would like to thank the directors of the Institutes of Latin American Studies in those two universities, Peter Flynn and John Lynch, for their assistance and encouragement with this project. Further work on the history of Mexican labour was made possible by a grant from the Nuffield foundation.

While I was collecting the data the cooperation of many people in the Mexican automobile industry was essential, and I would like to thank all those who made space in their crowded schedules to talk to me. On the whole, executives and union leaders were most helpful, with one notable exception. The management of the Volkswagen company refused to give me an interview, and in this they were atypical of the industry as a whole.

The Colegio de México was kind enough to provide infrastructural support during my stay in Mexico, and I would like to thank the then director of the Centro de Estudios Sociológicos, José Luís Reyna, for his help. My colleagues at the Colegio de México were invariably helpful and provided a stimulating and supportive intellectual environment. I would particularly like to thank Francisco Zapata for his help throughout this project.

Many other people in Mexico were also helpful. I will simply list the institutions which responded to my requests for assistance, and by so doing implicitly thank all those in them who facilitated my work: the Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje; the Departamento de Registro and the Centro de Estadística del Trabajo of the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social; the Asociación de Manufactureros de la Industria Automotriz; the Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje of the States of Mexico, Puebla and Morelos and of the Federal District; the Instituto Nacional de Estudios del Trabajo; the Centro de Estudios Históricos del Movimiento Obrero.

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My research assistant, Miguel Zenker, helped greatly in the collection and organization of material for this book. A number of friends and colleagues discussed my work with me and tried to correct some of my errors. They are of course not to blame for those that remain. Mark Thompson, Ken Coleman, Ken Mericle, Richie Kronish, Doug Bennett, Ken Sharpe, Kevin Middlebrook, Javier Aguilar, Ilán Bizberg, Peter Worseley, Bryan Roberts, Alan Angell, John Humphrey, Rhys Jenkins, Danny James, José Luís Reyna and Manuel Camacho are the names that spring immediately to mind.

My secretary, Jenny Law, typed an immaculate first draft and then a series of equally immaculate amended versions.

Finally, it remains to thank my wife, Sharon Witherspoon, who took time off from her own work to help me clarify my ideas and improve the exposition. More importantly, she helped me in a number of non-instrumental ways which were equally essential for the completion of the final product.



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## Preface

I began this study with the object of examining what, in the early 1970s, was a widely held proposition about the role of organized labour in the political system of contemporary Mexico. Briefly, the idea had been developed that the emergence of new forms of 'independent' unionism would challenge the previously dominant forms of corporatist union control. The 'official' unions, tied to the dominant party, had been one of the major pillars of political stability in the post-war period. The development of this new form of 'independent' unionism, then, implied a potential threat to political stability in Mexico.

I decided to examine the behaviour of these independent unions in a single industry, the automobile industry, characterized by the coexistence of both independent and official unions. My aim was to see whether there really were important differences in behaviour between the two types of union.

The results of the empirical research suggested that there were, indeed, important differences between types of union in the auto industry, but that these differences could not be traced solely and exclusively to the dichotomy of independent versus official unionism.

As a result, I was led to explore the implications of my findings in a number of areas. On a fairly concrete level, the research presented in this book seemed to have a number of implications for theories of industrial democracy and militancy, particularly (though not exclusively) in third world countries. These are discussed in chapter 9.

As I moved deeper into the question of exactly how the much-cited but rarely analysed 'mechanisms of control and co-optation' actually operated in Mexican trade unions, I was led to re-examine the prevailing orthodoxy regarding the historical development of the Mexican labour movement and working class.

In my view, the generally accepted versions of Mexican labour history (and perhaps also of labour history in other Latin American and third

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world countries) place an exaggerated and one-sided emphasis on the fact of *control* over the rank and file, an emphasis which is detrimental to an understanding of the pervasive and persistent movements of worker militancy and insurgency.

Finally, in the concluding chapter of this book, I explicitly take up the original concern of the research project: the likely evolution of the Mexican political system. Here I examine the implications of my findings for certain currently fashionable theories of the relationship between the state and the working class in the third world, namely those theories which are now referred to under the heading of 'bureaucratic authoritarianism'. I then go on to offer some tentative guesses about the possible implications which trends in the Mexican labour movement may have for political stability in that country.

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## Abbreviations

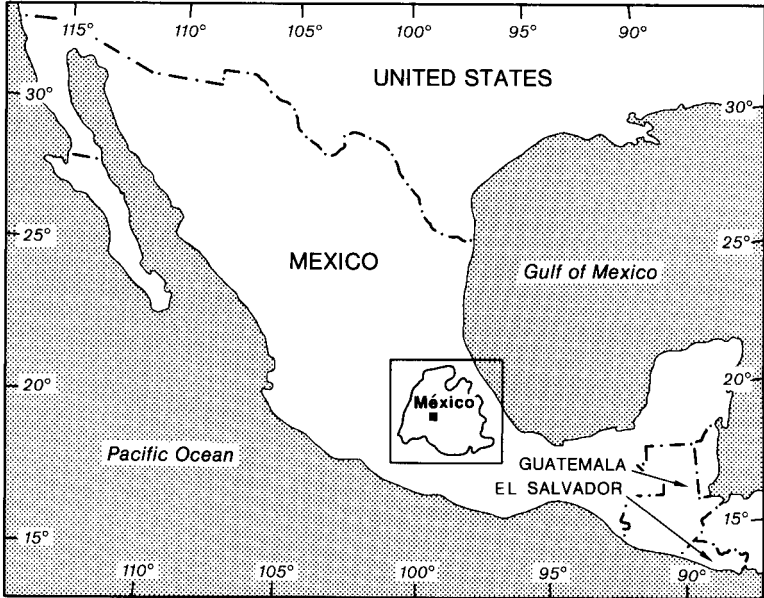
BUO	Bloque de Unidad Obrera
CGOCM	Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México
CGT	Confederación General de Trabajadores
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina
CNOP	Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares
CNT	Central Nacional de Trabajadores
COR	Confederación Obrera Revolucionaria
CROC	Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos
CROM	Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana
CSUM	Confederación Sindical Unitaria de México
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México
CUT	Central Unica de Trabajadores
FAT	Frente Auténtico del Trabajo
FITIM	Federación Internacional de Trabajadores de la Industria Metalúrgica
PLM	Partido Liberal Mexicano
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana
UGCOM	Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México
UOI	Unidad Obrera Independiente

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Location of automobile plants