

## **Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Bread, and Class Negotiation in Postrevolutionary Mexico City**

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In the first panel of a mural painted in the Abelardo L. Rodríguez Market, a few blocks from the central plaza in Mexico City, porcine businessmen sit at a table counting gold coins. The second panel shows skeletal workers in tattered overalls; behind them smoke billows from sacks of burning grain. In the final panel, indigenous peons load trucks with Mexico's agricultural bounty, soon to become ashes and gold. The caption reads, "The capitalists destroy grains to raise prices while workers and peasants die of hunger. Let us destroy the capitalist system and eliminate the exploiters." Wealth and hunger, the mural suggests, are two sides of the same coin.

Painted in 1937, soon after the market was built, the mural is representative of the anti-speculation media campaigns launched by the government after the end of the Mexican revolution in 1920.<sup>1</sup> The campaigns accused an array of merchants of hoarding, but they especially targeted bakery owners, who also controlled the wheat flow and the flourmills. Through the lens of propaganda at least, these were apt villains. The almost universal distrust of bakers was compounded by in Mexico by the country's particular history of colonization because the majority of bakery owners in the capital were Spaniards—mostly Basque immigrants from the province of Navarre.<sup>2</sup> What's more, the Spaniards had established their dominance in the bread industry during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910), whose preferential treatment of foreign capitalists had generated much of the ire behind the outburst of the revolution in 1910.

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<sup>1</sup> On the official anti-speculation campaign in the press, see Enrique C. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico: The Political Uses of Food Since 1910* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2000), 48-49.

<sup>2</sup> Steven L. Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris: Merchant and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade During the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984); Charles Tilly, "Food Supply and Public Order in

In addition to the burden of distant and recent history, the bakery owners were something of the metaphorical “Jew” in Mexican popular imagination.<sup>3</sup> Endogamous, frugal, culturally and socially separate, they allegedly fed on the populace as they sold it bread.

Ironically, the mural could appear as a denunciation not only of a capitalist cabal, but also of the shortcomings of the revolution. Twenty years after the fighting had ended and a new constitution had mandated a decent quality of life for workers and the prohibition of monopolies, the continuation of hunger and exploitation by a handful of capitalists would seem to confirm assertions from revisionist scholarship that the revolution had little impact on the structural aspects of social life in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Worse still, the Spanish bakery owners managed to thrive through the revolution and its aftermath not despite the better intentions of the government, but rather because they were key allies of successive administrations in the contentious 1920 and 1930s. Not surprisingly, though, the actual relationships between the bakery owners, authorities, and workers were much more complex than the mural indicates. On the one hand, the bakery owners fulfilled a vital material function, controlling the flow of wheat into the city and its subsequent transformation into flour and bread. Officials before and after the revolution relied on them to fulfill what was widely considered a public service for all social classes, especially

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Modern Europe,” in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 380-455.

<sup>3</sup> Pablo Yankelevich, “Hispanofobia y revolución: Españoles expulsados de México (1911–1940),” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86, 1 (2006): 29–59; Tomás Pérez Vejo, “La conspiración gachupina en *El Hijo del Ahuizote*,” *Historia Mexicana* LIV, 4 (2005): 1105–1153; Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, “Desabasto, hambre y respuesta política, 1915,” in *Instituciones y ciudad. Ocho estudios históricos sobre la ciudad de México*, ed. Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, Colección Sábado Distrito Federal (México, D.F.: Ediciones ¡UníoS!, 2000), 133–166. See protests of Spaniards’ “Judaic behavior” by the Liga Anti-Española in Condomex Fondo XXI, carpeta 53, legajo 5844, and complaints against the “judíos gachupines” mill owners in Alberto Sánchez and Alfonso Sánchez to Alvaro Obregón, Tacubaya, D.F., 8/8/1923, AGN Presidentes, O–C, caja 199, exp. 707–S–17.

<sup>4</sup> John Womack, “The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Labor and the Ambivalent Revolutionaries, Mexico 1911–1923* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *The Great Rebellion: Mexico, 1905-1924* (New York: Norton, 1980); Arturo Anguiano, *El estado y la política obrera del cardenismo* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1975).

proletarian families. On the other, they collectively employed some 3,000 Mexican bakers—one the city's largest and most combative workforces.

The role played by the bakery owners thus involved, one, the material needs of the city and, two, the class struggles that dominated urban politics in the 1920s and 30s. This article analyzes the place of Spanish bakery owners in the labor negotiations in Mexico City during two distinct stages. During the first stage (1919 to 1928), the bakery owners rejected worker demands and relied on police force to keep strikers from stopping production. This official support for owners was certainly part of a broader effort by the administrations of the 1920s to constrain the revolutionary actions of workers, as revisionists have pointed out; but it was also the consequence of a government anxious to ensure some basic needs of a restive working class. In the second stage (1929 to 1940), however, a shift in the array of forces led the government to pressure owners for negotiations, against to ensure the bread supply. This, in turn, produced an alliance between organized bakery workers, the Spanish bakery owners, and state officials against Mexican small producers and petty retailers. Indeed, at the same time that public coffers were financing art that denounced hunger profiteers, inspectors were confiscating bread and roughing up vendors from the very same Abelardo L. Rodríguez Market.<sup>5</sup>

These configurations around class and food differ sharply from other cases of foreign involvement in the Mexican economy and social relations. Following Friedrich Katz and John Hart, Michael J. Gonzales argues that “foreign enterprise was a key cause of regional discontent and a target for reform.”<sup>6</sup> In Sonoran copper mines, revolutionary leaders backed the demands of Mexican workers against their North American bosses in order to reverse the preferential treatment they had received under Porfirio Díaz and thus to “increase the power of

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<sup>5</sup> Víctor Díaz to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 2/24/1938, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 638, exp. 521/8.

[postrevolutionary] state.”<sup>7</sup> In the case of the bakeries, by contrast, the state supported the interests of Spanish employers in order to build its authority in the capital. In the first stage, this occurred at the expense of the striking bakers, whose attempts to paralyze the bread supply threatened to jeopardize state legitimacy. The cross-class alliance in the second stage, in turn, was not a result of state co-optation of labor, as Eduardo Ruiz, Mario Anguiano, and others have argued, but rather the product of negotiation between contending forces.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as Mary Kay Vaughn and Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, have shown, negotiation and compromise was the only option for the long term since no single group was able to impose its will on the others.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, although in the 1920s there was a great distance between the radicalism of popular revolution and the reformism (or even the reactionary conservatism) of the national leaders, after 1930 these strands found an unexpected though unstable confluence of interest. This was not a bloodless alliance; rather workers and employers passed on the cost of their reconciliation to small producers.

Understanding how the Spanish bakery owners appeared simultaneously as hunger profiteers and *de facto* allies of workers and officials requires an examination of their place in the Mexican economy. Critics often denounced the supposed “Judaic behavior” of the Spanish entrepreneurs, by which they meant the “special talent for bribery, scant sense of commercial

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<sup>6</sup> John M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Michael J. Gonzales, “U.S. Copper Companies, the Mine Workers' Union, and the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 76, 3 (1996): 503–534.

<sup>8</sup> Anguiano, *El estado y la política obrera del cardenismo*; Ruiz, *Labor and the Ambivalent Revolutionaries, Mexico 1911–1923*.

<sup>9</sup> Mary K. Vaughn, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, “Popular Culture and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico,” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Daniel Nugent (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994).

ethics, and unhealthy frugality.”<sup>10</sup> Beyond anti-Semitism, however, the analogy helps explain how the bakery owners continued to prosper in apparently adverse conditions after the revolution. Spanish immigrants fulfilled key functions in the broader Mexican economy as “minority middlemen” or “immigrant entrepreneurs,” a role classically held in European history (and imagination) by Jewish businessmen. As ethnic or religious outsiders subject to hostility or distrust, immigrant entrepreneurs tend to concentrate in lines that are undesirable for local elites and inaccessible for local poor but that provide vital services between both. In Edna Bonacich’s formulation, Jewish money-lenders filled this “status gap” much like Indian merchants in colonial Africa, and Korean grocers in Los Angeles.<sup>11</sup> The bakery owners first fulfilled their middlemen function when the postrevolutionary regime relied on them to keep the population fed, an imperative that trumped the demands of the bakery workers. Secondly, the state relied on the Spaniards in order to negotiate with organized labor and incorporate workers into a tractable organizational framework that would bolster state authority.

## BASQUE IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS

In the late-nineteenth century, Spanish immigrants came to dominate banking, retail, and manufacturing—sectors that the Mexican elite regarded as demeaning or excessively risky.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bernardino Mena Brito S., “Política monopolista en México” (B.A. Thesis, Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales, UNAM, 1945) 25, 53; Germán List Arzubide, *¡Mueran los gachupines!* (Puebla: Casa Editorial: Germán List Arzubide, 1924).

<sup>11</sup> Edna Bonacich, “Theory of Middlemen Minorities,” *American Sociological Review* 38, 5 (1973): 583-594; Edna Bonacich and John Modell, *The Economic Basis of Ethnic Solidarity: Small Business in the Japanese American Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles, 1965–1982* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1988); Roger D. Waldinger, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Immigrants and Enterprise in New York’s Garment Trades* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1986); “Immigrant Enterprise: A Critique and Reformulation,” *Theory and Society* 15, 1/2 (1986): 249–285.

<sup>12</sup> Moisés González Navarro, *Historia Moderna de México. El Porfiriato. Vida Social* (México, D.F.: Editorial Hermes, 1957); David W. Walker, *Kinship, Business, and Politics: The Martínez del Río Family in Mexico, 1824–1867* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Walther L. Bernecker, *De agiotistas y empresarios. En torno a la temprana industrialización mexicana (siglo XIX)*, trans. Perla Chinchilla Pawling (México, D.F.: Universidad

The first wave of Spanish immigration arrived soon after Porfirio Díaz seized power and began his thirty-five year dictatorship. The impact of bakeries was immediate. An 1877 survey counted sixty-eight bakeries that employed a total of 865 workers.<sup>13</sup> By 1898, bakery workers had increased threefold to 2,538; assuming the same ratio of workers to bakeries (12:1), there were some 200 shops.<sup>14</sup> An 1895 list of donators to the war effort in Cuba—as trustworthy an indicator as any for the time—shows 130 Spanish bakery owners in Mexico City; seventy-three of these were Basques from the province of Navarre.<sup>15</sup> The growth of bakeries coincided with that of the Spanish immigrant population, and far exceeded the general population growth of the city, which increased by a factor of 1.5, from 327,500 in 1887 to 476,000 in 1900.<sup>16</sup>

What the new owners transported to Mexico was not a particular bread tradition. Although urban Mexicans, rich and poor, clearly began to eat more of it, bread had long been prominent in Mexican foodways.<sup>17</sup> Rather the immigrants brought tightly woven entrepreneurial

Iberoamericana, 1992); John E. Kizca, “The Great Families of Mexico: Elite Maintenance and Business Practices in Late Colonial Mexico City,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 62, 3 (1982): 429–457; Carlos Herrero, *Los empresarios mexicanos de origen vasco y el desarrollo del capitalismo en México, 1880–1950* (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Plaza y Valdés, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Emiliano Busto, *Estadística de la República Mexicana. Estado que guardan la agricultura, industria, minería y comercio. Resumen y análisis de los informes rendidos á la Secretaría de hacienda por los agricultores, mineros, industriales y comerciantes de la república y los agentes de México en el exterior, en respuesta á las circulares de Io. de agosto de 1877*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (México, D.F.: Impr. de I. Cumplido, 1880).

<sup>14</sup> Dirección General de Estadística Ministerio de Fomento, “Población según la ocupación principal,” in *Censo General de la República Mexicana, 1895. Distrito Federal* (México, D.F.: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1898), 45–65.

<sup>15</sup> “Subscripción en favor del Ejército de Cuba. Ramo de Panaderías,” *El Correo Español* 10/24/1895.

<sup>16</sup> For Spanish immigrant population, see Departamento de Estudios Económicos Secretaría de la Economía Nacional, *Estadísticas sociales del Porfiriato, 1877–1910* (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1956); Dirección General de Estadística Ministerio de Fomento, “Población según la nacionalidad,” in *Censo General de la República Mexicana, 1895. Distrito Federal* (México, D.F.: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1898), 32–33; Colonización e Industria Secretaría de Fomento, “Nación o país de su residencia de donde han salido los extranjeros,” in *Censo general de la República Mexicana, 1900. Distrito Federal* (México, D.F.: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1901). For general population of Mexico City, see Dirección General de Estadística Ministerio de Fomento, “Población Distrito Federal,” in *Censo General de la República Mexicana, 1895. Distrito Federal* (México, D.F.: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1898), 8–9; Colonización e Industria Secretaría de Fomento, “Población Distrito Federal,” in *Censo general de la República Mexicana, 1900. Distrito Federal* (México, D.F.: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1901), 12–13.

<sup>17</sup> Virginia García Acosta, *Las panaderías, sus dueños y trabajadores. Ciudad de México. Siglo XVIII* (México, D.F.: CIESAS, 1989); Sonia Iglesias and Samuel Salinas Alvarez, *El pan nuestro de cada día: sus orígenes,*

networks based on family and regional identity that allowed them to integrate wheat, flour, and bread into a cohesive complex. The forging of this complex occurred through a long chain of immigrants, mostly from the Basque-speaking Baztán Valley in Navarre, the first of whom appears to have been Pedro Albaitero. Albaitero arrived around 1855, decades before the first wave of immigrants, and married ten years later into a Mexican provincial elite family.<sup>18</sup> The dowry was likely key to the initial establishment of Albaitero's bakeries, but his subsequent expansion relied on fellow immigrants rather than on his in-laws. He formed a partnership with fellow Baztanese José Arrache—who married into the same Mexican family in 1874—and then brought over several nephews.<sup>19</sup> One of these, Juan Irigoyen, married Albaitero's daughter and established himself as a major planter and miller in the Bajío, the fertile crescent-shaped region northwest of Mexico City. Together with his brothers, Irigoyen came to control much of the wheat supply to the capital.<sup>20</sup>

Albaitero and Arrache's key innovation was to insert flourmills inside the city, further from the wheat fields but closer to the bakeries. New steam-powered machinery liberated mills

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*historia, y desarrollo en México* (México, D.F.: CANAINPA, 1997); Cristina Barros and Mónica del Villar, *El santo olor de la panadería* (México, D.F.: Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor, Fernández Cueto Editores, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Their first child was born in 1868. See Christening record of Cipriana Cornelia Merced del Rosario Albaitero García, 24 September 1868, Asunción, México in Vital Records Index of the Family History Library Catalogue of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), batch no. C619629, source no. 0035212. Agustín Otondo y Dufurrena, *Diccionario histórico biográfico del Valle de Baztán (Navarra)* (Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2002), 29. Brading observes that in the late eighteenth century, "A startling number of creole heiresses gave their hand to European Spaniards." D. A. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763-1810* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 112. Walker similarly notes that in the mid nineteenth century, Mexican families married their daughters to immigrants in order to "help ensure a family's adjustment to changing times." Walker, *Kinship, Business, and Politics: The Martínez del Río Family in Mexico, 1824-1867*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Marriage record of José Arrache and María García Rejón y Piñón, 28 november 1874, La Candelaria, Tacubaya, D.F., in International Genealogical Index of the Family History Library Catalogue of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). batch no. M643217, source no. 0652544.

<sup>20</sup> Marriage record of Juan Martín Irigoyen and Mercedes Albaitero, 23 April 1885, La Candelaria, Tacubaya, D.F., in International Genealogical Index of the Family History Library Catalogue of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). Batch no. M643217, source no. 0652544. Albaitero and Irigoyen had an aunt in common and shared a surname (Albaitero' maternal surname was Irigoyen). Pilar Arcelus Iroz, *Presencia de Navarra en México, 1870-1950* (Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, Departamento de Presidencia, Justicia e Interior, 2001). Alberto Alday Garay, "Presencia baztanesa en las regiones de México, siglos XIX y XX," in *Los vascos en*

from the streams that flowed into the central basin, and shifted the center of gravity from rural estates to urban manufacturing, giving new stability to the bread industry and greatly enhancing the influence of mill-bakery owners over the food supply and the politics of provisioning. They established the mill “La Florida” in 1887 to supply their several bakeries. With this privileged access to raw materials and to the urban market, the next year Albaitero and Arrache established Mexico’s first mechanized bakery, “Gran Panadería de Los Gallos.”<sup>21</sup>

Their success opened the way another group of Baztanese bakery owners, led by Braulio Iriarte, who closely followed the Albaitero’s path. Iriarte arrived to Mexico in 1877, and reportedly began distributing bread at Albaitero’s bakeries.<sup>22</sup> By 1890 he had bought “El Factor,” one of Mexico City’s oldest and most prestigious bakeries;<sup>23</sup> less than a decade later, he had “several branches” in which “bread production ha[d] reached the progress of the great capital cities of the world.”<sup>24</sup> He also married into a Mexican family, then brought over nephews and countrymen and integrated them into his businesses. His daughter married Andrés Barberena, who arrived to Mexico around 1900 and started out as manager of the downtown bakery, “La Vasconia,” before taking over the bakeries on San Juan de Letrán Street and “El Factor.”<sup>25</sup>

Iriarte opened the city’s second urban flourmill “El Eúskaro” in 1903, where Barberena became

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*las regiones de México siglos XVI a XX*, ed. Amaya Garritz (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Ministerio de Cultura del Gobierno Vasco, Instituto Vasco-Mexicano de Desarrollo, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> “La fabricación de pan con maquinaria,” *Diario del Hogar* 12/10/1889.

<sup>22</sup> “Impuestos municipales. Panaderías,” *El Municipio Libre* 7/17/1896. Carlos Herrero, *Braulio Iriarte. De la tahona al holding internacional cervecero*, Cuadernos de Historia Empresarial (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Iztapalapa, 2002); Alejandro Arriola Ortiz, *Recordando otros tiempos* (México, D.F.: Private Edition, 1944), 47.

<sup>23</sup> Iglesias and Salinas Alvarez, *El pan nuestro de cada día: sus orígenes, historia, y desarrollo en México*, 166-169.

<sup>24</sup> J. Figueroa Doménech, *Guía general descriptiva de la República Mexicana; historia, geografía, estadística, etc., etc., con triple directorio del comercio y la industria, autoridades, oficinas públicas, abogados, médicos, hacendados, correos, telégrafos y ferrocarriles, etc.*, 1. ed., 2 vols., vol. 1. El Distrito Federal (Mexico, Barcelona (España): R. de S. N. Araluce, 1899), 310.

<sup>25</sup> Arcelus Iroz, *Presencia de Navarra en México, 1870–1950*, 205. “Fábricas de pan y bizcochos,” *Boletín Mensual del Departamento del Trabajo* (1922).

manager. Iriarte then brought over two nephews, Segundo Minondo and Agustín Jáuregui.<sup>26</sup> Minondo ran some of Iriarte's bakeries; Jáuregui married another of his daughters and took over the bakery on Santa María la Redonda Street.<sup>27</sup> More of Iriarte's nephews followed and established a flourmill in Toluca, the agricultural and industrial zone west of Mexico City.<sup>28</sup> In 1912, together with the Leonese immigrant, Pablo Díez, Iriarte founded Mexico's first industrial yeast factory, "Leviatán y Flor."<sup>29</sup> He then led a group of Baztanese bakery owners in opening the Modelo Brewery in 1925. When he established a new, expanded "El Eúskaro" mill in 1929, he was grinding the lion's share of Mexico's wheat.<sup>30</sup> The dominance of the Baztanese mill and bakeries owners, then, was infused with deep links of family and regional identity.

A few wealthy Mexican bakery owners found a profitable place within this complex. Pedro Laguna, for instance, was a senator who owned three bakeries and, together with Spanish immigrant Eugenio Jubién, "La Esperanza" flourmill.<sup>31</sup> However, most Mexican owners complained bitterly of the "terrible monopoly" formed by the "Iberian potentate and a few Hispanized Mexicans" who tightly controlled the flow of raw materials and bread retail.<sup>32</sup> In 1926, they complained that "Most of the bakeries are in the hands of Spaniards, represented by the TRUST formed around the Eúskaro flourmill that controls everything from the fields where wheat is sewn to the bakeries where the bread is sold. [...] Their greed is so enormous that they

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<sup>26</sup> Arcelus Iroz, *Presencia de Navarra en México, 1870–1950*, 237.

<sup>27</sup> "En la 5º Comisaría se distribuyeron 20,000 panes," *The Mexican Herald* 6/30/1915, 1, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Alday Garay, "Presencia baztanesa en las regiones de México, siglos XIX y XX."

<sup>29</sup> Roberto Salazar, *El empresario industrial. Patronos tradicionales de constitución y sucesión empresarial* (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Económicos y Demográficos, 1971), 66.

<sup>30</sup> Ramón Fernández y Fernández, *El Trigo en México. El Comercio*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (México, D.F.: Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, S.A., 1939), 162. Acta constitutiva de Molino El Eúskaro, Libro 3, vol. 76, fs. 283, num. 584, del Registro Público de la propiedad y el Comercio del D.F. cited in Salazar, *El empresario industrial. Patronos tradicionales de constitución y sucesión empresarial*.

<sup>31</sup> "Fábricas de pan y bizcochos.;" Pedro Laguna to Alvaro Obregón, México, D.F., 1/23/1923, AGN Presidentes, O–C, caja 166, exp. 424–T–2. "Licencias expendios pan bizcocho," AHDF, Ayuntamiento, Licencias, Panaderías, vol. 3210 1922.

<sup>32</sup> Agrupación de Fabricantes Mexicanos de Pan y Bizcochos del Distrito Federal to Eulalio Gutiérrez, México, D.F., 12/21/1914, AGN Departamento del Trabajo, caja 71, exp. 3, fs. 15–22.

want to ruin our small shops.”<sup>33</sup> Despite these protests, these owners had little leverage with which to challenge the “Spanish monopoly” since they depended on the Basques for flour and other raw materials.

### *The Decade of Strikes*

Workers constituted a greater threat than the Mexican rivals. But since the Spanish owners were so thoroughly ensconced in the provisioning of the city, they could count on state support to break strikes. Between 1919 and 1928, bakery workers staged five general strikes. The demands they made—eight-hour shifts, compensation for injuries, higher wages, and a labor contract to homogenize working conditions in all Mexico City bakeries—remained fairly consistent.<sup>34</sup> These were demands that the Constitution of 1917 had already codified as worker rights. Nonetheless, owners consistently rejected them and strikes broke out and followed a clear pattern. At the beginning of the nightshift at 6:00 PM, strikers marched through the city center, stopping at the bakeries that did not observe the strike or hired replacements, charged inside, roughing up the non-union bakers, damaging machinery and furniture.<sup>35</sup> But the violence and the effect of strikes in general were limited by the “veritable military posts” that protected the replacement workers inside.<sup>36</sup> At least once, police fired directly into a crowd of striking bakers, wounding a handful.<sup>37</sup> The chief of police argued that the gendarmes were not breaking the

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<sup>33</sup> Onofre Madrigal, D. Mondragón, J. Martínez, Norberto Castillo, Salvador E. Rosas, José E. Segura, and Agustín Orozco to Plutarco Elías Calles, México, D.F., 5/8/1926, AGN Presidentes, O-C, caja 135, exp. 407-P-18.

<sup>34</sup> “Los panaderos son ahora, los que quieren la huelga,” *El Pueblo* 2/18/1919. “Hoy estalla huelga de panaderos,” *El Universal* 1/17/1922.

<sup>35</sup> “Los panaderos no han vuelto a las tahonas,” *El Universal* 1/19/1922.

<sup>36</sup> James Payne, *Labor and Politics in Peru* (New York: Yale University Press, 1965); Ian Roxborough, “The Analysis of Labour Movements in Latin America: Typologies and Theories,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 1, 1 (1981): 81-95. “La huelga de tranviarios continúa pues no se logró llegar a un acuerdo,” *El Universal* 6/18/1922; “El Gobierno está resuelto a no permitir manifestaciones públicas de huelguistas,” *El Universal* 6/19/1922; “Terminó la huelga de tranviarios,” *El Universal* 6/22/1922.

<sup>37</sup> “Los panaderos no han vuelto a las tahonas,” *El Universal* 1/19/1922.

union's strike, but rather defending the non-union workers' (*obreros libres*) "indisputable right to work."<sup>38</sup> Bakers, he added, could carry out "protest movements" but the police would "repress all scandals." He called on the bakers to form "commissions of individuals to enter into bakeries and invite the non-union workers to cease their labors, but leave them in peace if they do not accept the invitation."<sup>39</sup>

Owners asserted that the workers' demands—indeed, the constitutional mandates—would have hindered bakeries from fulfilling their basic function of providing bread. They argued that eight-hour day shifts and seven-hour nightshifts were incompatible with the volume bakeries had to produce.<sup>40</sup> The government agreed. An official from the Conciliation and Arbitration Board said he would study the possibility of eight-hour shifts in bakeries, but that the nature of bread production made them impractical. "Although bakers remain in workrooms twelve hours or more a day, they do not work continuously, but with intervals of idle time."<sup>41</sup> Owners similarly rejected the union's proposed ban on nightshifts. Bakeries did most business in the early morning when consumers demanded fresh bread for breakfast. Without nightshifts, they pointed out, customers would have to gnaw on hard *bolillos* and dried up *conchas* baked the day before, or else forgo their morning bread.<sup>42</sup>

Given the absence of chemical preservatives, their defense of nightshifts was fairly solid. The rejection of fixed shifts, however, was related less to the need to produce a minimum volume of bread than to the structural limitations on bakery profits. Bread prices were fairly inflexible, pegged informally to the wages of the working class. Anxious to keep the proletariat

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<sup>38</sup> "Tumulto promovido por los obreros de una panadería," *El Pueblo* 3/17/1919.

<sup>39</sup> "Los panaderos no han vuelto a las tahonas." *El Universal* 1/19/1922.

<sup>40</sup> Sack=45 kilograms of flour. "Encuéntanse exitados los tahoneros," *El Pueblo* 3/17/1919.

<sup>41</sup> "Los panaderos son ahora, los que quieren la huelga." *El Pueblo* 2/18/1919.

<sup>42</sup> Manuel Ponce de León to Alvaro Obregón, México, D.F., 9/12/1921, AGN Presidentes, O-C, caja 135, exp. 407-P-18. "Los panaderos votaron la huelga general," *El Universal* 9/13/1921.

reasonably well fed, government officials appear to have established a tacit agreement to restrain striking workers as long as bakeries kept their prices low. As a result, profits came from maintaining labor and infrastructure expenses to a minimum. Keeping capital expenses low also sprang from the functioning of chain migration. Bakeries remained small production units dispersed throughout the city in order to facilitate the movement of immigrants from clerks to owners. Concentration and mechanization of production would have hindered the social mobility that predicated the ethnic solidarity of the immigrants by raising the economic barriers to proprietorship.<sup>43</sup> With few exceptions, then, owners resisted investing in machinery.<sup>44</sup> As a result, owners themselves would have had to pay for the higher wages and shorter shifts that the bakers demanded.

This model of entrepreneurial expansion kept bakery production archaic, but it granted the Spanish owners an extraordinary coherence with which to resist their bakers' demands and defend their source of profits. The strikes only seemed to strengthen their family ties and ethnic and regional identity. Iriarte's relatives and associates moved to increase their collective authority over their workers by establishing the "Union of Bakery Proprietors of Mexico City" in 1924. The union created a fund to help owners endure strikes and to encourage disciplined unity. Associates pledged to collectively close their shops as soon as workers seized any single bakery. They would also refuse negotiations until workers withdrew. Alternately, any owner who

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<sup>43</sup> Waldinger, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Immigrants and Enterprise in New York's Garment Trades*.

<sup>44</sup> This did not keep owners from threatening workers with obsolescence. "Almost all bakeries," argued owners, were ordering machinery from the United States. "Bakeries will only need three workers at most, instead of twenty or thirty." The massive firings were to begin in a month. Arrache and Córdoba claimed they had imported American machines precisely in order to "avoid the recent difficulties created by the demands of some *amasijo* workers." They announced the imminent dismissal of eighteen bakers. This threat, however, was a bluff: Six years later, Arrache and Córdoba's Recabado Street bakery employed at least thirty-five workers, far more than most. "Sólo tres obreros emplearán los panaderos," *El Pueblo* 4/1/1919. "Dificultades entre propietarios y trabajadores de amasijos," *El Pueblo* 4/28/1919. "Fábricas de pan y bizcochos."

negotiated individually with the union forfeited his access to the fund.<sup>45</sup> This solidarity extended beyond business, into banquets and charity events at the Centro Vasco and the Casino Español, where the bakery owners figured prominently.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to this internal unity, owners enjoyed high political connections that sprang from their control over the subsistence of the city and their role as middlemen. In this sense, the message of Union of Bakery Proprietors was as much an admonition to associates as it was for local authorities. Attacks on owners' property and authority would jeopardize the bread supply for the entire city, which could then had disastrous consequences for the government. Whether effected by workers or owners, the closure of bakeries disrupted the food supply beyond bakeries. During strikes consumers compensated for the lack of bread with more tortillas, which invariably led maize merchants and tortilla sellers to raise prices.<sup>47</sup> As a result, the poorest families who ate the least bread suffered the most. "If there is no bread," asked a commentator, "what did the revolution achieve?" The political elite was keenly aware of the importance of ensuring the supply of bread and forged close relations with the owners and grain traders. Alvaro Obregón, for instance, exchanged chummy letters with Pedro Albaitero's nephew Pedro Irigoyen

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<sup>45</sup> Segundo Minondo, Angel Rosales, Arturo Leopoldo Romero, Agustín Orozco, Ruperto Luna, Antonio Armesto, Porfirio Barajas, Marcelino Yglesia, J. Hernández Rosas, Gabino Gutierrez, H. Ordóñez, Adolfo Fernández, Manuel Díaz, Michelena Hernández, Fernández y Calvin, Alfonso Ruiz, Juan Elizondo, Valentín Elizondo, Aurelio López, J. Romano, José Larrondo, Emilio Pérez, Manuel R. Martínez, Tiburcio Castillo, Simón Servián, Camilo Sánchez, Fermín Barberena, José Barberena y Hno., José Martínez, and José Rodríguez to Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje Gobierno del Distrito, México, D.F., 9/12/1924, AHDF Ayuntamiento, Departamento Consultivo, Huelgas, exp. 2077.

<sup>46</sup> Lorin R. Gaarder, "The Basques of Mexico: An Historical and Contemporary Portrait" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Anthropology, University of Utah, 1976); Alberto Alday Garay, "La comunidad baztanesa en la ciudad de México en los siglos XIX y XX," in *Los vascos en las regiones de México siglos XVI a XX*, ed. Amaya Garriz (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Ministerio de Cultura del Gobierno Vasco, Instituto Vasco-Mexicano de Desarrollo, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> "La producción de pan disminuyó por aumento de peso," *El Universal* 1/20/1922; "México se queda hoy sin comer bizcochos," *El Universal* 9/13/1924; "Se fijan precios para la masa, la maquila y las tortillas," *El Universal* 4/11/1931; "Peligro de que además de pan falte leche," *Gráfico* 4/17/1936.

over wheat imports and barbecues on his ranch; later Obregón gave Irigoyen an important post in the Secretary of Agriculture.<sup>48</sup>

As much as the politics of bakery labor derived from the place of bakeries in the city, the government's resolve to break the strikes also responded to its relationship with organized labor in general. In 1921, the bakers co-founded the anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT), which formed in opposition to the reformist quasi-official *Confederación Regional de Obreros de México* (CROM).<sup>49</sup> As ties between the CROM and the regime increased, so did the repression against the CGT unions.<sup>50</sup> That the strikers jeopardized the food supply and opposed the CROM gave the government little inclination to support them. The most expedient way to deal with the “bread question” and, at the same time, with dissident labor organizations, then, was by putting down the strikes.

Nonetheless, this strategy had weaknesses that eventually led officials to pressure owners to negotiate. The regime had little interest in furthering the cause of independent anarcho-syndicalism, but it based its legitimacy, rhetorically at least, on the vindication of the lower classes. The spectacle of protecting owners—Spaniards no less—from workers who demanded their constitutional rights threatened to undermine this legitimacy. The bakers' union seized upon

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<sup>48</sup> Pedro Irigoyen to Alvaro Obregón, México, D.F., 7/18/1918, Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca Fondo FAO, serie 020500, exp. “223”/206, inv. 494, legajo 1, fs. 5; Juan Irigoyen to Secretaría de Estado de Agricultura y Fomento, 3/23/1926, AGN Presidentes, O-C, caja 335, exp. 816-Y-15; “Nombramiento a Irigoyen a Comisión Agrícola,” AGN, Presidentes, O-C, caja 185, exp. 602-B-1 3/15/1921; Alvaro Obregón to Fernando Torreblanca, Cajeme, Sonora, 2/13/1925, AGN Presidentes, O-C, caja 319, exp. 814-I-1.

<sup>49</sup> Linda B. Hall, *Alvaro Obregón: Power and Revolution in Mexico, 1911-1920* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981); Viviane Brachet-Marquez, *The Dynamics of Domination: State, Class, and Social Reform in Mexico, 1910-1990* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994); Marjorie Clark, *La organización obrera en México* (México: Era, 1979); José C. Valadés, *Memorias de un joven rebelde*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Culiacán: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1986), 78.

<sup>50</sup> Guillermina Baeza Paz, “La Confederación General de Trabajo (1921-1931),” *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 83 (1976): 113-186; Hall, *Alvaro Obregón: Power and Revolution in Mexico, 1911-1920*; Lorenzo Meyer, *El conflicto social y los gobiernos del Maximato*, 1a ed., Historia de la Revolución Mexicana. Periodo 1928-1934; 13 (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 1978), 126.

this weakness to put into doubt the revolutionary character of the government's actions. The "bread industry is in the hands of a foreign monopoly that exploits the sons of Mexico."<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, the May 1928 strike showed bakers' ability to paralyze the bread supply. By the late 1920s, there more than two hundred bakeries in Mexico City; almost of their workers belonged to the CGT. During the four days of the strike, bread was so precious that the presence of it was a sign of treachery. Four striking bakers were at a downtown cantina when they saw a man walk by with a "sack of bread." When they tried to take it, the man stabbed one of the bakers, killing him, and ran off with the bread.<sup>52</sup> The government had to mobilize considerable resources and energy to defend bakeries. The political costs of this rose in tandem with bakers' ability to paralyze bread production.<sup>53</sup>

The government's strategy of strike-breaking also weakened together with the waning influence of the CROM. Extravagant and corrupt, CROMista leadership became a political liability. The final break came in 1928. As Obregón was preparing to assume a second term as president, a Catholic militant angered by the official anticlericalism shot him dead. Obregonistas, suspecting that CROMista leader Luis Morones was behind the caudillo's death, pushed outgoing president Plutarco Elías Calles to remove CROMistas from the administration.<sup>54</sup> Emilio Portes Gil, the

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<sup>51</sup> "La escasez de pan fue ayer más grande," *El Universal* 5/17/1928. "Lo que pasará si se reanuda la huelga de panaderos," *El Universal* 5/22/1928.

<sup>52</sup> "Hours later, Mrs. María Guadalupe Blanco Hernández arrived at the cantina, saying that women from her neighborhood had told her that her husband, Ignacio Rodríguez, had gotten into a fight at the cantina 'La Imperial.' Since he hadn't arrived home, she supposed he had been killed. The police took her to see the body, but it was not her husband. In this way, she unintentionally revealed who the murderer was." "Hombre muerto por un costal de pan," *El Universal* 5/19/1928.

<sup>53</sup> "Se suspendió la elaboración del pan en todo el Distrito Federal; ayer fue votada la huelga," *El Universal* 5/14/1928; "Tampoco hoy habrá pan; sigue la huelga," *El Universal* 5/15/1928; "Entramos al tercer día de ayuno," *El Universal* 5/16/1928; "La mitad de los panaderos de ciudad de Méjico se han declarado en huelga," *La Prensa* 5/17/1928, 1; "La escasez de pan fue ayer más grande."; "Armisticio en la huelga de pan," *El Universal* 5/18/1928.

<sup>54</sup> Arnaldo Córdova, *La revolución en crisis: la aventura del maximato* (México, D.F.: Cal y Arena, 1995); Tzvi Medin, *El minimato presidencial: historia política del maximato (1928–1935)* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1982); Meyer, *El conflicto social y los gobiernos del Maximato*.

interim president following Obregón's death, then pressured unions to leave the CROM and gave considerable support to the CGT.<sup>55</sup>

This shift in state patronage helped the bakers: After the strike in May 1928, owners and unionists signed a collective contract that standardized wages, set the workday at eight hours, and recognized the union as the representative of workers. The CGT, however, did not prosper in the new configuration. Internal conflicts over objectives and strategies had led an early split; a decade of battles with police and the CROM further diminished its numbers and strength. The state sponsorship discredited what little remained of its former vigor.<sup>56</sup> The bakers' union, along with others, left the CGT shortly after signing the labor contract in mid-1928, and reconstituted itself as an independent organization.<sup>57</sup> Now, instead of attempting to concentrate workers into a state-supported labor hub, the state encouraged the atomization of unions. In order to retain a degree of control over the labor movement, authorities relied on owners to negotiate with individual unions.

### ***From Class Struggle to Partnership***

After government officials and employers shifted from strike breaking to negotiations, their challenge was how to improve working conditions for bakers, and thus prevent strikes from disrupting the supply of bread, without causing a rise in the price of bread that would erode the spending power of other workers. Put another way, the bind officials found themselves in as “arbiters” of class equilibrium was to convince owners to pay workers more and prevent them

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<sup>55</sup> Medin, *El minimato presidencial: historia política del maximato (1928–1935)*, 26-30.

<sup>56</sup> Baeza Paz, “La Confederación General de Trabajo (1921-1931).”

<sup>57</sup> Salazar argues that the CGT leadership had grown more rigid and dogmatic, which increased the already existing tensions between Genaro Gómez and other leaders who identified as communists. Rosendo Salazar and José G. Escobedo, *Las pugnas de la gleba (Los albores del movimiento obrero en México)* (México, D.F.: Editorial Avante, 1923), v. II, 224. Interviews with Alfonso Ortega Ríos, 05/27/2005, Mexico City; and Mario Anguiano Trejo, 06/03/2005, Mexico City.

from raising prices, without driving them out of business or pushing them into political opposition. The middlemen role of the Spanish bakery owners continued to be the provisioning of bread; now they were also intermediaries between the state and workers.

In January 1929, six months after the union and owners signed the contract, the federal government promulgated a series of bakery regulations contained in a *reglamento*. The *reglamento* and the contract were separate and distinct documents. While the contract defined the wages, workday, benefits, hiring policies, and other accords that pertained to unionized bakeries, the *reglamento* governed all bakeries in the capital, regardless of unionization. Indeed, nothing in the *reglamento* explicitly linked it to unionization or the working conditions defined in the labor contract. Its ostensive objectives were to ensure hygienic, inexpensive bread and, ironically, to prevent the formation of monopolies. Nonetheless, the practical function of the *reglamento* was to create conditions that would allow the owners and union workers to comply with the contract. To accomplish this, the *reglamento* sought to eliminate non-union bakeries' access to the market. Since the vast majority of the unionized shops belonged to Spaniards, this was tantamount to formalizing the ethnic monopoly.

The *reglamento* mandated that bakeries fulfill several new requirements in order to obtain a license. Bakeries had to meet the health code and be easily visible to inspectors. Their production areas (*fábricas*) had to open directly onto the street and display a sign on the outside, no smaller than a square meter. In order to professionalize bread production and ensure hygienic conditions, the new laws ordered that *fábricas* could not be located “within tenements or apartments, but only in buildings that are not directly connected with residences.” Retail outlets

(*expedios*) could only sell bread from licensed *fábricas*; the same applied to street vendors and small neighborhood grocery stores.<sup>58</sup>

Two other provisions placed more explicit restrictions on the market and generated the greatest controversies. The first limited the spatial distribution of bakeries by imposing a minimum of five hundred meters between *fábricas* and three hundred meters between *expedios*. The second introduced price fixing, which had not been applied to bakeries since independence.<sup>59</sup> The price was set at five cents for two pieces of bread with a total weight of 160 grams. Finally, the reglamento established a *comisión mixta*, a task force that included owners, unionists, and government officials who were to advise the city government on “prices, weight, quality, and other circumstances pertaining to bread.” The reglamento did not confer the commission any enforcement authority; however, the members delegated inspectors—unionist bakers—to collaborate with police and health inspectors in the persecution of violators.<sup>60</sup>

Although the reglamento focused on hygiene, infrastructure, and licensing, it was aimed specifically at the non-unionized small bakeries. Some of their operators were long-time residents who had established modest workshops before the 1920s; others were village bakers who had recently arrived along with the waves of rural migrants uprooted by the revolution.<sup>61</sup> Some had worked as scabs during the strikes. Displaced by the union contracts, these self-described “simple workers emancipated from the tyranny of foreign capitalists” set up their own bakeries.<sup>62</sup> The violent encounters with strikers in previous years likely made them adverse to unions, and the constitution established their right to not unionize. More importantly, like the rest

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<sup>58</sup> “Reglamento de la Industrial del Pan en el Distrito Federal,” *Diario Oficial* 1/15/1929, 7–8.

<sup>59</sup> “Reglamento de la Industrial del Pan en el Distrito Federal,” *Diario Oficial* 1/15/1929, 7–8.

<sup>60</sup> “Decreto que modifica el Reglamento de la Industria del Pan, en el Distrito Federal,” *Diario Oficial* 5/27/1931, 9–10.

<sup>61</sup> Oral interviews with Pascual Cortés Cruz, 14 July 2005, Mexico City; and Agustín Moreno, 3 August 2005, Mexico City.

<sup>62</sup> “Los vendedores de pan barato, perseguidos,” *La Prensa* 1/19/1935.

of the small producers, their shops hired only few workers from outside their family-based workforce. Lacking resources to set up a retail annex, the small producers peddled bread in plazas, market stands, and through small, neighborhood grocery stores known as *tendejones*.<sup>63</sup> These shops were especially important in the poor neighborhoods, away from commercial centers.<sup>64</sup> As one *tendejón* owner noted, “The very setting of this area makes it hard for people to purchase goods in established bakeries.” Furthermore, he pointed out, “most of the area’s inhabitants have open credit with the local *tendejones*, which allows them to buy bread there rather in the bakeries because most people lack available cash.”<sup>65</sup>

While some of these small bakeries were clandestine affairs—brick and adobe ovens hidden in tenement basements and patios—many were legally licensed. The dominant bakery owners portrayed them all as filthy and diseased sites of moral depravation;<sup>66</sup> however, what distinguished the small producers was not legality per se. Indeed, few bakeries were entirely

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<sup>63</sup> Also spelled *tendajones* and known as *misceláneas* and *abarroterías*. María Rebeca Yoma Medina and Luis Alberto Martos López, *Dos mercados en la historia de la ciudad de México: El Volador y La Merced* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1990).

<sup>64</sup> Jay Kinsbruner, *The Colonial Spanish-American City: Urban Life in the Age of Atlantic Capitalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 72-79; *Petty Capitalism in Spanish America: The Pulperos of Puebla, Mexico City, Caracas, and Buenos Aires* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987); Jorge Silva Riquer, “La organización de las tiendas pulperas en la ciudad de México, siglo XVIII,” in *La población de la ciudad de México en 1790. Estructura social, alimentación y vivienda*, ed. Sonia Pérez Toledo (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2004), 281–310; Carol Meyers de Ortiz, *Pequeño comercio de alimentos en colonias populares de Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl. Análisis de su papel en la estructura socioeconómica urbana* (Guadalajara, Jalisco: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1990).

<sup>65</sup> José Espinosa de los Monteros to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 9/23/1937, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>66</sup> One owner wrote the Health Secretary to denounce that the clandestine bakeries “handle and sell bread in conditions so filthy that they alone could explain the shocking mortality that dominates our poor classes. Dirty and sick workers make bread with dirty utensils; at night the bread stays in filthy stalls in the midst of lamentable promiscuity where many people sleep, lacking the most elemental hygienic practices, crowded in an atmosphere poisoned by the humors of their bodies and their very excrement.” Onofre Madrigal to Departamento de Salubridad Pública, México, D.F., 8/9/1927, AHSS Fondo Salubridad Pública, Sección Servicios Jurídicos, caja 4, exp. 8. Another letter to President Abelardo Rodríguez alleged that, “The totality of market retailers get bread at night and take it to their homes, which, on account of their economic conditions, are not hygienic. They sleep with the baskets of breads among the bad air, the lice and an infinity of parasites that later go onto the consuming public that, because of their limited resources, goes to the markets to buy supposedly cheaper bread.” Many vendors had “syphilis, tuberculosis, and leprosy” and “never wash their hands, etc. etc.” Crecencio Pérez to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, México, D.F., 5/12/1933, AGN Presidentes, ALR, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5.

legal. Inspection reports show that few of the major bakeries met the health code.<sup>67</sup> Records of municipal fines show that owners of licensed bakeries also ran clandestine ones; fines from these transgressions were another business expense.<sup>68</sup> The defining characteristic of the small producers, besides their size and their nationality, was the fact that they did not employ union labor and therefore did not have to comply with the obligations of the labor contract.

Ironically, the reglamento protected the dominant, unionized bakeries tacitly, through language that appeared to defend the small producers. Authorities claimed that the distance requirements and the minimum prices kept predatory competitors from establishing shops next door to small bakeries and driving them out of business by dumping cheap bread. In practice, however, the distance requirements guaranteed—indeed, codified—the dominance of the bakeries already located in the central neighborhoods. Similarly, the reglamento’s prohibition of “persons or associations that effectuate any combination that could constitute improper competition” did not refer to the simultaneous ownership of wheat fields, mills, yeast factories, and bakeries, but rather to the small producers’ strategy of selling cheaper bread. While officials purported that price ceilings, in turn, would ensure working-class families’ access to bread, enforcement focused almost exclusively on shops where bread cost less or weighed more. There is no evidence of punishment for underweight bread, nor for other violations by dominant

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<sup>67</sup> Inspectors in 1925 declared that of twenty-two bakeries inspected, “all but three are in miserable sanitary conditions; they called for the immediate closure of five. “Informe de inspección de panaderías,” AHSS, Fondo Salubridad Pública, Sección Servicio Jurídico, caja 4, exp. 8 10/17/1925; “Reglamento de higiene a que quedan sujetas las panaderías, bizcocherías y pastelería a las condiciones siguientes,” AHSS, Fondo Salubridad Pública, Sección Servicios Jurídicos, caja 4, exp. 8 6/16/1925.

<sup>68</sup> “Infracciones,” AHDF, Ayuntamiento, Infracciones, Sección Panaderías, vol. 2390 1919–1920. “Cantidad íntegramente devuelta al los Sres. Boades y Zugarramudi [sic] de una multa de \$20.00 que depositó el día 30 de mayo de 1927.” “Relación de multas,” AHSS, Fondo Salubridad Pública, Sección Servicios Jurídicos, caja 16, exp. 7-8 3/10/1929.

bakeries that, for instance, had upstairs dormitories for employees and amasijos located in basements where they could not open directly onto the street.<sup>69</sup>

Soon after the promulgation of the reglamento, the health department declared that it would close bakeries that did not comply with the health code in a week. Inspectors closed the shop of one small producer who then turned to the courts. According to him, the health department was responding to “maneuvers by the large bakery owners who want to control [the industry]. The small establishments are closed without appeal even if they comply with the dispositions of the health department.”<sup>70</sup> The court agreed. It granted an injunction (*amparo*) against the closures and ruled that the distance requirements violated Article 28 of the Constitution of 1917, which prohibited “any act or measure that stifles or endeavors to stifle free competition of any production, industry, trade or public service.”<sup>71</sup> Consequently, President Abelardo L. Rodríguez eliminated the distance requirements, acknowledging that they had “exclusively favored a reduced number of people.”<sup>72</sup> The city governor likewise conceded that the distances “protected the monopoly.” He stressed that the modification to the reglamento proved that the government “had set out energetically to destroy the monopoly.”<sup>73</sup>

The court also ruled that the minimum prices were “absurd.” The judges declared that, “beyond the interests of one group, it is in the true public interest that bread be sold as cheaply as possible.” One magistrate asked rhetorically, “Are we really going to prosecute people for selling cheap bread?”<sup>74</sup> On this point, however, the president and the local government were firm. They

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<sup>69</sup> “Fábricas de pan y bizcochos.” See description of living quarters above the “Flor de México” in Josefina Sendra de Servitje, *Vivir es Luchar* (México, D.F.: Private Edition, 1977), 51.

<sup>70</sup> “Quieren el monopolio del pan los ricos extranjeros,” *El Nacional* 5/3/1930.

<sup>71</sup> H.N. Branch and L.S. Row, “The Mexican Constitution of 1917 Compared to The Constitution of 1857,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 71, Supplement (1917): i–v, 1–116.

<sup>72</sup> “Ya se dio fin al monopolio de pan,” *El Universal* 5/28/1931.

<sup>73</sup> “El precio del pan en México,” *El Universal* 7/11/1931.

<sup>74</sup> “La suprema corte de justicia se declaró abierta y públicamente en favor del pan barato para el pueblo,” *El Universal* 7/9/1931; “Un reglamento absurdo que impedía al pueblo comprar el pan barato,” *Excelsior* 7/9/1931.

argued that the minimum prices would remain since they protected small producers from “ruinous competition” masked by an “apparent benefit of the public.”<sup>75</sup>

### ***Policing the “Formal Market”***

The reglamento was largely successful in its primary objectives of ensuring the bread supply and containing labor strife. There were only three strikes in the 1930s, the last major ones bakeries experienced.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, these strikes and other minor conflicts drove the enforcement of the reglamento. As the annual expiration date of the contract approached, union leaders invariably presented new demands and accused owners of neglecting their obligations. Each time, owners refused, arguing that they were barely breaking even. Usually negotiations led to changes in the reglamento; waves of persecution against the small producers and petty retailers invariably followed. In the few cases when negotiations failed, strikes broke out, negotiations resumed, and owners and the union signed a new contract and renewed the reglamento.

The first labor conflict after the reglamento occurred in September 1932 when the union demanded payment based on a percentage of the daily value of production rather than fixed wages. Owners and the union disagreed over percentages.<sup>77</sup> The governor of Mexico City tried to attract owners into arbitration by offering to “forgive fines, persecute clandestine bakeries, and exert influence over the health department to prohibit the sale of bread in plazas.”<sup>78</sup> But there was no agreement and the union declared a strike that shut down the major bakeries for five

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<sup>75</sup> “El precio del pan en México.”

<sup>76</sup> Marisela Flores Garza, “El desarrollo de la clase trabajadora en la industria de pan y pasteles en México en el periodo 1960–1975” (Tesis de Licenciatura, Economía, UNAM, 1981)

<sup>77</sup> Owners proposed paying workers \$1.00 for every \$1.44 of bread; workers asked for \$1.00 for every \$1.20 of bread. “Pronta solución del conflicto del pan,” *La Prensa* 9/6/1932.

<sup>78</sup> “300 panaderías clausuradas el día de ayer,” *La Prensa* 9/3/1932, 11.

days.<sup>79</sup> Negotiations brought a new contract and then a new reglamento.<sup>80</sup> The contract granted workers fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen percent of the production profits, based on the degree of mechanization (the more rudimentary the shop, the more the workers earned). Owners agreed to pay workers on four national holidays and four yearly vacation days. Five percent of workers' salaries plus five percent of daily profits was to go toward a "workers' saving account." Owners were also to pay eight cents per worker per day for a medical fund.<sup>81</sup>

In exchange for these concessions, the reglamento reinstated the distance limitations that President Rodríguez had repealed the year before.<sup>82</sup> If there had been any doubts about the underlying function of the reglamento, this action dispelled them. This decision restored the key instrument to attack the small producers, who immediately complained of an "unbearable situation" of inspectors from the *comisión mixta* confiscating bread, issuing heavy fines, and even throwing them in jail.<sup>83</sup> In order to restrict the small producers' access to consumers, inspectors also pursued the *tendejones*. This was doubly bad for the small retailers. First, the dominant owners stopped selling bread to them; then inspectors fined them for selling bread from the small producers.<sup>84</sup> Small producers and *tendejón* operators wrote directly to the

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<sup>79</sup> "Buena parte de la ciudad se encuentra sin pan," *El Universal* 9/3/1932; "300 panaderías clausuradas el día de ayer.," "Los panaderos están desde hoy en huelga," *El Universal* 9/2/1932; "Fracasaron las juntas realizadas," *El Gráfico* 9/2/1932.

<sup>80</sup> "Se solucionó ayer la huelga de panaderos," *El Gráfico* 9/7/1932, 3, 12; "La huelga de panaderos," *El Universal* 9/7/1932.

<sup>81</sup> "La decisión sobre el pan," *El Universal* 9/23/1932; "Se ahonda el conflicto de los panaderos por el laudo que se dictó," *Excelsior* 9/23/1932; "Texto del laudo pronunciado en el conflicto de la industria del pan entre obreros y patrones," *El Nacional* 9/22, 9/24, 9/25/1932; "Intentan desconocer la sentencia. Los dueños de tahonas tratan de violar el laudo que dictó el General Cabral," *El Nacional* 9/22/1932.

<sup>82</sup> "El pan y su reglamento," *El Nacional* 9/21/1932.

<sup>83</sup> Gabriel Pacheco, José Baltazar, and Víctor Díaz to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, México, D.F., 9/22/1932, AGN Presidentes, ALR, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5; Marcelino Feria to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, México, D.F., 11/21/1932, AGN Presidentes, ALR, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5; Sebastián Moreno to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, México, D.F., 11/21/1932, AGN Presidentes, ALR, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5.

<sup>84</sup> The Spanish bakery owner, Mariano Redorta wrote on behalf of his colleagues, that, "We sell our bread exclusively in our own expendios. Naturally, then, if we don't sell bread through stores and other sites were bread is sold, this bread must come from the Clandestine Bakeries. Mariano Redorta to Secretaría de Salubridad, México, D.F., 11/5/1937, AHSS Fondo Salubridad Pública, Sección Servicios Jurídicos, caja 4, exp. 8.

president, protesting that, “this law has only benefited the large business owners and damaged the small ones.” They pleaded with him “to intervene on behalf of small commerce in order to end the effects of the decree.”<sup>85</sup> Another accused the city government of supporting “the large bread industrialists who are ruining the *tendejones* by prohibiting the free sale of bread.”<sup>86</sup>

The next year, as the contract expired, owners and the union exchanged a series of threatening comments in the press. Owners argued that high wages were forcing them to close.<sup>87</sup> The union responded that owners amassed huge fortunes, “despite the primitive, colonial administration that constitutes the foundation of the city’s bread industry.”<sup>88</sup> If their profits allowed them to “vacation so often in old Europe” surely they could pay “fair wages.”<sup>89</sup> Before this volley grew into a strike, a new contract and reglamento appeared in October 1933. The reglamento changed the price of bread, or, more precisely, the weight of bread. Two pieces still cost five cents, but their total weight fell from 160 to 110 total grams.<sup>90</sup> This shift gave owners a greater profit margin that, in turn, allowed them to meet the workers’ demands, without, perhaps, having to forego their trips to old Europe.

The small producers, formed into the National Union of Small Bread Producers (*Unión Nacional de Pequeños Industriales del Pan*), defiantly announced their offer to sell three pieces for five cents.<sup>91</sup> Again, they complained of a “brutal offensive” in which police “broke down bakery doors and arrested poor peddlers.” One small producer wrote to the president saying that,

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<sup>85</sup> José T. Orrico to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, México, D.F., 1/30/1933, AGN Presidentes, ALR, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5.

<sup>86</sup> José T. Orrico and Ramón L. Sánchez to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, México, D.F., 6/2/1933, AGN Presidentes, ALR, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5.

<sup>87</sup> “Siguen cerrando las panaderías,” *Excélsior* 6/19/1933; “Hay menos pan para la venta en la capital. Los Tahoneros no han podido resistir los altos salarios y están cerrando,” *Excélsior* 6/17/1933.

<sup>88</sup> “No existe problema en la industria del pan,” *El Nacional* 6/20/1933.

<sup>89</sup> “El problema de la industria del pan,” *El Nacional* 9/18/1933.

<sup>90</sup> “Acuerdo por el cual se fija el precio y el peso del pan en el Distrito Federal,” *Diario Oficial* 10/13/1933, 444–445; “Dos piezas por 5 Cts.,” *El Universal* 10/14/1933.

<sup>91</sup> Aarón Sáenz to Sebastián Moreno, México, D.F., 10/30/1933, AGN Presidentes, ALG, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5.

“It is inexplicable that small bakers are imprisoned and mistreated when they sell inexpensive bread in order to alleviate the hunger of the people.”<sup>92</sup> The *comisión mixta* confiscated so much bread from the small bakeries and market stalls that the small producers said they were “being destroyed.”<sup>93</sup> Another complained that, “The legal office of the city government harasses us with excessive fines because it is in connivance with the monopolists.”<sup>94</sup>

Although it was exceedingly clear that the *comisión mixta* was pursuing small producers and petty retailers in favor of the dominant bakeries, the government continued to insist that the reglamento served the general public’s wellbeing. The city governor declared that, “Although it is true that consumers, particularly in the poor neighborhoods, are accustomed to buying three pieces of bread for five cents, it is in the false belief that they are receiving greater quantity for the same price. In reality, they acquire the same or less total weight of bread that is undoubtedly of inferior quality. They must realize that it is more advantageous to buy higher quality and weightier bread than a larger number of pieces.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, “prohibiting the sale of such bread is *imminently revolutionary*” since lighter pieces of bread meant less drudgery for bakers.<sup>96</sup> That is, consumers, “especially in poor neighborhoods,” so easily duped by simple prestidigitation, could feel satisfied knowing that their ever-smaller *bolillos* were emblems of revolutionary justice.

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<sup>92</sup> Sebastián Moreno and Alfredo Torices to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, México, D.F., 10/20/1933, AGN Presidentes, ALR, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5.

<sup>93</sup> “La pequeña industria está siendo destrozada por las cantidades de pan que diariamente se les decomisa no sólo a ellos sino también a los expendedores, con el pretexto de fabricar pan de tres por cinco centavos.” Sebastián Moreno to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 1/14/1935, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8. “Los locatarios en el ramo del pan, del mercado Alvaro Obregon están siendo perjudicados por la decomización que lleva a cabo la Comisión Reguladora del Ramo de Panaderías.” Isabel Bustamante to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 1/21/1935, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>94</sup> Salvador Bejerano to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 1/14/1935, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>95</sup> “Acuerdo por el cual se fija el precio y el peso del pan en el Distrito Federal.”

<sup>96</sup> Octavio B. Barona to Florentina García, México, D.F., 11/23/1933, AGN Presidentes, ALR, caja 202, exp. 561.8/5. Italics added.

The city government declared that it would not issue any new licenses to retail outlets that were not part of established bakeries, regardless of their location. In theory, peddlers and *tendajón* owners who had already received licenses could continue.<sup>97</sup> However, many complained that city officials refused to renew their permits.<sup>98</sup> A widow who ran a *tendejón* in Plaza Garibaldi wrote the city government to ask, “Is it possible that such a decision has been made, which will damage us poor people who lack *fábricas* and only subsist thanks to our bread sales?”<sup>99</sup> When the small producers wrote to the government requesting that the minimum prices be canceled, authorities responded that their request was impossible “because the objective of the restrictions on the free sale of bread is to prevent illicit competition and the formation of monopolies.”<sup>100</sup> Authorities continued to justify their defense of the Spanish monopoly by insisting that they were actually fighting monopolies.

Another strike erupted in January 1938 when owners refused the union’s demand for higher wages. The usual violence against non-union bakeries ensued, with strikers breaking the counters, throwing dough onto the floor, damaging machines, and beating the workers inside. At one bakery, they drenched the owner in cold water; at another, they scattered the long line of customers. The police arrived at another bakery, not to protect the workers inside, but rather to convince them to stop working.<sup>101</sup> Strikers closed the highways that entered the city in order to keep out bread from outlying towns. When they found a man walking down the street with a

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<sup>97</sup> “Reglamento de la Industria del Pan,” *Diario Oficial* 6/6/1936, 26–30; Adolfo Ruiz Cortines to Secretario Particular del Presidente de la República, México, D.F., 7/20/1936, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>98</sup> José T. Orrico to Secretario del Presidente de la República, México, D.F., 8/4/1936, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>99</sup> María Nieves Gómez Viudad de Rivera to Oficina de Licencias e Inspección Jefe del Departamento Central, México, D.F., 4/8/1936, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 355, exp. 415.2/21.

<sup>100</sup> Luis G. García to Ramón L. Sánchez, México, D.F., 9/18/1937, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>101</sup> “Sangre por la huelga del pan. Un muerto y un herido en una tahona,” *Gráfico* 1/4/1938.

basket of bread, they gave him a pummeling and took the bread.<sup>102</sup> This went on for five days and ended when owners agreed to a new contract with increased wages.<sup>103</sup>

A week later, a revised reglamento lowered the weight of bread from 110 to 75 grams.<sup>104</sup> Inspectors from the *comisión mixta* closed more small bakeries and confiscated bread. The small producers claimed that the *comisión mixta* closed twelve bakeries one day, and ten a week later.<sup>105</sup> The next week they protested the closure of ten more.<sup>106</sup> A large crowd of neighbors gathered in front of one small bakery to protest.<sup>107</sup> Customers were also indignant about the decreasing size of the bread on the shelves at the Spanish-owned bakeries. The pieces were of “such miniscule proportions that they could only throw them back.”<sup>108</sup> Inspectors also patrolled the markets, looking for *canasteros*. They took “nearly forty” to jail.<sup>109</sup> When one *canastero* defended his mother’s basket of bread, an inspector shot his pistol into the air; other *canasteros* then grabbed him and hit him with his own pistol. The police rushed in and arrested the first *canastero*.<sup>110</sup>

The chief of the Conciliation and Arbitration Board applauded the cooperation between government officials, unionists, and owners “to combat the nefarious clandestine bakeries”

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<sup>102</sup> “Continuaron los asaltos a las panaderías, pero esta vez sin que hubiera sangre,” *Excélsior* 1/6/1938.

<sup>103</sup> “Cómo acabó la huelga del ramo de panadería,” *El Universal* 1/8/1938.

<sup>104</sup> “A qué pesos y precio se venderá pan. Con fecha de ayer entró en vigor el nuevo reglamento para el Distrito Federal,” *El Nacional* 1/20/1938.

<sup>105</sup> “Más panaderías se clausuraron ayer,” *El Universal* 4/7/1938; “Diez panaderías más fueron cerradas sólo por vender panes de un peso no bajo,” *Excélsior* 4/12/1938.

<sup>106</sup> “Cierre en masa de panaderías por vender pan más barato,” *Excélsior* 4/15/1938.

<sup>107</sup> “Otro escándalo al ser cerrada ayer una tahona. El propietario de ella, señor Francisco B. Salido, fué golpeado.” *Excélsior* 4/21/1938.

<sup>108</sup> “Telescopios para comprar bolillos. Son de tan reducidas proporciones, que no se ven a la simple vista,” *Excélsior* 3/24/1938.

<sup>109</sup> “Nuevo amparo de propietarios de panaderías,” *El Universal* 2/3/1938. “Nueva batida a los canasteros. Los expendedores de pan en pequeño fueron detenidos en el mercado,” *Excélsior* 2/22/1938. Sebastián Moreno to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 3/9/1938, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>110</sup> “La situación es cada vez peor y temen choques,” *Excélsior* 1/13/1939.

including the “so-called small producers who have adopted a posture of open rebellion.”<sup>111</sup>

Whereas authorities previously had denied the actual effects and purpose of the reglamento, they now emphasized the alliance of the state, the union, and owners against the threat that the small producers represented toward the achievements of the revolution. In January 1939, after another day of conflicts between small producers and the *comisión mixta*, announcers on the weekly government radio broadcast, “La Hora Nacional,” denounced the “illegal competition” and the “reactionary agitation” of the small bakery owners.<sup>112</sup>

Nonetheless, as the persecution of small producers intensified, and the bread became ever lighter, it became increasingly difficult for the government to justify its bread policy. Officials argued that the assaults on the small producers benefited organized workers, but they avoided commenting on the Spanish owners. The small producers insisted precisely on this contradiction to order to question the government’s commitment to the revolution. “It is not true that the Revolution protects the proletariat,” they exclaimed. “The authorities are supporting the capitalists who victimize the proletarians. The district government has used the reglamento to favor the tyranny of foreign capitalists, covering up the existence of monopolies.”<sup>113</sup> This argument was likely compelling to customers, who saw the weight of bread decrease even further. The weight of *bolillos* oscillated between 40 and 80 grams.<sup>114</sup> “Since colonial times, the bread industry has been the exclusive economic activity of the dominant caste. The Mexican people eat scraps of stale bread because they are still a humiliated and vanquished race that pays

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<sup>111</sup> “Situación de la industria de panaderos. La abierta actitud de rebeldía asumida por un grupo, la ha perjudicado,” *El Nacional* 3/5/1938.

<sup>112</sup> Feliciano Gutiérrez and Vicente Reyes to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 1/9/1939, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8; Jesús J. Morales to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 1/5/1939, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8; “Considera el gobierno que la reventa del pan es una actividad fuera de la ley,” *Excelsior* 1/9/1939.

<sup>113</sup> “Los vendedores de pan barato, perseguidos.” *La Prensa* 1/19/1935.

<sup>114</sup> “Se acabaron los 'bolillos' de a dos por cinco,” *El Universal* 1/3/1939; “El pan creció y bajó de peso,” *El Universal* 1/3/1939; “Las panaderías defraudan al consumidor. El pan no tiene el peso que fija el reglamento,” *El Nacional* 1/5/1939.

a bitter tribute of hunger and deprivation.”<sup>115</sup> Why, commentators asked, was the government going to such lengths to support the Spanish monopoly?

Advisors to President Lázaro Cárdenas warned that the bakery struggle made the government vulnerable to criticism from the right. “The Reaction,” a report noted, “takes any disruption caused by the revolutionary efforts and uses it against the government.” The bread conflicts were especially damaging because a large number of people of limited economic possibilities, petty retailers (*canasteros*) and small producers, have had to be eliminated.” This was particularly embarrassing since the “large producers” whom the reglamento protected made bread whose “weight and quality have diminished in an alarming fashion [...] for the simple reason that they are not willing to lower their profits, accustomed as they are to an anachronistic system that has yielded them enormous riches.” The report urged the president to find employment for the small producers in state-sponsored cooperatives, where they would “make toys or any other objects that there is a market for.” Otherwise, they might join the forces of “Reaction.”<sup>116</sup>

By the late 1930s, fears of the “Reaction” indeed weighed upon Cárdenas. As the president reached the end of his term, conservative opposition over his support for organized workers, as well as the extensive land reform and anticlericalism, grew sharply.<sup>117</sup> His concerns were compounded by events in Europe, where fascists had taken over in Spain, Italy, and Germany. The same advisor brought this point home, reminding the president that, “In other

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<sup>115</sup> “Festín de mistificadores,” *La Prensa* 1/11/1939.

<sup>116</sup> Dr. Jesús Díaz Barriga to Lázaro Cárdenas, México, D.F., 1/16/1939, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>117</sup> John W. Sherman, “Reassessing Cardenismo: The Mexican Right and the Failure of a Revolutionary Regime, 1934-1940,” *The Americas* 54, 3 (1998): 357-378; Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán peasants, and the redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

countries, it is among such groups of small producers that Fascism has recruited its infantry.”<sup>118</sup> This political pressure, added to the street violence against small producers and the growing discontent among consumers, help explain a sharp change in the government’s rhetoric. In April 1939, on the heels of another wave of violence against small producers, the city governor cancelled the *comisión mixta*, arguing that “it has damaged the collective interest and strengthened, through new forms, the old monopolistic tendency.” In his declaration, he expressed what had been obvious for the last ten years:

The strongest industrialists declared they would accept the benefits the union demands, but only as long as the district government dictates a reglamento that would allow the *comisión mixta* to retain absolute powers over everything that pertains to the production and sale of bread. In other words, the large bread producers are willing to improve the conditions of their workers if, in exchange, the government gives a legal form to their monopoly and, furthermore, delegates to them sufficient authority to persecute and exterminate their competitors.<sup>119</sup>

Owners expressed their indignation in an open letter to Cárdenas. “Our blood has been offered in futile defense; it is unjust that now we are made to appear like exploiters of a people we respect and love.”<sup>120</sup> They need not have been quite so concerned, for the distance requirements and price fixing remained. These regulations continued to bolster their monopoly that now further enjoyed the protection by the state and unionized workers.

### ***Conclusion***

The Spanish bakery owners who became deeply entrenched in the everyday subsistence of Mexico City during Porfiriato would appear to have kept the bakers from achieving the rights

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<sup>118</sup> Díaz Barriga to L. Cárdenas, México, D.F., 1/16/1939, AGN Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8.

<sup>119</sup> “Absurda proposición de los tahoneros ricos. Querían obtener prerrogativas absolutamente ilegales, para consolidar el monopolio,” *El Universal* 3/30/1939.

promised by the revolution. During the 1920s, at least, when owners refused union demands and resisted strikes, this was indeed the case. What's more, to the degree that their recalcitrance rested on government support, the bakery owners represented more than the bread industry. The invariable arrival of strike-breaking police highlights the post-revolutionary regimes' broader reluctance to comply with the mandates of the Constitution of 1917. Faced with opposing demands of workers, owners, and consumers, the state opted to sustain the interests of the latter two groups at the cost of the first. Between the immovable weight of the barons of wheat, flour, and bread, on the one hand, and the imperious need to keep the city's masses fed, on the other, sacrificing bakers' rights appeared to be the most feasible option.

After 1928, as the array of political actors shifted and the bakers' leverage increased, authorities and employers began to negotiate. Subsequently, the government's bind was (1) how to satisfy bakery workers' demands without (2) causing a rise in the price of bread or (3) pushing owners toward political opposition. The most expedient resolution was to shave ounces from consumers' bread and restrict the rights of the small producers. The major owners demanded the restriction, if not the total elimination, of small producers in exchange for their concessions to union workers. The state then took up the awkward role of sanctioning and carrying out the persecution of Mexican businesses that sold cheap bread. Finally, unionized workers—no greater fans of free-market competition than their employers—equally restricted the small producers who jeopardized their leverage by selling bread during strikes and, more broader, threatened to erode the conditions that undergirded their labor contract.

To be sure, this confluence of interest made for a volatile alliance. Conflicts between owners and workers climaxed in August 1938 when Leandro Uzcanga, the leader of the baker's

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<sup>120</sup> "Carta Abierta al ciudadano presidente de la república General de División Lázaro Cárdenas," *El Nacional* 3/31/1939.

union, shot dead a Spanish owner inside the Conciliation and Arbitration Board.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, the attacks on small bakeries were a consequence of both the agreements between unions and owners, embodied in the reglamento, as well as the continued antagonism manifested in the strikes. The most naked violence against small producers occurred with the strikes, when unionists roughed up their non-union rivals. The duller but no less destructive violence against the small producers came with the resolutions, when inspectors closed their shops and confiscated their bread.

That vendors at the Abelardo L. Rodríguez Market were among the petty retailers who suffered the effects of the reglamento gives the mural inside an especially poignant irony. Yet, this alignment of forces fulfilled key exigencies in the realpolitik of production, consumption, and state formation. If the state had not supported the dominant bakery owners, the latter would have likely refused to accede to union demands. This would have left bakery workers in substandard conditions and strikes would have continued to disrupt the food supply. Shortages, in turn, rippling down from bakeries to tortilla stands in the market, would have compromised the state's claim as provider of the urban proletariat. On the other hand, in the improbable case that owners adhered to the contract without the restrictions established in the reglamento, small producers could have eroded their dominance. The union would have fallen with them, and the state would have lost a crucial constituent. Instead, organized workers achieved undeniable gains, the state could tout the "unification of the proletariat," and the population continued to have access to inexpensive bread (albeit of somewhat unpredictable size and quality). Yet, it was the Mexican small producers and retailers, not the Spanish owners—the supposed historical enemies of the Mexican proletariat—who footed the bill.

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<sup>121</sup> "Industrial asesinado ayer por un líder obrero," *Excélsior* 8/6/1938. Presidentes, LCR, caja 637, exp. 521/8