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- HARPER'S MONTHLY:** Harper's 1856 in an amiable spoof on the benefits of progress and the merits of democracy, comes up with a vision of the world of 3000 A.D. and anticipates both Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*.
- WARFEL:** Claremont resident and writer, submits another of her refreshing travel pieces for Quarterly readers.
- SCHRECKER:** cosmopolitan philosopher with a long and distinguished scholarly career both in Europe and America — was visiting professor at Claremont Graduate School and University Center last year. (Mr. Schrecker's article was translated by W. B. Hamilton)
- LOMBARDI:** 1963 Pomona College graduate and former student at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, interviewed a number of people in Mexico to write this study of a little known but potentially quite important movement in Mexican political life.

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MEXICO AND THE MLN

With a presidential election close at hand in Mexico, attention has been drawn to the recent formation of a leftist political group closely affiliated with Castro's Cuba. Increased discontent among the have-not groups has added to the importance of the new organization. Much of this discontent has focused on Mexico's one-party political system. Some have felt that the new movement may be an effort to force Mexico's predominant party to loosen its hold on public offices, while others have felt that the movement's chief purpose is to prepare the ground for a Castro-type revolution in Mexico.

In March 1961 the Latin American Congress for Peace, Emancipation and Liberty of Peoples was held in Mexico City. The Congress — a direct descendant of the international Communist conference held in Moscow in November-December of 1960 — was sponsored by Mexico's ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) and was supported by the Cuban, Russian and Chinese embassies. Attendance was poor in spite of the 16,000 dollars spent for publicity. In August 1961 the Mexican delegation met and formed the executive committee of a *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (MLN) to carry out the program of the Congress in Mexico.

The MLN program covers six major areas. First, the platform calls for a vigorous defense of national sovereignty. This, to no ones surprise, would mean a lessening if not complete elimination of United States influence in Mexican affairs. Second, foreign monopolies of natural resources must be ended. Third, national industrialists and businessmen must be protected by keeping Mexican industry genuinely Mexican rather than an appendix and source of profits for foreign capitalists. All foreign investment must be ended. Fourth, those political prisoners jailed by the government

under the law of social dissolution for their activities in pro-Cuban demonstrations must be released. Fifth, a revision in the national agrarian reform program must be made to speed up land distribution to the peasants. Sixth, university students, labor unions and *epidias* must be given more autonomy and their right to demonstrate must be guaranteed.

Perhaps the most important factor in the emergence of the MLN was the Cuban revolution. For many years Mexico had prided herself on the uniqueness of her revolutionary experience. The *mystique* of the Revolution was so strong that no political party could hope for success without basing its program on the Revolution. The Cuban revolution was a profound shock to the Mexican revolutionary myth. It provided dramatic contrast to the slow evolutionary progress of the Mexican Revolution. Because of this, many Mexicans were ready for more positive action in pushing forward the revolutionary goals of *¡Tierra y Libertad!*

To add to the political unrest, 1961 was a bad year economically. Because of Mexico's strict neutralist attitude toward Cuba much short-term capital left the country, keeping the growth rate down to four or five per cent. National income rose 3.5 per cent, back ahead of a population increase of 3.4 per cent. Added to the lack of economic growth, peasant uprisings in certain areas increased the general unrest.

Another reason for the activity in domestic politics is the phenomenon called *futurismo*. Since under the Mexican Constitution a President can never be elected for two successive terms, the maneuvering for position to influence the choice of a President begins early. Quite possibly the leaders of the MLN wanted to have more of a say in the choice of a President than they would have been given within the official party. By leaving the party and forming a pressure group they may be able to exert more influence on the decision makers within the official group. The strength of the movement may serve as an indicator of any discontent with the actions of the present government. These factors will be taken into

account when the actual choice of a presidential candidate is made.

For the last thirty years the political scene in Mexico has been dominated by a most successful one-party system. The party rose out of the need for order in the chaotic situation caused by the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. It developed to provide a measure of stability to the domestic politics of Mexico long characterized by military solutions to political problems.

Officially, the government party — now called the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) — is made up of three sectors of approximately equal influence: the Farm Sector, the Labor Sector, the Popular Sector. In fact, the power structure of the PRI resembles this only slightly. The most important faction within the PRI is the group of present office holders and entrenched bureaucrats. Predominant in this group are the Cabinet ministers and other high government officials. This group does the actual policy planning and has the largest influence in the selection of a presidential candidate. The other sectors such as labor, the industrial elite and the farmers only have influence insofar as they can exert pressure on the central core of officials.

The official party makes the decisions in Mexico. The PRI chooses the candidates for office — almost always tantamount to election. All policy conflicts are settled within the framework of the PRI and once a program has been agreed upon there is no real opposition. The elections in Mexico have the appearance of a farce since it is almost impossible for opposition candidates to make any significant gains. Nonetheless there are always opposition candidates presented. It is remarkable that the PRI candidates spend as much time as they do campaigning. It is not fair, however, to contend that the political system in Mexico does not allow for some reflection of opposition viewpoints.

Outside the PRI are two strong opposition movements holding radically different ideas. The conservative *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN) voices the opinions of the majority of conservatives within Mexico who feel that the PRI is carrying the country too far toward

a socialist state. On the left there is a conglomeration of parties and pressure groups one of which is the MLN. These leftist groups with the exception of the small, Marxist *Partido Popular Socialista* (PPS) are not qualified to run candidates in the elections. These groups represent all the viewpoints from mildly socialistic to ardently Communist. Both of these wings of Mexico's political activity attack the moderate policies of the government and of the PRI. In order to stay in power the PRI must gauge the influence of each of these groups and then move to placate one or the other. Thus by an indirect and inefficient means the voices of opposition groups are heard and are taken into account in the formation of official policy. This system while admitting many abuses has been a primary reason for the rapid development and political stability prevalent in Mexico since the end of the Revolution.

The central figure in the leftist movement has been ex-President Lázaro Cárdenas. Since his return to politics in early 1960, Cárdenas has been firmly on the side of the leftist, pro-Cuban element. He re-entered politics after a long retirement because he felt that the Mexican Revolution was being thwarted by the moderate government of President López Mateos. Almost as much a myth as the Revolution, Lázaro Cárdenas continues as the champion of rapid reform for the needs of the underdogs. He earned this reputation during his famous campaign for and term in the Presidency.

In 1934 General Lázaro Cárdenas was named presidential candidate by the official government party. He was picked for his popularity with the people and his record as a revolutionary general. Instead of accepting the nomination and eventual election as events predestined to occur, Cárdenas campaigned vigorously throughout Mexico as if there were a real election to be fought. He carried out the most extensive political campaign in Mexican history. No village was too small or insignificant to visit nor was any citizen too humble to be heard. More people saw and talked with the candidate than ever before. Cárdenas promised aid to small rural villages and land for the landless; not in six years or ten years but right away. He

was convinced that in order to be the actual president of Mexico he must have the support of all the people, not just the ruling junta of the PRI.

The Cárdenas administration will be remembered because more land was distributed to peasants than during any other administration. But it was not only in the field of land reform that Cárdenas' policy was radical. He was definitely on the side of labor against management. As he expressed it, "Any employers feeling weary of the social struggle may turn their industries over to the workers or the government. Such action would be patriotic; a shutdown would not be." This identification with the demands of the rural and industrial workers has given Cárdenas a reputation as a radical.

The real importance of the Cárdenas regime resides in the little things he did for people. The same spirit that permeated his election campaign was carried on in the policies of his government. The petition of a small Indian village for a well or for a school would be promptly and efficiently dealt with and should any demand of a *campesino* be at all feasible it would be granted. Cárdenas spent many hours and days traveling about the country visiting rural villages and meeting an endless procession of people. His ear was always ready to listen to the petition of a poor farmer and the doors to his office were open to any and all with special treatment for *los de abajo*. These things did not amount to much, measured in purely material terms, but they did create a legend around the name and the man. When asked why he was willing to take such great risks in his travels among the peasants, Cárdenas replied, "It is better to die doing good than to remain alive doing evil." His identification with the downtrodden and his association with fundamental land reform has kept Cárdenas an influential figure in contemporary politics.

Cárdenas' presence in the ranks of the MLN has made it a threat to the government. Because of his great prestige and large following it was felt that the MLN represented a substantial threat to the stability of Mexico.

Since the most important figure in Mexican politics is the President, all of these factors — Cárdenas, economic and social unrest, and the Cuban situation — have focused on the figure of López Mateos. He must exercise his power in order to keep it. If he does not he is courting disaster. In consideration of this the best way to view the development of the MLN is to examine its actions in contrast to the measures taken by López Mateos.

In order to maintain his position in Mexican politics as the supreme head of the PRI, López Mateos began his campaign to keep control on the political situation with a speech on Freedom of the Press day in June 1961. He spoke out strongly against foreign influence in Mexico, referring to the activities of Cárdenas whose movement is believed to be supported by the Cuban, Russian and Chinese embassies. This speech may have been meant to help the party candidates in the July 2 elections.

The results of these elections are hard to interpret. In general apathy prevailed. The PRI captured over 86 per cent of the votes, with the conservative party, PAN, next with 11 per cent. The only officially recognized party from the left, the PPS — a small Marxist party allied until 1963 with the MLN —, polled 1.9 per cent of the votes. Of course the comments were made that in Mexico the PRI counts the votes. This is true and may account for some of the small turnout. One remarkable feature of this election, however, was the quite unprecedented high vote recorded by the PAN. This does not necessarily indicate a strong rightist sentiment in the country, for many people vote for the PAN to register dissatisfaction with PRI policies. It is interesting to note that the PPS polled considerably less in the capital city than it did in 1955. If the elections can be trusted as indicators of the public mind they indicate no revolutionary temper in the summer of 1961.

In his State of the Union message in September 1961, López Mateos noted the formation of the MLN and the increased agitation on the left and right. He said, "Those who take up extreme positions have tried to qualify the Mexican revolutionary movement in a

colorless center position. Nothing is more false. Within our Constitution and within our ideals we are acting radically. We are realistic revolutionaries and not utopian dreamers." This speech established the theme of government attitude and policy toward the MLN. Government strategy has been to emphasize the role of the PRI as the primary supporter and actuator of the aims of the Revolution.

Because of the adverse criticism of the MLN for its rebellious tone, Cárdenas stated the non-violent orientation of MLN programs. Speaking in October, 1961 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his land distributions he said, "I am an enemy of violence, . . . There are other ways to achieve your [MLN] goals." This statement was a blow to the left as it came immediately following a condemnation of extremists by the PRI. The press, previously hostile to Cárdenas, recommended that leftist Mexicans follow his advice. These events caused some speculation on the possibility of an understanding between the PRI and Cárdenas.

In Mexico at present seven ex-Presidents are still living. Most of them are involved in politics in one way or another but two are the outstanding representatives of the left and the right: Lázaro Cárdenas and Lucas Alemán. At the end of 1961 in December López Mateos established a commission made up of the seven ex-Presidents. The commission appointments had the effect of putting the ex-Presidents in the midst of the presidential camp. Each member of the commission gave pledges of support to the government. That of Lázaro Cárdenas (Executive Director of the Balsas River Development Commission) was, "We will do our share, gladly, to assure the economic development of Mexico. I shall exert every effort to fulfill my duties efficiently." The establishment of this commission and Cárdenas' membership in it took some of the revolutionary drive out of the left.

In late 1961 López Mateos moved again to diminish the influence and drawing power of the MLN. The government passed a Constitutional amendment, approved by a majority of Mexico's twenty-nine states. The amendment requires profit sharing by both

Mexican and foreign companies operating in Mexico. A special committee appointed by the President will decide to how much profit sharing each industry will be subject, and it will have the power to exempt certain companies where reinvestment of profits will benefit Mexico more than will profit sharing. The amendment also tightened labor laws regarding firing of employees and protection of women and children. The importance of this new law will depend on how it is administered by the Presidential committee. The political effect of the amendment will be to remove some of the force of leftist propaganda directed at exploitation of Mexican resources by both foreign and domestic concerns. Although it is by no means a solution it does demonstrate that the government is aware of the problem and has moved to meet it.

In order to lessen the impact of the charges that the government is undemocratic and unrepresentative, in early 1963 the Chamber of Deputies broadened its representation by a new electoral law. A minimum of five seats will be conceded to any opposition party that polls 2½ per cent of the national vote in future congressional elections even should no one be elected. For each ½ per cent above this a seat will be conceded up to a maximum of twenty seats. This revision of the PRI's monopoly on the Chamber of Deputies may soften the impact of charges that the government is undemocratic. The measure may also dispel some of the cynicism with which Mexicans regard their elections.

In the middle of 1962 the official magazine of the MLN appeared. *Política's* first job was to try to unify and to define the left. "The Movement [MLN]" it said, "is not just one more organization 'along side of those now existing' . . . Its program is not an imitation of those elaborated in Moscow as some 'theoreticians' claim — who are as intemperate as they are removed from reality — nor is it a shallow invention of intellectuals." But this statement was followed in the same issue of *Política* by another that emphasized the respect of the MLN for the Constitution and assumed a position of loyal opposition. These definitions of the program of the MLN seem

to compromise its chances of attracting a large following because the concept of a loyal opposition is not viable where the loyal opposition has no chance to gain power legally.

The entire course of events since early 1961 suggests that the most notable aspect of the development of the MLN has been the government's and particularly López Mateos' response to its challenge. They have managed to make enough left of center speeches and sponsor enough left of center legislation to mitigate the impact of the MLN's program. This was a difficult task as López Mateos felt obligated to try to restore foreign confidence in Mexico which had been shaken during the Cuban invasion crisis. Mexico's slow growth rate encouraged the belief that foreign investment in Mexico was of prime importance in order to stay even with population growth. Mexico's stand against Soviet arms in Cuba has renewed the confidence of foreign capital, and a notable rise in investment is expected throughout 1963.

The strength and resources of the MLN merit examination at this point. One indication of the funds behind the movement is the amount spent on the publication of the two leftist, pro-Cuba magazines put out by MLN sympathizers. Mexican journalist Henri Cartault estimates that together these two magazines (*Política* and *¡Siempre!*) run a deficit of about 770,000 dollars a year. Since this is quite a sum to be made up out of contributions of individuals it is believed that the Cuban, Russian and Chinese embassies are providing the financial backing for the publications.

An indication of the probable strength or appeal of the MLN lies in the economic condition of the country. Since 1940 the middle class has risen from 12 per cent to 33 per cent. Nonetheless 40 per cent of the population lives in extreme poverty. Of even greater significance are the statistics on the state of farmers. Almost 20 per cent of private farmers are without land. Because a large group of communal farmers are either landless or dissatisfied with the land they do have one of the most difficult problems in Mexico today is agrarian reform and this is the area of most concentrated attention

by leftist groups. Mexico has very little good farm land. The land now in use is not always employed in the most efficient way because of inadequate training on the part of the farmers and insufficient social overhead capital in remote areas such as irrigation and adequate transportation. More credit is needed for the development of those farms now in use, and some of the productive land still held in non-productive *latifundios* must be released. The problem is urgent and quite complex. It cannot be solved by some simple expedient such as land distribution. The discontent caused by these agrarian imbalances are being exploited by the MLN in their organization and tactics. The discontented farmers are very susceptible to the programs promoted by the MLN.

The attempts to estimate the strength of the MLN have been at best only approximate. The strength of the MLN and other leftist groups is difficult to judge because in the net of pro-Cuban and pro-Communist agitation in Mexico the same people may be found on the executive committees writing the articles for the propaganda sheets. However, it has been estimated that out of the 35 million inhabitants of Mexico these groups command no more than one thousand permanent and active members. But, this does not take into consideration the large numbers of people who although not official members of the MLN would be willing to support its programs.

Up to the middle of 1962 the Mexican left composed of Cárdenas and the MLN had the support of Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the Marxist *Partido Popular Socialista* (PPS). However, in the middle of 1962 a profound break occurred between the two parties and leaders. The occasion of the split was the World Peace and Disarmament Congress in Moscow. A question arose about who would appoint the delegates to the conference. Both the MLN and the PPS appointed delegations and sent them. Moscow accepted the MLN delegation thus terminating a long friendship with Lombardo Toledano. This split has done much to lessen the chances of the revolutionary left in Mexico, for even united theirs is a hard battle

Separated and quarreling there seems to be little hope for a powerful opposition party.

No sooner had the controversy over the split between the MLN and the PPS died down when the Mexican left was dealt another blow. The crisis over the presence of Russian nuclear arms in Cuba caused conflicts within the left. Carlos Fuentes, a prominent intellectual leader, suggested that Cuba should break away from a "servile imitation of the Soviet experience. The defense of Cuba is . . ." the defense of Mexico and, ". . . above all Soviet or North American interests, we are with Cuba." *Politica* tried to restore harmony and warned against a split. The controversy over whether to support Soviet intervention in Cuba or whether to denounce it did much to lessen the influence of the MLN.

In this discussion the MLN has been treated as if it were an isolated political group within the Mexican milieu. However this is not the case. The MLN is just one of the more recent manifestations of leftist agitation in Mexico. Its leaders and prominent members are all people who have taken part in similar organizations in the past. The MLN was formed not as a political party but rather as a pressure group to sound out the depth of discontent with PRI policies.

In early 1963 a *Central Campesina Independiente* (CCI) was formed to appeal to the large group of farmers dissatisfied with the government agrarian program. This group is a good example of the interrelated nature of the Mexican left. The central executive committee of the CCI is composed of people either belonging to or working with the MLN. Yet the CCI and the MLN have stressed their independence of each other.

These interlocking hierarchies of the various groups tend to complicate the situation. While on the surface the Mexican left appears to be splintered into many disparate groups the fact of the matter is that there are only two or three major centers of leftist leadership and even these are interrelated.

An indication of this community of purpose was the formation

in May 1963 of a *Frente Electoral del Pueblo* (FEP). This group's avowed purpose was to bring all of the leftist groups under its banner and then run a candidate for President in the 1964 elections. At present (June 1963) the FEP is in the process of trying to register with the authorities in Baja California in order that they might appear on the ballot.

The leadership of the FEP consists of members of all the main leftist political groups in Mexico: the PRS, the MLN, the CCI, and the small Mexican Communist party the PCM. While disagreeing among themselves over the tactics that should be used these many groups show a general consistency in their political philosophy. They seem to follow the general outlines of Marxist-Leninist dogma. They engage in a concerted effort to keep people stirred up in demonstrations and the bewildering array of different political groups is designed to appeal to the largest possible body of people. They emphasize the legal conquest of political power, although some of the peasant leaders grow impatient and sometimes revert to violence. They exhibit a feeling of good will toward the Communist Bloc countries and the support of the Cuban revolution is a major slogan. The Cuban missile crisis, however, has tarnished the Soviet-Cuban image.

Despite these manifestations of the world Communist movement the leftist movement is not necessarily being directed in any concrete way by Moscow. Mexico is not interested in the ideological aspects of the cold war and is just as hostile to Soviet imperialism as it is to American imperialism. Marxist-Leninist doctrine is probably being used to further the political aims of one group of Mexicans for the benefit of Mexico. While individual Communists may lurk within the movement it is essentially Mexican rather than Soviet.

The future of the MLN itself is hard to predict. On its own it offers little hope for success as a political party inasmuch as it has consistently refused to enter the lists as anything more than a "movement." If, on the other hand, the MLN should join the newly formed front, the FEP, this group would be greatly strengthened. The FEP

has little chance to elect a President but under the new system of representation in the Chamber of Deputies it might gain a maximum of 20 seats.

The MLN has apparently come to an impasse in its political development. It must either join the FEP, reconstitute itself as a political party or be reduced to an insignificant faction. Since the MLN's leadership is partially included in the executive of the FEP the MLN will probably merge with the FEP before the elections in 1964. Mexican politics offer a varied panorama, sometimes explosive, sometimes not, but always interesting.