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Mary Kay Vaughan*

The Implementation of National Policy in the Countryside: Socialist Education in Puebla in the Cárdenas Period

Since the mid-1930's, the question has been debated whether socialist education in Mexico was demagoguery and rhetoric which interrupted the process of education initiated by the Revolution, or whether federal teachers formed a vanguard of the Cárdenas social reform program (1934-1940) mobilizing communities for change and national integration. Whatever one's view, it is clear that the implementation of national policy must be looked at in the countryside toward which it was directed, and where the interplay between local, regional, and national political forces shaped its practice.[1]

This essay on socialist education in the state of Puebla between 1934 and 1938 confirms that religious opposition--long held to be a central source of hostility to the school--was widespread. However, other factors also shaped the implementation of socialist education and its reception. At the local level, revolutionary upheaval, agrarian reform, and the volatile politics of state formation had unleashed a high level of rural conflict, which reverberated in responses to schooling. At the regional level state governments, jealous of their autonomy and politically conservative, failed to promote socialist education and marginalized federal teachers from the political process of national integration. At the national level the army was negligent in protecting teachers. President Cárdenas, deferential to the state government and to the military, apparently did little to guarantee tecahers' threatened lives. As other government agencies entered communities, they were not always cooperative with the school effort and their presence tended to diminish the role of the teacher in social change. These factors, combined with the teachers' lack of preparation and political feuding within the Secretaría de Educación Pública, meant that socialist education in Puebla more clearly resembled the school of the 1920s rather than an abrupt radicalization in policy, and that as such it continued to evoke grass-roots resistance as an institution which threatened longstanding cultural practices in the name of its civilizing mission.

Since the Porfiriato, Mexican educational policy followed a single ideological trajectory which aimed at integrating masses of people into a capitalist market and nation-state. Insofar as socialist education fit within that trajectory, it was not a hiatus in policy. In three ways, it differed in degree but not in kind from national school policy in the 1920s. First, it was more explicitly anti-clerical than its predecessor, although this specific aspect of education seems to be associated with Narciso Bassols, Education Minister from 1931 to 1934, and with Plutarco Elías Calles, Jefe Máximo of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario. After Cárdenas successfully challenged Calles' dominance over the party in 1935, the new president sought a modus vivendi with the Church. Within the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), the question of "defanaticization" was soft-pedalled in directives to school inspectors and teachers in 1936.

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[1]Most scholars share the first critical perspective on the socialist school; see, for instance, John A. Britton, *Educación y radicalismo en México*, 2 vols. (Mexico City, 1976); Victoria Lerner, *La educación socialista. Historia de la Revolución mexicana, período 1934-1940*, vol. 17 (Mexico City, 1979); and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, "La educación socialista en los años treinta", *Historia Mexicana*, 18 (1969); pp. 408-423. D.L. Raby's pioneer work in oral history, *Educación y revolución social* (Mexico City, 1974), argued the teachers' role in social reform, as did Arnaldo Córdova, "Los maestros rurales en el cardenismo", *Cuadernos políticos*, 2 (1979), pp. 77-92.

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Second, the socialist school proposed a more explicit role for the teacher in socio-economic reform: in the implementation of federal labor and agrarian laws, in the mobilization of workers and peasants against oppressors, and in the unification of popular movements. Implicity, the teacher had always been an agitator. This new emphasis on mobilization came in part from the teachers themselves, in part from more radical leadership in the SEP, and in part from President Cárdenas, who saw the critical role of education in the dual task of securing social justice for the masses and integrating them into the state.

Third, the socialist school placed more explicit emphasis on developing democracy and opposing caciquismo at the grass-roots levels than did its predecessor. This emphasis, clear in programmatic prescriptions and a plethora of new texts emanating from the SEP, echoed the sentiments of Mexican intellectuals identified with the Communist Party, whose reverence for grass-roots process stemmed from their anarchist formation. How effective this approach was in practice is very much open to question. In principle it served as a mandate to unseat local powerholders unfriendly to the Revolution and the welfare of the masses. As a complement to these changes, new textbooks emphasized the role of class struggle in Mexican history. But in the most fundamental and critical way, the socialist school was still the school of the 1920s and of the Porfiriato: it sought to integrate masses of people, thought to be traditional, backward, primitive, and ethnically different, into a singular urban, culturally homogeneous capitalist paradigm and its patron, the emerging nation-state.[2]

In looking at the implementation of socialist schooling, it is critical to grasp context: the configuration of conditions at the local, state, and national levels which shaped the implementation of school policy, its reception, and its impact. Categorically, it can be stated that in Puebla federal teachers did not play a vanguard role in agrarian reform, nor were they key actors in political processes. Nor were they rabid anti-religious propagandists. Without exaggeration, Puebla was no hospitable environment for the socialist school.[3] In the Cárdenas years, approximately seventeen teachers lost their lives in actions the teachers invariably attributed to "cristeros" and "enemies of agrarianism", stimulated by "clerics and the bourgeois reaction".[4] Federal teachers probably faced more violence in Puebla than anywhere else in the country except Jalisco, cradle of the cristero rebellion of 1926. The reasons for the divergence in teacher behavior from national policy prescriptions and for strong opposition to socialist education must be found in an analysis of local economic structures, social formations, and regional politics. These must be examined within the context of a complex and fluid process of post-revolutionary state formation which culminated during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas.

The fact that Puebla's countryside was "traditional", within the SEP's definition of its modernizing mission, made Puebla both a target for the school's program and a logical place for resistance to it. The state had a large indigenous and mestizo population living in varying degrees of subordination to haciendas and sugar mills in the state's central southern regions and to regional cacicazgos based on commercial exploitation in the Sierra Norte. Because Puebla was a venerable seat of Catholic

[2]I have analyzed the changes in program policy, textbooks, and complementary materials in "Ideological Change in Mexican Educational Policy, Programs, and Texts, 1920-1940", *Proceedings of the VI Conference of Mexican and United States Historians* (Los Angeles, forthcoming).

[3]This preliminary essay on the state of Puebla is part of a long-term project on the socialist school at the regional level. It is based on school inspectors' reports for 1936 contained in the SEP archives, material from the Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas in the Archivo General de la Nación, Puebla newspapers and governors' memorials, interviews with veteran Puebla teachers, U.S. Military Post Reports, and two recent secondary works on Puebla in the 1930s: Julio Glockner Rossainz, *La presencia del Estado en el medio rural. Puebla, 1929-1941* (Puebla, 1982), and Jesús Márquez Carrillo, "Los orígenes del Avilacamachismo. Una arqueología de fuerza en la constitución de un poder regional. El estado de Puebla, 1929-1941" (Tésis de Licenciatura, Colegio de Historia, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1983).

[4]Raby identified nine teachers murdered in Puebla in this period in her article, "Los maestros rurales y los conflictos sociales en México (1931-1940)", *Historia Mexicana*, 18 (1968); pp. 19-226. So far, I have identified eight other assassinations.

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Church power in Mexico, poblanos were often intensely loyal to their religion, which educational ideology had consistently identified with anti-scientific values and unproductive behavior.

Socio-economic formations such as these seem to have been penetrable by the revolutionary federal school under two conditions. First, teachers had to build an organic relationship with communities through personal charisma and/or by playing a key role in agrarian and other reforms. Second, the space and respect teachers won in communities through their identification with reform depended upon larger processes of state formation, i.e., the degree to which teachers were supported by and played a part in emerging political organizations (campesino organizations, trade unions, political parties). Neither one of these conditions existed in Puebla. Most agrarian reform took place before the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. Although teachers seem to have played a role in helping communities obtain land, their assistance did not win them a significant bargaining position in their communities. More than most Mexican states in the post-revolutionary era, Puebla was wracked by anarchy and localism. This situation prevented teachers from building effective, enduring linkages with supra-local organizations, which in turn would have enhanced their power in communities. Not unitl 1929 did a state political machine, linked to the national PNR and under the leadership of Governor Leonides Andreu Almazán (1929-1933), begin to gain control over local forces.[5] In some parts of the state, federal teachers played a role in this initial consolidation. However, when Almazán and his faction were ousted from leadership of the state PNR by Governors José Mijares Palencia (1933-1937) and Maximino Ávila Camacho (1937-1940), federal teachers lost favor and influence. Their marginalization occurred at a critical moment of political integration: the unification of campesino and worker organizations and the consolidation of the state PNR machine. As President Cárdenas called upon federal teachers to lead in this unification, one might have expected the central government to intervene in Puebla in such as way as to broaden the political space open to federal teachers and to provide them with resources to realize their program of socio-economic change. Neither at the level of the presidency, the military, nor reform and development agencies did the central government do so.

Troughout Puebla in 1935 and 1936, school inspectors attributed low attendance to religious propaganda. How organized this religious opposition was is unclear. Puebla scholars have argued that the Church was stronger in the cities than in the countryside, and that even in the cities conservative Catholic groups like the Acción Católica, The Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia, and the Camisas Doradas appealed to the upper and middle classes but failed to develop a following among the workers.[6] Puebla never developed a militantly Catholic peasant movement similar to the cristero armies which fought the government in western Mexico between 1926 and 1929. Nonetheless, spontaneous resistance to socialist education as Godless was widespread in rural Puebla in 1935-1936 and was undoubtedly spurred on in places by clerical written propaganda and sermons.

Only in the Sierra Norte (Teziutlán, Huauchinango, Zacatlán, and Zacapoaxtla), where violence against the school was greatest, did teachers pinpoint specific priests as instigators and blame the state governors for allowing an illegal number of them to preach. The role of clerics in organized opposition to the school may have been strengthened by the presence of the Veracruz Church-in-exile in Teziutlán and ties with the archdiocese of Tulancingo among priests in the western districts of Zacatlán and Huauchinango. According to teachers, in April, 1935 residents from six barrios of Teziutlán organized a band which attacked the city on Good Friday. Holding the hill

[5]Glockner, *La presencia del Estado*, p. 21.
[6]Jesús Márquez Carrillo, "Los orígenes del Avilacamachismo", pp. 70-85.

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of Cihitl, they descended in subsequent months on their own and other communities, assaulting residents as well as teachers. On July 18 they burned the school at El Mohón and on the 30th bombarded the one in Ixtlahuacán, setting fire to the files, supplies, and doors. On August 8 they broke down the doors and destroyed the furniture in the school of Ahuatengo, then smeared its interior with human excrement. During a school fiesta on August 15 they tried to kill the teachers Carlos Pastraña and Atalo de Santillana, who were shielded by villagers. But on November 15 Pastraña was murdered along with the teachers Librado Labástida and Carlos Sayago. At this point the school inspector, who himself had been fired upon in the middle of the city of Teziutlán, gathered the teachers in the town. The teachers claimed that the rebels received support from the "authorities, capitalists, and clerics" of Teziutlán. They pointed to the priest, José Cabezas, a one-time rebel leader now illegally operating in the city despite his trial for sedition. They named two other priests from the Teziutlán cathedral and the priests of Chignahuautla and Atempan, who according to the teachers went out into the communities to organize opposition.[7] Teachers attributed a series of murders in Zacatlán in 1936 and 1937 to "fanatical action" fomented by illegally practicing priests. The school inspector in Huauchinango blamed resistance to schooling on the propaganda of Pahuatlán's priest.[8]

Pre-conditions for this hostile reaction to schooling existed in the multiple indigenous communities of the Sierra. While relations between mestizo caciques and Indian villages had always been exploitative, they also protected the indigenous people from outsiders and so permitted the persistence of a high degree of cultural cohesion and village integration. The federal school, entering the region in accelerated fashion in the early 1930s, alienated villagers with its aggressive program of cultural change and its "foreign" teachers. Because religiosity was central to village cohesion, teachers' questioning of it, or reputed questioning, did not endear them to large sectors of the local population. The potential for such opposition to crystallize in violence was enhanced by another factor. Immediately prior to the Revolution, rapid population growth in the districts of Teziutlán, Huauchinango, and Zacatlán created conditions for the emergence of armed bands, mobilized in 1910, then maintained and ecouraged by internecine cacique feuding. This feuding was stimulated by the penetration of competing Revolutionary armies and factions in the course of armed struggle (1910-1917) and incipient state formation after 1917. Until 1929, the level of feuding was kept somewhat in check by the local potentate, General Gabriel Barrios.

The fact that "cristeros" did not confine their attacks to teachers and schools, but also targeted farmers, merchants, and political office-holders suggests that the detonator sparking violence against the socialist school was not religious fervor alone. It related to the Revolutionary state's penetration of the region after 1929. To widen his power base within the state PNR machine, Governor Almazán entered the Sierra Norte, exiled General Barrios, and sponsored the emergence of new political office-holders.[9] To promote state penetration, Almazán sometimes used agrarian reform and also used the federal school. Two Puebla scholars identify the violence in the Sierra with teacher promotion of agrarian reform.[10] Stronger evidence suggests that disputes over political power were more important than disputes over property. In the Sierra Norte, Indians showed relatively little interest in agrarian reform because they held small plots of land, while mestizos monopolized commerce and

[7]Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter cited as AGN), Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas (hereafter cited as Cárdenas), Expediente 545.2/2, Mariano Franco and José Muñiz to Cárdenas, May 16, 1938.

[8]*Ibid.*, Rogelio Coria to Cárdenas, May 15, 1937.

[9]This thesis has been proposed by Jesús Márquez Carrillo, "Los orígines del Avilacamachismo", p. 150, and seems to be borne out by more extensive archival research.

[10]*Ibid.*, pp. 145-147; Glockner, *La presencia del Estado*, pp. 91-92.

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political office. Disputes within villages, between villages, between *barrios* and head-towns, *pueblos* and *cabeceras*, and between regional cacique families became commonplace in struggles for political power.[11] A second wave of commotion occurred between 1934 and 1936 when the faction of the state PNR machine associated with José Mijares Palencia and Maximino Ávila Camacho ousted the Almazanistas in a particularly brutal contest for power. This shake-up coincided with the introduction of socialist education and violence against the school.

Although Governor Almazán had exiled General Barrios, Barrios' armed bands still roamed the region in 1935-36 allegedly taking orders from his home in Mexico City. A direct associate was Odilón Vega, scourge of the western Sierra who attacked teachers and schools to the cries of "Viva Cristo Rey!" Folk wisdom has it that the devoutly Catholic mother of Governor Maximino Ávila Camacho (and future Mexican president Manuel Ávila Camacho) hired the "cristeros" of the eastern Sierra to attack the teachers around her hometown of Teziutlán. The story is not entirely far-fetched. Violence against teachers in the Sierra Norte coincided with Maximino Ávila Camacho's expulsion of Almazanistas from political power in the Sierra. Among the Almazanistas was another powerful family of the Sierra, the Molina Betancourt family of Zacapoaxtla. Rafael Molina Betancourt was Oficial Mayor of the Secretaría de Educación Pública in 1935 and in 1938 a federal deputy, secretary of press and propaganda of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, and member of the board of directors of the Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal.[12] His brother Fausto was Director of Federal Education in Puebla throughout the Cárdenas period. The expansion of federal schooling in the Sierra Norte in the 1930s represented an expansion of influence for the Molina Betancourt family, with which Maximino Ávila Camacho and several of his cacique allies were not in agreement. Given the byzantine world of Mexican politics and Maximino Ávila Camacho's reputation for sinister tactics, it is not unreasonable to imagine that he used his mother's piety to further his interests.

In the center and south of Puebla, opposition to socialist education was also widespread in 1935-6. The reaction was not as concentrated and violent as in the Sierra. Hostility came from landowners, pistoleros, and caciques jealous of local power and property.[13] It also came from agraristas, land reform recipients who in principle were expected to support the school. Because most land division had taken place in central Puebla prior to the advent of socialist education, teachers could hardly act as a vanguard in land reform. Although evidence suggests that many teachers had used their literacy skills and familiarity with urban bureaucracies to help villages obtain land, their efforts had won them little local bargaining power. Ejido (land reform) committees fought with the teacher over the plot of land legally allotted to the school to finance the purchase of supplies, furniture, and repairs. Ejido officials not infrequently seized the harvest of the school plot or assigned the plot to themselves and their friends for private use.[14] When land reform gave rise to disputes within villages concerning the distribution of ejido plots, the election of the ejido committees, the allocation of water, or the functioning of cooperatives, the teacher was put in an awkward position. If the teacher related to one faction or another, the move might cost the school pupils. The teacher could attempt to mediate disputes, as the SEP instructed, but mediation within communities and between the communities and the emerging state seems to have rested not with the

[11] *See*, for example, Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de la Educación Pública (hereafter cited as SEP), Dirección General de Educación Primaria en los Estados y Territorios (hereafter cited as DGEP), Expediente IV/100 (IV-4) (724.7)/1, Porfirio Cordero, Zacapoaxtla, February-April 1936; informes, Sabino Rodríguez, Huauchinango, SEP, April 17, July 4, and Sept. 19, 1936; Esteban Muñoz to Sabino Rodríguez, Oct. 22, 1936.

[12] AGN, Cárdenas, Expediente 534.6/362, Maximino Ávila Camacho to Cárdenas, March 4, 1938.

[13] AGN, Cárdenas, February 27, 1936; Expediente 542.1/2404, Luis Pérez, *et. al.*, to Cárdenas, August 2, 1938.

[14] *See* SEP, DGEP, Expediente IV/181.21(IV-4) 724.7, Miguel Villa, Inspector Escolar, to Ingeniero Francisco Aguilar Gómez, Jefe de Zona Ejidal, Departamento Agrario, April 17, 1936.

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teacher but with agrarian reform bureaucracies, state-wide campesino organizations, and the state-level PNR.

None of the institutions at the local, regional, or national level seems to have given much space or importance to the federal school in the mid-1930s. The state PNR did not provide the support necessary to offset what appeared to be widespread local indifference to schools. In the 1930s the state government and the PNR were still in the process of gaining control over strife-ridden local governments. Even before the advent of socialist education, municipal authorities were notoriously lax in assisting the school.[15] Some protected the school's enemies or were in their employ, others were indifferent, and still others were afraid for their own lives or incapable of defending the teachers.[16] Teachers and inspectors repeatedly urged the SEP to have the state governor pressure the minicipalities to fulfill the laws of obligatory education, and the governor usually responded with a written circular tepid in tone and probably of little impact. Nor were the state administrations of José Mijares Palencia and Maximino Ávila Camacho warm supporters of the socialist school. Traditionally jealous of their autonomy, state governors were often wary of federal teachers, whom they believed to be agitators and knew to be outside their jurisdiction. Puebla had inherited a strong state school system built during the nineteenth century. State schools dominated the cities, district cabeceras, and many pueblos. Federal schools had to locate in small towns and more isolated areas. Still, the federal school had penetrated the state probably because of the instability of state governments in the 1920s and Governor Almazán's friendlier attitude toward the federal school during his tenure. In 1930, there were 760 federal schools and only 260 state schools.

Reformed Article Three of the Mexican Constitution, which established socialist education, had passed the Puebla state legislature backed by Masonic Lodges, trade unions, and Governor Mijares Palencia out of his loyalty to Plutarco Elías Calles, but Mijares' successor, Maximino Ávila Camacho, was an avowed political conservative who ran his 1936 campaign on a stridently anti-communist platform.[17] During his years in office he consolidated a state PNR machine which incorporated and subordinated worker and peasant organizations to the interests of the owning class. His task was facilitated by division within the trade union movement, the dispersed and fragmented nature of agrarianism in the state, and the alacrity with which the favored Confederación Campesina Emiliano Zapata lent itself to struggles against "Communists". Further, Ávila Camacho constructed an effective modus vivendi with the Catholic Church.[18] Although some Catholic schools had been closed in 1934, neither Mijares Palencia nor Maximino Ávila Camacho appear to have vigorously enforced anti-clerical legislation, and the teachers' constant accusation that they permitted priests to officiate beyond their legal numbers is undoubtedly true.

Maximino Ávila Camacho opposed outside interference in his consolidation of the state PNR.[19] In 1940 he opposed the federalization of education, a central state project backed by organized teachers. Although federal policy recommended that teachers play a vanguard role in the unification of campesino and worker organizations, Ávila Camacho sought to exclude them from these processes and also

[15] *See*, for example, SEP, Escuelas federales en la sierra de Puebla: informe sobre la visita a las escuelas federales en la sierra de Puebla realizado por el C. Subsecretario de Educación, Prof. Moisés Sáenz (Mexico City, 1927).

[16] SEP, DGEP, Expediente IV/100 (IV-4) (724.4)/1, Informe Tirso García, Huauchinango, June 22, 1936; Informes, Jesús López, Ahuatempan, April 3, 1936, July 20, 1935, August 11, 1936; Informe, Sabino Rodríguez, Huauchinango, April 17, 1936; Antonio Reyes, Presidente Auxiliar, Ahuacatlán, to Sabino Rodríguez, Huauchinango, Nov. 4, 1936.

[17] *See*, for example, Diario de Puebla, Jan. 10, Jan. 20, 1936.

[18] Jesús Márquez Carrillo traces relations between church and state in Puebla in his "Orígenes del Avilacamachismo", pp. 39, 73-75, 84-86.

[19] However, as Jesús Márquez Carrillo demonstrates, he used the national Confederación de Trabajadores de México to discipline the dominant regional trade union organization while the national PNR was instrumental in bringing about campesino unification and the formation of the state Confederación Nacional Campesina affiliate; see "Los orígenes del Avilacamachismo", pp. 211-238.

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attempted to control the unionization of teachers. When he saw his control threatened, he reacted quickly. In 1937 he wired Cárdenas that federal teachers were intervening in the process of campesino unification. Behind them, he saw the hand of Rafael Molina Betancourt and his brother Fausto, whom he accused a few months later of agitating among teachers to split their union.[20] He went so far as to blame them for the murder of a teacher in Tochimilco, an accusation which merits further research.[21]

Nor did Puebla's federal teachers receive strong support from the central government they represented. Beneath the veneer of a central government committed to the democratic and social rigths of the oppressed, conservative regional political machines were being consolidated and integrated into the emerging state and its political party, the PNR. President Cárdenas supported teacher radicalism in certain states but not in others. Toward Puebla, he practiced a "hands-off" policy in return for loyalty from Maximino Ávila Camacho.

When the president received frantic telegrams from SEP representatives telling him of teacher assassinations in Puebla, he turned to the state governor to send in federal troops and to conduct an investigation. Evidence suggests that federal army officers of the 25th Military Command were negligent and cynical in their protection of teachers. Following a series of teacher assassinations in Zacatlán in June, 1936, the 15th Military Command reported to the War Department that the region was calm, that the press had mistakenly reported the burning of one school, and that residents, now apprehended by municipal authorities, had torched two other schools. "As for the cristeros the teachers so often mentioned", reported the military officer, "these are a few prison escapees devoted to plunder".[22] In July, the 25th Military Command told the Minister of War that there was no threat to teachers' lives and that only personal misconduct could account for their being in danger. This charge the officers repeated in September.[23] In that month, Prof. Roberto Candeñedo Olmos was murdered near Zacatlán. The SEP called all its teachers into the city and Fausto Molina Betancourt wired Cárdenas that the situation in both Zacatlán and Teziutlán was desparate.[24] Sent to investigate the death of Candañedo Olmos, the army reported that according to the victim's mother the local judge had killed him. They indicated no further need for protection or investigation, nor did the governor.[25] Teachers appealed to Cárdenas for the right to bear arms, for the organization of Defensas Rurales among the campesinos, and for the deployment of military detachments around threatened schools. The military was keen on none of these, and it claimed not to have enough troops to meet all the requests. Although some Defensas Rurales were organized the military viewed these as promoting violence and banditry, and had them disarmed definitively in 1938.[26] General Manuel Enrique, in charge of the 25th Military Command in 1936, made no secret of his contempt for "Communist elements which claim to enjoy the support of certain influential personages".[27]

Neither did other units of the central government offer much support to teachers. Officially the federal teacher was a much celebrated broker between rural squalor and backwardness on the one hand and modernity and well-being on the other. Alone the teacher was hardly prepared to implement the grandiose scheme of transformation the SEP assigned itself, because he/she was not likely to be a modern agronomist, nor an expert in small industries, nor an urban-trained doctor. For these tasks, other state agencies

[20]AGN, Cárdenas, Expediente 404.4/24, Maximino Ávila Camacho to Cárdenas, Dec. 1, 1937.
[21]*Ibid.*, March 4, 1938.
[22]AGN, Cárdenas, Expediente 545.2/2, Manuel Ávila Camacho, Subsecretario de Guerra, to Cárdenas, June 19, 1936.
[23]*Ibid.*, Manuel Núñez, Col. Jefe de Ayudantía, to Rodríguez, July 20, 1936; José Mijares Palencia to Rodríguez, Sept. 28, 1936.
[24]*Ibid.*, Fausto Molina Betancourt to Cárdenas, Sept. 3, 1936.
[25]*Ibid.*
[26]U.S. National Archives, U.S. Military Post Reports, Nos. 2657 G 605/419/7706, Dec. 11, 1936; 2657 G 605/420/7717, Dec. 15, 1936.
[27]*See Ibid.*, 2657 G 605/419/7706, Dec. 11, 1936.

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had to assist, and in this regard three patterns emerged in Puebla. First, in many instances these other agencies did not come with the exception of the health authorities who taught teachers how to vaccinate. It is now well-known that agrarian reform, understood in the full sense not only as land division but assistance with production and marketing, was highly uneven in the Mexican Revolution and that its major beneficiaries were in select areas of large-scale commercial agriculture, usually for export. Thus in Puebla, an area of many small producers of domestic staples, state agencies did not provide credit, technical assistance, water, or market organization on a scale which would have made feasible the school's project of significant material transformation.

Second, when these agencies came into rural areas their experience with the communities and the teachers was not always positive. One veteran teacher, who taught all over Puebla, recalled:

> When the agrarian authorities arrived in Nopalucan, they first went to the hacendados and showed them their plans. The hacendados changed the demarcated lands, gave fewer of them and more distant ones. In the land question, there was always corruption on the side of the big landowners.[28]

In the east-central region of Tecamachalco in 1936, the school inspectors explained that the ejidatarios had received an average of 1.5 hectares of temporal land with no access to water. With payments always pending to the Ejidal Bank they lived no differently, he said, than they had as peones. Without specifics, he wrote:

> It is the role of the teacher to see to it that the interests of campesinos do not suffer, that moral and economic fraud is avoided, since through bitter experience we have learned that many government agents abuse their responsibility, creating mistrust in the institutions they represent.[29]

The teachers often found themselves in the curious position of representing a state whose misdeeds they criticized on principles of social justice and democracy in accord with SEP doctrine.

A third pattern emerged. As other state agencies entered communities, the teacher's role in social, political, and economic change diminished. In Tecamachalco teachers' involvement in economic improvement had been curtailed by the arrival of the Ejidal Bank. Federal agencies like the Agrarian Department or the Ejidal Bank were sometimes contemptuous of the school and teacher. For example, in the fight for the SEP to keep the legally allotted school plot from being confiscated by the ejido committees in Texmelucan, the Agrarian Department apparently sided with the ejidatarios against the school. At the same time, the consolidation of campesino organizations at the regional and national levels in the Cárdenas period tended to leave teachers marginalized from local political life. The school inspector in Tecamachalco wrote:

> The campesino leagues have now been absorbed into big groups in the capital and have abandoned their defensive posture. The leaders are given to politics. We try to discourage this behavior but as the pueblos are divided into factions, when the teachers intervene, they are seen as taking sides. Only in a few places do people see democratic organization as a reality.[30]

In its mandate to improve production and to foster grassroots democracy, the school found other agencies of the central government and popular organizations to

[28]Interview, Puebla, Puebla, March 6, 1984, with former federal school teacher who wished not to be identified.
[29]SEP, DGEP, Expediente IV/000(IV-4)(724.7)/1, Plan de Trabajo, Jesús M. González, Tecamachalco, 1936.
[30]*Ibid.*, *Informe*, Jesús M. González, Tecamachalco, Nov. 30, 1936.

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be more obstacles than partners, and to be far more powerful agencies of immediate integration than was the school.

If the Puebla case shows (not unexpectedly) that lack of cooperation and coordination between various units of the state hindered the realization of the socialist school program, obstacles to its realization existed within the SEP itself. First of all, most teachers were unprepared for the myriad tasks demanded of them by the revolutionary school. They were not well equipped to tackle questions of agricultural development and cooperative organization. In Puebla in 1936 most had a sixth-grade education and no normal school training, and many were of recent entry into the profession. They received training and instruction through SEP Cultural Missions, the periodical El Maestro Rural, and most importantly through monthly Centros de Cooperación organized by school inspectors. It is interesting that when compared with Veracruz inspectors' reports on their Centros de Cooperación for 1936, those of the Puebla inspectors reflect relatively little socialist content. In comparison with Veracruz there was little reading on historical materialism, class struggle, or militant trade unionism, although teachers used the new campesino-oriented text, Simiente. And in all instances Puebla inspectors recommended prudence on the religious question. The muted voice on religion was an adaptation to local conditions and, moreover, part of SEP policy after 1936.

The more conservative approach to politics among Puebla school inspectors is not clearly explained, nor do we know if it lasted throughout the Cárdenas period. It may, however, relate to the strength and position of the Molina Betancourt family. As Oficial Mayor of the SEP in 1935 and 1936, Rafael Molina Betancourt derived his power from his association with Narciso Bassols and Calles. He virtually controlled the Unión de Inspectores Federales, which in turn dominated the national teachers' union, the Confederación Mexicana de Maestros. In 1936 when the new, more vociferously left-leaning officials, Vázquez Vela and Gabriel Lucio, sought to consolidate their leadership of the ministry, they sponsored the rise of the more radical Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Enseñanza to break the power of the CMM and its SEP patrons.[31] It is very possible that Molina Betancourt did not identify with the new political radicalism and plethora of socialist literature emanating from the SEP. Possibly Puebla inspectors loyal to him, his brother, and the CMM shared these sentiments. When we look at the implementation of socialist education, we must look at the particular and changing relations within and between national SEP leadership, school inspectors, and teachers.

We must also look at horizontal organizations to which teachers belonged: trade unions, political parties, or associations. We know that most male teachers in Puebla were Masons, and that some teachers were members of the Communist Party. We need to know more about their ideological formation before we can say anything definitive about their particular understanding of socialist education. Nonetheless, of the seven teachers I have so far been able to interview in Puebla, Doña Socorro Rivera best summed up their common experience: "Neither we nor the villagers had the slightest idea what socialism was. It was more a feeling than a theory".[32] Each of the teachers I interviewed shared commitments to agrarianism, trade union rights, and a nationalism identified with social justice. Of these, two were members of the Communist Party, one a former priest, three women, and one a Totonac Indian who had run away from home because his parents would not allow him to attend school; he had no party affiliation. But all were ardent Cardenistas, and all were missionaries of "civilization".

What, then, did the Puebla school program look like in 1936, and how was it received? No clear pattern of receptivity to the school emerges. In general, apathy

[31] Correspondence concerning this question is contained in AGN, Cárdenas, Expediente 433/11.
[32] Interview, Socorro Rivera, Puebla, Puebla, May 10, 1984.

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and resistance seemed strongest in indigenous areas, which were usually the most distant and isolated. Response improved in the more commercialized and integrated regions. This pattern had probably prevailed for some time and was not directly related to socialist education. On the other hand, religion-linked resistance was common to most areas in 1935 and 1936, including commercialized zones. Other contradictions emerged as well in commercialized, urbanized zones. For example, higher attendance records may not always have indicated active support for the school but rather different work patterns of parents: they may not have been able to take their children to the work-place nor have needed them there. It was also not uncommon for people for whom literacy had value in daily life to resist the federal school's particular packaging of literacy, i.e., its pretensions to modernize and sanitize customs. Doña Socorro Rivera recalled how women near the city of Tehuacán excused themselves from her cooking and hygiene classes to do their marketing.[33] Ways in which political factionalism and disputes could hurt the school's reception have been noted. On the other hand, the ideological dimension of the school program which emphasized patriotism, nationalism, and social justice integrated well at the level of cultural events and school curriculum in many communities, which were less receptive to the teachers' projects for social change or their political leadership.

Throughout rural Puebla few children went to school beyond the first grade. In non-Spanish-speaking areas few even finished the preparatory course which would have taken them into the first grade. Few girls or women attended, although their participation increased in commercialized areas. On the basis of present data I cannot identify a federal school in which half the local school-age population was enrolled in 1936.[34] While school policy stressed the importance of adult education, adults were less responsive than children. In many regions it was difficult to sustain night schools owing to opposition, the burdens of work, distances between home, work, and school, and the lack of security fed by feuding and banditry. Whether they stayed away alleging work, distance, weather, sure damnation, communism, or simple politics, non-attenders were in the majority. Many saw no point to the school and were offended by it; others were displaced by it or threatened with displacement; still others did not like their neighbors who supported it. Everywhere the teacher asked the village to cede scarce resources for a plot, a school building, a sports field, school supplies, a chicken coop. The state placed the burden on those it supposedly would help. Many lacked the resources or the will to respond. The school made large requests considering the uncertain investment return it promised, and many refused to invest.[35] This explains why so many schools were barren and in disrepair.

Despite the muted anti-religious program of the Puebla federal schools, the teacher could offend religious sentiments. Many schools were housed in Churches closed down by the government. In most zones teachers used "domingos culturales" to distract people from religion. On such occasions they lectured or sponsored plays which demonstrated the waste of money on religious fiestas and the evils of alcohol which accompanied them. In Huauchinango the avid school inspector actively tried to end the celebration of village saints' fiestas. His gesture cut into the heart of community life and he failed.[36]

In many parts of Puebla the school program was very reduced owing to local hostility, the children's age and educational level, their very irregular pattern of attendance, and lack of teacher preparation. It was usually limited to teaching the

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] It is difficult to assess accurately school attendance as the majority of towns lacked reliable school censuses and this makes national figures questionable. On the basis of the fullest evidence presented by teachers and where a school census existed, I cannot find cases where over half the school-age children were attending classes.

[35] SEP, DGEP, Expediente IV/100 (IV-4) (724.7)/1, Informes, Tirso García, Huauchinango, Nov. 8, Nov. 9, 1936.

[36] *Ibid.*, *Informe*, Tirso García, Huauchinango, February-April, 1936.

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rudiments of reading and arithmetic through verbalist methods. Texts and supplies were scarce; annexes of agricultural plots, gardens, orchards, carpentry shops, and rabbit, bird, and bee shelters were fragile or non-existent.[37] For lack of an adult constituency and for lack of technical expertise and assistance, the "action" pedagogy so central to revolutionary Mexican education was limited.

As the program developed and reached into the community beyond young children, it clearly embraced a modern urban paradigm. Although born in a small town in rural Oaxaca, Socorro Rivera imbibed and transferred the aspirations and customs associated with this paradigm. She exemplified most other energetic teachers in Puebla. In a small village in the isolated southeastern Sierra near Coxcatlán, she learned Nahuatl and managed to organize a night school where she taught Spanish. As she did, she introduced Mexico to her students:

> Well, I told them there were big cities like Coxcatlán and even bigger and bigger cities, where there were many children, cars, and trucks, where people knew how to read and write and sing. I told them how people earned a lot of money there so they had better hurry up and study so they could earn money and put on other clothes-a nice shirt, a pair of pants. My sister and I spoke with the señoras and sometimes with the big men. I had an old Victrola. I put music on it like the Flor de Maíz and the Marcha de Zacatecas. I taught them to sing the Agrarista hymn. I told them about the land question and how people took up arms for it.[38]

Of the lessons she passed on to the community--making ink and glue out of local plants, preserving fruits, preparing guisados, making tables and beds--most she had learned from her mother or her father, El Maestro Rural, or the Centros de Cooperación. For Socorro Rivera, as for other teachers, it was a matter of priority to change the campesino home, to get the animals out of the living quarters, to raise the hearth to waist level from the ground, to introduce tables, beds, chairs, and European clothes: these were the priorities of the school just as they had been from the epoch of Vasconcelos.[39]

The issue of health was critical. In most places, people suffered from malaria, tuberculosis, stomach disorders, typhoid, typhus, measles, and chicken pox. Of all the tasks beyond the teaching of letters, the most common work of the teacher was vaccinating. With the little pharmacies they set up in the schools they tried to introduce modern medicines to substitute for folk cures. For the sake of hygiene they sought to have the garbage burned, the flies eradicated, the water boiled, and potable water introduced. Above all, through their cultural festivals and sports they tried to discourage the consumption of alcohol. In the name of a modernizing package which held out the uncertain promise of greater longevity, higher productivity, and greater material reward, they sought to root out longstanding customs and practices. The validity and effectiveness of these customs and practices, the manner in which they formed part of a communal integrity, not even the most sensitive and politically aware teachers took into account.

Above all, the teachers peddled patriotism. To plant a tree, to put on pants, to comb one's hair, to hit a baseball, to bathe was to be a good Mexican. The social studies curriculum succeeded less as abstract book-learning in mostly empty schools, but came through more effectively as patriotism in the fiestas which marked the school calendar: Independence Day, the anniversary of the Revolution, the tribute to Zapata, the Día de la Madre, the Día del Trabajo. Consistently the theme was Mexico.

[37] *See*, for example, SEP, DGEP, Expediente IV/100 (IV-4) (724.7)/1, Informes, Galación Pérez Rios, Coxcatlán, Oct. 25, 1936; Jesús López Aja, Ahuatempan, April 3, 1936, June 13, August 11, 1936, Plan de Trabajo, 1936.

[38] Interview, Socorro Rivera, Puebla, Puebla, May 16, 1984.

[39] These goals run through inspectors' reports. For a concrete example, see SEP, DGEP, Expediente IV/100(IV-4) (724.7)/1, Informe, Miguel Villa, Texmelucan, Dec. 3, 1936.

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Socorro Rivera may have had no clear idea of the meaning of socialist education, but she was a missionary for the Mexican nation, which she identified with social justice and modernization. The high point of her teaching career and one which still brings tears to her eyes was Cárdenas' expropriation of the oil wells in March 1938. She was working in Pantzingo near a textile factory:

> Workers, campesinos, merchants, children, everyone was elated. Every Monday, the children came to school to donate their centavitos. We organized kermesses and fiestas to raise money. At dances, we sold floral bouquets, confetti, chalupas, and tamales. The workers, you should have seen with what cariño they gave their money. It was very emotional. You would see very poor people, who had no money, who didn't have enough to feed themselves. But with what cariño they brought their money to pay the debt. In the night school we taught the history of oil. In fiestas we talked of how Mexico had reconquered her oil but how we had to pay for it. In the schools we showed the children the derivatives of oil like parafin and vaseline.[40]

The teachers were sent to create Mexico, and at an ideological level they did.

Despite the socialist schools' theoretical emphasis on class revindication, popular mobilization, and democracy, what runs through the practice of the Puebla school in the Cárdenas period is less the democratic socialist constellation and more an idealizaed paradigm of an integrated, homogeneous capitalist society in which prosperity overshadows exploitation, cooperation masks competition, and nationalism unites mutually antagonistic classes. The child is to acquire an "egoismo propio" independent of ethnic, familial, or communal ties. This ego equips him or her for competition within an allegedly neutral arena dominated by science, technology, and merit. In their gardens beside their schools, teachers tended new vegetables, used chemical fertilizers, and sprayed insecticides. They planted trees they hoped would bear fruit for a nearby market.[41] Through sports events and arithmetic and reading contests, they encouraged inter-village competitions which sometimes resulted in cooperation in road-building and the repairing of bridges. Without much success but with good intentions, they tried to undercut local usurers by forming cooperatives to marke goods to state agencies or directly to urban markets. They introduced Escritorios Públicos, telephones, and mail service so people could communicate better with the outside world. In brief, with limited success but as one agency in a more global if uneven process, they tried to integrate communities into one market and one nation.

In conclusion, the teachers of Puebla were neither demagogues spouting inflamed rhetoric, nor a militant vanguard of social reform. While local political and socio-economic conditions reduced their possibilities for implementing the kinds of changes recommended by educational policy makers, the central state, its president, army, and civilian bureaucracies did little to widen their space for action. If this preliminary study of Puebla suggests that the 1930s may not have been the apogee of teacher militancy we normally associate with the Cárdenas years, the Puebla case cannot be generalized. It illustrates that an understanding of the implementation of socialist education can only be arrived at through an examination of regional politics, social formations, and economic structures. These must be analyzed within the context of a complex process of post-revolutionary state formation, which reached its nadir and drew to a close under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas.

[40]Interview, Socorro Rivera, Puebla, Puebla, May 21, 1984.

[41]*See,* SEP, DGEP, Expediente IV/100(IV-4) (724.7)/1, Informe, Manuel Quiróz, Puebla, Dec. 31, 1935; Informe, Jesús M. González, Sept. 30, 1936.

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