

AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS IN MODERN MEXICO AND SPAIN

The basic patterns of government which presently persist in Mexico and Spain were forged, in the main, in the aftermath of violent internal social upheavals: the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

It has often been remarked that both countries are alike in that they have developed similar authoritarian regimes supported by ~~one~~ one-party systems: in Spain, the Falange; and, in Mexico, the PRI (the Institutional Revolutionary Party).

(It is true, however, that Mexico differs from Spain in that its constitution provides for multi-party politics; it has a one-party system in the sense that the PRI can and does virtually ignore all of the other minor parties in its political calculations).<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, it is quite clear that there are a number of non-party groups which play important roles in the political systems of both countries. In Spain it is generally agreed that the regime is responsive, in varying degrees, to pressures from the army, the church, the monarchists, the Carlists, the financial oligarchy, Opus Dei, and the Falange. Mexico's regime, by comparison, is responsive to pressures both from the PRI, whose sectoral organization represents the group interests of the peasants, workers and the loosely defined popular sector which includes bureaucratic actors, technical specialists and intellectuals; and from outside interests, particularly organized business groups.

It is further true that while the ideological outlook of Mexico's regime is basically radical, in Spain it is basically conservative.

The primary purpose of this paper is to attempt a comparative analysis of the political systems of modern Mexico and Spain.



Of the three dimensions that have been suggested as relevant for the classification of political systems- 'participation in decision-making', 'means of achieving decisions' and 'general policy ends'- this paper will be concerned with the second which relates to the degree of imposition and relative freedom which exist in a given polity.

In this respect, it is commonly agreed that there are at least two types.

At one extreme, in ideal authoritarian systems, a single official ideology, often with chiliastic elements, is imposed by means of a monolithic political structure on all kinds of groups and organizations, even on areas remote from politics, like sports and leisure; indeed, the distinction between state and society is obliterated.

At the other, in ideal liberal systems, an almost unlimited number of political groups and organizations, each with its own 'natural' norms or patterns of behavior, peacefully compete or coexist with one another.

Thus, Nazi Germany and Soviet Communism are examples of patterns of government which approximate the first ideal type; on the other hand, Western liberal democracies, although, of course, constrained by overruling constitutions, approximate the second ideal type.

It appears, however, that the concept of authoritarian political systems, standing somewhere in the middle between the two extremes, is more appropriate for understanding the patterns of governments that have emerged in Mexico and Spain. According to J. Linz,

"Authoritarian regimes are political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism; without elaborate and guiding ideology (but with distinctive mentalities); without intensive nor extensive political mobilization (except some points in their development); and in <sup>which</sup> a leader (or occasionally a small group) exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones".



In the first place, therefore, authoritarian political systems are characterized by regimes which impose on the polity a limited pluralism whereby certain group interests are politically repressed (even violently), or are shaped by certain interventionist economic measures; but, at the same time, some competition between differing interests is allowed.

Leaving aside, for one moment, the question of the political expression of these groups (particularly labour and the peasantry in Mexico) that emerged after the present authoritarian patterns had already been set, this paper will initially examine the repression of political forces which played an active part on the political scene prior to the upheavals: most noteworthy, labour in Spain and the Church in Mexico.

To begin with, it is clear that the labour movement in Spain, at the outbreak of the Civil War, presented a full-fledged political force. Its two main branches-Anarcho-Syndicalist and Socialist-had already evolved into mass organizations demanding revolutionary social and economic change. Indeed, the latter participated in a coalition composed of largely liberal middle-class Republicans which governed the country from 1931 to 1933. The anarchists, on the other hand, who had always shunned parliamentary democracy, supported the communists in the Popular Front coalitions which won the February 1936 elections.

But the Nationalist victory in 1939 meant that the labour movement, as a political force, would be totally stifled. In effect,

"Political parties were outlawed, as was universal suffrage, and in their place emerged the 'organic' state, with participation in government theoretically limited to three channels: family, municipality, and the worker-employer Syndicates".

It was decreed that thenceforward labour and management, organized sectorally according to economic units (for example, the textile industry) would work out their mutual problems under the overarching umbrella of the 'official' National Syndicate, manned and arbitrated by representatives of the government.

~~Naturally, for a long while such machinery remained an empty~~



Naturally, for a long while such machinery remained an empty artifice imposed on the labour force from above.<sup>4</sup> After the last surviving core of leadership of the underground resistance movement had been crushed in 1951, it functioned, at best, more often than not, as an instrument used by the regime and the financial oligarchy to keep the labour groups under control.

It is worth noting that Spain's recent economic transformation, begun in earnest with in 1954 with United States aid,<sup>5</sup> has evidently spurred the government to take a more tolerant attitude towards trade union activity. Alongside the 1965 revision of Article 222 of the Spanish Penal Code, which excluded prosecution of strikers engaged purely in labour disputes without direct political involvement,<sup>6</sup> an increasing number of illegal workers' councils, representing genuine grievances and demands, have been allowed to emerge.

It is significant that these councils have sometimes been able to win concessions by dealing directly with management, thus bypassing the official National Syndicate. However, it would be premature to interpret this as evidence that the regime's laxity may someday move it either to legalize the workers' councils status or to provide for their assimilation by undertaking a major structural reform of the existing National Syndicate.

In any event, one can conclude that although the labour movement has established a limited measure of independent economic bargaining power, the Franco regime continues to deny it any form of political expression.

Whereas in Spain, labour's full integration into Society, as a political force, had been a relatively recent development; in Mexico, the power and influence of the Church were originally intertwined, organically, with the colonial system.



The Spanish Crown, during Mexico's colonial period, ruled the Church in general (and the Church in Mexico, in particular) by virtue of the "patronato" (patronage) (granted to the Spanish Crown by Alexander VI in the year 1493): it nominated all of the Church's episcopate and claimed all Church properties as its own. In return, the Church was granted immunity from the ordinary jurisdiction of the courts, the enjoyment of a number of special privileges and control of the educational system.

By the time of Mexico's Independence in 1810, the Church in Mexico possessed considerable power and influence: for one, it owned more than half of the land of the country.

With Mexico's separation from the Crown, the Church steadfastly insisted that the exercise of the powers represented by the patronage, in the absence of the king, reverted to itself. Indeed, it survived successfully to become a rival political power within the State.

Throughout the 19th. century, in an effort not only to establish undisputed supremacy of the State but also to bring about a greater measure of liberty and equality for society as a whole, various liberal governments promulgated laws- in 1833, 1855, 1857, 1873 and 1874- which progressively weakened the Church's position until it was stripped of its economic power base (the Church was <sup>not only divested of most of its property but also</sup> prohibited from acquiring <sup>additional</sup> real property or lending money on mortgages) as well as of all its ancient prerogatives including its special juridical status.

The long dictatorial regime of Porfirio Diaz (1876-1910), without making any fundamental changes in the law, permitted the Church to recover a part of its lost power and influence. An amendment of Article 27 of the Constitution of 1857 coupled with Diaz's indulgence, permitted the Church to double its total wealth (from 50 million pesos in 1874 to 100 million pesos in 1910)<sup>7</sup>, and to re-establish schools and colleges in a number of states, and rural schools in numerous villages.

Moreover, the Church re-entered the field of public affairs in a variety of ways. Thus, for example, following the publication in 1890



~~Thereafter, following the promulgation~~  
of Pope Leon XIII's encyclical, Rerum Novarum, the Church began to organize part of the working-class into catholic trade unions; and, very shortly before the end of the Díaz regime, realizing that it would need a political instrument to deal with the new regime, the Church played a major role in the founding of the Catholic Party which soon attained a membership of 486,000 persons.<sup>8</sup>

Foremost among the planks in this party's platform was that it would demand the reform of the laws by legal means. In other words, the Church, with the aid of the party, sought to amend or repeal the 1857 Reform Laws which had severely limited the Church's activities in purely worldly affairs.

The Church's belated attempt to play an active part on the radically changed political scene, however, was to no avail. The Constitution which emerged out of the revolution in 1917 reaffirmed the existence of a basically anti-clerical state. It incorporated three much celebrated Articles (3, 27, and 130) which proscribed clericalism, religious education, and Church ownership of property. Thus, at least on paper, it excluded the possibility that the Church could ever reestablish its political and economic power.

From the outset, the Church publicly proclaimed that it could not obey the above Articles because to do so would be to betray their own basic faith and beliefs. This conflict was brought to a head in 1926 when the bishops of the Church formally declared that the Catholics should organize to change the Constitution. In short, the Church directly committed itself to undermining the very basis of the revolutionary's regime legitimacy.

It is understandable that the government, commonly still challenged by armed revolts of all kinds (~~instigated~~ by factions led by "caudillos" subscribing to vague beliefs), should be led to take a number



of somewhat draconian measures--for instance, all priests were required to register with the government-- that empowered it to control or repress any future Church actions. In reply, The Mexican episcopate ordered all priests to abandon the churches, as it were, to go on strike. A rebellion, which the Liga de la Defensa de la Libertad Religiosa (League for the Defense of Religious Liberty) had been brewing in behalf of the Church since 1925, broke out in some of the states and dragged on for three years costing over thirty thousand lives. At length, the rebellion was defeated by the government forces in 1929.

The Church and the State subsequently effected a reconciliation: the government agreed to recognize the existence of a Church which expressed its first loyalty to the nationally defined objectives of the 1917 Constitution rather than to the deposed landowning class and various foreign interests. The Church, on the other hand, agreed to lay aside its past bickering on the condition that the government guarantee it a certain amount of independence and security from further persecutions. One direct consequence of this agreement was the government's decision to repress left wing groups which had previously militated for harsher measures against the Church; thus, for <sup>partly, as a result of this policy,</sup> among others ~~example~~, in 1929 the Mexican Communist Party was banned.

Thenceforward, the government gradually instituted a greater tolerance for the activities of the Church; by 1940, it was possible for the newly elected President, Manuel Avila Camacho, to declare in public that he was a believer.

In addition, it has been noted that the Church has been able to covertly restore, through the expedient of third parties, some economic power and political influence; <sup>9</sup> the outright expansion of its sphere of activities is nonetheless, ~~the~~ narrowly circumscribed by the governmental framework drawn in 1917.



In sum, the present ~~authoritarian~~ patterns of government in Mexico and Spain both emerged under similar historical circumstances: a violent internal social upheaval. Both regimes necessarily acquired authoritarian characters since both were ~~established~~ violently established against the will of organized political forces which were fully integrated into the very fabric of society. In a sense, the Franco regime has kept a more authoritarian character than the Mexican Revolutionary regime since ~~it has not yet come to~~ <sup>yet to</sup> terms with the political needs of one of Spain's major group interests: the labour force. In Mexico, by contrast, the 1926 agreement between the Church and the regime determined that the repression would be directed only against minor fringe groups on the extreme left and right of the political spectrum: respectively, the Communists and the Sinarquistas (Fascist in its tendencies). Had the regime, however, dismantled the Church, as the Soviets did in Russia after 1917, it is possible that it would have acquired a considerably more authoritarian character than ~~it presently has~~ <sup>it</sup> today.

Lastly, the emergence of new social forces- the middle-class groups in Spain, labour and peasantry in Mexico- raises the important question of how the authoritarian regimes have handled their integration into society. Has forcible repression been substituted by much more subtle forms of control? Indeed, is the authoritarian pattern amenable to change?



Notes

1. S. Huntington, "Social and Institutional Dynamics of One-Party Systems" in S. Huntington and C.H. Moore, Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society, London, 1970, p.8.

2. J. Linz, "An Authoritarian Regime: Spain" in E. Allardt and Y. Littunen, Cleavages, Ideologies and Party Systems, Helsinki, 1964, p.297.

3. B. Welles, Spain: the gentle anarchy, London, 1965, p. 116.

4. S.G. Payne, Franco's Spain, London, 1968, p.113.

5. ~~According to~~ According to The Economist (13-19 Nov. 1971), during the 1960s, while wages in Spain increased by 60%, the incomes of middle-class people more than doubled.

6. S.G. Payne, op.cit., p.125.

~~7. Luis Baldrera, El clero y el gobierno de México, tomos I-II, México, D.F., 1927, p.6~~

7. Luis Baldrera, El clero y el gobierno de México, tomos I-II, México, D.F., 1927, p.6

8. N. Larín, La Rebelión de los Cristeros, México, D.F., 1968, p.75.

9. M.A. Velasco, Notas acerca del papel de la Iglesia en México, México, D.F., 1959, p.8.

Other works consulted

1. J. Blondel, An Introduction to Comparative Government, London, 1969.

2. G. Jackson, The Spanish Republic and the Civil War 1931-1939, New Jersey, 1965.

3. S.G. Payne, The Spanish Revolution, London, 1970.

4. S.G. Payne, Falanga (A History of Spanish Fascism), London, 1962.

5. F. Tannenbaum, Mexico: the struggle for peace and bread, London, 1965.



Mi querido Joaquín:

Tu padre me dio una copia de tu trabajo reciente sobre Política autoritaria en el México y la España modernos, con la indicación de que deseabas algún comentario mío.

Desde luego, el trabajo me parece bueno, si bien quisiera yo hacer dos observaciones de algún interés.

En primer lugar, hablar de gobiernos o de política autoritaria requiere siempre algún matiz o algún distinguo. Por mucho que nos quejemos los mexicanos, en efecto, de lo que llamamos política o gobiernos autoritarios, no hay comparación entre lo nuestro y la España franquista, aun la España franquista de estos días. Yo estuve allí en mayo de este año y pude ver las elecciones sindicales, y, además, de enterarme de nuevas disposiciones legales para la reunión de trabajadores, en que se especificaba que ningún grupo obrero podía reunirse sin una autorización pedida con treinta días de anticipación, especificándose la orden del día de la reunión, el local en que iba a tener lugar y la advertencia de que no podían concurrir sino el número de asientos que tuviera ese local.

Por otro lado, no sé si el modus vivendi a que han llegado los gobiernos mexicanos con respecto a la iglesia católica, es la mejor ilustración, digamos, del poder asimilador del gobierno mexicano y compararlo con procedimientos semejantes del gobierno español en lo que toca a los grupos obreros.

Agradecido por la distinción que me has hecho de pedirme estos comentarios, quedo siempre tuyo, amigo y servidor.

Daniel Cosío Villegas  
México, D.F., diciembre 21, 1971.



México, D.F., diciembre 21, 1971.

Sr. Víctor L. Urquidí  
El Colegio de México  
Guanajuato 125  
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Mi querido Víctor:

Como no sé la dirección de Joaquín, le envío a usted adjunto mis comentarios con el ruego de que se los mande.

Siempre suyo,

Daniel Cosío Villegas

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Señor don Daniel Cosío Villegas:

Estoy muy agradecido por la distinción que igualmente usted me hace al comentarme mi trabajo reciente sobre Política autoritaria en el México y la España modernos, si bien quisiera hacer una réplica a las dos observaciones de interés que me ha hecho.

En primer lugar, yo estoy muy de acuerdo con usted que no hay comparación entre la política autoritaria de estos días de la España franquista y nuestro México frente a los grupos obreros.

Por otro lado, yo no sé si el modus vivendi a que han llegado los gobiernos mexicanos con respecto a la iglesia católica haya cubierto de misterio las actividades políticas de ciertos grupos de derecha, amén de dificultar mucho la discusión 'oficial' de temas, en mi opinión, de gran importancia como, por ejemplo, el control de natalidad. En un artículo suyo que hace poco salió en Excelsior entitulado, Pocos Amigos, Muchos Adversarios, usted afirma que "a diferencia de la Alemania y la Italia actuales, donde hay hitleristas y fascistas pobres, aquí el desheredado no es nada, pero cuando es algo, no es derechista. A lo sumo cabría admitir una clase media, no rica, pero que vive con cierto desahogo, que es, no derechista, pero sí conservadora".

Yo no sé si los hechos del 10 de junio de 1971, el llamado "jueves de corpus", y otros parecidos, tengan alguna relación con grupos de derecha que el gobierno no conozca bien porque es pudoroso para investigar a fondo las actividades de grupos que dicen asociarse a lo religioso católico y porque es reticente en el examen de las causas y las consecuencias políticas del modus vivendi que ha llegado a establecer con respecto a la iglesia católica.

Y por último, usted me habla de tú y con cariño, probablemente porque me conoce desde que soy niño. A mi, en cambio, no me nace hablarle de tú, más que nada porque la experiencia que usted ha acumulado me tiene francamente impresionado.

No obstante, quedo, igualmente como usted, suyo, amigo y servidor,

*Joaquín Urquidí*

Joaquín Urquidí  
University of Essex, 6 de enero de 1972.



México, D.F., enero 18, 1972.

Sr. Joaquín Urquidí  
C/o Student Pidgeon Holes  
University of Essex  
Colchester, Essex  
England.

Querido Joaquín:

Unas cuantas líneas acerca de tu última carta, del 6 de enero.

Tienes mucha razón en suponer que el *modus vivendi* entre el gobierno mexicano y la iglesia católica no haya cubierto de misterio las actividades políticas de ciertos grupos de derecha. Sin embargo, aun aquí cabría aclarar un poco las cosas: no me cabe la menor duda de que esos "ciertos grupos de derecha" quisieran aprovechar a la iglesia para sus maniobras políticas; pero me cuesta cierto trabajo admitir que la iglesia no se diera cuenta de estos subterfugios y no aclarara su posición con el gobierno. La razón, me parece, es sencilla: la iglesia católica puede entenderse con el gobierno sin necesidad de acudir a ningún intermediario.

No se sabe a ciencia cierta nada respecto del Jueves de Corpus; pero la opinión más extendida es que fueron elementos del régimen pasado los que más intervinieron en estos sucesos.

En fin, cuando vengas por aquí hablaremos más despacio de estos temas, que son ciertamente de un interés enorme pero en cuyo conocimiento no se puede avanzar, a falta de pruebas o testimonios, sino de modo muy cauteloso.

Un gran abrazo y hasta la vista.

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DCV/meh.-