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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

RECLAIMING THE PATRIA:
SINARQUISMO IN THE UNITED STATES, 1936-1966

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HISTORY

BY

NATHAN ELLSTRAND

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2022

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Camisas Doradas	Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista (Revolutionary Mexicanist Action)
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
C.M.F.	A priest who is part of the Congregation of Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary or the Claretians
COI	United States Office of the Coordinator of Information
C.S.C.	A priest who is part of the Congregation of the Holy Cross
C.S.P.	A priest who is part of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle or the Paulists
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican Workers)
El Congreso	El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Español (El Congreso or the Spanish-Speaking People's Congress)
FARA	United States Foreign Agents Registration Act
FBI	United States Federal Bureau of Investigation
La Liga	The Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa (National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty)
La U	La Unión Católica Mexicana (The Catholic Mexican Union)
LULAC	League of United Latin American Citizens
NCWC	National Catholic Welfare Conference
OCOCRBAR	United States Office of the Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Relations Between the American Republics
OCIAA	United States Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs
O.S.B.	A priest who is part of the Order of Saint Benedict or the Benedictines
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PDM	Partido Demócrata Mexicano (Mexican Democratic Party)
PFM	Partido Fascista Mexicano (Mexican Fascist Party)
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution)
PRUN	Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Nacional (Revolutionary Party of National Unification)
S.J.	A priest who is part of the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits
UNS	Unión Nacional Sinarquista (National Synarchist Union)

INTRODUCTION

We did not choose to be absent from Mexico; it is not by mere adventurous spirit that we have settled in a strange land where our homes are, although that could change at a moment's notice when the conditions that brought us disappear. But understand: it is not our homeland that has forced us to leave, it has been those who, calling themselves saviors of Mexico, who have created a miserable situation which has already existed for many years. We have gone to strange lands in search of tranquility and guarantees, we who wanted to devote our best years and energies to the Homeland.¹

Jesús María Dávila was a local leader of the McAllen, Texas chapter of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista (UNS or National Synarchist Union) in 1939. He explained his perspective on the displacement of many Mexicans, expressing discontent in the postrevolutionary government of Mexico.² His statement was an autobiographical one – he fled his home country for safety in the United States as a member of Mexico's Catholic resistance, seeing little future for him as an openly religious person in postrevolutionary Mexico.³ Dávila's sentiments also

¹ “No es por gusto nuestro que nos háyamos ausentado de México; no es por mero espíritu aventurero que hemos fincado en tierra extraña nuestros hogares, que aunque no se crea, tienen la semejanza de tienda de campana listas para levantarse cuando las condiciones que nos lanzaron al extranjero desaparezcán. Pero entendedlo bien: no es nuestra patria la que nos ha corrido, han sido los que, auto-llamándose salvadores de México, crearon una situación desgraciada que y a lleva muchos años de existir. En busca de tranquilidad y garantías hemos ido a tierras extrañas, nosotros que hubiésemos querido entregar nuestros mejores años y energías de la Patria.” Juan Ignacio Padilla, *Sinarquismo: contrarrevolución* (México: Editorial Polis, 1948), 157-158.

² Mexico was an one-party state for seventy-one consecutive years. It was first the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR or National Revolutionary Party) from 1929 to 1938, then the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM or Party of the Mexican Revolution) from 1938 to 1946, and finally the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI or Institutional Revolutionary Party) from 1946 to the present moment. This dissertation utilizes the terms “Mexican government,” “Mexican state,” “postrevolutionary government,” or “postrevolutionary state” to encompass those changes.

³ Dávila was a leader in the McAllen branch of the Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana (AJCM, or the Mexican Catholic Youth Association) prior to joining the UNS. “Mother's Day Meet Planned at Mission,” *El Herald de Brownsville*, May 7, 1937; “Catholic Youths Select Officers,” *The Brownsville Herald*, September 6, 1937.

reflected that of other sinarquistas who resented the Mexican state and believed that the nation's leaders were misdirecting the country.

The UNS held an inherently counter-revolutionary vision of Mexico. The political organization did not develop in isolation, but grew out of decades of political and religious conflict in the country, centering on the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the “new” Mexico after the revolution. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 to 1920 was a prolonged and violent civil war, resulting in the deaths of roughly a million Mexicans. The conflict began with the overthrow of dictator Porfirio Díaz and ended with the creation of a new government of political elites. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 that emerged from the revolution, targeted the historic privileges of the Church by stripping it of any rights in the Mexican public sphere, restricting its impact on education, worship, property, and legal standing.⁴ Both lay Catholics and clergy fought two wars – the Cristero Wars – in the Bajío of Western Central Mexico against the government from 1926 to 1929 and 1934 to 1938 to defend what they saw as attacks on Catholicism. The UNS developed in 1937 as the next iteration of Catholic resistance against the state, embracing politics while actively touting itself as nationalistic, moral, anti-communist, and dedicated to bringing Mexico back to its glory with Christianity as a main element. Even the organization's name drew from the ancient Greek word “synarchy” meaning “with authority.” The UNS, as such, was conservative as it advocated for restoring previously dominant forces like the Catholic Church. By the group's height in the early 1940s, its membership was around half a million, drawing predominantly from the core of Mexico including the states of Guanajuato,

⁴ David C. Bailey, *¡Viva Cristo Rey!: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 23-24; Jean A. Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State 1926-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 14.

Michoacán, and Querétaro.⁵ With such numbers, the UNS was the largest opposition force to the postrevolutionary state since its founding.

The forces that emerged against the UNS – the press, political left, and both the U.S. and Mexican governments – characterized the organization as fascist. Scholar Robert O. Paxton argues that fascism is composed of “mobilizing passions.” These include a sense of never-ending crisis that traditional solutions could not resolve, prioritization of national group identity over the individual, embodiment of anti-liberalism, advocacy for a pure community, embrace of violence, and the cult of personality around a male leader.⁶ Supporters of the postrevolutionary Mexican state and the media painted the sinarquistas as more than simply arising out of the Mexican church-state conflict, but as also materializing through connections with European-based fascism. Fascism responded to a rapidly changing region through the impact of World War I, the hardening of nation-states, and the success of the communist Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution of 1917. Fascism in Italy emerged gradually over the course of the 1920s with Benito Mussolini, Germany represented a rapid shift towards fascism in 1933 with Adolf Hitler, and the Nationalists under Francisco Franco won out against left-wing opposition in Spain by 1939. With the onset of World War II by the late 1930s, fascism was at its peak. Sinarquismo’s embrace of nationalism, patriarchy, hierarchy, and anti-communism echoed similarities with fascism. The UNS also took on a symbolism of particular salutes, flags, marching, and uniforms that the

⁵ Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 168. Numerous newspapers from 1941-1944 mention this number as well.

⁶ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 41.

movement's opponents latched onto. Soon, the opposition to *sinarquismo* argued that Nazi Germany funded the group and the Falange Española coordinated its expansion.⁷

Although the UNS shared many similarities with concurrent fascism in Europe, the group was not fascist in the exact image of the movements across the Atlantic. The organization grew out of a long-standing admiration and support for the Catholic Church rather than having roots in political and paramilitary organizations. *Sinarquistas* did not publicly embrace violence like movements abroad, although members did partake periodically in incidents within the context of Mexico, but not in the United States.⁸ *Sinarquismo* did have exclusively male leaders, but a cult of personality never emerged around one leader as was the case with Benito Mussolini or Adolf Hitler. Lastly, despite consistent accusations by the UNS's opponents that the organization was a puppet for totalitarian fascist regimes in Europe, no evidence existed that this was indeed the case.

The UNS operated both at home in Mexico and in the United States, largely because of the massive emigration of Mexicans in the years before. The movement stemmed from Central Mexico and sought to encompass all Mexicans within and beyond its borders. The Mexican Revolution, coupled with the *Cristero Wars*, forced many Mexicans into exile in the north towards the Southwestern U.S. and beyond. Mexico's Great Migration during and after the

⁷ See Betty Kirk, "Fascist Hand Seen in Mexican Fracas." *The New York Times*, June 18, 1939; Kirk, "Sinarquista Rise in Mexico Seen as Totalitarian Plot," *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 7, 1941; Kirk, "Unrest in Mexico," *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1941; "CTM Regional Congress to Combat Sinarchists," *Mexican Labor News*, March 14, 1941; "CTM Forms Committees to Fight Nazifascism," *Mexican Labor News*, April 10, 1941; "Phony Anti-Nazis Take Line of Masks; Adopt Fascist Line," *Mexican Labor News*, June 26, 1941; Marshall Hail, "Hate An Easy Life...Love Discomfort and Death," *The Burlington Daily Times-News*, October 10, 1941.

⁸ Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, *In The Vortex of Violence* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 25 and 56-59; Thomas Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1920-1960* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 64.

revolution consisted of the largest emigration from Mexico to the United States by this point. Between 700,000 and one and a half million Mexicans migrated to the United States between 1900 and 1930.⁹ A significant portion of those who fled following the revolution were not in agreement with the ever-increasing left-leaning politics of the postrevolutionary Mexican government, which embodied anti-clericalism, a strict separation between church and state, secular education, and land reform, thus aligning them with counter-movements such as that of the UNS. Although sinarquismo and its supporters existed elsewhere in the Americas such as in Cuba and Guatemala, the vast majority were either in Mexico or the U.S.¹⁰

Those sinarquistas who fled Mexico to the United States became part of a growing community in the country. Mexicans found economic opportunity in agriculture and industry, and forged community through political and social organizations. They also encountered discrimination in the U.S. Mexicans were barred from employment in certain professions, faced segregation in housing, and were subject to deportation. Nonetheless, Mexicans survived and thrived despite the limitations placed upon them north of the border.

Sinarquismo gained hold in the United States for some time as the organization sought influence and stability in the north away from its base of support in Central Mexico. One of the precursor movements to the movement – Las Legioneros (The Legionnaires) – established branches in the U.S. in 1936. Those networks led to the creation of sinarquista chapters the

⁹ Benjamin C. Montoya, *Risking Immeasurable Harm: Immigration Restriction and U.S.-Mexican Diplomatic Relations, 1924-1932* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 9.

¹⁰ In regards to Cuba, see Collection CHC5339, Enrique Ros Papers, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection. In regards to Guatemala, see “Alerta guatemaltecos: el pueblo ya no soporta la carestía de vida, sinarquismo está causando graves daños a patria y poniendo en ridículo juventud,” Item 13, Revolution and Counterrevolution in Guatemala, 1944-1963, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin).

following year. The UNS established its first committee in the U.S. in Los Angeles, California in November 1937, followed shortly by one in El Paso, Texas as an outgrowth of the Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua regional committee. Other chapters emerged in Southern California, California's Central Valley, Texas' Rio Grande Valley, the El Paso metropolitan area and Chicagoland. The organization distributed its newspaper, *El Sinarquista*, in those areas as well as beyond, across the entire United States. The lead-up and entry into World War II brought about suspicion of politically-tinged outsiders in the United States, particularly of an organization that had nationalist, and supposedly fascist, sympathies lying outside its boundaries. Pre-existing nativism, as well as fear of fifth column – or internal enemy – elements in the United States, eventually made it difficult for the UNS to freely operate as an organization in the country.

Historiography and Argument

Historians who study the Unión Nacional Sinarquista are limited in their scope. From the 1940s onward, a variety of studies by Mario Gill, Albert L. Michaels, Hugh Campbell, Jean Meyer, John W. Sherman, and Friedrich E. Schuler emerged, debating whether or not the movement was fascist.¹¹ Others like Servando Ortoll and Héctor Hernández García de León provide large national studies of the organization.¹² Pablo Serrano Álvarez, Daniel Newcomer,

¹¹ Mario Gill, *Sinarquismo, su origen, su esencia, su misión* (Mexico: Comité de Defensa de la Revolución, 1944); Albert L. Michaels, "Fascism and Sinarquismo: Popular Nationalisms Against the Mexican Revolution," *Journal of Church and State* 8:2 (1966): 234-251; Hugh Campbell, *La derecha radical en Mexico, 1929-1949* (Mexico City: Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1976); Jean Meyer, *El sinarquismo: un fascismo mexicano?* (Mexico: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1979); John W. Sherman, *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929-1940* (Westport: Praeger, 1997); Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico Between Hitler and Roosevelt: Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Jean Meyer, *El sinarquismo, el cardenismo y la iglesia: 1937-1947* (Barcelona: Tusquet Editores, 2003).

¹² Servando Ortoll, "Catholic Organizations in Mexico's National Politics and International Diplomacy (1926-1942)," PhD Dissertation (Columbia University, 1987); Héctor Hernández García de León, *Historia política del sinarquismo, 1934-1944* (Mexico City: Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2004).

and Jason Dormady delve into regionally-specific accounts of the movement.¹³ The issue is that the majority of scholars of the UNS describe the organization only within the context of Mexico, however the movement was transnational from the very beginning. Only a couple of scholars like Oscar Lozano and Julia G. Young consider sinarquismo in the context of the United States, although neither details the organization at length in its entirety nor do they focus on opposition to the movement.¹⁴

Beyond UNS-specific work, this study of the sinarquistas engages with three other fields of literature – postrevolutionary Mexican, Western, and Mexican American history. First, the majority of the extensive literature on postrevolutionary Mexico takes on political movements within the national context. Historians including David C. Bailey, Marjorie Becker, Jean Meyer, Ben Fallaw, Robert Curley, Robert Weis, and Gema Kloppe-Santamaría demonstrate how pro-Catholic movements contested the Mexican state within Mexico’s borders. They examine the church-state conflict either regionally or on the national level, focusing frequently on domestic violence and state formation that developed through this process. With the exception of work by Julia G. Young, academics do not consider the Mexican Catholic resistance beyond the boundaries of the nation.¹⁵ This dissertation also diverges from viewing the postrevolutionary

¹³ Pablo Serrano Álvarez, *La batalla del espíritu: el movimiento sinarquista en El Bajío, 1932-1951*, 2 Volumes (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992); Daniel Newcomer, *Reconciling modernity: urban state formation in 1940s León, Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Jason Dormady, *Primitive revolution: restorationist religion and the idea of the Mexican Revolution, 1940-1968* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Oscar Lozano, “Patria y Nacionalismo en el Mexico de Afuera: The Extension of Sinarquismo into the United States,” Master’s Thesis, University of Texas at El Paso, 1999; John Smith, “True Patriots for the Salvation of the Fatherland”: Sinarquistas and the Struggle for Post-Revolutionary Mexico,” Master’s Thesis, University of New Mexico, 2014; Julia G. Young, “Creating Catholic Utopias: Transnational Catholic Activism and Mexico’s Union Nacional Sinarquista,” *Catholic Southwest* 29 (2018): 3-20.

¹⁵ Bailey; Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion*; Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacan, Peasants, and Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Ben Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham and London: 2013); Robert

Mexican state as purely antagonistic to the UNS, but instead embraces a perspective that the government was accommodating to the movement. For instance, the government worked alongside the organization to see through its colonization project of northern Mexico in the early 1940s. As such, this work joins a growing literature on state hegemony in the period such as by scholars such as Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith, which characterizes the Mexican state as compromising when necessary to maintain the veneer of political control over the nation.¹⁶

Secondly, Western – particularly borderlands – scholars contemplate the political contestation of the United States-Mexico border over time. The scholarship by Benjamin H. Johnson, Elliott Young, Gerald Horne, and David Dorado Romo examines the Mexican Revolution, with political actors transcending and contesting the border.¹⁷ While Verónica Castillo-Muñoz argues that the border between California and Baja California hardened the divide between the two nations, Geraldo Cadava believes that the boundary during the post-World War II era between Arizona and Sonora was a place of cultural, political and commercial

Curley, *Citizens and Believers: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Jalisco, 1900-1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018); Robert Weis, *For Christ and Country: Militant Catholic Youth in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Kloppe-Santamaría. Only Julia Young's book takes place outside of the Mexican national context. Julia G. Young, *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Refugees, and Exiles of the Cristero War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁶ Paul Gillingham and Peter T. Smith, "Introduction: The Paradoxes in Revolution," in *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Benjamin Heber Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Elliott Young, *Catarino Garza's Revolution on the Texas-Mexico Border* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); David Dorado Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez, 1893-1923* (El Paso: Cinco Puntos, 2005).

exchange.¹⁸ However, little borderlands history hones in on World War II and none recognizes the role that the UNS played in the West and along the borderlands.

Third, Mexican American historiography intersects with the study of the *sinarquistas* in the United States. The literature focuses on identity adaptation and the maintenance of a hyphenated identity. Mario T. García, George J. Sánchez, David G. Gutiérrez, and Douglas Monroy emphasize the notion of belonging as a unique group – as both Mexican and American – within the context of the United States.¹⁹ They do not take into consideration Mexicans like the *sinarquistas* who did *not* consider themselves to have a hyphenated identity as both Mexicans and Americans, but instead held onto their *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness). The *sinarquistas* were Catholic Mexican nationalists residing outside of their nation of origin, who had a contested relationship with the U.S. government and opposed the dominant Protestant Christian faith. Zaragoza Vargas does include the *sinarquistas* into his work on Mexican American workers in the twentieth century. In describing the situation in Los Angeles in the early 1940s characterized by the Sleepy Lagoon incident and Zoot Suit Riots, he oversimplifies them as fascists who were seeking to undermine the Mexican community by infiltrating youth gangs.²⁰ Rather, this dissertation shows that the ethnic Mexican left in the region utilized the power of the state to

¹⁸ Geraldo Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

¹⁹García; George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

²⁰ Zaragoza Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Kevin Starr similarly oversimplifies the *sinarquistas* in his work. Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950* (Oxford and New York: 2002).

repress the UNS. Lastly, this work engages with Mexican American historiography in regards to politics and especially conservatism in the community, and more broadly the Latinx population, taking into account recent works by Benjamin Francis-Fallon and Geraldo Cadava.²¹ Their scholarship looks at the post-war era and at Latinx participation in United States politics, whereas this work examines both a different time period and a transnational politics. It also explores ties between ethnic Mexican conservatism in the United States and American Catholicism.

This dissertation seeks to explore three themes in particular. First, the UNS sustained nationalism away from the nation. Sinarquismo not only existed, but thrived for a period of time in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, composed of individuals devoted to a vision of a strong, Catholic Mexico. The UNS as a Mexican nationalist movement maintained a membership of fellow countrymen and women who were away from their country of origin. Sinarquistas viewed themselves as exiles from Mexico, even though most arrived before the organization started, because they were displaced from their home due to civil unrest. They did not shed their identity, but rather held onto it dearly in the United States. Separation from Mexico fortified their allegiance to the nation and what it could be. A study of the UNS shows an example of why and how conservative migrants organize in the United States to transform policy back home.²²

²¹ Benjamin Francis-Fallon, *The Rise of the Latino Vote: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019); Geraldo Cadava, *The Hispanic Republican: The Shaping of an American Political Identity, from Nixon to Trump* (New York: Ecco Press, 2020).

²² Another good example of this is the Cuban exile community who escaped the island following the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro.

Second, the UNS was not monolithic and it changed over time negotiating between being a political and religious movement, with these transformations reverberating in the U.S. There were differing interpretations of who the group was, even from its foundation in the precursor group, Las Legiones. Manuel Romo de Alba and later Salvador Abascal sought for a highly-structured militaristic – and even authoritarian – movement that would bring about an integralist Mexico, unifying church with state. Alternatively, Antonio Santacruz envisioned a more moderate social and religious movement that would work directly with the Mexican Catholic Church to regain the historic privileges that it once had. Initially, Las Legiones began as a militant movement under Romo de Alba and was later reformed by Santacruz to be more religious. Santacruz maintained power behind the scenes during the beginning of the UNS, even as it shed some of its public religiosity. When Abascal served as president from 1940 to 1941, he brought back the militant faction, alienating Santacruz and leading to the characterization of sinarquismo in the public eye as authoritarian with similarities to fascism. Following 1941, Santacruz reclaimed power and sidelined Abascal, but he soon found himself in conflict with Manuel Torres Bueno who believed that the UNS should be a political party. These divisions and different visions of the UNS and contributed to its downfall in the U.S.

Third, the United States and Mexican governments, Mexican American left, and the U.S. media mobilized against the UNS in the U.S. and ultimately took away its safe harbor there. Just as sinarquismo's nationalism was transnational, so too was the fear of fascism. The Mexican labor confederation, the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM or the Confederation of Mexican Workers), initiated rumors as early as 1939 that the UNS was an internal enemy. The rumors only grew in the years that followed, crossing the border to the north. They drew the attention of the U.S. press, left-wing organizations, and governments on both sides of the U.S.-

Mexican border, whom picked up on the notion that the UNS was fascist. The sinarquistas could not maintain their presence in the U.S. without being seen as a threat. Researching sinarquismo provides insight on the manifestation and effects of fear and sensationalism in the U.S. against a particular enemy, which plays out time and again in the country's history.²³

This dissertation explores the rise and fall of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista in the United States between 1936 and 1966. The individuals who became sinarquistas found refuge in the United States from the church-state conflict in Mexico. The organization's leadership therefore envisioned an expanded Mexico wherever its members were – in and beyond the country's borders. The UNS mobilized and gained financial support from Mexicans in the United States to ultimately attempt to destabilize the anti-clerical postrevolutionary Mexican state back home. Some conservative American Catholics amplified their cause, seeking to sway the hearts and minds of Americans, and ultimately the United States government, against the Mexican state. The UNS created a transnational conservative community among Mexicans in the U.S. that was eventually brought down through the combined efforts of the political left, media outlets, and both the United States and Mexican governments. The Catholic-influenced Mexican nationalism that drew the community to the movement in the United States ultimately led to its demise. Not only were there differing notions of what the UNS was, but opponents perceived the movement to be a fascist enemy.

Context on Mexicans and Catholics in the Early Twentieth Century United States

The sinarquistas rose to prominence in the midst of pre-existing Mexican and Catholic communities in the United States. Mexicans in the U.S. formed community, as well as faced

²³ Within the context of the twentieth century alone, examples include communism and terrorism.

marginalization in the country. Mexicans resided in what is now the present U.S. Southwest – distant from the center of Mexico far to the south. Nonetheless, they established settlements via pueblos and ranchos in the north. As a result of the Mexican American War of 1846-1848, the United States acquired the region from Mexico. Mexicans residing in the region became American citizens under the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, however newly-arrived white Americans largely disregarded their rights.²⁴ White disenfranchisement of Mexicans continued over the following decades into the turn of the twentieth century, even as more migrated to the United States because of economic opportunities and railroad networks. The upheaval of the Mexican Revolution and the First Cristero War in the 1910s and 1920s brought even more Mexicans to the U.S.²⁵ These individuals found homes not only in the Southwest, but the Midwest, settling in agricultural regions like California's Central Valley and Texas' Rio Grande Valley, as well as growing industrial centers such as Los Angeles, El Paso, and Chicago. By the 1930s, however, Mexicans faced increasing scrutiny from white Americans due to rising xenophobia in the 1920s paired with the Great Depression of 1929. These factors led to a series of deportations targeting Mexicans over the course of the decade.²⁶ The U.S. was at once a place of belonging and alienation.

During the 1930s, the Mexicans that remained in the country or those who returned encountered difficult conditions and sought to do something about them. The U.S. continued to deny them their civil rights. In addition, they faced a lack of employment and education, poor

²⁴ Johnson, 10.

²⁵ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 6.

²⁶ See Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Adam Goodman, *The Deportation Machine: America's Long History of Expelling Immigrants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

health, and crime within their communities throughout the U.S.²⁷ As a result, Mexicans within the country founded organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Español (El Congreso or the Spanish-Speaking People's Congress). These groups advocated on behalf of civil and political rights for the population. Mexicans who later would be *sinarquistas* would interact and clash with such politically-minded groups in California, Texas, and Chicagoland.

California was indeed a hotbed of Mexican politics, particularly progressive activism. Not only did community members respond to social conditions within the country, as was the case with El Congreso, but they were part of a larger legacy of revolutionary and labor activism. Within Los Angeles, the exiled and anarchist Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party) organized alongside the International Workers of the World in Los Angeles of the 1910s for class-conscious, inclusive, industrial unionism. In the city in the 1920s and the 1930s, Mexicans were involved in the Confederación de Uniones de Obreros y Campesinos Mexicanos (Confederation of Unions of Mexican Farmers and Workers), continuing on such labor activism. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was a larger tent labor federation, but nonetheless focused on issues of the community with its Committee to Aid Mexican Workers.²⁸ Beyond cities like Los Angeles, Mexicans were less organized politically, especially in agricultural regions of the state.²⁹

²⁷ See George I. Sánchez, *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940).

²⁸ Monroy, 222-250.

²⁹ Lori A. Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 30-32.

In Texas, Mexicans asserted their presence in the state in the 1930s, resisting decades of racial violence. White terror in the state towards Mexicans would result not only in groups like LULAC, but other forms of organizing as well. Working class Mexicans asserted their place in agriculture and industry in the state. The Fabens Laboring Men's Protective Association organized cotton pickers near El Paso, whereas Tejana domestic, cigar and garment workers orchestrated a series of strikes in El Paso as well as in San Antonio.³⁰ Mexican middle-class immigrants and Mexican Americans advocated on behalf of the community at large. Rómulo and Carolina Munguía disowned postrevolutionary Mexico in favor of Texas where they pursued careers in media and Mexican American community uplift. Emma Tenayuca saw societal issues lying in poverty and discrimination, first embracing communism and later labor activism, coordinating the 1938 San Antonio pecan shellers strike.³¹

As for Chicagoland of the 1930s, the Mexican community was relatively young, dating only back to the 1910s. Although there were generations who grew up in the United States, such as those who migrated north from Texas, the population was largely from the Bajío. As a result, Mexicans brought with them their politics – and their political divisions from their home country. Transnational Mexican liberals, conservatives, and radicals made up the political arena, organizing societies and coalitions.³² The Confederación de Trabajadores de México –who would openly and frequently oppose the UNS – helped organize a Popular Front against the rise

³⁰ Vargas, 68 and 76-89.

³¹ See Gabriela González, *Redeeming La Raza: Transborder Modernity, Race, Respectability, and Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³² John H. Flores, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago: Immigration Politics from the Early Twentieth Century to the Cold War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 4.

of fascism not only in Mexico, but among radicals in Chicagoland. Mexican radicals as well as working-class conservatives were active in the CIO as was the case in Los Angeles.³³

Not only did Mexican communities in different parts of the United States shape the sinarquistas, but so too did American Catholics. From the very founding of the U.S. in the late eighteenth century, Protestants dominated the American sociopolitical project. Although Catholics were present in the U.S. from the nation's beginning, they were a small religious minority. A major point of contention among Protestants in the country was where did the loyalties of Catholics lie – were they dedicated to American democracy or rather the pope in Rome? By the early twentieth century, that question persisted with the influx of migrant Catholics to the U.S.³⁴ American Catholic clergy sought to assert their growing power within the nation. The National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) would be such a force.

The NCWC began as the National Catholic War Council in August 1917 during World War I to counteract Protestant hegemony. Reverend John J. Burke, C.S.P. was involved in various U.S. Catholic efforts including *The Catholic World* and Catholic Press Association, but wanted to consolidate national Catholic power in the U.S. during the war.³⁵ He believed that the Catholic Church of the United States needed to have an equivalent to the Protestants' Federal Council of Churches' war effort. After reaching out to the American hierarchy, the prelates recommended that he become the general secretary of the council, which he did. At the war's end

³³ John H. Flores, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago*, 12-13.

³⁴ Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6 and 128; For more on a broad history of U.S. Catholicism, see James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

³⁵ William J. Shepherd, "The Archivist's Nook: The First Catholic Action Hero," The Catholic University of America University Libraries, June 2, 2016, <https://www.lib.cua.edu/wordpress/newsevents/7959/>

in November, council member Bishop J. Muldoon pushed for a permanent organization, which formed in September 1919, with the title of National Catholic Welfare Council (becoming Conference in 1923). Burke continued his leadership and led what became the official voice of the U.S. Church.³⁶ The NCWC not only cared about bringing American Catholics into the fold of the U.S., but concerned itself with supporting Catholics across national borders. The NCWC would play an instrumental role in the transnational Mexican church-state conflict, as well as serve as a vital ally to the UNS.

Context on the Transnational Mexican Church-State Conflict

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 to 1920 redefined the Mexican national community, who was part of it and who would no longer be considered welcome. The revolution occurred because of resentment building against Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, who served in office from 1876 to 1911. His administration favored foreign investment and large landowners (hacendados), while allowing the Catholic Church – a political and religious force in Latin America since colonization in the sixteenth century – relative leeway in operating as it pleased. The functioning constitution of the time, the Constitution of 1857, removed institutional privileges and promoted sale of Church property, yet Díaz simply did not enforce the document. Instead, the Church grew more powerful with more clergy, property, schools, associations and publications.³⁷ After multiple decades in power, Díaz signaled that he was open to political opposition, leading to a power vacuum and the Mexican Revolution. The decade-long conflict

³⁶ Matthew A. Redinger, *American Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, 1924-1936* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 65-68.

³⁷ Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 227; Stephen Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism, 1920-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 22; Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 21-22.

was a civil war that pitted various factions against one another with different visions of Mexico – conservative, liberal, and anarchist among others. All levels of Mexico’s class structure – elites, middle class, working class and farmworkers – all partook in the revolution. The revolution was a total war across all of Mexico that completely uprooted the social and political fabric of the nation. Near the end of the revolution, the faction under Venustiano Carranza won out and rewrote Mexico’s constitution. Among the privileged interests of the Díaz administration, the Catholic Church in Mexico became a target of the revolution, and the Mexican Constitution of 1917 codified the sentiment against the Church.³⁸

The Constitution of 1917 sought to transform Mexico, restricting the systemic power of the Catholic Church in Mexico. The constitution targeted the historic privileges of the Church through several articles. Article 3 made all education secular, preventing any religious education. Article 5 outlawed the establishment of monastic orders. The constitution’s Article 24 banned worship in public outside of Church buildings. Article 27 empowered the Mexican state to expropriate property for what it saw as the good of the nation. The article denied religious bodies like the Mexican Catholic Church the right to obtain, hold, or oversee property. It allowed the Mexican government to break up large-landholdings, many of them owned by individuals invested in the Church. Lastly, Article 130 denied the Church of any legal personality. It gave the government the power to intercede in internal matters of the Church. The Church needed

³⁸ There is a vast literature on the Mexican Revolution. Among the various works, see John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968); Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, Two Volumes (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); John M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910–1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); William H. Beezley and Colin M. MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910–1946: An Introduction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule Since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

permission from the government to open new houses of worship. Priests had to be Mexican by birth and could not criticize the government. The article stated that religious publications could not speak on politics and banned any political group associated with a religion.³⁹ Together, these five articles essentially stripped Catholics and the Catholic Church of any rights in the Mexican public sphere. However, the Constitution of 1917 initially proved to be more of a symbolic threat to the Catholic Church in Mexico, rather than a real one as the early postrevolutionary government did not enforce the document for several years.

Nonetheless, Catholics within Mexico sought to secure the institutional role of the Church during and after the revolution through the creation of Catholic resistance organizations such as La Unión Católica Mexicana (La U).⁴⁰ La U was active during the 1920s, however an auxiliary bishop from Morelia, Michoacán, Luis María Martínez, founded the organization in 1915 with the support of local Catholic hierarchy. The association's goal was to secretly organize Catholics in the political landscape of the country through a hierarchical cell structure, defending Catholicism, as well as supporting Catholic seminaries, schools, unions, and press. La U's ultimate objective was to destroy the postrevolutionary state. Among the secret society's members were not only Martínez (later to be the Archbishop of Mexico City), but also Adalberto Abascal (father of sinarquista leader Salvador Abascal). Abascal would go on to direct the group's activities, particularly in raising funds and developing networks of Catholics throughout

³⁹ República de México, *Constitución Federal de 1917*, Political Database of the Americas, Georgetown University Center for Latin American Studies, March 23, 2006, <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Mexico/mexico1917.html>

⁴⁰ Among other organizations formed during this time include the Asociación de Damas Católicas, the Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana, the Asociación Nacional de Padres de Familia, the Confederación de las Asociaciones Católicas de Mexico, the Secretariado Social Mexicano, and the Confederación Nacional Católica de Trabajo. See Andes, 28.

the country. Word of La U made its way to the Vatican, and despite its defense of Catholicism, Rome was wary of overt politics. The Vatican preferred diplomacy rather than underground activism.⁴¹ By the mid-1920s, the Mexican government decidedly shifted the focus of Catholics towards being on the defensive.

The presidential election of 1924 brought Plutarco Elías Calles to the presidency, and within a couple of years, the government did indeed pose a threat to the Mexican Church. He wanted to fulfill and act on the articles stated explicitly in the constitution. In large part, the federal government under Calles wanted to weaken the Catholic Church in Mexico as an institutional competitor within the nation.⁴² Soon after his presidency, he ordered local authorities to surveil priests' activities during Holy Week of 1925. They had the authority to make sure that clergy did not exceed their proper functions, per the constitution. As a result, government representatives acted on their duty, going into churches.⁴³ In 1926, Calles announced and enacted penal code reforms known collectively as the Ley Reglamentaria (Regulatory Law, also known as the Ley Calles or Calles Law). The law prohibited not only faith-based education in primary schools, but all religious orders and all religious vows. It also placed penalties upon clergy involved in politics, banned religious political parties, and prohibited religious acts outside of churches.⁴⁴ Peaceful resistance that year against the Calles administration, however

⁴¹Yves Bernardo Roger Solis Nicot, "Asociación espiritual o masonería católica de la U," *Istor* 33, no. IX (Summer 2008), 123-124; Yves Bernardo Roger Solis Nicot, "La U, un acercamiento desde los archivos vaticanos y mexicanos" in *Sociedades secretas clericales y no clericales en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2018), 55; Andes, 53-68.

⁴² Bailey, 49; David FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages its Migration* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2009), 43.

⁴³ Bailey, 50.

⁴⁴ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 26.

they did not prove successful. The Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa (National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty or La Liga) formed and focused on a campaign of mobilization, supporting legal pathways and economic boycotts, but these actions did not affect the government as it responded with military force.⁴⁵ The Mexican state put the Catholic Church in Mexico on notice.

The Vatican responded to the developing situation at the end of 1926. Pope Pius XI in his encyclical, *Iniquis Afflictisque*, came out publicly denouncing the situation in Mexico. He declared that the Mexican government did “away with the liberties of the majority and in such a clever way that they have been able to clothe their lawless actions with the semblance of legality.”⁴⁶ The pope recognized the vast numbers of Catholics in the country and how the Calles government was acting against the interests of its own people. He articulated that “the truth is that the clergy and the great majority of the faithful have been so strengthened in their longsuffering resistance to these laws by such an abundant shower of divine grace that they have been enabled thereby to give a glorious example of heroism.”⁴⁷ The pope supported the active participation of Catholics in defending their faith, but he was never explicit regarding forming a stance on the emerging use of armed rebellion in Mexico. Rome never came out fully in favor or against church-state violence.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion*, 50.

⁴⁶ Pius XI, *Iniquis Afflictisque*, The Holy See, November 18, 1926. http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_18111926_iniquis-afflictisque.html

⁴⁷ Pius XI, *Iniquis Afflictisque*.

⁴⁸ Andes, 86.

Violence soon escalated between Cristeros – who consisted of primarily lay Catholics and some clergy – and the Mexican government in the Bajío in the First Cristero War between 1926 and 1929. The Cristeros, which included La Liga, emerged in reaction to the Calles administration’s hardline policy regarding the constitution. Consisting of conservative, pro-Catholic Church Mexicans, they wanted to preserve the religious institution that they believed was an essential part of the social fabric of the nation. They also opposed government-led land reform, breaking up the land that many of them owned or had connections to. These individuals moved from social activism towards taking up arms against the state.⁴⁹ The government called them “Cristeros” for their battle cry of “¡Viva Cristo Rey!” (“Long Live Christ the King!”). The Cristeros ultimately sought to overthrow the Mexican government.⁵⁰ Cristero organizing and fighting against the state was concentrated in Mexico, but the movement’s struggle spanned across the country’s boundaries.

Large waves of migrants left Mexico for the United States in the 1910s, and the First Cristero War only contributed to the movement north, where Mexican Catholic resistance pursued their cause from across the border. The revolution ravaged the country, displacing many Mexicans, which was only aided by transportation networks to the north and work opportunities in the United States. By 1926, the emigrants of the First Cristero War followed suit by heading north. Entire municipalities in the states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Michoacán completely lost their populations as a result.⁵¹ Catholic organizations in the U.S. such as the Knights of

⁴⁹ Meyer, 52.

⁵⁰ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 5-10.

⁵¹ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 6-7.

Columbus and the Catholic Extension Society worked with the United States Immigration Bureau and Catholic hierarchy to place and provide assistance to migrants throughout the country. They were directed to cities with significant Mexican populations including El Paso, San Antonio, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Local organizations based in parishes in these cities cultivated spaces where Mexicans could discuss issues relating to the relationship between the Catholic Church in Mexico and the Mexican state.⁵² Cristeros also utilized the press to disseminate their points of view through papers such as San Antonio's *La Prensa*, Los Angeles' *La Opinion*, and El Paso's *Revista Católica*. Their articles criticized the Calles administration, but also provided a platform for prominent Catholic political exiles including La Liga leader René Capistrán Garza.⁵³ This press added to creating a sense of belonging and a shared identity among the Cristero diaspora in the United States. These migrants were not alone, but part of a larger community abroad with a specific cause.

The National Catholic Welfare Conference and its general secretary Burke were invested in the conditions of Mexican Catholics both in Mexico and the U.S. Through his position as general secretary, Burke took a position on the situation in Mexico, writing Mexican Catholic hierarchy that "the behavior of the Church in Mexico in the present crisis is forcefully related in an intimate and important way with the position, the intelligence, and well-being of the Church

⁵² Anne M. Martínez, *Catholic Borderlands: Mapping Catholicism Onto American Empire, 1905-1935* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 108; Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 50-51 and 77-79. For more on U.S. Catholic assistance during the First Cristero War, see Redinger.

⁵³ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 65.

in our country. Between both there is a very real solidarity of interests."⁵⁴ Both he and his organization sought to defend the interests of Catholics across national borders.

The First Cristero War reached a resolution in 1929, and this was not possible without the mobilization of Mexicans in exile, nor without the involvement of American Catholic support. The NCWC's Burke and its Legal Department Director William F. Montavon were critical in bringing about an end to the war, mediating discussions between Calles, the Mexican Church, and the U.S. Department of State.⁵⁵ Montavon, in particular, had spent a considerable amount of time in Latin America. His department monitored changes in state and federal law and worked to represent the NCWC nationally, but he was especially concerned about Catholics abroad.⁵⁶ Both Montavon and Burke aided U.S. Ambassador Dwight Morrow in brokering a deal between the Mexican government and the Cristeros. The Catholic Church in Mexico would be able to regain the use of former religious buildings. It would also now have the right again to conduct religious instruction in places of worship. Lastly, the deal provided the clergy with the same political rights as any other Mexican citizen to appeal for changes in the laws of the country.⁵⁷ The violence of the First Cristero War officially came to an end; however, the Mexican church-state conflict was not yet over.

⁵⁴ Burke's quote is cited in Servando Ortoll, "Catholic Organizations in Mexico's National Politics and International Diplomacy (1926-1942)," 84.

⁵⁵ Redinger, 147.

⁵⁶ Shane MacDonald, "The Archivist's Nook: From Manila to Madrid – Montavon's Legal Department Goes Global," The Catholic University of America University Libraries, July 27, 2017, <https://www.lib.cua.edu/wordpress/newsevents/tag/ncwc-legal-department/>

⁵⁷ Bailey, 280-282.

Three years later in 1932, Pope Pius XI commented on the situation in Mexico once again, this time in the encyclical, *Acerba Animi*. As of 1928, Plutarco Elías Calles was no longer officially president of Mexico, however he was still in control as “el Jefe Máximo” (the maximum leader) of the nation until 1934, institutionalizing political power of Mexico through the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR, or National Revolutionary Party). Despite the peace brokered at the end of the First Cristero War in 1932, the Mexican government continued practices from before by targeting Catholic clergy once again. Pius XI denounced the government for betraying the terms of the agreement, by ignoring Church hierarchy, and instead continuing to require that priests registered with the government. The Mexican state under Calles continued to criminalize clergy, did not restore their residences, and publicly attacked them through the press. The papal encyclical also condemned the secularization of education in the country as the government banned any form of religious instruction.⁵⁸ In response to these issues, Pius XI pushed forward the concept of Catholic Action, encouraging the involvement of lay Catholics in influencing Mexican society. It would revive the Church by encouraging religious observance, education, and practice. Catholic Action existed since the late nineteenth century, however Pius XI institutionalized the movement, channeling lay activities under centralized leadership, while strictly banning any involvement in political parties. The Vatican believed that Catholic Action not only applied to Mexico, but that it pertained to the entire world, as a reaction to what it perceived as radical movements such as socialism, secularism, and fascism.⁵⁹ Pius XI

⁵⁸ Pius XI, *Acerba Animi*, The Holy See, September 19, 1932. http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_29091932_acerba-animi.html

⁵⁹ Pius XI, *Acerba Animi*; Andes, 3, 147 and 154.

re-empowered a wave of resistance in Mexico amid remaining repression against the Catholic Church.

Armed Catholic rebellion re-emerged in Mexico with the Second Cristero War between approximately 1934 and 1938 in response to the rising concern over the growth of both government-led secular education and land reform in the 1930s. In July 1934, Calles mandated socialist education, taking Article 3 in the 1917 Constitution on the secularization of education to the next level by focusing on eradicating the “fanaticism” of Mexico’s youth. Many Mexican Catholics perceived government education as an affront to religious-based teachings, advancing atheism. They also believed that agrarian reform went squarely against the “natural right” to private property. This opposition to land reform largely came as a result of ties between landholders and Catholic priests and lay leaders through kinship, affinity, and clientelistic connections.⁶⁰ The Second Cristero War differed from the first one as Catholic rebels were less structured, more involved in guerrilla warfare, and more locally-based.⁶¹ They attacked federal schools, teachers, as well as ejidos (communal land holdings created through land reform). These attacks appeared through violence committed by landowners attacking agricultural reform, in addition to violence perpetrated by young adults and children against instructors.⁶² The resuscitation of violence necessitated solutions.

Pope Pius XI published the last of his three encyclicals on the situation in Mexico in 1937, *Firmissimam constantiam*. He wrote that Mexicans needed to continue to resist attacks on

⁶⁰ Fallaw, 6 and 18.

⁶¹ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 127; Fallaw, 18.

⁶² Fallaw, 6.

the Mexican Catholic Church. Nonetheless, he took a stance on Catholic rebel violence, articulating that “care must be taken to guard against either making violence legitimate with the pretext of applying a remedy to the ills of the people, or admitting and favoring those rapid and violent changes of temporal conditions of society which may lead to effects that are more harmful than the evil itself which is intended to be corrected.”⁶³ Instead, Pius XI advocated for Catholic Action once again as a solution, in preparing “Catholics to make just use of their rights, and to defend them with all legitimate means according as the common good requires.”⁶⁴ In order to end prolonged warfare, Mexican Catholics needed to pursue peaceful, civic-minded approaches towards shaping their influence upon society.

The Mexican government ultimately ended the Second Cristero War. In 1934, Mexicans elected Lázaro Cárdenas as president, and despite breaking away from Calles, the new president took several years to help remedy the church-state conflict in the country. A clash in the state of Guanajuato involving Catholics that left dozens dead in March 1936 compelled Cárdenas to take action. He encouraged the Supreme Court to slowly nullify anti-clerical legislation on both the federal and state level. Finally, in January 1938, the president allowed Catholic schools to operate under the law, which no longer made socialist education the only choice for Mexican youth.⁶⁵ And with that, both Cristero Wars were over.

The Mexican church-state conflict was evolving over the course of the 1930s. Catholic activism persisted both through violent resistance and civic action through the Church-

⁶³Pius XI, *Firmissimam constantiam*, The Holy See, March 28, 1937. http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19370328_firmissimam-constantiam.html

⁶⁴Pius XI, *Firmissimam constantiam*.

⁶⁵ Fallaw, 21 and 158.

sanctioned Catholic Action. Although some Catholic resistance organizations like La U dropped off in the 1920s, new ones emerged in the 1930s with limited support from Rome.⁶⁶ The influence of the Vatican would remain relevant in the years to come, as would U.S.-Mexican connections that formed during the First Cristero War. In fact, these transnational connections between Mexican Catholic resistance in the two countries proved decisive in establishing the UNS as a force to mobilize more people against the Mexican state.

Chapter Layout

This dissertation builds off of this historical context by starting with the first chapter documenting the creation of transnational organizational structures in 1936 up to 1940, the UNS expanded into the U.S. Individuals who were part of one of the precursor secret societies to the UNS, Las Legioneros, expressed differing notions of what the movement should be early on. Nonetheless, they created and maintained ties with clergy and lay Catholic leaders in the NCWC, even as they organized the UNS in May 1937. Within months of the movement's founding in Mexico, committees opened up in the U.S. Speeches from Mexican nationals, paired with sinarquista propaganda and regular correspondence, sustained organizational ties in the United States. However, the expansion of a pro-Mexican Catholic nationalist organization like the UNS in American Southwestern cities and towns soon fed into the growing fear of fascism in the country and would be a subject of suspicion of the U.S. government.

Chapter two is situated between the Mexican presidential election of Manuel Ávila Camacho in July 1940 and the United States entry into World War II in December 1941 when the movement established a foothold in the U.S. New sinarquista president Salvador Abascal

⁶⁶ Andes, 149.

transformed the organization and further facilitated the movement of its institutional culture across the U.S.-Mexican border. The group increased distribution of its newspaper, *El Sinarquista*, disseminated pamphlets purveying its values, created new traditions such as songs, and solidified its stance on a variety of issues. The *sinarquistas* established more committees in California and Texas, both in urban and rural communities. The UNS also grew beyond just the two states, expanding into the Midwest through setting up a committee in the Chicagoland and selling its newspaper across the region. The movement continued to benefit from its relationship with the NCWC, all the while building new connections with conservative American Catholics elsewhere in the country. No longer was *sinarquismo* an emerging transnational movement during this period, but instead became a mainstay among conservative Mexicans in the U.S. Nonetheless, reports that the UNS was a fascist movement were spreading. American media outlets identified the group as connected with the Falange Española and Nazi Germany, threatening the security of the U.S. The government built off of the media reports, surveilling the organization.

As *sinarquismo* was at its height in 1941, chapter three details how organizational leaders, with Salvador Abascal at its helm, envisioned putting rhetoric into action with the development of colonies in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The UNS rejected the Mexican government's use of "revolution" and instead pursued a plan based on "organization," establishing from the ground-up places to live out the movement's ideals in "colonies," obtaining control of regions in the less-populated north of Mexico. Disciplined *sinarquista* members emulated the Spanish conquistadores who they admired by settling and populating the colonies. Colonization allowed for the *sinarquistas* to develop societies completely from scratch, centered on their Catholic faith as well as ownership of property. The colonies epitomized Abascal's

leadership, putting organization and discipline into practice. Sinarquista members from the U.S. were vital in making colonization a reality. They donated money and materials to make the colonies possible. Sinarquistas in the U.S. even envisioned themselves as returning to Mexico via the colonies. Sinarquista families, with the large majority being upper middle-class families, established and populated the colonies. The largest and most publicized of the colonies was Santa María Auxiliadora in Baja California Sur. The sinarquistas established a secondary colony which they called Villa Kino de Santa María de Guadalupe in Sonora. The UNS established other colonies in the north of Mexico including San Miguel Arcángel in Durango, Santa María del Refugio in Tamaulipas, and San José Opodepe in Sonora. External opposition combined with internal logistical issues eventually led to its demise in 1944.

From the U.S. entry into World War II in December 1941 to the Zoot Suit Riots in June 1943, the fourth chapter details the beginning of the end for the UNS in the U.S. The UNS could no longer operate freely without scrutiny. The group experienced its height between 1940 and 1941 and advanced its ambitious project to colonize the north of Mexico in the years that followed. The war, however, placed the movement under scrutiny. Advocates on behalf of the Mexican community in the U.S. wanted to address the social issues that the population faced for decades, known colloquially as the “Mexican problem.” The Mexican American left, the U.S. press, and U.S. and Mexican governments spread the rumor that the UNS was going to feed upon such issues to sway the population in favor of the Axis. The Sleepy Lagoon murder and successive trial at the end of 1942 highlighting Mexican American youth delinquency led to speculation about the group’s involvement. Eventually, this resulted in the California Un-American Activities Committee led by California state politician Jack B. Tenney to investigate the UNS as one among other fascist and communist movements in 1942. The Zoot Suit Riots in

early June 1943 led to further scrutiny and another such investigation of the sinarquistas. The media, government, and the political left targeted the UNS more than in previous years. The UNS pushed back against the opposition. The UNS made use of ties with conservative U.S. Catholics more than ever to amplify the organization's presence – and narrative. Some American Catholics even sponsored a tour of sinarquista leaders to college campuses around the U.S. The UNS believed that there was still time to convince hearts and minds that its cause was a just one.

The fifth and last chapter covers the end of the UNS in the U.S., facing a multi-decade downfall between 1943 and the mid-1960s. Overwhelming negative sentiment built up against the organization as a fascist fifth column. Opponents on the political and in the press called on the U.S. government to eliminate the organization, which the state took note of implementing further investigations and censorship. Conservative American Catholics also started to turn their backs on the organization, denouncing sinarquismo. These factors combined with the growing internal split in the movement led to its eventual decline in the U.S.

The dissertation in the pages that follow depicts how sinarquistas in the United States sought to bring change to the political situation in Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century. The Unión Nacional Sinarquista resisted and threatened the postrevolutionary Mexican state with its membership transcending national boundaries into the U.S. Its leaders encountered a variety of internal struggles as well as difficulties of how to define the movement. Ultimately, the organization could not shake off the reputation that it gained over time of being a fascist fifth column. Nonetheless, this transnational study of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista challenges and transforms how we look at Mexicans – and more broadly migrants – in the U.S. No community is a monolith and the sinarquistas certainly demonstrated that.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SPREAD OF SINARQUISMO AND FEAR OF FASCISM, 1936-1940

In California you still hear the clamor of the bells of our peoples, you Mexicans, who have half of your soul nailed with a dagger, forever longing for the sanctuary where [the Virgin of Guadalupe] greeted Juan Diego with a smile; you, Mexicans, who are happily sent everywhere and will always be Mexicans, to feel and always feel in your heart the enthusiastic heartbeats of those in Mexico who are determined to rebuild the heroic glory of Mexico.¹

Salvador M. Velasco spoke to a crowd of Mexicans in Los Angeles in October of 1937, representing the Central Sinarquista Organizing Committee of León, Guanajuato. The committee sent him to spread “oral propaganda” to the city’s residents.² Not only that, he sought to draw the explicit connection between Mexicans at home and Mexicans abroad in the United States. California formerly belonged to Mexico, and he expressed that Mexicans there never completely lost their ties to their homeland. Although Mexicans now resided in the United States, they had a duty to ensure that Mexico was on the right course for the future, while not losing sight of the past.

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista embodied nationalist, pro-Catholic, and anti-communist sentiments both at home in Mexico and in the U.S. The movement stemmed from Central

¹ “Que en California escuchais todavía el clamoreo de las campañas de nuestros pueblos vosotros, mexicanos, que traéis clavada en mitad del alma, como un puñal, la nostalgia infinita del Santuario en que se espera la sonrisa que acaricio a Juan Diego; vosotros, mexicanos que por estar felizmente condonados a ser en todas partes y para siempre mexicanos, sentir y sentirse siempre en vuestras entrañas las palpitaciones entusiastas de los que en Mexico estamos resueltos a reconstruir el heroico Blason Mexicano.” Salvador M. Velasco, “Speech on ‘Sinarquismo,’” Los Angeles, CA, October 30, 1937, Rómulo Munguía Papers, 1911-1980, Box 16, Folder 4, Benson Collection, UT Austin.

² Velasco, “Speech on Sinarquismo.”

Mexico and sought to encompass *all* Mexicans. It held a holistic vision of the Mexican nation within and beyond its borders. Mexicans existed in the American West prior to the U.S. colonization of the region, however religious and political conditions uprooted Mexicans and pushed even more northward. The Mexican Revolution, coupled with the two Cristero Wars, forced Mexicans into exile in the north towards California and Texas. A significant portion of those who fled were not in agreement with the left-leaning politics of the postrevolutionary Mexican government, thus aligning them with counter-movements such as that of the UNS.

From the creation of transnational organizational structures in 1936 up to 1940, the UNS worked towards creating a transnational community of Mexicans between Mexico and the U.S. Individuals who were part of one of the precursor secret societies to the UNS, Las Legioneras, created and maintained ties with clergy and lay Catholic leaders in the NCWC, even as they organized the group in May 1937. Within months of the movement's founding in Mexico, committees opened up in the U.S. Individuals like Velasco were instrumental in helping spread the movement across the U.S. Speeches from Mexican nationals, paired with sinarquista propaganda and regular correspondence, sustained organizational ties in the U.S. Pro-Catholic, nationalist Mexicans built a community across the northern border right as the specter of fascism was spreading internationally.

International fascism emerged as a growing force in the world during this period, particularly in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Falangist Spain, and as a result, so did fear of such politics in the U.S. Xenophobia contributed to this perceived threat as Americans grew increasingly concerned about foreign political movements within the boundaries of the U.S. Especially with the build-up to and start of World War II in 1939, the U.S. government perceived these "fifth column" elements as undermining national security from within. American political

leaders also drew the distinction between fascism and pan-Americanism – one as a detrimental ultranationalist foreign force and the other as a forward-thinking U.S.-led policy to unite the Americas. Fascism ran counter to the Good Neighbor Policy established by Franklin Delano Roosevelt which was an effort to extend U.S. influence and build a coalition against fascism in the Americas. Mexico too feared fascism in the late 1930s. It was the connection that the Mexican political left made between *sinarquismo* and fascism that ended up influencing the U.S. government. That connection started to make the UNS a subject of U.S. government surveillance.

This chapter examines these two parallel processes between 1936 and 1940 – the spread of Las Legiones and ultimately *sinarquismo* in the United States, as well as the rising alarm around the spread of fascism. The expansion of a pro-Mexican nationalist organization like the Unión Nacional Sinarquista in U.S. Southwestern cities and towns soon fed into the growing fear of fascism in the country and would be a subject of suspicion of the United States government. As the movement grew across national boundaries, so did the beginning of the opposition to it.

The Establishment of a Transnational Unión Nacional Sinarquista

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista emerged as a movement as part of the Mexican church-state conflict of the 1920s and 1930s – a struggle over hearts and minds transcending borders. Although it took place largely within the confines of Mexico's boundaries, the conflict was never limited solely to the Mexican nation. The same was the case with UNS. One of the precursor secret societies to the movement, Las Legiones, had ties with the NCWC starting in 1936, sustaining connections that existed between Mexican Catholic resistance and the institution from the First Cristero War. The founding of the UNS in 1937 not only led to the establishment of the organization's platform, but the dissemination of it through the growth of committees on both

sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. The UNS claimed a stake in Mexican communities throughout the American Southwest. The formation of a transnational, conservative community strengthened the movement against the Mexican government.

“Social Justice,” Las Legiones, and Their Relationship with the NCWC

In 1931, the Vatican took a stance on the state of world politics. The encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, was Pope Pius XI’s response to Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 circular letter, *Rerum Novarum*, which discussed the situation of the world’s working classes, denouncing socialism as well as unregulated capitalism by favoring both private ownership and labor unions.³ Pius XI, like Leo XIII before him, also sought harmony between classes. Following the effects of the Wall Street Crash of 1929, politics throughout the world were becoming increasingly polarized. On the left, socialism and communism appealed to the disenfranchised working class, whereas on the right, fascism sought to bring order to societies perceived to be in disarray. *Quadragesimo Anno* took a middle ground between the two political extremes. Pius XI articulated for a particular notion of “social justice” that he defined as “to each, therefore, must be given his own share of goods, and the distribution of created goods” because of the “huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered propertyless, must be effectively called back to and brought into conformity with the norms of the common good.”⁴ He encouraged closing the gap between the wealthy and the poor through cooperation, navigating a place in the middle of individualism and collectivism. Pius XI also made a point of defending

³ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, The Holy See, May 15, 1891. http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html

⁴Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, The Holy See, May 15, 1931. http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html

private property, by arguing that when states bring private ownership into harmony with the common good, they thereby secure private possessions and private property rights.⁵ He sought up to uplift the masses, without completely undermining capitalism. *Quadragesimo Anno* left a major influence on how Catholics worldwide would pursue a Christian social order.

Las Legiones represented this push for Pius XI's "social justice" as a militant Catholic organization. Manuel Romo de Alba, a teacher from Guadalajara, Jalisco founded the organization in 1934. Similar to La U before it, Las Legiones served as an underground Catholic movement based on cells. Romo de Alba sought early on to combine men and women together in a giant hierarchical organization that he sought would resist the postrevolutionary Mexican state. In doing so, he hoped that Las Legiones would restore the rights of the Catholic Church and Catholics in Mexico. The movement brought in former Cristeros, as well as professionals who were devout Catholics such as the rector of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico or UNAM), Manuel Gómez Morín, who would later form the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN or the National Action Party).⁶ Sharing the sentiments of *Quadragesimo Anno*, Las Legiones' goals were to restore "Christian social order" and for freedom of thought, teaching, press, and assembly. Las Legiones had six action-oriented strategies focused on government infiltration, a plan to generate "intense propaganda," the spread of home schools to counteract socialist schools, the infiltration of labor groups, aid to workers in acquiring property, and the creation of a party run secretly by the organization. Of the six

⁵ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*.

⁶ Servando Ortoll, "Las Legiones, La Base, y El Sinarquismo, Tres Organizaciones Distintas y Un Solo Fin Verdadero? (1929-1948)" in *El PDM: Movimiento Regional* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1989), 18-19; Hernández García de León, 45 and 125-128.

strategies, the party would concentrate on ending the church-state conflict, as well as promoting the right to property, freedom of education, and a cooperative society.⁷ Although Las Legiones was a clandestine group, it still sought to eventually enter the public political arena.

Las Legiones believed that Mexican Church-approved Catholic Action alone was not the answer for Mexico. A 1936 document, the “Brief History of The Legionaries in Mexico,” articulated that Mexico’s Catholic Action needed to be “wide and vigorous like that of the U.S. with an adequate press, with her schools, colleges, and universities.” It proclaimed that “Catholic Action, such as we are allowed to have is not enough to save Mexico. The enemy has large daily newspapers, we have a few sheets of propaganda issued weekly; the enemy conveys his message in the plaza, the theatre and by radio, Catholic Action must use the small reference room; the enemy has thousands of public schools, Catholic Action must use small home schools.”⁸ According to Las Legiones, Catholic Action was more or less symbolic, but did not have real power in Mexico.

From the beginning of Las Legiones – and even into the development of sinarquismo – there existed a conflict between two factions. One faction led by Manuel Romo de Alba sought for a hierarchical militant organization that would take Mexico towards integralism, bringing together church and state as one. Catholicism would be fundamental to public law and public policy. Salvador Abascal as the son of La U’s founder Adalberto Abascal, followed in the ideological line of Romo de Alba. He was a lawyer from Morelia, Michoacán, involved in more

⁷ José Antonio Urquiza, “Brief History of the Legionnaires in in Mexico,” 1936, Box 150, Folder 28, USCCB General Secretary Files, CUA Archives.

⁸ Urquiza, “Brief History of the Legionnaires in in Mexico,” 1936, Box 150, Folder 28, USCCB General Secretary Files, CUA Archives.

militant Catholic activism over the course of the decade. He served briefly as a judge in Jalisco, but became disillusioned with how the postrevolutionary Mexican state operated.⁹ Another faction led by Antonio Santacruz aimed for a social-religious movement. Santacruz was a chemical engineer in Mexico City, who owned various pharmaceutical laboratories and properties in the city. He was entrenched in Catholicism and worked closely with the Mexican Catholic Church.¹⁰ His latter faction won out – known as La Base (The Base) – and was initially composed of a secret council of Santacruz, José Antonio Urquiza, and Gonzalo Campos. Urquiza and Campos were cousins, close to the order of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), and members of a prominent landowning family in Querétaro.¹¹ Not only would the secret council evolve in the coming years and transcend into the advent of sinarquismo, but so too would definitions of what the movement would be.

In September 1936, Las Legiones' representatives, brothers José Antonio and Carlos Urquiza, and Salvador Abascal, arranged a meeting with the NCWC's Reverend John J. Burke, C.S.P. through the Catholic hierarchy in Mexico.¹² The Archbishop of Morelia and Apostolic Delegate to Mexico, Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, wrote an introduction letter on behalf of the Urquiza brothers and Abascal to Burke, explaining in advance the purpose behind their visit. Their group's aim was "not to take up arms or overthrow the Government, but constrain it, by

⁹ Young, "Creating Catholic Utopias," 5. Also, see Salvador Abascal, *Mis recuerdos: sinarquismo y Colonia María Auxiliadora (1935-1944): con importantes documentos de los Archivos Nacionales de Washington* (Mexico City: Editorial Tradición, 1980).

¹⁰ Hernández García de León, 128-129 and 140.

¹¹ Hernández García de León, 138; Young, "Creating Catholic Utopias," 5; Ortoll, "Catholic Organizations in Mexico's National Politics and International Diplomacy (1926-1942)," 186-187.

¹² Letter from Leopold Ruiz to John J. Burke, September 12, 1936, Box 150, Folder 28, USCCB General Secretary Files, CUA Archives.

the means of the force of public opinion, to have the social justice law as a standard to meliorate the proletarians.” Ruiz clarified that the men “are looking for the sympathy of Washington” and “that they don’t want to mix Religion in politics, but cannot miss Religion as the ground of their action.”¹³

The Urquiza brothers and Abascal ending up meeting with Burke and William F. Montavon, director of the NCWC Legal Department, at the NCWC’s offices in Washington, D.C. The three men explained the clandestine nature of the group and its focus on granting Mexicans religious rights. They also talked about infiltrating official labor unions and the main party of Mexico, the PNR, and their goal of replacing “Bolshevists” within these organizations. The Mexican men presented themselves as having the moral support of Catholic bishops in Mexico. Burke responded to the men, sharing that he sympathized with the movement, but expressing some concerns. He disliked the clandestine nature of the organization, arguing that it needed to be public to make a real difference in Mexico. Additionally, Burke believed that the group was too Catholic, and that Las Legioneras instead needed to be focused on patriotism, standing for “Christian principles” against “Bolshevism.” The meeting ended by Burke stating how he and Montavon “endeavored, in the past ten years, to make known the true conditions in Mexico, and of how we have made a change in public opinion in the United States.”¹⁴ As Pius XI opposed atheistic communism, Burke followed suit. The NCWC had shown its dedication to the cause of Mexican Catholics in First Cristero War in supporting them against the

¹³ Letter from Ruiz to Burke, September 12, 1936, Box 150, Folder 28, USCCB General Secretary Files, CUA Archives.

¹⁴ William F. Montavon, Interview Transcript, September 24, 1936, Box 150, Folder 28, USCCB General Secretary Files, CUA Archives.

postrevolutionary Mexican state, which it perceived as communist-minded. Burke aimed to assist Las Legiones just as his organization had aided Cristeros in the past, particularly in shaping public opinion in the U.S. in favor of the organization. Las Legiones agreed to send men once every three months from then on to check in on the progress of the endeavor.

Later in 1936, Salvador Abascal traveled north and throughout the U.S.-Mexico borderlands where he found support for Las Legiones in communities populated by Mexicans who fled the religious violence in the Bajío because of the Cristero Wars. Cities he visited included Matamoros, Brownsville, McAllen, Reynosa, Piedras Negras, Eagle Pass, Presidio, Ciudad Juárez, El Paso, Cananea, Nogales, Mexicali, and Tijuana. He founded branches of the movement in Los Angeles and Bakersfield, California where Mexicans “arrived to lend their brave services.” Through this process, Abascal met, and would sustain contacts with Pedro Villaseñor of Los Angeles, as well as Porfirio Rivera and José Cleofas Rojas in Bakersfield who would later be involved in sinarquismo. These men migrated to the U.S. because of violence in Mexico due to the First Cristero War. They previously supported the Cristero cause, and Las Legiones was a natural extension of that movement. Villaseñor, in particular, migrated from Coeno, Michoacán after being jailed for his pro-Church activities. The priest in his town wrote a letter to the priest of La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles (Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church) in Los Angeles at the center of the city’s Mexican community. He not only set up a new life as a shopowner in Boyle Heights, but continued his pro-Catholic activism as the founder of the Comité Popular de Defensa Mexicana (Popular Committee of Mexican Defense).¹⁵ In addition to forming a relationship with the NCWC, Las Legiones knew that

¹⁵ Abascal remarked that in Los Angeles and Bakersfield, Mexicans “llegaron a prestar valiosos servicios.” Abascal, *Mis recuerdos*, 136. For more on Pedro Villaseñor’s involvement in the the Comité Popular de Defensa Mexicana, see Box 2, Pedro Villaseñor Papers, 1925-1990, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. For more on his

Mexicans at the literal edge of Mexican society in both the border region and within the U.S. itself were invaluable not only to expanding, but strengthening their cause. Although much of the church-state conflict took place in the Bajío, it was important for Las Legiones to acquire as much support as it could receive to resist the Mexican state under Cárdenas.

Into 1937, the Urquiza brothers kept in constant contact with the NCWC, despite the passing of Burke in October 1936 soon after they met. Reverend Michael Joseph Ready, who was formerly assistant general secretary of the NCWC replaced Burke as general secretary, however it was Montavon who would interface with the men. Montavon noted how the Urquiza brothers' plan of Catholic cooperation in Mexico appealed to Burke, and he wanted to maintain that line of communication. The Urquiza brothers were fearful that any letters that they sent would be censored by the United States Post Office Department, so they planned to visit again as they had promised.¹⁶ The brothers simply sent Montavon news clippings of the situation in Mexico, rather than letters detailing him of what was happening with the movement. As the months passed, it appeared that a visit would no longer be possible as discussion began about when Montavon would visit Mexico City instead. José Antonio reiterated how appreciative Las Legiones was, expressing, "you mean to us a great deal, for you are a great moral support to

involvement in the Cristero Wars, see Box 1, Folders 2 and 19, Villaseñor Papers, Huntington Library. His daughters described him in considerable detail; Lucila Villaseñor Grijalva, María Elena Villaseñor, and Alicia O. Colunga, Interview by Nathan Ellstrand, June 14, 2020. Villaseñor, Porfirio Rivera, and José Cleofas Rojas would eventually become sinarquista leaders. Also, see Young, *Mexican Exodus*, Chapter 5.

¹⁶ William F. Montavon, Office Memorandum, February 17, 1937, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

us.”¹⁷ Indeed, the contact between the NCWC and Las Legiones did not wane, especially between William F. Montavon and José Antonio Urquiza.

The Start of the UNS and Its Spread in the U.S. Southwest

While José Antonio Urquiza exchanged correspondence with Montavon during mid-1937, he was in the midst of forming the public face of Las Legiones – the Unión Nacional Sinarquista.¹⁸ Members of Las Legiones’ council decided that they did not want the movement to divide nor disappear, so they decided to move out of the shadows, going public. Urquiza met in secret with seven other leaders of Las Legiones including Abascal, José Trueba Olivares and Manuel Zermeño in León, Guanajuato on May 23, 1937 and created the new, public organization.¹⁹ The name “sinarquista” derived from the Ancient Greek word “synarchy” meaning “with” and “authority,” demonstrating that the group was distinct from – and the opposite of – anarchism.²⁰ This new organization therefore set itself apart from the Mexican state, and particularly that of President Lázaro Cárdenas, of whom its leadership perceived as not legitimately ruling Mexico. The new movement was led publicly by José Trueba Olivares, yet controlled by the now-sinarquista secret council headed by Antonio Santacruz.

¹⁷ Letters from Las Legiones to the NCWC were addressed to Miss Edith Jarboe per a prior agreement made with Burke. Letter from José Antonio Urquiza to William F. Montavon, February 17, 1937, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

¹⁸ It is not clear if the movement was called the Unión Nacional Sinarquista upon its founding, and even Abascal comments on this in his memoir, *Mis Recuerdos*. If anything, it was called the Comité Organizador Sinarquista (Sinarquista Organizing Committee). I am using the name to maintain consistency throughout the dissertation.

¹⁹ Servando Ortoll, “Los orígenes sociales del sinarquismo en Jalisco (1929-1939),” *Encuentro: Movimientos Sociales* 1, no. 3 (1984): 116-118; Meyer, *El Sinarquismo, El Cardenismo y La Iglesia*, 50.

²⁰ This is the most common (and correct) interpretation of the term, although sometimes there are references in other materials to its meaning being “without anarchy.” Memorandum from Michael Joseph Ready to William F. Montavon, September 24, 1937, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

The following month on June 12, 1937, the UNS released its manifesto, putting forward the group's ideology as one focused on individual sacrifice on behalf of the Mexican nation. It argued for the "restauration of the fundamental rights of each citizen, whose main purpose is the salvation of the country." Instead of an utopian society without laws, sinarquismo "wants a society governed by a legitimate authority, coming from the free democratic activity of the people." The sinarquista "asks nothing for himself; he must always be willing to give himself to any work that results in collective benefit." The group asserted that it was instead positive, advocating for freedom, and thus happiness and progress. The document closed with the movement's motto: "MOTHERLAND, JUSTICE, AND LIBERTY."²¹ The manifesto concentrated on dichotomies – the individual versus the nation, anarchy versus authority, and self-interest versus the collective good. The organization created a one-page flyer distillation of its manifesto that it disseminated to the public.²²

Whereas the manifesto was quite general in content, the organization also released its "Sixteen Basic Points" that honed in on specific issues. Among them, the UNS stated the importance of each and every Mexican to save Mexico, ignoring class distinctions in favor of the nation. The class distinctions that did exist needed to be narrowed, bridging the gap between rich and poor. The nation, therefore, was above all else, especially communism and internationalism.

²¹ Segments of the original text in Spanish are as follows: "restauración de los derechos fundamentales de cada ciudadano, que tenga como su más alta finalidad la salvación de la Patria," "el "sinarquismo" quiere una sociedad regida por una autoridad legitima, emanada de la libre actividad democrática del pueblo," "El sinarquista no pide nada para si; debe estar siempre dispuesto a entregarse a toda obra que redunde en beneficio colectivo," "PATRIA, JUSTICIA Y LIBERTAD." Comité Organizador Sinarquista, *1937 Manifiesto del Comité Organizador Sinarquista al pueblo Mexicano*, Memoria Política del México, Instituto Nacional de Estudios Politicos, A.C., June 12, 1937, <http://www.memoriapoliticademexico.org/Textos/6Revolucion/1937MCO.html>

²² Comité Organizador Sinarquista, One Page Manifiesto, 1937, Colección Comité Organizador Sinarquista, 1937-1938, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Mexico City, Mexico.

The Mexican nation's emblems also stood apart from those of communism and Nazism.

According to the UNS, there existed no political left nor political right, but only "Mexicans" and "anti-Mexicans." Mexico needed to value liberty of the individual, as well as economic liberty.

Ultimately, the Mexican government needed to implement the strong rule of law with the Mexican people as the reason for which it stands.²³ These points demonstrated where the UNS placed themselves regarding issues affecting both Mexico and the world at the time. The manifesto in combination with the sixteen points showed that the UNS as a new organization signaled a break in the postrevolutionary Mexican church-state conflict. The UNS embraced Mexican nationalism at its core identity, rather than Catholicism in contrast to Las Legiones and other predecessor movements.

Prior influences – many of them transnational – were clear in the new movement, especially in its manifesto and sixteen points. The UNS chose to be a movement rather than a party. Although Las Legiones originally wanted to organize a public-facing party, the 1926 Ley Reglamentaria or "Ley Calles" under Mexican President Calles prohibited religious parties.²⁴ Additionally, UNS secret council leader Antonio Santacruz envisioned a social-religious and not an explicitly political organization. The NCWC also had an impact on the UNS. The newly-found movement embraced the suggestions that the NCWC's Burke made to the Urquiza brothers and Abascal while they were part of Las Legiones the prior year. Burke believed that the group needed to be public to be successful, and he also commented that it was necessary for

²³ Comité Organizador Sinarquista, *1937 Manifiesto del Comité Organizador Sinarquista al pueblo Mexicano*, Memoria Política del México, Instituto Nacional de Estudios Políticos, A.C., June 12, 1937, <http://www.memoriapoliticademexico.org/Textos/6Revolucion/1937MCO.html>

²⁴ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 26.

Las Legiones to downplay its Catholic identity in favor of anti-communist patriotism.²⁵ The men heeded his advice, and the documents reflected a whole-hearted embrace of nationalism as counter to communism. The sinarquistas believed in a Mexican exceptionalism which placed Mexico above and ahead of others. Communism represented an external force pushing for international solidarity, in addition to an imposition of collective ownership on the economy. Relating to economics, the influence of “social justice” as laid out in Pope Pius XI’s 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno*, was also evident. He supported the right to private property, as well as the need to close the disparity between rich and poor in the world. The sinarquistas’ sixteen points echoed the sentiment, advocating for a regulated capitalism – without communism – in Mexico that benefited all of its citizens.²⁶ The UNS adopted ideals that would gain them support and traction among Mexicans – both in Mexico and in the United States.

Shortly after the release of these documents on June 26, 1937, conservative-leaning San Antonio-based *La Prensa* published a piece supporting the “El Partido Sinarquista” to its Mexican readership in the Southwestern U.S. The article was one of the first that appeared in the U.S. about the sinarquistas, and openly declared the UNS to be a political party that would rival the PNR of President Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1940 presidential election. The piece contrasted the sinarquistas with the PNR, which it identified with voter suppression and corruption. It mentioned how it will be “the perfect party” as it was opposed to anarchism and sought for a social equilibrium in Mexican society. *La Prensa* commented that if the sinarquistas succeed,

²⁵ William F. Montavon, Interview Transcript, September 24, 1936, Box 150, Folder 28, USCCB General Secretary Files, CUA Archives.

²⁶ Comité Organizador Sinarquista, *1937 Manifiesto del Comité Organizador Sinarquista al pueblo Mexicano*, Memoria Política del México, Instituto Nacional de Estudios Políticos, A.C., June 12, 1937, <http://www.memoriapoliticademexico.org/Textos/6Revolucion/1937MCO.html>

they would benefit Mexico for the better.²⁷ Although the UNS chose consciously not to be a political party, *La Prensa* saw its political power and deemed it as such. The newspaper, one notoriously against the postrevolutionary state in the 1920s and 1930s, reaffirmed its stance by backing the UNS.

This new movement took hold within a matter of just a few months in the Southwestern U.S. Right as the UNS established committees in the stronghold of Mexican Catholic resistance in the cities of León, Querétaro, and Guadalajara in the Bajío, the movement opened up branches in Los Angeles, California and El Paso, Texas.²⁸ El Paso and its neighboring city, Ciudad Juárez, already had Las Legiones chapters in their respective cities. Abascal had visited both of them as part of a tour of northern Mexico and the borderlands the previous year. He was also instrumental in establishing a chapter in Los Angeles at the same time. The new sinarquista committees in the U.S. Southwest built off of prior support for Mexican Catholic resistance.

In 1937, the UNS inaugurated a committee in Los Angeles, a city that had long been a destination of exile for Mexicans in the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods. The Central Organizing Committee of León, Guanajuato sent Salvador Velasco to speak on behalf of sinarquismo in Los Angeles on October 30, 1937. In addition to drawing the connection between Mexicans in the U.S. and Mexico as the same people, Velasco referred to many of the points brought up in the group's founding documents, critiquing the contemporary situation in Mexico. Velasco complained about Mexico's overreliance on capital from outside the nation. He believed that a minority of people were exploiting the masses. Ultimately, he focused on how he believed

²⁷ "El Partido Sinarquista," *La Prensa*, June 26, 1937.

²⁸ Abascal, 152.

that the Mexican government desired to be communist. Velasco emphasized communism as the main force of evil in the world, conflating it with despotic leaders and the “international Jewry,” building off anti-Semitic rhetoric commonplace among conservative Catholics at the time. Through the leadership of men and the support of women, Velasco argued that sinarquismo would bring to reality the ideals of order and social peace, promoting “liberty” instead of what he perceived as communistic tyranny. He made a point to distinguish the UNS from German Nazism and Italian Fascism, emphasizing that there was no connection between the two as sinarquismo was intended by and for Mexicans.²⁹ Velasco’s sinarquista propaganda had an impact on the population, and two days later on November 1, the UNS established the California Regional Organizing Committee in the city.³⁰

Later in November 1937, sinarquismo arrived in the Texas-Chihuahua borderlands. Both El Paso and Ciudad Juárez received an influx of Mexicans as a result of the Mexican Revolution, and were defined by both those who supported and opposed the revolution, including the UNS.³¹ The sinarquistas held an assembly in front of 400 people at the Sociedad Ignacio Zaragoza in Ciudad Juárez November 7. Samuel Abasolo essentially reiterated the talk Velasco gave earlier, denouncing communism and advocating for “social justice.” He distanced the sinarquistas from the doctrine of Nazi Germany, arguing that sinarquismo was “not fascist or Hitlerist, but a supporter of a true democracy, with a strong and respected authority that guarantees the rights of all.” The audience applauded him with enthusiasm, and the address ended with the Mexican

²⁹ Velasco, “Speech on Sinarquismo.”

³⁰ Betty Kirk, “Mexico’s Social Justice Party,” *The Nation*, June 12, 1943.

³¹ Romo, 10.

national anthem. The meeting closed by addressing the desire of residents across the border in El Paso to form a committee. The chief of the Juárez committee, Herminio Mendoza, discussed that his committee was only provisional at the moment. Once the Juárez committee obtained permanency, local sinarquista members would start work on an El Paso committee.³² Later in the month on November 26, Mendoza hosted another assembly at the Sociedad Zaragoza, announcing that the UNS central committee approved the El Paso committee as an offshoot of the Juárez committee. The UNS leadership chose Martín Ramirez as president, Julian G. Quintanar as secretary, and Miguel Salazar as treasurer.³³ The Los Angeles and El Paso committees served as the foundation for future expansion elsewhere in the U.S. in the years to come.

Over the course of 1938, the UNS national committee headed now by president Manuel Zermeno solidified its function and ideology. The sinarquista headquarters, now based in the capital of Mexico City instead of León, disseminated a series of bulletins to its branches in Mexico and the U.S. One bulletin explained the hierarchical structure of the organization that was emerging on the ground. The national committee was at the core of the group, regional committees existed in large cities representing Mexican states or broad areas of influence, and local committees served smaller towns. The national committee was led by a president, whereas the regional and local committees were led by chiefs.³⁴ Another bulletin laid out the format of

³² Abasolo argued that “el sinarquismo no es fascista ni hitlerista, sino un partidario de una verdadera democracia, con una autoridad fuerte y respetada que garantice los derechos de todos.” “Se constituyó en Ciudad Juarez,” *El Continental*, November 10, 1937; “Se Fundo en C. Juarez el “Sinarquismo,” *La Prensa*, November 12, 1937.

³³ “Fue establecido en El Paso un subcomite sinarquista.” *El Continental*, November 27, 1937.

³⁴ The term the UNS used for “chief” was the Spanish word, “jefe.” Unión Nacional Sinarquista, Bulletin Number 3, “La Organización de la U.N.S.,” Mexico, D.F., January 30, 1938, Munguía Papers, Box 16, Folder 5, Benson Collection, UT Austin.

each meeting. The regional and local committee meetings met on a weekly basis and dealt with themes introduced to them by the national committee. Each reunion needed to result in action steps for the following week, as well as items to report back to the national level.³⁵ Among a variety of themes, these internal communications also discussed the need to establish affinity groups among women and children, how the sinarquistas valued farmworkers, as well as recapitulated the movement's stance against communism, anarchism, and liberalism in favor of what they saw as "social justice."³⁶ These bulletins ensured that all committees, including those in the U.S., were in alignment with the national organization.

The California Regional Organizing Committee out of Los Angeles released its own pamphlet to recruit potential members, focusing on beliefs and member incorporation. The document featured the UNS manifesto, as well as a "sinarquista doctrine" reemphasizing prior sentiments of nationalism, but honed in on the family as the fundamental base of Mexican society. It explicitly mentioned religion, acknowledging that "sinarquismo considers religious liberty as absolutely necessary not associated with persecutory acts or laws." The Los Angeles regional committee tailored the pamphlet to its residents noting that "Mexico should be the Motherland loving of all of its children" including those outside of the country.³⁷ In addition to laying out sinarquista beliefs, the pamphlet articulated four steps to entering sinarquismo,

³⁵ Unión Nacional Sinarquista, Bulletin Number 5, "Indicaciones generales para la celebración de las reuniones sinarquistas," Mexico, D.F., February 13, 1938, Munguía Papers, Box 16, Folder 5, Benson Collection, UT Austin.

³⁶ See bulletins number 6, 10, and 11, Munguía Papers, Box 16, Folder 5, Benson Collection, UT Austin; Bulletin Number 8, "Un programa de trabajo," Colección Comité Organizador Sinarquista, AGN.

³⁷ The pamphlet says in Spanish that "El Sinarquismo considera absolutamente necesaria una libertad religiosa, no coartada por actos ni por leyes persecutorias" as well as "Que Mexico sea la Patria amorosa de todos sus hijos." Pamphlet, Unión Nacional Sinarquista, Comité Organizador Regional de California, N.D., Box 2, Folder 17, De La Torre Family Papers, 1864-2003, Special Collections at the University of Arizona Libraries, Tucson, Arizona.

encouraging involvement in smaller local committees in the state beyond Los Angeles. First, any interested person needed to bring the brochure with them to a local organizing committee, and if they did not understand any of the points, they needed to consult the chapter's leadership. Second, if the person had any doubts about entering, they should not join. Third, the interested individual had to fill out a card requesting membership, as well as a letter describing why they wanted to join. Fourth and lastly, the interested person needed to be Catholic, as well as have the means to monetarily sustain the local committee. Beyond the local committees, the goal of the California Regional Organizing Committee was to form committees wherever there existed Mexicans in the state. Sub-committees could be created with a minimum of ten members and with the approval of local committees. The regional committee also did not lose sight of women, and like the nationally-disseminated bulletins, it emphasized that women were an indispensable factor towards the three main goals of motherland, justice, and liberty.³⁸

Not all of these communications were about structure and beliefs, as committees sought to build solidarity among themselves across national boundaries as well. For example, around the one-year anniversary of the organization in May and June 1938, chiefs from throughout Mexico sent a variety of letters to the San Antonio sinarquista committee. These leaders from Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas in the north to Mérida, Yucatán in the south wished the San Antonio committee the prosperity on the organization's first year anniversary. They commented on how it was a year of learning, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the unity of all of the members of

³⁸ Pamphlet, UNS, Comité Organizador Regional de California, N.D., Box 2, Folder 17, De La Torre Family Papers, University of Arizona Libraries.

the movement.³⁹ Leaders from the national committee also reached out, but were much more direct in their communications. Sinarquista treasurer, Juan Ignacio Padilla, also celebrated the anniversary, yet expressed concern over the movement's lack of funds. He stressed the need for fundraising to facilitate personal visits from the national committee, more publicity, as well as the focus on building notoriety.⁴⁰ It was the responsibility of the treasurer of the committee to raise money and expand the organization's presence.

Cultivating Support for Sinarquismo in the U.S.

While sinarquismo began to spread in the American Southwest in California and Texas, José Antonio Urquiza continued to be in contact with the NCWC in D.C., still seeking to affect public opinion in the U.S. regarding the situation in Mexico. Urquiza finally made a visit back to the U.S. that he previously promised in September 1937. Luis María Martínez, former La U founder and now Archbishop Elect of Mexico, wrote him an introduction letter conveying that Urquiza "is an excellent Catholic, and labors with seriousness, self-denial, and intelligence in favor of the Catholic Church and for the welfare of our country. For these reasons he is deserving of our confidence and recommendation."⁴¹ Upon his visit to Washington, D.C., William Montavon accompanied Urquiza in meeting with Dr. Robert White, Dean of the Law School of the Catholic University of America and part of the leadership of the American Legion. They discussed a proposal to create a relationship between the sinarquistas and the American Legion

³⁹ Letters were sent from the leaders of committees in Aguascalientes, Ciudad Juárez, Mérida, Nuevo Laredo, and Torreon to the San Antonio committee, Munguía Papers, Box 16, Folder 5, Benson Collection, UT Austin.

⁴⁰ Letter from Juan Ignacio Padilla to San Antonio Committee Treasurer, June 13, 1938, Munguía Papers, Box 16, Folder 5, Benson Collection, UT Austin.

⁴¹ Letter from Luis María Martínez, September 12, 1937, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

in opposition to communism. The meeting proved unsuccessful, as White said that other such anti-communist and anti-fascist organizations had reached out to the American Legion and that his group turned down all of them.⁴² After Urquiza ended his visit, one setback was followed by another, as Montavon notified NCWC General Secretary Ready that he just found out that sinarquista meetings in Guanajuato were banned.⁴³ Urquiza, however, did not lose sight of the cause. He wrote Montavon in February 1938, affirming the sinarquista manifesto in writing that “the people of Mexico are each day more clearly the enemy of the communist and fascist government and I am sure that with all of their hearts they will aspire to freedom, the thing that only a truly democratic government can obtain.”⁴⁴ Despite the optimistic sentiment of the message, communication between Urquiza and Montavon would drop off – for good.

José Antonio Urquiza, the principal contact with the NCWC for over a year, was killed on April 11, 1938. Montavon received a telegram from his father, Manuel M. Urquiza, expressing that, “Greatest sorrow my son Jose Antonio Urquiza was murdered Monday afternoon.”⁴⁵ Montavon sent his sympathies to Manuel, later finding out the details behind the murder. Urquiza was returning from a visit to his farm in the state of Guanajuato. While heading to the train station, Isidro Parra, a farmworker who most likely sympathized with the Mexican

⁴² Memorandum from William F. Montavon to Michael Joseph Ready, September 27, 1937, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁴³ Letter from William F. Montavon to Michael Joseph Ready, October 13, 1937, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁴⁴ “El pueblo de Mexico es cada día más claramente enemigo de un gobierno comunista y fascista y estoy seguro que con todo su corazón aspira a la libertad, cosa que solo la podrá obtener con un gobierno verdaderamente democrático.” Letter from Jose Antonio Urquiza to William F. Montavon, February 26, 1938, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁴⁵ Telegram from Manuel M. Urquiza to William F. Montavon, April 13, 1938, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

government, followed him. While he was waiting for a train in the town of Apaseo, Guanajuato on his way back home to the state of Querétaro, Parra approached him and killed him at the station. Parra was sent to trial, and when tried, the court sentenced Parra to thirty years in prison.⁴⁶ The death of José Antonio became a galvanizing moment for the sinarquistas, who quickly portrayed him as a martyr for the movement.

With the passing of his son, Manuel ensured that the UNS had a new liaison with the NCWC through his cousin and sinarquista secret leader Gonzalo Campos. Montavon became acquainted with Campos via correspondence. Campos visited the NCWC's headquarters in September, and met with both Montavon and General Secretary Ready. He concerned himself with picking up conversations about amplifying the sinarquista cause in the U.S. Campos asked Montavon to keep him aware of the "attitude of informed opinion in the United States." He pushed for the "publicizing of definite facts for the purpose of informing public opinion" as Campos believed that the NCWC "do whatever may be possible to assure that the Government of the United States will assume a sympathetic attitude toward honorable right-acting men in Mexico."⁴⁷ In his meeting with Ready, Campos reiterated the need for publicity in the U.S. as the majority of news coming into the U.S. stemmed from the Mexican government itself. The sinarquistas needed to work with someone already based in the U.S. who was sympathetic to the movement. Campos initially suggested hiring San Antonio, Texas-based Rómulo Munguía. He was a former employee of *La Prensa*, as well as a printer and publisher of a variety of

⁴⁶ Memorandum from William F. Montavon to Michael Joseph Ready, September 8, 1938, Box 71, Folder 35, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives. "30 años de prision para el asesino Isidro Parra," *El Informador*, October 19, 1938, Box 72, Folder 5, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁴⁷ Memorandum from William F. Montavon to Michael Joseph Ready, September 8, 1938, Box 71, Folder 35, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

publications for the Mexican community in the city including *Actividades*, *El Pueblo*, *La Voz de Mexico*, and *La Voz de la Parroquia*. Munguía dedicated himself to engender pride within Mexicans of their identity, while also building ties between Mexico and the U.S. After some thought, Campos expressed concerns about Munguía's ability of working with confidential information, most likely because of his extensive connections. Instead, Campos chose Benigno Silva to be the sinarquista correspondent in San Antonio.⁴⁸

In the meantime, the NCWC utilized its own news agency, the *N.C.W.C. News Service*, to follow through on its promise to shape public opinion of the sinarquistas in the U.S. One such piece, titled "Synarchists, New Citizen Body, Seen as Hope in Mexico," aimed to do just that. The article portrayed the group as not inherently political or religious, but instead as a neutral civic-minded organization. It argued that "the Synarchists are not a political party. They have no religious test for membership. They are a voluntary association of Mexican citizens for the defense of the political rights those Mexicans excluded from civic activities under the one-party system as reorganized by President Cárdenas under Communist inspiration."⁴⁹ The piece focused on how on the heels of President Cárdenas' nationalization of petroleum in Mexico in March 1938, that he acquired more control over the country, particularly in the popular, labor, military, and agrarian sectors.⁵⁰ The U.S. Catholic Church through the NCWC sided with the UNS in

⁴⁸ Memorandum from William F. Montavon to Monsignor Ready, September 8, 1938, Box 71, Folder 35, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; Letter from William F. Montavon to Monsignor Ready, September 9, 1938, Box 71, Folder 35, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; Gabriela Gonzalez, *Redeeming La Raza: Transborder Modernity, Race, Respectability, and Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 136-139.

⁴⁹ "Synarchists, New Citizen Body, Seen as Hope in Mexico," *N.C.W.C. News Service*, September 5, 1938.

⁵⁰ Aaron Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010), 88.

opposing the petroleum nationalization, in contrast to the Mexican Catholic Church who supported expropriation.⁵¹ Cárdenas' control of power through various sectors throughout Mexico was represented in the name change from the Partido Nacional Revolucionario to the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM or Party of the Mexican Revolution). The NCWC article ultimately demonstrated the group's appeal for sympathy, particularly from "social justice"-minded Catholics fearful of the spread of communism around the world.

The sinarquistas' "social justice" anti-communist message, such as this one, evoked responses from the exact group it antagonized within its short duration as an organization. This empowered Mexicans to defend the state against any perceived threats, such as the sinarquistas. The *El Paso Times* reported in November 1938 how communists looted and burned the León, Guanajuato offices of the organization. Luis Uranga, the chief of the UNS committee in El Paso, issued a response to Governor Rafael Rangel of Guanajuato articulating that "members of this anti-Communist Union, who had held a meeting in the building, were helpless to defend it when police failed to render assistance."⁵² Less than a year later in July 1939, San Antonio's *La Prensa* published an article on how sinarquistas were attacked once again, this time in Celaya, Guanajuato. Sinarquistas arrived as a part of a political tour in the region, which evoked a response from local farmworkers. They opened fire on the sinarquistas, and either killed or injured roughly twenty-five of them. This time, Uranga wrote a letter to President Cárdenas, claiming that "the sinarquista committee of El Paso respectfully, but energetically protests before

⁵¹ Roberto Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia Católica en México* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), 59; Albert L. Michaels, "The Crisis of Cardenismo," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 2, no. 1 (May 1970), 51.

⁵² "Communist Raid Fought," *El Paso Times*, November 16, 1938.

you punishing those responsible for assassinating sinarquistas in Guanajuato.”⁵³ The sinarquistas’ message was not being received without pushback. However, the UNS still benefited at least to some extent, allowing them more publicity, particularly in the U.S., as well as cultivating a sentiment that those who were targeted were both defenseless and martyrs for the sinarquista cause.

Sustained Growth in the U.S.

By 1940, the UNS experienced significant growth beyond the large urban centers of Los Angeles and El Paso. Smaller, rural sinarquista committees had emerged both in Texas and in California. These local committees fell under the supervision of the regional committees in the two cities. Whereas the urban regional committees consisted of middle-class Mexicans such as property owners and small businessmen, the rural committees were composed of lower class, predominantly agricultural workers. This divide was similar to that of the composition of committees in Mexico by this point, split between the capitals of states and rural towns on the periphery.⁵⁴ In the U.S., the committees were concentrated in particular regions of Texas and California respectively.

The Texas committees operated along the U.S-Mexico border. One such committee opened up in McAllen, Texas, led by Jesús María Dávila. He was an active member in the Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana (AJCM, or the Mexican Catholic Youth

⁵³ “25 Killed or Injured in Mexican Clash,” *The Evening Star*, July 11, 1939; Uranga wrote in Spanish that “El Comité Sinarquista en El Paso, Texas, respetuosa pero energicamente, protesta ante usted pidiendo castigo responsables asesinatos de Sinarquistas en Guanajuato” in “Protesta el Comité Patriótico de El Paso, Texas,” *La Prensa*, July 28, 1939.

⁵⁴ Oscar Lozano, “Patria y Nacionalismo en el Mexico de Afuera,” 96.

Association), having served as its vice president.⁵⁵ Like Las Legioneras, AJCM embodied the Catholic resistance in Mexico, but with a focus on young adults. It was a natural transition for someone like Dávila to move from an organization like AJCM to the UNS. In October 1939, he represented the McAllen committee at the organization's national convention in Mexico City.⁵⁶ Dávila and McAllen sinarquistas even welcomed UNS president Manuel Zermeño to town as part of a tour to Texas. The sinarquistas also established committees in the neighboring communities of Weslaco and Edinburg within the Rio Grande Valley, as well as in Clint, Fabens, and Fort Hancock closer to El Paso.⁵⁷

Similarly in California, the UNS expanded into agricultural regions with significant Mexican populations. The movement entered Fillmore in Ventura County, as well as the rural Central Valley, starting local committees in Bakersfield and Fresno.⁵⁸ The local sinarquista committee of Fresno acted like a civic-minded community group. The local committee of the UNS joined fellow "clubs" like the Edison Social Club, American Loyalty League, and the Japanese Association in pledging donations towards uniforms for band members of Edison Technical High School. The Fresno branch similarly worked alongside Mexican civic groups such as Alizana Hispana Americana, Feminil Morelos, Sociedad Morelos, and the Unión

⁵⁵ "Mother's Day Meet Planned at Mission," *El Heraldo de Brownsville*, May 7, 1937; "Catholic Youths Select Officers," *The Brownsville Herald*, September 6, 1937.

⁵⁶ "Sociales de Weslaco, Texas," *La Prensa*, October 12, 1939.

⁵⁷ "Mexican Group Chief to Speak," *The Brownsville Herald*, June 15, 1940; "Donativos," *El Sinarquista*, August 22, 1940; "Lista de Donativos," *El Sinarquista*, November 7, 1940.

⁵⁸ "Donativos," *El Sinarquista*, August 22, 1940.

Nacionalista Mexicana to prepare the festivities for the city's Mexican Independence Day celebration.⁵⁹ Both in Texas and California, the UNS expanded its presence.

UNS secret leader Antonio Santacruz supported the spread of sinarquismo in the U.S. Like José Antonio Urquiza and Gonzalo Campos, he sought the aid of the NCWC to sway hearts and minds towards sinarquismo. Santacruz wrote to William Montavon's secretary, Rita Walsh, in the NCWC's Legal Department, looking to promote the group, such as providing support in publishing an advertisement in one of Hearst's papers in the U.S.⁶⁰ She agreed, and he provided her with a detailed list of sinarquista activities in Texas. He described mass meetings with enthusiastic audiences and entertainment in and around El Paso in Clint, Fort Hancock, Socorro, and Ysleta. Santacruz also commented that possibilities for circulating the movement's year-old paper based out of Mexico City, *El Sinarquista*, were expanding.⁶¹ Growing audiences in these local committees provided for a new base of readership, and thus new potential followers to the movement.

The movement did indeed grow over the course of four years since the initial interaction of Las Legiones' members with the NCWC. The UNS not only created a formalized organizational structure connecting members in both nations, but geographically extended north of Mexico throughout the Southwestern U.S. Its original connections with the NCWC expanded its presence in the U.S., if at least among the Mexican and Catholic communities. However, as

⁵⁹ "Uniforms Sought for School Band," *The Fresno Bee*, June 15, 1940; "Mexican Fete Group Organized," *The Fresno Bee*, July 31, 1940.

⁶⁰ Letter from Antonio Santacruz to Rita Walsh, May 29, 1940, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁶¹ *El Sinarquista* started in 1939 in Mexico City. Letter from Antonio Santacruz to Rita Walsh, June 29, 1940, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

the UNS grew, fascism was gaining strength in Europe, eventually leading to building suspicion that the group was itself fascistic.

Increasing Anxiety around Fascism

The United States was firmly a world superpower in 1936 as fascist aggression was growing in Europe. Either by or during that year, Fascist Italy under Mussolini invaded both Libya and East Africa, Nazi Germany conquered the Rhineland, and the Spanish Civil War began. The government under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt grew increasingly concerned about threats within and beyond its borders, especially instigated by foreign nationals from fascist countries on the rise. To the south, Mexico had a similar anxiety in relation to fascism, particularly in relation to a foreign force overthrowing the Lázaro Cárdenas administration. The Mexican political left led the fight against fascism and drew the connection between the expanding UNS and international fascism. This, in turn, led the U.S. government to target the movement as a foreign threat, laying the groundwork for surveillance of the movement.

Fear of Fascism in the United States

In the midst of increasing fascist-led hostilities in the second half of the 1930s, the U.S. state feared that immigrants from these particular countries embodied the same extremist politics. The concern was that foreign political organizations such as German Nazis, Italian Fascists, and Soviet Communists would stir up racial, class, and religious prejudice to undermine U.S. democracy and eventually overthrow the government. During this period, the Communist Party USA did not call for toppling the state, and although the Italian American community had the Sons of Italy and the Fascist League, they were disorganized. The closest internal threat existed in the form of the German-American Bund. The Bund tapped into German nationalism,

participated in paramilitary activities, and had a membership of 200,000 by 1937.⁶² Ernest Hemingway's 1938 book, *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories*, spread the term which these groups would be associated with – the fifth column. Fifth columnists were groups that could potentially subvert the security of the nation.⁶³ The Roosevelt administration monitored the activities of these political associations within its borders.

The president expressed concern about what took place beyond the nation's boundaries as well. On March 4, 1933, in his first inaugural speech as president, Roosevelt established that he would “dedicate this Nation to the policy of the good neighbor,” one “who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.”⁶⁴ Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy stemmed from this speech, seeking to reverse the government's stance on interventionism in Latin America, established under the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and reaffirmed by the Roosevelt Corollary of 1904. Years later at the Buenos Aires Conference of 1936, Franklin Delano Roosevelt promoted not intervening in the region, and instead supported Pan-Americanism which focused on the peaceful exchange of ideas, culture, and education.⁶⁵ The United States gave up military intervention in the hopes of market access through diplomacy and economic alliance. Yet, the architect behind the Good Neighbor

⁶² Frank C. Hanighen, “Foreign Political Movements in the United States,” *Foreign Affairs* 16, no. 1 (October, 1937): 1-16.

⁶³ Hemingway's book detailed the Spanish Civil War, picking up on a term coined by Spanish Nationalist General Emilio Mola. Mola referred to the troops overseen by the four major Spanish generals. The “fifth column” would be Nationalist supporters inside Madrid who would support him, undermining the opposing Republicans.

⁶⁴ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *FDR's First Inaugural Address Declaring 'War' on the Great Depression*, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Updated September 23, 2016. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/fdr-inaugural>

⁶⁵ Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18-21.

Policy was not Roosevelt, but rather Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Hull wanted to counteract the possibility of German penetration of Latin America. He acknowledged Nazi aggression taking place in Europe and stressed the importance of U.S.-Latin American cooperation.⁶⁶ National cooperation contrasted greatly with extreme nationalism, and if the Roosevelt administration was to combat fascism, the Good Neighbor Policy appeared to be its answer.

Beyond the federal government, American communists were also fearful about the spread of fascism, and rightfully so, as fascism blatantly attacked communism. Earl Browder, Chairman and General Secretary of the Communist Party USA, penned a 1938 pamphlet titled, *A Message to Catholics*, calling on American Catholics to embrace communism rather than reject the movement. He articulated his concern about how particular Catholic leaders attacked communism, siding instead with fascism.⁶⁷ Although the NCWC never condoned fascism, prominent American Catholic leaders such as Reverend Fulton J. Sheen were vocally conservative and anti-communist, and some such as Reverend Charles Coughlin publicly supported fascism. The U.S. government was not the only entity in the country concerned about an internal threat, as the American political left also thought that Catholics, who were approximately one-sixth of the country's population, would share the wrong sympathies.⁶⁸

Fear of Fascism in Mexico

The situation in Mexico fed into American fears around the spread of fascism in the world, and fascism did indeed appear to be a real threat in the country as it materialized through

⁶⁶Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas*, 20-25.

⁶⁷ Earl Browder, *A Message to Catholics* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1938), 11-15.

⁶⁸ For more on Father Coughlin, see Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); Ronald H. Carpenter, *Father Charles E. Coughlin: Surrogate Spokesman for the Disaffected* (Westport and London: Greenport Press, 1998). Browder, 7.

a couple of organizations. The Partido Fascista Mexicano (PFM or Mexican Fascist Party) was the earliest such organization. Italian fascism influenced the party started by Gustavo Sáenz de Sicilia in 1922, which openly opposed socialism. The party took adopted the Italian model to some extent with a supreme leader in the form of Sáenz de Sicilia and an official paper, *El Fascista*. However, the PFM diverged from Italian fascism as it was not a violent movement and openly Catholic, affiliating with clerical groups.⁶⁹ The party targeted the agrarian reform put forward by the Constitution of 1917, particularly appealing to landowners in rural areas who were afraid of their land being seized by the postrevolutionary government. They did not want the indigenous landed class to have access to Mexican political and cultural life.⁷⁰ Ultimately, the PFM was short-lived, losing support to the range of other conservative, Catholic resistance organizations at the time.

The Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista (Revolutionary Mexicanist Action, known as the Camisas Doradas or the Gold Shirts) was another example of a fascist movement in the country. Nicolás Rodríguez Carrasco, a former general during the Mexican Revolution, started the organization in 1933. The Camisas Doradas were called just that because members wore a gold shirt worn with black pants and a palm hat. At meetings, they marched in formation according to cavalry, infantry, and medical services, always led by a military-style leader.⁷¹ The group embraced a very exclusive form of nationalism, utilizing violent tactics to attack communists and

⁶⁹ Franco Savarino, "The Sentinel of the Bravo: Italian Fascism and Mexico, 1922-35," in *International Fascism, 1919-1945*, eds. Gert Sorensen and Robert Mallett. (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 101; Mario Raúl Mijares Sánchez, *Mexico: the Genesis of Its Political Decomposition* (Bloomington: Palibrio, 2013), 88.

⁷⁰ Savarino, 101; Jason Oliver Chang, *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880-1940* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

⁷¹Michaels, 234-235.

Jews in the country. For example, the Camisas Doradas forcefully entered and destroyed the Communist Party headquarters in Mexico City in March 1935.⁷² Attacks such as this called attention to the movement, and the Cárdenas administration forced Rodríguez Carrasco into exile in the U.S. in 1936. Rodríguez Carrasco died in 1940, and the movement eventually dissolved in the mid-1940s.

The Mexican labor movement was very much behind building panic around the spread of fascism. The Confederación de Trabajadores de México, a coalition of Mexican labor unions, emerged out of the former Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM or the Regional Confederation of the Mexican Laborer) in 1936. Both sought to consolidate Mexican workers under the postrevolutionary Mexican government. The latter CTM, however, was instrumental to the Cárdenas administration's base of support and led by labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano. He was a lawyer by training, influenced by Christian morality as well as socialism. Lombardo Toledano rose to prominence in the CROM and the postrevolutionary Mexican political machine.⁷³ He established a variety of institutions to assert the CTM's influence including the periodicals *América Latina*, *Futuro*, *El Popular*, *U.O.*, and the English-language *Mexican Labor News*, as well as the Universidad Obrera de México (Workers' University of Mexico). All of these acted as mouthpieces to disseminate the sanctioned voice of labor, and more broadly the government's leftist stance in the late 1930s. As the Mexican state consolidated power over the years, especially under Cárdenas, it did not want to lose any political ground.

⁷² Michaels, 235; Sherman, 55 and 62; Schuler, 58.

⁷³ See Daniela Spenser, *In Combat: The Life of Lombardo Toledano* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

As a result, Lombardo Toledano's CTM formed an Anti-Fascist Committee by 1937 to stomp out the foreign political right in Mexico. The confederation sent out an invitation to its constituency and beyond "to organize and coordinate the task of combatting fascist tendencies wherever they appear." Not only would the committee counteract international fascism via disseminating propaganda, but "study fascist movements and their effects in other countries; to investigate fascist activities, particularly those being carried on by foreign powers in Mexico."⁷⁴ The confederation highlighted in particular the Spanish fight against fascism in the form of the Falange Española during the Spanish Civil War.⁷⁵ The CTM galvanized a Mexican base, but promoted the committee in its June 1937 *Mexican Labor News* for an English-speaking, assumedly sympathetic audience of laborers and labor activists in the United States. Both the CTM and its new committee took on the crusade against fascism.

The CTM's Lombardo Toledano led the fight, claiming that there existed tangible alarm aimed directly against the Mexican state. U.S. periodicals disseminated this threat in Mexico to its readership across Mexico. In early August 1937, *United Press* disseminated an article in a variety of American publications such as the *Los Angeles Times* about him claiming that a "Fascist revolutionary plot" was taking place against President Cárdenas. He said that Mexico was at "the center of international Fascist espionage" as stocks of arms and ammunitions were supposedly compiled along the borders of Mexico both with Guatemala and the United States to

⁷⁴ "Anti-Fascist Committee to Be Formed," *Mexican Labor News*, June 16, 1937. PRISM: Political, Rights Issues, and Social Movements Collection, Florida Atlantic University Digital Library. Accessed January 30, 2020. <https://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/search/?type=edimax&collection=fau%3Asmc>

⁷⁵ The full name of the Falange Española in power for forty years was the Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (JONS).

take down the president.⁷⁶ This prompted the president to investigate into attacks on the government. Later in the month, *The New York Times* reported how Lombardo Toledano received fascist pamphlets from unionists in the north of Mexico, confirming the notion that a plot against the security of the country was taking place. By this point, however, Cárdenas ordered the end of the investigations, stating that there was no real danger of activities against the government. As a result, Lombardo Toledano had to fall in line with his message.⁷⁷ Even years later in June 1939, the newspaper highlighted how the labor leader obtained similar fascist propaganda. This time around, the materials did not relate to a plot to overthrow the government, but rather to sour increasingly positive relations between the administrations of U.S. President Roosevelt and Mexican President Cárdenas. Lombardo Toledano carried on the CTM's focus on the Falange Española, noting how it is operating secretly within Mexico, spreading the influence of Francisco Franco and totalitarianism.⁷⁸ Lombardo Toledano's accusations had been relatively vague up to this point, without identifying a particular group or individuals involved in espionage. The labor leader and his confederation were set on stirring up panic both in Mexico and the U.S. about external fascist infiltration, and they were about to find their smoking gun.

The Sinarquistas as Fascist Foreign Agents?

The growth of the UNS by 1939 in Mexico and the U.S. led Lombardo Toledano's CTM to attack sinarquismo a month later in a July 14, 1939 article in its newspaper, *El Popular*, which drew the connection between the sinarquistas and international fascism. Its title, "Nazi Agents

⁷⁶ "Mexican Revolt Plot Charged," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1937.

⁷⁷ "Mexican Scores Fascists," *The New York Times*, August 27, 1937.

⁷⁸ Betty Kirk, "Fascist Hand Seen in Mexican Fracas," *The New York Times*, June 18, 1939.

Lead Sinarquismo in the Country,” fed into fears of fascist infiltration. The piece claimed that two Germans – Oscar Hellmuth Schreiter and another with the last name Ritter (the first name was not included) – were foreign provocateurs who were the true leaders of sinarquismo. A notarial act written up by Manuel Villaseñor, Jr. was the source of this information. The document reportedly showed that the sinarquistas were receiving weapons and ammunitions from Hitler, acting through former Cristeros to assassinate farmworkers and ultimately take down the Cárdenas administration. The article noted that in response the National Council of the CTM would create a commission to investigate the activities of sinarquistas in Guanajuato and Querétaro. It sought to expel the two men, create a manifesto denouncing their activities and finally, “declare sinarquismo enemy of the proletariat and the people.”⁷⁹ The article perpetuated the trope that Lombardo Toledano repeated since 1937 about how foreign fascists were transporting arms to overthrow the Mexican state. Instead of the Falange Española, it incriminated the sinarquistas as connected to the German-based Nazi Party. This particular *El Popular* piece would leave a lasting impact on the sinarquistas for years to come, tying them directly to international fascism.

This article labeling the sinarquistas as fascists drew the attention of the U.S. government. The organization’s leadership believed that in cooperation with the NCWC that they could direct U.S. government policy in their favor, particularly through the media. Instead, in July 1939, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico was starting to become suspicious of the sinarquistas as the group questioned the supremacy of the Cárdenas administration. U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Josephus Daniels, reported to Secretary of State Hull on a lecture that a member of the

⁷⁹ The piece states that the CTM said to “Declarar enemigo del proletariado y del pueblo el ‘sinarquismo.’” “Los agentes nazis jefaturan el ‘sinarquismo’ en el país,” *El Popular*, July 14, 1939.

embassy attended regarding sinarquismo. The speech was titled “The Labor Movement in Mexico” by César Ortiz, and hosted by The Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America. Daniels relayed verbatim to Hull what Ortiz articulated during his speech. He communicated that the UNS was composed of individuals who fought against the Mexican government during the First Cristero War. He also noted that it was an organization under the direct control of the Catholic Church, first called the National Confederation of Catholic Workers, a trade union operating in Guanajuato, that was expanding to other parts of Mexico. Not only were the sinarquistas under the control of the Church, they were influenced by fascist and Nazi elements, according to an investigation made by the CTM.⁸⁰ Daniels expressed concern about the sinarquistas on multiple fronts. He was worried how the sinarquistas threatened the upcoming 1940 presidential election as the organization opposed Cárdenas, and would undoubtedly oppose his successor as well. The U.S. ambassador also stressed the association of the sinarquistas with international fascism, and attached the *El Popular* article in his communications to Secretary Hull. If the UNS won the election, the organization could threaten the security of the U.S.

The 1940 general election was a particularly contested moment in Mexican politics. The PRM chose the Secretary of National Defense under President Cárdenas, Manuel Ávila Camacho, to be the party’s choice for the presidential race. Juan Andreu Almazán served as his opponent under the Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Nacional (PRUN or the Revolutionary Party of National Unification), representing the rising tide of political conservatism in Mexico who opposed the postrevolutionary state. Not only did the UNS

⁸⁰ Dispatch from Josephus Daniels to Cordell Hull, Embassy of the United States of America, Number 8813, “Union Nacional Sinarquista,” July 18, 1939, World Scholar: Latin America & the Caribbean.

emerge within the past several of years, but so did the Partido Acción Nacional in 1939, a political party founded by former Las Legiones member Manuel Gómez Morín, similarly founded by devout Catholics.⁸¹ The postrevolutionary government with its official party did not want to lose any political ground, and a conservative candidate such as Almazán threatened its hegemony.

Much of Mexico was anxious about the outcome of the 1940 presidential election, yet the sinarquistas decided to opt out altogether. U.S. Ambassador Daniels' concern came to naught. The official stance of the UNS was not to support either the PRM's Manuel Ávila Camacho nor the politically conservative Juan Andreu Almazán for president. UNS president Manuel Zermeno urged members at a rally in León, Guanajuato in May 1940 to "take no notice of the forthcoming elections for president, congress and state governors which are nothing more than a pretext for an armed revolution." He believed that communists and the political left in Mexico would use the election as an opportunity for a revolution, "seizing the opportunity to sow in Mexico anarchy and terror, the only means by which they can triumph."⁸² On July 7, 1940, Mexico voted and Ávila Camacho won by a landslide, defeating Almazán – with no revolution. The ruling party remained in power, nonetheless general unease about fascism and the sinarquistas did not dissipate.⁸³

⁸¹ Fallaw, 217.

⁸² "Mexicans Advocate Election Boycott," *El Paso Herald-Post*, May 24, 1940.

⁸³ Immediately following the election, the PRM portrayed Almazán as a fascist in an English-language booklet. It described his supporters as taking to the streets on election day with weapons, and said that although he lost the election, that he and his followers could take Mexico by force. See Alejandro Carrillo, *Mexico and the Fascist Menace* (Mexico City: PRM, 1940), 18-19.

As the United States Department of State was beginning to monitor the UNS in Mexico, the U.S. federal government also sought to do the same of sinarquista committees within its national boundaries. The government was becoming increasingly wary of foreign threats over the course of the late 1930s. In 1938, Congress passed the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) in response. FARA required “foreign agents,” or individuals who supposedly held the interests of another country in the U.S. in a political or semi-political capacity, to disclose their relationship with a foreign organization, regularly registering and submitting evidence to the federal government.⁸⁴ A year later, Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, beginning World War II. The U.S. doubled down on seeking out internal threats. Jerry Voorhis, a Democratic Congressman from California, introduced a bill that required the registration of particular organizations with the Attorney General. The organizations were any that the U.S. government perceived as potentially at risk of overthrowing the government or representing a foreign power through using violence.⁸⁵ The Voorhis Act of 1940 passed, and weaponized registration during the beginning of war abroad.

The federal government began investigating sinarquista committees in the U.S., requiring them to adhere to the federal law, and they ended up following suit. The sinarquista correspondent in San Antonio, Benigno Silva, corresponded with the NCWC’s William Montavon in May 1940 about how representatives of the department approached individual committees in Fabens and McAllen, Texas. Silva was unsure of whether they should register.

⁸⁴United States Congressional Research Service, *Foreign Agents Registration Act: An Overview*, Federation of American Scientists, Updated March 7, 2019. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IF10499.pdf>

⁸⁵United States Department of Justice, *Voorhis Act--18 U.S.C. § 2386*, The United States Department of Justice Archives, Updated January 17, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/archives/jm/criminal-resource-manual-2067-voorhis-act-18-usc-2386>

However, Montavon advised that there was nothing to fear and that they should register.⁸⁶ In the following months, sinarquista committees like the one in El Paso, proudly proclaimed that their registration. The *El Paso Herald-Post* boasted that the “Regional Sinarquista Committee of El Paso now enjoys legal status in the United States.” The chief of the El Paso committee, José Neder Quiñones, claimed that despite the need to register, that the UNS was an apolitical group with more than half a million members in Mexico. Neder Quiñones even used registering as a way to convince the public that the UNS was not fascistic. Although the group was not political, it was ideological “dedicated to combatting Communism, Fascism, and Nazism.”⁸⁷ Legality was not only important, but so was legitimacy as an organization. By complying with U.S. law, the sinarquistas demonstrated that they were not going to undermine it.

The national organization emphasized the legitimacy of the movement in the U.S. *El Sinarquista* published a piece about the importance of registering with FARA. The paper proclaimed how “our movement has been distinguished in every occasion for its discipline and in respecting the law.” The article went on to assert that “we are a legitimate association, accepted by the highest federal authority of the United States and our propaganda has in that country the protection that our ideals claim.” The UNS interpreted complying with federal registration as reinforcing the notion that the sinarquistas were assembling peacefully throughout the United States.⁸⁸ Sinarquista secret leader Antonio Santacruz even remarked that the federal government

⁸⁶ Letter from O.C. Alvarez to William F. Montavon, May 24, 1940, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; Letter from William F. Montavon to Benigno Silva, May 27, 1940, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives. O.C. Alvarez is a pseudonym for Antonio Santacruz.

⁸⁷ “Anti-Red Group Gets Permit from the U.S.,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, July 31, 1940.

⁸⁸ The article states that “Nuestro Movimiento se ha distinguido en todas las ocasiones por su disciplina y por su respeto a las leyes.” It goes to say that “Somos una asociación lícita, aceptada por la alta autoridad federal de los

was buttressing the movement: “Immigration Agents and other Government officials have been ordered to protect and help our members as far as they can.”⁸⁹ Not only did the UNS respect U.S. federal law, the U.S. government was in turn respectful of its members.

Despite Santacruz’s optimism, the U.S. government would not continue to respect the sinarquistas. Building anxiety around fascism in the U.S. and Mexico compelled the respective administrations to pin particular organizations as fascist. The sinarquistas with their ultra-nationalist rhetoric, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism made them a target. That combined with their growing public image in the U.S. placed the UNS a subject of government scrutiny.

Conclusion

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista emerged as a result of years of sustained conflict between the Mexican Catholic Church and the Mexican state, but which ultimately had a transnational impact. American and Mexican Catholics forged bonds during and after the First Cristero War, maintaining ties via U.S. Catholic institutions such as the NCWC. Las Legiones found an ally in the NCWC, helping them gain a foothold in the U.S., especially with the foundation of the UNS. The UNS built up itself as a highly structured movement, creating committees first in cities with large Mexican populations, spreading out to more rural communities. As the UNS grew in the late 1930s, so did panic around international fascism and the threat of possible insubordination via foreigners. With increased publicity, the sinarquistas drew the attention of the U.S. government, leading to surveillance of their activities.

Estados Unidos y nuestra propaganda tiene en ese país la protección que nuestros altos ideales reclaman.” “El Sinarquismo Quedó Registrado en Washington,” *El Sinarquista*, August 22, 1940.

⁸⁹ Letter from Antonio Santacruz to Rita Walsh, June 29, 1940, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

Despite growing attention towards the group, from 1940 to 1941, the UNS would reach its height as a movement. The organization gained approximately half a million followers across national boundaries with tens of thousands within the United States, growing beyond the American Southwest into the Midwest. The UNS formed relationships with new conservative American Catholics, supporting dissemination of the organization's message. However, as the movement grew, so did the opposition to it.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SINARQUISTAS IN THE UNITED STATES – 1940-1941

“Finally, the nation of the North has awoken to interest in knowing about Sinarquismo,” reported the editors of the October 9, 1941 edition of *El Sinarquista*. Felipe Vázquez Galván and Alfonso Trueba proclaimed that, “we want to advertise that Sinarquismo is willing to inform the Yankee nation of what it is, it is not inspired by any other purpose than that of being known to all. With the same goodwill, we will inform all of the world.”¹ The leadership of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista knew that the movement was reaching the attention of United States residents. American press – and as a result the United States government – grew an interest in the organization. The editors asserted that the group was public, transparent, and not associated with international fascism. This recognition – both positive and negative alike – signaled that the Unión Nacional Sinarquista reached a place of prominence in the country.

Between the Mexican presidential election of Manuel Ávila Camacho in July 1940 and the United States entry into World War II in December 1941, the movement established a foothold in the U.S. With the new sinarquista leader Salvador Abascal, the organization further facilitated the movement of its institutional culture across the U.S.-Mexican border. The group increased distribution of its newspaper *El Sinarquista*, disseminated pamphlets purveying its

¹ The article says that “Ultimamente se ha despertado en la nacion del Norte un vivo interes.” It goes on to explain that “Advertimos que se el Sinarquismo esta dispuesto a informar a la nacion yanqui de lo que es, no lo inspira otro fin que el de que sea conocido por todos. Con la misma buena voluntad informaremos a todo mundo.” “En Los E.E.U.U. Hay Interes Por el Sinarquismo,” *El Sinarquista*, October 9, 1941.

values, created new traditions such as songs, and solidified its stance on a variety of issues. The sinarquistas established more committees in California and Texas, both in urban and rural communities. The UNS also grew beyond just the two states, expanding into the Midwest through setting up a committee in the greater Chicago region and selling its newspaper across the region. The movement continued to benefit from its relationship with the National Catholic Welfare Conference, all the while building new connections with conservative American Catholics elsewhere in the country. No longer was sinarquismo an emerging transnational movement during this period. Instead, it became a mainstay among conservative Mexicans in the United States.

Especially as the UNS became an established movement, debate swirled around the “true” political motives of the group. The left-wing Confederación de Trabajadores de México continued its attack on what the confederation deemed to be a fascist movement. Media outlets in the United States picked up on the notion that the group was fascist. Writers such as Betty Kirk and Marshall Hail wrote publications conveying that not only was the movement a threat to Mexico, it endangered the future of the United States by undermining the nation’s security. The U.S. government’s Office of the Coordinator of Information built off of the media reports, continuing state surveillance of the organization. The UNS and its supporters, however, pushed back against accusations that it was associated with European fascism. Local sinarquista committee leaders denounced the fascist label as did American Catholic leaders.

This chapter examines this high period of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista as the movement both gained ground as well as faced growing backlash in the United States. Members embraced sinarquismo, holding onto a particular Mexican identity not held by Mexican Americans or the Mexican state. Amid the aftermath of the Mexican presidential election and the

onset of world war, the sinarquistas did not seek to be Americans and they certainly did not want reflect the leftism of the Mexican government. In this period of uncertainty, the Unión Nacional Sinarquista under Abascal provided a sense of stability across borders through idealizing a hierarchical and Catholic Mexico. This was an identity that the movement would not let go, even among doubts of its organizational purpose.

Solidifying a Presence in the U.S. after the 1940 Mexican Election

By mid-1940, the Unión Nacional Sinarquista established a foothold in the American Southwest among Mexicans. As World War II was picking up in Europe and amid changing politics in the country, the group needed to recapitulate its ideology amongst its members in the U.S. The movement's presence demonstrated its purpose as a Mexican nationalist organization rooted in Catholicism in a context of growing American nationalism and apprehension towards political outsiders.

U.S.-Mexican Relations Following the 1940 Election

Just as Mexico elected a new president in July 1940, the United States was also at the midst of a political crossroads. Europe descended into war less than a year before, and Americans were awaiting the actions of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt was reaching the end of his second term as president, having served since 1933, and Americans questioned whether or not he would serve a third term. At the Democratic National Convention on July 19, 1940, Roosevelt won the nomination from the party. In accepting the nomination, he embraced liberal ideas over dictatorship and force. In doing so, President Roosevelt made clear – despite his administration's neutral position in the war – a stance against fascism. This included

fascism and perceived fascism in all forms, even “fifth columnists” perceived as sowing division within the United States’ boundaries.²

Soon after the July 7, 1940 presidential election, American and Mexican leaders claimed international cooperation between the two governments over any fifth column activities in the respective countries. Lázaro Cárdenas still served as Mexico’s president until December. He wanted to demonstrate to the United States that Mexico had fascism under control. This was important, especially among accusations swirling around the fascist nature of failed presidential candidate Juan Andreu Almazán and the *sinarquistas*, as well as the *Camisas Doradas*, *Partido Nacional de Salvación Pública* (National Party of Public Salvation), and the *Movimiento Nacional de Vanguardia* (National Vanguard Movement). Mexico was one of many nations that partook in the Havana Conference of July 21-30, 1940, a meeting focused on defending the Western Hemisphere against fascist intrusion.³ Cárdenas’ Secretary of the Interior, Ignacio García Téllez, assured Americans that “the Mexican government had Nazi fifth column activities under control and was cooperating closely with Washington in the spirit of the Havana Conference for the preservation of American democracy.” García Téllez claimed that Mexican foreign policy “was one of friendship toward the United States and opposition to all totalitarian powers.”⁴

² Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Radio Address to the Democratic National Convention Accepting the Nomination (July 19, 1940)*, The American Presidency Project, UC Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-address-the-democratic-national-convention-accepting-the-nomination>

³ “July 1940,” *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Day by Day*, The Pare Lorentz Center at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/event/july-1940-23/>

⁴ Russell B. Porter, “Mexico Sees No Nazi Peril Now; Her Relations with U.S. Improve,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 1940; Russell B. Porter, “Nazis Foment Mexican Discord; They Aid Both Sides in Politics,” *The New York Times*, August 29, 1940.

The Roosevelt administration also sought for the two states to have an amicable relationship with Cárdenas as long as he was still in power. The governments entered into secret military talks starting in summer 1940. The U.S. military wanted to establish bases in Mexico in Magdalena Bay, Territorio Sur de Baja California (the Southern Territory of Baja California and known as Baja California Sur), as well as in Acapulco on Mexico's southern Pacific Coast. Mexican Ambassador to the U.S. Francisco Castillo Nájera and military officers responded by asserting that Mexico could defend itself, without U.S. aid.⁵ Nonetheless, these talks solidified a military relationship between the governments in preparation for war in the Western Hemisphere, especially against a possible Japanese invasion.

This favorable relationship between the two carried over into the incoming presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho as well. Roosevelt ended up winning a third term in office in November 1940. His Vice President-elect Henry A. Wallace noted that "we have with Mexico, as with other Latin-American countries, a concern in keeping peace in this hemisphere and primarily this implies sound national economies and satisfactory trade relationships. If those are secured we need not worry as to our ability to get along together and to keep out the Nazi and Fascist influences we agree in detesting."⁶ Wallace invoked Pan-Americanism through the Roosevelt administration's Good Neighbor Policy, advocating for a harmonious relationship based on mutual economic benefit. Roosevelt sent Wallace to the December 1, 1940 inauguration of Ávila Camacho, confirming his trust in the relationship between the U.S. and Mexican governments.⁷

⁵ María Emilia Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 51-60.

⁶ "Hands Across the Border," *The New York Times*, November 14, 1940.

⁷ Halbert Jones, *The War Has Brought Peace to Mexico: World War II and the Consolidation of the Post-Revolutionary State* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 16.

President-elect Ávila Camacho surprised both Mexicans and Americans alike with a statement he made on religion in September 1940. Since the establishment of the 1917 Constitution and its anti-clerical articles limiting the presence of the Catholic Church in Mexico, Mexican political leaders avoided overt statements regarding their faith. All of this changed when Ávila Camacho declared that “I am a believer.” This confession of spirituality benefitted him, as Mexican Catholics saw him as the less religious of the two presidential candidates as compared to Juan Andreu Almazán.⁸ Ávila Camacho’s statement ended up swaying some notable Catholic resistance leaders who in the past actively organized or fought against the postrevolutionary Mexican government, which they previously saw as atheistic. Archbishop Luis María Martínez Martínez, formerly of clandestine organization La U, remarked that Ávila Camacho was “the only president who declared publicly and categorically that he is a Catholic.” He argued that “liberty of conscience” would increase under the new president, and encouraged Mexican Catholics to cooperate with his administration.⁹ Not only did Mexican Catholics find Ávila Camacho’s faith and subsequent reaction by Mexican Catholic leaders notable, so too did the U.S. government. A day after the *Novedades* piece came out, the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels notified Secretary of State Cordell Hull.¹⁰ The United States government was invested in a mutually-beneficial relationship with Mexico. This relationship appeared to materialize in the transition from the more radical President Cárdenas to the more moderate President Ávila Camacho.

⁸ Ávila Camacho proclaimed that he was “soy creyente;” *Hoy*, September 31, 1940, 8-9.

⁹ *Novedades*, December 4, 1940; “Catholic Leader Backs Camacho,” *The Monitor*, December 4, 1940.

¹⁰ Transmission by Josephus Daniels to Cordell Hull, December 5, 1940, State Department Central File, 812.001 Camacho, Manuel A./88, Record Group (RG) 59, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

Disseminating Ideology Across the U.S.-Mexico Border

Within this rapidly-changing context, the UNS utilized the opportunity to emphasize its ideology and did so via the dissemination of published materials across the U.S.-Mexico Border. Salvador Abascal was largely behind this reinvigoration of the group's platform when he assumed the role of president of the sinarquistas a month after the Mexican presidential election. Abascal helped found the movement in 1937, but took a role on the sidelines until 1940, where he would push the UNS and its ideology into the forefront. Abascal was a controversial figure. The ex-Las Legiones leader was charismatic and a great orator, however he was also more fanatical and doctrinal than past sinarquista president, Manuel Zermeño. Abascal and Antonio Santacruz, both in the upper leadership of the movement, had differing views and their own respective factions that stemmed from conflict originating during Las Legiones. Whereas Abascal was more political and in opposition to the Mexican government generally regardless of who was president (whether Cárdenas or Ávila Camacho), Santacruz was more religiously-minded, moderate, and willing to compromise. From 1940 to 1941, Abascal shifted the direction of the organization, albeit briefly, from Santacruz's vision of a social-religious movement towards an overtly political one advocating for a Christian social order. He emphasized hierarchy, discipline, and paramilitarism.¹¹ The UNS became even more of a top-down movement than it already was.

The head of the UNS developed a variety of publicity materials at this time to be distributed far and wide. The organization expanded the distribution of its one-year-old

¹¹ Salvador Abascal, *Mis recuerdos*, 181-186; Ortoll, "Las Legiones, La Base, y El Sinarquismo," 27-28; Leonor Ludlow, "La Union Nacional Sinarquista (mayo de 1937- marzo de 1944)," *Estudios Politicos* III, no. 10 (1977): 83; Pablo Serrano Álvarez, "El Catolicismo Sinarquista," in Martha Pacheco, ed. *Religión y sociedad en México durante el siglo XX* (México: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 2007), 264.

periodical, *El Sinarquista*, to subscribers across California and Texas, as well as sold at newsstands in these respective states.¹² Sinarquismo had an audience through those invested in politics, as well as religion. Not only did Mexicans interested in the movement purchase *El Sinarquista*, they bought sinarquista publications such as José Trinidad Cervantes' *Alba-Patria*. Cervantes' work featured a variety of sinarquista poems praising the group.¹³ These publications circulated the organization's ideas years after its founding. In 1940, they disseminated ideas around martyrdom, gender, and revolution, strengthening sinarquista identity among members on both sides of the border.

Among the movement's beliefs, the group fully embraced the notion of martyrdom. José Antonio Urquiza's unexpected death in 1938 ushered in a practice of treating anyone who died on behalf of sinarquismo as a martyr. Immediately following the 1940 election, the editors of *El Sinarquista* published a full-page spread on the front of the newspaper that proudly declared "to remember the blood of the martyrs is to fully fight for justice."¹⁴ The paper was honoring two sinarquistas who died in Celaya, Guanajuato July of the previous year in a clash between sinarquistas and farmworkers.¹⁵ Of them, one was Gonzalo Aguilar, "whose example will lead the youth to continue the goal that he gave up with his sacrifice," and the other was María Teresa

¹²*El Sinarquista* began in Mexico City in 1939 and was under the authority of editor A. Martínez Aguayo until 1941, when Felipe Vázquez Galván and Alfonso Trueba took over. Letter from Antonio Santacruz to Rita Walsh, June 29, 1940, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; "Sinarquism," 1941, Folder M: Mexico – Nazi Activities, Miscellaneous Items, RG 75, NARA.

¹³ "Alba-Patria" roughly means "sunrise of the motherland." José Trinidad Cervantes, *Alba-Patria: Clarinadas Sinarquistas* (Mexico City: Union Nacional Sinarquista, 1940).

¹⁴ One of the headlines states "Recordar la sangre de los martires es vivir en plena lucha por la justicia," *El Sinarquista*, July 11, 1940.

¹⁵ "25 Killed or Injured in Mexican Clash," *The Evening Star*, July 11, 1939.

Bustos, “whose blood is the flower of eternal blessing for Mexico.”¹⁶ Both of them were examples for living sinarquistas to carry on the struggle which they gave their lives for. The membership of two sinarquista committees in Texas even decided rename themselves after Bustos. McAllen sinarquistas named their committee after “Maria Teresa Bustos” whereas the women’s branch of the El Paso committee took on the name “Grupo Teresa Bustos.”¹⁷

The commemoration of martyrs did not stop there as the UNS also actively began a donation campaign in 1940, asking committees to raise funds for the families of the martyred. Each edition of *El Sinarquista* featured the names of those “fallen” in the Bajío such as Emilio Cruz, Ramón Mendez, Constantino Mendoza, Martín Peña, Inocencio de la Rosa, Esteban Saldaña, and Victor Villanueva. Accompanying the names in each copy of the paper was a list from regional and local committees in the Bajío and elsewhere in Mexico, as well as from the U.S that gave funds. Donations came from Bakersfield, Fillmore, Fresno, Los Angeles, and Pittsburg in California and Clint, Edinburg, Fabens, Fort Hancock, and Weslaco in Texas. Along with the names of the committees, the paper also listed how much they gave, and the chapters in the U.S. almost always gave more money those in Mexico, in relation to the capital that sinarquistas had available.¹⁸ Donations not only represented mobilization on behalf of the group’s martyrs, they demonstrated the vastness of its reach across the U.S.-Mexican Border.

¹⁶ The paper notes this about Aguilar, “Su ejemplo llevará a las juventudes a cumplir el destino que trazo a su sacrificio.” As for Bustos, “Su sangre es flor de bendición eterna para Mexico,” *El Sinarquista*, July 11, 1940.

¹⁷ “El Grupo Sinarquista conmemoró en McAllen, Texas, ‘el Día de la Bandera,’” *La Prensa*, March 3, 1941. There is discussion about the El Paso women’s group in *El Sinarquista*, December 14, 1939.

¹⁸ See *El Sinarquista*, August 22, 1940; “Últimos Socorros,” *El Sinarquista*, October 3, 1940; “Lista de Donativos,” *El Sinarquista*, November 7, 1940.

The organization built a culture of martyrdom that could be exported through media as well as through music. Also in 1940, the UNS released a book titled *Canciones y Corridos Sinarquistas*. A song titled “Faith, Blood, Victory” contained lyrics including “Motherland, for your honors, the best fell: their precious blood was of freedom. Their remains, lying down: but their souls present in the fighting positions are always there. – The fallen! – Present!” Other songs had a particular emphasis on individuals who died on behalf of the movement such as the “Ballad of Gonzalo Aguilar,” the “Ballad of Juan Martín y Celaya,” and the “Ballad of Martín Peña.” The ballad about Aguilar in particular explained that “There the evil communists killed this Man. Gonzalo Aguilar died: he already fulfilled his mission. He had given his country, soul, life, and heart.”¹⁹ Although the movement claimed itself to be nonviolent, it honored dying on behalf of a valiant cause – for sinarquismo by advocating on behalf of freedom and Mexico, and against communism. This music carried on the notion of martyrdom through song, utilizing another medium to spread a message to sinarquistas and potential supporters in the U.S.

Beyond martyrdom, another important aspect of ideology that the UNS focused on during this period was the role of women. Sinarquista leadership emphasized as early as 1938 in its bulletins to committees that women were essential to the movement, despite placed within a hierarchy.²⁰ They held a belief in a traditional family structure with a man at its head, a wife as support, and children at the bottom. Only men could be committee chiefs and chapters were

¹⁹ “Fé, Sangre, Victoria” includes the lyrics, “Patria, por tus honores, cayeron los mejores: su sangre preciosa fué de libertad. Sus despojos, yacentes: mas sus almas presentes en los puestos de lucha siempre están. – Los caídos! – Presentes!” The “Corrido de Gonzalo Aguilar” explained that “Allí mataron a este Hombre los comunistas malvados. Murió Gonzalo Aguilar: ya cumplió con su misión. A su Patria había entregado alma, vida, y corazón.” Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Canciones y Corridos Sinarquistas* (Mexico City: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1940).

²⁰ Bulletin Number 6, February 20, 1938, Box 16, Folder 5, Munguía Papers, 1911-1980, Benson Collection, UT Austin.

dominated by men. Women were to aid men in their endeavors. They did so through the creation of women's groups like the Bustos branch of the El Paso committee.

As *El Sinarquista* served as the main organ of disseminating sinarquista values, the paper reiterated these prescribed gender roles for women. One instance of this was when the newspaper laid out the "Ten Norms of Life" for the sinarquista woman in its August 22 edition. As part of the organizational commitment to the collective over the individual, the piece emphasized the necessity of women to be first and foremost dedicated to God, and then Mexico. It also continued the notion of women supporting men in their struggle for the nation. Sinarquista women were to "cultivate in the heart of men and boys a grand love of the motherland" and that they should "push and encourage men to fight." They could not rest "until all of their family members participated in the sinarquista section" and could not support "cowardness nor laziness."²¹ *El Sinarquista* restated the movement's stance on women. They had a role to place in sinarquismo, albeit on the sidelines.

On the heels of the July presidential election, the UNS also utilized *El Sinarquista* to make its viewpoint known on the group's stance on the possibility of another revolution in Mexico. Prior to the election, rumors circulated that the sinarquistas would undermine the process by revolting. Following the vote, no revolt occurred and in fact, the organization promoted a slogan of "no revolution" across the front page of *El Sinarquista* in August 22, 1940. The newspaper's editors wanted to show that the fears of revolution had come to naught. They published a piece by new sinarquista president, Salvador Abascal, denouncing revolution in

²¹ The article articulates that "cultiva en el corazón del hombre y del niño un grande amor a la patria" and "empujar y decidir al hombre a la lucha." It also states that "hasta que todos los tuyos participen en la sección sinarquista; no protejas cobardias ni consientas peregas." In "Para la mujer sinarquista: diez normas de vida," *El Sinarquista*, August 22, 1940.

favor of “organization.” He explained that Mexico did not need a regime change, but rather order – in reference to the group’s name. There needed to be the organization of bodies as soldiers under the hierarchy of chiefs. This structure, Abascal predicted, would expand to the point where there would only be sinarquistas and non-sinarquistas. As such, sinarquismo would ultimately overtake the Mexican state through organization.²² Therefore, committee structure – whether in the Mexico or the U.S. – was so important. Order was key. While the UNS was already a hierarchical group, Abascal’s new role as sinarquista president marked a period of discipline. He ensured that ideology unified the movement’s members.

Transnational Organizing, Support, and Backlash for Sinarquismo at the End of 1940

The national committee of the UNS in Mexico City with Salvador Abascal at its helm invited sinarquistas from the U.S. to partake in its second annual meeting from November 3 to 9, 1940. Twenty-five Mexican states, as well as California and Texas, had representation at the conference. It was the first national conference to have representatives from the U.S. The 470 sinarquistas reflected some of the organization’s half a million members across both countries. At the conference, the UNS celebrated its exponential growth.²³ In addition to discussing internal affairs of the movement, the conference also featured talks by movement leaders such as José Trueba Olivares, Manuel Zermeño, Alfonso Trueba, Manuel Torres Bueno, and Abascal. Among the speeches, Abascal reiterated the group’s nationalist rhetoric, pushing members to reject

²² “Habla el jefe Abascal,” *El Sinarquista*, August 22, 1940.

²³ The conference was enshrined in a sinarquista song, ““Corrido de la Segunda Junta Nacional de Jefes.” The particular line that mentions the meeting goes, ““McAllen y California no dejaron de asistir; para alcanzar la victoria, hay que vencer o morir.” Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Canciones y Corridos Sinarquistas* (Mexico City: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1940); Letter from William F. Montavon to Michael Joseph Ready and Mr. Hall, November 5, 1940, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; “Women in Mexico Start League to Fight Leftists,” *The Catholic Advance*, November 22, 1940; Abascal, *Mis recuerdos*, 194.

“Anglo and Protestant penetration” on the customs of Mexico, instead reviving and strengthening the “beautiful national and regional traditions.”²⁴ He expressed a growing organizational fear of the U.S. and its cultural influence upon Mexico and Mexicans. Even as members were based in the country to the north, they were to resist any encroachment on their Mexican identity. The meeting was a celebration of who the UNS was and what it meant to be a sinarquista.

The American Catholic press highlighted such actions of the UNS, applauding their efforts. In Kansas, the Catholic Diocese of Wichita’s newspaper, *The Catholic Advance*, published its support for Mexican women’s anti-leftist activism. The paper honed in on their involvement in the recent national sinarquista congress, and how the movement dedicated to seek out and destroy communism.²⁵ In Washington, D.C., the NCWC continued its unconditional support of the UNS in the United States through its Press Department and its syndicated newspaper, the *N.C.W.C. News Service*. The NCWC Press Department’s Charles Betico asserted the importance of sinarquismo and how it sought to develop civic education “without anarchy” in Mexico. He also highlighted the movement’s re-embrace of Catholicism under Abascal.²⁶ The group originally shed its religious label in 1937, taking it up again three years later in 1940. The American Catholic press was invested in seeing through the success of its Catholic brethren by promoting the UNS cause in the U.S.

²⁴ Abascal proclaimed that “ordené que todos los sinarquistas se empeñaran en que el pueblo rechazara la penetración sajona y protestante en las costumbres y en que se revivieran y fortalecieran las bellas tradiciones nacionales y regionales.” Abascal, *Mis recuerdos*, 196.

²⁵ “Women in Mexico Start League to Fight Leftists,” *The Catholic Advance*, November 22, 1940.

²⁶ Charles Betico, “‘Sinarquism’ Looms as Important Growing Movement in Mexico,” *N.C.W.C. Catholic News Service*, November 4, 1940.

Just as the UNS's supporters utilized the press to buttress the group during this time, the movement similarly had its detractors, especially in the form of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México, who used the same tactics as in the past to bring it down. A year after the CTM drew the connection between the UNS and fascism, the labor confederation continued to emphasize the relationship between the two. Its English-language publication, *Mexican Labor News*, aimed at swaying hearts and minds of Americans. The CTM in its November 14 edition called out sinarquismo, describing how as "Franco Fascism [is] increasing its propaganda in Latin-America, Mexican labor is turning its attention to the most likely conveyor of the Spanish brand of fascism in this country." According to the publication, "they resemble the so-called 'Social Justice' movement of Father Coughlin in the United States, altho the Sinarchist leaders are considerably smoother."²⁷ More than anything, the CTM pushed forward the notion that the sinarquistas were not rooted in the Mexican nation, but were instead fifth columnists working on behalf of fascism in either its Spanish or U.S. iteration.

Sinarquismo at Its Height in the U.S. in 1941

In 1941, the UNS grew on multiple fronts within the U.S., maintaining the nationalist cause among Mexican expatriates.²⁸ The movement experienced widespread growth of the UNS across the entire state of California, along the Texas borderlands, and into the Chicago region. The majority of these that emerged during this time were in smaller, rural areas. Outside of the committees themselves, sinarquismo grew in terms of reputation. The readership of *El Sinarquista* took off both in and beyond where the committees existed. The organization

²⁷ "Sinarchism Likely Conveyor for Franco-Almazan Issue," *Mexican Labor News*, November 15, 1940.

²⁸ "El Sinarquismo Prendio Ya En Todo El Norte De La Republica," *El Sinarquista*, August 21, 1941.

distributed the paper and its pamphlets to wherever there were sizeable populations of Mexicans in the U.S. Through both a membership of tens of thousands of members and the dispersal of its ideas on a mass scale, sinarquismo sought to make a name of itself in the country on its own terms.

The UNS distributed a new pamphlet to its committees throughout Mexico and U.S. in 1941. This booklet aimed at committee chiefs, titled *Folleto Para Jefes (Pamphlet for Chiefs)* demonstrated Abascal's desire for hierarchy and structure within the organization as a whole. In addition to reiterating the movement's manifesto and sixteen points, the brochure provided a series of instructions for committee chiefs to follow. It reinforced the role of local or municipal committees below regional committees, and that both existed underneath the authority of the national committee based in Mexico City. Each local committee needed to consist of a chief, with various other positions for note-taking, propaganda, finances, organization, as well as laying out youth and women's branches. The local chief oversaw the mobilization of members as if they were soldiers, with them broken up into quadrants, centuries, and companies. The brochure also emphasized how sinarquismo was fulfilling the Mexican Constitution – and thus not in full opposition to the postrevolutionary state. Lastly, there was a list of all of the sinarquistas who died on behalf of the movement at the very end of the pamphlet, reiterating its veneration of martyrdom.²⁹ Each and every committee chief possessed the booklet, and thus organizational structure in U.S. chapters followed suit.

²⁹ Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Folleto Para Jefes*, (Mexico City: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1941), Box 1, Folder 20, Frank Gross Papers, 1941-1949, Marquette University Special Collections and University Archives, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The UNS also disseminated another pamphlet in 1941, yet this one was less about organization and instead about portraying its vision of Mexico approximately twenty years in the future. The former chief of the El Paso regional committee, José Neder Quiñones, left the city and moved to Mexico's capital where the UNS national committee appointed him to be the official distributor of the group's pamphlet, *México en 1960* (*Mexico in 1960*). The document was a fictional work imagining a sinarquista-controlled nation. In the pamphlet, it explained that Mexico "is dictated by the enthusiasm of those who participated in the saving action and has seen the evolution from the anarchic state to the synarchist state."³⁰ No longer was there a postrevolutionary Mexican state, but the new Mexican government was portrayed in Abascal's vision as top-down and authoritarian following an integralist Christian social order. This utopia was the vision of Salvador Abascal and Manuel Romo de Alba before him as the booklet detailed an organized, hierarchical society. Neder Quiñones distributed *México en 1960* far and wide across Mexico and the U.S., including back home in El Paso. New committee chief for the city, José Soto, noted how "it forecasts a better state of affairs for Mexicans in general 19 years from now."³¹

While the UNS disseminated its ideas via its publications across the U.S., it continued to expand in California. The UNS established local committees throughout Southern California branching off of the regional committee in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles branch continued to be quite active under the leadership of Pedro Villaseñor, former Las Legiones member who ran the

³⁰ The document explains that Mexico "Está dictado por el entusiasmo de quien participó en la acción salvadora y ha contemplado la evolución del estado anárquico al estado sinarquista." Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *México en 1960*, (Mexico City: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1941).

³¹ Chester Chope, "Growing 'Sinarquista' Movement Worries Officials of Mexico," *El Paso Herald-Post*, August 28, 1941; "Sinarquistas Will Proceed With Colony," *El Paso Times*, October 19, 1941; "Sinarquista Spokesman Says Book is 'Fantasy,'" *El Paso Herald-Post*, November 12, 1941.

committee since 1937. Sinarquistas regularly met at Townsend Hall in Boyle Heights, a neighborhood with a population of Mexicans living alongside people of Japanese and Jewish descent.³² The Los Angeles regional committee established chapters in the environs in and surrounding the city in Azuza, Claremont, La Verne, Ontario, Pacoima, Pomona, San Bernardino, San Fernando, Van Nuys, and Watts. A little farther afield, the Southern California regional committee established a local committee in the agricultural community of Oxnard in Ventura County. *El Sinarquista* regularly published reports from these committees and others in the U.S. and Mexican states under the headline of “News from All of the Republic.”³³ Although not part of the Mexican Republic, the paper portrayed these Southern Californian members as contributing to their country as much as those within Mexico were.

In Northern California, the UNS set up a new regional committee with headquarters in Bakersfield to represent the region, stretching up north through the Central Valley into the San Francisco Bay Area. Porfirio Rivera, formerly of Las Legiones, led the Bakersfield regional committee where he directed efforts to consistently create new local committees. Although Fresno already had a committee, Rivera worked to establish chapters in Antioch, Benicia, Pittsburg, and San Francisco, working to set up more in Bellavista and Stockton. These committee meetings typically included assemblies and sometimes showed films depicting sinarquista activities in Mexico. *El Sinarquista* reported a meeting in Richmond in late 1941

³² “Sinarquism,” 1941, Folder M: Mexico – Nazi Activities, Miscellaneous Items, RG 75, NARA; Lozano, “Patria y Nacionalismo en el Mexico de Afuera,” 89.

³³ “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, August 21, 1941; “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, September 25, 1941; “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, October 16, 1941.

between the Bay Area chiefs where “they talked with love of the distant motherland. And they proved that wherever there is a Mexican heart, there is Sinarquismo.”³⁴

Such was the case in Fresno where sinarquismo existed for over a year. The local committee’s chief, Isaias Torres, sustained Mexican nationalism and identity through civic participation and a commitment to the UNS. After a successful Mexican Independence Day celebration in the city in September 1940, the organizations that hosted the event formed the Mexican Patriotic Committee. Torres, alongside Tirso Romo, served as the sinarquista representatives on the planning committee, working alongside the other members to organize Fresno’s Cinco de Mayo Celebration. In April, the membership of the committee voted Torres to be head of the group.³⁵ The committee organized a successful celebration in Fresno in May. Beyond his role on the Mexican Patriotic Committee, a month later Torres traveled to Mexico where he attended two sinarquista conventions, as well as took a 6,000-mile trip throughout the country, examining living and working conditions.³⁶ The Fresno committee under Torres’ leadership concerned itself with Mexicans both on the local and transnational level.

Outside of California, the UNS maintained an active presence in Texas with El Paso as its center. El Paso served as the regional committee for the state, with local branches clustering around the city in Clint, Fabens, Fort Hancock, and Yselta. In the Rio Grande Valley,

³⁴ “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, September 25, 1941; “Noticias de Toda la República,” October 16, 1941. The article about the meeting in Richmond mentions that “se hablo con amor de la patria distante. Y quedó probado que en donde quiera que haya un corazón mexicano, hay Sinarquismo.” “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, December 4, 1941.

³⁵ The organizations included the Alianza Hispana Americana, Artístico club, Azteca club, Gaona club, Morelos Society, and Unión Nacional Mexicana. “Mexicans Plan Patriotic Fete,” *The Fresno Bee*, March 17, 1941; “I. Torres Heads Mexican Group,” *The Fresno Bee*, April 16, 1941.

³⁶ “Fresno Delegates Return from Mexico Conclaves,” *The Fresno Bee*, July 2, 1941.

committees, McAllen was the center of the sinarquista community, flanked by Edinburg, Mission, and Weslaco. By 1941, the group was unable to sustain the committee in San Antonio despite its large Mexican population.

The Texas chapters in the Rio Grande Valley around McAllen were particularly active. The McAllen “María Teresa Bustos” committee under the leadership of Jesús María Dávila met weekly. Once a month, a regional meeting took place in McAllen with groups such as Edinburg, Donna, and Milla.³⁷ As Fresno sinarquistas worked to commemorate Mexican holidays, so too did those in the McAllen committee as they honored Día de la Bandera (Flag Day) at the Sam Houston School Auditorium. Organizers scheduled a two-day program from February 23 to 24, 1941, to accommodate the schedule of workers in the region. Among other speakers, Dávila, gave a brief history on the Mexican flag.³⁸ As with sinarquistas in other parts of the country, those in the Rio Grande Valley drew a connection between themselves and Mexico.

As early as February 1941, the UNS moved away from having committees solely in the southwestern U.S. as it established a presence within the pre-existing Mexican community in the area in and around the city of Chicago.³⁹ Mexicans arrived to the region beginning during the Mexican Revolution of the 1910s as a result of railroad networks connecting Mexico with the Midwest. Initially migrants came predominantly from Mexico City and northwestern Mexico, but by the 1930s, especially with the upheaval of the First Cristero War, most were arriving from the Bajío. Labor agencies enlisted Mexicans in Texas to work in agriculture in the Midwest.

³⁷ “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, October 16, 1941.

³⁸ “El Grupo Sinarquista conmemoró en McAllen, Texas, ‘el Día de la Bandera,’” *La Prensa*, March 3, 1941.

³⁹ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, February 27, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

However, upon arrival to the metropolitan region, many decided instead to work in higher-paying industrial and manufacturing jobs such as the railroad, steel production, and meat packing. Most ended up in cities such as Chicago and Aurora, Illinois as well as East Chicago, Indiana.⁴⁰

Mexicans brought with them their Catholic faith and houses of worship worked to serve this community. The Congregation of Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the Claretians) established Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on the South Side of Chicago in 1924 as the first Spanish-speaking parish in the city in 1924 for Mexicans. Reverend James Tort, C.M.F. became the pastor there, as well as worked to convert an old German Catholic Church – St. Francis of Assisi on the Near West Side – into a Mexican-serving church in 1926. St. Francis became the center of the Mexican Catholic community in the neighborhood.⁴¹ Aurora’s Mexican community formed in large part because of the railroad, both for transportation to the Midwest and for work there. The Mexican Catholic community either attended mass at a chapel at the Eola boxcar camp or in the city at St. Therese Church.⁴² In East Chicago, Mexicans uprooted by the religious conflict came to find a home in the its very own Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in 1925.⁴³ By the 1940s, ex-Cristeros and devout Catholics from the Bajío in these respective parts of the region were attracted to what the UNS offered. The

⁴⁰ Flores, 23-26 and 50; Deborah E. Kanter, *Chicago Católico: Making Catholic Parishes Mexican* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 17-18; Susan L. Palmer, “The Community-Building Experiences of Mexicans in Aurora, Illinois, 1915-1935,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 98, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 127.

⁴¹ Flores, 67; Kanter, 23-24.

⁴² Irene Campos Carr, “Mexican Workers in Aurora: The Oral History of Three Immigration Waves, 1924-1990,” *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 1 (1992): 34-35.; Palmer, 133-135.

⁴³ Sister Mary Helen Rogers, “The Role of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in the Adjustment of the Mexican Community to Life in the Indiana Harbor Area, 1940-1941” in *Forging a Community: The Latino Experience in Northwest Indiana, 1919-1975*, eds. James B. Lane and Edward J. Escobar (Gary: Cattails Press, 1987), 187.

movement allowed Mexicans in the Chicago area a connection to their home country although they were far from home.

As early as February 1941, sinarquismo established a presence in and around the city of Chicago. For example, Victoriano de León, a Mexican migrant and billiard hall owner wrote a letter to the editors of the UNS publication, *El Sinarquista*, describing the rising demand for the paper among his customers. He described that “it is impossible for my compatriots to buy their newspaper, due to their shifts and working hours. For this reason, I ask you to tell me at what conditions and prices I can sell *El Sinarquista* to Mexicans who want it.” The editors responded, explaining that they would supply papers to De León, noting that “where there is a Mexican, there will be a sinarquista.” De León and others soon started disseminating the publication among communities of Mexican migrants.⁴⁴ Organizational leadership expressed excitement in building sinarquismo in the region. Although conservative Mexicans were far from their home country, they sought to remain connected with like-minded individuals through the periodical – and through the movement.

Sinarquismo started early in the year in Chicagoland with the distribution of *El Sinarquista* and solidified in the form of a committee later in the year. In May, *El Sinarquista* discussed work in the region to form a committee, hoping “in that great city, like others in the United States, they do all that can be done to unite under the flags of Sinarquismo for [our]

⁴⁴ De León described that “Como las agencias se hallan muy retiradas de este lugar, a mis compatriotas les es imposible comprar su periodico, debido a sus turnos y horas de trabajo. Por lo cual pido a usted me diga a que condiciones y precios puedo vender El Sinarquista a los mexicanos que lo quieren.” The editors responded that “Donde haya un mexicano, habrá un sinarquista.” “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, February 27,

1941, Archivos Históricos, Biblioteca de la Universidad Iberoamericana (Ibero), Mexico City, Mexico; “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, March 13, 1941, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

banished compatriots.”⁴⁵ The editors of the newspaper in Mexico City, emphasized how Mexicans were displaced from their country because of the church-state conflict and forced to live in places like Chicago as a result. The first committee to emerge in the area was in Indiana Harbor (part of East Chicago) in August. Jesús Acevedo, María Dolores Acevedo, Francisco Alvarez, Wenceslao Cortés, Ester Flores, Manuel Reyes, Nicolás Salvador, Elías Valdés, Eloísa Valdés, and Luis Verduzco came together in forming the sinarquista chapter. By August 15, the group had fifteen members, was meeting weekly, and was working to bring in more people from Indiana Harbor and the surrounding region.⁴⁶ The sinarquista local committee in Indiana Harbor would be instrumental in mapping the expansion of the UNS committees in Chicago and Aurora.

Elsewhere in the Midwest, Frank Gross, a lay Catholic residing in Milwaukee, Wisconsin would delve into the world of sinarquismo. The Mexican community in the city grew starting in the 1920s to work in the leather and steel industries.⁴⁷ White parishioners of Holy Trinity Church alongside with the local branch of the Knights of Columbus organized an outreach to Mexican Catholics in 1924. Gross was a parishioner of German descent and an active member of both the Knights and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He had traveled throughout Latin America in his work as an accountant and banker. Through the outreach campaign of Holy Trinity Church and the Knights, Gross began a connection with the Mexican Catholic community that grew in the following years. With the beginning of the First Cristero War in 1926, Gross was instrumental in working alongside the community to establish the Mexican

⁴⁵ “Mexicanos de Chicago: Gracias por su Ayuda!,” *El Sinarquista*, May 1, 1941, Fondo Unión Nacional Sinarquistas (UNS), Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

⁴⁶ “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, August 21, 1941.

⁴⁷ Frank Gross, interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, “Milwaukee Mexican-American Interviews, 1974–1977” [sound recording], Tape 854A, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

Mission Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe to demonstrate the need to guard and support Catholicism in both the U.S. and Mexico.⁴⁸ By the 1940s, he continued to be working alongside Mexican Catholics so he wanted to know of the contemporary situation in the country. In February 1941, Gross reached out to a friend of his, Carlos Fernández, a former employee at Harley-Davidson Motorcycles in Milwaukee, who used to reside and give talks to Mexican Catholics in the city, but had since returned to Mexico. Upon his return to Mexico, Fernández became involved in sinarquismo as a devout Catholic, as well as a landowner opposed to Mexican government-instituted land reform.⁴⁹ The information that Fernández shared regarding the UNS and how Gross could help would send him down a path in aiding the sinarquistas for the next eight years, garnering him the nickname of “Sinarquista Gringo.”⁵⁰

Fernández responded to Gross’ original inquiry, sending him a range of news articles on the labor situation in Mexico, but ultimately emphasized sinarquismo. He described the movement and how NCWC Legal Department Director William Montavon aided the group in registering for the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Fernández noted that despite accusations that the UNS was Nazi or fascist, it functioned freely in the U.S. Southwest as a federally-registered organization.⁵¹ The main reason why Fernández was describing sinarquista activities

⁴⁸ Sergio M. González, “Interethnic Catholicism and Transnational Religious Connections: Milwaukee’s Mexican Mission Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 1924–1929,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 36, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 6, 14-16, and 21-22.

⁴⁹ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, February 26, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives. Fernández mentioned that he worked at Harley-Davidson. Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, May 3, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁵⁰ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, August 30, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁵¹ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, February 26, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

in the U.S. was because he wanted Gross to disseminate *El Sinarquista*, as well as sinarquismo more broadly, in Milwaukee. He explained that “we want you to help us place a few subscriptions, particularly among the paisanos and at least one for the ‘hemeroteca’ of the Mexican Mission. I will start by asking the editors to mail some sample numbers.” Fernández wanted to see sinarquismo come to Milwaukee, reiterating the sinarquista motto for recruiting new members: “where there is a Mexican, there will be a sinarquista.”⁵² Gross agreed and in doing so, he maintained in contact with Fernández over building a sinarquista committee in the city, expanding the reach of the UNS.

One topic that the two discussed in the following months was over who could be a sinarquista member in Milwaukee. Gross inquired about the extent to which he could be involved in the Milwaukee local committee. Fernández responded by not wanting Gross to be directly involved, instead having him to encourage involvement of the Mexican population itself. Gross could partake indirectly, facilitating involvement in the organization as a sympathizer and extraofficial promoter of the movement. All he had to do was share *El Sinarquista* with Mexicans in the city, observe their reactions, and choose whoever was the most able or enthusiastic to be the local sinarquista leader.⁵³

Tied to the conversation over membership in Milwaukee was a discussion about the sinarquistas’ particular Mexican identity, especially within the context of the U.S. Fernández explained that Mexico had not been the motherland, but rather a “cruel stepmother” to Mexican

⁵² “Hemeroteca” means newspaper library. The motto is “Donde haya un mexicano, habrá un sinarquista.” Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, February 27, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁵³ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, April 11, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

migrants. The government's revolutionary ideas did not benefit the population as a whole, and instead were utilized for political purposes. He therefore believed that it would be best for Mexicans who migrated to the U.S. to become citizens and enjoy the advantages of being an American. Fernández thought that they could be members as long as they longed for their native land, and above all, its traditions. In doing so, they could assist in the restoration of Christian social order to Mexico and the removal of the revolutionary government influenced by "Bolshevik ideas."⁵⁴ Fernández reinforced the nationalism of the movement towards a particular notion of what Mexico was and how it had gone astray. Sinarquistas in the U.S., including in Milwaukee, were to embody such a nationalism.

Gross did his best to make the Milwaukee sinarquista committee a reality. Fernández worked with the editors of *El Sinarquista* to send him copies, which he then distributed to Mexicans – residents and citizens alike. After a few months in May 1941, Gross followed Fernández' instructions by finding someone from the Milwaukee Mexican community to be the committee's chief. Gross chose Jesús Sánchez to lead the group. As a result, he regularly received copies of the newspaper to disseminate himself. Fernández expressed excitement regarding the possibility of a new committee, waiting to hear about the reactions from his countrymen in the city. After some time, however, the chapter was not as successful as he had hoped as Sánchez contacted the editors of *El Sinarquista*, asking for the suspension of the shipments.⁵⁵ The Milwaukee committee unfortunately did not come to fruition. Gross was able to recruit subscribers to the newspaper, but not facilitate a new center of sinarquismo.

⁵⁴ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, April 11, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁵⁵ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, May 3, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.; Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, June 22, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers,

Southwest of Wisconsin in the Lower Midwest, Mexican Catholics attempted to drum up support for the UNS in Kansas. *El Progreso*, the newspaper of Topeka's Our Lady of Guadalupe Sodality highlighted sinarquismo and encouraged its members to engage in the movement in one form or another. In its May 11, 1941 edition, the paper had a feature on Mexican movements that were seeking for a "Great, United, and Free" Mexico. In doing so, the periodical honed in on the UNS. It described that its objective is Mexico and Mexicans, and that within that objective, Catholicism was essential.⁵⁶ Months later in September, *El Progreso* encouraged its readership to subscribe to *El Sinarquista* and join its ranks. The paper proclaimed that *El Sinarquista* "week after week talks of sacrifices, of fights, [and] unheard of triumphs." "Many Mexican residents in this country are intimately becoming part of this savior movement. Those who want to communicate with the leaders, can ask for information, in order to obtain the weekly periodical."⁵⁷ Even in the middle of the U.S., Mexican nationalists were gaining traction.

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista solidified a presence in the United States starting in 1940, going into 1941. The movement was establishing deeper organizational roots in the U.S., as well as camaraderie between committees as the U.S. prepared for eventual war. Under the leadership of Salvador Abascal, it used materials to promote the group's ideas across the U.S.-Mexico border. UNS committees and its newspaper, *El Sinarquista*, became more ubiquitous

Marquette Archives.; Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, July 8, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁵⁶ The paper explains that it wants a "Patria Grande, Una, y Libre." "De Nuestra Patria," *El Progreso*, May 11, 1941, Robert and Hazel Gomez collection, Box 14, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁵⁷ The article describes that *El Sinarquista* "semana a semana habla de sacrificios, de luchas, de triunfos inauditos." Regarding joining the organization, "Muchos Mexicanos residentes en este pais están incorporando intimamente con este movimiento salvador. Los que quieran comunicarse con los Jefes, son para pedir informes, sea para obtener el periódico semanal." "Ecos de la Patria," *El Progreso*, September 21, 1941, Gomez collection, Box 14, Kansas State Historical Society.

wherever there existed sizeable populations of Mexicans within the United States. The organization thrived in 1941, yet the year also served as a moment of contention over the movement's true purpose.

Contestation and Compromise in 1941

While the Unión Nacional Sinarquista grew across the U.S. Southwest and Midwest in 1941, the rumors that movement was associated with European fascism were growing stronger than ever before. At the center of these reports was that the UNS was a tool for the Falange Española, which was itself under the control of Nazi Germany. Spain supposedly had a plan to take over the Western Hemisphere and the sinarquistas were part of their grand project. Conservative U.S. Catholics, particularly the staff of the NCWC, worked to defend the group.

Negative Sentiment Builds Against the UNS

As sinarquismo extended through much of the U.S., the movement's detractors were growing in force, and coming from the political left, media and government. What occurred in Mexico made its way to the U.S. through each of these transnational channels. Additionally, each one channel influenced the other. As Mexicans in the United States established committees, fostering communities supporting their political and religious ideals, they increasingly found themselves the subject of attacks that they were fascist surrogates.

The CTM continued to publish its *Mexican Labor News* for a base of sympathetic left-leaning American readers. In March 1941, the labor confederation planned a concerted effort against the UNS who it saw as paramilitary organization, trained by Nazi agents.⁵⁸ The CTM utilized its English-language newspaper, publishing a piece attacking the sinarquistas in almost

⁵⁸ "A Campaign to be Initiated Against the Sinarquistas by the C.T.M.," 812.00/31637, Box 4096, RG 59, NARA.

every month for the remainder of the year. It framed the UNS as “Mexico’s native clerico-fascism,” as part of the Axis’ efforts to increase agitation in the Western Hemisphere led by the Falange Española and the Nazi Overseas Bureau. Sinarquismo was “trying to provoke a conflict between the US and Latin America.” *Mexican Labor News* emphasized that it would do so by attacking all organizations asking for aid in support of the allies as “communist,” stressing the idea of Nazi Germany defending the world from communism, and winning over bourgeois non-fascist sections.⁵⁹ The newspaper conjured up fear in its American reader base of the organization.

Similarly, U.S. media equated the sinarquistas to be a fascist threat. Betty Kirk was an American freelance journalist whose articles were published in mainstream outlets such as *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. Kirk wrote a variety of pieces aimed at U.S. audiences on the threat of fascism to Mexico starting in 1939, but particularly honed in on the UNS beginning in 1941.⁶⁰ She demonstrated a sympathy for the postrevolutionary Mexican government over the years, and her view towards President Ávila Camacho was no different. Similar to the CTM, she sought to build fear around the movement as not only endangering Mexicans, but putting Americans at risk as well. In fact, the language she used about the sinarquistas as totalitarian agents was almost exactly the same as what the CTM used. She described how the movement was a proxy of the Falange Española,

⁵⁹ “CTM Regional Congress to Combat Sinarchists,” *Mexican Labor News*, March 14, 1941; “CTM Forms Committees to Fight Nazifascism,” *Mexican Labor News*, April 10, 1941; “Phony Anti-Nazis Take Line of Masks; Adopt Fascist Line,” *Mexican Labor News*, June 26, 1941.

⁶⁰ See Betty Kirk, “Fascist Hand Seen in Mexican Fracas.” *The New York Times*, June 18, 1939.

sowing division amid the unity created by Pan-Americanism. Sinarquismo would weaken Mexico, as Nazi Germany weakened surrounding countries in the midst of the war.⁶¹

El Paso-based journalist Marshall Hail also took on sinarquismo. As a reporter with the *El Paso Herald-Post*, he watched and covered the movement as it grew over the years ever since it started in the city back in 1937. What took him beyond audiences in West Texas was a highly-syndicated piece published everywhere from the *Los Angeles Daily News* in California to *The Burlington Daily Times-News* in Vermont. In some ways, this article was more compelling than those of *Mexican Labor News* or the works by Kirk because images of the sinarquistas accompanied the text. The photos alone evoked a totalitarian movement. One showed sinarquistas saluting with their right arm over their right shoulder, another was a portrait of the “fuehrer” Salvador Abascal, and the last image demonstrated hundreds of members marching. The photos immediately drew associations between European fascism and the movement. The accompanying text elaborated on the connections. Hail noted how it attracted supporters in the hundreds of thousands, with branches in the U.S. and throughout Latin America. Symbolism was of particular importance to Hail. He emphasized the “united front” of the Mexican family, which according to him meant “one party – and one leader.” In addition to the salute, the flag featured a silhouette of Mexico in a circle on a dark field – similar to the composition of Nazi Germany’s flag. Hail also honed in on its political stances of embracing nationalism and rejecting communism. He quoted the sinarquistas as saying, “We condemn the Communistic tendency to unify all countries into a sole universal republic...and will defend the independence of Mexico.”

⁶¹ See Betty Kirk, “Sinarquista Rise in Mexico Seen as Totalitarian Plot,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 7, 1941; Betty Kirk, “Unrest in Mexico,” *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1941.

He used the sinarquistas' nationalistic anti-internationalism against the movement.⁶² Hail, like other journalists of the time, drummed up panic about the looming effect that these fascist fifth columnists would have in Mexico – and the U.S.⁶³

The U.S. government, as it had in the past with the sinarquistas, utilized the press as a major source of intelligence gathering. The Division of Press Intelligence for the Office of Government Reports collected articles across the country that were of relevance to various departments. Coverage on the sinarquistas by reporters like Kirk and Hail were of particular importance to the Department of State. The department was acquiring any information that it could in regards to what it deemed were “axis activities.”⁶⁴ Although the U.S. was not yet at war, it was compiling any relevant information that could compromise hemispheric security.

The Roosevelt administration founded the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI) in July 1941 to better facilitate information between government agencies. The agency noted how the sinarquistas were an actual or potential enemy of the U.S., alongside the PAN. The COI echoed sentiments displayed in the press about the UNS. The office characterized the group as semi-militarized, opposed to the Ávila Camacho administration, pro-Catholic and anti-

⁶² Marshall Hail, “Hate An Easy Life...Love Discomfort and Death,” *The Burlington Daily Times-News*, October 10, 1941.

⁶³ See additional articles that portray the UNS as fascist: “Mexico Takes Sharp Stand Against Nazis,” *Borger Daily Herald*, August 1, 1941; William D. Patterson, “Mexico Explains Fascist Curb,” *Oakland Tribune*, August 22, 1941; Chester Choep, “Growing ‘Sinarquista’ Movement Worries Officials of Mexico,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, August 28, 1941.

⁶⁴ United States Office of Government Reports, Press Intelligence Bulletin No. 2409, September 11, 1941; United States Office of Government Reports, Press Intelligence Bulletin No. 2437, October 14, 1941; United States Office of Government Reports, Press Intelligence Bulletin No. 2440, October 17, 1941; United States Office of Government Reports, Press Intelligence Bulletin No. 2452, October 31, 1941.

Semitic, as well as showing sympathies with Axis powers, particularly the Falange Española.⁶⁵

The COI believed that the Falange was working on behalf of Berlin, operating behind the scenes to coordinate efforts in the Americas. It sought to cause internal insurrection through armed disturbances and anti-U.S. sentiment.⁶⁶ The COI was aware that Mexican laborers in the U.S. were joining the movement. The office reported that sinarquista “cells” existed in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and in Chicago.⁶⁷

Responses to and Effects of the Charges

Such targeting of the sinarquistas by various forces provoked the movement to respond. In the U.S., local committee chief of McAllen, Texas, Jesús María Dávila, responded directly to charges against the movement. He said that from such press, “one can learn that Synarchists are nothing less a Nazi-Fascist organization, something which is absolutely false. As organizer of the Synarchists of the Lower Valley of the Rio Grande, I can not but deny most explicitly such assertions.” He further explained the movement’s longevity as an organization since 1937, its “Sixteen Basic Points,” and that “our organization was registered at Washington, D.C. in May 31, 1940.”⁶⁸ Amid accusations that the movement was associated with the Axis, U.S. chiefs such as Dávila had to be on the defensive. As Mexicans, sinarquistas already faced discrimination,

⁶⁵ United States Office of the Coordinator of Information, Latin American Section, Research and Analysis 137, “Analysis of Insecurities in Mexico,” 1941, Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch Sinarquista Microfilm, Göttingen State and University Library.

⁶⁶ United States Office of the Coordinator of Information, Latin American Section, Research and Analysis 149, “Spanish Fascist Operations in Latin America, with Particular Attention to Mexico,” November 21, 1941, Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch Sinarquista Microfilm, Göttingen Library; James B. Reston, “Spain Said to Aid Axis Propaganda,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 1941.

⁶⁷ “The Union Nacional Sinarquista in Mexico,” December 18, 1941, Box 45, Folder 3, Donald Marquand Dozer Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

⁶⁸ Jesús María Dávila, “Letter to the Editor: Synarchists Defended by Organizer of Group,” *The Monitor*, August 26, 1941.

especially in places like Texas, but these charges took the attack against them to the next level. Therefore, registration with the Foreign Agents Registration Act was of particular pride and a sign of legitimacy, even as Fernández noted in his conversations with Gross. Nonetheless, this layer of imagined protection would only go so far with mounting charges from various angles.

Salvador Abascal himself faced the effects of this pushback. He sought to return to the U.S. in August 1941, wanting to connect with members in Los Angeles, but did not plan on holding any meetings in the country. He initially received a transit certificate from the Vice Consul A.F. Yepis at the United States Consulate in Tijuana and was set to cross. The Tijuana Chief of Police, Félix Zavala, received notice that the sinarquista president was in town. He informed Yepis that the movement was very dangerous, aiming to overthrow the Mexican government, and that Abascal should not be admitted into the U.S. Yepis received additional information that the movement was “Nazi at heart” and masquerading as being pro-Catholic and pro-Mexican, as well as anti-communist and anti-fascist. Swayed by what he heard, the Vice Consul cancelled approval and notified the local Immigration and Naturalization Service office.⁶⁹ Abascal attempted crossing into Southern California via the entry at San Ysidro, however the U.S. Border Patrol stopped him from doing so. The building sentiment against sinarquismo in Mexico was working against him because of the reputation’s ever-growing pro-Axis reputation. As a result, he ended up returning back to the UNS headquarters in Mexico City.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ “The ‘Sinarquista’ Movement in Mexico,” August 28, 1941, United States Consulate to Tijuana, 812.00/31766, Box 4097, RG 59, NARA.

⁷⁰ “Mexican Leader Returns Home,” *San Diego Union*, August 31, 1941; “U.S. Officials Bar Mexican Sinarquista,” *San Antonio Express*, August 31, 1941.

Even the editors of *El Sinarquista* felt compelled to respond to the growing negative sentiment and took the accusations of fascism head on. They wrote that U.S. journalists and “agents” are investigating the movement. In response, they noted how the sinarquistas sought to be transparent, consistently answering questions openly and explicitly. There is enough information “to get rid of the fear that we are ‘Nazis’ and other equally fantastical things.” The editors hoped that “they know who we are, appreciate us justly, and dissolve falsities circling about them.”⁷¹ Sinarquismo “– does not have any assistance other than it can offer to the people of our motherland – have no fear.”⁷² The sinarquistas did their best to control the narrative. Ultimately, though, they had continued assistance in the form of conservative American Catholics.

Sustained Support by Conservative U.S. Catholics

Catholics in the U.S. – both clergy and lay alike – supported the UNS over the course of 1941. Although the majority of these individuals were of European descent, they found common bonds through a particular politicized conservative Catholicism. Conservative American Catholics sustained transnational networks with Mexican sinarquista leadership and passionate members. They did so via mobilizing populations in the U.S. to create committees, spreading the word to Catholic leaders, as well as through speaking on behalf of the movement in front of federal government bodies.

⁷¹ The article said that “para que desaparezca el temor de que somos ‘nazis’ y otras cosas igualmente fantásticas.” Also, “conociendonos, se nos aprecie justamente y se disuelvan todas esas falsedades que circulan.” “En los EE.UU. Hay Interés Por El Sinarquismo,” *El Sinarquista*, October 9, 1941.

⁷² The piece noted that Sinarquismo “– que no tiene mas apoyo que el que le ofrece el pueblo de nuestra patria – have no fear.” “El sinarquismo se divulga entre los norteamericanos,” *El Sinarquista*, October 16, 1941.

In Milwaukee, Gross and Fernández eventually moved beyond forming a committee in the city, and instead discussed the need for swaying public opinion in the U.S. towards sinarquismo. Gross believed that it was necessary to publish more about the movement in American media. Fernández agreed, saying that “I also think that publicity in the secular press would be more valuable for our purpose than the Catholic press.”⁷³ U.S. Catholic periodicals had supported the movement for years, but that was not the case with other publications. The UNS needed to reach a wider audience. In order to counteract “ill-intentioned Jewish propaganda against Sinarchism,” Fernández pushed that it is “absolutely indispensable to publish as many articles as possible in American dailies and magazines.”⁷⁴

The sinarquistas needed someone – a “good American Catholic writer” – who could translate their Spanish-language materials and newspapers into English for an American audience. Fernández and Gross considered various options, all of whom were rooted in Catholicism, yet could speak to a broader audience and who would be willing to do the translation work for free.⁷⁵ One was Reverend James A. Magner whose recent 1941 book, *Men of Mexico*, highlighted seventeen Mexican leaders through a politically conservative, anti-communist perspective. Beyond his book, Magner sympathized with counter-revolutionary Mexican movements in the past such as the Camisas Doradas and was also sympathetic to the sinarquistas. Alternatively, Gross and Fernández thought about Reverend Ramón José Miller,

⁷³ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, May 3, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁷⁴ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, August 30, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁷⁵ Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, August 30, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, September 7, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

another American sympathizer to sinarquismo, and contributor to the *N.C.W.C. News Service*.

The two also considered Gross himself.⁷⁶ They hoped that whoever wrote the articles in English would build stronger connections between sinarquismo and influential American Catholic leaders like Magner, Reverend Francis W. Kelley of the Catholic Church Extension Society, and well-known radio priest and fascist-sympathizer Reverend Charles Coughlin.⁷⁷ In the end, Gross and Fernández went with both Gross and Miller as American spokespersons for sinarquismo, supporting the work that the NCWC, and specifically William Montavon, was doing. According to Fernández, Montavon “has provided us with extremely valuable services.”⁷⁸

Meanwhile in Washington, D.C., the NCWC demonstrated its commitment to the UNS by amplifying the sinarquista cause in a positive light. Like Gross and Fernández, the NCWC envisioned that it could affect public opinion in the U.S. and ultimately the U.S. government. William Montavon and his secretary, Rita Walsh, at the NCWC Legal Department worked to facilitate these interactions. For example, among Catholics, he introduced Reverend Bartholomew Timlin, O.F.M., the guardian and rector of Holy Name College in Washington, D.C. to sinarquista national committee representative, Emilio Cervi. Timlin wrote to Montavon that he appreciated the opportunity to meet him. He explained that “when I write to Fr.

⁷⁶ Magner demonstrated shared his support for the sinarquistas in his book, which only grew over the following years. James A. Magner, *Men of Mexico* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1941), 591; Magner’s sympathy of and support for the Camisas Doradas is evident in correspondence with the organization’s leader, Nicolás Rodríguez. Letter from Nicolas Rodriguez to James A. Magner, May 2, 1940, James A. Magner Papers, CUA Archives; Miller is mentioned in correspondence between Gross and Fernández. Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, August 30, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁷⁷ Reverend Coughlin did indeed publicly support sinarquismo in his periodical, *Social Justice*. “Mexico for the Mexicans!,” *Social Justice*, September 29, 1941.

⁷⁸ Fernández describes that Montavon “nos ha prestado valiosísimos servicios.” Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, October 26, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Letter from Carlos Fernández to Frank Gross, December 3, 1941, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

Provincial, I wish to tell him of the splendid work of this body of militant Catholics.”⁷⁹ The more that the sinarquistas could be known about, the better.

The NCWC published sinarquista articles in the U.S., portraying the UNS in a favorable light. Walsh was in contact with sinarquista Alfonso Franco. He requested that the NCWC publish a series of articles in the U.S., related to the motherland, communism, family, racism, and education.⁸⁰ She responded that, “I will be delighted do what I can to arrange for the publication of the articles on such interesting topics.” In considering Pan-Americanism, she said, “they will contribute much to the spirit of good will between our countries.” Walsh worked with Charles Betico and the NCWC Press Department to circulate the *N.C.W.C. News Service* pieces in favor of sinarquismo. The NCWC published articles disseminated among Catholic spheres of influence nationwide.⁸¹ One of the *N.C.W.C. News Service*’s syndicated pieces made its way to New York City in the official paper of the Brooklyn Diocese, *The Tablet*. Like other articles by the NCWC, it attempted to show how the UNS was embracing “social justice,” seeking to reduce disparities between classes. It dispelled accusations of fascism, distancing sinarquismo from fascism, asserting that the movement was both anti-fascist and anti-communist. The piece, above all, worked to portray the sinarquistas as nationalists valuing the Mexican motherland, seeking to

⁷⁹ Letter from Bartholomew Timlin to William F. Montavon, April 18, 1941, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; “Bartholomew Timlin, O.F.M.,” Franciscan Friars: Holy Name Province, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://hnp.org/who-we-are/our-friars/deceased-friars/bartholomew-timlin/>

⁸⁰ Letter from Alfonso Franco to Rita Walsh, July 11, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁸¹ Letter from Rita Walsh to Alfonso Franco, July 21, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives. For articles that supported sinarquismo, see “Mexico Sinarchists Reply to Charge of ‘Totalitarian Plot’” and “‘Communists Accused,’” *N.C.W.C. News Service*, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

unify rather than divide the nation.⁸² The NCWC would do its best to counteract mainstream publicity attacking the group in the U.S.

The connection between the sinarquistas and NCWC staff was beyond one of just strategic importance between Americans and Mexicans; it was also a relationship based on transnational friendship. Franco in correspondence with Walsh, noted that “I am sure that you received the little flower of Mexican silver...even though in itself it does not have much value, it is simply a small token of gratitude for all your attentions and as a remembrance of Mexico.”⁸³ Walsh was extremely grateful, thanking the sinarquistas “for the beautiful sample of Mexican handiwork in silver. I have often heard of the delicate bounty and design of these articles and I am most pleased to be the proud possessor of the lovely broach which you sent me.”⁸⁴ The sinarquistas appreciated the time and effort that the Walsh and Montavon put in to support and promote the cause.

Montavon’s sights were still on influencing government policy in favor of the sinarquistas. Montavon accepted an appointment as a member of the Advisory Policy Committee in the United States Office of the Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Relations Between the American Republics (OCCCRBAR) in early 1941.⁸⁵ President Roosevelt created the office August of the previous year under the leadership of Nelson A. Rockefeller to institutionalize

⁸²Charles Betico, “Plea for Unity in Mexico is Being Spread,” *The Tablet*, September 13, 1941.

⁸³ Letter from Alfonso Franco to Rita Walsh, October 1, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁸⁴ Letter from Rita Walsh to Emilio S. Servi, October 7, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁸⁵ Letter from Rita Walsh to Antonio Santacruz, March 17, 1941, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

Pan-Americanism and the Good Neighbor Policy, preventing the spread of fascism in the Western Hemisphere. Montavon had considerable experience working in Latin America, especially in the context of Mexico as he aided in brokering the modus vivendi that ended the First Cristero War in the 1920s. Just as Montavon had an interest in protecting Catholic rights in Latin America then, he sought to do the same in the 1940s, and one of his focuses was the UNS.

Montavon used his platform to provide a pro-sinarquista voice in OCCCRBAR. Walsh wrote sinarquista leader Antonio Santacruz upon Montavon's appointment that "Don Guillermo [Montavon] will be happy to cooperate with you and your associates in this connection."⁸⁶ As the year progressed, Montavon received two documents relating to the philosophy of the UNS from his sinarquista colleagues in Mexico. One was a general statement of the principles of sinarquismo from 1939, while the other was a recent article in *El Sinarquista*, defending the movement against "false charges" made against the movement. He sought to influence the Office so he sent both to Rockefeller.⁸⁷

Of particular interest to Montavon was the second piece that he sent to the head of the OCCCRBAR. The *El Sinarquista* piece responded to two articles written by Betty Kirk in the *Christian Science Monitor* and *The Washington Post* respectively in June 1941. Kirk claimed that sinarquistas were at "the service of international fascism in Mexico" as tools of the Spanish nationalists. The sinarquista organization "is totalitarianism incarnate, transplanted to this continent, and backing a European-dictated crusade to destroy democracy in the Western

⁸⁶ Letter from Rita Walsh to Antonio Santacruz, March 17, 1941, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁸⁷ Letter from William F. Montavon to Michael Joseph Ready, July 15, 1941, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; Letter from Michael Joseph Ready to William F. Montavon, July 16, 1941, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

Hemisphere.”⁸⁸ Kirk was convinced that “injection of this poisonous fluid into the Mexican nation is for the purpose of undermining the Ávila Camacho government, which has declared its support of Pan-American solidarity and friendship with the United States, and for sabotaging continental defense.”⁸⁹ Salvador Abascal wrote a response on behalf of the UNS national committee to her accusations in the July 17 edition of *El Sinarquista*. He claimed that the sinarquistas were nationalists and had no connections to foreign parties or concepts. According to Abascal, sinarquismo did not have totalitarian aspirations, but was driven by faith and fraternal love.⁹⁰ Montavon made sure that when Rockefeller saw the rebuttal, he would have another side of the story not present in the widely-disseminated pieces written by Kirk.

Montavon was convinced that he could sway Rockefeller. He wrote Rockefeller that “it is my impression that the Sinarquist movement is being maligned.” He explained that the sinarquistas turned down invitations from the Spanish Falange. According to him, “it was not easy for them to do this because the Phalangists based their appeal on the community of religious belief, language, and so forth, but the Sinarquists were firm in holding to their position of Mexican nationalism.”⁹¹ In response, Rockefeller articulated that “I was most interested in having this information and appreciate greatly your thoughtfulness in bringing it to my

⁸⁸ Betty Kirk, “Sinarquista Rise in Mexico Seen as Totalitarian Plot,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 7, 1941.

⁸⁹ Betty Kirk, “Unrest in Mexico,” *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1941.

⁹⁰ Statement by Salvador Abascal in the Name of the National Synarchist Committee to be Published in the July 17, 1941 Edition of “El Sinarquista,” Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁹¹ Letter from William F. Montavon to Nelson A. Rockefeller, July 17, 1941, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

attention.”⁹² Through Montavon’s inside position within OCCCRBAR, the NCWC staked its claim to influence U.S. government opinion in Pan-American circles.

Montavon did not stop there, seeking to influence other government offices as well. He contacted Vincenzo Petruccio from the federal government’s Science Service, noting that “I am sending you herewith a translation which I have prepared some time ago of the statement of principles of the National Sinarchist Union of Mexico. I would be glad to meet with you sometime for the purpose of discussing matters of this nature in which we have a mutual interest.”⁹³ Montavon also was in communication with Jean Varthaliti, Chancellor of the Belgian Legation in Mexico. Varthaliti informed Montavon that he was sympathetic to sinarquismo and was in contact with the U.S. Embassy in Mexico. He wanted to defend Catholicism in the country.⁹⁴ In light of rising attacks against sinarquismo, Montavon did what he could to speak on their behalf.

Even beyond the NCWC, Montavon had the support of U.S. Catholic leaders that he was able to leverage, including Reverend John O’Grady. O’Grady served as the executive secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Charities since 1920 and very much believed in Catholic “social justice” principles. The priest scheduled a meeting with Department of State diplomats Philip Bonsal and George H. Winters, where he relayed his recent visit to Mexico. He admitted that that he was biased towards the movement prior to his trip, but even upon his return, he saw

⁹² Letter from Nelson A. Rockefeller, July 21, 1941, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁹³ Letter from William F. Montavon to Vincenzo Petruccio, August 22, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁹⁴ Letter from William F. Montavon to Michael Joseph Ready, September 4, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

the movement as a desirable one. O'Grady denied that the movement was under totalitarian influence. He did note that the UNS was somewhat critical of the U.S., but believed that their opinion could be altered. Winters listened to what O'Grady had to say, but was mindful that what he said was different from prior State Department reports.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, O'Grady was able to have air time with officials dealing directly with Mexico.

Towards and Into War

A world war was raging its way through Europe since 1939, but it had yet to touch the Western Hemisphere until December 7, 1941 with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The Roosevelt administration expected to enter the war at some point, so it was only a matter of when. The next day, the United States Congress declared war on Japan and on December 11, 1941, Germany declared war on the U.S. The U.S. was suddenly thrown into the midst of a two-front war on the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Ávila Camacho worked to demonstrate that his administration was still allied with Roosevelt's government.

Ever since Mexican President Ávila Camacho took office in December 1940, he sought to maintain amicable relations with the Roosevelt administration in the U.S. This was especially on his mind on the eve of U.S. involvement in an impending war. In March 1941, Ávila Camacho made public the military discussions occurring between the U.S. and Mexico, while assuring neutrality.⁹⁶ In the following months, there were two issues in particular that he would have to deal with – assuring military cooperation and getting rid of any threats to internal security. As such, Ávila Camacho pledged the Mexican military in joint cooperation with the

⁹⁵ "Conditions in Mexico," September 2, 1941, United States Department of State, 812.00/31775, Box 4097, RG 59, NARA.

⁹⁶ Jones, 18.

U.S. defense effort. He also promised to squash any fifth column elements in Mexico that could potentially spill over into the U.S.⁹⁷ The Mexican president would therefore demonstrate that Mexico was fully on board as an ally to the U.S.

Upon the U.S. entry into war in December 1941, the Mexican president worked in conjunction with the U.S. Department of War to secure Mexico's borders and stomp out any fifth column elements. Ávila Camacho sent military reinforcements to the country's Pacific Coast under the command of former President Cárdenas and ordered Rear Admiral Luis Hurtado de Mendoza to supervise naval forces on the Gulf Coast. The Mexican Naval Ministry captured two small Japanese fishing boats and held them for investigation. Deputy Cesar Garizurieta released a statement detailing centers of Nazi activity, asking the government to bring them to justice.⁹⁸ Although the Mexican government did not declare war itself, it was consolidating power over its domain.

Despite 1941 being a year of great success for the Unión Nacional Sinarquista, the organization faced head-on attacks. These attacks revolved around its connections to fascism on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Conservative American Catholics worked to counter negative sentiments against the group with their own publicity campaign, as well as attempts to influence policymakers. By the end of the year, the UNS was steadily gaining the reputation as a fifth column, despite efforts to the contrary.

⁹⁷ "Mexico Ready to Curb Foes," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1941.

⁹⁸ "Mexico Rightist Leader to Direct Colonization," *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1941.

Conclusion

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista established itself in the United States in a short period of time between mid-1940 and the end 1941. Although the movement grew in the U.S. in the late 1930s, it became a force of its own in this year-and-a-half. The UNS under the leadership of Salvador Abascal became more hierarchical, structured, and militaristic. The distribution of materials in conjunction with the creation of committees gave the UNS a presence like it had never had before. This presence brought with it a backlash led by the left, influencing the U.S. media, and eventually the U.S. government. Conservative U.S. Catholics came to the organization's defense. With the U.S. government's declaration of war on December 7th, the group had reached its peak towards a long, slow demise that would last into the late 1960s.

Also in 1941, the Unión Nacional Sinarquista started a colonization effort, bringing together Mexicans in the U.S. and Mexico. Colonization would be the epitome of sinarquismo itself. Between 1941 and 1944, the UNS set out to create colonies to live out its ideals and bring "organization" to Mexico. Mexicans from mainly the Bajío and the U.S. donated funds, materials, and themselves to the effort. The Unión Nacional Sinarquista colonization plan was more than just the materialization of sinarquista dreams, it continued to be – just like the movement itself – a point of contestation.

CHAPTER THREE

HOPE FOR A NEW SOCIETY – SINARQUISTA COLONIZATION IN THE BORDERLANDS – 1941-1944

“Sinarquista comrade: To ensure the triumph of colonization is to ensure the triumph of sinarquismo,” proclaimed *El Sinarquista* on January 1, 1942. The newspaper and principal organ of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista displayed its hope for the movement’s colonization plan. A full-page spread featured a Mexican family in front of a map of northwestern Mexico, with one sinarquista flag located in Baja California Sur and another in Sonora. The paper went on to make known that “remember that we have to rescue the great part of the motherland that is Baja California; that we have to establish great MEXICAN populations there that will unite Mexico.” Both Baja California Sur and Sonora “will be the places where Sinarquismo constructs the basis of a New Motherland; where we will test our ability to construct.”¹ The sinarquistas’ plan for colonization in the north of Mexico along the United States border would create a new society, taking over and unifying Mexico.

As sinarquismo was at its height in 1941, organizational leaders, with Salvador Abascal at their helm, envisioned putting rhetoric into action with the development of colonies. The UNS

¹ “Compañero sinarquista: ¡Asegurar el triunfo de la colonización es asegurar el triunfo del sinarquismo!” “Recuerda que tenemos que rescatar ese gran girón de la patria que es la Baja California; que debemos fundar allí grandes poblaciones MEXICANAS que lo unan a México.” “Baja California y Sonora serán los lugares donde el Sinarquismo construirá las bases de una Patria Nueva; donde probaremos nuestra capacidad constructiva.” “Compañero sinarquista,” *El Sinarquista*, January 1, 1942. I label the Territorio Sur de Baja California as Baja California Sur for ease and consistency.

embodied ultra-nationalist, anti-communist, and pro-Catholic values, and the group did its best to promote these values through *El Sinarquista* and demonstrate them on the ground via its committees. Abascal emphasized as sinarquista president that the movement needed organization and discipline rather than a revolution. The opposition – the Mexican government – took on the Mexican Revolution as its own, embodying it through the ruling Partido de la Revolución Mexicana. Rejecting revolution, the UNS instead pursued a plan based on organization, establishing from the ground-up places to live out the movement's ideals in "colonies," obtaining control of regions in the less-populated north of Mexico. Disciplined sinarquista members from the various committees in Mexico and the U.S. emulated the Spanish conquistadores who they admired by settling and populating the colonies. Sinarquistas attempted to develop societies completely from scratch, centered on their Catholic faith as well as ownership of property. The colonies epitomized Abascal's leadership, putting organization and discipline into practice. Sinarquista members from the U.S. and Mexico donated money and materials to make the colonies possible. Sinarquista families, with the large majority being upper middle-class families, established and populated the colonies. The largest and most publicized of the colonies was Santa María Auxiliadora in Baja California Sur. The sinarquistas established a secondary colony which they called Villa Kino de Santa María de Guadalupe in Sonora. The UNS also had other colonies in the north of Mexico including San Miguel Arcángel in Durango, Santa María del Refugio in Tamaulipas and San José Opodepe in Sonora, but they were all considerably smaller.

The sinarquistas' project faced opposition from a variety of forces amid growing suspicion and animosity against them at the beginning of World War II. Both the Mexican and U.S. governments opposed the effort. Together, they saw the UNS as a fifth column element infiltrating both nations in the midst of World War II. These settlements would not only

empower the sinarquistas even more, but they would threaten the security of Mexico and the U.S., aiding the Axis, especially on the Pacific Coast where these colonies were located.

This chapter examines how between 1941 and 1944, the Unión Nacional Sinarquista embarked upon an ambitious project to colonize the north of Mexico as the world delved intowar.² The colonization project began as a master plan that would epitomize the sinarquistas and their goals in creating a Mexican society rooted in their Catholic-based “social justice” values. External opposition combined with internal logistical issues led to its demise. Nonetheless, the project allowed the Unión Nacional Sinarquista to both live out its values in utopian settlements and assert autonomy away from both the Mexican and U.S. governments in the borderlands, albeit for a limited amount of time.

The Master Plan and Build-up to Colonization

Salvador Abascal envisioned colonization in 1941 as incapsulating various elements of sinarquismo under his leadership. The north of Mexico, particularly the northwest of the country close to the U.S.-Mexico border including the peninsula of Baja California and the states of Sonora and Sinaloa, was less populated than the rest of the country. There had been many attempts since Spanish colonization of the 1500s to bring “civilization” to the desert. Abascal believed that the region was ideal to develop as well as to live out what he saw as sinarquista ideals. By developing this part of Mexico, the UNS could have autonomy and make multiple integralist societies – fusing together church and state – a reality. Abascal set out to do just that at the end of 1941.

² The UNS established the colony of Cristo Rey in Sinaloa in 1947 following a split in the organization into two separate groups – one political and one religious.

The Problem with the Peninsula of Baja California

By the 1930s, Northern Mexico was considerably less populated than the center of the country. The Mexican government wanted to incorporate the region into the rest of the nation. The majority of Mexico's population resided in Central Mexico, one of the first regions to be colonized by the Spanish in the sixteenth century. While Northern Mexico consisted of states along the U.S.-Mexico border, the peninsula of Baja California had two sparsely settled territories – Territorio Norte del Baja California (Baja California) and Territorio Sur de Baja California (Baja California Sur) – which was just one until 1930.³ Neither territory was connected with reliable land routes via road or train. When President Lázaro Cárdenas came into office in 1934, he sought to develop the economy in the region. In 1936, construction started on the Sonora-Baja California railway to facilitate development and national integration.⁴ Ultimately, the goal was to encourage Mexicans from throughout Mexico and the U.S. to move there. The plan was to “colonize” the peninsula.

Word of his plan to populate the territories spread during his presidency both within Mexico and among Mexicans in the United States. Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution empowered the Mexican state to expropriate land, however the majority of land reform and redistribution did not take place until President Cárdenas took office.⁵ The peninsula was no

³ The names of the territories versus the peninsula are a bit confusing. I refer to the territory of Baja California as the “northern territory” and the southern territory as “Baja California Sur.” The geographic area I refer to as the “region” or the “peninsula.”

⁴ Miguel Leon-Portilla, “Paradoxes in the History of Baja California,” *The Journal of San Diego History* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1973).

⁵ República de México, *Constitución Federal de 1917*, Political Database of the Americas, Georgetown University Center for Latin American Studies, March 23, 2006, <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Mexico/mexico1917.html>

exception from participating in land reform and Mexicans reached out to the president, expressing their desire to cultivate the land there. José Alvarado Cortés wrote on behalf of the residents of Quiringuicharo, Michoacán in February 1939. He requested that the president provide them with a new settlement in the peninsula for those who were displaced from their homes. Alvarado Cortés explained to President Cárdenas that we “accept to colonize those regions of the republic that await the hands of men to develop them, being willing to work with the protection that your worthy government gives us.”⁶ Similarly, Mexicans outside of Mexico wanted to return and cultivate land in the northern territory of Baja California. The Unión Nacional de Veteranos de la Revolución (Veterans of the Revolution) branch based in Los Angeles, California sought to establish an agricultural colony. They met with President Cárdenas and he agreed, setting into motion reintegrating Mexican families.⁷ Los Angeles was also the home to the Sociedad de Colonización pro Baja California (Colonization Society for Baja California), dedicated to transforming the peninsula. The society sought “to colonize, to industrialize and to make the motherland.” The organization claimed that “we will make a great empire in the ugly Baja California. We will build the great Mexican City of the Pacific.”⁸ The Cárdenas administration in conjunction with the interest of Mexicans themselves worked to make the economy viable by populating the region.

⁶ Alvarado Cortés’ letter states that the people of Quiringuicharo “aceptar colonizar aquellas regiones de la República que esperan la mano del hombre para producir, estando nosotros bien dispuestos a trabajar correspondiendo así a la protección que su digno Gobierno nos imparta.” Letter from José Alvarado Cortés to Lázaro Cárdenas, February 11, 1939, 503.11/212, Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN-LCR).

⁷ Letter from Ignacio M. Beteta to the Secretario de Agricultura y Fomento, July 14, 1939, AGN-LCR 503.11/212; Letter from Lázaro Cárdenas to the Unión Nacional de Veteranos de la Revolución, July 14, 1939, AGN-LCR 503.11/212; Letter from R.B. Arnaiz to Lázaro Cárdenas, September 6, 1939, AGN-LCR 503.11/212.

⁸ The society promoted “Colonizar, Industrializar, Hacer Patria.” It believed that “Hagamos un Imperio Económico de la ubérrima Baja California. Fundemos la Gran Ciudad Mexicana del Pacífico.” Letter from Manuel G. Martínez to Lázaro Cárdenas, March 7, 1940, AGN-LCR 503.11/212.

By 1941, there existed sustained interest to populate the peninsula, unifying it with the rest of Mexico. Benjamin R. Hill, ex-deputy from the northern territory, called on Mexicans in April 1941 “to save” the region from the U.S. He explained how the U.S. government was concerned about protecting its coasts and the Panama Canal from Asian totalitarianism and thus had interest in the peninsula, which was being under-utilized by the Mexican state. Mexico needed to be united and fully incorporate the region. Hill proposed that a highway be constructed between Tijuana and Mexicali as well as another between Tijuana and La Paz and Cabo San Lucas. The roads would be financed through bonds. He also suggested that Mexicans who were now residing in the United States could reintegrate into the country, populating the peninsula with Mexicans and for Mexicans.⁹ Hill believed that it was beyond time for the region to fully be incorporated into Mexico.

The Sinarquista Colonization Plan

The UNS certainly did not seek to serve the Mexican government, but it also saw an opportunity in the peninsula, for many of the same reasons that the postrevolutionary government had. The organization had regional and local committees throughout Mexico and the United States, but did not have a chapter in the region. The UNS shared some of the concerns as Hill. There was fear among organizational leadership that Mexico was in danger of losing the peninsula – either to the ruling Mexican state, by American filibusters or to the U.S. government – if the group did not do something.¹⁰ In June 1941, the movement set up a committee in the

⁹ Benjamin R. Hill, “Baja California: ¡Hay Que Salvarla!,” *Hoy*, April 5, 1941.

¹⁰ Americans had interest in Baja California for some time such as William Walker who wanted to take Baja California away from Mexico and create the “Republic of Baja California.” There was also considerable conversation in the United States about the government needing to annex Baja California because of fear of a Japanese takeover. David Tamayo, “The Perilous Borderlands: The Role of Anti-Japanese Hysteria in American

small border city of Tijuana led by Gustavo Morán.¹¹ Abascal, however, wanted something more. Rather than being located in pre-existing settlements, he wanted the group to create towns and cities from scratch, and the sparsely-populated peninsula would be ideal for making an impact.

Colonization was a chance for the movement to develop this region of Mexico on its own terms, while contesting the power of the Mexican state. Salvador Abascal traveled throughout northwestern Mexico in August 1941 and saw great potential in the region for the *sinarquistas*.¹² He, like Hill, noted problems regarding transportation, encountering particular issues with the lack of networks linking the peninsula to the rest of the country. No direct routes existed through Mexico and he noted that to get to the northern territory from Sonora, one had to pass through the United States or take a boat across the Gulf of California. Baja California Sur, on the other hand, was completely isolated from Mexico. Abascal explained the region's significance to the *sinarquistas*:

Baja California is like a very important arm, which is not united to Mexico except spiritually, thanks to the strong patriotism of [Baja] Californians; but it is also necessary to unite it to the body of Mexico maternally; and thus we will further strengthen spiritual ties. Populating and connecting Baja California is the only way to protect Sonora and Sinaloa; and saving Sonora and Sinaloa is saving Mexico.¹³

Efforts to Annex Baja California, 1900-1942," *California History* 97, no. 2 (2020): 61; Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Synarchism – its Program* (Los Angeles: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1942), 28.

¹¹ Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Historia Gráfica del Sinarquismo* (Mexico City: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1947), 365; Jason Dormady, *Primitive Revolution: Restorationist Religion and the Idea of the Mexican Revolution, 1940-1968* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011), 114.

¹² "Movimiento de Jefes," *El Sinarquista*, August 21, 1941; "Mexican Leader Returns Home," *San Diego Union*, August 31, 1941.

¹³ "La Baja California es como un brazo, importantísimo, que no está unido a Mexico mas que espiritualmente, gracias al acendrado patriotismo de los californianos; pero es necesario tambien unirlo el cuerpo de Mexico maternalmente; y así estrecharemos aún más los vínculos espirituales. Poblar y comunicar a Baja California es la

Northwestern Mexico was of strategic importance because of its location on the Pacific Coast, economically and militarily, and the region just needed to be tapped for its potential. The UNS had the ability to lead the charge to develop and connect this portion of Mexico, instead of the Mexican state itself.

The movement could act as a sovereign entity in its own right. Salvador Abascal would facilitate the movement of hundreds of *sinarquistas* and their respective families to the peninsula, developing its riches without government funding. Abascal offered the UNS to construct the entire projected network of highways as they were necessary for success and development of colonization. Not only that, he believed that the *sinarquistas* could build them for half the price of the federal government. The organization would distribute any resources found in the construction of the roads between themselves and the government. Not only was the colony focused on *sinarquistas*' well-being, but Abascal welcomed thousands of dispossessed Mexicans in the Bajío to join the effort. Those who lost their land as a result of Cárdenas' land reforms could choose to be part of the project.¹⁴ Beyond economic development, he also demonstrated the *sinarquistas*' support of national defense in the buildup to war. He would invite garrisons of federal troops to the peninsula.¹⁵ The UNS would have an upper hand over the government in the region, maintaining autonomy while negotiating the terms on which the Mexican state could operate.

única manera de proteger a Sonora y Sinaloa; y salvar a Sonora y Sinaloa es salvar a Mexico." "El Jefe Abascal Narra Su Viaje De Exploracion Por La Baja California," *El Sinarquista*, September 18, 1941.

¹⁴ "Fascist group seeks colony," *Austin American-Statesmen*, September 5, 1941; "Un patriótico ofrecimiento al gobierno," *La Prensa*, September 9, 1941; "Colonización de Baja California," *El Sinarquista*, September 25, 1941.

¹⁵ "Sinarquista Colony Proposal Accepted," *El Paso Herald-Post*, September 12, 1941.

Colonization also embodied the religious and nationalist ideals of the organization. The construction of a colony would spiritually unite the country, as well as maintain its integrity by incorporating the peninsula into the fold. The UNS was destined by God to develop what it saw as a barren territory. By doing so, the movement would create a new type of society founded in Christian principles. The organization envisioned colonization as an opportunity to create an integralist Mexico where Catholicism and the state were one. Colonization allowed the sinarquistas to bring back the grandeur of what they perceived as the foundation of the nation – Spanish colonization – where church and state indeed worked hand-in-hand.¹⁶ Sinarquistas openly embraced Hispanidad (Spanishness) in their vision of Mexico, acknowledging Spain as shaping Mexican “civilization.” The UNS noted how conquistadores like Hernán Cortés, Francisco de Ulloa, Francisco de Alarcón, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, and countless others failed in their attempts to colonize the peninsula, but that the sinarquistas would succeed.¹⁷ Colonization epitomized Abascal’s influence upon the organization as sinarquismo is “unity, peace, hierarchy. It is a spiritual militia. It is eminently Mexican and absolutely incompatible with sectarianism of any sort.” The group’s leadership issued a statement on the project that proclaimed that it was “animated by a spirit of missionaries and soldiers; determined to deliver everything that we are and have, we sinarquistas will undertake this gigantic work that no one had dared to commit.”¹⁸ The UNS would finish what the Spanish colonizers had started over four hundred years before.

¹⁶ “Colonización de Baja California,” *El Sinarquista*, September 25, 1941.

¹⁷ “El Jefe Abascal Narra Su Viaje De Exploración Por La Baja California,” *El Sinarquista*, September 18, 1941.

¹⁸ Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Synarchism – its Program* (Los Angeles: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1942), 6; The statement reads “animados por un espíritu de misioneros y soldados; resueltos a entregar todo lo que somos y

The organization's national committee sent out a circular in September 1941 to all of its committee chiefs laying out its plan for the colonization of Baja California Sur. The first expedition to the territory would take place in November or December and consist of a hundred families, carefully choosing the strongest men ready for the work to construct the colony and work the land. Sinarquista members would cultivate corn, beans, dates, olives, peas, chiles and tomatoes. Not only did sinarquista leadership need farmers, but intellectuals, artisans and laborers, developing industry where there would be a market in Mexico and the southwestern United States. The plan limited where colonists could come from, allowing for migration only from the Bajío states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato y Querétaro. The national committee explained that it was in these Central Mexican states where both the majority of farmers and dispossessed came from, not to mention they were where the highest concentration of sinarquistas existed. Money and resources were also necessary to make colonization possible and the organization would have to collect any and all aid that it could receive. Lastly, the movement's leadership asked its committee chiefs for a list of members who were willing to colonize including their contact information, as well as their moral fortitude and ability to work.¹⁹

Salvador Abascal presented the national committee's colonization plan that same month to now-President Manuel Ávila Camacho as the UNS still needed the federal government's consent to proceed. He explained to the president that he wished to utilize the UNS's "great

tenemos, los sinarquistas emprenderemos esta obra gigante que nadie se había atrevido a cometer." "Colonización de Baja California," *El Sinarquista*, September 25, 1941.

¹⁹ Unión Nacional Sinarquista Comité Nacional, General Instrucciones a los Jefes Regionales y Municipales, Circular Number 33, September 11, 1941, Fondo Manuel Ávila Camacho, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN-MAC) 544.61/39, caja 0565.

popular force in patriotic works and in collaboration with the Government of the Republic, to arrive at creating NATIONAL UNITY that frees Mexico from internal and external dangers” by colonizing the peninsula.²⁰ Abascal justified settlement of Baja California Sur as opposed to the northern territory as the population was 55,000 as opposed to 100,000. He sought the government’s help with transportation – in sea passage between Manzanillo, Colima or Mazatlán, Sinaloa across to Magdalena Bay and in road transport upon arrival. Abascal unveiled the first town that would start the colony – Santa María Auxiliadora (Holy Mary Help of Christians) in Comondú municipality – and asked Ávila Camacho for the concession to construct highways connecting it to Magdalena Bay, La Paz and Santa Rosalía. He also wanted the availability to develop private property and the extension of taxes on the colony until August 31, 1946. In addition to covering logistics, Abascal sought to ensure “absolute freedom in religion: for the construction of temples, a hospital with religious workers, Catholic schools, etc., and without limitation on the number of priests.”²¹ Abascal promised the president collaboration between the UNS and the federal government towards the mutually beneficial goals of national defense and economic development, all the while allowing the sinarquistas freedom to practice their Catholicism and live in a Catholic society.

²⁰ Abascal writes that the UNS will “emplear su gran fuerza popular en obras patrióticas y de colaboración con el Gobierno de la Republica, para llegar a realizar la UNIDAD NACIONAL que libre a México de los peligros interiors y exteriores.” Letter from Salvador Abascal to Manuel Ávila Camacho, Plan de Colonización del Distrito Sur de la Baja California, September 12, 1941, AGN-MAC 544.61/39, caja 0565.

²¹ Abascal asks for “libertad absoluta en la religión: para construcción de templos, un hospital con religiosas, escuelas católicas, etc., y sin limitación en el número de sacerdotes.” Letter from Salvador Abascal to Manuel Ávila Camacho, Plan de Colonización del Distrito Sur de la Baja California, September 12, 1941, AGN-MAC 544.61/39, caja 0565.

Sinarquista Colonization and the Mexican Government

Up to this point in 1941, the Mexican federal government appeared that it was unified against the UNS. President Ávila Camacho issued orders in early August curtailing public demonstrations. Ávila Camacho issued an executive order sharply restricting public demonstrations by the sinarquistas. His call came after a sinarquista rally in Michoacán that ended in two sinarquistas killed and three sinarquistas wounded. The president claimed that his action supported national unity, ordering political leaders throughout Mexico to guard against demonstrations.²² Ávila Camacho also openly denounced sinarquismo as well as communism during his address of the opening of Congress on September 1.²³ Upon notice of the planned sinarquista colony, the CTM publicly opposed the project. The confederation continued to claim that the UNS was a totalitarian movement that had ties with fascist powers in Europe. The CTM argued that the Axis wanted control over the peninsula because of its strategic and vulnerable location next to the U.S. on the edge of Mexico.²⁴ The sinarquistas appeared to have multiple forces in the government opposing them.

On September 12, 1941, President Ávila Camacho surprised everyone by accepting the sinarquistas' colony proposal. The president agreed to collaborate with the sinarquista national committee colonization plan. Ávila Camacho notified Abascal that he offered the UNS an immediate plan to work alongside the organization regarding colonization of lands in the desert for the purpose of agricultural cultivation, road construction and the creation of new industries.

²² "Mexico Takes Sharp Stand Against Nazis," *Borger Daily Herald*, August 1, 1941.

²³ "Mexico May Aid Plan for Colony," *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1941.

²⁴ "Un patriótico ofrecimiento al gobierno," *La Prensa*, September 9, 1941; "Sinarquista Colony Proposal Accepted," *El Paso Herald-Post*, September 12, 1941; Memorandum from Gerald A. Mokma to Cordell Hull, "Colonization of Lower California by 'Sinarquistas,'" September 6, 1941, 812.00/31771, Box 4097, RG 59, NARA.

He just needed the sinarquista leader to provide more exact details regarding the overall project.²⁵ The president approved the colonization plan partially as part of a broader aim to bring more people to the peninsula, continuing the efforts of his predecessor, Cárdenas. Ávila Camacho completed preparations to send six hundred agrarian families to colonize the northern territory around the city of Mexicali on the Mexican-U.S. border.²⁶ Ávila Camacho also likely wanted the sinarquistas occupied with colonization rather than with national politics. The colonization project would not only distract members, but would silo them on the edge of Mexican society. Nonetheless, the sinarquistas viewed the agreement to collaborate as a success.

Certain representatives serving on the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, on the other hand, did not. Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar, a partisan dedicated to the postrevolutionary Mexican state, founded the Comité Nacional Antisinarquista (National Anti-Sinarquista Committee) and led the charge in the chamber against the sinarquista colonization project. Similar to the CTM, he expressed concern about the adverse effects of colonization on both Mexico and the U.S. Díaz Escobar claimed that the UNS was openly anti-American and posed a threat to Mexico's northern neighbor.²⁷ On October 14, the sinarquista colonization plan was the subject of debate on the chamber floor. Deputy Díaz Escobar continued to argue that the UNS was a threat to national security, calling the movement a fifth column within Mexico. Deputy Carlos Zapata Vela proclaimed that "a Lower California colonized by the Sinarquistas would be for Mexico

²⁵ Letter from J. Jesus Gonzalez Gallo to Salvador Abascal, September 11, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB General Secretary Files, CUA Archives; "Mexican President Makes Labor Move," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, September 12, 1941; "Sinarquista Colony Proposal Accepted," *El Paso Herald-Post*, September 12, 1941; "El Gobierno de la República nos ofrece su ayuda para colonizar Baja California," *El Sinarquista*, September 18, 1941.

²⁶ American Consulate, Tijuana, "Colonization of Lower California by 'SINARQUISTAS,'" September 15, 1941, 812.00/31781, Box 4097, RG 59, NARA.

²⁷ "El sinarquismo es criticado en la Camara de Diputados," *La Prensa*, October 10, 1941.

and the United States what Holland and Belgium were for France and England.” Zapata Vela drew the parallel between the loss of countries in Europe to the fascist Axis during World War II to what potentially could happen in North America. At the end of the debate, the chamber introduced a resolution asking the president to reconsider and withdraw supporting the sinarquista colonization plan. Deputies expressed concern that the colony would be a possible base for the Nazis because of its location near the harbor of Magdalena Bay on the western coast of the peninsula and therefore threaten the hemisphere.²⁸ The Comité Nacional Antisinarquista distributed pamphlets among the public following the session, arguing that the president should not only remove his support for colonization, but that the UNS should be considered illegal and dissolved as an enemy of Mexico.²⁹

The sinarquistas pushed back against the Chamber of Deputies’ proposed resolution. Sinarquista leadership argued that the chamber did not have any right to oppose the project which was received well by the president. Abascal admitted that the plan he presented to the president was going to be difficult because of the desert location, but that the movement had the manpower to cultivate the land and develop industry.³⁰ El Paso sinarquista chief, José Soto, noted how “the Mexican government not only has approved the plan, but it also has shown its co-operation by supplying government-owned vessels for transportation of colonists.”³¹ The sinarquistas were determined to have their colony.

²⁸ “Sinarquista Colony Meets Opposition,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 15, 1941.

²⁹ Comité Nacional Antisinarquista, *La Colonización de Baja California* (Mexico City: Imprenta de la Cámara de Diputados, 1941).

³⁰ “Los sinarquistas niegan los cargos que les hacen en la Cámara de Diputados,” *La Prensa*, October 16, 1941; “Los Demagogos No Impedirán Nuestra Patriótica Empresa,” *El Sinarquista*, October 23, 1941.

³¹ “Sinarquistas Will Proceed With Colony,” *El Paso Times*, October 19, 1941.

The Chamber of Deputies decided to reject the resolution to ban the sinarquista colonization plan, but Deputy Díaz Escobar did not give up his fight against the movement. The chamber gave the president a vote of confidence, agreeing with Majority Leader Leonardo Reynoso, who stated that the president granted permission for the project because he believed that he could not restrict the movements of Mexicans within Mexico. If anything, deputies discussed how non-sinarquistas could colonize Baja California Sur, countering the sinarquistas.³² Díaz Escobar did not agree with this response at all and kept opposing the plan. He contended that the colonization project was a pretext to determine the selection of recruits for Hitler. The deputy thought that the UNS was preparing for an armed movement to fight in Europe.³³ Despite his opposition, multiple elements of the Mexican government supported the sinarquistas' project.

The fact that the president supported the enterprise also led two major Mexican politicians to back the project. One was Francisco José Mujica, a general in the Mexican Revolution who became the governor of Baja California Sur starting in 1940. He trusted Ávila Camacho's support of colonization, but believed that such an effort would be very difficult given the circumstances of the region.³⁴ The other individual would be Lázaro Cárdenas, now no longer president of Mexico, but appointed by Ávila Camacho to oversee the Pacific Command of the nation's military. The area he oversaw included the peninsula and he aligned with the

³² "Mexico Colony Ban Rejected," *Arizona Republic*, October 22, 1941.

³³ "Sinarquista Armed Movement Charged," *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 29, 1941; "Descabellada version de un diputado," *La Prensa*, November 2, 1941.

³⁴ Letter from Francisco J. Mujica to J. Genaro Billarent B., November 6, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

president by agreeing that have the sinarquistas there would “protect” the region.³⁵ This was quite remarkable as Cárdenas and the UNS were archenemies at the founding of the organization. Why would the former leftist president seek to support sinarquista colonization? Like Ávila Camacho, Cárdenas probably agreed with that sending the sinarquistas away would make them less of a threat to the Mexican government. They would be isolated on the edge of Mexican society.

Attention to Sinarquista Colonization in the U.S.

The sinarquistas’ desire to colonize Baja California Sur not only attracted those in Mexico, but drew attention and support in the United States. Although the UNS was going to receive some aid from the Mexican federal government, the colony would not be possible without garnering support in the U.S. For example, in Topeka, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri, Catholic organizations serving the Mexican community in the respective cities saw colonization as a great patriotic work that would bring religion back to Mexico, coming to reality with the approval and cooperation of the Mexican government.³⁶ However, more than anything else, support needed to come from sinarquistas themselves.

From October 30 to November 1, 1941, sinarquistas across the U.S. and Mexico came together for the movement’s third annual meeting in Mexico City, with the topic of colonization clearly on their minds. Approximately 600 members met, including leaders from committees in twenty-six Mexican states, in addition to those in California, Texas, and Indiana. The national

³⁵“Mexico Moves Army to West,” *Arizona Daily Star*, December 14, 1941; “Mexico Rightist Leader to Direct Colonization,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1941.

³⁶ “Mirando a Mexico,” *El Progreso*, October 26, 1941, Robert and Hazel Gomez collection, Box 14, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; “Mirando a Mexico,” *The Knight’s Spear*, November 20, 1941, 8, no. 10, Institution records, box 81, folder newsletters P1110779-780, Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocesan archive, Kansas City, Missouri.

committee in conjunction with the regional and municipal branches joined together to discuss plans for the future. They voted to raise funds for the colonization of Baja California Sur where they hoped 100,000 of the organization's half a million members would settle.³⁷ Abascal spoke at the conference, reiterating concepts valued during his tenure as sinarquista president. He emphasized how sinarquismo was part brotherhood and part militia, the belief that sinarquistas could conquer their enemies by loving them, and that sinarquismo was a movement of international importance. Manuel Zermeño, former UNS president and on the UNS national committee spoke to the need for a Christian state that colonization was bringing. This could not be done without support in the U.S. Zermeño explained that, "Sinarquismo has interested not only Mexicans, but also the United States, they are very aware of what we do, they translate our newspaper *El Sinarquista* to know what we say and what we think the peoples that make up Hispanic America."³⁸

U.S. sinarquista committees played their part in making colonization a reality. No longer did *El Sinarquista* galvanize its members to raise money for solely families of martyred sinarquistas, but the paper also also advocated that sinarquistas raise money for colonization efforts in late 1941. U.S. committees did just that. The Bakersfield, California chapter was quite generous as were committees in Donna, Edinburg, McAllen, Milla, Pharr, and Weslaco, Texas.³⁹ The list of donations from sinarquista committees regularly took up the length of the entire page

³⁷ "Leaders of Mexico's Sinarquistas' Meet Secretly in Capital," *Fresno Bee*, November 3, 1941.

³⁸ Zermeño said that "El Sinarquismo ha interesado ya no tan sólo a los mexicanos, sino también a los Estados Unidos, ellos están muy al pendiente de lo que hacemos, traducen nuestro órgano periodístico 'El Sinarquista' para saber qué decimos y que pensamos los pueblos que forman la América Hispana." "Los sinarquistas explican su proyecto para colonizar a Baja California," *La Prensa*, November 10, 1941.

³⁹ "Donativos para la Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, December 4, 1941.

of the publication. More people donated than before and they were also more invested in a cause that they themselves could partake in. Beyond money, sinarquistas gave anything that they could to the cause. A sinarquista from Ontario, California agreed to donate fifty thousand grapevines to the colonization effort. Another member from the San Fernando, California committee offered four hundred quince plants and a few thousand vines. Others from the chapter offered tools for tilling land, and women members donated clothing.⁴⁰ In addition to donations of various kinds, California sinarquistas literally came together for the colonization effort in Los Angeles. Porfirio Rivera of the Northern California regional committee, Pedro Villaseñor of the Southern California regional committee, and chiefs of local chapters around Los Angeles met in the city. Together – amid a celebration the sinarquistas organized to celebrate Mexican independence leader Agustín de Iturbide – they drafted work plans of how they would collaborate in supporting the colonization effort.⁴¹

The U.S. federal government also became aware of the sinarquistas' plan and was initially cautious. As early as September 1941, the Department of State was aware of the project. Gerald A. Mokma, U.S. Consul to Tijuana, sent a memorandum to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, notifying him of what he knew. Mokma had read an article in the *Heraldo de la Baja California* that brought his attention to the sinarquista plan as well as the CTM's opposition to it. The consul could not determine whether or not the UNS had a connection with any Axis power, but he did remark that the peninsula was sparsely populated and that any anti-democratic

⁴⁰ "Noticias de Toda la República," *El Sinarquista*, September 25, 1941.

⁴¹ "Noticias de Toda la República," *El Sinarquista*, October 16, 1941.

organization could be dangerous.⁴² U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels and even the Federal Bureau of Investigation relayed information to the Secretary of State as the UNS moved closer to making its colony a reality.⁴³ The U.S. government was unclear if the colony would endanger national security.

However, the U.S. government became increasingly more apprehensive of the planned Baja California Sur colony, especially when the U.S. entered World War II on December 8, 1941. The U.S. Office of the Coordinator of Information believed that the Axis did indeed have interest in the region. The office's analysts Maurice Halperin and Vincenzo Petruccio reported that newspapers were claiming that 5,000 Japanese were coming to the peninsula from throughout Mexico. They disputed the claim of such a massive migration, however noted that colonists in the region resided in the region for some time as fishermen. They noted how the Army's intelligence division reported how Japanese were also coming into the peninsula from Southern California. Although the region consisted of a desert climate, there was a possibility that some of the ports along the Pacific Coast could be used for the refueling of Japanese submarines or surface raiders.⁴⁴ The COI's Halperin and Petruccio shared a variety of concerns with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt about how the Japanese and UNS were connected, and therefore the sinarquista colonization project threatened the U.S. The analysts observed that only the Japanese knew the peninsula well, and neither Mexico nor the U.S. really had knowledge of the region.

⁴² Memorandum from Gerald A. Mokma to Cordell Hull, "Colonization of Lower California by 'Sinarquistas,'" September 6, 1941, 812.00/31771, Box 4097, RG 59, NARA.

⁴³ See Box 4097, RG 59, NARA.

⁴⁴ United States Office of the Coordinator of Information, Latin American Section, Special Situation Memorandum Number 15, Research and Analysis 161, "Report on the Current Situation in Baja California," December 12, 1941, Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch Sinarquista Microfilm, Göttingen Library.

They expressed how upper-class Mexicans opposed U.S. influence, instead trusting the Spanish government. Not only that, but Halperin and Petruccio believed there was no real opposition to the Axis in Mexico. Lastly, they shared that they thought the U.S. government's policy was weak and not geared to the wartime emergency. Halperin and Petruccio advocated for intervening, creating an anti-Axis propaganda campaign in Mexico, building pro-U.S. sentiment.⁴⁵ Although the U.S. was now in the midst of a two-front war in the Pacific and European Theatres, the COI was urging more of a focus against the Axis within the Americas.

Making Colonization a Reality

Even with Mexico's neighbor now at war, the sinarquista national committee did not lose its sights on colonization, mobilizing its own warlike support and excitement among its members in *El Sinarquista*. Sinarquista leadership continued to utilize its periodical to collect donations, regularly publishing a list showcasing the individuals and committees from throughout the U.S. and Mexico that gave money to the cause. The paper even published a call for sinarquistas to donate gold and silver to María Auxiliadora's first church. Monetary donations continued to arrive, as did precious metals through the end of the year.⁴⁶ Beyond donations, the paper built off of the organization's *Canciones y Corridos Sinarquistas*, featuring songs that further worked to cultivate sinarquista identity. One such song, "Voy a California" ("I go to California") by León

⁴⁵ Memorandum from Maurice Halperin to William J. Donovan, Number 97, December 22, 1941, The President's Secretary's File (PSF), Office of Strategic Services: Donovan Reports, December 22, 1941-January 15, 1942, Box 163, Folder 3, FDR Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York; Memorandum from William J. Donovan to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Number 97, December 23, 1941, PSF, Donovan Reports, Box 163, Folder 3, FDR Library; Memorandum from Vincenzo Petruccio to William J. Donovan, December 30, 1941, Box 1, Folder 1, RG 226, NARA.

⁴⁶ "Donativos Para la Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, November 27, 1941; "Donativos Para la Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, December 4, 1941; "Donativos Para la Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, December 18, 1941; "Donativos Para la Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, December 25, 1941.

Aguilar, was from the perspective of a *sinarquista* who believed that he was destined to colonize Baja California Sur. He claimed that “I know very well that my chiefs are Christians like me; that's why I am going with them to such a distant region. With my wife and children I go to California ... *Sinarquistas*: Viva Mexico! God help us! Goodbye!” Another piece by Agustín Montaña titled “Morir Tambien es Triunfar” (“To die is also to triumph”) argued that the colony was essential because “we *sinarquistas* want our nation to have a government that loves and serves the people with attention.”⁴⁷ Colonization mobilized *sinarquista* members as if they were going to war. *El Sinarquista* was crucial in convincing *sinarquistas* – whether traveling or not – that they were all necessary to make a Christian society possible.

Finally, in mid-December 1941, the time came for the UNS to make colonization a reality. Salvador Abascal resigned from his position as president of the UNS to personally direct the Baja California Sur colonization effort with fellow colonists from the Bajío. Abascal turned the organization's leadership over to Manuel Torres Bueno.⁴⁸ In the public eye, it appeared that Abascal chose to resign and lead colonization on his own, however UNS secret leader Antonio Santacruz encouraged him to do so.⁴⁹ Santacruz continued to want a social-religious movement, rather than the militant integralist one that Abascal was creating, and so he decreased his power in the organization, sending him off to Baja California. On December 18th, the first one hundred families were en route from the Bajío as the *sinarquista* national committee had promised.

⁴⁷ The first song notes that “Yo sé muy bien que mis jefes son cristianos como yo; por eso me voy con ellos a tan lejana región. Con mi mujer y mis hijos a California me voy...¡*Sinarquistas*: Viva Mexico! Que Dios nos ayude! Adiós!” The other song states that “Queremos los *sinarquistas* que tenga nuestra nación un gobierno que ama y sirva el pueblo con atención.” “Versos y Canciones,” *El Sinarquista*, November 27, 1941.

⁴⁸ “Mexico Rightist Leader to Direct Colonization,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1941.

⁴⁹ Hernández García de León, 233.

Approximately 450 people participated in the expedition including people from the cities of Querétaro, Acámbaro, Pátzcuaro and Morelia. Each family paid their own travel costs, first meeting in Guadalajara and from there disembarking by boat from Mazatlán.⁵⁰ Although entirely all press about the sinarquista colonization project up to this point highlighted Baja California Sur, the organization revealed at the point of departure that it indeed had two colonization projects. Abascal mentioned back in September how colonizing Baja California Sur would protect Sonora and the UNS actually sought to do so. The majority of colonists made their way across the Sea of Cortés to the peninsula, while a smaller contingent instead went to establish a settlement on the coast of Sonora, north of Guaymas. José Trueba Olivares, former sinarquista president and brother of *El Sinarquista* editor Alfonso Trueba led the expedition.⁵¹ While Abascal and Trueba Olivares led the respective colonization projects on the ground, the new sinarquista President Torres Bueno designated Juan Ignacio Padilla as the national secretary of colonization. It was his responsibility to ensure that the new colonists had all the resources they needed in order to be able to succeed. Padilla oversaw the creation of secretaries of colonization at the regional and municipal committee levels, such as in El Paso, where they worked to mobilize their membership for contributions to the cause.⁵²

⁵⁰ “Colonists En Route to Lower California,” *San Diego Union*, December 19, 1941; “Sinarquistas Start to Colony.” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1941; “Cien Familias Han Salido a Colonizar a la Peninsula de California,” *El Sinarquista*, December 25, 1941.

⁵¹ “Cien Familias Han Salido a Colonizar a la Peninsula de California,” *El Sinarquista*, December 25, 1941; Presidencia de la Republica, Extracto, Expediente 60295, November 15, 1941, AGN-MAC 544.61/39, caja 0748.

⁵² “No Abandonemos a Nuestros Compañeros Colonizadores,” *El Sinarquista*, December 25, 1941; Felipe Araiza served as the head of the colonization committee in El Paso. “Sinarquistas Meet in E.P., Valleys; Set Forth Aims,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 5, 1943.

Now with the colonists en route to the colonies in Baja California Sur and Sonora, Padilla pushed more than ever for sinarquistas across Mexico and the U.S. to give to the colonization project. At the beginning of 1942, he called on all members to prepare for January 4 – a day of giving. Padilla urged every sinarquista to contribute to the colonization effort on that day, insisting that “OUR COLONISTS SHOULD NOT, CANNOT BE ABANDONDED.” He encouraged members to “remember your companions; your obligation to collaborate; excite the indifferent; sway those who don’t care; in your home, in your workshop, talk about colonization and make everyone realize its immense importance.”⁵³ Sinarquista chiefs hosted assemblies on the date for their respective committee members to give money and metals. The effort was indeed successful and the organization received the largest amount of donations up to that point at \$48,458.31 pesos. Contributions came from either the sinarquistas’ center of support in the Bajío or from Southern California and Texas along the border.⁵⁴ This campaign would not be the last of Padilla’s efforts to support the colonies.

The colonization plan that Salvador Abascal dreamed up was coming to fruition with the aid of Juan Ignacio Padilla and the leadership of José Trueba Olivares. Despite opposition, the UNS moved forward with the project. Colonists traveled to northwest Mexico to construct colonies from scratch and make sinarquista societies possible. Colonization was ambitious so it was only a matter of time to see if either settlement would not only survive, but thrive.

⁵³ Padilla urged that “NUESTROS COLONOS NO DEBEN, NO PUEDEN SER ABANDONADOS.” Circular from Manuel Torres Bueno and Juan Ignacio Padilla to Sinarquista Jefes, Circular #35, December 27, 1941, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; “Recuerda a tus compañeros; su obligación a colaborar; entusiasma a los indiferentes; conmueve a los fríos; en tu hogar, en tu taller, habla de la colonización y haz que todos se den cuenta de su inmensa importancia.” “Compañero sinarquista,” *El Sinarquista*, January 1, 1942.

⁵⁴ “Toda la República Contribuye a La Obra De la Colonización,” *El Sinarquista*, January 15, 1942.

Santa María Auxiliadora, Baja California Sur

María Auxiliadora was the principal colony and Salvador Abascal's personal project. He had his sights on the peninsula for some time in 1941 and now he would both live and oversee the colony himself starting in 1942. Abascal would see if he could create not only one settlement, but multiple colonies in the region, acting on promises made to the organization and to the Mexican state. He also worked to build a society, implementing the ideals of "social justice" lessening class divisions all the while integrating church and state. Abascal's optimism and idealism only took María Auxiliadora so far and issues mounted over time.

Optimism around María Auxiliadora

Abascal was quite positive about the colonization project in Baja California Sur that he was about to lead and oversee. Abascal met with the soon-to-be colonists upon departure and noted that "to abandon the land in which they were born, detaching themselves from it forever; leaving affections, interests, everything, and accepting the luck that God brings only for love of Mexico, that is heroism."⁵⁵ His political vision combined with the determination of the initial colonists gave the sinarquistas the sense that the colonization project in the peninsula would indeed succeed.

Upon arrival to Baja California Sur in December 1941, the colonists made their way to establish María Auxiliadora in January of the following year, and were optimistic of the project at hand. They first arrived to the coastal city of La Paz and from there took buses into the interior of the peninsula, first stopping at the town of La Cruz and later the town of El Refugio. The

⁵⁵ Abascal writes in a letter to the sinarquista newspaper editors that "abandonar la tierra en que se nació, desprendiéndose de ella para siempre; dejar afectos, intereses, todo, y aceptar la suerte que Dios depare sólo por amor a Mexico, eso es heroismo." "Llegaron a la Baja California," *El Sinarquista*, January 8, 1942.

journey to the colony took a very long time through the desert, finally arriving to the site of the settlement near Santo Domingo where they were greeted by its residents. They departed the buses, lining up behind former sinarquista president Manuel Zermeño who was holding up the Mexican flag. Collectively, they marched to the settlement.⁵⁶

Sinarquista leadership planned on agriculture being fundamental to the colony and it was the first task that the colonists worked on. The colonists were particularly concerned about transforming a place that otherwise appeared inhabitable into one that could flourish. They removed cactus and other desert flora to establish the first experimental farm of the colony. The colonists utilized multiple wells to extract water and worked the land to plant onion, garlic, peas, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, radish, date palms, and olive trees.⁵⁷ The residents of María Auxiliadora first needed to sustain themselves through farming before developing enterprises.

Another crucial aspect of the colony in Baja California Sur was for the sinarquistas to have a settlement where they could openly practice their Catholicism in Mexico without persecution. Father Daniel Zavala arrived on January 10 as the colony's priest. The colonists worked with the priest to unpack religious objects donated by sinarquistas from Acámbaro, Guanajuato, holding mass among them. Father Zavala would share a role in María Auxiliadora alongside Salvador Abascal, fitting into the organization's belief that Catholicism was crucial for one's personal life.⁵⁸ Abascal arrived a day later on another bus, saluting the crowd with

⁵⁶ "Como Trabajan y Como Viven Los Colonizadores de Baja California," *El Sinarquista*, January 22, 1942.

⁵⁷ "Como Trabajan y Como Viven Los Colonizadores de Baja California," *El Sinarquista*, January 22, 1942; "Desmontando la Abrupta Tierra," *El Sinarquista*, February 5, 1942; "Sembrando en California," *El Sinarquista*, February 5, 1942.

⁵⁸ "Como Trabajan y Como Viven Los Colonizadores de Baja California," *El Sinarquista*, January 22, 1942; W. Eugene Shiels, "Mexicans Organize for a New Order," *America*, April 18, 1942.

“Sinarquistas, long live Mexico!” Upon departing the bus, he marched with sinarquista national committee leader Manuel Zermeño and fellow colonists to the newly-built improvised chapel. It was there where he announced the official foundation of the colony: “I declare the sinarquista colony María Auxiliadora in Santo Domingo, Baja California, founded for the good of the country and to honor God, today, Sunday, January 11, 1942, at 1:15 PM.”⁵⁹ Catholicism was part and parcel of the establishment of the settlement. It would be at this site where the UNS hoped that it could finally practice integralism through bridging together church and state.

By the end of January, more people were planning on supporting María Auxiliadora. Over 500 sinarquistas reached out to the Office of Colonization and its secretary, Juan Ignacio Padilla, whom approved the grand majority of requests. His efforts to accumulate donations for the colony was gaining traction, but he sought even more to industrialize the peninsula. Padilla addressed comments that the sinarquistas were partnering with the Japanese. He countered by arguing that the Japanese were outsiders robbing Mexico of its fish. The fishing industry in Baja California Sur needed to be improved and it was up to the colonists to do the work, but they were not able to do so without the additional investment of sinarquistas.⁶⁰ Even beyond the organization, Mexicans became invested in the project. The Coahuilan Committee for the Economic Reintegration of Baja California formed in the city of Saltillo, Coahuila to publicly support the effort. Committee members organized an evening to raise funds for colonization.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Abascal officially established the colony, stating that “Declaro fundado, para bien de la patria y honra a Dios, la Colonia Sinarquista Maria Auxiliadora en Santo Domingo, Baja California, hoy, domingo 11 de enero de 1942, a las 13 horas 15 minutos.” “Como Trabajan y Como Viven Los Colonizadores de Baja California,” *El Sinarquista*, January 22, 1942.

⁶⁰ “Más Sinarquistas se Inscriben para la 2a. Expedición a B.C.,” *El Sinarquista*, January 29, 1942; “Seis Tortillas,” *El Sinarquista*, January 29, 1942.

⁶¹ “Formose en Saltillo un Comité Pro-Colonización,” *El Sinarquista*, January 29, 1942.

The peninsula was separated from the rest of Mexico and such a group believed that the UNS was destined to bring Mexico together.

On the ground in Baja California Sur, sinarquista leader Manuel Zermeño thought that he was indeed witnessing the sinarquista promised land. Zermeño explained that he saw “the silhouettes of the sinarquistas [working], with their hoes and shovels on their shoulders. Some returned from digging wells; others to clean the ground of scrubs; others cut wood for the huts. They gleefully returned to their temporary shelters, glad to have labored hard for many hours.” He described that they while they worked they were singing “beautiful sinarquista songs.” Zermeño contrasted the current joy of these people while in Baja California Sur as opposed to the horrible conditions they left in the Bajío, where they watched their backs and were constantly threatened with violence.⁶² According to him, now the sinarquistas could joyously live and work in peace among their brethren in contrast to where they came from and were outsiders due to their middle class status and political identity as sinarquistas.

This was possible due to a daily routine emphasizing both hard work and the colonists’ commitment to a community of faith. The colonists collectively woke up at dawn and attended mass. Then they ate based upon a ration that each family received of corn, beans and meat. Following their meal, they divided into various work crews, each overseen by a respective boss who oversaw their work. Zermeño saw the discipline of the colonists and the society they were

⁶² Zermeño describes the “las siluetas de los sinarquistas, con sus azadones y sus palas al hombro. Unas regresaban de cavar pozos; otros de limpiar el suelo de matorrales; otras de cortar madera para las chozas. Volvían jubilosamente a sus provisionales moradas, contentos de haber trabajados rudamente durante muchas horas.” He mentioned “hermosas canciones sinarquistas.” “La Colonización Sinarquista de California Anuncia Una Vida Nueva Para La Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, February 5, 1942.

creating as a utopia in the model of sixteenth century priest Vasco de Quiroga.⁶³ Quiroga, the so-called “protector of the Indians” and part of the colonial project of New Spain, constructed what he named pueblos-hospitales. These settlements “offered” the indigenous peoples of Michoacán physical salvation through an opportunity to live and work, as well as spiritual salvation via education of the Gospel.⁶⁴ Zermeño similarly believed that “on the unshakable foundation of the Religion of Christ, sinarquismo must aspire to the construction of a more just world than this uninhabitable world in which we live.”⁶⁵

Many of the colonists at the onset of the colonization project took sinarquismo to heart and thought that a UNS utopia was taking shape in the peninsula. Vicente González expressed “how happy we are in these lands so beautiful, and so beautiful, and so rich. We daily have our Holy Mass and our temple that is covered with interwoven reeds. We have a holy peace, we have charity, we have conformity, we have brotherhood and we are very happy and very, very encouraged.” This notion of a paradise within Mexico was indeed shared by other colonists. Isidro Rivera, described how the peninsula was ideal for the sinarquistas. “You have no doubt that this is the true promise land. We are in Baja California and I say for myself that this seems like a dream and as I have observed others say the same.”⁶⁶ Colonists embraced the plan as envisioned by Abascal and sinarquista leadership, and believed that it was coming to reality.

⁶³ “La Colonizacion Sinarquista de California Anuncia Una Vida Nueva Para La Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, February 5, 1942.

⁶⁴ Geraldo Witeze Junior, “Vasco de Quiroga Rewrites Utopia,” in *Utopias in Latin America: Past and Present*, ed. Juan Pro Ruiz (East Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2019), 55.

⁶⁵ Zermeño writes that “sobre la base inconvencible de la Religión de Cristo, el Sinarquismo debe aspirar a la construcción de un mundo más justo que este mundo inhabitable en el que vivimos.” “La Colonizacion Sinarquista de California Anuncia Una Vida Nueva Para La Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, February 5, 1942.

⁶⁶ Rivera notes how “No tiene duda que ésta es la verdadera tierra de promisión. Estamos en la Baja California y yo digo por mi que esto me parece un sueño y según he observado otros dicen lo mismo.” González explains “qué contentos estamos en estas tierras tan hermosas, y tan bellas, y tan ricas. Tenemos diariamente nuestra Santa Misa y

Education of the youth would be crucial in raising ideal sinarquistas. Lázaro Cárdenas visited in March to help foster sinarquista schools in the colony after previously supporting the colonization project the past year. By donating funds towards the schools, Cárdenas worked to isolate the movement. The former president gave 4,000 pesos to establish a school destined for the colony's children, with the approval of Ávila Camacho.⁶⁷ The colonists ended up constructing not one, but two schools – one for boys and one for girls growing up in the colony.⁶⁸ Abascal led one school whereas Juventina Morales oversaw the other. As Catholicism held an important role in everyday life, so was its importance in schooling. Each school had a cross over its entryway, notable in Mexico where secular education became the norm in the postrevolutionary era. The colony's schools trained the youth to live an ideal, conservative Catholic life where each gender knew their place in society, discouraging intermixing between men and women besides forming a family. Boys were trained to expect to work in the public, whereas girls were taught to expect a life of work inside of their houses.⁶⁹

Plans were in the works for building more permanent structures for the settlement so as to live out these roles. Up to this point, the majority of the structures were temporary, built with branches and reeds. Even the “mansion” of Salvador and his wife Guadalupe Carranza de Abascal was made of these materials. The colonists did succeed in building a permanent cellar of

nuestro templo que esta techado de carrizos entretejidos. Tenemos una santa paz, tenemos caridad, tenemos conformidad, tenemos hermandad y tenemos mucho contento y mucho, mucho ánimo.” “Cartas de California,” *El Sinarquista*, February 12, 1942.

⁶⁷ “Cárdenas ayuda al Sinarquismo,” *La Prensa*, March 23, 1942.

⁶⁸ Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Historia Gráfica del Sinarquismo* (Mexico City: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1947), 226, 227, and 230.

⁶⁹ Dormady, 124; Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Historia Gráfica del Sinarquismo*, 226 and 227.

adobe to store the colony's food, as well as houses of the same material. They eventually converted the colony's temple into a lasting structure. The colonists sought to construct the industry that Abascal promised, including a proposal for a textile factory that would produce clothing for the colony.⁷⁰

The colonists ushered in the fifth anniversary of the UNS on May 23, 1942, taking the day off to honor the movement that had founded its very own settlement. Abascal, however, did not want María Auxiliadora to be the only such sinarquista city in the region. Abascal toured the peninsula passing through Loreto and San Francisco Javier, encountering a variety of people who were sympathetic of the organization.⁷¹ He was most likely scoping out possible places in the territory for expansion of his colonization project. The colony appeared to be successful and destined for future success.

Issues arise in the colony

Over the course of 1942, the colony persisted, yet not as an absolute utopia as it was starting to face some issues. Water was an issue in the middle of the desert, however the colonists dug an additional well to sustain them, leading to the planting of more crops. They also finished constructing an oven to create roof tiles and bricks to replace the temporary structures that they initially built. Although the settlement was taking shape, there were some colonists who wanted to return to the Bajío, where they originally came from. A colonist, José R. Basagoiti, commented that he did not worry about the colony losing residents as they could easily be

⁷⁰ "Noticias de la Colonia," *El Sinarquista*, June 11, 1942; Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Historia Gráfica del Sinarquismo*, 223-228.

⁷¹ "Noticias de la Colonia," *El Sinarquista*, June 11, 1942.

replaced by sinarquistas wanting to come live there. He believed that the majority of those who resided in the colony were good, strong and loyal to the effort.⁷²

By July, the colonists were running into another issue – having a lack of supplies and food to sustain María Auxiliadora. They did not have corn, a staple food, nor did they have the sufficient amount of tools to work the land and build the settlement. Secretary of Colonization Juan Ignacio Padilla was running short on funds and had to rely on emergency donations. Sinarquistas in California donated money to purchase more food for the colony.⁷³ This problem in not being able to supply the colony with basic necessities led to Padilla initiating another contribution campaign. Padilla galvanized members via *El Sinarquista* to donate on July 26, 1942, bringing in even more money. The majority of support came from Mexico, however a considerable amount came from the U.S. Committees in South Chicago and Indiana Harbor in the Midwest, McAllen and El Paso in Texas, and Richmond and Bakersfield in California, all donated funds.⁷⁴ Sinarquistas sustained the colony going from afar.

A physical divide did indeed exist between the sinarquistas who gave up their lives to be colonists in Baja California Sur and those who resided in Mexico and the U.S., but *El Sinarquista* made a point of closing that gap. It was a strategic decision to keep the colony afloat. The paper's editors, Alfonso Trueba and Jose Néder Quiñones, regularly published pieces on colonization, highlighting the colony on the peninsula. They featured a series of pieces justifying

⁷² “Noticias de las Colonias: Baja California,” *El Sinarquista*, March 19, 1942; “Como marcha la Colonia de la Baja California,” *El Sinarquista*, April 30, 1942; “Nuestras Colonias,” *El Sinarquista*, July 30, 1942.

⁷³ Sinarquistas in California donated 3,000 pesos for food. “Ya no Tienen Maiz los Colonos de B. California,” *El Sinarquista*, July 9, 1942; “Nuestras Colonias,” *El Sinarquista*, July 30, 1942.

⁷⁴ “Mexicano,” *El Sinarquista*, July 23, 1942; “Donativos Para la Colonizacion Recogidos el 26 de Julio de 1942,” *El Sinarquista*, August 13, 1942.

the need for the Baja California Sur colony. They worked to dispel notions from the sinarquistas' opponents that it was going to be a failure. The editors responded that the colony was the embodiment of sinarquismo and that the sinarquistas would sacrifice everything for the project; to triumph or die. Trueba and Quiñones also reiterated the need for the colony – the importance of reintegrating Mexico and the ability for the sinarquistas to live on their own terms.⁷⁵ In addition, *El Sinarquista* began an effort of drawing a more explicit connection between the past of Spanish colonization and that of the sinarquista colonization project than Abascal did at the beginning. The paper frequently had a column called “The History of Baja California” which emphasized the region’s past as connected to Spanish colonization. It taught readers of various attempts by conquistadores to establish settlements in the region.⁷⁶ More importantly, it emphasized the peninsula’s history as part and parcel of Mexico and how the sinarquistas were fulfilling their legacy. *El Sinarquista* also regularly published a piece titled “Figures and Episodes of the Motherland’s History” glorifying the Spanish conquest. The periodical frequently featured Hernán Cortés in addition to incidents in history such as the Cholula Massacre of 1519 and the Conquest of Jalisco from 1530 to 1531.⁷⁷ Colonization may have been in motion from afar, but all sinarquistas were still part of the colonization effort. All members were part of Mexico’s new conquest whether physically at the colony or not.

⁷⁵ “A Triunfar o Morir Están Dispuestos Los Sinarquistas Que Se Hallan en California,” *El Sinarquista*, February 12, 1942; Isaac Valdivia, “Una Hazaña Insólita, que Revela que aún Hay Alientos Para la Epopeya, es la Colonización de la Península de Baja California,” *El Sinarquista*, February 19, 1942.

⁷⁶ For example, see “Historia de la Baja California,” *El Sinarquista*, March 12, 1942.

⁷⁷ “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, February 26, 1942; “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, March 12, 1942; “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, May 28, 1942; “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, June 4, 1942; “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, September 10, 1942; “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, January 21, 1943; “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, March 25, 1943; “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, April 22, 1943; “Figuras y Episodios de la Historia Patria,” *El Sinarquista*, July 8, 1943.

U.S. Government Surveillance of Colonization

As María Auxiliadora was in development in Baja California Sur, the United States government continued to be skeptical of the sinarquista colonization project, particularly as a tool of the Axis. The Office of the Coordinator of Information noted how the Ávila Camacho administration acted in a spirit of cooperation with the U.S. since its entry into war. It severed relations with Axis powers and helped organize the United States-Mexican Joint Defense Board. The office was still concerned with the Ávila Camacho administration's handling of domestic affairs. Of them, the COI did not believe his administration was handling the sinarquistas appropriately. Colonization was continuing unchecked and sinarquistas were growing in the U.S. with activity in Los Angeles, El Paso and Las Cruces. The COI claimed that sinarquistas were arriving from California into the peninsula to agitate. These sinarquistas formed a California unit called itself "El Sol Naciente" or "The Rising Sun," suggesting possible Japanese connections from the agency. The Office of the Coordinator of Information intelligence agency believed that the Ávila Camacho government needed to address Axis forces in Mexico before they grew out of hand.⁷⁸

The FBI was also concerned about the growth of the UNS in Mexico, especially in relation to "totalitarian activities" occurring within the country. Although outside of the U.S.'s borders, the FBI considered its neighbor to the south to be of vital importance economically, politically and militarily. The latter was especially the case as the Mexican government formally declared war on Germany, Italy and Japan on May 22, 1942, joining the U.S. in World War II.

⁷⁸ United States Office of the Coordinator of Information, Latin American Section, Special Situation Memorandum Number 8, Research and Analysis 596, "Pro-Axis and Anti-Axis Forces in Mexico," March 5, 1942, Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch Sinarquista Microfilm, Göttingen Library.

The bureau shared different concerns than the COI, but still believed that the sinarquistas threatened the stability of Mexico. The FBI shared reports that the UNS colonization project was a front for overthrowing the Mexican government. The sinarquistas were planning a coup and sought to install the Governor of Baja California Sur, Francisco Mújica, as Mexico's president. The peninsula itself was militarily strategic during wartime. Although the region had Mexican military presence, the FBI believed it was insufficient. A weak naval patrol oversaw the western coast. Between 13,000 and 15,000 troops were stationed in the peninsula, with only about 3,000 in Baja California Sur. Near the site of María Auxiliadora was Magdalena Bay, which had a harbor and a Mexican Army landing field.⁷⁹ The concern was that the Axis could dock ships and invade from the harbor. The U.S. government did not believe the UNS's intentions for its colony, instead viewing the organization's involvement in Baja California Sur as undermining hemispheric security. Despite this fear on the part of the U.S. federal government, it took no action regarding the colony, other than to continue to surveil the organization's actions in the peninsula.

Mounting Issues

Meanwhile in the colony, the residents were more concerned about growing internal problems such as with its religious life than aiding the Axis. While Abascal led María Auxiliadora's development, Father Zavala was to oversee the maintenance of Catholic spirituality. The colony paid the priest monthly for his services, but in the middle of 1942, he abandoned the settlement and its residents. Father Campos replaced him in December, but he was not free of issues. Campos was strict in his beliefs. Campos believed that residents needed to

⁷⁹ United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Totalitarian Activities: Mexico...Today," September 1942, 85, 359a-363, Box 143, Harry L. Hopkins Papers, 1928-1946, FDR Library.

reject material comfort, chastising men for eating snacks of tomatoes, and Abascal for wearing gloves. When Abascal sought to baptize his newborn child, Campos would not allow the baby's godfather to be from outside of the colony, forcing him to choose someone from within the settlement. Eventually disagreements between the two led to Campos leaving the colony.⁸⁰

As the colony had issues with its spiritual life, its financial issues did not disappear. Secretary of Colonization Padilla made donation campaigns for the colonization effort a common occurrence. This time around he was looking for funds for the next planting of crops in the colony including corn, wheat, pears, dates and figs.⁸¹ He promoted the third contribution drive for February 7, 1943 through a full-page advertisement in *El Sinarquista*. At the top of the page, the paper published an image of the makeshift church in María Auxiliadora with a roof of reeds. He reiterated the need for the colony, stating that “trusting in God, waiting for all his Providence and the efforts of all Mexicans, a year ago we undertook this work pushing for a united nation” by constructing settlements and cultivating new land.⁸² Padilla explained that because of the lack of funds, the colonists lived in poverty without work, in large part because of not having enough food nor fuel. Rather than engage exclusively with sinarquistas as Padilla had before, he made a point of reaching out to all Mexicans: “Go to her, sinarquista. Go to her, Mexican.” “We invite all sinarquistas and non-sinarquistas - also those who call themselves our enemies - to give their

⁸⁰ The colony paid 608 pesos a month for Father Zavala's services. Dormady, 125-126.

⁸¹ Circular C-2 from Juan Ignacio Padilla to Regional, District and Municipal Chiefs, January 25, 1943, Caja 7, Expediente 1815, Colección Sinarquistas, Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia (BNAH), Mexico City, Mexico.

⁸² “Confiado en Dios esperándolo todo su Providencia y del esfuerzo de todos los mexicanos, hace un año que emprendimos esta obra de la que está pendiente a la nación entera.” “Mexicano,” *El Sinarquista*, February 4, 1943.

support and generous help to this enterprise that belongs to no one, but only to Mexico.”⁸³

Padilla reaffirmed the need for unifying the nation. The situation was so dire that he had to reach out beyond the organization’s membership and appeal to the nationalism of all Mexicans.

Luckily, he indeed received an influx of donations as he had before, this time receiving more funds from throughout Mexico, as well as from Los Angeles and San Francisco in the U.S.⁸⁴

Money was a constant struggle for maintaining María Auxiliadora.

Mounting issues led to rumors increasingly being circulated about the colony being a failure in 1943. Informants from the FBI reported that the colony was poorly managed and how many colonists were going hungry. They believed that María Auxiliadora was in fact in decline. U.S. and Mexican press corroborated this information, explaining that colonization was going slowly and not leading to the goals that Salvador Abascal was touting at the end of 1941.⁸⁵ Both the U.S. government and the media portrayed such information as positive, perhaps signaling a decline in the UNS as a whole.

This growing talk of failure prompted responses from the group. *El Sinarquista*’s editors Alfonso Trueba and Jose Neder Quiñones pushed back, explaining that “we are poor, yes, and work gives us support. But we sinarquistas know how to get out of the most difficult situations. The colonies will continue to live. The generosity of our colleagues is inexhaustible and with our

⁸³ “Acude a ella, sinarquista. Acude a ella, Mexicano.” “Invitamos a todos sinarquistas y no-sinarquistas - también a quienes se dicen enemigos - a otorgar su apoyo y su ayuda generosa a esta empresa que no es de nadie, pero sólo es de México.” “Mexicano,” *El Sinarquista*, February 4, 1943.

⁸⁴ Padilla received more than than 16,000 pesos from the campaign. “Donativos Para La Colonizacion Recogidos en Las Asambleas del Domingo 7 de Febrero,” *El Sinarquista*, February 25, 1943.

⁸⁵ United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Union Nacional Sinarquista,” File No. 100-1767, April 28, 1943, Box 13, RG 319, NARA. One such example of press from the time was a piece aimed at the Mexican community in the U.S. Harold E. Davis, “The Enigma of Sinarquism,” *Mexican Life*, June 1943.

own scarce resources, we will move forward.”⁸⁶ Sinarquista Salvador Navarro visited the colony in mid-1943 also addressed these concerns. He admitted that there were issues, particularly the desert, lack of diversity of food and the loss of labor over time. Nonetheless, he highlighted the daily routine that the colonists maintained over time, especially admiring their strong work ethic. Navarro did admit that Abascal was having issues with rumors of failure. He described how “the gossip, the intrigues, the slander, the ingratitude and the tremendous weight of his responsibility, have aged him. In the 18 months that the colony has existed, Abascal has lived a whole life full of bitterness. But, nevertheless, he is strong and optimistic.”⁸⁷ The attacks on sinarquismo, and on the colony in particular, were mounting. Abascal had a grandiose plan to create a colony not just in María Auxiliadora, but criticism existed from the very beginning and was simply not going away.

The Ávila Camacho government that previously agreed to sinarquista colonization in the peninsula back in 1941 was beginning to see that the project was not working out as originally intended by July 1943. The Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (General Directorate of Political and Social Investigations or DGIPS), the government’s intelligence agency, conducted a study of María Auxiliadora, interviewing many of its colonists, as well as Salvador Abascal, noting issues particularly in relationship to the management of the colony. DGIPS found that Abascal was becoming increasingly authoritarian, focusing much of his oversight of the colony on ensuring that the people stayed and did not leave the settlement, in

⁸⁶ “Suponen que las Colonias han Fracasado y se Alegran,” *El Sinarquista*, June 17, 1943.

⁸⁷ “Las murmuraciones, las intrigas, las calumnias, la ingratitude y el peso tremendo de su responsabilidad, lo han envejecido. En 18 meses, han llevado la Colonia, Abascal ha vivido toda una vida llena de amarguras. Pero, sin embargo, está fuerte y optimista.” Salvador Navarro, “Como Vive y Prospera la Colonia B. California,” *El Sinarquista*, June 17, 1943.

order for them to work. He encouraged single male colonists to have children with indigenous women from Baja California Sur, committing them to the colony while also birthing future colonists. Abascal also had a tactic of not allowing colonists to earn enough salary for them to afford the return trip home to the Bajío. The leader divided up any necessary supplies, including food, through a ration system. DGIPS noted that while the colony began with high morale among its residents, in large part tied to sinarquista culture – meetings, songs and celebrations – that was no longer the case.⁸⁸

In March and April 1944, journalist Carlos Velasco Gil also examined the debate swirling around whether the colony was indeed a failure in a two-part series in *Mañana* magazine titled, “El Nuevo Moisés” (The New Moses), in reference to Abascal. More than anything, Velasco Gil sought to prove that Abascal’s project was indeed not working and that he was masquerading as a new prophet. Velasco Gil detailed the issues that the colonists had with the climate, not having a reliable source of water, as well as the lack of supplies to construct truly a great society. He described that the “the dreamed city of Abascal, with its great universities, factories and convents, was a bitter dream that no one wanted to remember.”⁸⁹ What was once a grandiose plan to build a vast new Mexican civilization across the peninsula ended up being an isolated little village in the middle of the desert.

⁸⁸ “Informe sobre el resultado de la investigación relacionada con las actividades y antecedentes de la UNION NACIONAL SINARQUISTA, en la colonia MARIA AUXILIADORA, situada en la Peninsula de Baja California,” July 8, 1943, caja 93, expediente 2, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN-DGIPS).

⁸⁹ Velasco Gil writes that “La ciudad soñada de Abascal, con sus grandes universidades, fábricas y conventos, era un sueño amargo que nadie quería recordar.” Carlos Velasco Gil, “El Nuevo Moisés: Salvador Abascal, con “su pueblo”, en el desierto!,” *Mañana*, March 25, 1944.

Not long after the exposé, Salvador Abascal ended up being forced out of the very colony that he dreamt up. The sinarquista national committee in Mexico City under the leadership of President Manuel Torres Bueno – and with Antonio Santacruz behind the scenes – viewed Abascal as lacking the “ideals of the movement” and the “principles” of the sinarquista doctrine. National leaders initially wanted to isolate Abascal from the UNS by having him lead the colonization of Baja California Sur in late 1941, but by 1944, he was tarnishing the image of the movement as a whole. The national leadership ended up replacing him with José Valadez and Valentín Lozada as leaders of the colony.⁹⁰

Mutiny occurred against the new leaders of María Auxiliadora. A group of over 34 people left the colony, claiming that they sought to serve Abascal and if he had to depart, they would do the same. In an open letter, these individuals explained their complete dismay at having Abascal’s integralist Mexican society vanish:

We thought we would live until the day of our death in that colony, dripping with our sweat and with the tears of our families. We dreamed of seeing the desert blossom and to form a Christian community, without expecting any other reward than that of that blessed land that would shelter our bodies after death.⁹¹

These former colonists instead would instead return back to their homes in the Bajío, teaching their children in their “Holy Religion” of Catholicism and that it was the only institution that they needed to obey. They articulated that they broke off from “a sinarquismo that no longer is

⁹⁰ “Por qué nos Separamos de la Colonia ‘María Auxiliadora,’” November 6, 1944, Caja 7, Expediente 2052, Colección Sinarquistas, BNAH.

⁹¹ “Pensábamos vivir hasta el día de nuestra muerte en aquella colonia, regada con nuestro sudor y con las lágrimas de nuestras familias. Soñábamos en ver florecer el desierto y formar un pueblo cristiano, sin esperar otra recompensa que la de aquella tierra bendita cobijara nuestros cuerpos despues de muertos.” “Por qué nos Separamos de la Colonia ‘María Auxiliadora,’” November 6, 1944, Caja 7, Expediente 2052, Colección Sinarquistas, BNAH.

sinarquismo because it now does not conform with the Christian spirit.”⁹² These individuals gave their lives to Abascal’s colonization project and were truly dedicated themselves to it, despite its growing problems. Once he was gone, no longer would they be colonists nor sinarquistas. Abascal’s dream was over.

The colony continued on for a while after Salvador Abascal left, yet the UNS under Manuel Torres Bueno ultimately let María Auxiliadora die. Abascal’s plan for the Baja California Sur colony was grand in scale in 1941 and yet it ended as a shadow of its former self by 1944. Issues, whether caused by circumstances, the location or personality, hindered the initial vision. Nonetheless, Abascal’s colony brought attention to the peninsula of Baja California, briefly providing an alternative version of Mexican society.

Villa Kino, Sonora

In 1941, Villa Kino was a secondary colonization project in relation to María Auxiliadora. Abascal honed in on Baja California, yet nonetheless did have interest in colonizing Sonora. Sonora was on the other side of the Sea of Cortes from the peninsula of Baja California and he believed that the two needed to be connected to unite Mexico. José Trueba Olivares would direct this colony rather than Abascal. Although the leader was different, the overall idea was similarly ambitious in establishing a settlement for sinarquistas to live on their own, work hard and practice their faith. Despite the vision, the size of the colony combined with conditions ultimately impeded its success.

⁹² “Nos separamos de un sinarquismo que no es sinarquismo porque ya no conforme al espíritu cristiano.” “Por qué nos Separamos de la Colonia ‘María Auxiliadora,’” November 6, 1944, Caja 7, Expediente 2052, Colección Sinarquistas, BNAH.

Planning Villa Kino

The UNS saw Sonora as a vital place to colonize. Similar to the peninsula of Baja California, there was a lack of sinarquista influence in the state for quite some time. Sonora was one of the last states not to have the presence of a sinarquista committee.⁹³ Over the course of 1941, Felipe Navarro of the sinarquista national committee visited Sonora several times to establish a chapter on behalf of the movement. In particular, he focused on training individuals to “conquer” Sonora on behalf of sinarquismo in the town of Nogales on the Mexico-United States border, but was facing considerable difficulty. Navarro claimed that “we need much patience and tenacity to go conquering little by little these cold people. Sometimes it gives us despair, especially with the youth who ignore us; but we do not lose faith; the more difficulties we face, the more courageously we fight.”⁹⁴ Navarro described the people of Nogales as wayward and who needed to be brought into the sinarquista fold. By December, Navarro ended up having success in Navojoa, a city located farther south than Nogales and closer to the coast of the Sea of Cortés.⁹⁵ The sinarquistas were finally starting to make inroads into Sonora. Although not as sparsely populated as Baja California Sur, it was geographically as strategic because of its location on the Sea of Cortés.⁹⁶ By managing the land around the gulf, the UNS could bring

⁹³ Memorandum from William F. Montavon to Michael Joseph Ready and Howard Joseph Carroll, August 29, 1939, Box 72, Folder 1, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁹⁴ “Necesitamos mucha paciencia y tenacidad para ir conquistando poco a poco a esta gente fría. A veces nos da desesperacion, sobre todo con la juventud que no nos hace caso; pero no hacemos perdido la fe; mientras mas dificultades se nos presentan, luchamos con mas coraje.” “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, September 18, 1941.

⁹⁵ “Noticias de Toda la Republica,” *El Sinarquista*, December 18, 1941.

⁹⁶ “El Jefe Abascal Narra Su Viaje De Exploracion Por La Baja California,” *El Sinarquista*, September 18, 1941.

together and unite Mexico. Having control of the state's people and resources would give the movement an upper hand over the Mexican state.

The UNS purchased a plot of land on the coast of Sonora honoring a Catholic priest instrumental in Spanish colonization. The colony was located on Kino Bay named after Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, S.J., an individual that the UNS admired. As with sinarquismo and the overall project of colonizing the north of Mexico, the movement sought to honor the nation's Spanish heritage rather than its mestizo one. Kino was a Jesuit missionary who originated from the Bishopric of Trent and lived from 1645 to 1711. Kino received holy orders from the Society of Jesus to proselytize the indigenous populations in New Spain, first in the peninsula of Baja California and later in the Pimería Alta of what later became Sonora and Arizona. His expeditions of the region led to the creation of more than two dozen missions and brought about the colonization of the region.⁹⁷ The sinarquista national committee sought to bring a new wave of colonization to the region such as Father Kino had.

Representatives of the UNS national committee scouted out the land prior to the arrival of the colonists at the end of November. The site ninety kilometers southwest of Sonora's capital of Hermosillo contained approximately 2,000 hectares.⁹⁸ The leader of the colony, José Trueba Olivares, met with Felipe Navarro and a representative of the Yaqui indigenous people to tour the colony's site. They spent one day and one night at the site, and Trueba Olivares was instantly

⁹⁷ See Herbert Eugene Bolton, *The Padre on Horseback: A Sketch of Eusebio Francisco Kino, S.J., Apostle to the Pimas* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986); Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Rim of Christendom: A Biography of Eusebio Francisco Kino, Pacific Coast Pioneer* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017); Charles W. Polzer, *Kino Guide II: A Life of Eusebio Francisco Kino, S.J., Arizona's First Pioneer and a Guide to His Missions and Monuments* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

⁹⁸ The amounts are 56 miles and 5,000 acres. Extract of a letter from Salvador Abascal to Manuel Ávila Camacho, Expediente 60295, November 15, 1941, AGN-MAC 544.61/39, caja 0748; Hernández García de León, 233.

impressed at the richness of the arid, yet “virgin land.” With a little water, he believed that anything could grow from wheat to olives to tobacco. He portrayed it as a promised land and that it just needed to be cleared of mesquite and cactus. Trueba Olivares was obviously optimistic about the location, but needed the right people to make the settlement thrive.⁹⁹

As with the main colony, sinarquista leadership were very selective in who could reside, work and practice their faith in the colony. Trueba Olivares asserted that “we need the settlers to be the best sinarquistas; that they do not cower in the face of difficulties, that they have initiative, a well-formed character and a Christian life.” He awaited the orders of the sinarquista president and looked forward to the colonists that the UNS national committee would choose.¹⁰⁰ In December, the organization’s leadership indeed chose the sinarquistas who would live in Sonora and they departed in the middle of the month.

Concerns of the Colony’s Connection to the Axis

Opponents of the UNS claimed that the group had Axis connections and rumors circled around Japanese influence in Sonora as they did in the peninsula of Baja California at the same time. Xenophobia combined with wartime fear prompted anxiety about the population in the state. The Liga Nacional Campesina (National Farmworkers League) shared a report with President Ávila Camacho in late 1941 about possible infiltration. The organization claimed that an engineer by the name of Yokama, was the chief of the “Japanese fifth column” in Ensenada, Baja California and was in the process of organizing an armed attack. His trained guerillas would

⁹⁹ “Son Estupendas las Tierras de Sonora Que Colonizaremos,” *El Sinarquista*, December 18, 1941.

¹⁰⁰ “Necesitamos que los colonos sean sinarquistas de los mejores; que no se achiquen ante las dificultades, que tenga iniciativa, carácter bien formado y vida cristiana.” “Son Estupendas las Tierras de Sonora Que Colonizaremos,” *El Sinarquista*, December 18, 1941.

start an armed attack in Sonora, passing into Arizona then west, and back into Mexico in Baja California. Such a plan would distract both the Mexican and U.S. militaries, allowing Axis troops to disembark on the west coast of Mexico.¹⁰¹ This plan did not come to fruition, however similar reports persisted into the following year.

The U.S. government also worried about foreign intrusion into Sonora by the Japanese. The United States Army's intelligence unit compiled a long list of individuals who it deemed to be connected to the Axis in the region. On the list were Japanese and Germans residing in Sonora from Hermosillo to Navojoa. These foreigners were residing in the state and had connections with municipal and state officials, but the worry was that they could use such affiliations against Mexico.¹⁰² The FBI did pinpoint Japanese influence close to Villa Kino. The agency reported a Japanese rancher residing twenty-four kilometers to the east of Kino Bay who was suspected by local residents as against the interests of the U.S. and Mexico. Not only that, the FBI believed that the area immediate to the bay was strategic. The bay itself had a vast beach area that could be utilized by the Japanese or Axis powers for landing operations of troops or planes. Just inland, an extensive piece of flat open land could be used for an improvised landing strip for planes.¹⁰³ Although there was no proven link between the sinarquistas in Sonora and the Axis, such a plan to create a colony in the state during wartime appeared to be a threat.

¹⁰¹ Extract of a letter from Liga Nacional Campesina to Manuel Ávila Camacho, December 29, 1941, AGN-MAC 606.3/17, caja 0993.

¹⁰² Headquarters Southern Defense Command, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Smith-Young Tower, (G-2) 5940 Gen., San Antonio, Texas, September 5, 1942, Subject: Pro-Axis Activities in the States of Sonora and Sinaloa, RG 181, NARA, Riverside, California.

¹⁰³ The amount is 15 miles. Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Totalitarian Activities: Mexico...Today," September 1942, 369a and 372, Box 143, Harry L. Hopkins Papers, 1928-1946, FDR Library.

Building and Sustaining the Colony

By early 1942, José Trueba Olivares established the colony of initially 85 people on the coast of Sonora. Whereas the Baja California Sur colony was populated by individuals from throughout the Bajío, the Sonoran colonists all came from the stronghold of sinarquismo in Mexico – León, Guanajuato. After arriving to San Blas, Nayarit from Guadalajara, the group made its way north along the coast up to Sonora. The colonists briefly met up with fellow sinarquistas in Navojoa before heading to Hermosillo and then eventually to the site on the Sea of Cortés.¹⁰⁴

The colonization effort in Villa Kino took off slowly, constructing temporary shelters and then working to create a more established community. Trueba Olivares emphasized the importance of sinarquistas working from the ground-up, creating the colony from scratch. He oversaw the development of the colony, first constructing huts, eventually working towards more permanent structures.¹⁰⁵ They then transitioned into building adobe houses, with Trueba Olivares' hopes of eventually building 30,000. He sought to take advantage of resources in and around the colony. The colonists planned on extracting rocks from a nearby hill for the construction of more structures. They were also in the early stages of cultivating crops for sustenance.¹⁰⁶

The principal project among colonists at the beginning was the construction of the “Casa Común” (Common House) which served as the colony’s church. *El Sinarquista* poetically

¹⁰⁴ “Los nuevos pobladores de Sonora tomaron ya posesion del campo en que se erigirá Villa Kino,” *El Sinarquista*, January 29, 1942;

¹⁰⁵ “Los nuevos pobladores de Sonora tomaron ya posesion del campo en que se erigirá Villa Kino,” *El Sinarquista*, January 29, 1942.

¹⁰⁶ José Trueba Olivares, “La Fundacion de Villa Kino,” *El Sinarquista*, February 5, 1942.

described the building “whose foundations were laid on February 6 and whose walls are already humble but strong. An airy tower that is already twelve meters high and on which our tricolor flag floats - shaken by the wind.”¹⁰⁷ The structure stood above the rest of Villa Kino as a sign of not only the colony’s progress, but as a sign of the sinarquistas’ service to the nation. As with María Auxiliadora, such a project was uniting Mexico. This building would serve as the centerpiece of the development of Villa Kino and documentation of the colony frequently showed the building.¹⁰⁸

Trueba Olivares as well as the secretary of colonization Juan Ignacio Padilla sought the buy-in of all sinarquistas to both sustain and build-out Villa Kino. Although less publicized and smaller than María Auxiliadora, the colony was no less important. Trueba Olivares traveled from Villa Kino to Mexico City for the fourth annual UNS Assembly in December 1942. It was there where he updated sinarquistas from the U.S. and Mexico about the colony and the progress it was making.¹⁰⁹ However, it could not survive without the aid of all members. Padilla’s regular fundraising campaigns promoted by *El Sinarquista* and promoted via assemblies at committees across North America pushed for support of both colonies. In the case of Villa Kino, the donations particularly were helpful in regards to construction and in sustaining the colonists with food. The hope, however, was to move beyond providing sustenance towards the point where the

¹⁰⁷ The casa “cuyos cimientos se pusieron el 6 de febrero y cuyos muros se levantan ya humildes, pero fuertes. Un airoso torreón que ya tiene doce metros de altura y sobre el que flota - agitada por el viento - nuestro tricolor Bandera.” “Villa Kino, la Nueva Ciudad que Surge en las Costas Desiertas del Mar de Cortés,” *El Sinarquista*, March 26, 1942.

¹⁰⁸ See Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Historia Gráfica del Sinarquismo*, 229; “Mexicano,” *El Sinarquista*, July 23, 1942; “Mexicano,” *El Sinarquista*, February 4, 1943.

¹⁰⁹ “Representantes del pueblo,” *El Sinarquista*, December 17, 1942.

colony could be self-sustaining, gaining strength, support and influence in Sonora and beyond in Northern Mexico.

Problems in Villa Kino and Its Demise

By March 1943, sustenance did indeed come from the outside as the colonists could not maintain the settlement. As sinarquistas from the U.S. and Mexico funded Villa Kino by donating to Padilla's colonization drives, the colonists had some funds, yet not a lot. Trueba Olivares distributed the money respectively to single persons and members of families. Villa Kino could only survive as long as sinarquistas continued to support the colonization effort.¹¹⁰

Trueba Olivares' plans for a vast development did not materialize. Colonists began to see the small colony as a failure. Families slowly left the colony, heading back to Guanajuato. The colony only had eight families left. The settlement featured only a church and five adobe houses with some families sharing houses. The houses had dirt floors and roofs covered with reeds, straw and dirt. The isolation of the location, combined with discouragement and ill health, did not help matters in building up the colony.¹¹¹

Agriculture was to be instrumental to the success of the colony. Trueba Olivares claimed from the onset that the site of Villa Kino was ideal for agriculture, yet he was a lawyer by profession and had no experience in agriculture. Some colonists had expertise in working the land, however they were used to the fertile land of Guanajuato and not the desert climate of Sonora. They were accessing water from wells, yet it was unreliable. The colonists were

¹¹⁰Trueba Olivares received 250 pesos a week, distributing five pesos to each single individual and a little less than five pesos to each individual within a family. Nathan L. Whetten, *Rural Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 512-513.

¹¹¹ Whetten, 513.

disappointed with the crops they could produce given the resources they had access to. The residents of Villa Kino relied on trips to neighboring towns for food and supplies.¹¹²

By 1944, Villa Kino faced its end. There was a split between José Trueba Olivares' idea and reality. His vision of a settlement with tens of thousands of adobe houses, flourishing agriculture as well as successful development did not come to be. The colony was to be a place where colonists could live a disciplined, Catholic life. Villa Kino was barely staying afloat and could not persist without outside assistance. Colonists could not concern themselves with their faith when they were concerned about basic survival. The UNS intended for a colony like Villa Kino to thrive and be a shining example of sinarquismo, but it was the opposite.

The Other Colonies

The UNS was not done with colonization in 1944. The colonies were not meeting the vision set out for them in 1941 and yet the organization under the leadership of Manuel Torres Bueno supported having even more of them in other parts of Northern Mexico. He wanted to garner more support for the movement which had since been waning and believed colonization was the way to go. The colonies that did take off only lasted for a short period of time. The multi-year saga of colonization was coming to an end.

San Miguel Arcángel, Santa María del Refugio, and San José Opodepe

Juan Ignacio Padilla left the post of Secretary of Colonization and Manuel Torres Bueno replaced him with Gustavo Arizmendi who pursued more colonies, despite the pre-existing ones failing. Padilla could see that the writing was on wall in regards to the colonies. Arizmendi,

¹¹² The sinarquistas' newspaper notes in 1944 that finally the colony had sufficient water for its population after being founded two years before. "Tienen Agua Suficiente en Villa Kino," *El Sinarquista*, April 27, 1944; Whetten, 512-513.

however, did not give up hope, picking up where Padilla left off. He believed that the colonies could be salvaged through the continued support of sinarquistas on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. Arizmendi published a piece in *El Sinarquista*:

The enterprise of colonization requires generous donations and no negotiation. Sinarquismo currently maintains four colonies: María Auxiliadora in Baja California, Villa Kino in Sonora, Santa María del Refugio in Tamaulipas and San Miguel Arcangel in Durango. But let's not settle for the mediocrity of colonies that can hardly be maintained. We aspire to make them prosper. Sinarquista, do your duty cooperating in this common work.¹¹³

He, like his predecessor, sought to see the colonies thrive. Arizmendi did admit that they were at the point of failure and sinarquistas needed to keep them afloat.¹¹⁴ Perhaps with more colonies, members could give even more to the overall effort.

Arizmendi oversaw colonies elsewhere in Northern Mexico. Local committees in Durango and Tamaulipas started San Miguel Arcángel (Holy Michael, the Archangel) and Santa María del Refugio (Holy Mary of Refuge) in the respective states, which were very small in comparison to María Auxiliadora and Villa Kino.¹¹⁵ Whereas San Miguel Arcángel was far from the Mexico-U.S. Border, Santa María del Refugio was close to the border city of Matamoros. Both were essentially subsidiaries of the efforts of municipal sinarquista chapters.

¹¹³ The piece in the paper argues that “La empresa de colonización requiere una entrega generosa y sin regateos. El sinarquismo mantiene en la actualidad cuatro colonias: María Auxiliadora en Baja California, Villa Kino en Sonora, Santa María del Refugio en Tamaulipas y San Miguel Arcangel en Durango. Pero no nos conformemos con la mediocridad de unas colonias que apenas se pueden mantener. Aspiramos a hacerlas prosperar. Sinarquista, cumple con tu deber cooperando en esta obra común.” “La colonización no es un negocio,” *El Sinarquista*, January 20, 1944.

¹¹⁴ In fact, one colony collapsed almost immediately prior to 1944 in mid-1942 – Salvatierra de Santa María de Guadalupe in Sonora. Norma Delia Morales Suarez, “Las Mujeres de Cristo Rey, Comunidad Sinarquista Sur del Sinaloa,” in *Mujeres, ciudadanía y poder*, ed. Dalia Barrera Bassols (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 2000), 344; Hernández García de León, 233.

¹¹⁵ “La colonización no es un negocio,” *El Sinarquista*, January 20, 1944; Hernández García de León, 233; Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Historia Gráfica del Sinarquismo*, 212; Whetten, 516.

Later in 1944, Arizmendi did facilitate the colonization of San José Opodepe, Sonora from the level of the UNS national committee. As before, sinarquistas left their home in the Bajío for a colony in the north, this time for a settlement 138 kilometers to the north of the state capital of Hermosillo. Fifteen sinarquista families abandoned their town of Janamutato, Michoacán because of issues with the postrevolutionary Mexican government for a new life showing their “moral greatness” and “profound love of the motherland.”¹¹⁶ What set this colony apart was not only sinarquistas arriving from Michoacán, but was that members were arriving from the U.S. The leader of the colony was the former secretary-treasurer of the Los Angeles Regional Committee in California, Baltazar de Luna. Additional colonists set to return were the former Fresno committee chief Juan Enciso, ex-McAllen committee chief Jesús María Dávila, and former Los Angeles chief Pedro Villaseñor. The sinarquistas in the U.S. that were supposed to repatriate to Mexico never did.¹¹⁷ The notion that Mexicans would under their own volition move back to Mexico appealed to the nationalist sinarquistas, yet it was difficult for them to leave their jobs and families in the U.S. In the end, the actual colony was quite small, composed of only de Luna and the sinarquistas from Michoacán. San José Opodepe was without enough resources to survive as a sinarquista colony.

The UNS under Manuel Torres Bueno attempted to drive more support for the cause of colonization by implementing more projects. The two long-standing colonies had failed and so the organization began a slew of others. The issue was that the movement was already losing

¹¹⁶*El Sinarquista* mentions how sinarquistas are showing their “grandeza moral y de profundo amor de la patria.” “En Qué Condiciones Marchan los Nuevos Colonos,” *El Sinarquista*, February 10, 1944. The amount is 86 miles. “Sinarquista Colony To Be Started in Sonora,” *The Brownsville Herald*, January 31, 1944.

¹¹⁷ “En Qué Condiciones Marchan los Nuevos Colonos,” *El Sinarquista*, February 10, 1944; Lucila Villaseñor Grijalva, María Elena Villaseñor, and Alicia O. Colunga, Interview by Nathan Ellstrand, June 14, 2020.

support from its members because of its growing negative reputation combined with organizational in-fighting. The sinarquista colonization project was a dream that could only last so long.

Conclusion

Salvador Abascal led the Unión Nacional Sinarquista during its height, working to put ideology into action. Rather than working within the confines of postrevolutionary Mexican society, Abascal envisioned a plan to colonize and take over regions that had been previously neglected. This way the sinarquistas could develop these areas while establishing ideal settlements that represented its values of discipline, organization, Catholicism and finally completing where Spanish conquistadores failed. Abascal developed the colony of María Auxiliadora as he considered the peninsula of Baja California of the utmost importance as it was underpopulated and isolated from the rest of the country. José Trueba Olivares oversaw the colonization of Sonora as the state linked the peninsula to the nation. The plans for colonies were ambitious, but ultimately failed due to mounting internal and external issues. The UNS later on attempted other colonies, but the movement's reputation waned and its membership could no longer support such efforts.

Meanwhile, sinarquistas were facing growing scrutiny in the United States between 1941 to 1943 as the nation delved deeper into the Second World War. No longer was the UNS at its height. Media outlets raised even more suspicion about the group as a fifth column organization. In Southern California in particular, the press connected the sinarquistas with instigating criminal activity among Mexican youth, bringing about the Sleepy Lagoon incident and Zoot Suit Riots. The UNS faced opposition through anti-sinarquista government committees and the political left. Communists also targeted the group. The organization went on the defensive, taking on a pro-

war stance and publicly denounced fascism. Catholic American allies worked to support the sinarquistas, even sponsoring a public relations tour to change the perception of the group in the U.S. The sinarquistas in the U.S. faced the beginning of the end following 1941, but they did not give up without a fight.

CHAPTER FOUR

SINARQUISTAS PLACED ON THE DEFENSIVE – 1941-1943

Synarchism has been maliciously slandered with the accusation of being influenced by Nazis, Fascists, Falangists, etc., and thus constituting a ‘fifth column’ at the service of totalitarianism. It is false that Synarchism has ever considered a totalitarian system. It will have nothing to do with the idolators of the Omnipresent State.¹

The Los Angeles Regional Committee of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista responded to and denounced any association that the movement was connected with European-based fascism in 1942. The chapter distributed its English-language pamphlet, *Synarchism – its Program*, throughout not only Southern California, but across the United States. Although the Mexican nationalist organization was composed of and focused on Mexicans, the committee felt compelled to reach out to English-speaking people beyond the movement. Accusations that the UNS was linked to the Axis powers in World War II continued, but rumors also emerged that the movement was creating instability among the Mexican community in Los Angeles – and beyond.

From the U.S. entry into World War II in December 1941 to the Zoot Suit Riots in June 1943, the UNS could no longer operate freely without scrutiny. The group experienced its height between 1940 and 1941 and advanced its ambitious project to colonize the north of Mexico in the years that followed. The war, however, placed the movement under scrutiny. Advocates on behalf of the Mexican community in the U.S. wanted to address the social issues that the population faced for decades, known colloquially at the time as the “Mexican problem.”

¹ Unión Nacional Sinarquista, *Synarchism – its Program* (Los Angeles: Unión Nacional Sinarquista, 1942), 9, Anita Brenner Papers, 1923-1981, Box 28, Folder 6, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, UT Austin.

Connected to the “problem” was the emerging rumor that the UNS was going to feed upon such issues to sway the population in favor of the Axis. The Sleepy Lagoon murder and associated court case at the end of 1942, which focused on the supposed threat of Mexican youth delinquency in Los Angeles, led to speculation about the group’s involvement. Eventually, this resulted in the California Un-American Activities Committee led by California state politician Jack B. Tenney to investigate the UNS as one among other fascist and communist movements in 1942 and 1943. The Zoot Suit Riots in early June 1943 between U.S. servicemen and Mexican residents of the city led to further scrutiny and another such investigation of the sinarquistas. The media, governments, and the political left targeted the UNS more than in previous years.

The UNS pushed back against the opposition. In Los Angeles, the regional committee held documentary screenings to demonstrate that they were not connected with European fascism. The UNS also made use of ties with conservative U.S. Catholics more than ever. The movement utilized connections that it formed with U.S. Catholic leadership through the National Catholic Welfare Conference. Organization leaders also connected with Catholic laity and clergy across the U.S. including Frank Gross, Reverend Alcuin Heibel, O.S.B., and Bishop Edwin O’Hara to amplify the organization’s narrative. These individuals wrote pieces defending the UNS, and in the case of O’Hara, he even sponsored a tour of sinarquista leaders to college campuses around the U.S. The UNS believed that there was still time to convince hearts and minds in the U.S. that its cause was a just one.

The period between 1941 and 1943 was one of attack and response. The press, government forces, and left-wing organizations asserted that the Unión Nacional Sinarquista compromised United States national security in the middle of world war. As a result, the organization went on the defensive, utilizing its members and American allies to attempt to

change the narrative. They argued how youth delinquency ran contrary to order, and that threats of danger were socially constructed. The attacks on the Unión Nacional Sinarquista outweighed any attempts to counteract them because of the concerted effort to root out any opposition to the war effort, leading to the beginning of the end of the sinarquistas in the United States by 1943.

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista as a Fifth Column?

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista faced attacks for years, but the offensive changed as the United States entered World War II. No longer was the organization simply surveilled by the Department of State or compared to fascism in the media. The assaults on the group grew as the sinarquistas' supposed association with the Falange Española and Nazi Germany compromised a nation now at war. The dominant white population already looked down upon Mexicans in the U.S. Southwest and being an organization of nationalist Mexicans within the country's boundaries made matters worse. The Sleepy Lagoon murder and respective trial as well as the Zoot Suit Riots were key moments in which engrained racism led to a mobilization among Mexicans for civil rights. In the case of the UNS, liberal and left-wing ethnic Mexican political organizations used the repression both to discredit conservative Mexicans and to encourage the government to suppress them.

Perception of the UNS as an Internal Threat During Wartime

The U.S. government had its sights on the UNS as a fifth column more than ever. The Office of the Coordinator of Information surveilled the movement in Mexico, especially in relation to its colonization plan, as well as in the United States. According to the office, the organization proved as much a threat to the U.S. as it did to Mexico. The Coordinator of Information believed the UNS to be a well-developed fascist movement controlled by the Axis and ready for social and military activities. Its widespread development of committees

throughout the U.S. Southwest and Midwest showed that it established roots in the country. The Coordinator of Information also noticed sinarquismo's U.S. Catholic sympathizers, citing the radio priest Reverend Charles Coughlin, as well as the Reverend John O'Grady who previously defended the movement in September 1941.² The Department of Justice, like the Coordinator of Information, was carefully watching the UNS. The department arrived on many of the same findings, however it pointed out the effect that the movement was having on Mexican communities in the U.S. It drew a correlation between the establishment of sinarquista committees in the country and reduced war morale among the Mexican population in those respective communities. The Department of Justice came to the conclusion that the organization was lowering the interest of Mexicans in the war effort.³ The department worried about the UNS would divide the population when the nation was in a state of total war. The government certainly did not residents to be undermined by what it viewed as an enemy group.

Other U.S. government offices viewed the UNS as an internal threat, controlling the dissemination of sinarquista material as the country delved deeper into World War II. The U.S. Post Office Department started limiting the mailing of *El Sinarquista* in 1941, preventing its delivery to the movement's members and supporters living in the U.S. Although the post office allowed for some issues of the paper to be delivered, others were deemed "non-mailable," principally because the department saw them as containing "foreign propaganda."⁴ Similarly, the

² Donald Marquand Dozer, "Union Nacional Sinarquista," 1941, Box 45, Folder 3, Donald Marquand Dozer Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

³ "Sinarchismo," 1942, Box 33, Earl Browder Papers 1879-1990, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.

⁴ United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster General* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), 47; Memorandum from Jesús Torres to the Unión Nacional Sinarquista, "Que en EE.UU.AA. está prohibida la publicación de su periódico," February 24, 1942, Secretaría de Comunicaciones y

newly-created U.S. Office of Censorship restricted correspondence relating to sinarquismo between Mexico and the U.S., as well as domestically. The office blocked any reference to the movement to prevent its spread. Such material included letters on what sinarquismo was, minutes from sinarquista meetings, as well as correspondence commenting how Mexicans could support the sinarquista colonization project.⁵ These government offices believed that by controlling information about the movement, the UNS would have less of opportunity to win over potential supporters and would therefore be less of a threat to the country.

Fear of sinarquismo as an internal threat existed beyond the government and on the ground where sinarquista committees existed. The Bakersfield, California chapter was one of the more well-known because it was a regional committee and its chiefs, first Porfirio Rivera and later José Cleofas Rojas, led efforts to spread sinarquismo throughout the Central Valley and Northern California. Sinarquismo began to face scrutiny in the region. Merle Taylor of the Bakersfield Women's Club hosted a talk in January 1942 to her fellow members on pan-Americanism and how the sinarquistas proved to be a threat to the policy. Elliott J. Taylor of the Reedley Junior College faculty spoke to the club warning the women of the sinarquistas, arguing that they were pro-Nazi fifth column and grew through espionage and sabotage of Hitler's agents. Taylor argued that they seemed harmless, but that "we are apt to underestimate the power and influence of the enemy." According to him, pan-Americanism was necessary for hemispheric peace and all Americans needed to support President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's

Obras Públicas, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Files, CUA Archives; Letter from William H. McCarty to Jose G. Padilla, Box 72, Folder 2, USCCB Legal Department Files, CUA Archives.

⁵ See 812.00/31922, 812.00/31924, 812.00/31926, 812.00/31927, 812.00/31930, 812.00/31931, 812.00/31932, Box 4098, RG 59, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

efforts towards a Good Neighbor Policy.⁶ The sinarquistas' existence as a nationalist force in the context of the U.S., such as in Bakersfield, violated that peace.

Sinarquista committees in the U.S. felt compelled to demonstrate that the movement was not a fifth column. UNS branches made a point of showing their allegiance to both Mexico and the U.S., dispelling the notion that the movement was an internal threat to either nation. The El Paso chapter of the UNS, hosted an assembly in honor of Mexico's Flag Day. The celebration at the city's St. Ignatius Auditorium addressed attacks on the organization. Sergio Arriola, a leader in El Paso's regional committee, pushed back against accusations and believed that it was time for sinarquista members, like himself, to give their side of the story. He asked "what has Sinarquismo done to be called Fifth Columnist?" Arriola placed an emphasis how the group cared deeply about the current state of Mexico, but caused no harm. He also asserted the sinarquistas' respect for the U.S., explaining that "countless times our movement has publicly declared itself friendly to the United States."⁷ The El Paso sinarquista committee closed out the meeting singing the U.S. and Mexican national anthems. Its members attempted to demonstrate to the public that it had transnational ties to both Mexico and the U.S.

Down the Rio Grande in McAllen, Texas, the UNS chapter also made a point of dissociating itself from the fifth column label. Like the El Paso committee, the McAllen committee partook in local festivities to honor Mexican holidays. McAllen sinarquistas organized the Cinco de Mayo parade alongside the local Concordia and Guadalupe societies.⁸

⁶ "Nazi South American Aims Revealed by Club Speaker," *Bakersfield Californian*, January 27, 1942.

⁷ "Speaker Defends Sinarquistas," *El Paso Herald-Tribune*, February 26, 1942.

⁸ "Reynosa in Gala Attire for Big 'Cinco de Mayo,'" *The Monitor*, May 5, 1942.

In addition to celebrations, the committee organized a drive to finance U.S. military operations during World War II. Male members of the youth branch of the McAllen sinarquista committee including José M. Ponce, Leonardo Zamora, and Mauro Pérez sold \$915.60 worth of war stamps and bonds in support.⁹ McAllen sinarquistas worked to demonstrate not only their local commitment to the war effort, but that the UNS as a whole did not oppose the Allies in World War II. They pushed back against accusations that the sinarquistas did not support the war effort. Although sinarquistas were political Mexicans residing within the borders of the U.S., they aimed to show that they were not enemies, but allies.

Concerns About Mexicans and the Broader Spanish-Speaking Community in the U.S.

As the Mexican population increased in the Southwestern United States from the 1910s into the 1940s, scholars and government officials increasingly studied the community and what became known as the “Mexican problem.” Two individuals – Carey McWilliams and George I. Sánchez – connected the “problem” with the domestic situation during World War II. McWilliams, a lawyer, writer, and the Chief of California’s Division of Immigration and Housing, defended and worked alongside migrant farmworkers, many of whom were Mexican, and developed an interest in the community. He believed that they were neglected and that the federal government had a responsibility, especially during wartime, to make sure that all individuals in the region were brought into the nation, even if they were not citizens.¹⁰ Similarly, Sánchez, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin and the national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, a Mexican American civil rights organization, was

⁹ “Youths Organization Sells Stamps, Bonds,” *McAllen Daily Press*, July 3, 1942.

¹⁰ Letter from Carey McWilliams to Nelson A. Rockefeller, October 15, 1941, Box 1717, Folder: McWilliams, Carey – Plan, RG 229, NARA.

concerned about the welfare of Mexicans in the U.S. He called attention to the community and issues it faced with poverty and discrimination, pushing for the U.S. government to act.¹¹ Both McWilliams and Sánchez turned to the United States Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) to address these issues.¹²

In late 1941, Carey McWilliams reached out to the coordinator, Nelson A. Rockefeller, laying out his specific concerns and proposing a solution. He explained that Mexicans had a sense of divided loyalty – one between Mexico and the United States. In California and Texas, they had not been fully or partially assimilated because of their working-class status and Spanish language. McWilliams believed that Mexicans in the U.S. faced “many years of manifold discrimination both with respect to work opportunities, educational facilities and access to public services. It has been this fact, more than any other consideration, which has made the Mexicans a permanently disadvantaged, underprivileged social group.” He believed that in order to foster positive hemispheric relations in preventing the spread of the Axis in the region, the U.S. government also needed to respect Latin Americans within its own borders. McWilliams laid out an ambitious proposal to bring in Mexicans into U.S. society. He proposed that the “most effective way to improve Latin-American relations is for the national government to take public cognizance of the problems faced by this resident Mexican population.” McWilliams wanted to see the establishment of a committee in California composed of public officials, social workers, professors and representatives from the Mexican community. The committee would study

¹¹ See George I. Sanchez, *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940).

¹² The Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) was formerly the Office for Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics (OCCCRBAR).

discrimination, economic problems and import Mexican labor. It would encourage citizenship, forums focused on the community and legislation to benefit the population.¹³

Around the same time, George I. Sánchez also reached out to Rockefeller. Like McWilliams, he also envisioned a committee, but his was more an investigatory group. Sánchez submitted a proposal for funding from the OCIAA in December 1941 to create a national research commission that would study the conditions of Mexicans in the U.S. Southwest. This government body would consist of seven academics and three government officials to investigate the matter. Sánchez did not hear anything from the office early the next year, so he followed up. He believed that Rockefeller needed to move as quickly as possible to address issues in the Southwest.¹⁴

The OCIAA responded to these advocacy efforts to focus on addressing the issues of Mexicans in the U.S. The proposals of McWilliams and Sánchez, combined with federal reports that came out during late 1941 and early 1942, insisted that the incorporation of Mexicans into American society was a wartime issue, necessitated a response.¹⁵ Rockefeller supported the creation of the Division of Inter-American Activities in the United States in March 1942, which established the Program for Cooperation with Spanish Speaking Minorities in the United States shortly thereafter. The program worked with public and private groups to “harmonize Spanish

¹³ Letter from Carey McWilliams to Nelson A. Rockefeller, October 15, 1941, Box 1717, Folder: McWilliams, Carey – Plan, RG 229, NARA.

¹⁴ Natalie Mendoza, “The Good Neighbor Comes Home” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2016), 21; John M. Clark, “Problems of Resident Latin Americans,” N.D., Box 1717, Folder: Folder: Program for Cooperation with Spanish Speaking Minorities in the United States, RG 229, NARA.

¹⁵ Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during WWII* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009): 73-75, 263 n22 and n23; For one such report, see Paul Horgan, “United States Latins in the Southwest, A Domestic Wartime Responsibility with Foreign Overtones,” January 1942, Box 1717, Folder: Paul Horgan, RG 229, NARA.

speaking minority groups in the United States with the American Way of Life.” It conducted a field survey of residents throughout the Southwestern U.S. and consulted with government agencies such as the Department of War and Department of Justice. The office pinpointed the program’s purpose during wartime as Spanish-speaking people were isolated from the rest of the population and that their loyalties could lie elsewhere. These people were easy prey for “subversive propagandists and un-American ideologies.” The OCIAA saw the Axis as seeking to undermine inter-American solidarity by highlighting the problems that the population faced in the U.S. Such problems the program observed were juvenile delinquency, illiteracy, criminal activity, unemployment, poverty, disease and malnutrition. The OCIAA therefore saw the program’s role as providing leadership for the community, valuing the contribution the population could make and educate white Americans of the issues of the Spanish-speaking people.¹⁶ The office believed that supporting these people would aid the war effort and foster President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s policy of pan-Americanism.

The OCIAA’s Program for Cooperation with Spanish Speaking Minorities in the United States implemented its work through public relations, monetary assistance and popular education. The program worked closely with the office’s motion picture, radio, press, and science, and education divisions to disseminate information among Spanish-speaking people. It provided financial assistance to Barel Community Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico and to Taos County, New Mexico. The program also sought to foster education bring up English-speaking representatives from Mexico and by providing scholarships to “promising” Spanish-

¹⁶ Mendoza, 19; “Proposed Project Authorization: Program for Cooperation with Spanish Speaking Minorities in the United States,” April 20, 1942, Box 1717, Folder: Program for Cooperation with Spanish Speaking Minorities in the United States, RG 229, NARA.

speaking high school students in the Southwest.¹⁷ Not only did the program seek to address inequities among Mexicans in the U.S., it would combat fascism and any attempts to subvert the government.

The Congreso Nacional de los Pueblos de Habla Español wanted to ensure that Rockefeller and the OCIAA followed through, especially by dealing with the UNS. El Congreso formed in 1939 as a progressive political coalition of various Hispanic populations in the United States. El Congreso sympathized with the Communist Party of the United States of America's Popular Front against international fascism.¹⁸ The general secretary of the organization, Josefina Fierro de Bright, had an eye on the anti-communist UNS. She made a point of gathering information on the UNS, even having fellow El Congreso members infiltrate the organization.¹⁹ Fierro de Bright contacted Rockefeller on the eve of El Congreso's fourth annual convention in Los Angeles in May 1942. She emphasized how the group aligned with the OCIAA in seeking to unify the community around the war effort at the convention. Fierro de Bright notified him that the UNS and certain sections of the Catholic Church opposed the conference. *El Sinarquista* was continuing to be sold and being consumed by Mexicans. She urged Rockefeller to curb the movement's activities and counteract them.²⁰ Following the convention, Fierro de Bright notified

¹⁷ "Proposed Project Authorization: Program for Cooperation with Spanish Speaking Minorities in the United States," April 20, 1942, Box 1717, Folder: Program for Cooperation with Spanish Speaking Minorities in the United States, RG 229, NARA.

¹⁸ Enrique M. Buelna, *Chicano Communists and the Struggle for Social Justice* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2019), 29-31.

¹⁹ Letter from Carey McWilliams to Ernesto Galarza, April 10, 1942, Box 32, Folder 4-16, Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); Letter from Marta Cézares to Carey McWilliams, N.D., Box 32, Folder 4-16, Carey McWilliams Papers, UCLA.

²⁰ Letter from Josefina Fierro de Bright to Nelson A. Rockefeller, May 6, 1942, Box 1717, Folder: Spanish Speaking People's Congress, RG 229, NARA.

Rockefeller of the resolutions that members of El Congreso passed. Many of the resolutions overlapped with that of the Program for Cooperation with Spanish Speaking Minorities in the United States, especially in regards to job training, employment discrimination and unifying support of the Spanish-speaking community in the U.S. in support of the Allies. Most importantly, El Congreso emphasized its support for hemispheric unity against “propaganda as an anti-democratic influence” that was threatening “Pan-American Unity and sabotaging the War efforts.”²¹ In doing so, the organization drew a parallel between pan-Americanism abroad as well as at home. El Congreso believed that a movement such as the UNS and its publication undermined World War II and needed to be stopped.

Sleepy Lagoon, Youth Delinquency and the Sinarquista “Fifth Column”

In Los Angeles, one event early in August 1942 would shape how the broader public saw the UNS as a fifth column. On the night of August 1, José Díaz decided to attend a party at the house of his neighbors, Amelio and Angela Delgadillo. Very early the next day, Díaz was walking home and attacked. He was hit with several blows to his face, arms and head. Once he collapsed onto the pavement, someone stabbed him twice in the stomach with an ice pick near the swimming hole known as the Sleepy Lagoon. Díaz died a couple hours later in Los Angeles General Hospital. City newspapers considered this act of violence as one of many among the Mexican population on Los Angeles’ Eastside.²² If anything, the press viewed the attack on Díaz as another example of youth delinquency and the broader “Mexican problem.” What normally

²¹ “Resolutions: Victory Convention,” May 22, 23, 24, 1942, Box 1717, Folder: Spanish Speaking People’s Congress, RG 229, NARA.

²² Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-2.

would have been written off was elevated to national importance because public officials sought to dig deeper, even blaming the UNS as the source as prompting the attack on Díaz.

By mid-August, the attacks on sinarquismo as a fascist fifth column surfaced again, this time by government leaders arguing that the movement was provoking Mexican gang activity, which supposedly killed Díaz. One such individual, Guy T. Nunn, a representative on the War Manpower Commission of Minority Groups, claimed that the sinarquistas took advantage of the “idleness” of Mexican youth to sway them away from democracy. Not only did Nunn say that the UNS was a fascist organization attempting to create disturbances among the population, but that “the Sinarquistas discourage participation in the war effort in any way.”²³

Nunn’s accusation prompted a response from UNS national headquarters in Mexico City. The national committee of the UNS under Manuel Torres Bueno responded that the organization had no participation whatsoever in the disturbances, but rather that the organization tried to support the U.S. in the war effort. As the sinarquistas had in the past, the Torres Bueno administration emphasized the approval that the group had from the U.S. government as part of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The UNS leadership specifically noted how it was encouraging Mexicans in the U.S. not only to purchase bonds to support the war effort, but to be grateful for the hospitality that the U.S. gave them. It considered the claim that the movement was a Mexican fascist organization to be slander rooted in propaganda spread by leftist extremists in Mexico.²⁴ The UNS national committee swore that the group’s opponents – such as in labor and the Mexican Chamber of Deputies – fueled Nunn’s statement.

²³ “Fascist Influence Blamed for Juvenile Outbreaks,” *Washington Evening Star*, August 13, 1942.

²⁴ “Se Defiende la Union Sinarquista,” *La Opinión*, August 15, 1942; “Los Rojos de Aquí Asocian con los de E.U.,” *El Sinarquista*, August 20, 1942.

Within Los Angeles, the movement's supporters spoke out. The Reverend Manuel A. Canseco of Los Angeles' Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe defended sinarquistas in the city. He considered Nunn's charges to be "absurd." Canseco believed it was outrageous "that anyone, much less a person in a responsible government position should charge our Los Angeles youth with being instigators or promoters of disorderly gangs either here or elsewhere."²⁵ He rejected what he saw as an outlandish claim.

Despite the denial of such accusations, others picked up on and amplified Nunn's notion that Axis-inspired agents inspired youth delinquency in Southern California. Mexican workers of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Local 26 claimed that Mexican young adults were defaming the American flag and tearing down war propaganda posters. They believed that the sinarquistas inspired and directed such actions and called on the Department of Justice to investigate the movement within Los Angeles County.²⁶ Others concerned about Axis influence included Elis M. Tipton, a teacher at San Dimas Elementary School in the Los Angeles region, reached out to the OCIAA in October. She remarked about the outbreaks of gang activity in the region and how law enforcement was reporting that Axis agents were distributing marijuana among the youth. Tipton mentioned that "Axis propaganda has been widely disseminated among the Mexicans here and throughout the Southwest, and we find that many Mexicans are secretly in sympathy with the Germans and Japanese whom they like and greatly

²⁵ "Charge Sinarquistas Stir Up Lawlessness in Los Angeles Denounced," *N.C.W.C. News Service*, September 7, 1942.

²⁶ "Mexican Workers Demand F.B.I. Investigation of Sinarquista Youth Movement in L.A. County," *The Spanish-American Shopping News*, October 1, 1942, Box 31, Folder 1-19, Carey McWilliams Papers, UCLA.

admire.”²⁷ Like Nunn, some Southern Californians believed that agents in their midst were misguiding juvenile Mexicans.

Even those from Mexico had something to say on the situation in and around Los Angeles. Later in October, El Congreso’s Josefina Fierro de Bright invited Ernesto Félix Díaz Escobar to come to Los Angeles from Mexico to speak to the city’s Mexican community. Díaz Escobar was a lawyer, the head of the organization and propaganda section of Mexico’s Comité Nacional Antinazifascista (National Anti-Nazi-Fascist Committee, formerly the Comité Nacional Antisinarquista), and brother to committee president and Mexican politician, Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar. Díaz Escobar described that he was confident that “the organization has a foothold among Mexicans in Los Angeles and other sections. The Sinarquistas, in turn, are being used by Axis agents and fifth columnists who find them an excellent agency to promote disunity within Mexico and bad feelings between Mexicans and citizens of the United States.” Díaz Escobar admitted that “while our Antinazifascista Committee has been unable find conclusive proof that Axis agents are financing the Sinarquista movement, the money must come from somewhere.” He sought to create local committees to educate gang members that they were subject to Axis influence and that it was their patriotic duty so as not to let racial friction impede the war effort.²⁸ Advocates on behalf of the Mexican community identified not only the enemy, but one such cross-national solution to youth delinquency. Díaz Escobar’s idea was that if the gangs did not receive some form of intervention, the sinarquistas could infiltrate and corrupt them even more.

²⁷ Letter from Elis M. Tipton to Henry A. Wallace, October 10, 1942, Box 1717, Folder: Paul Horgan, RG 229, NARA.

²⁸ “Boy Gang Terrorism Charged to Axis Agents,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1942.

Once again, the UNS felt compelled to respond, this time sinarquistas on the ground in Los Angeles. Pedro Villaseñor, leader of the regional sinarquista committee, issued a statement to the press directly responding to Díaz Escobar. He asserted how the sinarquistas were not a tool of the Axis, but rather reiterated a line that the UNS used before – that the movement was opposed to communism, fascism, Nazism, and the Falange Española. Villaseñor wanted to set the record straight about sinarquismo, explaining that sinarquista “means ‘anti-anarchist’ and it is well named Sinarquism [as] it demands an end to class war.”²⁹ He sought to distance the local chapter of the organization from any association as an internal enemy while clarifying what the overall movement was. Such accusations of the UNS as a fifth column did not go away, however.

Meanwhile, the Sleepy Lagoon incident developed into a highly-publicized trial surrounding José Díaz’s murder. The Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office and law enforcement officials utilized the incident as an opportunity to crack down on youth delinquency. The court case started in October between the state of California and twenty-two alleged members of the 38th Street “Gang” who supposedly killed Díaz.³⁰ The state charged that all men were involved in his murder, but lacked the evidence. Not only that, not all the defendants had access to due process. By November, the grand jury held a public hearing calling in a hundred representative citizen “social experts.” These individuals brought up a variety of causes for the “Mexican problem” and specifically youth delinquency. Many of these issues which had been brought up before in discussion of the Spanish-speaking population included poor living

²⁹ “Sinarquista Leader Denies Organization Tool of Axis,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1942.

³⁰ Obregón Pagán, 71-97.

conditions, social neglect and lack of assimilation into American society. Multiple speakers honed in on the UNS to determine whether the movement could be held responsible for unrest among Mexican youth. They noted how “fiery race theories” fueled these young people to commit acts of violence after feeling nothing but discrimination all of their lives.³¹ The jury needed to identify what was the source of the violent incident at Sleepy Lagoon and the UNS continued to be portrayed as an instigator of youth criminal activity.

The Sleepy Lagoon case provoked a mobilization in the city’s Mexican American community. Various local residents stepped up and created organizations to protect the youth defendants. Josefina Fierro de Bright believed that the OCIAA needed to help bring justice to Mexican youth as well as monitor the sinarquistas. She was responsible in forming the Citizens' Committee for the Defense of Mexican American Youth in October 1942.³² The committee was composed of some members of El Congreso including Fierro de Bright as well as other Mexican and white activists. Fierro de Bright still did not believe that the OCIAA was fully addressing the needs of the Spanish-speakers, specifically the Mexican community. In November, her and her husband, John Bright reached out to the OCIAA’s Dr. Walter H.C. Laves, the director of the Division of Inter-American Activities in the United States. The Brights wanted more government investment in the Mexican community in the U.S. They also believed that “underestimation of the activities of enemy agents in the ranks of the Mexican-Americans, and failure to recognize the increased success of these energetic minions, would be a perilous mistake.” The Brights noted that “from Madrid are instructed the thousands of fanatical Falangists and their subtle

³¹ “Los Angeles Is Working to Find a Solution To Its Mexican Youth Problem,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 4, 1942.

³² The committee was also known as the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee.

collaborators of the Sinarquist Union.” Not only did the OCIAA need to surveil the UNS, but the Brights believed that the office needed to investigate the Sleepy Lagoon case.³³

Another committee formed to address both youth delinquency and supposed Axis propaganda. Roger Jessup, chairman of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, formed the Citizens Committee for Latin Americans led by the Reverend Thomas J. O’Dwyer of the Catholic Welfare Bureau. The committee included a range of individuals from community organizations, institutions, and the government including representatives from the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the city’s principal Spanish paper *La Opinión* and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. It aimed for the cooperation of agencies to remove the causes of youth crime among the Mexican population. The committee emphasized its urgency in the midst of wartime and President Roosevelt, explaining that the situation was being taken advantage of by fascist propagandists. According to the group, they were seeking to divide any unity between the U.S. and Latin America.³⁴ These committees of local residents did not believe that the judicial process of the Sleepy Lagoon Trial was going to get to the bottom of sinarquista influence, so they took the matter in their own hands.

Of the committees, however, California state politicians were the ones to lead such a deeper investigation into the sinarquistas and gang activity in December 1942. The California Un-American Activities Committee formed a year before as a result of the efforts of California State Assembly member Jack B. Tenney. Tenney was originally a lawyer and songwriter who

³³ Letter from John Bright and Josefina Fierro de Bright to Walter H.C. Laves, November 10, 1942, Box 1717, Folder: Spanish Speaking Project, RG 229, NARA.

³⁴ “County Program to Fight Axis Propaganda Starts,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1942; “New Group Acts Today to Aid Mexican Youth,” *People’s Daily World*, November 30, 1942.

shared sympathies with the political left, especially as a member of the American Federation of Musicians. A power struggle in the musicians' union pushed him to the right, turning on the left, particularly targeting communists.³⁵ In the midst of World War II, however, fascism was an international threat that he could not ignore. The now-State Senator-elect Tenney planned on holding a hearing on December 16 to look into recent events and rumors relating to the sinarquistas. He remarked that he wanted to investigate if there was "an Axis fifth column in our midst, undermining the morale of our American-Mexican boys and girls." He also wanted to see if the youth on trial for the Sleepy Lagoon incident were "stage-managed by Hitler's fifth columnists." Tenney called six witnesses including Guy T. Nunn, Josefina Fierro de Bright, John Bright, La Rue McCormick, and Oscar Fuss and Philip M. Connelly of the state's Congress of Industrial Organizations.³⁶ The date of the hearing arrived and none of the witnesses showed up, fearing his motives and that they themselves would be blamed. In their place, they sent telegrams excusing themselves from the hearing. The witnesses explained that the FBI and other federal governmental agencies were investigating the sinarquistas and that they saw nothing to come from the state hearing. Tenney issued a subpoena to have the witnesses appear.³⁷ He planned on holding a meeting on the sinarquistas one way or another to get to the bottom of the matter.

Tenney responded to allegations that this particular session was targeting Mexicans in the state. Tenney explained that "The Mexican people and Americans of Mexican origin are not under investigation by the Assembly committee investigating un-American activities in

³⁵ Starr, 302-303.

³⁶ "Influences Behind Gang Wars Here to Be Studied," *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1942.

³⁷ "Attempt to Link Axis to Gang Wars Dropped," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1942; "Legislators Will Hear Witnesses," *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1942.

California.” He asserted that the committee valued Mexicans in the state and their loyalty to the union. Tenney was instead more concerned about the leftist politics of the witnesses, explaining that:

It is rather significant that the agitation and turmoil heard for the past several months in Southern California has been raised by American Communists and close fellow travelers. It is this group that has continuously demanded an investigation of the so-called Sinarquista movement, alleging that recent disturbances among Mexican-American youth in Los Angeles is the result of the Sinarquistas. This same group, headed by a known Communist, La Rue McCormick, has continually alleged that the Sinarquistas are dominated by, linked with, financed and stage-managed by Hitler’s Nazis.³⁸

Several of the individuals were already openly anti-sinarquista such as the Brights. It was notable that all – except for Nunn whom worked for the federal government – were part of explicit left-wing organizations. State Senator Tenney, a noted anti-communist, believed that communists were attempting to smear the UNS. Perhaps the root of the Sleepy Lagoon incident did not lay in the organization.

Tenney’s subpoena brought at least some of the possible witnesses to the hearing whose purpose changed meaning. Philip M. Connolly, Oscar Fuss and La Rue McCormick showed up to face the committee. As Tenney expected, “The witnesses who appeared before us today failed in every respect to substantiate in any manner, shape or form the charges made by the group.” He expressed his disappointment that “the group was supposed to protect the Mexican boys on trial and to expose the fifth column they alleged was at work in the local Mexican community.”³⁹ In the eyes of Tenney and his committee, the hearing tarnished the reputation of the left-wing witnesses rather than the sinarquistas.

³⁸ “Tenney Tells Inquiry Scope,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1942.

³⁹ “Sinarquistas Cleared by Tenney Committee,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1942.

The *People's Daily World* – a communist publication based on the West Coast – was particularly upset about Tenney's portrayal of the leftist witnesses. The paper's editorial staff pushed back against the committee's results, arguing that the California Un-American Activities Committee whitewashed who the UNS was as a movement. Instead of attacking sinarquistas in the region, its editors expressed disdain over how it took the committee "only a few hours questioning of three witnesses behind closed doors to make up their minds that Sinarquism is something dreamed up by the 'reds' – just another 'red plot.'"⁴⁰ The paper's staff could not believe that the committee completely wrote off the organization as fascist based on what they considered little evidence. According to them, the issue was not the communists, but actually Tenney's committee instead who was secretly supporting the wartime enemies. The *People's Daily World* boldly posed this question to its readership: "why should the California legislature appropriate funds and give authority to a committee that helps the Fascist Axis? That's a question which YOU, and all California citizens and organizations, should ask the assemblymen at Sacramento."⁴¹ The communist newspaper was convinced that the California Un-American Activities Committee was in cooperation with the sinarquistas by turning the tables on the communists. The *People's Daily World*, just like others on the political left in the Los Angeles area at the time, kept their aim set on the UNS, yet could not prove the group as fascist.

Finally on January 12, 1943, the Sleepy Lagoon trial that occurred since October came to an end, however accusations that the sinarquistas were behind the incident did not end. Of the twenty-two defendants, the grand jury ruled that only five were innocent. The jury deemed the

⁴⁰ "Mexicali Rose Water for the Sinarquistas," *People's Daily World*, January 5, 1943.

⁴¹ "Tenney's Whitewashing," *People's Daily World*, January 18, 1943.

remaining seventeen to be guilty, where they faced various prison sentences, with some given life sentences at San Quentin State Prison.⁴² Despite the Sleepy Lagoon case and the California Un-American Activities Committee drawing no conclusive evidence regarding the UNS, those on the political left kept drawing an association between the movement and juvenile crime. Carey McWilliams explained afterwards that “there is some plausible evidence pointing to the conclusion that the local branch of the Sinarquistas is bent on making trouble in Los Angeles and that the activities and propaganda of the Sinarquista movement have had some effect upon Mexican youth in Los Angeles.”⁴³ Similarly, the Citizens' Committee for the Defense of Mexican American Youth did not end its work nor its focus on the sinarquistas following the trial. The committee released a statement, focusing not on the incident, but rather the case itself. It explained the trial “aided the offense of the Los Angeles Sinarquist movement. It aided in creating an atmosphere of hostility and distrust toward the Mexican-American population.”⁴⁴ The trial may have ended, but the targeting of the UNS did not.

Ernesto Félix Díaz Escobar had previously visited Los Angeles from Mexico in October 1942 representing the Comité Nacional Antinazifascista, yet it would be his brother and committee president Alfredo who would double down on sinarquismo as a threat to the U.S. Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar had already led the charge against the sinarquistas in Mexico and he did not lose sight of sinarquistas in the U.S. He traveled to the U.S. where he visited the headquarters of the OCIAA in Washington, D.C. in an attempt to sway both Nelson A.

⁴² Obregón Pagán, 89.

⁴³ Carey McWilliams, “Los Angeles’ Pachuco Gangs,” *The New Republic*, January 18, 1943.

⁴⁴ Citizens' Committee for the Defense of Mexican-American Youth, “Social Conditions of Mexican American Youth,” March 2, 1943, Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee Records, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Rockefeller and public opinion. Díaz Escobar claimed that the UNS was a fascist fifth column against democracy with ties to both Nazi Germany and the Falange Española that had 50,000 members in California. He argued how “leaders of the movement take advantage of historical incidents to drive a wedge in the Good Neighbor Policy. They point to injuries done [to] Latin-Americans by Yankee imperialists, and lead the people to believe that those injustices came from the American people as a whole.” He was surprised that the U.S. government did not take the steps to cancel the organization’s registration under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.⁴⁵ Díaz Escobar sought to bring about fear in Americans that the UNS were not only in large numbers in the U.S., but working to create dissension. As for registration, sinarquistas, especially the local leaders on the ground in the U.S., constantly reiterated that they had official approval from the U.S. government. To take away registration would allow the group to lose legitimacy. Díaz Escobar wanted to see the end of the UNS in both Mexico and the U.S.

As with others who attacked the UNS during wartime, the sinarquistas pushed back, on the defensive. Almost always such individuals were men, but Ana P. de Hernández, a sinarquista from Davenport, Iowa responded directly to Díaz Escobar. She believed that his distrust in the UNS had its roots in anti-Catholicism, not seeing Mexican Catholics as having rights. De Hernández spoke to why a believer like herself was in the U.S. rather than in her home of Mexico: “We have emigrated to a country perhaps hostile to the Mexican peon, and we have done so with the hope of returning as soon as the dissolving passions of certain parties have

⁴⁵ “Mexican Fascist Unit Said to Have U.S. Link,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 1943; “Grupos Mexicanos en E.U. Acusados,” *La Prensa*, March 24, 1943; “Subverters in U.S. Linked with Mexican Sinarquistas,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 24, 1943; [Alfredo] Félix Díaz Escobar, “The Spread of Sinarquismo,” *The Nation*, April 3, 1943.

subsided.”⁴⁶ Like the majority sinarquistas in the U.S., de Hernández arrived to the country as a result of religious turmoil in Mexico, whether it was the Mexican Revolution or the Cristero Wars. She validated her existence as someone who was displaced because of violence, but who sought to return to her homeland. Male leaders of the El Paso committee also responded to Díaz Escobar. Pablo Acevas, the head of the organization committee and Marcelino Ramirez, head of the information committee, said, “there is nothing secret about us.” They noted how “we have a program of Social Justice.” Rather than being fascists, the two simply noted how the UNS opposed communism and that Díaz Escobar’s comments were “Communist inspired.”⁴⁷ The El Paso committee operated openly and on behalf of a cause back in Mexico. Despite defending themselves, sinarquistas in the U.S. still could not catch a break from the organization’s opponents.

Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar’s Comité Nacional Antinazifascista was not the only Mexican organization seeking to tarnish the reputation of sinarquismo in the United States. The Confederación de Trabajadores de México which claimed the UNS to be a fifth column in Mexico back in 1939 aimed to do the same for the movement in the U.S. The CTM perpetuated the notion that the sinarquistas were trying to take advantage of the resentment that young Mexicans in the U.S. faced. The confederation warned the people of Southern California that sinarquismo was “the strongest Fascist movement in the Americas and has spread to the

⁴⁶ She writes that “hemos emigrado a un país quizás hostil para el peón mexicano, y lo hemos hecho con la esperanza de volver en cuanto se hayan calmado las pasiones disolventes de ciertos partidos.” Ana P. de Hernández, “Protesta contra Diaz Escobar una señora de Iowa,” *La Prensa*, April 3, 1943.

⁴⁷ “Sinarquistas Meet in E.P., Valleys; Set Forth Aims,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 5, 1943.

Southwestern United States.”⁴⁸ The CTM argued how the threat of the UNS was real and that Californians needed to be wary. This danger was among them.

The Zoot Suit Riots, Youth Delinquency and the Sinarquista “Fifth Column”

The Zoot Suit Riots, like the Sleepy Lagoon murder and respective trial before it, placed the sinarquistas once again at the center of blame for juvenile crime. The riots were a ten-day outbreak of violence in Los Angeles by whites against Mexicans that took place between June 3 and June 13, 1943. They were the result of fears stoked by the Sleepy Lagoon incident. The press in the city did not let up on characterizing Mexican youth – men and women alike – as involved with gang activity. As such, the media drew an association between young Mexicans and the popular clothing that many wore at the time – zoot suits – outfits characterized by drape pants and fingertip-length coats. White military personnel who recently returned from overseas, in instances joined by Los Angeles civilians and police, searched for Mexican zoot suiters. Once they found them, they beat them and stripped them of their clothing.⁴⁹ The event clearly represented the embedded racism against Mexicans in the city. Even the press portrayed the attackers as not white servicemen and allies, but Mexican “gang members.” Mexican youth were supposedly incited once again by the sinarquista fifth column.

⁴⁸ “Sinarchista Held Peril to Americas,” *People’s Daily World*, May 14, 1943.

⁴⁹ Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 1-6; Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1-3; Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth, Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 155-157; Catherine S. Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 1; Elizabeth Rachel Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 8-10.

The Zoot Suit Riots were not even over when rumors emerged about the role of the UNS. On June 10, the Reverend Francisco Quintanilla of the Mexican Methodist Church of Watts, also known as the “little Mayor of Watts,” came out blaming the riots on the fifth column. He claimed that a man came to talk to him in broken English about having interest in the Mexican population of Watts. Quintanilla refused his request to speak, but the next day the man was talking to a group of Mexicans on a corner near his church. He swore “that man was an enemy agent.” He believed that “these propagandists urge our Mexican youth to commit crimes, to build up police records so that they not be accepted by the armed forces.”⁵⁰ The rhetoric that Quintanilla utilized against the Axis was similar to language used during the Sleepy Lagoon incident. The only difference was that criminal behavior would prevent participation in the U.S. Armed Forces. He saw the Axis fifth column as the source of the riots.

Such speculation led to an investigation into determining the cause of the Zoot Suit Riots. Governor Earl Warren and Attorney General Robert W. Kenny created a Governor’s Committee who quickly met and reported on their findings, which they sought to make as objective as possible. The committee found that the problem was American youth and not one single ethnic or racial group. Zoot suiters were not specifically people of Mexican descent, criminals or juveniles. The committee instead saw the issue laying more in class and “slum surroundings.” If anything, the group believed that the press exaggerated the problems from the riots and that the guilty must be punished regardless of what clothes they wore, including the military. As for the sinarquistas, the Governor’s Committee found no influence at all. Carey McWilliams created a provisional committee of citizens to follow through on recommendations made by the

⁵⁰ “Watts Pastor Blames Riots on Fifth Column,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 1943.

Governor's Committee. These included the training of law enforcement to work with minority groups, establishing more correctional and detention facilities, as well as making sure that lawyers continued to protect the rights of youths arrested.⁵¹ The Governor's Committee saw the issue rooted in youth who grew up in poverty and not an internal enemy like the UNS.

Despite no proof, the California Un-American Activities Committee pushed forward for further investigations into the group in June 1943. State Senator Jack B. Tenney hoped to finish what he started in December of the previous year. His colleague, State Senator Hugh Burns, claimed that the committee learned of information that the UNS originated in Mexico under German influence.⁵² The California Un-American Activities Committee would either discover or put to rest such talk of sinarquista influence on juvenile criminal activity.

The committee convened on June 21 in Los Angeles' State Building with the leadership of the city's sinarquista regional committee, Pedro Villaseñor and Martín Cabrera, to look into such matters. Committee chairman Tenney singled out Villaseñor, who recently stepped down as the regional sinarquista chapter chief in April. Tenney questioned him about the organization, its leadership and its symbolism. The state senator pointedly asked Villaseñor if reports that the UNS was controlled by the Axis were true, and he said, "of course not," flatly denying any connections to international fascism. Tenney probed further about who oversaw the regional committee chiefs and Villaseñor said it was the UNS national committee president Manuel Torres Bueno and no one else, continuing to reject any notions of outside interference. Committee members kept quoting articles which characterized the sinarquistas as fascist and yet

⁵¹ "All Quiet on Zoot-Suit Front; Officials Consider Factors," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 16, 1943.

⁵² "Legislators Plan Zoot Suit Riot Inquiry Today," *Los Angeles Times*, June 21, 1943.

Villaseñor stood firm, rejecting such claims. He attributed all such attacks on the organization as stemming from communists.⁵³

The committee also questioned Villaseñor about how the UNS operated within the context of the U.S. and its impact on Mexican youth. Chief Counsel Richard E. Combs asked, “what is the objective, for instance, of your regions in California and Texas, if it is a nationalistic movement for Mexico?” Villaseñor replied that it was important to have “the moral support for the people of Mexico, they are working in the organization. And another thing, to bring to the American people the truth about what is going on over there [in Mexico].” As for numbers within California, he said that 400 existed in Southern California and not more than 800 resided within the entire state. He could not speak to sinarquista affairs in Texas or elsewhere in the U.S.⁵⁴ The numbers that he mentioned for California contrasted with the 50,000 that Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar noted earlier in the year, and therefore less of an internal threat that Californians once assumed. The hearing with Villaseñor ended with Tenney asking about the source of youth criminal activity. He attributed it not to the movement, but to “motion pictures – many of the boys that I know they take those things from the motion picture, especially the gangster picture they see in the show.”⁵⁵ By the end of his hearing, Villaseñor distanced himself

⁵³Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, Executive Session: Investigation into Matters Pertaining to Un-American and Subversive Activities, June 21, 1943, Box 30, Volume 17, California Un-American Activities Committees (CUAC) Records, California State Archives, Sacramento, California; “Sinarquist Head Denies Axis Influences Group,” *The Fresno Bee*, June 21, 1943; “Investigan el asuntos de los pachucos,” *La Opinión*, June 22, 1943; “Zoot Suit Problem Here Studied by Tenney Group,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1943.

⁵⁴ Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, Executive Session: Investigation into Matters Pertaining to Un-American and Subversive Activities, June 21, 1943, Box 30, Volume 17, CUAC Records, California State Archives; “Zoot Suit Problem Here Studied by Tenney Group,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1943.

⁵⁵ Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, Executive Session: Investigation into Matters Pertaining to Un-American and Subversive Activities, June 21, 1943, Box 30, Volume 17, CUAC Records, California State Archives.

and the UNS from any wrongdoing, whether being affiliated with the Axis or in encouraging Mexican criminal activity.

The next witness from the regional branch of the UNS to meet with the California Un-American Activities Committee was Martín Cabrera, the current sinarquista chief for Los Angeles. The committee proceeded to ask Cabrera similar questions as before in relation to committee structure, ideology and the movement's hierarchy. When asked about the role of the UNS in gang crime, he did not simply deny the group's involvement, but like Villaseñor, placed the blame on the communists. Cabrera explained how "it is almost a rule whenever they try to put the blame on somebody else, it is a general rule, because they have something themselves." In doing so, he provided the committee with an example from the *People's Daily World* that targeted the UNS. He also attributed such activity of Mexican youth as based in poverty. Cabrera explained that "it is deep rooted, but I think it is, I think it starts in the home. Most of the boys belong to poor families. They are poor families, the father and mother are poor people without any education, without any instruction worth while, so they have nothing to teach their children." When committee members asked about organizational symbolism relating to international fascist movements such as uniforms and armbands, Cabrera denied their use in Southern California. He also openly denied any association between the UNS and the Falange Española.⁵⁶ Cabrera, like Villaseñor, not only rejected the UNS as an Axis fifth column involved in the Zoot Suit Riots, but he placed the blame on communists.

⁵⁶ Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, Executive Session: Investigation into Matters Pertaining to Un-American and Subversive Activities, June 21, 1943, Box 30, Volume 17, CUAC Records, California State Archives; "Zoot Suit Problem Here Studied by Tenney Group," *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1943.

As with the California Un-American Activities Committee session in December 1942, the Tenney committee once again achieved the goal of tarnishing the image of local activists on the left. The committee continued to have a hearing on the sinarquistas and left-wing organizations in relation to the riots on June 22 and June 23. McWilliams turned over material on the sinarquistas which he gathered from a governmental agency. He denied an allegation from committee members that he was a communist. Herbert Ganahl, attorney and member of the National Lawyers Guild, described to the committee that he had a feeling that the Zoot Suit Riots were sinister and Axis-inspired. He believed that the UNS played a role in instigating because the movement was “fascistic” in tendency, yet he had no proof.⁵⁷ The reason why the UNS was under investigation by the committee in the first place was a result of reports by individuals largely on the left such as Josefina Fierro de Bright, Guy T. Nunn, and Carey McWilliams, however those proved naught. This only fed into State Senator Tenney’s anti-communism and the notion that communists sought to spread lies and dissension among Californians, and Americans more broadly.

Nonetheless, the sinarquistas still had a tarnished reputation by mid-1943. The notion that the UNS was a fascist internal enemy to the U.S. did not disappear. The U.S. press latched onto this idea for years, especially with the Sleepy Lagoon incident and Zoot Suit Riots. In *The New Republic*, Enrique L. Prado dedicated an entire piece to sinarquistas in the U.S. He believed that “sinarquismo, with its utopian program of prosperity and social peace for all, and its extremely nationalistic aspirations for the future of Mexico, is eminently suited to appeal to our

⁵⁷ “Zoot Clash Held Riot Safety Valve,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1943.

underprivileged Mexican minority.”⁵⁸ Another article by Ruth D. Tuck for *Survey Graphic*, argued that it was absolutely necessary to bring Mexicans into U.S. society. After reading UNS publications, she remarked how “I am inclined to feel that a deleterious effect on Mexican youth could result from UNS’s insistence on dividing the world into two hostile camps, Mexican and anti-Mexican, and their glorification of a rather shoddy virility for boys.”⁵⁹ Prado and Tuck reiterated prior rhetoric on the lack of incorporation of Mexicans into the U.S. More than a year after individuals like Sánchez, McWilliams and Fierro de Bright argued to the OCIAA that Mexicans in the U.S. were ignored and served as targets of the Axis, they believed that something still needed to be done. The UNS continued to serve as a specter haunting the country’s Mexican population.

The idea that the Unión Nacional Sinarquista was an Axis-aligned foe to the United States did not disappear even with several attempts by the group to portray otherwise. The setting of the “Mexican problem” and increasing repression with Sleepy Lagoon and the Zoot Suit Riots divided the Mexican population in the American Southwest. Politically liberal and leftist Mexicans turned the attention on the sinarquistas, who endured a targeted campaign against them. By mid-1943, they could not shake off the reputation of being a fifth column.

Sinarquistas and Conservative U.S. Catholics Push Back

Sinarquistas in the U.S. did what they could to respond to accusations that the UNS was not a fifth column, but in order for them to survive they needed to push back. Between 1941 and 1943, sinarquistas in conjunction with conservative American Catholics launched a public

⁵⁸ Enrique L. Prado, “Sinarquism in the United States,” *The New Republic*, July 19, 1943.

⁵⁹ Ruth D. Tuck, “Behind the Zoot Suit Riots,” *Survey Graphic*, August 1943.

relations campaign that was years in the making. The movement wanted to sway hearts and minds in the U.S. since the late 1930s and now amid growing pressure against the organization, it had to seize upon the opportunity. Together, both the UNS and conservative U.S. Catholics created their own material and wrote their own articles to clearly delineate what the group was. They kept their eye on negative press and any opportunity they had to shoot it down, they did. They even coordinated a sinarquista tour at college campuses to convince youth of sinarquismo's motives. This was the chance for the UNS to swing American public opinion in their favor, however the group faced limitations within the context of growing negative sentiment.

Conservative U.S. Catholics and the UNS Collaborate to Amplify the Sinarquistas' Message

Frank Gross, the lay Catholic German American "Sinarquista Gringo" in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, stayed steadfast in his loyalty to the UNS. The United States Department of State required him to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act because of his involvement with the organization. He registered under protest, explaining that he was not serving another country. Rather, Gross explained that "I feel that my friendship with certain gentlemen in Mexico and the resulting correspondence and favors are on the contrary to be classed as truly patriotic endeavors to promote international friendship which our government now is so strongly urging."⁶⁰ He believed that him and his voluntary work with the UNS was not undermining the security of the U.S. but rather strengthening it. Gross kept in regular contact with sinarquista leaders Carlos Fernández, José Neder Quiñones, and Antonio Santacruz in Mexico, doing everything he could from his home office to promote the organization. A critical component of his work was making UNS publications accessible to Americans. Gross and fellow Milwaukeean

⁶⁰ Letter from Frank Gross to the United States Department of State Division of Foreign Activity Correlation, May 20, 1942, Box 1, Folder 19, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

Reverend Ramón José Miller continued their translation work for the UNS, converting material from Spanish into English to be disseminated among Americans. They translated the organization's program summary, its sixteen points and its ten rules for sinarquista men and women.⁶¹ Gross aimed to extend the "correct" narrative of the UNS, whether through translation or dissemination of material, direct from its national leadership in Mexico City.

In his translation work, Gross made a point of making additions to the publications that directly related to the U.S., rather than keep them centered solely on Mexico. He made sure that the English-language material directly related to a U.S. audience.⁶² In addition to reiterating the movement's opposition of communism and fascism as well as a push for a Christian social order, the booklet laid out its role in the U.S. The document noted how "Sinarquism is loyally endeavoring to co-operate with the attitude and point of view of the United States and hopes, in turn, the United States will constantly keep in mind the position of Mexico, her traditions and the religious faith of her people."⁶³ However, he believed that these revised English-language publications were useless if they could not have an impact on a broad audience.

Gross thought that in order to sway more people towards the movement, the UNS and U.S. Catholic allies needed to reach out beyond their sphere of influence. He took it upon himself to contact both Catholic priests and Protestant pastors from across the U.S. from churches in Montana to Maryland. Upon further interest from the religious leaders, he followed

⁶¹ Letter from Frank Gross to José Neder Quiñones, April 1, 1942, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Letter from Frank Gross to José Neder Quiñones, May 21, 1942, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁶² Letter from Frank Gross to José Neder Quiñones, April 1, 1942, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁶³ "Sinarquistas Condemn Communism, And Deny Nazi or Totalitarian Leaning In Statement Of Policy," *El Paso Herald-Post*, August 22, 1942.

up by sending them the English-language material he helped create.⁶⁴ One individual that he contacted was the Reverend Charles S. McFarland, the executive secretary of the pan-Protestant movement, the Federated Council of the Churches of Christ in America. McFarland traveled to Mexico during the anti-clerical administration of Plutarco Elías Calles, hoping to ally with the president, but instead found himself disillusioned. As McFarland wrote *Chaos in Mexico* about the church-state conflict there, Gross hoped that he could “convert” him into becoming a supporter of the UNS. Gross was glad to hear back from McFarland about his interest in the movement.⁶⁵ The outreach to religious leaders like McFarland was just the beginning. Gross encouraged sinarquista chiefs in the Southwestern U.S. to disseminate the pamphlets even farther. With his aid, sinarquistas in the U.S. heeded this suggestion, contacting the chief editors of all leading magazines and newspapers, the chairs of college history departments, and selected public officials. The material reached all of these respective entities, however only a few actually gained traction with the select publication and promotion of the movement in metropolitan newspapers.⁶⁶ As Gross feared, word of sinarquismo stayed within Catholic circles.

⁶⁴ Letter from Frank Gross to Norbert Hoff, March 20, 1942, Box 1, Folder 4, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.; Letter from Frank Gross to Joseph Thorning, March 29, 1942, Box 1, Folder 4, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁶⁵ Letter from Frank Gross to José Neder Quiñones, March 20, 1942, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁶⁶ Together, Gross and sinarquista chiefs reached out to individuals including those at *El Paso Herald-Post*, *Inter-American Monthly*, Mount St. Mary’s College, *Newsweek*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Sign*. The material was published in the *El Paso Herald-Post*, *Inter-American Monthly*, and *The Sign*. Letter from Frank Gross to José Neder Quiñones, April 1, 1942, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Letter from Frank Gross to José Neder Quiñones, May 24, 1942, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; “Sinarquistas Condemn Communism, And Deny Nazi or Totalitarian Leaning In Statement Of Policy,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, August 22, 1942; Letter from José Neder Quiñones to Frank Gross, August 28, 1942, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Letter from Frank Gross to José Neder Quiñones, September 7, 1942, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

Although some U.S. Catholic priests came out in favor of the UNS in the past, more showed up during this period of deepening wartime scrutiny. One such individual was Reverend William Eugene Shiels, S.J., a writer for the Jesuit magazine, *America*. Shiels learned about the sinarquistas as a result of the support network that the NCWC established back in the late 1930s. In his article for the publication in April 1942, Shiels painted a favorable overview of the movement. He explained that “they are distinctly positive in their principles and in their activity, builders of a restored individual and national life rather than critics of their fellowmen” and how “they have had a pronounced effect on their people.” Shiels explained to his American Catholic readership how the organization gave new hope to Mexicans that a new profoundly Catholic society was possible in their country.⁶⁷ Shiels’ article was well-received. Gross read Shiels’ piece and absolutely loved it. He told him how “it is the first correct exposition of the movement that I have seen in any publication in this country.”⁶⁸ Sinarquista leadership even touted Shiels’ endorsement of the movement to its transnational readership in *El Sinarquista*. The paper’s editors Alfonso Trueba Olivares and José Neder Quiñones explained that amid negative U.S. press of the UNS that Shiels’ article was a shining light. They noted how the “article reveals the truth about Synarchism and its author expresses the sympathy that inspires him this great Mexican Popular Movement, whose virtues he appreciates and extols.” The editors even reprinted some of the piece in Spanish for its readership, particularly the portions that gave

⁶⁷ W. Eugene Shiels, “Mexicans Organize for a New Order,” *America*, April 18, 1942.

⁶⁸ Letter from Frank Gross to William Eugene Shiels, Box 1, Folder 16, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

nothing but praise of the group.⁶⁹ Therefore, Shiels' piece praising the UNS reached a broader audience that originally intended.

Support of the UNS among priests transcended religious orders. While the Jesuit Shiels supported the sinarquistas, so too did a Benedictine priest. Reverend Alcuin Heibel, O.S.B. of Mount Angel Abbey originally traveled to Mexico given his interest in agriculture, but by doing so, he learned about the UNS. Swayed by the Catholic ideals of the movement, Heibel took it upon himself to be a goodwill ambassador on behalf of sinarquismo in the U.S. and dispel any negative sentiments of the group. At the end of 1942, he expressed how "the radical or influential leftist elements in Mexico are fighting it desperately and accuse it of being everything anti-Mexican. The fact is that synarchism is a purely social movement headed in the direction of Christian democracy."⁷⁰ As with Gross, Heibel's interaction with sinarquistas themselves caused him to disseminate the "true" narrative of what sinarquismo was.⁷¹

Heibel believed that writing his own book on the movement, he would reach a wider audience in the U.S. than simply speaking to the press. His work, *Synarchism, "The Hope of Mexico's Poor,"* encapsulated an entirely positive message about the UNS. Heibel explained that "the purpose of this book is to picture to Americans the history of Mexico's present and

⁶⁹ The piece notes how "un artículo que da a conocer la verdad acerca del Sinarquismo y en el que su autor expresa la simpatía que le inspira este gran Movimiento Popular Mexicano, cuyas virtudes aprecia y exalta." "La Prensa honrada de los Estados Unidos sale en defensa del Sinarquismo," *El Sinarquista*, May 14, 1942.

⁷⁰ "Father Alcuin Makes Study of Synarchism," *The Capital Journal*, September 3, 1942.

⁷¹ Letter from Alcuin Heibel, O.S.B. to Abbot Alcuin, O.S.B., October 30, 1942, Mount Angel Abbey Library; "Sinarchism Defended by Priest; Magazine Article Denounced," *N.C.W.C. News Service*, January 18, 1943, Box 92, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Department of Immigration Records, 1920-1970, Center for Migration Studies.

encourage willingness to be understanding and helpful neighbors in Mexico's future."⁷² His book demonstrated his focus on agriculture. He laid out a history of Mexico from the colonial period to the contemporary moment, describing how "Indian peasants" were consistently disregarded and left at the bottom of Mexican society. He argued that only the sinarquistas could uplift the country's poor through private investment, rather than communal ejido land as implemented by the postrevolutionary state.⁷³ Ultimately, Heibel emphasized that the sinarquistas shared more in common with Americans than they might have been led to believe by the American media. He asserted that "the freedoms the synarchists are trying to get for their fellow Mexicans are the very ones we Americans treasure so highly: freedom of religion, education, speech and the freedom to organize for economic improvement, be it for the business-man, the laborer or farmer."⁷⁴ Reverend Heibel's book sought to dispel and push back against the notion that the sinarquistas were anti-American, but that they sought the support of average people in the U.S. with similar goals in life.

Although not a priest like Shiels or Heibel, John W. White was one such lay Catholic who also advocated for sinarquismo. The journalist found out about the organization as a result of Gross' outreach to media outlets earlier in the year.⁷⁵ His piece in the Catholic publication, *The Sign*, situated the sinarquistas within the context of the Mexican church-state conflict. He, like those before him, had a similar rosy view of the sinarquistas who would bring hope and

⁷² Alcuin Heibel, *Leaders in Mexican economic and social reform explain: synarchism, "the hope of Mexico's poor"* (Mount Angel: Mount Angel Abbey, 1943), 10.

⁷³ Heibel, 103-112.

⁷⁴ Heibel, 6.

⁷⁵ Letter from Frank Gross to José Neder Quiñones, April 1, 1942, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

balance back to the country. He claimed how “they plan to wipe out revolution in Mexico by improving the economic and social status of the agrarian masses and by making the members of this class better Mexicans, better democrats, and better men.”⁷⁶ White’s subsequent book, *Our Good Neighbor Hurdle*, continued to portray the sinarquistas as balancing out the situation in Mexico, pushing for Catholics whom the Mexican state persecuted to come back into political life. White also shared the notion that Gross previously pushed – that the UNS cooperated with the U.S.⁷⁷

The UNS and conservative American Catholics collaborated to create material beyond just the press. Film was an enormously popular way to reach the masses and the UNS utilized the medium as best as it could to its advantage. Daniel E. Doran of Los Angeles’ Catholic Film and Radio Guild showed documentary films in November 1942 to depict the activities of the Sinarquista movement. The guild hosted screenings to officials and civic organizations in the region to portray how the movement was pushing for “social justice” ideals in Mexico.⁷⁸ The films depicted the UNS as closing the gap between rich and poor, without resulting to the extremes of communism or fascism. This sinarquista material painted the group as rooted in Mexico, yet benevolent to the U.S.

Despite these concerted efforts, anti-sinarquismo gained momentum. The national press published nothing but negative content on the UNS into early 1943. *Time* argued how Falange Española-inspired Hispanidad pitted Latin Americans against the Good Neighbor Policy. The

⁷⁶ John W. White, “Mexico’s President and the Church,” *The Sign*, November 1942, Box 1, Folder 18, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁷⁷ John W. White, *Our Good Neighbor Hurdle* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1943).

⁷⁸ “Documentary Films of Mexico on Way,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1942.

publication drummed up fear in the sinarquistas as Nazi-inspired “Mexican blackshirts.”⁷⁹ Frank Gross was furious at *Time*, even contacting the magazine’s editors. He responded that “your January 11th article on the Synarchist movement in Mexico is such a thorough perversion of the truth that I challenge practically every statement in same.”⁸⁰ Gross was particularly upset as the sinarquistas could not shake off negative press, no matter how hard he tried. Yet, anti-UNS sentiment did not disappear. Writer and avid anti-fascist Anita Brenner described in *Harper’s* that the sinarquistas was a “peasant league based on ex-Cristeros, which says it defends religion, property, and the fatherland against bolshevisim (thus wrapping the Nazi-Franco formula in the Mexican flag).”⁸¹ Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar’s visit to the U.S. and denunciation of the group in March 1943 only made matters worse.

U.S. Catholic periodicals and writers continued to defend the group. The Jesuit publication, *America*, once again praised the movement. The editors argued how the UNS was not fascist as it taught and practiced freedom – such as freedom of religion – and worked to colonize barren lands in the northern Mexican state. They saw Díaz Escobar and the political left in Mexico as the “real” fascists as they actively engaged in suppressing the movement. The periodical’s editors also called out the U.S. government for prohibiting the transport of copies of *El Sinarquista* at the U.S.-Mexico border, but not that of other publications such as *Hoy*, *Excelsior* and *El Universal*.⁸² In the *Catholic Digest*, Reverend John O’Brien explained the

⁷⁹ “Mexican Blackshirts,” *Time*, January 11, 1943.

⁸⁰ Letter from Frank Gross to Editor of *Time*, January 12, Box 1, Folder 18, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁸¹ Anita Brenner, “The Wind That Swept Mexico: Part III – Mexico for the Mexicans,” *Harper’s Magazine*, January 1943.

⁸² “Who are Mexican Fascists?” *America*, April 3, 1943; “Strange Partiality,” *America*, April 24, 1943.

history and purpose of the UNS, completely denying that its connection to fascism. He gave nothing but support, arguing that “synarchism is, in the opinion of many, the hope of Mexico and the most promising means of enabling her to develop into a great democracy in accordance with the instincts, traditions, and genius of her people.”⁸³ The U.S. Catholic press showed unwavering support for sinarquismo, despite the period being particularly difficult for the organization.

Yet this was one of the multiple issues that Frank Gross saw in regards to the UNS public relation campaign in the U.S. He still viewed the promotion of the UNS as only within Catholic circles. For the counter-narrative truly to make an impact, it had to reach the secular press.⁸⁴ Additionally, the mainstream media continued to repeat anti-sinarquista talking points which consistently angered Gross. He was responsible for swaying U.S. media and could not help but feel as if he was failing. He encouraged the UNS national committee leadership to write up a series of refutations on what he considered were some of the “most dangerous accusations.” These included sinarquismo as pro-fascist, as anti-U.S., and as anti-Semitic.⁸⁵ The Catholic press had already took up these issues ad hoc, but the organization needed to be prepared with consistent speaking points for any and all media. The UNS leadership did come up with speaking points, but together with conservative U.S. Catholics, they determined it would be more advantageous to have sinarquistas explain the movement directly.

⁸³ John O’Brien, “Mexican Synarchism,” *Catholic Digest*, April, 1943, POBR 25/07, John A. O’Brien Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

⁸⁴ Letter from Frank Gross to Alcuin Heibel, March 27, 1943, Box 1, Folder 6, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁸⁵ Letter from Frank Gross to O.C. Alvarez, April 10, 1943, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives. O.C. Alvarez is a pseudonym for Antonio Santacruz.

Sinarquista Leaders Tour the U.S.

Also in the first half of 1943, leaders from the UNS national committee believed that such public relations via the press could only go so far, so they envisioned a sinarquista tour of college campuses in the U.S. The goal was to convince young adults, especially Mexican Americans and American Catholics, towards the movement and against the postrevolutionary Mexican state.⁸⁶ The group hoped that by continuing to stress a religious identity rather than a political one, the Americans they reached out to could both counteract negative publicity against the organization, as well as gain support of the U.S. government against the Mexican government.

Sinarquista leader Antonio Santacruz and Reverend Heibel drew up the idea of a tour. The plan was to have four sinarquista “students” visit the United States including Roberto Carriedo Rosales, Juan Ignacio Padilla, Alfonso Trueba Olivares, and Efrain Pardo. Juan Ignacio Padilla was a law student as well as the national director of colonization, supervising fundraising efforts for the sinarquista colonies in northern Mexico. Alfonso Trueba Olivares was a fellow law student, director of *El Sinarquista* and brother to José Trueba Olivares, directing the colony of Villa Kino in Sonora. Efrain Pardo was also a student – in medical school, however Roberto Carriedo Rosales was a professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico or UNAM). Santacruz and Heibel planned to have the four sinarquistas visit in February and over the course of January, they reached out to various Catholic university presidents to see if they expressed interest in hosting them. Among those who agreed were Reverend Hugh O’Donnell, C.S.C. of Notre Dame University, Reverend

⁸⁶ Letter from Alcuin Heibel to William F. Montavon, January 24, 1943, Box 72, Folder 3, USCCB Legal Department Files, CUA Archives.

William H. McCabe, S.J. of Rockhurst College and Reverend Robert I. Gannon, S.J. of Fordham University.⁸⁷ Santacruz and Heibel reached out to the NCWC's Montavon, however the issue was that the four visitors did not have an official sponsor for the trip and therefore could not come.⁸⁸

As Santacruz and Heibel worked out the travel logistics, the UNS had other individuals already based in the U.S. to represent the movement in the meantime. Two Notre Dame students from Mexico, Francisco Cabrera and Rafael Alducin, accompanied by the Reverend William F. Cunningham, C.S.C., spoke on panels about Latin American affairs to groups of college students in the Midwest. On March 19, La Santa Teresa club hosted a conversation centered on the contemporary problems of Mexico at Notre Dame. Alducin commented on the Mexican Constitution that resulted from the revolution, while Cabrera informed the group about the sinarquista movement.⁸⁹ Then, the two men traveled to Chicago under the auspices of the Notre Dame La Raza Club where they spoke at an assembly at a Catholic women's college, Mundelein College, in celebration of Pan-American Day in early April. Cabrera repeated his talk, outlining the sinarquista movement, "which is combatting Communism in Mexico."⁹⁰ Both campus newspapers, *The Notre Dame Scholastic* and *The Skyscraper*, framed these men as authorities of

⁸⁷Letter from Alcuin Heibel to William F. Montavon, January 24, 1943, Box 72, Folder 3, USCCB Legal Department Files, CUA Archives; Letter from Hugh O'Donnell to Brito Foucher, January 12, 1943, Box 72, Folder 3, USCCB Legal Department Files, CUA Archives; Letter from William H. McCabe to Rodolfo Britto Foucher, January 18, 1943, USCCB Legal Department Files, CUA Archives; Letter from Robert I. Gannon to Rodolfo Britto Foucher, January 25, 1943, USCCB Legal Department Files, CUA Archives.

⁸⁸ Letter from William F. Montavon to Alcuin Heibel, February 12, 1943, Box 72, Folder 3, USCCB Legal Department Files, CUA Archives.

⁸⁹ "South, Central American Affairs Held at Panel," *The Notre Dame Scholastic*, March 19, 1943.

⁹⁰ "Latin American Students Tell of Own Lands," *The Skyscraper*, April 2, 1943.

Latin America, depoliticizing their particular perspectives and the political project they were advancing with their remarks.

The federal government found out about and expressed skepticism about these public talks and the planned tour on *sinarquismo*. Analysts of the Military Intelligence Division of the Department of War did not find it surprising that the UNS would receive support from U.S. Catholic leaders and visit Catholic schools. They also realized that such efforts existed in light of criticism, particularly from Díaz Escobar.⁹¹ The Military Intelligence Division staff did not advocate to prohibit the tour, however they were wary about the effects of proselytizing, surveilling such efforts.

By April, Santacruz and Heibel secured a sponsor for Carriedo Rosales, Pardo, Padilla, and Trueba Olivares to tour the U.S. Bishop Edwin V. O'Hara of Kansas City, Missouri agreed to be the sponsor of the trip. Coincidentally just a month before, he founded the Inter-American Institute for the purpose of interpreting Latin America to the U.S. He sought to promote "a better understanding among the nations of the Western Hemisphere on the basis of their Christian tradition." O'Hara emphasized the importance of religion, believing that Americans did not respect the Catholic identity of Latin Americans. He too expressed concern that Latin Americans thought that Americans were atheistic and lacking morals. The institute sponsored such activities as exchange of professors and students, lecture tours and promotion of travel. Among the individuals that he consulted were Reverend Luigi Ligutti who supported the institute on rural matters and Reverend Hugh O'Donnell, C.S.C. of Notre Dame University who provided knowledge on scholastic matters. Bishop Joseph Schlarmann contributed one thousand dollars

⁹¹ War Department, Military Intelligence Division, "Sinarquistas," April 28, 1943, Box 13, RG 319, NARA.

towards the project.⁹² O'Hara's Inter-American Institute was the U.S. Catholic answer to the President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. The OCIAA, in particular, appeared to be swayed by individuals such as Carey McWilliams and Josefina Fierro de Bright. Rather than a secular pan-Americanism based on bringing together the Americas around democracy, O'Hara's institute sought to unite the Western Hemisphere via a shared religious identity of Catholicism. As a result of the institute, the four sinarquistas began their tour of the U.S., showing Americans how they were organizing to bring Catholic religious life back to Mexico.

The men began their tour in the Midwest, speaking to college audiences as well as U.S. Catholic leaders. The four sinarquistas first visited Bishop O'Hara's institute as well as Rockhurst College in Kansas City. Shortly thereafter, they made their way to St. Louis. At Saint Louis University, they lectured on sinarquismo and answered questions at an open forum.⁹³ The men then went to Chicago and onward to South Bend, Indiana. They held an assembly with a large group of students and faculty at the University of Notre Dame and St. Mary's College. The men articulated that sinarquismo was attempting to bring Catholicism and a "real democratic order" to Mexico. Efraim Pardo spoke to the crowd, explaining that "we seek no fame, nor power or wealth, but only to bring happiness to our country by restoring a Christian brotherhood." Pardo addressed the accusations by Díaz Escobar and others that the group was fascist. He argued that "because like some leftist groups we use a salute and sing songs an American

⁹² The quote is from an Inter-American Institute pamphlet. Timothy Michael Dolan, *Some Seed Fell on Good Ground: The Life of Edwin V. O'Hara* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1939), 209-210.

⁹³ "Mexican students lectured on their country," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 1, 1943; "Regresaron a México el Prof. Roberto Carredo y Tres Estudiantes," *La Prensa*, April 24, 1943.

magazine has called us fascists. This is like saying birds sing, girls sing, and therefore birds are girls.”⁹⁴ The men appealed to the Catholicism of their young college-aged audience. They provided their take on the situation in Mexico, rejecting the narrative that was being circulated in major U.S. news outlets. The men concluded their trip in the Midwest in Central Illinois, in Champaign and then Peoria where they met with Bishop Schlarmann, one of the institute’s benefactors.⁹⁵

The four sinarquistas then continued onward to the east and south. They visited Loyola University in New Orleans, heading onward to Washington, D.C. In the U.S. capital, the men kept busy attending a variety of events in the city including talks at Georgetown University and the Catholic University of America, as well as at a luncheon hosted by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, who focused on religious education towards youth. From Washington, D.C., the men traveled to New York where they spoke at Fordham University in New York and then finally wrapped up their trip in San Antonio.⁹⁶ The Reverend John L. Morkovsky of the Archdiocese of San Antonio accompanied the men as went to several Catholic schools in the city where they spoke to students about the movement. The visiting sinarquistas even made their way to the offices of the conservative, Catholic-sympathizing newspaper, *La Prensa*.⁹⁷ They worked to disseminate the organization’s message as much as possible, especially to those who would be

⁹⁴ “Mexico Student Relates Synarchist Movement Aims,” *The South Bend Tribune*, April 9, 1943; “Regresaron a México el Prof. Roberto Carredo y Tres Estudiantes,” *La Prensa*, April 24, 1943.

⁹⁵ “Bishop’s Visitors from Mexico,” *The Catholic Advance*, April 16, 1943.

⁹⁶ Letter from Cofraternity of Christian Doctrine to Sarah Waedick, April 8, 1943, Box 92, NCWC, Department of Immigration Records, 1920-1970, CMS; Letter from Bruce M. Mohler to Miriam Marks, April 9, 1943, Box 92, NCWC, Department of Immigration Records, 1920-1970, CMS; Letter from Sarah Waedick to Mr. Mohler, April 15, 1943, Box 92, NCWC, Department of Immigration Records, 1920-1970, CMS; “Regresaron a México el Prof. Roberto Carredo y Tres Estudiantes.” *La Prensa*, April 24, 1943.

⁹⁷ “Regresaron a México el Prof. Roberto Carredo y Tres Estudiantes.” *La Prensa*, April 24, 1943.

receptive. While the tour largely focused on Catholic students, the men made a point of utilizing sympathetic media as much as possible. By the end of April, the four sinarquistas wrapped up their tour heading back home to Mexico.

Not everyone took kindly to the tour, including Hispanics in other parts of the United States. O'Hara's Inter-American Institute and the UNS portrayed the visit of the four sinarquistas as a goodwill tour bridging Mexico and the U.S. Outlets like *Pueblos Hispanos* – a Spanish-language paper based out of New York – communicated quite the opposite. The paper communicated to its readership that elements of the U.S. Catholic Church were complicit in promoting the propaganda of the “pro-Hitler” agents. According to Mexican Deputy Cesar Garizurieta of Díaz Escobar's Comité Nacional Antinazifascista, whom the publication interviewed, such a tour was “an act of treason to the motherland and of disorientation for democratic Americans.”⁹⁸

Both the sinarquistas' public relations campaign and its U.S. tour were large in theory and yet they had their limitations in practice. The Unión Nacional Sinarquista saw that negative sentiment was only increasing and hoped to push back. Frank Gross dreamed up a massive campaign not only to influence the press, but also those in academia and government. Catholic outlets picked up on sinarquismo and defended the movement, yet it was too late for the rest as those opposing the movement had the upper hand. The tour similarly focused too much on the Catholic sphere of influence. Although the organization gained some supporters along the way, the delayed counter-attack appeared to be nothing but a response to the Sleepy Lagoon incident and Zoot Suit Riots.

⁹⁸ “Agentes de propaganda sinarquista recorren los Estados Unidos,” *Pueblos Hispanos*, June 19, 1943.

Conclusion

The period between the end of 1941 and mid-1943 was the beginning of the end of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista in the United States. The onset of total war in the U.S. united various forces around the war effort. The group, which already had a reputation of being associated with international fascism, became the subject of attacks through a series of upheavals in the city of Los Angeles. The sinarquistas in conjunction with conservative U.S. Catholics attempted to develop a public relations campaign and tour of the U.S. to dispel allegations that the movement had ties to the Axis. The limited scope of both towards predominantly Catholics and the lateness of such efforts prevented the UNS from shaking off the reputation of being an internal enemy within the nation.

While this period was the beginning of the end for the Unión Nacional Sinarquista, the movement faced a multi-decade downfall between 1943 and the mid-1960s. Overwhelming negative sentiment built up against the organization as a fascist fifth column. Opponents on the political and in the press denounced the group even more than before, which the United States government took note of implementing further investigations and censorship. Catholics also started to turn their backs on the organization, denouncing sinarquismo. These factors combined with an internal split in the movement led to its eventual decline in the United States.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISSOCIATION FROM SINARQUISMO – 1943-1966

If anyone will study the Sinarquista movement thoroughly he will learn that since its organization six years ago the members have constantly preached not only internal unity and peace but also strongly advocated mutual respect and friendly relations with foreign nations, particularly with our country. In the fact, the Sinarquistas go farther by insisting that it is the moral duty of the Mexicans to love us, maintaining that the precept of loving one's neighbor applies not only to individuals but also to nations.¹

Frank Gross, the “Sinarquista Gringo” of Milwaukee, Wisconsin responded directly to the growing backlash against the Unión Nacional Sinarquista in the *Milwaukee Journal* in July 1943. In the aftermath of the Sleepy Lagoon incident and Zoot Suit Riots and in the middle of World War II, the press, political left, and the governments of both the United States and Mexico largely saw the UNS as a fascist threat. Gross countered that the movement did not prove to be an enemy, but rather that the organization was an ally. According to him, the UNS wanted peace within Mexico and between Mexico and the U.S. Such defense of the sinarquistas proved to be too little, too late by mid-1943. The reputation of the UNS as a fifth column did not disappear, and internal issues within the group made matters worse. The sinarquistas were in decline.

During the remainder of World War II from July 1943 to the end of the war in September 1945, a battle ensued between supporters and detractors of sinarquismo. The sinarquistas distanced themselves from recent events by publicly embracing people of different races and ethnicities. Committees in the U.S. maintained their activities, working to bring even more

¹ Frank Gross, Letter to the Editor: “Teaching Mexico to Love Us,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 26, 1943, Box 1, Folder 10, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

people into the movement. Despite such efforts by the sinarquistas and allies to combat negative sentiment in the midst of the war, the opposition persisted and reached a peak in 1944. Former American Catholic allies openly withdrew their support for the movement.

From 1945 to 1966, the Cold War in conjunction with a split within the organization hastened its decline. Anti-communism became more mainstream than ever before. The group therefore stood out less than before to potential new members. Within the UNS, disagreement about the direction of the movement led to two transnational factions that maintained members in the U.S. The principal group oriented towards electoral politics, whereas the dissident organization focused more on religion and social matters. By the early 1950s, both were losing members and the division disappeared. Some Mexicans still identified as sinarquistas in the U.S. by the mid-1960s, but the UNS fell into disarray.

During this roughly two-decade span of time, sinarquistas in the United States faced a long downfall. External plus internal factors ultimately brought the movement to its end in the country. Continued attacks on the Unión Nacional Sinarquista combined with the internal split in the organization and the co-optation of its anti-communism in mainstream politics led to the eventual demise of sinarquismo in the United States.

Wartime and the Continued Debate Over the UNS as a Fascist Enemy

The Sleepy Lagoon incident of August 1942 and the Zoot Suit Riots of June 1943 firmly placed the UNS as an internal threat in the eyes of Americans. The opposition to the UNS painted the movement as having ties to European-based fascism and therefore sinarquistas residing in the U.S. were traitors undermining the war effort. In the years that followed, sinarquistas and allies sought to shake off the notoriety that they gained over time. Despite such efforts, the stigma did not go away, but was instead amplified.

Sinarquistas Negotiating the Aftermath of the Zoot Suit Riots

The official organ of the UNS, *El Sinarquista*, did not stay silent in the aftermath of the Zoot Suit Riots, seeking to distance the movement from accusations that it was instigating violence during World War II. Editors Alfonso Trueba Olivares and José Neder Quiñones launched a campaign pairing an anti-racist stance alongside one against fascism. In the months that followed the riots in June 1943, they published a series of articles denouncing what took place as an attack on persecuted races. In a piece on July 1, Trueba Olivares and Neder Quiñones wrote how “there are many in the United States who have racial hatreds, hatred that has manifested itself in the recent riots in Los Angeles.” In contrast, they framed the sinarquistas as supporting equality of races and that “Jews, blacks, Indians, or mixed race peoples deserve protection.” The editors therefore contended that the sinarquistas were anti-Nazi as they did not believe in the persecution of Jewish people.² In another article on July 15, Trueba Olivares and Neder Quiñones spoke out against negative U.S. press about sinarquismo, particularly from journalist Betty Kirk. They argued that the UNS was not a fifth column who fueled Mexican youth criminal activity. Instead, the editors reiterated that the sinarquistas always protested against racial discrimination and German Nazism.³ *El Sinarquista*’s editors Trueba Olivares moved away from the anti-Semitism and racially-tinged language featured in the publication some years before.

² The article in *El Sinarquista* noted that “Hay en Norteamerica muchos que tienen odios raciales, odios que se han manifestado en los recientes disturbios de Los Angeles.” It also mentioned that “Judíos, negros, indios o mestizos merecen protección.” “Aqui no Debe Haber Razas Perseguidas,” *El Sinarquista*, July 1, 1943.

³ “Los Sinarquistas son Tres Millones de Indios Analfabetas y Fanáticos,” *El Sinarquista*, July 15, 1943.

Although the Southern California regional sinarquista committee in Los Angeles, California received a considerable amount of attention in 1942 and 1943 because of the bouts of violence, the El Paso, Texas regional committee was the hub of sinarquismo in the U.S. The UNS national committee in Mexico City led by sinarquista president Manuel Torres Bueno designated the chapter with its chief, Ramón L. Ramírez, as the main point of contact. In the hierarchical tradition of the UNS, Ramírez transmitted instructions to lower committees, making sure that they followed through, and then he reported back to leaders in Mexico City about progress in the respective chapters. The El Paso regional committee also served as the distribution source for *El Sinarquista* and other printed materials including *16 Points of the Sinarquist Doctrine*, *Sinarchism: Summary of its Program*, *Viva México (Long Live Mexico)*, *México en 1960 (Mexico in 1960)*, *Canciones Sinarquistas (Sinarquista Songs)*, *The Mexican Scene*, and *Sinarquismo es la única salvación de México (Sinarquismo is the only salvation of Mexico)*.⁴

UNS committee leaders elsewhere did not lose sight of growing the movement within the U.S. Chief J.M. Gómez of the local San Diego, California chapter sought to create more committees in the region, particularly closer to the border with Tijuana, Baja California. He toured the nearby communities of National City and Bonita, talking to Mexicans that resided there, seeking to convert them to sinarquismo. Gómez connected with fellow Mexicans from Jalisco, bonding over their home state, as well as longing to return.⁵ Sinarquistas in the U.S. like

⁴ United States Department of Justice, *Report of the Attorney General to the Congress of the United States on the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, as amended to the period of June 28, 1942 to December 31, 1944*, June 1945, 391-392.

⁵ "Noticias de Toda la República," *El Sinarquista*, June 24, 1943.

Gómez aimed to expand the organization and build upon the pre-existing transnational Mexican community in the country.

As such, sinarquista committees in the U.S. continued to foster a particular Mexican nationalism through the movement. One of these ways was through maintaining a cult of martyrdom to members that gave their lives. *El Sinarquista* described how the San Diego municipal committee under Chief Gómez “organized several events in memory of those who knew how to give their lives in the struggle for the rule of justice in this country.” In places like San Diego, “Mexico is loved as much or more within its borders, as outside of them.”⁶ By participating in rituals to honor the fallen in Mexico, sinarquistas sustained a tie to their home country although they lived in the U.S. Sinarquistas also kept supporting the sinarquista colonies in Northern Mexico in María Auxiliadora, Baja California Sur and Villa Kino, Sonora. In California, sinarquistas in the Bakersfield, Fresno, Pittsburg, Richmond, La Verne, Los Angeles, Oxnard, Pomona, San Diego, and San Fernando committees donated to the colonization effort. In Texas, members in the Edinburg, El Paso, McAllen, Milla, and Ysleta committees also worked to sustain the colonies through donations.⁷ Collectively, these activities kept sustaining the movement and its ties to Mexico.

⁶ The newspaper noted that “los sinarquistas organizaron varios actos en memoria de quienes supieron dar la vida de la lucha por el imperio de la justicia de esta Patria.” It added how “Se ama tanto o más a México dentro de sus fronteras, como fuera de ellas.” “Noticias de Toda la República,” *El Sinarquista*, August 12, 1943.

⁷ “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, July 1, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, July 8, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, July 15, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, August 5, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, August 19, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, September 2, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, September 9, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, September 23, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, October 21, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, October 28, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, November 18, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, November 25, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, December 2, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, December 9, 1943; “Donativos para la Colonizacion,” *El Sinarquista*, December 30, 1943.

Frank Gross of Milwaukee, Wisconsin did not let up on his commitment to the movement either. He remained in correspondence with UNS leaders, as well as continued to work to sway the public narrative in favor of the movement. Gross proclaimed that “I am just another voice in the wilderness crying for justice for the Sinarquistas.” He noted that “I receive no salary or any compensation whatsoever – spend my money for postage, magazines, etc. – take no orders from anybody, but do as I please as a free agent.”⁸ Because of his dedication to the Mexican migrant community in Milwaukee – and conservative Catholicism – Gross maintained his involvement with sinarquismo.

The Opposition to Sinarquismo Persists

However, negative media around the UNS only grew on the heels of the Zoot Suit Riots, reiterating the notion that the movement was an internal enemy to the U.S. Journalists like Allan Chase perpetuated the depiction of the organization as a fascist threat. Chase argued that Franco’s Spain was orchestrating the spread of fascism across the Americas, but did so in much more extensive detail than past writers like Betty Kirk. His book, *Falange: The Axis Secret Army in the Americas*, documented the activities of the Falange Española in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Venezuela, Argentina, and Mexico to undermine the U.S. Chase argued that sinarquistas José and Alfonso Trueba Olivares, respectively the head of the Villa Kino colony and editor of *El Sinarquista*, were both members of the Falange. He believed that if Spain survived the war as a purveyor of fascism, the Americas would be extremely vulnerable with the roots that the Falange planted throughout the region.⁹ Chase described that within the U.S., the UNS was calling for its

⁸ Letter from Frank Gross to William Eugene Shiels, November 18, 1943, Box 1, Folder 16, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁹ Allan Chase, *Falange: The Axis Secret Army in the Americas* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s, 1943).

members to sacrifice their lives and give up their blood on behalf of the movement. Mexicans were to dedicate themselves to the movement and not in war activities such as civilian defense or the American Red Cross. He was convinced that the group attempted to bring about division within Mexicans in the U.S.¹⁰

Fellow journalist Selden Cowles Menefee similarly latched onto the idea of the UNS as a tool of the Axis in a piece in *The Washington Post*. He wrote that the group was a “Fascist movement which has worked closely with the Nazis.”¹¹ Menefee elaborated on the idea in his book, *Assignment U.S.A.*, situating the sinarquistas in the midst of home front during World War II. He described the UNS as a “religious-fascist Sinarquist movement of old Mexico” working with both the Nazis and Falange Española in making “some headway in the lower Rio Grande district.” Menefee argued that not only did the sinarquistas organize along the U.S.-Mexico border, but that they organized “among disgruntled Mexicans in Los Angeles,” making a reference to the incidents earlier in the year.¹² He firmly echoed the idea that the sinarquistas had ties to European-based fascism as other journalists had in the past, all the while adding on the layer of them as instigating domestic disturbances.

Conservative American Catholics maintained their support of the UNS and even responded to journalists like Menefee. Paul Dearing, the director of the Bureau of Information for the NCWC, took on a role similar to what Frank Gross had done by providing counter-arguments against negative sinarquista press. He responded to Menefee in *The Washington Post*,

¹⁰ Chase, 174-175.

¹¹ Paul Dearing, “Letters to the Editor: Pro-Sinarquista,” *The Washington Post*, July 25, 1943.

¹² Selden Cowles Menefee, *Assignment U.S.A.* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, Inc., 1943), 185 and 187.

articulating that “Sinarquista is a social movement offering a genuine hope of self-government to Mexicans.” He denied Menefee’s connection between the UNS and fascism, arguing that “Sinarquista is as anti-Fascist as our own Republican Party” and that the “Sinarquistas want no outside totalitarian doctrines interfering with Mexican life.” He believed that “they are not interested in Spanish falangism.”¹³ As opposed to Menefee, Dearing attempted to articulate that the sinarquistas were not fascists.

Dearing did not only respond to Menefee, but to Lloyd Mallan from the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America, Inc. The committee formed in 1926 by a group of scholars who sought for Pan-American unity across the hemispheres. Mallan described the UNS in the world affairs publication, *Current History*, as “a strong anti-United States, pro-Axis political organization.” He depicted the sinarquistas as among Mexican populations in the United States, with their stronghold in Los Angeles. According to Mallan, “the Sinarquistas are now more active than ever, spreading disorganization and confusion among the Mexican people, taking advantage of every traditional prejudice, United States as well as Mexican.”¹⁴ He seized upon much of the rhetoric of the press during the Sleepy Lagoon incident and Zoot Suit Riots. Dearing read the piece, to which he countered that Mallan was disseminating communist “misinformation.” He argued that “certainly the fact that the Sinarchists have often and openly condemned communism and other totalitarian doctrines should go a long way toward explaining the anti-Sinarchist propaganda of Leftist groups in the United States.”¹⁵ While Mallan declared

¹³ Paul Dearing, “Letters to the Editor: Pro-Sinarquista,” *The Washington Post*, July 25, 1943.

¹⁴ Lloyd Mallan, “Axis Propaganda in Latin America,” *Current History*, September 1943: 37-38.

¹⁵ Paul Dearing, “Letter to the Editor: Synarchism in Mexico,” *Current History*, November 1943.

that the UNS was pro-Axis, Dearing defended the movement, essentially writing him off as a communist sympathizer.

Reverend William Eugene Shiels, S.J. similarly defended the group as he had earlier in 1942, trying not only to decouple *sinarquismo* from fascism, but to demonstrate members as exceptional Mexicans in the context of the U.S. Shiels wrote in *America* magazine that “no one thinks them interested in or capable of causing us any political embarrassment.” He believed that “without a doubt, the *Unión* exists primarily to better the status of those within Mexico. It is a *Unión Nacional*, not an *Internationale*. But its purposes have not the least aim to injure or offend the United States.” Shiels did his best to situate the UNS as a progress-driven nationalist movement, and not an internationalist one being controlled by European fascism. He instead considered *sinarquismo* as “the embodiment of the best Mexican ideals.” Shiels argued that:

We have, of course, many other Mexicans of a different character, men who have come here for profit for their careers. Some few of these, from motives of attachment to ideas other than those of their native country, find severe fault with the Sinarquistas. These few are rarely Catholics, a sure line of division when we meet those who come from below the Rio Grande. Sinarquistas are frankly Catholic, and the division never fails to raise fires of contention when it is aired in public.¹⁶

He believed that the *sinarquistas* were morally sound as opposed to other Mexicans who were after their own interests. Both Dearing and Shiels questioned the prevailing reputation of the *sinarquistas* and attempted to insert a different perspective into the public discourse.

The leadership of the Mexican Catholic Church, alternatively, was distancing itself from the *sinarquistas* because of its supposed connection to fascist politics. Archbishop of Mexico City Luis María Martínez said that the Mexican Catholic Church did not have any ties to political parties. The archbishop specifically noted that the Church was not linked to pro-Catholic

¹⁶ William Eugene Shiels, “Left-wing Smear Hits Sinarquistas,” *America*, August 14, 1943.

movements such as the PAN or the UNS. He stated that “the aim of the church is to remain in the spiritual field.” Instead of politics, Archbishop Martínez claimed that “the Catholic church in Mexico is disposed to collaborate sincerely and efficiently with the civil government for the good of the country in the field which corresponds to its mission.”¹⁷ While many conservative U.S. Catholics were not losing sight of its support for sinarquismo, the Mexican Catholic leadership announced its public denunciation of the movement.

Beyond the press, the U.S. federal government sought to look deeper into who the sinarquistas really were. The United States Department of State ordered William F. Blocker, the American Consul General of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico to travel to Los Angeles to engage with local, state, and Mexican government officials in the city. From the Mexican Consulate of Los Angeles, he interviewed Adolfo de la Huerta, Alfredo Calles, and Ernesto Romero, whom believed that the incidents arose from the lack of enough state and county facilities for juvenile correction. They believed that this allowed the sinarquistas as Axis propagandists to take advantage of gangs. When Blocker reviewed U.S. Naval Intelligence Office material on the riots, he thought otherwise. The office reported how the sinarquistas “were for Mexico first, last and always, and were opposed to giving any aid to either the Axis or the United Nations.” Instead, Blocker looked into how the American political left, including El Congreso, targeted the sinarquistas. He believed that El Congreso’s Josefina Fierro de Bright spread the rumor that Axis powers were involved in the riots. Upon his collection of evidence, Blocker came to the

¹⁷ “Church’s stand in Mexico,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 1943; United States Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, “Church Does Not Support Sinarquismo,” *BBC*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report, December 8, 1943.

conclusion at the end of his investigation in Los Angeles that he did not “believe that the Sinarquista element had any connection with the affair.”¹⁸

Despite this one State Department-produced report, the U.S. government as a whole was still wary of sinarquismo and kept up its surveillance of the UNS as a threat in the midst of global war. Its concerns came from mounting pressure towards censoring the movement even more than before. The wartime United States Office of Censorship maintained its inspection and ban of any sinarquista material, especially of *El Sinarquista*, en route to the U.S. The House of Representatives worked towards imposing stricter censorship upon material. Milton N. Kemnitz, Executive Secretary of the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties provided a testimony to Congress, denouncing “organized bigotry” along the lines of groups like the sinarquistas. He argued how:

In some sections of the country, the victims of race and religious hatred are Mexicans and Catholics. In the South the Ku Klux Klan has long carried on a campaign against the Catholics and in the Southwest such a campaign has been waged against the Mexicans by the Sinarquist movement. Like Hitler’s Nazis, these native Fascist movements seize upon any latent local prejudice and fan it into disruption and violence.¹⁹

Pressure for censoring sinarquismo did not simply come from the fear of a fifth column within the U.S., but also from politicians in the Mexican government. El Comité por la Defensa de la República Mexicana (The Committee for the Defense of the Mexican Republic) also urged the House of Representatives to ban *El Sinarquista* as the paper called the Chilean Embassy in Mexico a center of communist activity, and therefore harmed another country in the Western

¹⁸ William F. Blocker, “Zoot Suit Disturbances in Los Angeles, California,” PSF: Office of Strategic Services: Donovan Reports, Mexico, 1943, Box 163, RG 226, NARA.

¹⁹ United States House of Representatives Subcommittee of the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, *Declaring Certain Papers, Books, Pictures, and Writings Nonmailable*, November 15 and 16, 1943, 46.

Hemisphere.²⁰ Censorship of sinarquista material did indeed persist because of such efforts, however that still did not fully prevent *El Sinarquista* or UNS pamphlets from being disseminated, and therefore read.²¹

The United States Department of Justice also continued to monitor the organization as it had in the past. The department tracked FARA registrations that representatives of sinarquismo in the U.S. had to complete since 1940 for “engaging in propaganda activities” for foreign agents. The Justice Department required representatives of sinarquismo to file an initial registration statement, and then one every six months thereafter. Registration required basic contact information, as well as organizational background, finances, and activities.²² Among those registered included Ramón L. Ramírez, who registered as the spokesperson for sinarquismo in the U.S., with the regional sinarquista committees of McAllen, Los Angeles, and Bakersfield and the respective local chapters beneath them. The Justice Department noted all the names of Mexican leaders in these various locations, as well as Frank Gross in Milwaukee. The department also expressed interest in the publications either being produced or disseminated in the context of the U.S.²³

²⁰ United States Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts, October 27, 1943; United States Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts, November 30, 1943.

²¹ Frank Gross described how he had friends in Northern Mexico and El Paso, Texas successfully send him copies of sinarquista publications. Letter from Frank Gross to William Eugene Shiels, September 8, 1943, Box 1, Folder 16, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

²² Frank Gross kept his initial FARA registration and every renewal between 1942 and 1949. See Box 1, Folder 19, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

²³ United States Department of Justice, *Report of the Attorney General to the Congress of the United States on the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, as amended to the period of June 28, 1942 to December 31, 1944*, June 1945, 386-391.

Sinarquistas in the U.S. used the registrations as a sign of legitimacy that the U.S. government officially recognized the presence of committees. The El Paso regional sinarquista committee continually placed a stamp on *El Sinarquista* and other organizational materials that it disseminated. The stamped note read: “Registered in Washington, D.C. dated May 31 Under No. 123.”²⁴ However, the Justice Department outright denied the assumption that the government sanctioned the movement. The department mandated the El Paso committee to change their wording, explicitly including this statement in its place: “A copy of this has been filed with the U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. where the registration statement filed by the Sinarquist Regional Committee of El Paso, Texas, as an agent of Union Nacional Sinarquista in Mexico, is available for public inspection. The fact of registration should not be considered as approval by the U. S. Government of the contents of this material”²⁵ FARA approval was not a sign of government approval of the UNS, but rather an indication that the Justice Department had an eye on the group.

The department’s FBI utilized FARA registrations in an extensive report that the agency issued on the UNS in mid-1943. The FBI listed all of the sinarquista committees throughout California, Texas and Chicagoland, noting as well plans for future chapters in Colton, California and Phoenix, Arizona. The agency pushed back against numbers proposed by anti-sinarquista Mexican Deputy Alfredo Félix Díaz Escobar, who claimed earlier in the year that there were

²⁴ The stamp read: “Registrada en Washington, D.C. con fecha 31 de Mayo Bajo el No. 123.” Letter from Chester T. Lane to Ramón L. Ramírez, August 30, 1943, Box 72, Folder 3, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

²⁵United States Department of Justice, *Report of the Attorney General to the Congress of the United States on the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, as amended to the period of June 28, 1942 to December 31, 1944*, June 1945, 21; Letter from Chester T. Lane to Ramón L. Ramírez, August 30, 1943, Box 72, Folder 3, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

50,000 sinarquistas in California alone. Instead, the FBI cited that based upon its investigation, there were no more than 700 members in the United States. Not only were the numbers low, but the agency noted that despite plans to open new committees, that there was a decline in sinarquista activity in the country. The FBI attributed the diminishing membership to the lack of appeal to the Mexican working-class community, as well as due to the continued prohibition of the mailing of *El Sinarquista* by the Office of Censorship. Similar to William F. Blocker's report for the State Department, the bureau did not find any evidence that the Falange Española or Nazi Germany used the UNS as a puppet nor that sinarquismo was a fifth column to the U.S.²⁶ Nonetheless, the FBI articulated that the militant nationalist organization was still worth observing as to future reports showed otherwise.

The United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS), like the FBI, also had an interest in the UNS. The office formed during World War II in 1942 under the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Department of War, replacing the Office of the Coordinator of Information. The department centralized intelligence activities, including that on the sinarquistas. By 1943, the OSS mapped the transnational nature of the organization, including all of the chapters and colonies in both Mexico and the U.S. OSS maps noted railroad and highway routes linking the various bases of sinarquismo in the two countries. In the U.S., the office documented committees in California, New Mexico, Texas, Illinois, and Indiana. The OSS in particular showed a concentration of sinarquista activity in and around Los Angeles, spanning Los Angeles, Ventura, and San Bernardino Counties.²⁷ Much of the information either came from FARA registrations or from *El*

²⁶ United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Union Nacional Sinarquista*, July 1943, 15-21, 10b, Box 23, Folder Union Nacional Sinarquista, FDR Library.

²⁷ United States Office of Strategic Services, Centers of Sinarquismo in Mexico, G4411.F81 1943 .U5, University of Chicago Map Collection, The Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago; United States Office of Strategic

Sinarquista as part of its regular documentation of committee activities.²⁸ The department at once demonstrated the widespread reach of the UNS in the U.S., while also showing its vast influence throughout Southern California.

As the OSS monitored the activities of U.S. *sinarquistas* in *El Sinarquista*, the office also obtained and read the organization's other publication, *Orden*, as well. The UNS started producing *Orden* the previous year in 1942 and the government similarly used information from the periodical against the movement. The July 1943 issue of the magazine featured an interview with Jesús Guisa y Azevedo, a critic of the postrevolutionary Mexican state. In the piece, he critiqued democracy claiming that it "has destroyed the civilization of those peoples who adopted it" and that "the history of Greece is obvious proof of the evil of the electoral regime." The OSS took such comments to be endorsed by the UNS, although the movement openly supported democracy in other instances. Analysts from the office explained how "the effects on the reader is not only to set him against democracy as an intellectual concept but more concretely to turn him against the United States and Mexican cooperation with the United States."²⁹ The OSS saw a periodical like *Orden* therefore as a tool in further dividing Mexicans in the U.S., drawing on a fear from previous years about the UNS as threatening the war effort.

Services, Centers of Sinarquismo in Mexico, G4411.F81 1943 .U6, University of Chicago Map Collection, The Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

²⁸ See "Noticias de Toda la República" in *El Sinarquista* from 1941 to 1944.

²⁹ United States Office of Strategic Services, Latin American Section, *Special Situation Memorandum Number 1067: Sinarquistas Continue Attack Against Democracy*, August 5, 1943, Reel 9, OSS, Part XIV, Latin America - 1941-1961, Göttingen Library.

Sinarquistas and Allies Defend and Maintain the Movement

Through the end of 1943 and into the beginning of 1944, the UNS and Bishop Edwin V. O'Hara's Inter-American Institute coordinated another speaking tour of Catholic colleges and universities in the U.S. to push back against the negative sentiment. This tour, however, did not consist of sinarquista leaders from Mexico traveling from campus to campus, but was instead more haphazard. Individuals – either from Mexico or exchange students – spoke on behalf of the UNS. Reverend Aniceto Ortega, S.J. and José Trueba Olivares accepted an invitation from Bishop O'Hara and Bishop Joseph Henry Leo Schlarman to come to the National Pontifical Seminary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, more commonly known as the Montezuma Seminary, in New Mexico. The NCWC purchased the property in 1937, which was managed by Mexican Catholic hierarchy, to train Mexican priests in exile.³⁰ However, Reverend Ortega and Trueba Olivares were at the seminary, and in the U.S., for more of a political role than a religious one. They attended “a week of Agricultural Conferences” with “the purpose of improving the lot of our Mexican peasants,” speaking against land reform being enacted by the postrevolutionary Mexican state. Following their time at Montzeuma Seminary, they went on to Los Angeles, Kansas City, Milwaukee, and Chicago “for the benefit of Inter American relations among Catholics.”³¹ Their visit to those cities was dedicated to spreading a positive perspective on sinarquismo under the guises of the Bishop O'Hara's Inter-American Institute.

³⁰ Anne M. Martinez, “‘From the Halls of Montezuma’: Seminary in Exile or Pan-American Project?” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 20, no. 4 (2002): 35, 38-39.

³¹Letter from Aniceto Ortega to William Montavon, August 4, 1943, Box 72, Folder 3, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; Letter from Antonio Santacruz to Frank Gross, July 26, 1943, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Letter from O.C. Alvarez to Frank Gross, August 19, 1943, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Letter from Frank Gross to Carlos Fernandez, August 27, 1943, Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives. O.C. Alvarez is a pseudonym for Antonio Santacruz.

C.J. McNeil from Kansas City, Missouri's *The Catholic Advance* sang the praises of the Inter-American Institute's work over the course of 1943, particularly about fostering fraternity among Catholics. McNeil proclaimed "with all respect to the State department, it can be said with complete assurance that the most important agency now working for good will and unity among all the Americas is the Inter-American institute established here by Bishop Edwin V. O'Hara."³² This was quite the hyperbolic statement as the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs had been around for three years as opposed to the Inter-American Institute which was less than a year old.³³ Among fellow Catholics like McNeil, aspirations for what the institute was going to do were quite high.

After having the tour earlier in the year come to South Bend, Indiana, the University of Notre Dame La Raza Club discussed having a guest speaker discussing sinarquismo in September, but then voted against doing so. The members decided that they did not want to have any political or religious controversy.³⁴ Nonetheless, a few months later in November, they went ahead and led a discussion on the sinarquistas at nearby St. Francis College in Fort Wayne, Indiana.³⁵ By January 1944, members finally hosted the guest speaker that they originally turned down. Professor Roberto Carriedo Rosales was part of the original speaking tour in spring of 1943. Now as a visiting professor to Notre Dame, he provided an overview of the history of

³² "Inter-America Group Under Bishop O'Hara's Auspices," *The Catholic Advance*, October 22, 1943.

³³ OCCCRBAR (Office for Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics) formed in August 1940, whereas the Inter-American Institute formed in April 1943.

³⁴ "La Raza Plans Full Program; Bob Romana President," *The Notre Dame Scholastic*, August 20, 1943.

³⁵ "La Raza Club Meets; Plans Soccer Game with Culver," *The Notre Dame Scholastic*, November 11, 1943.

Mexico, but was really set on talking about the sinarquistas.³⁶ According to Carriedo Rosales, sinarquismo was a movement to teach “the average Mexican” to become a land owner, providing a knowledge of farming to work and own the land. Carriedo Rosales concluded his talk at the University of Notre Dame pushing for a “more comprehensive” understanding of inter-American relations based upon Christian brotherhood, echoing O’Hara’s institute and the notion of a Christian Pan-Americanism.³⁷

In New York City at Fordham University, exchange student Rainaldo Tefel provided another favorable perspective on sinarquismo, albeit with more explicitly religious overtones. He insisted that the sinarquistas were neither Fascists nor Nazis, but that they were “truly Catholic” who took “the Gospels as their inspiration.” Tefel explained that the UNS was not declining, but rather on the rise in the midst of opposition. Many sinarquistas died for the movement in the name of Christian Justice, proving the words of early Christian author, Tertullian, to be true: “the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.” Tefel really believed the rhetoric that the sinarquistas were fighting on behalf of a just cause. He described that “they are working in defense of their country and its culture; they are the hope of Mexico. When they succeed in their program of Christian Social Justice then the Virgin of Guadalupe will be, in practice as well as in theory, the Queen of the Spanish Americas, and new standards with silver crosses will fly in a purged American sky.”³⁸ Tefel sought to persuade an audience of Catholic students that the sinarquistas were not fascist nationalists, but rather crusaders for Christ in a secular Mexico.

³⁶ Letter from O.C. Alvarez to Frank Gross, December 2, 1943, Box 1, Folder 13, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives. O.C. Alvarez is a pseudonym for Antonio Santacruz.

³⁷ “Professor Mexican U. Addresses La Raza Club,” *The Notre Dame Scholastic*, January 7, 1944.

³⁸ “Synarchist Movement In Mexico Explained by Fordham Student,” *Fordham Ram*, November 19, 1943.

Aside from the informal tour attempting to sway Catholics towards the movement, sinarquistas on the committee level maintained a commitment to the movement in early 1944. Donations for colonization continued to come in from committees throughout California, along the border in Texas, and in Chicago.³⁹ However, contributions to the colonies started to dwindle as the settlements were failing. Instead, members in the U.S. began to give financial support for families of fallen sinarquistas. As was the case prior to the start of the colonization project in 1941, the organization's members returned to honoring sinarquista martyrs. Sinarquistas from these same regions in the U.S. donated to the revived cause.⁴⁰

In addition to supporting the organization back home in Mexico, members worked to sustain and build their movement in the U.S. Chapters in the Southwestern U.S. and Chicagoland held their regular meetings, in addition to proselytizing to Mexicans in the respective regions to join the cause.⁴¹ Sinarquistas not only worked to expand among fellow Mexican migrants, but even aimed to recruit a particular segment of that community – braceros. The bracero program

³⁹ Donations were made by committees in Azusa, Bakersfield, Chicago, Pittsburg, Richmond, San Diego, San Dimas, San Pedro, San Fernando, San Francisco, and Santa Ana in California, El Paso, Laredo, McAllen, and Ysleta in Texas, and Chicago in Illinois. "Donativos Para la Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, January 6, 1944; "Donativos Para la Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, January 13, 1944; "Donativos Para la Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, January 27, 1944; "Resultado de la Tercera Colecta Nacional Pro-Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, February 17, 1944; "Resultado de la Tercera Colecta Nacional Pro-Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, February 24, 1944; "Resultado de la Tercera Colecta Nacional Pro-Colonización," *El Sinarquista*, March 9, 1944; "Donativos Para las Colonias," *El Sinarquista*, March 23, 1944; "Donativos Para las Colonias," *El Sinarquista*, April 20, 1944.

⁴⁰ Support came from Antioch, Bakersfield, La Verne, Los Angeles, Ontario, Pacoima, Pittsburg, Pomona, Richmond, San Fernando, San Francisco, and San Gabriel in California, and El Paso and McAllen in Texas. "Auxilios para las Familias de Caídos," *El Sinarquista*, March 23, 1944; "Auxilios para las Familias de Los Caídos," *El Sinarquista*, March 30, 1944; "Auxilios para las Familias de Los Caídos," *El Sinarquista*, April 6, 1944; "Auxilios para las Familias de Los Caídos," *El Sinarquista*, April 13, 1944; "Auxilios para las Familias de Los Caídos," *El Sinarquista*, April 27, 1944.

⁴¹ "Noticias de Toda la República," *El Sinarquista*, February 26, 1944; "Noticias de Toda la República," *El Sinarquista*, March 9, 1944; "Noticias de Toda la República," *El Sinarquista*, April 20, 1944; "De Texas a Quintana Roo Avanza Nuestra Ofensiva," *El Sinarquista*, May 18, 1944; "Noticias de Toda la República," *El Sinarquista*, May 25, 1944; "Noticias de Toda la República," *El Sinarquista*, June 8, 1944.

started in 1942 and grew out of bilateral agreements between the Mexican and U.S. governments, allowing for Mexican men to come to the U.S. and work in short-term positions, predominantly in agriculture and the railroad.⁴² In the Bajío, some UNS committees like the one in Puruándiro, Michoacán helped determine which individuals would receive eligibility cards to become braceros.⁴³ Sinarquista committees from throughout California similarly sought to have influence over braceros once they were in the U.S. They aimed to recruit braceros in the U.S. to join the movement, highlighting their experiences.⁴⁴ They viewed braceros as Mexicans like themselves who were temporarily separated from their country of origin and would return soon. Their recruiting of braceros, however, would not go unnoticed. Sinarquista Chief J.M. Gómez of San Diego, California in early 1944 visited the nearby town of Bonita to specifically bring braceros residing in that community into the movement. Some of the braceros reported his actions to the Mexican Consulate in San Diego. As a result, Mexican Consul Eliseo Ruiz Russek sought to prevent Gómez from proselytizing.⁴⁵ The U.S. Office of Censorship did its part to slow

⁴² See this extensive historiography for more on the bracero program: Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); John Weber, *From South Texas to the Nation: The Exploitation of Mexican Labor in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Mario Jimenez Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016); Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 2016; Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Ana Minian, *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Adam Goodman, *The Deportation Machine: America's Long History of Expelling Immigrants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

⁴³ Ortoll, "Catholic Organizations in Mexico's National Politics and International Diplomacy (1926-1942);" Alberto García, "Regulating Bracero Migration: How National, Regional, and Local Political Considerations Shaped the Bracero Program," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (2021): 14.

⁴⁴ "Tambien hay Revolucion en EE.UU.," *El Sinarquista*, March 23, 1944; "Nuestra Marcha Por El Pais," *El Sinarquista*, April 6, 1944.

⁴⁵ "Tambien hay Revolucion en EE.UU.," *El Sinarquista*, March 23, 1944.

the spread of sinarquismo and bring about the decline of the UNS in the country, which was only aided by actions like this on the part of the Mexican state. In the eyes of the two governments, the braceros were to solely provide their bodies for labor and for modernization.⁴⁶ They did not envision the braceros to give themselves for politics as the sinarquistas sought.

A Tidal Wave of Opposition to the UNS in 1944

However, the opposition to sinarquismo did not let up, especially as the Mexican political left perpetuated the idea that the UNS was a fifth column while also implicating U.S. Catholic leadership. The Confederación de Trabajadores de México utilized its English-language publication, *Mexican Labor News*, aimed towards U.S. audiences to solidify this notion in late 1943. The periodical noted how American Catholic groups were supporting the sinarquistas in pushing for a “New Christian Order.” The CTM cited notable American conservative Reverend Fulton J. Sheen as saying that “Mexico needs a revolution” and that “only the religious faith of the people and their Catholic tradition can save Mexico.”⁴⁷ Instead of fostering inter-American unity across the hemisphere, the CTM’s *Mexican Labor News* articulated to U.S. readers how the sinarquistas and their allies were doing the opposite, damaging the Good Neighbor Policy.

News reports proliferated over the course of 1944 noting that the organization was a fifth column aided by American Catholic leaders. Progressive American journalists built off of *Mexican Labor News* with several articles. Don Newton in *The Chicago Daily News*, Arthur Eaton in *The Protestant*, and Victor H. Bernstein in *PM* wrote about Reverend Sheen’s call for a

⁴⁶ Cohen, 31-35.

⁴⁷ “Mexican New Christian Order Plotters Heartened by U.S. Groups,” *Mexican Labor News*, November 16, 1943, Box 31, Folder 1-1, Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, UCLA; “Mexican Sinarco-Fascists Change Tactics, Streamline Group,” *Mexican Labor News*, December 15, 1943, Box 31, Folder 1-19, Carey McWilliams Papers, UCLA.

“New Christian Order” and for revolution. They described how sinarquistas in the U.S. and Mexico, as well as their Catholic allies, were pushing for another religious war in Mexico like the Cristero Wars that came before.⁴⁸

In addition, *The New Republic* denounced the “anti-democratic” UNS and the support that it gained support among Catholics in the U.S. The magazine claimed that “in spite of the overwhelming evidence of the Sinarquist threat, next to nothing has been done by either the Mexican or the American government to curb the anti-democratic, pro-Axis activities of this fascist organization. The only effective opposition to the Sinarquistas has come from the Confederation of Mexican Workers.” The publication emphasized how the organization was a threat to political institutions, and yet believed barely any actions were being taken. *The New Republic* advocated for both governments to act, as well as suggested “certain politically minded Catholic clergymen in this country, who have lately given much moral comfort to the Sinarquistas, that their words and deeds in favor of Mexican fascism are contrary to our democratic public policy.”⁴⁹ According to *The New Republic*, not only did governments need to respond, so too did American Catholics. It was their responsibility to come to terms with who the UNS really was.

Heinz F. Eulau, a political scientist and writer for various current affairs publications, viewed the sinarquistas from a similar perspective as Mexican fascists with aid from the U.S. Catholic Church. His piece in *The Inter-American* sought to demonstrate how entrenched the

⁴⁸ Don Newton, “Mexico Church Scents Sinarquist Danger,” *Chicago Daily News*, January 24, 1944; Arthur Eaton, “The Story of Sinarquism,” *The Protestant*, March 1944; Victor H. Bernstein, “Influence of Hitler, Franco Plain in Sinarquism,” *PM*, May 28, 1944, Box 31, Folder 3-19, Carey McWilliams Papers, UCLA.

⁴⁹ “Danger in Mexico,” *New Republic*, March 13, 1944; Frank Jellinek echoes this sentiment in his piece, “Watch Mexico,” *The Nation*, March 25, 1944.

UNS was in the U.S. and its institutional American Catholic support to change Mexico's political trajectory. Eulau noted how the movement had fifty committees across the U.S., and readership beyond those committees wherever *El Sinarquista* and *Orden* were distributed, often in front of Catholic churches serving the Mexican community. Beyond UNS materials, he wrote of the favorable treatment of the organization by the "Southwest's most important clerical weeklies" – *La Esperanza* of Los Angeles, *Revista Católica* of El Paso, and *La Voz* of San Antonio. Such treatment, he argued, was shared on the ground by Reverend Manuel A. Canseco of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Los Angeles. Eulau honed in on Bishop O'Hara's Inter-American Institute and its tour in spring 1943. He believed that the tour was not in the name of Pan-American unity, but the "real task was to make contact with local Sinarquista committees and hold propaganda meetings." Eulau advocated for the downfall of sinarquismo in the U.S. only "after democratic Catholics have expressed their indignation over the continued support, both financial and spiritual, which sectors of the clergy have given to the *Sinarquistas*. Otherwise they may well succeed in creating a dangerous irredentist movement among Mexican Americans."⁵⁰

Eulau expanded on his piece in a series of articles in *PM* newspaper, incriminating a slew of other Catholics in the U.S. Eulau posited that the sinarquistas "are seeking the creation of a fascist neighbor to the U.S.A. – and that they are seeking and winning the support of Americans here, some of whom are equally anxious to create a fascist neighbor to Mexico."⁵¹ He cited popular anti-communist and fascist-sympathizer, Reverend Charles Coughlin, as having praised

⁵⁰ Heinz F. Eulau, "Sinarquismo in the United States," *The Inter-American*, March 1944. The article was reprinted in May in *Mexican Life* as "Sinarquismo in the U.S.A."

⁵¹ Heinz H.F. Eulau, "U.S. Sinarquists Seek to Break Down War Morale," *PM*, May 22, 1944, Box 31, Folder 3-19, Carey McWilliams Papers, UCLA.

the UNS back in September 1941 in his publication, *Social Justice*. Eulau mentioned Reverend Alcuin Heibel, O.S.B. of Mount Angel Abbey, quoting him as praising how Americans should support the sinarquistas in the *Oregon Journal of Portland*. Most notably, he focused in on the activities of the NCWC and Frank Gross. He detailed how the *N.C.W.C. News Service* published stories praising the UNS, as well as material directly from the organization itself. The material from the NCWC made its way into Catholic publications across the country. As for Gross, Eulau wrote how his “activities clearly stamp him as one of the most important Sinarquist agents in the country. According to his own statement, he has given advice to Sinarquist headquarters on the English translation of the Sinarquist program, on U.S. mailing lists, on avoiding publicity in Catholic publications, [and] on cultivating the U.S. Embassy staff in Mexico City and American newspapermen.”⁵² Eulau compiled all of the ways – both public and clandestine – that American Catholic allies were supporting the sinarquistas. To him, they were not supporting fellow Catholics, but instead were sowing seeds of disunity and strife.

Conservative American Catholics responded to this tidal wave of press targeting the sinarquistas and themselves. Francis A. Fink examined whether sinarquismo was a fascist movement in the national weekly Catholic newspaper, *Our Sunday Visitor*. He posited that it was neither a fascist movement, a political movement, or a religious movement. “No, it is none of these. Of course, a persistent effort has been made by hundreds of propagandists to lead the American people to believe that any anti-Communist activity is pro-Fascist activity. But an analysis of Synarchism will make it very clear that it occupies that middle ground which is the safest for the preservation of true democracy.” He addressed both politics and religion, citing the

⁵² Heinz H.F. Eulau, “Coughlin, ‘Tablet’ Have Kind Words for Sinarquistas,” *PM*, May 21, 1944, Box 31, Folder 3-19, Carey McWilliams Papers, UCLA.

sinarquista platform as saying that “we have purposely kept out of politics” and that sinarquismo “is not a religious movement.”⁵³ Fink positioned himself as less of a Catholic, but more as a defender of democracy. Similarly, Reverend Francis J. Heltshe supported the sinarquistas in *The New York Times*, saying that it was equally against communism as it was against fascism. He contended that “Sinarquism is a frank and open and democratic movement – a spontaneous movement born of one man’s great vision and a whole people’s great need.”⁵⁴ Heltshe claimed that sinarquismo was being slandered and that the American people had to see who the sinarquistas really were. Even Ricard Pattee of the Inter-American Committee of the Catholic Association for International Peace – a cause similar to that of Bishop O’Hara’s – defended sinarquismo. He believed that “the military and unaggressive character of Synarchism is the very antithesis of the militancy and fanfare of the Falange. As an expression of Mexican traditionalism, enveloped in the modern garb of social justice and agrarian reform, it merits the attention of Americans.”⁵⁵ These Catholics sought to demonstrate that sinarquismo was more of a benevolent civic organization that one seeking to transform Mexico.

However, not all Catholics continued to view the UNS favorably during this time, especially those with a progressive political bent. The editor of *Commonweal* magazine, Edward Skillin, Jr., critiqued the sinarquistas and how American Catholics received them. Skillin did not doubt why certain Mexicans in the U.S. chose to be sinarquistas as they faced horrible treatment in the Southwest. He described that they do what they can to contribute to the movement by

⁵³ F.A. Fink, “Is Synarchism a Fascist Movement?” *Our Sunday Visitor*, April 2, 1944.

⁵⁴ Francis J. Heltshe, “Letter to the Editor: No Sinarquista Conspiracy,” *The New York Times*, May 19, 1944.

⁵⁵ Richard Pattee and the Inter-American Committee, *The Catholic Revival in Mexico*, 1944.

contributing money to the sinarquista colonies in Northern Mexico and by distributing sinarquista literature. Nonetheless, he expressed concerns that “any movement with a small intelligent leadership and a large ignorant and emotional following is all too easily taken over either by some scoundrel or some agent or some subversive political power.” The UNS was not innocent as “there is some reason for the application of the fascist label” because he viewed the organization as not envisioning a democratic state, but a top-down authoritarian one as depicted in the sinarquista booklet, *México en 1960*. He believed that the movement focused on opposing the postrevolutionary Mexican state at all costs: “if Sinarquists succeed in growing considerably more in numbers, there is real danger of a bloody civil war.”⁵⁶ As for American Catholics, Skillin did not think it was “surprising to find that scattered comments on Sinarquism in the US Catholic press have been entirely favorable.” He argued how “the way rightful respect for authority and morals becomes an unwarranted respect for the authoritarian principles in politics is a highly deplorable tendency, and it must be recognized for what it is.”⁵⁷ Skillin provided a progressive Catholic voice in a sea of conservative Catholic perspectives. He demonstrated that American Catholics were not monolithic on sinarquismo, but indeed disagreed about the movement. Like writers in the secular press, Skillin advocated for Catholics to change course on the UNS.

Leadership at the Archdiocese of Chicago came out forcibly against fascism alongside that of the leadership of the Archdiocese of Mexico in Mexico City. The Auxiliary Bishop of

⁵⁶ Edward J. Skillin, Jr., “A Note on Mexican Sinarquism,” *Commonweal*, June 9, 1944, 178; Letter from Elizabeth Maier to Edwin V. O’Hara, Reel 8, Folder 170, Archbishop Edwin V. O’Hara Papers, 1920-1956, Marquette Archives.

⁵⁷ Skillin, 174.

Chicago, Bernard James Sheil, and the Archbishop of Mexico, Luis María Martínez, came together to denounce the spread of fascism in the world. In particular, they highlighted that the UNS and the PAN were “fascist groups.” The sinarquistas, especially, “have deployed extensive activities among Mexicans in the United States and have also formed organizations among these elements of our population.” Archbishop Martínez affirmed that neither group had an official connection with the Catholic Church of Mexico.⁵⁸ Auxiliary Bishop Sheil, on the other hand, spoke out against fascism more generally and its embrace of anti-Semitism. He argued that “The world of the future must be a world in which racial hatred and irrational persecution cannot take place.”⁵⁹ Together, both Auxiliary Bishop Sheil and Archbishop Martínez condemned fascism – and in turn condemned sinarquismo, conflating the two.

Most notably, even the NCWC publicly distanced itself away from the UNS. Legal Department Director William F. Montavon had been close to UNS leaders since 1936, but mounting negative press, particularly news that implicated the NCWC, caused him to change course. Not only did the media over the course of 1944 focus on the NCWC, but such coverage prompted a government investigation. The FBI arrived at the headquarters of the NCWC on May 25, 1944, asking for Montavon and inquiring into UNS printed materials. Federal law enforcement inquired into an on-site printing press, particularly one that was producing the pamphlet, *México en 1960*. Montavon was not present, but NCWC staff notified the FBI that the

⁵⁸ The two groups “son agrupaciones de carácter fascista.” The sinarquistas “han desplegado amplias actividades entre los mexicanos en Los Estados Unidos y también han formado organizaciones entre estos elementos de nuestra población.” Pan-American Good Neighbor Forum, “Obispos Hablan,” 1944, Box 1, Folder 4, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁵⁹ Shiels argued that “el mundo del futuro debe de ser un mundo en el cual el odio racial y la persecución irracional no puedan tener lugar.” Pan-American Good Neighbor Forum, “Obispos Hablan,” 1944, Box 1, Folder 4, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Letter from Bernard James Sheil to Ramón José Miller, October 30, 1945, Box 1, Folder 9, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

organization did not have a print shop nor did it produce the material.⁶⁰ This was not the only instance that the office received multiple requests for sinarquista publicity in 1944, particularly for the movement's program.⁶¹ Montavon publicly cut off all ties with the group. He responded that the "NCWC has had no active part in the organization or action of the Synarchist movement and has issued no statement or literature of any kind regarding Synarchism."⁶²

By 1945, the disrepute of the UNS gained a firm hold in the U.S. and did not disappear. Sinarquistas and their American Catholic allies attempted to convince Americans that the movement was free of issues, but were not successful. In the midst of the war, these nationalist Mexicans lost much of their support, even from those who had supported them for so long.

The Postwar Era and the Internal Split Within the UNS

Following World War II, changes occurred on multiple fronts. The American state no longer focused on fascists as it shifted to communists as the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union took hold. The UNS was no longer distinctive for its anti-communism. As for within the UNS, a division ruptured throughout all levels of the organization, effecting members in the U.S. Such changes hastened the demise of sinarquismo in the country.

The End of World War II and Its Effect on Sinarquismo

As World War II was coming to an end in 1945, the opposition towards the UNS reached its apex and increasingly the focus shifted more and more towards communism. President

⁶⁰ Letter from Eugene J. Butler to Michael Joseph Ready, May 26, 1944, Box 72, Folder 4, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁶¹ Letter from Patty Ruble to the National Catholic Welfare Conference, February 21, 1944, Box 72, Folder 4, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; Letter from Denis A. McGuckin to William F. Montavon, October 30, 1944, Box 72, Folder 4, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

⁶² Letter from William F. Montavon to Denis A. McGuckin, October 31, 1944, Box 72, Folder 4, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt died in April 1945 and the U.S. government under new President Harry S. Truman still feared fascism. However, with the end of the war in September 1945, a threat from the past emerged again – communism. The U.S. government targeted communists in the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution throughout the 1920s during the First Red Scare, and with the Soviet Union’s growing influence in the world as World War II came to a close, it did so again. The Cold War shifted U.S. policy towards targeting and containing the spread of communism – at home and abroad. Rather than fear of a fascist fifth column, the U.S. government increasingly grew wary about a communist fifth column within its borders. The federal government, therefore, worried less about the threat of *sinarquismo* as compared to the thread of communism.

On the state government level within the U.S., the California Un-America Activities Committee which formerly highlighted fascist or perceived fascist groups like the UNS back in 1943, likewise shifted towards focusing exclusively on communists in 1945. The committee led by California State Senator Jack B. Tenney revisited the *sinarquistas* and their potential role in the Zoot Suit Riots from two years earlier. His committee reported that the investigation of the riots “resulted in exposing Communist techniques in fomenting racial prejudices and antagonisms.” The Tenney committee was “convinced that the *Sinarquistas* had nothing to do whatever with the agitation and fomenting of the ‘zoot suit’ disturbances in Los Angeles. The evidence clearly indicates that the *Communist Party* selected this organization for the public spotlight as it went about its vicious work creating a Mexican ‘minority’ in California.”⁶³

Tenney’s committee contended that the *sinarquistas* received attention because they were anti-

⁶³ California Legislature, Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, *Report*, (Sacramento: California State Senate, 1945), 209.

communist, and thus communists sought to implicate them in the riots. The legislators made a point of noting how the sinarquistas were a group of Mexican nationals focused on Mexico, and not the U.S. The state committee removed the blame from the sinarquistas, instead placing it on the communists.

An incident in late December 1945 likewise shifted focus from the sinarquistas to the communists. Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the CTM opposed the UNS from early on in its founding and had no plans in stopping. Lombardo Toledano was speaking at an open-air meeting of the CTM when he made the accusation that certain U.S. firms were providing arms and ammunition to the sinarquistas. He argued that the UNS sought an armed rebellion to install presidential candidate Ezequiel Padilla against the candidate of the ruling Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, Miguel Alemán Valdés, in the upcoming 1946 Mexican general election. Lombardo Toledano welcomed any investigations by the U.S. or Mexican governments into the accusation. He believed that an inquiry would implicate the UNS and force the Mexican government to dissolve the group as a subversive force against democracy.⁶⁴ Despite his statement, he failed to furnish proof of the sinarquistas smuggling arms from the U.S. to Mexico.⁶⁵ This specific claim was very similar to one that Lombardo Toledano invoked back in 1937 of a “Fascist revolutionary plot” to sneak weapons across the border against the Mexican government, which also lacked evidence.

Lombardo Toledano’s claim caused an uproar in the U.S. government. Leadership from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City expressed outrage about what Lombardo Toledano said.

⁶⁴ “U.S. To Probe Selling of Arms To Sinarquistas,” *El Paso Times*, December 19, 1945; “‘Welcomes’ Probe,” *Visalia Times*, January 2, 1946; “Toledano Hits PRM Leaders,” *Laredo Times*, January 16, 1946.

⁶⁵ “Dreame-Up Award,” *Time*, March 11, 1946.

Ambassador George S. Messersmith communicated to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, believing that “there is no basis whatever for such a statement. Knowing him as I do, and how he is carried away by his own voice and by his feelings when he speaks, it is not surprising at all that he should have permitted himself to make such an outrageous statement.”⁶⁶ When Messersmith talked to Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations, Francisco Castillo Nájera, he was convinced that Lombardo Toledano “destroyed himself” in the recent action.⁶⁷ Gildardo González Sánchez, president of the dominant sinarquista faction, reached out to Messersmith, feeding into the ambassador’s doubts about Lombardo Toledano. González Sánchez asserted that the labor leader’s charges were “devoid of truth,” and more importantly that he was a dangerous communist. The UNS president noted that the sinarquistas, on the other hand, were “patriotic” Mexicans who maintained good relations with the U.S.⁶⁸ Messersmith and his staff tracked the wave of publicity that emerged from Lombardo Toledano’s statement. By early 1946, he, like the sinarquistas, was convinced that “Lombardo is the instrument of Moscow and that he is out to make trouble for us.”⁶⁹ Messersmith was in line with the post-war sentiment of the U.S. government, seeing the sinarquistas as less a threat than communists.

Split Within Sinarquismo

At the end of World War II, a public division emerged among sinarquista leaders in spring 1944 after years of internal conflict behind-the-scenes. The most radical faction was under

⁶⁶ Letter from George S. Messersmith to James F. Byrnes, December 18, 1945, Box 5045, RG 59, NARA.

⁶⁷ Letter from George S. Messersmith to James F. Byrnes, December 19, 1945, Box 5, F115, Item 1758-00, MSS 0109, George S. Messersmith papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

⁶⁸ Letter from Gildardo González Sánchez to George S. Messersmith, December 19, 1945, Box 5045, RG 59, NARA.

⁶⁹ Letter from George S. Messersmith to John Willard Carrigan, January 12, 1946, Box 5045, RG 59, NARA.

the leadership of Salvador Abascal, who was forced out of the María Auxiliadora colony – and ultimately the movement – by individuals such as Manuel Torres Bueno and Antonio Santacruz. Abascal felt that the group was becoming too moderate and politically expedient, aligning too much with the Mexican and U.S. governments in the midst of war. He thought that the organization was compromising its nationalism in favor of internationalism like the Good Neighbor Policy. Abascal did not want to partake in compromise of any kind, continuing to advocate for an organized take-over of the Mexican state. Sinarquista president Manuel Torres Bueno led another, more moderate, faction. He wanted to maintain his power in the UNS, pursuing Mexican electoral politics rather than any form of violence against the Mexican state. Torres Bueno sought to turn the movement into a formalized political party. The UNS was political, but acted outside the confines of the electoral system, and Torres Bueno wanted to change that. Antonio Santacruz, who was involved in sinarquismo behind-the-scenes since Las Legiones, led the third and most reconciliatory-minded faction. He sought to collaborate with the Mexican state. As opposed to Torres Bueno who wanted the movement to be explicitly political, Santacruz wanted it instead to be both social, as well as religious, forming formal ties with the Mexican Catholic Church. Of the three camps, the Abascal group disappeared from the UNS altogether. Salvador Abascal pursued a new path by creating Editorial Jus, a publishing house focused on books dedicated to conservatism and Catholicism.⁷⁰ Therefore, two main groups of sinarquismo remained. The moderate Torres Bueno faction became the principal organization,

⁷⁰ Editorial Jus became Editorial Tradición in 1970 and still publishes works today.

whereas the reconciliatory and religious Santacruz faction became the dissident movement - both claiming the title of the “Unión Nacional Sinarquista.”⁷¹

Both camps of sinarquismo were at odds with one another, and the split of course carried over into sinarquista committees in the U.S. Torres Bueno led the moderate principal UNS, seeking to maintain the organization’s commitment to faith, its hierarchical structure, and to consolidate the UNS as one cohesive political movement. He presided over the faction until May 1945 when he turned over power to engineer Gildardo González Sánchez at the eighth anniversary of the founding of sinarquismo. González Sánchez followed in Torres Bueno’s path to unite all of the UNS. He replaced committee chiefs who he saw as disloyal.⁷² By doing so, González Sánchez was successful in securing the large majority of sinarquistas, including those in the U.S. Almost of all of the committees that the UNS established in California, Texas, and Chicagoland remained in the dominant movement.⁷³ As for the reconciliatory dissident movement, it was originally led by Santacruz and then later taken over by Carlos Athié Carrasco starting in February 1945. Athié Carrasco, a teacher, never served in the leadership of the UNS and was completely unknown by the majority of sinarquistas. Nonetheless, he worked to build a relationship with the Mexican state, emphasizing that his goal was not to contest its political power, but rather to sustain the Christian principles of the nation by building a social

⁷¹ Hernández García de León, 283-284; Pablo Serrano Álvarez, *La batalla del espíritu: el movimiento sinarquista en El Bajío, 1932-1951*, Volume 2 (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992), 138-139 and 166. Eva Nohemi Orozco García, “Las Mujeres Sinarquistas (1937-1962): Las Manos Ocultas en la Construcción del Sentimiento Nacionalista Mexicano de Derecha,” PhD Dissertation (University of Texas at El Paso, 2019), 60.

⁷² Hernández García de León, 285; Serrano Álvarez, 170-173 and 207-209.

⁷³ Ofelia Ramírez Sánchez, Interview by Armando Sandoval Pierres, transcript of oral history by María Georgina Escoto Molina, Laboratorio de Historia Oral, Departamento de Estudios de Cultura y Sociedad, División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad de Guanajuato, October 12, 1997, 4.

organization.⁷⁴ The dissident movement did secure some support in the U.S., including a handful of committees that joined the cause. Most notably, the faction received the favor of long-standing American Catholic allies. Although the NCWC no longer publicly supported sinarquismo, the organization privately aided the dissident group as Antonio Santacruz had a long-term relationship with William Montavon. Frank Gross likewise sided with the dissident group because of his connection to Santacruz.⁷⁵ Transnational fragmentation of sinarquismo would persist for years to come.

The Principal Movement

Gildardo González Sánchez led the politically-minded group organized by Manuel Torres Bueno, seeking to enter electoral politics in Mexico and maintain UNS institutional structures in the U.S. The organization developed and registered a political party with the Mexican state, Fuerza Popular (Popular Force), to participate in the 1946 Mexican general election. The party put forward Jesus Agustín Castro as its presidential candidate as well as various candidates for the Chamber of Deputies. This was notable as the sinarquistas had refrained from formal politics since its official founding in 1937 as they did not want to buttress the postrevolutionary Mexican political system. By 1946, however, the politically-minded group thought that electoral politics was the way to make concrete inroads in Mexico. Although the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI or the Institutional Revolutionary Party, formerly the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana) won the presidency with Miguel Alemán Valdés and maintained power in the

⁷⁴ Hernández García de León, 281.

⁷⁵ See Box 72, Folder 4, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives; Box 1, Folder 3, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives; Box 1, Folder 14, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

Chamber of Deputies, the presence of Fuerza Popular contested the power of the ruling party.⁷⁶

Sinarquistas in the U.S., meanwhile, kept their sights on Mexico while more publicly embracing the nation they resided in. Despite their location in another nation, they sought to maintain their affiliation with the Mexico-focused movement that some had been with for approximately a decade and as such, they supported the group's entrée into institutional politics.

González Sánchez made a trip to the U.S. to both demonstrate to the sinarquistas there that the movement was still intact and attempt to show Americans that the group was not a threat. The president visited sinarquista committees in El Paso, Los Angeles, and San Francisco where he conferred with local chiefs and showed committee members film footage of the most recent organizational convention in Mexico. During his time in those cities, González Sánchez wooed the public in response to the years of antagonism built up against the movement. He asserted that sinarquismo "is a civic movement to teach the people of Mexico to defend their civil rights." "Sinarquistas are opposed to any form of totalitarian government. We favor democratic types of governments." Instead, González Sánchez posited that "our movement is for democracy and cooperation between United States and Mexico."⁷⁷ The new president sought to bring about support, rather than distrust, for the group.

The organization under González Sánchez also highlighted the importance of women in the UNS more than ever before to bring more Mexicans in and sustain the movement. The president pursued a "national" campaign focused on mobilizing female sinarquistas across Mexico and the U.S. He created a national female section of the UNS began in 1945 under the

⁷⁶ Hernández García de León, 292-294.

⁷⁷ "Sinarquista Leader Visiting El Paso," *El Paso Herald-Post*, September 24, 1945; "Sinarquistas for Education and Religion, Says Chief," *El Paso Herald-Post*, September 25, 1945.

leadership of Ofelia Ramírez Sánchez, formerly the chief of the women's group in Celaya, Guanajuato. The notoriously patriarchal movement previously had local female sections in cities like Los Angeles and El Paso, but never one on a larger scale until then. One of the major reasons why González Sánchez created the national female organization was to stabilize and control what was left of the women's groups after the split in the UNS.⁷⁸ Ramírez Sánchez sought to do exactly that. She conducted a census of the UNS, documenting the amount of women in each respective committee. Ramírez Sánchez worked to either revive or activate women's activities on the local level, bringing structure as well as working to bring more women into the movement. She sought that each municipal and regional female section would have its own chief. Ramírez Sánchez laid out a plan that the respective sections would follow which included educating women creating libraries and schools, distributing pro-sinarquista propaganda, and raising funds to benefit the movement.⁷⁹ Female groups on the ground reported on their regular activities in *El Sinarquista*, including the one in Los Angeles which was doing exactly what she set out. Women in the regional female section in the city planned fundraisers, organized classes, and led the youth group.⁸⁰ Ramírez Sánchez collaborated with González Sánchez to maintain and strengthen the institutional structure of the organization, particularly in relation to women.

Even as the leader of the dominant faction of the UNS shifted to Luis Martínez Narezo, Ramírez Sánchez conducted tours to check in on the progress of the local women's sections,

⁷⁸ Orozco Garcia, 59 and 64.

⁷⁹ Orozco Garcia, 65-68.

⁸⁰ "Seccion Feminina de la UNS," *El Sinarquista*, May 2, 1946, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

traveling to the U.S. In 1947, she led a tour funded by Cuquita de Carrillo of the local women's group of Culiacán, Sinaloa. Ramírez Sánchez saw that the principal reason for the trip was for female sinarquistas to learn "about the history of Mexico! What did they know about the history of Mexico! How did they see the situation as Mexicans, of them as Mexicans in the United States, what they had for or against them, and the situation as sinarquistas."⁸¹ Female sinarquistas aided the movement by "adherence to ideas" and "with some monthly contribution."⁸² Ramírez Sánchez traveled throughout California, visiting San Diego, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Fernando, and ultimately San Francisco.⁸³ She was taken aback by the sheer number of sinarquistas in and around Los Angeles. As for San Francisco, she believed that the sinarquistas there were extremely dedicated to the movement. In San Francisco, Ramírez Sánchez met not only with local female sections, but also with male leaders such as the chief of the Northern California regional committee, Porfirio Rivera, who continued to be based in Bakersfield.⁸⁴ She would return to the U.S. on other occasions to check in on female sections in the country.⁸⁵ Ramírez Sánchez saw sinarquistas in the U.S. not as an extension of the movement, but part and parcel of the cause who needed to be fostered.

⁸¹ "¡De la historia de México! ¡qué sabían de la historia de México!, cómo veían ellos como mexicanos la situación, de ellos como mexicanos en Estados Unidos, lo que tenían a su favor o en contra y, la situación como sinarquistas." Ramírez Sánchez, 5.

⁸² "Ayudaban a la UNS [Unión Nacional Sinarquista] especialmente con adhesión a las ideas y, y sí, se les había dicho que si podían; podían este ayudar con alguna aportación mensual, como pudieran, y lo hacían." Ramírez Sánchez, 5-6.

⁸³ Ramírez Sánchez, 5.

⁸⁴ Ramírez Sánchez, 4-5.

⁸⁵ Ramírez Sánchez returned to the U.S. in 1950, touring between August and December of that year. Orozco Garcia, 94.

Sinarquista committees did indeed continue under the watch of the dominant UNS faction. In San Fernando, California near Los Angeles, the sinarquista community rose in and around Santa Rosa Catholic Church. The large majority of parishioners were farmworkers from Jalisco in the Bajío, having left the region because of insecurity tied to the church-state conflict of the 1920s. They were in communication with relatives back in Jalisco and many were very religious. Although decades passed after these individuals left Mexico, they were sympathetic to a pro-Catholic movement that would reinvigorate the power of the church in Mexico, even through the means of electoral politics. Parishioner Tomás Gasca sold copies of *El Sinarquista* and *Orden* to churchgoers at Santa Rosa Church. Gasca, and local sinarquista committee leader José Macías, connected the local religious Mexican community of San Fernando with sinarquismo. The chapter regularly held its meetings not far from the church on Pico Street.⁸⁶

In Texas, the El Paso chapter continued to bridge being both a community organization and a political one. Sinarquistas in the city regularly made their presence known, frequently holding parades marching through El Paso, carrying the Mexican and U.S. flags, in addition to the movement's flag.⁸⁷ In early 1947, the regional committee participated in El Paso's annual New Year's Day Parade alongside bands, ethnic community organizations, and the El Paso County Sheriff's Office. Among many other floats, the local chapter's entry depicted "Mexico's part in the fight for peace."⁸⁸ As El Paso was situated along the border with Mexico, the

⁸⁶ Carlos B. Gil, Interview by Nathan Ellstrand, November 22, 2019; Carlos B. Gil, *Hope and Frustration: Interviews with Leaders of Mexico's Political Opposition* (Lanham: SR Books, 1992).

⁸⁷ "Gráficas del Movimiento," *El Sinarquista*, November 7, 1945, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

⁸⁸ "Thousands Acclaim Carnival Pageant," *El Paso Herald-Post*, January 1, 1947.

sinarquista float connected with many people in the community, whether they agreed with the movement or not.

The dominant faction of the UNS utilized both of its publications, *El Sinarquista* and *Orden*, not only to communicate with members throughout greater Mexico, but to also further declare its admiration of and willingness to collaborate with the U.S. government. In the March 1947 issue of *Orden*, the paper openly praised the president of the U.S. The periodical declared that “the greatest sinarquista in America” was not one of the group’s leaders or members, but rather President Harry S. Truman.⁸⁹ This was a notable shift from the previous ambivalent and frequently apprehensive stance that the UNS had towards the U.S. government. The dominant organization saw the government on its side as both were openly anti-communist. The moderate, reconciliatory stance of the principal movement would only last so much longer in 1947.

In September, the principal movement would transform. The new leader of the dominant faction, Luis Martínez Narezo, focused less on electoral politics as Manuel Torres Bueno envisioned, instead concentrating more on community issues. He met with more radical leaders such as Salvador Abascal, Juan Ignacio Padilla, and Valentín Lozada.⁹⁰ The UNS could either go down the path of continuing to be a relatively moderate movement or instead choosing to be an uncompromising militant organization. The leaders decided on the latter, undoing the reforms that Torres Bueno implemented, even unseating him from a leadership position in the group.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Truman was said to be the “más grande sinarquista de América.” Orozco Garcia, 78.

⁹⁰ United States Central Intelligence Group, *Central Intelligence Report: Activities of Sinarquistas*, October 30, 1947, Freedom of Information Act, Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, D.C.

⁹¹ Hernández García de León, 299.

The dominant group was no longer moderate, but instead focused on promoting conservative Catholic social doctrine.

Just a year after *Orden* praised U.S. President Truman as “the greatest sinarquista” in the country, the paper under new leadership reversed its course on the U.S. The new editor of *Orden* and conservative Nicaraguan activist who was part of the UNS, Pablo Antonio Cuadra, wrote against the “false dilemma” that Mexico must choose between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Cuadra argued instead that Mexico needed to pursue a “third position” of Catholicism and Hispanidad, as Abascal argued years before.⁹² Such a stance demonstrated how the dominant faction firmly rooted itself away from reconciliation.

By the late 1940s, various factors led to a decline in the principal movement. In Mexico, the group’s entry into electoral politics via Fuerza Popular was short lived as the Mexican government banned the party in 1949. The Mexican state controlled by the PRI cancelled the registration that the party received in 1946, claiming that it was seditious, undemocratic, and a threat to public order.⁹³ The conservative Partido Acción Nacional eclipsed the UNS in electoral politics and more broadly throughout Mexico. It also took in members who formerly supported Fuerza Popular. In both Mexico and the U.S., Mexicans who had been sinarquistas were leaving the movement. Although efforts were made by leaders to sustain the group, they were too little, too late. Political blows to the organization back home combined with a rapidly shifting ideology added to reasons why sinarquistas in the principal faction were departing.

⁹² “Synarchist manifesto,” *America*, February 21, 1948.

⁹³ “Sinarquista Organized on Military Lines,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 30, 1949.

The Dissident Movement

While the dominant movement operated in a transnational context, the minority faction of the UNS created by Antonio Santacruz and led by Carlos Athié Carrasco also functioned in the context of the U.S. This branch of sinarquismo believed that the other camp had gone astray by participating in institutional politics and instead operated as a Catholic social organization, but still with an anti-communist bent. Carlos Athié Carrasco and his followers presented themselves on the “right” side of the movement in the “segunda época” or second period of the UNS. They focused on moral values, the importance of traditional family structure, and the continued reverence of martyrdom.⁹⁴ The group still maintained contact with sinarquistas in the U.S., conducting a campaign among female members and having sympathetic committees. This branch of the UNS notably received the support of conservative American Catholics which was missing in the dominant group.

Athié Carrasco constructed a hierarchical organization similar to what existed before. The national committee remained at the top, followed by regional, district, and municipal committees. For the national committee, he appointed former chief of the El Paso regional committee, José Neder Quiñones, as the National Treasurer of the movement.⁹⁵ Athié Carrasco also created a national female section like the principal movement, but this one was led by María del Carmen Rodríguez. The goal of the female section was to “help the development of women in all aspects, giving them the opportunity to control their own affairs and specialties.”⁹⁶ The

⁹⁴ See Caja 1, Expedientes 33-35, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

⁹⁵ Letter from Carlos Athié Carrasco to all of the regional, district, and municipal chiefs, September 16, 1946, Caja 1, Expediente 33, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

⁹⁶ Athié Carrasco wrote that he created the female section “ayudar al desarrollo de la mujer en todos sus aspectos, dándoles al mismo tiempo oportunidad de manejar sus asuntos propios y especiales.” Letter from Carlos Athié Carrasco to all of the regional, district, and municipal chiefs, January 2, 1947, Caja 1, Expediente 33, Fondo UNS,

sinarquista president appointed new chiefs in locations vital to the UNS in the U.S. including José Cleofas Rojas in Bakersfield and José de Jesus Muñoz in El Paso.⁹⁷ The dissident faction even held annual meetings with leaders from the various committees representing. Muñoz, for example, showed up on behalf of the El Paso chapter at the 1946 congress in Querétaro in the Bajío.⁹⁸

Although the leader of the female section, María del Carmen Rodríguez, did not lead a tour of the U.S. as Ofelia Ramírez Sánchez of the dominant movement did, she engaged with women in the country. She developed the publication, *Mejicana*, with the tagline, “a magazine that interests the woman. But...also men.”⁹⁹ The newspaper allowed female sinarquistas to have a form of autonomy, while still embracing the patriarchal order of the organization. The periodical sought to promote sinarquismo without publicly doing so while advocating for Mexican patriotism. The goal was to counteract other publications that went about spreading “frivolity, atheism, and bizarre customs.”¹⁰⁰ In addition to subscribers in Mexico, readership for Rodríguez’s periodical included individuals in Bakersfield, Los Angeles, and Pomona in

Archivos Históricos, Ibero; “Integración del Consejo Nacional,” N.D., Caja 1, Expediente, 35, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

⁹⁷ “Integración del Consejo Nacional,” N.D., Caja 1, Expediente, 35, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

⁹⁸ Tercera Junta Nacional de Jefes, February 4, 1946, Box 1, Folder 20, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

⁹⁹ A promotional poster for the magazine states, “Una revista que interesa a la mujer. Pero...también a los hombres.” *Mejicana*, N.D., Caja 2, Expediente 57, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

¹⁰⁰ A document laying out the purpose of the paper notes that it wants to counteract “la fribolidad, el ateismo y las costumbres extranas” in other publications. *Revista “Mejicana,”* N.D., Caja 2, Expediente 57, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

California, and El Paso in Texas.¹⁰¹ Beyond the newspaper, Rodríguez oversaw the activities of women in these cities. The El Paso women's committee met weekly with women from nearby local committees in Ysleta and San Juan attending. The group also aided the women in the family of sinarquista leader of José L. Soto who were facing financial troubles.¹⁰² Similarly women elsewhere reported on their activities to Rodríguez.

As the dissident branch created parallel committees in the U.S., the El Paso regional committee represented the organization in the city in the eyes of the U.S. government. José de Jesus Muñoz, José A. Zambrano, and Vicente Arriola collectively filed a FARA registration with the Department of Justice. In registering with the U.S. federal government, they noted that “the Regional Council in El Paso, Tex. directs all its activities to organize the people of Mexican extraction into groups and to teach these groups the Sinarquist Doctrine: The betterment of existing conditions in Mexico, amongst its people, both economic and social. To form a true Christian and civil order in Mexico.”¹⁰³ Muñoz, Zambrano, and Arriola maintained a focus on transforming Mexico, all the while emphasizing the particular focus of the dissident group on serving a social and religious function.

Conservative American Catholics like William F. Montavon from the NCWC and Frank Gross also engaged with the dissident group. Although Montavon no longer publicly supported sinarquismo as he had in the past, he maintained correspondence with Antonio Santacruz for

¹⁰¹ *Corte de la Caja de la Revista “Mejicana” del Num. 23*, January 15, 1948, Caja 2, Expediente 57, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.; *Corte de la Caja de la Revista “Mejicana” del Num. 23*, February 16, 1948, Caja 2, Expediente 57, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

¹⁰² Letter from María del Carmen Rodríguez to Carlos Athié Carrasco, July 31, 1947, Caja 2, Expediente 55, Fondo UNS, Archivos Históricos, Ibero.

¹⁰³ United States Department of Justice, *Registration Statement Abstract*, Registration Number 387, October 25, 1946, Freedom of Information Act, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.

some time. He told Santacruz that “you have been generous in giving your service to the welfare of others. You have done more than could reasonably have been demanded of you.”¹⁰⁴ He was grateful for Santacruz’s role in sinarquismo and sided with his cause. Similarly, Frank Gross and Santacruz maintained contact, especially after the organizational split. He did not lose his dedication to the movement. Gross continued to offer his role as a liaison and translator to the dissident sinarquistas following the divide.¹⁰⁵

The movement still provoked interest and admiration from some Americans. Gross received mail from sinarquista sympathizers from around the U.S. These Catholics knew about the organization, but wanted to become involved further. Edward P. Garcia, a lay Catholic and vocal anti-communist based in Boston, maintained regular correspondence with Gross. He explained how “I am convinced that it is a truly fine organization opposed to hellish Communism and that it is fighting for Christian social order in Mexico.”¹⁰⁶ Reverend Dennis A. McGurkin, O.F.M. from Holy Name College told Gross that “Synarchism first engaged my attention about three or four years ago and I have read practically everything that I could find that dealt with the Movement.”¹⁰⁷ Even at Mundelein College in Chicago, an all-female Catholic institution, students in a Geography class investigated the movement. Dolores Bresingham, Mary

¹⁰⁴ Letter from William F. Montavon to Antonio Santacruz, July 10, 1945, Box 72, Folder 4, USCCB Legal Department Records, CUA Archives.

¹⁰⁵ See Folder 14, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Edward P. Garcia to Frank Gross, April 5, 1945, Box 1, Folder 4, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Dennis A. McGurkin, O.F.M to Frank Gross, February 27, 1946, Box 1, Folder 4, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

K. Kennedy, and Virginia Morris found sinarquismo “to be not just another *ism*, but a democratic and Catholic undertaking which has done much to eliminate illiteracy in Latin America.”¹⁰⁸

Despite the lingering support for sinarquismo, Gross’ involvement in supporting the dissident movement dropped off starting in 1946. National chiefs Carlos Athié Carrasco and later Hernán Leal Cetina gave Gross increasingly less work to do. His days of serving as a liaison by giving talks, translating documents, and publicly defending the organization were soon behind him.¹⁰⁹

By 1949, Gross was no longer aiding the UNS and therefore no longer saw the justification in filing as a foreign agent to the Department of Justice. Gross had been filling out FARA registrations ever since 1942. He reached out to the department on March 16, saying that he was no longer active and asked “how I can terminate the necessity of making these needless reports”? He added in defiance, “how can I resign from a position that I never had? It is you who insist that because I wrote a few letters making suggestions to my friends who were in this movement in Mexico that I was an ‘official adviser’ of those.”¹¹⁰ William E. Foley from the department responded accordingly, confirming that that he was inactive. He explained to Gross that “you did not engage in any activities for or in the interest of the [Unión Nacional Sinarquista].” Foley noted that “should you resume your activities on behalf of the Union Nacional Sinarquista, it will be necessary for you to notify this office in order that proper registration forms may be forwarded.”¹¹¹ Gross, however, was done with his involvement in the

¹⁰⁸ “Red in Synarchism? No, Answered,” *The Skyscraper*, April 21, 1947.

¹⁰⁹ See Folder 19, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Frank Gross to Thomas Campbell Clark, Box 1, Folder 19, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

¹¹¹ Letter from William E. Foley to Frank Gross, Box 1, Folder 19, Frank Gross Papers, Marquette Archives.

movement. After eight years of active involvement as an unofficial representative for the movement in the U.S., the “Sinarquista Gringo” was no more.

Although Gross no longer participated in the dissident movement, some American Catholics still lent support. The Claretians provided support to sinarquismo via its Spanish-language, Los Angeles-based publication, *La Esperanza*. Reverend A.E. Vergara, C.M.F. frequently defended the dissident branch against the dominant movement in 1950. He supported sinarquista president Leal Cetina and the chief of the regional sinarquista committee of El Paso, José A. Zambrano, against attacks from the other faction. Vergara argued that the dissident movement was actually “true” sinarquismo and advocated for the very ideals that the original leaders laid out in 1937 - motherland, justice, and freedom.¹¹² Vergara defended sinarquismo just as other Americans, especially religious leaders, had done so in the past. However, just as the dominant faction was losing supporters, so too was the dissident group.

Between the mid-1940s and the early 1950s, rapid transformations affected the UNS in the U.S. Cold War policy paired with an organizational split weakened the group. The UNS lost both its distinctiveness as well as its members. The movement was simply not the same as it once was.

Remnants of Sinarquismo in the United States

The UNS persisted into the 1950s and 1960s in the U.S., however the end was near. Over the course of the 1950s, the split within sinarquismo was less defined than before, with members simply identifying as sinarquistas and not with one faction or another. Chapters across the U.S. disappeared. By the late 1950s, the sinarquista regional committee of El Paso was for all intents

¹¹² A.E. Vergara, “Por Teléfono,” *La Esperanza*, May 21, 1950; A.E. Vergara, C.M.F., “Por Teléfono,” *La Esperanza*, June 4, 1950.

and purposes non-existent. In 1957, committee leadership stopped filing its FARA registration as a foreign agent with the U.S. Department of Justice, noting that the group suspended all activities.¹¹³ The Ciudad Juárez sinarquista committee in Mexico acted as a proxy for the El Paso chapter for several years, speaking on behalf of the organization.¹¹⁴

Into the 1960s, sinarquistas remained in the U.S., however the movement was struggling. The El Paso chapter reemerged. Sinarquista president David Orozco Romo made a trip to Ciudad Juárez in 1961 where regional chief of the El Paso regional committee, Alberto Molina, was present. Orozco Romo pushed a renewed sinarquista agenda of anti-communism. He stipulated how U.S.-based sinarquistas needed to fight communism within the laws of the country to encourage partnership between the U.S. and Mexico. The UNS president said that sinarquismo “always will strive for an effective cooperation and spiritual get together of all nations.”¹¹⁵ Orozco Romo revived the moderate stance of the Torres Bueno wing, seeking collaboration rather than antagonism, hoping that a revived anti-communism would bolster the organization. The UNS, however, was no longer unique in its vision as anti-communism in the U.S. took hold among Americans.

By 1966, the issue was less anti-communism, but rather just to keep the organization alive. In Los Angeles, Pedro Villaseñor was no longer part of a formal committee, however he still identified loosely as a sinarquista. Villaseñor received letters from movement leadership in Mexico City asking for financial support. One was from Isidro Vélez Avilés, the UNS president

¹¹³ United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, Union Nacional Sinarquista of Mexico Registration Act, July 14, 1958, Freedom of Information Act, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁴ “Sinarquistas Here Explain Purpose of Organization,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, March 9, 1959.

¹¹⁵ “Mexican Group to Fight Communist Infiltration,” *El Paso Times*, November 23, 1961.

at the time, who articulated how “the National Committee is going through a very difficult economic situation, to such a degree that we are in serious danger that they will ask us for the house, where our offices are, they cut off the electricity and the telephone; all for non-payment.”¹¹⁶ The situation was so dire for UNS headquarters that the organization could not function without the aid of its members. Once again as sinarquista leadership had done before, the national committee in Mexico City called for monetary support from sinarquistas in the U.S. like Villaseñor.

Vélez Avilés attempted to appeal to Villaseñor with language that he was still a nationalist Mexican in the United States longing for his homeland. He expressed that “we know too well that those who live beyond the borders feel their hearts beat along with ours and that they also yearn for a great, free, prosperous, and happy motherland.”¹¹⁷ The president utilized the same language that sinarquistas like Salvador Velasco and Jesús María Dávila used at the beginning of the movement in the late 1930s. The issue was that by the mid-1960s, the Unión Nacional Sinarquista no longer had the base of support in the United States that the organization had decades before. With the lack of people power compounded with the changing political situation of the Cold War, the movement could simply not sustain itself and survive in the country.

¹¹⁶ “El Comité Nacional pasa por una situación económica difícilísima, a grado tal que estamos con el grave peligro de que nos pidan la casa, donde están nuestras oficinas, nos corten la luz y el telefono; todo ello por falta de pago.” Letter from Isidro Vélez Avilés to Pedro Villaseñor, August 15, 1966, Box 1, Folder 8, Pedro Villaseñor political papers, Huntington Library.

¹¹⁷ “De sobra sabemos que cuantos viven allende las fronteras, sienten latir sus corazones junto con los nuestros y que anhelan también una patria grande, libre, prospera y feliz.” Letter from Isidro Vélez Avilés to Pedro Villaseñor, August 15, 1966, Box 1, Folder 8, Villaseñor papers, Huntington Library.

Conclusion

From the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, the Unión Nacional Sinarquista faced a long decline in the United States. The movement persisted for years, despite major changes inside and outside of the movement. Nonetheless, increased criticism of the group combined with internal strife and the onset of the Cold War all led to the group's demise. However, the organization and its complicated – and contested – legacy live on today.

CONCLUSION

Val Rodriguez from the Los Angeles, California suburb of Signal Hill wrote a letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times* in November 1989 in response to an article on correcting historical injustices. Rodriguez described that while he was attending junior high school on the Eastside of the city during the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, the school's administration banned any students from wearing the outfits. As a result, he and his classmates staged a walk out. Rodriguez explained that "the next day was judgement day. Most of the leaders received two swats. I was asked if I knew what a fascist *Sinarquista* was. I replied that I thought it was a new Mexican dish (like *fajitas*), or a new *pan de huevo* (Mexican pastry). I took three swats."¹ Rodriguez's commentary reflected on the complicated legacy that the Unión Nacional Sinarquista had in Los Angeles – and more broadly in the United States – years after its height.

Following the 1960s, *sinarquistas* in the United States generally distanced themselves from the movement which persisted in Mexico, instead choosing to be more involved directly with the Catholic Church. From Southern California to Chicagoland, many former *sinarquistas* originally learned about the UNS in the first place through their local parishes through the dissemination of *sinarquista* publications. When the movement dissolved in the mid-1940s and beyond, they returned to their home churches.²

¹ Val Rodriguez, "Letter to the Editor," *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1989, B9.

² This was the case at Santa Rosa Church in the San Fernando Valley just north of Los Angeles; Carlos B. Gil, Interview by Nathan Ellstrand, November 22, 2019. This was also the case at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Chicago; Charles Leslie Venable, "Chicago Mexicans Meet Synarchism," *The Christian Century*, October 11, 1944

Pedro Villaseñor, longtime leader of the Los Angeles regional committee, was one such person whose Catholicism lasted throughout his life. He remained loosely affiliated with the movement as a member and nothing else, completely dropping his public association with the organization. The UNS national committee reached out to him not only for financial support, but sought his aid in locating other sinarquistas in the U.S.³ Nonetheless, more than anything else Villaseñor saw himself primarily as a Catholic. He lived his Catholicism in all that he did. He attended daily mass at Our Lady of Lourdes Church on the Eastside of the city, and he sent all of his children to Catholic school. He became a naturalized United States citizen in the late 1950s. Although Villaseñor was socially very conservative, that did not affect his vote in the 1960 U.S. presidential election. Rather than voting for a Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, his Catholicism trumped his political identity and he voted for the candidate of the Democratic Party, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. As for his family, his children did not follow his conservative politics. In particular, his daughter Lucila was active in the progressive Chicano movement, participating in walk-outs, painting murals, and becoming involved in the Raza Unida Party. In Pedro Villaseñor's later years up to his death in 1996, his religion continued to play a primary role in his life where he became a regular parishioner at St. Alphonsus Church, also on Los Angeles' Eastside.⁴ Pedro Villaseñor came to the U.S. as a right-wing Catholic, nationalist Mexican in exile, but passed away as a Catholic who found community among his brethren in his new home.

³ Letter from Adalberto D'Leon to Pedro Villaseñor, Box 1, Folder 10, Pedro Villaseñor political papers, Huntington Library.

⁴ Lucila Villaseñor Grijalva, María Elena Villaseñor, and Alicia O. Colunga, Interview by Nathan Ellstrand, June 14, 2020.

Rosendo Sánchez, a less-prominent, former sinarquista leader shared similar experiences to Villaseñor in his years following the UNS. Whereas Villaseñor was the regional committee chief of Los Angeles, Sánchez served as the municipal committee leader of the small community of Fabens, Texas on the outskirts of El Paso. Sánchez originally left Mexico amid the upheaval of the Mexican Revolution in 1917. His Catholicism caused him to join the UNS in the U.S., but it was also his refuge when he left the movement. Sánchez was an active parishioner of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Fabens, as well as a member of various Catholic associations including the Adoración Nocturna (Nighttime Adoration) and Asociación Guadalupana (Guadalupe Association). A year before he passed in 1983, he became a U.S. citizen.⁵ Like Villaseñor – and other ex-sinarquistas – Sánchez turned to his faith as an integral part of his identity in the U.S.

While sinarquismo disappeared from the United States, it persisted in Mexico in various iterations. Salvador Abascal remained active as a public writer and publisher, not going underground as he once did. He made a point of distributing books that casted a positive light on the height of sinarquismo and a negative perspective on the postrevolutionary state.⁶ Although he passed in 2000, one of his children, Carlos Abascal, left a mark on Mexican politics as the Secretary of the Interior under President Vicente Fox. The faction under Manuel Torres Bueno that sought electoral politics did not go away. The Mexican government banned Fuerza Popular in 1949, but it re-emerged as the Partido Demócrata Mexicano (PDM or Mexican Democratic Party) in the 1970s. The conservative and Catholic PDM reached its height in the 1980s, possessing over 500,000 active members and twelve seats in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies,

⁵ “107 become citizens; elderly gets short wait,” *El Paso Times*, May 29, 1982; “Sanchez,” *El Paso Times*, November 24, 1983.

⁶ Abascal created Editorial Jus and later Editorial Tradición, which continues to publish works today.

lasting into the 1990s.⁷ Otherwise, the Partido Acción Nacional took any of the remaining sinarquistas during and after the PDM. The social and religious faction of Antonio Santacruz lived on through various committees scattered throughout Mexico.

In fact, sinarquismo through the Santacruz faction still remains in Mexico today. The organization maintains its headquarters in Mexico City, with its national committee there. The group still has regional and municipal committees scattered throughout the country. The respective committees throughout Mexico promote their activities to their members through social media. In July 2021, for example, the regional committee of San Luis Potosí hosted a regional sinarquista forum, a eucharist, and a musical program.⁸ In many ways, the UNS celebrates assemblies today just as the movement did in the past. Although the organization does not possess a half million members as it once had, it still cultivates a sense of community of like-minded individuals who envision a different Mexico. Sinarquistas currently in Mexico still believe that conservative Catholicism needs to shape the nation.

This study examines the growth and collapse of the UNS in the United States between the 1930s and the 1960s. Conservative Catholic Mexicans fled Mexico in the first place because of the conflict in the country between the anti-clerical postrevolutionary state and Mexicans who supported a strong Mexican Catholic Church. These individuals found refuge alongside their like-minded compatriots in the U.S. The UNS was an organization that embodied their values and allowed them to maintain their particular form of nationalism while residing outside their

⁷ Alan Riding, *Mexico: Inside the Volcano* (London: Cornet Books, 1989), 102.

⁸ There are tens of UNS pages on Facebook including regional committee in San Luis Potosí. Unión Nacional Sinarquista San Luis Potosí, "Homenaje a caídos sinarquistas," Facebook, June 24, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/Uni%C3%B3n-Nacional-Sinarquista-San-Luis-Potos%C3%AD-317197715525569>

home country's boundaries. The movement organized these individuals into forming committees in California, Texas, and Chicagoland, in addition to cultivating readers throughout the U.S. of the various *sinarquista* publications. The UNS utilized this base of support in the U.S. to undermine the Mexican state. UNS leaders reached out to and collaborated with conservative American Catholics to shift public opinion in the U.S. towards their perspective and similarly subvert the Mexican government. The National Catholic Welfare Conference, Inter-American Institute, and individuals such as Frank Gross and Heibel Alcuin did their part to amplify the *sinarquista* cause. This transnational conservative Catholic community, however, only lasted so long.

The UNS faced divisions within the movement that tore it apart. Differing visions of what Mexico should be split the organization's membership. While some wanted an integralist and authoritarian Mexico that fused together church and state, others sought for more influence from the Catholic Church in Mexican society. The third group that emerged believed that the way towards conservative Catholic influence in society was through formal electoral politics. Each of these factions replicated themselves in the U.S. at different points in time.

In addition to internal divisions, the fall of the UNS was coordinated by various interest groups including the U.S. and Mexican governments, the Mexican American left, and the U.S. media. The *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* initially claimed that the organization was fascist and in short time this notion made its way to the U.S. Especially with the onset of World War II, Americans expressed real fear of fascism and of foreigners undermining the nation's security. As the war persisted, the *sinarquistas* could not exist without being seen as an internal enemy to the U.S. The reputation of the UNS as fascist combined with a split within the movement led to its ultimate collapse.

This dissertation contributes to the historiography in various ways. In terms of the literature on the UNS, it paints the first whole picture of sinarquismo in the United States from the movement's beginnings with its roots in the church-state conflict to its demise in the 1960s. Not only were Catholic Mexican nationalists in Mexico passionate about changing their country, but so too were those in the U.S. Through organizing, partnerships, publications, and donations, they did what they could to transform the situation back home. Sinarquistas in the U.S. were also misunderstood and utilized as scapegoats during World War II. Future works can further examine the transnational dimensions of sinarquismo, not just in Mexico and the U.S., but in other parts of the Americas.

This study also builds on the historiography of postrevolutionary Mexico. It examines Mexicans during this period beyond the confines of the nation-state, adding onto the work of scholars like Julia G. Young. This study also complicates how the UNS interacted with the postrevolutionary state and its various apparatuses, showing that these "enemies" actually worked with one another to get what they wanted, especially in the context of colonization. Upcoming research can investigate postrevolutionary Mexico in a variety of ways such as by examining postrevolutionary leaders in exile (such as Plutarco Elías Calles) or by presenting a larger-scale history on the Mexican political right in the U.S. during this time.

The scholarship on Western and U.S.-Mexico borderlands history also benefits from this dissertation. Whereas historians explore the contestation and hardening of this particular borderland over time, none hone in on World War II or the UNS. Future studies can delve into the border during this period of total war, examining who transcended it, who was perceived to be a threat, and how it was policed. For example, Vicente Lombardo Toledano consistently

warned about the threat of arms being transported across the border to “enemies” of the Mexican state like the *sinarquistas*.

Lastly, this dissertation contributes to the historiography on Mexican Americans in the U.S. Not only does this work focus on historical actors who did not seek a hyphenated identity, it complicates oversimplified portrayals of Mexican Americans during the Sleepy Lagoon incident and Zoot Suit Riots. This study also builds on a growing body of work on Latinx conservatism. Upcoming scholarship has the opportunity to delve into the effect of transnational Mexicans on the U.S., explore political and religious conflicts of the Mexican American community, and examine the many other dimensions of the Latinx political right.

Even though *sinarquismo* does not exist during this present moment in the U.S., the history of the movement still matters. Despite *sinarquistas* no longer residing in the country today, conservative and religious Mexicans – and migrants more broadly – certainly do. All too often does the American political system, media, and general public consider the Latinx community to be uniform – as was portrayed by the U.S. media during the 2020 presidential election. However, like any population, it is varied, diverse and complex. This dissertation demonstrates the ideological diversity and intense fights within the Mexican diaspora, as well as how complicated and contested ideas of Mexicanness are. In an era of widespread growth of the political right, it is essential to understand the complexities and underlying context behind the rise – and fall – of such movements like the *Unión Nacional Sinarquista*.

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