

## A Model Dinosaur: Power, Personal Networks, and the Career of Rubén Figueroa

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This article explores the career of Rubén Figueroa, who, as governor of Guerrero, came to represent a classic regional boss during the latter part of the PRI regime. It examines how and why upwardly mobile actors built extensive personal networks and it offers a discussion of the nature of political power under the PRI. It advances three arguments: that effective networks were socially and spatially diverse, tying provincial aspirations to Mexico City's corporatist politics; that these broad networks were important because of the regime's particular metrics of "political strength;" and that this system articulated a distinctive power that linked capital and province.

Este artículo examina la carrera política de Rubén Figueroa, quien llegó a ser visto como un cacique típico durante el régimen del PRI. Explorando por qué los aspirantes al poder construyeron redes personales y cómo esas redes fueron fundamentales para el poder priísta, se argumenta: que las redes que fueron efectivas eran diversas tanto en lo social como en lo espacial, y que ligaron las aspiraciones regionales a la política corporativista de la ciudad de México; que esas redes fueron importantes por la interpretación singular priísta de la "fuerza política"; y que esos entendimientos iluminan la naturaleza de poder político bajo el PRI.

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**Key words:** Alliance of Mexican Bus Operators (Alianza de Camioneros), caciques, camarilla politics, Rubén Figueroa, Guerrero, Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), political theater (*acarreo*).

**Palabras clave:** acarreo, Alianza de Camioneros, caciques, Rubén Figueroa, Guerrero, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), política de camarillas.

On the morning of May 14, 1974, three hundred buses from Guerrero arrived outside the central offices of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) on Insurgentes Avenue in Mexico City.<sup>1</sup> Six thousand peasants streamed from the buses toward the central patio of the building, proclaiming their support for Rubén Figueroa as the next governor of their state. By the standards of Mexican political rituals, the scene presented little that was out of the ordinary. The career of the man at the center of the morning's events, however, was indeed remarkable, and how those peasants came to be bit players in the pageantry of power is deeply revealing of the pathways of Mexican politics. During a political career that spanned five decades, Rubén Figueroa had built a network of personal relationships that allowed him to rise from a modest provincial background to become a national political figure. It is a story that reveals much about the nature of Mexico's soft-authoritarian PRI regime, and the ways in which the diverse mix of *priista* actors understood their participation in a political system that seemed to follow a set of unwritten rules.

The examination of Figueroa's<sup>2</sup> career offered here makes three contributions to an understanding of Mexican politics during the soft-authoritarian PRI regime that ruled the country for most of the twentieth century:

First, it shows how political networks allowed upwardly mobile political actors to exercise regional influence.<sup>3</sup> Figueroa's path suggests that even those who aspired to provincial authority often needed to build political power bases in the capital, establishing ties to corporatist organizations and the national party bureaucracy.

1. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), México D.F., DGIPS C.1934C Exp.2, May 14, 1974.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, Figueroa refers to Rubén Figueroa.

3. Peter Smith, Merilee Grindle, and Roderic Ai Camp have all provided important insights on the functioning of such networks; Peter Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Merilee Grindle, "Patrons and Clients in the Bureaucracy: Career Networks in Mexico," *Latin America Research Review* 12, no. 1 (1977): 37-66; Roderic Ai Camp, "Camarillas in Mexican Politics: The Case of the Salinas Cabinet," *MS/EM* 6, no. 1 (1990): 85-107.

Simultaneously, prominence as a leader within the PRI's corporatist system of social organization offered only limited opportunities for advancement without a network that reached beyond Mexico City. As a result, those historically seen almost exclusively as regional bosses (caciques), and identified with heavy-handed control of a state or locality—as Figueroa was with Guerrero—tended to move between interlocking spheres of activity and space. In constructing the networks that linked those spheres, political actors forged loyalties by dispensing both tangible and intangible patronage. By focusing on the spatial dimensions of these networks, I offer a fresh perspective on how informal political practices shaped the articulation of PRI rule between the capital and the states;

Second, I provide an explanation for why *priistas* invested such substantial resources in building and maintaining these networks, known as *camarillas*.<sup>4</sup> Standard examinations of these networks have tended to emphasize their connection to the pursuit of government patronage jobs. Here, I explore how these networks allowed Mexico City-based politicians to influence state politics by undermining and attacking opponents through various forms of subterfuge. Furthermore, I demonstrate how these systems served as the gears of political mobilization. Networks like Figueroa's facilitated the practice of bribing or coercing massive participation in rallies, a phenomenon known as *acarreo*. Together, these two features made *camarillas* invaluable, since the language of politics emphasized "political strength," an abstract metric based on the combination of capability for *acarreo* and capacity for subterfuge. In exploring how the construction and deployment of these networks were tied to concepts of power, I move beyond explanations that focus on their connection to patronage;

Third, in exploring how Figueroa matured from a local tough, whose political youth was characterized by election-day shootouts, to an architect of *acarreo* who moved in the circles of Mexico City high politics, I uncover an evolving definition of power and authority in the political system as a whole. Figueroa's evolution highlights the ways in which "classic" *priista* figures acquired power, not simply through violence or patronage, but by moving between the worlds of rural "hardball" and urban, entrepreneurial, and corporatist politics.<sup>5</sup>

4. The term "camarilla" described nineteenth-century private royal advisors and court favorites in Spain and later elsewhere in Europe. In modern Mexico, however, it came to signify the political cliques that emerged around powerful politicians.

5. Alan Knight, "México bronco, México manso: una reflexión sobre la cultura cívica mexicana," *Política y Gobierno* III, no. 1 (1996); Rogelio Hernández, "Challenging

Though his opponents would describe him as a retrograde, repressive political boss and label him as a cacique in the purest PRI tradition, he does not conform well to the classic model of the local lords who exemplified *cacical* politics.<sup>6</sup> That model emphasizes the role of caciques as intermediaries between national politics and marginal, often rural, communities, as well as their coercive control of those communities through patronage networks.<sup>7</sup> But where studies of those figures underscore their intimate connections to their communities and localities, Figueroa became the cacique of Guerrero while living and working in the world of Mexico City's corporatist politics. He was an entrepreneurial urban politician who simultaneously established a provincial *cacicazgo*. He was neither a union boss nor a backwoods rowdy. In pursuing the governorship of Guerrero, Figueroa built a political authority based as much on policy influence and corporatist support as on violence. He defies easy classification, much as the regime has eluded ready typologies. Yet it is telling that, at the end of his career, Figueroa would describe himself as a political dinosaur, perhaps paradoxically concurring with those critics who had labeled him an avatar of the PRI system.<sup>8</sup> His power was, if anything, typical in a PRI regime that never abandoned violence, but simultaneously developed unique models and codes for upward mobility.

Figueroa's career is hardly an obvious candidate for historical reconstruction: little is known about his early life, and he seems to have every reason to obfuscate his political adolescence. Indeed, documentation of his life prior to the 1970s is sparse. It is, nevertheless,

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*Caciquismo: An Analysis of the Leadership of Carlos Hank González,* in *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, Alan Knight and Wil Pansters, eds. (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2005), 271.

6. It must be noted that the term itself is extremely imprecise. As Claudio Lomnitz remarks, "the phenomenon of 'caciquismo' is so diverse—in terms of the kinds of power relations involved, in terms of the economic and ethnic characteristics of caciques, in terms of their position in society—that the utility of the term itself can be doubted," Lomnitz, *Exits From the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 296.

7. Caciques, nevertheless, included a diverse range of figures: from Gonzalo N. Santos and Maximino Ávila Camacho—men who built personal political machines in their home states of San Luis Potosí and Puebla on the back of coercion and violence—to Heliodoro Charis, who served as a broker for indigenous residents of Juchitán, Oaxaca, and Heliodoro Hernández Loza in Guadalajara, who became a powerbroker in local politics as a labor boss controlling the transportation workers union, María Teresa Fernández Aceves, "En-gendering *Caciquismo*: Guadalupe Martínez, Heliodoro Hernández Loza and the Politics of Organized Labour in Jalisco," in *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 201–226.

8. Ignacio Ramírez, "Cacique, monopolista, senador, gobernador, majadero," *Proceso*, March 23, 1991.

this relative anonymity that makes him a compelling case for understanding the regime writ large. Figueroa represents the middle strata of upwardly mobile political actors who comprised the solid core of the PRI: if the contours of his life are murky, they nevertheless speak to how many similar careers were built in this way. It is instructive, therefore, that the archival key to tracing Figueroa's ascent does not follow his trajectory in Guerrero's politics, but rather his connection to Mexico City's corporatist politics and his leadership of bus industry entrepreneurs. His leadership of the National Alliance of Mexican Bus Operators (*Alianza de Camioneros de la República Mexicana*, ACRM) from 1957 onward, put him at the head of an organization that controlled vital public transportation services and helped mobilize the PRI's political machine during campaigns and other events. As the representative of the group of businessmen who owned buses, Figueroa had influence that opened doors. The key to upward mobility under the PRI was in the strategic construction of networks that allowed power to move across space.

In undertaking this analysis, this essay moves first to a discussion of the Figueroa family history, examining how the careers of Rubén, his brother Rufo and their uncles intertwined from the 1920s to the 1940s, and how Rufo came to be the family's standard bearer until his death in 1967.<sup>9</sup> The second and third sections offer synchronic discussions of Figueroa's *camarilla*-building efforts during the 1950s and 1960s; the second covers the creation of a *camarilla* among bus industry entrepreneurs (a *camarilla camionera*) and the third, Figueroa's *camarilla* in the state of Guerrero. The fourth and final section will briefly discuss Figueroa's governorship of Guerrero, the crowning achievement of his political career, and perhaps paradoxically, the moment when his national influence began to disintegrate.

### The Librarians

The story of Figueroa's life begins far from the central offices of the PRI on Insurgentes. Born in the town of Huitzuco at the north central edge of Guerrero in 1908 to lower middle-class parents, he spent his childhood weathering the Revolution.<sup>10</sup> If his parents were humble, his relatives were well-known ranchers in the region who were early joiners of the Revolution, firing, as Ian Jacobs notes, the first shots of

9. "Rufo" is also frequently spelled "Ruffo." I have chosen to use the former here, as it seems to be preferred by those close to the Figuroas.

10. By one account, his childhood stint as an altar boy ended when he was caught stealing the hosts, Ramírez, "Cacique, monopolista."

the *maderista* revolt in the state.<sup>11</sup> Uncles Rómulo, Ambrosio, Andrés, and Francisco Figueroa all participated in the fighting and gained both fame and power. Francisco, the family's intellectual, briefly served as interim governor of Guerrero in 1918. Andrés was a well-regarded career military man during the 1920s and 1930s, culminating with his designation as Secretary of War under President Lázaro Cárdenas.<sup>12</sup> Rubén and his brother Rufo, older by three years, were merely witnesses to the Revolution, however, and they would follow very different paths to those of their uncles.

In 1921, Rufo emigrated to Mexico City in search of better prospects, with Rubén following not long behind. By then, Francisco Figueroa was serving in the Public Education Ministry (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP) and through him, Rufo obtained a job as a librarian's assistant in the Ministry's public libraries.<sup>13</sup> Although he had never received formal education after primary school, Rufo was a dedicated autodidact and quickly rose to the directorship of the José Rodó Public Library in Mexico City. When a bureaucratic shuffle demoted him back to a librarianship, he refused to accept the transfer and instead he passed the job to Rubén. The brothers shared an entrepreneurial intellectuality and Rubén made good use of his time, training himself at the National Library and eventually entering the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM) where he completed a degree in topographical and hydrological engineering.<sup>14</sup> Both brothers participated in politics in these years, but Rubén—by virtue of his education—tended to occupy appointments as a government engineer, while Rufo established himself as a leader of the Bureaucrats' Union (Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado, FSTSE). While their lives remained intertwined, their divergent paths reveal the importance of Mexico City's corporatist politics to upward mobility.

Judging only by a list of titles, Rubén appeared the more fortunate of the two during the 1930s. After graduating from UNAM in

11. Ian Jacobs, *Ranchero Revolt: The Mexican Revolution in Guerrero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 28.

12. *Ibid.*, 136.

13. "Semblanza Biográfica de Rufo Figueroa Figueroa," *El Informador Camionero*, June 1968. Much of the biography included here of Rufo is compiled from this article in *El Informador Camionero*; see also, Roderic Ai Camp, *Mexican Political Biographies, 1935–1993*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); and José C. Gutiérrez Galindo, *Rubén Figueroa: Permanencia de una Revolución en Guerrero* (México, D.F.: Costa-Amic, 1974).

14. Rubén had the benefit of schooling at the National Preparatory School (Escuela Nacional Preparatoria) in Mexico City.

1932, he served as a member of the Mixed Agrarian Commission of Guerrero where he was tasked with planning ejidos, and was subsequently named head of the state's Ministry of Public Works.<sup>15</sup> In 1933, Rubén was designated as one of the thirty-four delegates from the state of Guerrero to attend the Mexican Revolutionary Party (Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, PRM) convention that nominated Lázaro Cárdenas as a candidate for the 1934 presidential elections, suggesting that Rubén had some stature as a *guerrereense* political up-and-comer.<sup>16</sup> During those same elections, Rubén was the alternate candidate for a congressional deputyship in Guerrero's fourth district.<sup>17</sup> He meanwhile continued to develop a career in the Mexico City bureaucracy, serving in 1935 on the Communications Ministry (Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, SCOP) commission that recommended the nationalization of the railroads; and from 1936 to 1940, he worked for the Public Health Ministry (Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia, SSA). But if Rubén had succeeded in maintaining close ties to Guerrero while simultaneously establishing himself in the capital, it was his family's legacy that proved his most valuable asset. When Rubén received the PRM's nomination for the congressional deputyship in Guerrero's second district in 1940, the local government ministry agent remarked that he had been recommended for the post by none less than PRM presidential candidate Manuel Ávila Camacho, who held Rubén's uncle Andrés in high esteem.<sup>18</sup>

Like most elections in Guerrero in those years, the 1940 balloting proved exceptionally messy and election day brought predictable turmoil throughout the state.<sup>19</sup> In numerous instances, the competing factions established their own polling stations, and violence was frequent. Government ministry agents monitoring the vote dryly catalogued extensive violations of electoral law. According to one report,

15. Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), México, D.F., Versión Pública del Expediente de Rubén Figueroa Figueroa (hereafter abbreviated as VP RFF) L1 H54, undated.

16. Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Instituto de Capacitación Política, *Historia documental del Partido de la Revolución, PRM-PRI, 1945-1950* (México, D.F.: Partido Revolucionario Institucional, 1982), 2: 52.

17. *Suplente* or alternate deputies only served if the primary seat holder (*propietario*) was unable to fulfill their duties.

18. AGN, DGIPS C.773 Exp.13, July 18, 1940, PS-10 to IPS. Andrés was also Manuel Ávila Camacho's uncle, and Rubén and Rufo benefited greatly from Ávila Camacho's esteem for Andrés, Camp, *Mexican Political Biographies 1935-2009*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2011): 70-71.

19. See Paul Gillingham, "Force and Consent in Mexican Provincial Politics: Guerrero and Veracruz, 1945-1953" (PhD diss., Saint Anthony's College, Oxford, 2005).

“the operation of marking the ballots was carried out under the eyes of polling station officials and the general public, in a manner such that the voting was not secret.”<sup>20</sup> The same account noted that in urban areas, “some individuals voted with credentials that obviously did not correspond to them, having arrived from other villages the night before in trucks . . . Many of these individuals deposited ballots at two or more polling stations.”<sup>21</sup> Rubén Figueroa was not out of place in this electoral scum. According to subsequent reports, at 9:30 in the morning, the fifth polling station in his district was occupied by opposition supporters. A half-hour later, a group of gunmen, reportedly under the direction of Figueroa, opened fire on the unarmed occupiers at the polling station and retook control.<sup>22</sup> If the report was equivocal about the perpetrators of the violence, which left five dead and seven wounded, letters from Agrarian Party (Partido Agrarista) representatives pinned responsibility squarely on “the nefarious Rubén Figueroa.”<sup>23</sup> Bloodstains notwithstanding, the results stood. Figueroa was duly seated as a deputy, though it was apparent that he lacked legitimacy—the intrepid government ministry agent calculated that “in a clean vote” Figueroa would only have received a quarter of the ballots.<sup>24</sup> If this episode suggested Rubén was on track to become a regional tough like Gonzalo N. Santos in San Luis Potosí or Maximino Ávila Camacho in Puebla, his career nevertheless moved in a completely different direction following his congressional term. It is entirely possible that the electoral violence and his apparent unpopularity may have slowed Rubén’s career, since it would be twenty years before he again held elected office in the state.

The beginning of Rufo’s political career was no less murky than that of his brother, although it developed in an entirely different milieu, far from the polling stations of Guerrero. As a state employee in the 1920s and 1930s, working first in public libraries and

20. AGN, DGIPS C.773 Exp.13, July 18, 1940, PS-10 to IPS. All translations are my own.

21. *Ibid.*, July 8, 1940, PS-10 to IPS.

22. *Ibid.*, July 15, 1940, PS-10 to IPS. The individuals identified as attackers were Salustio Salgado, Genaro Salgado, “a Mr. Jaimes, brother-in-law of General Castrejón, a ‘costeño’ who is Inspector of Markets, a police sergeant claimed to be Rubén Figueroa’s cousin, and a Mr. Bravo.” A subsequent report noted that “while [Figueroa’s] involvement in the armed assault cannot be completely proven, it is undeniable that after the events he endeavored to cover up actions of the cowardly *berberista* assassins,” *Ibid.*, July 18, 1940, PS-10 to IPS. “*Berberista*” refers to supporters of Governor Adolfo Berber.

23. *Ibid.*, July 11, 1940, PS-10 to IPS.

24. *Ibid.*, July 18, 1940, PS-10 to IPS.



subsequently in the Mexico City treasury (Sección de la Tesorería del Departamento del Distrito Federal), Rufo was forced to endure the vicissitudes of public employment, particularly frequent furloughs, transfers, and layoffs.<sup>25</sup> Whether galvanized by such struggles or motivated by keen political ambition, Rufo quickly became involved in early attempts to organize public employees and by the mid-1930s was a prominent leader of the Mexico City Employees' Union (Sindicato Único de Trabajadores del Departamento del Distrito Federal, SUTDDF). From there, Rufo moved to the recently founded Federation of State Employees (FSTSE), the union representing the interests of all government bureaucrats and workers.<sup>26</sup> By 1943, Rufo had risen to the Secretary Generalship of the FSTSE, reportedly with the backing of Mexico City regent Javier Rojo Gómez.<sup>27</sup> In that same year, Rufo was a delegate from the Federal District to the founding convention of the National Confederation of Popular Organizations (Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares, CNOP), and was elected Secretary of Bureaucratic Action (Secretario de Acción Burocrática) of the new sector. By the early 1940s he had thus established himself as a key leader of government employees, a sector that the official party was increasingly interested in controlling. Rufo inhabited a world filled with powerful political fixers; the FSTSE and the CNOP brought him into close contact with PRI leaders during the 1940s. The organizational melee of Mexico City's corporatist politics was a prime setting for someone interested in forming alliances and building connections, and Rufo proved adept at this, cultivating relationships with Rojo Gómez as well as PRI leaders Rómulo Sánchez Mireles and Alfonso Martínez Domínguez.<sup>28</sup> He attained such political stature that he would serve as a presiding secretary at the 1946 convention that transformed the PRM into the PRI. At the same time, Rufo shared his brother's take-no-prisoners approach to politics, and government ministry agents remarked that, "he has a reputation for honesty in economic matters, but is a fan of violence when it comes to achieving his political ambitions."<sup>29</sup> On at least one occasion it was

25. "Semblanza Biográfica de Rufo Figueroa Figueroa," *El Informador Camionero*, June, 1968.

26. The FSTSE was founded in 1938 as a *cardenista* initiative.

27. AGN, DGIPS C.809 Exp.11, "Antecedentes."

28. Most accounts link Rufo to Sánchez Mireles, who was something of a gray figure in 1940s politics and was involved in the messier aspects of public employee politics, though it was later rumored that the two were at odds. DFS, VP RFF L1 H10, July 21, 1955, Agent 104 (Pedro Vázquez Torres) to DFS.

29. AGN, DGIPS C.119 Exp.70, October 11, 1949, "Antecedentes de Rufo Figueroa," Delegado del IPS (JCB).

rumored that he had used thugs from Mexico City's Trash and Sanitation Service (*Limpia y Transporte*<sup>30</sup>) to enforce his victory in union elections.<sup>31</sup>

Connections and influence in the capital did not immediately translate to authority in Guerrero. In 1943, Rufo was named the PRM's candidate for a congressional deputyship but, significantly, the nomination was for the seat representing Mexico City's fourth district rather than any region of Guerrero. Both Rubén and Rufo were mentioned as possible pre-candidates for the governorship of the state in 1944, and although Rufo's odds appeared better, neither saw their aspirations bear fruit. A government ministry report would later note that Rufo was "*desvinculado*"—detached—from his home state, since he had "spent the majority of his life in Mexico City."<sup>32</sup> The Figueroas were hardly unique in being distant stewards of their family's regional power. Indeed, many of the state's potentates absented themselves from Guerrero—it was simply too dangerous, too downtrodden, and most importantly, too far from the center of power.<sup>33</sup> It is instructive, though hardly remarkable, that of the eight pre-candidates for Guerrero's governorship mentioned in Federal Security Directorate (*Dirección Federal de Seguridad*, DFS) reports two decades later, only one was actually living and working in the state, while four were reported to be "little known" in the state, and two were reported to visit the state only rarely.<sup>34</sup>

Detachment from Guerrero, therefore, was hardly an obstacle to political aspirations in the state, and in 1946, Rufo received the PRI's

30. Sección Uno de Limpia y Transportes del Sindicato Único de Trabajadores del Gobierno del DF.

31. AGN, DGIPS C.119 Exp.70, October 11, 1949, "Antecedentes de Rufo Figueroa," Delegado del IPS (JCB).

32. *Ibid.*

33. If Guerrero was geographically close to Mexico City, it was worlds away socially. If PRI *políticos* might have hobnobbed in Cuernavaca, they certainly did not in Chilpancingo; see Gillingham, "Force and Consent" for a discussion of the circle of guerrerense expatriates in Mexico City.

34. Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, of those mentioned in the report from 1962, none became the PRI's candidate. Though the eventual candidate did reside there, his nomination had been pushed by the presidential secretary, himself a powerful guerrerense expatriate. One of those listed in the report—Caritino Maldonado—would be selected as the PRI's gubernatorial candidate in 1969. Maldonado followed a similar path to Rubén Figueroa, becoming a leader of the CNOP and a leader of teachers, while building a network of allies in the state, Alex Aviña, "Insurgent Guerrero: Genaro Vázquez, Lucio Cabañas, and the Guerilla challenge to the Postrevolutionary Mexican State, 1960–1996" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009), 237; DFS, VP RFF L1 H64, February 4, 1962, "Antecedentes de los principales aspirantes a la gubernatura del estado de Guerrero."

nomination for one of Guerrero's senatorial seats. That he had effectively led the FSTSE into enthusiastic support for the presidential campaign of Miguel Alemán—and forged a friendship with the candidate—was apparently qualification enough to represent the state. While he was duly elected to the seat, family habits died hard: DFS agents sardonically reported that Rufo had, “with pistol in hand, ensured that the vote was respected, leaving several people dead.”<sup>35</sup> While he may have been something of a legacy candidate with few ties to the state, as a senator, Rufo dedicated himself to pushing for the construction of dams and other public works, using his Mexico City connections to channel resources into policies that might build a clientele capable of supporting his gubernatorial ambitions. In one case, it appears that Rufo worked with the cacique of Huitzucó, Jesús Figueroa (a cousin through Rómulo) to arrange for the electrification of the town.<sup>36</sup>

By the 1950s, Rufo was consistently mentioned as an important player in Guerrero state politics, but he remained personally and professionally tied to the Mexico City bureaucracy, and other actors surpassed the Figueroas as the preeminent powerbrokers in the state. From 1952 until 1964, he served as the sub-director of the bureaucratic pension fund, the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers (Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado, ISSSTE), before a one-year stint as CNOP head (1964–1965). He collected powerful friends, including Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and Miguel Alemán, and served in congress with Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and in the senate with Adolfo López Mateos.<sup>37</sup> By the 1960s, he enjoyed a sterling reputation as an upstanding professional politician who was, in the words of one DFS report, “honest and upright. Well-off financially. Well known and liked in his hometown and in Guerrero in general. Esteemed in the national bureaucracy. Long-time militant in the PRI. Considered a discrete and experienced politician.”<sup>38</sup> That his previous affinity for violence in union and provincial politics was unmentioned in these reports does not suggest that he had abandoned such tactics. Rather, it seems more likely that—perhaps out of politeness—the occasional use of the pistol by those who ran in the circles of high politics was common enough to

35. DFS, VP RFF L1 H58, May 25, 1962, “Panorama del Estado de Guerrero.”

36. AGN, P, ARC 523.4/349, April 4, 1955, Jesús Figueroa to Ruiz Cortines.

37. It is intriguing that DFS agents included notable “*compañeros de Cámara*” (“congressional colleagues”) as part of their dossiers, underscoring the importance of the networking that took place in the halls of the national congress.

38. DFS, VP RFF L1 H90, “Antecedentes,” undated.

no longer merit comment. It is also interesting that he was no longer “desvinculado” from the state, with his reputed popularity there perhaps the result of his self-promotional efforts as a senator.

His credentials, however, failed to win Rufo what he sought. In what appears to have been a consolation prize, in 1965 Rufo was named the PRI candidate for the governorship of Quintana Roo. He would only serve two years of his term, however, felled by a fatal illness at age 62.<sup>39</sup> That Rufo should have failed to achieve the governorship of Guerrero speaks to the perils of absentee careers. Nevertheless, the fact that after 1943 Rufo—and not Rubén—should have become the standard bearer of the Figueroas’ ambitions to rule their home state, suggests the importance of participation in Mexico City party politics to regional careers. Rufo rose faster than his brother largely because of the power and connections he had cultivated as a leader of federal employees within the PRI’s corporatist system.

The Figueroa brothers were not unique figures. Their careers from the 1920s to the 1950s were in many ways typical for politicians of their generation. Indeed, Jacobs describes them as following “classic careers,” remarking that their family’s “comeback was possible because they had abandoned the role of autonomous local caciques and learned the rules of the political process of the new Mexico.”<sup>40</sup> The brothers moved upward, trading on their family’s Revolutionary legacy and establishing political connections to powerful patrons. If their home was Guerrero, their world was Mexico City. They cultivated their own clientele outside of their home state, principally in the capital, using the PRI’s corporatist system as an entrée into national politics. Those urban networks did much to eventually allow the Figueroa family to regain power in rural Guerrero. Building careers in the corporatist organizations of the capital was no simple task, however, as becomes clear through the story of Figueroa’s *camarilla camionera*.

### The Mogul

In truth, the brothers’ careers had diverged in the early 1940s. While Rufo became a union leader, Rubén became a *camionero*—the term

39. In what was perhaps a bit of sentimental politics, Javier Rojo Gómez was appointed to finish Rufo’s term.

40. Jacobs, *Ranchero Revolt*, 137; Gillingham also echoes this sentiment, noting that, “A parallel shift occurred in [Guerrero’s] politics as old career paths through the military or popular organizations grew obsolete before the encroachment of the Mexico City bureaucracy. At a state level, it was significant that the Figueroa family fortunes should be restored by Ruffo a life-long bureaucrat,” “Force and Consent,” 56.

that applied to the entrepreneurs who ran the country's bus and truck industry. His involvement was more than business, however. As owners of a small domestic industry, transportation entrepreneurs represented the sort of nationalist business interest that aligned closely with the PRI regime from the 1940s onward. Much as his brother had built his career through the FSTSE, by the late 1950s, Rubén would build a political reputation as the leader of the *Alianza de Camioneros de la República Mexicana* (ACRM), claiming to represent the interests of the national collective of camioneros.<sup>41</sup> Through the ACRM, Figueroa was able to cultivate an increasingly powerful clientele of truck and bus industry entrepreneurs and establish himself as an important player in national politics.

How Figueroa became involved in bus industry politics is something of an enigma. By his own account, at some point after his election to congress in 1940, Rubén founded the *Autotransportes Figueroa* cargo trucking company with a route running from Mexico City to Acapulco.<sup>42</sup> Rubén had apparently driven a cargo truck owned by his father in the area of Huitzucó during the 1920s, and he had also worked sporadically for the San Ángel Inn bus line in Mexico City in those same years, so the decision to invest in transportation was not entirely accidental.<sup>43</sup> The cargo line flourished, though much of its success seems to have been tied to political connections, as the company received the lucrative postal concession to carry mail from Mexico City to Morelos and Guerrero.<sup>44</sup> In part owing to this success, in 1951 Rubén became the president of a struggling intercity bus line running from Mexico City to Nuevo Laredo, *Autobuses Blancos Flecha Roja*.<sup>45</sup> A member line of the *Alianza de Camioneros de México*, (commonly known as the *Alianza*), the organization that represented the interests of bus industry entrepreneurs, the presidency of the line

41. Not to be confused with the *Alianza de Camioneros de México*, the oldest organization representing the interests of transportation entrepreneurs, from which the ACRM emerged as a dissident group.

42. Though the exact year of the founding is unclear, Figueroa claims that the line was founded in 1940, Carlos Bravo, *Apuntes para la historia del autotransporte* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, Dirección General de Autotransporte Federal, 1982), 169. The material comes from an interview with Rubén Figueroa. Hereafter *Apuntes*, RFF.

43. See *Apuntes*, RFF, 163–164. Other accounts suggest that Figueroa had first purchased trucks to aid in gathering linaloe essential oil from farms, work that he had begun doing with pack animals, Ramírez, “Cacique, monopolista.”

44. Ramírez, “Cacique, monopolista.”

45. It is unclear whether he assumed leadership in 1951 or 1952, but he was certainly a member of the line's leadership in 1951 when he appeared at an *Alianza* assembly, *El Informador Camionero*, July 1, 1951.

provided Rubén an entrée into camionero politics. Soon he would move from simply administering the business of a bus line to participating in the world of PRI corporatism.

Figuroa's choice of the bus industry was an astute one. By the 1950s, the Alianza had become a powerful player in Mexico City's politics.<sup>46</sup> The Alianza had accumulated a tremendous amount of influence during the 1930s and 1940s by leveraging its monopolistic control over Mexico City's bus system into government subsidies and operating concessions.<sup>47</sup> While residents complained of poor service, urban authorities and national politicians sanctioned the private operation of the city's public transportation network by the Alianza's entrepreneurs. For many of the group's members, owning buses became a lucrative enterprise, and the Alianza was first and foremost a lobbying group for the economic interests of these businessmen. Beyond provisioning the transportation services that were vital to the daily mobility of residents in the metropolis, the Alianza also provided buses to the PRI, allowing the regime to move supporters—*acarreados* or “rent-a-ralliers,” as was more often the case—to demonstrations, parades, or campaign events. By the 1950s, this integration into both the administration of Mexico City and the machinery of authoritarianism had turned the Alianza's entrepreneurs into cagey and influential political operators. Loyal supporters of the regime, well-connected to key priístas through personal ties, and members of the PRI's popular sector (the CNOP), the Alianza's leaders could often spin their position as industry representatives into political office. When Figuroa became president of Autobuses Blancos in 1951, one member of the organization's executive committee was serving in congress and another headed the Social Security Ministry (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social). In short, the camionero organization promised significant professional rewards to those who claimed its leadership.<sup>48</sup>

46. A comprehensive history of the Alianza can be found in my dissertation, Michael Lettieri, “Wheels of Government: The *Alianza de Camioneros* and the Political Culture of P.R.I. Rule, 1929–1981” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, San Diego, 2014).

47. Michael Lettieri, “Los tentáculos del pulpo: La Alianza de Camioneros y la cultura política del sistema priísta en la formación de la política de transporte, 1934–1958.” In *México a la luz de sus revoluciones*, Vol. 2, Susan Deeds and Laura Rojas, eds. México: El Colegio de México, 2014.

48. It is worth noting that while the leaders of the Alianza de Camioneros were the most prominent, they were not the only aspiring politicians who colonized the transportation industry. There are, however, significant differences between Alianza leaders and the well-known other cases. In Guadalajara, Heliodoro Hernández Loza

That promise often led to conflict however, and in 1954 a clash of ambitious leaders led to a rift in the organization. During that schism, Figueroa backed a faction in the group that was opposed to excessive government intervention in the industry. By one account, after the government-backed group took control of the Alianza's offices by force, Figueroa sheltered the dissidents in the offices of Autobuses Blancos Flecha Roja.<sup>49</sup> By 1955, he would fully sign on with the schismatic group, participating in the foundation of the Alianza de Camioneros de la República Mexicana, a competing organization to the Alianza de Camioneros de México, the ACRM, its name a clear attempt to undercut the position of the older organization.<sup>50</sup> For the remainder of the decade, the two organizations would engage in a ferocious struggle to claim the mantle of authentic industry representation and the loyalty of the camioneros. The ruthlessness of these struggles speaks to the stakes: the political system cast aside those who lacked credible organizations and affiliates. One of the most effective rhetorical weapons in these contests was to label a rival as nothing more than the leader of a "letterhead organization."<sup>51</sup>

It is unclear if Figueroa originally set out in 1955 to cultivate a clientele of camioneros, though it appears likely that he did. While his entrepreneurial ventures in the industry were quite successful, he did not consolidate the same sort of economic empire in the industry as did many other camionero leaders. His motivations for involvement in the ACRM were therefore more political than financial, as he, like others before him, tried to use transportation industry

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became the leader of the bus and taxi drivers workers union while his brother Jorge became head of the bus owners organization, a group affiliated with Alianza. Through this partnership, the brothers controlled transportation in Jalisco and as a major Mexican Confederation of Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de México, CTM) labor leader, Heliodoro would serve as a senator and twice as a congressional deputy. No such incestuous partnership existed in Mexico City, though CTM controlled labor unions largely worked hand-in-glove with the Alianza's bus owners. Where Heliodoro was a labor leader who moved within the CTM, Figueroa and other Alianza leaders represented bus owners and developed their political careers within the CNOP and maintained a healthy distance from the CTM labor leaders who controlled Mexico City's bus driver unions. Neither were the patterns of patronage as clearly visible in Mexico City as in Guadalajara. If Figueroa helped bus drivers acquire their own buses in order to cultivate their loyalty, as Heliodoro did, there is no evidence of it.

49. "Como nació la Alianza de Camioneros de la República Mexicana," *El Informador Camionero*, February, 1971.

50. The name was a shrewd attempt to position the new organization as a truly national alternative to the Mexico City-based Alianza, but also caused plenty of confusion as DFS agents often mixed up the two groups in their reports.

51. DFS, 45-1 L3 H95, November 7, 1957.

organizations as professional springboards. How Figueroa came to be a national leader of camioneros thus reveals how corporatist organizations intersected with calculations of political strength and the construction of powerful personal networks. He, like other upwardly mobile priístas, saw groups like the ACRM not only as a means of acquiring political capital in the corporatist system, but as an opportunity for building the strategic social networks necessary for advancement. Figueroa would build this *camarilla camionera* not simply by distributing patronage in the form of loans, jobs, and gifts, but by using his political connections to influence policy decisions that affected the industry. In doing so, he cultivated a web of loyalties that included wealthy businessmen, seasoned *políticos*, and the thousands of camioneros who controlled the country's transportation system.

Figueroa's success in building his *camarilla camionera* had much to do with the unfavorable political conditions the transportation industry faced in these years, in particular the struggles of the urban camioneros with whom he had broken in 1955. In 1954, the government had successfully installed a pliant proxy at the head of the Alianza in order to facilitate a program of restructuring that would limit fare increases, redraw routes, and oblige bus owners to purchase new, modern vehicles from a government agency. Four years later, the national government legally subordinated the Alianza to an official coordinating agency, the Union of Permit Holders (Unión de Permisarios—known as, Unión) which assumed (usurped, in the eyes of the camioneros) responsibility for administering urban transportation. The Unión oversaw routes, set fares, and managed credit and equipment purchases, but Alianza entrepreneurs continued daily operations as before, and initially retained rights to their vehicles and the profits from their operations. Figueroa, who did not own any urban buses, was not directly affected by these policies, but there was opportunity in catering to those who were. Rodolfo Solís Soto and Carlos Dufoo, independent leaders who had assumed control of the Alianza that same year, saw their political position weakened with the creation of the Unión and quickly found themselves in need of influential advocates.

During the summer of 1960, the Unión attempted to impose a new concession-holding system on the urban bus industry, threatening the livelihoods of Mexico City's camioneros. After failing to gain the ear of President Adolfo López Mateos, Solís Soto and Dufoo turned to the ACRM for support. On November 12, 1960, Figueroa spoke before a convention of camioneros from across the country in Torreón, Coahuila, announcing that he had brokered a deal with



López Mateos that overturned the Unión's order for legal restructuring.<sup>52</sup> Why Figueroa succeeded where Solís Soto and Dufoo had failed is unclear. He seems to have traded on his familial connections—in 1960 Rufo was at the height of his career and had a relationship with President López Mateos—and his own political pedigree. He also certainly leveraged his singular authority as a representative of the national collective of camioneros, a stature that the Mexico City-based Dufoo and Solís Soto could not claim. Regardless of its cause, the victory would cement his authority. On the heels of the agreement, an independent camionero magazine lauded Figueroa as the “genuine representative” of all the country's *transportistas*, declaring the following month that his “decisive and definitive intervention” had been crucial in resolving the matter, praising “his personal labor” and “dynamism.”<sup>53</sup>

Vital to Figueroa's success in solidifying his influence within the industry was his ability to recruit supporters who could function as his agents within groups like the Alianza. By bringing these leaders into his personal network, Figueroa gained a measure of influence over organizations in which he had no economic stake. His recruitment of Isidoro Rodríguez Ruiz is suggestive of how this process worked. Rodríguez Ruiz had been one of the original dissidents in the 1954–1955 schism, though his sizeable economic interests in Mexico City's transportation industry kept him from an outright break with the Alianza. Figueroa nevertheless actively patronized Rodríguez Ruiz's efforts to undercut collaborationist Alianza leaders from 1955 to 1958, reportedly providing advice and financial assistance for his subterfuges. When permits for Rodríguez Ruiz's bus line were canceled in the summer of 1958, in part due to his rebellious activities, Figueroa helped Rodríguez Ruiz retain Octavio Sentiés, a prominent PRI politician and experienced transportation lawyer, who succeeded in blocking the cancellation order.<sup>54</sup> Rodríguez, in turn, helped Figueroa establish connections with other Mexico City camioneros, such as Solís Soto and Dufoo. Those relationships

52. DFS, Versión Pública del Expediente de Rodolfo Solís Soto L1 H80-81, November 12, 1960.

53. *Transportes y Turismo*, November, 1960; *Transportes y Turismo*, December, 1960.

54. DFS, Versión Pública del Expediente de José Valdovinos Rodríguez (VP JVR) L1 H144, July 29, 1958. Sentiés had been active in Alianza legal matters since the early 1950s, and according to some accounts, had become Figueroa's trusted ally after winning an important *amparo* (constitutional injunction) to save Figueroa's bus line in the 1940s, David Esteban Rodríguez, *Derecho de sangre: historias familiares de berencia del poder público en México* (México, D.F.: Grijalbo, 2005).

facilitated the Alianza's eventual incorporation into the ACRM as a subsidiary member organization in 1965, the final step in the upstart ACRM's usurpation of the Alianza's previous authority, and a clear demonstration of Figueroa's preeminence and power. His connection with Figueroa also allowed Rodríguez to become a leader within the ACRM, and by the 1970s he would move his sizeable financial interests out of Mexico City and delink politically from the Alianza.

Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's 1964 presidential campaign proved a pivotal moment for Figueroa's camarilla camionera. With the bulk of the country's camioneros squarely behind him after his lobbying successes in the first years of the 1960s, in 1963 Figueroa sought to put those relationships into action. In November, Figueroa and Rodríguez formed the Camionero Political Committee (Comité Político Camionero, also known as, the Comité), an organization intended to formalize industry participation in the PRI's campaign efforts and further cement Figueroa's political relevance as a camionero leader capable of commanding the industry's resources and loyalty. The attendance of PRI notables at the Comité's founding ceremony seemed a testament to its founder's rising political profile. The Comité's subsequent success, as Rodríguez and Dufoo marshalled Alianza and ACRM members into enthusiastic participation in the campaign, secured Figueroa's stature as the PRI's preferred camionero representative. After 1963, Figueroa would further the integration of the camioneros into the party structure, and in doing so he was able to distribute favors to clients, such as positions within the CNOP and access to politicians during policy disputes. Of the five leaders of the Comité Político in 1963, three—Abelardo Matamoros, Rodríguez, and Dufoo—would subsequently hold party positions and Dufoo would be elected to congress.<sup>55</sup>

By 1965, Figueroa had arrived. His efforts with the Comité had yielded immediate benefits—resulting in his election to a congressional seat representing Guerrero in 1964—and had positioned the ACRM as the preeminent camionero organization.<sup>56</sup> During the summer of 1965, Figueroa collaborated with his clients in the Alianza, principally Dufoo, to resurrect the Alianza's magazine, *El Informador Camionero*. In June, the Alianza officially became a member

55. DFS, 45-1 L7 H211; 213, November 14, 1963. Rodríguez Ruiz would be considered, but passed over, for a congressional nomination.

56. The timing of Figueroa's consolidation of power suggests that his growing influence was tied to Díaz Ordaz, but there is no concrete evidence from 1965 or 1966 that the president was directly supporting Figueroa.

organization of the ACRM, and together the two groups organized a national transportation congress attended by over 1,500 delegates in an impressive display of unity. In orchestrating the final reunification of the country's camionero organizations, Figueroa acquired new prestige: he was able to attract high-ranking PRI leaders to events and encourage dialogue between camioneros and officials. In May, PRI president Carlos Madrazo attended a private breakfast hosted by Rodríguez and Figueroa, and both Madrazo and the president of the CNOP, Renaldo Guzmán Orozco, attended the 1965 convention.<sup>57</sup> In September, Figueroa hosted another camionero banquet for party notables, including Guzmán Orozco and PRI legislative leader Alfonso Martínez Domínguez.<sup>58</sup> When Lauro Ortega assumed the presidency of the PRI in January 1966, Figueroa and Rodríguez Ruiz led a delegation to congratulate him.<sup>59</sup>

The clearest sign of Figueroa's newfound political strength was the sudden rapprochement between the revitalized Alianza and a defanged Unión de Permisarios, which no longer appeared to be setting the policy agenda for urban transportation or controlling the camioneros' political access. This subtle shift was primarily visible in the extent to which it was camionero lawyers who were now addressing the question of the industry's legal structure, rather than representatives of the Unión de Permisarios. Less than a decade after its creation, the government had apparently abandoned the Unión, a change likely tied to the warm relationship between Figueroa, Rodríguez, and Díaz Ordaz. The Mexico City Alianza was not the only group to fall under Figueroa's sway either. Many regional groups, from Nayarit to Guanajuato, formed affiliated organizations of the ACRM and often requested Figueroa's intervention in local matters ranging from fare disputes to intra-industry factionalism. In one example, *El Informador Camionero* published a letter from a camionero leader in Guaymas, Sonora thanking Figueroa for resolving a dispute over route invasions.<sup>60</sup>

Figueroa's camarilla camionera solidified in these years. Within the Alianza, Figueroa had established ties not only with Solís Soto and Abelardo Matamoros, but also with Héctor Hernández Casanova, who was emerging as an important organizational figure in the late 1960s. Rodríguez and Dufoo had become key actors in the ACRM, often acting as Figueroa's liaisons to regional transportation

57. *El Informador Camionero*, June, 1965.

58. *Ibid.*, October, 1965.

59. *Ibid.*, January, 1966.

60. *Ibid.*, February, 1966.

organizations. The ACRM also brought into Figueroa's network men such as Enrique Pacheco Larrondo and J. Guadalupe López Velarde, camionero leaders from Yucatán and Aguascalientes, respectively.<sup>61</sup> Figueroa also had especially strong ties to transportistas in Guerrero, Morelos, Jalisco, and Puebla. Because transportation entrepreneurs often played important roles in state politics, particularly through the CNOP—Pacheco Larrondo would twice serve as a congressman and López Velarde as an alternate senator—Figueroa's connections to camioneros across the country were of no small value. Intercity bus entrepreneurs also established personal ties with Figueroa, particularly those whose lines ran through Figueroa's home turf in the country's southwest. All these men benefited from the political protection Figueroa was able to provide their organizations and from his ability to negotiate the resolution of problematic policies.<sup>62</sup> He, in turn, would benefit from their allegiance and resources as he increasingly flexed his political muscle on the national stage.

Through his camarilla camionera, Figueroa had gained access to the industry's significant material and financial resources. In 1965, Figueroa would estimate that there were over 15,000 permit-holders across the country who operated upwards of 375,000 buses and trucks.<sup>63</sup> These were not empty numbers: buses and trucks were crucial to the PRI's efforts to mobilize contingents during campaigns. Controlling the camioneros gave Figueroa significant political leverage. In the fall of 1969, when Luis Echeverría Álvarez received the PRI's official presidential nomination, Figueroa threw the entire weight of the Alianza and the ACRM behind him in an impressive display of personal and organizational strength. Once again, Dufoo swung into action with the Comité Político Camioneros, trailing the candidate around the country with a bus filled with a camionero cheering section and countless ACRM banners. When the candidate

61. This expansion of Figueroa's network was indicated, for example, by his attendance at a holiday party thrown by Guadalupe López Velarde and Omnibus de México, *El Informador Camionero*, January, 1969.

62. In 1966, for example, Figueroa intervened to mediate PEMEX's decision to stop selling liquefied butane gas to transportistas, a fuel that was popular in the industry owing to its lower price.

63. *El Informador Camionero*, June, 1965. A significant percentage of those 375,000 would have been cargo trucks: in 1977, when the first comprehensive studies were conducted, the federal government counted 17,000 intercity buses and 13,000 in Mexico City, AGN, P, JLP 1876, "Programa de Desarrollo de Autotransporte Federal, 1977–1982;" Secretaría de Obras y Servicios, Comisión de Vialidad y Transporte Urbano, *Anuario de Vialidad y Transporte del D.F. 1980* (México, D.F.: Departamento del Distrito Federal, 1981). Located in the Secretaría de Transporte y Vialidad (SETRAVI) Archive.

arrived in Mexico City, the Alianza erected triumphal arches proclaiming, “*Arriba y adelante*,” “onwards and upwards,” Echeverría’s slogan.<sup>64</sup> In March 1970, Figueroa hosted Echeverría at a working breakfast with transportation industry leaders in Acapulco. Shortly thereafter, Figueroa was named as candidate for one of Guerrero’s two senate seats. The extent of camionero support for the campaign marathon—a 30,000 mile effort that touched every state in the nation—cannot be understated. It was what Figueroa had been building toward since 1955 and his success in mobilizing a national network of camioneros ensured his ascent to the national political stage and helped cement a friendship with Echeverría.<sup>65</sup> As he would later remark, “I owed the Senate seat to the Alianza and its intervention in Echeverría’s campaign.”<sup>66</sup>

Figueroa’s political good fortune was a boon for the camioneros generally, and for members of his camarilla in particular. Senties was elected to Congress from Mexico City’s fourth district in 1970, but he would serve less than half of the term because in 1971 Echeverría, allegedly at Figueroa’s behest, named Senties the regent of Mexico City.<sup>67</sup> It was an exceptional victory for the Alianza, which had long disagreed with city government on transportation policy and could now hope for better days ahead. It was also a political masterstroke by Figueroa, whose control of Mexico City’s camioneros was secured with the designation. That same year his longtime ally Héctor Hernández Casanova assumed the Alianza’s presidency. Senties also appointed Figueroa’s son, Rubén Figueroa Alcocer, an advisor on transportation policy.<sup>68</sup> This influence over Mexico City’s transportation policy proved vital for Figueroa, however, as his grip on his

64. *El Informador Camionero*, December, 1969; *Transportes y Turismo*, April, 1970.

65. It is unclear when the two men became friends, though they were certainly acquainted by the Díaz Ordaz presidency. They shared similar populist ideological outlooks and visions for development—Echeverría’s interest in tourism dovetailed with Figueroa’s plans for Acapulco—an overlap that was certainly a basis for a political partnership.

66. *Apuntes*, RFF, 165. The statement is intriguing precisely because Figueroa does not attribute most of his political successes to his position in the Alianza, but specifically the senate seat, suggesting his assessment was more than just a platitudinous nod to his corporatist clientele.

67. Carlos Loret de Mola, *Los Caciques* (México, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, 1979), 152.

68. Hernández Casanova: “We cannot ignore or forget that behind the warm relations with the president and regent was *Ingeniero* Figueroa Figueroa and of course his son Rubén Figueroa Alcocer, who regardless of his youth had ample experience in political battles, both through his father and through all he learned from his uncle Ruffo,” Archivo Privado de Héctor Hernández Casanova (HHC AP).

national camarilla camionera and the ACRM weakened significantly following his 1975 split from Rodríguez Ruiz (as I discuss in this article's final section). Paradoxically, perhaps, that defeat occurred at the same moment that Figueroa's political star reached its apogee with the realization of his long-held dream: the governorship of Guerrero.

### The Cacique

Figueroa did not arrive at the governorship by accident. Rather, during the many years he spent building his camarilla camionera, he also established an overlapping network of transportistas, politicians, and relatives in Guerrero beginning in the mid-1960s. This web of strategic allies was crucial to Figueroa's aspirations, as he needed to demonstrate his ability to control the state. To reach regional power, connections in Mexico City were necessary, but the limits of central authority—the regime's "thin" hegemony—rendered provincial proxies crucial to success. Figueroa would establish connections with local political actors who put their resources at his disposal, both mobilizing supporters for demonstrations and actively impeding the projects of rivals. Through this network, he came to wield increasing political and economic influence in Guerrero. Such was Figueroa's reputation as a manipulator of the state's politics that, by the time he was nominated for the governorship, opponents would already label him "the foremost cacique in the state."<sup>69</sup> While the tag applied in some respects, Figueroa was a distant cacique, his power exercised through proxies and his influence through intermediaries. He could shape the fortunes of Guerrero and its people because his network allowed him to hit the state's political pressure points.

The Revolution had left the Figueroa family with a powerful legacy in Guerrero, particularly in the region around Iguala. Even as Rufo and Rubén built their careers in Mexico City, they retained ties to prominent players in state politics. This was in no small part due to the family's sheer size and capacity for strategic intermarriages. There was, however, no predictable career path for relatives. Rubén's nephew, Febronio Díaz Figueroa, left his hometown near Huitzucó and followed his uncle to Mexico City, where he obtained a degree in Economics from UNAM in 1965, and subsequently taught courses in Marxism at the university.<sup>70</sup> It seems he followed the path of a populist-leftist intellectual, dabbling in radical ideology but ultimately

69. DFS, 100-10-1 L47 H164-166, June 12, 1974.

70. Ignacio Ramírez, "El alcalde Díaz Figueroa," *Proceso*, May 12, 1979.

pursuing political ambitions.<sup>71</sup> He moved into Rubén's orbit, serving as an ACRM advisor, and only returning to Guerrero in the 1970s when his uncle gained power there. Others remained in the state, typically in the northern region, where they often acted as local powerbrokers. In the family's ancestral hometown of Huitzucó, Jesús Figueroa Alcocer remained the town's petty cacique well into the late 1960s and possibly beyond.<sup>72</sup> He was Rómulo Figueroa's son, and his name suggested deep kinship ties: Rubén's wife was Lucía Alcocer.<sup>73</sup>

Figueroa's nephew, Victorico López Figueroa, became an important local ally. López Figueroa remained in the region around Iguala where he became a teacher and teachers union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE) leader during the 1940s. He was an unpopular leader, however, who was accused of killing a fellow teacher, and in 1946, only two percent of the state's teachers reportedly supported his bid for a seat in the state congress.<sup>74</sup> He won the election anyway. By 1960, López Figueroa was head of the police in Iguala and was reportedly rather effective in suppressing the protest movement that was challenging the state's governor.<sup>75</sup> Three years later, he became head of the local PRI, his reputation for overweening political ambition clearly evident.<sup>76</sup> He was involved with both the conservative League of Agrarian Communities (Liga de Comunidades Agrarias) and the state chapter of the National Peasant Confederation (Confederación Nacional Campesina, CNC), and was himself a rancher owning various properties around his hometown of Tepecoacuilco. López Figueroa was also the president and major stakeholder in the Autobuses Estrella Roja del Sur bus line running on the Mexico City-Iguala-Acapulco route. Predictably, both the bus line and López Figueroa were members of the ACRM, and López Figueroa served as a sort of emissary for Rubén to many of the state's transport industry leaders.

71. His self-styling as an intellectual leftist within the PRI was similar to that of Luis Echeverría, with whom he was friendly.

72. DFS, 100-10-1 L7 H249, 27 May 1960; AGN, DGIPS C.1981 Exp.26, December 12, 1965; *El Informador Camionero*, March, 1968.

73. Jacobs, *Ranchero Revolt*, 137.

74. "Guerrero: Futuros Diputados," *Tiempo*, November 22, 1946.

75. DFS, Versión Pública del Expediente de Victorico López Figueroa L1 H38, January 2, 1964. Hereafter DFS, VP VLF. The history of Vázquez and the protest movement, known as the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense is discussed in Aviña, "Insurgent Guerrero."

76. DFS, VP VLF L1 H43, undated "Antecedentes." Not only was López Figueroa a relative of Rufo and Rubén, but also a friend of Donato Miranda Fonseca, a prominent guerrerense politician and personal secretary to Adolfo López Mateos; DFS, VP VLF L1 H38, January 2, 1964.

Transportation became something of a family business not only because it provided a steady source of low-effort income, but also because it offered political control on various levels. Of particular importance was the ability to deny mobility to dissidents. In February 1968, protesting students had rented buses from a small local line in Guanajuato, and, as the DFS reported, “although the line is outside the control of the Alianza, nevertheless Rubén Figueroa plans to intervene to prevent any line from renting to the students.”<sup>77</sup> In Guerrero, the Figueras’ ability to restrict access to transportation, whether to political opponents seeking to rally supporters or to dissident groups, of which there were many, was a boon. Likewise, raising rates or limiting cargo transport could be used to control rural producers who needed to move products to market.<sup>78</sup> In 1967, the CNC sponsored the formation of a peasant transportation union (la Unión Nacional de Propietarios de Camiones de Carga Rural, Agrícola y en General, A.C.), noting that the effort “attempts to lower the cost of transport, which is monopolized by the ACRM under Rubén Figueroa, and which gives rise to the exploitation of campesinos since scammers and intermediaries hamper the possibility of transportation.”<sup>79</sup> Figueroa’s own freight line, connecting Acapulco and Mexico City, certainly controlled a large portion of the traffic on that vitally important commercial route, as well as offering the most efficient postal service.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, transport in the state remained highly fragmented, rife with unlicensed, unregulated, “pirate” trucks, local small bus and freight companies, and with a powerful group of taxi owners working in Acapulco’s tourist market.<sup>81</sup>

Crucial to Figueroa’s attempt to control transport in Guerrero was an effort to gain control over the state’s divided bus, truck, and taxi organizations. To that end, Figueroa attempted to bolster the Alianza de Camioneros del Sur (ACS), a group founded in Acapulco

77. DFS, RFF VP L1 H146–147, February 3, 1968.

78. It is somewhat unclear, beyond rumors and suspicions, whether such coercive control of peasants’ access to transportation was common or not. It seems, from the history, to have been possible in theory, but difficult in practice. After the 1950s, unlicensed transportation flourished, and a description of cargo transport in the state in 1972 painted a rather messy picture—Figueroa clearly did not have strong control over low-level transportation at this point; DFS, 100-10-1 L1 H298, June 21, 1972. If Figueroa did attempt to control peasants by controlling their transportation, I have no evidence for it.

79. DFS, VP RFF L1 H131, May 4, 1967. The awkwardness of the language is still worse in the original.

80. See *Últimas Noticias*, February 3, 1977, clipped in AGN, DGIPS C.1934B Exp.3.

81. Consult AGN, DGIPS C.1488B Exp.5.



in 1961. Although the group originally had no affiliation with Figueroa, he presided over its assembly in November 1967 to push for the unification of the state's transportistas.<sup>82</sup> Rodríguez Ruiz and Figueroa's son were also in attendance. At an assembly the following spring, 1,500 of Guerrero's transportistas met to reorganize the ACS and elect new leadership. They also voted to affiliate with the ACRM. The man chosen to lead the organization, José Hernández García, also led the group representing Acapulco's *taxistas*, Organizaciones Unidas de Autos de Alquiler (Organizaciones Unidas), and had a long-standing feud with state authorities over operating permits issued to car rental agencies.<sup>83</sup> Over the following years, Figueroa took an increasing interest in the struggles of Acapulco's transportistas, showing particular concern for the taxi owners struggling against irregular rental car concessions.<sup>84</sup> In April, Figueroa organized a meeting between the governor and transportation industry representatives, and during a strike in July, Figueroa advised Hernández García and the taxistas in their protests.<sup>85</sup> When camioneros and taxistas from across the state issued a broadside in the Mexico City newspaper *Excélsior* attacking Governor Raymundo Abarca Alarcón in 1969 over his administration's concession policies, DFS reported that Figueroa was behind the publication.<sup>86</sup>

By the early 1970s, his leverage bolstered by his place in the Senate, Figueroa had become something of a powerbroker in Acapulco transport. In cultivating Hernández García and becoming the patron of Acapulco's besieged transportistas, Figueroa showed his political craftiness: he now controlled a group whose protests could create serious political difficulties in the state's most important city. In 1971, when internal disputes threatened Hernández García's control over the taxistas, Figueroa intervened to keep his client at the head of Organizaciones Unidas, sending Isidoro Rodríguez and Abelardo

82. DFS, VP RFF L1 H133–134, November 9, 1967. Figueroa's involvement in Guerrero's transport industry seems largely oriented around cargo transportation entrepreneurs and taxi owners and drivers in Acapulco, as well as the state's small bus industry. Hence, I prefer the broader term "transportista" to the more narrow "camionero" here.

83. Hernández García did not appear to have a prior connection to Figueroa, however. In July 1967 he had attempted and failed to enlist Victorico López Figueroa, then a local congressman, to serve as an emissary to Rubén; DFS, Versión Pública del Expediente de Jesús Hernández García L1 H5, March 4, 1967. Hereafter DFS, VP JHG.

84. He also intervened in problems with pirate transporters of construction materials, but by far the biggest issue in Guerrero's transportation industry was that of tourist taxi and rental car concessions in Acapulco.

85. DFS, VP JHG L1 H39, April 19, 1968; AGN, DGIPS C.1488B Exp.5, July 2, 1968.

86. DFS, VP RFF L1 H153, March 6, 1959.

Matamoros to oversee the group's assembly.<sup>87</sup> A few months later, as local elections approached, the ACS and Organizaciones Unidas published a broadside attacking the state's transit director over rumored legal changes to operating concessions. A report from the government ministry noted that the "veiled threats" in the letter "in reality can be considered the first demonstrations of Rubén Figueroa's group, which aspires to place . . . Jesús Hernández [García] in the state congress," noting that Hernández García was "characterized by his involvement in the innumerable problems that the industry has created for diverse authorities."<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the report observed that the state's Transit Director had never been popular with the transportistas, who now aspired to replace him with Acapulco's transit officer, José Ríos Larios. Ríos Larios also happened to be married to Figueroa's niece and was thus his "political nephew."<sup>89</sup> A year later, a DFS agent reported that the politicking had not abated, with Ríos Larios (who allegedly received instructions from Figueroa by telephone) provoking numerous conflicts in Acapulco by issuing irregular permits in a perverse attempt to create conflict and undermine the governability of the state.<sup>90</sup> In these maneuvers, Figueroa's agents persistently undercut the gubernatorial administration of Israel Noguera Otero.<sup>91</sup> As the local DFS agent noted, these intrigues were the product of a struggle for position in the run-up to the 1975 state elections, in which Figueroa had assured followers he would win the governorship.<sup>92</sup>

During these same years, Figueroa's political capital in Guerrero grew as a result of his activities in the federal Senate. In 1970, Echeverría designated him head of the Río Balsas Commission (CRB), a legislative body concerned with public works in the Balsas river drainage.<sup>93</sup> The commission had been created in 1960 to develop the watershed, which included Mexico State, Puebla, Guerrero, and

87. AGN, DGIPS C.1488B Exp.5, August 14, 1971.

88. *Ibid.*, September 9, 1971.

89. *Ibid.*; DFS, 100-10-1 L40 H55, May 26, 1972.

90. DFS, 100-10-1 L40 H55, May 26, 1972; DFS, 100-10-1 L40 H133, June 27, 1972.

91. Noguera Otero was from the coast of Guerrero, and no friend of the Figueroas. He had come into office after Caritino Maldonado, an ally of the Figueroas, was killed in a plane crash in April 1971. As discussed below, thanks partially to Figueroa's machinations, Noguera Otero would be forced from office only months before his term was to conclude.

92. DFS, 100-10-1 L40 H133, June 27, 1972.

93. The benefits of the designation could hardly have been lost on Echeverría, who, in tapping Figueroa, gave his friend the perfect platform from which to reach for the governorship.

Michoacán. The CRB was responsible for several major dams on the river that reduced flooding and provided hydroelectric power, particularly the Infernillo dam near the end of the Balsas on the border between Guerrero and Michoacán. The Commission's broad mandate included not only hydroelectric dam projects, but also involvement in rural road construction, agro-industrial promotion, flood mitigation, tourist development, and social projects such as schools.<sup>94</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas had served as the first president of the Commission, but Figueroa was hardly a random pick to succeed the famous former president, as he had, after all, studied hydrological engineering at UNAM. At the CRB, Figueroa channeled his energy into encouraging fruit cultivation on ejidos, improving the management of forest resources, and, most importantly, building his base in Guerrero.<sup>95</sup>

As the CRB's chairman, Figueroa controlled substantial government resources that could be used to cultivate campesino clienteles throughout Guerrero. Significantly, because the river and its tributaries ran near Huitzucó and Iguala, he was also able to reinforce his authority there. Since the CRB served as a clearinghouse for everything from credit to donated candy to irrigation and road projects, Figueroa had a ready source of patronage that could be extended or withdrawn as his political ambitions required.<sup>96</sup> For example, in 1974 Figueroa inaugurated a dam and irrigation system in the tierra caliente near Ciudad Altamirano, Guerrero that reportedly allowed 62,000 hectares to be planted twice per year, dramatically increasing the productive potential of the land, as well as the diversity of crops there.<sup>97</sup> The works benefited nearly 21,000 people, forty percent of whom were small-holders, while the rest were ejidatarios. The dam also happened to be named after Rubén's illustrious relative, Andrés Figueroa. If such projects did not always produce local benefits—residents of one area reported that Figueroa's forest agency paid low rates for timber and simply resold it in Mexico City for huge profits—Figueroa did establish himself as an important rural benefactor.<sup>98</sup> He certainly was able to cultivate the support of local politicians such as Herón Varela, the local CNC's secretary of hydraulic resources and irrigation, who could mobilize local resources to further Figueroa's aims.<sup>99</sup>

94. Gutiérrez Galindo, *Rubén Figueroa*, 133.

95. *Ibid.*, 134–135. Figueroa also pushed through the construction of a ring road around Iguala that required negotiation for ejidal land.

96. *Ibid.*, 147.

97. *Excelsior*, May 18, 1974, clipped in AGN, DGIPS C.1934C Exp.2.

98. AGN, DGIPS C.1934C Exp.2, May 13, 1974.

99. *Ibid.*, February 28, 1974; DFS, Versión Pública del Expediente de Israel Noguera Otero L1 (IPS) H307, undated. Hereafter DFS, VP INO.

Figueroa's control over rural parts of the state continued to tighten in the early 1970s. Primo F. Reyes, the delegate from the Department of Agrarian and Colonization Affairs (Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonización) to Guerrero, had close ties to the Figueroas. He had been classmates with Rubén's son at UNAM and in 1958 had led student protests against Figueroa's rivals in the Alianza, as well as later serving as Figueroa's personal secretary. As an agrarian affairs official, Reyes used his position in Guerrero's countryside to support Figueroa's ambitions. The end game of this was clear. In the summer of 1973, an agent for the Ministry of Government reported that Reyes had been so successful in resolving grievances that it was creating friction with Noguera Otero's government by undercutting typical channels for addressing campesinos' problems.<sup>100</sup> By the end of the year, another agent remarked that Reyes was coordinating efforts to ensure that all the state's campesinos supported Figueroa, so that when the PRI began investigating the popularity of potential candidates for governor it would be clear that Figueroa had the backing of the rural sector.

If such maneuvering was an intrinsic part of Mexican regional politics, some of the finest displays were to be found in Guerrero. The state's deserved reputation for ungovernability—Guerrero bronco—and its tendency to buck unfamiliar or uncertain governors, helps to explain Figueroa's efforts to strengthen his political hand well before the pre-campaign began. The PRI had long sought to determine public opinion of potential candidates through the process of *auscultación*, borrowing from the medical term for listening to the body, as through a stethoscope.<sup>101</sup> Although a formal *auscultación* occurred only in the months immediately preceding the party's designation of candidates, agents for the government ministry's General Directorate of Political and Social Investigations (DGIPS) maintained running tally sheets of regional influence, and presidents and PRI leaders were well aware who held sway in any given state. In a very real sense, however, both this constant monitoring and the periodic *auscultación* were exercises in calculated delusion. DGIPS agents had little means for ascertaining the actual popularity of pre-candidates, often relying openly upon local journalists or other equally partial informants when they did not simply

100. AGN, DGIPS C.1934C Exp.2, June 13, 1973.

101. *Ibid.*, December 21, 1973. For more on *auscultación*, see Paul Gillingham, "We Don't Have Arms, but We Do Have Balls': Fraud, Violence and Popular Agency in Elections," in *Dictablada: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968*, Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

report pure rumor. Party delegates carrying out the *auscultación* spoke with local leaders and perhaps had a better sense of grassroots opinion, but the process was on the whole an easily manipulated paternalistic simulacrum of democracy. The PRI delegate in Acapulco in 1974 also happened to be the head of the Unión de Permissionarios and an ally of Figueroa.<sup>102</sup> If these various physicians of authoritarianism could not realistically take the temperature of an electorate—since the absence of effective franchise meant that one did not exist—what they could determine was the muscle of political actors as measured in *acarreados*.

Agents were well aware of their unreliable diagnostics, remarking on rare occasions that crowds had turned out “spontaneously, without the customary *acarreo*,” but more frequently simply noting the size of a rally, which they easily equated with the strength, the “*fuerza*” of its organizer.<sup>103</sup> And if *acarreo* was the norm across time and space in priísta Mexico, in Guerrero’s rough and tumble political world it was particularly rampant. In one revealing account, a DGIPS agent complained that in order to “present a massive attendance” for Echeverría’s 1971 visit to Tixtla, residents of nearly every nearby town were trucked in. The agent declared that “those *acarreados* not only cause the familiar fights and jealousies between the different local sectors of the party, but have also provoked various unfavorable commentaries regarding the inability of the state government to overcome the antiquated and negative system of pointless *acarreo* . . .”<sup>104</sup> But even if the flaws were obvious, there was little incentive for change, particularly when the underlying calculus valued power over popularity.

In this context, Figueroa’s maneuvers over the preceding years were aimed at ensuring that by 1974 he could demonstrate impressive “political strength.” He commanded a certain degree of loyalty from many campesino groups, controlled the state’s transportistas, and had countless clients among aspiring local politicians. One DGIPS report on presumptive aspirants for the governorship in 1974 noted that nearly every political force in the state had allied with Figueroa, some explicitly in exchange for future positions.<sup>105</sup>

102. Rivera Uribe had replaced Julio Serrano Castro at the Unión in 1971. On another occasion in 1970, Figueroa nearly came to blows with another PRI delegate, effectively intimidating the man charged with monitoring the campaign for senator, AGN, DGIPS C.1488A Exp.4, June 23, 1970.

103. AGN, DGIPS C.1701B Exp.5, August 15, 1973; DFS, 100-10-1 L43 H53-54, June 22, 1973; AGN, DGIPS C.1488A Exp.4, October 6, 1974.

104. AGN, DGIPS C.1488A Exp.4, September 22, 1971.

105. AGN, DGIPS C.1934C Exp.2, February 28, 1974.

That list of allies included not only Hernández García and Ríos Larios, but also CNC leader and local congressional candidate Herón Varela, popular Acapulco politician Virgilio Gómez Moharro, and the state's other senator, Vicente Fuentes Díaz.<sup>106</sup> Clientelistic links served as tentacles of local control. In one instance during the late 1970s, Varela apparently gathered 2,500 campesinos for a political demonstration.<sup>107</sup> Through his network, Figueroa could thus rally supporters at will, launching an aggressive pre-campaign that included transporting 6,000 guerrerenses on Hernández García's buses to the PRI's offices in Mexico City for his official designation as candidate on May 14, 1974.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, he had successfully weakened the authority of the Nogueta Otero administration, ensuring that he appeared to be the only candidate with sufficient political capital to govern the troublesome state. Scant months before his term was to end, Nogueta Otero was impeached by the National Congress after charges of defrauding campesinos in an Acapulco land deal became public.<sup>109</sup>

Figueroa's ascent did nothing to calm the discontent bubbling in Guerrero. The civic movement that had begun in the 1960s had grown, by the early 1970s, into a full-fledged guerrilla insurgency questioning the legitimacy of the regime.<sup>110</sup> Figueroa was nothing if not an avatar of that authoritarian system. Early in his campaign he had promised to meet with the leader of the guerrillas, Lucio Cabañas, to discuss an end to the conflict. On May 30, 1974, along with Febronio Díaz and four others, Figueroa traveled into the mountains of Guerrero to meet with Cabañas.<sup>111</sup> It was a bold, even bizarre,

106. *Ibid.* Varela also had served as Acapulco's transit official in the early 1970s and was, intriguingly, the local CNC's Secretary of Hydraulic Resources and Irrigation, suggesting a connection to Figueroa's CRB.

107. DFS, 100-10-1 L77 H107, undated.

108. Newspaper reports on the event varied, some wildly suggesting 45,000 people were present, others a more modest—but still unrealistic—20,000. The official press release put the attendance at 15,000. Newspapers were likely paid to inflate the numbers, adding another layer to the *acarreo*. The 6,000 number comes from an IPS report on the event, AGN, DGIPS C.1934C Exp.2, May 14, 1974.

109. The official process of congressional impeachment was known as *desaparición de poderes*. The details of the charges against Nogueta Otero can be found in both Carlos Loret de Mola's *Los últimos 91 días* (México, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, 1978); and AGN, DGIPS C.1701B Exp5, "Boletín de prensa."

110. The history of Genaro Vázquez, Lucio Cabañas, and the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense has been ably recounted elsewhere, along with sharp analyses of the dirty war both before and after Figueroa's governorship, Aviña, "Insurgent Guerrero."

111. Figueroa apparently thought that Díaz Figueroa's Marxist training would allow him to communicate with Cabañas, Ignacio Ramírez, "La investigación de la CNDH, 'hasta ilegal, no llegó a fondo,'" *Proceso*, November 28, 1992.

decision fueled by machismo and an unflinching belief in his own powers of persuasion. It apparently never crossed Figueroa's mind that Cabañas's worldview was so radically different from his own that dialogue would be impossible. When the group arrived at the meeting place, an armed squad of Cabañas's guerrillas promptly kidnapped the candidate. Figueroa would spend three difficult months in captivity, while the PRI carried out a remarkable campaign without a candidate. After he was finally freed in a military operation in early September, Figueroa was duly elected governor of Guerrero the following year.<sup>112</sup>

### The Governor

When he took office in 1975 at the age of sixty-seven, Figueroa reached the pinnacle of his political career, realizing his family's fifty-year aspiration of returning to reign supreme in Guerrero. When a French documentary television crew visited him in 1981, their cameras captured a man waxing fat on his own power, truly *El Señor Gobernador!*, as the filmmakers suggested by their title.<sup>113</sup> During his term, he rewarded his clients with prestigious new posts, expanded his own financial interests in the tourism industry, and attempted forcefully to pacify the unquiet state. Yet the governorship, paradoxically, also marked the beginning of his decline. After 1975, Figueroa struggled to retain control of the camarilla he had so assiduously constructed during the previous two decades. His national influence began to wane as external forces limited his ability to shape transportation policy, and his administration proved unable to overcome Guerrero's chronic political infighting. In the French documentary's depiction, he appears to be the last of a dying breed of paternalistic PRI caciques whose time was coming to an end.

The first indication that the governorship could have unforeseen consequences came shortly after Figueroa received the nomination. It was rumored that Echeverría's powerful Interior Minister, Mario Moya Palencia, was attempting to maneuver Figueroa out of the

112. Many aspects of the kidnapping story are murky and it is unclear exactly what happened. Figueroa, who was certainly prone to embellishment, later described running through a hail of bullets to freedom during the rescue. Other accounts suggest a ransom was paid. The whole episode—Figueroa's decision to meet Cabañas, the kidnapping and rescue, and the PRI's campaign without a candidate—was one of the more surreal moments of Mexican political life.

113. The motivations for the documentary are unclear, though Figueroa certainly is an entertaining character; *Un Voyage au Mexique: El Señor Gobernador!*, prod. and dir. by Jean-Émile Jeannesson (1981; Télévision Française 1).

ACRM by giving him the governorship.<sup>114</sup> Whether or not that was wild speculation, the fundamental prediction came true a year later when Figueroa lost control of the ACRM during an acrimonious rupture with Isidoro Rodríguez Ruiz that ultimately led to the collapse of the organization. After 1975, the industry unity that Figueroa had forged a decade earlier fractured spectacularly; and by 1976, the ACRM ceased to be a meaningful organization. Apart from Graciano Ángeles Cuevas and Eduardo Peynetti, whose lines ran through Guerrero, Figueroa lost most of the national camioneros to Rodríguez and Dufoo who had decamped, along with their followers, to an alternative organization, the National Transportation and Communications Chamber (Cámara Nacional de Transporte y Comunicación, CNTC). Rodríguez's close ties with José López Portillo, who was elected president in 1976, further weakened Figueroa's national influence. López Portillo favored Rodríguez's CNTC, and launched a major transportation development project that consulted closely with the CNTC, but completely cut Figueroa out of the process.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, Figueroa's willingness to engage in such an internecine struggle over the group suggests the immense value he placed on his camarilla camionera; and he would remain tightly linked to the Alianza even as he sat in the governor's chair.

Ultimately, Figueroa's position among the camioneros was untenable. Under Héctor Hernández Casanova, the Alianza retained close ties with the governor—in 1974, they renamed the assembly hall at the group's offices after Figueroa, and the group's executive committee would remain wholly *figueroaísta* until its end.<sup>116</sup> In 1976, Figueroa helped Hernández Casanova win the election to congress from Mexico City's seventeenth district; he attended the Alianza's 1977 meeting with López Portillo; and he continued to advocate on the group's behalf during the years that followed. But Figueroa's ability to sustain dual bases in Guerrero and Mexico City was slipping, since the new regent of Mexico City, Carlos Hank González, was a friend of neither the Alianza nor Figueroa. After 1976, the camioneros struggled, often in vain, against unfavorable policy on fares and route restrictions, and in 1981, Hank González declared the Federal District government's municipal takeover of urban transport services, effectively dissolving the Alianza. In that final moment, Figueroa stood

114. DFS, VP RFF L4 H232-248, July 23, 1984, "Antecedentes."

115. AGN, P, JLP 1876, "Programa de Desarrollo de Autotransporte Federal, 1977-1982."

116. *El Informador Camionero*, September, 1974.



as both the group's last political patron and as a witness to its demise, his lack of influence with López Portillo on open display.<sup>117</sup>

Figueroa's supporters in Guerrero faced no such difficulties. The new governor was able to immediately reward those who had supported him, appointing Victorico López Figueroa to the State Transit Agency and eventually naming Febronio Díaz Figueroa the mayor of Acapulco.<sup>118</sup> He named one nephew a police commander in Acapulco despite a total lack of police training.<sup>119</sup> He supported Hernández García's power grabs in Acapulco's taxi industry, reportedly allowing the police to provide Hernández García weapons for an attempt to seize the offices of Organizaciones Unidas in 1977.<sup>120</sup> Herón Varela, by then the leader of the state legislature, brought the body firmly under Figueroa's control, and in 1979, Varela won election to the national congress.<sup>121</sup> Figueroa also pursued his opponents, chasing Nogueta Otero's supporters from office and often forcing them to leave the state.<sup>122</sup> In one case, the unpopular former transit director was arrested in Mexico City on presumably trumped-up charges of fraud.<sup>123</sup> None of this, it should be said, was particularly shocking in the context of Guerrero. Most former governors had persecuted their opponents, and nearly all had installed friends and family in government jobs that offered opportunities for personal

117. He never reconciled with Hank González, though he remained on good terms with López Portillo. Both would attend his funeral in 1991; Ramírez, "Cacique, monopolista."

118. Figueroa had broken with Primo Reyes, however, and it is unclear if Ríos Larios received a new post under Figueroa's administration. Febronio Díaz Figueroa would reportedly leave Acapulco 157 million pesos in debt; Andrés Campuzano, "El Grupo Monterrey compra los hoteles más caros del Puerto," *Proceso*, April 11, 1981.

119. DFS, 100-10-1 L63 H134-139, May 14, 1976.

120. AGN, DGIPS C.1488B Exp.5, May 14, 1977.

121. AGN, DGIPS C.1701B Exp.5, undated.

122. DFS, 100-10-1 L63 H134-139, May 14, 1976. It does not appear there was any ideological content to the persecution, though there might have been a regional component to the personal feud, since Nogueta Otero was a *costeño* with a political base in Acapulco.

123. That arrest, according to DFS agents, was reportedly arranged by Mario Arturo Acosta Chaparro, the military officer who likely oversaw Figueroa's rescue in 1974. Acosta Chaparro was also the regime's chief prosecutor of the dirty war in Guerrero during the 1970s and 80s, and he had close ties to Figueroa, serving in various official police capacities in the state. Acosta Chaparro also reportedly made tidy sums through "*manejos turbios*" (shady operations) and was protected, of course, by Figueroa; DFS, 100-10-1 L63 H134-139, May 14, 1976; DFS, VP RFF L4 H232-248, July 23, 1984, "Antecedentes;" "Las andanzas de Acosta Chaparro: de contrainsurgente a presunto narco," *Proceso*, September 3, 2000.

enrichment.<sup>124</sup> For Figueroa's clients there were also plenty of chances to line their own pockets. López Figueroa allegedly held eighteen permits for taxis in Acapulco, and he distributed eighty-one more to "journalists, bureaucrats, and friends and family," including Herón Varela.<sup>125</sup> By the end of his term, the head of the PRI in Acapulco would complain not only of Figueroa's nepotistic distribution of taxi permits, but also of questionable land sales to friends and the blatant enrichment of many officials.<sup>126</sup> Figueroa also benefited from the governorship personally, consolidating his control of tourism and strengthening his cargo transportation business.<sup>127</sup> In 1977, the head of National Postal Services complained that insufficient funding had resulted in poor service in Guerrero. As a result, Figueroa's cargo and bus lines—which admittedly provided better service—had "monopolized" mail delivery in the state.<sup>128</sup> Whether or not that was a fair assessment, it likely reflected the reality of Figueroa's commercial strength.

Unsurprisingly, Figueroa's actions as governor provoked a backlash. From the outset he was embroiled in conflict. Throughout the course of his administration he would struggle with Acapulco's taxistas, who resented both the imposition of Hernández García as the leader of the Organizaciones Unidas, and the ongoing irregularity in how permits were distributed. When the taxistas arranged a meeting with the governor in 1977, they did not receive a warm welcome from Figueroa, who promptly declared that, "Yo soy Gobernador, no gobernadorcillo . . . yo parí la ley y puedo darles placas a cualquiera que se me antoje" (I am a governor, not a softy . . . I gave birth to the law and I can give permits to whomever I like).<sup>129</sup> Figueroa also fought publicly with tourism groups, particularly tour guides, who suffered from restrictive policies on charter vehicles and were forced to work for the sole Figueroa-controlled concessionary in Acapulco.<sup>130</sup>

124. See description of the extreme nepotism and corruption that existed under Raúl Caballero Aburto's administration (1957–1961) in DFS, 100-10-1 H174–185, June 11, 1960. The report lists no fewer than thirty-two of Caballero Aburto's relatives who received official positions.

125. AGN, DGIPS C.1488B Exp.5, April 19, 1977; AGN, DGIPS C.1934B Exp.3, March 23, 1977. The report mentions that Herón Varela was among the recipients of a permit.

126. DFS, VP RFF L4 H148, July 28, 1981.

127. *El Universal*, July 29, 1976, clipped in AGN, DGIPS C.1934B Exp.3.

128. *Últimas Noticias*, February 3, 1977, clipped in AGN, DGIPS C.1934B Exp.3.

129. AGN, DGIPS C.1488C Exp.9, May 16, 1977.

130. AGN, DGIPS C.1934C Exp.4, January 21, 1979; *Diario de la Tarde*, January 22, 1979, clipped in AGN DGIPS C.1934C Exp.4.

Compounding these problems was Guerrero's continued violence and instability, and Figueroa's haughty attitude often exacerbated the difficulties. Within scant weeks of taking office, in an attempt to improve the image of both the state and his administration, Figueroa attempted to suppress the *nota roja*—the gory scandal-sheet crime pages in local newspapers. This infringement of press freedom prompted local and national journalists to savage the governor, with the Mexico City paper *Ovaciones* declaring him “drunk with power” after he reportedly threatened local editors.<sup>131</sup> The spat blew over quickly, since, according to the DFS, a 5,000 peso-per-month subsidy to the editors of Acapulco's newspapers resulted in a “radical change” in their content by July.<sup>132</sup> But even if he could suppress the news, Figueroa could not change the reality, and the state continued to experience an ongoing wave of crime and insecurity. In October 1975, a DGIPS report summarized the situation, observing that, “a serious increase in crime,” primarily kidnappings, had combined with police and military abuses to create, “a climate of social uncertainty and distrust toward the government of the state.”<sup>133</sup> In May of 1976, a DFS agent remarked that the atmosphere in the state was “tense,” commenting that, “where security is concerned, the citizenry has been left in second place, and crime, assaults, murders, robberies, and rapes have all multiplied,” and furthermore, he noted that Figueroa's expansion of the police force had done little to improve the situation.<sup>134</sup> Troublingly, the agent described the existence of a “*grupo de represión*” (hit squad) that reported directly to Figueroa and was dedicated primarily to avenging insults to the governor, settling scores for the military, and pressuring drug traffickers to reach an understanding with the government.<sup>135</sup> The governor certainly did not have a light touch, either in policy or personality. One DFS agent commented that he had a reputation for “rude, vengeful, capricious, and rough treatment of citizens,” recounting that when a group had come to his office to request that drinking water be provided in their town, Figueroa had replied that he would “come piss in their fountain” so that they would have plenty to drink.<sup>136</sup>

131. *Ovaciones*, June 2, 1975, clipped in AGN, DGIPS C.1934A Exp.4; DFS, VP RFF L2 H143–144, June 2, 1975.

132. DFS, VP RFF L2 H182, July 15, 1975.

133. AGN, DGIPS C.1934A Exp.4, October 11, 1975.

134. DFS, 100-10-1 L63 H134–139, May 14, 1976.

135. *Ibid.*

136. *Ibid.*

El Señor Gobernador was more than a title—it was a mindset. In his rule of the state, Figueroa became a classic arch-macho, paternalistic and domineering, secure in his authority. In the French documentary he wore a humble *sarape* with “Rubén Figueroa” woven across its front. He relished the gifts of jaguar pelts sent by campesinos, seeing them as genuine tokens of affection, which perhaps they were. Figueroa’s was not a distant power: he toured the state, met with its citizens, personally rewarded their loyalty—handing out pesos to supplicants—and savored the defeat of his opponents. There was naked violence to this power, built of clandestine goon squads and with the pistol always theatrically strapped to Figueroa’s side. In nearly every regard, as governor he consciously projected an image of a regional strongman. He had obtained the governorship in part by building and mobilizing broad networks of corporatist supporters, but once in office, he seemed to exercise power as a traditional cacique, converting the state into a personal fiefdom, and becoming every bit the Gonzalo N. Santos-like figure that his opponents claimed.

### Conclusion

Even years after his term ended, Figueroa continued to loom large in the national political imaginary. In 1991, his obituary in *Proceso* magazine labeled him a “model of Mexico’s political dinosaurs.”<sup>137</sup> He was cast as the stereotypical PRI tyrant in the waning years of the regime’s golden era, a man rumored to have an empire of buses and a fiefdom in Guerrero. If none of the rumors about Figueroa was precisely true, they nevertheless spoke to realities of mid-century Mexican political life. In tracing Figueroa’s career, it is possible to better understand the world of those powerful *príista* operators who were central to the regime’s survival. This political paleontology, then, is less about the individual skeleton and more about the species.

Like many aspiring politicians of his generation, Figueroa migrated to the capital and began to build connections among the political elite that resided there. During the 1930s and 1940s he failed to construct a solid base in Guerrero; his early congressional

137. He himself felt that Mexican politics had shifted around him, telling a reporter in 1984 that, “I am one of the dinosaurs, who are not identified with the [current] regime, we are not children of some university, we do not have refined tastes or pedigrees . . . the new politicians think we are of another mentality, that we have passed into history,” Ramírez, “Cacique, monopolista.” His perceptions support the argument I have made in my dissertation that a shift in political culture occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Lettieri, “Wheels of Government.”

deputyship was hardly any indication of local authority. Though the ultimate goal was to return to power in his home state, Figueroa focused his energy on Mexico City's corporatist politics as a leader of bus industry entrepreneurs. During the 1950s and 1960s, he built an extensive network of personal relationships among the *camioneros* that allowed him to mobilize the industry's considerable resources for political ends. *Autotransportes Figueroa* and the ACRM were central to his upward mobility as a politician. Simultaneously, he built a network that allowed him to influence politics in Guerrero, using patronage and subterfuge, family members and political clients to support his gubernatorial aspirations. In 1975, he achieved that goal.

Figueroa's rise was intertwined with the emergence of postrevolutionary politics that created a new structure for political careers, one where a migration to Mexico City was vitally important for upward mobility. This political pilgrimage, when it was successful, resulted in connections to the PRI's corporatist system and the national bureaucracy. Regional influence, then, was primarily exercised through proxies and distant patronage, strategies that sought to create a local base of allies that could mobilize in support of political ambitions. Those who remained local bosses had extremely limited prospects, particularly as bureaucratic centralization and the institutionalization of regime politics fragmented their power.<sup>138</sup>

Figueroa was labeled a *cacique*, yet his control of Guerrero was deeply unstable and short-lived, and he had not attained his power through the sort of intimate local authority associated with classic figures, such as Santos or Heliodoro Charis. Rather, he accumulated political capital as a corporatist leader in Mexico City, far from Guerrero both geographically and socially. The point is not that Figueroa forces a redefinition of what it meant to be a *cacique*—since the term's application to him is perhaps more evidence of its promiscuous usage than his conformance to a model—but that those who rose to power during the latter years of the PRI's mid-century heyday often did so by moving between urban and rural spheres of action, and by cultivating broad networks of corporatist allegiances. Figueroa illuminates not the shape of PRI *caciquismo* but the nature of PRI power—a power that relied on the networks of aspiring regional actors to intertwine the politics of the capital with the exercise of local authority. Power meant not only commanding resources that

138. Wil Pansters, "Goodbye to the *Caciques*? Definition, the State and the Dynamics of *Caciquismo* in Twentieth-Century Mexico," in *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 363.

could be mobilized to gain influence, whether those resources were material—like buses—or corporatist constituencies, but also having networks of agents who could ensure the successful mobilization of those resources. The regime relied on those who, like Figueroa, played various roles, moving not only between public and private spheres, but also across space. If local caciques lost prominence as the regime matured, it was because the system created figures like Rubén Figueroa, whose broad networks articulated a distinctly *priísta* sort of power.