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## In the Service of the *Gremio*

*Bus Industry Magazines,  
PRI Corporatism, and  
the Politics of Trade Publications*

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The first issue of *El Informador Camionero* in November 1941 opened with an editorial treatise on the moral fiber of Mexico City's bus industry entrepreneurs (*camioneros*). The essay exhorted the magazine's readers, presumably the same *camioneros*, to dedicate themselves to both unity and hard work. This was, perhaps, an odd way to begin a trade publication, yet given the context in which it appeared, such a tone was unsurprising. Five months earlier the organization that published the magazine and represented the interests of the transportation entrepreneurs, the Alianza de Camioneros, had been fractured by internal factionalism. The appearance of *El Informador Camionero* in November was a clear response to that infighting. Over the next thirty-eight years, apart from one six-year interruption, the alianza continually published the magazine and used it to trumpet the value of organizational unity. This message was ostensibly part of a broader mission, as *El Informador Camionero* claimed to serve the interests of the collective of transportation entrepreneurs—what the *camioneros* called their *gremio* (guild). As a self-congratulatory editorial in 1954 remarked, the magazine by then had provided thirteen years of “uninterrupted service to the industry and its men, carrying out a true social function . . . linking, unifying, seeking

the fraternity of all the elements that make up the Alianza de Camioneros.”<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I examine magazines published by the bus and trucking industry—principally but not exclusively *El Informador Camionero*—in an attempt to explain the role of such trade industry publications in Mexican society and politics. I also explore how these sometimes idiosyncratic documents can be read as a source for understanding the history of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) regime. I ultimately suggest that these publications flourished because they were important pieces in the PRI’s system of corporatist control, yet simultaneously offered a space for limited critiques of that system.

Trade publications such as *El Informador Camionero* occupied a strange place in the world of mid-twentieth-century Mexican political life. Their contents were a unique combination of *People* magazine–style social reportage, technical manuals, industry news, and editorial commentary. They were conceived of and promoted as informative outlets, yet because these trade publications were also the direct channel through which organizational leaders could communicate with their affiliates, the magazines also served a fundamentally political purpose. Informing, in this context, meant orienting. Indeed, *El Informador Camionero* was published as the official journal of the alianza and was often under the direct control of the group’s executive committee. Irrespective of the industry or organization in which they operated, leaders saw the trade magazines as valuable tools for maintaining the coherence of the corporatist system. Those who attempted to control groups as dissimilar as camioneros and mill workers were quick to patronize such official magazines.

While union publications are not explored at length here, their purposes and usages bear much resemblance to trade publications. The similarities are strongest when trade magazines are compared with smaller labor publications. In the 1940s, union boss Antonio Hernández controlled sugar workers at the La Concha and El León sugar mills, though rather than challenging owner William O. Jenkins and manager Ronnie Eustace, Hernández collaborated with them. Yet this alliance needed to be veiled, and Hernández apparently used his union newspaper to present a more radical image, one that would legitimize his leadership. As Andrew Paxman writes, on one occasion Hernández’s newspaper published “a cartoon of Eustace and Jenkins, drawn as beasts sucking the blood of the workers.” When Eustace

demanded an explanation, Hernández replied that “he had to allow such things from time to time; he had to keep up appearances.”<sup>2</sup> Union publications also served to justify collaboration with the government. In analyzing major labor confederation magazines, Joseph Lenti observes that “they conveyed an editorial alliance with the state that promoted their mutually shared goals,” and they served as a targeted vehicle for delivering the rhetoric of paternalism and collectivism.<sup>3</sup>

Since politically ambitious leaders needed to ensure the loyalty of their groups to the PRI, these magazines tended to promote both internal unity and political discipline. Yet these officially controlled magazines did not consist entirely of the self-serving rhetoric that might have predictably emanated from such loyal PRI actors. Rather, they were the legible texts of the corporatist system with all its tensions and disputes. They were arenas in which corporatist actors fought almost endless rhetorical struggles over the definition of legitimate leadership and the character of their relationship with the regime. The pages of *El Informador Camionero* reveal a continual renegotiation of organizational discipline and unity, and in part to retain credibility with the average camionero, the magazines contained open critiques of leaders gone awry and ill-conceived government policies.<sup>4</sup>

Setting aside the somewhat provincial content of *El Informador Camionero*, there are important reasons to examine small, narrow-audience publications such as trade journals and union magazines. In particular, the analysis presented here underscores their value as a source for social and political history. First, this research suggests that these periodicals were a space where censorship, if not absent, was perhaps different from that present elsewhere. Obscure enough that they almost certainly fell into the holes of the PRI’s “Swiss cheese” authoritarianism, their content was limited by self-censorship and the decisions of the leadership groups that bankrolled the publications. Second, the frequently editorializing content of these publications, penned by a diverse group of political actors and specialized journalists, provides a different sort of voice than exists in other documentary records.<sup>5</sup> Third, the sheer volume of such publications is staggering: a list of union and worker publications compiled in 1980 by Guillermina Bringas and David Mascareño runs some thirty-five pages, and a similar list of small trade publications likely would be of similar heft.<sup>6</sup> Understanding the function (and functioning) of such periodicals, then, gives insights

on the subtle mechanisms of the PRI's corporatist rule and the importance of a public sphere in maintaining it.

I begin with a discussion of the history of transportation industry publications, suggesting that linkages between leadership groups, internal politics, and trade publications reveal the unique motivations behind the magazines. I then discuss in detail the history of *El Informador Camionero* during the 1954–1958 period when the alianza experienced a major internal schism, showing how the publication attempted to construct the concept of legitimate leadership rhetorically. The chapter concludes with a broader discussion of how such publications offered a limited space for critiques of the corporatist system and how they thus illuminate the understandings inherent to the functioning of that system.

### **Organizations, Mastheads, and Political Careers**

Interpreting camionero publications is not a straightforward task. This is partly because the history of the alianza and the country's bus industry is not well understood.<sup>7</sup> The improvised automobile transportation system that emerged after 1916 quickly grew into a flourishing bus transportation industry by the early 1930s. This was partly due to official support since various political factions saw the collective organizations of moderate owner-drivers to be a bulwark against more radical workers of the city's trolley system.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Álvaro Obregón had personally backed the alianza's early commercial ventures, aiding the group in securing gasoline contracts and capital for a commercial bank. Throughout the 1930s, the alianza consolidated its pre-eminent position in the industry, and in 1939 entrepreneurial forces organized within the group successfully thwarted an attempt to convert the bus system into one operated by state-directed workers cooperatives, ensuring that for the following forty-three years, the city's bus transportation network would be operated by alianza-affiliated permit holders.<sup>9</sup> Although many of these permits were held by individuals who owned and operated single buses, perhaps a greater number were concentrated in the hands of entrepreneurs who managed small fleets of buses. Though the city government set fare rates, the combination of subsidized oil, vehicles, and parts—and the lack of competition from other modes of public transportation—ensured that most bus owners were able to turn a profit, though it was clearly harder for those

with a single bus. While poor service and rumors of fabulously wealthy bus magnates led urban residents to label the system the *pulpo camionero*—the bus octopus<sup>10</sup>—it was in truth not a centralized monopoly but a fractious group of entrepreneurs that dominated the city’s public transportation network. As the organization that represented the interests of those owners, the *alianza* was therefore something of a hybrid. It was equal parts classical PRI urban corporatist organization and commercial interest lobby, combining elements of groups as disparate as street vendors and hoteliers.<sup>11</sup>

Official publications were among the strategies employed by *alianza* leaders to control their fractious group. Analyzing the bus industry trade press is complicated, however, because of the sheer volume of publications that appeared during some sixty years of history. Since their content cannot be understood outside of their context—the personal feuds and political struggles that shaped *camioneros*’ concerns—it is helpful to briefly chart a history of publishing in the transportation industry and the organizations and men (the writers were exclusively men) involved in it.

The first *camionero* magazine, *Movimiento*, appeared in the late 1920s and was published by a newly founded *alianza* that was a loose collective of bus owners and drivers. *Movimiento* was followed in 1931 by *El Heraldo Camionero*, which was published as the official journal of the *Alianza de Camioneros* under the direction of two longtime *alianza* leaders.<sup>12</sup> During the run of *El Heraldo Camionero* from 1931 to 1933, the *alianza* consolidated its position as the sole political representative of bus industry entrepreneurs, and the magazine’s content reflected that sense of collective progress, emphasizing the economic achievements of the *camioneros* and the advancement of the organization as a whole. During its short run, *El Heraldo Camionero* presented a decidedly romantic cooperative vision of the industry, one where the leadership seemed to have much in common with the average bus owner; fraternity was the order of the day. *El Heraldo Camionero* bore much similarity to roughly contemporaneous workers publications in Monterrey. On “The Workers Page” of *Colectividad*, the “slick monthly magazine” of a company-supported steelworkers’ recreational society, essayists emphasized “class harmony, work discipline, and self-improvement,” and “the language of revolution and constitutional rights” was “notably absent” from the magazine’s pages.<sup>13</sup>

When *El Informador Camionero* appeared in 1941 as the *alianza*’s

reconstituted official publication, much had changed. The organization was firmly positioned politically as the most important national representative body for camioneros, and crucially, the dynamics of leadership had undergone a dramatic shift. As the alianza's executive committee came to resemble an insular clique composed of relatively wealthy members who owned small fleets of buses, the organization lost the egalitarian aura of a society of "emancipated workers" that had characterized the years of *El Heraldito Camionero*. The rapid erosion of the romantic early structure of the industry marked a profound change in the organization's politics, and it was of no small consequence that by the 1940s a perceptible gap had opened between the alianza's leaders and its average member in terms of wealth, influence, and political aspirations. *El Informador Camionero* was, in part, an attempt to bridge that divide.

At the time of its founding, *El Informador Camionero* was placed under the direction of Narciso Contreras, the alianza's secretary of press and propaganda. The position was a new one—the alianza's committee had previously consisted only of administrative positions—and its primary responsibility seems to have been the management of the magazine. Until the mid-1960s, the organization's propaganda secretary would also appear on *El Informador Camionero*'s masthead as the magazine's managing editor. Importantly, Contreras was close to Antonio Díaz Lombardo, the organization's powerful secretary-general and the man whose leadership had been challenged in the 1941 schism described at the start of this chapter. There was little doubt at the magazine's founding, then, that its editorial voice was that of the alianza's high and mighty. Contreras controlled the magazine until 1954 when his bid to succeed Díaz Lombardo (who had resigned the secretary-generalship) failed. During that rupture, Contreras's rival and the eventual victor, José Valdovinos, installed his own adherents in the positions of editor and director and bent the magazine toward bolstering his leadership. In 1958, however, *El Informador Camionero* ceased publication. After massive protests over fares and poor service shook the capital that year, the city government intervened in the alianza, ousting Valdovinos, installing a new leadership group, and placing the entire industry under the control of a newly created administrative institution called the Unión de Permisionarios. Through the union, the city government assumed a more direct role in urban transportation policy, managing

routes, loans, subsidies, and vehicular models—areas where the *alianza* members had previously enjoyed significant autonomy.

That *El Informador Camionero* was shuttered following the intervention reveals just how autonomous and organic trade publications were. The decision to either intentionally kill off the publication or simply let it fall into desuetude in these years indicates that the dissemination of these trade publications and the control of their content was a central concern for industry leaders, but was less of an issue for political authorities. This is somewhat surprising, but supports two conclusions. First, trade publications were indeed a somewhat unintended space where criticism could flourish; and second, the corporatist system worked through independent agents, not central control, and trade publications were an expression of that autonomy. The appearance two years later of an independent bus industry magazine—and its prompt co-optation by *alianza* leadership—underscores the importance of these magazines for the group's leaders.

*El Informador Camionero* returned to print in 1965 when government control of the *alianza* loosened and a group of politically and economically powerful camioneros supported by Rubén Figueroa gained control of the organization.<sup>14</sup> Under Figueroa, *El Informador Camionero*'s masthead was reworked, and the publication was placed under the control of the *alianza*'s secretary-general, who now served as the magazine's director. A close Figueroa ally, Isidoro Rodríguez, became its general manager. With the modified title of *El Informador Camionero: Voz de la Transportista Nacional*,<sup>15</sup> the magazine acquired a new national focus as Figueroa sought to unify Mexico's camioneros into a single countrywide *alianza*. He exerted increasing control over the publication, and by 1970 Figueroa was included on the masthead as director-general. The revived *Informador Camionero* was published until 1979, although it slipped into obsolescence after 1975 when Figueroa abandoned the magazine following an acrimonious power struggle with Rodríguez.

Although *El Informador Camionero* was the most important, it was not the only industry publication tied to the *alianza*. In 1960 an independent group began publishing *Transportes y Turismo*. By 1963, the magazine had fallen under the sway of an embattled *alianza* leadership group, then struggling to gain legitimacy among the camioneros who resented its collaboration with the city government's intervention in the industry. From 1963 to 1965, *Transportes*

*y Turismo* mimicked the function of *El Informador Camionero* as a communication tool for alianza leadership. When the collaborationist leaders lost power in 1965 and *El Informador Camionero* was resurrected, *Transportes y Turismo* returned to semi-independence, but remained closely tied to industry politics. The magazine did attempt to develop a market niche, focusing its content on Mexico City's transportation issues while *El Informador Camionero* aimed at a national audience. Following the Figueroa-Rodríguez schism in 1975, *Transportes y Turismo* was colonized again, this time by Figueroa's allies, who ensured it was published steadily until 1978. Elsewhere in the country, transportation entrepreneurs also published magazines, though most had much shorter lives than those of *Transportes y Turismo* and *El Informador Camionero*—for instance, the 1966–1968 run of *La Voz del Chofer*, a publication of Acapulco's bus entrepreneurs.

That the fortunes of these magazines were so closely tied to the projects and aspirations of camionero leadership groups suggests that their fundamental importance was political, not journalistic or professional, though this was not readily apparent from their authorship. Indeed, the men associated with the magazines can be classified into two categories—career journalists and political careerists. The former group comprised men who did not feature among the alianza's notable members and may not even have owned buses; they were professional camionero journalists who covered industry issues and events. These professionals occasionally editorialized and did have links to factions within the alianza, but their careers tended to survive political schisms. Enrique Aguirre Harris, for example, was one of Valdovinos's choices to lead *El Informador Camionero* in 1954, but he remained active in camionero journalism through the 1970s, when he directed *Transportes y Turismo*. Fernando Andrade Warner was a frequent columnist in *El Informador Camionero* during the 1940s and '50s and seemed to have ties to Díaz Lombardo; he later served as subdirector of *Transportes y Turismo* from 1960 to 1962 and subsequently returned to the resurrected *El Informador Camionero* in 1965.

The political careerists sometimes had equally long tenures as contributors to the magazines but were distinguished from their professional colleagues by their status as bus owners and their involvement in industry (and often national) politics. Narciso Contreras, *El Informador Camionero*'s first and long-tenured director, was a wealthy bus owner, a member of Díaz

Lombardo's inner circle, and later a national congressman. Carlos Dufoo briefly succeeded Contreras before being replaced in 1954, returned to edit *El Informador Camionero* in the late 1960s and '70s, and was a prominent industry leader who twice served as a national congressman. For careerists such as Contreras and Dufoo, involvement with the magazines had the clear goal of promoting the projects and messages of their political groups in an effort to solidify the leadership's control over the camioneros, but their messages of unity and discipline were often interchangeable and bland.

Neither was the content of the magazines wholly indicative of particular political motivations. Although the purpose of *El Informador Camionero* had been clear at its founding, articles tended to range from the overtly political to the purely social, and this mixture was central to the *sui generis* nature of all the publications. A typical issue might contain an editorial on the history of Labor Day celebrations, articles on fare disputes in a provincial city and on new policies for route placards in the capital, photographs from a recent banquet hosted by a bus line, a section on camionero sporting activities, information on tire maintenance, and official alianza circulars regarding taxes. Political content was sprinkled throughout, in both opening editorials and middle-page commentaries. Articles were frequently unsigned, leaving some purportedly informational columns with obviously editorial content unattributed, though their tone and messages made their nature (and likely authorship) clear. At times, the magazines engaged in a classic strategy of journalistic deflection, republishing columns from national broadsheets or foreign publications that offered more biting critiques of transportation policy than the camioneros perhaps felt comfortable advancing independently. Though the balance shifted toward this more strident political content during times of internal alianza conflict, the magazines tended to return to a state of relative equilibrium where the social and technical content offset the political messages. Indeed, the relative consistency of the magazines' blandness across some sixty years is striking. This was because the target audience for these publications was the average camionero, and for the magazines to be credible they had to appear to be serving the interests and needs of the gremio, which meant not simply serving the political objectives of leaders, but also catering to the quotidian interests of members. The relatively broad diffusion of camionero magazines—10,000 copies monthly of *Transportes y Turismo* in 1962

and 15,000 copies of *El Informador Camionero* in 1965—suggests that they were intended to reach all members of the *alianza*.<sup>16</sup>

With its content thus ranging from highly technical reports to bickering over arcane internal disputes, *El Informador Camionero* and its ilk on superficial examination hardly seem an intriguing source for the study of twentieth-century Mexican political life, and the publications' prosaic qualities hardly seem to make for exciting historical research. Yet when these magazines are properly contextualized and their messages more closely considered, they emerge as fascinating elements of the PRI corporatist system. If publications such as *El Informador Camionero* were unremarkable examples of journalism, they were nevertheless remarkable pieces of marketing and agitprop, and the resources that camionero leaders invested in them suggests their importance.

### **Constructing Leadership on Glossy Pages**

How the editors and editorialists of *El Informador Camionero* pursued their political objectives is perhaps best illustrated by an examination of the magazine's content during the organizational rupture in 1954. That year, a dispute over the group's strategies for negotiating an increase in bus fares provoked a major schism when the leadership group tied to Narciso Contreras found itself out of political favor and stonewalled by the city government. The conflict came to a head when, with the backing of Ernesto Uruchurtu, the head of Mexico City's government, a collaborationist faction led by José Valdovinos succeeded in forcing Contreras's group from power through a series of shadowy maneuvers. Yet this story was entirely absent from the pages of *El Informador Camionero* where Valdovinos simply appeared as the group's new secretary-general—without explanation—three-quarters of the way through the magazine's May edition as if the partially completed issue had been amended shortly before press time. Sharp-eyed readers would have noticed that the following month, *El Informador Camionero* had an entirely new masthead since Valdovinos had apparently installed those loyal to him as the magazine's editor and director. Less subtle was the message splashed across the publication's cover, where Valdovinos appeared alongside Uruchurtu. This and additional interior photos where the organization's new secretary-general was captured in meetings with the mayor and the president

clearly indicated to readers that the new leader of the camioneros had a degree of political access that his predecessor, Contreras—who had been shut out of the mayor's office—had lacked.

Opposition to Valdovinos was fierce, however, as some dissident members of the alianza saw him as an opportunist who, in seeking to use the group for his own political gain, had adopted an overly collaborationist stance toward the city government. In order to consolidate his leadership in the face of these challenges, Valdovinos's *El Informador Camionero* undertook a massive effort to establish his legitimacy and to promote unity in the face of dissent. The June 1954 issue featured an article entitled "A Ray of Hope," which reported on Valdovinos's meeting with the mayor—documented on the cover—and suggested that the warm relationship between the two men offered the best chance for a favorable resolution of the dispute over fares. The magazine also sought to contrast Valdovinos's rectitude, moderation, and dedication with the venality and extravagance of his predecessors and rivals: a photo of the alianza's executive committee hosting a working dinner was captioned with the comment: "Notice the sodas—the price of whiskey is sky high!"<sup>17</sup> These were clear efforts to persuade camioneros to line up behind Valdovinos, presenting his leadership as both effective and more legitimate than that of his opponents. By September, with the schism in the organization deepening, the alianza increased the circulation of *El Informador Camionero* by 5,000, to a total of 20,000 copies, a clear indication that the leaders saw the magazine as an important method of spreading official messages during times of conflict. That month's editorial offered a strident but hardly unique commentary, remarking that "now, more than ever, the unity of the gremio is necessary. True unity, stripped of all individual interest. Unity without sophism, demagoguery, or betrayal of our tradition of guild fraternity." The editorial asserted that "three unalterable principles . . . have permitted the survival of our dear gremio camionero: unity, discipline, and responsibility."<sup>18</sup> Suggesting that the camioneros rise above personal ambitions for collective gain was hardly an apolitical or altruistic message: industry schisms disrupted service and deeply concerned government officials, weakening Valdovinos's position as a leader. If Valdovinos could not unify the organization and ensure that it accepted official decisions on fares, the regime would likely force him from office just as it had his predecessor.

The 1954 episode underscores three common techniques that the trade

magazines used to consolidate the authority of leadership. First, by advertising the advantageous political position of leaders through photography and reporting on meetings with officials, the magazines sought to portray leaders as working diligently and effectively to solve industry issues. Second, in their portrayals of these men as models of rectitude, the publications set the terms of debates over legitimate leadership, attempting to cast dissidents as disloyal to the interests of the gremio. Third, through the aggressive and continual rhetorical promotion of unity and discipline, the magazines argued that only through subordination to that legitimate leadership could the camioneros expect the industry to advance. Organizational unity and discipline had benefits beyond the collective interests of the camioneros, however, since those qualities also bolstered the positions of alianza leaders within the PRI's corporatist system. The mechanics of that system, well documented by the labor leaders who advanced politically by ensuring the docility of their organizational affiliates, was developed by entrepreneurial groups such as the camioneros as well.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, alianza leaders were never the authoritarian union bosses of classic *charrismo* caricature, nor were they industry caciques.<sup>20</sup> Political success was predicated on more than heavy-handed leadership: those who could also build some measure of "legitimate" support were the regime's preferred intermediaries, and specialized publications were a tool to construct that support.<sup>21</sup> In this, the careers of alianza leaders followed common patterns. Valdovinos's success in consolidating his authority resulted in his nomination to a congressional seat in 1958—though this too was scarcely mentioned in the magazine's pages.

### **Legible Corporatism**

If the individual benefits of the alianza's collaboration with the regime were frequently elided in the pages of *El Informador Camionero*, leaders nevertheless had to defend the legitimacy of the organization's involvement in politics. *El Informador Camionero* proved a valuable tool for justifying both cooperation with official policy and participation in PRI rituals, particularly after 1946 when the camioneros began providing the party with free bus service during campaigns and when industry leaders were first nominated to political posts. As the magazine's chief editorialist wrote that year, the naming of the alianza's president to a cabinet position "represented an honor for

all the camioneros of the country . . . [and] is an explicit recognition of the virtues of our gremio.”<sup>22</sup> This rhetorical attempt to portray the advancement of the political careers of camionero leaders as a collective rather than individual gain was a typical trope in the magazine. Similarly, *El Informador Camionero* sought to justify the group’s participation in electoral campaigns, which imposed significant costs on members, by suggesting that it was both a civic duty and a means to obtain policy benefits. As a May 1958 commentary observed, the group’s contribution of a hundred vehicles to campaign convoys “was of such magnitude that it could go neither unnoticed nor unappreciated by our government. This effort will not be in vain, and we hope that in a not-too-distant future the industry will reap the fruits.”<sup>23</sup> The *alianza*’s collaboration in these mobilizations served to demonstrate leaders’ control over the group but was also indispensable for the regime’s political theater: the group’s vehicles provided the transportation necessary to make large rallies and demonstrations possible. *Alianza* leaders thus had every reason to ensure that members cooperated, and they continually sought ways to reinforce the importance of the practice. In 1969, on the eve of another election, the magazine published a photographic retrospective of *alianza* participation in every presidential campaign since 1946, reminding readers that support for the PRI had the legitimacy of tradition and that the camioneros were the most important spokesmen of the revolution.<sup>24</sup> Extra copies of that edition were printed, further underscoring that leadership believed the magazine to serve an important orienting purpose.

Yet *alianza* leadership was careful to maintain an image of distance from the PRI, and the magazine occasionally addressed the tensions caused by the significant costs of collaboration. In one instance, *El Informador Camionero* published a commentary that criticized government ministries for misusing the buses provided free of cost by the *alianza* in support of demonstrations, noting that on occasion vehicles would spend six hours waiting for ralliers to board and that frequently ministries requested more buses than necessary. Such practices were deemed egregious because of their wastefulness: taking buses out of circulation both harmed the interests of the public and caused a pointless loss of income for the camioneros.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, the role of camioneros in supporting *acarreo*—the PRI’s practice of mobilizing ralliers<sup>26</sup>—seems to have been a perennial source of friction. Industry publications thus give a valuable glimpse of discontent even within

the most solidly *priista* corners of the corporatist system, illuminating the way these groups viewed the terms of their participation in authoritarian politics. In one lively example from Acapulco's *La Voz del Chofer*, one faction of the port city's struggling camioneros offered a harangue against leaders arranging buses for acarreo:

Sheep! Let us consider the matter calmly. [Head of the PRI] Dr. Lauro Ortega comes and now they [the camionero leaders] are organizing the "supposedly revolutionary masses" and are going to the capital to receive orders, and we ask: Is the secretary of the organization [Acapulco's camioneros] going to require that new recipients of operating permits be bootlickers . . . ? Isn't it true that when the president came he said beforehand that he did not want any demonstration of that sort? That he didn't want the workers to waste time, but nevertheless the bootlickers obliged all the bus owners and workers to demonstrate, and not even then were their interests considered. . . . Now it's the same thing. Are the "advisers" going to oblige the workers to go like flocks of sheep to shout and applaud a man we don't even know? What have we gained? Nothing, it is true. The poor campesinos that they bring from the villages even get a "cold drink and a taco" . . . but we who lose more than half a day of work, what do we gain? They say that all of this is to prepare the way for Juan Chueco [a local leader] to become a congressman, because that is what Rubén Figueroa desires, but what have we done to deserve such poor treatment?<sup>27</sup>

While the terms "bootlickers" and "sheep" clearly critiqued the practice of acarreo, this commentary aimed only at its most exaggerated expression as orchestrated by unscrupulous, self-interested local actors—which the head of the PRI and the president were both cast as opposing. This sprawling denunciation was thus hardly revolutionary. Transportation industry entrepreneurs tended to be loyal *priistas*, and this airing of grievances was more about internal politics than any direct challenge to the regime's core values. Obscure provincial trade publications such as this would likely have received little scrutiny from censors, and neither would it have been necessary to restrain their content since complaints would have passed more or less unnoticed except by the camionero audience for whom they were intended—and

with whom this expression of naked frustration might have resonated. What ire this commentary might have raised would have come from the local politicians who staked their careers on turning out acarreados with Acapulco's buses. Indeed, the editorial's shot at Chueco and Figueroa—who was then maneuvering for the governorship of Guerrero—may have had repercussions since after that issue all political content vanished from the publication. What the episode reveals, though, is the degree to which grudging collaborators with acarreo expected their leaders to take their interests into consideration, and the internal bickering that often surrounded participation in political rituals.

When bickering escalated into leadership struggles, rivals often targeted each other with savage printed salvos. Indeed, the *Voz del Chofer* editorial was not the first time Figueroa had been criticized in industry publications. Under Valdovinos, *El Informador Camionero* had lambasted Figueroa's attempts to claim the leadership of provincial camioneros during the mid-1950s. In one instance, after Figueroa had published a newspaper advertisement attempting to take credit for obtaining subsidized chassis for Monterrey's camioneros, the magazine sniped that "the announcement was signed by someone who calls himself 'ingeniero' [engineer] and is named Rubén Figueroa. It was this 'Mister' Figueroa who had the shameful audacity to try to take advantage and capitalize on the work of the Alianza de Camioneros of Mexico. And this is not a critique of Figueroa, but a recognition of his deplorable attitude, worthy of Petronius's tirade against Nero: 'You are worthy of the spectacle, and the spectacle is worthy of you.'"<sup>28</sup> The mockery of Figueroa's title of ingeniero (he had received a degree in hydrological engineering from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) was undoubtedly intended to suggest that he was a political opportunist, not an authentic camionero, despite the fact that by that point he had been involved in the industry for nearly a decade. On other occasions, the magazine accused rivals of engaging in "vulgar political maneuvers . . . [and] attempting at any cost to use [the camioneros] as a trampoline to obtain political office."<sup>29</sup> The tenor of these commentaries seems to have been calibrated to inflame the sensibilities of alianza members by suggesting that opponents were violating the moral codes of camionero leadership. That strategy could be adapted *ex post facto* as well, and alianza leaders occasionally shored up their position by attacking former leaders, as was the case in 1965 when *El Informador*

*Camionero* published a cartoon depicting the recently deposed—and much despised—secretary-general as a snake wrapped around a distraught bus owner. The caption read, “This is how that pseudo lawyer with false pretenses wanted to strangle the gremio.”<sup>30</sup>

Open criticism of rivals was central to trade publications not only because it served the political needs of leaders, but also because it occasionally reflected the discontents of members. Similarly, in seeking to maintain unity and discipline the periodicals had to reflect the more prosaic policy concerns and complaints of their readers. Since the camioneros saw themselves as loyal collaborators of the regime, but maintained a stubborn, conservative, middle-class sense of self-sufficiency and frequently struggled with the government over transportation policy, leaders needed to appear as though they were faithful advocates of the gremio’s interests. This involved not only painting rivals as self-serving or traitorous but also channeling the expression of collective grievances into the pages of the magazine. In *El Informador Camionero*, this tended to take the form of editorials that obliquely critiqued officials’ decisions and lamented officials’ incomprehension of the issues. Fares were a particular area of dispute, and the blunt observations of the following column are a representative example of the typical strategy for addressing uncooperative authorities:

In a free market such as ours, despite its numerous elements of directed economy, there are inflationary tendencies in products and services that require periodic leveling of prices. . . . Transportation does not escape these phenomena. The revision, every two years, of labor contracts and the ever-increasing rate of the minimum wage, as well as the increase in prices of automotive parts, repairs, and maintenance, necessarily influence the cost of the services we provide. . . . The [government’s] adjustment of fares does not coincide with these cycles, and when they are raised, it is with such delay as to cause fatal disparities in the economy of transportation.<sup>31</sup>

The dry tone of this introduction quickly shifted to a more plaintive voice, lamenting that whenever the issue of fare increases is raised, “from all corners emerge ‘technical experts in these matters’ who offer opinions that range from reasonable to the most absurd” and that almost always the

conclusion blames the camioneros for failing to turn a profit even though they do not control the price of their own product. The column finished in full-throated wail, reminding camionero readers—and perhaps celebrating their abnegation—that “bus transportation in Mexico City is in the hands of more than 4,500 permit holders, Mexicans of working backgrounds who over 50 years organized and maintained the industry, making of it an honest living. . . . Their efforts and perseverance have sustained it in conditions ever less favorable. . . . We cannot ignore or avoid the solution. The raising of fares is an imperative that now more than ever is fully justified.”<sup>32</sup> Absent from this full-page missive was any direct confrontation of those responsible for setting fares: blame was laid at the feet of false experts and a stingy public, but government officials went unmentioned. This was not unusual: low-level transit officials might come in for sharp-edged criticism, but the chief complaint against the head of Mexico City’s government was never more than a vaguely blameless incomprehension of the issue. The purpose of the column, then, was less to elicit an official reaction, and much less to achieve a change in policy, but more to present to average camioneros the image of a leadership sympathetic to their struggle; it was empathetic, not proactive.

Such policy critiques, therefore, like the commentary on *acarreo* discussed above, were more discussions of the *terms* of political incorporation, not debates over incorporation itself. The collective of camioneros had no choice but to participate in PRI rituals, and they had little ability to alter transportation policies, which were often shaped by public protest over any fare increases rather than by economic calculations. In addressing these topics, the magazines did not aspire to change them. What the discussion in trade publications did achieve, however, was to reinforce the sense that the camioneros had a voice in the official government sphere, that policy *could* be discussed openly, and that leaders *could* challenge the government on issues of importance to the industry. It was an illusion that was useful for nearly all involved.

## Conclusion

Within the PRI’s corporatist system, groups like the Alianza de Camioneros offer an important explanation for the stability of the regime from the 1950s to the 1980s. If their loyalty bordered on unconditional, it was not blind, and

the leaders of these organizations needed to construct the legitimacy of their cooperation with authoritarian politics. Magazines like *El Informador Camionero* not only pushed for unity and discipline, but also provided a space for hashing out the rules of corporatist politics. They were fundamentally political, conceived and purposed to support the needs of organizational leadership, but they did not consist entirely of anodyne puffery. Rather, these publications reflected the complex and difficult process of establishing authority in corporatist organizations. Precisely framed denunciations of rivals and frank discussions of policy were among the subtle techniques that successful leaders employed to bolster their moral and pragmatic legitimacy. Similarly, leaders used these publications to finesse the integration of their groups into the PRI's corporatist system, balancing the concerns of affiliates with the demands of political patrons. This often meant presenting leaders as staunch advocates for the best interests of the group while simultaneously explaining the collective benefits of collaboration and arguing for its necessity. Ultimately, these publications became the texts of the corporatist system, and as groups like the *alianza* negotiated their relationship with the regime, their official journals set the terms of the discussion. Between the lines of the magazines, it is possible to read the unwritten rules of the PRI.

## Notes

1. *El Informador Camionero*, Apr. 1954.
2. Paxman, *Jenkins of Mexico*, 305.
3. Lenti, "Collaboration and Conflict," 21. Since leaders of the major labor confederations had a greater degree of security (enjoying careers several times longer than those of even the longest tenured *alianza* leaders) the need to reinforce the legitimacy of their leadership was perhaps lower. See also Gutiérrez Espíndola, *Prensa obrera*.
4. Predictably, however, what was seen as "ill-conceived government policies" was subject to rather tendentious interpretations.
5. With the exception of Salvador Novo, who famously wrote for *El Chafre* in the early 1920s, those who contributed to *El Informador Camionero* were relatively anonymous historical actors, and their writing thus offers a fresh look at the internal workings of the corporatist system.
6. Bringas and Mascareño, "Un siglo de publicaciones."
7. A much more detailed account of the history of the *alianza*, its leaders, and its members can be found in my dissertation: Lettieri, "Wheels of Government."

8. For a history of the politics and emergence of the bus transportation industry in Mexico City, see Davis, *Urban Leviathan*, 58.
9. The attempt to create a system of cooperatives, pushed by Francisco Múgica, was in part a response to the alianza's alleged mistreatment and blacklisting of bus drivers.
10. The alianza was labeled a "pulpo" as early as 1934.
11. See Cross, *Informal Politics*.
12. Juan P. Morales, the director of the magazine, was a prominent member of the alianza, and Francisco Zubillaga, the publication's editor, was the alianza's recording secretary.
13. Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance*, 92.
14. Figueroa's career and the intersection between his political aspirations and his involvement with the alianza are detailed in Lettieri, "A Model Dinosaur."
15. This rebranding notwithstanding, the post-1965 magazine was a continuation of the earlier publication, and I use the shorter, original name of *El Informador Camionero* in all cases.
16. A 1965 promotional page in *El Informador Camionero* soliciting advertisers depicted the publication's supposed national coverage with a map showing its distribution routes stretching out from Mexico City; it further claimed that "an average of four readers per copy 'see' and 'hear' our messages." That would have meant that the magazine had approximately 60,000 readers, which strains credulity. *El Informador Camionero*, Sept. 1965.
17. *El Informador Camionero*, June 1954.
18. *El Informador Camionero*, Sept. 1954.
19. Maldonado Aranda, "Between Law and Arbitrariness"; Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*.
20. As Michael Snodgrass has pointed out, *charro* rule was often legitimized by the benefits delivered to affiliated workers. Snodgrass, "The Golden Age of Charismo," 183–84.
21. Smith, "Who Governed?"
22. *El Informador Camionero*, Dec. 1946.
23. *El Informador Camionero*, May, 1958.
24. *El Informador Camionero*, Nov. 1969.
25. *El Informador Camionero*, Aug. 1967.
26. These demonstrators were minimally compensated with food, T-shirts, or the promise of future intangible benefits (electrification, a playground, jobs); they were also frequently coerced to attend with threats of blacklisting, and other repercussions, but it was never a purely monetary transaction.
27. *La Voz del Chofer*, Sept. 1966. Illustrating the importance of context and the difficulty of analyzing trade publications without it, there is little more that can be said about this commentary, which was published under a comedic alias (Agent 007). With little external information available about the politics of

buses in Acapulco, it is only possible to make the rather obvious inference that the co-opted leadership of the city's transportation industry had failed to deliver adequate benefits to the camioneros after organizing them in support of PRI activities. The leaders were thus facing a challenge from those who controlled the magazine. More substantive analysis about that struggle is elusive, as is any context for the references to Chueco and Figueroa.

28. *El Informador Camionero*, Jan. 1956.
29. *El Informador Camionero*, Sept. 1954.
30. "Así quisiera ver al gremio, ahorcado, un pseudo licenciado con título colorado"; *El Informador Camionero*, July 1965.
31. *El Informador Camionero*, Jan. 1970.
32. *El Informador Camionero*, Jan. 1970.