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## MEXICO'S TURN TOWARD THE THIRD WORLD

Rural Development Under President Luis Echeverría

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ON DECEMBER 2, 1972, Salvador Allende, the embattled president of Chile, spoke to a group of university students in Guadalajara, Mexico. To a packed auditorium, Allende thanked Mexican President Luis Echeverría for hosting him and then addressed issues of poverty, imperialism, and revolution. He emphasized the overwhelming youthfulness of Latin America, with half of its population under twenty-seven years of age, and noted that after 150 years of political independence, Latin America remained poor and dependent on external powers. Describing the lack of literacy, housing, and food in the Americas, Allende argued progressive governments such as those of Mexico and Chile must address the issues directly. He noted the differences between “la vía chilena,” or Chilean road to socialism, and guerrilla struggle, associated with the Cuban Revolution, to emphasize the plurality of paths toward revolutionary change. University students, he contended, had a “patriotic obligation” to use their knowledge to improve the conditions of their countries, particularly in rural areas. Allende’s presence in Mexico was highly controversial. The conservative press, much of the Catholic Church, and northern business interests viewed the state visit with suspicion. Coming just two years into Luis Echeverría’s *sexenio* (1970–76), the visit of the avowedly socialist president of Chile heightened fears and rumors of a creeping socialism under Echeverría.<sup>1</sup> In addition to domestic opposition, the visit antagonized U.S. President Richard Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, who actively worked to sabotage Allende’s ruling coalition. While the Mexican Right viewed the

event as part of a worrying leftward trend, much of the Mexican Left and student movement were also skeptical, albeit for different reasons. For post-1968 dissidents, Echeverría's leftist rhetoric, his invocation of Third World solidarity, even the visit of the *compañero presidente* Allende, was nothing more than progressive rhetoric masking a violent and authoritarian regime. Allende's speech, in which he admonished students to focus on their studies and work hard, only seemed to confirm this interpretation of events.<sup>2</sup>

The debate over Allende's University of Guadalajara speech is reflective of broader debates surrounding how to understand post-1968 Mexico and President Echeverría's officially termed *apertura democrática* (democratic opening), a series of wide-ranging reforms that included increasing press freedoms, the expansion of the education system at all levels, and the release of political prisoners.<sup>3</sup> Scholars of mid-century Mexico have debated how to understand the nature of the state and the centrality of the 1968 student movement. While participant memoirs emphasize the student movement in the capital as a watershed moment in Mexican history, the beginning of the end of the authoritarian Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) rule, historians have begun to point to broader processes at work before 1968.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the nature of the Mexican state, dominated by the PRI after the violent phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20), has been disputed, with some emphasizing its repressive features and others its relative democratic responsiveness.<sup>5</sup> Gillingham and Smith have popularized for an English-speaking audience the term *dictablanda* (soft dictatorship) to capture these two elements of the regime.<sup>6</sup> Others have emphasized regional approaches to understanding how power operated.<sup>7</sup> Yet scholars have yet to come to a consensus on the nature of the democratic opening or reckon with Mexico's short-lived Third Worldist project.

This chapter examines how the post-1968 Mexican establishment reformulated its rule in response to a dissident politics that included not only a university student movement in Mexico City but also broader opposition forces in both rural and urban Mexico. The 1972 state visit of President Allende was part and parcel of a shift in Mexican foreign policy towards a Third Worldist discourse and posture. That shift is significant in its own right but also shaped domestic politics in fundamental ways. Scholars, including many in this volume, rightly highlight the repressive aspects of Echeverría's presidency, including counterinsurgent campaigns, the detention of political dissidents, and the use of torture, in effort to combat the trope of Mexican Cold War exceptionalism.<sup>8</sup> Yet Echeverría's political response to discontent in rural Mexico has received far too little attention. Indeed, the connection between Mexico's Third Worldist

posture abroad and its domestic reform agenda was laid out by the president in his 1973 annual governmental address, in which he argued, "In the same way we fight for the rights of the Third World to be respected, we do it in our own country so that workers and peasants have justice."<sup>9</sup> The Echeverría administration went on to dramatically increase social spending, particularly for poor and rural regions, and exponentially expanded rural development programs. I argue the existence of Third World politics internationally shaped Mexican officials' response to domestic opposition and contributed to a dramatic reformulation of rural development policy in the post-1968 era.

Scholars have increasingly begun to employ a "Global Sixties" framing to understand the period in question. This framework has the advantage of foregrounding the transnational connections that shaped a truly global period of world history and emphasizes demographic growth, technological change, the expansion of higher education, and Cold War ideologies as central processes shaping the period.<sup>10</sup> Yet as with any analytical framework, it has limitations. For example, despite the best intentions of its practitioners, Global Sixties frameworks have struggled to decenter iconic events in the United States and Western Europe and often emphasize urban over rural experiences.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Mexico, the 1968 Mexico City student movement no doubt developed in dialogue with events in the United States and Europe, and Mexican youth followed U.S. protests against the Vietnam War and civil rights organizing on Mexican television.<sup>12</sup> These youths also welcomed activists from Europe in the capital's universities. Yet the Global Sixties' emphasis on these relationships has often implicitly excluded Mexico's engagement with the Global South. This emphasis has kept us from exploring the ways in which the Global Sixties were grounded in south-south connections. Indeed, the Mexican establishment's engagement with Third World politics was a direct response to the swelling opposition and crisis of legitimacy it faced domestically. Third World alternative political and economic projects, such as those of Cuba and Chile, as well as international formations such as the Non-Aligned Movement, shaped Mexican rural development policy as well as dissident politics.

### **"MEXICO, OPENLY WITH THE THIRD WORLD, COMES OUT OF ITS 'SPLENDID ISOLATION'"<sup>13</sup>**

Mexico's engagement with and contribution to the Third World has received little scholarly attention. With its origins in post-World War II decolonization

and the 1955 Bandung Congress in Indonesia, the Third World was “not a place,” as Vijay Prashad has pointed out, but rather a political “project.”<sup>14</sup> As a project of formerly colonized countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, Third World politics achieved one of its most significant moments in 1961 with the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement. Latin American nations, despite a shared colonial past, were late to join this movement. Nonetheless, postrevolutionary Cuba’s hosting of the 1966 Tricontinental Congress in Havana marked a significant increase in Latin American participation. Perhaps because of these distinct chronologies of decolonization, scholars have yet to fully reckon with Latin America’s, and particularly Mexico’s, role in the Third World project.<sup>15</sup> Given a perceived weakness of the United States on the world stage, Mexico under Echeverría made significant efforts to strengthen Third World politics internationally, particularly through the United Nations, as evidenced by its successful proposal of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1974. The charter was a key document in support of the New International Economic Order, a declaration passed by the General Assembly in May of that same year. These efforts aimed at a legally binding framework to insure sovereignty over both economic and political spheres.<sup>16</sup> While Mexico’s involvement and engagement with Third World politics and Global South alliances have only recently begun to receive attention, several scholars have observed how foreign relations have served as a salve for domestic problems.<sup>17</sup> Yet precisely how Third Worldism shaped domestic politics in Mexico remains to be analyzed.

President Allende’s speech at the University of Guadalajara was part of a three-day state visit to Mexico. Many of the Mexico City daily newspapers carried wall-to-wall coverage of the Chilean president’s arrival in Mexico City. Indeed, they noted the dramatic departure from the staid state visits and receptions of previous administrations, describing how the Mexican president and his wife met the Chilean delegation at the capital city’s airport and proceeded to lead a sixteen-kilometer procession from the airport to the Chilean embassy downtown, with thousands lining the streets. Along the parade route supporters raised chants in favor of Allende and his stand against U.S. imperialism, along with renditions of “The Internationale.”<sup>18</sup> *El Día*, a newspaper highly sympathetic to the president, chose to frame the visit with the headline “apertura al socialismo” (socialist aperture), deliberately connecting Allende’s Chilean “road to socialism” with Echeverría’s “apertura democrática.” In anticipation of the visit, Pablo González Casanova, the Mexican intellectual and then director of

the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM), warned of potential conflicts within the student movement sparked by the visit. While his worries appear to not have materialized, students in Mexico City used the opportunity to confront Echeverría in front of Allende, demanding a “permanent dialogue” with the president.<sup>19</sup>

Mexico’s support of and collaboration with the Chilean government was part of a much broader realignment of Latin American diplomatic relations. In response to the U.S. war in Vietnam, the emergence of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the oil crisis of the 1970s, governments as diverse as Peru, Argentina, and Venezuela reoriented their diplomatic relations toward more independent positions.<sup>20</sup> As Hal Brands has noted, a “period of distress for the West was a time of opportunity for those developing nations unsatisfied with existing systems of world commerce and diplomacy.”<sup>21</sup> Governments such as Mexico’s, emboldened by both high oil prices and seemingly weaker U.S. power internationally, strove to reorient international diplomacy and economic policy on fundamentally more favorable terms for Latin America, Africa, and Asia.<sup>22</sup>

Mexico under President Echeverría went above and beyond adjusting to a new international order. Echeverría aimed to provide leadership to a renewed Third World project internationally. During this period, Mexico increased the number of countries it had diplomatic relations with; the president visited over forty countries during his six-year term, an impressive number for any head of state, and Echeverría started an international think tank based in Mexico City, the Centro de Estudios Económicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo (Center for Third World Studies). To further promote this international agenda, Mexico hosted the World Conference for the International Women’s Year in June 1975 in Mexico City.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps his most significant effort was the successful adoption in the UN of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, albeit without any legally binding measures for member states. The notions of economic sovereignty and the rights of nations to equitable development outlined in the charter reflected the ideals associated with the 1910 Mexican Revolution and applied them to the context of a rapidly decolonizing world.

Mexico’s participation in the September 1973 Conference of Non-Aligned Nations, held in Algeria, demonstrates its fraught and complex engagement with Third World politics. President Echeverría had actively attempted to provide leadership to the Non-Aligned Movement in the lead-up to the meetings. He visited Santiago, Chile, in April 1972 where he first promoted his

proposed charter at the Third UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD III). President Allende then encouraged him to personally attend the upcoming Non-Aligned meeting in Algiers the following fall. Yet Echeverría ultimately chose to send his foreign minister, Emilio Rabasa, in his place, perhaps concerned about overly antagonizing the U.S. government. When the Chilean administration became aware of Mexico's plan, Chilean officials were deeply disappointed.<sup>24</sup> Though given their own previously professed skepticism of Echeverría's political commitment, perhaps they were not entirely surprised.<sup>25</sup> Nor was Allende himself able to attend, as the meetings occurred during the final days of his government. This incident highlights the delicate balance involved in Mexico's turn to the Third World.

Mexico's balancing act was intimately tied to its own long-standing relationship with the United States government. This relationship partially suffered in 1971, as the United States imposed higher tariffs on imports, including Mexican products. Despite this, the Mexican government under the PRI had a long history of collaboration with the United States, with Mexico City hosting one of the largest offices of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in the world.<sup>26</sup> While President Echeverría publicly represented himself as a flag-bearer for the Third World, declaring in 1974, "We have a fundamental purpose: to strengthen our political independence and our economic autonomy, objectives for which we fight alongside the peoples of the Third World," he privately reassured U.S. President Richard Nixon of his continued allegiance to the United States.<sup>27</sup> In White House conversations with Nixon in June 1972, he had contended his Third Worldist leadership was necessary, "because if I don't take this flag in Latin America, Castro will. I am very conscious of this."<sup>28</sup> Yet U.S. officials observed Echeverría's increasing Third Worldist discourse with concern. A September 1973 State Department cable from Mexico City summarized its analysis of the Mexican administration with characteristic paternalism: "In conclusion, although the Echeverría government is less easy to handle than its predecessor, I do not believe that our essential interests have suffered."<sup>29</sup>

This turn toward the Third World cannot be understood without reckoning with its place in the broader history of postrevolutionary Mexico. While President Echeverría invoked Third World solidarity, he also explicitly portrayed his own policies as a dramatic break with the previous two decades of Mexican policy at home and abroad. He consciously contrasted his administration with previous policies of "stabilizing development," and newspaper headlines described

the democratic opening as a return to the policies of President Lázaro Cárdenas, putting the social movement back into “the revolution.”<sup>30</sup> The domestic and foreign policy reforms under Echeverría certainly constituted a reformulation of the PRI political project, but scholars debate the severity of the rupture in Mexican foreign relations. Gerardo Lézama, for example, makes the claim that foreign relations served to justify the regime domestically, but that Echeverría’s foreign policy did not ultimately constitute a “rupture.”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, others point to long-standing Mexican diplomatic advocacy of principles of economic self-determination and sovereignty, dating back to the 1910 Revolution.<sup>32</sup> In the history of Mexican foreign relations, its turn to the Third World appears as a window that briefly opened and precipitously closed.<sup>33</sup> Echeverría was unsuccessful in his bid to lead the United Nations, and Allende died in a U.S.-backed military coup on September 11, 1973, but the experience underscores the contingent possibilities of Third World politics in Latin America.<sup>34</sup>

### **RURAL CRISIS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT’S RESPONSE: THIRD WORLD POLITICS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

The Mexican establishment’s domestic policies underwent a dramatic reformulation as well in the post-1968 period. While President Echeverría sponsored a host of reforms, his policies toward rural Mexico and poverty generally constituted a substantive break with previous administrations. During the previous three decades, Mexico had experienced a period of impressive macroeconomic growth, dubbed the “Mexican Miracle.” This economic boom was fueled by green revolution agricultural reforms, particularly in northern Mexico, and increasing industrial production in cities such as Monterrey and the nation’s capital.<sup>35</sup> Accompanying this growth came substantial migration, rural to urban as well as south to north (for commercial agriculture).<sup>36</sup> This model of economic development, termed “stabilizing development,” achieved average growth rates of over 7 percent annually into the late 1960s.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Mexico’s hosting of the Summer Olympics in 1968, the images of which have become central to 1968 globally, was designed to be the crowning achievement of the “Mexican Miracle.” Policy makers and observers at the time were aware of the inherent contradictions in the model of stabilizing development.<sup>38</sup> To promote an urban and industrial economy, rural producers were sacrificed. The model of commercial

agriculture disproportionately benefited northern Mexico, and food prices were deliberately kept low to feed growing urban areas.

By the early 1970s, this model of development, particularly in terms of agricultural production, achieved its limit. During the mid-twentieth century, Mexico had been a net exporter of foodstuffs, yet by the mid-1970s it had become a net importer.<sup>39</sup> As Sanderson has pointed out through case studies of the fruit and vegetable, beef, and grains industries, the internationalization of these markets both undermined Mexico's agricultural self-sufficiency and frequently produced few benefits for agricultural workers.<sup>40</sup> This had dire consequences for the rural poor, who struggled to access and purchase basic corn, as wheat was prioritized in this development model. In addition, while Mexico stood out in Latin America as one of the few countries to have successfully implemented land reform in the first half of the twentieth century, the crisis in rural Mexico in the 1970s was exacerbated by a growing illegal concentration of communal and ejidal lands.<sup>41</sup> Thus in the 1970s a growing population of rural Mexicans struggled both to access land for subsistence agriculture and to find decently remunerated agricultural work.

As Armando Bartra has noted, if the “stabilizing development” model ran out of steam in the 1970s, “so did the patience of the campesinos.”<sup>42</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency recognized the threat of a radicalized countryside in Mexico, noting in 1974, “The unrest is partly a result of corruption and exploitation, but ignorance, population pressures, a shortage of good land, and the concentration on industry during the last 30 years also play a part.”<sup>43</sup> Peasants drawing on long-standing *agrarista* traditions, as well as radicalized youth who joined them, engaged in everything from illegal land seizures to armed rebellions.<sup>44</sup> Rural struggles took various forms, from fights over agricultural pricing, wages for agricultural work, access to land, and opposition to authoritarianism. Rural teachers at times provided leadership in struggles over land seizures (Padilla and Villanueva in this volume). In the Sierra Juarez of Oaxaca, communities employed by two major lumber companies struck for higher lumber prices in the late 1960s. The struggle involved thousands of rural people and multiple indigenous communities. After multiple years of bitter fights with the timber companies, the communities won a victory in 1972, which resulted in increased prices and improved working conditions.<sup>45</sup> This was just one of many struggles responding to a development model that had favored industrialization, corporate interests, and commercial agricultural production.

Regardless of the Echeverría administration's progressive rhetoric, government officials initially did not hesitate to use the military against a mobilized peasantry, particularly in the first half of the sexenio. Conforming to long-standing PRI practices, those who could not be dealt with through PRI corporatist structures, such as the Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Peasant Confederation, CNC), were potential victims of state violence. The case of Ruben Jaramillo and his followers in the state of Morelos is a prime example of such practices in the decades before.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Trevizo notes at least sixty-four cases in the early 1970s of state officials forcibly dislodging campesinos from seized land, with twenty-six of those cases involving the army.<sup>47</sup> Nor was the army solely employed against land seizures. In multiple instances in the state of Oaxaca, military force was deployed to support PRI-backed candidates in disputed municipal elections.<sup>48</sup> Particularly in the country's south, but also in the north, military repression of rural discontent went hand in glove with more robust development programs.

Particularly after the first few years of Echeverría's presidency, federal officials expanded their political response to rural discontent with a broad-based strengthening and reorientation of rural development programs. Existing institutions such as the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenist Institute,INI), long considered the caboose of the developmentalist train with relatively few resources, saw its overall budget double during this period. New initiatives such as the Programa de Inversiones en el Desarrollo Rural (Rural Development Investment Program, PEDIR) received support from federal officials and the World Bank, which was briefly animated by the philosophy of "redistribution with growth." Federal officials sought to provide increased access to rural credit, and legal protections for such credit were strengthened. Finally, one of the central ways federal authorities chose to counter rural discontent was through a dramatic expansion and reformulation of a previously existing institution, Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares (National Basic Foods Company, CONASUPO).<sup>49</sup>

CONASUPO had its origins in long-standing agricultural price controls and subsidies but in the early 1960s became its own agency with an independent budget. Previous presidents Adolfo López Mateos and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz had gradually expanded the program. Díaz Ordaz specifically expanded the program's rural reach, establishing *tiendas rurales* (rural stores) to alleviate rural poverty while maintaining relatively orthodox "stabilizing development" policies.

Yet President Echeverría transformed the program through both a quantitative expansion and a qualitative reframing of the politics of the development agency.

## “SHARED DEVELOPMENT” AND THE RADICALIZATION OF CONASUPO

Shortly after taking office, President Echeverría challenged long-standing traditions in Mexican economic policy. During much of the mid-twentieth century, Hacienda (the Ministry of Finance) and the Banco de México (Bank of Mexico) handled economic policy rather than the office of the presidency. Indeed, the arrangement was understood as a key component of stabilizing development after the years of agricultural reform under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40). While the Ministry of Finance functioned under the economic thinking of comparative advantage, Echeverría rejected such theories in favor of nationalist and state-centered policies aimed at combatting inequality, which he dubbed “shared development.”<sup>50</sup> His fight with the ministry was key to his ability to transform CONASUPO into his central rural policy instrument.<sup>51</sup> Once Echeverría had wrested control from Hacienda, he began to expand the program, both its urban and rural components. While the sharp increase in state spending on CONASUPO came in 1973, by 1974 the “federal government transfers to the agency were augmented in real terms by 270 percent.”<sup>52</sup> The key reform of CONASUPO under Echeverría was the creation of *bodegas rurales* (rural warehouses), which aimed to help small producers store and bring their products to market. In addition, the number of rural stores selling subsidized goods increased from 43 in 1970 to 899 by 1975.<sup>53</sup> The government also raised guaranteed grain prices, which had stalled under President Díaz Ordaz. Fueled by oil wealth and a desire to relegitimize the regime, federal authorities matched their advocacy for economic self-determination abroad with robust domestic reform.

Communities and individuals seized on the rhetoric of the democratic opening and shared development to make demands on federal agencies. Town authorities from Los Tejocotes, in the state of Oaxaca, complained of having neither the ability to produce sufficient corn for their own consumption nor the ability to purchase it through intermediaries. Describing their town as one of the “most forgotten” of the region, the town authorities wrote directly to the director of the INI, the indigenous development agency, describing their plight.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, the operational logic of many INI and CONASUPO policies at the time was to replace “bad” local intermediaries, such as regional strongmen or political bosses, with “good” intermediaries, such as federal employees and trustworthy community members. This strategy framed indigenous poverty as stemming from unequal local exchange and had its roots in postrevolutionary agrarian reform of the 1930s as well as 1950s indigenous development policy, which aimed to break the control of provincial elites through federal intervention.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, much of the scholarship on post-1968 reformism has frequently looked backward to the postrevolutionary reforms under President Lázaro Cárdenas as a point of reference.<sup>56</sup> In this comparison, the reformism or “populism” of President Echeverría is often cast as a failure in contrast to the success of the 1930s. Scholars have argued a comparatively better organized rural bourgeoisie, in alliance with industrialists such as the Monterrey Group, were able to block many of Echeverría’s more radical rural reforms. In addition, Basurto and Sanderson have noted that by the 1970s, state institutions had become exponentially larger and more bureaucratic than those of the Cárdenas era.<sup>57</sup> These arguments are compelling in their emphasis on the structural and political limits of the post-1968 reform agenda. Nonetheless, there are other points of comparison for Echeverría’s reforms beyond Mexican national history. La vía chilena and agrarian reform under President Allende is one such comparison, but so too is the Cultural Revolution in China, which like Echeverría’s rhetoric involved a critique of established political leadership, an effort to reinvigorate revolutionary traditions, and an emphasis on the role of youth. Indeed, the Cultural Revolution served as inspiration for many 1968-era dissidents and various currents of Maoism thrived in Mexico (see the Soldatenko chapter in this volume). While domestic agrarista traditions shaped rural development policy in the 1970s, so too did Maoist and Third World discourses. One sees evidence of these currents in the way rural development policy shifted not only to meet basic needs but also to empower the rural poor through active participation in government programs.<sup>58</sup>

That participation was encouraged primarily in two ways: one, the use of community members themselves to staff stores and warehouses; and two, the development of a large-scale popular theater program. Local staffing of stores was meant to block against bureaucratization and to ensure fair prices. CONASUPO stores received support from INI coordinating centers nearby, which provided oversight to guarantee fair pricing. The pricing of basic goods, such as sugar and corn, was often highly contentious and local populations

frequently petitioned the INI to investigate pricing practices. In Oaxaca in the early 1970s, there were clear cases of success at monitoring prices.<sup>59</sup>

The second way mass participation was encouraged was through the creation of popular theater brigades. The Teatro Conasupo de Orientación Campesina (CONASUPO Theater of Peasant Training) program lasted from 1972 to 1976. The CONASUPO theater brigades formed part of a long history of rural theater in Mexico dating back to the 1910 Revolution.<sup>60</sup> Yet the revival of rural theater in the early 1970s was part of a more generalized revival of political theater through New Left politics and a turn toward the countryside internationally. CONASUPO created the brigades, providing training for young actors in Mexico City, with the mission of transforming the agency's work with poor communities throughout the republic. In the early years the brigades staged classical works by Moliére and Chekhov, but as the program developed they engaged the Brazilian method of "theater of the oppressed," developed by Augusto Boal, to create plays based on the rural poor's own experiences.<sup>61</sup> These works involved local community members in the productions and drew from peasant traditions and indigenous mythology to politicize the rural poor and facilitate their engagement in CONASUPO programs.<sup>62</sup> Urban theater troops on the other hand promoted CONASUPO milk production and distribution and held early morning performances with housewives in poor neighborhoods in Mexico City.<sup>63</sup> With themes of inequality, corruption, and rural poverty, Third World politics were implicit in many of the performances.

One of the professional actors employed by CONASUPO was Amdéli Yaber. Just nineteen years old in 1972, Yaber took theater classes through the CONASUPO training offered in Mexico City and went on to perform throughout Mexico in the following years. Yaber recalled one of the most important plays as being a work that consciously mocked CONASUPO itself. This play took aim at corrupt CONASUPO officials aligned with a rural strongman. Indeed, CONASUPO was riven by internal divisions between those aligned with a more conservative view of the agency's role and those who viewed it as a way to provide material benefits for the poor and create a more politicized and organized social base.<sup>64</sup> The latter faction supported the work of the theater brigades as a way to challenge the more conservative sector.<sup>65</sup> The brigades performed throughout Mexico, with an estimated two to three million people viewing six thousand performances from 1972 through 1976.<sup>66</sup> Much like 1970s development policy, these rural theater troops drew on long-standing Mexican agrarista traditions as well as new Third Worldist discourses.

As Echeverría moved to radically reform rural development policy, CONASUPO became the “showcase” program in his efforts.<sup>67</sup> The exponential expansion of the program meant that at times Echeverría had biweekly meetings with CONASUPO administrators.<sup>68</sup> One such administrator was Gustavo Esteva (b. 1936), who came of age in Mexico City in the late 1950s and early 1960s. After working for corporations such as IBM and Proctor and Gamble, he found political inspiration in the 1959 Cuban Revolution and the writings of Karl Marx. By the early 1960s, Esteva was a Marxist and participated in several revolutionary organizations.<sup>69</sup> After one of the groups fell apart due to internal disputes, he and several comrades chose the path of what they termed “conquering the state from within” and took jobs in federal agencies. By the time Echeverría assumed office in 1970 and began his reformulation of CONASUPO, Esteva had risen in the ranks of the federal agency to the position of coordinating executive in the senior management office. In that capacity, he oversaw the creation of new programs, including the theater brigades. In Esteva’s assessment, the theater brigades had a radicalizing potential, to “create an organized social base to produce profound transformations” and to develop a global view of social change.<sup>70</sup> It is here that one sees more radical versions of Third Worldist politics at play within federal agencies during the mid-1970s.

In addition to the rural theater brigades, Jorge de la Vega Domínguez, the director of CONASUPO, tapped Esteva to create a brigade for “special persons,” a few of them former political prisoners and leaders of the 1968 student movement. Esteva therefore put together the brigade of youth, whose tasks, while ill-defined, generally aimed at promoting CONASUPO programs. The brigade included one of the most notable leaders of the 1968 student movement, Luis Tomas Cervantes Cabeza de Vaca, along with one of the president’s own sons, Alvaro Echeverría. The strategy of providing former dissidents employment and other benefits was a key component of the PRI’s political repertoire. In this case, the expansion of antipoverty programs also provided resources to incorporate 1960s dissidents and others into state agencies. Yet framing Esteva’s experience as merely part of tried-and-true PRI political authoritarianism disallows us from understanding the broader dynamics at stake. As a high-level functionary, Esteva participated in key debates about rural development policy, such as those involving the Ministry of Finance referenced earlier. Esteva and others were staunch advocates of increasing guaranteed pricing for commodities such as corn. Indeed, after the debate among policy makers was won in favor of raising prices, Echeverría asked the agencies to delay the announcement to have

peasant organizations demand it, part of a long history of PRI-orchestrated mobilization and negotiation.<sup>71</sup> In this case, Esteva's strategy of working inside the government but on his own terms ("adentro pero afuera") benefited both rural producers and Echeverría's goal of rehabilitating the political system.

What is evident is that PRI strategies for containment of rural discontent in the mid-1970s, and perhaps during much of its reign, were always partial and contingent. Echeverría and Esteva, for example, ultimately had far different political goals, yet they coincided with each other on specific issues, such as the theory of unequal exchange, and the president benefited from the fights Esteva waged within federal bureaucracies. Nor did Esteva have illusions about the nature of the reforms during the democratic opening, later recalling that "we weren't making the revolution with Echeverría." Esteva consciously chose to leave his career in federal administration in 1976 and went on to serve as an advisor to the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army, EZLN), after their 1994 uprising in the state of Chiapas.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, the democratic opening and official Third Worldist rhetoric provided the political space and institutional support for Esteva and others to develop innovative rural development policy. Those policies provided substantive benefits for large swaths of rural Mexicans through improved agricultural pricing (however short-lived) as well as land reform, as government officials conceded to land seizures instigated by activists throughout the republic.

Ultimately, the reality of Allende's government in Chile, not merely his December 1972 University of Guadalajara speech, facilitated Echeverría's turn toward the Third World. The existence of leftist governments in Latin America, such as those of Chile and Cuba, provided Mexico the space to pursue a Third World posture and renewed economic nationalism. Echeverría engaged in a careful balancing act, privately reassuring the United States of his role as a safe alternative to Fidel Castro and Salvador Allende, while simultaneously marching through the streets of Mexico City arm and arm with the compañero presidente. This U.S.-friendly version of Third Worldism in turn created space for figures such as Esteva, who consciously aimed to radicalize Mexico's rural development programs, yet also allowed for deep contradictions, evidenced in the Mexican military's simultaneous violent campaigns of counterinsurgency in parts of the country's south.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Mexico's turn toward the Third World was short-lived. Allende, who Echeverría envisioned as a collaborator in the New International Economic Order, would be dead just ten months after his visit to Mexico. The Mexican government made significant efforts to provide safety

and support for Allende's immediate family and other Chilean dissidents in the aftermath of the 1973 coup. That U.S.-supported coup violently signaled the limits of Latin America's move toward an independent path. Echeverría himself would end his term embattled, facing opposition from business interests and an increasingly fraught economic situation. Yet the experience of rural development in post-1968 Mexico points to the power of global Third World politics to shape domestic policies as well as to the limits of the Mexican political system.

## NOTES

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1. Walker, *Waking from the Dream*, 45–72; Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana* 2, 116.
2. For a detailed account of the domestic context of Allende's remarks, see Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*.
3. On the role of the press in politics, see Freije, "Exposing Scandals, Guarding Secrets."
4. Walker, *Waking from the Dream*; Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter*; Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*.
5. For an unorthodox analysis of democratic possibilities during midcentury PRI rule, see Smith, "Who Governed?"
6. Gillingham and Smith, *Dictablanda*.
7. Rubin, "Contextualizing the Regime"; Aviña, *Specters of Revolution*, 14.
8. On challenging Mexican Cold War exceptionalism, see McCormick, "Last Door," 58.
9. "Tercer Informe de Gobierno."
10. Zolov, "Introduction: Latin America in the Global Sixties," 354.
11. For a notable exception to this trend, see Christiansen and Scarlett, *Third World*.
12. On the consumption of international events in Mexico, see Volpi, *La imaginación y el poder*.
13. Headline, *Excélsior*, November 29, 1972.
14. Prashad, *Darker Nations*, xv.
15. Lee, *Making a World After Empire*, 6.
16. Gilman, "New International Economic Order."
17. See Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*; Shapira, "Mexico's Foreign Policy Under Echeverría."
18. Manuel Mejido, "Recorrido Entre Disparidades," *Excélsior*, December 1, 1972. The original chants, "Allende, seguro a los yanquis dales duro!"
19. Mejido, "Recorrido Entre Disparidades."
20. Brands, "Third World Politics."
21. Ibid., 107.
22. See Dietrick, "Oil Power and Economic Theologies."
23. Burke, "Competing for the Last Utopia?"
24. "Travel Plans of President Echeverria," U.S. State Department Cable from Mexico City, August 25, 1973, "Plus D: Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy," *Wikileaks*,

- accessed May 17, 2017, <https://wikileaks.org/plusd/>. The cable concludes, “Chileans had called to indicate their sharp disappointment that Echeverría would not be present.”
25. Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 169. “In Almeyda’s opinion, expressed privately a year earlier, the Mexicans were acting under the ‘guise of progress and an attachment to a revolutionary tradition,’ but were in reality closely tied to U.S. interests. Or, to put it another way, Echeverría wanted to appear ‘progressive’ among his own people, which is why he was reaching out to Allende, but as far as Chile’s foreign minister was concerned, this was merely a ‘facade.’”
  26. See Agee, *Inside the Company*.
  27. “Cuarto Informe de Gobierno del presidente Luis Echeverría Álvarez,” September 1, 1974, accessed May 17, 2017, [http://www.biblioteca.tv/artman2/publish/1974\\_81/Cuarto\\_Informe\\_de\\_Gobierno\\_del\\_presidente\\_Luis\\_Ech\\_1212.shtml](http://www.biblioteca.tv/artman2/publish/1974_81/Cuarto_Informe_de_Gobierno_del_presidente_Luis_Ech_1212.shtml).
  28. Conversation between President Nixon and President Echeverría, June 15 and 16, 1972, Transcript 27, June 15, 1972, 10:31 a.m.–12:10 p.m., Conversation no. 735–1, cassette nos. 2246–48, Oval Office, National Security Archives, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/>.
  29. “State of U.S.-Mexican Relations at Midway Point in Echeverría Administration,” U.S. State Department cable, September 5, 1973, “Plus D: Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy,” *WikiLeaks*, accessed May 17, 2017, <https://wikileaks.org/plusd/>. The report goes on to note, “This multiplication of Mexican activities on the world scene is not necessarily harmful from our viewpoint though the fawning adulation of Allende is more than a little nauseating.”
  30. “La Revolución, Movimiento Social Frenado, Afirma Echeverría,” *Excelsior*, November 21, 1972.
  31. Gerardo Lezama Juárez, “La política exterior de Echeverría. Continuidad o ruptura?,” accessed May 17, 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/15866658/La\\_pol%C3%A1tica\\_exterior\\_de\\_Luis\\_Echeverr%C3%ADa.\\_Continuidad\\_o\\_ruptura](https://www.academia.edu/15866658/La_pol%C3%A1tica_exterior_de_Luis_Echeverr%C3%ADa._Continuidad_o_ruptura).
  32. Thornton, “A Mexican International Economic Order?”
  33. Gilman, “The New International Economic Order,” 1. Gilman similarly describes the NIEO as an “apparition” and an “improbable political creature” that disappeared as quickly as it emerged.
  34. Lee, *Making a World After Empire*, 8.
  35. Cotter, “The Mexican Revolution and the Green Revolution, 1950–1970,” in *Troubled Harvest*, 233–79.
  36. Wright, *Death of Ramón González*.
  37. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico*, 178.
  38. Ibid. For how this development model deepened domestic income inequality, see Navarrete, *La distribución del ingreso*.
  39. Bartra, *Los nuevos herederos de Zapata*, 125–26; Trevizo, *Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy*, 100.
  40. Sanderson, *Transformation of Mexican Agriculture*.

41. Andrews, "Departures and Returns," 51; Trevizo, *Rural Protest*, 97.
42. Bartra, *Los nuevos herederos de Zapata*, 27.
43. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Weekly Review, "Mexico: Rural Discontent," June 14, 1974, Freedom of Information Request No. 18961, National Security Archive, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/>.
44. Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*; Schryer, *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico*; Aviña, *Specters of Revolution*.
45. Mathews, *Instituting Nature*, 130–31.
46. See Padilla, *Rural Resistance*; McCormick, *Logic of Compromise*.
47. Trevizo, *Rural Protest*, 103.
48. Bailón Corres, "Los avatares de la democracia (1970–2008)," 254.
49. For the most comprehensive analysis of CONASUPO, see Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico*.
50. Dietrich, "Oil Power and Economic Theologies," 515.
51. Esteva, author's interview. For struggles over Banco de México's role in development policy, see Sanderson, *Agrarian Populism and the Mexican State*, 170.
52. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico*, 180–81.
53. Ibid., 184–85, 187.
54. "Agencia Municipal de los Tejocotes, Mixtepec, Juxtlahuaca, Oaxaca, Oax. Asunto: Solicita Expendio de Maiz," Caja 107, Expediente 1570, Acervo Alfonso Caso, Ex-Convento, Yanhuitlán, Mexico.
55. On the legacy of agrarian radicalism, see Ochoa, "Lic. Moisés de la Peña," 165–79. On indigenous development, see Aguirre Beltrán, *Regiones de refugio*.
56. Kiddie and Muñoz, *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico*.
57. See Basurto, "The Late Populism of Luis Echeverría"; Sanderson, *Agrarian Populism*.
58. Esteva, "La experiencia de la intervención estatal reguladora."
59. Felipe Sánchez Bautista, "Untitled Letter," February 21, 1972, Caja 88, Expediente 1290, Acervo Alfonso Caso, Ex-Convento, Yanhuitlán, Mexico.
60. Frischmann, "Misiones Culturales, Teatro CONASUPO, and Teatro Comunidad."
61. Ibid., 291.
62. Ibid., 292.
63. Yaber, personal communication with author.
64. Esteva, author's interview.
65. Ibid.
66. Frischmann, "Misiones Culturales," 296; Esteva, author's interview.
67. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico*, 177.
68. Esteva, author's interview.
69. Esteva recalls purchasing a copy of Marx and Engels's *German Ideology*, which converted him to Marxism. He participated briefly in two organizations, the Alianza Revolucionaria Espartaco and the Partido Revolucionario del Proletariado.
70. Esteva, author's interview.

71. Ibid.
72. Esteva has since become a public intellectual and a proponent of postdevelopment theory.
73. For an example of the complicity of rural development with counterinsurgency, see Aviña, *Specters of Revolution*, 151–53.

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