

POPULAR MOBILIZATION IN MEXICO

THE TEACHERS' MOVEMENT 1977-87

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Introduction: The character and context of popular mobilization in contemporary Mexico

This is the story of the most important popular movement in modern-day Mexican politics – the teacher’s movement. From small beginnings in the state of Chiapas in the late 1970s, the movement became a major force in the national politics of the 1980s. At a time when many union organizations faced defeat and despair, the teachers took the lead in combatting the corporatist controls and austerity policies of an increasingly unpopular government. Through their novel forms of organization and their audacious tactics, they captured the national imagination, as well as provoking the opprobrium of government leaders and political bosses; and through their mass mobilizations on the streets of Mexico City they challenged the government’s claims to be the revolutionary and democratic representative of the Mexican people.

Teachers are not usually so important, but the special political and cultural legacies of the Mexican Revolution gave Mexico’s teachers a central role in the political life of the country. The official teacher’s union, the SNTE (The National Union of Workers in Education), is the largest and possibly the most powerful union in Latin America. The teachers organized within it have traditionally acted as one of the principal “transmission belts” of the political system overall, and in their community roles they are the living links the government uses to reproduce the kind of consensus and consent that has been called “hegemonic.” The SNTE is thus one of the key corporate players of the system, and its ubiquitous presence gives it real political muscle. Unlike other syndical corporations, its strength does not derive directly from the federal administration. Most important of all in the contemporary context, the SNTE is strategically central to Mexico’s “corporatist democracy” (Aziz 1987) insofar as SNTE machinery and SNTE cadres have run electoral campaigns, mobilized the vote for the dominant party, and controlled the voting booths. In short, the SNTE binds together the two main operational fields of the system, the corporative and the electoral, at an historical moment when their mutual influence and mutual incursions are becoming decisive for the future of the system. For these reasons the teachers’ struggle to win democratic control of their union impinges directly on the destiny of Mexico’s political regime.

Thus, the teachers’ movement is of special interest because it has succeeded

in advancing into the strategic core of the political system. But it is also important because it has come to epitomize a complex process of popular struggle involving many different movements. This struggle has increased the intensity and multiplied the forms of popular mobilization in contemporary Mexico, so that no aspect of Mexican politics can now be considered impervious to popular influence. Such is the dynamism of this development that many commentators are debating (prematurely in my view) the likelihood of a "democratic transition." Whatever the prognosis for the future, it is undeniable that this mobilization has already had a marked impact on the performance of the political system. In this study the teachers' movement serves as proxy for the phenomenon of popular mobilization writ large.

Popular mobilization began to characterize contemporary Mexican politics in the watershed year of 1968. This was the year of the first of the modern popular movements, the students' movement. This movement astonished the political authorities by the impetus of its organization, which was only reversed by the political massacre of Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968 (Hellman 1982; Zermeño 1978). The immediate result was the return to orderly streets required by the government, but the longer term legacies included increasing popular combativeness against a progressively less legitimate government. In analytical terms it can be argued that 1968 marked a general shift from the politics of class antagonisms to the politics of popular and democratic struggle. Before 1968 Mexican civil society found political expression largely through class conflicts, the majority of which were successfully mediated through the sectoral and syndical organizations of the ruling party (or were repressed). After 1968 the struggles of civil society were also directed to a broader and implicitly democratic set of demands, and they assumed organizational forms and developed strategic capacities that have been more difficult to counter and contain.

The changing character of popular organization

The government's violent response to the students' movement impelled many student activists into popular grass-roots organizing, and this "generation of 1968" provided new leadership for popular movements that emerged in the following years. According to seasoned observers these new leaders have participated in all the popular movements of the past twenty years and in every attempt to build new parties. They have acted as advisors and leaders of insurgent unions and have moved on to become party organizers or nonpartisan activists in urban popular movements (Pérez Arce 1990). In this way the middle-level cadres of the students' movement acted as the seeds of a new popular political culture, and through their leadership they provided continuity to diverse movements in different regions and sectors. Moreover, although nearly every popular movement in contemporary Mexico has its historical forerunners, it can be argued that the very accumulation of movements in recent years has

worked a qualitative change in their character, especially insofar as they have achieved a national political expression, first in the syndical arena of the 1970s and then in the electoral arena of the 1980s. This sea change in popular politics finds a striking metaphor in the explosive occupation of the Zócalo (the historic central square of Mexico City). These occupations began in 1968 and have recurred as popular mobilizations have increased, providing a measure of the (re)appropriation of public and political space by the people.

Popular movements are not only national in scope but also very diverse in their social composition. They are not confined to any one class or class fraction, but, on the contrary, have involved workers, peasants, slum dwellers, students, teachers, and even the middle classes. Yet more striking is the salient role of women in post-1968 popular organizations, especially in the urban and teachers' movements. Women clearly have played the key part in organizing low-income neighborhoods in the cities (even if the leadership of the urban movements is still mainly male), and they have become increasingly active in pressing a broad range of political demands (Carrillo 1990; Logan 1990). Hence, it seems plausible to suggest that popular politics have come to encompass more of the Mexican people, as more numerous popular movements have succeeded in mobilizing "new," or previously passive, political actors.

Just as the contours of popular mobilization have been changing, so, more importantly, has its political content as this is expressed through popular demands and popular political practices overall. In illustration, whereas some movements at some times continue to appeal to political leaders to resolve conflicts with their adversaries in civil society, many more call on the government itself to respect peasants', workers', teachers', and more generically, citizens' rights. By asserting that labor, land, and human rights are "universal," these demands represent a principled opposition to the traditional ways of doing politics in Mexico, which have been condensed in the particularistic relations of clientelism and of the very Mexican version of political bossism called *caciquismo*.¹ Thus, it is not simply the accumulation of movements, nor even a changing balance of social force, that is changing the character of popular mobilization; rather, it is the political and cultural shift from making petitions and asking for benefits to making demands and insisting on rights. This is tantamount to challenging the prerogative of the government to rule arbitrarily. Today's popular movements want to see the Constitution made real and the

1 *Caciquismo* is derived from the historical figure of the *cacique*, the Indian chief or headman, who kept his people subservient in return for political support or favors from the Spanish colonizers. Modern *caciques* manipulate their social and political clientele through their special access to superior and often State resources. By extension, *caciquismo* has come to describe an informal system of political control and exchange, which is personal, particularistic, and often arbitrary. Where the practices of *caciquismo* have become institutionalized in some degree, or have come to form a relatively stable pattern of political power, they are said to form a *cacicazgo*. Such *cacicazgos* may be found in State-chartered union corporations, municipal and regional governments, and, indeed, throughout the Mexican political system.

government made accountable. Before anything else they aspire to the rule of law.

Nonetheless, popular demands are rarely political in the first instance, nor are they “democratic” in the sense that democracy has been imagined as a general aim. On the contrary, initial demands tend to be more concrete and more circumscribed, focusing on wages, social security, and services of all kinds including housing, education, and health provision. In short, they are immediate and pragmatic demands, and in this sense popular movements play a role analogous to that of trade unions at an early moment in liberal State welfarism in Western Europe. But where the political environment offers no response, or no effective means of making demands, the popular agenda expands to include the conditions for getting demands met. In this sense, contemporary popular movements are democratic insofar as they aspire to achieve more autonomous control over the political conditions of the social lives of the people they organize (Rubin 1987).

Similarly, it is worth insisting that most popular actors do not initially see their own struggles in terms of such high-flown notions of political control and self-determination. But a more conscious affirmation of citizenship can emerge where the movement is seeking to vindicate its “rights,” or where the issue of political representation has become central to its political practice. Both professional rights and representation were clearly relevant to the teachers’ movement, and the struggle to defend them led one of its first regional leaders to declare from his prison in Cerro Hueco, Chiapas (see Chapter 6), “We are not political actors and no longer political objects.” Manuel Hernández was one of the main protagonists of the struggle in Chiapas, and his long years of militancy had convinced him that the change had come because of the organizational efforts of the movement, which had made of every committee and assembly a “school of democracy.”

Making demands may set the popular political agenda, but the demands themselves fall far short of describing popular political practice, which is a complex combination of organization, strategic choice, and tactical deployment. To talk only of strategy for a moment, the movements have often chosen to organize within the syndical corporations or agencies of the government, the better to advance their demands through legal forms of representation. At the same time they have sought horizontal alliances in civil society, the better to protect their organizational autonomy from absorption by the State. In effect, negotiation and participation coexist with mobilization and direct action in modern grass-roots politics in Mexico, with novel results. The challenge to the pervasive patterns of clientelistic control has already been mentioned, and by aspiring to form competing and autonomous organizations the popular movements also challenge the main political premise of the corporatist system, which is its monopoly of representation through State-chartered institutions. In addition, their internal practices of mass consultation, collective decision making, and

rotating leadership can further undermine traditional mechanisms of political control.

These initial observations simply serve to suggest the widespread changes that have been occurring in popular organization and mobilization in Mexico. In my view, all of these changes have found their fullest expression in the teachers' movement. Although organized within a syndical corporation of the government, the movement is rooted in rural communities and urban neighborhoods, and in both social composition and political practice it is a popular movement par excellence. Its organization is assembly-based and directly democratic, and its leadership is collective and accountable. The teachers' movement achieves sophisticated strategic choices and deploys an extraordinary range of tactical devices to reap maximum political benefit from mass mobilization. And at the heart of its practice is an insistence on professional rights that has carried the movement from syndical and community demands to a struggle for political control of the union and democratic representation.

Yet despite the scope of the changes in popular politics in Mexico, in reality very little is known about the political processes that either underpin or directly configure these changes. In a perceptive recent essay, Ann Craig (1990) remarked that little or no research has been done on questions of identity and leadership, or on "how strategic decisions are taken within popular movements." She assumes that leadership emerges and identities are constructed through "experience of struggle and interaction with the (legal and institutional) environment," but argues that research must begin with the "internal practices . . . for discussing demands, selecting leaders, making strategic choices, and forging alliances." It is precisely in response to such concerns that this account of the teachers' movement delves in detail into forms of organization and factional strife, into leadership and identity, and into moments and modes of strategic choice. The account certainly does not stop there, but it is my hope that its first and intrinsic virtue is that it tells the "inside story" of the movement (at the regional level) before proceeding to reconstruct its interaction with the political system at large.

The political environment of popular movements is important because their characteristic political practices make it so. Whereas popular movements in Western Europe are said to seek a noninstitutional style of politics because of the growing perception that the conflicts and contradictions of advanced capitalism can no longer be solved by *étatisme*, increasing political regulation, and a lengthening bureaucratic agenda (Offe 1985), quite the opposite is true in Mexico, where all these things are still seen as necessary and inevitable for demands to be met and needs satisfied. In other words, Mexico's popular movements seek institutional recognition in order to get material improvement, and despite a sometimes radical or revolutionary rhetoric, they pursue these ends through political exchanges and gradualist strategies that usually require some sort of negotiation with the government. The political outcome is a range of particular

and differentiated forms of linkage between popular movements and the political system, which the movements will then seek to fix and validate in law. This "institutionalism" (see Chapter 10 and *passim*) is the hallmark of popular political practice, and there is no real alternative to this quest for what the movements call a *capacidad de gestión*, or enough political purchase to resolve their problems and possibly get their demands met.

The changing political context of popular organization

The only way to understand the political practices of popular movements in general is in their relation to the political system. The literature has been remiss in this regard and has been correctly criticized by Boschi (1984) for consistently overlooking the links between popular movements and the State structure, which "is ignored both in its repressive potential and in its ability to endure and adapt to changes," let alone in its importance for "the movements' emergence and *raison d'être*." In a similar vein, Touraine (1987) argues rotundly that any analysis of these movements must include "the form of their participation in the political system." Hence, this study of the teachers' movement aims to address its engagement with its political environment.

The broad assumption here is that the political system will shape, but not entirely determine, the discourse, demands, and even the organizational form of popular movements. This is a result of government policies that bear on popular organization, and even of those that do not; but more importantly, it is a result of complex interactions between popular movements and the accretion of State laws and institutions that compose the shifting terrain where popular political struggle takes place. The law, in particular, can "recognize" certain groups and encourage certain practices while denying and rejecting others, but there are limits. The State does not itself create popular movements, which may themselves develop strategies "positively and opportunistically" (Craig 1990) for taking advantage of the law and of divisions within and between State institutions. In short, it is not the political system alone that shapes forms of linkage. Yet it must be clear that legal and institutional changes will impinge on popular organization, and that government policies and priorities will create both opportunities and constraints for specific movements at different times.

The State has changed the legal context of popular mobilization since 1968, and the political trajectory of popular movements corresponds to these changes in some degree. The "democratic opening" of President Echeverría (1970-6) seemed to encourage these movements as a response to the apparent failure of the State to mediate a new order of conflicts in civil society (Rubin 1987), and many new local and regional organizations began to emerge. In particular, the labor law revisions of 1970 opened the door to independent unions (Pérez Arce 1990; Cook 1990), and changes in agrarian reform law and policies pressed some peasant organizations into credit and marketing agendas (Harvey 1990a;

Fox and Gordillo 1989). Then, beginning in 1977, the several political reforms provided opposition groups with limited incentives for electoral competition and subsequently catalyzed the difficult development of alliances between popular movements and political parties. Moreover, organized labor and the middle classes had mainly managed to defend their living standards in the 1970s, and the "union uprising" had created a number of independent and parallel unions; but the onset of the acute phase of Mexico's economic crisis in 1982, combined with the impact of an aggressive entrepreneurial reform project and with the initial success of the political reforms, appeared to restrain the more radical union and urban popular movements (Carr 1987). Yet, at the same time, important shifts in other areas of the legal and institutional terrain had created a favorable conjuncture for the dynamic emergence of the teachers' movement in many states of the federation.

The complexities of the interactions between popular organization and the political system seem to find no place in analyses of this system as it existed prior to 1968. In the "standard account" (Roxborough 1984) the State appeared to respond only to organized actors who were effective in pressing class demands, and the success of its corporatist strategy led to a characterization of the system as "inclusionary corporatist," even though it was recognized that the government's efficacy in limiting, discouraging, and manipulating the demands of the majority of the population made the system mainly exclusionary. In short, in the impeccable logic of this account, what could not be included was indeed excluded (which appeared to take care of all the possibilities), and exclusion often meant violence. Thus, the system was sustained by a politic admixture of cooptation and coercion, concession and repression, and such a comfortable result was more possible because the majority of the Mexican people were seen as unwilling to change the system, or incapable of doing so (Fagen and Tuohy 1972; Gonzalez Casanova 1970; Hansen 1971; Smith 1979). Since 1968, however, it has become increasingly apparent that the "people" do want to change the system, or at least the terms of their own representation within it, and are prepared to organize and mobilize to bring this about (Gómez Tagle 1987).

For the past sixty years and more this system has been dominated by its ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, which was successful in imposing an enduring political order on a notoriously unruly nation. Yet Mexican civil society was never so quiescent before 1968 as it was often supposed to be. Historians point out that the period they ironically refer to as the *pax priista*² was relatively short, possibly only fifteen or twenty years, and then

2 This simply translates as the "peace of the PRI" or the "peace of the ruling party," by reference to the regimes of the *pax britannica* or *pax romana*, which achieved peace by force of arms and extension of empire. Many commentators have also pointed to the ironies implicit in the name of the PRI itself, where the "institutional revolution" composes a perfect oxymoron.

only very partial (Knight 1990). Stevens's (1924) work was seminal in this respect, recalling the railroad strikes of the late 1950s and the mass movements of those years in the telephone, oil, and especially the teachers' unions (see Chapter 3); the doctors' strike in Mexico City in the mid-1960s; and, above all, the student movement of 1968, which achieved "a magnetic influence on the conscience of the people" (Paz 1985). And Roxborough (1984) was successful in arguing that such popular combativeness was not merely episodic and that corporatist controls were always more uncertain than most studies allowed. Moreover, he saw the progressive weakening of such controls leading to a qualitative change in Mexican politics, with "civil society now seeking a place in the sun" (Roxborough 1984, p. 175).

Since 1968 the relations between popular organization and the State have been accorded a much higher profile, and there is no longer any doubt that these relations are now problematic. In the first place, this has to do with the rapidly expanding social base of popular demands. The industrial workforce grows, and so do subsidiary technical and administrative sectors in universities, schools, and the nuclear and electrical industries; slum districts swell within the cities, fed by the economic and social crisis in the countryside; and severe economic downturns in the mid-1970s, and especially the early 1980s, have left larger numbers from an increasingly young population unemployed or underemployed. Traditional rural demands for land and water moved into the city, where low-income groups agitated for the provision of public services; while in the countryside itself demands expanded to include jobs, wages, access to credit and markets, guaranteed prices, and sanctions against *caciques* and municipal authorities (Cornelius and Craig 1984). Furthermore, during the 1970s the number of teachers in Mexico nearly doubled.

At the same time the State was also expanding. Federal government agencies and apparatuses moved to control water resources and urban planning, public housing and social services, and agricultural credit and marketing mechanisms (Craig 1990). This control was highly centralized (and, as I argue in Chapter 11, is certainly becoming more so), and the provision of services and access to funds often appeared subject to arbitrary legal and bureaucratic criteria. As a consequence the State became a direct party to an increasing number of social and political conflicts (Craig 1990); and as legal and institutional initiatives designed to assuage these conflicts multiplied, it was drawn into further disputes over land tenure, syndical prerogatives, and electoral rules. In short, the expansion of the State's political domain through an increasing range of social regulation and economic responsibility meant that the main adversary for the emerging popular movements was now the gorgon-headed Leviathan that was the State itself. Indeed, the movements' insistence on "autonomy" by which they meant their right to organize and negotiate their demands "without vertical imposition" (Craig 1990), can only be understood in the context of the massive proliferation of these vertical controls.

Finally, the higher profile of State—people relations is a result of the organizational dynamism and the strategic discoveries of the popular movements themselves. In the city the movements began with the syndical insurgency of the early 1970s, which was marked by widespread rank-and-file militancy in many sectors both of industry and of the government bureaucracy (the FSTSE, the Union Federation of Workers in the State Sector). The “democratic tendencies” within the electrical workers’ union (SUTERM) and, later, the nuclear workers’ union (SUTIN) played vanguard roles, and so were crushed by military intervention, but not before they had demonstrated the rapid translation of economic demands into political demands. Over the same period in the countryside mobilization around land invasions had led to increasing coordination of regional organizations by the mid-1970s, and by the end of the decade two independent and national organizations had emerged in opposition to the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) of the dominant party. Independent syndical federations had also begun to organize in some sectors of industry, to the consternation of the old-guard leadership of the official syndicalism. In subsequent years a number of nationwide, intraunion, and popular organizations appeared on the political scene, including the “Plan de Ayala” National Coordinating Committee (CNPA), the National Coordinating Committee of the Urban Popular Movement (CONAMUP), the National Syndical Coordinating Committee (COSINA), the Authentic Labor Front (FAT), the Independent Labor Union (UOI), and, last but by no means least, the National Coordinating Committee of Workers in Education (CNTE).

This process of popular organization promoted an intense search for strategic solutions. In the case of the teachers’ movement, and many others too, the key strategic choice was to take the struggle forward inside the syndical corporations of the dominant party. But reviewing the panorama of popular organization as a whole, there is no doubt that it was the recurrent effort to forge political alliances that created its strategic thrust. At the local and regional levels this was the principle that informed most of the multi-class “fronts” of the early 1970s, and in more recent time it was precisely the effort to link the peasants’ and teachers’ movements in Chiapas that put Manuel Hernández and fellow activists behind the bars of Cerro Hueco (see Chapter 6). At the national level, it was this same effort that led to the intrasectoral alliances such as the CNPA and CONAMUP, and to the intersectoral “anti-austerity” fronts that finally coalesced into the National Popular Assembly of Workers and Peasants (ANOC). Without these efforts to secure the lateral coordination of hundreds of local and regional associations, it would never have been possible to mount the massive and unprecedented mobilization of a broad range of class, sectoral, and community groups in the “civic stoppages” of October 1983 and June 1984 (the first and most successful winning the support of some two million people). Without the alliance strategy, the effervescence of popular politics might never have achieved effective mobilization.

For all this organizational effort, it is worth pausing before endorsing this vision of the millenarian march of popular movements across modern Mexican history. If 1968 is indeed a watershed, then the popular movements that emerge in its wake can be seen as a rising tide of popular organization, and this is the strong image projected by Carlos Monsiváis (1987b) of “a society getting organized.” But others doubt whether the movements have ever achieved an “organic consolidation” and question the real degree of continuity between them (Pérez Arce 1990). Moreover, Sergio Zermeño (1990) has offered his own provocative and apocalyptic vision of a society in radical disarray. The social disruption caused by the modernizing thrust of Mexican society was thrown into a “double disorder” as this same society careened unchecked into the deep and unforgiving crisis of the 1980s. The rapid destruction of emerging “intermediate identities” pulverizes civil society, breaking it into a thousand unconnected pieces. Tens of millions of children and teenagers without jobs, homes, or prospects drift like flotsam and jetsam in a sea of exclusion. Directly contrary to the Monsiváis image, Zermeño sees “a society disintegrating.”

Zermeño is right to question the political significance of popular movements in Mexico. After all, the great majority of the population is not organized in popular movements; a capacity for popular mobilization (as the story of the teachers’ movement will show) is very different from an enduring organization; and popular movements themselves may therefore be just a tiny organized part of a civil society that is crumbling under the impact of economic crisis. Even the support for the rapidly growing electoral opposition to the government may come more from the disaffected but disorganized middle classes than from popular organizations (see Chapter 11). On the other hand, the radical anomie of urban youth, which is the focus of Zermeño’s recent research, should not be taken as a paradigm for an atomized civil society writ large. One must always remember that in most popular struggles at most moments in modern history it is only a small minority of any population that associates civically and only a handful that organizes politically. In the social disarray so graphically portrayed by Zermeño, militancy in a popular movement becomes an heroic act.

Transforming popular politics

This summary analysis suggests that the relationships between popular movements and the political system in Mexico have been changing rapidly for at least twenty years. The process of change is clearly interactive, but how can this complex interaction be understood? There is no short answer to this question, which is why this book begins to provide a long one. But I think it helps to characterize the process in terms of “transformism,” which describes a specific State project for neutralizing political opposition and muting political conflict. This concept directs attention immediately to the relationships between State and civil society, and especially to the dissident groups in this society, which are “trans-

formed" by a mixture of cooptation, corruption, and concession. In this way it does not offend traditional descriptions of the Mexican political system. But having first borrowed Vincenzo Cuocco's concept, Gramsci (1971) enriched it by defining the project as "revolution from above," or the "transformation" of society itself. In doing so Gramsci captured the intrinsic contradictions of a process that depends on the continual absorption or dispersal of popular organizations at the same time that it is expanding the conditions for their emergence and growth. In its dual implication, therefore, transformism means more than the simple cooptation of potential popular opposition (which for most political systems would prove impossibly costly); it requires the construction of a specific legal and institutional terrain that is capable of containing popular demands by defining their terms of representation and, at the margin, by fixing the political boundaries of popular struggle.

Hence, the concept of transformism does not deny the vitality of civil society but recognizes and reaffirms it. The transformist project has civil society both as object and aspiration, insofar as it "transforms" real or potential opposition as well as transforming civil society itself through "revolution from above." In the Mexican case (as suggested earlier when talking of the expanding social base of popular demands) the latter process implies high rates of demographic growth, high rates of urbanization, higher literacy levels, and an exponential increase in all kinds of communication including the mass media. Although these developments create propitious conditions for the growth of popular opposition, they are not equivalent to it; and simply stating these developments is insufficient to explain popular mobilization, which is a complex result of social agency, including motivation, leadership, organization, and strategy. To study popular movements is to study the ways in which such agency finds political expression and projection, and the ways in which popular organizations find strategic room for political maneuver on the legal and institutional terrain of the political system.

The constant political goal of transformism is therefore not simply to coopt popular political opposition, but to undermine its organizations and disarm its strategies through the discursive legal and institutional means that can impose or reassert State-sanctioned terms of representation. In the Mexican case such political control has traditionally been ensured by the clientelistic relations that deepen the sectoral, regional, political, and cultural cleavages in Mexican civil society, and reinforce the divisions between its many and various political constituencies. The federal government has consistently cultivated this "compartmentalized" civil society and has sought to restrict the scope of popular movements in order to disarticulate them on a case by case basis. This could never be considered an "organic" process, but was always "rational, arbitrary and willed" (Gramsci 1971), involving specific legal and institutional initiatives designed to contain popular challenges.

The historical success of this "transformist" project is not in doubt. Of all

the political systems constructed during the twentieth century, Mexico's has probably proved the most stable and durable. But while the Mexican State has been unusually successful in fixing the terms of representation available to popular actors, the rise of popular movements in the modern period has challenged its traditional controls and has turned its laws and institutions into a far more contradictory terrain for the exercise of State power. In particular, the system has proved vulnerable to the colonization of its syndical corporations, and the transformist project has proved especially susceptible to the horizontal alliances of the popular opposition. Although still embryonic, in many cases these alliances have had some success in "finessing" the many fissures of Mexico's split and splintered civil society, and the strategy has proved especially effective since the mid-1980s when it shifted into a more intense struggle for representation in the electoral arena. To the degree that popular movements succeed in reversing the equation of political control, and vindicate different terms of representation unfettered by "vertical imposition," they will have made some headway in transforming transformism.

There are signs that this may already be happening (as I argue in Chapters 10 and 11). But political science is certainly not scientific in the sense of being predictive, and the political outcome remains unsure. In particular, there is no way of knowing whether Mexico's political system will become more democratic, by whatever measure, even if the teachers' movement may be understood as a struggle for enhanced democratic control of one key piece of that system. In the meantime, the extrinsic virtue of telling the story of the movement is to reconstruct its relations with the system in all their complexity, and possibly in novel ways. Hence, the story will show how the genesis and trajectory of the movement are closely conditioned by the legal and institutional terrain linking State and civil society, and how the movement sometimes finds sufficient strategic purchase on the terrain to advance its goals and even to alter the terrain's configuration. Above all, a consistent effort is made to trace the mutual interaction of the movement's internal practices with its external linkages. In this way, the study of the movement may illuminate the popular dimension of modern Mexican politics. But remember that this small history has not ended. After fourteen years of popular struggle, this history, as always, is only just beginning.

The analytical shape of the argument

The aim of this book is to use the story of the teachers' movement to enhance our understanding of popular mobilization in Mexico, and in general. The argument is shaped not so much by chronological narrative as by a political analysis of the movement, which is meant to make the story make sense. Thus, this analysis looks at different aspects of the movement and of its interactions with its political environment, and seeks to combine them into an integrated view of this major process of popular mobilization and its political significance.